2.2.1: Structural Learning:

Although there are universal principles which are innately acquired ,there are also language-particular aspects of grammatical structure which children have to learn as part of the task of acquiring their native language. In other words, language acquisition involves both *lexical learning* and *structural learning*. Concentrating on *structural learning,* Chomsky says that it is limited to those *parameters* (i.e. dimensions, or aspects) of grammatical structure which are subject to language-particular variation (i.e. which vary from one language to another). In order to determine just what aspects of the grammatical structure of their native language children have to learn, we have to examine the range of parametric variation in grammatical structure between different (adult) natural languages. For example, Italian and Arabic differ from English in that finite verbs (i.e. verbs which carry present /past etc. tense) license a null (i.e. missing but understood) subject, as shown in 15.

15.

(i) Maria speaks French.
(ii) * speaks French
(iii) (Maria) parla francese
(iv) (Maria) bititkallim fransaawi

Thus, "finite verbs in a null subject language like Italian license either overt or covert (=null) subjects, but in a non-null subject language like English, finite verbs license only overt subjects ,not null subjects." (A.Radford,1997: 17) In describing these differences between these two types of languages, we call Italian and Arabic as