

## Chapter 5

# Bridging constructions in narrative texts in White Hmong (Hmong-Mien)

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This chapter examines bridging constructions in narrative texts in White Hmong (Hmong-Mien, Laos). Bridging constructions occur in all the texts examined for the study, with frequency and type of construction varying according to narrator and text type. Recapitulative linkage is far more common than either summary linkage, which is limited to first-person narratives and reported speech, or mixed linkage, which serves to summarize direct quotations in oral and written texts with a more literary character. In terms of function, the analysis shows that bridging constructions in White Hmong narrative texts work cohesively, linking one unit in the event line of the narrative to the next and thus serving to progress the main sequence of events. The event described by the bridging construction is constructed as a salient point in the event line, and becomes the base from which the next unit in the event line of the narrative proceeds.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 White Hmong language

White Hmong (ISO code: mww) is a language of the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) family, mainly spoken in the mountainous regions of northern Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand, and of southern China, as well as in some diasporic communities. White Hmong is an analytic, isolating language; most words are monosyllabic, although compounding and borrowing result in some multisyllabic words. Syllable structure is basically open and every syllable carries one of seven phonemic tones, represented by syllable-final consonant letters in the orthography used



here. Some consonants are quite complex, including combinations of features such as pre-nasalisation with both lateral and aspirated release.

Alignment in White Hmong is nominative-accusative, and the syntactic function of core arguments is coded by constituent order: generally AVO for transitive clauses and SV for intransitive clauses. Presentative existentials are verb initial and copula clauses are CS copula CC. Topical elements can be fronted and ellipsis of arguments can occur when referents can easily be retrieved through the linguistic or extra-linguistic context. While head modifier order is most common, within the noun phrase some elements, including possessives, numerals and numeral classifiers, precede the head.

Like many other languages of Mainland Southeast Asia, White Hmong is rich in serial verb constructions (SVCs). These involve two or more distinct verbs, linked together in a single clause by virtue of the fact that they share one or more core arguments as well as all grammatical categories. Thus it is very common in White Hmong for a single event to be expressed by multiple verbs, none of which is subordinate to any other (Jarkey 2015: 76–110). This phenomenon, along with the ellipsis of arguments, mentioned above, is illustrated in many of the examples in this chapter, such as in the sequence of verbs in (1):

- (1) *muab coj            mus los    tas*  
take take.along go bury finish  
'after (they) took (him) (and) carried (him) away (and) buried (him),...'

## 1.2 Chapter overview

This chapter examines bridging constructions in White Hmong narrative discourse. In accordance with Guérin & Aiton (2019 [this volume]), a bridging construction is viewed here as a discourse cohesion strategy linking two discourse units, often though not always immediately adjacent to one another. The final clause of the first unit is referred to as the “reference clause” (underlined throughout) and initial clause of the second unit, as the “bridging clause” (bolded throughout). The bridging clause refers back to the reference clause by recapitulation or anaphora.

The corpus for this study, comprising six narrative texts (approximately 15,000 words in total), is presented in §1.3. §2 deals with the topics of the frequency (§2.1), position (§2.2), form (§2.3), and types of linkage (§2.4) that occur in bridging constructions in this corpus. §3 examines their function. All bridging constructions in the data work cohesively, linking one unit in the event line of the narrative to the next (Longacre 1983: 14–17). This often involves a change in aspect between

the reference clause and the bridging clause, which contributes to constructing that point as a salient one in the narrative progression and highlights its function as a pivot between the preceding and following discourse units (§3.1). In other cases, the bridging construction simply serves to bring the narrative back to the event line after a brief digression (§3.2).

### 1.3 Data sources

All of the six narrative texts examined for this study are in linear narrative form – four transcribed from recordings of oral narratives (Fuller 1985; Johnson 1992) and two produced in written form from the outset (Vang et al. 1990). The texts and text types are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Texts and text types

Mode	Person	Narrative type	Source text
Oral	First	Personal account	<i>Kee's story</i> (Fuller 1985: Appendix B)
	Third	Traditional myth	<i>The beginning of the world</i> (Johnson 1992: Chapter 1)
			<i>The story of Ms Fine Flower I</i> (Johnson 1992: Chapter 5) <i>The story of Ms Fine Flower II</i> (Johnson 1992: Chapter 6)
Written		Semi-historical account with legendary elements	<i>The beginning</i> (Vang et al. 1990: Chapter 1) <i>God sends the Pahawh</i> (Vang et al. 1990: Chapter 2)

The first text shown in Table 1 – *Kee's Story* – is a first-person oral account of the narrator's escape from Laos in 1975, after the end of the war (Fuller 1985: 225–235). The next three – *The beginning of the world* and two versions of *The story of Ms Fine Flower* told by two different narrators – are traditional White Hmong myths (Johnson 1992: 3–13, 120–140, 161–168). These stories are told in the third person, but contain some first-person components in reported speech. The final two texts are also in the third person with some first-person, reported speech components. These are accounts of the life and teachings of a messianic figure, Shong Lue Yang, who was active in northern Laos from 1959 until his

assassination in 1971. The story was written by two of his disciples using the Hmong writing system Shong Lue Yang himself had developed (Vang et al. 1990: 11–37).

## 2 Characteristics of bridging constructions in narrative texts

Having introduced the language and data in §1 above, this section discusses the frequency, position, form, and types of bridging constructions found in the texts examined.

### 2.1 Frequency

On average, across all the texts used as data for this study, one bridging construction occurs roughly every 37 clauses. Although this gives a general idea of frequency, it must be noted that this figure is not particularly robust. This is due not only to the limited amount of data examined, but also to the fact that it is often quite challenging to determine the boundaries of a single clause in White Hmong. A number of factors contribute to this challenge, including the range of paratactic strategies involving simple juxtaposition that occur (in addition to verb serialisation), as well as the frequent linkage of multiple serial verb constructions (Jarkey 2015: 183–186, 237–241).

One of the texts examined – *The legend of Ms Fine Flower I* – stands out from the others in that very few bridging constructions appear in it: only one in approximately 174 clauses. A second version of this same traditional myth, told by a different narrator, was also examined, and was found to use bridging constructions far more frequently: around one in every 28 clauses. This shows that the low frequency in some texts cannot be attributed to narrative mode, person, or type, and probably relates simply to the style of the narrator.

