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## **The linguistic philosophy of Noam Chomsky**

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(مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ ۖ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا  
كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ) (النحل، ٩٦)

**"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"**

{ Whatever you have will end, but what Allah has is lasting.  
And We will surely give those who were patient their  
reward according to the best of what they used to do. } (Al-  
Nahal, 96)

## **Dedication**

This graduating paper is dedicated to Allah SWT, all praises to Allah The most Gracious and The Most Merciful . It's also dedicated to our Beloved parents who give us love, cares, supports, Endless prayers, great responsibilities as parents, Motivations, and the very best also most anything They have for us. We also dedicate this work to our Best friends, classmates, and colleges.

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## **Introduction.**

The current research paper deals with the linguistic philosophy of Noam Chomsky, one of the most influential thinkers in modern linguistics and analytic philosophy. The study is structured in two parts, each addressing key components of Chomsky's theoretical framework and philosophical stance.

The first part explores Chomsky's concepts of Universal Grammar and Transformational Grammar, examining their foundations and implications within the broader context of analytic philosophy. This section aims to highlight how Chomsky redefined the scope of linguistic inquiry through his formal and generative approaches.

The second part Investigates the philosophical underpinnings of Chomsky's work, focusing on Essentialism, his rationalist orientation, and his position on linguistic reductionism. This section sheds light on Chomsky's commitment to the idea that language is a natural faculty rooted in the human mind, and how his views challenge empiricist traditions in the philosophy of language.

# Part One

## 1.1.Universal Grammar (UG)

The idea of universal grammar (UG) proposed by Noam Chomsky has been a decisive driving force in linguistics. Whether they agree with him or not, linguists are defined by their reactions to him, not only in terms of general concepts of language and language acquisition, but also in the way they describe the linguistics. From the 1960s to the 1980s, UG became a focus for disciplines outside of linguistics such as psychology, computational language analysis, and native language acquisition, although these fields tend to lose touch in recent years (Cook and Newson, 2007:1).

According to Chomsky, universal grammar (UG) is a system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties common to all languages, the essence of human language. All human beings share some knowledge of language. UG is their common property, whatever language they speak. UG rules provide the basic pattern that all languages follow. (Chomsky, 1976:29) (Cook and Newson, 1996:1-2) (Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams, 2007:25) UG theory attempts to explain the relatively rapid acquisition of native language on the basis of minimal exposure to external input. Learning would be impossible without a universal, specific knowledge of language. Chomsky says:

It is reasonable to assume that UG defines a set of basic grammars and that what is actually represented in the mind of the individual, even under the idealization of a homogeneous linguistic community, would be a basic grammar with a periphery of marked elements and constructions (Chomsky, 1982: 8).

Chomsky argues that human infants are born with a basic linguistic sense common to all languages, which helps them acquire any specific language in the environment. According to Chomsky, the faculty of language is part of our biological endowment and, therefore, is largely genetically determined. Neuropsychologist Eric Lenneberg in his book *The Biological Basis of Language* (1967) supports Chomsky's view. He argues that the ability to learn a language is truly innate and, like many innate mechanisms, limited in time. If a child does not learn a language before the onset of puberty, he will never master it, as the critical period hypothesis suggests. The proposal of universal grammar places Chomsky at the center of the rationalist tradition. Chomsky's proposal has an affinity with the concept of archetype theorized by the famous Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. According to Jung, people are born with certain inherited modes of functioning rooted in the collective unconscious, called archetypes. Archetypes are conceived as innate neuropsychic centers that possess the capacity to initiate, control, and mediate behavioral characteristics and experiences common to all human beings. According to Chomsky, although grammars differ from one another, their basic forms, their deep structures, are universal; that is, at the deepest neuropsychic level there is a universal or archetypal grammar, on which all individual grammars are based.

