



Full Length Research Paper

The Quest for Afaan Oromoo's Inclusion to the Federal Government Working Languages in Ethiopia: Causes and Benefits

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Abstract

This paper explores long standing demands of the Oromoo to make Afaan Oromoo, the most widely spoken language in the Horn of Africa as a mother tongue, one of the working Federal languages. The antagonism behind the linguistic policy of the consecutive Ethiopian regimes is the main reason for the exclusion from the Federal working languages during the last three decades. Although FDRE constitution of 1995 gives equal status to all languages, the status quo has still continued marginalizing Afaan Oromoo and other major languages considering the demography of the speakers and public demands. In spite of these facts, the struggles for inclusion of Afaan and its marginalization from the Federal working language from its historical root is overlooked. The paper argues that the use of Afaan Oromoo as a Federal working language has multifaceted importance in the country's unity and political stability. The paper considers the socio-political and historical background in relation to the promotion of Afaan Oromoo to the Federal working language. It also puts flashlights on the continuing use of the language as an expression of Oromoo identity, Oromummaa and Sabboonummaa. The main purpose of this research, therefore, is to identify the causes of exclusion, and to address the benefits of inclusion of Afaan Oromoo to the Federal working language. To achieve this objective, qualitative research design was used and qualitative data were collected using interviews and document analysis. In the interview, informants with good knowledge of linguistic history of the country were identified. The data revealed that Afaan Oromoo was excluded from politics, business, administrative, religious, media of instruction and other public services. The study also displayed that including Afaan Oromoo in the Federal working languages of the country develops and enriches the language, and gives job opportunity to many youths in the Federal Institutions. As the language is spoken by many nations as lingua franca, its inclusion plays significant roles in stabilizing the country and cementing the unity of the nations. The study, thus, recommends that the government should keep the freedom and inclusion of all languages to enhance the legitimacy of political processes.

Keywords: Afaan Oromoo, Ethiopia, exclusion, inclusion, Federal, working language

Dhimmama Afaan Oromoo Afaan Hojii Mootummaa Federaalaa Taasisuu: Dhiibbaa Qooddiifi Faayidaa Dabaluu

Axareeraa

Qorannoon kun gaaffii Oromoon yeroo dheeraaf Afaan Oromoo, afaan gaanfa Afriikaatti baayyina dubbattootaan beekamuufi daangaa ce'ee dubbatamu, afaan hojii Federaalaa taasisuuf carraaqaniifi bu'aa inni afaan Federaalaa yoo ta'e uummata biyyittiif buusu gadi fageenyaan ibsa. Dhiibbaa imaammata afaanii sirnoota Itoophiyaa duraanii duuba jiruun Afaan Oromoo waggoota kurnan sadan darbaniif afaanota hojii Federaalaa keessaa akka hinseenneef sababa guddaadha. Heerri FDRE bara 1995 afaanota hundaaf sadarkaa walqixa kan kennu ta'us, ammallee haalli jiru garuu Afaan Oromoofi afaanota gurguddoo biroo dimogiraafii dubbattootaafi gaaffii uummataa ilaalcha keessa galchuu dhiisuun qooddaan itti fufee jira. Dhugaan kun jiraatus, qabsoon Afaan Oromoo afaan hojii Federaalaa keessatti akka hammatamuu tasisamaa jiu ammas akkuma xiyyeeffannoo dhabetti jira. Kanarraa ka'uun, qorannoon kun kan xiyyeeffatu Afaan Oromoo akka afaan hojii Federaalaatti fayyadamuun tokkummaafi tasgabbi siyaasaa biyyattii keessatti gahee gudda qaba jechuun falma. Kana malees, Afaan Oromoo gara afaan hojii Federaalaatti guddisuu waliin walqabatee seenduubee hawaas-siyaasaafi seenaa uummatichaas guddisuuf tajaajila. Akkasumas, itti fayyadama afaanichaa itti fufsiisuun akka eenyummaa Oromoo, Oromummaafi Sabboonummaan ittiin ibsachuuf fayyada. Kanaaf, kaayyoon qorannoo kanaa inni guddaan sababoota Afaan Oromoo afaan hojii Federaalaa keessatti hammatamuu dhabe adda baasuufi bu'aa keessatti hammatamuun isaa qabu xiinxaluudha. Kaayyoo kana galmaan ga'uuf, saxaxa qorannoo qulqullinaa fayyadamuun ragaaleen akkamtaa meeshaalee funaansa ragaalee af-gaaffiifi sakatta'aa dokimantiin walitti qabamaniiru. Af-gaaffii kana keessatti beektotni seenaa, afaaniifi manguddoonni muuxannoo qaban keessatti hirmaataniiru. Ragaaleen qaaceffaman kunneen akka mul'isanitti, Afaan Oromoon afaan hojii Federaalaa akka hintaane taasisuun akka inni tajaajila siyaasaa, daldalaa, bulchiinsaa, amantaa, afaan barnootaafi tajaajila mootummaa biroo keessaatti akka dubbattoonni dhimma itti ba'uu dhabuun rakkachaa jiran ibsa. Kunis, qabsoo uummatni Oromoo yeroo dheeraaf Afaan Oromoo afaan hojii Federaalaa taasisuuf qabsaa'e akka hinmilkaa'in agarsiisa. Kanaafuu, Afaan Oromoo Afaan hojii Federaalaa biyyattii keessatti hammachiisuun afaanicha akka guddatuufi badhaadhu, akkasumas dargaggootni hedduu Dhaabbilee Federaalaa keessatti carraa hojii akka argatan taasisa. Afaan kun afaan daangaa darbee dubbatamuufi saboota hedduun tajaajilamu waan ta'eef, afaan hojii Federaalaa keessatti hammatamuun isaa biyyattii tasgabbeessuufi tokkummaa sabootaa cimsuu keessatti gahee olaanaa taphachuu danda'a. Kanaarraa ka'uun, qorannoon kun, haala kanaan, mootummaan seera qabeessummaa adeemsa siyaasaa guddisuuf bilisummaafi hammatamuu afaanota hunda eeguu akka qabu yaada furmaataa dhiheessa.

