

Subject Agreement in Marovo: diachronic explanations of synchronic conditions

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1. Introduction¹

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

Marovo (Northwest Solomonian, Solomon Islands)²

- 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 canoe³

And so I just left my canoe.

The synchronic behaviour of preverbal subject markers in Marovo is rather different from those in most other Oceanic languages. In particular, they are not obligatory and their presence is conditioned by both the pragmatic and lexical-semantic structure of the clause. The detailed discussion of the synchronic behaviour of subject marking in Marovo indicates its place within cross-linguistic typologies of person marking and agreement. It is also demonstrated that there are diachronic explanations for the unusual aspects of Marovo subject marking.

Marovo is an Oceanic language spoken in the New Georgia group of islands of the Solomon Islands. It is most closely related to other languages of this island group, forming part of the Northwest Solomonian subgroup. 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 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.

¹ The research for this paper has been supported by a Simon Fellowship at the University of Manchester. This fellowship and also a British Academy Small Grant (SG-40401) provided financial support for the fieldwork carried out on Marovo, both of which are gratefully acknowledged. Parts of this paper have been presented at The Seventh International Conference on Oceanic Linguistics (Nouméa) and The 18th International Conference on Historical Linguistics (Montréal), and I would like to thank members of those audiences for comments. I would also like to thank Luisa Miceli and Louise Mycock for comments on an earlier version of this paper. I am also grateful to all those in Buini Tusu, a community on a small island in Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands, who helped me during my fieldwork.

² All Marovo examples presented in this paper are from data collected during my time spent in Buini Tusu, Solomon Islands.

³ 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.

Marovo

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

2. Person marking 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 forms within the verb phrase that indicate the person, number and/or gender of one or more core arguments of a clause. This debate has often centred on syntactic analysis and the status of such morphs as either:

- (i) incorporated pronouns that bear an argument relation to the verb, while any co-occurring noun phrases are adjuncts; or
- (ii) agreement markers that redundantly index the person, number and/or gender of a noun phrase which is itself the argument of the verb.

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. For example, Bresnan and Mchombo (1987) conclude that this distinction is one of function rather than structure, since in the Bantu language Chichewâ verbal subject markers are structurally ambiguous, behaving as incorporated pronouns in some contexts and as agreement markers in others. In other languages the difficulty of analysis occurs within paradigms, and, as Baker (2002) demonstrates for the Australian language Ngalakgan, different person, number and/or gender forms within a paradigm of pronominal affixes may show different degrees of pronoun-like versus agreement-like behaviour. 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 incorporated pronouns and agreement markers is less significant (Corbett 2006:110). Rather, independent pronouns, pronominal affixes and agreement markers can all be viewed as part of a continuum of “interconnected strategies for identifying the referent of the arguments of verbs, and of tracking referents through discourse” (Corbett 2003:194-195). Adopting a canonical approach to typology, Corbett (2003, 2006) defines a typological space in terms around typical characteristics of agreement markers and free pronouns, Table 1. Pronominal affixes are within this space, tending to represent a mid-point in the behaviour of each characteristic. Described in this way, individual verbal markers do not need to be labelled as agreement markers or incorporated pronouns, but can be analysed in terms of their place within the typological space and their degree of similarity or difference to the agreement marker and/or free pronoun ends of the continuum.

Table 1: Typical characteristics of agreement markers, pronominal affixes and free pronouns (Corbett 2003:180)

		AGREEMENT MARKER	PRONOMINAL AFFIX	FREE PRONOUN
I	Case roles	1	2	all
II	Referentiality	low	high	highest
III	Descriptive content	low	higher	highest
IV	Balance of information	roughly equal	higher	higher
V	Multirepresentation	normal	possible	largely excluded

Corbett's (2003, 2006) canonical approach to agreement provides the typological framework for the present analysis of Marovo subject markers. Similar to pronominal affixes in other languages, subject markers in Marovo cannot be neatly classified as either incorporated pronouns or agreement markers. However, they do fit within the typological space of agreement, broadly defined, and as such this approach leads to an insightful description of their behaviour.

3. Subject markers in Oceanic languages

Preverbal markers which index the person and number of the subject argument within the verb complex occur in most Oceanic languages and are reconstructable for Proto Oceanic. Typically subject markers in Oceanic languages are obligatory prefixes or proclitics, and can occur either alongside a pronominal or lexical noun phrase, as in (3) and (4) from Manam, or can be the only expression of the subject argument within the clause, as illustrated by the optionality of the 3PL independent pronoun in (4).

Manam (North New Guinea, Papua New Guinea)

- 3) [Tamóata]_{SUBJ} [di-panána-to]_{VC}.
 man 3PLS.RL-run-PC

The (few) men ran.

