

LANGUAGE PROFILES IN ETHIOPIA: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACH

Daniel Aberra

Kotebe College of Teacher Education

Abstract

Language situations of a country are ever changing. Such changing situations have been exhibited frequently in multilingual, pluralist countries like Ethiopia. Formulating the changes in terms of sociolinguistic profiles is one viable approach to recapitulate the changes.

This article, like the previous works of Ferguson (1972), and Takkele (1985) describes the dynamic multilingual situations of Ethiopia to date using the sociolinguistic profile formula designed by Ferguson 1966; Kloss 1968; Stewart 1968; and Ngalsso 1981.

The study mainly focuses on twenty-three Ethiopian languages with speakers of more than a hundred thousand each except Ge'ez. Seven of these languages are identified as major languages, and fifteen as minor languages. Ge'ez, English and Arabic are considered as special languages.

In addition, the altered roles of Arabic, English and Italian as discussed in Ferguson (1972), Stoddart (1986) are raised with a view to examining their current status.

Abbreviations

A	=	Afar
Afr	=	Africa
Ba	=	Bale
BS	=	Beni Shangul
GG	=	Gemu Gofa
H	=	Harerge
lgs	=	languages
ME	=	Middle East
N	=	North
S	=	South
Sh	=	Shewa
Si	=	Sidamo
T	=	Tigray
W	=	Wollo
?	=	doubtful or not known

1. Introduction

Ethiopian is a multilingual country. There are about one hundred languages spoken (Wedekind 1994; Mackey 1992; Grimes 1988 and Aklilu (forthcoming)) with speakers ranging from twenty million to a few hundred. Of these languages, twenty-two are spoken by more than one hundred thousand people each. Furthermore, three languages namely, English, Arabic and Ge'ez (a classical Semitic language) assume special status in the country.

The main purpose of this article is to outline the sociolinguistic profiles of these languages and to sketch out the multilingual situations in the country.

Although similar earlier works were done by Ferguson (1972) and Takkele (1985), the past two decades have witnessed two major changes of governments and constitutions. This has drastically altered the language situations of the country. Owing to this fact, this study as the sequel to the works mentioned above, attempts to bridge the time gap. It recounts the language situations after a decade from Takkele's 1985 work. As early as 1972, Ferguson (112-124) presented the Ethiopian language profile formula¹ as follows:

- 1 5 Lmaj + 13 Lmin + 3 Lspec
- 2 (35 + 2V) + (13V) + (1C + 1S + Arabic)
- 2a (Sowe + Sie + Sgw + Vgw + Vg) + (13Vg) + (1Cr+1Sw+Arabic)

For comparative purposes his summary is given here, including the functions identified for Arabic.

Lmaj (in approximate order to sociopolitical importance)

S _{owe}	Amharic	(Ethio-) Semitic
S _{ie}	English	Indo-European (Germanic)
S _{gw}	Tigrinya	(Ethio-) Semitic
V _{gw}	Galla [Galla]	E. Cushitic
V _g	Somali	E. Cushitic

Lmin (in alphabetical order)

V _{1g}	Afar	E. Cushitic
V _{2g}	Anyuak	Nilo-Saharan
V _{3g}	Beja	N. Cushitic
V _{4g}	Chaha Gurage	(Ethio-) Semitic
V _{5g}	Derasa	E. Cushitic
V _{6g}	Gumuz	Nilo-Saharan
V _{7g}	Hadiyya	E. Cushitic
V _{8g}	Janjero	Omotiic
V _{9g}	Kefa	Omotiic
V _{10g}	Kembata	E. Cushitic
V _{11g}	Sidamo	E. Cushitic
V _{12g}	Tigre	(Ethio-) Semitic
V _{13g}	Wellamo	Omotiic

Lspec

Cri	Geez	(Ethio-) Semitic
Sw	Italian	Indo-European (Romance)
Crew:Vgw	Arabic	Semitic

On the other hand, Takkele's (1985) study identifies the eight major languages of Ethiopia together with their type and functions. The table which summarizes the nucleus of his study is replicated here.

