



***In memoriam* Kirsti Siitonen**

o.s. Tuominen, 16.6.1951–6.3.2020

Remembering and longing for our bright and resourceful friend Kirsti Siitonen

Professor Kirsti Siitonen, the editor of Finnish language articles in *Lähivördlusi. Lähivertailuja* (2010, 2014–2018) passed away in early March after a long illness. We knew to expect the sad news, nevertheless it is difficult and distressing to believe that Kirsti, always so full of joy and energy, is gone.

Kirsti was born and raised in Rauma. She moved to Turku to study, and established a home there with her philosopher husband, Arto. Their apartment, on the fourth floor of a building without an elevator, near the River Aura, was their headquarters all along, even when life took them to many other countries and cities. It was a warm and welcoming home also to countless friends and students, relatives and colleagues. A bed or a location for a late-night party was always available. The daily life of the whole family was both international and multilingual.

Kirsti, an enthusiastic and hard-working student of Finnish, was picked to work on departmental projects early on. The syntax of Finnish and the dialects of South-West Finland, the areas around Turku and Pori, became a part of Kirsti's life at that time. The dialects of her home area were a focus of interest all her life, whether for research, a poetry recital, or a spontaneous speech in Rauma dialect to entertain the guests at a formal dinner. She also wrote and talked about dialects on all sorts of occasions and in a wide range of publications. Her knowledge of syntax beyond standard Finnish and local dialects was deepened and extended when she became involved with learner Finnish.

Already before completing her MA, in 1976, Kirsti was appointed to a Finnish-teaching lectureship at the University of Münster in Germany.

This became the stepping-stone to her career studying the Finnish learned and used by speakers of other languages. She also taught in Göttingen, and later returned to Münster for another four-year period. Between these assignments she taught Finnish to foreigners and writing skills to Finns at the University of Jyväskylä, and spent a year as a researcher at the University of Pittsburgh in the USA. In 1993 she was given a permanent post as a lecturer at the University of Turku, where she worked until her retirement, in the last years as a professor. In addition to all this she taught short courses at many universities offering Finnish across Europe, and spent a year as a visiting professor at the University of Vienna. She also organized courses of Finnish in Turku for Nordic students.

Kirsti was a pioneer in the teaching Finnish as a second language in Turku, and she had a crucial role in its development across the whole country. When the need to develop the teaching of Finnish for foreigners became apparent in the early 1990s, Kirsti was involved in the first research project funded by the Academy of Finland and in the in-service courses for teachers. She also took part in the planning and realization of the predecessor of the current *National certificates of language proficiency*, the national Finnish language test. As a researcher Kirsti specialized in the characteristics of Finnish syntax from the learners' point of view, particularly the problems encountered by advanced students. Her doctoral dissertation, *In search of the agent*, in 1999, was only the second one written in the area of Finnish as a second language. It played an important role in establishing the division of research areas between the Finnish universities: while elsewhere the focus has been on elementary and intermediate learners, Turku has collected and done research on texts by advanced students and academic contexts.

In addition to her academic career and her training of generations of teachers and researchers, Kirsti held many positions of trust. She joined the editorial board of the journal *Lähivördlusi. Lähivertailuja* in 2010. She first edited the Volume 19, based on a 2008 seminar in Seili and a VIRSU workshop, as she was involved in organizing these events. This was an important turning point because with the Volume 19 the

sporadic collections of articles published by various university departments became a journal published by *Eesti Rakenduslingvistika Ühing* (Estonian Association for Applied Linguistics). Kirsti's expertise and input were in demand when the structure, practices and work processes for the new journal were created. She edited altogether six volumes of *Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja*, in addition to 19 also volumes 24–28. Together with her colleagues she also wrote three articles for the journal. Kirsti was a professional and experienced editor, teaching her younger colleagues about thoroughness, flexibility and empathy. She was exemplary in giving feedback; she knew how to discuss an article with the author in a calm, kind, and constructive way without omitting the necessary criticism. We warmly remember her heartiness, humour and efficiency and always think of her when we apply our IKK principle: things get best done *ise, kohe ja kiiresti* (by yourself, right away and quickly).

In addition to *Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja*, Kirsti edited articles for many other academic publications, such as *Virittäjä* and *Sananjalka*. For many years she was also a valued member of the committee responsible for overseeing the teaching of Finnish in foreign universities. Both her work and, more recently, her family were very international, but she was also very active in supporting the local community. Rauma, Turku and particularly the River Aura were dear to her. She cycled to work along the river, even skated or skied on the river ice when possible, always wearing one of the long dresses Arto bought for her on his trips.

Kirsti never saw work as separate from the rest of her life. We worked together around our kitchen tables, both hers in Turku and mine Jyväskylä. Our children played while we worked and got to know each other and learned each other's home dialect. The children were also made to contribute: teenagers piloted test tasks for advanced learners or were asked to judge if our linguistic choices would pass among the younger generation.

Kirsti was a warm, bright, active and hard-working person. She was involved in life until her final moments. In early February she still made the trip to Tampere to take part in a get-together of the members of

IN MEMORIAM KIRSTI SIITONEN

the first research project on Finnish as a second language. Academic traditions were important to her; she never considered it right to leave a karonkka (a formal party after a successful doctoral defense) before morning. A week before her death she went to the centenary celebrations of the University of Turku and followed this up in her final week with an opinion piece for the local newspaper about the egalitarian nature of the celebrations. A person who got involved and made an impact right to the very end!

*Maisa Martin, Annekatrin Kaivapalu,
Johanna Laakso*