



Sociolinguistic Jingoism and its Repercussion on Ethiopian English Education

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Abstract

From time immemorial, human beings have been struggling for the exclusivity of their identities based on several factors such as race, region, tribe, creed, culture, religion, language, etc. This paper hypothesizes that an average Ethiopian is highly engulfed with sociolinguistic jingoism. Hence, this paper aims to ascertain whether or not an average Ethiopian is really obsessed with soio-linguistic jingoism by eliciting the perceptions of 150 representative samples of five different ethnicities. The findings revealed that 69% Ethiopians are obsessed with their linguistic identities; whereas 21% had neutral stand and 10 % went against the notion of sociolinguistic jingoism. Since sociolinguistic jingoism has caused adverse impacts on the country's English education, the paper proposes a language policy to unify languages in order to diminish mutual differences at cognitive level and pave the path of expediting any talk on peace, progress, and success for Ethiopia and the Ethiopians.

1. Introduction

Sociolinguistic jingoism is one's excessive linguistic obsession towards one's mother tongue or first language and deeming other languages to be of lesser prominence. Sociolinguistic jingoism in general and multilingual education in particular have posed a serious threat not only to the holistic growth of Ethiopian cities but more importantly to the quality of English education in Ethiopia. English in Ethiopia is being used paradoxically as a foreign language rather than second language because a vast majority of Ethiopian believes that English can never be a crutch to survive in Ethiopian society. Therefore, English is foreign to most, and is known and used only by a small minority of educated, economic, and/or political elite in Ethiopia (Bogale, 2009). Although Ethiopia's need for English language is more intensified as globalization is the agenda of the time, the 'depressing picture of English language teaching' never improved (Eshetie, 2010).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia is a multilingual country with more than 72 languages. In 1994, a constitutional amendment was made in which regional languages were allowed to be used as the medium of instruction in Ethiopia (Seidel, 2009). As a result, almost all the states showed their affinity towards mother tongue education which resulted into a trilingual education consisting of *mother tongue + Amharic + English* (Bogale, 2009). This pattern of multilingual education laced with linguistic identities of the states has not only caused disparity among fellow Ethiopians but also impaired the quality of English education in Ethiopia.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

- To ascertain whether or not an average Ethiopian is engulfed with sociolinguistic jingoism
- To propose a language policy to improve the quality of English education in Ethiopia.

To attain the aforementioned research objectives, the paper poses two research questions as follows.

- What is the degree of sociolinguistic jingoism among Ethiopians?
- How sociolinguistic jingoism can be minimized to ensure quality English education in Ethiopia?

2. Methodology

A mixed research design (qualitative and quantitative) was adopted to conduct this study as the first research question required to gather quantitative data; whereas, the second research question required to gather qualitative data.

2.1 Subjects of the Study

The subjects of this perception study were 150 volunteers from five different ethnicities namely Oromo, Amhara, Somali, Tigray, and Sidama. The participants were selected using convenience sampling technique.

2.2 Data Collection

The study used only one data gathering tool namely *unstructured interview* as it allowed the respondents to answer freely and the researcher to probe and explore the exact and related problem(s) as they came up during the interview.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data gathered through unstructured interview was analyzed using percentile scale (see doughnut chart – Figure 1) which shows the degree of consent on sociolinguistic jingoism.

3. Findings and Discussion

Ethno-linguistic conflicts are a persistent problem in Africa and Ethiopia is no exception. The current language policy, which is a potential source of conflict in Ethiopia, has caused a furore among Ethiopian academicians and social science researchers over language use and language policy. This section presents the elicited perceptions and the degree of consent on sociolinguistic jingoism.

