

IN MEMORIAM JOHN HAIMAN

He had arrived with a bang, flying in from Canberra in June 1975 to meet the University of Manitoba's linguists and anthropologists, dazzling both audiences with the first of what became a stellar series of lectures. He died on 7 April 2025.

As a student of Slavic languages and literatures at Toronto (BA 1967), John Haiman was inspired to work in linguistic analysis and historical linguistics by David Huntley. At Harvard (PhD 1971) he studied primarily with George Lakoff, Haj Ross, Calvert Watkins and Ken Hale.

By 1975, recently returned from a year's linguistic and ethnological fieldwork among the Hua of Papua New Guinea, he had already published his first book as well as a pair of articles on Rhaeto-Romance and Germanic phonology and syntax in *Language* (the most prestigious journal in the field). He went on to create an oeuvre of extraordinary scope (including four more articles in *Language*) and remained active to the end, with his last book published in 2018 and a number of journal articles and chapters still to appear.

Haiman soon gained an international reputation, with guest lectures across the world and conference papers too many to count, thus playing a key part in the founding of the Linguistics Department. Research fellowships took him, for a year at a time, to the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Studies at Wassenaar and to the Max-Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology at Leipzig; he was also invited to teach at the Linguistic Institute of the LSA at Albuquerque. In his last year at Manitoba (1989) he was named University Distinguished Professor, at the same time winning a Guggenheim Fellowship before moving to Macalester College in Minnesota.

John Haiman represents the complete linguist, combining the sophisticated analysis of language-specific and cross-language evidence with close attention to language use and depth in related fields from ethnology and history to music and literature. His lectures were exemplary in every respect, pellucid and profound, beautifully structured and full of wit.

On the practical side, few of his anglophone colleagues will have realised that he was a native speaker of Hungarian; his fluency in French and German and his familiarity with literature and history in both was astounding, though topped in all respects by Russian (and, to a fair extent, Ukrainian and Serbo-Croatian, along with Rumanian). His grasp of vernacular Alemannic and Rhaeto-Romance was the stuff of legend.

He had spent a year in Chur learning Surselvan, a total of 17 months among the Hua, and later almost two decades of intensive work with his Khmer teacher, documented in a wealth of papers and another grammar. The Hua grammar alone would be a *monumentum aere perennius*, and the treatise on language and politics in the Grisons (with Paola Benincà) is a masterpiece in a different key. His books on linguistic theory and many other issues in General Linguistics invariably proved provocative – always inspired, never doctrinaire, and in a style that moved an expert reviewer (of the Khmer grammar) and rare peer to call him “the most poetic linguist since Edward Sapir.”

BOOKS

Targets and Syntactic Change (Mouton, 1974)

Hua: A Papuan Language of the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea (Benjamins, 1980)

Natural Syntax: Iconicity and Erosion (CUP, 1985)

Hua-English Dictionary (Harrassowitz, 1991)

The Rhaeto-Romance Languages (with Paola Benincà; Routledge, 1992)

Talk is Cheap: Sarcasm, Alienation and the Evolution of Language (OUP, 1998)

Cambodian: Khmer (Benjamins, 2011)

Ideophones and the Evolution of Language (OUP, 2018)

EDITED VOLUMES

Iconicity in Syntax (1983)

Switch-Reference and Universal Grammar (John Haiman & Pamela Munro, 1983)

Clause Combining in Grammar and Discourse (John Haiman & Sandra A. Thompson, 1988)