

# On the Syntactic and Semantic Property of the Causative Construction

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**Abstract:** The main topic of investigation in this paper is the causative construction. In English the causative constructions involve several verbs such as *make, have, let, get*, and also are concerned with other verbs accompanied by *into/out of*, while in German the causative verb is practically limited to *lassen* 'let'. However, *lassen* itself shows some very unique syntactic phenomena, and covers much wider range of the semantic fields to which various kind of causative expressions would be related in English. A detailed characterization of the syntactic behavior of *lassen* will be given in the later portion of this study.

**Key Word:** Causative construction, Word order, 'Faire-Par' construction

## 1. Introduction

Human beings speak languages, and natural languages are generally recognized as being composed on the basis of its grammar. However, there are numerous languages existing in the world, and a casual glimpse of them would lead us to the conclusion that the elements of sentences in various languages have no regularity at all.

Although many languages exhibit considerable variation in major sentence constituent

order, and the order of constituents in some languages has even been characterized as syntactically very free, it is commonly acknowledged that no genuine free word order language exists in this world. Needless to say, if word order in language is not random, the possible orderings and the condition imposed on them must be stipulated in a grammar.

The main purpose of this paper is to provide a basis for clarifying the complement of causative verbs in German, together with the more detailed syntactic characterization of the word order in the matrix clauses in German, as seen in the italicized portion of (1):

(1) Er ließ sich von einem berühmten Arzt operieren.

*(He let himself by an famous surgeon operate)*

'he had a famous surgeon operate himself'

It should be quickly noticed that in German *operieren* 'operate' is in its infinitival form, not its past participial form although the semantic relation between the postverbal elements can be characterized as passive, namely 'er wurde geoperiert.'" How can this syntactic peculiarity be accounted for?

## 2. Principles of Word Order

In his principles and parameter approach, Chomsky proposed an parameter regarding the cross-linguistic word order. Languages are said to differ as to whether they have the order Verb-Object (VO), as in English embedded clauses, or the order Object-Verb (OV), as in German embedded ones:

(2) a. Mary said that Hans bought the ball.

b. Mary said that Hans [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V</sub> bought [<sub>NP</sub> the ball]]]

(3) a. Mary sagt, daß Hans den Ball kaufte.

b Mary sagt, daß Hans [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> den Ball [<sub>V</sub> kaufte]]]

Chomsky (1986a) has suggested that the difference between English-type and German-type languages illustrated in (2-3) can be accounted for in terms of the parameter shown in (4) below, understood to be associated with X-bar theory. The parameter involved in this situation is referred to as the Head Parameter. It has two values: Head-first (or Head-initial) and Head-last (or Head-final). The former value yields the order shown in (2b), which is taking V-O order and is found in English-type languages, and the latter value yields the order shown in (3b), which is taking O-V order and is found in German-type languages. Accordingly, the difference between English and German responsible for the observed difference in word order reduces to the assumption that English selects value (i) whereas German selects value (ii):

(4) Head Parameter:

- (i) Head-initial
- (ii) Head-final

In English, where heads select their complement to the right, I will precede VP. In German, where heads select their complement to the left, I will follow VP. This prediction is borne out by the example below; That German I follows VP is shown in (5) by the order of the finite auxiliary relation to the non-finite main verb, assuming that the auxiliary occupies I<sup>1</sup>.

(5) Mary sagt, daß Hans den Ball gekauft hat.

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<sup>1</sup>However, not all head categories in German select their complement in the same direction as V and I. It is to be noticed that the linear relation of the complementizer to IP in (5) is the same as in English, suggesting that C selects its IP-complement to the right in German, too. The prepositions in German also resemble their counterparts in English in that they select their complement to the right.

### 3. Verb Second Phenomena

Let us further comment on the structural property of the German sentences, turning to the syntactic behavior of the matrix clauses. The Germanic languages, including German of course but not excluding English<sup>2</sup> completely, have the finite verb in the second position in declarative matrix clauses, and in the first position in direct yes/no questions. These facts are often referred to as the Verb Second Phenomenon. We will then call the languages which exhibit this phenomenon as the Verb-Second languages or simply the V2 languages.

