AN INCHOATIVE CONJUNCTION IN HMONG: 
EXTRA - SENTENTIAL TOPIC MARKER?

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0. INTRODUCTION

The White Hmong (Miao) of Laos\(^1\) has an intransitive verb to directional motion, los [ lɔ́ \(1\) ] meaning 'to come, return (in a homing sense)'. There is another los, probably derived from the intransitive verb, which occurs with a preceding sentence and a following sentence. Previously (Clark 1985 & 1982:9-11) I claimed that this los was another verb synchronically derived from the intransitive verb, was an inchoative verb meaning 'become, (and/or) happen that', and occurred in the structure S1_____[ S2 ], in which S2 was subordinate to the verb los. After further thought and investigation into the semantic and structural characteristics of this los, I have concluded that I was mistaken in the claim that it was a verb. I now believe it is a derived inchoative probably coordinate conjunction with the approximate meaning 'and then/so, thus, therefore, yet, and it happens, and it turns out, with the result.' The sentence in 0.1 illustrates the use of the intransitive verb los and one use of inchoative conjunction los.

0.1  
Peb los   txog tim no  los    tsis muaj cov    Hmoob nyob ntawm no\(^2\)

we V : come to across this C : & then not have group Hmong stay place at this
We've come over here and there aren't any Hmong living here.
Los occurs as an interclausal conjunction in three patterns:
S1____S2, in which neither S is subordinate but the two propositions are semantically related by
los (e.g. 0.1);
S1____S2 = V [ +stative ], in which los introduces a stative verb which refers to the event of S1;
[S1]____S2, in which the head (nuclear verb) of S1 is subordinate to the head of S2, S1 stating
a condition for the event of S2.

In all these structures los has an inchoative function with respect to S2. By 'inchoative function' is meant an indication of the commencement of actual or perceptual change, including such concepts as realization and consequence.

English:   be - come
come off
go bad/off (of food)
go missing

English - based pidgins: come

Russian:   vi - khadit (prefix out - go)

Hindi:     ho - jānā (be/become - go)

Vietnamese: tr'ū - thành (return - become)
            thành - ra (become - go out)
            hòa - ra (become - go out)

The speculation that intersentential los is derived from the verb 'to come, return' is the fact of a common association of directional locomotion verbs such as 'come' and 'go' with inchoation. A few examples from other languages make the point:

to become
to happen (successfully)
to become spoiled

to become missing, disappear
to become

to go out; appear, come out as
to become

to become, turn into
to become, eventualize

to change, to
However, the speculation regarding derivation is not central to the paper and will not be discussed further.

I will discuss these three patterns and give the reasons for believing intersentential los to be an inchoative conjunction which is more closely associated with the second sentence but appears to be a coordinating conjunction not a subordinating conjunction. Then I will illustrate the use of conjunction los as a topic marker for NP's and, finally, suggest the possibility that conjunction los marks topicalized or given clauses, the first sentence being the given clause.

1. S1 and then happen S2

Following are some examples of los occurring as a conjunction between two sentences. In coordinated sentences such as those in 0.1 and the examples in this section, both sentences are grammatically independent sentences. However, the sentence following los relies on the proposition of the sentence preceding los for its full import; i.e., the proposition of the second sentence follows from the proposition of the first sentence, expressing sometimes consequence (1.1 - 4) and sometimes a situation contrary to expectation (1.5 - 7).

1.1 Peb nyob deb deb neb lawm los peb nco txog neb kawg li.

We're living very far from you so we miss you very much.

1.2 Wb muab tso rau koj muag los wb yeej tso siab lawm.

We gave it to you to sell so/and we're happy (whatever you do).

1.3 Neb muab txiav lawm tsib duas los tsis uas kas kav liam.

You're going to take out $5, well, it's no problem.

1.4 Meslis, kuv tsis paub sau ntauv Askiv, kuv sau tsis yog, Mary I not know write paper English I write not (be)so

Mary, I don't know how to write in English so I make mistakes, so I ask you to please excuse me.

