



# ENG423A: Current Issues in Linguistics

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CRITIQUING GENERATIVE LINGUISTICS

# Coming up...

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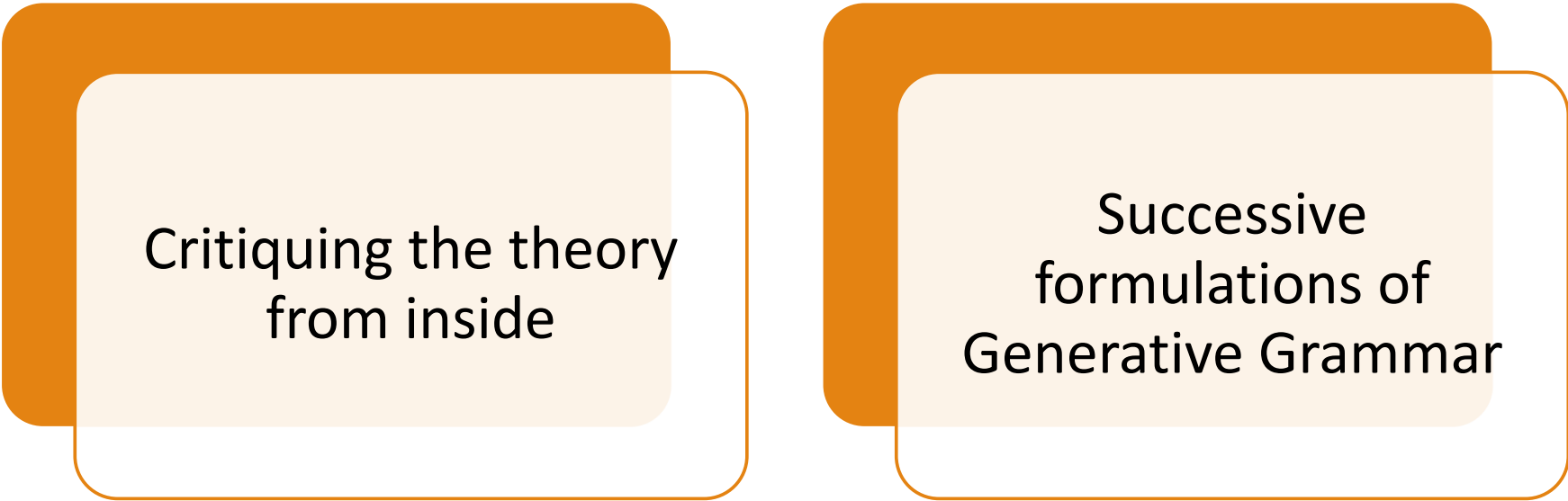
Critique of GG  
(Generative Grammar)

A variant of GG  
explored by linguists to  
address some of the  
criticism

An alternative  
approach to theorizing  
about language and  
language faculty

# Critiquing Generative Grammar

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Critiquing the theory  
from inside

Successive  
formulations of  
Generative Grammar

# Colourless green ideas sleep furiously...

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How the nature of explanation changes in the successive formulations of Generative Grammar (GG)

Formulation 1: A well formed expression

Formulation 2: Syntactically well-formed but semantically ill-formed

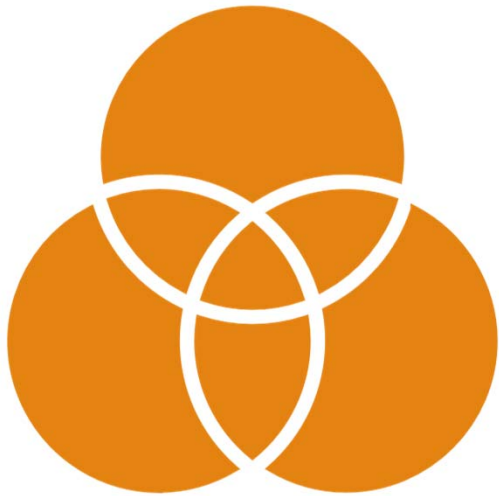
Formulation 3: Syntactically well-formed, semantically well-formed but referentially vacuous

Formulation 4: Converges in the computational component and meets the legibility conditions for the C-I system to assign it varied interpretations.



