

Subject Agreement in Marovo: synchronic and diachronic perspectives

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1. Introduction¹

Marovo, like many other Oceanic languages, has preverbal markers which indicate the person and number of the subject argument. Thus in (1) the form *-gu* indicates that the subject argument is 1SG. In this example, the subject is also expressed by the independent pronoun *raka*.

Marovo (Solomon Islands)

- 1) He-[**gu** veko tera ni-a ngana]_{VC} [**raka**]_{SUBJ} [ia gua mola]_{OBJ}.
th/fore-1SGS leave away TR-3SGO just 1SG ART:SG 1SGP canoe

And so I just left my canoe.

(1-11:66-00:07:50.685-txt)²

In this paper subject markers in Marovo are described from both a typological and an historical perspective. First, I look at the synchronic behaviour of preverbal subject markers in Marovo, describing in particular the types of constructions in which the subject markers occur. Then I will show that some aspects of subject agreement in Marovo that appear unusual from a cross-linguistic perspective can be explained if considered from an historical perspective.

2. The Marovo language

Marovo is a language spoken on islands in and around Marovo Lagoon in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands. It is a member of the of Northwest Solomonian group of the Oceanic family.

The basic word order in Marovo is VERB-SUBJECT-OBJECT, as demonstrated by (2). The syntactic string which comprises the lexical verb or verbs, any accompanying adverbial-like modifiers and morphemes marking aspect, mood, transitivity and participant reference will be labelled the verb complex. For ease of interpretation of the examples the verb complex is

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² Abbreviations used in glossing examples are: ABS - absolutive noun phrase, ART - article, CAUS - causative, DEF - definite, DEM - demonstrative, DES - optative mood, ERG- ergative noun phrase, EXCL - exclusive, FUT - future tense, IMP - imperative, INCL - inclusive, INTJ - interjection, IRR - irrealis mood, LOC - locative, NEG - negative, O - object marker, OBJ - object, OBL - oblique, P - possessive pronominal form, PASS - passive, PC - paucal marker, PL - plural, RDP - reduplication, REL - relative clause marker RL - realis mood, S - subject marker, SG - singular, SUBJ - subject, TR - transitive, V - verb complex, 1 - 1st person, 2 - 2nd person, 3 - 3rd person.

enclosed in square brackets and denoted by *vc*. The subject and object noun phrases are also enclosed in square brackets and denoted by *SUBJ* and *OBJ*, respectively.

Marovo

- 2) [Heru-i]_{vc} [hami]_{SUBJ} [ria labete]_{OBJ} ...
 carry-TR:3PLO 1PLEXCL ART:PL timber
We carried the timber ...

(2-19:15-00:02:14.995-txt)

3. Person markers and agreement

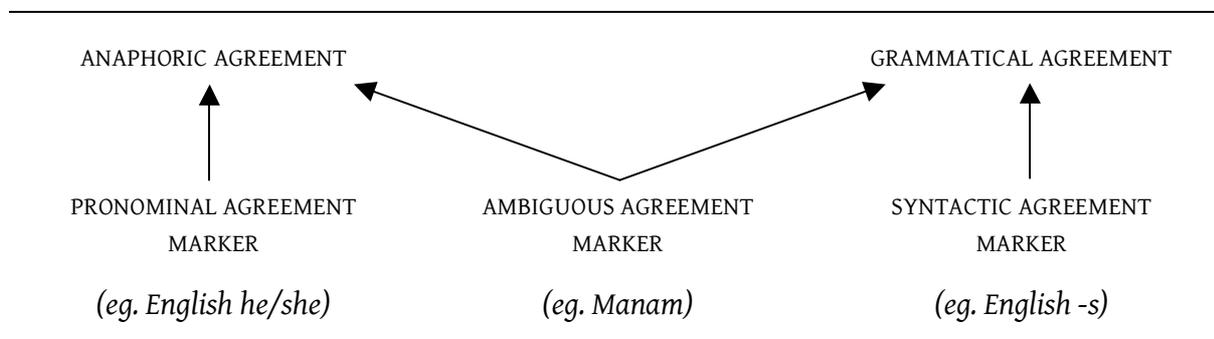
Within both the typological and theoretical literature, there has been considerable debate on the status of morphs like *-gu* in (1). That is, of phonologically-bound morphs within the verb phrase that indicate the person and number of the referents of one or more arguments within the clause (see Corbett 2003, 2006). Often labelled pronominal affixes, the two ‘extreme’ analyses of such morphs, which depend crucially on the analysis of their status as arguments or not, are:

- (i) that they are typical agreement markers; or
- (ii) that they are pronouns which happen to be phonologically dependent.

While some pronominal affixes in some languages can be fittingly described within one or other of these analyses, for many neither analysis is completely satisfactory. However, this dilemma of analysis becomes less relevant if the position is taken that the domain of agreement does not need to be local, but can reach beyond the clause. Under such an analysis free pronouns also agree with their antecedents and the difference between pronominal affixes and agreement markers is less significant (Corbett 2006:110).

