Chapter 5

How multilingual policies can fail: Language politics among Ethiopian political parties

Mehari Zemelak Worku

Addis Ababa University

Because language has instrumental as well as symbolic values, the issue of language will always have a political aspect (Smith 2008). Often, the choice of language and its use is construed as one of the central traits to people's definition of themselves. Besides, any given state must decide or determine the language that it deems appropriate to carry out its development and to generate, disseminate and enrich the knowledge necessary for such development. However, the case grows problematic when it comes to Sub-Saharan Africa where "every language carries a distinct and weighty baggage" of identity (Obeng & Purvis 1999). The decision was not easy for different regimes in Ethiopia, home of more than 80 ethnic groups (CSA 2008). The three consecutive regimes which have ruled the country for the last 75 years followed different paths in addressing this diversity management question. The reframing of the country under ethnic federalism, which legislates Amharic as the working language of the federal government (hereafter WL) and guarantees the right of each ethnic state to decide its own WL, is the recent attempt to respond to the same politics of recognition. However, dissatisfied voices regarding the current language policy (hereafter LP) can still be heard among political groups. Some see it as 'not enough' while others see it as Balkanization. Despite a few research efforts and publications on the LPs of the consecutive governments of Ethiopia, there has been no research done on the alternative policies and options available among the political parties or their relative value as LPs. Thus, the grand objective of this study is to survey, analyze and evaluate the linguistic proposals of Ethiopian political parties in government, education, and endangered languages.

1 Language politics in Ethiopia: Historical overview

In this section I will briefly discuss the issue of language throughout Ethiopian political history.[1] A compact version of the history will be presented with a focus on three sections: pre-1974 (before the outbreak of the student-led Ethiopian Revolution), 1974–1991 (the time where the military junta called the "därg" stayed in power) and post-1991, the era of the incumbent EPRDF.

1.1 Pre-1974: Language in imperial Ethiopia

"In the historical, political and literary fields, two languages have dominated Ethiopian Studies: Amharic and Geez" (Bender 1976). Along with their dominant status in the field of Ethiopian Studies, Bender's words can be extended to show how overriding the two languages were in the overall social life of Ethiopia. As the antiquities from the Axumite Dynasty indicate, Geez was the official indigenous language of the Axumite Dynasty (Philipson 2012). This official domain had been kept to Geez until Amharic took over as ləsanä nəgus 'the language of the king' some time during the reign of the Zagwe Dynasty in the 11th–13th centuries (Awgchew 2009). We do not have any document to answer why and how Geez took over the higher domains as the official language in that time. Nevertheless, we can say it can be one of the two cogent reasons given by Cooper (1976): as a result of government-implemented official LP or as a consequence of societal dynamics among speakers of different languages, or maybe both.

Irrespective of efforts by evangelists to reduce other Ethiopian languages into writing like Onesimos Nesib, an Oromo missionary who translated the Holy Bible into Affan Oromo[2] using the Ethiopic script in the early 20th century, Amharic and Geez continued to confluence dominantly in the educational, religious and political domains of the region until the 20th century, when western education stepped in to the country with the complete support of emperor Menilik II (ኃይለየሱስ 2008). The policy of the Ethiopian kingdom regarding other languages was only to be found in the indigenous traditional collection of religious and secular laws known as the Fətha Nägäst (law of kings). The code has been used in the country for several centuries and contains legal provisions for speakers of other indigenous languages to have judges speaking their native tongues (Tzadua 1968 cited in Cooper 1976).

The boost of modern education and its legacy during the reign of emperor Haile Selassie I created a new domain for Amharic and Geez. Meanwhile other indigenous languages, regardless of their powers in numerical terms, were kept only to non-official domains. The education arena, in its early stages, was generally a field for the learning

---

[1]In this regard the works of Cooper (1976); McNab (1990); Bulcha (1998); Getachew & Ado (2006); Heugh et al. (2007); Smith (2008); Zemelak (2011) and Leyew (2012) are worth reading for a more detailed discussion on the typology of the LPs of different regimes in Ethiopia. Even though it is not going to be confined to their outlooks, the timing frame of the discussion in this paper is basically sketched out by the marked works.

[2]Cobarrubias (1983) wrongly writes "Gallah [sic] in Ethiopia" (Galah is a derogatory reference to mean Oromo) as an example for a language "without a writing system." But, by the time Cobarrubias' article was published, Afan Oromo speakers had been using the Afan Oromo Bible for about 90 years.

of foreign languages. Remarkably, it was a stage of competition between French and English, as the envoys of both neighboring colonial powers vied for swift influence over the Ethiopian crown. Initially, the French were more successful than their British contenders in retaining a positive attitude of the oligarchy towards French. However, this lasted briefly, only up to 1935 when Fascist Italy declared war on the Ethiopian Empire and invaded to avenge the humiliating defeat it suffered at the battle of Adowa in 1896. Bowen & Horn (1976: 610) note that during the Italian occupation, which lasted until 1941, the burgeoning educational efforts of Ethiopia were interrupted and most schools were closed. The mission of the few functioning schools was altered from training indigenous children to be citizens defending the country's interest in all possible domains, to educating the colonial masters' Italian children to keep them in touch with their European "mother civilization." This offered them a corner of the earth where they could enjoy 'sun bathing', to use Mussolini's terms. Ethiopians were obliged to stay confined to primary level education.

