



IN MEMORIAM

Charles Douglas Johnson
Professor Emeritus, Department of Linguistics
Santa Barbara
1932 — 2003

Doug joined the University of California as a faculty member in 1968. He passed away on November 23, 2003 – professor emeritus at the time. In 1968, as a young assistant professor, he was one of a small group of linguists establishing a department of linguistics where none had existed before. His field was phonology, and he was our mainstay in that area until his retirement. As a phonologist, he worked within the generative framework and directed his research inquiries toward testing that theory and improving it. Generative phonological theory requires precision and clarity of formulation, and the discipline that theoretical orientation asks of its proponents was admirably suited to Doug’s mind and character. It is difficult to say whether he chose it, or it chose him. To us who saw him work and heard him expound on rule iterativeness or rule ordering or whatever the formalism demanded, it seemed a natural match between theory, method and man.

As a teacher, he embodied the same qualities that characterized his research. He was careful, sensitive and scrupulous – both in the selection of data from a broad range of languages, and in its bearing on some theoretical issue that needed confirmation (or, more likely, disconfirmation). Students may have been put off at first by his quiet, slow, somewhat understated method of exposition, but over the course of a quarter, they would be won over by his solidity and his conscientiousness. He was not melodramatic in discussing phonetic or phonological universals, but students came to appreciate the drama of a constraint that could hold for all languages for all time (barring a mutation), in spite of wildly different cultural conditions and psychological needs. Consistently for over 30 years, he modeled focus and painstaking scrutiny for our students.

To his colleagues, Doug was – in Wally Chafe’s words – “a quiet man whose head was stuffed with knowledge, a linguist with a broad and deep knowledge of a variety of languages, but also one with good, sensible judgment.” We often went to him for information and clarification on esoteric matters of phonetic detail or theoretical implication. He was an invaluable asset to our department and we relied on that good, sensible judgment that was so firmly grounded empirically, yet capable of leavening opaque data into some theoretically interesting issue.

On the personal side, the attributes that we admired in Doug also manifested themselves in his relations to family members – to his wife (and colleague) Edith, and to the step- children that she brought to her marriage with Doug. John, for example, remembers his step- father “as a brilliant linguist ... who also knew how to have fun with his discipline. As a child, I enjoyed giving him challenges, like: ‘say something in Eskimo, with a French accent’ ... And he always managed to meet the challenge good- naturedly, and (to me, at least) convincingly.” John Trager is now Curator of Cacti and Succulents at the Huntington Library Botanical Gardens: looking back at his childhood he “feels blessed to have grown up with Doug ... and grateful for the calm stability he provided our household.” Edith has observed that among Doug’s many fine qualities were compassion and kindness – not only evident to family members but to colleagues and professional associates as well.

In the year that Doug passed away, a book appeared called Finite State Morphology, published by the Center for the Study of Languages and Information at Stanford University. Fortunately, it was issued in time for Doug to be honored for his contribution to the research in that area. A group came down from Stanford to acknowledge Doug “as one of the pioneers in the field of finite- state linguistic theory.” It is gratifying to know that he lived to enjoy that recognition. We all appreciated Doug, still appreciate ... and, of course, now miss him.

Edith Trager Johnson
Arthur Schwartz