Election Statement

Computational linguistics is a thriving scientific field and ACL is flourishing with it. As executive committee member, my main ambition would be to sustain the positive development resulting from wise strategic decisions in the past, and I believe my broad experience from different ACL activities puts me in a position to do so. However, we must constantly face new challenges, and I think there are two areas in particular that demand our attention.

**Publishing and reviewing:** By tradition, most of our work is published in conference proceedings rather than journals, which can be a disadvantage when we compete with researchers from other fields for grants or promotion. In addition, the traditional conference reviewing model is showing signs of strain, with growing reviewer loads and declining review quality as a consequence, which also points to the need for more journal publications. The creation of TACL has been a successful first step in this direction, but how do we scale it up? Can we maintain the quality when volume grows? Do we need more journals for conference-length articles? Do we need a different reviewing model for our conferences? I don’t know the answers, but I am convinced that we need to take these questions seriously.

**Scientific methodology:** As the amount of empirical research in computational linguistics has grown, more emphasis has been put on scientific principles such as reproducibility. This has led to a number of good initiatives, in particular to encourage researchers to release code and data, work that needs to be continued. However, the question of scientific methodology goes beyond the sharing of code and data. Researchers from neighboring fields, when reading our papers, sometimes point out that it is hard to see what the research questions are, let alone what specific hypotheses are being tested in relation to these questions. I believe an important part of becoming a mature science is to develop a greater awareness of scientific methodology and better articulate the ways in which we contribute to the advancement of human knowledge. Again, I don’t know exactly how, but I am willing to listen and work with you all on this.

Short Biography

Joakim Nivre is Professor of Computational Linguistics at Uppsala University. He holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Gothenburg and a Ph.D. in Computer Science from Växjö University. His research focuses on data-driven approaches to morphosyntactic analysis and linguistic resources needed for these tasks. He co-authored the standard textbook on dependency parsing and led the development of MaltParser. He served as secretary of EACL (2009-2012), secretary/president of SIGNLL (2007-2011), editorial board member for CL (2010-2012), action editor for TACL (2012-), and in major organizing roles for over 20 international conferences.
**Gender Balance**

**Q1:** Counting the outcome of this years' election, we will have had six male ACL presidents in a row (since Bonnie Dorr in 2008). This is unprecedented back to 1989. In fact, from 1989-2000 we had a 50/50 division female/male, which, by 2014 will have dwindled to a ratio of almost 1:3. What does this mean, to you, in terms of the health of the organization, and if you believe it's a problem, why? What would you plan to do during your term to address the problem of diversity, including but not limited to gender?

**Response:** I really think this is important, because people with different backgrounds have different experiences and provide different perspectives, so we can only gain by letting as many of these perspectives as possible contribute to our field. This is true in science as in all domains of society, and – as the questioner pointed out – it is not limited to gender but also applies to geographical, cultural and ethical diversity, as well as scientific diversity within our field. At the same time, these factors always have to be balanced against other criteria such as competence and suitability, which means that there is no simple mechanical procedure that can solve the problem.

In the long term, I think the only way to deal with this problem is to work to raise awareness, because a fundamental difficulty here is the phenomenon known as gender blindness – and you can generalize this to other dimensions than gender – namely that members of the favored majority tend to be blind to the issue even with the best of intentions. In the short term, there may be other things we can do and if you have concrete ideas about how to do it, I am eager to hear them.

**Public Presence**

**Q2:** It's not uncommon these days to see media coverage of language science or language technology issues, which often includes commentary by people who have no connection to our community. (And who are sometimes rather clueless.) The question for the candidates is whether they consider it important to make ACL a publicly visible "go-to" organization for expertise and commentary on these issues? If so, how would you go about it?

**Response:** I do believe that this is important, and I have heard the same issue being raised by other colleagues as well recently. However, I must confess that I don't have a very clear idea of what we need to do to address it. It seems to be another case of awareness-raising, but this time we need to raise the awareness of people outside our community, which makes it even harder. When we organized ACL in Uppsala, we managed to get three senior members of our community into the national news on TV, but I honestly don't know whether that had any lasting effect. So I guess I would have to start by collecting ideas from people who know more about this than I do. ACL is a large organization, with many different competences, so I am sure that there are many great ideas out there, and I am certainly willing to listen and to work to improve the situation. I am sorry that I can't be more specific than that.
Scientific Dissemination

**Q3:** TACL was established (in part) to enable tenure-track academics to disseminate research results in journal form, rather than as conference papers, because tenure committees have historically valued journal papers more highly. But TACL has decided to allow accepted papers to be presented as conference talks and posters as well (possibly to justify conference travel). The number of such journal paper-cum-talks is beginning to creep up, with 13 at this conference. What do the candidates think of this practice? Does it show a field that is conflicted as to how research results should be disseminated? To avoid ACL being caught in a double bind between what TACL has promised and what conference organizers can deliver, would you address this during your vice-presidency and presidency?

