

Switch Reference: The Division of Labor between Syntax and Discourse Coherence

This themed session aims to bring together researchers from a variety of perspectives to look at the phenomenon of switch reference (SR) crosslinguistically (Jacobsen 1967, Finer 1985, Stirling 1993, McKenzie 2015). Traditionally, there has been too stark a division between researchers who aim to do everything in the syntax and those who aim to do everything with discourse coherence mechanisms. Here are a few representative puzzles and issues below:

One recently successful framework is the Agree-without-agreement analysis of switch-reference (SR, Baker and Camargo Souza 2020), which was designed to account for SR on adjunct clauses, which is the most common kind crosslinguistically – and the only kind found in some languages. While promising, it turns out that SR marking on complements is also possible, and poses new puzzles for this framework. One is why SR is found only on auxiliary verbs and restructuring predicates, but not full CP complements in some languages. The other is why SR on full CP complements always tracks the reference of the subject of the matrix clause, never that of the structurally closer object. Promising directions might come from a different view of the relationship between Agree and semantic interpretation: that of Ikawa (2021), in which functional heads can be predicates that find their arguments via Agree.

Empirically, it is instructive to consider Wá:šiw (Washo; isolate, USA), which displays a typologically unusual type of ellipsis, where the remnant is comprised of peripheral verbal suffixes that appear without their usual verbal host. As it turns out, this remnant also requires switch reference markers where appropriate, which Arregi & Hanink (2022) argue to be the realization of an embedded C head that has agreed with the index features of both the subject in the embedded clause and the subject in the clause that embeds it. Given this morphosyntactic requirement, one can debate whether in fact the presence of this switch reference morphology in this type of ellipsis offers a unique clue for the presence of syntactic structure in ellipsis sites (Sag 1976, Ladusaw & McCloskey 1995, Merchant 2001).

On the other hand, when one examines Switch Reference in languages such as A'ingae, it seems that while a syntactic generalization about the environments where it is used proves elusive, a semantic generalization proves more successful. It appears that SR in A'ingae occurs in all and only environments whose semantics oblige a non-structuring coordinating discourse coherence relation – in sense of SDRT (Asher & Lascarides 2003).

Similarly, discourse connectors in Southern Quechua such as *hina* 'like' can be marked with same subject (SS) or different subject (DS) suffixes as in *hina-spa-n-mi* 'like-SAME SUBJ-EUPH- EVID/FOC' or *hina-pti-n-mi* 'like-DIFF SUBJ-EUPH-EVID/FOC.' One possibility is that by encoding same/different subject on the discourse connector, the speaker is guiding the listener to pay attention to subject (topic) continuity in the sequences of events. Thus, by encoding evidentiality on the discourse connector the speaker is establishing/ renewing their commitment to the grounds assigned to the first sequence of events.

This brief sampling of the some of the empirical and theoretical issues found crosslinguistically in Switch-Reference systems will ideally bring together researchers from different angles to confront a common set of shared patterns and reach a consensus on which patterns require syntax, which require discourse coherence, and how, potentially, a hybrid model might achieve a division of labor. Submissions from understudied languages and from early career researchers will be especially welcome and we aim for a supportive atmosphere of fruitful dialogue and shared understanding.

Contact Andrew Nevins (nevins2020@protonmail.com) and/or Daniel Altshuler (daniel.altshuler@ling-phil.ox.ac.uk) with any questions.