LANGUAGE PLANNING CHALLENGED BY IDENTITY CONTESTATION IN A MULTILINGUAL SETTING: THE CASE OF GAMO

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ABSTRACT

A common language-planning problem in places with plural societies is deciding which language should be the language of education. Indeed, decisions regarding which languages should be established as the medium of instruction (MOI hereafter) are political decisions which, if ill managed, can lead to appalling consequences. Often, political ideologies and identity contestations interact with and bring influence to on the interpretation of linguistic endeavors. Linguistic diversity in the Gamo area has become entangled with political interests in the process of (re)articulating and implementing the current multilingual language policy in Ethiopia. Contrasting positions have been taken in the course of implementation of the policy. On the one hand, the local authorities have tended to adopt a type of assimilationist approach. Considering the close genetic relationship among the linguistic groups, a common MOI has been prescribed for several ethno-linguistic groups in the former North Omo Zone. On the other hand, despite the existing strong linguistic similarities and mutual intelligibility, various groups have asserted that they differ from each other. Mutual intelligibility between them has been denied. The process has resulted in unstable language planning. The issue of identity and distinctiveness has persisted even among the sub-groups of Gamo, the focus of this study. This shows that the language of education has been viewed both as a social practice and as a symbolic system through which identity is marked and represented. The issue of the language of education has become complex in multilingual settings of Gamo, since it is compounded with ethnic identity. In the Gamo area, the situation has resulted in the repeated alteration of language planning and reorganization of the structure of the administrative unit. The aim of this study is to investigate the trajectories and challenges of implementing the new language policy in the multilingual administrative unit to which Gamo belongs. It shows how issues of identity have made it difficult to achieve settled language planning in a multilingual area.

[1] BACKGROUND

Ethiopia is a linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous country with over 80 officially recognized languages (Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia, 2010). The linguistic heterogeneity increases as one goes from the center of the country to the west and southwest. The Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) Regional State of Ethiopia, particularly the Gamo-Gofa Zone, on which this study focuses, is known for its multitude and high concentration of languages and dialects.

As often frequently the case in multilingual countries, a single language, which is Amharic, has played a role of a *lingua franca* for most people in Ethiopia, regardless of their ethnic background. For several decades in the 20th century, Amharic enjoyed the status of national language in Ethiopia. It also served as the only language of literacy and education (Lanza and Woldemariam 2014).

At the beginning of modern education in Ethiopia, in the early decades of the 20th century, the first schools offered education in French (cf. McNab 1988). In the 1940s, English replaced French as the most common medium of instruction for education in Ethiopia, as a result of its increasing global significance and in recognition of its widespread international use (Pankhurst 1976:315, Yigezu 2010: 32). Earlier studies have claimed that prior to the Italian war, the Imperial government had little interference in language and education matters until its first decree in 1944, which targeted missionary activities. The 1944 decree was itself a reaction to the Italian colonial administration's introduction of a "language policy", whereby five local languages were selected for education and administration in different corners of the country. It was only in 1958, i.e. fourteen years after the 1944 decree and fifty years after the first government schools were opened in 1908, that Amharic was constituted as a medium of instruction (Pankhurst 1972; see also Azeb Amha 2010: 189-191).

The dominance of Amharic has its roots in the state-building process and was imposed on the multi-ethnic state in an attempt to achieve national cohesion (Cooper, 1989; Yonatan, 2010). History shows that during Emperor Haile Selassie's reign (1930–1974), the process of amharization became institutionalized. The language policies of that era were aimed at producing an Amharic-speaking society, and consequently, at discouraging the use of other Ethiopian languages. The development of written forms of language other than Amharic was therefore forbidden (Cooper 1976, 1989; Cohen 2006; Woldemariam & Lanza 2014). The use of Amharic as the most important language, particularly in literacy, was sustained countrywide even during the socialist regime (1974-1991).

In 1990s, the country underwent a dramatic change in regimes and several major political, social and economic changes came about at the same time (cf.

Pausewang et al. 2002; Smith 2008). A new constitution was initiated, advocating a policy of ethnic federalism was initiated. Consequently, Ethiopia's Federal Constitution now guarantees that persons belonging to various ethnic and linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture and to use their own language. Various proclamations have been made to undertake decentralization of decision-making between central and regional administrations. In practice with language issues, decision making goes down as far as Zone level, an administrative unit within a Regional State. The newly formed Ethiopian government then introduced a national educational policy, which allows the use of "mother-tongues" as the MOI for primary education of all public schools.

