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IN MEMORIAM

Howard Isaac Aronson

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Howard I. ("Howie") Aronson, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, the Department of Linguistics, the Committee on Jewish Studies (now the Joyce Z. and Jacob Greenberg Center for Jewish Studies), and the College at the University of Chicago, died on 26 October 2024. He was 88. Howie was a major figure in Balkan linguistics and in Caucasian linguistics and also contributed significantly to the study of Yiddish. He published numerous articles on theoretical linguistic issues relating to Bulgarian and Georgian, but also to English and Yiddish as well as various non-Slavic and Slavic languages of the Balkans and the ex-USSR. His numerous book reviews also included works on Esperanto, Cree, and linguistics in general. Such was Howie's standing in the field that when he retired, he received two Festschriften focusing on different aspects of his oeuvre: Current Trends in Caucasian, East European, and Inner Asian Linguistics (*Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* 246, Benjamins, 2003), and Of All the Slavs My Favorites (*Indiana Slavic Studies* Vol. 12 -2001, Slavica, 2002).

Howie was dedicated to both theoretical (structural) linguistics and to applying the insights of linguistics to the teaching of language, a topic that he addressed in articles on the teaching of Russian in the *Slavic and East European Journal* (1964, 1966, 1970, 1973). Howie's insights into how to teach foreign languages made his *Georgian: A Reading Grammar* (Slavica, 1982) the most effective first-year textbook of its kind for a language that is high on the scale of difficulty for English-language learners. By special arrangement with the publisher, a pdf of the second edition (1989) is available for free download from the web site of Duke University's Slavic and East European Language Resource Center (http://www.seelrc.org:8080/grammar/pdf/stand_alone_georgian.pdf). Howie also published an important second-year Georgian course (with Dodona Kiziria) *Georgian Language and Culture: A Continuing Course* (Slavica, 1999), as well as *Singing in Yiddish* (with Arthur Graham, Tara Publications, 1985), a textbook that uses authentic texts to teach grammar and culture. Howie's insights into teaching language also influenced others. Prof. Christina Kramer (U. Toronto) has said that Howie's articles on language pedagogy were crucial in influencing the innovative structure of her award-winning textbook *Macedonian: A Course for Beginning and Intermediate Students*, (Best Contribution to Language Pedagogy, American Association of Teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Languages, 2003; third edition U. Wisconsin Press, 2011).

Born in the Albany Park neighborhood of Chicago's northwest side on 15 March 1936, Howie graduated with a B.A. (with honors) in French from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1956. It was an excellent time to be entering the field that is now Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies. Howie was in the first group of Americans sent to study in Russia by the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants in 1958-1959

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(the IUCTG became part of IREX upon the latter's founding in 1968). He was the first PhD (in 1961) to matriculate from Indiana University's Slavic Department, and he got a teaching job in Slavic at the University of Wisconsin Madison that same year. Howie's mentor, Edward Stankiewicz, and his mentor's mentor, Roman Jakobson, had each successfully escaped from Nazi Europe, and Howie represented a new generation of US-born scholars of the region. The year Howie received his PhD was also the year that UChicago received a grant from the Ford Foundation that supported the founding of a Slavic Department, which promptly hired Howie away from the University of Wisconsin in 1962. Howie retired from UChicago in 2002, having taught there for forty years without ever taking an academic year off, such was his love of teaching. He mentored countless graduate students successfully to the conclusion of their PhD's in the Slavic and the Linguistics departments at UChicago, and he extended his wisdom, generosity, kindness, and collegiality not only to his colleagues and his students, but to his students' students, and his students' students' students, and onward.

Howie's love of teaching extended to his love of facilitating scholarly exchange. In 1978, with Bill J. Darden, Howie organized a conference at UChicago on Balkan and South Slavic language, literature and folklore that was so successful that a second conference was held at UChicago in 1980 (papers from which contributed to a Festschrift for Eric P. Hamp as a special issue of *Folia Slavica*, vol.4, no. 2-3). Following that, the conference became regular, moving among various universities, and the 23rd Biennial Balkan and South Slavic conference was held in 2024 at the University of Mississippi. In 1979, Howie organized a conference at UChicago on the non-Slavic languages of the Soviet Union in connection with the 15th annual meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society (CLS). The papers from that conference were published as part of that year's CLS proceedings, but in subsequent years, the non-Slavic languages conference had its own volume of proceedings, which Howie edited and CLS published. That conference met at UChicago biennially through 1995. During the 1980s, the conference had the nickname "the Captive Languages Conference". With the dissolution of the USSR, the conference was renamed for the non-Slavic languages of the Union of Independent States, but by the mid-1990s, ease of travel and communication had changed the configuration of area studies such that there was a critical mass for a conference and a journal dedicated completely to Caucasian studies. Howie edited the Journal of the Society for the Study of Caucasia (1989-1996), and hosted several conferences of the Society at UChicago during the 2000s.

Howie was also a very able administrator. In addition to organizing so many conferences, he also chaired the Linguistics Department and the Slavic department. As chair of Linguistics in the early 1970s, Howie oversaw a complete revision of the PhD program and arranged for the creation of a dual degree program in Slavic linguistics. It was the first dual degree program within the Humanities Division at UChicago. Howie's scholarship was internationally recognized and included publications in *Macne* (Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, 1990) and *Bedi Kartlisa* (a Georgian émigré journal, 1976, 1977). His first book — *Bulgarian Inflectional Morphophonology* (Mouton, 1968), an excellent and original structural analysis of Bulgarian grammar — was considered sufficiently significant by Soviet linguists that they arranged for its translation into Russian (by T.V. Popova and N.G. Obušenkov, published as *Морфология болгарского словоизменения*, Progress Publishers, 1974). Owing to the lack of communication in those days, Howie discovered that his book had been translated when he saw the title in a catalogue of Soviet books for sale in the US.

After he retired in 2002, Howie devoted himself to other interests, especially by participating as both instructor and student in Northwestern University's continuing education program. However, he continued to teach Georgian after retirement, and his publication *The Balkan Linguistic League, "Orientalism," and Linguistic Typology* (Kenneth E. Naylor Memorial Lecture No. 4, Beech Stave Press, 2007) is a masterful summation of his thinking on these

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topics, clarifying the importance of historical considerations for areal and contact linguistics. Among other things, this work makes clear the significance of Balkan Slavic vis-à-vis Russian and other North Slavic languages in discussions of linguistic developments in Slavic in general. As one who was present at the inception of the post-Sputnik development of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies in the US, Howie published a masterful overview of the development of the field from a Balkanist perspective in *Balkanistica*, the Journal of the Association for South East European Studies (2019, Vol. 31:1, 55-60).

Howie will be remembered with fondness, respect, and gratitude by many generations of students and scholars. A complete bibliography of his works along with more on his scholarship will be published in *Balkanistica* (Vol. 38, 2025).

Светла му памет. ნათელში იყოს. יהי זיכרונו לברכה

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