

IN MEMORIAM ANNA SIEWIERSKA

(25 December 1955 – 6 August 2011)

Anna Siewierska, Professor of Linguistics and Human Communication at Lancaster University, former President of the Societas Linguistica Europaea, and member of the Editorial Board of *Folia Linguistica*, died on 6th August in a tragic car accident in Vietnam. Reproduced below are speeches delivered by three of Anna's friends and colleagues at a memorial event held on Thursday, 8th September 2011 at the 44th Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea, in La Rioja, Spain.

Bert Cornillie
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Dear Anna,

Ten years ago (in September 2001) you were elected as the president of the Societas Linguistica Europaea. I remember this election very well, because it was during the SLE conference in Leuven, which was organized by Nicole Delbecque and myself. The following year, in Potsdam, it was clear that you had taken your responsibility to heart, and you showed yourself to be a very committed president. You did not restrict yourself to delivering the presidential address, but, importantly, you started thinking, together with fellow travellers, of ways to make SLE stronger in the future. I was fortunate to be one of those travellers.

In 2006, in Bremen, your husband Dik Bakker was elected as the Secretary/Treasurer of SLE. Although you were very discrete at the time, I am sure that you were part of his backstage campaign team. In 2008, in Forlí, you became an SLE officer again, this time as an active member of the Executive Committee. It was also at the Forlí conference that you convened an extremely well-attended workshop on impersonal constructions. The volume co-edited with Andrej Malchukov came out earlier this year.

Anna, all this is now part of history, your history, SLE's history, but it still very much alive to me. After the tragic news from Vietnam I looked for the intensive e-mail exchange that we had back in 2002 and 2003, when times were quite different. I read these mails again, several times, as precious goods, and I was very much moved by them. I am sure you would allow me to mention two clear dimensions, two leitmotifs from your messages. They are: your vision of the future and your commitment to involve young scholars. I will present them against the background of the recent history of the SLE.

In 2002-2003 you and I were members of a small, informal committee, together with Ilse Wischer, with Camiel Hamans as go-between. The aim of the committee was to look for ways to improve the position of SLE meetings in the field of linguistics. Many years later we can say that most of the ideas that you proposed then are now part of our organizational model. Let me mention some of your proposals: a) an informative website with online registration, b) prizes, c) posters, d) workshops organized by young and upcoming scholars, e) special subscription rates for young postgraduates, f) and a stricter assessment of abstracts.

Today, these ingredients for success seem so straightforward and evident, but at the time we had to struggle for them. In lengthy e-mails we discussed our strategies for their successful implementation. I will never forget that you always managed to find a

friendly, but not less direct or convincing, tone to communicate our arguments. Your elegance and eloquence have served the cause for reform. Now, after all these years, it is with great satisfaction that I see the ideas that you raised in your messages being put into practice.

And the second dimension: involving the new generations. Your interest in the work and drive of new scholars has always been an integral part of your prestigious career. This clearly showed in the supervision of your PhD students, but involving young scholars was also part and parcel of your work in SLE and the Association for Linguistic Typology. Back in 2002 when I was still one of those young scholars, you took the time and effort to discuss new strategies for SLE with me, to write me elaborate e-mails, and to include me in the small SLE committee. You could have done it alone, strictly speaking you did not need me, but you kept me on board and stressed the role I was willing to play. Ever since, and in different contexts, I have aimed to do the same – taking people on board – to get things done.

Like many other informal committees, ours is no longer operational, but the ideas and practices you proposed survive. And so will the values of your beautiful life. Thank you so much, Anna.

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Ruth Wodak
Lancaster University
President of SLE (2010-2011)

Anna

It is not easy to speak about Anna in just a few minutes.

She was not only an excellent scholar and teacher, and – as we all know – a dedicated member of the Societas Linguistica Europaea and the Association for Linguistic Typology. She was also an elegant, knowledgeable and charming woman with a huge range of hobbies and interests apart from linguistics; always available for her colleagues and friends in many different ways, and very involved with all departmental matters at Lancaster.

I first met Anna a few days after having arrived in Lancaster, in September 2004. She immediately offered to help me to find my way around the university; we soon had lunch together and discovered many similarities in our past personal and professional lives. Moreover, we discovered that we had similar views about linguistics, higher education and politics in general, and that as Central Europeans we shared quite a few stereotypes about ‘the English’ – I will not list these here!

It was wonderful to be able to chat with Anna almost every day in the department corridors, frequently for 5-10 minutes, discussing university policies, exciting or boring meetings, or salient problems in our writing and research. Though her work was in the functionalist theoretical tradition, she could make connections across a wide range of linguistics (she even discussed my work patiently – though it must have seemed very woolly to her). Indeed, we started integrating her innovative research on pronouns with discourse-analytic approaches; pronouns, for example, play a salient role in identity constructions and also in political discourses.

