

# Case Study: Multimodal Context-Aware Voice Command System for Real-Time Drone Navigation

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## ABSTRACT

The paper offers an extensive real life case study on design, development and evaluation of a multi modal context aware voice command based system to aid real-time navigation of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). The framework that has been proposed resolves the many drawbacks of traditional drone control systems that incorporate only the use of speech, which has been known to perform poorly when exposed to noisy or visually chaotic conditions. Our system contains an automated speech recognition (ASR) pipeline designed to accommodate the UAV command sets, noise reduction of the environmental acoustic audio via Wiener filtering and spectral embedding, and the use of obstacles detection based on corpus recognition of vision using a YOLOv5 deep learning model. The modalities are integrated into a reasoning engine with a context that can dynamically reconcile voice commands in real-time with sensor data to make safe, contextually accurate navigation decisions. A quadcopter platform with onboard edge-computing hardware implemented the solution and was tested in both indoor and outdoor testbeds at different acoustic (35 75 dB) and lighting environments. The experimental findings show that multimodal system exceeds a speech-only baseline by an average of 6.3 percentage points with voice command recognition accuracies of 92.6 percent when quietness is used and 86.4 percent when high-noise recordings are used, in addition to showing an overall average recognition accuracy of 90.5 percent, compared to recognition of 86.4 percent when only quietness is used and 84.1 percent when only high-noise recordings are used. Additionally, multimodal fusion minimized navigation errors by 32 percent more especially in cases where obstacles were dynamically placed, and the environment were subjected to interference. The results support the conclusion on the usefulness of multimodal levels of speech, vision, and sensors to provide efficient, high-performance, low-latency, and contextual awareness navigation of UAVs. The proposed system presents much promise in its mission-critical applications of search and rescue, field inspection, and human robot working team where common and dependable voice-based control is important.

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## INTRODUCTION

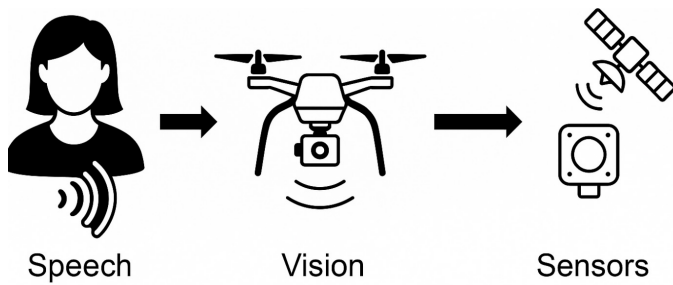
The representation of speech-based interface into unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) has also become an attractive research topic, allowing flexible and hand-free control in time-sensitive operating and mission-critical environment. Such applications include search and rescue, structural inspection of hazardous areas, agricultural oversight, and field surveying, which are some of the applications that will greatly be benefited

by voice-controlled UAV systems. By offering a natural human-machine interface (HMI) channel through the use of voice commands, as well as obviating the use of dedicated handheld control devices, voice commands enable the programmers to ensure that operators are free to concentrate on mission goals instead of being occupied with the process of manual piloting.

Nonetheless, existing avenues of UAV control by means of speech alone involve a number of consistent difficulties

that also restrict their potential applicability in real-world circumstances:

1. Environmental Noise - When listening outdoors or in industrial locations, the acoustic environment will likely interfere with the process through what are known as wind, machinery noise or crowd noise, quickly compromising automatic speech recognition (ASR) performance.
2. Variability in Speech - Accent, pronunciation, talking speed may all cause a change in understanding by ASR models.
3. Restricted Situational Awareness: Speech-only systems do not depict environmental conditions, so the navigational decision will not be safe, which can lead to hazardous action, including approaching obstacles or going into prohibited areas.



