Noam Chomsky

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Noam Chomsky visiting Vancouver, British Columbia in 2004

Other names	Avram Noam Chomsky
Born	December 7, 1928 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Era	20th / 21st-century philosophy
Region	Western philosophy
School	Generative linguistics, Analytic philosophy
Main interests	Linguistics · Psychology Philosophy of language Philosophy of mind Politics · Ethics
Notable ideas	Generative grammar, universal grammar, transformational grammar, government and binding, X-bar theory, Chomsky hierarchy, context-free grammar, principles and parameters, Minimalist program, language acquisition device, poverty of the stimulus, Chomsky–Schützenberger theorem, Chomsky Normal Form, propaganda model[1]

Avram Noam Chomsky (/ˈnoʊmˈtʃɒmski/; born December 7, 1928) is an American linguist, philosopher,[2][3] cognitive scientist, historian, and activist. He is an Institute Professor and Professor (Emeritus) in the Department of Linguistics & Philosophy at MIT, where he has worked for over 50 years.[4] Chomsky has been described as the "father of modern linguistics"[5][6][7] and a major figure of analytic philosophy.[2] His work has influenced fields such as computer science, mathematics, and psychology.[8][9]

Ideologically identifying with anarcho-syndicalism and libertarian socialism, Chomsky is known for his critiques of U.S. foreign policy[10] and contemporary capitalism,[11] and he has been described as a prominent cultural figure.[12] His media criticism has included *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), co-written with Edward S. Herman, an analysis articulating the propaganda model theory for examining the media.

According to the Arts and Humanities Citation Index in 1992, Chomsky was cited as a source more often than any other living scholar from 1980 to 1992, and was the eighth most cited source overall.[13][14][15][16] Chomsky is the author of over 100 books.[17] He is credited as the creator or co-creator of the Chomsky hierarchy, the universal grammar theory, and the Chomsky–Schützenberger theorem.

Life and career

Chomsky was born on December 7, 1928, to Jewish parents in the affluent East Oak Lane neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the elder son of noted professor of Hebrew at Gratz College and IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) member William Chomsky (1896–1977), a native of Ukraine. His mother, Elsie Chomsky (née Simonofsky)—a native of what is present-day Belarus—grew up in the United States and, unlike her husband, spoke "ordinary New York English". Chomsky's parents' first language was Yiddish,[18] but Chomsky said it was "taboo" in his family to speak it.[18] Although Chomsky's mother was part of the radical activism in the 1930s, he was influenced largely by his uncle who, having never passed 4th grade, owned a newsstand that acted as an "intellectual center [where] professors of this and that argu[ed] all night".[19] Chomsky was influenced also by being a part of a Hebrew-based, Zionist organization, as well as by hanging around anarchist bookstores.[19]

He describes his family as living in a sort of "Jewish ghetto", split into a "Yiddish side" and "Hebrew side", with his family aligning with the latter and bringing him up "immersed in Hebrew culture and literature", though he means more a "cultural ghetto than a physical one".[20] Chomsky also describes tensions he experienced with Irish Catholics and German Catholics and anti-semitism in the mid-1930s. He recalls "beer parties" celebrating the fall of Paris to the Nazis.[20] In a discussion of the irony of his staying in the 1980s in a Jesuit House in Central America, Chomsky explained that during his childhood, "We were the only Jewish family around. I grew up with a visceral fear of Catholics. They're the people who beat you up on your way to school. So I knew when they came out of that building down the street, which was the Jesuit school, they were raving anti-Semites. So childhood memories took a long time to overcome."[21]

Chomsky remembers the first article he wrote was at age 10 while a student at Oak Lane Country Day School about the threat of the spread of fascism, following the fall of Barcelona in the Spanish Civil War. From the age of 12 or 13, he identified more fully with anarchist politics.[22]

A graduate of Central High School of Philadelphia, Chomsky began studying philosophy and linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania in 1945, taking classes with philosophers such as C. West Churchman and Nelson Goodman and linguist Zellig Harris. Harris's teaching included his discovery of transformations as a mathematical analysis of language structure (mappings from one subset to another in the set of sentences). Chomsky referred to the morphophonemic rules in his 1951 master's thesis—*The Morphophonemics of Modern Hebrew*—as transformations in the sense of Carnap's 1938 notion of rules of transformation (vs. rules of formation), and subsequently reinterpreted the notion of grammatical transformations in a very different way from Harris, as operations on the productions of a context-free grammar (derived from Post production systems). Harris's political views were instrumental in shaping those of Chomsky.[23] Chomsky earned a BA in 1949 and an MA in 1951.

In 1949, he married linguist Carol Schatz. They remained married for 59 years until her death from cancer in December 2008.[24] The couple had two daughters, Aviva (b. 1957) and Diane (b. 1960), and a son, Harry (b. 1967). With his wife Carol, Chomsky spent time in 1953 living in HaZore'a, a kibbutz in Israel. Asked in an interview whether the stay was "a disappointment" Chomsky replied, "No, I loved it"; however, he "couldn't stand the ideological atmosphere" and "fervent nationalism" in the early 1950s at the kibbutz, with Stalin being defended by many of the left-leaning kibbutz members who chose to paint a rosy image of future possibilities and contemporary realities in the USSR.[25] Chomsky notes seeing many positive elements in the commune-like living of the kibbutz, in which parents and children lived together in separate houses, and when asked whether there were "lessons that we have learned from the history of the kibbutz", responded,[26][27] that in "some respects, the kibbutzim came closer to the anarchist ideal than any other attempt that lasted for more than a very brief moment before destruction, or that was on anything like a similar scale. In these respects, I think they were extremely attractive and successful; apart from personal accident, I probably would have lived there myself – for how long, it's hard to guess."

