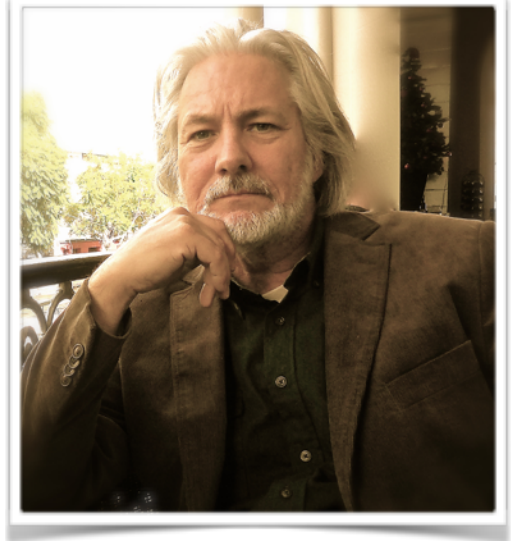


John Alexander's Newsletter

Ingarö • January 2015

'Reflections on Swedish Culture'



The Meaningful Dialogue

For my part, another eventful year with seminars and engagements - mainly in Sweden and the Nordic region, but also Strasbourg, Munich, Shanghai covering subjects such as International Leadership, Resolving Cross Cultural Dilemmas, Introducing Swedish Values, Sustainability in the Baltic Region, Nordic Business Culture, as well as the many seminars on various aspects of Swedish culture - film, television, media, storytelling and corporate narrative.



In September and October I joined forces with the Swedish Institute and the Global Leadership Network initiated by the Institute to further awareness of sustainability, corporate social responsibility, transparency and values and policies held in such high regard in the Swedish public sector.



Seven hundred participants from more than 60 countries made up the most enthusiastic audiences I have encountered - SI scholarship holders from African republics, large and small, from Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, from SE Asia, the Caucasus - a truly international and diverse group of people with a barrage of questions and perspectives, confirming my view that the best way to learn about different cultures is the meaningful dialogue — open communication, problem solving and discussions, together with good humor and mutual respect.

John Alexander speaking at the Swedish Institute's Global Network for Young Leaders in Stockholm, October 2014. Seven hundred participants from more than sixty countries.

[Photographs by Abul Kalam Azad]



The World's Most Polite Language?

Some years back a Swedish association was set up to keep a watchful eye on the 'Swedishness' of the Swedish language, to raising warnings about impingements and infiltrations of American English into everyday Swedish usage. They have published a number of titles and in December launched an anthology with contributions from Swedish and Finland Swedish writers and essayists on the subject of the Swedish language. My contributing chapter was entitled: 'The Most Polite Language in the World?' My aim was to explore 'high-context' Swedish with its subtle and nuanced expressions, which I suggest contribute to the remarkable Swedish capacity for consensus and avoiding confrontations. My closing remarks lament the intrusion of American English swear words into everyday Swedish. For me one of the charms of the Swedish language is that amongst the worse things you can say to another person include expressions like 'for seventeen', 'go the forest' and 'jösses.' Verbal relics of a bygone age.

Guld i strupen. rötter och relationer till svenska språket. En antologi från Språkförsvaret. Frank-Michael Kirsch, Per-Åke Lindblom, Arne Rubensson (red.) Språkförsvaret 2014. 241 s

Available from:

sprakforsvaret@yahoo.se

For Swedish readers, a review from Finland's Österbottenstidning is attached...



“De många ingångarna bär sägen om hur intressant diskussionen om språk kan bli om man kan växla perspektiv.”

Många perspektiv på svenskan

... Australiensaren **John Alexander** för ett intressant resonemang om språk med låg respektive hög kontext.

Han hänvisar till kulturanthropologen Edward Halls fyrdelade kulturmodell som inte kan beskrivas i sin helhet i det

här sammanhanget, men där avsnittet om kommunikation är speciellt intressant. Det handlar om hur saker sägs, inte bara vad som sägs.

Hög kontext – skriver Alexander – anses som nyanserad, artig, indirekt; låg kontext mer direkt, preciserad, rakt på sak.

På japanska betyder ”ja” ibland ”nej” eftersom det anses oartigt att säga nej. Enligt samma resonemang kan ”nu” i en högkontextkultur i stället för lågkonjunktur kulturens ”inom cirka 1-2 minuter” betyda ”senare”.

Man behöver inte förflytta sig till Asien för att hitta den här kulturskillnaden, den finns redan mellan Sverige och Finland, noterar Alexander, dock utan att ge några exempel. Men visst är den finska kommunikationskulturen med sitt "management by perkele" mera direkt än den svenska.

Samma klyfta finns mellan svensk och amerikansk eller australiensisk kultur, medan den brittiska engelskan enligt honom också omfattar "weakeners"; mjukgörande uttryck som "ganska", "kanske", "sådär" och "tja".

Enligt Alexander är ord, som "nja", "lyhörd" och "ganska", svårtolkade ord i kontrast till utpräglade lågkontextkulturer som i USA eller Australien.

Alexander granskar också svenska svordomar och ser en förskjutning från försiktiga konsensus- ord som "helsicke", "jösses" och "stick och brinn", delar av vad han kallar ett "icke- konfronterande språk" till ungdomars friska bruk av engelska kraftuttryck i stället för sitt eget artiga modersmål.

För övrigt ger han också en förklaring jag inte hört förr till det lindriga uttrycket "fy sjutton"- uttrycket ska ha sina rötter på Gotland och avse de sjutton stenarna i galgens pelare, som fortfarande står utanför Visby!

>> Facklitteratur

Guld i strupen. rötter och relationer till svenska språket. En antologi från Språkförsvaret. Frank-Michael Kirsch, Per-Åke Lindblom, Arne Rubensson (red.) Språkförsvaret 2014. 241 s.

Feedback from talks & seminars from 2014...

“Communicating Across Cultures”, H&M, Shanghai and Stockholm • Spotify • Octopharma • “Sweden & Sustainability” Swedish Institute • “The Nordic Baltic Equation” “Introduction to Sweden” Swedish Institute • “The Nordic Model - A Winning Concept” , Merck Stockholm, “Cultural Diversity to Corporate Narrative” Scania, “Cross Cultural Solutions”, Karolinska Institute “Resolving Cultural Dilemmas” • “The Corporate Narrative: Communicating Values with Stories” MBA, Stockholm School of Economics, also lectures and seminars at Stockholm School of Economics, Stockholm University, Swedish Institute, Södertorn University College.

Some comments:

“On behalf of all of us a huge thank you for a phenomenal workshop at kick-off! The response was extraordinary and we were extremely pleased with it.” Swedish Institute • “Really inclusive and cleverly done. Left you with a feeling that you were curious to find out more about everyone. Some useful insights and takeaway points.” “Great content and delivered really well.” “Great presenter! Really engaging.” “Brilliant -get him again!” Spotify • “Great presenter. Fun and charismatic” Karolinska Institute • “Excellent speaker, great energy and ability to keep people focused on the topic.” KI • “Super fun – should have been longer” H&M Stockholm