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SOCIOLINGUISTICS. [*This entry is concerned with the ways in which language is integrated with aspects of human society—e.g., social identity in terms of class and role, the social situation, social interaction, and social change. It comprises five articles:*

Interactional Sociolinguistics
Language Planning
Minorities and Sociolinguistics
Quantitative Sociolinguistics
Sociohistorical Linguistics

The term 'sociolinguistics' is often used to refer particularly to studies from the viewpoint of linguistics; for work from the viewpoint of sociology, see Sociology of Language. *For related topics, see* Address; Attitudes to Language; Obsolescent Languages; Power and Language; Register and Style; Social Dialect; Social Structure and Language; *and* Variation Analysis.]

Interactional Sociolinguistics

[TANNEN, DEBORAH]

With the rise of interest in discourse analysis, a growing number of linguists have turned to analyzing the language of face-to-face interaction. The form of interaction most commonly studied in this framework is ordinary conversation; but research has also focused on other speech genres, such as interviews, public lectures, and classroom discourse, and on specific strategies, such as asking questions and telling stories. Work in this area can be distinguished by its relative focus either on the linguistic phenomena or on the interaction. Some linguists use the tape-recorded language of real interaction as a source of data for linguistic analysis, the main goal of which is understanding the linguistic structures found in the transcript. Work in this branch of discourse analysis is an extension of grammatical analysis beyond the sentence level. Others use their knowledge of linguistic phenomena to account for the processes and outcomes of interaction. This branch of discourse analysis may be called I[nteractional] S[ociolinguistics]. In contrast to CONVERSATION ANALYSIS [*q.v.*]—a subdiscipline of ethnomethodological sociology whose primary concern is demonstrating the universal orderliness of everyday behavior—IS is associated with anthropology, and is frequently concerned with culturally identified interactional strategies.

The backbone of IS is the detailed transcription of audio- or video-taped interaction. Transcription systems vary, depending on conventions established in particular disciplines and the requirements of particular theoretical assumptions and methodological practices. [*See* Discourse, *article on* Transcription of Discourse.] However, most interactional sociolinguists attempt to represent intonational and prosodic contours in the transcription, since these are often crucial for analysis.

A theoretical framework underlying much of the research in IS is the schematization of politeness phenomena. Goffman 1967 observed that speakers serve two 'face' requirements: the POSITIVE FACE need to show involvement with others, and the NEGATIVE FACE need not to offend others. Lakoff 1979 sees linguistic choices as resulting from the application of underlying RULES OF RAPPORT. She has devised a schema to account for the way speakers choose not to say exactly what they mean, in order to serve the social requirements of interaction—i.e. face needs. Lakoff suggests that speakers choose among three pragmatic rules which result in three different communicative styles: Rule 1, 'Don't impose', results in a DISTANT style; Rule 2, 'Give options', results in a DEFERENT style; and Rule 3, 'Be friendly', gives rise to a style based on CAMARADERIE. Brown & Levinson 1987 have formalized and elaborated these schemas as UNIVERSALS OF POLITENESS phenomena.

Gumperz 1982 shows that speakers use CONTEXTUALIZATION cues—prosodic and paralinguistic features, familiar formulaic expressions and conversational routines, and identifiable conventions for organizing and sequencing information—to signal not only what they mean to say, but also what SPEECH ACTIVITY they are engaged in, i.e., what they think they are doing at each point in the interaction. Gumperz departs from immediately preceding linguistic theory by placing at the core of his theoretical framework features which had previously been dismissed as marginal to the linguistic system.

In giving prominence to the notion of speech activity, this approach to IS builds directly on Bateson's (1972) notion of FRAMING. Bateson points out that no message (the meaning of words or utterances) can be interpreted without reference to a metamessage about the frame. For example, any utterance can mean the opposite of what it says if the speaker is operating in a frame of play, irony, joking, or teasing. A formidable, multilayered framework for frame analysis is presented by Goffman 1974. Theories of framing have been a fruitful source of work in lexical semantics as well as IS; the latter sees the language produced in interaction as the means for accomplishing continual shifts in FOOTING among participants (Goffman 1981, Tannen & Wallat 1987).

Another key element in Gumperz's theoretical framework is CONVERSATIONAL INFERENCE: not only do participants glean meaning from words and phrases as they occur, but they also make active predictions about what will come next, based on the line of interpretation suggested by on-going talk as measured against prior interactive experience. In Gumperz's view, speakers do not follow conversational rules, but rather are guided by interpretive norms which are continually reinforced or revised in the light of on-going interpretation. The analyst's task, then, becomes one of interpreting specific instances of discourse, giving rise to the label HERMENEUTIC for this approach.

Much of the work of Gumperz (and those influenced by him) uses cross-cultural communication as a heuristic site. We can examine conversations in which the interaction of different signaling systems leads to misinterpretation of others' abilities and intentions; this affords insight into the processes of signaling and interpreting meaning which go unnoticed in successful interactions.

