



## Planet Word

*J.P. Davidson , Stephen Fry (Foreword)*

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**Unravel the mysteries of language with J.P. Davidson's remarkable *Planet Word*.**

*'The way you speak is who you are and the tones of your voice and the tricks of your emailing and tweeting and letter-writing, can be recognised unmistakably in the minds of those who know and love you.'*

**Stephen Fry**

From feral children to fairy-tale princesses, secrets codes, invented languages - even a language that was eaten! - *Planet Word* uncovers everything you didn't know you needed to know about how language evolves. Learn the tricks to political propaganda, why we can talk but animals can't, discover 3,000-year-old clay tablets that discussed beer and impotence and test yourself at textese - do you know your RMEs from your LOLs? Meet the 105-year-old man who invented modern-day Chinese and all but eradicated illiteracy, and find out why language caused the go-light in Japan to be blue. From the dusty scrolls of the past to the unknown digital future, and with (heart) the first graphic to enter the OED, are we already well on our way to a language without words?

In a round-the-world trip of a lifetime, discover all this and more as J. P. Davidson travels across our gloriously, endlessly intriguing multilingual *Planet Word*.

John Paul Davidson is a film and television director and producer. After studying at Bristol University and completing his doctoral field work in The University of Malaysia, he joined the BBC's Travel and Exploration Unit as their resident anthropologist.

Stephen Fry's film, stage, radio and television credits are numerous and wide-ranging. He has written, produced, directed, acted in or presented productions as varied as *Wilde*, *Blackadder*, *Jeeves and Wooster*, *A Bit of Fry and Laurie*, *Fry's English Delight* and *QI*. After writing many successful books, his recent memoir *The Fry Chronicles* was a number one bestseller.

## Planet Word Details

Date : Published (first published January 1st 2011)

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## From Reader Review Planet Word for online ebook

### Rachael says

This book is the accompaniment to the television program regarding the English language (and the use of language in general) presented by Stephen Fry. The book is more in depth than the series whilst covering the same topics. There are laugh out loud funny moments but for the most part the book is informative, there is a significant cross over with Bill Bryson's Mother Tongue except this book does go beyond English looking into the origins and development of languages like Yiddish and the Irish literary greats and the reasons for their literary lifts. The main overlaps lie in the analysis of the development of the dictionary and the looks at Shakespeare's influence on the English Language. A great read though and thoroughly interesting if you enjoy learning more about language.

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### Diego says

love linguistic and reading this for the second time ?

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### Roger Paine says

Fairly typical of the TV series derived genre, Planet Word is like a good sponge cake: light and easy with a bit of cream on top; nothing that's going to require much chewing or a tooth pick. A good starter for anyone who thinks they might be interested in language rather than diving straight into the Pinker/Chomsky deep end.

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### Melanie says

3.5 stars. Very entertaining read, the writing had a nice flow to it and felt fresh. I did find some inaccuracies and for a book called "Planet Word" it was still a bit too Anglocentric in my opinion, so that's what is keeping me from giving it a full 4 stars.

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### Rosemary says

So, technically I didn't exactly finish this book, but I was very close. Unfortunately it was due back at the library. It wasn't a bad book. Davidson's writing style kept the at times quite academic subject matter interesting. However, be aware that if yo have seen the show you will be revisiting a lot of information.

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### Sue Law says

Enjoyable companion work to the tv series, full of interesting information about how language develops and where it is going.

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## **Aurora says**

This book is great for those interested in linguistics/philology. It covers a broad range of language, from Cockney rhyming slang to the story-telling of the Odyssey and Illiad. There are many different examples in each section, detailed explanations as a result of what must have been a lot of research, and pictures and diagrams approximately 1 every 2 pages. There are also quotes and discussions from many leading people in the subjects - Steven Pinker, various authors and poets, actors commenting on delivering the epic works. I read it cover to cover but you could equally drop in and out.

Accompanying this book there is a TV series, of which I have seen 2 episodes, and will now watch the other 4. When reading this book I sometimes got the impression that the example would be more demonstrative if heard, so I think there is a small incompleteness if the TV series were not watched. However, the book still works well on its own.

One final comment is I dislike how this book is often marketed as by Stephen Fry, when - although Stephen Fry unquestionably had a lot of input - all the prose except the foreword is by J. P. Davidson. He surely deserves credit.

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## **Jennifer says**

Great start to my summer! Followed the TV show very closely with a chapter for each episode, but included a lot of extra information that was not in the show, along with beautiful colour pictures! Amazing quality hardback book with beautiful pictures and full of interesting information. A must-read for anyone who is studying the English language, or just has a passion for it.

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## **Popup-ch says**

The companion book to Stephen Fry's TV series from a couple of years ago. It covers the basics of 'what is language', with a bit of history of writing systems and evolution thrown in. While it's ostensibly about all languages, a lot of it focuses on the peculiarities of English.

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## **Matt DSGNS says**

I was overjoyed when I was able to purchase this book and get around to reading it, only to be bitterly disappointed at the final hurdle when I got into it and then really started to struggle on my way through it.

The sections and chapters are not flowing and once you get into a topic, there is a sudden switch to another unrelated topic. You really need a mass of determination to get through this book.

Could have been done better by the authors.