With the implementation of the age-old *divide et impera* policy of oppressors, the Italians divided the country into six regions according to major ethnic lines. They also ordered, without any deliberate effort to capacitate the languages in corpus planning, each of the major indigenous languages to be used in native schools in the respective regions. In addition, the Governor- General of each province had the authority to establish any other language as additional instructional medium in the schools (Pankhurst 1976: 322, cited in Bowen & Horn 1976; Zewde 2002).

Table 1: Administrative regions and languages of instruction during the Italian occupation (1935–1941).
* This term is used by the Italians to refer to the Oromo people. However, the Oromo people do not refer themselves with this word and is considered offensive.

No.	Regions named by the Italians	Languages proclaimed to be media of instruction
1	Eritrea and Tigray	Tigrinya and Arabic
2	Amhara	Amharic
3	Addis Ababa	Amharic and Oromifa
4	Harar	Harari and Oromifa
5	Galla[*] and Sidama	Oromifa and Kafficho
6	Somalia	Somali

This LP, nevertheless, was not put into full effect except in Eritrea, which had been a colony of Italy for about fifty years after the battle of Adowa in 1896. First, the policy was understood by the natives as a separatist movement to dissuade the country's noble men and gentry in to ethnic division to enervate the patriotic movements. Second, during the Italian occupation the education system was barely functioning. Third, as a result of the multitude of patriotic movements against them, the Italian Fascists did not have enough

time to establish a lasting educational system. Nonetheless, this time is remarkable because of the deliberate abandonment of any effort in the education sector to promote a common indigenous language of communication among the variegated linguistic groups of Ethiopia. The LP of the occupiers came to an end when the Italians were ousted by the coalition of Ethiopian patriotic forces and the British troops from eastern Africa in 1941.

After the Italians, the British took their shot at attempting to influence the crown. Since then 'the British way' of doing things came to be accepted as the better way in alignment with His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie's I aspirations for a strong, modernized nation. This was particularly reflected when gradually English took away the education domain that French occupied.[3]

Amharic had also reclaimed its former dominance over all indigenous languages as Haile Selassie I aspired to build a unified modern empire under one crown and one dominant language. In the revised constitution of Ethiopia it was stated explicitly that "the official language of the empire is Amharic." (Revised Constitution of Ethiopia: 125). It was a must that new laws be published in Amharic and English in the official gazette of Ethiopia. The statutes of domestic companies were required to be filled in Amharic or English. Foreigners were also required to write and speak Amharic 'perfectly', in order to attain Ethiopian citizenship. According to the regulation decreed in 1944 concerning missionary activities in Ethiopia, missionaries also were obliged to learn Amharic to pursue their mission for it was outlawed to use other indigenous languages except at the early stages of the missionary activity. The credo insists on both the missionary and the pupil to have a working knowledge of the "official language of the empire" (Cited in Cooper 1976). Such proclamations, charters and codes vividly display the dominant status Amharic had in the state.

In the 1960s, as a result of external and internal political pressure exacerbating through time, the state-owned broadcast media had shown some signs of a more relaxed stance towards embracing indigenous languages other than Amharic. The languages that were introduced to the government-owned broadcasting radio stations were Afar, Somali, Tigrinya and Tigre (Smith 2008). However, the time allotment for them was extremely scanty when compared with the time allotment to Amharic. The imperial administration did not have the political will to abandon the counterproductive effort of unifying a multilingual country under one language and a unitary state.

---

[3] According to Bowen & Horn (1976) the erosion, nevertheless, began in the 1930s before the Italians stepped in to the Ethiopian soil. Aleme Eshete (cited in Bowen & Horn 1976) points at one person's influence on the crown, Dr. Workneh Eshete, who was taken to India, a British colony by then, and studied medicine. As Aleme remarks, because of this man's beliefs in the British system and conviction to make the country as strong as the Great Britain, a group of 18 Indians were brought to Ethiopia in the 1930 to serve as technicians, doctors, teachers and other badly needed specialists. Since Indians were not well versed in French, if not oblivious at all, it was necessary for the students to become literate in English to exploit the available expatriate resource. However, a few exceptions can be mentioned in relation to the use of local languages in the Ethiopian primary education. For example, in Swedish and American missionary schools, mother tongues were used before European languages at the primary level (McNab 1988, cited in Heugh et al. 2007: 45).

1.2 1974–1991: The Ethiopian Student Movement and the därg on the language issue

Amharic as an established state language was challenged with the increase in influence of modern education in the country's social, economic, and political domains. University students who were becoming increasingly political espoused strong criticisms against the regime. The imperial regime did not have the administrative ability among its agents to undertake any successful amendment to appease the public demand (Zewde 2002).

