

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY ETHIOPIA

***Amanuel Raga Yadate, **Eba Teresa Garoma**

**Department of Afan Oromo and Literature, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University, Ethiopia*

***Department of English Language and Literature, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University, Ethiopia*

ABSTRACT

This study tried to investigate to what degree language is used in marking national identities among the Ethiopian nations, and examine how the various nationalities perceive the relation between language and nationality. The sources of data for this study were 54 key informants who were selected from 27 representative linguistic groups using multi-phase purposive sampling technique. Accordingly, the data for the study were collected using thematically structured interviews which generally inquired about linguistic behaviors and nationalism, conviction about national identity and its salient features, and perceptions about language and national identity. Then, the data were analyzed in light of the social identity theory which asserts that 'individuals strategically use language as a potent symbol of identity when testing or maintaining intergroup boundaries.' As found out by this study, the majority of the nations considered in our investigation do not use language as the salient feature of their national identities because of its dynamic nature. However, they all consider that it is an important means through which their cultural and historical values transmit from generation to generation. Consequently, they use it in various modes or for various purposes. Therefore, the study concluded that in the contemporary Ethiopia, language is not the primary symbol of national identities; yet it is used in constructing them.

Key Words: Language, National Identity, Ethiopia

1. INTRODUCTION

This study has aimed at unraveling the role of language in national identity constructions in the current Ethiopia. Yet, for those who try to understand the title of this research based on the experiences of Ethiopia's past hundred years of state formation processes or for scholars guided by the definition of 'nation' based on the theory of 'one-nation-one language', the operational definition we have assigned to 'national identity' or 'nation' may not come to their minds at once. So, before going further, we would explain what we mean by 'nation' and 'national identity' first.

Accordingly, our definition of 'nation' follows that of Emerson (1959) which draws in the sociocultural authenticity as a defining factor. According to Emerson a nation is "a community of people who feel that they belong together in the double sense that they share deeply significant elements of a common heritage and that they have a common destiny for the future" (ibid: 95).

What is more, our definition of national identity, goes in line with Smith's (1991) specification which says that "national identity is a multidimensional concept...extended to include a specific language, sentiments and symbolism." (ibid: vii) As other scholars generally define it, national identity is a characteristic feature of a nation that differentiates it from other nations (cf. Zohar 1985, Pride and Holmes 1979). Therefore, unlike the past political 'philosophers' of the country who chose to consider Ethiopia as just one nation with many ethnic groups and one national language, this study considers the country as a multi-national unit with multilingual nationalities. This means each linguistic group of the country is treated as a separate nation in this monograph.

As already stated above, language is one of the salient features of national identity. Regarding the historical origin of this phenomenon, Plank (1979:430) tells us that in the medieval period university students of international European cities who belonged to the same linguistic groups used to identify themselves as the same nationals and in the same period the expansion of French territories seemed to depend on linguistic bases too. But this trend has been changed very quickly because of the European cultural renaissance. Yet, the use of language as a symbol of national identity once again popped up in the 19th century and pulled through to the 20th and the 21st century though not uniformly (ibid).

The National Education and Training Policy (NETP) of Ethiopia, published in April 1994, clearly stated that one of the objectives of the policy is: 'to recognize the rights of nations and nationalities to learn in their own language.

It goes on to say that 'Primary education will be given in nationality languages', and 'nations and nationalities can either learn in their own language or can choose from among those selected on the basis of national and country-wide distribution' (Ethiopia, MOE, 1994). Therefore, the NETP led to the present two-or three-language outcome in Ethiopia. Nationality languages or Amharic are the language of instruction in primary school. English is given as a subject beginning in grade 1, and it is the language of instruction in secondary schools and institutions of higher education, usually beginning in either grade 7 or grade 9. In regions where a nationality language (NL) is taught which is other than Amharic, the latter is given as an additional subject from grade 1 or grade 5, depending on the region. This is presumably because of the special constitutional status of Amharic as the national 'working language'. This rather specific set of policies on language took shape under the TGE, but was formalized in the 1995 Constitution. Article 5 of the Constitution guarantees that, 'All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition. Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal government. Members of the Federation may by law determine their respective working languages'. And in Article 39 it provides that: 'Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write, and to develop its own languages; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history' (Ethiopian Constitution, 1995).

It is under the protection of this new constitution that many of the country's nationalities started to use their mother tongues for various official and non-official purposes as they desired. This new phenomenon which increased the frequencies of vitalities of many of the country's languages must have surprised scholars like Abraham Demoze (1998) to the extent of asserting that the current national identities of the country's citizens are marked by language uses. However, given the short life of the current language policy of the current government and the language policies of the past political powers of the country which had almost managed to create the sense of denying linguistic identifications of oneself among all but one of the nations of the country, one may not totally accept this assertion without irregularities. Thus, this study was conducted to find out the soundness of this claim.

Taking the above mentioned irregularities as one evidence for Abraham's (1998) over generalization, we further see a different practice among the Ganza in Begi area whose national identity is uniformly marked by language than religion or culture (cf. Krell 2011). However, for the other nations of Ethiopia who unlike the Ganza and the Oromo are either far from our observations or not yet researched, the practice may take a different image. Therefore, to either bridge the epistemological gap seen in this regard or to refute the assertion of scholars like Abraham (1998) cited above or others who may hold similar view, this study aimed at unraveling the currently blurred image of the role of language in national identity construction in Ethiopia.

