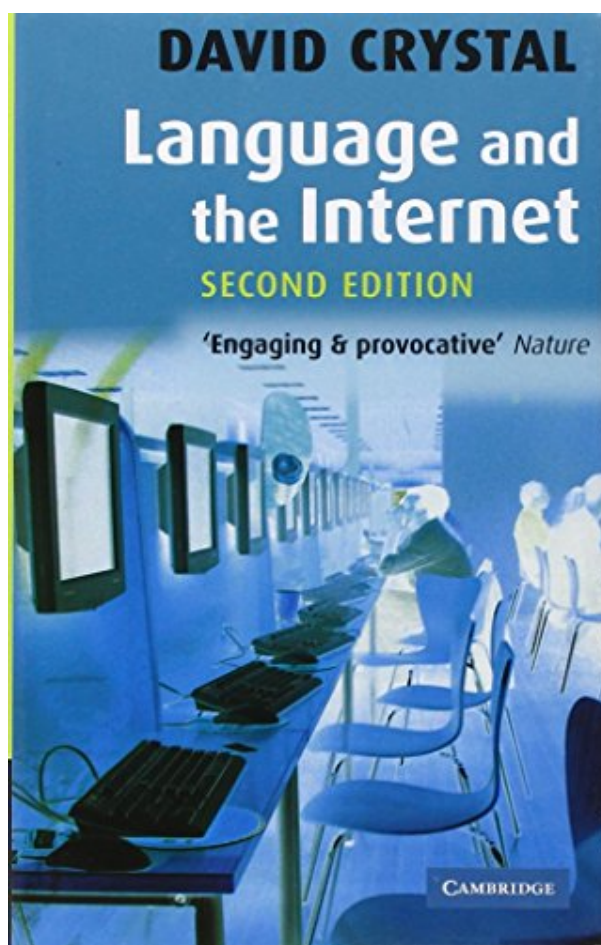
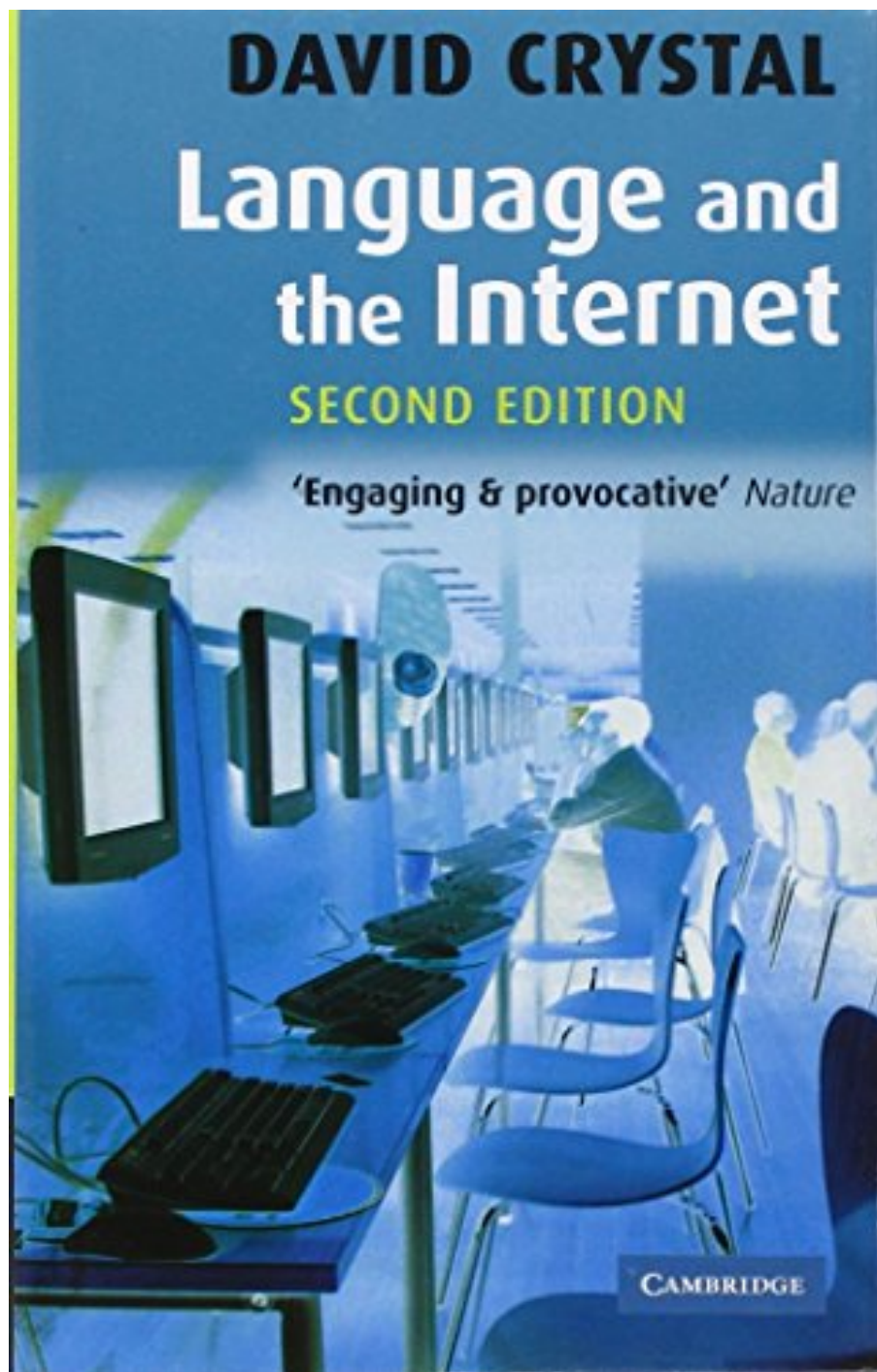


