

Adjective Ordering in Iu Mien

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Abstract

Like in other Hmong-Mien languages, the majority of adjectival modifiers in Iu Mien are postnominal and have both attributive and predicative uses. However, Iu Mien also has a handful of adjectival modifiers, borrowed from Chinese, that occur prenominally and are restricted in their syntactic distribution. In this paper, we investigate the syntax of these loan modifiers, and propose three stages of change to account for the development of a prenominal, attributive-only modifier to a postnominal modifier with unrestricted uses, via reanalysis of attributive modification as predicative modification within a reduced relative clause.

Keywords: Syntax, adjective, word order, Iu Mien (ISO: ium), Hmong-Mien

1. Introduction

The lexical category of “adjective” describes a class of words used to modify a noun. Adjectives may have two syntactic functions, modifying the noun directly in its attributive function (e.g., *the tall man*) or indirectly in its predicative function (e.g., *the man is tall*) (Dixon 2004). Cross-linguistically, attributive adjectives may be prenominal, as in English and Chinese, or postnominal, as in Thai. Some languages, such as French, have both prenominal and postnominal adjectives; in French, it is possible for the same adjective to be used either prenominally or postnominally, with a slightly different meaning (Laenzlinger 2004).

In this paper, we discuss the syntax of adjectives in the Hmong-Mien language Iu Mien (ISO: ium). The majority of Iu Mien attributive adjectives are postnominal, as in examples (1)-(3). The adjectives *maeng* ‘green’, *ndaauv* ‘long’, and *nzueic* ‘beautiful’ all follow the noun *lui* ‘shirt’.¹

- (1) *naaiv yienc lui- maeng*
DEM CLF shirt green
‘this green shirt’
- (2) *naaiv norm donc- mbuov- waaic*
DEM CLF chair blue broken
‘this broken blue chair’
- (3) *naaiv norm biau- siqv- nzueic*
DEM CLF house red beautiful
‘this beautiful red house’

¹ Iu Mien examples in this article employ the “Unified Script” or “New Roman Script” (Arisawa 2016) orthography, which was standardized in the 1980s (Purnell 1985). Tones are represented with a final <c, v, h, x, z>, and tone sandhi is represented with a hyphen <->, unless the citation form and surface form of the tone is the same (Purnell 2012); modification within the noun phrase triggers tone sandhi while predicative modification does not. The article follows the Leipzig Glossing Rules, with the additional abbreviation: AFF = affirmative.

A handful of adjectives, however, are prenominal, as shown in examples (4)-(6).

- (4) *naaiv yienc domh lui*
 DEM CLF big shirt
 ‘this big shirt’
- (5) *naaiv yienc siang- sic*
 DEM CLF new problem
 ‘this new problem’
- (6) *naaiv yienc loz- biauv*
 DEM CLF old house
 ‘this old house’

Iu Mien thus bears some similarity to French in having both prenominal and postnominal adjectives. However, unlike French, the same adjective cannot be used both prenominally and postnominally.² Prenominal adjectives cannot appear postnominally (7), and postnominal adjectives cannot appear prenominally (8).

- (7) **naaiv yienc maeng- lui*
 DEM CLF green shirt
 ‘this green shirt’
- (8) **naaiv yienc lui- domh*
 DEM CLF shirt big
 ‘this big shirt’

In this paper, we investigate the nature of these prenominal adjectives, and their implications for in Iu Mien syntax more generally. Previous work by Purnell (1972), Downer (1973), Court (1985), Ratliff (2010) and Arisawa (2016) suggests that the prenominal adjectives are loanwords from Chinese, which explains their exceptional word order. However, if we consider all of the adjectives in Iu Mien that are plausibly Chinese loans, we find that they can exhibit different syntactic behavior. While some Chinese loan adjectives are strictly prenominal, others are postnominal; some can only be used attributively while others can also be used predicatively. The heterogenous behavior of this group of adjectives, particularly on varieties of Iu Mien spoken in Thailand, suggests that they are undergoing change due to language contact.

We note that our use of the term “adjective” is not uncontroversial. Adjectives in Lao (Enfield 2004), Thai (Post 2008), and Hmong (Bisang 1993) have been analyzed as stative verbs, that is, as predicates. Iu Mien adjectives have also been analyzed as stative verbs by Court (1985). However, some of the Chinese loanwords under investigation can only be used attributively and not predicatively, and therefore do not behave like stative verbs. We will thus use the term “adjectival modifier” instead of stative verb. This paper examines the nature of the prenominal adjectival modifiers in Iu Mien and their characteristics.

