

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends of English,

The chairperson of this honourable session asked me to write a few words for you. My theme is, „Old Men Remember“ (by the way, this is also the title of a book of memoirs of one British Prime Minister“).

Old is not only the author of this little speech, old is also the textbook „English for Language Schools“. In a few months it will be forty years since when the manuscript of volume I received the approval of the Ministry of Education, after four favourable comments arrived, from the Brno School of Languages, from the College of Economics in Prague, and from two native speakers, Don Sparling from Brno University and John Newton from Oxford University.

What preceded it? When I was offered this project, I accepted it as a challenge. I was fortunate in finding one experienced teacher who agreed to write the exercises, Dr. Nangonová from Ostrava University. And the final language revision was to be done by Don Sparling. No one said at that time there should be three more volumes to follow. Likewise, when a six-year old child asks how long shall I be going to school, you won't say, 16 more years. The reply is more likely, well, until the summer holidays. Even adults don't like to hear that learning English takes a long time. Soon after 1989 I saw notices posted in trams of Olomouc, where someone offered to teach you English in 3 months. A little later, a competing poster promised success in English in 3 weeks. A Czechoslovak Radio reporter, who had spent six years in the USA and two years in Iraq reporting on the war, after his return was asked by an interviewer, which of your teachers of English do you remember most? The answer was: „Mr Peprník, because he said: „It takes some twenty years to learn English and even then the success cannot be guaranteed.“

Finally, the four volumes of the Language School textbook were written and designed for five or six years of study, while the subsequent „English for Philologists“ (later renamed „English for the Advanced“), was meant for four-year university study. The first volume of the Language School textbook turned out to be success, in four weeks, the publishing house sold 40 000 copies, something previously never heard of. Several reprints followed.

A Czech-American friend wrote to me that she had seen the textbook in the bookstore in the Rockefeller Center in New York. A British journalist based in Prague travelled to Olomouc to make an interview for the Prague Post, a daily published in English. And the textbook turned out to be fairly durable. A Prague journalist travelling on the metro noticed a student with this book and he remembered that 20 years before he had studied from the same book. So he

came to Olomouc to make an interview. One recent winter, my wife slipped at night on the iced street and fell down. A young man offered to accompany her home. When parting, he said, "So now I know where "46 Concord Street" is. (that is the title of Lesson 11 in volume I). An American lecturer at the University of Olomouc married a Czech lady and he learned Czech vocabulary from the Language School textbook. In gratitude, when a son was born to him, he named him Prokop. An American family in Pennsylvania wrote to me: "Our grandfather who came to America around 1900 was a Prokop. Do you know more about the ancestors of Mr Prikop in your textbook?"

You might think that by now the author must be proud as a peacock. By no means. The older I get, the more I believe that the textbook is not so important, that the main thing is the steady will to learn. Masaryk is said to have improved his English by comparing texts in an English and a Czech Bible. My first lesson in my prewar textbook of English was "The Human Body". Of course, a good textbook, with grammar based on the differences between English and Czech systems, is definitely a great help. And I dare to say, more helpful than the imported textbooks published for students living in three continents. On the other hand, they are unrivalled in their illustrations and documentary photographs. The Language School textbook was allowed to have pen drawings only, and in the university textbook in the 1980s no illustrations at all were permitted. Now even new conceptions of approach to the subject are born. For example the textbook of Czech written at Oxford by Mr Newton consists of lessons taking place in Prague pubs.

Before I end, let me come back to the motivation for language learning. In adults now that the world is open to travel and study and business, learners have an excellent motivation. But this idea comes slowly. My wife tried to teach her six-year old grandson the beginnings of English, so that he might have a headstart when at school. One early response she got from him was: "Proč mám znát slovo sister, když žádnou sestru nemám?" By now the boy is twenty-four and has travelled in three continents. But he says: "And yet I never needed the word for sister."

Thank your for your attention. With all good wishes, Jaroslav Peprník (92).