

1987

Syntactic Variation in Swedish and Norwegian

Susan Rustick

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/nels>



Part of the [Linguistics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rustick, Susan (1987) "Syntactic Variation in Swedish and Norwegian," *North East Linguistics Society*. Vol. 18 , Article 26.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/nels/vol18/iss2/26>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Linguistics Students Association (GLSA) at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in North East Linguistics Society by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

SYNTACTIC VARIATION IN SWEDISH AND NORWEGIAN

SUSAN RUSTICK

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN- MADISON

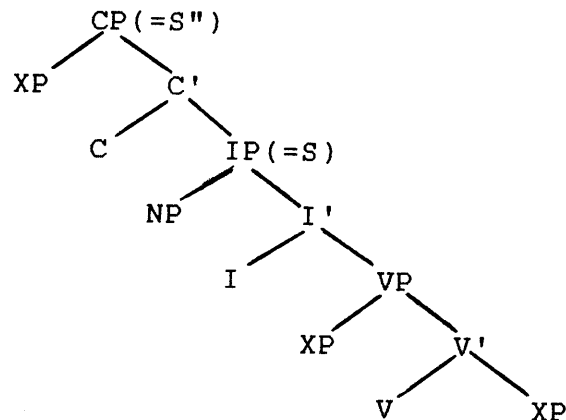
0. Introduction*

Variation in phrase structure and variation in the headedness of S have been assumed lately in accounts attempting to explain the verb second phenomena in the Germanic languages. In this paper, I concentrate on the causes of syntactic variation in Swedish and Norwegian and argue that these causes do not entail variation in the base, and that, in fact, the phrase structure of Swedish and Norwegian is the same as that of English. Taraldsen(1984), in one of the few studies focussing on this issue, has proposed that variation in the headedness of S in Swedish and Norwegian accounts for the syntactic variation between the two languages. However, I will show that the let causative, which represents an example of the variation Taraldsen discusses, is the result of variation in the lexical properties of causative let in Swedish and Norwegian. Platzack, on the other hand, does not posit variation in the headedness of S between Swedish and Norwegian, but he does maintain that Verb Second patterns indicate that the phrase structure of Swedish and Norwegian is different from that of English. However, the second part of this analysis will show how variation in certain

parameters accounts for the Verb Second patterns in Swedish and Norwegian, which renders stipulated differences in phrase structure unnecessary.

The phrase structure I will assume for Swedish and Norwegian in this analysis is the phrase structure proposed by Chomsky (1986) and reflects aspects of the phrase structure proposed by Travis (1984):

(1)



1.0 Variation between Swedish and Norwegian: Taraldsen's data

Taraldsen claims that certain constructions in Swedish and Norwegian show that these two closely related languages have different heads of S. The let release construction presents an example of the data he uses to support his claim. The two possibilities are as follows:

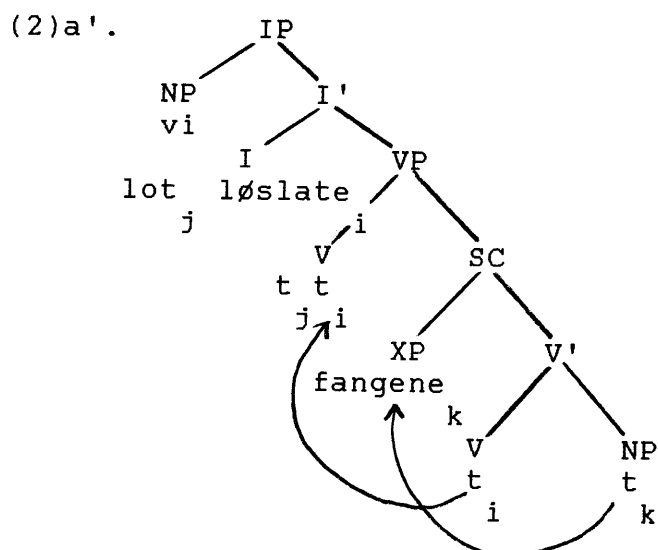
- (2)a. Vi lot løslate fangene. Swed. and Nor.
we let release the-prisoners
- b. Vi lot fangene løslate. Nor.
we let the-prisoners release
 We let the prisoners be released.

