Ethiopian Federalism: The Politics of Linguistic Pluralism and Language Policy Discourses

Milkessa Midega[1]

Abstract

Academic research on the contemporary language policy of Ethiopia as a specific aspect of Ethiopian federal studies is one of the least developed areas. This article, therefore, is a brief exploration of the language policy of Ethiopia at both federal and regional levels using theoretical, historical and comparative analytical lenses. The study conceptualizes linguistic pluralism as an advocacy for diversity taking into account the assumptions on language functions including primordialism, instrumentalism and social constructivism. This piece has shown that there exists functional correlation between federalism, language rights and language policies which also highlights the tangible problems of monolingual federal governments in multilingual societies. The finding further shows that the current Ethiopian language policy is characterized by federal monolingualism (as its predecessors) and regional language policy autonomy. In effect, the federal monolingual policy has tended to limit the participation of non-Amharic speaking national groups such as Oromo, Somali, Sidama and others in the Federal Civil Service institutions. Regional states and the two autonomous cities have shown variations in the implementation of their respective language policies, some using two or more languages for different purposes while others limited their languages. Finally, the ongoing language policy discourses in Ethiopia show that the contending politics of language at both federal and regional government levels remain unbridgeable in their approaches.

1 Milkessa Midega is a lecturer at the Department of Political Science and International Relations of Dire Dawa University, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. He is a PhD Candidate at the Center for Federal Studies of Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. E-mail: milkessam@gmail.com. This paper has benefited much, in terms of access to empirical data, from my M.A. thesis entitled "Ethiopia's Choice of Federal Working Language and Its Implications for Non-Amharic Languages: The Case of Afaan Oromoo". M.A. thesis. AAU. 2011.

Key words: *language policy, Ethiopian federalism, working language*

1. Introduction

Language policy research, as part of federal studies, remains one of the least studied areas in Ethiopia in terms of policy analysis and impact assessments on empirical and practical basis. Few aspects of such policy studies (or rather associated studies) can be the works of Cohen (2006), Aberra Degefa (2009), Yared Legesse (2009), Yonatan T. Fiseha (2009), Amlaku B. Eshetie (2010), Milkessa Midega (2011) and Mengistu Arefaine (2014). In fact, very few of them are empirical researches while the others are entirely legal analysis. All of them could be categorized under some contending politics of language a critique of which has been made towards the end of the paper.

Yonatan T. Fiseha (2009), for instance, compares language rights regimes in South Africa and Ethiopia. His final assessments inform the potential of Amharic to be reintroduced as an "official language" or "as a cohesive force" both at the federal and regional levels (ibid: 519). Yonatan does not even question the status of Amharic which came about through linguistic impositions and injustices of the past; he instead endorses history of inequality as advantage and opportunity for the language in question to thereby retain its old status. Finally, Yonatan tends to underestimate the problems of a single working language in a multilingual society like Ethiopia by saying "It is not at all clear how the language policy will have the effect of compromising the capacity of individuals from a non-Amharic-speaking group to access the state, thereby continuing their historical marginalisation. In fact, the reverse seems to be true in present-day Ethiopia" (2009: 521). As opposed to his claim, a simple look at the federal civil service employment annual reports can tell us the consequences of the monolingual federal government.[2] Therefore, it appears important to pay more attention to language

2 On average, about 50% of the Federal Civil Service annual employment continued to be in favour of the Amharas. "If the two major ethnic groups, Oromo and Amhara, are to be compared with regard to access to federal government employment opportunities over the years,

policy analysis as part of a federal research by analysing the existing literature as well as conducting language policy impact assessments using empirical, historical and comparative perspectives.

Ethiopia is a common home to multiple diversities; however, as is formally highlighted, the polity constituted particularly the "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" (Preamble of the Constitution of Ethiopia, 1995). One of the defining elements of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia, according to the constitution (Article 39), is a distinct language. So, language as an identity marker is recognized. It is also one of the bases used to reconfigure the Ethiopian state into a federation of nine member states (Article 46). The other, but very important, general language policy response to the linguistic plurality of the society is provided in Article 5 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's (FDRE) Constitution (1995). It states that all Ethiopian languages enjoy equal state recognition. It, however, selects Amharic as the sole working language of the Federal Government of Ethiopia while offering the member states the opportunity to choose their respective working languages. There are several confusions surrounding the interpretation of this constitutional provision. The first is related to the practical implication of 'equal state recognition'. In a country where language inequality had been the prevailing principle of language policy, affirmative actions for the historically disadvantaged languages are common practices (see for instance, the South African Constitution, 1996, Article 6). Equal status declaration, therefore, may inevitably favour the already privileged language unless affirmative action precedes it. The other confusion is associated to the clause 'working language of the federal government'. Some wrongly see it as a "national language of Ethiopia", others take it as an "official language of Ethiopia", and still others write it as a "working language of Ethiopia". "Why only Amharic?" is also a question widely debated. All these confusions will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this piece.

the latter are hired three-fold the former mainly for linguistic reason" (see my own M.A thesis, Milkessa Midega, 2011: p.154).

To this end, the following questions are designed to guide the arguments of the paper: What are the roles of languages in a multilingual society? How does federalism promote the respect of language rights? What are the common confusions surrounding the concept of "working language"? What are the problems of having monolingual federal government in a multilingual society? How do we characterize the language policies of Ethiopian governments in the past? To what extent has the Ethiopian Federalism rectified historical linguistic injustices and accommodated linguistic plurality through the new language policy? What are the arguments for and against the current language policy structures? In order to address these major research questions, this paper opts for a research design of theoretical, historical and practical language policy comparative methodology. The interpretation of the data thus is made on theoretical, historical and practical comparative analytic lenses. Data utilized have been diversified including literatures on Ethiopian federalism, multilingual federations' language policies, constitutions, federal and regional laws, political programmes and regulations, government reports, media sources, and others.

The paper is organized into four general points of discussions. It starts by casting light on linguistic diversity and language functions (primordialism, instrumentalism and social constructionism). Second, it tries to find conceptual links between federalism, language rights and language policies in multilingual federations of both developed and developing worlds which further helps to identify the challenges of monolingual government of multilingual societies. Third, it offers a brief historical outline of Ethiopian language policy and practices (1855-1991). Finally, in its main analysis, the paper discusses the current federal and regional language policies, practices and challenges of Ethiopia as well as the contending language politics surrounding them.

2. Linguistic Pluralism and Language Functions

The term plurality literally refers to co-existence of diversity, such as ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. For scholars of federalism, "pluralism" may mean political theories that emphasize the value of promoting distinctive identities such as ethnic, language, region or religion implying that public policies should promote social diversity (Connolly, 2005). Diversity is approached not as a threat but as a resource. To this end, political processes may be divided into policy areas to accommodate group diversity (the relative power of central government versus state or local governments) (Elazar, 1987). The federal arrangement of self-rule and shared-rule does also mean self-rule and shared-rule in the languages of their respective preferences. Therefore, in linguistically diverse society, federalism tends to promote linguistic pluralism. In this section, three competing assumptions on language functions including primordialism, instrumentalism and social constructionism are discussed. This paper does not aim to delve into presenting the controversies or seemingly unending debates between the assumptions. It rather briefly touches upon very important aspects of the debates which are believed to be explaining the Ethiopian languages usage and policy contexts.

2.1 Primordialism

"A people without a language of its own is only half a nation […] to lose your native tongue […] is the worst badge of conquest" (Thomas quoted in Edwards, 1984:2). As could be understood from this classic primordialist quote, the symbolic identity marker role of language in society is emphasized. Primordialists tend to treat language as natural and inevitable phenomenon: "Language is not invented, nor is it a matter of choice. It is a gradual constitutive legacy, or… language and the nation are natural organisms" (Williams, 1984:188). Abraham Demoz further argued that "A language is in a sense a flag representing a particular nationality" (1990:71). By taking the Imperial language policy of Ethiopia as a case study, Abraham arrived at a conclusion that "there is a sense in which we can say that

in most societies *a person is what he or she speaks* (emphasis added)" (ibid:71). According to notable sociolinguists such as Fishman (2001), those who continue to use a language for its symbolic meaning speak of its "sacred heritage," their "roots" or "the language of their forefathers," as a result of which many continued to die defending it.

