

EDMUND LEACH

## SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY AND LINGUISTIC PERFORMANCE\*

This collection of essays is successor to a number of other items with rather similar titles. The series starts with Dell Hymes' seminal "The Ethnography of Speaking" (1962); this was followed by Gumperz-Hymes symposium on *The Ethnography of Communication* (1964); then came another symposium from the same editors, *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication* (1972); and now the present volume which brings the argument full circle by ending up with an essay by Hymes entitled "Ways of Speaking". Just where we go from here is not clear.

Almost all the essays in the whole *corpus* are provocatively interesting and the various editors are quite justified in holding that they represent a field of interest which had become, almost by accident, interdisciplinary. For without question, despite notable counter-examples (e.g., Malinowski and Sapir), the major developments both in linguistics and in social (cultural) anthropology have repeatedly taken place at quite different academic centers under the auspices of scholars of wholly different orientation.

On the linguistic side, the distrust of empirical ethnographic context can be traced back to Saussure. The object of study has been *langue* ('competence', etc.), that is to say, idealized constant forms of language, explicitly contrasted with *parole* ('performance', etc.) which, being variable and 'incorrect', is at best irrelevant and at worst thoroughly misleading. From Bloomfield onwards, most specialists in the field have held that the central focus of all investigation in scientific linguistics should be the pure mechanics of grammar and phonology, the syntax of the linguistic code itself; meaning and use, or, in jargon, 'semantics' and 'pragmatics', could and should be left to others. The very different view briefly advocated by Benjamin Lee Whorf, though much discussed, has usually been written off as both eccentric and wrong.

Correspondingly, the social scientists, especially those concerned with exotic societies, have consistently failed to take serious notice of develop-

\* Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer (Editors), *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (Cambridge University Press, 1974).