

# Generative grammar



# NOAM CHOMSKY (1928)

American [linguist](#), [philosopher](#), [cognitive scientist](#), [historian](#), [social critic](#), and [political activist](#). Sometimes described as "the father of modern linguistics," Chomsky is also a major figure in [analytic philosophy](#) and one of the founders of the field of [cognitive science](#). He is the author of over 100 books on topics such as [linguistics](#), war, politics, and [mass media](#). Ideologically, he aligns with [anarcho-syndicalism](#) and [libertarian socialism](#).



# Generative grammar

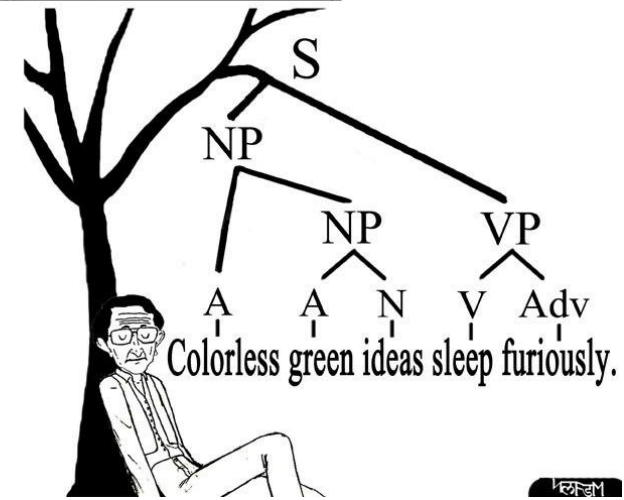
Generative grammar is a linguistic theory that regards grammar as a system of rules that generates exactly those combinations of words that form grammatical sentences in a given language.

Noam Chomsky first used the term in relation to the theoretical linguistics of grammar that he developed in the late 1950s.

Cambridge, 1687



Cambridge, 1957



# Chomsky hierarchy

The tree model works something like this example, in which:

S - sentence,

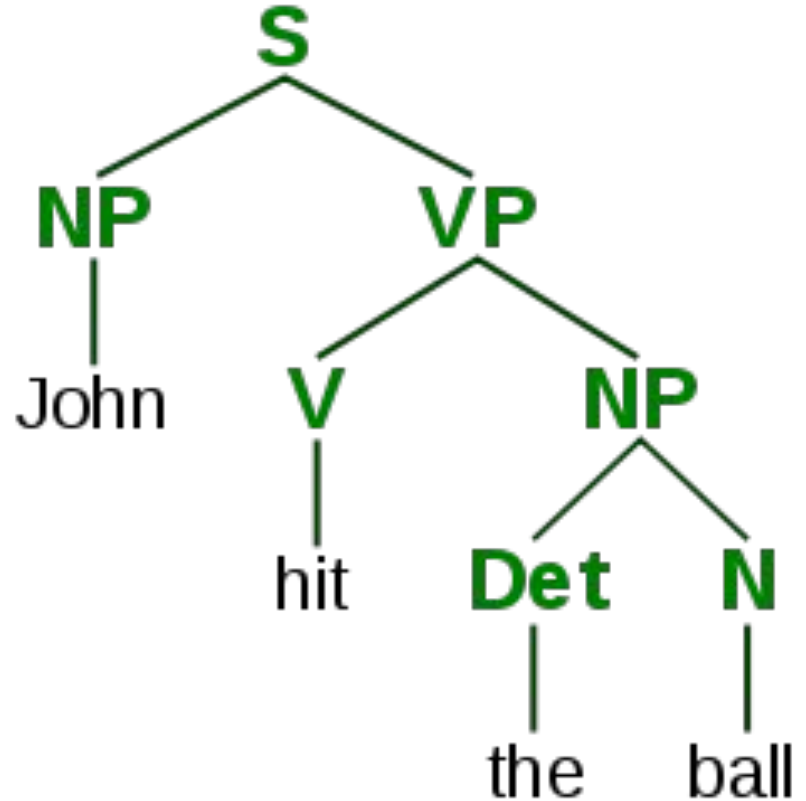
D - determiner,

N - noun,

V - verb,

NP - noun phrase,

VP - verb phrase.



# Development of the theory

- Early versions of Chomsky's theory were called transformational grammar, which is still used as a general term that includes his subsequent theories.
- The most recent is the minimalist program, from which Chomsky and other generativists have argued that many of the properties of a generative grammar arise from a universal grammar that is innate to the human brain, rather than being learned from the environment.

# Strengths and weaknesses

## Strengths:

- Chomsky put the emphasis on our possibly innate capacity to build language in our heads
- The use of transformations highlighted the multilayered nature of grammatical structures

## Weaknesses

- Chomsky's approach is syntactocentric (stresses syntax over phonology and semantics)
- Chomsky's rationalist approach which tends to dismiss empirical evidence in conflict with the theory