

Prof. Ruth Berman

EMET Prize Laureate for 2012

Professor Ruth Berman is awarded the EMET Prize for her activities to promote language teaching on the basis of principles of linguistic science and for advancing Israeli society in the domain of education, for groundbreaking studies in general linguistics, and for developing/establishing research on acquisition of Hebrew as a native language as a field of scientific inquiry.

Professor (Emeritus) Ruth Berman (née Aronson) was born in South Africa. After finishing her undergraduate studies in languages and literature at the University of Cape Town, she immigrated to Israel in 1954. She completed her M.A. studies at Columbia University, New York, and received her Ph.D. from the Department of Linguistics and Hebrew Language at the Hebrew University.



Following her arrival in Israel, Ruth Aronson responded to the call made by the late Dr. Pua Menchel to join the educational enterprise in the Negev as an English teacher in Beersheba. Her achievements in this role won her a British Council scholarship for post-graduate studies at Edinburgh University, where she first came into contact with modern linguistics. On her return to Israel, she was appointed inspector for English teaching in the new Negev communities and, as a research assistant at the Hebrew University, co-authored a major research investigation into the teaching of English in Israel. Subsequently, in the course of her MA studies, she founded and headed the section for teaching English as a Second Language at the United Nations International School in New York. Back in Israel, in the mid-1960s, she founded the program in English Language and Linguistics in the English Department of Tel Aviv University, based on the ideas of current American linguistic theory. During this period, she also conducted and supervised innovative programs on Israeli radio and Instructional Television supervised for teaching English, heading a large-scale project for constructing progressive materials for teaching English to Hebrew-speaking Israeli students, resulting in a series of books that for many years were widely used in the Israeli school system. In all these activities, Ruth Aronson actively fostered the teaching of English as a second language based on the principles of contrastive linguistics, focusing on Hebrew as the source language and English as the target language of this process.

From the 1970s on, beginning with her doctoral research and culminating in her 1978 book on *Modern Hebrew Structure*, the focus of her academic concerns switched to Israeli Hebrew, including research in the domains of syntax, morphology, and the lexicon. These studies formed the basis for her subsequent work from the 1980s onwards in the area of acquisition of Hebrew as a first language. The monograph she published on this topic in 1985 constituted the first large-scale, scientifically motivated study of child language in Hebrew, conducted in the framework of an international project on the cross-linguistic study on language acquisition. This formed the basis for her extensive research activities in cooperation with renowned scholars from the United States and Europe on acquisition of Hebrew in a cross-linguistic perspective in the lexicon, in narrative construction, in advanced second language learning, and in later, school-age language development.

A member of the faculty of Tel Aviv University since 1965, Ruth (Aronson) Berman was instrumental in founding its Department of Linguistics, in which she was appointed associate professor in 1983, and full professor in 1989. Prior to her

retirement in 2004, she served on major committees in the Faculty of Humanities and on general university committees at Tel Aviv University.

Berman's work has won her numerous awards and recognition from leading academic institutions around the world, among them the presidency of the International Association for the Study of Child Language, a Humboldt Award for outstanding research, and honorary life membership of the Linguistic Society of America. A *Festschrift* was edited in her honor by two of her colleagues, containing original research papers by her colleagues and students from Israel and abroad.