
The Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Amharic Euphemisms of Death

Bamlaku Endegen¹ Samuel Handamo² Endalew Assefa³

Abstract

The main objective of this study is to examine the socio-pragmatic analysis of Amharic euphemisms of death within the frameworks of relevance and politeness theories. The study used a qualitative research design and employed focus group discussion, semi-structured interviews, and introspection for the purpose of data gathering. The results show that death is taboo in Amhara society in the study's realms, including the church, mosque, home, school, and hospital. As a result, they refrained from mentioning the deaths of infants, children or youths, adults, and elderly people. Instead, they use euphemistic expressions. The linguistic devices that are used in euphemizing taboo expressions in Amharic include metaphor, idiom, understatement, overstatement, and borrowing. Hence, research participants in the study locations employed different techniques for avoiding anxiety, maintaining calm, and being polite.

Keywords: [taboo, euphemism, death, euphemistic strategies, face]

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Amharic is a member of the Afro-Asiatic phylum's transversal South-Ethio-Semitic language group (Girma, 2009). Moreover, it is extensively spoken throughout the majority of the nation. Arabic is the most widely used Semitic language in the world, with Amharic coming in second (Hudson, 1998).

Amharic was the most extensively used and dominant language in Ethiopia until 1991. It continues to be the defacto language of communication in towns; until 1991, it served as the exclusive language of administration, the sole language of instruction in primary schools, and the principal language of the printed press (Meyer, 2006).

To avoid taboos, people use euphemistic language. This explains why it is essential to employ euphemisms in order to sustain social interactions. ‘Fear, embarrassment, and disgust’ are the three main drivers behind the adoption of euphemisms (Bakhtiar, 2012: 7). Euphemisms are described as ‘linguistic fig leaves or sweet-talking techniques’ (Bakhtiar, 2012: 7).

Expressing society’s culture is one of the characteristics of euphemism. Euphemisms serve to convey uncomfortable subjects like death by swapping out their preferred language. In other words, it demonstrates courtesy and creates social connections to effectively communicate with others. Euphemism reflects politeness and hides feelings while avoiding taboos and painful situations (Samoškaite, 2011). Euphemisms are common in everyday speech across a range of topics, and they have long been the focus of academic study. As usual, euphemisms are used to avoid using certain words or phrases (Mwanambuyu, 2011). In order to communicate with others in harmony on a daily basis, euphemism is unavoidable (Enright, 1985). In other words, using euphemisms not only helps to smooth out language, reducing the likelihood of conflict, but it also makes it easier to avoid using taboo terms.

Amharic speakers employ euphemisms associated with death to foster social relationships, maintain their dignity, and demonstrate politeness. In addition, people avoid using offensive, unsuitable, or embarrassing phrases or expressions when speaking to others in many different cultures.

The socio-pragmatic analysis of Amharic euphemisms of death is studied by the present researchers for practical reasons. Since two of the researchers are native Amharic speakers, they have noticed that native Amharic speakers frequently employ euphemisms in a variety of social domains. Domains are places where various groups develop their working environments and utilize varied languages based on various social conditions (Fishman, 1972). Hence, in Amharic euphemistic expressions of death for people of different ages vary depending on the social sphere.

The researchers have found that adopting euphemistic phrases improves interpersonal communication. When someone uses death-related taboo expressions, people will be terrified and startled to go about their regular lives. As a result, they become gloomy, worried, and depressed. Thus, this study focuses on social realms like churches, mosques, hospitals, schools, and homes. The present study provides the socio-pragmatic analysis of Amharic euphemisms of death in the East Gojjam zone (Debre Markos) and neighboring woredas.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Many researchers have conducted extensive research on the phonology, morphology, and syntax of Amharic. On the semantics and pragmatics of Amharic, there are few works. For instance, “The pragmatics of greetings, felicitations, and condolence expressions in four Ethiopian languages” (Baye, 1997), “The semantics and pragmatics of spatial expressions in Amharic” (Gashaw, 2020), “The semantics and pragmatics of Amharic *bəgəna* Lyrics” (Tadesse, 2020), “Metaphors of time in Amharic” (Derib, 2016), and “conceptions of life and death in Amharic” (Gashaw, 2021).

