

CLASSES 11–12: PRINCIPLES AND PARAMETERS

PARAMETER SWITCHBOARD

- UG as a rule-network akin to a circuit with a set of on/off switches
- *wh*-parameter: front a *wh*-phrase or leave it in situ (SpecCP)
- *pro*-drop parameter: allow a null subject or not (EPP/SpecTP)
- Infl-parameter: enforce verb movement or not (V-to-I/adverbs)
- head parameter: head-initial or head-final (X–YP vs YP–X/different?)

- | | | | |
|-----|----|---|------------------|
| (1) | a. | What will you buy tomorrow? | <i>English</i> |
| | b. | You will buy what tomorrow? | <i>Chinglish</i> |
| (2) | a. | (I think that) he will buy a car. | <i>English</i> |
| | b. | (Think.1SG that) will.3SG buy a car. | <i>Greeklis</i> |
| (3) | a. | John quickly/never buys a car. | <i>English</i> |
| | b. | John buys quickly/never a car. | <i>Frenghis</i> |
| (4) | a. | [_{vP} John give the book to Mary] | <i>English</i> |
| | b. | [_{vP} John book-the Mary-to give] | <i>Japanglis</i> |

Is variation in language (biology) endless? By today, linguists (biologists) have come to understand that variation is severely constrained by the cognitive (genetic) constraints imposed by the very system that makes language (life) possible (from Boeckx 2010: 88).

Question: How many parameters are there? Say, 100 — then: 2^{100} possible languages...

Revisit the *wh*-parameter: Multiple *wh*-questions (e.g. Chinese vs English vs Russian).

- | | | | |
|-----|----|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| (5) | a. | John will not buy what when why? | <i>Chinglis</i> |
| | b. | Why will John not buy what when? | <i>Englis</i> |
| | c. | Why what when John will not buy? | <i>Ruslis</i> |

PARAMETER HIERARCHIES

There is a clear interdependency among parameters. Hornstein *et al.* (2005: 4, fn. 4):

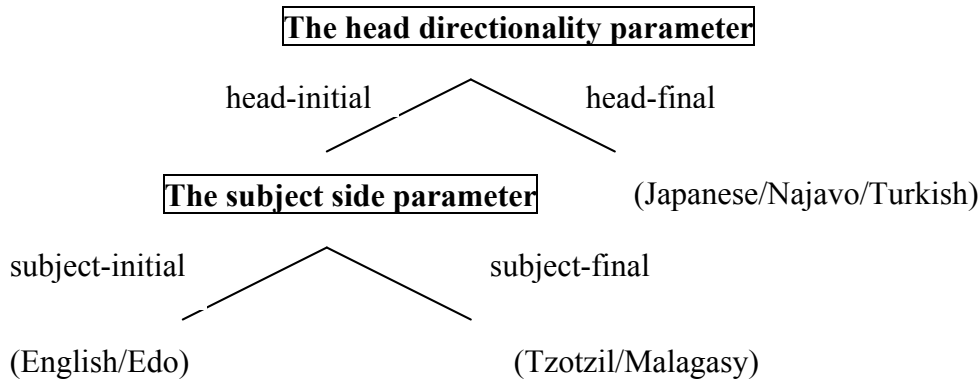
Take, for example, the null-subject or *pro*-drop parameter (see Rizzi 1980), arguably one of the better studied ones (see the papers collected in Jaeggli and Safir 1989 for pertinent discussion). It has been argued that languages that have an “on”-setting, thus allowing for null-subjects, also show lack of *that*-trace effects and overt expletives, and allow for free subject inversion, long *wh*-movement of subjects, and empty resumptive pronouns in embedded clauses (see Chomsky 1981: 240ff.).

- (6) Ho trovato il libro. *missing subject*
 have.1SG found the book
 ‘*(I) found the book.’
- (7) Ha mangiato Giovanni. *free inversion in simple clauses*
 has.3SG eaten Giovanni
 ‘Giovanni ate.’
- (8) l’uomo [che mi domando [chi abbia visto]] *long wh-movement of subject*
 the.man that me wonder.1SG who has seen
 interpretation: ‘the man *x* such that I wonder who *x* saw’
- (9) Ecco la ragazza [che mi domando [chi crede [che possa VP]]] *empty embedded RP*
 here.is the girl that me wonder.1SG who thinks that may.3SG VP
 ‘This is the girl who I wonder who thinks that *(she) may VP.’
- (10) Chi credi [che partirà]? *apparent violation of the *[that-t] filter*
 who think.2SG that will.leave.3SG
 ‘Who do you think (*that) will leave?’

Word order	Languages number	%	Parametric settings
SOV	180	45	head-final and subject-initial
SVO	168	42	head-initial and subject-initial
VSO	37	9	[to be discussed at some point]
VOS	12	3	head-initial and “rare” subject-final
OVS	5	1	head-final plus “rare” VP-movement
OSV	0	0	violates the object-verb constraint

Table 1: Parametric settings of basic word orders in natural languages

Baker (2001) proposes a parameter hierarchy on the basis of relevant data:



The bottom line is that the linguistic system is as universal as the vision system: Every typically developing, able-bodied human being knows language and can see. Variation we clearly find in the former, and which may be absent in the latter, might better be compared with variation other faculties of the human mind/brain and cognition, such as the human moral sense or music instinct. However, in order to express the *parameters* of UG properly, we simply need to know more what the exact *principles* are (if we want to develop the P&P route), or generally: rules of languages...

References

Baker, M. 2001. *The Atoms of Language: The Mind’s Hidden Rules of Grammar*. New York: Basic Books.
 Chomsky, N. 1981. *Lectures on Government and Binding: The Pisa Lectures*. Dordrecht: Foris.
 Hornstein, N., J. Nunes & K.K. Grohmann. 2005. *Understanding Minimalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.