

OBITUARY

Joshua A. Fishman 1926–2015

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Joshua Fishman died in March this year. He was founder-editor of the International Journal of the Sociology of Language, one of the early and central journals of sociolinguistics. Alongside this major editorial involvement, which he maintained to the end, he also edited several of the field-defining book collections which helped shape the growing field in the 1960s and 70s. He might well have viewed the founding of the Journal of Sociolinguistics in 1997 as unfortunate or competitive, the more so since our opening manifesto questioned the role of traditional sociology in our field. But Fishman responded graciously and positively to the invitation from me and Nikolas Coupland to join our inaugural Editorial Board. He remained on the Board, and was warm in his support and advice. The one piece he published with us was in 2000, a very personal obituary for Charles Ferguson which was notable for the respect and warmth it displayed. The editorial team is indebted to Fishman's longtime collaborator, Ofelia García, for this memoir on him and his significance in sociolinguistics.

The Editors

The 1991 symposium that was held in honor of Joshua A. Fishman's 65th birthday at the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of Santa Cruz, had as its title, *SOL Rising* – SOL for the acronym of the field Fishman founded, Sociology of Language, but also SOL for the Spanish word for 'sun,' a reminder of his commitment to language minorities throughout the world and of the enlightenment that his work on language and society has brought us. Our 'sol' has been momentarily obscured by the clouds of Joshua A. Fishman's passing at the age of 88 on March 1, 2015. But the legacy he leaves not only to his immediate family – his wife of over 60 years, Gella Schweid Fishman, his three children and their wives, his eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren – but also to all who have been touched by Fishman's scholarship, humanity and generosity, will continue to enlighten a future that will be vastly different

from that in which he started his work in the 1960s. The light of his work clarifies a road ahead for many.

Those of us throughout the world who have read and studied Joshua A. Fishman's writings in the last fifty years have understood that scholars of language in society have a role in building a more just world.

Those of us who have had the privilege of working with him in contributions to the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language (IJSL)*, the journal he founded in 1974, and to the Mouton/De Gruyter series, *Contributions to the Sociology of Language*, have learned from him how to mentor scholars from the developing world, as well as young scholars.

Those of us who work with language minority communities, have leaned on his work to defend the rights of linguistic minorities to exist and participate in societal endeavors, especially education.

And those of us who have had the good fortune of having studied with him, have modeled our role as teachers and mentors in his gentle, generous and consistent guidance.

I have had the privilege of being Joshua Fishman's student since the summer of 1981 when I participated in a National Endowment for the Humanities Institute on Language Maintenance and Language Shift, which he led. After that summer, I never stopped learning from him – attending his doctoral seminars, working with him on research projects, discussing ideas, co-editing and co-authoring with him. I had no idea in 1981 that Fishman would turn out to be a mentor *sans pareil*, my intellectual father – generous and demanding, unwavering in his support, but insisting that the work be serious.

Many might think that Joshua A. Fishman had a lot of assistants and clerical help. I know better. I have been with him when he made photocopies, wrote letters, mailed manuscripts, and performed many other clerical duties himself. He replied to everyone who reached out to him for advice, even before the convenience of email. Many sociolinguists and language communities throughout the world owe a great deal of gratitude to Joshua Fishman for his steadfast support. Despite the enormous amount of time that Joshua Fishman spent in assisting others, he was able to produce a gargantuan amount of scholarly work – innovative in ideas and critical of the status quo in perspective.

SCHOLARSHIP: SOL SHINING THROUGH

Joshua A. Fishman is unquestionably the leader and founder of the sociology of language, or what some have called Fishmanian sociolinguistics. The two vast bibliographies that his wife, Gella Schweid Fishman, published in García, Peltz and Schiffman (2006) and in Issue #213 of *IJSL* (2012) attest to the magnitude of his work. In an article in 1965, Fishman posed the question that was to dominate all sociology of language studies up to today: 'Who Speaks What Language to Whom and When?' A year before, Fishman had participated with the group that came to be the original sociolinguists *par*

excellence at a Summer Institute of Linguistics in Bloomington, Indiana – Charles Ferguson, John Gumperz, Einar Haugen, Dell Hymes, William Labov, William Bright, and Stanley Lieberson, among others. And that same year (1964), Fishman completed the report to the U.S. Office of Education that became the first major study of the emerging field of the sociology of language – *Language Loyalty in the United States*, published in 1966 by Mouton. In that volume, Joshua Fishman attested to his scholarly interest in the maintenance of minority languages by ethnolinguistic groups.

