In the past few years German syntax has been a renewed object of interest on the part of many linguists. This is evident in the number of works specifically dealing with peculiarities and developments in the present-day language (see for example Abraham 1982, 1985; Clément / Thümmel 1975; Clément 1980; Edmonson 1982; Engel 1977; Etzensperger 1979; Heringer et al. 1980; Zint-Dhlyr 1982 and somewhat older works such as Admoni 1873; Brinkmann 1971; Steger 1970). Furthermore a number of grammars of the language, or new editions of older ones, have appeared since the beginning of this decade (Eisenberg 1986; Heiddoph et al. 1981; Duden 1984; Erben 1980; Helbig / Buscha 1981; Jung 1980; Schulz / Griesbach 1980).

There are a number of reasons why German syntax should be of interest to scholars. One is that it has quite considerable alternations of word order for the purpose of topicalization; another is that certain changes are taking place in standard German which have repercussions for the typological classification of the language. For example brace constructions (Satzklammer) are frequently being abandoned for those which keep the elements of a verbal phrase closer together. Thus the first of the following sentences can hardly be regarded as acceptable in present-day German.

(1) a Sie fragte, ob er wohl Interesse hätte, an.
(1) b Sie fragte an, ob er wohl Interesse hätte.

Hand in hand with this restriction on the linear scope of brace constructions goes a further phenomenon which is usually termed ‘extraposition of heavy elements’ (Extraposition schwerer Glieder) (Wunderlich, 1980: 149) and which can be seen progressively in the second and third versions of the following three sentences respectively (note the position of the preposition auf).

(2) a Sie hörte langsam zu lamentieren über den Freund auf, der sie verlassen hatte.
   b Sie hörte langsam zu lamentieren auf über den Freund, der sie verlassen hatte.
   c Sie hörte langsam auf zu lamentieren über den Freund, der sie verlassen hatte.

This complex concerns verbs and their complements and will be seen to have a certain bearing on the subject matter of this paper. To begin with, however a brief review of complement types in German is called for.
1. Complement Types

Verbal complements in present-day German can be divided into four main types (see Engel/Schumacher, 1978: 21ff. for a more differentiated classification):

(3) (i) nominal  
(ii) prepositional  
(iii) sentential  
(iv) infinitival

For the present paper only the types (iii) and (iv) are of interest. Sentential complements can be seen in the following two sentences:

(4) a Klaus sagte, daß sie vor zwölf auftauchten.  
    b Sie meinte, er sei unanständig in seiner Ausdrucksweise.

Both of the above sentences contain sentential complements (Satzergänzungen) in that the object of the verb is a relative clause (4a) or the main sentence with the verb in the subjunctive when the relative pronoun is deleted (4b).

The second type of non-nominal, non-prepositional complement in German is the infinitive complement. Here one must distinguish two basic types. The first is that where the verb of the main clause is intransitive and the second where it is transitive.

(5) a Er versuchte, aufzustehen.  
    b Sie forderten das Mädchen auf, den Saal zu verlassen.

Whether the verb of the infinitive complement is also transitive or not is irrelevant. The sentence in (5c) is of the same type as that in (5b).

(5) c Sie forderten das Mädchen auf, fortzugehen.

What is interesting from the point of view of syntactic change, however, is the kind of construction where the verb of the main clause is intransitive and that of the infinitive complement is transitive. An example of this would be:

(6) Er versuchte, den Saal zu verlassen.

Note that object and infinitive verb follow the finite verb form of the main sentence. This incidentally holds for all elements which might be associated with the infinitive complement immediately before the verb.

(7) Er versuchte, den Saal möglichst schnell zu verlassen.

Before elaborating on these constructions consider the structure of German sentences with auxiliaries. A peculiarity of German syntax is the Satzklammer, whereby a non-finite verb form comes at the end of a declarative sentence.

(8) a Hans hat Jürgen geschlagen.

Again further complements always occur before the non-finite verb form as in (8b).
Returning to the construction type in (7) one sees that it also occurs with complex verb phrases in the main sentence. The standard forms of such sentences are illustrated in (9a+b).

(9) a  Maria hat versucht, ihn zu erreichen.
   b  Sie hätte versucht, ihn zu erreichen, wenn sie zu hause wäre.

2. Infinitival Complements with Transitive Verbs

The syntactic change in present-day German which is the object of the present paper is to be seen with sentences of the type in (9a+b) in the colloquial language. In spoken German, sentences which have infinitive complements with intransitive verbs have the object of this verb within the brace of the main clause verb. Consider (10a+b).

(10) a  Maria hat ihn versucht zu erreichen.
   b  Er hat sie vergessen zu bezahlen.

