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Essays for
Robert E. Longacre**

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When Switch Reference Moves to Discourse: Developmental Markers in Mbyá Guaraní

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SWITCH REFERENCE is a means of marking a clause to indicate whether it has the same or different subject referent as a neighboring clause. According to this canonical view (Haiman and Munro 1983:ix), switch reference is essentially a phenomenon relating to grammatical structure within the sentence.¹ However, in Mbyá Guaraní,² a Tupí-Guaraní language of southern Brazil, northern Argentina, and eastern Paraguay, switch-reference marking is also used to link sentences or larger units within a discourse. In an earlier study of Mbyá switch reference on the interclausal level, it was found that it compares subject reference in more than ninety-eight percent of all cases; it is used for comparison of other categories—semantic or pragmatic—only when comparison of subject reference becomes difficult in some sense (Dooley 1989).

When switch-reference marking moves to the intersentential, discourse level, however, it no longer signals sameness versus difference of subject referents, although its higher-level use would correctly predict subject referents around ninety percent of the time. Rather, it signals sameness or

¹An early study of switch reference in New Guinea languages is found in Longacre 1972. Reesink 1983 reexamines the phenomenon in many of the same languages. Haiman and Munro 1983 is an important collection of papers on the topic.

²The present study is based on field work carried out from 1975 through the present in southern Brazil under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The author wishes to acknowledge the helpful comments of Stephen Levinsohn, and of Joseph Grimes and Albert Bickford on earlier papers which have fed into the present one.

difference of semantic or pragmatic information. In particular, the erstwhile SAME SUBJECT marker signals the routine continuation of what will be referred to as an expectation chain, and the DIFFERENT SUBJECT marker signals, simultaneously, that it is not the case that an expectation chain is routinely continuing, and that there is a switch of sentence topic or actor. Similar connectives in Koiné Greek are described in Levinsohn 1987 as DEVELOPMENTAL MARKERS, particularly those which signal a new development in the narrative.

This paper is organized as follows. In §1, the mechanism of switch-reference marking in Mbyá is briefly presented, along with an overview of its usage within the sentence. A survey of intersentential connectives is presented in §2, particularly those used in narrative. §3 discusses the meaning of switch-reference marking on the discourse level. §4 presents a few concluding remarks.

1. Switch-reference marking

In Mbyá, switch-reference marking between clauses in a sentence is accomplished through one of two markers: *vi* (same subject) or *ramō* (different subject); *ramō* also has a contracted form *rã*. These morphemes occur as enclitics to a clause, as shown in (1) and (2).³

- (1) [ava o-o vi] moi o-exa
 man 3-go SS snake 3-see
 When the man went, he saw the snake.
- (2) [ava o-o ramō] moi o-exa
 man 3-go DS snake 3-see
 When the man went, the snake saw him.
- (3) [ava o-o rã] moi o-exa
 man 3-go DS snake 3-see
 When the man went, the snake saw him.

³With a few exceptions, the transcription of Mbyá data in this paper is that designed for use by the Mbyá-speaking community. There are six vowels /a e i o u i/ and fourteen consonants /p t x [ts] k ku [kw] ? h m n j [dy,ñ] ŋ ɲu [ŋw] v [β] r/. Nasal vowels are written with a tilde. Nasalization occurs throughout a word whose final vowel is nasal and is regressive from any nasal consonant. The following abbreviations are used: ANA (anaphoric pronoun), CAUS (causative), DS (different subject), NEG (negative), s (singular), SS (same subject), 1 (first person), 2 (second person), 3 (third person).

In these and certain other examples in the paper, the marking clause (the one to which the switch-reference marker is attached) appears in brackets. The labels *ss* and *ds*, abbreviating 'same subject' and 'different-subject', respectively, will be used throughout the paper as glosses of *vi*, *ramō*, and *rã*, even in their discourse-level use when these descriptions do not exactly apply. In (1)–(3), the marking clause precedes its matrix clause. It is also possible for the marking clause to occur following the matrix clause:

- (4) *ava o-exa moi [o-o vi]*
 man 3-see snake 3-go *ss*
 The man saw the snake as he was going.
- (5) *moi o-exa [ava o-o ramō]*
 snake 3-see man 3-go *ds*
 The snake saw the man when he left, or
 The snake saw when the man left.

As indicated by the two free translations of (5), the relative ordering of the two clauses can have semantic consequences. It can also have pragmatic consequences. Compare (6) and (7) as answers to the question 'Why did you come?'

