


**Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics**  
**Professor Doctor Om Prakash**  
**Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida**  
**Lecture 45**  
**John J. Gumperz and His Work**

Welcome to class. In our continued series of founding scholars in modern sociolinguistics, today we are going to talk about John J. Gumperz, a renowned linguist, an anthropologist and ethnographer and a wonderful professional researcher and person. He had a long illustrious career and his major contributions and a series of collaborations with philosophers, linguists, psychologists, and anthropologists allowed him to produce so much voluminous work.


And a wide range of his personal experiences with different cultures, he traveled to India, Norway, various parts of the United States, and England, which allowed him to collect a lot of ethnographic data and interactional data and communication data and enriched his experiences and knowledge and we see how that culminated into a series of impactful and influential publications.

John J. Gumperz is one of the founding pillars of sociolinguistics and his major contributions force us and inspire us to include him in the galaxy of scholars who shape the discipline. So today we are going to talk about John J. Gumperz.


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**John Joseph Gumperz**  
January 9, 1922– March 29, 2013




**John J. Gumperz** was an American Linguist. Gumperz was, for most of his career, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley. He is known for his research on the languages of India, Code-switching in Norway, and on Conversational Interaction, Discourse Analysis, Linguistic Anthropology, and Urban Anthropology.



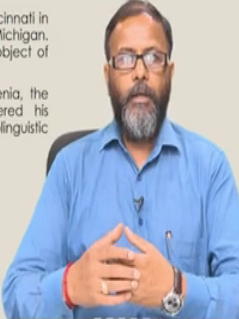
John J. Gumperz, John Joseph Gumperz or Hans Joseph Gumperz, (his German name) was born on 9th January, 1922 and passed away on 29th March, 2013. He was an American linguist and for most of his career he worked at University of California at Berkeley. He is known for his research on languages of India, code switching in Norway and on conversational interaction, discourse analysis, linguistic anthropology and urban anthropology to name a few areas.

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## Journey

- Hans-Josef Gumperz was born on January 9, 1922, in Hattingen, Germany.
- As a Jewish youth he was barred by Nazi racial laws from attending high school and his parents sent him to Italy to study. He later spent time in a Dutch refugee camp before moving to the United States with his family in 1939.
- He Americanized his name to John Joseph Gumperz shortly thereafter, and went on to serve in the United States Army.
- John Gumperz earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from the University of Cincinnati in 1947 and started working on his graduate studies in that field at the University of Michigan. But he soon became fascinated by the idea that language itself could be an object of scientific scrutiny, and switched to a graduate program in linguistics.
- Through in-depth fieldwork in Norway, northern and central India, Austria, Slovenia, the United States, and England, he collected ethnographic data that furthered his understanding of communication in the context of social boundaries and sociolinguistic structures.



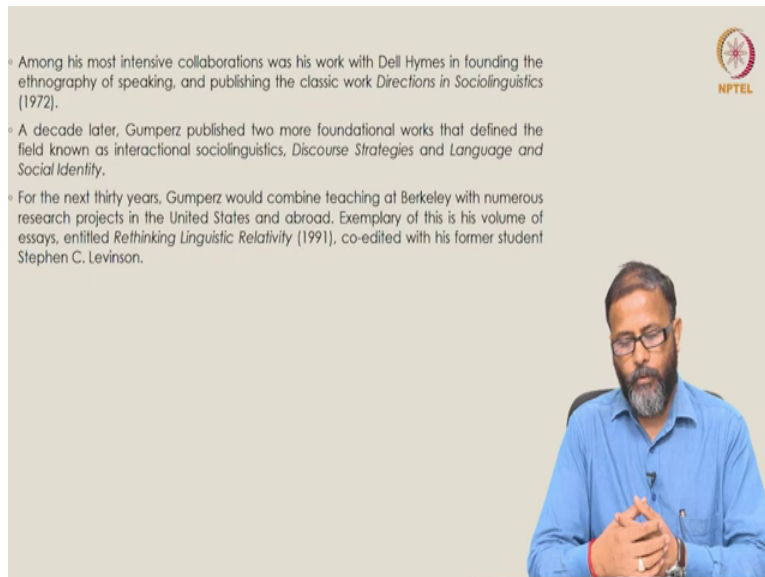
If you look at his journey as a researcher, as a sociolinguist, as an anthropologist, as an interactionist, it is full of milestones. Hans Joseph Gumperz was born on January 9, 1922 in Hattingen, Germany. And the first word Hans was a German name which he Americanized later on as John. As a Jewish youth he was barred by Nazi racial laws from attending high school and his parents sent him to Italy for studies.

