



# Peter Ladefoged

September 17, 1925 — January 24, 2006



Jenny and Peter's Wedding



## **A Celebration of the Life of Peter Ladefoged**

February 4, 2006

Speakers:

Tim Stowell, Thegn Ladefoged, Katie Bottom, Shirley Forshee, Robert Stockwell, John Ohala, Ian Maddieson, Louis Goldstein, Sandy Disner, Dani Byrd, Bruce Hayes, Sun-Ah Jun, Sarah Dart, Pat Keating

Please join us following the program  
for chocolate and champagne.

**Peter Ladefoged** was born on Sept. 17, 1925, in Sutton, Surrey, England. He attended Haileybury from 1938 to 1943, and Caius College Cambridge from 1943 to 1944. His university education was interrupted by his war service in the Royal Sussex Regiment from 1944 to 1947. He resumed his education at the University of Edinburgh, where he received an MA in 1951 and a PhD in 1959. At Edinburgh he studied phonetics with David Abercrombie, who himself had studied with Daniel Jones and was thus connected to Henry Sweet. Peter's dissertation was on *The Nature of Vowel Quality*, specifically on the cardinal vowels and their articulatory vs. auditory basis. At the same time, he began important research projects with Donald Broadbent, Walter Lawrence, M. Draper, and D. Witteridge, with his first publications appearing in 1956. His 1957 paper with Donald Broadbent, "Information Conveyed by Vowels." was particularly influential. In 1953, he married Jenny Macdonald; he told her that if she married him they would travel to every continent.

In 1959-60 Peter taught in Nigeria, and thus began his lifelong commitment to instrumental phonetic fieldwork. He returned to Africa in 1961-62 to do the work that resulted in *A Phonetic Study of West African Languages*. In its introduction Peter wrote, "I do not know of any previous attempt to use data provided by palatograms, linguagrams, casts of the mouth, photographs of the



lips and spectrograms all of the same utterance, supplemented by tracings of cine-radiology films and pressure and flow recordings of similar utterances of the same word,” and this was for 61 languages! Ian Maddieson has noted that nothing like it has been done since.

When not in Africa, Peter was teaching at Edinburgh. After summer research visits at the Royal Institute of Technology and the University of Michigan, the Ladefogeds decided to move to America permanently. Peter joined the UCLA English Department in 1962, and in 1966 he moved to the newly-formed Linguistics Department. He established, and directed until 1991, the UCLA Phonetics Laboratory, which became the most prominent linguistic phonetics laboratory in the world.



Not long after he arrived at UCLA, he was asked to work as the phonetics consultant for the 1964 movie *My Fair Lady*. He advised on equipping Henry Higgins’s phonetics lab, he made all the phonetic transcriptions seen on-screen, and it is his voice heard producing the vowel sounds. Peter gave a multimedia lecture about his experience to the UCLA Friends of Linguistics in Spring 2004. Recently, he created a pirate language for the upcoming movie *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest*.



During his career Peter became a world-wide field linguist, visiting Nigeria, Botswana, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Senegal, India, Yemen, Papua New Guinea, Nepal, Thailand, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, Korea, Scotland, the Aleutians, and China. Much of Peter's fieldwork remains unique to this day. Many data collection and analytic techniques in the field were originated or refined by Peter (and often tried out on himself). His instantly-classic 1996 *Sounds of the World's Languages* (with Ian Maddieson) summarized his knowledge of all the sounds he had studied and remains the definitive reference work. Ian Maddieson summarized this aspect of Peter's career in this way: "Among many distinctive contributions to phonetics by Peter Ladefoged is an insistence on the immense diversity of phonetic phenomena in the languages of the world, particularly at the segmental level. (...) Perhaps more than any other phonetician he has always *expected* to find surprises, and has gone to far corners of the world in search of them." [from his 2005 Acoustical Society presentation; punctuation added].

Peter loved laboratory phonetics, and instrumental analysis was always a key component of his fieldwork. Earlier in his career, the instruments were back home in the Phonetics Lab, but later he brought the lab to the field. His 2003 book *Phonetic Data Analysis: An introduction to phonetic fieldwork and instrumental techniques* teaches other linguists his methods. But his laboratory interests went beyond recording sounds of the world's languages. He studied speech production in English speakers, from the electromyography of speech respiration to tongue positions of vowels to articulatory-acoustic modeling. And throughout his career he was interested in speech technology, especially speech synthesis. He also consulted on many cases of forensic speaker identification.

