
LEVELS OF LANGUAGE SHIFT AND LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT IN THE GURAGE VARIETIES OF MUHER AND EZHA

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Abstract

Gurage is a multilingual area located about 150 km in western parts of the capital of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. Muher and Ezha are language varieties of Gurage. They are neighbors and share common cultural values. The Muher community is found in the north-western part of the Gurage Zone. It shares a border with Ezha in the west, Mesqan and Dobbi in the southeast, Wolene in the northeast, K'abeena in the northwest and Silt'e in the southeast. The Ezha district is located southwest of Muher, northwest of Chaha and northeast of Gumer. Many of the Muher and Ezha speakers are bilingual in one of their neighboring languages. This study investigates the level of language shift and language endangerment in Muher and Ezha. Mixed research methods (questionnaire, interview, participant observation, UNESCO vitality index and EGIDS (expanded Graded integration disruption scale)) are used as research tools. The findings show that Muher is the most endangered language and Muher and Ezha are also highly influenced by the dominant official working language of the country, Amharic. Amharic is used in all official settings in Muher and Ezha, such as in schools, in court, in health centers and in administration. Elders tend to use their mother tongues, while young people mix their mother tongue with the dominant language, or tend to speak Amharic. Generational transformation of Muher and Ezha is decreasing in urban areas.

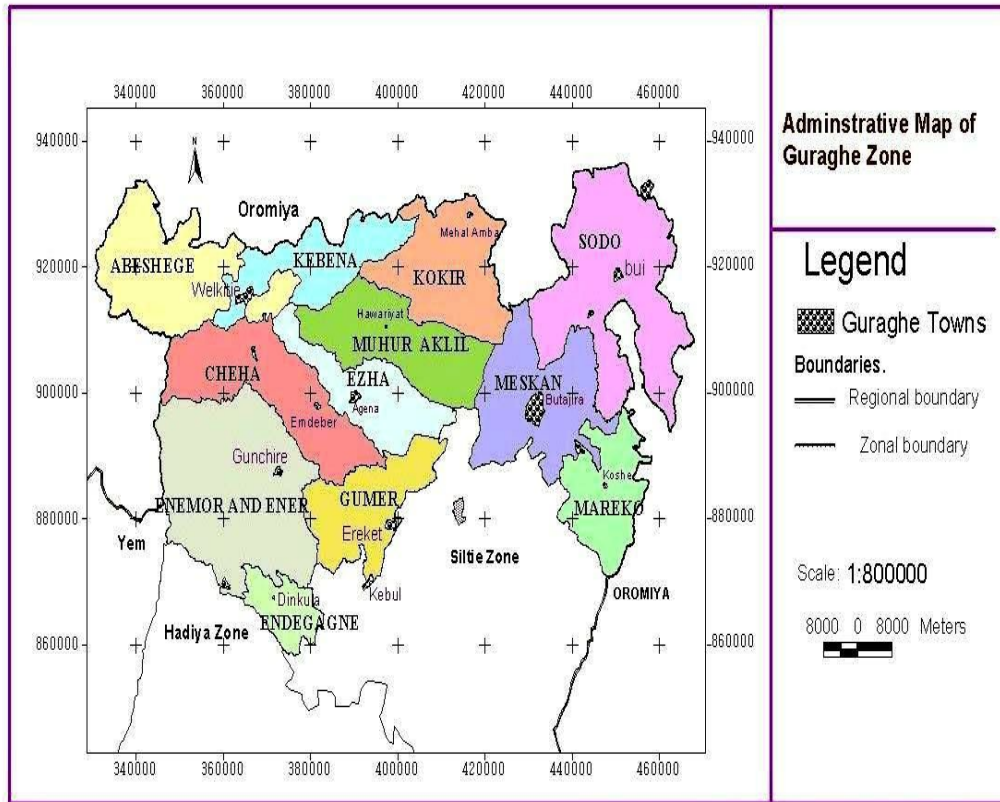
1. Introduction

Muher and Ezha are neighboring Gurage varieties as shown in Map1 below. But, the linguistic classification of the two Gurage varieties is different.

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Muher is from Northern Gurage and Ezha is from Central Western Gurage (Hetzron 1972:122). These two languages influence one another due to geographical and linguistic proximity between each other's. Amharic, the official working language of FDRE has also influenced Muher and Ezha.

