

In memoriam

*Dunja Jutronić (1943–2025)**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reflect on the life and work of Dunja Jutronić.

I know what Dunja would say – that I had written far more than necessary.

*I first met Dunja in the second half of the 1980s. On several occasions she gave talks at informal gatherings of philosophers in Rijeka, the so-called sjedeljke. Since she lived in Zadar, she was not a frequent participant—perhaps only when passing through on her way to Zagreb. At that time, she was working on nativism, and I remember her lecture at Nenad Smokrović's apartment on the city market. The question she addressed is one of the perennial problems in the philosophy of language: Is language innate or learned? Nativism holds that language is innate, while empiricism holds that it is acquired. The nativist thesis was revived by Chomsky with his claim that transformational grammar is innate. Despite Chomsky's enormous authority, Dunja remained skeptical of the innateness of language. She defended the more plausible view that we are born with a general disposition to acquire language, but not with language itself. Her style was always clear and straightforward. She wrote and spoke with focus, avoiding unnecessary terminology and elaborate formulations. She claimed only what she could substantiate, she was cautious in making assertions. Her work on nativism from the 1980s culminated in the book *Linguistics and Philosophy*, published in the *Filozofska istraživanja* series in 1991. A decade later, when new arguments in favor of nativism had crystallized, she critically examined them in her article "Arguments Against Nativism," published in *Metodički ogleđi* (2003). That essay is available online, and may well serve as a model of how a scholarly article should be written.*

In Zadar, Dunja was active in an informal philosophy circle that met regularly, composed mainly of members of the Department of Philosophy. Among its participants were Nenad Mišćević, Vanda Božičević, Arne Markusović, Darko Polšek, Dragana Sekulić, Boran Berić, and Slavko Brkić. Later, Elvio Baccharini and I joined, once we were employed in Zadar. It was through this group that her interest in philoso-

** This is the speech that I gave on August 21, 2025 on the Krasica cemetery, near Rijeka.*

phy deepened—particularly in the philosophy of language—though her formal background was in linguistics. Meetings were held weekly, often in her apartment on the Old Town Peninsula. A downstairs neighbor, his family name was Trupac, found these gatherings suspicious and reported them to the police, worried about “subversive intellectuals” (perhaps in the climate of 1971 Croatian Spring in which intellectual meetings were mistrusted by the authorities). While the neighbor annoyed everyone, Dunja herself did not condemn him. Though she was naturally combative, she bore no resentment. The man had survived a Nazi concentration camp during WW2, and that experience marked his behavior. Dunja had understanding for this and responded with empathy rather than judgment.

The war years in Zadar were extremely difficult, especially for a mother of three. The Faculty building, with its deep basements, served as a shelter. In the early days, there were up to one hundred detonations per minute—I counted them, though few believe me even now. It was impossible to step outside; there was no water, no food, ATMs did not function. Later we would risk venturing out for coffee at Čulina’s café near the Faculty, despite the ever-present threat of shelling. Life under constant danger continued in Zadar for more than three years. Worse still was the purge of “undesirables” carried out by the Dean of the Faculty with the support of certain people from the Ministry of Science. Within a matter of days, dozens—perhaps over seventy people—lost their positions. In such an atmosphere, taking a position in Maribor and relocating to Rijeka was both logical and lifesaving, and the salary was better. Yet the move weighed heavily on her daughters, Jelena, Katina, and Gordana, who had already endured multiple displacements—from Zadar to Split, from Split to Zagreb, and then to Rijeka.

*In Maribor, her knowledge and expertise were fully recognized. She was appointed full professor in the newly established department and twice served as chair of the Department for Anglistics and Americanistics. She supervised nearly eighty bachelor theses and taught a broad range of courses, including *History of the English Language*. She once recited Middle English texts for us on a drive back from Maribor to Rijeka; the language, reminiscent of modern Dutch, fascinated us, since she rarely spoke of her Anglicist work—we usually discussed philosophy or organizational matters. Dunja drove extensively: first a white VW Golf 1, then a Seat Cordoba, later a Seat Leon. For twenty years, every week, she traveled from Rijeka to Maribor, always accompanied by Nenad Mišćević, who neither drove nor owned a car. They shared the costs of fuel and tolls. At Nenad’s funeral, Dunja opened her eulogy with the words: “Life is a journey.” The metaphor of travel was the leitmotif of her address.*