Generally, this study tried to investigate the role of language in national identity constructions and the degree of prevalence of this practice throughout Ethiopia. Specially, the study tried to:

1. investigate to what degree language is used in constructing national identities among the Ethiopian nations,
2. analyze and expound how language functions in constructing national identities among various nationalities of Ethiopia, and
3. analyze how the various nationalities of Ethiopia perceive the relation between language and nationality.

As already stated, this study investigated the interaction between language and national identity. It expounded perceptions and convictions of Ethiopian peoples' national identities and their relationship with language. To this end, the study will be based on purposively selected speakers of 27 languages of the two super-families of Ethiopia i.e. Afro-asiatic and Nilo-saharan.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study basically involved both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Informants are selected from sample languages based on purposive sampling techniques. Structured interview

is a tool used for collecting data for this research. The types of data on which the research relies on are thematic language and identity inquiries.

The theoretical base of this study was the Social Identity Theory. What is termed as Social Identity Theory, in linguistics is the practice of using language to manipulate personal identity through group identity one portrays. This is described by Meyerhoff as the way in which individuals can strategically use language as a potent symbol of identity when testing or maintaining intergroup boundaries. This can take place as either divergence, when one highlights the differences between the identity group one belongs to and that of one's interlocutor, or as convergence, when in order to help form or nurture a social bond with the interlocutor, and to show solidarity and amiability towards that person, one may use language to play down the differences between oneself and the other person. A speaker is able to choose from the various linguistic choices available to him, knowing that these choices will be read by the listener as identity markers. The choices made can either create and or reinforce the bond between the two (convergence), or can work to increase the social distance between them (divergence). It is important to emphasize at this stage that this process almost always happens on a fully unconscious level.

Informants for this study were selected based on multi-phase purposive sampling techniques. As discussed in the statement of the problem section, in Ethiopia there are around 80 different languages with over 200 dialects which are spoken by over 85 million people. As a result, with the limited time and resources allocated for the study, it is not possible to consider all population of the country. So, based on the primary purpose of this study i.e. finding out the extent of Ethiopian people's language use in constructing national identities, mother tongue speakers' population size has been given primary attention to select target languages from which informants are selected.

Accordingly, 10 languages each with at least near one million or more speakers (CSA 2007) are selected from the two super-language families of the country. Then, 17 more languages are selected from language sub-families not able to meet the first criterion based on at least one of the following criteria: languages which ranked first in their families, languages with conservative speakers, languages alienated from their families, and languages whose speakers exercise multiple identity interactions.

Thus, the total of 27 languages whose sum of speakers according to CSA (2007) report is over 90% of the total population of Ethiopia are selected as target languages from which informants for this study are selected. From each of the selected languages, two key persons were selected as informants, giving equal chances to both male and female. So, the total number of informants for this research is $27 \times 2 = 54$.

For this study, 12 different sites have been selected from all over Ethiopia. These are: Jimma, Awash, Harar, Gambella, Arba Minch, Hawasa, Key-afer (42 kms from Jinka), Gonder, Asosa, Begi, Tepi, and Jinka. Starting from Jimma, each of these sites has been selected to obtain

informants from as many selected language speakers as possible to be found at the least possible distance. This is done to keep the cost of the study low. So, informants selected from any of the sites may not necessarily be natives of the site but currently live there due to factors like education or employment. (See, appendix 3 for detail).

The types of data on which the research is based on are more of the informants' perceptions, and convictions of their own national identities and/or their keen observations about linguistic behaviors of their nations. To collect the data, thematically structured interviews were used. The themes of interview are: linguistic behaviors & nationalism, and conviction about national identity and its salient feature (s).

After collecting the data we organized them under the various themes and presented them in tables. Then based on the Social Identity Theory, we analyzed and interpreted them to draw conclusions of the study.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

To uncover earlier researches in the area of language and national identity, we mainly searched the Linguistics and Language Behavior articles and monographs on the internet, inputting various keywords relative to our research questions on language and national or ethnic identity. We also have reviewed books, searching for chapters detailing work on these topics.

This section presents the literature review. In this section, the studies we focus on emphasized the role of language in recognizing group membership, which represents how individuals identify themselves in contexts of nationality within a diverse society. In addition, we have also tried to review various books and articles to come up with the conceptual framework of this study.

According to Bailey (2002), language is essential in the construction of identity both as a medium through which it is constructed and as a symbol. Gafaranga (2005) also supports this view stating that it is through conversational structures such as language preference that social structure including group membership of ethnic identities are created, ascribed, and accepted.

In a separate article, Gafaranga (2001) discusses points made by Sacks (1966) that speakers frequently evoke membership to "collections" or categories through conversations. By displaying their membership or categories, they are also revealing their recognition of other participants' identities. Gafaranga further suggests that speakers fit themselves and others in a language based categorization device which define them as speakers of specific languages.

