SWITCH-REFERENCE IN SERI

Mary B. Moser

0. Introduction
1. ta and ma as subject-change markers
2. The verb 'be' in the subordinate clause
3. The verb 'be' in sentence-final position
4. Subject-change without markers
5. Summary

0. Several recent papers\(^2\) have presented data on switch-reference (subject-change markers) in certain of the Yuman languages. The first article dealing with the subject in general is Jacobsen's "Switch-Reference in Hokan-Coahuiltecan",\(^3\) in which he reports the feature as present in Washo and Kashaya (Southwestern Pomo) but absent in certain other Hokan languages. Winter\(^4\) states that "switch-reference signaled by -m must be reconstructed for Proto-Yuman." As for Proto-Hokan, he believes that we must admit to the possibility that an independent development of switch-reference occurred in various member languages. He considers the likelihood "utterly remote" that a Proto-Hokan switch-reference device might be posited and effectively reconstructed.

This paper presents the Seri system of subject-change (SC) markers, thereby providing evidence of switch-reference devices from still another Hokan language.

1. Seri sentences frequently consist of one or more subordinate clauses and a main clause. In such sentences, all tenses of the lexical verb must normally be past or future, not a combination of the two. Change of subject in consecutive clauses within a sentence is marked in the subordinate clauses, which normally precede the main clause. This signaling of subject change is redundant when the verbs are overtly marked for person and number. But when the subjects of successive clauses are all third person (unmarked in Seri) and of the same number, it is the switch-reference marker alone that signals a change of subject.

One way in which Seri differs from the other Hokan languages already described is the manner in which it signals switch-reference. In some of these languages, same subject (SS) is indicated by adding -k to the verb in the subordinate clause. Different subject (DS) is indicated by -m.

In Seri, SS is unmarked. DS is signaled by either of two forms of the auxiliary -a(a) bo: ta (subject change future (SCF)),\(^5\) indicating a change of subjects between clauses pertaining to the future, or ma (subject change past (SCP)), between clauses pertaining to the past or present. Each occurs as the final word of a clause. In 1.1 these two SC indicators are illustrated in simple sentences. The functions of ta
and ma are described in detail in 1.2 and 1.3, respectively, and in 1.4 both are presented as they occur with verbs of time and space, number, location, and manner.

1.1 In (1) the subjects of both clauses are the same, and therefore no SC indicator occurs.6

(1) po-k6o / sfi-škam-a?a (DF-[be all] / fut-[arrive pl]-TM) They being all, they will arrive, i.e., All of them will arrive.

In (2) the subjects are different, signaled by SCF indicator ta in the first (subordinate) clause.

(2) po-k6o ta / i-n-sfi-??iit-a?a (DF-[be all] SCF / [3 obj]-[2 sub]-fut-eat-TM) They being all, you will eat them, i.e., You should eat them all.

The SCF indicator ta co-occurs only with a verb marked by dependent future (DF) p-,7 which indicates that the verb of the subordinate clause has a future meaning. The SCF ta anticipates both that the verb of the following main clause is also future and that the main clause has a different subject.

In (3) both clauses have the same subject, and therefore no SC indicator occurs.

(3) t-k6o / y-åanniipXat (DP-[be all] / past-[go home pl])) They being all, they went home, i.e., They all went home.

In (4) the subjects are different, signaled by SCP indicator ma in the subordinate clause.

(4) t-k6o ma / i-mfi-to+ka (DP-[be all] SCP / [3 obj]-perf-[eat pl]) It being all, they ate it, i.e., They ate all of it.

The SCP indicator ma co-occurs only with a verb marked by dependent past (DP) t-, which indicates that the verb of the subordinate clause has a meaning of past. The SCP ma anticipates both that the verb of the following main clause is also past or present and that the main clause has a different subject.

1.2 In (2) the subordinate clause is marked for SC by the SCF ta, and the verb in the main clause is marked for future by s-. In (5) the subordinate clause is marked for SC by the SCF ta, and while the semantic category future is not overtly expressed by a future aspect marker, it is correctly realized in the main clause by t- (assertive) followed by m- (perfect) prefixed to the verb. In other words, each dependent aspect prefix corresponds to more than one aspect in the main clause, as long as that aspect is not incompatible with the semantic category of the dependent prefix.

(5) im-p6o-fp ta / t-m-a-t'fkpan ([2 sub]-DF-arrive SCF / asser-perf-ca-work) When you arrive, he works.