Chomsky received his PhD in linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania in 1955. He conducted part of his doctoral research during four years at Harvard University as a Harvard Junior Fellow. In his doctoral thesis, he began to develop some of his linguistic ideas, elaborating on them in his 1957 book *Syntactic Structures*, one of his

best-known works in linguistics.

Chomsky joined the staff of MIT in 1955 and in 1961 was appointed full professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics (now the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy). From 1966 to 1976 he held the Ferrari P. Ward Professorship of Modern Languages and Linguistics, and in 1976 he was appointed Institute Professor. As of 2010, Chomsky has taught at MIT continuously for 55 years.

In February 1967, Chomsky became one of the leading opponents of the Vietnam War with the publication of his essay, "The Responsibility of Intellectuals",[28] in *The New York Review of Books*. This was followed by his 1969 book, *American Power and the New Mandarins,* a collection of essays that established him at the forefront of American dissent. His far-reaching criticisms of U.S. foreign policy and the legitimacy of U.S. power have raised controversy[29][30], and he is frequently sought out for his views by publications and news outlets internationally. In 1977 he delivered the Huizinga Lecture in Leiden, the Netherlands, under the title: *Intellectuals and the State.*

Chomsky has received death threats because of his criticisms of U.S. foreign policy.[31] He was also on a list of planned targets created by Theodore Kaczynski, better known as the Unabomber; during the period that Kaczynski was at large, Chomsky had all of his mail checked for explosives.[31] He states that he often receives undercover police protection, in particular while on the MIT campus, although he does not agree with the police protection.[31]

Chomsky resides in Lexington, Massachusetts, and travels often, giving lectures on politics.

Thought

Linguistics

Chomskyan linguistics, beginning with his *Syntactic Structures*, a distillation of his *Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory* (1955, 75), challenges structural linguistics and introduces transformational grammar. This approach takes utterances (sequences of words) to have a syntax characterized by a formal grammar; in particular, a context-free grammar extended with transformational rules.

Perhaps his most influential and time-tested contribution to the field is the claim that modeling knowledge of language using a formal grammar accounts for the "productivity" or "creativity" of language. In other words, a formal grammar of a language can explain the ability of a hearer-speaker to produce and interpret an infinite number of utterances, including novel ones, with a limited set of grammatical rules and a finite set of terms. He has always acknowledged his debt to Pāṇini for his modern notion of an explicit generative grammar, although it is also related to rationalist ideas of a priori knowledge.

It is a popular misconception that Chomsky proved that language is entirely innate, and that he discovered a "universal grammar" (UG). In fact, Chomsky simply observed that while a human baby and a kitten are both capable of inductive reasoning, if they are exposed to exactly the same linguistic data, the human child will always acquire the ability to understand and produce language, while the kitten will never acquire either ability. Chomsky labeled whatever the relevant capacity the human has that the cat lacks the "language acquisition device" (LAD) and suggested that one of the tasks for linguistics should be to figure out what the LAD is and what constraints it puts on the range of possible human languages. The universal features that would result from these constraints are often termed "universal grammar" or UG.[32]

The Principles and Parameters approach (P&P)—developed in his Pisa 1979 Lectures, later published as *Lectures on Government and Binding* (LGB)—makes strong claims regarding universal grammar: that the grammatical principles underlying languages are innate and fixed, and the differences among the world's languages can be characterized in terms of parameter settings in the brain (such as the pro-drop parameter, which indicates whether an explicit subject is always required, as in English, or can be optionally dropped, as in Spanish), which are often likened to switches. (Hence the term principles and parameters, often given to this approach.) In this view, a child learning a language need only acquire the necessary lexical items (words, grammatical morphemes, and idioms), and

determine the appropriate parameter settings, which can be done based on a few key examples.

Proponents of this view argue that the pace at which children learn languages is inexplicably rapid, unless children have an innate ability to learn languages. The similar steps followed by children all across the world when learning languages, and the fact that children make certain characteristic errors as they learn their first language, whereas other seemingly logical kinds of errors never occur (and, according to Chomsky, should be attested if a purely general, rather than language-specific, learning mechanism were being employed), are also pointed to as indications of innateness.

More recently, in his Minimalist Program (1995), while retaining the core concept of "principles and parameters," Chomsky attempts a major overhaul of the linguistic machinery involved in the LGB model, stripping from it all but the barest necessary elements, while advocating a general approach to the architecture of the human language faculty that emphasizes principles of economy and optimal design, reverting to a derivational approach to generation, in contrast with the largely representational approach of classic P&P.

Chomsky's ideas have had a strong influence on researchers of language acquisition in children, though many researchers in this area such as Elizabeth Bates[33] and Michael Tomasello[34] argue very strongly against Chomsky's theories, and instead advocate emergentist or connectionist theories, explaining language with a number of general processing mechanisms in the brain that interact with the extensive and complex social environment in which language is used and learned.