### 2.2 Position

To understand more about the functions of bridging constructions in narrative texts, it will help to begin by looking at the positions in which they predominantly occur. Bridging constructions in the texts examined occur most commonly at the boundary between discourse episodes, at what might be thought of as major boundaries (“chapters”) or minor boundaries (“paragraphs”) (see Guérin & Aiton 2019 [this volume]). The only cases in which they appear other than at

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the junction of discourse episodes is where they are used simply to bring the narrative back to the event line after a diversion containing supportive material. This minor type will be discussed later, in (§3.2). Here the focus is on their most common position, at the boundary of discourse episodes.

The extract below from *The Story of Ms Fine Flower I* comes at the end of a series of paragraphs describing a plot to kill the character Mr Sultry Toad by having a snake bite him. We pick up the story in clause (2a), just after the snake has bitten his foot four times:

- (2) a. *Ces Nraug.Kub.Kaws mob~mob ko.taw*  
 and.then Mr.Sultry.Toad REDUP~be.hurt foot  
 ‘And then Mr Sultry Toad’s foot really hurt.’
- b. *ces Nraug.Kub.Kaws tuag lawm lau.*  
 and.then Mr.Sultry.Toad die PRF IP  
 ‘and then Mr Sultry Toad died.’
- c. *Nraug.Kub.Kaws tuag tas, ...*  
 Mr.Sultry.Toad die finish  
 ‘After Mr Sultry Toad died, ...’
- d. *muab coj mus los tas,*  
 take take.along go bury finish,  
 ‘(and) after (they) took (him) away (and) buried (him),’
- e. *ces Txiv.Nrau.Ntsuag thiaj.li mus coj*  
 and.then The.Young.Orphan so.then go take.along  
*Niam.Nkauj.Zuag.Paj rov los.*  
 Ms.Fine.Flower return come.home  
 ‘then The Young Orphan came back home, bringing Ms Fine Flower along.’ (Johnson 1992: 140)

The major episode concerning the murderous plot culminates in the death of Mr Sultry Toad, described in the reference clause (2b). The bridging clause (2c) then serves to pivot the narrative to the final episode of the story, introducing the events after Mr Sultry Toad’s death, as the plotters bury him (2d), return home (2e), subsequently taking up their life together.

In example (2), the bridging construction brings a relatively lengthy discourse episode, a whole series of paragraphs or a “chapter”, to a close and creates a link to the next episode. In other cases, however, a bridging construction serves to introduce what might be thought of as simply a new minor episode, or “paragraph”. In the myth of *The beginning of the world*, the first man and woman on

earth have suffered the loss of their first crop, swept away by a windstorm. A new major episode begins:

- (3) a. *Txiv.Nraug.Luj.Tub thiab Niam.Nkauj.Ntxhi.Chiv nyob~nyob*  
 Master.Lu.Tu and Ms.Ntxi.Chi REDUP~live  
 ‘Master Lu Tu and Ms Ntxi Chi lived on’
- b. *ces ua.ciav ya mus poob rau puag nram kwj.ha*  
 and.then how.is.it fly go fall to yonder place.down valley  
 ‘and then – how can it be! – (the grains) flew way off (and) fell in yonder valley’
- c. *ces pob.kws xya nplooj laus txaus*  
 and.then corn seven leaf be(come).old be.sufficient  
 ‘and then the seven-leaf corn became fully matured’
- d. *ces nws xub taug kev los.*  
 and.then 3SG initiate follow way come.home  
 ‘and then it was the first to follow the path home.’
- e. *Nws taug kev los txog*  
 3SG follow way come.home arrive  
 ‘It followed the path right back home’
- f. *ces nws hu hais tias, “Niam thiab txiv, quib qhov.rooj.”*  
 and.then 3SG call say COMP mother and father open door  
 ‘and then it called out, “Mother and Father, open the door!”’ (Johnson 1992: 4)

After just three clauses of this new major episode (3a–3c), a bridging construction (3d–3e) is used to draw to a close the minor episode of what happened way off yonder, and to focus in again on the home scene. Here the bridging construction works to link two minor episodes (or “paragraphs”) within a much longer major episode.

### 2.3 Form

The reference clause in a bridging construction in White Hmong is always a main clause. It can exhibit all the properties of a main clause, including the expression of illocutionary force, as shown by the final illocutionary particle *lau* in example (2b), and exclamatory topicalizers, such as *ov* ‘oh!’ in example (9). Another sign of the status of the reference clause as a main clause is its ability to be preceded

by a coordinating conjunction. By far the most common coordinating conjunction used, not only before reference clauses but in general throughout narrative texts, is *ces* ‘and then’.<sup>1</sup> As shown in example (4), this conjunction often appears both immediately before the reference clause and immediately after the bridging clause, bracketing the construction as it links one unit to the next in the narrative sequence.

- (4) a. *Mus txog tom kev,*  
 go arrive place.over.there road  
 ‘(She) got to the road,’
- b. *CES txawm mus ntsib nraug zaj.*  
 and.then then go meet young dragon  
 ‘and then (she) went (and) met a young dragon.’
- c. *Ntsib nraug zaj,*  
 meet young dragon  
 ‘(She) met the young dragon’
- d. *CES nraug zaj txawm hais tias, ...*  
 and.then young dragon then say COMP  
 ‘and then the young dragon said, ...’ (Johnson 1992: 163)

Example (4) also illustrates the fact that the coordinating conjunction *ces* is very often accompanied by another type of conjunction indicating temporal sequence in relation to the preceding event, such as *txawm* ‘then’, as in (4b) and (4d), *thiaj (li)* ‘so then’, and *mam (li)* ‘then next’. These sequential conjunctions appear not before the whole clause, as the coordinating conjunctions do, but rather clause internally, after the subject (if it appears). In (5), we see both the clause external *ces* ‘and then’ and the clause internal *mam li* ‘then next’ in clauses (5a) and (5c).

- (5) a. *CES nws MAM.LI tho them hauv no.*  
 and.then 3SG then.next pierce layer place.underneath this  
 ‘And then next he pierced the layer underneath this.’
- b. *Luj.Tub tho them hauv no to*  
 Lu.Tu pierce layer place.underneath this make.hole  
 ‘Lu Tu pierced the layer underneath right through’

<sup>1</sup>Another two coordinating conjunctions that appear occasionally before reference clauses in the corpus are *es* ‘so’ in (13) and *tab sis* ‘but’.

