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## Subject position and the Marshallese restructuring configuration

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# Subject Position and the Marshallese Restructuring Configuration

Heather Willson\*

## 1 Introduction

This paper examines Marshallese (Austronesian, Oceanic, Micronesian) infinitival sentences and argues that there are at least two types of infinitival constructions: a bi-clausal construction (1) and a mono-clausal one (2):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) Kōrā ro r-ar ɭōmṇak in āj.<sup>2</sup>  
woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) plan IN weave<sup>3</sup>  
'The women planned to weave.'

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<sup>1</sup>Marshallese is spoken in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and has around 60,000 native speakers. The RMI consists of two island chains, the Ratak and the Rālik chain. Each chain has a distinct dialect, although the two are mutually intelligible. This talk examines the dialect of the capital island of Majuro. While Majuro is part of the Ratak island chain, its dialect includes many lexical elements of the Rālik dialect.

<sup>2</sup>In Marshallese orthography, the following letters represent the following sounds (Abo, et. al. 1976):

<u>orthography</u>	<u>IPA</u>	<u>orthography</u>	<u>IPA</u>	<u>orthography</u>	<u>IPA</u>
a	[a]	n	[nʲ]	l	[lʲ]
ā	[æ]	ṇ	[n <sup>w</sup> ] or [n <sup>u</sup> ]	ɭ	[l <sup>w</sup> ] or [l <sup>u</sup> ]
o	[o] or [ɔ]	ṇ	[ŋ] or [ŋ <sup>w</sup> ]	m	[mʲ]
o	[ɔ]	u	[u]	ṃ	[m <sup>u</sup> ]
ō	[ɔ] or [ʌ]	ū	[u]		

<sup>3</sup>Abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: pl = plural; s = singular; T(fut) = future tense; T(pres) = present tense; T(past) = past tense; AgrS = subject agreement clitic; and TAM = tense, aspect, modality marker.

- (2) Kōrā ro r-ar jino āj.  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) start weave  
 ‘The women started to weave.’

Following Cinque (2006) and Wurmbrand (2001), I argue that an analysis of the mono-clausal construction as functional restructuring, in which the matrix verb is the head of a functional projection, can explain the Marshallese prohibition against the  $V_{\text{matrix}}$ -subject- $V_{\text{embedded}}$  word order and the absence of selectional restrictions imposed on the subject by the matrix verb.

The outline of this paper is as follows. Section 2 is an introduction to Marshallese syntax focusing on word order variations of intransitive sentences and on passives, two topics which will come into play in the analysis of infinitival sentences. Following this introduction, section 3 details some of the morphosyntactic properties of the two infinitival constructions. Section 4 proposes an analysis of the structure of these two constructions and shows how the proposed analysis accounts for the Marshallese word order facts, followed by a conclusion in section 5.

## 2 Marshallese Syntax

Marshallese is a head initial language with pro-drop and a subject agreement clitic (AgrS). AgrS usually cliticizes to the tense, aspect, or modality marker (TAM).<sup>4</sup> Transitive sentences usually have SVO order (3a), while VOS order is possible when the subject is focused (3b). However it is not possible for the subject to intervene between the verb and the object (3c).

- (3) a. Leddik ro re-kar rāpij kuj eo.  
 girl the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) hold cat the.s  
 ‘The girls held the cat.’  
 b. Re-kar rāpij kuj eo, leddik ro.  
 3pl-T(past) hold cat the.s girl the.pl.human  
 ‘The girls held the cat.’  
 c. \*Re-kar rāpij leddik ro kuj eo.  
 3pl-T(past) hold girl the.pl.human cat the.s  
 ‘The girls held the cat.’

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<sup>4</sup>It is also possible for AgrS to cliticize to the verb when there is no overt TAM.

