

Gerhard Stickel

## **Ανοιγμα / Opening**

Κυριε Προεδρε,

Αγαπητες και αγαπητοι συναδελφοι,

Κυριες και Κυριοι:

Με την ευκαιρια της εναρξης του ετησιου Συνεδριου της ΕΦΝΙΑ, της Ευρωπαϊκης Ομοσπονδιας Εθνικων Φορεων για την Γλωσσα, σας χαιρετιζω ολους στη Θεσσαλονικη.

Ειναι η ογδοη φορα απο την ιδρυση του Οργανισμου μας στη Στοκχολμη που συναντιωμαστε σ ενα επισημο Συνεδριο.

Οπως και στο παρελθον διαλεξαμε μαζι με τους συναδελφους που μας φιλοξενουν ενα θεμα Που εχει ιδιαιτερη σημασια για τις εργασιες μας: Γλωσσα, Γλωσσες και νεες Τεχνολογιες.<sup>1</sup>

We all use tools and methods of ICT in our daily work and would get frustrated or desperate if somebody took away the personal computer or laptop from our desk or the advanced mobile phone from our pocket. The older ones among us have in the course of our professional life experienced several radical changes of the material conditions for our professions as lexicographers, grammarians, dialectologists, sociolinguists or language teachers since the time when we mainly used books, typewriters and card files for our work. Maybe, some are still secretly using card files because they do not trust the durability of digital data carriers. I still remember the attempts during the sixties of the last century to have linguistic routine tasks done by huge machines that droned with their 8 or 12 tape units in large halls. We fed them with Hollerith cards or paper tapes that first had to be punched on other clumsy machines. As a result we got our processed data printed in coarse characters on large leporellos.

At that time, the big main frame computers and the available software were also first of all made for numerical computing. It took quite a while to develop programmes for the processing of non-numerical data, that is, words and texts. I remember that two of my colleagues needed several days to write a programme for arranging words in alphabetic order. That was 45 years ago. Now every little laptop or notebook computer has such programmes as small components of its rich standard software. In the old times of linguistic data processing, the input and storage of larger texts also meant real physical efforts, because besides the huge number of punch cards or tapes for the input, the magnetic tapes of the computer also had to be exchanged again and again or moved from one unit to the next. Now the input and output facilities have become multimedial and highly

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. President, dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I salute you at the Annual Conference of EFNIL, the European Federation of National Institutions for Language. Since the foundation of our organization in Stockholm, this is now the 8th time that the members assemble for an official conference. As in previous years, we have chosen – in agreement with our hosts – a general theme that is of special importance for the research and administrative work in our member institutions: “Language, Languages, and New Technologies”.

flexible. There was even hope for paperless research and other office work. However, practice showed that the consumption of paper increased considerably due to comfortable high quality printers. The storage capacity of computers for linguistic data has increased enormously and is continuously growing. This has led, among other things, to the development of a new linguistic discipline, that is, corpus linguistics. Unfortunately, the legal conditions for the storage and computational processing of printed and oral texts have not quite kept up with the progress made in computational and linguistic methods. Our conference also offers an opportunity to discuss this issue and to look for feasible solutions.

Besides the rapid progress in the development of ever smaller and more powerful computers, the introduction of new communicative tools and channels by the interlinking of computers, by the Internet and the world wide web, has caused great changes for our work in traditional fields of linguistics. They affect the methods of research in the various disciplines of pure linguistics as well as the tools and ways of applied linguistics such as translation and interpretation, language teaching, learning, and testing. Perhaps, we are not even aware of some of these effects. Most of the EFNIL delegates assembled here are trained linguists or philologists. As far as I know, only a few of them, few of us, are experts in computational linguistics or other fields of ICT. Therefore, I think, many of us (including myself) have not yet grasped all the opportunities and possibilities that recent developments in ICT offer for our work. We also have only limited information on the advanced uses that some of our member institutions are making of ICT. Thus, I presume, that we all are eager to hear from our colleagues about their use of ICT including specific explorative projects in their institutes and to learn from the invited guest speakers about new developments in ICT and their actual and potential relevance for the study, the learning and the use of our languages.

The topic “language and new technologies” has one additional aspect that will, perhaps, also be treated in some of the contributions to this conference: This is the influence that ICT has or can have on languages proper, on their phonological, grammatical and textual structures. We can all observe that the use of computers, the Internet and mobile phones has led to changes of verbal communication: from the emergence of new types of communicative interactions, that is, new text and dialogue types and conventions, to grammatical innovations down to new spellings and, perhaps, even phonetic peculiarities. I am not quite sure about phonetic changes but would not be surprised if they were discovered. These changes mean that the new ICT technologies do not only offer new tools and methods for linguistic research and linguistic applications but also cause new forms of language use that itself again becomes the object of linguistic investigation.

At this conference, however, the changes of verbal behaviour by ICT can only be a minor issue. The general overviews and principle reflexions of our guest speakers and the reports about the concrete use of ICT in several of our member institutes will, probably, focus on the instrumental qualities that ICT has or could have for the activities in the service of our languages. At this conference, most of us will be learners rather than teachers. But I think that the expert speakers will also have some gain from the questions we will ask them and I hope that the reports we will hear will stimulate new cooperative projects among EFNIL members.

Let me conclude with thanks to our Greek colleagues and friends for so carefully organizing the conference and for the generous hospitality offered to us.

And let me add special thanks to Vasiliki Dendrinou (Bessie Dendrinou as we call her), member of the EFNIL Executive Committee, who proposed the important and attractive theme of this conference and who also had an essential part in the preparation of this event. I am confident that at the end of the general assembly tomorrow afternoon we all will have ample reason for repeating and confirming these thanks also to Maria Theodoropoulou and her team.

Now, let's get to work!

Danke sehr, Merci beaucoup, Many thanks etcetera, and, of course: Sas efxaristo!