FROM LANGUAGE TO LIFE: CHOMSKY'S PHILOSOPHICAL LEGACY IN AN AI-DRIVEN WORLD

Alexandra RADU[1],[2]*
[1] Department of Education, Bucharest University, Bucharest, Romania
2 Cultural Psychology of Sustainable Human Development –
Laboratory of Psychology, Salerno, Italy
*Corresponding author: alexandra.peca63@s.fpse.unibuc.ro
ORCID iD: 0009-0005-0350-5316

Abstract
Language has long been considered one of the defining features of the human being, but Noam Chomsky's theories have radically reconfigured this understanding. By introducing the concept of "generative grammar" and supporting the innate language hypothesis, Chomsky proposed that language is not just a social or cultural construct, but a fundamental dimension of human nature. These ideas have profound philosophical implications: if linguistic structures are universal and pre-exist individual experience, then freedom, knowledge, and human identity unfold within this constitutive framework. In parallel with the intuitions of philosophers such as Wittgenstein or Cassirer, Chomsky's theories suggest that the limits of thought and culture are inseparable from the linguistic structures that make them possible. Moreover, their impact is not limited to the academic field, but extends to social and political life: language is, in this perspective, an instrument of emancipation and resistance, giving individuals the opportunity to oppose oppression and build communities of solidarity. Therefore, Chomsky's theories not only explain the mechanisms of language, but also open up a philosophical horizon essential for understanding the human condition, making language both a natural phenomenon and an existential space.

Keywords: Chomsky, language, philosophy, generative grammar, freedom, existence

Introduction

In the contemporary humanities and social sciences, language is considered a fundamental dimension of human existence. Just as research on acculturation has attempted to explain the processes by which individuals adapt to cultural diversity (Berry, 2001, 2005, 2008; Chirkov,

2009; Ozer, 2013), Noam Chomsky's theories about the universality of language raise major philosophical questions about the nature of man and his cognitive structures. If in cultural studies the emphasis falls on dialogue and interaction between traditions (Gamsakhurdia, 2018), in linguistics, Chomsky proposes the idea that the diversity of languages originates in a common structural scheme, inscribed in human nature (Chomsky, 1965, 1986). This hypothesis radically changes the paradigm: language is not just a cultural construction, but a universal biological faculty.

The question of defining language is essential to understanding the philosophical impact of Chomsky's theories. Wittgenstein (1922/2010) pointed out that the "limits of language" coincide with the limits of thought, showing that language does not only describe reality, but constitutes it. Cassirer (1944), in turn, interpreted language as a symbolic tool that underpins culture and knowledge. In contrast to these cultural or phenomenological views, Chomsky (2000) argued that language is an "organ of the mind", similar to other cognitive faculties, implying that its structures are universal and innate. This paradigm shift from language as a cultural product to language as a biological faculty forces philosophy to rethink the relationship between nature and culture, between freedom and determinism.

At the same time, Chomsky's theories have implications that go beyond linguistics. In a manner comparable to the criticisms of mechanistic models of acculturation (Rudmin, 2009; Weinreich, 2009), Chomsky rejects behaviorist explanations, which reduce language to simple associations between stimuli and responses (Skinner, 1957). In his famous review of Verbal Behavior, Chomsky (1959) showed that such a model could not explain the unlimited creativity of human language. This position supports the idea that the human being is fundamentally creative and free, even if he acts within universal structures. From a philosophical perspective, it opens the discussion about human freedom as a possibility to create new meanings within the limits imposed by innate cognitive structures.

In addition, Chomsky's conception invites a rereading of the relationship between the individual and the community. If language is innate, then every human being has access, at least potentially, to the same cognitive resources. This universality implies a fundamental equality between people, and this aspect has not only philosophical but also political consequences. Chomsky himself emphasized, in his political writings, that language and critical thinking are tools of social emancipation (Chomsky,

2000). Thus, language is not only a biological or cultural phenomenon, but also a space of resistance and transformation, where freedom is manifested through the ability to criticize and create alternatives to dominant power structures.

