THE SECOND PRAGUE INTERNATIONAL TEACHER-TRAINING SEMINAR ON TEACHING ENGLISH TO THE DEAF

During the last week of August 2004 the Faculty of Arts Language Resource Centre, under the auspices of Charles University Rector, Prof. Ing. Ivan Wilhelm, CSc. and the Faculty of Arts Dean, Prof. Ph.D. Jaroslav Vacek, CSc., in cooperation with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology, USA, organized the second international week long seminar on teaching English to the Deaf. This Prague seminar could not be held without generous support of the Nippon Foundation through NTID project PEN-International aimed at improving the tertiary level of Deaf education worldwide.

Teaching English to Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students at Secondary and Tertiary Levels of Education in the Czech Republic was the theme of the seminar, which was coordinated by PhDr. Daniela Janakova, CSc. of Charles University and Dr. Gerald P. Berent, of the NTID Department of Research. Dr. James J. DeCaro, Director, and E. William Clymer, Coordinator, of the PEN-International (http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu) worked closely with seminar organizers and presenters to facilitate the development and implementation of the training activities.

Primarily, this teacher-training seminar was designed for Czech teachers of tertiary level educational institutions language departments who have been providing their deaf students with classes of English. The seminar was attended by sixty six participants. Out of this, there were eighteen university teachers, ten teachers of primary and secondary special schools for the Deaf, sixteen teachers of the Deaf from abroad; thirteen seminar participants were deaf or hard of hearing.

The rising interest in the seminar among the university teachers as compared with year 2000, when the first seminar took place in Prague, is a very positive sign.

As well as in year 2000, Language Resource Centre enabled both deaf and hearing Faculty of Arts students of Czech in the Communication of the Deaf to take part in this seminar. This was highly appreciated by the students who were very active in the seminar discussions. Out of 11 students taking part in the seminar in 2004, several are Charles University graduates by now and they participated in the previous Seminar 2000 as well. Distinguished guests and seminar committee members took part in the seminar activities, too.

This seminar was primarily aimed at instruction of Czech hearing teachers who teach English to the Deaf. English was therefore established the conference language. However, American and English colleagues also used ASL, BSL and their personal sign language interpreters. As in the Czech Republic there is unfortunately not any sign language interpreter who would be able to interpret directly from ASL, BSL, or English to Czech Sign Language, Czech university teacher from the Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Kralove, Pavla Machova, MA, who had taken part in the three week Summer School of English at Gallaudet University in year 2000 with her deaf university students, kindly undertook this difficult task and tried her best interpreting most of the morning lectures and afternoon workshops for Czech deaf and hard of hearing university students and young deaf teachers.

The seminar welcome reception was held on the premises of the ancient Carolinum Hall on August 22, and the festive seminar opening at Spork Palace, on the premises of the Faculty of Arts the following morning, on August 23. Welcome speeches of Dr. Janakova and several distinguished guests opened the seminar. Prof. Alan Hurwitz, NTID Vice-President, spoke about the history of NTID and various study programs which NTID provides to Deaf learners. Prof. James J. DeCaro, Director of NTID PEN-International project, explained in his speech the main goals of this project, aimed at improving tertiary level of deaf education worldwide, and stressed the enormous help provided to this and to many other projects by the Nippon Foundation in Japan.

Chief representative of the American Foundation, Robert Andrew Battmer, J.D., PEN-International Project Coordinator, Assoc. Prof. William Clymer, Director of the Centre for Deaf Studies at Bauman Technical University in Moscow, Prof. Alexander G. Stanevsky, Charles University Vice-Rector for Foreign Affairs, Prof. Dr. Josef Stingl, CSc., the Faculty of Arts Vice-Dean for Study Affairs, Doc. Dr. Jana Kralova, CSc., Director of Charles University Information and Advisory Centre, Ph.D. Hana Urychova, as well as Doc. Ing. Jaroslav Hruby, CSc., Representative of the Government Board for Human Resources, and Prof. Ph.D. Alena Macurova, CSc., founder of the Charles University Bachelor Study Program Czech in the Communication of the Deaf, all took part in the festive seminar opening. During the opening ceremony the certificates for assistence were passed on to all distinguished guests.

The seminar program was very rich and varied and every participant could choose according to his/her own sphere of interest. Morning lectures and afternoon workshops and discussions embraced several main topics: general linguistic strategies for learning foreign languages, special methodological and psychological strategies applied in teaching the Deaf, practical strategies for teaching English writing and reading skills to the Deaf, basic information about the situation in deaf education and career opportunities of the Deaf in the Czech Republic, the USA and

Great Britain.

Afternoon seminar workshops took place in two different seminar venues simultaneously: on the premises of the Language Resource Centre (LRC), and Charles University Information and Advisory Centre, which kindly hosted a part of the seminar workshops providing its premises of computerized library for practical afternoon training. Every day, when the official seminar program was over, in late afternoons, seminar participants had the chance to visit LRC and get familiar with a large collection of special language teaching materials and textbooks for teaching deaf students English, with close captioned video programs, feature films and computer programs on Deaf Studies, Culture and History of the Deaf Community in the USA, Great Britain and on learning sign languages: ASL, BSL and on sign language interpreting. New LRC resources funded by the Nippon Foundation concern teaching the deafblind students and students with other learning difficulties and disorders.

