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Paul Kiparsky's work in linguistics has been wide-ranging and fundamental. His contributions as a scholar and teacher have transformed virtually every subfield of contemporary linguistics, from generative phonology to poetic theory. This collection of essays on the word_the fundamental entity of language_by Kiparsky's colleagues, students, and teachers reflects the distinctive focus of his own attention and his influence in the field.

As the editors of the volume observe, Kiparsky approaches words much as a botanist approaches plants, fascinated equally by their beauty, their structure, and their evolution. The essays in this volume reflect these multiple perspectives. The contributors discuss phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics bearing on the formal composition of the word; historical linguistic developments emphasizing the word's simultaneous idiosyncratic character and participation in a system; and metrical and poetic forms showing the significance of Kiparsky's ideas for literary theory. Collectively they develop the overarching idea that the nature of the word is not directly observable but nonetheless inferable.