The V2 languages can be characterized by the word order of declarative main clauses and yes/no questions. In the V2 languages, a topicalized element immediately precedes the finite verb, whereas in English it is normally located in front of the subject, as illustrated below:

(6) Ge: Peter hat wahrscheinlich den Ball gekauft.

*(Peter has Probably the ball bought)*

\*Wahrscheinlich Peter hat den Ball gekauft.

Wahrscheinlich hat Peter den Ball gekauft.

(7) Eg: John had probably bought the book.

Probably, John had bought the book.

\*Probably, had John bought the book.

Direct yes/no questions are introduced by the finite verb in all Germanic languages. However, whereas in the V2 languages this description applies to all types of verbs including main verbs as well as auxiliaries, English has to insert the auxiliary *do* in the case where no other auxiliary verb is present. See the following examples for the

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<sup>2</sup>English has the syntactic characteristic called residual V2 in the sense that the finite auxiliary verb is required to be in the 'second position' in *wh*-questions and sentences with topicalized negative elements.

illustration of this point:

(8) Eg: Had John bought the book?

\*Bought John the book?

Did John buy the book?

(9) Ge: Hat Peter den Ball gekauft?

(*Has Peter the ball bought?*)

Kaufte Peter den Ball?

\*Tat Peter kaufen den Ball?

The V2 phenomena seem inconsistent with the word order in the embedded clause in (5), repeated below:

(5) Mary sagt, daß Hans den Ball gekauft hat

The [V I] word order characteristic of embedded clauses is completely excluded in root sentences in (6-7). German has the underlying word order [O V] and [VP I] as was shown in the forgoing discussion, then it is to be explained why this order is not maintained in the root clauses. The best solution is to say that the V2 languages including German has the special constraint which restricts finite verbs in root sentences to the 'second position.' This constraint is typically known as the V2 Constraint. Here we are left with the identification of nature of this 'second position,' however, we do not go into any further detail at this moment <sup>3</sup>.

#### 4. Syntactic Properties of the Causative Construction

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<sup>3</sup>For the argument of this position, see Platzack (1986) and Weerman (1988) among many others.

#### 4.1. English Causative Construction

When we look at the cross-linguistic syntactic phenomena, divergences between different languages are very considerable, and very intriguing especially in the field of causation. At the one extreme, there appear to be languages with hardly any causatives at all. The Australian Aboriginal language Kayardilt may be a case in point (See Wierzbicka (1988)). At the other extreme, there are languages such as English, with a wide range of causative constructions, especially in the area of human interaction: various *make* causatives, *have* causatives, *get* causatives, *into* causatives (e.g. "X tricked/talked/manoeuvred Y into doing Z") and so on. Wierzbicka (1988) characterized English causative construction as 'analytic', which focuses on the presumed relations between causes and effects. For the illustration of this point, she presents the following classification:

X made Y V <sub>intentional</sub> -INF	(e.g. X made Y wash the dishes)
X made Y V <sub>non-intentional</sub> -INF	(e.g. X made Y cry)
X made Y ADJ	(e.g. X made Y furious)
X had Y V <sub>intentional</sub> -INF	(e.g. X had Y wash the dishes)
X had X'Z V <sub>intentional</sub> -ed	(e.g. X had her boots mended)
X had Y V <sub>non-intentional</sub> -ing	(e.g. X had Y crying)
X had Y V <sub>intentional</sub> -ING	(e.g. X had Y staying with her)
X got Y to V <sub>intentional</sub> -INF	(e.g. X got Y to wash the dishes)
X got Y ADJ	(e.g. X got Y furious)
X got herself V <sub>intentional</sub> -ed	(e.g. X got herself kicked out)
X V <sub>intentional</sub> -ed Y into doing Z	(e.g. X talked/tricked Y into doing Z)
X V <sub>asp</sub> -ed Y V-ing	(e.g. X kept Y wanting)

