

## Choice for a Working Language in Ethiopia: A case study among graduating classes of Oromo speakers in selected public universities

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**Abstract:** This study has explored the working language choice of prospective graduate students in some selected public universities of Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, federal offices and institutions, which are accountable to federal governments and four regions along with two administrative cities, have chosen Amharic as their working language. Currently, however, Amharic is not a language of wider communication in some larger regions of the country. Particularly, claims from students of Oromia region of the country concerning the existing language use policy of the country are becoming serious issues on stage very often. The researcher of this study, therefore, has focused on identifying what choice of language they have and in what linguistic domains they want to use. For this study, the researcher has employed a quantitative and qualitative data collecting method. The data were collected from prospective graduates of Oromo speaking students in three public universities of the country. The universities were selected purposefully based on what languages are profoundly spoken in communities surrounding the universities. Totally 450 subjects were selected to participate in the study, with 150 from each university. Data were collected in questionnaires. The findings of the study have revealed that prospective graduates of Oromo language speakers are poor in grasping, defining, conceptualizing, stating, organizing and analyzing information in Amharic, especially, in reading and writing skills. Therefore, they would be choosing the Oromo language as their working language in their future career by delimiting their working place to Oromia where the working language is Oromo language. As a researcher, I recommend that the students should extend the scope in which the Oromo language is served as a working language in extra regional and federal government institutions.

**Keywords:** language choice, working language, language skills proficiency

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the study**

As education is unquestionably very important property for all nations of the world, individuals, groups and institutions from around the world are seen acting separately and cooperatively to insure its accessibility and the quality it has to have. Experiences from all corners of the world show that most of the developed nations have come to sustainable development supported by education. However, education is not real education unless the media/languages, through which knowledge or skills are transferred to the addressees, are suitable devices. Success in educational development of many countries of the world is mainly attributed to their choices of appropriate languages for education. To clarify what it means by appropriate language here is that the access to usability of languages among the service providers and the seekers in education and in any other profession. Wolff (2006:28) asserts this fact by saying that, “development comes from using communication and effective communication can be facilitated through a familiar language among the various groups for social and individual developments”. In this sense, therefore, language is a means for communication, which serves as a tool for sustainable development of a nation in economy, education, science and politics. (Orman, 2008:116).

In another sense, when languages are used in a setting the users have no skills with, nothing worthy as a result of communication is gained unless leaving things puzzled and making communicators perplexed with complexion of language. Particularly, when teachers are to teach in a language they don't know and when professionals of any field are to serve in a language they don't know, any scholars can predict what the result could be. In a situation like this, it is impossible to assume that language is a fertile device in supporting development, rather, it is a means to make people be in confusion. Many scholars seriously condemn situations where a working language of a country is a language strange to the people of the country. Scholars describe that situation as, “language is an instrument and a symbol of power to dominate others” (Pattanayak, 2001:567; Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2001:571; Phillipson, 1988:339). Some scholars bitterly condemn the pressure of making a language be used by people who don't know it. Omoniyi (2003:13) referring Kassahun (2000) asserts that concept; “If you take away my right to speak my own language by mandating another language as the official language, you pull me out of circulation; you take me out of the dialogue”. According to Omoniyi (ibid), the concept of “Pulling out of circulation” was defined as the action to make that people to become out of all cultural, economic, social and political values that they would have shared with others.

In Ethiopia, Amharic language is the only federal working language and, therefore, this language is served in all federal government structures and in institutions whose accountability is authorized to that federal government. In addition, Amharic is a working

language in five of the nine regions and two administrative cities of the country. According to Bourdieu, (1991), when a language possessed a determinative bargaining power in the linguistic market, those who don't have sufficient skills qualification would be losers. Despite the fact that all human languages are essentially equal in terms of their ability to express the entire range of their speakers' thoughts and feelings, linguistic markets are inevitably hierarchical, giving different values to different languages and people's competence in them. Therefore, the linguistic and labor market, especially of Oromo speakers, who benefit balance in Ethiopia, is the subject of this study.