In (6), since there is no change of subject in the three subordinate clauses, or between them and the main clause, no SC indicator occurs.
Example (7) contains four subordinate clauses and one main clause. The subject of the first clause is you, that of the second clause is I, and that of the remaining three clauses is foreigner. Each of the first two clauses is marked to indicate that the subject of the next clause is different.

Note that in the second clause of (7), the SC indicator is suffixed by -χ (conditional). This is the only suffix which can occur with either the SC indicator or the other forms of the auxiliary be described in 2. below.

Examples (8) and (9) illustrate change of subject when the singular subject of a subordinate clause is included in the plural subject of the main clause. In spite of the partial identity of referents, the SC indicators are required in such cases. In (8) the you of the first clause is included in the we of the second clause.

In (9) the I of the first clause is included in the we of the second clause.

1.3 In (10) the DP t- marks the verb of the first clause as dependent past. The subjects of both clauses are the same, and therefore no SC indicator occurs.

In (11) and (12) the subjects are different, signaled by SCP indicator ma.

1.3 In (10) the DP t- marks the verb of the first clause as dependent past. The subjects of both clauses are the same, and therefore no SC indicator occurs.

In (11) and (12) the subjects are different, signaled by SCP indicator ma.
In (12) the semantic role of the SC indicator is evident. When they saw them, they fled is ambiguous in English. In Seri the occurrence of the SC indicator eliminates the ambiguity. It clearly indicates that when subject₁ saw subject₂, subject fled.

Example (13) contains four subordinate clauses with singular verbs unmarked for third person subject, and a main clause marked for first person plural subject. Change of subject is signaled in the first, second, and fourth clauses. In the first two instances, the SC indicator is the sole marker of the change; in the final clause, the change is also evident because of the subject prefix. The context from which (13) is taken makes it clear that the subject of the first, third, and fourth clauses is horse, and the subject of the second clause is he (man).

(13) tākX iti t-áp ma / yāX kix an i-t-átni ma / i-k-áattaaX i-t-kW̃g / tā ?ak iti t-áp ma / kW̃-a-mfí-škam (there on DP-stand SCP / belly pos in [3 obj]-DP-hit SCP / inf-nom-go [3 obj]-DP-[neg=know] / there spec in DP-stand SCP / [3 ref]-[1 sub pl]-perf-[arrive pl]) When it stood there, after he hit it in the belly, it could not move, it stood over in that place, we arrived to where it was.

1.4. Many Seri expressions that translate English adverbs are basically clauses that meet the requirements for SC. These include notions of time and space, number, location, and manner. (14)-(20) all make use of the SC indicators:

(14) ?ánt po-?:t ta / ?a-s-fi-tX-a?a (land DF-regain SCF / [1 sub pl]-fut-[go pl]-TM) When the land regains (the sun), we'll go, i.e., Tomorrow we'll go.

(15) po-ʔámook ta / píest ?ánt s-m-fix k-ée-ya (DF-night SCF / fiesta land fut-neg-sit nom-say-Q) When it is night, won't there by a fiesta?, i.e., Tonight won't there by a fiesta?

(16) po-ʔáam ta / ?-p-s-óoss-a?a (DF-[be spacious] SCF / [1 sub]-intr-fut-sing-TM) When it is spacious, I'll sing, i.e., Later I'll sing.

(17) iX̃ap t-ápXa ma / yóó-škam (days DP-three SCP / past-[arrive pl]) When there were three days, they arrived, i.e., They arrived three days ago.

(18) ?ákki ?ak ano t-i? ma / in-t-á??o (someplace spec on DP-[be located] SCP / [2 sub]-inter-see) When it was someplace, did you see it?, i.e., Where did you see it?

(19) óX t-p-akt ma / ?ápX i-t-ako+ka / i-y-óktam (thus DP-pass-[look at] SCP / outside [3 obj]-DP-[take out pl] / [3 obj]-past-[look at pl]) When it was thus looked at, they took them out, they looked at them, i.e., They took them out and looked at them.

(20) s6 t-p-ákt ma / in-t-óo?ta (what DP-pass-[look at] SCP / [2 sub]-inter-cry) What it was looked at, are you crying, i.e., Why are you crying?
One common time expression in which no SC indicator occurs is the term for yesterday.

