

DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF PARTICLE *TES* IN GREEN HMONG

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1. Introduction

Particles are generally known as one of areal features of Southeast Asian Languages. They are ubiquitous in speech in Hmong and many other languages in the area such as Thai, Vietnamese, and so on. Hmong has a variety of particles serving various types of functions. Thereby linguists working on Hmong spoken discourse definitely confront overwhelming particles and they certainly have to overcome the difficulty in clarifying the function of particles, especially the utterance-final ones. Lyman (1974) collects 41 particles including their tonal variants in the Dictionary of Mong Njua: A Miao (Meo) Language of Southeast Asia. These particles show either syntactic or discourse functions as well as communicative or pragmatic functions such as *le* showing possessive, *los* connecting clauses or *nawj* used at end of a statement emphasizing something the other person does not know. Apart from that, a group of particles are multifunctional in which two or more functions are found according to their occurrences. Of those, interesting ones are *es*, *los*, *le*, *mas*, *nab*, *nev*, *nua*, *tes*, as they play significant roles in discourse; for example, connecting two clauses or more, showing the illocutionary force of the speaker when preceded by an intonation unit or reducing the illocutionary force of the speaker and so forth.

Previous analysis of particles, especially final ones (cf. Lyman 1974), is nothing but showing the attitude of the speaker or intensifying preceding assertion. In my previous research (Somruedee 1998), however, shows that the particle *le* does not appear only in the final position. From the discourse analysis, *le* has two major functions. In a narrative *le* is a cohesion marker appearing between the subject and the main verb, indicating cause and effect as well as temporal

sequencing of an event. In conversation *le* is a final particle that increases the illocutionary force of the utterance. Its major function when dealing with speech act is to assert the propositional content of the utterance.

In this paper I focus my attention to *tes*, a particle I assume to be multifunctional, just like *le*, but in different aspects. An occurrence shows somewhat a type of connective function as same as *le* but others occur after phrases—in nominal expressions and interclausally. With the latter occurrence, it is assumed that *tes* is plausibly a topic marker. I will, therefore, investigate the functions of the particle *tes* whose usage domain is in the discourse especially in spoken discourse such as conversation, story telling, interviewing and so on.

Most of the data given here are from my own field notes and recordings, except where noted. The data from my field notes are excerpt from a tale narrated by the 65-year-old male informant. They are shown in Roman-based orthography system or so-called Romanized Popular Alphabet¹. The data are divided into intonation units as they represent the flow of thought of the speaker. The intonation unit is defined by Chafe (1987:22 quoted in Tao 1996:9) as a minimal discourse unit. Chafe gives the following definition for the intonation unit:

An intonation unit is a sequence
of words combined under a
single, coherent intonation
contour, usually preceded by
a pause.

Tao (1996:52) points out that in natural discourse, one finds that particles correlate to an overwhelmingly large degree with the end of intonation units. We cannot claim that particles are a defining property of the Mandarin intonation unit, because the absolute majority of the intonation unit in Mandarin discourse does NOT end with a particle. It is safe; however, to say that particles constitute a useful cue for identifying Mandarin intonation unit boundaries, although Mandarin particles do not mark intonation boundaries per se,

they correlate highly with intonation unit boundaries, constituting an important feature of the terminal point of the Mandarin intonation unit. Considering the correlation between intonation units and particles in Hmong, I find out that they are, it is safe to say, in some way analogous to those of Mandarin. We can somewhat, therefore, claim that Hmong particles constitute a feature of the boundaries of the Hmong intonation unit.

After data analysis, I find that *tes* has two major functions, i.e., cohesion marker and topic marker.

2. *tes* as a cohesion marker

As a cohesion marker, *tes* can further divided into functions as follows:

A. *tes* indicates cause and effect

Tes is regarded as a connective particle that occurs in the medial position of a sentence (Lyman 1974). *Tes* is listed as a variant of *tais*, a connective particle when it occurs at the medial position of a sentence. Lyman translates this particle as ‘then, in that case, since...then, but if...then’ as shown in the following examples.

- (1) koj noj taag lawm **tes** sawv
 you eat all PF² PRT leave
 ‘(Since) you have finished eating, then (you can) leave
 (us, if you want).’

- (2) koj tsw saav sawv **tes** ca le
 you not wish get up PRT never mind
 ‘(But if) you don’t wish to get up, then never mind.’

(Adapted from Lyman 1974:311)

(1) and (2) are coordinate sentences each of which consists of two independent clauses. *Tes* connects two clauses into a coordinate sentence showing a temporal sequence rather than a consequence of an event as in the translation.

However, the examples drawn from my personal note below show more clearly other relationships expressed by *tes*.

- (3) a ...nplaj teb tuab neeg tuas tuas
 earth people die die
 b ...tes³ paa lwj tsw nto ntuj lawm tes
 PRT smell rotten to sky PF PRT
 ‘Many people on earth had died, the rotten smell
 reached to the sky.’

Tes occurs interclausally in a narrative. It connects two clauses showing a vague relationship between them. It is interpretable as indicating the cause and effect of an event or simply showing the temporal sequence of an event. But in (3)b *tes* clearly shows the consequence of an event and thus, the clause after *tes* is the result of the previous one.

B. *tes* indicates temporal sequencing of events

In addition to cause and effect, *tes* indicates temporal sequencing of events. In (4), *tes* does not overtly show cause and effect of two clauses. Rather, it connects two clauses in chronological order in a narrative. Thus, *tes*, in the case of obscurely expressed relationship, simply indicates the temporal sequencing of an event, as same as ‘then’ in English.

- (4) a ...(zaaj laug) moog thov thov faaj tim tes
 Naga old go ask ask PN PRT
 b ...faaj tim tas
 PN say
 c ...ab
 EXC
 d ...kuv pov tsw tau koj taub hau es
 I protect not able you head PRT
 ‘The old Naga went to ask Fang Ti (to protect his head)
 Fang Ti said (that) I cannot protect your head.’

Therefore, in (5)b, *tes* shows the temporal sequencing of an event *faaj tim tshaug tshaug sus* ‘Fang Ti felt asleep’; in other words, (5)b is a subsequent of an antecedent clause in