

Mother tongue Education and language shift: The Paradox of Kafi Noonoo

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Abstract

This study focuses on Kafi Noonoo, an Omotic subfamily of minority languages spoken in the south-western provinces of Ethiopia. The language is spoken in the region of Kafa Governorate. This language has been used as an administrative language for a decade and a half. It is also the language of instruction for grades 1-4. More recently, however, native speakers have replaced the notable Kafi Noonoo terms with Amharic terms. As a result, this study argues that Kafi Noonoo as a language of administration and instruction is conflated with loanwords. The study found that local indigenous terms were exchanged for Amharic terms of credit. The findings also reveal that no matter how the language is used as an administrative language and as a language of instruction, these all efforts have not preserved the language. Unless community attitudes will be changed, the language will be displaced by a Amharic terms. Therefore, the subjective belief about language and its use at the individual or community level requires serious action. The pressure to replace these terms comes from within. Our mother tongue dies when careless usages and substitutions are taken from Amharic every day. Native speakers, especially the younger generation and celebrities, are linguistically unable to socialize in Kafa culture. As a result, these people have lost their Kafa cultural identity and linguistic identity. This is so because a person's identity is determined by the language they were raised in and the culture that goes along with it. Actually, a significant aspect of cultural identity is language. So, a significant portion of our identity is determined by the language we speak, which is also our linguistic identity. To reconstruct such a linguistic identity, a wide research lacuna is open in Kafa.

[Key words: identity, pressure, language of instruction, language of administration]

1.1. Introduction

Education is frequently described as a comprehensive process by which one generation passes on its culture to the next or as a method by which people are equipped to live successfully and efficiently in their surroundings (Sifuna, 2020). Additionally, it should be highlighted that every society has a culture that is passed down through its educational system from one generation to the next (Ocitti, 1994). Indigenous education is understood by sociologists as a cultural action that is perceived as a process of assimilating into society and is thus a process through which group values are inculcated into the individual. Each person is prepared by cultural action for the responsibilities they must play in their families, communities, and society at large. The integration of society as a whole is dealt with in the socialization of members of the family, clan, lineage, age-group, and others. Assimilation requires a significant amount of enculturation, and in this sense socialization, like enculturation, refers to the internalization of culture. According to Ocitti (1973), this is the process through which an individual picks up culture in order to fit in with the group or society. As a result, it is generally acknowledged that education helps to retain language more. According to this perspective, Kafi Noonoo has been adopted as both a subject and a language of instruction for grades 5 through 10.

Ethiopia's educational system was heavily centralized, and Amharic had a larger role in the fields of politics, commerce, and other social spheres. Tewodros II (1855–1868) made an attempt to turn Amharic into a literary language for the first time. During his rule, Amharic was both a literary language and a lingua franca. As a result, he employed a subversive and promotional linguistic strategy (Crawford, 2023) (Anteneh Getachew and Derib Addo, 2006). Amharic has been referred to be "*yanegus kwankwa*" or the king's language ever since. Later, Menelik II (1889-1913) also wrote his chronicle in Amharic (Richter, 1985). Amharic was given a new status as a sign of racial harmony for the people of the multilingual Ethiopian society under Menelik II. Amharic was proclaimed the national language of Ethiopia by Haile Selassie I (1923–74), who also formally established its status in the 1955 constitution. However, he already made Amharic the exclusive language used in school in 1944 (Meyer, 2014). Later, the military regime (1974–1991), often known as the *Derg*, contributed to Amharic's development by establishing public education across the nation and making it the de facto only language of

teaching. Every child beginning basic education was required to acquire Amharic, according to the *Derg's* educational policy. Amharic achieved its highest social position during the Derg era as a result: it was the official language of basic education in both fact and law and was used as a communication tool in the government.

