

OBITUARY

Peter Nielsen Ladefoged ● 1925–2006



Peter Nielsen Ladefoged, a Fellow of this Society and Society Silver Medal recipient, passed away unexpectedly in London on January 24, 2006 due to a stroke. Professor Ladefoged was returning from a fieldwork trip to India where he was studying Toda, an endangered language with few remaining speakers. This was the last of many fieldwork trips Ladefoged conducted with an array of colleagues, including stays in Nigeria, Botswana, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Senegal, India, Yemen, Papua New Guinea, Nepal, Kenya, Korea,

South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, and China. At the time of his death, Ladefoged was Distinguished Professor of Phonetics Emeritus and Research Linguist at University of California, Los Angeles, as well as Leverhulme Professor at University of Edinburgh (2005) and Adjunct Professor at the University of Southern California.

Professor Ladefoged is considered the father of the field of linguistic phonetics, which integrates phonetic sciences with linguistic theory. His seminal textbook used throughout the field, *A Course in Phonetics*, is now in its 5th edition (1st edition, Harcourt Brace 1982; 5th edition, Thomson Wadsworth 2006). Professor Ladefoged emphasized the importance of considering the full diversity of human speech sounds—their articulatory, acoustic, and perceptual properties—in seeking a linguistic characterization of the sounds of language. In particular, he melded field and experimental data collection with pioneering analytical techniques. The volume *The Sounds of the World's Languages*, coauthored with Ian Maddieson (Blackwell 1996), stands as a comprehensive account of their research in this area. At the time of his death he was engaged in developing a web archive of diverse speech sounds gathered from scores of languages in over 50 years of research (archive.phonetics.ucla.edu/ and phonetics.ucla.edu/).

In addition to Ladefoged's contributions investigating and documenting the sounds of the world's languages, his important research on vowel acoustics, perception, and classification began with his Ph.D. thesis and continued throughout his career in collaboration with Donald Broadbent, Walter Lawrence, Richard Harshman, Louis Goldstein, Keith Johnson, and Mona Lindau [*Lingua* **5.2**, 113–128 (1956); *Nature* **178**, 815–816 (1956); *J. Acoust. Soc. Am.* **29**, 98–104 (1957); *J. Acoust. Soc. Am.* **62**, 693–707 (1977); *J. Acoust. Soc. Am.* **94**, 701–714 (1993)]. He demonstrated that

vowels can be well classified by their auditory properties and advocated that auditory properties, in addition to articulatory ones, are relevant in the categorization of speech sounds.

Ladefoged valued instrumental techniques in the field and in the laboratory, and developed a long-standing interest in seeing that they were appropriately applied outside these arenas as well. He was particularly concerned that spectrographic analysis was being abused in the field of forensic “voiceprinting,” and was concerned about factors affecting the reliability of earwitness testimony [*Language and Speech* **21**, 373–374 (1978); *Echoes* **14**, 2, 14–15 (2004)]. His scholarly efforts and public advocacy in these areas introduced a measure of healthy skepticism regarding expert and naïve trial testimony.

Ladefoged's seminal contributions led to numerous prestigious awards. During his career, Professor Ladefoged was elected Fellow of the Acoustical Society of America, of the American Speech and Hearing Association, and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He served as President of the Linguistic Society of America (1978) and of the International Phonetic Association (1985), receiving the Gold Medal from the International Congress of Phonetic Sciences in 1991 and the Silver Medal from the Acoustical Society of America in 1994 “for advancing the theory of acoustic phonetics and phonology using acoustic field data from many of the world's languages” [*J. Acoust. Soc. Am.* **96**(5), 2 (1994)]. He received honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Edinburgh (D.Litt., 1993) and Queen Margaret University (D.Sc., 2002).

Professor Ladefoged was born in Sutton, England in 1925. After his war service from 1944–1947, he received his Ph.D. from University of Edinburgh in 1959, where he studied with David Abercrombie. He continued research on vowel perception with Donald Broadbent and on respiration with David Whitteridge. In 1953, Ladefoged married Jenny Ladefoged (née MacDonald), who became his partner and collaborator throughout his life. Ladefoged joined the faculty of the University of California, Los Angeles in 1962 and founded the UCLA Phonetics Laboratory shortly thereafter. Among his more than 20 Ph.D. students were Victoria Fromkin, John Ohala, Ian Maddieson, Louis Goldstein, and Catherine Browman. He retired in 1991 but remained active in both teaching and research until his death at the age of 80. More details regarding Professor Ladefoged's impact as a teacher and a phonetician can be found at www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/ladefoged/remember/index.htm. A recognition by the field of his recent 80th birthday, celebrated with a special session at the 150th Meeting of the Acoustical Society [*J. Acoust. Soc. Am.* **118**(3), 2 (2005)], can be found at sail.usc.edu/peterladefoged80.html. In addition to his wife Jenny, Peter Ladefoged is survived by his three children and his grandchildren.

DANI BYRD
JODY KREIMAN