1 Foreword

The idea for a workshop dedicated solely to matters of punctuation first arose during a discussion with Robert Dale at COLING-94 in Kyoto, Japan. We thought the time was right to be able to dedicate an entire day of presentations to the subject, since it seemed to be becoming more and more popular, and the best venue to attract participants from as wide an area as possible was thought to be an ACL. I approached the then head of SIGPARSE, Prof. Tomita, to see if they would be willing to sponsor such an event, and he seemed keen on the idea. The concept floundered during 1995, but because of other commitments at the time nothing ever came of the idea. By late 1995 I knew that I would only be remaining in the field for another year, so in order to be able to see the event through, it had to happen during the summer of 1996. By this time, leadership of SIGPARSE had passed on to Harry Bunt, who gladly gave his support to the concept. And so, with the assistance of the ACL exec and local organisers, the meeting finally came to fruition in Santa Cruz in late June, where virtually the entire world-wide NLP/punctuation community were able to meet and get to know one another.

The meeting was indebted to Geoff Nunberg for two reasons: not only for agreeing to come and give an excellent invited talk, but also for stimulating interest in pucntuation in the first place. Every single paper presented at the meeting references Geoff's book, "The Linguistics of Punctuation" (1990) in the bibliography. The publication of this book served to focus our minds on the existence of punctuation, and showed us that it was an area worth investigating. Hence one of Geoff's (many) claims to fame is to be the "Father of Modern Punctuation Research". (and I hope he forgives me for not transposing that full-stop!) One of the most remarkable things about the SIGPARSE meeting was that people interested in punctuation just seemed to crawl out of the wood-work. If we had been asked a month before about our work, we would have thought of it as a rather peculiar, if interesting, backwater. The presence of so many people in Santa Cruz, however, showed us that there is a thriving world-wdide community with an interest in punctuation. I hope that this community will continue to have occasional meetings such as this one, if only to remind punctuation-freaks that they are not alone!

A final, and large vote of thanks must be made to all the people who helped towards the realisation of this meeting: The University of Edinburgh, for handling all the financial arrangements; the ACL executive, for logistical support; and of course the wonderful local organisation provided by Geoff Pullum and his team of eager helpers. Their help made this meeting one that was not only informative and useful, but also extremely relaxing and enjoyable.

Bernie Jones
Organiser