

*Swimming into Memory and Beyond: Farewell to Dunja**

This year, just under a month ago, the Philosophy of Language and Linguistics community lost one of its own, one of its founding pillars. We lost our Dunja. Let me share a few anecdotes about Dunja that I personally witnessed.

How I Met Dunja—Twice

I first met Dunja when I was just a bachelor student. Back then, she was simply “a professor” to my mind, a linguist whom my mentor at the time, Professor Nenad Mišćević, brought to our reading group. It didn’t take long before I realized that I had stepped into Dunja and Nenad’s world, their personal and academic stories from before, during, and after the war in the former Yugoslavia.

I listened to accounts of their commutes together to work in different Croatian cities: Zagreb, Zadar, Rijeka, Split, as well as abroad, to Maribor and Central European University (now in Vienna, but at that time—in their time—located in Budapest).

Only recently did I truly grasp the impact their stories had on my life. Their way of living inspired mine: from applying, to studying, to working abroad, and even seeing commuting to another city or another country for work as normal. Though we have shared these ways of living, my professional life has turned out perhaps a bit less dramatic, less innovative, and, most importantly, not as deeply shaped by war and politics—at least so far.

Dunja came into my life twice, or rather, as I’ve recently realized, I came into hers. Just over three years ago, Dunja reached out to me again, completely out of the blue, inviting me to become one of the co-directors of this conference. A special, invisible bond we had built long ago suddenly revealed itself. When I saw Dunja again in Dubrovnik in 2023, it had been about eight years since our last meeting. The first thing that struck me was how nothing had changed. The spirit of the conference hadn’t changed. Dunja hadn’t changed. The same presence, the same grounding force she always carried with her!

* Read at *In Memoriam* for Dunja Jutronić, Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik, Croatia, September 8, 2025 (Revised in Oslo and Lørenskog, Norway, October–November 2025).

Dunja Being Nenad's—and Everyone Else's—Sidekick

It's hard for me to talk about Dunja without mentioning Nenad Mišćević. Many of you may have known him, if not directly, then through Dunja. She was his grounding force, and I witnessed that both personally and through Nenad. When Nenad was overly idealistic or on the verge of making what he himself sensed might be the wrong choice, she was often the one to bring him back to solid ground, as he once admitted to me.

Dunja was truly supportive, loyal, and empowering, both academically and personally. She had a gift for finding the right words. I always felt she treated us with respect, regardless of our academic or social position. I remember presenting at this very conference for the first time as a student. My talk was much shorter than the usual sixty minutes most people take—I nervously sprinted through my notes. Afterward, she said something like, “short and sweet,” but in a way that made me feel I had succeeded. She had a Socratic, midwife-like approach—trusting, guiding, and teaching by showing.

Witnessing Dunja's Two Legacies: Philosophy of Language and Linguistics Conference, and Croatian Journal of Philosophy

Dunja leaves behind many legacies. I want to highlight two that are most closely tied to my relationship with her and to the work that connected us.

She was deeply loyal to this conference, which she helped establish in 2005, twenty-one years ago. I still regret not emailing her the final version of this year's program before she passed, although I did send it afterward. My impression was that it mattered deeply to her that the conference would continue.

Dunja was also a long-time editor of the special issue of the Croatian Journal of Philosophy, dedicated to topics in philosophy of language and linguistics, often featuring work presented at this conference. After I took over her role just a few months before she learned she was ill, I recall her saying she felt deeply relieved to have both things sorted out. I realized then that it was never about her—it was about the survival of something she cared about profoundly.

Witnessing Dunja's Sporting Spirit—Never Giving Up

Dunja's determination was not limited to academics; it extended to sports. She was once a junior triathlon champion of Yugoslavia. It's been said that her record has never been surpassed—and likely never will be—since Yugoslavia no longer exists, nor does that particular version of the triathlon. Yet this secure win did not stop her. In the 21st century, she actively took part in swimming marathons, often as the oldest competitor. The most recent public record I found shows she participated in one in 2022. And many of you will remember her swims, or

perhaps even swam with her, during lunch breaks at the Philosophy of Language and Linguistics Conference over the years.

Speaking of never giving up, I suspected—but didn't want to believe—that she was very ill. Nor did she, at least not in front of me. She remained positive. Even in her last email to me, she was complaining that Michael Devitt simply did not understand that she would need time to recover—and that him coming to Rijeka to see her this September, instead of attending this very conference in Dubrovnik, was too early in her recovery process!

I want to share part of Dunja's email that, I believe, captures her spirit:

'Danas mi je rođendan, 81. koji uzas!!! (...) Uzas ne znaci nista vise nego te silne godine...' / 'Today is my birthday, the 81st. What a horror!!! (...) Horror means nothing more than all those countless years...' (Dunja Jutronic, personal correspondence, November 17, 2024).

For those who did not know her, this may sound unusual; for those of us who did, it is a vivid picture of how Dunja could be at once blunt, realistic, and full of determination to live and carry on.

Celebrating Dunja

This year's conference program honors Dunja in three ways: with an In memoriam for Dunja Jutronic, with the Dunja Jutronic Memorial Lecture by Barry C. Smith, titled "LLMs: Tools or Colleagues?", and with the Dunja Jutronic Memorial Swim.

Let me leave you—and bid farewell to Dunja—with a verse from a poem titled *Kada iz velike posude* (When from a Large Vessel) by her favorite Croatian poet, Danijel Dragojević:

Za tu vodu imam razumijevanja /
For that water I have understanding /
kao za sebe u najboljim časovima /
as for myself in my best hours /
kao za riječ koja je izgubila rečenicu /
as for a word that lost its sentence /
na putu do nas. /
on the way to us. /

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