Natural Voice-Enabled CAD: Modeling via Natural Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a CAD system named Natural Voice-Enabled CAD and it is aimed at using natural discourse to perform CAD modeling operation. This voice interactive method is not restricted to fixed vocabularies or predefined expressions (e.g. "circle", "delete it" and "view from left"). It can also manage free-form sentences (e.g. "change the radius of this circle to 40 please"). In order to achieve this, an approach called Verb-based CAD Semantic Search is proposed to process the input natural discourse to realize semantic understanding. It consists of two main steps: Phrase Identification (PI) and Targeted Word Distilling (TWD). The definitions and algorithms of this proposed approach are discussed, and the details of mapping distilled targeted words to CAD commands are also explained. The framework of Natural Voice-Enabled CAD and the preliminary results of this system are demonstrated, and the direction of future work is also discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Traditional Graphic User Interface (GUI)has ever gained its advantage over the old Command Line Interface (CLI)by using vivid graphical icons and visual indicators. However, when the complexity of the CAD system increases, this interface also causes a decrease in operability. It is not uncommon to browse among hundreds of icons or menu scripts and to switch between various command panels in order to do a modeling task; and this has lead to problems.CAD employees may spend several weeks on training before taking on assignments and they may also spend another six months to a year to get comfortable and productive with this system [1]. As for designers, they are also faced with the cognitive complexity from both CAD system operations and their design work [2].

Many researchers have been aware of such limitations; they have tried to use different technologies to compensate these drawbacks, e.g. Speech Recognition [3-7], Gesture Recognition [5, 6], and Eye-movement Tracking [5]. Speech Recognition (SR) has played a very important role among all of these attempts, which has gained rapid development since the last decade [8, 9]. It has been employed not only in the field of CAD, but also in varied other domains, such as telephony, hospital, automobile, household and office. Despite these wide applications, it seems very difficult to ignore the effect of GUI especially in CAD field. Some of the former work tried to convert names of menus and icons into voice controlled commands [4] and some of them aimed at using fixed expressions [3, 6, 7] to perform modeling operations. Users still need to devote a lot of time to being familiar with these systems and

remembering all the fixed words and expressions. This impedes the freedom that might have been brought by speech, because too many restrictions have been added to the users' expression.

This paper is motivated to employ natural expression with fewest restrictions to free CAD users from the tedious command buttons and menu items. Users no longer need to communicate with CAD systems like reciting a command list file. Different expressive structures and different words can be used to denote the same operational intention, which is distinguished from the direct one-to-one mapping in the previous voice assisted CAD systems. That is to say, the proposed natural discourse includes both fixed expressions (e.g. "circle", "delete it") and free-form ones (e.g. "change the radius of this circle to 25").

The following sections are structured as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant previous work and discusses the problems and challenges. Section 3 presents the verb-based approach for processing the input natural discourse in order to map it to CAD API functions and Commands. Section 4 outlines the framework and demonstrates the preliminary results. Section 5 concludes this CAD system and discusses some possible directions of future research.

2. RELATED WORK

The idea of integrating speech technology into CAD system has already been raised for many years. Chu et al. [5], by studying the product design activity and the requirements of the interaction mechanism, proposed a Virtual Reality based CAD system (VR-CAD). They chose voice and hand gesture and motions as the input mode, and audio and image as the output. Users can issue voice commands like "select", "dimension" and "delete". Among all the input methods, voice command is treated as the most efficient input channel. Another example is COVIRDS (COnceptual VIRtual Design System) [6] which was capable of carrying out conceptual designs by using a voice and hand tracking based bi-modal interface. In this system, users can change the radius of a fillet by grasping the "corner" and saying "change radius". Similar work was also done by Trika et al. [7] with the aim to establish a feature-based CAD system using Virtual Reality (VR) technologies; users can also employ their voice to specify the distance of the a "protrusion" feature.

However, these efforts haven't proposed a fine-grained architecture (e.g. how to build grammars, how to map recognized literal words to CAD specific commands) to combine speech with CAD design. This limitation is partly due to the fact that speech technology was not mature enough for massive use at the time. Besides, almost all the technologies integrated (gesture recognition, eye-movement tracking, etc.) were not mature either. Despite those limitations, previous investigation have shown great needs of improving the traditional interface for CAD and they, together, expanded a new frontier for the design of innovative CAD interface.

