

## The causative-passive alternation in French

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### 1. Problem

Causative-passive alternation :

- (1) a. **The causative construction :**  
 Eve fait [offrir un poste à Paul]. (*faire* = 'make')  
 Eve CAUSE [offer a position to Paul]  
 'Eve causes (pro) to offer a position to Paul'
- b. **The 'passive se faire' construction (PSF) :**  
 Paul<sub>i</sub> SE fait [offrir un poste e<sub>i</sub>].  
 Paul SE CAUSE(?) [offer a position]  
 'Paul is offered a position'  
 (may also have a reflexive causative reading : Paul causes... to himself.)

Causative-anticausative alternation :

- (2) a. **The lexical causative :**  
 Pierre cassa la branche  
 'Pierre broke the branch'  
 a'. [[Peter ACT] CAUSE [vase BECOME <broken>]]
- b. **The result anticausative construction :**  
 La branche<sub>i</sub> SE cassa e<sub>i</sub>  
 'The branch broke'  
 b'. [vase BECOME <broken>]

- In both alternations, a complement in (a) surfaces as subject in (b) ;
- In both cases, SE is crucially involved in the alternation ;
- In both cases a CAUSE predicate is involved : present in (a), absent in (b).

This suggests that SE in (1b) is the anticausative (or decausative) morpheme found in (2b) (e.g. Koenig & Pedersen, 1992, Labelle, 2002).

However, such an analysis raises some intriguing questions concerning (1b):

- a. Starting with the embedded event (*offrir un poste à Paul* ‘offer a position to Paul’), why would one want to add to it a causative verb (*faire*), only to decausativize the predicate immediately after, using SE ?
- b. Why would that operation of causativization-decausativization yield a passive reading?
- c. What is the semantic import of the higher clause in the structure?

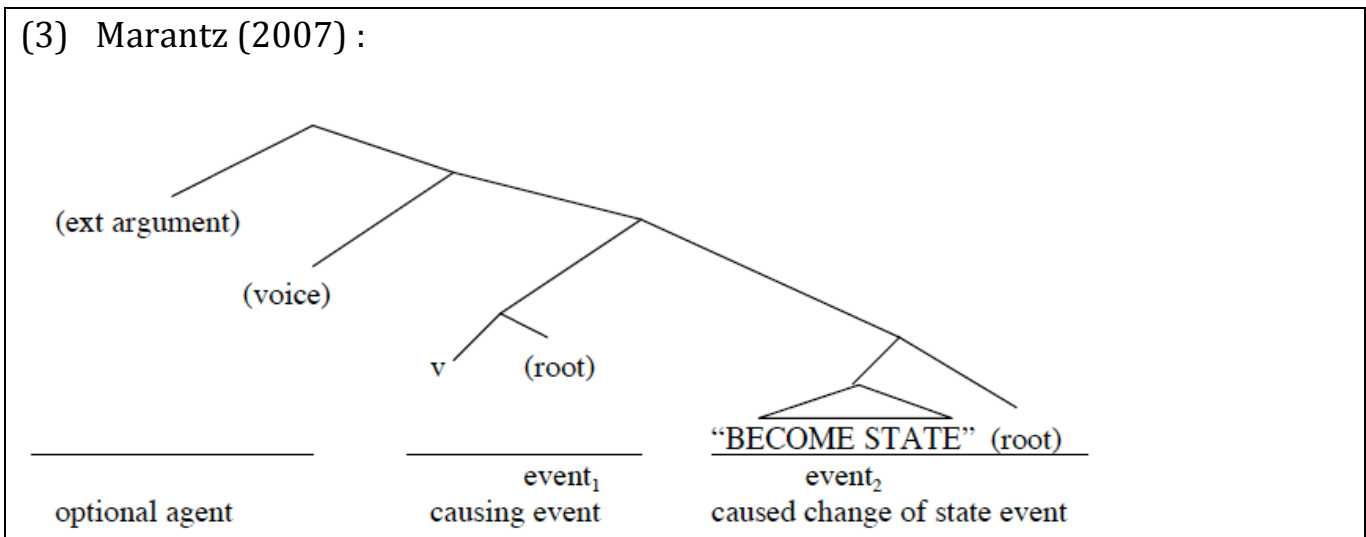
Questions raised by Marantz (2007) :

“How much of the semantic event structure finds representation in syntactic heads and relations?

- i. is there a CAUSE head in causative vPs?”

