

## Message from ELRA CEO

**Khalid Choukri**

Dear LREC participants,

Welcome to LREC 2004, welcome to Lisbon!

ELRA (European Language Resources Association), its operational body and distribution agency ELDA (Evaluations and Language resources Distribution Agency), and the Universidade Nova de Lisboa are proud to welcome you in Lisbon, where we are pleased to organise the fourth edition of the Language Resources and Evaluation Conference, LREC 2004. We are very pleased to continue the organisation of such an important event in such an attractive city.

LREC 2004 is the fourth biennial conference on Language Resources and Evaluation, the fourth in a very successful series of events since ELRA initiated it with the strong involvement of Antonio Zampolli and Angel Martin Municio. This event is held in Memory of Antonio Zampolli, who died in August 2003. Antonio initiated LREC in 1998, as founder and first President of ELRA, and has largely contributed over the past years, and with the 3 previous LREC conferences, to the success of the event. It is also an opportunity for us to remember Angel Martin Municio, whom we lost in November 2002.

To honour the memory of Antonio Zampolli and acknowledge his contributions to the set up of ELRA and LREC, the ELRA Board has decided to create a prize: The Antonio Zampolli Prize will be awarded for the 1<sup>st</sup> time at this LREC, to individuals whose work lies within the areas of Language Resources and Language Technology Evaluation with acknowledged contributions to their advancements.

There is no doubt that LREC has become an essential milestone in the field of Human Language Technologies, both for academic and industrial players.

The indubitable success of the first 3 LREC conferences is a good illustration: The first LREC conference was organised in spring 1998 in Granada, Spain. It was the first time such an initiative in the field of HLT was launched and successfully carried out: more than 500 HLT experts, representing 325 world-wide industrial and academic organisations, had the opportunity to meet and share their views and experiences.

For the first edition, over 200 papers were presented, thus bringing awareness and promoting the field. Several pre- and post-conference workshops addressing issues in relation with different aspects of HLT were also jointly organised.

Granada (1998) was followed in May 2000 by the second LREC conference, which took place in Athens, Greece. Over 600 participants from all over the world gathered at LREC 2000, to attend the sessions where a number of HLT issues were discussed during the main conference (with more than 270 papers and presentations!) and to participate in its satellite workshops

Previous LREC conference took place in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, in 2002. LREC 2002 attracted even more players in HLT, with around 715 representatives who participated in the conference and its pre- and post-conference workshops: 365 papers were selected and largely covered the HLT field; 18 workshops addressed a large variety of topics in the area.

If you would like to obtain an overview of the previous LREC conferences, we invite you to visit the LREC web site, at [www.lrec-conf.org](http://www.lrec-conf.org), where links to these three different editions are available.

Since LREC 1998, important progress has been achieved in various fields of HLT. Many emerging topics have matured or got more focus (e.g. multimodal resources, semantic web-related issues, etc.). We are very pleased to offer a forum for discussions on the latest developments of Research in the field. Since 1998, LREC has also boosted the international cooperation, thanks to interchanges between researchers and industrials who could meet in these attractive LREC sites. We are also pleased to have initiated an event that covers both the speech and the written aspects of Natural Language Processing, but also emphasizes the need for a broad understanding of multidisciplinary and global issues of HLT. Through the joint sessions between the Speech and Written communities, we hope to contribute to bridging the existing gap. The important joint meeting between Cocosda and the recently established International Committee on Written Language Resources and Evaluation should contribute to this (this joint meeting is planned on Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> May).

We are pleased to see the great and increasing interest in LREC 2004: We have received and reviewed more than 790 abstracts and the number of participants would be close to 1,000.