In addition to these, the following examples can be pointed out:

X let Y V <sub>intentional</sub> -INF	(e.g. X let Y talk) <sup>4</sup>
X caused/obliged/forced Y to V <sub>intentional</sub> -INF	(e.g. X caused Y to wash the dishes)
X V <sub>intentional</sub> -ed Y out of doing Z	(e.g. X trapped Y out of doing Z)
X pushed Y into NOM	(e.g. X pushed Y into marriage)

As is obvious from the variation above, English causative sentences cannot be integrated into one unit, and there are of course a great deal of semantic difference between the various verbs, such as *make*, *have*, *get*, *let*, *cause*, *force*, etc.

## 4.2. German Causative Construction

### 4.2.1. Introduction

In German the causative verb *lassen* has several distinctive characteristics compared with the English ones. In German the causative verb is practically confined to *lassen*, while in English we have several kind of causative verbs as is just mentioned. There are also of course semantic differences between the various type verbs that can be used as a causative verb such as *make*, *have*, *let*, *cause*, *force*, etc., as we have just mentioned above. Thus it can be asserted that *lassen* covers a much wider range of semantic field which several verbs in English are expected to cover:

(10) Lassen wir Vater noch ein bißchen schlafen. Er ist so müde.

(*let we father yet a little sleep. He is so tired*)

'Let our father sleep a little more'

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<sup>4</sup>Refer *Collins Cobuild English Grammar*, p.193.

(11) Leutnant Müller ließ alle Mann antreten.

(*Lieutenant Müller lets all men up-line*)

'Lieutenant Müller made his men line up'

It is manifest from the examples above that *lassen's* semantic field ranges from the simple suggestion or advice to the very mandatory demand or request. Therefore, it is sometimes translated into English *let* and sometimes into *make*, as the case may be.

Look at the sentence below:

(12) \*Er läßt mich reich.

(*He makes me rich*)

'He makes me rich'

(13) Der Hut macht dich alt.

(*The hat makes you old*)

'The hat makes you look old'

As is evident from the sentences above, *lassen* does not take the 'accusative with adjective' construction. This is supplemented by *machen* 'make', which can participate in the syntactic circumstance involving an adjective.

#### 4.2.2. 'Faire-Par' Construction

Moreover, it is surprising that German causative verb *lassen* never takes a past participial form within its complement when English equivalent does:

(14) Er ließ sich von einem berühmten Arzt operieren<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>This infinitival form 'operieren' is referred to in German grammar as 'Ersatzinfinitiv,' which is literally translated into 'substitutional infinitive.' This special form will be made mention of in the following discussion. See Schulz & Griesbach (1967) among others.



(He let himself by an famous surgeon operate)

-*implicates*, 'Er wird von einem berühmten Arzt geoperiert.'-

'He had a famous surgeon operate himself'

(15) Der Vater läßt einen Brief von seinem Sohn schreiben.

(The father lets the letter by his son write)

-*implicates*, 'Der Brief wird von seinem Sohn geschrieben.'-

'The father had a letter written by his son'

(Schulz & Griesbach (1967: 477))

This past participial form in the English translation is asserted to have been derived from the passive past participle, which means that this past participial form is the passive participle in its origin because the post verbal two elements forms one single constituent. Therefore, many linguists have been imparting a special designation to the accusative object accompanied by the past participle within English causative complements, such as 'nexus,' to which we owe Jespersen (1961), or 'small clause,' to which we owe Chomsky (1981) and Stowell (1981) among others. While in German, the infinitival form<sup>6</sup> is used instead of the past participial form, and this infinitival form is called 'Ersatzinfinitiv (infinitive as a substitute).' That is, in this particular syntactic circumstance the embedded verb within the causative *lassen* complement does not bear its regular past participial form 'geoperiert' or 'geschrieben' but instead takes the infinitival form 'operieren' or 'schreiben,' respectively. For the more detailed analysis of this construction, see section 5.