With the extensive application of speech technology these years, a few standalone speech interfaces for CAD have gradually appeared. One of them is called Speak4CAD [4] and it is aimed at replacing traditional menu strips and icons with voice commands. Users can apply their voice to perform most of commands and to assign dimensions with units in CAD system. Users may also create their own voice commands according to their preference. Nevertheless, these voice commands and the ones supported in the aforementioned examples are all fixed words and word combinations. In fact, are fixed expressions, too. Comparing the command list of Speak4CAD (Fig. 1) with the menu items of GUI (Fig. 2), similarities are obvious that all the voice commands are almost the same as the names of the menu items. These kinds of voice-based CAD systems cannot benefit users because users need to remember the exclusive command names (totally six pages in A4 for Speak4CAD).This system is somewhat like an old Command Line Interface (e.g. in DOS) without using keyboard but voice as the input method.

Some preliminary research was also performed, an idea about "designing by talking with computers" [3] was proposed in 2008. CAD targeted grammars composed of some predefined rules were employed, which allowed users to use relatively complicated expressions (e.g. "view from left" and "Add a circle"). However, this method still restricts the user's expressive style by all of pre-defined rules and makes it

look like a cloze test. It cannot free CAD users as much as advocated to be because they still need to remember all of the expression styles.

SolidWorks Commands   speak4CAD
Black–All Types (Optional)
Red–Drawing Only
Blue–Part Only
Green–Assembly
Violet–Part and Assembly
Orange–Drawing and Assembly   **Shortcuts**
File New   Ctrl+N
File Open   Ctrl+O
File Close   Ctrl+W
File Save   Ctrl+S
File Save As   Ctrl+Alt+S
Save all files   Ctrl+Alt+T
File Reload   Ctrl+L
Find References   Ctrl+Alt+F
File Print   Ctrl+P
Backspace   {Backspace}
File Properties   Ctrl+U
Make Assembly   Ctrl+G

Fig. 1: Command list in Speak4CAD for SolidWorks [4].

File   Edit   Format   View   Help
New   Ctrl+N
Open...   Ctrl+O
Save   Ctrl+S
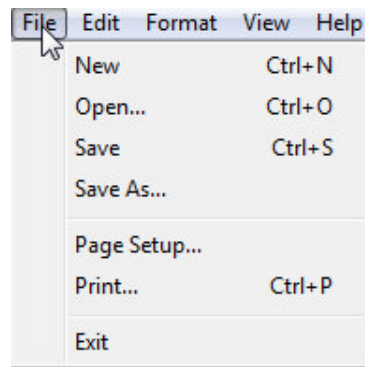Save As...

Page Setup...
Print...   Ctrl+P

Exit

Fig. 2: A menu of GUI in windows vista.

Naturalness represents least restriction and least predefined rules to the users' expressions. In other words, the only thing that can be done by the CAD system is to process whatever the users might say. Most recently, a more flexible voice-enabled CAD system was proposed by using the knowledge-guided semantic inference [10], users can communicate with CAD by non-predefined natural expressions like "give mea circle" and "create a chamfer feature". Even though they regarded Preposition Phrases (PP) as part of natural expressions, they didn't present any method to parse these PPs or to use the information contained in these PPs.

Based on these considerations, this paper is motivated to design a new voice-enabled CAD interface by using natural discourse with fewest limitations and none predefined rules. Users are encouraged to use commands like "how about a circle" and "I would like to change the radius of this circle to 40".They can issue the parameters (e.g. "with radius 40", "here") together with commands (e.g. "fillet this edge"), which makes the modeling process more efficient. To make this system capable of processing such natural discourses, a method called Verb-Based CAD Semantic Search is elaborated. It can prune the

sentence, find the CAD semantic information and finally map it to actual CAD API functions and commands. The detailed definitions and algorithms are presented in the following sections.

3. VERB-BASED CAD SEMANTICSEARCHFORNATURAL VOICE-ENABLED CAD

3.1 Definitions

The special phrases used in the following sections are defined here:

- **Sentence command:** Sentence command, denoted as capital letter S, is a sequence of words processed by the speech recognizer and it contains the modeling intentions of the user. For example, "rotate this circle about this axis please". The general structure of a sentence command is shown in Fig. 3.
- **Verb Phrase (VP):** Verb Phrase is a phrase in a sentence command that delivers the information about API functions and commands. For example, "draw a rectangle" and "change the radius".
- **Complements (Cs).** Compliments are the phrases in a sentence command that delivers the information about the parameters associated with the API functions and commands. For example, "with radius 23", "here" and "about this axis".
- **Phrase Identification (PI):** Phrase Identification is a process that gets the VP and Cs from a sentence command.
- **Targeted Word Distilling (TWD):** Targeted Word Distilling is a process to distill the important targeted words contained in VP and Cs. Important targeted words are verbs, nouns, numbers, articles (especially "the"), pronouns (especially "this", "that", "those" and "these") and adverbs(especially "here" and "there").

