The book has been painstakingly edited and printed; mistakes are admirably rare. The (apparently editorial) decision regarding capitalization of English nouns is uncommon (as in ''secondary *U*mlaut in *o*ld *h* igh *G*erman,'' p. 1330).

Only a very thorough analysis of the literature quoted in all chapters could provide an overview of much updating that has been achieved in the revised texts; I found some 15% to 40% of post-1985 titles — which testifies to a thorough account in the revised chapters. (Chapter 134, p. 1931, is exceptional in listing explicitly ADDITIONS to publications mentioned in the first edition.) The reviewer and no doubt many readers are looking forward to the third volume, which will soon complete the second edition of *Sprachgeschichte.*

University of Cologne MANFRED GORLACH

David Crystal: *Language Death.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. x + 198 pp. US $19.95 hardback

One of the more positive developments to be observed in our discipline over the last eight years or so is the fact that the topic of language death has finally attracted the general interest of a gradually growing group of linguists. Committees on, and foundations and societies for, endangered languages were founded, there are more and more conferences on the topic, and in 2000 the German Volkswagen-Stiftung started funding a program for the documentation of endangered languages (for information visit their website: http://www.volkswagen-stiftung.de). In the last few years we have also seen the publication of more and more books on the study of endangered languages; however, almost all the publications that I am aware of address only the linguistic peer group. David Crystal's monograph *Language Death* is a book that addresses both the expert linguist and the interested layman.

In the preface (pp. vii–x) the author provides the reader with a brief history of the growing awareness of the rapid endangerment and death of many minority languages within linguistics since 1992. Crystal points out that despite this positive development within our discipline, ''the educated public … is still unaware that the world is facing a linguistic crisis of unprecedented scale'' (p. viii). To change this situation by providing sound information and answers to central questions of the problem is (one of) the explicit aims of this monograph:

This book … aims to establish the facts, insofar as they are known and then to explain them: what is language death, exactly? which languages are dying? why do languages die? — and why apparently now, in particular? … Why is the death of a language so important? Can anything be done? Should anything be done? … It is time to promote a new ecolinguistics. … Everyone should be concerned, because it is everyone's loss (p. ix).

The first chapter asks the question, ''what is language death?'' (pp. 1–26). Actually, the answer is relatively simple: ''A language dies when nobody speaks it any more'' (p. 1). But is this really such a problem given the world's many languages? To answer this question Crystal first refers to the ''language pool'' (p. 2). He points out that we do not — and probably cannot — know the exact number of languages that are spoken in the world today. The world's languages have a highly uneven distribution, not all languages have yet been ''discovered,'' there is a problem of different names used to refer to one and the same language, and there is the difficulty of deciding whether two speech systems should be considered as separate languages or as dialects. Nevertheless, the author comes up with the careful and cautious estimate that the number of languages in the world lies somewhere in the range of 5,000–7,000 languages (p. 11). Crystal then points out that ''just 4% of the world's languages are spoken by 96% of the population. Turning this statistic on its head: 96% of the world's languages are spoken by just 4% of the population'' (p. 14). Developing on this statistic he points out that at the moment about 4,000 languages can be considered to be endangered. What such a situation looks like is impressively illustrated with data on Canada's 50 aboriginal languages. With respect to the global situation of language endangerment it seems realistic that in the next 100 years 50% of the languages that are still spoken on earth will have died. This means that from now on, ''one language must die, on averge, every two weeks or so'' (p. 19). It goes without saying, of course, that there are different levels of danger. Languages are classified with respect to these levels of endangerment, and Crystal provides the reader with the various classification systems and the terminology linguists use for describing endangered languages. In his conclusion to this first chapter the author emphasizes once more that ''the present time [is] a particularly critical moment in linguistic history'' (p. 24), and he quotes various sources to illustrate what it is like ''to be without your rightful mother tongue'' (p. 24) and what this ''enormous concept of language death'' (p. 25) really means and implies. The sources quoted reveal that the issue of language death is important to many people. This leads to the question, ''why should we care?'', which is asked in chapter 2 (pp. 27–67).

This second chapter starts with unmaking the myths that ''any reduction in the number of languages is a benefit for mankind'' (p. 27) and that there are ''primitive'' languages. Crystal convincingly shows that there ''is no plausibility in the view 'the fewer languages the better' '' (p. 31) and then provides the following five answers to the question of why we should care if a language dies:

– because we need diversity (p. 32) (the central biological/ecological answer),

– because languages express identity (p. 36) (the central ethological and cultural answer),

– because languages are repositories of history (the central historical answer),

– because languages contribute to the sum of human knowledge (p. 44) (the central cognitive answer), and

– because languages are interesting in themselves (p. 54) (the central linguistic answer).