Within such a framework, Siewierska (1999, 2004) describes all person markers as part of a continuum of agreement, which ranges from independent pronouns at one end to inflectional agreement markers at the other. She establishes a tripartite typology of such person markers, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Typology of person agreement forms (after Siewierska 1999, 2004)



These three types of person agreement markers can be distinguished on the basis of their distribution. Thus pronominal agreement markers are forms like independent pronouns in English that are in complementary distribution with lexical noun phrases, as shown by the

examples in (3). The verbal ending -s in English is a syntactic agreement marker. Such forms are obligatory and always co-occur with lexical or pronominal noun phrases.

- 3) a. **He** laughs.
 b. **The boy** laughs.
 c. ***The boy he** laughs.
 d. *Laughs

Subject markers in Manam, an Oceanic language of Papua New Guinea, are ambiguous agreement markers and can occur in constructions of anaphoric or grammatical agreement. This is shown by examples (4) and (5). Verbs in Manam occur with a prefix which indicates both the person and number of the subject argument as well as realis or irrealis mood. These prefixes can co-occur with a pronominal or lexical noun phrase, but can also occur as the only indication of the subject argument within the clause, as shown by the optionality of the 3PL pronoun in (4).

Manam (Papua New Guinea)

- 4) ([Di]_{SUBJ}) [di-ŋára]_{VC}.
 3PL 3PLS.RL-swim
They swam.
- 5) [Tamóata]_{SUBJ} [di-panána-to]_{VC}
 man 3PLS.RL-run-PC
The (few) men ran.

(Lichtenberk 1983:113)

I favour this broader view of agreement and thus will describe Marovo subject markers, not only within Siewierska's continuum of person marking, but also within Corbett's (2006) approach to agreement.

4. Subject agreement in Marovo

Many Oceanic languages have preverbal markers which index the person and number of the subject argument, and like those in Manam can be described as ambiguous agreement markers in terms of Siewierska's (1999, 2004) typology of person forms. In Manam subject agreement markers also indicate mood (realis or irrealis), and portmanteau morphemes indicating both the subject and person of the subject argument and tense/aspect/mood are not uncommon in Oceanic languages. Examples (6) and (7) from North-East Ambae, a language of Vanuatu, show the same distribution of subject markers as in Manam, but here the forms indicate the person and number of the subject argument only.

North-East Ambae (Vanuatu)

- 6) [Da=mo hala-gi]_{VC} [na laveti]_{OBJ}.
 1NSGINCS=REAL go.for.APP ACC celebration
We went for a celebration

(Hyslop 2001:323)

- 7) [Ngire mwalakelo]_{SUBJ} [ra=mp qalo tamwere]_{VC}.
 3NSG youth 3NSGS=REAL fight always
Those young people are always fighting.

(Hyslop 2001:323)

One way in which the subject is indexed within the verb complex in Marovo is with a similar set of preverbal agreement markers. For example, in the intransitive clause in (8) the form *-ma* indicates that the subject argument is a 1st person plural exclusive participant, also expressed by the clause-final independent pronoun. (9) is a transitive clause and demonstrates that the preverbal agreement markers also index transitive subjects.

Marovo

- 8) ... beto ma-[ma la tepa~tepa]_{VC} [hami]_{SUBJ}.
 finish then-1PLEXCLS go RDP~pray 1PLEXCL
... and then we prayed.

(2-19:12-00:01:56.159-txt)

- 9) Beto ma-[ma la va-hobili hore-a]_{VC} [hami]_{SUBJ}...
 finish then-1PLEXCLS go CAUS-roll down-3SGO 1PLEXCL
Afterwards we then rolled it [the log] down...

(2-18:53-00:07:36.630-txt)

The forms of preverbal subject markers in Marovo are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Preverbal subject agreement markers in Marovo

	1	2	3
SINGULAR	-gu	-mu	-ni
PLURAL INCL	-da	-mu	-di, -ni
EXCL	-ma		

While all three number categories in the 1st person, namely singular, plural inclusive and plural exclusive, are distinguished. There is complete syncretism of number in the 2nd person with both singular and plural being denoted by *-mu*. Thus in (10) *-mu* occurs indexing a 2SG subject referent, also indicated by the 2SG pronoun *hoi*, whereas in (11) *-mu* occurs indexing a 2PL subject referent, indexing the same participant as that denoted by the 2PL independent pronoun *hamu* in the preceding clause.

Marovo

- 10) “Ei, sa hua ma-[mu irongo]_{VC} [hoi]_{SUBJ} pa tani?”, hua vonu.
 INTJ what HUA then-2S float 2SG LOC here say turtle
“Eh, why are you floating here?”, said the turtle.

