

Ilse Lehiste 1922–2010

Ilse Lehiste passed away at the age of eighty-eight on Christmas Day in 2010, in Columbus, Ohio. Lehiste had to leave her native Estonia as an émigré at the early age of twenty-two. After completing PhD theses in Germany and the US, she became an internationally acclaimed phonetician and scholar in the field of language contacts, who also made a significant contribution to the study of Finno-Ugric languages.

Ilse Lehiste was born in Tallinn on 31 January 1922. She started her student life at the Tallinn Conservatory, where she studied the piano for a year; however, already in 1942 she enrolled as a student in the Faculty of Philosophy at Tartu University. Her student life in Tartu remained brief; during the Second World War she had to flee, together with her parents, to Germany in 1944. There she was able to continue her studies in philology at the University of Hamburg, where she focused on Germanic, Old Icelandic, and Classical philology, completing her PhD in Germanic studies in 1948. In 1949 Lehiste moved to the United States, where at first she had to take on various casual jobs. In 1957 she enrolled as a doctoral student at the University of Michigan, and as early as 1959 she defended her second PhD thesis, this time in acoustic phonetics. The thesis, which dealt with junctures or phonetic phenomena on the boundaries of linguistic units, determined Lehiste's research interests for the following decades, which focused on the study of prosody. At the University of Michigan she rapidly developed into an internationally acclaimed phonetician. In the following years, in collaboration with Gordon E. Peterson, she published a number of groundbreaking experimental studies in contemporary phonetics.

Lehiste remained at the University of Michigan until 1963, at which time she joined the faculty of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature at Ohio State University. From then on Columbus, the capital of the state of Ohio, remained her home-town down till the end of her life. Lehiste took a more general interest in phonetics and linguistics; she was one of the founders of the Department of Linguistics at Ohio State University. From 1965 onward she held a chair in linguistics and was the first head of the department (1965–1971). She retired from her professorship in 1987, having previously once again served as department head (1984–1987).

During the second half of the 1960s Ilse Lehiste wrote several well-known articles and books, the best-known being *Suprasegmentals* (1970, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press). Ilse Lehiste can be characterized by her active

attitude toward life during the following decades as well. She became an internationally acclaimed linguist, as shown by the fact that in 1980 she was elected President of the Linguistic Society of America. Lehiste was invited to lecture in many universities on several continents; honorary doctorates were awarded to her by the universities of Essex (1977), Lund (1982), Tartu (1989), and finally by her own University of Ohio (1999). Ilse Lehiste was also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1990), the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters (1998), and a foreign member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences (2008).

Ilse Lehiste wrote or edited altogether 20 books, and authored over 200 scholarly articles. In addition to her phonetic studies, Lehiste is internationally known for her work on language contacts (*Lectures on Language Contacts*, 1988, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press) and historical linguistics (*Principles and Methods for Historical Linguistics*, 1979, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, co-authored by Robert Jeffers). These university textbooks focused on changes in phonetic systems, but they also dealt with other levels of language, either in relation to phonology or independently. Lehiste disliked the idea that phonetics is not part of linguistics; she emphasized that she was studying linguistic phonetics and that she was a linguist. She was interested in phonetic phenomena as part of the linguistic system; at the same time she was convinced that the use of exact scientific methods could lead to more accurate linguistic descriptions, and would thus result in a deeper understanding of language. Lehiste also published articles on a variety of other subjects, including but not limited to word-formation, syntax, semantics, translation studies and sociolinguistics. In addition, her research interests included poetics, literature, music, and folklore.

Apart from the diversity of methods, Lehiste emphasized the importance of studying different languages. She claimed that it was of utmost importance to take into account the peculiarities of languages and language contacts when establishing general properties of languages. In addition to languages with large numbers of speakers, such as English, German, and Japanese, Lehiste studied also several smaller languages. Her long-time research interest was her native language, Estonian, which served as a basis for the study of its neighbouring languages. Thus, in addition to Estonian, Lehiste studied all the major languages of the Circum-Baltic linguistic area, such as Latvian, Lithuanian, Finnish, Swedish, Danish, Russian, and (Baltic) German. She was also interested in the Balkan linguistic area and the southern Slavonic languages. It was in Estonian, however, that Lehiste's in-

terest was most comprehensive. Already a year after completing her PhD thesis on phonetics, she published a longer study about quantity in Estonian, *Segmental and syllabic quantity in Estonian* (Bloomington 1960). The year 1966 witnessed the publication of a book by Indiana University on Estonian pronunciation, *Consonant Quantity and Phonological Units in Estonian* (Bloomington 1966), which had a major impact on the development of experimental phonetics in Estonia.

In addition to the Estonian language, Ilse Lehiste took a deep interest in Estonian literature and folklore. She applied the methods of phonetics to the study of oral poetry and folk songs; she was interested in the manifestation of the prosodic features of language in different metrical forms and in the traditional *runo* songs. In the 1990s, together with the musicologist Jaan Ross, she co-authored several articles on the prosodic features of Estonian folk songs, as well as an internationally recognised monograph on the same topic (J. Ross, I. Lehiste, *The Temporal Structure of Estonian Runic Songs*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter 2001). In this book Ilse Lehiste provided an overview of Estonian prosody, based on her numerous studies.

Ilse Lehiste considered it important to maintain contacts with Finnish and Hungarian scholars and to study the Finno-Ugric languages. During the period when Estonia was not open to visitors, Finland served as her second home-country during her trips to Europe, and close contacts with Finnish linguists enabled her to experience the closeness of home and its mentality. Lehiste was unable to attend the first Congress of Finno-Ugric Studies but she attended all the following ones, beginning with the second Congress held in Helsinki in 1965, and she always gave a presentation. The Congresses of Finno-Ugric Studies, held every five years, provided a good opportunity for establishing direct contacts with Estonian linguists. The 2010 congress, held in Piliscsaba Hungary, was already the tenth Finno-Ugric congress that Ilse Lehiste attended. She greatly appreciated the opportunity to give a plenary lecture at this congress, enabling her to present the results of the Finno-Ugric prosody project; the lecture, entitled “Experimental study of prosody in Finno-Ugric languages”, by I. Lehiste and K. Pajusalu, was published in the first volume of the congress proceedings “Congressus XI Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum, Piliscsaba 2010”, p. 225–245).

The Finno-Ugric prosody project, which Ilse Lehiste initiated in 1999 together with Estonian phoneticians and Finno-Ugric scholars, has thus far resulted in monographs on Erzyan, Meadow Mari, and Livonian word prosody and in articles dealing with several other Finno-Ugric languages.

The most outstanding achievement of this project is the emergence of a new generation of Estonian phoneticians, who all benefited directly from Ilse Lehiste's guidance.

Ilse Lehiste will remain in the memory of her colleagues as a brilliant individual and scholar, who was able to find witty and at the same time simple solutions even to the most complicated problems. Even living and working far away from her homeland, her native language and its kindred languages remained her favourite research area.

Karl Pajusalu