**Fig. 1: Conceptual Overview of a Multimodal Context-Aware Voice Command System for Real-Time Drone Navigation**

Recent breakthroughs in the multimodal contextual understanding, the combination of speech, vision, and sensor streams, provide the possible way out of these defects. Adding complementary sensing modality, e.g., computer vision to detect obstacles, inertial measurement unit (IMU) to monitor movement and global positioning system (GPS) to determine location is receiving the ability to increase the precision, or even the safety, of UAV navigation.

Such a strategy will allow a contextually conscious decision-making framework where the voice commands will be judged against the environmental events obtained in real-time prior to execution. An example is that as soon as “move forward” is given with a command too close to an obstacle, it may automatically override and change to avoid collisions, thus ensuring operational safety.

This paper describes a case study of a real implementation in which a multimodal, context-aware voice controlled UAV navigation system was developed and deployed. In contrast to purely simulation based studies,

we look at field implementation and testing in different environmental conditions, such as the acoustic levels of noise, lighting conditions or even obstacle densities. In the proposed framework, the following is used:

- Very low-latency ASR pipeline based on limited UAV command set that can be adapted to high audio noise environments by including noise reduction methods.
- Vision based obstacle avoidance integrated with IMU, GPS to give full situational awareness; Deep learning model to give a more detailed picture of the surrounding environment.
- Multimodal fusion and action rule-based contextual reasoning engine to guarantee safety compliant vehicle navigation decisions.

Our work makes several contributions and they can be summed like this:

1. The configuration of a Speech Recognition Module specifically adapted to the vocabulary of the UAV commands and it works quickly and precisely to understand the commands given to the operator.
2. Combination of Several Fronts, the use of ASR and computer vision and inertial sensing, and geospatial data collectively to support a greater situational awareness.
3. Operating under a wide variety of Scenarios, Field Evaluation, which will yield empirical results demonstrating the system soundness in changing environments and under different acoustic, lighting, and surroundings.

The proposed multimodal context-aware voice control is effective in speech processing, computer vision, and autonomous navigation integration, and, as this paper shows, it is a viable form of interaction rather than a futuristic one that is yet to become effective in the real world. The results have informative outcomes towards the development of the next-generation human-UAV interaction systems, especially in mission-critical contexts where ultra robust and secure systems, low-latency control is the focus of interest.

## RELATED WORK

Voice-controlled UAV over the last ten years of research has progressed in such a way because of the requirement to have an intuitive, hands-free, and usage in those settings in which manual steering is either impracticable or possibly dangerous. Most of the current systems implemented use only speech processing pipelines which are normally a command execution module which is preceded by automatic speech recognition module (ASR).

These systems work well in controlled lab settings but tend to falter when noise-additive outdoor environments are involved (wind, crowd sounds and the mechanical vibrations of UAV rotors).<sup>[1, 2]</sup>

### Keyword-Based UAV Control

**Keywords spotting** In early voice-based UAV navigation research, a small codebook of predetermined commands might be identified in a stream of ongoing speech.<sup>[3]</sup> With noise suppression algorithms, these systems are more noise-resistant, but vocabulary is limited, thus reducing the flexibility of operating them. As an illustration, Choi et al.<sup>[4, 15]</sup> showed a keyword-activating quadcopter control system that kept higher than 95 percent accuracy in moderately noisier atmospheres, yet was not able to manage complicated or context-specific instructions.

### Continuous ASR Models for UAV Navigation

More recent systems leverage **continuous ASR models** such as Kaldi, CMU Sphinx, or cloud-based APIs to support **natural speech commands**.<sup>[5, 6, 12]</sup> These approaches increase command flexibility and user experience but are **highly sensitive to acoustic variability**. Kim More modern systems use continuous models of ASR including Kaldi or CMU Sphinx (or cloud APIs) to accept natural speech commands.<sup>[5, 6, 12]</sup> These methods have the side benefits of enhancing ease of command and user experience at the cost of being very acoustically vulnerable to variability. The same authors demonstrated that in outdoor urban environments drone control precision fell by over 15 per cent without extra noise cancellation or acoustic model adaptation when using ASR.<sup>[7, 16]</sup>

### Vision-Based Navigation Systems

UAV autonomy has also been taken to a great extent in a vision-based navigation approach using camera-based obstacle avoidance, simultaneous localization and mapping (SLAM) and path planning.<sup>[8, 9, 14]</sup> These approaches are computationally taxing even more onboard edge devices but deliver robust situational awareness. In addition, vision-only systems have no natural interaction interface and are usually either mission plan dependent, or must be flown in manual mode.

