

## 30 years of the Dutch Language Union

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It is a great honour for me to address an audience of such renowned computational linguists. I would like to thank the organising committee of CLIN 2010 for this opportunity. The CLIN conference is held every year at a university in either the Netherlands or Belgium. It provides researchers in the field of computational linguistics with a unique opportunity to present and discuss their research. Belgium and the Netherlands are neighbours with much more in common than just a border. What is particularly important in relation to this conference is that the two countries share a common language: Dutch.

It is this bond which, in 1980, led to the two countries joining forces to set up the Dutch Language Union, with the aim of implementing common language policy for Dutch. In 2004, the two founding members were joined by Surinam as an associate member of the Dutch Language Union (DLU).

DLU initiatives cover all aspects of language policy. Each one is aimed at creating the right conditions to make it easier for Dutch speakers to use their language in as many different situations as possible, including when they are abroad.

It is ultimately not the governments of the Netherlands, Flanders and Surinam, who are the DLU's most important 'clients', but the people who use Dutch to communicate.

The activities of the DLU range from promoting the teaching of Dutch, both within the Dutch speaking areas and beyond, and stimulating language-related cultural and literary cooperation, to compiling dictionaries and grammars. Over the last decade the DLU has taken a serious interest in supporting the development of digital language resources and human language technologies (HLT) for Dutch.

As Dutch is a so-called medium-sized language and companies are not always willing or able to invest in developing HLT for a language with a relatively small market, government support was needed. On the other hand, the development of HLT is considered essential, if a language is to survive in the information society.

It was against this background that the DLU set up a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening the position of Dutch in human language technologies. The most important being:

- The STEVIN programme: a subsidised programme aimed at establishing a complete digital language infrastructure for Dutch, and promoting strategic research in language and speech technology
- The HLT Agency: a central repository for digital language resources based

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within an important linguistic organisation in our language area: the Institute for Dutch Lexicology (INL).

I am delighted that a number of STEVIN results are being presented at this year's CLIN conference.

As the Dutch Language Union is a relatively small organisation, these activities have been set up in close co-operation with the relevant ministries and organisations in Belgium and the Netherlands. This is a key characteristic of the way we work: the DLU does not operate in isolation, but in close cooperation with other professional organisations and associations both within and outside of the Dutch language area. It is thanks to such cooperation that we are today able to look back on the past 30 years, and conclude that a great deal has been achieved, since the DLU was founded in 1980:

- In total there are more than 400,000 learners of Dutch as a foreign language across the world, and Dutch is taught at 200 universities in 40 different countries
- Books by Dutch and Flemish authors are translated into 100 languages
- Close cooperation links have been established with Surinam, the Dutch Antilles, Aruba, South Africa and Indonesia
- Advice on a range a Dutch language and linguistic issues is freely available to the public. In 2009, 5.5 million items were consulted, and 6,300 new questions were submitted and answered
- The DLU website, "Taalunieversum", receives over 17 million visitors a year
- Numerous digital Dutch language resources have been made available to researchers and to the general public. These resources are now being managed and maintained for future use.

2010 marks the 30th anniversary of the DLU, and also the 20th anniversary of the CLIN conference. I would like to congratulate the CLIN community for having reached this milestone. We should acknowledge the valuable contribution CLIN has made towards creating an excellent environment in which Dutch and Belgian computational linguists can exchange and cultivate ideas. It is in part thanks to CLIN that computational linguists, like yourselves, have come to enjoy such international renown.

I would like to conclude with one simple wish: in 10 years' time, when the DLU celebrates its 40th anniversary and CLIN its 30th, my speech will not need to be translated beforehand, but will be able to be produced real-time, using machine translation.

I hope you all enjoy an interesting and fruitful conference.