

# Subject Position and the Marshallese Restructuring Configuration<sup>1</sup>

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## 1 Introduction<sup>2</sup>

This paper examines Marshallese 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>3</sup>

(1) Kōrā ro r-ar ḷōmṇak in āj.<sup>4</sup>  
woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) plan IN weave<sup>5</sup>  
'The women planned to weave.'

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

I argue that these mono-clausal sentences are instances of functional restructuring in the sense of Cinque (2006) and Wurmbrand (2001), who propose that in the functional restructuring configuration, the matrix verb is the head of a functional projection, while the embedded verb is

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<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this paper will be published as "Subject Position and the Marshallese Restructuring Configuration" in *U Penn working papers*.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank my Marshallese teachers Annie Lynn Kabua, Ether Jaik, Lane Lanny, Isaac Marty, Michael Iones, Cassidy Swain Matthew, Erika Langidrik, Joanna Baptist, Ricky Graham, Mary Graham and Emina Vaughn for sharing their time and their language with me. I would also like to thank Anoop Mahajan, Pamela Munro, Tim Stowell and David Schuler for their comments and suggestions. This research would not have been possible without the financial support of Mrs. Yvonne Lenart and the UCLA linguistics department.

<sup>3</sup> Marshallese (Austronesian, Oceanic, Micronesian) 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 its own dialect, although the differences between the two dialects are primarily lexical. This paper examines the dialect of the capitol island of Majuro. While Majuro is part of the Ratak chain, its dialect includes many lexical elements of the Rālik dialect.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I will adopt the orthographic conventions of the Marshallese-English dictionary, as depicted below (Abo, et. al. 1976):

orthography	IPA	orthography	IPA	orthography	IPA
a	[a]	n	[n <sup>y</sup> ]	l	[l <sup>y</sup> ]
ā	[æ]	ṇ	[n <sup>w</sup> ] or [n <sup>u</sup> ]	ḷ	[l <sup>w</sup> ] or [l <sup>u</sup> ]
o	[o] or [ɔ]	ṇ	[ŋ] or [ŋ <sup>w</sup> ]	m	[m <sup>y</sup> ]
o	[ɒ]	u	[u]	m̄	[m <sup>u</sup> ]
ō	[ə] or [ʌ]	ū	[u]		

<sup>5</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.

the head of a VP. This analysis can explain the syntactic behavior of sentences like (2), including the prohibition against post-matrix verbal subjects and the absence of selectional restrictions imposed on the subject by the matrix verb.

The paper will proceed as follows. Section 2 is an introduction to Marshallese syntax and focuses on word order variations of intransitive sentences and on passive sentences, as an understanding of these two topics will be necessary to the analysis of infinitival sentences. Following this introduction, section 3 details some of the morpho-syntactic properties of bi-clausal and mono-clausal infinitival sentences. Section 4 proposes an analysis of these two types of sentences and shows how the proposed analysis accounts for the morpho-syntactic properties of these sentences.

## 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>6</sup> The basic word order of a transitive sentence is:

(3) Subject AgrS=TAM Neg Adv V Adv Object PP

Transitive sentences usually have SVO order (4a), while VOS order is also possible (4b). VSO order is never possible (4c).

(4) a. Leddik ro re-kar dāpij kuuj eo.  
 girl the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) hold cat the.s  
 'The girls held the cat.'

b. Re-kar dāpij kuuj eo leddik ro.  
 3pl-T(past) hold cat the.s girl the.pl.human  
 'The girls held the cat.'

c. \*Re-kar dāpij leddik ro kuuj eo.  
 3pl-T(past) hold girl the.pl.human cat the.s  
 'The girls held the cat.'

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<sup>6</sup> It is also possible for AgrS to cliticize to the verb when there is no overt TAM.