The first sentence, where the object phrase the prisoners follows the two verbs, is grammatical in both Swedish and Norwegian. The second sentence, where the object phrase occurs between let and the verb of its complement, is grammatical only in Norwegian. It is important to note that both sentences translate as We let the prisoners be released. First, I argue that causative let takes a Small Clause (SC) complement in both languages (Holmberg (1986)). Second, I propose that the

divergent syntactic possibilities exhibited result from a difference in a lexical property of causative let in the two languages. In Swedish, causative let is a "weak" verb and as such requires that the verb of the SC complement undergo head to head movement in order to incorporate (see Baker (1988)) with the weak verb and render it a viable head. Norwegian, as a language synchronically and diachronically in close contact with Swedish, has both a weak let and a let of regular verbal strength in the lexicon. In cases where weak let is inserted, incorporation occurs and Norwegian patterns like Swedish, but in cases where a normal let is inserted, incorporation does not occur.

In addition to verb incorporation in let causatives, there is also noun incorporation. As mentioned earlier, the SC complement translates as a passive. As noted in Baker, passives entail noun incorporation whereby the D structure object becomes the S structure subject. In the SC complement of causative let, the D structure object the prisoners moves to the subject position in both (2a) and (2b). The sentence given in (2a) is the result of both noun incorporation and verb incorporation, while (2b) only displays noun incorporation.

Diagram (2a') shows both types of incorporation, which occur in both languages:



The thematic object the prisoners moves from the object position to the subject position of the SC in order to acquire case which is assigned by let. Causative let subcategorizes for a SC which is

[+passive] and this requirement is met by the head of the SC, release, which assigns θ -role but not case to its object. At S structure, the incorporated let release possesses the qualities of both let and release and hence case is assigned to the derived SC subject by the let component of the incorporated verb.

The situation in (2b) does not involve verb movement, but only the object to subject raising in the SC passive.

Baker (1988) posits a Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH) which stipulates that identical assignment of θ -roles indicates identical D structure relationships. (2a) and (2b) consist of parallel thematic relationships, which is evidenced by the unique translation of the two sentences, and they contain the same morphemes. This indicates that they have the same D structure. In addition, the D structure complement of let in (2) is a Small Clause. The argument for this claim rests on the fact that there is no COMP and there is no INFL in the complement. Regarding the latter claim, the infinitive marker \grave{a} , while not omissible in Norwegian, is not possible in the complement, but the verb release is nonetheless in infinitive form, which indicates that there is no INFL and hence no IP associated with the complement. Furthermore, the impossibility of control PRO in the subject position of the complement supports the claim that the complement, being a SC, has no COMP, and that the SC is [+passive]:

- (4)a. *Vi lot [[PRO løslate fangene]]
 i CP IP i
 b. *Vi lot [PRO løslate fangene]
 i SC i

The only possible understood thematic subject in (4b) would be the indeterminate someone, realized in the oblique case, by someone, in translation. This example casts into doubt any analysis involving optional raising of the prisoners (cf. Taraldsen (1984), Holmberg (1988)), as the SC subject must be either a lexically realized noun phrase or control PRO (Hoekstra (1984), Johnson (1988)).

In addition, the SC nature of the let complement

is borne out by the fact that causative "let" can take a full clausal complement in both languages, as is evident in the examples in (5):

- (5)a. Vi lot fangene bli løslatt.
we let the-prisoners be released
 b. Vi lot fangevokteren løslater fangene.
we let the-warden release the-prisoners

(5a) displays passive morphology in the embedded clause, which indicates that the complement has its own INFL and consists of either an IP or CP. (5b) shows a full clause complement which contains an INFL to assign present tense to the verb, which, being present tense, assigns both an object and a subject θ -role.

Evidence that a weak let precipitates head to head complement verb raising is provided by the fact that Swedish does allow one lexical item to intervene between let and release at S structure: the reflexive pronoun seg, which has been argued to be a clitic (Holmberg (1984,1986)).

- (6) Hun lot seg ikke bedra.
she let self not cheat
 She didn't let herself be cheated.

The incorporation of cheat has been obviated in (6) because self has cliticized onto let after raising to the subject position of the SC. The clitic, when attached, provides the necessary fortification for the weak verb.

The other differences Taraldsen presents are also due to a greater prevalence of weak lexical items in Swedish than in Norwegian. This precipitates a greater range of incorporation and affixation in certain constructions in Swedish versus the same constructions in Norwegian. In all, this explanation of the data brings into question the claim that the two languages have different heads of S.

