

SLOVAK REPUBLIC
NATIONAL REPORT
Language Training – BILC Conference 2007

The language training (particularly the ELT) continues to enjoy a high priority in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. Following the re-subordination of the Language Institute (LI) to the Staff of Personnel Management (J 1) of the General Staff of the Armed Forces (on 1st January 2006) the coordination of activities has become more intensive and the focus on interoperability and standardization has been strengthened. Higher demand for language trained personnel due to many NATO and international staff positions and involvement in a number of international peace missions brought new requirements in various aspects of language training. The integration of the Slovak Republic into NATO and the European Union accelerated and intensified language training within the Armed Forces. Many course participants became more motivated by the increasing number of international opportunities and needs to use the English language in various fields of their professional activities. As a result of that, the Language Institute has to organize various new forms of language training tailored to the requirements of the Armed Forces. This variety and steady increase in requirements for English language training resulted in overloading of teachers and subsequently to the planned growth of the LI teaching staff by almost 20 %. Still more and more teachers have studied abroad or became internationally experienced by working for some time abroad. Their task becomes more and more difficult because also the number of internationally experienced students in higher level courses (aimed at reaching SLP 3333) continues to grow. Increasing numbers of our military personnel is capable to work independently in the international environment and the use of interpreters in international military activities becomes still more and more rare. However, the increasing demand for language training quality brought about also some criticism asking for improvements in tuition methods, testing procedures and testing materials. A number of organizational aspects of the language training system are to be dealt with, including the preparation of new documentation and regulations so that they comply with the latest needs and conditions in the Armed Forces. Of course, the main attention is still focused primarily on the English language as the NATO operational language, but increasing attention is paid also to the French language as the second NATO official language. As a result of the regional cooperation, German, Russian and other languages are also taught to a limited extent.

In 2006 the Language Institute organized 57 intensive courses 13 extensive afternoon and evening courses and 15 summer complementary, refreshment and specialized courses in which approximately 1000 students could improve their language skills (more than 95 % of them were military personnel). Besides this, assistance in language training was offered to declared units in their preparation for their tasks. The Language Institute also participates in the very demanding language training of the National Defense Course students. More than 2500 military personnel took English language exam in the process of selection for many international mission in which the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic are involved. Further 200 military cadets and course students received their language training at the Armed Forces Academy and almost 600 military personnel were trained in external courses run by civilian institutions in 34 intensive and extensive basic – SLP-1 and refreshment courses. The success rate (i.e. success in all four skills) in the basic - SLP 1 courses organized by the LI is satisfactory (varies above 90 %), but in the medium-level courses drops below 50 %. The situation in the case of the higher course graduates

who are supposed to reach approx. the level SLP 3333 is much worse, particularly because of long periods between courses, overloading by daily routine work, few opportunities to use the English language, high demands of SLP 3333 and often lower aptitudes for English language studies. Measures have been taken by the J1 and the Armed Forces as a whole to practice the English language in units within the complex of their combat preparation. New forms of language training and specialized preparation were introduced especially in some of the declared units. The + levels have been used practically from the very beginning of STANAG 6001 application in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. This approach has been found very useful in personnel management not only in selection of the best suited personnel for international activities (with almost complete prescribed skill capabilities), but also for planning the number and length of language courses.

The main part of language training of professional military and civilian personnel continues to be organized by the **Language Institute** (now the LI of the GS) in Bratislava and in its detached language training centers in Trenčín, Nitra, Topoľčany, Zvolen, Martin and Prešov. The language training of almost all cadets is the responsibility of the Academy of the Armed Forces in Liptovský Mikuláš, however, the Aviation Faculty of the Technical University in Košice (i.e., what remained of the former AF Academy) continues training only a small number of military aviation cadets. Education and training of cadets at both of the above-mentioned institutions is now controlled by the National Academy of Defense. The language training effort as a whole is the responsibility of the Staff of Personnel Management (J 1) of the Armed Forces General Staff. This move enables direct cooperation with the Armed Forces - “the main customer” representing more than 95 % of language training “clients” and much more flexible response to the practical needs of units.

Developing situation in the Armed Forces and their very wide participation in the international peace missions led to the increasing shift towards practical aspects of professional military service and to the operational and specialized English language. Therefore, also in 2006 various specialized military terminology courses were organized for selected military specialties considered to be priority specialties with regard to the declared units and Force Goal Objectives. The Main Language Training Center and each of the six Detached Language Training Centers of the Language Institute continue to specialize in a certain military trade area so as to cover the needs of units, achieve higher quality of our language training and consequently, better study results of the trained military personnel. Thanks to the intensified language training the whole units are becoming more and more interoperable and getting ready to fulfill their tasks in multinational NATO and EU-led missions abroad, military exercises in the Slovak Republic, as well as to fulfill their tasks in international military structures within the Alliance. However, as a result of continued reforms of the Armed Forces, ever changing requirements of the Alliance and cuts in personnel numbers have led to significant losses of previously language trained personnel. Enormous proportion of the new military personnel, particularly the NCOs receive their language training almost from the beginning in the Language Institute centers. Especially the lower ranks bring poor or often none knowledge of the English language from their civilian studies. As in many other countries the military service is losing its attractiveness and it is difficult to recruit personnel with proper education for low-rank positions. To meet all the ever increasing language training requirements, various additional supporting activities have to be organized. The most frequent forms are the intensive courses organized in cooperation with civilian language institutes. The Armed Forces procured 34 of them last year to provide the basic language training