Anna was always full of energy, smiling, walking quickly around the department and listening to everybody’s worries. She was HoD from 2005 until 2008; and in this period, she really changed the structure of the department in significant ways: from a rather hierarchical institution to a much more democratic enterprise; from a rather ‘efficient’ male into a much warmer, female working environment; this implied that social skills became important. And aspects of ‘well-being’ became an integral part of our diverse strategies for the departmental future. While starting to implement her visions, she immediately organized two away days where the entire department discussed all dimensions of teaching, administration and research together and made some important decisions on the future of the department – together.

Specifically, Anna was very involved with the stressful situation of new young staff members who frequently were totally overwhelmed by the manifold – and contradictory – pressures on them, on a daily basis. She arranged training and mentoring sessions for them; indeed, each member of staff got a mentor who listened and helped with the large range of problems which confront all of us in times of rapid socio-political change. Anna supervised approximately 10 PhD students from around the world. Students admired her for her knowledge, and she served as a model for many, especially female students, who realized that ‘women could make it to the top’. Notably, – on Woman’s Day, every 8th March, Anna always brought a flower for every female member of staff.

Apart from the daily life at the department, I felt very privileged to be able to get to know the more private side of Anna: she was a perfect host; she loved to entertain guests, to cook huge meals with many courses, always trying out new recipes together

with her husband Dik; to hike in the Lake District every Sunday even when it rained; to listen to music and to watch films and read novels. On a regular basis, we exchanged videos and novels and spent much time discussing favourite films, actors, writers, exhibitions, and trips. During the last Christmas holidays, Anna and Dik became addicted to the series *Mad Men* and watched almost 24 episodes in 10 days; they actually went to a 1960s-style dance which they both enjoyed tremendously! She laughed a lot when she told me about this – in her characteristic self-deprecating and humorous way.

Anna was a wonderful, loyal friend. Last summer, Anna and Dik spent 10 days with us in Croatia – there, we got to know a really relaxed Anna, enjoying the sea, swimming, having picnics and making boat trips. The sea reminded Anna of her home town Gdansk and the Baltic Sea.

We all miss Anna very much indeed: her sharp intellect, her outstanding contributions to scholarship, her dedication to the Societas Linguistica Europaea, her collegiality and her tireless functions as mentor and teacher. But, most importantly to me, I miss my friend Anna.

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Johan van der Auwera
Universiteit Antwerpen

We first met twenty five years, almost to the day: Antwerp, 1986, the 2nd Functional Grammar Conference and Anna's second conference presentation in Europe. Anna was then an English lecturer at the University of Gdansk.

Two years earlier, 1984, once again almost to the day, Anna had her first conference paper in Europe. It was in Spain, and it was a meeting of the Societas, in Toledo. There she met the Amsterdam Latinist Harm Pinkster, who had earlier browsed through the conference program with his colleague, Simon Dik. That meeting confirmed to both of them that Anna really was a fabulous linguist, not only to Harm Pinkster, but indirectly also to Simon Dik, who was external reviewer for Anna's PhD that same year. Fabulous she was for she had already published her first monograph, *The Passive, A Comparative Linguistic Analysis*, which, remarkably, was the book version of her 1980 MA thesis and which, again remarkably, remained her most cited publication in a long list of influential books and papers. And it was also remarkable that both the MA and the doctorate were actually defended in Melbourne, where business had provided Anna's parents with temporary residence.

Two years later, in 1988, the year that *Word Order Rules* appeared, her second monograph and the book version of her PhD, Anna started the first of two research fellowships in the Netherlands, preparing her for the Lancaster professorship that would begin in 1994.

Perhaps two features characterized Anna's work from early on, partially under the influence of Barry Blake, her Australian mentor. One passion was cross-linguistic variation, from the MA thesis passives to today's impersonals and ditransitives, with focal points on word order, alignment, argument structure, agreement, and referential hierarchies. Her second passion was cross-theoretical variation. She consistently took a specific functional-typological perspective, but much more than most she compared and applied assumptions and methods from various functionalist as well as formal approaches, and this made her unique.

Anna's own language came in a continuum of three registers. In academic affairs, she explained difficult matters with a sparkling matter-of-factness, which baffled the less sparkling of us. In organizational matters, in which at least in the nineties she was often the only woman, she convincingly appealed to common sense and efficiency. And in private conversation she spoke with warmth and empathy so that colleagues became true friends. The time in which I had the privilege of seeing Anna and also Dik Bakker a few times a year was the 1990-1995 period of the so-called EUROTYP project – Typology of the languages of Europe, and I remember with particular fondness a 5 hour car drive from Strasbourg to Brussels. This project also illustrates Anna's efficiency: 9 big edited volumes and 9 editors, one of whom was Anna; and the big volume that was published first was indeed Anna's.

A little over 26 years ago Andy Warhol predicted that everyone will be famous for 15 minutes. This does not apply to Anna – she will remain famous for as long as we all live.