

Book reviews

Herbert Purnell, *An Iu-Mienh–English Dictionary with Cultural Notes*, Center for Lao Studies, San Francisco, and Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 2012, 855 + xxxix pp.

reviewed by *Elisabeth Ginsburg, doctoral student, Linguistics, Australian National University, Coombs Building # 9, Fellows Road, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia. E-mail: elisabeth.ginsburg@anu.edu.au.*

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Purnell's *An Iu-Mienh–English Dictionary with Cultural Notes* is an impressive, useful and somewhat unconventional dictionary. Iu Mienh is a Hmong-Mien language spoken in China, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and parts of the USA and Canada. The dictionary is the result of more than 20 years of work, and it shows. Purnell bends some of the rules of traditional lexicography in interesting and innovative ways. Perhaps the most valuable of these is the extensive inclusion of cultural notes providing information which may not be found elsewhere. In this way, Purnell successfully documents both Iu-Mien language and culture. The book is divided into three main parts. The first part contains a short section on how to use the dictionary and an introduction, which primarily includes a sketch of the sound system and gives further information about navigating entries. The second section is the longest and contains all the dictionary entries, including cultural notes in many cases. The largest and most comprehensive Iu-Mienh dictionary currently in press, it contains: 5,600 entries; 5,000 sample sentences (extracted from a large corpus); 28,000 sub-entries; and 4,500 notes on usage, register and idiom. The extensive cultural notes embedded within the dictionary entries are written on a variety of topics including beliefs, clothing, cooking, courtship, marriage, ceremonies, embroidery, folklore, names, poetry and riddles. The third and final section contains six appendixes, with information about numbers, names, kinship terms, astrological terminology and resources. Purnell writes that this dictionary was created first for the Iu-Mien people living in the USA and Canada. The secondary audience is a group of non-native speakers including anthropologists, linguists and heritage learners.

The 'How to use the dictionary' chapter is brief and instructional. It gives a concise set of definitions for different parts of the entries, written especially for those who are either new to dictionaries or for those who want to jump straight into the dictionary without spending much time reading the introduction. The introduction goes on to provide extended explanations of the format of the dictionary, as well as a general introduction to the language. It includes more detailed discussions of headwords and how to locate specific entries, sub-entries and their meanings. The lists of abbreviations and labels also include arrows pointing to the relevant parts of example dictionary entries, which are helpful for quick reference. Most of the conventions used are likely to be familiar to those who have previous experience with English dictionaries. Additionally, the description of terminology (especially in the introduction) should be sufficient to allow access to those who are not so familiar with dictionaries already.

The introduction contains nine sections. In order, they are: orthography; syllable structure; sound system; contractions; sample of text; variation in spelling; alphabetical order; abbreviations and labels; and additional notes. The explanation of the sound system is the most extensive. Purnell discusses initial and final consonants, both phonetically and orthographically. He also explains the vowels and tones, as well as tone sandhi. Perhaps most interestingly, the tone changes that occur in the context of longer utterances, expressions and compounds are also explored. Although tone sandhi is likely to be touched on to some extent in nearly every dictionary of a tonal language, some of the more complex tone sandhi processes might be dismissed as too complicated for a dictionary, thus typically relegating this topic solely to linguistic articles and so forth. Purnell not only addresses tone sandhi in some depth, but also briefly touches on the complex and intriguing interplay of tone and intonation. He strikes a refreshing balance between appealing to linguist, native speaker and heritage learner audiences throughout the dictionary in explaining linguistically complex ideas in both technical and easily accessible terminology. Bold type is used successfully in this and other sections to engage the reader and to highlight what may be new jargon for non-linguists.

In terms of navigation, the dictionary is easy for a native speaker of English to use because the Iu-Mienh orthography in the dictionary employs a roman script and entries follow English alphabetical order. However, as a non-speaker of Iu Mienh, I found it difficult to search the dictionary because there is no English-to-Iu-Mienh glossary. This could be remedied by making a searchable PDF available on purchase. In this way, a reader could simply search for an English word and be directed to relevant entries. Making a searchable version available might also reduce the duplication of sub-entries. Purnell noted during a presentation about the dictionary at the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society meeting in 2013 that 30% of sub-entries were currently duplicated.

