

Google updates Read Along and Google Lens apps

8 May 2020, by Peter Grad

Google this week announced upgrades to two programs: one will assist users researching words and expressions and learning foreign languages, and the other will help children who are learning to read.

The Google Lens app is a popular tool used by people who need instant translations of foreign words or phrases. They point their phone camera at the wording of a public sign or a page in a book, and Lens translates the text into any of about 100 languages.

Beginning this week, Lens will pronounce the words, too. Just tap on selected text and the new feature, Listen, will say it. Further, Lens will serve up explanatory notes about selected words or phrases. Want to know more about coronavirus? Tap on the word and Lens will pull up relevant

search results.

The Listen feature is currently operating on Android. An iOS version is due soon.

Google is also adding a nifty new application to Lens. It will let you copy and paste handwritten notes from a notepad to your computer. To do this, fire up Google Lens and point your smartphone at your handwritten notes, wait for the text to be recognized and tap "Copy to computer" on your phone. On your desktop, open your project in Google Docs, click Insert, and watch your text appear.

A few requirements: You must have the most recent version of Google Chrome on your desktop and either the Google Lens app on your Android device or Google app on an iOS device. On iOS devices, Lens is accessed by an icon in the Google search bar. Also, you must be logged on to your Google account in both devices.

Last, if your handwriting resembles the jagged lines of a seismograph machine during high activity—that is, if your handwriting is unrecognizable to most other human beings—the Lens cut-and-paste operation will likely not work well. Be sure to write legibly. Lens can perform wonders, not miracles.

Also unveiled this week is a program that will be welcomed by millions of parents involuntarily drafted as teachers for their children in this era of quarantine. The Read Along app is designed for children 5 years of age and above who are learning to read. Utilizing text-to-speech and speech-recognition, the app holds children's hands as they navigate sentences in stories geared to their age level. A digital reading buddy named Diya recognizes when the child is struggling with pronunciation and offers encouraging feedback.

When children need help pronouncing a word or defining one, they can ask Diya and the assistant

will provide the answer. Diya also provides positive feedback throughout the sessions.

Read Along keeps track of children's progress through the stories—there are about 500 in all—and makes recommendations on future stories based on how well they do. Children are rewarded with in-app prizes and mini word games.

Originally called Bolo, the app was first used in India last year. Following its success, Google renamed the app and expanded it to more than 180 countries and nine languages, including English, Spanish, Portuguese and Urdu.

Google emphasizes there are no in-app ads or purchases, and no voice data is retained on Google servers.

Read Along may be downloaded from the Play Store.

More information:

www.blog.google/products/googl...ore-productive-home/
www.blog.google/outreach-initi...y-access-read-along/

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