

SEALS XVII

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**Same Language, Different Contexts, Different Dictionaries for Iu Mien**

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(3) Name(s) of author(s)

**Herbert C. Purnell & Greg Aumann**

(4) Affiliation(s) of author(s)

**Purnell: Biola University (emeritus); Aumann: SIL International**

(5) Email address for each author

**herb.purnell@biola.edu** (for correspondence)  
**Greg\_Aumann@sil.org**

## Same Language, Different Contexts, Different Dictionaries for Iu Mien

### Abstract

Two new dictionaries of Iu Mien (or simply Mien) are nearing completion. The first is a bilingual Iu Mien – English one (hereafter IMTL; Purnell, mss.) based on the virtually identical dialects spoken in Thailand and Laos and by the 30,000 or so Iu Mien refugees from Laos living in the U.S. (about 600 pages containing some 5,400 main entries, 26,000 subentries, 6,500 cultural notes, etc.). The second is a trilingual Iu Mien – Chinese – English dictionary (hereafter IMCH; Pan, Purnell, Aumann, and Aumann, mss.) based on one of the major Mien dialects in China (some 8,000 entries, both main and sub-entries, plus finder lists in characters, *pinyin*, and English). Although both authors of this paper are involved to a considerable with both dictionaries, the two volumes are quite different because they reflect, among other things, differences in contexts, spellings, main secondary languages, target users, and possible functions.

A few brief examples can show something of the differences. First, the target users of IMTL are projected to be researchers, language learners, and Mien refugees concerned to preserve and promote their heritage language both within and outside the ethnic community. However, the target users of IMCH are primarily Mien speakers in China. Second, to serve its target users, IMCH has definitions in Mien, and with the inclusion of a Chinese gloss, *pinyin* of the gloss, and Chinese definition, it is like a combined monolingual and bilingual dictionary. The goal is to help Mien speakers in China learn to read their own language and also learn Chinese characters and *pinyin* (Aumann & Pan 2004). However, this goal was not shared by IMTL because of the considerable number of Mien in the U.S. and other countries outside China that are already literate. Third, although the agreement to use a common orthography for China and U.S. Mien was made in 1984, the spellings used in the two dictionaries differ somewhat because of different preferences based on both structural choices and the pressure of the national language (Purnell 1987, 2002).

This paper will give specific examples of how the differing contexts in which the dictionaries were situated contributed to different decisions about the rationale, collection, and presentation of entries and their content. It will also briefly describe the lexicography software program being used, the modifications that were necessary to accommodate the multilingual data, and the supplemental finder lists it will generate. A handout with samples of actual database and formatted entries from both dictionaries will be provided.

## References

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