RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE IMPACT OF MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IN PREVENTING LANGUAGE SHIFT WITH REFERENCE TO SILT'E

*Dr. Tiglu Geza Nisrane

College of Social Science and Humanities, Wolkite University, Ethiopia

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the impact of mother tongue education in preventing language shift with reference to Silt'e. The goal of the study is to examine the relationship between social and linguistic factors in considering the causes and effects of language shift in the speech community. It used a mixed method concurrent design, and data were collected using questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion. The finding showed that using mother tongue in education is not the endpoint in the development of a language. Local language should also be used for official purposes, mass communication and personal communication in oral and written form in all socioeconomic domains.

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the impact of mother tongue education in preventing language shift with reference to Silt'e. Language Shift is the progress of substituting inherent language with another higher status and widely used language in a certain society. It is common that the use of dominant and colonial foreign languages instead of local languages in Africa and elsewhere in the world. People learn and use foreign languages, principally English, since they believe that they do not have ample opportunity to participate in social and economic activities in the world unless they know these languages. Still today many African countries sustain the legacy of this language practice. For this reason, there are still challenges in local language use, attitudes and development decisions in many countries. I observed that in some countries, constitutions declare that all community languages have equity and impartiality in their locality but practically one language is given more attention and recognition than the others. In other words, the constitutions express all languages have equal status but the government encourages the use of one of the languages as the only working or official language. This leads to unfair contest among the languages that results a quick language shift. In Ethiopia, for example, the language situation is different from other African countries since it was not colonized except five years of Italian occupation (Smith 2008; Bahru 1992). Nevertheless, the language policy has been

changed many times based on the knowledge of the influential figures and the political pressure of the country. The local people were urged to give high prestige for Amharic and foreign languages but low esteem to their own local language. In the country only Amharic and English were used as MOI at primary, secondary and tertiary education until the end of the socialist government in 1991 while other Ethiopian languages were marginalized and remained underdeveloped for educational and administrative purposes. In other words, the regulation of language use during the Imperial and the Derg governments advocated Amharic as the sole local language in formal education and administration while the use of the remaining eighty-five Ethiopian languages was restricted to mere oral interaction. These governments feared of entertaining various local languages in education and writing since they believed that one language seems to constitute a convenient tool for obtaining sociolinguistic, political and national unity (McNab 1989) while using several languages was considered as divisive. The socialist government made attempts to use fifteen languages, including Silt'e, for literacy campaigns, which were not thriving to be continued in formal education. In both governments, Amharic was the official language. Recently, the language-in-education policy of Ethiopia set up possibilities of using local languages as MOI. Since 1991, ideological changes in language use took place in the country based on the declaration of the United Nations on the freedom of choice as primary human rights (UNESCO

1953). The current constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian education policy motivate the use of local language in order to promote the culture, language and identity of the respective ethnic groups (MOE 1994; FDRE 1995). Following these declarations, several local languages started to be utilized as media of instruction in the country so that this change induces to maintain and promote local languages. However, the question is, does the use of local language in education prevent the language shift in Silt'e? It is believed that language shift is influenced the existing socio-cultural, political, historical and economic considerations. It is required to evaluate gaps between language planning and actual practice of language policy on the ground. In Ethiopia, there are dilemmas in the use of local languages as medium of instruction preserving them in their respective communities. In my observations in Silt'e, there are dissatisfactions put across by the people in the use and the development of their language to achieve the intended status and standardization. As a result, it is crucial to find out contextual solutions based on the actual practice of the language use in the community. Silt'e was chosen for the reasons such as its sociolinguistic interest and its position as a multilingual community.

Statement of the problem

Silt'e is an Ethiopian language which is used as a MOI at elementary schools and given as a subject in junior and secondary high schools in the Silt'e Zone since 1995. According to the Central Statistics Authority (2007), the number of Silt'e speakers is 751,159. The Silt'e land is densely populated, many Silt'e migrate to urban areas for work. They, therefore, seek to increase their fluency in Amharic since it is the best vehicle for pursuing opportunities in the country. Thus, many young and adult Silt'e are bilingual in Amharic, the language of wider communication in Ethiopia, and in Silt'e, the local language of the community. In the Silt'e Zone, it is clearly observed that there is contest in languages use. The coexistence of Amharic and Silt'e in the zone caused the community to become bilingual. Then gradually the young generations are shifting to the dominant language, Amharic and losing their linguistic and cultural identity in the process. The community was not able to balance the use of Silt'e along with Amharic and English. In Silt'e there are serious challenges of turning down the use of the local language of the community. This study discerned stakeholders' perspectives on language shift in the zone. This study is concerned with verifying the appropriateness of mother tongue education to meet the need of the development of language in the community. It furthermore investigated the impacts of using the language as an instructional medium in preventing language shift. The main thrust of this study was also to find out the impact of using Silt'e as medium of instruction in modernization, status and function of Silt'e in the overwhelming activities.