The most relevant work to the present study is Hussen’s (2017) study, entitled: “the socio-linguistic study of Amharic taboo”. Hussen (2017) claims that Amhara people do not use avoidance strategies to talk about death-related matters. Nonetheless, the results of the present study indicated that death is one of the fear-based taboos among the Amhara people. Residents in the study areas employed various euphemistic strategies to avoid linguistic taboos. This research, therefore, intends to fill the knowledge gap observed in the socio-pragmatic analysis of Amharic euphemisms of death.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the socio-pragmatic analysis of Amharic euphemisms of death.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- a) Identify euphemisms related to death in different age levels
- b) Uncover the different euphemistic construction strategies

- c) Discuss why people in the study areas use euphemisms instead of taboo expressions

1.4 Literature review and theoretical frameworks

1.4.1 Literature review

Several subjects are taboo, unpleasant, harsh, or forbidden from being directly discussed in public in many societies. Instead, individuals employ euphemisms, which are covert and indirect phrases (Burchfield, 1986). Euphemisms are valued and typically used to allude to forbidden, uncomfortable, or unpleasant things in a socially acceptable or favorable way (Hughes, 2006).

One of the oldest taboos is the word death. People have been resolved not to directly refer to death for many years. People now use a variety of substitutions for death. This explains why there are so many euphemisms for death. The impulse for euphemism substitutes comes from taking into account the grief of the lost family members and dread of the unknown (Enright, 2005). The taboo around death is founded on five fears: 1) the loss of loved ones; 2) the dissolution of the body; 3) the belief that death marks the end of life; 4) the ghosts and souls of the dead; and 5) the idea that death is pointless. Although many people are afraid to mention it out loud, everyone eventually experiences death. No one enjoys discussing death (Allan and Burridg, 2006).

There are some previous works on Ethiopian languages. For example, Birhanu (2016) conducted research entitled “a study of linguistic taboos related to woman and their euphemistic expression in Oromo society”. His findings show that the Oromo society considered taboos which include women, virginity, pregnancy, delivery, and menstruation. Instead, they use polite expressions to build social communication better. Besides, Birhanu (2020) researched “a sociolinguistic taboo of death and their euphemistic expressions among Bale Oromo”. The result of his study indicates that the Oromo society of the research locations prohibits uttering death-related words directly. Instead, they use euphemistic expressions. Birhanu (2017) has

also conducted another research titled “the thematic analysis of taboos and their corresponding euphemistic expressions in Afan Oromo”. His findings reveal that the Oromo people do not call taboo topics related to death, diseases, women, defecations, excretion, sex and sexual body parts, and sexual acts directly. Instead, people use corresponding euphemistic expressions for them.

Bamlaku, et al. (2023) did a research on the socio-pragmatic analysis of Amharic euphemisms of women. This article emanated from the dissertation project entitled “The socio-pragmatic analysis of Amharic euphemisms”. The findings of this study show that the Amhara society in the research settings do not directly utter expressions including virginity, pregnancy, menstruation, delivery, abortion, menopause, wives, concubine, and prostitute in public. Instead, they use a variety of euphemisms. Yet, this study focused on the socio-pragmatic analysis of Amharic euphemisms of death.

The Amhara people who live in the study areas avoid using the word *motə* ‘death’ out loud. It is a terrifying yet unavoidable incident that abruptly prevents many people from achieving their goals and aspirations. Hence, the Amhara people in the research areas employ various euphemistic construction tactics to soften the harsh words to avoid such taboo words associated with death.

1.4.2 Theoretical framework

1.4.2.1 Relevance theory

Principles of cognition and communication are essential to relevance theory. According to a more constrained communicative interpretation of the cognitive principle, every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance (Sperber and Wilson, 1986). By maximizing relevance, cognitive mechanisms which make up the cognitive system behave in a way that optimizes cost-benefit ratios, or seeks to achieve the greatest benefit at the lowest feasible price. On the other hand, the communicative principle asserts that statements raise the possibility of positive significance. This theory explains how metaphors work in a context

to convey the meaning the speaker wishes to get across (Sperber and Wilson, 1986).

This theory, which is founded on the concept that humans have a single highly developed mental ability to select the most pertinent information from incoming inputs, is a pragmatic approach to human communication that is cognition-centered. The theory's central tenet is that humans possess the biological capacity to optimize the relevance of receiving stimuli (linguistic utterances or nonverbal behavior). Relevance is a characteristic of internal representations and thoughts as well as external stimuli, both of which can serve as inputs for cognitive processing (Sperber and Wilson, 1986).

According to the relevance theory, ostensive utterances achieve relevance through imparting knowledge that has contextual impacts on their addressees' cognitive systems. The ostensive stimulus is pertinent enough for the hearer to consider processing it worthwhile. The most pertinent stimulus that is in line with the speaker's skills and preferences is the ostensive stimulus. The speaker has preferences for the language they choose to communicate their ideas; in terms of hiding the taboo expressions, this means that they like using euphemistic phrases and idioms. Furthermore, the concept of context is crucial to relevance theory since what is relevant is that which permeates the contextual discourse or has concrete contextual impacts. Although recognizing certain elements of both, the fundamental premise behind relevance theory is neither fully psychological nor entirely epistemic. It seeks to provide a theory that is somewhat realistic in terms of psychology and psycholinguistics (Sperber and Wilson, 1986).

