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STANDARDIZATION PROBLEMS OF EMERGING LANGUAGES OF MULTILINGUAL ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF GAMO

ABSTRACT

This research deals with problems of low standardization of words in the Gamo textbooks, an Afro-asiatic Omotic language of Ethiopia. Problems of designating one concept in two or more words, using different linguistic forms for the same grammatical function and degeminating and shortening long consonant and vowel segments were observed. These problems reduce the quality of the textbooks and mother tongue education and put pedagogical and cognitive burden on students.

KEYWORDS: Ethiopia, Gamo, standardization problems, textbooks

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejsze badanie dotyczy problemów związanych z niską standaryzacją słów w podręcznikach Gamo, afroazjatyckim języku omotycznym Etiopii. Zaobserwowano problemy z wyznaczeniem jednego pojęcia w dwóch lub więcej słowach, przy użyciu różnych form językowych dla tej samej funkcji gramatycznej i degeminacji oraz skrócenia długich spółgłoskowych i samogłoskowych segmentów. Problemy te obniżają jakość podręczników i nauki języka ojczystego oraz obciążają uczniów pedagogicznie i poznawczo.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Etiopia, Gamo, problemy normalizacyjne, podręczniki

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is a multilingual country where more than 85 languages are spoken (Lewis 2009). The languages are geneologically classified under Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan phylum. Omotic family, a group of Afro-Asiatic, of which Gamo is a member has four major categories that include South Ometo, North (Central) Ometo, East Ometo and West Ometo (Bender 1975: 127). They take their name

according to the settlement history of respective speakers in the four directions of Lake Omo.

None of the Omotic language was used in public offices before 1991, except the Wolaitta language which was implemented in the literacy campaign in Wolaitta and in the adjacent places like Gamo in 1974. The proclamation of the country's constitution in 1995 allowed for use of regional languages for various purposes, and this was enhanced by Education and Training Policy (1994) which declares use of mother tongues in primary education. One of the languages selected for education is Gamo.

The Gamo language comes under Afro-Asiatic Omotic Central Ometo language category (Bender 1975: 127). According to Central Statistical Authority (2008: 91), Gamo is natively spoken by 1,070,626 people who mainly live in South West Ethiopia. It is spoken in several forms of dialects which exhibit varied degrees of intelligibility (Hirut 2005a; Wondimu 2010: 33). Since 1993, the language has been used as medium of instruction (MOI) in schools. The introduction of Gamo in to education has made its standardization very pertinent and as a result textbooks and few literature books are published by the administration and individual writers.

The idea of using Gamo as MOI is not so simple owing to problems relating to ones like shortage of materials and trained mother tongue teachers, lack of a developed standard variety, attitude towards mother tongue education, etc. The purpose of this research is to show the impact of low standardization of words in terms of use and grammar on the quality of textbooks that again immensely decreases the quality of education. It addresses questions like: What are standardization problems in the Gamo textbooks? How does lack of a standard orthography affect textbooks and mother tongue education? What is the best possible way out of the current language standardization problem in Gamo?

The concept of standardization in this paper concerns to the need to uniformity in using word grammar and spelling. The commitment to use uniform linguistic elements and avoid extreme variations that confuse students in textbooks paves way to fix a standard language. A standard language in turn plays several pivotal social roles as mentioned in Garvin (1993). It strengthens social interaction and integration and makes communication in social settings among diverse dialect speakers possible. Lack of standardization on the other hand delays provision of quality education and reduces students' and teachers' trust and interest in the language to carry consistent knowledge across generations.

The research takes a sociolinguistic approach and seeks to understand the impact of low standardization of words and their orthography in mother tongue education. It considers the perspective that writing words in a standard orthography and grammar in the textbooks is a fundamental condition to improve the quality of mother tongue education and to provide consistent form of knowledge to students learning in the language across different grade levels.

MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION POLICY IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has had different policies towards the language of education at schools at different times. During the Emperors' time, Amharic was used to address education and information on the media to the people across the country. When the Derg regime took power in 1974, Amharic continued to serve as MOI in formal education and the main channel of information on media and publications. Among the changes observed during the regime was use of 15 languages, which some were Tigrigna, Oromo, Somali, Wolaitta and Sidama, in a literacy campaign held in 1974–1977 (Cooper 1986: 21). But, the languages were never used in the formal education system.

Due to change of government in 1991, a new constitution which allows for use of native languages in education was proclaimed. Regions swiftly took this constitutional provision and started to use languages for education and other areas of public service. Later on, the Ministry of Education framed a new policy titled Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia (1994), which in its article 3.5/ 3.5.1 declares, "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." After the ministry announced this amendment, 26 languages are used so far in education and other official settings. There was a strong belief that inclusion of as many languages in the education policy as possible would enable to engage different language speakers into the development system as stated in Seidl and Moritz (2009: 1133).

Different perspectives have been reflected towards the decision to use mother tongues as MOI. The policy is positively evaluated for codifying an article that acknowledges the prevalence of multilingualism in the country and allows the languages to serve in public spaces in respective areas. With regards to this, Trudell (2016: 32) states that the policy is appreciated by experts of the field to be "the most progressive national policy environment in Africa." A linguistically flexible policy towards education gives opportunity to promote and celebrate cultural diversity of the country, and bears pedagogical benefits to the learners. In relation to its pedagogical advantages, Teshome (2007) compares Grade 8 students who studied natural science and English in mother tongue with those studied the subjects in non-mother tongue. From the analysis of students' academic achievements, Teshome (2007: 59) concludes that his study "… has confirmed the pedagogical effectiveness of learning with the mother tongue in Ethiopia" and suggests the policy to be maintained and more local languages to be included in the school system. However, the data did not outline which languages were used for the purpose. Languages of the country do not have the same development level. To put students who learn in languages with a different level of development in the same context and to conclude that their academic achievement was generally better becomes dubious.

Several factors hampered the practical realization of the policy and affected the expected outcomes. The commonly referred challenges include the development level of the languages selected for mother tongue education, lack of trained mother tongue teachers, lack of grammar books, dictionaries, and other supportive materials (Seidel/ Moritz 2009: 1127).

Cohen (2007) argues that the very idea of the country's decision to provide education in several languages which are not in the same state of development and public use is ineffective. Cohen (2007: 70) identifies the major problem to be introduction of the new languages to schools, "… in great haste before they were sufficiently standardized."

A relatively similar opinion is also reflected by Daniel and Abebayehu (2006: 156) who consider the education policy to be a politically motivated than a pedagogically outlined one. They point to the limited time available to ready the required materials and skills as, "The course of implementing the language policy was so hurried that little time or opportunity was left for sound planning." Obviously not enough time, financial and material resources were allocated to train teachers, fulfill the required learning materials. Due to this, textbooks and other learning materials were prepared with low quality and standard.

It is understandable that though languages all over the world are at different level of development and social use, their role as vehicles of information cannot be downplayed. In terms of improving the role of nationality languages, the initiative to devise a multilingual policy is a promising step, but this has to be enhanced by developing languages which are in low state of standardization.

RESEARCH METHODOLODGY AND THE DATA

The research used qualitative and quantitative data to analyze standardization of Gamo in textbooks. The data were collected from written materials and interviews. Due to its young history as a written language, Gamo is not extensively used until recently in publications except in textbooks and a few dictionaries. Textbooks are the most accessible ones for researches of this type. They are available for all subjects from Grade 1–4. From Grade 5–10, Gamo is taught as a subject alongside Amharic and English, while the medium of instruction to other natural and social sciences switches to English. Accordingly, this research used textbooks to be the major sources of data. Words were collected from, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 9 and Grade 10 textbooks of the Gamo language subject, and a Grade 3 Mathematics textbook. These textbooks were chosen based on the researcher's access to them by borrowing from individuals and school libraries and buying some from public shops. The data from the textbooks were used to show spelling

and grammatical inconsistencies and variations in word choice and the impact of this practice on the users, especially students and teachers.

