

Critique of Dr. Julia Hirschberg's Presentation

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Using a sentence like '*What Siri Can't Do?*' as the title of an academic presentation might be questionable for some people, but I am in the same side as Dr. Julia Hirschberg, thinking this would be a good idea. In Thursday's seminar, Professor of Columbia University, Dr. Julia Hirschberg, gave this presentation entitled *What Siri Can't Do: Creating Clarification Questions for Spoken Dialogue Systems*. As the style of the title suggested, the presentation was a relaxed, pleasant yet fruitful performance.

First of all, the slides were decent and charming. One thing I would like to talk about is the use of charts. Dr. Hirschberg put eight charts in her slides. Some of them were used to show user preferences of guessing in conversation; some were showing result of experiments. Among these charts, tables were best used. Dr. Hirschberg chose two different colors that had close RGB values for adjacent rows, which makes the data more readable without introducing clutter into the slide. Other charts were not as good as tables, in that some of them have too many bars in it and thus made the chart look crowd. But placing the attributes of x-axis in two rows (instead of align them using smaller fonts) added some readability. Another thing worth to be mentioned is that Dr. Hirschberg not just provided a slide about outline of the presentation for the audience, which is appreciated, but also showed this slide repeatedly every time the presentation was transitioning from one section to the next. This is a very tiny addition to the slides, but also a very effective one. It makes the structure of the talk looked like water flow, very clear and very smooth.

The other good point is that Dr. Hirschberg's speed of speaking was just in the right spot. And she interacted with her audience a lot. These two together made the atmosphere in the meeting room more like a conversation between friends than a stiff introduction from someone who was unfamiliar with you. Dr. Hirschberg was not just reading her slides, but using them as a guide (as they should be). One probable proof is that Dr. Hirschberg spent different times in different slides according to (maybe) the importance of the content and the whether she would like to talk more, even though the amount of content in these slides was similar. In one word, she was controlling the presentation for herself, not controlled by the slides.

There are also two unexpected situations during this presentation, both of which were handled well by Dr. Hirschberg. The first one is that her phone suddenly rang during the talk. Dr. Hirschberg's decent response with sense of humor skillfully dispelled the embarrassment before it could pervade in the meeting room. The other unexpected event is that Dr. Hirschberg's laptop went to sleep and thus the slides disappeared from the big screen display. This incident resulted in a few seconds of break of the presentation but did not have huge impact to the overall quality of this lecture.

In one word, the performance of this lecture was the best among all distinguished lectures I have attended in UIC. The major merits include decent slides design, appropriate word speed, good control of the talk, and clever handling of unexpected situations. Basically I am not able to find any flaws in this presentation. It can be concluded as perfect.