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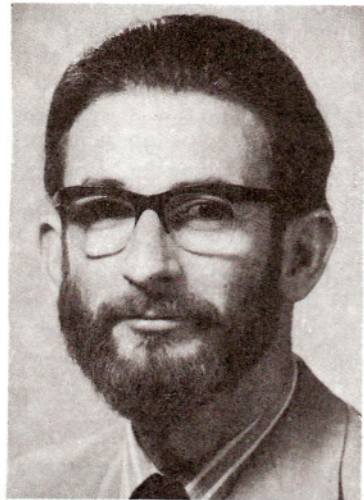
ENTREVISTA

TALKING ABOUT LINGUISTICS
WITH DAVID CRYSTAL

Pablo Domínguez

— **Besides being a professor of linguistic science you also are a prolific author and editor of various scholarly journals. Is this the reason why you were included in the 1982 edition of *Who's who*?**

— I have no idea why people get included in *Who's who*. There is surely a great power somewhere that decides these things. I suppose it must be the range of publications I've managed to write, but I've no idea why this year in particular. There are far better people around to put in *Who's who* than me.

— **You are very modest. According to your birth sign you are supposed to be patient, adaptable and tenacious, emotionally complex, possessor of an excellent memory, a person who has great affinity with the past and all that it holds, a lover of money and a poor loser. How much of this is true and how much false?**

— Oh, I'm sure it's all true! But, really, I don't know. I honestly couldn't evaluate these characteristics in any useful way. I like to be working on several projects at once, so I suppose that's being adaptable. And you certainly have to be able to remember where everything is! It's true that I have a fascination with the past... But I suppose, with reference to your previous question, the point to stress is that I am fortunate in my capacity to organise myself. I have a fair amount of stamina, and application, and for instance am quite happy to stay up late at night to get something finished, or to work on a particular project until it is finished, and to put off doing things that other people might call hobbies. There are so many varied aspects to the work I do that I have never felt the need of them. In any case, after taking time out for my family, and for various religious activities, there really isn't time for much else. And I should mention at this point that I have been particularly fortunate in having a very supportive family. Without the help of my wife, Hilary, the adjective 'prolific' simply wouldn't apply.

– What do you think of the idea of interviewing linguists for a journal like this one?

– You've not interviewed a linguist before?

– **Yes, I have, but I did'nt put this question to them.**

– I've often been interviewed on radio, but never for an academic journal. What could interviews of this kind contribute, I wonder? Possibly, some ideas not obtainable from other styles of communication? When you are writing for a particular publication you have a very specific aim in mind; somebody asks you to do something and says: 'We want a contribution to this book', or 'would your write that particular thing?', and you inmediately take up a position, write, narrow the topic down, revise it. You end up with something you may be satisfied with, but as a consequence, a lot of the reality of discovery and the author's feelings and motivation, never shows its head. The author's 'discovery process' gets eliminated in his revision.

An interview is very different because when we talk you ask me a question and I give you a spontaneous reply. In the process, I run the risk, of course, of saying something stupid, but on the other hand, it enables me to say things that I would never dare allow in a formal article or a formal book. And to give opinions, of course.

– **Yes, I think that's why interviews are always read, no matter what their content is. I mean, they have a sort of appeal for readers that makes them interesting. Even if they aren't, you know.**

– Oh, I always read them myself for that reason.

– **Would you accept the following definition as a valid one: Linguist, a mechanic of language?**

– No, I wouldn't. The analogy is, for example, with people who fix motor cars. I would not consider myself to be simply a fixer of linguistic motor cars, though in fact I do spend a lot of time worrying about what happens when language breaks down, and what to do about it, on the clinical side of my work. But there is far more to linguistics than this. Linguists are as much concerned with the whole question of how one designs the motor car, it seems to me, or whether the motor car has a role to play in modern civilization which other vehicles, or other forms of transport, would not play. In fact, the concept of 'design feature' is quite a familiar one in linguistics. Charles Hockett, many years ago, talked about the design features of human language – what is it that makes a language distinctively human. He cited various characteristics – for example, language's productivity, its duality of structure, etc. Linguists in general are people who are concerned about the properties of language as a whole. Of course, in order to understand language, they must take languages to bits and put them back together again, and therefore, in that sense they are mechanics. But they have a purpose in mind which a mechanic does not have.