In conclusion, the introduction of Chomsky's theories into the philosophical debate highlights a productive tension: language is simultaneously universal and particular, natural and cultural, biologically determined and open to creativity. This tension invites philosophy to go beyond reductive interpretations and explore language as a constitutive space of the human condition. In this sense, Chomskyan linguistics cannot be separated from philosophical reflection, since it reconfigures the way we think about freedom, knowledge and existence.

Foundations of Chomsky's theory

Chomsky introduced the concept of "generative grammar", arguing that all languages have a basic universal structure (Chomsky, 1986). This theoretical framework suggests that language is not an exclusively cultural construct, but a constitutive dimension of human nature. In this regard, Chomsky contradicts behaviorist perspectives and proposes an anthropological vision in which man is "programmed" for communication.

1. The philosophical dimension

1.1 Chomsky and the human condition

Noam Chomsky's theories introduced a radically new paradigm: language is a universal biological faculty, an integral part of human nature (Chomsky, 1965, 1986). This perspective suggests that each individual is endowed with an innate linguistic structure—the "universal grammar"—that makes unlimited creativity of speech possible. Philosophically, this position shifts the discussion of language from the cultural level to the ontological level, suggesting that speaking is equivalent to being human.

1.2 Cassirer and the symbolism of culture

In contrast, Ernst Cassirer (1944) understood language within a symbolic philosophy. For him, man is not only homo sapiens, but above all a symbolic animal: the being who lives and develops in the universe of symbols. Language is not just a cognitive tool, but the foundation of culture,

religion, art, and science. Unlike Chomsky, Cassirer did not seek innate universal structures, but emphasized the constitutive symbolic and cultural character of language.

1.3 Wittgenstein and the limits of thought

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922/2010) brought another dimension: for him, "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world". Language is not just a set of internal structures (as Chomsky states) or a cultural symbol (as Cassirer argues), but a horizon of possibility for thought and reality. Later, in Philosophical Research, Wittgenstein (1953/2009) emphasized "language games" – practical and communal contexts through which meaning is born.

1.4 Comparative synthesis

The three perspectives offer a complex picture: Chomsky emphasizes biological universality, Cassirer on cultural symbolism, and Wittgenstein on the epistemological and pragmatic conditioning of language. Together, they show that language is simultaneously natural, cultural, and existential.

The table below illustrates these theories and their main philosophical implications:

Table 1. Comparative table: Chomsky – Cassirer – Wittgenstein

Author	Vision of language	Level of analysis	Main philosophical implications
Noam Chomsky	Language as a universal biological faculty (generative grammar)	Ontological/cognitive	Language defines human nature, creativity is structured by innate rules.
Ernst Cassirer	Language as a symbolic form, a cultural foundation	Anthropological / cultural	Man is *a symbolic animal*, language underpins culture and meaning.
Ludwig Wittgenstein	Language as a limit of thought and as "language games"	Epistemological / pragmatic	Meaning depends on usage and context, language conditions our world.

Comparative analysis therefore highlights the fact that language is an irreducible dimension of the human condition. Chomsky shows that language is inscribed in our biology, Cassirer emphasizes that it is the foundation of culture, and Wittgenstein reminds us that language draws the limits of thought and reality that we can conceive. Together, these perspectives suggest that the development of language is inseparable from the development of the individual and society: without language there is no knowledge, without symbols there is no culture, and without communities of meaning there is no humanity. Therefore, the study of language is not just a linguistic exercise, but a reflection on the very essence of human life.

2. Language in the Age of Technology: AI and Linguistic Transformations

The development of language has profound effects on the individual and society: the formation of thought, identity, communication, culture. In the age of AI, this development is accelerated and significantly modified. Large language models (LLMs), smart replies, and language assistance tools generate new habits, norms, and risks (Hohenstein et al., 2023; Yakura et al., 2024).

2.1. The impact of language development on human life and the influence of AI. From the Chomsky paradigm to the AI paradigm...