3.2 Problem Statement

In general, the command sentence cannot be directly mapped to the executive commands or functions. It should be pruned first and then mapped to the targeted API functions and commands. This process is called Verb-Based CAD Semantic Search, which is divided into two main stages:

The first Phrase Identification stage is used to get the proposed key phrases:

$$P = \{VP, Cs\} = I(S) \tag{3.2.1}$$

where VP stands for Verb Phrase and Cs for Compliments, I is called the Identification Function (Eqn. 3.2.1).

The Second stage is called Targeted Word Distilling and it is aimed at identifying the targeted words the same as or with their meanings close to the name of relevant API commands/functions. And the distilled targeted words will be mapped to the CAD API function/command and correlative parameters. (For the definition of targeted words, please refer to the definition of TWD in section 3.1.)

$$T = D(P) \tag{3.2.2}$$

where T is the set of the distilled targeted words from the phrase pair P (VP and Cs), D is called the Distilling Function (Eqn. 3.2.2).

For example, if

$$S = "I\ would\ like\ to\ create\ a\ circle\ with\ radius\ 25",$$

then

$$P = \{VP, Cs\} = \{"create\ a\ circle", "with\ radius\ 25"\},$$
$$T(VP) = \{"create", "circle"\},$$
$$T(Cs) = \{"radius", "25"\},$$

And the API function is:

$$CreateCircleByRadius()$$

3.3 Verb-Based CAD Semantic Search

3.3.1 Verb-Based Phrase Identification
3.3.1.1 Structure of the command sentence

When using CAD system, users tend to apply sentences like a request or an order, for example, "create a circle with radius 25". The most important words in this imperative sentence are (1) verbs (2) objects, and (3) complements as shown in Fig. 3. (In the above sample sentence, the important words and phrases are 'create', 'circle' and 'with radius 25' respectively). If such key words or phrases can be successfully parsed from the sentence command, we can then map them to actual CAD modeling commands, but with a more natural and user-friendly interface enabled. In the process of PI, the structure of the command sentence S shown in Fig. 3is divided into three units: Header, Verb Phrase and Complements.
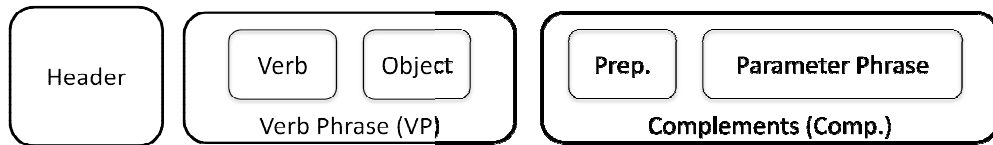
Fig. 3: The structure of a command sentence S.

The header is a unit carrying less important information for the CAD semantic understanding of the command sentence S (See Tab. 1), however, is necessary in terms of grammar or rhetoric requirements The Verb Phrase (VP) is the key unit of the command sentence and the verb contained in VP is also start point of both PI and TWD. Sometimes, verb may not exist, for example "how about a circle with radius 25", "this circle"; and default verbs are assigned to these kinds of VPs. If "a circle" is uttered, the probable intention is to "create a circle" and if it is "this circle", the probable aim is to "select this circle", so that the default verbs are "create" and "select".

Complements are the units containing information related to the API function or command. The complements can be single adverbs (e.g. "here", "through") or phrases (e.g. "with radius 23").In a general sentence command, there maybe more than one complement; and all of the complements are of the same equality. In the knowledge guide semantic inference [10], the definition of Preposition Phrase is similar to the complement here, but it is more restrictive because complements in this paper include not only Preposition Phrases (PP) but also other forms of phrases and words.

Command Sentence	Header	Verb Phrase	Complements
I would like to create a circle with radius 25	I would like to	create a circle	With radius 25

Tab. 1: Example struture of command sentence.

Fig. 4: Phrase identification.

3.3.1.2 Verb-Based Phrase Identification Algorithm
As shown in Fig. 4, the process consists of three steps:

- **Tokenization:** The recognized sentence expression is first divided into separate tokens in the Tokenizer by outputting the strings like {"I", "would", "like", "to", "create", "a", "circle", "with", "radius", "25"}.(There is no punctuation in the command sentence, because it is really difficult to add a proper punctuation between words through Speech Recognition. Even though, sometimes, some punctuation would be inserted by Speech Recognition, they will be removed during this process.)