His best-known work in phonology is *The Sound Pattern of English* (1968), written with Morris Halle (and often known as simply *SPE*). This work has had a great significance for the development in the field. While phonological theory has since moved beyond "SPE phonology" in many important respects, the SPE system is considered the precursor of some of the most influential phonological theories today, including autosegmental phonology, lexical phonology and optimality theory. Chomsky no longer publishes on phonology.

Generative grammar

The Chomskyan approach towards syntax, often termed generative grammar, studies grammar as a body of knowledge possessed by language users. Since the 1960s, Chomsky has maintained that much of this knowledge is innate, implying that children need only learn certain parochial features of their native languages.[35] The innate body of linguistic knowledge is often termed universal grammar. From Chomsky's perspective, the strongest evidence for the existence of Universal Grammar is simply the fact that children successfully acquire their native languages in so little time. Furthermore, he argues that there is an enormous gap between the linguistic stimuli to which children are exposed and the rich linguistic knowledge they attain (the "poverty of the stimulus" argument). The knowledge of Universal Grammar would serve to bridge that gap.

Chomsky's theories have been immensely influential within linguistics, but they have also received criticism. One recurring criticism of the Chomskyan variety of generative grammar is that it is Anglocentric and Eurocentric, and that often linguists working in this tradition have a tendency to base claims about Universal Grammar on a very small sample of languages, sometimes just one. Initially, the Eurocentrism was exhibited in an overemphasis on the study of English. However, hundreds of different languages have now received at least some attention within Chomskyan linguistic analyses.[36][37][38][39][40] In spite of the diversity of languages that have been characterized by UG derivations, critics continue to argue that the formalisms within Chomskyan linguistics are Anglocentric and misrepresent the properties of languages that are different from English.[41][42][43] Thus, Chomsky's approach has been criticized as a form of linguistic imperialism.[44] In addition, Chomskyan linguists rely heavily on the intuitions of native speakers regarding which sentences of their languages are well-formed. This practice has been criticized on general methodological grounds. Some psychologists and psycholinguists, though sympathetic to Chomsky's overall program, have argued that Chomskyan linguists pay insufficient attention to experimental data from language processing, with the consequence that their theories are not psychologically plausible. Other critics (see language learning) have questioned whether it is necessary to posit Universal Grammar to explain child language acquisition,

arguing that domain-general learning mechanisms are sufficient.

Today there are many different branches of generative grammar; one can view grammatical frameworks such as head-driven phrase structure grammar, lexical functional grammar, and combinatory categorial grammar as broadly Chomskyan and generative in orientation, but with significant differences in execution.

Chomsky hierarchy

Chomsky is famous for investigating various kinds of formal languages and whether or not they might be capable of capturing key properties of human language. His Chomsky hierarchy partitions formal grammars into classes, or groups, with increasing expressive power, i.e., each successive class can generate a broader set of formal languages than the one before. Interestingly, Chomsky argues that modeling some aspects of human language requires a more complex formal grammar (as measured by the Chomsky hierarchy) than modeling others. For example, while a regular language is powerful enough to model English morphology, it is not powerful enough to model English syntax. In addition to being relevant in linguistics, the Chomsky hierarchy has also become important in computer science (especially in compiler construction and automata theory).[45] Indeed, there is an equivalence between the Chomsky language hierarchy and the different kinds of automata. Thus theorems about languages are often dealt with as either languages (grammars) or automata.

An alternate method of dealing with languages is based upon Formal Power series.[46] Formal Power series as well as the relationship between languages and semi-groups continued to occupy M. P. Schützenberger at the Sorbonne. Formal Power Series are similar to the Taylor Series one encounters in a course on Calculus, and it is especially useful for languages where words (terminal symbols) are commutative.[47]

Politics

Chomsky has stated that his "personal visions are fairly traditional anarchist ones, with origins in the Enlightenment and classical liberalism",[48] and he has praised libertarian socialism.[49] Although Chomsky tries to avoid the ambiguity of labels, his political views are often characterized in news accounts as "leftist" [50][51][52][53] or "left-wing," and he has described himself as an anarcho-syndicalist.[54] He is a member of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy and the Industrial Workers of the World international union.[55] Chomsky is also a member of the International Organization for a Participatory Society which he describes as having the potential to "carry us a long way towards unifying the many initiatives here and around the world and molding them into a powerful and effective force."[56][57] He published a book on anarchism titled *Chomsky on Anarchism*, published by the anarchist book collective AK Press in 2006.

Chomsky has engaged in political activism all of his adult life and expressed opinions on politics and world events, which are widely cited, publicized, and discussed. Chomsky has in turn argued that his views are those the powerful do not want to hear, and for this reason he is considered an American political dissident.

Chomsky asserts that authority, unless justified, is inherently illegitimate, and that the burden of proof is on those in authority. If this burden can't be met, the authority in question should be dismantled. Authority for its own sake is inherently unjustified. An example given by Chomsky of a legitimate authority is that exerted by an adult to prevent a young child from wandering into traffic.[58] He contends that there is little moral difference between chattel slavery and renting one's self to an owner or "wage slavery". He feels that it is an attack on personal integrity that undermines individual freedom. He holds that workers should own and control their workplace, a view held (as he notes) by the Lowell Mill Girls.[59]

