1983

Review of John J. Gumperz, Discourse Strategies
Barbara Johnstone

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/barbara_johnstone/103/
ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE STATE:  
A CRITICAL REVIEW AND AN ALTERNATE FORMULATION  
by Herbert S. Lewis and Sidney M. Greenfield ..............1

GERMAN KIN CLASSIFICATION  
by Thomas Helmig ........................................17

CULTURE CHANGE IN POST-FRANCO SPAIN:  
PRELIMINARY REPORT FROM AN ANDALUSIAN TOWN  
by David D. Gilmore ....................................31

CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION  
IN TRADITIONAL TIBET:  
"CASTE" AND CASTEISM IN A NON-HINDU SOCIETY  
by Ugen Gombo ........................................43

BOOK REVIEWS
Fruzzetti: The Gift of a Virgin (Messina) ....................73
Furer-Haimendorf: Asian Highland Societies (Hicks) ..........74
Maxwell: Contexts of Behavior (Clatts) ....................75
Allan: Playing with Form (Irvin) ..........................78
Karim: Ma’ Betisek Concepts of Living Things (Dunkhase) ..80
Hammond: Ancient Maya Civilization (Feinman) .............82
Chippindale: Stonehenge Complete (Gwynne) ................84
Gumperz: Discourse Strategies (Koch) ....................85

Copyright 1984 by Anthropology. All rights reserved. No part of this journal may be reprinted in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.
henge as a possible astronomical observatory than any number of other treatises (such as Owen Gingerich's innovative piece in *Technology Review* 80[5], unreferenced by Chippindale). And *literati* will be dismayed at the author's failure to mention, among the dozens of literary references, the memorable if grisly Stonehenge scene in Erica Jong's *Fanny* (1980). Nevertheless, the wealth of information—significant and otherwise—is impressive.

There are a few minor problems in format. For instance, one wants to read every footnote, some of which contain wonderfully obscure references, but they are inconveniently placed at the back of the book. There is no comprehensive bibliography; one must read through twelve pages of "Notes" to find references. Still, this is an attractive as well as readable book. It is profusely illustrated with artistic and photographic renditions of Stonehenge (most notably the works of some of the 19th-century landscape painters and some evocative modern photos, but also pages from illuminated manuscripts, drawings, engravings, and woodcuts—indicative of the unreliability of the human eye and memory). Advertisements featuring the monument ("Stonehenge, Wilt., but Shell goes on forever") are amusing.

**Stonehenge Complete** (too bad about the "pop" title; this is a more serious book than the name suggests) ably treats its subject in the contexts of myth, history, art, and science. If it has a unifying theme, it is that through the years interpretations of Stonehenge have been colored by the preconceptions of those who have attempted to interpret it. The book will not fail to satisfy any reader who, along with poet Siegfried Sassoon, views Stonehenge as a symbol of "the rootless past; Man's ruinous myth; his uninterred adoring of the unknown. . . ."


Barbara J. Koch
Indiana University/Purdue University at Fort Wayne

In the past fifteen years a new linguistic paradigm has been emerging. This paradigm, sociolinguistic, has its start in anthropological studies of bilingualism and multilingualism; what began in the realization that one language does not necessarily correspond to one culture—and vice versa—has developed into a concern with how and when people switch from one language, dialect, or variety to another, and what these switches mean. John J. Gumperz has been a key figure in the development of the sociolinguistic paradigm from its beginning. Readers who are interested in a state-of-the-art view of sociolinguistics by an important scholar in the field will find *Discourse Strategies* well worth reading, as will anyone with an interest in the minute and marvelous complexities of linguistic interaction.

Gumperz's studies of linguistic variation differ substantially from the quantitative macroanalyses of the socio-economic and situational correlates of variation done by scholars like William Labov (1966). Instead, Gumperz does microanalyses of individual communications and miscommunications, to show how every aspect of talk—every rise and fall of intonation, every phrase switched into another linguistic code, every pause—can serve to signal something. His approach, which he calls "interpretive sociolinguistics," is based on the belief that understanding is the result of interpretation, not automatic decoding. For Gumperz, a theory of discourse must include not only a description of the specific nature of the linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge that speakers and audiences must share, but also a description of "what it is about the nature of conversational inference that makes for cultural, subcultural, and situational specificity of interpretation" (p. 3).

