

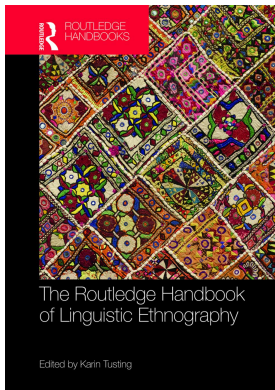
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Interactional sociolinguistics

Ben Rampton

Introduction

Interactional sociolinguistics (IS)¹ developed as the expression of John Gumperz's approach to research, and it usually focusses on face-to-face interactions in which there are significant differences in the participants' sociolinguistic resources and/or institutional power. IS has a broad methodological base, with deep roots in ethnography, dialectology, pragmatics, Goffmanian and conversation analysis, and it generally seeks as rich a data set on naturally occurring interaction as it can get. Data-collection involves the audio and/or video recording of situated interaction from particular events, people and groups, supplemented by as much participant observation and retrospective commentary from local participants as possible, and analysis moves across a wide range of levels of organisation, from the phonetic to the institutional. Overall, IS constitutes a comprehensive framework for engaging with the empirical specifics required for any social science aligning with practice theory (Ortner, 2006), and more particularly, it is a central pillar within linguistic ethnography, encouraging researchers to "roll up [their] linguistic sleeves and drill down to the detail of social problems" (Auer & Roberts, 2011, p. 381), making optimum use of the sensitising frameworks available in the (sub-)disciplines focussing on language.

With Dell Hymes, Gumperz was also a foundational figure in contemporary sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (LA) more generally, but while "Hymes outlined the broad goals of sociolinguistics research, Gumperz concentrated on concrete evidence of sociolinguistic methodology in action" (Sarangi, 2011, p. 377). Where Hymes produced new maps for the relationship between linguistics and anthropology in programmatic manifestos that stressed practical and political relevance to contemporary social life, Gumperz developed and tested the analytic resources emerging across this newly reconstituted field, providing a "dynamic view of social environments where history, economic forces and interactive processes ... combine to create or to eliminate social distinctions" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 29). And while Hymes's vision of ethnography as a 'democratic science' has provided linguistic ethnography in the UK and Europe with an especially powerful warrant for engagement

1 I am very grateful to Celia Roberts (who introduced me to interactional sociolinguistics) and to Jan Blommaert for some very helpful feedback on the arguments here. A longer discussion can be found at Rampton (2017).

beyond the academy (Blommaert, 2009a; Rampton et al., 2015, pp. 37–44; Snell et al., 2015), Gumperz theorised and deployed a synthesis of (potentially divergent) perspectives that stands as a touchstone for “anti-structuralist rigour” (Auer & Roberts, 2011, p. 382; see below).

This chapter first sketches the origins of IS in Gumperz and Hymes’s early efforts to develop a general theory of language and society. Characterising the key features of Gumperzian IS, it emphasises the notions of ‘inference’ and ‘contextualisation’ as well as the (counter-hegemonic) centrality of intensive analyses of recorded interaction. It then turns to IS’s close relationship with LA and conversation analysis (see also Heinrichsmeier, this volume), considering the challenges presented by IS’s insistent interdisciplinarity and its relative lack of formalisation, following this with a brief discussion of how IS seeks to intervene in non-academic activity. Concurring with Auer and Roberts’s (2011) view that Gumperz was the first to develop a sociolinguistics capable of handling globalised superdiversity (see Blackledge and Creese, this volume; Grey and Piller, this volume), the paper then describes the ways in which his work on code-switching and intercultural communication has been updated in, respectively, studies of stylisation and asylum procedures. Finally, it suggests that in future work, IS should examine the interface between face-to-face and digital interaction together with the implications of new forms of surveillance, capitalising on the anti-structuralist rigour that IS can bring to the study of Foucauldian ‘governmentality’.

Historical background

Building on links formed in the 1960s, Gumperz and Hymes’s seminal 1972 collection, *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, articulated several concerns central to IS (as well as containing an exemplary early IS study in Blom & Gumperz, 1972). First, there was the search for a theory capable of treating language as integral to social and cultural processes as well as the need to develop methods and technical concepts suited to describing this. Hymes referred to “a basic science that does not yet exist” (1972, p. 38), and Gumperz and Hymes suggested that “[r]ecent publications ... have, so far, not been integrated into any general theory of language and society” (1972, pp. vi–vii). Second, this was infused by a commitment to making language analysis count in a period of major political upheaval – decolonisation, civil rights and the quest for fairness in education (Hymes, 1972, pp. 10, 13, 38, 53). Third, to build adequate models of the interaction of language and social life, “there must be ... an approach [to description] that partly links, but partly cuts across, partly builds between ... the disciplines” (Hymes, 1972, p. 41). Indeed, the collection brought contributors together from very different backgrounds in linguistics, anthropology, sociology and psychology, and Hymes subsequently reflected, “[a]n important attraction in the early years of sociolinguistics was that a number of individuals, interested in [language] use, were marginal to their official affiliations” (1997, p. 125).