Amharic thus rose to prominence and took center stage in Ethiopia (Meyer, 2014). Amharic's status didn't change until a new language policy was put in place after 1991. However, since the Derg regime was overthrown in 1991, minority languages have been granted constitutional recognition in order to be used for administration, education, and communication. Kafi Noonoo has therefore been used as a medium of instruction at the elementary school level in the first cycle (1-4) since 1996.

1.2. Reviews of Related literature

According to Elizabeth, McKinley, and Linda (2019), although it is not always a given, most national constitutions recognize citizens' rights to education, schooling, and access to a free primary education. However, it is not always clear whether or not Indigenous Peoples have the same rights to citizenship as other ethnic minorities. The survival, security, safety, and well-being of Indigenous communities and ways of knowing and being, they said, depend critically on education. The regeneration and restoration of Indigenous language, culture, and knowledge are critically dependent on education (Elizabeth and Linda, 2019). Additionally, Gorter, Zenotz, and Cenoz (2019) explore how minority communities frequently view education as a bulwark against the extinction or decline of their languages. According to (EMRIP, 2009), education enhances indigenous children's capacity to exercise civil rights in order to influence political policy processes for better human rights protection. Education also enables indigenous children to exercise and enjoy economic, social, and cultural rights. Individual empowerment and self-determination can only be attained by implementing indigenous peoples' rights to education. The enjoyment, preservation, and respect of indigenous cultures, languages, traditions, and traditional knowledge are all made possible via education. According to (Cantoni, 1997), maintaining minority languages needs more than simply including local language instruction in the existing curriculum; rather, it calls for systemic transformation throughout the entire

educational system. The loss of primary languages is a widespread phenomenon that can be very costly to not just the families and communities immediately affected, but also to society as a whole, according to a study on language shift among linguistic-minority children in the United States (Fillmore, 1991). According to Fillmore (1991), acquiring a second language does not always lead to the loss of the original language, therefore it might be difficult to grasp or explain why these kids are abandoning their native tongue as they acquire the new one. However, even before they start school, the majority of youngsters whose first language is not English experience strong pressures to assimilate and follow the rules of the dominant youth culture. They start to perceive their distinctions in language, appearance, and behaviour as negative since they make it harder for them to integrate into the culture around them. Since others won't learn their language, if they want to fit in, they must acquire the language of the majority.

Long before they start school, children are sensitive to social acceptance or rejection. Even if they do not directly denigrate others, they are surrounded by messages that support the dominant culture and its language while ignoring all others (Cantoni, 1997). Additionally, (Cantoni, 1997) adds that using native languages is crucial in order to preserve them. It is not enough to value them. It is vital to define unique events and designate special times and locations where it makes sense to avoid using English if their use is declining. The neighbourhood must provide guidance, but until the educational system takes part in the perspective of the educated youth of today.

Although the young Kafa children do not yet care about prestige and status, they do need to belong and be accepted by the larger community in general, they give up utilizing their native tongue as they learn the prestige language. Since, Amharic is the high-status, prestige language of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's present emphasis on multilingual education brings to light the complexities of language mixing in the classroom. In other words, rather than focusing on the teaching of minority languages in isolation, contexts where the combination of English, Amharic, and Kafi Noonoo leads to significant linguistic amalgamations both in classrooms and outside of the class.

Kafi Noonoo is currently experiencing a significant domestic and global dimension. Globalization enters the lives of speakers, although relative isolation in distant places previously

served as protection for Kafi Noonoo's survival. It is impossible to avoid the influences of ideas and objects from other cultures because of the advancements in telecommunication and transportations. The global economy is connected with the local economy, and the coffee industry in particular, and the consequences of the movement of goods, labour, capital, and tourism can be felt everywhere in the world. These forces are frequently perceived as posing a threat to the survival of this minority language. The importance of Kafi Noonoo must be discussed because language is a component of culture and a medium of cultural transmission. Kafa pride and self-esteem were damaged by borrowed language education, directly translated textbooks, devaluation of indigenous knowledge and culture.

