

Closing Session Remarks

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It is now the moment of closing the Conference. We are all very tired, in some cases even exhausted, and I will be very brief.

Tonight we will have the occasion to thank everyone who worked on this Conference. In the meantime, my colleagues of the Organising Committee have offered a first survey of the outcome of the major thematic sessions of the Conference.

Their remarks and conclusions, and the summaries of the various Panels and possibly of the Workshops too, will certainly appear in one of the next ELRA Newsletter issue.

My Colleagues, whom I want to heartily thank for the intelligent smooth co-operative work in the Program Committee, have already summarised highlights and trends in the respective areas.

It seems to me very significant that so many common points and issues have emerged. Due to time constraints, I can indicate only some examples: the requirement of a continuous effort for developing standards; the recognition of the impact of the WEB on LR and HLT; the numerous consequences, in terms of strategy, policy choices, organisational problems of the infra-structural role of LR in the ICT-based Society; the need of international co-operation to comply with this role and with the requirement of globalisation and multilinguality; the need of co-ordination between national efforts and activities supported by international Funding Agencies; the recognition, in the different areas, of various signs of progress towards maturity of HLT (for ex. the programmatic inclusion of evaluation in the development cycle of NLP systems and in the design and production of spoken and written LR); the need of developing acquisition methods to implement LR flexibly adaptable to specific domains and applications ("corpora and lexica go together"); the trend toward combining rule based technologies with corpus based, data driven approaches both in speech and in NLP; the combination and integration of speech and NLP in building badly needed complete/complex systems.

This last issue provides a clear example of integration between R and D and evaluation,

speech and NLP, empirical and rule-based methods, etc.; the promotion of this integration seems to me, as I pointed out in the opening, a characterising feature of LREC.

Speech technology, which has been very successful in recognition tasks, should today cope with applications like dialogue, speech to speech translation, broadcast news on demand, voice interface with WEB, etc., which clearly requires the recognition of linguistic structures and the processing and use of semantic and pragmatic knowledge, which have been until now the realm of NLP.

All that requires (and we already have interesting examples provided by papers presented here) not only the conception, design and construction of new types of LR, optimally suited for building speech systems, but also the creation of standards in new areas, innovative annotation methods, grammar processing, dealing extensively with "meaning", methods to flexibly adapt grammars, lexica, dialogue management rules to domains and sub-languages, acquisition and "discovery" procedures, even for semantics, experiments for transferring models and technologies between languages, etc.

We can already observe the effect of this integration of speech and NLP on the evaluation paradigm, in efforts, reported in this conference, to combine two different traditionally distinct approaches, namely user-oriented and developer-oriented.

I hope that in this way we will also acquire more evidence to answer the vexed question of the reason for the gap between available LR and industrial systems: scarcity of LR, in particular for some languages, inadequacy for the intended applications of the information provided by available LR, the inability of industrial systems to exploit the information provided, etc..

In any case, we will do our best to prompt companies to take a more active role in the next LREC: i.e. not only watching what is already available, but actively co-operating or driving

the realisation of new types of LR. For example, multimodal LR, including more than written and spoken language, will probably have a more prominent role in the next LREC

I hope that the results of this Conference will contribute to the advance of the state of the art in our field of HLT and, in general, to the improvement of the Society where we live, in which information, communication, multilinguality play an increasingly central role.

The outcome of the Conference has reinforced my belief that our work is an essential part of the effort of the R&D community to open the possibility of a democratic access to an increasingly large part of the citizens of our world.

This awareness has motivated the Programme Committee to continue its efforts. We ensure you that we will organise a third LREC, possibly in an historical attractive place, and we hope that your presence will contribute to its success. We will announce the venue very soon.

Let us also hope that the many voices who have witnessed the relevance of LR and evaluation will persuade the public Authorities to ensure an adequate support to our field.

You are all invited to the LREC gala dinner which will take place tonight at the Hilton Hotel at 21.00.

Many people still remember - I hope with pleasure - the "El Relicario" happening in the Alhambra Gardens in Granada. We will certainly do our best to conclude our stay in Athens with songs and dances.

After all, Greece is not only the land of Apollo and Minerva, but also of Bacchus and Venus!

Seeing you tonight at the dinner and thanks again to all of you for your participation.

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