- c. *CES*      *ib* *co*            *coob~coob*            *MAM.LI*    *tawm*  
 and.then one CLF:COLL REDUP~be.many then.next emerge  
*hauv*                      *los.*  
 place.underneath come  
 ‘and then next a great many (people) came out (from) underneath.’  
 (Johnson 1992: 12)

While the reference clause is always a full main clause, the bridging clause never is. It can be, first, a somewhat reduced main clause or, second, a temporal subordinate clause. Both of these clause types freely occur sentence-initially in other contexts in White Hmong; they are not restricted to bridging constructions. The bridging clauses in examples (4) and (5) are both cases of the first type: reduced main clauses. Clauses like this are reduced in that they cannot contain topic markers or outer operators such as illocutionary force, nor the clause-external coordinating conjunctions or clause-internal sequential conjunctions such as those so commonly occurring with the clauses that both precede and follow them. The bridging clause in example (6) exemplifies the second type: a temporal subordinate clause, that is, one that indicates the temporal relationship (*when*, *after*, etc.) between the event described by the bridging construction and that described by the following main clause. The bridging clause in (6b) is introduced by the subordinating conjunction *thaum* ‘when’.

- (6) a. *ces*            *nws poj.niam thiaj*    *xauv.xeeb tau ob*    *leeg tub ntxaib.*  
 and.then 3SG woman so.then give.birth get two CLF son twin  
 ‘...and so then his wife gave birth to twin boys.’  
 b. *Thaum xauv.xeeb tau nkawd...*  
 when give.birth get 3DU  
 ‘When she had given birth to them...’ (Vang et al. 1990: 31)

Whether in the form of a reduced main clause or a subordinate clause, bridging clauses cannot stand alone as independent sentences, and so are never followed by a sentence-final pause (indicated by a full stop in the orthography). No more than a brief, comma-like pause separates them from the following main clause, which functions to introduce the next event in the event line. Within the bridging construction itself the sentence-final break after the reference clause functions iconically as a signal of a momentary break in the temporal flow of the narrative. The repetition in the bridging clause reinforces this sense that the sequential flow of events has halted briefly, before it takes off again with no more than a minor pause after the bridging clause.



## 2.4 Types of linkage

With only a small number of exceptions, bridging constructions in the narrative data examined involve recapitulative linkage. Exact recapitulation seems rare; in fact, considerable variation between the reference clause and the bridging clause is the norm. This is discussed and exemplified in §2.4.1.

Examples of summary linkage are limited to the first-person text (*Kee's Story*) and to reported speech components within third-person narratives, shown in §2.4.2. A mixed linkage type occurs with speech verbs introducing direct quotations. This is discussed in §2.4.3.

### 2.4.1 Recapitulative linkage

Most examples of recapitulative linkage found in the data involve one or more than one of the types of variation identified by Guérin & Aiton (2019 [this volume]): modification, omission, addition, and substitution. Below, each type of simple variation is illustrated in turn.

The high frequency of variation between the reference clause and the bridging clause relates to one of the key features of bridging constructions in this language: variation of the aspectual construal of the event described so that it can function as a pivot between the preceding and following discourse units. This is discussed in detail in §3.1. In addition to change in aspect, the examples in the next subsections show a range of other kinds of variation.

#### 2.4.1.1 Almost exact recapitulation

No example of exact recapitulation, in which the reference clause is simply repeated word-for-word in the bridging clause, occurs in the data. Example (7) came closest.

- (7) a. *ces*            *Txiv.Nraug.Ntsuag txawm mus pom nkawd.*  
           and.then The.Young.Orphan then go see 3DU  
           ‘... and The Young Orphan then went to see them.’
- b. *Txiv.Nraug.Ntsuag mus pom nkawd.*  
           The.Young.Orphan go see 3DU  
           ‘The Young Orphan went to see them’
- c. *ces*            *Txiv.Nraug.Ntsuag hais tias,...*  
           and.then The.Young.Orphan say COMP  
           ‘and The Young Orphan said,...’ (Johnson 1992: 161)

Here the only difference is the sequential conjunction *txawm* ‘then’, which appears in the reference clause (7a), supporting the preceding coordinating conjunction *ces* ‘and then’ in anchoring the reference clause in the sequential flow of events. As noted above (§2.3) and as seen in (7b), sequential conjunctions do not appear in bridging clauses, which offer a momentary break in this sequential flow.

#### 2.4.1.2 Modification

Example (8), illustrating modification, is from a story about the first man and woman on the earth, who emerged from a rock fissure and initially survived by cooking the seeds of a magic flower.

- (8) a. *ces nws rauv zeb.ntsuum xwb.*  
 and.then 3SG burn pieces.of.coal only  
 ‘... and he burned only pieces of coal.’
- b. ***Luj.Tub nkawd ob.niam.txiv rauv cov ntawd.***  
 Lu.Tu 3DU couple burn CLF:COLL that  
 ‘Lu Tu and his wife burned those’
- c. *kib lub paj ntawd cov noob noj xwb.*  
 fry CLF flower that CLF:COLL seed eat only  
 ‘(to) fry the seeds of that flower to eat.’ (Johnson 1992: 3)

In (8a), the reference clause refers to the protagonist, *Lu Tu*, with the third singular pronoun *nws*, and to the pieces of coal with the full NP *zeb ntsuum*. These nouns appear in modified form in the bridging clause (8b), as the full NP *Luj Tub nkawd ob niam txiv* ‘the Lu Tu couple’ and the pronominal phrase *cov ntawd* ‘those’, respectively.

#### 2.4.1.3 Omission

The bridging clause may represent a considerably reduced recapitulation of the reference clause by virtue of the omission of one or more elements.

- (9) a. *ces cua-daj-cua-dub ov txawm nplawm puag*  
 and.then wind-yellow-wind-black EX then beat long.way  
*tim qab ntug tuaj.*  
 place.beyond behind boundary come  
 ‘... and then a storm [lit. wind yellow wind black] oh! (it) then came whipping (from) way over the horizon.’

