Delimiting and Demystifying Switch-Reference: on distinguishing form and function

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Syntax of the World’s Languages 7

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1. Defining Switch-Reference
2. Previous research: regional distributions
3. Worldwide distribution
4. Typology and definition revisited
Question: What is “Switch-Reference” marking and how does it work?

Problem 1: A theoretical analysis requires a representative range of descriptive data.
(What is the range of variation? What are the core properties?)

Problem 2: Comparative data requires a consistent applicable definition. (Does a language “have” X?)

Problem 3: What are the properties of SR? Origin?
Switch-Reference marking encodes whether the subject of one clause is the same as or different from the subject of another clause.

Well known for North America, Papua New Guinea, Australia and also now South America.

Working definitions used by different researchers vary greatly.
Switch-Reference Examples


daka oro-go-nuge auki da era-ga-nu
1SG come-SG-DS 3SG 1SG.OBJ see-SG-PST
‘I came and he saw me.’ (DS)

Overt suffixes for SS and DS

daka oro-go-i era-ga-nu
1SG come-SG-SS see-SG-PST
‘I came and saw him.’ (SS)
Switch-Reference Examples

Washo (United States: Jacobsen 1967)

gitʔáːt’u ʔéʔ-ʔišda múwami
his.older.brother where.he.was. DS he-ran-to
‘he ran to where his older brother was’ (DS)

géyeweʔ-ida ŋaŋáwŋaŋ gayáː:ma?
go.away-and.SS children tell
‘go away and tell the children’ (SS)

Morpheme indicating DS (š)
Switch-Reference Examples

Quechua (Assmann 2012)

chakra-chaw urya-pti-i, María pallamurqu-n w. field-LOC work-DS-1SG M. picked-3SG flowers
‘While I worked in the field, M. picked flowers.’ (DS)

chakra-chaw urya-shpa, pallamurqu-u waytakunata field-LOC work-SS picked-1SG flowers
‘While I worked in the field, I picked flowers.’ (SS)

Subordinating suffixes for DS vs. SS
Jacobsen (1967) defined Switch-Reference as when “a switch in subject or agent is obligatorily indicated in certain situations by a morpheme, usually suffixed, which may or may not carry other meanings in definition”
Defining Switch-Reference

- Jacobsen described SR for languages in the southwestern United States
  - Suggested possible areal influence
    - SR not shared by all languages in each family
    - Found in distantly related or unrelated languages

- Also indicated similarity to two Panoan languages in South America
- and languages in Papua New Guinea
Haiman & Munro (1983:ix): “Canonical switch-reference is an inflectional category of the verb, which indicates whether or not its subject is identical with the subject of some other verb.”

McKenzie (2015:409): “…a set of morphemes associated with the juncture of two clauses that indicates whether a certain prominent argument in each clause co-refers”

But definitions vary substantially
Defining Switch-Reference

- Typically morphological, often suffixing
- Now understood to refer to contrastive *same subject* (SS) and *different subject* (DS) marking
- SS and DS may be both overtly indicated by a special morpheme or by morphemes of another purpose, or one may be contrastively unmarked
- Extensive variation in form and usage, even in whether it necessarily indicates “subject”
Defining Switch-Reference

- Relatively limited theoretical research, which varies by definition and what data is considered.
- More descriptive research, especially in grammars in the regions where SR is prevalent.
- Identification of SR apparently based on perceptual similarities to known SR languages in those regions.
- Found in various types of subordinate clause, and also in clause-chaining (functionally coordination).
Overlap with other phenomena

- Converbs: suffixed verb forms (like \(-ing\)) that function in clause-chaining or adverbial clauses
  
  *(Typically these would be the SS forms)*

- Subordination: SR markers can also indicate different subordinating relationships

- Coordination: SR markers can be used in the function of coordination

- Tense, aspect and agreement: SR markers can also encode various other verb-morphology features
Previous regional studies usually:

- Previous comparative research on SR typically limited to a specific area.
- Influenced by common, prototypical types of SR in that region.
- May include languages from that region with non-typical SR systems that, if found elsewhere, would not be considered SR.
- No worldwide perspective published yet.
Miles

0 100 200 300 400

Map 2: Switch-reference and clause type

- Relative clauses
- Implicated/purposive clauses

Linguistic diffusion of phonological and morphological features has been reported for a number of areas in Australia; see especially Hercus 1972, Hercus & White 1974, Alpher 1976, and Dixon 1976a. An important detailed study is Heath 1978, which traces morphosyntactic diffusion in eastern Arnhem Land (Northern Territory). Heath distinguishes between 'direct' and 'indirect' diffusion, defining the latter as 'a process whereby one language rearranges its inherited words and morphemes under the influence of a foreign model, so that structural convergence results. Indirect diffusion thus involves patterns, while direct diffusion involves actual morphemes' (119). As far as switch-reference is concerned, languages differ in the actual instantiation of it in their syntax; but, as Map 2 illustrates, patterns recur. It would seem that indirect syntactic diffusion has occurred, although the original source of the mechanism is not obvious. Perhaps the existence of switch-reference in both relative and purposive/implicated clauses in the central languages points to them as the source. At present, it seems best to leave this question open. Although the postulation of indirect syntactic diffusion accounts for the recurrent patterns of clausal distribution, evidence for indirect morphological...
MAP: DISTRIBUTION OF TYPES OF SWITCH-REFERENCE SYSTEMS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA
North America: McKenzie 2015

