



How Language Works: How Babies Babble Words Change Meaning And Languages Live Or Die

By David Crystal

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In this fascinating survey of everything from how sounds become speech to how names work, David Crystal answers every question you might ever have had about the nuts and bolts of language in his usual highly illuminating way. Along the way we find out about eyebrow flashes, whistling languages, how parents teach their children to speak, how politeness travels across languages and how the way we talk show not just how old we are but where we're from and even who we want to be.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. A world authority on language, Crystal (*The Stories of English*) offers an impeccably organized guide to language and communication that brings clarity to a scholarly subject, and is sure to become a standard reference. Written in an unadorned style, Crystal's chapters are purposeful lessons ("How we use tone of voice"; "How children learn to mean"; "How we choose what to say") that demonstrate his pedagogical genius for rendering complex matters simple. Crystal's tome imparts a vast amount of knowledge concerning intricate and interrelated aspects of speech, the written word, lexicography, grammar and neurological aspects of communication; it encompasses issues of identity, ethnicity and the preservation of disappearing languages, the structural organization of the world's different language families, multilingualism, and the pragmatic uses of artificial and natural languages. A feat of academic distillation, Crystal's book abounds in wisdom and dry wit. (Nov.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Longtime language writer and linguistics professor Crystal (*The Stories of English*, 2004) offers a well-organized, thoroughly comprehensive guide to language and communication in 73 short chapters. The passionate word enthusiast addresses every aspect of language, including how we learn to speak, read, and write; the physiology behind the formation of speech sounds; how we choose what to say; how gestures and tone of voice impact communication; how the brain handles language; and how language tells us where we are from. After beginning with spoken and written language, Crystal moves on to sign language, language structure, discourse, dialects, language families, and multilingualism. The book also includes diagrams of the human tongue, ear, and brain; a chart of Egyptian hieroglyphs over time; and illustrations of finger spelling. Although its size and subject matter may suggest otherwise, this volume is aimed at and written for general readers, and Crystal makes for an especially genial guide. Whether expressing his fair-minded assessment of the prescriptive-descriptive debate or knowledgably discussing the connection between dialects and social status, he proves to be both accessible and informative. *Joanne Wilkinson*

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Review

A virtual encyclopedia of language...packed with information, memorable anecdotes and surprising statistics, all presented with assurance and enthusiasm. -- *Kirkus Reviews, July 2006*

Users Review

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Ira Knudsen:

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