Writing this book has been a long process of discovery and learning that dates back to my first explorations in human–computer dialogue using natural language, documented in my book *The Articulate Computer* (Blackwell). Published in 1987, it described research in dialogue modeling where the primary input mode was the keyboard rather than speech. Since then things have come a long way. The fields of natural language processing and speech technology have come together, and the discipline of spoken dialogue technology has emerged. Moreover, there has been an increasing commercial interest in the technology, with a number of large, influential companies actively involved in spoken language technology and offering advanced toolkits and development platforms to researchers wishing to explore the exciting potential of conversing with a computer using spoken natural language.

Along the way I have met many people who have helped me and shaped my work. My first attempts with spoken dialogue interfaces involved acquiring and learning how to use the CSLU toolkit. This brought me into contact with Ron Cole, a pioneer in the development and promotion of freely available, open source software to support teachers and students wishing to learn about spoken language technologies. Through Ron I met several of his colleagues: Jacques de Villiers, Ed Kaiser and John-Paul Hosom at the Center for Spoken Language Understanding, who provided me with invaluable advice and support, and later, when Ron moved to the Center for Spoken Language Research (CSLR), Bryan Pellom and Wayne Ward, who introduced me to the CU Communicator and other toolkits and platforms being developed at CSLR.

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