

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are emerging and affecting our lives in many aspects. However, the majority of individuals are merely *users* of AI with little capability to adapt AI to their own heterogeneous needs. Most software developers also encounter significant barriers to developing AI-powered applications. **In my research, I design, build, and study interactive systems to empower end-users and non-AI-expert developers to configure, extend, and create AI-powered applications.**

My work approaches AI system research from a human-centered perspective, where I design and build new AI systems and techniques based on the insights from my studies of the capabilities, contexts, preferences, and needs of different user groups. As a human-computer interaction (HCI) researcher with a background in natural language processing (NLP) and end-user software engineering, I apply HCI design, user research, and evaluation methods in designing new interfaces and interaction techniques to make AI techniques more accessible and more useful for end users and developers, while at the same time, developing new AI techniques that enable novel interactions.

My interdisciplinary research has resulted in contributions across premier academic venues in HCI, NLP, programming tools, and system research (e.g., CHI, UIST, CSCW, ACL, MobiSys, VL/HCC), producing 15 major peer-reviewed publications and book chapters, with 10 first-authored. My first-authored work has been awarded two Best Paper [3,6] and a Best Paper Honorable Mention [1] awards and resulted in sustained collaborations with academic and industry partners (UCLA; UCSD; Yale; Microsoft Research; Verizon; J.P. Morgan). Over the last 5 years, I helped raise over \$1 million in research grants to support my research.

Below, I summarize two areas in my work. The first focuses on the end-users, where I developed and deployed a multi-modal interactive-task-learning agent that allows them to teach new tasks and concepts using a combination of natural language instructions and demonstrations on the graphical user interfaces (GUIs) of existing apps [1–8]. The second focuses on non-expert software developers, lowering the barrier for them to build AI-powered systems [9,11,13,14]. My future research work will continue this trajectory of democratizing AI to empower individuals with two areas of emphasis: the future of work with AI and the natural interaction modalities in AI development tools.

SUGILITE: HUMAN-AI COLLABORATION IN INTERACTIVE TASK LEARNING

Enabling end-users to automate their tasks using intelligent agents has been a long-standing objective in both the HCI and the AI communities. Instead of letting the users learn programming tools and languages, I developed a new intelligent agent named SUGILITE [1] that learns the human’s natural way of instructing tasks and concepts.

SUGILITE uses a new multi-modal interactive task learning approach that enables end users to teach new tasks and concepts using combined natural language instructions and demonstrations on existing app GUIs. This project presents a new human-AI interaction paradigm for task learning, where the existing third-party app GUIs are used as a medium for users to communicate their intents with an AI agent instead of as the interfaces for interacting with the underlying computing services. Compared to prior systems, SUGILITE made significant progress in usability, applicability, generalizability, expressiveness, robustness, and shareability. SUGILITE has been open-sourced on GitHub, deployed in-situ through Google Play Store, and evaluated in several user studies.

On the HCI side, SUGILITE features novel intelligent interfaces and interaction techniques that facilitate the collaboration between the user and the AI system. The multi-modal approach allows the user to first describe their intended task in natural language, and demonstrate task procedures and concept on existing app GUIs. I created a collaborative approach for users to disambiguate the intents of their actions [4]. After an ambiguous demonstrated action, the agent asks the user to clarify through natural language conversations. The system provides an interactive visualization that highlights the agent’s understanding of the user’s utterances and prompts the user to explain specific aspects (Figure 1). My work extends and contributes to frameworks in designing human-AI interaction such as *mixed-initiative interaction* and *mutual disambiguation* in multi-modal interfaces.

My work in SUGILITE introduced a top-down lazy-evaluation dialog framework [8] for supporting concept and conditional instructions. Informed by results from a formative study, this new framework allows the user to start with saying an automation rule at a high level with ambiguous and vague concepts, procedures, and conditions. The agent then recursively resolves the ambiguities and vagueness with the user through multi-turn conversations, seeks clarifications from the user, and guides the user to define new concepts and procedures if needed (Figure 2).

