

Chapter 19

Non-canonical switch-reference in Serer

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This paper takes a closer look at third-person pronouns in the Atlantic language Serer. In canonical affirmative clauses, the language disposes of two sets of non-locative subject pronouns. Previous descriptions of the language relate their distribution to conjugation paradigms on the one hand and/or to construction types on the other. However, an analysis of corpus data clearly contradicts these claims. The data rather provide evidence for a functional account of these pronouns relating their distribution to non-canonical switch-reference – in the sense that it deviates from the definition of prototypical instances of the latter. This finding contributes to the description of variations of switch-reference systems in general as well as to a more accurate typological profile of Serer.

1 Introduction

Serer is a North-Atlantic language of the Niger-Congo phylum (Segerer 2016) and is spoken by about 1.4 million people in Senegal and North-Western Gambia (Simons & Fenning 2017). As summarised in Renaudier (2012: 4), five dialects of Serer can be distinguished: Serer-Sine, Serer A’ool, Serer Jegem, Serer of Fadiouth and Palmarin, and Serer Nyomiñka. Of these five varieties, Serer-Sine and Serer Nyomiñka (Saloum region) are the most thoroughly described ones.¹

One of the most prominent features of Serer’s nominal morphosyntax is its noun class system, which shows slight variation between dialects (see Renaudier 2015). Nouns are marked by a class prefix which in turn can trigger consonant mutation on the noun root (Faye 2005; McLaughlin 1994; 2000; Merrill 2014; Pozdniakov & Segerer 2006).

¹The data used in this paper are mostly taken from Faye (1979) (Sine) and Renaudier (2012) (Nyomiñka). In addition, examples were judged and provided with contexts by Papa Saliou Sarr who is a mother tongue speaker from the town Bambey (A’ool variety).

Noun class is indexed on a number of agreement targets such as determiner stems, adjectives, relative pronouns, and numerals up to five (Renaudier 2015: 493).

Turning to the verb system, there are five slots for the composition of verb stems (see Faye & Mous 2006: 90):

- (1) **root** – (derivational suffix(es)) – **conjugation suffix(es)** – (pronoun) – (relative perfective suffix *-(ii)na*)

Finite verbs consist minimally of a root and one or more conjugation suffixes. Roots can hereby exhibit consonant mutation in order to distinguish singular from plural grammatical subjects (McLaughlin 1994; 2000). Conjugation suffixes are commonly divided into perfective and imperfective paradigms. For the sake of convenience, only the suffixes of perfective *-a* (??) and imperfective *-aa* (??) are distinguished in this paper.²

- (2) a. Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 193)
 I pir-a bil le.
 1PL hit-PFV 5.stone 5.DEF
 ‘We hit against the stone.’
 b. Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 217)
 I mbad-aa
 1PL beat-IPFV
 ‘We beat [someone].’

In the examples in (??) above, all information related to the finite verb is expressed on the verb. I refer to such verbs as “simple” verb forms. These can be differentiated from “complex” verb forms which are defined by the presence of an additional preverbal marker (??) or by a periphrastic construction involving a locative subject pronoun (??).

- (3) a. Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 217)
 Ba nu mbad.
 IMP.NEG 2PL beat
 ‘Do not beat [someone]!’

²All examples are unified in orthography and morpheme breaks. Regardless of the source language, glosses and translations are given uniquely in English. Information which is irrelevant for this discussion is removed from the glosses. Singular/plural noun and verb roots are not distinguished. The numbering of noun classes follows Faye (1979: 118). Note that verb stems without any conjugation suffix are used as narrative perfectives.

- b. Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 248)

Inwe ngum-aa a-ndok.

1PL:LOC build-IPFV 3-hut

‘We are building a hut.’

