

# Matti Luukkainen

\* 18.3.1937 † 18.5.2021



**Matti Veikko Luukkainen**, Professor Emeritus of German at the University of Turku, died at the age of 84 on 18 May 2021 in Espoo. Luukkainen was born on 18 March 1937 to a farming family in Ruskeala in Karelia. Young Matti became a Karelian evacuee, eventually settling in Sääminki, in what is now Savonlinna.

Matti Luukkainen graduated from the Joensuu Lyceum in 1956 and earned a master's degree at the University of Helsinki in 1961 and a Master of Arts degree in 1962 with a combination of Germanic and Nordic philology and Roman literature. Professor of Germanic Philology Emil Öhmann was an important teacher and role model for Luukkainen.

Over the years, Luukkainen worked as a Germanist at four Finnish universities: from 1962–1969 as an Assistant at the University of Jyväskylä under Professor Erik Erämetsä, from 1975–1991 as a Lecturer at the University of Helsinki, from 1991–1997 as an Associate Professor at the University of Tampere and from 1997–2001 as a Professor at the University of Turku. Luukkainen gained first-hand experience of the language education in schools as Senior Lecturer of German language at Töölö Secondary School from

1969–1975 and in the German language division of the Matriculation Examination Board in the 1970s and 1980s. Luukkainen was one of the authors of the German grammar book *Viel Erfolg!* (1981–2014, 29 editions in total).

Luukkainen defended his PhD at the University of Turku in 1982. He became a docent at the University of Helsinki in 1984. Luukkainen was invited to become a full member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1996. His career as a scientist was advanced by his work as a researcher for the Academy of Finland and his study trips to Germany (e.g. Freiburg im Breisgau and Leipzig).

Luukkainen was one of Öhmann's last and Erämetsä's first students. His range of research topics in Germanic philology, i.e., German language, literature and culture, was broad and varied. Luukkainen approached his topics based on the traditions of our discipline while critically examining their origins and creating new perspectives.

Focusing on the history of language, Luukkainen's dissertation takes us back to German language and culture a thousand years ago and the world of manuscripts and editions: *Untersuchungen zur morphe-*

*matischen Transferenz im Frühdeutschen dargestellt an den Tegernseer Vergilglossen. Ein Beitrag zur Transferenzlexikologie.* (1982). Luukkainen examined the close contacts between Latin and German culture primarily in terms of language. The study of Old High German, the oldest literary language period of the German language, was, indeed, a unique new territory in the history of Finnish Germanics overall, and particularly due to the primary material and theoretical analysis model.

Fairly soon, Luukkainen turned to synchrony in contemporary language and fundamental questions in grammatical theory. Drawing from a wholly original conceptual and terminology apparatus, Luukkainen looked especially at the role of word formation within the lexicon, syntax and grammar, such as in the work entitled *Von der Lexik zur Grammatik. Überlegungen zu den Begriffen Wortart, Satzglied und Satz im Rahmen eines aktionalen Sprachmodells* (1988).

In addition to his mainly linguistic research interests concerning the history and current state of the German language, Luukkainen, as a passionate and creative researcher, set out in the 1990s to look for connections between linguistics and literary studies by turning to stylistics, focusing on newer German literature. Luukkainen started out by comparing Veijo Meri from Finland and Heinrich Böll from Germany, but his reviews of writers representing fiction from Eastern Germany using the methods and theories of linguistic style analysis were particularly fruitful.

Luukkainen approached the features of Christa Wolf's style as a systematic analyst and interpreter who examined the interdependencies of language, style, content and social background evident in the historical

continuum of individual works: These, *Antithese, Synthese. Zu Wandel und Beständigkeit des Sprachstils im Werk von Christa Wolf 1961–1996* (1997). Christa Wolf's career history as an author and a social advocate in the former GDR and reunited Germany was an important topic to Luukkainen and close to his heart, with the motto "You cannot be just a little bit author...". Luukkainen also looked at the special characteristics of the style and language of other Eastern German writers, particularly Wolfgang Hilbig.

Over the decades, Luukkainen's strong areas also included German language didactics in schools, and he would often discuss topics, which are still current, with other colleagues in schools and universities. Some of the questions he explored were "What, how and why do we teach" and "How are language skills reflected in writings", with a focus on the new type of communicative language teaching in relation to traditional grammar-translation methods. He did this already more than 40 years ago. These visions drew significant inspiration from the experiences he gained from the experimental school activities of Töölö Secondary School and the reforms made to the foreign language test in the matriculation examination.

Matti Luukkainen's time in Turku from 1997–2001 was significant for the discipline, the department and the faculty. Luukkainen was present in many forums in Turku. None of the participants will ever forget the international seminar organized by Luukkainen and Professor of Russian Language Riitta Pyykkö in August 2000 at the Archipelago Research Institute of the University of Turku in the inspiring milieu of the island of Sjalö, or Seili. The topic was "Language and society in the grip of

change”, with a focus on Germany and Eastern Europe, (cf. *Zur Rolle der Sprache im Wandel der Gesellschaft – The Role of Language in Changes of Society* (2002).

Luukkainen’s research interests were reflected in many ways in the themes of the publication prepared in his honour in 2012: *Herausforderung Sprache und Kultur*.

Luukkainen outlined his deeply humanistic outlook in his 2001 farewell lecture at the University of Turku entitled “Onnenmaata etsimässä: kieli, utopia ja todellisuus”.

Matti Luukkainen’s spouse M.A. Ritva Luukkainen (née Fabrin) stood by his side, and their children Riitta Mäkelä and Sakari Luukkainen and their families gave them much joy and support. The academia has

played a central role in the Luukkainen family’s life. Many of their colleagues have also become family friends. The university also brought Matti and Ritva together. They met at the University of Jyväskylä while both were holding an assistantship position there. Matti and Ritva shared a passion for the theatre, ballet and classical music, especially the opera. The Savonlinna Opera Festival was always the highlight of the summer for the whole family. “Niitty-salo” in the village of Juvola in Savonlinna was a dear place where the family would spend time together. The memory of his childhood home left behind in the hills of Karelia also remained clear in Matti’s heart until the very end.

*Obituary by Kari Keinistö*