(21) moXímmaa zi ?-y-ðo??o (yesterday one [l sub]-past-see) I saw one yesterday.

moXímma yesterday is a particle, not a verb. At first glance it might appear to be a variation of the verb -ðXXi die/finish, followed by SC indicator ma, i.e., m-ðXXii ma (perf-die SCP). But SC indicator ma co-occurs only with the t- (dependent past), never with m- (perfect). Compare the following (22)-(25) containing the verb -ðXXi.

(22) t-ðoXXii ma / ñìmoo ?a-y-ða+axk (DP-die SCP / far [l sub pl]-past-throw) When it died, we threw it away.

(23) t-ðoXXi / i?némt (DP-die / [perf=stink]) When it died, it stank.

(24) m-ðoXXi (perf-die) It is dead/finished.

(25) m-ðoXXi // tâax / ma-t-kôk-kêep (perf-die / that [2 sub pl]-inter­neg-[like pl]) It's dead. Don't you like that?

Example (22) contains a subordinate clause that is marked by SCP ma indicating a change of subject in the following clause. Example (23) contains the same clause without the SCP indicator, because the next clause has the same subject. Example (24) is a one-clause independent sentence in which the verb -ðXXi occurs with the perfect tense marker m-. Example (25) contains two independent clauses. It is possible that historically yesterday was a verb meaning 'when it was finished' or 'after it finished'.

2. The auxiliary verb -a(a) be frequently occurs as a second verb in a clause. It is marked for tense-aspect. We assume it has a third person prefix which is Ø. It is not marked for number.

In the subordinate clause in (26), the combination of the lexical verb marked by s- (future) and the verb be marked by DF p- translates 'if it will be ...' The subjects are the same in both clauses, and therefore no SC indicator occurs.

(26) sfx k? in-si-??iit p-ða-ða8 / in-so-néax-a?a (thing def [2 sub]-fut-eat DF-be-cond / [2 sub]-fut-[wash hands]-TM) If it will be that you will eat a thing, wash your hands, i.e., If you are going to eat something, wash your hands.

When a change of subject is marked in a clause containing both a lexical verb and the verb be, this subject change is triggered by the subject of the lexical verb, but the verb be takes the dependent tense marker. The SC indicator always follows be.

In (27) the subjects are different, signaled by the SC indicator ta following the DF-marked verb be.
(27) §fx k? in-sí-??iit p-a ta-ß / ma-?/-s-íx-a?a (thing def [2 sub]-fut-eat DF-be SCF-cond / [2 obj]-[1 sub]-fut-leave-TM) If it will be that you will eat a thing, I will leave you, i.e., If you are going to eat something, I'll leave.

In (28) and (29) the verb be occurs as the only verb in the subordinate clause. In both examples, the be is followed by the SC indicator.

(28) míšx p-a ta / ?e-sí-mX-a?a (well DF-be SCF / [1 ref]-fut-tell-TM) It being well, he will tell me, i.e., He will tell me correctly.

(29) míšx t-a ma / ?e-ýo-m-ímX (well DP-be SCP / [1 ref]-past-neg-tell) It being well, he didn't tell me, i.e., He didn't tell me correctly.

In the subordinate clauses in (30) and (31), the combination of the lexical verb marked by s- (future) and the verb be marked by DP t- translates 'when ... was going to ...'. The subjects are the same in both clauses and therefore no SC indicator occurs.

(30) ktám kí? kanóaa kon ano s-íx t-a / i-t-íaaai / ?ánt y-a-?-xíit (man def boat pos in fut-sit DP-be / [3 obj]-DF-[go to] / land past-cas-pass-fall) When the man was going to get in the boat, when he went to it, he fell.

(31) sâo-??iit-in t-a / i-ý-óó??o (fut-eat-rep DP-be / [3 obj]-past-see) When he was going to eat, he saw it.

In (32) and (33) the subject change is signaled by the SCP ma following the DP-marked verb be.

(32) sâo-??iit-in t-a ma / ktám i?máa kí? yóó-fp. (fut-eat-rep DP-be SCP/man other def past-arrive) When he was going to eat, the other man arrived.

(33) s-m-áttaax t-a ma / i?-ýóó-mm-e (fut-neg-go DP-be SCP / [1 sub]-past-neg-give) When he wasn't going to go, I didn't give to him.

3. The subordinate clauses described so far have preceded the main clauses. These consecutive clauses are frequently temporal in meaning, one event closely following the other or associated with the other in time.

