**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.

Children produce sentences they have never heard before

- He hitted
- No eat cake
- It's raining. Where is the umbrella?
- Give me the beach lookers! (binoculars)

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 shiny bald head? He is the most intelligent man I have ever known!

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

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