- (6) *a-ju [a-ma?e-apo vi]*
 1s-come 1s-thing-do *ss*
 I've come in order to work.
- (7) *[a-ma?e-apo vi] a-ju*
 1s-thing-do *ss* 1s-come
 It's in order to work that I've come.

Although the semantic content of (7) is the same as that of (6), it differs from (6) in pragmatic structuring, particularly in regard to focus. A discussion of such matters is beyond the scope of the present paper; see Dooley 1982 for fuller treatment.

Over ninety-eight percent of interclausal switch-reference marking in Mbyá compares subject reference in the straightforward way illustrated above. Nevertheless, there is a small residue of cases in which other kinds of sameness or difference are signalled: same versus different topic or agent, or else same versus different semantic type of predication.⁴ The signalling of these pragmatic and semantic differences does not occur

⁴Longacre (1972:7–16) discusses exceptions to same-different subject marking within the sentence for languages of Papua New Guinea.

randomly among the more typical instances of switch reference. Rather, it occurs precisely in those places where same versus different subject referents would be difficult to calculate, namely where there is zero reference in both clauses or where the sets of subject referents have partial overlap (Dooley 1989).

That is, the norm for Mbyá switch-reference marking, in its interclausal use, is to signal strictly grammatical information. Instances where other kinds of information are signalled fit the prototypical pattern of exceptions to a norm, as can be seen both statistically and in terms of conditioning. For the intersentential (discourse) use of Mbyá switch-reference marking, however, the signalling of grammatical information cannot even be considered a norm, as will be shown in subsequent sections. In fact, all instances of these markers on the intersentential level signal semantic or pragmatic information.

2. Sentence-initial connectives

Expressions with Mbyá switch-reference markers on the intersentential level form part of a larger class of expressions, which are here referred to as SENTENCE-INITIAL CONNECTIVES.⁵ Different genres of discourse typically use different sets of sentence-initial connectives. Those common to narrative text take the form displayed in (8); they are composed of the anaphoric pronoun *haʔe* 'that', followed optionally by the postposition *ramī* 'like', followed by a subordinating conjunction.⁶

(8) *haʔe (ramī)* subordinating conjunction

In this construction, the reference of *haʔe* is the content of an antecedent sentence or grouping of sentences; the latter possibility—a text unit larger than a single sentence—can be specifically indicated by the occurrence of the postposition *ramī* 'like'. Since switch-reference markers enter into this construction in the role of subordinating conjunctions, this latter class is now discussed.

⁵The present section presents material that is discussed more fully in Dooley 1986.

⁶Foley and Van Valin (1984:239–63) claim that the relationship between clauses in a switch-reference construction within a sentence is not subordination, but rather what they term cosubordination. Their crucial point for this claim is that a clause with a switch-reference marker does not fill an adverbial role with respect to the matrix clause. See Dooley to appear, for evidence that would make this viewpoint problematic for Mbyá.

Besides the switch-reference markers *vi* and *ramō* (~ *rā*), other subordinating conjunctions are *rire* 'after', *jave* 'during', and *eʔi move* 'before'. This class coheres by means of both syntactic and phonological properties. Syntactically, subordinating conjunctions occur enclitic to the clause they are subordinating; phonologically, they do not ordinarily carry primary stress. (Coordinating conjunctions occur preceding the clause to which they are phonologically attached.)⁷

Clause subordination with subordinating conjunctions is of the adverbial type. With switch reference markers, this has already been illustrated in (1)–(7); (9)–(11) show *rire*, *jave*, and *eʔi move* as subordinating conjunctions.

- (9) [ava o-o rire] moi o-u
 man 3-go after snake 3-come
 After the man left, the snake came.
- (10) [ava o-o jave] moi o-u
 man 3-go during snake 3-come
 While the man was leaving, the snake came.
- (11) [ava o-o eʔi mo-ve] moi o-u
 man 3-go NEG CAUS-more snake 3-come
 Before the man left, the snake came.

The sentence-initial connectives indicated by formula in (8), then, are listed in (12):

- (12) *haʔe (ramī) rire* 'after that'
haʔe (ramī) jave 'during that, meanwhile'
haʔe (ramī) eʔi move 'before that'
haʔe (ramī) vi 'continuity of expectation'
haʔe (ramī) ramō 'discontinuity of expectation'
haʔe (ramī) rā 'discontinuity of expectation'

One other sentence initial connective is common in narrative:

- (13) *haʔe ŋui* 'after that'

⁷An exception is *eʔi move* 'before', which carries primary stress on the negative morpheme *eʔi*.

