Lecture Notes in Computer Science

Commenced Publication in 1973
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Intercultural Collaboration

First International Workshop, IWIC 2007
Kyoto, Japan, January 25-26, 2007
Invited and Selected Papers

Springer
Preface

The 1st International Workshop on Intercultural Collaboration, IWIC 2007, was held January 25–26, 2007, in Kyoto, Japan. The main theme of this workshop was intercultural collaboration, from both technical and sociocultural perspectives. To increase mutual understanding in our multicultural world, topics included collaboration support (such as natural language processing, Web, and Internet technologies), social psychological analyses of intercultural interaction, and case studies from field workers. This was a unique workshop in a world in which physical borders disappear rapidly and people and cultures are more and more on the move and in contact.

The workshop featured three prominent invited speakers: Christiane D. Fellbaum from the Department of Psychology, Princeton University, introduced the Global Wordnet activities, Yumiko Mori from NPO Pangaea presented communication components bridging children around the world, and Gary Olson from the School of Information, University of Michigan, explained the Science of Laboratories Project. The workshop included 2 panels, 23 oral presentations, 19 posters, 6 demos, and excursions to world heritage sites in Kyoto. Participation in the workshop was by invitation only, but there were 103 professionals from 23 regions/countries: Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia and the USA.

To organize the workshop, three Program Co-chairs from different research fields worked together for the first time. Their expertise covered computer-supported collaborative work (CSCW), language technology and social informatics. The workshop itself became a case study in intercultural collaboration. To provide a different perspective of the workshop, each Program Co-chair noted a few paragraphs independently as follows.

The rise of the Internet and associated technologies for CSCW has made possible new collaborations among people from different national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. While these intercultural collaborations have the potential to bring great benefit to fields like business, science, and education, they are presently fraught with problems arising from linguistic and cultural differences. In order to address these problems and thereby more adequately support intercultural CSCW, we need a better understanding of how culture impacts communication and collaboration and we need new computer-mediated communication tools that enhance intercultural communication. The proceedings from this 1st International Workshop on Intercultural Collaboration provide insights on both of these fronts.

From the point of view of intercultural CSCW, the conference addressed many exciting topics, including the limitations of English as a common language, the potential of machine translation and related tools to better support collaboration.
between people with different native languages, the suitability of avatars and pictograms as alternatives to text-based communication, and the ways in which the broad range of cultures impact intercultural collaboration. The technologies described in this volume foreshadow an exciting new world in which anybody speaking any language can interact with anybody else. Taken together, the papers in this volume increase our understanding of how linguistic differences and cultural/national differences impact intercultural collaboration and help identify the key issues researchers will want to address in future research. (Susan R. Fussell)

Being an enabling technology, language technology is usually evaluated independently from end-user applications that incorporate them. What made this workshop extremely interesting was that it dealt with solving the real and complex problem of effective communication across different cultures and not just the perfect technology. A cross-cultural perspective does not just require a good translation, it requires successful communication. The tension between technology and effect in that case is even bigger. A failed language technology may not have any effect on the communication or it may have a fatal effect. Technically correct language technology may have the same effects.

From a language technology perspective, we are interested in building a universal index of meaning across languages and cultures, while maintaining cultural and linguistic differences in each language resource. We do not know how much common ground there is for interpretation and therefore we do not know what the differences are or how we can handle mismatches across cultures. Such an index will be a good starting point for exploring this and could become the basis for any cross-cultural communication system of the future. It will be a long and painful process that may take many decades to build, but we have to start somewhere. This workshop brought together people who help build such systems and people who deal with cultural mismatches on a daily basis; it helped to realize the full complexity of the problem. (Piek T.J.M. Vossen)

Intercultural collaboration is a goal-directed group activity based on intercultural communication. We set our research target on collaboration, not on communication, because we can clearly identify research issues when the goal of human group activities is defined. Goal-directed group activities can also be a target of optimization, and thus attract researchers who work on social and computer sciences. Obviously, the research area of intercultural collaboration encompasses CSCW and language technologies. To bridge the gap between these two research areas and fields of actual intercultural activities, however, we think the methodology of social informatics can be well used.

In the field of intercultural collaboration, various ideas have been tried out to overcome language barriers and to understand cultural diversity. For example, conversations between Chinese and Japanese are often done in English with the aid of written Chinese characters. To understand how humans manage language and cultural issues, researchers should join and observe intercultural activities. However, sites of intercultural activities are often far from research laboratories (both geographically and mentally). From the social informatics point of view,
mutual learning between researchers and field workers is essential in developing new methodologies and technologies. In this workshop, we thus invited case studies from field workers as well as technical and scientific research papers to learn from experience and to share common issues in our community. (Toru Ishida)

This volume includes 29 invited and selected papers presented at the workshop. The papers are categorized into the following areas:

– Ontology for Language Resources and Services
– Developing Language Resources and Services
– Connecting Language Resources and Services
– Tools for Intercultural Collaboration
– Emotions in Intercultural Collaboration
– Analysis of Intercultural Collaboration
– Actual Fields of Intercultural Collaboration

During the workshop, we held discussions on how to create a new field under collaboration among CSCW, language technologies and social informatics. Our discussion will be continued at the next workshop, which will be held in 2008.

May 2007

Toru Ishida
Susan R. Fussell
Piek T.J.M. Vossen
IWIC 2007 was organized by the Language Grid Project, the National Institute of Information (NICT), Center of Excellence on Knowledge Society, Kyoto University, and the IEICE Special Interest Group for Intercultural Collaboration, and was supported by UNESCO.

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