- 4) [(Di)]_{SUBJ} [di-ŋára]_{VC}.
 3PL 3PLS.RL-swim

They swam.

(Lichtenberk 1983:113)

In Manam the subject markers also denote mood (realis or irrealis), and portmanteau morphemes indicating both the subject argument and tense/aspect/mood are not uncommon in Oceanic languages. Examples (5) and (6) from North-East Ambae show subject markers with the same distribution as those in Manam, but which indicate only the person and number of the subject argument and are attached to the first element within the verb complex.

North-East Ambae (Southern Oceanic, Vanuatu)

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

(Hyslop 2001:323)

- 6) [Da=mule]_{VC}!
 1NSGS=go.home
Let's go home!

(Hyslop 2001:326)

In some Oceanic languages, preverbal subject markers are not obligatory and their omission is dependent on a range of different factors both within and across languages. For example, in Longgu the verb complex typically contains a preverbal subject marker as in (7). However, subject markers may be ellipsed: (i) in imperative clauses; (ii) in non-sequential clauses comprising the adverb *lahou* 'then', (8); (iii) in dependent clauses introduced by *kote* 'lest, in case, otherwise'; (iv) with generic subjects; and (v) in clauses with a fronted subject noun phrase, (9).

Longgu (Southeast Solomonian, Solomon Islands)

- 7) m-[ara ta'e na]_{VC} [kisu-gi-na]_{SUBJ}.
 CONJ-3PLS get.in PERF blind-PL-DEIC
And those blind ones got in [the canoe].

(Hill 1992:18)

- 8) Lahou [rabu-si-a na]_{VC} [manu-i-na]_{SUBJ} ...
 then hit-TR-3SGO PERF bird-SG-DEIC
Then the bird hit it ...

(Hill 1992:220)

- 9) [Manu-i]_{SUBJ} [ili~ili-a]_{VC} [zata-na Sibiloko]_{OBJ}.
 bird-SG tell~RDP-3SGO name-3SGP S.
The bird kept calling Sibiloko's name.

(Hill 1992:135)

Subject markers in Marovo appear to be rather different from those in other Oceanic languages. First, although Marovo subject markers occur as the initial element in the verb complex, they are phonologically dependent on preceding clause-level particles. Second, Marovo subject markers are not obligatory, and are in fact often absent from verbal clauses.

4. Subject markers in Marovo

Preverbal subject markers in Marovo may occur as the first element of the verb complex. For example, in the intransitive clause in (10) the form *-ma* indicates that the subject argument is a 1st person plural exclusive participant, also expressed by the clause-final independent pronoun. (11) is a transitive clause and demonstrates that the preverbal markers also index transitive subjects.

Marovo

- 10) ... beto ma-[**ma** la tepa~tepa]_{VC} [**hami**]_{SUBJ}.
 finish then-**1PLEXCLS** go RDP~pray **1PLEXCL**
... and then we prayed.
- 11) 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...

As well as subject markers, Marovo also has a set of object markers; see -a ‘3sgO’ in example (11). In this respect the Marovo system of participant reference is less like typical agreement systems, which tend to index only one core argument (Corbett 2003:172-173, 184).

The paradigm of preverbal subject markers in Marovo is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Preverbal subject agreement markers in Marovo

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

All three number categories in the 1st person, namely singular, plural inclusive and plural exclusive, are distinguished. However, there is complete syncretism of number in the 2nd person with both singular and plural subjects denoted by *-mu*. Thus in (12) *-mu* occurs indexing a 2SG subject referent, also indicated by the 2SG pronoun *hoi*, whereas in (13) *-mu* occurs with a 2PL subject referent, indexing the same participant as that denoted by the 2PL independent pronoun *hamu* in the preceding clause.

Marovo

- 12) “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.
- 13) ... “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.”

There is partial syncretism in the 3rd person. The form *-di* is only found indicating a 3rd person plural subject argument, as in (14), and 3SG subject arguments are only indicated by *-ni*, (15). However, there are examples where a 3PL subject argument may be indexed by *-ni*, (16).⁴

⁴ Third person plural subject arguments appear to be indexed by 3SG *-ni* in contexts in which the plural subject participants are construed as a single group within the event denoted. However, further investigation of this phenomenon is needed.

Marovo

- 14) ... [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.
- 15) 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.
- 16) 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.

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 (17) with the connective particle *pata* ‘in order that’ which has primary stress on the first syllable. In (18) *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.⁵

Marovo

- 17) ... 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 ...
- 18) Patá-[gu gura vagara]_{VC}.
 in.order-1SGS be.able to.net
For me to be able to net.

However, there are also a few examples in which the subject markers do in fact appear to be phonologically independent. In (19b) 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

- 19) 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 ...

