

Language technology in the European programmes and policies

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Abstract

In the European technology funding framework, the 1990's and early 2000's was the era of specific language technology projects. The 4th and 5th Framework Programmes were complemented by specific programmes such as the Multilingual Information Society (MLIS). These programmes provided direct financial support to projects for translation and terminology tools, multilingual information retrieval, machine translation etc. Towards the end of the 5th Framework Programme and in the eContent programme, language technology started to appear as a component technology within different application domains, while a smaller number of central language technology activities (such as machine translation and speech processing) continue to be supported in specific language technology projects in the 6th and 7th framework programmes.

Language technology is above all an enabling technology for ICT systems and online solutions, leading to easier use, access to information and empowerment of the user. On the one hand, this means improving the quality of life, and on the other hand, boosting competitiveness and innovation potential of businesses in the European multilingual and multicultural market landscape.

Language technology solutions are beginning to find the application areas, but a lot of work needs to be done. Barriers exist to the optimal use of language technologies and, in particular, language resources. Efforts are needed to network and harmonise sources of language resources and to unleash the wealth of resources held by the public sector. While the major languages are well equipped with language resources and tools, the same is not true for the less widely spoken languages. New languages enter into the sphere of commercially important languages. The mass migration towards online self-service solutions in commerce, culture and governance accentuates the need of using the citizens' own language online.

To address these new challenges, the European Commission is working on a roadmap for future programmes. We will continue to collect input from the language technology community and from the content producers and users. Here are some of the questions we need to find answers to:

- What are the biggest obstacles for user-friendly and truly multilingual systems and on-line services?
- As far as language resources and language technology components are concerned, what are the gaps in coverage and obstacles against efficient use?
- To what extent can the treatment (e.g. collection, annotation, evaluation) of language resources be automated?
- In general: how do you see the role of language technology in creating a single European information space
- ...and, in particular, how can we improve the conditions for the development of digital content, taking into account multilingualism and cultural diversity?