

THE SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY OF LUDMILA URBANOVÁ

The docent of English linguistics at Masaryk University's Faculty of Arts, Ludmila Urbanová, a highly regarded follower of the Prague School linguistic tradition, celebrated her sixtieth birthday in the summer of 2004.

Ludmila Urbanová was born on 14th July 1944 in Boskovice. In 1961, after leaving secondary school in Svitavy, she entered Brno University's Faculty of Arts. Owing to a private teacher, she had a very good knowledge of German and wished to study German in combination with Russian or Czech. At that time, however, German was only offered in combination with English – a language which was only taught at very few Czech secondary schools. Ludmila greatly feared that her knowledge of English was inadequate and almost abandoned her studies soon after the beginning of the first semester. In spite of the initial fear and insecurity, thanks to her natural talent for languages, she gradually became an excellent Anglicist. She completed her studies by defending a major M.A. thesis on nominal tendencies in German and a minor M.A. thesis on nominal tendencies in English.

In 1965, a year before graduating, she started commuting to the University of Prešov in Slovakia, whose newly established Department of Foreign Languages badly needed competent teachers of English. Prešov became her home for the next 27 years. She worked hard helping to establish English studies at the Faculty of Arts. She got married to a colleague and gave birth to two sons. While teaching in Prešov, she acquired the degrees of PhDr. in 1978 and CSc. in 1984, both from Brno University. In her doctoral and CSc. dissertations, she examined stress and rhythm in present-day English, and the prosodic realizations of the English verb and adverbial. After the fall of communism and the division of Czechoslovakia, she left Slovakia and followed her sons back to the Czech Republic. Once again she assisted in launching an English studies programme, this time at Masaryk University's Faculty of Education. In 1997, she was invited to become a member of the Department of English and American Studies at the same University's Faculty of Arts. Although this Department was well established when she moved over, her expertise was again needed in adapting the curricula of B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. studies to the newly introduced European credit system. She successfully defended her habilitation thesis on semantic indeterminacy in English conversation in 1998.

The focus of Ludmila's research has always been on the function of language in the act of communication. From the beginning of her academic career, she was attracted by sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and corpus linguistics. Apart from numerous articles examining these disciplines, she has published *A Handbook of*

English Phonetics and Phonology, and *Úvod do anglické stylistiky* [An introduction to English stylistics; in co-authorship with Andrew Oakland]. She has also contributed a chapter on Phonetics and Phonology to the collective handbook *Rudiments of English linguistics*. Her habilitation dissertation was published in the form of a monograph entitled *On Expressing Meaning in English Conversation, Semantic Indeterminacy*. Ludmila Urbanová has carried out research not only at home but also at such prestigious foreign research centres as the University of East Anglia, University College London and Lund University. She has lectured at the Universities of Munich, Wrocław, Magdeburg, and Vienna.

During her life, Ludmila met several outstanding personalities that influenced her academic career. She was very fortunate to be able to follow Professor Vachek's lectures at Brno University when she was still an M.A. student. Later on, she met Vachek again, this time as a teacher at Prešov University, where Vachek held Ph.D. seminars in the late 1970s. During her international research stays, she met and co-operated with Professor Randolph Quirk and Professor Jan Svartvik, both of whom evoked her interest in corpus linguistics. The strongest influence, however, was the personality of Jan Firbas, who supervised much of Ludmila's early research and encouraged her in pursuing her later research projects. He realized Ludmila's potential and was often instrumental in furthering her career. It was he, who recommended Ludmila for the teaching post in Prešov, thus diverting her interest from German to English. It was he, who recommended her for the prestigious research stays at University College and Lund University, ultimately making corpus-based analysis the basis of her research. And it was he, who inspired her to return to Brno after the split of Czechoslovakia to fill a certain generation gap in the ranks of Brno Anglicists. Ludmila became a true follower of Jan Firbas not only in her research principles but also in gradually taking over – from Josef Hladký, who replaced Jan Firbas after his death – the positions of the head of the linguistic section and the head of Ph.D. studies at the Department of English and American Studies. Like Jan Firbas, Ludmila has become a wise and receptive advisor of younger colleagues.

On behalf of all Brno Anglicists, I would like to congratulate Ludmila Urbanová on her sixtieth birthday and thank her for her continuous support of the development of English studies at Brno University, as well as her genuineness, friendliness, and sympathy for her colleagues and friends.

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