REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
GEORGE W. AYER

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for George W. Ayer, associate professor emeritus, Spanish and Portuguese, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
GEORGE W. AYER

Although more than four decades have passed since Dr. George Weston Ayer taught in the UT Austin Department of Romance Languages, he is remembered as a scholar and teacher of Spanish literature and linguistics as well as a language test developer. Dr. Ayer died in El Paso, Texas, at the young age of fifty-three on June 8, 1976.

Born in Nacozari de Garcia, Sonora, Mexico, on November 27, 1923, he served in the U.S. Army Signal Corps during World War II (1942-45). He had a brief career in journalism as a newspaper reporter for the Brownsville Herald (1948-50), as a local news editor for the Herald in Mexico City (1950-51), and as managing editor of The News in Mexico City (1950-51). He seems to have always enjoyed a trilingual, tricultural life, living, studying, and working either in the U.S., in a Hispanic country, or in Europe. He obtained a B.A. from Harvard College in 1947, an M.A. cum laude from Mexico City College in 1952, a Diploma de Estudios Hispánicos from the University of Barcelona in 1954, and a Ph.D. from the University of Paris Institute of Hispanic Studies in 1958. His dissertation was titled “Les Jugements critiques de Cervantes et leur transformation dans sa propre oeuvre littéraire.” To fulfill the requirements for his doctoral degree, he also prepared two monographs: “Quevedo et le Comte-Duq d’Olivares” and “Azorin et Barojà devant le meme bourg espagnol: Yécla en 1902—La voluntad et Camino de perfección.”

Professor Ayer joined the University of Texas Department of Romance Languages in 1954. While at UT Austin, he developed an interest in pedagogical innovations, as seen in his work on the use of radio for supplementing the teaching of foreign languages, and on the development of testing instruments for level placement and advanced standing for Spanish students. In 1962, he was named director of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) Summer Language Institute, held at UT Austin, and he became the chair of the Applied Linguistics Section at the South Central Modern Language Association in 1963. His interest in language testing was recognized when he was named chair of the National Test Development Committee of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese as well as a consultant for the Educational Testing Service to construct a new Graduate Record Examination for Spanish and served as president of the Texas Chapter for the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, the largest Spanish teacher organization in the country. From 1965 to 66, he worked as project coordinator and consultant for the Ministry of Education of Chile, with a grant from the Ford Foundation for curriculum development and teacher training. These experiences led him to work at an NDEA Institute at the University of Arizona to train teachers of bilingual students in the summers of 1967 and 1968.

As instructor and later as assistant professor and associate professor of Spanish, Professor Ayer taught courses at all levels. He taught lower-division Spanish courses and at some points in his career coordinated the language program. His undergraduate teaching at the upper-division level included introductory literature courses (both Spanish and Spanish American literature), more specialized courses on Golden Age literature, Spanish phonetics, and applied linguistics. At the graduate level, he taught courses on Cervantes, the picaresque novel, the Generation of 1898, Spanish phonetics, and the Spanish of Mexico and the American Southwest. He was
also invited to teach at other institutions. During the summer of 1960, he taught courses on contemporary Spanish American poetry and Latin American theater at the College of Mexico City. During the 1961-62 academic year, he was a visiting assistant professor of Spanish at the University of Chicago and during the summer of 1967, he taught in Guadalajara, Mexico.

He was an active member of the South Central Modern Language Association and gave papers at its annual meetings on pedagogical topics, such as “Aural Discrimination of Some Spanish Allophones” (1959) or on Cervantes: “Changing Attitudes of Cervantes toward the Pastoral Novel” (1961) and “Cervantes vs. Avellaneda: Some Observations of Critical Technique” (1963).

While Professor Ayer’s book reviews and translations reflected his literary training and broad interest in the Hispanic world, his articles reveal his long-standing interest in pedagogy. “An Auditory Discrimination Test Based on Spanish” appeared in The Modern Language Journal in 1960. He also published in Hispania, one of the most important journals in his field. “Linguistic Research in the 1960s” came out in 1972 and a much shorter piece, titled “A Second Look at an Applied Linguistics Text,” was published in 1968.

Professor Ayer left UT Austin to become chair of the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Texas, El Paso, where he worked until his untimely death.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Dale Koike and Madeline Sutherland-Meier.

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