

Message from ELRA President

Stelios Piperidis

Welcome to LREC2012! Welcome to Istanbul!

Let me first express, on behalf of the ELRA Board and Members, our profound gratitude to Mrs Neelie Kroes, Vice-President of the European Commission, for her Distinguished Patronage of LREC 2012 and for honoring us with her message.

The 8th edition of LREC takes place in a most interesting context for our field, in times when everything is changing at a dazzling speed. The common denominator of all changes being the quest of the best recipe for rapid development, competitiveness and innovation. Information technology at large has an undisputable contribution to this endeavour, as access to the whole spectrum from data, information, content, up to knowledge, and the ability to process it is one of the enabling factors leading to development and innovation. Taking into account the importance of language in this spectrum, language technologies have a decisive role to play. To be able to fulfill the role, understand the complex phenomena, tackle open problems, build useful applications and foster innovation, access to the necessary resources infrastructure is indispensable. It is, thus, not to wonder why during the last years issues relating to data access, open data, collaboration and exchange have absorbed a non-negligible portion of the energy of the scientific world and certainly of our field.

ELRA, established already in 1995, has played a pioneering role in this respect. At times when data-driven techniques had just started rising, and numerical and learning methods had not prevailed in the language technology field, ELRA was set up as an association that would take care of identifying, archiving, and distributing language data, as well as cater for language technology evaluation. These initial goals were soon extended into production and validation of language data, production of technology evaluation packages, as well as into offerings of specific services and organisation of specific events, LREC being the major such event since 1998.

ELRA has achieved to establish itself as a high-quality data centre, as a main player in the field of language resources and evaluation, enjoying a steady base of membership. Throughout its life, the Association has been constantly responding to new challenges and needs of the field, as well as adapting to new cultures and trends. Besides its ever evolving catalogue of language data with clear distribution rights and licences, ELRA has set up the Universal Catalogue, a bottom-up, community-built resource radar, a catalogue of resources, data and tools, irrespective of whether these can be acquired through ELDA, ELRA's Distribution Agency, or not. It supports the LRE Map, a concerted effort towards a new culture, a rich, community-built, information base, already embraced and re-used by many conferences, a unique tool for monitoring progress, identifying specific gaps, highlighting trends. It also supports the emerging Language Library, a platform for collaboratively built annotated resources at all levels, available as open resources to the whole community. A big "thank you" to all participants for contributing to this initiative.

In a similar vein, through its catalogues and other initiatives, ELRA reinforces its cooperation links with major data centres around the world, notably LDC and NICT, trying to unify all component catalogues into a Global Inventory of appropriately identified LRs.

To achieve its goals, ELRA has restructured its activities along three axes : a) *infrastructural*, taking care of identification, cataloguing, updating metadata-based LR description and documentation, and new simpler distribution mechanisms, b) *scientific*, taking care of LRs production & validation, and evaluation, and c) *promotion*, taking care of marketing and promotion activities like LREC and information aggregation services.

Along these axes, ELRA has currently set 5 main priorities:

- Opening up segments of its catalogue

Anticipating users' expectations, ELRA has decided to offer a large number of resources for free for the research community. Such an offer will consist of several sets of speech, text, multimodal databases that will be released for free regularly, as soon as legal aspects are cleared.

- Fostering the use of Public Sector Information

Being among the first to recognize the importance of public sector information, the Association joins forces with all stakeholders in the effort to reinforce and extend the free use of public sector information for research, technology and application development.

- Supporting META-SHARE, the new resource sharing and exchange infrastructure

ELRA, through its operational body ELDA, is a founding member of META-NET, and plays an important role in META-SHARE offering a range of services (among others supporting the legal helpdesk and the non-local repository of the infrastructure) and helping sustain it. Most of the resources already distributed by ELRA are also available on META-SHARE.

- Promoting collaborative and crowd-sourcing based methods of language resources building

During the last year, the Association has been investigating the setup of a dedicated platform for crowd-sourcing based language resource building. Your feedback through the questionnaire we have prepared is most valuable.

- Establishing the Language Resources and Evaluation Forum (LRE-F)

ELRA is establishing the Forum that is expected to help maintain and extend our vibrant community through sharing, exchange and collaboration assisting services.

Just a few words about the Antonio Zampolli Prize, the 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. Citing 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 LREC 2012 conference, the Prize will be awarded for the fifth time. The ELRA Board has been very happy to receive very strong nominations made by outstanding people in the field, and we do recognize there are several persons who are eligible for this prestigious prize.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who have worked so hard to make this conference a big success: the LREC Programme Committee, chaired by Nicoletta Calzolari, the Scientific Committee, the International Advisory Committee, the group in Pisa, Khalid Choukri and the ELDA staff in Paris, the two LREC "pillars" Helene Mazo and Sara Goggi, Mehmed Özkan and the Local Organising Committee. Each one of them in his/her own role has been taking care of the myriad of issues that pop up when undertaking the organisation of such a complex and demanding conference as LREC, a Herculean task. Particular thanks to all sponsors and supporters, all conference participants, workshop and tutorial organizers, project consortia participating in the EC Village; you have all helped outperform once again all previous editions in all the dimensions of our LREC conference.

Dear LREC Participants, The Conference is now in your hands. With your active participation in the oral sessions, your lively discussions with the presenters at the poster sessions, your visits to the EC Village and participation in the EC Track to discuss with the investigators of the research projects funded by the European Commission, LREC 2012 will be yet another success.

I welcome you all to LREC 2012 in magnificent Istanbul and wish you a fruitful conference.

Stelios Piperidis
ELRA President