Two dictionaries, Gebreyohannis (2000) and Hayward and Eshetu (2014) were also used. The first dictionary includes words written in the conventional Latin orthography while word meanings are given in Amharic. Hayward and Eshetu (2014) provide notes and descriptions on the grammar of Gamo and word entries. The word entries are written in the orthography which is referred to as Ethiopic. That means its orthography is not compatible to the one applied in textbooks. Though this is the case, the dictionary was a very good source of information about the grammatical features of Gamo and phonetic transcription of words.

Data were also collected via semi-structured interviews conducted with eight native speakers of Gamo. In their profession, they were language developers, textbook writers, teachers and students. The data were about the standardization process of Gamo and how they dealt with the observed problems of standardization in the language.

LANGUAGE STANDARDIZATION PROBLEMS IN GAMO TEXTBOOKS

The standardization process of Gamo was commenced by devising a Latin based orthography that served to write the four North Ometo languages namely Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro in 1993. After orthography was fixed, textbooks were published for mother tongue education. There was an effort to fix a standard grammar that would be used in textbooks and in classrooms (Almaz 2016: 281). The selected forms, however, were not always maintained in the textbooks, which exhibit many language related problems that might have resulted from dialectal variation or writers' reluctance.

Textbooks are essential materials to provide formal education at school. Careful production of them helps to provide quality education. In many situations, textbook preparation is owned by governments, and the process is believed to be handled in an organized and controlled manner. Due to follow ups and guides from different bodies, a standard language endorsed by officials is assumed to be implemented. They are among publications with chance to reach the wider society via students, and, as Adegbija (1994) also believes it, their quality shapes the attitude a society builds towards mother tongue education and MOI.

Textbook related problems of education are multifaceted. There is an assumption that the contents covered by the mother tongue textbooks do not reflect the cultural and ideological bases of the respective society. With regards to Gamo, Yishak and Gumbo (2014) believe that many non-Gamo ideologies and cultures dominated the contents of the textbooks while Gamo values were not significantly portrayed for students to sustain and appreciate their culture. The other problem is standardization

of words and grammar. In what follows, some standardization problems will be explained with examples from textbooks and a dictionary.

USING DIFFERENT WORDS FOR THE SAME CONCEPT

As mentioned in Almaz (2016), standard Gamo prioritizes some forms to be used in publications. These forms are frequently available in textbooks and other publications than the counterpart dialectal forms. Their use, however, was not consistent throughout textbooks that a lot of varieties were available for one word or for one concept. The presence of varied words could be a way of dialect accommodation. There was no framework, however, that governed inclusion of different dialect forms in the textbooks and so the practice differs from book to book for different grade levels and from page to page in the same textbook sometimes.

Following are some examples to explain the case:

1. *gutsa*   small
   uga
   salloo saʔa   universe
   bitta ubba

The word *gutsa* 'small' is used in some dialect areas like Dache, Ochollo and Dorze while *uga* is used in Gamo area called Ganta. In the textbooks, once *gutsa* was used and at another time the word *uga* was applied though the former appeared more frequently than the latter. Due to its distribution across dialects and frequent appearance in the textbooks, the word *gutsa* 'small' is believed to be a standard use. Both of these forms can be introduced as parallel forms but due to its social position, it may take longer time for the word *uga* 'small' to be accepted as a legitimate standard by the speakers. If the dialectal feature has to maintain standard position, it should be used consistently across textbooks.

The concept 'world/ universe' was mentioned with the newly created compound word *saloo saʔa* in some textbooks and with the commonly used expression *bitta ubba* in others. *bitta ubba* is used in everyday communication to mean 'everyone' or 'every person.' It doesn't refer to every creation on the sky, earth or ocean to mean 'universe.' *bitta* means 'earth' and *ubba* is 'all.' The word *bitta* symbolizes creatures on earth especially humans, but it does not refer to other creatures that exist on earth. So, it less likely represents the idea 'universe' which includes other planets as well. These kinds of use may limit students' chance to understand and explore science since the word fails to inform them everything about what a "universe" entails.

