*FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER –*

*FROM GOALS TO OUTCOMES*

Presented by

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The Foreign Language Center “Katarina Zrinska” (FLC), was established within the Croatian Defense Academy “Dr. Franjo Tuđman” in 1995, and was tasked with organizing and realizing both intensive and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Courses for the needs of the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Croatian Armed Forces (CAF) General Staff members. Four languages, English, German, French and Italian, have been taught in the FLC since its establishment.

Although the Center and its Headquarters were founded in Zagreb, it became obvious very soon that this could not satisfy the needs of the CAF. So, in the spring of 1996, the Center started intensive courses in Split, and in the following year in Osijek.

Today, the FLC functions as a joint all-service language center for the CAF and MOD members.

I would like to draw your attention to the Center's name. The center was named after a very famous historical figure from the Croatian past – Ana Katarina Zrinska (Anne Cathrine). As a writer and translator, Ana Katarina was well educated and learned, which was unusual for a woman of her time (17th century). We named our Center after her for two reasons – she could speak foreign languages and most of our employees are women (95 %).

What we do – The FLC “Katarina Zrinska” organizes and executes foreign language training for officers, NCOs, and civilian personnel of the CAF and Croatian Ministry of Defense (MOD) as well as the members of the wider security and defense community (MOI, Military Intelligence, Security and Intelligence Service, etc.).

Why we do it? – to prepare students (‘*customers*’) to successfully perform their duties in a modern security environment as well as for their education and training abroad.

The core business of the FLC is its comprehensive language training policy carried out through the system of three-month intensive courses based on STANAG 6001 and other international civilian requirements (CEFR – *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*) consisting of four levels such as elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate/advanced.

When did we start with STANAG-based syllabuses and why?

Previous courses – general language course with military terminology

The moment Croatia joined the PfP in 2000 by signing the MAP, the FLC with its management and stakeholders anticipated the need for language knowledge which would best suit the needs of those who would serve in a multinational environment.

This need arose particularly in 2003 when the first Croatian contingent of Military Police was invited to join multinational forces in Afghanistan. In addition, the first military personnel of the CAF joined different multinational headquarters in warring areas and started working in NATO headquarters in Brussels and Mons.

These moments and the fact that PfP membership was just a step toward NATO, were enough for the FLC management to realize that we should change language training to fit the needs of those who would go abroad for different purposes and they needed to be effective and efficient. Since then, STANAG has become a buzz word

First, the FLC changed the syllabus for language training based on STANAG 6001 criteria. At that time, the STANAG testing team was established. Of course, the FLC together with its foreign partners (the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, and France, through the U.S. IMET program, the British Peacekeeping English Project, French foreign language instructors, and the German and Austrian military language teacher development programs) provided for the FLC teachers with useful training in military language, methodology, course development and design, test design and testing.

Throughout time we have ‘upgraded’ syllabuses of our intensive courses on several occasions trying to foster general language comprehension of our students. However, we have never neglected instructions in military terminology.

We have also run a couple of specialized English courses, International English Skills for Staff Officers Course, English for OMLT, Radio-Communication Course, English Course for Logistics Personnel in PSOs, and Methodology Course for English Language Instructors. (short courses, student-tailored and student oriented; syllabuses encompass the following – development of listening and speaking skills, presentation skills, briefings, military correspondence, reading skills – military texts)

(Foreign students and students from other ministries and agencies)

We made some changes not only in teaching and testing methods, but also for our students so that they can receive a certificate of successful completion of the course.

First, we introduced achievement tests for all levels in 2008. (which hadn’t previously existed). The next step was the introduction of a structure and vocabulary section in the final achievement test.

In 2011 we designed and introduced a pre-intermediate level course. This was the result of the guidelines from the BILC conferences, positive back wash as well as common sense. There had been a huge gap between elementary and intermediate levels (STANAG L1 & L2) which we had wanted to bridge for a long time and finally accomplished that in 2011.

How did STANAG 6001 affect teaching and testing in our Center? I’d dare to say – the effect was positive.

Benefits on the teacher’s part:

1. The FLC has enhanced and fostered INSETT whenever it is possible (workshops and consultation with teachers)
2. Teachers have become more conscious of the importance of skill-based and student-oriented teaching and skill-based testing
3. Better understanding of STANAG 6001 descriptors
4. Better progress and achievement tests.

Benefits on the student’s part:

1. they feel more confident about what they know and what they have mastered during a course
2. they are better prepared for official STANAG testing
3. they are taught how to further their language knowledge when leaving the Center.

However, I know that there is always room for improvement.

What do we do now? The Center doesn’t accept absolute beginners in our English courses. Thanks to the Methodology Course, the FLC teachers have trained a lot of excellent English instructors (usually soldiers and NCOs with good English knowledge and talent for teaching) whose task is to teach beginner courses on bases along Croatia (about 12 locations) under the FLC supervision.

Course books for all levels in general English are LANGUAGE LEADER (Pearson) supplemented with different materials (other course books, grammar books, Internet), and military English – CAMPAIGN (Macmillan) supplemented with BREAKTHROUGH, COMMAND ENGLISH, CARRIER PATH series (Command and Control, Air Force, Navy), and depending on the proficiency level, NATO documents, materials from military sites, etc.

At the end of the course students are required to take an achievement test (pro-chievement) consisting of five parts – listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar/structure. They have to obtain a score of 70 % on each test in order to receive a certificate.

The FLC is a modern and flexible institution, prepared to respond directly to the needs and demands of a wider security and defense community.

We have provided language training for more than 9000 for 21 years.

In order to have a self-sustained system of English language teaching and learning, Self-Access Centers (SAC) were established in all three departments of the FLC. The SAC (a result of the joint effort of the U.S.A, U.K. and Croatian armies) is an integral part of the English language training concept. Its purpose is to enable the FLC students to assume responsibilities for their own language acquisition and maintenance.

Where do we see us in the future? – First, we would like and we’ll do our best to get our certificates verified in civilian context. I mean we would like our students to be competitive in the job market once they leave the military. Next, we would like to open more to customers from other ministries and to be established as a national language training center. However, last or it could be first – to maintain our best asset – teachers.

Nothing could be accomplished if the Centre did not have excellent and enthusiastic staff. The forty-seven foreign language teachers and the three active duty military personnel are its greatest asset and the guarantor of its future development.