

# Multi-dialect Language Use and Management with Reference to Gurage Language(s)

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined possibilities to use and manage multi-dialect language with reference to Gurage language. This study evaluated the perspectives of Gurage people towards dialect variations effects on its development, challenges in its use, ways to improve standardization, and the optimum conditions to use the language. To achieve these objectives mixed research methods were used. Quantitative data was obtained from questionnaires using stratified sampling. Qualitative data was obtained based on purposive sampling through interviews and focus group discussion. The data analysis was both descriptive and interpretative. The findings show that the dialect variation influenced the use of the language. They also revealed that there are three possible ways to utilize the language for various purposes.

**Keywords:** multi-dialect language, language use, language management, Gurage

## INTRODUCTION

Gurage language refers to a Semitic language that is spoken in Gurage zone which is unique in its dialects. The language of Gurage is called Guragina, which has about thirteen varieties ((Leslau, 1951; Hetzron, 1972). The language has thirteen dialects; namely, Chaha, Ezha, Endegegn, Ener, Inor, Gumer, Gura, Geyto, Meskan, Muhir, Dobi also called Gogot, Kistane also called Sodo or Aymelel, and Mesmes. Mesmes is a dead language whose speakers have shifted partly to the languages of Endegegn and Hadiya (a Cushitic language). Majority of the dialect groups are intelligible while the some there are not (Gutt, 1980, p. 58). Gurage language is called Guragina by its native speakers. This language is marginalized in its use due to its variations. It is not used for education, media and official purpose. In the past, Gurage people were insisted on to have high prestige for Amharic, the wider communication language in the country. They were influenced to have low esteem for their own language. Recently, however, the language-in-education policy of Ethiopia set up possibilities to use local languages. However, still Gurage does not get such opportunity. In other words, it is not used as MOI at elementary schools, written and official language in the community.

According to the CSA (2007, p. 80), the number of Gurage speakers is 1.8 million who live in fourteen administrative districts commonly known as Woreda and two town administrations in the Gurage Zone within the SNNPR. As the Gurage land is densely populated, many Garages migrate to urban areas for work particularly for trading. Thus, many young and adult Gurages are bilingual in Amharic, the language of wider communication in Ethiopia, and in Gurage, the local language of the community. Therefore, they seek to increase their fluency in Amharic since it is the best vehicle for pursuing opportunities elsewhere in the country. This makes the use of Gurage is limited in the community.

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There are also constraints in the use of Gurage for education and media because of its varieties. There is, besides, a serious language shift to Amharic in the community. For illustration, during Menelik era it was hard to get Amharic speakers in the community. But nowadays every person shifts to Amharic which is the wider communication language in the urban areas of the country. Linguistic diversity within Gurage posed another challenge to use Gurage as MOI in schools. Gurage has a couple of dialects which are mutually intelligible and unintelligible features (Gutt, 1997, p. 512). This had serious implications for using Gurage in education. Standard Gurage is not based on any of the actually occurring dialects. The study also examined the connection between language development and beliefs about the link between language and nation in Gurage. It also examines in what means Gurage dialects are going to be used in education in any optimum conditions. The problems and prosperities will be examined in the use of various alternatives in the utilization of the language.

This study puts attention to all stakeholders on language choice and practice in Gurage Zone. It also focuses on language related problems during modernization and standardization of Gurage. Finally the study strives to contribute on the language in education planning and policy to improve the function of Gurage. It furthermore describes the linguistic variables in the community. It looks specifically at issues such as the Gurage language varieties spoken in the zone and their application in linguistic situations.