The entries are varied, including a range of different pieces of information. Some entries provide detailed cultural notes, as shown in example 1 below, the entry for *la'haux* [cardamom], which discusses how this particular type of cardamom has spiritual functions:

1. **la'haux** *n.* a type of cardamom. *cul:* The dried pods and seeds are used as a spice. A bunch of the flowers is hung on the top of a baby's hat to protect it from being harmed by the tiger spirit.

Other entries, such as *ndaatv* [a bird's wing] in example 2, contain sub-entries that provide compounds such as *ndaatv ngaengc*, which has an additional idiomatic usage:

2. **ndaatv** *n.* (1) a bird's wing; (2) a fish's fin. **ndaatv ngaengc** wings strong enough to fly (as a young bird). *Usg:* Also an idiom: a strong-willed child unwilling to stay at home.

Yet other entries, such as *douz-mbietc* [a flame of fire] in example 3, include sample sentences drawn from an extensive and varied corpus of Iu Mienh:

3. **douz-mbietc** a flame of fire. *Douz-mbietc za'gengh hiaangx haic oh.* Wow, the flames are shooting up.

In some entries, headwords are followed by common collocations. These entries, with collocations included, convey more about the word or root than would typically be possible in a traditional dictionary. For example, some examples of collocations with the headword *tiux* ‘to run, jump, leap, skip’ are shown in example 4:

4. **tiux** (1) *v.* to run, jump, leap, skip. **kekʋ jienʋ tiux** to hop. **tiux duqʋ henv** to be good at running, run well. **tiux hlaang** to jump or skip rope.

In the final portion of the dictionary there are six appendixes. These include lists of semantically related terms, such as numbers, names, kinship terms, astrological terms, as well as a bibliography and, finally, information about the corpora used to extract examples for the dictionary.

Appendix A discusses how the complex number system works in Iu Mien. Unfortunately, it is written in a somewhat confusing way. This may be due to the immense complexity of the subject matter. There are two number systems, Sets A and B, used in Iu Mien, which each have specific purposes. Set A is used for numbers one to nine and to count thousands and tens of thousands. Set B is used to count tens and hundreds and is also used in a variety of other situations. For instance, Set B numbers are used to count months in ritually significant phrases and as ordinals. Helpfully, throughout this appendix there are charts that allow the reader to unpack the intricate system.

Appendix B, concerned with Iu-Mien names, is a strong aspect of the work. It contains information on lineage name or surname groups, childhood names, adult names and ritual names. This description of the different naming practices of Iu-Mien culture provides a good example of the work that characterizes the dictionary as a whole. The lineage names are handed down through the generations. Purnell lists 12 lineage names, but says that some would list more. Occasionally it is the woman’s lineage name that is passed down and is taken by her husband. This matrilineal transfer of lineage name occurs if the husband is adopted by his wife’s family for some reason – for instance, if he cannot afford the bride price upon marriage. Childhood names can be based on a number of different characteristics including: birth order (which is common, based on gender and using both sets of numbers mentioned above); birth circumstances; dedications and wishes of the parents (such as wishing that they had a boy instead of a girl); and nicknames based on the characteristics of the child. Women keep their childhood names for their whole lives, but men take new adult names when they have their coming-of-age ceremony in their teenage years. Adult male names are composed of two parts. The first part, the generation name, is dependent on the man’s lineage group and denotes the generation which he shares with others in his family of the same generation. The generation names cycle every six years and then repeat. Intriguingly, the second part of a man’s adult name is a personal name which a man’s children will take as their lineage name, unless he is adopted by his wife’s family. Lastly, ritual names are given to a man and his wife upon the man’s completion of up to three ritual ceremonies. These ritual names are used for religious ceremonies and bestow additional merit and honour on those who possess them. The section on Iu-Mien names is well written and makes clear the complex Iu-Mien naming conventions and the great importance placed on the status that names grant a person throughout his or her life.

In Appendix C, which explains Iu-Mienh kinship terms, there are 28 detailed charts which begin to show how complicated the kinship system is in Iu Mienh. In terms of practicality, for a speaker of Iu Mienh, the charts are set up very well. These charts are sometimes separated based on the gender of the speaker and/or whether the relative is related to the speaker through the speaker's mother or father. In each section, the relationships are represented in two ways: paraphrastically ('grandfather of a woman's father or mother') and by using shorthand kinship terminology ('FaFa w.s.' for a woman's father's father). Appendix C contains eight sections. The first explains how to refer to relationships in the three generations below your own (those of your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren). Sections two and three are about relationships which include one's own siblings and their children, and one's cousins. Sections four and five discuss relationships of older generations including one's parents' generation and one's grandparents' generation and older. Sections six to eight describe relationships which include direct in-laws (through one's spouse) and indirect in-laws (through one's siblings, children and grandchildren).