There are tendencies among the primordialists to equate language with ethnicity. Herder, for instance, radically poses essentialist question: "Has a nation anything more precious than the language of its fathers?" (quoted in Edwards, 1984:2). As to whether language is the sole symbol of ethnicity, Fishman (1977:25) has pointed out the likelihood:

> Language is the recorder of paternity, the expresser of matrimony and the carrier of phenomenology. Any vehicle carrying such precious freight, indeed, is precious in and of itself… Anything can become symbolic of ethnicity, but since language is the *prime symbol* system to begin with and since it is commonly relied upon so heavily (even if not exclusively) to enact, celebrate and 'call forth' all ethnic activity, the likelihood that it will be recognized and singled out as symbolic of ethnicity is great indeed.

Language, therefore, could be singled out as a symbol of ethno-national identity for this approach. Thus, conflicts over language status and choice tend to take the shape of conflicts over identity and symbolic matters. The theoretical implication of this perspective is obvious: the necessity to extend equal recognition and support to all nationalities' languages, and affirmative actions to historically disadvantaged languages, for better harmonious co-existence of multilingual societies. The major critique against the accounts of primordialists was advanced by instrumentalists who, for example, say a child with certain ethnic identity may happen to know a different mother tongue which is not the language of his ethnic group.

2.2 Instrumentalism

Language is treated as a mere means of communication, according to instrumentalists' version of language usages. Language is not an identity marker, proponents argue, but is rationally chosen for material or other purposes (Lagerspetz, 1998). Language can thus be changed at any time through personal conscious choices or imposition by systematic policy. Lopez (quoted in Gebre Hishe, 2008:13) found that since "language shift doesn't imply anything about loosening ethnic bonds", language maintenance was not even required for maintaining one's ethnic identity.

A more moderate primordialist instance was presented by Eastman (1984:259) who suggests that despite the fact that language is one of the defining features of ethnicity, ethnic identity does not always coincide with the language used. He maintains that the relationship between language and an ethnic identity is one of association: "A particular 'associated language' is a necessary component of ethnic identity but the language we associate ourselves with need not be one we use in our day-to-day lives" (ibid.). Instrumentalists could be criticized on many grounds such as from minority rights, language rights, and indigenous rights points of view. It is usually accused of ignoring group identity questions. Even if instrumentalists press on the functional roles of languages, they predominantly fail to recognize language as resources or means of getting access to such resources as political power, employments, media, wealth, national pride and education derived from the official status of a chosen language (Weinstein, 1983).

2.3 Social Constructionism

The third approach to defining the roles of language in society is known as social constructionism. It has to do with the usage of language that is artificially created or socially constructed medium of communication for societal-building. Building a society or a nation on the basis of one language criteria goes as far back as Westphalia Treat of 1648 which brought up the notion of nation-state theory.

It is usually referred to as one language-one nation-one state approach of nation-building. De Varennes observes that "using the language of one ethnic group as the language of government and administration is often seen as part and parcel of nation-building" (2006:1). A notable scholarship in this regard was presented by Deutsch who wrote that a nation is "people who have learned to communicate with each other and to understand each other well beyond the mere interchange of goods and services" (1953:65). Moreover, Talleyrand claims that "the unity of language is the fundamental condition for the unity of the state" (quoted in Weinstein, 1983)." So, language serves as means of social unity.

The social constructionist assumptions have now been challenged by the practical unity in language diversity as experienced by many multilingual federations and non-federations across the world (Elazar, 1995). A serious pitfall of this approach was uncovered by Connor (1972) in his argument that *nation-building* was partly *nation-destroying*. In the US context, constructionists had believed that "the key to equal opportunity for non-English speakers is a shift to English as rapidly as possible" (Ricento, 2006:7). Therefore, according to this group of rather assimilationists, policies that might encourage non-English speakers to continue to rely on their native languages, such as "bilingual education, bilingual ballots, etc., are actually hindering their chances of achieving social equality" (ibid.). In relation to this, Ricento (2006: 4) discusses the notion of linguistic imperialism where "big" languages – such as English – expand their functional jurisdiction across the country or the world, "in killing other languages." In contrast, Weinstein (1983) points out that "the strongest elite or government cannot decree a language out of existence or into existence, at least in its spoken form" while assimilating linguistic groups for political expediency purposes. Thus, social constructionists uphold that language is a social artifact and can be used for a nation-building.

To conclude, the assumptions on language functions are not totally exclusive of each other. Primordialists use language for communication as well. But they do

not stop there; they argue that language signifies ethno-national identity. There are scientific findings which firmly establish that our mother language structures our thinking, speeches and arguments. Instrumentalists build their arguments on what they perceive the weaknesses of primordialist roles of language. Social constructionism shares arguments with instrumentalism and primordialism for language is instrumental to build a nation.

For the purpose of Ethiopian context, language functions as a means of communication, symbol of ethnic identity, instrument of nation-building, and regulator of human thought. An excerpt from the work of Eastman appears worth quoting: "When we stop using the language of our ethnic group, only the language use aspect of our ethnic identity changes; the primordial sense of who we are and what group we think we belong to for the remainder remains intact" (Eastman, 1984:260).

The debate between the assumptions has made language one of the most indispensable, politically negotiable resources in the contemporary political discourse, which is likely true for Ethiopia as well. The role of language in Ethiopia has been debated from all perspectives discussed above (Dirribi Demissie, 2011; Mesfin W/Mariam, 1999). For instance, Mesfin Wolde-Mariam argues that "strictly speaking language is an instrument of communication. But there are people who attach very strong feelings to their languages as manifestations of their identities. It is not useful to argue against such purely subjective feelings" (1999:31). Other scholars observe that "language is a key defining feature of each group" of nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia (Assefa Fiseha, 2012:438). Historically, Ethiopian regimes had attempted to implement a nation-building project using Amharic language throughout the empire state; and the current regime, however, recognized language both as means of communication and symbol of identity, as is argued in the following sections.

3. Federalism, Language Rights and Language Policies

If human rights are supposed to be about rectifying human wrongs, as some argue, then, obviously, language rights pronounced and enshrined in the policies of many multilingual countries are meant to remedy language wrongs (Paulston, 1997). There are controversies as to whether language rights are enjoyed individually or collectively. Reaume (1997) contends that language rights should be approached from collective human rights perspectives. Some also argue that both personal and group principles to language rights are rather interlocked. For instance, according to Kymlicka (1995), individual choices are made within a cultural context, and community's cultural structure provides the context for personal choice. The main aim of this study is not to deal with the debate but to provide a brief theoretical and comparative understanding of Ethiopian language policy. It is often argued that lack of language rights is one of the causal factors in certain conflicts particularly in multilingual countries (Paulston, 1997). When it comes to group conflicts over the status, usage, equality and rights of their languages, federalism through its language policy instruments is suggested to favour linguistic rights: territorially grouped and non-territorial personality rights (Yonatan, 2009; Mitra, 2002).

3.1 Language Policies in Multilingual Federations

Language policy of a given jurisdiction is part of the public policy which regulates the functions of, and statuses given to, each language. More generally, a language policy could be designed and implemented with an *overt* legal status *(de jure)* or *covert* language politics and practices *(de facto)* (Bender, 1985). The concept of language policy is mainly related to decisions, rules, regulations and guidelines about the status, use, domains and territories of languages and the rights of the speakers of the languages under question (Schiffman, 2005). It is, therefore, a policy subset of planning, language planning, which determines the relative language status within a polity. It determines the nature of inter-language relations on the one hand, and state-language relations on the other hand. McNab (1989) similarly defines language policy as the decisions of a country regarding

the language choices for those who are to carry out the politics, economics, laws, and social affairs of a polity, or a region of a country in the public domain. For the purpose of this paper, language policy refers to the constitutional and legal provisions, regulations, directives and other guidelines regarding the language status, choice and usage in a specific jurisdiction. In this regard, there are confusions as to the usage of such terminologies as "official language", "national language" and "working language", which should be briefed at this juncture.

An 'official language' is usually understood as a language that is given "legal recognition of an elevated status" in a particular administrative unit or jurisdiction (courts, parliament and administration) (de Varennes, 2012:4). In addition, official status can also be used to give a language (often indigenous) a legal status, even if that language is not widely spoken. This is so because official status is connected to the wider political issues of sovereignty, nation-building, and the rights of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, including immigrant communities (Patten and Kymlicka, 2003). On the other hand, the term 'national language' especially when used in the very constitution of a jurisdiction, raises the language in question to the status of national identity, national flag and national anthem (Mputubwele, 2003). Thus, the term implies that any one "who does not know or use the so-called national language is somewhat less than loyal or patriotic and that his or her status as a national of the country is somehow deficient" (Abraham, 1990:73-74). Finally, a 'working language', also known as a procedural language, is a language that is given a unique legal status in a jurisdiction or an organization as its primary means of communication (de Varennes, 2012). It is simply the language of the daily correspondence and conversation in an organization since it often has members with various differing language backgrounds. For a given organization or a state, a working language may or may not also be an official language or a national language (Abraham, 1990).