LREC 2004, starting on 24<sup>th</sup> May and ending on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2004, is organised on the same model as the previous ones: on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> May, pre-conference workshops on topics as diverse as computational terminology, eLearning and eTeaching, multimodality, or spoken corpora are organised; on 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May, the main conference will be officially launched with its Opening Ceremony on Wednesday morning: more than 500 presentations are scheduled, distributed in sessions on general issues, speech issues, written issues, terminology issues, and evaluation issues; at last, on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May, the post-conference workshops will notably focus on evaluation in cross-lingual information retrieval, lexical resources building, or language resources repository area. Among those workshops, it should be observed that one will honour more specifically Antonio Zampolli, bringing together the two communities of the HLT field, i.e. the written community and the spoken one, with the purpose of building a common roadmap for LRs and Evaluation.

To better understand the LREC conference, it is necessary to elaborate a little bit on ELRA, the European Language Resources Association.

ELRA was founded in 1995, with the support of the European Commission; the main mission of the Association was to provide a clearing house for language resources, while promoting HLT more generally. In parallel, ELDA, the Evaluations and Language resources Agency, its operational body and distribution agency, was created to handle every activity in relation to the identification, collection, production, marketing and distribution of language resources, along with the participation in HLT evaluation campaigns and other HLT projects, at the European and international levels.

ELRA now counts around 100 members, who belong to academic and industrial organisations involved in the use and exploitation of language resources for research and/or Human Language Technologies development. ELRA members are offered several advantages, in particular reduced prices on the language resources available in the catalogue: ELRA's catalogue included at the end of 2003 a total of around 750 language resources, distributed in three colleges, namely Spoken Language Resources (SLR), Written Language Resources

(WLR), and Terminological resources. The language resources can be purchased by members and non-members: the whole HLT community is thus offered the possibility to access the catalogue on-line, and to buy any needed resources. In 2003, over 360 language resources were distributed.

The collection and distribution of language resources are major activities for ELRA and ELDA and highlight the central role played by both bodies for the advances in the field, but other crucial services related to language resources and language technologies are also offered. These include the validation of language resources, thus ensuring the best quality of the language resources presented in the catalogue, with the support of ELRA's network of validation centres; the production of language resources, mainly SLR within projects ELRA and ELDA participate in; and the evaluation of speech and language technologies, with involvements in evaluation campaigns to ensure that evaluation resources (data test suites, protocols, methodologies, results, etc.) are packaged and made available to the HLT community, on the model of LR's distribution. More recently, it was agreed to strengthen our position in the standardisation area, getting further involved in related initiatives.

If you would like to learn more about ELRA and ELDA, the ELRA/ELDA staff is at your disposal during the conference. You will also find more information on our web sites, at [www.elra.info](http://www.elra.info) and [www.elda.fr](http://www.elda.fr).

ELRA and the Organising Committee have made every effort to ensure the success of LREC 2004, making it a fruitful and enjoyable event. We hope that you will enjoy LREC 2004, benefiting at most from the conference programme, the satellite workshops, and the social programme. Hopefully you will get the opportunity to have a look around, and enjoy Lisbon and Portugal.

On behalf of ELRA, and on your behalf, I would like to warmly thank the local team in Lisbon responsible for the practical aspects of this event. As you can imagine, organising such an important event (in particular once our expectations have been revised from 700 attendees to about 1,000!) is not an easy task to carry, in addition to the daily commitment of a university staff. I would like to thank very much Teresa Lino for having managed such organisation and extend this to her team.

I would like to thank all members of the Scientific Committee, for their valuable help to review the 790 submitted papers, as well as the workshops' organisers for contributing to the success of LREC.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the LREC Organising Committee, Sara Goggi and Sergio Rossi from ILC in Pisa, Italy, and Magali Jeanmaire and Louis-Gabriel Pouillot from the ELRA/ELDA staff, who dedicated quite often their personal time, for their tireless efforts to make this impressive event happen.

Suggestions to improve any aspects of the conference are welcome, and if you need any assistance to make of this event a more memorable one, please contact our staff.

Once again, welcome to Lisbon, welcome to LREC 2004, held in Memory of Antonio Zampolli and to remember Angel Martin Municio.

Khalid Choukri  
ELRA CEO