

Indigenous Language Shift and Maintenance in Shinasha Community

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Research Article

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Abstract

This paper discusses language shift and maintenance in Shinasha community. The purpose of this study is to assess language shift in Shinasha. More specifically, to identify the factors that lead some of the Shinasha people to use other languages, to show in which domain Shinasha language preferred and to indicate which language Shinasha people prefer in various domains. To collect the necessary data for the study, interview, questionnaire and focus group discussion were used as data collection instruments. The descriptive survey research design was used to conduct this study by using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The result showed that demography, economy, psychology and intermarriage are some of the major factors that led Shinasha people to shift from Shinasha to other indigenous languages. Amharic and Afan Oromo are used in various domains by Shinasha youths. On the other hand, a few elders speak Shinasha language. In general, in Shisha community youths prefer Amharic, Afan Oromo and Awngi in various domains because of economic, attitudinal, historical, demographic factors.

Introduction

The existence of language surely cannot be separated from our daily life. Through language, the interaction among tribes and religions can be delivered smoothly (Holmes & Janet, 2008). Language is a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary convention infinitely expandable modifiable according to the change needs and conditions of the speaker (Robins, 1985).

Background of the study

Language shift happens when the people in a particular culture or subculture alter their primary language for communication. It is also the process by which a speech community in a contact situation which is consisting bilingual speakers gradually stops using one of its own vernaculars in favor of the other (Holmes and Janet, 2008).

The casual factors of language shift are generally considered as social needs in the era of globalization, where people speak using more modern language, like English and Amharic and Afan Oromo Ethiopia with more improved spelling. That will link to the social status or prestige of the speakers. The more often they speak with dominant language, the easier they get along with people with higher status social (Holmes & Janet 2008).

This paper approached the issue of language shift and maintenance in Shinasha community, Benshangul Gumuz Regional state of Ethiopia.

The Shinasha language or Bowro is a North Omotic language spoken in Western Ethiopia by the Shinasha people (Ashenafi, 1989). Its speakers live in scattered areas in north of the Abay River in Dangu, Dbat'i, Bullen and Wombera districts which are parts of the Benshangul Gumuz Regional State.

In Shinasha community the main languages of wider communication are Amharic and Oromo. But it is also quite frequent that Shinasha people know some Gumuz; and a few also speak Agaw (Awngi). There is a strong tendency for highlanders to use Oromo, while the lowlanders use Amharic as their second language. Many of them speak both (Wedekind and Alga, 2002)

Statement of the Problem

Bilingual and multilingual societies may gradually stop using one of its two languages in favor of another. Today Shinasha people gradually abandoned using their language in favor of other major languages. Previous research has shown that the Boro people, also known as the Shinasha, are in the process of shifting from the Borna language to Oromo and Amharic. According to Wedekind and Alga (2002) their main languages of wider communication are Amharic and Afan Oromo. But it is also quite frequent that Shinasha people know some Gumuz; and a few also speak Agaw (Awngi). There is a strong tendency for highlanders to use Oromo, while the lowlanders use Amharic as their second language. Many of them speak both.

So, the researcher is more interested to come up with the factors that lead them to shift from Shinasha language to other languages as well as to show the possible ways to save the language from language death.

To tackle the above indicated problem the researchers addressed the following research questions.

- What are the factors that lead them to shift from Shinasha language to other languages?
- In which domain Shinasha language is preferred?
- What languages do Shinasha people prefer in various domains?

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The general objective of the study is to know why Shinasha people shift from their language to other languages.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study mainly is

- To identify the factors that leads some of the Shinasha people to use other languages.
- To show in which domain Shinash language preferred.
- To indicate which language is Shinasha people prefer in various domains.

Research Methodology

Sample Size

For the fulfillment of this study researchers selected two districts among the four Shinasha districts. Furthermore, researchers selected 100 respondents. Besides, the selection put in to account all people who belong to Shinasha speech community to get reliable data. Researchers asked only Shianasha languages speakers and this is a criterion which was used to select respondents.

