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Personalia

In memoriam Marvin Lionel Bender (1934–2008)
Aethiopica 11 (2008), 223–234
ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by
Universität Hamburg
Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik
Marvin Lionel Bender, a prominent figure in Afroasiatic and Ethiopian linguistics for 50 years and whose works are among the authoritative sources on Omotic and Nilo-Saharan linguistics, died on Tuesday, February 19, 2008 in Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

Born August 18, 1934 in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, he received Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from Dartmouth College in mathematics (1956, 1958). After M.A. studies, Bender taught mathematics in Ghana and then in Ethiopia at Haile Sellassie I University, where he became interested in Ethiopian languages and linguistics, and so returned to graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin, where his 1968 dissertation was directed by Emmon Bach. After Ph.D. studies, Bender was immediately recruited to the research team of the Language Survey of Ethiopia, a Ford Foundation project and part of the five-nation Survey of Language Use and Language Teaching in East Africa. He was the only member of the survey team (also Donald Bowen, Robert Cooper, and Charles Ferguson) with experience in Ethiopia and knowledge of Amharic. The survey report, *Language in Ethiopia* (1976, Oxford University Press), included several chapters by Bender, some co-authored with Ethiopian linguists. Words he wrote in the preface suggest the understanding about research conclusions which was to characterize his many books and articles in Ethiopian linguistics: ‘an attempt to summarize the state of the art … and not a new source of orthodoxy’.

His freely expressed conclusions from research, especially concerning Omotic and Nilo-Saharan classification in which his work became foundational, were frequently controversial, and often superceded by findings of his later work. He was among the first to take up the hypothesis of Harold Fleming about the status of Omotic as a separate branch of Afroasiatic, and that of Robert Hetzron about the internal classification of Ethiopian Semitic. Upon completion of the Survey’s work in Ethiopia, to enable his editing of its report Bender was appointed at Stanford University, where he valued his continuing relationship with Ferguson and, newly, with Joseph Greenberg. In 1971 he joined the Department of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University where he remained until retirement in 1996.

With Ethiopia as an example his early research explored Ferguson’s idea of ‘language areas’, and Greenberg’s method of mass comparison as a basis for genetic language classification in a diverse and under-documented linguistic setting such as Ethiopia. As Greenberg’s classification of African
languages had brought order to the broad field of African linguistics, Bender’s would similarly serve Omotic and Nilo-Saharan.

He was the first to systematically sort through the many problems of Ethiopian-language nomenclature, which had arisen from decades of research in four European languages and competing use of ethnic-group names, self-names, and Amharic names, and failure to distinguish dialect and language, and he was the first to attempt a comprehensive catalog of the languages and named dialects, including a preliminary genetic classification: "The Languages of Ethiopia (Anthropological Linguistics 13.5, 1971).

Bender began to fulfill the need for descriptions of Nilo-Saharan and Omotic languages. His thorough knowledge of prior work, ability to question informants in Amharic, and the new data he acquired enabled him to provide the first internal classification of Omotic, in his Omotic: a New Afroasiatic Language Family (1975), and eventually his Comparative Morphology of the Omotic Languages (2000), and Omotic Lexicon and Phonology (2003). He obtained grants, including from the US National Science Foundation, to study Nilo-Saharan languages, an extraordinarily diverse family with often poorly accessible members. In order to provide the Ethiopian academic community with an affordable introduction to these largely ignored and often despised peoples and their languages, he self-published, in Addis Ababa, The Ethiopian Nilo-Saharans (1975). Bender authored, with speakers of the languages, dictionaries on two, Gaam (1980) and Kunama (1996), and edited six volumes of Nilo-Saharan papers. His latest book on this family was The Nilo-Saharan Languages: a Comparative Essay (1996). His Omotic and Nilo-Saharan works are a major contribution to the preservation of endangered languages.

After retiring from Southern Illinois University, he continued to write and publish with energy, despite failing health, including entries in Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, and a finished 145-pp. manuscript on ‘Cushitic lexicon and phonology’.

List of Publications

1966
1. Notes on lexical correlations in some Ethiopian languages. JES 4.1: 5–16.
1968
1969

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1970


1971


1972


1973


1974


1975

26. Toward a lexicostatistic classification of Ethiopian languages. *Hamito-Semitica: proceedings of a colloquium held by the Historical Section of the Linguistics Association,*
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1976


39. with ROGER COWLEY, HAILU FULASS, GETATCHEW HAILE, and CHARLES A. FERGUSON. The Amharic language, LiE, 77–98.

40. with SYDNEY W. HEAD and ROGER COWLEY. The Ethiopian writing system, LiE, 120–129.

41. with MULUGETA ETEFFA. Galla, LiE, 130–148.

42. with J.D. BOWEN, ROBERT L. COOPER, and CHARLES A. FERGUSON. Introduction, LiE, 1–19.

43. with HAILU FULASS and ROGER COWLEY. Two Ethio-Semitic languages, LiE, 199–119.


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1977

52. Editor (1977–79). *Nilo-Sahelian Newsletter*. 6 issues. (no. 1 titled *Nilo-Saharan newsletter*).

53. Discussion and debate: two notes on terminology: reviews by GAMST and AUSTIN. *AA* 79: 901–902.


1978


1979


1980


1981


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1985

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1987


122. Gender in Omotic. *Journal of Afroasiatic languages* 2.2: 203–221.


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1992


1993


1994

152. Aroid (South Omotic) lexicon. AAP 38: 133–162.


1995


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1996
162. The genetic sub-grouping of East Sudanic, Proceedings of the sixth international Nilo-Saharan linguistics conference (Santa Monica, 1995; AAP 45), M.L. Bender and Tom Hinnebusch, eds., 139–150. Cologne: Institut für Afrikanistik, Universität zu Köln.
164. Nilo-Saharan 95, AAP 45: 1–25 (Proceedings of the Sixth International Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Conference (Santa Monica, 1995), M. Bender and Thomas J. Hinnebusch, eds.).

1997

1998

1999

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2000
183. Roland Stevenson’s Nyimang and Dinik Lexicon. AAP 63: 103–120.

2001

2002

2003
190. Anfillo, EAE 2, 161–262.

2005
196. Dizi, EAE 2, 175–176.
197. Ethiopian language area, EAE 2, 411–413.
198. Ferguson, Charles Albert. EAE 2, 529.
199. Gonga, EAE 2, 848–849.
201. Harro, EAE 2, 1037–1038.

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204. Hozo-Sezo, *EAE* 3, 85–86.

**Forthcoming**

208. *Cushitic lexicon and phonology*, 145 pp. finished manuscript.

**Abbreviations in the List of Publications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>American Anthropologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Anthropological Linguistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>AuU</td>
<td>Afrika und Übersee</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAE 1–4</td>
<td>Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, vol. 1–4, Siegbert Uhlig, ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz</td>
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<tr>
<td>JES</td>
<td>Journal of Ethiopian Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>LiE</td>
<td>Language in Ethiopia, M.L. Bender et al., eds. London: Oxford</td>
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<tr>
<td>LiS</td>
<td>Language in Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSiAL</td>
<td>LINCOM Studies in Afroasiatic Linguistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>TiNSL</td>
<td><em>Topics in Nilo-Saharan Linguistics</em> (Nilo-Saharan linguistic analyses and documentation 3), M. Lionel Bender, ed. Hamburg: Buske.</td>
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