

## COMPETENCE & PERFORMANCE

Since the publication of Noam Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* in 1965, most linguists have made a distinction between linguistic competence, a speaker's tacit knowledge of the structure of a language, and *linguistic performance*, which is what a speaker actually does with this knowledge.

### Competence:

Linguistic competence is the system of linguistic knowledge possessed by native speakers of a language. It is distinguished from linguistic performance, which is the way a language system is used in communication. Noam Chomsky introduced this concept in his elaboration of generative grammar,<sup>[1]</sup> where it has been widely adopted and competence is the only level of language that is studied.

According to Chomsky, competence is the ideal language system that enables speakers to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in their language, and to distinguish grammatical sentences from ungrammatical sentences. This is unaffected by "grammatically irrelevant conditions" such as speech errors. In Chomsky's view, competence can be studied independently of language use, which falls under "performance", for example through introspection and grammaticality judgments by native speakers.

### Performance:

The term linguistic performance was used by Noam Chomsky in 1960 to describe "the actual use of language in concrete situations". It is used to describe both the production, sometimes called *parole*, as well as the comprehension of language. Performance is defined in opposition to "competence"; the latter describes the mental knowledge that a speaker or listener has of language.

It is the ability to produce and comprehend sentences in a language.

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