EUROPEAN LANGUAGE EQUALITY

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Report on ELE Conference

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Abstract

This deliverable reports on META-FORUM 2022, first providing a brief description of the event series and an overview of the ELE conference (Section 2). In Section 3, we describe the 2022 event with regard to the participants and stakeholder groups and programme. Finally, we highlight the main outcomes of the event. The report concludes with a summary.

1 Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, META-FORUM 2022 was planned as a hybrid conference, enabling face-to-face contact with colleagues again after two years of online events. The conference took place on 8 and 9 June 2022, covering the whole two days. The conference received a lot of interest and can be considered a great success with stimulating presentations and many fruitful conversations. The organisers received a lot of positive feedback from various stakeholders during and after the event.

2 META-FORUM Conference Series

META-FORUM is the annual international conference on Language Technologies in Europe, organised by ELE and its sister project ELG, also in collaboration with the META-NET Network of Excellence, dedicated to fostering the multilingual European information society. META-FORUM 2022 took place as a hybrid conference in Brussels, Belgium, on 8 and 9 June 2022, covering the whole two days, like the META-FORUM conferences before the COVID-19 pandemic, but with shortened session durations taking the attention span of the online participants into account.

Previous META-FORUM editions were organised and financially supported through the EU projects T4ME (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013) and CRACKER (2015, 2016, 2017). For 2019-2022, ELG took over the organisation of the four META-FORUM conferences and in 2022, the ELE and ELG projects shared the organisation so that the 2022 edition served as the fourth annual ELG and also as the first annual ELE conference. For the time being, we continue using "META-FORUM" as the primary name and brand of the event while the primary goal of ELE, Digital Language Equality, was included in the motto or title of the conference (META-FORUM 2022: "Joining the European Language Grid – Together towards Digital Language Equality"). The objectives of the ELE project and conference overlap significantly with those of the META-FORUM conference series.

Consistently with the previous years, the two main goals of the event were community building and outreach to the wider European Language Technology community, including both research and industry. The first day of the 2022 edition focused upon the final results of ELG, while the second day emphasised the key achievements of ELE, e. g., with an overview of the current status quo of digital language equality in Europe, the project's vision of digital language equality to be achieved in Europe by 2030 and the first draft of the strategic research, innovation and implementation agenda (SRIA) and roadmap.

The conference series has always acted as a dissemination and promotion platform. The ambition was to attract a large number of diverse participants, so that all relevant stakeholder groups were adequately covered and represented. During the preparation of the programme of META-FORUM 2022, special attention was paid to include enough breaks for informal face-to-face communication between the onsite participants to support networking after two years of online events. All editions of the META-FORUM conference series are

thoroughly documented with their own websites, and the URL http://www.meta-forum.eu always redirects to the most recent edition (see Table 1).

Year	URL	Motto	City, Date
2022	https://www.european-language-grid.eu/meta-forum-2022	Using the ELG – Together towards Digital Language Equality	Brussels, June 08/09
2021	https://www.european-language-grid.eu/meta-forum-2021	Using the European Language Grid	Online, Nov. 15-17
2020	https://www.european-language-grid.eu/meta-forum-2020	Piloting the European Language Grid	Online, Dec. 1-3
2019	https://www.european-language-grid.eu/meta-forum-2019	Introducing the European Language Grid	Brussels, Oct. 8/9
2017	http://www.meta-net.eu/events/meta-forum-2017	Towards a Human Language Project	Brussels, Nov. 13/14
2016	http://www.meta-net.eu/events/meta-forum-2016	Beyond Multilingual Europe	Lisbon, July 4/5
2015	http://www.meta-net.eu/events/meta-forum-2015	Technologies for the Multilingual DSM	Riga, Apr. 27
2013	http://www.meta-net.eu/events/meta-forum-2013	Connecting Europe for New Horizons	Berlin, Sep. 19/20
2012	http://www.meta-net.eu/events/meta-forum-2012	A Strategy for Multilingual Europe	Brussels, June 20/21
2011	http://www.meta-net.eu/events/meta-forum-2011	Solutions for Multilingual Europe	Budapest, June 27/28
2010	http://www.meta-net.eu/events/meta-forum-2010	Challenges for Multilingual Europe	Brussels, Nov. 17/18

Table 1: Overview of the META-FORUM conference series (2010-2022)

Figure 1 shows the welcome page of the META-FORUM 2022 website, informing visitors about the conference and its highlights. In the various sub-pages, the detailed programme, the project expo, venue, photo gallery and contact page can be accessed.

3 META-FORUM 2022: Joining the European Language Grid – Together towards Digital Language Equality

META-FORUM 2022 was the 11th edition of the international series of conferences on powerful and innovative language technologies for the multilingual information society. The motto of the conference was "Joining the European Language Grid – Together towards Digital Language Equality".