In the new era, the system has changed from an assimilationist model to a multiculturalist model. Education includes both the students' mother-tongues as well as the lingua franca Amharic (and English), and it can therefore be argued that it will promote bi- or multi-lingualism (Vedder & Virta 2005; Hüge & et al. 2007; Küspert-Rakotondrainy 2013). With the new constitution that advocates a policy of "Ethnic Federalism", Ethiopia's Federal Constitution (particularly, Articles 5 and 39) guarantees that persons belonging to various ethnic and linguistic minorities will not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture and to use their own language. Various proclamations have been made to undertake decentralization of decision-making between central and regional administrations, including the decentralization of language choice under the federal constitution, which has led to the use of languages other than Amharic by members of different ethno-linguistic communities. There has also been also a policy switch to emphasizing the Latin script for Cushitic languages in particular, as well as the decentralization of language choice (Hoben 1994; Smith 2008, Lanza & Woldemariam 2014).

As mentioned earlier, Ethiopia has introduced a national Educational and Training Policy that promotes "mother-tongue education" and publication of text materials in vernacular languages. Notwithstanding this, implementation of the policy shows that demographically major languages serve as the official working languages and languages of education throughout an administration region or a zone. Hence "mother-tongue" in most regions in reality meant, and still generally means, the regional official languages (cf: Woldemariam & Lanza 2014).

The Gamo people inhabit a fairly extensive territory of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, about 500 km south west of Addis Ababa. In the new federal system of Ethiopia, Gamo was first classified along with several other groups within the SNNP Regional State, under the administrative

zone known as North Omo. The major boundaries of what was the North Omo Zone from 1991 to 2000 were established by the Dergue regime in 1987. The Administrative unit was created by taking elements from each of the three imperial Regional Administrations, Gamo Gofa, Sidamo, and Kafa, which had up to that point been retained by the Dergue, and was subsequently known (somewhat confusingly) as the Gamo-Gofa Administrative Region (see Vaughan, 2003:251). The North Omo Zone comprised multiple ethno-linguistic groups, of which four groups, namely Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro, are the majority groups. All of those belong to the Omoto genetic group within the Omotic language family (see Fleming 1976). The earlier North Omo Zone has been divided into three smaller administrative zones, mainly as a result of tension aroused in relation to language issues (see section 2). Currently, Gamo, along with many other ethno-linguistic groups, belongs to the Gamo-Gofa Zone, one of the three units of the earlier larger administration unit.

The area where Gamo is spoken is known for its multitude and high concentration of genetically related linguistic variations. The area demonstrates a distinctive dialect continuum, ranging from the varieties considered as dialects to those claiming to be separate languages. These include Chench, Dita, Kucha Dorze, Ochollo, Dache, Ganta, Boreda, Kemba, Bonke, etc. Due to a lack of exhaustive research work on the area, it is not possible either to determine the exact number of dialects or to define their clear status. No study has been done so far on the mutual intelligibility of Gamo variations. Nonetheless, informants agree that there is a high level of degree of mutual intelligibility. However, there are a few dialects that tend to be divergent. These are, according to the informants, Ochollo, Ganta, Kucha, Boreda and Dorze. As an earlier research study noted (Woldemariam 2007), it is often difficult for students to understand a lesson in the Gamo language because of dialect differences. Students also complain about their grades, arguing that teachers have evaluated them incorrectly due to dialectal differences. There were also instances in which a word used by teachers appears to be taboo in the students' dialect, and vice versa, resulting in tension and confusion that then affects the classroom interaction (Woldemariam, 2007:221).

This paper has four main sections. These are: 1) Background; 2) Methodology; 3) Discussion and observation; 4) Summary, concluding remarks and recommendations. The third section on discussion and observation, which presents the main finds of the study, is organized into the following five subsections: one medium of instruction for all; the attempt to use a harmonized language as an MOI; the use of Gamo as an MOI and new contestation among its dialects; language ideology towards Amharic and English; and language issues

related to minority groups.

[2] METHODOLOGY

The overall design of this research study is qualitative in nature. This approach was considered suitable because this paper is an exploratory study and aims at gaining an understanding of the practices and challenges of mother-tongue education in the multilingual setting of the Gamo area. The information was gathered mainly through interviews. The study is also founded on other data sources, such as field notes, written documents and observations. The informants were purposively selected on the basis of their typicality. They were teachers and experts involved in the language development and education sector in the Gamo district. Twelve teachers who were involved in mother-tongue education, and eight experts (also mainly teachers) of language development, were used in the interview. Interviews also took place with a couple of officers in the educational bureau.

In addition, written documents such as minutes, newspapers, and social media have been used to triangulate with the findings from the interviews. The researcher has undertaken consecutive fieldwork studies in Arbaminch, the main town of the Gamo-Gofa Zone, since 2005. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in 2013 and 2014 with experts of the educational office, teachers and parents involved in language development and teaching material preparation. The interviews were framed in a way that enabled the researcher to discover the various processes and practices being used in the implementation of mother-tongue education, the challenges encountered at various points in time, and the attitudes of the informants toward these. A special focus was given to issues of identity as the researcher had noted that identity contestation was a major factor challenging the implementation of the language policy in the area.