Later he was at a Dutch refugee camp before moving to the United States with his family in 1939. He changed his name as John Joseph Gumperz and he went to serve in the United States army for a very short period of time. Gumperz earned a bachelor degree in chemistry and he started working in a similar area at the University of Michigan before he realized that language can also be a theme, a subject of scientific investigation.

He was so fascinated with this idea that he switched over to graduate studies in linguistics. Through in-depth field work in Norway, northern and central India, Austria, Slovenia, the United

States and a large part of England, he collected ethnographic data that further enriched his understanding of communication in the context of social boundaries and sociolinguistic structures.

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- Among his most intensive collaborations was his work with Dell Hymes in founding the ethnography of speaking, and publishing the classic work *Directions in Sociolinguistics* (1972).
- A decade later, Gumperz published two more foundational works that defined the field known as interactional sociolinguistics, *Discourse Strategies* and *Language and Social Identity*.
- For the next thirty years, Gumperz would combine teaching at Berkeley with numerous research projects in the United States and abroad. Exemplary of this is his volume of essays, entitled *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity* (1991), co-edited with his former student Stephen C. Levinson.


Among his most intensive collaborations was his work with a very renowned sociolinguist Dell Hymes about whom we have already talked about. He published the classic ethnographical work ‘Directions in Sociolinguistics’ in 1972 and a decade later Gumperz published two more foundational works that defined the field, known as ‘Interactional Sociolinguistics, Discourse Strategies’ and ‘Language and Social Identity’.

For the next 30 years, Gumperz would combine teaching at Berkeley with numerous research projects in the United States and abroad. Exemplary is his volume of essays entitled ‘Rethinking Linguistic Relativity’ (1991), co-edited with his former student Stephen C. Levinson.

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- After returning from India, Gumperz was invited to establish a Hindi-Urdu program at the University of California, Berkeley.
- In 1964, he became a member of Berkeley's Department of Anthropology and a leader in the university's new Language Behaviour Research Laboratory.
- In the mid-1960s and 1970's, Gumperz worked with a galaxy of scholars and researchers who shared his interest in the relationship between linguistic meaning and the inferential processes of communication.
- Such people included:
  - philosophers (H.P. Grice and John Searle),
  - linguists (Charles Fillmore, Robin and George Lakoff),
  - anthropologists (Brent Berlin, Dell Hymes and Paul Kay) and
  - psychologists (Susan Ervin-Tripp and Dan Slobin).
- Gumperz collaborated with these and others in cross-disciplinary research and teaching that helped shape a generation of students and a new paradigm for integrative social science bearing on speech practices.

