กลุ่มสาขาภาษาศาสตร์

A Descriptive Phonology of Mewari

Royson Norman D'Souza[1]

Abstract

This phonological sketch outlines the phonemic system of the Mewari language, an Indo-Aryan language spoken in the state of Rajasthan, India. As in other Indo-Aryan languages, Mewari shows a four-way contrast among the stops (voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated, voiced unaspirated, and voiced aspirated) (D'Souza, 2013). Mewari has 8 vowel phonemes with their nasalized counterparts and 31 consonant phonemes and uses the Devanagari script. During the study, it is also noted that the Mewari shows a reduction in aspiration among the aspirated voiced stops and slight implosion among the unaspirated voiced stops.

Keywords: Coronals, dorsals, deletion, consonant harmony

1. Introduction

This study outlines the phonological sketch of the Mewari Language spoken in the Rajasthan state of India. The culture and language of Rajasthan can be divided into six major parts called circuits. The Mewar circuit is one of them. Mewar consists of five districts, which are Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara, Rajsamand and Pratapgarh. Mewari is the language spoken in the Mewar region (Abraham et al., 2012; Samuvel, Joshua, Koshy, and Abraham, 2012). **Figure 1** shows the Mewari language area with Kapasan Thesil marked, the subdistrict where Lakha Kheda village is situated.

Figure 1: Mewari Language Map (Mao provided courtesy of Rajappa, Creative Commons License)

[1] Payap University MA Linguistics Program, roysonnormandsouza@gmail.com

2. Literature Review

Mewari language is classified as an Indo-Aryan language belonging to the Indo-European language family (Abraham et al., 2012; Cardona & Jain, 2003; Masica, 1991). This belongs to the Rajasthan language cluster, having lexical and grammatical similarities with the Rajasthani varieties. Abraham et al. (2012) list four dialects of Mewari, and the dialect spoken in Chittaurgarh is shown to be the central dialect, which is highly intelligible in other dialectical regions.

In the past few years, there have been some materials developed about Mewari. Gusain (2004), in his book, has written in brief about the phonology of Mewari and the description of Mewari grammar. D'Souza (2013) has described the phonology of the Mewari language, but this remains an unpublished document. A Mewari-Hindi-English dictionary ("Mewari trilingual dictionary") is published by the Nirmaan Society which consists of a brief description of Mewari orthography and lexicon of 6407 words with their gloss and/or meaning in Hindi, pronunciation of the lexeme in International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), grammatical information, and example sentences for each of the lexemes, variants (Jat, Gadri, Charan, Yogi, and Yogi, 2018). The digital copy of this dictionary is available on the Nirmaan website for the Mewari language (https://www.mewari.org.in). In recent years Nirmaan Society has also developed pre-primers, primers, story books, proverbs, and other materials in Mewari.

The sociolinguistic assessment of Abraham et al. (2012) recommended language development in Mewari. The current study of Mewari phonology was undertaken in response to these recommendations and as an extension of the phonology studies done by D'Souza (2013) with more data being available now. It aims to provide a solid linguistic foundation for developing a standardized orthography based on the Devanagari script and for developing mother tongue literacy materials. This paper aims to officially document Mewari phonology, and it is hoped that this study will motivate the Mewari people to document, preserve and develop the language for future generations.

2. Methodology

The dialect studied for this analysis is the one spoken in Chittorgarh (pronounced as Chittaurgarh) district of Rajasthan. This dialect of Mewari was chosen following the recommendations for language development in the sociolinguistics survey by Abraham et. al (2012). Specifically, the data collected for the analysis was produced by Mewari speakers residing in Kapasan Taluk of Chittorgarh district in Rajasthan, which is considered the central dialect (Abraham et al., 2012). Most of the words were elicited in isolation, and some were taken from recorded texts. Mr. Om Lal Kumawat of Kapasan Taluk served as a language informant during the Phonology Workshop held in Nashik, Maharashtra, from January 25th to February 19th, 2010. For this paper, additional data was used from the Mewari trilingual dictionary as more evidence (Jat et al., 2018).

The analysis presented here is based on research conducted between November 2007 and 2013 and reevaluated in 2024 in light of the additional data from the Mewari trilingual dictionary (Jat et al., 2018). The

analysis was done on a corpus of approximately 1800 words collected by the author between 2007 and 2013 (D'Souza, 2013) and the Mewari trilingual dictionary, which contains over 6000 entries (Jat et al., 2018). For the analysis of contrast and relation between the sounds, SIL's Phonology Assistant software was used.

3. Consonants

Mewari has thirty-one consonant phonemes that fall into six classes based on their place of articulation (**Table 1**): labial (including bilabial and labio-dental), denti-alveolar (including dental and alveolar), palatal (including palato-alveolar and palatal), retroflex, velar, and glottal.

Table 1: Consonant inventory in Mewari

	Bilabial		Labio-Dental	Dental		Alveolar	Palato-Alveolar		Palatal	Retroflex		Velar		Glottal
Plosives	p	b		t̪	d̪					ʈ	ɖ	k	g	
	pʰ	bʱ		t̪ʰ	d̪ʱ					ʈʰ	ɖʱ	kʰ	gʱ	
Affricates							t͡ʃ	d͡ʒ						
							t͡ʃʰ	d͡ʒʱ						
Nasals		m				n					ɳ			
Fricatives						s								h
Taps or Flaps						ɾ					ɽ			
Laterals						l					ɭ			
Approximants			ʋ						j					

Contrast among consonants

/paʈ/ *'millstone upper stone'*
/pʰaʈ/ *'to blast'*
/baʈ/ *'weighing stone'*
/bʱaʈ/ *'caste that keeps a record of genealogy'*
/maɭ/ *'fertile land'*
/ʋaʈ/ *'wick'*
/t̪ak/ *'stare'*
/t̪ʰak/ *'tired'*
/d̪ak/ *'resins'*
/d̪ʱap/ *'satisfied'*
/ʈaʈ/ *'bald'*
/ʈʰaʈ/ *'comfort'*

/ɖaʈ/	*'scold'*
/ɖʱak/	*'a tree butea frondosa'*
/nak/	*'nose'*
/t͡ʃak/	*'potter's wheel'*
/t͡ʃʰak/	*'to taste'*
/d͡ʒal/	*'spider web'*
/d͡ʒʱag/	*'foam'*
/kəɾ/	*'do'*
/kʰəl/	*'oilcake'*
/gəl/	*'large underground water spring'*
/gʱəɳ/	*'large sledgehammer'*
/mən/	*'mind'*
/sag/	*'vegetable'*
/ɾaʈ/	*'fight'*
/laʈ/	*'love'*
/hak/	*'plough'*
/bal/	*'hair'*
/lal/	*'saliva'*
/laʈ/	*'love'*
/laj/	*'wildfire'*

Mewari contrasts stops at five places of articulation: labial, dental, retroflex, palato-alveolar and velar. The palato-alveolar stops are laminal post-alveolar affricates.