With contributions by many leading scholars, in *Readings in the Sociology of Language* (1968) Fishman legitimated a field that took language as its focus, but that was deeply interdisciplinary, recognizing that the work of language scholars must be ‘sociological,’ with attention to how it functions in society, but bringing in lenses of anthropology, economics, geography, history, linguistics, political science, psychology, sociology, literature and the humanities. In this sense, Fishman’s work pioneered an approach to language studies that went beyond the discipline of linguistics as defined by first Saussure and then Chomsky, and which opened up the study of language to its interaction with the manifold influences of human agency in societal contexts. Related to other work in sociolinguistics at the time, Fishman’s work focused not solely on the use of language by individuals, but also on how social groups, including political states and nations within those states, use language for their own purposes, while insisting on the deep connections between individual speakers and the socio-political context in which they ‘language.’ In going beyond the structuralist nature of language and acknowledging the political economy of the language context, Fishman’s work goes beyond modernist notions, and introduces the post-modernist/post-structuralist ideas that are prevalent in today’s work on language in society.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on July 18, 1926, Fishman – or as he was called in Yiddish, Shikl – grew up in a ‘Yiddish activist home in Philadelphia,’ where, he says:

Yiddish writers, poets, teachers and leaders of Yiddish cultural organizations gathered together to discuss the creativity and continuity of the Yiddish language and culture. This was the air I breathed. The food (for thought) I digested. (April 8, 2013)

Fishman earned his BS and MS degrees at the University of Pennsylvania in 1948. That summer he went to UCLA to study with the Yiddish scholar Max Weinreich, father of one of the earliest scholars of bilingualism, Uriel Weinreich. With Uriel and his brother, Fishman had written a Yiddish youth magazine, *Yugntruf*, as a teenager. His early interest in Yiddish and bilingualism earned him a prize from the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in 1949, and he established a Yiddish-speaking home when he married his wife, Gella Schweid, in 1951.

In 1953 Fishman received a PhD in social psychology from Columbia University. His first academic appointment was at The City College of New York, where he taught a social psychology course that became the basis for the field of the sociology of language. In 1958 he moved to the University of Pennsylvania, but came back to New York City two years later when he was appointed professor of psychology and sociology at Yeshiva University. There he served not only as Dean of the Ferkauf Graduate School of Social Science and Humanities, but also as academic vice president and Distinguished University Research Professor until 1988, when he became professor emeritus. Toward the end of his career at Yeshiva University, Fishman organized and implemented a Bilingual Developmental Psychology PhD Program, bringing to the Jewish university a cadre of Latino doctoral students and infusing bilingualism in doctoral studies in psychology throughout the university. After his retirement from Yeshiva University, Fishman remained active as visiting professor at Stanford University, New York University and The Graduate Center of The City University of New York. During his academic career, Joshua Fishman held fellowships at the Center for Advanced Study (Stanford), The East West Center (Hawai'i), and the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), and had many other visiting professor appointments in the U.S., Israel, and the Philippines.

In the early 1970s, the titles of his books already reveal his interest in advancing general understandings of the sociology of language: *Sociolinguistics* (1970); *Advances in the Sociology of Language I* (1971); *Advances in the Sociology of Language II* (1972); *Language in Sociocultural Change* (1972); and *The Sociology of Language* (1972). The rest of his work is dedicated to advancing different aspects of the sociology of language and can be grouped into three intersecting broad categories, using the titles of some of his books as examples:

1. Aspects of language policy

- Language planning and policy: *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (1968); *Advances in Language Planning* (1973); *Language Planning Processes* (1977); *Progress in Language Planning* (1983); *The Earliest Stages of Language Planning* (1993); *Do Not Leave your Language Alone* (2006).
- Language and nationalism: *Language and Nationalism* (1972).
- Language maintenance, shift and revitalization: *Language Maintenance* (1977); *Reversing Language Shift* (1991); *Can Threatened Languages be Saved?* (2001).
- Language and power: *Along the Routes to Power* (2006).