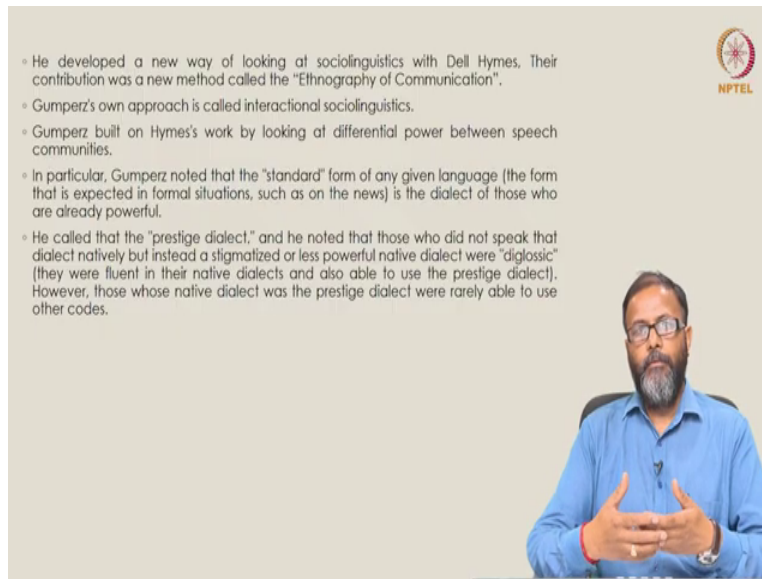


After returning from India, Gumperz was invited to establish a Hindi-Urdu program at the University of California, Berkeley and he worked intensively to research and promote Indian Urdu at Berkeley. In 1964, he became a member of Berkeley's department of anthropology and a leader in the university's new Language Behavior Research Laboratory.

In the mid-60s and 70s Gumperz worked with a galaxy of scholars and researchers who shared his interest in the relationship between linguistic meaning and the inferential process of communication and to just name a few collaborators with whom Gumperz worked, people in philosophy like H P Grice and John Searle, they are pioneers in philosophical research. Linguists like Charles Fillmore, Robin Lakoff and George Lakoff; anthropologists like Brent Berlin, Dell Hymes and Paul Kay and psychologists like Susan Ervin Tripp and Dan Slobin. So, if you look at a wide range of disciplines he worked in and a wide huge galaxy of scholars he collaborated with, we can imagine and understand the quality of research work he produced and the immense impact he rendered to the discipline.

Gumperz collaborated with all these scholars and others in cross-disciplinary research and teaching that helped shape a generation of students and a new paradigm in interactive, interactional sociolinguistics for integrating social science bearing on speech practices. So, he studied language in a real socio-cultural context.

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- He developed a new way of looking at sociolinguistics with Dell Hymes, Their contribution was a new method called the "Ethnography of Communication".
- Gumperz's own approach is called interactional sociolinguistics.
- Gumperz built on Hymes's work by looking at differential power between speech communities.
- In particular, Gumperz noted that the "standard" form of any given language (the form that is expected in formal situations, such as on the news) is the dialect of those who are already powerful.
- He called that the "prestige dialect," and he noted that those who did not speak that dialect natively but instead a stigmatized or less powerful native dialect were "diglossic" (they were fluent in their native dialects and also able to use the prestige dialect). However, those whose native dialect was the prestige dialect were rarely able to use other codes.

He developed a new way of looking at sociolinguistics with Dell Hymes and their contribution was a new method called 'Ethnography of Communication', which Dell Hymes developed as a speaking model that we have already talked about and you can see the details in the video that we did on speaking model by Dell Hymes and communicative competence of course.

But Gumperz's own approach in dealing with language in socio-cultural space and the actual interaction taking place among members is known as interactional sociolinguistics. So, Dell Hymes's approach was known as Ethnography of Communication where Gumperz also contributed a lot, collaborating with Dell Hymes; but Gumperz's own unique work and intervention is known as interactional sociolinguistics.