Left wing Marxism became the dominant ideology among the students. Immediate recognition of "the oppressed identities of nations and nationalities" [4] was one of the main demands of the students. The issue reached a boiling point when the Lenin/Stalin-Fanon inspired Wallelign Mekonen published an article entitled "On the Question of Nationalities" on 17th November, 1969 in the Haile Selassie I University student publication, *Struggle*. Walelign merged the Leninist/Stalinist idea of *the nation* with Frantz Fanon's justification of violence against colonial oppression. His argument was that Ethiopia was not a nation; rather it was a collection of nations (Gurage, Somali, Oromo, etc.) that had been subdued by the "Amhara-Tigre (two of the dominant ethnic groups) hegemony." These oppressed nations, he explained, can only reclaim their freedom through "revolutionary armed struggle" (Mekonen 1969). [5] Since then, the language issue has clung to Ethiopian politics as a symbol of identity recognition for ethno-linguistic groups in the country.

The imperial regime was toppled in 1974 by a revolution rooted in the student movement, and abetted by the distraught military personnel of the regime. In the wake of the victorious revolution, a sense of euphoria spread with the prevailing idea of creating a modernized and prosperous Ethiopia, where all people, irrespective of their linguistic identity, would be treated equally. The trajectory of ethnic equality spilled over to language, as every linguistic group in the country was to be recognized as equals (Zewde 2002; Gudina 2006; Balsvik 2007).

Consequently, the military council, [6] which hijacked the revolution, [7] waged a literacy campaign across the country using 16 indigenous languages as media of instruction for basic literacy. This was in direct contrast to the former overtly monolingual education policy. The 1976 political program of the National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia overtly proclaimed the right of nationalities as the following:

---

[4]It is at this particular time where ethnic groups of the country started to be referred as "nations and nationalities" in the political discourse of the country.

[5]For Stalin (1913) one of the defining characteristics of a nation is speaking one common language. After defining the nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture," he asserts that "it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be lacking and the nation ceases to be a nation." Wallelign's denial of the existence of the "Ethiopian nation" as one nation seems to be based on influence from his Marxist tendency.

[6]Often called "the därg," a word derived from Geez to mean 'committee' or 'council'.

[7]The aim of the campaign had two aims: to show the military council's intention to the linguistic equality and empowerment of all Ethiopians, to weaken the voice of the students, who were calling for the establishment of civilian administration, by dispersing them in the rural parts of the country as teachers in the literacy campaign (Balsvik 2007).

> The right of self-determination of all nationalities will be recognized and fully respected. No nationality will dominate another one since the history, culture, language, and religion of each nationality will have equal recognition in accordance with the spirit of socialism…. Given Ethiopia's existing situation, the problem of nationalities can be resolved if each nationality is accorded full rights of self-government. This means that each nationality will have regional autonomy to decide on matters concerning its internal affairs. Within its environs, it has the right to determine the contents of its political, economic, and social life use its own languages and elect its own leaders and administrators to head its own internal organs (Ethiopian Government Programme (1976) cited in McNab 1990).

Despite the overflowing rhetoric, the centralist ideology of the military regime and its ambition to create a unified Ethiopia was uncompromising to the idea of transferring power to a civilian government. It did not take much longer for the politics of recognition and autonomy to ascend to the dome of political discourse as an unanswered question. Because of its extremely repressive politics the military junta forced most of the leftwing socialists and ethnic liberation groups, some of whom were already guerilla fighters, to armed struggle. Later, the military council unsuccessfully tried to transform itself into a civilian government. In 1987 it promulgated a new constitution, which renamed the country as the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. All indigenous languages were guaranteed equal recognition as languages of the country. Amharic lost its status as the national language but maintained its degree of dominance as the constitution declared it as the official Working Language (hereafter WL) of the government.

Under this constitution the country was reframed under 14 autonomous provinces as way to appease the guerilla fighting ethnic rebel groups. It was too late! The rebels disparaged the transformation attempt as a theatre to cover all the cantankerous and assimilationist natures of the dictator Mengistu Hailemariam to pen in the rebels, but they did not give in.

1.3 Post-1991: Language in the country of "Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples"

The military regime's LP was essentially a *de jure* claim of equal status of all languages in the country, while the *de facto* LP was merely a preservation of the imperial LP which prescribed Amharic for all educational and official domains at the expense of other indigenous languages. Research done by the Ministry of Education in 1986, proves the language policy of the military regime was merely the extension of the imperial policy, jeopardized the enrolment and efficacy of students whose mother tongue was not Amharic (cited in Heugh et al. 2007.

On May 28th 1991 the coalition of ethnic cored armed groups under the umbrella of EPRDF took control of the capital Addis Abäba, ousting the military regime. The questions of autonomy and recognition of linguistic identity were reinvigorated. In July, 1991 a conference was held for the plethora of newly formed as well as old, but highly enervated, political parties. At the conference a charter, which served as a foundation for the

forthcoming constitution, was provided. That was the stance where the political arena, which used to be entirely occupied by a military junta, officially proclaimed to embrace several parties to give sufficient significance for all the voices of cultural and political groups (Zewde 2008; Berhanu 2003). The question of language appeared to be a subject of notability to the political agendas held by most of the political groups. The historian Bahru Zewde recalls an event from the conference:

> The first order of business in the course of the eventful deliberations of that conference was the determination of the working language. In view of the difficulty getting interpreters for the multiplicity of languages represented by the ethnonationalist organizations attending the conference, it was decided to adopt Amharic and English. However, organizations that brought their own interpreters could use their language. The EPLF leader, Issayas Afeworki, took the latter option and addressed the conference in his native Tegreñña. But what is of particular interest to this investigation is the ire that he visibly demonstrated at what he felt was a less than adequate Amharic rendering of his delivery, showing that his Amharic was as good as, if no better than, his designated interpreter. The spokesman of OLF, also understandably, addressed the conference in his native Oromo language. But it was translated not in to Amharic but into English, there by leaving the overwhelming majority of the national audience in the dark (Zewde 2008: 77).