Turning to the pronominal system, first and second person subject pronouns are either preverbal – as in examples (??) and (??) – or appear as enclitics on the verb stem. The enclitic vs. preverbal distribution depends on the person, number, and conjugation paradigm involved. The third-person subject pronouns are always preverbal. In combination with affirmative verb forms, Serer has three third-person subject pronouns: *a*, *ta/te* and *da/de*. *Ta* and *da* are the variants in the Sine dialect. In Nyomiñka they are realised as *te* and *de*. *A* is used in both varieties. Whilst *ta/te* and *da/de* uniquely correspond to a singular or plural nouns respectively, *a* is insensitive to number, as shown by (??) for the Sine variety:

- (4) a. Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 283; Papa Saliou Sarr, p.c.)

a/ta/*da ret

PRO/SG:PRO/PL:PRO go

‘he/she/it went’

- b. Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 277, 291; Papa Saliou Sarr, p.c.)

a/*ta/da ndet

PRO/SG:PRO/PL:PRO go

‘they went’

Many authors relate the distribution of these three pronominal forms to conjugation paradigms and/or to construction types. In affirmative clauses with a non-focal subject, the imperfective suffix *-aa* is said to appear with *ta/da* or *te/de* only (Faye 1979: 234; Renaudier 2012: 347), as illustrated by (??) for *ta*.

- (5) Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 283)

ta ñaam-aa

SG:PRO eat-IPFV

‘she ate’

However, this analysis is contradicted by data from the same text (a folktale), as shown in (??) which is the next clause following example (??). Here, it is even the same verb stem that is preceded by the pronoun *a*.

- (6) Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 283)

a ñaam-aa

PRO eat-IPFV

‘she ate’

A similar pronominal distribution is asserted for the complex verb form involving the preverbal marker *kaa* (example (??) below) (Faye 1979: 234; Faye & Mous 2006: 91f; Renaudier 2012: 348). *Kaa* appears in contexts where either the verb or the entire verb phrase is pragmatically in focus. The interpretation of any type of term focus – such as subject, object, adjunct, etc. – is excluded.

- (7) Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 196; context by Papa Saliou Sarr, p.c.)

{Yoro bought a pagne.}

Kaa **ta** riw pay.

NON.T.FOC SG:PRO weave 6.pagne

‘He WOVE a pagne.’

However, natural discourse data, as in example (??), reveal that the pronoun *a* is grammatical in this construction type, too:

- (8) Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 276)

{The habitants of a village have to hide from soldiers under a bush. One woman betrays their shelter by not entering into the bush fast enough.}

Kaa **a** moof.

NON.T.FOC PRO sit.down

‘She SAT DOWN.’

Examples (??) to (??) above show that conjugation paradigms and construction types are obviously not a decisive factor for the distribution of the non-locative preverbal third-person subject pronouns. In the remainder of this paper I take a closer look at this phenomenon and argue for a new analysis. The argumentation is based on corpus data provided in the appendices of Faye’s (2005) and Renaudier’s (2012) works. I start by examining the third-person pronouns in Serer in §??. In addition to the description of form and function (§??), I also present a hypothesis for the emergence of *ta/da* and *te/de* (§??). I then turn to the distribution of *a*, *ta/te*, and *da/de* in discourse (§??). §?? deals with the theoretical classification of the phenomenon (§??) as well as with the scope and limits thereof (§??). My findings are summarised in §??.

2 The third-person pronouns: A closer look

2.1 Form and function of pronouns

As aforementioned, Serer possesses three preverbal subject pronouns for the third-person in combination with affirmative verb forms: *a*, *ta/te* and *da/de*. Whilst the pronoun *a* is insensitive to number and substitutes nouns of all classes, *ta/te* and *da/de* differentiate between singular and plural referents. *Ta/te* and *da/de* share this property with other third-person pronouns such as locative, object, possessive, and emphatic pronouns (see Table ??).

Table 1: third-person subject, object, possessive, and emphatic pronouns in Serer (Faye 1979; Renaudier 2012) (S=Serer-Sine, N=Serer Nyomiñka).