Stops contrast for voicing and aspiration. Aspirated and breathy voiced stops (traditionally known as 'voiced aspirates') are characteristic of most Indo-Aryan languages. However, Mewari speakers exhibit a notable reduction in breathy voice compared to Hindi. Breathy-voiced stops are often pronounced with little or no breathy release and come close to sounding like plain-voiced stops in many cases, although sometimes a slight breathiness can be heard on the following vowel. Aspirated stops of all kinds, whether voiceless or breathy voiced, are rare or barely present in non-initial positions and are preserved primarily in word-initial positions (Allen, 1957, p. 6). Compare the breathy release of the initial plosive in /bʱal/ 'brow', as spoken by a Hindi speaker, with the much weaker breathy release of the initial plosive in /bʱaʈ/ 'a caste name', as spoken by a Mewari speaker in **Figure 2** below. The waveform and spectrogram for Hindi /bʱal/ 'brow' were generated from sound recordings that accompany Ohala (1994). The sound recordings were downloaded from http://web.uvic.ca/ling/resources/ipa/handbook_downloads.htm.

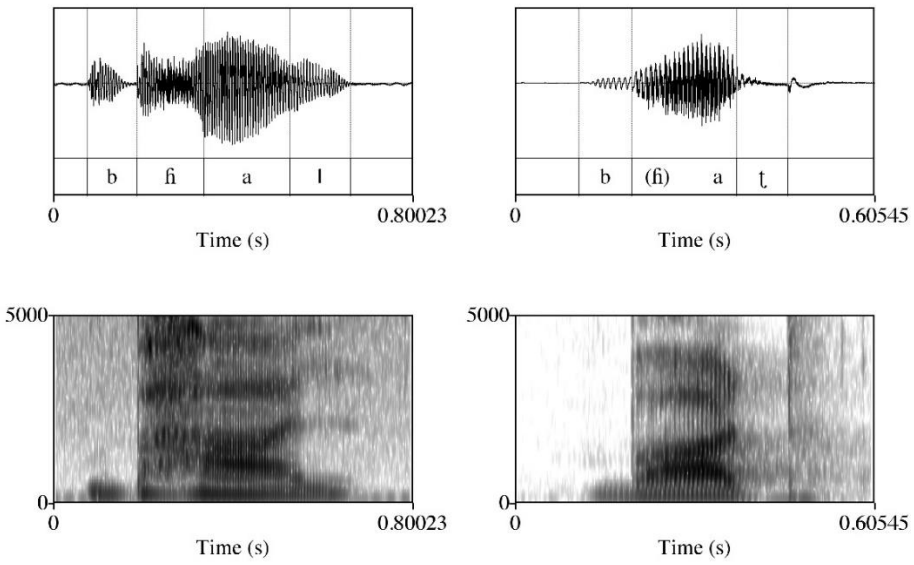

Figure 2: Hindi /bʱal/ 'brow' (left) and Mewari /b(ʱ)aʈ/ 'a caste name' (right)

It is worth noting that the loss or reduction of breathy voiced stops is also characteristic of other Indo-Aryan languages of the western and northwestern zones. For instance, to the north of Rajasthan, Panjabi has lost the breathy voiced stops of Old Indo-Aryan and replaced them with tonal contrasts (Bhatia, 1993; Malik, 1995; Shackle, 2003); to the south, Gujarati has shifted breathiness from the stops to the vowels (Mistry, 1997); and to the west, Sindhi has has converted most breathy voiced stops into a new series of modal voiced stops. In Sindhi, some breathy stops are still retained under special circumstances, thus creating a three-way contrast between implosive (from previously modal voiced stops), modal voiced (from previously breathy voiced stops) and breathy voiced stops that have maintained their original phonation (Turner, 1924).

Mewari shows developments similar to Sindhi in that the modal voiced stops of Mewari are often pronounced with mild implosion. According to Ladefoged & Maddieson (1996), one of the tell-tale signs of implosion is a steady increase in the amplitude of voicing during the period of oral closure leading up to the release of the stop. By comparison, normal "modal" voicing typically shows a slight decrease in the amplitude of voicing just prior to the release of the stop. These patterns are evident in the waveforms for modal voiced /b/ and implosive /ɓ/ in **Figure 3**, which shows the words /buʈʊ/ 'shoes' and /ɓaru/ 'child' as spoken in Sindhi. The Sindhi waveforms are based on recordings that accompany Nihalani, P. (1999). The sound recordings were downloaded from http://web.uvic.ca/ling/resources/ipa/handbook_downloads.htm.

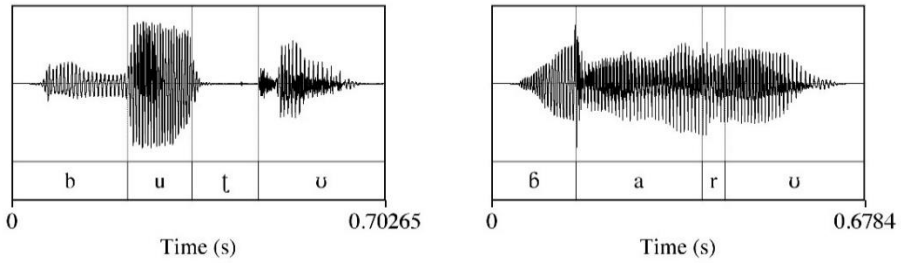

Figure 3: Sindhi voiced stop example /buʈʊ/ 'shoes' and implosive stop example /ɓarʊ/ 'child'

The voiced stops of Mewari exhibit the same general pattern as the implosive stops of Sindhi, albeit not quite as drastic. That is, they show an overall increase in the amplitude of voicing leading up to the release of oral closure rather than a decrease in amplitude just prior to release. Compare the waveform for Mewari /baḍi/ [ɓaḍi] (or possibly [ɓaɗi]) 'fire' in **Figure 4** with that of Sindhi /ɓarʊ/ 'child' in **Figure 3**. There may also be some implosion on the intervocalic /d/ in /baḍi/ 'fire', but it is more difficult to discern the implosion in non-initial positions.

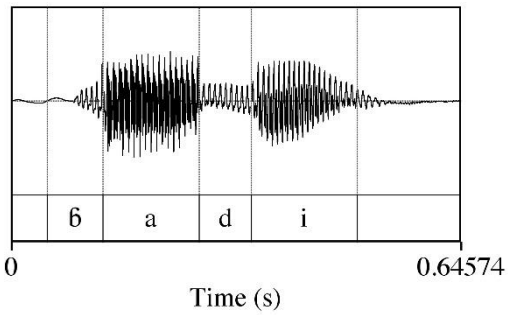

Figure 4: Mewari /baḍi/ [ɓadi] (or [ɓaɗi]) 'fire'

Unlike Sindhi, we were not able to find evidence of a three-way contrast between modal-voiced, breathy voiced and implosive stops in Mewari. Rather, mild implosion appears to be the normal phonetic implementation of the plain modal voiced (i.e., non-breathy) series. Ladefoged & Maddieson (1996, p. 86) have observed that implosives are generally favoured at anterior places of articulation and that bilabial implosives are by far the most common cross-linguistically. This trend is reflected in Mewari where implosion is strongest on labial stops, weakest on velars, and intermediate on all others.

Implosion is not represented in the phonetic and phonemic transcriptions employed throughout this paper. The reader should bear in mind that plain-voiced stops are typically produced with some implosion as described here.

The voiced bilabial plosive [b] and [bʱ] also occurs in free variation with [ʋ], a voiced labio-dental approximant, in a restricted set of words. It is mostly noticed as a dialectical variation. Outside of this restricted set, labial stops and approximants contrast. Examples showing free variation include: /baɾ/ [bɐɾ]~[ʋɐɾ] *'day of the week' and* /bʱəɾka/ [bʱəɾkɐ]~[ʋəɾkɐ] *'rain'.*

The voiceless palato-alveolar affricate [t͡ʃ], and [t͡ʃʰ] also occur in free variation with [s], a voiceless alveolar grooved fricative, in a restricted set of words as in [ɾət͡ʃko]~[ɾəsko] 'a type of green fodder'. It is mostly noticed as a dialectical variation. Outside of this restricted set, voiceless palato-alveolar affricate and fricatives contrast.

Mewari has two fricative phonemes: /s/ and /h/. /s/ is predominantly alveolar [s], but it also has a laminal post-alveolar allophone [ʃ] which occurs only before a palatal approximant as in [kəʃjan] 'how'. Glottal /h/ is predominantly breathy voiced [ɦ] except in utterance-initial position where it tends to be voiceless [h]. Like aspiration and breathy voice in general, the phoneme /h/ is very rare outside of the word-initial position. The general absence of non-initial /h/ was also noted for Mewari by Allen (1957, p. 6).

Mewari appears to show free variation between /s/ and /h/ in a select number of words. Words showing this /s/ ~ /h/ variation tend to have /s/ in other Indo-Aryan languages suggesting that the variation stems historically from lenition of Old Indo Aryan*s (Allen, 1957, p. 6). Examples of words showing this variation include the following: /həɳɖasi/ [həɳɖɐsi]~[səɳɖɐsi] 'tong' and /həngɭo/ [həŋgɻo]~[səŋgɻo] 'all'

Mewari has four liquids, two of which are rhotics, /ɾ/ and /ɽ/, and two of which are laterals, /l/ and /ɭ/. The phonemic status of the retroflex flap /ɽ/ is somewhat marginal because it is in near complementary distribution with the retroflex stop /ɖ/. The stop occurs word-initially and in homorganic consonant clusters while the flap occurs intervocalically and word-finally after vowels. However, there are a few cases where the stop also occurs intervocalically and finally after vowels as in the minimal pair /goɖo/ *'knee'* and /gʰoɽo/ *'horse'*. Thus, it appears to contrast with the flap in these environments. For this reason, the flap /ɽ/ is treated as a marginal phoneme. The retroflex lateral /ɭ/ tends to be flapped in most environments except in homorganic consonant clusters. It does not occur word-initially. Mewari has two approximants /ʋ/ and /j/.

Mewari has three nasal consonant phonemes: /m/, /n/ and /ɳ/. The retroflex nasal does not occur word-initially and is flapped intervocalically and finally after vowels, but not in homorganic nasal+stop clusters. Phonetic dental, palato-alveolar and velar nasals occur only before homorganic consonants and can be analyzed as allophones of alveolar /n/.

4. Vowels

There are eight oral vowel phonemes, each with a phonemic nasalized counterpart. They are classified as front, central and back vowels (**Table 2**).

Table 2: Mewari phonemic vowel chart

	Front		Central		Back	
Close	i	ĩ			u	ũ
Mid Centralized	ɪ	ĩ			ʊ	ʊ̃
Close-mid	e	ẽ			o	õ
Mid			ə	ə̃		
Open			a	ã		

Contrast among Oral Vowels

Closed syllable

/lik/ *'lice's egg on the head'*
/lɪk/ *'write'*

/pɪr/ *'father's house'*
/per/ *'wear'*
/pəs/ *'caught into'*
/par/ *'cross over'*
/por/ *'last year'*
/pul/ *'bridge'*
/pol/ *'large entrance'*
/d̪ʊk/ *'grief'*
/d̪uk/ *'pain'*

Open syllable

/bɪʈi/ *'finger ring'*
/piʈi/ *'the wedding ceremony'*
/peʈi/ *'box'*
/paʈi/ *'long agricultural farmland'*
/poʈi/ *'stomach'*
/gəli/ *'lane'*
/gali/ *'scolding'*
/goli/ *'tablet'*
/melo/ *'fair'*
/molo/ *'slow'*
/mulo/ *'radish'*
/həɽo/ *'fence of thorn'*
/huɽo/ *'parrot'*

Mewari shows contrast between five long tense (or peripheral) vowels /i/, /e/, /a/, /o/, /u/ and three short lax (non-peripheral) vowels /ɪ/, /ə/, /ʊ/. Each vowel has phonemic oral and nasal counterparts. All vowels are voiced.

Many Indo-Aryan languages contrast close-mid vowels /e, o/ with open-mid vowels /ɛ/, /ɔ/ (or, alternatively, diphthongal /ei/ and /ou/). Previous publications also report this contrast for various languages of Rajasthan (Gusain, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004). The open-mid vowels have separate orthographic symbols in the Devanagari script which is used for other Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi and which is commonly used for the languages of Rajasthan. Although the Rajasthani languages lack standardized orthographies, the close-

mid and open-mid vowels are often distinguished in the spelling of words. However, they are not clearly distinguished in speech by any of our language informants. A similar observation was made by Magier (1983) concerning Marwari:

> "In spoken Mārwāṛī, I find that the higher-mid and lower-mid vowels. have more or less collapsed together and are now all pronounced as mean-mid vowels... Thus, although Bahl [1980:5] lists minimal pairs showing the contrast between /e/:/ai/ and between /o/:/au/, these words, though still spelt differently, are pronounced identically, as far as I can determine without electronic analysis of the tapes, by the people in the areas I studied." (Magier, 1983, pp. 34–35)

For this reason, we have not recognized the open-mid vowels /ɛ/, /ɔ/ as phonemes. Further research is required to determine if they are preserved as distinct phonemes by some speakers or dialects.

It is also noticed that there is slight breathiness on all vowels following /h/. When older people speak the breathiness is clearly evident, but the younger generation instead inserts 'h' in the word-initial position as in the example below: /həɭ/ [ə̤ɻ]~[həɻ] *'plough' and* /hãp/ [ə̤̃p]~[hə̃p] *'pant'*

Contrast among Oral and Nasal Vowels

In Mewari, vowels tend to be phonetically nasalized in the context of nasal consonants (especially before nasal consonants), but some nasal vowels occur in contexts without nasal consonants and must be treated as phonemic. Thus, all oral vowels have phonemic nasal counterparts, but the contrast between oral and nasal vowels is neutralized before nasal consonants where vowels are always predictably nasalized to some degree.