This is a self-explanatory situation to portray the linguistic sensitivity of the post 1991 political system. In 1992 the new Transitional Government of Ethiopia first proclaimed the rights of every ethnic group of Ethiopia to use and develop its languages and culture. This was further strengthened and confirmed in the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution.

In contrast to the 1987 constitution which starts with the phrase "We, the working people of Ethiopia", the preamble of the 1991 constitution begins with "We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia." [8] The constitution also divides the country into nine autonomous ethnic states each with its own constitution, flag and the right to self-determination including and up to secession (Article 39). This took nobody by surprise since most of the political players who had a greater role in writing the constitution were members of the student movement. In the retention of Amharic as the WL of the government and the egalitarian approach to all languages in the country, the new constitution follows in the footsteps of the 1987 constitution (Article 5: 2). Audaciously supporting the ethnic cause, the new constitution gives member ethnic states of the federation unsurpassable right to determine their respective WL by law (Article5: 3). Subsequently, indigenous languages became widely used in primary education, media, administrative and judiciary systems. In 1994 the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia proclaimed a new

---

[8]However, the constitution doesn't give a single hint, let alone definition, to state the difference between these three terms is. Rather, it defines all the three terms as follows: "Nation, Nationality or People for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory" (Article 39: 4). Hence, in the current political discourse of Ethiopia any linguistic group is considered as a "nation/nationality" (Vaughan 2006).

Education and Training Policy, which declares: "Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages" (FDRE 1994). The existing language in education policy frames the entire system as indicated by the following table.

Table 2: The Existing Language in Education Framework.

No.	Languages	Level of education	Function
1	Mother tongues/ Nationality languages	Primary	Medium of instruction
2	Amharic	Primary up to secondary level education	As a subject and language of country wide communication
3	English	From grade 1	As a subject
4	English	Secondary and higher education	As a medium of instruction
5	One more nationality and foreign language	All levels	As subjects for intercultural and international communication
6	Mother tongues/ Nationality languages	Teachers training for primary level education	Medium of Instruction

Currently, there are twenty five indigenous languages used as media of instruction. Most regions selected indigenous languages spoken by the 'majority' of the denizens of that particular area. It is about twenty years now since this LP favoring indigenous languages has been implemented, and there is a sizeable amount of research reckoning the effects of this policy. However, it is still considered by the EPRDF government as one of its achievements from both the linguistic rights as well as pedagogical point of view. There are political groups who consider the current system as 'The Answer' for all questions on linguistic rights. On the other hand, there are others who criticize the system as Balkanization and enhancing deadly ethnic conflicts. These voices have representations in the political discourse of the country through political parties which suggest options through their political programs and manifestos. In the next part of this paper I will try to expound what policy proposals are forwarded by these political groups of the country.

2 Sampling methodology and conceptual tools

Scarcity of resources would not allow this study to include all the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia recognized (hereafter NEBE) 79 political parties, since most of them are regional parties (Board 2009). Particularly the number of regional parties, 63, and their scattered location all over the country is unmanageable to be taken as a whole. Hence, this study is done by taking representative samples. According to the NEBE, there are 79 National[9] and Regional Political Parties. Out of these 19 are categorized by the NEBE as National Political Parties while the remaining 60 are labeled as regional. Out of the 19 parties labeled as national 10 were selected randomly.[10] The same was done to the parties categorized as regional. Fourteen regional parties were selected randomly.[11] This enabled the sample to include about 30.4 % of the entire party population. The size of the sample was intentionally expanded to include parties from different ethnic and ideological bases. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the distribution of regional parties is extremely uneven throughout the regional states of the country. Among the regional parties there were those which reported to NEBE not to be functioning anymore and thus excluded from the sampling.

The conceptual tools used in this descriptive study to analyze the types of the LPs as well as the motivations and ideologies beneath the LPs are garnered eclectically from Fishman (1972); Cobarrubias (1983); Schiffman (1996) and Patten (2001).

3 Language politics among the functioning political parties of Ethiopia

In this section an overall assessment of the LPs of the political parties is presented first. Then, I will deal with the proposals of the political parties about the language that should take the status of the WL of the federal government. The next focus of the analysis is the proposals about language in education. Through the analysis besides providing typology of the LPs motivations and ideologies of the proposals are inferred.

3.1 Overall assessment of the political parties' LPs

Although the need for a thoroughly thought-out and well planned LP for a multilingual country such as Ethiopia is unquestionable, out of the 24 political parties included in this study only seven[12] have put relatively clear and implementation orientated LPs. It is only these seven parties which explicitly propose to legislate, if they are voted to power, what the federal WL should be or how it should be selected, and what the language use in education shall be. Moreover, they also suggest establishment and expansion of

---

[9]According to the Board (2009), national political parties are those whose campaigns are not limited to a certain ethnic state. In contrast, parties which run only in a certain ethnic state are called regional parties.