### 1.2 Statement of the problem

Following the downfall of the Dergue regime, the coming of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) to power in 1991 has put a *de jure* foundation to nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopian to develop and use their respective languages in Ethiopia. The Federal Democratic Republic Government of Ethiopian (FDRE) constitution in Article 5, says: (1) All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state of recognition, (2) Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government and (3) Members of the Federation may by law determine their respective working languages. For general enactment of the law, the FDRE had made the country have nine regional governments of which five (Oromia, Afar, Tigray, Somale and Harari) have been privileged to develop their own working languages and the remaining four (Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Gambela and southern nations nationalities and peoples) decided to keep with Amharic be their working language. There are also two autonomous administrative cities (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa) identified as a domiciliary for peoples of heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds and, therefore, they have been entitled with Amharic to be their working language (FDRE Constitution Art. 47). Moreover, the federal government and its institutions, which in administrative structure are not under the jurisdiction of respective regional governments, have also taken Amharic as their working language.

Similarly, the Ministry of Education of FDRE prepared documents in 1994 on a new Education and Training Policy, which were recognized as the use of home languages in primary school education. The document was depicted, "Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the learners in learning in mother tongue and the rights of the nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages" (FDRGE, 1994:23).

The Oromia regional government, based on the FDRE constitution and ministry of education policy, has taken Oromo language as the region's working language, media of education, media of broadcast communication and so forth (Oromia Regional State Constitution Art.5). Accordingly, primary education from first cycle (grade 1-4) and second cycle (grade 5-8) and teachers' education for the two cycles above mentioned have being

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undergone in Afaan Oromoo (Oromo language) as media of instruction. In the region, English language is learned as a subject matter starting from grade 1 to grade 12, i.e. the completion of secondary education, and serves as a medium of instruction in the whole secondary education (grade 9-12) (Heugh et al. 2007:49).

In the region, Amharic, the de facto working language of federal government and other five regional governments, is commenced to be studied as a compulsory subject as of grade five and become optional after national examination is taken at grade ten. However, it is still consistent with federal policy requiring study of the national language during primary schooling. In addition to the late commencement of education to learn the language, Amharic, teachers who are trained to teach at the primary level are not fluent speakers of it as they get access to the language as a trainee of teacher education. What is more, most of the schools' localities in the region are surrounded by either Oromo speakers or non-Amharic speakers for the environment might have contributed to the acquisition of the language. For these aforementioned reasons or others, students who have reached their tertiary level of education and come to universities for the first time from different zones of Oromia are found to be unable to communicate in Amharic with non-Oromo speakers. For some of them, it is difficult even to complete their registration for the campus unless otherwise helped by translators or served in their own language.

Fortunately, what is worth mentioning here is that the duration of the students to stay on the campus for their study is assumed to be a good opportunity for them to learn Amharic as a result of communication they make with non-Oromo speakers. Their duration maybe last three to six years according to their field of study. Upon their graduation from tertiary level education, they are expected to go into the society to serve them with the profession they have been qualified. However, serving a society with one's profession is possible and become effective if one knows and understands the language the society uses. Therefore, this study is concentrated to identify what language the Oromo graduates choose as their working language when they have finished their education and been ready enough to serve the society. Accordingly, the following research questions are the focus of this study:

- (1) What is the proficiency level of Oromo speakers in non-Oromo languages?
- (2) What language do the Oromo graduating students choose as their working language?
- (3) What are the implications of the study results for the language planning and policy designers?

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The general objective of this study is to explore the choice of the working language and its implications for Oromo graduating students and specifically:

- (1) To identify the proficiency level of Oromo speakers in non-Oromo languages.
- (2) To identify what language the Oromo graduating students choose as their working

language.

(3) To indicate what implications the study results may have for the language planning and policy designers.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

A language choice is a worldwide phenomenon and has effects on the social, cultural, and economical development of every country with multilingual and multicultural composition. Since Ethiopia is a multilingual and multicultural country, it must have diversified research results on language use to practice scientifically supported language policy and planning in the country. Currently, there is a wide range of language use demands and conflicts in this country. The unstable state of the countries' language use manner, which very often instigates conflict among users, may be kept on chronic unless be resolved through scientific researches. Therefore, this study is very useful for language policy and planning designers at national level and regional level, too.

#### **1.5 Delimitation of the study**

This study does not aim to go deeper into the issues of choosing working languages from the perspective of both national and regional governments. That aspect of study remains to be a gap for further researches. The scope of this study is limited to identifying language choice of prospective university graduates of Oromo students.