In 1.5 - 1.8, S2 contains anaphoric reference in the form of zero anaphora ([ ]) to one of the NP's in the first sentence. The sentences in 1.6 and 1.7 are from folk tales (Vang & Lewis 1984: 20 & 16).3

1.5 Nws ua paj-nuaeb los tsis muaj chaw muag Ø lawm.

She does needlework and/but there's no place to sell it.

1.6 Nws xav coj mus pub rau luag lwm tus, los Ø pub tsis tau li.

She wanted to give away her wealth to other people, but she couldn't.

1.7 Nws tau tsaus-ntuj los Ø tsaus ntev heev.

When it was night, it was night for a very long time.

1.8 Nws tau kaj -ntug los Ø kaj ntev heev.

When it was day, it was daytime for a very long time.

(Lit.: It became dark then it was dark...)}
Of course it is common for both sentences to have anaphoric reference to preceding discourse, as in 1.8.

1.8 Koj xa Ø tuaj rau peb los peb txais tau Ø lawm nawb.   
   you send hither to we THEN we receive already sure

You sent it to us and we received it already.

In all the sentences 1.1 - 8 los seems clearly to be a conjunction conjoining two independent but associated sentences. The earlier argument for los being a verb was based on its inchoative nature and the parallel with existential verbs such as yog ‘be’ and muaj ‘have’ which may take embedded sentences instead of NP arguments.

Given that inchoation means commencement of change, including consequence, and if one accepts that conjunctions may also serve an inchoative function, the first argument for verbs is invalid. The sentences in 1.9 - 1.11 have English conjunctions which serve an inchoative function. Note that the and in the second sentence in 1.9 represents simple coordination not inchoation, and that both the second and third sentences in 1.9 are different semantically as well as grammatically from the first sentence. (This shows that there are at least two and’s in English, one for coordination only and one to express realization. See Stubbs 1983: 80 - 81 regarding the wide range of functions of and and other conjunctions common in conversational discourse.)

1.9 He came there and (it turned out/he found) she’d left already.
≠ He came there and she talked with him.
≠ When he came there, she’d left already.

1.10 My parents need some money so I’m going to send them some.
1.11 She’s going to Vientiane, therefore she’s studying Lao.

Probably most languages have such interclausal inchoative conjunctions. Here are examples in Vietnamese (1.12 - 13) and Thai (1.14), though the Thai sentence is a little unusual. Compare the Vietnamese sentence in 1.13 with the Hmong one in 1.5; the Vietnamese conjunction has approximately the meaning “and on the contrary, on the other hand” and is derived from the Vietnamese verb ‘to come’.

1.12 Một ngày sau tôi đến đó thì cô đã bỏ đi rồi.
   one day after I reach there then Miss Past leave go already

   The day after I came there and she had left already.
1.13 Chị ấy làm đồ thù lai không có chỗ bán.
   sister that do thing embroidery however not have place sell

   She does embroidery but/and yet there’s no place to sell it.
1.14 Khâu thêu phá leew kò phọ-khả máy ráp.
   3P weave cloth already and then merchant not receive

   They did the weaving and but the merchants didn’t buy it.

As for interclausal los being an existential verb, it must be admitted that this los may not be negated or questioned and may not take aspectual adverbs. Note the negation of existential yog in 1.4 above (with topicalized embedded sentence) and in 1.15

1.15 Wb hais lus Askiv tsis yog hais lus Hmoob.
   we2 speak word English not be speak word Hmong

We spoke in English not (be the case that we spoke) in Hmong.
1.16 Tus muaj leej twg noj kiaj. not have person which eat at all
There isn’t anyone eating them.

1.17 Puas muaj leej twg noj lawm? whether have person whichever eat already
Is there anyone (else) who wants to eat?

1.18 *Peb nyob debdeb neb lawm tus los peb nco txog neb.
We’re living very far from you & it doesn’t happen that we miss you.