⁵ The representation of subject markers in Marovo as affixes indicates only that they are phonologically dependent. These markers do show some clitic-like behaviour, namely occurring with different kinds of hosts. However, this issue is not investigated here.

As in many Oceanic languages, 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 (10) to (13) show the use of subject markers along with pronominal noun phrases. Example (20) shows the use of the 3SG subject marker *-ni* with a lexical noun, and (21) shows the use of *-ni* as the only expression of the subject argument within the clause.

Marovo

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

In clauses like (1) or (20), the pronominal or lexical noun phrase has the characteristics of a typical core argument, and thus the co-occurrence of such noun phrases, and particularly pronominal ones, with subject markers is indicative of their agreement-like status (Corbett 2003:186-188). However, it should be noted that the clauses with both a pronominal noun phrase and a co-referent subject marker are not frequent and are restricted to specific contexts, as described below.

There are two other characteristics of Marovo subject markers that show agreement-like, rather than pronoun-like, behaviour, namely that they can index a non-referential participant and that more than one instance of them can occur in a clause. N. Evans (2002) highlights differences in referentiality between pronominal affixes in the Australian language Bininj Gun-wok, and both independent pronouns and verb agreement markers. In Bininj Gun-wok object pronominal affixes are obligatory and as such can index a range of indefinite, generic and non-referential object arguments, making them less like independent pronouns in terms of semantic specification, and more like agreement markers. Evans (2002:47) suggests that the obligatory nature of pronominal affixes in many languages results in this wider range of functions than are typical of independent pronouns. Thus non-referential uses of pronominal affixes imply a lack of full pronominal status, and such affixes should be analysed as agreement markers. The majority of uses of subject markers in Marovo are indeed referential and identify a bounded and individuated entity or referent in the minds of the speakers and listeners (Du Bois 1980, Chafe 1994, Payne 1997); compare all previous examples. However, Marovo subject markers can be used non-referentially, as shown by (22). This example is from a narrative on traditional methods of fishing. Having described how people jump into the water with a rope, the speaker then states that “fish are caught” where *ihana* ‘fish’ is generic (non-referential) and denoted by the 3sg subject marker *-ni*.

Marovo

- 22) Beto ia, ma-[**ni** ta-vae]_{VC} [ihana]_{SUBJ}.
 finish 3SG then-3SGS PASS-take fish
After that, then fish are caught.

Corbett (2003:188-189, 2006) proposes that a clear indication of a marker's status as agreement is if there can be more than one instance of it within a clause. This is the case with subject markers in Marovo, as shown by example (36) where there are two subject markers within the verb complex. This multi-representation of subject markers occurs in specific semantic-grammatical contexts and is discussed below in more detail.

Subject markers in Marovo are not obligatory. In fact within the set of narrative data used for the current analysis less than half the verbal clauses comprised subject markers. In many clauses the expression of the subject argument is a pronominal or lexical noun phrase only, as in (23a), or the subject argument is inferred from context and not overtly expressed within the clause, as in (23b).

Marovo

- 23) 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 on the fire.*

This is a more pronoun-like characteristic of Marovo subject markers. Thus, while conditions which determine the presence or absence of a marker are found with pronominal affixes, conditions on markers that are clearly agreement usually determine only the value (Corbett 2003:190).

Table 3 shows the distribution of different ways of expressing the subject argument in Marovo across four narratives. 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 occurrence of subject markers in these texts ranges from 11 to 26 percent of verbal clauses, and thus an important issue to address in the description of subject markers in Marovo is what conditions their presence within versus their absence from a clause.

Table 3: 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

Corbett (2006:184) describes the factors that condition the use of agreement as involving “higher’ linguistic levels” such as the syntactic characteristics of the clause (eg. word order), the (lexical-) semantic nature of the participant denoted (eg. animacy) or the pragmatic status of this participant (eg. topic). He (2006: cht 6) demonstrates that conditions of agreement are not only cross-linguistically similar, but also show the same direction of effect. For example, with respect to pragmatic conditions referents “which are also topics will always be more likely to control agreement (and to control semantic agreement) than non-topics” (Corbett 2006:203). In terms of person marking, Siewierska (2004:148-162) proposes that its presence is conditioned cross-linguistically by the inherent and/or discourse saliency of the referent, and can be expressed as a set of implicational hierarchies, Figure 1. Cross-linguistically, there is a preference for person markers to occur if the referent indexed has a feature to the left of an arrow as compared to features to the right of an arrow. For example, person markers are more likely to index a 1st person referent than 2nd or 3rd person ones.

