

**Daniel L. Everett**, *Dark matter of the mind: The culturally articulated unconscious*. Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2016. Pp. xvi + 378.

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Daniel Everett's *Dark Matter of the Mind* presents a detailed and extended argument against the innateness of language as a system, and more generally against the search for universals across the domains of language and culture. He contends that, rather than looking for unifying sets of principles that can adequately account for and explain the variation observed around the world, cultures (and the languages they produce) can be better understood as emergent properties of individuals in interaction. His argument follows in the traditions of Edward Sapir and Kenneth Pike, extending and reinforcing the fundamental link between the human language and human culture. His main thesis, as set out on page 1, is three-fold:

1. that the unconscious of all humans falls into two categories, the unspoken and the ineffable
2. that all human consciousness is shaped by individual apperceptions in conjunction with a ranked-value, linguistic-based model of culture
3. that the role of the unconscious in the shaping of cognition and our sense of self is not the result of instincts or human nature, but is articulated by our learning as cultural beings.

To develop this thesis more fully, the book is divided into three sections: the first defines what Everett means by 'dark matter' (Chapters 1–4), the second examines the relationship between dark matter and language (Chapters 5–8), and the third considers some implications of his model (Chapters 9–10).

The thrust of Chapter 1 is a discussion of the philosophical notion of knowledge, traced through history and culminating in Everett's proposal: 'Dark matter of the mind is any knowledge-how or knowledge-that that is unspoken in normal circumstances, usually unarticulated even to ourselves' (26). He positions dark matter as emergent through embodied actions, through 'linguaging' and 'cultur-ing', which locates the origins of culture at the level of the individual rather than of the group. This is the foundation of his claim against nativism and universalism, which he argues throughout the book are not only unnecessary for explaining and understanding culture and language, but actually inimical. In Chapter 2 he presents inter-cultural differences as a product of a ranked-value system akin to Optimality Theory. Differences between cultures arise out of differently-ranked systems of values, and the process of being cultured in a community is essentially one of acquiring the relevant rankings. Culture in the collective sense thus arises out of the 'overlapping values, roles, and knowledge of individuals that live together, eat together, think together, language together, and culture together'

(116). Chapter 3 addresses the question of how individuals acquire their locally-relevant culture, which Everett argues is principally through language ('grammar' in the broadest sense, grounded in local appropriateness) in a way that cannot be abstracted away from the individual: it encapsulates the 'consciousness, emotions, apperceptions, cognitive plasticity, culture, society, and physiology' (135) of each person. In Chapter 4 he details a series of visual perception experiments conducted with the Pirahã of Brazil, presenting dark matter as fundamental to framing and interpreting experience: not only what we do, but also how we make meaning from it.

The second section of the book begins with an examination in Chapter 5 of dark matter across a handful of texts, both Western and Pirahã. Here Everett delves into a discussion of presuppositions, hidden assumptions, and what is essentially a light critical discourse analysis (CDA; with strong echoes of Fairclough (e.g. Fairclough 2015), although these are unacknowledged), and discusses how the implicit meanings in each text are evidence of culturally distinct dark matters. Chapter 6 considers the extent to which grammatical forms can also be said to be shaped by culture, as opposed to by universal linguistic constraints. This discussion is scaffolded with further examples from Pirahã, and builds towards a suggested methodology for studying language from an ethnogrammatical perspective. In Chapter 7, Everett discusses the relationship between gesture, language, culture, and dark matter, and argues that gesture cannot sensibly be thought of as a system distinct from language, but that the two are mutually constitutive and evolutionarily-linked. Chapter 8 looks at the difficulties in translation that dark matter can account for. This includes religious translations intended for cultures that do not share comparable world-views, and the discussion at this point draws on both Gricean maxims and Quine's (1960) radical translation in illustrating his points.

The third part of the book focuses on dark matter as an alternative to theories of innateness, instinct, and nativism more generally. Aside from a small set of biologically-determined factors (such as emotion), Everett argues that all knowledge – including linguistic knowledge – is learned through culture and cannot depend on any inborn knowledge or instinct. Chapter 9 takes a critical look at appeals to innate instincts in the Chomskyan programme in syntax, as well as in phonology (e.g. Berent 2013) and semantics (e.g. Wierzbicka 1996), which he examines from a logical standpoint that is likely to resonate with those who agree with him, and irritate those who do not. Chapter 10 is an extrapolation from his conclusions in Chapter 9, moving beyond linguistics to social sciences more generally, ultimately claiming that 'there is no human nature, if by that we mean inborn knowledge or concepts' (326): everything is a product of dark matter.

Overall, this is a generally interesting but at times frustrating book to read. Everett is attempting to synthesise across a range of disciplines – psychology, anthropology, biology, linguistics, evolution, sociology, and probably a few others – and reading as an outsider to most of these fields, it is difficult to evaluate the merits of all of the various strands of his argument. Those that I CAN follow with

a reasonable degree of confidence are not always as comprehensive as they could be, which is perhaps inevitable with as ambitious a project as this one – it is simply not possible to address everything. That said, there were points in his discussion of areas that I am familiar with that would have benefited from a broader engagement with particular strands of previous research. On page 236, Everett acknowledges that he has largely ignored ‘the dynamic aspect of . . . grammar and syntax that sociolinguists have discussed for so long’, but rather than engage with these now, he continues to ignore a host of potentially productive parallels. One example is the seeming re-invention of CDA in Chapter 5; another would be his observation that to be a fully competent speaker of Pirahã, one needs an understanding of the grammar as well as the ‘ability to use the grammar to tell appropriate stories’ (133) – this locally-emergent link between language and culture is strongly reminiscent of Meyerhoff’s (2003) discussion of *ples* ‘place’ in Vanuatu, among others. If these are the kind of gaps that pervade the material I feel confident in addressing, I am left wondering what holes there are that I am not aware of, in the other fields he engages with.