1.19 *Peb los txog tim no puas los tus muaj cov Hmoob nyob ntawm no?
We’ve come over here & is it that there are no Hmong living here?

There seems to be no real justification for claiming that interclausal los is a verb. However, the question of subordination remains. Is los a subordinating conjunction?

Both sentences in the conjoined sentences of 1.1 - 1.8 are grammatical sentences and may therefore be considered to involve coordination rather than subordination. However, los is entirely associated with the second sentence and, as mentioned before, the second sentence depends on the proposition of the first sentence to be properly interpreted, i.e., it is pragmatically dependent on S1. Foley and Van Valin (1984:256ff) and Olson (1981) have given the term cosubordination to clause linkages that do not involve embedding but are not altogether independent. It may be that the los sentences might be termed as one class of cosubordination in which the second sentence is loosely dependent in terms of syntax and more tightly dependent semantically on the first sentence. Such a linkage is mediated by los and its properties are formulated in the lexical matrix of los.

The approach of some kind of dependence being involved seems even more appropriate when one examines the sentences in the following section.

2. S1 WITH THE RESULT S2
( = STATIVE )

The second “sentence” in this pattern is a sentence only in that it is a verb with optional verb modifiers, and in Hmong a Vp with no accompanying arguments may form a full sentence, especially in discourse. However, in these constructions the stative verb phrase is dependent on S1, being a tag comment on the proposition in S1 in that it is a description of state regarding that proposition or some element in it. Here los at once conjoints the stative sentence to S1 and separates it from S1, making explicit that the stative comment is not an integral part of S1.

2.1 Nws ua pajtaub qab qwj txiav los zoo nkauj.
3P do stickery snailshell cut THEN beautiful
She does snailshell applique and it’s beautiful.

2.2 Muaj luang tus muab lawm los puâm chawj.
have others person take already THEN so be it
Somebody took it, well so too bad - that’s the way it is.

2.3 Neb tau muag wb cov pajtaub poob lawm los zoo kawg.
you2 get sell we2 group stickery gone already THEN good very
You sold our pieces of needlework already, well that’s very good.

The Vietnamese copula - like conjunction in 1.12 above can be used in the same way:

2.4 Chi ảy cung đi với chúng tôi thì vui lắm.
sister that also go with we(Excl) then happy very
She went with us too so it was a lot of fun.
Conjunction los occurs in what appears to be an idiomatic expression in which los introduces the stative verb tau ‘be possible’. As with the other stative verbs in this structure, tau takes no arguments but may take adverbs and negation (e.g. 2.7), which confirms it as a verb. In these sentences, S2 refers to the possibility or non-possibility of the proposition stated in S1. This fact is made clearer by comparing the sentences in 2.5. S2 in 2.5b has an animate subject and another verb, in which case tau refers to the possibility of the action of preceding verb ua. 2.5b is acceptable but unusual and 2.5a, with its direct reference to the proposition in S1, is preferred (Chu Lee, pers. comm.).

2.5 a Kuv mam li sau rov tuaj qhia rau koj los tau. I presently write back hither tell to you THEN possible

It’s alright: I’ll write back to tell you.

b Kuv mam li sau rov tuaj qhia rau koj los kuv ua tau. I presently write back hither tell to you THEN I do possible

I can write back to tell you, it doesn’t worry me.

2.6 Tau kawg. Kuv muaj mensis thiab kuv mam li muab possible very I have a little and I presently hand

ob peb duas rau koj los tau.

2 3 dollar to you THEN possible

Of course. I have a little and I’ll give you a few dollars, that’s fine.

2.7 Peb xav... tabsis peb tsis muaj nyiaj lawm es los tsis tau xwb.
we want but we not have money already and THEN not possible only

We want... but we don’t have money so it’s not possible at all.

The preceding clause with this idiom is sometimes a conditional, as shown in 2.8 and 2.9. S1 in 2.9 is itself an idiomatic expression and S2 refers not to S1 but to previous discourse or an understood situation. Conditionals with conjunction los are discussed further in Sec. 3.

