**Key Concepts in TGG**

**Introduction**

The criticism of structuralism laid the basic foundations of TGG, causing modern linguistics to make a colossal footstep in the course of its development. TGG involved certain new concepts about language as a reality and about the way it should be analysed.

**1. Competence and Performance**

**Competence** refers to a person's internalised grammar (knowledge) of his language. This means a native speaker's ability to produce and understand sentences, including sentences they have never heard before. It also includes a person's knowledge of *what are* and *what are not* sentences of a particular language. So, it is the code which underlies all utterances in a given language. A speaker's linguistic competence enables

him to produce only **grammatical** and well-pronounced sentences, and to avoid the generation of **ungrammatical** and mispronounced sentences, and to recognise whether sentences are synonymous, ambiguous, simple, complex, etc. For Chomsky, linguistics should be concerned with **competence**. The latter is purely linguistic. He sees it as a set of processes possessed by the individual and developed in him as part of his maturation. “Langue” is extracted from utterances after they were produced, but “competence” is the system which creates sentences never heard before.

**Performance**, on the other hand, refers to the realisation of this code in actual situations. It is the person's concrete use of language in producing and understanding sentences. Performance represents only a small sample of the utterances of language and is influenced by external non-linguistic factors such as lapses of memory, lapses of attention, malfunctioning of the mechanisms related to speech, stress, fatigue, noisy

surroundings and so on. As a result, a speaker may produce false starts, changes of plan in mid-course, restructuring of what the speaker wants to say, etc. For Chomsky, “performance” is not the object of study in linguistics (but psychology).

**2. Deep Structure and Surface Structure**

Chomsky, rejecting the formal analysis of sentences, distinguishes two levels of syntactic structure in a sentence: the surface structure and the deep structure. The **surface structure** (**SS**) is the syntactic structure of the sentence which a person speaks or hears: it is the *observable* form of the sentence. Chomsky argues that any analysis based on the surface structure encounters difficulties. Therefore, another level of sentence

structure should be taken into account. The **deep structure (DS)** is much more abstract and is considered to be in the speaker's mind. It refers to certain important generalizations about the structure of the sentence which are different from its surface.

The deep structure contains all the syntactic information needed for the understanding of a given sentence. The deep structure is converted into a surface structure after the application of a specific kind of rules called **transformational rules (TRs)**.

**DS TRs SS**

This distinction between surface and deep syntax became a major dichotomy in TGG, and, for many people, it is the main difference between the old and new approaches to syntax. For Chomsky, grammar is **not confined to formal description** but it should incorporate **the internal processes that take place in the speaker's mind**.

**3. LAD (The Mentalist Attitude)**

According to Chomsky, language is creative and behaviourism is totally unable to

explain creativity. He argues that the comparison of the sentences a speaker has heard

(the input) with the sentences a speaker produces (the output) shows differences

between them. That is to say, the output contains sentences the speaker has never heard

before. On the basis of this evidence, one can deduce that there is “something” between

the input and the output. Chomsky calls it **the language acquisition device (LAD)**

The LAD is an inborn capacity (a genetic mechanism or apparatus) which is present in the

brain right from the beginning and which enables children (by the age of 3 to 4) to extract

the rules of language from speech when they are exposed to it and to use them

productively. Animals do not possess this capacity. For this reason, their learning of

language-like behaviour stops at a definite stage even if they are exposed to it.

Language acquisition takes place not as a result of imitation (stimulus + response)

but as a result of the functioning of the LAD. In fact, what happens is that the child, when

exposed to adult language, tries mentally to form hypotheses about its rules, then he

tests the validity of these rules continuously and adapts them until he internally masters

the abstract system of rules that adults have as part of their competence. So, language

acquisition is part of the maturational process.

**4. Language Universals**

Chomsky sees that linguistic theory should be concerned with **linguistic universals,**

i.e with the common characteristics between human languages. According to him, the

deep structure is common, and languages differ only at the level of transformational rules

which produce different surfaces.