Number	Subject		Object	Possessive	Emphatic
	Non-locative	Locative			
Sg.	<i>ta</i> (S)	<i>oxe</i>	<i>=(i)n/ne</i> (S)	<i>ten/um</i> (S)	<i>ten</i> (S)
	<i>te</i> (N)		<i>=in/ten</i> (N)	<i>ten/=um</i> (N)	<i>(o) ten</i> (N)
	<i>a</i>				
Pl.	<i>da</i> (S)	<i>owe</i>	<i>(a) den</i>	<i>den</i>	<i>den</i>
	<i>de</i> (N)				

Apart from the bipartite split in number that concerns all pronouns except *a*, Table ?? shows that the pronouns *ten* and *den* are polyfunctional and appear as emphatic, possessive, and – in the Nyomiñka variety – also as object pronouns. This degree of functional conflation reflects a general trend in Serer’s nominal system, especially when compared to its closest linguistic relative Fula. Not only does Serer have fewer noun classes than Proto-Fula-Serer and present-day Fula (Merrill 2014), its nouns display also less frequently an overt morphological affix for head noun marking than those in Fula. Furthermore, Fula has distinct pronouns in the third-person for each noun class. Hence, compared to its closest relative, Serer exhibits significant reductions in these domains.

Turning again to the pronouns in Table ??, their occurrence in the clause structure is of course well determined. Object pronouns appear either as enclitics to the finite verb or they are simply postverbal.³ Possessive pronouns are part of the noun phrase and occur after their head.

³The plural object pronoun *den* seems only to be preceded by the object marker *a* when the pronoun refers to humans (Renaudier 2012: 112-116).

The subject and emphatic pronouns, on the other hand, can be differentiated with respect to the clausal field in which they occur. Within the field-based approach – which provides a useful cross-linguistic (abstract) template for syntactic fields that are relevant for information structure (see Good 2010; Güldemann in prep. Apel et al. 2015) – the central field is the clause, as schematised in (??). It hosts the finite verb.

(9) [Clause]

Clause-internal constructions (as presented in all examples above) can be defined as single clauses. On the information-structural level, the canonical single clause has a topic-comment pattern. The grammatical subject is interpreted as topic.⁴ The verb phrase represents the comment and hosts the focus information.⁵

The clause can be preceded by a topic field (see scheme 10 below). The topic field might host topical entities in contexts in which the topic shall be emphasised, i.e. for contrast or for signalling topic shift (see Givón 1976: 153).

(10) [Topic] [Clause]

One way of exploiting the topic field consists in placing a pragmatic argument therein via left-dislocation. Dislocation involves a resumptive pronoun in the thematic clause-internal position; this pronoun is cross-referential with the dislocated entity (Gregory & Michaelis 2001; Lambrecht 2001). An example for left-dislocation in Serer is given in (??) below. The emphatic pronoun *ten* is resumed by the preverbal subject pronoun *a*.⁶

(11) Serer Nyomiñka (Renaudier 2012: 53)

[Ten]_{Topic} a-ñaam-a maalo.

SG:EMPH PRO-eat-PFV 7.rice

‘[As for] him, he ate rice.’

In the next section I argue that this construction is the grammatical source of the pronouns *ta/da* and *te/de*.

⁴In this paper TOPIC is defined as that entity in a sentence about which something is predicated (following Strawson 1964; Hornby 1971; Dik 1997; Reinhart 1982; Lambrecht 1994).

⁵Applying the functional framework, FOCUS is defined as “that information which is relatively the most important or salient in the given communicative setting” (Dik 1997: 326).

⁶Note that Renaudier (2012) analyses *a* as an affix (see §??).

2.2 Emergence of *ta/da* and *te/de*

Before turning to pronominal subject topics, it might be useful to review nominal subject topics in Serer first. Within the single clause, nominal grammatical subject topics appear in a preverbal position. When the verb is conjugated in an affirmative paradigm, nominal subjects of all noun classes are obligatorily followed by the pronoun *a*, as illustrated by the two examples in (??) below.⁷

- (12) Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 289)

{The Tukulors, the Serer, and the Juula are related.}

a. Dukloor we a ndef siriñ.

2.Tukulor 2.DEF PRO be 2.Muslim

‘The Tukulors are Muslims.’

b. Sereer ke a yer-aa.

9.Serer 9.DEF PRO drink-IPFV

‘The Serer are animists [i.e. not Muslims].’, lit. ‘The Serer drink [alcohol].’

