The Argobba Language Revitalization: Practices and Limitations

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Abstract: There are down-to-earth efforts in revitalizing the Argobba language. However, the desired steps forward has not been observed. In this scenario, the first thing to be well thought about is the root of the problem that made it so happen. The main objective of this study is, therefore, to critically analyze the Argobba language revitalization practices, identify challenges encountered and finally provide future directions that can make the revitalization endeavor triumphant. The study found out that the endeavor has become fruitless because of three major problems. First, the efforts were not well coordinated and directed to the desired goal. Second, some activities, which obligatorily require the involvement of different professionals, were carried out on an individual basis. Third, more importantly, the determining role of the community was disregarded. As a result of these drawbacks, the practices for the Argobba language revitalization have become futile. Argobba community members, education professionals, teachers, elders and spiritual leaders should recognize the importance of the revitalization, and participate in the revitalization endeavor at all levels. As a final point, this study recommends the revitalization process be community based, institutionalized with top-down and bottom-up approaches synchronized and taking regional varieties into consideration.

Introduction

The Argobba people live sparsely in different regional states of Ethiopia together with different ethnic groups. The people call themselves and their language Argobba. Following the Amharic noun derivation, some call the language *Argobbigna* analogous to *Amarigna* (Amharic). A small portion of the Argobba community speaks the language with different levels of competence.

As it can be clearly perceived from the review of previous studies on the Argobba language in subsection 2.2, no study has analyzed and evaluated attempts pertaining to the Argobba language development practices. This study is, therefore, devised to take up the issue in question.

The principal objective of this study is to examine and critically explore the language revitalization practices and problems encountered. Although there is no revitalization strategy developed in the speech community, the general language development practices are used to serve the purpose. The paper is organized as follows: In the immediately following two introductory subsections (1.1 & 1.2), a short note about the Argobba community and the Argobba language is presented. Section 2, which has two subsections, reviews relevant theoretical issues (2.1) and previous work done on Argobba (2.2). Section 3 discusses practices and drawbacks pertaining to the Argobba language revitalization. Section 4, summarizes the discussion and recommends feasible alternatives.

The Argobba People

With regard to the history of the Argobba people, scholars put forward two hypotheses about the origin of the Argobba people. One proposes that the Argobba people are immigrants or refugees in Ethiopia (Tesfaye 2000). This assumption, of course, is fully accepted by Argobba elders who believe that they originated in Arabia. To substantiate this assumption, people argue that the term Argobba is derived from the two terms, Arab and gebba, which has the literal meaning 'Arabs have entered'. The other

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hypothesis, conversely, presumes that the Argobba people are one of the ancient or indigenous peoples in Ethiopia (Aklilu 2000).

At present, the Argobba people reside in Amhara, Oromiya, Afar and Harari Regional States in Ethiopia. The Argobba people who live in rural areas are farmers whereas most of the urban inhabitants are businesspersons. The Argobba communities in all regional states practice peaceful co-existence with other ethnic groups. In most Argobba villages, intermarriage between Argobba and non-Argobba members is a common practice. In villages like Shonke, however, the Argobba people very rarely accept intermarriage with non-Argobba community members. The binding identification of the Argobba people is that they are Muslims. It is hardly possible to find a non-Muslim Argobba.

The Argobba Language and its Status

The Argobba language belongs to the Ethio-Semitic language family in the Afro-Asiatic phylum. The Ethio-Semitic language family has two sub-families: North Ethio-Semitic and South Ethio-Semitic (Leslau (1966), Hetzron (1972), Hudson (2000)). Argobba is classified into the South Ethio-Semitic sub-family together with Amharic, Harari and Gurage languages.

In some works like Bender et al. (1976), Bender and Hailu (1978), and Zelealem (1994), however, Argobba is treated as a dialect of Amharic. Zelealem (1994:13), for instance, writes ''I suggest that Argobba and Amharic are dialects of one another, not independent languages.'' Similarly, Leslau (1997: 131) concludes, "The mutual intelligibility combined with many common features between Amharic and Argobba leads me to the conclusion that Argobba is an Amharic dialect". The data collected from different Argobba areas do not substantiate the presupposition by these linguists. The data rather confirm that Argobba and Amharic are two independent sister languages (Wetter 2006, Getahun 2009).

