Generative grammar
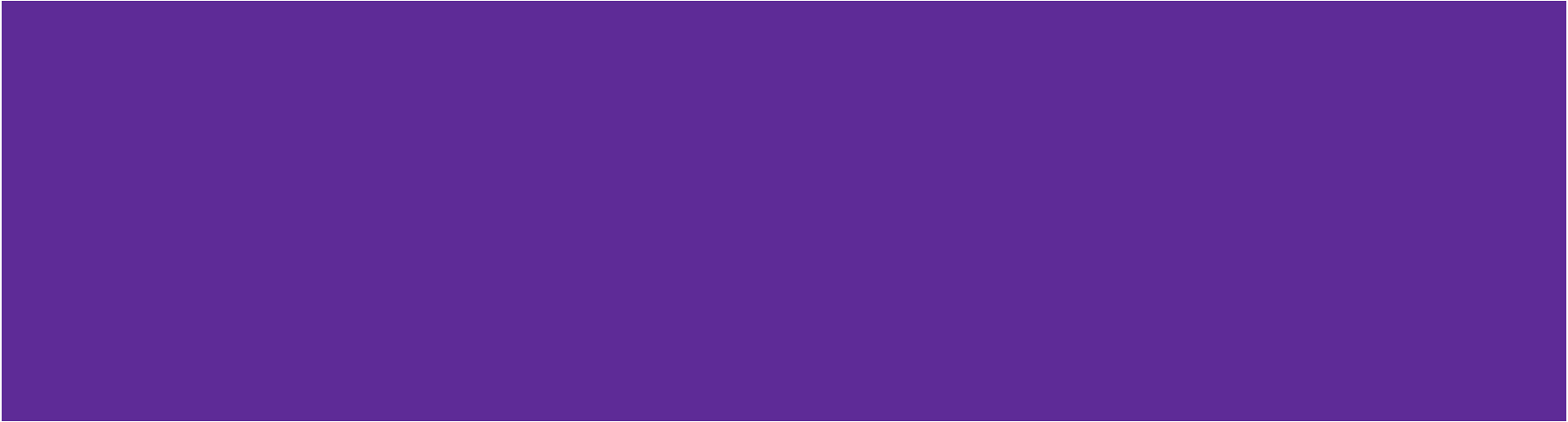
NOAM CHOMSKY (1928)
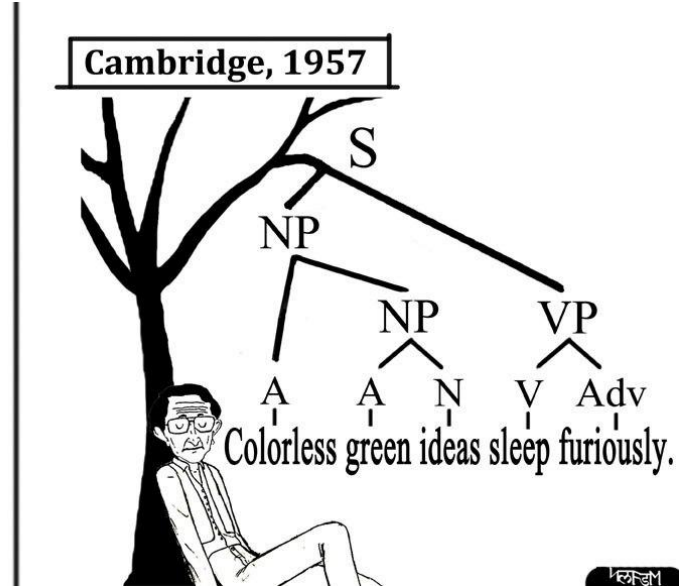
American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, historian, social critic, and political activist. Sometimes described as "the father of modern linguistics," Chomsky is also a major figure in analytic philosophy and one of the founders of the field of cognitive science. He is the author of over 100 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.

Chomsky hierarchy

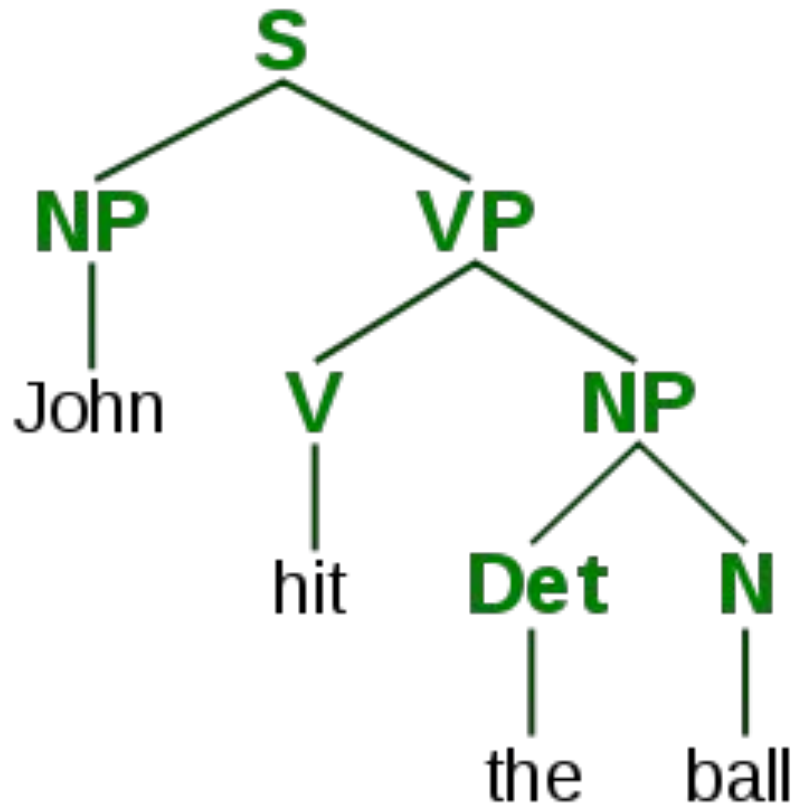The tree model works something like this example, in which:

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