Chomsky has strongly criticized the foreign policy of the United States. He claims double standards in a foreign policy preaching democracy and freedom for all while allying itself with non-democratic and repressive organizations and states such as Chile under Augusto Pinochet and argues that this results in massive human rights violations. He often argues that America's intervention in foreign nations, including the secret aid given to the Contras in Nicaragua, an event of which he has been very critical, fits any standard description of terrorism,[60]

including "official definitions in the US Code and Army Manuals in the early 1980s."[61][62] Before its collapse, Chomsky also condemned Soviet imperialism; for example in 1986 during a question/answer following a lecture he gave at Universidad Centroamericana in Nicaragua, when challenged about how he could "talk about North American imperialism and Russian imperialism in the same breath," Chomsky responded: "One of the truths about the world is that there are two superpowers, one a huge power which happens to have its boot on your neck; another, a smaller power which happens to have its boot on other people's necks. I think that anyone in the Third World would be making a grave error if they succumbed to illusions about these matters."[63]

Regarding the death of Osama bin Laden, Chomsky stated: "We might ask ourselves how we would be reacting if Iraqi commandos landed at George W. Bush's compound, assassinated him, and dumped his body in the Atlantic. Uncontroversially, his crimes vastly exceed bin Laden's, and he is not a 'suspect' but uncontroversially the 'decider' who gave the orders to commit the 'supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole' (quoting the Nuremberg Tribunal) for which Nazi criminals were hanged: the hundreds of thousands of deaths, millions of refugees, destruction of much of the country, [and] the bitter sectarian conflict that has now spread to the rest of the region."[64]

He has argued that the mass media in the United States largely serve as a "bought priesthood"[65] of the U.S. government and U.S.-based corporations, with the three intertwined through common interests. In a famous reference to Walter Lippmann, Chomsky along with his coauthor Edward S. Herman has written that the American media manufactures consent among the public. Chomsky has condemned the 2010 US Supreme Court *Citizens United* ruling revoking the limits on campaign finance, calling it a "corporate takeover of democracy."[66]

Chomsky opposes the U.S. global "war on drugs", claiming its language is misleading, and refers to it as "the war on certain drugs." He favors drug policy reform, in education and prevention rather than military or police action as a means of reducing drug use.[67] In an interview in 1999, Chomsky argued that, whereas crops such as tobacco receive no mention in governmental exposition, other non-profitable crops, such as marijuana are attacked because of the effect achieved by persecuting the poor.[68] He has stated:

> U.S. domestic drug policy does not carry out its stated goals, and policymakers are well aware of that. If it isn't about reducing substance abuse, what is it about? It is reasonably clear, both from current actions and the historical record, that substances tend to be criminalized when they are associated with the so-called dangerous classes, that the criminalization of certain substances is a technique of social control.[69]

Chomsky is critical of the American "state capitalist" system and big business; he describes himself as a socialist, specifically an anarcho-syndicalist, and is critical of "authoritarian" communist branches of socialism. He also believes that socialist values exemplify the rational and morally consistent extension of original unreconstructed classical liberal and radical humanist ideas to an industrial context. He believes that society should be highly organized and based on democratic control of communities and work places. He believes that the radical humanist ideas of his two major influences, Bertrand Russell and John Dewey, were "rooted in the Enlightenment and classical liberalism, and retain their revolutionary character."[70]

Chomsky has stated that he believes the United States remains the "greatest country in the world",[71] a comment that he later clarified by saying, "Evaluating countries is senseless and I would never put things in those terms, but that some of America's advances, particularly in the area of free speech, that have been achieved by centuries of popular struggle, are to be admired."[72] He has also said "In many respects, the United States is the freest country in the world. I don't just mean in terms of limits on state coercion, though that's true too, but also in terms of individual relations. The United States comes closer to classlessness in terms of interpersonal relations than virtually any society."[73]

Chomsky objects to the criticism that anarchism is inconsistent with support for government welfare, stating in part:

> One can, of course, take the position that we don't care about the problems people face today, and want to think about a possible tomorrow. OK, but then don't pretend to have any interest in human beings and

their fate, and stay in the seminar room and intellectual coffee house with other privileged people. Or one can take a much more humane position: I want to work, today, to build a better society for tomorrow – the classical anarchist position, quite different from the slogans in the question. That's exactly right, and it leads directly to support for the people facing problems today: for enforcement of health and safety regulation, provision of national health insurance, support systems for people who need them, etc. That is not a sufficient condition for organizing for a different and better future, but it is a necessary condition. Anything else will receive the well-merited contempt of people who do not have the luxury to disregard the circumstances in which they live, and try to survive.[74]

Chomsky holds views that can be summarized as anti-war but not strictly pacifist. He prominently opposed the Vietnam War and most other wars in his lifetime. He expressed these views with tax resistance and peace walks. In 1968, he signed the "Writers and Editors War Tax Protest" pledge, vowing to refuse tax payments in protest against the Vietnam War.[75] He published a number of articles about the war in Vietnam, including "The Responsibility of Intellectuals". He maintains that U.S. involvement in World War II to defeat the Axis powers was probably justified, with the caveat that a preferable outcome would have been to end or prevent the war through earlier diplomacy. He believes that the dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were "among the most unspeakable crimes in history".[76]

