Phonetica 2010;67:275–276 DOI: 10.1159/000324889

## **Ilse Lehiste**

## 31.01.1922-25.12.2010

Ilse Lehiste was born into a higher officer's family in Tallinn. Estonia, in 1922. During the Nazi occupation of Estonia in 1941-1944, she graduated from Lender Gymnasium, then studied piano for 1 year at the Conservatory of Tallinn, and in 1942 started her studies at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Tartu. In order to escape the Soviet occupation of Estonia, Lehiste fled to Germany in 1944, where she continued studies at the University of Leipzig and then at the University of Hamburg. In 1948, she defended her PhD in philology at the University of Hamburg. Lehiste's dissertation concentrated on the work of William Morris and its links to the Nordic literature.

In 1949, Lehiste moved to the United States. In 1959, she defended



her PhD in linguistics at the University of Michigan. Lehiste's main research area was acoustic phonetics where she enjoyed worldwide recognition. She authored 20 books, a couple of hundred articles and a large number of reviews. Lehiste received honorary doctorates from several universities: Essex, Lund, Tartu, and Ohio State. She was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of numerous professional associations in the United States, as well as of the Finnish Academy of Sciences. She was active as the president of the Linguistic Society of America, and lectured at universities all over the world. From 1963, Lehiste worked at Ohio State University in Columbus. In 1965, she was promoted to professor in linguistics, and from 1987 became professor emeritus. She fulfilled the tasks of the head of the Department of Linguistics and was a member of the tenure committee of the university.

Lehiste's central research field in phonetics, which fascinated her during all her academic life, was rhythm and prosody, as manifested first of all in the

book *Suprasegmentals* (MIT Press, 1970). In this book, the author assembled and summarized what was known at the time about the phonetic nature of prosodic features in speech, and evaluated the available evidence from the point of view of linguistic theory. In doing so, she established in the United States the research on speech prosody as a necessary complement to the all-pervading study of vowels and consonants long before it was recognized in mainstream linguistics. Retrospectively, Osamu Fujimura and Donna Erickson wrote in the *Handbook of Phonetic Sciences* (Blackwell, 1997, p. 87): 'Phoneticians, in reality, must understand the characteristics of speech far beyond the special situation of minimal contrast. [...] Based on experience of handling day-to-day speech phenomena, partly in response to the needs of speech technology, the recent tendency is to place more emphasis on effects of what is often called prosodic or suprasegmental conditions (Lehiste, 1970) or of situations under which real-life conversation takes place.'

In 2001, Lehiste and the author of this obituary published a book *Temporal Structure of the Estonian Runic Songs* (Mouton de Gruyter) where the results of their decade-long interdisciplinary collaboration were presented. The topic of the book was the acoustics of Estonian folksongs looked at from three aspects: the prosodic structure of the language, the metric structure of the verse, and the rhythmic and melodic structure of the tunes. In particular, we investigated how meter interacts with prosody and musical structure in singing, as well as how prosody and musical structure interact with each other. The results demonstrated that the meter and the musical structure of the tunes ultimately dominate over the prosodic structure of the language, as the utterances performed in singing exhibited considerable neutralization of almost all durational oppositions inherent to the spoken language.

Lehiste was a bridge between the linguists and philologists of Estonia and the West. It was her suggestion to organize the 11th International Conference of Phonetic Sciences in Tallinn in 1987. In 1989, Lehiste published a set of poems under the title *Noorest peast kirjutatud laulud (Songs Written in My Young Years)* in Canada. She also wrote numerous reviews of Estonian literature for the quarterly *World Literature Today* (formerly *Books Abroad*) in the United States. Since 2000, Lehiste was active researching the prosody of minor Finno-Ugric languages in cooperation with the Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics at the University of Tartu. She received the Estonian Order of the White Star in 2001; in 2008, the Estonian Academy of Sciences elected her a foreign member, and in 2009, she became laureate of the Wiedemann Language Prize in Estonia.

In her character, Lehiste combined outstanding intellectual capacities with a strong sense of humor. We exchanged letters regularly since the 1980s and used to meet each other at least once or twice a year, either in Estonia or in the United States. Lehiste remained active until a few months before passing away, participating in the 11th International Congress of Finno-Ugric Studies in Piliscsaba, Hungary, August 2010, and paying the last visit to Estonia prior to that. She will be remembered by two first cousins once removed, and a large number of close friends and colleagues.

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