The Amhara people in the research areas have a taboo against using the term *motə* 'he died', due to their feelings of fear. As a result, many in the research settings avoid using it in public. The Amhara people that reside in the Debre Markos, Lummamie, and Gindewoyin woredas employ acceptable, relevant, and courteous terms to refer to the deaths of infants, children, adults, and elderly people to avoid using taboo words. It is considered taboo when society employs euphemistic language to refer to infants' deaths as children's deaths or when individuals use euphemistic expressions used by seniors to

refer to children's deaths or vice versa. To save face and be courteous, society should therefore employ appropriate and relevant euphemisms to replace the deaths of infants, children, young people, and the elderly.

1.4.2.2 Politeness theory

This study used the politeness theory, which Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced, to illustrate politeness in its broadest sense. In other words, keeping both a positive face and a negative face during conversation is something that all interlocutors are motivated to do. They are regarded as having produced the most significant and thorough work on pragmatic politeness theory. Because of things like distance between participants, their relative rank, and the formality of the context, people choose which manners to utilize in a given situation (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Politeness is a universal concept. Every language and culture has a manner of expressing deference, refraining from forbidden language, maintaining one's dignity, and lessening the impact of offensive language (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Thus, the primary motivation for using euphemistic expressions is to demonstrate politeness. Therefore, the Amhara society in the research areas uses a variety of euphemistic construction strategies, such as understatement, overstatement, metaphor, idiom, and borrowing to demonstrate respect, mitigate the negative power of the taboo word death, and demonstrate politeness.

In a nutshell, politeness theory and relevance theory are related in their pragmatic approach to euphemisms. In other words, courtesy is the primary driving force behind indirect speech acts. Euphemisms are used to express courtesy and preserve the listener's good impression. Similarly, using acceptable and relevant expressions is a sign of courtesy and helps to save the listener's face. To find the most pertinent information from incoming inputs, politeness theory does just that. Euphemisms, relevance theory, and politeness theory are all related. For instance, listeners and audiences experience less loss and suffering when people use appropriate euphemisms to describe the passing of elders. In other words, the more appropriate

euphemisms people employ, the more they appear courteous and save the listeners' faces.

1.5 Research methodology

This study used a qualitative research design to collect data for the analysis. A naturalistic interpretive perspective is part of it. Through descriptive qualitative research, objects are examined in their natural environments (Dezin and Lincoln, 2005). Focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and introspection were utilized for the data gathering purpose.

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed by the researchers because they allowed them to find native speakers and volunteers who fit their specific research objectives. Moreover, the data were transcribed using a morpheme-by-morpheme transcription technique and then analyzed in accordance with the study's objectives.

2. Presentation of results

One of the reasons why people find it awkward to discuss death is that it is a complicated event. Unquestionably, the word 'death' inspires apprehension, anxiety, and superstition. People used to describe sudden deaths as God's wrath when they could not comprehend the circumstances surrounding the death. The suffering of losing a loved one is the effect of death. Thus, in order to lessen the negative impacts of death, individuals try to utilize euphemisms and cautious word choice (Alego and Pyles, 2009).

According to the respondents' explanation, there is a fear-based taboo against talking about death in places like hospitals, churches, mosques, schools, and homes. The Amhara society in the study areas avoids discussing death directly; especially in front of the deceased person's close family or friends. Adults and senior citizens avoid discussing death in public since no one can predict what will happen after death. Hence, Amharic native speakers restrict themselves from using the term death openly in public. This is an indication of the general discomfort surrounding the subject of death in general. There are, nevertheless, some contexts of communication when it is impossible to

avoid thinking about mortality. As a result, language users work to minimize the impact of the use of linguistic taboos. They deliberately sidestep the death-based taboos and swap them out for more conciliatory ones. Researchers found that to lessen the terrible effects of death, the elderly and adults employed various euphemism terms to explain the deaths of infants, children, youths, and elderly people. Furthermore, they use different ways of informing about someone's death, suicide, death at the battlefield, calling the name of the deceased, and condoling the family of the deceased.

2.1 Euphemisms related to infants' death

The Amhara people in the research locations choose to use preferred terms instead of unfavorable ones to describe the death of infants. Language users in the research locations avoid using the word *motə*, which means 'died', to describe an infant's death in public. Instead, they employ the following euphemisms:

- (1)a. *t'əff -a*
disappear -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'He disappeared'.
'He passed away'.
- b. *hijwot -u alif -o -all*
life -DEF-3MSG pass -CVB- PRF-AUX-3MSG
Lit: 'His life passed away'.
'He passed away'.