## 2. SE in Result Anticausative clauses

(3) Marantz (2007) :



Labelle & Doron (2010), Doron & Labelle (2011)’s analysis of result anticausatives.

Accomplishments involve a layered [vP [VP]] structure where :

- V heads a change of state subevent and licenses a result phrase,
- v heads an activity subevent.

No meaning such as ‘causative’ attached to the higher v : ‘cause’ is the normal interpretation of the configuration (Hale & Keyer 2002: 10&174ss.; Marantz 2005).

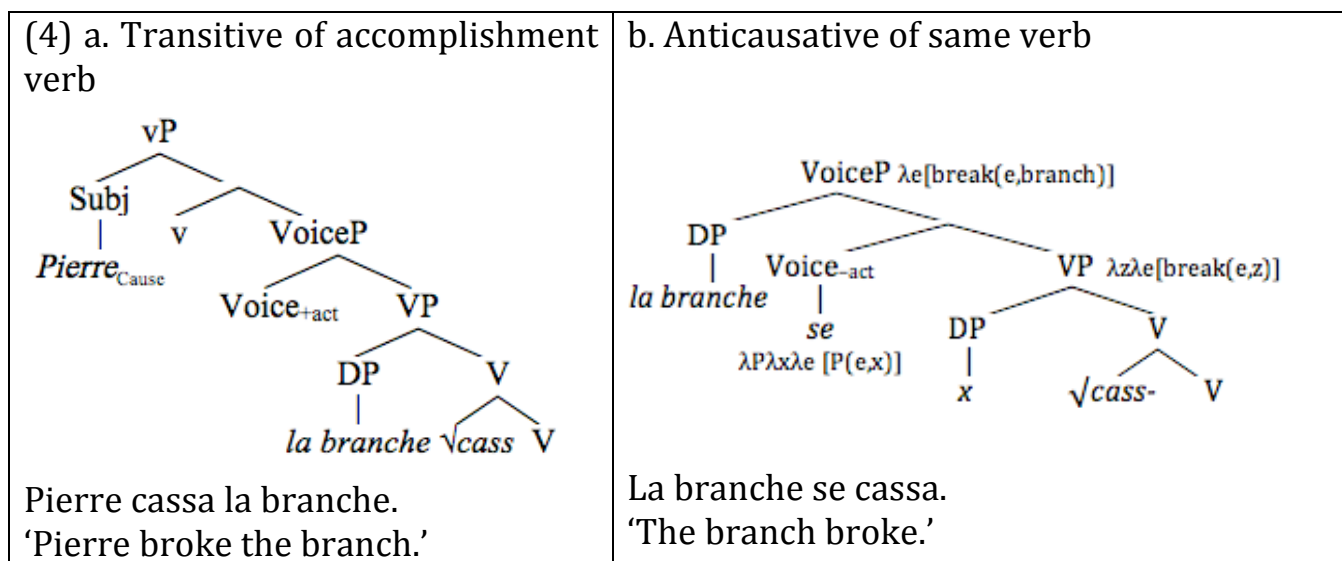
[+Active] Voice : introduces the external argument and assigns it a thematic role compositionally determined by the complex verb phrase (Marantz 1984, Kratzer 1996) :

- If a root merges with the head of an activity subevent, the external argument is an Agent;
- If a root merges with the head of a change of state subevent, the external argument is a Cause.

[–Active] Voice : does not introduce an external argument in syntax.

In Result Anticausatives, SE heads [–Active] Voice and combines directly with a change-of-state subevent (VP).

SE selects for an open predicate ( $\lambda P\lambda x\lambda e[P(e,x)]$ ) & creates a property-denoting predicate whose subject corresponds to the VP internal missing argument.



### 3. SE in the causative-passive alternation

#### 3.1. Causative *faire*

Does not passivize:

(5) a. Marc a fait [chasser Pierre de l'organisation]. (Active)

Marc AUX CAUS dismiss Pierre from the organization

'Marc had Pierre dismissed from the organization'

b. \*Pierre a été fait [chasser e de l'organisation]. (Passive)

