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# How to quote Ethiopian authors in linguistic publications

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## Abstract

As the patronymic Ethiopian names do not match the widespread GIVEN NAME – FAMILY NAME pattern of the Western world, the names of Ethiopian authors are often quoted inconsistently and inappropriately by scholars in the field of linguistic typology and historical-comparative linguistics. After a brief introduction into the Ethiopian naming conventions and a summary of recurrent issues in quoting Ethiopian authors in scientific publications, we propose a number of general citation rules that would help overcome these issues and do justice to the Ethiopian naming conventions. The rules are offered as an addendum to the *Generic Style Rules for Linguistics*. Finally, the article demonstrates how reference management software can be manipulated so that it correctly applies the Ethiopian naming conventions.

Keywords: Ethiopian names, patronym, quotation, reference management software

## 1. Introduction

Thanks to the steadily increasing number of Ethiopian scholars engaged in linguistics and, consequently, thanks to the growing international visibility of their publications, more and more Ethiopian authors are quoted in typological and historical-comparative works. However, as the Ethiopian naming system does not match that of the widespread GIVEN NAME – FAMILY NAME pattern in the Western world (§2), the citation conventions applied when quoting Ethiopian authors are highly inconsistent and often inappropriate due to the patronymic structure of Ethiopian names.

In this paper, we first introduce the Ethiopian naming conventions (§2) and highlight some of the recurrent issues (§3) arising when authors quote Ethiopian colleagues in their works and when scientific and commercial editors of books and journals proofread these manuscripts. In the core of this paper (§4), we propose general rules on how to quote Ethiopian authors appropriately. In the section on practical solutions

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(§5), we show how reference management software can be “tricked” into applying Ethiopian naming conventions correctly. The paper is concluded in §6.<sup>1</sup>

We offer this text as an addendum to the *Generic Style Rules for Linguistics* (Haspelmath 2014). We want to stress that it is not targeted at an audience of Ethiopianists (i.e. scholars engaged mainly in the study of Ethiopian culture, history, and languages), but we address an audience of scholars in the field of linguistic typology and historical-comparative linguistics.

## 2. Ethiopian naming system

In the Ethiopian patronymic naming system (see Kaplan & Smidt 2007: 1126–1127),<sup>2</sup> the concept of a FAMILY NAME is unknown. A person is identified by their GIVEN NAME, which is followed by their FATHER’S NAME (patronym) and, especially in administrative contexts (e.g. at the immigration office, town hall, university), by their paternal GRANDFATHER’S NAME (avonym), e.g.

- a. Tsehay Berhanu Abebe (*Tsehay* = female given name, *Berhanu* = her father’s name, *Abebe* = her father’s father’s name)
- b. Mohamed Ahmed Nasir (*Mohamed* = male given name, *Ahmed* = his father’s name, *Nasir* = his father’s father’s name)

The FATHER’S or GRANDFATHER’S NAMES are not FAMILY NAMES but simply GIVEN NAMES of the respective individuals. Hence members of the same family do not share a family name. If Mohamed Ahmed Nasir in (b) had a daughter Sitti, she would be called Sitti Mohamed (= her father) Ahmed (= her grandfather). Names do not change through marriage.

In Ethiopia, people are exclusively addressed by their GIVEN NAME, with which forms of address such as ‘Mr’/‘Ms’ (e.g. in Amharic the corresponding terms would be *ato* ‘Mr’, *wäyzero* ‘Mrs’, *wäyzerit* ‘Miss’, in Oromo *obboo* ‘Mr’ and *aaddee* ‘Ms’) or academic and other titles can be combined. In a formal context, the two persons in (a–b) could be addressed as Ms Tsehay or Prof. Tsehay (and **not** Ms/Prof. Abebe), and as Mr Mohamed or Dr Mohamed (and **not** Mr/Dr Nasir).

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<sup>2</sup> By “Ethiopian” naming system, we mean the naming system as reflected in official documents of the modern Ethiopian state as well as the naming practice currently followed by most Ethiopians irrespective of their linguistic, ethnic and religious background. Readers should note that certain of the more than eighty ethnic groups in Ethiopia may traditionally follow (or have followed) a different naming system.

The patronymic naming system is not particular to Ethiopia or the other countries at the Horn of Africa (i.e. Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia) but is also found elsewhere in the world where the (grand)father's name or a name derived from it is used as a component of a child's full name and where family names are either unknown or uncommon, see e.g. Iceland (Garðarsdóttir 1999) and parts of India and Sri Lanka (e.g. the Tamil naming system; see Nalini et al. 2008). For further information, see *A guide to names and naming practices* (2006).

