SOBRE CRYSTAL, DAVID. *El lenguaje e Internet.* Trad. Pedro Tena. Madrid: Cambridge UP, 2002. 304 pp.

David Crystal, a respected linguist and responsible for many books and dictionaries on English language and use, delights us again, this time in his intellectual and personal maturity with a very interesting book on the type of language used on the Internet. His own extensive use of this relatively modern technology and his wide-ranging knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of the English language allows him to write about the peculiarities and main features of this new development and to stress its importance in our common everyday life. He starts his book by mentioning the many different fears the Internet has awoken, as did previous inventions that also revolutionised human life such as the press, the telephone, the radio, or the television. But in this case, as witnesses of a change still in a transitional state, we need to be cautious, says Crystal, because we shall see many more developments connected to this new technology happening in the future, and many more people will have the chance of using the Web for shopping, playing, finding information, applying for a job, or just for communication.

Crystal distinguishes four main different forms of expression on the web: chat groups, e-mails, virtual games, and web pages, all of them interconnected and also with some peculiar features of their own. He prefers the term "netspeak" to refer to the type of language people use on the Net, this being understood as an electronic, global, and interactive means of communication. Crystal then establishes the opposition between prescriptive and descriptive approaches to netspeak, just as it also happens in everyday language. Although most of the manuals written on the subject pretend to be descriptive and advocate fluidity and an aversion to rules, they cannot avoid a certain prescription in their preference of certain terms or their reference to some other features. Prescriptivism is especially present in many software programmes which include certain tools for spelling and grammar correction. We still need, according to Crystal, a guide which is based only on empirical observation and which reflects the frequency of use of the differ-

ent structures on the Net. Some of the language we use here includes the use of specific terms (e.g.: hackers, surfers), neologisms (e.g.: mouseclick, webmaster), abbreviations and acronyms (e.g.: html, b4n), together with other linguistic features such as a tendency to a lack of punctuation, the use of small letters and symbols, etc.

Professor Crystal also refers to the overwhelming importance of English as the language for communication on the Web as one of the main reasons for fear of the Internet. Certainly, it is now beyond question that most web pages are in that language. This is related to the origins of the Internet in the United States and the fact that it is a relatively modern invention. Its use will surely be widespread in the next few years and the supremacy of English will give way eventually to a more heterogeneous range of languages than now exists. The presence of other languages, such as Spanish, German, or French, for instance, is increasing rapidly and their users will find it easier now to obtain more useful information available on the Net. But what will happen to the minority languages then? Will this invention be their tomb as some people dare to suggest? According to Crystal, this is certainly not the case as they may also benefit from the greater economy and simplicity of creating a web page if compared, for example, with the expenditure and effort needed to edit a newspaper.

To summarize, the panorama presented and analysed by Crystal is not chaotic and pessimistic but rather based on confidence in the constant and rapid development of an always changing and rapid new technology. Given these circumstances, it is difficult even for a brilliant scholar with a sharp mind such as his to characterize the main features of the language used on the Internet, as its varied uses will surely enlarge and increase with time. It is something alive, still moving, and new features will soon appear on the scene. Interactivity of voice, image and words will be more common in the near future, and the implications of some of these developments on education and automatic translation will also be very remarkable, as it is now in the field of foreign language teaching. So, contrary to the current tide of pessimism that invades some spheres of our life and which undoubtedly may

also affect our confidence in modern technology, David Crystal offers us a very clear picture of the present situation of the Internet and a view that, far from menacing our linguistic variety, it will be a useful tool for enriching our language further by adding a greater diversity to our knowledge and by opening new and different possibilities of expression.

JOSÉ FRANCISCO PÉREZ BERENGUEL