1.1 Language background

Iu Mien, also known as Yao, is a tonal SVO language with 800,000 speakers (according to Ethnologue) in China, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, United States, Canada, and Australia (Barker & Saechao 1997). The

² Adjectives such as *jaav* ‘fake’ which have been observed to exceptionally occur both prenominally and postnominally will be shown to be undergoing a change in progress.

language had close and prolonged contact with Chinese, resulting in Chinese loanwords in all parts of speech (Purnell 1972: 261). Data for this project comes from original fieldwork with two Iu Mien speakers also fluent in English (including the first author) in Northern California.

Word order within the Iu Mien noun phrase is given in (9). With the exception of adjectives, nominal modifiers generally precede the head noun. Modification within the noun phrase triggers tone sandhi, usually indicated orthographically with a hyphen.

- (9) Demonstrative > Numeral > Classifier > Adjective > Noun > Adjective
naaiv *buo* *yiemc* *siang-* *lui-* *siqv*
 DEM three CLF new shirt red
 ‘these three new red shirts’

Relative clauses also precede the head noun, as in (10), and are ordered after demonstratives and before numerals within the noun phrase, shown in (11). The relative pronoun *uov* and classifier *yiemc* in (10) can be omitted, resulting in a reduced relative clause.

- (10) [*Yie* *maaiz* *daaih* *uov*] *yiemc* *lui* *naaic* *siqv* *nyei*.
 1SG buy come REL CLF shirt TOP red AFF
 ‘The shirt that I bought is red.’

- (11) *naaiv* [*yie* *maaiz* *daaih* *uov*] *buo* *yiemc* *siang-* *lui-* *siqv*
 DEM 1SG buy come REL three CLF new shirt red
 ‘these three new red shirts that I bought’

Most adjectives in the language are postnominal in their attributive use (11). Postnominal adjectives may be used both attributively and predicatively, as diagnosed by the predicative intensifier *haic* ‘very’ (13) and clausal negation *maiv* (14) (Arisawa 2016).

- (12) *Ninh* *oix* *zuqv* *naaiv* *yiemc* *lui-* *maeng*.
 3SG want wear DEM CLF shirt green
 ‘He wants to wear this green shirt.’

- (13) *Naaiv* *yiemc* *lui* *maeng* *haic*.
 DEM CLF shirt green very
 ‘This shirt is very green.’

- (14) *Naaiv* *yiemc* *lui* *maiv* *maeng*.
 DEM CLF shirt NEG green
 ‘This shirt is not green.’

1.2 Status of Adjectives

While dynamic verbs denote events with internal structure that may exhibit changes over time, stative verbs denote events with steady states, whereby “every instant involves the same lexical content” (Smiecinska 2003). Like other languages in the Hmong-Mien, Sino-Tibetan and Kra-Dai language families, adjectives in Iu Mien have been categorized as stative verbs. Enfield (2004) argues that Lao adjectival modifiers are stative verbs because they can combine with verbal markers such as perfective aspect in their predicative use. Similarly in Iu Mien, both dynamic verbs (15) and adjectival modifiers (16) can combine with the perfective marker *mi’aqv*, the latter indicating a change of state. Adjectives in Iu Mien have therefore been analyzed as stative verbs (Court 1985, Arisawa 2016).

- (15) *Naaiv yienc lui ndortv mi'aqv.*
 DEM CLF shirt fall PFV
 'This shirt fell.'
- (16) *Naaiv yienc lui ndaauv mi'aqv.*
 DEM CLF shirt long PFV
 'This shirt became long.'

Under the view that Iu Mien adjectival modifiers are not truly adjectives but stative verbs, what appears at first glance to be an attributive modifier, as in (17), should instead be analyzed as a predicative modifier within a (reduced) relative clause. However, since relative clauses in the language are prenominal, as shown in (18), this would not derive the correct word order for adjectives, which are generally postnominal.

- (17) *Ninh oix naaiv yienc lui- ndaauv.*
 3SG like DEM CLF shirt long
 'He likes this long shirt.'
- (18) *Ninh oix naaiv ndaauv uov yienc lui.*
 3SG want DEM long REL CLF shirt
 'He likes this shirt that is long.'