#### **1.1.1. The Early Development of (UG) Theory.**

The development is done in two levels. At the first level are the general concepts about language and language acquisition, on the theory is based. The origins of ideas such as competence and performance or the Innate nature of language date back to the late 1950s or mid-1960s. These theories have continued to develop over the years without being replaced or abandoned. At this level, UG theory is known in all its Incarnations, and



the general outlines have remained essentially the same despite numerous additions. On another level, we find Ideas about the description of syntax, which are divided into well-defined historical stages. Different periods of Chomsky's description of syntax tend to be known by the names of particular books. Each was characterized by certain concepts, which were often rejected by subsequent periods; therefore, statements from one period are often difficult to translate into others. In contrast to the continuity of general Ideas, there are variations in the concepts of syntax, which lead to a series of apparent discontinuities and changes of direction. The original model, Syntactic Structures, takes its name from the title of Chomsky's 1957 book, which itself established the notion of generative grammar, with its emphasis on explicit and generative formal description by means of rules of rewriting as S → NP VP. He made a distinction between the rules of sentence structure that generated the basic structures, called core sentences, and the transformations that changed them in various ways, turning them into passive or negative sentences, etc. (Cook and Newson, 2007:2).

## **1.2. Transformational Grammar (TG)**

Starting formally in 1957 with the publication of Noam Chomsky Syntactic Structures, a new approach to the study of language was inaugurated. This newer grammar has gone under various names: generative, transformational, generative transformational, and transformational-generative., and the term transformational is used for consistency and brevity. Scholars have been so impressed by the importance and potential of transformational grammar that since 1957 the majority of published studies of English syntax have used this approach (Bruce, 1971:6).

Past ten years there have been many developments in transformational grammar, and there will certainly be more in the future. Almost every aspect of language is still being examined. There is so much controversy among linguists that many people use the plural in speaking of transformational grammars; there is no single transformational grammar which is accepted by all scholars in the field. Nevertheless, there are many ideas which most transformationalists do accept (Bruce, 1971:7).

The transformational grammarian is not content with describing what he finds in a corpus of sentences collected from native speakers. He feels that his grammar should enable one to produce all the sentences of a language, and he is as interested in possible sentences as he is in the ones actually recorded. Since the number of possible sentences in English or any other language is infinite, no one could have heard all of them. Yet native speakers of English understand new sentences such as *I spilled milk in the bathtub* and *He left his shoe polish in the refrigerator*. Every day the native speaker hears, reads, and creates new sentences, sentences which seem so ordinary that he is not aware that they have never been used before. An adequate grammar of English should enable a person to produce not just those sentences that have been said in the past, but all the sentences that a native speaker is capable of creating or understanding. In addition, the grammar should not generate sentences that a native speaker would reject, such as *The man horrified the door* or *Boy on the roof* is (Bruce, 1971:7).

### **1.3. Analytic Philosophy.**

Chomsky's work happens to fall in the line of analytic philosophy, where logic and language are central to theorisation. Chomsky makes use of logic and mathematics in his linguistic analysis, yielding a distinct formal language. In TGG, Chomsky creates a small set of rules that can

correctly generate all the combinations of words possible to form all the grammatical sentences of a language. He does this by using an algorithm to predict all grammatically correct sentences.

Chomsky's position among analytic philosophers has been respected due to three factors. First, Chomsky contributed substantially to a major methodological shift in the human sciences, turning away from the prevailing empiricism of mid twentieth century: behaviourism in psychology, structuralism in linguistics and positivism in philosophy. Second, his groundbreaking book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965) laid a conceptual foundation for a new cognitivist approach to linguistics and provided philosophers with a new framework for exploring human language and mind. And finally, he has persistently defended his views, engaging in important debates with the major figures in analytic and critical philosophy including Tyler Burge, Donald Davidson, Michael Dummett, Saul Kripke, Thomas Nagel, Hilary Putnam, Willard Van Orman Quine, John Searle, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva throughout his career. This debate literature is the evidence of his Intellectualism. His distinction between deep and surface structure seemed to sit well with the tradition within analytic philosophy, going back to Russell's theory of descriptions, that the surface appearance of a sentence often masks its true structure. As shown in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), grammar is divided into two levels of representation: the deep structure, generated by the recursive rules of a context-free phrase structure grammar, and the surface structure, derived from the deep structure through the application of transformation rules. Much of the subsequent development of the theory in the 1970's can be viewed as a series of attempts to formulate constraints on both the generative and the transformational components.

## **Part Two**

### **2.1.Essentialism.**

Noam Chomsky has been called the Intellectual ancestor of linguistic essentialism, which aims to Identify the intrinsic properties of language per se. Linguistic essentialism Is interested in postulating universals of human linguistic structures, unlearned but tacitly known, that permit and assist children to acquire human languages. It has a preference for finding surprising characteristics of languages that cannot be inferred from the data of usage, and are not predictable from human cognition or the requirements of communication.