[2.1] *Data Collection procedure*

Informants were accessed through the Educational and Cultural Offices of the Gamo-Gofa zone that facilitated the research. In order to proceed with the process of collecting data, the informants' permission was requested. The informants were assured that their anonymity would be preserved. The informants were not persuaded to participate in this study and did so of their own free will. They were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study if they desired to do so. All the interviews were conducted in either the schools or offices or a place chosen by the participants. A friendly and non-intimidating atmosphere was created for participants to feel free and talk unreservedly. As a re-

sult, the participants gave the researcher permission to audio record the interviews verbatim.

[2.2] *Theoretical frame*

This study follows the different theoretical conceptions important for addressing the issue of language planning, as well as language and identity. Cooper (1989: 45) defines language policy and planning as ‘deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure or functional allocation of their language codes’. This essentially refers to the range of activities that contribute in different ways to the language planning process. Fishman (1974), identifies five types of language planning within the typology of approaches: status planning, which is usually decreed by law at the constitutional level and results in the declaration of languages as official; corpus planning, which involves norm selection, codification and terminology development; acquisition planning, which generally refers to language-in-education and makes provision for the learning of the various official and national languages; and usage planning, which attempts to extend the use of a language into new domains.

In conceptualizing the relationship between language and identity, the study follows the post-structuralist theory as outlined in Pennycook (2004) and Weedon (1997). Accordingly, the study takes account of the view that considers “the productive force of language in constituting identity rather than identity being a pre-given construct that is reflected in language use” (Pennycook, 2004: 13). In line with post-structuralist theory, Weedon (1997:21) argues that: “language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of our selves, our subjectivity, is constructed”. By focusing on linguistic differences as a means of identity formation, this study follows the basic conception of identity as constructed through the marking of difference. As Woodward (1997:29) points out, the difference arises “through the symbolic systems of representation.... Identities are formed in relation to other identities, and the most common means of marking difference is by using binary oppositions, for example ‘we and them’, or ‘self and other’ (Woodward, 1997).

[3] DISCUSSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

[3.1] *One medium of instruction for all in the administrative zone*

For many years, an exclusive monolingual use of Amharic, and of English as a

MOI, was the practice in both primary and secondary/territory education in Ethiopia. Since the 1990s, the strategy has shifted to a multilingual policy (cf: Heugh et al, 2007: 44). With the new language policy, public primary schools in the country have started using mother-tongue education. However, implementation of the policy was left to respective regional and zonal authorities. From the start of such implementation there has been confusion between the mother-tongue and the major language of an administration unit.

In the former North Omo, where Gamo belonged, the implementation has been challenged, since the multilingual policy was challenged by the opposing stance adopted by the assimilationists. At the initial stage of the implementation, a common MOI was promoted to serve in all the public schools throughout the zone. The process went through a number of trial and error progressions, before Gamo was recognized as an independent MOI. Below, the various historical trajectories of mother tongue education in the Gamo area will be discussed.

As mentioned above, when the policy of mother-tongue education was first launched in 1992, the administrative zone, within which Gamo was classified, had a different structure from the present one. The zone was bigger and comprised several languages and dialects which were later reclassified into three separate zones. Demographically, the major members were Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro. There were also other minority groups accommodated in the same administrative zone. These include Zayse, Zergula, Oyda, Koreete, etc. The languages in that administrative zone are genetically closely related and classified as the "Omoto" linguistic group within the Omotic language family (Fleming 1976). As pointed out by Bender (1976), members of the Omoto group share 50 to 90 percent of forms with each other (Bender 1976:51).

Even though the national language policy promotes multilingualism, the administration zone was trying to implement a policy that relies on a common language for all. Wolaitta, the most dominant language in the zone, with a relatively developed history as a written language, was selected to serve as a MOI. According to informants, text books, which were prepared in the Wolaitta language, have been distributed to all primary schools in the zone, including in the Gamo area. The main reasons behind that approach, according to informants, are the following. Existence of a high degree of linguistic similarities among the languages in the zone was considered as an opportunity, which can enable the speakers even to achieve mutual intelligible. As Wolaitta was used for bible translation, and the bible had been distributed and used across the vicinity for several years, it had already been well developed to function as a medium of communication. It was also believed that Wolaitta could be understood better

by all the others as a central language. Another reason, differing from the previous ones, was suggested as being the desire to facilitate political and social cohesion in the administrative unit by using a common language.

The language of the majority group is often preferred over other languages, as the common language in plural societies that subscribe to the assimilationist approach. Such an approach is driven by the “one language, one nation, one people” principle of linguistic or organic nationalism, which is premised on the notion that “the political and the national unit should be congruent” (May 2008:91, Gellner 2006:1).