I assume that this canonical marking of clause-internal nominal subject topics in Serer is the result of the grammaticalisation of a left-dislocation construction. The respective grammaticalisation path is schematised in (??) below. In the left-dislocation construction, the dislocated noun phrase in the preclausal topic field – which might also be set off prosodically by a pause (indicated by #) – is resumed clause-internally by an anaphoric subject pronoun. After grammaticalisation the nominal topic is reinterpreted as a clause-internal grammatical subject. Now the former subject pronoun no longer functions as a pronoun but expresses rather some sort of agreement with the (true) grammatical subject.⁸

- (13) Grammaticalisation path for nominal subject topics (adapted from Givón 1976: 155)

[the man]_{Topic} # [he came]_{Clause} > [the man he(-)came]_{Clause}

⁷There is an asymmetry between affirmative and negative paradigms: with negative paradigms nominal grammatical subjects are not followed by *a*. Note that focal pragmatic subject noun phrases do not trigger the presence of *a* either. The same is true forthetic statements in Sasse’s (1987) sense in which *a* is ungrammatical, too.

⁸This grammaticalisation path is cross-linguistically well attested; a similar development has been described for the subject markers in Bantu languages (Benue-Congo) (see, e.g., Morimoto 2008).

Taking the grammaticalisation path in (??) above as a basis, the question arises as to the status of Serer's preverbal *a* after grammaticalisation.⁹ It is plausible to assume that in the presence of a nominal subject, *a* is a bound morpheme being part of the verb stem. Accordingly, the free pronoun *a* underwent grammaticalisation resulting in a bound (agreement) prefix. This analysis is adopted, i.a., by Renaudier (2012), Neely (2013), and Heath (2014) who describe the Nyomiñka variety. Interestingly, Faye (1979) who provides a morpho-syntactic study of the Sine dialect treats *a* as a free weak pronoun (also Faye & Mous 2006). The different analysis of *a* seems to reflect in fact its different stage of grammaticalisation in the dialects. Nevertheless, historically, it has most likely been a free morpheme in both language varieties.

Departing from the presumption as sketched in (??) above, the emergence of the subject pronouns *ta/da* and *te/de*, respectively, proceed along similar lines. In Serer-Sine *ta* is probably the contracted form of the singular emphatic pronoun *ten* and the clause-internal pronoun *a* within the left-dislocation construction; *da* is the contracted form of the plural emphatic pronoun *den* and *a*.¹⁰ This path is illustrated in (??) for *ta*.

(14) Emergence of *ta* in Serer-Sine

[Ten]_{Topic} [a ñaam-a maalo.]_{Clause} > [Ta ñaam-a maalo.]_{Clause}
 SG:EMPH PRO eat-PFV 7.rice SG:PRO eat-PFV 7.rice
 ' [As for] him, he ate rice.' > 'He ate rice.'

This hypothesis is supported by the observation that *ta* and *da* do not co-occur with *a* in the Sine dialect.

In Serer Nyomiñka the grammaticalisation seems to have led to the (probably optional) drop of the preverbal *a* in conjunction with a phonological reduction of the emphatic pronoun, resulting in *te* and *de* respectively. This development is sketched for *te* in the next scheme.

(15) Emergence of *te* in Serer Nyomiñka

[Ten]_{Topic} [a ñaam-a maalo.]_{Clause} > [Te (a-)ñaam-a maalo.]_{Clause}
 SG:EMPH PRO eat-PFV 7.rice SG:PRO PRO-eat-PFV 7.rice
 ' [As for] him, he ate rice.' > 'He ate rice.'

⁹Thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for pointing out this question. The problem of distinguishing free from bound pronominal morphemes in African languages in general is discussed by Creissels (2005).

¹⁰Special thanks to Lee Pratchett for this observation.

The co-occurrence of *te* and *a* in this variety is recorded by Renaudier (2012) and John Merrill (p.c.) and illustrates the further grammaticalisation of *a* as a bound morpheme that functions as pure agreement marker.¹¹ Nevertheless, the historical account for the emergence of *ta/da*, *te/de*, and *a* as sketched in (??) and (??) above is supported by their functional role which is subject of the next section.