# Questions to be posed

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1. Is GG empirically adequate?
2. Is the GG conceptually adequate?
  - a. Any aspects of language left out?
  - b. Optimality?

GG answers most of the questions that it sets out to answer – the five questions.

# A More Basic question

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How is GG a cognitive theory?

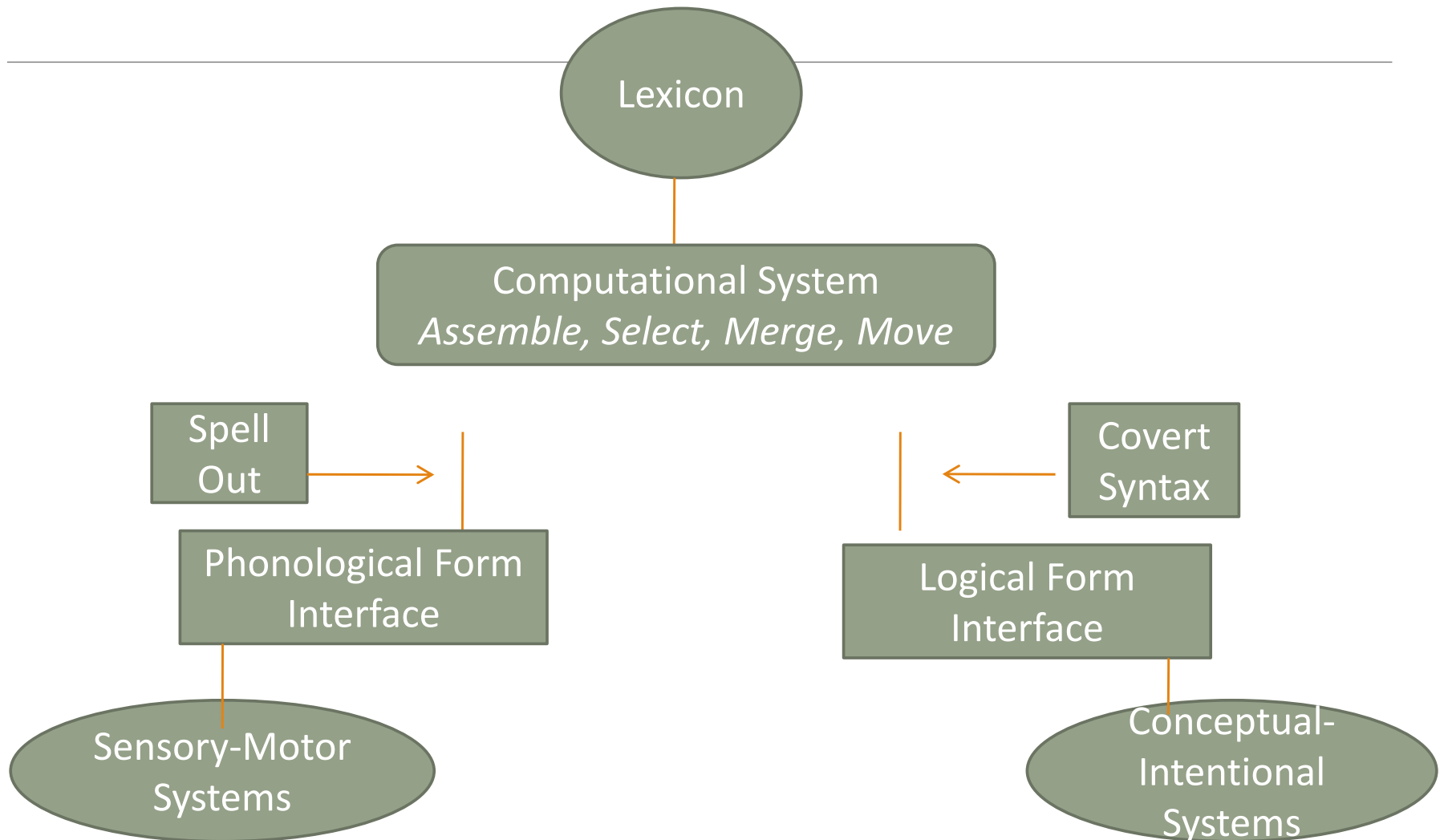
- A theory of linguistic knowledge and how it arises in the mind is a cognitive question.
- However, GG answer to Q 3 decontextualises language.

