

## **Knowledge of Language**

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Language is a complex idea, thing, matter, concern. With its complexities, the understanding of its nature becomes more and more interesting for scholars to explain what and how language is- concept, use and relevance.

With the questions posed by Bierswick (1987) to be answered by psycholinguistics. These are:

1. What is knowledge of language? 2. How is knowledge of language acquired? 3. How is knowledge of language put to use?

One cannot help to dig where these ideas came from. Lo and behold! Such ideas will still go back to a great linguist who will never be missed when discussing about language.

Noam Chomsky ( 1986) in his presentation of *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin and Use* answers the first question by explaining that a knowledge of language is given by a particular generative grammar, a theory concerned with the state of the mind/brain of the person who knows a particular language. Generative grammar is concerned primarily with the intelligence of the reader, the principles and procedures brought to bear attain full knowledge of a language.

Thus, Chomsky thinks about knowledge of language as something that is innate within the mind or brain of a person who is naturally born with language. In like terms, generative grammar in this sense is a predetermined set of rules or systems that enables a person to learn, use, know of language.

Strikingly, Chomsky also explained that knowledge of language is often characterized as a practical ability to speak and understand however he later rebuffed the idea due to concerns of impairment, lost ability and improvement of ability.

To explain, a person who is born with a knowledge of language may lose it because in his/her later life, he/she may contract a disease and will cause impairment in his/her speech or hearing. In this case, a different set of language will be utilized by the person to cope with his condition. On the other hand, when a person is not good enough in speaking, he/she may take speech improvement classes thus enabling him to improve his ability in speaking.

It is at this point that Chomsky repudiated the idea and differentiated between knowledge and ability. Perhaps, it is in this realm that Chomsky already had an inkling on competence and performance which were latter terms used in studying language. As early as this, he recommends that we should follow normal usage in distinguishing clearly between knowledge and ability to use that knowledge.

Moreover, Chomsky also elucidated that the system of knowledge that has somehow developed in our minds has certain consequences; it relates sounds and meaning and assigns meaning of structural properties to physical events in certain ways. And because of the complexities of language, he explained that there is little hope in accounting for our knowledge in terms of such ideas as analogy, induction, association, reliable procedures, good reasons, and justification in any generally useful sense, or in terms of “generalized learning mechanisms.

Chomsky defined then that knowledge of language is a certain state of mind brain, a relatively stable element in transitory mental states once it is attained; furthermore, as a state of some distinguishable faculty of the mind- the language faculty- with its specific properties, structure, and organization, one “module of the mind”.

Interestingly, Chomsky also pioneered the concept of the succeeding ideas of scholars to answer the question (1). This is the occurrence of Externalized language ( E-language) to be transformed to Internalized knowledge ( I-language). E- language refers to the construct is understood independently of the properties of the mind/brain while I-language is some element of the mind of the person who knows the language, acquired by the learner, and used by the speaker-hearer.

The author of the book, *Psychology in Language*, David W. Carroll ( 2004) identified that there are two knowledge of language. *Tacit knowledge* refers to the knowledge of how to perform various acts while *Explicit knowledge* is the knowledge of the processes or mechanisms used in these acts. Further, Ellis ( 2006) explains implicit and explicit knowledge in this situation, ask a young child how to form a plural and she says she does not know; ask her “ here is a wug, here is another wug, what have you got? ” and she is able to reply, “two wugs.” Children acquire their first language (L1) by engaging with their caretakers in natural meaningful communication. From this “evidence”, they automatically acquire complex knowledge of the structure of their language. Yet paradoxically they cannot describe this knowledge, the discovery of which forms the object of the disciplines of theoretical linguistics, psycholinguistics, and child language acquisition.

In addition, Crain (n.d) presented that there is another way in which knowledge of language and real-world experience are kept apart in the minds of children; they do not always base their understanding of language on what they have come to know from experience. For example, children do not combine the words of the sentence 'Mice chase cats' in a way that conforms with their experience; if they did, they would understand it to mean that cats chase mice, not the reverse. In other words, children are able to tell when sentences are false, as well as when they are true. This means that children use their knowledge of language structure in comprehending sentences, even if it means ignoring their wishes and the beliefs they have formed about the world around them.

