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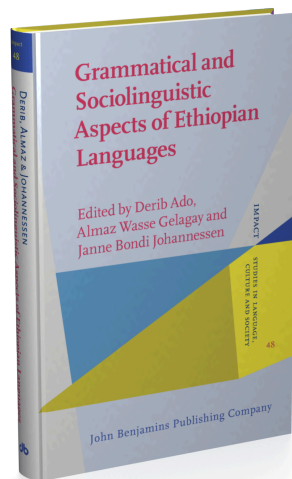
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# Language contact and its effects on language use of the Gurage varieties of Muher

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Social and linguistic contact between speakers of diverse Gurage varieties, as well as the influence of the surrounding Cushitic languages, has contributed to the establishment of widespread bi- or multilingualism. However, the actual extent and effects of language contact in the Gurage Zone are not clearly known. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to investigate language contact and its effects on language use of Muher. The Muher community lives in the north-western part of the Gurage Zonal administration of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional State. Muher speakers are bilingual in Amharic, the official working language of the country, and Ezha, one of neighboring languages the Gurage varieties. A mixed research method is used for data collection. The findings show that Muher is often used in the home and within the community, and is highly influenced by the dominant official working language of the country, Amharic, and the neighboring language, Ezha. It is very hard to find monolingual speakers of Muher. Amharic is used in all official settings in Muher, such as in schools, in court, in health centre's and in administration. Muher children are bilingual with Amharic prior to starting school. Elders tend to use their mother tongues, while young people mix their mother tongue with the dominant language, or tend to speak Amharic. Generational transformation of Muher is decreasing in urban areas. In Wolkite and Hawariyat, most of the children have Amharic as their L1.

**Keywords:** language contact, language endangerment, language shift, language use, speech accommodation theory

## 1. Introduction

The main objective of this research is to investigate language contact and its effects on language use of Muher, a Gurage language of the Semitic language family. Muher has approximately 90,000 speakers. Muher speakers are bilingual in Amharic, the

official working language of Ethiopia, Ezha, one of neighboring languages and also other Gurage varieties. I will investigate where and with whom they speak Muher, and what effects the language contact may have on their language.

The paper is structured as follows: The introduction presents background data about Gurage classifications and Muher. Section 2 discusses theoretical frameworks, Section 3 shows the research methodology, Section 4 discusses the language knowledge and language use of participants, Section 5 analyses the data and Section 6 presents summary and conclusion.

## 1.1 Background

Ethiopia is a country of diverse cultures and languages. Among the four language families in Africa, two of them, the Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan families are found in Ethiopia. Three sub-families from Afro-Asiatic – the Cushitic, Omotic, and Semitic are spoken in Ethiopia, and among the Semitic languages, Amharic, Tigrinya, Harari, Silt'e, Argobba and Gurage are spoken. Gurage is the most complex sub-variety in Ethio- Semitics, and its internal classification is still not well settled. Hudson (1996: 1) captures this idea, stating:

The Gurage people and their languages presented unusual problems for research. There are several languages, perhaps as many as seven or eight, but often the individuality of these is disguised by a continuum of dialect differences, and the differences of culture as well as language, are surprisingly sustained within a relatively small area, and with much interaction.

Meyer (2011) concluded that the genetic classification of Gurage languages done so far is simply an approximation and quite nascent, so that further investigation and reclassification are needed.

Scholars who are engaged in Ethio-Semitic studies agree with three major divisions within Gurage: Northern, Eastern and Western. However, there are differences in the sub-divisions, as shown in Table 1 below.

As indicated in the Table 1, the place of Muher in the classification of the different Gurage varieties is also debated by various scholars. Hetzron's (1972) classification is preferred for this study, considering that Muher and Ezha are different language varieties within Gurage languages.

The social and linguistic contacts between speakers of diverse Gurage varieties, as well as the influence of the surrounding Cushitic languages (cf. Ullendorff 1955: 4; Hetzron 1972: 122; Crass & Meyer 2011: 1266), might have contributed to the establishment of dialects and bi- or multilingualism. However, the actual extent and the effects of language contact on individual language structures and their use in the Gurage Zone is not clearly known. Leslau (1952: 63–81; 1959: 1–7) and

