This issue of the Data Engineering Bulletin describes a spectrum of research projects making the first attempts towards scaling the multi-lingual Tower of Babel confronting today's globalized information systems.

Most industrial-strength database engines, both commercial and public-domain, are extremely well-designed for efficiently storing and processing textual information in languages based on the Latin script. These languages include English, the defacto lingua franca of the world, as well as Western European languages such as French, German, Spanish and Italian. But in a rapidly globalizing universe, where the "world is becoming flat", database engines should ideally support text data processing equally efficiently and seamlessly in the entire panoply of human scripts, including Arabic, Cyrillic, Greek, Brahmi, and Kanji, each used by millions of people in a variety of languages. Apart from ease-of-use, there are also compelling business imperatives – market studies indicate that customers are significantly more likely to purchase a product if it is advertised in their native language – making multilingualism a critical factor in global e-Commerce. Similarly, the importance of multilingual support in e-Governance solutions has been well documented.

In a nutshell, while database engines have by and large successfully become "programming-languageneutral", we must now work towards creating *natural-language-neutral* database systems. This issue contains five articles that provide insight into the technical challenges of developing such systems and propose techniques for addressing several key issues in their development.

The first article, by Sorensen and Roukos of IBM Research, highlights the problems of handling full-text indexing and search for morphologically complex languages, such as Chinese and Arabic. A UIMA-based modular architecture for flexible processing of texts based on language-specific properties is proposed as a roadmap towards organically supporting applications for world markets.

The second article by Sarkar of IIT Kharagpur considers the problem of regular expression matching, as exemplified by SQL's LIKE operator, in the multi-lingual world. Through a detailed analysis of language scripts, a rich set of character classes is proposed to comprehensively support script-specific regular expression matching. A new crosslingual operator is introduced to match regular expressions across languages, and extending the standard character-based matching to higher-order linguistic terms is also discussed.

The third article by Ramanand et al from IIT Bombay investigates the Wordnet world of semantically rich language ontologies and quantitatively shows how under all the seeming diversity, there is significant unity in their structural and semantic properties even across vastly different language families. They also discuss strategies for automatically generating, given the Wordnet of a seed language, the Wordnets of related languages in the family, demonstrating their approach by constructing the Marathi Wordnet from Hindi.

The fourth article by Kumaran and Carlin of Microsoft Research leverages the recently-proposed OrdPath node ordering technique to efficiently implement cross-lingual semantic queries on Wordnet ontologies. Efficiency is of paramount importance in handling such queries since they entail the computationally expensive task of computing transitive closures on the Wordnet hierarchies. The initial performance results suggest that the proposed algorithm can more than halve the time taken by the classical approaches.

Finally, the last article by Pingali and Varma of IIIT Hyderabad, tackles the problem of improving the relevance of answers in multilingual information systems. Specifically, they propose strategies for simultaneously achieving the twin objectives of high precision and high efficiency by developing powerful indexing techniques that are tailored to language models, in contrast to the standard term-based inverted-index approaches.

In closing, I thank the article authors for their painstaking and timely efforts in developing their contributions for this special issue. I also thank Dave Lomet, the Editor-in-Chief, for patiently showing me the ropes. I hope that the work presented here will serve as a stimulus for the academic and industrial research communities to redouble their efforts on multi-lingual information processing.