### 3. Problem

Following the naming conventions in §2, in publications written in Ethiopian languages, Ethiopian authors are exclusively cited by their GIVEN NAME followed by their FATHER'S (and optionally GRANDFATHER'S) NAME. See, for instance, Baye's (2000 EC: 459) Amharic grammar, Berhanu's (1999 EC: 417–418) study of Amharic poems, or Laphiso's (1983 EC: 325–332) work on the Ethiopian feudal system.<sup>3</sup> A number of scientific journals published in Ethiopia request explicitly that Ethiopian authors are quoted according to the conventions explained in §2, see e.g. the submission guidelines of the *Ethiopian Renaissance Journal of Social Sciences and the Humanities* (2019) and *Ethiopian Journal of Sciences and Sustainable Development* (2019).

In the domain of Ethiopian Studies, Ethiopianists also use the GIVEN NAME + FATHER'S NAME citation style in their publications in English or other European languages, e.g. Rubenson (1978: 421–427), Pankhurst (1990: 335–351), and Bahru (1992: 79–80, 148–149, 176–177, 226–227) on Ethiopian history, Ullendorff (1978: 138–141) and Leslau (1995: xxviii–xlv) on Amharic, and Griefenow-Mewis (2001: 10) on Oromo. The same established practice is followed in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (Uhlig & Bausi 2003-2014) and the journal *Aethiopica*.

However, any linguist who addresses a general linguistic audience and quotes Ethiopian authors in accordance with the Ethiopian naming conventions regularly has their reference list and in-text citations “improved for the worse” (here we lack a good translation of the useful German word *verschlimmbessern*). Outside Ethiopia, scientific and commercial editors of journals and books tend to turn FATHER'S and GRANDFATHER'S NAMES into FAMILY NAMES and order them accordingly in the reference list. Alternatively, authors' GIVEN NAMES are turned into FAMILY NAMES and their FATHERS' and GRANDFATHERS' NAMES into GIVEN NAMES. In in-text citations, authors are variably

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<sup>3</sup> University students in Ethiopia often over-apply the Ethiopian naming conventions and quote Western authors by their GIVEN NAME rather than their FAMILY NAME, e.g. “as stated in Ronny (YEAR) ...” for “as stated in Meyer (YEAR) ...”.

quoted by their GIVEN NAME, their FATHER'S or GRANDFATHER'S NAME or by a two-name or three-name sequence. If the style manual of a publication requires author's initials only, one can find Ethiopian authors cited by their FATHER'S NAME (interpreted as a FAMILY NAME) and their GIVEN NAME abbreviated to the initial letter, e.g. "Demoz, A." for Abraham Demoz (as cited in Ghirmai 1999: 222–236) – which renders it almost impossible for readers to identify the quoted author. Ethiopians themselves contribute to the already existing confusion by sometimes signing their papers as GIVEN NAME + FATHER'S NAME, and sometimes with an additional GRANDFATHER'S NAME (e.g. Degif Petros or also Degif Petros Banksira) – which means that editors order some publications under the assumed family name "P[etros]", others under "B[anksira]".<sup>4</sup> The situation is rendered even more complicated by scholars of Ethiopian origin living in the West who follow Western naming standards and who quote themselves (whether of their own accord or obliged by the editors) by their GRANDFATHER'S NAME (usually when they have left Ethiopia within the past two decades) or by their FATHER'S NAME (usually when they left Ethiopia more than two decades ago). For instance, the specialist for Ethiosemitic languages Girma Awgichew Demeke, who lives in the US, cites his work as "Demeke", the Omotist Azeb Amha in the Netherlands cites her works as "Amha", and Mengistu Amberber, an expert of Amharic in Australia, cites his works as "Amberber". In addition, scholars of Ethiopian ancestry but born in the West may have an Ethiopian name as an established family name, as, for instance, Julian Tadesse (e.g. Seidel, Moritz & Tadesse 2009).

#### 4. Proposal

In order to do justice to the Ethiopian naming conventions in scientific publications, we propose the following rules for citing Ethiopian authors:

**Rule R1:** The patronymic structure of Ethiopian names should be retained in citations and references.

**Rule R2:** The names of Ethiopian authors should not be abbreviated, even if a style manual calls for authors' initials only.

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<sup>4</sup> Ethiopian linguists suffer the same fate as Ethiopian long-distance runners like Kenenisa Bekele and Tirunesh Dibaba, who usually wore their FATHERS' NAMES (rather than their GIVEN NAMES) on their jerseys in international competitions. Ethiopian politicians, too, are often mistakenly called by their FATHERS' NAMES in Western media. The former Ethiopian head of state (1977-1991) Mengistu Haile Mariam (with *Haile Mariam* being a compound name meaning the 'power of Mary') was even once referred to as *Herr Mariam* ('Mr Mariam') in the German media and thus called, literally, 'Mr Mary'.

