Obituary: Arthur S. Abramson

Throughout this time, Abramson continued to work at Haskins Laboratories, both when it was based in New York City and after its move to New Haven, Connecticut, in 1972. Abramson’s long-term collaboration with Lisker, through Haskins, revealed a simple yet powerful measure of voicing distinctions across the world’s languages, VOT. Since its introduction, many hundreds of studies have reported VOT values and used VOT in perceptual studies. Further aspects of VOT are discussed in the accompanying introduction to the special issue.

Abramson continued to work on other aspects of language, particularly tone and voice quality (Abramson & Luangthongkum, 2009; Abramson, Luangthongkum, & Nye, 2004; Abramson, Tiede, & Luangthongkum, 2013, 2015). His startling discovery that Pattani Malay perceptually maintained a contrast between single and geminate voiceless stops even in absolute initial position (Abramson, 1987) continues to generate competing theories. He also contributed to theoretical discussions, including tonogenesis (Abramson, 2004) and tone in general (Abramson, 2013).

Arthur was an energetic, optimistic, erudite yet humble person who was loved by those who met him. He was active in his synagogue, and he provided expert advice on linguistic aspects of Hebrew and Yiddish. He was engaged and productive until his final days and is sorely missed by the many communities he touched. It is still possible to hear his charming voice in his contributions to the oral history of Haskins Laboratories (http://haskinslabs.org/news/haskins-laboratories-oral-histories-and-transcriptions).

References


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