Gibt es das korrekte Englisch?
Auch Sprachen müssten sich fremden Einflüssen öffnen, meint Professor David Crystal in einem Gespräch mit IAN McMASTER. medium

SPOTLIGHT: Will English one day become the world's only language?

Crystal: I think that's most unlikely. There was a time when people felt that nothing was going to be able to stop English. But as people have begun to sense the increasing dominance of English, so there have been reactions against it, and this has raised language consciousness the world over. I expect English to be a very important world lingua franca, but with the other languages of the world maintaining their positions.

SPOTLIGHT: Some German-speakers worry that their language might be in danger, since so many English words are used.

Crystal: It is normal for languages to adopt words from other languages. It doesn't cause a language to die out. English is the perfect example of that. English has the position it has today not despite the languages it has borrowed from, but probably because of them. English has now borrowed from 350 or more other languages. This adds richness and vitality and strength to a language. As long as this process doesn't go too far and start to take over basic words like "table" and "chair", there's no real risk of a language being eliminated.

SPOTLIGHT: Is American English now the dominant version of English?

Crystal: It depends on which group you look at. If you look at first-language speakers of English — mother-tongue speakers — there are around 400 million, and 230 million live in the United States. So, more than half the native speakers do speak American English. However, 1.5 billion people speak English throughout the world, including those who speak it as a second language — in countries like Ghana, Nigeria and Singapore — and those who speak it as a foreign language in 120-odd countries, including Austria, Germany and Switzerland. So for every native speaker, there are three non-native speakers who speak English with a whole variety of accents and dialects. American English is therefore increasingly becoming a minority dialect of world English, and, although it has exercised a greater influence on world English than any other variety, I don't think it is going to be the dominant version for much longer.

SPOTLIGHT: What influence is the Internet having on English?

Crystal: It is having a fundamental effect, as on all languages. Traditionally, we have had two mediums — speech and writing. Now we have a third medium — electronic communication — producing a fundamental difference in the way language is communicated. The Internet is many things: e-mail, chat groups, the fantasy games that are played out there, the World Wide Web. In each you see a completely new way of using language, a kind of amalgam of writing and speech with new sets of conventions. This is undoubtedly going to have a major long-term effect on the language, just as broadcasting did nearly a century ago and the invention of printing did several hundred years ago.

SPOTLIGHT: Is the Internet increasing the importance of English?

Crystal: That is uncertain. Originally, the Internet was 100 per cent English, but it's down to something like 75 per cent now and falling fast. Probably in a couple of years' time, it will be down to about 50 per cent. In a survey I did for a book that's coming out later this year, *Language on the Internet*, I tried to count the number of other languages that are already out there in cyberspace. I stopped at a thousand, but I would estimate that at least 1,500 languages, a quarter of the world's 6,000 languages, now have an Internet presence. And this is going to increase.

SPOTLIGHT: With all the different forms of English around the world, how serious is the danger that they will become mutually unintelligible?

Crystal: Oh, it's very serious for speech. It's not serious for written English. Apart from a few minor local variations, written English is virtually the same around the world. But at the spoken level, we already have varieties that are mutually unintelligible. There are times when I go round Britain and can't understand what people are saying, so it's not surprising to find this happening on a world scale, too. This has been so for a long time. But something different is happening now. In many parts of the world, the new kinds ▶

> **"There are times in Britain when I can't understand what people are saying"**

|	
lingua franca [ˌlɪŋgwə ˈfrænkə]	Verkehrssprache
to maintain sth. [meɪnˈteɪn]	etw. aufrechterhalten
to adopt sth. [əˈdɒpt]	etw. übernehmen
despite	trotz
to eliminate sth. [ɪˈlɪmɪneɪt]	etw. auslöschen
mother-tongue speaker [tʌŋ]	Muttersprachler(in)
billion	Milliarde
-odd	etwas über
to exercise sth.	etw. ausüben
amalgam [əˈmælgəm]	Mischung
survey [ˈsɜːveɪ]	Erhebung
mutually [ˈmjuːtʃuəli]	gegenseitig
unintelligible [ˌʌnɪnˈtelɪdʒəbl]	unverständlich
virtually [ˈvɜːtʃuəli]	so gut wie
on a world scale	auf globaler Ebene

of English are amalgams of English and some local language: <u>hence</u> all these terms like "Spanglish" for Spanish English, "Chinglish" for Chinese English, "Denglish" for German English, and "Singlish" in Singapore, a mixture of English and Chinese. This leads to a different sort of unintelligibility from what you would find if you went to Glasgow or Newcastle. If the language were left to itself, it would indeed <u>fragment</u> just as Romance did 1,000 years ago. The existence of standard written English is a <u>cohering</u> force, as is the fact that satellite communication is beaming down a sort of standard spoken English from Britain, America, Australia and so on. But it seems very likely that English will become a <u>diglossic</u> language — one with two quite different standards: one for everyday communication, and one for formal, especially written, communication.

