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Podcast episode 53: Paul Kiparsky on Pāṇini

Study notes by Sanskrit AI Universe, based on this video

Video by Paul Kiparsky (Stanford University) · History and Philosophy of the Language Sciences · 24 Jun 2026

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About these notes

— Official title: Podcast episode 53: Paul Kiparsky on Pāṇini

— Speaker and channel: Paul Kiparsky (Stanford University) · History and Philosophy of the Language Sciences

— Published 24 Jun 2026 · Running time 28 min 56 s · https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag-BDHREwV0

— Official description: In this interview, Paul Kiparsky introduces us to the ancient Indian grammarian Pāṇini and the philosophical significance of his grammatical description of Sanskrit. (Download (| Spotify (| Apple Podcasts (| YouTube (Feature image: Pāṇini stamp, India (2004). Wikimedia Commons (References for Episode 53 Bloomfield, Leonard. Tagalog Texts with Grammatical Analysis, 1917. Bloomfield, Leonard. The Menominee Language, Yale University Press, 1962. Kiparsky, Paul. Panini as a Variationist, MIT P

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From the official description

— In this interview, Paul Kiparsky introduces us to the ancient Indian grammarian Pāṇini and the philosophical significance of his grammatical description of Sanskrit.

— (Download (| Spotify (| Apple Podcasts (| YouTube (Feature image: Pāṇini stamp, India (2004).

— Wikimedia Commons (References for Episode 53 Bloomfield, Leonard.

— The Menominee Language, Yale University Press, 1962.

— Pāṇini as a Variationist, MIT Press, 1979.

From the talk · 0:07–4:34

— Hi, I'm James McElvenny and you're listening to the History and Philosophy of the Language Sciences podcast online at hifilingualsci.net. at hifilingualsci.net.

— Maybe you could tell us who Pāṇini was and what his grammar was. >> We actually don't know very much about Pāṇini at all.

— It also deals selectively, not completely, with the Vedic, earlier form of the language, and treats it as a kind of aberrant system.

— Like a character who's invented to be the author of the grammar. >> Well, >> Well, there must have been someone.

From the talk · 4:36–9:14

— The people who do work with it that way just know all the rules.

— You know, a school grammar or people still study it from that perspective. but as a formal grammar, it's nothing that you could use practically.

— Uh so the Buddha, who is roughly very roughly uh a contemporary maybe before Pāṇini, was writing in a much more vernacular form of Sanskrit.

— So, would you say that Pāṇini's grammar influenced the development of Western linguistics? linguistics? >> I'd say in very fundamental ways.

From the talk · 9:17–14:11

— And uh the reason this was important is that it enabled Vop to get started with comparative grammar, because it's those things, the stems and the endings, that are uh reconstructible.

— Actual words, you can reconstruct post hoc, but those are not the entities on which you do your comparative work.

— And also uh the other thing that um was a big contribution was the idea of uh phonological structure.

— In fact, the classification of classification of sounds was actually much better than better than for most of the linguistics that was to follow.

From the talk · 14:14–19:05

— So thematic role can correspond to different semantic categories and it can also correspond to different cases for example.

— All of these very sophisticated categories, conventions, devices and so forth, which we admire, emerge from only two fundamental things.

— I mean, it seems to me that's a very exciting answer. exciting answer. >> But is it stated explicitly that >> Oh, nothing is stated.

— We don't even have the all of the principles by which those rules and their interaction is interpreted.

From the talk · 19:07–23:45

— Joshi, who was a Pāṇini scholar from Pune, uh where I spent some years, to question to question the principles by which rules interact.

— On the other hand, I think we have convinced a lot of people, so the discussion continues. discussion continues.

— But anyway, that's why this is a continuing quest, and we don't have a finished system that we can just apply and talk about.

— These are principles about how to decide, for example, if two rules are applicable, which one do you choose?

From the talk · 23:50–28:50

— And so you have essentially input You can think of it as an input. an input.

— And then you have morphophonology, and that is then mapped into phonology, and following on that, and not dealt with in the grammar, is phonetics.

— I mean, all of this theory that goes into phonology and phonemics in Western linguistics isn't even there.

— I think it's a amazing fact. >> So, do you think it's a fact about the structure of human language?

Sources and credit

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