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Neil Smith and Nicholas Allott  
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## Chomsky

Noam Chomsky continues to be one of the most influential intellectual figures of modern times. His wide-ranging contributions to the fields of linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and politics have revolutionized our view of language, the mind, and human nature. Assuming no prior knowledge of linguistics, this book explores Chomsky's key theories, especially recent developments in his Minimalist Program, addressing issues such as: How do we know a language? How do children acquire this knowledge? How did language evolve?

This third edition has been expanded and thoroughly updated and includes an exploration of Chomsky's contributions to philosophy and psychology, outlining the impact of his radical and often controversial views. It concludes with an account of his political activism and his critique of recent developments such as the Arab Spring, Wikileaks, and the Occupy movement. There is also a new section covering his views on climate change and nuclear disarmament.

- \* A wide-ranging overview of all areas of Chomsky's work
- \* Authoritative and unbiased coverage of his more controversial ideas
- \* Thoroughly updated to cover recent developments

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## *Ideas and Ideals*

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*Third Edition*

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*Dedication to our friends*

Dear friends, I say friends here  
In the larger sense of the word:  
Wife, sister, associates, relatives,  
Schoolmates, men and women,  
Persons seen only once  
Or frequented all my life:  
Provided that between us, for at least a moment,  
Was drawn a segment,  
A well-defined chord.

... remember the time  
Before the wax hardened.

From “To my friends” by Primo Levi (Levi, 1990: 5)

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## Preface to the third edition

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It is more than a decade since the second edition of this book appeared: a decade in which the perils besetting the world have increased, in which developments in linguistics and the cognitive sciences have burgeoned, and in which Chomsky has continued to make a seminal academic contribution while still devoting the majority of his time and energy to political activism and the exposure of the lies and obfuscations of business and government across a huge range.

To understand and explain these developments and to do justice to Chomsky's continuing work it seemed necessary to widen the authorial expertise, so NVS enlisted the help of NEA, who has all the relevant knowledge and experience needed.

We have again left the basic plan of the book unchanged but we have attempted to update and revise it to reflect both advances in understanding and Chomsky's role in those advances. Where we have become aware of them we have corrected any mistakes and elucidated any obscurities in the earlier editions, and we have highlighted what we perceive to be the most notable innovations. This means that apart from adding some corroborative evidence we have left the opening introductory chapter mostly unchanged. The other chapters were less straightforward. In linguistics there has been a ferment of activity. While the Minimalist Program is still the dominant paradigm within the generative tradition, it has undergone some radical changes. Accordingly, we have modified and extended Chapter 2 in an attempt to explain and make more accessible the sometimes opaque theoretical and formal innovations in current work. Apart from his technical contributions to current syntactic theory, which we explain in some detail, Chomsky has devoted the majority of his recent academic work to the study of the evolution of the language faculty and we elaborate the earlier brief discussion accordingly.

In the psychology of language and psycholinguistics the most significant changes have been the increasing, and increasingly hostile, reactions to Chomsky's postulation of an innate "Universal Grammar" (UG), and the appearance of a range of "emergentist" alternatives. In Chapter 3 we discuss a number of these alternatives, dissect the claims being made, and adjudicate appropriately. This debate is part of a wider disagreement about the nature and interpretation of "poverty of the stimulus" arguments which we revisit in

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Chapter 4 on philosophical realism. In this chapter we also explain at greater length some of the terminological and substantive complications which have led to much misunderstanding of Chomsky's work in the philosophical community. These include such basic notions as "knowledge," "(mental) representation," and "internalism," as well as the semantic "word-world" relation which Chomsky notoriously rejects.

Chapter 5, on Chomsky's political work, has been revised to cover recent developments in the Middle East, including the "Arab Spring," the continuing aftermath of 9/11, and the rise of ISIS, the threat of nuclear war and environmental catastrophe, but also to emphasize the possibility of a positive future based on human dignity and creativity, as is explicit in changes in attitude to racism and sexism, and implicit in libertarian socialism and the Occupy movement. We have also expanded the sections on Chomsky's Enlightenment liberal and anarchist forebears.

Chomsky continues to be indefatigably productive. Our updated bibliography includes some fifty new articles and books by Chomsky himself and a comparable number by others. The secondary literature is now vast, including not only contributions in the specialist domains of syntax, phonology, and semantics, but also a number devoted more specifically to Chomsky and *his* contribution. Recent helpful books in this area include: Al-Mutairi, 2014; Barsky, 2007; 2011; Bricmont & Franck, 2010; Collins, 2008a; McGilvray, 2005; Piattelli-Palmarini & Berwick, 2013; Sperlich, 2006. Further, Chomsky's website ([www.chomsky.info](http://www.chomsky.info)) lists a great number of useful resources and, as he responds positively to endless requests for interviews, one can access on the web his views on everything from "Afghanistan" via "ISIS" to "Zionism." It can be hard to keep up.

