An Introduction to Syntax : A Minimalist Approach

I: Introduction : Basic Concepts

The first basic concept to be discussed is related to the fact that descriptive Linguistics has concerned itself primarily with spoken language : for the linguist of the Transformational Grammar this debate that Linguistics should concern itself primarily with spoken rather than written language is a non-issue. This is because Transformational Grammarian is seeking to describe the native speaker's *competence* (i.e. his linguistic knowledge ,which is a mental property that has two physical manifestations :spoken and written language). He studies " *language* (in all its physical instantiations)" (A. Radford ,1989: 9);i.e. he does "not study only the spoken language, or only the written language." (A. Radford ,1989: 9)

The second basic concept is related to the fact that all native speakers have to some extent their own individual way of speaking (i.e. an *idiolect*) and the fact that speakers with a common geographical background may share a common *dialect* while speakers from a common social background may share a common *sociolect*. However, despite the fact that the task of the linguist is to describe what people actually say (and this has lead to paying greater attention to the different dialects in different languages and to the tendency to accept these different dialects as different varieties of that language since they are not linguistically inferior) , Chomsky remarks in *Aspect* (1965:3) that "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener ,in a completely homogeneous speech community." In other words, Chomsky assumes that speech communities are homogeneous ,contrary to