But this changed as the study of language and society expanded in the period that followed, and several of the perspectives represented in the 1972 volume consolidated themselves as separate sub-disciplines – for example, conversation analysis (Sacks and Schegloff), variationist sociolinguistics (Labov) and the sociology of language (Fishman) (cf. Bucholtz & Hall, 2008; Duranti, 2009). As editor of *Language in Society* from its inception in 1972 until 1994, Hymes certainly stayed in touch with this diversification, promoting cross-fertilisation, and in 1982, Gumperz established a book series, *Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics* (subsequently co-edited with Paul Drew, Marjorie Goodwin and Deborah Schiffrin) for research on the social dynamics of talk in everyday and institutional settings (clinics, schools, workplaces,

courtrooms, news interviews, focus groups). But if one looks across the range of scholars and approaches represented in Gumperz' series – for example Tannen, De Fina, Culpeper, Myers, Couper-Kuhlen, Selting, Heritage, Stivers, Sidnell, Jacquemet; discourse analysis, pragmatics, interactional linguistics, conversation analysis and LA – IS seems like a relatively loose grouping of mutually intelligible perspectives, rather than a tight alignment. Gumperz himself, however, persisted in the quest for “a general theory of verbal communication which integrates what we know about grammar, culture and interactive conventions into a single overall framework of concepts and analytic procedures” (1982, p. 7).

Approach to analysis

The “general theory of verbal communication” associated with IS builds on Gumperz and Hymes's crucial early insight, which was “to take the speech event as the unit of analysis rather than community-wide linguistic and cultural norms, to see that culture did not stand outside talk but was constituted in and through situated speaking practices” (Auer & Roberts, 2011, p. 385; see also Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2008, p. 536). The theory brings together several major sets of resources: *linguistics and discourse analysis*, which provide an initial idea of the potential meaning of the linguistic resources that participants draw on in situated communication; *Goffmanian* and *conversation analysis*, which illuminate the ways in which intersubjective understanding develops as interlocutors follow each other building up their conversation (Heritage, 1997), the moral sensitivities permeating the use of semiotic forms and strategies, and the ways in which people distribute their attention when they are physically present together; and *ethnography*, which provides a sense of the stability, status and resonance that linguistic forms, rhetorical strategies and semiotic materials have in different social networks beyond the encounter-on-hand; an idea of how and where an encounter fits into longer and broader biographies, institutions and histories; and a sense of the cultural and personal perspectives/experiences that participants bring to interactions, and take from them. Finally, with these elements in place – very loosely, “grammar, culture and interactive conventions” – Gumperz adds the vital notions of conversational ‘*inferencing*’ and ‘*contextualisation*’ (see e.g. 1996, pp. 378–381).

‘Inferencing’ refers to the interpretive work that people perform in trying to reconcile the material that they encounter in any given situation with their prior understanding. It refers to the normally effortless sense-making that occurs when people work out the significance of a word, an utterance, an action or an object by matching it against their past experience, against their expectations of what's coming up, their perceptions of the material setting and so forth. The term ‘contextualisation cue’ is complementary, though it shifts the focus from receptive sense-making to speech production. When someone formulates an utterance, it is more than just the semantic proposition that they construct. They also produce a whole host of small vocal signs that evoke, for example, a certain level of formality (shifting to a more prestigious accent, selecting the word ‘request’ rather than ‘ask’), or that point to the presence of bystanders (talking quietly), and this non-stop process of contextualisation may either reassure their listener that they are operating with a broadly shared understanding of the situation, or it can nudge the recipient's inferences in another direction. A lot of this processing is relatively tacit, with participants constantly engaged in low-key monitoring of how all the details of verbal communication fit with their grasp of the propositions being expressed, with their sense of the speaker's intent, with their understanding of the activity they are in and how it should proceed, etc. But it only takes a slight deviation from the habitual, a small move beyond expected patterns of variation in the way that somebody speaks or acts,

to send recipients into inferential over-drive, wondering what's going on when a sound, a word, a grammatical pattern, a discourse move or bodily gesture doesn't quite match: should I ignore or respond to this? Is it a joke or serious? What ties these apparently unconnected ideas together? Is the speaker still wearing their institutional hat or are they suddenly claiming solidarity with a particular group?