2.0 Verb Second: The Parameters

2.1 Preliminary concepts

There are two parameters which are relevant to the discussion of the verb second patterns in Swedish and Norwegian. These parameters involve the assumption of two constructs, a specified head and a clausal head, which are defined as follows:

SUSAN RUSTICK

Specified Head:

a zero level category containing one or more of the features $\pm N$, $\pm V$, agreement, tense, and [+wh]

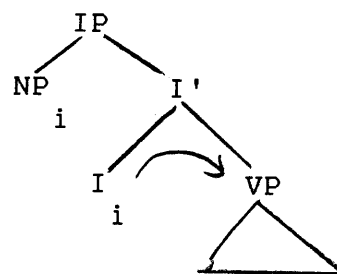
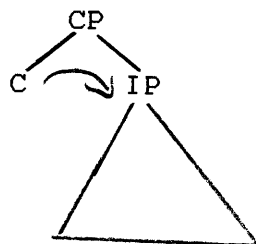
Clausal Head:

- (i) $\pm N$, $\pm V$, and/or [+wh]
- (ii) INFL information, i.e. tense and agreement, and [+wh] in the case of main clause questions.

The concept of a specified head is closely related to the X-bar principle stating that every maximal category have a head; a specified head is required by every maximal category containing lexical material and is subject to parametrization in that the level or levels of derivation in which this requirement is met varies from language to language. The ensuing analysis of Swedish and Norwegian verb second patterns will demonstrate that setting this parameter one particular way accounts for a unified class of V/2 constructions.

The concept of clausal head represents a revision of the Head Uniqueness Principle (HUP) first proposed by Safir (1981). A clausal head, which may be base generated or derived at S structure, licenses a clause by virtue of governing both the subject and the predicate. In accordance with this stated purpose, two different nodes emerge as possible locations for the clausal head: COMP or INFL. COMP stands in a C-commanding relationship to both the subject and predicate and as such licenses the clause under government, while INFL can accomplish the same by governing the subject via the coindexation of INFL with its specifier position (Borer (1986), Baker (1988)), and C-commanding the predicate:

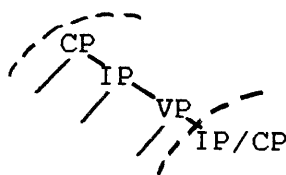
- (7) COMP as clausal head INFL as clausal head



The relevant parameter accounting for another class of V/2 constructions in Swedish and Norwegian is, then, which nodes may serve as a clausal head in these languages.

In addition to this brief description of these two terms, it is also important to identify precisely what is meant by "clause". Whereas the nodes S and S' of earlier theory conveyed the inherent relationship between these two structural positions, the Barriers phrase structure does not convey the implication of such a unit: there is only CP and IP. As indicated in diagram (8), the clause consists of CP and all the nodes it dominates until the next CP or non-complement IP, or, when there is no CP, IP and all the nodes it dominates until the next CP or IP.

(8) The clause

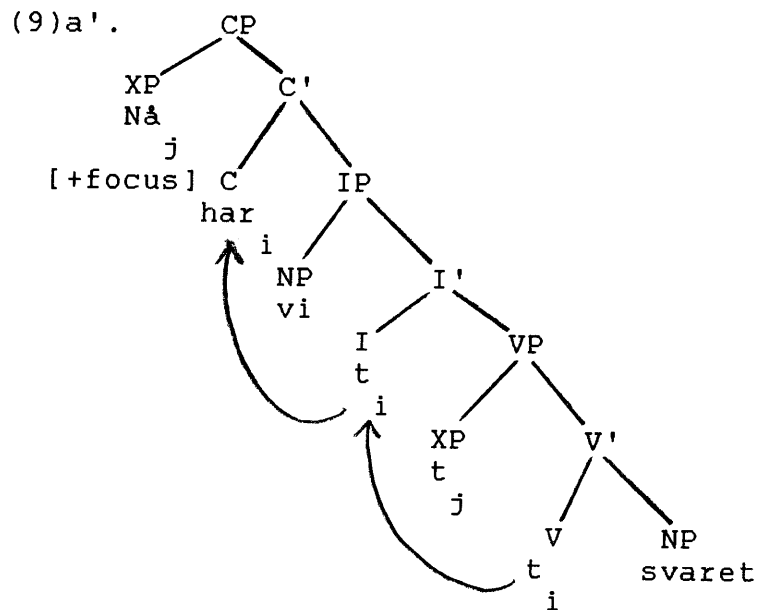


2.2 Parameter one: specified head at D structure and S structure

The first parameter is set such that in Swedish and Norwegian, every maximal category containing lexical material must have a specified head both at S structure and at D structure. The requirement for a specified head at S structure results in the type of verb second constructions presented in (9):

- (9)a. Nå har vi svaret.
now have we the-answer
 Now we have the answer.
- b. Boken kjøpte han.
the-book bought he
 The book, he bought.