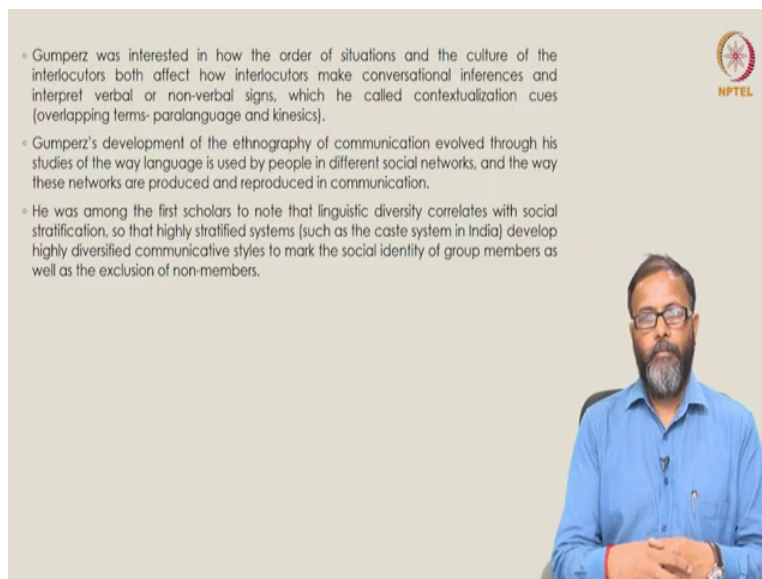
Gumperz built on Hymes's work by looking at different power between speech communities. In particular, Gumperz noted that the standard form of any given language, the form that is expected in formal situations such as on the news and media and administration, is a dialect of those who are already in power. So, the stratification of society reflects upon the stratification of organization of direct valuations in the society.

So, the people, so what you call the formal speech is the dialect of the powerful people and that is what, this is how he connected language and its use with power structure in the society. He called that 'prestige dialect' and noted a kind of diglossic situation. He noted that those who did

not speak that dialect natively were stigmatized or that people who spoke the less powerful native dialect were diglossic because they were fluent in their native dialect and were also able to use the prestige dialect.

So a diglossic situation created out of a social power network is what he pointed out. However, those speaking the native dialects were really able to use the prestige dialect and other codes. So, a diglossic situation where the prestige dialect speakers could not use the low-prestige dialect but those other people were diglossic bilingual and diglossic in the sense that they used the prestige variety in order to be included in the social power structure.

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- Gumperz was interested in how the order of situations and the culture of the interlocutors both affect how interlocutors make conversational inferences and interpret verbal or non-verbal signs, which he called contextualization cues (overlapping terms- paralinguage and kinesics).
- Gumperz's development of the ethnography of communication evolved through his studies of the way language is used by people in different social networks, and the way these networks are produced and reproduced in communication.
- He was among the first scholars to note that linguistic diversity correlates with social stratification, so that highly stratified systems (such as the caste system in India) develop highly diversified communicative styles to mark the social identity of group members as well as the exclusion of non-members.

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Gumperz was interested in how the order of situation and the culture of the interlocutor both affect how interlocutor makes conversational inferences and interpret verbal and non-verbal science: he called it contextualization cues, similar to what we know in other disciplines like communication research—overlapping terms like paralinguage and kinesics.

Gumperz's development of the ethnography of communication evolved through his studies of the way language is used by people in different social networks and the way these networks are produced and reproduced in communication. So, the pattern of interaction is deeply rooted in the pattern of the network of society, power network of the society, hierarchical network of the society.

He was among the first scholars to note that linguistic diversity correlates with social stratification; so that highly stratified systems such as the caste system in India develop highly diversified communicative styles to mark the social identity of group members as well as the exclusion of non-members. So, among the few scholars who correlated social structure with linguistic structure and patterns of use, Gumperz was one of them.

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**Major Works**

- **1955:** The Phonology of a North Indian Village Dialect. *Indian Linguistics* 16: 283-295.
- **1957:** Some Remarks on Regional and Social Language Differences in India. In: M. Singer (ed.), *Introduction to Indian Civilization*, pp. 31-38.
- **1958:** Dialect Differences and Social Stratification in a North Indian Village. *American Anthropologist* 60:668-681. [Also Bobbs-Merrill reprint A-98].
- **1960:** Linguistic Diversity in South Asia, Introduction (with Charles Ferguson). *International Journal of American Linguistics* 26:3, part 3, vii-18.
- **1961:** Speech Variation and the Study of Indian Civilization. *American Anthropologist* 63:976-988. (Reprinted in: D. Hymes (ed.), *Language in Culture and Society*. New York, Harper and Row).
- Naming Practices in the Hindi Speaking Area, working paper (with Ellen M. Gumperz). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

If we look at the major work and as I mentioned it is very difficult to make the complete list of his contributions to the field but there are certain major works which require a mention here. I will quickly go through the selected works of John Gumperz year-wise and years which are not mentioned here in the list, years which are missing in the list does not mean that, it does not mean that there was no work produced.

