**A Brief Personal Reminiscence of BILC**

**Martha Herzog**

My introduction to BILC was not very auspicious. At some point in the early-1980s, Pierre de Lespinois, a top manager at DLIFLC and a friend of Dave Ellis at SHAPE, began to worry that BILC would soon be disbanded. He liked BILC but feared the organization was not very productive. His idea was to get DLIFLC more involved by sharing one of our most significant tests in translation form.

This test was the Defense Language Aptitude Battery, the DLAB. Of course, determining potential students’ aptitude for foreign language learning were completely different issues in the United States and Europe. It was not really a consideration in Europe where military students had already been exposed formally and informally to one or more foreign languages so that a certain amount of aptitude for learning yet another language could be assumed. In the United States, where the educational system did not emphasize foreign language learning and geography supported the notion that everyone spoke English, the military needed a tool to determine which draftee or enlistee had the best chance of successfully learning another language. The DLAB had been developed and validated carefully and worked well for the Defense Department. However, it was designed for native speakers of American English. The developers had not intended the DLAB to be used with other populations; nor had they ever expected it to be used use in translation.

This more or less doomed project was turned over to me. Mr. de Lespinois provided expert translators from among the faculty and ensured complete test security and confidentiality. When complete, the translations would be given to BILC member nations by Mr. Ellis who would instruct them about possible use. In this way, BILC’s continued existence would be assured for a while, and the United States would have played a significant role.

This served as my introduction to BILC. Now, it may have been a dubious project, but it paved the way for other, more fruitful endeavors.

In 1985, DLIFLC sent me to the BILC conference in Italy, partly to answer questions about the DLAB project. Of course, I was more than eager to refer all questions to Dave Ellis. But there could not have been a more beautiful venue than Florence for discussing tests, aptitude, language learning, and military language schools.

It did not actually appear that BILC was in danger of immediate collapse. In fact, I was extremely impressed by the group from the Bundessprachenamt that formed the Secretariat. The unflappable Herbert Walinsky headed a team that included Josef Rohrer. His title was Head of Institute Training, but that did not capture his imaginative, creative approach to language learning and virtually every aspect of communication. It seemed this group had the energy and skill to keep BILC going forever.

A few years later, however, they decided that the German delegation had done more than its share and provided an example for managing the BILC Secretariat. It was determined that this was an effort in which the United States might play a more useful role than in translating internal tests originally intended for native speakers of American English.

The United States agreed to form the Secretariat, with Ray Clifford of the Foreign Language Center and Keith Wert along with Peggy Garza of the English Language Center, sharing responsibility. All did an excellent job. But from the beginning of this US service to BILC, I was impressed by the contributions of Keith Wert.

Because of his relationship with the Partnerships for Peace nations, Keith had special insight into the needs and issues facing those countries as they struggled to prepare for full NATO membership. While others looked at the revision of the descriptors in STANAG 6001 as an interesting academic exercise, Keith correctly viewed this as a requirement that the PfP nations had for descriptors that were clear, precise, and implementable. He foresaw the results as a set of standards that would put all current NATO nations and PfP nations on an equal footing in testing, evaluation, and improvement of language training. When some of us were making tentative suggestions, Keith essentially said, “Do it. The time is right.”

The revision took time, in terms of preparing the documentation for publication, but it had quick results.

The Secretariat was approached about providing a seminar to introduce the revised STANAG to the PfP nations by means of a language testing seminar for potential test developers in those countries. To produce that seminar, I was privileged to participate in a working group that included Lt Cdr Andre Gervais of Canada, Michel Schwarz from Germany, Gerard Seinhorst from the Netherlands, and Lt Col Carlos Rey of Spain, with guidance from Peggy Garza. The result was a two-week workshop that has been taught scores of times and expanded to include original NATO nations.

Other workshops on related topics and a large number of assistance visits and needs analyses have followed. A BILC Working Group on Level 4 testing, led by Jana Vasilj-Begovic even wrote one chapter of a book published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Many of these milestones were reached after I retired from government service in 2005; however, even then, so much had already been accomplished that I felt reassured that the US contribution had progressed since I had half-heartedly accepted the assignment to rescue BILC through translations of the aptitude test.