



David Crystal



English — is it still one language?

Wohin bewegt sich die englische Sprache? Das fragte *Spotlight*-Autorin **RITA FORBES** den Englischexperten David Crystal. Im zweiten Teil erklärt Jörg Kilian, Professor der Germanistik an der Universität von Kiel, welchen Einfluss die englische auf die deutsche Sprache hat.

Spotlight: Is English still one language?

David Crystal: This question is actually quite difficult to answer. Two criteria are used to decide whether various manifestations of speech are dialects of the same language or different languages. One criterion is intelligibility: if two speakers don't understand each other, they must be speaking different languages. The other is identity. As has often been said, a language is a dialect with an army and a navy. In other words, if you have the power, you can call your dialect a language with impunity. For the present, I would say that there are signs of an emerging English "family of languages", but the vast majority of English speakers around the globe speak the same language.

Spotlight: How has English changed in the recent past?

David Crystal: By developing new varieties that reflect the way it is used in different countries. When a country adopts English, it immediately adapts it, using it not only for international purposes, as a lingua franca, but also for internal purposes, to express local cultural identity. The chief effect is in vocabulary, where thousands of local words are soon incorporated into the country's speech. If you pick up an English-language newspaper in South Af-

impunity: with ~ [ɪm'pjʊ:nəti]	ungestraft
intelligibility [ɪn,telɪdʒə'bɪləti]	Verständlichkeit
lingua franca [ˌlɪŋgwə'fræŋkə]	Verkehrssprache



Moving forward: English is evolving in many ways

rica, for example, you might read of people eating “putu” (a Zulu word for a type of porridge) or approaching a “robot” (a traffic light). There are now dictionaries of South African, Jamaican and Indian English, as well as many other varieties of world English.

Spotlight: How do non-native speakers contribute to changes in English? Will learners’ “mistakes” one day be considered standard English?

David Crystal: With roughly five non-native speakers in the world to every one native speaker, this is bound to happen. Numbers always count when it comes to language change. But there’s nothing new about this. The entire history of English shows usages that were at first thought to be errors and which then became standard. And several of the errors produced by second-language learners today turn out to be usages that once existed in the language. Take the common L2 [second language] usage of making uncountable nouns countable, saying such things as “informations” and “accommodations”. You’ll find such forms as early as Chaucer (14th century) and as recently as Johnson (18th century). They went out of fashion, but L2 learners may be the catalyst that will bring them back in.

Spotlight: David Cameron recently used the word “informations” in a speech.

David Crystal: A lovely example, and straight out of Chaucer: “Whanne Melibee hadde herd the grete skiles and resouns of dame Prudence, and hire wise informacions and techynges...” (See “A closer look”, page 38.)

Spotlight: What changes to English do you expect to see in the next five to ten years?

David Crystal: It’s difficult to predict the future when it comes to language; but all the signs indicate that global diversification will continue, as other countries come to use English increasingly, and develop a sense of ownership of the language as a result. I expect to see this ownership expressed in the writing of local novelists, poets and playwrights who use English in their own way to reflect the culture of their own country, without feeling the need to apologize or think that they have somehow made a “mistake” just because their usage doesn’t follow the norms of traditional British or American English. It will take longer than five to ten years, but eventually a German, Swedish, Russian (etc.) English will evolve, as

playwright [ˈpleɪraɪt] Bühnenautor(in), Theaterautor(in)

linguistically distinctive in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary as, say, American and Indian English.

We're going through a rapid period of change now, chiefly as a result of the internet, which has given us unprecedented fast access to new usages everywhere. The effects are mainly seen in vocabulary. Grammar changes more slowly and steadily over time.

Spotlight: Will teachers of English need to adapt their methods in order to accommodate the changes to the language?

David Crystal: Certainly, as they have already had to do to take into account the differences between British and American English. The global changes don't much affect the teaching of language production. If you are used to teaching British received pronunciation (BRP) and British standard English, for example, you will continue to do so, as these are perfectly respectable varieties. But in terms of listening and reading comprehension, everything changes, as teachers have to prepare their students for encountering the two billion people who use English around the world, only a tiny proportion of whom will be using BRP. Fortunately, thanks to the internet, this is much easier than it was a decade or so ago: all the main global varieties of English can now be seen and heard online. ■

A closer look

David Crystal quotes from one of *The Canterbury Tales* — a collection of stories in Middle English by **Geoffrey Chaucer** (1343–1400). In *The Tale of Melibee*, a man leaves his wife, Prudence, and his daughter, Sophie, at home for a day. He returns to find that three of his enemies have broken into his house and beaten his wife and daughter. Melibee wants to take revenge, but his wife persuades him that it would be a bad idea.

"Whanne Melibee hadde herd the grete skiles and resouns of dame Prudence, and hire wise informaciouns and techynges..."

In modern English this could be translated roughly as:

"When Melibee had heard the great logical argument and reasoning of Dame Prudence, and her wise recommendations and teachings..."

affect [ə'fekt]	beeinflussen
billion ['bɪljən]	Milliarde(n)
British received pronunciation (BRP) [ˌbrɪtɪʃ riːsɪvd prəˌnɑːnsi'eɪʃən]	britische Standardaussprache
distinctive [dɪ'stɪŋktɪv]	charakteristisch
revenge [ri'vendʒ]	Rache
unprecedented [ʌn'presɪdntɪd]	beispiellos, noch nie da gewesen