

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

RUTH HIRSCH WEIR (1926 - 1965)

The University community has suffered a severe loss in the premature death, on November 13, 1965, of Ruth Hirsch Weir, Associate Professor of Linguistics.

Professor Weir was born in Czechoslovakia, October 8, 1926. After attending secondary schools in Czechoslovakia, she studied Linguistics for one year (1946-47) at Charles University, in Prague. She passed the Czech State Board examination in Principles of Education and qualified as a teacher of English in secondary schools in Czechoslovakia.

In 1947 she came to the United States. She received the Bachelor's degree in 1948 at West Virginia University, with a major in French and a minor in German, and entered the graduate school of the University of Michigan, where she earned two Master's degrees, the first, in Spanish literature, with a minor in French literature, in 1949, and the second, in Linguistics, in 1950. In 1951 she received the Ph.D. degree in Romance Linguistics. The rapidity with which she attained these degrees attests to her brilliance and multiple talents. These were amply confirmed in her subsequent career. All her college and graduate work was accomplished through the award of scholarships. She held scholarships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the University of Michigan Graduate School, the University of Michigan Research Club, and the Hillel Foundation, as well as teaching fellowships at the University of Michigan.

She started her teaching career as instructor at the Foreign Service Institute, School of Language Learning, of the United States Department of State, in Washington, D.C., during the year 1952-53. From 1953 to 1956 she served as instructor, and assistant professor, at Georgetown University's Institute of Languages and Linguistics, where she supervised the teaching of French, German, Spanish and Czech on the introductory and intermediate levels, and taught graduate courses in Phonetics and Phonemics, Romance Structure, and the Methodology of Language Teaching. She was invited to Stanford, in September, 1956, under a joint appointment, as Assistant Professor of Education and Spanish, a title which was later changed to Assistant Professor of Education and Linguistics. In 1963 she was promoted to the post of Associate Professor of Linguistics.

Professor Weir's services to the University were unusually broad, as the nature of her appointment and the several changes in her title reflect. For several years she supervised the work of teaching assistants in the first- and second-year Spanish courses, guiding them in new techniques and approaches to language teaching. At the same time she taught graduate courses in applied linguistics in the Department of Modern European Languages and courses in language teaching methodology in the School of Education.

Professor Weir's formal training and much of her professional experience was in the field of theoretical and applied linguistics. The two shaping intellectual influences

upon her career and research were her long and close association with Professor Roman Jakobson, of Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and her studies under Professor C. C. Fries, her principal teacher at the University of Michigan. It was natural, therefore, that she was able to exert leadership in both theoretical and applied linguistics at Stanford. She served as chairman of a committee to inquire into the total teacher preparation in the area of languages, and she was one of the principal persons involved in establishing and developing the new graduate program in Linguistics. At the same time, she was the principal investigator in a variety of major research projects.

Because of her multiple activities, Professor Weir early acquired a national reputation in the fields of teacher training, the preparation of teaching materials, applied and theoretical linguistics, and problems of language learning on various levels. Concepts and innovations pioneered by her found their way into many school systems. She provided guidance to the Palo Alto Unified School District, the Stockton School District, and many others, in establishing language laboratories and linguistically-oriented language programs.

Her early publications were focused on applied linguistics. In more recent years the pursuance of her diverse research interests led to her collaboration with a number of other scholars in cross-disciplinary studies related to linguistics.

With the publication of her book Language in the Crib in 1962, Professor Weir made a major contribution to the study of language development in the child. The book gained wide recognition as a fresh approach to the study of child language, one which not only made significant contributions in data and theoretical analysis but which showed promise for future research.

At the time of her death, Professor Weir was engaged in two research projects: one, an investigation of phoneme-grapheme correspondences in English, with potential significance for the teaching of reading, and the other, a cross-language study of infant babbling, with implications for theories of language learning. Her continuing interest in both theoretical and applied linguistics gave unusual interest to her work. It is greatly to be regretted that a young person with the accomplishments and potential of Ruth Weir was unable to continue her work.

To Mrs. Weir's husband and family the University offers its deep sympathy and sincere condolences.

Aurelio M. Espinosa, Jr., Chairman
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