2.3 Distribution of non-locative third-person subject pronouns in discourse

This section investigates two examples from the corpora of Faye (1979) and Renaudier (2012) in order to exemplify the distribution of the pronouns *a* and *ta/da* or *a* and *te/de*, respectively. Starting with (??) below from Faye (1979) for Serer-Sine, this example consists of eleven clauses. It is taken from a folk tale in which a woman tries to kill her co-wife's daughter by burying her alive. Luckily an eagle observes the woman's actions. It digs out the child and raises her as its own.

(16) Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 283)

{After she buried the child, she walked away and}

a. a-qawooc ale a gar.
3-eagle 3.DEF PRO come
'the eagle came.'

b. A ut=in.
PRO dig.out=SG.PRO
'It [=the eagle] dug her [=the child] out.'

c. A ret no mbuday ne no nqel ne.
PRO go PREP 6.tree 6.DEF PREP 6.public.place 6.DEF
'It went to the tree [species] at the public place.'

d. A rang m-aaga.
PRO build.nest LOC-there
'It built a nest there.'

e. A geek m-aaga o-ɸiy onqa.
PRO keep LOC-there 12-child 12.DEF
'It kept the child there.'

¹¹ At the same time, the co-occurrence provides evidence for the analysis of *ta/te* and *da/de* as free morphemes which are unlikely additionally bound to the verb stem. In fact, the large majority of authors analyse *ta/te* and *da/de* as free pronouns.

- f. A coox-a=n.
 PRO give-PFV=SG.PRO
 ‘It gave her [food].’
- g. Ta ñaam-aa.
 SG:PRO eat-IPFV
 ‘She [=the girl] ate.’
- h. A ñaam-aa.
 PRO eat-IPFV
 ‘She ate.’
- i. A ñaam-aa
 PRO eat-IPFV
 ‘She ate’
- j. bo a maak.
 until PRO grow
 ‘until she was big.’
- k. Ta waaf-aa wurus iin (...)
 SG:PRO search.for-IPFV 7.gold 1PL.POSS
 ‘It [=the eagle] looked for our gold (and our silver, everything that increases us).’

The first clause in (??) is a single main clause with the nominal grammatical subject topic *aqawooc’ ale* ‘the eagle’. *The eagle* has been introduced as a referent a couple of clauses before and is therefore definite. In clauses (??-??), *the eagle* is substituted by the pronoun *a*. In clause (??) the singular subject pronoun *ta* appears. Pragmatically it refers to *the girl* which is the topic of this clause. In (??-??) the subject pronoun is again *a* (still replacing *the girl*). Finally, in (??) the pronoun *ta* is used which again substitutes *the eagle*.

Before interpreting the example from Sere-Sine above, it might be useful to also take a look at the Nyomiñka variety. The six clauses of (??) are part of a narrative on the relationship between the Nyomiñka people and fishing.

(17) Serer Nyomiñka (Renaudier 2012: 356)

- a. Na jamaano paap ke in a-mbaal-eeg-a mbaal.
 PREP 7.epoch 9.father 9.DEF 1PL.POSS PRO-fish-PRET-IPFV fish
 ‘At this epoch, our fathers were fishing.’

- b. A-njeg suk.
PRO-have 9.boat
'They had boats.'
- c. A-ngaad-oox-a.
PRO-leave-MIDD-PFV
'They were nomads.'
- d. Gi-ndiig a-joot-ang-a,
6-rainy.season PRO-cross-HYP-PFV
'When the rainy season passed,'
- e. de iid-ik.
PL:PRO leave.at.dry.season-DIR
'they went during the dry season.'
- f. A-njeg laalaf.
PRO-have ambition
'They had ambition.'

In the first clause in (?), the noun phrase *paap ke in* 'our fathers' is the grammatical subject of the verb *mbaaleega mbaal* 'were fishing'.¹² The presence of the prefixed pronoun *a* signals the topical status of that noun phrase (see §??). In the next two clauses in (?) and (?), the pronoun *a* both times substitutes *our fathers*. In the subsequent subordinate clause in (?), the noun *gindiig* 'rainy season' represents the topical subject. Then in (?) the plural subject pronoun *de* occurs which again substitutes *our fathers*. The same noun phrase is referred to by *a* in the final clause in (?).