/t͡ʃik/ *'scream'*	and	/t͡ʃʰĩk/ *'sneeze'*
/heṭ/ *'love'*	and	/hẽṭ/ *'honey'*
/hug/ *'dirtiness'*	and	/hũʈ/ *'dry ginger'*
/t͡ʃʰaʈ/ *'rock'*	and	/t͡ʃʰãʈ/ *'select'*
/gəʊ/ *'cow'*	and	/gə̃ʊ/ *'wheat'*
/kəɾoṭ/ *'saw'*	and	/behõs/ *'faint'*
/t͡ʃəɾu/ *'large metal pot'*	and	/həɾũ/ *'mustard'*
/ḍʱʊpano/ *'incense'*	and	/ḍʱõʊaɽo/ *'smoke'*

5. Phonotactics

The syllable

The syllable nucleus is represented by one vowel and is obligatory. The onset and the coda are optional and are represented by consonants. All Mewari syllables conform to the following template: (C)(C)V(C)(C). Although complex onsets and codas both occur, no syllable contains both (i.e., there are no CCVCC syllables). There are eight-syllable types in Mewari. They are as follows:

(i) V	/o/	*'this'*
(ii) VC	/ek/	*'one'*
(iii) VCC	/ung/	*'doze'*
(iv) CV	/po/	*'tank for animals to drink water'*
(v) CVC	/bʱəs/	*'bark'*

(vi) CVCC /lung/ *'clove'*
(vii) CCV /kjaɾo/ *'furrow'*
(viii) CCVC /njaʊ/ *'justice'*

Syllables without onsets (i.e., V, VC, VCC) occur primarily in word-initial position. All syllable types occur in monosyllabic words except for CCV, which occurs only in polysyllabic words in our data. CCVC syllables occur only in monosyllabic words in our data.

Most monomorphemic noun and verb stems are disyllabic, but monosyllabic and trisyllabic stems are also common. Stems consisting of four or five syllables are rare.

Geminates

Geminates occur intervocalically, primarily after short vowels /ɪ/, /ə/ and /ʊ/ (Cardona & Jain, 2003, p. 729; Masica, 1991, p. 125). They contrast with singletons in those environments. There are also a few words with geminates occurring after long /a/.

/d͡ʒəbbo/ *'traditional kurta'*
/gət͡ʃt͡ʃəɾ/ *'stamp'*
/hɪʈ̤ʈ̤əɾ/ *'seventy'*
/pənnʊɾo/ *'leaves over maize bunch'*
/gaɾɾo/ *'sheep'*
/əssi/ *'eighty'*
/ʈ̤əlli/ *'sesame seed'*
/gəʈʈi/ *'millstone'*
/nɪsəɳɳi/ *'ladder'*
/məkki/ *'maize'*

Retroflex consonant harmony

Mewari has a pattern of retroflex consonant harmony. Dental and retroflex stops do not co-occur within roots. If a root contains two coronal plosives then both are either dental or retroflex. The following table shows the co-occurrence of dental, alveolar and retroflex consonants in C1V(N)C2 sequences. The leftmost column represents C1 and the top row represents C2.

Table 3: Co-occurrence of dental, alveolar and retroflex consonants in CV(N)C sequences

	t̪	t̪ʰ	d̪	d̪ʱ	t	tʰ	d	dʱ	ɾ	n	l	ɽ	ɳ	ɭ
t̪	4								23	6	10	7	6	16
t̪ʰ									5	2	1		2	2
d̪	3		6						19	9	2	6	10	12
d̪ʱ			2						6	4			4	2
t					12		2		4	2	1	3	5	1
tʰ					4		1		1	1		1	3	1
d					3		10		6	5	5		7	11
dʱ							1		2	1	3		2	3
ɾ	15		2		2		2		1	5	1	7	12	5
n	5		2		2		2		10	11		2		5
l	1		2		5		3		7	5	3	5	7	3
ɽ										1	2			
ɳ	3		1							1				
ɭ	1		2											

Some representative examples showing co-occurring dental plosives and co-occurring retroflex plosives are: /t̪it̪ər/ *'butterfly'*, /d̪ad̪o/ *'elder brother'*, /d̪ʱund̪/ *'fog'*, /tʰoɽi/ *'weak'*, /ɖoɖe/ *'one hundred fifty' and* /ɽiŋɖko/ *'wood'*

As revealed in **Table 3**, harmony applies only to co-occurring plosives. It does not apply between plosives and sonorants. Dental and retroflex plosives both co-occur freely with alveolar and retroflex sonorants.

/t̪irət̪/	*'sacred place'*
/t̪ʰəne/	*'to you'*
/peḍəl/	*'by foot'*
/t̪aɽ/	*'send forcibly'*
/t̪ʰaɳ/	*'udder'*
/d̪al/	*'pulse'*
/ɖeɾo/	*'tent'*
/ɽang/	*'leg'*
/ɖʱol/	*'drum (big)'*
/ɽʰoɽ/	*'place'*
/ɖəŋɖ/	*'punishment'*
/ɖʱol/	*'spill'*

Interestingly, **Table 3** also reveals that retroflex sonorants are never followed by other retroflex consonants. This may be due in part to the fact that retroflex sonorants do not occur word-initially. As a result, they rarely occur in the C1 position.

Stress

Stress does not appear to be contrastive in Mewari. When words are spoken in isolation the final syllable tends to be stressed. In connected speech, some words appear to lose their stress. Further research is required to confirm these observations and to identify the precise phonetic correlates of stress in Mewari.

/gaʈi/	[gaˈʈi]	*'shawl'*
/baɖi/	[baˈɖi]	*'fat'*

Morphophonology

Schwa Deletion

Schwa is deleted from the final closed syllable of a word when the stem is followed by a suffix beginning with a vowel. This can be illustrated by the plural.

/bələd/ *'ox'* //bəld-ã// *'oxen (plural)'*

6. Conclusion

As found in many Indo-Aryan languages, Mewari shows a four-way contrast among the stops (voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated, voiced unaspirated, and voiced aspirated). Mewari has 31 consonant phonemes and 8 vowel phonemes with their nasalized counterparts. With the limited analysis of the sound files, it is noted that the Mewari shows a reduction in aspiration among the aspirated voiced stops and slight implosion among the unaspirated voiced stops. A further study should be carried out to study this change, including more speakers from the same village.

All Mewari syllables conform to the following template: (C)(C)V(C)(C). Geminates occur intervocalically, primarily after short vowels /ɪ/, /ə/ and /ʊ/. They contrast with singletons in those environments. There are also a few words with geminates occurring after long /a/. Mewari demonstrates a pattern of retroflex consonant harmony. Dental and retroflex stops do not co-occur within roots. Stress does not appear to be contrastive in Mewari. As a phonological process, Mewari shows schwa deletion from the final closed syllable of a word when the stem is followed by a suffix beginning with a vowel.

