

Message from ELRA President

Bente Maegaard

Let me first express, on behalf of the ELRA board and members, our profound gratitude to His Majesty Mohammed VI, King of Morocco, for his Royal Patronage of this 6th edition of LREC.

When ELRA was established only 13 years ago, in 1995, the main purpose of the association was of course the identification and distribution of language resources. But very soon the idea emerged of organising a conference covering the same fields as ELRA, with the addition of Evaluation. Such a conference should promote the field, and create a meeting place, and the first conference was organised by ELRA in 1998. And this idea proved to be very good, - the LREC conference has established itself as the main meeting point of those who believe that language resources and evaluation are main building blocks for language technology both for written and spoken language. If you want to meet somebody from the field, just go to LREC and he/she will be there.

Over time, ELRA has further developed its mission from LR distribution to also cover production, validation and support for evaluation of language technologies. And language resources have developed from relatively simple speech or written resources to more advanced resources and to multimodal resources. The ELRA Board, and the distribution agency, ELDA, are watching the development, and welcome any request for specific types of resources and even for specific resources. We may be able to find them for you, or to encourage their production.

ELRA has a number of strategic activities. We have been further developing the main activity, namely identification and distribution of LRs. The ELRA catalogue now contains around 1000 resources (1012 to be specific), i.e. resources for which we have obtained distribution rights. In addition ELRA has asked ELDA to make the assembled list of existing LRs available to our members. We call this the Universal Catalogue, in contrast to the ELRA catalogue which contains only the LRs. We believe the Universal Catalogue is very interesting and very useful, and we hope to be able to have an online service for those who want to provide information about their own resources, so that we can help spread information about what is available.

I would also like to mention the Antonio Zampolli Prize, created by the ELRA Board in order to honour our founder and first president who did so much for the field of language resources. A citation from the prize articles: "The Antonio Zampolli Prize is intended to recognize the outstanding contributions to the advancement of Human Language Technologies through all issues related to Language Resources and Evaluation. In awarding the prize we are seeking to reward and encourage innovation and inventiveness in the development and use of language resources and evaluation of HLTs. The prize covers the field of Language Resources and Language Technology Evaluation in the areas of spoken language, written language and terminology". At the LREC2008 conference, the Prize will be awarded for the third time. The ELRA Board has been very happy to receive the nominations made by outstanding people in the field, and we recognize there are several persons who are eligible for this prestigious prize.

At LREC 2008 you will have the chance to discuss strategic issues concerning language resources and evaluation and the contribution of these two fields to the further development of language technology for both spoken and written language. You will also see a multitude of language resources and tools for very many different languages that may be useful for your own work or you may get or provide

new ideas for the further evolution of the field. This year you will also see several new networks and projects focussing on language resources. This is a very important development, and it is a profound pleasure to see that funding authorities are supporting the development, the distribution and the sharing of language resources.

Please take advantage of all this, and enjoy your participation!

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who contributed so hard to making this conference a success. This year we are for the first time outside Europe, we are in Morocco - which is not too far away from Europa! The fact that we are in Morocco, means that a very large part of the local organization work has been taken care of by Khalid Ckougri. At the same time Khalid Choukri and the ELDA team have taken a large part of the responsibility for the practical organization of the conference, so this has been a gigantic task and we thank Khalid Choukri and all of his team.

The content part of the conference has been taken care of by the Programme Committee, as always chaired by Nicoletta Calzolari, from the Istituto di Linguistica Computazionale, CNR, Pisa. Nicoletta Calzolari and her team in Pisa have been managing more than 900 submissions, their review, their selection, final papers, and finally the creation of the programme that you will be enjoying these days. We are deeply grateful to Nicoletta Calzolari and her team, as well as to the Programme Committee. Finally, we would like to thank the Scientific Committee who did all the reviewing and the International Advisory Committee for their valuable advice.

Bente Maegaard
ELRA President