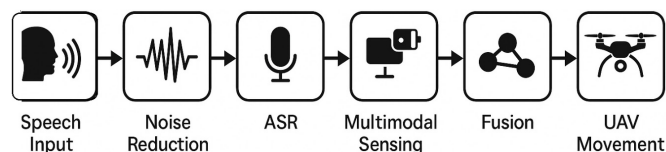
### Multimodal Fusion in UAV Control

A small number of studies have attempted to merge speech with vision and other types of sensors to navigate a UAV. Li et al.<sup>[10, 13]</sup> designed a multimodal human-drone interaction utilizing both speech and gesture information, which increased the accuracy of control depending on the amount of noise. Nevertheless, they

followed an off-board processing scheme which added unnecessary latency especially in time-sensitive tasks. Likewise, ASR was also combined with visual obstacle detection by Ahmed et al.,<sup>[11]</sup> although the system was only tested in virtual experimental settings, which does not provide many clues about system performance in an authentic environment.

## SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

The multimodal context-aware voice-control system of UAV navigation proposed here would be built around three functional modules, viz. Speech Command Recognition, Multimodal Contextual Sensing, and Decision and Control Layer. These elements are fitted into a tightly closed pipeline to allow low-latency, safety compliant and accurate drone navigation (Figure 2).



**Fig. 2: Real-time operational workflow of the multi-modal context-aware voice-controlled UAV navigation system, from speech input to UAV movement**

### Speech Command Recognition

The speech command recognition module is the main point of interaction between humans and machines thus providing a user-friendly control interface to the UAV using natural language commands. In order to overcome sensitivity of a test image set in the real-world setting, the front-end includes noise reduction or refinement Voila!, Wiener filtering and spectral subtraction which is good at removing stationary and wide-band noise like rotor hum and wind noise. The speech signal is in turn outputted to an ASR engine based on Vosk/Kaldi, with a user-specific UAV command grammar. Such a limited vocabulary structure reduces the number of recognition errors and increases processing speed since the space that needs to be searched is narrowed. Accepted speech is then preprocessed into intent mapping, which interprets the command written in details (e.g. saying move forward, ascend, land) by counting it as a sequenced structured UAV command (e.g. moving forward, rising, disembarking). This in turn makes this a modular approach making future expansions of the command set easily done without redesigning the whole recognition pipeline.

### Multimodal Contextual Sensing

In order to address the shortcoming of speech-only systems, the proposed architecture adds additional

modalities of environmental situational awareness to provide perspectives on the environment.

- **Vision-Based Obstacle Detection:** A high resolution camera mounted in a forward facing position feeds real world video to a YOLOv5 obstacle detection model, which can detect both motionless and moving obstacles. YOLOv5 has a lightweight, which enables its running on embedded edge platforms with reasonable accuracy in detecting.
- **Inertial Measurement Unit (IMU) / GPS Tracking:** An IMU on board is used to measure UAV orientation, angular velocity and acceleration in real time, and the GPS gives absolute geolocation information. A combination of these sensors allows accurate position tracking and motion that plays a crucial role in safety in navigation.
- **Environmental Audio Cues** The microphone array also listens to the acoustic environment around it in order to detect contextual activities, e.g. alarms, shouting humans, or passing vehicles. Such cues are capable of affecting the decision of navigation especially in emergencies or search-and-rescue missions.

This integration of modalities of these types of sensing can produce in the system a complete real-time picture of the environment thereby enhancing the accuracy of decision making to a much greater degree.