However, this postverbal subject position is available in intransitive sentences. So in addition to sentence initially (5a) or finally (5b), subjects of intransitive sentences may also occur immediately following the verb (5c).<sup>7</sup>

- (5) a. Irooj ro re-naaj etetal n̄an kweilɔk eo.  
 chief the.pl.human 3pl-T(fut) walk to meeting the.s  
 'The chiefs will walk to the meeting.'
- b. Re-naaj etetal n̄an kweilɔk 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 n̄an kweilɔk 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

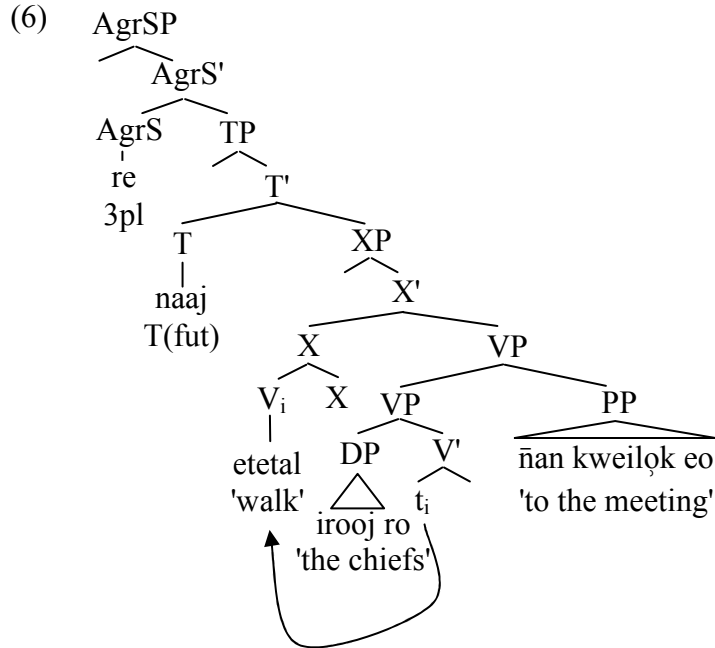
Following Hale (1998), I assume that immediately postverbal subjects are a result of verb movement out of the VP and the subject remaining VP internal. While Hale proposes that the verb raises to right adjoin to Tense, in Willson (2004, to appear) I argue that the position of the verb with respect to most adverbs indicates that the verb cannot be raising to a position as high in the clause as Tense. I also argue that constituency evidence shows that the verb forms a constituent with the sentential elements following it, rather than with Tense. Therefore, I propose that the verb raises to left adjoin to the head of an XP directly above VP, as shown in (6).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> If there is a postverbal adverbial, the subject must follow the postverbal adverbial and may not intervene between the verb and the adverbial, as shown below:

- (i) a. Re-j jambo bajjek likao ro n̄an Laura.  
 3pl-T(pres) cruise for.no.important.reason young.man the.pl.human to Laura  
 'The young men are cruising to Laura for no important reason.'
- b. \*Re-j jambo likao ro bajjek n̄an Laura.  
 3pl-T(pres) cruise young.man the.pl.human for.no.important.reason to Laura  
 'The young men are cruising to Laura for no important reason.'

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I assume that prepositional phrases are right adjoined to the VP, although I concede that the facts are more complicated than presented here and may necessitate a revision of this analysis at a future date.



When the subject of an intransitive sentence remains VP internal, VSPP order results, as shown in (6). However if the subject raises to the specifier of AgrSP, the sentence will have SVPP order. 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 and that it must raise to the specifier of AgrSP, resulting in a sentence initial subject.<sup>9</sup> At this time, it is unclear why the VP internal position is not available to subjects of transitive sentences, but this issue will be addressed in future research.

## 2.2 Passives

The morphological form of a Marshallese passive verb is not distinct from that of an intransitive verb (Bender 1969, Hale 1998). So it is often the case that these types of sentences may have an active or a passive reading. This is because passive sentences may have sentence initial subjects. However, whether the sentence has an active or a passive reading is often clear from the context.

<sup>9</sup> This analysis does not address the position of sentence final subjects. These sentences have a different structure from that of VSPP sentences. Unfortunately, this issue cannot be addressed at this time, and I will leave it for a future research.

In a sentence with a passive reading, the DP receiving the theme theta role appears sentence initially and triggers agreement with the subject agreement clitic. In (7), the plural DP *amimōño* *ko* 'the handicrafts' is the subject. Therefore the 3pl agreement clitic *r-* must be used, while (8) has a singular subject—*amimōño* *eo* 'the handicraft'—and the 3s clitic *e-* must be used. (7b) and (8b) are ungrammatical because the wrong agreement clitic is used.