**Response:** This is a very important strategic issue for the ACL, and one that I raised in my own election statement. So let me take it step by step. First of all, the creation of TACL was clearly a step towards having more journal publications, and I believe this was a step in the right direction. Secondly, since getting a conference presentation out of a paper seems to have a high appeal in our community, I also think it was a good strategic decision to allow TACL papers to be presented at conferences, but I am aware that this has led to practical coordination problems for our conferences.

I am a firm believer in the advantages of the TACL model, so I think it is important that we promote and enhance this. A radical solution would be to say that only TACL papers get long talks at ACL, and that all other submissions get posters or possibly short talks. We may not be ready for this yet, but I think it is important that we work towards a model where TACL papers have a prominent and natural place at our conferences, instead of being a nuisance for conference organizers.

**Q4:** What do the candidates think about the recent change in the reviewing process at NIPS, where the reviews and the rebuttal are made available upon publication of an accepted paper?

Thanks for asking this question. Since I don’t normally go to NIPS, I wasn’t aware of this change, but I have now looked briefly at some of the published papers and their reviews, and I must say that part of me really likes the idea. Although I have only looked at a very small sample, my impression is that the reviews are better because they were written to be read by a wider audience, and I felt I gained a better understanding of the paper by reading the reviews. At the same time, there is another part of me that says that this is a bad idea because it will put even more pressure on our reviewers, who are already struggling to maintain reviewing quality and meet deadlines. So, I think I would have to know more about the experience from NIPS before I make up my mind on this, but I am definitely not opposed to the idea.
Q5: With the growing number of ACL-sponsored conferences and workshops, all of which are insisting on multiply peer-reviewed papers, I fear we are developing reviewer fatigue, at the same time as reviewers are being asked not just to review papers but engage in discussions with authors and other reviewers. What do the candidates think of the radical proposal of adopting the policy used in biology and bioinformatics conferences of simply accepting ALL papers -- without review -- for poster presentation, leaving it to short-turn-around peer-reviewed journals, to announce their significant new results? Is this an issue you would consider addressing in your term of office.

Response: Let me first say that this is definitely an issue that I would like to address during my term of office. In fact, it is one of the two main issues I raise in my election statement. As I have already said, I believe that the creation of TACL was a step in the right direction, but we need to think seriously about how to scale it up and about how this impacts on our conferences and their review procedure. My experience as an action editor, a reviewer and an author is that the reviewing quality is much higher in TACL than in our conferences, while the turnaround is just as fast. Now, the big question for me is to what extent this is due to the fact that the volume is much smaller in TACL, and whether it will be possible to maintain both quality and fast turnaround times as the volume grows.

How do we deal with this? Do we need more journals for conference-length papers? Do we need to modify the reviewing model for our conferences in order to free up reviewer time for these journals? The proposal of having no review at all for conference papers is an extreme variant of this, but maybe this is just the right thing to do. It is probably better than trying to do some more light form of reviewing, which would probably only make the review quality worse. It also seems perfectly compatible with the idea of giving long talks only to TACL papers and posters to all other submissions. Now, before we implement any of this, we obviously need to anchor this in the community, but we definitely need to do something.

Scientific Dissemination

Q6: ACL has a centralized repository for papers. But we lack centralized repositories for educational materials and for software, as well as a central site where the public can ask questions or where researchers can find collaborators. Do the candidates have any thoughts on extending the scope of our valuable centralized resources and services?

Response: This sounds like it would be very useful. But I am afraid that it is harder to achieve than the anthology. I have been involved in several initiatives for teaching materials and software, both nationally in Sweden and on the European level, and it has been surprisingly hard to get these projects off the ground. I suspect that part of the problem is that the use cases are more diverse than for the anthology and therefore the optimal structure less obvious. It also requires more effort from the community in the form of contributions, which may create a bottleneck. But if there is a a clear interest from the membership, it is definitely something that I could consider working on.