Cashman (2004) similarly supports Gafaranga's view that language preference is a way speakers ascribe and accept or reject group membership or identification. In language preference and choice, Eisdahl (2003) also notes that bilinguals seem to distinguish between the "we" and the "they"

depending on in-group or out-group interactions, which represents how bilinguals identify themselves in regards to the majority and minority cultures. Fuller (2007) adds that the status of a language as majority or minority in a particular society in identity negotiation in a multilingual community is very important. In her research in a bilingual program of Spanish-English bilingual elementary students, she concludes that the quantity of their English or Spanish use and the functions they fulfill with each language are linked to their identification as social beings. While language choice was not the single factor influencing students' identities, each language took on different meanings and functions, allowing variable construction of identities.

Along-side language preference and use, Rampton (as cited in Esdahl, 2003) suggests that social interactions also contribute to the creation and negotiation of identities. Speakers may use a language that is not considered their "own language", providing opportunities to explore and re-define their identities. Furthermore, the social relations brought along in the conversation can influence speakers to choose a certain language in interactions. In her study of Turkish-Danish pupils' development of language choice, Esdahl goes on to propose that bilinguals not only use their two languages to establish themselves in opposition to an outer society but also to establish themselves within a group, creating in-group versus out-group interactions.

The power associated with language is another important issue to consider relative to identity. Bourdieu (as cited in Garcia et al, 2006) posits that "linguistic practices are symbolic capital that is distributed unequally in the linguistic community." Some languages have economic and social rewards compared to other languages which can ascribe more power to individuals who choose to speak that language.

Given all this research on language preference, use, and identity formation, it is important to note a contrary position stated by Auer (2005). Opposite to the previously discussed authors, he asserts that bilingual and monolingual is not a membership or identification category. In other words, bilinguals do not group and identify themselves similarly simply because they speak more than one language.

The idea of language as a method of displaying one's identity can be seen in works by a range of linguists, including that of Thornborrow (2004), who claims that 'one of the most fundamental ways we have of establishing our identity, and of shaping other people's views of who we are, is through our use of language'. This function is indisputable and unavoidable. Whether one likes it or not, every time one uses language to communicate, membership of one or more identity groups is shown, be that as part of a group of speakers of a certain language or a certain linguistic variety, a certain social class, age group, educational background and indeed many more. One cannot communicate using language without disclosing at least some of this information about one's identity. This second use of language - that of being a means of outward portrayal of identity is the

one which will form the basis of our study, a sociolinguistic study specifically looking at the use of language to express identity.

The use of language to construct identity has been explored by many scholars (Adger, 1998; Bucholtz, 1999; Valdés, 2000; and Zentella, 2002, to mention few) among multilingual societies. And all of them show that neither identity nor language use is a fixed notion as both are dynamic, depending upon time and place. How we perceive ourselves changes with our community of practice, allowing us multiple identities over the years or even within a day. In discussions of national identity, many have pointed out that language is not a necessary requirement to identify with a nation (e.g., a person may identify themselves as Irish yet not speak Gaelic; see Eastman & Reese, 1981, or Liebkind, 1999). Additionally, a nation or an individual ascribing to that group may have a symbolic attachment to an associated language, but may use another more utilitarian language instead. This presumes the speaker is able to self-select their nationality, or more broadly, their identity.

The work of Goffman (1963) has been influential in showing that the self is constructed entirely through discourse, making our language choices of paramount importance to our identity construction. In fact, he states that personal identity is defined by how others identify us, not how we identify ourselves. The speaker can attempt to influence how others perceive them, but ultimately it is the hearer who creates the speaker's identity. If the speaker is not allowed any influence on their own output, then the hearer is able to construct an identity for the speaker which may be entirely disparate from the speaker's desired identity. This allows the hearer an inordinate amount of power, and diminishes the self-sufficiency and independence of the speaker. This is a frequently used technique to control populations in settings as diverse as schools, prisons, and workplaces. It is also used in national language policies to extinguish the power associated with politically "subversive" and "inappropriate" languages, such as Catalan in Spain or Hokkien in Singapore (cf, Pennycook, 1994). Being multilingual in the wrong languages is seen as an impediment to integration and hegemony, which is equated with harmony, although Phillipson (1999:99) has pointed out that there is "no straight correlation between a single language such as English and positive ascriptions such as progress, peace, international understanding, or the enjoyment of human rights".

The use of language by a group is often analyzed as having two components: the "we" versus "they" code (Gumperz, 1982; Lambert, 1972 in Zentella, 1990), or the high versus low language (Valdés, 2000). The group language "we" code represents in-group speech. It connotes intimacy and is largely confined to the home because it suffers lower prestige than the "they" code or high language, which is the language of the more powerful group and is associated with wealth and status. In an English speaking environment, Spanish speakers may choose to use Spanish to signify themselves as different from the dominant group, while simultaneously creating camaraderie with other Spanish speakers. These choices are made not only within situations, but within conversations.

Code switching is another form of language use, which can be at once exclusionary and inclusionary. It serves to create an important sense of 'them' and 'us', as outsiders cannot easily share in this linguistic code. To insiders this is a legitimate form of communication with its own unconscious rules and forms. It serves as an important identity marker for the Spanish-speaking community, and like any linguistic code, is a dynamic, evolving symbol of solidarity. (Mar-Moliner, 2000:185)

When a single language is prized above all others, there is danger that those others will be silenced, both literally and figuratively. Lippi-Green (1997) states that "a standard language ideology, which proposes that an idealized nation-state has one perfect, homogenous language, becomes the means by which discourse is seized, and provides rationalization for limiting access to discourse" (ibid: 64-65). A monoglot ideology, warns Blommaert (2004), will not only deny that linguistic diversity exists within its borders, but will put in place practices that prohibit such diversity. When English is the only language that is allowed to be heard, other languages and their entwined cultures and ideas are effectively silenced. "Through sameness of language is produced sameness of sentiment and thoughts," declared the Federal Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1887 (Crawford, 1992: 48) as he instituted English Only boarding schools in an effort to eradicate the Navajo language and Native American resistance to the U.S. government.