- **Part-Of-Speech Tagging (POST):**These tokens will be all passed into the Part-Of-Speech Tagging (POST) processor to be identified with relative Part-Of-Speeches (POS) such as "NN", "VB", "TO"(abbreviations for different Part-Of-Speech). This POST processor is based on Brill [11] algorithm.

- **Verb-Based Identification:** The tagged words will be processed using the Verb-Based Identification Algorithm shown in Fig. 5 in order to get Verb Phrase and Complements.

Take the command sentence $S = "I\ would\ like\ to\ fillet\ this\ edge\ with\ radius\ 5"$ as an example. And the final output is $P = \{VP, Cs\} = \{"fillet\ this\ edge", "with\ radius\ 5"\}$.

3.3.1.3 Verb-Based Phrase Identification

Verbs are very important in telling others to do something when appearing in imperative sentences. Observing the interface of Windows applications (e.g. Web Browser, SolidWorks), words like "edit", "save", "fillet" and "extrude" are all verbs. When clicking on an icon or selecting a menu item, it seems that users are requesting the computer to perform the command indicated by these verbs.CAD users tend to employ imperative sentences to deliver their modeling intentions; and verbs or imperative verbs in these sentences are important in understanding the intentions. Based on this observation, the idea about using verb categories to help parsing the sentence is elaborated. (The verb categories are explained in the next section)
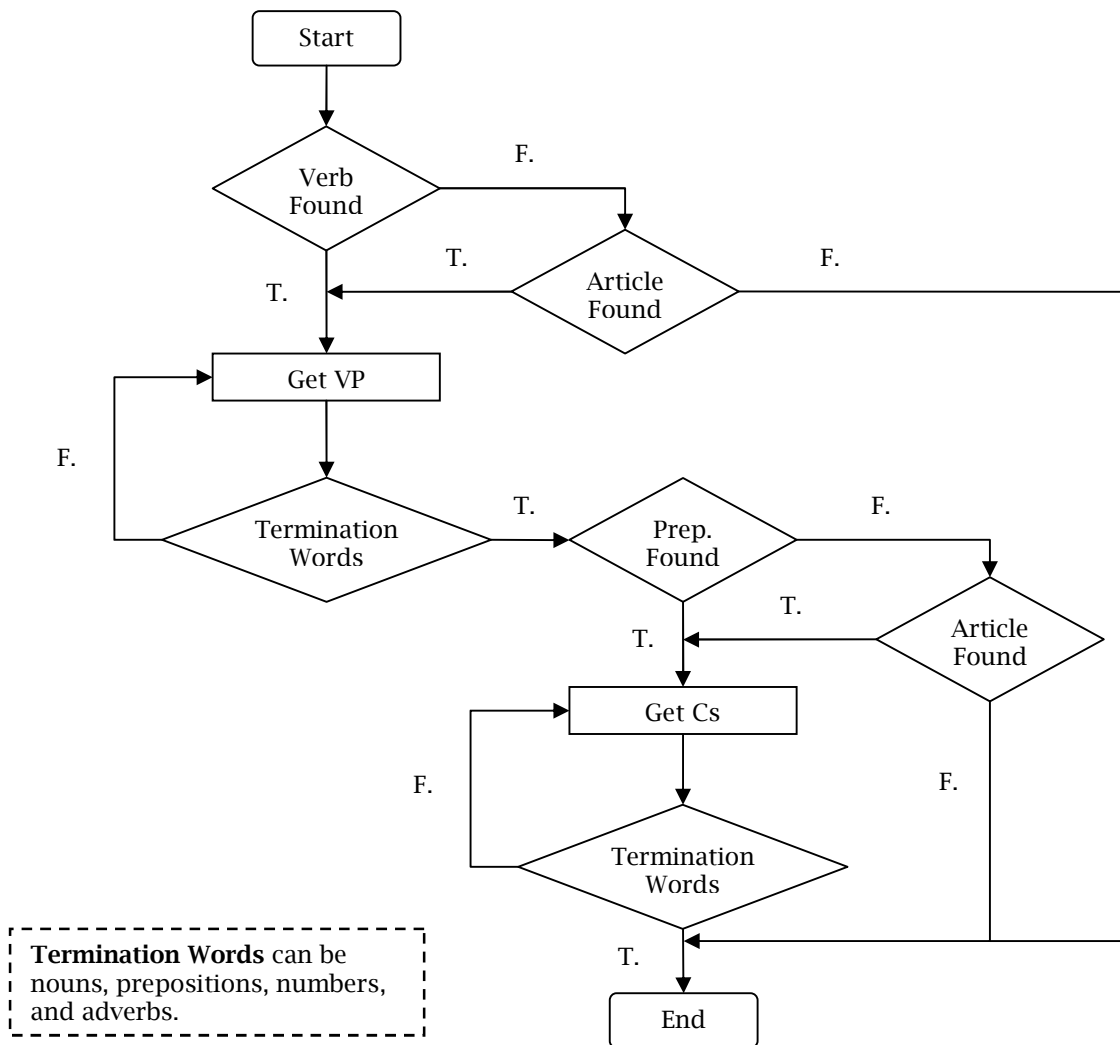

