

EdYOUfest

Correcting myths about correctness

In an article for the Spectator magazine a few years ago, the British broadcaster John Humphrys gave an interesting definition: 'the job of a journalist is to simplify and exaggerate'. I've spent a great deal of my life as a linguist trying to correct the way the media present myths about language as if they were truths. In this talk, I take three headlines from British tabloid newspapers and explore the realities behind them, and the consequences for teachers of English language and literature.

'Everyone speaks English now'. I give the latest statistics, and discuss the way the 'new Englishes' that have developed around the world are making us rethink traditional notions of correctness.

'The Internet is changing English - for the worse'. How much linguistic change has there actually been as a result of electronic communication? I review the evidence, and conclude: not much.

'Shakespearean English is a foreign language' - and the writer meant, for 21st century mother-tongue English speakers. Just how different is Shakespeare's language from Modern English?

Again I conclude: not much - and illustrate the influence he continues to have on everyday usage.



Biography

David works from his home in Holyhead, North Wales, as a writer, editor, lecturer, and broadcaster. Born in Lisburn, Northern Ireland in 1941, he spent his early years in Holyhead. His family moved to Liverpool in 1951, and he received his secondary schooling at St Mary's College. He read English at University College London (1959-62), specialised in English language studies, did some research there at the Survey of English Usage under Randolph Quirk (1962-3), then joined academic life as a lecturer in linguistics, first at Bangor (1963-5), then at Reading (1965-84). He published the first of his 100 or so books in 1964, and became known chiefly for his research work in English language studies, in such fields as intonation and stylistics, and in the application of linguistics to religious, educational and clinical contexts, notably in the development of a range of linguistic profiling techniques for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. He held a chair at the University of Reading for 10 years, and is now Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Bangor.

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