

## NATIVIST THEORY



Chomsky



## Language is an innate faculty

- Noam Chomsky (1928 - )
- Professor of Linguistics



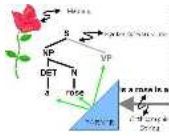
- “Language is an innate faculty”
- “We are born with a set of rules about language in our heads”
- “The universal grammar is the basis upon which all human languages build”

## Universal Grammar

- Grammar offers a certain limited number of possibilities
- E.g. word order
- The teacher gave a lecture

S V O

75% of the world's languages use this order



## We are born with a set of rules

- It's wired into the brains
- UG: „The system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages.. The essence of human language.“
- „UG is a theory of knowledge; its concern is with the internal structure of the human mind.“
- „The nature of this knowledge is inseparable from the problem of how it is acquired.“

## Noam Chomsky's Innate Hypothesis (1)

- Children (even with IQ of 50) **can acquire language**.
- Children acquire language **effortlessly**.
- Children acquire language in relatively **short period** of time.
- Language is a **complex system**.
- A child **does not have to be formally taught** to acquire language.



## Noam Chomsky's Innate Hypothesis (2)

- Children discover the system of language **from an unsystematic and small amount of data** .
- Language acquisition involves **very little imitation**, if any.
- Reinforcement = correction and reward: **very little role** in acquisition.
- Language acquisition is an **active process** . Children say things that they have never heard from adults.



## Setting of parameters

- Child recognises which kind of language the parents are dealing with
- Child sets his grammar to the correct one
- Child has a number of hypotheses



## Conclusions:



- Infants are born with Language Acquisition Device (**LAD**).
- **Exposure** to language is all that is needed for a child to discover the system of language.
- Exposure is critical as evidenced from cases of children in isolation.

## Pre-Linguistic Stages:

- not language specific
- **Crying:** involuntary responses to hunger, discomfort, content, happy, etc.
- **Cooing:** noises that are not language specific.
- **Babbling:** produce sounds but many are not speech sounds of the language of the parents.



## Reasons

- Children learn L1 easily.
- Children are exposed to very little correctly formed language
- Children deduce rules
- Children produce sentences they have never heard before
- Children adjust their grammar until it matches the adult speaker population

## Children produce sentences they have never heard before

He hitted

No eat cake

*It's raining. Where is the underbrella?*

*Give me the beach lookers! (binoculars)*



## Create a new language Pidgin

- No mother tongue
- Reduced syntax and vocabulary
- Can become a language - Creole (Hawaii)
  - Language is enriched - becomes a full language- takes one generation



## Can become a language - Creole (Hawaii)

- Language is enriched - becomes a full language- takes one generation

AKAMAI

You know my Feezicks Professah, you know da bolo head one? Some AKAMAI!

Definition: Someone who is very smart

Translation: You know my Physics Professor at the University of Hawaii Manoa? The one with the shinny bald head? He is the most intelligent man I have ever known!



## Critics

- People often speak ungrammatically (performance)
- Grammar changes due to social and historical circumstances
- Chomsky reduces language to its grammar – not meaning

## Evidence

- Language learning under extreme condition
- Neurology

## Language learning under extreme conditions

- Wild children / wolf children
- The blind and the deaf
  - Deaf children



## Wild children / wolf children

- E.g. Genie
  - Was locked up by father for 11 years
  - No sound in the house
  - No visual and physical stimulation
- Critical period
  - Until puberty
- Cannot master language



## Critical period hypothesis

- Until puberty
- If a child does not learn a language before the onset of puberty, the child will never master language at all.



## Blind children

- Achieve fluency
- No difference



## Deaf children

- Children learn ASL (American Sign Language) fluently
- Adults learn it with difficulties



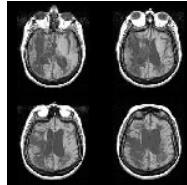
## Deaf children: Example: Chelsea

- At 31 was recognised to be deaf
- After therapy, reads, writes, but cannot speak normal sentences



## Neurology

- Children with left hemisphere damages transfer language to the right



## Mother-tongue acquisition

- Children do not simply repeat the language they hear
- Some social groups don't adapt their speech to children - still learn it
- Children don't make mistakes, have a different grammar to the grammar of the adults

