

Lozano

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEST



5 When two or more people communicate with each other in speech, we can call the system of communication that they employ a code. In most cases that code will be something we may also want to call a language. We should also note that two speakers who are bilingual, that is, who have access to two codes, and who for one reason or another shift back and forth between the two languages as they converse by code-switching, are actually using a third code, one which draws on those two languages. The system (or the *grammar*, to use a well-known technical term) is something that each speaker 'knows', but two very important issues for linguists are just what that knowledge is knowledge of and how it may be best characterized.

10 In practice, linguists do not find it at all easy to write grammars because the knowledge that people have of the languages they speak is extremely hard to describe. It is certainly something different from, and is much more considerable than, the kinds of knowledge we see described in most of the grammars we find on library shelves, no matter how good those grammars may be. Anyone who knows a language knows much more about that language than is contained in any grammar book that attempts to describe the language. What is also interesting is that this knowledge is both something which every individual who speaks the language possesses, and also some kind of shared knowledge, that is, knowledge possessed by all those who speak the language.

15 Today, most linguists agree that the knowledge speakers have of the language or languages they speak is knowledge of something quite abstract. It is a knowledge of rules and principles and of the ways of saying and doing things with sounds, words, and sentences, rather than just knowledge of specific sounds, words, and sentences. It is knowing what is *in* the language and what is not; it is knowing the possibilities the language offers and what is impossible. This knowledge explains how it is we can understand sentences we have not heard before and reject others as being *ungrammatical*, in the sense of not being possible in the language. Communication among people who speak the same language is possible because they share such knowledge, although how it is shared – or even how it is acquired – is not well understood. Certainly, psychological and social factors are important, and genetic ones too. Language is a communal possession, although admittedly an abstract one. Individuals have access to it and constantly show that they do so by using it properly. As we will see, a wide range of skills and activities is subsumed under this concept of 'proper use'.

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35 Confronted with the task of trying to describe the grammar of a language like English, many linguists follow the approach which is associated with Chomsky, undoubtedly the most influential figure in late twentieth-century linguistics. Chomsky has argued on many occasions that, in order to make meaningful discoveries about language, linguists must try to distinguish between what is important and what is unimportant about language and linguistic behavior. The important matters, sometimes referred to as *language universals*, concern the learnability of all languages, the characteristics they share, and the rules and principles that speakers apparently follow in constructing and interpreting sentences; the less important matters have to do with how individual speakers use specific utterances in a variety of ways as they find themselves in this situation or that.

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45 Chomsky has also distinguished between what he has called *competence* and *performance*. He claims that it is the linguist's task to characterize what speakers know about their language, i.e., their competence, not what they do with their language, i.e.,



G. Rosa

3. The text is taken from a book called *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Which topic do you expect NOT to be treated in the book?

- a) Features of communicative competence
- b) Literary translation
- c) Code-switching
- d) Dialects

Exercise 4: Making reference to the text, decide whether the statements below are TRUE (T), FALSE (F), or INCOMPLETE (I) paraphrases of the information conveyed. (N.B.: the statements follow the order in which the information is presented in the text)

- 1. Bilingual speakers use two codes. _____
- 2. Grammars are difficult to write because people have little knowledge of it. _____
- 3. The language knowledge shared by speakers has both specific and abstract features. _____
- 4. Chomsky's linguistic theory identifies *language universals*, and defines *linguistic competence* as opposed to *linguistic performance*. _____
- 5. Speakers' competence is what they do with the language. _____
- 6. The book will further investigate into linguistic performance. _____

Exercise 5: find words/expressions in the text which match the synonyms given below, and write them in the blanks also indicating their respective line number. The paragraph containing each word is given in brackets.

- 1. resorts to (par. 1) _____
- 2. substantial (par. 2) _____
- 3. tries to (par. 2) _____
- 4. person (par. 2) _____
- 5. in what way (par. 3) _____
- 6. regularly (par. 3) _____
- 7. leading (par. 4) _____
- 8. statements (par. 4) _____
- 9. assignment (par. 5) _____
- 10. occasionally (par. 6) _____
- 11. in addition (par. 6) _____
- 12 properly (par. 6) _____

Part C: writing

Exercise 6: Choose ONE of the two topics below and write a paragraph of approx. 100 words.

- 1. Argue for or against the use of bilingualism in public institutions (schools, local administrations, universities).
- 2. Argue for or against the preservation and study of dialects.



G. Rami

Part A: Approaching the text

Exercise 1: *This text is made up of 6 paragraphs: match each of the sub-headings given below with its corresponding paragraph.*

- a) Language knowledge as a shared, abstract possession of language users. par. _____
- b) Code and language in the communication system. par. _____
- c) Social aspects of linguistic competence. par. _____
- d) Linguistic competence vs. linguistic performance. par. _____
- e) Chomsky's perspective on language knowledge. par. _____
- f) How language knowledge differs from written grammars. par. _____

Exercise 2: *Match each connective given below with the function it performs in the text. Fill in the corresponding blank with either*

- A** (for ADDITIVE)
- B** (for CONCESSIVE)
- C** (for CONTRASTIVE)

(N.B.: do not write more than ONE LETTER in each blank. The reference line is given in brackets.)

- 1. that is (l. 4) _____
- 2. In practice (l. 10) _____
- 3. Certainly (l. 29) _____
- 4. although (l. 30) _____
- 5. However (l. 63) _____
- 6. Moreover (l. 65) _____

Part B: Intensive reading

Exercise 3: *Read the text carefully and circle the appropriate answer:*

1. What is the overall function of the text?
 - a) To illustrate the differences between linguistic competence and linguistic performance.
 - b) To explain how to write a grammar book.
 - c) To provide a detailed description of Chomsky's linguistic approach.
 - d) To introduce the various aspects involved in language knowledge and use.

2. Who is this text for?
 - a) secondary school students
 - b) university students or academics
 - c) average readers
 - d) publishing houses



their performance. As Chomsky himself explained in 1965:

50 Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a
completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly
and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory
55 limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or
characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance.
This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general
linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered. To study
actual linguistic performance, we must consider the interaction of a variety of
60 factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker-hearer is only one. In
this respect, study of language is no different from empirical investigation of
other complex phenomena. (Chomsky 1965, pp. 3-4)

From time to time, we will return to this distinction between competence and
performance. However, the knowledge we will seek to explain involves more than
65 knowledge of the grammar of the language, for it will become apparent that speakers
know, or are in agreement about, more than that. Moreover, in their performance they
behave systematically: their actions are not random; there is order. Knowing a language
also means knowing how to use that language, since speakers know not only how to
form sentences, but also how to use them appropriately. There is therefore another kind
70 of competence, sometimes called *communicative competence*, and the social aspects of
that competence will be our concern here.

From: Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*,
Blackwell, 2006, 2nd ed., pp. 1-2.