Map1: Map of Gurage zonal administration.



Hawariat in Muher Aklil district and in Wera-Debane farmers' village association and the town of Agena in Ezha district and Wolkite, the zonal administration center of Gurage are taken as the common contact area for the two languages. Mixed research methods (questionnaire, interview, participant observation, UNESCO vitality index and expanded Graded integration disruption scale (EGIDS) are used as research tools. Total of one hundred twenty-six participants are used to fill the questionnaire. Eighteen

key informants are selected according to their linguistic ability, cultural and historical knowledge. Equal numbers of Muher and Ezha with proportion numbers of both sexes are considered. Triangulation is also used in the analysis of this research. As Berthele (2012:4) noted triangulation helps to change perspectives and to use methods and data pertaining to two or even more spaces in order to find answers to the respective problems.

1. Language shift and endangerment

Language endangerment refers to the growing trend of language loss through the processes of language shift and death. Apple and Muysken (1987:33) discussed that when a language is reduced in its function, which happens in the case of shift towards the majority language, generally speakers will become less proficient in it, i.e. language loss is taking place. Lewis & Simons (2016:4) also pointed out that the contact between users of different languages increases; the pressure towards language shift (and eventual death) also increases. Currently the majority of the world's languages are in states of endangerment. UNESCO's document describes the current linguistic situation of the world as follow;

About 97% of the world's people speak 4% of the world's languages, and conversely about 96% of the world's languages are spoken by about 3% of the world's people.... We estimate that, the most world regions, about 90% of the languages may be replaced by the dominant languages by the end of 21 century UNESCO (2003:1).

Gurage language varieties are also in the state of endangerment. Levels of language shift and endangerments in the Gurage varieties of Muher and Ezha discussed are based on quantitative, qualitative data collected from the research area, UNESCO's vitality index and Expanded Graded Integration Disruption Scale (EGIDS).

2.1. Quantitative analysis

Muher and Ezha are refers to the languages and the neighboring districts as well. They have common cultural values and strong bondages and ties. The

language contact between Ezha and Muher in the market and in the formal domains is discussed below.

2.1.1. Language use in informal domains

Muher and Ezha are dominantly used in the home domains. But, in the markets and other social domains the use of Muher and Ezha are decreasing. In informal domains the market domain is selected for this study.

A market is a place where different communities interact with each other. Ezha and Muher people have a big contact in the market of Ezha, Muher and Wolkite. Table 1 indicates the language use of Muher and Ezha in the market.

Table 1: Language use in the market

Language use	Frequency	Percent
Muher	12	9.5
Ezha	7	5.6
Amharic	47	37.3
Amharic Ezha and Muher	13	10.3
Amharic and Muher	12	9.5
Amharic and Ezha	32	25.4
Amharic Ezha, K'abeena and Afan Oromo	3	2.4
Total	126	100.0

Table 1 shows the maximum numbers of Muher and Ezha participants are use Amharic in the market. Accordingly, forty-seven (37.3%) participants used Amharic in the market and followed by thirty-two (25.4%) participants using mixed Amharic and Ezha, thirteen (10.3%) participants using mixed Amharic, Ezha, and Muher. Muher and Ezha are used only by twelve (9.5%) and seven (5.6%) respondents respectively. The minimum numbers of

respondents i.e. three (2.4%) of the total participants are dwellers of Wolkite who mix Amharic, Ezha, K'abeena and Afan Oromo.

When compared Ezha with Muher, Ezha participants are more none accommodating than Muher participants and Muher participants only use Muher with Muher speakers and shifted to Ezha with Ezha speakers and shifted to Amharic with Amharic and shifted to the other languages with the speakers of other languages.

2.1.2. Language use in the formal domain

The language used in the outside ethno linguistic influence refers to language use situations in informal domains. Amharic is the official language of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; Southern Nation, Nationalities and People regional state, Gurage Zone Administration and Ezha and Muher Aklil district administration as well. The 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, gives equal recognition to all Ethiopian languages through Article 5. Articles 20 and 39 of the Constitution also provide the rights of every nation, nationality and people of Ethiopia to use its language in speech and writing; to develop its language; to express, develop and promote its culture; and to preserve its history. But, Gurage community didn't practice their rights in informal domains. This right is not practiced in any of Gurage varieties including Muher and Ezha. The language used in the court is present as an example of a formal domain.