(7) a. *Amimōño ko r-ar āj.*  
 handicraft the.pl.nonhuman 3pl-T(past) weave  
 'The handicrafts were woven.'

b. \**Amimōño ko e-ar āj.*  
 handicraft the.pl.nonhuman 3s-T(past) weave  
 'The handicrafts were woven.'

(8) a. *Amimōño eo e-ar āj.*  
 handicraft the.s 3s-T(past) weave  
 'The handicraft was woven.'

b. \**Amimōño eo r-ar āj*  
 handicraft the.s 3pl-T(past) weave  
 'The handicraft was woven.'

Note that the above sentences cannot have an ambiguous reading, since handicrafts are not capable of weaving. (9) below shows an example using another verb and illustrates how sentences of this type can be ambiguous:

(9) *Likao eo e-ar deñdeñ.*  
 young.man the.s 3s-T(past) slap  
 'The young man was slapped.'  
 'The young man did some slapping.'

In most passives, it is possible to have a *by* phrase, as shown in (10):

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

### 3 Marshallese Infinitives

Like passive verbs, Marshallese infinitival verbs lack overt infinitival morphology. Compare (11a) and (11b). In (11a), the matrix verb is *āje* 'weave', whereas in (11b), *āje* is the embedded verb. These verbs have an identical overt morphological form, which includes the transitive suffix *-e*.

- (11) a. *Kōrā ro r-ar āj-e amimōŋo ko.*  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) weave-trans handicraft the.pl.nonhuman  
 'The women wove the handicrafts.'
- b. *Kōrā ro r-ar lōmŋak in āj-e amimōŋo ko.*  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) plan IN<sup>10</sup> weave-trans handicraft the.pl.nonhuman  
 'The women planned to weave the handicrafts.'

Rather, what seems to mark a Marshallese verb as an infinitive is that it is not preceded by a subject agreement clitic nor does it have an overt subject distinct from the matrix subject. Infinitival sentence become ungrammatical when AgrS or an overt subject is introduced into the embedded clause, as shown in (12a) and (12b) respectively.

- (12) a. \**Kōrā ro r-ar lōmŋak in r-āj-e amimōŋo*  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) plan IN 3pl-weave-trans handicraft  
*ko.*  
 the.pl.nonhuman  
 'The women planned to weave the handicrafts.'
- b. \**Kōrā ro r-ar lōmŋak in leddik ro āj-e*  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) plan IN girl the.pl.human weave-trans  
*amimōŋo ko.*  
 handicraft the.pl.nonhuman  
 'The women planned for the girls to weave the handicrafts.'

While all Marshallese infinitival sentences behave in this manner, the behavior of these sentences with respect to other morpho-syntactic properties seems to indicate that there are at least two kinds of infinitival constructions. These properties are 1) whether long passives are

<sup>10</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 issue of where this word is generated is still in question.

possible, 2) whether the subject may immediately follow the matrix verb and 3) whether *in* must intervene between the matrix and embedded verbs. Since an infinitival sentence's behavior with respect to these three properties is determined by the matrix verb, it seems justified to argue that these verbs fall into two different classes: restructuring and non-restructuring verbs.

### **3.1 Theoretical Justification for Restructuring Verbs**

Bech (1955), Evers (1975), and Rizzi (1978) were among the first to observe that, in many languages, infinitival sentences do not behave uniformly with respect to their clausal domains. They noted that some infinitival constructions were transparent for syntactic processes, such as clitic climbing and long passives, and that these transparencies should, in principle, not exist if these constructions had a bi-clausal structure. Because of these facts, it has been argued that infinitives displaying these transparencies have a mono-clausal rather than bi-clausal structure. While there is still some debate regarding the structure of these sentences, it is generally agreed that whether an infinitive is mono-clausal or bi-clausal is related to properties of the matrix verb.

In the discussion that follows, my classifying Marshallese verbs as restructuring or non-restructuring is primarily based on the fact that some verbs allow long passives and others don't, as the existence of long passives is taken in the relevant literature as evidence of a mono-clausal structure.

