

Proceedings of the  
**Eighth International Conference  
on Computational Semantics  
IWCS-8**

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Harry Bunt, Volha Petukhova, and Sander Wubben, editors

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# Preface: 15 years of IWCS

Fifteen years ago the idea of IWCS was born. We noted that, while there was a highly successful biennial workshop in the Netherlands on *formal* semantics, the Amsterdam Colloquium, that there was nothing comparable in the area of *computational* semantics, although that area seemed to be becoming at least as interesting and significant as formal semantics. As the Amsterdam Colloquium was always held in December in uneven years, we wanted to explore the possibility of a biennial workshop in the ‘empty’ December months of even years. And so the “International Workshop on Computational Semantics IWCS” (without a “1”) was organised in December 1994. The Call for Papers featured the following list of topics:

- ambiguous (or ‘underspecified’) semantic representations
- the use of context in interpretation
- dynamic logic and natural language
- the semantics-pragmatics interface
- incremental interpretation
- algorithmic aspects of interpretation
- type theory and natural language interpretation

Note the ‘underspecified’ semantic representations at the head of list – in quotes since the term was not yet widely used. About half of these topics are still topics of today’s IWCS, but the current list is much larger, reflecting the breadth that IWCS has these days, and includes items such as semantic annotation and machine learning of semantic structures, topics that were not even dreamt of in 1994.

Among the speakers at the first IWCS were Johan Bos, Nick Asher, Tim Fernando, Claire Gardent, Jonathan Ginzburg, Graeme Hirst, Rodger Kibble, Daniel Marcu, Massimo Poesio, Stephen Pulman, Allan Ramsay, and Matthew Stone. There were some 35 participants, it was all quite small-scale and informal, and we all enjoyed it. So we decided to try again two years later, but since December appeared to be a stressful period for many people, we moved to January in 1997. And we stayed in January of uneven years ever since.

At IWCS-2 there were some 50 participants, and things began to look seriously. We went from two to two and a half days, included an excursion and a conference

dinner, and had invited speakers: Jerry Hobbs, Manfred Pinkal, and Lenhart Schubert. IWCS seemed to be a viable formula. And so we decided to go for a regular biennial series, which since then has been continuing successfully until now; a time span of 15 years since the start in 1994.

The many high-quality contributions to IWCS-2 inspired us to contact Kluwer Academic Publishers - would they be interested in publishing a book with edited selected papers from the workshop? Yes they were, and they even suggested the possibility of starting up a book series on computational semantics. After discussion with the editors of the Studies in Linguistics and Philosophy series, we decided to go for a subseries within the prestigious SLAP series. So far, *Computing Meaning*, volumes 1, 2, and 3 have been published, based on IWCS contributions.

IWCS-3, in 1999, included a meeting organized by Patrick Blackburn and Claire Gardent to discuss the idea of setting up a special interest group on computational semantics within ACL. This was an excellent idea, and meant the start of SIGSEM. Kees van Deemter, Patrick Blackburn, and James Pustejovsky were invited speakers at this workshop. Over the years, the invited speakers have invariably formed highlights at IWCS. In the period 2001-2007 invited speakers were James Allen, Alex Lascarides, Jan van Eijck, Patrick Hayes, Adam Kilgarriff, Michiel van Lambalgen, Matthew Stone, Dafydd Gibbon, Alexander Koller, Daniel Marcu, Maarten de Rijke; Johan Bos, Makoto Kanazawa, and Paul Buitelaar, an impressive and varied list of prominent researchers, completed at IWCS-8 by Martha Palmer, Ido Dagan, and Massimo Poesio.

At IWCS-5, in 2003, an important new element was the organization, right before IWCS, of a joint workshop of the SIGSEM Working Group on the Representation of Multimodal Semantic Information which had been established in 2002, and an expert group of the International Organisation for Standardisation ISO concerned with interoperability in language resources. This associated workshop, with a focus on semantic annotation, has been continued in 2005 and 2007 and also continues this year, at the workshop called ISA-4: Fourth Joint ISO-SIGSEM Workshop on Interoperable Semantic Annotation.

At IWCS-7, in 2007, it was decided to change the name of IWCS from ‘workshop’ to ‘conference’, while keeping the abbreviation ‘IWCS’, in order to better do justice to the character and status that IWCS now has.

In 2009 I am going to resign from my full-time post at Tilburg University, and this seems a good moment for me to stop organizing IWCS. I am very pleased that Johan Bos and Stephen Pulman have offered to take over the organization. This will also mean that IWCS is going to move around, rather than stay in Tilburg forever. I would like to use this occasion to thank a number of people who have been especially important for the organization of IWCS over the years.

The organization committee has always included Reinhard Muskens and nearly always Elias Thijssse, who have both given invaluable support. Ielka van der Sluis has played a pivotal role in the organization of IWCS-4, -5, and -6. She designed the beautiful IWCS logo, based on the ground plan of the Warande forest next to Tilburg University. Several PhD students have over the years contributed to the organization, including Gerrit Rentier, Leen Kievit, Margriet Verlinden, Yann Girard, Jeroen Geertzen, Roser Morante, Marieke van Erp, Olga Petukhova, and Sander Wubben. I am grateful to them all. Equally important has been the support of administrative staff. For many years, my then secretary Anne Adriaensen has been essential for a smooth organization; in recent years, Femke Wieme and especially Lauraine Sinay have provided wonderful administrative assistance. The support of Leen Jacobs as financial manager of the Faculty of Humanities has also been indispensable. Special thanks go to Kiyong Lee and Laurent Romary for their role in organizing the ISO-SIGSEM workshops associated with IWCS since 2003.

The preface to a volume of IWCS proceedings is usually just one page. But at this turning point I thought it might be appropriate to look back a little, and to thank a number of people who have made IWCS into the well-established conference series that it has become. And looking forward, while they say that past performance is no guarantee for the future, with a new team of organizers and the prospect of having IWCS conferences in other locations, perhaps even more exciting than Tilburg, there are good reasons to believe that IWCS will continue to be a pleasant, fruitful, and inspiring opportunity to meet everyone who likes computational semantics.

Thank you all and best wishes,

Harry Bunt  
IWCS chair

# Program Committee

James Allen	Anette Frank	Don Moldovan
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Massimo Poesio

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