Objective of the Study

The overall objective this study was to find out the impact of mother tongue education on preventing language shift in Silt'e. to this end the study attempts:

- ➤ To identify the issues that affect language shift in Silt'e as the speech community.

- ➤ To examine the implication of mother tongue education in preventing language shift.
- ➤ Ascertain ways to preserve local languages over the dominance of the wider communication language.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study in particular followed a mixed method concurrent design as both the quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to identify the impact of mother tongue education on preventing language shift. It was conducted in Silt'e zone which has nine administrative districts. It was selected four districts. The main participants in this study were officers, parents, students and teachers. They were asked to complete survey questionnaires, respond interviews and focus group discussion. It was hoping that it could help to produce large amounts of data for analysis. The results from the questionnaires were recorded, tallied, and converted in to percentage. The interview method helped me to focus on inadequate answers from the questionnaire. I conducted 4 semi-structured interviews and 4 FGDs from April 2019. A list of questions was designed to guide the interview. The interviewees were asked to evaluate the impact of MTE on language shift. During the data collection, notes were taken down in a field journey. With granted permission from the participants, almost all the interviews were recorded. These research tools were very useful to obtain detailed information in connection to language related problems, dilemmas and prospects of using Silt'e in education. Interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders for the purpose of capturing information on their views and perceptions regarding the concept of multilingual education as well as their understanding of the current policy and its implementation. Discussions carried out during the interviews also focus on the impact of the language practice of the imperial and socialist governments on the present language situation of Silt'e. Data analysis refers to shifting, organizing, summarizing and synthesizing the data to arrive at certain results and conclusions. I used descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage) to analyze the questionnaires and represent the data in tables. FGD and interviews were processed qualitatively. The interviews and FGDs were recorded and then transcribed. The transcripts were used to identify key issues that emerged from participants' statements in relation to the objectives of this study. These key issues were codified and categorized. The findings from individual interviews with officers, teachers, parents and students, and from the FGDs were treated together since the reflections were categorized based on the themes. Some responses were presented under different themes when appropriate.

Theoretical Framework on Language Shift

Language shift and death are very closely linked. Language shift is the gradual or sudden move from the use of one language to another either by an individual or by a group (Crystal 2000). There are a number of reasons for language shift, such as modernization, economy, immigration and political influence. Continuous contact between languages can create language competition resulting in language replacement or death of one language, and, consequently, in the spread of the other (Mukherjee and Khemlani 2011). Cooper *et al.* (2001) defines language spread as an increase over time in the proportions of a communicative network that adopts a given

language or variety for a given communicative function. Acquisition planning is a formal way to affect language spread. Baker (1998) point out that language shift occurs when the speakers of one language have more political power, privilege and social prestige than the speakers of the other language. Thus, usually speakers of the minority language shift to the majority language (Hornberger 2008). Language shift from the minority language to the dominant language is often seen as a signal to implement minority language planning and bilingual education so that the minority language speakers will maintain their language. Language maintenance is defined as "… relative language stability in its number and distribution of speakers, its proficient usage in children and adults, and to retaining the use of the language in specific domains" (Baker 1998). Hornberger (2008) suggests that language revitalization, renewal, or reversing language shift goes one step further than language maintenance, in that it implies recuperating and reconstructing something that is at least partially lost, rather than maintaining and strengthening what already exists. Fishman (1991) develops a theory for reversing language shift (RLS) by focusing on examining the vitality of endangered minority languages. This theory is helpful for language planners to observe and analyze the endangerment situation of minority languages.

Data analysis and Interpretation

Analysis of Data from Questionnaires

The aim of this section is to present the results in figures or tables and describe the findings. The results are based on the responses obtained from the questionnaires. Item (1) in Table 6.1 shows that the majority of the participants (67.8) use two language side-by-side at home, namely Amharic and Silt'e. This shows that Amharic and Silt'e are used interchangeably at the family level at home in Silt'e zone. When compared with the school domain (Item 2), administration (Item 3) or religion (Item 6), item (1) reveals that Silt'e is used frequently at home rather than in other domains. On the other hand, when compared with the use of mother tongue, Silt'e and the wider communication language of the country, Amharic indicated in Table 1, it can be deduced that the majority of Silt'e mother tongue speakers acquired a very good command in Amharic as second language. This is further evidenced by items (4), language used to communicate with the spouse or close friends is Silt'e. Besides, item 5, the majority i.e. 85.8% of the participants, use Silt'e in market places more frequently. Moreover the data from interview and focus group discussion indicate that many of the parents and elders of the community still use Silt'e (see section 6.2). However, table 4.1 indicates that majority of the participants are using Amharic in schools, offices and spiritual places i.e. 50%, 81.9% and 66.7% of the participant respectively. This shows that the people of Silt'e shift and use Amharic in public domains though they use it for personal purpose at family level in home and market.