However, the adoption of the Wolaitta language as a MOI for all speakers within the zone has been challenged by other groups in the zone, including Gamo. The process was accused of partiality for benefiting the language and culture of one group of people within a given administrative unit over that of others. Besides that, it was considered as a threat which could wipe out all linguistic identities in the area, replacing them with that of Wolaitta. The non-Wolaitta groups in the zone argued that Wolaitta could not be considered as their children’s mother-tongue in the schools. According to informants, the Gamo people were demonstrating that they are not Wolaitta and their language is not Wolaitta, but that instead they are Gamo and their language is Gamo. Informants agree that the objection against the use of Wolaitta as a MOI was not driven solely by linguistic difficulties, but was mainly driven by a political motivation to maintain the Gamo identity. Since language is an immediately audible indicator of identity, the exclusion from educational use has been considered as a targeted attack to destroy the non-Wolaitta identities in the zone. It was also taken as denial of the people’s rights and that has resulted with anxiety among the Gamos. The issue was therefore not about language alone, though that also contributes, but was tied up with questions of identity and power. In this regard recent studies have taken a more nuanced approach, recognizing the social positioning, partiality, contestability, instability and mutability of the ways in which language uses and beliefs are linked to relations of power and political arrangements in societies (Gal 1998; Woolard 1998; Blommaert 1999).

Consequently, a corrective measure was taken by the then administration to restrict the use of Wolaitta to being a MOI only for the Wolaitta district. However, much to their disappointment, Gamos (also the other two groups) were not allowed to employ their respective languages as MOI. Instead, an approach to harmonizing the three major groups, namely Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro, was proposed. It was an innovatively inclusive but still monolingual approach - creating and adopting a composite language of literacy out of the three to serve as a

common language for all.

[3.2] *The attempt to used a harmonized language as MOI*

In 1994, while the Wolaitta language was left solely for the Wolaitta group, it was decided to harmonize the other three languages, namely Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro.

Researchers interchangeably use the concepts of language harmonization with language unification. The term denotes a particular kind of practice, where two or more related languages are combined to form one language. According to Asher & Simpson (1994), as quoted by Babane & Chauke (2015:346-347), “language harmonization refers to a situation whereby two or more different languages are unified to form one language that does not contain contradictory features. It needs to be mentioned that harmonization does not necessarily refer to a situation where only languages are unified, but it could be dialects of a language which are harmonized to become one.”

A team of teachers from Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro groups have been set up as a panel of experts and given the task of creating a harmonized synthesis of the three languages. The harmonized language was designated by an acronymic representative term GAGODA (Gamo-Gofa-Dawuro). According to information from the Gamo experts who were involved in the process, the course of action taken in order to achieve a fair representation of each of the three languages in a text was a big challenge, involving a lot of confrontation and dispute between members. Most of the time, members were in contention in order to get the most and the best representation of their respective languages. The procedure they were employed was the following. As much as possible, they attempted to use mutually shared common lexical items, or, when that was not possible, a form from one language was used and its equivalents from other languages would be given within parentheses or brackets. A more serious challenge was harmonizing grammatical features of the three languages, which vary from each other in terms of number, definiteness, case markers of nouns and verb conjugations. Mixing up the grammatical features of all the representative languages in a proportional way was the main procedure followed in order to make a text inclusive in a fair manner. Finally in 1995, the preparation of text books in GAGODA was completed and dispatched to all the public schools of the three ethnic groups. As reported by teachers, GAGODA was only put in practice for a couple of years. According to interviews with the teachers, the Gamo students often encountered unfamiliar linguistic elements in their lessons. The problem might arise from poor methods of harmonization. The process was carried out by teachers in the locality who did not in fact have the expertise or

know how to handle such a task. The process lacked the involvement of linguists or language experts. On top of that, according to informants, the negative attitude of most members of the community towards the harmonized language was another challenge in accepting GAGODA as a MOI. Accordingly most people considered the practice as a political motive to destroy group identities by blending them into a single unit.

On the side of the implementers, even before they had evaluated the effectiveness of GAGODA as a MOI, it was decided to incorporate Woalitta in the composite language to create WOGAGODA. As informants indicated, that decision was purely political, since it was made straight after the merging of the political parties of the four ethnic groups to form a coalition party. The main idea behind this was, according to informants: “If we could merge the political parties why not we do to the languages”. It was a purely political decision, that did not take into account either the pedagogical benefits or the existing sensitive identity issues in the zone. As pointed out by the informants, the people of the four groups did not discuss nor endorse this decision made by the local authorities. A panel of experts, who were teachers from the four groups, were put together to prepare textbooks and other learning aids in WOGAGODA. When put into practice, the use of WOGAGODA as a language of learning faced widespread opposition. It was rejected by all four of the groups for being nobody’s mother-tongue. In fact, according to informants, WOGAGODA was criticized as a retrogressive step, taking people away from an established form of their own language and diluting their respective languages with elements from others’ languages. According to Gamo informants, the attempt made to create composite languages was considered as an effort “to blend and crush distinct identities into one”. This indicates that as the process moves to deny members of the four groups the opportunity and means to develop and use their own particular language, they have become increasingly politically mobilized and ready to take action against the practice¹. There were successive public uprisings and protests against WOGAGODA. The protests, which were also made by Wolaittas, have caused destruction of school properties, the burning of textbooks, and even the deaths of a few participants, sufficient to attract even international media attention. As reported by the BBC: “WOGAGODA was greeted by protests in the area. Just two weeks before the decision was reversed, at least two people were shot dead by local police, when riots broke out after two teachers at the local elementary school refused to teach in WOGAGODA” (BBC News Online

[1] It is to be noted that similar practices have also been undertaken in other multilingual zones in the SNNP Regional State.

