



## قسم اللغة الانجليزية

## لجنة التصحيح

دكتوراه

## Sociolinguistics

## تخصص لسانيات اجتماعية

## Question 2 in General Linguistics

Sampson (1980:130) writes that “Chomsky is commonly said to have brought about a ‘revolution’ in linguistics, and the political metaphor is apt.”

## Sample Correction

## Introduction

- Advent of modern linguistics following De Saussure’s CLG at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a number of dichotomies (synchrony/diachrony, sign > signifier/signified, *langue/parole*...)  
 - inspired formal / structural analysis of language > led to the emergence of structuralism  
 However, in 1957, Chomsky’s Syntactic Structures proved to be a turning point in mid-20th century linguistics. He proposes his linguistic theory of generative grammar, which departed radically from the structuralism and behaviourism of the previous decades. Earlier analyses of sentences have been shown to be inadequate in more than one respect because they failed to take into account the differences between “surface” and “deep” levels of grammatical structure. A major aim of generative grammar was to provide a means of analysing sentences that take account of this underlying level of structure. To achieve this aim, Chomsky drew a fundamental distinction (similar to Saussure’s *langue* and *parole*, 1915) between a person’s knowledge of the rules of a language and the actual use of that language in real situations. The first he referred to as competence; the second as performance.

## Body

Saussure’s dichotomy *langue/parole* re-emerged with Chomsky but in a more profound view:

- Def of competence: a person’s knowledge of his language, i.e., the system of rules which a language user has mastered so that it would be possible for that user to be able to produce and understand an indefinite number of sentences and recognize grammatical mistakes and ambiguities.
- Def of performance: the actual use of language in concrete situations
- Importance of this distinction:  
 Linguistics should be concerned with the study of competence, and not restrict itself to performance, actual language use  
 It helps understand the speaker’s linguistic behaviour (performance errors)  
 In teaching it helps understand learner performance and put more focus on it (CLT)
- This definition of linguistic competence has come to be associated with a rigid and narrowly defined concept of grammatical competence. Therefore, Hymes (1974) introduced the idea of “communicative competence” (linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence)
- What is revolutionary: Chomsky’s view on language acquisition LAD as opposed to behaviourists’ theory > Skinner’s view that language is acquired on the basis of Stimulus/Response while in Chomskyan theory > impossible for a child to acquire such a complex system on imitation bases.
- LAD > a device in the brain triggered by ling environment > soon child starts creating sentences > unlimited number of sentences, including those never heard before > productivity vs. imitation

## Conclusion

Chomskyan linguistics impact on language theorizing, language teaching but also on overall intellectual thinking...

•

**Question 2:** Discuss why and how sociolinguists' focus on *language variation* was a departure from the generativists' analysis of language.

**Sample Correction**

**1. Introduction:**

- Introducing issue and questioning the importance of linguistic variability...
- Language variation often seen as problematic in linguistics theory, as formal linguists focus on language structure, considering that variation results from non-linguistic factors (Chomsky's view).
- Socioling, however shows the importance of taking into account language in context.

**2. Body:**

- Defining Chomsky's position on his two concepts *competence* and *performance* – in particular how he neglected performance (E-language in more recent terms vs. I-language) seen as somewhat imperfect realization of linguistic competence and thus hindering idealization of underlying patterns.
- "ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community" (Chomsky 1965:3).
- Sociolinguists, however, (Labov and followers) insist that language variation deserves consideration > all languages vary > language change is the output of synchronic variation.
- In addition, with the widespread interest in sociolinguistics since the late 1960's, language use is always subject to influence by social factors and contexts, while formal linguistics only takes account of the structure of language > unable to explain variation and change.
- In fact, for Labov the 'socio'-part in 'sociolinguistics' is redundant and genuine linguistics is:
  - 1. to learn more about language by examining correlations between lg and social phenomena
  - 2. To investigate the mechanisms of linguistic change: ling systems/ling variability
- However, sociolinguists do not reject what has been achieved in formal linguistics and generativism; but "see themselves as *linguists*, with the avowed aim of attempting to discover regular correspondence between linguistic and social structure... see their role as calling into question some of the assumptions of linguistics" (R.T Bell 1976:23).
- Therefore, sociolinguists' focus on language variation is a clear departure from formal linguists' analysis of language; sociolinguistics then examines how language really works in relation to society: information about social relationships in a speech community; aspects of social identity.

**3. Conclusion:**

Theoretical linguistics > faced with the problem of language variation and linguistic change.

Only an integration of sociolinguistics and formal linguistics can provide a fuller description of the language phenomenon.