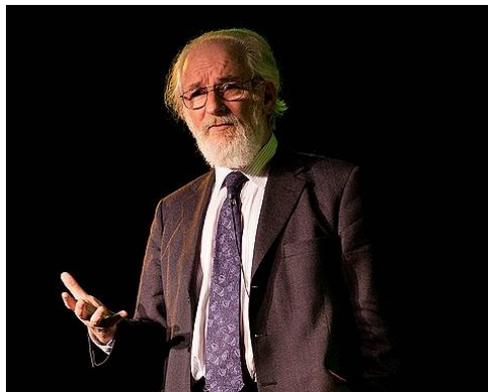


“PRAGMATICS IS COOL”: DAVID CRYSTAL IN LEIDEN

By Charlotte Liebelt and Minke Jonk



Professor David Crystal’s name will ring a bell with most students in Leiden’s English department. He is the author of *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language*, one of his many books on English language and linguistics. As such, he is widely known and respected in the academic world. Needless to say, we were very thrilled to learn he would give a lecture right here in the Academiegebouw in Leiden. Very curious, we entered the Klein Auditorium and one look reassured us that this was going to be a very interesting lecture indeed. Before, we were afraid his awesome intellect would be slightly intimidating to us mere students. We need not have feared; nothing could have been further from the truth.

Our very own Professor Tiekens-Boon van Oostade provided the introduction to the lecture, which was entitled ‘Pragmatics: The Final Frontier?’. Of course, we could give you all the details of what he told and explained to us, but that would not only take up several pages, but would not convey the relaxed atmosphere of the lecture, either. Professor Crystal definitely knows how to captivate the attention of his listeners and at the same time how to get his message across in a humorous way.

He started his lecture with his definition of ‘pragmatics’, adding that anyone already familiar with this was allowed to doze off for the next five minutes. This set the tone for the rest of the lecture. After explaining how the study of pragmatics has emerged, he elaborated on his definition of it, which is three-fold. Pragmatics mainly deals with the choices we make when using language, reasons for these choices, and effects of these choices. He illustrated his points with many amusing examples and anecdotes, for instance the difference between active and passive sentences. Pragmatics asks the question why this difference matters and why the difference exists at all as an active sentence and its passive equivalent really mean the same thing. Other examples included the use of *you* and *thou* in Shakespearean drama, swearing, and being rude in French. The lecture concluded with a Q&A session and drinks afterwards. All in all, it was a wonderful opportunity to hear a celebrity of linguistics speak. Hear, hear.