↑ \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_ |

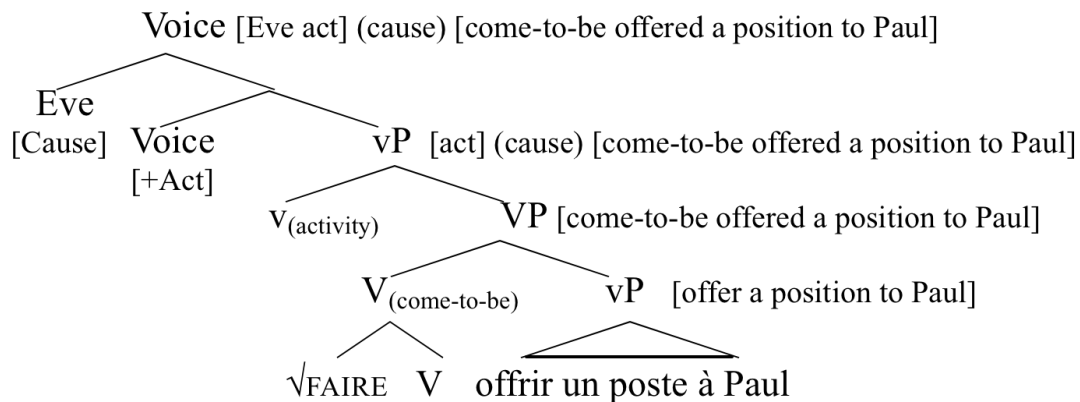
>> suggests that there is no restructuring with formation of a complex verb [*faire+infinitive*]:

- (6) Marc a *fait-chasser* Pierre<sub>ACC</sub> de l'organisation.  
 ○ (6) should allow passivization of accusative complement.

Proposal:

- (1) a. Eve fait [offrir un poste à Paul].  
 Eve CAUSE [offer a position to Paul]  
 'Eve causes (pro) to offer a position to Paul'

(7)



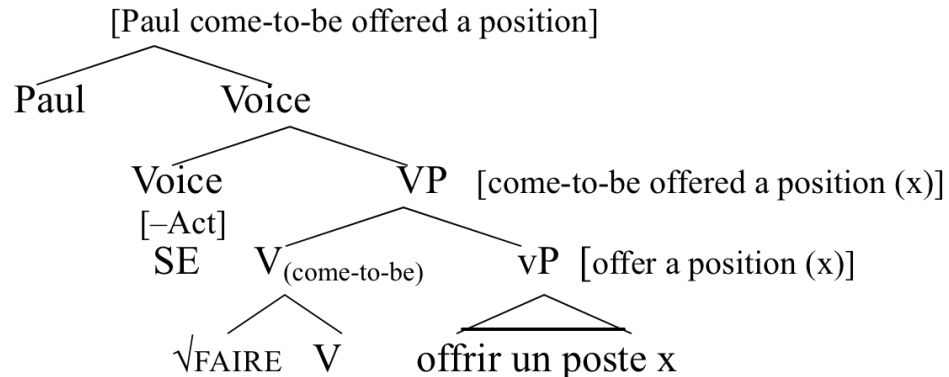
- Crucially:  $\sqrt{\text{faire}}$  is not a causative head, but a root that lexicalizes V, licensing the merge of a result clause (= the caused event).
- The caused (embedded) event is a vP (not a Voice phrase = no position for the subject = realized as a by-phrase in PSF).
- Active Voice introduces the external argument = Cause (because the root merges with V)

The complete structure states that the external argument caused the coming-about of the caused event, viewed as a situation resulting from some unspecified action of the external argument.

### 3.2. Passive *se faire*

- (8) b. Paul **SE** fait [offrir un poste].  
 Paul SE CAUSE(?) [offer a position]  
 'Paul is offered a position'

(10)



- SE realizes [-Active] Voice
- SE selects for an open predicate (Labelle 2008 for reflexive clauses).
- The DP merged above Voice combines with the open predicate to yield a sentence.

The construction denotes a situation where an entity comes to be in a result state expressed by the lower clause, hence the passive reading.

### 3.3. *Faire* as modifying V

#### 3.3.1. *Inchoative reading of se faire* :

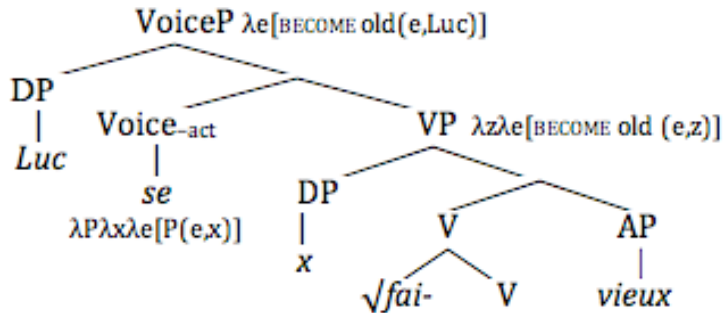
(9) Le fromage se fait.  
the cheese comes-to-be.

