

A word of welcome

Manuel Alvar Ezquerro

Three years ago, at the closing ceremony of our last congress in Budapest, we parted company without knowing when we were to meet again. The determination shown by our President, Antonio Zampolli, and the trust he continues to bestow on me led me to take on the organization of the IV EURALEX International Congress. The Executive Board of our association soon got caught up in the President's enthusiasm, and before long we began our work. This was no easy task: other international meetings forced us to hold our congress at a time which was far from convenient. The University is closed for the summer vacation, and last week when I went to pick up your latest correspondence I found that there was no electricity, and it was quite a challenge to locate the person in charge of unlocking the doors between me and my office. Furthermore, at this time of the year the University is without public transport. I was therefore obliged to search for a venue outside the University campus. I found it rather difficult to come up with the right place; as there were no suitable public buildings available I had to turn my attention to hotels, which were not anxious to commit themselves to accommodating us so far in advance. In August they are full to capacity and are bound by agreements with large tour operators. Finally, we managed to find just what we needed and, a year ago, we sent out the invitations, to which you have so generously replied.

But I had more than one reason for deciding to take on the organization of a congress. This was the first time EURALEX was to meet in a country where a Romance language is spoken, a southern European country. I could have put off the congress until 1992, when such an important event would have coincided with the large-scale celebrations to be held in Spain, which you all know about. However, I went ahead and decided on 1990 because we too have reasons for celebrating events which happened five hundred years ago.

The City Council of Málaga, which is today our host in one of its most beautiful properties, has very recently commemorated the five hundredth anniversary of its first meeting. This is important because it reveals an unflagging centuries-old will to maintain those cultural and political values which we now take so much for granted. The city of Málaga, being a true seaport, opens its arms to all who wish to put in here. It is a city where every foreigner feels at home, and today, surnames such as Strachan, Krauel, Mapelli, Loring, Gross, Garret and so many others are so typical of Málaga as to seem native. It is only natural, then, to call together people of such different backgrounds as yourselves, and to hold a congress with bilingual dictionaries as its central theme.

Above all, I wanted this lexicography congress to be held in Spain, especially in 1990, because it would coincide with the five hundredth anniversary of the first great dictionary which included our language: our first bilin-

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gual dictionary. The Universal vocabulario en latín y en romance written by the humanist Alfonso Fernández de Palencia, was printed in Seville by four Germans who brought us this amazing new creation which, among other things, made it possible for dictionaries to become widely available and occupy their intended place in men's lives: Paul of Cologne, Johann Pegnitzer of Nuremberg, Magnus Herbst and Thomas Glockner patiently, page by page, put together one of our greatest treasures. Not only they were European, but so was the tradition from which their work sprang, and its direct source, Papias, with whom the Spanish were already well acquainted.

Underlying these two seemingly unrelated facts was the strength of will of the Catholic King and Queen, Ferdinand and Isabella. While he was largely responsible for the incorporation of Málaga into the Crown of Castille, she was the prime mover behind our first great dictionary and for the lexicographic and grammatical activity of the great Elio Antonio de Nebrija which followed shortly after.

Today we come together to perpetuate the five hundred years of history since these events: we come from a thousand different places and we speak a thousand different tongues, but we share in one desire; how else could we have come so far together?

We are soon to begin our activity, and it is my wish to ask of you only one thing: please do not forget the human being. Behind every dictionary and every word there is one of us. Remember how our German predecessors set, letter by letter, their Universal vocabulario, and how throughout the centuries lexicographers have sacrificed their eyesight, health, fame and fortune. Keep in mind that dictionaries are written by people like us, and that many of us spend all the time we have (and don't have) writing them. Do not forget that dictionaries not only delight us, but also teach others, and that for each volume produced there is and will be a user who places blind faith in it.

I have almost finished. Thank you for coming to Málaga. I hope these few days will fulfil your expectations and be useful to all of us, rewarding the personal interest that has led each of us here.

*Last of all, my thanks to all the public and private institutions which have enabled us to organize the Congress: first, to **VOX Dictionaries**, who joined me in the challenge and carried the weight of the most demanding tasks long before the Congress was announced, and will continue to do so until its closing ceremony; to the City Council of Málaga for the setting in which they have received us, and for their totally unlimited and unconditional generosity, and to the County Council, the University of Málaga, the Town Council of Benalmádena, IBM Spain, and the Savings Banks of Antequera, Ronda and Málaga which have recently merged into Unicaja, whose generosity has been outstanding.*

Welcome.