A study conducted by Tiglu and Chernet (2018, p. 880) deals with Gurage Language Attitude and Status. This research finally shows that though the people have positive attitude towards their local language while its status is very low. It implies that it is crucial to work on language planning activities in order to preserve the language. Fekede (2014, p. 9) also shows that there are challenges in the inter-communication in the groups Gurage speech community. The current study, nevertheless, gives a due attention how the community shall use the language in education, media and official purpose in near future.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall objective of this study is to find out **solutions on** multi-dialect language use and management with reference to Gurage Language(s). To this end the study will attempt to:

- Examine the perspectives of Gurage people towards their language
- Look into challenges in use of Gurage as MOI in a multidialectal context
- Scrutinize ways to improve the status, standardization and promotion of Gurage
- Identify the optimum conditions of using in Gurage in education, media and offices in the zone.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Language is a sensible and emblematic component in nation-building, economic development, and political participation. In attempting to conduct a study on language planning and policy in the Gurage Zone, the current study incorporates several models. The framework of language planning and policy is developing for decades by incorporating ideas from various disciplines, particularly from sociolinguistics and applied linguistics (Wee, 2011, p. 16). Language planners made enormous achievements through models of LP based on problem identification, agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. For instance, Rubin (1971, p. 218) formulated a LP model which embraces: (i) fact-finding, (ii) policy formulation, (iii) implementation, and (iv) evaluation.

Ruiz's (1984) language orientations theories (language as a resource model) are given a due emphasis on the process of language planning and policy implementation. Scholars need to defend the position that languages are natural resources and that ethnic groups have the right to maintain their languages, cultures and beliefs. Furthermore, Ricento (2006, p. 17), Chumbow (1987, p. 18), Skutnabb-Kangas (2010, p. 213) and Kamwangamalu (1997, p. 235) support the position that African languages have to be valued, and that their speakers need to experience them being used in formal and prestigious contexts such as education, administration, media and business.

On the basis for this framework, this study is grounded on models of corpus planning, status planning and language acquisition planning (Cooper, 1989, p. 31). In other words, the study tried to address issues of language use, needs of language users and language development in a multilingual community as a social construct that may involve the discursive production of a language planning and policy (Blommaert, 1996a, p.

185; Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003, p. 26). The study also incorporates status planning which includes recognition by government and the importance of one language in relation to others in its functions (Kembo-Sure & Webb, 2000, p. 10). Finally, acquisition planning is intended for increasing the numbers of speakers of a language through education. It influences the distribution of language users, and typically improves opportunities to learn, maintain and use the language (Cooper 1983, p. 46).

Spolsky (2004, p. 198) associates language policy with “a social group, ranging from a family to an institution to a geographical or political setting.” Moreover, Cooper (1989, p. 35) and Rubin (1971, p. 219) mention that the practice of LP can be applied effectively by grassroots activists, teachers in classrooms, care takers in homes and even individuals who are concerned about their own linguistic usage and behavior. In order to evaluate the LP process, it is appropriate to take into consideration linguistic and nonlinguistic aspects of language use in the respective community for the ongoing development (Rubin, 1983, p. 333).

However, if linguistic minorities do not learn the dominant language in a multilingual society, then they will suffer from economic and social inequality. Demonstrating this problem, Rubin (1971, p. 218) defined LP as the pursuit of “solutions to language problems through decisions about alternative goals, means, and outcomes to solve these problems.” In short, this study makes use of models of LP and policy from different researchers.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to conduct a study on multi-dialect language use and management with reference to Gurage language(s), a mixed research design was used. I believe that it is relevant and appropriate to use this design which mingles qualitative and quantitative designs to obtain adequate information on the language use and management of a community. Data were collected by interviewing various people who include administrators, language experts, teachers, students and parents. In addition to interviews, questionnaires were administered to all the above-mentioned research participants. The data in this study were also gathered through observation and focus group discussion.

### Research Setting and Population Sampling

The data were collected during field trips in Gurage zone which is divided into 14 districts and two town administrations. In this study, the population comprised of students, parents, teachers, language experts and administrators. Representative samples from each target group were selected in all the 12 administrative districts of the zone to participate in the study. In this study, stratified random sampling was used to select the informants from the administrative districts of the Gurage Zone. A sample size of 20 from the districts participated in filling the questionnaire.