Jechoota Ijoo: Afaan Oromoo, Itiyoophiyaa, qooddii, itti dabaluu, Federaala, afaan hojii

1. Introduction

The Oromoo language, which is called Afaan Oromoo, is one of the languages of the Lowland East Cushitic within the Cushitic family of the Afro-Asiatic Phylum, and the most widely spoken of the Cushitic family (Bender & Mulugeta, 1976, p.166; Gragg, 1982, p. Xiii; Baye, 1986, p.8). It is also one of the major Ethiopian languages constituting a large number of speakers. According to Gadaa (1988, p. 9), it is the third most widely spoken language in Africa after Arabic and Hausa and it is also the widely spoken language in Ethiopia. Besides first language speakers, a number of members of other ethnicities who are in contact with the Oromoo speak Afaan Oromoo as a second language. It has an officially decided writing script known as *Qubee*, which is based on the Latin orthography (Girma, 2001).

In Ethiopia, Afaan Oromoo is spoken as a lingua franca by other nations and nationalities who have contact with Oromoo people (Wondimu, 2015). According to Mekuria (1994) and Feyisa (1996), Afaan Oromoo is used by different nations and nationalities such as Harari, Sidama, Anuak, Gurage, Amhara, Koma, Dawuro and Kafa for communication and trade with their neighboring Oromoo people. Yet, debates over the use and the status of languages have been integral to the history of modern Ethiopian socio-political struggle.

Moreover, Amanuel and Samuel (2012, p. 32) states that “It [Afaan Oromoo] is used as a language of inter-group communication in several parts of Ethiopia.” However, Afaan Oromoo has been relegated from Ethiopian Federal working languages. Contrary to this fact, Jeylan (2006, p. 33) describes that only 20% of the Ethiopian population speaks Amharic as a mother tongue which is the language of the government. In spite of these all facts, it was banned by law until the Derg took power in 1974. During that era, even naming children in this language was considered uncivilized. In addition, Afaan Oromoo is spoken in a vast territory of Ethiopia ranging from Tigray in the North to the Northern part of Kenya in the South, and from Wollega in the West to Harar in the East (Wondimu, 2015, p. 361) It is also spoken in different parts of Africa such as Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Tanzania (Tilahun, 1993); and it is one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa (Bender, 1976).

Afaan Oromoo, a very profound part of human beings, is used not only as a means of communication; it is a representation of its political, economic, cultural, and different social practices. Thus, in the context of Ethiopia, a common home of diverse groups and ethno-linguistic diversity, the attempt to not considering Afaan Oromoo as the official language of the country would be a sort of down grading the language from the representations of its political, social and cultural issues, which plays a significant influence on the country’s political, socio-economic and cultural systems.

In general, a given language is a manifestation of identity and meanings of life (Alima, 2018, p. 13). It carries huge life experiences, meanings and cultural values, philosophy and world views of the owner of that language. Supporting this Asefa (2014, p. 123) explains that *Afaan Oromoo* has remained the blood and sinew of the Oromo identity, culture and history without having a national institution that can protect it. Today, the survival of this language has enabled all Oromoo to be connected and revive their national institutions and *Oromummaa*. Asefa states Afaan Oromoo as the gold mine of Oromoo history and culture and it is considered as one of the main pillars and markers of *Oromummaa*.

There are some studies related which are worth recognizing and moving forward. One of these studies are Milkesa (2014) which focuses on the politics of language and representative bureaucracy in Ethiopia. The main issue of his study was the challenge of building an inclusive representative and adequate bureaucracies in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multicultural polity in Ethiopia. Thus, Milkesa’s study is different from this study because the main focus of this study is causes of exclusion and the benefits of inclusion of Afaan Oromoo in the Federal working language of Ethiopia and its advantage for the Oromoo people in particular and the country in general.

