

# Obituary – Kenneth David Smith (1935 - 2016)

by Bruce Hansen, Linda Hansen, David Smith, Peter Smith, Phil Smith, Wendy Smith



Dr. Kenneth David Smith, 81, whose career with SIL International as a linguist and administrator spanned more than half a century, died November 8, 2016 in Carol Stream, Illinois.

Born July 19, 1935, Ken grew up in Evanston, Illinois, until the end of World War II when his family moved to East Orange, New Jersey. After completing a degree in mechanical engineering at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, he moved to Waltham, Massachusetts, where he worked at Raytheon Company and completed a Bachelor of Divinity at Gordon Divinity School in 1960. During this time, while playing the organ at Waltham

Evangelical Free Church, he noticed Marilyn Brady singing alto in the choir. They married there in 1959.

Having sensed a call to “technical missionary” service in high school, he joined Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL in 1960. In 1962 he sailed with Marilyn and their newborn daughter Linda to South Vietnam for his first assignment. After learning Vietnamese, he took up study of the Sedang language. In addition to language research, he also served as general contractor for the building of a linguistic workshop center in Kontum. His colleagues recognized his gift of administration and in January 1975, while on furlough, he was elected branch director. Before he could return to take up the role, however, SIL personnel had to evacuate the country because of the communist takeover later that year.

Returning overseas, Ken and Marilyn went to the Philippines. For the next three years, he directed the phase-out of the Vietnam/Cambodia Branch as members published or archived their materials before moving on to other assignments. During that time, he made nine visits to Thailand and Malaysia, initiating SIL work in both of those countries. In 1979 the SIL board appointed him to serve as the first director of the SIL branch in Sabah, Malaysia, where he served until 1985.



From 1986-1992 and again from 1993-1997, he worked as executive assistant to the SIL Asia Area director in Manila. During the first three of those years, he also served as the first director of the Thailand Group, a role performed mostly from Manila. In 1998 Ken and Marilyn moved to Chiang Mai, Thailand, where he then served 12 years as finance manager for the Mainland Southeast Asia Group.

After spending most of his life serving Bibleless people groups in Southeast Asia, Ken's last assignment, from 2011-2015, was as cashier, financial aid administrator, and work-study coordinator for the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics in Dallas, Texas.

In between field terms, Ken earned an M.A. in linguistics (University of North Dakota, 1968), a Ph.D. in linguistics (University of Pennsylvania, 1975), taught linguistics (especially literacy-related courses), and compiled a dictionary of the Sedang language (published 2012).

He retired in 2015 at the age of 80.

After living with cancer for many years, his health began to decline early in 2016. He died peacefully at home in Windsor Park Retirement Community on November 8, 2016.



He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Marilyn Lois Brady Smith; his children, Linda Ann Hansen, nurse and homemaker in Laibin, China; Dr. David Kenneth Smith, music professor and director of The Genevans, the student choir of Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania; Peter Edward Smith, a business consultant in Warrenville, Illinois; Philip Jon Smith, Global Ministries Field Director for Leadership Resources International, also in Warrenville, Illinois; and 15 grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his parents and brother Donald in the late 1970s, and by his son Jonathan Howard Smith, who died in a traffic accident in 1971 in Nha Trang, Vietnam, at the age of two. The story of that event is told by Hugh Steven in a 1974 book, *It Takes Time to Love*, published by Wycliffe Bible Translators. (It was privately reprinted in 2003 with an Epilogue update by Ken.)

As a young boy, Ken accepted Jesus as his Savior. His life was permeated by a devotion to his Lord and a desire to serve Him faithfully. He was widely known for his humble spirit of service and his organizational skills. He was gifted in turning chaos into order. He loved music and participated in choirs whenever he could. He played trumpet, piano, and organ, and enjoyed accompanying people singing hymns as much as they enjoyed him doing it. His forgiving spirit, sense of humor, and optimistic outlook on life will be greatly missed.