- Rule R3:** In the reference list, Ethiopian authors should be sorted by their GIVEN NAME followed by their FATHER'S NAME and (if used) GRANDFATHER'S NAME without a comma. Example:
- Girma Mengistu Desta. 2016. Tone in Sezo. *Oslo Studies in Language* 8, 1: 55-83.
  - Hirut Woldemariam. 2006. Some aspects of the phonology and morphology of Dawuro. *Folia Orientalia* 42/43: 71-122.
- Rule R4:** When following the author-date in-text citation, Ethiopian authors should be quoted by their GIVEN NAME. Example:
- “As has been shown by Girma (2016), ...”  
not: “... by Mengistu Desta/by Desta (2016)”
  - “For more information see Hirut (2006).”  
not: “... see Woldemariam (2006)”
- Rule R5:** If two or more works of authors with identical names are published in the same year, the FATHER'S (and GRANDFATHER'S) NAME should be added in the in-text citation. Example:
- “As has been shown by Girma Mengistu (2012) and Girma Awgichew (2012), ...”
  - “For more information see Tsehay Abebe (2019) and Tsehay Berhanu (2019), ...”
- Rule R6:** For better readability, R5 can also be applied when authors of the same GIVEN NAME have published works in different years.
- Rule R7:** Names of Ethiopian authors are given in their established Romanised form and are not transliterated from the Ethiopic script (*fidel*). Note that authors with the same name may use different Romanisations. For instance, ቡርሃኑ (transliteration: Bərhanu) may write himself “Berhanu” or “Birhanu”, or ቡንሃም (transliteration: Bənyam) may write himself “Beniam”, “Binyam” or “Biniyam”. If the established Romanised form of an Ethiopian author is unknown because they only publish in Amharic or other Ethiopian languages written in fidel, their name is transliterated according to the conventions of the journal *Aethiopica* (see Transcription/transliteration tables n.d.). These conventions are also used in the reference list for

transliterating titles of articles, book and chapters written in the Ethiopic script (as in our reference list below).

These rules should be considered optional. Linguists of Ethiopian descent living in Europe, North America or Australia tend to adapt to Western naming standards and to reinterpret their FATHER’S or GRANDFATHER’S NAME(S) as FAMILY NAMES. These authors may prefer to be quoted according to the Western naming pattern – a look into their self-edited publications should give an indication about their citation preference.

## 5. Practical solutions

Reference management software usually provides two fields for an author’s (editor’s, translator’s, etc.) name: GIVEN NAME and FAMILY NAME. When citing Ethiopian authors according to the conventions laid out in §4, it is necessary to trick the software into displaying the names correctly in in-text citations and in the bibliography. We provide here two workarounds for bibliography management in the free software Zotero and LaTeX.

### 5.1. Zotero

In order to sort Ethiopian authors by their GIVEN NAME according to R2, all name components (GIVEN NAME, FATHER’S and GRANDFATHER’S NAME) need to be inserted into the field “last name”; the field “first name” remains empty (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

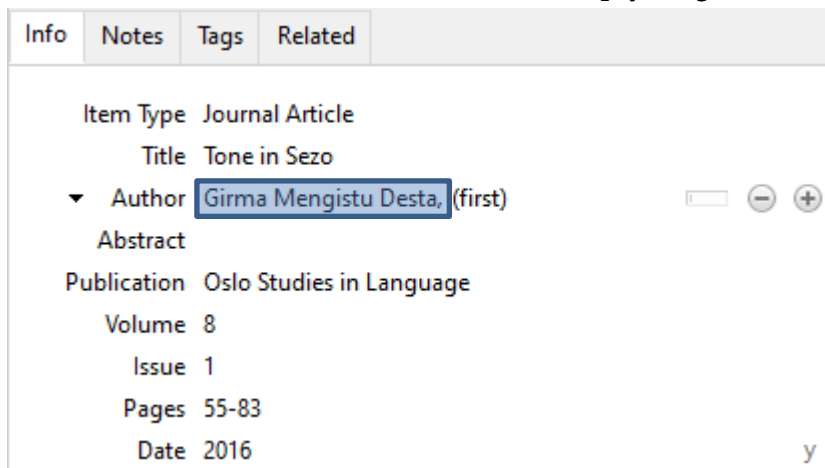


Figure 1. Zotero metadata sheet

While this causes the works by “Girma Mengistu Desta” to be sorted correctly under “G[irma]” and not “[D]esta” in the list of references, it creates overly long in-text

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<sup>5</sup> We advise against choosing single field formatting in the author line and against inserting the GIVEN-FATHER-GRANDFATHER NAME in this one field, as this would not change Zotero’s “understanding” of the name. It would continue to interpret the GRANDFATHER’S NAME as the name according to which it sorts.