Without any change of meaning, a subordinate clause containing a verb marked by DF p- may also follow the clause. The order of the clauses in (16) is reversed in (34). the subordinate clause is now sentence final. The occurrence of ta in sentence final position following the DF marked verb identifies it as an SC. Examples (16) and (34) have essentially the same meaning.

(34) ?-p-s-ôöss-a?a / po-yâam ta ([1 sub]-intr-fut-sing-TM / DF-[be spacious] SCF) I'll sing later.

There is a change of meaning when a subordinate clause that con-
tains a lexical verb marked by s- (future) and the verb be marked by t- (dependent past) occurs following the main clause, rather than preceding it, as do the subordinate clauses in (30)-(33). When such a marked clause occurs sentence final, it expresses purpose or motivation, and is not a sequence of past events; the action may yet be unrealized. Examples (35) and (36) contain subordinate clauses of purpose or motivation. There is no SC indicator.

(35) yóo-fp / sóo-??iit-in t-a (past-arrive / fut-eat-rep DP-be) He arrived, it was that he will eat, i.e., He arrived to eat.

(36) ma-?-p-mí-fp / ?-a-p-ó??aa k-ís pak i?-s-óX+ t-a (2 ref-[1 sub]-intr-perf-arrive / nom-ca-pass-grind nom-raw some [1 sub]-fut-take DP-be) I arrived to you, it was that I will take some flour, i.e., I came to you to get some flour.

When the verb be marked by m (perfect) occurs sentence final following a subordinate clause, it seems to function as a sentence closer. Note that this is homophonous with SCP ma. It is conceivable that at some point in the history of Seri ma functioned as a subject-change marker in sentence final subordinate clauses, but examples (39) and (40) below provide counterexamples to this hypothesis for a synchronic analysis of Seri.

In (37) and (38) there is a change of subjects in the final, subordinate clauses. In (39) and (40) the subjects are the same in both clauses. Each of these four sentences ends with m-a (perf-be).

(37) Xíkkaa ?-a-p-ámya? ki? tássoo ?íi-mm-e / i-síi-m t-a m-a (things nom-ca-pass-[swallow pl] def one [1 sub]-perf-give / [3 obj]-fut-swallow DP-be perf-be) I gave her a pill, it is that she was going to swallow it, i.e., I gave her a pill to swallow.

(38) šíxkám kom i-míi-Xkim / ?áXš kop i-síi-??iit t-a m-a (fish pos [3 obj]-perf-throw / dog pos [3 obj]-fut-eat DP-be perf be) He threw the fish, it is that the dog was going to eat it, i.e., He threw the fish to the dog to eat.

(39) móoffi ki? kíkkoot míi-p / kíkkoot i-s-áai-tin t-a m-a (Móoffi def [with them] perf-stand / [with them] [3 obj]-fut-do-rep DP-be perf-be) Móoffi was with them, it is that she was going to help them, i.e., Móoffi was with them to help them.

(40) kwáxkoox António k ?a-t-ošít / ?a-s-óoktan t-a m-a ([old man] Antonio def [1 sub pl]-DP-[go to pl] / [1 sub pl]-fut-[look pl] DP-be perf-be) We went to Old Man Antonio, it is that we were going to look at him, i.e., We went to visit Old Man Antonio.

Note that in (40) both clauses are subordinate, with both the lexical verb in the first clause and the verb be in the second clause marked by the DP t-.

Although a description of the other functions of be lies outside the scope of this paper, several more examples of be in sentence final
4. Clauses with nominalized verbs contain no SC indicator when followed by a clause with a different subject. In (45) there is no subject in the subordinate clause, so an SC is not anticipated. In (46) and (47) there is a subject change, but even though the nominalized verbs contain person markers, no SC indicators occur.

(45) mi-m-óos i-s-a-X / mo-n-s-íin-a?aa (2-neg-sing inf-fut-be-cond / toward-[2 sub]-fut-move-TM) If it is to be your-not-singing, come back, i.e., Even if you don't sing, come back.

(46) mi-m-óos i-s-a-X / ñíkkäa k-óppoo+ me-?-s-áa-ss-a?aa (2-neg-sing inf-fut-be-cond / things nom-black [2 ref]-[1 sub]-fut-ca-drink-TM) If it is to be your-not-singing, I'll give you black things to drink, i.e., Even if you don't sing, I'll give you coffee to drink.

(47) i-táppoo+kim i-s-a-X / ñe-ká-mxk (3-broken inf-fut-be-cond / [1 ref]-imp-bring) If it is to be its-being-broken, bring it to me, i.e., Even if it is broken, bring it to me.

