

Preface

Welcome to NLDB 2004, the 9th International Conference on the Application of Natural Language to Information Systems, held at the University of Salford, UK during June 23–25, 2004. NLDB 2004 followed on the success of previous conferences held since 1995. Early conferences, then known as Application of Natural Language to Databases, hence the acronym NLDB, were used as a forum to discuss and disseminate research on the integration of natural language and databases and were mainly concerned with natural-language-based queries, database modelling and user interfaces that facilitate access to information. The conference has since moved to encompass all aspects of information systems and software engineering. Indeed, the use of natural language in systems modelling has greatly improved the development process and benefited both developers and users at all stages of the software development process.

The latest developments in the field of natural language and the emergence of new technologies has seen a shift towards storage of large semantic electronic dictionaries, their exploitation and the advent of what is now known as the Semantic Web. Information extraction and retrieval, document and content management, ontology development and management, and natural language conversational systems have become regular tracks in recent NLDB conferences.

NLDB 2004 saw a 50% increase in the number of submissions, and NLDB has established itself as one of the leading conferences in the area of applying natural language to information systems in its broader sense. The quality of the submissions and their diversity made the work of the members of the program committee more difficult than usual. Sixty-five papers were submitted from 22 different countries. Twenty-nine were accepted as regular papers, while 13 were accepted as short papers. The papers were classified as belonging to one of these themes:

- Natural language conversational systems
- Intelligent querying
- Linguistic aspects of modeling
- Information retrieval
- Natural language text understanding
- Knowledge bases
- Recognition of information in natural language description
- Natural language text understanding
- Knowledge management
- Content management

This year we were honored by the presence of our invited speaker Fabio Ciravegna from the University of Sheffield, UK. His lecture on “Challenges in Harvesting Information for the Semantic Web” was highly appreciated, and initiated vivid discussions.

We are very thankful for the opportunity to serve as Program Chair and Conference Chair for this conference. However, the organization of such an event is a collective effort and the result of a team’s work. First of all we would like to thank the

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members of the Program Committee for the time and effort they devoted to the reviewing of the submitted articles and to the selection process. My thanks go also to the additional reviewers for their help and support. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the local organizing committee, especially its chairman Sunil Vadera, for their superb work. We would like to thank Nigel Linge the head of the School of Computing Science and Engineering, Tim Ritchings the head of the Computer Science, Multimedia and Telecommunication discipline, and Gary Wright from the External Relations Division for their help and support.

Obviously we thank the authors for their high-quality submissions and their participation in this event and their patience during the long reviewing process.

June 2004

Farid Meziane
Elisabeth Métais

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