– **True, yes. Now, «to study linguistics – I quote from one of your books**

– **one has really to be a bit of a schizophrenic». Aren't you exaggerating a little?**

– Well, I certainly myself often feel schizophrenic. The point of the quotation is reflected very clearly in the name of my own department. It's a department of linguistic *science* and it's in the Faculty of *Letters* of the University of Reading. That is what I meant: it is partly art, partly science, and you need to have two kinds of mind in order to profit fully from it.

– **We have a similar situation in my country: the departments of linguistics, and of modern languages, are in the faculties of philosophy and letters.**

– That's right. When we talk of linguistics as a science, we mean that we try to study language in an objective, systematic, comprehensive and precise way. We try to avoid the impressionism that has made language study suffer in the past. On the other hand, we are perfectly well aware that language is a tool used for the expression of emotions, and a thing of beauty, and so we inmediately find ourselves talking about literature, and other things.

Therefore, you have to balance the scientific and the artistic sides of the work. And there are other ways in which you are pulled in different directions; the distinction between theoretical and applied linguistics, for example. I have the greatest trouble with this one. Originally, I came from a department of English, and then trained in general linguistics, teaching myself a lot of the time. I have never published much on a theoretical level, but I would consider myself as a linguist, primarily. And to begin with, this meant being a general linguist, only incidentally interested in applications. But increasingly over the years, I have found myself pulled in the direction of applied linguistics. Most of my writing in the last ten or fifteen years has in fact been on such fields as the language of literature, or language as studied in a teaching situation, or, more specifically in recent years, what happens in the clinic when language breaks down.

I now find myself partly a general and partly an applied linguist. I teach courses under both headings, for instance. And it isn't always easy resolving the tension between the aims of these two fields.

– **I can understand that, yes. You referred to the fact that, of course, a linguist studies language in a scientific way and that linguistics is a science. Would you then not agree with those who think that there cannot be a general theory of language, or more specifically, that «a scientific description of the semantics of a language is impossible»?**

– I think that depends largely on how you define the word semantics. If you go back to Bloomfield, for instance, who would claim that semantics was impossible, then this is only because he was including under the heading of semantics an encyclopedic vision of the world and in that sense, of course, it's not possible to be systematic about everything. But if you take a more restricted view of semantics and talk about semantics in terms of, for example, semantic fields, or the relations between sets of lexical

items (antonyms, synonyms and the like) then you can make very systematic observations about meaning indeed. And it is the business of the linguist to explicate these relationships. That I think is very feasible.

– **What made you decide to start teaching linguistics? You said that you come from a department of English, then you taught yourself general linguistics, etc.**

– Well, my first degree was in English language and literature at University College, London. I started off as a general purpose English undergraduate with no interest in language particularly at all. In fact, in the first year of my life as an undergraduate in this English department I wrote one essay on linguistics and it received a fail mark. The person who changed my life totally in relation to English language studies was Randolph Quirk who joined the department in my second year there and, as he did for so many people, taught us what English language studies were really all about. I was then fortunate when I finished my undergraduate degree to be offered a place as a research assistant on his Survey of English Usage, and that gave me an empirical training in how to listen to English and to transcribe it and analyse it. It also gave me a chance to find out about Linguistics. I found myself sitting in on seminars and meeting people who visited his department, from all over the world, including some very eminent linguists, and gradually a more general interest in linguistics developed. I should add that I'd already had some training as an undergraduate -for instance, I got my phonetics training from Gimson and O'Connor and others in the Department of Phonetics – but I had no special interest in being a linguist. At that time I was a research student of English, no more. And then, life takes you, doesn't it, and a job came up at the University of North Wales in Bangor as an assistant lecturer in a linguistics department. One has to work. I applied for it and I was lucky enough to get it. I was then made to teach several courses in linguistics, something I had never done before. So I had to learn the subject by teaching it, as I suspect many people of my generation did. You certainly didn't have a qualification in linguistics in those days. None of the people in the department at Bangor had a formal qualification in linguistics, as far as I recall. It's different today. These days you couldn't get a job in linguistics without a qualification in the subject.

– **While on this matter of teaching, are you what we would call in Spanish – do you know Spanish?**

– Just a little. I can read the language quite well.

– *un profesor simpático*, **a friendly professor whose lectures are a lot of fun and who enjoys mixing with his students or, on the contrary, are you one of those people who would never tell a joke in class?**

– No, I tell a lot of jokes, that is true.