To further explain explicit and implicit knowledge, Hulstijn ( 2006) contends that implicit knowledge is knowledge that is represented in a way that allows for rapid, parallel processing. To date, connectionist networks might be the best candidates for the representation and processing of implicit knowledge. It is implicit knowledge that underlies the normal, fluent

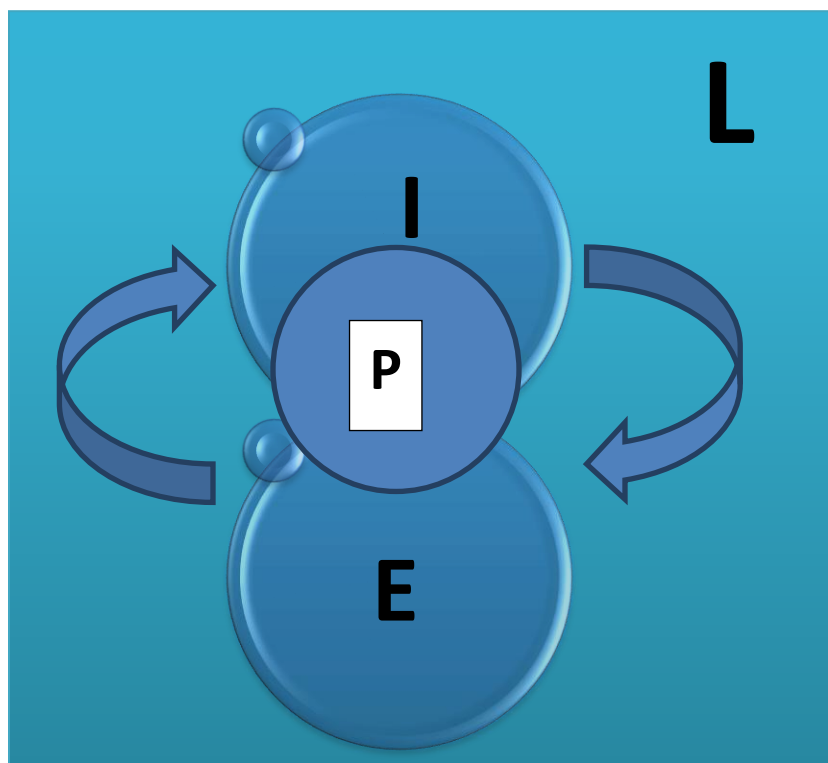
speaking, listening, reading, and writing behavior of skilled native speakers. At the phenomenological level, it can be observed that implicit knowledge is not open to conscious inspection; its processing components cannot be verbalized. Recent neurocognitive studies suggest that implicit knowledge resides not in a particular, restricted area of the brain but is spread out over various regions of the neocortex. Implicit learning is the forming of implicit knowledge. This is an autonomous, non-conscious process taking place whenever information is processed receptively (through hearing and seeing), be it intentionally and deliberately or unintentionally and incidentally. That is, once we have decided to listen, read, speak, or write, we cannot choose not to encode and store information, or, technically speaking, not to adjust the connection weights in our network.

Explicit knowledge is knowledge in the form of symbols (concepts, categories) and rules, specifying intersymbol relationships. Explicit knowledge, including many aspects of vocabulary knowledge, has been claimed to reside, or at least be processed, in a particular area of the brain (the medial temporal lobe, including the hippocampus), independent of the areas where implicit knowledge resides. Explicit learning is the construction of explicit, verbalizable knowledge—a conscious, deliberative process of concept formation and concept linking. This process may either take place when learners are being taught concepts and rules by an instructor or textbook, or when they operate in a self initiated searching mode, trying to develop concepts and rules on their own. Explicit learning, therefore, requires a certain cognitive development, and will generally not occur in early childhood. In most instructional settings around the world, explicit teaching and learning are the preferred modes of instruction and knowledge acquisition. This is true for many school subjects, including foreign languages.

Ellis ( 2005) in his article Measuring Implicit and Explicit Knowledge of a Second Language affirmed that there is no model or test yet in distinguishing explicit and implicit knowledge however he presents the following table based from several studies to approximate the differences.

Characteristics	Implicit Knowledge	Explicit Knowledge
Awareness	Intuitive awareness of linguistic norms	Conscious awareness of linguistic norms
Type of Knowledge	Procedural knowledge of rules and fragments	Declarative knowledge of grammatical rules and fragments
Systematicity	Variable but systematic knowledge	Anomalous and inconsistent knowledge
Accessibility	Access to knowledge by means of automatic processing	Access to knowledge by means of controlled processing
Use of L2 knowledge	Access to knowledge during fluent performance	Access to knowledge during planning difficulty
Self Report	Nonverbalizable	Verbalizable
Learnability	Potentially only within critical period	Any age

Pivoting from these scholars, the model as follows is forwarded to exemplify the answer to the central question, What is knowledge of language?



In the diagram, **P is person**. The overlapping circles of **I (Implicit)** knowledge and **E (Explicit)** knowledge shows that of Chomsky's construct that knowledge of language is one module in the mind apart from its other functions. This knowledge of language enables the person to understand more and use language.

The **I** and **E** circles accommodate the constructs of the succeeding scholars who determined that knowledge could either be implicit or explicit. For implicit knowledge, this function is within that allows people to know about language while explicit knowledge are the grammar within a language.

Scholars believe that implicit knowledge can be transformed to explicit knowledge and vice versa. However, as Ellis puts it, there is no measure yet to determine this transformation.

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