Table 1. Classification of Gurage varieties

Research work	Classification	Criteria	Conclusion
Leslau 1992[1965], 1969	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Eastern Gurage: Silt'e, Wolane, Zay (Silt'e is now declared as a different linguistic society from Gurage by referendum.</li> <li>2. Central Western Gurage: Chaha, Geyta, Ezha, Enemor and Endegagn</li> <li>3. Western Gurage: Muher, Mesqan and Goggot (recommend for further study)</li> <li>4. Northern Gurage: Kistane</li> </ol>	Vocabulary and morphology	There was a proto-Gurage language and Gurage is a dialect cluster belonging to a single language.
Hetzron 1968, 1972	Central western Gurage: Ezha, Chaha, Gumer, Gura  Peripheral western Gurage: Enemor, Endegagn, Ener, Gyeto, Mesmes  Western Gurage: Mesqan  Northern Gurage: Muher, Kistane and Dobbi	Main verb markers	Gurage is a group of different language varieties. East Gurage is a dialect cluster, Central Western Gurage is dialect cluster and Peripheral Western Gurage (Enemor and Endegagn) is dialect cluster. Northern Gurage is language cluster
Dinberu et al. 1987	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ijja-bet speakers are Cheha, Mesqan, Zay, Silti</li> <li>2. ədi-bet speakers are Kistane and Mokorkor</li> <li>3. anə-bet speakers are Dobbi and Muher</li> </ol>	Based on 1st person singular 'I'	Culturally, Gurage is one linguistic community

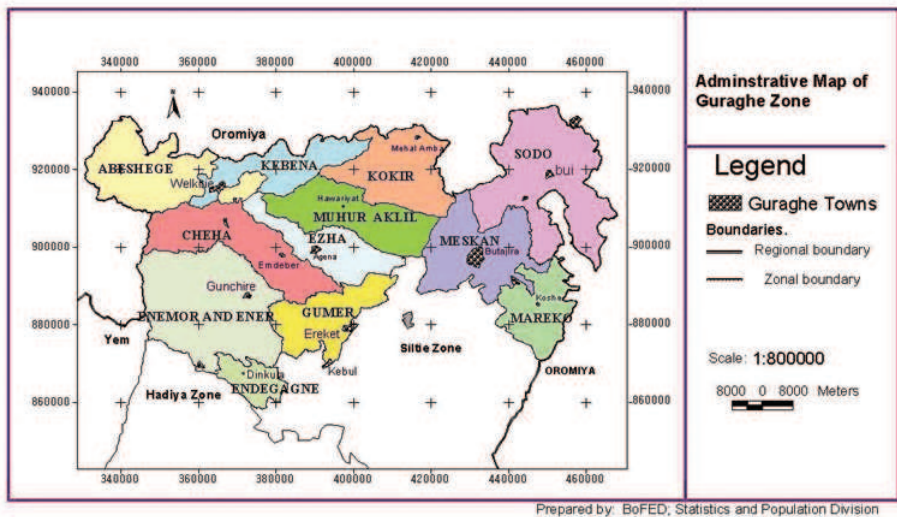
Meyer (2006: 813–821) argued that there is a lack of sufficient and comparable data for all Gurage varieties, which are changing through the intense multilingualism of their speakers, and the resulting language-contact phenomena.

The research in this paper intends to investigate language contact and its effects on language use in the place and the language of Muher. The main reason for selecting this research topic is that I am a native speaker of Muher and my father's L1 and my mother's L1 are Muher and Ezha, respectively. Muher people are bi/multilingual speakers of Amharic, Ezha and Gurage varieties. For instance, I have had strong contacts with Ezha since childhood, especially with my mother's relatives. When I went to Ezha as a child, I was surprised that no one was able to speak Muher there; even my mother spoke Ezha, her L1, and I was the only person mixing Muher with Ezha. When my uncles came from Ezha to Muher, almost all of my family members shifted to Ezha to communicate with them. But my uncles did not try to speak

Muher, or the official working language of the country, the regional administration, the zonal and district administration, Amharic. To the contrary, my sisters from Muher who married Ezha men immediately shifted to Ezha. On the other hand, my mother never speaks Muher, even with her children. The reason behind this is not clear, and may be linguistic divergence, structural complexity, language attitude or accommodation or something else. Thus, this research project was initiated to investigate the reasons behind such asymmetrical shifts in language use.

Muher (or *m<sup>w</sup>ahir* as called by the native speakers) refers to the people, the language they speak and the area they live in. The Muher community lives in the north-western part of the Gurage Zone. Its neighbors are Ezha to the west, Mesqan and Dobbi to the southeast, Wolane to the northeast, Quebena to the northwest and the Silte zone to the south and southwest, as shown in Map1 below. As a result, many of the Muher speakers also speak one of these languages.

