

## An obituary of Russell Schuh



Russell Galen Schuh, a distinguished Chadicist, Africanist, and general linguist, passed away 8 November 2016.

He was born 14 March 1941 in Corvallis, Oregon and grew up in Klamath Falls, Oregon. As a child he read constantly; he also studied the clarinet and became a proficient player. He attended the University of Oregon, where he received a B.A. degree in French in 1963, followed by an M.A. degree in French from Northwestern University in 1964. He did a year of graduate work in Linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley the following year, then joined the Peace Corps, a development agency sponsored by the U.S. government.

His Peace Corps posting (1965–1967) was to Agadez, Niger, where he was tasked with supervision of an adult literacy program in the Agadez-Tahoua-Bilma region. It was there that he learned to speak Hausa, and developed an interest in field work, studying Tamazhaq and working with the Tamazhaq disc jockey for Radio Niger. On returning to the United States, Russ enrolled in the then-new Graduate Program in Linguistics at UCLA, where he received his M.A. degree in 1968. After his first year in the program, he was invited by the distinguished Chadicist Paul Newman to join him in a one-year fieldwork visit to Potiskum, in Yobe State in Northern Nigeria. This proved to be the formative experience of Russ's career, the first of numerous visits to the same territory, several times funded by NSF grants. For the first trip, Russ focused on the Chadic language Ngizim, which became the basis of his 1972 Ph.D. dissertation *Aspects of Ngizim Syntax*, as well as a published *Dictionary of Ngizim*. Russ's dissertation supervisor at UCLA was Paul Schachter.

After finishing his degree, Russ spent a year teaching in the UCLA Linguistics Department as an Acting Assistant Professor. He then spent two years (1973–1975) in Gashua, Northern Nigeria, doing more fieldwork, this time under the auspices of the Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages at Ahmadu Bello University. His focus languages were Bade, Duwai, and the Manga dialect of Kanuri.

On his return Russ joined the ladder faculty at UCLA, with teaching duties primarily in Hausa. In his research he produced a steady flow of important contributions to the understanding of the Chadic languages, incisively explaining their relevance to issues of theory in the best tradition of fieldwork-theory interaction. While the particular language Russ commanded best was Hausa, he also delved intensively into the other, far less-studied Chadic languages. A particular fruitful year was 1982–1983, which he spent as a visiting professor at Ahmadu Bello University; from this year of study emerged Russ's book *A Grammar of Miya*, which he felt was his best descriptive study.

Russ believed in collaborative fieldwork and his outposts in the field typically housed both himself, his graduate students, and a team of native-speaker experts. He was a loyal and patient thesis adviser to many graduate students while at UCLA, including several who came to the department from Africa to study. The fieldwork also included a form of giving back to the native speaker communities; in his own words, Russ sought “to publish, using local resources and printers, work that would be meaningful to the communities.”

Russ's contributions to theoretical linguistics included a taxonomy of tonal rules worked out with Hyman, which remains influential. He was also a leader in the modern revival of the study of quantitative meter—not as part of classics, but in languages where it is a living tradition. Russ's strong musical back-

ground proved to be essential in this work, for the topic turned out to involve a major language-music connection. Just as Homer sang his hexameters, so do modern Hausa and Bole poets sing their verse, both written and improvised. The verse follows Greek-like patterns of heavy and light syllables, but the sung rhythm—often strikingly distinct from the bare rhythm defined by lights and heavies—is always co-present.

In the UCLA Linguistics Department, Russ was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure in 1979, to Full Professor in 1984, and ultimately to the highest possible rank of Distinguished Professor in 2015. He served devotedly as the Department Chair from 1989 to 1994. Through his career he was noted among his colleagues as a model of generosity, one who could take on hard tasks that needed to get done and complete them successfully.

For many years, Russ's teaching load at UCLA consisted largely of Hausa language instruction along with the big lecture course Linguistics 1 ("Introduction to Language"). With time, Russ taught himself enough about a broad spectrum of related fields to be able to teach a true Introduction to Language, not just intro linguistics. In his Hausa instruction, Russ was an innovator, developing projects to improve instructional materials and particularly to expose students learning in America to video examples of Hausa language and culture; these materials are currently on line at the UCLA African language teaching site.

In 2009 UCLA dropped Hausa instruction and the 68-year-old Schuh suddenly found himself teaching a much broader range of undergraduate courses including phonology, sociolinguistics, and a new morphology course of his own devising. This was a lucky stroke for linguistics students, since Russ taught all these courses very well and provided them with a wealth of new problem sets and teaching materials. He continued with Linguistics 1 on an annual basis, gradually accumulating more knowledge and skills. His final innovation took Linguistics 1 online, both as a "hybrid" course (digital lectures, in-person section meetings) and as a fully-online course in summer.

Given the huge number of students he taught, Russ was widely known on campus, both for the quality of his teaching and for the rather unexpected sartorial flashiness it called forth from him. The photo above was from a *UCLA Daily Bruin* article that spotlighted smart-dressing faculty.

Russ possessed an extraordinary level of physical vitality as a result of his assiduous training as a marathoner; he often recorded top times for his age group. Another activity was music: he was a skilled clarinetist and frequently played the rhythmically-complex folk music of the Balkans with UCLA students and colleagues. He was devoted to his wife Maxine, to his daughters Gretchen and Elizabeth, and in later life to his grandchildren.

Russ's very robustness proved, in a way, his undoing: his long training runs in the Southern California sunshine led to metastatic melanoma, from which he died after a period of several months of declining health. He worked very hard during this time, teaching at UCLA to the last feasible moment and, with help from Paul Newman and other friends, organizing his own scholarly legacy.<sup>1</sup> His courage and positive outlook during this time were inspirational.

Russ is remembered fondly and with great respect by family, students, friends, and colleagues. A web page with personal remembrances is posted at <http://aflang.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/schuh/RememberingRuss/>.

*I would like to thank members of Russ Schuh's family for information they provided for this obituary. I also consulted Russ's web site (<http://aflang.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/schuh/>) as well as a scholarly autobiography he submitted to UCLA in 2014.*

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1 See in particular his *A Chadic Cornucopia* (2017), prepared with extensive contributions by Paul Newman and available at <https://escholarship.org/content/qt5zx6z32d/qt5zx6z32d.pdf>.