The other problem observed from the textbooks was using words from different languages to refer to one concept. This can be explained by the following words.

2. *s'aafite/t'aafite*   *tobite*   write
    iskuere   *kare*   square

The word *tobite* 'write' is a Gamo word and *s'aafite/t'aafite* 'write' comes from Amharic. In the textbooks both *tobite* and *s'aafite/t'aafite* were used to mean 'write.' In addition, *kare* from Amharic and *iskuere* from English were used to express a 'square' shape. This situation of overlapping words apparently puts cognitive burden on students and hampers transmission of consistent and long lasting knowledge. Instead of using the words interchangeably, it may be better to set one of it as a standard use for students to easily recognize the orthography.

Gamo exists in many dialect forms estimated around forty two (Wondimu 2010). The range of dialect diversity implies the prevalence of many ways to say something. One idea can be expressed with diverse words or one word may mean many concepts. For example, the Gamo word *kare*, with the same orthography as the Amharic word *kare* 'square', refers to 'evaluation', 'curse', 'confession', 'blame', or 'door/outdoor' (Gebreyohanis 2000: 117). The meanings depend on the context the word is used. When it comes to textbooks, these kinds of variations need to be properly handled and a consistent form of writing should be fixed for learners to coherently build knowledge in their own language.

The other problem observed in the textbooks was putting parallel forms in brackets.

3. *hatstsa/hatta*   water
    hatstsa/tt

As can be seen from the example, 'water' was written as *hatstsa/hatta*, *hatstsa/tt* or only as *hatstsa*. The variation is on the forms /ts/ and /t/. Both of these phonemes are used in different dialects of Gamo. Looking at the words, one may think that /t/ is always used as an alternative whenever /ts/ appears in words. But this was not the case, and in most other cases, words like *laytsa* 'year', *sintstsa* 'face', *suntsay* 'name' were written in /ts/ alone. The forms seem to be used alternatively, but this might be a potential cause to delay stability in the standard language and confuse users, especially students.

Both of these consonants /ts/ and /t/ are available in the phonetic inventory of Gamo (Azeb 2012: 434) and are used in different dialects. Teachers from /t/ dialect area once asked for publication of textbooks in this form instead of the affricate /ts/, which was mostly used in the textbooks as a standard. However, the administration considered publication of textbooks in two forms to be costly and to harm social unity of Gamo (Manna 45).

Some informants, on the other hand, considered the ethnic identity of Gamo to hinge in sounds like /ts/ and /dz/. They were seen as icons that index the language and its speakers and to culturally and morally connect the society to their language. Irvine and Gal (2000: 37) call this kind of language ideology that governs language users as iconization. The phonemes were taken to be symbols that identify Gamo from other languages as expressed by the following informant:

> In order to keep the standard use of the language in the textbooks, Gamo words should be identified. The original words and sounds of Gamo that should come on the first level of standardization should be known. In fact there are sounds that make the Gamo language unique. If the standard language should be taken as standard Gamo, it should consider these unique features. Those sounds are souvenir and must be protected in the standard language. For example, sounds like /ts/ and /dz/ are not available in Ethiopian languages. The words of the standard language must sound like Gamo.
>
> (Yishak, 38)

The informant believed that the standardization should protect and preserve these features by ensuring their use in publications. The use of the two features /ts/ and /dz/, which are represented by the diagraphs <th> and <dz>, in Gamo textbooks was associated with the recognition of Gamo identity while reluctance to use the features was taken to harm social cohesion.

