



# Text-to-Speech Tools: A Helping Hand...er...Mouth for Translators/Interpreters

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**Most translators** work solely by reading documents on paper or on a computer monitor and inputting their translations using a keyboard. Some are beginning to use speech-to-text tools like Dragon Naturally Speaking instead of a keyboard, but few know about text-to-speech (TTS) tools to replace reading. TTS tools

convert text into audio, sending the audio either to the speakers or to an audio file (MP3 or WAV).

How can translators and interpreters use this kind of tool?

- To proofread their work by having the computer read the original or the translation, which is particu-

larly useful for verifying numbers.

- To record lists of terminology when preparing for an interpreting assignment.
- To read aloud a text for interpretation and to practice simultaneous interpreting.

**Table 1**

Tool	File formats	Price	Languages
NaturalReader 6.5	Has a floating toolbar to read from any open document. Toolbar add-ins for MS Word, Outlook, PowerPoint, and Internet Explorer.	\$39.50 with one premium voice	English, Spanish, French, German
ReadPlease Plus 2003	Must copy text to the program window. Can open TXT files directly.	\$49.95 without premium voice	U.K., U.S. English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Continental Portuguese, Spanish (free voices)
Text2Go	Program works only from within Internet Explorer.	\$25 for program + \$35 for one voice	English (U.S., U.K., Australian, and Indian accents)
TextAloud	Can paste text to the main window, or open MS Word, PDF, or HTML files from TextAloud program interface.	\$29.95 for program + \$25 - \$45 per voice	English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish (two accents for some languages).

## Text-to-Speech Tools Continued

- To read an original while translating. (I have not tried this, but it might work if used together with a speech-to-text tool to capture a first draft of the translation.)
- To avoid excessive eyestrain by having the program read e-mails or other text while the listener does other tasks.

How can anyone use this kind of tool?

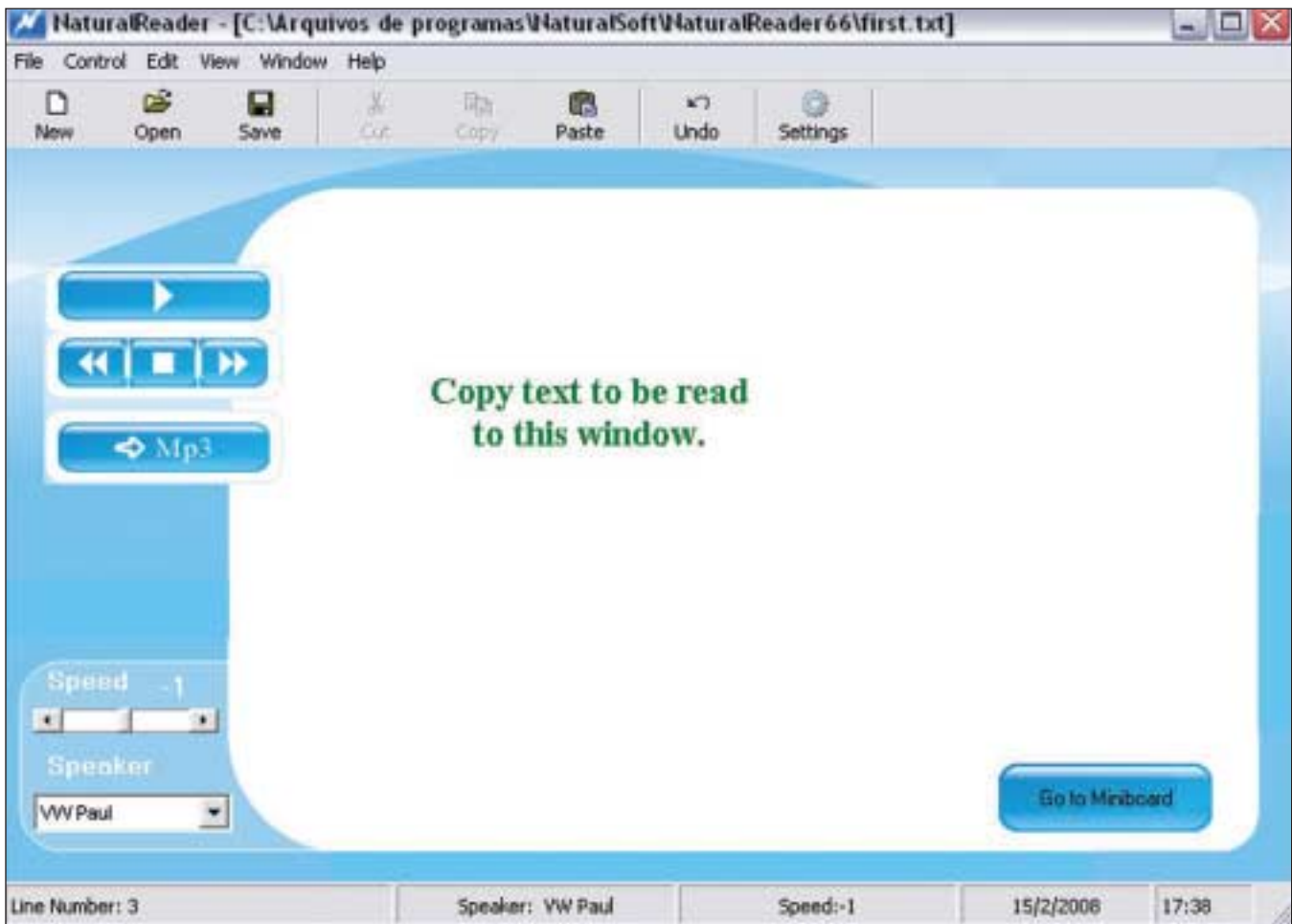
- To record newspaper or magazine articles for listening while away from the computer, washing dishes, jogging, etc.
  - To record study/reading material while taking courses on most subjects.
- I work with a lot of scanned documents: medical reports, laboratory reports, and signed contracts. I can only use a translation environment tool like across or Déjà Vu X if I take the time to convert the file into MS Word first. I normally do not convert unless I see some immediate benefit (e.g., obvious repetition of text in a long document).