Table 2 shows language shift at school in Silt'e zone. Item 7 reveals that 73.3% of the students do not translate into Silt'e when they are teaching English. However, a considerable number of teachers (47.8%) are translating English into Silt'e when they teach. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents in item (8) said that they translate English to Amharic in their teaching. In general, students prefer Amharic when they communicate in the classroom. As a result, they are learning both English and Silt'e via Amharic.

Table 3 shows the participants' responses to improve the status, the function and the standardization of Silt'e. In item (9), the majority of teachers (88.9%) and students (83.3%) think that Silt'e will help them in the future. Besides, in item 10, 83.3% of the students and 92.2% of teachers agree that Silt'e courses are necessary in schools.

In item 10 and item 11, all students indicated that they have to take Silt'e courses in schools whereas the majority of the teachers (83.3%) said that they did not take courses recently. Furthermore, item (12) reveals that 73.3 % of the students and 76.7% of the teacher would like to learn Silt'e if they did not know it. According to item (13) the participants agree that it is important to learn Silt'e in elementary schools. Correspondingly, 88.9% of the teachers said that it is essential to teach Silt'e in schools. Moreover, the majority of the students believe that Silt'e should be studied as a compulsory subject in elementary schools. Similarly, the majority of the respondents in item (14) believe that Silt'e should be taught in high schools. In items (15) and (16), almost all participants suggest that there should be radio and television programs in Silt'e to improve the status, function and standardization of the language. Although the majority of the respondents are of the opinion that Amharic should be the official language of the Silt'e Zone in item (17) of Table 4 below, there are also a number of participants who disagree to use Amharic in this function. This is because the participants think that Amharic is useful for Silt'e and non-Silt'e speakers can use it (see section 6.2). Similarly, the vast majority of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that Silt'e should be used as official language of the zone in item (18). This is for the reason that the participants believe that using Silt'e in the official circumstance is one of the means to preserve and maintain it in its locality (cf. section 6.2)

Regarding language preference in Table 4, the majority of the parents prefer to learn Amharic (48.9%) or English (28.9%), as shown in item (17). Only 22.2% of the parents would prefer to learn Silt'e. A similar distribution is also found with teachers and students. Although the majority of the officers also tend to prefer English, the preferences of the remaining officers regarding Amharic and Silt'e are almost equally distributed. That means that the officers seem to have the highest motivation to learn Silt'e. As far as the item (18), language preference in relation to listening radio, is concerned, majority of the parents (72.2%) and officers (73.3%) prefer to listen to Amharic programs. However, in the FGD and in the interview the participant mention that if there were radio programs in Silt'e they would listen to them (see Section Error! Reference source not found.). Among the teachers, only a tight majority of 48.9% prefers to listen to Amharic programs while 46.6% mention that the prefer English as language to listen to radio program. With regard to the students, the distribution is reversed; here a tight majority of 47.8% prefers English programs but only 46.6% mention Amharic. Teachers and students further mention that there is only limited access to radio programs in Silt'e. Regarding language preference in Table 5, the majority of the parents prefer to learn Amharic (48.9%) or English (28.9%), as shown in item (19). Only 22.2% of the parents would prefer to learn Silt'e. A similar distribution is also found with teachers and students. Although the majority of the officers also tend to prefer English, the preferences of the remaining officers regarding Amharic and Silt'e are almost equally distributed. That means that the officers seem to have the highest motivation to learn Silt'e.

Table 1. The Overall Language Use in Silt'e Zone

R.N	Items	Silt'e only		Amharic only		Silt'e+ Amharic		English	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	What language is commonly spoken at home?	93	25.8	23	6.3	244	67.8		
2	What language is commonly spoken at school?	10	2.8	180	50	110	30.6	60	16.6
3	What language is commonly spoken at offices?	20	5.6	295	81.9	45	12.5		
4	What language is commonly spoken with spouse	246	68.3	22	6.1	92	25.6		
5	What language is commonly spoken at market?	309	85.8	51	14.2				
6	What language is commonly spoken at spiritual places?	40	11.1	240	66.7	80	22.2		

Table 6.2. Teachers and Students' Responses on Language Shift in Educational Practice in Silt'e Zone

	Item		Yes		No		Uncertain	
			N	%	N	%	N	%
7	Do you translate from English into Silt'e in non-Silt'e classes?	Students	24	26.7	66	73.3		
		Teachers	43	47.8	47	52.2		
8	Do you translate from English to Amharic in non-Silt'e classes?	Students	70	77.8	20	22.2		
		Teachers	81	90	9	10		