The examples (?) and (?) above suggest that the distribution of the subject pronouns *a* and *ta/da* or *te/de*, respectively, is linked to the nominal referent that the pronoun substitutes. *A* is used whenever it is coreferential with the subject of the preceding clause, i.e. when there is topic continuity on the information-structural level. If the two subjects have disjoint referents – i.e. in case of topic change – in the second clause *ta* or *te* in the singular or *da* or *de* in the plural are used.¹³ In the next section I relate these findings on the pragmatic and information-structural level to the grammatical device switch-reference which is used for reference tracking.

¹²Reduplication in Serer is discussed by Heath (2014).

¹³This distribution demonstrates that topic and subject are overlapping concepts. Whilst topics operate on the information-structural level, subjects operate on the syntactic level. In an unmarked sentence, the grammatical subject is by default the sentence topic.

3 Non-canonical switch-reference

3.1 Theoretical classification of the phenomenon in Serer

In the past, canonical SWITCH-REFERENCE has been described mainly in American, Australian, and Papuan languages (Haiman & Munro 1983). Recent research, however, shows that switch-reference is also found on the African continent.¹⁴ Prototypically, it defines constructions in which “a marker on the verb of one clause is used to indicate whether its subject has the same or different reference from the subject of an adjacent, syntactically related clause” (Stirling 1993: 1). On the functional level, it is “a device for referential tracking” in order to avoid ambiguity (Haiman & Munro 1983: xi). An often-cited example from Mojave, a Cochimí-Yuman language spoken in the South West of the United States is given in (??) below. In (??) the subjects in the main and subordinate clause have both the same referent (same subject, SS). This is signalled by the suffix *-k* which replaces the tense marking on the first verb. In (??) the referents of the two subjects differ (different subject, DS). This is indicated by the suffix *-m* on the first verb.

(18) Mojave (Munro 1980: 145, in Stirling 1993: 3)

- a. Nya-isvar-**k**, iima-k.
when-sing-ss dance-TNS
‘When he_i sang, he_i danced.’
- b. Nya-isvar-**m**, iima-k.
when-sing-ds dance-TNS
‘When he_i sang, he_j danced.’

Cross-linguistically, switch-reference marking is more likely to be found with third-person subjects than with first or second persons; in some languages switch-reference is even limited to the third-person (Haiman & Munro 1983: xi). As the data in §?? suggest, Serer can be aligned with such languages.

However, Serer does not have a canonical switch-reference system because switch between referents is not marked by verb morphology but by free pronouns. In the literature, pronominal marking in relation to switch-reference is discussed under the term LOGOPHORICITY.¹⁵ It is defined by Stirling (1993: 1) as follows: “in central cases of logophoricity, a special pronoun form is used within

¹⁴Prototypical switch-reference is for instance described by Treis (2012) for Omotic and Cushitic languages (Afro-Asiatic) in South-Western Ethiopia.

¹⁵A full discussion of the differences between the two reference tracking devices switch-reference and logophoricity is provided by Stirling (1993: 50-56).

a reported speech context, to indicate coreference with the source of the reported speech”. In contrast to canonical switch-reference, logophoric systems have been described for various West-African languages, e.g. Ewe (Gbe) in Ghana and Togo, Kera (Chadic) in Chad and Cameroon, or Igbo (Benue-Congo) in Nigeria (*ibid.*: 311). Logophoricity in Igbo is illustrated in (??) below. The third-person pronoun in the complement clause is *yá* when it has the same referent as the pronoun in the main clause. When it has a different referent, the pronoun in the complement clause is *ọ*.

(19) Igbo (Hyman & Comrie 1981: 19)

- a. Ọ sịrì nà yá byàrà.
he said that he.ss came
‘He_i said that he_i came.’
- b. Ọ sịrì nà ọ byàrà.
he said that he.ds came
‘He_i said that he_j came.’

Thus two main characteristics distinguish prototypical switch-reference from prototypical logophoricity:

1. the location of marking, i.e. verb vs. pronoun, and
2. the syntactic and semantic context of marking, i.e. unspecified adjacent clause vs. embedded clause in a reported speech context.