References

Abraham, B., Koshy, B., & R., V. R. (2012). *Sociolinguistic survey of selected Rajasthani speech varieties of Rajasthan, India* (Vol. 2). SIL International.

Allen, W. S. (1957). Some Phonological Characteristics of Rājasthānī. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/610359

Bhatia, T. K. (1993). *Punjabi*. Routledge.

Cardona, G., & Jain, D. (Eds.). (2003). *The Indo-Aryan languages*. Routledge.

D'Souza, R. N. (2013). *A descriptive phonology of Mewari* [Unpublished manuscript].

Gusain, L. (2000). *Bagri*. Lincom Europa.

Gusain, L. (2001). *Shekhawati*. Lincom Europa.

Gusain, L. (2003). *Mewati*. Lincom Europa.

Gusain, L. (2004). *Mewari*. Lincom Europa.

Jat, G. L., Gadri, R. L., Charan, R. S., Yogi, K., & Yogi, M. K. (Eds.). (2018). *Mewari dictionary* (2nd ed.). Nirmaan Society.

Ladefoged, P., & Maddieson, I. (1996). *The sounds of the world's languages*. Blackwell Publishers.

Magier, D. S. (1983). *Topics in the Grammar of Marwari*. University of Califonia.

Malik, A. N. (1995). *The phonology and morphology of Panjabi*. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.

Masica, C. P. (1991). *The Indo-Aryan languages*. Cambridge University Press.

Mistry, P. J. (1997). Gujarati Phonology. In A. S. Kaye & P. T. Daniels (Eds.), *Phonologies of Asia and Africa* (Vol. 2). Eisenbrauns.

Nihalani, P. (1999). Sindhi. In *In Handbook of the International Phonetic Association* (pp. 131–134). Cambridge University Press.

Ohala, M. (1994). *Hindi*. *24*(1), 35–38.

Samuvel, N., Joshua, M., Koshy, B., & Abraham, B. (2012). *Sociolinguistic survey of selected Rajasthani speech varieties of Rajasthan, India* (Vol. 1). SIL International.

Shackle, C. (2003). Panjabi. In G. Cardona & D. Jain (Eds.), *The Indo-Aryan languages* (pp. 581–621). Routledge.

Turner, R. L. (1924). The Sindhi recursives or voiced stops preceded by glottal closure. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, *3*(2), 301–315.

Discourse Functions of the Particle *jek* in Hmong Shib

Elissa Low Jia Min[1]

Abstract

The particle *jek* in Hmong Shib [cqd] is found in sentence-initial, sentence-medial and sentence-final position, and can be translated in a variety of ways, or not at all. This paper argues that the discourse functions of *jek* in sentence-medial and sentence-final position can be understood as either giving prominence to a point of departure, or backgrounding the clause or sentence that it attaches to, in order to highlight what follows as a significant development or climactic event.

Keywords: Hmong, discourse, backgrounding

Introduction

Hmong (Hmong-Mien; known as Miao-Yao in China) is a cluster of languages spoken in southern China and the northern parts of Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, and among diaspora in the USA, Australia, and other countries. This study focuses on Hmong Shib, which is one of the lects of the Chuanqiandian (CQD) dialect cluster (ISO 639-3 code: [cqd]) of Hmong spoken in the provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan in southwestern China. The writing system used here is Chuanqiandian Miao orthography. The letters <b, x, d, s, l, t, k, f> at the end of each syllable are used to mark tone. The data used in this paper is from the publication *Selected Hmong Folktales* (Zhang & Cohen, 2018), a collection of folktales told by Li Chengmei, a Hmong Shib woman from Wenshan prefecture in Yunnan, China.

Like many Asian languages, Hmong Shib has a plethora of particles used to indicate illocutionary force, speaker attitude, sentence mood and so on. One of these particles is *jek* (alternatively *zhek, zek, zhes* or *dek*), which is nearly ubiquitous in Hmong Shib narrative and can be translated in a variety of ways, or not translated at all. This paper aims to determine the discourse functions of the particle *jek* in Hmong Shib.

Methodology

The research corpus is a set of 10 folktales. Out of these, three texts from the folktale collection were used as the primary corpus for this study and fully analysed, with details in Table 1. The other text cited in this study is *Mid Ghaib Boux Guat Roub Nzhuab* 'The Revenge of the Young Chickens' (49 lines).

[1] Master of Arts in Linguistics, Payap University
Email: elissalow.lx@gmail.com

Table 1 Texts used in the primary corpus

Title	Abbreviation	Number of lines
Mid Dof Zhuas 'Why Cats Eat Rats'	MDZ	30
Ngoux Naos Shuad Ghuad Zhuas 'Ngou Nao Picks Rat Droppings'	NNSGZ	122
Shout Ndox Uat Jangl Muax Hnob Ghob 'Why There Are Stars in the Sky'	Stars	26

The use of *jek* was examined in these texts using the method of discourse analysis in Levinsohn (2023) in which he lays out the steps to analyse discourse features that have direct implications in the translation of narrative texts (2023, p. 1).

Morphosyntactic features of *jek*

Jek may appear in sentence-initial, sentence-final or sentence-medial position. When it appears in sentence-initial position, it can be translated as 'so', 'then', 'and', or 'but', and it is most frequently left untranslated.

(1)	***Jek***	*lob*	*bad*	*nyax*	*hab*	*lob*	*bad*	*gob*
	JEK	CL.INAN	cake	silver	and	CL.INAN	cake	gold
	jeuf	*ib*	*lob*	*mol*	*kuaf*	*drout*	*ib*	*shangb*
	then	one	CL.INAN	go	hang	on	one	side
	ndox	*leux.*						
	sky	PFV						

'So [that is how] the gold cake came to hang in the sky on one side of the horizon, and the silver cake came to hang in the sky on the other side of the horizon.' (Stars 21)

Jek may appear at the end of sentences, and is always left untranslated in this position:

(2)	*Jek,*	*nil buab*	*jeuf*	*nax hnob*	*nax hnob*	*uat*	*let ndeuf*
	JEK	3SG	then	every day	every day	do	that way
	mol	***jek.***					
	CONT	JEK					

'The two of them did this every single day.' (NNSGZ 29)

In sentence-medial positions, *jek* can occur in phrase- or clause-final position, for example, after a point of departure, tail-head linkage or other clauses, and it can also occur in phrase- or clause-initial position before a topic or subject in a main clause. The clause-initial use is not examined in this paper.

(3) a. *Muax* *ib* *hnob* ***jek,***
have one day JEK
'One day, however,'

b. *nil buab* *mol* *mol* *zos* *bel* *lob* *drongb*
3PL move move arrive above CL.INAN mountain
jek,
JEK
'they went up on a mountain,'

c. *bof* *muax* *ib* *hangd* *roub gis,* *laok shix* *let*
see have one valley nettles extremely SUB
maol *rongt.*
be fine be good
'and [they] saw that there was a meadow valley full of especially tender plants.'
(NNSGZ 3)

Clause-final *jek* can produce an interpretation of a subordinate clause in the absence of a subordinating conjunction, as seen in example (4) below. Typically, such clauses marked with *jek* can be interpreted to be temporal subordinate clauses, and can be translated with 'after', 'when', or 'since.'