This theorisation has major implications for our understanding of 'context'. As noted above, word denotation, the formal structures of grammar and the propositional meaning of sentences still count, but they lose their traditional supremacy in linguistic study, and instead become just one among a large array of semiotic resources available for the local production and interpretation of meaning. Language is regarded as pervasively indexical, continuously pointing to persons, practices, settings, objects and ideas that never get explicitly expressed, and in what Erickson calls a "Copernican shift in perspective within sociolinguistics" (2011, p. 399), context stops being the relatively static, external and determining reference point traditionally added to language analysis as something of an afterthought – what Drew and Heritage call the 'bucket' theory of context (1992, p. 19) – and is instead seen as dynamic, interactively accomplished and intrinsic to communication.

So context is an understanding of the social world activated in the midst of things, an understanding of the social world that is interactionally ratified or undermined from one moment to the next as the participants in an encounter respond to one another. At the same time, however, when people engage with one another, there is considerable scope for social difference in the norms and expectations that individuals orient to, as well as in the kinds of thing they notice as discrepant, and there can also be a great range in the inferences that they bring to bear ('good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', 'art' or 'error', 'call it out' or 'let it pass', 'typical of this or that'). The normative expectations and explanatory accounts activated like this in the interactional present seldom come from nowhere. Instead, they instantiate discourses that the participants have picked up through prior involvement in socio-communicative networks that can range in scale from intimate relationships and friendship groups to national education systems and global media – "what we perceive and retain in our mind is a function of our culturally determined predisposition to perceive and assimilate" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 12). In this way, the notions of inferencing and contextualisation offer us a way of seeing how long-term experience and more widely circulating ideologies infuse the quick of activity in the here-and-now, introducing the force of social expectation/'structure' without overlooking the participants' skilled agency (cf. Blommaert & Rampton, 2011, p. 11).

From very early on, Gumperz contested the view that language merely reflected more basic social forces. He insisted that, "the relationship of ... social factors to speech form is quite different from what the sociologist means by correlation among variables" (Gumperz & Hernández-Chavez, 1972, p. 98), and he proposed "an important break with previous approaches to social structure and to language and society. Behavioural regularities are no longer regarded as reflections of independently measurable social norms; on the contrary, these norms are themselves seen as communicative behaviour" (Blom & Gumperz, 1972, p. 432). In this way, his theory of communication aligns with constructionist theories of social practice, connecting, for example, with Giddens's conception of practice as the "production and reproduction of society ... as a skilled [but by no means wholly conscious] performance on the part of its members" (Giddens, 1976, p. 160). Practice theories have become influential right across social science (Ortner, 2006), and Gumperz's theorisation positions sociolinguistics as an exceptional interdisciplinary resource for engaging "with the facts of modern life" and "yield[ing distinctive] insights into the workings of social process" (Gumperz, 1982, pp. 4, 7).

Once positioned like this in a larger interdisciplinary field of social science, however, IS faces a question raised by John Twitchin in a 1979 interview with Gumperz that is likely to resonate with researchers who take a macro-scope approach to social processes and/or lack the time to learn linguistics. Twitchin commented:

Now all these points you've made about the details of the way language is used are very interesting, but ... isn't this matter of language really unimportant, compared with the fundamental problems of racial discrimination and the social and economic disadvantages of black and other ethnic minorities in Britain?

(1979/1990, p. 51)

Gumperz responded: "There's no denying that politics and economic conditions are extremely important in race relations, and that ultimately redressing the balance of discrimination is a matter of power. But communication *is* power." And to persuade non-linguists of this, "there is no need for real technical analysis ... we need to use a tape recorder [for] a sort of action replay" (ibid: p. 52). The BBC's intercultural communication training video *Crosstalk* illustrates this, and it was designed to help public service and other workers "to learn and practise awareness immediately" (Gumperz et al., 1979). But much more generally, the slow and intensive analysis of selected strips of audio or video recordings of situated interaction, following its moment-by-moment unfolding, is central to IS, both as a resource for communication with non-academics and researchers from other disciplines (see below), and as a fundamental discovery procedure (Erickson, 2011, p. 397).

