

## Rejoinder to Cameron

Bent Preisler

*University of Roskilde*

As Cameron correctly points out, my review article deals with five recent books about language and gender. Of these, and of the individual articles they contain, I review some favorably and some not so favorably. All of these works and the research traditions they represent are of an explicitly feminist orientation, the authors being almost exclusively women, including those whose work I obviously admire and speak very highly of in my review. Cameron wants to give the impression that I have launched a full-scale attack on feminism in general, and feminist contributions to language and gender in particular, and in so doing she manages to seriously misrepresent my article. The worst example is her final paragraph, where my observation that some authors seem to place feminist goals above sociolinguistic ones is made to look as if I have suggested that sociolinguistic and feminist goals are incompatible!

The term 'feminist linguistics' (note the quotes in my title) I regard as unfortunate because it seems to imply that language-and-gender studies cannot be legitimately pursued by sociolinguists who are not 'feminists', in whatever sense of the word. The term is used by particular authors who obviously (often explicitly) do *not* treat sociolinguistic and feminist goals as equally important (cf. my references), and in my article the term refers to these and similar works, not to feminist contributions generally.

The word 'appropriated' (also in quotes) was meant to humorously echo one of the recurring metaphors in the literature, that of women 'appropriating' male language, but this subtlety was obviously misplaced.

I do see certain inconsistencies in the postmodernist thinking of *some* feminist researchers as being ideologically determined, but there is no foundation in my article for saying that I 'present diversity . . . within feminism as a problem' or regard it as being 'not about intellectual matters'. Self-contradiction is the issue in some of my criticisms, but the passage cited by Cameron is not one of them.

Cameron thinks I believe in 'some Platonic realm of . . . unassailable truth', yet she has no problem with the expression 'the wrong question' in judging 'nonfeminist scholarship'. According to her, I do not make my ideological standpoint clear, yet she has no trouble identifying it correctly: I deplore the fact that there are so few male researchers in the field. I am hardly being 'dismissive' of the work of James Milroy or Peter Trudgill by pointing out that, numerically, the male names are a drop in the ocean. I have never claimed (as Cameron implies that I have) that male researchers represent a 'distinctively masculine' approach, or that our experiences as men or women 'exhaustively determine all

our ideological and intellectual commitments'. But Cameron herself observes that 'few [men] have taken a serious interest in the field', and unless she wants to be accused of essentialism, I think she owes us an explanation as to what might 'determine' this apparently collective attitude.

It is true that 'there has never been a policy or a practice of excluding men' from the field of language and gender, but Cameron's response does suggest an intellectual climate in which it is not possible to critique particular works and tendencies on the basis of criteria such as internal consistency and scholarly integrity without being accused of attacking feminism. From an ideological point of view her response constitutes a commendable display of solidarity with the authors that I criticize (she is not one of them, despite her reference to 'our alleged propensity to . . .' (my emphasis)). However, as her main argument is that 'feminist linguistics' is not primarily about ideology but about intellectual differences, her strategy in making that point is unfortunate.

*Bent Preisler  
Department of Languages and Culture, Blg. 3.2.4  
University of Roskilde  
P.O. Box 260  
4000 Roskilde  
Denmark  
preisler@ruc.dk*