### Research Instruments

#### *The questionnaire*

In this study the questionnaire was used to extract data that will be embedded deep in people’s minds or within their attitudes, feelings or reactions. The subjects also forwarded their perception on the language use and management in the community in education system and other domains. It was distributed for 240 participants.

#### *The interview*

The interview method enabled me to probe vague or inadequate answers which may be given by respondents of the questionnaire. The list of questions was designed to guide the interview. All the key informant interviews were audio recorded and conducted in Amharic and Gurage. In the interview 12 educators, elders, teachers, parents and students were involved.

#### *The focus group discussion*

Focus groups, at the broadest possible level, are collective conversations or group interviews in which participants were asked about their opinions on ideas, concepts and social phenomena dialect variations, challenges in the use of Gurage language in education, media and other purposes. The focus group discussions were conducted in Wolkite and Butajira towns. The number of participants in each group was eight and ten.

**Table 1.** General Language Use in the Gurage Zone

Items		Gurage only		Amharic only		Gurage+ Amharic		English	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 What language is regularly spoken at home?	Parents	7	11.7	3	5	50	83.3		
	Teachers	9	15	4	6.7	47	78.3		
	Students	6	10	8	13.3	46	76.7		
	Officers	10	16.7	9	15	41	68.3		
2 What language is regularly spoken at school?	Parents	3	5	52	86.7	5	8.3		
	Teachers	4	6.7	42	70	8	13.3	6	10
	Students	6	10	39	65	10	16.7	5	8.3
	Officers	7	11.7	41	68.3	12	20		
3 Which language do you frequently use at offices in the zone?	Parents	3	5	51	85	6	10		
	Teachers			52	86.7	8	13.3		
	Students	2	3.3	45	75	13	21.7		
	Officers			55	91.7	5	8.5		
4 In which languages do you commonly speak to strangers?	Parents	6	10	47	78.3	7	11.7		
	Teachers	9	15	41	68.3	10	16.7		
	Students	2	3.3	48	80	10	16.7		
	Officers	6	10	41	68.3	13	21.7		

### Piloting

In this research, a pilot study was carried out to test instruments were appropriate. It was carried out in Wolkite and Butajira towns where 60 participants were randomly selected from schools and other administrative offices in the towns to allow validation of the research instruments.

### Data Analysis Procedures

Processing of collected data was both qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative methods of data processing and analysis such as tables were used. Percentages and frequencies were also used to analyze data. The data obtained from the key informants and the focus group discussion was transcribed and analyzed by categorizing in themes. The result obtained from the different instruments like the FGD, the questionnaires and the interviews which were processed qualitatively as well as quantitatively with the aid of a computer like SPSS and Open Code.

## DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

### Data from the Questionnaire

Item (1) in **Table 1** shows that the majority of the parents (83.3%) use two language side-by-side at home with their family, namely Amharic and Gurage. 11.7% of the parents use only Gurage at home, while 5% use Amharic only with their family. Similarly, 78.3% of the teachers, 76.7% of the students and 68.3% of office workers use Amharic and Gurage interchangeably to communicate at home, while only a few of them use either only Gurage or only Amharic at home with their family. This shows that the Amharic and Gurage are used interchangeably at the family level at home in the Zone. When compared with the school domain (Item 2) or administration (Item 4), Item (1) reveals that Gurage is used most frequently at home rather than in other domains. On the other hand, when compared with the data for the mother tongue indicated in **Table 1**, it can be deduced that the majority of Gurage mother tongue speakers acquired a very good command in Amharic as second language.

Item 2 in **Table 1** indicates that the majority of the respondents use Amharic in schools for communication. 86.7% of parents, 70% of the teachers, 65% of the students, and 68.3% of the officers use only Amharic in this domain. Item 3 regarding the language use in the offices show similar responses in which an overwhelming majority reports the use of Amharic only. According to item (3) in **Table 1**, the majority of the participants use only Amharic in various offices in the Gurage Zone (85% of the parents, 86.7% of the teachers, 75% of the students and 91.7% of the officers). In this domain, Gurage is almost not used at all. None of the officers or teachers but only a few students and parents indicated to use Gurage in this domain.

