

Preface: General Chair

To be the General Chair of a major conference like ACL is exciting and stimulating as well as honourable.

Nevertheless, I encountered an additional and unexpected difficulty in organizing the conference this year: the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). As you may know, SARS has affected many conferences in this region resulting in many of them being cancelled. The uncertainty over how SARS will develop has put a lot of stress on all the people involved in ACL03, and in particular, on the local organizing committee chaired by Kenji Araki.

However, although we had to cope with the mental stress caused by the outbreak of the epidemic, it has also given us the opportunity of appreciating the fact that we belong to a community of researchers who share common interests and beliefs, care for each other and are willing to help. We have received numerous messages of encouragement from our scientific community, which helped us tremendously in preparing this conference. My special thanks go to the researchers from the affected regions who have been extremely helpful while we were discussing the possible measures to be implemented in order to make the conference safe.

Whatever the outcome of this turmoil will be, I believe that it has strengthened our mutual understanding and belief in the good intentions of other researchers in our community.

My special thanks are also addressed to the members of the local organizing committee, the ACL executive committee and the colleagues who have been extremely helpful in giving advice and suggestions throughout these difficult times.

This conference at Sapporo is the second in Asia, following the successful conference (ACL00) in Hong Kong. Since then, the interest in Computational Linguistics and Natural Language Processing has increased substantially both in our region and throughout the world. I am pleased to announce that we have attracted a record-breaking number of paper submissions for the main conference, 360 papers, out of which 71 were selected by the program committee chaired by Erhard Hinrichs and Dan Roth.

Despite the high number of submissions and the shorter reviewing period than in previous conferences, I am pleased that the program committee has organized the work extremely well.

The student workshop committee chaired by three students in the three regions (Jahna C Otterbacher- North America, Kotaro Funakoshi - Asia and Sandra Kübler - Europe) with Chris Brew as faculty member adviser has produced an interesting program of 12 papers. A new attempt of interactive posters and demonstrations sessions, designed by Yuji Matsumoto, will have 27 presentations.

The workshop chairs, Lori Levin, Takenobu Tokunaga and Alessandro Lenci, attracted exciting proposals of workshops with eleven of them selected, including two associated conferences (EMNLP and IRAL) as official workshops. They also have coordinated the preparation of these 11 workshops in a professional way. A very attractive tutorial program that consists of four tutorials to be given by internationally renowned experts was compiled by the tutorial co-chairs, John Carroll, Keh-Jiann Chen, and Lauri Karttunen.

The publications chairs, Sadao Kurohashi and David Yarowsky, have worked hard to prepare all the proceedings both in the printed forms and CD-ROMs. The publicity committee chaired

by Hitoshi Isahara issued a series of newsletters that were full of useful information, and were responsible for the administration of our Website. The financial committee chaired by Hiromu Hayashi and the exhibition co-chairs, Hitoshi Iida and Key-Sun Choi, jointly attracted many industrial sponsors and their exhibitions that will add new industrial dimensions to our conference.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those already mentioned and to many others who helped in numerous ways to produce a high quality conference.

Last but not the least, I would like to express my thanks to all who submitted their work to ACL03 and who will attend the conference.

Early summer is the best time to be in Sapporo. I hope you will enjoy Japan.

Jun-ichi Tsujii
May 31, 2003