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b. *Cua nplawm tuaj ces...*

wind beat come and.then

‘The wind came whipping and then,...’ (Johnson 1992: 4)

Here the locative phrase *puag tim qab ntug* ‘(from) way over the horizon’, which appears in the reference clause (9a), is completely omitted from the bridging clause (9b), as are the sequential conjunction *txawm* ‘then’ and the exclamatory particle *ov* (which functions in (9a) as a topicaliser). Substitution also occurs to further reduce the length of the bridging clause, with the simple noun *cua* ‘wind’ replacing the four-part elaborate expression *cua-daj-cua-dub* (wind-yellow-wind-black) ‘storm’ (Jarkey 2015: 233–237, Johns & Strecker 1982; Mortensen 2003).

2.4.1.4 Addition

While a locative phrase that occurs in the reference clause is omitted in the bridging clause in example (9), a temporal phrase is added in (10).

(10) a. *ces thiaj mam xeeb nws tus poj.niam rau*

and.then so.then then.next be.born 3SG CLF wife to

*ntawm nws qhov.chaw.*

place.nearby 3SG place

‘... and so then next his wife was born into his place [i.e., into the rock fissure from which the first man, Lu Tu, had emerged].’

b. *xeeb nws tus poj.niam rau ntawm nws qhov.chaw*

be.born 3SG CLF wife to place.nearby 3SG place

*puv-hnub-puv-nyoog ces...*

be.filled-day-be.filled-age and.then

‘His wife was born into his place (until her) time was fulfilled and then...’ (Johnson 1992: 3)

The elaborate expression *puv-hnub-puv-hnoog* ‘fulfil one’s days’, not found in the reference clause (10a), appears in the bridging clause (10b) to indicate the length of time that the protagonist’s wife remained behind before she followed her husband out to the earth.

2.4.1.5 Substitution

In some cases, rather than modification, omission, or addition in the bridging clause, an element of the reference clause is substituted by an alternative in the bridging clause. Example (11) shows this kind of variation:

- (11) a. *thiab tau nyob tos*,  
 and PFV stay wait  
 ‘...and (he) stayed (there and) waited,’
- b. *thaum nws tab.tom mus nyob tos ces...*  
 when 3SG just go stay wait and.then  
 ‘(and) when he had just gone to stay (there) and wait, then...’ (Vang et al. 1990: 28)

The morpheme *tau*, marking perfective aspect, in the reference clause (11a) is substituted by the morpheme *tab tom* ‘just (begin to)’, functioning here to mark immediate inceptive aspect, in the bridging clause (11b). Inceptive aspect is reinforced by the addition of the verb *mus*, here meaning ‘go to do something’.

#### 2.4.2 Summary linkage

As explained by Guérin & Aiton (2019 [this volume]), summary linkage involves the use of a summarizing verb (such as a light verb) in the bridging clause, which links anaphorically to the reference clause without lexical recapitulation. This kind of linkage occurs in the first-person text, *Kee’s Story*, where it is roughly as frequent as recapitulative linkage. In the third-person texts, on the other hand, it appears only occasionally, and then only in reported speech (both direct and indirect). This suggests that summary linkage may be associated more with unplanned personal narrative and conversation than with more literary style, third-person narration (the narrative parts of the myths and written accounts examined).

Summary linkage is expressed in these texts with the copula verb *yog* ‘be’ followed by the adverbial *li* ‘like, as’ and, optionally, by a demonstrative pronoun, *no* ‘this’ or *ntawd* ‘that’. This is illustrated from *Kee’s Story* in example (12):

- (12) a. *Lub sij.hawm ntawm neeg khiav coob heev mas.*  
 CLF time that person run be.many very IP  
 ‘(At) that time there were very many people fleeing.’
- b. *Yog li ntawd,*  
 COP like that  
 ‘That being the case,’

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- c. *lawv thiaj hais tias ua peb puas yog neeg nyob nram*  
 3PL then say COMP do 1PL Q COP person live place.down  
*tiag.*  
 level.place  
 ‘they then asked whether we were people (who) lived down (in  
 Vientiane).’ (Fuller 1985: 227)

The expression *yog li ntawd* ‘that being the case’ in (12b) summarizes the information in the reference clause – that there were many people fleeing at the time – to explain why the officials asked the travellers where they came from. The narrator goes on to explain that only travellers who lived in Vientiane were allowed to go there.

In (13), a similar expression, *yog li no* ‘this being the case’, is used in an indirect speech report from *The legend of Ms Fine Flower II*:

- (13) a. *Niam.Nkauj.Zuag.Paj teb tias Txiv.Nraug.Ntsuag tsis yuav*  
 Ms.Fine.Flower reply COMP The.Young.Orphan NEG marry  
*Niam.Nkauj.Zuag.Paj es Niam.Nkauj.Zuag.Paj los mus.*  
 Ms.Fine.Flower so Ms.Fine.Flower come go  
 ‘Ms Fine Flower replied that The Young Orphan (would) not marry  
 her so she (had) left.’
- b. *Ces nraug zaj txawm tias yog li no ces nraug*  
 and.then young dragon then COMP COP like this and.then young  
*zaj yuav nws no ces ...*  
 dragon marry 3SG this and.then  
 ‘And then the young dragon said that, this being the case, then he  
 (would) marry her, and then ...’ (Johnson 1992: 163)

In this example the expression, *yog li no* ‘this being the case’ is attributed to the dragon, summarizing the heroine’s explanation of her plight as the basis for his marriage proposal. Here the reference clause and the bridging clause function as a bridging construction within the reported conversation, rather than in the narrative text that reports it.

### 2.4.3 Mixed linkage

There are other examples in the third-person narrative parts of the more literary texts (both written and oral) which do not qualify as summary linkage, but which are quite similar. They are characterized here as mixed linkage because, while the

verb of the reference clause is recapitulated in the bridging clause, the remainder of the bridging clause consists only of summarizing, anaphoric elements.

All examples found involve verbs of speech introducing a direct quotation in the reference clause, and it is the quotation only, not the whole of the reference clause, that is summarized anaphorically in the bridging clause. This is exemplified in (14).