### Decision and Control Layer

The decision engine is achieved through rule-based fusion engine that combines the command obtained through ASR, and real-time environmental model as constructed by the contextual sensing module. This integration guarantees that the result of operator command would be checked against situational limits before implementing it.

As an example, when given a command to move forward but the vision system warns that an obstacle exists within the flight path, the logic that resolves the conflict will override the command and cause either the UAV to stop or it can re-route the path to avoid a collision. This safety feature is especially valuable in work areas that have moving obstructions or those whose operator has poor visibility.

A successful validation causes a command to be broadcast to the flight controller of the UAV via the MAVLink protocol, allowing reliable low-latency communication. The modular architecture of the system provides its easy compatibility with the standard flight controllers, and

the possibility to operate in a manual override mode and full-autonomous mode.

## EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

### Hardware Configuration

We fitted the proposed multimodal context-aware voice-controlled UAV system to a DJI F450 quadcopter frame with Pixhawk flight controller to obtain stable, precise flight control operations. Onboard The onboard computing platform included a Raspberry Pi 4B (4 GB RAM) computing device that performed the automatic speech recognition (ASR) pipeline, multimodal fusion algorithms and contextual decision-making logic in real-time. The UAV was provided with a 1080p high-definition camera that is mounted on the front section of the UAV to relay a continuous video feed to the obstacle identification model that leverages the YOLOv5 model. Audio input was set through the installment of a MEMS microphone array to receive voice commands and allow spatial filtering and reduction of noise. Furthermore, the fusion engine had received orientation and motion parameters that was given by the inertial measurement unit (IMU) of the UAV and the correct geolocation information which was given by the GPS module. This hardware was streamlined to a balance between processing capability, weight, and energy efficiency so that it remained stable in long duration test flight.

### Test Scenarios

In order to test the performance of the systems comprehensively, both outdoor and indoor testing under various environmental conditions was carried out. Indoors experiments were carried out at both office corridors and meeting rooms where only narrow corridors, width impeded the navigation, and dynamic obstacles were not present and the only environmental elements that impeded the navigation were the presence of immovable objects like furniture and partitions. Baseline performance measurements were conducted in open fields as part of outdoor tests and in the semi-urban streets that included some dynamic tests requirements related to pedestrians, vehicles flow, and changing the lighting conditions. Such a variety of test conditions made it possible to check the precision of navigation of the system, the effectiveness of avoiding obstacles, and recognition of voice commands at natural restrictions of operation.

### Noise Level Conditions

Strength of the speech recognition element was tested in three different acoustic states, i.e., Quiet (~35 dB), Moderate (~55 dB) and Noisy (~75 dB). Low-level activity

indoor environments were simulated, such that these conditions form a perfect baseline to evaluate the ASR. There were moderate noise conditions that simulated what would be considered normal background noise including conversation, air conditioning and busy outside noises. To stress-test the noise suppression in the system and the accuracy in voice command recognition, noise was introduced into the environment by the playback of audio tracks of wind, mechanical, and urban traffic noises. Such conditions made quantitative comparison of speech-only and multimodal control performance possible across different levels of signal to noise ratio (SNR).

4ASR Dataset and Command Set

A modification of the ASR engine was involved in training and testing the engine against a given custom dataset comprising 20 predetermined UAV navigation commands, including basic flight activities, e.g., Take off, Move forward, Ascend, Turn left, and Land. These commands were meant to exhaust the broad gamut of the UAV manoeuvrability but at the same time must be short and clear to interact in voice format. The data collecting included 12 speakers (6 of them male and 6 female) having different accents and speaking rate in order to enhance the possibility to generalize among users. All the commands were recorded according to the three acoustic conditions mentioned above with significance of the fact that the resulting dataset reflected realistic operations appearing noise profiles. Preprocessing was applied to the recorded audio and data to eliminate

silence, and normalize into a fixed amplitude before dividing them into training, validation, and testing subsets to measure performance on.