This sentence internal position is available in intransitive sentences. So in addition to sentence initially (4a) or finally (4b), subjects of intransitive sentences may also immediately follow the verb (4c).<sup>5</sup>

- (4) a. Irooj ro re-naaj etetal ñan kweilok eo.  
 chief the.pl.human 3pl-T(fut) walk to meeting the.s  
 'The chiefs will walk to the meeting.'
- b. Re-naaj etetal ñan kweilok eo irooj ro.  
 3pl-T(fut) walk to meeting the.s chief the.pl.human  
 'The chiefs will walk to the meeting.'
- c. Re-naaj etetal irooj ro ñan kweilok eo.  
 3pl-T(fut) walk chief the.pl.human to meeting the.s  
 'The chiefs will walk to the meeting.'

## 2.1 Analysis of Intransitive Sentences

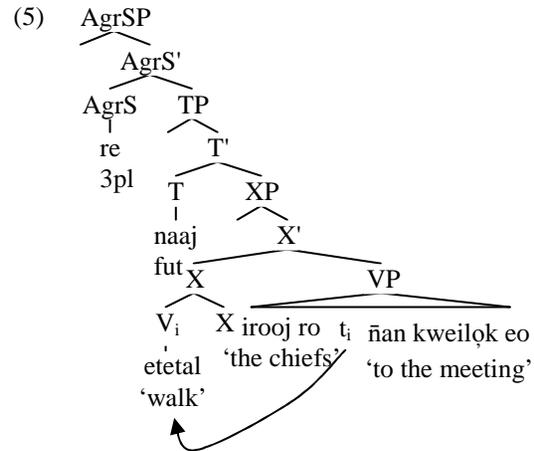
Following Hale (1998), I assume that the postverbal position of the Marshallese subject in intransitive sentences is due to the verb's movement out of the VP and the subject's remaining VP internal. While Hale assumes that the verb raises to left adjoin to tense, in Willson (2004) I argue that the position of the verb with respect to adverbs and constituency facts show that the verb does not raise to a position as high as tense. Instead I argue that the verb raises to an XP above VP, as shown in (5).

When the subject of an intransitive sentence remains VP internal, VS(PP) order results. However if the subject raises to the specifier of AgrSP, the sentence will have SV(PP). In order to account for the prohibition against VSO order in transitives, it must be assumed that the subject cannot remain VP internal in transitive sentences. In other words, the subject must raise to the specifier of AgrSP in transitive sentences, resulting in a sentence initial subject.<sup>6</sup> At this time, it is unclear why the VP internal position is not available to subjects in transitive sentences. I therefore set aside this issue for future research.

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<sup>5</sup>If there is a postverbal adverb, then the subject must follow the postverbal adverb and may not intervene between the verb and the adverb.

<sup>6</sup>This analysis does not address the position of sentence final subjects. Since these subjects are focused, I assume that they have a different structure than the other sentences I am discussing.



## 2.2 Passives

The morphological form of Marshallese passive verbs is not distinct from that of intransitive verbs (Bender 1969, Hale 1998). So it is often the case that these types of sentences are ambiguous between having an active and a passive reading. Distinctively in a passive sentence, the DP receiving the theme theta role appears sentence initially and triggers agreement with the subject agreement clitic:

- (6) a. Amiṃōṇo ko r-ar āj  
 handicraft the.pl.nonhuman 3pl-T(past) weave  
 'The handicrafts were woven.'
- b. \*Amiṃōṇo ko e-ar āj.  
 handicraft the.pl.nonhuman 3s-T(past) weave  
 'The handicrafts were woven.'
- (7) a. Amiṃōṇo eo e-ar āj.  
 handicraft the.s 3s-T(past) weave  
 'The handicraft was woven.'
- b. \*Amiṃōṇo eo r-ar āj  
 handicraft the.s 3pl-T(past) weave  
 'The handicraft was woven.'