### **2. Review of related literatures**

Among studies conducted so far on the issue of working language and some related contents in Ethiopia, a Ph.D dissertation by Mekonnen (2015), was among the reviewed. The topic of the dissertation is "Language Policy in Ethiopia: The Interplay and Tensions between Language Policy and Practices". The study employed qualitative research methodology with an ethnographic research design and a critical discourse analysis method. The main findings of the study are stated as follows. Although de jure multilingual policies are officially proclaimed in the country, de facto restrictive or hegemonic language policies are perpetuated or maintained in practice. It also found out that such residual resistance to pluralism emanated from the dominant group's interest, instructionally rooted practices, ideologies, mechanisms and agents which have had explicit and/or implicit manifestations. Yet, the study also found out that even though the majority of language groups continued to perpetuate hegemonic language policy to maintain their language based on dominance and ideology, individuals or groups from the minority (e.g. activists, educators) would continue to struggle for and gain their language spaces and rights by creating micro-level resistant language policy processes and mechanisms which influenced the macro-level de facto hegemonic language policies. On the other hand, this study failed to touch the proficiency level of the people of the country in the dominant and hegemonic language policies and its

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implications. My study is conducted to fill that gap.

A research by Milkessa (2011) is another study closely related to this study. The title of the study says “Rethinking Ethiopia’s Choice of Working Language: The Implications of the Choice of Working Language of the Federal Government of Ethiopia for Afan Oromo and Its Speakers”. The study substantiates that the choice of the working language of the federal government including Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa is no less than discriminatory in its consequences and hence flawed for it totally neglected other competing languages, such as Oromo language. The selection of Amharic as the exclusive working language in all federal jurisdictions has adversely affected access to employment opportunities, mass media sharing, choice of medium of instruction in schools, services in courts and hospitals and ultimately the survival of the Oromo national identity in those areas. Like the study by Mekonnen (2015) mentioned earlier, this study also didn’t discuss the proficiency level of the people of the country in Amharic, the sole working language of federal government and thus, my study is conducted to disclose that and aimed to identify prospective students’ language choice for their career.

Lahra (2008) is another scholar who conducted a research on language policy of Ethiopia with the title “The Politics of Contemporary Language Policy in Ethiopia”. The study is conducted based on structured interviews and participant observations in selected regions of the country. The finding of the study revealed that, in modern Ethiopia, the historical distribution of the political goods of communication, recognition and autonomy has been highly distorted, benefiting native Amharic-speakers disproportionately. However, the study has failed to touch the issue of the Amharic proficiency level of people who are non-Amharic speakers.

### **3. Materials and methods**

#### **3.1 Areas of the study**

The study was conducted among Oromo speaking students who are prospective graduates and currently attending their study in regular program at undergraduate level. For the study, three universities were selected: Addis Ababa University, Jimma University and Wollega University. These universities were selected on purpose. The main activity of the study was to identify the Amharic skills proficiency level of the students for it is the working language of many regional and federal governments and institutions’ offices in the country. To that end, identifying the surrounding environments of the selected universities was very important. Accordingly, the surrounding environment language condition is fairly undesirable, for Addis Ababa University is Amharic, Wollega university is Oromo and Jimma university is mixed language type.

#### **3.2 Study population**

All the Oromo speaking prospective graduates residing in Ethiopia are the population of this study. The figure of all Ethiopian higher institution students graduating in different fields of study varies from year to year. According to the data from the Ministry of Education, for instance, in 2017 academic year, there were 150,000 students graduated from all universities of the country, of whom the majority constitute Oromo speakers.

### **3.3 Data collection instrument: questionnaires**

Data were collected through both open-ended and close-ended questionnaires administered by selected persons for collecting data. The questionnaires were distributed to prospective graduates of Oromo students attending regular classes at an undergraduate level in all study sites. There were seven colleges in each university and every college has a constituting department under it. A total number of 450 samples were selected to participate in the study, among whom 150 came from each university. 21 participants were randomly selected from six colleges and 24 from technology institute. The questionnaires have different questions like respondents' first language, place of birth and residence, and language, especially Amharic skills proficiency level. Questions which measure language skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing were included. The proficiency levels of the above mentioned skills were represented by numbers: 1 = poor, 2 = good, 3 = very good and 4 = excellent. The final part of the questionnaires is developed to identify respondents' reasons to learn Amharic and on what the working language choice of the respondents is.

## **4. Results and discussions**

This chapter presents the results and discussions of responses from questionnaires and interviews. The data obtained through the questionnaires were presented in tables with details below it. The number of samples the data gathered was 75, of which 25 were from each university. The data gathered through interviews were transcribed and presented thematically in paragraphs.