Table 2: Language use in the court

Language use	Frequency	Percent
Ezha	4	3.2
Amharic	102	81.0
Amharic & Muher	3	2.4
Amharic & Ezha	17	13.5
Total	126	100.0

As the researcher data and Table 2 indicate, one hundred two (81%) participants in the court, one hundred one (79.8%) participants in the health center, one hundred three (81.7%) participants in the school, ninety (71%) participants in district administration use Amharic. The media (FM radio of Gurage) is used only Amharic in Gurage zonal administration. When Muher compared with Ezha, thirty-four (51.6%) of Muher participants used Amharic in the court and only twenty (33.7%) of Ezha respondents used Amharic in the court. Other participants used their L1 or mixing their L1 with Amharic.

This result shows that Ezha people used their mother tongue better than Muher people in court, police administration and in health centers. They at least mix Ezha and Amharic. But, the majority of Muher people used Amharic in the court and other governmental offices.

2.1.3. Language use of Mates in Muher and Ezha

Marriage is one of the main social factors which have an effect in language use. Many of Muher and Ezha people are married to one another. Many Muher males marry Ezha women and some Ezha Males also marry Muher women as to this researcher experience and observation. Since language contact is bidirectional, they also influence one another. Table 3 shows the influence of mate’s language on their partner’s language due to contact.

Table 3: The woman shifted to the L1 of husbands Cross tabulation

Residence		Language shift to L1 of husband between Ezha and Muher					Total
		Muher	Ezha	None of them	each of them shifted	mix L1 & L2	
MH*	Count	12	0	1	0	1	14
	% of Total	9.5%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.8%	11.1%
MT	Count	27	1	1	0	0	29

Levels of Language Shift and Language Endangerment...Muher and Ezha - Awlachev

	% of	21.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	23.0%
	Total						
MW	Count	21	0	1	0	0	22
	% of	16.7%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	17.5%
	Total						
EA	Count	28	1	0	0	0	29
	% of	22.2%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	23.0%
	Total						
EW	Count	11	0	2	1	1	15
	% of	8.7%	0.0%	1.6%	0.8%	0.8%	11.9%
	Total						
ED	Count	16	1	0	0	0	17
	% of	12.7%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	13.5%
	Total						
	Count	115	3	5	1	2	126
	% of	91.3%	2.4%	4.0%	0.8%	1.6%	100.0%
	Total						

The language use situation is different in the mates of Ezha and Muher as shown in Table 3. Regarding language shift, one hundred-fifteen (91.3%) participants responded that Muher women shifted to the language of their husband (Ezha). Five (4%) informants responded none of them shifted to the language of their husband. Three (2.4%) participants replied that they shifted to the language of their husband (Muher). Two (1.6%) participants responded that each of them mixed Muher and Ezha, one (0.8%) participants responded that each of them shifted to their husbands language.

Any language cannot be free from the influence of other languages due to contact. The participants were asked to fill the questioner whether their mother tongue is influenced by the dominant language or not.

Table 4: Is your L1 influenced by a dominant language or not?

Influenced?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	69	54.8
No	57	45.2
Total	126	100.0

As shown in Table4, sixty-nine (54.8%) participants replied that their mother tongue was influenced by dominant language and the remaining fifty-seven (45.2%) participants responded that their mother tongue was not influenced by the dominant languages. As the research data indicated 58.3% of the Muher participants and 50% of the Ezha participants replied that their mother tongues were influenced by dominant languages. On the contrary, 31.9% of Muher participants and 59.25% of Ezha participants replied that their mother tongue was not influenced by the dominant language. From the above analysis, it is possible to judge that Muher is more influenced and Ezha is better maintained.

The participants were asked to explain which language influenced their mother tongues more.

Table 5: Which language influences your L1?

Residence		M	EZ	A	A, EN & EZ	A & O	A & EZ	Total
M	Count	0	2	1	0	0	11	14
H	% of	0.0	2.2	1.1	0.0%	0.0	12.2	15.6
	Total	%	%	%		%	%	%
M	Count	0	1	4	1	0	9	15
T	% of	0.0	1.1	4.4	1.1%	0.0	10.0	16.7
	Total	%	%	%		%	%	%
M	Count	0	3	12	0	0	7	22
W	% of	0.0	3.3	13.3	0.0%	0.0	7.8%	24.4
	Total	%	%	%		%		%

EA	Count	1	0	15	0	0	2	18
	% of Total	1.1	0.0	16.7	0.0%	0.0	2.2%	20.0
E	Count	0	0	15	0	0	0	15
W	% of Total	0.0	0.0	16.7	0.0%	0.0	0.0%	16.7
ED	Count	0	0	4	0	2	0	6
	% of Total	0.0	0.0	4.4	0.0%	2.2	0.0%	6.7
	Count	1	6	51	1	2	29	90
	% of Total	1.1	6.7	56.7	1.1%	2.2	32.2	100.0
		%	%	%		%	%	%

As shown in Table 5, fifty-one (56.7%) participants assumed that their language is influenced by Amharic, twenty-nine (32.2%) of the participants replied that their languages is influenced by Amharic and Ezha, six (6.7%) respondents replied that their language is influenced by Ezha and one (1.1%) participant assumed that his language is influenced by Ezha, Amharic and English. On the other side, 37.8% of Ezha participants assumed that their languages is influenced by Amharic, 2.2% assumed that their language is influenced by Amharic and Afan Oromo and 1.1% assumed that their languages is influenced by Ezha and Amharic.

One of the questionnaires was to identify whether the informants recognize that their mother tongue is endangered or not. Eighty-one (64.5%) participants responded that their mother tongue is endangered; the remaining thirty-six (28.2%) participants respond that their mother tongue is not endangered and nine (7.3%) participants didn't have the idea whether their mother tongue is endangered or not.

2.2. Qualitative data analysis

Key informants from Wolkite (IN*_01, IN_02, IN_03, IN_04, IN_06), from Ezha (IN_07, IN_08, IN_09) and from Muher (IN_11, IN_12, IN_13, IN_14, and IN_17) agreed that all Gurage language varieties are endangered.

All the key informants asserted that Muher is the most endangered. They also mentioned that the people who went to urban areas and students shifted their L1 to Amharic and have the interest of mixing Amharic with English. Most of the key informants also said that the people of Muher also diverted their L1 to their neighboring language, Ezha and Wolene.

IN_01, IN_02, IN_06, IN_07, IN_08, IN_09, IN-12 and IN_17 pointed out as many of the cultural values of the society are disappearing. They refer “wərko”/ “jək’umbixə” ‘funeral songs of known personalities’, “Məsk’əl” ‘True Cross’ ceremony, “weg” ‘cultural songs of elders’, “Bedina” ‘lyrics of Goddess of Cheha’, “zərərjə” ‘tales’, “nəxənk’wət” ‘riddles’, cultural naming, “Kurfuwə” ‘songs of girls for Saint Mary’ which is similar to Tigray girls song “afənda” and “gənnə” ‘Christmas songs of boys’, “nək’wə” ‘girl’s ceremony and songs of Saint Mary’, Market songs and “migigir” ‘bonfire’, artifacts of Gurage and “dʒəfʷe/ dʒəfʷərə” ‘the free walkway between houses’ which was the symbol of Gurage are currently highly endangered. According to most of key informants “wərko” is not religious act, it is cultural mourning ceremony. But, currently it is condemned by main stream religions. The informants said that the endangerment of their culture is the precondition for the endangerments of their language. They also pointed out that most of elder cultural singers passed away with no any descendants.

All the Muher key informants explained that all endangered cultural values of Muher mentioned are transferred from generation to generation by Ezha language. This researcher also knows as a mother tongue speaker of the language and with his observation that all the songs and poems of boys and girls in Muher are either in Ezha or in Amharic. The songs of elders both for holidays and funeral ceremony of Muher are also in Ezha.

Most of the informants agreed that there is good improvement in naming personal names. Even in the town and abroad Gurage people are naming their children with their mother tongue. But, their language is not used as a language of education in media.

The questionnaires, interviews and observations asserted that Muher and Ezha were dominantly used in the home domains and with rural relatives. The dominant language Amharic is used for preaching in the Church and in the Mosque dominantly and Geez and Arabic is used for sanctification in the Church and in the Mosque respectively.