Language	Type	Function	SRO	Class
Amharic	Sa	o,w	IV	B
Hadiyya	Val	g	V	F
Oromo	Val	g	IV	C
Sidamo	Val	g	[V]	F
Somali	Val	g	V	F
Tigrinya	Sy	g	V	D
Wolaytta	Val	g	V	F
English	Lspec	-	-	-

The functions of these major languages have understandably altered since 1991 due to the change of political, language, and educational policies of the new government. This change necessitates that upto date sociolinguistics profile be drawn.

2. Methodology

After a preliminary data collection and classification, the sociolinguistic profile formula which are designed by Ferguson (1966), Kloss (1968), and Stewart (1968), was found to be a pertinent framework to describe the national multilingual situation of Ethiopia. Their formula has been adapted to fit into the Ethiopian situation by Takkele (1985), and to the African situation by Ngalsso (1981). In addition to this, some 'partially re-modeled' specificities and new labels are used in the current study.

The profile formulas that are used in describing national multilingualism can be classified into four. (1) Those that are the core indicators of the overall situations by comparing one language with the others to identify the important ones, listed here from (a) to (d), (h) and (k). (2) Those that describe the functions of languages in the multilingual speech community, stated in (e) and (j). (3) In countries like Ethiopia where there are more than one scripts in use (cf. category (g)) and where the choice of one over another is contentious specifying the kinds of scripts that are in use can be of value. (4) Languages are not equal in their developmental stages and categories; for instance (f) and (i) are beneficial to identify the status of languages.

Ngalsso (1981) states that language situations of a country can be surveyed for the attributes listed from (a) to (f) below.

- a. the population, expressed in millions (M) or as part of a million;
- b. the approximate number of speakers (native), expressed as a percentage (%) from the total population;
- c. the geographical area where the language is spoken within the country under consideration;
- d. other countries where the language is spoken, with or without the same status;
- e. the uses of the language in the country³:
 - A = used in administration (local or national), including government, law, military and police forces, political speeches,
 - E = used in teaching,

O = in experimental classes (for interested individuals outside the school situation as in literacy classes);

1 = at primary school level,

2 = at secondary school level,

3 = at higher education and university level,

m = as a subject,

P_(small) = used in press,

r_(small) = used in radio,

r1 = non-educational broadcasting,

r2 = educational broadcasting,

T = used in TV

T1 = non-educational broadcasting,

T2 = educational broadcasting,

L = existence of literary works in the language,

L1 = few books, grammar works and dictionaries (beginning level),

L2 = at advanced level existence of all types of literary works in abundant supply,

f. SR = the level of development of research as demonstrated by the existence of works in the language (linguistic description, school textbooks, etc.),

SR1 = insufficient and unsatisfactory level of research,

SR2 = insufficient and partially satisfactory level of research,

SR3 = satisfactory but limited level of research,

SR4 = satisfactory level of research in terms of quality and quantity,

g. Scripts

There are now three scripts being used in Ethiopia. These are Ethiopic (ES), Latin (LS) and Arabic (AS).

h. Classification

According to Ferguson (1966), languages of a multilingual nation can be classified into: major, minor, and languages of special status.

- (1) Major languages (Lmaj) have one or more of these characteristics: number of population = 25%+, or more than 1,000,000 speakers.
function = official, language of education for over 50% of the secondary school graduates of a nation.
- (2) Minor languages (Lmin) have one or more of these characteristics: number of population = 5-25%+, or more than 100,000 speakers.
function = medium of instruction in primary schools
- (3) Language of special status (Lspec) have one or more of these characteristics:
 - widely used for religious purposes
 - used for literary purposes
 - taught as a subject in secondary schools
 - used as a lingua franca by a substantial number of people

i. Types

Stewart (1968) classifies languages into seven types on the bases of the following four attributes: standardization, autonomy, historicity and vitality.

- Standardization refers to the codification and acceptance within the community of users, of a formal set of norms defining "correct usage".
- Autonomy relates to the function of the linguistic system as a unique and independent one.
- Historicity refers to a situation in which the linguistic system is known or believed to be the result of normal development over time.
- Vitality refers to the use of the linguistic system by an unisolated community of native speakers.

If we take four of the seven types of languages indicated earlier, the attributes could be listed as in the following table.