In sentence (a) an adverb is fronted to the sentence initial position, while in (b) a noun phrase is fronted; in either instance the fronted constituent is followed by the verb. The adverb or noun phrase is fronted to the specifier of CP due to an associated [+focus] element, and subsequently the verb is forced to raise to COMP in order to provide a specified head at S structure. As the following diagram indicates, the adverb originates in the specifier of VP position and is preposed to the specifier of CP, which forces the verb to undergo head to head raising:



In example (b), the same pattern of movement occurs with the same motivations, to precipitate a parallel S structure.

In short, the first parameter explains the appearance of the verb in second position when a fronted constituent creates the need for a specified head for CP.

2.3 Parameter two: INFL or COMP as clausal head

The determination of which node or nodes may serve as the site of the clausal head is the second parameter affecting the verb second pattern. I propose that Swedish and Norwegian have both COMP and INFL as possibilities for clausal head. This parameter accounts for what has commonly been described as the asymmetry between main and embedded clauses, but which is more accurately described as clauses that have a filled COMP at deep structure versus those that do not, a distinction which a later example will clarify. In Swedish and Norwegian, this asymmetry is manifested by the position of the adverb: the adverb follows the verb in clauses with an empty COMP at deep structure, which entails most main clauses, and the adverb precedes the verb in clauses with a filled COMP at deep structure.

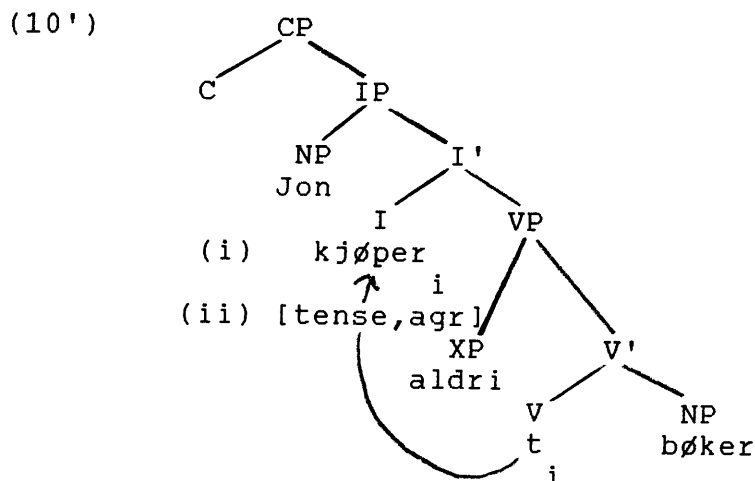
2.3.1 INFL as clausal head

The empty COMP pattern is shown in (10):

SYNTACTIC VARIATION IN SWEDISH AND NORWEGIAN

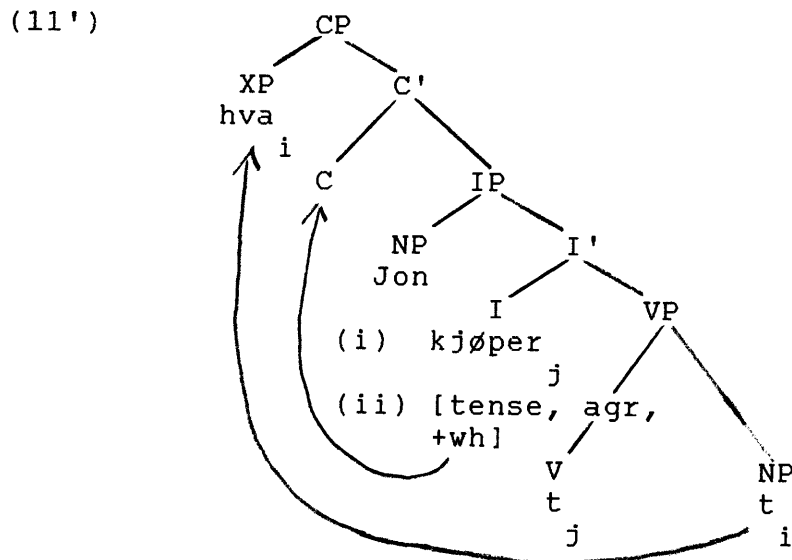
- (10) Jon kjøper aldri bøker.
Jon buys never books.

