Alumna
Chiara Gianollo

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Senior Assistant Professor,
Department of Classical Philology
and Italian Studies,
University of Bologna

Artwork by
Patrick Tresset
Chiara Gianollo, senior assistant professor at the Department of Classical Philology and Italian Studies in Bologna, says that she always had an international and interdisciplinary aspect in her profile. “Believe me, that wasn’t planned at all!” she laughs, when thinking of all the directions her research career has taken.

Chiara finished her PhD in Linguistics 2005 at the University of Pisa and did not anticipate that she was about to spend so much time abroad thereafter. Pisa has a partner university in Paris, so her first stays followed there. “Over the past 15 years I lived and worked in France, the Netherlands, the USA and Germany. This was very important for my development as a scientist!” Influenced the way she conducted her own research and how she followed different interests – looking at structure and meaning of language theoretically, but also in its use and in the changes it undergoes in time. As a result, her path led her towards interdisciplinarity. In her application for the Zukunftskolleg, she included a project about language families in which she treated them like biological species. The idea was to meld language models into models of biology: “Something very new and exciting!”

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In 2008, Chiara was a Fellow in 2008 and stayed until 2011. She arrived at a time when the Zukunftskolleg was being shaped the most. “Fellows had the opportunity to create the atmosphere around the meetings, which developed into the Jour Fixe gatherings.”

Chiara is sure that understanding other researchers and their research, problems and frustrations is something that she mostly learned at the Zukunftskolleg. “Everything I learned is still so useful!” she smiled. “It felt so natural to learn these dead languages. I tried to figure out the relation between them and discover my love for grammar!” After her PhD she also completed a postgraduate Master course to become a teacher, allowing her to teach Italian, Latin and Ancient Greek. Then various positions in Trieste and Rome followed, before Chiara applied to the Zukunftskolleg. “Everything about the application process was so open and transparent, I liked that a lot! ” She became a Fellow in 2008 and stayed until 2011.

Chiara points out that it is very difficult for researchers to search for a new job and trying to be creative and productive at the same time. “This time is literally like poison for all young researchers, as it is also a time when people want to start a family and have many changes in their personal life. That’s not easy when you have no idea where you might end up. I can only advise to put up with it and keep on pushing forward! There will be better times.”

Since 2016, Chiara has a position as a tenure track senior professor in Bologna and despite some obstacles she thinks that young researchers should enjoy their path. “Don’t rush your education. Don’t be afraid to take some time to explore new ideas, as it will help you in the long turn with your career.”

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