The Argobba language is one of the seriously endangered Ethio-Semitic languages (Getahun 2009). According to Waldron (1984), Leslau (1966) and Stitz (1975), there are two groups of Argobba: Northern and Southern Argobba. The Southern Argobba people live in Harari Regional State whereas the Northern Argobba ones live in villages found in Amhara, Oromiya and Afar Regional States. It is generally believed that the Southern Argobba people have completely shifted to Afaan Oromo. Leslau (1978) says that the inhabitants of Argobba villages in Harar do not speak Argobba anymore; rather they use Afaan Oromo.

In the same way, the domains of the language in Northern Argobba have shown rapid erosion in rural areas and may be at risk of disappearing. The same process of gradual erosion leading to language death has already occurred in towns, where the Argobba people have lost their first language, customs and folklore shifting to Amharic and/or Afaan Oromo (Lesalau 1997).

The Argobba people use Argobba only in restricted situations and settings. In the community, Amharic and Afaan Oromo have replaced Argobba in a wide range of areas that require a more formal language. The lack of widespread use of Argobba has gradually diminished its expressive force, so that it can now only partially fulfill the needs of everyday conversation, which has encouraged the language shift towards the widely used languages (Getahun 2009).

In Argobba, the dwindling of linguistic competence occurs first in language that is more formal and slowly spreads into the informal structures and vocabulary; thus, it is the opposite of a 'bottom-to-top death' process specified in the typology of language attrition by Campbell and Muntzel (1989:185). One of the main features of the Argobba language today is the widespread existence of "semi-speakers" or non-proficient speakers, which is a common characteristic of languages undergoing attrition (Dorian 1981:115).

Not surprisingly, the status of the Argobba language is not the same in different Argobba areas. The Argobba people in Harar, for instance, have completely shifted to Afaan Oromo. The Argobba communities living in Aliyu Amba, Ankober, Gacheni and surrounding villages, on the other hand, seem to be in a more advanced stage of language attrition but with some elderly semi-speakers. In these villages, only older generations speak the language but with low proficiency. In Shonke and Telha, however, the community exhibits stable and widespread bilingualism. It has been observed that, in Shonke, younger generations speak the language fluently (Wetter 2006, Getahun 2009).

Literature Review

This section focuses on two categories of literature: literature that serves as a theoretical framework for the study (2.1), and literature that specifically focuses on the Argobba language (2.2).

Theoretical Overview

Language is closely linked with individual or group identity. The language we speak is interwoven with who we are. This symbolic element is seriously put in jeopardy (Hinton 2003). When a language dies, it is not only the language that dies, but also unique and irrecoverable knowledge is lost. Wurm (1991:17) argues that

Every language reflects a unique world –view and culture complex mirroring the manner in which the speech community has resolved its problems in dealing with the world…with death of the language…an irreplaceable unit of our knowledge   and understanding of human thought and world-view has been lost forever.

As linguistic diversity is closely linked with cultural diversity, scientific inquiry and is associated with human rights, the loss of language is the loss of all these. Based on this justifiable set of concerns, there is a significantly growing language revitalization effort, which counteracts the disastrous loss of indigenous languages and cultures. Following the 1970's and 1980's movements of language maintenance, in 1990 language revitalization efforts began to revive dying languages and look for ways for people to learn the language and transmit it to the next generation (Hinton 2003).

It is also worth noting that language revitalization is not language documentation. The latter focuses on preserving a language before the last speaker dies or to preserve what remains of the language before it is too late (Hinton 2003), while the former focuses on making it revive. As it shall be seen in due course, it should be noted that language documentation can play an important role in language revitalization endeavors provided that it is adequately done.

Language revitalization strategies

Researches reveal that different speech communities have employed various revitalization strategies to revive their endangered languages. In the discussion that follows, the commonly observed strategies are briefly reviewed.

Bottom-up strategy: It is apparent that the revitalization of a language is for the most part in the hands of its speakers. Speech communities, thus, have the responsibility to retain and revive their endangered languages. In light of this, scholars propose that revitalization movements should be community driven and community based. Some of them strongly caution that the revitalization effort should not be top-down but rather a bottom-up strategy (Grenoble and Whaley 2006).

Nevertheless, although there is a decisive role to be played by communities at the grass roots level, government support (from both national and regional levels, top-down) ease the progress of the revitalization endeavors. The top-down approach, for instance, would have a significant role in addressing issues like national and regional policies encouraging language revitalization, community identity and prestige building and in creating economic opportunities for learners of a mother language.