Sampling Technique

To select informants researchers used purposive sampling technique, because, it enables researchers to get bilingual informants. In this study researchers are considering all people living in the speech community that can either bilingual or multilingual and the selected informants should belong to that speech community particularly Dangur and Wombera districts.

Data Collecting Instruments

To collect the necessary data researchers employed both questionnaires and interview and the detail is as follows.

Questionnaire

The questionnaires contained both open and close ended questions and distributed for selected hundred informants in the study area. Researchers used questionnaire as a main data collection instrument to collect the necessary data.

Interview

On the other hand, the interviews contained both structured and semi structured questions. First researchers selected twenty interviewees. Interview was conducted for ten days with selected informants in the study areas to strengthen the data obtained through questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected from informants, researchers employed only qualitative data analysis method. Besides, researchers analyzed the data using statements with some important examples. So, qualitative method of data analysis has been employed for analyzing data collected in a statement form.

Data Analysis And Results

Analysis of data obtained through questionnaire

Causes of language shift in Shinasha speech community

Respondents Response for factors led them to Shift from their language to other indigenous languages

Table 4.1 shows cause of language shift.

Question	No of Respondents				
	Economic factor	Attitudinal factor	Intermarriage	Historical factor	Demographic factor
What factors lead you to shift from Shinasha to other indigenous language?	40	20	17	3	20

The above table shows that the respondents on factors that leads them to shift from Shinasha language to other indigenous languages. Based on their response, Economic, attitudinal and demographic are major causes that contain 40 or 49.1% and 20 or 37.5% and 17 or 34% of the total respondents respectively. And the remaining 17 respondents or 20.8% and 3 or 13.6% said intermarriage factors and historical factors are causes to Shift from their language to Amharic, Afan Oromo and Awnji. The explanation is discussed below.

Based on the above table, there are four basic causes to shift from Shinasha languages to other indigenous languages. These are economic factor, attitudinal factor, intermarriage, historical and demographic factors.

The domain that Shinasha language preferred by Shinasha Community?

Respondent's response on in which domain Shinasha language is preferred by Shinasha community

Table 4.2 shows in which domain shinasha language is preferred?

Question	No of Respondents					
	With family members	With husband and wife	With their colleagues in work places	With their teammates in sport places	With shopkeepers in shops	With waiter or waitress
In which domain you prefer Shinash language?	70	25	0	5	0	0

The above table indicates that the respondent's on in which domain Shinasha language is preferred? Based on their response, Shinasha language is preferred with family members that account 70 or 49.1 % and particularly with husband and wife and it accounts 25 or 20.8%. Moreover it is rarely preferred in sport places that account 5 or 13%. But Shinasha language is not used by Shinasha community in hotels with service providers and work places with colleges that account 0 or 0%.

The language Shinasha community prefer for various domains

Respondents' response on which language Shinasha people prefer for various domains

Table 4.3 shows the language that Shinasha community prefer for various domains

Question	No of Respondents				
	Shinasha language	Amharic language	Afan Oromo language	Awngi language	Gumuz language
Which language you prefer for various domains?	0	70	20	7	3

Table 4.3 shows that respondents' response on the language Shinasha speech community prefers. According to their response Shinasha speech community prefers Amharic for various domains that account of 70 or 60% and in addition to Amharic they prefer Afan Oromo for various domains which account of 20 or 37.5 percent and rarely do they prefer Awngi and Gumuz languages for various domains. But they do not prefer Shinasha language or their original language.

Discussion Of The Findings

Results related to language shift and maintenance revealed that Shinasha people shift from their original language to another because of various reasons. These are economic, attitudinal, intermarriage, demographic and historical factors led them to replace their language by another. These results agree with Nawaz's (2012 & et. al,) Language shift is a complex and affected phenomenon, motivated and stimulated by accumulative force of historical, cultural, economic, social and psychological factors.

Economic factor is the main reason that forces many Shinashas to abandon speaking their language. This is happens when Shinasha people see the importance of learning the second language for a better job and living. For instance, most of Ethiopians eagerly learn English, Amharic and Afan Oromo because those three languages share a great contribution in economic and political aspects. This idea is related to Holmes's (2008) job seekers see the importance of learning a new language which is widely used in

business. Furthermore, this idea meets with Nawaz's & et. al. (2012) according to Marxist point of view, economical factors are the basis for overall social patterns. English language promised and promises financial security. You can get high level jobs only if you know English language. The importance of English for success in any field can hardly be emphasized because it is the language of financial activities.