Fig. 5: Verb-based identification algorithm.

The algorithm of Verb-Based PI (Fig. 5and Fig. 6) searches for the verb first (L3). If there is no required verb found, it searches for an article/pronoun with no preposition ahead and assign a default verb to the sentence ("create" if the article is "a/an" and "select" if the article or pronoun is "the" or "this/that/those/these") (L5-L13). After this, it records the words from this verb to the termination words (e.g. nouns, adverbs and prepositions) outputting the VP string (L14-L19). And then, it finds all the prepositions or individual adverbs ("here" and "there") (L20-L21) and stores all the words between prepositions and termination words or the very adverbs as Cs string (L22-L27). Sometimes, propositions and adverbs may not exist; and this algorithm will search for an article/pronoun too (L28-35). (We assume that both of verb and preposition should not be missed in case of the collision in article/pronoun finding. For example, "a circle the center", this is not understandable for this algorithm)

```
L1      String Phrase_Identification(StringArray SentenceToken, StringArray SentencePOS)
L2      {
L3        string Verb=FindVerbFromSentence(SentenceToken,SentencePOS);
L4       int Index =IndexofVerb+1;
L5        if (Verb=null)
L6        {
L7            string Art_or_Pron=FindArticleOrPronounFromSentence(SentenceToken,SentencePOS);
L8     Index=IndexofArt_or_Pron;
L9        }
L10      if(Art_or_Pron="a" ||"an")
L11          Verb = "create";
L12      if(Art_or_Pron="the"||"this"||"that"||"these"||"those")
L13          Verb = "select";
L14      for(i=Index;i<=SentenceToken.Count;i++)
L15        {
L16   if(SentenceToken[i]=TeminationWord)
L17              break;
L18        VP=Verb+SentenceToken[i];
L19}
L20       string PrepositionOrAdverb=FindPrepositionFromSentence(SentenceToken,SentencePOS);
L21      //adverbs are "here" and "there"
L22       if (PrepositionOrAdverb!=null)
L23       for(i=IndexofPrepositionOrAdverb +1;i<=SentenceToken.Count;i++)
L24       {
L25          if(SentenceToken[i]!=TeminationWord)
L26            Cs=PrepositionOrAdverb+SentenceToken[i];
L27       }
L28       else if (FindArticleOrPronounFromSentence(SentenceToken,SentencePOS)!=Art_or_Pron)
L29       Art_or_Pron_of_Prep=FindArticleOrPronounFromSentence(SentenceToken,SentencePOS);
L30       for(i=IndexofArt_or_Pron_of_Prep;i<=SentenceToken.Count;i++)
L31       {
L32          if(SentenceToken[i]=TeminationWord)
L33                break;
L34          Cs=SentenceToken[i];
L35       }
L36        return null;
L37      }
```

Fig. 6: The pseudo code of verb-based Phrase Identification Algorithm.

3.3.2Targeted Word Distilling
3.3.2.1 Targeted Word Set

The targeted words in VP and Cs are: verbs, nouns, numbers, articles (especially "the"), pronouns (especially "this", "that", "these" and "those") and adverbs (especially "here" and "there").During this process, VP and Cs are pruned to get the above kinds of targeted words, which are stored as the targeted word set of VP and Cs respectively.

For example, if the VP and Cs are $P = \{VP, Cs\} = \{"fillet\ this\ edge", "with\ radius\ 5"\}$, The targeted word sets are $T(VP) = \{"fillet", "this", "edge")$ and $T(Cs) = \{"radius", "5")$.