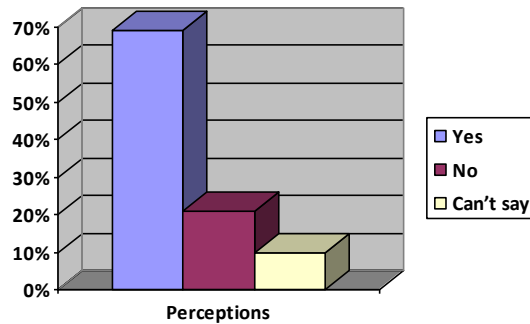


Figure 1: Perceptions on Sociolinguistic Jingoism

The pie chart in figure 1 shows the degree of consent on sociolinguistic jingoism in the eyes of 150 respondents selected from five different ethnicities of Ethiopia. It is noteworthy that 69% respondents were found to be highly obsessed with their linguistic identities as shown in blue pie; whereas 21% respondents were found to be indifferent towards the notion of sociolinguistic jingoism; whereas 10 % respondents totally went against the notion of sociolinguistic jingoism. Thus, it is evident that a vast majority of Ethiopians are highly engulfed with the sense of sociolinguistic jingoism as they strongly favour mother tongue education as well as form and function of a state on linguistic ground. Believing in the hypothesis that a monolingual country is often more harmonious and peaceful than a multilingual country, the paper discourages the notion of sociolinguistic jingoism. Sociolinguistic jingoism not only causes disparity among fellow Ethiopians but also impairs the quality of English education in Ethiopia. It was found in this case study that Ethiopians are really obsessed about their linguistic identities which in turn result into disparity among communities leaving little or no space for minor linguistic community to participate in the shaping of the national identity. Given the stated problem, the paper proposes a pattern of trilingual education as follows.

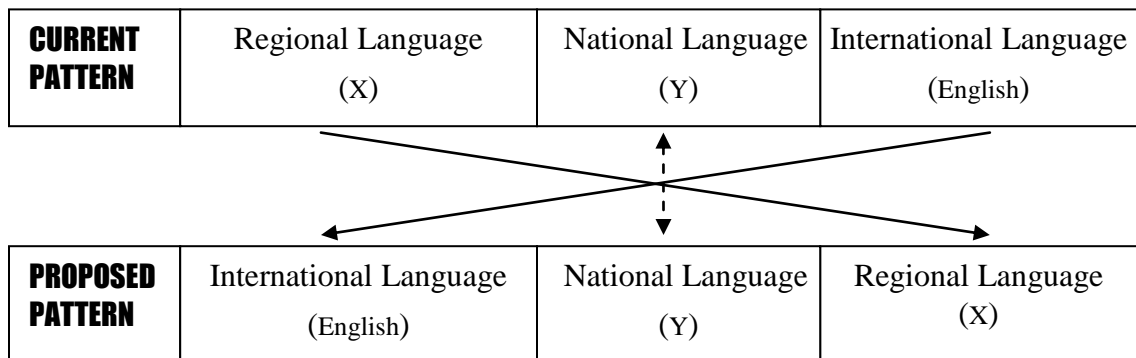


Figure:2 (Proposed Pattern of Reversing the Current Trilingual Education)

The figure-2 is the rendition of transition from current pattern of trilingual education to the proposed pattern of trilingual education. It is noteworthy in figure-2 that regional language is at the first place as a medium of instruction in current pattern of trilingual education; whereas, the proposed pattern suggests to shift it to the third place in terms of priority and bring in English (international language of wider communication) from the third place to the first place as a medium of instruction from nursery to tertiary education. As far as the place of Y (which could be either Amhara or Orominga) as a national language is concerned, it has been retained at its place without any shuffling. As for X in the form of regional language, it has been shifted to the third place so that English could get more attention in Ethiopian academia. Notwithstanding, the debate on the language use remains open from sociolinguistic perspective.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the paper firstly went for eliciting the perceptions of 150 respondents towards sociolinguistic jingoism. The findings revealed that 69% respondents were found to be highly obsessed with their linguistic identities as shown in blue pie; whereas 21% respondents were found to be indifferent towards the notion of sociolinguistic jingoism; whereas 10 % respondents totally went against the notion of sociolinguistic jingoism. The paper secondly proposes a pattern of trilingual education (as shown in figure 2) to minimize the linguistic obsession found among the vast majority of the Ethiopians and maximize the promotion of English in order to improve the quality of English education in Ethiopia.

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