Cartesian Linguistics and the Recursion-Only Hypothesis

Benjamin Fischer¹

Personal research project

This presentation will try to explain the content of the Recursion-only Hypothesis (ROH) of Hauser, Chomsky and Fitch (2002) by reference to the biography of Noam Chomsky. The investigation will begin with Chomskys formative years (until ca. 1957), and show how the content of his early linguistic theory is composed of ideas derived from (mostly) his teachers and colleagues. Two things are especially notable about the early writings of Chomsky, which are the rejection of mentalism and the relative disinterest with recursion. These positions changed as his rejection of Post-Bloomfieldian structuralism became complete, followed by the construction of Cartesian Linguistics. Ultimately, we will see that the ROH can be understood to follow from Cartesian Linguistics. Furthermore, the Minimalist Program in general appears as a remarkably successful synthesization of ideas Chomsky that encountered in his youth.

Selected bibliography


¹University of Vienna; b_fischer@live.at