BOOK REVIEW

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Language and the Internet

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Author:	David Crystal
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With Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) making headline news in the literature, Crystal's (2001) "Language and the Internet" is ever more so a prescribed reading for any teacher; whether ESL, LOTE or not. CMC involves all forms of electronic communication, from simple emailing to discussion groups, Internet Relay Chat, website design and in the not too distant future video conferencing (Harrington and Levy, 2001; Warschauer, 2004). Crystal's goal seems to be to explain and document in layman's terms the current position of CMC as well as its effect on linguistics.

Language and the Internet is divided into eight chapters. The first three investigate how "the Internet's global scale and intensity of use, is having an affect on language in general and on individual languages in particular" (p. 5). The following four chapters define and document the linguistic aspects of email (chapter four); chatgroups (chapter five); virtual worlds (chapter six) and the Web (chapter seven). These chapters deal with how to express, write, format and deliver an opinion/thought electronically. The last chapter not only concludes this XLNT b%k (see Crystal, 2001 for a translation), but also provides some suggestions about language and the internet otherwise known as "Netspeak" (p. 24).

What the reader is constantly reminded of is that no matter which medium of communication is the preferred mode of delivery, the Net endorses "creativity" (p. 240). Creativity, it seems, breaks or redefines all boundaries, and CMC being primarily received in the written format defies certain linguistic rules.

Crystal sets the scene by reviewing the possibilities offered by the Internet; a "global medium" (p. 3) through which users are given a voice to share information using a comprehensible opened text available to a wide audience. The Internet is predominantly a text world with a homogenous language. Thus native speakers rely on prior experiences and knowledge to set the Netspeak rules and regulations. Second language learners, on the other hand need to learn not only the basic grammar rules and different kinds of written genre, but they must also become adept with deciphering how those rules and genres have been redefined to fit in with the electronic communication environment.

Language learners interested in CMC should be aware of a few rules. Netspeak is also about behaviour and verbal protocol. Crystal explains that interlocutors must comprehend how to use Netspeak and how to read it. Unlike face-to-face conversation emotions and body language become invisible tools hidden behind words and between lines. In addition, net participants delineate an identity and appropriate linguistic behaviour specific for their group and accessible by all. The rules for appropriate register use are

explicit. Commenting on appropriate register, Crystal brings the metamorphosis of grammar and orthography to life by providing examples of linguistic preferences over others. Netspeak has created never before seen compound formations, with never thought possible affixes usage, acronyms apparitions and spelling creation which defy the realms of orthography. All these being adhered to online conversation offers no guarantee of feedback until someone on the World Wide Web decides to respond.

"The Language of Emails" begins the more in-depth aspect of Crystal's work. What needs to be highlighted is that emailers (predominantly native speakers) rely on formal letter format to structure the presentation of their emails. However, they are forever developing new styles to render their message more succinct and understandable.

Unlike asynchronous communication (such as emailing), synchronous exchanges offer the most challenge. Chatgroup messaging is in real time, providing faster, more personal and endless conversations. Language learners being exposed to chatgroups ought to be aware of all its idiosyncrasies. Most relevant to teachers is the dilemma students face in such environment. Crystal provides a student's opinion: 'I don't want to know what *everyone* else in my class thinks every week'" (p. 149). This example was also echoed in a research by Lee (2000). This Korean study confirms that amidst the positive response in utilising CMC as a mode for language learning, students noticed that long contributions were avoided by their fellow readers.

Like emails, chatgroups have developed their own grammar constructions and specific vocabulary. Such creation is also occurring in "The Language of Virtual Worlds" or MUD. However, users are observed to have a preference for the third person as well as an aptitude in negotiating meaning from ambiguous seemingly more closed text. Virtual world are more private environments with more regulations and codes.

"The Language of the Web" on the other hand is an open text environment, where precision is preferable. Traditional and web publishing do not follow the same guidelines. This form of communication has also developed a specific language not because of a need to restrict access but more for a need

to save space and time. It is for this very reason that web publishing adheres more strictly to grammatical and sentence structures.

By the end of this book, it becomes visible that the "Linguistic Future of the Internet" is promisingly self-rejuvenating. Net participants are creative using all forms of media to deliver their information which meet their ability, assist in expressing their ideals and reveal their character. Such innovation renders participants adaptable and language malleable.

Crystal's book opens a new horizon for teachers to view the reality of language and the Internet. He predicts that these new forms of communication provide an opportunity for language education in vivo; students have a chance to influence Netspeak. To achieve these objectives, educators might need to become aware of Netspeak's demands and become conversant with its linguistic mutation. They will need to be alert to technological advancements such as online translations or texting, as well as develop new skills, to guide students through this wide web world.

As this text comes to an end one last question remains unanswered: "How does one learn to write for potential millions, with clarity and… cultural sensitivity?"(p. 206). It is this question that language educators in this contemporary world must begin to examine. Crystal's *Language and the Internet* provides relevant and accessible answers.

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