– **You do.**

– Yes, I know the word 'simpático'. I have a very firm view about this. It seems to me that unless you can motivate your class to enjoy the subject, then, as a teacher you are a failure. I am not somebody who feels that you

learn the facts and that is all. You must get enjoyment from the subject. Now, one way of ensuring this is to show that there is a humourous side, and I frequently make use of as many literary and other dramatic devices as I can to get this participation. I think university lecturing – or indeed, any teaching – is a form of acting. So often you have to act. You arrive at the university at nine o'clock in the morning and you have a headache –but you've still got to teach the class. So you have to act. Also, it's no service to the subject, no service to the students, no service to yourself, and in these economic days, no service to your department if your put off people by a dry, withdrawn academic style. You have got to be able to motivate them. And this of course also means that you have got to be able to simplify the subject. Now, here I find myself in some difficulty because one of the things I have tried to do, more than anything else in the last twenty years, is popularize linguistics. The trouble is, that popularization is not in itself a popular academic pastime. If you popularize you run the risk of being considered marginal as an academic. I've always tried to balance this by regularly writing something that would be considered central to the research venture – a monograph or something of this sort. But my instincts are very much towards popularization. I want *everybody* to know about linguistics and about the need to be systematic in studying language, and how it is possible to solve various social and other problems by having this knowledge. That's what I want. And that is these days where I spend most of my writing time. But once you become even slightly popular, by doing radio programmes and things of that sort, then you do run the risk of attracting the criticism of the linguistics establishment. And I have often been criticized by colleagues who feel that I have been too popular in my writing, and that I should be spending more time working on some research enterprise. I remember once overhearing somebody saying: 'Why is Crystal wasting himself writing such and such a thing?'. And such comments always make me pause and reflect, but having reflected I would still maintain that the balance that I have tried to present is an important balance. I don't think I've let the academic side down, in that I think I can cite several works which of their own right would be considered contributions to knowledge. But on the other hand, in this day and age in particular, when universities are being cut, and staff are being cut, and people are saying: 'Do we really need to teach such and such a subject?' 'How useful is it?', I think popularisation is essential. It may even be developing a fresh respectability, as universities come to terms with their social responsibilities. Somebody has got to take the responsibility for showing the public at large that linguistic departments are worth while, and I consider this to be a very important feature of the work.

– **Am I right in thinking that it was *Prosodic Systems and Intonation in English* that catapulted you to fame?**

– I should be surprised if that was so! I really should! I can't imagine that there are many people in the world who have read that fairly technical

monograph.

– **You'd be surprised to know that, as far as my country is concerned, when they mention your name it's mainly in reference to your books on intonation.**

– How very interesting! Because it's very difficult to know what makes you most well-known. In England I suppose the book that made me most well-known in schools was the little book, *What is linguistics*, which has now had several editions. And then I suppose the Penguin book, *Linguistics*. Who was it said that if you want to be famous you write a Penguin book? It's certainly the one that turns up on the book stalls. And I imagine most people refer to this book rather than to anything else I've written. But, what is fame? And if you mean...

– **Well, well-known and...**

– But amongst whom? If you mean academic prestige, I think you are probably right: the first serious academic book I wrote by myself was *Prosodic Systems*, which was a write-up of my Ph. D., a few years previously. Even so, having said that, I don't think it's the academic book I've written that is the most well-known, by any means. I think the book with Derek Davy on *Investigating English Style* is probably more well-known, or some of my writing on language disability.

– **Any human undertaking is, of course, perfectible as you well show in *The English Tone of Voice*, where you take into account earlier criticisms of your work. Do you always react positively to unfavourable reviews?**

– I am always upset by an unfavourable review. I don't take things personally but I do think deeply about them because I can usually see that the basis of the criticism is a limitation in my own writing. I'm always grateful for criticism. After all, someone has spent a chunk of his life trying to understand you. That's quite a tribute. You have a responsibility to take a review into account, if you ever get the chance of revising what you have written. And I would always acknowledge such a point. I think that's a very important thing to do. Of course, if you think like this, you end up with a somewhat eclectic view of your subject – but that's not such a bad thing. You know, there's a phrase often used about some English linguists, and that is 'they are very eclectic'. The Reading group has, for instance, sometimes been called (it was once called in one of *The Times* Supplements) 'the eclectic school', by which I think the author simply meant that in our department we did not teach only one form of linguistics (for example, generative linguistics) but several different schools of linguistics withing the department. And having had to do this, and being involved with people who are doing this, I find myself adopting the view – somewhat clichéd view, I must admit – that there is good in everything. I've always learned a great deal from my critics.