#### 4.2.3. 'Lassen' in Its Perfective Aspect

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<sup>6</sup>This construction dubbed since Kayne (1975) FAIRE-PAR (FP) is present both in Romance languages (Italian, French, Spanish, Catalan) and in Germanic languages (German, Dutch, West Flemish, Danish, etc.) Mysteriously enough, English is devoid of this construction. For the historical explanation of its disappearance in English, see Guasti (1990).

Another conspicuous characteristic of *lassen* is shown in its perfective context.

Witness the following examples:

(16) a. Ich habe den Brief schreiben lassen.

(I have the letter write let)

'I had someone write the letter'

b. Ich habe den Arzt rufen lassen.

c. Ich habe mir einen Anzug machen lassen.

d. Die Mutter hat Fritz nicht ins Kino gehen lassen.

(b: *Großes Deutsch-Japanisches Wörterbuch*,

c,d: Schulz & Griesbach (1967: 64))

It should be noted that in the sentences above the causative *lassen* is in the infinitival form although the sentence itself is obtaining the present perfect aspect. This is another case of 'Ersatzinfinitiv'. In this circumstance the causative *lassen* does not bear its regular past participial form 'gelassen,' but instead takes the infinitival form 'lassen'.

There are some other verbs, which share this syntactic behavior with *lassen*; namely, *zu brauchen, machen, sehen, hören, fühlen heißen*<sup>7</sup>. Witness the following

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<sup>7</sup>The other day a linguist (Henk Wolf, H.A.Y.Wolf@stud.let.ruu.nl) posted a message in the computer network. The following is the part of it:

I recently heard someone use the following sentence on television:

"Und niemand hat mich schreien gehoert"

and none has me yell-INF hear-PART

I also remember having heard a similar construction without IPP with the complex "kennen gelernt". I haven't been able to find this type of construction in the literature, though. On the contrary, the literature that deals with Germanic verbal complexes, often states that all (Dutch and German) lects that have a participial prefix, also have obligatory IPP, a generalization which plays a central role in several explanations given for the IPP effect.

examples for the illustration of this point:

(17) a. Er hat das Buch mitgehen heißen.

(*He has the book bringen order*)

'He ordered someone to bring the book'

b. Die ganze Stadt hat das Kind suchen helfen.

c. Er hat den Brief nicht zu schreiben brauchen.

(a, b: Hamakawa (1975: 206), c: Schulz & Griesbach (1967: 64))

The modal auxiliary also gives us similar syntactic phenomena<sup>8</sup>:

(18) a. Er hat früher sehr gut Englisch sprechen können.

(*He has once very good English speak can*)

'He used to speak English very well'

b. Er heute hat tanzen gehen wollen.

c. Er hat Karl kommen sehen können.

d. Er hat das Buch liegen lassen müssen.

(b-c: Schulz & Griesbach (1967: 452))

#### 4.2.4. 'Lassen' in Embedded Clauses

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According to Henk Wolf, several responders to this message confirmed that they allow for this construction, but most of them added that they considered it 'unusual', 'obsolete', or 'substandard' as compared to the constructions with IPP.

<sup>8</sup>See also the following examples, where modal auxiliaries are used as main verbs:

Ich habe das nicht gekonnt.

Wir haben das Beste gewollt.

Er hat das Essen nicht gemocht.

Gestern haben wir ins Kino gedurcht.

(Schulz & Griesbach (1967: 64))

In the above sentences, modal auxiliaries used as main verbs are taking past participial forms.

We turn to the syntactic phenomena of *lassen* in the embedded clauses. Look into the following sentences:

- (19) a. Er hat sich von einem berühmten Arzt operieren lassen.  
 b. ... daß, er sich von einem berühmten Arzt hat operieren lassen.

It is asserted that German takes the SOV<sup>9</sup> word order in the subordinate clause in the foregoing discussion. However, in the embedded clause above, the finite form of the perfect auxiliary verb *haben*, namely *hat*, is located in the front position of the string of two infinitival forms, 'operieren lassen,' instead of occupying the end position of the clause.

