

Markku Filppula

* 29.11.1949 † 9.4.2024



Markku Filppula, Professor Emeritus of English Language and Culture at the University of Eastern Finland, died on 9 April 2024 at the age of 74, exhausted by a prolonged illness.

Markku Filppula was born on 29 November 1949 in Mikkeli, where he spent his childhood and youth. He studied at the University of Helsinki and graduated with a Master of Arts degree in 1975, majoring in English Philology and minoring in Romance Philology, General Linguistics and General Literature.

In 1975, Filppula moved to study in Dublin, Ireland (University College Dublin), on a 12-month grant. His studies in the department of Old and Middle English at UCD also kindled his interest in the structure and history of Irish English. In 1977, he was appointed Assistant in English at the then University of Joensuu, where he completed his postgraduate studies and graduated as a Licentiate of Philosophy in 1983. Even before completing his licentiate degree, Markku Filppula had begun his doctoral studies at University College Dublin under the supervision of Professor Alan J. Bliss. Bliss was a leading scholar in the history and language contacts of Irish English in his day, and he

inspired Filppula on a lifelong journey of exploration into this language variety.

Filppula's PhD project involved extensive data collection trips around Ireland. These trips were made on his Jawa motorcycle, and the extensive dialect interviews collected during this fieldwork formed the cornerstone of all his research on Irish English. He completed his doctorate at UCD in 1986, and UCD was the university he always considered his alma mater.

Markku Filppula's academic career in Finland was centred around the University of Joensuu, which became the University of Eastern Finland (UEF) in 2010. He was appointed an Associate Professor of English at the University of Joensuu in 1988 and became Professor of English in 1998. Filppula also had an impressive career in university administration, serving as the Dean of the Philosophical Faculty from 2010 until his retirement in 2017.

During his research career, Filppula led four research projects funded by the Academy of Finland: English and Celtic in Contact (2000–2002), Vernacular Universals vs. Contact-Induced Language Change (2005–2009), Global English: Typological, Contact-Linguistic and Second-Language Acquisition Perspectives (2010–2013

and Changing English: Users and Learners Worldwide (2014–2017). The Finnish partners of these projects were researchers from the University of Tampere and the University of Helsinki, while the international partners were leading researchers from Germany and the UK, among other countries. In addition to the Academy projects, Filppula served as a Senior Research Fellow at the Academy of Finland for four terms (1990–91, 1996–97, 2001–02, 2007–08). He was invited to become a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 2007.

As a linguist, Markku Filppula is widely acclaimed not only for his groundbreaking work on contemporary and earlier varieties of Irish English and other Celtic Englishes, but also for his research on contact languages and World Englishes. Filppula's publication profile is impressive. He is the author of *Hiberno-English in a Functional Sentence Perspective* (University of Joensuu Press, 1986) and one of the central works on Irish English, *The Grammar of Irish English: Language in Hibernian Style* (Routledge, 1999). Together with Professor Juhani Klemola and his former doctoral student, Senior Lecturer Heli Paulasto, he published *English and Celtic in Contact* (Routledge, 2008), which has become a key reference work for scholars in the field.

Given Filppula's long-standing interest in historical contacts between Celtic languages and English, it was no surprise that in 2009 he was invited, with Klemola, to guest edit a special issue of *English Language and Linguistics*, a leading journal in the field of English language research, on the theme of "Re-evaluating the Celtic Hypothesis". It is largely thanks to Filppula and Klemola that the influence of Celtic languages on the development of English

has in the 21st century become a serious topic of research in historical linguistics. The previously prevailing view that Celtic languages have not, despite prolonged historical contact, had much influence on the development of the English language has been rejected, and the role of Celtic language contact in the development of English is now a subject of growing interest.

Filppula also edited several major works in his field of research. These include *The Celtic Roots of English* (University of Joensuu Press, 2002), *Dialects Across Borders* (Benjamins, 2005), *Vernacular Universals and Language Contacts* (Routledge, 2009), *The Oxford Handbook of World Englishes* (OUP, 2016) and *Changing English: Global and Local Perspectives* (Walter de Gruyter, 2017).

In addition to his extensive research and publications, Filppula was active as a respected figure in the scientific community in many international linguistics organisations. He was also the organizer of several major international conferences and workshops, including the Methods XI conference in Joensuu in 2002 and the ISLE 6 conference of the International Society for the Linguistics of English, where he was Honorary Chair. Due to these and other conferences and workshops, he put the University of Joensuu, later UEF, firmly on the world map as a university of outstanding research in World Englishes and contact linguistics.

In Finland, Filppula served as Chair of the Linguistic Association of Finland from 1992 to 1994. In 2003, he was appointed Director of the Finnish Graduate School in Language Studies (LANGNET), a position he held until 2011. During this period, he also became Director of NordLing, the Nordic Network of Graduate Schools in

Language Studies (2006–2009). He also established connections with graduate schools in linguistics in other countries (e.g. the Swiss-German Hermann Paul School of Linguistics in Basel and Freiburg).

Despite his deteriorating health, Markku's deep passion for research continued long after his retirement. He actively participated in research seminars of the English subject at UEF, listened to and commented on the ideas of new generations of researchers and was keen to understand the latest trends in digital linguistics and computational methods. The English subject in Joensuu has lost a great advocate for the discipline and a nationally and internationally renowned scholar.

Besides linguistics, music was Markku's passion, and he was an active participant in the music scene of his hometown Joensuu. For this obituary, Markku's brother-in-law recalled the spring of 1970, when he and Markku, two young men, were sitting on the steps of the Helsinki Cathedral, contemplating their future. Markku was a second-year language student at the time, but he was still seriously considering a career change to music.

Markku's musical hobby had begun with oboe studies at the Mikkeli Music Institute, and he made his debut at a concert of the Mikkeli City Orchestra in his hometown at the age of 16. As a student, he played oboe in the Helsinki University Symphony Orchestra, and in 1975–1976 he also played in the UCD Symphony Orchestra. In the 1980s, the Joensuu City Orchestra had only one oboist post, so Markku was invited to join the orchestra to play 2nd oboe and cor anglais alongside his professorship.

According to Markku's musician colleagues, he was a reliable musician who took his playing seriously, performing in events such as the Joensuu Chamber Music Week, with concerts conducted by Rudolf Baumgartner. Markku was actively involved in chamber music productions, particularly when Mozart was on the programme. Fellow musicians also remember the demanding cor anglais solo in Sibelius' *The Swan of Tuonela*, which Markku played like a professional.

Markku will be greatly missed by his wide circle of friends and colleagues both in Finland and abroad, but he has left a lasting impact on the study of language contacts and Irish English through his pioneering work.

*Obituary by Juhani Klemola
and Mikko Laitinen*