Ha?e ηui does not, strictly speaking, derive from (8), since *ηui* 'from' is a postposition rather than a clause subordinator. **ha?e ramī ηui* does not occur.⁸

As indicated by glosses of (12) and (13), sentence-initial connectives in narrative can be divided into two groups on semantic grounds—temporal connectives containing *rire*, *jave*, *e?i move*, or *ηui*, on the one hand, and nontemporal connectives containing switch-reference markers on the other. This semantic division has important correlates for the organization of Mbyá discourse, especially for narrative paragraphs. Paragraph-like units have been usefully characterized along notional lines (Longacre 1979, Givón 1983, etc.), as being units at whose boundaries occur significant changes in the major parameters of the discourse. For narrative, these parameters include scene, time, and character configuration. Where there is a significant change in one of these parameters, it is common practice for others to be updated as well.⁹ Thus, for example, it is common to find characters being renamed paragraph initially where there is a change of scene.

Against this background, it is noted that in Mbyá narrative, sentence-initial connectives of the temporal type tend to occur paragraph initially, while those of the nontemporal type occur paragraph medially. In a sample of narrative texts, forty-seven percent of all paragraph-initial sentences began with a temporal connective, whereas only five percent of all paragraph-medial sentences did. That is, even though in a typical narrative all of the events occur one after the other, with larger or smaller temporal gaps in between, at paragraph boundaries it is common for the AFTERNESS to be presented as a discontinuity that necessitates an explicit updating of the temporal framework. Once a paragraph is under way, temporal orientation is not felt to require the same kind of attention, and the events being narrated are connected in other ways.

An example is due. The text segment given in (14) consists of a narrative paragraph which is fairly typical for Mbyá. In the preceding episode, a Guaraní man was coming home from hunting, carrying a load of coatis (raccoon-like animals) over his shoulder. He heard something behind him but didn't bother to look. Later he felt something tugging at the coatis' tails. When turned around, he saw a man who appeared to be grinning at

⁸The obvious explanation is that *ramī* is a postposition and *ha?e ramī* 'like that' is a postpositional phrase, thus does not function as the object of a postposition. The gloss 'after that' given for *ha?e ηui* is the same as that for *ha?e (ramī) rire* in (12). The difference between the two is basically hierarchical rather than semantic: *ha?e (ramī) rire* tends to be used to connect major units of the text, larger even than paragraphs. Especially when *ramī* is present, *ha?e (ramī) rire* carries a causal component of meaning as well as a temporal one: 'as a consequence of that'.

⁹The term SIGNIFICANT here has to do with the speaker's judgment in regard to the overall organization of the discourse and cannot be predicted on a priori grounds.

him. It was really a dangerous enemy, a mythical 'wild man', baring his teeth. But the man did not recognize him; he merely grinned back and went on his way. The events of (14) then follow:

- (14) a. *haʔe ŋui* 'after that' when he had gone a long way, he again felt something pulling on the coatis' tails.
 b. *haʔe rã* the man looked again.
 c. *haʔe rã* the other one was really baring his teeth again this time.
 d. *haʔe rã* the man looked very closely.
 e. *haʔe ŋui ae ma* 'only after that' he suddenly recognized what he was.
 f. *haʔe vi* he threw away the dead coatis.
 g. *haʔe vi* immediately the man took off running towards his home.

The sequence in (14) begins with the temporal connective *haʔe ŋui* 'after that'. It is dominated medially by the nontemporal connectives *haʔe rã* and *haʔe vi*. The connective *haʔe ŋui ae mã* in (14e) does not follow this pattern, but is a special-purpose focus element (Dooley 1982). In the nontemporal connectives, the choice of switch-reference markers does not match up completely with the distinction of same versus different subject. For example, the connective *haʔe rã* in (14b) does not correspond to a change in subject from the independent clause in (14a).

In (15), the opposite phenomenon can be observed; namely, *haʔe vi* occurs where there is a change of subject reference.

- (15) [A young man] arrived at the house of a rich farmer [with sheep to sell]. When he got there, he didn't know what to do with the sheep. So the sheep were just milling outside in the yard. *haʔe vi* the farmer got angry at him and said, "Don't you know that the sheep pen is over there?"