Table 6.3. Status, Standardization and Modernization of Silt'e

	Items		Yes		No		Uncertain	
			N	%	N	%	N	%
9	Do you think Silt'e will help you in the future?	Students	75	83.3	10	11.1	5	5.6
		Teachers	80	88.9	4	4.4	6	6.7
10	Are Silt'e courses necessary in schools?	Students	75	83.3	15	16.7		
		Teachers	83	92.2	7	7.8		
11	Did you attend Silt'e courses recently?	Students	90	100				
		Teachers	35	16.7	55	83.3		
12	If you do not understand Silt'e, would you learn the language?	Students	66	73.3	19	21.1	5	5.6
		Teachers	69	76.7	17	18.9	4	4.4
13	Should Silt'e be a compulsory subject in elementary school?	Students	80	88.9	9	10	1	1.1
		Teachers	68	75.6	18	20	4	4.4
14	Should Silt'e be given in high school?	Students	44	48.9	41	45.6	5	5.6
		Teachers	59	65.6	28	31.1	3	3.3
15	Should there be radio programs in Silt'e?	Students	59	65.6	21	23.3	10	11.1
		Teachers	78	86.7	12	13.3		
16	Should there be TV programs in Silt'e?	Students	81	90	3	3.3	6	6.7
		Teachers	80	88.9	2	2.2	8	8.9

Table 6.4. Attitudes to Silt'e, Amharic and English

No	Item	Scale	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagreed	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
17	Amharic should be the official language in the Silt'e Zone	Parents	32	35.6	25	27.8	3	3.3	18	20	12	13.3
		Teachers	26	28.9	28	31.1	2	2.2	18	20	16	17.8
		Students	40	44.4	22	24.4	5	5.6	20	22.2	13	14.4
		Officers	50	55.6	20	22.2			15	16.7	5	5.6
18	Silt'e should be the official language in the Silt'e Zone	Parents	40	44.4	23	25.6	2	2.2	10	11.1	15	16.7
		Teachers	28	31.1	26	28.9	5	5.6	21	23.3	10	11.1
		Students	35	38.9	18	20	6	6.7	23	25.6	7	7.8
		Officers	25	27.8	21	23.3	4	4.4	14	15.6	26	28.9

Table 6.5. Language Preferences

	Item		Silt'e		Amharic		English	
			N	%	N	%	N	%
19	Language commonly preferred to teach/learn	Parents	20	22.2	44	48.9	26	28.9
		Students	3	3.3	3	3.3	84	93.3
		Teachers	7	7.8	19	21.1	64	71.1
		Officers	18	20	19	21.1	53	58.9
20	Language commonly preferred to listen to in the radio	Parents	12	13.3	65	72.2	13	14.4
		Teachers	6	6.7	44	48.9	40	44.4
		Students	5	5.6	42	46.6	43	47.8
		Officers	6	6.7	66	73.3	18	20
21	Language commonly preferred to communicate with learners/ children/teachers/clients	Parents	53	58.9	36	40	1	1.1
		Teachers	18	20	68	75.6	4	4.4
		Students	18	20	67	74.4	5	5.6
		Officers	10	11.1	79	87.8	1	1.1

As far as the item (20), language preference in relation to listening radio, is concerned, majority of the parents (72.2%) and officers (73.3%) prefer to listen to Amharic programs. However, in the FGD and in the interview the participant mention that if there were radio programs in Silt'e they would listen to them (see Section 6.2). Among the teachers, only a tight majority of 48.9% prefers to listen to Amharic programs while 46.6% mention that the prefer English as language to listen to radio program. With regard to the students, the distribution is reversed; here a tight majority of 47.8% prefers English programs but only 46.6% mention Amharic. Teachers and students further mention that there is only limited access to radio programs in Silt'e.

Item (21), in Table 5, shows that Amharic is the preferred language of communication among 75.6% of the teachers, 74.4% of the students and 87.8% of the officers. However, the majority of the parents (58.9%) prefer to communicate in Silt'e; only 40% of the parents mention Amharic for this function. In my observation during the data collection, the people in the rural area prefer Amharic to communicate with officers of the zone and districts. On the other hand, students believe that English could be very useful for their education in the future. The officers also prefer to communicate in Amharic since it enables them to communicate with people outside the Silt'e Zone. Thus, the most preferred language for communication in the Silt'e Zone is Amharic. The participants in the focus group discussions and interviews also confirm that Silt'e is the least preferred language in the community when it is compared with Amharic, particularly among young and educated Silt'e, and mobile members of the community (cf section 6.2). This reveals that language shift is very high in the speech community.

Data from Interview and Focus Group Discussion

Influence of Amharic and English over Silt'e: The data obtained from interview and focus group discussion revealed the dominance of Amharic in the Silt'e-speaking area goes probably back to the reign of Menilek II. After he conquered the area, he sent asgäbari [Amharic] 'tax collectors' who urged the people to speak in Amharic. Those who learned and spoke Amharic were rewarded a piece of land, while the others were punished (key informant interview 2 hereafter: KII2). Most people in the Silt'e Zone prefer Amharic to Silt'e for various reasons. Currently, it is very hard to find a person who does not know Amharic in the Silt'e Zone. Even old people are fluent speakers of Amharic, i.e. almost all members of the Silt'e community are bilingual in Silt'e and Amharic. Consequently, the use of Amharic is growing fast while the use of Silt'e is gradually decreasing. Some of the responses on the dominance of Amharic are presented below:

"It is possible to say Amharic dominates Silt'e. When you look at towns, you may think that they are inhabited by educated people or people living there for a long time, but even in rural areas when you speak in Silt'e the people respond in Amharic. This indicates the dominance of Amharic. This situation can lead to the extinction of the Silt'e language. We rarely use Silt'e in the office. The first reason is that the official language of the region is Amharic." (KII3)

"In this zone, learning Amharic is very simple. But learning Silt'e is more difficult. There are words which need to be given attention, and gaps need to be identified and filled with specific words. Children learn Amharic easily. They get it everywhere." (KII4)

"I am now more than 65 years old. I did not go to school to learn Amharic. I don't know how it entered into my ears, and how I learned it. Now I speak this language fluently. The current generation also speaks the language surprisingly well. It is beyond control. It is also a very useful language." (KII 3)

The extracts show that people use Amharic for communication in towns as well as in rural areas. Learning Amharic in the zone is easy, even outside schools. In FGD, the dominance of Amharic in all domains of language use, such as government offices, for employment, the court, markets, shops, and all other business areas, was emphasized (FGD, T9). Although Silt'e was used in the markets and in cultural conflict resolution, Amharic plays a significant role in most domains. The interviewees further express their fear that the dominance of Amharic can lead to the extinction of Silt'e. Silt'e is rarely used in offices. One officer mentions that Silt'e does not function as written language in administration – only Amharic is used for writing. Furthermore, a teacher reports that he was surprised when he recognized at a rural kebele meeting that the officers cannot speak Silt'e for five minutes although they were born in the zone. When officers go to the rural area, they usually start their speech in Silt'e but then quickly shift to Amharic. Women are said to have a relatively better command of Silt'e than men because they do not mix it with Amharic so much. Usually, women easily understand Amharic but they have difficulties to speak it. Elder women most frequently use Silt'e for communication within the family and with neighbors, as well as in locally organized social institutions, like *ikub* 'mourning association'. However, younger women also tend to use Amharic to speak with their children, family members, and neighbors (KII1). Elder men, too, speak in broken Amharic but usually do not use Silt'e in public meetings (KII8). Thus, there are differences in the use of Silt'e between the two genders and the younger and older generations.

According to the interviewees, the cause of the dominance of Amharic in the Silt'e Zone results from the past educational and political system, in which Amharic was strongly promoted. It was the only official and national language in Ethiopia; it was the language of literature and associated with modernity and urbanization (KII8&9). Another interviewee draws attention to the fact that in the past religious leaders and teachers in mosques advised parents not to send their children to modern schools in order to protect their religion, Islam, and their language, Silt'e. During the reign of Haile Selassie I, textbooks in government schools were highly influenced by and in favor of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. As a result, the Silt'e people were not motivated to send their children to government schools, but preferred Quran schools in mosques. The following extract describes this situation:

"The people were not willing to send their children to school. In the past, Islamic religious leaders demotivated the people to learn science in general. They encouraged the children to go to the mosque to learn the Quran. This influenced modern education. There was the belief that children [in government schools] will convert to another religion." (KII 13). Nowadays, there is no association of Amharic with religion in the Silt'e Zone. One parent interviewee even explains that Silt'e and Amharic have the same Semitic origin, and that they use the same script, Fidel. Generally, Amharic is valued as the working language of the federal government (PKII 13).

Furthermore, it is commonly associated with urban life and modernity so that many Silt'e speakers are motivated to learn it. As the Silt'e Zone is near to Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, and many Silt'e commute from their zone to the capital and other urban areas, they have a high exposure to Amharic – and to a lesser extent to Afan Oromo, too (KII8). Therefore, learning and speaking Amharic has a lot of prestige among the Silt'e. One of the FGD interviewees says,

"We are using Amharic. When we compare Silt'e and Amharic, Amharic is very rich to be used for various purposes. Amharic is better. For example, in the court there are different background judges. In urban areas, you cannot use Silt'e [for communication]. The access to print media, films, music, and the like is via Amharic." (FGD, S2)

According to one officer, the gap in language use between Silt'e and Amharic is created in the family where the parents focus on Amharic as language of wider communication. Many Silt'e are merchants moving to different parts of Ethiopia to earn money and to support their family. Then, the children start to consider Amharic as a good and prestigious language which facilitates a modern and comfortable way of life. They do not struggle to use their own local language, Silt'e (KII5). Consequently, the use of Silt'e is confined to the home domain if at all (FGD, T7).

