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Noam Chomsky: Defining Problems in Contemporary Linguistics

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ABSTRACT

Chomsky has provided new methods of analyzing the problems in linguistics by delineating the necessity of transformations following the outlines of grammar, in order to generate sentences. This approach of Chomsky is in tune with his assertion that on the basis of the available resources of a language any number of sentences can be generated in appropriate tiers indicating the growing capacity and richness of language expressions. From the basic phonetic level, language will emerge into higher and higher levels of expression in words, phrases and sentences in manifold combinations, and this development has been analyzed through the mathematical procedures and rationalism by Chomsky. This task is as innovative as it is complex. The new trend in linguistics cannot be dissociated from its impact on social sciences. That the language prevalent in the community or country, reflect the fundamentals of grammar, similar to which are also present in other languages, has to be taken note of by the linguistic analysts according to Chomsky. He has maintained that languages share common tendencies and patterns, and the linguist has to identify the forms and related aspects unfolding the process of unlimited language expressions. This paper presents a brief introduction to Chomsky's approach toward linguistics.

Key Words: Internalized language (I language), externalized language (E language), cognitive, biological, grammars, universal grammar, formal language, natural language

Chomsky has analyzed the foundation of linguistics in a way which will open the closed boundaries/ barriers of many subjects including psychology. The traditional approach to linguistics has been transformed into new interpretations and modes of analysis, and it requires an intensive zest and concentration to follow the technicalities introduced by Chomsky, at every step unfolding the structure of language. Chomskyan effect on linguistic studies and other allied subjects is deeper than it is generally accepted, and a concerted attempt is required, to unravel the implications of the formal system outlined by him.

The constituents of the subject of linguistics envisaged by Chomsky have a rigorous logic, under the veneer of formal system. The evolution of his ideas has a consistency of its own, and the system of linguistics explained by him leaves much scope for adjustment with more rigorous viewpoints supported by new data and evidence. Chomsky has recognized the process and emergence of new ideas which he affirmed, will undoubtedly blaze new paths of success in the development of human knowledge.

Chomsky's approach toward the problems of linguistics, depict a new departure in the analysis of languages in different racial and cultural groups. The origin and growth of language is a phenomena which distinguish humanity from the apes, bees and other biological species which live in groups, herds and flocks having their own modes of

communication. In the close-knit family life of apes and other wild animals, the members communicate their instinctual urges through sounds and gestures. Similar behavior has been observed in other species by biologists and anthropologists.

Chomsky has analysed the views of Watson, Sapir and Bloomfield and admired the work done by Zellig Harris in language studies in his book Methods in Structural Linguistics. He did not remain under the influence of Harris for long, and formulated his theory that phonology and syntax should not be clubbed with semantics. Chomsky has visualized linguistics as a formal study and indicated that semantics in its link with syntax should develop independently.

Chomsky recognized the contributions of Humboldt in the area of linguistics. His preface to Aspects of the Theory of Syntax acknowledge the view of Humboldt that language possess the quality for producing amazing results, even when the resources available are meagre. The creative aspect of language is accepted by Chomsky which brings him closer to the rationalistic movements, and the acceptance of the role of mind in shaping its structure. Chomsky's analysis of the subject of linguistics convey the spirit of universality, objectivity and empirical experience, which bring him closer to grammarians like Panini belonging to a different period, tradition and culture, yet an inalienable part of the history of language. Chomsky moves toward the ideal of expanding the scope of linguistics through the application of the methods of logic and mathematics. Chomsky's analysis of the subject of linguistics is broad based and his theory of generative grammar defines the role of syntax, sound and meaning. The scenario where the speaker and hearer possess the ability to follow the meaning of statements unflinching, describes the aim and function of generative grammar.

Chomsky has applied the methods used in mathematics for dissecting the different aspects of linguistics in order to reach better results. The term 'generate' for Chomsky duplicates the meaning in which it is used in mathematics, when dealing with the generation of numbers. Like in mathematics numbers are being generated to fulfil a definite purpose, so in linguistics the elements of grammar provide the necessary foundation to generate sentences having a definite meaning based on words and phrases. Chomsky's theory of generative grammar and production of sentences, reflect the creativeness embedded in language. He has proposed that the required set of principles governing transformational grammar, would facilitate the formulation of any number of sentences. The formal rules indicated by Chomsky has clarified the need for implementation of the theory of transformational grammar in letter and spirit for the development of linguistics on lines comparable with mathematics and sciences.

There is no grammar without rules, and the way in which Chomsky has given an innovative role to generative grammar which focus on the possibility and capacity of the person to communicate in numberless sentences. The operation of generative grammar cannot be followed comprehensively without an idea of the speaker's depth of knowledge and competence. In this context the speaker emerges as the central figure, along with the need to clarify the terms competence and performance.

Chomsky has described the rise and growth of natural languages, and elucidated their structure and significance in the light of generative grammar. He is no stranger to language studies having learnt Hebrew under the guidance of his father. He observed that the innovative developments in modern logic have produced a deep impact on linguistics and social sciences. Taking the cue from Chomsky, linguists have developed the manifold aspects of syntax in mathematical terms. The principles of mathematics function perfectly in its domain and it has to be seen how far they will operate successfully in linguistics.

Chomsky's acquaintance with the historical linguistics and his admiration for the views of Zellig Harris, a reputed linguist, helped him embark on the study of linguistics. The

developments in mathematical logic also deeply impressed him. Chomsky formulated the theory of generative grammar, and analyzed the linguistic problems according to its scope and methods. Chomsky accepts the significance of biological and empirical foundation, and the accompanying inherent tendencies in the development of language. He has taken linguistics to a level where it would be well-matched with mathematical logic in the exposition and analysis of its subject matter.

Languages of the world share many common characteristics, and in this respect they can be regarded as linked with each other, as well as having their own specific qualities. Chomsky points out that here exist incipient tendencies which help in generating sentences, and varied forms of expression. The growth of language in the child, as well as its development in the human societies is a universal manifestation of Chomsky. This approach of Chomsky is at the basis of his theory of universal grammar, which explains his views on the origin and growth of languages. He finds that the principles of grammar as reflected in the developed languages of the world, demonstrate their universal significance. The extent to which grammar guides the standard language expressions, throws light on the elements comprising the development of language in all its variegated contours. In order to reach the higher levels of expressing the feelings, emotions and the association of ideas steeped in a web of complexity, Chomsky has proposed the concept of transformational grammar to comprehend the development of language in all its strength and maneuverability. The term grammar used by Chomsky encompasses the three aspects of linguistics, phonology, semantics and syntax. Generally, linguists do not make any hard and fast distinction between grammar and syntax. Chomsky's technical innovations do not negate the spirit of linguistics, uplifting it to a deeper level of analysis not conceived so far.

The system of formal language introduced by Chomsky in linguistics intends to reach the level of logical precision present in mathematics, in spite of the lack of clarity between its structural elements and those of natural language. There is a need to clarify the extent to which a natural language can possibly adopt the techniques of the system of formal language. The possibility of replacing the natural language spoken in the society with the formal language, even partially, may pose a great challenge to linguists as well as the people. A greater amount of theoretical clarity is required before an attempt is made in applying the techniques of formal language on the natural language, when both function on the basis of their distinct structural elements. It is hardly possible to bypass the connotation and meaning from language expressions, words, sentences and phrases, for they touch the sensibilities and value systems which are embedded in the beliefs of humanity. There is no harm however, in assuming that the usefulness of formal language, in this context has to be fixed in correlation with the elements governing the natural language, in order to remove from it all shades of obscurity.

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