The concepts of nation and nationality are themselves of post-Renaissance origin and they only came to acquire their modern sense in the 19th century, largely in virtue of the geo-political climate in Europe marked by the spirit of colonialism and the ethnocentric sentiments aroused by the conquest and subjugation of alien territories and their peoples. As Renan (1990: 9) put it: "Nations are something fairly new in history. Antiquity was unfamiliar with them; Egypt, China and ancient Chaldea were in no way nations. They were flocks led by a Son of the Sun or by a Son of Heaven. Neither in Egypt nor in China were there citizens as such".

Summing up his discussion of the political interests that were at work in the formation of modern French identity, Greenfield (1998:639) writes: "The example of France, one of the paradigmatic early nations, underscores the weakness of the theory which views national identity as a reflection of an objective unity and separateness based on primordial, 'ancestral' ethnic characteristics, and specifically on language."

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study tried to explore the importance of language in national identity construction and the degree of prevalence of this practice throughout Ethiopia. It tried to: investigate to what degree language is used in constructing national identities among the Ethiopian nations, investigate and illustrate how language functions in constructing national identities among various nationalities of Ethiopia, and examine how the various nationalities of Ethiopia perceive the relation between

language and nationality. Therefore, under this section we would present the findings of the study in three sub-sections (4.1-4.3), which interconnectivity concentrate on the major objective of the study while separately addressing the specific aims.

4.1 Language Use as National Identity Marker among Ethiopians

In this sub-section, we would present the pervasiveness of language use as a major marker of national identities among Ethiopians, which is one of the three objectives of this study. Many scholars agree with the fact that nationality has something to do with the way people are classified by a variety of contexts and communities. (cf. Pride and Holmes 1979) It is a constructed attribute and used by individuals interacting with their surroundings. A definition, which includes all the aspects of nationality, is given by Schech and Haggis, (2003:112) who argue that nationality is often defined as a consciousness of shared national origin. In turn, national origin is thought to be objective, but the strength of the shared sentiment is highly variable, being the product of an interaction between within-group feeling and the degree of institutional recognition, accorded by the political environment.

What is more, national identity is a social construction which is engaged in the personal, social and symbolic meanings which are given to ethnic differences between people. Individuals fulfill their own nationality as well as that of others. According to Plank (1979) there are some five common salient features of national identity. These are: language, genealogy, culture, religion, and geographical boundary. Based on these criteria we have tried to investigate which features are used very often by Ethiopians as markers of their national identities. Accordingly, as found out by this study, all of the 27 nationalities of the country involved in this study believe that at least the first three features i.e. language, genealogy, and culture are important in marking their national identity. However, in terms of choosing one of these features as the most important symbol of their national identities, their experiences varied. (See, table 1 below)

Table 1: Major Markers of National Identities among the 27 Nationalities

S/N	Salient Feature of National Identity	Nationalities
1.	<i>Language</i>	Ganza, Dorze, Gamo, Gofa, Wolayita , Dawuro
2.	<i>Genealogy</i>	Somali, Silte, Harari, Oromo, Sidama, Afar, Tigrian, Amhara, Argoba, Arbore, Zeyse , Mejengir, Kimant, Kafa
3.	<i>Culture</i>	Agnuak, Gumuz, Gurage, Nuer, Mursi, Berta, Yem
4.	<i>Religion</i>	
5.	<i>Geographical boundary</i>	

As can be observed in table 1, it is only 6 (six) of them that perceive language as the major marker of their national identities. On the contrary, for 21 (twenty-one) of the nations, genealogy, culture, and religion are perceived as the salient features of their national identities. Even among these, genealogy supersedes with 14 (fourteen) nations while culture follows with 7 (seven) nations using them as their major national identity markers.

What is more, disregarding the roles of religion and geographical boundary, which are rather not important here, as they are used by none of the nations, we find that among the 27 nations, genealogy and culture are the major markers of national identities, compared against language. (*Regard, table 1*)

When we further assess this scenario in terms of percentage distribution of the nations represented by each of the features, genealogy which is claimed by fourteen nations that account for about 82 % of the country's total population again overrides language which is claimed by six nations that account only for about 5 % of the total country's population (*See, table 2 below*).

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of the 27 Nationalities based CSA report for 2007

National Group	Population Number	%	National Group	Population Number	%
Oromo	25,488,344	34.5	Gumuz	181,541	0.24
Amhara	19,867,817	26.9	Yem	159,923	0.21
Somali	4,581,793	6.2	Nuer	153,407	0.2
Tigrigna	4,483,776	6.1	Argoba	140,820	0.19
Sidama	2,966,377	4.0	Agnuak	89,051	0.12
Guragie	1,867,350	2.5	Harari	31,722	0.04
Welaita	1,707,074	2.3	Mejengir	21,951	0.03
Afar	1,276,372	1.7	Dorze*	21,000	0.028
Gamo	1,107,163	1.5	Zeyse	17,889	0.024
Siltie	940,000*	1.27	Mursi	7,483	0.01
Kafa	863,000	1.16	Arbore	7,283	0.009
Dawuro	537,000	0.72	Ganza	3,000	0.004
Gofa	362,241	0.4	Kimant*	1,700	0.002
Berta	208,759	0.28			

* taken from the 1994 CSA report as there are no entries for these groups in CSA 2007

Therefore, the role of language is not that strong, to the extent that one can regard it as a prominent marker of national identities of today's Ethiopians. In fact, scholars usually argue that the language a speaker uses allows others to read his/her identity. So, we cannot undermine the role of language in constructing national identity. Nevertheless, the weakness of language in marking national

identity or identity in general is that it could be learned by anyone who may not be a member of the mother tongue speakers. Thornborrow (2004) who observed this fact argues that linguistic manipulations and adaptations can be employed to purposely alter the exact identity of a speaker. In this way a speaker is able to mask his true identity, and invent a false one in order to influence others' interpretation of the identity he displays through his use of language.

In this study too, we have found out that 21 of the 27 nationalities under investigation (see table 1) do not consider language as the primary feature of their national identity marker. Actually, all of our 54 key informants generally believe that language cannot be an objective salient feature of national identity. However, they said the use of language as the primary marker of national identity may be possible for some nationalities of Ethiopia because they do not have or they have few people who speak their languages as second languages. In this regard, the examples they gave us are generally the Nilo-Saharan language speaking nations who have been geographically estranged from the center of the country and live on the periphery, hence marginal from political lives of Ethiopia too.

Hypothetically, it may be correct to assume that in multilingual countries, a nation's alienation from speakers of other languages may bring linguistic isolation, which in turn leads to absence of second language speakers of the language. Hence, isolated nations could use language as an objective marker of their national identities.

However, as found out in this study, this practice is not common among Ethiopian nations who live on the peripheries of the country. If you look at table 1, among the six nations who use language as a primary marker of their national identities, five of them i.e. Dorze, Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa, and Dawuro are nearer to the center of the country and their languages are also spoken as second languages by others. To its odds, they even speak very closely related languages that some linguists dare to call dialects of one language. So, the assumption about the direct correlation between linguistic isolation and use of language as a salient feature of national identity does not commonly hold true among the 27 nations considered in this study. The exceptional case of Ganza matches with the assumption though. The Ganza are Nilo-Saharan people who are monolinguals themselves and whose language is not spoken by other neighboring nations as a second language and who also live mainly on inaccessible boundary of Ethiopia and the Sudan.

The issue of language in constructing national identities among the contemporary Ethiopians may be explained based on the history of state formation processes of the country. The language policy of Haile Selassie (1930-1974) and Mengistu Hailemariam (1974-1991) fostered a strong sense of pride in Amharic among speakers of the language that had privileged access to employment, unrestricted mobility and the resources of the state. In addition the use of other languages of the country except Amharic in public had been banned under the successive governments (Boothe and Walker, 1997: 2; Keller, 1988: 160; Mekuria, 1997).

Hansen and Liu, (1997) argue that, when a society ascribes positive values to one language over others, speakers of devalued languages may be shamed into abandoning their native tongue. In the quest for a more positive social identity, they may choose to assimilate linguistically. "If language is a salient marker of group membership, the individual may face linguistic adaptations." (ibid: 568) Hansen and Liu's argument here, best explains, the case of many Ethiopian people who had abandoned their mother tongues in favor of Amharic during the past. This has affected the symbolic use of language in the construction of national identities among the current Ethiopians in two ways. First, it created attachment to Amharic among none Amhara's while simultaneously disassociating them from the languages of their nations. This has made them think that they closely linked with the sense of Ethiopian citizenship and identity at the cost of their original national identities. Second, they developed negative attitudes towards their national groups and their languages. The earliest manifestation of this scenario was observed when many non-Amhara nationalities objected the use of early mother tongue education in collaboration with the Amhara in 1991/92 school year. In sum, the overall effect of the whole scenario led most of the Ethiopian nations to distrust language in symbolizing their national identities. Consequently, they must have shifted to smilingly stronger features like genealogy or culture in constructing their national identities.

4.2 Rank and Modes of Language use in National Identity Construction in Ethiopia

In sub-section 4.1, above, we have tried to present the extent of language use in marking national identities in Ethiopia. In this regard, the findings of the study show that in comparison with the two strong salient features of national identities i.e. genealogy and culture, the role of language is weak. This does not mean that language is totally excluded in marking national identities of the 21 nations (*see, table 1*) who do not consider it as a primary means. In fact, language is considered as one of the feature of human identity. When we hear someone speak, we immediately make guesses about gender, education level, age, profession, and place of origin. Beyond this individual matter, language is a symbol of national and social identities. (Spolsky, 1999:181) So, at least it comes at other levels if not at the first level of national identification.

Incidentally, in this sub-section, we would see the rank of language in marking national identities among the 21 nationalities who do not perceive it as their primary identity marker (*see table 1*) and how it is used in the process of identity marking among all the 27 nations irrespective of at what level they use it as their identity marker. Accordingly, as found out in this study, a significant number of nationalities perceive language as the second marker of their national identities. (*see table 3*).