Amharic is used dominantly in formal domains. Because the official working languages of the region, the zonal administration and the two targets district administrations is also Amharic. The data and the observation shows that literate people mostly use Amharic whether they are with rural or with urban relatives. Because, literate people act they are more intelligent than illiterate people by showing their proficiency in Amharic.

These results show Ezha people use better their mother tongue than Muher people in court, police administration and health centers. Ezha people at least mix Ezha and Amharic. But, the majority of Muher people use Amharic in the court and other governmental offices.

The language use of children in Wolkite, Agena and Hawariat asserts the intergenerational language shift of Muher and Ezha to the dominant working language of the country, Amharic.

As stated in Lewis and Simons (2016:4), intergenerational language shift occurs prototypically over three generations where grandparents are largely monolingual in the heritage language, the next generation is bilingual in that language and a dominant language, and their children (the grandchildren) are largely monolingual in the dominant language. Accordingly, children born in urban areas are becoming monolingual in the dominant language of Amharic.

2.3. UNESCO Language Endangerment Framework

Assessing the status and vitality of languages in danger was proposed by a UNESCO panel of experts in 2003, the framework provides a set of nine factors that can be analyzed to determine the category. Here the

endangerment level of Muher and Ezha is analyzed based on the evaluative factors of language vitality proposed by the UNESCO panel of experts.

2.3.1. Absolute number of speakers

According to the UNESCO (2003) document, it is impossible to provide a valid interpretation of absolute numbers, but a small speech community is always at risk. A small language group may also merge with a neighboring group, losing its language and culture. According to population projection (2013) value of 2017 central statistics authority of FDRE, the total population of Muher is 105,134 and the total population of Ezha is 104,554. From the viewpoint of language endangerment, the absolute numbers of Muher and Ezha are relatively high and both Muher and Ezha have strength in numbers of speakers.

2.3.2. Proportion of speakers within the total population

The UNESCO language vitality index of the assessment of language endangerment indicates that the language is safe if all the people speak the language, the language is unsafe if nearly all speak the language. The interview and the observation approved that from the total thirty farmers' village associations of Muher-Aklil district, seven of them which accounts for about 25,000 in numbers (i.e. Wegerawe, Feresgura, Yebejeche, Wiranfuna, Batinakeras, Dengez, and Wikiye) have completely shifted to *ijja-bet* (Ezha variety). But, Ezha is more stable than Muher in rural areas. This researcher observed that the youth of Ezha and Muher living in urban areas are also shifting to the dominant language, Amharic. This indicates that Muher and Ezha are unsafe language varieties of Gurage and Muher is even more unsafe.

2.3.3. Intergenerational language transmission

UNESCO experts' team (2003) set the following assessment tools to evaluate intergenerational language transformation.

Table 6: Assessment tools for intergenerational language transformation

<i>Degree of Endangerment</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Speaker Population</i>
<i>safe</i>	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.
<i>unsafe</i>	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
<i>definitively endangered</i>	3	Language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
<i>severely endangered</i>	2	The language is used mostly by the grand parental generation and up.
<i>critically endangered</i>	1	The language is used mostly by very few speakers, of great-grand parental generation.
<i>extinct</i>	0	There exists no speaker.

Muher and Ezha are unsafe based on intergenerational language transformation. The speakers of Muher and Ezha do not use their mother tongues equally in all domains. Children use their mother tongues mostly in home domains. They use Amharic and English in school. Amharic is also used in the religious and official domains. In the urban area of Muher and Ezha intergenerational language transformation is disturbed. The mother tongue of Muher and Ezha children in urban areas is Amharic and the language use domain in the family is also Amharic. This also indicates that Muher and Ezha are unsafe.

2.3.4. Trends in existing language domains

UNESCO (2003) research team asserted that if the language is used in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even the home domain, i.e. it is dwindling it. Amharic is used in the government institution, religious and market domains. Amharic also begins penetrating home domain more dominantly in Muher and to a lesser extent in Ezha. This shows that Muher and Ezha are dwindling at home domains.

2.3.5. Response to new domains and media

Mother tongue education, the medium of instruction, print and broadcast media, and the internet are the indicators of new domains and media. Accordingly, new domains and media are the response of the dominant languages i.e. the official working language of the country, Amharic and the medium of instruction at secondary and higher education is English. Muher and Ezha do not have orthography and they are not media of mother tongue education. They are not used in any print and electronic media and the internet. According to this criterion, Muher and Ezha are not used in any new domains and they are in state of endangerment.

