An explosion of Web-based language techniques, merging of distinct fields, availability of phone-based dialogue systems, and much more make this an exciting time in speech and language processing. The first of its kind to thoroughly cover language technology – at all levels and with all modern technologies – this book takes an empirical approach to the subject, based on applying statistical and other machine-learning algorithms to large corporations. Builds each chapter around one or more worked examples demonstrating the main idea of the chapter, using the examples to illustrate the relative strengths and weaknesses of various approaches. Adds coverage of statistical sequence labeling, information extraction, question answering and summarization, advanced topics in speech recognition, speech synthesis. Revises coverage of language modeling, formal grammars, statistical parsing, machine translation, and dialog processing. A useful reference for professionals in any of the areas of speech and language processing.

As its lengthy subtitle suggests, this is a big book (just under a thousand pages) and unbelievably comprehensive. On the whole, the book is a major improvement over its predecessor. The first edition was plagued with typos on seemingly every page, and was also way too thin in certain places. I seem to remember them rushing through phonetics in a single page or two, and then describing optimality theory in just a couple sentences! The second edition’s coverage of the field is significantly broader and deeper. Phonetics now gets a good 15 pages. The typos are gone and the appearance of the book is also much improved, with nice-looking black-and-white diagrams on nearly every page.

I have one pedagogical quibble with the new edition. The first edition introduced readers to the Bayesian noisy channel model by applying it to the problem of spelling correction, as implemented in the classic paper by
Kernighan et al. Because noisy channel spelling correction is so fiendishly simple, and the paper is so readable, this was the perfect way to introduce a student to Bayesian models of language. In the second edition, however, the authors decided to jump straight into noisy channel POS tagging, a much more challenging topic, and to relegate spelling correction to an "Advanced" (?) section at the end of Chapter 5. They really should have started with spelling correction and then moved to tagging.

Quibbles aside, this book is a spectacular achievement. The first edition of Speech and Language Processing was a breathtaking synthesis of material, and it helped to unify the field of language technology, despite its flaws. This greatly updated second edition is a big improvement and will be the standard text in the field for years to come.

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