

## Echo Subject in Whitesands: the argument for corpus collection

Whitesands is an under-described Oceanic language belonging to the Southern Vanuatu sub-grouping. Like other languages of the Southern Vanuatu sub-group, it utilizes a system of ‘switch reference’ that has been named “Echo Subject” (Lynch 1983, Crowley 2002). This paper investigates the underlying syntactic properties of the Echo Subject system in Whitesands based on the author’s field data. The focus of this paper is on the formal complexity of the system and on its pragmatic determinants, that is showing that the system is subject to pragmatic influence. Furthermore, it is shown that all the possible variations of the system cannot be captured by mere elicitation, which supports the arguments for corpus collection in typologically diverse languages.

Whitesands is a (S)VO language with a nominative/accusative syntactic system. This is marked through rigid word order and subject indexing of person and number via prefixing on the predicate. In (1) the subject agreement form is *ja-* ‘1SG’. The subject prefix can also occur in a portmanteau form (with various TAM alternations) such as (2) *t-* ‘3SG.NPST’.

1. jow            ja-k-ani            namsu.  
   1SG            1SG-NPST-say    story  
   ‘I will tell a story.’
2. Namu        t-əskasik            metow            pukah            t-aiju            pək.  
   Namu        3SG.NPST-strong    but            pig            3SG.NPST-run    INTENSIFIER  
   ‘Namu is strong but the pig runs quickly.’

In coordinate clauses, the Echo Subject (ES) marker *m-* is canonically used instead of a normal subject prefix when the subject of a clause is co-referential with some referent(s) of the preceding clause. In (3), the *m-* ‘ES’ is replacing the *ja-* ‘1SG’ and also the tense marking.

3. ja-am-uen            (ko)            m-ua.  
   1SG-PST-go            (and.then)    ES-come  
   ‘I went and then came back.’

If the subject of the coordinate clause is not coreferent with a preceding argument (i.e. ‘different’ subject), then full predicate inflection is required (2). The subject number indexing on the predicate is still retained with the ES use, as in (4) where *ot-* ‘PLURAL’ is repeated in the coordinate clause.

4. K-ot-awan            m-ot-awan.  
   3.NPST-PL-eat.INTRS    ES-PL-eat.INTRS  
   ‘They (PL) ate and ate.’

The Whitesands’ Echo Subject system differs from canonical switch reference systems in three key areas. Firstly, as we can see in (3), the use of overt coordinators in the construction is optional, that is both variations are grammatical. Secondly, its form as a prefix is rare in switch reference typology. This is a result of Whitesands not being verb final (which is also rare for switch reference languages) and the ES’s historical development from a clause coordinator (see De Sousa 2008). Thirdly, from discourse organization perspective, the retrieval of the antecedent solely from

preceding clauses (i.e. anaphoric reference) distinguishes the ES from other switch reference systems which typically point forward to a same or different referent (i.e. cataphoric reference).

The antecedent for an ES clause is usually the subject of the preceding clause. Indeed, in canonical elicited responses this is the primary pattern. However, in the current Whitesands corpus, it is seen that the antecedent can also be the other core argument (i.e. the object), an oblique or some combination of these. For example, in (5), there is co-reference to two disparate arguments (1SG and 2SG) of the preceding matrix clause. This is diagnosed by the *u-* 'DUAL' on the ES predicate.

5. ja-k-arun            n-eles-ien            ik,        m-u-ari.  
   1SG-NPST-know    NMLZ-carry-NMLZ    2SG      ES-DUAL-landwards  
   'I can carry you and we'll go to the shore'

This variety of possible antecedents poses a significant problem for formal syntactic theories and I argue that this variation can be conditioned by the pragmatic structure of a text. That is, this syntactic construction can be 'filled' by the pragmatically salient participants, overriding syntactic regularity.

The use of the ES in Whitesands is pervasive and in the current corpus is found on nearly one third of inflected predicates. This frequency, combined with the interesting syntactic properties of coordination and co-referentiality, and the interaction of pragmatics with the syntax, mean that a thorough descriptive and formal account of the ES is important for both the typology of switch-reference systems and also for the description Southern Vanuatu sub-group. Moreover, the low levels of non-canonical ES usage (especially in basic prompted examples), supports the claim that natural-language documentation is important for grammatical description and analysis.

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