At D structure, the adverb precedes the verb in the specifier of VP position, but at S structure, the verb has raised to INFL, and the verb precedes the adverb. This movement is required so that at S structure, the INFL node fulfills the necessary requirements for clausal head: it contains both the contents of INFL and an element which is +V. Note that the clausal head is in a position to govern the predicate and INFL's specifier, the subject of the clause, via coindexing. This is shown in the diagram for (10):



A variation on the empty COMP pattern, which not only displays clausal head formation at INFL, but also requires a specified head for CP due to XP fronting, is shown in (11):

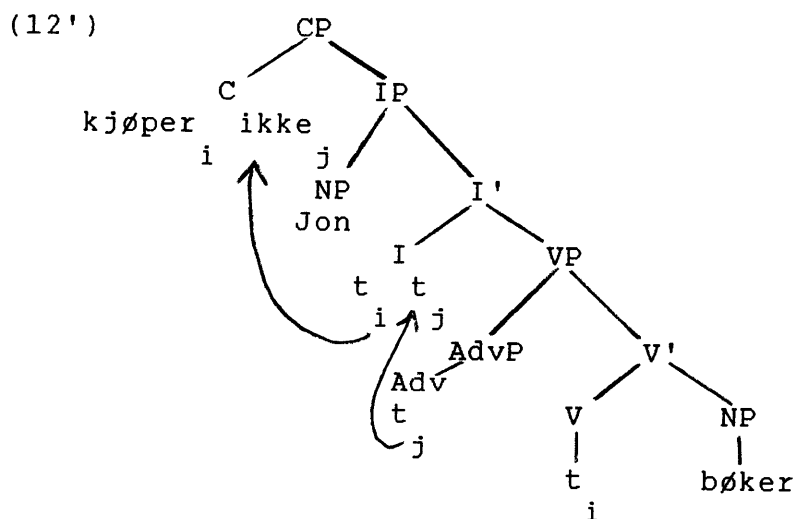
- (11) Hva kjøper Jon?
what buys Jon
 What does Jon buy?



The verb undergoes head to head raising from V to INFL, where it joins the information originating under INFL to create the clausal head. Although the [+wh] element would appear to fulfill the first requirement for clausal head, it actually does not do so in this case, because the [+wh] element belongs to the second requirement: namely the grammatical information which originates under INFL. The need for a specified head arises when what raises to the specifier position of CP, a movement motivated by the [+focus] element which I assert is usually associated with [+wh]. At this point, the verb movement to COMP could result from either the need for the specified head or the [+focus] element associated with the INFL information. In yes-no questions, the [+focus] element associated with [+wh] is solely responsible for verb raising to COMP.

Two observations support the claim that the verb obligatorily undergoes head to head raising to INFL when COMP is empty. The first concerns the fact that the adverb precedes the verb when COMP is filled and follows the verb when COMP is empty, indicating that the verb has raised to a position preceding the adverb when COMP is empty. Another important point concerns the post-verbal position of the negative particle when the verb is raised to COMP. A case in point involves the syntax of questions, where COMP is empty at D structure and the verb is raised to that position:

- (12) Kjøper ikke Jon bøker?
buys not Jon books
 Doesn't Jon buy books?



As the diagram indicates, the negative particle cliticizes onto INFL. The fact that the verb raises to INFL before raising to COMP accounts for the post-verbal appearance of the negative particle at S structure. Positing that the verb raised directly to COMP from V would violate the Head Movement Constraint (Travis (1984)). This construction also supports the proposed position of the adverb at D structure: in accordance with the noted cliticization patterns in Swedish and Norwegian (Hellan and Christensen (1986)), the adverb should follow the verb at the time of cliticization and verb raising to COMP.