The reason why pronouns, articles and adverbs are important for semantic understanding is because these words usually require users to specify a location or select a proposed entity. For example, "create a circle with its center here", "here" means a center point should be specified. These targeted words can also be used as the reference for designing the user feedback. In the above example, if the user forgets to select a point as the center, CAD system should raise prompts to remind the user based on these pronouns, articles and adverbs.

3.3.2.2 Mapping the distilled targeted words to the CAD API function/command
Verbs are very important in understanding imperative sentences just as mentioned before. Many of the verbs (e.g. "edit", "extrude" and "fillet") carries apparent information associated with CAD API functions and commands. But, some of them do not bear this information as expected. For example, "draw a spline" and "give me a circle". The verbs, "draw" and "give", don't contain explicit clues for getting the API functions, i.e. CreateSpline() and CreateCircle().
Based on this thought, verbs can be divided into two categories as shown in Tab. 2.

Category	Criteria	Examples
1	verbs **WITH** apparent CAD meaning	rotate, fillet, extrude, save
2	verbs **WITHOUT** apparent CAD meaning	create, insert, apply, carry out

Tab. 2: Two categories of verbs.

However, these two categories seem too vast to achieve sufficient understanding of these verbs, especially the relevant VPs. More sub-groups are needed to assist CAD semantic understanding.
In **Category 1**, as verbs deliver the main CAD semantic information, distinguishing the meanings of different verbs appears most important. In this paper, it is proposed to divide verbs belonging to this category into CAD synonym groups as Group 2-4 shown in Tab. 3.

Group No.	Group Tab	Examples
1	New	create, insert, apply, carry out
2	Edit	edit, change, modify, convert
3	Delete	delete, cancel, remove, erase
4	Fillet	fillet, round, smooth
…	…	…

Note: New: These verbs denote that a new entity is created or a new operation is carried out. It is the only Group that belongs to Category 2.

Edit, Delete, Fillet and so on are all the representative words for their groups respectively. Word in a same group are all synonyms for CAD operations, but they may not be synonyms as everyday words. These groups belong to Category 1.

Tab. 3: Example of verbs grouping.

In **Category 2**, because verbs do not bear direct CAD semantic information, so it is probable that the information contains in the rest part of VP. In CAD modeling, creating new entities and carrying out new operations seem to be these cases. For example, "create a circle" and "apply rotation", "circle" and "rotation" are important in finding relevant CAD API functions and commands. As the meaning of the verbs in this category is not that important, only one group is used to enclose these verbs as Group 1 shown in Tab. 3.

The mapping approach is designed according to the characteristics of different categories (Tab. 4). Candidate Word is a word that has apparent relation with CAD API function/command and Objective is the entity that needs to be specified ahead of time such as "circle", "line" and "rectangle" just as indicated in Tab. 5.

Category	Candidate Word	Objective
1	word (e.g. noun) behind the verb	
2	Group Tag	word (e.g. noun) behind the verb

Tab. 4: Candidate words and objectives for different verb categories.

From this sense, the whole problem has been simplified into using fixed words and word combinations to help CAD modeling just as proposed by Speak4CAD and Voice-Enabled CAD. The difference is that not only the CAD command but also the relevant parameters associated with the very CAD command are delivered to the system, which will, to a large degree, enhance the naturalness and efficiency. The examples are shown in Tab. 5.

Sentence	Category	T(VP)	T(Cs)	Candidate Word	Objective
create a circle with radius 25	2	create, circle	radius, 25	circle	
rotate the plane about this axis	1	rotate, plane	this, axis	rotate	plane
round this circle	1	round, circle		fillet	circle
change the radius of this circle to 25	1	change, radius	1st : this, circle 2nd : 25	edit	radius

Tab. 5: Examples.

In the 4th example in Tab. 5, "circle" is the real objective that user need to specify instead of "radius"; and "radius" indicates the parameter name. As is known, "rotate a plane" can also be expressed as "do rotation to the plane". Even though the string "the plane" appears in different parts (i.e. VP and Cs), but it possess the same meaning that plane is the operational entity. From this aspect, if the verb belongs to Category 1, the objective may come out from the complements instead of the word behind the verb in VP; and the object in VP can also be treated as one of the Cs as shown in Tab. 6.

Sentence	Category	T(VP)	T(Cs)	Candidate Word	Objective
rotate the plane about this axis	1	rotate, (plane)	1st: the, plane 2nd: this, axis	rotate	plane
remove this circle	1	remove, (circle)	this circle	delete	circle
Change the radius of this circle to 25	1	change, (radius)	1st: the, radius 2nd: this, circle 3rd: 25	edit	circle

Tab. 6: Specific examples about verbs of Category 1.