2. Aspects of language, ethnicity and identity

- Language and ethnicity: *Ethnicity in Action* (1985); *The Rise and Fall of the Ethnic Revival* (1985); *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective* (1989); *In Praise of the Beloved Language: A Comparative View of Positive Ethnolinguistic Consciousness* (1996).

- Language and identity: *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity* (1999); *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity, Vol. 1* (2010); *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity, Vol. 2* (2011).
- Language and religion: *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion* (with Tope Omoniyi, 2011).

3. Aspects of bi/multilingualism and different language resources

- Multilingualism: *Advances in the Study of Societal Multilingualism* (1978).
- Bilingual education: *Bilingual Education* (1976); *Bilingual Education: Current Perspectives* (1977); *Bilingual Education for Hispanic Students in the United States* (1982).
- Yiddish and the Sociology of Jewish Languages: *Yiddish in America* (1965); *Never Say Die!* (1981); *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages* (1985); *Ideology, Society and Language: The Odyssey of Nathan Birnbaum* (1987); *Yiddish Turning to Life* (1991).
- Languages in the U.S.: *The Multilingual Apple* (2001); *Developing Minority Language Resources: Spanish for Native Speakers in California* (2008).
- English: *The Spread of English* (1977); *Post-Imperial English* (1996).

His commitment to using Yiddish was enacted in the regular column he wrote on Yiddish sociolinguistics in the quarterly *Afn Shvel*, and in the many contributions he made to the weekly *Forverts*.

Joshua A. Fishman received many honors in his lifetime. To celebrate his 65th birthday, four volumes were published in his honor: a three-volume *Festschriften* published by John Benjamins – one on *Bilingual Education*, edited by Ofelia García; one on *Language and Ethnicity*, edited by James R. Dow; and one on *Language Planning*, edited by David F. Marshall – and a volume published by Mouton and edited by Robert L. Cooper and Bernard Spolsky entitled *The Influence of Language on Culture and Thought: Essays in Honor of Joshua A. Fishman's Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. When Fishman turned 80, the University of Pennsylvania honored him with a celebration, and Multilingual Matters published two volumes in his honor – a collection of Fishman's recent writings published under the title *Language Loyalty, Language Planning and Language Revitalization*, edited by Nancy Hornberger and Martin Pütz; and *Language Loyalty, Continuity and Change* that contains an integrative essay on his sociolinguistic work by Ofelia García and Harold Schiffman, an essay on his Yiddish work by Rakhmiel Peltz, and a bibliographical inventory by Gella Schweid Fishman. Among the honors he received in his lifetime he treasured the receipt of the Linguapax Award in Barcelona, Spain, in 2004.

FISHMANIAN SOL LENSES FOR THE FUTURE

Although Joshua Fishman's scholarship emerged in the mid-20th century, the sociolinguistic lenses he took up in his work – those that were activist,

minority-focused, and stemming from 'within' – make his work especially relevant for a sociolinguistics of globalization in today's neoliberal era.

The activist lens

Defining the sociology of language, Fishman (1991: 2) said that it 'is centrally concerned not only with societally patterned behavior through language but with societally patterned behavior *toward* language' (my emphasis). It is this belief in *social action* on behalf of language, and its speakers, that spurred his early interest in language maintenance, language revitalization, and language planning. In 1972 he had argued for the important societal role of activist scholars, and complained about the paucity of such scholars:

[M]ost social scientists feel more comfortable with diagnosis (study design, instrument construction, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation) than with therapy (recommendations for action, planning action, involvement with action-oriented branches of government or segments of the community). (1972a: 16)

But Fishman's therapeutic action was not towards *any* language, but towards those of language minority communities, that is, it adopted a minority lens.

The minority lens

Fishman's work was magnified through his interest in what he called 'the periphery.' In 1990, he explained his interest in language minorities:

The periphery magnifies and clarifies. Above all, it refuses to take matters for granted. It refuses to confuse peripherality with unimportance, or weakness in numbers or in power, with weakness *vis-à-vis* equity, justice, law and morality. (1990: 113)

Fishman's scholarship focuses on the periphery not solely because it clarifies the scholarly work, but because it is a matter of social justice. He says:

Our political and cultural foundations are weakened when large population groupings do not feel encouraged to express, to safeguard, and to develop behavior patterns that are meaningful to them. Our national creativity and personal purposefulness are rendered more shallow when constructive channels of self-expression are blocked and when alienation from ethnic-cultural roots becomes the necessary price of self-respect and social advancement. (1972b: 23)

Evidence of his commitment to language minority communities has been his insistence on publishing in every issue of the *IJSL* a section which he called 'Small languages and small language communities,' edited for many years by Nancy Dorian. Fishman's sociolinguistic work is unapologetically committed to those language minority groups who have been oppressed.

