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JAN CHOVANEC

## LUDMILA URBANOVÁ: AN APPRECIATION

The academic career of Ludmila Urbanová, in a sense, has run in parallel with the development of this journal. Urbanová studied at the English Department in Brno with the late Professor Josef Vachek, the founder of this journal. Shortly before her graduation in 1966, she accepted a teaching position at the Faculty of Arts in Prešov, Slovakia, to help strengthen its newly formed English Department. Within a few years, she completed her post-graduate studies in the field of functional sentence perspective, focusing on the prosodic realization of sentence adverbials, which led to her titles of PhDr. (1978) and CSc. (1984). Her advisor and mentor was the late Professor Jan Firbas, a follower of the Prague School of Linguistics who remains Brno's most renowned linguist. During her Prešov years, Urbanová taught phonetics, phonology and stylistics, developing her life-long involvement in the study of spoken language.

In the 1980s, she was among the first scholars in Czechoslovakia to turn their attention to the relatively new field of pragmatics, which has remained her domain ever since. Thanks to her background in functional linguistics – which conceives of language and human expression as a goal-oriented activity through which interlocutors satisfy their communicative needs – she found pragmatics naturally appealing, particularly the idea of the speaker's communicative intention, which, though subjective and not directly available for analysis, perceptibly shapes actual utterances and the whole speech event. At this time, she conducted research with Professor Sidney Greenbaum at University College, London, and studied with Professor Jan Svartvik at Lund University in Sweden, where she gained access to the London-Lund corpus of spoken English conversation. As a sign of her respect for Professor Svartvik, she, together with Professor Firbas, was later involved with Masaryk University's awarding him an honorary doctorate in 1998.

At the beginning of the 1990s, at the suggestion of Professor Firbas, she moved back to Brno and became the head of the newly established English Department at the Faculty of Education. Thanks to her hard work and international

contacts, the department was launched on a successful path in regard to both teaching and research, especially through her work there with numerous doctoral students.

In 1997, Urbanová moved to her current position in the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, where she became an associate professor in the following year, after defending her dissertation devoted to semantic indeterminacy in English conversation. With her arrival, the department, previously dominated by the structuralist and functionalist traditions of the Prague School of Linguistics, experienced a significant change. Teaching and research shifted from the previously prevailing structuralist preoccupation with the sentence level towards the pragmatic analysis of discourse.

It is not surprising then that she soon started to play an important role within the postgraduate studies in the department, taking over the role of the head of the programme from professors Jan Firbas and Josef Hladký. She has supervised more than twenty doctoral students, fifteen of whom have already been granted doctorates and assumed teaching and research positions at departments throughout the Czech Republic and Slovakia. As a tutor, Urbanová is demanding and uncompromising – as some of the contributors to this volume know quite well. In this, she is extending to them the treatment and attention she received from her own professors, the Czech linguistics legends Vachek and Firbas, the two leading Czech linguists in the post-war era. For Urbanová, students have always come first, taking precedence even over her own career.

In her own work, Urbanová combines the methodology of conversation analysis, discourse analysis and pragmatics. She has dealt with such issues as semantic indeterminacy, spoken and written styles, genre hybridity, dialogic discourse, and meaning in interaction. She has written several textbooks and chapters of textbooks, as well as the monographs *On Expressing Meaning in English Conversation* (2003) and *Stylistika anglického jazyka* (2008, originally published as *Úvod do anglické stylistiky*, 2002, and co-authored with Andrew Oakland).

More recently, she has focused on fictional dialogue and textual aspects of dialogism, exploring the linguistic manifestation of the phatic function and the role of ritual in conversational interaction. She draws on functionalist and structuralist concepts, such as phaticity, enriching them with discourse analysis and pragmatic perspectives, thus arriving at unexpected and novel understandings of the way discourse and interpersonal interactions operate. In her conception, language is a means to an end. Language forms are to be studied in close conjunction with situational and extralinguistic phenomena, such as speakers' intentions, communicative effects and social constraints. In this sense, she is a true follower of the Firthian principle of 'language as function in context'. For Urbanová, meaning is located not only in the language use and context but also the social ritual underlying such contextualized language use.

Ludmila Urbanová has closely cooperated with colleagues from various universities abroad, such as East Anglia (the late Roger Fowler), Lund (Jan Svartvik, Bengt Altenberg), Vienna (Herbert Schendl) and Munich (Hans Sauer, Richard

Janney). In more recent years, Ludmila Urbanová has been sharing her inspirational approach to linguistics with students at universities across Central Europe. In the context of Czech and Slovak Anglicist studies, she has played a crucial role in introducing, promoting and developing modern trends in linguistics.