(1-14:46-00:04:55.307-txt)

- 11) ... “boru pa hua ia makasina toka **hamu**,
 and.so LOC HUA 3SG time depart **2PL**
 ma-[**mu** suranga kala ni-a]_{VC} [trip susua]_{OBJ}.”
 then-**2S** get.in go TR-3SGO trip first
 ... “and so it’s time for you to leave, you load up and go off on the first trip.”
 (2-19:22-00:03:06.509-txt)

There is partial syncretism in the 3rd person. The form *-di* is only found indicating a 3rd person plural subject argument, as in (12), and 3SG subject arguments are only indicated by *-ni*, (13). However, there are examples where a 3PL subject argument may be indexed by *-ni*, (14).

Marovo

- 12) ... [suranga-e]_{VC} [**rikisa**]_{SUBJ} [ria labete]_{OBJ},
 load-TR **3PL** ART:PL timber
 ma-[**di** mae]_{VC} pa Buini pia.
 then-**3PLS** come LOC B. DEM
 ... they loaded the timber, and then they came to Buini.
 (2-19:26-00:03:48.565-txt)
- 13) Beto ma-[**ni** va-mae ni-a]_{VC} [**ia**]_{SUBJ} [kokoru-na]_{OBJ}.
 finish then-**3SGS** CAUS-come TR-3SGO **3SG** half-3SGP
 After then he gave half to me.
 (1-13:121-00:09:53.164-txt)
- 14) He-[**ni** ukala kina tou]_{VC} [**ria ihana**]_{SUBJ}.
 th/fore-**3SGS** after be.cooked all **ART:PL fish**
 So after all the fish are cooked.
 (1-11:76-00:08:44.831-txt)

The subject markers are represented as affixes because there is evidence that they are not phonologically independent, but form a phonological word with the preceding discourse connective particle. The tendency in Marovo is for primary stress to occur on the penultimate syllable. This is shown in (15) with the connective particle *pata* ‘in order that’ which has primary stress on the first syllable. In (16) *pata* ‘in order that’ occurs with a following subject marker and the sequence *pata-gu* behaves as a single phonological word in terms of stress, primary stress thus occurring on the final syllable of the connective particle stem, but the penultimate syllable of the entire sequence.

Marovo

- 15) ... ma-[gu valu keli]_{VC} **páta** [la chaba]_{VC} ...
 then-1sgS paddle go.up **in.order** go to.fish
 ... then I paddled up to go fishing ...
 (1-11:06-00:00:55.935-txt)
- 16) **Patá**-[gu gura vagara]_{VC}.
in.order-1sgS be.able to.net
 For me to be able to net.
 (1-11:15-00:00:35.295-txt)

However, there are also a few examples in which the subject markers do in fact appear to be phonologically independent. For example, in (17) the 1SG subject marker *gu* occurs clause-initially and does not appear to be phonologically bound to either the preceding word or the following verb stem.

Marovo

- 17) a. [Ivasa]_{VC} [ra]_{SUBJ},
get.out 1SG
b. [**gu** mae]_{VC} pa vanua rejo ...
1SGS come LOC house oven
a. *I got out [of the canoe],*
b. *and I came to the kitchen ...*

(1-11:68-00:07:55.935-txt)

Marovo subject agreement markers are best analysed within Siewierska's (2004) typology as ambiguous agreement markers. Like other forms analysed as ambiguous agreement markers, subject markers in Marovo can co-occur with a pronominal or lexical noun phrase or may themselves be the only expression of the subject argument within the clause. Examples (8) and (9), and (10) and (11) showed the use of subject markers along with pronominal noun phrases. Example (18) shows the use of the 3SG subject marker *-ni* with a lexical noun, and example (19) shows the use of *-ni* as the only expression of the subject argument within the clause.

Marovo

- 18) He-[**ni** kala]_{VC} [vonu]_{SUBJ}.
th/fore-3SGS go turtle
Therefore the turtle went.
19) Ma-[**ni** choga va-kiki la]_{VC} pa idere...
then-3SGS jump CAUS-small go LOC sea
Then he jumped gently into the sea ...

(1-14:68-00:06:41.329-txt)

(1-26:25-00:02:50.972-txt)

Subject markers in Marovo are not obligatory. In fact within the set of narrative data used for the current analysis less than half the clauses comprised subject agreement markers. In many clauses the expression of the subject argument is a pronominal or lexical noun phrase only, as in (20), or the subject argument is inferred from context and not overtly expressed within the clause, as in (21b).

Marovo

- 20) [Taleto ni-a]_{VC} [**vonu**]_{SUBJ} [ia ororeke pia]_{OBJ} ...
feel.sorry TR-3SGO **turtle** ART:SG wife DEM
Turtle felt sorry for this wife ...

(1-14:48-00:05:06.740-txt)

- 21) a. ... beto [pocho]_{VC} [ia]_{OBJ} [hami]_{SUBJ},
 finish squeeze 3SG 1PLEXCL
 b. [va-reka la ni-a]_{VC} pa ikuchu.
 CAUS-hot go TR-3SGO LOC fire
 a. ... after we have squeezed it [the coconut],
 b. we boil it in the fire.