Usually, literature presents Amharic as a 'national language' of Ethiopia, other times as 'official language' of Ethiopia. These terminologies frequently appeared

to have been confusing for elites of political parties as well (TVO, April 2015, Election Debate).[3] The tendency of treating a working language with national status could be argued as a policy legacy of the imperial regimes of the country, for the clear fact that the federal constitution of Ethiopia designates Amharic as the working language of the Federal Government (FDRE 1995, Art.5). Therefore, contrary to the past language policies of Ethiopia, the new federal and regional constitutions of the country provide a 'working language' policy model. Amharic is not the only working language of Ethiopia, but of the Federal Government since the regional states, special zones and some special districts have adopted their own working languages. Fernand de Varennes, in a footnote, identified that "countries such as Canada, India, and Ethiopia have a much larger number of official languages once one considers the regional/provincial languages: around 50 for India, 11 for Canada, and 8 for Ethiopia" (2012:11). Thus, today, Ethiopia has acquired several working languages.

Furthermore, there are also confusions among the society as well as scholars on the applications of bilingual or multilingual working language policies. For Mengistu Arefaine, for instance, "each and every Ethiopian should learn at least three or four languages depending on how many languages are going to be added to Amharic as working languages of the federal government for the future" (2014: 23). This means that, if the federal working languages of Ethiopia are four in number, according to his understandings, citizens would learn all of them. However, international practical experiences show that working languages by definition are not the languages that each citizen should learn, but the languages that the government should use to exercise it powers and responsibilities such as public service provisions according to the specific language preferences of the people in question (de Varennes, 2012). Rather each and every citizen should learn one or two of the working languages of the government as can be understood

3 Representatives of political parties invited to the election debate held on TVO Afaan Oromo program could not differentiate these concepts. One of them even said that "if we are elected and become government, we will designate Afaan Oromo the other language of the country just equal to Amharic". This is huge confusion. In fact all of the four opposition parties that participated on the debate demanded Afaan Oromo to be the other federal working language. And the OPDO did not wholly resist but tended to postpone saying that it requires national consensus.

from the experiences of multilingual governments (ibid.). For instance, the Government of the Republic of South Africa has 11 official languages; that does not imply that every South African has to know all of them. The European Union (EU) has 24 official languages, which does not mean that EU citizens are expected to know all of them. In Canada, citizens are expected to learn either of the two official languages or for bilingual offices, both. Article 5 of the Bolivian Constitution (2009) lists 37 languages as its unitary state's official languages. What makes Bolivian language policy so special is that it has included extinct indigenous languages in the lists of declared "official languages".

The declaration of 37 languages as "official languages" does not in any way show that Bolivians should learn all of them. It rather means that all native nations and peoples receive public services in their own respective local languages. So, adding one or more languages to the working language of the federal government does not imply additional burden or imposition over the rest of the citizens. It only means that the federal government exercises it powers and responsibilities in one of the chosen languages in accordance with the language preferences of the people in question. Citizens are expected to know one or two of the working languages as may be required by the constitution.

In terms of its grand aims, language policy and practices could be either assimilationism or accommodationism or mixed (Patten and Kymlicka, 2003). The type of language policies designed and pursued in multilingual federations mainly depends on the political and ideological orientations of the states towards linguistic diversity (ibid.). The main objective of an assimilationist language policy is homogenization or "nation-building" project (Mekuria, 1997). Multilingual federations incline to pursue accommodationist language policy responses to linguistic diversities: group identity and personal identity (Mengistu, 2014). Languages may definitely compete with one another for similar official status in multilingual societies, and the success of a state, therefore, depends on its capacity to respond "through constitutional accommodation of diversity" (Watts, 1981:117).

The applications of working language policy usually include language of education (medium of instruction), i.e., primary education through mother tongue (UNESCO, 2005), language of administration, language of courts, language of mass-media, language of health services, and language of other state duties.

3.2 The Problems of Monolingual Federal Governments in Multilingual Societies

The choice of one language as a government working language of a given jurisdiction, where language diversities and potential language struggle for similar status exist, would result in challenging consequences. Federations which consider themselves linguistically homogenous, or rather mono-national federations did not see any language choice problem. Mitra, for instance, argues that "language, in that sense, has been a non-issue in the United States and Australia, or for that matter, in language-proud and linguistically homogenous Germany" (2002: 1). Today, however, no country in the world can claim immunity from diversity of languages. Even the US assertion of homogeneity has been foundationally criticized and especially accused of the so-called "melting-pot" form of assimilation to English.

Those federations which acknowledge their internal language diversity had to face the challenges often posed by language choice dealings and consequences. Patten and Kymlicka, for instance, observe that:

> [T]he very process of selecting a single language can be seen as inherently exclusionary and unjust. Where political debate is conducted in the language of the majority, linguistic minorities are at a disadvantage, and must either invest the time and effort needed to shift as best they can to the dominant language or accept political marginalization (2003:16).

Similarly, Abraham Demoz (1990) contends that as soon as one language is designated the working language of a jurisdiction, it thereby gives a major competitive advantage to the native speakers of that language. Therefore, selecting only one working language for a government of a multilingual society does not guarantee equal opportunity for every citizen.

As a result, language choice questions at the shared-rule can have audible resonances for the broader issues of federalism: democratic participation, political power sharing and equality of linguistic groups. Language problems may limit citizen's access to the state. The language choice can "erect or tear down barriers to power, wealth, and prestige at the center of a political system" (Weinstein, 1983:100). Turgeon and Gagnon suggest that "the inability of members of a linguistic minority to be served in their own language can lead to serious challenges to the legitimacy of the state" (2013:407). The legitimacy crisis of the state due to its under-representation of the groups whose languages were not chosen, suggests policy revision so as to build a more inclusive state. That is why Canadian language policy reforms took place as argued by the Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (Government of Canada 1969:95):

> The possibility of national disintegration has forced a re-examination of the linguistic policies of the Public Service. The debate is no longer about efficiency, merit, patronage, and representation, but rather between thoroughgoing reform and schism. Change is imminent and no institution requires reform more urgently than does the federal administration.

In a nutshell, choosing a working language for official purposes in multilingual societies would pose endless encounters. Monolingual government of multilingual society, therefore, does not imply linguistic equality; and it may appear a loss for those who cannot speak the chosen language. So, as much as possible, in order to reduce the undesirable consequences of working languages, states are expected to continue reforming their language policies.

One could ask, 'What are the basic principles of working language choice?' Aberra Degefa (2009) explores the general guiding principles that must be (and indeed are) followed while choosing government's working language in multilingual societies that include the numerical size of the speakers of the languages, their economic and political contribution, language neutrality in the country (foreign language). Other scholars identify language rights such as language efficiency and fairness compromise, adding tax burden over those whose language is chosen, territoriality and personality, and language implications of the three main human rights principles (the right to freedom of expression, the right to non-discrimination, and the right of individuals belonging to minority) (Pool, 1991; Yared Legesse, 2009; de Varennes, 1994, Paulston, 1997). Using one or more of the general guiding principles of (official) working language choices, Canada has a bilingual Federal Government (English and French); Switzerland has three official (German, French and Italian) and four national languages (German, French, Italian and Romansh); Belgium designated three working languages (Dutch, French and German); South Africa has endorsed eleven official languages; India has had two Union Government working languages (Hindi and English), Nigeria opted for its former colonial language (English) due to disagreement over it.

Other officially non-federal states have also opted for multilingual central government. For instance, Cameroun has chosen two (English and French), Djibouti has two (Arabic and French), Paraguay has two (Castilian and Guarani), Bolivia has thirty seven, Sri Lanka has three (English, Tamil and Sinhala), Singapore has four (Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English), Fiji has three (English, Fijian and Hindustani), Kenya has two (Kiswahili and English), Rwanda has three (Kinyarwanda, French and English), Zimbabwe has sixteen (including English) and Somaliland has two (Somali and Arabic).

