

Séamus Mac Mathúna

University of Ulster

Piotr Stalmaszczyk

University of Łódź

Professor Edmund Gussmann
(27.01.1945–2.09.2010)



Professor Edmund Gussmann, an eminent Polish linguist, associated with the universities of Lublin, Gdańsk and Poznań, died in Gdynia on 2nd September 2010.

Edmund Gussmann was born in 1945 in Lubichowo, after his school years in Sopot he studied at the University of Warsaw, where he graduated in 1968 with an MA degree in English. The same year he won an Icelandic government scholarship to study Icelandic language, literature and culture at Reykjavik University. The period in Iceland was to have a profound influence on him both culturally and academically; he was deeply impressed by the country, its people, its language and culture. He also became a regular visitor to the island throughout the remainder of his life, particularly in his last ten years, the last time in the summer of 2010, just before his untimely death. During his first visit to Iceland he not only deepened his interest in Icelandic and the Germanic languages, but also developed a new interest in Irish and the Celtic languages.

Edmund Gussmann completed his doctorate (devoted to the phonology of consonantal alternations in Polish and English) in 1973, and his habilitation (on abstract phonology) in 1978. He spent the academic year 1975–76 on a Fulbright Scholarship at the MIT, where he studied under Noam Chomsky, Morris Halle and other renowned generative theoretical linguists. His *Studies in Abstract Phonology*, published by MIT Press in 1980 (as the fourth volume of the highly prestigious *Linguistic Inquiry* monograph series), established his international reputation in the field of theoretical linguistics, with particular reference to phonology. This publication had been preceded by his *Contrastive Polish-English Consonantal Phonology* (Warszawa: PWN, 1978) and *Introduction to Phonological Analysis* (Warszawa: PWN, 1980); other major works on phonology followed, such as *Phonology: analysis and theory* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), and the groundbreaking *The Phonology of Polish* (Oxford: OUP, 2007). This latter work, the most complete phonology of contemporary Polish, develops a non-

derivational Government Phonology account of Polish; however, as observed by the author himself, it is primarily “a description of a language and not a study of a particular theoretical framework”. This remark is characteristic of Professor Gussmann’s work in general, whether it was concerned with Polish, English, Icelandic, or Irish.

Works edited by Edmund Gussmann included *Rules and the Lexicon: Studies in Word-formation* (Lublin: KUL, 1987), and *Licensing in Syntax and Phonology* (Lublin: Folium, 1995). He also translated into Polish Stephen R. Anderson’s *The Organization of Phonology* (*Wprowadzenie do fonologii*, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1982).

His appointment as University professor at the Catholic University of Lublin in 1981 (full professor in 1985, and Ordinarius 1992) proved to be an inspired choice with regard to future developments in Celtic linguistics in Poland. As Professor in the newly-formed English department, he succeeded in appointing a Welsh language teacher, thereby starting his Celtic linguistics programme. Having spent a year (1984-85) in Ireland as a visiting professor at University College, Dublin, working in Professor Conn Ó Cléirigh’s Department of Linguistics, he received support from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and set about introducing the study of Modern Irish in the Lublin programme. An Irish language teacher was appointed and Irish became a compulsory component of the course. In 1991, he established the Chair of Celtic Studies at the Catholic University, a position which he himself occupied until he left Lublin in 1999. Some of his publications during this period were co-authored with the Irish linguist Aidan Doyle and include the first Irish handbook in Polish, *An Ghaeilge: podręcznik do nauki języka irlandzkiego* (Lublin: KUL, 1991, 2nd ed. 1996, 3rd ed. 2004), and *A Reverse Dictionary of Modern Irish* (Lublin: Folium, 1996, 2nd ed. 2004), an indispensable tool for researchers in the area of Irish phonology, morphology, and word-formation.

Professor Gussmann returned to his first love of Icelandic when in 2010 he took up the Chair of Icelandic in the School of Scandinavian Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, having previously spent some time as professor at the University of Gdańsk in the Institute of English Studies when he left Lublin in 1999. During his professorship in Poznań he published numerous important papers on Icelandic phonology, including a bibliography of Modern Icelandic phonology in the 20th century (in *Folia Scandinavica Posnaniensia*, 2003), and several studies on Icelandic vowels and the vocalic system.

Not only did Edmund Gussmann have a very distinguished academic career, he was also one of those special people who greatly influenced those with whom he came into close contact. He was always generous with his time, knowledge and expertise. Among Celtic scholars Professor Gussmann will be particularly remembered for introducing Celtic Studies as a discipline at the Catholic University of Lublin and ensuring the teaching of Modern Irish and Welsh to his students. The Chair of Celtic Linguistics continues to the present day to be an important force in both Celtic and General linguistics. His unexpected death has been noted in the Irish media, with an obituary published in *The Irish Times* (September 25th, 2010).

Go ndéana Dia grásta ar a anam uasal!