3.1 Programme

For this hybrid conference we decided to return to a full two-day programme as before the COVID-19 pandemic, but we slightly reduced the typical session duration due to the higher cognitive load entailed by attending an online conference for remote participants. Given that the conference should cover both sibling projects, we decided to dedicate the first day to ELG and the second day to ELE. Preparing the conference, the setup and programme were discussed in various meetings among the partners involved in the organisation of the event.

The main achievements of ELE covered in the second day of the event were the analysis of the current status of technology support of European languages and digital language equality, the elaboration of a vision of digital language equality in 2030 and recommendations about how to reach this vision. Moreover, with the project in its last month, issues

Figure 1: META-FORUM 2022 website

regarding the future development after the completion of the project was another focus of the programme.

Additionally, we organised sessions with representatives from selected language communities and stakeholder groups. Their inclusion in the discussion was important for bringing the different stakeholders closer together and thus, crucial for the project and conference. The detailed programme of the ELE day of the conference is shown in Figure 2. Videos of all sessions as well as all presentations are available in the "Programme" section of the META-FORUM website.[1] The event was also live streamed on YouTube.

3.2 Main Content

After a brief welcome and introduction by Georg Rehm (Co-Coordinator of ELE), the ELE day was opened by two keynote speakers. The first one was presented by June Lowery-Kingston, Head of Unit "Accessibility, Multilingualism & Safer Internet", DG Connect, European Commission (EC), with the title "Language Equality Across Europe – A Multilingual World". The second keynote was given by François Alfonsi, Member of the European Parliament (EP), who covered the topic of digital language equality from the point of view of the EP.

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[1] https://www.european-language-grid.eu/meta-forum-2022/programme/

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META-FORUM 2022
Thursday, 09 June 2022

	Session 7	Opening – European Language Equality
09:00	**Opening**	Georg Rehm (DFKI, Germany; Co-coordinator ELE)
9:10	**Invited Keynote**	June Lowery-Kingston (European Commission, Head of Unit "Accessibility, Multilingualism & Safer Internet")
9:25	**Invited Keynote**	François Alfonsi (Member of the European Parliament)
9:40	**National LT/AI Strategies in Europe – Is Language Represented?**	German Rigau (University of the Basque Country, Spain)
9:55	**Defining Digital Language Equality**	Federico Gaspari (Dublin City University, Ireland) Annika Grützner-Zahn (DFKI, Germany)
10:15	**Digital Language Equality Dashboard**	Stelios Piperidis (ILSP, R.C. "Athena", Greece)
10:30	**Coffee Break**	

	Session 8	Technology Support of Europe's Languages in 2022
11:00	**Language Technology for Europe's Languages in 2022 – Cross-language Comparison**	Maria Giagkou (ILSP, R.C. "Athena", Greece)
11:20	**Language Report Irish**	Teresa Lynn (Dublin City University, Ireland)
11:25	**Language Report Dutch**	Frieda Steurs (Instituut voor de Nederlandse Taal, Netherlands)
11:30	**Language Report Bulgarian**	Svetla Koeva (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria)
11:35	**Language Report Welsh**	Gareth Watkins (Bangor University, UK)
11:40	**Language Report Icelandic**	Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson (Institute for Icelandic Studies, Iceland)
11:45	**Discussion**	
12:00	**Lunch Break and Video Expo**	

	Session 9	Demands, Needs and Gaps of the European LT Community
13:00	**European LT Developers**	Maria Giagkou (ILSP, R.C. "Athena", Greece)
	CLARIN	Maria Eskevich (CLARIN, Netherlands)
	CLAIRE	Marlies Thönnissen (CLAIRE, Netherlands)
13:15	**European LT Users & European Citizens**	Natalia Resende (Dublin City University, Ireland)
13:30	**Deep Dives**	Teresa Lynn (Dublin City University, Ireland)
	Machine Translation	Andrejs Vasiljevs (Tilde, Latvia)
	Speech Technologies	Gerhard Backfried (Hensoldt, Austria)
	Text Analytics	Andrés Garcia Silva (Expert System, Spain)
	Data and Knowledge	Martin Kaltenböck (Semantic Web Company, Austria)

	Session 10	LT Vision for 2030
14:00	**Our Vision for 2030: Digital Language Equality**	Jan Hajič (Charles University, Czech Republic)
14:20	**Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda**	Georg Rehm (DFKI, Germany)
14:45	**Discussion**	
15:00	**Coffee Break**	

	Session 11	Continuation of ELE
15:15	**Next steps, New funding opportunities, Sneak Peak: ELE book**	Georg Rehm (DFKI, Germany) Jane Dunne (Dublin City University, Ireland) Jan Hajič (Charles University, Czech Republic)
	Closing Session	
15:45	**Recap and Closing Remarks**	Georg Rehm (DFKI, Germany)
16:00	**End of META-FORUM 2022**	

Figure 2: ELE conference programme

After the opening, the analysis of all European national LT/AI strategies, the developed digital language equality metric and the implemented digital language equality dashboard were presented by members of the ELE consortium.

