Generative Grammar

• Linguistics is a branch of cognitive psychology.

• It is the study of a psychological system—a “mental organ” called the “language faculty”.

• This is the system that allows us to produce and understand complex and precise evidence of what we want to say.

• It is also the system that allows us to acquire language in the first place.
“...the shift in focus [represented by generative grammar] was from behavior or the products of behavior to states of the mind/brain that enter into behavior...”

(i) What constitutes knowledge of language?
(ii) How is knowledge of language acquired?
(iii) How is knowledge of language put to use?

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“The answer to the first question is given by a particular generative grammar, a theory concerned with the state of the person who knows a particular language.”

(i) What constitutes knowledge of language?

(ii) How is knowledge of language acquired?

(iii) How is knowledge of language put to use?

“The answer to the second is given by a specification of a UG [Universal Grammar] along with an account of the ways in which its principles interact with experience to yield a particular language; UG is a theory of the ‘initial state’ of the language faculty, prior to any linguistic experience.”

Chomsky, Knowledge of Language (1986)
(i) What constitutes knowledge of language?
(ii) How is knowledge of language acquired?
(iii) How is knowledge of language put to use?

“The answer to the third question would be a theory of how the knowledge of language attained enters into the expression of thought and the understanding of presented specimens of language, and derivatively, into communication and other special uses of language.”

Language of Thought vs. Generative Grammar

• Crucially important: generative grammar is a theory of our ability to acquire and use language of the kind that we speak out loud.

• Jerry Fodor’s language of thought hypothesis is a theory about something else—namely, the language in which we think.

• Don’t confuse the two!
Intention to send a message encodes a evidence of this message in a sentence \( \sigma \).\n
\( \sigma \) decodes the evidence of S's message from \( \sigma \).\n
\( \sigma \) infers that S meant p.
SPÉECH COMPREHENSION

**FACULTY OF LANGUAGE**

- **PARSER**
  Computes the structure of linguistic input
- **SEMANTIC COMPOSITION**
  Uses the structure to compute the meaning.

**CENTRAL SYSTEMS**

- **PRAGMATIC INFERENCÉ**
  Uses the meaning to infer speaker’s message.
- **BELIEFS, MEMORY, ETC.**

**PHON. COMPETENCE**

**SYNTACTIC COMPETENCE**

**SEMANTIC COMPETENCE**
John flew to Paris and Mary flew to Chicago.
This is the book that Walter was reading to his friends and fellow students on Friday.

This is the book that Walter was reading to his friends and fellow students about on Friday.
It’s raining x.

Everyone x was at the party x last night.
As the parents left their child played the guitar nicely.
As the parents left their child played the guitar nicely.
[As the parents left their child] played the guitar nicely.

[As the parents left] their child played the guitar nicely.
The rat the cat the dog worried chased the malt.
The rat the cat the dog worried chased the malt.
The rat [the cat the dog worried] chased ate the malt.
The rat Socks chased ate the malt.
The rat the cat the dog worried chased the malt.