(10) Luc se fait vieux. (McIntyre, 2006)  
LUC SE FAIRE old  
'Luc is becoming old'

(11) Le monde ne s' est pas fait en un jour.  
the world NEG-PRT SE AUX NEG made in one day  
'The world did not come to be (/was not made) in one day.'

= √FAIRE merged with V adds no semantic modification to it: by definition V, expresses a change of state subevent, is interpreted as meaning « come-to-be »  
=> faire = a type of expletive head : lexicalizes the head without modifying it.  
=> When √FAIRE merges with V, it lexicalizes the result subevent and licenses a resultative complement.

(12)



### 3.3.2. Re-prefixation

Marantz (2007): re-prefixation creates the restitutive of the verb (not the repetitive).

- (13) a. The walls in the house were green long before they purchased it; they plan to re-paint them (white) as soon as they can.
- b. \*John re-smiled. / (vs John smiled again.)

In English, re- takes scope over the change of state event :

(14) \*They re-put the book on the table.

(15) \*They re-gave John the award.

(from Marantz --Restitutive re- and the first phase syntax/semantics of the VP)

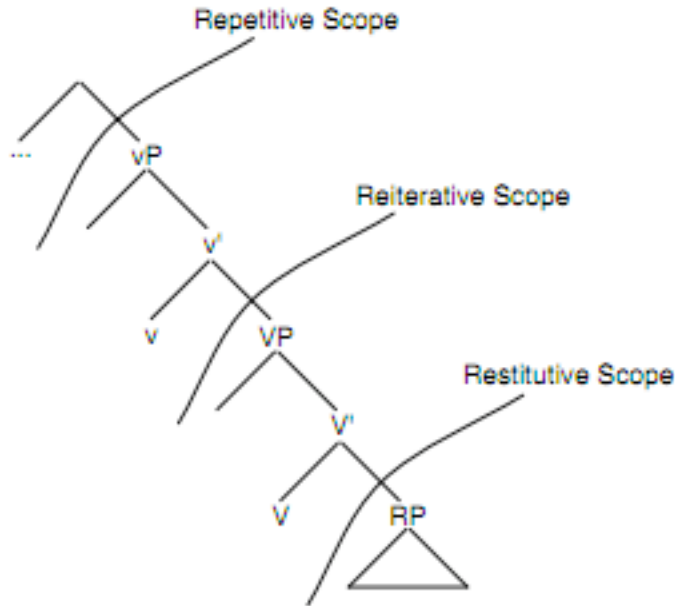
(16) and (17) are OK in French :

(16) Ils ont remis le livre sur la table (après qu'il soit tombé).  
       they put [AGAIN [ the book on the table]]

(17) Ils ont redonné le prix à John.  
       they gave the award to John back/a second time/again

re- may scope higher than the change of state event. But, crucially, it does not require the subject to have done the first action (i.e. not repetitive). Holsinger (2008) introduces a third interpretation, reiterative scope, that may be adequate:

(18)



Similarly, in causatives : (19) compatible with a situation where Eve did not cause the first painting act (e.g. she just bought the house) :

(19) a. Eve a refait peindre la maison en rouge.

b. Eve ACT CAUSED AGAIN [come to be painted the house in red]

= The house was already red.

(20) a. Eve a fait repeindre la maison en rouge.

b. Eve ACT CAUSED [come to be [[AGAIN painted the house] in red]]

= The house could have been a different colour.

(21) a. Eve a refait offrir un poste à Paul

b. Eve ACT CAUSED AGAIN [come to be offered a position to Paul]

= Eve is not necessarily responsible for the first offer.

RE- scopes over the change of state predicate.

It does not scope over a cause predicate.

The root  $\sqrt{\text{FAIRE}}$  heads the change of state predicate. (not a cause predicate)

### 3.4. Koenig & Pedersen's arguments against an anticausative analysis

#### 3.4.1. Cross-linguistic differences

The equivalent of (10) is possible in Spanish, but the passive reading of *se hacer* is not (same with Catalan, Italian). Why ?

