

The Language Parallax: Linguistic Relativism and Poetic Indeterminacy (Texas Linguistics Series)

Paul Friedrich



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Humankind has always been fascinated and troubled by the way languages and dialects differ. Linguistically based differences in point of view have preoccupied many original minds of the past, such as Kant, and remain at the forefront of language study: in philosophy, anthropology, literary criticism, and other fields.

Paul Friedrich's *The Language Parallax* argues persuasively that the "locus and focus" of differences among languages lies not so much in practical or rational aspects as in the complexity and richness of more poetic dimensions—in the nuances of words, or the style and voice of an author. This poetic reformulation of what has been called "linguistic relativism" is grounded in the author's theory of the imagination as a main source of poetic indeterminacy. The reformulation is also based on the intimate relation of the concentrated language of poetry to the potential or possibilities for poetry in ordinary conversation, dreams, and other experiences. The author presents challenging thoughts on the order and system of language in their dynamic relation to indeterminacy and, ultimately, disorder and chaos.

Drawing on his considerable fieldwork in anthropology and linguistics, Friedrich interweaves distinct and provocative elements: the poetry of language difference, the indeterminacy in dialects and poetic forms, the discovery of underlying orders, the workings of different languages, the strength of his own poetry. The result is an innovative and organic whole.

The Language Parallax, then, is a highly original work with a single bold thesis. It draws on research and writing that has involved, in particular, English, Russian, and the Tarascan language of Mexico, as well as the personal and literary study of the respective cultures. Anthropologist, linguist, and poet, Friedrich synthesizes from his experience in order to interrelate language variation and structure, the creative individual, ideas of system-in-process, and questions of scientific and aesthetic truth. The result is a new view of language held to the light of its potentially creative nature.

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