

3.3. The motivation for principles, parametric variation and parameter-setting in modern comparative linguistics

To begin with, parameters constitute the framework within which a clear distinction can be made on the syntactic, lexical, phonological and morphological level. Parameters specify the range of variation apparent in natural languages while being, on the one hand, flexible to account for linguistic diversity and, on the other, sufficiently restrictive to have a bearing on the relative ease of L1 acquisition (Ayoun 2003: 71/72). The rationale for parameters is derived from cross-linguistic comparative studies, and they lend themselves useful to dividing up linguistic space, with the result being that interactions between various values of parameters supplant linguists with the potent linguistic data (Villiers & Roeper 2011: 137). UG being a highly structured and constrained system of principles and parameters with an array of available options for parameter setting induced by triggering data, it follows that parameter setting subject to typological considerations and contrastive realizations can yield substantial evidence due to the set values of parameters that derive complex consequences to a particular language under investigation, with the result being that any proposal must be rigorously held accountable to this evidence within the framework of principles-and-parameters model, which is in itself a great empirical challenge, considering the shift of perspective from the descriptive adequacy to explanatory adequacy. However, both seem to be mutually inclusive to be in position to account for the phenomenon of the faculty of language (Chomsky 1986: 148). Chomsky adds that even though a difference in a single parameter setting has serious ramifications for a particular language: “the assignment of a single parameter derive complex consequences, yielding a cluster of different properties, as evidenced in comparative studies” (Chomsky 1986: 151), this linguistic ‘radicalism’ is somewhat minimized given that major respects of language resemble the universal nature of language; that “they are cast in the same mould” (Hornstein and Lightfoot 1981: 42). In retrospect, Chomsky claims that the wide-ranging complexities of language may be propitiously

approachable and deemed answerable, given the framework of principles and parameters model and the density of empirical data applicable from parametric variation, so Chomsky claims while adducing his rationale for a positive outcome of his proposal:

As concepts and principles become simpler, argument and inference tend to become more complex - a consequence that is naturally very much to be welcomed. We hope that it will ultimately be possible to derive complex properties of particular natural languages, and even to determine the full core grammar of a language with all of its empirical consequences, by setting the parameters of general linguistic theory (universal grammar, UG) in one of the permissible ways. While this goal should always have been an obvious one, it is only quite recently that the task could actually be considered in a serious way, a development that is in my opinion a sign of significant progress in linguistic theory (Chomsky 1982: 3).

Needless to say, the principles-and-parameters model has generated a wide spectrum of analyzable, observable data on the basis of parametric variation whereby applied values of parameters bear fruition to new assumptions, as evidenced by: “in this way we can derive observable differences between languages (or between different diachronic stages of one language) from elementary contrast, the assignment of a different value to a parameter” (Haegeman & Guéron 1999: 596). Nonetheless, the initialization of any potential inquiry is deemed achievable as long as it pertains to the limits of parametric variation, which is assumed to be a starting point by the advocates of the approach. Those limits are attributed to parameterization based on the extent to which principles of UG are constrained (parameterized) among a variety of languages, and on comparative evidence (Jankowsky 1995: 334). In this respect, Chomsky eloquently asserts that “we heavily rely on grammar-internal consideration and comparative evidence, that is, on the possibilities for constructing a reasonable theory of UG and considering its explanatory power in a variety of language types, with an eye open to the eventual possibility of adducing evidence of other kinds” (1981: 9). As new theoretical innovations admit of a range of possible interpretations of leading ideas and, above all, permit relating to observed but unexplained phenomena, parametric variation inevitably can assist researchers with the selection of

