

Mentalism

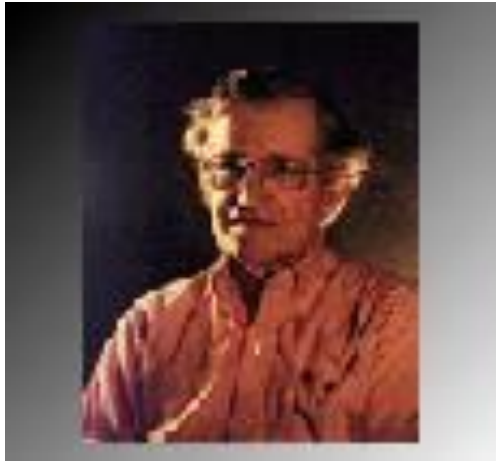
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Warm-up

Which is more important for you:

LOVE or FOOD?

Noam Chomsky



Introduction

“Evidently each language is the result of the interplay of two factors: the initial state and the course of experience. We can think of the initial stage as a ‘language acquisition device’ that takes experience as ‘input’ and gives the language as an ‘output’---an ‘output’ that is internally represented in the mind/brain.” (Chomsky, 2000, p. 4)

What constitutes knowledge of language?

- **Principles and parameters:** All human beings inherit a universal set of **principles** and **parameters** that control the shape human languages can take, and which are what make human languages similar to one another.
- **Minimalist program:** the core of human language is the **lexicon** (1. lexical categories—content words; 2. functional categories—grammatical words)

Universal Grammar

1. Human beings are born with an innate “blueprint” for language

2. Children acquire language as quickly and effortlessly b/c they do not have to figure out all the rules of their language, only those that are specific to their particular language.

What does UG consist of?

1. Principle
2. Parameters

1. Principles

1. All languages are structure-dependent: all languages are made up of sentences which consists of at least a **Noun-Phrase** and a **Verb-Phrase**.

Ex. **My friend** **bought** a new car yesterday.

The friend that I met in Australia last year **bought** a new car yesterday.

2. Move α

Ex. The cat who is friendly **is** Ginger.

Is the cat who is friendly Ginger?

3. A over A condition

(i) ... [_A ... [_A ...

(ii) a I won't forget [_{NP} my trip to [_{NP} Africa]]

b *Africa, I won't forget my trip to

c my trip to Africa, I won't forget

2. Parameters

- All language do not behave in the same way in terms of their structural properties → therefore, parameters come in.

Ex. Head parameter:

1. Head-first (head--complements): English —
“the girl with blue trousers”
“The picture is hanging on the wall.”
2. Head-last (complements--head): Japanese —
“picture wall on is hanging”

2. Parameters

- “a language is not, then, a system of rules, but a set of specifications for parameters in an invariant system of principles of Universal Grammar.” --- Chomsky

Mentalism

- Infant is born with complete world knowledge
 - Infants count
 - Infants have a concept of objects
 - Infants have physics concepts
 - Infants have language

Mentalism

- Evidence for the claim of complete world knowledge
 - **Youngsters learn an extremely complex system (language) effortlessly**
 - **Youngsters learn an extremely complex system (language) in a short amount of time**
 - **Youngsters do not need instruction to learn their mother tongue**

Mentalism

- In the case of language, infants are born with:
 - a universal grammar (UG) - a database of grammar
 - language acquisition device (LAD) - hypothesis tester

Chomsky's theory

- Good points:
 - explains why language is learned relatively quickly
 - explains how language is learnt despite poverty of the stimulus, no negative evidence etc
- Bad points:
 - very little evidence for adultlike grammatical knowledge in young children (Braine, 1976)
 - young children make errors Chomsky would not predict (e.g. omit obligatory constituents such as determiners, possessives)
 - cannot explain why children make grammatical errors (e.g. doggie go walkies) even after extensive language exposure

Discussion

- Why does N. Chomsky criticize B.F. Skinner's theory?
- Say what you know about N. Chomsky's ideas of language .
- Why does this concept have a great influence on the teaching and learning a foreign language?