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Level : Second Year

Course Six

Mentalism : Chomsky and Transformational Generative Grammar

Introduction :

The new linguistics, which began in 1957 with the publication of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*, deserves the label 'revolutionary.' After 1957, the study of grammar would no longer be limited to what is said and how it is interpreted. In fact, the word *grammar* itself took on a new meaning. The new linguistics defined grammar as our innate, subconscious ability to generate language, an internal system of rules that constitutes our human language capacity. The goal of the new linguistics was to describe this internal grammar

1- Mentalistic Theory and Language Learning

The mentalistic theory of language leaming, deveIoped in America by Noam Chomsky, first and later by Eric H. Lenneberd (a neuropsychologist), came up as a reaction against the Behavioristic language learning theory, The major principle of Mentalistic language acquisition theory is that"everybody learns a language, not because they are subjected to a similar conditioning process, but because they possess an inbom capacity which permits them to acquire a language as anormal Maturational Process" In 1965. in a booktitled 'Aspects of the Theory of Syntax', Chomsky claimed that there are innate properties of language because a child masters his native language in a very short time in spite of the highly abstract nature of rules. Chomsky's own speculations about the psychological realities underlying language development

include the hypothesis that the rules or principles underlying linguistic behavior are abstract and innate.

2- Language Acquisition Device (LAD)

Mentalistie language leaming theory is that the leaming capacity of human being by definition is not only universal but also innate, and this innate capacity is not something to be obtained soeially.ln other words, language learing is not socially orientcd. Then, language leaming and its environment must be viewed as a biologically acquired process rather than a resuIt of social learning. In the end, the Chomskian doctrine came up to support the fact that universals of language were a set of rules programmed in the brains of only and only human infants

LAD is an innate property "whose, nature and mode of operation are inviolable, it has got the folIowing features:
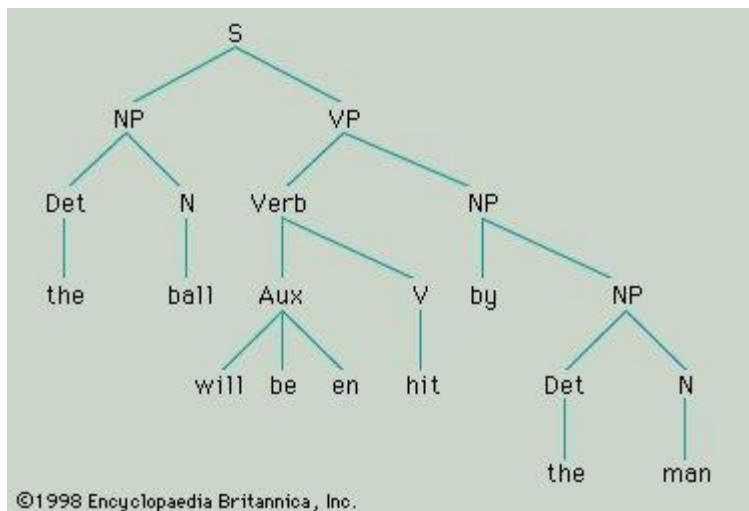
a) The power to differentiate speech sounds from each other
b) The capacity to organize linguistic events in various classes that can easily be redefined afterwards.
c) Knowledge specifying the possible linguistic system and rejecting the impossible and inadmissible ones,
d) Data-selccting ability, its constant evaluation. in an advancing linguistics system and of the linguistic data that are encountered

3-Transformational Generative Grammar

Transformational grammar is a theory of grammar that accounts for the constructions of a language by linguistic transformations and phrase structures. Also known as transformational-generative grammar or T-G or TGG.

In the Encyclopedia of Linguistics, 2005 we can read :

The era of Transformational-Generative Grammar, as it is called, signifies a sharp break with the linguistic tradition of the first half of the [twentieth] century both in Europe and America because, having as its principal objective the formulation of a finite set of basic and transformational rules that explain how the native speaker of a language can generate and comprehend all its possible grammatical sentences, it focuses mostly on syntax and not on phonology or morphology, as structuralism does"

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Surface and Deep Structure :

One of the most important concepts proposed by Chomsky is the concept of surface and deep structure. The Generativism paradigm claims that the concept of structural analysis proposed by Structuralism paradigm is too swallow, it only reaches the level of surface structure. Surface structure can be defined as the syntactic form they take as actual sentences. In the other words, it is forms of sentences resulted from modification/ transformation. Consider these sentences:

(1) You close the door.
(2) The door is closed by you.
(3) Close the door!

The first sentence is active, second is passive, and the last is imperative. However, if you take a look those closely, you will find that those three are very closely related, even identical. They seem to be identical, since they have the same underlying abstract representation that is called deep structure. It is defined as an abstract level of structural organization in which all the elements determining structural interpretation are represented. If you want to analyze the relation of those three sentences, the first you have to know about the deep structure of them, since deep structure is the input of **transformation rules**. You cannot apply transformation rules if you don't have **deep structure**. transformation rules are sets of rules which will change or move constituents in the structures derive from the **phrase structure rules**.

Competence and Performance.

Chomsky separates competence and performance; he describes 'competence' as an idealized capacity that is located as a psychological or mental property or function and 'performance' as the production of actual utterances. In short, competence involves "knowing" the language and performance involves "doing" something with the language. The difficulty with this construct is that it is very difficult to assess competence without assessing performance. A person's linguistic competence is his tacit knowledge of his language in how to produce and understand an indefinite number of utterances never heard before. However, performance is considered to be the physical representation, usually in utterances of any type of the human competence which refers to how someone uses language