In other instances, forms with wider geographical distribution were dropped out. The following variations are meant to illustrate this claim:

4. *yotanas*   *yotanau*   to tell
    s'elanas   *t'elanau*   to see
    sas'anas   *sat'anau*   to bite

The words in the first column were attested to be used in many dialect areas whereas the other three words were used in one of the Gamo dialect areas. The variations in the words are the forms used to express the infinitive with 'to.' The form applied throughout the textbooks to add 'to' to the words was -u, one with limited distribution. The grammatical feature -u, which is one of the postpostions in Gamo according to Hayward and Eshetu (2014: 155), in fact can be taken as a standard use in the textbooks since it was consistently applied throughout the books.

USING DIFFERENT FORMS FOR THE SAME GRAMMATICAL FUNCTION

The other problem attested in the textbooks was the use of different forms to express the same grammatical function. Some instances include:

5. *nagiza*   one who guards
   giza   one who said
   koʃʃiza   one who needs

   bessizay ⎫
   bessiyay ⎬   one who shows
               ⎭

   immizay   ⎫
   immiyay   ⎬   one who gives
               ⎭

In the examples above, two basic grammatical forms, *-za/zay* and *–yay*, were used to express a relative clause 'who'. In the textbooks, relative clause was once expressed with the form *–za/zay* as in the words *nagiza* 'one who guards', *giza* 'one who said', *koʃʃiza* 'one who needs.' In the last two pairs of words, two forms of the relative pronoun were used to write a word at different places in the textbooks. The words *bessizay* and *bessiyay* were used to mean 'one who shows'. Similarly, one word was spelt as *immizay* and *immiyay* to mean 'one who gives.' According to the form selection criteria in Gamo, *-za* fulfills the standardization requirement since it is used in wider geographical locations. Hayward and Eshetu (2014: 268) describe words taking *-za* form to be relative verb forms, and Gebreyohannis (2000) indicates *-yay* to have an equivalent role to *-za*.

The users might have combined *-za* with the *-y* from *-yay* and created *-zay* another expression of relative clause. In this way, three forms were available to mean the same thing in the textbooks. It is difficult to know which form has to be used as a standard since the options are a lot. This is cognitively demanding for student users. The fluctuating forms also decrease the chance for students to predict which form should be used in what context.

PROBLEM OF GEMINATION

Gemination in phonetics is defined as, "sequence of identical adjacent segments of a sound in a single morpheme" (Crystal 2008: 206). In most Ethiopian languages, consonant and vowel length is a significant and most prevalent feature of words. Different grammatical and communicative functions are associated with gemination. Short and long segments cause meaning variation in some words and in others they are features that give energy to a word. The geminating sound segments and their meaning is identified in the context of use in some languages like Amharic, while the orthography rules of Gamo demands geminating sound features to be explicitly shown with doubled graphemes.

Linguistic analysis indicates that most of the Gamo consonant and vowel phonemes demonstrate gemination (Hayward and Eshetu 2014: 23). Short and

long consonant and vowel segments bring about meaning variation in some words and in others they add energy and make a word strong and tight.

Gemination was frequently overlooked in spelling words in the textbooks. The words were written with and without overtly showing the geminating sound features. Examples include the following:

6.
dok'k'a *dok'a* }	lift
k'oodɗe *k'ooɗe* }	neck
suntstsa *suntsa* }	Name
keetstsa *ketsa* }	house

There are many instances of non-doubled letters for geminating segments. From the examples, the word *dok'k'a* 'lift' was written with geminating sound feature and other times without gemination as *dok'a*. Similarly, *k'oodɗe* 'neck' was spelt with gemination and degemination as *k'ooɗe* 'neck'. Both *suntstsa* and *suntsa* 'name' were available in the textbooks to mean 'name'. Similarly, the doubled graphemes *keetstsa* 'house' and the non-geminated consonant and the short vowel *ketsa* 'house' were also used across the textbooks. One may consider these kinds of irregularities to be typing problems or other forms of simple errors, but for a language which is in the process of establishing a written standard, these kinds of spelling inconsistencies confuse students and decrease the standard of the language in textbooks. They may also mislead one to think doubling graphemes to show geminating features to be optional in Gamo.