(4) a. *Nil* *mol* *zos* *bel* *dleuf* ***jek,***
3SG move arrive above mountain pass JEK
'When she reached the mountain pass,'

b. *nil* *shaib* *ndrangl* *lob* *houd* *daox...*
3SG look below CL.INAN Flower Mountain Festival grounds
'she looked down toward the Flower Mountain Festival grounds...' (NNSGZ 53)

In (5b), *jek* is used with tail-head linkage, where part of the main clause in (5a) is repeated in the non-finite clause (5b) at the beginning of the next sentence.

(5) a. *Jek* *lob* *bad* *nyax* *hab* *lob* *bad*
JEK CL.INAN cake silver and CL.INAN cake
gob *jeuf* *ib* *lob* *mol* *kuaf* *drout*
gold then one CL.INAN go hang on
ib *shangb* *ndox* *leux.*
one side sky PFV
'So that is how the gold cake came to hang in the sky on one side of the horizon, and the silver cake came to hang in the sky on the other side of the horizon.'

b. *Ib* *lob* *mol* *kuaf* *drout* *ib* *shangb*
one CL.INAN go hang ON one side
ndox ***jek,***
sky JEK
'Hanging like that on opposite sides of the sky,'

c. *Ngoux Hnob* *tab* *Ndrous Hlit* *jeuf* *zhit dout* *nyaob*
sun and moon then cannot stay
uat get *leux.*
together PFV
'the sun and the moon could no longer be together.' (Stars 21, 22)

Semantics of *jek*

The semantics of a jek-marked clause depends greatly on the interpretation of how it relates to its context. The logical relation between a clause marked with jek and the following clause can include cause-effect, action-consequence, contrast, temporal succession and simultaneity. These semantics are not inherent to the particle itself. The following examples demonstrate the different semantic relations that jek can encompass, such as: cause-effect (6), action-consequence (7), contrast (8), simultaneity (9), and temporal succession (10). It is also not always the case that jek specifies a semantic relation, since it is sometimes left untranslated.

(6) *Dol* *mid* *ncaik* *ndeuf* *nil* *duab* *dol*
CL.AN little daughter DIST 3SG only one CL.AN
mol *nyaob* *daof* *hangd rongd* ***jek,***
go live over on the side forested mountains JEK
nil *zhit dout luas* *nyaob* *leuf...*
3SG be lonely live COMPL
'As the little girl had to live all alone there in the forest, she was so extremely lonely...' (Stars 12)

(7)

"Gaox	*tlat*	*pleud*	*drout*	*hod*	*lob*	*dlangb*
2SG	jump	jump	to	in	CL.INAN	manger
suat	***jek,***					
hull	JEK					
gaox	*jeuf*	*dout*	*ib*	*ngeuf*	*kout*	*nbuas*
2SG	then	obtain	one	pair	shoe	satin
lak."						
REA						

'"[If] you jump into the manger of rice hulls, you will get a pair of silk shoes."' (NNSGZ 49)

(8)

Muax	*ib*	*hnob*	***jek,***			
have	one	day	JEK			
dol	*naf chab,*	*dol*	*naf chab*	*jeuf*	*mol*	*dlet*
CL.AN	stepmother	CL.AN	stepmother	then	go	pick
roub nbuat	*nat hak,*					
pig fodder	TIME SCOPE					

'But one day the stepmother went out on the mountainside to pick fodder for the pigs...' (NNSGZ 30)

(9)

Jek,	*nil buab*	*aob*	*dol*	*jeuf*	*nyaob*	*ndeuf*
JEK	3SG	two	CL.AN	then	be at	there
ched	*ched*	*ched*	*juaf,*			
scold	RDP	RDP	quarrel			
ched	*ched*	*juaf*	***jek,***			
scold	RDP	quarrel	JEK			
mid	*haik*	*dak*	*yaos*	*zhuas*	*naox*	*leuf, ...*
cat	say	COMP	COP	rat	eat	COMPL

'So the two of them quarreled and quarreled, accusing and insulting each other. The cat said that the rat must have eaten the fat...' (MDZ 18)

(10)

Nil	*suak*	*dout*	***jek,***		
3SG	feel	ACHV	JEK		
nil	*jaox*	*mol*	*zos*	*daof*	*dol*
3SG	bring	go	arrive	over on the side	CL.AN
mid	*ncaik*	*aot*	*zat*	*nyaob*	***jek,***
little	daughter	swell	goiter	live	JEK

nil	*jeuf*	*muab*	*jed*	*hlaot*	*dol*
3SG	then	take	hand over	quickly	CL.AN

mid *ncaik…*
little daughter

'After she pulled them from her pocket, she took them to where the little girl with the two lumps on her neck was living and quickly passed them to her.' (Stars 18)

As can be seen from the above examples, *jek* itself does not constrain a specific interpretation when connecting clauses.

Literature Review

Various analyses of *jek* in Hmong Shib have been proposed to date. One analysis is that it is a particle that can be translated 'upon' or 'since' when it appears after preposed clauses (Cohen, 2011, p. 26). Another proposal is that it belongs to a set of particles that add prominence to non-final clauses (Cohen, 2019, p. 14). The lexicon defines *jek* as "a particle that delimits the foregoing content as the scope of the following comment." (Cohen, 2024, personal communication).

The equivalent particle in other Hmong varieties has been studied as well. Dej-Amorn (2004) identifies the particle *tes* in Green Hmong spoken in Thailand as either marking cohesion or topics. As a cohesion marker, *tes* can conjoin independent clause to indicate a cause-effect relation or temporal sequencing. When it appears after noun phrases, adverbial phrases or conditional clauses, it functions as a topic marker.

McLaughlin states that *zhek* in Hmong Soud is a scope marker that occurs with topics and adverbial settings and is "used to signal that the sentence is not complete" (2018, p. 15). The discourse functions of *zhek* include "closure of a discourse unit, setting the scope for a new discourse unit, signaling the peak of a narrative, and signaling secondary narrative salience" (McLaughlin, 2012, p. 160). The definition of a "scope particle" follows Iwasaki (1987), where the main function of the Japanese particle *wa* is argued to be "setting the scope for the predication" (Iwasaki, 1987, p. 107), which can encompass negative scope, comparison, and contrast. This is a broader function than topic or theme marking. However, in my view, the scope-setting function of *jek* does not adequately account for its use in sentence-final position.

Discourse perspective

The particle *jek* is not grammatically required, and indeed does not occur in every position that it could possibly occur in. The principle of "choice implies meaning" (Levinsohn, 2023, p. 2) means that there should be a linguistic reason for its absence or presence. There is also the question of if and how the sentence-initial and sentence-final use of *jek* is related to the scope-setting function of *jek*. Since an explanation of *jek* seems to lie beyond the scope of syntax and semantics, a discourse analysis approach may serve to illuminate its functions.

