

IPA NEWS

IN MEMORIAM
MAX MANGOLD (1922–2015)

Max Mangold, who died on 3 February 2015 aged 92, devoted his whole life to learning and describing languages and their pronunciation. It is no exaggeration to say that he was the IPA phonetician *par excellence* of the German-speaking world, adopting the system at an early age in preference to the established German transcription systems of the time, because it enabled him to acquire more efficiently the correct pronunciation of the many languages he studied. And many there were! Apart from those he could speak fluently – estimates vary between 10 and 20 in different reports – he studied the grammars of many more. His answer to a personal enquiry in 1992 as to how many languages he could speak was 15 – and a few weeks to polish up the other 15! He then circulated among the multi-national staff and students at the departmental summer barbecue, speaking to the Italian, Japanese, Chinese, Czech, Bulgarian, Greek, Spanish and Swedish guests in their respective native tongues. That was about three years after retiring from his position as professor of phonetics at the Universität des Saarlandes in Saarbrücken, where he had taught since 1957. He continued to offer transcription classes and a colloquium each semester until he was over 90.

Max Mangold was born in Switzerland, in Pratteln, a small village southeast of Basel, on 8 May 1922, and spoke the local High Alemannic dialect of the village (and his father's native language) as his first language, and possibly also absorbing some features of the Highest Alemannic dialect spoken by his mother. His background provides no indication of the language diversity to come; his mother never learned a standard language, and his father, who was a lorry driver working the North of Switzerland, Southern Germany and South Eastern France, only learned German. But, in a way, it was his father's work that stimulated his interest in languages. He followed the routes his father took, learning the names of the towns, rivers and other features marked on the road maps. When he was given a World Atlas, his life-long interest in place names and his remarkable knowledge of world geography took root. By the end of primary school he knew all the names in the atlas and could place them on the maps. The village doctor noticed this special ability and used his influence to help him get a place in a Basel 'grammar school', incidentally one specializing in the natural sciences (naturwissenschaftliches Gymnasium) rather than languages.

It was possibly the shock he received when he started at the Basel school that helped to sensitize him aurally. He was teased by his peers, who spoke the more prestigious Low Alemannic of Basel, and the German teacher even tried to have him excluded because of his dialect. But he not only mastered the Basel dialect; in revenge for the snobbery he had been exposed to, he also learned standard German pronunciation (Hochdeutsch), something very few others at the school achieved. From the first year on, he was taught French, with a great deal of attention to the pronunciation. In the third year came English, something which was not offered at the other grammar schools, which taught Latin – very traditionally. His English teacher, however, was a keen follower of a 'little-known' (well, in Pratteln anyway) English phonetician, Daniel Jones, and his use of the IPA in teaching English opened up a whole new view of languages for Max Mangold. Using Daniel Jones' phonetic approach, the young boy had added Spanish and Portuguese to French and English by the time he was 16. He had also been selected to attend Latin classes given to gifted pupils from all the Basel schools, which added the experience of learning a language from texts rather than by speaking. Political events of the late 1930s reported in the international press provided abundant additional material – and influenced the languages he worked on. Reports of the Spanish Civil War improved his Spanish; he learned Albanian after the Italian invasion, and

Polish after the German invasion. But he had already started travelling: In 1938, at 16, he spent the summer in Italy improving his Italian in a ‘tandem’ arrangement with a German teacher. Travel was curtailed by the outbreak of war, but propaganda radio transmissions in countless languages proliferated and in 1940 the 18-year-old had bought a short-wave radio with which to access them, as indeed he could do quite legally in neutral Switzerland. In this way he learned to speak fifteen Germanic, Romance and Slavonic languages and a number of Asian languages as well as Hungarian and Arabic. He continued, single-mindedly, to listen every day until shortly before his death and considered it so important that he lent his radio to young colleagues he considered talented and interested enough (but only after the advent of satellite radio made the short-wave radio supplementary to his needs).

The one-way communication that the radio offered changed when he became a university student, reading Philology in Basel and Geneva (he had first registered even before completing his ‘School Certificate’ (Abitur) in order to join a Russian class). The war had brought refugees from many countries to Switzerland, and they created a situation that was mutually advantageous: They were keen to hear the latest news from this extraordinarily well-informed Swiss student, and he wanted the chance to practise his many languages in two-way communication with native speakers. A potential downside to these activities was the interest to the security forces of a person who spoke perfect Russian and spent much of his time in conversation with all the foreigners he could meet. It attracted surveillance for some time but fortunately without any negative repercussions.

After the war, foreign travel was once again possible. The 23-year-old went to Paris in 1945 as a graduate student at the Institute of Phonetics under Pierre Fouché, returning to Basel in 1948, where he successfully completed his doctoral thesis, *Etudes sur la mise en relief dans le français de l'époque classique*, in 1950. He spent the academic year 1951–1952 at University College London studying under Fry, Gimson, and O'Connor, but he also attended classes at the School of Oriental and African Studies, where he returned to Chinese and Korean, languages he had begun to learn before leaving Switzerland, and was introduced to Siamese and Burmese. Further periods of study followed in Madrid and Coimbra as well as a non-academic interlude as a multi-language interpreter for the United Nations in Korea. In 1956 his post-doctoral thesis (Habilitation), *Phonetic Emphasis: A Study in Language Universals*, was accepted by the Faculty in Basel. After eight further years as an ‘academic journeyman’, based initially in Basel but transferring to Saarbrücken in 1958, with temporary teaching contracts in Zurich and Bonn, Max Mangold was appointed professor at the Universität Saarbrücken in 1964. He remained as Professor of Phonetics until he retired in 1989, but true to his multi-lingual interests, he also taught in the Department of Comparative Indo-European Linguistics and Indo-Iranian Studies and was made Associate Professor there in 1969.

Max Mangold’s phonetics teaching followed the tradition of the ‘British School’. He provided rigorous ear-training as the foundation for all analysis. As an insatiable polyglot and structural linguist, he was a magnet for foreign students who wished to understand German and their own languages. He supervised the theses of over 40 African master students covering 30 African languages, and the 20 or so doctoral and post-doctoral dissertations he supervised were concerned with, for example, Breton, Neo-Aramaic and numerous Saarland and Palatinate dialects. To those who have heard his lectures or radio talks, it is clear that he was also a phenomenal mimic. One of his ‘party pieces’ was to illustrate ‘foreign accents’ by pronouncing Latin as spoken by a Frenchman, an Englishman, a German, an Italian, etc. But his most enduring legacy is his lexicographic work on the pronunciation of standard German, in particular the DUDEN Pronunciation Dictionary (*Duden Aussprachewörterbuch*) in six editions from 1962 to 2005. And the authority of his work required that his name should also appear under the introductory descriptions of German pronunciation in many other standard works, for example, *Der Große Duden*, *Das Große DUDEN LEXIKON*, *Meyers Großes Universalexikon*.

His life and his work will be remembered by his colleagues and his many students with affectionate respect.

Friends and colleagues from Saarland University

Other writings on Max Mangold's life and work

- Bonner, Maria. 1987. Engagement für Wissenschaft der Sprache. Prof. Dr. Max Mangold 65 Jahre alt – Seit 1964 in Saarbrücken. *Campus* 2/87, Universität des Saarlandes, p. 18.
- Braun, Edith. 2012. Max Mangold zum 90. Geburtstag. *Mundartpost Saar*, Mundartring Saar e.V., p. 6.
- Dogil, Grzegorz. 2009. Beyond talent: A short language biography of Prof. Max Mangold. In Grzegorz Dogil & Susanne Maria Reiterer (eds.), *Language talent and brain activity*, 351–358. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.