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Switch Reference in Seri

Stephen A. Marlett and Mary B. Moser

Switch reference systems have attracted attention since they were first described as such by Jacobsen 1967. The Seri facts presented here have challenged the most detailed theoretically-oriented account of such systems (Finer 1985a, Finer 1985b), despite the relatively simple appearance of the system. The Seri switch reference system, apparently unlike other switch reference systems, is not keyed in to the superficial subject of the clause nor to some notion like Agent, Actor, or deep structure Subject. Passive clauses and those with Raising are very relevant facts, besides clauses with impersonal verbs like rain and verbs with nonvolitional action like die (which interact just like verbs with volitional action).

Seri is spoken by about 700 people who live in the state of Sonora in northwestern Mexico. The data presented here were collected primarily by Edward and Mary Moser between 1951 and the present. Further data were collected by Steve Marlett between 1976 and 1981. Basic data and analysis are presented in various publications (listed below) by Moser, Marlett, and most recently Farrell, Marlett and Perlmutter.

This data squib presents key data in one place and in one orthographic form (the practical orthography). The interlinear translations, while not morpheme by morpheme or even word by word, are fairly literal. Switch reference marking appears on verbs in the dependent reals (t-, switch reference marker ma) and verbs in the dependent irrealis (po-, switch reference marker ta). These verb forms are translated with simple past and simple future forms in the English interlinear glosses. There are no words such as if, when, as, while, after, etc., in Seri, but these are supplied in the free translation line as appropriate, although other translations may also be possible. Similarly, nominalized clauses are translated below with simple tense in English.

References


Switch Reference in Seri
(Mexico)

Basic Data

(1)  Pocoo(*ta)  siizcamaha.  
they will be all  they will arrive  
All of them will arrive.

(2)  Pocoota  nsiiahitaha.  
they will be all  you will eat them  
You should eat them all.

(3)  Tcoo(*ma)  yaanipxat.  
they were all  they went home  
They all went home.

(4)  Tcooma  iimiitolca.  
it was all  they ate it  
They ate all of it.

(5)  Impoofpng  tmaticpan.  
you will arrive  s/he can work  
When you arrive, s/he can work.

(6)  Tapcama  hpyiim.  
it rained  I slept  
I slept while it rained.

(7)  Toxix(*ma)  mheem.  
it died  it stank  
It stank after it died.

(8)  Miz tama  he yomaamx.  
it was well  s/he didn't tell it to me  
S/he didn't tell it to me correctly.

(9)  Nim tcaznima  hpyaha.  
it bit me  I cried  
Since it bit me, I cried.

(10) Mini quih pozaxtax  insoohaha.  
your fingers will have thorns in them  you will cry  
If your fingers get thorns in them, you will cry.

(11) Tommequema  hyomasi.  
it wasn't warm  I didn't drink it  
Since it wasn't warm, I didn't drink it.

(12) Hapaspox zo mpaaita  hpaazitax  cocsar zo haquix mopa(*ta)x  
you will make a paper  I will carry it  an outsider will come along  
he poopf(*ta)x  ziix zo him iseha.  
s/he will arrive to me  s/he will give me something  
If you make a paper, and I carry it, when an outsider comes along and s/he comes to me, s/he will give me something.

(13) Yooop(*ma/*ta)  xo  hymaho.  
s/he arrived  but  I didn't see him/her.  
S/he arrived but I didn't see him/her.
Data with Passive

(14)  *Ihpahcaznitax ihpsoohaha.*
I will be bitten I will cry
If I am bitten, I will cry.

(15)  *Hap quih toxima yopahit.*
the deer died it was eaten
Whenever a deer died, it (the deer) was eaten.

(16)  *Cöset hapah hehe cap tpezima tatax yogue.*
the tree called Cöset was defeated he went away it is said
The tree called Cöset was defeated, (and) he went away, it is said.

(17)  *Haat quih pahcaax heepol quih mos sahcaaha.*
limberbush will be looked for white ratany will also be looked for
Whenever limberbush is looked for, white ratany (plant) should also be looked for (at the same time).

Data with Raising

(18)  *Ma hiizt ihpmaapxa.*
my tattooing you I was three
I tattooed you three times.

(19)  *Moxima quih iqui iiipca maapxa.*
it's raining yesterday it was three
It rained three times yesterday.

(20)  *Hipazt quih yootxo / hyahatxo.*
your being tattooed it was many / I was many
I was tattooed many times.

(21)  *Mipazt qusiipootxotax impahatxo(*tq) / impahatxo(*tq) insoohaha.*
your being tattooed it will be many / you will be many you will cry
If you are tattooed many times, you will cry.

(22)  *Haxz himcop him icatxla quih pahatx (*tq) soxiaha.*
that dog’s biting me he will be many he will die
If that dog bites me many times, he will die.

(23)  *Sooda coopol quih ipasi quih pocahatx (*tq) hacx scamiihaha.*
cola soda’s being drunk one will be many one will die
If cola soda is drunk often, one will die.

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1 Switch reference marking never appears before a quotative verb like *yogue*.

2 Literal translation is not very meaningful here. The tensed verb is inflected for person (as shown), and when it is so inflected in agreement with the (superficial) subject of the lower clause, the number verb also carries an extra prefix. The verb of the lower clause occurs in a nominalized form.

3 When the complement clause is passive, there are two possibilities: without raising (the simple verb), or with raising (the derived verb has person agreement as discussed above).