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NOTE

Our Lucky Moments with Frederick Jelinek

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This contribution is going to be a congratulation to Frederick Jelinek's birthday jubilee. Before I reach the very congratulation I would like to remind a lucky moment that had a strong influence on the life of a certain Institute of Charles University in Prague after 1989. And it is by no chance that the honored person witnessed the above mentioned moment and its consequences. From my personal point of view, I have become one of the "victims" of this lucky moment so I really appreciate the opportunity to wish well to Fred via the Prague Bulletin circulating the institutions over the world.

The crucial events in November 1989 in Czech Republic brought freedom to a lot of people. Freedom to scientists in the group of computational linguistics at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Charles University changed (among other things) their subdepartment into an independent department of the faculty in 1990, namely the Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics (ÚFAL) headed by Eva Hajičová. Freedom to Fred Jelinek made it possible for him (among other things) to give a two term course on spoken and written language analysis at the Czech Technical University in Prague in 1991-1992. At that time, Fred was a senior manager of the IBM T.J. Watson Research Center, Yorktown Heights, NY and he was heading a group carrying out research on continuous speech recognition, machine translation and text parsing and understanding. While being in Prague, he was looking for a Czech scientist to offer him/her a position in his IBM group. The first one who he asked refused. The second one did not. But what is more important, the second one was the present director of ÚFAL Jan Hajič. As far as I know the search for a candidate was running via the question Do you know someone who would be interested to spend some time at IBM? So Jan was among those addressed and he did accept Fred's offer. The experience with the statistically based machine translation that Jan acquired at IBM became crucial for the next progress of ÚFAL.

In 1993, Fred moved to Baltimore and became the director of the Center for Language and Speech Processing (CLSP) at Johns Hopkins University. His very nice idea of the summer workshops came into life for the first time two years later in 1995 and lasts till now when CLSP invites proposals already for the 14th workshop.

Since 1993, when Jan returned back to Prague, much work had been done in a field of corpus linguistics and corpus-based approaches at ÚFAL - the Prague Dependency Treebank v. 0.5 was released in 1998 and the statistically-oriented experiments on tagging and parsing were performed even before then. Thus the topic of parsing happened to be one of three projects solved during the 4th Summer workshop in 1998 and Fred had a lot to say! Going through the complete workshop participant listings during the whole time of existence of this wonderful event, I can summarize that the members of ÚFAL participated in five out of thirteen workshop series - please, recall a lucky moment described at the very beginning! The summer workshops do not present the only possibilities open by Fred to ÚFAL's people - the graduate students are invited for the stays in CLSP. The benefits and motivation gained over these stays are undeniable and exceptional.

Needless to stress that I have touched upon only a few of key moments for ÚFAL that Fred initiated. A more comprehensive birthday congratulation to Fred was presented by Eva Hajičová and Jan Hajič at the Text, Speech and Dialogue Conference 2007 in Pilsen. If you had no chance to hear it, do not despair. You can read it, see (Hajič and Hajičová, 2007).

To conclude I am happy to know that the word "speech" knows to elude smile while taking photo as well as the word "cheese". *Happy birthday and good luck, professor Jelinek! Thanks for being helpful, original and exceptional . . .*

Bibliography

Hajič, Jan and Eva Hajičová. 2007. Some of Our Best Friends Are Statisticians. In *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Text, Speech and Dialogue*, pages 2–10. Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg.