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 Alphabet. 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 PF 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 ...npaj 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
(5a) whereas in (5c), *tes* after *faaj tim ib nyuas ncawg* ‘Fang Ti nodded’ clause indicates the effect of an antecedent.

(5) a ...yawnm zaaj laug thov thov
grandfather Naga old ask ask
b ...tau peb nub peb mos *tes*
PF three day three night PRT
c ...faaj tim tshaug tshaug sus *tes*
PN sleepy sleepy rest PRT
faaj tim ib nyuas ncawg *tes*
PN one nod PRT
‘The old Naga kept asking Fang Ti, on the third day
Fang Ti felt asleep then he nodded.’

(6) shows several interesting functions of *tes* depending on its occurrences. Clark (1992) points out that since two grammatically independent clauses are connected by the particles, the status of connected sentence is in question as to whether or not subordination is involved. Although such sentence is frequently translated into English with subordinate clauses, in this structure they appear to be grammatically independent with a coordinate relationship. Then (6) comprises four clauses but in five intonation units, connected by *tes* to be coordinate construction.

(6) a ...faaj tim nci tsum yuav noj mov *tes*
PN reach table FUT eat rice PRT
b ...hej leej pov sw tsaaam
PN
c ...txhawg poob ntshoog *tes*
chopsticks drop suddenly PRT
d ...faaj tim tas ca muab tus tshaab *tes*
PN say let bring CLF new PRT
hej leej pov sw tsaaam tas
PN say
e ...ca kuv muab tus nuav lob
    let I have CLF this PRT
‘Fang Ti reached the table to eat rice, suddenly the
chopstick of Hey Leng Po Sue Tsang dropped from
the table. Fang Ti said (that) let me bring you the new ones, Hey Leng Po Sue Tsang said (that) let I have these ones.’

This example allows us to determine tes in (6)a as a conjunction connecting (6)a and (6)b-c to be a coordinate construction, and indicating the temporal sequential part of an event. In (6)c-d, tes shows different relationship of clauses. In (6)e, tes indicates effect of the antecedent clause, i.e. (6)b-c, in the sense that because the chopsticks dropped from the table, Fang Ti will bring another one for Hey Leng Po Sue Tsang. In the third occurrence, (6)d, tes shows the sense of contrastive meaning to the antecedent event.

In brief, Hmong has a group of particles functioning as a cohesion marker such as tes, le, or los. These particles have nonrestrictive and inexplicit meaning. Since they show several meanings even when appear in the same position, their meanings depend on the relationship of the connected clauses. If that relation is vague, these conjunctions simply indicate the temporal sequencing of an event that is expressed in the chronological order in a narrative—the nature of narrative discourse.

Thus, tes and le are similar in the function of connecting. While le is regarded as a conjunctive marker in the language whenever it occurs between the subject and the main verb, tes is a conjunctive marker as well whenever it appears interclausally. Tes seems to have less restricted meaning than le as the former is somewhat able to express the contrastive meaning while the latter is not.

3. **tes as a topic marker**

Previous research of topic and comment in White Hmong shows that mas and ces are topic markers whereby mas is more clearly a topic marker (Fuller 1988:77). After noun phrases and prepositional location phrases as well as time clauses and conditional clauses, mas is used much more than ces, and these clauses can be interpreted as topical. Two independent clauses which have a ‘then’ or ‘so’ relationship
are much more likely to be joined by *ces* than *mas*, and the
time relationship is typically joined by *ces*.

From Fuller’s research we can see that the functions of
topicalizing and connecting are in some degree involved.
Fuller points out that *mas* marks the less ‘topic-like’
constituents that are noun phrases and integral dependent
clauses. *Ces* marks the less ‘topic-like’ constituents, loosely
connected dependent clauses, and coordinate clauses. Fuller
does not, however, explicitly claim that these particles are
multifunctional particles that serve as topic markers and in
different occurrence they could serve as cohesion markers.
Clark (1992) overtly claims that, from a different aspect,
discourse function of these conjunctions, namely *thi* in
Vietnamese, *ko* in Black Tai and *los* in Hmong is of a
topicalizing one, a kind of topicalization process. The
conjunctions highlight a usually contrastive aspect of the
background discourse as a given for new information.
Interestingly, Clark claims that the particles *mas* and *ces* are
inchoative conjunctions as topicalizers which *mas* is a regular
topicalizer of NPs and clauses while conjunction *ces* occurs
interclausally.

In this section I will show that another discourse
function of *tes* is to mark the topic phrases and clauses. This
function can be divided into three categories due to the
constructions of topic, i.e., noun phrase, temporal and location
phrase and clause.

**A. *tes* with Noun Phrase**

According to Keenan and Schieffelin’s (1976 quoted in
Fuller 1988) categorization of discourse topics, the
categorization makes a primary division of continuous topics,
which occur in previous sentence, and discontinuous topics,
which do not. Continuous topics include collaborating topics,
in which the topic is the same as the topic of the previous
sentence, and incorporating topics, in which the topic is part of
the comment of the previous sentence. Discontinuous topics
include re-introducing topics, in which the topics appear in the
previous discourse, and introducing topics, in which the topic
is new in the discourse.
TES preceded by noun phrases occurs frequently in the double-subject constructions in which that noun phrases are both topic and subject of the clause--since it has argument with the predicates of the clauses. The most frequent use of TES with noun phrases is to encode entitles that have been introduced in the previous sentence and have been incorporated into the present sentence as a topic. Examples of these noun phrases topics are given in the following:

\[
(7) \begin{align*}
\text{a ... } & \text{kuv pov tsw tau} \\
& \quad \text{EXC I protect not able}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{b ...yog yuav pov tau tes} \\
& \quad \text{if FUT protect able PRT}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{c ...yuav yog faaj tim es} \\
& \quad \text{must COP PN PRT}
\end{align*}
\]

'I could not protect (your head) the one who could protect was Fang Ti only.'

\[
(8) \begin{align*}
\text{...faaj tim TES yog kaav teb kaav chaw tes} \\
& \quad \text{PN PRT COP rule earth rule place PRT}
\end{align*}
\]

'Fang Ti was the ruler.'

\[
(9) \begin{align*}
\text{...faaj tim TES faaj tim has pov tau} \\
& \quad \text{PN PRT PN CP protect able}
\end{align*}
\]

'Fang Ti could protect.'

(7) is the preceding clauses to show the context of (8)-(9). In (8) faaj tim is mentioned in the predicate of (7), i.e. in (7)c, and becomes topic in (8) and (9). Thus faaj tim is the incorporating topic.

\[
(10) \begin{align*}
\text{a ... } & \text{lis seeb seeb tas faaj tim txhus nuav teg} \\
& \quad \text{PN say PN reach this PRT}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{b ... } & \text{eb yuav ncaim kiv hov} \\
& \quad \text{we FUT split way PRT}
\end{align*}
\]

'Li Seng Seng said (that) Fang Ti we reached here then we both would have to split up.'
(11)...kuv **tes** kuv yuav thaus kiv nuav moog **es**
   1 PRT 1 FUT along way this go PRT
   ‘I would go along this way.’

(12)...koj **tes** koj moog txuj kiv ntawv
   You PRT you go CLF way that
   ‘You must go to that way.’

(10) is the preceding sentence to show the context of
(11) and (12). **Eb** in (10) is the first dual pronoun for **lis seeb seeb** and **faaj tim**, the main characters of the story. The
pronoun **kuv** for **lis seeb seeb**, is mentioned again and marked
by **tes** as a topic and also subject of (11) since it has an
argument with its predicate as well as **koj** in (12) is marked as a
topic by **tes** as well. **Es** in (11) is other particle—cohesion
marker shows temporal sequencing of an event as well.

**B. tes in Temporal and Location Phrase**

Temporal and location phrases in Hmong are mostly
shown in nominal expressions and some in prepositional
expressions if prepositions clearly occur. Temporal phrases
with **tes** are shown in (13)-(14). Location phrases with **tes**
are shown in (15)-(16). Temporal and location expressions are
topics of the following clauses in which they are in parallel to
the use of **mas** in (17)-(18).

(13) a ...txhus nub **tes**
    reach day PRT
   b ...ntshaug ntshuas moog nuv **tes**
    orphan go to fish PRT
   ‘Reaching that day, the orphan man went to fish.’

(14) ...nws nuav **tes** toj-sab naag lug lug
    time this PRT high hill rain fall fall
   ‘Now, the rain had fallen onto the high hill.’

We can see that both temporal phrases in (13)-(14) are
marked as topic by **tes**.
(15) a...pes roob tes
  upon mountain PRT
b...lus tau peb hli naag es
  fall already three month rain PRT
  ‘Upon the mountain, the rain had fallen for three
  months already.’

(16) a...chaav chaw qhe tes
  area place-location low PRT
b...tshaav tshaav ntuj es
  shine shine sky PRT
  ‘At the low area, the sun was very shiny.’

The followings are the usage of mas marking the
temporal and location phrases as topics, respectively.

(17) a...ab xyoo nuav mas
  EXC year this TOP
b...toj sab mas yuav tshaav peb hli ntuj
  plateau TOP FUT shine three month sky
  ‘Oh this year, at the plateau, the sun would shine for
  three months.’

(18) ...chaw qhe mas yuav lus peb hli naag
  place low TOP FUT fall three month rain
  ‘At the low area, the rain would fall for three months.’

In my text, it seems that the narrator obviously uses tes
much more frequently than mas. The usage of both particles
tes and mas – topic markers I have come to believe that they
are varied from speaker to speaker. Even the usage of topic
markers in Hmong varies from person to person, tes is
ultimately a topic marker.

C. tes with Clausal Construction

Clausal topics in Green Hmong can be divided into
three types and they all can be marked by tes as follows.
(i) *tes* in Temporal Clause

The use of *tes* in temporal clauses is parallel to the use in temporal phrases that is in the form of nominal expressions. As same as temporal phrases, temporal clause is topic as in the following.

(19) a ...muaj ib nub **tes**
    have one day PRT
b ...hej leej pov sw tsaam
    PN
  c ...yaa qog phlawg tuaj **tes** khuam daaj
    fly rapid come PRT carry sword
    ntoo mom
    wear hat
  ‘There is one day, Hey Leng Po Sue Tsang, carrying a sword and wearing a hat, fled rapidly (to kill the old Naga).’

(ii) *tes* in Conditional Clause

According to Haiman (1978 quoted in Fuller 1988) conditionals are topics with the argument that the meanings of conditionals and topics are similar because they are both ‘given’ with respect to a following clause. Conditionals in my data are marked with *tes* and *mas* with the most frequent use of *tes*.

(20) a ...yog koj tsw paab **mas**
    If you not help TOP
b ...kuv muaj tsw tau
    I take not able
  c ...zaaj laug taub hau
    Naga old head
  ‘If you did not help me, I could not take the old Naga’s head.’
(21) a ...yog yuav pov tau koj taub hau tes
    if FUT protect able you head PRT
b ...yuav yog faaj tim es
    must COP PN PRT
‘If there was the one who could protect your head, it
must be Fang Ti.’

(22) a ...yog hej leej pov sw tsaaam tes
    if PN PRT
b ...kuv has tsw laib lawm es
    I say not able PF PRT
‘If it was Hey Leng Po Sue Tsang, I could not ask
him.’

(23) a ...yog koj yuav moog muaj yawm zaaj
    if you FUT go take grandfather Naga
laug taub hau tes
    old head PRT
b ...koj ntshus kuv noj ib plhuas xu tsaiv
    you and I eat one CLF lunch before
‘If you would go to take the old Naga’s head, you
and I should have lunch before.’

Mas marks conditional topic and noun phrase topic in
the same way as tes, thus, tes is a topic marker. When
occurring after subordinate clauses such as adverbial clause of
temporal and conditional clause, tes functions as a topic marker
rather than a cohesion marker.

However, it is to be considered that whenever tes
appears interclausally and indicates vague meaning of the
clauses in between, as to whether function tes does—a
cohesion marker showing temporal sequencing of an event or a
topic marker. The next part will show more clearly answer of
that problematic occurrence.

(iii) tes with other Clausal Constructions
In these constructions, the particle tes marks the
incorporating clausal topics in which the topic is part of the
comment or the predicate of the previous sentence. The
examples below are serial clause construction. Clauses preceding tes in (24)-(27) can be analyzed as clausal topics. They are continuous topics in which topics are the predicate or comment of the previous clauses. This usage provides the contrastive functions of tes that occurs interclausally between the function of topic marker and cohesion marker—showing chronological order of a narrative. Since the previous comment or predicate is mentioned again in the presence clause and becomes a topic.

(24) a ...hej leej pov sw tsaam nyo ntshws tes
    PN    bend down PRT
b ... hej leej pov sw tsaam nov qaab hlas lus
    PN    faint come
   ‘Hey Leng Po Sue Tsang bent down then he fainted.’

(25) a ...nov qaab hlas lawm tes
    faint PF PRT
b ...hej leej pov sw tsaam
    PN
 c ...ib ci hws taag
    one CLF sweat all
   ‘(Hey Leng Po Sue Tsang) fainted, he sweated all over
his body.’

(26) a ... ib ci hws tuaj tes
    one CLF sweat come PRT
b ...faaj tim tshu hlo tus ntsuaj lus
    PN    bring CLF fan come
   ‘(He) sweated all over the body, Fang Ti
brought out a fan.’

(27) a ...peb ntsuaj tes
    three fan PRT
b ...hej leej pov sw tsaam
    PN
c ...seev plhawv lus tes
    regain again come PRT
   ‘(Fang Ti) fan (toward Hey Leng Po Sue Tsang)
three times. Hey Leng Po Sue Tsang recovered’

Generally, in the simultaneous discourse, repetitive may signal something the speaker wishes to, such as he wishes to highlight the content of the repetitive proposition; or the repetition of the speaker reflects his narrative style as he would like to delay the next proposition so as to attract the attention of the addressee(s); or even he merely does not remember the next proposition but does not want to be silent; or in conversation, he simply wants to keep the floor or the turn—the repetition is to continue or advance the discourse. However, no matter what the intention of the speaker in using repetitive clauses is, they are most likely, in my examples, topics marked by *tes*.

3. Conclusion

In sum, I have shown that, after looking at the data in the discourse level, *tes* is a multifunctional particle whose two major functions are cohesion and topic markers. In a narrative, *tes* is a cohesion marker connecting two independent clauses or more to form a coordinate construction. In this case, it indicates cause and effect as well as shows the temporal sequencing of events. The former has the meaning of ‘then, so, thus, consequently, but’ in English. After noun phrases, temporal and location phrases and conditional clauses, *tes* is claimed in this paper, a topic marker.

The functions of clauses connecting and topic marking of *tes* are believed being related. Clark (1992) claims that the conjunction conveying inexpressive meaning is developmental or inchoative conjunction to suggest that the conjunction introduces a new development with respect to an element topicalized by the conjunction. This type of conjunction is unique in that it conveys nonrestrictive and inexpressive meaning about the relationship being expressed. Such conjunctions are *thì* in Vietnamese, *los* in Hmong and *kô* in Black Tai. Clark states that ideas in SEA languages tend to be expressed in coordinate, in a linear fashion rather than in clause-within-clause constructions. They are often unmarked by conjunctions; therefore, when conjunctions are used they signal
that the speaker wishes to make some point about the relationship between clauses or phrases involved with that conjunction.

Clark (1992) may be right that ideas in SEA languages are expressed in a linear construction. The data from my field notes, however, reveal that ideas or propositions are often marked by particles indicating various functions. And whenever the cohesion markers are used they do always signal points the speaker wishes to make but rather they merely show the chronological order of ideas or propositions in the discourse.

Notes

1. The RPA system uses VV for nasal vowels and final consonant for tones:
   - b high level   - g low falling breathy
   - j high falling   - s low level
   - v mid rising   - m low with final glottal
   - Ø mid level

2. Abbreviations and symbol used in this paper:
   CLF classifier   PF perfective
   COP copular   PN proper name
   CP conjunctive particle   PRT particle
   EXC exclamation   TOP topic marker
   FUT future marker   .... pause

3. It is a well-known fact that particles cannot be glossed in the conventional way; hence no glosses are given in this paper.

4. Generally, the temporal and location phrases can be regarded as adverbial phrases in accordance with their functions of modifying of the whole clause. However, I use the term ‘temporal and location phrase’, in lieu of adverbial phrase, according to their functions in a narrative discourse as they are settings of events.

5. Determining the nominal expressions or prepositional expressions depends simply on the surface structure occurrence or non-occurrence of preposition. The status of the preposition in Hmong is not at all clear such as txhus ‘reach’ in (13), can
be translated as preposition or verb, or others can be translated as nouns of location.
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