Figure 1: Hierarchies that influence the presence of person markers (Siewierska 2004:149)

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- a. the person hierarchy
1st > 2nd > 3rd
 - b. the nominal hierarchy
pronoun > noun
 - c. the animacy hierarchy
human > animate > inanimate > abstract
 - d. the referential hierarchy
definite > indefinite specific > non-specific
 - e. the focus hierarchy
not in focus > in focus
-

It will be shown here that the focus and person hierarchies both play a role in the presence of subject agreement in Marovo, as well as the occurrence of certain grammatical particles.

It is the interaction of these different factors that determine the ways in which the subject argument is expressed.

The majority of instances of subject markers are within two types of constructions: (i) negative verbal declarative clauses; and (ii) verbal clauses with an initial discourse connective particle. Marovo has a negative element *ka* which in negative declaratives occurs preverbally and forms a prosodic unit with a following subject marker. For example, in (24) the negative particle occurs with the subject marker *-gu*, indexing the 1SG subject argument, which is also expressed by the clause-final independent pronoun *ra*. Within my corpus, the negative particle *ka* always occurs with a following subject agreement marker.⁶

Marovo

- 24) “Oh [**ka-gu** lulu ngina]_{VC} [**ra**]_{SUBJ},
INTJ **NEG-1SGS** follow IRR 1SG
“Oh, I won’t follow [with you] ...”

Subject markers also occur with clause-initial discourse connective particles. Marovo has four such morphs; *ma-* ‘and then’, *he-* ‘therefore’, *boru* ‘and so’ and *pata* ‘in order that’. Examples (10) to (13) comprise subject markers with *ma-* ‘and then’, and (20) and (25) demonstrate their use with *he-* ‘therefore’. Subject markers appear to be obligatory with *ma-* ‘and then’ and *he-* ‘therefore’, as I have no examples in my corpus of these particles occurring without them.

Marovo

- 25) Boru he-[**gu** talavuni vagara]_{VC}.
and.so th/fore-1SGS start net
And so I started to net.

The other two discourse connective particles, *boru* ‘and so’ and *pata* ‘in order that’ behave somewhat differently. With these particles subject markers are optional. For example, (26) shows the use of *boru* ‘and so’ with the 1SG subject marker *-gu*, whereas, in (27) the 1PLEXC subject marker *-ma* does not occur. Examples (17) and (18) demonstrate the optional use of subject markers with *pata* ‘in order that’.

Marovo

- 26) ... **boru-gu** la choga]_{VC} vasina.
and.so-1SGS go jump place
... and so I jumped [dropped the net] there.
- 27) ... ma-[ni made tu]_{VC} pa hua pia,
then-3sgS four already LOC HUA DEM
boru [kala pule nga]_{VC} [hami]_{SUBJ}.
and.so go go.back NGA 1PLEXC
... now it’s coming up to four, and so we’re going back.

⁶ *Ka* is also used in non-verbal clauses, and in this context it also occurs with subject markers, as in *ka-gu teacher* [NEG-1SGS teacher] ‘I am not a teacher’.

One factor which influences the presence of subject markers with *boru* ‘and so’ and *pata* ‘in order that’ is the person of the subject participant. While *boru* ‘and so’ can occur with 1st and 2nd person subject markers, it does not appear to occur with 3rd person ones, even in contexts where the presence of a subject marker is otherwise expected. In (28b) *boru* ‘and so’ occurs without the 3SG subject marker even though, as described below, its presence would be expected based on the pragmatic status of the subject.

Marovo

- 28) a. ... [vari omi]_{VC} [Mo]_{SUBJ},
 RECIP see M.
 b. **boru** [lulu mae]_{VC} [ia]_{SUBJ}.
 and.so follow come 3SG
 a. ... *Mo saw this,*
 b. *and so he followed.*

While *pata* ‘in order that’ also occurs with 1st and 2nd person subject markers, it does rarely occur with the 3SG marker *-ni*, as in (29). It should be noted that with all persons the use of subject markers with *boru* ‘and so’ and *pata* ‘in order that’ is much less frequent than their absence.

Marovo

- 29) ... **pata-[ni** usu heru mae ni-a]_{VC}
 in.order-3SGS bite.cut carry come TR-3SGO
 [meka chochopo]_{OBJ} pa tusu vasina ia.
 one point LOC island place 3SG
 ... *so that he bites off and brings one point to the island at that place.*

Subject markers in Marovo are also pragmatically conditioned such that the occurrence of subject agreement is influenced by the pragmatic status of the subject as Continuing Topic.