Documentation: According to Grenoble and Whaley (2006), language documentation is considered as a model for language revival because linguists begin their language revitalization efforts with language documentation. Hinton and Hale (2001), quoted in Grenoble and Whaley (2006:68), argue that "perhaps the most important thing to do when a language is down to a few speakers is to document the knowledge of those speakers as thoroughly as possible." Put differently, the wider the range of the documentation, the easier the revitalization effort will be.

Documentation is primarily a boon to language preservation - to safeguard what remains of the language before the last speakers die (Hinton 2003). Obviously, linguistic elements recorded in the documentation (i.e., a grammar, a dictionary, a body of text, etc.) can be used for the purpose of language revitalization. The problem here would be that endangered languages might not have adequate documentation of these items. The other drawback of using language documentation for language revitalization is that it is deficient in recording some discourse aspects (conversation, rules of address, politeness, turn taking, etc.) (Hinton 2003). It is generally believed that language documentation serves the purpose of language revitalization, if it has wide-ranging information.

In the case of Argobba, most of the practices we observe correspond to language documentation rather than revitalization.

Language Immersion: Language immersion is a method for teaching a second or a foreign language. The method is used to teach children their parents' and grandparents' native endangered languages. Language immersion is necessary to successfully initiate a language transmission process. The immersion could be total or partial. The total- immersion refers to the situation in which "that language, and only that language, is used constantly" (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:51). Partial- immersion, on the other hand, is a bilingual program in which both the endangered and the language of wider communication are used. Partial-immersion allows a local language to be taught as a second language and a language of wider communication to be used as a medium of instruction for other subjects. Language activists, however, do not advocate for this method.

Master-apprentice program: Master-apprentice refers to a language learning team, which involves language learners and a "master", who could be an elder native speaker of the language. The program does not require a classroom; learning occurs in real-life situations together with any day-to-day activities. It is driven by endangered language speakers based on the concept that the oldest generation is the main resource supporting non-speakers to learn in a natural way. The primary objective of the program is language use based on oral rather than written communication.

One of the potential problems in the master-apprentice system is that the person who is considered as a language master may not actively use the language. As a result, the master may not have active command of the language.

Literacy: Literacy in an endangered language has been recognized as one of the factors that strengthens a language's vitality. It is often assumed that literacy is a necessary first step in language revitalization programs: developing literacy in a local language can imbue a greater sense of prestige to it and make it suitable for use in many modern social contexts, which in turn raises the status of the language. As it makes it possible to communicate in ways not known before, it also makes it possible to use in school contexts, thereby expanding the domains of language use. It also serves as a bridge and eases the way toward literacy in the language of wider communication.

Promote positive attitude: Speakers attitude towards their language is one of the major factors which strengthen or weaken language vitality. Positive attitude eases language revitalization. In the contrary, negative language attitudes represent a major obstacle to the success of the language revitalization process. Identity is more an affective factor, determined by how the speaker sees himself in relation to his community and wider environment. Wherever language is seen as a symbol of unity, it works positively towards promoting it. On the contrary, language revitalization efforts are hindered by lack of interest among many young people (McCarty et al. 2006). Endangered languages, thus, will become extinct when societies that use these languages are indifferent or develop negative attitude.

What stands on the way of success in language revitalization

There are several reasons why communities renounce using their languages, for example, low numbers of speakers, lack of official support and external social, economic, and political pressures (Barrena et al. 2007). The complexity of the cause makes the revitalization movement an intricate task. In other words, a number of factors stand in the way of success to revitalize a given endangered language, as elaborated below.

- *Political, economic and social dominance of the language of wider communication –* as the dominant language could be an official language of the country, some portion of

the community may consider the dominance required for national unity and the revival of minority languages as a menace to that unity. Consequently, not to give way to tribalism, some members of a speech community could be indifferent, if not in opposition to revitalization.

- *Economic gain-* speakers of an endangered language may assume that their children will have a job and contribute to a sustainable economy if they learn the dominant language. This understanding in the speech community results in a critical impediment for intergeneration transmission, which is a key factor for the revival of minority languages.