Session 8 was dedicated to the presentation of five selected language reports and the cross-language comparison. The language reports were presented by their main authors with regard to achievements, gaps and recommendations for the strategic research, innovation and implementation agenda and roadmap.

After the lunch break, Session 9 was organised as a mix of presentations and a discussion panel on the topic "Demands, Needs and Gaps of the European LT Community". The presentations introduced the three surveys conducted with the different target groups: European LT developers, LT users and European citizens. In the technology deep dive panel, industry representatives from the ELE consortium discussed their main findings and their views on shortcomings and gaps with regard to the impact on European society.

Session 10 was dedicated to ELE's LT vision for 2030. The work package leader presented the vision of achieving digital language equality by 2030 and explained natural language understanding in and for general AI applications as one main goal. This was followed by the presentation of the current state of play of the strategic research, innovation and implementation agenda and roadmap, as well as the recommendations for progress towards digital language equality in 2030 collected from all deliverables produced in the project.

The last session covered the future plans after the completion of the project tasks in June 2022. This included topics such as the follow-up project ELE 2, funding opportunities within ELE 2 and the crucial issue of data availability. The event closed with a summary of the con-

ference, information about the ELE book and an announcement for the next META-FORUM and other events in which ELE will be presented.

3.2.1 Contributions

Speakers and panelists of META-FORUM 2022 were invited by the organisers to actively contribute to the event. This approach enabled a coordinated curation of the programme and balanced selection of representatives from different areas, covering different perspectives. Presenting the wider LT landscape and language-centric AI community, whilst including diverse perspectives was considered to be crucial for the conference to ensure an attractive event for industry stakeholders and researchers as well as other stakeholder groups.

3.2.2 Keynote Speakers

Two keynotes were presented at the beginning of the second day, one by June Lowery-Kingston, Head of Unit G.3 "Accessibility, Multilingualism & Safer Internet", DG Connect, EC, and one by François Alfonsi, Member of the European Parliament (EP).

The first keynote, given by June Lowery-Kingston was about Language Equality in Europe. This topic was specified with regard to the headlines "Social", "Culture", "Competitiveness", "Autonomy", "Sovereignty", "Inclusive", "Diversity" and "Economy". June Lowery-Kingston emphasised the high priority of language as part of our culture and the challenges resulting from English being the dominant language in many areas. Actions to tackle language inequalities by the European Commission were summarised into the three areas "Policies", "Coordination" and "Funding". Within these areas, the goal is to include multilingualism at the beginning of digital developments and programmes. June Lowery-Kingston further elaborated the area of "Funding" with regard to the two funding programmes Horizon Europe and Digital Europe Programme. Moreover, the data strategy together with the forthcoming language data space were examined.

François Alfonsi, co-chair of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages in the European Parliament, highlighted the topic of language equality from the perspective of the EP with a focus on digital language extinction and missing technical support of minority languages. The conference on the Future of Europe was mentioned in which European citizens declared that Language Technology could solve the problems produced by multilingualism, as missing information access.

3.3 Participants and Stakeholder Groups

Overall, approx. 400 persons had registered for META-FORUM 2022, 104 registered for in person and approx. 300 for online attendance. Eventually the conference was attended by a total of 86 persons on-site and 193 persons online. The no-show rate of approx. 30% was not unexpected due to various other events and conferences taking place in June but it is still low compared to the more typical no-show rate of 50-60% for virtual conferences. Besides, the Youtube live stream of the main track was viewed by over 100 users by the end of the week in which META-FORUM 2022 took place. This number indicates that many interested people seized the opportunity and watched the event in an asynchronous manner.

The number of unique online participants on the second day was, incidentally, also 86. Figure 3 shows the participation of online attendants over time. The highest numbers were reached at the beginning, in the middle of Session 1, and at the end, in Session 11. Generally, the number of participants was consistently high, except for the breaks.

Attendants from 41 different countries participated in the conference, with the majority being from Belgium, Germany and Spain with more than 10% each, see Table 2.