Elderly people in the realms of the church, mosque, home, and school utilize the expression (1a), which is an understatement, to describe the passing of infants. In response to the priests' explanation, the Amhara people in the research areas in the church's domains used the expression (1a) to symbolize the death of children before they are christened because infants can be thought of as Christless until they are Christianized. Although the conventional meaning based on this context is used to conceal infants' deaths to lessen fear and maintain politeness in communication, the literal meaning describes someone's departure.

Health professionals in the hospital setting utilized the expression in (1b) as a circumlocution to convey infants' deaths. People in the hospital domain really used the prohibited word *motə* 'died' directly when they discussed it with their pals, according to informants. Yet, when they wanted to inform a baby's family and close friends about their demise, they used the phrase in (1b). So, this expression's precise meaning is distinct from its context-specific meaning. The term in (1b) literally indicates that his life has passed away. Yet, the expression in (1b) signifies that someone died, which is utilized to avoid death-related taboos and to preserve the listeners' faces.

2.2 Euphemisms related to children's and youths' death

Children and young people can die for a variety of reasons. The saddest deaths as informants' responses are those of children and young people. Saying *motə* 'he died' to convey a child's or young person's death was frowned upon by the residents of the research locations. Instead, they employed the following euphemisms:

- (2)a. *tə- k'əssəf -ə*
PASS- blight -PRF: 3MSG
Lit: 'He was blighted'.
'He passed away'.

- b. *tə- k'əzəf -ə*
PASS blight -PRF: 3MSG
Lit: 'He was blighted'.
'He passed away'.

- c. *tə- k'əf'f -ə*
PASS- strain -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'He was strained'.
'He passed away'.

- d. *tə- k'ət't'əf -ə*
PASS- break up -PRF: 3MSG
Lit: 'He was broken up'.
'He passed away'.

- e. *tə- k'orrət' -ə*
PASS cut -PRF: 3MSG
Lit: 'He was cut'.
'He passed away'
- f. *bə- af'f'ir k'ərr -ə*
by- short remain -PRF: 3MSG
Lit: 'He lost his life in short'.
'He passed away'.
- g. *idime -u təbət't'əs -ə*
age -3SMG snap -PRF: 3MSG
Lit: 'His age was snapped'.
'He passed away'.
- h. *tə- f'anaggol -ə*
PASS miscarry -PRF: 3MSG
Lit: 'He was miscarried'.
'He passed away'.
- i. *bəlləl -ə*
misfire -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'He was misfired'.
'He passed away'.
- j. *wəssəd -ə*
take -PRF: 3MSG
Lit: 'God has taken'.
'He passed away'.
- k. *tə- nət't'ək' -ə*
PASS- take -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'death has taken him'.
'He passed away'.

1. *alləf -ə*
passed -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'he passed by'.
'He passed away'.

The expression in (2a) is understatement. This euphemistic expression was used in the contexts of the home, the school, and the church to describe the passing of children and young people. The people used this expression when they talked with elders and strangers. As for the informants' reaction, the term in (2a) is typically understood to signify that God directs and punishes sinners. Also, this euphemistic expression demonstrates that children and young people are not ready to pass away. Also, Elderly males and females in urban locations utilized this word to convey the sadness and gravity of children's and youths' deaths in home and at school. Language users in rural areas, in the contexts of the church and the home, make use of metaphor, as in (2b). Elderly people use this expression when they talk with pals to conceal fear. The usual interpretation of this word in this situation suggests that children's and youths' death are the saddest. As a result, illiterate senior males and females who reside in both urban and rural areas utilized the word in (2b) to indicate the death of children and youths.

The examples in (2c), (2d), and (2e) are likewise metaphoric expressions that have been employed by native speakers of Amharic in church and home realms. Elderly males and females used these expressions when they talked with their neighbors, and with guests. The literal meanings of these terms indicate the cutting of immature seeds, leaves, or whatever. Likewise, people in the study areas use these metaphoric expressions conventionally to show how children and youths are not mature to die. Also, these statements contextually convey how sudden and untimely children's or youths' deaths are. According to Leech (1983), there are six maxims that make up the politeness principle which include tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. So, from these maxims language users in the study realms apply the sympathy maxim. In other words, they use the expressions in (2c), (2d), and (2e) to share the sadness or sorrowfulness of the deceased family. Because of this, research participants in the study locations cover up

the fear-based taboo of death and lessen dissatisfaction by using euphemistic language in (2c), (2d), and (2e).