In Gumperzian IS, issues of relatively wide-spread concern to social scientists, politicians and/or the public – for example, race discrimination, class stratification and gender relations – are a vital point of departure (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2008, pp. 537–538), but they are addressed by micro-analysing recorded interactions in ways that avoid the over-generalisation and essentialism to which other research methods (interviews, surveys) are often vulnerable. Dwelling on recordings and transcripts of people interacting in particular activities – being interviewed for a job, sitting in class, having a meal, hanging around with friends and so forth – you soon realise that local, institutional, activity- and discourse-specific identities may be a lot more compelling for the participants than, for example, their Anglo, Pakistani or African Caribbean family backgrounds. And when ethnicity does become an issue, this happens in all sorts of different ways – deconstructive, respectful, racist, some quite spectacular and others hardly noticed. This procedure also offers a validity check on notions like 'contradiction' or 'ambivalence', which in more macro-studies sometimes seem more like analyst attributions than participant experiences. Within any single episode, there is usually a lot of information on the specifics of the situation, and so if you are interested in political analysis, you can look at a particular act as a micro-political intervention in particular social relations there-and-then. And working with dozens of examples, it becomes obvious that there are a great many different things going on with, say, a set of acts that one might broadly call 'resistance' (Rampton, 1995/2018, Part II).

Challenges

But if Gumperz's approach resonates so well with current perspectives in social science, why isn't the term 'interactional sociolinguistics' much more widely used in ongoing work on language, culture and society? Is it now just merely an 'antecedent', with very little contemporary 'bite'? In fact, in the US, one half of the phrase – the term 'sociolinguistics' – is

now generally associated with the quantitative variationist tradition, which still holds to the correlational perspective that Gumperz explicitly repudiated (Bucholtz & Hall, 2008, p. 402; Duranti, 2009, p. 2). To win space for the continuing vitality of a broad perspective of the kind that Gumperz sought, Bucholtz and Hall speak of ‘sociocultural linguistics’ (e.g. 2008), and in a similar vein, British and European scholars are now more likely to refer to ‘linguistic ethnography’.

A clue to the answer lies in the broad range of approaches covered in the *Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics* series noted above, which effectively position IS as an ‘umbrella’, now almost more an ‘ontology’, more a foundational account of the qualities and processes underlying communication, than a ‘substantive theory’ with claims that are designed as open to empirical refutation. Gumperz certainly was an empirical researcher, also seriously committed to improving methods for analysing interaction. But he combined empirical work with a deep and sympathetic engagement with the schools and literatures that went their separate ways after 1972, developing substantive theories about different aspects of communication. Out of this, he developed a deeper theoretical synthesis capable of accommodating many of the advances made in different (sub-) disciplinary traditions, while also suggesting how they could be brought back together.

Although it is now seldom cited as a distinctive approach there, Gumperzian IS fits most easily into contemporary LA, itself quite a broad church (Gumperz, 1996; Duranti, 2009). The effort to develop a “closer understanding of how linguistic signs interact with social knowledge in discourse” (Gumperz, 1982, p. 29) predates Silverstein’s influential (ontological) formulation of the ‘total linguistic fact’, arguing that “the datum for a science of language, is irreducibly dialectic in nature.... an unstable mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms, contextualised to situations of interested human use and mediated by the fact of cultural ideology” (1985, p. 220). Comparably, the early distinction between ‘metaphorical’ and ‘situational’ code-switching (Blom & Gumperz, 1972) speaks to what Silverstein subsequently differentiated as ‘presupposing’ and ‘creative’ indexical signs (Silverstein, 1976; Rampton, 1998, pp. 302ff; Collins, 2011, p. 412). At the same time, however, even though he undoubtedly appreciated it, Gumperz did not himself participate in, for example, the elaborate theorisation of semiotic systems that has flourished in LA (Agha, 2007). Where others have explored in detail the subtle differences between indexes, icons, interpretants and so forth, Gumperz’s theorisation of ‘contextualisation’ and ‘inferencing’ is less differentiating. The account is well tuned to the dynamic parameters within which sense-making occurs, but it holds back from the simplifying abstraction that the modelling of systems necessarily entails, and instead, it leaves semiotic processes closely embedded in the contingencies of situated here-and-now interaction between socially located individuals, where both the effectivity and the ambivalence of signs emerge.

This lack of formalisation also distinguishes Gumperzian IS from conversation analysis (see Heinrichsmeier, this volume). CA and IS share a commitment to the slow and intensive analysis of recordings of natural interaction, but whereas IS examines the dialectic between linguistic signs and social knowledge in discourse, “the goal in CA is to identify structures that underlie social interaction” (Stivers & Sidnell, 2013, p. 2). CA researchers are certainly very well aware of the uniqueness of each episode they analyse, but they respond to this by zooming in on the designs, actions and sequences that give it predictable structure. Of course, there is much more to the interpretive process in conversation than CA can reach through this prioritisation of structure (Blommaert, 2001; Auer & Roberts, 2011, p. 385), and it differs from IS in other ways as well: CA has often taken cooperative conversational involvement for granted, focussing on sociolinguistically homogenous settings (Gumperz, 1982, p. 4), and

