

Initiation à la linguistique anglaise | Noam Chomsky and Universal Grammar

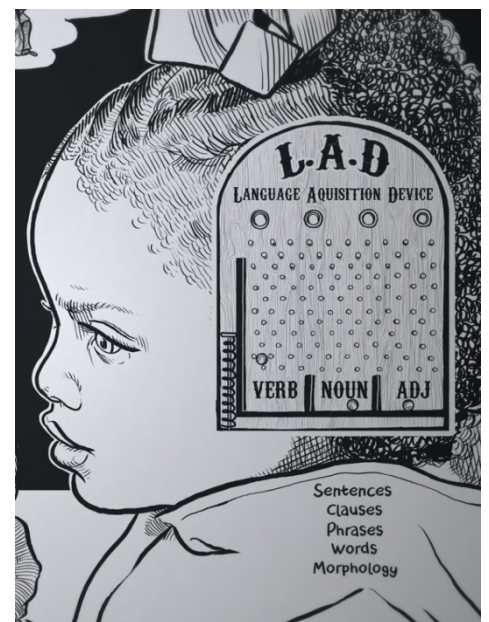
Compréhension orale | CORRECTION

Language ***sets us apart***. Other animals ***communicate*** but they ***don't have*** anything approaching the sophisticated ***grammar*** of human languages. How is it that we learn to speak and think in language so easily? ***Young children*** become adept in a new language very ***quickly***.

Since the ***dawn of philosophy***, thinkers have argued about whether or not we have ***innate ideas***, whether or not ***we are born*** knowing things as Plato [Platon] believed, or rather as John Locke and other empiricists argued: 'The man is a blank slate on which ***experience*** writes.

An ***American linguist***, Noam Chomsky, ***gave a twist*** to this debate in the ***1960s*** by demonstrating that children learning to speak just don't have enough information to form the complex ***grammatical*** maneuvers that allow them to generate ***unlimited*** new and original ***sentences***. Yet, they do so with ***ease***. There is a poverty of stimulus. Something else ***must be going on***. Chomsky's Hypothesis was that there are ***inborn structures*** in our ***brain*** - what he called a ***Language Acquisition Device*** (or LAD) – which gives us a ***natural*** propensity to organize the spoken language that we hear in various ***grammatical*** ways. Without that, we couldn't get started as language learners.

If he is right, language is ***hardwired*** as a kind of ***universal grammar***. Our slate has been written on before we emerge from the ***womb***.



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