Expressions in (2f), (2g), and (2h) signify a person's travel is brief in a literal sense. These idioms are used by persons in the home and church settings to express the death of children and young people. Elderly males and females employed this expression when they talked with their friends and neighbors. The idiomatic meaning of those euphemistic phrases demonstrates how death reduces, ruins, and disqualifies children's and youths' dreams for the future. Thus, local Amharic speakers, especially in rural regions, employ those terms to lessen the negative impact of the taboo word death and to maintain their dignity. Also, native Amharic speakers utilize the expression in (2i) as a metaphor, particularly in rural churches and homes. This expression's literal meaning states that anything is worthless. Similarly, when someone passes away, s(he) is viewed as being worthless. Hence, in order to prevent dread and promote appropriate communication, individuals in the research locations use this metaphorical language rather than the word *motə* 'he died' to explain the deaths of children and youths.

People in the home and church contexts employ understatement to refer to children's and youths' deaths as in (2j) and this idiom's literal meanings speak of someone snatching something. However, the conventional interpretation of this expression in this context demonstrates how God made children and adolescents and took them. As a result, elderly people utilize this saying when they condole the deceased family as well as to lessen the loss felt by the deceased's relatives.

When children and young people pass away, the residents of the Debre Markos and Lumammie woredas use the word *motə* 'he died' in the mosque realms. In other words, those who live in mosque settings do not hesitate to use the word *motə* 'he died' to refer to youngsters and young adults who have passed away. But, in hospital settings, individuals employ a metaphorical expression, such as in (2i), to describe children's and youths' passing. This expression's contextual meaning describes the passing away of a deceased

person. As a result, this expression is used by language users to lessen fear and to improve relationships.

2.3 Euphemisms related to elders' death

When an infant, child, or young person passes away, different expressions are used than when an elderly person passes away. Language users in the research locations do not directly convey the death of elderly people by saying *motə* 'he died' in public. Instead, they substitute euphemistic expressions, as in (3).

- (3)a. *arrəf -ə*
rest -PRF: 3MSG
'Lit. He rested'.
'He passed away'.
- b. *alləf -ə*
PASS -PRF: 3MSG
Lit. He passed by'.
'He passed away'.
- c. *təsənabbət -ə*
say good bye -PRF: 3MSG
Lit: 'He said goodbye'.
'He passed away'.
- d. *tə- ləjj -ə*
PASS depart -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'he departed'
'He passed away'.
- e. *hed -ə*
go -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'he has gone'.
'He passed away'.
- f. *tə - fəjjən -ə*
PASS- see off -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'he has been see off'
'He passed away'.

- g. *tə- t'ək'aləl -ə*
PASS- complete -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'he has completed'.
'He passed away'.
- h. *at't'a -n -ə -u*
loss -ACC -PRF: 3MSG -3MSG
Lit: 'We lost him'.
'He passed away'.

Elderly males and females, both literate and illiterate, who reside in urban and rural locations, employ metaphorical expressions, as in (3a) and (3b) to express the death of elderly people in the context of the church, school, mosque, home, and hospital. In (3a), the statement refers to someone's temporary rest, and in (3b), refers to the movement of someone from one place to another. Yet, its usual meaning, in this case, refers to the death of elderly people. The idiomatic word as in (3c) is used to convey the death of elders in the contexts of the church, home, school, and mosque. When someone departs from someone, the explicit connotation relates to a temporary farewell. Yet, its colloquial connotation in this situation alludes to someone's death. Elderly males and females, who live in urban and rural settings, use this expression to describe the death of the elderly in the social context of elders, guests, and in front of the deceased families.

The phrase in (3d) is also metaphorical. It is used by people in the church, home, school, and mosque communities to express the death of elderly people. Elders use this expression when they bless, and when they raise the deceased name accidentally. This expression's literal meaning describes someone's break with something. In contrast, the connotation given by this expression indicates that someone has died. The expression in (3e) is also idiomatic. It is a term used to characterize the passing of the elderly in both the church and the home realms. Elders used this expression when they talked about their peers' death. Literally, it means going someplace while walking. The idiomatic meaning of this word, on the other hand, refers to someone's passing depending on the context. The expression in (3f) is understatement. The phrase in (3f) is used in the church, at home, at school, and in the mosque

settings. This euphemistic phrase basically denotes saying goodbye to someone for the short term. On the other hand, the context-specific meaning of the expression denotes someone's death. When someone has finished something, language users in the home realms employ circumlocution (3g), which literally implies that they have completed it. Yet, the common or contextual meaning of this expression refers to someone's death.

