



Timo Riiho

* 17.10.1950 † 2.6.2021

Dr. Timo Riiho, Professor of Ibero-Romance Languages at the University of Helsinki, passed away on 2 June 2021, at age 70. Riiho was a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters since 1991. Riiho was born in Kymi on 17 October 1950. His early life was spent in the Kotka region. He received his MA degree at the University of Helsinki in 1974 and his Ph.D. in Romance Philology in 1979 from the same university. He worked at the University of Helsinki throughout his career, first as an Assistant Professor from 1981 and appointed to full Professor in 1983, a position he held until 2017.

In the 1970s, Riiho visited Madrid on several occasions and studied at the Complutense University of Madrid. Lavapiés, in particular, was an important neighbourhood for him, as he secretly studied Basque there during the Franco era. Later, in 1980, he continued his studies in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Arantzazu, in the Basque country. He also visited the University of Lisbon in 1976. In addition to Spanish, Portuguese and Basque, Riiho studied Catalan and Galician, languages that are still offered in the Ibero-Romance Languages Section at the University of Helsinki.

In 1986–87 and 1994–95 Riiho was a visiting fellow at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. He also travelled in Latin America and, as a linguist, even visited the Polisario Front in Algeria. In the 1980s, he participated in the efforts to establish the Ibero-American Center at the University of Helsinki, and in the 1990s he co-founded the Ibero-American Foundation, which maintains the Finnish Cultural and Academic Institute in Madrid. Riiho was the Director of the Institute from 2002–2006, focusing on strengthening the cooperation between Spanish and Nordic Hispanists. He organized several exhibitions on Finnish historical figures, highlighting his interest in military history.

Riiho's research interests included the historical comparative syntax of Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan, with a special focus on pronouns and prepositions. Among his publications, we would like to highlight his doctoral dissertation *Por y para: estudio sobre los orígenes y la evolución de una oposición prepositiva iberorrománica* (1979). This monograph analyses the origins and development of the Spanish prepositions *por* and *para* in Ibero-Romance languages. Due to its comparative approach, the volume was of ground-breaking importance

in the study of prepositions, and it received outstanding reviews among scholars in the field. The book is still found in all university libraries in Spain, and it has become an important reference work. Riiho's second monograph, *La redundancia pronominal en el iberorromance medieval* (1988), was an ambitious attempt to find evidence that the redundancy of object pronouns in Spanish and Portuguese is caused by contact with Basque. Despite his efforts, Riiho had to conclude that the influence of the Basque language could not be unequivocally demonstrated on the basis of existing data. The significance of this work lies in that it shows clearly how difficult it is to prove the effects of language contact on syntactic structures, especially in a historical perspective. Riiho's subsequent articles on the subject continued examining Ibero-Romance languages in a comparative perspective and gained international visibility.

Another field of interest was the comparative research of historical texts and text editions. The publications of the Finnish

Academy of Science and Letters on the subject include Riiho's and Lauri Juhani Eerikäinen's *Crestomatía Iberorrománica* (1993), which presents parallel versions of texts written in the 13th and 15th centuries in Catalan, Spanish and Portuguese. Subsequently Riiho directed a research project at the University of Helsinki, which led to the publication of early documents from the Pyrenees in the *Colección Diplomática del Hospital de Santa Cristina de Somport I*, edited by Jukka Kiviharju and published by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 2004.

Riiho was a passionate and highly appreciated teacher and mentor who took a special interest in his students and encouraged independent thinking. He organized several field trips to Spain.

Riiho was a corresponding member of the Royal Spanish Academy, and Commander of the Order of Prince Henry (Portugal), the Order of Civil Merits (Spain), and the Order of Rio Branco (Brazil). He is survived by his wife Katri, his two children and two grandchildren.

*Obituary by Martti Pärssinen,
Anton Granvik and Eeva Sippola*