I am particularly interested in the issue of error handling in human-AI interaction, which is often overlooked in prior research. In SUGILITE, I designed a new multi-modal interface [3] that helps users discover and recover from

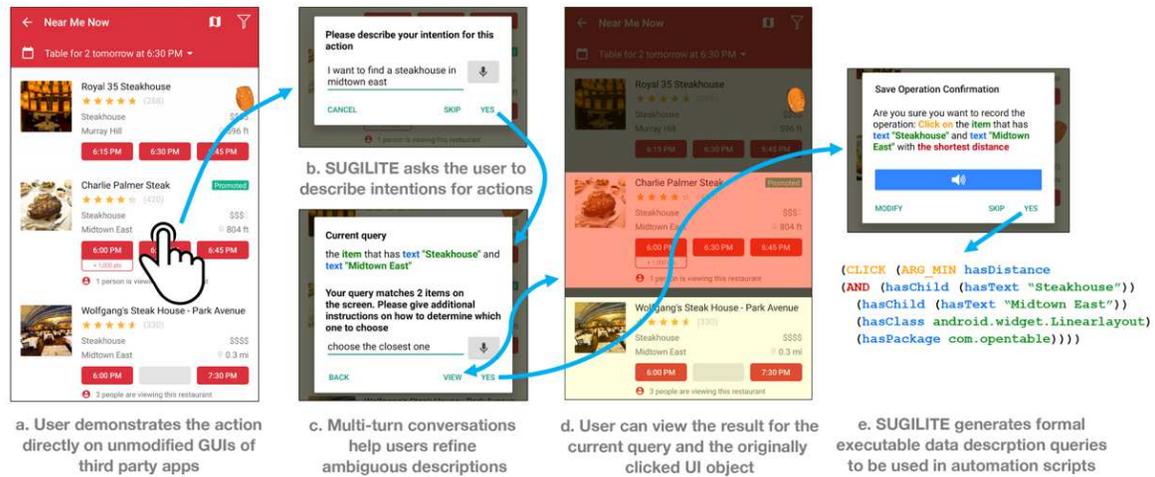


Figure 2. The screenshots of SUGILITE’s demonstration mechanism and its multi-modal mixed-initiative intent clarification process for the demonstrated actions.

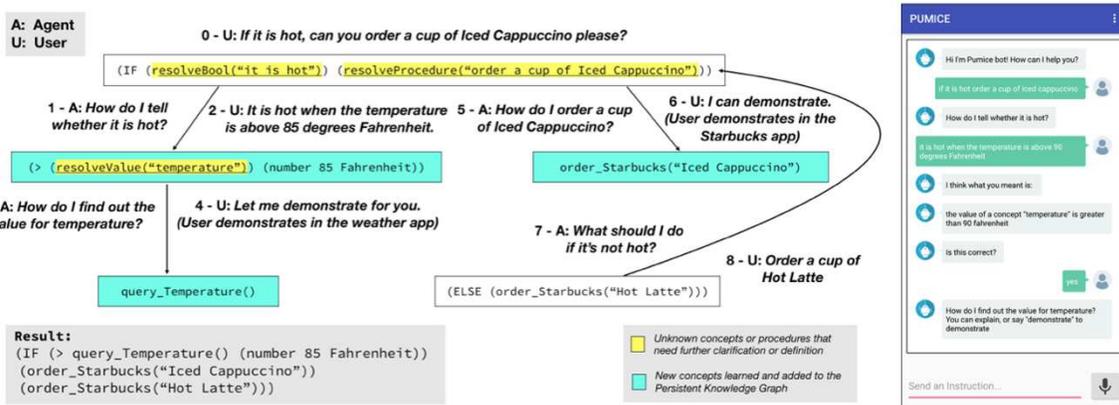


Figure 1. An example dialog structure when SUGILITE learns a new task that contains a conditional and new concepts. The numbers indicate the sequence of the utterances. The screenshot on the right shows the corresponding conversational interface.

conversational breakdowns based on the grounding theory in communication. This interface displays the system’s state of understanding through GUI screenshots, allows the user to refer to third-party apps and their GUI screens in conversations as inputs for intent disambiguation, and enables the user to repair breakdowns using direct manipulation on these screenshots.

On the applied AI/NLP side, I created new AI-powered system capabilities. For example, a key challenge in multi-modal task learning is to ground the user’s natural language explanations to the corresponding GUI elements. I developed a new technique in SUGILITE that represents each screen as a *UI Snapshot Graph* [4,7]. A floating semantic parser parses the user’s natural language instruction into graph queries on this graph in a simple and flexible LISP-like functional query language. An iterative human-in-the-loop pipeline executes the query on the graph, validates if the result matches the entity that the user originally demonstrated, and seeks additional input from the user if the result does not match, or matches more than one entity (Figure 3). The goal of this process is to generate a query that uniquely matches the target UI element and also reflects the user’s underlying intent.