The linguistic strategy used in (3h) is an understatement. People used to convey the death of the elderly in the contexts of the home, church, school, and mosque. The literal meaning conveys the absence of someone. This expression implies that someone's death causes regression and the existence of someone determines whether or not different chores are completed at a movement. So, elderly people use this expression at the time of their conversation to express their grief.

2.4 Ways of informing someone's death

The Amhara people in the study areas find it frustrating to inform close family and friends of someone's death. A direct announcement of someone's death, especially to close friends and family members of the deceased is regarded as taboo, and listeners become frustrated by it. As a result, they try to tell it carefully. They prefer to use deceptive methods while discussing death. As a result, language users in the research locations utilize the euphemistic terms listed below to inform others of a deceased person's death, as in (4).

- (4)a. *dəkim -o -all*
tired -CVB -PRF-AUX:3MSG
Lit: 'He is tired'.
'He passed away'.
- b. *tam -o -all*
sick -CVB -PRF-AUX:3MSG
Lit: 'He is sick'.
'He passed away'.
- c. *aliḥ -o -all*
pass -CVB -PRF-AUX:3MSG

Lit: ‘He passed by’.

‘He passed away’.

- d. *hijwot -u alif -o -all*
life -3MSG pass away -CVB -PRF-AUX:3MSG

Lit: ‘his life passed away’.

‘He passed away’.

- e. *tə- fənnif -o -all*
PASS- lose -CVB -PRF-AUX:3MSG

Lit: ‘he lost’.

‘He passed away’.

The phrases in (4a) and (4b) are circumlocutions specifically refer to illness and exhaustion, respectively. These expressions are used by people in the contexts of the church, the home, the school, and the mosque to allude to indirect death. In other words, when elderly males and females wanted to tell the death of somebody to the deceased family and close friends, they employed these expressions. These euphemistic terms are used by people to vaguely describe someone’s death. As a result, Amharic native speakers in the research settings use circumlocution as a euphemistic construction technique to allay worry and maintain face.

Individuals in the hospital setting utilize idiomatic expressions to inform the deceased person’s relatives or close friends about the death of the person, as in (4c) and (4d). The terms in (4c) and (4d) refer to someone who has physically died in their literal senses. Nonetheless, language users use idioms as euphemistic construction techniques since speaking the prohibited expression causes the deceased person’s relatives to feel anxious, worried, or afraid. These expressions are used in the study areas to convey courtesy and mask anxiety.

The phrase in (4e) is used in mosque realms to inform close family or friends about a deceased person. The phrase’s literal meaning alludes to a person’s loss. On the other hand, the conventional interpretation, in this case, illustrates how someone indirectly informs family or a friend of someone’s

death. In order to lessen frustration and lessen shock, research participants utilize circumlocution as a euphemistic construction mechanism.

2.5 Euphemisms related to suicide

The other type of fatality that occasionally occurs in study areas is suicide. The direct usage of the Amharic word *tannk'ə*, which means 'committed suicide' is discouraged. Suicide is also seen negatively in Amhara culture, especially in the study areas, where people hold the view that hanging oneself is a sin that directly equates to the murder of a creature of God. As a result, Amharic native speakers avoid using the expression *tannk'ə*, 'committed suicide' in public. Instead, they employ the euphemistic phrase, as in (5).

- (5) *iras -u -n at'əff -a*
He -DEF -ACC efface -3MSG
Lit: 'He effaced himself'.
'He passed away'.

Language users in church, mosque, school, hospital, and home settings use circumlocution as a linguistic strategy as seen in (5). The literal meaning of this statement implies someone has lost himself or herself. Whereas, its' contextual meaning denotes someone's suicide. Therefore, language users utilize this tactic (i.e., circumlocution) to demonstrate courtesy and prevent fear.

2.6 Euphemisms related to death in the battle

The research participants utilize a variety of euphemisms to describe deaths on the battlefield. To convey someone's death on the battlefield, one would not use the word *motə* 'dead', for instance. Instead, they employ the following euphemisms:

- (6)a. *tə səww -a*
PASS- sacrifice -PRF:3MSG
Lit: 'He was sacrificed'
'He passed away'.

- b. *məsəwaʔit hon -ə*
sacrifice become -3MSG
Lit: ‘He became sacrifice’.
‘He passed away’.

As in (6a) and (6b), individuals utilize understatement in the church, home, mosque, school, and hospital settings. Such statements literally depict someone who has made a sacrifice. The customary and contextual connotations, on the other hand, denote a death on the battlefield. The usage of those terms lessens the negative impact of using the word "death" directly and demonstrates respect for the elderly and visitors.

