THE QUEEN AND US

Zu Zeiten der Krönung, vor 50 Jahren, sprachen fünf Prozent der Bevölkerung "das Englisch der Königin" — heute kaum noch zwei Prozent. In einem Interview äußert sich David Crystal zur Geschichte und Zukunft dieser Sprache. *medium*

With the people: the queen's accent has changed slightly over the past 50 years

Interview by IAN McMASTER

SPOTLIGHT: There are various names to describe "standard English": received pronunciation (RP), the Queen's English, Oxford English, BBC English. Are these all the same?

Crystal: Yes, basically. However, received pronunciation or RP refers only to accent. The other terms relate to dialect, which includes grammar and vocabulary as well. So when we talk about BBC English or the Queen's English, we are talking about an amalgam of accent and dialect features. However, for a lot of people, all these terms relate primarily to accent. RP started about 200 to 250 years ago in Britain as the accent of the cultured classes, and especially of the court, the universities and the church in the south-east corner of England, in the triangle between London, Oxford and Cambridge. That accent, which became the accent of the public schools and the civil service, the accent of the "educated Briton", was then deliberately chosen by Lord Reith when he invented the BBC in the 1920s. He chose it as the accent that was most likely to be intelligible to the majority of his listeners. But the more the English language has travelled around the world, the less relevant these concepts of the Queen's English or Oxford English have become. The idea of the Queen's English implies that the queen owns English. But, of course, nobody owns English any more, least of all the queen.

SPOTLIGHT: So does the queen herself, and do other members of the royal family, still speak the Queen's English?

> ## "Nobody owns English, least of all the queen"

Crystal: Well, I listened very carefully to the queen's pronunciation in her speech on the day before her mother's funeral in April. When she is speaking formally — and none of us really knows how the queen sounds when she's off duty — there are without a doubt differences compared to her speeches from 50 years ago. Her voice is somewhat less "far back" or "plummy" than it was then, by which we mean that the vowel sounds are created towards the back of the mouth. Some of the queen's vowels and diphthongs are now more centralized. For example, take the word "cup". Instead of the pronunciation [kæp] with a very open "a", her ►

accent [ˈæksənt]	Akzent
amalgam [əˈmælgəm]	Mischung
civil service [ˈsɪvəl]	Staatsdienst
cultured classes	gebildete Gesellschaftsschichten
deliberately [dɪˈlɪbərətli]	ganz bewusst
feature	Merkmal
funeral [ˈfjuːnərəl]	Begräbnis
imply sth.	hier: etw. unterstellen
intelligible	verständlich
Lord Reith	see pp. 40–41
majority	Mehrheit
off duty	nicht im Dienst
plummy	vornehm
primarily [ˈpraɪmərəli]	in erster Linie
public school UK	Privatschule
received pronunciation (RP)	britische Standardaussprache
relate to sth.	sich auf etw. beziehen
triangle [ˈtraɪæŋgəl]	Dreieck
vowel [ˈvaʊəl]	Vokal

The voice of Britain: prime minister Clement Attlee during a BBC broadcast in 1945

pronunciation is more like [kʌp] these days. But on the whole, there are very few differences. She is still speaking essentially the same kind of English on formal occasions as she was 40 or 50 years ago. Charles is also very much like his mother, although I don't doubt that when he is off duty Charles has a much more colloquial style. That's what we all do. None of us has a single style, a single accent. We all have a variety of accents that we use to suit the circumstances we are in.

SPOTLIGHT: What about the queen's grandchildren?
Crystal: Well, this is one of the interesting things, because they are beginning to use some of the consonantal changes that are so characteristic of "demotic" English these days, the English of the streets. The most obvious is the use of glottal stops in so-called "Estuary English". For example, in RP, the name of the London airport, Gatwick, has a nice clear "t" in the middle and a nice "k" at the end. Estuary English would tend to drop the t and sometimes drop the k as well, so you get [ˈgæʔwɪʔ]. Or take the word "hot", in which the "t" is often dropped, so it is now pronounced [hɒʔ]. These are features that are very widespread in modern English, and you can hear them in the speech of the younger members of the royal family. The changes are subtle and only really to be heard when they are talking informally. When they are on their best behaviour and producing a formal speech they might well articulate more carefully. But, of course, when you hear the younger members of the royal family speak, it is usually on an informal occasion. And therefore we are hearing the contrast between formal English and informal English as much as a chronological change in the way the royal family speaks.

"Scottish accents are preferred for marketing"

SPOTLIGHT: Going back 50 years, to what extent did the ordinary people in Britain speak the Queen's English? And to what extent do they now?
Crystal: Not many people have ever spoken the Queen's English. The whole point of an educated, cultured accent and dialect is that it is only spoken by a minority. If everybody used it, it wouldn't be of use to the educated classes. So RP has only ever been spoken at most by about five per cent of the population of England. And don't forget it is England we're talking about. We're not talking about Wales, where RP was never an important element, nor Scotland, nor Northern Ireland, let alone Ireland as a whole. But even in England, 50 years ago, only about five per cent of the people would have spoken RP, and that figure is now down, I imagine, to less than two per cent — and it is now often a modified RP that has been influenced by local accents.