4. IMPLEMENTATIONS
4.1 Framework
The framework of Natural Voice-Enabled CAD system is shown in Fig. 7. Users' voice, received through microphone, is digitalized by the sound card first and then passed to the Speech Recognition Engine (implemented using Microsoft SAPI 5.3) to be recognized as a sequence of words. The recognized sequence of words is parsed using the proposed Verb-Based CAD Semantic Search approach to get the targeted words. After that, the distilled targeted words are mapped to CAD API function/command

through SolidWorks Addin module, so that the corresponding CAD modeling operations can be executed by the CAD systems generating the visual feedbacks on the screen.

4.2 Results

Fig. 8illustrates the interface of the proposed Natural Voice Enabled CAD system. The "Sentence" label shows the recognition results of the sentence command from the user, and then this sentence is processed using the proposed Phrase Identification Algorithm to get the VP and Complements indicated in the "Phrase Identification" label. These phrases are further processed to get the candidate command, objective and relevant parameters by Target Word Distilling approach. In the end, this information is mapped into API functions and commands for execution.
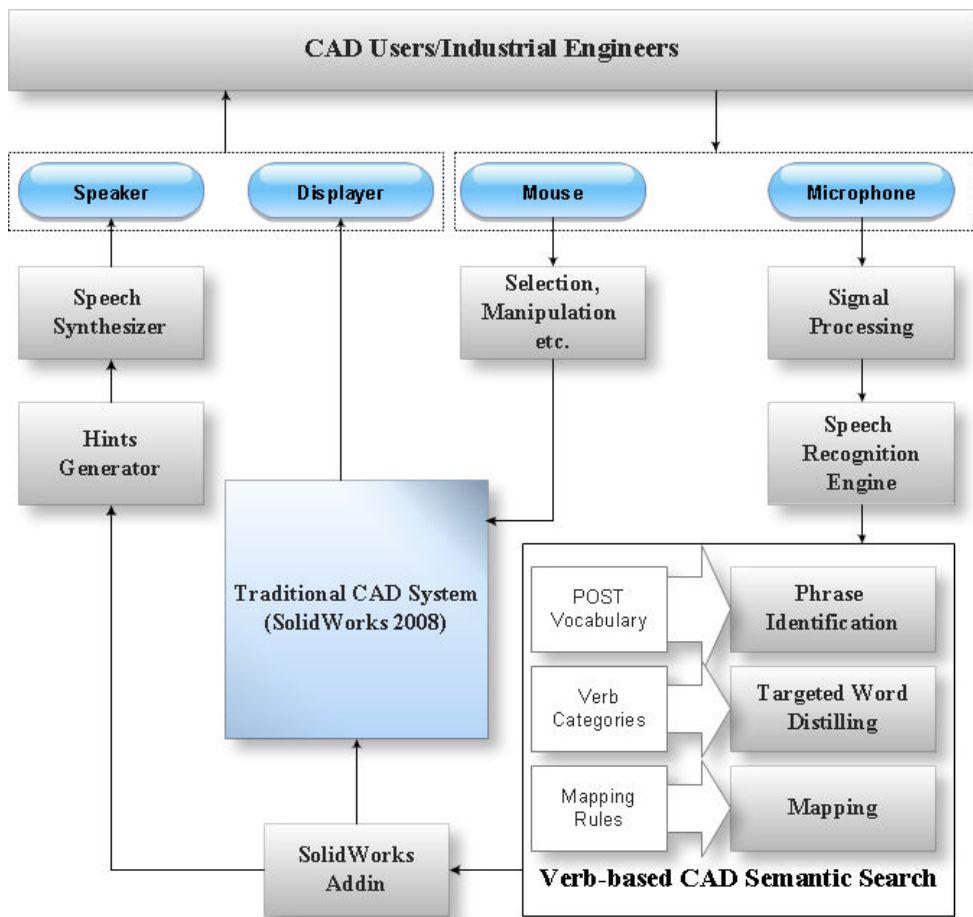

Fig. 7: Framework of natural voice-enabled CAD system.

5. CONCLUSIONSAND FUTURE WORK

The proposed Verb-based Semantic Search approach extracts useful semantic information from the sentence command effectively. This natural voice-enabled CAD free CAD users from the tedious command buttons and menu items by allowing natural discourse as the input. User can assign parameter values at the same time when CAD commands are uttered. The expression (i.e. natural discourse) is also less restricted than the previous voice-based systems.

