

## Presidential address

M. Teresa Turell Julià \*

As president of the International Association of Forensic Linguists, it gives me a great pleasure to address you in the opening session of the second regional IAFL conference taking place this year. The other regional conference, also sponsored by IAFL, took place in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) last July.

I'm very grateful to Ed Finegan, our IAFL vice-president, for reading my presidential address on my behalf.

This regional conference entitled "Forensic Linguistics: Bridging the Gap(s) between Language and the Law" is jointly hosted by the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Law at the University of Porto here in Portugal and is co-organised by scholars from several centers at this same institution: *Centro de Linguística da Universidade do Porto* (CLUP) and *Laboratório de Inteligência Artificial e Ciência de Computadores* (LIACC).

With fond memories from the last IAFL biennial conference organized by our Aston colleagues a year ago and the very successful Kuala Lumpur conference last July, I'm sure that this regional conference will be a great success, thanks to the local organizing committee led by Belinda Maia and Rui Sousa-Silva. I would like to thank all colleagues involved in the organization of this event for their efficiency and "savoir faire". My heartfelt thanks also go to the plenary speakers invited to this conference, for contributing to it with substantial topics and areas of expertise, and to all participants for choosing this conference to disseminate their research results in the many areas of study around which our discipline is structured.

The seventy-one papers, two round-tables, and the colloquium on "Making Linguistics Relevant to the Law" open for discussion at this conference indeed reflect the multidisciplinary nature and the multi-dimensionality of Forensic Linguistics. We are very pleased to welcome participants from all five continents and from nineteen countries around the world: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Check Republic, China, Germany, Cyprus, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, South Africa, the UK and the US.

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As a representative of the IAFL, I would like to say a few words about our discipline, Forensic Linguistics/Language and Law, and our association.

I usually refer to our discipline as Forensic Linguistics in its “broadest” sense, and this means covering all areas where law and language overlap: Language and the Law, Language and the Legal Process, and Language as Evidence, both in criminal cases (authorship analysis and attribution, forensic speaker identification/voice comparison) and civil cases (contract disputes, defamation, product liability, consumer product warnings, deceptive trade practices, copyright infringement and plagiarism detection, and trademark litigation).

By referring to “Forensic Linguistics”, I purposely emphasize the term Forensic, which stands for “used in Court of law or public discussion and debate” but, most importantly, derives from “Forum”, whose third entry in *Webster’s Encyclopaedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* reads as “an assembly for the discussion of questions of public interest”, that is, in our case all questions that refer to the interface between language and law. And I also emphasize Linguistics because the term refers to the scientific study of language, the task in which we are all engaged.

For those of you who are not familiar with the development of our discipline, suffice to say that, although it was born in the fifties, it was not until the nineties of the twentieth century that Forensic Linguistics emerged very forcefully: the experts’ performance became much more professionalized; there was an outstanding increase in the publication of articles and chapters in a number of forensic linguistics topics, whose content was much more methodologically grounded than before; the *International Association of Forensic Phonetics* (now named the *International Association of Forensic Phonetics and Acoustics*) was founded in 1991 and the *International Association of Forensic Linguists* in 1992; a Forensic Linguistics journal was created in 1994, which had different publishers and whose title underwent several changes, its current name being *The International Journal of Speech Language and the Law*. I take this opportunity to thank former and current editors of the journal for carrying out their task rigorously and efficiently.

The present state of the discipline reflects consolidation and vitality. With the turn of the century, Forensic Linguistics has grown to see *The International Journal of Speech Language and the Law* reaching its 19<sup>th</sup> year of publication and many FL articles appearing in law journals; IJSL has become one of the facilitators of the international development of Forensic Linguistics, and it can also be said that a vital spark for the discipline is the interdisciplinary stand that this journal has taken. Another sign of international vitality is the number of international and regional conferences that have been celebrated: our 10<sup>th</sup> biennial IAFL conference took place in Aston in July 2011 and our next biennial conference will be held in Mexico City in June 2013; our discipline has also grown to see the emergence of forensic linguistics laboratories and centres, government-funded police laboratories and agencies around the world; a state of the art in FL literature with volumes on particular topics, edited volumes, introductions to the field, textbooks and handbooks; and finally FL graduate courses and specialist Master’s degree courses in several universities around the world.

All this shows that in many countries around the world Forensic Linguistics is now a well-defined, well-established discipline, which seeks to uncover and establish the existing interplay between linguistics and legal issues.

We have a legacy from the past that involves in most cases quality, rigour, validity and reliability in our analysis and opinions. The discipline faces several challenges, however: the integrated study of forensic linguistics/language and law across different judicial systems and geographical boundaries; the development of replicable methods of analysis to be used in expert witness evidence in order to ensure internal and external validity in research; the extensive setting up of codes of good practice and conduct; and also our presence in associations and societies of Forensic Sciences.

When I started my mandate in 2011, IAFL was facing several challenges: a centralised enrolment and payment system made operational through a new website, with a new design and updated content, and the activation of the already existing IAFL-MEMBERS@JISCMail.AC.UK list, in order to foster and promote internal debate within the association. I'm very pleased to be able to say that some of these challenges are *now achievements on their way*, thanks to the very efficient work of all members of the IAFL Executive Committee without exception: Ron Butters as past president, Ed Finegan as vice-president, Georgina Heydon as secretary, Phil Gaines as treasurer, and our three active additional members, Krzysztof Kredens as publicity officer, and Peter Gray and Azirah Hassim as ordinary members:

- a) The design and content of our new website is almost ready, thanks to work done by the steering committee (Ed Finegan, Krzysztof Kredens and myself) that I appointed before the summer. This new IAFL website will include a centralised enrolment and payment system, with a two-tiered option: regular and reduced (student and retired members) and a donation mechanism, a members' directory, and other options. Meanwhile, we invite scholars to join the IAFL or renew their membership through the existing provisional system of enrolment and payment.
- b) The IAFL-MEMBERS@JISCMail.AC.UK list, through which the EC will encourage the electronic vote of the membership on several issues between general business meetings, is now active.
- c) An IAFL Code of practice draft, which has been put together by a committee chaired by Ron Butters, will soon be posted up on our web for members to make suggestions and then have an electronic vote through the IAFL members list.

Finally, I'd like to say that we – IAFL officers and members – are in fact taking advantage of the legacy handed down by former presidents and previous executive committees in order to a) promote the celebration of regional conferences like this one in Porto; b) reflect the multifaceted nature of Forensic Linguistics and of IAFL and develop all areas of work and study; c) encourage rigorous research and work across the different judicial systems around the world; and d) extend membership to other continents and countries where IAFL is not yet present.

On behalf of the IAFL Executive Committee and on my own behalf, let me pronounce my words of friendship and support to the organisers of this conference, and extend my best wishes for a very successful conference to all participants.

M. Teresa Turell

President, International Association of Forensic Linguists

Barcelona, October 11, 2012