The other study that is related to this study is Tesfaye (2019) on the use of Afaan Oromoo in the past consecutive Ethiopian government. He produced detailed elaboration on how the use of Afaan Oromoo was suppressed in the past successive Ethiopian governments. However, since he focused on how these governments used to dissolve the identity of the Oromoo, his presentation on the inclusion of Afaan Oromoo in the Federal working languages of Ethiopia is null. Similarly, Mekuria, (2017), a distinguished scholar and who produced a chapter of panoramic work on Afaan Oromoo didn’t see the

disadvantages of exclusion and benefits of inclusion of Afaan Oromoo to the Federal working languages. His main argument is the use of Afaan Oromoo as Official language for independent Republic of Oromia than in the Federal languages.

Furthermore, Getachew and Derib (2006) studied language policy in Ethiopia based on the past and current trends. The major objectives of their study were to identify the type of language policy Ethiopia had in the past and the current policy of the country (Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democracy-EPRDF); and how Ethiopia is implementing the language policy of the time. The analysis of the data collected from the secondary data sources shows that there had been a change from having no written policy to a policy that encourages the development and use of all the languages in the country. However, the implementation showed a little change in the time from the reign of Tewodros II up to the end of the Derg. The language policies of Tewodros II, Minilek II, Haileseilasie I and the Derg regime implemented a one-language use policy. Thus, the study identified that the language use policy of the EPRDF government is quite different in its approach and implementation. However, their study is different from this study as they have no intention on the Federal working language.

Lastly, Zelalem (2012) who elaborated language policy of Ethiopia during Emperor Haileseilasie (1928 -1974), Derg (1974 -1991) and EPRDF (1991 – 2018) clearly explained how other Ethiopian languages including Afaan Oromoo were marginalized in favor of Amharic. He also tends to advise multiple use of Ethiopian languages for official purposes. However, he generalized as though all Ethiopian people have been speaker of Amharic at least since 14th century. In this regard, what he over looked to see is that before the period of Emperor Menilek II (1889-1913), except the Amhara people and some Tigrayans as well as some individuals North of Abay, the other nations South of Abay were not parts of Ethiopia that Zelalem claimed for leave alone speaking Amharic. The other limitation of his work is, the focus was on adopting monoscript to be used for all Ethiopian languages, which is less feasible. For these reasons, issues of excluding Afaan Oromoo from Federal working languages and the advantages of its inclusion hasn't got attention in his work.

In this paper, thus, I will be detailing what caused Quest for Afaan Oromoo's Inclusion to the Federal Working Language in Ethiopia to be excluded and the benefits of its inclusion. I will also explain the Causes and Benefit of including and excluding Afaan Oromoo in the Federal language of Ethiopia. Thus, the study also detailed on digging into the assimilative language policy of Ethiopia and how this language policy is fueling ethnic tensions. As the study elucidates based on scientific facts, it elaborates the Oromoo language, Afaan Oromoo and their identity and the struggles the Oromoo people in general and the elites in particular made for the language be a language of instruction, media, business and other public services.

2. Review Literature

An official language is a language that is given special legal status in a particular country, state or their authority, where it is used in courts, parliament and administration. Abraham, (1990, p. 74) explains that an official language is usually given special status even if that language is not widely spoken in the given country or state. This is because official language status is often connected with wider political issues of sovereignty, nationalism and the rights of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. Thus, in the context of Ethiopia, Official language choice in a multi-linguistic country is a challenging phenomenon, (Milkessa, 2014, p.1). He further describes that Ethiopia took "historical accident" justifications for grant to select its official language which unequivocally disregards its own linguistic diversities and selected

Amharic as a sole official language of Ethiopia. This serves government institutions as a means of exclusion of non-official language speakers such as Oromoo, the largest ethnic group in the country.

Accounts of the history of Ethiopia depict that homogenization or assimilative policy centering on language played the greatest role in State building. Mekuria (1997, p. 325) explains this as “suppression of ethnic identity to create homogenous State.” He also further describes that this was done to create loyalty and belongingness to the State. This notion reflects that state building can be attained by destroying language diversity, as diversity and belongingness to one’s own language unlike the national one threatens the loyalty of citizens to the national State they belong. Moreover, Mekuria (1997, p. 326) elaborates that languages are the virtually exclusive carriers of Ethiopian Civilization which in this case is the language of the ruling class or ethnic group and any diversity of language is a barrier to the aspired Ethiopian identity and nationalism called Ethiopianism.

Different scholars clarify that language issue has been politically influential because it represents nation building in the case of Ethiopia benefiting native Amharic speakers disproportionately. This disproportionate aspect disclosed itself in power and education that causes civil conflict that had language as its root causes. Benefits manifested itself in terms of dominance in power which generated conflicts. Language monopoly itself served as instrument in the spheres of education. Desire or ambition to forge one nation (nation state) out of a multilingual society through assimilation policy was the main cause for excluding all other languages.