1.2. Data presentation

As previously indicated, Kafi Noonoo has been a teaching tool in the first cycle of elementary school (grades 1-4) since 2006. However, the language community combines Kafi Noonoo and Amharic words. The information shown below makes this reality crystal obvious.

(A) *Baṅk beetoof hammet*

The term is fused with Amharic which means “to the bank”. This phrase is formed by two words one from English and the one from Amharic. These are “bank” which denotes an institution where one can keep his/her money and “bet” is an Amharic phrasing which meaning house. Literally it is “money keeping house”. The Kafa by vanishing away their indigenous expression “giddʒee qoop’p’i kexotʃ” → which means house where you can save money, moved to use the above combined term. The current mother tongue schooling couldn’t save the native phrase.

(B) *fint beeto fanaddayoo qayaache*

In the above expression, three loanwords are used. The only indigenous term is peripheral word “*qayaache*”. The other three conjugated words are taken from Amharic. “*fint*” means urine; “*beet*” means house and “*fanaddayoo*” means to burst. The meaning of the whole phrase is ‘the

toilet basin might have been burst'. Nonetheless, we have indigenous terms for all the amalgamated ones.

ʃint = sheeyo

beeto = kexo

fanaddayoo = gaaho

When we join the three indigenous terms, we get “*sheetfi kexo gaahoo qayaache*”. This literally means ‘urine house might have been burst.’ The indigenous communities have given up their native terms and shifted to Amharic. The expressions we discussed above and will discuss below are instances of dying terms. This on the other hand, shows that the mother tongue education is not saving Kafi Noonoo. Therefore proficiency in Kafi Noonoo is jeopardized because the native speakers focus on speaking Amharic at school and home. It is saddening that, in some cases, children come to school proficient in their mother-tongues but soon begin to lose this as the focus is shifted to developing proficiency in Amharic both at school and home.

(C) *danno tʃʃatʃʃafeete*

When we see the above utterance, the only native expression is the verbal agreement marker. The expression is common everywhere in the linguistic community. The native expression for the same concept is elapsed. It is wise to incorporate traditional pedagogies into the education process with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally appropriate methods of communication and transmission of knowledge. As we can check from the following there is no the indigenous term except the agreement markers in the verb.

‘danno’ dän (*in Amharic*) means ‘forest’

‘tʃʃatʃʃafeete’ tä tʃʃäfätʃʃäfä (*in Amharic*) means ‘destroyed’

The first and most fundamental cause for the decline of the indigenous language use is the political supremacy of Amharic for the last 150 years in Ethiopia. Meanwhile, the linguistic

attitude (the views and opinions people have about their language) of the community towards their language needs inquisitive courtesy and further research.

(D) *biddiro bi toomootf beete*

The data in (D) above describes that the linguistic amalgamation. The term '*biddiro*' (means debt or loan) is taken from Amharic and conjugated with other Kafi Noonoo terms as shown in the data. The Kafi Noonoo term which is equivalent with Amharic '*biddiro*' is '*hiishoo/eretto*'. The blending together of such Amharic and Kafi Noonoo varieties in different sociolinguistic contexts is always unconsciously acted. Language amalgamation in Kafa is unplanned linguistic act which is now developing as normal linguistic situation

(E) *gonde niddeetefone*

The data in (E) above also shows the incorporation of Amharic and Kafi Noonoo terms together. '*niddeetefo*' is taken from Amharic '*niddät*' and conjugated with '*gonde*', to mention 'bad tempered' individuals. The Kafi Noonoo term which has an equivalent meaning with '*niddät*' is '*ippo*' which is steadily shifted to Amharic.

(F) *duqetoo lawasib*

As we see from the above expression except the imperative marker /b/ all the rest are Amharic terms. However both conjugated words have equivalent in the indigenous language (Kafi Noonoo) people use Amharic terms. The Amharic term '*duqät*' is flour in English and '*meläwä*' is to soak. Meanwhile the Kafa terms for these ones are '*buddino*' and '*qechib*' respectively. These terms are disappeared from the mouths of the speakers. Therefore, as mentioned above, some people and adult generations use the language for home and public domains by amalgamating it with some Amharic terms. Especially, the ones mentioned here and some others are almost elapsed among the younger generations due to language preference and reign of Amharic for a century and half in Ethiopia.