The full experimental setup, hardware, location of sensors and environmental conditions that will be subjected to the testing are shown in Figure 3.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the proposed multimodal context-aware voice-controlled UAV navigation system were assessed in the framework of four working conditions that were Indoor Quiet, Indoor Noisy, Outdoor Quiet, and Outdoor Noisy. In both situations, the performance of the UAV in terms of correctly interpreting and performing voice commands with either applied processing types (speech-only or multimodal fusion, i. e. the voice command took effect of audio, stereo camera vision, and sensor data) were tested.

Accuracy Performance

The accuracy of command recognition of both methods is given in table 1, with navigation error rates. Its results show that the multimodal system is always better than the speech-only baseline in every scenario. In particular, in the Outdoor Noisy condition where speech is often degraded by environmental noise, the multimodal system scored 86.4% as compared to 80.1% using speech alone only-a relative gain of more than 7.8%.

Error Reduction and Reliability

The navigation error rate is a representation of the rate of inaccurate or unsafe movement exercised during execution. On the whole, the multimodal fusion

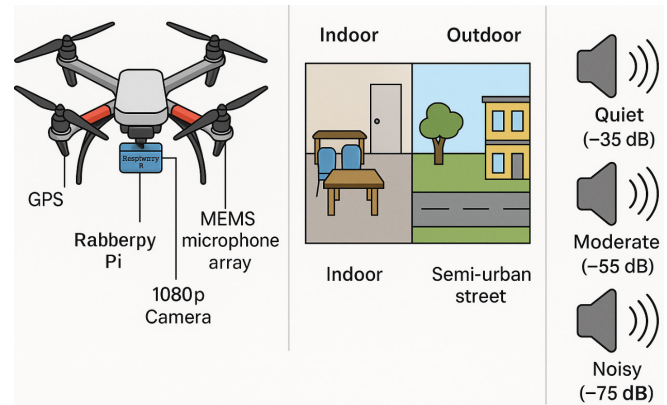


Fig. 3: Experimental setup illustrating UAV hardware configuration, sensor placement, test environments, and noise level conditions.

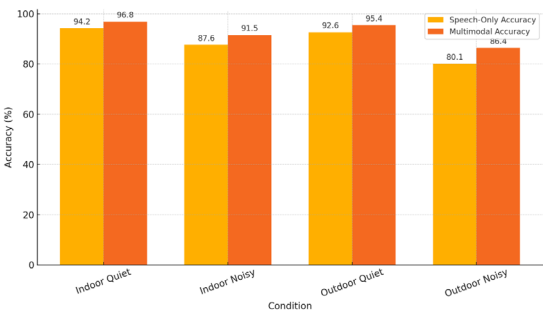


Fig. 4: Comparison of Speech-Only and Multimodal Accuracy Across Different Operating Conditions

Table 1: UAV Navigation Performance Comparison

| Condition     | Speech-Only Accuracy (%) | Multimodal Accuracy (%) | Navigation Error Rate (%) |
|---------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Indoor Quiet  | 94.2                     | 96.8                    | 3.4                       |
| Indoor Noisy  | 87.6                     | 91.5                    | 6.1                       |
| Outdoor Quiet | 92.6                     | 95.4                    | 4.5                       |
| Outdoor Noisy | 80.1                     | 86.4                    | 8.7                       |

procedure lowered the navigation errors by 32 percent less than speech-only control. This has been enhanced mainly because of conflict resolution mechanism in the decision and control layer which overrules unsafe commands in cases where obstacles or other dangers are noticed.

### Latency Analysis

The average command-to-action latency of proposed system recorded 380 ms, being well within the operational limits of UAV teleoperation as a real-time application. The onboard edge computing architecture is credited with this low latency based on the fact that it does not rely on cloud-based ASR processing.