– **Stress patterns and intonation are said to be among the first things a child acquires when he learns to speak, and yet they are often stumbling-blocks for the learner of a foreign language. Does adequate**

production of intonation patterns depend on good perception on the part of the learner, do you think?

– I think the question presupposes a discussion of the concept of the critical period for learning, doesn't it? After all, when they did the studies a few years ago of young children learning a foreign language, there was no hint of this kind of problem. The children had difficulties in making their learning permanent because of the artificiality of the teaching situations in which they found themselves, but one of the things that was noticed was that the children's fluency in terms of intonation and rhythm was much better than what you would expect from the way adults learn a foreign language. So I don't myself think that there's anything intrinsically difficult about intonation and stress. I'm quite sure that if teaching techniques were made to capitalize on certain general ideas a lot of the problem would be solved. To take an example: most books which teach you about English pronunciation (and I'm sure the same is true of Spanish or any language) begin with vowels and consonants and teach you how to produce words. Only at the end of the book – if they mention it at all – do they tell you about words in connected speech, and about stress and intonation. And at that point they say: 'Now, reader, you mustn't forget that many of the things we've told you about vowels and consonants don't apply in connected speech, you must leave out these consonants, change these vowels...'. Asimilation and elision rules are given. Now, it seems to me that this is really back to front. Why teach a foreigner to do things and then have to tell him later that he doesn't have to do them? Or that he should do them differently? Rather, I would tell the student earlier on about these things – at least, expose him to examples of fluent connected speech with good intonation, good rhythm, good stress, and perhaps even train him in aspects of these problems. This way, it might be possible to establish a good foundation in these matters.

– **Which aspects, as regards English, of non-segmental phonology still remain to be studied in 1982?**

– I think there's still a very great deal which remains to be done. The area that is still most neglected is that of 'paralinguistic features'.

– **I was just going to ask you about that. Has the study of paralinguistics any future at all?**

– Well, I think there's a great deal here that we have only the haziest ideas about. We must remember that by 'paralanguage' I'm talking about the *vocal* aspects of language (not, as some people have it, the facial expressions and the gestures, though there is plenty to be done there as well). I'm referring to those features of non-segmental phonology *other than* intonation and stress and speed (which are usually called the 'prosodic' features) – a whole range of effects that take place in the larynx, pharynx, oral and nasal cavities. The books that I used to write on this subject were very patchy in this particular respect. The main criticism I personally have of that 1969 book on prosodic systems and intonation, is

that it was not as full as I would have liked on the description of English paralinguistic features. I mentioned only a few of the possible ones that there are. Now, since that time, I have come across a large number of paralinguistic features that were never mentioned in that early book. For example, there's the use of the lips to produce various degrees of lip-rounding and lip-spreading, such as is used in talking to babies. But as you go back through the mouth, all of the things that phoneticians sometimes call 'secondary articulations' (palatalization, velarization, nasalization, pharyngeallization, and so on) you find in many languages are used paralinguistically. For example, some regional dialects in England are characterized by their velarization; some American dialects are characterized by their nasalization. As you look around the world, you find that different languages make use of different paralinguistic features in different ways. This is what is not known. English is quite well studied, but there are so many languages where nothing has been done, though there are important differences in their use of paralanguage. Paralinguistics is a branch of phonology but a paralinguistic theory within phonology as yet does not exist.

– Would you agree that some of the problems that you deal with in your books can be found in embryo in *What is linguistics*? I notice that you touch on them here, and then you sort of develop them in your later books.

– *What is linguistics* was designed as a perspective book. I wanted to be fair to the school leaver, to tell him the main issues he was likely to encounter if he took up linguistics. I did not want to give him any unnecessary technicality and I did not want to confuse him by talking about individual scholars. I did not want to expound Chomsky, for example. In fact, Chomsky's name does not even turn up in that book and this point has received criticism. People say: 'How can you write an introduction to linguistics which doesn't mention Chomsky?'. Well, I think Chomsky would be the first to agree that there are more important things in life – in academic life that is – than people. The knowledge, the ideas are the thing. I talk a lot in there about knowledge and ideas which obviously owe a lot to Chomsky, amongst others, but I didn't go into the whole scholarly paraphernalia that I would have to do if writing a book at a more advanced level. So I should find it very surprising if there was any major subject matter in linguistics which wasn't alluded to somewhere in that book. But having said that, I don't think particularly that distribution of emphasis in the book in any sense reflects the way in which I subsequently worked. There was never any plan in my mind at the time. You can't plan your life so easily. For instance, these days I spend a lot of time working on clinical linguistic topics. Why? Because of any original theory or insight of mine? No. I started working on clinical linguistics for one reason only; when we moved to the Department of Linguistics at Reading, in 1965, I was sitting in my office one day, quite happily minding my own business, probably studying intonation or something, and I was rung up by a man