Although the language revitalization process is challenging, scholars have recommended ways to attain the desired goal. Crystal (2000:130-142), for instance, suggests important conditions, which help an endangered language to revive. He argues that an endangered language revives if its speakers:

- *Increase their prestige with the dominant community-* Here Crystal stresses the use of endangered languages to appear in advertizing, public-service leaflets etc., and expose the language to media in cultural festival and religious celebration, which could assist extending the domain of its use.

- *Increase their wealth relative to the dominant community-* if the speakers of the endangered language increase their wealth corresponding to the dominant community, their power and authority increase accordingly.

- *Have a strong presence in the education system-* as education plays an important role to revitalize an endangered language, the education practice should not be in the dominant language only; children of the endangered language speakers should learn in their mother tongue.

- *Can write their language down -* when literacy is considered a component of a language revitalization movement, the language needs to have a writing system. Of course, orthography development, especially in multi-dialectal communities, is a complex process.

- *Can make use of electronic technology -* provided that endangered languages have writing systems, and the availability of IT, internet could smooth the progress of language revitalization or development.

Previous Studies on the Argobba Language

This subsection addresses previous studies on the Argobba language categorizing them as vocabulary, comparison, description, orthography development and dictionary based on their focus.

Vocabulary

The first list of vocabularies with the name Argobba goes back to 1816 by Seetzen. Leslau (1949), however, attests that the words were Silti–Wolane, not Argobba. In 1845, Lefebvre also gave lists of vocabularies in French–Argobba. Cohen (1931) incorporates the earlier vocabularies and has lists of some nouns and numerals 1–10 in German. In 1939, Cohen also has a similar work mainly on the vocabulary of South Argobba in French. Leslau (1957) presents Arabic loanwords in Argobba.

Leslau's (1978) article '*Argobba Vocabulary'* is a formal linguistic work, which is an improvement on the earlier ones in both depth and data. Leslau lists a number of Argobba vocabularies collected from Ankober, Addis Ababa and Harar.

Comparison

Leslau (1960) tries to indicate the position of Argobba within the classification of Ethiopic languages comparing some of Argobba features with other related Ethiopic languages. He argues that although Argobba has some features of North Ethio-Semitic, its basic classification as South Ethio-Semitic should not be changed. He further shows some of the Argobba features in comparison with the features of the South Ethio-Semitic group. Hetzron's (1972) work, which deals with Ethio-Semitic classification, has one subsection which discusses the comparison between Amharic and Argobba. He presumes that the two languages form a closer unit in the classification. In order to attest the similarity and differences between the two languages, Hetzron uses gemination, present perfect forms, possessive forms and relative particles. Hudson (1997) does a comparison between Amharic and Argobba focusing on the phonology and morphology of the two languages. The relatively recent comparative study between Argobba and Amharic is Getahun's (2017). The research argues against prior studies, which consider Argobba as a dialect of Amharic. The study provides counter examples which challenge the claims in Hudson (1997) by producing concrete linguistic evidences that attest Argobba and Amharic are independent sister languages.

Description

The first descriptive work on the grammar of Argobba is Leslau's (1959) article entitled *A Preliminary Description of Argobba*. His article addresses the phonology and morphology of the language. He further reports that his attempt to find South Argobba speakers was not successful.

The next work that can be considered as a linguistic description is Zelealem's (1994) survey report. Zelealem briefly describes the phonology, morphology and syntax of the language. Based on his data's similarity to Amharic, he concludes that Argobba is a dialect of Amharic.

 Leslau (1997), in his book '*Ethiopic Documents: Argobba Grammar and Dictionary*', discusses the grammar of the language first followed by Argobba-English and English-Argobba word lists.

Getahun (2006) addresses the causative constructions of Argobba. The study identifies causative morphemes and shows how they can be projected to valencey increasing constructions.

Getahun (2009) describes and analyses the verb morphology and syntax of the language based on Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG) framework. This study gives both descriptions and theoretical analysis.

Getahun (2010) analyses the passive structures of the language. The paper shows the passive morpheme, the passive verb stems and words. It analyses the passive structures in lexical rule arguing against transformational rules.

Wetter (2006) presents a preliminary grammatical descriptions of the Tollaha variety. He discusses some of the peculiar grammatical features of the variety which in turn show the difference between Argobba and Amharic.

Wetter (2010) describes the grammar of Argobba based on the variety spoken in Shonke and Tollaha in German.