SPOTLIGHT: Do native speakers of English, and particularly those doing business with non-native speakers, now need to learn some new <u>simplified</u> form of "International Standard English"?

Crystal: Well, in so far as anybody tries to introduce such a standard in an <u>artificial</u> way, it's <u>doomed to failure</u> like other attempts to control language in an artificial way have been, including all the efforts to simplify spelling. You can't control a language like English, which is spoken by so many people in so many places. What I meant by International Standard Spoken English in my book *English as a Global Language* is not a simplified version. It is just a regionally neutral version of spoken English, which would avoid distinctive Americanisms, distinctive Briticisms and so on. But it will not be any simpler than any of the other varieties.

SPOTLIGHT: Another aspect of language change is that people worry that standards are falling. Is this true?
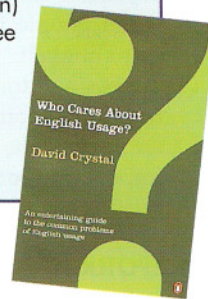
Crystal: People have always worried about this. In 1975, a British government report on the teaching of English in schools, the Bullock report, began by giving some <u>quotations</u> from people saying that standards are awful, that things have never been as bad as this before and so on. And then it says: "These quotations, of course, are all from the 1920s." I've got a book called *The Queen's English* by Henry Alford, printed in the 1860s, which says the same thing: that there isn't any future for the language. What has happened, of course, is quite <u>the reverse</u>. The language has gone from strength to strength. So it's a <u>perennial</u> worry, and one that I don't suppose we will ever eliminate, but it's <u>based on</u> nothing.

> **"People have always worried that standards of English are falling. There is no basis for this"**
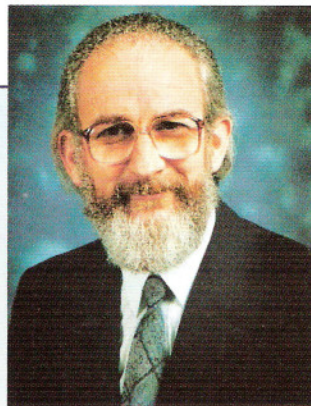
Professor David Crystal is <u>honorary professor</u> of linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor. His many books include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, *English as a Global Language* and *Language Death* (all Cambridge University Press). He is also the <u>editor</u> of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* and *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia*. His recent book *Who Cares about English Usage?* (Penguin) can be ordered from the Spotlight Shop (see page 60).

honorary professor ['ɒnrəri]	Honorarprofessor(in)
editor	Herausgeber(in)

Who Cares About English Usage?
David Crystal
An entertaining guide to the common problems of English usage

SPOTLIGHT: All the same, many people still get very <u>upset</u> about language usage. For example, about <u>split infinitives</u>, as in the famous *Star Trek* example, "to boldly go where no man has gone before"; sentences that start with "and" and "but"; the use of the word "hopefully" to mean "it is hoped that"; or sentences that end with prepositions. As you say in your book *Who Cares about English Usage?*, people still write to newspapers and the BBC to complain about these things because they see them as a sign of falling standards.

Crystal: Well, all the examples you've given are from grammar, and altogether there are about 30 or 40 such <u>contentious</u> rules. Almost all of them began in the 18th century. The split infinitive rule came later; that was a 19th-century invention by <u>grammarians</u>. But the 18th century was the century of correctness, the century of manners, the century when people wanted to distinguish very clearly between people who were educated and people who were not. There were all sorts of ways of doing this: in clothing, in the way you eat at the table, but specifically, through language. <u>Dr Johnson</u> did the same thing for vocabulary. This was the period when he produced his famous dictionary to get the language organized. So these rules help to define a kind of educated elite in language use. But the important thing to remember is that they are very largely artificial rules that have no basis in everyday usage. And what we're seeing now in <u>contemporary</u> English is a move away from this position, which has lasted some 250 years. The new national <u>curriculum</u> in British schools is very <u>emphatic on</u> the point that we must look at the language as it is, and examine such rules to see whether they are based simply on social diktat, or whether they have a basis in real linguistic use.

SPOTLIGHT: So it's OK now to boldly split our infinitives, is it?