In addition to those mentioned in previous editions of the book we are grateful for comments, correspondence, questions, and intermittent outrage to Klaus Abels, Eline Busck Gundersen, Timothy Chan, Annabel Cormack, Jan Terje Faarlund, Christel Fricke, Carsten Hansen, Jonathan Knowles, Ad Neeleman, Anders Nes, Jessica Pepp, Georges Rey, Marc Richards, Amahl Smith, Malcolm Todd, Hiroyuki Uchida, Hans van de Koot, Sebastian Watzl, and Juhani Yli-Vakkuri. We are especially grateful to Marc Richards for answering our questions and providing comments on a draft of Chapter 2, to Jan Terje Faarlund for comments on Chapter 2, and to Georges Rey for comments, questions, and invaluable discussion of the whole book. They should not be held responsible for what we have done, or failed to do, with their suggestions. Closer to home, NVS is again deeply indebted to his family (Saras, Amahl, Anne, Zak, and Josh; Ivan and Janneke) for love and support as well as technical advice. NEA would like to thank his colleagues at the research centre, CSMN, and research project, *The Reflective Mind*, and the Research Council of Norway for funding both, and above all, Jui Chu for her love, patience, and support.

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## Preface to the second edition

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Much has happened in the five years since I finished the first edition of this book. Linguistics has advanced, the cognitive sciences have exploded, the world has become ever more dangerous, and Chomsky has continued to lead a dual existence as academic and activist.

To take account of all these changes is impossible. I have left the basic plan of the book unchanged, but I have made many additions and amendments. First, I have corrected mistakes where I have become aware of them, and attempted to clarify points which were unclear. Second, I have updated the notes and references where that has been within my ability. As no one can be master of all the disciplines touched on here, I have concentrated on updating those sections pertaining to areas where Chomsky's recent work has been directly relevant. As a result, the bibliography contains entries for about forty new works by Chomsky himself: over fifteen new or revised books, and another twenty-five new articles. At the same time, the secondary literature on Chomsky has also burgeoned: major works have appeared by Antony & Hornstein (2003), McGilvray (1999), Mitchell & Schoeffel (2002), Winston (2002), and many others.<sup>1</sup> These, as well as about a hundred other new entries are likewise included and, where relevant, I have simultaneously expanded the notes to include reference to these new items.

Third, I have attempted to give some indication of how the field and the world have changed since 1998. Chomsky has continued to produce seminal work in linguistics, and I have revised the relevant sections of Chapter 2 and added some discussion of developments in Minimalism accordingly. This has entailed making a number of modifications to the first edition, where I had failed to lay the relevant groundwork for some of the issues that now occupy center-stage. I have also updated the discussion of evolution, another area where Chomsky has produced interesting new work. Most obviously, I have added a section on the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath – “9-11” – which have overwhelmingly preoccupied Chomsky's

<sup>1</sup> Mitchell & Schoeffel's book is an edited transcription of discussions with Chomsky, so we list it under Chomsky's name in the bibliography: 2002h.

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time and energy. These revisions and extensions have necessitated other minor changes throughout the book.

As before I have benefited from comment, criticism, and correction from colleagues and friends. In addition to those mentioned in the original acknowledgments, I am grateful for the input of *inter alia*: Misi Brody, Dick Hudson, Annette Karmiloff-Smith, Colin Phillips, Paul Postal, Geoff Pullum, and a number of reviewers, including Martin Atkinson, Gary Milsark, and especially Philip Carr. It is reasonably certain that none of them will be entirely happy with what I have done with their contributions. I am especially grateful to Nicholas Allott, Annabel Cormack, and Ann Law, who read and commented on the entire revised manuscript. A draft of the first edition received extensive comments from Chomsky, and he later said that, while not agreeing with everything I had written, he had no serious objections. He has not seen this revised edition and is not to be blamed for my interpretation of his ideas and ideals.

As always, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the love and support of my family and friends.

## Preface to the first edition

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My greatest debt, both intellectual and personal, is to Noam Chomsky. Without his work, and inspiration, my career would have been radically different, and this book would obviously not have existed. In addition, he has made time over the years to talk and correspond with me, despite the overwhelming pressures of his innumerable other commitments. When I sent him the pre-final version of the manuscript, he replied with some sixty pages of comments and suggestions. If I have still misrepresented him in any way, he is not to blame. It has been a privilege to work in his shadow.

A number of colleagues and friends have discussed all or parts of the contents of this book over the five years or so that I have been preoccupied with it: Stefanie Anyadi, Misi Brody, Robyn Carston, Ray Cattell, Teun Hoekstra, Rita Manzini, Milena Nuti, Ianthi Tsimpli, Hans van de Koot, Nigel Vincent, and especially Annabel Cormack and Deirdre Wilson. Needless to say, they are not to be taken to agree with what I have written, nor to be blamed because I have sometimes failed to take their advice. Closer to home my family – Amahl, Ivan, and Saras – have inspired and supported me with sage advice, heartfelt encouragement, and good food.

Part of the work for this book was carried out while I was in receipt of a British Academy research grant, which was matched by a comparable period of sabbatical leave from University College London. I was also granted travel expenses by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at UCL to visit Chomsky at MIT. I am grateful to the Academy and to the College for their support, and to my colleagues for shouldering my duties while I was away.