(1-10:10-00:00:55.854-txt)

4.1. The presence and absence of subject agreement

Within a text count of 723 verbal clauses, only 267 (37%) have preverbal subject markers. Thus an important issue to address in the description of subject markers in Marovo is what determines their presence within versus their absence from a clause.

Table 2 gives the frequencies of the different ways in which subject arguments are expressed in Marovo across four texts. Most commonly, subjects are denoted by a pronominal or lexical noun phrase, without preverbal subject agreement within the verb complex. However, subjects are also denoted either solely by a subject marker within the verb complex, or by both a noun phrase and a subject marker. The presence of subject agreement within a clause appears to be motivated by both discourse functions and the semantic-grammatical structure of the clause.

Table 2: Ways in which subject arguments are expressed in four texts

	1-11	1-12	1-13	1-14
Pronominal noun phrase	57	12	197	62
Lexical noun phrase	9	0	39	60
Preverbal subject marker only	46	7	22	17
Preverbal subject marker and lexical noun phrase	4	0	1	5
Preverbal subject marker and pronominal noun phrase	14	1	16	13
No overt expression of subject argument	22	10	68	21
Other expression of subject	3	1	9	8
Total no. of verbal clauses	155	31	352	186

A primary function of subject agreement in Marovo is reference tracking. Thus subject markers typically denote a referent that is the topic of a section of discourse. Here I am following Lambrecht's (1994) definition of topic:

TOPIC: A referent is interpreted as the topic of a proposition if in a given situation the proposition is construed as being about this referent, i.e. as

expressing information which is relevant to and which increases the addressee's knowledge of this referent.

(Lambrecht 1994:131)

For example, in (22) the 1SG participant is initially denoted by an independent pronoun. This referent is topic of the subsequent clauses, where it is denoted solely by subject agreement markers.

Marovo

- 22) a. [Mae]_{VC} [raka]_{SUBJ},
come 1SG
- b. [gu mae kaduvu]_{VC} pa chopochopo Adado,
1SGS come arrive LOC point A.
- c. beto ma-[gu la ukala mae]_{VC},
finish then-1SGS go past come
- d. ma-[gu la mae hodoko]_{VC} pa gua sera.
then-1SGS go come arrive LOC 1SGP shore
- a. *I came*
b. *and reached Adado Point,*
c. *and then I came over,*
d. *then I came and arrived at my shore.*

(1-11:64-00:07:33.744-txt)

The pattern shown in (22), in which a topic is first denoted by a pronominal or lexical noun phrase and subsequently by subject markers often occurs within intonational units that correspond to a sentence. However, (23) demonstrates that this pattern also occurs across sentence boundaries.

Marovo

- 23) a. [La]_{VC} [hami]_{SUBJ},
go 1PLEXCL
- b. ma-[ma la hodoko]_{VC},
then-1PLEXCLS go arrive
- c. ma-[ma la ivasa]_{VC}.
then-1PLEXCLS go get.out
- d. Ma-[ma la keli la]_{VC} pa vanua pu mucha-i ria babaere.
then-1PLEXCLS go go.up go LOC house REL sleep-TR ART:PL boy
- a. *We went,*
b. *and we arrived,*
c. *and we got out [of the canoe].*
d. *Then we went up to the house where the boys were sleeping.*

(2-18:07-08-00:01:08.402-txt)

An on-going topic referent, which has the grammatical function of subject, will also be denoted by a noun phrase rather than a subject marker if there is a change in the activity being described. For example, in (24a) the flying fox participant is re-introduced into the

discourse with the use of a pronominal noun phrase as subject and a lexical noun phrase adjunct. In (24b) and (24c) which follow and describe the flying fox's journey, this participant is denoted by subject markers alone. In (24d) and (24e), the narrative changes from describing the journey to Kolombangara to describing the collecting of water there, and the same topic participant, which is the subject, is denoted by a pronominal noun phrase.

Marovo

- 24) a. He-[**ni** kala]_{VC} [**ia**]_{SUBJ}, ena vekuveku pia,
th/fore-3SGS go 3SG ENA fly.fox DEM
- b. [**ni** charava]_{VC},
3SGS fly
- c. ma-[**ni** la kaduvu]_{VC} pa Kolombangara.
then-3SGS go arrive LOC K.
- d. [**La**]_{VC} [**ia**]_{SUBJ},
go 3SG
- e. [**la** leko vae]_{VC} [**ia**]_{SUBJ} [**kavo**]_{OBJ} vasina,
go carry.w/leaf take 3SG water place
- f. ma-[**ni** heru pule mai ni-a]_{VC}.
then-3SGS carry go.back come TR-3sgO
- a. *So, the flying fox, he went off,*
b. *he flew*
c. *and then arrived at Kolombangara.*
d. *He went*
e. *and he took the water with a leaf there,*
f. *then he brought it back.*

(1-14:84-85-00:08:01.516-txt)

This same pattern, in which a topic referent which is the subject argument, is denoted by a pronominal noun phrase when there is a change in the activity described, is illustrated within a single sentence in (25).