Tuesday, 23 November, 1999, 14:46 GMT). Consequently, the local government was forced to reverse the decision to use WOGAGODA as a MOI, and decided instead that each group should use its respective language as a MOI in its respective locality. Following the disintegration of WOGAGODA as a MOI, a decision was made to restructure the North Omo Zone by splitting it into three smaller administration zones, in order to run each zone independently and to make the new language management easier. The three zones are: Gamo-Gofa, Wolaitta and Dawuro-Konta zones, leaving the Gamo-Gofa zone still complex with multiple ethno-linguistic groups.

When asked why they objected to GAGODA/WOGAGODA, the Gamo respondents pointed to the importance of the Gamo cultural and linguistic identity as the object of preservation, rather than perceptions of the political or even educational benefits. They were concerned about losing the Gamo identity, which, they thought, would presumably happen if the language was blended with the other languages of the area. Teachers also confirm that the use of WOGAGODA had substantial negative effects on the teaching-learning process, not only because of comprehensibility reasons, but mostly because it was labeled as an alien form, far from the real native tongue. That means that the most significant factor was linguistic purity.

[3.3] *The use of Gamo as a MOI and a new challenge from the dialect variants*

After a long period of ups and downs, in 2000, Gamo has been recognized as an independent language of education. This position given to Gamo in the educational domain has been considered as being a recognition given to the Gamo ethnic identity as an independent group. The concerns related to losing the Gamo identity, which would happen if it was synthesized with other languages, have gone, and that has led to relief among members.

Gamo has been introduced as a MOI from grade one to grade four. English takes over as a MOI from grade five onwards. Gamo is also used as a subject from grade one to grade 10, and has been introduced as a program in the Arbaminch Teachers' Training College. In addition, a diploma program on the Gamo language has been started at the Arbaminch University. As indicated by the experts from Educational bureau of the Gamo-Gofa Zone, the use of Gamo in the mother-tongue program has resulted in a significant increase in the enrolment rate, as well as a high completion rate.

Soon after the success story was achieved, issue of dialect variation within Gamo became a new challenge. The Dache dialect, which was taken as a standard form in the process of developing Gamo as a MOI, has become a subject of contest by other sub-groups of Gamo. According to informants, the rationale

behind choosing Dache over the other dialects to serve as a standard form was not clear. Some people believe that the experts, who were working on the Gamo language development, have come from the Dache dialect, and they got the opportunity to influence the language planning to their advantage. Accordingly, in the process of textbook preparation, the experts used the Dache dialect, which is their own native tongue. Informants from the non-Dache varieties think that the use of Dache as a standard form is a deliberate attempt to create a mono-dialectal form of Gamo. This indicates the fact that identity based contestations are difficult to address, since identity is a constructed thing, and people keep on constructing and reconstructing identities according to situations.

Recently, in September 2014, a group of local leaders from the Kucha dialect were presenting an appeal for the recognition of Kucha as a distinct ethno-linguistic group outside Gamo. They were protesting against their Gamo identity, and strongly asserting that their Kucha group identity should be recognized by the administration. They further claimed for independent administrative autonomy outside Gamo, and for their children to be taught in the Kucha dialect (they claimed that Kucha is an independent language). The demonstrators have even taken violent action, such as burning school books and destroying other public properties, steps which have put them in conflict with police officers. Consequently, some members were arrested. However, the request has not received any positive response. The following is a description of the situation in the Kucha district by one social media, also confirmed by the informants.

“Many elementary and secondary schools have been closed in Kucha Woreda, a town that has been wobbled due to ‘identity’ related protests and conflicts for the past few months. The students seek a right to study in their own language and the rights violations in the area to stop. After the Federal police surrounded the area, 25 to 40 students have been detained. As the tension escalates, at least 40 people that have been released recently have been rearrested.”

<http://danilemulu.blogspot.no/2013/11/schools-closed-after-protests-in-kucha.html>

It seems that members of the dialect are emphasising around the phonological differences Kucha has from other dialects. My own earlier research (Woldemariam 2013) indicates that Kucha differs phonologically from the others. As indicated below, the phonemic inventory of the Kucha dialect appears different from the rest, since it lacks two consonants, namely, /ts/, and /s'/. By

contrast, the Kucha Gamo has /t'/ which is not found in the other dialects. Kucha replaces /tt/ in place of /ts/ in the cognates. The following cognates illustrate the sound correspondences attested between /t'/ and /s'/, as well as the sound correspondences between /tt/-/ts/ as found in Kucha versus the others.