There are also similar examples. Consider the following examples including a modal auxiliary:

- (20) ..., weil er die Kinder hat singen hören können.  
 (... , *Because he the children has sing hear can*)  
 '... , Because he was able to hear the children sing'  
 (van Kemenade (1985: 77))

- (21) Ich weiß, daß er hat singen wollen.  
 (*I know that he has sing will*)  
 'I know that he wanted to sing'  
 (Platzack (1986: 229))

As for (20), within the embedded *weil*-clause, the finite auxiliary *hat* is situated right in front of three infinitival elements 'singen hören können'. Contingent on the SOV word order, the word order in the embedded clause would be 'singen hören können hat'. The

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<sup>9</sup>For the general discussion of word order, see section 2.

same story applies to (21); the word order in the embedded clause would be 'singen wollen hat' if it obeyed the SOV word order. The account of this peculiar word order needs to be given in the future research.

## 5. 'Faire-Par' Construction in German Matrix Clauses

### 5.1. Introduction

In the previous section we discussed several syntactic traits of causative *lassen*. In this section we will focus on the 'Faire-Par' (henceforth, FP) construction in the German matrix clauses. The following examples from German are repeated here for convenience:

(14) Er ließ sich von einem berühmten Arzt operieren.

(*He let himself by an famous surgeon operate*)

-*implicates*, 'Er wird von einem berühmten Arzt geoperiert.'-

'He had a famous surgeon operate himself'

(15) Der Vater läßt einen Brief von seinem Sohn schreiben.

(*The father lets the letter by his son write*)

-*implicates*, 'Der Brief wird von seinem Sohn geschrieben.'-

'The father had a letter written by his son'

FP constructions are said to be present both in Romance languages (Italian, French, Spanish, Catalan) and in Germanic languages (German, Dutch, West Flemish, Danish, and so on). The following examples are from French and Italian:

(22) Fr: J'ai fait réparer la voiture par Jean. (Guasti (1990))

(*I made repair the car by John*)

"I got the car repaired by John"

It: Ho fatto riparare la macchina da Gianni. (Guasti (1990))

(I made repair the car by Gianni)

"I got the car repaired by Gianni"

As we mentioned before, *operieren* and *schreiben* in the German examples above are capturing a infinitival form instead of a past participial one although the semantic relation within the complement is passive. Moreover, in German causative complement infinitival verb is put at the end position, while in French and Italian the infinitival verb immediately follows the causative verb. Keeping these facts in mind, we have the following questions yet to be solved:

- What is the syntactic representation of the FP construction in German matrix clauses?

To answer this question, let us begin by reviewing a few previous analyses.

## 5.2. Den Besten (1984)

Den Besten gives the sentences below and proposes the following syntactic representation<sup>10</sup> as the D-structure of the derivation of the FP construction:

(23) Er hat [<sub>S</sub> Johann<sub>Acc</sub> dem Karl<sub>Dat</sub> das Buch<sub>Acc</sub> bringen] lassen.

(He has John (to) Charles the book bring let)