Marovo

- 25) a. [**La** kaduvu]_{VC} [**ra**]_{SUBJ} vasina,
go arrive 1SG place
- b. [**omi**]_{VC} [**raka**]_{SUBJ} [**ria** baeni ihana]_{OBJ}.
see 1SG ART:PL school fish
- a. *When I reached there,*
b. *I saw a school of fish.*

(1-11:27-00:02:49.815-txt)

The presence of subject agreement markers in Marovo is also conditioned by the semantic-grammatical structure of the clause in that the use of certain particles within the clause require the use of subject markers. Thus subject markers obligatorily occur with the negative particle *ka-*, as shown in (26).

Marovo

- 26) “Oh, [pavu]_{VC} [ia]_{SUBJ}, boru [ka-ni tavete]_{VC}”, [hua]_{VC} [ia]_{SUBJ}.
 INTJ be.sick 3SG and.so NEG-3SGS work say 3SG
“Oh, he’s sick and so he’s not working”, she said.

(1-13:25-00:01:59.677-txt)

Subject markers also always occur with certain discourse connective particles, namely *ma-* ‘and then’ and *he-* ‘therefore’, as seen in (24). With *boru* ‘and so’ and *pata* ‘in order that’, on the other hand, subject agreement is optional (see Table 3).

Table 3: Discourse connective particles and their use with subject markers

OCCUR ONLY WITH SUBJECT MARKERS		OCCUR WITH AND WITHOUT SUBJECT MARKERS	
ma	<i>and then</i>	boru	<i>and so</i>
he	<i>therefore</i>	pata	<i>in order that</i>

The combination of: (i) the obligatory use of subject agreement with the negative particle and certain discourse connective particles and; (ii) the discourse functions associated with the different ways in which the subject argument can be expressed, also explain the use of subject markers in conjunction with noun phrases, as well as the occurrence of more than one subject marker within a verb complex. For example, in (27a) the subject argument refers to a participant that has not been mentioned for several clauses and is being re-introduced into the discourse as a topic. Thus this participant is denoted by a lexical noun phrase. However, as the clause comprises the discourse connective particle *ma-* ‘and then’, the subject argument is also denoted by a preverbal subject marker.

Marovo

- 27) a. Ma-[ni ivasa]_{VC} [ia ororeke pia]_{SUBJ}
 then-3SGS get.out ART:SG wife DEM
 b. ma-ni la ko pa vasina pu heru mae ni-a rava pia.
 then-3SGS go stay LOC place REL carry come TR-3SGO groper DEM
a. Then the wife came ashore,
b. and she lived at the place where the groper had brought it.

(1-14:78-00:07:34.906-txt)

The co-occurrence of the pronominal noun phrase and subject agreement in (28) is similarly explained. It is also interesting to note that the occurrence of both the discourse connective particle *he-* ‘therefore’ and the negative particle *ka-* means that subject agreement occurs twice within the verb complex.

Marovo

- 28) Boru he-[gu ka-gu vagara]_{VC} pa Omo [raka]_{SUBJ} ...
 and.so th/fore-1SGS NEG-1SGS to.net LOC O. 1SG
So therefore I didn’t net at Omo ...

(1-11:11-00:01:04.336-txt)

5. Historical origins of subject agreement markers

That the occurrence of subject agreement in Marovo is conditioned by both discourse functions and the presence of the negative particle and/or certain discourse connective particles, appears unusual when compared with the distribution of subject marking in other Oceanic languages, as well as from a broad cross-linguistic perspective on agreement. However, the distribution of subject markers in Marovo can be explained in terms of their historical development.

5.1. Marovo subject agreement markers as archaic and innovative

The presence of preverbal subject agreement markers in Marovo is not unexpected as similar markers are found in a wide range of contemporary Oceanic languages, and can be reconstructed for Proto Oceanic. In Proto Oceanic subject agreement proclitics occurred as the second element within the verb complex, as can be seen from the structure of the Proto Oceanic verb complex reconstructed by Lynch, Ross and Crowley (2002:83) and shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The Proto Oceanic verb complex (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002:83)

(ASPECT/MOOD =)³ SUBJECT MARKER = VERB (= OBJECT MARKER) (= DIRECTIONAL MARKER)

This original structure is still clearly reflected in some Oceanic languages including Hoava, a New Georgia language closely related to Marovo, where preverbal subject markers occur after the future tense marker *ma-* and before the verb, as in (29).

Hoava (Solomon Islands)

- 29) Koleo, [ma-**qu** puta]_{VC}.
 good FUT-1SGS sleep
 Good, I will sleep.