Muher was originally called *oxiä*. The highland and lowland areas were called '*nənoxä*' 'the upper *oxiä*' and '*tətoxä*' 'the lower *oxiä*', respectively. Currently, '*nənoxä*' 'the upper *oxiä*' is called *Muher* and '*tətoxä*' 'the lower *oxiä*' is called *Aklil*. The people of Muher Aklil are predominantly followers of Orthodox Tewahido Christianity. The present name of Muher was introduced by Saint Abunezenamarkos, and the name Aklil was introduced by AbuneYacob during the expansion of Orthodox Tewahido Christianity into the Muher Aklil area (currently, the *Muher Aklil district*). Fekede (2015: 7) asserted that, when Abune Zena Markos, a priest and missionary



Map 1. Map of Gurage zonal administration. (Published with permission from the Ethiopian Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' regional state finance office.)

of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith, came to the *ox'ä* and preached Christianity, the majority of the people were converted to Christianity, and abandoned their traditional beliefs and practices.

All the Gurage varieties can generally be categorized into three groups, based on the first person singular pronoun: *anä-bet*, *ädi-bet* and *ijja-bet* (Dinberu et al. 1987: 255), as shown in Table 2 below. As Meyer (2005: 41) and Hetzron (1977: 5) indicated, Muher language has two sub-varieties, one of which is *anä-bet* and the other *ädi-bet*. Additionally, *ijja-bet* is also spoken in the Muher Aklil district. *ijja-bet* speakers of Muher Aklil are *anä-bet* speakers who have shifted to *ijja-bet*, due to the influence of neighboring Gurage varieties, such as Ezha.

The Muher Aklil district has thirty village administrative units (*kebeles*), including Hawariyat. Hawariyat, the capital of the Muher Aklil district, is situated approximately 207 kilometers south of Addis Ababa, or 52 kilometers southeast of Welkite.

**Table 2.** Locations of *anä-bet*, *ädi-bet* and *ijja-bet* speakers

<i>anä-bet</i> speakers	<i>ädi-bet</i> speakers	<i>ijja-bet</i> speakers	
Muher	Kistane	Cheha	Zay
Dobbi	Moqorqor	Mesqan	Silti
		Gumer	Endegegn
		Ezha	Enemor
		Gura	

The *anä-bet* variety is spoken by the majority in the Muher Aklil district, especially in the upper parts of the river Kereb, in the eastern and southern areas. In eighteen villages of the Muher Aklil district, Muher speakers are speakers of the *anä-bet* variety of Muher. The *ädi-bet* variety is used by minority groups in the lower areas of the river Kereb. In five of thirty villages of the Muher Aklil district, (Məqorqor, Koror, Yeshehara, Chebe and Atat), *ädi-bet* varieties are spoken.

According to Meyer (2012), approximately 800 *ädi-bet* Muher speakers also live in the village of Tattessa, situated six kilometers to the east of Wolkite, the administrative centre of the Gurage zone. These Muher speakers are the descendants of a few male emigrants who moved from Meqorqor to this location three or four generations ago, around 1880. According to Meyer, Muher in Tattessa is now only used in discussion with elder men or at village meetings. Younger children usually don't speak Muher, but have a passive knowledge of it. He also asserted that the most commonly used languages in Tattessa nowadays are Ezha and Amharic. Additionally, most of the Aklil people of the Muher Aklil district have also shifted to *ijja-bet* (the Ezha variety) because of a history of invasion of Aklil by Ezha speakers, and migration to Cheha. After returning to their homeland, the male emigrants

usually married women from the nearby Ezha speaking group, after which their children grew up bilingual. Currently, from thirty villages of the Muher Aklil district, the following seven villages have completely shifted to *ijja-bet* (Ezha variety). These villages are Wegerawe, Feresgura, Yebejeche, Wiranfunu, Batinakeras, Dengez and Wikiye.

The 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia gives equal recognition to all Ethiopian languages through Article 5. Articles 20 and 39 of the Constitution also provide the rights of every nation, nationality and people of Ethiopia to use its language in speech and writing, to develop its own language, to express, to develop and to promote its culture and to preserve its history. However, Gurage people didn't practice their rights in formal domains, even at the community level. This right of language and culture development is not practiced in any of Gurage varieties, including Muher.

The official working language of the Gurage Zone and the Muher Aklil district administration is Amharic. Therefore, the children learn the Amharic language as a subject and use it as medium of instruction in primary school.

The language of Muher is in state of shift and endangerment due to lack of attention of the government and awareness of the community to use and develop it. One of my informants from Muher Teklehaimanot claimed that Muher speakers who knew Amharic well completely shifted to Amharic in Addis Ababa or other urban areas. He also indicated that is not only applied to urban dwellers who are Muher speakers, but said that even a mother who only went to an urban area for a short visit, carrying her baby on her back, would begin speaking in Amharic when she returned to Muher afterwards.