One must note that foreign languages such as English and French are selected

as official languages on the fact that English and French peoples are not citizens of the said countries (or put differently, whites have already left), which makes these foreign languages more neutral to the state or to all indigenous peoples. Senegal, for instance, has many national languages but has chosen French as its working language while Uganda has opted for English, Niger for French, Guinea for French, and Benin for French for similar official purposes. A research question now seems to locate the Ethiopian experience in a comparative perspective.

4. Ethiopian Linguistic Homogenization Policies of the Past (1855-1991)

The modern multilingual Ethiopia was built mainly through wars of conquest and occupation (Teshale Tibebu, 1995). Language policy was central to the making of modern multiethnic Ethiopia (ibid.). As a result, there are now more than 80 languages spoken in Ethiopia that can be categorized under different language families (i.e. Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic, Nilotic). Of these languages, the major five include Afaan Oromo (33.8%), Amharic (29.6%), Somali (6.1%), Tigrigna (5.9%) and Sidama (4.0%) languages (CSA, 2010). Despite this diversity, previous regimes of Ethiopia had oppressed non-Amharic languages: "During the reign of Menelik II, who expanded the Ethiopian empire to today's borders, Amharic was given a new status as a symbol of unification for the people in the multilingual Ethiopian society" (Meyer, 2006: 120). Amharic language was imposed upon all nationalities incorporated into the empire state, and thus Amharic linguistic imperialism was implemented. Language conquest and language defeat evidently dehumanized all of the conquered nationalities.

Linguistic homogenization policy was the primary aim of the language policy of the imperial regime of Ethiopia. The imposition of Amharic on the various ethno-linguistic groups in the empire state was designed as a primary tool of

'one nation-building' project (Donham, 2002). Amharic was promoted as "*lesane negus*" (the language of the king) (ibid.). Tedla Haile (1930) specialized (M.A. thesis) on the implication of French colonial assimilation policy for Ethiopia and recommended the following policy:

> The policy of assimilation should be at the top of our reforms; for, without the union of the Amhara and [Oromo], it is impossible to visualize the future with certainty or enthusiasm. The two peoples who are allowed to evolve separately will end up forming two different, and perhaps antagonistic, nations (quoted in Bahru Zewde, 2002:132-133).

Subsequently, in 1933, Sahle Tsadalu, the then Minster of Education of Haile Selassie government made the following directives:

> The strength of a country lies in its unity, and unity is born of (common) language, custom, and religion. Thus, to safeguard the ancient sovereignty of Ethiopia and to reinforce its unity, our language and our religion should be proclaimed over the whole of Ethiopia. Otherwise, unity will never be attained. Amharic and Ge'ez should be declared official languages for secular as well as religious affairs and all pagan languages should be banned (quoted in Bahru Zewde, 2002:140).

Thus, the imperial regime of Ethiopia intensified its linguistic assimilation policy and practices through various means such as formal education, religious institutional teachings, army establishments, public services and others. Bender (1985) considered the entire socio-linguistic policy substance and processes of the empire of Ethiopia as a formal *Amharaization*.

The Italian intervention (1936-41) only interrupted the imperial linguistic policy of homogenization project (ibid.). For instance, Italians built schools which used non-Amharic languages as medium of instruction in the non-Amhara regions.

Mekuria Bulcha (1997:98) wrote:

> They [Italians] were interested in winning the trust of non-Amhara peoples through the elimination of the Amhara claim to superiority over them. Therefore, employment of Amharas in government offices and using Amharic language in non-Amhara territories was prohibited. Afaan Oromo, Kaficho, Somali and Adare languages were used as medium of instruction in government schools in the South. In Addis Ababa schools, Afaan Oromo and Amharic were used.

Whatever motives one may associate with Italian colonial language policy, Ethiopia had briefly experienced language policy of pluralism.

Following the defeat of Italians, Haile Selassie restored his power in the country and reintroduced his linguistic homogenization policy. One of the laws he passed for this purpose was the Imperial Decree, No. 3 of 1944 which required Amharic to become the exclusive medium of instructions throughout Ethiopia (Government of Ethiopia, 1944). Article 125 of the revised Imperial Constitution of Ethiopia (1955) declared that "the official language of the Empire is Amharic," and accordingly, Amharic became the language of administration, courts, mass-media, health services and medium of instruction in schools throughout Ethiopia. Not only did it became the instrument of public service delivery, as Alelign Aschale observes, "Amharic had been regarded as a language of national symbol and unity" (2013:1).

One of the leading causes for the outbreak of the Ethiopia Student Movement (ESM) was the quest for language equality and justice (Donham, 2002). Walelign Makonen, a leader of the ESM of the 1960s, is often quoted: "To be a 'genuine Ethiopian' one has to speak Amharic, to listen to Amharic music. In some cases, to be an 'Ethiopian', you will even have to change your name" (1969:6). Therefore, the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution and the subsequent proliferation of national

liberation movements were partly caused by the language factor.

The *Derg* military rule did not peacefully respond to language questions of nationalities. It rather opted mainly for military responses to language autonomy questions. Thus, no genuine language policy reform was made. Bender describes the situation as "a *de facto* continuation of the old policy of Amharization" (1985:276-77). The *Derg* Constitution of Ethiopia declared that "in the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia the working language of the state shall be Amharic" (1987: Art 116). Even though this provision reviewed the status of Amharic to the "working language of the state", it generally allowed the continuity of Amharic linguistic hegemony across the empire state of Ethiopia. Art 2(2) of the same Constitution stated that "the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia shall ensure the equality, development and respectability of the languages of nationalities." This clause only provided lip service for the age-old language questions. As Smith correctly argued, "Amharic knowledge remained a prerequisite of political or economic participation," and language policy thus remained virtually unchanged.

In a nutshell, literatures on the status of Amharic languages during the previous Ethiopian regimes (1855-1991) could be categorized under three general interpretations: language of unification, language of oppression, and language of colonialism (Bahru Zewde, 2002; Merera Gudina, 2003; Assafa Jalata, 2007).

5. Ethiopian Federalism from Language Policy Discourse

The current Ethiopia's language policy foundation was laid down during the transitional period as a *de facto* federalization policy began in 1991 with the declara-

tion of the Transitional Charter. Put differently, the current ethno-linguistic based regional states and their respective language policies were already in practice before the new Federal Constitution came into effect in 1995. The late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, when the Transitional Charter was ratified in 1991, made the following speech (quoted in Aalen, 2002:40):

> The key cause of the war all over the country was the issue of nationalities. Any solution that did not address them did not address the issue of peace and war… *People were fighting for the right to use their language* (emphasis added), to use their culture, to administer themselves. So without guaranteeing these rights, it was not possible to stop the war, or prevent another one coming up.

This quote implies that the protection of language rights was taken as one of the politically significant issues for the new government of Ethiopia. As a result, language became one of the factors used to delimit the territorial boundaries of the fourteen regions of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) (see Proclamation No. 7/1992). The 1995 constitution of the country formally endorsed by and large the transitional language policies and practices, however by reducing the number of the transitional constituent units from fourteen to nine. Thus, in the making of the borders of the member states of the federation (Art 46), special zones and districts, the language factor has been determinant.

Even though the current language policy of Ethiopia particularly at the regional level has radically changed from the past, this does not imply that the country has a comprehensive language policy document. Nonetheless, language laws, rules, principles and regulations are here and there in separate documents: federal and regional constitutions, education policy, cultural legislations, media laws, and other legal documents.

5.1 Monolingual Language Policy of the Federal Government of Ethiopia

The Federal Constitution of Ethiopia as a mega-policy of the country clearly stipulates the language policy guidelines and principles. The key clause remains Article 5 (FDRE, 1995) which states that "All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition. Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government. Members of the Federation may by law determine their respective working languages." First, the "equal state recognition" clause signifies the national status that all Ethiopian languages should enjoy. Thus, it is constitutional to say that all Ethiopian languages are today national languages, for which, the knowledge of one indigenous language is a prerequisite to be an Ethiopian citizen (Government of Ethiopia, 2003). Second, the role of Amharic, as a 'working language' of Ethiopia, is limited to the Federal Government since the regional governments have their respective working languages.

Moreover, the cultural policy of Ethiopia (2003) highlights its commitments to promote multilingualism in this way:

> [All] the languages, literature of the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia receive equal recognition, respect and chance to development. Creating a favorable situation to carry out scientific research and inventory of the languages, oral literature of the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia and make them useful in development endeavor. Providing the necessary professional assistance to the various nations, nationalities and peoples while making their choice of language.