On the other hand the contestation of Amharic and Silt'e is observed in the code shifting and code mixing. According to most interviewees, the main challenge of developing the Silt'e language is that its speakers are frequently shifting to Amharic or heavily code mixing Silt'e with Amharic (KII14). The Silt'e people are very mobile and frequently commute to urban areas in which Amharic is used as main lingua franca. In addition, Amharic and Silt'e are both Semitic languages which share many linguistic features, which make code mixing easy. The following extracts describe these problems:

"Currently, the people cannot change the different use of Amharic and Silt'e. As you know, the people are mobile; they use Amharic frequently. As a result, they use both languages as they like. They mix them and do not differentiate between the two. The language policy is not the cause for the dominance of Amharic." (KII 13)

"This is because Amharic is used here by both, educated and non-educated people. If Amharic is used by educated people, you can say that this is the result of education – but it is not. All are speaking in Amharic." (KII 10)

"Fortunately, I am participating in the teaching-learning material preparation. As I told you, I was unable to speak Silt'e before I came here. I have a degree in English. But I learned it soon; now I am teaching it. Before Silt'e started to be taught in schools, it was mixed with Amharic. Even at this time, many people mix [Silt'e] by shaping its form to some extent [from the Amharic pattern]." (THS, KII8)

Student interviewees often state that teachers are immediately shifting to Amharic when they teach Silt'e. Consequently, the students, too, frequently shift to Amharic in Silt'e classes (see Error! Reference source not found.). Furthermore, officers in rural area are usually not well versed in Silt'e and tend to shift to Amharic. Language shift to Amharic is very common in the Silt'e community. This makes learning of Silt'e very challenging (KII 3). Regarding the frequent code shifting to Amharic, many interviewees express their nuisance because

they fear that Amharic might substitute Silt'e in the long run. As an example, greeting forms are given. Younger people usually reply to the Silt'e greeting fäyyä andärkä? 'lit. Did you spend the night well?', which means 'Good morning', with the Amharic expression dähna addärk? 'lit. Did you spend the night well?', or mix it with English, like fasär [Engl. father] dähna addärk? 'lit. Father, did you spend the night well?' (KII8 and FGD, T1).

Currently, it is almost impossible to find a person who speaks Silt'e without mixing it with Amharic. Except a few aged people, almost all adult and young Silt'e are bilingual in Amharic and in Silt'e (FGD, S4). In all domains, Amharic and Silt'e are used together. This is detrimental for the community since it may yield the extinction of the Silt'e language.

As far as the dominance of English is concerned, the interviewees argue that English does not influence Silt'e. They say that English might influence Amharic but not Silt'e. In fact, English is dominantly used as MOI in schools starting from grade 5. However, the students complain that they are learning all subjects in schools via Amharic. Despite that most classroom discussions are conducted in Amharic, the students say that their teachers even teach Silt'e and English as subjects via Amharic.

In the Silt'e Zone, Amharic is used for interaction in most domains, and has a high prestige. In my observation, the entire younger generation is bilingual in Silt'e and Amharic. Most of them even communicate in Amharic with their friends in schools and sport fields. Although Silt'e is used in the education system currently, it is not the official language of the zone. It is not used for writing official letters in the zone nor to record minutes, most public notices, street names, menus, reports or speeches. The FM radio programs, newspapers, and magazines prepared in the zone are disseminating information in Amharic, not in Silt'e. This clearly shows the influence of Amharic over Silt'e. this forced people to shift in to Amharic rather than using their heritage language.

DISCUSSION

Firstly, despite efforts exerted to recognize and provide mother tongue education, the children of many linguistic groups have not yet had the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue. Currently, out of the total 89 languages (the 2007 Population & Housing Census), about twenty five languages have been in use at the primary schools (Tekeste, 1990). As a result, a significant number of ethnic groups are still attending primary school in their L2. The Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia (1994) stipulates: "Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages." However, more than twenty five years since the introduction very little progress has been made towards the implementation of mother tongue education. Tiglu (2016) pointed out that reasons such as multiplicity of languages, lack of teaching materials in the local languages, absence of grammar and scientific terms, and lack of commitment on the part of ethnic groups to develop their own languages and to successfully implement their local languages into the education sector make the implementation of mother tongue education difficult. Secondly, when the education policy was put in to place in 1991, minority groups faced obstacles during instruction. The settlement pattern of people in Ethiopia is that minority

communities live side by side with the dominant ethnic groups. When the policy was put into effect, no arrangement was done for children in these communities. To overcome the problem, MoE issued a circular to the regions to offer instruction to the communities in Amharic. However, this move by the government was not welcomed by some regions, and parents pulled their children out of school. As Amharic became the medium of education, those whose home language was Amharic had the advantage of learning in their own language, whereas, those whose home languages other than Amharic were disadvantaged. Misconception about mother tongue education and preference to some language over the mother tongue is a major problem. In this regard, two different views have emerged since the language in education policy has been in effect. One is the mandatory use of instructional language in some parts of the country. Due to this situation some parents were forced to send their children to schools that catered for ethnic language instruction even when the children do not speak the language. On the other hand, the promotion of mother tongue education is challenged by social attitudes. The communities in some regions are not aware of the cognitive and linguistic benefits that mother tongue education offers, and would not subscribe to their children being taught in their mother tongue. For example, the findings show that Some of Silt'e community members consider it a waste of time to send their children to school to learn their own language, which they already know. They view that it may restrict their progress. In so doing, the society disapproves of mother tongue education in favor of Amharic due to lack of awareness about mother tongue education.

