

Heikki Leskinen

* 10.10.1930 † 7.12.2021



Heikki Leskinen, Professor Emeritus of Finnish Language at the University of Jyväskylä, died after battling a long illness in the evening of the day after Independence Day, 7 December 2021. He was born on Aleksis Kivi's Day on 10 October 1930, so you could say that, like Aleksis Kivi, he too lived from autumn to Christmas, in the words of Eino Leino. Thankfully, this period between autumn and Christmas consisted of 91 happy and busy years.

Heikki Leskinen was born on the north-western coast of Lake Ladoga where he spent the first decade of his life. His father worked as a forestry advisor in Kurkijoki, and Heikki had four older brothers and one younger brother. Following the outbreak of the Winter War, the family settled on the other side of the new border in Parikkala and no longer moved back east, not even temporarily.

Heikki Leskinen developed an early interest in language and particularly the form of language spoken in his home district. His career plans were therefore clear from the beginning and immediately after his school years he applied to the University of Helsinki to study the Finnish language. Pursuing his bachelor's degree, Heikki Leskinen studied Finnish language

and Finnish literature, with Finnish history and folklore studies as his minors. He wrote his master's thesis on the dialect of Parikkala in 1954 under Professor Martti Rapola. During his studies, Leskinen did a lot of fieldwork related to dialectology and onomastics under the guidance of Veikko Ruoppila, a pioneer in the field. Towards the end of his bachelor's studies, he was invited to work in the editorial board of a dictionary of Karelian and devoted himself to a career in research. Heikki Leskinen defended his doctoral thesis in 1963. The diachronic-synchronic study was entitled *Luoteis-Laatokan murteiden äännehistoria* ("Historical Phonology of the North-Western Laatokka Dialects"), and he collected most of the data himself. He was awarded the title of docent at the University of Helsinki in 1966 and professor of Finnish language at the University of Jyväskylä on 1 September 1967. He served in this position until retirement age, a total of 26 years.

Heikki Leskinen authored or co-authored almost 80 publications over 50 years. His main research had to do with the phonetic history of Finnish dialects, particularly south-eastern Finnish dialects, but also Finnic languages more widely. Among other topics, he studied the merg-

ing of the dialect of Karelian evacuees, the phonemic lengths of south-eastern and Ingrian dialects and the representation of the word-final *n* phoneme in south-eastern Finnish dialects and, in morphology and syntax, the formation of the imperative in Finnic languages and Sámi. He also published numerous popular texts outside linguistic forums, especially on Eastern Finnish dialects and the Karelian language.

Naturally, his contributions to science are not limited to publications alone. Heikki Leskinen served for twelve years as a member and chair of the board of directors of the Institute for the Languages of Finland, established in 1976. Under Leskinen's leadership, sociolinguistic research of the change in spoken Finnish also began in Jyväskylä. Another major research project was the atlas of the Karelian language, which covers words that are common in all the Eastern Finnish dialects and the Karelian language. Its first part was published by the department, and the results of the project have later been published as part of an extensive atlas of Finnic languages, *Atlas linguarum fennicarum*. The 8th international Finno-Ugristic conference (CIFU 8), held in Jyväskylä in 1995, can be considered a culmination of Leskinen's scientific career. Heikki Leskinen was invited to become a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1973.

The staff and resources of the Department of Finnish Language at the University of Jyväskylä grew substantially during Leskinen's professorship. The department moved to Seminaarinmäki in 1977 to a recently renovated, distinguished brick building from the 1800s, which was named Fennicum. The discipline of Finn-

ish was first an independent department and then part of the Department of Languages for over forty years. In its heyday, the then Department of Finnish Language and Communication not only taught Finnish, but also related languages, phonetics, general linguistics and speech communication. Even after many administrative reforms, it can be said that the roots of the Department of Language and Communication Studies and the Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Jyväskylä lie in the department led by Heikki Leskinen. Separate teaching in phonetics, general linguistics or the languages related to Finnish is no longer provided in Jyväskylä.

Heikki Leskinen naturally had other interests besides linguistics that he would pursue to relax and about which he enjoyed talking about with his family and his closest acquaintances. Sport was important to him from when he was a child. Leskinen never became an active athlete on any level, but was all the more passionate as a spectator. Soon after settling in the capital city, he was able to see the Olympic Games in Helsinki, which gave him many important sporting memories he cherished for the rest of his life. Leskinen was also interested in history and has explained that this interest was first sparked in his childhood when he heard the news of Austria being annexed into Germany. All the way until the last weeks of his life, Leskinen followed world politics, in the end mostly by asking others about the latest news, when reading the papers and watching television was no longer easy for him. It is not hard to imagine what we would be talking about right now, if he had had more days ahead of him.

Vesa Jarva and Juha Leskinen