

# In Memoriam / U spomen

---

## Mirjana Vilke

(8 February 1931 – 26 January 2012)

Mirjana Vilke, *professor emerita* of the University of Zagreb at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, whose activities were also closely connected with the Faculty of Teacher Education, died in Zagreb barely two weeks before her eighty-first birthday. The news caught us unprepared, as we had been used to her steady, reliable and encouraging presence. Important pieces of our private and professional lives, and a significant part of our world, went with her. Mirjana Vilke was dedicated to teaching methodology all her life. She established the Chair for English Language Teaching Methodology within the Department of English at her Faculty, started the academic research of FLT (foreign language teaching) and founded early language learning in Croatia. She also initiated study programmes for the education of English language teachers at the Faculty of Teacher Education.

Death interrupted her in numerous activities. Even the long-lasting and difficult illness did not prevent her from pursuing all her academic and professional duties with amazing enthusiasm and bliss. She was engaged in the graduate and doctoral study programmes, as well as in research projects which were a continuation of her own previous achievements, she was writing, sharing her experiences, promoting the teaching profession, helping young people in their academic endeavours, giving support to her colleagues and students.

Professor Vilke, born in Zagreb, majored in English language and literature and Languages and literatures of Yugoslavia in 1954, obtained her Master's degree in linguistics in 1970, and her doctorate in 1975. Throughout her professional life, she always looked ahead, considering the future. She witnessed and contributed to the establishment of several Croatian institutions which are nowadays considered to be crucial in the field of FL learning, and she founded some herself.

She used to say that 'teacher' is one of her favourite words, because it incorporates the best qualities of the person who instructs – knowledge transfer, education, understanding and friendship towards the learner. She also experienced all the teaching roles which were later adopted by her individual students, thus we can all consider ourselves her successors. Mirjana Vilke was one of the first teachers of the "Course for English language learning", which later developed into the Centre for Foreign Languages in Zagreb, a well-known institution dedicated to extra-curricular learning of foreign languages. For a couple of years she taught English at the teachers' school and in a primary school, and then at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering

in Rijeka. She returned to Zagreb in 1968, when she got a job as a lecturer of English language teaching methodology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. She became full professor in 1996, and *professor emerita* in 2005.

Mirjana Vilke published nine books and textbooks, more than 80 academic research papers, including chapters in several books. She co-founded the Croatian Applied Linguistics Society (1976) and was its first president. She was the head of the Division for foreign languages of the Croatian Philological Society, an esteemed member of several other Croatian and international academic and professional associations. She was a UNESCO expert for research in foreign language acquisition at an early age, the editor-in-chief of the journal *Strani jezici* (1988-1991), the editor of the section on Foreign language teaching methodology/glottodidactics in the journal *Metodika* (2002-2010), a member of editorial boards of several international journals, a beloved professor. The Croatian National Award “Ivan Filipović” for the advancement of pedagogical theory and practice (1999) could not have been bestowed upon more deserving hands.

The importance of Mirjana Vilke for the status and the reputation of the FLT methodology is immeasurable. It is she who first managed to convince the academic establishment that it was justified for a teaching methodology professional to enter the procedure of acquiring a doctorate, and – about teaching foreign languages. In her dissertation entitled “Influence of the Linguistic Theories on the Development of the Methods in Teaching English as a Foreign Language” (title translated here into English), Mirjana provided evidence for the mutual interdependence of, as well as the correlation between, the theoretical thought and teaching practice. Despite prejudices by many, she managed to demonstrate that teaching and learning a foreign language is a complex process with a specific theoretical background, a new academic discipline she named glottodidactics. Soon, and supported by Professor Rudolf Filipović, Mirjana Vilke managed to establish the Chair for English Language Teaching Methodology. She was Head of the Chair until her retirement in 2000, when she left it in steady and reliable hands. In spite of wide opposition and misunderstanding by the academic circles, she established the first post-graduate Master study programme in the field of foreign language teaching methodology (1977), which existed for ten years under her leadership. That programme also set the foundation for the first Croatian doctoral study programme in Glottodidactics at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb (since 2006), in which she also had a significant role. Additionally, at the Faculty of Teacher Education, she taught a course in the module “Foreign languages in primary school” within the doctoral study programme “Early childhood education and compulsory schooling”.