As a variationist sociolinguist, I do not fundamentally disagree with Everett’s position that language AS A SYSTEM in any given speech community should be thought of as an aggregate of the idiosyncratic grammars of the members of that speech community, rather than as a single, uniform system that exists identically in the minds of all speakers of a variety. The variationist approach to sociolinguistics (e.g. Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968, Walker 2010) has found linguistic variability and structured heterogeneity across multiple domains of linguistic analysis (from the phonological to the morphosyntactic, into the pragmatic and the interactional), and at different levels of social organisation (from the linguistic system as an abstract whole down to the behaviour of agentive individuals in the speech community – see Eckert 2012 for an overview of these focal shifts). Looked at from this perspective, Everett’s argument that language (and by extension, culture) originates in the individual through interaction – and therefore does not need to rely on a pre-existing universal or innate language ‘instinct’ to explain its emergence – is not a particularly shocking or discomfiting one. However, whether this necessarily means that there CANNOT or MUST NOT exist an innate facility is less obvious, and Everett’s arguments against such an inborn facility do not always stand up to close scrutiny.

For one thing, much (though not all) of his case rests on evidence from Pirahã, which is not universally accepted as demonstrating the structural exceptionalities that Everett has long claimed that it does (e.g. Nevins, Pesetsky & Rodrigues 2009). But even if we take his analysis of Pirahã at face value, the extent to which his premise relies on evidence from one particular language is a serious weakness for his overall argument. He devotes some time in Chapter 4 to a discussion of exception vs. counterexample – whether a piece of contradictory evidence necessarily threatens the integrity of the theory it contradicts – but does not apply this reasoning to the case of Pirahã. Everett clearly sees it as a counterexample which fundamentally undermines many of the claims of generative theories, but

he does not make a particularly strong case for why we should agree with this classification. He posits that ‘Pirahã is not a unique case and that all languages will show culture-language connections if we look . . . [but] it is hard to find such connections if we do not look for them’ (204); this raises the question of why he does not present corroborating evidence from a wider range of languages to support his arguments, if such evidence is to be found everywhere. There are no doubt practical considerations – the investment of time and resources necessary to collect and organise this evidence would be enormous – but a more cautious author might have tempered their argument somewhat given the largely untriangulated nature of their supporting data. Indeed, the bulk of the third section is devoted to a logical examination of prior claims of the innateness of human language, but many of his own arguments throughout the book would be unlikely to stand up to a similarly rigorous interrogation.

A further frustration I have with this book is the sense of alterity and exoticism that Everett brings to his descriptions and discussions of the Pirahã. Deeply-seated differences between Western and Pirahã world-views and modes of living are regularly invoked, with an oddly prurient undertone: nakedness, approaches to child-rearing, and the sexuality of young people feature prominently in some of the passages, and one of the only photos of the Pirahã in the book is of a woman breastfeeding a cat (the other photo of a Pirahã person is very neutral, and presented as part of the visual stimuli used in a perception experiment). Whether this is intended to demonstrate a fundamental otherness in the culture as a calculated move to further exceptionalise the language, or whether Everett is anticipating a readership that simply cannot fathom non-Western ways of living, this perspective may ultimately be a product of Everett’s own dark matter and ranked-value culture, derived from the missionary mindset with which he first encountered the Pirahã.

So where does that leave *Dark Matter of the Mind*? On balance, it seems to sit in a slightly awkward position. It raises some interesting points that merit closer examination, and it makes a useful contribution to larger debates about the fundamental nature of language. However, as a piece of scholarship, it leaves itself open to critiques of scope, tone, and argumentation. Ultimately, this book might do something akin to what Robin Lakoff’s *Language and Woman’s Place* did in 1973 for the study of gender and language (Lakoff 1973): to invigorate a renewed and freshly empirical interest in these larger questions, to impel researchers to seriously investigate the claims that he makes, and to move debate about the origins of language in productive and unforeseen new directions.

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**Alexander Haselow**, *Spontaneous spoken English: An integrated approach to the emergent grammar of speech* (Studies in English Language). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xiv + 326.

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Drawing insights from cognitive psychology, neurology, and conversation analysis, Alexander Haselow offers in this book an emergentist approach to grammar. The two dominant approaches to syntactic theory, Saussurean and American structuralism, and Chomskyan generative grammar, whose grammar conception is composed of canonical patterns, have long been focusing on internal structures of pure but often isolated sentences. Linguistic structures are treated as finished products in fixed-coded rules and decontextualized configurations. Consequently grammatical analysis is to integrate different elements into unified abstract superstructures, focusing on morphosyntactic and semantic dependency relations with other constituents. Without reference to cognitive constraints and interactive features, the relatively static and monolithic knowledge system, which cannot be reconciled with cognitive, psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic findings on syntactic processing, is largely inappropriate for describing structures produced in spontaneous speech.

Given the human parallel ability to process linear sequences without hierarchization like [ABCD] and hierarchically structured linear sequences like [A[B[CD]]], Haselow argues that language structure is not fixed but continually reshaped by adapting established patterns in conversational interactions. Grammar under this view is a dynamic structuring system encompassing two domains, in which linguistic structures are incrementally created in the time flow of spontaneous speech. Language therefore is a complex adaptive system arisen