

## Second Language Acquisition and Theories of Universal Grammar

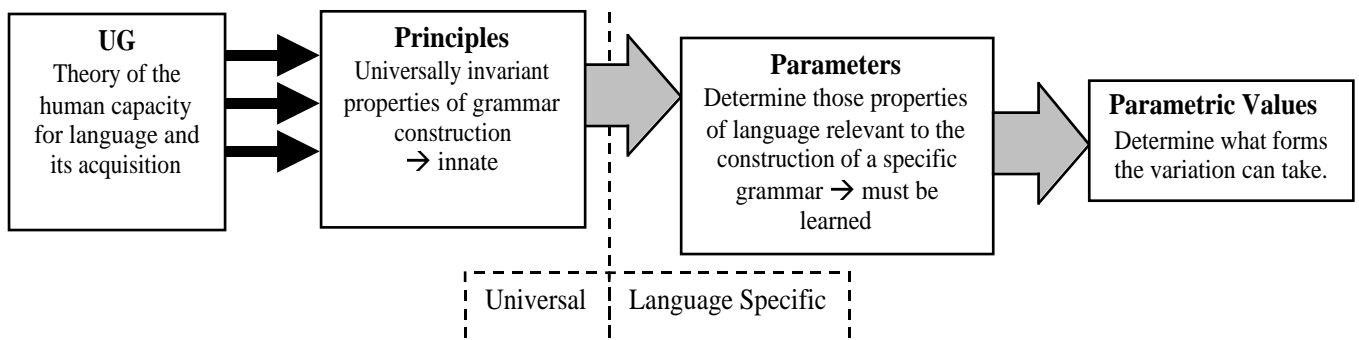
As the research of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is developing and becoming more theory oriented there is a need to deal with two problems in the L2 acquisition theory, namely:

- the **Logical Problem**: How do speakers come to know more than is present in the input (L2 competence transcending the input)? A property theory explaining the components that constitute the system that is responsible for LA to take place is needed.
- the **Developmental Problem**: Why are some properties acquired earlier than others? A transition theory explaining the processes of SLA is required is needed.

According to Atkinson, a valid acquisition theory must consist of a theory that explains what the properties of the components of SLA are (solving the logical problem), how SLA is taking place and at what stage certain aspects of L2 are acquired (solving the developmental problem) (Gregg 1996, 66-67).

A starting point to look at SLA is the **principles and parameter setting model** which is the most promising advancement in L2 acquisition research. Flynn presents three hypotheses to explain role of UG in SLA (→ logical problem):

- **“No Access” Hypothesis**  
UG is totally inaccessible to the adult L2 learner; learning takes place in terms of non-linguistic learning strategies
- **“Partial Access” Hypothesis**  
UG is partially available to the learner; only those parametric values characterising the L1 grammar are available, the rest must be learnt in terms of non-linguistic learning strategies
- **“Full Access” Hypothesis**  
UG is fully available; differences in patterns of acquisition between L1 and L2 learners and the lack of completeness can be accounted for in other ways.



Another approach is to think of UG as the theory of the language faculty but also of the initial state. Initial state is to be understood as having a set of finite discrete principles available at any language specific ‘event’. This definition leads to two possible models of LA:

- **Maturation Model**: UG over time becomes the language specific grammar, i.e. UG and L1 are indissociable from each other → UG is only fully available until L1 is fully acquired.
- **Strong Continuity Hypothesis**: UG remains distinct from the language specific grammar and remains constant over time and is available continuously.

Revisions in linguistic theory, proposing a **Minimalist Program**, shed a new light on the role of UG in SLA. It seems though, that this new theory is compatible with the approach to language acquisition embracing the principle and parameter setting model (into which also the SCH fits in). Minimalist Theory proposes that languages are based on simple principles that interact to form often intricate structures. The Language faculty is not redundant and can still be the basis for grammatical mapping → integration of UG principles in the grammar of the specific TL.

### Bibliography:

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