Despite these merits, this system has its limitations and it can be improved in many aspects:

- **Eliminating the use of mouse:** The idea of making CAD for the disabled is advocated by many researchers [1]. The direction of our research can make a progress in eliminating the usage of

mouse in order to make the whole system operational for the users with disability in their limbs. However, it seems very difficult and also inefficient to locate cursor by voice in a traditional coordinate system. It is also very difficult to select entities with similar shapes or names. Some of the commercial products, for example Speech Recognition Engine in Window Vista, try to label all the entities and icons with numbers or names to help users select them by voice. These methods work at the cost of naturalness and cannot perform as effective as a mouse does; and they still cannot locate the cursor to a specific point easily. So, how to use voice replacing mouse has been a most challenging problem. It is also possible that other techniques instead of speech technology could be integrated to achieve the function of mouse, for example, eye-movement tracking and gesture recognition.
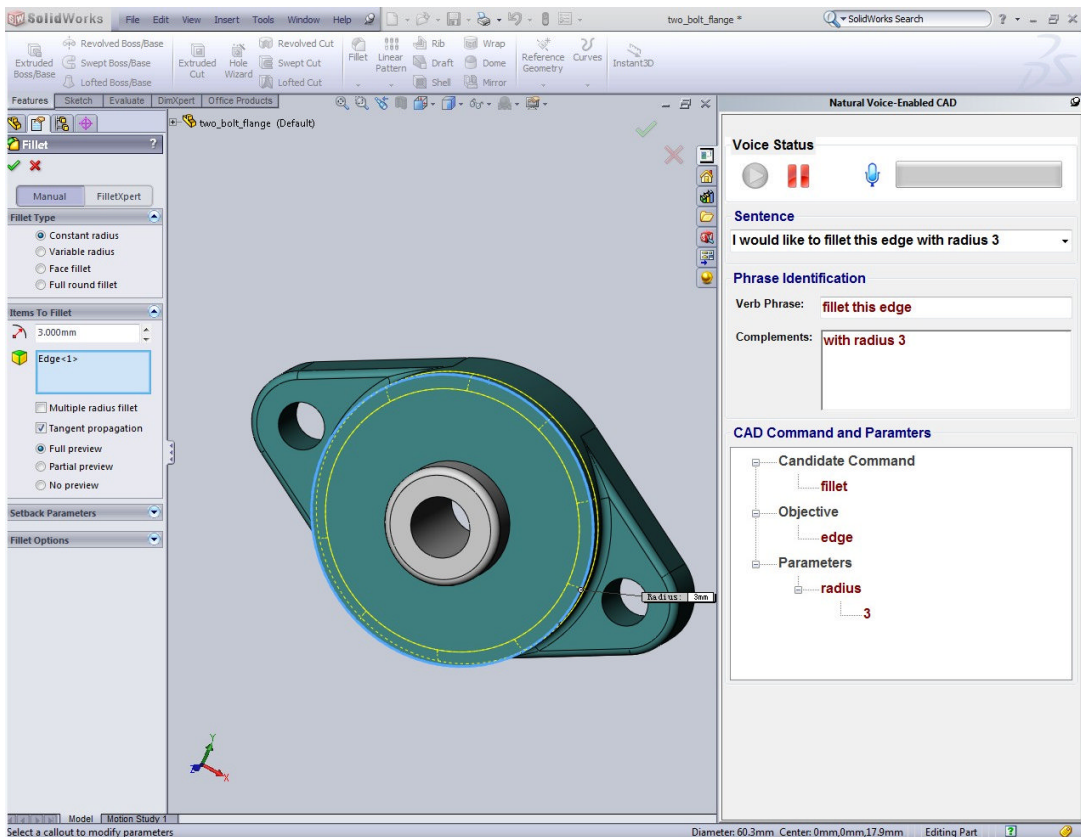

Fig. 8: The interface of the proposed natural voice-enabled CAD system.

- **Making the interface more natural:** The speech used in the modeling process should be much more flexible and it should require zero training so that naive users with limited knowledge about CAD can handle it quickly. In order to achieve this, the interactivity should be enhanced, for example the system should provide more detailed guide when the user doesn't know how to create a hole in a rectangle block. Users may also use commands like "draw a square", "drill a hole" and "create a spring", which is not understandable for this proposed system. Some expert system could be added to understand words like "square", "spring" and "hole".

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