Siewierska (2004:159-162) describes this kind of condition on person marking within a focus hierarchy. That is, a preference for person agreement to denote constituents which are not focussed, and since referents that are not in focus are often topics, this implies a preference person marking with participants which are topics. As noted above, Corbett (2006:203) makes a similar prediction; topics are always more likely to control agreement than non-topics. This is supported by many studies of agreement systems (see for example Seidl & Dimitriadis 1997, Nocentini 1999, Polinsky & Comrie 1999, Nikolaeva 2001). Subject agreement in Marovo also supports such a prediction, with subject markers more likely to occur if the subject argument is also Topic. However, to adequately account for the different ways in which subject arguments are expressed in Marovo, a more fine-grained categorisation of discourse functions is needed, as it is with particular kinds of Topics that subject markers are more likely to occur.

There are many different proposals regarding the kinds of discourse categories that are relevant to the pragmatic or informational structure of an utterance (eg. Strawson 1964, Halliday 1967, Chafe 1976, Prince 1981 and Reinhart 1982), which are based primarily on a distinction between the more and less informative parts of an utterance (Vallduví 1992:28).

The present paper follows the approaches of Erteschik-Shir (2007) and Vallduví (1992), and is concerned with the category of Topic (or Link in Vallduví's terminology).⁷ Erteschik-Shir (2007) proposes two information structure primitives; Topic and Focus, and defines Topic in the following way, based on the work of Strawson (1964:97-98):

- (a) The topic is what a statement is about.
- (b) The topic is used to invoke "knowledge in the possession of an audience".
- (c) "The statement is assessed as putative information *about its topic*".

Erteschik-Shir 2007:13

Vallduví (1992) presents a trinomial hierarchy of information structure, such that an utterance (or sentence) comprises Focus and Ground, with Ground, the non-informative component of the utterance, further divided into Link and Tail. Link is similar to Topic (as defined above), and is the part of an utterance which indicates where the information denoted by the Focus should be placed within the "hearer's knowledge-store" (Vallduví 1992:47). The linguistic relevance of the discourse category Topic (or Link) can be seen from languages like Danish where nominal phrases denoting referents which meet the criteria of topichood can be marked linguistically as such through fronting (Erteschik-Shir 2007). The linguistic structure of other languages indicates the need for the category of Topic to be further subdivided.

Aissen (1992) demonstrates that in Mayan languages two kinds of Topic, switch and continuing are relevant to linguistic structure. Most Mayan languages are verb-initial, but allow for a pre-verbal Topic noun phrase.⁸ However, Aissen (1992) illustrates how structural differences between fronted Topic noun phrases in two languages, Tzotzil and Tz'utujil reflect pragmatic differences. In Tzotzil a fronted Topic noun phrase is an adjunct to an otherwise "fully well-formed clause", whereas in Tz'utujil such noun phrases are internal to the clause. Pragmatically fronted Topic noun phrases in Tzotzil are always Switch Topic. That is, a Topic participant which represents a new Topic in the discourse. In contrast, in Tz'utujil fronted Topic noun phrases can denote either Switch Topics or Continuing Topic, namely a participant that has already been established as Topic and continues as Topic within the discourse. Vallduví and Engdahl (1996) in their discussion of English make a distinction between Contrastive and Non-contrastive Links, and they view Switch Topics as one kind of Contrastive Link. A Contrastive Link indicates not only where in the hearer's knowledge-store information should be placed, but also that there is a salient opposition between this Link and that of adjacent discourse (Vallduví and Engdahl 1996:497-480).

Marovo represents a language in which both the difference between Switch and Continuing Topics and Contrastive and Non-contrastive Topics are linguistically relevant, allowing for the investigation of the different semantic and pragmatic characteristics of each. In terms of subject agreement in Marovo, there is a preference for the subject argument to be denoted by preverbal subject markers if the subject referent is a Continuing Topic. For example, in (30) the 1SG participant is initially denoted by an independent

⁷ Although there are significant differences between Erteschik-Shir's (2007) approach and that of Vallduví (1992), the current paper uses compatible aspects of their models to provide an accurate description of Marovo.

⁸ Focus noun phrases can also occur pre-verbally in Mayan languages, but are not relevant here.

pronoun. This referent continues as the Topic of the subsequent clauses, where it is denoted solely by subject agreement markers.

Marovo

- 30) 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.

The pattern shown in (30), 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, (31d) demonstrates that this pattern also occurs across sentence boundaries.

Marovo

- 31) 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.

In contrast, subject arguments that represent a shift back to a previous Topic within the discourse tend to be denoted by a pronominal or lexical noun phrase. (32) is part of an extended narrative about the speaker's fishing trip. In the first clause, (32a), the subject argument, expressed by the pronoun *ria* '3PL', refers back to the Topic of preceding clauses. The switch to the 1SG participant as both Topic and subject argument is denoted in (32b) by the use of the pronoun *raka* '1SG'.