According to Chomsky, the essence of language Is its structural rudiment. His essentialism has several characteristics. These are discussed below,

#### **2.1.1. Competence, not Performance.**

As an essentialist, Chomsky distinguishes between competence and performance. Competence is the knowledge of language-a tacit grasp of the structural properties of all the sentences of a language. Performance involves actual real-time use and may diverge radically from the underlying competence due to environmental disturbances and memory limitations.

Competence enables people to generate all possible grammatical sentences. Performance is the transformation of this competence into everyday speech. Chomsky proposed that linguistic theory should explain the mental processes that underlie the use of language. That is, the subject matter of linguistics will be competence, not performance.

### **2.1.2. language, not E-language.**

Chomsky (1986) introduced two technical notions of language: E-language and I-language. E' stands for 'extensional and 'external' and E-language refers to language data or corpus which is external to the mind. T stands for Individual", "internal", and "Intensional", and I-language means internalized language the properties of the mind of Individuals who know them. (Chomsky, 1995: 15-16) As a generative essentialist sees it. I-language is a state of mind/brain. Chomsky rejects E-language as undeserving of study and suggests I-language as the only suitable object of study in linguistics. I-languages can and should be studied in isolation from their external environments. Chomsky says:

For H to know L is for H to have a certain I-language. The statements of the grammar are statements of the theory of mind about the I-language, hence structures of the brain formulated certain level of abstraction from mechanisms (Chomsky, 1986 :23).

This branch of the study of language (generative grammar) is indeed marked by an absence of any role for community and culture There is nothing of any significance known, at least to me, about community and culture that relates to these questions about the nature of a certain biological system (Chomsky 2000:42).

This conclusion puts Chomsky in wrestling ring facing non-essentialists, who think that language is a social-functional or external phenomenon. Michael Dummett has thought language as a social custom, Esa Itkonen as social rules and David Lewis as social convention. Piaget and Vygotsky also laid the primary emphasis on the role of social or environmental factors in language development. Largely influenced by Wittgenstein, ordinary language philosophers H. P. Grice, J. L. Austin and

J. R. Searle postulated their pragmatic theories like implicatures, conversational maxims and speech acts based on the practical use of language (Levinson, 1983). In fact, there are various views about the nature of language and meaning that can be labelled externalist and Chomsky has been critical of them all' (Bezuidenhout, 2006: 129). His conviction even pitted him against descriptive linguistics of Leonard Bloomfield and structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. In his scientific capacity, Chomsky views language as a biological organ or device. As such, it's devoid of humour, metaphor, emotion, communicative intent, social meaning or anything else people normally think of as Language (Knight, 2010: 22). (Maher and Groves, 1998: 59-60). Noted that Chomsky's Internalist view of language faced Opposition from five fronts – Anthropological linguistics, Sociology, political economy, philosophy and Humanistic .

## **2.2.Chomsky's Rationalism.**

As a linguist, Noam Chomsky adheres to rationalism, In opposition to empiricism. His philosophy of language shows a clear influence of rationalistic ideology, which claims that reason or rationality as a property of mind Is the primary source of knowledge or way to knowledge. His work Is inspired by such philosophers as Plato, Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz and Immanuel Kant.

The history of philosophical concern with language is as old as philosophy itself. Plato in Cratylus explored the relationship between names and things and engaged in what today would be recognised as philosophy of language. Most philosophers since Plato have shown some interest in language. Rene Descartes (1596-1650), the founder father of modern philosophy, for instance, believed in the existence of universal language underpinning the diverse languages which human communities

use and is seen by twentieth-century linguist Noam Chomsky as a precursor of the theory of innateness of linguistic abilities.

As a self-declared Cartesian, Chomsky via Cartesian Linguistics (1966) clearly embraces the interpretation of Descartes famous dictum 'I think therefore I am' (cogito ergo sum) as the solid foundation for knowledge. With this Cartesian spirit, Chomsky has provided a subjective view of language, claiming that language refers to certain mental states, which a linguistic theory will explicate. He says:

We should, so it appears, think of knowledge of language as a certain state of mind/brain, a relatively stable element in transitory mental states once it is attained; furthermore as a state of some distinguishable faculty of the mind the language faculty with its specific properties, structure and organisation, one module of the mind (Chomsky, 1986: 12-13).

