

IN MEMORIAM

ELISABETH PIIRAINEN

12.01.1943 – 29.12.2017

In the last week of 2017, renowned phraseologist Elisabeth Piirainen unexpectedly passed away.

Piirainen, who had a background of a German linguist and philologist, started her research in the field of Low German (*Westmünsterländisch* dialect and phraseology of Flemish), and within a couple of decades became one of the most significant developers of the modern theory of phraseology. Today the books published together with Dmitrij Dobrovolskij, “Symbole in Sprache und Kultur. Studien zur Phraseologie aus kultursemiotischer Perspektive” (1996), “Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives” (2005), and “Zur Theorie der Phraseologie: Kognitive und kulturelle Aspekte” (2009) are among the most substantial researches on phraseology. These works vividly reveal Piirainen’s attempt to compare the phraseology of different languages and find their common features. As a natural continuation of this interest, she started a project in 2006, with an aim to establish common elements in the phraseology of different European languages. The first stage of the project under the name *Widespread Idioms in Europe and Beyond* brought together phraseology experts of approximately 90 languages. At the very beginning of the project, in 2008, due to personal contacts, the Estonian language together with Finnish and Hungarian became a test language, on the basis of which Piirainen wished to find potential candidates for widely-spread phraseologisms. The following years saw close cooperation with phraseologists from different countries, who reacted to the lists sent to them and also complemented them with their own material. In 2012 this voluminous work resulted in a publication “Widespread Idioms in Europe and Beyond: Toward a Lexicon of Common Figurative Units”. Four years later it was followed by the second part, “Lexicon of Common Figurative Units”. In total these publications included 470 phraseologisms which could be regarded as widespread in European languages. For the first time in history, this concrete cooperation pointed to the fact that phraseology, generally considered as unique and language-specific, is actually more universal. Apart from compiling these two publications, Piirainen completed numerous articles in different languages and presented papers at conferences and seminars, including regular EUROPHRAS meetings. Within the latter, workshops were organised for those involved in the project, which enabled them face-to-face meetings with the project leader and other colleagues, to discuss their work and make further plans. After the publication of the two voluminous works, Piirainen decided to continue with the same objectives, on the basis of 30 so-called European standard languages, focusing on the main grammatical constructions central to phraseologisms. Unfortunately, this work remained unfinished.



Anneli Baran