

Remarks on a So-called Encyclopedia of Language

Bengt Löfstedt

David Crystal's *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (Cambridge University Press, second edition, 1997) is a useful textbook, although the title "The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language" would have been more appropriate¹; everything in it centers around the English language and it seems that only for the sake of curiosity other, foreign and strange languages like Tonga, Arabic or German are cited. The first edition appeared in 1987 and has been widely used as a textbook in different universities. We have been waiting for a new edition for some time and we are happy that it has just appeared. Some improvements and additions can still be made, however.

P. 10. Already the ancient Romans replied to a sneeze with a good wish: Petronius, *Satiricon* 98 *Giton ... ter continuo ita sternutavit, ut grabatum concuteret; ad quem motum Eumolpus conversus salvere Gitona iubet*. In Swedish another Latin good wish has survived from the Middle Ages in the same context: *Prosit*.

11. Instead of the inane ball-bouncing rhyme quoted in the chapter "Power of Sound", why not choose *Eeney, meeney, miney, moe*? It is interesting, because American girls, docile and politically correct, have changed the original sequel *Catch a nigger by the toe; if he hollers, let him go* to the meaningless *Catch a tiger...*, although tigers do not have toes and do not holler.

52. It is noted that in Arabic one answers to a greeting by adding to it. It can be mentioned that Mohammed actually ordered that it be done so: *The Koran* (translated by N. J. Dawood, Penguin Books 1990) 4:86 (p. 70) *If a man greets you, let your greeting be better than his.*² Prof. H. Rosén (Jerusalem) informs me that one finds the same custom in Israel: to a greeting *Good morning* the answer is often *Good and blessed morning*. But this is not characteris-

¹ Mr. Crystal published, in fact, a book with this title in 1995, which is rather similar to the book under consideration in format and contents.

² My son, Torsten Löfstedt, has pointed this out to me.

tic of Semitic languages only. In Modern Irish, greeting and answer can be: *God and Mary to you! — God and Mary to you and St. Patrick!* (M. Dillon & D. O'Cróinín, *Teach Yourself Irish*, London, 1961, p. 40); cf. Spanish *Buenas tardes! — Muy buenas!*; Old French examples are quoted by Leena Löfstedt, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 79 (1978), 210 f.³

88. Six different kinds of grammars are enumerated: descriptive, pedagogical, prescriptive, reference, theoretical, traditional. What about historical grammars?

88. R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, and J. Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985; 1779 pp.) is characterized as “probably the largest grammar produced for any language”. Has Mr. Crystal forgotten O. Jespersen's *Modern English Grammar* (Heidelberg 1922-49) in seven volumes and H. Poutsma's *A Grammar of Late Modern English* (Groningen 1914-29) in five fat volumes? As for other languages, I draw his attention to H. Paul's *Deutsche Grammatik* (Tübingen 1968) in five volumes, Kr. Nyrop's *Grammaire historique de la langue française* (Copenhagen 1914-30) in six volumes, and Ph. Plattner's *Ausführliche Grammatik der französischen Sprache* (Freiburg/Briesgau 1912-17) in five volumes with more than 2300 pages; just the Latin morphology by F. Neue & C. Wagener (*Formenlehre der lateinischen Sprache*, Leipzig 1902-05) in four volumes has 3079 pages. It is a good idea to look around a little, before making sweeping general statements.

91. “There are no word spaces in the 4th century AD Greek *Codex Sinaiticus*. Word spaces were a creation of the Romans.” First, in the oldest Latin texts *scriptio continua* was the rule. Second, the use of word-dividing puncts began quite early in Greece and appears side by side with *scriptio continua* from the oldest Greek inscriptions on. When the spaces between words

³ C.-C. Ehlert in *Ord och struktur. Studier i nyare svenska tillägnade Gun Widmark* (Uppsala 1980) p. 431 maintains that a Swede when replying to a greeting repeats the greeting unchanged and that a change would be interpreted as a joke or a correction. That is not true. It is rather my experience that one often changes the greeting a little, e.g. by doubling it or by adding a suffix: *Tjänare! — Tjänare, tjänare!* or *Hej! — Hejsan!*. If one just repeats the greeting, it is an indication that no further conversation is wanted. The answer to *God natt!* ('Good night!') is often not only *God natt!* but *God natt. Sov gott!* ('Good night. Sleep well!').

were introduced in Byzantine times, it is not necessary to assume Roman influence; see E. Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik* 1 (Munich 1953) p. 148.

99. "English has a single pair of response words that can be used to reply to all questions ... *yes* and *no*." As a contrast, Welsh is mentioned with an indefinite number of replies, since the word of the question is repeated. It could be added that the latter type is characteristic of many archaic languages like Latin and Finnish, and that there are traces of it in English in the answer *I do* to the question of the pastor at weddings and of the judge at oath taking. It is also worth mentioning that in some languages there are three replies, e.g. German *ja*, *nein*, and *doch* (the latter is used when the question is negated), also in Swedish (*ja*, *nej*, *jo*) and French (*oui*, *non*, *si*).

112. As a foreign-language equivalent to the English family name *Smith* is mentioned i.a. Spanish *Hernández/Fernández*. This is completely wrong. The Spanish name has nothing to do with any word for 'smith' (Spanish *herrero*). *Hernández* is a patronymicon from *Hernando*, German *Ferdinand* < Gothic *Fridunand-* (see Elda Morlicchio, *Antroponimia longobarda a Salerno nel IX secolo*, Naples 1985, 159 f.).

114. Mr. Crystal writes that placenames derive from "memorable incidents or famous events, such as a battle, e.g. *Waterloo*, *Crimea* ... ". I suppose and hope that he is thinking of an English placename *Waterloo*, although this is not mentioned; after all, there is the Flemish placename *Waterloo*, after which the battle is named. But what about *Crimea*? I cannot on any map find any other *Crimea* (*Krim*) than the one in Southern Ukraine, which certainly is not called after some memorable event. (According to M. Vasmer's Russian etymological dictionary from 1967 *Krim* is a Tartar/Turkish word, meaning originally 'ditch' or 'wall'.)

115. It is stated that "more time is spent deciding the name of a new product than on any other aspect of its development" and a horror story is told to show how long it can take to come up with a new, legally safe name. In Sweden a company 'Scriptor' has been in business for decades inventing new brand names and checking on proposed ones. It seems strange that there is no such company in Great Britain.

118. We read about misunderstandings which arise because (English) men and women mean different things with movements of the head and in-

terjections. If we cross the borders to non-English speaking peoples, we find, e.g., that in Arab countries a European could encounter still greater difficulties: there one nods the head to say *no*. See also the classic paper by Roman Jakobson 'Motor signs for Yes and No', in *Language in Society* 1 (1972), 91 ff.

208. "The use of shorthand died out in the Middle Ages." No, the Tironian notes were still widely used in the Middle Ages. (Professor David Ganz, London, is preparing a catalog of all Medieval Latin manuscripts with Tironian notes.⁴)

299. As examples of ablaut or vowel gradation are listed *foot* – *feet* and *take* – *took*. Oh no! *Feet* is Umlaut of *foot*, not Ablaut. Elementary, my dear Crystal!

367. It is stated that Frisian is "spoken in several dialects in the northern part of Schleswig-Holstein". It is mainly used in parts of the Netherlands.

407. As an example of sign language one could also mention the signs used by commodity traders in Chicago: they move their hands forward to indicate 'sell', they raise three fingers to indicate three items, etc.

⁴ See David Ganz' paper 'On the history of Tironian notes' in Peter Ganz, *Tironische Notizen* (Wiesbaden 1990) p. 36 ff.