Crystal develops these five answers to the central question of this chapter and illustrates his arguments with many excellent examples. I would like to elaborate briefly on one point Crystal makes in his linguistic answer to the question. Referring to Bob Dixon, his experience as a fieldworker, and his ideas with respect to fieldwork, David Crystal emphasizes the need of field linguistics and fully acknowledges the contributions of field linguists to our discipline. He agrees with Dixon that ''the analysis of a previously undescribed language is … 'the toughest task in linguistics', yet 'the most exciting and the most satisfying of work' '' (p. 65) and then provides the following quote from Dixon (1997: 144):

> The most important task in linguistics today — indeed, the only really important task — is to get out in the field and describe languages, while this can still be done. … If every linguistics student (and faculty member) in the world today worked on just one language that is in need of study, the prospects for full documentation of endangered languages (before they fade away) would be rosy. I doubt if one linguist in twenty is doing this.

However, in a footnote to this strong plea for descriptive field linguistics Crystal also mentions the following: ''There have … been several cases reported of students applying to do research on endangered languages being turned down by a linguistics department on the grounds that their proposals were of insufficient theoretical interest'' (p. 65, note 76). I myself have been confronted with such criticism, and I am sure that other fieldworkers have had, or are having, the same experience. However, I hope that Crystal's book will contribute to changing this — to my mind scandalous — misconception of theory and the dialectics between theory

and practice within our discipline. And I am also convinced that the efforts and program for the documentation of endangered languages will have important implications for our discipline as a whole. But — as Crystal points out in his conclusion to this chapter — we first have to convince as many people as possible that we should all care about endangered languages.

''If people care about endangered languages, they will want something to be done'' (p. 68). However, before we can act, we have to know answers to the question raised in chapter 3 (pp. 68–90), namely ''why do languages die?'' We all know that languages have always died; however, as Crystal (p. 70) points out,

> [t]he current situation is without precedent: the world has never had so many people in it, globalization processes have never been so marked; communication and transport technologies have never been so omnipresent; there has never been so much language contact; and no language has ever exercised so much international influence as English.

There is no simple answer to the question of why languages die, but there are certain trends and factors that play an important role with respect to language endangerment and language death. Crystal first of all mentions factors ''which put the people in physical danger,'' like natural catastrophes, climatic changes, famines and droughts, imported diseases, desertification, military conflicts and genocide. Then the author lists factors ''which change the people's culture'' (p. 76), like changes due to cultural assimilation, urbanization, language policies, and the media, especially television. Linguistically we can observe three broad stages in such assimilation situations. In the first stage there is ''immense pressure on the people to speak the dominant language'' (p. 78). Stage 2 can be characterized as a ''period of emerging bilingualism'' (p. 79). And the third stage is a stage ''in which the younger generation becomes increasingly proficient in the new language, identifying more with it, and finding their first language less relevant to their new needs.'' Attempts to prevent languages from dying have hardly any chance if the speech community has already reached this third stage. Crystal emphasizes that it ''is the second stage — the stage of emergent bilingualism — where there is a real chance'' (p. 79) to slow down, stop, or even reverse the decline of the dominated language because it is still possible to foster positive language attitudes. However, the author also points out that it is not always a simple task to do this, because of negative attitudes toward the dominated language both by its speakers and by the speakers of the dominating language, because of stigmatization of the dominated language, and because of active ''language murder'' (p. 86). ''The forces

which cause language death are … massive'' (p. 89), indeed, but ''a response to the threat is possible'' (p. 90). What such responses look like is reported in chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 first presents an answer to the question, ''where do we begin?'' (pp. 91–126). Crystal rightly points out that we have to start with establishing the top priorities for all the attempts to reduce the impact of language endangerment. We first have to establish ''what the really urgent cases are,'' of course. However, we should also try to develop a ''theoretical frame to orient the fact-finding and to provide guidelines about assessment and diagnosis'' (p. 92f.), because ''[s]uch a framework would yield models which could identify and inter-relate the relevant variables involved in endangerment, and these models would generate empirical hypotheses about such matters as rate of decline or stages in revival'' (p. 93). This kind of fact-finding and developing a theoretical perspective has to be financed, of course. Thus, fund-raising is another top priority, and the sooner linguists — with the help of the media, the arts, and political and academic agencies — manage to promote language and language endagerment issues to an important part of the general ecological thinking, the better will be the chances of convincing funding agencies that financing such research projects is not only necessary but also worth its while. Crystal mentions some of the more successful attempts of ''political lobbying and effective agitation,'' but he also points out at the same time that the need for such action ''remains strong'' (p. 101).

