

## Obituary

Peter Grzybek (1957 – 2019)



It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Peter Grzybek on 29 May 2019 in Graz, Austria. He had been receiving medical treatment for a long time, and did not recover from his last operation. He left our world and community much too early.

Peter Grzybek graduated in Slavic Studies, English Studies and Language Didactics at the University of Bochum, Germany, in 1984, and in 1988 he completed his PhD with a thesis on the concept of signs in Soviet semiotics. His academic outlook was influenced by the Slavist Karl Eimermacher, by the Anglicist and semiotician Walter A. Koch, and by the linguist Gabriel Altmann. Peter started his academic career as an assistant to Karl Eimermacher at Bochum University. In 1992 he moved to the University of Graz, where he worked as Senior Scientist Lecturer at the Institute of Slavonic Studies. In 1992 he completed his Habilitation, receiving the *venia legendi* for “Slavic literary studies” and “Semiotics”. Since 1998 Peter held a professorial chair at the University of Graz as well as many other visiting professorships at other universities. From 2004 to 2011 he was Head of the Department of Slavonic Studies in Graz. From 2007 to 2009, he served as Secretary General of IQLA and then, from 2009 until 2012, as Vice-President. He was one of the leading heads who helped in restarting and restructuring IQLA activities and was very successful in doing so.

In 1989 Peter co-founded the “Yearbook Znakolog” with Wolfgang Fleischer, and was also initiator and editor of the book series “Studien zur Phraseologie und Parömiologie”, co-editor of “Glottometrics” (2003 – 2017), established the monograph series “Quantitative Linguistics” with Reinhard Köhler in 2011, and was co-editor of “WSK 9: Quantitative und

Formale Linguistik". He was a member of the editorial board of many scientific journals, among others of "Glottology" and "Glottometrics" and the editor of many QL-related omnibus volumes. Peter also organised many scientific conferences which were closely related to quantitative linguistics and quantitative text analysis. Two of them in particular have to be mentioned. In June 2002 he was the organiser of "Word Length in Texts. International Symposium on Quantitative Text Analysis" (University of Graz and Seggau), where the leading experts in word length studies gathered. At the same time (2002–2005) Peter was project leader of the internationally recognised project "Word Length (Frequencies) and their Distribution in Slavic Texts". The results of this project were presented at the follow-up conference "The Science of Language: Structures of Frequencies and Relations" in 2005.

Many IQLA members will also remember the specific unique atmosphere of QUALICO 2009 "Text and Language: Structures – Functions – Interrelations" (Graz, Austria, September 2009), masterly organised by Peter. Moreover Peter very much helped in promoting and spreading quantitative linguistics idea to the scientific community by attending many international conferences.

His extensive scientific oeuvre covers work in psycho- and neurolinguistics, semiotics, paremiology, and of course quantitative text and linguistic analysis. He "entered" quantitative linguistics through the back door, since his primary interest was the study of proverbs, from a quantitative point of view. After that he broadened his interest to more and more fields of quantitative linguistics and quantitative text analysis. His main interests were grapheme frequencies and word length studies; in particular he was interested in modelling problems, sentence length studies, Menzerath's and Zipf's law, the rhythmic organisation of literary texts, and the history of quantitative linguistics, where he mostly focused on older and almost forgotten contributions from Russia and Eastern Europe. In addition to this he also started to work in quantitative film and picture studies.

He imposed demanding standards of rigour on himself in his scientific publications, and extended these to his academic teaching: collegial, but on a high level, requiring from his students a maximum of commitment and effort.

Peter was extraordinarily productive and full of wit. His interests in cultural and literary studies as well as in linguistics were for the most part methodologically driven by a desire to obtain empirically well-founded scientific insights and results. His Wikipedia entry ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Grzybek](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Grzybek)) and his personal webpage (<http://www.peter-grzybek.eu/>) provide a good overview of his achievements and publications, published mainly in German, English and Russian.

Peter was as cosmopolitan and inter- and multidisciplinary in science as in life. As a scientist and as a character, Peter Grzybek was original and independent, and sceptical about many entrenched traditions and customs in academia. His openness of mind, his positive attitude towards new research directions, his cooperativeness and willingness to help, and even his rather direct manner, will all be sadly missed by his extensive circle of friends and colleagues.

Emmerich Kelih  
Reinhard Köhler  
Gabriel Altmann