For the implementation of homogenization policy, they used the approach of inclusion and exclusion through language. The concept of exclusion and inclusion through language began to gain its root in Ethiopian politics since the period of Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868), (Tefaye, 2019). Mascareño and Carvajal, (2015, p. 126) state that the notions of inclusion and exclusion have a long tradition in sociology, but have gained significant currency more recently in public policy analysis. They further discuss that inclusion in exclusion implies inclusion, but in a position of subordination compared with other social categories. Inclusion in exclusion supposes asymmetry between groups, generally justified in traditional or community terms.

Post-colonial theories refer to subalterns (Guha and Spivak, 1988) explain that groups who suffer discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, caste, class, gender, sexual orientation, language or religion. Without adopting that denomination or the political elements that go with it, it is nevertheless true that inclusion in exclusion is sustained by public discourses that form social categories on the basis of certain features that are understood to be shared by them, but do not necessarily form part of their self-description. These social categories again form public stabilization of that discourse which leads the group to adopt these externally formed categories. And, the adoption of these categories situates the group in a position of subordination relative to the dominant discourse, which is reproduced by the same group to the extent that it assumes its hetero-categorization (Mascareño and Carvajal, 2015, p. 137).

This is serious issues in the case of the Oromoo because of their largeness in number and vast territorial areas they occupied as the original inhabitants. The Oromoo are the largest of the Eastern Cushitic speaking group and have lived in the Horn of African region for thousands of years. Therefore, recent historical, linguistic and anthropological studies reveal that the Oromoo people are the indigenous people of the current central and the Southern Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa (Mohamed, 1994, p.44).

The Ethiopian assimilative language policy favored and included Amharic as an official working language of Ethiopia and excluded others only for the reason that the royal families and subsequent leaders of the country drawn from the Amharic speaking ethnic group. As a major Ethiopian language, the language of majority in Ethiopia, Afaan Oromoo is disadvantaged though the speakers of Afaan Oromoo account significant number in Ethiopia (Mohammed, 2008). Therefore, excluding the language from the formal public usage as an official and Federal working language has a negative impact on the speaker's day to day life.

Afaan Oromoo and the speakers of the language are marginalized so as to be included into the aspired Ethiopian identity, an identity believed to be of civilization, through assimilative language policy (Alima, 2018, p. 14). This assimilation countered pluralism or diversity in a brutal way to homogenize the diverse Ethiopian population particularly the largest Ethnic group, the Oromoo, into the aspired Ethiopian identity or Ethiopianism.

Although this policy of assimilation was seemed to be countered by the communist regime soon after the communists came to power in 1974 because of the continued Oromoo and other nations and nationalities struggle, it did not deter from the predecessors' language policy of centralization. The centralization process through the Ethiopian identity making language suppression as one major element and depriving one's identity seemed to come to an end in 1991 with the down fall of the communist regime and the end of singularity, which is one nation with one language.

As pluralism was cherished, facts on the ground did not guarantee the assimilative policy's beam into the dust of history but constitution of the country and the general picture with diverse languages reviving and Afaan Oromoo growing coming out of the chains of the Ethiopian identity stress the facts. Though pluralism is growing, still ethnic tensions are high to the boiling point accompanied with vast past grievances and how the current regime handles ethnic tensions, language issues. Especially, Afaan Oromoo, a predominately spoken language in Ethiopia where the language speakers are deprived of getting job placement in the Federal government, systemic means of marginalizing the language is very critical (Milkessa, 2014).

Language is the maker of identity and it is quite difficult if not erroneous to separate ethnic identity and language. To claim an identity of certain group or to designate oneself into a group of language owner needs, ability to speak the language and expression of culture. Thus, Afaan Oromoo, an expression of Oromummaa and Sabboonummaa still did not reach the status it has to, as a language of the majority. The suggestion made to the Ethiopian parliamentary discussion in 2020 to include five Ethiopian languages (Amharic, Afaan Oromoo, Tigrigna, Somali and Afar) into the working federal languages has not yet been materialized. The implementation yet needs the amendment of article 5/2 Ethiopian Federal constitution that declares Amharic as the only working Federal language of Ethiopian (Federal Negarit Gazeta, Proclamation No. 1/1995, Addis Ababa). Therefore, this development needs study that reveal the importance of including Afaan Oromoo to the working Federal language of Ethiopia as there has not been critically studied scholarly documents.

3. Methodology of the Study

This study is suited more to qualitative research methods because qualitative research methods are more oriented towards generating rich data that express experiences and realities of the informants (Creswell, 2003). It requires the generation of rich qualitative data rather than summarizing and tabulating quantitative data. As studying this research requires generating rich qualitative data that describe

experiences and realities in relation to Oromoo people and their language Afaan Oromoo, the qualitative research method suites the analysis and interpretation of the data thoroughly.

The data were collected from documents using document analysis and discussions from informal interviews. In the interview, three historians, three language experts and four experienced elders were participated. The informants had much to say on the mistreatment of the Oromoo and their language, Afaan Oromoo, both under the Imperial and the *Darg* regimes in a wider context. During the discussion, I had to be careful to direct them to issues pertinent to my research issue. Great care was taken not to offend the informants when I directed them from informal initial discussions to open-ended interview questions.