### **3.2 Restructuring Verbs**

A list of Marshallese restructuring verbs is provided in Table 1. Unsurprisingly, those verbs which are restructuring verbs in Marshallese also tend to be restructuring verbs cross-linguistically.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In contrast to other languages, Marshallese only has a handful of restructuring verbs. In this respect, Marshallese is different from Romance languages and from German, as these other languages tend to have a large number of restructuring verbs. Even in Chamorro, a distantly related Austronesian language, restructuring is more freely available (Chung 2004).



A second syntactic property of restructuring verbs is that they do not require *in* to be present, as shown in (15a) and (15b).

- (15) a. Kōrā ro r-ar aikuj in āj.  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) need IN weave  
 'The women needed to weave.'
- b. Kōrā ro r-ar aikuj āj.  
 woman the.pl.human 3pl-T(past) need weave  
 'The women needed to weave.'

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

- (16) a. E-aikuj ḷaddik eo in katak.  
 3s-need boy the.s IN study  
 'The boy needs to study.'
- b. \*E-aikuj ḷaddik eo katak.  
 3s-need boy the.s study  
 'The boy needs to study.'

### 3.3 Non-restructuring Verbs

The majority of Marshallese verbs that require infinitival complements are non-restructuring verbs. These types of verbs require *in* to be present, as shown in (17a).<sup>12</sup> If *in* is absent, the sentence is ungrammatical (17b).

- (17) a. Kōrā eo e-ar ḷōmḥak in āj.  
 woman the.s 3s-T(past) plan IN weave  
 'The woman planned to weave.'
- b. \*Kōrā eo e-ar ḷōmḥak āj.  
 woman the.s 3s-T(past) plan weave  
 'The woman planned to weave.'

In addition, the subject may immediately follow the matrix verb:

- (18) E-ar ḷōmḥak kōrā eo in āj.  
 3s-T(past) plan woman the.s IN weave  
 'The woman planned to weave.'

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<sup>12</sup> It is unclear whether *in* is generated as the head of the tense phrase of the embedded clause or as the head of the embedded CP. Crucially, the presence of this word does not license an overt subject in the embedded clause.



movement that will help explain the differences in the syntactic properties of restructuring and non-restructuring sentences.

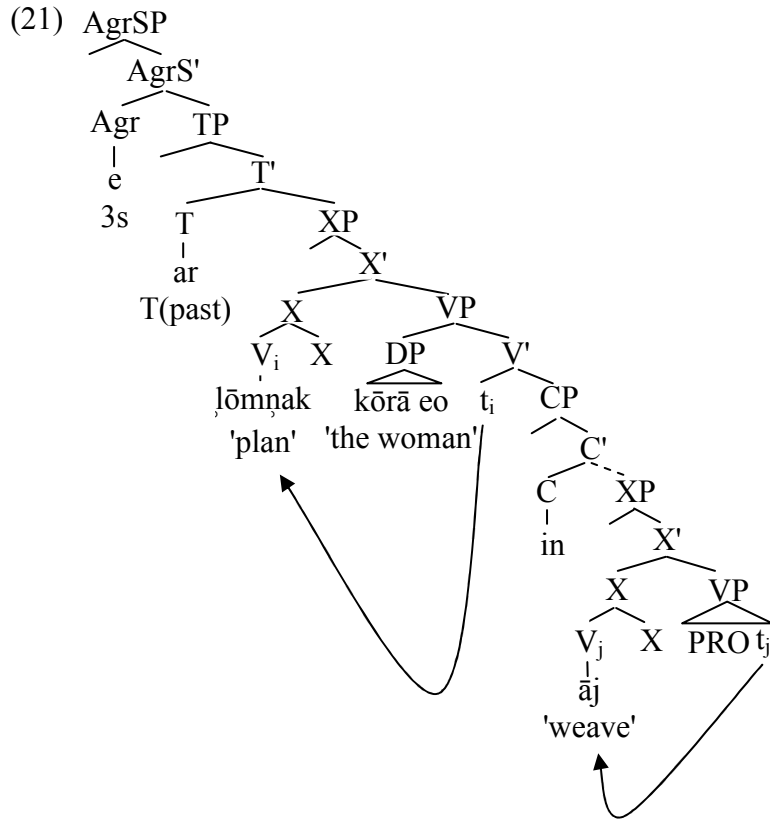
Take a bi-clausal sentence like (18), repeated here:

- (18) E-ar            ʃōmṇak kōrā    eo    in    āj.  
      3s-T(past) plan    woman the.s IN    weave  
      'The woman planned to weave.'