Types	Symbol	Standardization	autonomy	Historicity	Vitality
Standard	S	+	+	+	+
Classical	C	+	+	+	-
Vernacular	V	-	+	+	+
Dialect	D	-	-	+	+

Based on the work of Kloss (1968), Takkele (1985) further classifies standard and vernacular languages on the basis of their developmental stages:

- i. *A mature standard language (Sm)*: This refers to a modern language such as English, French or German through which all modern technological and scientific subjects are taught and discussed at all levels of education and institutions.
- ii. *An adolescent standard language (Sa)*: It is a language whose developmental stage is far below that of an Sm but is actively used for writing all governmental and private activities of the country. It is used as a medium of instruction, taught as a subject at all levels, with a relatively abundant published literature, such as grammar books, dictionaries, textbooks, literary works, etc.
- iii. *A young standard language (Sy)*: It is a language whose developmental stage is below that of an Sa. It is written and used as a medium of instruction in some limited ways without, however, having a large body of literature.
- iv. *An alphabetized vernacular language (Val)*: It is a language which has been recently alphabetized. Because of its recent alphabetization, it lacks grammar books, dictionaries, textbooks, and as a consequence, it has first to pass through some standardization processes before it is put into effective use in writing.

v. *A preliterate vernacular language (V_{pv})*: This is as yet an unalphabetized language.

j. **Functions**

Some of the functions of the languages which were not mentioned under (e) are classified here, Stewart (1968); Takkele (1985).

1. *Official (o)*: language used by the head of state and government of a country as a medium of communication at all formal occasions. In addition, it is the language through which all governmental and private agencies, organizations, and institutions all over the country use in formal communication.
2. *Group (g)*: language used by a community of native speakers for in - group communication and as a symbol of ethnic identity.
3. *Wider communication (w)*: language used by native speakers of all other languages as a means of wider communication or as a lingua-franca.
4. *Literary (l)*: language used for literary or scholarly purposes.
5. *Provincial (p)*: language used as a provincial or regional official language. In this case, the official function of the language is not nation - wide, but is limited to a smaller geographical area.

6. *International (i)*: the function of a linguistic system (other than one which already has an 'o' or 'p' function) as a major medium of communication which is international in scope e.g. for diplomatic relations, foreign trade, tourism, etc..
7. *Religious (R)*: the use of a language primarily in connection with the rituals of a particular religion.

k. **Degree of Use**

The degree of use of each language in a multilingual situation is determined in terms of statistical rank order and class.

Statistical rank order

Kloss as cited in Takkele (1985:84) outlines the percentage of native speakers in relation to the total population.

Statistical Rank Order (SRO)

I.	90-100%	IV.	20-39%
II.	70-89%	V.	3-19%
III.	40-69%	VI.	Below 3%

Class

The term 'class' as originally proposed by Stewart (1968) is used to represent the notion 'degree of use'. The percentage of speakers (native and non-native) is calculated from the total population of the country.

A.	75% +	D.	10% +
B.	50% +	E.	5% +
C.	25% +	F.	Below 5%

Based on the likely properties of the sociolinguistics profiles that are listed so far, the present language situations of Ethiopia could be outlined as follows:

3. Analysis

Language	A. Popula- tion in mill. ⁴	b. Perce nt %	C. Region	d. Other countries	e. Use
Oromo	13.0	30.57	Oromia	Kenya	A E, m p r _{1,2} T, L ₁
Amharic	12.0	28.29	All	-	A E, m p r _{1,2} T, L ₂
Tigrinya	4.24	9.74	Tigray	Eritrea	A E, m p r _{1,2} T, L ₁
Gurage lgs. ⁵	1.85	4.36	Shewa	-	A
Somali	1.61	3.79	H, Ba, Si	Somalia	A
Sidama	1.26	2.96	Sidamo	-	A E, mr,
Wolayyta	1.09	2.57	Sh, Si, GG	-	A E, mr,
Hadiyya	0.64	1.51	Shewa	-	A ? E, m
Agew lgs. ⁵	0.64	1.54	Region 3	Eritrea	--
(Q) Afar	0.58	1.37	A, H, T, W	Djibouti	A E, mr,
Gamo	0.46	1.09	GG	-	--
Gedeo	0.45	1.07	Sidamo	-	A E, m
Kefa	0.44	1.04	Kefa	-	A E, m
Kembata	0.43	1.02	Shewa	-	A E, m
Dawro	0.27	0.65	GG, Kefa	-	A E, m
Gofa	0.15	0.36	GG	-	--
Saho	0.14	0.34	Tigray	Eritrea	--
Bench	0.12	0.29	Kefa	-	m
Yem	0.11	0.27	Kefa	-	--
Ari	0.10	0.26	S. Omo	-	--
Konso	0.09	0.22	N. Omo	-	--
Alaba	0.08	0.19	Shewa	-	--
Arabic	-	-	BS, H	Mid. Ea/Afar	E, mr,
English	-	-	all over	World	E, m p r _{1,2} T, L ₂
Ge'ez	-	-	all over	-	E, mL ₂