Applying the two definitions above to the non-locative third-person subject pronouns in Serer, it becomes evident that these pronouns are in between the two. On the one hand, they resemble logophoric pronouns because they are pronominal. On the other hand, their occurrence is open to different types of adjacent clauses and is not restricted to contexts of reported speech. Because of the non-restriction of syntactic and semantic context, I relate these pronouns to NON-CANONICAL SWITCH-REFERENCE – in the sense that the system under discussion deviates from the definition of archetypal switch-reference.¹⁶

Non-canonical systems are also found in languages that mark switch-reference by clausal coordinators, such as in Fon (Gbe) from Benin and Nigeria (Lefebvre

¹⁶The term SWITCH-REFERENCE in relation to the pronouns *te/de* has been firstly mentioned by Neely (2013): “Kaa shares this paradigm [=incl. the third-person pronouns *te* and *de*, VA] with certain types of subordinate clauses (particularly relative clauses), and clauses where switch-reference is indicated.”

& Brousseau 2002: 113f) or Supyire (Senufo) from Mali (Carlson 1994: 602ff). On the other hand, there are also languages that mark logophoricity by affixes on the verb, e.g. Gokana (Benue-Congo) from Nigeria (Hyman & Comrie 1981). As a consequence, cross-linguistically there might be a lot of variation that operates in between these two reference tracking categories.

However, to my knowledge, switch-reference pronouns are cross-linguistically uncommon and have only been described for a few languages, amongst which are Bafut (Grassfields) from Cameroon (Wiesemann 1982: 53), Kaulong (Oceanic) from Papua New Guinea (Crowley et al. 2011: 391), and Yiddish (Germanic) (Prince 2006: 311). Whilst in Bafut the switch-reference marking of subjects is restricted to consecutive clauses, in Kaulong it is restricted to the marking of the possessive pronoun. The data from Yiddish show a situation somewhat comparable to the one in Serer because switch-reference operates across main clause boundaries. As the two examples in (??) below reveal, “Yiddish has a pronominal form for switch-reference, *yener* ‘that [one]’ which is used to refer to something other than the Cp [preferred centre; here: topic of the preceding clause, VA] of the previous utterance” (Prince 2006: 311). Thus, in (??), the subject pronoun is *er* when it is coreferential with the subject of the preceding clause. When the two subjects have a disjoint referent, the pronoun *yener* is used in the second clause (??).

(20) Yiddish (Prince 2006: 311)

- a. {A guy_i had to meet a certain Rubinstein_j on the train.
Iz **er** arumgegangen oyfn peron. “[...]”.
is he.ss went.around on:the platform
‘So he_i walked around on the platform “[...]”’}
- b. {A guy_i once asked a friend_j of his: “[...]”.
Makht **yener** “[...]”.
makes that.one.DS
‘That one_j says: “[...]”.’, lit. ‘That one_j makes: “[...]”’}

At a first glance, *er* and *yener* in Yiddish have a similar distribution as *a* and *ta/te/da/de* and in Serer. However, the Yiddish pronouns differ in (at least) two aspects. Firstly, it is unclear whether *yener* consistently marks switch-reference over a longer string of text as is the case for *ta/te/da/de*. Secondly, *yener* has a deictic semantic content. Naturally, pronouns expressing special deixis ‘this one, that one’ or ‘the other’ are associated with referent switch (or topic change) because of their potential contrastive implicature. Although the respective pronouns in Serer do not have such a specific semantic content, they are also related to con-

trast. This is demonstrated in §?? where I suggest that these pronouns arose from emphatic pronouns in a left-dislocation construction which is inherently associated with contrast (Givón 1976: 153).

In the next section, I define the scope of the non-canonical switch-reference system in Serer and present some puzzling cases, before summarising the results in §??.

3.2 Scope and limits

The analysis of the available corpus data reveals the following:

- switch-reference in Serer is restricted to non-locative third-person subject pronouns and affirmative clauses;
- these pronouns are the grammatical subject and represent the pragmatic topic of the clause;
- switch-reference operates across sequential clause boundaries – such as in a sequence of pragmatic dependent clauses in narratives.