None of the abovementioned developments would have been possible if, in the early 1970s, Mirjana Vilke had not started research on early foreign language learning, and if she had not established the main principles of that important segment of foreign language instruction in general. Mirjana – as she insisted all her colleagues

should address her, regardless of the differences in age, experience, professional role, knowledge, or status – established the research project “Earlier learning of a foreign language”, and thus set the foundations for subsequent studies, and also for the teaching practice. By 1978 her work had already been internationally recognized, and, as a member of the international expert team supported by UNESCO, she co-authored the influential book *Teaching Foreign Languages to the Very Young*, edited by R. Freudenstein (1979). At that time, in her lectures and seminars, she offered her undergraduate students the most recent research results in early foreign language learning, and, to our delight and with great confidence, confronted us with the challenge of teaching English to eight-year-olds.

Mirjana was a visionary with clear ideas, which included both the academic community and school teachers, both research and teaching practice. She was certain that the success of early foreign language learning equally depended on both areas, and that their interconnectedness and cooperation of all parties involved were of utmost importance. In that spirit in 1991 she started the next great project “Investigation in the process of FL learning/acquisition in early school years”. The support by the educational authorities was welcome, because the project also marked the beginning of the experimental introduction of foreign language learning in the first grades of the Croatian primary schools. The project was also another step onto the international scene, as it was included into a network of similar projects from about twenty countries, gathered by the Council of Europe under the common name “Language Learning for European Citizenship”.

For Mirjana, early learning of the English language had always been much more than a mere field of research. For her, it was a mission and a patriotic duty, as she was deeply aware that the knowledge of foreign languages, English in the first place, was crucial for the position and status of Croatia with the international community. Her ultimate aim was to achieve, for each individual, the ability to competently use at least one foreign language in the course of formal schooling. Therefore, she put great effort into initiating an appropriate study programme of English language teacher education at the Faculty of Teacher Education (Teacher Education Academy at the time). She managed to ensure the basic conditions for such a programme in 1992, at the moment when primary teacher education became a four-year study programme. Having established new teaching positions, Mirjana allowed us to build a new study programme ourselves, giving support at all times.

We owe the present-day excellent results of Croatian learners of English, in comparison with other countries, largely to Mirjana’s enthusiasm and dedication, to her life-mission, and to her work – her tireless endeavours to educate good teachers for all levels of schooling, and to ensure the theoretical background for teaching practices.

Mirjana had a unique personality, which made us all feel respected and cosy in her company. She was caring and wise, so we always looked forward to spending time with her; she was patient and understanding, so we readily and spontaneously shared all the

happy moments, and our problems, with her. Mirjana also had qualities which made her special within the academic community – infinite confidence in her colleagues, open-mindedness, tolerance and belief in young people. Even when she had a different opinion, she would support us, encourage us to evolve, to investigate; and she would take delight in each new achievement. She never closed any door; she would see us off smiling and send us off with good wishes to any new journey. Because of that, she left behind firm foundations, an established research field, good professional principles, many answers. Yet, as a true enquirer, she also left new questions, valuable work to be done. She taught her successors, both researchers and teachers, not only what, but also how to do what is needed, and how to reach the youngsters, well aware the young ones were in charge of her and our own future.

Mirjana was our teacher and our friend. She intimately, humanely and professionally enriched us. Deeply grateful for her nobleness, for her being our true co-traveller, and for showing us that we always can and need to go on, we part with her with the words from W. B. Yeats' poem; the one Mirjana loved so much:

*And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled  
And paced upon the mountains overhead  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.*

*Smiljana Narančić Kovač*

## Mirjana Vilke

(8. veljače 1931. – 26. siječnja 2012.)

Mirjana Vilke, *professor emerita* Zagrebačkoga sveučilišta s Filozofskoga fakulteta i dugogodišnja suradnica Učiteljskoga fakulteta, preminula je u Zagrebu nepuna dva tjedna prije svog 81. rođendana. Vijest nas je zatekla, naviknute na njezinu sigurnu, pouzdanu, diskretnu i poticajnu prisutnost. S njom je otišao dio našega intimnoga i profesionalnoga života i dio našega svijeta. Metodika je bila njezin životni poziv. Bila je osnivačica i profesorica Katedre za metodiku engleskoga jezika na Filozofskom fakultetu, začetnica znanstvenih istraživanja nastave stranih jezika i utemeljiteljica ranoga učenja stranih jezika u Hrvatskoj te inicijatorica obrazovanja učitelja engleskoga jezika na Učiteljskom fakultetu.

Smrt ju je prekinula u mnogim poslovima. Ni dugotrajna i teška bolest nije ju spriječila da sa zadivljujućim entuzijazmom i vedrinom sudjeluje u svim svojim znanstvenim i stručnim aktivnostima. Održavala je nastavu na diplomskom i doktorskim studijima, sudjelovala u hrvatskim i u međunarodnim znanstvenim projektima koji se naslanjaju na njezina inicijalna postignuća, pisala, govorila, dijelila svoja iskustva, brinula za razvoj struke, pomagala novim naraštajima istraživača, podržavala i podupirala svoje suradnike i studente.

