

Arvo Eek and Estonian Phonetics

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One of the greatest Estonian phoneticians Arvo Eek was born in 1937 and died in 2009. His interest in phonetics developed probably during the university time. As an undergraduate student he wrote his first pieces of research on phonetics. In his seminar paper written in 1961 he studied the vowels of Varbla sub-dialect of Western Estonian dialect. His diploma thesis written in 1963 dealt with the problems related to the pronunciation and perception of Estonian quantity degrees. This work combined the two sides of Arvo: pedagogue and researcher. In the same year Arvo became a graduate student at the Institute of Language and Literature of the Estonian Academy of Sciences in Tallinn. In 1971 he defended his Candidate of Philology thesis “Articulation of the Estonian Sonorant Consonants”. He became a head of the phonetics laboratory at the Institute of Language and Literature and later he worked there as a senior researcher. Arvo was an editor-in-chief of the Estonian Papers in Phonetics during the whole time it was published (1972–1986). During this time he was interested both in segmental phonetics (acoustic and articulation of Estonian sonorant consonants (including palatalised consonants), nasalisation), and suprasegmental phonetics (acoustics and perception of Estonian quantity degrees). In his works he used methods of articulatory, acoustic and perceptual phonetics. During the times when Estonia regained its independence Arvo Eek engaged actively in politics but in the 1990s he returned to phonetics. From 1993 the laboratory of phonetics and speech technology of the Institute of Cybernetics at the University of Technology became his workplace for many years. In 1994 Arvo Eek defended his PhD thesis “Studies on Quantity and Stress in Estonian”.

I don't know exactly when Arvo started to plan writing a book on Estonian phonetics but I remember that I heard about the book when I met him for the first time. It was during the Phonetics Symposium – Foneetiikan Päivät held in Pärnu in 1998. I was then a graduate student and I did not imagine that one day I will be the editor of this book. In my paper I would like to speak about the first volume of the book “Estonian Phonetics” (“Eesti keele foneetika I”, 2008) and my experience of collaborating with Arvo. I will also speak about the manuscript of the second volume what Arvo worked on intensively before his death but which unfortunately he could not complete.