This GUI grounding approach allows SUGILITE to learn generalized procedures (e.g., to order *any* kind of beverage from Starbucks) from a demonstration of a specific instance of the task (e.g., ordering an iced cappuccino) [1]. SUGILITE achieves this by grounding the utterance (e.g., “order a cup of iced cappuccino”) to the target UI elements (e.g., click on the menu item that has the text “Iced Cappuccino”) and the arguments of the demonstrated actions. It analyzes the hierarchical structure of GUI to extract the potential values of the parameter. The GUI-grounding approach is also used for disambiguating the procedures to invoke [1] and for learning generalized concepts [8].

accessing and processing personal data (e.g., sensory inputs, location, contacts, photos) as a stream in a functional programming model, making it easier for developers to use personal data while simultaneously making it easier to analyze how that personal data is processed. WIKIBRAIN [14] democratizes computation with Wikipedia knowledge for developers by providing simple access to the Wikipedia data and the state-of-art Wikipedia-based algorithms. All these tools have been open-sourced on GitHub and used by the communities of developers and researchers.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

In the future, I plan to continue my line of research in **democratizing AI to empower individuals**. In this section, I outline two research themes that I am the most excited about.

End-User-Programmable AI Systems for the Future of Work

SUGILITE presents an example of supporting end user programming for task automation. For the next step, I am particularly interested in developing end-user-programmable AI systems to specifically address the challenges faced by the workforce in the era of “the fourth industrial revolution”. While the adoption of AI technologies has significantly increased the overall productivity of society, the gains have mostly gone to a small group at the top while many workers have been stagnated in wages or displaced by AI. I attribute much of this phenomenon to the *top-down* approach used in developing and deploying AI. While many workers, especially the rapidly expanding group of “gig workers”, participate in the corporate-provided AI infrastructures, they often act as interchangeable and replaceable components (e.g., Uber drivers, Instacart shoppers, data annotators) in large algorithm-directed workflows with little agency. The AI systems are often developed from a corporate’s perspective with its best interest in mind, with little support for individual worker’s personal preferences, motivation, and creativity.

I propose to explore a *bottom-up* approach that helps individual workers automate and augment their work with AI systems. Instead of replacing workers with AI, this approach can emancipate workers from mundane repetitive tasks, enabling them to focus on the creative and social aspects of work they love that AI systems cannot feasibly replace in near future. In our formative study with SUGILITE, many users stated they would love to automate their work tasks. The current SUGILITE is already able to learn work-related tasks that involve basic lookups, simple conditional rules, and well-defined actions through app GUIs. In the future, I plan to conduct contextual user research to investigate the automation needs of workers in different disciplines, study the societal impacts of end-user-programmable AI systems for the future-of-work, and develop more effective and more personalized interactive AI systems to assist individual users with their work-related tasks in their best interests.

A significant barrier to the bottom-up approach is the data ownership problem. An effective AI system usually requires a large amount of data to train, which is often only feasible for large organizations. I consider the recent advances in general-purpose language (e.g., BERT, GPT-3), reasoning (e.g., COMET, Atomic), and task completion (e.g., Almond) models an important step towards end-user programmable AI. These models are great fits for *few-shot learning* and *transfer learning*, allowing effective incorporation of general knowledge with small amounts of data and instructions from end users. For my future research, I plan to focus on designing the interaction between the user and the AI system in these scenarios, bridging the transparency and explainability of AI systems with the user’s natural cognitive models for the task, and enabling the user to provide useful inputs that boost the generalizability, expressiveness, robustness of the AI system through effective human-AI collaboration.

Natural Interaction Modalities in Developer Tools

In my past work of designing different interactive developer tools, I have used several distinct input modalities and interaction methods for program specifications, such as conventional source code, natural language spoken instructions and conversations, program synthesis with demonstrated examples, and direct manipulation in visual programming and GUIs. For the next step, **I plan to further explore the design space of interactive tools for diverse types of programming activities in the full end-to-end lifecycle of developing AI systems.** such as data labeling, data wrangling, exploratory analysis, model tuning, error analysis, bias mitigation, system deployment and monitoring, system extension, and performance optimization.

The advances in fields such as natural language processing, sensing for gesture and gaze tracking, interactive data visualization, program synthesis, and computational modeling of programming activities through software repository mining have laid the technical foundation for my next breakthrough in multi-modal interaction for software development. In my design process, I will specifically focus on the needs, capabilities, and routines of different types of developers, creating dynamic developer interfaces that are adaptive to these changing factors.

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