Chomsky has made many criticisms of the Israeli government, its supporters, the United States' support of the government, and its treatment of the Palestinian people, arguing that " 'supporters of Israel' are in reality supporters of its moral degeneration and probable ultimate destruction" and that "Israel's very clear choice of expansion over security may well lead to that consequence."[77] Chomsky disagreed with the founding of Israel as a Jewish state, saying, "I don't think a Jewish or Christian or Islamic state is a proper concept. I would object to the United States as a Christian state."[78] Chomsky hesitated before publishing work critical of Israeli policies while his parents were alive, because he "knew it would hurt them" he says, "mostly because of their friends, who reacted hysterically to views like those expressed in my work."[79] On May 16, 2010, Israeli authorities detained Chomsky and ultimately refused his entry to the West Bank via Jordan.[80] A spokesman for the Israeli Prime Minister indicated that the refusal of entry was simply due to a border guard who "overstepped his authority" and a second attempt to enter would likely be allowed.[81] Chomsky disagreed, saying that the Interior Ministry official who interviewed him was taking instructions from his superiors.[81] Chomsky maintained that based on the several hours of interviewing, he was denied entry because of the things he says and because he was visiting a university in the West Bank but no Israeli universities.[81]

Chomsky has a broad view of free-speech rights, especially in the mass media, and opposes censorship. He has stated that "with regard to freedom of speech there are basically two positions: you defend it vigorously for views you hate, or you reject it and prefer Stalinist/fascist standards".[82] With reference to the United States diplomatic cables leak, Chomsky suggested that "perhaps the most dramatic revelation ... is the bitter hatred of democracy that is revealed both by the U.S. Government -- Hillary Clinton, others -- and also by the diplomatic service."[83] Chomsky refuses to take legal action against those who may have libeled him and prefers to counter libels through open letters in newspapers. One notable example of this approach is his response to an article by Emma Brockes in *The Guardian* which alleged he denied the existence of the Srebrenica massacre.[84][85][86] Chomsky's complaint prompted The Guardian to publish an apologetic correction and to withdraw the article from the paper's website.[87]

Chomsky has frequently stated that there is no connection between his work in linguistics and his political views and is generally critical of the idea that competent discussion of political topics requires expert knowledge in academic fields. In a 1969 interview, he said regarding the connection between his politics and his work in linguistics:

> I still feel myself that there is a kind of tenuous connection. I would not want to overstate it but I think it means something to me at least. I think that anyone's political ideas or their ideas of social organization must be rooted ultimately in some concept of human nature and human needs.[88]

Some critics have accused Chomsky of hypocrisy when, in spite of his political criticism of American and European military imperialism, early research at the institution (MIT) where he did his linguistic research had been substantially funded by the American military.[89] Chomsky makes the argument that because he has received funding from the U.S. military, he has an even greater responsibility to criticize and resist its immoral actions.

He is also an outspoken advocate against the use of the death penalty and has spoken against the execution of Steven Woods.

> I think the death penalty is a crime no matter what the circumstances, and it is particularly awful in the Steven Woods case. I strongly oppose the execution of Steven Woods on September 13, 2011.

In March of 2012,[90] Chomsky endorsed Jill Stein for President of the United States in 2012, saying,

> As you know, popular anger at the political and economic institutions, and the subordination of the former to the latter, has reached historic heights. And for sound reasons. There could hardly be a better time to open up political debate to the just anger and frustrations of citizens who are watching the country move towards what might be irreversible decline while a tiny sector of concentrated wealth and power implements policies of benefit to them and opposed by the general population, whom they are casting adrift.

Nick Cohen has criticised Chomsky for frequently making overly critical statements about Western governments, especially the US, and for allegedly refusing to retract his speculations when facts become available which disprove them.[91]

Media

Another focus of Chomsky's political work has been an analysis of mainstream mass media (especially in the United States), its structures and constraints, and its perceived role in supporting big business and government interests. Edward S. Herman and Chomsky's book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988) explores this topic in depth, presenting their "propaganda model" of the news media with numerous detailed case studies demonstrating it. According to this propaganda model, more democratic societies like the U.S. use subtle, non-violent means of control, unlike totalitarian systems, where physical force can readily be used to coerce the general population. In an often-quoted remark, Chomsky states that "propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state." (Media Control)

The model attempts to explain this perceived systemic bias of the mass media in terms of structural economic causes rather than a conspiracy of people. It argues the bias derives from five "filters" that all published news must "pass through," which combine to systematically distort news coverage.

In explaining the first filter, ownership, he notes that most major media outlets are owned by large corporations. The second, funding, notes that the outlets derive the majority of their funding from advertising, not readers. Thus, since they are profit-oriented businesses selling a product—readers and audiences—to other businesses (advertisers), the model expects them to publish news that reflects the desires and values of those businesses. In addition, the news media are dependent on government institutions and major businesses with strong biases as sources (the third filter) for much of their information. Flak, the fourth filter, refers to the various pressure groups that attack the media for supposed bias. Norms, the fifth filter, refer to the common conceptions shared by those in the profession of journalism. (Note: in the original text, published in 1988, the fifth filter was "anticommunism". However, with the fall of the Soviet Union, it has been broadened to allow for shifts in public opinion.) The model describes how the media form a decentralized and non-conspiratorial but nonetheless very powerful propaganda system, that is able to mobilize an elite consensus, frame public debate within elite perspectives and at the same time give the appearance of democratic consent.

Chomsky and Herman test their model empirically by picking "paired examples"—pairs of events that were objectively similar except for the alignment of domestic elite interests. They use a number of such examples to attempt to show that in cases where an "official enemy" does something (like murder of a religious official), the press investigates thoroughly and devotes a great amount of coverage to the matter, thus victims of "enemy" states

are considered "worthy". But when the domestic government or an ally does the same thing (or worse), the press downplays the story, thus victims of US or US client states are considered "unworthy."

