

In Memoriam: Susan Armstrong

Pierrette Bouillon*
University of Geneva

Paola Merlo
University of Geneva

Gertjan van Noord
University of Groningen

Mike Rosner
University of Malta

Susan Armstrong worked as Professor of Translation Technology at the University of Geneva until her retirement in 2014. She served as secretary to the European chapter of the ACL from 1993–2000, remaining on the chapter’s nominating committee until 2004. She had a fundamental role in the founding and successful development of SIGDAT.

Susan arrived in Switzerland from the United States in 1978 to work at the University of Lausanne in the German Department teaching literature and linguistics, as well as pursuing her interest in computers and language as translator and consultant to Logitech. She then moved to Geneva to work at the ISSCO research institute where she participated in a number of European research projects related to natural language processing (NLP) and machine translation, also working with corpora in translation applications. She joined what has now become the University of Geneva’s Faculty of Translation and Interpretation in 1985. As of 1996, she worked in the Department of Multilingual Language Processing, contributing to new programs in information communications technology for translators and, more recently, exploring e-learning possibilities for translation technology courses in collaboration with European and Swiss centers. At the University of Geneva she progressed in the academic ranking to become Full Professor in 2010.

Susan was a pioneer. At a time when there was still a great deal of skepticism in Europe about working with corpora, Susan was very active with the European Corpus Initiative (ECI). ECI was founded to oversee the acquisition and preparation of a large multilingual corpus, supporting national and international efforts to design, collect, and publish large-scale multilingual corpora, both written and spoken. Multilingual Corpus I (ECI/MCI) was made available on CD in April 1994.

She was the guest editor of the two issues of *Computational Linguistics* that brought about the paradigm shift towards statistical methods: In these issues, she recognized and collected papers of ground-breaking nature, such as the description of the Penn Treebank, and other early papers on statistical modeling in NLP. At a time where many

* E-mail: pierrette.bouillon@unige.ch.

of us thought a good piece of work was just a good idea, she talked about the scientist's accountability and the need for empirical proof.

During her career she participated in many European projects (MULTEXT, ECoLoRe, MeLLANGE) and, in Switzerland, for example, the national excellence project IM2, for which she contributed to many central topics in NLP, from machine translation, to collocation extraction, to using multilingual and parallel corpora.

Susan worked in a university and a field where the number of women was, and still is, small. She devoted her time generously to many activities for gender equality and has been a mentor to many female colleagues. An individual with a warm personality with profound human qualities, she will be greatly missed by all who knew her, personally and professionally.