(Davis 2003:150)

Comparison of Marovo subject agreement with that in Hoava and Roviana, two languages closely related to Marovo, suggests that in Marovo subject agreement has both archaic and innovative features. As Table 4 illustrates these three languages have very similar paradigms of subject agreement markers.

³ The initial element of the Proto Oceanic verb complex, labelled as ASPECT/MOOD, does not include tense as it is presumed that Proto Oceanic, like many contemporary Oceanic languages had grammatical distinctions for aspect and mood, but not tense (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002:84).

Table 4: Preverbal subject markers in eastern New Georgia languages

	1SG	2SG	3SG	1PL.INC	1PL.EXC	2PL	3PL
Roviana	-gu	-mu	-na, -ni	-da	-mami	-mi	-di
Hoava	-gu	-mu	-na	-da	-mami	-mi	-di
Marovo	-gu	-mu	-ni	-da	-ma	-mu	-di

Data from Waterhouse 1926, 1949, Davis 2003⁴

The distribution of subject marking in Roviana and Hoava is rather different from that in Marovo. For example, in Roviana subject agreement markers occur in three environments⁵:

- (i) following the preverbal particle *o-* that indicates desire, (30);
- (ii) with the imperative mood/future tense marker *ma-*, (31) and (33); and
- (iii) in negative imperatives, (32).

Roviana (Solomon Islands)

- 30) O-**da** gani igana.
 DES-1PLINC eat fish
We (incl.) wish to eat fish.

(Waterhouse 1949:83)

- 31) Ma-**mu** podek-i-a.
 IMP-2SG try-TR-3SGO
You try.

(Waterhouse 1949:68)

- 32) Meke **mu** la.
 NEG.IMP 2SG go
Do not go.

(Waterhouse 1949:246)

While the preverbal marker *ma-* always denotes imperative mood with 2nd person subject arguments, with non-2nd person subjects it can also be interpreted as indicating future tense, as in (33).

⁴ There are two orthographies that are used with many New Georgia languages, reflecting different conventions established by different groups of missionaries. In examples cited in full I use the orthography of the source, however, in tables of comparative data like this the orthography is standardised following Ross, Pawley and Osmond (1998) for ease of comparison of cognates across languages. The main difference between the orthographies is with the velar segments. Thus the prenasalised voice stop [ʔg] is written as *g* in Marovo, but as *q* in Roviana, and the voiced fricative [ɣ] is written as *gh* in Marovo and *g* in Roviana.

⁵ While Waterhouse (1926, 1949) describes the use of subject markers in Roviana, more recent work (Corston-Oliver 2002, Corston 1996) makes no mention of subject agreement; suggesting that the rather marginal system described by Waterhouse is no longer used.

Roviana

- 33) Uve; ma-**qu** podek-i-a.
 yes FUT-1SG try-TR-3SGO
Yes, I will try.

(Waterhouse 1926:6)

Comparison of Roviana, Hoava and Marovo data suggests that these languages have all retained the original structure of the verb complex, reflected with the mood markers *ma-* and *o-* in Hoava and Roviana and in negative constructions in Roviana and Marovo. Thus the use of subject markers with negative *ka-* in Marovo and negative imperative *meke* in Roviana reflect an original verb complex structure like that in Figure 3.⁶

Figure 3: Original structure of the verb complex in eastern New Georgia languages

(ASPECT/MOOD =)	(NEGATIVE =)	SUBJECT MARKER =	VERB	(= OBJECT MARKER)	(= DIRECTIONAL MARKER)
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However, while the use of subject markers in negative constructions in Marovo is archaic, their use with discourse connective particles is innovative. I propose that as preverbal markers of aspect and mood were lost in Marovo, the original irrealis mood marker **ma=* was reanalysed as the discourse connective particle *ma-* ‘and then’.

Table 5 sets out the stages of development which I propose have led to the use of subject agreement markers with discourse connective particles in Marovo.

⁶ In Kubokota the negative particle follows the portmanteau marker of aspect/mood and the subject (Kettle 2000, M.Raymond pers.comm.). Further details of negative constructions in Proto Oceanic and its daughter languages need to be reconstructed to determine the structure of negatively marked verb complexes further back in the history of Oceanic.

