

Osmo Ikola

* 6/2/1918 † 27/4/2016



OSMO KALERVO IKOLA, emeritus professor of Finnish at the University of Turku and rector emeritus of the university died in Turku on 27th April 2016 at the age of 98 years, having been born in Joensuu on 6th February 1918. His family was nevertheless from Satakunta, as his father, Prof. Niilo Ikola, also a specialist in the Finnish language and a university man, had been born in Tyrvää and his mother Salli, née Paloheimo, was of Satakunta descent. For practical purposes, however, Osmo Ikola regarded himself as hailing from Turku, since his family had moved there when he was a couple of years old and that had been his home throughout his life. The Turku Classical Lyceum, from which he graduated in 1936, gave him a sound basis for language studies and for everything else that he was to do in the course of his career.

Ikola entered the University of Turku in autumn 1936 to study Finnish and its related languages as his main subject and gained the degree of Candidate in Philosophy in 1940. His principal academic mentor was the celebrated Finno-Ugrist Paavo Ravila, who, unlike the majority of his colleagues at that time, was especially interested in the principles of linguistics

and syntax and encouraged his pupils to follow suit. Thus it was that syntax became Ikola's main field of study as well. Having taken his first degree, he now set out to work for a doctorate, although this was interrupted for some time by military service, which came to an end only in autumn 1944. After the war he worked as a part-time teacher of Finnish and business correspondence at the Turku Business School while otherwise concentrating on his doctoral studies. In autumn 1947 he began a three-year term as lecturer in Finnish at Uppsala University in Sweden, again working on his doctoral thesis at the same time. He finally completed this methodologically sound and academically fruitful thesis, *Tempusten ja modusten käyttö ensimmäisessä suomalaisessa raamatussa verrattuna vanhempaan ja nykyiseen kieleen* ("The use of tenses and moods in the first Finnish-language Bible by comparison with older forms and the modern language"), in 1949, and published a second volume on his research the following year.

Following his appointment as professor of Finnish and related languages at the University of Turku at the end of 1950, Ikola continued intensively with his re-

search, publishing a series of six papers entitled *Suomen lauseopin ongelmia* ("Problems in Finnish syntax") in the journal *Virittäjä* in 1954–1957, which gave rise to protracted discussion in academic circles for some time to come and inspired a great deal of new research. He also published a number of papers on syntax in the collection *Lauseopin kysymyksiä* which came out in the series *Tietolipas* in 1961. A new departure methodologically was his contribution to syntactical stylistics in the same year, 1961, *Das Referat in der finnischen Sprache*, which by taking account of the contexts in which language was used was a forerunner of what was later to be referred to as text linguistics.

Apart from basic sentence structure, Ikola was also interested in participial phrases and other structures that were typical of Finnish. He published an extensive paper *Lauseenvastikkeista ja upotetuista lauseista* ("On participial phrases and embedded clauses") in the journal *Sananjalka* in 1971 and revised and supplemented it for his *Lauseenvastikeoppia* ("The Grammar of Participial Phrases") that came out in *Tietolipas* in 1974. The fact that he applied principles belonging to generative transformational grammar in his structural analyses shows that he was well schooled in the contemporary international trends in linguistics. At the same time, however, he was also interested in the syntax of Finnish dialects in addition to the standard language, and it was at his suggestion that the University of Turku decided in 1967 to create its *Lauseopin arkisto* ("Syntactic archives") an electronic data bank containing recordings of dialectal speech and texts representing the written language, which, in addition to serving the needs of its own researchers, could be

made available to those undertaking linguistic research elsewhere. The project for the syntactical description of Finnish dialects that Ikola supervised culminated in the production of the substantial *Suomen murteiden lauseoppia ja tekstikielioppia* ("Syntax and Text Grammar in Finnish Dialects") in 1989.

Another object of constant interest for Ikola was early written Finnish, which he discussed in numerous studies in addition to his doctoral thesis. His excellent command of both early written Finnish and the contemporary language was of great practical value when he acted as a language consultant for the committee engaged in producing a new Finnish translation of the Bible. This work was closely connected with questions of language use, correctness and language editing, which had occupied an important position in his research and teaching ever since he had discussed them in his inaugural lecture *Kielenohjailu ja kieliyhteisö* ("Language supervision and the linguistic community"). One testimony to this is the established position achieved by his guide to language use *Nykysuomen käsikirja* "A Handbook of Modern Finnish") in schools, universities and other places where the use of the Finnish language is of importance. His own writing was always thoroughly appropriate and clear and highly polished both grammatically and stylistically. In addition to Finnish, Ikola also studied related languages, above all Estonian.

As well as being highly respected for his research, Ikola was also an eminent administrator. In the early 1950s, when he became professor, the University of Turku was a relatively small institution with about 500 students and a handful of staff.

Soon after that, however, as Finland recovered from the war and conditions improved, it was able to grow at a rapid pace, and for long periods of time Ikola was involved in administration at all levels: as head of department, dean of the faculty, a member of the consistorium, vice-rector and eventually rector. He was able to use his active and broad-minded talents not only for the benefit of his own subject or even the Faculty of the Humanities, but also in order to exert a positive influence on the growth and development of the whole university.

The last decade for which he held office, 1970–1981, during which he was vice-rector and then rector of the university, was a time of great upheavals in the Finnish academic world. Radical reforms were brought about in both the administration of the universities and also their degree systems and curricula. In his memoirs from that period, *Oppia ikä kaikki* ("Learning for all ages", 1993), Ikola describes those events largely from the perspective of the University of Turku. The strict, centrally controlled plans laid down for the reforms reflected the aftermath of the student radicalism of the late 1960s, which had also extended as far as Finland, and not only were the political parties also involved but there were regional policy considerations to be borne in mind. Ikola directed his highly justifiable criticism at the planning work, which in his opinion had not taken sufficient account of the knowledge and experience of experts, something that was essential for any reform in higher education. The autonomy of the universities, academic freedom and the international nature of advanced research were values that he was pre-

pared to defend in all his actions and statements of opinion.

Ikola's wide-ranging expertise was indeed revered and made use of in all manner of national and international contexts. He was a long-serving member and chairman of the Finnish Language Board, a member of the Universities' Council, a member of the board of the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, chairman of the trustees of the Finnish Dictionary Fund, and a member of the central board of Pohjola-Norden, the governing board of the Finnish Cultural Fund and the board of Huhtamäki Oy. He was invited to membership of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1965 and was a member of its board in 1982–1988, serving as vice-chairman and chairman in 1982–1984. He was involved in the work of the International Finno-Ugric Congress from the Budapest conference of 1960 onwards and acted as president of the fifth conference, held in Turku in 1980. He was a visiting professor at Columbia University in New York and at Göttingen University.

Ikola also took an active part in the work of academic and cultural societies, especially the Porthan Society and the Finnish Language Society, both of which are based in Turku, and was chairman of each for about twenty years. He was also editor in chief of the latter society's multidisciplinary journal *Sananjalka* for more than thirty years. Many societies and communities awarded him honorary membership or some other honour in gratitude for his support, and he likewise received the Kalevala Prize from the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1971 and its Academy Award in 1989. Nationally, he received the medals of a Commander of the Order of the White Rose of Finland and a

Commander of the Order of the Lion of Finland and the Cross of Liberty with 4 swords. It is easy to concur with these acts of recognition: Osmo Ikola's life's

work was a meritorious chapter in the cultural history of this country, which had declared itself independent precisely two months before he was born.

*Obituary by
Aimo Hakanen*

*Picture:
Archive of the Finnish Language Society*