Languages	f. SR	g. Script	h. Class	i. Type	j. Functions	k ₁ SRO	K ₂ Class ⁶
Oromo	SR ₂	LS	L _{MAJ}	S _Y	pIR	IV	C
Amharic	SR ₁	ES	L _{MAJ}	S _A	owIR	Iv	B
Tigrinya	SR ₂	ES	L _{MAJ}	S _Y	plw	V	D
Gurage lgs.	SR ₁	ES	L _{MAJ}	V _{AL}	P	V	F
Somali	SR ₂	LS	L _{MAJ}	V _{AL}	pw	V	F
Sidama	SR ₂	LS	L _{MAJ}	V _{AL}	p	V	F
Wolayyta	SR ₂	LS	L _{MAJ}	V _{AL}	p	V	F
Hadiyya	SR ₁	LS	L _{MIN}	VAL	p	VI	F
Agew lgs.	SR ₁	ES ⁷	L _{MIN}	V _{AL}	g	VI	F
(Q) afar	SR ₁	LS	L _{MIN}	VAL	pw	VI	F
Gamo	SR ₁	LS	L _{MIN}	V _{AL}	g	VI	F
Gedeo	SR ₁	LS	L _{MIN}	V _{AL}	p	VI	F
Kefa	SR ₁	LS	L _{MIN}	V _{AL}	p	VI	F
Kembata	SR ₁	LS	L _{MIN}	V _{AL}	pg	VI	F
Dawro	SR ₁	LS	L _{MIN}	V _{AL}	g	VI	F
Gofa	SR ₁	-	L _{MIN}	V	g	VI	F
Saho	SR ₁	-	L _{MIN}	V	g	VI	F
Bench	SR ₁	LS ^c	L _{MIN}	VAL	g	VI	F
Yem	SR ₁	-	L _{MIN}	V	g	VI	F
Ari	SR ₁	ES	L _{MIN}	V _{AL}	g	VI	F
Konso	SR ₁	-	L _{MIN}	V	g	VI	F
Alaba	SR ₁	-	L _{MIN}	V	g	VI	F
Arabic	SR ₁	AS	L _{SPEC}	S _M	Ri	-	-
English	-	LS	L _{SPEC}	S _M	wil	-	-
Ge'ez	-	ES	L _{SPEC}	S _M	R	-	-

When we compare the sociolinguistic profiles of Ferguson (1972), Takkele (1985), and the present one, some differences and changes can be observed.

1. The number of major and minor languages has increased. This is not only due to the growing number of speakers, but also due to the promotion by the present government of the use of vernacular languages as medium of administration, instruction and as school subjects.
2. Some languages like Italian, have lost their previous use, others like Amharic and Arabic have changed their functional roles. With regard to Arabic, the earlier work of Ferguson (1972: 117-118) enumerates that there were four waves of migration of Arabic speakers to Ethiopia:
 - i. from Yemen and the Southern Coast of Arabia,
 - ii. the expansion of Muslim Somali tribes in the South East,
 - iii. the coming of Egyptians who basically spoke Arabic as a result of the relation between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Egyptian Coptic Church. Egyptian political influence did also extend down to the Red Sea into the Eritrean low lands and the city of Harar,
 - iv. the mobility of Arabic speaking muslims from the Sudan to Ethiopia.