Table 5: The development of subject markers with discourse connective particles

STAGE	CONSTRUCTIONS	FUNCTION
I	* <i>ma</i> VERB COMPLEX * <i>ma</i> =SUBJ VERB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discourse connective particle <i>ma</i> precedes clause-initial verb complex aspect/mood marker <i>ma</i>= followed by subject marker and lexical verb
II	* <i>ma</i> VERB COMPLEX * <i>ma</i> =SUBJ VERB * <i>ngina</i> (<i>ma</i> =SUBJ) VERB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discourse connective particle <i>ma</i> precedes clause-initial verb complex irrealis mood marker <i>ma</i>= followed by subject marker and lexical verb innovative epistemic adverb denoting ‘possibility’
III	* <i>ma</i> VERB COMPLEX * <i>ma</i> =SUBJ VERB * <i>ngina</i> (<i>ma</i> =SUBJ) VERB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discourse connective particle <i>ma</i> precedes clause-initial verb complex semantic bleaching of *<i>ma</i>= so that it is no longer a clear cut marker of irrealis mood gradual grammaticalisation of <i>ngina</i> such that it comes to be used in contexts broadly described as irrealis mood
IV	* <i>ma</i> =SUBJ VERB COMPLEX * <i>ngina</i> VERB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>ma</i>=, with subject markers, in clause-initial position reanalysed as reflected the discourse connective particle <i>ma</i> <i>ngina</i> occurs as preverbal marker of irrealis mood
V	<i>ma</i> -SUBJ VERB <i>he</i> -SUBJ VERB <i>boru</i> (-SUBJ) VERB <i>pata</i> (-SUBJ) VERB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subject agreement markers are extended to use with other discourse connective particles

Stage I shows two original structures with a morpheme **ma*. In one **ma* was a clause-initial discourse connective particle that preceded the verb complex. There is strong evidence that this morpheme and construction are reconstructable for Proto Oceanic. This type of construction is exemplified by (34) from Roviana.

Roviana

34) [Nuquru la]_{VC} [rau]_{ABS}, **me** [nanas-i-u]_{VC} [sa titisa]_{ERG} ...
enter go 1SG **and** ask-TR-1SGO DEF teacher

I went in, and the teacher asked me ...

(Corston 1996:31)

The other stage I structure comprises an aspect/mood marker **ma*= followed by subject markers and the verb. This construction is reconstructable for Proto Northwest Solomonic, although the exact function of **ma*= is not so easily reconstructed (see Ross 1982). This type of construction is exemplified by the Roviana sentences (33) and (35).

Roviana

- 35) [Ma-**qu** tiok-i-a]_{VC} [si asa]_{ABS}.
 FUT-1SGS call-TR-3SGO ABS 3SG
I will call her.

(Waterhouse 1926:19)

Stage II represents structures which are reconstructable at least back to the common ancestor of eastern New Georgia languages. An innovation at this stage is the epistemic adverb *ngina* that denoted ‘possibility’. Evidence that *ngina* occurred alongside the original irrealis mood marker *ma=* is not strong, however, its presence or absence in this construction does not affect the overall analysis. In Hoava *ngina* is an epistemic adverb that occurs preceding the verb complex (Davis 2003:247-249), as in (36).

Hoava

- 36) **Ngina** [koni tavet-i-a]_{VC} [rao]_{SUBJ}.
possibly FUT make-TR-3SGO 1SG
I will possibly make it.

(Davis 2003:249)

Stages III and IV are those reconstructed for pre-Marovo. During this period I hypothesise that *ngina* underwent a gradual process of grammaticalisation; losing its specific epistemic meaning, extending in use to a broader range of contexts, and becoming a marker of irrealis mood. One function of *ngina* in Marovo is to indicate future tense, as shown by example (37). In this way *ngina* in Marovo has taken over the future tense function of **ma-*.

Marovo

- 37) “[**Ngina** tepa-tepa paki]_{VC} [hita]_{SUBJ}...”
 IRR RDP-ask first 1PLINC
“We will pray first ...”

(2-19:09-00:01:42.849-txt)

The original future tense marker **ma=* has also undergone semantic change, and I would argue has been reanalysed as the discourse connective particle *ma-* ‘and then’. The two constructions with **ma*, shown in stages I to III in Table 5, have merged in Marovo to a single construction with a clause-initial discourse connective particle *ma-* that occurs with subject agreement markers. Thus juxtaposed sequences of clauses with an initial tense marker *ma-*, like those in (38) from Roviana, have been reanalysed as clauses conjoined not by juxtaposition, but by the discourse connective particle *ma-*, as are those in (39) from Marovo.

Marovo

- 38) Uve, [ma-mu la va mate-a]_{VC} [sa boko tagarau]_{ABS}
 yes IMP-2SG go CAUS die-3SGO DEF pig 1SGP
 [ma-da yani-yani]_{VC}.
 FUT-1PLINC RDP-eat
Yes, go and kill my pig that we may eat.

(Waterhouse 1926:18)

- 39) a. [La]_{VC} [raka]_{SUBJ} pa tania vasina tope-ani,
 go 1SG LOC here place dive-NOM
- b. **ma-[gu** ngina choga]_{VC} [raka]_{SUBJ}
then-1SGS IRR jump 1SG
- c. **ma-[gu** tope]_{VC}.
then-1SGS dive
- a. *I'll go to the place for diving,*
 b. *then I'll jump in*
 c. *and I'll dive.*

(1-17:2-00:00:16.498-txt)

At first glance this appears to be a merger of two very different constructions, however, the change, which looks to have been triggered by the structural ambiguity resulting from the chance homophony of the forms, has also been facilitated by cognitive and communicative associations between these two meanings. Evans (2007) examines the semantic aspects of this change in more detail.