[10]GSPP, EDP, EPRDF, Forum, EJDFF, AEUP, EPAP, ERaeiP, UEDF, AEDP.

[11]ONC, OPDU, DDQPDU, DDDP, OLP, WPDF, HNL, GPRDF, KPC, ANDO, ARDUF, BMPDO, BGDUF, WSDP.

[12]EDP, AEDP, EPRDF, OLP, Forum, GPRDF and ONC.

language research centers and the deployment of resources by the federal government to the corpus development of the languages. Out of the remaining 17 parties 16 of them do not give detailed and implementation oriented LPs. The remaining one party[13] proposes nothing about the language issue.

Depending on the broadness or narrowness of their LPs, the 16 parties without detailed LPs can also be divided into two sub-categories. First,[14] there are ten parties which present a **too-broad** and highly generalized claim to ensure the recognition of the languages and cultures, history and identities ethnic groups. Even though these parties have not offered any detailed implementation frame work, they have displayed support to mother tongue education at primary level. The second group holds five[15] parties, all of them regional parties, which provided **too-narrow** LPs in their political programs such as, language X shall be included in schools as a subject. The proposals in this group neither tell what the medium of instruction at the schools shall be nor what is to be done in the development of the languages they suggest to be included in the education system; nor do they say anything about the linguistic rights of other linguistic groups in the area where these parties aim to gain legitimacy.

3.2 Issue of the federal WL

Out of the seven parties that give relatively detailed and implementation orientated LPs, two[16] propose the promotion of Afan Oromo, to have the WL status beside Amharic. The reason for such legislation, the two parties forward, is the numerical muscle Afan Oromo have.[17] Three[18] parties from this group propose the adoption of an additional WL beside Amharic without mentioning a particular language. One[19] of these three parties forwarded that the additional WL should be chosen from the indigenous languages based on its numerical muscle; while the other two[20] preferred the selection to be on the basis of "facilitating science, technology and market exchange." On the other hand, two[21] of these seven parties stand in peculiarity by not mentioning the promotion of any specific language overtly; rather they propose egalitarian preservation, usage and development to all languages in the country. All[22] the proposals from the parties grouped under the non- detailed LPs have the same stand. All propose the preservation of 'all languages' in the country.

As described above, the LPs from these two parties are overt and dedicated to the promotion of Afan Oromo to be the federal state's WL. As the language they propose is

---

[13] DDPDO.

[14] HNL, AEUP, GSPP, WPDF, DDQPDO, UEDF, EJDFF, OPDU, EPAP, ERaeiP.

[15] ARDUF, WSDP, ANDO, BMPDO, KPC.

[16] OLP and ONC.

[17] Oromo is the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia (CSA 2008).

[18] EDP, AEDP, and FORUM.

[19] FORUM.

[20] EDP and AEDP.

[21] EPRDF and GPRDF.

[22] DDQPDO, WSDP, ANDO, HNL, WPDF, BGDUF, BMPDO, OPDU, ARDUF, EPAP, ERaeiP, AEUP, UEDF, EJDFF, GSPP, KPC.

an indigenous one, they are endoglossic LPs. Besides, these overt and promotion LPs of the parties can be said to follow the Language Maintenance model to formulate their LPs for the following reasons. First, the aspiration is to preserve and promote the language and the identity represented by the language through making the language the WL of the FDRE. This provides a better opportunity to the language and speakers of the language to preserve their language and identity as something worth preserving as it opens access to higher domains of state business and economic benefit. In other words, the parties aspire to win symbolic affirmation and identity preservation simultaneously. However, because none of the policies proposed by the political parties have explicitly included anything about the economic, social, cultural and/or political benefits to be gained by making the language they propose the WL of FDRE, the motivation can be argued to be sentiment and authentication. The only points the LPs mention to justify the need for Afan Oromo to be the national language is the numerical muscle the language has and as part of the "emancipation" of Oromo identity from the "cultural oppression" perceived by the parties.

The second group is constituted from three parties[23] which follow linguistic rationalization model and overtly propose the adoption of an additional WL besides Amharic. One of the parties in this group proposes the numerical muscle of the language to be the rationale for selection. The remaining two[24] parties, forward that the selection should be based on "the people's will" and suitability for science, technology and market exchange. As all the parties in this group favor the selection and promotion to be from the languages of the nationalities of the country their LPs can be labeled as endoglossic and promoting. On the other hand, from the point of view of the model provided by Patten (2001), the policies of these political parties always confirm that all the languages and identities of nationalities shall be respected and allowed to flourish. With this their proposals show a major feature of the official multilingualism model.

The third group holds two[25] of the detailed and all of the non- detailed parties. These parties propose nothing as a precise answer to the question of the WL of the federal government. Instead, they propose the equal preservation and cultivation of languages and linguistic identities.

