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LANGUAGE DEFINITION

CHOMSKY'S COMPETENCE AND PERFORMANCE

The American linguist, Noam Chomsky (1965) has made a similar distinction between linguistic competence and performance. According to Chomsky, *competence* is the native speaker's knowledge of his/her language and the ability to produce and understand large stretches of sentences. *Performance* is the actual use of these utterances in routine life. In other words, the abstract or the internal grammar, which enables a speaker to utter and understand sentences and utterances in potential use, is a speaker's competence. According to him, competence is free from interference due to the slips of memory, the lapses of attention and so on. Chomsky states:

"Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance."

(1965: 3)

Chomsky's LAD (language acquisition device) and UG (universal grammar):

-Chomsky theorized that children were born with a hard-wired language acquisition device (LAD) in their brains.

-LAD is a set of language learning tools, intuitive at birth in all children.

-LAD explains human acquisition of the syntactic structure of language.

-It encodes the major principles of a language and its grammatical structures into the child's brain.

-It enables the children to analyze language and extract the basic rules.

-The child exploits its LAD to make sense of the utterances heard around it, deriving from this "primary linguistic data" –the grammar of the language.

-He later expanded this idea into that of universal grammar, a set of innate principles and adjustable parameters that are common to all human languages.

Chomsky says that UG does not have the actual rules of each language but it has *PRINCIPLES* and *PARAMETERS*.

Principles: universal basic features of Grammar .These features are common across all languages. In other words, principles account for the similarities between languages e.g. Nouns, Verbs and structure dependency (all languages have sentences consisting of NP and VP).

Parameters: account for variation between languages. In other words, these parameters tell us how languages are different. E.g. English has SVO pattern, while Japanese has SOV pattern.