Additionally, if adjectival modifiers were truly stative verbs in Iu Mien, then we would expect all modifiers to be able to be used predicatively and combine with the perfective marker *mi'aqv*. However, this is not the case. Adjectival modifiers that cannot co-occur with *mi'aqv* include *domh* 'big' (19), *fiuv* 'small' (20), and *hieh* 'wild' (21).

- (19) **Naaiv yienc lui domh mi'aqv.*
 DEM CLF shirt big PFV
 'This shirt became big.'
- (20) **Naaiv norm sic fiuv mi'aqv.*
 DEM CLF problem small PFV
 'This problem became small.'
- (21) **Naaiv dauh dungz hieh mi'aqv.*
 DEM CLF pig wild PFV
 'This pig became wild.'

Given the issues that arise with the stative verb analysis, we continue to use the term “adjectival modifier” to refer to all words of the class in Iu Mien that are comparable to the prototypical adjective.

2. Prenominal Adjectival Modifiers

While most adjectival modifiers in Iu Mien are postnominal, there are a handful that occur prenominally. These prenominal adjectival modifiers, listed in Table 1, have been identified as loanwords from Chinese and were borrowed into Iu Mien with the superstrate Chinese word order (Purnell 1972, Downer 1973, Court 1985, Ratliff 2010, Arisawa 2016).

Table 1: Prenominal adjectival modifiers borrowed from Chinese

English	Iu Mien (Unified)	Iu Mien (IPA)	Mandarin (Pinyin)	Mandarin (IPA)
‘new’	siang	siaŋ33	xīn	ɕin55
‘old’	loz	lo231	lǎo	lɑo21
‘big’	domh	tɔm31	dà	ta51
‘small’	fiuv	fiu44	xiǎo	ɕjao21
‘fake’	jaav	ca:44	jiǎ	tɕa35
‘real’	zien	ɕien33	zhēn	tʂən55
‘wild’	hieh	hie52	yě	je21

Other adjectival modifiers identified by Ratliff (2010) as Chinese loans from Middle Chinese (ca. 500 AD), however, are postnominal in the current language. We assume that these postnominal adjectival modifiers, listed in Table 2, were once prenominal and became nativized over time.

Table 2: Postnominal adjectival modifiers borrowed from Chinese

English	Iu Mien (Unified)	Iu Mien (IPA)	Middle Chinese	Modern Chinese (Pinyin)
sour	sui	sui33	swan	suān 酸
narrow	hepc	hep ^h 11	hep	zhǎi 窄
red	siqv	sic ^h 44	tsyhek	chì 赤
salty	nzaaih	dza:i31	dza	cuó 齶
lazy/tired	lueic	luei11	lwojH	lèi 累

In this section, we present the various stages of change of Chinese loan modifiers, using both historical and synchronic evidence. We show that loan modifiers, borrowed initially with prenominal word order and only used attributively, may then expand to predicative uses, and may then finally become postnominal.

2.1 Stage 1: Initial Borrowing

We assume that all adjectival modifiers loaned from Chinese were borrowed into Iu Mien with prenominal word order, reflecting the word order properties of the superstrate language. Seven loan modifiers remain prenominal in the current language; these were listed in Table 1. In addition to their exceptional word order, three of these seven can only be used attributively and not predicatively; *domh* ‘big’ (22), *fiuv* ‘small’ (23), and *hieh* ‘wild’ (24) cannot appear with, for example, the predicative intensifier *haic* ‘very’.

- (22) a. *naaiv norm domh biauiv.*
 DEM CLF big house
 ‘this big house’
- b. **Naaiv norm biauiv domh haic.*
 DEM CLF house big very
 ‘This house is very big.’

- (23) a. *naaiv norm fiuv sic.*
DEM CLF small problem
'this little problem'
- b. **Naaiv norm sic fiuv haic.*
DEM CLF problem small very
'This problem is very small.'
- (24) a. *naaiv dauh hieh dungz.*
DEM CLF wild pig
'this wild pig'
- b. **Naaiv dauh dungz hieh haic.*
DEM CLF pig wild very
'This pig is very wild.'

We posit that these three modifiers preserve the initial state of Chinese loanwords, which were syntactically segregated from native adjectival modifiers not only in their prenominal word order but also by their limited distribution as attributive-only modifiers. The other four prenominal adjectives given in Table 1, however, can be used both attributively and predicatively in the current language; we suggest that these adjectives have progressed to the next stage of change: syntactic expansion.³

2.2 Stage 2: Syntactic Expansion

Siang 'new', *loz* 'old', *jaah* 'fake', and *zien* 'real' are prenominal loan modifiers that expanded in their syntactic distribution to include predicative uses, as shown in (25b) for *siang*.

