

Crystallised English

David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. vii + 489, hb 0-521-40179, £29.95. *In 24 sections, grouped into 6 parts, each containing numerous superbly-designed double-page spreads, with many high-quality colour illustrations. Covers: an opening section on Modelling English, then the following six divisions and their many subdivisions (1) The History of English, including its origins, Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, Modern English, and World English. (2) English Vocabulary, covering the nature and sources of the lexicon, etymology, lexical structure, and lexical dimensions. (3) English Grammar, including grammatical mythology, word structure, word classes, and sentence structure. (4) Spoken and written English,

WHAT COUNTS AS A WORD?

The cover of the periodical *English Today* poses a question of considerable theoretical and practical significance. Usually, people look at the spaces in a piece of writing, and think that they are enough to decide the matter. So, the first sentence of this paragraph, we would all agree, contains 16 words. Unfortunately for lexicologists, word space is not an infallible guide, as the cover examples show.

- Hyphens complicate matters: shall we count *eat-as-much-as-you-like* as a single word? or *Highs-Lows*?
- The absence of hyphens complicates matters: is *Value for Money* truly three separate words?
- Unusual compounds complicate matters: shall we count *FLYAWAY* and *CITYSPRINT* as single words?
- Abbreviations complicate matters: are *BA* and *BCal* one word or two?

Several other kinds of difficulty can be given

- Meaning complicates matters: *bear* (the animal) and *bear* (to carry) are plainly different words, but are *lock* (on the door) and *lock* (in a canal) different words? Is *high* in *high tea*, *high priest*, and *high season* the same word?

- Usage complicates matters: people sometimes write *flowerpot*, sometimes *flower pot*, and sometimes *flower-pot*.

- Idioms complicate matters: if we insist that a word should have a clear meaning, then how many words are there in *get my act together* and *get my own back*?

Problems of this kind mean that it is always wise to take word estimates cautiously, especially when evaluating the competing claims about coverage made by English dictionaries. Equally, the problems present an interesting challenge to lexicologists, as they get to grips with their task.

including the sound system and the writing system. (5) Using English, including varieties of discourse and regional, social, and personal variation, each with many component sections. (6) Learning about English, including learning English as a mother tongue (bringing in such matters as child language acquisition, literacy, grammatical development, and language disability) and new ways of studying the language (including corpora, dictionaries, and technological developments). With Appendices: a glossary; special symbols and abbreviations, references, further reading, an index of linguistic items, an index of authors and personalities, an index of topics, and acknowledgements. Crystal's work makes many direct and indirect references to *English Today* and its contents, as in the specimen below:



findings in language understanding. In three parts: (1) Language and Knowledge, which looks at the amount of knowledge required to understand language; (2) Language Processes and Models, which concentrates on the linguistic processes underlying language use and the models which we use to explain them; (3) Anaphoric reference,

which analyses how language users understand the links between words in a sentence. With self-assessment questions at the end of each section, references, and an index.

► Laurie Bauer, *Watching English Change: An Introduction to the Study of Linguistic Change* in