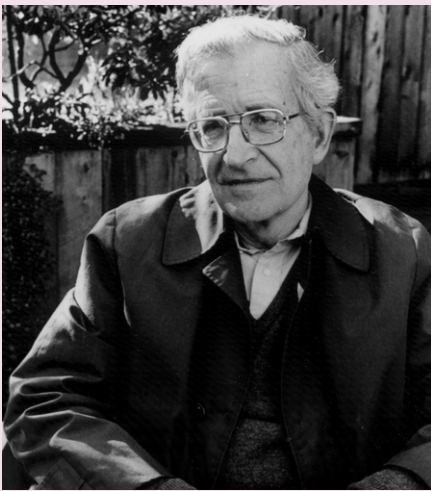


### Structuralism to Generativism

- Generativism as succeeded by structuralism (de Saussure);
- Structuralism w/ emphasis on segmentation and classification; cataloguing elements, their relations and distributions;
- Structuralism's main contribution: methodological (according to Chomsky); the idea of language as a formal system;
- Structuralism makes it possible to address the problems posed by UG (SR p5).

### Noam Chomsky (1928-)



- creator of the theory of **generative grammar**, one of the most significant contributions to the field of linguistics in the 20th century;
- genuine insights in linguistics imply an understanding of aspects of mental processing and human nature

### Mentalistic Approach of Generativism

Generativism forms a return to Kant:

- **similarities:** emphasis on mental structures which experience (learning a language) can order ('setting the parameters'), but which cannot be derived from experience (they are genetically determined);
- **difference:** for Chomsky, these structures are not just transcendental, found only through philosophical reflection, but can form the object of empirical (cognitive psychological) research.

### A Universal Grammar (UG)

- the ability to learn grammar is hard-wired
  - provides insight into the use and acquisition of language
  - not just descriptive but also explanatory
  - distinction between deep structure and surface structure
- Chomsky advocates a return to the idea of a universal grammar; the kind of grammar that flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries; **"concerned with general features of language structure rather than with particular idiosyncracies"**

### The decline of universal grammar

- Tradition of universal grammar came to an end in the 19th century:
- dismissed as **too metaphysical**
  - **too ambitious:** "the problems posed were beyond the scope of the technique and understanding then available"
  - **the problem of rule-governed creativity:** how is it that from an early age onwards, children can create sentences they have never heard?
  - ousted by IE comparative linguistics

### Generative grammar

- **Object of research:** syntax only (autonomous component) (SR p21);
- **Only this part of the grammar is susceptible to rules:** "The fundamental aim in the linguistic analysis of a language L is to separate the **grammatical** sequences which are sentences of L from the **ungrammatical** sequences which are not sentences of L and to study the grammatical sequences. The grammar of L will thus be a device that generates all of the grammatical sequences of L and none of the ungrammatical ones." (SR p18)

### Grammaticalness

- Grammaticalness cannot be determined by:
- a corpus of utterances (performance)
  - meaning (semantics):
  - frequency of use

### Grammaticalness (cont)

the rules of grammar as formulated in the language of mathematics and logic;

**economy:** by specifying a finite number of rules the grammar can generate an infinite number of sentences (**recursivity**); accounts for creativity in language

S → NP + VP  
 VP → V + NP  
 NP → D + N  
 D → the  
 N → boy, dog  
 V → chased

*The boy chased the dog*  
*The dog chased the boy*

### Chomsky's Evaluation

- Linguistic theory must provide the means to evaluate possible grammars
- **Possible grammars:** devices that generate the grammatical sentences of a language
- Such a grammar must be **descriptively adequate** in the sense that it is able to disambiguate ambiguous sentences, i.e., sentences with an identical surface structure (signal, form), but with different semantic interpretations (deep structures)

### Competence vs Performance vs Saussure

- Performance:** what speakers do (= de Saussure's parole);
- Competence:** an individual native speaker's implicit knowledge of the language (≠ de Saussure's langue)
- Both de Saussure and Chomsky regard language as a system and ignore individual speech acts;
  - Chomsky's competence is a psychological phenomenon, imprinted in the mind, not a shared generality but a genetic endowment in each individual; its basis is universal grammar;
  - de Saussure's langue is a socio-psychological phenomenon shared among a community of speakers and is language specific.
  - "The only legitimate object of linguistic research is the competence of the ideal native speaker" (Chomsky)



### Innateness vs UG

- “a universal grammar – a general theory of linguistic structure that determines the form of grammar – is primarily of interest for the information it provides concerning innate intellectual structure”
- language acquisition and use are made possible by a particular component in the human mind: the language faculty, consisting of a Universal Grammar;
- languages scarcely differ at the level of deep structure – which reflects the basic properties of thought and conception – but that they may vary widely at the much less interesting level of surface structure
  - the rapid language acquisition of children
  - the poverty of the stimulus;
  - creative language use of native speakers;
  - competent critical period (sensitive period)
  - gave rise to the nature vs nurture debate

### Generativism: a new paradigm (Kuhn)

- **field:** syntax as an autonomous component
- **emphasis:** **evaluation** instead of discovery
- **tool:** grammaticality judgments (i.e., informal elicitation) of data

#### Principles & Parameters:

- **Principles:** abstract rules of grammar, common to all languages
- **Parameters:** markers or switches that are turned on or off for particular languages and determine variability

#### Government & Binding Theory:

- **Government:** an abstract syntactic relation mainly concerned w/ the assignment of case > all languages have abstract case though they may not have morphological case
- **Binding:** an abstract syntactic relation mainly concerned with the referents of pronouns, anaphors (reflexives) and referential expressions