Voigt (2003) gives encyclopedic information about the Argobba language in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* based on data from Leslau (1997) and Zelalem (1994). He describes Argobba as an Ethio-Semitic language closer to Amharic with four dialects. According to him, with the exception of few grammatical features, the sounds, verb forms and vocabularies are similar to Amharic.

Sociolinguistic Survey

The first sociolinguistic survey carried out was by Siebert in 1994 in Shewa Robit. Siebert found that the Argobba spoken in that area is highly influenced by Amharic. The survey also discovered that the cognate words with Amharic amount to 75%.

Another sociolinguistic survey carried out on Argobba is by Hussein et al. (2014). Unlike Siebert (1994), this survey covered wide range of areas and came up with detailed sociolinguistic information. The survey discloses that with the exception of the Shonke variety, the Argobba varieties in most of the

other areas are extinct, nearly extinct or will be quickly replaced by dominant languages spoken in the respective areas.

In (2015) Girma published a book on Argobba varieties. He discusses that the language has at least four varieties. He categorized the varieties into two major categories: South Argobba and North Argobba.

Orthography Development

To the best of my knowledge, two Argobba orthography development attempts have been made. The first attempt was made by Gebre in 1991. Gebre adopts the syllabic writing system as used in Amharic. The proposed orthography is based on the phonology of the Shonke variety without taking into account the other varieties of the language.

The second attempt was made by Girma in 2006. As opposed to Gebre's attempt, Girma's work was based on the phonology of the Gacheni variety.   Girma identifies 24 consonant and seven vowel phonemes of the Gacheni variety. The proposed orthography is designed by adopting the syllabic writing system. One significant development made in this attempt is that, immediately following the proposed orthography, a reading material, which mainly focuses on the grammar of the Gacheni variety, was produced.

Dictionary

The first work to be considered as an Argobba bilingual dictionary (Argobba- Amharic) was made by Sheh Muhammed Meded Ahmed and Lij Jewhar Muhammed Meded (n.d). Although the book is organized as a bilingual dictionary, the title reads Argobba Language Teaching Material, not Argobba dictionary. In this book, the Argobba entries are written in Arabic and the Amharic translations (definitions) are written in Ethiopic script.

The *Argobba -Amharic Dictionary*, compiled by Girma in 2011(2003 E.C), is a proper bilingual dictionary in both form and content. The book has three sections. The first section (1-40 pages) gives unpretentious information about the Argobba people and the Argobba language, focusing on its classification, grammar and dialects. The second section (41- 461pages), which is the main part of the book, is the dictionary. The third section (462 -528) is an appendix, which consists of independent pronouns, different verb conjugation systems, the Argobba especial *weredas* (districts) and their locations, written documents in Arabic script and some pictures. With regard to the orthography used in the dictionary, the author has not fully put into practice the orthography he had developed for the language in 2006. Thus, although a mechanism to write words with geminated sounds had been proposed in the orthography designed by the author, it is not implemented in the dictionary. It is observed that the author has used different ways of writing for the same word in the reading material and in the dictionary.

Discussions

The success or failure of language revitalization is determined by diverse factors such as motivation, program design and commitment. In Argobba, different activities have been undertaken that can have a positive effect on the revitalization of the Argobba language. That is, although the endeavors are not systematically organized in the spirit of team work, some activities have been carried out by teachers, linguists and others leading efforts to revitalize the Argobba language, rites and traditions. The institution that directs most of these activities was the *Argobba Development Association* in Addis Ababa. It was the center of research and other activities for Argobba development. In the subsections that follow, the major attributes of the undertakings are addressed.

Linguistic Researches

Linguistic research is critical to addressing issues of recovering and maintaining indigenous languages (Kirkness 2002). It should be noted, however, that research plays the desired role if and only if it is well organized, coordinated and planned to the direction of the desired goal.

As can be learnt from the preceding section, the majority of the works on the Argobba language are linguistic researches. The linguistic research goes back to 1959 by Professor Leslau. Following that both foreign (Hetzron 1972, Leslau 1997, Wetter 2006, 2010) and local linguists (Zelealem1994, Getahun 2006, 2009, 2010) have made different linguistic studies. The linguistic researches, of course, are designed by individual researchers, and address different aspects of the language. That is to say, as the researches have been carried out on an individual basis, they were aimed at their own respective goals without having a direct link to the revitalization process. Consequently, it is hardly possible to find works on the functional or discourse aspects of the language that characterize natural conversation and daily use of the language. It goes without saying that this downside results from lack of a well-organized Argobba revitalization program and lack of cooperative or team work practice, which could help to efficiently utilize the scarce human and material resources.