Fieldwork on little-studied sounds and instrumental laboratory phonetics were two cornerstones of Peter's career. The third was linguistic phonetic theory. The ultimate aim of his studies of the world's sounds was to understand what sounds are possible in languages. His particular passion was the theory of phonetic features for representing phonological contrasts: what features should be proposed in order to distinguish all the contrasts of the world's languages? Should these features be articulatory or auditory or some of each? A related concern was the International Phonetic Alphabet: Peter instigated its expansion in the early 1990s to include symbols for more sounds, he oversaw the preparation and publication of a new



*Handbook* describing the principles behind the alphabet, and he worked to ensure that computer fonts of the alphabet would be widely available. The current vibrant state of the IPA is part of Peter's legacy.

Over his career, he produced 10 books and over 140 other publications. Among the books not mentioned above are *Elements of acoustic phonetics* (2 editions), *Preliminaries to linguistic phonetics*, and *Vowels and consonants* (2 editions). He was working on "Representing linguistic phonetic structure" in 2006.

Peter was also a dedicated and successful teacher. His classroom teaching at UCLA, from introductory linguistics to advanced graduate courses, was always exemplary. His 20 PhD students included such influential figures as Vicki Fromkin, John Ohala, Ian Maddieson, Louis Goldstein, and Cathe Browman. His textbook *A Course in Phonetics*, which recently released its fifth edition, is the standard in phonetics. It has been one of the most successful textbooks in the field of linguistics, having trained multiple generations of linguists. It draws on his extensive fieldwork experience and has shown generations of students the richness of linguistic sounds. Peter developed computer-based teaching materials for this and other courses, materials now used on-line all over the world. He valued the daily interactions in the Phonetics Lab as an important aspect of his mentoring. In Ian Maddieson's words, "Peter's legacies include more than his writing - they include the development of a teaching style and the creation of the UCLA Phonetics Laboratory. As Peter put it in the career summary on his website, "For me, the people mattered more than the equipment". Peter created a lab that remains a model of camaraderie, intellectual challenge and pragmatism."

Among the ways in which his contributions have been honored by colleagues are: a 1972 Distinguished Teaching Award from the UCLA Alumni Association; the 1985 Festschrift edited by Vicki Fromkin, *Phonetic Linguistics: Essays in Honor of Peter Ladefoged* for his 60th Birthday; the UCLA College of Letters and Sciences Faculty Award in 1991; the Gold Medal at the XIIth International Congress of Phonetic Sciences; a D. Lit. degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1993; the Silver Medal in Speech Communication of the Acoustical Society of



America in 1994; a doctor of Science degree from Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh in 2002; and the special session "Phonetic Linguistics: Honoring the contributions of Peter Ladefoged" at the October 2005 meeting of the Acoustical Society of America. He was president of the Linguistic Society of America in 1978, and of the International Phonetic Association in 1985.

Although Peter retired in 1991, he never stopped working. At the time of his death, he was active as a Research Linguist at UCLA, especially with his NSF grant "Broadening Access to UCLA Phonetic Data," as one of three editors of the *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*; as a council member of the International Phonetic Association, and as an Adjunct Professor of Linguistics at USC. *by Pat Keating, with help from Dani Byrd*



*The last fieldwork. Peter with Peri Bhaskararao and a group of native speaker consultants assisting them in their research on Toda. Photo taken at Kiawiarh Village on January 22, 2006*



*Celebrating Peter's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday at the fall meeting of the Acoustical Society of America in Minneapolis, October 20, 2005*

“I was also able to create a Phonetics Laboratory group. For me, the people mattered more than the instruments. Of course we tried to get good computers and all the hardware we needed. But getting a group that functioned together and saw themselves as a working unit was of prime importance. I enjoyed going around every day, chatting to everyone, and lunching in the lab with as many people as possible. It was also useful to have weekly lab meetings which all the staff, students and faculty were expected to attend, even if only for the first ten minutes when we talked about what was going on. Building a research group who felt that they had a stake in the development of the lab taught me their varied ideas from statistics to engineering, and the philosophy of linguistics. And interacting with bright students keeps one intellectually honest.”

--Peter, on his home page



## **Tomorrow**

If I should die tomorrow  
Grieve not for me  
Sorrow's fine for those  
Who leave too early on their way.  
My stay was a full time,  
Glowing like a rhyme with unexpected parts  
That starts new lines and gives  
New twists to older arts

*Peter Ladefoged, 2005*



*Thegn, Jenny, Peter, Dave, Lise, Katie Jerry  
Joe, Cat, Amy, Ethan  
Zelda and Sarina  
At Jenny and Peter's 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary party  
December, 2003*

The family wishes to thank Pat Keating, Bruce Hayes, and Tim Stowell for all their help and support since Peter's death. Many thanks also to phoneticians and linguists around the world who sent warm wishes and Peter stories. Finally, our deepest appreciation to our friends and family for your support and love

A web site for remembrances has been set up:  
[www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/ladefoge/remember/index.htm](http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/ladefoge/remember/index.htm)

In lieu of flowers, please send donations to:

Endangered Language Fund, Inc.  
300 George St., Suite 900  
New Haven, CT 06511