To make the interviews effective, guiding interview questions, and open-ended questions were made. The informants were carefully selected based on their knowledge of the topic which enabled me to access valuable information related to the history of Afaan Oromoo. Hence, the informants were purposefully selected historians, language experts and experienced elders. As a result, most of the informants had the capacities to explain both the past and the contemporary situations with regard to Afaan Oromoo. Particularly, the participants can explain causes of questions to make Afaan Oromoo one of the Federal Working languages together with its benefits, putting it into historical contexts. In addition, they can express the challenges of using Afaan Oromoo for social services and religious purposes, the struggles Oromoo scholars and students made to make their language a Federal Language of Ethiopia. Moreover, different documents such as policies, Federal constitution and other related literature were searched and related data were collected to support the data collected through interviews.

Lastly, the collected data from both primary and secondary sources such as interviews, research works, studies of various levels and different documents was carefully transcribed, translated, arranged and qualitatively analyzed, and synthesized based on analytical research methods. I have tried to critically examine the data obtained from interviews and document analysis.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

Being one of the major languages of Ethiopia and spoken as a first and second language by the majority of the Ethiopian population, Afaan Oromoo was subjugated for a long period of time. Afaan Oromoo and Oromoo identity were put under the surveillance of Ethiopian state functionaries. The document analyzed and the data interviewed stated that agents of the Ethiopian state have been discouraging the use of *Afaan* Oromoo not only for written purposes but also even to use it in public for communication, and to use for religious and office purposes. Surprisingly enough, Afaan Oromoo was not used for the purpose for which the established church was imposing Geez and Amharic, preaching and teaching in *Afaan* Oromoo were banned.

According to the data collected, the extreme sensitivity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on issues of doctrine and language is well known. Therefore, the church critically made use of Geez, Amharic in Orthodox liturgical procedure. The rulers thought that using Afaan Oromoo for the liturgical service instead of Geez, deviated from principle in the making of Ethiopian unity and exploded things before proper arrangements. However, informants explained that the majority of the Oromo attending Orthodox Christianity wished to be preached in their language, Afaan Oromoo. They questioned and rumored among themselves the reason why the use of Afaan Oromoo was banned and instead why they suffered to listen in the language they had not any quittance.

This was the reason why the use of *Afaan Oromoo* in the protestant church services soon began to win the hearts of Oromoo who were attending the church sermons. The functional relationship between *Afaan Oromoo* and social codes received stronger aspiration from the congregation (Tesfaye, 2019, p. 226). Tesfaye further states that “the preaching and singing in *Afaan Oromoo* by the congregation is said to have collected many new members as followers even from distant places as the Oromoo constantly needed their language for office purposes”. It gave them a new and distinctive idiom of self-expression.

Nonetheless, Tesfaye, (2019) explains that learning in *Afaan Oromoo* was the result of Oromoo resistance in different ways including church services.

...the expansion of education in *Afaan Oromoo* and the increased demand for *Afaan Oromoo* scriptures were not without resistance. Bit by bit the rumors about the use of *Afaan Oromoo* in sacred church services and for holy books reached the ears of many clergies in the surrounding areas and became the source of confrontations (Tesfaye, 2019, p. 230).

Although the rumors started in the early days of the beginning of using *Afaan Oromoo* in the churches for the purpose of religion for worship open opposition and excluded its service not only in churches but also in other public services. As a result, conflicts started as a result of excluding their language, *Afaan Oromoo*, from church services. However, according to the informants, “the people had the right to hear God’s word in their language as far as the purpose was to advance Christianity”.

The endeavors to elevate *Afaan Oromoo* as a language of literacy and religion on the one hand, and the pressure to assert Amharic as a unifying language on the other hand, increased the conflicts in different parts of the Oromoo inhabited areas. The teaching and preaching in *Afaan Oromoo* and distribution of Oromoo literature took firm positions in areas where religious influences were low. It was a sort of resisting the Amhara system using written *Afaan Oromoo* which was completely opposed by the homogenization policy of the Amhara. The homogenization policy never allowed not only *Afaan Oromoo* but also other languages of Ethiopia to be used in public services. One of the historians interviewed seriously raised that specially, *Afaan Oromoo* which is the one spoken by the majority of the people, was under critical pressure.

However, the conflict was not ended by the efforts the homogenization policy imposed on. The Oromoo never allowed the substitution of *Afaan Oromoo* by other language. Even the conflict was aggravated from time to time. The aggravated conflict practically indicated the argument which says the mutual relationship between language and identity never appears more clearly than in the resistances against domination and social injustices are communicated, and a reaction to the circumstances is called upon. As a result, for the speech community guarding their language from attack is protecting their common identity. For the subjugators removing the language of the targeted community is getting a free passport for easy suppression. Therefore, the challenges brought the linkage between mother tongue and the related identity issues of the Oromoo people to the front and made its role the consolidation of a vibrant identity.