One criticism of the ongoing practices is that it has not engaged teams of elders, community leaders, linguists and educators to successfully pursue the desired goal. It is evident that every team member would bring specific skills, experience and community knowledge to the team to inform revitalization process. Linguists and elders, for instance, counsel orthography development and documentation projects.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that although the studies have not been systematically organized and specifically directed to the effort for the revitalization, as linguistic documentations, their contribution to the revitalization process is undeniable.

Community Participation

The Argobba language and culture undoubtedly constitute the Argobba identity and pride which are accompanied by the reaffirmation of linguistic and cultural values. The Argobba language is, thus, a focal point of the Argobba culture revitalization and the formation of the Argobba identity. Every endeavor to revitalize the language should be with and to the Argobba community, which results in cultural, socio-political empowerment and higher self-esteem as they are identified by their language and culture. As the owner of the final result, community members should be consented to participate meaningfully in activities pertaining to their language and culture. In connection with this, one of the recommendations made in the International Conference on Safeguarding Linguistic Diversity in Africa held in March 2006 reads, "Consult with beneficiary communities before starting any documentation project, involve communities in the research work and accompany research projects with capacity-building in the communities" (Kube 2006: 10).

Accordingly, a language revitalization effort becomes successful if it does the groundwork   at the micro-societal level. Since revitalization of a language is determined by its speakers' language choice decision, everyone should get involved in the revitalization endeavor. In this regard, the linguistic researches conducted so far are not community driven.

The commitment of the community and its efforts towards revitalization are, therefore, decisive for the future fate of the language. Hence, to give the greatest chance for success, the Argobba community should be motivated to participate in the revitalization process with the principle that *everyone is a specialist of some kind or another*. Each member of the community has the responsibility to contribute to the revitalization of the language. For instance, elders advise documentation projects and are consulted for cultural activities and feedback. Teenagers carry out learning their ancestral language. This inspires the community in such a way that *we can make the road by walking*. In all of the works on Argobba so far, community members have not been involved fully as the owners of the end results. It has been observed that some community members were serving as assistants, informants, etc. to those working on the language without a clear knowledge of the goal and benefit of it.

Attitude

As mentioned earlier, language attitude is a key factor to determine the survival of a language. When speakers have positive attitude towards their language they transmit their language to their children and create an opportunity to use it. Argobba elders, who can speak the language, are not encouraged to develop positive attitude and transmit the language. The concrete evidence for this is that the Argobba language in Harar has given way to Afaan Oromo; and in Gacheni and surrounding villages, the younger generation does not speak the language, but only elders speak it with a low level of proficiency.

The interview results in Hussin et al. 2014:7, which read as follow, substantiate this presupposition.

Group interviewees in all locations have positive attitudes towards Amharic. They suggested that they would like their children to learn in Amharic. Eight individual interviewees (one from Afre and seven from Aliyyu Amba) prefer Amharic to any other language. Three people (one from Afre and two from Abbule Arada) prefer Argobba, and one individual interviewee from Afre prefers Afar.

  Although it is hardly possible to make all have a positive attitude, the majority of the community should be optimistic in helping Argobba begin to take on a life of its own. The Argobba language dies if its speakers are indifferent to protecting it. The facts on the ground show us that creating positive attitude, which is one of the commonly employed revitalization strategies, is not practiced in Argobba.

Moreover, this drawback is reflected in not making use of the master-apprentice approach, which is an informal practice conducted in the context of daily life. The approach has been ignored in the revitalization effort. This is meant close the eyes to the fundamental importance of oral transmission to the next generation of speakers.

Policy

There is no doubt that the root cause of the recent degeneration of the Argobba linguistic system is a long-term lack of institutional intervention or government support. At present, the Government of Ethiopia assures instruction in minority languages and their use in elementary schools with the training of teachers, all key factors in the process of raising the prestige and the use of Argobba. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Article 39, No, 2 declares that,

Every Nation, Nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture, and to preserve its history.

This right unquestionably plays a significant role in easing and facilitating the revitalization movement of the language. Different ethnic groups in the country are taking advantage of the policy in developing orthography and using their mother tongue as a medium of instruction in elementary schools.