from the local hospital who said: 'We have a three year-old girl here who doesn't know any language, we don't know what's wrong with her. You're a linguist, you'll know. Come down and see her'. Now, I had never seen a language delayed child in my life, so I hadn't the foggiest idea of what was wrong with her. But the process of discussing with medical colleagues what the situation was attracted me greatly and led to the subsequent research on clinical linguistics. And this of course, was one factor in changing my state of mind about linguistics. It gradually dawned on me that one might possibly do something useful by studying such children as opposed to, for example, getting deeper and deeper into the deep structure of deep structures.

– You've just referred to this new field of study, clinical linguistics. Now, surely, a detailed knowledge of how language works is an essential prerequisite for successful speech therapy, and your various books on language disabilities will no doubt feature prominently on the shelves of any speech therapist worth his name. But there's one thing I would like to ask you in this respect. Could one talk of language disorder, of language pathology, when people may begin not to speak, as you say, but to *write unintelligibly*, or to lose control over *writing*? I'm of course thinking of a certain category of people who live on the pen.

– I use the term language pathology in the broadest sense. Language there means any modality of language– speaking, listening, reading or writing– and pathology means any breakdown or handicap, not simply a breakdown due to degeneration of tissue, which, of course, is the strictly medical sense of the word 'pathology'. So it's a bit of a metaphor, really. Having said that, I find that it is perfectly possible to study descriptively the types of breakdown that take place in the domain of reading and writing. The psycholinguist's view is to say that any model of language processing in the brain has got to be an integrated model. That is, there is no point in studying reading and writing unless you are able to relate these modalities to your ability in speaking and listening. And much of the current thinking about such topics as dyslexia, for instance, is precisely to relate the kinds of difficulty that children or adults manifest in their reading and writing to other underlying difficulties in language which would also be manifested in speaking and listening. It isn't a simple paralellism. It isn't the case that there is a neat one for one correlation between your difficulties in reading and your difficulties in listening, or in writing and in speaking. But there are correspondences that need to be worked out.

Now, I'm not sure whether you can extend this notion to include the sort of people you are talking about. If someone literally has no control over what he writes, then I would consider it a disorder. If he is physically in control, but is unintelligible or obscure, it's trickier, as we are here entering the realm of psychological disturbance. There are very thin boundaries between eccentric personalities, personality disorders, and

creative thinkers. Some metaphors used by schizophrenic speakers are extremely expressive - one might even go so far as to say 'aesthetic'. But, of course, the underlying intention of the language is fundamentally different from that which you would associate with literature.

– **When one talks of new advances in linguistics one inmediately tends to think of America as the principal promoter of this field of study. To what extent is this a fallacy?**

– I don't think that's fallacious. Most of the recent initiatives in linguistic inquiry have come out of the United States. I think this is true for most of the branches of linguistics that I have anything to do with. For instance, I edit the *Journal of Child Language*, and nine out of every ten papers from that journal come from the United States.

– **Why is that?**

– I think it's to do with the number of teaching courses which exist–and, presumably, the money available to set up these courses, and the foundations which support research. There is far more money available for research in the United States than in this country. There are more people working in the field. And, of course, there has been the influence of several dominant theoretical figures – Chomsky, Bloomfield, Sapir, Jakobson. In England, who have we had? There was J.R. Firth, of course, and Daniel Jones, and Firth's students – people like Halliday, and Palmer, Robins, and others, who have become major figures in their own right. I am a third-generation linguist in this tradition. I have learnt most of what I know about linguistics from these people. But there hasn't been the same focusing, the same development of a school of thought in England, as there has been in America. Some people say that this is very much the British way. I've already mentioned 'eclecticism' and the 'empirical approach'. These are phrases that are often used about the British way of doing things in linguistics. I am not a historian of ideas, but it seems to me that the British tend to be more sceptical about schools of thought, disciples, and the like. There certainly isn't such a highly developed network of everybody reading each other's work and getting on people's mailing lists as happens a great deal in the States.

