

Christer Platzack

My name is Marianne Thormählen. As Dean of Research in the Humanities and Theology in Lund, I'm proud and happy to welcome you all to this workshop in honour of Professor Christer Platzack.

The Academy is a tough habitat, but it's made habitable by the presence of persons whom it's an honour to be honouring. Christer is such a person. We have it on the highest authority that 'a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country' (Matthew 13:57), but Christer is the exception that proves the rule. Well known and respected among linguists the world over, he is held in the highest esteem here on his home ground as well. The presence of distinguished scholars from at home and abroad testifies to the fact, and let me say a special thank-you to those who have come from far away, defying this horrid early winter, to be here and honour not only Christer but Lund with your presence.

When you look at Christer's publications, you marvel at the range of expertise he has come to command over the decades. I think it's significant that he started out as a student of readability, a quality for which the Humanities world-wide are now hungrier than ever before, after a couple of decades beset by the mists of abstruse abstraction. From the very first, his research on the Swedish language has contained a dimension of applicability beyond the context of Swedish. Whether he's studied mood and meaning, prepositions and temporality, nominal sickness (a disorder evident in this sentence), verb participles and inflections, pronouns, adjectives and a wide variety of syntactical features, he has always been concerned with what language is and does. (I was pleased to find that a current project in Nordic-language study is partly derived from work that Christer did on adverbs in the 1980s; that gives me a reason to quote one of the great masters of English prose, Henry James, who said: 'I adore adverbs; they are the only qualifications I really much respect.') Whatever Christer has done, his interest in language is that of a student of essential humanity. That helps to explain why his work has become so widely known and admired.

The word 'humanity' is applicable to Christer in more than one sense. He manages to combine high scholarly standards with true humane-ness. It has always amused me a little that the acronym 'GRIMM' is associated with a man whose personality evinces so little of that particular quality. True, Christer possesses a natural authority which ensures that he is treated with respect; but he is a kind man who characteristically uses the power conferred by his position for constructive purposes.

One of those purposes has been the bringing together of scholars of grammar in a joint forum for grammatical research, irrespective of language. Christer Platzack is a co-creator of one of the strongest research environments in the Humanities in Lund, Grammar In My Mind. When I say co-creator, I don't mean to diminish Christer's contribution to GRIMM – it has been of fundamental importance – but to pay tribute to the manner in which

he has made his colleagues feel that they have as much of a stake in this research enterprise as he does. Not many leaders are also team players, but again Christer is an exception.

Talking about leaders, I'd like to mention that Christer recently concluded a six-year period as one of 16 Leading Scholars in the Humanities, Theology and Social Sciences appointed by the Swedish Research Council in the years 2003 to 2005. The term 'leading scholar' is particularly apt for Christer: not only has his own research placed him in a leading position in the field of generative grammar; his scholarly leadership is also of the highest quality.

That leadership is clearly seen in Christer's record as a doctoral supervisor. And here I have a personal memory, dating about 12 years back: Christer had just been granted a sabbatical term, as professors could in those days; and I asked him what he was going to do with it. One of our colleagues had recently spent such a term in Paris, and I was expecting Christer to go off somewhere exciting too, to focus entirely on his own research. But Christer said, 'Well, I have a doctoral student who's finishing this term, and you know what it's like, a lot of my time will be bound up in getting him through the viva.' That's the kind of commitment Christer has always felt towards his doctoral students, several of whom are in this room today. (Possibly including the man he was talking about – I don't know who that was.) According to my thumbnail estimate, producing a doctor takes 4 to 6 months out of your life if you're chief supervisor. By that measure, it's easy to work out that Christer has spent over a decade full-time fostering new generations of scholars – a literally awesome record.

You'd have thought a man of such stature would exude a sense of his own importance, but Christer has the virtue of modesty. I think it was Golda Meir who said to someone, 'Don't be modest, you're not that great.' But in Christer Platzack real greatness is combined with genuine modesty. He's a man of few words, but when he speaks everyone listens. The fact that he's associated with a research ideology – generative grammar – which has been strongly opposed has never lessened the respect for his integrity and good will felt by his colleagues in the cognitive field. (One of them is even married to him.)

It gives me great pleasure to hand over the floor to you, Christer, with my heartfelt congratulations, and my very best wishes for a happy and fruitful workshop. Once again, a warm welcome to you all.