appropriate data but, at the same time, cannot preclude the possibility of making further claims in a particular regard in comparative studies (Chomsky 1981: 1). Obviously, In every potential undertaking it is obligatory to base one's comparative inquiry on the amalgamation of universal features, language-specific realizations and the degree to which the specificity of universality of certain interpretations is connected with, ideally, a finite array of parameters. In other words, every investigation puts reliance on the adherence to principles first, then its focal point of study is directed towards parameterized principles, underlying the notion of parameterization, and moreover it yields an extensive coverage of idiosyncratic features, which are naturally of the least importance (Fuertes 2001: 19/20); however residual and peripheral, and specific, they might import certain interesting insights, which are always welcome and desirable since the advancement towards the delineation of a general linguistic theory cannot proceed auspiciously without taking account of highly specific mechanisms, conditions and properties governing linguistic systems (Chomsky 1981: 2). It is further assumed that contemporary comparative grammar constitutes a major conceptual and paradigmatic shift from 19th century comparative work that was largely based on disclaimed hypotheses whose main objective was the study of the relationship between languages in terms of a common ancestry. The current comparative grammar, by contrast, embodies the significant, explanatory paradigm that is concerned with the theory of grammar that establishes the relationship between all languages and underlies language as an innate human component, the faculty of language. For example, binding theory, one of the most thoroughly scrutinized domains of the principles of UG, has made substantial contributions to account for cross-linguistic variation in binding from a parameterized theory of binding principles (Freidin 1992: 1/4). Nonetheless, principles and parameters constituting invariance and variance as they do, the principles-and-parameters model makes also allowances for diachronic developments in language. This can be starkly illustrated by the strength of the shift of prominence in certain linguistic features between Old English and Modern English; for instance, case agreement and morphology, and SOV word order were the features that assigned specific characteristics to

Old English, whereas Modern English, having undergone certain transformations in this respect, has almost completely dispensed with this specification, resulting in resetting the object parameter and following SVO word-order, unlike Old English being similar in this respect to German, and in having case feature only visible on pronouns (Haegeman & Guéron: 1999: 594). Furthermore, obvious from erstwhile idealizations of the notions briefly outlined, a single value assigned to a parameter of the common ancestry, ostensibly superficially unrelated, may derive complex consequences, yielding a wide range of properties, which has proved to be axiomatic thanks to comparative studies. The engaging investigation as such is thus greatly beneficial for the structure of principles and parameters of UG to be determined by dint of ever-increasing, accessible data from comparative linguistics, which do provide identifiable and verifiable, observable phenomena. This introspection has made substantial contributions to certain areas of study, notably the Romance Languages, which, when approached on reflection within the principles-and-parameter model, represent typologically different languages as the result of several changes in parameters interacting with principles and attest to the conviction that they can be acquired with approximated ease and limited data quite consistently (Chomsky 1986a: 151/152). The principal object of research must ultimately adhere to the indispensability of two notions, namely descriptive adequacy and explanatory adequacy, specifying conditions that have set guidelines for research paradigms largely based on comparative inquiries. A particular grammar is sufficiently reliable and descriptive when it accommodates a wide range of phenomena by specifying an extensive account of the properties of language of various sorts, the grammar that is pertinent to the idealized steady state attained. Conversely, explanatory adequacy is related to the conviction that any steady state attained under idealized 'boundary conditions' set by experience must be answerable to a uniform and universal structure of the human language endowment, the faculty of language, to the extent that properties of UG determine the attainment of a steady state; to put it briefly, descriptive explanatory yields a wide-ranging coverage of complexities and varieties of rule systems, while explanatory adequacy requires that language

structure be invariant (Chomsky 2000: 7) as the species-specific component of the human brain responsible for mastering and using any natural language whose perplexing nature and intricacies must be scrutinized and comprehended in correspondence with cognitive sciences alongside biological determination (Chomsky 2002: 1). Apart from offering intriguing insights into the logical problem of language acquisition, the principles-parameters model can also be an adequate approach within which language developmental processes and patterns can be accounted for in terms of how parameters are actually fixed, or if it is possible that they can be reset in L1 (the supposition that was dismissed in this paper), underlying the mechanisms that govern parameter-setting (Chomsky 2002: 16), which extend their jurisdiction to approaches to second language acquisition, taking into account transfer, learnability, variation and developmental process of L2 in relation to parametric variation and parameter-setting variables (Towell & Hawkins 1994).

3.4. Conclusion

The interwoven interconnectedness of principles, parameters, parametric variation and parameter setting has been embraced from an adequate introspection, offering the insights into the complexities overriding interactive processes, which make reference to a structural, dynamic and variational character of the overall nature of the phenomenon. The interaction of the principles and parameter settings leading to the emergence of all natural languages hence represents far-reaching implications ranging from descriptive to explanatory adequacy. The descriptive attests to the effectiveness of compiling an arguably inexhaustible source of obtainable linguistic data, consequently serving a very useful purpose to be capable of arriving at a unified, solidified invariant characterization of the Faculty of Language. Obviously speaking, the schematization of that undertaking must