

Me – a purist?

From: David Crystal
Akaroa
Gors Avenue
Holyhead, Wales

Well, I have been called some things in my time, but never, never a 'purist'! I have spent my life attacking language purists, and purists have spent their lives attacking me. So to see myself introduced thus at the end of Aysha Viswamohan's interesting paper on 'Code-mixing with a difference' (*ET*79: Jul 04) was quite a shock. 'Many purists like David Crystal believe...'

But as I read on, I realized that something odd was happening. The quote from me which followed was actually reinforcing the point the author was making: 'Code mixing takes place to some degree everywhere that English is spoken alongside another language, and is a normal feature of bilingualism...' She sees me as supporting her point, not being critical of it.

Purists hate code-mixing, of course. So to see the term being used in a positive way, in this context, is distinctly odd. The editor did not correct it, so perhaps it is indeed more widely used than I think – and I only noticed it this time because it was applied to me. I would be interested to know of any other cases where 'purist' has been used as a pun-word, and in the meantime affirm to *ET* readers that purism is as far from my linguistic heart as it ever was.

Editor I did not change the usage because it was what the writer had chosen, the choice was intriguing, language changes all the time and this might be a novel (and viable) Indianism, and it was just the kind of thing a reader might take up.

More attention to detail?

From: Robert Phillipson
University of Roskilde
Denmark

David Crystal begins his article 'The future of Englishes' (*ET*58, Apr 99) with a plea for clarity in theoretical thinking and in observing the facts of language change. He sees intelligibility and identity/attitude as two key parameters for the existence of one or more languages, but his examples from Scandinavia and Yugoslavia are simply incorrect.

To claim that on grounds of intelligibility 'people from Norway, Sweden and Denmark speak a single language' is false. There is substantial variation within and between each language. Literary works in each language are translated into the others rather than being read in the original. Students in higher education in each country are very reluctant to use books and articles in other Scandinavian languages.

In Norway there is continuous debate in educational circles about the extra burden that the promotion of two standard languages imposes on learners. Intelligibility in inter-Scandinavian speech presupposes a substantial effort to accommodate, and there are manuals advising speakers of each language on how to make their tongue more readily accessible. Examples of distance and difference could be multiplied. All of which does not contradict the evidence that Scandinavians from many walks of life develop an active receptive competence in other Scandinavian languages. But it would never occur to them to conclude that this means that Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are one language. Neither intelligibility nor attitude/identity would justify such a conclusion.

Crystal goes on to claim that in the early 1990s 'the populations of Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia would all be described as speaking varieties of Serbo-Croatian'. This statement ignores social realities and history. The monarchy that existed between the two world wars was 'the kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes'. Throughout Titoism, Yugoslavs identified themselves as speakers of Serbian or Croat in addition to Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian. The old self-ascriptive labels were never dropped. Political forces have for 20 years been actively dismembering Serbo-Croat and instilling exclusive linguistic identities, but it is false to create the impression that the Croat and Serb languages have come into existence since the disintegration of Yugoslavia. It is a sociolinguistic fact that they have been there for as long as these forms of language have had labels.

Let me cite one more example from Crystal's article where more rigour would be needed: 'Britain leads the world in ELT... no-one was predicting such world language scenarios for English in the 1960s' (p. 18). The expansion of ELT was in fact deliberate policy by the British government from the mid-1950s, the main contours of which I have summarized in chapter 6 of *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

A blueprint for English as a 'world language' was written by an adviser to the British Council in 1941, H. V. Routh, 'The diffusion of English culture outside England' (Cambridge University Press). He envisaged an 'army of linguistic missionaries' (p.12); the new service must 'lay the foundations of a world-language and culture based on our own'; the model teacher 'must think as a citizen of the world, and behave as a representative of England should behave' (p.86);

Britain has a responsibility which implies that 'we not only have a spiritual heritage of our own – a national soul – but that somehow this possession is incomplete unless shared with other nations'

(p. 134). This world language scenario and key official documents of the 1950s and 60s are a part of the history of ELT that no amount of contemporary rationalising can explain away.

I happen to agree with much of what Crystal writes otherwise, but his argument would benefit by the kind of attention to detail that one expects from someone of his eminence. ■
