

Urbanová, Ludmila

**Professor Emeritus Jan Svartvik and his role in corpus linguistics**

*Brno studies in English*. 2021, vol. 47, iss. 2, pp. 5-6

ISSN 0524-6881 (print); ISSN 1805-0867 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2021-2-1>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/144872>

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

# PROFESSOR EMERITUS JAN SVARTVIK AND HIS ROLE IN CORPUS LINGUISTICS

*Brno Studies in English*  
Volume 47, No. 2, 2021

ISSN 0524-6881 | e-ISSN 1805-0867  
<https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2021-2-1>

LUDMILA URBANOVÁ

This year the linguistic community of Anglicists celebrates the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of birth of Jan Svartvik, a distinguished Swedish linguist of world-wide repute. His outstanding qualities both in the field of research into several areas of contemporary English as well as his teaching skills reflected in the activities of his pupils and followers bear witness to the whole gamut of work done as Head of the English Department at Lund university. His contribution to modern linguistics is manifested in a number of publications both in Sweden and abroad.

Jan Svartvik was born on 18th August 1931. He studied at Uppsala university where he obtained the title of Doctor of Philosophy. His talent for languages and his devotion to linguistic research were reinforced by stays abroad extending his scope of interest and enriching his expertise in many new areas of linguistics.

The profile of Jan Svartvik as a corpus linguist started to develop during his stay at University College London. As the only non-native speaker of English, in collaboration with Randolph Quirk, he participated in the Survey of English Usage, together with another outstanding linguist Sidney Greenbaum. As a visiting professor at Brown university Providence, where the *Brown Corpus of Standard American English* was initiated in 1963-64 by the Czech-American linguist Henry Kučera (in collaboration with W. Nelson Francis), Jan Svartvik gained valuable experience and erudition.

Jan Svartvik was well aware of the contribution of the leading Brno linguist Jan Firbas to functional and contextual linguistics. In the 1990s Czech Anglicists were seeking advice at Western universities to make the standard of English studies in the Czech lands compatible with the advances of linguistic research at prestigious universities abroad. The Lund English Department keenly supported the development of the two English departments at Masaryk university in Brno. Our colleagues in Sweden enabled young Czech researchers to explore the latest trends tackling the current topics of conversation analysis, pragmatics, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. The English Department at Lund university was most influential and supportive in spreading and implementing the recent approaches in linguistic research. Apart from the crucial role of Professor Jan Svartvik, I would also like to stress the contribution of Lund scholars Karin Aijmer, Bengt Altenberg and Lars Hermerén, who visited Brno researchers supplying them with resources which at that time were hardly accessible in the Czech Republic. On 26<sup>th</sup> March 1998, as an expression of recognition and respect, the title *doctor honoris*

*causa* was conferred on Jan Svartvik by Masaryk university for his ardent support and promotion of cooperation between Lund and Brno Anglicists.

One of the spheres in which Jan Svartvik showed his unique insight and mastery deserves particular attention: his invaluable input in the rapidly developing branches of computational linguistics and corpus linguistics. It has become the advantage and privilege of the last 60 years that linguists have been well equipped with large collections of texts of spoken and written language for the purpose of a subtle analysis of current language use. Due to corpora, all aspects of language variation in different styles of communication can be scrutinized at various stages of complexity.

Above all, it is necessary to emphasize the access of language scholars to authentic spoken materials. The possibility to study ordinary language in real-life situations has shifted the boundaries and limitations of previous language research. Never before was a detailed analysis of the spoken form of language (including the prosodic and paralinguistic features) subjected to such minute observation, interpretation and evaluation as in the last six decades of modern linguistics. In this respect, the *London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English* (ed. Jan Svartvik) has played a key role in the study of different genres of spoken language. The corpus, consisting of 100 texts of spoken English, was published as a book in 1990 at Lund university by Sidney Greenbaum and Jan Svartvik. A significant amount of tagged texts represents a merger of two sources: the *Survey of English Usage* developed in 1957 by Randolph Quirk at University College London (later continued by Sidney Greenbaum) and the *Survey of Spoken English* started in 1975 by Jan Svartvik at Lund university.

Jan Svartvik participated in the two editions of descriptive academic grammar of the English language: Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik: *A Grammar of Contemporary English* published in 1972 and Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik: *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* published in 1985 by Longman. Both compendiums are based on the study of elicitation tests and several research corpora reflecting the current shape of the English language in a broad spectrum of uses.

On behalf of Brno Anglicists, I would like to express our deeply felt gratitude to Jan Svartvik for his constant support, valuable advice and inspiration.