Contrary-to-fact sentences, which contain the contrary-to-fact particle pikiX, are not marked for SC when the main clause has a different subject. (48) and (49) are examples of such sentences.

(48) mi-m-mokéeppee pikiX / ña-síi-tX-a?aa (2-neg-sick [cont fact] / [1 sub pl]-fut-go-TM) If your-not-sick, we will go, i.e., If you had not been sick, we would have gone.

(49) i-k-a-tíkpan ño-?-a-p-á?oo pikiX / ñ-p-s-a-tíkpan-a?aa (inf-nom-ca-work-TM) If to be a worker were seen, I will work, i.e., If there were work to do, I'd work.

Clauses joined with the coordinate conjunction Xo but do not occur with the SC indicator. These are independent clauses and each can stand alone without the connecting Xo. This demonstrates that the relationship between them is one of coordination rather than subordination.

(50) pak ñáXXoos im-áškam-i?aa Xo pak ñáXXoos k-áškam-i?aa (some shore [neg nom]-[enter pl]-TM but some shore nom-[enter pl]-TM) Some
don't arrive at shore but others do arrive at shore.

(51) yóó-fp Xo ?-yo-m-á??o (past-arrive but [1 sub]-past-neg-see) He arrived, but I didn't see him.

5. In summary, subject change in Seri between subordinate clauses or between subordinate and main clauses is signaled in the subordinate clause by a combination of two factors. The first is the occurrence of one or two tense markers (DF p- or DP t-) either on the lexical verb when it is the only verb in the clause, or on the auxiliary verb be following the lexical verb. The second is the occurrence of the appropriate form of the verb be as SC indicator (ta (subject change future) or ma (subject change past)).

FOOTNOTES

¹Seri is a Hokan language spoken by some 440 people living along the coast of Sonora, Mexico in two main villages, Punta Chueca and El Desemboque, and in a number of seasonal camps. This paper is based on language data collected during the past two decades under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. A revision of an earlier draft of this paper was done at a workshop of the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the Centro de estudios Jaime Torres Bodet in Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico in September 1975. I am deeply grateful to my many Seri tutors, and especially to my principal language assistants Roberto Herrera T., Oscar Romero, Lorenzo Thompson, and Maria Tomoson. I am indebted to Viola G. Waterhouse, Barbara E. Hollenbach, Donald G. Frantz, and Edward Moser, of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, for their valuable comments and suggestions. A concordance of Seri texts, produced at the University of Oklahoma under National Science Foundation grant GS-1605, Project for Computer Support of Linguistic Fieldwork, proved useful in the analysis. For a description of Seri phonemes see Edward W. Moser and Mary B. Moser, "Consonant Vowel Balance in Seri (Hokan) Syllables." Linguistics (1965): (1965): 40-67.


³Jacobsen, pp. 238-263.
Winter, op. cit.

For this paper, the SC auxiliaries are written ta and ma instead of t-a (DP-be) and m-a (perf-be) because synchronically they act as units. It is inviting to speculate why auxiliary verbs meaning 'when it is' and 'it has been, it is', developed into SCF and SCP markers respectively. Presumably at some point in the history of Seri they were productive. Perhaps they were once used only in sentences in which the relationship between the subordinate clause and the main clause is strictly temporal, but now their use has broadened to sentences in which other relations hold (see examples (2) and (4)).

Square brackets are used to enclose a gloss containing more than one word. = joins a gloss of more than one word when the Seri form is complex. / marks division between clauses. // marks division between sentences. Hyphens mark morpheme boundaries. The following abbreviations are used:

asser, assertive
ca, causative
cond, conditional
def, definite
DF, dependent future
DP, dependent past
DS, different subject
fut, future
imp, imperative
inf, infinitive
inter, interrogative
intr, intransitive
loc, locative
neg, negative
nom, nominalizer
obj, object
pass, passive
perf, perfect
pl, plural
pos, positional article
ref, referent
rep, repetitive
SC, subject change
SCF, subject change future
SCP, subject change past
spec, specific
SS, same subject
sub, subject
TM, tense-mode

For convenience, these prefixes are hereafter cited in the text in their simple base forms, but in examples are given in the actual surface forms.

\[\text{p-a-X}\] has an idiolectal variant \[\text{p-i-X}\].

\[\text{pikiX}\] has an idiolectal variant \[\text{pakiX}\].