Of course, some informants reflected negative attitude towards the orthography rule of Gamo that requires overt indication of consonant and vowel length by doubling respective graphemes/ diagraphs. To avoid these requirements, some respondents like the following one said that they preferred to write in Amharic or English:

> In Gamo a word cannot be written without vowels. When every letter is written with vowels, it takes a lot of space. It is not possible to write many things in short time and small space unlike in Amharic. In English as well, it is possible to write many words in a small space. But Gamo has vowels that need to be doubled, and when consonants are also geminated, it occupies much space. So I write notes or any information in Amharic and in English to save time and space.
>
> (Aster, 32)

The orthography of Amharic and English were perceived to be simple and economical to write while Gamo was considered to have an orthography that

consumes much time and space. These kinds of evaluations of the orthography oblige language standardization in Gamo to update the orthography and make it user friendly as is also recommended by Hirut (2014).

LABELLING SOME WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS AS SLANG USES
IN A DICTIONARY

The other important material that provides a great deal of ideas about the standardization of Gamo is Gebreyohannis (2000). The dictionary contains Gamo words which meanings are given in Amharic. In this regard, it provides information to one who wants to understand word meanings in Amharic. It creates a platform to standardization of Gamo, but the dictionary labeled some words as 'slang uses.' These words were ones which were not mostly included in the textbooks. The following examples are presented to show the case:

lankuʧe (p 135)	eight
majd-eɗe (p 149)	oxen
majtstsa (p 149)	wound
meh-eɗe (p 150) *meheta*	cattle
is given as a standard	
plural form	
mentt-eɗe (p 151)	twins
aaɸe (p 8)	eye
baaso (p 16)	unavailable
boora (p 28)	a flat bread
gahaje (p 76)	find
garabbo (p 79)	cat

The first word *lankuʧe* 'eight' was considered by the writer to be a colloquial word because there is another word, *hospuna* 'eight', which is widely used in the area and taken to be a standard one. Similarly, *majd-eɗe* 'oxen', both the lexeme and the plural noun forming morpheme *-eɗe* were labeled to be low variety. The wider public and the textbooks use *bora-ta* 'oxen', *bora* is 'ox' and the morpheme *-ta* indicates plural number. In words *mentt-eɗe* 'twins' and *meh-eɗe* 'cattle' the plural form *-eɗe* was mentioned to be a slang use because *mentte* 'twin' and *mehe* 'cattle' are standard uses. All of the remaining words, *aaɸe* 'eye', *baaso* 'unavailable', *boora* 'a flat bread', *gahaje* 'find' and *garabbo* 'cat' were labeled nonstandard uses because *ajiɸe* 'eye', *bawa* 'unavailable', *ojitstsaa* 'a flat bread', *demmaa* 'find' and *gaware* 'cat' are widely used in Gamo.

Dictionaries are capable of building readers' positive or negative attitudes towards certain forms of a language (Locher/ Strassler 2008: 6). Therefore, tagging words as colloquial speeches creates negative image towards those forms.

CONCLUSION

The endeavor of this research was to identify the major problems with regards to standardization of Gamo for mother tongue education. Problems related to standardization in Gamo textbooks are multifaceted, but ones identified in this research include a problem of using different words for the same concept, using different grammatical forms for the same function, a problem of gemination and a problem of labeling words as slang uses in a dictionary. The observed grammatical and lexical inconsistencies in the textbooks put cognitive pressure on the learner. Inconsistent forms are unpredictable and confusing. These irregularities in the textbooks also reduce stability and uniformity of the language and the materials, and this in turn negatively affects quality of mother tongue education. To overcome problems of standardization in Gamo, publications in the language should be encouraged in different sectors. Training textbook writers on the orthography rules of Gamo and on the importance of maintaining a standard use in textbooks could also help to reduce the problems.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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