

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

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0. INTRODUCTION

The White Hmong (Miao) of Laos¹ has an intransitive verb to directional motion, *los* [lɔ¹¹] 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/so) 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.

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 :

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'ở - thành (return - become)

thành - ra (become - go out)

hóa - ra (become - go out)

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 stay far far you2 already THEN we remember to you2 much so
 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.
we2 take put to you sell THEN we2 willing at ease already
 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 ua cas kav liam.
you2 take cut already five dollar THEN not do how so be it
 You're going to take out \$5, well, it's no problem.

- 1.4 Meslis, kuv tsis paub sau ntawv Askiv, kuv sau tsis yog,
Mary I not know write paper English I write not (be)so
los thov koj zam txim rau kuv thiab.
THEN request you yield pardon to I also
 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 ($[\phi]$) 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-ntaub los tsis muaj chaw muag \emptyset lawm.
3P do stitchery THEN not have place sell already
 She does needlework and/but there's no place to sell it.

- 1.6 Nws xav coj mus pub rau luag lwm tus, los \emptyset pub tsis tau li.
3P want take go give to others next person THEN give not able so
 She wanted to give away her wealth to other people, but she couldn't.

- 1.7 Nws tau tsaus-ntuj los \emptyset tsaus ntev heev.
3P get dark sky THEN dark long time very

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

Nws tau kaj -ntug los \emptyset kaj ntev heev.
3P get light sky THEN light long time very

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 sen-

tences 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.⁴ Here are examples in Vietnamese (1.12 - 13) and Thai (1.14), though the Thai sentence is a little unusual.⁵ Compare the Viet-

namese 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 thêu lại 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 Kháw thoó pháa léew kô phô-kháa mây 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

and the negation and questioning of existential *muaj* in 1.16 and 1.17. The sentences in 1.18 and 1.19, taken from 1.1 and 0.1 respectively, illustrate that *tsis los* 'not happen' and *puas los* 'does' it happen?' are ungrammatical for interclausal *los*.

- 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 Tsis muaj leej twg noj kiag.
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 tsis 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 tsis 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 VP⁶ 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 conjoins 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 pajntaub qab qwj txiav los zoo nkauj.
3P do stitchery snailshell cut THEN beautiful
She does snailshell applique and it's beautiful.
- 2.2 Muaj luag tus muab lawm los puam 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 pajntaub poob lawm los zoo kawg.
you2 get sell we2 group stitchery 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 ấy cũng 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.