Ochollo	Dorze	Boreda	Kucha	Gloss
s'unguts	s'unguts	s'unguts u	t'unguntta	'nail'
mek'ets	mek'ets	mek'etsi	mek'etta	'bone'
kets	kets	kets a	ketta	'house'

TABLE 1: the contrast between s' and t' and ts.

As indicated above, Kucha uses the phoneme /s'/ where the others use /t'/. It is also shown that /ts/ of Occhollo, Dorze, Boreda corresponds to /tt/ in Kucha.

Another phonological feature that makes Kucha different from the other dialects of Gamo is the following. A word-initial alveolar ejective t' in Kucha corresponds to the alveolar implosive ɗ in other dialects such as Bonke, Kemba and Dita. Comparative reading of the following cognates establishes the point:

Kucha	Other dialects	Gloss
t'ale	ɗale	'medicine'
t'iilee	ɗiille	'flour'
t'isko	ɗisko	'sleep'

TABLE 2: The contrast between t' and ɗ in Kucha and other dialects.

There is also a correspondence in which r of Kucha occurs as /d/ intervocalically elsewhere, as shown in Table (3):

Kucha	Other dialects	Gloss
mero	medo	'appearance'
wora	woda	'trophy'
gara	Gada	'low land'
sire	Side	'nose'

TABLE 3: r and ɗ in Kucha and other dialects.

The features shown above make the Kucha dialect more resemble Wolaitta, which contains t' in its phonemic inventory in cognates, whereas other Omoto languages use s'. This could be a result of contact, since the Kucha dialect is

spoken adjacent to Wolaitta. However, Kuchas have not claimed identification with Wolaittas. One can say that obviously there are dialect markers in Kucha, and they are magnified to serve political interests. As mentioned above, a distinct identity from both Gamo and Wolaitta has been requested. As pointed out by Tabouret-Keller (1997:317): “The link between language and identity is often so strong that a single feature of language use suffices to identify someone’s membership in a given group. Language features are the link which binds individual and social identities together”.

Similarly to Kucha, an appeal that demands an independent recognition of the Dorze dialect as a separate ethnic identity outside Gamo, has been presented by the senior members of the community. According to informants, the appeal was taken to all levels of governmental bodies starting from the zone, to the region, and, then, to the federal government. However, the request has not been yet granted any acceptance. The goal of the appeal is to make Dorze a language of education for children of the respective locality. Accordingly, that is what provides the confirmation of having a distinct identity. It was also indicated that if the group’s identity claim is acknowledged, apart from developing Dorze as a language of education, the group expects to gain other socio-political benefits. These include an opportunity to participate in the political and administrative systems.

An interesting point here might be the shifting identities demonstrated by certain dialect speakers of Gamo. Depending on the situation, they focus on one of the two identities: that is, the Gamo identity and the smaller dialectal identity such as Kucha, Dorze, etc. When it was decided to use Wolaitta, or (WO) GAGODA as a medium of instruction, the main concern of all Gamos, irrespective of their dialectal background, was maintaining the Gamo identity. Then, once Gamo has been recognized as a mother-tongue, members of some of its dialects have made it a point to make a claim for independent recognition outside Gamo. The dialect members tended to behave as if the standard form of Gamo is incompressible to them and so they should be allowed to use their respective dialect as a MOI. Group discussions with Gamo language experts revealed that members of the Gamo dialects stand together when there is a threat against the Gamo identity, but tend to focus on their independent identity at other times.

Despite their dialectal differences, Gamo speakers organize themselves into one homogenous group when they sense a threat against the Gamo identity. An instance of this happened in 2015, when a controversial book² which misrepre-

[2] The book was authored by Tadele Tuffa and published in February under the title “Madola malana Dogala”

sented the Gamo group was authored and disseminated by a non-Gamo person. The book boldly asserted that there is neither culture nor language called 'Gamo'. Members of the Gamo community, regardless of their different dialectal backgrounds, stood together protesting against the author. The situation has ignited violent protests in Arbaminch town. As indicated by the informants, members of the group were deducing that there could be some political motive behind the book in targeting the Gamo identity. It was also considered as an insult to the Gamo people. Consecutively, a team of Gamo elders have taken the case to the attention of authorities at different levels, including to the Prime Minister's Office. This indicates how sensitive the Gamo people are about maintaining their Gamo identity. Nonetheless, there is a tendency to fall back to their dialectal identities, when the Gamo identity is not being challenged. In general, the situation with Gamo exemplifies the fact that language and identity should not be seen as singular, fixed, and intrinsic to the group or individual, but instead should be viewed as socially constituted; a reflexive, dynamic product of the social, historical and political contexts of a group's or individual's lived experiences.