They also test their model against the case that is often held up as the best example of a free and aggressively independent press, the media coverage of the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War. Even in this case, they argue that the press was behaving subserviently to elite interests.

Science

Chomsky sees science as a straightforward search for explanation, and rejects the views of it as a catalog of facts or mechanical explanations. In this light, the majority of his contributions to science have been frameworks and hypotheses, rather than "discoveries."[92]

As such, he considers certain so-called post-structuralist or postmodern critiques of logic and reason to be nonsensical:

> I have spent a lot of my life working on questions such as these, using the only methods I know of; those condemned here as "science", "rationality," "logic," and so on. I therefore read the papers with some hope that they would help me "transcend" these limitations, or perhaps suggest an entirely different course. I'm afraid I was disappointed. Admittedly, that may be my own limitation. Quite regularly, "my eyes glaze over" when I read polysyllabic discourse on the themes of poststructuralism and postmodernism; what I understand is largely truism or error, but that is only a fraction of the total word count. True, there are lots of other things I don't understand: the articles in the current issues of math and physics journals, for example. But there is a difference. In the latter case, I know how to get to understand them, and have done so, in cases of particular interest to me; and I also know that people in these fields can explain the contents to me at my level, so that I can gain what (partial) understanding I may want. In contrast, no one seems to be able to explain to me why the latest post-this-and-that is (for the most part) other than truism, error, or gibberish, and I do not know how to proceed.[93]

Although Chomsky believes that a scientific background is important to teach proper reasoning, he holds that science in general is "inadequate" to understand complicated problems like human affairs:

> Science talks about very simple things, and asks hard questions about them. As soon as things become too complex, science can't deal with them... But it's a complicated matter: Science studies what's at the edge of understanding, and what's at the edge of understanding is usually fairly simple. And it rarely reaches human affairs. Human affairs are way too complicated.[94]

Psychology

Chomsky's work in linguistics has had profound implications for modern psychology.[9] For Chomsky, linguistics is a branch of cognitive psychology; genuine insights in linguistics imply concomitant understandings of aspects of mental processing and human nature. His theory of a universal grammar was seen by many as a direct challenge to the established behaviorist theories of the time and had major consequences for understanding how children learn language and what, exactly, the ability to use language is.

In 1959, Chomsky published an influential critique of B.F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*, a book in which Skinner offered a theoretical account of language in functional, behavioral terms. He defined "Verbal Behavior" as learned behavior that has characteristic consequences delivered through the learned behavior of others. This makes for a view of communicative behaviors much larger than that usually addressed by linguists. Skinner's approach focused on the circumstances in which language was used; for example, asking for water was functionally a different response than labeling something as water, responding to someone asking for water, etc. These functionally different kinds of responses, which required in turn separate explanations, sharply contrasted both with traditional notions of language and Chomsky's psycholinguistic approach. Chomsky thought that a functionalist explanation restricting itself to questions of communicative performance ignored important questions. (Chomsky —Language and Mind,

1968). He focused on questions concerning the operation and development of innate structures for syntax capable of creatively organizing, cohering, adapting and combining words and phrases into intelligible utterances.

In the review Chomsky emphasized that the scientific application of behavioral principles from animal research is severely lacking in explanatory adequacy and is furthermore particularly superficial as an account of human verbal behavior because a theory restricting itself to external conditions, to "what is learned," cannot adequately account for generative grammar. Chomsky raised the examples of rapid language acquisition of children, including their quickly developing ability to form grammatical sentences, and the universally creative language use of competent native speakers to highlight the ways in which Skinner's view exemplified under-determination of theory by evidence. He argued that to understand human verbal behavior such as the creative aspects of language use and language development, one must first postulate a genetic linguistic endowment. The assumption that important aspects of language are the product of universal innate ability runs counter to Skinner's radical behaviorism.

Chomsky's 1959 review has drawn fire from a number of critics, the most famous criticism being that of Kenneth MacCorquodale's 1970 paper *On Chomsky's Review of Skinner's Verbal Behavior* (*Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior,* volume 13, pages 83–99). MacCorquodale's argument was updated and expanded in important respects by Nathan Stemmer in a 1990 paper, *Skinner's Verbal Behavior, Chomsky's review, and mentalism* (*Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior,* volume 54, pages 307–319). These and similar critiques have raised certain points not generally acknowledged outside of behavioral psychology, such as the claim that Chomsky did not possess an adequate understanding of either behavioral psychology in general, or the differences between Skinner's behaviorism and other varieties. Consequently, it is argued that he made several serious errors. On account of these perceived problems, the critics maintain that the review failed to demonstrate what it has often been cited as doing. As such, it is averred that those most influenced by Chomsky's paper probably either already substantially agreed with Chomsky or never actually read it. The review has been further critiqued for misrepresenting the work of Skinner and others, including by quoting out of context.[95] Chomsky has maintained that the review was directed at the way Skinner's variant of behavioral psychology "was being used in Quinean empiricism and naturalization of philosophy."[96]
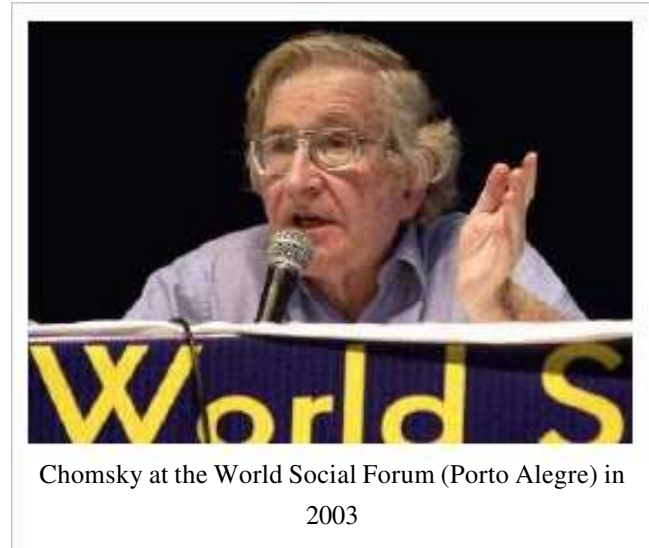
It has been claimed that Chomsky's critique of Skinner's methodology and basic assumptions paved the way for the "cognitive revolution", the shift in American psychology between the 1950s through the 1970s from being primarily behavioral to being primarily cognitive. In his 1966 *Cartesian Linguistics* and subsequent works, Chomsky laid out an explanation of human language faculties that has become the model for investigation in some areas of psychology. Much of the present conception of how the mind works draws directly from ideas that found their first persuasive author of modern times in Chomsky.