Tesfaye (2019, p. 245) states that Oromoo identity in the first three decades of the 20th century experienced the same challenges. Once the conquest was completed, language and cultural assimilation into ‘core Ethiopian culture’ were encouraged and began to be fully implemented. Furthermore, Mekuria, (1994, p. 90) explains this policy and its impact on the Oromoo people as follows:

This policy was intensified upon the Oromoo as their population number was large, their territory was vast and their geographical location is at the center. As a result, the Oromoo were

forced to defend their language and identity from the ongoing reconfiguration and assimilation.

The data above states that the police that excludes the largest population of the country led the people to confrontations to preserve their language and identity. Thus, they highly oppose the assimilation policy which encourages the inclusion of one language, culture and identity over the other nations and nationalities.

The other Historian interviewed explained that the armed forces and clergy who were distributed over the conquered land to enforce the intended unity began either to replace or destroy the spiritual and material representation of Oromoo identity. The informant further describes that:

Individual names, places, and even wild animals' names were made to be replaced by the names in the aspired language for united Ethiopia. Mainly, Afaan Oromoo was depicted as vulgar and it was planned to replace it with Amharic. Similarly, the Oromoo religion was described as the worship of the devil and was castigated as profane to Orthodox Christianity, (informant interview).

The data above indicated that the movements and aspiration of the previous system was not only excluding Afaan Oromoo from church service and other social phenomenon, it also a cause of creating one language, culture and state. Consequently, the exclusion of Afaan Oromoo from the government languages reached from changing the names of wild animals from to that of Amharic and castigating preaching it in the church was as using undeveloped and devil language. As Teshale (1995, p. 18) states, the Oromoo culture was indiscriminately depicted as 'primitive', 'backward' and 'undeveloped' and presented as a culture that needed civilization.

The Ethiopian State formation which seems to be concluded in the late 19th century instilling the ideology in Bigelow's words as "one language, one flag and one country ignored this reality." Until 1991 this strategy of nation building was distinguished with the ideology of having one religion and national dresses although minor adjustments were done during the communist regime. Zahorik (2009, pp. 92-93) details this as policy of "one language one nation" where others were excluded from opportunities due to language barrier and assimilative homogenization policy.

The depiction was to make the Oromoo feel ashamed of the cultural identity they had built over generations and exclude their language, an expression of their identity, from any public services such as in churches, schools and media, and instead to force them to join the identity of their conquerors. The Oromoo were also discouraged as far as possible from speaking and singing in the language of their masters although majority of them were non-communicants in Amharic (Baxter, 1978, p. 288). The aim was to uproot the Oromoo identity so that the Oromoo would not develop Oromoo nationalism which could hamper the intended homogenous unity (Tesfaye, 2019, p. 247).

With this newly introduced socio-economic and political transformation, the cultural experiences and societal values of the Oromoo that were built over many generations were threatened and made to suffer. The nationwide Oromoo system of communication, cooperation, and assembly which sustained the common identity of the Oromoo society was outlawed (Mohamed, 1996, pp. 18-19). Thus, the acts challenged the very existence of Oromoo and Afaan Oromoo, their identity in particular, and the Oromoo way of life in general. However, the Oromoo elites and activists struggled against the oppressor's objectives and things did not go as imagined. Since the implementation was based on coercion, attack, mistreatment, and pressure, the activities pushed the Oromoo into reaction.

It was based on this consistent Oromo quest for the use of Afaan Oromoo at least in the territory they occupied that attracted Italy to present itself as allies of the Oromo by picking up Afaan Oromo and used in the media of administration and field of literacy education, and made it enjoy special status during her occupation of Ethiopia from 1936-1941. She also left the Oromo free to nurture their language for office usage and cultivated their common identity of pan-Oromo national unity. In fact, this Italian use of Afaan Oromo for official works was not spontaneous. Her agent, Enrico Cerulli, studied the Oromo persistent but confined struggle to see the use of Afaan Oromoo for office purposes since 1922. The Oromo status of serfdom that was discovered by Cerulli gave the Italians the confidence that favoring the Oromo would help them to overcome any resistance to come from Ethiopian sides (Alberto, 1985).

The pressures of ethnic groups to use their language in administration practices made Italy to use different languages in different administrative regions. Based on this, Italy introduced an ethnically based language policy. As a result, they put the country into six divided administrative regions with languages of education as follows:

Administrative Region	Language of instruction
Eritrea +Tigray	Tigrinya and Arabic
Amhara	Amharic
Addis Ababa	Amharic and Oromifa[sic]
Harar	Harari and Oromifa[sic]
Sidama	Oromifa[sic] and Kafficho
Somalia	Somali

Consequently, the legacy of Italian occupation transformed the Oromoo to demand fundamental political change everywhere in Oromoo land (Tesfaye, 2019). The Oromoo who tested the sweetness of using their language without any interference refused to allow Emperor Haile Selassie the same approach he used to practice before Italian occupation. Grievances against the emperor almost covertly took all parts of Oromo-occupied areas (Tesfaye, 2019). The Oromo continued requesting for freedom from Amhara domination and recognition of their language, cultural identity and political autonomy.