2.8 (Yog) koj xav hu mus nrog kuv tham, los tau.
be that you want call away with I converse THEN possible

If you want to call and talk with me, then it’s alright.

2.9 Tshav kub los nag, los tau.
sunshine be hot come rain THEN possible

Come rain or come shine I’ll do it: I’ll do it for you whatever happens.

Since it is possible for los tau to be preceded by a subordinate conditional clause ‘then it must be said that tau is a main clause in these los tau sentences. However, tau in a VP-only sentence occurs only in conversational discourse as a response, as shown in 2.6 and 2.10, not as a presentative comment. Note that 4os cannot initiate an utterance and such a response cannot be preceded by los:

2.10 Koj ua rau kuv puas tau?
you do for I whether able
Can you do it for me?

I, Tau. can/possible
Yes, I can.

It is possible that, where S2 is reduced to a stative VP as in the sentences in this section, los can not be characterized in the same way as the los in the Sec. 1 sentences. In Sec. 5 I will discuss the possibility of conjunction los and nominalization of S1. First, we will look at los with S1 as a conditional.
3. IF S1 THEN S2

In the third type of interclausal los, the first sentence is clearly subordinate to the head of the proposition in the second sentence but not to the conjunction los, which is still more closely associated with the second sentence. In these sentences los explicitly states "given S1 then S2 is the case", the first sentence being a conditional, as in 2.8 - 9 above and the sentences below.

3.1 (Yog) koj tsis pom qab sau no los tsis ua li cas.
be that you not know write this THEN not do as how
If you don't know how to write this (so) it doesn't matter.

3.2 Yog koj xav nrog peb tham los koj thiaj li tau tham nwb.
be that you want with we converse THEN you consequently get converse sure
If you want to talk with us then certainly you can.

3.3 (Yog) nws yuav tuaj los tsis txbob qhib qhow rooj.
be that 3P will come THEN not don't open door
If she's going to come, then don't open the door (for her).

3.4 Thaum twg koj muab tau nyiaj tuaj rau peb, yog peb pauv tau,
time which you hand able money hither to we be that we exchange able
los peb mam li qhia koj nwb.
THEN we right away tell you sure
Any time you can give us money and (if) we can cash it, then we'll tell you right away.

3.5 Ho yog peb pauv tsis tau los peb qhia koj paub thiab.
and then be that we exchange not able THEN we tell you know also
And if we can't cash it, then we'll let you know too.

3.6 Muab rau qhov twg los tau.
take to place which THEN possible
Wherever you put it (then) it's alright.

3.7 Koj nrog leej twg mus, los kuv tsis nrog koj mus.
you with person which go THEN I not with you go
You can go with whomever you want, I'm not going with you.

3.8 Koj hais li cas, los nws tsis mloog.
you say as how THEN 3P not listen
Whatever you say, (even so) he won't listen.

3.9 Tab yog nws hu, los kuv tsis mus.
even be that 3P call THEN I not go
Even if he calls me, (even so) I won't go.

S1 may be marked with (and subordinate to) the copula verb yog 'to be' for 'if' (hypothetical) clauses, as in 2.8 and 3.1 - 5. Typically, noun phrases with indefinite question words (3.6 - 8) and various conjunctions mark other types of conditionals preceding los clauses, e.g. tab (txawm) for some counterfactuals (3.9 - 10). (The sentences in 3.7 - 10 are from Mottin 1978 : 132.7.)

The Vietnamese conjunction cited above; the sentence without the hypothetical 'if' is more natural.
3.11 (Nếu) cô động ý (thì) tôi sẽ đến.

if Miss agree then I will arrive

If you agree, (then) I'll come.

To understand further the nature of conjunction los, we can 1) look at its use within a clause, i.e. within an equivalent of S2, and 2) compare it with somewhat similar conjunctions.