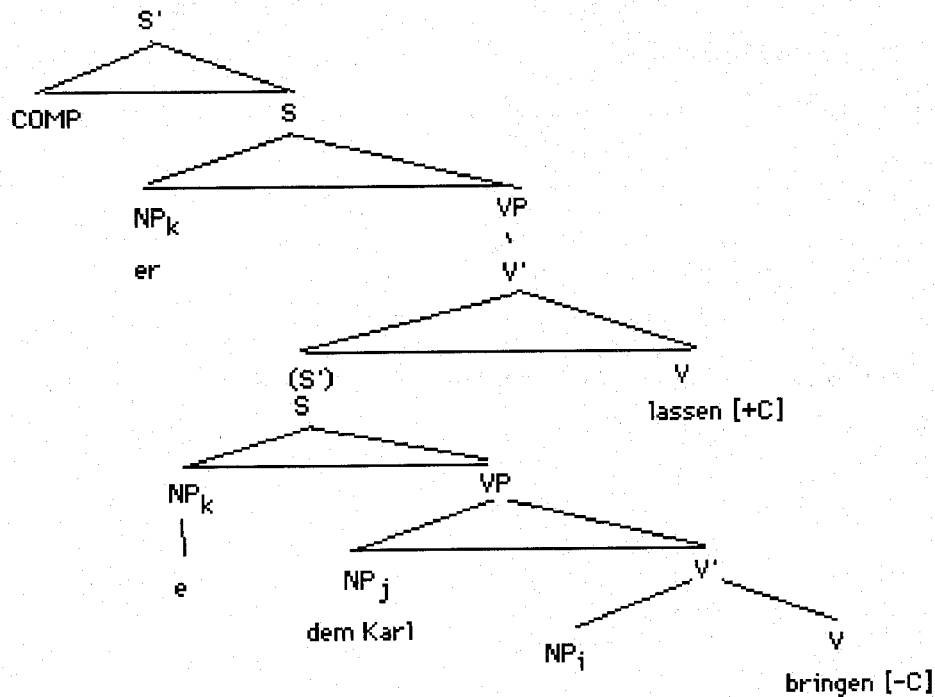
(24) Er hat [<sub>S</sub> dem Karl<sub>Dat</sub> (von Johann) das Buch<sub>Acc</sub> bringen] lassen.

(He has (to) Charles (by John) the book bring let)

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<sup>10</sup>The temporal auxiliary *haben* has been left out to simplify the tree.

(25)



He characterizes *lassen* as the ECM (Exceptional Case Marking) verbs and remarks that some sort of passivization can take place in the complement of *lassen* in the absence of the usual passive morphology. *Bringen* behaves like a passive past participle, and therefore absorbs objective Case and does not theta-mark its subject.

It has indeed been asserted in the literature that the causative construction resembles the passive. (cf. den Besten (1984: 52)) Both allow the appearance of an optional *by*-phrase expressing the external argument role and both are constrained by a number of similar restrictions noted by Kayne (1975) for French and discussed by Burzio (1986) for Italian. However, the subject cannot be left out in passive at least in German. Therefore, it is difficult to analyze the FP construction completely on a par with passive sentences.

Moreover, we see from the co-index 'k' in the above representation that the subject in the embedded complement is raised to the matrix subject. This is impossible because

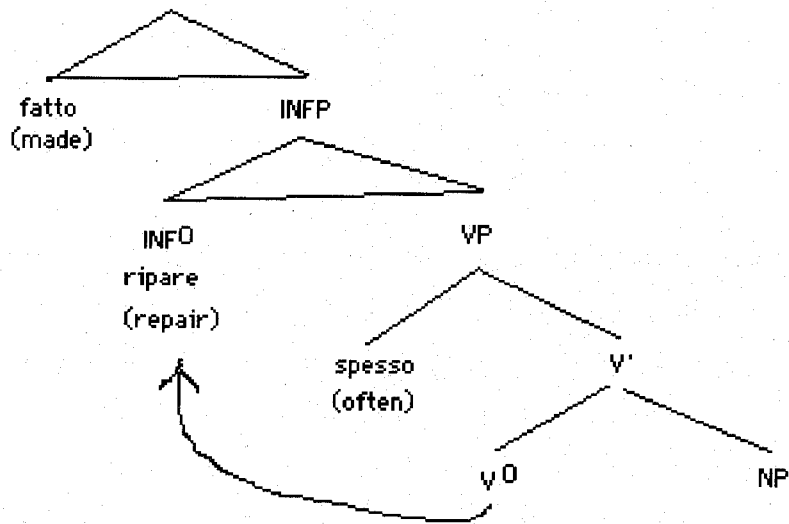
the embedded subject cannot be PRO in the *lassen* causative.

Furthermore, he characterizes *lassen* as an ECM verb without any discussion of its plausibility or validity. Regrettably, it is wrong to analyze *lassen* as an ECM verb because a ECM verb such as *believe* in English never allows its raised object to disappear.