Seminar lectures and workshops were led by twelve presenters. Three presenters were Czech university teachers: Prof. Alena Machova, Director of the Institute for Czech Language and Theory of Communication (her lecture concerned general linguistic aspects of foreign language learning of the Deaf), Dr. Daniela Janakova, Head of the LRC and Coordinator of teaching English to the Deaf at Czech universities and colleges (her workshop described the situation in teaching English to the Deaf at the Faculty of Arts and gave a list of useful English LT strategies, sequences from captioned video programs on English Summer Schools for Czech deaf Charles University students organized by Dr. Janakova at Galaludet University and the University of Bristol were presented), and Pavla Machova, M.A., English teacher of the Deaf, University of Hradec Kralove (her workshop demonstrated practical English teaching strategies used in her teaching the Deaf and various exercises). Assoc. Prof. Galina Kirsanova, represented Bauman Technical University in Moscow (her lecture concerned practical English teaching strategies applied in teaching deaf students at Bauman). Two seminar presenters were from the University of Wolverhampton in Great Britain: Assoc. Prof. John Hay (his lecture concerned the results of his research on deaf education in Great Britain) and Joan Fleming (workshop on English teaching strategies). Both of these English colleagues had taken part in the Seminar 2000 as well.

NTID provided the Prague seminar with seven highly professional presenters whose interesting lectures and workshops on different topics connected with deaf education, were supported by power-point presentations. Prof. Alan Hurwitz, Ed.D. and his wife, Ms. Vicki Hurwitz gave a truly wonderful presentation, based on personal experience with raising their two deaf children. Psychological aspects of classroom management and educational strategies of teaching the Deaf were covered by both the lecture and the workshop of Prof. Sidney Barefoot, whose charming sense of humour was very much enjoyed by all seminar participants. Real

abilities of the Deaf compared with the sphere of jobs available for deaf graduates at the job market in the U.S.A were the topic of Ms. Pat DeCaro, M.S./C.A.S.´s interesting workshop. Various methodological strategies of teaching English writing and reading skills to the Deaf were presented in the lectures and workshops of Prof. Gerald Berent, Ph.D., Assoc. Prof. John Panara, M.A., and Prof. Kathleen Eilers-crandall, Ph.D., who gave the participants direct links to the web pages she developed for her students.

The Prague seminar, whose most significant feature was the willingness to share all knowledge and experience, received a very positive feedback from the participants. It was closed by a vivid and fruitful panel discussion and final Friday morning evaluation which covered all the main seminar topics. After closing speeches, the time for graduation came. Dr. Janakova together with Prof. Hurwitz and Prof. DeCaro passed certificates of completion on to all seminar participants, who expressed their hopes for the seminar to be followed by more to come in the future.

Dr. Janakova, who was the main Czech organizer of both this and the previous Prague seminar 2000, remarked that without hiring at least one young and devoted teacher for the program of teaching English to the Deaf to LRC, this will hardly be possible. It is high time to do so because a new specialist must have time enough to get familiar with all the aspects involved so that in the future it will be possible to pass on him/her not only all gathered knowledge and experience but also all contacts made abroad regarding cooperation in the sphere of Deaf Studies in order to continue all projects which have been successfully launched. Ideally, this new teacher should also master Czech Sign Language to be able to teach deaf students English through it. This would be a very positive change and a great advantage in their teaching: Czech deaf students would be taught through their mother tongue and Czech teacher of English to the Deaf would become independent of the sign langauge interpreters, and there would be no more risk of mixing up the conveyed information.

As the Prague seminar was also visited by Prof. Alexander Stanevsky, Director of the Centre for Deaf Studies at Bauman State Technical University in Moscow, possibilities of establishing links and possible ways of cooperation with the Centre in the sphere of consultancy were discussed as well. So far the cooperation will be realized mostly through taking part in the further activities connected with the PEN-International project and perhaps through the Russian deaf students and their English teacher, Prof. Kirsanova, joining Dr. Janakova´s project of English Summer Schools at the University of Bristol.

Besides certificates, all seminar participants received copies of Methodological Guide on Teaching English to the Deaf prepared by LRC team, supervised by Dr. Janakova. Czech seminar participants from primary and secondary special schools for the Deaf also received a university English teaching study plan with lots of LT materials

designed by Dr. Janakova and Mgr. Tvrdikova. The LRC team hopes that by letting the colleagues from primary and secondary schools for the Deaf know how English to the Deaf is taught at Czech universities and what the requirements regarding deaf students´ progress in English are when they enter universities, may help the process of coordination of their learning English from the very early stages.

Regarding the seminar outcomes, the LRC team will prepare the Seminar 2004 Proceedings for publishing, complimentary copies of which will be sent to all seminar participants by the beginning of year 2005. Approximately at the same time it will be possible to order at limited costs copies of captioned seminar video program on all seminar days or just its parts in LRC. A large photogalery from all seminar activities can be found on the LRC web site:

http://jc.ff.cuni.cz/mmp/deaf/E_deaf.htm (English version)
http://jc.ff.cuni.cz/mmp/deaf/deaf.htm (Czech version)

On these web pages you can always find basic information on all special activities and projects organized by the Faculty of Arts LRC for deaf and hard of hearing students of English.

Those of you who could not take part in Prague seminar 2004 will welcome the seminar web site as developed by NTID colleagues, where summaries of all seminar presentations can be found:

http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu/ewc/engcr/schedule.htm

Directly under the title of this web page you will find the link to the description of the way how to access the description of each presentation and related materials and resources. The title of this link is:

"How to Access Seminar Resources"
http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu/ewc/engcr/access.pdf

This document and many others on the seminar web site are Adobe Acrobat files (PDF). To open PDF files, your computer must have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. You can download the free Adobe Acrobat Reader application from:
http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html

Prague seminar 2004 met its goals. Not only did it become a rich source of useful information for all its participants but above that it became a manifestation of great friendship which can overcome various barriers.

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