The other policy document which deals with language rights is the Federal Education and Training Policy (2002) which provides "Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities

to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages". The 1994 Ethiopian Education and Training policy has also promised that "Students can choose and learn at least one nationality language and one foreign language for cultural and international relations." Federal media such as Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) has had its own language usage guidelines. In general, these and other policy documents provide language policy directions on the use and status of languages at the federal level.

Amharic remains the only working language of the federal government. It means that "as the federal government has only one [working] language, there is no territorial limit to its use - but this is only true in relation to matters falling within federal jurisdiction" (de Varennes, 2012:15). The choice of Amharic has often been justified on an 'accident of history' advantages ("*betarik agatami*") (Minutes of Constituent Assembly, 1994). But it is known that Amharic was imposed and promoted across the country at the expense of non-Amharic languages (ibid.). Since Amharic became the sole working language of the empire state by design and conscious state policy, the idea of 'accident of history' thus seems misleading. The historical advantages accrued to Amharic that came about through linguistic injustices should not have been used as criteria for language choice. According to Boran (2001), if there was inequality between languages, then providing equal status will work in favour of the already advantaged language and reinforce the existing relational inequalities. The case of Ethiopia shows that historically suppressed languages are not given federal affirmative action. The South African Constitution (1996) provides affirmative action benefits for those historically disadvantaged indigenous languages. Following the designation of French as the other co-equal working language of the Canadian Federal Government, there was 'the language normalization process', aimed at elevating the status of the newly chosen language (Yonatan, 2009:507).

Analysing Ethiopia's federal working language choice from the current language distributions in the country shows that the largest mother tongue language of

Ethiopia, Afaan Oromo, remains neglected. Second, taking the socio-political and historical significance of Amharic without addressing language problems by designing and implementing affirmative actions for the victim languages was not appropriate. Moreover, it would be misleading to compare the worldwide retained power and historical significances of English and French with the role and significance of Amharic in Ethiopia. This is due to the fact that many former British and French colonies retained their colonial official languages in their post-colonial administrations generally for two reasons: (1) for international language relations and (2) for the supposed neutrality of the languages to their states and to their contending indigenous peoples; meaning neutrality in the sense that white colonizers who used to speak these languages have departed. Amharic, however, is neither significant for international relations nor is it neutral to the state of Ethiopia and to the indigenous peoples in the country since we have native Amhara people in Ethiopia who would have special attachments to Amharic. This does not mean that Amharic should stop providing link service between regions or among different nationalities as is required or found appropriate. But it would be wrong to continue offering special assistance to Amharic only (as the current constitution does) to continue dominating other non-Amharic languages of Ethiopia in practice. If we accept that the historical linguistic imperialism of Amharic was unjust, we have to rectify it now. Cohen (2007) aptly observes that:

> In the present circumstances children who receive primary education in Amharic are at a distinct advantage in the State because Amharic is the de facto societal lingua franca and the [federal] official working language of Ethiopia. Achieving second language fluency in Amharic is necessary for students continuing in education, and the wider societal importance of Amharic, moreover, in accessing economic opportunities is not understood within the context of attempts to produce equity (p.70).

Finally, selecting only one federal working language in multilingual society like Ethiopia, would not evidently promote the rights of the natives and non-natives equally. Commenting on the post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa's official multi-

lingualism, Young (1998:18) argues that "citizens seeking upward mobility will therefore need mastery of three languages (their vernacular, the lingua franca and the official European language)". Indeed, language determines the upward mobility of citizens. In Ethiopia too, federal language policy affects participations in bureaucracy, parliamentary debates, language of courts and media, schools under federal jurisdiction, and others (Abera, 2009; see also Milkessa, 2011). For instance, the following table shows the Federal Government employment composition of ethnic groups.

Table 1: Federal Government's Permanent Employees by Ethnic Groups (2003-2008)

Ethnic groups	2003		2004		2006		2007		2008		Averag (2003-8)
		%		%		%	Number	%		%	%
Amhara	23964	52.65	25141	54.44	24753	46.85	28539	50.15	28669	50.29	50.88
Oromo	8149	17.90	8719	18.88	9206	17.42	10103	17.75	10434	18.30	18.05
Tigrayan	3423	7.52	2968	6.43	3533	6.69	4951	8.70	4439	7.79	7.43
Guraghe	2148	4.75	2101	4.56	2222	4.21	2425	4.26	2433	4.27	4.41
Walaitta	464	1.02	533	1.15	687	1.30	779	1.37	829	1.45	1.26
Sidama	175	0.38	166	0.36	206	0.39	223	0.39	234	0.41	0.38
Somali	53	0.12	64	0.14	47	0.09	54	0.09	66	0.12	0.11
Not stated	5337	11.73	4607	9.95	10152	19.22	7692	13.52	7441	13.05	13.49
Others	1801	3.96	1879	4.07	2027	3.83	2145	3.77	2467	4.33	4.00
Total	45514	100	46184	100	52833	100	56911	100	57012	100	100

*I could not find the 2005 personnel statistical report.Source: Ministry of Civil Service, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008 (Computed by Milkessa, 2011)

According to the government reports, on average, the Amhara access the Federal Government employment by 50%, while the Oromo, the largest ethnic group, access it by 18%. This is the result of the Amharic-only language policy of the Federal Government. As we can see, the Tigrayans and the Guraghe are also employed at the rate higher than the comparative share of their population. The federal share of the Somali and that of the Sidama are at a severe stage. With regard to the civil service participation of the Somalis, the above table shows

that they are at critical juncture to disappear from the federal participation at all. Whatever the cause might be, this marginalisation speaks loud. It would be good to take a look at the experience of Malaysian Federation. In addition to "the goal of eradicating poverty in general," the renewed goal of Malaysia's New Economic Plan (NEP) was that "by 1990 Malays and a smaller number of other indigenous peoples [who continued to fall behind] would own and manage a higher percentage of firms and would be employed in the various sectors of the economy in proportion to their percentage of the population. This resulted in new employment quotas in the public sector and pressure in the private sector to hire Malays, as well as government assistance programmes and higher quotas for education" (cited in Jenkins, 1998:195). In the case of Pakistan, Jenkins observed that "in terms of reducing the inequality of regional representation in the bureaucracy and educational institutions, the quota system has been quite effective" (ibid:205).

In general, the discriminatory linguistic formula of the federal language choice from the outset has now resulted in seemingly discriminatory employment opportunities and outcomes. The seldom idea claiming that 'the marginalisation of the Oromo in the Federal Civil Service institutions is not discrimination by the state unless they [the speakers of the largest language of the country] speak the working language of the federal government' is not convincing much due to the following reasons: I have clearly argued that the choice of Amharic as an exclusive language of the Federal Government of Ethiopia is a continuation of past linguistic imposition. First, in making a judgement on the federal employment outcomes, one should take into account the "bad historical" connotations – language of national oppression or colonialism as one may prefer to call— associated with Amharic particularly in non-Amharic speaking regions such as Oromia. Second, no affirmative actions were constitutionally stipulated and offered to those historically disadvantaged languages following the downfall of the monolingual government of Derg. Third, it is very difficult to ignore competing languages such as Afaan Oromo and at the same time expect the speakers of this language to learn other languages such as Amharic and integrate into the federal institutions. Fourth, upon the collapse of the Derg regime, the civil service employment of

the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), which later became the Federal Government, was not seriously reconfigured and reinstituted to make those shared civil service institutions reflect the ethno-linguistic character of the country. Finally, due to the unfortunate status assumed by Afaan Oromo at the federal level, students especially from Oromia, for instance, tended to have continued to be reluctant to learn Amharic as a mode of resistance to the federal language imposition despite the continuous efforts the Government of Oromia has made to change the perceptions of the students to learn and use Amharic. There are indicators in the Oromia Region that many students are reluctant to learn Amharic, which they associate with the past *naftegna* rule (Oromia Education Bureau cited in Milkessa, 2011). Of course, you can advise the students to be smart and learn more languages [which in fact is good for the students], but also you cannot force them to learn a language. But at the same time, the justifications of the students hold water due to the reasons listed above. My whole arguments refute the unfair choice of Amharic from the outset as the sole working language of the Federal Government of Ethiopia. One must be clear: The Federal Government of Ethiopia cannot afford to continue marginalizing Oromo and other nationalities in its institutions on language grounds. In conclusion, if some nationalities are underrepresented or underserved at the federal level due to language problems, the very purpose of the federation –shared-rule –might be threatened.