Because the parties in this group have no explicitly stated language proposal about the WL of the federal government, it will be ambiguous to point their sway exactly whether they have agreed with the status quo or not. This makes their LPs regarding the WL of the federal government to be a covert one. However, it is also worth mentioning that they have an overtly stated proposal for an egalitarian preservation of all languages in the country. Besides, since their policies affirm the preservation and cultivation of the languages of the "nations, nationalities and peoples" of Ethiopia, it can be said that as a trajectory they lean towards the indigenous languages. Although all the parties in this group do not explicitly promote any particular language, their proposals for the dedication of the state towards full support to the development and preservation of the

---

[23]EDP, AEDP and FORUM.
[24]AEDP and EDP.
[25]EPRDF and GPRDF.

indigenous languages makes them holders of the promoting and official multilingualism models. Yet, there are two[26] parties in this group that presented the value of recognition of the indigenous languages from an angle of political participation and democratic rights as follows:

> Unless the people are using their own language they would not be able to sufficiently participate in the political system through interpreters. Unless citizens use their language to express about their culture and history it is impossible to them to exercise their right to freedom of expression (Press and Audio Visual Directorate/ EPRDF 2002).

The motivations behind the LP proposals of this group can be said to be both sentimental and instrumental. Those who propose the preservation and recognition of the languages for the sake of identity preservation are the ones with a sentimental motivation and those that propose the recognition and preservation of the languages to be used by the respective people emphasize the political benefits to be reaped from using one's own language as an instrument for communication.

The fourth group is constituted from one regional party[27] with no language proposal at all. This party has suggested no proposal regarding the WL of the federal government. Yet, it is still possible to argue that the party hasn't mentioned the language issue in its political programs may be because, it has a covert LP that is comfortable with the current LP of the country.

3.3 Language in education

From the parties that presented relatively expatiated language proposals,[28] two parties[29] explicitly propose one particular language to be used as medium of instruction. These parties overtly state Afan Oromo to be used as medium of instruction in schools. However, no instrumental benefit that is to be gained from using the language as medium of instruction in this multilingual country is pointed out by the parties. It can be argued that such LPs covertly marginalize other languages from being used as instructional media within the Oromia ethnic state itself since other ethnic groups also live there. In the proposals from these parties there is no mentioned space in education to other languages of the country. Since the LP is aimed at promoting the language and the linguistic identity the ideology beneath can be supposed to be vernacularization. The motivation behind can be, thus, inferred as authentication of the Oromo identity. However, one can contend that there is an assimilationist and hegemonic tendency in this policy because it tries to impose a particular language over "all schools" in the vicinity to be ruled by the party. Such a policy does not seem to look how imposing one's language in a multilingual arena would certainly contradict with the economic development and political participation of

---

[26]EPRDF and WPDF.
[27]DDPDO.
[28]FORUM, GPRDF, EPRDF, EDP, AEDP, ONC and OLP.
[29]ONC and OLP.

minority groups. This in turn can result resentment from other ethno-linguistic groups. At the worst case scenario, it could invite a total discordance in a region.

From the non- detailed group, two parties[30] in the **too-narrow** sub-group share common feature that they mention a language to be used in education. For instance, the social program of the ARDUF suggests that "Afar language shall be included in the school curriculum as a subject." The social program from the KPC also suggests that "Kambata language shall be introduced and taught." In the proposals from these parties, there is nothing stated about the other indigenous languages in the region. In addition, the proposals do not seem to push beyond making the languages they mention to be included in the school curriculum as a subject. They also do not justify their suggestions based on the benefits that the policies will bring to the people. Nor they give any additional policy about developing the languages to sustain their use in education.

The remaining five[31] parties in the detailed group, one[32] of the parties from the **too-narrow** and all the parties in the **too-broad** subgroups accede with one axiom: mother tongue education at the primary level. Particularly at the primary level education all of them consent that the medium of instruction shall be the mother tongues of the students. None of the policies of these parties restrict any indigenous language from being used as medium of instruction. However, it is worth mentioning that two[33] parties in this group propose to take special consideration towards metropolitan cities in the implementation of mother tongue education. With such policies the two parties have shown special consideration and a peculiar treatment of the metropolitan cities of the country that are practically variegated in ethnic composition. This gives space to the interest of people from different ethnic groups as their children probably pick the ethnic language of their parents as mother tongue. There is also the possibility for the children to assume the dominant language of the city as their native language. Besides, in addition to promoting the indigenous languages to be used as media of instruction, such policies also show caution from imposition of one language over another linguistic community without the interest and consent of the latter.

On the other hand, from the parties that offered relatively detailed LP, three[34] of them which are among parties that proposed the selection of additional language(s) to the status of the federal WL, affirm that, after selection of the additional language the selected language(s) of the federal government shall be taught as (a) subject(s) in the entire schools of the country; and shall also serve as media of instruction depending on the need. They also have conferred the responsibility onto the shoulders of the government to implement the teaching of the selected language(s) in the regular education system. Unification is the major motive at play in such LPs because teaching the federal WL in all schools of the regional states is basically to facilitate communication and social mobility among different language speakers of the federation as one political society. Since these LPs confer the authority to the regional states to select their respective WLs and

---

[30]KPC and ARDUF.
[31]EDP, EPRDF, AEDP, FORUM, and GPRDF.
[32]ANDO.
[33]EDP and AEDP.
[34]EDP, AEDP, and FORUM.

use them as media of instruction in schools located in the region, there will be no space for the oppressive assimilationist ideology.