2.2.2 COMP as clausal head

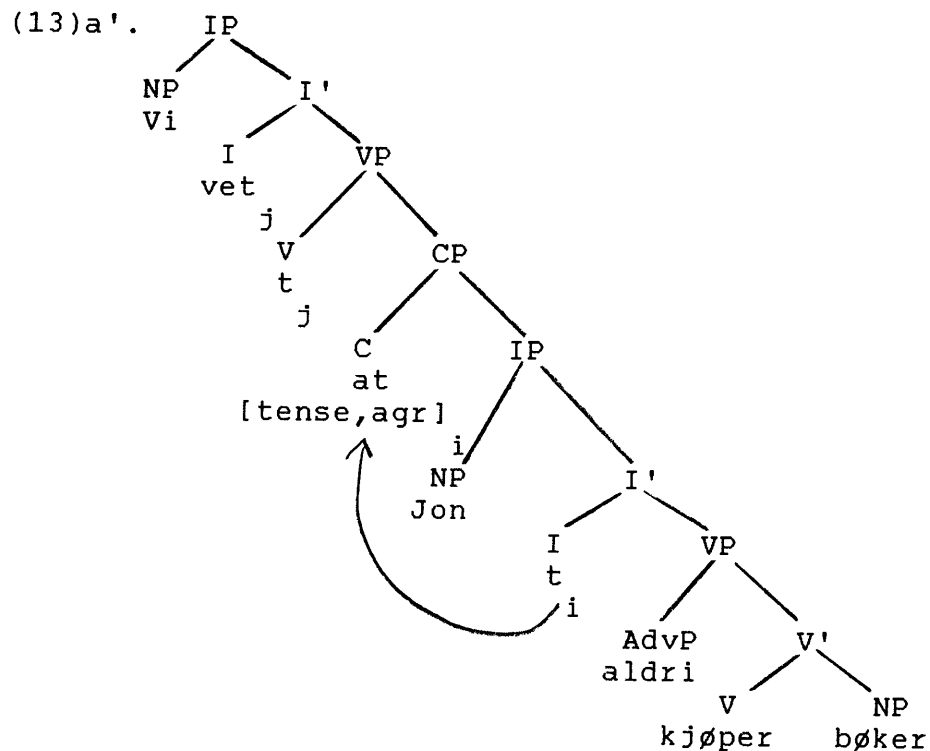
When COMP is filled at deep structure, COMP becomes the clausal head. Under government by the clausal head in COMP, verb raising to INFL is obviated, and at S structure, the adverb precedes the verb because the verb has remained in the V position:

- (13)a. Vi vet at Jon aldri kjøper bøker.
 We know that Jon never buys books.
 b. Kanskje Jon aldri kjøper bøker.
 Perhaps Jon never buys books.

That occupies COMP in (13a), and perhaps occupies COMP in (13b). The example of (13b), which is a main clause with what is generally construed as embedded

clause word order, demonstrates the importance of citing the filled COMP/empty COMP distinction rather than the main clause/embedded clause distinction. Although embedded clauses usually do have a filled complementizer and main clauses usually do not, there are exceptions which need to be accounted for.

The complementizer fulfills the first requirement for clausal head, but COMP still needs the information under INFL in order to satisfy the second requirement. For this, I propose that the contents of INFL raise to COMP:



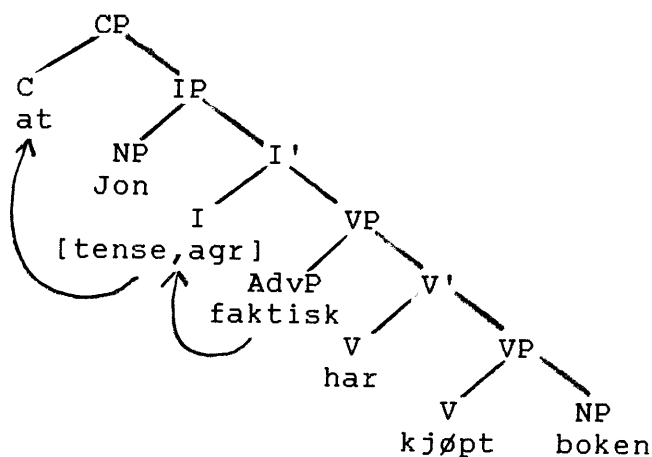
A filled COMP forces raising of the INFL features under government, which creates the clausal head under COMP.