Does the Minimalist Program contextualize language?

- The MP recognizes the fact of language being embedded in a conceptual-intentional system without really seeking to investigate how the relationship might actually be working.

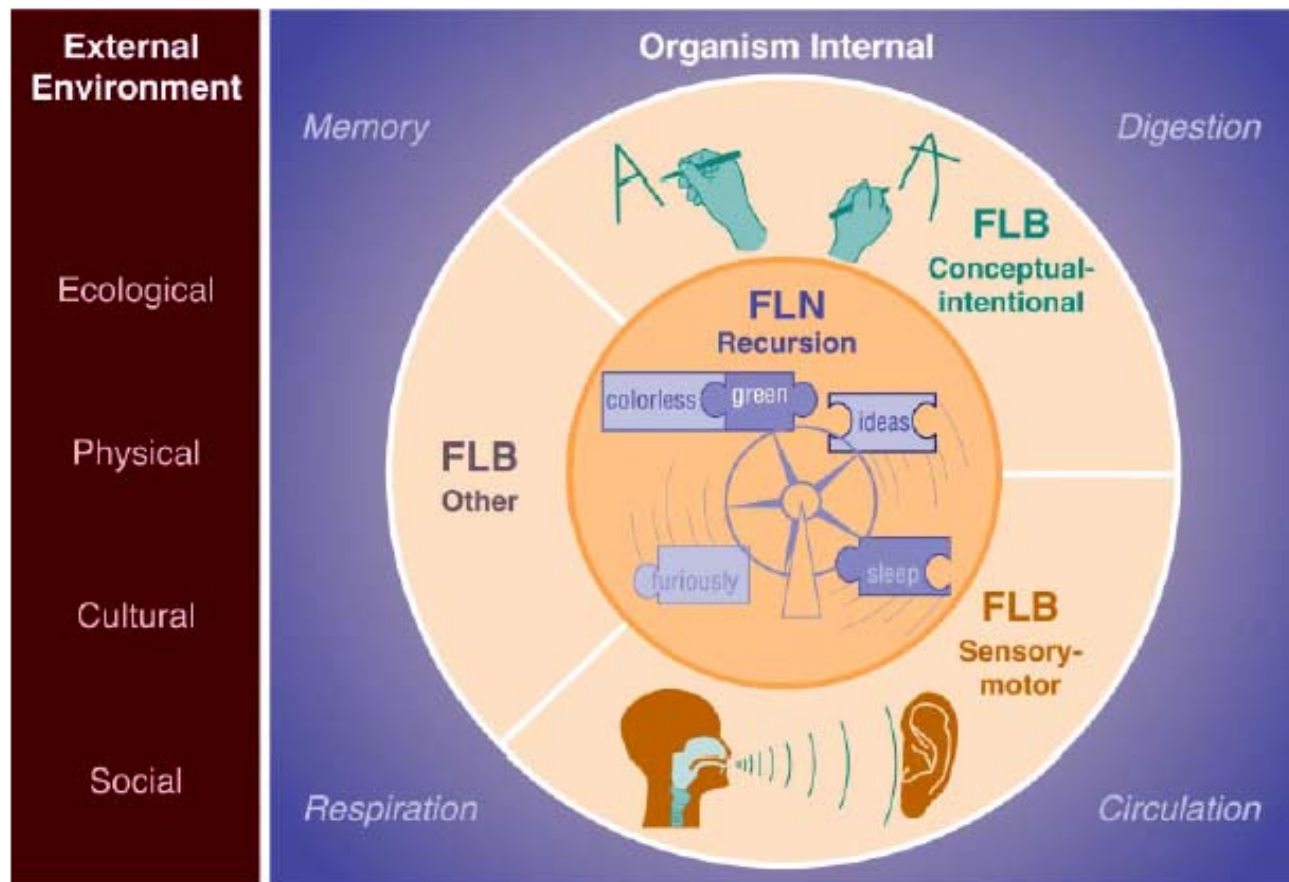


# Minimalism: Form of Grammar



# Faculty of Language

Hauser, Chomsky and Fitch, 2002





# Major hypotheses

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Three major hypotheses that we can attribute to GG:

1. **Modularity hypothesis:** A modular mind with different cognitive abilities functioning as distinct modules; language a dedicated faculty.
2. **Recursion only hypothesis:** Faculty of language narrowed down to syntax; equated with a set of recursive procedures in syntax.
3. **Internalist hypothesis:** meaning as symbolic objects, devoid of a referential or cognitive content.



# Some weakening?

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A progressive weakening of 1 in recent times:

- 1) A dedicated faculty of language, initially autonomous but later a restricted notion of meaning entering into the grammar. Finally claimed to be optimally readable or legible to external systems imposing legibility conditions.
- 2) Cross-modularity of an operation like *Merge*
- 3) Recursion not specific to language, extendible to navigation (spatial cognition) apart from the number system

**Internalist hypothesis remains strong as ever – syntactic and semantic objects devoid of a referential or cognitive content.**

# Critique from outside GG

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- 1) **Amodular theories of the mind:** interactive theories where different capacities of the mind work together to give us a different conceptualization of the language faculty .
- 2) **More to language than recursion:** speech production-perception, lexicon, morphology, lexical processes as productive as syntactic processes etc.
- 3) **Externalist language design:** where meanings are grounded in sensory-motor systems and conceptual-intentional systems.



# Critique from outside GG

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**Symbol-grounding problem of the internalist design:**

Syntactic and semantic objects are symbolic entities

What is the relationship between these symbols and the sensory-motor abilities?