Except for one[35] party none of the parties included in this study have proposed an LP regarding the language to be used as a medium of instruction beyond the primary level education. On the other hand, except for the above pointed one party and the parties that propose the maintenance of the selected additional WL of the federal government, none of the political parties have articulated anything about the medium of instruction after the primary level education or on second or foreign language choice. It might be conjectured that they are either comfortable with the status quo, i.e. using English as medium of instruction, or that they have no alternative policy to offer the public in this regard.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

Although there exists no political party that overtly proposes the adoption of a monolingual LP, none of the parties can take pride in having a thoughtful, all-encompassing and strategically implementable LP. These policies have failed in addressing burning linguistic issues in Ethiopia.

The failure of the LPs to address the issue of language beyond primary language education is one instance. Notwithstanding the necessity of language of wider communication (LWC), the best communicative medium in education is the best known language by both the learners and the teacher: in most of the cases the mothertongue. However, in Ethiopia, English -a language barely known by the overwhelming majority- takes the secondary and tertiary level education dominantly as the only official medium of instruction. The reality in Ethiopian schools as well as researches investigating the effectiveness of this policy, nevertheless, indicate that English, a foreign tongue for both the teachers and the students, has become the "medium of obstruction" in classes (Stoddart 1986 cited in Bogale 2009). It is ironic to see none of the political parties addressing this very critical issue! The other point where all the political parties have failed to address is the issue of language endangerment in the country. According to UNESCO (2015), 28 Ethiopian languages are endangered. The numerical muscle of most of Ethiopian languages is in hundreds and a few thousands. I argue that none of the current multilingual LPs of the political parties discussed above will benefit these languages. Putting an LP which treats all languages as equals can by no means be beneficial to these endangered languages, no matter how endoglossic it is. Equality should not mean treating the advantaged and the disadvantaged in the same way. Rather, it is supporting the disadvantaged without diminishing the advantaged unfairly. LPs cannot benefit their respective societies just because they appear to be proponents of multilingualism. Without well thought and strategically well designed LPs neither empowerment of indigenous languages nor preservation of endangered languages can happen.

---

[35]OLP.

Since Ethiopia is a multilingual state, with all the centuries old squabbling between elites of different ethno-linguistic groups, any societal development plan should always consider language as an issue to be thought thoroughly in planning economic development as well as regional tranquility. Hence, all the political parties should try to work in cooperation with the concerned academia for a well detailed discussion of the pros and cons of LPs.[36] In addition, beyond the promotion of ethnic identities, parties should look for policies that will have a positive effect on durable regional stability, since imposing one's language over the other will inevitably ostracize the latter from easily accessing economic development and political participation.

Furthermore, as there is a sizeable number of parties that are calling for an additional WL of the federal government, all of the people in the political business and stake holders of the language issue, such as researchers and consultants of policy makers, should begin to deeply look at the economics of such LP from the perspective of language economics (Grin 1994; Chiswick 2008). Any proposal regarding the WL of the federal government should not be a result of incessant lobbying from the political entrepreneurs. A thorough cost benefit analysis that carefully considers the ethnographic and economic realities of the country is the only best way to design an effective LP.

Acknowledgments

---

[36] At least, the three language model forwarded by Wodajo (2014), the replacement of Amharic by English as the sole WL suggested by Gebreselassie (2015), etc., should all be considered, discussed and evaluated by political groups to come up with better LPs with well-designed implementation strategies.

Abbreviations

AEDP	All Ethiopian Democratic Party	GSPP	Geda System Proponents Party
AEUP	All Ethiopian Unity Party	HNL	Harari National League
ANDO	Argoba Nation's Democratic Front	KPC	Kembata People's Congress
ARDUF	Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front	MEISON	All Ethiopian Socialist Movement
BGDUF	Benishangul Gumuz Democratic Front	OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
BMPDO	Bahrworq Mesmes People's Democratic Organization	OLP	Oromo Liberation Party
DDPDP	Dubie and Degeni People Democratic Party	ONC	Oromo National Congress
DDQPDO	Denta, Dubamo Qinchilchila People's Democratic Organization	OPDU	Omo People Democratic Unity
EDP	Ethiopian Democratic Party	PDRE	People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
EJDFF	Ethiopian Justice and Democratic Forces Front	PMAC	Provisionary Military Administrative Council
EPAP	Ethiopian Pan-Africanist Party	SNNPR	Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region
EPLF	Eritrean People Liberation Front	TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front	UEDF	United Ethiopian Democratic Forces
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party	UJDP	Unity for Justice and Democracy
ERAEIP	Ethiopian Vision Party	WPDF	Wolaita People Democratic Front
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia
FORUM	Forum for Federalist Democratic Unity of Ethiopia	WSDP	Western Somalia Democratic Party
GPRDF	Gambella People's Revolutionary Democratic Front		

References

Awgchew, Girma. 2009. *The origin of Amharic.* Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Balsvik, Randi Ronning. 2007. *The quest for expression: State and University in Ethiopia under Three Regimes, 1952- 2005.* Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Bender, M. Lionel. 1976. Introduction. In M. Lionel Bender (ed.), *The non-Semitic languages of ethiopia*, 1–24. East Lansing: Michigan State University in Cooperation with Southern Illinois University.

Berhanu, Kassahun. 2003. Political culture and party politics in Ethiopia. In Mohammed Salih (ed.), *African political parties: Evolution institutionalization and governance*, 1–2. London: Pluto Press.

