
The Employment And Dangers Of Different Languages In The History Of Ethiopia

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will try to cover the employment of different languages at different periods and locations in the history of Ethiopia and the endangered languages or the extinction that this may have resulted in. These languages were diversified both culturally and by the means of the language classifications. I have also understood that there are written and unwritten languages which will be described in detail.

Languages are different means of communication among people. Most countries of the world are known to have a national language and additional languages spoken by the minority. With Ethiopia being an ethnically diverse country, there are more than 80 languages used by the different cultural and religious groups of each language from the different linguistic families.

CLASSIFICATION

Language classification is based on the origin from which language descends. The mainly known linguistic groups in Ethiopia are Semitic, Cushitic, Nilo Saharan and Omotic.

SEMITIC

Semitic language group is internationally used by the largest world's Semitic language groups are found in Ethiopia and are located on northern and central parts of Ethiopia and are classified as north Semitic and South Semitic. Some of the known North Semitic languages include Tigrinya and Ge'ez, and in the south Semitic group Amharic, Harari, Argoba, East and West Gurage language group clusters, Silte are a few examples.

CUSHITIC

When we see the Cushitic group they're located on the southwestern and eastern parts of the country and are grouped into several classifications. they are known as Agew languages, East Cushitic, Lowland East Cushitic, Southern lowland East Cushitic, and transversal southern East Cushitic. They are spoken by people of Oromo, Somali, Agew, Hadiyya, Kambata, Konso and many other southern nations and nationalities in Ethiopia. Other than Ethiopia, the Cushitic family languages are known to be spoken in the horn of Africa.

AFRO ASIATIC

Another large linguistic group which is the combination of the Cushitic and Semitic families is known as the Afro-Asiatic family. It is also known as "Hamito Semitic" or "Semito Hamitic" which originated from the book of Genesis. These families have over 300 languages located in West Asia, North Africa, Horn of Africa and Sahil. It is the 4th largest linguistic family group.

OMOTIC

The other language family we can see is the Omotic group which is spoken widely in the southwest regions of the country. It is named after the Omo River so the location of the users is around that region. It has unclear classification so some of the languages are uncertain. It's mostly used by Wolayta people and another minimum of 30 languages are identified as members of this group.

NILO SAHARAN

The Nilo Saharan language group is part of the larger Nilo Saharan group which consists of the African countries located along the Nile River and the Sahara desert. It is located mostly around the southwestern and western margins of the country. The term in Ethiopia is referred to as Nilotic. It has 17 different languages. Anuak, Berta, Gumuz, Mursi, Nuwer, and Suri are a few examples of these Nilotic family languages.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ETHIOPIA

As mentioned earlier, Ethiopia has so many languages but most of them are known to be oral. Ethiopian history has been studied by the different manuscripts which are written documents. A language not being written not only prevents the language from sustaining, but also prevents us from understanding the history of the country. So we should keep in mind that documentation of a language is one of the most important ways to keep the languages alive.

The fact that Ethiopia is known as the only black African country with its alphabet, most of the languages did not employ the alphabet to use their languages. The only languages that made use of Ge'ez in their written documents starting from old times are Ge'ez, Amharic, and Tigrigna. However, other region populations of Ethiopia particularly the Muslim population made use of the Arabic alphabets to write their languages. With the coming of Islam and the conversion of different Ethiopian communities, Arabic literacy was introduced. This population made use of Arabic literature to understand their religion and later on wrote their local languages using the Arabic alphabet. These literatures are called "Ajami". We can find Harari, Oromo, Afar, Somali, Silte, Amharic, Alaba, Argoba, Hadiyya and Gurage languages written in the Ajami form of writing. It has more than 30 other languages spoken in black Africa.

NATIONAL LANGUAGE AND HISTORY

The first language known as Ge'ez used during the Axumite period in the central highlands of the country till the 14th century. This ancient language served both as an official, means of communication and liturgic purposes used by the state royals and the rest of the population. Several pieces of kinds of literature were believed to be produced during the 4th century in the reign of Ezana as he introduced the religion of Christianity. The nine saints who fled from the religious prosecution in the Middle East were believed to have translated the bible from Greek to Ge'ez. Thus, we find manuscripts with these religious contents in the ancient Ge'ez language. These manuscripts were spread to monasteries in different parts of the country. The alphabet used to write Ge'ez which has become the Ethiopian alphabet is known to have Sabaec origins.

However, from the 14th century, it was replaced by Amharic as an official and communication

language. Ge'ez remained for church and religious purposes until the present day. In other regions of Ethiopia, several languages of the different families mentioned earlier were employed. Following the unification of Ethiopia, Amharic was being imposed as a national language in many parts of the country. The only language used as a medium of instruction is Amharic and it kept spreading throughout all of the regions. Some were unhappy about this phenomenon. As a result, the government system was replaced so it allowed regions to use their languages both as a regional language and as a means of communication. Amharic proceeded to be the official language of the country and the medium of instruction but all the other regions still enjoyed their rights to use their languages.

ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

Languages can live or die depending on the number of users it has and the population of its people. The less the number of speakers of a particular language is, the closer it is to the risk of extinction. These languages are called endangered languages. Some languages of Ethiopia have been extinct which also took place as a result of a lack of population of users. The second factor that results in the extinction of languages is socio-economic factors as a group of people are influenced and dominated by another group of people. The other reason would be the languages existing as oral and not having a written document for the language. Not having institutions that record or study the languages also contributes to the extinction of the language. Preserving diversity in languages is a responsibility to the people of a country as well as government officials.

One of the most used ancient languages in Ethiopia is Ge'ez as it has lost its role as a national communicative language. But since it's still serving for liturgy purposes we cannot call it fully extinct. Qimant is also an Ethiopian language that has already been extinct. To prevent this risk of extinction that we are fearing it is very important that speaking the different languages is encouraged and used as a medium of instruction in their regions.

PRESENT DAY ENGAGEMENT OF LANGUAGES

When we try to see the current day languages spoken in Ethiopia, we can see that Oromo language speakers have the highest population, Amharic has the second-highest number of speakers and Somali being the third most spoken language. There are so many debates going on still since the language usage does not consider the population. The recent news on the number of national languages is to employ five Ethiopian larger group languages as national languages in Ethiopia. These languages are Oromigna, Amharic, Tigrigna, Somali and Afar.

When these proposals of language usage have been announced, a lot of effort needed to uplift the languages like Somali, Afar, Tigrigna, and Oromigna up to the standards of education, official languages and medium of instruction.

CONCLUSION

Ethiopia has a widely diversified culture and thus, diversified languages and populations. When trying to understand languages and their structures it is very crucial that we study their classifications and that can help us identify the similarities and differences of the various types of languages. A language is a national heritage of a country so it has to be preserved and

studied and documented. It is a cliché that a country or a nation has a single language as a medium of communication and that can prevent the cultural and linguistic diversity. So the solution might be to engage in practicing as many languages as possible which will not only preserve the languages from being extinct but also will promote a strong relationship between people of different cultural groups. Seeing the timeline and location of the languages is a major source of history so we must study the sources and the time they were spoken at.

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