Sport was an essential part of Dunja’s life. She once set a national record in the athletics triathlon, I think it was set in Belgrade in 1963—a record destined never to be broken, since neither the discipline nor the

state in which it was achieved still exists. After moving to Rijeka, first to Srdoči and then to Krnjevo, she immediately joined a recreational running group. Every Sunday morning in Kastav we ran routes of seven (to Zvirić) or twelve kilometers (a full circle), and did so for more than a decade. Initially she struggled for breath—unsurprising after the war years in Zadar spent raising three children—but regular training soon restored her fitness. She competed in Winter League races in Kastav and Kostrena. She always wore white leather Reebok Classic sneakers. After she developed problems with her foot, she turned to swimming, her other great passion, training regularly at 6 a.m. at the Kantrida pool. In both running and swimming she won numerous medals, particularly in her age group.

The Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik is an exceptional academic institution in Croatia, enabling direct contact with leading international scholars and keeping us abreast of the latest developments. Dunja was deeply engaged there, serving as course director for two important annual conferences. The September conference *Philosophy of Language and Linguistics* regularly hosted Michael Devitt, Barry Smith, and Michael Glanzberg; it will now continue under the direction of Mirela Fus-Holmedal and Julija Perhat. She also led the April *Philosophy of Science*, whose participants included James Robert Brown, David Davies, James McAllister, Joseph Berkovitz, and Zvonimir Šikić. We expect younger people from our Department to continue this work: Zdenka Brzović and Vito Balorda. This event, the very first and longest-running IUC conference, marked its fiftieth anniversary this year. It was the only conference that continued even during the war, and its significance for us cannot be overstated. In those pre-internet years, direct international contact was more vital than nowadays.

In her linguistic research, Dunja studied Croatian emigrants in the United States, especially those from Dalmatia. This was the subject of her doctoral work at Penn State. Emigrant communities are of particular interest to linguists because they preserve the language as it was spoken at the time of departure—sometimes a century earlier. Their speech remains “frozen,” offering a living record of Dalmatian dialects as they were spoken three generations ago. Analogous cases include the Rhaeto-Romance or Vlach dialect once spoken in some twenty villages on Učka mountain; today the largest Rhaeto-Romance community is found not in Istra but in New York, as a consequence of emigration.

Dunja worked a lot on naturalism in the philosophy of language, a contemporary and compelling approach that treats language as a natural phenomenon, to be studied as one would any other. She worked closely with Michael Devitt, her longtime colleague and friend, one of the leading figures in the field. Together they explored the causal theory of reference and meaning, grappling in particular with the so-called *qua* problem: to explain the meaning it is not enough simply to point to an object; one must also specify the relevant aspect—its color, mate-

rial, shape, edibility, and so on. This challenge appeared to force causal theorists to concede something to their rivals, the descriptivists. Their discussions resulted in the substantial edited volume *The Maribor Papers in Naturalized Semantics* (University of Maribor, 1997).

As a native of Split, Dunja felt a duty to preserve the city's dialect. She accomplished this in her *Rječnik splitskog govora – A Dictionary of Split Dialect* (Durieux, 2006), published both in *Split–Croatian and Split–Croatian–English* versions. There one finds, for example, that *katriga* means “chair” and *ponistra* means “window.” As language changes and fades, younger generations risk forgetting it altogether. Such dictionaries are therefore invaluable, and for this contribution we are indebted to Dunja.

Above all, what remains with us is Dunja's spirit and character. She was, in the best sense of the phrase, a “get-things-done” person. We were all happy when she was organizing conferences, knowing everything would run smoothly: reimbursements processed, travel expenses paid, and always on time. A few years ago, we stayed a couple of days in her house in Sutivan, she gave us her house key and instructions for watering the garden: not only the plants in the middle, but also those at the back, behind the house. “Here's the hose—it's long enough!” she said. She wanted things done properly and seen through to completion.

Dunja enriched our lives with her presence. Her spirit and character will remain with all of us who were fortunate enough to know her and to share time with her. Dunja, we love you!

BORAN BERČIĆ

University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia

- *Professors at the University of Novi Sad: Life Stories*, recorded by Svenka Savić, January 2011, University of Novi Sad jubilee volume (1960–2015), pp. 191–205.
- *Od jezika k filozofiji in nazaj: Festschrift on the 75th Birthday of Dunja Jutronić*, eds. Bojan Borstner, Tomaž Onič, University of Maribor, 2019.