

linguistics and sf

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 01 Nov 1998

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Damien Broderick — 01 Nov 1998, 15:01

< This post is interesting, because I recently saw a book by Jack Vance called *The Languages of Pao*, which said something like "The first science fiction book based on the science of linguistics" on the cover. I have no idea what the story is about. Since Wolfe says he was influenced by Vance, particularly the Dying Earth books, I wondered if there are any stories where someone has noticed any emphasis on linguistics.

prion >

Practically everything by Samuel R. Delany. Except that, alas, his notion of linguistics is still mired in Saussure and the whole erratic poststruck recension via Lacan. The *NATIVE TONGUE/JUDAS ROSE* books by Suzette Haden Elgin, a linguistics prof, in which Xian ayatollah-oppressed wimmin implausibly invent a language for themselves that more truly reflects their distinctive experience, and excludes the foe (a language, as it were, that men can't hear). Vance is full of (a crudely emphatic parody of) the Whorf posit, as are various other classic '50s Campbell-era stories and novels. Some guy with a Frog name who's a computational linguist and whose fairly recent book has *GLASS* in the title.

At risk of a hernia, I lug out my Clute/Nicholls *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SF* - yep, there's a long detailed entry by my old pal Peter Nicholls, who inter alia makes the disgraceful error of writing `deep structure' (the hidden cognitive substructure of variant sentences meaning the same thing) when he means `genetically-ordained grammar template' (the phenotypic universals instilled by a common genotype rather than by personal experience or cultural tradition - which can only set choices from those menus - required by regnant Chomskyan linguistics).

Damien Broderick