Ferguson (P:121) also goes on to say that "many of the Arabic speaking immigrants to the Ethiopian areas throughout the centuries have been merchants. Arab traders, shopkeepers, and small merchants can be found in many parts of Ethiopia". This situation of migration has totally changed. The 1960's extraction of oil in the Middle East which makes the Arab world relatively rich and the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution have deterred the flow of Arabs into Ethiopia.

Nowadays, there are many speakers of other languages who used Arabic⁹ as a language of religion.

When one looks at the situation of English, what Ferguson (1972: 116) has stated still holds true. It is the medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels and to some extent the language of socioeconomic mobility. It was given as a school subject in government schools starting from grade three, and in private or public schools from grade one. Now it has been declared that it should start from grade one and go to tertiary levels in all schools.

In the Ethiopian context, it is very difficult to consider English as "the nation's second language" (Ibid). Stoddart's (1986: 4) argument for the status of English a foreign language is as follows:

The designation of English as second official language of Ethiopia is... misleading although in fact - and contrary to much popular belief. This has no logical basis other than its affirmation in particular regulation. Apart from official proclamations being published in both Amharic and English and the limited use of

English in the government controlled media, the role of English in Ethiopia, at least outside the educational system resembles more closely that in countries where English is considered a foreign language (eg. Sweden) than that where it is considered as a second language used widely for purely internal purposes (eg. Nigeria).

4. Conclusion

One of Takkele's (1985: 89) conclusions reads, "social cleavages resulting from clashes of interest based on ethnic, religious, and linguistic loyalties have not so far signalled a serious concern in Ethiopia, let alone causing anxiety". This has now possibly changed. Today, the reverse seems to be true in Ethiopia.

At present, due to the policy decisions of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1992, 1994 a,b), the functions of Amharic are reduced: In the educational sphere, it serves as school subject in the whole country from grade 4-12. Previously, it was given from grade 1-12, and was the medium of instructions almost in all schools of primary level throughout the country except in very rare cases as in some private schools in Addis Ababa (the capital city). In administration, it has been changed from being the national official language of the whole country to the working language of the central government and some regions like 3, 6, 12, 14, and in the region of Southern Ethiopia. Nevertheless in the two colleges and in the University of Addis Ababa, it is still given as one field of study at diploma, B.A and M.A levels.

To conclude, one cannot be certain about the future role of Amharic in Ethiopia due to changes of governments and language policies. However, because of its functions in the past, Amharic will possibly remain as a medium for the study of Ethiopian culture and society. Furthermore with the new changes, knowledge of Oromo and Tigrinya is valuable as the three language speakers (Amharic, Oromo and Tigrinya) comprise about 70% of the total population of the country.

NOTES

1. For the symbols used in the profile formula see the methodology part.
2. To comment on Ferguson's work:
 - i. the names for Galla, Derasa, Janjero, and Wellamo nowadays are replaced by Oromo, Gedeo, Yem and Wolaytta respectively as the former names are considered as derogatory labels.
 - ii. Beja, and Tigre are precluded from the list of Ethiopian languages since they are spoken in Eritrea.
 - iii. Italian, as Ferguson (p.116) has predicted, is replaced by English in Ethiopia and Arabic in Eritrea.
3. The subclassification under the categories 'r', 'T', 'L' and (g) are developed by the present writer.
4. The population figure has been taken from the 1984 census conducted by the Central Statistics Office for the reason that the 1994 census results are not yet disclosed.
5. Agew is a family name for a group of (Central Cushitic) languages and their speakers (Awi, Bilen, Qimant, and Xamta (Xamtanga)). Gurage is also a family name for the group of South Ethio-Semitic languages and dialect groups.