2.3.6. Materials for language education and literacy

Education in the language is essential for language vitality. In general, however, literacy is directly linked with social and economic development. A current trend show that the development and advancement of a more developed and advanced country are due to their advanced education system. For Muher and Ezha there is no orthography and they are not used as the language of education and literacy.

2.3.7. Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies

According to the constitution of FDRE, all languages of the country have equal recognition. All nations, nationalities, and peoples of the country can

study, develop and protect their languages. But, Muher and Ezha are not favored by such rights. They are not either official or working languages. They are not encouraged by any language development strategy of the government. Amharic is used as with official status in the two districts and the regional state.

2.3.8. Community members' attitudes towards their own language

The speech-language communities of Muher and Ezha seem to have two opposing views of their languages. On the one hand, Muher and Ezha villagers seem to be proud of their language, identifying positively as their mother tongues. This is very different from any other varieties. These groups prefer to learn with their mother tongues. But, they didn't get the advantage to learn and teach their children with their mother tongues. On the other hand, others negatively express that to learn with the mother tongue is to be detached from modernity and it forbids from sharing from different national advantages. These groups prefer to learn the country's working language, Amharic as a mother tongue.

2.3.9. Amount and quality of documentation

Muher and Ezha are still under-documented and least studied Ethio-Semitic languages. Only a few grammatical sketches, short word-lists, and fragmentary texts are found in both varieties. This level encompasses languages that may not have official recognition but are "vehicular" in that they are used as a second language by members of multiple first language communities and serve important functions for business and intergroup communication. They are learned outside of the home either formally or informally and often have a standardized (though perhaps not officially sanctioned) written form.

Only the first factor, i.e. the absolute numbers of speakers suggests that Muher and Ezha are safe languages. But, all the other eight factors show that Muher and Ezha are unsafe language varieties. Therefore, the UNESCO

nine vitality factors show both Ezha and Muher are endangered and unsafe language varieties.

When Muher and Ezha are compared for their status based on UNESCO vitality assessment, Muher is the most endangered and Ezha is better than Muher based on the following factors.

1. Ezha is used as vehicular language among different Gurage varieties. Muher people also use Ezha as their L2 in addition to Amharic. But, Ezha people use Amharic as L2, but they do not use Muher as their L2.
2. Ezha and Muher are not officially recognized but Ezha is used beyond the local community for intergroup interactions. These may include business (trade), social or other communicative functions.
3. Intergenerational transmission of L1 is being disrupted both in Muher and Ezha. But, as indicated in sociolinguistics analysis the neighboring villages of Muher are shifted to Ezha. This responded that Muher is in a more advanced language shift.
4. Ezha has dialect varieties of Cheha, Gyeta, Gumer, Gura and Mesqan. It is spoken in six Woreda/districts. But Muher is spoken only in Muher and Aklil district. Therefore, Ezha has a wider distribution and Muher has a narrow distribution.

2.4. Expanded Graded Integration Disruption Scale (EGIDS)

As Lewis and Simons (2016:79) noted the place of the language within ecology can be more understood when the status of each is located on the EGIDS, a scale for assessing language development versus decline. The EGIDS as its name states is an expansion of the graded integration disruption scale developed by Fishman (1991). Lewis and Simons (2016:80) also stated that EGIDS can be used in any speech community as a tool for profiling the roles and relationships of each language with the language ecology of that community. In what follows EGIDS' 13 labels are given.

Table7: Expanded Graded Integration Disruption Scale (EGIDS)

Level	Label	Description
0	International	The language is widely used between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and international policy.
1	National	The language is used in education, work mass media, and government at the national level.
2	Provincial	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within major administrative subdivision of a nation.
3	Wider communication	The language is used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language difference across a region.
4	Educational	The language is in vigorous use; with standardization and literature being sustained through a wide spread system of institutionally supported education.
5	Developing	The language is in vigorous use, with literature in standardized form being used by some, through this is not yet widespread or sustainable.
6a	Vigorous	The language is used for face-to-face communication by all generations and the situation is sustainable.
6b	Threatened	The language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users.
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children.
8a	Moribund	The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older.
8b	Nearly extinct	The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community, but no one has more than symbolic proficiency.
10	Extinct	The language is no longer used and no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language.