Stage V represents the contemporary Marovo system, where subject agreement markers have been extended to use with other discourse connective particles. In Marovo subject agreement markers in this context have been interpreted as a referent-tracking device.⁷ In this way, although their history explains their obligatory use with *ma-*, with other discourse connective particles, like *boru* 'and so' and *pata* 'in order that' their use reflects typologically expected stages of development, namely occurring first with highly accessible referents, for example 1st and 2nd persons (Ariel 2000) and also indexing the topic referent.

As mentioned preverbal subject agreement markers can be reconstructed for Proto Oceanic, shown in Table 6. However, the Marovo subject agreement markers (see Table 1, repeated as Table 7) are not direct reflexes of the Proto Oceanic forms.

Table 6: Proto Oceanic preverbal subject markers (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002:67)

	1	2	3
SINGULAR	*ku=, *au=	*mu=, *ko=	*(y)a=, *ñā=, *i=
PLURAL INCL	*∅, *ta=	*∅	*∅, *ra=
EXCL	*∅		

⁷ This function of subject agreement is different from that which Ross (2004) proposes for canonic Oceanic languages and Proto Oceanic.

Table 7: Subject agreement markers in Marovo

	1	2	3
SINGULAR	-gu	-mu	-ni
PLURAL INCL	-da	-mu	-di, -ni
EXCL	-ma		

Most obviously, Marovo has a complete paradigm of subject markers, whereas Proto Oceanic did not. Just as with their distribution and function, I argue that the forms of Marovo subject agreement markers are both archaic and innovative.

Synchronically, Marovo subject markers are mostly identical with nominal possessive suffixes. That is, suffixes which occur with a possessed noun and indicate the person and number of the possessor, as in (40).

Marovo

- 40) [Siti via]_{VC} [matana-**gu**]_{SUBJ}
 be.sore very eye-1SGP

My eye is very sore.

(NB3:114-conv)

Some similarity in form between subject markers and possessive suffixes is not unexpected in Oceanic languages and was also present in Proto Oceanic. The nominal possessive suffixes which are reconstructed for Proto Oceanic are given in Table 8. This similarity across paradigms reflects the origins of the Proto Oceanic forms. Thus the variety of forms reconstructed for Proto Oceanic as subject markers reflects their origin as a merger of two pronominal paradigms of Proto Malayo-Polynesian, namely nominative and genitive (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002:57-63, 68-69).

Table 8: Proto Oceanic possessive suffixes (Ross 1988:112)

	1	2	3
SINGULAR	*-gu	*-mu	*-ña
PLURAL INCL	*-da	*-m[i]u	*-dra
EXCL	-ma[m]i		

In Marovo, and also in Roviana and Hoava, the presence of original subject markers with forms similar to nominal possessive suffixes has led to analogical changes resulting in a paradigm of subject markers based on the forms of nominal possessive suffixes. Table 9 sets out the origins and development proposed for Marovo subject agreement markers. Thus while 2SG *-mu* is interpreted as a direct reflex of Proto Oceanic **mu=*, it is proposed that irregular sound changes have occurred with the 1SG and 1PLINCL forms by analogy with the possessive suffixes. The 1PLEXCL form *-ma* is taken to be a direct extension in function of the possessive suffix of the same form. The forms of the 3SG and 3PL subject markers are slightly more complex and I will not discuss them here.

Table 9: Origins and development of Marovo subject markers

	PROTO OCEANIC	CHANGES	MAROVO
1SG	*ku=	• irregular sound change *k > g, analogy with possessive suffix paradigm	-gu
2SG	*mu=	• direct reflex	-mu
3SG	*i=, *ña=	• reflects combination of original *i= and *ña=	-ni
1PLINC	*ta=	• irregular sound change *t > d, analogy with possessive suffix paradigm	-da
1PLEXC	*∅	• extension of possessive suffix	-ma
2PL	*∅	• extension of 2SG form to 2PL	-mu
3PL	*ra=	• extension of possessive form, incorporating changes from Proto Western Oceanic	-di

6. Concluding remarks

As shown here the occurrence of subject agreement markers in Marovo depends on: (i) discourse functions and their association with different ways of expressing the subject argument; and (ii) the occurrence within the clause of the negative particle and/or the discourse connective particles *ma-* ‘and then’ or *he-* ‘therefore’. This unusual synchronic distribution is explained by its history. The original structure of the occurrence of subject markers alongside aspect/mood markers in preverbal position is still reflected in Marovo, but by constructions in which the subject markers occur with discourse connective particles. The future tense marker **ma=* has been reanalysed as the discourse connective particle *ma-* ‘and then’, and the two constructions with preverbal *ma* have merged. The change, apparently triggered by a chance homophony of forms, nonetheless demonstrates natural processes of syntactic and semantic change.

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