

Opening Speech

Distinguished Chairman , Secretariat of BILC, ladies and gentlemen, I am here to bid you all a warm welcome to Denmark and to our capital Copenhagen. It is indeed a pleasure to welcome an assembly of NATO language professionals from such a variety of countries to a week of collaboration and discussion about one of the areas of growing importance in today's world of international engagement .

The building that will be your meeting place during this seminar , Eigtveds Pakhus, is today used as meeting facilities for the central administration of the Danish state. But from its construction in the 18th century to the middle of the 20th century, it was a centre of commerce and international exchange as it functioned as a warehouse in the international trade. It started out as a warehouse for the Danish Asiatic Company, one of the big players in the global economy of its time with a monopoly on trade with the Danish colonies, among them Tranquebar in India.

The architect of this building was Nicolas Eigtved, a peasant's son , who was trained as a gardener and then - because he taught himself German while working as an apprentice gardener in Saxony - got acquainted with a famous German architect and then through networking made further contacts with other master builders in Germany. He was inspired by German, Polish, French and Italian architects and builders in developing his rococo style and with time became one of the most important architects in Denmark. Among his buildings is Amalienborg castle, now the residence of the royal family.

All this, I tell you to illustrate the importance of speaking foreign languages, of chance meetings for building networks and communities of good practice, and of the international ties that have always been so important in the development of new ideas.

So this place, built by a man of international inspiration and knowledge, is a fitting place for you to meet for networking, for discussing a subject like communication in an international organization, and for seeking inspiration for language training, teaching and testing

Language is of importance, we all know that, we also know that it has become of vital interest in this age of global collaboration, but also of fighting terror in an international effort with unprecedented cooperation. And we know that more languages are needed as our areas of operation and cooperation are spreading out.

In order to cooperate, we must speak the same language, and for that to happen there must be efficient language schools and valid language testing. I know that this is what BILC has worked to accomplish and that good progress has been made over the years.

English is today the de facto language of cooperation within NATO, hence one focus of the BILC must be and should remain the English language. The English we need is an instrumental international language that belongs to all of us so that we can handle our communicative needs within the organization.

Warfare itself has changed. It is now not enough to win the battle - we must , as the saying goes , also win hearts and minds; we must first and foremost win the peace, or nothing will have been accomplished. This requires a whole new catalogue of skills, one of them being how to speak languages that we have almost never heard of before and to understand cultures that were utterly foreign to us just a few decades back. Having at our disposal cultural effects officers with very strong language capabilities to act as advisors and players in the field is therefore an important factor in modern military operations.

Teaching these lesser taught languages, lesser whether spoken by thousands or millions, has its own problems. Finding qualified teachers , creating teaching materials from scratch, finding

students ready to give years of their life to learn a language that might not further their career in civilian life, all this is fraught with difficulties

Collaboration among nations becomes very necessary in this situation. Nations must become open and willing to share their products, their teachers, their experience, and it is my hope that a seminar like this can stimulate this process.

The theme of this seminar is the classroom of the future. New technological possibilities will necessarily be one of the prevalent subjects of your discussion this week – and you might even conclude that technology holds part of the answer to some of the problems I mentioned before.

The 21 century classroom is changing with the introduction of technological solutions that are not only solutions to old problems, but that are also transforming the very way we teach and think about teaching and learning.

Our students are digital natives and they expect to be engaged and motivated, they expect individualized and differentiated attention and we, now beginning to become digital immigrants, must know how to give them these opportunities through the skilful use of technologies.

Some of the tools of the digital trade will give us new means of cooperating and communicating. They might even show us ways of learning in play and they will create possibilities of sharing our knowledge in new ways.

In the military, we need new methods to help us learn languages.

One reason being that everyone in the armed forces now need some language proficiency, even those who never liked studying languages – and here motivation becomes a key factor. For these groups, the computer might become a source of new enthusiasm.

It has also become more difficult to make people join to study in a class placed in a certain location, but distance learning with distributed learning systems makes it possible to study from everywhere and at all times.

Sometimes technological solutions are preferable because they can be more cost-effective, letting schools, indeed nations, share scarce resources in a constructive way

And to sum it up, we all simply expect that the newest technologies will be used to enhance the time we spend on learning the tools of our tasks

Earlier this year The Military Committee made an action plan to enhance interoperability. Their analysis of what is needed to obtain better interoperability is expressed in these words

“Success of Alliance operations depends on the smooth functioning of and co-operation between joint and multinational headquarters and between operational forces. In this context, interoperability is an important force multiplier. It is axiomatic that improvements in the ability to communicate between individuals, units and HQs produce corresponding improvements in the ability for these structures to operate and fight together i.e. improved language skills lead to improved interoperability. Thus the inability to understand each other could appear as the current main obstacle to enhancing interoperability. However, the ability to understand each other not only requires speaking the same language, it also requires knowledge of cultural and military background or common understanding of underlying terms through the NATO Terminology Programme.”¹

This should give you the reassurance that your work is important and very much appreciated and will be given the right priority in the time ahead.

¹ Extract from IMSM-0252-2009 dated 19 May 09 from Director of the IMS to the Assistant Secretary General (Defence Investments), HQ NATO

I hope that a forum like this, where the best and brightest professionals within the field of language education in NATO come together to discuss and work, will foster new ideas that might later be developed and implemented in your home countries. It is important to share the results with teachers, testers and managers, so that the thoughts and practices discussed in the four days ahead can become an inspiration for all.

I hope your stay in Copenhagen will be fruitful and that you will leave us with good memories and valuable lessons learned.