Generativism

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◆ Generativism refers to the theory of language that has been ~~developed by Avram Noam~~ Chomsky in the late 1950s.

◆ The generative approach views **linguistic knowledge as being unique and specialized, and stemming from brain structures** devoted specifically to the processing of language.

The Generativist view of language

◆ Language is a **species-specific** property: Language is a human faculty.

◆ Language is **innate** and **pre-wired** in the human brain.

  ▪ Children are born with a faculty to acquire language (**Language Acquisition Device: LAD**).

The Generativist view of language

◆ **Universal Grammar (UG)**: **the grammatical properties shared by all human languages.**

- The strongest **evidence for the existence of UG** is the actual capacity of children to acquire their native language in a short time (before the age of 3).

Main concepts of Generativism

◆ The **competence-performance** dichotomy is in the heart of generativism (it is similar to Saussure's **Langue and parole**).

◆ **Linguistic competence** is **'the speaker/hearer's knowledge of his language'** (Chomsky, 1965:4).

   ■ It is a **set of rules constructed in the speakers' minds by virtue of language acquisition.**

Main concepts of Generativism

◆ **Performance:**

  ■ The **actual use of language in concrete situations**.

Generativism & Language Acquistion

- Under a generative approach, human beings are assumed to be **prewired for language**,
- Human beings begin life with **a linguistic template or blueprint** that they **flesh out upon exposure** to specific linguistic data.
- Yet, instead of learning language by imitating those around them, children create their own grammars.

Generativism & Language Acquistion: Evidence

◆ Although the environments in which children acquire their language vary, they all **go through similar stages** *(babbling stage; one-word/holophrastic stage; two-word stage, telegraphic stage)* in acquiring a language and **during the same general time** .

Generativism & Language Acquistion: Evidence

- Although children do not hear examples of every possible structural pattern (**poverty of the stimulus**), they attain a grammar capable of generating all the possible sentences in their language.
  - Most children **are not given explicit instruction** in their language.
- **They make errors that adults do not** (e.g. 'I hurted myself');
- They **generate novel forms** which they have never been exposed to.