It would be interesting to see a clearer picture of where the overlap of kinship terms does or does not occur, as it may allow for a deeper understanding of the social structures of the Iu-Mien people. However, such an endeavour could easily turn into a publication on its own. Even so, there is plenty of well organized information in this section from which a linguist or anthropologist could analyse the system of kin terms. Perhaps because of the extreme complexity of the system, there are no visual aids (such as kinship diagrams), but, if constructible, they might have been helpful in better understanding the kinship relations. The kinship section was especially interesting and should be particularly useful for Iu-Mien speakers and heritage students wishing to refer appropriately to others within their Iu-Mien social spheres.

Appendix D, on celestial stems and earthly branches, explains the language of the Chinese Zodiac as it is used by the Iu-Mien people. According to Purnell, the Iu Mien have been following the Chinese Zodiac for hundreds of years and also keep track of a 60-year astrological cycle. Like Appendix A, on numbers, the counting section of this appendix is somewhat confusing, though the charts and examples are helpful.

In Appendix E, 'Sources consulted', there are eight sections with a total of 55 references. The sections are organized as follows: general; dictionaries; history, culture, religion and identity; clothing and embroidery; music and literary language; vernacular spoken and written language; historical and comparative linguistics; and finally, Mien as refugees in the USA. The largest section is history, culture, religion and identity. Purnell informs us that the references in this appendix are those which were either integral in the compilation of the dictionary or are important works for Iu-Mienh language and culture, both current and historical. This appendix is clearly divided, well formatted, easy to reference and nicely selective.

Finally, in Appendix F, 'Sources of Iu-Mienh concordance database', there are two sections: published and unpublished materials. Twenty published sources including folk tales, official documents, language teaching materials (topic-specific glossaries) and bibles make up a significant portion of the corpus. The rest comprises unpublished materials from a wide variety of sources, including, but not

limited to, oral folktales, narratives, newsletters and websites. The corpus contains approximately 1.3 million words and was used to check definitions for consistency and to find natural examples. It is wonderful that there is such a large and varied digital corpus now available for Iu Mienh. It is especially helpful to have different genres of language use documented because there are so many modes of communication.

As noted above, I have only two minor criticisms of what is otherwise a fantastic work. The first is that two of the appendixes are difficult to follow, which is unsurprising given the complex nature of the content. The second is that it is difficult for a non-speaker of Iu Mienh to use the dictionary to find specific words based on meaning. It would make the dictionary so much more accessible if a searchable PDF were made available with the purchase of the dictionary. This would immediately mitigate the issue of the lack of an English-to-Iu-Mienh section or glossary. Creating such a searchable PDF would require minimal extra work, but would be a wonderful addition to an already impressive dictionary.

The cultural notes, in addition to the many traditional dictionary entries, make this dictionary invaluable in terms of cultural heritage as well as language preservation. In this important work, Purnell clearly achieves his goals of simultaneously documenting Iu-Mienh language and culture in an accessible and creative manner. This dictionary is an indispensable addition to the libraries of both the Iu-Mienh people (especially those living in the USA and Canada) and scholars of Iu-Mienh and related languages and cultures.

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Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach, eds, *Women, Leadership, and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority*, Brill, Leiden, and Boston, MA, 2012, xvii + 851 pp.

reviewed by *Dr Chiara Formichi, Department of Asian and International Studies, City University, Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong. E-mail: c.formichi@cityu.edu.hk.*

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Women, Leadership, and Mosques is a comprehensive volume addressing multiple manifestations of female religious authority across the world. Going beyond the already established scholarship on Sufi leadership, debates on ‘gender equality’ and Islamic feminism, Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach bring together the work of 25 scholars to pursue an ‘analysis of the growing acceptance of women within mosques and *madrasahs*’, thus taking these spaces traditionally dominated by men as gradually being open to accepting a female presence in leadership roles (p ix).

Definitions of ‘Islamic authority’ vary across disciplines and contexts, but by delimiting its understanding to apply only to processes directly connected to religious knowledge, the contributors to this volume are committed to unpacking the role of Muslim women who are active within conservative institutional settings and who operate through the vocabularies and methodologies used by their male