Outline

Generativism (definitions

- theory of language that has been developed in the 1950s by Noam Chomsky and his disciples.

- It implies the usefulness and feasibility of describing the human language by means of generative grammars (Lyons, 1981).

- It also refers to the approach of language analysis based on such types of grammar.

Generativism (definitions)

- A 'generative' grammar is the type of grammar whose rules generate (i.e., produce) all and only the correct combinations of elements in a language (Trask, 2007)
- It also refers to a conceptual model whose central tenet is that language is a property for which human beings are biologically prewired.

Outline

1- Definition of Generativism

2- Reasons for the rise of generativism

3- Principles of genrativism

      - Generativist view of language

      - Main concepts of generativism

4- Generativism and language teaching

5- Evolution of Genrativism

2- Reasons for the rise of generativism

- Generativism had its origins in the 1950s with the publication of Noam Chomsky's 1957 book Syntactic structures.

- Chomsky's approach was a reaction to the behaviorist theory of language prevalent at the time (structuralism), championed by the psychologist Skinner.

  – For behaviourists, the brain is considered a blank slate with regard to linguistic knowledge;

  – children must be explicitly taught their language by the adults around them in a stimulus–response manner,

  – behavior is rewarded when chidren imitate the adults' language correctly.

Reasons for the rise of generativism

- Chomsky also rejected structuralist's approach to language analysis:
  - 'taxonomic' approach which aimed to describe languages rather than explain them
  - focus on 'surface' forms rather than the underlying cognitive system and the.
  - use of 'discovery procedures' to ensure that linguistics was an objective, empirical science.

Reasons for the rise of generativism

- Chomsky: some brain activities are unconscious and reflexive, just as is the case for many physical processes.

- Much of human beings' linguistic knowledge, Chomsky argued, is abstract and unconscious, but can be brought to conscious awareness by examining speakers' usage of such linguistic knowledge

Generativist view of language

- **language is a species-specific property**
  - part of the mind/brain.
- **Children are born with a faculty of language in its Initial State**
  - i,e. the state of the faculty of language before it is exposed to the input of a particular language.
  - innate knowledge : Universal Grammar.
- **Language is a human faculty**
  - It is part of the human biological endowment
  - thanks to the faculty of language, any speaker of a language is believed to internalize a system of rules in a particular way.

Main concepts of Generativism

- *Competence*: linguistic competence is 'the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language' (1965a:4). It is also our ability to use language. It is a set of rules constructed in the speakers' minds by virtue of language acquisition.
- *Performance*: 'the actual use of language in concrete situations'. It is also defined as the real utterances produced by real people
- *Universal Grammar:* the grammatical properties shared by all human languages.
- **I-language**: a set of rules and principles internalized in the minds of speakers
- **E-language**: a set of possible sentences that can be externalized in society

Biology, Environment and Language acquisition

- **Empiricist models** attribute a greater role to the environment, focus on differences across speakers' grammars:

  - how the particular input that children receive influences the development of their grammar.

- **Nativist models** attribute a greater role to the biological component, focus on commonalities across speakers' grammars.

Generativism and language acquistion

- The generative approach as subscribed to by many linguists, views linguistic knowledge as being unique and specialized, and stemming from brain structures devoted specifically to the processing of language.

- Under a generative approach, human beings are assumed to be prewired for language, beginning life not with a blank slate but rather with a linguistic template or blueprint that they flesh out upon exposure to specific linguistic data. Instead of learning language by imitating those around them, children create their own grammars.

Generativism and language acquistion

- children make errors that adults do not (e.g. 'I hurted myself') and generate novel forms, neither of which should occur if they learned solely by imitating.
- most children are not given explicit instruction in their language
- although the environments in which children acquire their language vary, they all go through similar stages in acquiring a language and during the same general time
- although children do not hear examples of every possible structural pattern, they nonetheless attain a grammar capable of generating all the possible sentences in their language (poverty of the stimulus).

The features of language

- Language is productive (recursion)
  - Language consists of a finite number of rules, yet is capable of generating an infinite number of sentences from such rules.
- Language is highly constrained:
  - All syntactic rules make reference to the internal structure of the sentence (known as structure dependency).

Developments of Generativism

- The Classical Theory aims to make linguistics a science. *Syntactic Structures*. 1957.
- The Standard Theory deals with how semantics should be studied in a linguistics theory. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax.* 1965.
- The Extended Standard Theory focuses discussion on language universals and universal grammar.
- The Revised Extended Standard Theory (or GB) focuses discussion on government and binding.

  "Remarks on Nominalization" (1970), *Reflections on Language* (1975), *Rules and Representations* (1980), *Lectures on Government and Binding* (1981).

- The latest is the Minimalist Program, a further revision of the previous theory.

  - *The Minimalist Program* (1995), *Minimalist Inquiries: The Framework* (1998).

Generativist approach to research

- Chomsky believes that the aim of linguistics is to produce a generative grammar which captures the tacit knowledge of the native speaker of his language. This concerns the question of learning theory and the question of linguistic universals. In fact, Chomsky and his followers are interested in any data that can reveal the native speaker's tacit knowledge. They seldom use what native speakers actually say; they rely on their own intuition.

Generativist approach to research

- Chomsky's methodology is **hypothesis-deductive**, which operates at two levels:

  (a) The linguist formulates a hypothesis about language structure – a general linguistic theory; this is tested by grammars for particular languages, and

  (b) Each such grammar is a hypothesis on the general linguistic theory. Finally, Chomsky follows rationalism in philosophy and mentalism in psychology.