Profesorica Vilke, po rođenju Zagrepčanka, na Filozofskom fakultetu u Zagrebu završila je engleski jezik i književnost te jugoslavenske jezike i književnosti 1954., magistrirala lingvistiku 1970., a doktorirala 1975. Cijeli je svoj profesionalni vijek gledala u budućnost. Neposredno je svjedočila i pridonijela nastanku hrvatskih ustanova koje danas smatramo nezaobilaznima u profesionalnom području učenja stranih jezika, a neke je od njih i osnovala.

Znala je reći da joj je jedna od najdražih riječi 'učitelj', jer se u njoj sažima sve ono najbolje što utjelovljuje uloga osobe koja poučava – i prijenos znanja, i odgoj i razumijevanje i prijateljstvo prema učeniku. Prošla je sve učiteljske uloge koje su kasnije preuzimali pojedini njezini studenti, tako da se svi možemo smatrati njezinim nasljednicima. Bila je jedna od prvih nastavnica ustanove „Tečaj engleskog jezika“ iz koje je izrastao Centar za strane jezike u Vodnikovoj. Nekoliko je godina predavala engleski u osnovnoj školi i na Učiteljskoj školi, a potom na Strojarskom fakultetu u Rijeci. U Zagreb se vratila 1968., kad je dobila posao predavačice metodike engleskoga jezika na Filozofskom fakultetu. Od 1996. je redovita profesorica u trajnom zvanju, a 2005. postala je *professor emerita*.

Objavila je devet knjiga i udžbenika te više od osamdeset znanstvenih i stručnih radova i poglavlja u knjigama. Bila je suosnivačica Hrvatskoga društva za primijenjenu lingvistiku (1976) i njegova prva predsjednica, voditeljica Sekcije za strane jezike Hrvatskoga filološkoga društva, ugledna članica i drugih hrvatskih i inozemnih strukovnih društava, ekspert UNESCO-a za istraživanje usvajanja drugoga jezika u ranoj školskoj dobi, glavna urednica časopisa *Strani jezici* (1988-1991), urednica rubrike Metodika stranih jezika / glotodidaktika u časopisu *Metodika* (2002-2010), članica uredništava inozemnih časopisa, voljena profesorica. Državna Nagrada „Ivan Filipović“ za promicanje pedagoške teorije i prakse (1999) nije mogla doći u zaslužnije ruke.

Značenje je Mirjane Vilke za status i ugled metodike stranih jezika nemjerljivo. Upravo se ona uspjela izboriti da prva od metodičara krene u postupak stjecanja doktorata, i to o nastavi stranih jezika. Tezom „Utjecaj lingvističkih teorija na razvoj metoda u nastavi engleskog jezika“ dokazala je međusobnu uvjetovanost i korelaciju teorijske misli i nastavne prakse. Na tom je tragu, usuprot predrasudama mnogih, uspjela pokazati da je poučavanje i učenje stranih jezika složen i znanstveno utemeljen proces koji ima teorijsku pozadinu, interdisciplinarnu znanstvenu disciplinu koju je nazvala glotodidaktikom. Uskoro se, kako je sama isticala, uz potporu profesora Rudolfa Filipovića, uspjela izboriti i za osnivanje Katedre za metodiku na Odsjeku za anglistiku, koju je vodila sve do umirovljenja (2000) i ostavila je u sigurnim rukama. Usprkos otporima i nerazumijevanju, osnovala je (1977) i deset godina vodila prvi poslijediplomski znanstveni magistarski studij metodike stranih jezika, koji je bio temeljem i prvoga hrvatskoga doktorskoga studija glotodidaktike na Filozofskom fakultetu u Zagrebu (od 2006), u kojem je imala važnu ulogu. Imala je svoj kolegij i na doktorskome studiju Učiteljskoga fakulteta, Rani odgoj i obvezno obrazovanje, na modulu Strani jezici u osnovnoj školi.

