

BIRUTE KLAAS-LANG 60

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March 19, 2017 was the 60th birthday of Birute Klaas-Lang, professor of Estonian as a foreign language at the University of Tartu. In addition to the round-number birthday, Birute is also celebrating another anniversary this year: 30 years working at the University of Tartu. Birute has been engaged in productive academic and public activity for decades. She is a renowned linguist and expert on language and education policy both in Estonia and abroad.

Birute Klaas-Lang graduated with a gold medal from Tartu Secondary School 5 (the former Tamme Secondary School) in 1975, after which she began studies in the field of Estonian philology. Six years later (1981) she graduated *cum laude*. In 1987, she began work in her first academic position, as a senior instructor in the department of practical Estonian language at Tartu State University.

In her 30-year academic career, Birute Klaas-Lang has filled numerous roles both at her *alma mater* and in foreign universities, as well as in public positions. Let's start from the beginning. Having begun as a senior instructor in the department of practical Estonian language, she soon became assistant professor of Estonian as a foreign language (1995), and achieved the title of professor in 1999. She remains professor of Estonian as a foreign language today, as well as department head and leader of many of its projects. Her positions held at the University of Tartu include director of the language center (1997–1999), Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy (1999–2005), and Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs (2006–2010). She has been a member of the university senate, and starting in 2017 is a member of the university governing board. On two occasions, her academic career has taken her to the Department of Finno-Ugric Languages and Cultures at the University of Helsinki: first as a guest lecturer (1991–1995), and then as a guest professor (2012–2016).

Birute Klaas-Lang is known to the Estonian general public through her many public activities, all of which are of course related to language. As one would expect of a professor active both academically and publicly, she belongs to numerous boards, committees, and collabora-

tive networks. Of her public activities related to the Estonian language, the most important has been her work in language policy development as a long-time member (since 2001) and chair (since 2005) of the Estonian Language Council. The development plan for the Estonian language has been compiled and monitored under her leadership. For the past decade, she has also been at the head of the Council on the Academic Studies of Estonian Language and Culture Abroad. Birute's great contribution to Estonian linguistics has been the continued development of studies of Estonian as a foreign language. In addition to these leadership roles, Birute has always gladly engaged in more practical tasks, such as the organization of the conferences "Native language and other languages" and "Estonian language and culture in the world" or the cultural excursions of University of Helsinki students to Estonia every spring during her time in Finland.

The jubilarian is a welcome speaker and opinion leader in the academic circles of Lithuania. Since 2003 she has been serving as Honorary Consul for the Republic of Lithuania in Tartu and Tartu County.

Birute Klaas-Lang's primary fields of research are language typology, diaspora Estonian, and the acquisition and teaching of Estonian as a second or foreign language. Among topics related to language structure, she has been particularly interested in Estonian and Lithuanian syntax, especially subjects, objects, and predicates. Comparative, contrastive studies are a recurring theme in her work, and she has repeatedly devoted attention to comparisons between Estonian and Lithuanian. In her diploma work (1981), she examined simple sentences in Estonian and Lithuanian, and two years later (1983), she published an article on this topic in German, her first scientific article. In her candidate dissertation, defended in 1988, she studied the structural similarities between Estonian and Lithuanian. In addition, she has also studied Circum-Baltic attribute constructions and addressee objects, word-initial consonant clusters and local cases. Later in her career, she has added research topics such as multilingualism, the language of Estonians living in Sweden, and discourse behavior. For the past three years, she has actively dealt with issues related to the teaching of Estonian in Russian-language schools, a topic on which her workgroup has produced two large studies and several articles.

As professor of Estonian as a foreign language, Birute Klaas-Lang has developed teaching methods, compiled teaching materials and textbooks and written about the history of the teaching of Estonian as a

foreign language. Her work as an instructor and supervisor of students' diploma projects has been just as varied as her research and public activity. Birute has taught the history of the Estonian word stock and language contacts, Estonian syntax (for non-Estonians), the history of the Baltic languages, and contrastive grammar, as well as leading a number of seminars. In recent years, her favorite subjects have been those dealing with language policy and the role of language in society. In supervising students, primarily those whose native language is not Estonian, she has dealt with whatever topics have interested the students, from grammar and the teaching of Estonian as the national language to the usage and understanding of slang and obscenities. She has supervised doctoral dissertations related to code switching as well as second language acquisition and instruction.

For her merits, the Republic of Estonia bestowed on Birute Klaas-Lang the Order of the White Star, 4th Class in 2011. She has also been awarded state decorations of France (2007) and Lithuania (2013). In 2003 the Estonian Business and Professional Women's Association named her the Woman of the Year.

There is no doubt that Birute's productive and diverse activity will continue. We wish her inspiration, strength, and energy for the future!

On behalf of colleagues and the editors of this compendium,
Kristiina Praakli and Tõnu Tender