EGIDS level 0 (International), encompasses languages that function as the language of international communication. Relatively few languages of the world serve as an international language. International languages have very large numbers of L1 and L2 speakers. In Ethiopia, English is used as a de facto international language and used as a language of the medium of instruction and thought as a subject in primary, secondary and higher education level.

EGIDS Level 1 (National), This level encompasses languages that function as official languages at the national level and have full face to face and more important perhaps written use. In FDRE the official working language of the country is Amharic.

EGIDS Level 2 (Provincial) This level includes languages that functions which function similar to national languages, but only the scope of a nation (e.g. province, state, territory, department, etc.). In FDRE there are nine regional states, namely, Amhara, Tigray, Benshangul Gumuz, Gambella, Oromia, Hareri, Somale, Afar and Southern Nation Nationalities people regional states and Addis Ababa and Diredawa City Administrations. These nine regional states and the city council can decide their working languages. Accordingly, Oromia, Tigray, Hareri, Somale, and Afar regional states use their mother tongue as the working language of the regional state. But the two city administrations and the rest of the regional states use Amharic as the working language.

EGIDS Level 3 (Wider communication), encompasses languages that do not have official recognition but which are 'vernacular' in that they are used as second language members of multiple first language communities and serve an important function for business and intergroup communication. Gurage language varieties do not have a major impact on other neighboring Ethiopian language. But within the Gurage communities, Gurage varieties also have a significant difference in intergroup communication. Accordingly, Muher people use Ezha as the vehicular language in the

market and other social interaction and they use Ezha and Amharic for intergroup communication.

EGIDS Level 4 (Educational), encompasses languages used institutionally supported education. Gurage varieties including Ezha and Muher do not have orthography and literacy. So, they do not fit this level.

EGIDS Level 5 (Developing) at this level literacy is incipient, more often than not through informal education structures and systems and with only weak or transient societal institutional support. Gurage Zonal Administration tried to develop and harmonize the orthography of Gurage varieties. But it did not succeed due to lack of decision to start with standardization or harmonization within the varieties.

EGIDS Level 6a (Vigorous), at this level, intergenerational oral or face to face transmission of the language is intact and widespread in the community. The language use and transmission situation is stable or gaining strength. At this level, the vast majority of adults, parents, grandparents, and great grandparents are using the language for everyday communication. Muher and Ezha are used as languages of identity in their communities. But, children, Youth's and literate of the communities are using Amharic in the social domain, in the market, and official domains.

EGIDS Level 6b (Threatened) is the level of face-to-face use that indicates the beginning of erosion in language use. Level 6b represents a stable multilingual configuration where informal functions are assigned to the low language and more formal functions are assigned to the higher varieties. At level 6b, a large number of parents continue to transmit the language to their children; even though a significant number do not so, hence intergenerational transmission is weakening. With each new generation, there will be fewer speakers or fewer domains of use or both. EGIDS 6b is the first of the EGIDS levels that are not considered "safe" according to the criteria used by UNESCO.

EGIDS Level 7 (Shifting) identifies clear cases of language shift in progress. The fact that parents are not passing the language on to their

children is discernible and has become the norm within the language community. Consequently, the number of domains where the use of language is dominant is decreasing.

According to Lewis & Simons (2016:90) like its predecessor, the GIDS, the EGIDS was created primarily as a measure of the disruption of intergenerational language transmission. By adding and the higher level of the scale, however, the EGIDS is also a tool that can be used to evaluate the degree of development of a language. EGIDS 6a (vigorous) identifies the normal state of most of the languages of the world; languages higher on the EGIDS are those which have undergone or are in the process of development while those which are lower on the scale are those which are undergoing decline and lose.

3. Summary and Recommendations

This research investigated the levels of endangerments of the Gurage varieties of Muher and Ezha. Mixed research method is used for data collection and data analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected from ethnic groups residing in the towns markets of Wolkite, Agena, Hawariat and the farmers' association of Wera Debane and Teklehaimanot.