Marovo

- 32) a. Ukalae [ukala kala]_{VC} [ria]_{SUBJ},
 after pass.by go 3PL
- b. [valu]_{VC} [raka]_{SUBJ}
 paddle 1SG
- c. [gu valu pule la]_{VC} pa meka kalakavo-na Ladoro.
 1SGS paddle go.back go LOC one side-3SGP L.
- a. *After they had passed,*
 b. *I paddled*
 c. *I paddled back across to the other side of Ladoro.*

Subject arguments which do denote Continuing Topics can also be expressed by a noun phrase rather than subject markers, and this tends to occur when there is a change in the event being described. For example, in (33a) 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 (33b) and (33c) which follow and describe the flying fox's journey, this participant is denoted by subject markers alone. In (33d) and (33e), 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

- 33) 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.*

This same pattern, in which a continuing Topic referent that 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 (34).

Marovo

- 34) 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.*

Example (32) also represents another instance in which noun phrases rather than subject markers tend to denote Continuing Topics. In Marovo discourse a sentence which expresses a shift in event and/or Topic is often preceded by a subordinate clause reiterating the event of the previous section of discourse. The subject of such clauses are usually denoted by a noun phrase, even in the case it is the Continuing Topic. The stretch of discourse that precedes (32) is about the 3PL participant denoted by *ria* ‘3PL’ (32a), but despite being the Continuing Topic of the discourse up to and including this clause, this participant is expressed by an independent pronoun.

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 (35a) 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

- 35) a. Ma-[ni ivasa]_{VC} [ia ororeke pia]_{SUBJ}
 then-3SGS get.out ART:SG wife DEM
 b. ma-[ni la ko]_{VC} 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.*

The co-occurrence of the pronominal noun phrase and subject agreement in (36) 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

- 36) 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 ...

5. Historical development of Marovo subject markers

The synchronic distribution of subject markers in Marovo appears unusual from the perspective of both general linguistic typology and the behaviour of subject markers in other Oceanic languages. However, the interaction of lexical-semantic and pragmatic conditions on Marovo subject agreement can be explained in terms of its historical development.

As mentioned in section 3, preverbal subject markers are found in many contemporary Oceanic languages and can be reconstructed for Proto Oceanic. In Proto Oceanic subject proclitics occurred as the second element of the verb complex, as can be seen Lynch, Ross and Crowley's (2002:83) reconstruction in Figure 2.

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

(ASPECT/MOOD =)⁹ SUBJECT MARKER = VERB (= OBJECT MARKER) (= DIRECTIONAL MARKER)

This original structure is still clearly reflected in some Oceanic languages, including Hoava, a language closely related to Marovo, where preverbal subject markers occur following the future tense marker *ma-* and preceding the verb, as in (37).

Hoava (Northwest Solomonian, Solomon Islands)

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

(Davis 2003:150)

Comparison of subject agreement in Marovo with that in Hoava and Roviana, another closely related language, suggests that the Marovo system has both archaic and innovative features. As Table 4 illustrates these three languages have very similar paradigms of preverbal subject markers.¹⁰

⁹ 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).

¹⁰ Marovo, Hoava and Roviana are eastern New Georgia languages. In western New Georgia languages like Kubokota and Simbo, grammaticalisation within the verb complex has resulted in sets of portmanteau forms that indicate both aspect/mood and the person and number of the subject argument. These changes are different from those that have occurred in Marovo and other eastern New Georgia languages, and will not be discussed here.

Table 4: Preverbal subject markers in Roviana, Hoava and Marovo

	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 2003¹¹

However, the distribution of subject marking in Roviana and Hoava is rather different from that in Marovo. For example, in Roviana subject markers occur in three environments¹²:

- (i) following the preverbal particle *o-* that indicates desire, (38);
- (ii) with the imperative mood/future tense marker *ma-*, (39) and (41); and
- (iii) in negative imperatives, (40).

Roviana (Northwest Solomon, Solomon Islands)

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

(Waterhouse 1949:83)

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

(Waterhouse 1949:68)

- 40) 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 (41).

¹¹ There are two orthographies that are used with many New Georgia languages, reflecting the conventions of different groups of missionaries. In examples cited in full I use the orthography of the source. In tables of comparative data 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 [ʰg] 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.

¹² 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

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

(Waterhouse 1926:6)

On the basis of the Roviana, Hoava and Marovo data the verb complex structure in Figure 3 can be reconstructed. The original Proto Oceanic structure is retained, reflected with the aspect/mood markers *ma-* and *o-* in Hoava and Roviana. It is proposed that the use of subject markers with negative *ka-* in Marovo and negative imperative *meke* in Roviana indicates that the negative particle likely occurred between the aspect/mood markers and the subject markers.¹³

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

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

The use of subject markers with discourse connective particles in Marovo is innovative and I argue that as original markers of aspect and mood were lost in Marovo, the aspect/mood marker **ma=* was reanalysed as the discourse connective particle *ma-* ‘and then’. The stages of development which I propose have led to the use of subject agreement markers with discourse connective particles in Marovo are set out in Table 5.