4. NP TOPICALIZATION AND OTHER INCHOATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

There is a structure in which conjunction los occurs between the apparent subject and the main verb of a sentence, say S2, in discourse:

(S1), NP—V,

as in 4.1, 4.2 (from Mottin 1978:142), and in 4.3 where the NP is a Time phrase in a subjectless meteorological statement.

4.1 Koj thiab koj tsev neeg puas noj qab nyob zoo lawm?
you and you house person whether happy & well already

Peb los tseem noj qab nyob zoo li qub thiab.
we THEN still happy & well as old also

How are you and your family? As for us, we're still fine as usual.

4.2 Nws paub, kuv los kuj paub thiab.
3P know I THEN likewise know also

He knows it, and me, I know it too.

4.3 Tamsim no los tseem no thiab.
now this THEN still cold also

And right now, it’s still cold.

In these sentences, los is clearly a topic marker for the preceding noun phrase, creating a topic-comment structure. In fact, the topicalized NP may be even more explicitly marked for topic by the topic-marking noun ntaum, as in 4.4 (from Mottin 1978:142) and 4.5. The topic in 4.6 is a clause nominalized by the noun ntaum. Kuj ‘equally, likewise’ is conjunctive and emphatic, underlining the inchoative aspect implied by los.

4.4 Nws mus, ntaum kuv los kuj mus thiab.
3P go place at I THEN likewise go also

He's going; and me, I'm going too.

4.5 Ntaum kuv thiab kuv niam los noj qab nyob zoo.
place at I and I mother THEN happy & well

As for me and my mother, we're fine.

4.6 Ntaum kuv nyob tim no los kuj nco txog koj kawg li thiab.
place at I stay place over this THEN also remember to you very to also

As for my living over here, I likewise miss you very much.

However, this type of occurrence of los seems to be fairly restricted in usage. More frequently occurring in such a role is the conjunction mas. Fuller (1985 & 1987) gives a convincing argument for mas as topicalizer of the preceding NP, and I accept that analysis. The sentences in 4.7-8 are given by her (1985:113) as examples of NP topicalization. 4.9 is another example.
4.7 peb lub zos mas yog peb tib pawg kwv tij xwb.
our CLF village PRT BE our one brothers only
Our village was only our group of cousins.

4.8 Cov Suav mas muaj nyiaj hcev.
group Chinese PRT have money very
The Chinese had a lot of money.

4.9 Kuv zaum hauv av (thiab) koj mas zaum nyob saum rooj nawb.
I sit inside earth and you then sit at top bench sure
I'll sit on the floor and you, you sit on the bench, alright?

Mas also occurs as a clause linker similar in function to los. It can occur in a preceding conditional, as in 4.10, or linking two more or less independent sentences, as in 4.11 and 4.12 (4.10 - 11 from Mottin 1978: 141).

4.10 Yog nws tuaj, mas koj hais rau kuv.
be that 3P come so then you say to I
If he comes, (so) tell me.

4.11 Nws ua teb tas lawm, mas txhiaj li ua si.
3P do field finished already so then consequently play
He has finished working his fields so he's enjoying himself.

4.12 Nyaj Zuag ... kom ntxawm Npis rho koj cov nyiaj los mus yuav...
aunt Zua cause sis-in-law Bee extract you group money hither go buy
mas ntxawm Npis rho lawm 26 duas mus yuav...
so then sis-law Bee extract already 26 dollar go buy
Aunt Zua...asking Bee to take some of your money to go buy..., so Bee took $26 and went and bought...

The sentence in 4.13 shows the use of mas both as NP topicalizer and as interclausal conjunction.

4.13 lb duas mas yog kuv coj mus yuav daim tshev... ob duas mas
one dollar then be that I take go buy sheet check 2 dollar then
yog kuv rho los ua nyiaj xa... mas tag peb duas lawm nawb.
be that I extract do money send so then finish 3 dollar already sure
One dollar that was for buying the check, two dollars that was for paying the postage, so altogether it was three dollars.9

The conjunction ho appears to function in much the same way; i.e., it appears to be an inchoative conjunction which can occur both intersentential and preverbally (4.15 from Heimbach 1979: 53):10

4.14 Kuv xav tias neb... ho kuv kuj noj qab nyob zoo li qub thiab.
I wish that you? & then I likewise happy & well as old also
I hope that you...and I too am happy and well as usual.