Noam Chomsky described language as a universal faculty, biologically rooted in human nature. In his theory of generative grammar, language is not a simple cultural tool, but a constitutive quality of the human species (Chomsky, 1965, 1986). This view places language in the sphere of nature and suggests that each individual carries within himself the cognitive structures necessary to create and understand unlimited sentences. In this paradigm, language is inseparable from the human being and his existential condition.

However, the emergence of artificial intelligence opens a new historical stage, one in which language is no longer exclusively human prerogative, but can be generated and processed by machines. Large language models, such as ChatGPT, manage to produce coherent texts, learn from interactions, and provide responses that mimic natural language

(Hohenstein et al., 2023). This situation requires a paradigm shift: language, once seen as an ontological given, is also becoming a technological artifact, which raises unprecedented philosophical and ethical questions.

The confrontation between the two perspectives is significant. If for Chomsky language is the expression of human cognitive freedom, in the age of AI there is a risk that this freedom will be shaped or even conditioned by algorithms. AI-generated language has the potential to influence human language itself, as demonstrated by recent studies showing the takeover of expressions and structures from interaction with AI systems (Yakura et al., 2024). Thus, language ceases to be just a natural dimension and becomes a field of negotiation between man and technology.
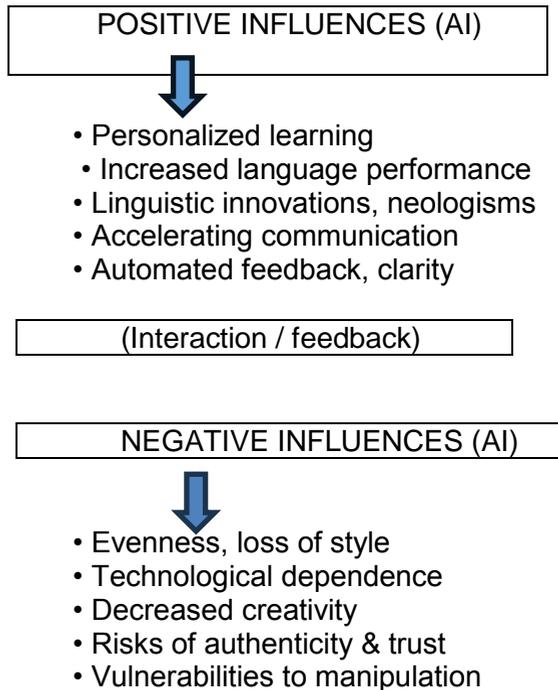
The outcome of this confrontation is ambivalent. On the one hand, AI democratizes access to language, providing educational tools and support for expression, which can strengthen the role of language as a foundation for individual and collective development (Zou & Xie, 2024). On the other hand, transferring some of linguistic functions to machines risks diminishing human authenticity and creativity if humans become overly dependent on automatic suggestions or predefined patterns. Philosophically, this forces a reassessment: if language is no longer just "ours", what does it mean to be a talking being in the age of AI?

Table 2. Pros and Cons of AI for Language

Aspect	Advantages	Disadvantages
Learning and education	Personalization of learning; increasing language performance (Zou & Xie, 2024).	Dependence on technology; decrease in one's own creativity.
Variability and innovation	The emergence of neologisms and new expressions; linguistic diversity (Yakura et al., 2024).	Homogenization of styles; reduction of dialects and variations.
Social communication	Speed up conversations; increased positive tone (Hohenstein et al., 2023).	Negative perceptions of authenticity; potentially manipulative.
Structure of language	Grammatical clarity; Access to multiple translations and styles.	Oversimplifying syntax; stylistic standardization.

Figure 1. Positive and negative influences of AI on human language

(Figure made by the author, based on Hohenstein et al., 2023; Yakura et al., 2024; Zou & Xie, 2024).