- (14) a. *Ces Luj.Tub thiaj.li hais tias “Yog tsaug~tsaug.zog thiab and.then Lu.Tu so.then say COMP COP REDUP~be.sleepy and nqhis~nqhis nqaij mas yuav.tau rov mus...”*  
 REDUP~crave meat TOP must return go  
 ‘And so then Lu Tu said, “If (you) are very sleepy and are really craving meat, (I) must go back”...’
- b. *Hais li ntawd tag ces...*  
 say like that finish and.then  
 ‘After saying that, then...’ (Johnson 1992: 8)

Rather than a copula or light verb appearing in the bridging clause, as in summary linkage, the speech verb of the reference clause, *hais* ‘say’, is repeated. It is accompanied by the adverb *li* ‘thus, like’ and the demonstrative *ntawd* ‘that, there’, which serve to summarize the direct quotation.<sup>2</sup>

In other examples of this mixed type of linkage, substitution is also involved:

- (15) a. *Vaj.Leej.Txi tau teb tias “tsis tau txog caij, koj kav.tsiq God PFV reply COMP NEG PFV arrive season 2SG hurry.to rov qab mus dua.”*  
 return back go again  
 ‘God replied, “The season has not come; you hurry back again”.’
- b. *Vaj.Leej.Txi tau txhib li ces...*  
 God PFV urge like and.then  
 ‘God urged (him) like (that) and then...’ (Vang et al. 1990: 17)

Here the narrator substitutes the speech verb *teb* ‘reply’ in the reference clause with a semantically more specific speech verb *txhib* ‘urge’, which describes the nature of God’s reply.

<sup>2</sup>This is somewhat similar to the type of linkage reported by Guillaume (2011: 128–129) for Cavineña (Tacanan, northern Bolivia), except that there is no restriction on the speech verbs that can be used in Hmong, while in Cavineña the verbs used are limited to two summarizing verbs, which literally mean ‘be’ and ‘affect’.

### 3 Functions of bridging constructions in White Hmong narratives

As shown in §2.2, bridging constructions in White Hmong all play a role in enhancing discourse cohesion, serving to progress the main event line. Furthermore, the occurrence of a bridging construction often contributes to constructing a particularly salient point of progression – a point at which the narrative moves forward to a new event, a new scene, a new episode, or a new “chapter”. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006: 210) describe the notion of salience as “the degree to which an element draws attention to itself due to its size, its place in the foreground or its overlapping of other elements, its colour, its tonal values, its sharpness or definition and other features.”

The salience of the event described by the bridging construction is signaled linguistically in all cases by virtue of the simple fact that the clause describing that event is repeated in some way, whether by recapitulative, summary, or mixed linkage. However, as will be shown in §3.1, in many cases of recapitulative linkage in White Hmong, the salience of the event described is further enhanced by variation, not only due to the features of modification, omission, addition, substitution, and summary (§2.4), but also involving a change in aspect between the reference clause and the bridging clause. This change allows the narrator to shift from a “bird’s eye” view of the event to a more engaged construal, as if pausing momentarily to observe the event as it is realized. This event then becomes a base from which the event line of the narrative moves forward. This aspectual variation is the first main way in which bridging constructions serve to progress the narrative sequence.

The second way in which a bridging construction can facilitate the narrative progression is where supportive material temporarily interrupts the flow of the event line. This is discussed in §3.2. In this case the bridging clause serves to pick up the action exactly where it was left off, bringing the focus back to the main event line and allowing it to proceed. These two ways in which bridging constructions are used to progress the narrative sequence are not necessarily distinct; a single construction can serve to bring the narrative back to the main event line and also facilitate a change in aspectual construal.

#### 3.1 Change in aspect; change in construal

In the clear majority of cases of recapitulative linkage in the narrative texts examined, there is a change in aspect between the reference clause and the bridging clause. This not only enhances the salience of the event by adding to its temporal

texture but also results in a change in its construal. It often allows the narrator to move from a more removed, “bird’s eye” perspective on the event to a more involved stance – to zoom in on the event and describe it as it unfolds. The narrator then uses this revised construal of the event as a point of departure, from which to move on to the next event in the narrative sequence.

Aspectual meaning is conveyed in White Hmong in a variety of ways beyond the inherent aspectual meaning of the verb itself, including the use of pre-verbal aspectual morphemes, time adverbs, verbal reduplication, and some types of serial verb constructions (SVCs). The use of pre-verbal aspectual morphemes to change the way in which the same event is depicted between the reference clause and the bridging clause has been illustrated in example (11). Aspectual change from a simple verb in the reference clause to a SVC in the bridging clause occurs in example (2), while the opposite occurs in (4), which starts with verbs in series and changes to a simple verb. Variation in the type of SVC resulting in aspectual change is shown in examples (3) and (5). The use of time adverbs in combination with reduplication is illustrated in example (16), and that of reduplication with SVCs in (17).

Example (16) comes from the *Legend of Ms Fine Flower II*. Ms Fine Flower and her companion, Ms Sultry Toad, are introduced as being very poor. There follows a brief word picture that captures their poverty, describing how they go out every day to scavenge for wild nuts:

- (16) a. *nkawd niaj hnub mus khaws txiv.ntseej txiv.qhib noj.*  
 3DU every day go pick chestnut acorn eat  
 ‘Every day the two of them went to pick chestnuts (and) acorns to eat.’
- b. *Nkawd mus khaws~khaws txiv.ntseej txiv.quib noj,*  
 3DU go REDUP~pick chestnut acorn eat  
 ‘[One day] they went along picking (and) picking chestnuts (and) acorns to eat.’
- c. *ces Txiv.Nraug.Ntsuag txawm mus pom nkawd.*  
 and.then The.Young.Orphan then go see 3DU  
 ‘and then The Young Orphan went to see them.’ (Johnson 1992: 161)

The young women’s action is explicitly indicated as habitual with the use of the time adverb *niaj hnub* ‘every day’ in the reference clause (16a). The bridging clause (16b) then switches to continuous aspect, using the reduplicated verb *khaws~khaws* ‘(be) picking (and) picking’. With this aspectual change, the narrator zooms in from an initial overview of their life circumstances to focus on a



particular moment when, as they were busily engaged with their daily task, The Young Orphan entered their life (16c), and changed their fortunes completely.

The next example of aspectual change is from later in the same story, by which time the heroine, Ms Fine Flower, has married The Young Orphan. Her companion Ms Sultry Toad, enraged and jealous, devises a scheme to shame Ms Fine Flower.