Furthermore, Amharic alone is the preferred language to communicate with strangers, as 78.3% of the parents, 68.3% of the teachers, 80% of the students and 68.3% of the officers indicate in item (4) of **Table 1**. This indicates that Amharic is used and practiced for diverse purposes in the Gurage zone starting from the

**Table 2.** Challenges to Use Gurage as MOI

Item		Yes		No		Uncertain		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
5	Do you think that there will face problem in the use of Gurage in MOI due to dialect differences?	Students	51	85	6	10	3	5
		Teachers	60	100				

**Table 3.** Participants' Responses on Ways to Use Gurage Dialects in education

Item		Cheha		Kistane		Wolene		Enor		If other, mention		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
6	Which dialects of Gurage are favored to be taught in the community?	Teachers	15	25	6	10	4	6.7	11	18.3	24	40
		Students	21	35	5	8.3	4	6.7	12	20	18	30
7	If your dialect group is not selected for MOI, which one is preferable for you?	Teachers	31	38.75	14	11.7	3	5	18	30		
		Students	38	63.3	9	15	6	10	14	11.7		

\*Note that these dialects are selected based on the many researchers classified them on their intelligibility into four groups which embraces Kistane, (the northern), Cheha (Western), Wolene (eastern) and Enor (peripherals to west) in this groups there are also other varieties as well

**Table 4.** Status, Standardization and Modernization of Gurage

Items		Yes		No		Uncertain		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
8	Do you think Gurage will help you in the future?	Teachers	45	75	10	16.7	5	8.3
		Students	50	83.3	4	6.7	6	10
9	Do you think Gurage courses is necessary to be offered in schools?	Teachers	55	91.7	5	8.3		
		Students	53	88.3	7	11.7		
10	Should there be radio programs in Gurage?	Teachers	50	83.3	6	10	3	5
		Students	58	96.7	2	3.3		
11	Should there be TV programs in Gurage?	Teachers	51	85	7	11.7	2	3.3
		Students	50	83.3	9	15	1	1.7

family to the public domains. The data show that English, in contrast, is not used at all for this function except some students and teachers indicated that they use in schools in classroom situation.

**Table 2**, Item (5) shows almost all the participants agreed that there will be challenges in the use of Gurage as MOI. During the focus group discussion, the participants indicate that they think that there are different local varieties in Gurage. There will be problems in use of Gurage as MOI because of the dialect variation (see Section "Challenges in Use of Gurage as MOI in a Multidialectal Context").

According to item (6), the majority which is 40% of the teachers and 30% of students are preferred their respective dialect groups which is not mentioned in the table such as Mesken, Endeganya, Enernya, Getogna, Mohirgna, Ezhigna, Gumerigna and the like. On the other hand 25% of teachers and 35% of students said that the Cheha dialect is favored dialect for schooling in the community. However, quite significant number of the participants i.e. 18.3% of teachers and 20% of students are favored Enemor to be taught in school. In the same token 11% and 12 % students preferred Kistane to be taught in schools. Finally only 10% teachers and 8.5% of students are favored Wolene to be taught in the school. On the other hand in Item (7) the participants asked their preference to use one central dialect rather than their own. The data shows that majority of teachers (38.75%) and 63.3% of students said that they need to learn the Cheha dialect as academics. More half of the students in the item suggest that they preferred other dialects to be given as an academic while others wished to learn in their respective dialects.

**Table 4** shows the participants' responses to improve the status, the function and the standardization of Gurage. In item (8), the majority of teachers (75%) and students (83.3%) think that Gurage will help them in the future. Besides, in item 9, the vast majority the participants' i.e. 88.3% of students and 91.7% of teachers agree that Gurage courses are necessary to be offered in schools. Besides, in items (10) and (11), almost all participants suggest that there should be radio and television programs in Gurage to improve the status, function and standardization of the language.