it attaches little significance to the metalinguistic commentary on interaction provided by participants. Nevertheless, CA research is very well represented in *Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics*, and it has generated a set of rigorous procedures and descriptions that no one investigating interaction can really dispense with (cf. Duranti, 1997, ch.8) (even though they might want to say that they were ‘using’ rather than ‘doing’ CA). Ethnography plays a substantial part in workplace CA (Mondada, 2013, p. 37), and at the interface of CA and LA, Clemente (2013, pp. 696–698) identifies studies which actually look very similar to Gumperz’s “dynamic view of social environments where history, economic forces and interactive processes ... combine to create or to eliminate social distinctions” (1982, p. 29) – M.H. Goodwin’s *The Hidden Life of Girls: Games of Stance, Status and Exclusion*, and Moerman’s ‘contexted conversation analysis’, “directed toward discovering which of the many culturally available distinctions are active and relevant to the situation, how these distinctions are brought to bear, and what they consist of” (Moerman, 1988, p. 70). The chief difference, it appears, lies in these studies’ adherence to transcript analysis “using CA’s analytic apparatus in *stricto sensu*, even while”, adds Clemente, this is combined “with other methodologies and theoretical concepts” (201, p. 696).

Part of the viability of Gumperz’s ‘general theory of communication’ no doubt derives from his position as founding figure, sowing the seeds and/or supporting the growth of subsequent developments. But it is sometimes harder for less senior scholars to promote integrative approaches like IS, and Bucholtz and Hall, for example, report being “confronted [with] a wide range of responses to our efforts to bring together perspectives from multiple areas of inquiry, from ‘That’s not linguistics (or anthropology or...)’ to ‘Linguistics (or anthropology or...) has already done that!’” (2008, p. 405). This raises two questions.

First, with reactions like these, why persevere? The answer is unsurprising: to engage with pressing real-world issues, recognising that “problems lead where they will and that relevance commonly leads across disciplinary boundaries” (Hymes, 1969, p. 44; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2008, pp. 533, 537–538). So Bucholtz and Hall say that their approach “coheres less around a set of theories, methods, or topics than a concern with a general question: how does the empirical study of language illuminate social and cultural processes?” They also note a third response to their work – “This is exactly what linguistics (or anthropology or...) needs!” (2008, p. 405; Duranti, 2003, pp. 332–333). In linguistic ethnography, concepts and methods developed in fields like LA are viewed as valuable “both for other disciplines such as sociology, psychology or management studies, and for engagement with professionals such as teachers, doctors and social workers” (Rampton et al., 2015, p. 32). Indeed, Coupland and Jaworski’s ‘new sociolinguistics’ is comparably interdisciplinary in orientation (2011). Across all these endeavours, the frameworks and substantive theories developed in fields like CA and LA play an absolutely vital role, but as in ethnography more generally, they provide an array of sensitising rather than definitive constructs, “suggest[ing] directions along which to look” rather than “prescriptions of what to see” (Blumer, 1969, p. 148).

Second, how do you actually teach the kind of synthesis that IS involves? Traditions like CA and variationist sociolinguistics have clearly defined theories and procedures which can come together in quite coherent learning programmes, but in IS, it can take quite a lot of experience to appreciate the span of sub-disciplinary perspectives potentially available/relevant, and to figure out how micro-analysis can speak to issues of wider concern in the social settings in focus. So to embark on the IS mission – to try to ensure that academic and political generalisations about social life are accountable to the kinds of small-scale everyday activity which we can observe, record and transcribe – apprentices either only begin once they have received a fairly thorough all-round training in linguistics (phonetics, pragmatics,

functional grammar, CA, etc.). Or they start with substantial experience of a particular domain – working as professionals in health, education, etc., or researching them in another discipline – and they gradually pick up the IS ingredients piecemeal, drawn by their relevance to particular aspects of the larger problem they are addressing. But either way, data sessions once again play a central role, immersing students in a recording and its accompanying transcript: running with their interests and interpretations while at the same time pointing to the insights afforded by the new perspectives; pushing them to make their claims accountable to evidence, with an eye on the perils of under- and over-interpretation. The format partly resembles the traditional CA data session – there are the insistent questions like ‘why this now?’, ‘what next?’ etc. (ten Have, 1999). But instead of prioritising a drilling down into the sequential machinery of interaction, these sessions also work outwards to larger-scale institutional and societal processes, reflecting, for example, on the data’s implications for the next steps in ethnographic fieldwork (see also Scollon & Scollon, 2007, pp. 615, 619; Rampton et al., 2015, Part 3).