- (25) a. *naaiv siang- biau*
DEM new house
'this new house'
- b. *Naaiv norm biau siang haic.*
DEM CLF house new very
'This house is very new.'

We propose that this change was facilitated by a reanalysis of some prenominal modifiers as a reduced relative clause. In a reduced relative clause, certain elements such as relative pronouns are deleted without altering the meaning of the clause (Master 2002: 201). Relative clauses occur prenominally in Iu Mien, as shown by the full relative with a verbal predicate in (26a). In its reduced relative counterpart in (26b), the relative pronoun *uov* and classifier *dauh* are omitted.

- (26) a. [*zueiz jienv don uov*] *dauh mienh*
sit PROG chair REL CLF person
'the person who is sitting on the chair'
- b. [*zueiz jienv don*] *mienh*
sit PROG chair person
'the person sitting on the chair'

³ Two loan modifiers, *domh* 'big' and *fiuv* 'small', have competing native counterparts, *hlo* 'big' and *faix* 'small', which may explain why the loan modifiers have not undergone syntactic expansion to predicative uses.

Prenominal loan modifiers such as *siang* ‘new’ which can be used predicatively can also appear in full relative clauses, as shown in (27a). Omitting the relative pronoun and classifier would produce the reduced relative clause in (27b), which is strikingly identical in form to an attributive use of the prenominal modifier.

- (27) a. *siang uov norm biauv*
 new REL CLF house
 ‘the house that is new’
- b. *siang- biauv*
 new house
 ‘new house’

We propose that the attributive use of prenominal modifiers like *siang* was reanalyzed as a reduced relative clause. Since most adjectival modifiers are postnominal but relative clauses are prenominal in Iu Mien, this reanalysis would account for the apparently exceptional word order of these loan modifiers. Importantly, relative clauses have the internal syntax of predicates; in order for the modifier to appear in a relative clause, then, a predicative use must have been innovated. Iu Mien speakers thus took advantage of the close relationship between direct modification and reduced relative modification pointed out by Cinque (2014), whereby attributive, direct modification was reanalyzed as predicative modification within a reduced relative clause. Thus the prenominal adjectival modifiers expanded their syntactic function.

2.3 Stage 3: Nativization

An adjectival modifier being prenominal is a clear indication of being a Chinese loan. However, the loan modifiers given in Table 2, identified by Ratliff (2010) as being borrowed from Middle Chinese, are postnominal today and syntactically indistinguishable from native adjectival modifiers. We posit that these postnominal adjectival modifiers were once prenominal. Data collected by Arisawa (2016) during his time in an Iu Mien village in North Thailand provides evidence for this development. He noticed that “those Iu Mien who have knowledge of Chinese tend to prepose these adjectival element to the head noun, whereas younger Iu Mien who are familiar with Thai tend to postpose them” (2016: 433). *Jaav* ‘fake’, for example, was used prenominally by the older speakers he consulted (28a) but postnominally by younger speakers (29b).

- (28) a. *jaav- nyaanh*
 fake silver
 ‘counterfeit money’
- b. *nyaanh jaav*
 silver fake
 ‘counterfeit money’
- c. *naaiv nyungc nyaanh jaav nyei.*
 DEM kind silver fake AFF
 ‘This money is counterfeit.’

(Arisawa 2016: 434, modified gloss)

Importantly for our proposal, both groups of speakers allow *jaav* to be used predicatively (28c). For Arisawa’s older speakers, then, *jaav* has undergone syntactic expansion to a predicative function. For his younger speakers, *jaav* not only expanded in its function but then became completely nativized, adopting the postnominal word order of native Iu Mien adjectival modifiers. Thus syntactic expansion of the loan

modifiers into a predicative function occurs first, before change to postnominal word order and full nativization.