- Differences between possible and realized constructions
- Microparametric syntax:  
E.g. in Italian, the causative may passivize :

(22) La macchina sarà fatta riparare domani.  
The car will-be made repair tomorrow  
'The car will be had repaired tomorrow.'  
(Radford 1978 :37, from Lo Cascio 1970 :187)

Impersonal SE constructions in Italian, Spanish...

### 3.4.2. Affected nature of the subject

Semantic/pragmatic specialization of PSF.

K&P claim that

- the subject must be animate (23)
- the event must affect the subject referent (27), and
- For speakers who accept an inanimate subjects, "the inanimate subject is affected in such a way that in its changed state it affects a relevant an animate entity." (p. 153)

### **PSF with inanimate subject:**

(23) Mon sandwich s'est fait manger par ce salaud de Jean.  
My sandwich refl-be-pr make-prt by this bastard of Jean  
'My sandwich was eaten by John, the bastard.'  
== starred by K&P (ex. 32, p. 151), but OK for Paul & me.

Counter-examples :

(24) mon message s'est fait manger  
my message was eaten up  
([http://blog.aufeminin.com/blog/seeone\\_20478\\_2806008](http://blog.aufeminin.com/blog/seeone_20478_2806008))

(25) [ma plante] s'est fait manger les feuilles solide!  
my plant got her leaves eaten solid ! (=a lot)  
(<http://jardinfamilial.bbactif.com/t67134-une-horticultrice-dans-la-salle>)

(26) Vous pourriez perdre votre connexion [...]à cause d'un câble qui *s'est fait manger* par votre chien.  
You could lose your connexion because of a cable that has been eaten by your dog  
(<http://onfaitduweb.com/programmation/nouveau-drm-pour-ubisoft/>)

**PSF with experiencer verb:**

(27) Marc s'est fait craindre par/de tout le monde.

Marc refl-be-pr make-prt by all the world

'Marc was feared by everybody'

== starred by K&P (ex. 42 p. 153)

(possible with a reflexive interpretation; more difficult, but not impossible as a PSF)

Counter-examples :

(28) Instaurer une autorité qui *se fait craindre*.

Establish an authority that is feared.

(29) Un beau visage est un traître qui *se fait craindre* et qu'on regarde avec plaisir.

(Plutarque.)

A beautiful face is a traitor that is feared and that one looks at with pleasure

Possibly true that if the subject is inanimate the sentence is understood as affecting an animate entity. Why? The apparent semantic/pragmatic specialization of PSF may stem from :

1) Two distinct realizations of non-active Voice: passive vs SE.

Passive : Paul a été frappé.

PSF : Paul s'est fait frapper.

2) In the passive, only one event is involved.

In PSF, the higher event introduces a "come to be"/affected event on top of the embedded event. Could that trigger a more "affective" interpretation?

In any case, this should not prevent us from assigning a syntactic structure to the construction.

**3.5. Extensions :**

*3.5.1. Reflexive causatives (from Labelle 2008)*

In true reflexives, SE is merged under [+Active Voice].

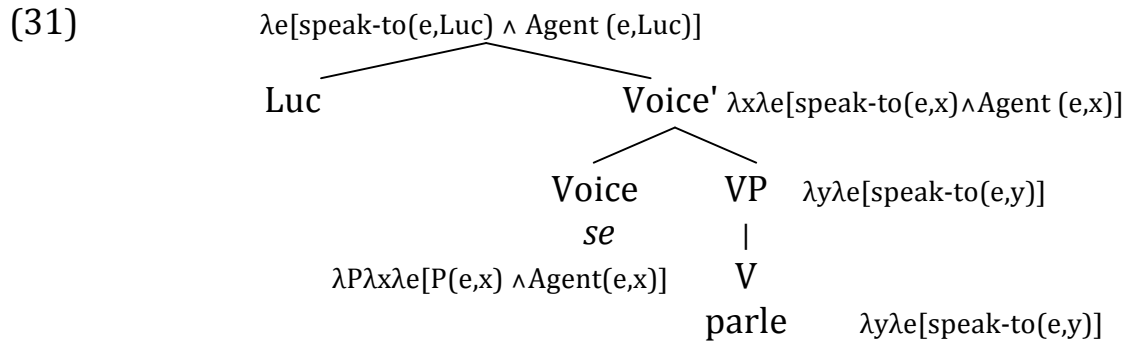
1- combines with an open VP;

2- introduces an external argument;

3- identifies the external argument with the free variable within the VP.