Although the majority of the respondents are of the opinion that Amharic should be continued as the official language of the Gurage Zone in item (12) of **Table 5**, there are also a number of participants who disagree to use Amharic in this function. This is because the participants think that Amharic is useful for Gurage and

**Table 5.** Attitudes to Gurage, Amharic and English

No	Item		Scale									
			Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagreed	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
12	Amharic should be continued using as the official language in the Gurage Zone	Parents	28	46.7	20	33.3			4	6.7	8	13.3
		Teachers	26	43.3	25	41.7	2	3.3	6	10	3	5
		Students	30	66.7	22	36.7	2	3.3	5	8.3	1	1.7
		Officers	25	41.7	20	33.3			7	11.7	8	13.7
13	Gurage language should be the official language of Zone	Parents	20	33.3	23	38.3	2	3.3	8	13.3	7	11.7
		Teachers	22	36.7	21	35			11	18.3	6	10
		Students	23	38.3	18	30			15	25	5	8.3
		Officers	19	31.7	17	28.3	4	6.7	14	23.3	6	10
14	Knowing Gurage is an advantage	Parents	50	83.3	8	13.3	2	3.3				
		Teachers	53	88.3	6	10	1	1.7				
		Students	58	96.7	2	3.3						
		Officers	60	100								
15	I wish to be a fluent speaker of Gurage	Parents	55	91.7	5	8.3						
		Teachers	45	75	15	25						
		Students	42	70	18	30						
		Officers	60	100								
16	Learning English is more important than learning Gurage	Parents	12	20	9	15			28	46.7	11	18.3
		Teachers	12	20	10	16.7	3	5	20	33.3	15	25
		Students	8	13.3	12	20			25	41.7	15	25
		Officers	7	11.7	8	13.3	4	6.7	19	31.7	22	36.7
17	Learning Amharic is more important than learning Gurage	Parents	6	10	1	1.7			39	65	14	23.3
		Teachers	5	8.3	3	5			43	71.7	10	16.7
		Students	3	5	2	3.3			50	83.3	5	8.3
		Officers	1	1.7	3	5			48	80	8	13.3
18	Learning Amharic is more important than learning Gurage	Parents	6	10	1	1.7			39	65	14	23.3
		Teachers	5	8.3	3	5			43	71.7	10	16.7
		Students	3	5	2	3.3			50	83.3	5	8.3
		Officers	1	1.7	3	5			48	80	8	13.3
19	It is possible to learn Gurage, Amharic and English	Parents	39	65	14	23.3			6	10	1	1.7
		Teachers	43	71.7	10	16.7			5	8.3	3	5
		Students	50	83.3	5	8.3			3	5	2	3.3
		Officers	48	80	8	13.3			1	1.7	3	5

non-Gurage speakers can use it (see Section “Status, Standardization and Modernization of Gurage”). Similarly, the vast majority of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that Gurage should be used as official language of the zone in item (13). This is for the reason that the participants believe that using Gurage in the official circumstance is one of the means to preserve and maintain it in its locality (cf.5.2.3).

In item (14) and (15), almost all respondents strongly agreed that knowing Gurage is advantageous for them and need to be fluent speaker of Gurage. On the other hand, items (16) to (17) show that all respondents have a strong desire to speak English, Amharic and Gurage. However, they do not believe that learning English or Amharic is more important than learning Gurage in items (18) and (19).

Moreover, in item (19), the vast majority of the respondents also disagreed that learning Gurage is more important than learning Amharic and English. Thus, the respondents did not give a clear preference to any of the three languages, Gurage, Amharic and English. Furthermore, they suggest that it is possible to learn Gurage, Amharic and English together in item (19). In general, **Table 4.5** can be interpreted in the way that the respondents have a positive attitude towards bi- and multilingualism without a clear preference towards a single language.

Item (20) in **Table 6** indicates that the majority of the respondents disagree with the perception that Gurage is not important for their identity, i.e. the Gurage people consider their language as vital for their identity. However, in item (21), the majority of the respondents disagree that Gurage should be an important requirement for employment in the zone. On the other hand, in item (22), they strongly agree that learning Gurage is useful for the younger generation in the community.

