

2004 ACL Lifetime Achievement Award

Karen Sparck-Jones: ACL Award Winner! The ACL Lifetime Achievement Award The ACL Lifetime Achievement Award was instituted on the occasion of the 40th anniversary meeting of the Association. The award will henceforth be presented for scientific achievement, of both theoretical and applied nature, in the field of Computational Linguistics. The executive committee of the ACL will nominate and select at most one award recipient annually at its winter meeting, considering the originality, depth, breadth and impact of the entire body of the nominees' work in computational linguistics. The award is a crystal trophy, and the recipient is invited to give a 45-minute speech on his or her views on the development of Computational Linguistics at the annual meeting. The speech is introduced by the announcement of the award, which is confidential until then. The Recipient of the 2004 ACL Lifetime Achievement Award The Association for Computational Linguistics is proud to present its 2004 Lifetime Achievement Award to Karen Sparck-Jones, Professor of Computers and Information (emeritus) at Cambridge University. The award was presented at the 42nd meeting of the ACL on July 23, 2004.

A Brief Laudatio

Karen Sparck Jones has worked in automatic language and information processing research since the late 1950s. She is a Fellow of the British Academy, a AAAI Fellow and ECCAI Fellow, and she was President of the Association for Computational Linguistics in 1994. She has been a member of the DARPA/NIST Text Retrieval Conferences Programme Committee since 1994, and is involved with several other US evaluation programmes.

Her work in the last decade has been on document retrieval including speech applications, database query, user and agent modelling, automatic summarisation, and information and language system evaluation. She has had funded projects on Automatic Summarising, Belief Revision for Information Retrieval, Video Mail Retrieval, and Multimedia Document Retrieval.

Karen Sparck Jones' received her PhD from Cambridge in 1964. And her thesis, entitled Synonymy and Semantic Classification, so I'm told, has had an interesting and unusual history. When she completed it in 1964, it was reproduced only in the simple mimeo book form then used by the Cambridge Language Research Unit where she worked. It was finally published in 1986, in an Edinburgh University Press series. And while I was doing my research for this introduction, several of my sources told me that even this late publication managed to be ahead of a great deal of later work that recapitulates aspects of it, usually from ignorance of its existence. There is no doubt that Karen's thesis was developing statistical and symbolic techniques for the use of what we now call language resources twenty or thirty years ahead of its time.

Her present research interests are in the development of the probabilistic model of retrieval, and in automatic summarisation, ranging from foundational work on the form and use of discourse structure to practically-oriented work on shallow processing techniques that combine rule and data driven methods; and in language and information system evaluation.

Her publications include numerous papers and eight books.

Now, an introduction like this would NOT be complete without a little personal anecdote. As some of you know, Karen and her late husband, Roger Needham, built their own house. Literally. They drove in every nail themselves, with one exception. When the builders were delivering the concrete for the foundation, they needed help, so the whole Computer Lab came to help. The job was to hold the wheelbarrow while the cement was poured in and then wheel it from the truck over to the place where it was needed. As you can imagine it was immensely heavy and hard to control. Well, as it turned out, Karen was the only person who could do it. She is a truly powerful woman!

An now, I'll turn over the floor to our third Lifetime Achievement Award winner. Karen Sparck Jones.

by Johanna Moore, ACL President.