4.15 Nws ho yuav sau nyiaj.
3P then want collect money
And so he wants to collect money.
Similar conjunctions in Vietnamese and Thai, which were illustrated above as intersential conjunctions, occur more often as NP topicalizers: Vietnamese sentences in 4.16 (from Huffman & Tran 1980: 150), 4.17 and 4.18, and Thai in 4.19 (from T. Diller and P. Juntanalamaga, pers. comm.).

4.16 Bao giù? thì trời bắt đầu mưa, anh?
what time then sky begin rain brother
(So) when does it begin to rain? (speaking of seasons)

4.17 Quân áo thì được chị giặt.
trousers blouse then put sister wash
As for your clothes, leave them for me to wash.

4.18 Chí tôi lại không thích đi Brisbane.
sister I however not like go Brisbane
My older sister, on the other hand, doesn't like to go to Brisbane.

4.19 Khâu thò phaà lêw phêà khàà kàVy ráp suù.
3P weave cloth already merchant then not receive buy
She did the weaving but the middleman wouldn't buy it.

Fuller (1985 & 1987) groups mas and the conjunction ces together in her discussion of NP topicalization but gives no examples of ces with NP and, in fact, ces seems rarely if ever to occur with NPs, only with clauses, i.e. verbs dominated by S. Following are examples (4.20 from Bertrais 1979: 14; glosses and English translation mine).

4.20 Pëb mus mntsib suav rog ces peb khiaù.
we go meet stranger war so then we run
We chased upon the enemy and so fled.

4.21 Nag hmo kuv pw lig lig ces tagkiis no kuv thiaj sawv lig lig.
yesterday I lie late late so then morning this I therefore rise late late
I went to bed very late last night so this morning I got up very late.

With ces, S1 can be a conditional clause (from Fuller 1985: 118):

4.22 Yog koj mus ces nrog peb mus niam no.
if you go PRT with us go now
If you are going, go with us now.

The regular coordinating conjunction thiaù (‘and’) links NPs (4.23), predicates (4.24, from Fuller 1985: 80), and clauses (4.25, from Indochinese Refugee Education Guide 15: 14).

4.23 Kuv thiaù Pov tsis sib tham.
I and Pao not Recip talk
Pao and I don’t talk to each other.

4.24 Nws pom cov me nyanam thiaù nyanam lawv.
s/he see group child and like they
S/he saw the children and liked them.
4.25 Pia yog Yaj Txhim poj niam thiab nkawd
Pia be Yang See Clf wife and they
muaj ib tug tub.
have one Clf son

Pia is Yang See’s wife, and they have one son.

This conjunction seems to have a somewhat inchoative value in the sentence in 4.26. Perhaps, like English and, thiab is generating an inchoative coun-

terpart. (See Li 1987 for a discussion of Green Hmong hab ‘and’ as strictly coordinate.)

4.26 Peb twb tau mus nees nkawm kilo
we already go twenty kilometer
thiab sawdaws neces heev.
and everyone tired very

We’ve already gone twenty kilometers and we’re all very tired.

It is obvious from the examples with conjunctions mas, ho, and ces that they share an inchoative function with los, i.e., they signal that S2 relates to S1 in terms of realization. There are subtle differences among these conjunctions; for example, almost all the sentences with los given in Sec. 1 disallow either ces or mas in place of los, or are much better with los. However, I do not intend here to attempt to discover the nature of these distinctions but rather to focus on their semantic and functional similarities.

The parallel uses of los and other conjunctions between intersentential juncture and NP topicalization raises the question of topicalization of clauses within discourse, and I will discuss this in the next section.