- (17) a. *es Niam.Nkauj.Kub.Kaws txawm muab Niam.Nkauj.Kub.Kaws*  
 so Ms.Sultry.Toad then take Ms.Sultry.Toad  
*cov niag ntshav pim coj mus pleev~pleev*  
 CLF:COLL great blood vagina take.along go REDUP~smear  
*Niam.Nkauj.Zuag.Paj lub qhov.ncauj,*  
 Ms.Fine.Flower CLF mouth  
 ‘so then taking her own menstrual blood, Ms Sultry Toad took (it) over (to) smear (and) smear (on) Ms Fine Flower’s mouth,’
- b. *muab pleev~pleev Niam.Nkauj.Zuag.Paj lub qhov.ncauj*  
 take REDUP~smear Ms.Fine.Flower CLF mouth  
*lo ntshav liab-vog,*  
 be(come).plastered blood red-speckled  
 ‘(she) took (it) (and) smeared (and) smeared (it) (on) Ms Fine Flower’s mouth (so that it) was plastered (with) red blood.’ (Johnson 1992: 162)

The reference clause (17a) uses a serial verb construction, also involving reduplication, to focus on the process of Ms Sultry Toad’s action – *muab ... coj mus pleev~pleev* (take ... take.along go REDUP~smear) – taking up the blood, carrying it over to her victim, and smearing it all over her mouth. The bridging clause (17b) retains some focus on this process – *muab ... pleev~pleev* (take ... REDUP~smear) – but adds another verb in the series – *lo* (become plastered with) – to also include the result of the action, Ms Fine Flower’s mouth becoming plastered all over with blood. This is a point of great significance in the story, as Ms Sultry Toad then tells The Young Orphan that Ms Fine Flower’s red mouth is a sign that she has been drinking sheep’s blood, provoking him to drive his young wife out of their home.

In this section we have discussed the extremely common phenomenon of variation in aspect between the two clauses in a recapitulative linkage. This variation in aspect results in a change in the construal of the event, giving a sense that the narrator moves to a closer focus and pauses briefly as the event unfolds, before moving on with the main line and thus progressing the narrative sequence. In

the next section we will look at the second way in which bridging constructions are used in White Hmong to achieve this same broad function of moving the event line of the narrative forward.

### 3.2 Return to the event line after supportive material

In White Hmong bridging constructions, the bridging clause generally follows the reference clause directly. Less commonly, one or more clauses intervene between the reference clause and the bridging clause. Their purpose is always to provide information that supports the narrative, but which is not part of the event line. The bridging clause then serves to bring the narration back to the event line, as the narrator picks up the main sequence of events again following this parenthetical digression. In example (18) the event line is describing the ceremonies associated with the birth of twins in the story of Shong Lue Yang.

- (18) a. *lawv thiaj muab ob leej me.nyuam ntxaib hu plig thiab tis*  
 3PL so.then take two CLF child twins call spirit and assign  
*npe.*  
 name  
 ‘... so then they took the two children (and) called (their) spirits and gave (them) names.’
- b. *Leej hlob muab hu.ua Tsab.Yaj,*  
 CLF be.old take name Tsa.Ya  
 ‘The older one (they) called Tsa Ya,’
- c. *leej yau muab hu.ua Xab.Yaj.*  
 CLF be.young take name Xa.Ya  
 ‘the younger one (they) called Xa Ya.’
- d. *Tom.qab muab nkawd hu plig tis npe tag,*  
 after take 3DU call spirit assign name finish  
 ‘After having taken those two, calling (their) spirits (and) giving (them) names,’
- e. *niam.tais thiab yawm.txiv tau rov mus tsev lawm.*  
 mother-in-law and father-in-law PFV return go home PRF  
 ‘mother-in-law and father-in-law went back home.’ (Vang et al. 1990: 33)

The reference clause (18a) introduces the ceremonies. The two juxtaposed main clauses in (18b) and (18c) follow, providing supportive information concerning

the names given to the babies. The bridging clause (18d) then functions both to bring the narrative back to the main event line and to introduce the fact that the next event – (18e) the in-laws’ return home – occurred after the ceremonies were concluded.

While the intervening clauses in example (18) are main clauses, in example (19) non-main clauses intervene. This excerpt also comes from the story of Shong Lue Yang, whom the narrators believed to be one of the twelve sons of *Vaj Leej Txi* ‘Sovereign Father, God’.

- (19) a. *ces nws thiaj tau muab lub tsho Soob.Lwj hle*  
 and.then 3SG so PFV take CLF shirt Shong.Lue remove  
*tseg cia*  
 leave.behind set.aside  
 ‘...and so he took (his) Shong Lue garb, removed (it) (and) left (it) behind’
- b. *tso rov qab mus nug Vaj.Leej.Txi dua*  
 release return back go ask God again  
 ‘so (he) could go back [to heaven] to ask God again,’
- c. *seb tim.li.cas nkawd thiaj tsis lawv qab los.*  
 find.out why 3DU so NEG follow back come  
 ‘to find out why those two [his younger brothers] had not followed (him) back [to earth].’
- d. *Nws tau hle lub tsho Soob.Lwj tseg cia,*  
 3SG PFV remove CLF shirt Shong.Lue leave.behind set.aside  
 ‘He removed his Shong Lue garb (and) left (it) behind’
- e. *ces nws rov qab mus...*  
 and.then 3SG return back go  
 ‘and then he went back...’ (Vang et al. 1990: 16)

The digression in the non-main clauses (19b) and (19c) in this case serves to explain the purpose of the action described in the reference clause (19a): the protagonist took off his human garb *in order to return to heaven*. The action of taking off his human garb is repeated in the bridging clause (19d), as the event line is resumed.

In example (20) from the first-person narrative text *Kee’s Story*, we see quite a lengthy diversion occurring between the reference clause (a) and the subsequent

bridging clause (f). The narrator, along with his father and younger brother, managed to buy a letter giving permission to travel to Vientiane, so that they could then cross the Mekong River and flee war-torn Laos.