Chomsky was also influenced by Kantian epistemology. which sought a synthesis of empiricism and rationalism. Kant's influence on Chomsky is laid down by Pinker:

Kant's version of nativism, with abstract categorising frameworks but not actual knowledge built into the mind, is the version that is most viable today, and can be found, for example, in Chomskyan linguistics, evolutionary Psychology, and the approach to cognitive development called domain specificity (Pinker, 2007: 160).

Chomsky's linguistic-philosophical formulations also owe much to the ideas of Plato and Leibniz. He recalls:

Much of the interest of the study of language, in my opinion, lies in the fact that it offers an approach to the classical problem that I call 'Plato's problem: the problem of explaining how we can know what we do know. Plato's answer was that much of what we know is inborn, remembered

from an earlier existence. Leibniz argued that the idea is basically correct, but must be purged of the error of pre-existence (Chomsky, 1986: 263).

Recalls Chomsky argued that a serious theory of mental processes should replace empiricism, the belief that experience is the source of knowledge. Opposing empiricism, he says, 'In a sense, empiricism has developed a kind of mind-body dualism, of a quite unacceptable type.... Empiricism insists that the brain is a tabula rasa, empty, unstructured.... There is no reason to believe that the higher mental faculties are in some manner dissociated from this complexity of organisation' (Chomsky, 1977: 81). He further states:

These empiricist hypotheses have very little plausibility, in my opinion; it does not seem possible to account for the development of commonsense understanding of the physical and social world, or science, in terms of processes of induction, generalisation, abstraction, and so on (Chomsky, 1977: 68).

Noam Chomsky is recognized as an heir to the rationalist tradition in the philosophy of language and mind due to his characterization of language as a system of knowledge that emphasizes creative language use while downplaying actual performance. He endorses innate principles of grammar and posits structures that are not immediately apparent on the surface. Chomsky (1966) acknowledges his indebtedness to the Port-Royal Grammar and Humboldt as influences on his work.

But there are important aspects in which Chomsky's views are different from the rationalist picture. First of all, in speaking about linguistic competence, Chomsky is willing to consider a kind of knowledge which, although innate, is not exactly based on reason. Second, he does not think that UG bears any intrinsic relation to the structure of reality. Third,



he rejects semantic theories that are based on truth and reference and consequently require the study of language-world relations(Szabó, 2004).

### **2.3.Chomsky's Linguistic Reductionism.**

Chomsky virtually reduces language to its grammar. He says, 'A grammar of the language L is essentially a theory of L' (Chomsky, 1957/2002: 49) and 'Grammar is best formulated as a self-contained study independent of semantics' (Ibid, 106). According to him, linguistics equates grammar, excluding the discussion of meaning. He regards meaning as secondary, so he disregards the social situation in which language is normally used. For Chomsky, semantics and pragmatics are not a central Part of the study of language and the study of meaning and Reference and of the use of language should be excluded from the field of linguistics. Chomsky's syntax-semantics non- interface is recounted by Alexander Luria:

According to him, it is possible to determine whether or not a sentence is grammatical without regard to its semantic acceptability....Chomsky's approach made it possible to Make progress in the formal syntactic analysis of sentences Without becoming bogged down in semantic problems (Luria, 1982: 121-22).

Chomsky posits a syntactocentric view of linguistic analysis and he says natural language consists of 'internalist computations'. This aspect of his reductionism has been elaborately explained in The Minimalist Program (1995). He also discusses the ability and desirability of reduction of Linguistic knowledge to its mathematical basis in his article 'Mysteries of Nature: How Deeply Hidden' (2009).

## **Conclusion**

Chomsky's work in linguistics has had profound implications for modern psychology, philosophy and science. The branch of knowledge which we call 'biolinguistics' today took direct inspiration from him. For Chomsky, linguistics is a branch of cognitive psychology. Genuine insights in linguistics imply concomitant understandings of the aspects of mental

Processing and human nature. One consequence of such insights is that linguistics, psychology and philosophy are no longer to be regarded as separate and autonomous disciplines Chomsky has placed linguistics at the core Of studies of the mind. According to him, linguistic theory must account for universal similarities between all languages. His Contribution to the cognitive sciences – fields that seek to understand how we think, learn, and perceive – emerges from His insightful theories. His unique philosophy of language has given linguistics a respectable place in the wider sphere of Epistemology.

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