### **4.1 Respondents' Amharic proficiency**

The fact that respondents are all Oromo speakers, identifying their Amharic skills level is mandatory for this study. Accordingly, they were asked to rate their Amharic proficiency level by applying a four-point scale which ranges from 'perfect to poor' and the results have been presented below the table.

Explanations have been given in the questionnaires what they imply when ranging their proficiency from perfect to poor. Accordingly,

- Perfect for listening implies: I can easily understand any complex level of Amharic speech
- Very good implies: I am not perfect, but I can understand simple and ordinary

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Amharic speech

- Good implies: I understand only basic Amharic words and very short sentences. I can't understand if it is constructed in two or more clauses.
- Poor implies: I cannot understand Amharic entirely.

Table 1. Students' Self-Rated Proficiency Level in Amharic

Skills	University	Proficiency level								Total
		Perfect		Very good		Good		Poor		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	100%
Listening	Addis Ababa	42	28	51	34	47	31.3	10	6.6	150
	Jimma	30	20	43	28.6	51	34	26	17.3	150
	Wollega	27	18	23	15.3	72	48	28	18.6	150
Speaking	Addis Ababa	16	10.6	21	14	39	26	74	49.3	150
	Jimma	7	4.6	13	8.6	38	25.3	92	61.3	150
	Wollega	5	3.3	11	7.3	33	22	111	74	150
Reading	Addis Ababa	7	4.6	13	8.6	16	10.6	114	76	150
	Jimma	1	0.6	6	4	20	13.3	123	82	150
	Wollega	-	-	13	8.6	18	12	119	79.3	150
Writing	Addis Ababa	5	3.3	8	5.3	13	8.6	124	82.6	150
	Jimma	2	1.3	9	6	8	5.3	131	87.3	150
	Wollega	1	0.6	3	2	7	4.6	139	92	150
Total										450

(F = frequency, % = percentage)

#### 4.1.1 Respondents' listening proficiency level of Amharic

From the table 1 above, one can see that the number of the respondents of each study site for every item of the proficiency level is below than the average (50%). According to the data, it is impossible for the researcher to assign the respondents' Amharic listening skill exclusively to any alternative proficiency level in the questionnaire. Having the descriptions given to each alternative proficiency levels, therefore, we can merge them based on the meaning closeness given to each item of the proficiency level. When we merge and see the statistics, therefore, the number of respondents rated themselves as perfect and very good listener of Amharic are 216 (48%) and those respondents self-rating as good and poor Amharic listeners are 234 (52%). Now it is possible to infer that almost half of the total respondents can either easily understand any complex level of Amharic speech or with no perfection they can understand simple and ordinary level of Amharic speech. Whereas the remaining half of the total respondents rated themselves as they



understand only basic Amharic words and rather short sentences but they can't understand if it is constructed in two and more clauses and of this around 64 (14%) of the respondents rated themselves as they can't understand Amharic totally.

Another point clear from the table is the slight differences in the Amharic skill proficiency seen among the study sites. 93 (62%) respondents in Addis Ababa have rated themselves as very good and perfect listeners of the language, Amharic, and the remaining 57 (38%) were afraid that they are neither very good nor perfect in Amharic listening skill. The case in Jimma is a bit different from Addis Ababa in that nearly half of the respondents 73(48.6%) have rated themselves as very good or perfect listeners of Amharic and the rest 77 (51.4%) have reported their proficiency as good or poor. Significant differences in respondents' self-rating is seen in Wollega that only 50 (33.4%) of the respondents took themselves as perfect or as very good listeners and 100 (66.6%) of the respondents rated themselves as good or poor listeners of Amharic.

Due to the fact that the availability of the speakers in the environment contributes in learning second or foreign language, the differences seen among the respondents in Addis Ababa and Wollega is may be by the case of speakers in their surrounding environment. In the case of Addis Ababa, where the environment is Amharic speakers, more respondents have reported themselves as perfect listeners, whereas in Wollega, where the environment is Oromo speakers, most of the respondents have rated themselves as poor listeners of the language, Amharic. In Jimma, both languages, Amharic and Oromo, may be used equally in the environment and as a result there is no balance shift to any language among respondents' response.