Board, National Electoral. 2009. *Political parties for election 2010.* http://www.NEBE.net.et, accessed 2011-09-11.

Bogale, Berhanu. 2009. Language determination in Ethiopia: What medium of instruction? In Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Tefarra & Shiferaw Bekele (eds.), *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1089–1101. Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science & Technology.

Bowen, Donald & Nancy Horn. 1976. Language education. In Lionel Bender (ed.), *The non-Semitic languages of Ethiopia*, 608–634. East Lansing: African Studies Center Michigan state University.

Bulcha, Mekuria. 1998. The politics of linguistic homogenization in Ethiopia: Trends in the development of the oromo language. In Kwesi Kwaa Prah (ed.), *Between distinction and extinction*, 1–2. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Chiswick, Barry. 2008. *The economics of language: An introduction and overview.* Chicago: Institute for the Study of Labor.

Cobarrubias, Juan. 1983. Ethical issues in status planning. In Joshua A. Fishman & Juan Cobarrubias (eds.), *Progress in language planning: International perspectives.* 41–87. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Cooper, Robert L. 1976. Government language policy. In M. L. Bender, J. D. Bowen, R. L. Cooper & C. A. Ferguson (eds.), *Language in Ethiopia*, 187–190. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

FDRE. 1994. *Education and training policy.* Addis Ababa.

Fishman, Joshua A. 1972. *Language in sociocultural change.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gebreselassie, Fisseha. 2015. *Choosing a working language in mutilingual nations: Rethinking Ethiopia's working language policy.* no address: no publisher. http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/Paper-on-Ethiopia-Language-Policy.pdf, accessed 2015-06-25.

Getachew, Anteneh & Derib Ado. 2006. History and current trends. *Ethiopian Journal of Education and Sciences* 2. 37–60.

Grin, Francois. 1994. The economics of language: Match or mismatch? *International Political Science Review* 15(1). 25–42.

Gudina, Merera. 2006. Contradictory interpretations of the ethiopian history. In David Turton (ed.), *Ethnic federalism: The ethiopian experience in comparative perspective*, 119–131. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Heugh, Kathleen, Carol Benson, Berhanu Bogale & Mekonnen Alemu Gebre Yohannes. 2007. *Final report study on medium of instruction in primary schools in Ethiopia.* Addis Ababa: MOE.

Leyew, Zelealem. 2012. A historical and typological overview. *Ethiopian Journal of Languages and Literature* 12(2). 1–59.

McNab, Christine. 1988. *Language policy and language practice: Implementation dilemmas in Ethiopian education.* University of Stockholm dissertation.

McNab, Christine. 1990. Language policy and language practice: Implementing multilingual literacy education in Ethiopia. *African Studies Review: Special Issue for the International Year of Literacy* 33(3). 65–82.

Mekonen, Walelign. 1969. *On the question of nationalities in Ethiopia.* no publisher. http://www.walelignfordemocracia.com/onationalqu.pdf, accessed 2014-11-09.

Obeng, G. Samuel & M. Tristan Purvis. 1999. Sub-Saharan africa. In Joshua A. Fishman (ed.), *The handbook of language and ethnic identity*, 334–390. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pankhurst, Richard. 1976. Historical background of education in Ethiopia. In Lionel Bender (ed.), *The non-Semitic languages of ethiopia*, 305–323. East Lansing: Michigan State University in Cooperation with Southern Illinois University.

Patten, Allan. 2001. Political theory and language policy. *Political Theory* 29. 691–715.

Philipson, David. 2012. *Foundations of an African civilization: Aksum & the northern horn, 1000 BC-AD 1300.* Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Revised Constitution of Ethiopia. 1955. Addis Ababa.

Schiffman, Harold. 1996. *Linguistic culture and language policy.* London: Routledge.

Smith, Lahra. 2008. The politics of contemporary language politics in Ethiopia. *Journal of Developing Societies* 24. 207–243.

Stalin, Joseph. 1913. *Marxism and the national question.* http://www.marxists.org, accessed 2014-11-09.

Stoddart, John. 1986. *The use and study of English in ethiopian schools.* Addis Ababa.

Tzadua, Paulos. 1968. Foreward. In Peter L Strauss & Paulos Tzadua (eds.), *The fetha nagast: The law of the kings*, xv–xxix. Addis Adaba: Faculty of Law, Haile Sellassie I University.

UNESCO. 2015. *Interactive atlas of the world's languages in danger.* no address. http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php, accessed 2015-06-25.

Vaughan, Sarah. 2006. Responses to ethnic federalism in Ethiopia's Southern Region. In David Turton (ed.), *Ethnic federalism: The Ethiopian experience in comparative perspective*, 181–207. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Wodajo, Mesfin. 2014. Sociolinguistic challenges of the Post-1991 Ethiopian Language Policy. *Journal of Languages and Cultures* 5(2). 17–23. http://www.academicjournals.org, accessed 2015-06-25.

Zemelak, Mehari. 2011. *The language issue among Ethiopian political parties*. Addis Ababa. MA thesis unpublished.

Zewde, Bahru. 2002. *A history of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Zewde, Bahru. 2008. The changing fortunes of the Amharic language: Lingua franca or instrument of domination? In *Society, state and history: Selected essays*, 77–95. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.