In (6), the subject is the plural *amiṃōṇo ko* ‘the handicrafts.’ Therefore the 3pl agreement clitic *r-* must be used, while (7) has a singular subject *amiṃōṇo eo* ‘the handicraft,’ and the 3s clitic *e-* must be used. Notice that the above sentences cannot have an ambiguous reading, since, generally speaking, handicrafts don’t weave.

In most passives, it also appears that a *by* phrase is possible, as shown in (8):

- (8) *Amiṃōṇo ko*                      *r-ar*              *āj*              *jān kōrā*  
 handicraft the.pl.nonhuman 3pl-T(past) weave by woman  
*ro.*  
 the.pl.human  
 ‘The handicrafts were woven by the women.’

### 3 Marshallese Infinitives

Like passives, Marshallese infinitival verbs lack overt infinitival morphology. Compare (9a) and (9b). In (9a), *āje* is the matrix verb, whereas in (9b), it is the embedded verb. Both of these verbs have an identical overt morphological form which includes the transitive suffix *-e*.

- (9) a. *Kōrā ro*                      *r-ar*              *āj-e*              *amiṃōṇo*  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) weave-trans handicraft  
*ko.*  
 the.pl.nonhuman  
 ‘The women wove the handicrafts.’
- b. *Kōrā ro*                      *r-ar*              *ļōmṇak in āj-e*  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) plan IN weave-trans<sup>7</sup>  
*amiṃōṇo ko.*  
 handicraft the.pl.nonhuman  
 ‘The women planned to weave the handicrafts.’

Rather than morphology, what seems to mark a Marshallese infinitive is the lack of a subject agreement clitic and overt subject in the embedded clause.

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<sup>7</sup>In this paper I gloss the infinitival introducer *in* as IN so as to prevent the assumption that it is generated as the head of an infinitival TP. The question of where this word is generated is still in question.

Infinitival sentences become grammatical when these elements are introduced into the embedded clause, as shown in (10a) and (10b) respectively.

- (10) a. \*Kōrā ro r-ar ļōmṇak in r-āj-e  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) plan IN 3pl-weave-trans  
 amimōṇo ko.  
 handicraft the.pl.nonhuman  
 ‘The women planned to weave the handicrafts.’
- b. \*Kōrā ro r-ar ļōmṇak in leddik  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) plan IN girl  
 ro āj-e amimfōṇfo ko.  
 the.pl.human weave-trans handicraft the.pl.nonhuman  
 ‘The women planned for the girls to weave the handicrafts.’

While all Marshallese infinitival sentences share these properties, the behavior of infinitives with respect to three morphosyntactic properties seems to indicate that there are at least two classes of infinitival constructions. These properties are 1) whether *in* is required to intervene between the matrix and embedded verbs, 2) whether the subject may immediately precede *in* and 3) whether long passives are possible. Since these three properties seemed to be determined by the matrix verb, from here on out I will refer to two different classes of Marshallese verbs: restructuring and non-restructuring verbs.

### 3.1 Theoretical Justification for Restructuring Verbs

It has long since been noted that infinitives in many languages do not behave uniformly with respect to their clausal domains. Bech (1955), Evers (1975), and Rizzi (1976) were some of the first to note that some infinitival constructions were transparent for syntactic processes, such as clitic climbing and long passives, and that these transparencies should, in principle, not be possible given the bi-clausal structure of infinitives. This being the case, it has been argued that these infinitivals in fact have a mono-clausal structure. While there is some debate as to the structure of these types of sentences, it is generally agreed that whether an infinitive is mono-clausal or bi-clausal is related to properties of the matrix verb, hence, following syntactic convention, my adoption of the term restructuring and non-restructuring verbs.

In the discussion that follows, my placing Marshallese verbs into the restructuring or non-restructuring category is based on the fact that transparency effects surface with some verbs but not others. Those not showing transparency effects also display other syntactic properties that seem to war-

rant their inclusion into a single class. The same can be said for restructuring verbs. Thus I now turn my attention to a discussion of these two verb classes.