One might argue that raising the dialectal identities at the point, when Gamo has achieved the status of being a MOI, seems a process not merely of discovering or acknowledging a difference from the rest of Gamo, but, more fundamentally, of inventing differences by downplaying similarity. Such a situation is best described in Irvine & Gal (2000:35)'s words as follows:

“The significance of linguistic differentiation is embedded in the politics of a region and its observers. Just as having an army presupposes some outside force, some real or putative opposition to be faced, so does identifying a language presupposes a boundary or opposition to other languages with which it contrasts in some larger sociolinguistic field.”

[3.4] *Language ideologies held by Gamos about the position of Amharic and English*

Gamos demonstrate a positive attitude towards Amharic, the Federal Working Language of Ethiopia, and the English language. English is another language used in the educational system of Gamos. It is used as a MOI from grade 5 onwards, and as a subject from grade one. As understood from the interviews, in Gamo, as elsewhere in Ethiopia, English is considered as the language of the cultural elite and a symbol of belonging to the educated class. While contesting to keep their ethnic and linguistic identity, Gamos tend to prefer their children to learn in Amharic and English. Parents believe that Amharic and English are languages that can make their children competitive at national and interna-

tional levels. Most parents are skeptical about the benefits of the use of Gamo as MOI for their children. In fact, those who are financially able will take their children out of public schools and get them admitted to private schools that use Amharic or English as MOI. This shows that it is primarily for political reasons that they fight to maintain their language and identity through the school system. Otherwise, most of them believe that Amharic and English will grant a better future for their children.

As is the case for the rest of the country, Amharic is the other language used in the education system of the Gamo area. The language is introduced as a subject from grade 3 in the public schools. In addition in Arbaminch, public schools also offer a program with Amharic as a MOI. At the earlier stage of implementing mother tongue education, Gamo was the only MOI allowed in public schools throughout the town. However, considering the cosmopolitan nature of the town, schools have since then been made to offer a bilingual program with Amharic as a MOI for those who choose to have that, in addition to the use of Gamo as a MOI. This shows the dynamic nature of the implementation of the language policy in order to accommodate the needs of all citizens in the area.

With regard to the role of Amharic in the education system, as interviews with teachers have indicated, its unofficial use outweighs its official use. It is used as an informal MOI in classes where English is supposed to be a MOI, that is, from grade 5 onwards. As stated by a teacher: “Whenever there is a language barrier facing students and teachers in the classroom interaction, most of the time, both teachers as well as students switch to Amharic”. This is mainly due to the low English proficiency of both students as well as teachers. Besides, there is a pronounced positive attitude towards Amharic among parents as well as teachers who perceive those speakers of Amharic, and those who learn in Amharic, as being in a better position than others to access opportunities at the level of Federal Government. Parents believe that by learning Amharic, their children will become competitive in the national labor market. From their perspective, in Bourdieu’s (1991) terms, Amharic and English are perceived as languages that can offer the speakers an important ‘linguistic capital’ that will allow them to acquire ‘symbolic power’ (Bourdieu 1991:14-15).

The Gamo-Gofa zone has opted to continue the policy of using Amharic as a working language of the zone, as the case in the SNNP regional state. As the result, all formal meetings in the area are conducted in Amharic. Reports, official documents, and minutes are also written in Amharic. Public services, namely transportation, trade, banking etc., use Amharic.

According to informants, for a short period of time there was an attempt to use Gamo as an official language. It was used for conducting meetings, official

correspondences, and record keeping, as well as in business signs. However, after a very short period of time, it was replaced by Amharic. As indicated by the informants, the attempt to use Gamo for official purposes has created uneasiness among the other groups in the administrative zone. Besides, since the working language of the SNNP region is Amharic, the use of Gamo created technical difficulties with the process of correspondences with and reporting to the regional headquarters. Circumstances have, therefore, called for Amharic, which is a common but neutral language, to better serve the purpose. Amharic has become a better choice as it is not associated with any particular group in the zone, but instead carries out a mere functional aspect. The language is perceived as the best tool for achieving equality among the various groups. Besides, there is a pronounced positive attitude towards Amharic among members of the society as demonstrated by teachers who were interviewed. Amharic is perceived as a language of greater opportunities in Ethiopia. From their perspective, in Bourdieu's (1992) terms, Amharic will offer them an important linguistic capital which will enable them to acquire economic and symbolic capital.

An exclusive use of Amharic and English has also been observed in the linguistic landscape of the town of Arbaminch. All government and public signs are bilingual in Amharic and English. The commonly seen patterns on signboards indicate the use of Amharic on top. Private signs put up by the owners of shops, restaurants, and bars etc., almost always use Amharic. This contrasts with the situation in the neighboring Wolaitta zone, which is monolingual, where the Wolaitta language is widely used in the public sphere.

