

REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, by David Crystal, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1987, cloth, vii, 472 pages (including 8 appendices), \$39.95 U.S., ISBN 0-521-26438-3.

Competition has always been the key to survival. This book meets its competition more than half-way, and wins, hands down.

Staking out a place for itself in the book market was not the most difficult task for Crystal's Encyclopedia. Nothing comparable existed before it appeared. Ducrot and Todorov's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language, translated from French, is the only other work that comes to mind. This is a set of small essays on Linguistic topics, heavily laced with musings in the French tradition of philosophico -literary criticism, and haphazardly grouped under four main headings (Schools, Field, Methodological Concepts, Descriptive Contents). Information is there to be dug out, if you can find it, and if you can stop yourself from lengthy and ponderous cogitation over items like the following, on 'Grammatology,' which occasionally stray into one's field of vision: 'The thought of the trace cannot flow into that of the logos as soon as the latter is instituted as the repression, and eviction to the outside, of writing.' (Ducrot and Todorov 1981:351). It is no large victory to best this work, whose purpose is to explain, but which itself cries out for exegesis of its encrypted messages.

Those who have purchased a respectable general reference encyclopedia in the hope that it will eliminate the need to acquire a whole library of specialized single-volume reference materials will nevertheless find themselves very tempted to add Crystal's book to their shelves. The Brittanica, for example, does devote some 23 closely packed pages to the broad matter of 'Language,' and an impressive 224 pages, complete with full colour maps, tables of data and accounts of significant aspects of grammatical systems, to the 'Languages of the World.' And it also contains much that is both solid and clearly presented on many topics of interest to linguists, from artificial intelligence to machine translation to writing systems.

But Crystal's 480 pages enclose a wealthier store of information and thought than even the most comprehensive general encyclopedia could be expected to aspire to. Just as important, it displays this store so as to encourage the general reader and the linguist alike to savour it.

The keener kind of competition I had in mind was competition from sources other than books - all those colourful, immediate, multi-sensory appeals emitted by other forms of information exchange. To some, it is a wonder that books continue to find a market at all: film, television, user-friendly computers replete with graphical interfaces, hypertext and bundled Shakespeare are said to be nudging the book, as a vehicle for the pleasant acquisition of knowledge, towards its demise. Crystal's book is evidence that this vehicle is still robust, and can be customized to emulate its competitors, without losing anything in the process.

A distinguished panel of editorial advisors (including Victoria Fromkin, Charles Ferguson, Wilga Rivers and Dell Hymes) have provided counsel on content. But it is striking to note that on the list is the name of Professor Michael Tywman, Department of Typography and Graphic Communication, University of Reading. His influence perhaps explains the highly professional layout, which is more than just window-dressing for the text, but an integral part of it and a key to this book's success as a book. Crystal's aim in writing the Encyclopedia is, as he acknowledges in the preface, to celebrate language: the attractive design, marrying text and illustrative material into a highly appealing whole, is itself a successful evocation of the wonders that are our stock in trade.

The eye is drawn into this book and persuaded to stay by the same sort of tactics successfully employed by other media. Variety abounds, and characterizes every page.

The section devoted to Dictionaries is typical: four sizeable pages in all, and on each page, space for two wide newspaper-style columns plus a narrower column, set in a smaller and stylistically differentiated typeface. Less than half of this space, however, is taken up by the main text. The rest is pleasingly occupied. A picture of Dr. Johnson wearing a defiant and challenging expression is framed by an extract from an original edition of his dictionary. Also revealed are the faces of James Murray and Noah Webster, each illuminated by explanatory captions. Sample pages of different types of dictionaries are reproduced, taken from the Larousse du XX^e Siècle, an illustrated eighteenth -century German-Latin schoolbook, and a multi-lingual Duden, as well as excerpts from several modern English dictionaries. The reader is invited to determine how closely these works correspond to an 'ideal' dictionary, the desiderata for which are sketched out in a boxed checklist separate from the main text. A chronology of important events in lexicography, a discussion of the impact of computer technology on the field, and a marginal anecdote on rare and non-words complete the section.

This section is one of 65 sections dealt with, under 11 main headings. Crystal has, thankfully, shunned a simple-minded alphabetic approach to cataloging his celebration of language, and has instead organized the work thematically. The major divisions are as follows: Popular Ideas about Language; Language and Identity; The Structure of Language; The Medium of Language (Speaking and Listening, Writing and Reading, Signing and Seeing); Child Language Acquisition; Language, Brain and Handicap; The Languages of the World; Language in the World; Language and Communication.

Cross-references are provided throughout the text, and eight appendices give alphabetically organized ready reference to any topic. A glossary of twenty double-column pages covers the gamut of terms from 'abessive' to 'zoösemiotics.' This is followed by a comprehensive listing of the symbols and abbreviations used by linguists; a table of 1,000 of the world's languages, containing information on where each is spoken, its language family and number of speakers; a set of suggestions for further reading keyed to the eleven principal parts of the book; a bibliography; an index of languages families, dialects and scripts; an index of authors and personalities, and lastly, an index of topics.

The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language is a tour de force. In its broad coverage, its intelligent organization and its attractive layout, it encompasses a wide spectrum of issues of central interest to linguists. Crystal's writing style is crisp, clear and direct. Not for him the turgid muddle of Ducrot and Todorov's 'deconstruction' and 'inter-textuality:' this is a book which informs and which compels the reader to explore every page.

I could find no major fault with it. Perhaps some of the 600 or so maps, diagrams and photographs would have been more striking in colour, but they are nevertheless admirably clear and uncluttered. In any case, costs would have been significantly increased by the use of colour. Other reviewers, writing for a more general public, mildly chastize Crystal for the use of technical jargon (Carling 1988: 30), or for failing to be normative. (Moore 1988:166) These criticisms are of no consequence to those who avail themselves of the glossary or, indeed, who read page 2 of Crystal's book.

Crystal himself, however, avers that there are two main limitations to this Encyclopedia. On the one hand, there is no comprehensive treatment of the contribution to the study of language by academic traditions other than linguistics. Thus, the ideas engendered by philosophy and psychology, as well as anthropology, sociology and mathematics, though often acknowledged in the text, are not given a systematic account. This is because, says Crystal,

they operate within a different intellectual perspective, and use radically different procedures of study.

And on the other hand, this volume does not aim to focus on the many approaches and methods devised to analyse language, nor on the attendant controversies. Its focus is the use and structure of language, with its diverse patterns and functions.

So, the sequel is waiting to be written. Contentious academic issues raised by language study, and the light thrown on them by other academic traditions, would be a fine matter for another encyclopedia. It is to be hoped that this challenge is met by someone as able and as enthusiastic as Crystal.

REFERENCES

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