As well as playing a key role in IS training, data sessions with research informants – eliciting retrospective commentary on excerpts of recorded data in which the informants participated – can be a vital part of data-collection in actual research projects (Erickson & Shultz, 1982, pp. 56–63; Rampton, 1995/2018, pp. 333–334). They allow the researcher to find out more about, for example, the background and typicality of particular episodes, to tap into local language ideologies, and to address informants’ concerns and gain trust. Post-project, they can be a valuable resource for feedback, providing opportunities to examine and debate policies and practices with research informants and their colleagues. And for IS research, they are also central to more extensive practical interventions outside the academy.

Practical interventions beyond the academy

So far, I have characterised Gumperzian IS as a critical programme founded in a deep regard for the consequential subtleties of interaction. In line with this, its practical intervention strategy seeks relatively low-key, partial and specific transformations, compatible in fact with the approach outlined by Foucault: “analyzing and reflecting on limits” in order to open “the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think”, “practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over”, “grasp[ing] the points where change is possible and desirable” (Foucault, 1984/2003, p. 23; 2003, pp. 53–54). So when Gumperz and colleagues tackled race discrimination in institutional encounters using the “tape recorder” and “action replay[s]” in their 1979 *Crosstalk* programme, they sought to facilitate a rethinking that engaged with the complex lived relationship between situated actions and their longer-term influences and effects. Watching fairly familiar institutional interactions encourages professionals to bring their own first-hand experience into the frame, along with their sensitivity, interest or affection for clients as individuals, while at the same time, micro-analysis shows that actions are *jointly* produced among participants and that what people say and do is minutely synchronised with the feedback they are receiving from interlocutors differentially tuned to the institutional requirements. Once the co-constructedness of activity is made visible, it is much harder just to blame individuals, and discussion can turn to the constraints and affordances of the systems in play.

As Roberts underlines, there can be challenges and tensions around what counts as analysable and whether and how that matters, and these sessions are also places where relationships can be renegotiated, with institutional and professional knowledge trumping the researcher’s interpretations (Rampton et al., 2015, pp. 40–44). What may seem to be a healthy and realistic interpretive plurality in IS may look like ‘dormouse valour’ to professionals (*ibid.*), so

that in the end, if there is a consensus and not a stand-off on new ways of looking at institutional and professional problems, this can require compromise from both professionals and researchers. Still, Rose notes that

[t]he notion of resistance, at least as it has conventionally functioned with the analyses of self-proclaimed radicals, is too simple and flattening ... [Instead,] one [s]hould examine the [much smaller] ways in which creativity arises out of the situation of human beings engaged in particular relations of force and meaning, and what is made out of the possibilities of that location.

(1999, p. 279)

This is certainly consistent with the IS approach to intervention (see also Harris & Lefstein, 2011; Lefstein & Snell, 2014, ch.12).

Current contributions and research areas

Much of my account so far has looked back to Gumperz's work in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. But what about more recent IS research? This question is rather hard to answer in view of the general lack of boundary policing around IS, its interdisciplinary openness and its relationships with adjacent fields – foundational but low profile in LA, engaged but not identified with CA. A summary of the work published in *Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics* could lead in different directions, and indeed, although IS is usually qualitative, it can also be combined with variationist sociolinguistics and other forms of quantification (Erickson & Shultz, 1982; Cutler, 1999; Rampton, 2006, ch.7; 2013; Bucholtz, 2011). But for the sake of convenience, we can take two topics that were central in Gumperz's own work – code-switching and intercultural communication in institutional settings – and briefly consider the ways in which these topics have been treated more recently, expanding into a sociolinguistics of globalisation (Jacquemet, 2005; Blommaert, 2010).

Gumperz's research on code-switching focussed on people alternating between languages that were well-established in their own repertoires (Blom & Gumperz, 1972; Gumperz & Hernández-Chavez, 1972; Gumperz, 1982). But since the 1990s, there has been a good deal of work on language crossing and stylisation – the former refers to the (potentially) transgressive use of other ethnic varieties in settings where ethnic boundaries are quite sharply drawn, while the latter also involves the use of styles beyond one's normal repertoire but raises fewer questions of legitimacy for the participants (Hewitt, 1986; Rampton, 1995; Bucholtz, 1999; Cutler, 1999; Jaspers, 2005; Rampton & Charalambous, 2010; and see Jaspers and Van Hoof, this volume). This research shows people using different speech styles to denaturalise social category membership, variously challenging, shifting or reaffirming ascribed and established social identities, and the focus has extended beyond ethnicity to gender, social class, generation and their intersections (Hall, 1995; Jaspers, 2005; Rampton, 2006; Madsen, 2015). As an "observer of recent history", Gumperz suggested in 1982 that "individuals are freer to alter their social personae with the circumstances", and he explicitly questioned "the assumption that speech communities, defined as functionally integrated social systems with shared norms of evaluation, can [still] actually be isolated" (p. 26). He also replaced speech community with social network as a framework for understanding the distribution of linguistic practices (Ch.3). So IS has been conceptually very well-positioned to engage with the shift from a multiculturalism of communities framed within the nation-state to the globalised superdiversity experienced in many countries (Arnaut et al., 2016). Not that this shift now occupies