¹³ In Kubokota, a western New Georgia language, 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 the use of preverbal subject markers with discourse connective particles in Marovo

STAGE	CONSTRUCTIONS	FUNCTION
I	<i>*ma</i> VERB COMPLEX <i>*ma</i> =SUBJ.M 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.M VERB <i>*ngina</i> (<i>ma</i> = SUBJ.M) 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 innovative epistemic adverb denoting possibility
III	<i>*ma</i> VERB COMPLEX <i>*ma</i> = SUBJ.M VERB <i>*ngina</i> (<i>ma</i> = SUBJ.M) VERB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discourse connective particle <i>ma</i> precedes clause-initial verb complex implied sequential meaning of aspect/mood <i>*ma</i>= salient in certain contexts gradual grammaticalisation of <i>ngina</i> such that it is extended to use in a broader range of contexts
IV	<i>*ma</i> - SUBJ.M VERB COMPLEX <i>*ngina</i> VERB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two constructions with <i>*ma</i> merge; aspect/mood <i>*ma</i>= is reanalysed as the discourse connective particle <i>ma</i>- <i>ngina</i> used as a preverbal marker of irrealis mood
V	<i>ma</i> - SUBJ.M VERB COMPLEX <i>he</i> - SUBJ.M VERB COMPLEX <i>boru</i> (-SUBJ.M) VERB COMPLEX <i>pata</i> (-SUBJ.M) VERB COMPLEX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use of subject markers is extended to include co-occurrence 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 (42) from Roviana.

Roviana

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

a. *I went in,*

b. *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 Solomonian, although the exact function of **ma=* is not so easily reconstructed (see Ross 1982), although irrealis mood and future tense are common functions in modern languages. This type of construction is exemplified by the Roviana sentences (41) and (43).

Roviana

- 43) [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’.¹⁴ In Hoava *ngina* is an epistemic adverb that occurs preceding the verb complex (Davis 2003:247-249), as in (44).

Hoava

- 44) **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. Examples (45) and (46) show the future time reference and habitual uses of *ngina* in Marovo.

¹⁴ 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.

Marovo

- 45) “[**Ngina** tepa-tepa paki]_{VC} [hita]_{SUBJ...}”
 IRR RDP-ask first 1PLINC
“We will pray first ...”
- 46) [Manemaneke ororeke ta-gu raka]_{SUBJ},
 woman wife POSS-1SGP 1SG
 [**ngina** ta-tavete]_{VC} pa chigo tongania kolokolo.
 IRR RDP-work LOC garden every time
My wife works in the garden all the time.

The original aspect/mood marker **ma=* has also undergone semantic change, and I 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 as 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 aspect/mood marker *ma-*, like those in (47) from Roviana, have been reanalysed as clauses conjoined not by juxtaposition, but by the discourse connective particle *ma-*, as are those in (48) from Marovo.

Roviana

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

(Waterhouse 1926:18)

Marovo

- 48) 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.*

The merger of these two constructions was likely triggered by structural ambiguity that resulted from the chance homophony of the aspect/mood marker and the discourse connective particle **ma*. Evans (2008) demonstrates that this change was also facilitated by the two constructions having the same semantic and pragmatic affect in certain contexts.

Stage V represents the contemporary Marovo system, where subject markers have been extended by analogy to other discourse connective particles.

This proposed history of Marovo subject markers explains their synchronic distribution. The obligatory use of subject markers with *ma-* ‘and then’ reflects their original status as obligatory subject agreement within the verb complex and following markers of aspect/mood, including **ma-*. Note that the almost relic use of subject markers in Hoava and Roviana is with reflexes of aspect/mood **ma-*. The meaning of *ma* ‘and then’, conjoining sequential events in discourse and the tendency for subject arguments to be Topics would have resulted in a frequent correlation of the structure **ma* + SUBJECT MARKER with denotation of a sequence of events with an on-going Topic participant. As such subject agreement in Marovo gained an important role in reference tracking.¹⁵ The extension of subject markers to *boru* ‘and so’ and *pata* ‘in order that’ reflects this; subject markers occur with these particles if the subject is a Continuing Topic.

A final aspect of subject markers in Marovo that requires an explanation is their forms. The subject markers reconstructed for Proto Oceanic are given in Table 6. Comparison with Marovo subject markers, given in italics, shows that not all of them are direct reflexes of the Proto Oceanic forms.