“Same subject” is expressed pronominally by the pronoun *a*.¹⁷ “Different subject” is either expressed by the use of the lexical noun or by the pronoun *ta/te* in the singular and *da/de* in the plural.

In Serer-Sine, switch-reference marking is also extended to the third-person markers *tee* (sg.) and *dee* (pl.). *Tee* and *dee* are contracted forms of the pronouns *ta* and *da* and the complementiser *ee*. One of the functions of this complementiser is to introduce direct speech. An example for the use of *tee* is given in (??) where *tee* signals switch-reference with respect to the subject of the preceding affirmative clause.

- (21) Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 285)
{He_i said: “Is this one your mother?”}
Tee “ha?a”.
SG:COMP.DS no
‘She_j said: “No.”’

When direct speech is announced without referent switch, the expected pronoun *a* is used, as illustrated in (??).

¹⁷Rarely a zero pronoun is recorded, too.

- (22) Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 284)

{He_i shaved her skull.}

A lay=in ee: “Gayk-i kellem ke fa xa-paam axe!”

PRO.SS say=SG.PRO COMP herd-SG.IMP 9.camel 9.DEF and 11-donkey 11.DEF

‘He_i said to her: “Herd the camels and donkeys!”’

Nevertheless, there are some puzzling exceptional instances of unexpected “same subject” or “different subject” marking in the corpus. An example of the latter is given in (??) below. Although there is no referent switch across the clause boundary, the “different subject” pronoun *ta* occurs instead of the expected “same subject” pronoun *a*.

- (23) Serer-Sine (Faye 1979: 284)

{He_i spent the day at the public place.}

Ta lay=in: “[...]”.

SG:PRO say=SG.PRO

‘He_i said to her: “[...]”’

Stirling (1993: 98-114) discusses such striking cases in different languages and argues that different subject marking might also express discontinuity on a pragmatic or semantic discourse level. Despite this appealing explanation, this does not seem to hold in example (??) above because this clause is both syntactically and pragmatically dependent within the narrative. Thus, there is no interruption or discontinuity from a pragmatic perspective here. For this and other reasons, further research is necessary to shed light on these exceptional cases.

Another domain which would benefit from deeper analysis is impersonal constructions. Here, the data provide no clear picture with respect to the use of the subject pronouns.

Last but not least, more investigation is needed on clausal co- and subordination. This applies to complement and adverbial clauses in particular as the present corpus was insufficient to draw meaningful conclusions on switch-reference in such contexts. Relative clauses are an exception because they show a clear restriction. Here, only the “different subject” pronouns *ta/te* and *da/de* are grammatical, as illustrated in (??) below for the singular in combination with the perfective relative *-na*. The referential status of the subject pronoun is disregarded.

- (24) Serer Nyomiñka (Renaudier 2012: 350)
{The same antelope_i fell into the ocean. She_i landed here.}
Ye te jees-iid-na m-eeke it, “(...)”.
when SG:PRO.DS arrive-DIR-REL LOC-there also
‘When she_i arrived here, (they waited until the next day).’

4 Summary

In this paper, I have presented and discussed evidence of a non-canonical switch-reference system in the domain of non-locative third-person subject pronouns in two varieties of the Atlantic language Serer. When such a grammatical subject pronoun represents the topic of an affirmative clause, it indicates whether or not it has the same referent as the subject of the immediately preceding clause.

Amongst the Atlantic languages, Serer is thus the first language for which switch-reference has been attested. Furthermore, to my knowledge, its specific type of non-canonical switch-reference has not been described for other languages as yet, neither on the African continent – where switch-reference is already a rare phenomenon (Treis 2012: 3) – nor elsewhere.

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Abbreviations

COMP	complementiser	EMPH	emphatic pronoun
DEF	definite article	FOC	focus
DIR	directional	HYP	hypothetical
DS	different subject	IMP	imperative

IPFV	imperfective	PREP	preposition
LOC	locative	PRET	preterite
MIDD	middle voice	PRO	pronoun
NEG	negative	REL	relative
NON	non	SG	singular
PL	plural	SS	same subject
PFV	perfective	T	term
POSS	possessive pronoun	TNS	tense

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