Another important task in order to successfully carry out projects that aim at the documentation or even at the revitalization of endangered languages consists in fostering positive community attitudes within the endangered speech communities themselves. This can be extremely difficult and quite delicate (as Crystal illustrates with a few examples). It is a truism that ''[o]nly the indigenous community itself can save its language'' (p. 111). Therefore, to my mind Crystal seems to be a bit too optimistic in assuming that linguists may really succeed in convincing a speech community not to give up their indigenous language, though he acknowledges the ''enormity of this task'' (p. 109). An important part of this task is to convince members of endangered speech communities that their language is an important part of their culture, their cultural heritage, and their ethnicity. Crystal here promotes the ''view of language as a pre-eminent but not exclusive badge of ethnicity'' because it ''provides the most promising basis for the maintenance of an endangered language'' (p. 122).

To know something about the ''factors which cause a language to decline'' and about ''the effect of this process on people's attitudes'' is

absolutely neccessary in order to put linguists ''in a position to make informed decisions about when and how to intervene, in order to reverse language shift — or indeed about whether intervention is practicable or desirable'' (p. 127). On the basis of such knowledge chapter five now gives an answer to the question, ''what can be done?'' (pp. 127–166). Referring to ''a significant body of data on language maintenance projects which have achieved some success,'' Crystal isolates six factors that ''turn up so frequently that they should be recognized as postulates for a theory of language revitalization'' (p. 130). These factors are the following:

1. An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their prestige within the dominant community (p. 130).
2. An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their wealth relative to the dominant community (p. 132).
3. An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community (p. 133).
4. An endangered language will progress if its speakers have a strong presence in the educational system (p. 136).
5. An endangered language will progress if its speakers can write their language down (p. 138).
6. An endangered language will progress if its speakers can make use of electronic technology (p. 141).

Crystal elaborates on these six central factors, but he is aware that his ''six postulates cut the cake in a certain way, and there are many other ways'' (p. 143). He mentions two such other ways, namely Akira Yamamoto's nine factors ''that help maintain and promote the small langauges'' (p. 143f.) and Lynn Landwehr's ''eight 'indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality' for endangered languages'' (p. 144). After a brief but extremely interesting discussion of these factors, Crystal then elaborates on the role of linguists and their motivation in working with endangered languages. Here the author emphasizes something that actually should also be regarded as a truism for all linguists — and not only for linguists researching endangered languages (p. 145):

> The concept of linguists working on such languages with no interest in the people who speak them — other than to see them as a source of data for a thesis or publication — is, or should be as unacceptable a notion as it would be if doctors collected medical data without caring what is happening subsequently to the patients. This point would not be worth making if it had not often happened.

That a linguist has to emphasize this ethical issue — so basic and central for all linguistic data collection and empirical research — does not shed a very positive light on the ethical standards within our discipline; however,

as I mentioned before, it seems that the program to document and revitalize endangered languages may have important implications for our discipline as a whole — even with respect to our ethics! Crystal then mentions the psychological and social demands with which a fieldworker is confronted, and he points out what research on endangered languages and their documentation actually means and implies, what it means to collect a corpus of a language, what such a corpus should look like, and how difficult it is to cope with the dialectics of theory and practice in the actual field situation. Thus, it is no wonder that ''we see the emergence of a team approach to language maintenance'' (p. 154). Crystal then lists the steps that — ideally — have to be taken by such a revitalization team to ensure the successful documentation and revitalization of an endangered language (which may imply a life-long commitment of the team to the endangered language) — and he does not forget to mention the crucial aspects of such research, namely the ''copyright of the raw data'' question (p. 159) and ''the gap between academic linguistics and community wants and efforts'' (p. 161). Finally, the author briefly discusses the question of whether dead languages can actually be revived.

The chapter ends with the author's conclusions. Crystal strongly supports linguistic fieldwork and linguistic fieldworkers and emphasizes again the dramatic situation with respect to the endangerment and death of many minority languages in the last few sentences of this important monograph (p. 166):

> The linguists in the front line, who are actually doing the fieldwork, therefore need as much support as we can mobilize. The raising of public awareness is a crucial step, and this book I hope will play its part in that task.
>
> The urgency of the need to get things done has no parallel elsewhere within linguistics. Languages are dying at an unprecedented rate. If the estimates I reviewed in chapter 1 are right, another six languages or so have gone since I started to write this book.

The monograph ends with an appendix that provides data on some relevant organizations (pp. 167–169), an excellent and comprehensive list of references (pp. 170–181), an index of dialects, languages, language families, and ethnic groups (pp. 182–184), an index of authors and speakers (pp. 185–187), and a carefully compiled subject index (pp. 188–198).

This book is not only excellently edited, it is — indeed — the ''fascinating book … [which] poses urgent questions and provides interesting answers'' to the topic of language death (as advertised on the back flap of the jacket). It is a book that every linguist, every student of linguistics, every social scientist, and everyone with a general interest in language should, and must, read. And it is a source of excellent arguments for

convincing relevant agencies and reseach societies to provide funds for well-planned projects and programs for the documentation and revitalization of endangered languages.

Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, GUNTER SENFT
Nijmegen

Reference

Dixon, R. M. W. (1997). *The Rise and Fall of Languages.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.