Extension of earlier survey by Jacobsen (1983)
No comprehensive overview, but discussed in descriptive grammars and reference works: e.g. Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: *The Amazonian Languages* 

Also the talk you just heard, Valenzuela & Vuillermet (SWL7)

Recently Overall (2015) and Van Gijn (in press) have studied the distribution around the Amazon:
Not an area typically identified with SR

Treis (2012) discusses the distribution in Ethiopia
All languages have means to indicate whether two subjects are the same
- But are they grammaticalized systematically?

Research concentrated on areas where SR is a known and expected phenomenon
- But is it found elsewhere? How does it arise?

A few authors identify SR-like systems elsewhere
- e.g. Nichols 1983 for the Caucasus, Wiesemann 1982 for Bantu
Working Definition of SR

- Systematic morphosyntactic encoding
- Contrast between SS and DS
- Intentionally inclusive, not limiting
Language Sample (325)

Based on Haspelmath (2005) and WALS recommended 100-language sample. Sample based on Ross et al. (2015).
Distribution of Switch-Reference

Red: Switch-Reference (55)  Yellow: borderline SR (18)  Blue: no SR (252)
SR of some type found in about 22% of the languages in the sample
Distribution of Switch-Reference
Distribution of Switch-Reference
Distribution of Switch-Reference
Distribution of Switch-Reference
Switch-Reference in Europe?
Switch-Reference in Europe?

Polish
(not in sample)
Frajzyngier (1986) claims Polish has SR conjunctions

Jan(1) spotkał Piotra(2) w kawiarni
J. met P. in café
‘J. met P. in a café.’

(i) on jak zwykle nie miał pieniędzy (and.SS) he as usual NEG had money
‘As always, he(1) didn’t have money.’

A on jak zwykle nie miał pieniędzy and.DS he as usual NEG had money
‘As always, he(2) didn’t have money.’
Switch-Reference in Europe?

- But more generally the conjunctions *i* and *a* indicate parallel or contrastive coordinated phrases
  - SR is only one meaning of *a*

- Similar usage for *a* in Russian (but not as grammaticalized?):
  - “*a* connects... but semantically differentiates... shifts the focus to another subject of narration”
    (subject *is used here in the sense of* topic)
    (Dengub & Rojavin 2010)

- DS tendency for Russian *a* confirmed by native speaker, while *i* may be SS or DS (Tania Ionin, p.c.)
Switch-Reference in Europe?
Hayashi (1989, reported in Givón 1990:849-851) identified a pattern of reference relationships with English conjunctions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cataphoric referential continuity and contrastive conjunctions in written English (Hayashi 1989)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>and</em> (all punctuations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>while</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>but</em> (all punctuations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>though</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>yet</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*and* vs. *but*: tendency, *but not a rule*
Switch-Reference in Europe?

Spanish
Cameron (1995), among others, describes a function of Switch-Reference as a discourse function for pronoun usage in Spanish.

- Omission (dropping) a pronoun indicates SS.
- Overt pronouns indicate DS.
Switch-Reference in Europe?

Signed Languages?
For British Sign Language (BSL), Cormier, Smith & Zwets (2013) describe a similar function:

- Used in a certain type of imitative, quotative discourse
- Omitted subjects preferred for SS
- Overt subjects typical for DS

Different modality introduces questions about the form and implementation of Switch-Reference.
Switch-Reference in Europe (?)

- Even in German, SR argued to exist based on ordering of matrix clause and subordinate clause (Barnickel & Opitz 2012)

- Do these cases count as “real” Switch-Reference
  - Hard to draw the line... Some but not all? Which?

- Given the research bias for European languages, similar structures likely found elsewhere too!
Switch-Reference in Europe (?)
No SR found in creoles as far as I know
at least not morphologically
We might call it a “complex” type of construction
Also not common in globalized languages
Maybe a complex feature that disappears with larger speech communities, L2 learning and globalization (cf. McWhorter 2007; & Trudgill 2011)
There are clearly some kind of areal effects

In terms of development little is known, but suggested the morphology might come from conjunctions (Haiman 1983)
- Supported by isolated cases in the sample including Hmong and Lakhota

No necessary reason to exclude such types (or others)
Lakhota (Siouan, United States: Dahlstrom 1982:72)

Joe wĩyã wã hãska čʰa wãyãkĩ
Joe woman REL tall INDEF see
‘Joe saw a woman who was tall,

\{ na / yũkʰã \} heye ...
\{ and.SS / and.DS \} say
and \{ he / she \} said …’
“Echo-Subject” in Vanuatu

A similar phenomenon is common in the languages of southern Vanuatu, indicating grammaticalization.