But what I have tried, I have tried to selectively count those works which represent his contribution towards development of the field. In 1955, the ‘Phonology of North Indian Village Dialect’, major work was published in *Indian Linguistics*, Volume 16. In 1957, ‘Some Remarks on Regional and Social Language Differences in India’, that was the time when he was in India and he was working on Indian languages.


Then in 1958, he published ‘Dialect Differences and Social Stratification in a North Indian Village’; it was published in *American Anthropologist*. In 1960, he wrote the Introduction to



‘Linguistic Diversity in South Asia’, with Charles Ferguson and it was published in the International Journal of American Linguistics.

In 1961, a major publication came out, ‘Speech Variation and the Study of Indian Civilization’, it was published by the journal American Anthropologist, reprinted in Dell Hymes’s edited volume called Language in Culture and Society. Another major publication in the same year came, called ‘Naming Practices in the Hindi Speaking Area’, as a working paper, it was published by Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington DC.

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- **1963:** *Conversational Hindi-Urdu* (with June Rumery), Vol. 1, parts 1 and 2.
  - *Conversational Hindi-Urdu*, Vol. 2, pp. xiv-214, Berkeley: ASUC Bookstore, University of California.
- **1964:** *The Ethnography of Communication* (with Dell Hymes, eds.), *American Anthropologist* 66:6, part 2 (Special Issue).
  - Hindi-Punjabi Code-Switching in Delhi. In: H. Hunt (ed.), *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Linguistics*, pp. 1115-1124, The Hague: Mouton
  - Linguistic and Social Interaction in Two Communities. In: J. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (eds.), *The Ethnography of Communication*, *American Anthropologist* 66(6), 8 (Special Issue), 137-153.
  - Religion and Social Communication in Village North India 16: *Journal of Asian Studies* 23:89-97.
  - A Brief Hindi Reference Grammar (with Vidya Niwas Misra), Mimeo, 55 pp.




He published ‘Conversational Hindi-Urdu, Volume 1’ and another work, ‘Conversational Hindi-Urdu Volume 2’ with June Rumery. In 1964, the ‘Ethnography of Communication’ with Dell Hymes, it was published again by American Anthropologist, another major work that appeared in the same year was ‘Hindi-Punjabi Code Switching in Delhi’, that was the year when he was invited by the university to establish a Hindi-Urdu Center for Learning.

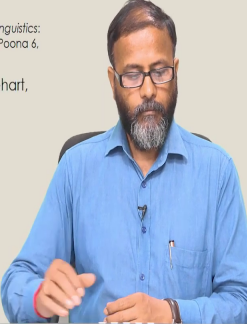
Another major publication in 1964 came as ‘Linguistic and Social Interaction in Two Communities, Religion and Social Communication in a Village of North India’ and last but not the least, a brief ‘Hindi Reference Grammar’ with a renowned Hindi scholar Vidhya Niwas Misra was published in 1964. So, a lot of early publications are from his Indian experiences and Indian field work.



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- **1967:** The Relation of Linguistic to Social Categories. In: D. Slobin (ed.), *Field Manual for the Cross-Cultural Study of the Acquisition of Communicative Competence*, pp. 65-81. Berkeley: Language Behavior Research Laboratory, University of California.
- **1968:** Language in Social Interaction. *Proceedings of the 8th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences*, pp. 408-411. Tokyo: Science Council of Japan.
  - Some Desiderata in South Asian Area Linguistics. In: Bh. Krishnamurti (ed.), *Studies in Indian Linguistics: M.B. Emeneau Felicitation Volume*, pp. 118-123. Linguistic Society of India, Deccan College, Poona 6, India.
- **1972:** *Directions in Sociolinguistics* (with Dell Hymes (eds.)). New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
  - The Communicative Competence of Bilinguals. *Language in Society* 1(1): 143-154.