2.7 Euphemistic expressions related to calling the name of the deceased

Everyone is afraid of dying. Because individuals are afraid of insulting the deceased’s ghost, calling the deceased by their first name is seen as taboo in the study areas. So, to avoid this, language users utilize the euphemistic terms listed below before calling the deceased’s name directly:

- (7) a. *afər -u ji k’lələ -u*
soil -DEF Juss be light -DEF
‘May the soil be light to him’
- b. *isu bə- ʔiwīnət -u hed -o -all*
he by- truth -DEF go -CVB-3MSG -AUX:3MSG
‘He has gone for sure’.
- c. *bə -səmaj nəfīs -u -n ji mar -əw*
by -sky soul -DEF -ACC Juss mercy -DEF
‘May God provide mercy to his soul’

In (7a), circumlocution is used as a strategy of euphemism. This term is used in the contexts of the church, the home, and the school. The literal meaning of this phrase alludes to condolences for the deceased as the ‘soil become lit’. Based on this circumstance, the term’s conventional meaning serves as an avoidance tactic for calling the deceased person’s name. The statement in (7b) is circumlocutory as well. The statement literally indicates

that someone has definitely left. Yet, individuals in study areas use the statement in (7b) as a strategy to avoid calling the name of the deceased.

The expression in (7c) is also a circumlocution. The phrase in (7c) is used at church, at home, and in school domains. The precise meaning expresses prayers for the deceased's soul to find mercy. The traditional and contextual interpretation of this statement, however, refers to a way to avoid calling the name of the deceased. To avoid the taboo based on fear and demonstrate respect, people in the studied locations adopted those euphemistic construction techniques. In contrast, language users in mosque and hospital settings do not call the name of the deceased using euphemistic phrases. Individuals in these fields directly use the deceased's name because they don't view it as improper.

2.8 Euphemistic expressions related to condolence to the family of the deceased

The Amhara people have a custom of comforting the families of the departed. To help the family of the deceased cope with their sorrow and grief, many people stop by and talk to them. Anybody who pays a visit to the deceased's family is forbidden from using crude language. Instead, the Amhara people, especially in the study areas, comfort the family of the deceased when they leave them with euphemistic expressions, as in (8 a-c).

(8)a. *igizi?abiher ji- as'ina -ffihu*
God JUSS- condole -2PL
'Let God condole you'.

b. *igizi?abiher ji- asiffil affihu*
God JUSS- strong 2PL
'Let God strengthen you'.

c. *igizi?abiher ji- abarta -ffihu*
God JUSS- strengthen -2PL
'Let God strengthen you'

In (8a), the expression is circumlocutory. The traditional interpretation implies accepting God's condolences. When literate and senior people leave

the home of the deceased's family, they use this expression to show respect and protect the hearers' faces.

The phrase in (8b) also employs circumlocution. Elderly males and females, both literate and uneducated, express their condolences to the deceased's family by using the phrase in (8b) in both the church and the home. The conventional meaning of this statement, in this case, denotes that 'let God give you the strength and compassion to get over your pain and loss'.

The expression in (8c) is also a circumlocution. This phrase is used by elderly men and women in both the church and the home. The contextual meaning refers to 'let God strengthen you'. People in the study locations employ this tactic to be polite and foster social connections.

Upon leaving the family of the deceased, research participants in the mosque domains use the following euphemistic expressions to offer their condolences:

- (9) a. *alah ji- s̄abir/sobir -affihu*
God JUSS- strong -2PL
'Let God strengthen you'
- b. *s̄ibir/sobir ji- sit't' -affihu*
strength JUSS- give -2PL
'Let God gives you strength'.

As in (9a), the expression *s̄ibir/sobir* is an Arabic loanword that indicates strength. This expression is used in mosque settings to convey sympathy to the grieving family. The conventional interpretation of this expression is to request God to give you the courage to move on after a loss. The elderly thus utilize the phrase in (9a) to demonstrate civility and prevent anxiety. Similarly, the same Arabic loanword is used in the euphemistic expression indicated in (9b). The context of this remark demonstrates that God (the creator) can provide bereavement recovery for everyone to experience condolence. So, people in mosque settings choose this tactic to both show sympathy to the deceased's family and preserve the dignity of the listeners.

3. Conclusion

This study found that language users in the study settings used varied euphemistic expressions, depending on the age of the deceased individual, to communicate death in different social domains. Participants in the study areas used a variety of euphemistic terms in church, home, school, mosque, and hospital domains. In other words, people in the research areas referred to the deaths of infants, children, youths, and the elderly using various euphemistic expressions. Moreover, the people in the research settings are forbidden from immediately informing relatives and friends about the death of someone. Instead, they inform a person's relatives and close friends about the death using a variety of euphemistic terms.

