2006 ACL Lifetime Achievement Award

Eva Hajicova: ACL Award Winner!

One of the highlights of COLING/ACL 2006 was the presentation of the 2006 ACL Lifetime Achievement Award to: Eva Hajicova

The following is an excerpt from the introduction made by Jun'ichi Tsujii (president of the ACL) at the COLING/ACL 2006 award ceremony.

I first met Eva, 26 years ago, at Coling in Tokyo, 1980.

I had just started my career as researcher then, while she was already an established researcher, a member of ICCL (International Committee of Computational Linguistics) and the representative, the banner carrier of the legendary Prague school of linguistics. Prague is the birth place of modern scientific linguistics, formal theory of discourse, and dependency representation

She started her career 40 years ago, and has successfully represented the Prague school together with Professor Petr Sgall. Throughout her career, she has been successful in leading the Prague school of linguistics and making it the Prague School of Computational Linguistics, one of the most influential centers of Computational Linguistics, always a front-runner of new ideas, in particular, in semantics and pragmatics.

She not only inherited the strong tradition of the Prague school in linguistics, but also, under the communist regime, despite the harsh restrictions on communication with the outside world, spread the Prague way of thinking on language to researchers outside, and has extended it in accordance with development of the fields.

One of her recent accomplishments, the Prague dependency treebank, is a good example of the combination of deep theoretical thinking nourished in the tradition of the Prague school, with the modern methodology of our days.

It consists of surface and deep annotations,analytical and tectogrammatical levels, for Czech, English, and Arabic. This effort has been extremely influential in that it represents one of the major annotation efforts in dependency syntax.

Furthermore, it was conceived from the beginning as a multi-layer annotation that goes beyond morphology and surface syntax. The Prague Dependency Treebank is used for linguistic research, and as the basis for machine learning experiments in computational linguistics.

She is certainly one of the people who have defined and formed the field of computational linguistics, and has developed it to the scientific field as we know it now. She has successfully injected the unique perspective of the Prague school, European tradition of linguistics, into our field, Computational linguistics and Natural Language Processing.

Without her, with the long period of the dark age in the region, we would have lost one of the greatest traditions in European linguistics which has enriched enormously our fields.

I remember her lectures on multi-layered representation including discourse structures, and their Machine Translation research at Kyoto University in Japan, some 20 years ago.

Her talks struck me by their strong intellectual, theoretical orientations, since MT research in Japan at the time was taken mostly as engineering endeavor, very much concerned with engineering issues such as efficiency, management of huge lexicon etc.

Eva's leadership quality has contributed to not only the Prague school but to the international movement of our field. She was Chair of European ACL and ACL as well as permanent member of International Committee of Computational Linguistics.

From the entire computational linguistics community, congratulations Eva on a lifetime of achievement!