My Early Experience with Smart Glasses

Brendan Barthe graduated with a degree in Architectural Technology, and has been in the renovation business for over 30 years. Now, he is working at home on all the unfinished projects that he started years ago. Brendan also enjoys exploring new fields such as 3D printing, restoring vintage bench vises and taking long walks with his husky.

In 1970 I was diagnosed as profoundly deaf. I was 11 months old. I then began training at the McGill University Program, followed by Kindergarten at the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf (MOSD).

At the age of seven, I was integrated into the regular school system while continuing to be supported by MOSD teachers throughout my elementary, high school, and CEGEP years. As I reflect on my time at school, it is a miracle that I got through, even though I understood less than 5 percent of what was spoken in class.

As a toddler, I started using Body Hearing Aids, changing to Behind the Ear Aids (BTE) at 11. However, my comprehension relied heavily on lip reading, which required significant effort and concentration. I'm guilty of giving the 'nod of incomprehension' more often than I like to admit.

At 30, I was a candidate for the Cochlear Implant. Twice, I went to Quebec City to be assessed, only to back out, as I had a gut feeling that it was not for me. I hoped there would be some type of technology more suitable for me.

That day came last fall, when a friend sent me a link to a product called Live-Caption Glasses. It is a new technology in which semi-transparent captions are projected within the lenses and are visible solely to the wearer. The text is very readable and appears several feet away from you. This turns speech into subtitles in real-time, letting hearing-impaired people "see" conversation.

Several companies have made similar products, known as augmented reality smart glasses, with some remarkable enhancements. Some smart glasses can translate foreign languages into their own and to display images and maps.

I chose the glasses made by the brand Even Realities. Currently, they are the only kinds of glasses that can incorporate your eye prescription into the lenses. One would not know by looking at them that they are the most technologically advanced glasses.

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Using Live-Caption Glasses is like getting instant speech bubbles of real-life conversations!

The frames have a microphone, which picks up the sound of the person speaking to you and transmits it to a proprietary app on your phone using Bluetooth. Then, live-captioning is processed and transmitted back to the frames for projection into the lenses. All of this takes place within a second or two, causing a small delay.

Within the app, you can adjust the settings and select which program to use, such as captioning, translation, GPS mapping, and others. The glasses come with a special case that charges via a USB-C connection, while the glasses themselves charge wirelessly. A full charge on the glasses will last about 6-8 hours. The charger is portable and can be recharged on the go.

In the past, when I would sit down to eat with others, I struggled to keep up with everyone in conversation. My food would often get cold. Now, I can eat and still follow the conversation with these special glasses. Even if I am not paying attention, I can look into my glasses and see the last five lines of what was said on the display, which makes it easier to participate. Although, it does take a while to get the hang of them.

The live captions are especially helpful in low-light situations. One night, I met a friend outside, and by using my glasses, I could read what she was saying without having to strain to read her lips. Recently, an Italian friend from college came to visit me. I took the opportunity to try out the translation function and asked him to speak to me in Italian. The glasses could interpret the simple sentences into English, and, needless to say, he was blown away. I have tried several other languages, such as French, Spanish, and Portuguese, with varying success.

The software for the technology is still in the early stages; some glitches still need to be worked out. There are still some limitations, such as background noise, which can affect accuracy, and translation can be delayed. The glasses might not always get everything word for word, but at least it gives a general understanding of what the conversation is about. The glasses' efficiency thrives in quiet settings, especially when just one person is speaking.

This is a truly remarkable technology, and I hope it will only improve for those with hearing loss in the future. Using Live-Caption Glasses is like getting instant speech bubbles of real-life conversations!