

Raimo Anttila 1935–2023

The Indo-Europeanist and general linguist Raimo Aulis Anttila passed away on 27 January 2023 in Turku after a long illness. Combined with the 2020 abolishment of the Indo-European program of the University of Helsinki, the loss of the greatest Finnish Indo-Europeanist of all time truly marks the end of the 150-year legacy of Indo-European studies in Finland.

Indeed, largely non-Indo-European-speaking Finland has an exceptionally long tradition in Indo-European studies. At the (Imperial Alexander) University of Helsinki, Otto Donner (1835–1909) was appointed the first docent in 1870 and the first professor in 1875. He was succeeded by two more professors of (Sanskrit and) comparative (Indo-European) linguistics, Julio Nathanael Reuter (1863–1937) and Pentti Aalto (1917–1998). In addition to these professors, there have been three docents of Indo-European linguistics at the University of Helsinki: Yrjö Moses Biese (1903–1983), Martti Nyman (b. 1944), and Petri Kallio (b. 1969).

Ironically, the most brilliant Finnish Indo-Europeanist never studied Indo-European linguistics in Helsinki or even in Finland. Anttila was born on 21 April 1935 in the Vintala village of Lieto. His roots went deep in the Southwest Finnish soil, his ancestors having been farmers for generations. His parents Tyyne Raakel *née* Alikirri (1915–1994) and Lauri Nikolai Anttila (1904–1964) became the first to break the tradition when they moved to Turku in order to work as a pressing worker and a metal worker, respectively. Due to his working-class background, Anttila was always incredibly handy for a scholar, being able to make anything from wooden swords to cockle stoves.

Anttila became interested in languages already as a wartime child evacuee in Swedish Lapland, and from 1956 onwards he studied English, German, Latin, and Greek at the University of Turku. Incidentally, it was English philology that he majored in, and nothing in his 1961 master's thesis *Stilostatistinen tutkielma Towneyleyn mysteerinäytelmien kahden eri kerrostuman vierasperäisistä sanoista sekä kotimaisista substantiiveista* predicted his future as an eminent Indo-Europeanist. Yet his English professor was none other than Biese mentioned above, who had made a career change from Indo-Europeanist to Anglicist.

Anttila's opposite career change from Anglicist to Indo-Europeanist ultimately took place at Yale University, where from 1962 he studied structural

linguistics under Bernard Bloch (1907–1965), comparative linguistics under Isidore Dyen (1913–2008), and, last but not least, Indo-European linguistics under Warren Cowgill (1929–1985). It was Cowgill who first suggested that Anttila look into *Schwebeablaut*, something that Anttila back then “had no idea what it was”, until he was put straight by his fellow student Alfred Bammesberger (b. 1938), another Anglicist turned Indo-Europeanist.

Yet Anttila was a quick learner, and his 1966 Yale dissertation *Proto-Indo-European Schwebeablaut* (published in 1969) remains the greatest Finnish achievement in Indo-European studies. Granted, Anttila himself would have been the first to disagree, since he instead preferred *Uralische Evidenz für die Laryngaltheorie* by his friend Jorma Koivulehto (1934–2014). While there is no accounting for taste, Anttila’s dissertation has stood the test of time better than Koivulehto’s 1991 monograph, because it continues to be recommended as further reading on *Schwebeablaut* in almost every twenty-first-century introduction to Indo-European linguistics.

In 1965 Anttila moved from Yale to UCLA, where he remained until his 2006 retirement despite his short stint as a professor of general linguistics at the University of Helsinki in 1972–1974. One can only wonder how Indo-European linguistics would have developed in Finland if he had declined to become a professor of Indo-European and general linguistics at UCLA in 1974, not least because, among other things, Anttila was also a versatile teacher whose students stretched from the general linguist Lyle Campbell (b. 1942) to the linguistic archaeologist James P. Mallory (b. 1945), neither needing any further introduction.

Early on Anttila moved from Indo-European to more general historical and comparative linguistics, as best exemplified by his 1972 classic, *An Introduction to Historical and Comparative Linguistics* (whose 1989 reprint *Historical and Comparative Linguistics* contains a new introduction as well as one additional chapter). At that time the American linguistic scene was dominated by the so-called Chomskyan revolution which Anttila’s 1977 monograph *Analogy* was among the first to correctly identify as “a most curious linguistic bubble”, having “no scientific merit” and representing “a big step backwards”. Unfortunately for him, what is self-evident today was long considered heretical and even blasphemous.

Yet Anttila never abandoned Indo-European linguistics, and he returned to it in his last monograph *Greek and Indo-European Etymology in Action: Proto-Indo-European *aǵ-*, published in 2000 but based on decades of mental exercise. As usual this swan song of his was much more than its

title might suggest, as it did not settle for only one Proto-Indo-European root but delved deep into different fields of the humanities. Stylistically Anttila was always entertaining and never boring, fully confirming the Saussurean wisecrack that “la linguistique évolutive est amusante”. Despite living over half a century in the USA, he remained a true epitome of Finnishness, preferring honesty over politeness.

Anttila’s very last publication was the most revealing: the 2018 English translation of *The Gundestrup Cauldron* by his senior archaeologist friend Unto Salo (1928–2019). Not anyone would bother to translate a 210-page book for free, to say nothing of a world-famous professor emeritus in his eighties. Anttila did so, “because he found the text exceptionally valuable for cultural history”, just to give an illustrative example of how altruistic he was as a person. Despite his achievements, he was always modest and down-to-earth, and great as he was as a linguist, he was even greater as a friend.

Petri Kallio