Furthermore, Abera Degefa (2009) observes that English has, without any constitutional ground, tended to become a *de facto* working language of the federal institutions. It is also argued that "English has gotten an increasing power over Amharic in Education since the introduction of modern education, and in business, since the enthronement of the incumbent political power" (Amlaku, 2010:1). It is practically true that the contemporary education policy of Ethiopia provides that "English will be the medium of instruction for secondary and higher education" (Article 3.5, MoE, 1994). Thus, the importance of English as a means of communication appears to have been rising than ever before among the literate citizens of Ethiopia as higher educational institutions expand rapidly.

The federal language policy of Ethiopia could further be critiqued for the constitution does not select a specific language for the conduct of intergovernmental relations (IGR) in the federation both vertically and horizontally. The practice, however, shows that Amharic has been a *de facto* working language of IGR. For instance, the Indian Constitution identifies a working language for IGR: "The language for the time being authorized for use in the Union for official purposes shall be the official language for communication between one state and another and between a state and the Union" (Article 346, 1950).

In conclusion, the federal language policy seems to have brought mixed results: (1) The concept of 'working language' seems to have been deliberately chosen to imply 'a mere means of communication' or to imply all Ethiopian languages are equally national languages; (2) One language choice (using its historical hegemonic status as a special criterion) in a multilingual society would not serve all citizens equally and fairly.

5.2 Regional and Sub-regional States' Language Policy Decentralization

Pursuant to Article 5(3) which offers member states the opportunity to choose their own working languages, and is reinforced by Article 39 (2) which states that every nationality of Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language (FDRE Constitution, 1995), the constituent units of the federation have adopted their respective regional language policies in their respective regional constitutions. The application of the current regional language policy, however, precedes the official declaration of the federal constitution as discussed above. Thus, one may argue that the new constitution of 1995 only legalized the *de facto* regional language policies of the Transnational Government of Ethiopia.

According to the following table (Table 2), regions recognized to be constituted of diverse linguistic groups selected Amharic as their working languages for convenience purposes. There are five regional states which opted for non-Amharic

working languages. Harari remains the only bilingual regional government in Ethiopia. The federal constitution mentions nothing about language policy of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa; however, both city charters select solely Amharic as their working languages despite their multilingual and multicultural compositions. In terms of language of education and media, Dire Dawa is trilingual, whereas Addis Ababa remains monolingual.

Table 2: Member States' Working Languages

Region	Member States	Working Language/s
1	Tigray	Tigrigna
2	Afar	Afar
3	Amhara	Amharic
4	Oromia	Afaan Oromo
5	Somali	Somali
6	Benishangul-Gumuz	Amharic
7	SNNPR	Amharic
8	Gambela Peoples	Amharic
9	Harari People	Harari and Afaan Oromo

As far as sub-regional language policy is concerned, different working languages are adopted at the special zonal and *woreda* levels, especially, in the South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela and Amhara Regions. For instance, Article 5 of the revised Constitution of the SNNPR (2001) provides that "All languages in the region shall enjoy equal state recognition. Amharic should be the official working language of the regional state. Zones and special *woreda*s may determine their respective working languages in their own councils." Accordingly, some of the SNNPR sub-regional working languages include, "Sidama Afo, Kambata, Kafinoono, Hadiyyisa, Gamonso, Gofa, Wolayta, Dawro, Silti, and Gedeo" (Alelign Aschale, 2013:3). Therefore, Amharic is not the only working language of the region, but it is the only working language of the regional government.

The practice of language policy of a given jurisdiction should be analysed in terms of its effects on school medium of instruction, languages of administrations, councils, courts, media and others. For instance, different regional states have freely chosen different scripts for usages. For the languages including Amharic, Tigrigna, Gurage, and Harari, the *Ge'ez* script has been selected, whereas for the languages such as Afaan Oromo, Somali, Sidama, Afar, Gamo, and many others, the Latin alphabet has been preferred.

The languages of primary schools in Ethiopia have been diversified as a result of the education and training policy that endorsed primary education to be given in nationalities' languages (MoE, 2002). As a result of this policy, "there are twenty one languages, excluding Amharic, which are currently used as media of instruction at primary school level" (Alelign Aschale, 2013:3). In this regard, except for Tigray and Addis Ababa, all regional states and city administration of Dire Dawa provide primary schools in more than one nationality language (Heugh et al., 2007). This means that the media of instruction for Tigray and Addis Ababa public primary schools are only Tigrigna and Amharic respectively. Cohen (2007) argued that

> Urban populations have rejected the use of Regional languages in favour of using Amharic as a medium of instruction for primary education. This tendency has been most pronounced in Oromiya where many of the larger urban centres in Ethiopia are located. The capital towns of geopolitical Zones in SNNPR have also decided to provide primary education in Amharic and local languages, often in different schools, thus giving a choice of media of instruction to the residents. Zones and special *wereda*s in SNNPR, including Bench Maji and South Omo Zones and Alaba special *wereda*, selected Amharic as the medium of instruction in an attempt to secure greater Regional and national integration for their inhabitants. In Amhara Region, Oromiya Zone chose to use Afaan Oromoo and Agew Awi Zone selected Awgni as media of instruction.

Rural *woreda*s in Oromia such as Shirka *Woreda* has six primary schools which teach in Amharic medium of instruction. For that matter, Oromia primary schools teaching in Amharic, located in 16 zones and 12 cities across the Region, total to 1006 (one thousand and six) (Oromia Education Bureau, 2015). This makes seven per cent of the primary schools in the Region.

Amharic is supposed to be delivered as a subject everywhere in Ethiopia because it is the sole working language of the Federal Government. As a result of this, except in Amhara Region, Addis Ababa City Administration and other cities where only Amharic and English (bilingualism) are taught, all regions and Dire Dawa have been practicing a policy of trilingual education provision (mother tongue, Amharic and English). This shows that citizens in some areas are required to learn only two languages while in others they had to learn three languages.

In addition to education, regional governments, special zones and *woreda* administrations have selected their own working languages (of councils, civil services, media, and courts). Moreover, the regional governments' working languages share airtime from the federal broadcasting media such as EBC. The overall impact of the new regional language policy of Ethiopia since 1991 is that non-Amharic languages got the space to develop resulting in radical change in the distribution of major mother tongues. For instance, according to the 1994 Census, Amharic was the largest mother tongue (32.70%) followed by Afaan Oromo (31.58%); however, the 2007 census showed a shift of linguistic order which made Afaan Oromo the largest mother tongue in Ethiopia (33.8%) followed by Amharic (29.3%), Somali (6.2%), Tigrigna (5.9%), Sidama (4.0%) (CSA, 1994; 2007). In fact, today, the working language of the Federal Government is not the largest mother tongue of Ethiopia. In conclusion, Ethiopia retained monolingualism for the jurisdiction of the centre (continuity), while promoting regional language policy pluralism (radical change from the past).

5.3 Discourses on Federalism and Politics of Language

The contemporary language policy of Ethiopia enjoys supports as well as suffers critiques. The overall arguments could be categorized under four contending perspectives. The first one embraces those who advocate the monolingual nature of the Federal Government but oppose the language policies of the regions particularly where Amharic is not a working language. This group accuses the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) of dividing the country along what they call *zer* (race), *neged* (tribe), *gosa* (clan), language, and ethnicity. They recommend geographical federalism rather than the current ethno-linguistic-based federalism and tend to focus on the role of Amharic as a symbol of overarching identity of Ethiopia. They suggest that the language be at least a co-official language of Member States (Yared, 2009; Yonatan, 2009). They believe that "if Amharic was placed firmly at the core of the education system it is likely that greater equity would be produced" (Cohen, 2007: 71). The extreme aspect of this approach even contends against the use of Latin alphabets. In general, this approach tends to promote a one-language-for-all policy. Basically, this is an aspiration of everyone who wants to become a nation-state (Hobsbawm, 1996). Hobsbawm had to warn this saying, "Let us be clear: in the absence of a willingness to change languages, national linguistic homogeneity in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual areas can be achieved only by mass compulsion, expulsion, or genocide" (ibid: 1071).

