

# Generative grammar

Linguistics, Language Acquisition



## FOUNDATIONS IN GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

Any native speaker of a language can be said to know the grammar of his/her own language, they know how to form and interpret any expression. However, this grammatical knowledge is subconscious. Native speakers have grammatical competence in their native language. This means that they have tacit knowledge of the grammar of their own language.

We have to make a difference between competence (the fluent native speaker's tacit knowledge of his language) and performance (what people actually say and understand, the use of the language). Criteria of adequacy Basically, the criteria of adequacy are 2: descriptive adequacy (universality) and explanatory adequacy. 1. A grammar is descriptively adequate if it correctly describes whether a sequence of words is or isn't grammatical and also correctly describes what interpretation(s) this sequence has. 1. 1. The goal of a descriptive linguist is to devise particular grammars of particular languages, while that of a theoretical linguist is to devise a theory of grammar.

This is a set of hypotheses about the nature of possible and impossible grammars of natural languages and about the inherent properties that natural languages do and don't possess. An adequate theory of grammar must satisfy the criterion of adequacy known as universality. This means that a theory of grammar must enable us to devise a descriptively adequate grammar for every natural language. The main goal of Generative Grammar is to build a theory of Universal Grammar. 2. This theory of UG will not only list

the universal properties of natural lang grammars, but also explain the relevant properties --i. e.

why grammar have the properties they do. This requirement is referred to as explanatory adequacy. Language Faculty According to Chomsky, the most plausible explanation for uniformity and rapidity lies in that the course of acquisition is determined by a biologically endowed innate language faculty within the brain, which provides children with a genetically transmitted set of procedures for developing a grammar on the basis of their linguistic experience (the speech input they receive). The hypothesis that the course of lang acquisition is determined by an innate language faculty is known as the innateness hypothesis. The major tenets of this hypothesis are: 1. The innate language faculty is unique to humans. .

All humans possess this ability of lang acquisition. 3. The uniformity character suggests that children have a genetic guidance in the task of building a grammar of their native lang. 4. Despite performance errors in the input, children acquire a competence grammar, which again points to the fact that the acquisition ability must be genetically determined. 5. Although no special care is taken to teach them, children acquire languages successfully, which again supports the genetic character of lang acquisition.

Principles We have claimed that children have a genetically endowed language faculty. If so, what are the defining properties of the language faculty? The lang faculty must include a set of principles of Universal Grammar, in the sense that the lang faculty must be such as to allow the child to develop a grammar of any natural lang on the basis of a sufficient

speech input. If these principles are universal their application in one language should reveal evidence of their application in other langs. The underlying rule to construct a particular structure in one language will be part of a general principle of UG. (1) a. Mary will tell me the truth. b.

Will Mary tell me the truth? Move the second word in a sentence in front of the first word) (2) a. The girl in the corner will tell me the truth. b. \*Girl the in the corner....

? | | STRUCTURE DEPENDENCE PRINCIPLE | | All grammatical operations are structure-dependent. | To explain grammaticality and ungrammaticality we should rely on general principles such as the Structure Dependence Principle, although in each language this principle will be turned into something more concrete: Move an auxiliary in front of a preceding noun expression which functions as its subject. This rule makes use of structural information which is subconsciously available to all humans, although people don't know what an auxiliary is. Also this rule accounts for the contrast in (3): (3) a. Mary told me the truth. b. \*Told Mary the truth? as we have applied inversion to a non-auxiliary.

A theory of grammar which posits that the internal structure of words, phrases and clauses in natural lang is determined by innate UG principles minimizes the burden of grammatical learning imposed on the child. This is quite important given the learnability criterion of adequacy for any theory of grammar. The UG theory accounts for the rapidity of the child's grammatical development by positing that there is a universal set of innately endowed grammatical principles which determine the nature of grammatical structure

and the range of grammatical operations found in natural lang. Since these UG principles don't have to be learned, the UG theory minimizes the learning load placed on the child and as a consequence maximizes the learnability of natural language grammars. Parameters Although the lang faculty involves a set of UG principles, all aspects of the grammatical structure of language are not determined by innate gramm. principles. Otherwise all languages would have the same structure and there would not be any structural learning in lang acquisition.

So although there are universal principles which control the overall structure of a lang, there are also language-particular aspects of grammatical structure which children have to learn as part of acquiring their native lang.

Acquisition involves structural learning, which is limited to a set of parameters. Parameters are those aspects of grammatical structure which are subject to lang-particular variation. Examples of parameters: 1. Null subject parameter: languages which permit omission of the subject of a finite verb and langs that do not. (4) a. Maria come pasta.

b. Come pasta. (5) a. Mary eats pasta. b. \*Eats pasta. 2.

Wh-parameter: languages which permit fronting of the wh-phrase or not. (6) a. What do you think he will say? b. ? Que piensas que el dira? c. Ni xiangxin ta hui shuo shenme you think he will say what English and Spanish Wh-phrases move to the beginning of the interrogative clause, but Chinese Wh-phrase remains in situ. 3. Head position parameter: the relative positioning of heads with respect to their complements. Head-first languages and Head-last langs.

(7) a. Close the door b. Moonul dadala. door close (8) a. desire for change. b. byunhwa-eadaehan kalmang change-for desire 4.

Discourse/Agreement Prominence: Miyagawa (2005) claims that languages can be classified according to whether they are focus or agreement prominent. On the basis of his classification, there are languages which overtly instantiate the notion of topic (Korean or Japanese), there are also languages which put a special emphasis on agreement marking (English), but additionally there are languages which show both (Spanish). >>>

Jimenez (2008, 2009) 9) a. Taro-ga hon-o katta. Taro-NOM book-ACC bought 'Taro bought a book'. b. Hon-o Taro-ga katta.

Book-ACC Taro-NOM bought 'A book, Taro bought'. 10) a. Mary likes syntax. b. \*Syntax Mary likes. (11) a. Susana corto los tulipanes.

(S-V-O) Susana cutpast3sg the tulips 'Susana cut the tulips.' b. Los tulipanes(,) los corto Susana. (O-cl-V-S) The tulips, CL3pl, masc cut Susana 'The tulips, Susana cut'. Parameter-setting Parameters involve binary choices, so structural variation between langs is constrained. The only structural learning that children have to face is the task of setting the appropriate value for each of the relevant structural parameters >>>>> Metaphor of the switch in the up or down position.