**Table 6.** Attitudes to the Role of Gurage for Social Life and Development

No	Item	Scale										
		Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
20	Gurage is not important for my identity	Parents			5	8.3	3	5	17	28.3	35	58.3
		Teachers	5	8.3	2	3.3	2	3.3	8	13.3	43	71.7
		Students	7	11.7	2	3.3	2	3.3	9	15	40	66.7
		Officers	6	10	5	8.3	1	1.7	7	11.7	41	68.3
21	Gurage should be compulsory for employment in the Gurage Zone	Parents	8	13.3	4	6.7	4	6.7	21	35	23	38.3
		Teachers	4	6.7	15	25	2	1.7	19	31.7	20	33.3
		Students	16	26.7	25	41.7			9	15	10	16.7
		Officers	10	16.7	12	20			20	33.3	18	30
22	Learning Gurage is useful for the younger generation of the community	Parents	41	68.3	19	31.7						
		Teachers	37	61.7	23	38.3						
		Students	39	65	21	35						
		Officers	22	36.3	38	63.3						

### Analysis and Discussion of Data from Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

This section deals with the data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions. The findings of the study were presented and discussed based on the following research questions:

- ✓ What are the perspectives of Gurage people towards the use of their language in education?
- ✓ What are challenges in use of Gurage as MOI in a multidialectal context?
- ✓ How is it possible to improve the status, standardization and modernization of Gurage?
- ✓ What are the optimum conditions of using in Gurage in education, media and offices in the zone?

#### *The perspectives of the participants towards Gurage language use*

The findings of this study showed that the vast majority of the participants have of positive attitude towards in use Gurage as medium of instruction. They indicated that their language is a resource and part of the development of the Gurage community. It is also an expression of their identity and culture. They vividly supports the use of Gurage as MOI, as shown in **Tables 4** and **5**. Using Gurage as MOI motivated the ethnolinguistic group to claim as their constitutional right.

The findings reveal that the participants prefer to learn in Gurage due to its symbolic value for their enriching uniqueness. Commenting on language and ethnicity, Bamgbose (1991, p. 11) states, "Language is one of the factors that determine ethnicity, but there is no other factor as powerful as language in maintaining by itself the genuine and lasting distinctiveness of an ethnic group." Kuper (2003, p. 96) also observes that children who were educated in a foreign language lose their identity and are handicapped to express themselves in proper words. They also do not give much respect and value for other languages and undermine their own language.

The participants approved that there are dialect variation in the language that it makes difficult to begin the language in education system. The degree of dialect variations is different one from the other. The finding revealed that dialect variation in Gurage is perceived that it affects mutual intelligibility. None of the dialects was selected as the standard variety of Gurage. There is also a contestation among the dialect group to be more dominant over others. Even though they have positive attitude towards their language, they are unable to start to use the language as medium of instruction though 51 Ethiopian languages enjoy such opportunity in the country. That is why the participants agreed that the dialect variation affects the development of Gurage language (see **Table 2**).

#### *Challenges in use of Gurage as MOI in a multidialectal context*

The participants indicated that dialect variation can have a great impact on the language teaching material development. Some the participants indicated that variation of dialect can influence children in the use of dialects rather than their own. Variation in proficiency in using local dialects, teachers will have challenges. They may also be prejudiced against using dialect in the classroom. Besides many of the dialect groups consider their dialect is their identity that they all need to learn and use their own dialect.

### *Status, standardization and modernization of Gurage*

The finding from FGD and interview revealed that the status given the Gurage currently is low. Gurage is almost never used for education, public or official communication in the zone (see **Table 1**). The official language in the Gurage Zone and the language with the highest status in the community is Amharic which is wider communication in Ethiopia and is the working language of the country and is the medium of instruction at elementary school in Gurage zone. Amharic is also frequently used for interpersonal communication while the use of English is basically restricted to schools starting from grade 5 in the zone.