5. INCHOATIVE CONJUNCTIONS
AND TOPICALIZATION

So far we have seen conjunction los as mediator between two sentences where S2 may 1) be an independent sentence which follows from S1, 2) be a stative VP which comments on S1, 3) be a subordinate clause whose subordinate S1 is a conditional, or 4) contain a subject-position NP which is marked for discourse topicalization by a succeeding los. This overview suggests a number of overlapping possibilities.

To what extent could S1 be a topic for S2? Almost all of the discussion through the years involving topicalization has centered on topicalization of noun phrases within a sentence, although, it is recognized that topicalization usually has extratensential reference. Definitions of topics frequently refer specifically to the sentence (e.g. Gundel 1985), and perhaps the term “topicalization” is not appropriate for cross-
sentence phenomena, but it seems to me that there is some kind of topicalization or backgrounding (setting the scene) involved in the cases of S1 los S2 and the same structure with mas, ho, ces, and es, another “and so” conjunction. Just as preverbal los, mas, and ho can topicalize preceding NPs, it seems quite likely, given the semantic relationship between S1 and S2 in the sentences here, that these conjunctions operating intersententially also make topics of a sort of the preceding sentence.

For the purposes of this discussion I will take the position that a topic is what is assumed by the speaker to be given background information as far as the addressee is concerned. I have excluded “old” and “known” information for the reason given below. With this position it is reasonable to suppose that the notion of topic can be extended from NP to a non-nominal clause in discourse. In fact, Haiman (1978), in his discussion of conditionals as topics, does just that. Furthermore, his argument is based strongly on identity of marking: the assumption that “superficial similarities of form are reflections of underlying similarities of meaning” (586, also discussion on p. 565). That is the situation we have here with conjunctions los, mas, and ho. They can mark both topic NPs and clauses which are semantically linked in a given - S1 - then - S2 type of association.

The givenness property in all cases of S1 when associated with los suggests that S1 is probably a topic. Haiman (1978: 585) has a definition that seems to be workable for the situation here. He defines topic as follows:

The topic represents an entity whose existence is agreed upon by the speaker and his audience. As such, it constitutes the framework which has been selected for the following discourse.
I would add to this, at least for topicalized whole sentences, that the agreement may occur at the time of uttering S1, i.e., it may be that S1 is not old information already known to the audience, but that S1 is received by the audience as given background to what follows. I would also add that the foreground discourse following a topicalized sentence (whether the topicalized sentence is conditional or presentative and independent) is frequently a single comment. This is certainly true of conversational discourse, as opposed to narrative discourse where a topic may be background for a whole paragraph.

If we are to consider the S1 sentences of the type described here to be topics, it is reasonable to ask whether they might not be nominalized sentences, the nominalization signalled by the inchoative conjunction. This is a tempting notion especially with respect to the sentences in Sec. 2, where S2 is a stative VP which describes the speaker’s attitude toward the event of S1. However, the usual structures of sentences in Hmong and its neighboring languages do not favor nominalization. Naturally, nominalization of clauses does occur, marked by particular nouns, especially *ntaym* ‘the place at’ (as in 4.6) and *thaym* ‘the time when’ (3.4), but on the whole these languages tend to be highly “verbalizing” languages. Therefore, I will admit that there is a possibility of S1’s or some types of S1’s being nominalized topics, but at this point in the investigation I will consider them still to be full verbal clauses dominated by S.

I have called the association between S1 and S2 inchoative with respect to S2, inchoation being marked by the inchoative conjunction. As said above in Sec. 0, inchoation means commencement of actual or perceptual change. The notion embraces such concepts as realization, consequence (sometimes contrary to expectation), discovery, etc. The claim I wish to make here is that many languages, perhaps most, have a set of inchoative conjunctions, each conjunction with its own finer distinctive features which determine the selection of that particular conjunction. This set would probably include words with the meaning of ‘but, etc.’ although they have not been discussed here.

