



## IN MEMORIAM

**Ferenc Kiefer**  
(1931 – 2020)

Ferenc Kiefer, the doyen of Hungarian linguists, a highly esteemed member of the international linguistic community, passed away on November 21, 2020. He was a member of Academia Europaea (London) and l'Académie européenne des sciences et des arts (Paris), president of CIPL (Comité International Permanent des Linguistes) between 2003-2013, a member of the Hungarian and the Austrian Academies of Sciences, an honorary doctor of Université Paris-XIII, Stockholm University, and the University of Szeged, and an honorary member of the Linguistic Society of America and the Philological Society of Great Britain.

Ferenc Kiefer was born in Apatin; his interest in languages may have been rooted in the multilingual, Hungarian, German, Serbian speaking community of his home town. In 1943, his family moved to Baja, where he attended the Cistercian Catholic Gymnasium – until the newly secularized school expelled him for “clerical, anti-state conspiracy”. He could graduate and enroll at Szeged University only in 1952, after years of manual work at Sztálinváros. He studied mathematics and physics at Szeged. He got interested in linguistics when he became a school teacher at Hajós, a village with a Swabian population, and discovered fascinating differences between the archaic German dialects of Hajós and his native Apatin. He took evening courses in German and French philology at Szeged University, and eventually landed in a research group of mathematical linguistics at the Institute for Computer Science in Budapest, and at the Department of Mathematical (later Theoretical) Linguistics of Eötvös Loránd University.

An important turning point in his career was 1964, when he and a few Hungarian fellow linguists had a chance to study generative linguistics with Ford-scholarships at the best universities of the USA. When they returned to Hungary, they started disseminating what they had learned there. They taught generative linguistics at Eötvös Loránd University, and built up a center of theoretical linguistic research at the Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.



Ferenc Kiefer also became a regular guest professor at the universities of Stockholm, Stuttgart, Aarhus, Paris, and Vienna. In 1992, he was appointed director of the Research Institute for Linguistics in Budapest; he worked there as professor emeritus until his death.

Ferenc Kiefer has written 14 books and more than 200 scholarly papers. His studies have influenced semantics (the theories of presuppositions and aspect, among others), morphology (the theories of compounding and derivation), pragmatics (the pragmatics of modality), and syntax (information structure). The four-volume *Strukturális magyar nyelvtan* (Structural Grammar of Hungarian), edited and partly written by him, the syntax volume of which was also published in English (*The Syntactic Structure of Hungarian, Syntax and Semantics* vol. 27, Academic Press, New York 1994), is the best-thumbed handbook of Hungarian grammar. He also wrote books on Swedish (*Swedish Morphology*, Skriptor, Stockholm, 1970) and French (*Generative Morphologie des Neuf Französischen*, Niemeyer, Tübingen, 1973); he studied shared areal features of Slavic languages, German, Romani, and Hungarian; but the real target of his interest was human language as such.

Ferenc Kiefer used his scholarly success and his scholarly connections to promote the integration of East European linguists and linguistics into the international linguistic world. He built bridges by various means. One of his earliest publications was the monograph *Mathematical Linguistics in Eastern Europe* (American Elsevier, New York, 1968). In the 1970s, he edited several volumes of Soviet and East European linguistic studies with international scientific publishers in Germany and the Netherlands. He also helped Hungarian linguists find their way to international journals and international scientific publishers by introducing in the publications he edited, among them the journal *Acta Linguistica Hungarica*, international editorial standards, including requirements such as emphasis on the theoretical relevance of the analyses, an up-to-date theoretical background, the adoption of the methodology of an internationally accepted framework, as well as the double-blind reviewing of the studies.

He believed in the importance of personal contacts. He developed close friendships with leading linguists from East and West, and he invited them to Hungary as his personal guests. His personal charisma: his wit, his erudition, his deep knowledge of classical music, his humor, and his culinary art attracted several great linguists to Budapest, where he put them in touch with his students and young colleagues. The guests he invited later supported the young linguists they got to know through him by invitations and fellowships. He strived to bring together linguists from East and West until his death. The International Morphology Meeting, a con-



ference held in Central Europe for the 19th time 2020, well illustrates the viability and success of his initiatives.

Ferenc Kiefer, his likeable personality, is sadly missed by his colleagues and students; but his scholarly results, and his achievements in the modernization of the institutions of linguistics remain with us.

Katalin É. Kiss