

BOOK NOTES

Language in Society 37 (2008). Printed in the United States of America
doi:10.1017/S0047404508081086

DAVID CRYSTAL, *Language and the Internet*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
Pp. xi, 304. Hb \$29.99.

Reviewed by ABDELALI BENTAHILA AND EIRLYS E. DAVIES
Translation School, Abdelmalek Essaadi University
BP 1220, Tangier, Morocco
bentahilaali@hotmail.com,
eirlys_davies@hotmail.com

Five years after the first edition of this book, Crystal has provided us with a revised version incorporating discussion of new trends such as blogging and instant messaging, together with more speculation about future trends. Drawing on specialist knowledge yet making his discussion accessible and enjoyable for nonspecialists, Crystal explores the particular linguistic characteristics of six major uses of the Internet: e-mail, chat groups, virtual worlds, the World Wide Web, instant messaging, and blogging. He provides a wealth of observations about their stylistic features (e.g., the form and function of the various elements of an e-mail) and their social and psychological functions (e.g., the sociolinguistics of chat groups). Insightful comparisons with other types of language use are provided. For instance, his discussion of the relationship of Internet usage to speech and writing leads to the conclusion that Netspeak is not merely a mixture of these two, but a genuinely new form of communication.

After reading so many others' remarks bemoaning the supposedly negative effects of the Internet on literacy and communicative skills, it is refreshing to see Crystal's openmindedness and appreciation of the innovative skills displayed by Internet users. He points with infectious enthusiasm to the creative and imaginative ways in which the medium is being exploited. He also emphasizes the exciting possibilities for linguistic research offered by Netspeak, pointing out that the language used in chat groups and on blogs offers us "written language in its most primitive state" (p. 176) or "in its most naked form" (245). His discussion throws up many ideas for future research topics, such as the nature of nicks, the implications of the Internet for cross-cultural communication, the notion of plagiarism, and the Semantic Web.

Our few reservations about the book include the fact that it is very much focused on English, with only a brief section dealing with other languages. This was certainly justified when the first edition appeared, but as Crystal himself acknowledges, since then the use of languages other than English has greatly expanded, and some examples drawn from these would have been welcome (for example, the impact of Netspeak on writing systems, as seen in the growing use of Latin characters to write e-mails and instant messages in Arabic).

The book is also, alas, once more out of date. The use of IP telephony, referred to in it as a future trend, is by now widely established, with the success of services such as Skype, as is Internet access via mobile phones. Some of the figures quoted may also strike the reader as outdated, as when reference is made to LISTSERV statistics dating from 2000 (136), or to predictions about the Web in 2002 or the first half of the 2000s (231). This is an inevitable problem, given the nature of the book's subject matter, but it is also one that allows us to look forward to reading the next instalment of Crystal's fascinating observations.

(Received 3 September 2007)