### 3.2 Restructuring Verbs

A list of Marshallese restructuring verbs is given in Table 1, which also indicates whether these verbs tend to be restructuring verbs cross-linguistically<sup>8</sup>

Verb	Cross-linguistically
modal <i>kōn</i> □ <i>aan</i> 'want' <i>maroñ</i> 'be able' <i>aikuj</i> 'need'	restructuring
aspectual <i>wōnṃaanlōk wōt</i> 'continue' <i>jino</i> 'start'	restructuring
<i>kajjeoñ</i> 'try'	language variation

Table 1. Restructuring verbs

The verbs listed in table 1 all show transparency effects in the form of long passives. In long passive sentences, the matrix and/or embedded verb is passivized, and the DP receiving the theme theta role from the embedded verb appears as the subject of the sentence. Compare (11a) and (11b). Notice that this sentence is ungrammatical when the subject does not agree with the agreement clitic (11b), which indicates that these are true passive sentences.

- (11) a. *Amiṃōṇo ko r-ar jino āj.*  
handicraft the.pl.nonhuman 3pl-T(past) start weave  
'The handicrafts started to be woven.'
- b. \**Amiṃōṇo ko e-ar jino āj.*  
handicraft the.pl.nonhuman 3s-T(past) start weave  
'The handicrafts started to be woven.'

<sup>8</sup>Only a handful of Marshallese verbs are restructuring verbs. In this respect, Marshallese differs from German and Romance languages which have a number of restructuring verbs, as well as from Chamorro, a distantly related Austronesian language, in which restructuring is more freely available (Chung 2004).

Although it can be concluded that these are passive sentences, it is difficult to tell if the matrix verb is passivized in Marshallese given that most of these verbs do not have a separate transitive/intransitive form. So while it is possible that the matrix verb is passivized, it is impossible to know for sure. However, the form of the embedded verb is enough to let us know that the embedded verb is passivized.

A second syntactic property of these verbs is that they do not require *in* to be present in the sentence, as shown in (12a) and (12b).

- (12) a. Kōrā ro r-ar jino in āj.  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) start IN weave  
 ‘The women started to weave.’  
 b. Kōrā ro r-ar jino āj.  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) start weave  
 ‘The women started to weave.’

Finally, these verbs allow the subject to follow the matrix verb when *in* is present:

- (13) a. E-aikuj laddik eo in katak.  
 3s-need boy the.s IN study  
 ‘The boy needs to study.’  
 b. \*E-aikuj laddik eo katak.  
 3s-need boy the.s study  
 ‘The boy needs to study.’

### 3.3 Non-restructuring Verbs

The majority of Marshallese verbs requiring infinitival complements are non-restructuring verbs. These types of verbs require *in* to be present in the sentence, as shown in (14a).<sup>9</sup> If *in* is absent, the sentence is ungrammatical (14b).

- (14) a. Kōrā eo e-ar ļōmṇak in āj.  
 woman the.s 3s-T(past) plan IN weave  
 ‘The woman planned to weave.’

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<sup>9</sup>It is unclear whether the Marshallese *in* is generated as the head of TP of the embedded clause or as the head of the embedded CP. This being the case, I will gloss *in* as IN. Crucially, the presence of this word does not license an overt subject in the embedded clause.

- b. \*Kōrā eo e-ar ļōmṇak āj.  
 woman the.s 3s-T(past) plan weave  
 ‘The woman planned to weave.’

In addition, the subject may immediately follow the matrix verb in these types of sentences:

- (15) E-ar ļōmṇak kōrā eo in āj.  
 3s-T(past) plan woman the.s IN weave  
 ‘The woman planned to weave.’

Sentences with word orders such as (15) are ungrammatical when *in* is not present. However this is predicted, given that infinitival sentences with matrix verbs like *ļōmṇak* are ungrammatical without *in*.

Finally, these verbs do not allow long passives. While an active reading is possible in these sentences, a passive reading is not.