There are three key ideas. First is that the mind is "cognitive", or that the mind actually contains mental states, beliefs, doubts, and so on. Second, he argued that most of the important properties of language and mind are innate. The acquisition and development of a language is a result of the unfolding of innate propensities triggered by the experiential input of the external environment. The link between human innate aptitude to language and heredity has been at the core of the debate opposing Noam Chomsky to Jean Piaget at the Abbaye de Royaumont in 1975 (*Language and Learning. The Debate between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky,* Harvard University Press, 1980). Although links between the genetic setup of humans and aptitude to language have been suggested at that time and in later discussions, we are still far from understanding the genetic bases of human language. Work derived from the model of selective stabilization of synapses set up by Jean-Pierre Changeux, Philippe Courrège and Antoine Danchin,[97] and more recently developed experimentally and theoretically by Jacques Mehler and Stanislas Dehaene in particular in the domain of numerical cognition lend support to the Chomskyan "nativism". It does not, however, provide clues about the type of rules that would organize neuronal connections to permit language competence. Subsequent psychologists have extended this general "nativist" thesis beyond language. Lastly, Chomsky made the concept of "modularity" a critical feature of the mind's cognitive architecture. The mind is composed of an array of interacting, specialized subsystems with limited flows of inter-communication. This model contrasts sharply with the

old idea that any piece of information in the mind could be accessed by any other cognitive process (optical illusions, for example, cannot be "turned off" even when they are known to be illusions).

Debates

Chomsky has been known to vigorously defend and debate his views and opinions, in philosophy, linguistics, and politics. [2] He has had notable debates with Jean Piaget,[98] Michel Foucault,[99] William F. Buckley, Jr.,[100] Christopher Hitchens,[101][102][103][104][105][106] George Lakoff,[107] Richard Perle,[108] Hilary Putnam,[109] Willard Quine,[110] and Alan Dershowitz,[111] to name a few. In response to his speaking style being criticized as boring, Chomsky said that "I'm a boring speaker and I like it that way.... I doubt that people are attracted to whatever the persona is.... People are interested in the issues, and they're interested in the issues because they are important." [112] "We don't want to be swayed by superficial eloquence, by emotion and so on."[113]

Chomsky at the World Social Forum (Porto Alegre) in 2003

Influence

Chomskyan models have been used as a theoretical basis in various fields of study. The Chomsky hierarchy is often taught in fundamental computer science courses as it confers insight into the various types of formal languages. This hierarchy can also be discussed in mathematical terms[114] and has generated interest among mathematicians, particularly combinatorialists. Some arguments in evolutionary psychology are derived from his research results.[115]

The 1984 Nobel Prize laureate in Medicine and Physiology, Niels K. Jerne, used Chomsky's generative model to explain the human immune system, equating "components of a generative grammar ... with various features of protein structures". The title of Jerne's Stockholm Nobel lecture was "The Generative Grammar of the Immune System".

Nim Chimpsky, a chimpanzee who was the subject of a study in animal language acquisition at Columbia University, was named after Chomsky in reference to his view of language acquisition as a uniquely human ability.

Famous computer scientist Donald Knuth admits to reading *Syntactic Structures* during his honeymoon and being greatly influenced by it. "...I must admit to taking a copy of Noam Chomsky's Syntactic Structures along with me on my honeymoon in 1961 ... Here was a marvelous thing: a mathematical theory of language in which I could use a computer programmer's intuition!".[116]

Academic achievements, awards and honors

In early 1969, he delivered the John Locke Lectures at Oxford University; in January 1970, the Bertrand Russell Memorial Lecture at University of Cambridge; in 1972, the Nehru Memorial Lecture in New Delhi; in 1977, the Huizinga Lecture in Leiden; in 1988 the Massey Lectures at the University of Toronto, titled "Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies"; in 1997, The Davie Memorial Lecture on Academic Freedom in Cape Town,[117] and many others.[118]

Chomsky has received many honorary degrees from universities around the world, including from the following:

