

Giovanni Anastasio

Biography Day



“Changes and progress very rarely are gifts from above. They come out of struggles from below.”

-Noam Chomsky

Avram Noam Chomsky was born on December 7th, 1928 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and is still alive today. Chomsky is known by many as a figure of modern linguistics and has been one of the biggest influences in the fields of cognitive science and analytical philosophy to this day. He was born into a middle-class Jewish family and while attending school as a child, Chomsky was always encouraged to further develop himself and his interests through self-directed leaning. In 1945, at the age of 16, Chomsky enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania, where he first began his linguistic work. Soon after attending the school he began to become unsatisfied with “Structuralism.” This led him to create one of his greatest ideology that “syntax and phonology are matters of abstract representations.” From the years 1951-1955 Chomsky was a junior fellow of the Harvard society of Fellows. While working in the society Chomsky first began to develop the theory of generative grammar. The theory of generative grammar classifies grammar as a system of rules that create a combination of words that form grammatical sentences. In 1956, Chomsky began to give classification to formal grammars. He did so with the creation of the Chomsky Hierarchy, which breaks formal grammar into four different classes. The four classes are: type-0 grammars which deals with unrestricted grammar, type-1 grammar which deals with context sensitive grammar, type-2 grammar which deals with context free grammar and type-3 grammar which generates grammar of regular languages. After his four years at Harvard he joined the faculty at MIT, where he taught linguistics to undergrads. In 1957 while he was working at MIT, Chomsky published one of his most important pieces of work. The work is title *Syntactic Structures*, and, in this piece, Chomsky first introduces the idea of transformational generative grammar, which he had begun working on while at Harvard. The book was actually a revised version of lecture he gave teaching at MIT. His method at its base is

a formal system that contains phrase structure rules, which break down sentences into smaller pieces. Along with the phrase structure rules, there are also transformation rules that allow for different sentence structures to be formed. The goal of his work was to be able to generate all the unlimited grammatical sentences of a language. Chomsky is also credited as one of the creators of universal grammar theory. The theory states that human languages all have a similar abstract template that makes learning your native language easier. Also, humans have a certain set of structural rules that we use to say something is grammatical or not that is independent from meaning. Today Chomsky continues to make his mark in society as he travels the world sharing his political ideology. Although if it wasn't for his scientific work in the mid to late 1900's the fields of linguistics and cognitive science would not be the same.

References

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