citations, as Zotero consequently displays all name components, i.e. “(Girma Mengistu Desta 2016)” rather than “(Girma 2016)”. Therefore, when inserting in-text citations, one has to suppress the author’s name in the cite options window (tick box “suppress author” in the menu) and add the GIVEN NAME or – if several authors of the same GIVEN NAME are quoted in one paper – the GIVEN NAME + FATHER’S NAME as a prefix instead (Figure 2). Possibly, a comma is needed after the author’s name, depending on the citation style of the publication outlet. This “prefix trick” helps to display the citation as “(Girma 2016)” in the text.<sup>6</sup>

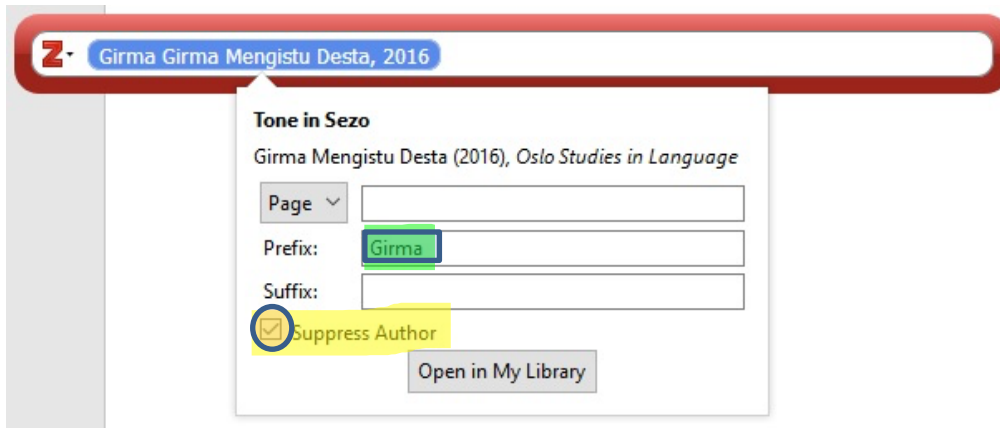


Figure 2. Zotero citation dialogue in Word

Matters are more complex when a co-authored paper is to be cited. In this situation, after the suppress box is ticked, all authors need to be typed into the prefix field. The ampersand “&” or the conjunction “and” needs to be inserted manually before the last author (depending on the citation style of the publication outlet).

## 5.2. LaTeX

In the bibliography file (.bib) of a LaTeX document (Figure 3), the full name of Ethiopian authors can be enclosed in parentheses so that no name component is analysed as a FAMILY NAME. Next, one adds two additional fields to the records (in bold in the following).

```
@book{Alemu2016,
    address = {Addis Ababa},
    author = {{Alemu Banta Atara}},
    shortauthor = {Alemu},
```

<sup>6</sup> In principle, one could also manually modify the author’s name and delete the superfluous “Mengistu Desta” directly in Word. However, manual modifications prevent Zotero from automatically updating the citation.



```
sortkey = {Alemu},  
publisher = {Berhanena Selam Printing},  
title = {Kookaata: {K}ambaatissa-  
\textup[{{K}ambaata-  
year = {2016}  
}
```

Figure 3. Bibliography file in LaTeX

The field `shortauthor = {Alemu}` abbreviates the full name “Alemu Banta Atara” to the GIVEN NAME “Alemu” in in-text citations (see Figure 4). If several quoted authors called Alemu need to be differentiated (see R4 in §4), one can also abbreviate the name to `shortauthor = {Alemu Banta}`.

<sup>1</sup>See (27) for an example of a pre-reduplicated noun.

<sup>2</sup>Transcriptions in this chapter use the official Kambaata orthography, which is based on the Roman script (Treis 2008: 73-80; Alemu 2016). One important adaptation is here made to the official orthography: phonemic stress is marked by an acute accent on the vowel. The following

Figure 4. In-text citation

The field `sortkey = {Alemu}` ensures that the entry is sorted by the GIVEN NAME in the list of references.

## 6. Conclusions

We are not the first to raise awareness to the Ethiopian naming conventions among members of the scientific and librarian communities; see Kebreab (2007 [1974]), Appiah (2010), Mesfin (2020) and Walsh (2004: 19-21), to quote but a few. The persistently widespread misinterpretation of the Ethiopian naming system by editors, publishers and researchers in linguistics (and beyond) has repercussions that go well beyond inverted author names in in-text citations and reference lists. The problem we have described here ensues issues with indexing and cataloguing in libraries and online archives, and consequently issues of information access. Moreover, on a personal level, variant and erroneous forms of names make it difficult to attribute publications to Ethiopian authors unequivocally and to determine where and how often they are cited and what the impact of their work is. In this paper, we have brought forward a proposal of citation conventions that, if followed consistently, would ensure that publications are correctly attributed, that linguistic works became

more easily accessible, and, most importantly, that research works by Ethiopian authors were duly acknowledged.

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