(SLP1) in smaller garrisons and in some cases also the intermediate language training in various shorter forms for personnel that cannot be sent to intensive courses for service duty reasons. The new legislature hampered to a certain degree this effort of procurement for some time, but the structures involved in the solution of this problem are struggling hard to get the process back on rails. In this situation the already overloaded Language Institute provided various other forms such as individual study programs for military VIPs, individual consultations and group assistance - that were offered in special cases when standard course studies could not be applied. Self-study centers are being built in several garrisons, for two of them the Armed Forces received material and software assistance from the US and they are expected to help the units to improve and to maintain the already achieved language skills.

The international cooperation and assistance continued to play a very important role in language training. Our system of English language training for military personnel was supported also by the partner institutions from abroad. They are particularly the Defense Language Institute in San Antonio, Texas, USA, the British Council (BC), the French Armed Forces provided language instructors, material and software, the Canadian Forces Language School in Ottawa offered courses for teachers and military personnel and valuable assistance was also provided by the German Armed Forces. As every year so far, several US instructors were directly involved in teaching at the Main Language Training Center in Bratislava and at the Detached Language Training Centers across Slovakia under the supervision of the language-training manager – advisor, Prof. Lisa HIMA (she terminated her mission in Slovakia in June 2006). The US delivered two language labs for unit language training in 2006 and after installation in March 2007 new ways of language training are being introduced in Michalovce and Sliach garrisons. Very valuable was the provision of ALC books, dictionaries, audio tapes, software (CDs) for these labs intended for use as self-study centers as well. The British Council PFP English Project manager from the UK - Mr. Gavin Floater, M.A. (he terminated his mission in Slovakia in 2006) organized and sponsored in cooperation with NATO several international courses and methodology activities for our ELT teachers and also provided valuable teaching material – particularly the Campaign 2 military English study program. The Language Institute teachers taught in some of these international activities both in Slovakia and abroad. The French Armed Forces provided two language instructors who taught the military personnel and the MOD personnel in both intensive and extensive French language courses. There is also some co-operation on the military Slovak-German and German-Slovak dictionary with the Austrian Armed Forces. The changing priorities of some of these countries lead to restrictions in language training assistance in 2006. To meet the needs of the military steps had to be taken in order to achieve higher level of self-sufficiency. By the end of 2007 more ELT teachers are to be employed, strengthening their force by more than 20 %. More tasks can be covered this way and the elimination of some of external teachers is expected to result in stabilization of teachers, better specialization and in the end, a higher quality of ELT in the coming years.

New ELT requirements and growing number of military personnel with higher language skills and extensive international experience ask for reliable testing of the achieved language skills which plays an important part in our language training system. The English Language Methodology and Testing Section co-operates with the British, American and other language-training managers in preparation of study materials, as well as testing and oral exam material. The expected application of CEF and alignment of STANAG 6001 is a real challenge that requires much closer cooperation with Slovak civilian language training institutions. In 2006 the

British, American and French language advisers and instructors also participated in testing and oral exams of military personnel where it was applicable and when they were available. This section provides instruction with regard to the application of modern tuition methods within our language training system, cooperates with the Academy of the Armed Forces and provides assistance to our own and hired external teachers.

Military personnel of the Slovak Armed Forces and civilian Defense Department employees, including teachers were trained in foreign languages and necessary professional skills in several international military schools and language institutions abroad. Selected candidates were sent to courses abroad in accordance with the possibilities and offers of the foreign partners - mostly the USA, the UK, Canada, France, the Netherlands and Germany. However, these possibilities have been significantly reduced recently and the conditions are more and more tough. Specialized military courses became our priority as a result of the fact that levels SLP 2222 up to SLP 3333 can be reached in educational facilities in the Slovak Republic. Wherever possible, shorter language courses abroad are used before starting professional studies in international institutions. These language courses are preferably given to military professionals who are under preparation for peace support operations, those who participate in the activities of the Alliance and to the personnel of units requested to reach a prescribed level of interoperability with the NATO forces within the frame of the Force Goal Objectives. Fulfillment of the latter is closely watched especially since the re-subordination of the LI to the J1 of the GS. Much more attention is paid to developing the necessary English language skills of the NCOs and Warrant Officers than before. Since the number of military personnel and units operating in international NATO-led, EU-led and UN-led missions is very high and it is not easy to keep pace with all the requirements.

CONCLUSION

The proportion of military personnel capable to communicate in foreign languages continues to grow every year despite the fact that the permanent reforms of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and the changing NATO requirements have led to significant losses of the already trained personnel. Our language training system as such, seems to be quite flexible to cope with the requirements of the near future. Gradual improvements in motivation and working conditions encouraged our teachers to work hard. The planned strengthening of the teaching staff by about 20 % at the beginning of 2008 is very promising. It is expected to increase the self-sufficiency of the Language Institute and enhance the quality. In cooperation with our international partners we should be able to meet international standards and continue to develop the whole system of language training in our Armed Forces.