The second perspective includes forces that are largely comfortable with the current regional language policies but accuse the EPRDF Government of selecting only one working language of the Federal Government unreasonably, which they consider a continuity of Amharic linguistic hegemony (Aberra, 2009). Those holding this view claim that unless equality of languages is guaranteed, it is difficult to guarantee equality of the groups who speak them (Cohen, 2006). They raise concrete instances of underrepresentation of non-Amharic speakers in the federal bureaucracies due to problems of federal monolingualism. They, there-

fore, oppose federal monolingualism and recommend other competing non-Amharic languages such as Afaan Oromo to become a co-working language (Aberra Degefa, 2009). Mengistu Arefaine (2014: 41) argues that:

> Even if the idea of adopting multilingualism at the federal level may not be popular among the speakers of the dominant language by providing many excuses, at least Afaan Oromo, Tigrigna, Somali should be adopted, in addition to Amharic, as working languages of the federal government. However, *if making such additional languages working languages of the whole federation creates difficulties*, they can be at least working languages of the federal government in dealing with the states using these languages.

Mengistu opts for multilingual federal government. However, it is not clear what he means by "making such additional languages working languages of the whole federation". As is known, the whole federation is equal to Ethiopia. Even Amharic is not the working language of the whole federation. In fact, such recommendation seems to have come from the usual confusion between the working language of Ethiopia and of the federal government.

The third perspective makes an argument for a language policy secessionism. This group, usually known as 'colonial thesis', continued to view Amharic as a 'colonial language', and recommends ethno-linguistic total independence (Asafa Jalata, 2010).

The last one is the ruling party approach which remains content with the current federal as well as regional language policies. It claims that the current regional language policy was adopted as a remedy to the historical linguistic injustices and opposes the quest for multilingual federal government. The group rejects this because of lack of national consensus and the financial costs associated with it. Yet there are officials who mistake working language of the federal government

with working language of the country to resist the quest for federal multilingualism. It seems that the ruling party is reacting to some of these critiques. Some of the websites of federal institutions have recently started to report their activities in four languages: English, Amharic, Afaan Oromo and Tigrigna. If these developments suggest the future prospect of a pluralist language policy at the federal level, then, the second competing viewpoint discussed above will prove successful.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that Ethiopian federalism has essentially changed the old ideological orientation of assimilationist language policy of the country. This is because of the equal constitutional recognition extended to all languages of Ethiopia as national languages and the concomitant freedom given to regional states to choose their respective working languages. Practically, Amharic is no more the sole official language of Ethiopia; it instead is the procedural language of the federal institutions. Now, there are several working languages of Ethiopia – the Federal Government working language of Ethiopia (Amharic), Tigray Regional Government working language of Ethiopia (Tigrigna), Afar Regional Government working language of Ethiopia (Afar), Oromia Regional Government working language of Ethiopia (Afaan Oromo), Somali Regional Government working language of Ethiopia (Somali language), Harari Regional Government working languages of Ethiopia (Harari and Afaan Oromo), and the other four (Amhara, SNNPR, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambela) regional governments working languages of Ethiopia (Amharic). The federal working language (Amharic) is at the same time a working language for Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa City Administrations. There are also several special zonal and district working languages of Ethiopia. Thus, the practice of language policy of Ethiopia since the introduction of federalism has resulted in one federal, five regional and many zonal and district working languages of Ethiopia. Therefore, Ethiopia has several working languages.

From the historical comparative policy analysis, the current Ethiopian language policy could be placed between continuity and change: continuity due to the retention of Amharic as the sole working language at the centre without any affirmative action extended to those historically disadvantaged languages, on the one hand, and radical transformation from the past due to the pluralist sub-national language policy, on the other. Amharic has been retained at the federal level on "accident of history" account. This could neither be sustainably taken as a democratic guiding principle in the choice of working language in multilingual federations nor be considered as an act to rectify historical linguistic injustices perpetrated against non-Amharic languages in the past. From comparative international experiences, Ethiopia's choice of the federal working language seems unreasonable and potentially arbitrary for the simple fact that, now, Amharic is no more the largest mother tongue of Ethiopia.

The finding shows that Ethiopia has not yet prepared a comprehensive codified language policy document. Like in any other multilingual countries, in Ethiopia too, language functions as a symbol of identity, means of communication and thinking (working language is also a part), and nation-building purpose. English language remained a *de facto* working language of the Federal Government. This paper finally suggests that democratic, reasonable and fair language policy be considered for language choices in multilingual federations. Especially the linguistic demographic factor and international multilingual experiences might be helpful for the future language planning of Ethiopia both at the federal and regional levels in order to respond to some of the compelling demands. The concept of working language should still be understood correctly; and the working language of the conduct of IGR needs to be legalized. If Ethiopia selects, for instance, additional two or three languages as co-working languages of the federal government, that does not imply in any way that citizens should learn all the four working languages as the working language policy experiences of multilingual countries show. Besides their mother tongue, citizens may get the opportunity to learn one more indigenous language from among the working languages as may be required by the constitution or other law. It means that all citizens would learn

only three languages (mother tongue, one working language and English) as majority of Ethiopian citizens have already been doing since the coming to power of the current regime. Having two or more federal working languages would not only enhance the right to obtain government services through the medium of one's own language and improve participation in the federal government, but also upgrade horizontal inter-regional social mobility. A federal language policy reform would in turn contribute to the success of language policy reform in regions where linguistic minorities demand linguistic accommodation. In a nutshell, Ethiopian federalism itself must, above all, be seen as a process.

References

Aalen, Lovise, (2002), *Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000.* Michelsen Institute of Development Studies and Human Rights.

Aberra Dagefa, (2009), 'Principles Guiding the Choice of Working Languages in Multi-lingual Societies: Some Reflections on the Language Policy of Ethiopia'. In Tsegaye Regassa (ed.). *Issues of Federalism in Ethiopia: Towards An Inventory, Ethiopian Constitutional Law Series*, Vol.2, Addis Ababa University.

Abraham Demoz, (1990), "Language, Identity and Peace in Ethiopia and the Horn". In *International Conference on the Horn of Africa 4th 1989*. New York: Centre for the Study of the Horn of Africa.

Alelign Aschale, (2013), "Language Policy and Practices in Ethiopia from Post1991." Addis Ababa University. Addis Ababa

Amlaku B. Eshetie, (2010), "Language Policies and the Role of English in Ethiopia." A Paper Presented at the 23rd Annual Conference of IATEFL, BESIG (19-21 Nov. 2010), Bielefeld, Germany.

Asafa Jalata, (2007), *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethno-national Conflict, 1868- 1992*. Boulder and London: Lynner Reinner Publishers.

_____, (2010), Urban Centers in Oromia: Consequences of Spatial Concentration of Power in Multinational Ethiopia, *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 39-74.

Assefa Fiseha, (2012), Ethiopia's Experiment in Accommodating Diversity: 20 Years' Balance Sheet, *Regional and Federal Studies*, 22:4, 435-473

Bahru Zewde, (2002), *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist*

Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century, Eastern African Studies. Oxford: James Currey.

Bender, Lionel, (1985), 'Ethiopian Language Policy 1974-1981'. In *Anthropological Linguistics* (Vol.27, No.3) PP. 276-277.

Boran, Idil, (2001), Autonomy as a Remedy for Language Conflict: Negotiating Territoriality and Identity. *Language Problems and Language Planning* Vol. 25, No.3, 237–257.

Capotorti, F., (1991), 'Study on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minority.' UN Special Rapporteur, New York.

Cohen, Gideon PE, (2006), 'The Development of Regional and Local Languages in Ethiopia's Federal System'. In David Turton (ed.). *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, Oxford.

_____, (2007), "Mother tongue and other tongue in primary education: Can equity be achieved with the use of different languages?". In Heywel Caleman (ed.). *Language and Development: Africa and Beyond.* Proceedings of the 7th International Language and Development Conference, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 26-28 October 2005. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: British Council. 62-75

Connolly, W. E, (2005), *Pluralism*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press

Connor, Walker, (1972), Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying? *World Politics*, (Vol. 24, No. 3).

De Varennes, Fernand, (2012), "International and Comparative Perspectives in the Use of Official Languages: Models and Approaches for South Africa", Draft Report. Afrikaanse Taalraad.

_____,(2006), "Language Rights of Minorities and Increasing Tensions in the People's Republic of China". In *Asia-Pacific Journal on*

_____, (1994), 'Language and Freedom of Expression in International Law.' In *Human Rights Quarterly*, 16, 163- 186. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/762415.

Deutsch, Karl W., (1953), Nationalism and Social Communication. Cambridge: Technology.

Dirribi Demissie, (2011), *Oromo Wisdom in Black Civilization*. Finfinne: Finfinne Printing and Publishing S.C.

Donham, Donald, (2002), 'Old Abyssinia and the new Ethiopian empire: Themes in social history'. In Donham and Wendy James (eds.). *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia, Essays in History and Social Anthropology.* Oxford: James Currey, 2002.

