An interview with Deborah Cameron

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言語は、私たちの自身の概念の基本であり、ジェンダーもそうである。これらがどう繋がっているかは興味深い。言語、ジェンダー、文脈、力はそれぞれ相互作用をする為、社会言語学者やフェミニストから研究対象とされ続けている。物質主義者で急進的フェミニストのDeborah Cameronはジェンダー関係の力学と闘争に着目し、ジェンダーと言語を探求している。最近は再び注目されているbiological essentialism（遺伝子構成が我々自身を決定する）との関わりから、進化論や神経科学も研究対象となっている。本インタビューでは、Cameronの草分け的研究を論じ、2010年9月18日から20日まで東京で開催されるIGALA会議への序文としている。

Blake E. Hayes
Ritsumeikan University

Language is basic to our sense of self, as is gender; how these are connected is intriguing. Language, gender, context, and power are interconnected and continue to be examined by sociolinguists and feminists. Deborah Cameron, a materialist radical feminist, has explored gender and language, looking at the dynamic of conflict in gender relations. Recently she has been examining evolutionary science and neuroscience in order to deal with the recurring popularity of *biological essentialism* (the notion that our genetic makeup determines who we are). This interview discusses some of Cameron's groundbreaking research and is a prelude to the IGALA conference to be held September 18-20, 2010 in Tokyo.

Blake Hayes (BH): Recently, in a discussion I was having with a friend, who is the dean of a large Women's Studies Department in Canada, we pondered the recent developments that we are now back to discussions of gender and biology/essentialism. How has this development occurred and what do you make of it?

Deborah Cameron (DC): I don't think there's just one reason why it has occurred, though I agree it's a very striking development. Part of it is about changing intellectual fashions: the excitement generated by new advances in life sciences—especially genetics and neuroscience—and the more general *Darwinian turn* in social sciences. Evolution/natural selection has become far more important in the stories we tell to make sense of ourselves, our history, and our place in the world. It also reflects changes in our self-perceptions, which are happening because of things like the decoding of the human genome. I think the return to a kind of biological determinism may have something to do with the postmodernist abandonment of earlier grand narratives which did a similar job (particularly Marxist or historical materialist ones). We can't easily do without these

big stories, and it's not entirely surprising that the Darwinian story has emerged as the one that seems most suited to fill the gap. It rests on solid scientific foundations and does not carry too much ideological baggage. In relation to sex and gender, however, it actually carries a lot of ideological baggage. I think that has also contributed to its popularity, both academically and in the wider culture. It's a story for conservative times: dressing up very traditional certainties in new scientific language for an era when there is no mass feminist movement any more and quite a lot of uncertainty, anxiety, and disillusionment about the legacy of second-wave feminism. So there's a political backlash element to it as well.

BH: Why is the study of gender and language important?

DC: Having a gender and speaking a language (or languages) are both very basic to our sense of who we are as human beings, so the question of how (or if) the two connect seems to me quite a profound one.

BH: Affective labour is strongly gendered. The norms of women's language are related to affective roles in relation to culture.

DC: Yes, I think that is certainly true. But in relation to actual practice (as opposed to ideology), I think role has more influence than gender per se. They are connected, of course, but you can tease them apart by looking at cases where, for instance, people are doing jobs that aren't traditional for their gender. Back in the 1990s, Bonnie McElhinny published some papers about the communicative behaviour of women police officers in Pittsburgh, USA. Their verbal and other self-presentations were strikingly low-affect—they didn't smile, their intonation was flat—not because they were mindlessly aping men, but because that was what they considered appropriate for the role and work. Of course policing is a historically male role, but arguably you will never have emotionally hyper-expressive police officers no matter how many women you recruit—it just doesn't go with what policing is. Conversely, a researcher in Belfast, Joanne McDowell, recently completed a doctorate looking at the behaviour of male nurses, who are still very much a minority in their profession. She found they were just as warm and empathetic as the women, because that too is what the work demands.

BH: You mention in *The Myth of Mars and Venus* (Cameron, 2007) that power is an important influence on the way women and men use language. You wrote, "Rather than being treated unequally because they are different, men and women may become different because they are treated unequally" (p. 12).

DC: Yes, I think power comes first, and of course it affects your behaviour if you belong to a dominant or a subordinate group.

BH: Tannen's work is widely known in Japan. Her work on same-sex, culturally homogeneous communication has been criticised when applied to male-female understanding. Uchida (1998), for example, proposed cross-cultural and intercultural communication, suggesting the importance of distinguishing these and the necessity of including issues of power. How has this discussion progressed, and where does it stand now?

DC: I always felt that Aki Uchida made a very important intervention in that discussion. As far as I was concerned, she was right and the argument was closed! I'm not sure anyone has improved on her contribution since, though there have been some interesting developments within applied linguistics, such as looking at gendered communication across cultural differences and in multilingual situations (the work of Aneta Pavlenko, for instance, and Ingrid Piller and Kimie Takahashi).