Crystal: Well, people have split infinitives in English since the 12th century. The reason why they do so, to take the famous *Star Trek* example, "to boldly go", is that they sense that this phrase has a natural rhythm for English — "te-tum-te-tum". If you do it some other way, such as "to go boldly" (te-tum-tum-te), or "boldly to go" (tum-te-te-tum), these are not natural rhythms for English. The only reason why people didn't like breaking an infinitive in that way was that it went against the Latin norms which the grammarians thought ought to be imposed on English. The Latin infinitive has only one word, of course, so it cannot be split! But the view that Latin is the language that controls another language has really now gone out of fashion. Or to take another example, the argument that you should never end a sentence on a preposition can be traced back to the 1700s. Shakespeare did it, of course — for example, in Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be" speech — but grammarians react to this by saying: "There you are. You see, even Shakespeare can get it wrong. Even the best authors can make mistakes." The mindset of somebody who thinks in this way is fundamentally different from what I feel is the natural way of looking at language.

SPOTLIGHT: So why do many native speakers — and non-native speakers — still feel so strongly about such issues?

Crystal: Because these rules were beaten into them at school — literally, in some cases. I once did a radio programme on split infinitives and asked people why they got so upset about them. One man wrote and said: "The reason why the older generation feels so strongly about English grammar is that we were severely punished if we didn't obey the rules! One split infinitive, one whack; two split infinitives, two whacks." The implication was that this suffering had made him a better person. He went on to argue that it's because people aren't punished for their language sins nowadays that society has deteriorated so much. I think one must achieve a balance in these matters. If one allows those features to rule completely, it's a bit like adopting a completely artificial approach to clothing, saying you should always be out in your best suit and not allowing yourself to wear anything else.

SPOTLIGHT: A lot of teachers might now be thinking: "Yes, but I have to teach my students 'correct' English, because they have to take exams."

Crystal: Well, the first thing all teachers have to do is develop a sense of what "correct" English means. Correct English for me is the English of the majority of English-speakers. That is the kind of English which should inform their teaching. If they stick with a very restricted, narrow, old-fashioned, prescriptive notion, then the kind of English they will teach will fit the grammar books, but will not fit the majority usage of the English-speakers of the world; and they will be doing their students no service at all. But remember, as I said, that there are only about 30 or 40 contentious issues of usage in English out of around 3,500 rules in the big grammar books. That's around one per cent. So the notion of correct English is largely uncontentious. Nobody disputes that the definite article goes before the noun; nobody disputes that the plural of "boy" is "boys", and so on. One shouldn't let these traditional shibboleths of usage obscure the fact that the majority of language usage is uncontroversial. ■

> **"Correct English is the English of the majority. This is the kind of English that should inform teaching"**

hence	daher
to fragment [fræg'ment]	zersplittern
cohering [kəʊ'hɪərɪŋ]	verbindend
diglossic [daɪ'glɒsɪk]	mit zweifacher Auslegung
simplified	vereinfacht
artificial [ˌɑːtɪ'fɪʃl]	künstlich
to be doomed to failure	zum Scheitern verurteilt sein
quotation	Zitat
the reverse [rɪ'vɜːs]	der umgekehrte Fall
perennial [pə'renɪəl]	ewig
to be based on sth.	auf etw. basieren
upset [ˌʌp'set]	aufgebracht
split infinitive	Konstruktion, bei der zwischen "to" und Infinitiv ein Adverb eingeschoben wird
contentious [kən'tenʃəs]	umstritten
grammarian	Grammatiker(in)
Dr Johnson	see pp. 32–33
contemporary [kən'temprəri]	modern
curriculum [kə'rɪkjʊləm]	Lehrplan
to be emphatic on sth. [ɪm'fætɪk]	etw. nachdrücklich vertreten
to impose sth. on sth.	etw. einer Sache auferlegen
mindset	Mentalität
issue ['ɪʃuː]	Frage
literally	buchstäblich
to obey sth.	etw. befolgen
whack [wæk] *ifml.*	Schlag
implication	hier: logische Schlussfolgerung
sin	Sünde
to deteriorate [dɪ'tɪərɪəreɪt]	sich verschlechtern
feature	Charakteristikum; hier: Gedanken
approach [ə'prəʊtʃ]	Herangehen
to inform sth.	hier: etw. beeinflussen
restricted	eingeschränkt
prescriptive [prɪ'skrɪptɪv]	präskriptiv, vorschreibend
notion	Vorstellung
to do sb. a service	jmdm. einen Dienst erweisen
to dispute sth.	etw. in Frage stellen
shibboleth ['ʃɪbəleθ]	(veraltete) Vorschrift
to obscure sth. [əb'skjʊə]	etw. verschleiern
to be uncontroversial	keinerlei Widerspruch hervorrufen

Professor David Crystal will be the keynote speaker at a special SPOTLIGHT conference on **THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH** in Munich on 20 February (see page 13 for details).