Gurage is a powerful symbol for ethnic identity. It is still important for interpersonal interaction in the family domain and with friends, and for cultural events (mourning ceremony, traditional conflict resolution, blessing, etc.) in the community. Gurage is also frequently used at rural markets (see **Table 1**). People belonging to the older generation use Gurage to communicate among each other while the younger generation is to a large extent bilingual in Amharic and Gurage and strives to learn and use English.

The function and development of a language is shaped by social and economic forces, as well as the political will of its users (cf. Webb, 1996, p. 141 for South Africa). With regard to Gurage, its function in the community, as well as its standardization and modernization is not satisfactory. Lack of commitment by members of the Gurage community, as well as lack of support and action by the zonal government yielded a situation in which Gurage has considerably less prestige and status within its community as compared to Amharic and English. A very worrisome trend in the Gurage community is the ever-growing influence of Amharic. Despite the widespread bilingualism in Gurage and Amharic throughout the zone, even in the family domain Gurage is losing ground vis-à-vis Amharic among the young generation. Often young parents speak with their children only in Amharic so that now the transmission of Gurage to following generations becomes questionable. It is important to note that language is a vital pillar of culture and identity. It is the means by which beliefs, rituals and behaviors from previous generations are one accessed. Since the majority of the adults in the Gurage Zone are still positive towards their mother tongue. It is important that they continue to inspire their children to love and use this language and to respect their culture since they believe that the children are the future protectors of the Gurage language and culture.

Regarding language standardization, Gurage has a standardized orthography, which is based on the Fidel script used for writing Amharic with a few modifications to avoid redundant graphemes representing the same sound combination. However, no attempt was made to standardize the dialect variation in Gurage. The participants identified four main dialect areas, namely (i) Kistane (the northern Gurage), ii) Wolene (the eastern Gurage, iii) western Gurage, and (iv) peripheral western Gurage (Inor, Ener, endegagn and Geto).

Thus, all in all, the standardization of Gurage is still far from satisfactory. Despite the lack of a centralized institution for coordinating language-planning activities in Gurage, the participants complained that there are several factors that do not encourage its standardization, namely: Government offices in the zone provide information in Amharic rather than in Gurage; Gurage is not used for writing; there are no radio or TV programs, newspapers, magazines or any kind of literature in Gurage. Even the local FM radio program for the Gurage community is broadcasted in Amharic; no detailed research is conducted on the Gurage language (see **Table 4**). Finding showed that the use of Gurage in education, in the mass media, and in various other official domains, like the court or government administration is very essential for its development or modernization. A language is considered developed when it is used in various domains and purposes including science, technology and economy of the respective community. One aim of modernizing a language is the expansion of its lexicon by creating new terms.

On the whole, the use of Gurage for academic purposes is a crucial issue in order to improve the status, standardization and modernization. It should also be supported by legislations and the council of the zone to be utilized in the mass media, the office and the court. This is because such efforts can influence the use of the language in the community as a whole. Most of the participants are confident about the possibility to develop Gurage.

In present-day Ethiopia, only three local languages, namely Amharic, Afan Oromo and Tigrinya, are actually used in various public functions in addition to education, while most other local languages are still ignored in this regard. Many of these languages are even used less and less for interpersonal communication in private domains. Gurage is no exception to this. One major finding of this study is that there is a tremendous decrease in the use of Gurage and in the number of Gurage mother tongue speakers among the younger generation while the spread of Amharic as second language is flourishing in the Gurage Zone (**Table 2**). This



is not to blame the influence of Amharic in the zone but to draw attention to promote its main linguistic resource, Gurage, without neglecting the already developed language, Amharic.

Therefore, it would be appropriate to use Gurage along with Amharic as official languages in the zone. The use of Gurage should be given due attention in the family domain, as well as in public spheres, i.e. in education, in the mass media, and in government administration. The Gurage community should be motivated to promote the use of their language through careful language planning with in relation to the aim of enhancing the functions of Gurage.

