

July 21, 2006

To Joshua Fishman on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at the University of Pennsylvania:

It was 1969. In the Albuquerque Journal was an announcement of a lecture on something called sociolinguistics, or the sociology of language, to be given at the University of New Mexico by a professor named Joshua Fishman. I had never attended a public lecture before, and had no idea what sociolinguistics was. The explanatory phrase “sociology of language” didn’t help me either. I don’t remember why I got a baby sitter for my three young children and went to that lecture. But I got there. It turned out to set me on the path of what has become my professional life. Once Joshua Fishman began to speak, I was hooked. What he was talking about made immediate sense (of course, who someone is speaking to affects the talk) and answered questions I wasn’t even aware I had (exactly why did they just switch to Yiddish?). Having never attended a public lecture, I hadn’t come prepared. The only paper I had for taking notes was a tiny spiral notebook in my purse.

Two years later, I was in graduate school, taking a course from Bernard Spolsky in sociolinguistics. Nearly thirty years later, in one of many moves, I found that spiral notebook. On one page I had written “IMPORTANT QUESTION: Who speaks what to whom, where, and for what purpose?” On another was something about dialects and languages—“both are LINGUISTIC VARIETIES—the difference is what is done to them (e.g., standardization) and what people think about them (how they rank them).” Such wonderful ideas! Almost like siren songs. They call to me still.

Carole Edelsky