- (20) a. *peb thiaj.li, peb txiv-tub, peb thiaj.li, aws, yuav lawv ib daig*  
 1PL so.then 1PL father-son 1PL so.then HESIT obtain 3PL one CLF  
*ntawv.*  
 letter  
 ‘So then we – we father and sons – so then we – um – bought their letter.’
- b. *Lawv daim ntawv ntawm yog ua Vientiane tuaj*  
 3PL CLF letter that COP make Vientiane come  
 ‘That letter of theirs came from Vientiane’
- c. *hais tias tuaj xyuas kwv.tij nyob rau pem Xieng.Khouang.*  
 say COMP come visit relative live to place.up Xieng.Khouang  
 ‘(and it) said (they would) come (to) visit relatives up in Xieng Khouang.’
- d. *Lawv muaj peb leeg thiab*  
 3PL have three people also  
 ‘They had three people too’
- e. *ces peb muaj peb leeg tab.tom phim lawv daim ntawv ntawd*  
 and.then 1PL have three CLF just match 3PL CLF letter that  
 ‘and then we had three people just matching that letter of theirs’
- f. *ces peb thiaj yuav lawv daim ntawv ntawm, ces...*  
 and.then 1PL so.then obtain 3PL CLF letter that and.then  
 ‘and then we bought that letter of theirs, and then...’ (Fuller 1985: 227)

This long diversion involving multiple clauses clearly supports the main line events of the narrative – the story of flight from Laos – by explaining how the letter the travellers bought suited their needs and facilitated their journey. The length of this intervening material may be related to the informal, unplanned nature of this personal monologue.<sup>3</sup> When the event line is picked up again in

<sup>3</sup>This use of recapitulation following a lengthy gap seems quite similar to some examples of self-repetition used for cohesion in Greek conversations, given by Alvanoudi (2019 [this volume]). In the Greek examples, however, the repetition connects a speaker’s previous and current turn, establishing contiguity after intervening turns by (an)other speaker(s).

(20f), it is introduced by the sequential conjunction *ces* ‘and then’, which normally does not occur again until after a bridging clause. This clearly serves to reinforce the return to the sequential event line of the story.

The use of bridging clauses described here, to pick up the event line after a parenthetical diversion, should not be thought of as completely separate from their use to modify the construal of the event (discussed in §3.1). In (18), for example, the bridging clause clearly serves both functions, not only returning the narrative to the event line but also shifting to completive aspect and thus explicitly asserting the ordered sequence of this event with the following one. Throughout the texts these two functions of bridging constructions can be seen to work together to progress the main event line and to facilitate discourse cohesion.

## 4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the position, form, frequency, and types of bridging constructions in White Hmong narrative texts, along with their discourse functions.

Bridging constructions are commonly positioned at the boundary between discourse units that belong to the event line of the narrative. Here they serve to link both major episodes (“chapters”) and minor episodes (“paragraphs”). They can also occur in the absence of a discourse boundary, simply to bring the narrative back to the event line after a brief digression.

In terms of form, reference clauses are all main clauses, and bridging clauses are either reduced main clauses, or temporal subordinate clauses serving to relate the event of the bridging construction to the next event in sequence (e.g., “after”, “when”, etc.). The construction as a whole is usually explicitly embedded in the sequential event line of the narrative with coordinating, sequential, or subordinating conjunctions.

The data show that the frequency and type of bridging constructions can vary in White Hmong depending on narrator and text type. Recapitulative linkage is far more common than summary linkage, which is limited to unplanned, spoken styles. A further mixed type of linkage involving a speech verb introducing a direct quotation occasionally occurs in more literary spoken and written texts.

The bridging constructions examined in this data from narrative texts in White Hmong serve to enhance the salience of the events they describe. This occurs in all cases by virtue of the fact that the clause describing that event “draws attention to itself” (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 210) through repetition. However, in White Hmong, this salience is further enhanced in most cases by variation

between the reference and bridging clause, including modification, omission, addition, substitution, and summary. A particularly common kind of variation involves a change in aspect. This change allows the narrator to shift from a “bird’s eye” view of the event concerned to a more engaged construal, as if pausing momentarily to observe the event as it unfolds. This momentary pause allows the narrator to use that event as a base from which the narrative then moves forward. In these multiple ways, bridging constructions in White Hmong work cohesively, linking one unit in the event line to the next and serving to progress the main sequence of events.

## Appendix

The excerpt below is the beginning of the story of the first man and woman on earth (Johnson 1992: 3–4). There are five bridging constructions in this excerpt, each of which helps to move the story forward in some way. The first bridging construction takes the story from the depiction of the man alone on the dark, barren earth, to the time when his wife is ready to join him. The second introduces a complication: the man has brought a magic flower with him to earth, but there is no wood to use to cook its seeds to eat. This dilemma is resolved, as the third bridging construction explains how they manage to burn coal to cook the seeds. When the seeds begin to run out, we see two bridging constructions in succession: the first resolving this complication, as they plant the remaining seeds, and the second introducing a new complication, as only one plant comes forth.

This excerpt illustrates well how bridging constructions function in White Hmong as part of a wider phenomenon involving the strategy of repetition with variation, to build up elements in a narrative text as it moves forward in intricate, overlapping layers.

(A1) *Thaum ub tsis muaj hnuv tsis muaj hli,*  
time yonder NEG have sun NEG have moon,  
‘Long ago, there was neither sun nor moon,’

(A2) *tsis muaj ib tug neeg nyob hauv lub ntiaj.teb no li.*  
NEG have one CLF person be.located inside CLF earth this at.all  
‘(and) there were no people at all on this earth.’

5 Bridging constructions in narrative texts in White Hmong (Hmong-Mien)

- (A3) *Muaj ib hnub, ib tug txiv.neej txawm tawm ntawm txoj*  
 have one day, one CLF man then emerge place.nearby CLF  
*sawv.toj los.*  
 vein.in.hillside come  
 ‘One day, a man emerged from a vein in the hillside.’<sup>4</sup>
- (A4) *Nws lub npe hu.ua Txiv.Nraug.Luj.Tub.*  
 3SG CLF name be.called Master.Lu.Tu  
 ‘His name was Master Lu Tu.’
- (A5) *Nws tawm ntawm txoj mem.toj los xwb.*  
 3SG emerge place.nearby CLF fissure.in.hillside come only  
 ‘He just emerged from a fissure in the hillside.’
- (A6) *Thaum nws tawm los txog saum yaj.ceb no mas,*  
 when 3SG emerge come arrive place.above earth this IP  
 ‘When he came out up onto the earth,’
- (A7) *ntuj tsaus li qhov.paj teb tsaus li qhov.tsua.*  
 sky be.dark like cavern earth be.dark like cave  
 ‘The sky was as dark as a cavern, the earth as dark as a cave.’<sup>5</sup>
- (A8) *Yeej tsis muaj hnub tsis muaj hli.*  
 originally NEG have sun NEG have moon  
 ‘There was no sun (and) no moon.’
- (A9) *Nws cev tes xuas txawm tau ntuj nyob ntawd ntag.*  
 3SG raise.up hand touch then get sky be.located place.nearby IP  
 ‘He raised up his hand (and) was able to touch the sky there!’<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The terms *sawv toj* and (a few lines further on) *mem toj* both mean ‘vein/fissure in the hillside’, and are related to the Hmong practices of geomancy.