In the case of Argobba, it does not seem that the Argobba people take full advantage of the policy. If something to be mentioned, it is taught as a subject in some elementary schools and compilation of the bilingual dictionary, which of course creates reading and writing problems for learners by using inconsistent ways of writing.

Orthography

One of the strategies to support an endangered language is by developing a standard written form. Scholars argue that "communities with a written tradition are certainly in a stronger position to revitalize a language" (Grenoble and Whaley 1998:34). Therefore, next to the very positive attitude of its speakers, the development of writing for Argobba would certainly have a decisive role in the process of its survival and restoration. However, as Moletsane and Maltsoso (1985) suggest, orthography development should not be driven by emotional feelings that come from being a nationalist or a regionalist; it should rather be based on linguistic and non-linguistic issues that could best serve teachers and students, for readers and writers of the language.

In Argobba, as indicated in (2.2), two orthography development efforts in 1991 and 2006 were made. As orthography development is a complex issue, it requires the involvement of different professionals (linguists, language teachers, education professionals, sociologist, etc.), community leaders and elders. As can be learnt from the reports in Gebre (1991) and Girma (2006), both Argobba orthography development attempts were made by the two individual linguists alone, closing eyes to other pertinent professions and professionals.

Besides, neither orthography development practice was community based. In such undertaking dealing with a critical issue, the participation of the speakers of the language is compulsory. It is also generally assumed that no writing system can be suggested or prescribed without the full consent of a speech community. The involvement of the community should start from the very beginning of the project. Argobba speakers should be aware of the benefits of Argobba language development and then the possible script that the language could adopt. In this regard, the two Argobba orthography attempts have paid no attention to the decisive role the community plays in choosing to use or not to use the proposed orthography. As researchers found, most failed attempts for orthography development are associated with outsiders who insist on a literacy program downplaying the role of the community, who are the ultimate owners of the system.

Another issue is that Argobba has regional varieties. Getahun (2009) identifies two regional varieties namely the dialect of Shonke and the dialect of Gacheni. In Hussin et al. (2014:8) we find three varieties namely Ankober-K'awat variety, Berehet-Minjar variety and Dawa-Chaffa variety. Voigt (2003) recognizes four dialects named as Southern dialect (Harar), Ankober, Shewarobit and Shonke. Girma (2015) recognizes four varieties. Any proposed orthography for Argobba should satisfy the speakers of the dialects/ varieties. This could be achieved only when the existing relationships between the dialects are critically examined. This could lead to a consensus-based decision making by the speakers of the dialects, which would play a significant role in the implementation of the proposed standard writing system. Unfortunately, in the above mentioned Argobba orthography development efforts, consideration of the regional varieties was not made. Without a close examination of the dialects, the proposed orthographies were made based on two dialectal phonological properties. That is, the first attempt was made based on Shonke variety whereas the second on the Gacheni. Moreover, in both Argobba orthography development attempts, no field-testing has taken place.

Literacy

 In endangered languages, like Argobba, literacy has a vital contribution in strengthening languages' vitality. It creates a greater sense of prestige to local languages, and paves the way for use in many modern social demands, which in turn raises the status of the language. Literacy, therefore, brings about linguistic empowerment that will trigger social and economic empowerment.

In some Argobba villages (e.g., Gacheni), we observe bilingual schooling. In the schools, Argobba is taught as a subject. Due to the dominance of Amharic and Afaan Oromo, the bilingual program has not yet proven successful in reviving the language. As Hinton (2011) suggests, bilingual education fits better to language maintenance than language revitalization, because the basic idea is based on the principle that the minority language is being used at home and children are fluent enough in the language. Hinton further underscores that bilingual education fails to create new speakers who use the language in their daily life. This inadequacy makes the revitalization effort lose its desired goal.

The literacy practice has not been effective in Argobba because little attention is given to motivational, pedagogical, and post-literacy materials. More to the point, it lacks a well-organized teacher- and author training, effective instruction and distribution of literature. Concerned Argobba officials or institutions are supposed to gravely work on training Argobba language teachers and distributing post-literacy materials as a strategy for the language's retention and revitalization.