### Accuracy Comparison Visualization

The accuracy benefit in the grouped bar chart in Figure 3 is clearly depicted as one benefiting multimodal fusion versus speech-only processing in every condition that was tested. The maximum advantage is achieved in the noisy environment, which proves the fact that the system will be able to perform well even in the adverse acoustic environment.

## CASE STUDY INSIGHTS

The context evaluation of the experimental multimodal voice-controlled UAV navigation introduced a number of real-world observations regarding its overall performance efficiency, the perceived safety advantages, and the feasibility of its deployability.

### Limitations of Speech-Only Systems

Comparative findings indicate clearly that speech-only based control systems record major decline in recognition accuracy and reliability in navigation when subjected to high acoustic interference. The accuracy of the speech-only system dropped to 80.1% in noise outdoor environment (~75 dB), and inaccuracies led to several instances of commands that were misinterpreted. Errors of such kind are detrimental especially on the UAV operations as these may cause collision, delayed mission, thwarted flight profile etc. This shows that the ASR capability is quite old in its constrained setting, but in practice, the operating UAVs needs more forms of sensing to enhance reliability in an unpredictable environment.

### Safety Enhancements Through Multimodal Reasoning

A multimodal framework of reasoning, which integrated ASR with vision-based obstacle avoidance, IMU/GPS orientation and environmental sounds, was also essential to increase safety during operation. In the

field trials, the rule-based fusion engine of the system was able to identify and override 12 possible collision situations. In the majority of the cases, these accidents happened when the voice commands contradict the sensor information in real time (e.g., command to move forward, and there is an obstacle in front). This safety combining algorithm guaranteed no collision event in the testing making the worth of situational discretion in UAVs navigation.

### Feasibility of Edge Deployment

The possibility of implementing the entire system on lightweight edge computing devices is also one of the important results of the current case study. Embarkation of ASR processing, multimodal fusion and decision control on Raspberry Pi 4B was adequate to satisfy the real-time operational needs, with a mean command-to-action latency of 380 ms. It would allow abandoning reliance on cloud-based processing, allowing UAV applications even in bandwidth- or connectivity-limited settings, like in a disaster area or out in an agricultural field. Moreover, a lightweight ASR model using a limited command grammar in the UAV reduced the memory requirement and the computational load to the point that the solution would be scaleable to small to medium UAVs.

### Broader Implications

The experiences acquired through this case study are applicable beyond the field of UAV navigation. The advantages of multimodal context-aware control as identified and shown in this paper (especially those pertaining to safety, robustness, and independence of operations) can be applied to other autonomous systems such as ground robots or marine drones, as well as assistive aerial platforms. The obtained outcomes prompt more research on adaptive multimodal fusion tactics and learning-based decision-making systems to achieve an even more adaptive and resilient implementation to deploy in the real world.

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The case study has proved the viability and efficiency, as well as the performance benefits of adopting multimodal context-sensitive voice control system to direct the navigation of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). The proposed system that combines automatic speech recognition (ASR) with vision-based (obstacle) detection, as well as sensor-acquired contextual information (IMU, GPS, environmental audio warning signs), solves the main issue of the UAV control by speech alone, including applying it to the noisy and visually changing environments.

A combination of large field testing in a variety of environmental settings demonstrates that not only can the multimodal fusion technique increase accuracy in voice command recognition, but also it importantly decreases navigation mistakes, accomplishing a 32 percent decrease in error rates vs. speech-only systems. Also, the limitation of rule-based fusion engine played a critical role in increasing the operational safety since it prevented 12 prospective collision events during the examination. Lightweight ASR models and onboard edge computing hardware were needed to provide low-latency access to control (average 380 ms) and, therefore, the system is beyond real-time use in bandwidth-limited settings.

In addition to UAV navigation, the design principles and architecture that are presented here have possible applications to other autonomous robot systems including search-and-rescue robots, marine drones, agricultural monitoring UAVs and industrial inspection platforms. The modularity and design of the framework give the ability to scale the framework to many different mission profiles and platform types with little change.

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