#### 4.1.2 Respondents' speaking proficiency level of Amharic

Unlike the Amharic listening skill of the respondents, there are significant differences at the speaking proficiency level of the respondents in all study areas. Accordingly, the number of respondents who have rated themselves as perfect and very good speakers of Amharic are 73 (16.2%) and those respondents self-rating as good and poor speakers of the language are 377 (83.7%). It is possible to infer from these statistics that except a few of the respondents, 28 (6.2%) who rated themselves as perfect speakers of the language and 45 (10%) who rated themselves as very good in the language, a significant number of the respondents 387 (86%) have reported themselves to be good and poor in the language Amharic. Goodness or poorness in the language implies, according to the description already given, that they understand only basic Amharic words and short sentences and they can't understand if the language is constructed in two and more clauses. For about 277 (61.5) respondents, they can't understand Amharic at all.

When we analyse the frequency observed at each study area separately, the situation in which the respondents who have rated themselves as good and poor speakers of the

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language at Wollega and Jimma are double 144 (96%) and 130 (87%) respectively as compared with the responses from Addis Ababa. This relative difference among the study areas could be seen because of the speakers' environmental factor that in Addis Ababa Amharic is the dominant language.

4.1.3 Respondents' reading proficiency level of Amharic

The frequency of responses reported on reading proficiency level which has labeled as perfect and very good competency at all study areas, as observed in the table, is all below 15%. Response from each study area shows a similar manner that there is a much weaker reading skill that the respondents have developed. Most of the time, reading and writing skills are learned in school setting with frequent practices. However, the language in education policy of the country's Oromia region allows Amharic learning as a subject starting from grade five and optionally continued after ten which might have contributed to the weak skill that the respondents have reportedly developed.

4.1.4 Respondents' writing proficiency level of Amharic

As is shown in the table 1 above, only less than 10% of the respondents are very good and perfect in writing. No significant difference is found among the study areas of the respondents in the competency. As already raised under the sub-section of reading previously, the education policy in Oromia, which allows Amharic learning as a subject starting from grade five and optionally continuing after ten might have contributed to the weak skill the respondents reportedly developed.

Generally, we can conclude from the above analysis that the rate of the proficiency level of the Oromo-speaking graduating students in Amharic skills decrease when one moves from listening ability to writing. Accordingly, their Amharic listening ability is poor for almost half of the respondents in all study areas whereas in writing skill of the language, more than 85% of the respondents are poor. Thus, when we come to conclude on the competence of the respondents, they lack language skills to grasp, define, retain, conceptualize, state, organize and analyze any necessary information, and facts through listening, speaking, reading and writing in Amharic.

The result from the respondents shows in the table 1 that there are very few statistical implications that lead us to think about and identify the reasons behind for respondents with 'perfect and very good' proficiency level in Amharic skills. Even though, there could be other ways to look at the case, this study focused on where the respondents originally came from, by taking into account their environmental background as one factor.

4.2 Students' Amharic proficiency level based on areas they came from

By taking into consideration that the respondents' background of living area can contribute to Amharic skills proficiency, I engaged in analyzing their proficiency by categorizing them in to rural and urban living background.

Table 2. Students' Amharic Proficiency Level Based on Areas They Came from

Table 2: Students' Annular Proficiency Level Based on Areas They Came from												
The skills	University	Area	Proficiency level								Total	
			Perfect		Very Good		Good		Poor			
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Listening	Addis Ababa	Urban	37	74	13	26	0	0	0	0	50	100
		Rural	5	5	38	38	47	47	10	10	100	100
	Jimma	Urban	27	54	23	46	0	0	0	0	50	100
		Rural	3	3	20	20	51	51	26	26	100	100
	Wollega	Urban	23	46	23	46	4	8	0	0	50	100
		Rural	4	4	0	0	68	68	28	28	100	100
Speaking	Addis Ababa	Urban	16	32	21	42	13	26	0	0	50	100
		Rural	0	0	0	0	26	26	74	74	100	100
	Jimma	Urban	7	14	13	26	30	60	0	0	50	100
		Rural	0	0	0	0	8	8	92	92	100	100
	Wollega	Urban	5	10	11	22	33	66	1	2	50	100
		Rural	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	100	100	100
Reading	Addis Ababa	Urban	2	4	4	8	6	12	38	76	50	100
		Rural	5	5	9	9	10	10	76	76	100	100
	Jimma	Urban	0	0	2	4	7	14	41	82	50	100
		Rural	1	1	4	4	13	13	82	82	100	100
	Wollega	Urban	0	0	4	8	6	12	40	80	50	100
		Rural	0	0	9	9	12	12	79	79	100	100
Writing	Addis Ababa	Urban	2	4	3	6	4	8	41	82	50	100
		Rural	3	3	5	5	9	9	83	83	100	100
	Jimma	Urban	0	0	3	6	3	6	44	88	50	100
		Rural	2	2	6	6	5	5	87	87	100	100
	Wollega	Urban	0	0	1	2	2	4	47	94	50	100
		Rural	1	1	2	2	5	5	92	92	100	100