Eastman, C., (1984), 'Language, Ethnic Identity and Change'. In John Edwards (ed.). *Linguistic Minorities, Policies and Pluralism.* London: Academic Press.

Edwards, John, (1984), 'Introduction'. In John Edwards (ed.). *Linguistic Minorities, Policies and Pluralism.* London: Academic Press.

Elazar, Daniel, (1987), *Exploring Federalism*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.

_____ (1995) From Statism to Federalism: A Paradigm Shift. *Publius* (Volume 25, Issue 2).

Fishman, Joshua A., (1977), 'Language and Ethnicity'. In Howard Giles (ed.). *Language, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Relations.* London: Academic Press.

_____, (2001), 'Why is it so hard to save a threatened language?. In J.A. Fishman (ed.). *Can threatened languages be saved? Revising language shift, revisited: A 21st century perspective.* Toronto: Multilingual Matters.

Gebre Hishe, (2008), 'Language Use and Identity of Children Born to the Tigrigna Speaking Community Living in Addis Ababa' (M.A thesis, Addis Ababa University).

Government of Bolivia, (2009), Bolivia (Plurinational State of)'s Constitution, 2009. Sucre.

Government of Canada, (1969), Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Canada.

Government of Ethiopia, (1992), 'A Proclamation to Provide for the Establishment of National/Regional Self-Governments. Proclamation No.7', *Transitional Negarit Gazeta*. Addis Ababa.

_____, (1995), 'Constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia'. *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, Proclamation No. 1, Addis Ababa.

_____, (2015), Oromia National Regional States. Reports of the GTP I. June 2015.

_____, (1999), The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia. Results at Country Level, Vol. II. Analytical Report. Central Statistic Authority, Addis Ababa.

_____, (1994), The Education and Training Policy, Ministry of Education. Addis Ababa.

_____, (2002), 'The Education and Training Policy and its Implementation' Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa.

_____, (2003), "A Proclamation on Ethiopian Nationality" *Ferderal Negarit Gazeta*, Proclamation No. 378/2003. Addis Ababa.

_____, (2003), Manual for Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2003. Addis Ababa.

_____, (2010), The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia. Results at Country Level. Analytical Report. Central Statistical

Agency, Addis Ababa.

_____, (1994), 'Minutes of the Ethiopian Constituent Assembly,' Vol. 2, Minutes No.11, (Addis Ababa, Tikimt 30 to Hidar 7, 1987 E.C) 000010-000026.

_____, (1955), 'The 1955 Revised Constitution of the Empire of Ethiopia, *Negarit Gazeta*. Addis Ababa.

_____, (1987), The People's Democratic Republic Ethiopia Constitution, *Negarit Gazetta*, 47th year No.1 Proclamation No. 1 of 1987, Addis Ababa.

_____,(1944), 'Regulations on the Establishment of Missionaries,' *Negarit Gazete*, Decree No.3 of 1944, Addis Ababa.

Government of India, (1950), The Indian Constitution, which came into effect on 26 January 1950. New Delhi.

Government of South Africa, (1996), The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, approved by Constitutional Court (CC) on 4 December 1996 and took effect on 4 February 1997.

Heugh, K., C. Benson, B. Bogale and M. Yohannes, (2007), Final Report: Study on Medium of Instruction in Primary Schools in Ethiopia, http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/researchoutputs/view/2926 (accessed 20 December 2014).

Hobsbawm Eric (1996) 'Language, Culture, and National Identity'. *Social Research*, Vol. 63, No.4.

Jenkins, Laura, (1998), "Preferential Policies for Disadvantaged Ethnic Groups: Employment and Education". In Crawford Young (ed.). *Ethnic Diversity and Public Policy: A Comparative Inquiry* UK: Palgrave Publishers Ltd

Kymlicka, Will, (1995), *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Lagerspetz, Eerik, (1998), 'On Language Rights'. In *Journal of Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* (Vol.1, No.2).

McNab, Christine, (1989), 'Language Policy and Language Practice: Implementation Dilemmas in Ethiopian Education', PhD Dissertation. Stockholm: University of Stockholm.

Mekuria Bulcha, (1997), 'The Politics of Linguistic Homogenization in Ethiopia and the Conflict over the Status of Afaan Oromoo'. In *African Affairs* (Vol.96, No.384).

Mengistu Arefaine, (2014), "The Language of Ethiopian Federalism: Language Policy, Group Identity and Individual Rights", *Journal of Ethiopian Federalism* (Vo.2, No.1).

Merera Gudina, (2003), *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000.* Netherlands: Shaker Publishing.

Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, (1999), *The Horn of Africa: Conflict and Poverty*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

Meyer, Ronny, (2006), "Amharic as lingua franca in Ethiopia". In *LISSAN – Journal of African Languages and Linguistics*, volume XX, no. 1/2, 2006.

Milkessa Midega, (2011), "Ethiopia's Choice of Federal Working Language and Its Implications for Non-Amharic Languages: The Case of Afaan Oromoo". M.A. thesis. AAU.

Mitra, Subrata K., (2002), 'Language and Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge'. In *International Social Science Journal* (Vol. 53, lssue 167).

Mputubwele, Makim M., (2003), 'The Zairian Language Policy and Its Effect on the Literatures in National Languages'. In *Journal of Black Studies* (Vol.34 No.2).

Patten, Alan and W. Kymlicka, (2003), 'Introduction: Language Rights and Political Theory: Context, Issues, and Approaches.' In Will Kymlicka

and Alan Patten (eds.). *Language and Political Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Paulston, Christina B., (1997), 'Language Policies and Language Rights'. In *Annual Review of Anthropology* (Vol. 26).

Pool, J., (1991), The Official Language Problem. *The American Political Science Review*, 82, 495-514. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1963171.

Reaume, Denise G., (1997), *The Intrinsic Value of Language: Justifying the Right to Comprehensive Official Language Use in the Courts*. Toronto: University of Toronto.

Ricento, Thomas, (ed.) (2006), 'Theoretical Perspectives in Language Policy: An Overview.' In Thomas Ricento (ed.). *An Introduction to Language Policy Theory and Method.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Schiffman, Harod, (2005), "Language policy: introductory remarks" retrieved on September 18, 2005 from http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/polintro/polintro.html.

Smith, Lahra, (2008), 'The Politics of Contemporary Language Policy in Ethiopia'. In *Journal of Developing Societies* (Vol.24, No.2).

SNNPRS, (2001), "Revised Constitution of Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional National State." Hawassa.

Teshale Tibabu, (1995), *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896-1974.* Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, Inc.

Turgeon, Luc and Alain G. Gagnon, (2013), 'The Politics of Representative Bureaucracy in Multilingual States: A Comparison of Belgium, Canada and Switzerland.' In *Regional and Federal Studies* (Vol. 23, No. 4).

UNESCO, (2005), 'Education for All. The Quality Imperative'. EFA Global Monitoring Report, Paris.

Walelign Makonnen, (1969), 'On the Question of Nationalities in Ethio-

pia'. In *Struggle* (Vol. 2) Addis Ababa.

Watts, Ronald L., (1981), 'Federalism, Regionalism and Political Integration'. In David M. Cameron (ed.). *Regionalism and Supranationalism: Challenges and Alternatives to the Nation-state in Canada and Europe*. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Weinstein, Brian, (1983), *The Civic Tongue: Political Consequences of Language Choices*. New York and London: Longman Inc.

Williams, Colin H. (1984) 'More than Tongue can Tell: Linguistic Factors in Ethnic Separatism'. In John Edwards (ed.). *Linguistic Minorities, Policies and Pluralism*. London: Academic Press.

Yared Legesse, (2009), Linguistic Regimes in Multinational Federations: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective. In Tsegaye Regassa (ed.). *Issues of Federalism in Ethiopia: Towards an Inventory. Ethiopian Constitutional Law Series*, Vol.2, Addis Ababa University Press.

Yonatan Fiseha, (2009), A Tale of two Federations: Comparing Language Rights Regimes in South Africa and Ethiopia. In Tsegaye Regassa (ed.). *Issues of Federalism in Ethiopia: Towards an Inventory. Ethiopian Constitutional Law Series*, Vol.2, Addis Ababa University Press.

Young, Crawford, (1998), "Ethnic Diversity and Public Policy: An Overview". In Crawford Young (ed.). *Ethnic Diversity and Public Policy: A Comparative Inquiry* UK: Palgrave PublishersLtd.