LANGUAGE AND THE INTERNET BY DAVID CRYSTAL



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In recent years, the Internet has come to dominate our lives. E-mail, instant messaging and chat are rapidly replacing conventional forms of correspondence, and the Web has become the first port of call for both information enquiry and leisure activity. How is this affecting language? There is a widespread view that as 'technospeak' comes to rule, standards will be lost. In this book, David Crystal argues the reverse: that the Internet has encouraged a dramatic expansion in the variety and creativity of language. Covering a range of Internet genres, including e-mail, chat, and the Web, this is a revealing account of how the Internet is radically changing the way we use language. This second edition has been thoroughly updated to account for more recent phenomena, with a brand new chapter on blogging and instant messaging. Engaging and accessible, it will continue to fascinate anyone who has ever used the Internet.

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4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

much-needed academic discussion of online language

By Nadyne Richmond

David Crystal, one of the world's eminent linguists, has given us a desperately-needed academic resource: this text. Although, as other reviewers have pointed out, some of the conclusions drawn are fairly obvious, this text is useful to have such conclusions stated concisely, in a single location, by a recognised linguist.

The book discusses the effects of the Internet on language, specifically English. Anyone who has spent any length of time online has noted that the language used online is a strange mix of formal and informal, abbreviations and highly-specialised jargon. How does this effect the language as a whole? Crystal does not pretend to answer this question, but raises questions for later research.

As with any book that discusses an aspect of the Internet, some pieces of the book are out-of-date. Search engines are more robust than when Crystal surveyed them. MUDs are essentially dead, replaced in part by massively-multiplayer online games that have their own linguistic ramifications.

In all, this book is an interesting and clearly-written broad introduction to the application of linguistics to the Internet. It is not an advanced text, although the nearly-exhaustive footnotes and citations are an excellent resource for a reader who would like to learn more.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

needs to be retitled "Internet for Dummies"

By A Customer

I'm a graduate student with a focus in computer technologies and writing, so I approached this book with an attitude of "what can I learn about language and the Internet?" The answer, unfortunately, was: not much. If you're at all familiar with the Internet and use email regularly, most of Crystal's book will just be covering a lot that you already know. Crystal gives the impression of having just discovered the Internet--e.g., he voices frustration at the number of non-relevant hits from a search on a word like 'depression', something that most of us have figured out strategies to deal with (and which he, as a linguist, might find interesting). Some of the solutions he suggests to the search-engine problem are already out or in beta, yet he doesn't show any familiarity with such developments.