Sentences in a discourse are not all equal in importance or prominence. In narrative, the themeline or foreground material moves the discourse forward and contributes to the development or progression of the narrative themeline; specifically, this consists of events in chronological sequence performed by agents (Levinsohn, 2023, p. 69). On the other hand, background material is used to set the scene or add information that fills out the gaps in the narrative, and consists of non-events, events outside the chronological sequence, or events that are marked as having secondary importance. Non-event material can include setting, explanatory, evaluative, collateral and performative information (Levinsohn, 2023, p. 72) which is background by default. Events that are not part of the themeline are considered to be backgrounded and are typically marked as such.

I argue that the concept of backgrounding and highlighting is a more useful concept for understanding the function and usage of *jek*. *Jek* is a backgrounding device that marks points of departure, clauses and sentences as less prominent in relation to what follows in order to highlight certain parts of the themeline. The following sections demonstrate the use of *jek* as a backgrounding device for material that is background by default, and for themeline events.

Jek marking points of departure

When *jek* marks points of departure or tail-head linkage, it gives them thematic prominence, and the effect is to highlight what follows as a significant development or a climactic event. The highlighting effect of *jek* can be seen in the difference between unmarked and *jek*-marked situational points of departure. *Jek*-marked points of departure, in addition to bridging a discontinuity, portray what follows as a complication, inciting event or significant development, whereas unmarked points of departure function only to establish a starting point for the utterance and to bridge a discontinuity. For example, in (11), the unmarked point of departure *muab ib xongt* ‘one year’ sets the scene for the first event of the themeline. It is not until the next paragraph that the inciting event occurs.

(11)	*Ek,*	***muax***	***ib***	***xongt,***	*nil buab*	*jeuf*	*duat*
	and then	have	one	year	3PL	then	kill
	dout	*ib*	*dol*	*nbuat*	*deb*	*draos*	*draos*
	ACHV	one	CL.AN	pig	field	be.fat	be.fat
	let…						
	STA						

‘One year, they [went hunting and] killed a wild boar that was very fat.’ (MDZ 3)

In example (12), the point of departure *muax ib hnob* ‘one day’ is marked with *jek*. In this story, the previous sentence is about how the couple were pitiful and had to work hard as manual labourers. The *jek*-marked point of departure serves to highlight what follows as a contrast from the previous sentence, when the

couple happen on a meadow valley full of plants. The use of *jek* thus portrays the change in circumstance as a significant development.

(12) a. *Muax* *ib* *hnob* ***jek,***
have one day JEK
'One day, however,'

b. *nil buab* *mol* *mol* *zos* *bel* *lob* *drongb*
3PL move move arrive above CL.INAN mountain
jek,
JEK
'they went up on a mountain,'

c. *bof* *muax* *ib* *hangd* *roub gis,* *laok shix* *let*
see have one valley nettles extremely SUB
maol *rongt.*
be fine be good
'and [they] saw that there was a meadow valley full of especially tender plants.'
(NNSGZ 3)

(13) is another example of the same. In (13a), the point of departure (*puak touk ot* 'very long ago') in the first sentence is not marked with jek, since it is simply setting the scene and introducing participants. In the second sentence in (13b), the point of departure (*muax ib hnob* 'one day') is marked with *jek* in order to highlight the inciting event of the mother hen being killed, which leads to the young chickens plotting revenge.

(13) a. *Puak touk ot,* *muax* *ib* *dol* *box ghaib,*
very long ago have one CL.AN hen
nil *jaox* *dreud* *nil* *jaod* *mid* *nyuas*
3SG bring CONT 3SG DEM.PL little child
mol *daof* *hangd rongd* *keuk* *gangb* *naox.*
go over on the side forested mountains pick insect eat

b. *Jek,* *muax* *ib* *hnob* *jek,*
JEK have one day JEK
jeuf *muax* *ib* *dol* *blik* *duab* *pleut*
then have one CL.AN wildcat only one jump
dif *koub fangb* *lol* *jek,*
across underbrush come JEK
jeuf *muab* *dol* *box ghaib* *dof* *mol* *naox*
then MUAB CL.AN hen bite go eat

leuf *lox.*
COMPL PRT
'But one day, a wildcat jumped out of the tall grasses and in one pounce, grabbed the mother hen, killed her in one bite and ate her up.' (Mid Ghaib 2.2)

The highlighting effect of *jek* is also found with tail-head linkage. The repeated part of the previous clause, which is the 'head', is not a themeline event. Marking tail-head linkage with *jek* has the effect of slowing down the narrative before a significant development or climactic event. In example (14), the *jek*-marked tail-head linkage highlights the following clause, 'the sun and the moon could no longer be together.' This is the climax of the story which all the tension in the narrative has been building towards. It is also the beginning of the resolution to the titular question of why there are stars in the sky.

(14) a. *Jek* *lob* *bad* *nyax* *hab* *lob* *bad*
JEK CL.INAN cake silver and CL.INAN cake
gob *jeuf* *ib* *lob* *mol* *kuaf* *drout*
gold then one CL.INAN go hang on
ib *shangb* *ndox* *leux.*
one side sky PFV
'So that is how the gold cake came to hang in the sky on one side of the horizon, and the silver cake came to hang in the sky on the other side of the horizon.'

b. *Ib* *lob* *mol* *kuaf* *drout* *ib* *shangb*
one CL.INAN go hang ON one side
ndox ***jek,***
sky JEK
'Hanging like that on opposite sides of the sky,'

c. *Ngoux Hnob* *tab* *Ndrous Hlit* *jeuf* *zhit dout* *nyaob*
sun and moon then cannot stay
uat get *leux.*
together PFV
'the sun and the moon could no longer be together.' (Stars 21, 22)

Jek marking events of secondary importance

When events that happen in chronological sequence are marked with *jek*, it signals that each event in turn is being portrayed as of less prominence or secondary importance compared to the unmarked clause that follows. This is to highlight what follows as a significant development or climactic material. *Jek* can be used to

indicate the relative prominence of clauses within a sentence by backgrounding the preceding clause, and it can also indicate the relative prominence between sentences by backgrounding a whole sentence.

In example (15), the rat has agreed to go up to the attic to have a look at the clay jar of fat. Clause (15a) and (15b) are the resulting action from his speech in the previous sentence. Although they are themeline events that happen in chronological sequence, they are backgrounded by *jek* in order to highlight what comes next: the fact that the clay jar is empty.