In Chapter 2 (the introduction is Ch. 1) the author provides the background for his work in a very clear, succinct history of linguistics and sociolinguistics. He specifically contrasts traditional descriptive linguistics, where the etic data are sound and the question to be answered is "What acoustic contrasts are meaningful, and how does a speaker combine sounds to create referential meaning?", and interpretive sociolinguistics, where the etic data are the words and their literal meaning and the question (which is in fact the question that we most normally ask ourselves about what others say) is "What is this speaker trying to do by saying that in that way?".

Chs. 3 and 4 provide detailed analyses of the pragmatic functions of code-switching. Gumperz shows, for example, that Slovenian/German speakers in southwestern Austria may use German for new information in a sentence, Slovenian for old; or that, in an argument, "the facts" may be presented in German, with Slovenian used for personal appeal. In Ch. 4 he adds data from Chicano Spanish/English speakers and Indian Hindi/English speakers to the Slovenian/German material. All these cases involve an in-group language and an out-group language: speakers use the out-group language in in-group situations for reasons like the ones mentioned above: for qualifying messages, for quoting, for reiterating or personalizing. Here, as elsewhere, Gumperz resists the notion that speakers use simple processing rules to determine which interpretation code switching will have in a given situation: "To say that code switching conveys information . . . does not mean that a switch can be assigned a single meaning in any one case. What is signalled are guidelines to suggest lines of reasoning for retrieving other knowledge" (p. 96). Ch. 5 examines another feature of conversation that provides cues to a speaker's communicative intent: prosody (intonation and stress).

In the next two chapters, the author ties together code switching and prosody with several other aspects of linguistic messages that also have no direct relevance to referential, literal meaning. These features include the choices speakers make among various syntactic and lexical options for saying "the same thing", and speakers' use of relatively "meaningless" conversational strategies and "empty" formulaic expressions. All these features, says Gumperz, are con-
textualization cues, or "the means by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence relates to what precedes or follows" (p. 151).

Chs. 8 and 9 are devoted to inter-ethnic differences in contextualization conventions, which can lead to miscommunication. Gumperz points out that "individuals who speak English well and have no difficulty producing grammatical English sentences may nevertheless differ significantly in what they perceive as meaningful discourse cues" (p. 172). The example in Ch. 8 is that of an employment counsellin session in which a British female counselor and an Indian male job-seeker prove unable to converse coherently. Ch. 9 examines an unsuccessful public speech by a Black Panther leader during the late 1960s (the speaker was shouted down), and relates the breakdown to the speaker's use of a rhetorical strategy unfamiliar to his predominantly white audience: the strategy used by Afro-American preachers.

In his postscript (Ch. 10), Gumperz summarizes some of the theoretical issues raised by the studies he has discussed. It is here that the reader gets the clearest notion of just how different the author's theoretical perspective is from that of anyone looking for simple, one-way causal connections between language and social interaction. To use his words: "... the conversationalist's problem is not simply one of making sense of a given chunk of discourse. What is to be interpreted must first be created through interaction, before interpretation can begin..." (p. 206); thus, "... theories of interpretation cannot rest on distinctions between literal and nonliteral meanings or direct and indirect speech acts. Knowledge of the world and socio-cultural presuppositions must not be regarded as merely adding additional subtleties to or clarifying what we learn from the propositional content of utterances" (p. 207).

The practical ramifications of Gumperz's work are clear, particularly when it comes to what is involved in knowing a language, or understanding what speakers' use of their language or languages shows about them. Like any important methodological work, Discourse Strategies shows not only what we need to look at in order to understand linguistic interaction, but also how difficult and complex the task is. Gumperz is not a reductionist, and Discourse Strategies is not an easy book to read. It is, however, well worth any anthropologist's effort.

REFERENCE CITED