Language and achievement are closely linked and the use of unfamiliar language as a medium of instruction contributes a great deal to students' poor performance and academic failure. In Ethiopian context, studies have been carried out to show the level of difficulty that language has been causing children in their achievement and understanding. The EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment) study (2010) carried out in eight regions shows that the children of several majority language groups who have not yet had the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue are unable to read and write. Besides, Heugh, Benson, Gebre Yohannes (2007) conducted a research on the effects of a multiplicity of models on academic achievement, including performance in English. The researchers made comparisons among students using mother tongue as four (early-exit model), six (late-exit model), and eight (very late-exit model) years of primary schooling. Their findings that Ethiopian students who were taught in their L1 for the first eight years had significantly higher mean achievement scores in mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics and outperformed their peers who were engaged in late-exit model and early-exit model supported by the continuation of mother tongue instruction for four years. As such, these researchers believe extended use of mother tongue ensures greater learning and that children engaged in it exhibited the highest level of academic achievement. Similarly, the study on media of instruction in Ethiopia attests the superiority of learners with substantial mother tongue schooling. They made comparisons among students using mother tongue as four, six, and eight years of primary schooling, and affirmed that academic performance was different. Children who had mother tongue as medium of instruction up to the end of primary school performed better in both L1 and L2 than their counterparts in late-exit and early-exit models. But this study shows there are challenges with regard to language in education choice. The

education of students from linguistic minority backgrounds comes with its own speech community forced to shift the dominant language. Since the introduction of Silt'e in primary education in 1995 and the referendum in 2000, even though there are progresses to tackle the linguistic problems in the community, Silt'e is not used widely for communication within the community and at government offices. There are also constraints in the use of Silt'e in the media as well. Lack of terminology development had serious implications for using Silt'e in education. Linguistic diversity within Silt'e posed another challenge in the use of Silt'e as MOI in schools. Standard Silt'e is not based on any of the actually occurring dialects. This happens because Amharic is used in the overall community for social interaction. It is noticed that Silt'e language speakers are motivated to learn and use Amharic for economic, political and social purposes. In other words, the influence of Amharic limits the development and the use of Silt'e in the community. The utilization of Amharic as official or working language for many years still resists the process of change. The study also focused on language related problems during modernization and standardization of Silt'e. The study addressed the discrepancy between what is expected and what is being achieved in the implementation of the policy in relation to language use in the Silt'e community. Finally, the study strives to identify the contribution of the language in education planning and policy of Ethiopia in the improvement of the function of Silt'e. It took into consideration problems related to teaching-learning in Silt'e. This study thus deals with the attitude of language use in the overall participation of the community in educational, economic, social, political and cultural development. It furthermore describes the linguistic variables in relation to language dominance in Silt'e. It looks specifically at issues such as the Silt'e language varieties spoken in the zone and their application in education. It also examines the extent to which these language varieties have influenced the standard form of Silt'e.

It focused on understanding how language in education policy has been implemented particularly within the community. The view of stakeholders towards the implementation of the language in education policy on the use of mother tongue as a MOI as well as the impact on teaching-learning of local language in economic, social and political development in relation to wider communication languages was investigated. This study gave a due emphasis for such issues to point out the impact of language attitudes, dilemmas and prospects of using Silt'e in the community for different purposes. There are numerous studies carried out on language planning and policy in Ethiopia and throughout the world. Basically in Ethiopia a countrywide study conducted by Heugh et al. (2007) describe that decentralization of educational authority to eleven Regional Education Bureaus in Ethiopia encouraged capacity building and increased local and regional participation in educational and language development activities. It shows the policy put into practice in the absence of clearly formulated implementation plans at federal level.

Tiglu Geza (2016) describes the Ethiopian language policy from historical and typological perspectives. In the historical overview, the different covert and overt language policies so far encountered are examined. The language ideologies of the Imperial (1930-1974), the Derg (1974-1991) and the EPRDF (1991–present) governments are compared. In the typological overview, the language policies implemented by different governments are classified based on the existing literature on

language policy. Issues surrounding language diversity, status and corpus planning and policy formulations are addressed. An attempt is made to assess and compare the Ethiopian experience with experiences of other multilingual countries. This paper reviews the trends of Ethiopian language policies based on document analysis. It gives an outline of the different language policies implemented in Ethiopia until today.

