

Tinlap3
Las Cruces, New Mexico
7-9 January, 1987.

Tinlap Grand Committee:

Nick Cercone (Simon Fraser University),
Richard Rosenberg (Dalhousie University),
Roger Schank (Yale University),
David Waltz (Brandeis University),
Bonnie Webber (University of Pennsylvania).

These are the individuals concerned with the instigation and organization of the two previous Tinlaps and Tanlu in Canada.

Tinlap3 General Chair: Andrew Ortony (University of Illinois)

Tinlap3 Program Chair: Yorick Wilks (New Mexico State University)

Tinlap3 Treasurer: Tom Puckett (New Mexico State University)

1. Introduction

Natural Language Processing is now an industrial process and product as well as a form of theoretical enquiry. Indeed, with the industrial growth of Artificial Intelligence and Expert Systems there is now a danger of difficult and resistant theoretical problems being ignored or pushed aside while products are generated and sold. It is therefore very timely for those in theoretical research in the area of natural language processing and understanding to stand back and survey the partial solutions available to problems in this field, the blind alleys that have been closed off, those that had been closed for many years but have now been declared reopened, and the new theories and representations that have been developed and published since the last such inventory was taken.

The role of Tinlap workshops, then, is not at all to set out and discuss particular applications and implementations of natural language processing systems, but to concentrate on the underlying issues, and to compare solutions and constraints across disciplinary borderlines by drawing into a workshop theoreticians in artificial intelligence, logic, psychology, philosophy and linguistics. The previous Tinlap Workshops were able to crystallize, in the published statements of position from panellists, particular discussions and disputes within the field; and a measure of this is the degree to which those published volumes have continued to sell and to be referenced in the general literature of the field.

The main aim of Tinlap3 is again to crystallize the state of the field at the present moment, after a period which has seen a revival of interest in syntactic approaches to analysis; a new and pressing concern with aspects of parallel processing and their role in language understanding; a shift in the aspects of semantics and pragmatics that are of most concern to researchers, as well as an underlying worry that the field has not progressed in the linear fashion that was hoped for at the time of Tinlap1.

2. The Origins of Tinlap

The first Tinlap was in MIT in 1975 and was designed with the above goals in mind, but also to provide a forum free of the conventional tedium of too many presented papers. We shall follow that model at Tinlap3 (as did Tinlap2): the workshop consists entirely of panel sessions (at least within the formal sessions) consisting of invited speakers only, and of figures who have made significant contributions to the field. The Chair of each session, in consultation with the members invited, sets out a range of questions that express current concerns in the panel's subarea. The panel members (including the Chair) then provide statements of position not exceeding two thousand words, a bound version of all of which is issued to every registrant well before the workshop. There are some missing position papers in this volume, but it is hoped that there will be something to distribute for every scheduled panellist before the workshop itself.

Those papers are taken as read at the panels sessions at the workshop, and the formal sessions themselves concentrate on interactions, discussion and disagreements between panel members, with the Chair seeking whatever consensus there is and allowing participation of the audience.

The Association for Computational Linguistics will continue to make the volume of preprints (i.e. position statements) available for sale: these have continued to be much in demand from previous Tinlaps. If there is a consensus at the Tinlap3 workshop, some additional version of the workshop proceedings, for wider publication, will be considered, perhaps with edited versions of discussions by panels.

The Association for Computational Linguistics was involved in planning for Tinlap3 at an early stage: the executive committee of the ACL and the Grand Committee above were all approached individually by the Program Chairman for their views of the most important issues to be addressed, for sample questions to panels, and for suggestions as Chairs and panel members. The majority of those asked responded in great detail, and the draft program was an assembly of those proposals and suggestions, modified later by individual panel Chairs.

ACL also committed funds to this workshop, which are gratefully acknowledged, as is the financial support of NSF, AAI and ACM/SIGART. The Program Chairman also owes a special personal debt of gratitude to Don Walker for advice and comfort at times of strain.

Yorick Wilks
Program Chairman