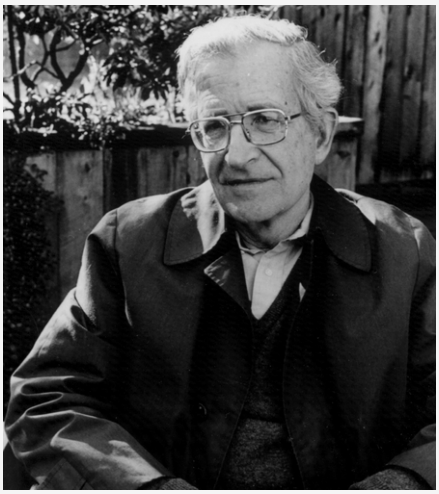
Structuralism to Generativism

• 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);

Mentalistic Approach of Generativism (cont)

• **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);

Generative grammar (cont)

• **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
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)



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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



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