A historical conjunction *ma has become an “Echo-Subject” prefix indicating SS.

Typologically unusual because this system is prefixing, centered around coordination (not subordination), and marked for SS, not DS.

But otherwise similar, and possible to integrate this type into the typology of SR constructions.
“Echo-Subject” in Vanuatu

Lenakel (Oceanic, Vanuatu: Lynch 1983:211)

i-ɨm-vɨn (kani) r-ɨm-apul
1-PST-go (and) 3SG-PST-sleep
‘I went and he slept.’ (DS)

i-ɨm-vɨn (kani) m-ɨm-apul
1-PST-go (and) SS-PST-sleep
‘I went and slept’ (SS)
“Echo-Subject” in Vanuatu

- Probably should be considered a region with SR

- But unusual form:
  - Primarily coordinating, not subordinating
  - Prefix
  - Overtly indicates SS, rather than DS

- Found in many southern Vanuatu languages (de Sousa 2008)
There does not even need to be any specific marking for either SS or DS.

Salt-Yui (Papua New Guinea; Irwin 1974) indicates:

- SS with no subject agreement on dependent verbs
- DS with subject agreement on dependent verbs

- bol-ere  
  fight-DEP  
  ‘fighting (SS)…’

- bo-m-g-ere  
  fight-1-PERF-DEP  
  ‘when I/we fight... (DS)’
Is SS or DS more prominent? Is one default?

Some languages seem to emphasize DS
- Where a specific DS morpheme is added to verb inflection (as Jacobsen showed for Washo)

Other languages seem to emphasize SS
- Where SS is marked consistently and DS by normal verb inflection (e.g., full subject agreement)
- Echo Subject marking in Vanuatu
- In some cases, SS is robust, while DS marking may optionally also allow SS interpretations (see Chechen below)
The typological anomaly of SR seems to be DS marking
- The name “switch-reference” emphasizes this too
- This is the rarer function across languages

- Many languages have SS constructions
  - Serial Verb Constructions are often SS
  - English infinitives are typically SS
  - But is *for* (‘I hoped *for* him to...’) a DS marker?
Mithun (1993, 1999:270) and others question whether SR is really *reference* tracking

“subject” better thought of as topic or event

Some thematically connected events with different subjects can be marked as SS

Some thematically disconnected events with the same subject can be marked as DS

Also, weather verbs, etc., can take SR marking
The form of SR can vary across languages

The function and use (in different syntactic constructions) of SR can vary across languages

Unclear what common thread ties together the various SR systems in languages of the world

Theoretical analyses for one language may not work for others
There are two ways to go from here:

1. reject the traditional category of SR cross-linguistically in favor of details (and consider instances of “SR” to be emergent)
2. use an approach like Corbett’s Canonical Typology (Corbett 2005; Brown, Chumakina & Corbett 2013) to include and identify variation.

Either approach requires breaking the SR phenomenon down into its component parts
The form of SR

- SR is typically **verbal morphology**
  - usually suffixes
- But **conjunctions** may also be used
- And sometimes **no marking** is used
- We might even consider use of pronouns or word order

- Overlap with other functions like verbal inflection
SR vs. converses

- SR marking is very similar to the use of converses
- Except that converses are usually SS only
- In some cases, we could say morphological SR is a verb system plus a DS form
- Some DS converses for SR have been proposed (For example, in the Caucasus and Ethiopia)
SR vs. converses

Chechen (Nakh, Caucasus: Nichols 1983:250)

\[\text{a:rväv-l-la cuo: iza e:lira} \]
\[\text{went.out-CVB he this said} \]
\[\text{‘he went out and said this.’ (SS)} \]

\[\text{a:rväv-l-ča cuo: iza e:lira} \]
\[\text{went.out-CVB he this said} \]
\[\text{‘he}_i \text{ went out and he}_{j,i} \text{ said this’ (DS or SS)} \]
Functions of SR

- Functions can include:
  - subordination (adverbial, relative clauses, etc.)
  - clause chaining
  - coordination
  - complex predicates

- Some languages mark SR for many of these types

- Some languages may be limited to only one type
  - Austin (1981:326-7) finds SR for only relative clauses in Alyawarra (Australia)
Conclusions

- Range of SR constructions from more prototypical to less prototypical
- SR can be broadly defined as indicating continuity and discontinuity of reference or discourse topic and may be realized by a wide variety of forms
- Overlap with other phenomena
- Areal phenomenon
  - The traditional areas for SR are supported, and limited instances elsewhere suggest origin
References


References


