

IPA NEWS

IN MEMORIAM

LEIGH LISKER, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, scientist at Haskins Laboratories, and Fellow of the Acoustical Society of America died on 24 March 2006 at the age of 87. He was born on 7 December 1918 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. He had all his higher education at the University of Pennsylvania, culminating in the Ph.D. in Linguistics in 1949. In the Second World War he served with the U.S. Army in Italy and North Africa.

In the early years of his academic career, Leigh sat astraddle two programs, Linguistics and South Asia Regional Studies. Two Fulbright-Hays fellowships in India added to his

standing in the latter. From 1965 until his retirement in 1989, his full professorship was just in the Department of Linguistics.

Although Leigh had a few papers of general linguistic interest and one language textbook, *Introduction to Spoken Telugu* (1963), his reputation came from a long list of publications in experimental phonetics from 1948 until 2003. His record shows considerable breadth of interest in phonetic questions, but the major focus of his career had been on the way that languages exploit glottal control over phonological distinctions between consonants. He began this line of work with a study of English intervocalic stop consonants and those of Tamil before talking with me about laryngeal control of the timing of glottal gestures for consonants. Word-initial position appeared to be the environment in which most languages exploited this plausibly temporal dimension. Given the focus on initial position, the dimension was labeled voice onset time (VOT). This led to much further research into the acoustic properties entailed, some forays into physiological mechanisms, and the testing of perceptual hypotheses through speech synthesis and the manipulation of natural speech signals. It was gratifying to Leigh to see so many other investigators exploit the notion in interesting and revealing ways.

Leigh was conspicuous for his patient perseverance in planning analyses and designing perceptual experiments to answer the many phonetic questions that intrigued him. His keen intellect, good humor, and sensitive and benevolent rapport with students and colleagues will be sorely missed.

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