Not too long ago the consensus in the field was that during the early stages of language development young children did not have grammatical categories or relations of any sort, but rather that their grammars had a semantic basis (cf. Bowerman, 1973; Schlesinger, 1971, for example). A notable problem for such analyses was to account for the transition to an adult-like, syntactically-based system. Current theories which propose that functional categories are lacking or underspecified in early grammars, face a similar challenge. The latter hypothesis, which I will henceforth refer to as the small clause hypothesis, following Radford (1986, 1990), may in fact have a harder task in that the kinds of semantic bootstrapping mechanisms which have been posited for the acquisition of lexical categories, such as Noun and Verb (cf. Wexler and Culicover, 1980; Grimshaw, 1981), do not readily extend to functional categories, such as INFL or COMP, which have no clear referential function.

The question of whether children have functional categories is a question not only about the correct description of early stages of language development, but also about the kinds of mechanisms available to the child in constructing a grammatical system. If functional categories are indeed missing from early language, as has been proposed by Radford (1986, 1990), Guilfoyle and Noonan (1988), Platzack (1990) and under somewhat different assumptions, Lebeaux (1988), what are the learning and/or maturational mechanisms responsible for the emergence of these categories? This is a central question which the small clause hypothesis must address if it is to provide an adequate account of grammatical development.

A second challenge to the small clause kind of analysis is an empirical one. With the exception of Platzack's work on Swedish, most of the support for this hypothesis comes from English child language (Radford, 1986, 1990; Guilfoyle and Noonan, 1988; Lebeaux, 1988). However, there is a broad range of empirical data from languages other than English which cannot be readily accounted for under the assumption that early grammars...
lack functional heads. For example, in many languages, children have knowledge of various inflectional processes such as subject-verb agreement and Case assignment, as well as the syntactic process of verb movement. In this paper I will focus on these cross-linguistic data and I will discuss the empirical problems which they present for the small clause hypothesis. I should point out that for the most part the data that I will discuss are not new. However, these data have either been overlooked by proponents of the small clause hypothesis or, where they have been considered, they are often not given the weight they deserve.

2. EVIDENCE FOR THE I SYSTEM

2.1. Subject-verb agreement and Case assignment

One language in which children give clear evidence of an I(NFL) system is Italian. Hyams (1983, 1986a), Schaeffer (1990), Pizzuto and Caselli (1991) and others have noted that Italian children between the ages of 1;10 and 2;0 (and for some children as early as 1;8) have productive subject-verb agreement for at least the singular present tense paradigm (1,2,3 person singular). Examples are given in (1).¹

(1) a. (1;11) Tu leggi il libro.

You [nom.] read [2nd per. sing.] the book

b. (1;11) Io mangio la pera.

I [nom.] eat [1st per. sing.] the pear

c. (2;1) Cosa fa il tore?

What does [3rd per. sing.] the tape recorder (do)?

d. (1;11) Chelo micino no è piccino.

That kitty not is [3rd per. sing.] little

Note that the lack of productivity for plural agreement markers is not due to errors in agreement, but rather to the fact that children simply tend not to use many plural subjects at this age. Valian (1990) notes a similar phenomenon in English, where young children use only singular pronouns.²