A 'voice from within' lens

It is precisely Fishman's commitment to social justice that prevents his scholarship from blindly following one discipline, one research methodology or external voice widely regarded as the only objective truth. His work is multifaceted – sometimes following traditional research design in the social sciences as in quantitative multiple regressions, but often bringing together research traditions from different disciplines, following what he called 'a voice from within.'

To try to solve the many puzzles in language and society, Joshua A. Fishman's scholarship relied on more than just numbers and variables. He explained this need saying:

I feel strongly that there is more 'out there' (even more to the sociology of language) than science can grasp, and I have a personal need for poets, artists, mystics and philosophers too for a deeper understanding of all that puzzles me. (1990: 23)

Poetry, philosophy and mysticism combined in Fishman's scholarship with numbers and quantification. But his work was not a mere game with a ludic intent, but rather a serious exploration of language in society ensuring the inclusion of all voices and modes of signification. Thus, he said:

The chief debit of the 'voice from within' is that it is self-interest biased, but at least it is admittedly so. However, the voices from without are also necessarily biased – in perspective and in expected audience and reward (and therefore, also in self interest) – no matter how much they dress themselves up in the garb of science, objectivity, theory and fashionable philosophy or ideology. (1996: 119)

THE FISHMANIAN LEGACY IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Joshua A. Fishman was clearly a man for all seasons. As such, his SOL continues to enlighten the ideas of younger and emerging scholars in the field of sociolinguistics. Poststructuralist sociolinguistics or, to quote Jan Blommaert, a sociolinguistics of globalization, pays attention to the dynamics and contingency of social, cultural and linguistic categories, as well as the power that circulates and constructs knowledge and subjectivities. From the very beginning, Fishman's work took up, and yet disrupted, the modernist thought that encompassed his era by recognizing the role of human agency in language use. Already in 1971, Fishman had said: 'Instead of witch-hunting for bilingual interference, modern sociolinguistics recognizes the *linguistic repertoires of bilingual speech communities ...*' (1971: 605, my emphasis). In focusing on the repertoires of bilingual speech communities, Fishman recognized that the observable sociolinguistic phenomena are

synchronizations of a complicated series of historical processes; they are resources that are inseparable from the users and the events and processes that bring them about. Thus, Fishman develops his theories of the sociology of language to be 'much more vigorously in touch with social and comparative history, with social geography and with political science than with linguistics' (1972a: 272). While not turning his back on quantitative work, Fishmanian sociolinguistics is also comfortable with history, literature and ethnographic research.

True, Joshua A. Fishman's work does not question the invention of language or of speech communities, or of diglossia, or of the link between language and identity, prevalent in the work of many poststructuralist sociolinguists today. Fishman conceives of all of this being socially constructed and imagined, but he insists that it is not *imaginary*, for these continue to be principles of collective identification and social organization that have had real and material effects. Fishman understood that linguistic choices are not only determined by situation and grammatical and social rules and conventions, but are subjected to history, biography, imagination and desire.

On the occasion of Fishman's passing, Sipra Mukherjee said: 'Good teachers do not die. They are like the languages Joshua was so passionate about – they get passed down from generation to generation. As Probal said: the responsibility is on us the survivors.' Fishmanian sociolinguistics is too complex and valuable to be dismissed, to declare ourselves in a post-Fishmanian era. Instead, we should be taking up the lenses of activism, minoritization, and 'from within' with which Fishman saw his SOL and extending it, so that his SOL illuminates future work in sociolinguistics. To borrow the title of one of his books in Yiddish, may we 'Never Say Die' to the Fishmanian SOL!

REFERENCES

(For Fishman's entire bibliography, the reader is referred to the bibliographical inventory compiled by Gella Schweid Fishman that appeared in Volume 2012 Issue 213 of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. Here we include only the references in which Fishman's words are cited above.)

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