Since in Mbyá narratives, in general, the switch-reference markers in sentence-initial connectives predict grammatical subject only around ninety percent of the time, a somewhat different distinction appears to be indicated. In §3, that distinction is investigated.

3. Switch-reference markers on the discourse level

In this section a description is given of conditions under which connectives with switch-reference markers occur in Mbyá narrative. Consider (16) and (17), which are taken from the same narrative as (15), concerning a man who was looked down upon for having the skin of a black.

- (16) Afterwards [the black] was standing outside. *ha?e vi* the rich farmer said, "Don't you know that here is where you always come in and sit?"
- (17) The black was walking around outside not really knowing what to do. *ha?e rā* the old woman said, "You too go take a bath."

There is little apparent reason why the connectives should be different in (16) and (17). In both, the black is standing or walking about outside and someone tells him what to do. One difference, however, is that the farmer's comment in (16) can be taken as a routine continuation of the line of action, whereas the old woman's order in (17) cannot. Under these circumstances and in this culture, one could be expected to be told to come inside, but hardly to go take a bath. Further, in order to take the bath the young man took off his black skin, and this had important consequences for the rest of the story.

The distinction noted between (16) and (17) holds generally in Mbyá narrative for sentence-initial connectives containing *vi*, on the one hand, and *ramō* or *rā*, on the other. This distinction can be stated as in (18).

- (18) a. Connectives with *vi* indicate a predictable, routine continuation of the same line of action already begun, regardless of whether the subject, agent, or topic is switched or remains the same.
- b. Connectives with *ramō* or *rā* indicate potential for a new and distinct line of action that affects the development of the story; simultaneously, they indicate a switch in the sentence topic or actor.

The discourse-pragmatic criteria mentioned in (18) represent judgments on the part of the speaker that the analyst cannot expect to predict fully, but can only hope to see as reasonable because of what he understands about the context and the culture. As with many other discourse-pragmatic factors, they must be investigated in terms of a posteriori plausibility rather than in terms of a priori predictability.

3.1 Examples. As (18a) suggests, it should be possible to find connectives with *vi* where there is a switch of topic and actor. This is the case in (19), where there is a switch in topic (and subject) with *ha?e ramī vi*. The connective here signals that the placing of the money on the black's head is a predictable sequel to what has gone before.

- (19) [The black] spoke to [the goat's owner]. "Here is money. If I die first, as may happen, put the money on top of my grave," he said. "After I am buried," he said. "But don't let me be laid out," he said. "Stand me up. Then put the money on top of my head," he said. After that, eight days later, the black died. *haʔe ramĩ vi* the owner of the goat put the money on top of his head.

A similar thing can be noted in connection with (15), where *haʔe vi* occurs with a switch in topic (and subject), but the farmer's anger is routinely predictable, since he was observing his livestock being left to run loose through apparent negligence.

In (20), a *vi* connective occurs where neither subject, topic, nor actor remains constant:

- (20) Afterwards, after he went to the black man's house, on his way back he forgot the path. *haʔe ramĩ vi* it got quite late.

It predictably and routinely gets late when someone forgets the path.

(18b) states that when a connective with *ramõ* or *rã* is used, the switch is in topic or actor, not necessarily in grammatical subject. This is illustrated in (14). In both (14a) and (14b), the Guaraní man is subject of the independent clauses, but the real actor in (14a) is the person who was pulling on the coats' tails; the connective *haʔe rã* here is thus occurring with a switch in actor, but not in subject. Another important point in regard to (14b) is the fact that the Guaraní man turned and looked, which is more than a routine continuation of the line of action. It is the beginning of his recognition of the kind of being which was following him; in fact, it can be considered as the beginning of the climax of the story.

3.2 Syntacticization. The claim of (18), then, is that whereas Mbyá switch-reference marking within a sentence essentially signals grammatical information (i.e., same versus different subject), between sentences it signals essentially semantic and pragmatic information. There is, however, a predictable addendum to this type of description. According to Comrie (1988:271), "it is extremely rare across languages to find a formal device that literally, in one-to-one correspondence, encodes some pragmatic distinction or combination of pragmatic (and semantic) distinctions . . . instances that seem to be purely grammatical encoding of a pragmatic distinction often turn out . . . to involve some degree of syntacticization away from the original pragmatic distinction." By SYNTACTICIZATION, Comrie means the use of a pragmatic (and perhaps semantic) marker for purposes of signalling grammatical information, that is, information which is less than fully motivated

by the original pragmatic (semantic) distinction. In this section, a degree of syntacticization is noted in the use of sentence-initial connectives with switch-reference markers.