- (16) Amimōṇo ko r-ar ļōmṇak in āj.  
 handicraft the.pl.nonhuman 3pl-T(past) plan IN weave  
 #‘The handicrafts planned to weave (something).’  
 \*‘The handicrafts were planned to be woven.’

Table 2 lists the Marshallese non-restructuring verbs.

Verb	Cross-linguistically
<i>bōjrak</i> ‘stop’ motion	restructuring restructuring
<i>meļōkļōk</i> ‘forget’	language variation
<i>ļōmṇak</i> ‘plan’	language variation
<i>kāālōt</i> ‘decide’	language variation
stative verbs	non-restructuring
<i>kōjatiktik</i> ‘hope’	non-restructuring
<i>ṇakoko</i> ‘refuse’	non-restructuring
<i>likjab</i> ‘fail’	non-restructuring
<i>kallimur</i> ‘promise’	non-restructuring

Table 1: Non-restructuring verbs

#### 4 The Structure of Marshallese Infinitival Sentences

In proposing an analysis of sentences with restructuring and non-restructuring verbs, I will first turn my attention to sentences with non-restructuring verbs, which have a bi-clausal structure. Recall that these types of sentences allow VSinV order but prohibit VSV order. Likewise recall that the analysis of Marshallese declaratives that was adopted in section 2 was one in which the Marshallese verb raises out of the VP to the head of an XP. If this is the case, then the analysis of non-restructuring sentence is as follows.

Take a sentence like (15), repeated here. In this sentence, the subject is selected by the matrix verb, while the embedded verb selects PRO as its specifier. In both the matrix and the embedded clause, the verbs raise out of VP to left adjoin to the head of XP, as shown in (17).<sup>10</sup> Thus the verb *ļōmṇak* raises above the subject *kōrā eo*. If the subject remains VP internal, then it will intervene between the verb and *in*. If it raises to spec AgrSP, then it will be sentence initial.

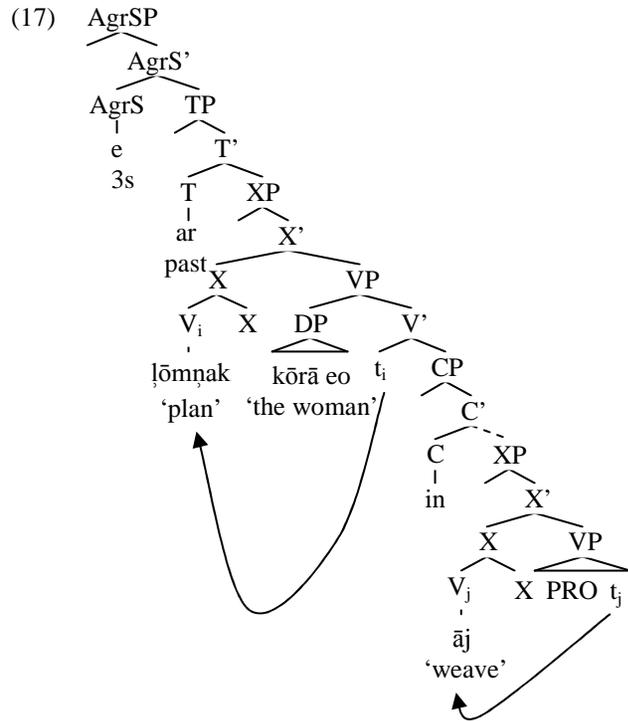
- (15) E-ar        ļōmṇak kōrā    eo    in    āj.  
           3s-T(past) plan    woman the.s IN weave  
           ‘The woman planned to weave.’

Let us now turn to the restructuring sentences. I propose that a functional restructuring configuration, as proposed by Cinque (2006) and Wurmbrand (2001) can account for the prohibition against VSV order in restructuring sentences. In this analysis, restructuring verbs are the heads of functional projections and not the heads of VPs. This being the case restructuring verbs do not have theta roles to assign, and therefore the matrix subject is not selected by the restructuring verb or, as I will continue to refer to it, the matrix verb. Rather the matrix subject is selected by the embedded verb, as shown in (18).