<sup>5</sup>The expression *qhov paj* (lit: ‘hole flower’) does not, by itself, mean ‘cavern’. However here, in combination with *qhov tsua* ‘cave’ (lit: ‘hole rock’), it is probably functioning poetically to refer to limestone caves characterized by flower-like stalactite formations, more generally referred to as *qhov tsua tawg paj* (lit: ‘hole rock bloom flower’) or *qhov tsua paj kaub* (lit: ‘hole rock flower crust’) in Hmong.

<sup>6</sup>In Hmong myths, the sky is often presented as a hemisphere that meets the earth at the horizon (Johnson 1992: 14, fn.2).

- (A10) *Nws tawm ib.leeg ua.ntej los rau nraum yaj.ceed no*  
3SG emerge alone first come to place.outside earth this  
'He came out first, all alone, to this earth'
- (A11) *ces thiaj mam xeeb nws tus poj.niam rau ntawm*  
and.then so.then then.next be.born 3SG CLF wife to place.nearby  
*nws qhov.chaw.*  
3SG place  
'and so then next his wife was born in his place [i.e., in the fissure from which he had emerged].'
- (A12) *Xeeb nws tus poj.niam rau ntawm nws qhov.chaw*  
be.born 3SG CLF wife to place.nearby 3SG place  
*puv-hnub-puv-nyoog*  
be.filled-day-be.filled-age  
'His wife was born into his place (until her) time was fulfilled'
- (A13) *ces nws tus poj.niam thiaj mam tawm lawv qab*  
and.then 3SG CLF wife so.then then.next emerge follow behind  
*los.*  
come  
'and so then next his wife came out after (him).'
- (A14) *Nws tus poj.niam mas hu.ua Niam.Nkauj.Ntxhi.Chiv no.*  
3SG CLF wife TOP be.called Ms.Ntxi.Chi this  
'His wife, (she) was called Ms Ntxi Chi.'
- (A15) *Ces nkawd ob tug niam.txiv thiaj los nyob ua.neej.*  
and.then 3DU two CLF couple so.then come live prosper  
'And then the two of them came [to earth] to live and prosper'
- (A16) *Tsis muaj hnub tsis muaj hli;*  
NEG have sun NEG have moon  
'There was no sun (and) no moon;'



5 Bridging constructions in narrative texts in White Hmong (Hmong-Mien)

- (A17) *ntuj tsaus li qhov.paj teb tsaus li qhov.tsua xwb.*  
 sky be.dark like cavern earth be.dark like cave only  
 ‘the sky was as dark as a cavern, the earth as dark as a cave.’
- (A18) *Thaum Txiv.Nraug.Luj.Tub tawm los*  
 time Master.Lu.Tu emerge come  
 ‘When Master Lu Tu came out’
- (A19) *ces nws txawm tau ib lub paj Caus Ci uas nyob*  
 and.then 3SG then get one CLF flower Cau Ci REL be.located  
*ntawm nws qhov.chaw nrog nws los.*  
 place.nearby 3SG place be.with 3SG come  
 ‘then he got a Cau Ci flower, which had been in his place [i.e., in the fissure] with him.’
- (A20) *Nws nqa tau lub paj tawm los rau nraum yaj.ceeб no.*  
 3SG carry get CLF flower emerge come to outside world this  
 ‘He brought the flower out to this world.’
- (A21) *Coj los*  
 take.along come  
 ‘[He] brought [it] along’
- (A22) *ces tsis muaj xyoob muaj ntoo, tsis muaj hluav.taws li*  
 and.then NEG have bamboo have tree, NEG have fire at.all  
 ‘and then (he) had neither bamboo [nor] trees, [so] (he) had no fire at all.’
- (A23) *Thaum ntawd nws txawm los nyob;*  
 time that 3SG then come live  
 ‘At that time he came to live (here);’
- (A24) *ces nws rauv zeb.ntsuum xwb.*  
 and.then 3SG burn coal only  
 ‘and then he burned only (pieces of) coal.’

- (A25) *Luj Tub nkawd ob.niam.txiv rauv cov ntawd*  
Lu Tu 3DU couple burn CLF:COLL that  
'Lu Tu and his wife burned those'
- (A26) *kib lub paj ntawd cov noob noj xwb.*  
fry CLF flower that CLF:COLL seed eat only  
'(to) fry the seeds of that flower to eat.'
- (A27) *Nkawd nyob ces nyob~nyob,*  
3DU live and.then REDUP~live  
'The two of them lived on and on,'
- (A28) *kib-kib cov noob ntawm lub paj ntawd noj yuav tag;*  
REDUP~fry CLF:COLL seed that CLF flower that eat will finish  
'(and) kept frying the seeds of that flower to eat (until) (they) were  
going to run out;'
- (A29) *ces nkawd thiaj muab koj mus cog.*  
and.then 3DU so.then take take.along go plant  
'So then they took (the seeds) and went to plant (them).'
- (A30) *Cog tas na*  
plant finish IP  
'(They) finished planting (them), don't you know,'
- (A31) *tuaj ib tsob xwb.*  
come one CLF only  
'(and) there came forth only one plant.'
- (A32) *Tuaj tau...*  
come get  
'There came forth (one plant)..''

## Abbreviations

1	first person	IP	illocutionary particle
2	second person	NEG	negation
3	third person	O	transitive object
A	transitive subject	PFV	perfective
CC	copula complement	PL	plural
CLF	classifier	PRF	perfect
CLF:COLL	collective classifier	Q	question particle
COMP	complementizer	REDUP	reduplicated
COP	copula	REL	relativizer
CS	copula subject	SG	singular
DU	dual	SVC	serial verb construction
EX	exclamative	TOP	topic
HESIT	hesitation	V	verb

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