In Mbyá discourse, there are two very common uses of the connectives *haʔe ramō* and *haʔe rā*. Both uses arise as natural applications of (18b). The first use is to introduce a response in a conversational exchange, as in (21):

- (21) "What did you come for?" said the teacher.
haʔe rā "I came to study," said the old man.

In a response like that of (21), the switch in speakers means both a switch in topic-actor and a certain nonpredictability as to what will be said, thus meeting the conditions of (18b) for the use of *haʔe ramō* and *haʔe rā*.

The second very common use of *haʔe rā* is to introduce the second statement in a contrastive pair, as in (22):

- (22) Our true father picked up a small stone [which he would eat after making it into bread].
haʔe rā his adversary picked up a large stone.

This type of contrast, called DOUBLE-FOCUS contrast by Chafe (1976:35), consists of two statements. The first statement makes an assertion about one entity, and the second makes a different assertion about a second entity. The two entities form "a closed and polarized microcosm" (Longacre 1983:84). In (22), this microcosm consists of 'our true father' and 'his adversary', the two participants on stage at that point. In Mbyá, the second statement in this type of contrast is typically introduced by *haʔe rā*. Note that the second statement in (22) has a switch in topic (from one pole of the microcosm to the other), and also that the second assertion does not follow routinely from the first, which is the whole point of the contrast. That is, the conditions in (18b) are fulfilled.

The common occurrence of *haʔe ramō* and *haʔe rā* in responses and double-focus contrast seems to have resulted in syntacticization in Mbyá, in the sense that *haʔe vi* appears to be inadmissible in such contexts, even in those rare cases where it might be plausible on discourse grounds. Consider (23):

- (23) The daughter said, "It's just at that [young man] I am going to throw my flower."
haʔe rā "All right then," her mother replied.

In cases such as (23), it would seem to be plausible to present the response as routinely predictable, yet *haʔe rā* occurs in place of *haʔe vi*.

Although this small degree of syntacticization does exist, the major factor in the use of connectives with switch-reference markers has to do with predictability: actions introduced with *vi* are presented as predictable continuations, while those introduced by *ramō* or *rā* are presented as embodying some type of switch or novelty. Put in another way, actions introduced by *ramō* or *rā* are presented as not being bound to a currently active expectation structure, but instead can take on a significance of their own in helping the narrative develop in interesting (i.e., nonpredictable) ways. This is similar to the distinction reported between the conjunctions *kai* and *de* in Koiné Greek by Levinsohn. The conjunction *de* begins a DEVELOPMENTAL UNIT in narrative, which is characterized by presenting a new development in the story (Levinsohn 1987:179); *de* is thus termed a DEVELOPMENTAL MARKER OR DEVELOPMENTAL CONJUNCTION. The form *kai* and certain other conjunctions, on the other hand, signal that the current developmental unit is simply continuing, hence do not carry with them the promise of significant developmental material. Although there are differences, the Mbyá connectives under discussion in this paper function in a similar fashion.¹⁰

4. Concluding remarks

In this paper, the focus has been on the role of switch-reference markers in Mbyá Guaraní in what might be considered a noncanonical mode of use, that of connecting sentences or groupings of sentences within a discourse. When switch-reference markers are used between clauses within a sentence, they almost always signal same versus different grammatical subject. When they move to the intersentential (discourse) level, however, they are typically used to signal semantic or pragmatic information. Specifically, they signal whether the sentence is a predictable continuation of a line of action already begun, or whether it has potential for a new and distinct line of action that affects the development of the story (and involves a switch in the sentence topic or actor as well). Thus, switch-reference marking on the discourse level signals semantic and especially discourse-pragmatic information, whereas in its interclausal use it typically signals grammatical information. In Mbyá, then, switch-reference marking fills distinct but related roles on different levels of language organization.

People whose work involves language as a whole cannot afford the luxury of saying that only sentence-level grammar, or only discourse, is of interest. Certain facts of language itself, as illustrated here, require both

¹⁰There appears to be some corresponding syntacticization with regard to Greek *de*, in the sense that *kai* is inadmissible in conjunction with articular pronouns (Levinsohn 1987:88).

kinds of approach. The citation of Longacre's work at various points in this paper, and on various topics, should be taken as a tribute to one who has pioneered in a wide variety of linguistic phenomena, both within the sentence and on the level of discourse.

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