(30) Luc se parle.

Luc speaks-to himself.

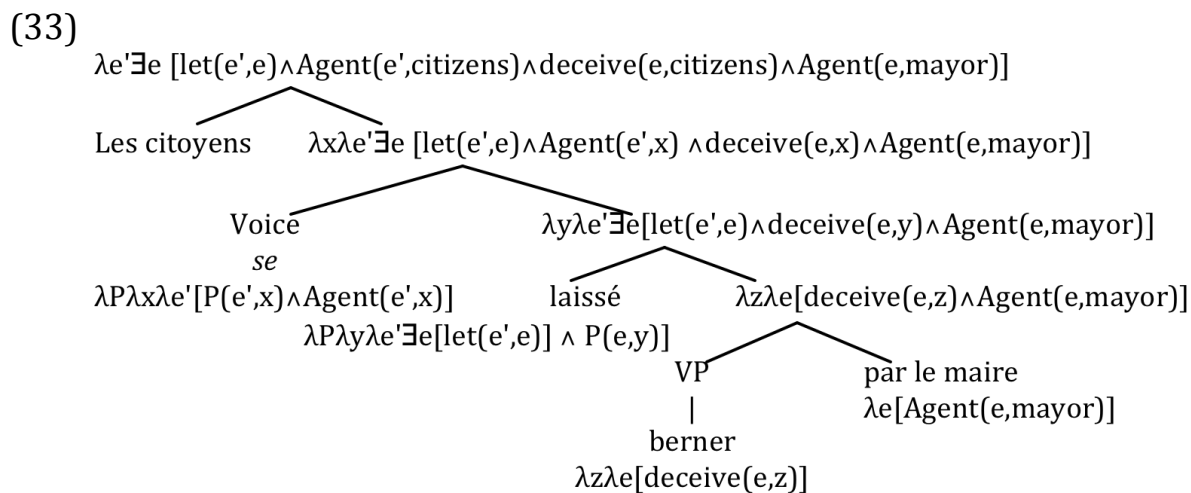


Similarly in reflexive causative constructions :

(32) Lescitoyens *se* sont tous très souvent laissé bêtement  
 The citizens SE AUX-3P all very often let-PP stupidly  
 [<sub>VP</sub> berner <θ> par le maire].  
 deceive \_\_\_ by the mayor  
 ‘The citizens very often let themselves all stupidly be deceived by the mayor.’

- None of the verbs is semantically reflexive: there is no coreference between their thematic subject and their thematic object.
- The relevant verbs are morphologically and syntactically independent — they are separated by adverbs : no complex predicate formation.

The translation of the causative verb allows it to combine with VP’s, i.e. with relations between individuals and events (33 from Labelle 2008):



- Both in true reflexives and in anticausatives, SE selects for an open predicate.
  - In true reflexives, SE is merged under Active Voice
  - In anticausatives, SE is merged under Non-Active Voice.

- In both cases, the subject is associated with an empty position within the lower event.
- In both cases, the position within the embedded event may be an unselected dative complement :

(34) Marc s'est fait couper les cheveux.

Marc refl-be-pr make-prt cut the hair

(a) Marc got himself a haircut

(b) Marc got his hair cut (by someone) (possibly unwillingly)

Strong points of the present analysis :

- In reflexive and non-reflexive sentences, SE combines with an open predicate ; the projection of the external argument thematic role is determined by the nature of the Voice head under which SE is realized.
- No object-to-subject movement
  - Dative arguments do not raise to subject in French, but they may form the subject in SE-FAIRE constructions.
- No lexical operation on a complex predicate :
  - Even unselected datives may surface as the subject of SE-FAIRE.
- No need to postulate the construction of a complex *faire+infinitive* verb .
  - The two verbs are distinct, the embedded verb may has its own external argument which may be realized as a by-phrase.
  - The two verbs may be separated by adverbs :

(35) Paul s' est fait [*brutalement* agresser dans le métro].