Note furthermore that adverbial complements associated with the infinitive complement verb are also to be found within the main verb brace:

(11) a  Maria hat ihn heute früh versucht zu erreichen.
   b  Maria hat heute früh versucht, ihn zu erreichen.
   c  Maria hat versucht, ihn heute früh zu erreichen.

In some cases the affiliation of an adverb with the verb of the infinitive complement may be ruled out on semantic grounds as in (11d) which can scarcely be said to have the interpretation in (11e)

(11) d  Er hat sie total vergessen zu bezahlen.
   e  ? Er hat vergessen, sie total zu bezahlen

With regard to the change embodied in (10a+b), there would also seem to be no case restrictions on the objects which can be drawn into the main verb brace. Thus dative objects are also found in sentences of the type in (10a+b). Note that in the following examples the main clause verbs cannot concern complements in the dative case.

(12) a  Er hat ihr versucht zu erklären, was los war.
   b  Ich habe Ihnen vergessen zu sagen, dass Ihr Bruder kommt.

The datives in (12a+b) are furthermore true dative complements of the infinitival verb and not instances of a so-called pertinence or ethical dative (Abraham 1971; Gippert
1981; von Polenz 1969; Wegener 1985:60-106) which can occur quite liberally with verbs which do not take a dative complement.

This syntactic change in German would not seem at first sight to have a parallel in other changes. Thus it is qualitatively different from, say, the demise of the genitive which is taking place on a broad front in present-day German.

3. Analogy

When searching for a possible explanation for this change one can naturally loot to analogy. The question which then arises is whether there are similar constructions in German syntax which may have served as a model here. The difficulty is, however, that there are several constructions which are partly similar to those in (10) – (12). One can begin with remarking that the verbs which have this change are all normal transitive verbs as well. This means that *versuchen* and *vergessen*, for example, can have a simple direct object complement which, when the verb is non-finite, is included in the brace before it.

(13)  

a  Karl hat Maria versucht.

b  Silvia hat das Buch vergessen.

Thus the position of the object in (10a+b) and (11a) before the brace could be in analogy to sentences like (13a+b). However, the inclusion of dative objects (see 12a+b) would seem to contradict this interpretation as the verbs of these constructions can never have simple dative complements.

(14)  

a  *Er hat ihr versucht.

b  *Sie hat ihm vergessen.

A more productive line of argument would seem to be analogy with constructions where the verb is different but the syntax is the same. Consider the following sentence:

(15)  

Er hat ihr versprochen zu erklären, was los ist.

In this case the dative complement is associated with the main verb *versprechen* which can, in contradistinction to *versuchen* or *vergessen*, take a dative in a construction without an infinitival complement.

(16)  

Er hat es ihr versprochen.

The verb *versprechen* can equally have a dative object with an infinitive complement associated not with the main clause verb but with that of the infinitive complement.

(17)  

Er hat verprochen, ihr zu erklären, was los war.

Note that semantically (15) and (17) are not identical: (17) does not imply that the speaker promises to explain to the person in question what is up, whereas (15) does carry this implication. (12a) is thus only formally equivalent to (15).
The fact that constructions such as those in (15) and (16) are possible in standard German could have led to the development of those in (12), as (17) is parallel to ‘standard’ constructions such as

(18) *Er hat versucht, ihr den Inhalt seiner Ideen zu erklären.*

The verb *versuchen* can never take a dative complement so that not only can semantic motivation not be postulated for the development of constructions like (12a) in analogy with that of (15), it would positively operate against it as the implication that the dative is associated with the non-finite verb-form, which closes the brace after a dative object, must, in the case of (12a), be deliberately ignored.

Another reason for not regarding sentences like (15) as the model for constructions like (12a) is to be found in the fact that the displacement of the object of an infinitive complement verb to a position within the main verb brace is not confined to animate objects; it is equally common with inanimate ones.

(19) a *Er hat versucht den Saal zu verlassen.*  
    b *Er hat den Saal versucht zu verlassen.*

In fact when one considers the set of inanimate objects in present-day German one finds that a large number of them can occur of the type in (17b) where animate objects are excluded. Consider the first (20a+b).

(20) a *Sie hat angefangen, den Keller auzuräumen.*  
    b *Sie hat den Keller angefangen aufzuräumen.*

These two sentences are parallel to those in (19a+b). One should additionally remark that the position of the object of the second verb (*aufräumen*) within the brace of the main verb (*hat…angefangen*) is evident even when the verb occurs in a simple form (without auxiliary verb) as the separable preposition (here: an) forms a brace with the verb stem, cf. (21a+b).