The second claim is that the inchoative marking on such conjunctions allows them to be used in topicalizing functions: yet another technique for background–foreground processing (see Hopper 1979). Depending on the particular inchoative conjunction, it can be used to background phrases or clauses as gives for foreground comment.

These statements can be illustrated to some extent with English *then*. There are at least four *then’s;* one, the *Time* pronoun in 5.1, does not concern us at all; nor does the sequential *Time* conjunction in 5.2.

5.1 We were busy preparing the meal *then* (at that time).
5.2 We chopped the veggies *then* cut up the meat.

The other two *then’s* are inchoative conjunctions, or perhaps they are only one lexical item whose features allow it to function in two ways. For the time being I will say that there are two lexical items because of the formulaic difficulties in stating constraints on an environment in which in one case the conjunction is associated with the preceding phrase, as in 5.3, and in the other with the following sentence, as in 5.4. I have taken the liberty of using some of Jeanette Gundel’s own text (Gundel 1977: 39).

5.3 With respect to this one reading *then* Chomsky’s analysis appears...
5.4 If this is the reading which is intended, *then* the claim...is incorrect.

The functions of *then* in 5.3 and 5.4 seem to parallel some of the functions of inchoative conjunction *los*, with the notable exception that, in English, the *then* which is associated with S2 occurs only with a hypothetical conditional as S1.

There is much that needs to be examined further...
NOTES

1 The dialect represented here is primarily but not exclusively that of White Hmong as spoken in Xieng Khouang province in Laos. I am indebted to my many Hmong friends who have helped me through conversations, letters, and elicited responses. Especially helpful have been my teacher, Vangkoua Cheurtong, and Neng Chue Yang, Tong Vang, Youa Vang, Sai Xiong, Youa Yang, and, more recently, Chu Lee. Also I have received helpful consultation on this paper from Tony Diller and Preecha Juntanamalaga, and I wish to thank them. Although it is not customary to "thank" printed material, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of ideas gleaned from a study of Judy Fuller's "Topic and Comment in Hmong" (Fuller 1985).

2 The orthography used for Hmong here is the Romanized Popular Alphabet (see Smalley 1976: 87-88 and Bertrais 1979). Double vowel symbols indicate Vng and orthographic final consonants indicate tone: -b high, -j high falling, -v mid rising, 0 mid, -g low falling breathy, -s low, -m low with glottal, -d low rising.

3 The sentences taken from Grandmother's Path Grandfather's Way, with their translations, follow the authors' presentation. The interlinear glosses are my own.

4 I specify "interclausal" because there are conjunctions which have discourse reference to previous clauses but which, at least in Hmong, Thai and Vietnamese, occur immediately before the verb of the sentence with which they are most closely associated and can be preceded by an NP. (See especially Fuller 1985). This type of conjunction is discussed in Sec. 4.

5 Tony Diller and Preecha Juntanamalaga, personal communication.

6 By VP I mean here a verb and any of its modifying adverbs occurring in the sentence, and excluding any NPs, time NPs or otherwise.

7 In sentence examples from Mottin the glosses are mine, as are the translations, from the Hmong and from Mottin's French translations.

8 Fuller goes on to hypothesize a topic-comment typology for Hmong but that is not of concern here.

9 Heimbach (1979) describes mas as a pause marker. This would be consistent with Chafe's notion (1976: 51-52) of a speaker uttering a subject before choosing a case frame, then inserting a hesitation particle before completing the sentence. However, in addition to Fuller's arguments (1985: 101-104) against mas being a pause marker, we have the evidence in 4.13. The sentence in 4.13 is written text, where one would hardly find conversational pauses.

10 Li 1987 discusses Green Hmong coordinate conjunction huas, which I believe corresponds to White Hmong ho, as a switch reference device, a slightly contrastive conjunction which complements the "same subject" enumerative coordinate conjunction hab (White Hmong thiab).
REFERENCES


Clark, Marybeth. 1982. The two 'have's of Hmong. 15th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, Beijing.