Gumperz has analyzed interaction between inner-city Black and middle-class White Americans, as well as British English-speaking and Indian English-speaking Londoners, by following these steps:

(a) Tape-recording and transcribing interaction among speakers of different cultural or subcultural backgrounds
(b) Interviewing participants separately to gain insight into their interpretations of the interaction, and to identify the linguistic phenomena which led to their interpretations
(c) Where possible, comparing instances of cross-cultural communication with recordings of similar speech events involving participants of a single cultural background
(d) Examining the tape and transcript to identify the linguistic strategies for signaling frames, and identifying speech activities which were differentially interpreted by the culturally different participants
(e) Explaining how the cultural differences in interpretive norms led to the differing interpretations, and consequently the breakdown in communication
(f) Checking the cultural basis of interpretive norms by playing segments of the interaction for other members of the cultural groups represented, to see if their reported interpretations follow patterns similar to those identified for participants

Tannen 1984 extends the paradigm of cross-cultural communication to account for conversation among Americans of different subcultural backgrounds. Individuals develop unique blends of signaling habits as they learn from peers in a particular speech community—influenced by, at least, regional, ethnic, class, age, and gender differences. These habits, which together make up an individual's conversational style, amount to slightly or grossly different systems used to signal meaning and to accomplish framing in interaction. When systems are relatively similar, participants share interpretive norms; so meaning is likely to be understood as intended. But when systems are relatively different, participants have different norms, and intentions are likely to be misjudged. A simple example with reference to the turn-taking system is the situation in which speakers have different expectations about the appropriate length of inter-turn pauses. The speaker who expects shorter pauses repeatedly but unintentionally 'cuts off' the one who expects longer pauses. The shorter-pausing speaker interprets the 'silence' of the other as evidence of having no intention to speak.

Analysis of the language of face-to-face interaction

has not been confined to linguistic and paralinguistic features, but has included kinesic and rhythmic phenomena (Kendon et al. 1975, Kempton 1980). Successful conversation is characterized by a finely tuned synchrony and microsynchrony, both within the behavior of a speaker and among participants. This shared RHYTHM amounts to a musical component of language which allows participants to show LISTENERSHIP, to move between speaking and listening, to emphasize points, to establish cohesion and coherence, and to predict where important information is likely to come, all in a smooth and seamless way. When rhythm is not shared, speakers cannot participate comfortably, or may not be able to participate at all; they may either miss information entirely, or misjudge its relative significance. Erickson & Shultz 1982 document this process in GATEKEEPING ENCOUNTERS—speech events in which only one of the participants has much at stake—between college counselors and students who have different subcultural backgrounds. [*See also* Nonverbal Communication.]

Influenced by the conversation analysts Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff, much study has addressed the turn-taking system. [*See* Conversation Analysis.] In contrast to that ethnomethodological approach, interactional sociolinguists claim that, whereas instances of observable phenomena can be assigned to a descriptive category such as 'overlap' without reference to interpretive norms, they can only be assigned to interactionally significant categories, such as 'interruption,' by understanding the perceived rights and obligations of the participants (Bennett 1981), and by reference to their conversational styles (Tannen 1984).

Research in IS often focuses on linguistic devices and strategies. Much attention has been paid to NARRATIVE [*q.v.*] and questions. Approaches to the analysis of such strategies are also influenced by the ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPEAKING [*q.v.*], which has supplied an invaluable source of cross-cultural evidence as an antidote to hasty claims for universality. For example, questions have been much studied as powerful interactional devices because they strongly favor a response. The analysis of questions as prime devices for implicature or indirect communication is supported by ethnographic accounts of cultures in which questions are routinely interpreted as hinting unstated meaning rather than directly requesting information (Goody 1978, Scollon & Scollon 1981).

Other devices and strategies that fall within the purview of IS include silence, hesitation phenomena, discourse markers [*see* Discourse, *article on* Discourse Markers], topic, power and solidarity, figures of speech [*see* Metaphor], FORMULAIC SPEECH [*q.v.*], repetition (Tannen 1989), and reported speech. Recent research has turned to an element rarely considered by linguists in the past: the conveying of emotion or affect.

A central concern of IS is the interactive nature of conversation. The model of language as produced by a speaker alone is questioned; rather, listening and speaking are seen as inextricably intertwined. Thus any utterance by any participant in a conversation is a joint production, influenced by speaker, listener, and audience (including the investigators or their equipment). For this reason, research has also focused on listenership behavior. Among the more frequently studied of such phenomena is BACKCHANNELING. This includes minimal responses such as *Mhm* and *Uhuh*, lax tokens such as *Yeah*, one-word responses such as *Right*, phrases such as *I see what you mean*, repetitions and sentence completions, and short ratifying utterances. Using a method similar to that of Gumperz, Erickson 1979 demonstrates that, when nonverbal listenership behavior is not shared, unexpected patterns of listenership create gross changes in speaker behavior. For example, a speaker who does not receive a steady GAZE, with nodding at key phrase boundaries, gets the impression that the listener is not attending, or not understanding; the speaker consequently recycles utterances in succeedingly more simplified form, with the result of seeming to 'talk down' to a fully comprehending listener.

One effect of the shift from the intuited data of syntactic studies to the language of real interaction is a corresponding shift in the conception of language. The syntactician's data typically consist of a SENTENCE; however, investigators who have examined transcripts of naturally occurring spoken discourse have observed that the minimal unit of spoken language is not the sentence, but the UTTERANCE or INTONATION UNIT. This is a phrase averaging six or seven words, always characterized by an identifiable intonational contour and often bounded by a pause, particle, or hesitation marker; it represents a single focus of consciousness (Chafe 1986). Some linguists find that analysis of conversational data suggests that the sentence is an idealization created by WRITTEN LANGUAGE [*q.v.*]. Moreover, examining the language of actual interaction has called into question the generative basis of grammar—suggesting that language is more a matter of arranging preformed phrases and utterances, rather than of arranging words (Bolinger 1976, Pawley 1986).

In sum, IS is a major field of research at the intersection of linguistics and anthropology. Because it frequently identifies discourse strategies as associated with culturally identifiable speakers, and examines the effects on interaction of the differing strategies of culturally different speakers, IS is a branch of linguistics that promises to help solve real-world problems involving communication. In addition, it contributes to theoretical issues in linguistics by shedding light on the nature of meaning in language, and on the nature of language in interaction.

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