This research shows Muher and Ezha are often used in home and within the communities. Muher is more accommodative to Ezha and the neighboring languages and Ezha is more maintained. When Ezha and Muher meet in the market and social affairs, most of the time both communicates with Ezha or some times each speaks with its own mother tongue and communicates each other. A Muher woman who marries Ezha immediately shifted in to Ezha while Ezha woman who married Muher never shifted.

Amharic is used in all official settings both in Muher and Ezha, such as in school, court, health center and in administration. But people are using their languages with their break times within different governmental institutions.

Elders usually tend to use their mother tongues while youngsters tend to mix their mother tongue with the dominant language or tend to speak Amharic.

Comparing Muher and Ezha speakers, Muher people are multilingual in Amharic, Ezha and other neighboring Gurage varieties, while most of Ezha people are bilingual in Amharic and some are bi/ multiannual in Muher and other neighboring Gurage varieties.

It is hard to get monolingual speakers of Muher and Ezha. In Muher children are bilingual in Amharic and Muher. They learn Amharic prior to starting school. But in rural areas of Ezha most of the children learn Amharic in the school.

Generational transformation of Muher is decreasing in urban areas. In the urban area Ezha people are better using their mother tongue in home and in social domains. But most of urban Muher people use Amharic in home and social domains. Most of Aklil people in Muher Aklil district shifted their language to *ijja-bet* (Ezha variety). Currently, from thirty village administrations of Muher Aklil district administration seven of them which accounts more than 25,000 in numbers completely shifted to Ezha (*ijja bet* varieties). These villages (kebele) farmers associations are Wegerawe, Feresgura, Yebejeche, Wiranfuna, Batinakeras, Dengez and Wikiye. Muher speakers of Tatesa also shifted to Ezha. Moreover, language use in the home domains, in the market and the social domains is decreasing replaced by Amharic and Ezha. Tales, songs, riddles and poems of Muher are completely narrated in Ezha. Therefore, the influence of the dominant language Amharic and the neighboring languages especially Ezha is high in Muher.

According to EGIDS analysis, Ezha language is labeled in EGIDS level 6b and Muher is labeled in EGIDS level 7. EGIDS level 0 to level 5 indicates the official status and educational status, Muher and Ezha do not fulfill such levels. EGIDS level 6a, intergenerational transmission to the new generation is not transmitted equally in all domains. Additionally, any formal function is communicated in the dominant official working language of FDRE,

Amharic. Literates and youth of Muher and Ezha also use Amharic in the Market, social and home domain.

As the UNESCO vitality index, Lewis & Simons (2016:80) EGIDS, quantitative analysis, and my observation it is possible to conclude that Muher and Ezha languages are endangered.

To maintain the language, the following measures have to be taken by the society and the government:

1. Develop positive attitudes of the societies to use and develop their own languages. The Gurage people including Muher and Ezha are very mobile in search of better life. This culture of the people need the adaptation and use of the languages of the working or living areas. This has a negative impact on their mother tongues. If they develop positive attitude to their mother tongue and their cultures they can maintain their language and cultures and they can also transfer to the new generations.
2. Documentation of the cultures and the languages to revitalize them. Material and folk culture of Muher and Ezha is highly endangered. Especially in Muher, naming, songs, cultural ceremonies are either in Ezha or in Amharic. It a very urgent works to document folkloric and cultural elements of Muher and Ezha to revitalize and to transfer the next generation.
3. Developing orthography. Currently Gurage Zone Culture and Tourism office developing a harmonized orthography to Gurage varieties, though not successful so far. The preparation of orthography is a good start for the developments of Gurage language varieties. But, it is better to revise the orthography by linguistic specialists before application.
4. Mother tongue education. The best solution to maintain Muher and Ezha is to start mother tongue education at elementary level. The Gurage zonal administration delayed to start mother tongue education by fear of societal conflict that may arise because of

the order of beginning with one variety but not the others. But, it is better to prepare different meetings, symposium and conferences with the people and different stake holders to bring mutual understanding and consensus.

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Abbreviations

MH	Muher in Hawariat
MT	Muher in Teklehaimanot
MW	Muher in Wolkite
ED	Ezha in Wera Debane
EA	Ezha in Agena
EW	Ezha in Wolkite
IN_1-IN_18	Informants 1-Informant18
M	Muher
EZ	Ezha
A	Amharic
EN	English
O	Afan Oromo