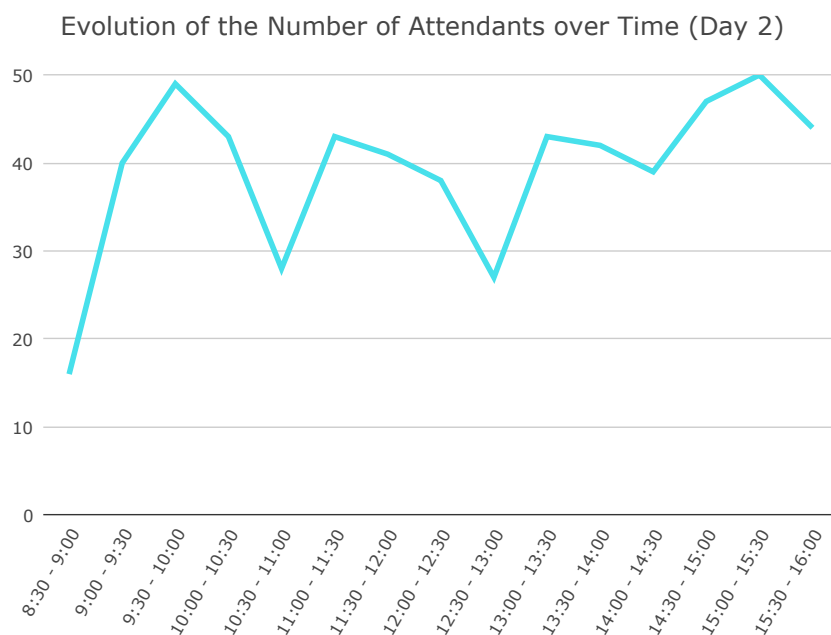Evolution of the Number of Attendants over Time (Day 2)

Figure 3: Participation of online attendants over time

The distribution with respect to the stakeholder areas was dominated by approx. 65% of registered participants belonging to the area of research (including some researchers from industry). Approx. 21% of the registered participants belonged to industry and just under 14% to public administrations.

3.4 Photo Gallery

A photographer documented META-FORUM 2022. Approximately 100 photos are available on the ELG website (see Figures 4 and 5 for a selection).[2]

3.5 Main Take-aways

The interest in ELE and its results and conclusions was very high. The participants provided a lot of positive feedback about the presentations and future plans. Generally, the feedback regarding the whole event was consistently positive and reflected the appreciation of first get-togethers after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although the organisation of the event including its technical aspects was challenging, we consider the event to be an enormous success. The hybrid mode enabled the interaction and communication between on-site participants which was missed in the last two years of online events, without excluding those who wanted to participate but who did not have the possibility to travel to Brussels. The high number of online participants and persons watching the online videos of the sessions after the event underlines this positive feature of a hybrid event. The coffee and lunch breaks invited the on-site participants to chat informally,

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[2]   https://www.european-language-grid.eu/meta-forum-2022/gallery/

Country	Percentage	Country	Percentage
Belgium	13.62%	Norway	1.08%
Germany	11.11%	Latvia	1.08%
Spain	10.04%	Denmark	1.08%
France	5.73%	Turkey	0.72%
Ireland	5.38%	Switzerland	0.72%
Greece	5.38%	Republic of Moldova	0.72%
Romania	5.02%	Malta	0.72%
United Kingdom	4.66%	Lithuania	0.72%
Czech Republic	3.94%	Iceland	0.72%
Italy	2.87%	Cyprus	0.72%
Finland	2.87%	Croatia	0.72%
Netherlands	2.51%	Brazil	0.72%
Estonia	2.15%	Algeria	0.72%
Bulgaria	2.15%	United States	0.36%
Austria	2.15%	Portugal	0.36%
Slovenia	1.43%	Montenegro	0.36%
Slovakia	1.43%	Japan	0.36%
Luxembourg	1.43%	Hungary	0.36%
Sweden	1.08%	Belarus	0.36%
Serbia	1.08%	Australia	0.36%
Poland	1.08%		

Table 2: META-FORUM 2022 – participants and country distribution

to connect and to get to know each other again outside of virtual meetings, through which such informal and slightly random coffee break chats are impossible to emulate.

While not every registered participant attended every session, the hybrid format makes it possible for online attendants to select only those sessions they are particularly interested in and which they had the time to attend. The hybrid mode with two cameras in the room and a professional technical team on-site enabled us to produce recordings of all sessions efficiently. All META-FORUM 2022 sessions are available on YouTube.

4 Conclusions

Despite the difficult consequences of the COVID-19 situation and the associated uncertainty in terms of planning, the ELE conference was an enormous success. It achieved a great deal of attention in the European LT community. The two main goals of the event, community building and outreach to the wider European LT research and industry community were realised, which was not only proved by the high number of attendants. The spirit of the conferences and the positive feedback we received reflects the positive perception of the ELE initiative as such and the great relevance and timeliness of the topics discussed. Especially possibilities for interacting and connecting personally in the hybrid conference mode at META-FORUM 2022 were appreciated and made use of and showed the involvement of a lively and engaged LT community. This experience encourages us to organise META-FORUM 2023 under the umbrella of ELE 2.

Figure 4: META-FORUM 2022 – Photo gallery 1/2

Figure 5: META-FORUM 2022 – Photo gallery 2/2