2.4 Summary of Stages of Change

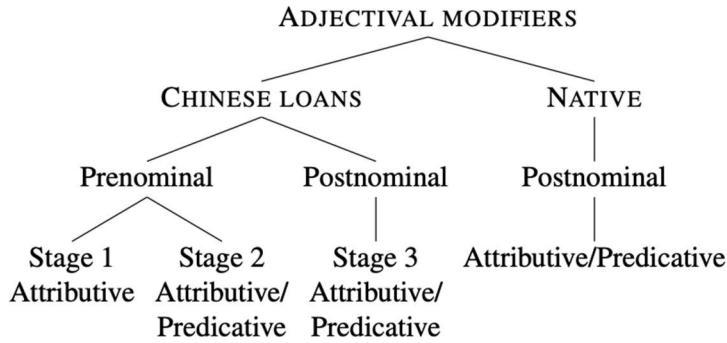
The proposed stages of change for Chinese loan modifiers and their features are summarized in (29). Arisawa (2016) also mentioned the three stages of Chinese loans in the Iu Mien language. At Stage 1 Chinese loans are borrowed into Iu Mien with prenominal word order and only attributive uses, thereby distinguishing them in both word order and syntactic distribution. At Stage 2 the attributive function of Chinese loans, being exceptionally prenominal, is reanalyzed as reduced relative clause modification, resulting in an expansion of the modifiers' syntactic function to include the predicative use. Finally, at Stage 3, the loan modifiers undergo a change from prenominal to postnominal word order, thus becoming indistinguishable from the native Iu Mien adjectival modifiers. The modifier *jaav* 'fake' appears as an example for both Stage 2 and Stage 3 as it is undergoing a change in progress towards nativization.

(29) *Iu Mien Chinese Loan Stages of Change*

- a. Stage 1: Initial Borrowing
 - Attributive use only
 - Prenominal word order
 - Examples: *domh* 'big', *fuv* 'small', *hieh* 'wild'
- b. Stage 2: Syntactic Expansion
 - Attributive and predicative uses
 - Prenominal word order
 - Examples: *loz* 'old', *sianh* 'new', *zien* 'real', *jaav* 'fake' (for older speakers)
- c. Stage 3: Nativization
 - Attributive and predicative uses
 - Postnominal word order
 - Examples: *sui* 'sour', *laangh* 'cool', *gaam* 'sweet', *aiv* 'low/short', *houx* 'thick', *jaav* 'fake' (for younger speakers)

The hierarchy in Figure 1 provides an overview of native and borrowed Iu Mien adjectival modifiers and their syntactic properties. The native adjectival modifiers exhibit uniform behavior, being postnominal and both attributive and predicative. At each successive stage of the Chinese loans, they look more like the native adjectival modifiers, eventually becoming syntactically indistinguishable at Stage 3.

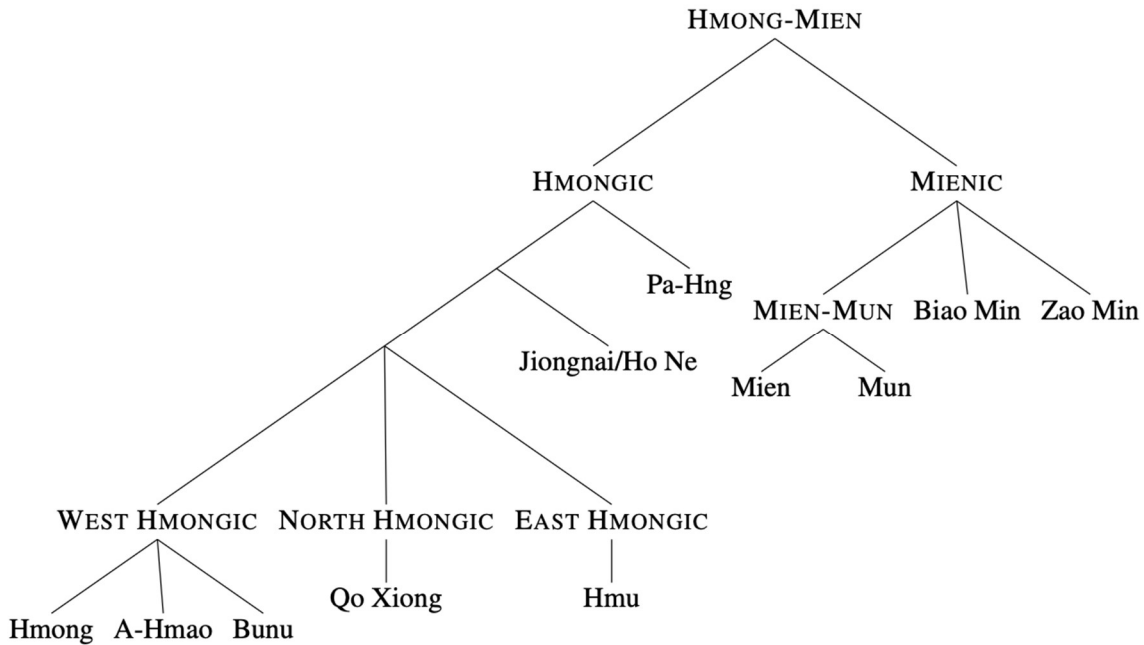
Figure 1: *Hierarchy of Iu Mien Chinese loans and native adjectival modifiers*