His professional writings, as listed in the SIL Corporate Bibliography (published, unpublished, and conference papers) are:

**Sole-authored works:**

- 1963 [Word lists: Sedang, Katu, Brou](#)
- 1965 [English guide to Cây-Cỏ Miền Nam Việt-Nam by Phạm Hoàng Hộ Bộ Quốc-Gia Giáo-Dục Xuất-Bản, 1960](#)
- 1967 [Sedang dialects](#), Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises
- 1967 Smith, Kenneth D., [Sedang dialects](#)
- 1967 '[BáihòctòpuiRótéang = Bài học tiếng Sedang = Sedang language lessons](#), Tủ sách ngôn ngữ dân tộc thiểu số Việt Nam

- 1968 [Laryngealization and de-laryngealization in Sedang phonemics](#)
- 1968 [The phonology of Sedang personal names](#), Anthropological Linguistics
- 1969 [The phonology of Sedang personal names](#), Anthropological Linguistics
- 1969 [Sedangethnodialects](#), Anthropological Linguistics
- 1969 [Sedang affixation](#), Mon-Khmer Studies
- 1969 [Homonyms in Sedang kinship terminology](#)
- 1970 [Proto-North-Bahnaric](#)
- 1972 [A phonological reconstruction of Proto-North-Bahnaric](#), Language Data, Asian-Pacific Series,
- 1973 [Denasolaryngealization in Sedang folk-linguistics](#), Mon-Khmer Studies
- 1973 [More on Sedangethnodialects](#), Mon-Khmer Studies
- 1973 [Eastern North Bahnaric: Cua and Kotua](#), Mon-Khmer Studies
- 1974 [Text vs. dictionary letter frequencies for primers](#), Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session
- 1974 [A computer analysis of Vietnam language relationships](#), Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session
- 1974 [Sociolinguistics and the Bahnar pronoun system](#)
- 1975 [The velar animal prefix relic in Vietnam languages](#), Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area
- 1975 [Phonology and syntax of Sedang, a Vietnam Mon-Khmer language](#)
- 1976 [North Bahnaric numeral systems](#)
- 1976 [A summary of the work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in languages of the Tai family](#),
- 1976 [Sedang pronoun reference](#), Mon-Khmer Studies
- 1976 [Sedang animal folk taxonomy](#), Mon-Khmer Studies
- 1978 [An automatic typewriter assist to comparative linguists, with application to 30 Mon-Khmer languages](#),
- 1978 [The payoff from rhyming dictionaries: distribution and frequency of word-final -VCs and a bridge between Bahnaric and Katuic](#)
- 1979 [Sedang grammar: Phonological and syntactic structure](#), Pacific Linguistics B, Linguistics
- 1981 [A lexico-statistical study of 45 Mon-Khmer languages](#), Linguistic Society of the Philippines Special Monograph Issue, Language Assessment
- 1981 [Bilingual education in the Austronesian languages of Vietnam circa 1974](#), 1981, Literacy and Education
- 1982 [Bibliography of the Summer Institute of Linguistics Malaysia Branch 1978 - 1981](#), Library/Museum/Archiving
- 1983 [InstitutLinguistik SIL, Cawangan, Malaysia: Annual report of the Malaysia Branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, January-December 1982](#), Communications
- 1984 [The languages of Sabah: a tentative lexicostatistical classification](#), Pacific Linguistics C, Language Assessment, Sociolinguistics
- 1985 [Technical writing: a look at the final manuscript](#), Academic Training, Publishing
- 1989 [Kinship variation among Vietnam language groups](#), Mon-Khmer Studies, Anthropology, Linguistics
- 1992 [The -VC rhyme link between Bahnaric and Katuic](#), Mon-Khmer Studies, Linguistics
- 2012 [Từ-điểnXơ-đăng-Anh-Việt-PhápSedang Dictionary with English, Vietnamese, and French Glossaries](#), SIL Language and Culture Documentation and Description, Linguistics

**Works authored with others:**

- 1973 Gregerson, Kenneth J. and Kenneth D. Smith, [The development of Todrah register](#), Mon-Khmer Studies
- 1976 Gregerson, Kenneth J., Kenneth D. Smith, and David D. Thomas, [The place of Bahnar within Bahnaric](#), 1976, Oceanic Linguistics, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics
- 2015 Sidwell, Paul and Kenneth D. Smith, [Sedang](#)

**Works edited:**

- 1985 [Annual report of the Malaysia branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, January-December 1984](#)

**Works compiled:**

- 1967 [Ngữ-vựngSedang = Sedang vocabulary](#), Tủ sách ngôn-ngữ dân tộc thiểu số Việt Nam
- 1968 [Vietnam word list \(revised\): Sedang](#)
- 1970 [Vietnam word list \(revised\): Kotua](#)
- 1978 [Bibliography of the Summer Institute of Linguistics Mainland Southeast Asia Branch 1958-1978 and Supplement of Unpublished materials 1958-1978](#)
- 2000 [Từ điển xơ-dăng-anh-việt-phápSedang dictionary with English, Vietnamese and French glossaries: a thesaurus-alphabetical listing of Sedang words and word groups](#)

**Self-published:**

- 2005 [Themes of Life, Vignettes from the Life of Our Family](#), self-published