

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### Paul Frommer

In his address, Frommer describes his involvement in the Na'vi language project—how he got the job, went about developing the language, and worked with James Cameron and the actors. He explains elements of the sound structure and grammar of Na'vi, along with a mini-language lesson, and discusses the interplay of language and culture in its creation. He also recounts the story of Na'vi post-Avatar: the development of a passionate Na'vi enthusiast community and the future of the language here on Earth.

Along the way, Frommer addresses topics of particular interest to interpreters and translators, including principles of effective communication that hold for all languages, natural and constructed.

**Paul FROMMER**, the linguist who developed the Na'vi language for James Cameron's film Avatar, is Professor Emeritus of Clinical Management Communication at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business.



After he received his undergraduate degree in mathematics from the University of Rochester, Frommer's career took him from teaching mathematics and English with the U.S. Peace Corps in Malaysia to helping upgrade the English skills of employees of National Iranian Radio and Television in Tehran to completing a Ph.D. in linguistics at USC, where he wrote a dissertation on an aspect of Persian syntax. He followed that with a ten-year sojourn in the business world as a Vice President and strategic planner in a Los Angeles corporation. Returning to USC in the mid-'90s, he joined the faculty of what is now Marshall's Center for Management Communication, serving as Director of the Center from 2005 to 2008. His teaching at USC included courses in Advanced Writing for Business and Cross-cultural Business Communication for Non-native Speakers.

In 2005, Frommer was hired by James Cameron to develop an entirely new language for the Na'vi, the indigenous race of humanoids on the moon Pandora in Cameron's groundbreaking film Avatar. In addition to determining the sound system and grammar of the language, he constructed vocabulary and translated the Na'vi dialog not only for the movie but also for the related video games. He also worked closely with the actors in the film to help them deliver their Na'vi lines convincingly. Since the release of Avatar, Na'vi has attracted a worldwide community of enthusiasts who are assisting Frommer in expanding the language further. In addition to Na'vi, he has worked on the Martian language for Disney's upcoming film John Carter of Mars.