As we can understand from the table 2 above, a significant difference is observed among the respondents of the universities based on where originally they came from. According to the result in the table, respondents who originally came from urban area of the country are either perfect or very good in their Amharic listening and speaking skills. The intention of the researcher when categorizing the respondents into urban and rural living background was with the expectation that reports from respondents with urban background would show high proficiency level as more exposure and practicing access to Amharic they have than

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respondents with the rural background can have. Accordingly, 146 (97.3%) of the total 150 respondents with urban living background from all study sites have reported that they are very good and perfect in Amharic listening skill while only 70 (23.3%) of the total 300 respondents from rural living background have reported that they are very good and perfect.

In the same manner, differences have been found in speaking skill between the respondents from urban and rural background. Accordingly, 73 (48.7%) of the total 150 urban origin respondents at all study sites have reported that they are very good and perfect in Amharic speaking and none of the total 300 respondents with rural origin have reported that they are either very good or perfect. The result of table 2, again, shows the differences among the respondents of urban and rural background, 77 (51.3%) of the total 150 urban background respondents at all study sites have reported that they understand only basic Amharic words and rather short sentences. But when we see responses from respondents with rural origin, all of them have reported that they understand only basic Amharic words and rather short sentences and of this 266 (88.6%) of the respondents self-reported as they can't understand Amharic totally.

Unlike responses on Amharic listening and speaking skills, there is no significant difference among respondents with urban and rural origin at all study sites in Amharic reading and writing skills. Accordingly, 44 (88%) of respondents of urban background from Addis Ababa, 48 (96%) of the respondents of urban background from Jimma, and 46 (92%) of respondents of urban background from Wollega reported that they are very poor proficient in Amharic reading and writing skills. Most of the time reading and writing skills are practiced in schools. The existence of language in use in the environment may not be complimentary for a language learner to learn reading and writing as equally it is for listening and speaking. Therefore, the reason behind for respondents of all study sites in lagging down in reading and writing of Amharic skills, regardless of their areas of the country they came from, is that all the respondents are equally privileged to learn the skills in schools.

#### **4.3 Respondents what for to learn Amharic in Ethiopia**

Amharic is a language of lingua franca in Ethiopian urban areas by which peoples from different linguistic backgrounds use to communicate in. Moreover, the language is currently serving as the sole working language in federal government offices and the so-called federal institutions in the country. It also serves as the sole working language in Amhara, Addis Ababa, southern nation's nationalities and peoples, Gambela and Benishangul regions of Ethiopia. Professionals need to know this language to serve in either of the regions mentioned here. Under this sub-topic, therefore, the researcher's intention was to examine that what are the respondents' reasons to learn Amharic in

Ethiopia.

Table 3. Respondents What for to Learn Amharic in Ethiopia

Items	University	Respondents' reports										Total	
		SDA		DA		UD		AG		SA			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
a	Addis Ababa	-	-	-	-	8	5.3	13	8.7	129	86	150	100
	Jimma	-	-	3	2	-	-	6	4	141	94	150	100
	Wollega	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.3	148	98.7	150	100
b	Addis Ababa	121	80.6	22	14.6	7	4.6	-	-	-	-	150	100
	Jimma	119	79.3	26	17.3	5	3.3	-	-	-	-	150	100
	Wollega	123	82	24	16	3	2	-	-	-	-	150	100
c	Addis Ababa	94	62.6	47	31.3	7	4.6	2	1.3	-	-	150	100
	Jimma	88	58.6	51	34	4	2.6	7	4.6	-	-	150	100
	Wollega	101	67.3	37	24.6	9	6	-	-	3	2	150	100

(Items: a. I know I lose nothing if I learn/know Amharic but gain. b. My reason to learn Amharic is that the language is prestigious and I have a desire to be integrated with the language speakers. c. I believe that the Oromo- speaking students have to know Amharic for better employment opportunities. SDA = strongly disagree, DA = disagree, UD = undetermined, AG = agree, SA = strongly agree)

According to Ellis (1991:117) and Romaine (1995:288), there are two cases by which a person is motivated to learn a certain language. The first case is the interest of the person to know and use a certain language by assuming that the language will be useful for him in some ways sometime in future. Those reasons that the users of the language take into consideration to use the language may be vocational, status, achievement, personal success, self-enhancement, self-actualization, or basic security and survival. The scholars called this kind motivation instrumental function.

