

Human Language Series: Part 1
Discovering the Human Language/ “Colorless Green Ideas”

- I. Noam Chomsky:
 - A. Syntactic Structures: there were patterns that could be explained by rules. Some process or rule in head that helps you process and produce sentences.
 1. Questions asked changed to “What kind of sentences can you produce and understand.
 - **Controversy:** Is language rule governed? → Parallel Distributed Processing Model says No (patterns), but linguist say yes and most research is focused on finding rules.
- II. Language is Generative and Productive: we can say something that has never been said before and have it understood. We can create new expressions to relate to new ideas.
- III. Language is Leveled:
 - A. Phonemes (lowest level): smallest significant sound units in language (speech sounds)
 1. there is about 40 of them in English
 - B. Morphemes: smallest units of language that carry meaning
 1. Morphology = rules of word formation - we attach prefixes, suffixes, etc., according to rules
 - C. Semantics = meaning of words or phrases
 - D. Syntax = combining words in order to form sentences (what use to be called grammar)
 - E. Pragmatics = rules about the use of language (social use of language)
 - With a finite number of words and sounds you can create an unlimited number of words and sentences.
- IV. Speech is Continuous: the majority of the breaks (pauses) in speech do not occur between words but at the end of syntactic structures (e.g., phrases). This is the problem of segmentation.
 - A. By the age of 1 year a child can pick apart natural speech into words.
- V. Form and Meaning: “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.” (Chomsky)
 - A. This quote demonstrates that form can be separated from meaning or syntax can be separated from semantics. Does not appear to mean anything coherent, but sounds like and English sentence.
- VI. Universal Grammar (Chomsky) - you inherit much of your knowledge about grammar.
 - A. Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and language universals.
- VII. Meaning and Syntax: meaning is conveyed by either
 - A. Inflections - plural ‘s’ on end of word (Greek and Latin)
 - B. Word order (English)
- VIII. Language Limitations: facial description, wine tasting descriptions, a spiral, directions
 - A. Verbal overshadowing
- IX. Language is Arbitrary → no relation between a word and what it represents.

e.g., "tree" in English, "baum" in German, "arbor" in Spanish

Exception = Onomatopoeia “meow”