Conclusion and implications

It is very essential to work on the development of the local languages since Silt'e language is a natural resource for Silt'e people which should be maintained. For Silt'e people, the language development is inseparable from other development endeavors. Many studies verify that using one's own language is considered as respecting self identity and developing self confidence. It also contributes in the academic success of learners. The findings of this study show that languages are a means of the expression of their unique identity of humanity rather than being the cause of fear and uncertainty. Preserving local languages and cultural assets and transferring to the next generations is one of alarming issues. The main reason is that the languages which have limited number of speakers are shifting to the dominant languages. It is believed that to help Silt'e language to be competent enough and survive the involvement of Silt'e people has no substitution. To develop Silt'e, the community should use it for oral and written communication in diverse domain. The teaching children's mother tongue at early grades (1-4) is not adequate the development of a language. They are forced to change the medium of instruction without recognizing their mother tongue very well. The findings revealed that the students are urged to shift before consolidating their knowledge on Silt'e language. Silt'e zone administration should therefore establish effective policies to preserve Silt'e language in the community. Advocates of mother tongue education sometimes say that it serves as a useful first step preparing for later successful learning of the socially dominant language. The study indicates that there is no change in using Silt'e as written media. In the past governments of Ethiopia, basically only Amharic was used for official purpose. Currently, only three Ethiopian languages are given more attention in the mass media, namely Amharic, Afan Oromo, and Tigrinya. Other Ethiopian languages are only rarely used in community FM radio programs as well as in television. This is also true for Silt'e. The study also revealed that Silt'e received very little attention for interpersonal communication. Many Silt'e people are currently shifting to Amharic in all domains. In other words, Amharic highly influenced Silt'e language use. The number of Amharic speakers in the Silt'e Zone is increasing. In fact, the expansion of Amharic is not a problem by itself. But there is no balance in the use of Silt'e and Amharic in the zone, i.e. Silt'e speakers started to substitute their mother tongue with the dominant language, Amharic. Therefore, it is crucial nowadays to promote the use of Silt'e in social, economic and political domains.

REFERENCES

Bahru Zewde. 1991. A History of Modern Ethiopia from 1855-1974. London: Janes Curry.

Bahru Zewde. 1999. History of Ethiopia from 1855-1991. *Ye-Ethiopia Tarik Ke-1847 eske 1983 E.C.* (In Amharic). Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Baker, Paul. 2010. *Sociolinguistics and Corpus Linguistics.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bekale Seyum. 2012. Language Diversity and the Challenges of Government Language Planning in Ethiopia. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.

Central Statistics Authority. 2007. Summary and Statistical Report of 2007 Population and Housing Census: Population Size by Age and Sex. Addis Ababa: UNFPA.

Cohen, Gideon. 2000. Identity and Opportunity: The Implication of Using Local Languages in the Primary Education System of SNNPR, Ethiopia. Unpublished PhD Thesis. London: School of African and Oriental Studies.

Cohen, Gideon. 2002. Language and Ethnic Boundaries: Perceptions of Identity Expressed through Attitudes towards the Use of Language Education in Southern Ethiopia. *Northeast African Studies.* 7/3:178-199. Michigan: Michigan State University Press

Cohen, Gideon. 2006. The Development of Regional and Local Languages in Ethiopia's Federal System. In: David Turton (Ed.), *Ethnic Federalism: the Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective.* Eastern African Studies. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University press

Cooper, Robert; Shohamy, Elana and Walters, Joel (eds.). 2001. *New Perspectives and Issues in Educational Language Policy.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. 1995. The constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. *Negarit Gazeta*, 1/1995.

Fishman, Joshua. 1991. Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages. England: Multilingual Matters.

Getachew Anteneh and Derib Ado. 2006. Language Policy in Ethiopia: History and Current Trends. *Ethiopian Journal of Education and Science.* 2/1, 37-62.

Heugh Kathleen, Benson Carol, Berhanu Bogale, Mekonnen Alemu. 2007. *Study on Medium of Instruction in Primary Schools in Ethiopia.* Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

Hornberger, Nancy. 2008. Can Schools Save Indigenous Languages? Policy and Practice on Four Continents. University of Pennsylvania. Palgrave: Macmillan.

Hussein Mohammed. 2010. Silt'e as a Medium of Instruction. Unpublished MA Thesis. Addis Ababa: Addis *Ababa* University.

McNab, Christine. 1989. Language Policy and Language Practice: Implementation Dilemmas in Ethiopian Education. Stockholm: Institute of International Education, University of Stockholm.

MOE (Ministry of Education). 1994. *New Education and Training Policy.* Addis Ababa: St. George Printing Press.

MOE (Ministry of Education). 2006. Five Year Education Sector Capacity Development Strategic Plan. Ministry of Education. Available at:www.ecdpm.org/dcc/capacitystudy . (accessed 03 January 2013).

Moges Yigezu. 2010. Language Ideologies and Challenges of Multilingual Education in Ethiopia. The Case of Harari Region. *African Books collectives.* Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA).

Mukherjee, Dipika and Khemlani, Maya. 2011. National Language Planning & Language Shifts in Malaysian Minority Communities Speaking in Many Tongues. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Smith, Lahra. 2008. The Politics of Contemporary Language Policy in Ethiopia. *Journal of Developing Societies.* 24/2: 207–243. Georgetown: Sage.

Tekeste Negash. 1990. The Crisis of Ethiopian Education: Some Implications for Nation Building. *Uppsala Reports on Education.* 29/1. Uppsala: Uppsala University.

Tiglu Geza. 2016. Language Planning and Policy in Silt'e. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.

UNESCO. 1953. The Use of the Vernacular Languages in Education. *Monographs on Foundations of Education.* 8/23. Paris: UNESCO.

****