- University of London
- University of Chicago
- Loyola University of Chicago

- Swarthmore College
- University of Delhi
- Bard College
- University of Massachusetts
- University of Pennsylvania
- Georgetown University
- Amherst College
- University of Cambridge
- University of Colorado[119]
- University of Buenos Aires
- McGill University
- Rovira i Virgili University
- Columbia University
- Villanova University
- University of Connecticut
- University of Maine
- Scuola Normale Superiore
- University of Western Ontario
- University of Toronto
- Harvard University
- Universidad de Chile
- University of Bologna
- Universidad de La Frontera
- University of Calcutta
- Universidad Nacional de Colombia
- Vrije Universiteit Brussel
- Santo Domingo Institute of Technology
- Uppsala University
- University of Athens
- University of Cyprus
- Central Connecticut State University
- National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)
- Peking University[120]
- National Tsing Hua University [121]

He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences, and the American Philosophical Society. In addition, he is a member of other professional and learned societies in the United States and abroad, and is a recipient of the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association, the Kyoto Prize in Basic Sciences, the Helmholtz Medal, the Dorothy Eldridge Peacemaker Award, the 1999 Benjamin Franklin Medal in Computer and Cognitive Science, and others. [122] He is twice winner of The Orwell Award, granted by The National Council of Teachers of English for "Distinguished Contributions to Honesty and Clarity in Public Language" (in 1987 and 1989).[123]

He is a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Department of Social Sciences.[124]

In 2005, Chomsky received an honorary fellowship from the Literary and Historical Society.[125] In 2007, Chomsky received The Uppsala University (Sweden) Honorary Doctor's degree in commemoration of Carolus Linnaeus. [126] In February 2008, he received the President's Medal from the Literary and Debating Society of the National University of Ireland, Galway.[127] Since 2009 he is an honorary member of IAPTI.[128]

In 2010, Chomsky received the Erich Fromm Prize in Stuttgart, Germany. [129] In April 2010, Chomsky became the third scholar to receive the University of Wisconsin's A.E. Havens Center's Award for Lifetime Contribution to Critical Scholarship.[130]

Chomsky has an Erdős number of four.[131]

Chomsky was voted the leading living public intellectual in The 2005 Global Intellectuals Poll conducted by the British magazine *Prospect*. He reacted, saying "I don't pay a lot of attention to polls". [132] In a list compiled by the magazine *New Statesman* in 2006, he was voted seventh in the list of "Heroes of our time".[133]

Actor Viggo Mortensen with avant-garde guitarist Buckethead dedicated their 2006 album, called *Pandemoniumfromamerica*, to Chomsky.[134]

On January 22, 2010, a special honorary concert for Chomsky was given at Kresge Auditorium at MIT. [135][136] The concert, attended by Chomsky and dozens of his family and friends, featured music composed by Edward Manukyan and speeches by Chomsky's colleagues, including David Pesetsky of MIT and Gennaro Chierchia, head of the linguistics department at Harvard University.

In June 2011, Chomsky was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize, which cited his "unfailing courage, critical analysis of power and promotion of human rights".[137]

In 2011, Chomsky was inducted into IEEE Intelligent Systems' AI's Hall of Fame for the "significant contributions to the field of AI and intelligent systems".[138][139]

Filmography

- *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*, Director: Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick (1992)
- *Last Party 2000*, Director: Rebecca Chaiklin and Donovan Leitch (2001)
- *Power and Terror: Noam Chomsky in Our Times*, Director: John Junkerman (2002)
- *Distorted Morality—America's War On Terror?*, Director: John Junkerman (2003)
- *Noam Chomsky: Rebel Without a Pause* (TV), Director: Will Pascoe (2003)
- *The Corporation*, Directors: Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott; Writer: Joel Bakan (2003)
- *Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land*, Directors: Sut Jhally and Bathsheba Ratzkoff (2004)
- *On Power, Dissent and Racism: A discussion with Noam Chomsky*, Journalist: Nicolas Rossier; Producers: Eli Choukri, Baraka Productions (2004)
- *Lake of Fire*, Director: Tony Kaye (2006)
- *American Feud: A History of Conservatives and Liberals*, Director: Richard Hall (2008)
- *Chomsky & Cie* Director: Olivier Azam (out in 2008)
- *An Inconvenient Tax*, Director: Christopher P. Marshall (out in 2009)
- *The Money Fix,* Director: Alan Rosenblith (2009)
- *Pax Americana and the Weaponization of Space*, Director: Denis Delestrac (2010)
- *Article 12: Waking up in a surveillance society*, Director: Juan Manuel Biaiñ (2010)

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[2]   "Noam Chomsky" (http://chomsky.info/bios/2004----.htm), by Zoltán Gendler Szabó, in *Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers, 1860–1960*, ed. Ernest Lepore (2004). "Chomsky's intellectual life had been divided between his work in linguistics and his political activism, philosophy coming as a distant third. Nonetheless, his influence among analytic philosophers has been enormous because of three factors. First, Chomsky contributed substantially to a major methodological shift in the human sciences, turning away from the prevailing empiricism of the middle of the twentieth century: behaviorism in psychology, structuralism in linguistics and positivism in philosophy. Second, his groundbreaking books on syntax (Chomsky (1957, 1965)) laid a conceptual foundation for a new, cognitivist approach to linguistics and

provided philosophers with a new framework for thinking about human language and the mind. And finally, he has persistently defended his views against all takers, engaging in important debates with many of the major figures in analytic philosophy..."

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