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#### SUMMARY

This paper explores a biolinguistic approach to second language acquisition by combining Di Sciullo's (2011) Directional Asymmetry Principle with Rizzi's (2010) refined analysis of Merge. My hypothesis is that grammatical development in a second language can be determined by increasingly greater asymmetrical relations along four sequential stages: i) Fluctuating Primary Merge Asymmetry, ii) Stabilised Primary Merge Asymmetry, iii) Phrasal Merge Asymmetry, and iv) Extended Phrasal Merge Asymmetry. This hypothesis is tested in relation to the development of Russian copular sentences, which display a variety of complex symmetry-breaking processes, and supporting evidence is provided by a small-scale cross-sectional study of 5 learners of Russian as a second language at different proficiency levels.