– **What about the London school of linguistics?**

– Well, what is it? I don't know what counts as a London school of linguistics these days. If you mean 'all the linguists who are in London', there is no meaning to the phrase, because the linguists in London at the moment represent as wide a variety of linguistic points of view as I could imagine anywhere. If you mean by the London school of linguistics·those linguists in the Firthian tradition, well some of the most prominent members of that school no longer work in London but have gone abroad. It's a historical notion that still has some reality in the person of several of the older linguists who still do work in London, but I don't think it has in any sense a degree of influence comparable to what you'd find in, say, M.I.T.

– *A First Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* **is one of your latest publications, which I find very useful, incidentally. But why this dichotomy? Isn't phonetics a part of linguistics?**

– Well, there is, as you know, a traditional controversy about this matter. The view of linguistics as the study of grammar, semantics and phonology/graphology plays down the role of phonetics. If you were studying a written language, you could do without it altogether. On the other hand, most people investigate the study of language through the medium of speech. That is how linguistics developed, after all, and that is how we train our students. Phonetics to all of us is, therefore, as Sweet put it, an 'indispensable foundation' of the subject. But still, if you look at phonetics as a pure phonetician, you find yourself dealing with a whole range of subject-matter that you don't have to know about in order to do linguistics. I know very little about acoustics, for example. I learnt a little, but I am not at home in an acoustic phonetics laboratory. I do not know enough physics or enough mathematics to work creatively there. Nor do I know enough about the neurophysiology of articulation and reception, to work creatively in that branch of phonetics. But this doesn't worry me.

I'm not so much interested in the processes of sound production and reception as an end in themselves. I am   interested in the use languages make of these processes. So, when I was writing this dictionary I decided to bring in as much phonetics as seemed to be frequently used and referred to in the fields where people were dealing with language. What I did was look at the works in speech therapy and foreign language teaching and all the other domains of applied linguistics, and at the level of terminology that was used there. I saw a great deal of phonetic terminology, and used that as my guideline as to what terms to put in. But once you put in some general phonetic terms, you have to pay due respect to the subject – hence the title.

I did not want to write a dictionary, you know. Nobody but a fool would write a dictionary of linguistics and phonetics. I remember visiting Henry Gleason in the United Satates, and looking at his preparations for his major dictionary of linguistics. I saw one of his files in his basement, a file which contained the word 'form' in linguistics. It was a file that was enormous, at that time representing twenty six different meanings for its use in linguistics! And if he's still carrying on with that project these days, I imagine the number of meanings must be forty or fifty by now! When you know this, a dictionary of linguistics and phonetics is not an enterprise that any sane individual would willingly consider. It needs to be done properly, along the lines of the *O.E.D.*, and indeed, both the Philological Society and the Linguistics Association of Great Britain, from time to time, have considered such a venture. But nobody's done it. What struck me, a few years ago, was that students, speech therapists and others continued to demand one. They were saying: 'If only there were an introductory dictionary, a first dictionary, a dictionary which just gave us a guideline'. So I thought it would be a useful and responsible excercise – even though

the responsibility scared me stiff while I was doing it. I made a few blunders, but on the whole it seems to have been favourably received – much to my relief.

– **Hartmann's and Stork's *Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* was published eight years earlier than yours, and although you do not acknowledge its existence explicitly one can deduce from your preface that you had their dictionary very much in mind, if only to avoid incurring what seemed to you its defects.**

– Well, their dictionary, you see, was a dictionary of *language* and linguistics. They have terms in that dictionary like 'alphabet'. Now, I was not concerned to expound these basic terms; I wanted only technical terms in linguistics and phonetics, terms which would not be available in a general dictionary...

– **Yes, you explain that in the preface.**

– I felt this was very important. I did not want to devote so much space to the basic terms that you can find in general dictionaries. I wanted to deal fully with the more technical terms that dictionaries omit or treat rather thinly. It is true that, as I wrote my dictionary, I did what every dictionary writer does. You sit in a room, and place around you every other dictionary that you can get hold of – whether of linguistics, or not. For instance, the Merriam Webster Third International Dictionary has some good definitions of linguistic terms. And you surround yourself with linguistics textbooks too. It then becomes routine to use all these guides and see what they have to say. But you have to remember that while my book is called a 'dictionary', in fact it is a cross between a dictionary and an encyclopedia. It's a discursive dictionary. I do not simply give definitions and I've always found that linguistic definitions by themselves are the most unintelligible of beasts. I think that you have got to discuss their motivation, background idiosyncrasies, and illustrate some of the concepts, involved – thus moving in the direction of an encyclopedia. That is also why I thought it very important to give some follow-up references for each entry, so that people who wanted to would be able to look in a standard book and find some more information about the topic.