In a broader African context, Wolff (2006, p. 30) states that the function of local languages should not be restricted for expressing identity and personality; they should also be used for economic, social and political development issues. This must be based on affirmative managing of the established linguistic and cultural diversity in order to realize national unity and social equality out of inherited social inequality and national disunity. The use of Gurage is inconsiderable because the Gurage Zone administration firmly entrenched Amharic as the language of administration, business, mass media, training and access to information, as well as upward mobility and wider communication within the Ethiopian nation. In conclusion, currently it is clearly observed that the constitution of FDRE offers all languages and cultures have equal recognition and respect so that one language is not greater than the other or one language cannot influence the other. It declares all languages, cultures, beliefs and history have cognizant as equal (FDRE, 1995, p. 48). Based on the constitution, the language in education policy motivates children learn in their mother tongue (MOE, 1994, p. 26).

### ***The optimum conditions of using in Gurage in education, media and offices in the zone***

The participants suggested that there are opportunities to use Gurage language for various purposes. They suggest that language use and management in culturally heterogeneous classrooms may help children to develop positive attitudes toward language diversity by sharing language experiences. By creating a supportive communicative environment, children are made aware of the social contexts in which different styles and varieties are appropriate. In this way children are helped to develop communicative skills in a functional repertoire of different language varieties.

The participants suggest that it will critically investigate possibilities of the language use and management. The participants commented that there are possible options to use gurage language for education, media and offices in the Zone.

- Selecting one common dialect for using it for various purposes in the speech community.
- Clustering the intelligible dialect group and applying similar contents in education and media.
- Finally the finding showed that if it is not able to agree on the above options, to preserve the language even for every dialect of Gurage develop the materials and use the language for various purposes.

The findings of this study show that Language in education is one of the major factors that influence the language use and development. Ferguson (2006, p. 104) states that education has a direct bond with language change. It determines the future development of the language use. It is also supposed to inculcate the ethno-cultural values and traditions and shape the linguistic norms of a community through MOI. It, besides, helps to manage the status, corpus and prestige development goals of a language. As a result, education is a powerful tool to create suitable conditions to use local languages together with the languages of wider communication. This is because large number of students of the community can be available in the school and they can learn in the language and its use. In the future they also can create influence in the use of the local language use in the offices or the community after their completion of their school life. In other words, education can attribute the development of language use by shaping the behavior of the next generation.

Therefore, it is very essential to work on the quality of education in the local languages. Gurage language is a natural resource for Gurage people which should be maintained. For Gurage people, the language development is inseparable from other development endeavors. Many studies verify that using one's own language is considered as respecting self-identity and developing self-confidence. It also contributes in the academic success of learners (Ager, 2001, p. 57; Heugh, 2011, p. 103; Wolff, 2010). The findings of this study show that the community becomes aware of Ethiopian languages are not the source of problems, conflicts and dread in the country. Languages are a means of the expression of their unique identity of humanity rather than being the cause of fear and uncertainty.

Nevertheless, preserving local languages and cultural assets, and transferring them to the next generations are alarming issues. The main reason is that speakers of smaller languages are shifting to the

dominant languages (Fishman, 2000, p. 12). It is believed that to help Gurage language to be competent enough and survive the involvement of Gurage people has no substitution. To develop Gurage, the community should use it for oral and written communication in diverse domains.

## CONCLUSION

- The use of the Gurage language in the community is seriously declining. Reasons for this decline are the mobility of the community, lack of mass media and lack educational access in language. As a result, Gurage speakers acquire an excellent command of Amharic as language for wider communication in Ethiopia. Besides, because of dialect variation the language is not used in education system. For this reason, gurage language use and management needs some sort of intervention.
- The zonal government or a responsible body under it should work on the advancement of Gurage at the grassroots levels. It has to work out short, medium, and long-term plans in language use improvement activities at various stages. It ought to show a clear political commitment for mother tongue education and the use of the language for administration.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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