When Emperor Haile Selassie was restored in 1941, issues of Afaan Oromoo and the Oromoo national question had already taken a challenging ground. Although not thoroughly dealt with and silenced, the first challenging political unrest the restored Emperor encountered was issues of the Oromoo national question. According to one of the application letters to the British officers (Quoted in Mekuria, 1997), the Oromoo question of resenting the restoration of the Amhara ruling system was started on the spot when they heard the news of the decision. It was before the emperor took his throne that the Oromoo were aware of the fact that the restoration of the emperor would reverse their linguistic and cultural

rights they had already started exercising under the Italian Occupation. As anticipated, the emperor began working to replace Afaan Oromoo with Amharic was taken as a cutting edge of the policy for unity. The banning of Afaan Oromoo from public use by the series of decrees that banned Afaan Oromoo from public use were promulgated one after another (Mekuria, 1997).

The expansion of Amharic and the suppression of languages other than Amharic were also reinforced by the amended constitution of 1955. In the article number 125 of the constitution, Amharic was declared as the only official language of Ethiopia while others were silently deprived of a status (Edict of the Ministry of Community Development and Social Affairs, 1948 E.C.). The purpose was to bring the languages of the others including Afaan Oromoo firmly under the sway of Amharic and Amhara dominated culture.

Yet, the Oromoo did not accept the imposition and kept quiet. Those Oromoo who felt the prohibition of their language from written form and conceptualized the proscription as a way to force them to relinquish the very culture of the Oromoo, counteracted strongly in resistance. The struggle to get Afaan Oromoo out of restriction and in writing was more strengthened. The struggle for written Afaan Oromoo was made the first major reaction against the imperial assimilation policy because as Benedict Anderson notes in the case of Europe (Benedict, 1994) they understood that it laid the bases for the Oromoo national consciousness in three distinct ways. The first was that it would give some fixity to Afaan Oromoo and helped to build an image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the Oromoo. It is because language in print has better power to retain the cultural identity stored in it than memorizing orality (Joseph, 1983).

In the 1960s these Oromo quest and struggle to have freely exercise their right including nurturing and developing their language became one of the forces that toppled the emperor and transferred power to the Darg. Yet, these struggles for the development of Afaan Oromoo and the Oromoo national question transferred the Oromoo struggle to a new chapter which was to continue within the regime of another ideology. Although the struggle did not ensure the Oromoo the right to exercise their own destiny, it laid a basic ground for the struggle to be continued under the *Darg* regime.

At the early period of the *Darg*, some measures *Darg* took as a response to peoples' questions looked as Oromo questions for the right to exercise their language and culture were responded. As it wanted to present itself as a government of people from peoples for peoples', at least for its first two years, it proved willing to accommodate cultural and linguistic practices of the suppressed nations in the country in contrast to the imperial period (Johon, 2011). Informants indicated that during the opportunities, the Oromoo were among the nations to organize themselves into cultural associations to restore the suppressed Oromoo cultural practices and to promote *Afaan* to a written and working language.

During this early period, newspaper, adult literacy materials and radio broadcasting in Afaan Oromoo from national station were allowed. Different cultural troupes organized and presented their songs in Afaan Oromoo. The Oromoo élites who found a little space for linguistic and cultural accommodation in the *Darg* program soon organized cultural activities and began working for the revival of Oromoo culture and *Afaan* Oromoo literacy. Informants state that it was the development of *Afaan* literacy that was a cutting edge in the revitalization of Oromoo cultural identity and unity. The increase in literacy in *Afaan* Oromo was given priority because of two main reasons. One, it was one of the forms of Oromoo cultural identity that had been severely repressed by the preceding Ethiopian government and its immediate revival was therefore necessitated. Secondly, it was seen as the best way to promote the level of Oromoo national consciousness (Tesfaye, 2019).

Again, fearing the upcoming Oromoo nationalism, the Darg soon began suppressing the frequent Oromoo quest to have Afaan Oromoo among working Ethiopian languages. Supporting this issue, an informant interview from historians explains that,

The Darg was not tolerant enough to accommodate the continuation of the language and cultural freedom which began to make much rapid progress. As soon as the Darg became sure that it had suppressed its opponents, the regime restored the linguistic policy of the past imperial regime and attempted to form a single nation.

Nonetheless, the Oromoo élites did not abandon the struggle to transform Afaan Oromoo to written literature and the Oromoo to a political nation. Many Oromoo élites and the organizations in which the Oromo were the dominant members joined the revolution with the aspiration to direct the vague and unarticulated political philosophy of the Darg's *Itiyophiya Tikdem* (Ethiopia First) towards the interest of all Ethiopian nations and nationalities in general and that of the Oromoo in particular (Tesfaye, 2019).

The *Darg* era of the 1980s was a period of severe cultural repression. Any potential elements suspected of the upsurge of ethnic-based nationalism was carefully identified and suppressed.

