

Memories of Ferenc Kiefer and the 1968 Conference at Balatonszabadi
In memoriam on Ferenc Kiefer's 90th birthday, May 25, 2021
Barbara H. Partee, UMass Amherst

Thank you, István and Marianne, for inviting me today, and my greetings and shared condolences to all the family and friends of Ferenc Kiefer who are gathered here today.

[Added during the event: And let me add that I am loving this event, which is a beautiful example of Feri's enthusiastic ability to bring people together from everywhere. I'm so happy to see some very old friends I haven't seen in years, and to meet new wonderful people -- that's so very Feri!]

Ferenc Kiefer did a huge amount to build bridges of human and intellectual connections across the Iron Curtain, to build cooperation and understanding across different schools and subfields of linguistics, to bring people together, to mentor his students and junior colleagues and give them a rich world full of international connections. And all of this with unfailing good will, humor, and an infectious smile.

I experienced all those wonderful qualities of Feri when he invited me to my first-ever international conference in September 1968, at the start of just my fourth year of teaching at UCLA.

The 4-day conference, on algebraic linguistics, theoretical linguistics, and automata theory and programming languages, was held at the Academy's lakeside conference center in Balatonszabadi. The organizers were Feri, György Szepe, and Dénes Varga.

They invited theoretical linguists, mathematical linguists, and computational linguists.

Most of the participants were from the Iron Curtain countries, including Solomon Marcus, Manfred Bierwisch, Alexei Gladkij, and local hero László Kalmár. It was a politically difficult time -- the Prague Spring had just been crushed by the August 21 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact countries, and invited participants Eva Hajičová and Petr Sgall felt compelled to cancel their participation. The conference organizers and participants were in full sympathy and we wrote group postcards of support

to both of them - an act that was easy for us Westerners but potentially dangerous for the others.

There were just five of us from the US -- Charles Fillmore, Jerrold Katz, David Perlmutter, Yuki Kuroda, and me. Papers were given in four languages -- English, German, Russian, and French. Feri made everyone feel very welcome, and I remember singing songs in all four of those languages in the evenings, with nice wine.

The program was wonderful -- interesting talks in the morning and in the late afternoon, roughly half and half theoretical linguistics and mathematical linguistics -- multilingual, with multilingual Q & A and discussion (I remember answering questions in all four languages after my own talk, with a little help from Feri), with a nice long break from 12 to 3 for lunch, chatting, and swimming. One day there was an afternoon boat excursion across the lake to a winery, with dinner at a restaurant with more good wine.

And there, thanks to respective invitations from Feri and Dénes Varga, I met my present husband Vladimir Borschev, although we didn't see each other again until well after the end of the Cold War, in Moscow in 1995. That's another story, but for me it's one of the happiest bridges that dear Feri built.

I will remember him forever with admiration and love.

[Attachment: I am sending along a scanned copy of the program from that 1968 conference -- Yuki Kuroda's copy, which his widow Susan Fischer sent to me in 2018. Handwritten annotations are his.]