**Developmental problem:** how are the symbols learnt?

# Our Critique: Form of Grammar

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**Assumptions about the organization of grammar that run counter to a cognitivist enterprise:**

**Lexicon an abstraction** distinct from conceptual structure (conceptual lexicon, ontology etc.) – a duplication?

**Lexicon-Syntax separation** with syntax as the singular source of generativity. Isn't the lexicon generative too?

# Our Critique: Form of Grammar

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**Semantics-pragmatics separation** which takes the grammar away from any notion of context-of-use

An unnatural division of labour with undesirable consequences such as taxonomies of linguistic phenomena as syntactic, semantic and pragmatic?

**A cognitively unrealistic theory of language**

# Language acquisition

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The *how* and the *what* question reduced to one

Universal Grammar and parameters: Initial and steady state

- 1) Child language grammars: viewed as uninteresting and un insightful as mere performance grammars.

Idealization of instantaneous acquisition

The nature of input changes with every subsequent stage.

No insight into the developmental sequence which is a cognitively important question as it can throw light on the *what* question.

# Language acquisition

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2) Steady state: the notion is not cognitively tenable.

Language development has no steady states.

The distinction between language acquisition and language development.



# Language acquisition

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3) Restricts acquisition models to acquisition of syntax – lexical parameterization notwithstanding

An entire area of word learning left out of the scope of research

Word learning presumes reference, and therefore, cannot be modular. Several nonlinguistic capacities working along with language in word learning.

# Language acquisition

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Acquisition of pragmatics??

When and how do children learn to metaphorize, for example?

Theories of language that can address these and other equally significant issues ...