

Ethics, Advocacy and Empowerment in the Humanities and Social Sciences Research: A Re-assessment

A One-Day Workshop, with Professor Deborah Cameron

The University of Hong Kong, Centennial Campus, Run Run Shaw Tower, 7/F, Room 7.45
Tuesday, 20th March 2018 from 9:15am – 5:30pm

Researchers in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences have always placed research ethics, integrity, and responsibility high on their scholarly agenda. It has been generally noted that researching human subjects – in diverse contexts and complex arrays of power, including the involvement of vulnerable, marginalised or otherwise underprivileged individuals and groups – should not only ensure treating them with full respect and responsibility, but also possibly lead to advocacy on their part and the striving for their empowerment. In this workshop, we will consider issues of responsible conduct of research in a wide range of contexts, especially when human subjects are involved in ethnographic, (socio-)linguistic, and cultural critical research. The workshop is intended as part of research training for postgraduate and early career researchers in the Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences, Education as well as other disciplines and will address the following questions, amongst others:

- What are the key principles of responsible research in designing and conducting projects that involve observing, interviewing and documenting human lives, as well as working alongside other people (team members, research assistants, etc.)?
- How do we calibrate our research goals with the needs and priorities of the communities under study? Should our needs and priorities be aligned with those of the individuals and communities that we approach as researchers? Who decides what those ‘needs’ and ‘priorities’ are?
- How do we reconcile the descriptive and analytic detail and maintenance of anonymity of our informants, if requested?

To debate the above questions, this workshop will put into conversation postgraduates, early career researchers and other research-active staff with Professor Deborah Cameron, University of Oxford, through a keynote lecture, case studies by participants, and discussions.

Keynote lecture

Sensitive subjects: The ethics and politics of linguistic research
Deborah Cameron, University of Oxford

Abstract

More than 25 years ago, four colleagues and I developed a framework for thinking about the relationship between linguistic researchers and research subjects which we set out in our book *Researching Language: Issues of Power and Method* (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson 1992). In this talk I will briefly revisit that framework, and then go on to consider how things have changed since the early 1990s. Researchers today are working in new settings (like online communities) and using new techniques (like data mining on a massive scale) that pose new ethical challenges; they are facing new institutional pressures (e.g., the demand to demonstrate that their research has ‘impact’ beyond the academy); and they are regulated more strictly by ethics committees whose remit is expanding to encompass new concerns (e.g., that ‘sensitive’ research topics may attract negative media coverage). I will discuss these contemporary challenges and explore some possible responses to them.

Speaker Bio

Deborah Cameron is a sociolinguist who currently holds the Murdoch Chair of Language and Communication in the Faculty of Linguistics at Oxford University. Since she began her career in

the 1980s she has also worked at the universities of London and Strathclyde in the UK, and held visiting positions in the US, Australia and Sweden. She is the author of numerous books, including *Verbal Hygiene*(1995), *Good To Talk* (2000), *The Myth of Mars and Venus* (2007), and most recently, with Sylvia Shaw, *Gender, Power and Political Speech* (2016). She regularly comments on linguistic topics on BBC radio, and presents research on language and gender for a general audience through her blog *Language: a feminist guide*.

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Suggested reading

Cameron, D., Frazer, E., Harvey, P., Rampton, B., & Richardson, K. (1997 [1993]). Ethics, advocacy and empowerment in researching language. In N. Coupland & A. Jaworski (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics: a reader and coursebook* (pp. 145-162). Basingstoke: Macmillan.