(G) *tfigginoo betfb*

The data in (G) above is also an instance for the language shift. In the example ‘tʃiggij’ is an Amharic term for ‘seedling’. The Kafa equivalent for the term is ‘*butfitfo:*’ no matter how it is missing in language use. This is a cursor for the inability of a speech community to maintain its language in the face of competition from Amharic language. The cause of shift is political domination of Amharic for the last 150 years and current economic change and the course of shift is frequently via domains of use.

(H) *kulaalito biiyete*

The data in (H) above is also an instance of language shift. The expression ‘*kulaalito*’ is a modification of Amharic ‘*kulalit*’ is kidney in English. The native term for this is ‘*yejitoo*’ in target language. The local community exterminated this word and shifted to Amharic loan word.

1.3. Discussion

It is contradictory for the linguistic community to stop using its own language through some process. The language is widely used in the region. Besides the language is media of instruction in elementary first cycle (1-4). There are reasons why it is necessary to employ indigenous languages as the languages of teaching and learning. As argued by (Kembo, 2000), cognitive and affective development occurs more effectively in a language that the learner knows very well and learning in general occurs more effectively if the required cognitive development has already taken place through the use of a first language as a language of learning. However, this all investigation and scholarly standpoint is not in line with Kafi Noonoo. However, this study discovers that the lexicalization procedure, which refers to the choice and publication of a suitable vocabulary for the Kafi Noonoo, was disregarded. According to Rajend et al. (2004), this is typically characterized by purist inclinations that seek to exclude words with foreign origin. Elaboration was another crucial component of language regeneration that was overlooked. According to Rajend et al. (2004), elaboration is the process of developing a codified language's terminological and stylistic features in order to fulfil the on-going communication needs of modern life and technology. The major domain of language elaboration is the generation and transfer of new terms, and several lexical enrichment approaches are typically used concurrently. In this context, extensive and comprehensive research on Kafi Noonoo's language

ecology should be done. As Kafi Noonoo shown, being instructional medium cannot prevent language from evolving. The formation of linguistic identity and language attitude should be prioritized. The majority of urban youngsters are linguistically insecure. Linguistic insecurity refers to speakers' belief that the language they employ is inferior or bad. It is the expression of negative attitudes toward one's own variation in aesthetic or moral terms. Linguistic insecurity refers to speakers' belief that the language they employ is inferior or bad. It is the expression of negative attitudes toward one's own variation in aesthetic or moral terms. In the face of social and linguistic pressure from the mainstream Amharic, the Kafa are abandoning their memorable words and phrases. After embracing the Amhara value system for the previous 150 years, the Kafa thought their lifestyle and language insufficient to explain some ideas and notions. Even today, Amharic is the zone's lingua franca and a school topic. Even within their community and at school, the youth fail to use Kafi Noonoo. In this regard, there is a significant research gap that has to be filled in order to better investigate linguistic identity.

1.4. Recommendation

Minority Language Groups should:

- ❖ Instead of translating textbooks and other materials, and develop community-centred curricula and instructional materials.
- ❖ Accept themselves and their language;

Government agencies should:

- ❖ adopt language development strategies;
- ❖ develop curriculum recommendations that can be modified to mother tongue education; and provide funds or find and encourage outside contributors to assist mother tongue education

NGOs should:

- ❖ Provide linguistic knowledge to aid in the creation of orthography
- ❖ Facilitate the production of indigenous language literature as well as "bridging" literature
- ❖ Provide funding or find and connect ethnic minority groups to relevant donor agencies

Academic institutions should:

- ❖ Gather and disseminate information regarding the linguistic situation
- ❖ Provide linguistic knowledge to enhance orthography development by training indigenous language speakers to perform linguistic research.

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