Besides the serious punishment of the detected nationalists, focus was also given to the systematic dilution of their ethnic solidarity. Above all, what the language policy had become in practice was not accepted by representatives of the Darg. The literacy Program, the state-owned mass media, the settlement programs, peasant associations and other forms of social Organizations were used as sophisticated means for the implementation of an Amharization policy and dilution of strong ethnic-based solidarity (Teshale, 1995).

However, the *Darg* was not able to escape the persistent Oromoo quest to have relevant linguistic and cultural rooms in the country's administration. The national liberation fronts which had been more or less active since the 1960s and 1970s made issues of the national question the cardinal elements of their political ideologies and posed serious challenges to the Darg policy of centralized administration. Thus, the OLF and the Oromoo diaspora took *Afaan* Oromoo as the most defining factor of Oromoo national identity. The Oromoo Liberation Front defined *Afaan* Oromoo as one of the major Oromoo cultural traits that needed liberation from the imposition of Ethiopian rulers (Tesfaye, 2019).

They worked on the development of suitable scripts that enabled them to write Afaan Oromoo without or with little problem. Informants from language experts explicate that:

The adoption of the Qubee alphabet was the beginning of a new chapter in Oromoo history. When the success in armed struggle was limited because of different factors, the success in this area was more impressive. It was taken by many Oromoo nationalists as a victory over the suppression of written Afaan Oromoo. Attempts were also made to introduce this adopted Qubee Afaan Oromoo to the Oromoo at large.

These years of continuous effort eventually transformed *Afaan* Oromoo in 1991 from a suppressed and household language to the official language of the Oromia Regional State and the Oromoo to a nation with their own state officially recognized.

During the transitional period (1991-1995) the use of Afaan Oromoo for official purposes got recognition. It was during this period Qubee was officially adopted, textbooks were written in Afaan Oromoo, and became the official language of the Oromia regional state. After 1995 the Oromoo pushed their quest to have Afaan Oromoo as a working language. Universities opened Afaan Oromoo departments, and electronic and print Media began to come out in good numbers (Kenei, 2021).

However, the quest of Making Afaan Oromoo Federal government's additional official working language, the quest has been one of the core issues that persisted during the Oromoo Protest in the last five or so years has remained unaddressed. Although the FDRE constitution of 1995 gives equal status to all languages and the struggle has continued across time and geographical areas, Afaan Oromoo has not become a federal working language. The antagonism behind the linguistic policy of the consecutive Ethiopian regimes that promoted Amharic, the language of the minority as a mother tongue, and actively worked against Afaan Oromoo is the main reason for the exclusion from the Federal languages.

The status quo has still continued marginalizing Afaan Oromoo and other languages. Drawing on existing literature and my own personal observations, the wish to suppress and if possible, to eliminate Afaan Oromoo, in fact, that had begun 150 or so years ago is not over. Contenders of multilingualism and multiculturalism have continued with an old outlook to reverse any possibilities of the efforts to develop Afaan Oromoo. The conspiracy frequently made to reshuffle Qubee Afaan Oromoo, the organization of a series of conferences to convince the Oromoo to resort to the use of Ge'ez Alphabet for the transcription of Afaan Oromoo, the opposition to teaching in Afaan Oromoo in some Finfinnee schools, the gimmick to assign non-Afaan Oromoo speakers into the department of Afaan Oromoo or into the departments that teach in Afaan Oromoo are some of the signals the researcher like to cite. These indicate that still there is continued resistance to excluding Afaan Oromoo from the Working Federal Language of Ethiopia. This made the Oromoo quest to have their language as a federal working language none stop.

As all these explicitly and implicitly moves take the administration of the country into the usual bloody conflicts as the paper discusses taking historical events, the federal government should put language policy in place in a way it serves all the citizens based the standards set by the linguists than politicians. Official status support and other attentions that are in congruent with the speakers' interest are still needed.

5. Conclusion

This paper is set out to examine the causes that suppressed Afaan Oromoo to be used as a federal working language equally with Amharic, and the benefits it provides if included as one of the major languages. The paper clearly indicated all the attempted possibilities that avoided Afaan Oromoo from the mouths of its speakers but remained without success because of the ardent and persistent resistances the speakers posed across period and time. As Afaan Oromoo is the language of large number of speakers over vast territorial areas and lingua franca for majority of the ethnic groups in the country including it as a federal language has multifaceted importance. Making Afaan Oromoo a working language of federal government ensures one of inclusive governance and government, democracy and national unity. It will be also one of the solutions for the political stability in the country and beyond as the response taught to have slow down Oromoo People's deep-seated resentment over past and present linguistic and socio-cultural unfairness. Therefore, the researcher of this paper recommends, learning from the challenges and the speakers' interest, the federal government should seriously consider the inclusion of Afaan Oromoo to the federal languages. Moreover, the government advised to see the demand of the Oromoo people wisely and respond to it positively in time. The federal government of Ethiopia needs to learn from Nigeria, South Africa, and Switzerland among others on how using different languages at federal level has benefitted them. The study, thus, recommended that the government should keep the freedom and inclusion of all languages to enhance the legitimacy of political processes by making more democratic and responsive to the concerns and perspectives of all segments of the society.

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