SPOTLIGHT: What about the BBC itself? It now has all sorts of accents, doesn't it?
Crystal: Yes, the change has been amazing. It started around 1980, when local radio stations appeared. These stations concentrated on local identity and, as a result, radio accents became very strong. People turned away from the national BBC and started listening to these local stations. The national BBC stations then soon brought in presenters with a regional tinge in their voices. The first ones got a lot of criticism. I remember interviewing one at the time, who used to get hate mail for her Scottish accent. But now you will hear an enormous diversity of accents, although some of the channels are still somewhat more conservative. On the classical music channel BBC Radio 3, you'll hear more RP than you will anywhere else. The news channel Radio 4, on the other hand, has become extremely diverse, and Radio 1, the pop channel, is the most diverse of all. Even the BBC World Service is now prepared to include quite a wide range of regional accents compared with 10 years ago. But we are still talking here about a modified RP, a mixture of RP and features from a regional accent. If the BBC went too far down the regional accent road, people would not be able to understand the speakers. So, for example, you would never hear someone with a strong Glaswegian accent reading the Radio 4 news, or someone with a strong Liverpool accent. But you will get people whose regional origins you can hear quite clearly in the RP they use, and that wouldn't have been the case 50 years ago.

SPOTLIGHT: What about BBC television?

Crystal: Well, there, anything goes. Indeed, some of the most successful programmes, such as comedies, are the most regionally diverse ones. But there are still situations where RP, or a modified RP, is the expected norm. For example, all the presenters for the Queen Mother's funeral were RP speakers. It would be inconceivable to have someone with a strong regional accent presenting such an occasion.

SPOTLIGHT: So is there now general acceptance in Britain of the diversity of accents?

Crystal: Yes and no. At one level, there has been an enormous increase in the acceptance of regional diversity. For example, in telemarketing, the voice at the other end of the phone is in 99 cases out of 100 now going to have a regional accent, whereas 20, 30 years ago, they would have been RP. And certain accents, such as types of Scottish accents, are now highly preferred accents for these purposes. At the same time, certain people remain extremely intolerant of regional diversity. Every now and again, stories appear in the press of people being criticized because of their accent or having to move from one county to another because people laugh at their accent.

SPOTLIGHT: Has pronunciation in British English become Americanized over the past 50 years?

Crystal: In some ways. For example, my natural pronunciation of "schedule" is ['ʃedjuːl], but all my children say ['skedʒuːl]. And when I'm talking to them, I accommodate to them, and then I sometimes say ['skedʒuːl] as well. So I think the traditional British pronunciation of "schedule" is on its way out, and there are lots of features like this that you could mention. But it isn't just American English that is influencing the language, because as one goes around the world, one finds all kinds of pronunciation habits and dialect habits that are having an effect.

SPOTLIGHT: Language learners still often say that they want to learn "correct English" or Oxford English. How do you view this attitude?

Crystal: Well, there's nothing wrong with a foreign learner of English having a relatively conservative attitude towards pronunciation. Teachers, on the other hand, have to take account of the fact that the language is changing, because it would be absurd to give learners the impression that RP is the norm. So, the more experience learners can be given of listening to a variety of English accents and dialects, the better. There are one and a half billion people speaking English in the world, and only a few hundred thousand speak RP. Three out of four speakers of English in the world today have an American English-dominated accent, let alone Australian accents and South African accents and all the others, which are very much non-RP.

SPOTLIGHT: Apart from accent, what are the other main changes that have taken place in English over the past 50 years? Vocabulary, for example?

Crystal: Undoubtedly. Vocabulary is always the main index of language change, because grammar changes very slowly. We're now going through a period in which ▶

accommodate to sb. [əˈkɒmədeɪt]	sich an jmdn. anpassen
amazing	erstaunlich
anything goes	erlaubt ist, was gefällt
attitude [ˈætɪtjuːd]	Einstellung
behaviour: be on one's best behaviour	sich von seiner besten Seite zeigen
billion	Milliarde
channel	Kanal; hier: Programm
circumstance	Umstand
colloquial [kəˈləʊkwiəl]	umgangssprachlich
consonantal [ˌkɒnsəˈnæntəl]	konsonantisch
county UK	Grafschaft
demotic [dɪˈmɒtɪk]	umgangssprachlich
diversity [daɪˈvɜːsəti]	Vielfalt
Estuary English [ˈestjʊri]	see pp. 40–41
Glaswegian [glɑːzˈwiːdʒən]	aus Glasgow
glottal stop	Kehlkopfverschlusslaut
hate mail	Drohbriefe
inconceivable [ˌɪnkənˈsiːvəbəl]	unvorstellbar
index	Gradmesser
let alone	ganz zu schweigen von
minority	Minderheit
modified	abgewandelt
presenter [prɪˈzentə]	Sprecher(in)
schedule	Plan
subtle [ˈsʌtəl]	fein
take account of sth.	einer Sache Rechnung tragen
telemarketing	Verkauf über das Telefon
tend to do sth.	dazu neigen etw. zu tun
tinge [tɪndʒ]	Färbung