Table 3: Ranks of Markers of National Identities by Nationalities

S/N	Marker	Rank of Markers of National Identity by Nationalities
-----	--------	---

	of National Identity	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
1.	<i>Language</i>	Ganza, Dorze, Gamo, Gofa, Wolayita , Dawuro	Oromo, Sidama, Afar, Tigrian, Zeyse , Mejengir, Kafa, Agnuak, Gumuz, Nuer, Mursi, Berta,	Arbore, Gurage, Yem	Somali, Silte, Harari, Argoba,	Kimant, Amhara, Kimant,
2.	<i>Genealogy</i>	Somali, Silte, Harari, Oromo, Sidama, Afar, Tigrian, Amhara, Argoba, Arbore, Zeyse , Mejengir, Kimant, Kafa	Ganza, Dorze, Gamo, Gofa, Wolayita , Dawuro, Gurage, Yem	Agnuak, Gumuz, Nuer, Mursi, Berta,		
3.	<i>Culture</i>	Agnuak, Gumuz, Gurage, Nuer, Mursi, Berta, Yem	Arbore, Kimant,	Ganza, Gamo, Dorze, Gofa, Wolayita , Somali, Dawuro, Silte, Harari, Oromo, Sidama, Afar, Tigrian, Argoba, Zeyse , Mejengir, Kafa,	Amhara,	
4.	<i>Religion</i>		Somali, Silte,	Amhara,	Ganza,	Dorze,

			Harari, Argoba,	Kimant,	Tigrian, Gurage,	Gamo, Gofa, Wolayita, Dawuro, Oromo, Sidama, Afar, Arbore, Mejengir, Zeyse , Kafa, Agnuak, Gumuz, Nuer, Mursi, Berta, Yem
5.	<i>Geographical boundary</i>		Amhara,		Gamo, Wolayita , Gofa, Dawuro, Oromo, Sidama, Afar, Arbore, Zeyse , Mejengir, Kimant, Kafa, Agnuak, Gumuz, Nuer, Mursi, Berta, Yem	Ganza, Somali, Silte, Harari, Tigrian, Argoba, Gurage,

As can be seen in table 3, a significant number of nations consider language as the second prominent national identity marker. As a result they try to use it in many domains or for various

social and cultural purposes. In this respect, we would discuss the modes of language use among the 27 nations below.

As found out in this study, for intimate and public communications, most of the 27 nationalities use mother tongue. The majority of them also use mother tongue to express emotions like dreams and anger while few of them report that they use second language. Furthermore, for occasions such as counting money or other items, most reported only use mother tongue but a few of them the use mother tongue or other languages. (*see table 4*)

Table 4: Modes of Language use in National Identity construction by Nationalities

S.N	Purpose of Language	Mother Tongue	Second Language	Mother Tongue and/or Second Language
1.	Religious	Mursi, Ganza, Mejengir	Somali, Silte, Harari	Afar, Agnuak, Amhara, Arbore, Argoba Berta, Dawuro, Dorze, Gamo, Gofa, Gumuz, Gurage, Keffa, Kimant, Nuer, Oromo, Sidama, Tigrigna, Wolayita, Yem, Zeyse
	Intimacy	Afar, Agnuak, Amhara, Arbore, Berta, Dorze, Gamo, Ganza, Gumuz, Gurage, Harari, Mejengir, Mursi, Nuer, Sidama, Silte, Somali, Tigrigna, Yem, Zeyse	Kimant, Argoba	Oromo, Dawuro, Gofa, Keffa, Wolayita,
	Public Communication	Afar, Amhara, Berta, Ganza, Mejengir, Mursi, Somali, Agnuak, Nuer	Kimant, Argoba	Arbore, Dawuro, Dorze, Gamo, Gofa, Gumuz, Gurage, Harari, Keffa, Oromo, Sidama, Silte, Tigrigna, Wolayita, Yem, Zeyse
	Expressions of emotions like dreams, anger, and etc.	Afar, Agnuak, Amhara, Arbore, Argoba Berta, Dawuro, Dorze, Gamo, Ganza, Gofa, Gumuz,	Kimant	

		Gurage, Harari, Keffa, Mursi, Mejengir Nuer, Oromo, Sidama, Silte, Somali, Tigrigna, Wolayita, Yem, Zeyse		
	Occasions such as counting money or other items	Afar, Agnuak, Amhara, Arbore, Argoba Berta, Dawuro, Dorze, Gamo, Ganza, Gofa, Gumuz, Gurage, Harari, Keffa, Kimant, Mursi, Mejengir Nuer, Oromo, Sidama, Silte, Somali, Tigrigna, Wolayita, Yem, Zeyse		

As can be observed in table 4, using mother tongue only for the purpose of religion is not very common among the majority of the 27 nationalities. This is because of the historical influx of foreign religions namely, Muslim and Christianity that replaced the indigenous religions of the nations. Since the new religions mostly required or encouraged the use of languages of their origins (as the case of Arabic for Muslim), or the languages of the Ethiopian nation that first acquired them (as the case of Ge'ez and Amharic for Coptic Orthodox), the followers of these religions do not mostly use their mother tongues for prayers or other religious ceremonies. This clearly manifested in table, 4 by Somali, Silte, Harari, Argoba, and Silte who dominantly follow Muslim and Kimant who Coptic Orthodox Christianity. On the other hand, diversification of language use among the other nations we see in the last column of table, 4 has resulted from the absence strict language requirements sanctioned on the followers like in the two cases we already discussed.