The other category is called integrative function of language. In integrative type, the intention of the person using the language is not to get any benefit by knowing of the language but motivated by a desire to be like representative member of the other language community members. Thus, this type of language learning motivation is related to or identifying oneself with a language group and its cultural activities.

Having the two types of language functions as a point of focus, we can see from the table 3 above that the majority of the respondents at all study sites have reported that they do believe that they can lose nothing if they learn/know Amharic but instead gain. If we put

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the figure, 439 (97.5%) of the total 450 respondents have reported that they agree and strongly agree with the statement.

On the other hand, what the respondents reported to the statement ‘I know I lose nothing if I learn/know Amharic but gain’ is the need to be identified what motivate these respondents to learn this language, Amharic. Accordingly, 435 (96.6%) of the total 450 respondents have reported that they disagree and strongly disagree with the statement ‘my reason to learn Amharic is that the language is prestigious and I have a desire to be integrated with the language speakers. This result indicates that the respondents are not in need to be assimilated with the language speakers.

The instrumental function of the language also seems not to be the real reason for the respondents to learn Amharic according to the result seen in the last row of the table. When we see the figure, 418 (92.8%) respondents, of the total 450 participants, disagree and strongly disagree with the statement that ‘I believe that the Oromo-speaking students have to know Amharic for better employment opportunities.’

Moreover, in the table 3 above, the responses that came from respondents of all study sites are almost similar. Thus, the analysis for very slight differences seen among all the study sites is not necessary for they have no significant value.

#### 4.4 Areas respondents working language choice

As mentioned earlier at the beginning of this chapter, the Amharic skills proficiency level of the respondents has been proven poor. In addition, they, the respondents, have confirmed that they use Amharic for non-integrative and non-instrumental purposes. Therefore, it is very important to know what the respondents choose as their working language(s) and in what way that could be realized. This situation of the respondents is depicted in table 4, below.

Table 4. Respondents Working Language Choice

Items	University	Respondents' reports								Total	
		Oromo	Amharic	Somali	Adare	Tigrigna	Afar	Other if any			
a	Addis Ababa	123	6	21	-	-	-	-		150	
	Jimma	107	9	34	-	-	-	-		150	
	Wollega	139	6	5	-	-	-	-		150	
		Oromia	Amhara	Somale	Addis Ababa	Tigray	Afar	Harari	Gambela	Benishangul	
b	Addis Ababa	141	-	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	150
	Jimma	133	-	-	17	-	-	-	-	-	150
	Wollega	144	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	150

(Items: a. Which language(s) of Ethiopia will be your working language in your future career? b. Did you decide a region where are you going to serve with your profession?)

In higher institution in Ethiopia, the medium of instructions is English except for local languages education, by which those languages are used as media of instruction. For instance, in the country's higher education, for Amharic and Amharic literature education a medium of instruction is Amharic, for Oromo and Oromo literature the medium of instruction is Oromo, for Tigrigna education Tigrigna is the medium of instruction and so on.

However, in the country, the usability of languages in different societal linguistic domains are determined by the language policy of the regional administrative governments that chosen working language(s) to the respective regions. For instance, if somebody is with insufficient skills in Amharic, he/she is unlikely to be employed in the country in governmental and non-governmental institutions whose working language is Amharic. Besides, in governmental institutions like Addis Ababa administrative city, in Amhara regional government, in Benishagul regional government, in Gambela regional government, and in southern nation's nationalities and people's regional government, knowledge of Amharic is mandatory for employment.

For the Oromo-speakers who were identified with insufficient Amharic skills proficiency, working in the regions of the country where Amharic is the working language is getting very difficult. In table 4 above, respondents themselves didn't choose Amharic as a working language for their future career as they have self-convinced that they don't have enough Amharic skills. Accordingly, the figure of their choice shows that 369 (82%) of the respondents have reported as their choice is Oromo and 60 (13.3%) and 21 (4.6%) are Somali and Amharic respectively. As one can see from the figure, a few number of the Oromo-speaking new generation, only less than 5% of my study participants, has chosen Amharic as a working language for their future career.

