

5 July 2006

I met Professor Joshua Fishman in digital space (next time, Fiji, eh?), which is where my research in recent years has increasingly ventured, though at the time of our meeting, I was writing about language and literacy education in the Pacific Islands from Australia as a Canadian. The invitation to write a chapter in one of the multitude of books edited by Professor Fishman, facilitated by my esteemed colleague and mentor Professor Michael Clyne, was for me a very great honour, and it led, most fortuitously, to years of further contact.

Since I always communicated with Joshua online, I often found myself wondering whether I would ever meet this venerable scholar in person. So when I saw that Joshua would be a plenary speaker at AAAL in Washington DC in 2003, I thought that my chance to meet him had finally arrived ("Remember me – the one with the abysmally late IJSL issue on Pacific Sociolinguistics?"). Unfortunately, getting to the conference was fraught, following unexpectedly tumultuous political events, and Joshua's talk was scheduled as the very last event in the program, which bit severely into the time I needed to get through airport security screening for my international flight home.

So I have yet to shake your hand, Joshua, and tell you how sustaining your unfailingly generous support has been to me. Your humour bridged unending obstacles in co-editing a publication across tiny islands half a world away, scattered over time zones and connected by tenuous (to say the least!) communication links. Thank you for your inspiration, belief and courage! Vinaka vaka levu!

I stayed at AAAL until the last possible moment, packed bags in hand, taxi waiting, to hear the first few minutes of your talk (airport security be damned), so that I could finally see and hear you, quietly, at the back of the auditorium – a few moments to contemplate the man who has so influenced generations of language researchers, teachers, learners, planners, and citizens of our multilingual world.

May you have many, many happy returns on your 80th birthday! Mazel Tov!



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