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In *Language Revolution*, Crystal, one of the leading authorities on language, effectively synthesizes three dominant trends that have drastically changed the dynamics of the global linguistic scenario. The emergence of English as essentially the world’s first global language, potential endangerment to minority languages and the inexplicable impact of internet technology on the use of English are trends that Crystal has already examined extensively in three different books. Taking a step further, in the current book he explores the interrelationship of these trends and
takes a position on its significance in present day situations. The book consists of five chapters. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 pull together previous arguments about the three trends within a “single frame of reference” (p. 4). Chapters 4 and 5 offer us a new vision of the linguistic future by drawing upon artifacts, which were never presumed to inform linguistic affairs.

In Chapter 1, Crystal reviews the cultural legacy that informs the rise of English as a global language in politics, economics, education, media, and popular culture. He argues that despite its current worldwide significance, the spread of English is not a stable and permanent phenomenon.

In chapter 2, Crystal articulates his concern about language death. The dreadful statistic of 96% of the world’s languages being spoken by only 4% of the world’s population offers an explanation as to why so many languages ceased to exist and so many of them are on the verge of dying. How does this happen? Languages die when its speakers die due to natural disasters, genocide, and political persecution or as they assimilate to the dominant culture. Can anything be done? Crystal draws our attention to some strategies that support language revitalization, including rigorous documentation, consciousness raising activities and financial assistance.

In chapter 3, Crystal reviews “the Internet as an event which is as revolutionary in linguistic terms as it has been technologically and socially”. This chapter is devoted to an extensive discussion of what he calls ‘netspeak’, the discursive features of the Internet. Referring to e-mails, chat room interactions, emoticon rebus characters and a range of other features from the internet, Crystal explores how the human world is provided with a radically new option of communication. Crystal renders this discussion extraordinarily striking by pointing out to the increasingly multilingual nature of internet discourse.

Having confirmed the status of English as a global language, in chapter 4, Crystal discusses some implications of this development, including in cultural domains such as arts. Finally in chapter 5, Crystal reflects on the implications of the lack of balance involved in the process of English becoming an international language. Crystal closes the book by ten key themes that should mark the linguistic diaspora of the twenty first century: concern for endangered and minority languages as well as for those who have difficulties learning or have lost their ability to speak their mother tongue, better preservation of accents and dialects of a language, promotion of style, tone and modes of discourse, inclusion of multilingualism as a profound phenomenon in our lives and finally an ingenuous appreciation of the role of language in society.

Crystal outlines the rapid growth of a single major language, the gradual demise of several endangered languages and the interplay between language and the
World Wide Web giving rise to a new kind of communication. By raising a compelling question, what do we do next, the book takes the existing discourse about the prominence of English a step ahead. Crystal handles this challenging topic with simplicity and grace that make it palatable for readers who would have otherwise found it difficult to envisage a transient, magnanimous, linguistic ecology. Some of the information the book offers may not be new but is nevertheless constructive because of the clarity with which it is all tied in together. The weakness of the book is in its repetitiveness—anyone who has a solid grasp of history and world Englishes or who is already familiar with Crystal’s previous work would hardly encounter anything new in the first three chapters. At the same time, Crystal’s amicable treatment of the subject and sophisticated presentation of the material succeed in catering to a broad audience of readers interested in languages and linguistics.


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The Curzon Arabic Linguistic Series, of which this volume is a part, has two stated readerships in mind: (1) non-Arabist general linguists with an interest in Arabic, and (2) students and researchers already in the field of Arabic language and linguistics. Unfortunately (for me) I slot into neither of these—at least not comfortably. As an English language teacher based at an Arab university, I had hoped to gain some insight into the relentless encroachment of English on contemporary Arab societies. Remarkably though—and much to my disappointment—this voluminous publication has virtually nothing to say about the contact or conflict phenomena engendered between Arabic and what is doubtless the most deeply