Amharic native speakers in the research locations employed euphemistic expressions to describe suicide and to express death at the battle. Also, it is forbidden to use the deceased person's name directly due to a fear-based taboo. Instead of calling the deceased's name, people use various euphemistic expressions. In addition, language users employed a variety of euphemisms to convey sympathy to the deceased's family.

The Amhara society in the study areas used a variety of euphemistic construction techniques, including borrowing, idioms, metaphors, understatement, and circumlocution. To avoid the death-related taboo, maintain their faces, and be polite, people in the research locations adopted such euphemistic strategies.

List of abbreviations

2	second person
3	third person
ACC	accusative
AUX	auxiliary
CVB	converb
DEF	definite
JUSS	jussive
Lit	literal
M	masculine
SG	singular
PL	plural
PASS	passive
PRF	perfective

References

- Alego, J & Pyles, T. (2009). *The origins and Development of English Language*.
- Allan, K. & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden words: Taboo and the censoring of Language*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press. Bakhtiar,
- Bamlaku Endegen, Endalew Assefa and Samuel Handamo. (2023). The Socio-pragmatic Analysis of Amharic Euphemisms of Women. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 10 (1), 1-14.
- Baye Yimam. (1997). The pragmatics of greetings, felicitation and condolence expressions in four Ethiopian languages. *African Languages and Cultures* 10(2), 103-128.
- Birhanu Takele. (2016). A study of linguistic taboos related to women and their euphemistic expressions in Oromo society. *International Journal of social science and humanities research*. 4, 69-81.
- Birhanu Takele. (2017). The thematic Analysis of Taboos and their corresponding Euphemistic Expressions in Afan Oromo. PhD dissertations. Addis Ababa University.
- Birhanu Takele. (2020). A Sociolinguistic Study of Linguistic Taboos of Death and their Euphemistic Expressions among Bale Oromo. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. 25 (5), 59-65.
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S.C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burchfield, R. (1986). An Outline History of Euphemisms in English. In D. J. Enright (ed.), *Fair of Speech: the use of euphemisms*. 13-31. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Denzin, N., and Lincoln, Y. (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research*. (3rd ed). Thousand oaks, CA: Sage.
- Derib Ado. (2016). Metaphors of Time in Amharic. In Ronny Meyer & Lutz Edzard (eds.), *Time in Languages of Horn Africa*, 103-116. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Enright, D. (2005). *In Other Words*. London: Michael O'Mara Books Limited.

- Enright, D. J. (1985). *Fair of Speech: The Use of Euphemisms*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fishman, J., A. (1972). *Language in Sociocultural Change*. (Dil, Anwar S., Ed). California: Stanford University Press.
- Gashaw Arutie. (2020). The Semantics and Pragmatics of Amharic Spatial Expressions. PhD Dissertation. Addis Ababa University.
- Gashaw Arutie. (2021). Conceptions of Life and Death in Amharic: A View from Cognitive Semantics. *Journal of EthiopannStudies*. 54 (2).
- Girma Awgichew. (2009). The Origin of Amharic. Addis Ababa: Alpha Printers.
- Hudson, G. (1998). Reference Grammar of Amharic by Wolf Leslau'': *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 118, 2, 295-297, Published by: American Oriental Society Stable URL: Retrieved From <http://www.jstor.org/stable/605917>.
- Hughes, G. (2006). *An Encyclopedia of Swearing: The Social History of Oaths, Profanity, Foul Language, and Ethnic Slurs in the English-speaking World*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Hussen Mohammed. (2017). A Sociolinguistic Study of Linguistics Taboos and Expressions in Amharic Language. *Abyssinia Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 2 (2), 39-46.
- Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. [M]. London: Longman.
- M. (2012). Communicative functions of euphemisms in Persian. *In The Journal of International Social Research*. 5 (20), 7-12.
- Meyer. R. (2006). *Amharic as Lingua Franca in Ethiopia*. *Lissan-Journal of African languages & linguistics*. Addis Ababa University Ethiopian Languages Research Centre.
- Mwanambuyu, L.C. (2011). A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Silozi Euphemisms. Master's Thesis. University of Zambia New York: Wordsworth Press
- Samoškaite, L. (2011). 21st Century Political Euphemisms in English Newspapers: Semantic and Structural Study. Master's Thesis. Vilnius Pedagogical University.
- Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (2nd ed. 1995). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tadesse W/Gebriel. (2020). The Semantics and Pragmatics of Amharic bəgəna Lyrics. PhD Dissertation. Addis Ababa University.