(21) a *Sie fing an, den Keller aufzuräumen.*  
    b *Sie fing den Keller an aufzuräumen.*

This verb *anfangen* and its semantic equivalent *beginnen* would also seem to allow an animate object to be moved forward to within the main verb brace:

(22) a *Sie fing an, ihrer Schwester von der Reise zu erzählen.*  
    b *Sie fing ihrer Schwester an von der Reise zu erzählen.*

The permissibility of (22b) in colloquial German once more invalidates the objection that these shifts in word order can only take place as long as the case requirements of a verb are not violated, i.e. it is parallel to the cases of shift of complement with the verbs *vergessen* and *versuchen* (cf. 12a+b).
4. Interlocking

When describing the change outlined in the above paragraphs a suitable term is required: for want of a better one I refer to it as ‘interlocking’ (for which one can use the term Verzahnung in German). What is meant by this is that the main clause of a sentence overlaps with the infinitival complement when the latter contains a transitive verb. The interlocking takes the form of a leftward shift of the complement of the infinitive verb, irrespective of case.

Returning to the question of the origin of this phenomenon, one can start by considering the scope of German brace constructions once more. It was remarked at the outset (cf. 1a+b and 2a-c) that the span of the brace tends to be reduced in present-day German. Now it is still possible in German to have a race which includes an infinitive complement. An example of this is to be seen in the following sentence:

(23) Maria hat ihn zu erreichen versucht.

Note that the brace cannot span a relative clause, so that sentential complements cannot occur in constructions of the type in (23).

(24) *Wir, daß der Lehrer krank sei, berichteten.

The maximal brace construction can include adverbial elements associated with the infinitive verb: compare (25a) and (25b).

(25) a Maria hat versucht, ihn am selben Abend noch vor Abfahrt der Fähre zu erreichen.
   b Maria hat ihn am selben Abend noch vor Abfahrt der Fähre zu erreichen versucht.

Now in treating a change in syntax in a language it is necessary to distinguish explanation from description. Explanation remains speculative; nonetheless an attempt should be made if one is to transcend pure taxonomy; the necessity to tentatively put forward an explanation is especially great at this change has not as yet been treated by German scholars. One reason for this is certainly the generally prescriptive nature of German grammars and the notion of correctness and a corresponding rejection of colloquial phenomena which tend to pervade many Germans’ thinking on their language. The nearest any linguist has come to dealing with the present change is to be seen in two articles by Kvam (1979, 1980) in his treatment of discontinuous infinitive phrases in German and by Wunderlich (1980) in his reply to Kvam (1979). However, these two scholars skirted the phenomenon being considered here and Wunderlich evasively admits (1980:150) that he has no explanation for the sentence, quoted by Kvam, which evinces interlocking (in this case with left-shifting of a prepositional complement: Ich möchte auf ihre Frage versuchen, eine präzise Antwort zu geben).

The explanation offered here is that interlocking resulted from the interaction of the maximal brace as seen in (25b) and the minimal (and nowadays normal) brace as in (9a+b) above. The interaction is restricted by a precondition which specifies that the main clause verb involved in interlocking be itself transitive, although there would not seem to be a requirement that the left-shifted element on interlocking be in the same case as the nominal complement of the main clause verb, cf. the examples of left-shifted dative complement with versuchen and vergessen above. Furthermore the left-shifted
complements can be prepositional. This case is, however, no different from that of (15) above. Consider in juxtaposition the sentence quoted by Wunderlich and Kvam and the one (15):

(26)  
a  Ich möchte auf Ihre Frage versuchen, eine präzise Antwort zu geben.  
b  Er hat ihr versprochen zu erklären, was los ist.

Interlocking in both these sentences involves the leftward shift into the main clause verb brace of the second, indirect complement of the infinitival verb form. In the case of geben (in 26a) this indirect complement is prepositional (auf Ihre Frage); in the case of erklären (in 26b) it is a dative (ihr) while the direct complement occurs in sentential form (was los ist). Note that interlocking allows the leftward shift of both complements of an infinitival verb form when these are nominal (27a); if one is sentential, as in (26b), then it cannot be shifted to within the main clause verb brace, cf. (27b); this correlates with the impermissibility of (24).

(27)  
a  Er hat ihr Lage versprochen zu erklären.  
b  *Er hat ihr, was los ist, versprochen zu erklären.

Note

1  The term ‘standard’ is used here in the sense of a supraregional colloquial variant of German. It is not possible to differentiate, in such a brief article as this, between social and/or regional variants. I should, however, mention that by and large my use of the term ‘standard’ refers primarily to the speech of at least moderately educated Germans of northern and central Germany.

References