### 5.3. Guasti (1990)

Guasti (1990) proposes the following syntactic representation for the FP construction:

(26)



According to Guasti, causative verb selects an INFP. This, in turn, takes a VP as complement, a projection which does not include the external argument, which is eliminated. The verb moves up to the head of the INFP to take the infinitival morphology, as illustrated in the figure above. Notice that INFP is characterized as nominal just like



infinitives in OE were actually nominals with the typical inflected ending of nouns.

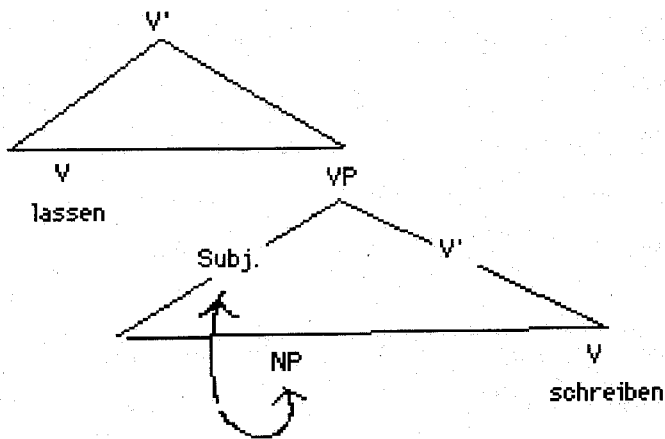
Unfortunately enough, the mechanism of Case marking is not shown in his analysis. *Reparare* 'repair' is argued to be raised to the  $INF^0$  position to obtain the infinitival morpheme. Then, what is the original form of *reparare* and how does it assign accusative Case to its object?

Moreover, it is not clearly shown where exactly the external argument of the embedded verb inside VP is generated, and whether or not it is projected.

#### 5.4. Syntax of 'lassen'

We propose the following representation for the sentences given below:

(27)



- (28) a. Der Vater läßt seinen Sohn einen Brief schreiben.  
 b. Der Vater läßt einen Brief schreiben.  
 c. Der Vater läßt einen Brief von seinem Sohn schreiben.

We suggest that the causative complement is VP, in which the subject of the complement exists<sup>11</sup>. Witness the English examples below:

- (29) a. I had the mechanic repair the radio.  
 b. I had the radio repaired (by the mechanic).

Here we notice the syntactic and semantic similarity between English causative *have* and German causative *lassen*. 'Passivization' is taking place within both of the causative complements. The only disparity between the two languages is that there is no passive participle in German equivalents.

Ritter & Rosen (1993) analyze the causative *have* as a functor, attributing its syntactic restrictions to the consequence of its status as a functor predicate. The lexical difference between *have* and *make*<sup>12</sup> has consequences for all subsequent levels of representation.

For the evidence of the VP status of the complement structure, we present the sentences below:

- (30) a. \*Der Vater läßt seinen Sohn einen Brief schreibend sein.<sup>13</sup>  
 (The father lets his son a letter writing be)  
 b. \*Der Vater läßt seinen Sohn einen Brief geschrieben haben.  
 (The father lets his son a letter written have)  
 cf. Der Vater läßt seinen Sohn einen Brief schreiben.

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<sup>11</sup>See Koopmann and Sportiche (1991) for VP Internal Subject.

<sup>12</sup>Ritter & Rosen (1993) characterize the complement of *make* as IP.

<sup>13</sup>I cherish my cordial gratitude to Prof. Matthias Voth for acting as an informant of German.

It is manifest that the complement cannot entail the aspectual element, which means the absence of INFL projection in the causative complement.

## 6. Conclusion

This present study has been devoted to the investigation of the syntactic and semantic property of the causative construction, with special reference to the comparison of English causatives and German *lassen* causative. We proposed syntactic representation of the FP construction in German matrix clauses, characterizing the complement structure as VP.

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