6. There is no direct figure for the degree of use of languages except (rough estimates) for Amharic. So the native speakers percentages are taken. For Amharic, Oromo and Tigrinya see also Takkele's (1985) table.
7. In July 1995, the Agew administrative zone officials and the Agews passed a resolution that they want to use the Ethiopic script for their languages.
8. It was declared broadcasted in 1994 that Bench was being given as a school subject. Whether they use LS or ES is not known by the writer. But following the trend of using the Latin script for Cushitic and Omotic languages, it is highly probable that they might also use LS.
9. In the 1992 policy decision of TGE about the use of ethnic languages in schools, the council (the supreme body) passed a decree stating that "In the region of Beni Shangul, since the lingua franca is Arabic, school curriculum will be prepared and instruction shall be conducted in this language (at the primary level)." Nonetheless after the June 1995 election, Region 6 was renamed Beni Shangual-Gumuz Region and the council passed a decision to use Amharic as the medium of administration. And according to linguists who conducted studies in this region in 1993, the writer was informed that the medium of instruction, the lingua franca and the medium of administration is Amharic. There are still some Arabic speakers at the border with the Sudan.

REFERENCES

- Aklilu Yilma (forthcoming) "Inventory of Ethiopian Languages."
- Barbara F. Grimes (ed.). 1988. Ethnologue: Languages of the World. USA: SIL.
- Ferguson, Charles. 1971. "National Sociolinguistic Profile Formulas." In: Bright, (ed.) Sociolinguistics Conference. the Hague, Mouton 309-324.
- _____. 1972. "The Role of Arabic in Ethiopia: A Sociolinguistic Perspective." In: J.B. Pride and Janet Holmes (eds.) Sociolinguistics. England: Penguin Books Ltd. 112-124.
- Haub, Carl and Machiko Yanagishita. 1995. "World Population Data Sheet." Washington: Population Reference Bureau (PRB) Inc.
- Kloss, Heinz. 1968. "Notes Concerning Languages Nation Typology." In: Fishman, et al (eds.) Language Problems of Developing Nations. 69-85.
- Mackey, William. 1992. "Language Policy, Literacy and Culture: Contexts, Contents and Constraints." In: Colin N. Power (ed.) Language Policy, Literacy and Culture. Geneva: International Conference on Education. 11-21.

Ngalsso, M. 1981. "Linguistic Situation and Language Policies of 46 African States." In: Document de la reunion d' experts qui a eu lieu a Conakery (Guinee) 21-25 September. UNESCO. 94-114.

Stewart, W.A. 1968. "A Sociolinguistic Typology For Describing National Multilingualism." In: Fishman, (ed.) Readings in the Sociology of Language. 3rd ed. The Hague, Mouton. 531-546.

Stoddart, John. 1986. "The Use and Study of English in Ethiopian Schools." A Report for the Ministry of Education. Addis Ababa.

Takkele Taddese. 1985. "Issues in Language Policy and Language Choice: A Sociolinguistic Profile of the Major Ethiopian Languages." Journal of Ethiopian Studies. xviii. 80-90.

TGE. 1992. "Policy Decision of Using Ethnic Languages in Education." Addis Ababa.

_____. 1994a. "Education and Training Policy." Addis Ababa.

_____. 1994b. "Draft Constitution of Ethiopian." Addis Ababa.

Wedekind, Klaus. 1994. "Updating Linguistic Maps." SLLE: Linguistic Report No.13. Addis Ababa: IES/SIL.

Ngalsso, M. 1981. "Linguistic Situation and Language Policies of 46 African States." In: Document de la reunion d' experts qui a eu lieu a Conakery (Guinee) 21-25 September. UNESCO. 94-114.

Stewart, W.A. 1968. "A Sociolinguistic Typology For Describing National Multilingualism." In: Fishman, (ed.) Readings in the Sociology of Language. 3rd ed. The Hague, Mouton. 531-546.

Stoddart, John. 1986. "The Use and Study of English in Ethiopian Schools." A Report for the Ministry of Education. Addis Ababa.

Takkele Taddese. 1985. "Issues in Language Policy and Language Choice: A Sociolinguistic Profile of the Major Ethiopian Languages." Journal of Ethiopian Studies. xviii. 80-90.

TGE. 1992. "Policy Decision of Using Ethnic Languages in Education." Addis Ababa.

_____. 1994a. "Education and Training Policy." Addis Ababa.

_____. 1994b. "Draft Constitution of Ethiopian." Addis Ababa.

Wedekind, Klaus. 1994. "Updating Linguistic Maps." SLLE: Linguistic Report No.13. Addis Ababa: IES/SIL.