

Istvan Kenesei

Welcome address

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Welcome to this magnificent neo-Renaissance building on the bank of the Danube, the seat of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which was inaugurated in 1862, exactly 150 years ago. It is fitting for this 10th Annual Conference of EFNIL on Lexical Challenges in a Multilingual Europe to be held at this venue, since the Academy owes its foundation in a very large part to endeavours to create a dictionary.

As with so many nations in the early 19th century, such as the Germans and Italians in particular, perhaps the most important instrument of the national revival of Hungarians was language. The Kingdom of Hungary at the time was part of the sprawling Hapsburg Empire, whose official language was of course German, and the Emperor was always decreed to be the ruler of Hungary, though not always crowned as its king. Parliament had some sovereignty in internal affairs but all bills passed had to be signed into law by the Emperor. National identity was the order of the day and one possible avenue to declare it was through the vernacular. After years of fruitless debates in Parliament on how to move forward, a wealthy young aristocrat who had travelled the world, Count István Széchenyi, stood up at the Diet in 1825 in Pozsony (Pressburg, today's Bratislava), and offered a year's income of his estate to establish the "Hungarian Science Society". His example was followed on the spot by a number other rich noblemen present, and the Academy was soon enacted.

The Society's primary function was to promote the case of Hungarian as the language of sciences, and in order to achieve this aim, members were asked in its very first session in 1831 "to collect ancient and current Hungarian technical terms from 782 Hungarian books so as to be read by members, each one as appertained to his own department", and thus the "Great Hungarian Word-Book" was to be created. But even at that time the Society was aware that "to gather every Hungarian word for the Great Word-Book many years' work will be necessary," though they cannot have predicted that after almost 200 years only four volumes would have been published.

But these four tomes of the Comprehensive Dictionary of Hungarian, as published by the Research Institute for Linguistics (RIL) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and comprising the letters *A* and *B* as well as a companion volume with the sources and technical information, rely on an extensive corpus and the most up-to-date technology available, thus, in effect, turning the delay into an advantage, and providing for an easily augmentable database. Ever since its foundation in 1949, RIL has been the most prolific producers of dictionaries of the Hungarian language of various sizes and subjects, from etymologies to loanwords to poets' vocabularies, to list just a few.

The lexicographic activities of RIL are, however, not limited to monolingual dictionaries. Although it is not within our sphere of interest to publish bilingual "paper" dic-

tionaries, having recognized the need emerging from the predicament that bilingual dictionaries of two languages each with less than a certain number of speakers are commercially not viable, on the one hand, and fostering the cause of machine translation between a wide range of European languages, on the other, we have embarked upon developing language technologies that have made promising advances in both areas, as will surely be discussed by my colleagues during this conference.

On behalf of the host organisation allow me to thank you for coming to Budapest and to this opening session of the Conference and I wish you have an excellent time whether as speakers or as audience.