# The 18th International Conference on Computational Linguistics



Proceedings of the Conference

Universität des Saarlandes Saarbrücken, Germany 31 July - 4 August 2000

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Saarbrücken, Germany

31 July - 4 August 2000

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ISBN 1-55860-717-X (2 volumes)

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#### Address of Welcome by the Federal Minister of Education and Research, Ms Edelgard Bulmahn, to the International Conference on Computational Linguistics – Coling 2000

I am very happy that the International Conference on Computational Linguistics – Coling 2000 – is taking place in Saarbrücken, and I appreciate very much that the conference was prepared by three countries of the European Union, Germany, France and Luxembourg, and that some of its events are being held also at other places, namely Nancy and Luxembourg. After my recent opening of the German-French University in Saarbrücken, I consider this conference to be another important milestone on the way towards closer cooperation within a European region in the field of cutting-edge research.

Supporting speech and language technology has been a priority in the Federal Ministry of Education and Research since the mid-1980s. Research funds to the amount of about 165 million DM have so far been made available for this purpose, while for Artificial Intelligence as a whole about 650 million DM have been made available. The first funding projects of speech processing addressed simple spoken dialog and information systems. Since the beginning of the 1990s, speech and language technology research has been conducted on the basis of interdisciplinary cooperation between the fields of computational neuroscience. The emphasis is on the syntactic and semantic recognition and translation of spontaneous speech. Since 1993 research on speech and language technology in Germany has been concentrated in the lead project VERBMOBIL, in which 23 research teams from science and industry work together. The project is now being concluded and its results will be presented at this conference.

International experts confirm that, as a result of this research support, Germany is one of the leaders world-wide in the areas of speech-to-speech translation, robust semantic speech processing, information extraction and document analysis. A broad research infrastructure in this field is available for cooperation with industry. A large number of new start-up companies in the field of speech and language technology, research teams of foreign companies in Germany, the massive expansion of language technology groups in large German IT companies, and numerous new speech technology products document the commercial success of this support effort.

On the basis of the research results from speech and language technology in Germany, I have so far launched five major lead projects on human-computer interaction in the knowledge-based society, with a funding volume of 132 million DM. With these projects, new interaction possibilities between humans and IT systems via speech, gestures, facial expressions, and haptic signals are to be opened up.

I wish the International Conference on Computational Linguistics in Saarbrücken every success.

EBulmah

Edelgard Bulmahn

## **Preface: President of the ICCL and Programme Chair**

This is the 18<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Computational Linguistics and, for myself and a few others, the 18<sup>th</sup> occasion on which I experience a growing sense of excitement at the prospect of meeting old friends, making new ones, and learning about the new discoveries and inventions that my colleagues have made in the last two years.

The late Hans Karlgren invented the name "Coling" as an obvious contraction of "computational linguistics", and also in memory of the vagrant hero of a well-known Swedish comic strip who went by that name. The term "computational linguistics" itself was coined only a few years earlier by the late David Hays to refer to a field of endeavor whose creation had been recommended by the Automatic Language Processing Advisory Board (ALPAC) to provide a more solid theoretical foundation for work on machine translation. During the five or so years that intervened, the International Committee on Computational Linguistics stumbled into existence and organised its first conference in New York in 1965.

During the 35 years since that first meeting, our field has become broader and deeper, and our students and colleagues can now command good salaries throughout much of the world. For evidence of the vigor of the field, you have only to look around you. The day before the opening of this meeting, a ceremony in Saarbrücken will mark the termination of the 8-year, 89-million dollar Verbmobil project on speech-to-speech translation that involved at one time or another, some 900 people. It will therefore be no surprise that Germany is one of the three countries to whom we owe such a debt of gratitude for the organisation of the meeting.

The programme committee decided to make some modest innovations of its own this year, determining for the first time to conduct its business entirely through the Internet. Electronic submission of papers was strongly encouraged, against the advice of several experienced and cautious people who predicted chaos for the conference and a mental breakdown for me. There were, of course, problems. But things went more smoothly than anyone expected and we will know how to do things better next time. No submission was sent for review as hard copy, the handful that arrived on paper being scanned to make the digital version that reviewers then accessed through the world-wide web.

323 regular papers, and about 100 project notes and demonstration proposals were received from 22 countries. Each was read by three members of one of the 11 panels of reviewers, totalling 222 people altogether. My gratitude to those dedicated and able people knows no bounds. 110 regular papers, 24 project notes, and 10 demonstration proposals were accepted, or about a third of the submissions. As one who has read many of the papers, I can assure you that the quality of the presentations is likely to be even higher than even this good ratio suggests. So I hope you share some of my excitement at what will be either the last Coling of the old millenium or the first of the new one, but surely one of a series that has only just begun.

#### Martin Kay

## **Preface : Chair of the Organisation Committee**

Every COLING conference I have attended has been special in its own way. COLING 2000 is special in three respects: time, place and people.

For a number of years, we have learned to live with predictions that our discipline was just about to enter a completely new era, a prosperous period of commercialisation. But not until now has it finally started happening on a broad scale. COLING 2000 seems to be the COLING of transition. That this transition occurs simultaneously with the start of a new millenium is a coincidence whose mnemonic value might only be appreciated by the students of our students. It is an exciting time. On one hand, we are still far away from unravelling the miracle of human language, but on the other hand, our results are already becoming useful to a broad customer base. This has led to the creation of numerous new companies in language technology. Quite a few of these start-ups are represented at our conference. In these proceedings some well-known names appear with new affiliations. Conference name tags link familiar faces with the imaginative names of small but ambitious corporations.

We could sense the dynamics of commercialisation when we contacted companies to solicit support for our conference. Although all industrial colleagues we contacted on a personal basis were extremely sympathetic to our good cause and expressed great interest in COLING, some companies were simply so busy coping with growth and economic success that they could not turn their interest into active support and divert resources at this very time of rapid development. We are all the more grateful to the businesses that were able to help us. As these proceedings go to press, we have received confirmation of support from the sponsors acknowledged on page i.

The second factor which makes COLING 2000 special is the venue of the event in the very heart of Europe. It is the first COLING to take place in three neighbouring countries. Nowadays you have to look very hard to detect the exact location of the political borders when you move from one conference site to the other, yet for nearly one thousand years these borders were the object of bloody wars. Nobody can count the human lives that were lost in the repeated silly attempts to move the borders by a few miles in one direction or the other. If you should have the possibility to go hiking in the area, you will see the remnants of fortresses, trenches, bunkers and graves. Only for the last forty-three years have the borders remained stable while the inhabitants have been enjoying the longest period of peace in the past millenium.

It was a great pleasure for us to work with our Programme Chair Martin Kay. The collaboration among the three sites went very smoothly. Our main partners were Laurent Romary in Nancy and Antonio Sanfilippo in Luxembourg. The main workload in the organisation was carried by Michelle Carnell, Carmen Görl, Corinna Johanns, Jasmin Schneider and Jan Timm. They were supported by Uta Merkle and Marion Metzen of the University's Contact Office for Knowledge and Technology Transfer. I cannot list here all the students, researchers and faculty who helped us with the preparations. For the computational linguists of Saarbrücken, Nancy and Luxembourg it is an honour and a great pleasure to welcome the international community to the SaarLorLux region. On behalf of my local and regional colleagues I wish you a successful and pleasant conference.

#### Hans Uszkoreit

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