

*Universal Grammar:* All languages are similar in fundamental ways, allowing us to acquire any L1 quickly and easily by hypothesizing, from the positive evidence we hear, what the language-specific settings of our L1 are. We don't have to learn what all languages have in common—only what our particular language has that is different from other languages. Research into UG has focused almost exclusively on syntax, and the differences among the syntactic rules of languages.

*Parameters:* Languages do, of course, differ in many ways. Acquiring our L1, we find out, for instance, whether its complements precede or follow its heads; whether transitive verbs and their objects must be strictly adjacent; whether reflexives (such as 'herself') can refer to NPs in the same phrase or different phrases; whether all sentences require a subject; whether prepositions can be stranded; whether an NP can be followed by an infinitive, as in 'I want you to go now', and so on. These are all ways in which languages can differ (in addition, of course, to having different sound systems, different semantics, different pragmatics, and different lexicons).

Learning a second language involves somehow acquiring the parameter settings of that language, or using the language as if you had acquired them. Some tasks of this nature are easier than others, as shown in the table on p. 108 of the textbook. It has been suggested that L2 learners do not acquire parameter settings, or reset parameters, the way L1 learners do: if the Pro-Drop parameter includes not only the null subject option but also subject-verb inversion and wh- extraction (which may be the case in L1), it appears that L2 learners of languages without the Pro-Drop parameter (such as English) do not acquire all of these at once. They acquire the null subject setting quickly, but the other two come late, if at all. Speakers of languages with the Pro-Drop parameter (such as Greek) learn quickly not to invert subjects and verbs, but take time to learn the other two settings. Perhaps L2 learners, rather than resetting parameters or learning new settings, simply misanalyze the L2 data they hear, and make it conform to their L1 settings. When this is impossible, L2 learners seldom learn the new settings and fossilize at that point.

Parametric differences between languages appear to explain L1 transfer, incompleteness, and staged development in SLA. It is less clear that systematicity across learners with different L1s, and variability within individual learners, are explainable by considering parametric variation.

Language teachers' familiarity with parametric variation can help them understand their students' performance. If you are teaching a non-Pro-Drop language such as English or French to speakers of a Pro-Drop language such as Spanish or Greek, you can understand why your students find it fairly easy to insert pronouns in main VPs, but still have difficulty with expletive 'empty' subjects like 'it' and 'there'. The notions of UG and parametric variation can help to explain a hierarchy of errors and difficulties, which in turn can help teachers and textbook writers to plan—a return to Contrastive Analysis, but on a much more sophisticated level than simply looking for differences between languages. It is an exciting and expanding area of research in SLA, one teachers should keep up with.