BH: In English, refusals can be direct or indirect, using silent pauses, hedges, and softeners (*I'd love to, but...*). However, it is socially plausible to plead ignorance to intent when it comes to women refusing sex. How is language linked to coercive sexuality? I think about this in terms of our students who feel culpable when they are coerced by senior students, Japanese and western professors, and teachers who take advantage of Japanese refusals that usually don't contain the word no.

DC: Well, it isn't actually believable to plead ignorance in either English or Japanese. If indirectness is the norm for refusals in a particular language, then no one who speaks that

language can plausibly claim not to understand indirect refusals. Just because the context is sexual doesn't make it some special case where the normal rules of interaction don't apply.

BH: Japan has the lowest percentage of immigrants and expatriate workers of any advanced industrialised nation, about 1% of the population. However, since the 1990s, permanent migrant communities have been increasing. Since we can no longer assume that Japan has a common language, the role of English has increased in importance. How do we deal with the language-teaching of gender-inclusive language without resorting to the *non-sexist guidelines* and *gender-inclusive handbooks* that are so problematic because they don't deal with issues of power and context?

DC: Not everything in those handbooks is problematic. If I were teaching academic writing in English to humanities and social science students, I would certainly advise them not to use the generic masculine pronoun *he/him/his* for sex-indefinite or inclusive reference. Gender-neutral alternatives are so much the norm in humanities and social science disciplines that generic masculines look old-fashioned as well as sexist. I would also have no problem telling students that *firefighter* is now preferred to *fireman*. It is. But where there isn't consensus, you've got an excellent opportunity to teach language learners, especially those with advanced proficiency, a more general lesson about the non-neutrality of meaning and the importance of choice by presenting them upfront with a range of alternatives now found in English and discussing the reasons (both contextual and political/ideological) why there is variation. Give them the means to make their own choices.

BH: Change in the amount of media reporting on human rights issues and the ensuing policy and legal changes have been possible partly because of the changes in an understanding that *women's rights are human rights*. In Japan, local discourses, which made taboo topics sound more delicate, have recently been reframed in international terms of human rights issues. For example, the term *sexual harassment* replaced the former *unpleasant sexual experiences*; *military sexual slavery* replaced *comfort women*; *sexual health and freedom* replaced *a problem of morality*; *domestic violence* replaced *marital disputes*; the *Elimination of Violence against Women Week* replaced the *Purification of Social Moral Environment Campaign*; and *child prostitution and pornography* replaced *assisted entertainment*. Language impacts how we conceptualise social issues. These terms did not exist in Japanese in the 1980s. They were treated with silence in academia and public policy, and only started to be addressed in the1990s, partially from the influence of transnational feminism and international treaties on women's rights. The influence of terminology has been profound in conceptualizing social issues.

DC: The examples you give from Japan are very interesting. And terminology does matter, but actually what matters more is the global dissemination of information. It is now very difficult for any democratic society not to engage with these ideas. I was talking recently to an American who used to work in Saudi Arabia, which is not a democracy. The ruling authorities do try very hard to prevent their citizens from coming into contact with global discourses on women's rights as human rights (actually they are not that keen on human rights in general). She told me about a rather innocuous presentation she used to give in schools and colleges about the US. There was a slide showing the first woman general in the US army, in uniform, with men saluting her. When she showed it at all-female institutions, there was always an intake of breath, and quite frequently the authorities didn't let her show it in these schools. In this case it was the visual image they were trying to censor directly, but any talk about that visual image would have called for the use of certain words to explain certain concepts. Vocabulary gets imported along with ideas—it's a whole conceptual/linguistic package. The words would not be any use, or threat, without the ideas. And conversely, ideas can change the value of the words without necessarily replacing them. For instance, there have been some extremely radical feminist campaigns fronted by Korean women which did use the term *comfort women*, but always in a way that challenged the delicate connotations of the phrase and emphasized the reality it referred to—forced prostitution in wartime.

BH: What is your current research about and what will you be talking about at the IGALA conference in Tokyo?

DC: Now we have come full circle back to your first question. Recently I have been reading evolutionary science and neuroscience in an effort to get to grips with the return of biological essentialism and develop a sociolinguistic feminist critique of it which is not just dogmatically opposed to the whole idea of biological sex differences or based on total ignorance about recent scientific discussions. I'll be talking about that in Tokyo.

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Author bio

Blake E. Hayes is an associate professor in the Department of International Relations at Ritsumeikan University, in Kyoto, Japan. She researches labour economics, examining vertical and horizontal labour segregation. Her research interests include feminism, labour discrimination against non-dominant groups, gender and technology, and labour policies.

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