



Professor David Crystal, OBE, is one of the world's foremost experts on the subject of language and the author of many books, including *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, and more recently with his son Ben Crystal *Shakespeare's Words*.

# Professor David Crystal

The announcement was made at the AGM in September that Professor David Crystal has graciously agreed to become the SfEP's vice-president, and incoming chair Penny Williams read this message from him at the SfEP annual conference.

It was a real pleasure and a privilege to receive your invitation to become an honorary vice-president of the SfEP, and I very much regret that my first 'close encounter', in this incarnation, has to be at a distance because of a prior commitment this weekend. In fact, of course, as I reflect, this is a second close encounter, having fond memories of the Whitcombe Lecture at the annual conference in Birmingham a year ago. Since then, a series of editorial projects has kept my mind very firmly in the domain of copy-editing and proofreading, and I have somehow managed to find time to be an author too. It is a curious schizophrenia: at one moment imposing my editorial will on everyone else – correction, humbly suggesting that my tentative suggestions be taken on board by the author – and the next having someone else's editorial will imposed on me. But in truth, I've worked with four copy-editors this past year, and each time it has been a huge value-added (have you encountered this latest usage, which I heard as a noun only this year?) – a huge value-added to my books, and hardly taxing at all.

But in that little word *hardly* lies a hundred stories of lurking graphological and grammatical inconsistencies and uncertain intuitions, where I have had to admit, with reluctant humility, that my copy-editor or proofreader has seen what I have not. So I begin to wonder: what value-added will there be for me while acting as an honorary vice-president of the SfEP? Perhaps, in some mysterious way, I will see everything now, and become supremely self-consistent. Perhaps it will give me extra clout – so that next time I get an email that says I should have used *which* instead of *that* because I had used *that* 32 pages before, I will simply draw myself up to my full virtual height and reply 'But I am the honorary vice-president of the SfEP!' I wonder what reply I would get, if I did that? 'Get knotted' (or worse)? 'Make my day, punk'? Or, possibly, 'What is the SfEP?'

I hope not the last of those – but it does surprise me that the Society is not more widely known, outside its specialist area. And perhaps this, in the end, is where an honorary vice-president from a different planet can give some value-added in return. I intend to lose no opportunity to inform people in the circles I inhabit about the work of the Society. And also about the workers within the Society, for there is no doubt in my mind that what you do – what we do – is hard, essential, professional work, largely unrecognized until it is not done well. Then they moan.

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'They' are everywhere. And this use of indeterminate 'they' reminds me of the old French paradigm: 'Je travaille, tu travailles, il travaille, elle travaille, nous travaillons, vous travaillez, ils profitent'. I hope we will all mutually profit from this new appointment. And I very much hope to be able to renew my physical connection with the SfEP at the conference next year in my new role – not authorially, or speakerly, but vice-presidentially – truly, a close encounter of the third kind.