

Introduction

John J. Gumperz was born in 1922 in Germany, and came to the United States in 1939. After getting his bachelor's degree in science at the University of Cincinnati in 1947, he did some graduate work in chemistry at the University of Michigan, where he became interested in attending lectures at the Linguistic Institute. He soon switched over to full-time linguistic studies, and in 1954, after two years as a research associate and instructor in linguistics at Cornell University, he was awarded a Ph.D. degree in German linguistics by the University of Michigan. There followed two years of field work in India and an appointment at the University of California, Berkeley, where he became Professor of Anthropology in 1965.

Gumperz is the organizer of the South Asian program at Berkeley and has served as chairman of the Center for South and South East Asia Studies (1968-71). He is one of the senior members of the research team at the Language-Behavior Research Laboratory at Berkeley, which is known for its work in cognitive anthropology, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. Since 1966 he has been active in the Committee on Sociolinguistics of the Social Science Research Council. In collaboration with Susan Ervin-Tripp and Dan I. Slobin, Gumperz has played an important role in planning and organizing cross-cultural research on the acquisition of language, both by training a number of students to do such work and by participating in the preparation of A Field Manual for Cross-Cultural Study of the Acquisition of Communicative Competence (1967). A high point of this activity, supported by the Committee, was a summer training program held at Berkeley in 1968 in which a number of students and scholars from a variety of fields became involved in sociolinguistic

work. He is a member of the editorial board of the new international journal Language in Society and has been a life member of the Linguistic Research Group of Pakistan since 1968.

Gumperz first developed an interest in sociolinguistic problems while working on his doctoral dissertation, a study of the Swabian dialect of a group of third-generation farmers in Washtenaw County, Michigan. The discovery that the linguistic leveling processes observable among these people, whose German immigrant ancestors had come from at least two dialect groups, could be accounted for, in large part, by the linguistic and social groupings formed after settlement in the United States, became the basis for his subsequent research on the relationship of speech alternation to social groups.

At Cornell University Gumperz was invited to take over the **Hindi** language training program. Subsequently he served as a member of a Cornell University team of social scientists carrying out a community study project in a North Indian village. As the only linguist in a team of anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and other specialists, he was forced to come to grips with problems other than linguistic and also to approach linguistic problems from different perspectives. His two years in India provided a rigorous training in interdisciplinary social science research that has proved of great value in his subsequent work. Above all his experience convinced him of the essential part that empirical field work and cultural background knowledge play in the development of good theory.

After his return from India, Gumperz was invited to set up a **Hindi-Urdu** program at the University of California, Berkeley. While the work of preparing language materials kept him occupied for the first few years at Berkeley, as can be seen from his well-known series of language handbooks and readers, he found his professional interests increasingly centering around the description of sociolinguistic problems in the data on speech behavior he had brought with him from India. He published at this time the first of a series of insightful essays on the relationships of social differences to linguistic differences. In the summer of 1956 Gumperz and Charles A. Ferguson were together as visiting faculty members at the Deccan College,

where they began to share notes on problems of linguistic diversity and language development in general. They continued this exchange and organized a symposium on the subject at the 1958 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. The resulting volume, Linguistic Diversity in South Asia (1960), has since become a standard work in the field. Its introductory chapter, written jointly by Ferguson and Gumperz, is generally regarded as one of the first concise statements of sociolinguistic problems and remains unequalled in its clear grasp of the broad issues.

In 1963, with the help of Dell Hymes and Susan Ervin-Tripp, he organized symposiums at the spring meeting of the Kroeber Anthropological Society and the annual meeting in November of the American Anthropological Association. Among the participants in these symposiums were Edward T. Hall, Erving Goffman, Charles O Frake, and William Labov. The resulting volume, The Ethnography of Communication (1964), edited by Hymes and Gumperz, is another landmark in the field.

Gumperz spent part of 1963 at the Institute of Sociology at Oslo University. While in Norway, he collaborated with Jan-Petter Blom of the Institute of Social Anthropology at Bergen in studying a community where social differentiation is far less important than in India. His work there bore out his earlier findings on the importance of social relationships in determining speech behavior in social groups. He subsequently extended his field work to Central India, Austria, and Yugoslavia, collecting data that have further refined his understanding of bilingualism in relation to social boundaries and overall sociolinguistic structure. More recently, he has also worked with Mexican-American bilinguals for the Bilingualism and Ethnic Boundaries Project at the Institute of International Studies at Berkeley. A volume of readings reflecting some of these interests, Directions in Sociolinguistics, co-edited with Dell Hymes, is scheduled to appear in 1972.

Perhaps the most notable feature of Gumperz's work so far is the growth of his concept of language as interaction. He is interested less in language per se than in language as it is used by people belonging to different social groups through particular networks of

relationships, and above all with how these relationships are reflected in verbal behavior. Especially because of his experience with bilingual and language contact situations, he finds it difficult to maintain the separateness of language systems; he prefers to look at languages, dialects, or styles as subsystems within an overall "speech repertoire" of an individual or a social group. "Repertoire," as opposed to the more limited notion of "a language," is a basic concept in his work; he finds the concept of linguistic repertoire necessary, for example, in describing code-switching in the verbal behavior of a bilingual person or community. In proposing such new concepts, Gumperz is in no way taking issue with the study of language in the abstract; his view is simply that sociolinguistic work requires a different set of concepts and methods.

As I see it, Gumperz is moving toward a type of sociolinguistic description that will make possible the processing of linguistic and social information in terms of a more coordinated theoretical framework. In this effort his most valuable contribution to date, as William Labov has observed, is his ability to locate what Merton calls "strategic research sites." His series of articles on language in social groups has been of pioneering value in explaining some sociolinguistic phenomena; but more important, his observations have raised a number of critical questions regarding the nature and function of language, the relationship of linguistic analysis to the speech behavior of people, and the principles and methods of sociolinguistic research. It is with confidence in the stimulating value of his work that I have compiled this volume of his representative essays for the Language Science and National Development Series. It should prove of interest to all students of sociolinguistics, especially those in areas where social processes in multilingual contexts present a challenge to national development and progress.

Anwar S. Dil

Committee on Linguistics
Stanford University
October 1971