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### **Sally Asnicar says**

I had high expectations for Planet Word, given its authorship and the foreword by Stephen Fry. I enjoyed the book; it was entertaining, informative and funny - although at times rather rambling. However, the main issue for me was the number of errors in the book. I'm not sure how much time was allocated to proofreading before it went to print, but there are repeated words (that that - twice), typos (patois spelled patios), missing full stops and a number of other glaringly obvious errors. One or two you can forgive in any book - especially one of this length - but there were far too many, which ruined my enjoyment of the book because I quietly seethed each time I spotted one and my fingers twitched for my red pen! For anyone who isn't bothered by such things, I'm sure they'll enjoy the book immensely.

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### **Wendy Unsworth says**

I enjoyed the TV series and loved this book. It's split up into lots of interesting bite-sized chunks so there is never a feel of getting bogged down. Covers the origins of languages around the world and how they have evolved; lots of snippets about slang and it's uses, where we get some of our well known phrases, great orators, writers, libraries - there is much to learn!

Strangely, because I had seen the TV series before I read the book, I imagined Stephen Fry narrating the text (and felt I heard his voice within it!!) and yet the foreward is actually the only part by Fry. Spooky - but fun.

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### **Fraser says**

I think I may have part watched a TV series based on this. It didn't stick with me, nor I to it, but the book was just fantastic. If you are going to learn about language, read about it!

Clearly Stephen Fry's involvement has helped this book's profile, but it doesn't overshadow or get in the way of the fact that it is an absolute treasure and pleasure to read. Fascinating, and full of the most interesting stories and facts told with a sense of humour by an author clearly immersed in his subject.

Highly recommended.

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### **Caleb Martin says**

This book is a worthwhile introduction/overview of language within our culture.

The book follows the BBC series of the same title closely which, unfortunately, is one of the shortcomings of of the book. The flow of information of an hour long episode of television does not translate well to the book format found here.

I picked up the book hoping to find significantly deeper research into the topics covered in the tv series, however was mainly left wanting more. To the authors credit, he has included extensive notes and bibliography for those that are interested.

If you have seen the tv series, probably best to skip this one and dive into some of the topics covered a bit

more rigorously yourself.

Overall, the language was simple to read and the information entertaining, however, as noted, the structure of the book should be revised and will leave most curious readers wanting.

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## Steve Dow says

<http://www.stevedow.com.au/default.as...>

SIX thousand languages are spoken today but by 2100 there will be only 900 in use.

Considering that for most English speakers the work of Shakespeare, penned in Elizabethan times, is difficult – if rewarding – and the millennia-old manuscript of Beowulf a muddle, where might today's languages be thousands of years hence?

Some say they won't exist, and Planet Word, a story of language with an Anglo-centric bias authored by British film and television producer John Paul Davidson, abetted with a foreword by polymath and entertainer Stephen Fry – who stars in the TV series currently airing Sunday nights on ABC1 – does not venture an answer.

Yet the book succeeds as a stimulating, informative and entertaining account of how language emerged and spread: in its written form, for example, the Phoenicians, hugely successful traders of the Mediterranean, were thought to have composed the first alphabet, which the Greeks adapted, and a modified form of Phoenician, the Aramaic alphabet – the language some say Jesus spoke – was the ancestor of modern Arabic and Hebrew.

Despite the book's global title, however, there's not much more in here about Arabic – apart from the interesting tale of a Tunisian rap said to have helped bring down former president Ben Ali – nor is there an examination of the projected spread of Mandarin; one unanswered big question is whether the official Chinese language sanctioned by Mao will grow with China's vast economic ambitions.

But there are fascinating stories here of the sometimes tyrannical spread of English, brutally imposed for instance on the Irish, yet producing great works by Joyce, Yeats and Beckett, who felt no compulsion to cooperate with standard English syntax and phrasing; and of the enforcement of French in France, where schoolchildren caught speaking Occitan or Breton were humiliated by being made to wear a symbol – which kids called “la vache” or the cow – and corporally punished at day's end.

Contemporary uses and abuses of language abound here, no doubt influenced by Fry's love of gadgetry: a new word is added to English every 98 minutes, spread through TV, films, computers and social networking, though one highly questionable claim has the animated series The Simpsons purportedly adding idioms to the language on a scale not seen since Shakespeare's and the Bible's contributions.

Hip-hop too has influenced the culture and language, going viral via Twitter and Facebook, while text abbreviations OMG, LOL, IMHO and BFF entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2011. Davidson doesn't think the world of books is coming to an end with digitisation: printed books and e-books can co-exist and people are reading more thanks to iPads and Kindles.

Should we fear the beauty of language is under threat of coarseness? Planet Word shows how the “F” word can help people overcome the pain threshold, such as when putting one's hand into a vat of icy water.

There's also a jolly examination of the rise of Klingon, an invented language from the Star Trek movies.

Moreover, is our capacity for language learned or innate? Davidson leans to the latter, but more importantly the book gives ample evidence of how a specific language is often a political tool, used to subjugate and control.

That makes Fry's foreword provocative: "Whoever you are," he writes, "... with this book or digital device in your hand, you can read or speak. What is more, the language you read and speak ... is at one and the same time entirely your own and that of your clan, your tribe, your nation and your people."

Yes, but if you're reading Planet Word in the language in which it is written – English – there's an outside chance your language was imposed upon you, perhaps to the banishment of your native tongue.

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