Data supporting the assertion that INFL features raise to COMP involve both the appearance of an inflected COMP (Haider (1986), Travis (1984)) in other Germanic V/2 languages and adverbs that appear to be cliticized onto COMP in Swedish and Norwegian. Platzack (1986b) notes that adverbs may appear between COMP and the subject of the sentence, only if COMP is lexically filled and only if the subject of the clause is not a pronoun. According to Platzack, this and

other evidence show that the adverb is cliticized onto COMP. In addition to the fact of cliticization, I here maintain that first the adverb cliticizes under INFL and then raises with the information under INFL to COMP when COMP is filled at deep structure. This movement has parallels with the movement proposed for the construction in (12) which involves verb raising rather than INFL feature raising and not cliticization rather than adverb cliticization. This is shown in the following example:

- (14) Han vet at faktisk Jon har
he knows that in fact Jon has
 kjøpt boken.
bought the-book

(14')



It is also significant that the sentential adverbs that may appear between a complementizer and the subject may also appear between a verb fronted to COMP and the subject:

- (15) Har faktisk Jon kjøpt boken?
 Has in fact Jon bought the-book?

Platzack's first restriction, that COMP must be lexically filled at surface structure in order for an adverb to be present in that position, follows from the fact that COMP cannot be deleted during the derivation if the adverb is cliticized onto it and from the fact that the contents of INFL, together with the adverb, only raise to COMP when COMP is filled at deep structure. The second restriction, that the subject of the sentence cannot be a pronoun, is due to a precedent constraint in cliticization order. Platzack suggests that the pronoun cliticizes onto COMP in front of the adverb which is cliticized onto

COMP.

3.0 Conclusion

In this analysis of the verb second pattern in Swedish and Norwegian there are two relevant parameters: the levels that require a specified head and the nodes that may serve as a clausal head. Swedish and Norwegian require a specified head at S structure and at D structure, and COMP or INFL may serve as clausal head. These parameters account for the data in a unified way without variation in the phrase structure. In addition, variation between Swedish and Norwegian can be attributed to the greater prevalence of words which are weak in the Swedish lexicon, resulting in a wider range of incorporating and affixing items in that language. These proposals argue in favor of consistency in the head of S and significant similarity in phrase structure between related languages.

* I would like to thank Peggy Speas for her insightful comments and discussion of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Baker, M. (1988) Incorporation. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Borer, H. (1986) "I-Subjects". Linguistic Inquiry 17(3):375-416.
- Chomsky, N. (1986) Barriers. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Haider, H. (1986) "V-Second in German". in Verb Second Phenomena in Germanic Languages, H. Haider and M. Prinzhorn, eds. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Foris Publications.
- Haider, H. and M. Prinzhorn, eds. (1986) Verb Second Phenomena in Germanic Languages. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.

SYNTACTIC VARIATION IN SWEDISH AND NORWEGIAN

- Hellan, L. and K.K. Christensen, eds. (1986) Topics in Scandinavian Syntax. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Hoekstra, T. (1984) Transitivity. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.
- Holmberg, A. (1984) "On Certain Clitic-Like Elements in Swedish". Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax 13, University of Trondheim.
- _____. (1986) Word Order and Syntactic Features in the Scandinavian Languages and English. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Stockholm.
- _____. (1988) "The Head of S in Scandinavian and English". McGill Working Papers in Linguistics: Special Issue on Comparative Germanic Syntax May 88:123-155.
- Johnson, K. (1988) "Clausal Gerunds, the ECP, and Government". Linguistic Inquiry 19(4):583-609.
- Platzack, C. (1986a) "Comp, Infl and Germanic Word Order". in Topics in Scandinavian Syntax, L. Hellan and K.K. Christensen, eds. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, pp. 185-234.
- _____. (1986b) "The Position of the Finite Verb in Swedish". in Verb Second Phenomena in Germanic Languages, H. Haider and M. Prinzhorn, eds. Dordrecht: Foris Publications, pp. 27-48.
- Safir, K. (1981) "Inflection-Government and Inversion". unpublished manuscript, MIT.
- Safir, K. and D. Pesetsky (1981) "Inflection, Inversion, and Subject Clitics". NELS 11, University of Massachusetts.
- Taraldsen, K. (1984) "Some Phrase Structure Dependent Differences Between Swedish and Norwegian". Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax 9, University of Trondheim.
- Travis, L. (1984) "Parameters and Effects of Word Order Variation". Ph.D. dissertation, MIT.