The Nature of the Word

Studies in Honor of Paul Kiparsky

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Preface

This book honors Paul Kiparsky, whose contributions as a scholar and teacher have transformed virtually every subfield of contemporary linguistics. In taking the form of a collection of studies of the word, it reflects the distinctive focus of his own attention, and the consequent shape of his influence.

The word has traditionally been recognized as a fundamental entity of language. Ordinary speakers often identify knowing a language with knowing its words, children attend to and acquire words before any other structural units in a language, and when one language influences another it is most commonly its words that are borrowed. From a more scholarly perspective too, the word has for centuries occupied a central place as the repository of basic phonological patterns, morphological structures, syntactic capabilities, semantic content, correspondences allowing the reconstruction of historical relationships among languages, and poetic possibilities.

Kiparsky's work belongs to this tradition, but in a way unique to him. As T. S. Eliot writes of poets in "Tradition and the Individual Talent,"

> If the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense . . . ; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.

Kiparsky's "place in time" is in the first group of PhD students graduated in 1965 from the new program in linguistics at MIT, a program directed by Morris Halle and committed to developing Noam Chomsky's revolutionary definition of language

as a generative system, and the hypothesis that crucial aspects of its formal structure are universal because they are innately determined. Kiparsky's "historical sense", it seems to us, has compelled him to express within that revolutionary paradigm "a feeling" that the whole of language and within it the whole of each language "has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." It is labor to obtain Kiparsky's tradition within the revolution that has defined his particular intellectual influence that is represented here.

At the outset of the early generative period, theoretical interest in productive rules in both syntax and phonology drew attention away from words, associated with the lexicon and memorized forms; but within only a few years, representing systematicity within the lexicon itself and relating the lexicon to other subsystems of grammar emerged as essential to generative theory. Difficulties in defining the word vexatious to everyone from Scrabble players to dictionary editors to poets turned out to reflect real complexities in the structure of grammar that had to be taken into account: Is a compound word like *blackbird* one word or two? Why is the "g" of *longer* pronounced like that of a simple word like *finger* rather than that of a complex word like *longing*? Why do poets not treat the stress of a preposition like *between* quite the same way that they treat that of a verb like *believe*? How can we know that a word that expresses such a dazzling set of complex syntactic and semantic relationships as the Finnish adverb *voimisteluttelemasta*, 'from having on and off caused to do gymnastics', really is just one word, and not the nine that English needs to convey the same meaning? Kiparsky's serious attention to questions like these has shown the word to be as central to grammar as tradition had always suggested. His work on formalizing its role, from his theory of Lexical Morphology and Phonology to his theories of morphosyntax and of the role of analogy in sound change, has been fundamental to the development of lexicalist approaches to every subsystem of grammar within the generative tradition.

The range of Kiparsky's influence derives not only from his rigorous focus on such an intricate and central entity as the word, but also from another intellectual commitment, equally represented in this book's title. Chomsky's definition of language famously cast linguistics as a science, and its object of study as a phenomenon of nature. In Kiparsky this idea must have fallen on especially fertile soil, as it were; for, as fine a gardener as he is a linguist, Kiparsky approaches words rather as a botanist approaches plants, fascinated equally by their beauty, by their structure, and by their evolution, and aware that only by considering them from these multiple perspectives can one begin to understand their true nature.

The contributions to this volume represent these multiple perspectives on the word that Kiparsky has explored and inspired, and are organized around the several complementary senses of the word *nature* that they seem to reflect. Part I, "Metrics," recognizes the nature of the word not only as a source of beauty, but also as something

that is not artifice, a recognition whose profound significance for literary theory Kiparsky's own work has drawn out. Part II, "Phonology and Morphology," explores the nature of the word as a matter of its formal composition, precisely the sense in which *morphology* refers equally to language and to organisms. Part III, "The Lexicon and Change," addresses the nature of the word simultaneously in the sense of having an idiosyncratic character, and in the sense of having a genetic inheritance, in something of the same way that nineteenth-century historical linguists' conceptions of the "genius" of an individual language combined historical accidents with formal necessity. Part IV, "Syntax and Semantics," captures the nature of the word in the sense of its having certain aptitudes, the way an organism's nature determines what it can do in the world. Finally, part V, "Poetics," acknowledges that the nature of the word, like nature in general, is not, finally, objectively describable, but only inferrable, partially and imperfectly, from observations that will always be different under different conditions. Poetry takes this as a central fact, and for Kiparsky, with a humbleness that paradoxically makes his work especially powerful, scientific inquiry into language is, in this regard, not fundamentally different from poetry.

Representation of this range of perspectives on language has partially determined the contributors to this book, but of course much more remains to be said about the inevitably difficult matter of their selection. The scope of Kiparsky's influence vastly exceeds what any single book could contain, and we have chosen to deal with this by simply acknowledging the limitations of our own perspectives, and focusing on those scholars whose close intellectual associations with Kiparsky we were especially aware of in our own work as students entering the graduate linguistics program at Stanford in 1984, the same year that he came there from MIT. These include Kiparsky's own teachers, his previous students, our fellow students, and colleagues whose relationship to him, with the remarkable indifference to institutional limitations so characteristic of him, derived purely from shared intellectual curiosities. The book largely excludes the many students and colleagues who have been important to him since that time, because we were aware when we began this project that that set would have grown and would continue to grow in ways we were simply not in a position to keep up with. It also excludes many whose own expertise overlapped insufficiently with our own at that time for Kiparsky's relationship to them to have been salient to us. And it undoubtedly excludes still others simply through errors for which we can only hope we will be forgiven. In this raggedness, at least, it represents something of Kiparsky's own helpful, honest awareness of how knowledge gets advanced: a bit here, a bit there, with gaps that hopefully can somehow, sometime be filled in.

Finally, it must be added that Kiparsky's influence does not, of course, derive from intellectual accomplishment alone. The same sense that any single word or flower, if studied closely enough in both its specialness and its generalness, can yield secrets of the universe, Kiparsky brings to his interactions with students, colleagues, and

friends—finding, cultivating, and delighting in each one's individual talent and potential relationship to tradition, not just within linguistics but within human experience more broadly. Shared exploration of language is for Kiparsky thus inseparable from shared enjoyment of life, and hence from friendship; which is, of course, in the end the deepest motivation for this book.

In this spirit we are therefore especially grateful for the patience, cooperation, expertise, and kindness of the many people who have helped bring the book into being. Dikran Karagueuzian helped us conceive, plan, and set in motion the entire project. Ann Banfield, Jim Blevins, Ed Flemming, Andreas Kathol, Paul Kay, and especially Gary Holland made helpful suggestions about individual papers, as did in fact virtually all the contributors, reading each others' papers as well as writing their own. Jeremy Ecke helped transform twenty-nine idiosyncratic papers into a single, coherent manuscript.

At The MIT Press, Tom Stone enthusiastically took on the project, and Sandra Minkkinen efficiently and elegantly saw it through to completion. Everyone working with her contributed stellar editorial and production work much appreciated by all the authors, who remained heroically patient during a long wait to see their papers appear. We were especially grateful for the involvement of Anne Mark—in the words of the book's own honoree, "a legend." Renowned for miracles of a different kind, Samuel Jay Keyser made a breeze blow again at a time when everything seemed becalmed.

And at the Library of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, with all the discretion of a royal retainer, Samantha Cox beautifully answered our peculiar request for botanical drawings of Finnish orchids.