Generally, as we have seen under this sub-section, the majority of the 27 nations of Ethiopia consider language as the second salient feature of their national symbol. As a result, they use their languages in various modes or domains except for religious purpose.

4.3 Ethiopians Perceptions about Language and National Identity

Under this sub-section, we would present the perceptions of Ethiopians with regard to the relationship between language and nationality. In this regard, we have asked our key informant what they think about the necessity knowledge of language in national identity construction in the contemporary Ethiopia. Accordingly, almost all of them have pointed out that use of language is not a must to identify with a nation but it would help a great deal if one knows the language of his/her nation because that would ease the communication process he/she makes with fellow members of

the nation. In addition, they believed that knowledge of one's own group's language fosters intimacy with other members of the group. So, as they said knowledge of language is not a necessity but an asset in identifying with a nation among the current Ethiopians. In this respect, many scholars, (Adger, 1998; Bucholtz, 1999; Fordham, 1998; Toohey, 2000; Garcia, 2001; Zavala, 2000; Johnson, 2000; Morales, 2002; Stepick & Stepick, 2002; Valdés, 2000; and Zentella, 2002) who explored the role of language in constructing national identity have found out that the knowledge of language is not a prerequisite to associate oneself with a certain nation.

The other question we asked our key informants in relation to this topic was what they think about the strength of language in marking national identity. And all of them said that they believe that language is a very weak feature of national identity marker because 'it is not a natural gift from the creator for anybody though one is born in to one'. Furthermore, they believed that language can be learned or abandoned based on the choice of individuals. Therefore, we may conclude that among the contemporary Ethiopians, language is not perceived as a primordial human feature that could be relied on for marking national identity.

However, all our informants believed that language is a media through which their cultural values and histories transmit from generation to generation. So, they have a positive attitude towards their mother tongue and are convinced that their languages will be used throughout generations and that they will not be forgotten. On the contrary, they are also aware of the fact that there are people who do not speak their mother tongues any more due to the past 'one nation-one language' political philosophy of governments of Ethiopia. As they reported, under the current government, they have seen a great change in terms of language use i.e. young people speak their mother tongues more and more due to the current favorable language policy. Nevertheless, they said children are giving up their cultures due to foreign cultures which they were afraid will have negative effects on their languages.

In general, as we have seen in this sub-section, among the current Ethiopian nations, language is not considered as a necessity to identify with a nation. In addition, though it is not seen as a strong symbol of national identity, language is perceived as a medium through which the other features of national identity like culture and history continue to thrive.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the role of language in national identity construction and the degree of prevalence of this practice throughout Ethiopia. Especially, the study tried to look into the degree of language use in marking national identities among the Ethiopian nations. It also investigated modes of language use in constructing national identities among the nationalities of Ethiopia. Furthermore, it has scrutinized the perceptions of the various nationalities regarding the relation between language and nationality. Thus the study has concluded that:

1. Language is not considered as a prominent marker of national identities of today's Ethiopians. In this regard, all of our 54 key informants believed that language cannot be an objective feature of national identity because it could be acquired through learning. As a result, most of the nations used genealogy, a relatively objective feature, to be a salient marker of their national identities.
2. In addition, although language is not considered as the most salient feature of national identity among most of the 27 Ethiopian nations studied in this research, most of them believed that it comes as a second prominent national identity marker. Consequently, they use it in many domains or in various social and cultural transactions. Therefore, we can say that though not major, language plays a role in constructing national identities among the contemporary Ethiopian nations.
3. What is more, among the nationalities, the relation between language and nationality is not one of interdependence. So, language is not considered as a necessity to identify with a nation. However, it is perceived as a medium through which the other features of national identity like culture and history continue to thrive.

REFERENCES

- Abraham D. (1998) Language Identity and peace in Ethiopia. In proceedings 4th International Conference on the Horn of Africa (26-28 May 1998). New York USA.
- Adger, T. (1998). Register shifting with dialect resources in instructional discourse. In S. Hoyle & C. T. Adger (Eds.), *Kids talk: Strategic language use in later childhood* (pp. 151-169). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bahru Zewde (1991) *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1974*. Athens, Ohio:
- Bahru Zewde (2002) *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals*
- Bender, M.L., Bowen, J.D., Cooper, R.L. and Ferguson C.A. (eds) (1976) *Language in Ethiopia*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Blommaert, J. (2004). Language policy and national identity. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language planning*. London: Blackwell.
- Boothe, K. and Walker, R. (1997) 'Mother Tongue Education in Ethiopia: From
- Cashman, H.R. (2004). Identities at play: language preference and group membership in bilingual talk in interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 37 (2005), 301-315.
- Cooper, R.L. (1976) 'Government Language Policy', in M.L. Bender, J.D. Bowen, R.L. Cooper and C.A. Ferguson (eds) *Language in Ethiopia*, pp. 187–90. London: Oxford University Press.
- Crawford, J. (Ed.) (1992). *Language loyalties: A source book on the Official English controversy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Edwards J. EDT. (1986) *Linguistic Minorities Policies and Pluralism*. Academic Press Inc. U.K.

