

Localizing the Marshallese question particle ‘ke’
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This paper examines the syntax of yes/no questions in Marshallese, with particular emphasis on the distribution of the question particle ‘ke’ in negative clauses. What makes negative interrogatives interesting is the fact that the distribution of ke is much more restricted than in affirmative clauses. (1) shows the various possible positions for ‘ke’ in affirmative sentences, while (2) illustrates possible positions for ‘ke’ in negative clauses.

- (1) *Herman e-n (ke) bajjik (ke) kqmmnon (ke) pade eo (ke) nan ir (ke)?*
 Herman 3sg-SUBJ Q just Q make Q party the(sg) Q for 3pl Q
 ‘Should Herman just throw the party for them?’ (Willson, 2005:1)
- (2) *(*ke) Kwo (*ke) j (*ke) jab (*ke) etal (*ke) nan Rita ke?*
 Q 2sg Q PROG Q NEG Q go Q to Rita Q
 ‘Aren’t you going to Rita?’ (Willson, 2005:5)

Willson (2005) proposes a remnant phrasal movement analysis of yes/no questions in Marshallese, positing that the question particle, ‘ke’, is generated in the left periphery of the clause as the head of an InterrogativeP. The restrictions on the occurrence of ‘ke’ in negative interrogatives are explained in terms of a Relativized Minimality violation: Int and Neg bear the same kind of features (Focus) and so anything lower in the structure than NegP (and thus further from Foc) may be attracted to Foc. The only possibility, according to Willson, is to move the whole AgrSP first to Foc, then to Int, which results in a sentence final position for ‘ke’.

We explore a number of problems related to Willson’s proposal: most importantly, the proposal overgenerates, e.g. the orderings AgrS-T-ke-neg-VP and AgrS-T-VP-ke-Subject are predicted to be grammatical, contrary to fact. We propose an analysis based on the same general clausal architecture, but different from Willson’s in two respects: one, the IntP is not in the left periphery but in the so-called ‘middle field’ (see Cardinaletti [2002]), i.e., in between TP and VP; two, interrogatives in Marshallese are clefts. We adopt an analysis of clefts along the lines of Heggie (1993), and propose that, in the case of Marshallese, interrogatives are structurally more complex than clefts.

We will show that the proposed structure accounts for all and only the grammatical strings involving the particle ‘ke’. Our analysis not only makes the right predictions, but also fits in with an independently argued analysis proposed by Adger and Ramchand (2005). They argue for a typological distinction of the following sort: between languages where relative clauses, clefts, and interrogatives have similar properties (in terms of the lexical specification of the complementizer), and in which wh- constituents are base-generated (merged) in their surface position; and those where relative clauses, clefts and interrogatives cannot be grouped together, and in which wh- constituents are moved from their merge position to a dislocated fronted position.

If this correlation is correct, the prediction is that Marshallese will show properties that are indicative of the Merge, rather than the Move analysis for wh- constituents. This prediction seems to be confirmed by the existence of a resumptive pronoun in wh- questions, merged in a (low) base position and bound by the wh-.

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