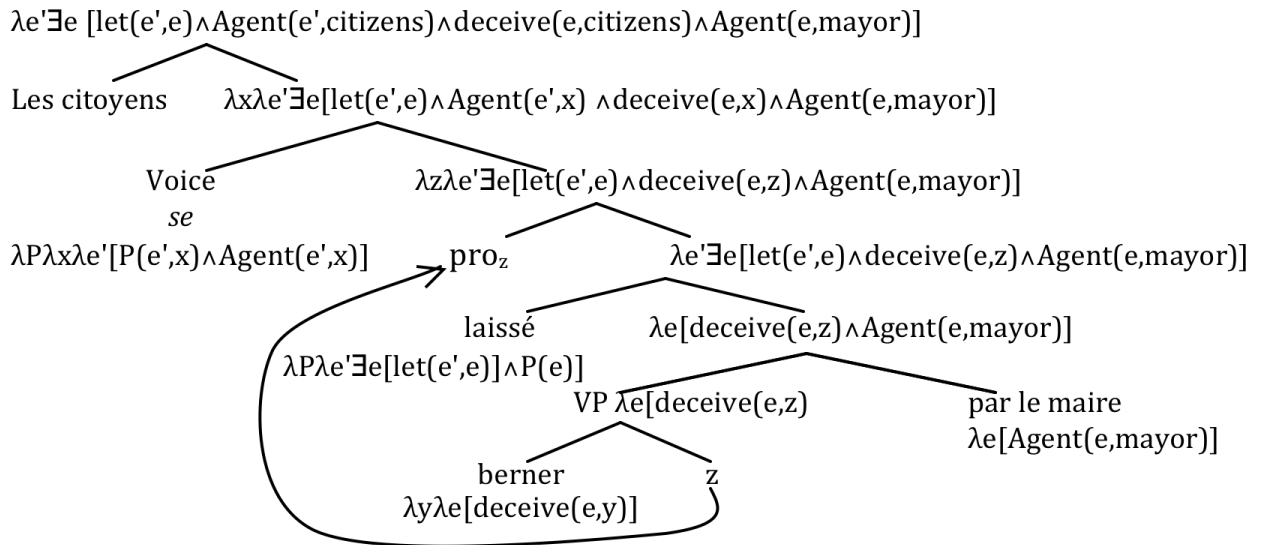
Paul SE AUX FAIRE [brutally agress in the metro]

'Paul was brutally aggressed in the metro'

### 3.5.2. Null pronoun/operator movement (NOP)

Labelle (2008) : "A purely syntactic alternative to the derivation of (47) [= (32)] would be to follow Bruening (2006) in assuming that the verb's object is a null pronoun that moves to adjoin above the VP dominated by *laissé*. Movement of the null pronoun leaves a trace, and abstracts over the adjoined-to structure, creating a constituent of type <e,st>. This would be as in (50) [= (36)] :

(36)



Suppose that, alternatively, the null pro adjoins to the embedded vP :

(37) Paul [<sub>Voice</sub> SE [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>√</sub>faire-V] [<sub>VP</sub> pro [<sub>VP</sub> offrir un poste  $\bar{p}\bar{r}\bar{\theta}$  ]]]]

↑ \_\_\_\_\_ |

This analysis makes the construction similar to the Chinese passive construction involving null operator movement discussed by Huang (1999) :

(40) Zhangsani bei [<sub>IP</sub> NOP Lisi da le NOP ]

|\_\_ predication \_\_\_\_||\_\_movement \_\_\_\_|

- NOP movement to the left periphery of embedded IP
- NOP movement has the effect of creating a property-denoting predicate = lambda abstraction
- main predicate meaning 'get, acquire, or end up with the property of...'
- Predication of the property on the main predicate's subject

- In PSF:

(37)' Paul [<sub>Voice</sub> SE [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>√</sub>faire-V] [<sub>VP</sub> pro [<sub>VP</sub> offrir un poste  $\bar{p}\bar{r}\bar{\theta}$  ]]]]

|\_\_\_\_\_ predication \_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_movement \_\_\_\_\_|

- NOP movement possible with accusative & dative objects.

A potential extension of the analysis is indeed East Asian causatives which have a passive reading, like Korean, Mongolian and Taiwanese.

#### 4. Conclusion

Questions in section 1 :

- a. Starting with the embedded event (*offrir un poste à Paul* 'offer a position to Paul'), why would one want to add to it a causative verb (*faire*), only to decausativize the predicate immediately after, using SE ?
- b. Why would that operation of causativization-decausativization yield a passive reading?
- c. What is the semantic import of the higher clause in the structure?

Answers :

- PSF permits the passivization of unpassivizable predicates (namely: predicates with a dative complement).
- The passive reading stems from the use of non-active SE with a root heading a change of state subevent.

Is there a CAUSE head in causative vPs? Perhaps not even in causatives sentences... universally ?

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