[3.5] *Minority Groups and the issue of language of education*

The minority groups in the Gamo-Gofa Zone, namely Oyda, Zergula, Zayse, Koreete, etc. have not been introduced into the mother-tongue education. They were rather presented with two choices: to accept Gamo (or Gofa in the case of Oyda) as MOI or use Amharic instead. Except for Zergula, all the groups opted to take Amharic as a MOI. Though most of them are bilingual in Gamo, and their languages are genetically closely related to Gamo, they preferred to use Amharic over Gamo. As understood from the interviews with the educational experts in the area, accepting Gamo as a mother-tongue was considered as accepting the Gamo identity, which also meant endangering their own respective identity. The use of Amharic was not perceived as a threat to their minority identity as it does not compete with their languages at the local level. Amharic has been perceived as a neutral language and even more as a language of high linguistic capital, as it is a working language of the federal government and a

language of wider communication in the country. The use of Amharic has been perceived as an advantage that can allow access to higher levels of socio-economic and political benefits. In 2014, an effort was started by the zonal educational office to introduce Zayse, Koreete, Oyda and Geditcho (the name is used for Bayso language) into the school system. The plan is to use each one as a subject in its respective locality.

[4] SUMMARY, CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mother-tongue education has been playing a positive role among the Gamos for pedagogical benefits. At the beginning, the implementation of mother-tongue education in Gamo was challenged by the way multiethnic and multilingual nature of the area were being managed by local authorities. Various contradictory scenarios were noted. On the one hand, there was a general tendency to encourage ethnic groups to be conscious of their respective group identity, maintain it and celebrate it. As the result, ethnic groups, which have lived side by side for long periods of time, complementing and supplementing each other in multilingual symbiosis, speaking each other's languages, and mutually intelligible with each other, started acting as competing entities. One can say that a new Tower of Babel approach has been developing in multilingual settings. Ethnic groups have been contesting over having their respective linguistic identities recognized as dissimilar from the neighboring ones.

On the other hand, there was, at least at the earlier stage, a tendency towards employing an assimilative approach of language policy at the zonal level. As a result, attempts were made to use a single language or a harmonized unitary language as a MOI across the administrative zone.

The clash between the language practice and the expectations of the people has caused recurrent changes to language planning in the area. In fact, even during the recent fieldwork of the researcher, in 2015, there were ongoing movements by some dialects of Gamo for new language planning in their respective dialect. This implies that the process has not yet fully settled.

It was also noted that a continuous contesting for distinctiveness has started with the bigger groups, such as Gamo against the other major groups in the zone, and has moved down into the subgroups within Gamo. Before Gamo was acknowledged as an independent MOI, the most important goal was to promote it as a MOI, and so to maintain the Gamo identity. The Gamo identity was perceived to be endangered if the community had accredited either Wolaitta or the harmonized languages as a MOI. Therefore, it was not necessary to negotiate for dialectal identities such as Kucha or Dorze. Later on, after Gamo achieved recognition as an autonomous MOI, and the Dache dialect has been chosen to

be the standard dialect, sister dialects have started contesting with each other. These disputes were severe enough to involve public protests, leading participants to conflict with the police and culminated in arrests.

In general, the linguistic differences between the closely related languages of Ometo in the former North Omo Zone, and even more between the dialects of Gamo, have been, by in large, exaggerated. The position of appreciating distinctiveness has been taken primarily for political benefits rather than pedagogic. The existing linguistic variation, even among the dialects of Gamo, has been used to mask the real motivation, which, in the informants' opinion, is political. Language is a very sensitive political issue in Ethiopia (cf: Cohen 2000, Smith 2008, Küspert Rakotondrainy 2013). Otherwise, considering the linguistic closeness between the languages in the zone, as pointed out by the informants, the use of one common MOI could have worked, not only for the dialects of Gamo, but also for Gamo, Wolaitta, Gofa and Dawuro. Achieve this would require some careful harmonization efforts by linguistic experts. The case of GAGODA and WOGAGODA was an attempt handled by people who lacked the necessary expertise in linguistics. One can refer to the best experience in South Africa on the harmonization of Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swati (Alexander 1998) and that of Yugoslavia on harmonization of three languages (Deprez & du Plessis, 2000).

Nonetheless, considering the existing high level of identity consciousness of the people, it would be better to try to enable linguistically divergent varieties to have their own respective language of education, rather than forcing them otherwise. The importance of mother-tongue education for pedagogical, psychological and sociological benefits of children achieved recognition long ago (UNESCO, 1953), and nowadays seems almost a common sense knowledge. So, if it is possible to give the opportunity to have a real mother-tongue education, this would be the best solution.

The most important issue, then, is what exactly mother-tongue means in linguistically diverse settings with very closely related linguistic varieties. What level of linguistic difference should be recognized as a separate mother-tongue in education? Should we consider dialectal and sub-dialectal level differences for the language of education? Besides, language planning should consider identity planning, since these are two sides of the same coin. Acknowledging the existing diversity in a multilingual setting, and designing a customized approach to mother-tongue education that adapts well to the relevant situation, will be the best solution in achieving pedagogical effectiveness, as well as a fairer and more inclusive society.

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