In 1967, the ‘Relation of Linguistics to Social Categories’. In 1968, the publication ‘Language in Social Interaction’, Proceedings of 8th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Tokyo, Japan. In the same year, ‘Some Desiderata in South Asian Area Linguistics’. In 1972, ‘Directions in Sociolinguistics’, co-edited with Dell Hymes was published by Rinehart and Winston, New York. ‘The Communicative Competence of Bilinguals’, it was published in *Language and Society*.

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- **1975:** Conversational Analysis of Social Meaning (with E. Herasimchuk). In: M. Sanches and B. Blount (eds.), *Sociocultural Dimensions Of Language Use*. New York: Academic Press.
- **1979:** Developing Skills for Interethnic Communication (with Celia Roberts). Regional English Language Centre, Singapore.
- **1980:** The Sociolinguistic Basis of Speech Act Theory. In: J. Boyd and S. Ferrara (eds.), *Speech Acts Theory: Ten Years Later*. Versus Vol. 26-7, pp. 101-121. Milan: Versus.
- **1981:** Ethnic Differences in Communicative Style. In: C. A. Ferguson and S. Brice Heath (eds.) *Language in the USA*. Cambridge University Press.



In 1975, yet another publication titled ‘Conversational Analysis of Social Meaning’. In 1979, ‘Developing Skills for Inter-ethnic Communication’. In 1980, ‘The Sociolinguistic Basis of Speech Act Theory’. In 1981, ‘Ethnic Differences in Communicative Style’.

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In 1982, ‘Discourse Strategies’ was published by Cambridge University Press. In 1983, ‘Inter-ethnic Discourse’ was published by Society. In 1984, ‘Ethnography in Urban Communication’. A major publication came in 1991 where he talks about ‘Rethinking Linguistic Relativity’ with his student Steven C. Levinson and he revised and created a fresh debate by the publication of this work on the age-old Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and controversy related to it.

In 1996, ‘Treacherous Words, Gender and Power in Academic Assessment’ a major work in Language and Gender was published. If you look at these publications and again, I repeat these publications are very selected publications but he has prolifically published his scholarship with a huge galaxy of scholars, of philosophers, of linguists, of sociologists, of anthropologists, which allowed him to elaborate and make a very consolidated impact on the shape of this discipline where he combined anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics together.

John Gumperz’s extended field work helped him understand language in real action. Fieldwork in Norway where he worked on code switching, intensive field work in India and I am one of the

fortunate persons who in-person spent time with Gumperz, when he was visiting University of Delhi and I spent 14 days with him learning a lot from our discussions and associations.

And he was a very incredible scholar and with a very rich experience of the field. He was a real field worker, who worked in the field with real speakers, in the real situation, in the real community. So, he was a scholar who worked with people at the grassroot level and he could monitor, he could observe language in action in the real socio-cultural space.

His extended field work allowed him to develop his understanding, a very keen observation and very deep understanding of language, interactions and communication patterns of communities. Language and gender; language and power, interpretations, how power is encoded in language in terms of power, the diglossic situations, and other such themes. He worked in code switching in Norway and did field work.

His field work in England, his field work in the United States, his intensive field work and multiple visits to India enriched his experience and if you can see the list of publications that he came out with, he is known for his publications on Indian languages; Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and then the attempt to correlate linguistic structures and patterns of use with that of the social structure.

And cultural norms are immensely important and have a very deep impact on understanding language in action. His own method is known as interactional sociolinguistics and he worked on the interface of anthropology and linguistics. He graduated in linguistics after his early degree in chemistry. So, a wonderful person, a great scholar, an influencer and one of the vital pillars of the discipline.

Gumperz, has survived with a huge trajectory of work in sociolinguistics, anthropology and on the interface of anthropology and linguistics. We will continue our discussion about such stalwarts and pillars of the discipline in our coming videos like Joshua Fishman, like Charles Ferguson, like Ellen Grimshaw, like Uriel Weinreich and others so stay tuned in and see you in the next class. This is it for now. Thank you very much.