Toga jamačno ne bi bilo da se profesorica Vilke ranih sedamdesetih godina prošloga stoljeća nije prihvatila istraživanja i osmišljavanja važnoga segmenta nastave stranih jezika, ranoga učenja. Mirjana, kako je inzistirala da je oslovljavamo svi mi njezini suradnici, bez obzira na razlike u godinama, iskustvu, znanju i statusu, započela je 1973. godine znanstveni projekt „Ranije učenje stranog jezika“, kojim je postavila temelje budućim istraživanjima i nastavnoj praksi. Do 1978. stekla je već međunarodni ugled te je pod patronatom UNESCO-a, kao članica autorskog ekspertnog tima, sudjelovala u nastanku utjecajne monografije *Teaching Foreign Languages to the Very Young* (ur. R. Freudenstein, 1979). Istodobno je svojim studentima ponudila najnovije rezultate istraživanja o ranom učenju stranih jezika u redovitom seminaru iz metodike, i tako nas, s povjerenjem, i na naše oduševljenje, suočila s izazovom poučavanja osmogodišnjaka engleskom jeziku.

Mirjana je imala jasnu viziju koja je uključivala i znanstvenike i učitelje, i istraživanje i praksu, sigurna da su za uspjeh ranoga učenja podjednako važni i nastava i znanstveni projekti, a najvažnija njihova povezanost i suradnja. U tom je duhu 1991. pokrenula i sljedeći veliki projekt, „Istraživanje procesa učenja i usvajanja stranih jezika u ranoj

školskoj dobi“, za koji je ključna bila i podrška prosvjetnih vlasti, jer je njime ujedno započelo eksperimentalno uvođenje stranih jezika od prvoga razreda osnovnih škola. Taj je projekt bio još jedan iskorak prema međunarodnoj sceni, kao dio mreže srodnih projekata dvadesetak zemalja „Language Learning for European Citizenship“ Vijeća Europe.

Za Mirjanu je rano učenje engleskoga jezika uvijek bilo više od područja istraživanja, ono je za nju bilo misija i domoljubna dužnost, jer je bila duboko svjesna da je poznavanje prije svega engleskoga, a onda i drugih stranih jezika presudno za položaj i mjesto Hrvatske u međunarodnoj zajednici. Njezin je krajnji cilj bio da u hrvatskoj školi svi dobro nauče barem jedan strani jezik. Zato je uložila veliki trud da se pokrene i odgovarajući studijski program obrazovanja učitelja engleskoga jezika na tadašnjoj Učiteljskoj akademiji, u trenutku kada je učiteljski studij postao četverogodišnji (1992). Kad su osigurana nova radna mjesta i kad je počela prva nastava engleskoga jezika za buduće učitelje, pustila nas je da gradimo novi studij i pritom uvijek bila uz nas.

Mirjaninu radu, njezinu neumornom nastojanju da se obrazuju što kvalitetniji učitelji i profesori engleskoga jezika, da se osiguraju znanstveni temelji za metodičku praksu, njezinu entuzijazmu i zalaganju, njezinoj životnoj misiji u velikoj mjeri dugujemo današnje izvrsne hrvatske rezultate u poznavanju engleskoga jezika u usporedbi s drugim zemljama.

Uz jedinstvenu osobnost, zbog koje smo se svi uvijek osjećali ugodno u njezinu društvu, uz brižnost i mudrost zbog koje smo se uvijek iznova veselili druženju s njom, uz strpljenje i razumijevanje zbog kojih smo tako rado i prirodno s njom dijelili sve naše i njezine radosne trenutke, ali i svoje male i velike brige, Mirjana je imala i osobine kojima se posebno isticala u akademskoj zajednici – bezgranično povjerenje u svoje suradnike, otvorenost, toleranciju i vjeru u mlade ljude. Čak i kad je imala drukčije mišljenje, Mirjana je davala podršku i poticala bi nas da se dalje razvijamo, da istražujemo, radujući se svakom novom postignuću. Nikada nije zatvorila ni jedna vrata, otpratila bi nas s osmjehom i dobrim željama na svaki novi put. Zato je za sobom ostavila stabilne temelje, izgrađenu struku i mnoge odgovore, ali također i nova pitanja, vrijedan posao za stručnjake, znanstvenike i učitelje koje je učila ne samo što, nego i kako raditi, i kako sve to prenijeti na mlade na kojima ostaje njezina i naša budućnost.

Mirjana nam je bila i učiteljica i prijateljica. Zauvijek nosimo u sebi ono čime nas je ljudski i profesionalno obogatila. Duboko zahvalni na njezinoj plemenitosti, na tome što nam je bila istinska suputnica i što nam je pokazala da uvijek možemo dalje, upućujemo joj pozdrav na njezinu posljednjem putu riječima pjesme W. B. Yeatsa koju je Mirjana toliko voljela:

*And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled  
And paced upon the mountains overhead  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.*

Smiljana Narančić Kovač