

LREC 2020 – 12th International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation
Opening Address
António Branco, President of ELRA

In the annals of ELRA, the European Language Resources Association, 2020 will remain as a memorable year. For very good and very bad reasons.

The bad reasons first. In the very same day that I should have been using these notes in Marseille to address the participants in the opening session of the 12th edition of LREC, the International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation, I am writing them at home. If instead, as scheduled, I was now at the auditorium of the beautiful Palais du Pharo, which overlooks the entrance of Marseille old harbour, I would be staring at a chilling scenario of empty chairs in a totally empty room. This would happen not because the participants would be staying outdoors, understandably mesmerized with the breathtaking view over the Mediterranean Sea and the joyful morning sunlight of Spring, but because all my colleagues who had planned to come, contribute, benefit and enjoy the conference also did not come to Marseille. The covid-19 outbreak and the confinement measures to fight it across the world disrupted the normal course of life everywhere. And LREC is no exception.

With a reinforced spirit of solidarity and camaraderie with which I would have welcomed you to the conference, on behalf of ELRA, I am hereby sending to all colleagues my best wishes that everything is fine with you, that you are keeping safe and that everything will turn out for the best when this ordeal will eventually fade away.

We should not forget also the very good reasons to recall 2020: this is the year when ELRA is celebrating its 25th anniversary! This is in itself a joyful sign of the vitality of our community, and also that the association's *raison d'être* keeps being valid and that its operation has been successful and survived the test of time.

The most visible sign of success of ELRA is its flagship event, the LREC conference, with its first edition 22 years ago, in Granada (Spain). Quantitatively, assessed by Google Scholar h5-index impact scores, LREC is in the top four most impactful world conferences of its area; its impact is in line with the impact of the most impactful journal; and it is the most impactful publication venue promoted by an organization based outside the USA. Qualitatively, I believe, it is by far the most relevant venue of its area supporting inclusiveness and diversity, therein comprising of course language diversity, by supporting the goal of advancing the scientific study of the whole human language in all its different empirical manifestations as 7 000 different languages in the world.

The activity of ELRA is by no means limited to the promotion of LREC. The association offers a wide array of other services to support researchers and the advancement of the science and technology of language. Those of you reading these lines who may not be acquainted yet with some of these services are hereby invited to visit ELRA's website and discover how you can benefit from them — and in case you have not already done so, you are also invited to enrol as an individual member of ELRA, like several hundreds of other colleagues already did. But I could not go without noting that these services include the premier European open platform for the mapping, preservation and distribution of scientific resources, which helps to match producers and users of resources of all types — for speech, text and multimodal processing, for research and innovation, with free and commercial licenses, etc. — under a design concept pioneered by our association 25 years ago. This is a repository that keeps striving as one of the very few, if not the only, independent self-sustaining platform of its kind in the world.

But celebrating our 25th anniversary is also and foremost looking and planning into the future. The celebrations program set up for this commemoration reflects this desideratum. Here are some picks: the conference LT4ALL - Language Technologies for All, organized by ELRA a few months ago at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, in association with the International Year of Indigenous Languages, that aimed at mobilizing language technology to promote linguistic diversity worldwide; the consultation of the ELRA Board with external experts, invited to a special purpose workshop aimed at stimulating ideas and proposals for directions into which the association should progress; and the online questionnaire addressed to and responded by ELRA members, with a similar aim.

Of course, most important moments in the celebration program are planned for LREC, and they will happen when the conference will take place. On the one hand, a special session is aimed at hearing from participants about their views, ideas and suggestions on the future of the association and LREC, and openly discuss how it should progress so that it can even better contribute to their members' research interests and needs, and vice-versa, so that members can even better contribute to an enhanced association. On the other hand, we will also have a big celebration party, much more needed and deserved now than before, when we will meet again, after overcoming the temporary hurdles caused by covid-19.

I close these notes with brief words of gratitude — in her opening session notes, the conference chair will know much better all those who should be thanked.

On behalf of ELRA, my warmest thanks go to all colleagues who submitted papers to LREC 2020 and who trust that the conference organized by the association is a good venue for the publication of their research results.

And I send to the colleagues in the Local Organization Committee in Provence (France), including Philippe Blache and Frédéric Béchet, in the Program Committee across the world, including its chair Nicoletta Calzolari, in ILC-CNR in Pisa (Italy), including Sara Goggi, and in the ELRA office in Paris (France), including Hélène Mazo and the ELRA Secretary General, Khalid Choukri, and to all colleagues who helped them, also my warmest thank you.

This is a thank you all as warm as we can imagine that the Spring Sun is shining now, at the moment that our conference should have started, outside the Palais du Pharo over the Mediterranean Sea — and as it will shine when we will meet again.

Lisbon, Portugal, May 13, 2020
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