Attitudinal factor or psychological is the other factor that leads Shinasha people to replace their language in favor of Amharic and Afan Oromo. Language shift is slower among communities where the minority language is highly valued, therefore when the language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it will be maintained longer and vice versa. As we understand Shinasha youths do not have positive attitude towards their language. Even they are ashamed of speaking their language as we got from respondents. When they speak their language they consider themselves as minor group. This idea is supported by Veettil's & et.al. (2020) another critical factor in promoting language maintenance or shift is the attitude of the natives or the dominant group towards the language of the migrant community. A positive and supportive attitude of the dominant group gives the minority groups more opportunities for language maintenance. One's attitude to a language is another factor that affects language maintenance and shift.

The other factor that helps Shinasha people to shift from their original language to another is intermarriage. Shinasha youths do not speak their language when they communicate with their in-laws after they got married with others, because, Shinasha language is not used for wider communication. Even they feel shame when they speak Shinasha language in front of their wives or husbands in different social occasions.

Historical factor is the other factor which leads Shinasha people to stop speaking their language. This factor is not the major one. There are few Shinasha people who dislike their language because of their historical background. This idea agrees with Nawaz's & et. al. (2012)

The other factor that pushes Shinasha people to transfer from their language to other indigenous languages is demographic factor. This factor plays the role in the process of language shift. When there is a community of speakers moving to a region or a country (urbanization) whose language is different from theirs, there is a tendency to shift to the new language. Every time an immigrant learns the native language of the new country he/she will pass it down to their children and replace the old language with a new one. When Shinashas migrate permanently or temporarily to another for different purposes, they do not speak their language in their new areas. Some time they do not expose their identities. This idea is related to Veettil's & et.al. (2020) from a demographic perspective, the numerical strength of a linguistic community and the concentration of speakers in one area are crucial variables in promoting language maintenance. Moreover, this idea is related with Crystal's (2000) the social factors leading to the abandonment of minority languages are many, of different type and usually interrelated. In this case we understand to demographic factors - as for example the number of the minority language speakers and their concentration in the settlement area the diffusion of linguistically mixed marriages within the

minority group, the status and the prestige of the language on a local and international level, the existing institutional support of the minority language, the intensity of the economic pressure deriving from the wider society, and so on.

Shinasha community in Ethiopia prefers their language when they interact with family members only. So Shinasha language is used only in home. However, when they communicate with others outside home they use either Amharic or Afan Oromo. In addition, Shinasha community prefers other indigenous languages for their various domains. These languages are Amharic, Afan Oromo and rarely Gumuz and Awigni, because these languages are prestigious languages. Particularly, Amharic is a more prestigious language in Ethiopia.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussions of the current study, the following conclusions have been reached: Apart from historical factors, economic, intermarriage, demographic, political factors and attitudinal factors have greatly contributed to the current language shift in Shinasha. It is concluded that majority of bilingual and young Shinasha have negative attitude towards using pure Shinasha language for their daily communication as they are in difficulty to fully express themselves in Shinasha and even they cannot speak the language at all. It is identified that they prefer Amharic, Afan Oromo and Awngi for various domains.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions and conclusions made above, the following recommendations are given: awareness training is needed for the young generation of Shinasha in the use of their heritage language for their daily communications. The concerned body should give due attention to preserve this minority language. The language policy of Ethiopian should consider minority languages and these languages should be planned before their death.

Declarations

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Authors' contributions

Adugnaw Techane a principal investigator designed the study and collected the data and analyzed and interpreted the data. He wrote the draft of the manuscript so many times and selected the appropriate

journal and formatted the manuscript. The researcher also revised the manuscript appropriately and edited the manuscript properly. He approved the manuscript.

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Availability of data and materials

The datasets of the study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request

Competing interest

The author confirm that I do not have competing interest

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