In this sentence, both the matrix and the embedded verbs are heads of VPs. As heads of verb phrases, they both have theta roles to assign to those arguments merged in their specifier positions. The matrix subject is merged in the specifier of the matrix verb, while PRO is merged as the specifier of the embedded verb. Further, both verbs raise out of the VP to left adjoin to the head of an XP, as shown in (21).<sup>13</sup> As a consequence of this movement, the matrix verb *ʃōmṇak* raises above the subject *kōrā eo*, which remains in the specifier of VP. The resulting sentence has verb subject *in* verb order.

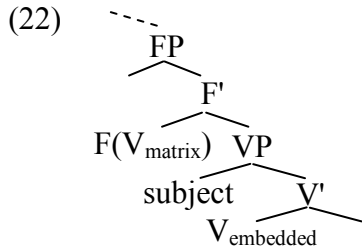
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<sup>13</sup> In tree (21), I have arbitrarily put *in* in CP.



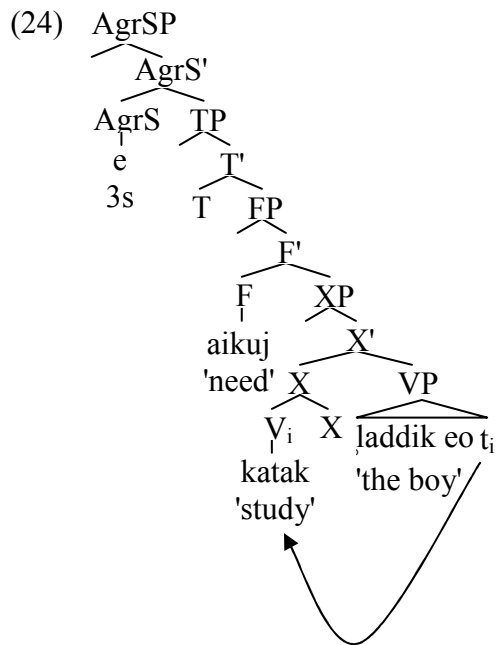
If the subject raises to spec AgrSP, then it will be sentence initial.

Let us now turn to the structure of restructuring sentences. If a functional restructuring configuration as proposed by Cinque (2006) and Wurmbrand (2001) is adopted for Marshallese, then the prohibition against VSV order in restructuring sentences is explained. Cinque and Wurmbrand argue that restructuring verbs are the heads of functional projections (FP) rather than verb phrases. As the heads of functional projections, restructuring verbs do assign theta roles to their specifiers. Therefore the matrix subject is not selected by the restructuring/matrix verb. Rather the matrix subject is selected by the embedded verb, as shown in (22).



Since only the embedded verb is the head of a VP, the embedded verb and not the matrix verb will raise to left adjoin to XP. Thus the embedded verb raises above the subject and will precede the subject if the subject remains VP internal, as shown in (24), the tree for sentence (23).

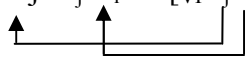
(23) E-aikuj katak ,laddik eo.  
 3s-need study boy the.s  
 'The boy needs to study.'



Notice that VSV order is never possible in restructuring sentences because there is no position between the head of FP (the position of what I have been calling the matrix verb) and the head of the XP (the position of the embedded verb) to which the subject can raise. There is a specifier position between these two heads. However the subject cannot move to and remain in

this position. If it could possible, we would expect the order AgrS-T-Subject-V to be possible in simple declarative sentences, as (25) illustrates.

(25) \* $[_{AgrSP} AgrS [_{TP} T [_{XP} subject_j V_i+X [_{VP} t_j t_i]$



Since this order is ungrammatical, we can conclude that this position is unavailable to the subject, and the prohibition against VSV word order in restructuring sentences is explained.