Together with the question regarding respondents' working language choice, reasons were also asked for their choices. Most of the responses given by theses respondents show that they don't have Amharic skills. One of my respondents from Addis Ababa University has reported as follows:

*We (the Oromos) have not been taught Amharic properly in all levels of schools. In the region where we came from, Amharic speakers are none. Even though they exist they don't speak with us in Amharic and we too, don't give them attention. We found the significance of Amharic upon joining higher education. In higher education setting, even we didn't give attention to it as we have been taught in English. Upon graduating our study in higher institution, we go for searching jobs in areas of the country and institutions working with Oromo language. /BW 22/05/2017/*

Like many countries in the world, the issue of working language in Ethiopia is a subject attached to the working environments and the institution varieties. Therefore, respondents were asked where they would go to serve the society with the profession they were

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graduated. Accordingly, 418 (93%) of the total 450 respondents have reported that they choose Oromia region where Oromo language is the working language in all governmental offices. All the remaining, 32 (7%) of the respondents choose Addis Ababa where the working language for governmental offices is Amharic. three of my respondents in Jimma have similarly reported as;

*Since the policy of working languages and the competency of the speakers in the languages are a blockage to go to elsewhere in the country in Ethiopia for employment purpose, we the Oromo-speakers are obliged to be delimited to work in Oromia Region. However, one promising process is there that the current discussion among governmental bodies to make Oromo language a working language of Addis Ababa on the way forward.*

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1 Findings**

The findings of this paper are as follows:

- The study has identified that prospective graduates of Oromo language speakers are poor in grasping, defining, conceptualizing, stating, organizing and analyzing information in Amharic, especially on skills of reading and writing.
- Most of the reports by the respondents have asserted that the Oromo speaking students have no hatred towards learning Amharic skills but didn't find conducive setting.
- For their future careers, almost all of the Oromo speaking students have made their working language choice the Oromo language. The students have also presented their poor proficiency level in Amharic as a reason for disregarding Amharic in their choice.
- As a result of insufficient Amharic skills scope bounded policy system on the language usage in the country and, the Oromo speaking students are delimited to Oromia region where the working language is Oromo.
- As an absolute solution, the Oromo students need the Oromo language to be a federal language so that they can serve in their profession in federal government offices and institutions.

### **5.2 The implication to the way forward**

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopian constitution gives equal state of recognition to all languages of the country. It says, all Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state of recognition. But the statement which comes next to this makes a bound for other languages, except Amharic, not to serve as a working language of federal government. According to the statement, "Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government" (FDRE Constitution Article 5, (1) (2)). Even though the former statement guarantees equal recognition of all languages, it didn't make a detail of its application and so that non-Amharic speakers, especially the Oromo, are suffering from inaccessibility to



compete for labor market needed at federal institutions level.

According to Alan, P. (2000) a language is recognized in public life when, as a matter of policy or right, public services are offered and public business can be conducted in that language. In the Ethiopian de facto constitutional law, federal government offices and institutions are working only in Amharic throughout the country. When the constitution was enacted in 1994, which is 24 years back, all Ethiopian citizens including the Oromo speakers were good Amharic speakers for the fact that the rulers of the country then were following the 'only one language policy', Amharic, in the country. However, the current generation of Oromo speakers' proficiency in Amharic is so poor and that they are unable to communicate in it. Therefore, even though the constitution is banning their language from serving at federal government level, they have made their choice of working language Oromo.

According to Alan (ibid), the choosing of one's language is not always because of inability in another working language. Instead, people often have fairly positive attitudes, preferences and attachments relating to their language use. An individual may self-identify with the community of speakers of his/her language. He/she may be proud of the language and the cultural achievements that have been expressed through it. He/she may take pleasure in using the language and encountering others who are willing to use it. He/she may enjoy experimenting with the language and discussing its intricacies with co-linguists. He/she may hope that the language community will survive and flourish into the indefinite future and so on. In some contexts, he/she may feel respected and affirmed when others address him/her in his/her language and denigrated when others impose their linguistic preferences on him/her.

Therefore, to conclude, in the country Ethiopia, a large number of Oromo language speakers are being graduated yearly from different higher education institutions with different professions. To encompass these graduate students in the country's labor market of all sectors including federal offices and institutions, Ethiopian government need to rethink the law stating that Amharic as the only working language of federal government. It must take the language choices of the community into consideration and take majors in making Oromo language the second federal working language next to Amharic.

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