Crystal admits up front that his aims with this book are modest -- basically, he wants to ask whether the Internet has affected language and language use. Um, well, yeah it has.

But he never answers the question that my undergraduate English professor made us ask of all of our paper theses--So what? Why/how do these changes matter? What larger significance do they have? As a linguist, Crystal isn't perhaps so interested in social or political commentary, but never was there such a disembodied look at language. It's as though because the words appear on a screen, we don't need to think about the social, political, or economic pressures that influence these "language communities" he's looking at. He admits that market forces are driving which languages get to be used in the "global village" but then acts as if that fact is of little consequence.

Crystal's method is best described as descriptive--but he doesn't have much to describe, as his sample for

analysis includes his own email as well as that of his two children. And as far as I can tell, he doesn't attempt to tie in these changes to any kind of linguistic theory (with the exception of his use of Grice to explain the cooperative nature of conversation). I'm also struck by the lack of evidence that he's read in this area at all--no citation of Sherry Turkle, for example, whose work would have been informative for the whole chapter he spends on MUDs.

If you know next to nothing about Internet-related communication (email, web pages, MUDs) then this book would be a good introduction for you (hence the title of this post). Viewed as an very introductory text, I'd probably give this a slightly higher rating, because it is clearly written.

4 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

New Styles for the New Medium

By Rob Hardy

Look at that next e-mail from someone you consider intelligent, and maybe you will see that little regard is paid to exact spelling, to punctuation, even to using capital letters. Are we becoming illiterates by means of the amazing changes the Internet has brought? Dr. David Crystal, who has produced many scholarly volumes such as *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, uses the internet a lot, and has looked into the many forms of its use by other people. It is changing things, surely, but it is its own new medium drastically different from anything that has gone before, and Crystal says, "It shows language expanding richly in all sorts of directions." In *Language and the Internet* (Cambridge University Press), Crystal surveys the language used in different branches of the Internet, and although he admits that some of his findings are going to be quickly dated because of the Internet's extreme rate of change, his book is a useful initial survey of Internet language, one upon which future studies will draw as a foundation.

The remarkable function of the Internet in linguistic communication stems from its not quite being speech and not quite being writing. Communication in chatgroups or MUD's, and to a lesser extent e-mail, is typed but is a good deal like speech, displaying the immediacy and flow of conversation. This is an entirely new way of communicating. It means that John's speech is typed one keystroke at a time, but appears to recipients all of a piece, with no way that a recipient can react to it while it is being typed. Unlike with speech, the sender cannot be clued by an "Uh-huh" to indicate that the speech in progress is being well received. The speed of such interactions, dependent on keystrokes and speed of the Internet at that particular time, means that the rhythm of interaction is not only slow, but irregularly and unpredictably so. If there are multiple users, everyone's speech is displayed along with everyone else's, with little of the ear's ability to tune into just one speaker. Taking turns in conversation, which we take for granted face-to-face or on the telephone, is disrupted, and no one can get cues from tone of voice. Crystal reviews many of the responses Internet users have developed to deal with the peculiarities of the new medium. There is a list of the famous "smileys" or "emoticons" which are punctuation marks used to simulate smiling faces, frowning faces, confusion, winking, and so on. Their linguistic interest is that they could have shown up earlier in written language; only with the immediacy of Net communication did smileys become a useful tool. He reviews ways in which content of this form of communication may be shaped by the new medium, and is dismissive of the current crop of style manuals that would impose rules on it.

This is an academic review, well referenced and footnoted, but Crystal's optimism and good humor abound. He has clarified many aspects of the styles and abbreviations one is likely to meet in e-communication, and he is documenting them, rather than trying to influence the style. And sometimes it is all amusingly above his head; check the footnote which ought to translate "Hay! Odz r he wen 2 Radio Hack 4 a nu crys 4 hiz rainbow box!" and you will find: "I don't understand it, either."

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