Furthermore, it is beyond question that literacy cannot be implemented without support from the local community. It seems, however, that the consent of the Argobba community has been disregarded here

again. Consequently, it is plausible to argue that one of the reasons for the destabilization of the Argobba revitalization effort is the failure in the literacy practice in the language.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Argobba is one of the seriously endangered Ethio-Semitic languages. Studies have confirmed that the Argobba people who live in Harar have completely shifted to Afaan Oromo. Correspondingly, the Argobba people who reside in towns have lost Argobba giving way to either Amharic or Afaan Oromo. Of all Argobba areas, it is only in Shonke and Telha where the community is coordinate bilingual and younger generations speak the language fluently.

Following the country's Constitution, which provides equal right to all ethnic groups to use and develop their language, the Argobba people and concerned bodies have woke up and started working on strategies that enable the Argobba language revitalized. The leading edge of the revitalization activities have been coordinated by the *Argobba Development Association*.

Due to a multitude of factors, language revitalization is a challenge. Undeniably, some crucial activities were devised to smooth the progress of the revitalization endeavor in Argobba. In this connection, linguistic researches, lexicography, literacy, orthography developments, etc. have been carried out. As something is better than nothing is, these activities have contributions to the Argobba revitalization endeavor. Nonetheless, no significant change has been observed in both the number of speakers and the domain of the language's use. The possible reasons for this abortive result could be many, but in this study, the following weaknesses are identified.

First, as can be learnt from the discussions in section (3), the activities done on Argobba are on an individual basis. The Argobba revitalization practice lacks cooperative or teamwork practice, which would have helped utilize human and material resources efficiently and effectively.

Secondly, activities that require the involvement of different professionals, like those of orthography development and lexicography, only one professional was involved. It is undeniable that the Argobba Development Association as a non-governmental institution is breaking new ground and doing its best to revitalize the Argobba language and culture. However, the association made the *Argobba – Amharic Dictionary* and the *Argobba Orthography development* a one-person project. It is beyond doubt that both the dictionary and the orthography works require the involvement of different professionals and community members. Hinton (2010:39) elucidates the issue by saying "The problem of language revitalization is too complex for one discipline to handle alone." In the works in question, however, community elders and different professionals have not been involved. One of the drawbacks of the attempts of the association is, therefore, its lack of cooperative orientation and teamwork spirit among different professional from different fields. Furthermore, most of the activities are not institutionalized.

In multi-dialectal communities, orthography development is a highly complex task. In order to develop orthography that satisfies speakers of the dialects, the existing linguistic and social relationships between the dialect speaking communities should be critically examined. That in turn results in a consensus-based decision and the implementation of a standardized writing system. The regional varieties of Argobba were not well considered. The revitalization movement of Argobba lacks a standardized written form.

Third, since revitalization of a language is determined by its speakers' language choice decision, the involvement of members of the linguistic community in the revitalization endeavor is mandatory.

The Argobba language revitalization effort has not brought about the desired change on the status of the language because the groundwork at the micro-societal level was not well done. Bearing in mind the commitment of the community and its efforts towards revitalization are decisive for the future fate of the language, the Argobba community should have been motivated to participate fully in the revitalization practice. It should be underscored that no strategy can be implemented without support from the local community. Thus, the case in Argobba could not be immune.

Fourth, with regard to promoting a positive language attitude, community members have not been motivated to develop a positive attitude towards Argobba. The clear evidence for this is that, in most Argobba areas, parents do not transmit the language to their children and create opportunities to use it. One of the reasons for this could be that the language is not attached to socio-economic gains in terms of literacy and income generating activities.

Overall, the failed attempts for Argobba revitalization are associated with outsiders (non-Argobba) who insist on the revitalization program downplaying the role of the Argobba community. Another critical issue worth mentioning is that the Argobba language revitalization strategies employed are top-down without giving a room to the bottom-up approach.

In conclusion, to make a meaningful and realistic revitalization of the Argobba language, this study proposes the following future directions:

- Build community identity and prestige, and encourage the new generation to learn the language.

- Create awareness about the importance of the revitalization of Argobba regardless of age.

- Set manageable goals tailored to the needs of the community.

- Involve the community initially from the plan to the revitalization movement.

- Organize teams of community leaders, elders and different professionals (teachers, linguists, curriculum developers, etc.).

- Synchronize top-down and bottom –up strategies.

- Use immersion and master –apprentice approaches to enhance learners' ability to communicate in the language and use it in culturally appropriate situations.

- Expand the domains of the use of Argobba both at home and in public.

- Consider the Argobba varieties and develop standardization.

- Develop revitalization strategy and execute campaign

- Institutionalize the revitalization movement.

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