– **Well, Hartmann and Stork do the same, if I remember correctly...**

– Oh yes, indeed, they have references also but there was no particular reason why I didn't refer to Hartmann & Stork – I think if I read between the lines of Hartmann's review of my dictionary, he was a little upset about this. But the point one has to appreciate is that I didn't refer to anybody. I referred to none of the dictionary sources I used.

– **No, that's right.**

– And this is just standard lexicographic practice. When you write a new dictionary you don't say: 'By the way, I used all the other dictionaries'. That goes without saying.

– **Yes. I was only a little, how shall I say, puzzled? – perhaps this is not the right word – by the fact that although you do not refer to it, you seem to** have had it in the forefront of your mind. Your preface is in fact a review, a critique of their dictionary.

– Well, yes. I think that's probably a very astute observation. After all, it was the case that for several years their dictionary was the only one that was available. There was Eric Hamp's little dictionary of terminology and a few other things around, but it was the one that was most widely encountered in England. And therefore, as a teacher, I often found myself discussing its strengths and its limitations with students and others who used it. So perhaps I did have their dictionary more in the forefront of my mind than any other. But my dictionary isn't modelled on anybody else's. The principle of selection of entries, for example, was exclusively a pragmatic one. I looked around to see what terms were the ones that people wanted to know most about, and then systematized these observations. So, for example, having encountered several terms for consonant types frequently used in the applied academic literature, I then put in *all* consonant type terms. Having encountered some distinctive feature terms in that literature, I put in all distinctive feature terms. And so on.

– **'Literature and linguistics', 'Linguistics and literature', which comes first? One often finds in books dealing with linguistics and other disciplines that linguistics occupies first position.**

– Yes, but that's only an unfortunate consequence of the serial nature of language, it seems to me. You might remember that Sebeok's early book *Style in Language* had its cover printed with the word 'language' and the word 'style' intertwined! I like to think of language and literature as if they were inside each other. By training, of course, for me it's 'linguistics and literature' –as a linguist. As a human being, it's 'literature and linguistics'. The point is sometimes forgotten that linguists do engage in a little bit of reading every now and again. Some of us are quite well-read, actually! I think there could be two quite different books written under these two headings, in much the same way as happens in many hybrid disciplines in linguistics these days. You can have two quite different books written depending upon your background. For instance, consider psycholinguistics. If you are a linguist writing an introduction to psycholinguistics, your book will look very different from the book a psychologist would write. Take the topic of language and memory, for example. If you are a psychologist, you are interested in memory, and language is but one way in to its study, along with other aspects of behaviour. If you are a linguist, you are interested in language, and memory is but one factor amongst others of ways in which to look at that. So the emphasis, and the approach, and the experimentation will be very different. I find the same with literature and linguistics. As a linguist, there are certain things that I would like to do in order to explicate the nature of literary effect. As a literary critic, I would not start with those principles, or that approach. Two books on the subject could therefore be very different.

Now, one would hope that the two approaches would meet in the middle. In practice, of course, for a variety of historical and other reasons, the two approaches pass each other by, or result in confrontation. But that I think is a sign of the adolescence of the subject. In due course a rapprochement is likely to emerge.

— **The book *Linguistic Controversies*, just out, was written as a tribute to F. Palmer, a distinguished scholar from whose guidance you admit to have personally benefited. Now, you also mentioned Quirk earlier on. Who do you think has influenced you most?**

— It's very difficult to say. All of my early ideas about why and how to work on language systematically I got from Quirk, but he and I worked together only with reference to English. When I joined Palmer's department, I was given a real exposure to linguistic thinking, with reference to language in general. And it's from him I learnt a great deal about the principles of doing linguistics in general – and picked up a lot of healthy scepticism about schools of thought. And also from my colleague Peter Matthews who was a senior colleague of mine when I went to Bangor. You see, I suppose I arrived in Bangor as a somewhat naive Firthian. I had had some contact with Michael Halliday, when he was in London, and I was full of ideas about collocations, and clines, and scales, and categories, and things like this. And, indeed, my very first book that I ever wrote has a linguistics component in it which is as Firthian as anybody could possibly want it to be. Then I came into contact with Palmer, who had a much broader perspective about the nature of Firthian linguistics and who had some very caustic things to say at the time, I remember, about what counts as a neo-Firthian; and there was also Matthews, who at that time was much into generative grammar. And I recall some quite vicious arguments that we had in those days about the right and wrong way of doing things. Whatever I've ended up as, they've had a part in it.