(15) a. *Nat hak,* *zhuas* *njet* *mol* *zos* *shout* *ghangb*
SURPRISE rat climb go arrive on below
ntangb ***jek,***
loft JEK

b. *zhuas* *shaib* ***jek,***
rat look JEK

c. *lob* *hob* *draox* *yaos* *kongb* *let,*
CL.INAN clay jar oil COP be.empty SUB

d. *dlangb zhit* *dub* *zhit* *muax.*
anything even NEG have

'The rat climbed upstairs to the attic and looked, and guess what? The clay jar that had held the fat was empty. There was nothing left in it.' (MDZ 14)

When *jek* is used in sentence-final position, it signals that the entire sentence has less prominence than what follows. In example (16), the sentence marked with *jek* about how the protagonist and her husband are running away is relatively unimportant compared to the fact that the antagonists, Ngou Nchen and the stepmother, were unable to find them.

(16) a. *Jek,* *aob* *dos* *jeuf* *tlat* *tlat* *tlat*
JEK two CL.AN then run RDP RDP
tlat *mol* *jek,*
RDP go JEK
'After running a long way,'

b. *aob* *dos* *jeuf* *blab* *hlaot* *ndeuf* *lob*
two CL.AN then be pressed flat quickly there CL.INAN
baob reb ***jek.***
rock JEK
'the two of them quickly ducked behind a rock.'

c. *Ngoux Ntrent* *hab* *dol* *naf chab* *jeuf* *tlat*
PN and CL.AN stepmother then run

tlat	*tlat*	*tlat*	*mol*	*ib*	*njuak*	*nat,*
RDP	RDP	RDP	go	one	time interval	PROX

Ngou Nchen and the stepmother also chased them for a long time,'

d.

ed,	*zhit*	*bof*	*ghangb*	*leuf.*
EXCL	not	find	even a trace	COMPL

'but finally they lost track of them.' (NNSGZ 94-95)

One particular way in which *jek* is used for backgrounding is when consecutive sentences are marked with sentence-final *jek*. These tend to occur with sections describing habitual events, which is background material that fills out the gaps in the story but does not move the narrative forward. The repeated use of *jek* in clause-final and sentence-final position in nearly every sentence backgrounds the whole section. In example (17), the repeated actions of the rat and the cat are being described, and *jek* appears both in clause-final and sentence-final position.

(17)

Nat jek,	*zhuas*	*jeuf*	*zhid*	*lol,*
so	rat	then	escape	come
zhuas	*jeuf*	*zhid*	*lol*	***jek,***
rat	then	escape	come	JEK
lol	*zos*	*houd*	*zhed*	***jek,***
come	arrive	in	home	JEK

zhuas	*jeuf*	*njet*	*duab yud*	*mol*	*shout*	*ghangb*
rat	then	climb	as quietly as possible	go	up on	below

ntangb	***jek,***
loft	JEK

zhuas	*jeuf*	*mol*	*nyas*	*hob*	*draox*	*naox,*
rat	then	go	steal	clay jar	oil	eat
naox,	*naox*	*dangl,*	*naox*	*zhout*	*zhout*	*let.*
eat	eat	COMPL	eat	enough	RDP	STA

'So the rat would escape. He would slip away, and when he got home, he would quietly climb up into the attic and steal some of the fat in the clay jar and eat it. He would eat and eat until he was full.'

Mid	*yad*	*lol*	*lok,*
cat	IRR	come	at that time

jek	*zhuas*	*let*	*zhid*	*mol*	*but*	*hlaot*
JEK	rat	only then	escape	go	lie down	quickly

shout	*zangx,*
up on	bed

jek	*let*	*nghol*	*qaox*	*goud*	*gas*	***jek,***
JEK	only then	pull	quilt	wrap	quickly	JEK
let	*uat zox*	*let*	*zhuangb*	*maob*	*blangb*	***jek,***
only then	pretend	SUB	pretend	hurt	belly	JEK
let	*nzhangx*	*nzhangx*	*let*	***jek.***		
only then	groan	RDP	SUB	JEK		

'When it was time for the cat to come home, the rat would run back and lie down on the bed, quickly pulling up the quilts to wrap himself in. He would pretend that his stomach hurt, moaning and whimpering.' (MDZ 6-7)

Conclusion

The particle *jek*, which has been previously described as a scope-setting particle, may be better characterized as a spacer, which is a short expression that is placed between constituents to indicate structural boundaries, usually topics or points of departure, and has discourse-pragmatic roles (Dooley & Levinsohn, 2023, p. 73). Spacers also separate information of unequal importance (Levinsohn, 2023, p. 75). This analysis of *jek* as a spacer is more useful as it provides a unifying explanation of its use in different contexts.

The discourse function of the particle *jek* is to signal the relative prominence on both intra-sentence and inter-sentence levels, and highlight the clause or sentence that follows the clause or sentence marked by *jek*. Two different mechanisms are at work in carrying out this function. When *jek* marks a point of departure, it gives thematic prominence to the point of departure, which has the effect of highlighting the material that follows. When *jek* follows a clause or sentence, it functions as a backgrounding device, marking the clause or sentence as having secondary importance and highlighting what comes after. Thus, *jek* functions as a marker of prominence or a backgrounding device, depending on the context it is used in, but the effect that both mechanisms produce is the same, namely, highlighting material that follows as a significant development or climactic event.

The function of sentence-initial *jek*, which is a connective, has not yet been addressed. It remains to be seen if the use of *jek* as a sentence-initial connective and a clause-initial marker is related to the use of *jek* as a backgrounding device.

List of Abbreviations Used

ACHV	verbal complement of achievement
CL.AN	classifier for animate beings
CL.INAN	classifier for inanimate objects
COMPL	completive aspect
CONT	continuative aspect
EXCL	exclamation

NEG	negative
PFV	perfective aspect
PL	plural
PROX	proximal demonstrative
STA	particle that follows stative verbs
JEK	particle *jek*
SG	singular
SUB	subordinating particle
SURPRISE	particle that indicates that event is surprising
RDP	reduplication

Bibliography

Cohen, D. (2011). *Cohesion and coherence in Hmong texts* [Unpublished manuscript].

Dej-Amorn, S. (2004). Discourse functions of particle 'tes' in Green Hmong. *Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (SEALS XI), 2001*, 199–214.

Dooley, R. A., & Levinsohn, S. H. (2023). *Analyzing Discourse: A Manual of Basic Concepts* (revised edition). SIL International. https://www.sil.org/resources/publications/entry/96114

Iwasaki, S. (1987). Identifiability, scope-setting, and the particle wa: A study of Japanese spoken expository discourse. In J. Hinds, S. K. Maynard, & S. Iwasaki (Eds.), *Perspectives in Topicalization: The Case of Japanese 'wa'* (Vol. 14, pp. 107–141). John Benjamins.

Levinsohn, S. H. (2023). *Self-Instruction Materials on Narrative Discourse Analysis*. SIL International.

McLaughlin, C. E. (2012). *A salience scheme for Hmong Soud: Types of foreground and background information in narrative discourse* [MA Thesis]. Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics.

McLaughlin, C. E. (2018). The sentence in Flowery Hmong. *Language and Culture Documentation and Description, 37*.

Zhang, Y., & Cohen, D. (2018). *Lol Ndrual 苗族民间故事选 Selected Hmong Folktales*. Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House.