POSITIVE INFLUENCES (AI)

• Personalized learning
 • Increased language performance
• Linguistic innovations, neologisms
• Accelerating communication
• Automated feedback, clarity

(Interaction / feedback)

NEGATIVE INFLUENCES (AI)

• Evenness, loss of style
• Technological dependence
• Decreased creativity
• Risks of authenticity & trust
• Vulnerabilities to manipulation

3. Conclusions

The analysis of Noam Chomsky's theories, compared with the perspectives of Ernst Cassirer and Ludwig Wittgenstein, reveals that language represents a fundamental and irreducible dimension of human existence. Chomsky showed that language is innate and universal, a biological structure that makes unlimited creativity possible. Cassirer emphasized the symbolic dimension of language, showing that it constitutes the foundation of culture and of the formation of man as a symbolic animal. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, highlighted the epistemological and pragmatic role of language, suggesting that its limits coincide with the limits of thought and reality that we can conceive.

In the age of artificial intelligence, language is undergoing further transformations, which influence both the way individuals communicate and the way societies develop. AI brings undeniable advantages, such as personalizing language education, clarity of expression, and speeding up communication. However, it also introduces risks, including stylistic uniformity, reduced individual creativity, and loss of perception of authenticity in social interactions. Philosophically, these effects show that language is a space of tension between the freedom to create meaning and the responsibility to preserve authenticity and diversity.

Thus, the study of language is not reduced to a linguistic analysis, but constitutes a reflection on the human condition. Language is simultaneously natural, cultural, and existential, and its development shapes both the individual and society. In this context, it is necessary to develop an ethics of digital language, which capitalizes on the advantages of technology without compromising authenticity, creativity and linguistic diversity. Only in this way can language maintain its fundamental role in the formation of human thought, identity and communities. Cassirer, E. (1944). An Essay on Man. Yale University Press.

References

Berry, J. W. (2001). A psychology of immigration. Journal of Social Issues, 57(3), 615–631. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00231

Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29(6), 697–712. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013

Berry, J. W. (2008). Globalization and acculturation. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 32(4), 328–336. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.04.001

Cassirer, E. (1944). An essay on man: An introduction to a philosophy of human culture. Yale University Press.

Chirkov, V. (2009). Critical psychology of acculturation: What do we study and how do we study it, when we investigate acculturation? International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 33(2), 94–105. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.02.003

Chomsky, N. (1959). Review of B. F. Skinner's Verbal behavior. Language, 35(1), 26–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/411334

Chomsky, N. (1965). Aspects of the theory of syntax. MIT Press.

Chomsky, N. (1986). Knowledge of language: Its nature, origin, and use. Praeger.

Chomsky, N. (2000). New horizons in the study of language and mind. Cambridge University Press.

Gamsakhurdia, V. (2018). Adaptation in a dialogical perspective—From acculturation to proculturation. Culture and Psychology, 24(4), 545–559. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X18791977

Hohenstein, J., Kizilcec, R. F., DiFranzo, D., Aghajari, Z., Mieczkowski, H., Levy, K., Naaman, M., Hancock, J. T., & Jung, M. F. (2023). Artificial intelligence in communication: When people use AI to generate language, how do others respond? PNAS Nexus, 2(4), pgad099. https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad099

Rudmin, F. W. (2009). Constructs, measurements and models of acculturation and acculturative stress. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 33(2), 106–123. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.12.001

Weinreich, P. (2009). "Enculturation", not "acculturation": Conceptualising and assessing identity processes in migrant communities. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 33(2), 124–139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.12.006

Wittgenstein, L. (2010). A Logical-Philosophical Treatise (C. K. Ogden, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1922)

Wittgenstein, L. (2009). Philosophical investigations (4th ed., G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and J. Schulte, Trans.). Wiley-Blackwell. (Original work published 1953)

Yakura, H., Lopez-Lopez, J. A., Brinkmann, T., Serna, J., Gupta, R., & Rahwan, I. (2024). Detecting LLM-driven change in human language. arXiv preprint. https://arxiv.org/abs/2409.01754

Zou, D., & Xie, H. (2024). Artificial intelligence in English language learning: A meta-analysis of its effectiveness. Computers and Education, 215, 105218. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2024.105218