— **This may sound complimentary to you, but I was talking the other day with somebody who knows your work very well, a linguist, and he said to me: 'What I admire of David Crystal is his independence of mind'.**

— That's a very kind remark for anybody to make about somebody, but I think you could say that about a lot of people. Certainly, I'm ready to look critically at my subject, as I've said. And I'm ready to engage in 'lateral thinking', so to say. For instance, I have never been scared of using one subject as a model for another. I'm quite happy to explore the possibilities of taking, shall we say, a model that was devised originally for use in foreign language teaching and trying it out in speech therapy. Or taking a model that was devised originally for one aspect of language structure and trying it out on another or something of that sort. I'm very happy to work in that kind of way without feeling myself constrained too much by tradition or, for that matter, by general opinion. Unfortunately, this sometimes gets me into trouble, as I've mentioned already with

reference to popularisation, and the like. In particular, if you try and balance theoretical linguistics on the one hand and applied studies on the other, you run the risk of upsetting both. If you say to the applied studies person: 'I'm going to present you with a simplified account of theoretical linguistics', you satisfy him, but you upset the theoretical linguist. Conversely, if you say to the theoretical linguist: 'I'm going to study this applied area in the degree of technical detail that would please you', you satisfy him, but you upset the people whom you are hoping will apply your ideas. You persevere, of course, if you believe in what you are doing, but sometimes you wish for a quieter life.

— **Just two more things. The following words were written by somebody whose work has no doubt contributed to the enrichment of the English language in the twentieth century. I'd like you to read them and then tell me what you think of them:**

> «... before English can be stripped to the bone and turned into a real world auxiliary, the academic pundits will have to learn a little more about practical semantics; they will have to submit to (or put up with) the most outrageous rationalizations. All verbs will have to become weak, forms like 'I swimmed' and 'I have swimmed' being semantically clear and hence thoroughly admissible. Verb inflexions must go: if 'I must'/'he must' is accepted then no noses may be wrinkled at 'I go'/'he go' (nor, of course, at 'I goed')».

— But, you see, English already is a world language. The argument doesn't even begin, it seems to me. English is already a world language despite the difficulties that this author has maintained. Now, to simplify the language is, of course, always a possibility, but it has been tried so often and it has never worked – for fairly obvious reasons. It's always dangerous to start tinkering with a language. It's so complex. You simplify something in one place, and you end up complicating something in another. People who talk about simplifying English have their attention totally taken up with morphological irregularities, but these are really a tiny aspect of the problem. It's English syntax that accounts for most of the complexity, and this the critics are usually silent about.

— **Finally, what are you working on at present?**

— Several things. As I've said, I always like to have several projects ongoing. If you work on just one project, you run the risk of waking up one day and not feeling like working on it – so you waste the day. But if you've got some alternative projects in the pipeline, you stand a reasonable chance of finding something to suit your mood. This does make it rather difficult to keep to deadlines, though! Anyway, at present I'm seeing through the final stages of a book on techniques for handling linguistic disability – a practical follow-up to *Clinical linguistics*, containing the details of the various profiling procedures developed at Reading. Then I propose to stop writing in this area, to give people time to assimilate and

react to the various ideas. I'm also very much involved in work on English usage at present, mainly for a BBC radio series which has turned out to be rather popular. It's a weekly 'correspondence of the air' programme, in which listeners' letters about the English language are read and discussed. It's an excellent way of getting some linguistic thinking across to a wide audience, I find, and it looks like continuing well into next year. It involves quite a lot of writing, and I hope to make use of this in various ways. Series-editing continues, of course. I have mixed feelings about this, because you have to read a lot of average material to find the good stuff, and it takes a lot of time. But the good stuff is there, and I find it extremely rewarding to help to get a good book through the press – especially if it's the work of someone who hasn't published much before. It's also very satisfying when you manage to commission and see through a book which turns out to be a best-seller (in academic terms!). I'm very proud of the books I invited for the Penguin Linguistics Series several years ago, for instance. And I hope that some of the books I'm handling now will do just as well. I wouldn't give up editorial work, despite the time it takes. Apart from anything else, it makes you read books properly!