3. Related languages

We find further evidence for the proposed stages of change from related languages such as Kim Mun (ISO: mji) and Hmong (ISO: hmh). As shown in Figure 2, Kim Mun is the language variety most closely related to Iu Mien, while Hmong is in a different branch of the language family. Like in Iu Mien, adjectival modifiers in Kim Mun and Hmong are predominantly postnominal, with the exception of some Chinese loan modifiers. The following data were elicited from three Kim Mun speakers living in China and one Hmong speaker in Northern California.

Figure 2. *Hierarchy of the Hmong-Mien language family (Ratliff 2010:3)*



3.1 Kim Mun

Data from Kim Mun shows evidence of syntactic expansion (Stage 2) of Chinese loan modifiers. For example, *xangd* ‘new’ is a prenominal Chinese loan modifier that can be used either attributively (30a) or predicatively, as shown by its use with the intensifier *gau* ‘very’ (30b).

- (30) a. *xangd biauv*
 new house
 ‘new house’
- b. *Wav xeenl biauv gau xangh.*
 That CLF house very new
 ‘That house is very new.’

The Kim Mun modifier *luv* ‘old’, meanwhile, is undergoing the process of nativization (Stage 3), like Iu Mien *jaav* ‘fake’. One of the Kim Mun speakers we consulted produced the adjectival modifier prenominally (31a) while the two others produced it postnominally (31b), although all speakers seemed to accept both word orders. While we found no correlation with age, we do note that our speakers were from different regions of China. We note, furthermore, that *luv* can be used predicatively by all speakers (31c), which supports our argument that syntactic expansion via predicative modification must occur before full nativization via change in word order.

- (31) a. *%luv biauv*
 old house
 ‘old house’
- b. *%biauv luv*
 house old
 ‘old house’
- c. *Wav xeenl biauv gau luv*
 That CLF house very old
 ‘That house is very old.’

3.2 Hmong

Our data for Hmong are not as robust as the data for Kim Mun, but nonetheless provide some evidence for Stage 3, nativization. Bisang (1993) and Jaisser (1995) both report several Chinese loan modifiers with prenominal word order at the time of publication: *nyuag* ‘little’, *tuam* ‘big’, *niag* ‘enormous’, *qub* ‘old, former’, *zoo* ‘good’, and *laus* ‘old’. Due to a difference in vocabulary, our Hmong consultant was not able to verify all of these modifiers. However, we were able to obtain judgments for *laus* ‘old’. As shown, our consultant uses *laus* postnominally (32a) and predicatively (32b), indicating that the modifier has been fully nativized.

- (32) a. *txiv neej laus*
 man old
 ‘old man’
- b. *Tus txiv neej laus heev.*
 DEM man old very
 ‘The man is very old.’

4. Conclusion

While most adjectival modifiers in Iu Mien appear after the head noun, a handful of modifiers borrowed from Chinese appear prenominally. In this paper, we showed that Chinese loan modifiers in Iu Mien do not have a uniform syntactic behavior, but can differ in word order as well as in the availability of a

predicative function. We proposed three stages of change that account for the development of a modifier from its restricted distribution as an attributive-only modifier with prenominal word order to unrestricted uses with postnominal order, via reanalysis of attributive modification as predicative modification within a reduced relative clause. These modifiers are now used by younger generations of Iu Mien speakers exactly like native adjectival modifiers, unaware that they are loans at all. The nativization stage can also be witnessed in related languages such as Kim Mun where certain prenominal adjectival modifiers can also be used postnominally. We hope that our investigation of adjectival modifiers in Iu Mien provides insight into the syntactic consequences of borrowing and language contact, particularly with under-studied languages.

Finally, Iu Mien has been considered to lack adjectives as a distinct lexical category. The fact that adjectival modifiers are generally postnominal while all other noun phrase constituents are prenominal, along with the presence of attributive-only loans, may suggest that Iu Mien indeed has true adjectives.

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