

Essentialists

Noam Chomsky / Generative Grammar

- Primary subject matter: **Abstract universal principles that explain the properties of specific languages**
- The essence of our language is **innate**
- The basis of language is **universal**
- Semantics and pragmatics are **not** a part of the study of language (Chomsky)
- **Descriptive** grammar with a penchant for judgment elicitation and intuition
- Goal: **An internalized generative device that characterizes an infinite set of expressions**

Emergentists

Edward Sapir

- "Language is primarily a cultural or social product."
- Primary subject matter: **Linguistic communication, cognition, variation and change**
- Cognitive, cultural, historical and evolutionary explanations of linguistic phenomena
- Children's language as a series of stages in an ontogenetic process of developing adult competence
- Goal: **A mainly conventional and culturally transmitted system for linguistic communication**

Externalists

Leonard Bloomfield / "structuralists"

- Primary subject matter: **Language use: structural properties of expressions and languages**
- Use of corpora
- Descriptions of expression structures and interrelations
- **Prediction** of properties
- **Patterns** inferable from accessible features of language use
- Goal: **A grasp of the distributional properties of a language**

I-Language

Individual: strictly a property of individual human beings, not groups or communities.

Internal: meaning is internal and a language is a state your mind/brain is in.

Intensional: a language is a specific procedure, generating infinitely many expressions of that language.

- Essentialist notion.
- Study of language in isolation.
- Two people could know different I-languages yet generate the same string of words.

E-Language

Extensional: research-based on attested utterances or extensionally definable objects.

External: view that conceives of a language as a public, intersubjectively accessible system used by a community of people.

- Other speakers can be involved in the study of a language, not just one object.
- Essentialists oppose this notion.

Competence/Performance

- **Essentialist distinction** (Chomsky)
- **Competence:** what knowing a language confers, a grasp of all sentences
- **Performance:** real-time use of a language
- **Criticism:** "The structure that underlines a language use reflects the operation of general principles of human cognition, they shape how individual speakers and hearers represent form and meaning."

Semantics

- **Chomsky:** "Semantics are merely a part of an interface level/form of syntax and are not related to the language faculty." (not *all* Essentialists agree with this view)
- **Bloomfield:** "It is okay to assign semantics to other fields than language because of the underdeveloped state of semantic research."

Semantics (cont)

- **Autonomy thesis:** syntactic form is independent from semantics and pragmatics.

Scales

Ordinal scale: a partial ordering equivalence in acceptability or ranking in degree of unacceptability.

Interval scale: a measure of distance between ordinal positions.

Magnitude estimation: a measure of subjects' judgments of physical stimuli on an interval scale.

