Chomsky

Noam Chomsky is one of the leading intellectual figures of modern times. He has had a major influence on linguistics, psychology, and philosophy, and a significant effect on a range of other disciplines from anthropology to mathematics, education to literary criticism.

In this rigorous yet accessible account of Chomsky’s work and influence, Neil Smith analyzes Chomsky’s key contributions to the study of language and the study of mind. He gives a detailed and partly historical exposition of Chomsky’s linguistic theorizing, and examines the ideas (such as deep and surface structure) for which he is best known. Smith discusses the psychological and philosophical implications of Chomsky’s work, and argues that he has fundamentally changed the way we think of ourselves, gaining a position in the history of ideas on a par with that of Darwin or Descartes. Finally, he examines Chomsky’s political ideas and how these fit intellectually with his scholarly work. Smith argues that, despite Chomsky’s own disavowal of any very close connection, there are fundamental ideas of rationality, creativity, and modularity that draw together the disparate strands of his vast output. Throughout, Smith explores the controversy surrounding Chomsky’s work, and explains why he has been both adulated and vilified.

This second edition has been thoroughly updated and revised to account for Chomsky’s most recent work, including his continued contributions to linguistics (in particular new developments in the Minimalist Program), his further discussion on evolution, and his extensive work on the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath. The bibliography and notes have been expanded to account for the rapidly growing secondary literature on Chomsky’s work, as well as the many new works by Chomsky himself. It will be welcomed by students and researchers across the disciplines of linguistics, philosophy, cognitive science and politics, and anyone with an interest in the impact of Chomsky’s work.

Neil Smith is Professor and Head of Linguistics at University College London. He is the author of *An Outline Grammar of Nupe* (1967); *The Acquisition of Phonology* (Cambridge University Press, 1973); *Modern Linguistics: The Results of Chomsky’s Revolution* (with Deirdre Wilson, 1979); *The Twitter Machine: Reflections on Language* (1989); *The Mind of a Savant* (with Ianthi Tsimpli, 1995), *Language, Bananas and Bonobos* (2002), and he has edited a volume on *Mutual Knowledge* (1982). In addition, he has published around one hundred and fifty essays, articles and reviews in a wide variety of publications, including *Journal of Linguistics*, *Lingua*, *Journal of Neurolinguistics*, and *Glot International*. He was elected FBA in 1999 and an Honorary Member of the Linguistic Society of America in 2000.
Dedication to my 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 second edition

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. Nevertheless, 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. 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 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 Phillip 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.
Acknowledgments for the first edition

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.