the whole of the IS agenda: there is also recent work investigating the complex and difficult moves involved in extending one's repertoire to the language of a former enemy in situations where there is a legacy of violent conflict, in spite of educational programmes encouraging this (Charalambous, 2012). Indeed, legacies of conflict also feature in more recent work on cross-ethnic bureaucratic encounters.

Gumperz's own work on intercultural communication focussed on interaction between bureaucratic 'gatekeepers' – managers, personnel officers, social workers, etc. – and people who had migrated for reasons of employment. But responding to massively increased population displacement since the 1990s in what Jacquemet calls 'Crosstalk 2.0', there is now a substantial body of work examining the encounter between state officials and asylum seekers and refugees (Blommaert, 2001, 2009b; Maryns, 2006). In this work, there is a more extensive focus on the discursive technologies through which gatekeeping operates (Jacquemet, 2011, p. 478). Gumperz and colleagues examined the affordances and constraints of the interview as an institutional genre (Gumperz et al., 1979; Roberts, 2016), but research on asylum procedures has brought writing and the trajectory of documents much more fully into the account, examining the shaping influence of bureaucratic protocols and the ways in which talk gets entextualised and reports get transmitted and recontextualised through the application assessment system (Blommaert, 2001, 2009b; Maryns, 2006). The multilingualism and the language ideologies in these encounters are also more elaborate. Where Gumperz examined unmediated interaction between minority and majority speakers in the dominant language (English), asylum interviews often involve interpreters and/or a lingua franca (Maryns, 2006; Jacquemet, 2011). And where Gumperz targeted common-sense belief in the communicative effectiveness of lexico-grammatical propositions, officials using language analysis for the determination of origin (LADO) refer to out-dated and/or irrelevant sociolinguistic survey data to determine the veracity of the narratives with which asylum applicants present their case (Maryns, 2006; Blommaert, 2009b; Spotti, 2016).

There are, of course, many other arenas where IS illuminates the sociolinguistics of contemporary globalisation, with micro-analysis and/or ethnography now often enriched by documentary text analysis as in Pérez-Milans's 2013 account of English language education in China. But the account here is sufficient to give credibility to Auer and Roberts's claim that

Gumperz was the first to develop a kind of 'social linguistics' which is able to deal with the challenges of language in late modernity, in an age of 'globalisation' whose 'superdiversity' ... has been on the agenda for him for many decades.

(2011, p. 390)

IS claims to interdisciplinary relevance have also been strengthened over the last 10–20 years by a more explicit interest in connecting the intensive analysis of specific interactional episodes to the work of major theorists in the humanities and social sciences like Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Foucault and Williams (Rampton, 1995, 2006, pp. 403–407, 2016; Coupland et al., 2001; Blommaert, 2005; Jacquemet, 2005, 2011; Pérez-Milans, 2013; Borba, 2015). In fact, as the next section suggests, the work of scholars like these and those they have influenced is likely to remain a vital interdisciplinary reference point for future work.

Future directions

As social issues have played a central role in the development of IS, a discussion of future directions needs to reckon with contemporary social change, and it is clear that new challenges

are opening up, even if we stay relatively close to the topics of code-switching and institutional communication.

In the ‘attention economy’, “the interest of consumers needs to be caught as eyeballs migrate from television to tablet to mobile phone to laptop” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 122). New forms of on-line digital sociality are developing, where “[a]lgorithms, protocols, and defaults profoundly shape the cultural experience of people active on social media platforms ... Online sociality has increasingly become a coproduction of humans and machines.... [and] a platform [like Facebook, YouTube or Wikipedia] ... shapes the performance of social acts instead of merely facilitating them” (van Dijck, 2013, and see Varis and Hou, this volume). With these developments, there are also new forms of social control. According to Deleuze, boundaries and enclosures of all kinds – hospitals, factories, schools and families – are giving way to the flows of people, objects and information associated with neo-liberal marketisation, and “ultrapid forms of free-floating control [are replacing] the old disciplines operating in the time frame of a closed system” (1992, p. 4). These new forms involve digital surveillance, which now plays a major role in the processes which constitute the population as consumers and seduce them into the market economy, “constructing and monitoring consumption” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 615; Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 16, pp. 121ff.). At the same time, some see a ‘dual society’ developing, where “a hypercompetitive, fully networked zone coexists with a marginal sector of excluded low-achievers” (Fraser, 2003, p. 169). For asylum seekers, immigrants and ethnic minorities, there is a proliferating transnational ‘archipelago’ of security experts – police, intelligence, military, immigration control, private companies, specialist lawyers and academics – whose job is to watch out for exceptional risks and potential enemies among these groups, attending to them in ways that are often licenced to exceed the usual democratic accountabilities (Bigo, 2002).