If the Marshallese subject is selected by the embedded verb and can either remain VP internal, it will follow the embedded verb, as shown in (19) and (20). Notice that VSV order will never be possible because there is no position between the head of FP (the position of the matrix verb) and the VP (the position of the embedded verb) to which the subject can raise. Thus the prohibition against VSV order is explained.

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<sup>10</sup>In tree (17), I have arbitrarily put *in* in CP, as it is unclear whether it is generated as the head of CP or TP.

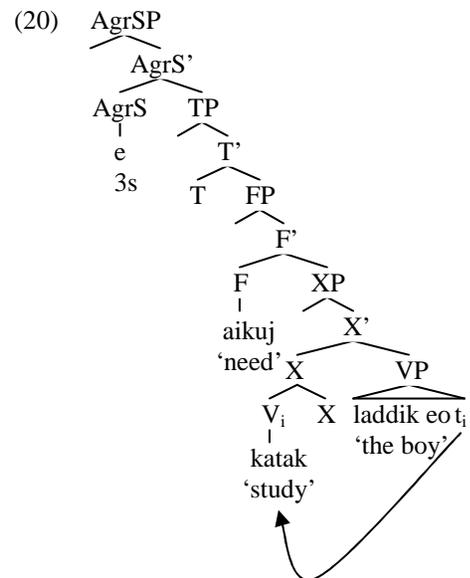


(18)  $[_{FP} F(V_{matrix}) [_{VP} subject [V_{embedded}]_i v [_{VP} t_i]]]$

(19) E-aikuj katak laddik eo.  
 3s-need study boy the.s  
 'The boy needs to study.'

In addition to explaining word order patterns, this analysis predicts that the matrix verb (the head of the functional projection) in restructuring sentences does not impose selectional restrictions on the subject because it does not assign a theta role to the subject. This turns out to be the case. First, as shown in (21), restructuring verbs are possible with weather verbs.

Since weather verbs do not assign theta roles to the subject and since dummy expletive subjects are possible, it seems that these verbs do not assign theta roles to the subject. Also, these verbs allow inanimate subjects.



(21) a. E-j jino wõt.  
3s-T(pres) start rain  
'It started to rain.'

b. E-marõñ wõt.  
3s-be.able rain  
'It is able to rain.'

(22) a. M̄weo e-j jino ka-mijak Jebro.  
the.house 3s-T(pres) start cause-be.afraid Jebro  
'The house started to frighten Jebro.'

b. Accident eo e-j marõñ ka-bõjrak ri-kõõt  
accident the.s 3s-T(pres) be.able cause-stop one.who-steal  
eo.  
the.s  
'The accident is able to stop the thief.'

The opposite seems to be true with non-restructuring verbs. They cannot be used with weather verbs (23a), and inanimate subjects are not possible (23b).

- (23) a. \*E-kar    ʔōmṇak in wōt.  
 3s-T(past) plan    IN rain  
 ‘It planned to rain.’
- b. \*Accident eo e-kar    ʔōmṇak in ka-bōjrak  
 accident the.s 3s-T(past) plan    IN cause-stop  
 ri-kṛoṭ    eo.  
 one.who-steal the.s  
 ‘The accident planned to stop the thief.’

These facts are further evidence for the analysis of these verbs as being either restructuring or non-restructuring verbs.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that there are at least 2 types of Marshallese infinitival constructions: a mono-clausal, restructuring construction and a bi-clausal, non-restructuring one. I have also argued that Marshallese restructuring verbs are the heads of functional projections rather than heads of VPs, and that this analysis can explain the subject position in Marshallese infinitival sentences as well as the lack of selectional restrictions on the subjects of restructuring sentences.

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