

Universal Grammar

8th lec

According to Chomsky, all human beings inherit a universal set of principles and parameters that control the shape of human languages, and which make human languages similar to one another. He claimed that principles are unvarying and apply to all natural languages, and parameters possess a limited number of open values which characterize differences between languages.

Universal Grammar is a theory in linguistics, proposing that the ability to learn grammar is hard-wired into the brain. It is sometimes known as "mental grammar". The theory suggests that linguistic ability manifests itself without being taught, and that there are properties that all natural human languages share. It is a matter of observation and experimentation to determine precisely what abilities are innate and what properties are shared by all languages.

Principles and Parameters is a framework within generative linguistics in which the syntax of a natural language is described in accordance with general principles (abstract rules or grammars) and specific parameters (markers, switches) that for particular languages are either turned on or off. For example, the position of heads in phrases is determined by a parameter. Whether a language is head-initial or head-final is regarded as a parameter which is either on or off for particular languages (English is head-initial, whereas Japanese is head-final).

eg: Wash the clothes.

2 head-initial.

the clothes wash.

head-final.

Principles and Parameters was largely formulated by the linguists Noam Chomsky and Howard Lasnik. Many linguists have worked within this framework, and for a period of time it was considered the dominant form of mainstream generative linguistics. Principles and Parameters as a grammar framework is also known as Government and Binding theory. That is the two terms Principles and Parameters and Government and Binding refer to the same school in the generative tradition of P.S.G.

The central idea of principles and parameters is that a person's syntactic knowledge can be modelled with two formal mechanisms:

- ◆ A finite set of fundamental principles that are common to all languages; e.g., that a sentence must always have a subject, even if it is not overtly pronounced.
- ◆ A finite set of parameters that determine syntactic variability among languages; e.g., a parameter that determines whether or not the subject of a sentence must be overtly pronounced.

Within this framework, the goal of linguistics is to identify all of the principles and parameters that are universal to human language (called Universal Grammar). As such, any attempt to explain the syntax of a particular language using a principle or parameter is cross-examined with the evidence available in other languages.

01. Principles: an example of principles is Structure-dependency. Lge is organized in such a way that it crucially depends on structural relationships between elements in a stce (such as words, morphemes ---).

Structure-dependency is the linguistic principle that grammatical processes function primarily on structures in stces, not on single words or sequences of words. Many linguists view structure-dependency as a principle of universal grammar.

The principle of structure-dependency compels all lges to move parts of the stce around in accordance with its structure rather than just the sheer order of words ---.

Structure-dependency could not be acquired by children from hearing stces of the lge; rather, it imposes itself on whatever lge they encounter. Children do not have to learn these principles but apply them to any lge they hear.

All speakers of English know structure-dependency without having given it a moment's thought; they automatically reject *Is Sam is the the cat that black? even if they have never encountered it like before. How do they have this instant response? they would accept many stces that they have never encountered before, so it is not just that they have never heard it before. Structure-dependency is, then, a principle of lge knowledge built-in to the human mind. It becomes part of any lge that is learnt, not just of English.

Principles and Parameters theory claims that an important component of the speaker's knowledge of any lge such as English is made up of a handful of general lge principles such as structure-dependency.

• Interrogative Structures

One example of a universal principle is structure-dependency. When a child learns interrogative stces, it learns to place the finite verb in stce initial position?

eg 1 { • The doll is pretty.

• Is the doll pretty?

eg 2 { • The doll is gone.

• Is the doll gone?

If children lacked insight into structure-dependency, it should follow that they make errors such as below, since they would not know that the doll is pretty is the stce to be put in the interrogative.

eg 3 { • The doll that is gone, is pretty.

• Is the doll that gone, is pretty?

• Is the doll that is gone pretty?

But children do not seem to produce incorrect stces such as the above, and nativist linguists conclude that insight into structure-dependency must be innate.