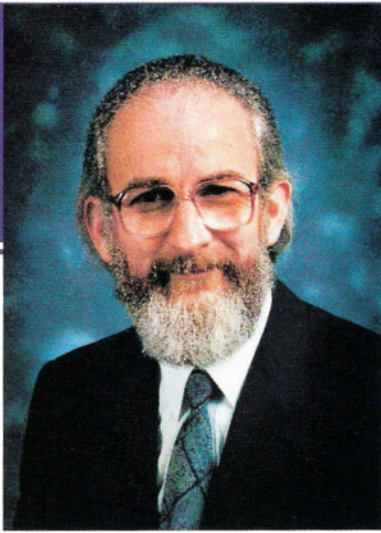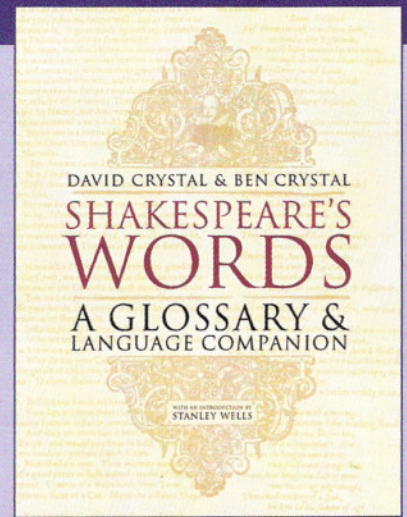**The future king: Prince William is beginning to use some of the features of common English**

reuters

"William is more likely to use informal styles on public occasions"

DAVID CRYSTAL & BEN CRYSTAL
SHAKESPEARE'S
WORDS
A GLOSSARY &
LANGUAGE COMPANION

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
STANLEY WELLS

Language expert:
David Crystal

tens of thousands — hundreds of thousands — of words are coming into English and being made available to the global population of English-language users.

SPOTLIGHT: What impact has the Internet had?
Crystal: Not as much as people think in terms of vocabulary. When you add up all the new words that have come in from the Internet, there are two or three thousand, maybe 5,000. That sounds like a lot, but when you consider that the vocabulary of English is well over a million words, this is not a very significant total, although the Internet has dramatically increased the speed at which new words come into the language.

> ## "The Internet has led to a massive change in styles"

However, it's not the vocabulary that makes the Internet a linguistic revolution, which I do really believe it is. It is the new styles of the language, which the technology is making available to us, for example in chat rooms or in the way I can take an e-mail message from you and cut and paste from it and send it back to you with my answers in between. Also, a new informality has grown up in e-mail, which is unprecedented in the language. For example, if I send you a message and I mistype it, you don't say, "Oh, dear! Crystal can't spell." You simply say, "Crystal's in a hurry."

SPOTLIGHT: If we look forward 50 years, what are the main changes you expect to see in English?
Crystal: I think the Internet will continue to have a massive influence on stylistic development in all languages, but especially English. We are now typing our messages to each other through the Internet, but in 50 years' time, we'll be speaking them, as speech synthesis and recognition develops. And we'll be able to choose our accent: I can imagine a keyboard in 50 years' time that allows you to press a key to choose whether you want your message to be heard with a British accent or an American accent or whatever. Another point is that the effects of globalization are not going to slow down. English is undoubtedly fragmenting into mutually unintelligible spoken languages. Standard English, of course, continues to exist as an international medium of written and printed expression.

SPOTLIGHT: And in 50 years' time, there will probably be the next King William on the throne in Britain. What will the King's English sound like then?
Crystal: I imagine that it will be a much more demotic form of English than you now get from any member of the royal family. I would expect King William to have an excellent command of a range of different styles from most formal to most informal. But he is likely to be more prepared to use the informal styles on public occasions, whereas his parents and grandparents would only have been prepared to use the formal styles. Ⓢ

➡ **www.spotlight-online.de**

command: have a command of sth.	etw. beherrschen
cut and paste	ausschneiden und einfügen
editor	Herausgeber
fragment [fræg'ment]	sich aufsplittern
honorary professor ['ɒnərəri]	Honorarprofessor(in)
impact ['ɪmpækt]	Einfluss
informality	Ungezwungenheit
keyboard	(Computer)Tastatur
mistype sth.	sich bei etw. vertippen
mutually ['mjuːtʃuəli]	wechselseitig
spell	orthografisch richtig schreiben
unprecedented [ʌn'presidentɪd]	noch nie da gewesen