## Working with Scanned Original Documents

When working with scanned documents, I rely heavily on LogiTerm (see the review of LogiTerm in the November 2007 and January 2008 issues of *The ATA Chronicle*). It allows me to look up terms in my terminology, bitext, and reference databases through one interface. However, two of the great advantages of using a translation environment tool are:

1. Numbers are copied from source

**Figure 1: NaturalReader Main Program Window**



to target, and are often converted from 1.200 to 1,200 if necessary/appropriate, depending on the tool.

- It is extremely hard to miss an entire sentence or an entire paragraph because each sentence is translated separately and the tool keeps track.

So, when I translate a scanned file without converting it into a formatted text document first, I use TTS tools to read through the translation while I silently read the original to make sure nothing is missing and that all the numbers are correct. Needless to say, you can also use TTS tools to read your translation just to see how it flows and to catch errors you might not see on the screen.

#### Four TTS Programs

The four main programs I found on the Internet are NaturalReader, ReadPlease, Text2Go, and TextAloud (see the references on page 30 for links). Most of them have 30-day trial versions or free versions with limited capacities. The paid versions can all convert text to MP3 files. I have summarized the tools' features in Table 1 on page 27.

#### "Natural" Voices and Free Voices

In my experience, the Microsoft voices, which are always free, are very painful to listen to for any length of time. If your objective is simply to proof a list of numbers or similar, you may be able to use a free product. Note that Dragon Naturally Speaking has a basic TTS function that may be all you need, if you already have Dragon installed on your PC. The AT&T Natural Voices and Nuance RealSpeak voices used by many TTS programs seem to me to be the best overall for

**Figure 2: NaturalReader Floating Window**



English, but some languages like Chinese are only available from other companies. Samples of the different voices are provided on the sites of the companies selling TTS software.

#### NaturalReader: My Favorite and Why

After trying all the programs in Table 1, I purchased NaturalReader. Surprisingly, it was the cheapest alternative, though all these programs (when including one decent voice) cost under \$75.

NaturalReader appears to work with any program, and is compatible with Vista and Office 2007. One way to convert text into speech is to copy the text and paste it into the main program window (see Figure 1 on page 28). You can also open TXT and RTF files directly in this interface.

However, NaturalReader also has a convenient floating window, shown in Figure 2. This is what I end up using most of the time. Select text in any window with your cursor and click on play (or on MP3 to create a sound file). Additionally, NaturalReader can install toolbar add-ins for MS Word and other programs (see Table 1).

In addition to the convenient floating window and low price, I chose NaturalReader because it had a good approach to numbers. I tested all four programs with the number sequences in Table 2.

NaturalReader's and TextAloud's renditions were all I could hope for. They read the following (with pauses between each cell):

One  
Two thousand point zero zero

**Table 2: Test Table of Numbers for TTS Tools**

1	2,000.00	123,456,789
525.00	852,00	63.2

One hundred twenty-three million four hundred fifty-six thousand seven hundred eighty-nine  
Five hundred twenty-five point zero zero  
Eight hundred fifty-two comma zero zero  
Sixty-three point two

ReadPlease was not satisfactory from a number-proofing standpoint. The output speech was:

One  
Two thousand [missing point zero zero]  
One hundred twenty-three million four hundred fifty-six thousand seven hundred eighty-nine  
Five hundred twenty-five [missing point zero zero]  
Eight hundred fifty-two comma zero [missing zero]  
Sixty-three point two

When proofing medical bills for insurance claims and corporate financial statements, which are both full of complicated numbers, I need a predictable rendition. I found ReadPlease's rendition hard to follow while reading the numbers. I did fiddle with the settings, but the output was always that written above. A customer service representative for TextAloud told me that this is partially due to the voice and the version of the voice, so ReadPlease used with a good voice could work.

Unfortunately, Text2Go was even worse, since Text2Go can only work with HTML files. After converting my table into HTML, Text2Go treated the numbers as if they were all run

# References

## Text-to-Speech Tools Continued

together. Text2Go is really the worst solution for a translator, and it is clearly meant to be used by people who want to read text on the Internet and save it to their iPods to listen to later.

The only drawback to NaturalReader is that it only works with English, Spanish, French, and German. Perhaps translators need to write the programmers an e-mail to ask them to add more languages!

### TextAloud: Runner Up

TextAloud has many more languages than NaturalReader, so it may be the only choice for some translators. Text can be read by pasting it into the program's main window, shown in Figure 3. MS Word, PDF, or

HTML files can also be opened from within this main window, but all formatting is lost (the formatted files are converted to simple text files).

The voices used by TextAloud are the same as those used by NaturalReader, or similar, but TextAloud provides a

much greater variety of voices and even accents, such as European French and Canadian French. It is a strong alternative to NaturalReader.

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Figure 3: TextAloud Main Window