These are not all-or-nothing developments and require a lot more sociological discussion. But there is a strong communicative and interactional dimension to these shifts, and to capture this, many scholars refer to Foucault’s notion of governmentality, which involves

small-scale techniques of coordination [widely diffused throughout society] [which] organise relations on the ‘capillary’ level ... organising individuals, arraying bodies in space and time, coordinating their forces, transmitting power among them ... ground-level social relations [ordered] according to expertly designed logics of control.

(Fraser, 2003, p. 162; Foucault, 1978/2003, pp. 229–245)

Gumperzian analysis can make a powerful empirical contribution to this, and it is worth briefly sketching the kinds of area that IS could engage with, even though IS will undoubtedly need further development to do so (cf. Rampton, 2016).

Gumperz’s work on code-switching managed to put real-time attentional tracking, cognitive inferencing, shifts in interactional footing and cultural repositioning all together in a single analysis, and this provides a good base for addressing the socio-communicative practices (and sensibilities) developing in the everyday use of digital technologies. Of course, the code-switching framework needs to be expanded beyond just registers and languages to different media, but Ron Scollon, for example, offers tools for analysing multi-tasking, where “keep[ing] open several competing sites of [media] engagement” simultaneously is “the normal attention pattern” (1998, p. 256). At the same time, although the analysis of real-time processing in the here-and-now is vital in Gumperzian analysis, it is never enough. Beyond the understandings articulated by co-present individuals, there are historically shaped and potentially discrepant communicative sensibilities operating unnoticed in the background.

Gumperz looked at this in the interaction between majority and minority ethnic groups, but as van Dijk indicated with a call to “make the hidden layer visible” (ibid: 29), there are often very influential ‘communicative styles’ in on-line Web 2.0 environments, which, far from disadvantaging their carriers, are logics of control expertly designed to generate profit. Gumperz’s concern about the superficiality with which institutions construe and assess individuals also gains extra edge when Haggerty and Ericson refer to the profiles constructed through surveillance:

Rather than being accurate or inaccurate portrayals of real individuals, [‘data doubles’] are a form of pragmatics: differentiated according to how useful they are in allowing institutions to make discriminations among populations ... [S]urveillance is often a mile wide but only an inch deep ... Instead, knowledge of the population is now manifest in discrete bits of information which break the individual down into flows for purposes of management, profit and entertainment.

(2000, pp. 614, 618, 619)

At the opposite end, IS studies of interactional conduct tuned to the ‘eavesdropper’ in Goffman’s participation frameworks (1981) could investigate the experience of surveillance, which, according to Ball, “has not yet been addressed in any detail” (2009, p. 640; but see Rampton & Eley, 2019). Likewise, data sessions focussed on the ways in which people actually experience – use, enjoy and depend on – digital technologies in their everyday practice could probe Ball’s suggestion that although “individuals sometimes appear to do little to counter surveillance[, that] does not mean that surveillance means nothing to them” (ibid.).

If IS researchers are to engage fully with new socio-communicative practices and forms of control like these, they will need to collaborate with computational specialists to tackle, *inter alia*, the codes, algorithms and protocols that translate human bodies, movement and communication into digital information, and they will also face the practical problem of getting access to the “scattered centres of calculation” where all the data gets processed (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 613). But short of this, there is still a great deal to learn about the manner and extent to which new technologies are (or aren’t) changing the institutional regimes and participant practices in offices, clinics and schools (on the latter, see Rampton, 2016). Foucault’s governmentality is a major reference point for social scientists trying to make sense of these developments, and offering IS such a clear point of connection, this is important new territory for IS to continue its interdisciplinary endeavour in.

Further reading

- Gumperz, J. (1999). On interactional sociolinguistic method. In S. Sarangi & C. Roberts (Eds.), *Talk, work and institutional order* (pp. 453–471). Berlin: Mouton. (A clear exposition of IS by Gumperz himself.)
- Rampton, B. (2007). Linguistic ethnography, interactional sociolinguistics and the study of identities. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies* 43. At academia.edu. (An exposition with a worked example.)

Related topics

Sociolinguistic ethnographies of globalisation; Heteroglossia; Style and stylisation; Language diversity in classroom settings; Youth language.

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