SIGSEM newsletter 2/2008

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Introduction

The SIGSEM members receive this newsletter, which is published approximately twice a year. The newsletter announces relevant events, software, projects, and presents news from SIGSEM and its working groups. SIGSEM members are welcome to contribute to the newsletter. Newsletter items can be sent to sigsem@aclweb.org

Report: STEP 2008

The first STEP workshop on semantics in text processing was organised as a three-day (Sept 22–24) event in the beautiful Aula Magna at Ca’ Dolfin, part of the University Ca’ Foscari in the magical city of Venice. The workshop attracted 38 participants, mostly from Europe and the U.S., who enjoyed a program featuring 18 regular papers, 5 short papers and 7 shared task papers (the overall acceptance rate was 75%). Two invited speakers, Harry Bunt (Univ. of Tilburg) on “A New Life for Semantic Annotations”, and Sanda Harabagiu (Univ. of Texas at Dallas) on “Semantic Processing in Textual Question Answering”, complemented the program. Topics ranging from word sense disambiguation, referring expressions, quantifier scope ambiguities, acquiring background and lexical knowledge, explanations, non-literal meanings, to discourse structure were presented and discussed in the main session.

The shared task on comparing semantic representations (as output by wide-coverage NLP systems) saw seven contestants “battle” for the STEP 2008 award. On the first day of the workshop each of them had to deliver a tutorial-type talk on their system, explaining the semantic formalism and the system implementation. The second day the contestants had to report how well their system (in their own view) performed on the shared task texts chosen by the other participants. The moment suprême arrived at the third day, when each participant voted for the best system for semantic interpretation. This last bit, of course, does not constitute any formal kind of evaluation, and has to be taken with a grain of salt, but was the icing on the cake of an interesting and fascinating experience. It was stunning to see so many non-participants interested in the shared task event, whose sessions were planned in the late hours of the afternoon each day (there is a lot of other interesting things to do in Venice!). It was informative and instructive to see how other semanticists dealt with common problems (that one never comes across in ordinary publications), the diversity of formalisms, the bitter reality of failure and success of a system performing on unseen real-world texts.

It was however not all about semantics at STEP. With the local organisation in the safe hands of Rodolfo Delmonte, we enjoyed a relaxing Venetian baroque chamber music concert, featuring a wildly enthusiastic cello player. Just as memorable was the social dinner, which took place in a typical Venetian trattoria treating us with a delicious selection of sea food (and wine).

Finally, for those who weren’t there: all papers of STEP 2008 are stored in PDF form at ACL anthology. The proceedings are also available in bookform and published by College Publications (click on image above). (Johan Bos)

http://project.cgm.unive.it/html/STEP2008/index.htm
**Report: OLP3**

The third workshop in a series of workshops on “ontology learning and population” (OLP3) was held July 22nd, 2008 at the European Conference on Artificial Intelligence (ECAI) at the University of Patras, Greece. OLP workshops have a focus on the extraction of domain knowledge (both on the assertion and terminological level) from text sources, possibly in combination with other (un)structured data sources. Ontologies formalize the intensional aspects of a domain, whereas the extensional part is provided by a knowledge base that contains assertions about instances of concepts and relations as defined by the ontology. The process of defining and instantiating a knowledge base according to an ontology is referred to as knowledge markup or “ontology population”, whereas semi-automatic support in ontology development is usually referred to as “ontology learning”. The OLP3 program consisted of six paper presentations and an invited talk by Enrique Alfonseca of Google Research Europe (Zürich) on ’Large-scale Learning of Semantic Relationships from Text Documents’. Details on the presentations and authors are available from the OLP3 website as provided below. 

*(Paul Buitelaar)*

**http://olp.dfki.de/olp3/**

**ACM Transactions on Computational Logic**

The number of journals for publishing research on computational semantics is rather small. So you might take into consideration the ACM Transactions on Computational Logic (ToCL), a journal interested in publishing papers on logical aspects of computational linguistics including computational semantics. ToCL is an international journal and included in the ISI Citation Index. 

*(Johan Bos, Vladimir Lifschitz)*

**http://tocl.acm.org/**

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**Report: CID 2008**

The third workshop in the series “Constraints in Discourse” (CID) was held July 30–Aug 1 2008 at University of Potsdam, Germany. CID workshops traditionally are dedicated to discourse semantics and pragmatics, with a mild focus on SDRT (Segmented Discourse Representation Theory). The Potsdam installment featured invited talks by Nicholas Asher, Berry Claus, Laurence Danlos, Julia Hirschberg, and Paul Piwek, with topics ranging from formal theory via empirical work to psychological modelling. The regular program consisted of thirteen papers and posters on various aspects of discourse representation and processing. Following a vote by the participants, the best paper award was given to Rudy Loock for his presentation of an information-packaging approach to appositive relative clauses and their competing allostructures in English. The program and online proceedings can be accessed via the webpage given below. 

*(Manfred Stede)*

**http://www.constraints-on-discourse.org**

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**Upcoming Event: IWCS-8**

Tilburg University will host the 8th International Conference on Computational Semantics on January 7–9, 2009. The aim of the workshop is to bring together researchers interested in any aspect of the computation, annotation, extraction, and representation of meaning in natural language, in multimedia objects, or in multimodal messages. The programme for IWCS-8 will be online soon! 

*(Harry Bunt)*

**http://iwcs.uvt.nl/iwcs8/index.htm**