The analysis of these verbs as restructuring verbs also makes a prediction regarding the selectional restrictions they can impose on the subject. Because they do not have a theta role to assign to the subject, they should not impose selection restrictions on the sentential subject. This prediction turns out to be true, as shown in the fact that restructuring sentences allow dummy subjects and inanimate subjects.

First take a sentence with an embedded verb that does not have any theta roles to assign, such as a weather verb. Since the embedded verb doesn't assign a theta role to the sentential subject and is therefore compatible with an expletive subject, we would expect a sentence to be ungrammatical if the matrix verb assigns a theta role to the expletive subject. However, this is not the case, as shown in (26a&b).

(26) a. E-j jino wōt.  
 3s-T(pres) start rain  
 'It's starting to rain.'

b. E-marōñ wōt.  
 3s-might rain  
 'It might rain.'

A second piece of evidence supporting the conclusion that the matrix/restructuring verb does not assign a theta role to the sentential subject comes from the fact that these verbs allow inanimate subjects, as shown in (27a&b).

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

b. Accident eo e-marōñ ka-bōjrak ri-kōṭ eo.  
 accident the.s 3s-be.able cause-stop one.who-steal the.s  
 'The accident might stop the thief.'

Neither houses nor accidents are typically capable of starting or stopping things, yet these sentences are grammatical. Therefore the matrix verbs in these sentences must not be assigning theta roles to their subjects.

The opposite seems to be true with non-restructuring verbs. These verbs cannot be used with weather verbs (28), nor can sentences with non-restructuring matrix verbs have inanimate subjects (29).

(28) a. \*E-kar ḷōmṇak in wōt.  
 3s-T(past) plan IN rain  
 'It planned to rain.'

b. \*E-kar ṁakoko in wōt.  
 3s-T(past) refuse IN rain  
 'It refused to rain.'

(29) a. \*Accident eo e-kar ḷōmṇak in ka-bōjrak ri-kōṭ eo.  
 accident the.s 3s-T(past) plan IN cause-stop one.who-steal the.s  
 'The accident planned to stop the thief.'

b. \*M̄weo e-j ṁakoko in ka-mijak Jebro.  
 the.house 3s-T(pres) refuse IN cause-be.afraid Jebro  
 'The house refused to frighten Jebro.'

These facts provide further evidence for analyzing restructuring verbs as the heads of functional projections, and non-restructuring verbs, as heads of VPs.

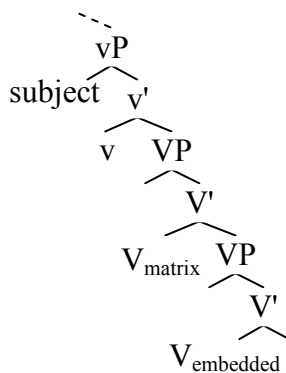
## 5 Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that there are two types of Marshallese infinitival constructions: a mono-clausal, restructuring construction and 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 position of the subject in Marshallese infinitival sentences as well as the lack of selectional restrictions on the subjects of restructuring sentences.

In addition to arguing for functional restructuring, Wurmbrand also argues for a second type of restructuring: lexical restructuring. The difference between lexical and functional restructuring is that, rather than being the head of a functional projection, a lexical restructuring verb is the head of a VP. As the head of a VP, these verbs select a DP argument as their specifiers. However, rather than selecting a CP complement, as the matrix verbs of bi-clausal infinitives do, lexical restructuring verbs select bare VP complements, as shown in (30).

(30) lexical restructuring



(30) shows that the subject of a lexical restructuring sentence is selected by the matrix rather than the embedded verb. By contrast, as the head of a bare VP, the embedded verb does not select a DP as its specifier since it has no theta role to assign to this position.

This analysis predicts that there should be restructuring verbs that allow long passives but that impose selectional restrictions on the subject. So far, I have not found any Marshallese verbs of this sort. Therefore there does not appear to be any evidence in Marshallese to support two distinct types of restructuring verbs. However I do not rule out the possibility that such verbs may be uncovered in the future.

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