

Preface

New tools and media are creating new possibilities for people to communicate and find information over the Internet in a multilingual, global society. This is reflected in the fact that writers now write more in everyday life, typically create text directly on the computer and on the Internet (e.g. on blogs and other Web 2.0 technologies), and use new forms of writing in e-mails, web chats or SMS-messages on mobile phones. This concerns not only adults at work, but also children and youth.

However, the new possibilities also put higher demands on our skills in using language for achieving our communicative goals in different situations. If the demands are not met, a great number of people will risk being excluded from participation in the emerging information society. Of course, this will have unfortunate consequences not only for the individual, but also for society at large. Therefore, there is a growing need for support in reading and writing.

Certainly, there already exists writing tools such as authoring aids in word processors and instructional support in writing education. However, existing solutions have great difficulties meeting the growing need of support. In part, this is due to technical limitations of the tools in processing language, but also to the fact that these tools are poorly adjusted to different tasks, target user groups, genres and media.

Another unfortunate fact is that both research activities and commercial improvements have been lacking until recently. During the last years, the situation has changed to some extent, and several workshops at the largest NLP-conferences have included this field. A short review of workshop proceedings shows that the methods used are based on machine-learning, while rule-based methods are more or less abandoned. This raises a question: Is this due to limited economical resources, or are grammar checking methods based on machine-learning the future for the field? Apart from spelling and grammar checking, many other technologies are knocking on the door, including for instance information retrieval, and speech technology.

In short, the communicative situation and the role of written language have changed, and so has the development of NLP-techniques; this brings new technological possibilities to this field. The purpose of the workshop was to gather people with experience in developing, studying and using such NLP-tools, and to discuss how they can be developed further in order to better meet the needs of language users today and tomorrow – at work, in school or elsewhere.

Eight papers were submitted for review. Four of them were accepted. They were approved in consensus after having been reviewed and ranked by each of the reviewers: Rickard Domeij, Sofie Johansson Kokkinakis, Ola Knutsson and Sylvana Sofkova Hashemi. After revision, the papers are now published in these proceedings together with a written version of Koenraad de Smedt's invited speech.

We were both surprised and pleased about the interest for the workshop from contributors and visitors. It confirms the impression that NLP for reading and writing now gets more attention again after a period of little interest. As exemplified by the contents of these proceedings, there is a wide spectrum of interesting and promising work going on for the benefit of the readers and writers of tomorrow.

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Ola Karlsson, Ola Knutsson and Sylvana Sofkova Hashemi

Workshop on NLP for Reading and Writing
– Resources, Algorithms and Tools

November 20, 2008, Stockholm, Sweden

Workshop webpage:

http://spraakbanken.gu.se/personal/sofie/SLTC_2008/SLTC_2008.html

Conference webpage:

<http://www.speech.kth.se/slrc2008/>

INVITED SPEAKER

Koenraad de Smedt, Univ. of Bergen, Norway.

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