Table 6: Proto Oceanic and Marovo preverbal subject markers

		1	2	3
SINGULAR		<i>*ku=, *au=</i>	<i>*mu=, *ko=</i>	<i>*(y)a=, *ña=, *i=</i>
		<i>-gu</i>	<i>-mu</i>	<i>-ni</i>
PLURAL	INCL	<i>*∅, *ta=</i>	<i>*∅</i>	<i>*∅, *ra=</i>
		<i>-da</i>	<i>-mu</i>	<i>-di, -ni</i>
	EXCL	<i>*∅</i>		
		<i>-ma</i>		

Proto Oceanic reconstructions from Lynch, Ross and Crowley (2002:67)

The most apparent difference is that 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 (49).

Marovo

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

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 reconstructed for Proto Oceanic, given in Table 7, are similar in form to one ‘set’ of Proto Oceanic subject markers; compare **-gu* ‘1SGP’ and **ku=* ‘1SGS’ and **-mu* ‘2SGP’ and **mu=* ‘2SGS’. The allomorphic variation reconstructed for Proto Oceanic subject

¹⁵ This function of subject agreement is different from that which Ross (2004) proposes for canonic Oceanic languages and Proto Oceanic.

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 7: 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		

I suggest that in Marovo 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 8 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 1PLINC forms through 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 3PL form is not a direct reflex of Proto Oceanic **ra=*, but reflects changes to the 3PL pronominal forms in Western Oceanic, as well as influence from the possessive suffix paradigm. The Marovo 3SG form *-ni* may reflect a merger of Proto Oceanic **ña=* and **i=*, but the history of this form warrants further investigation.

Table 8: Origins and development of Marovo subject markers

	PROTO OCEANIC	CHANGES	MAROVO
1SG	*ku=	• irregular sound change <i>*k > g</i> , analogy with possessive suffix paradigm	-gu
2SG	*mu=	• direct reflex	-mu
3SG	*i=, *ña=	• reflects combination of original <i>*i=</i> and <i>*ña=</i>	-ni
1PLINC	*ta=	• irregular sound change <i>*t > d</i> , 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

Analogical change across pronominal paradigms is not unusual in Oceanic languages, and thus the reconstruction of it in the history of Marovo subject marking is not implausible. Indeed, in Marovo today a similar change is occurring with the object markers, such that original object markers are sometimes replaced with forms from the possessive/subject paradigms. While Marovo reflects the original Proto Oceanic postverbal object agreement markers, some younger speakers replace these forms with ones identical to the possessive/subject markers. For example, (50) which was elicited from an older man, has the 2SG object marker *-ho*, whereas his daughter-in-law beginning the sentence before him

used the form of the verb in (51) with an object agreement marker identical with the 2SG possessive suffix.

Marovo

- 50) [Esei]_{SUBJ} [toka-ni-**ho**]_{VC} [hoi]_{OBJ} [tavete-a]_V [chore]_{OBJ}?
 who:SG help-TR-2SGO 2SG work-3SG canoe

Who helped you make the canoe?

- 51) [Esei]_{SUBJ} [toka-ni-**mu**]_{VC} [hoi]_{OBJ} ...
 who:SG help-TR-2SGO 2SG

Who helped you ...

6. Concluding remarks

Corbett (2003, 2006) establishes a typological space of agreement, which in terms of person marking represents a continuum bounded by independent pronouns at one end and agreement markers at the other. Marovo subject markers fit clearly within this typological space, showing both pronoun-like and agreement-like behaviour. However, the infrequent use of subject marking in Marovo discourse makes it an unusual system both from the perspective of subject marking in other Oceanic languages and more general typology of person marking. The lexical-semantic condition on Marovo subject agreement, namely occurrence with the negative particle and/or discourse connective particles, is shown to have a diachronic explanation. The use of subject markers with discourse connective particles reflects the merger of two original structures: *MA ‘ASPECT/MOOD’ + SUBJECT MARKER + VERB and *MA ‘AND THEN’ + VERB COMPLEX. The pre-Marovo structure of *MA ‘AND THEN’ + SUBJECT MARKER + VERB resulted in a correlation between subject markers and the discourse function of Continuing Topic, which in turn has led to the clear referent-tracking function of subject marking in present-day Marovo. The synchronic distribution of subject markers in Marovo highlights the pragmatic factors which can condition agreement. First, it is shown that subject agreement in Marovo is sensitive to specific, rather than general, discourse functions, in this case that of Continuing Topic. Second, Marovo subject agreement indicates that other features of discourse organisation are also relevant. Thus, in Marovo it is not only a subject’s role as Continuing Topic that determines the presence of subject agreement, but also the organisation of discourse around the events denoted. Clauses denoting one event are more likely to comprise subject markers, while in clauses denoting a shift in events the subject argument is more likely to be expressed by a lexical or pronominal noun phrase.

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