

Frederick B. Agard

September 23, 1907 — May 11, 1993

Fred (“Fritz”) Agard came to Cornell as assistant professor of linguistics in the fall of 1946, to be one of the “founding five” of the then newly established Division of Modern Languages. He had earned his A.B. and A.M. degrees at Brown in 1928 and 1930 respectively. His Ph.D. degree, awarded by Princeton in 1935, was in Romance philology and Old French literature. After ten years as instructor and assistant professor at Princeton, he abandoned philology and literature for linguistics, both Romance and general. Immediately after the war’s end in 1945, Fritz went to the University of Chicago’s School of Education to participate in a research investigation of foreign-language teaching. This work served as a transition to his enduring association with Cornell, where he was promoted to associate professor in 1947 and to full professor in 1953, retiring as emeritus in 1974.

At Cornell, Fred was an essential member of the new D.M.L.’s senior staff, all of whom, despite diverse specializations, had simply the title “Professor of Linguistics”. At the outset his work concentrated on Spanish and Ibero-Romance, but in time it expanded to include other Romance languages, particularly Roumanian, as well as comparative Romance. In the 1960s he was in charge of a special program for teaching Roumanian to selected Army personnel; this involved extensive preparation of classroom material and led to descriptive analyses of, eventually also to fieldwork in, that language.

Like many other members of the D.M.L., Fritz spent considerable time in overseas assignments, especially in connection with the Ford-Cornell project for the teaching of English in Italy, where he was a Fulbright lecturer in 1956-57 and directed the program from 1963 through 1966. Other assignments included a year in Bucharest in

1969-70 and a summer at the Cuarto Instituto Lingüístico Panamericano at the University of Puerto Rico in 1971. After Fred's retirement, he was a visiting professor in Konstanz, Germany in 1976-77 and in Edmonton, Alberta in 1985. In addition, he served for a number of years as examiner in French and Spanish for the College Entrance Examination Board.

During the nearly three decades of Fritz's association with Cornell, there were continual developments in linguistic theory and in its application to language teaching. He took an active interest in new approaches and devoted himself to their exploration. At first, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he turned for this to creolized languages: Papiamentu (spoken on Curaçao and neighboring islands) and Ladino (the Judaeo-Spanish of Thrace, for which he found a source of information in a family living in Rochester). His 1958 sketch of Roumanian, developed from a structuralist approach, was followed by further studies of that language from a transformational-generative point of view. His last and in some ways most outstanding work was *A Course in Romance Linguistics* (1984), in which he employed several modern approaches to the reconstruction of the ancestral form of speech known to historical linguists as "Proto-Romance" (close to, but not identical with, classical Latin), from which the various Romance languages developed. In addition to these works, he produced several outstanding language-teaching texts and reference works: *The Sounds of English and Italian* and *The Grammatical Structures of English and Italian* (both with Robert J. Di Pietro, 1955); *Speaking and Writing Spanish* (1951, with Angela Paratore and Raymond P. Willis, Jr.); *Modern Approach to Spanish* (1964); *Spoken Roumanian* (1974); and, for speakers of Spanish learning English, *El Inglés Hablado* (1953).

In the classroom and out of it, Fritz was a greatly beloved teacher and mentor. He was the chairman of the Ph.D. committees of a number of candidates in Ibero-Romance, Italo-Romance, comparative Romance, and general linguistics, and a member for numerous other candidates who had a minor in one of those fields. On his retirement, his students presented him with a diploma extolling him as a "native speaker of Proto-Romance". At social gatherings Fred was a stand-up comedian, his monologs exploiting his remarkable ability to mimic all manner of strange dialects and accents. In both professional and social matters, he was one of the most active and inspiring contributors, from 1946 onward, to the work of the D.M.L. and of its successor the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics.

Fred is survived by his wife Hildegard, his son Stephen, and his stepdaughter Leigh Jones, as well as by four grandsons and one great-granddaughter.