- Emerson, R. (1959). From Empire to Nation: The Rise of Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples.
- Esdahl, T. (2003). Language choice as a power resource in bilingual adolescents' conversations in the Danish folkeskole. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 24 (1&2).
- Fordham, S. (1998). Speaking standard English from nine to three: Language as guerilla warfare at Capital High. In S. Hoyle & C. T. Adger (Eds.), *Kids talk: Strategic language use in later childhood* (pp. 205-216). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fuller, J.M. (2007). Language choice as a means of shaping identity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 17 (1), 105-129.
- Gafaranga, J. (2001). Linguistic identities in talk-in-interaction: order in bilingual conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33(2001), 1901-1925.
- Garcia, O., Peltz, R., & Schiffman, H. (2006). *Language Loyalty, Continuity, and Change*. Victoria Road, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Girma-Selassie Asfaw and Appleyard, D., (eds), with Ullendorff, E. (1979) *The*
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hamer J. and Blanc M. (2000) *Bilinguality and bilingualism*. 2nd Edition. Cambridge University Press. U.K.
- Hansen, J. G., & Liu, J. (1997). Social identity and language: Theoretical and methodological issues. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 567-576.
- Hoben, S.J. (1994) 'The Language of Education in Ethiopia: Empowerment or Imposition?' Paper presented at the 'New Trends in Ethiopian Studies', International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Michigan State University.
- Irvine, J. T. (1989). When talk isn't cheap: Language and political economy. *American Ethnologist*, 16, 248-67.
- Johnson, F. L. (2000). *Speaking culturally: Language diversity in the United States*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Keller, E.J. and Smith, L. (2005) 'Obstacles to Implementing Territorial Decentralization: The First Decade of Ethiopian Federalism', in P.G. Roeder and
- Krel, A. (2011). *A Sociolinguistic Survey of the Ganza, Komo, and "Baruun be Magtole" Language Groups (Blue Nile Province, Sudan)*. SIL International.
- Lambert, W. (1972). *Language, psychology, and culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Liebkind, K. (1999). Social psychology. In J. Fishman (Ed.), *Handbook of language and ethnic identity* (pp. 140-151). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Markakis, J. (2003) 'Ethnic Conflict in Pre-Federal Ethiopia'. Paper presented
- McCann, J. (1991) 'Orality, State Literacy and Political Culture in Ethiopia: Translating the Ras Kassa Registers'. African Humanities Program, African Studies Center, Boston University.
- McNab, C. (1990) 'Language Policy and Language Practice: Implementing

- Mekuria Bulcha (1989) Onismos Nasib's pioneering contribution to Oromo Literature. Department of Sociology University of Uppsala. Sweden
- Mekuria Bulcha (1997) 'The Politics of Linguistic Homogenization in Ethiopia and the Conflict over the Status of Afaan Oromoo', *African Affairs*, 96: 325–52.
- Morales, E. (2002). *Living in Spanglish: A search for Latino identity in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Multilingual Literacy Education in Ethiopia', *African Studies Review* 33(3): 65–82.
- of the Early Twentieth Century. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- Pankhurst, R. (1969) 'Language and Education in Ethiopia: Historical Background to the Post-War Period'. Unpublished essay, Haile Selassie I University, Addis Ababa.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Longman.
- Phillipson, R. (1999). *Political science*. In J. Fishman (Ed.), *Handbook of language and ethnic identity* (pp. 94-108). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plank P. in Fishman J. EDT (1978) *Societal Multilingualism*. Student edition Mouton Publishers. The Netherlands.
- Policy to Implementation', *Language Problems and Language Planning* 21(1): 1–19.
- Pride J. and Holmes J. Edts (1979) *Sociolinguistics*. Penguin Books Ltd. Great Britain.
- Silverstein, M. (1996). Monoglot 'standard' in America: Standardization and metaphors of linguistic hegemony. In D. Brenneis & R. Macaulay (Eds.), *The matrix of language: Contemporary linguistic anthropology* (pp. 284-306). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Smith, A. (1991). *National Identity*. London : Penguin Books.
- Smith, L. (2005) 'Voting for a Nationality: Ethnic Identity, Political Institutions Special Envoy Preserved in the India Office Library. Oxford: Oxford University
- Thornborrow, J. (2004) *Language and Identity in Thomas, L. et al. Language Society and Power. An Introduction 2nd Edition* (London: Routledge,) p158.
- Valdés, G. (2000). Bilingualism and language use among Mexican Americans. In S. L. McKay & S.C. Wong (Eds.), *New immigrants in the United States* (pp. 99-136). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weinreich U. (1953). *Language in contact Findings and Problems*. Mouton Publishers. The Netherlands.
- Zavala, M. V. (2000). Puerto Rican identity: What's language got to do with it?" In S. Nieto (Ed.), *Puerto Rican students in U.S. schools* (115-136). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Zentella, A. C. (2002). Latin languages and identities. In M. M. Suárez-Orozco & M. M. Páez (Eds.), *Latinos: Remaking America* (pp. 321-338). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zohar E. (1985) *Language and Nation*. Published under the title "Language Conflict and National Identity" in *Nationalism and Modernity: A Mediterranean Perspective*, The University of Haifa. Israel (From the internet, www.google.com key words, 'national identity')