According to interviews with my key informants, most of the Gurage people seem to be interested in learning in their own mother tongue, but they also fear that mother-tongue education could have a negative impact on their unity, in that, if each Gurage variety learns with its own varieties, could signal the end of the unity of Gurage people as one society. They also fear that, if standardization takes place, the dominant variety will subsume the other varieties.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Language is used for communication in different domains: home, market, school, administration, religion, etc. As Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 91) pointed out, it is a normal requirement of daily living in many parts of the world that people speak several languages: perhaps one or more at home, another in the village, still another for purposes of trade, and yet another for contact with the outside world of wider social or political organization.

Benmamoun et al. (2013), defined heritage speakers as asymmetrical bilinguals who learned language 'x', the 'heritage language', as an L1 in childhood, but who, as adults, are dominant in a different language. This idea shows that heritage languages are influenced by dominant languages, due to contact.

Weinreich (1953: 1), Fasold (1984), Thomason (2001: 1) and Clyne (2003: 1) defined language contact as the use of more than one language in the same place and at the same time by people from different language backgrounds.

The potential outcome of language contact is bilingualism and multilingualism, as explained by Appel & Muysken (2005: 1), Garret (2006: 49) and Wei (2012: 26).

Language endangerment refers to the growing trend of language loss through the processes of language shift and death. Lewis and Simons (2016: 4) pointed out that, as contact between users of different languages increases; the pressure towards language shift (and eventual death) also increases.

Language contact also has a direct relationship to language attitudes. Language attitude is a feeling or response that people have toward their own language and other's language. Myer-Scotton (2006: 109) explained attitudes as assessments that speakers make about the relative values of a particular language. People may have a positive or negative attitude towards their own language and to the others' language. Language attitude may also attach to the societies who speak the language. Therefore, Language choice or use of individuals or the society in contact is also a direct relation to language attitude.

Speech accommodation theory is chosen for this research. The kernel meaning of accommodation theory is that speakers tend to accommodate their speech to people they like or whom they wish to be liked by, and they tend to diverge from those people they do not like, according to Myers-Scotton (2006: 132).

Garret (2006: 56) explains the driving forces of convergence as the need for maximal second (or third,  $n^{\text{th}}$ ) language learnability: convergence tends to occur in multilingual situations in which language functions as a silent marker of ethnic or other group identity.

The indigenous people of Muher live in Muher Aklil district of Gurage zonal administration. Since the geographical area of Muher is very small, most of the young people of Muher migrate to different parts of the country to search of opportunity. To be effective in their working life, they have an interest in learning different languages, including the dominant language of the country, Amharic, and the language of the society where they work. Accordingly, young speakers of Muher are shifting their L1 to the dominant languages and other languages of the country. This causes the endangerment of Muher language, due to such contact.



### 3. Research methodology

When applying field methods to the study of the effects of language contact on language use, a mixed research method is the best approach. Triangulation is also used in the analysis of this research. Berthele (2012: 4) noted triangulation as changing perspectives and using methods and data pertaining to two or more spaces in order to find answers to the respective problems. According to Berthele (2012: 4), triangulation in social research has the following four functions:

1. Validity checking: by using other data sources (e.g. by combining different qualitative measures, or by combining quantitative and qualitative methods.
2. Indefinite triangulation: make visible how accounts are shaped by different purposes/perspectives of social actors.
3. Seeking complementary information: Can lead to the first interpretation, and thus is not incompatible with the validity checking function.
4. Epistemological enrichment: transgress the limitation of particular methods by combining several approaches; encourage dialogue between paradigms.

Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. Quantitative methods are used mostly for the analysis of language use, and the qualitative method is used mostly to cross-check the data.

Questionnaire, interview, participant observation and recording of spoken texts were used as main data collection tools/techniques. Both the questionnaire and the interview were used to collect information on the following: language contact situations, bi/multilingual abilities, ethno-linguistic vitality, linguistic accommodation strategies, and attitudes towards mother tongues and second languages. Participant observation in the market, in the home, in governmental offices and places of worship and the analysis of recorded texts were used to identify language use.

Amharic was used as meta-language, both for the questionnaire and in interviews. If the informants didn't understand the idea of the questionnaire, or the interview, I helped them by translating it into Muher, since I am a bilingual speaker of Amharic and Muher.

In order to yield a more comprehensive investigation, introspection and data from all available secondary sources were examined.

The study targeted individuals belonging to Muher ethno-linguistic groups. In terms of geographic area, the study targeted the village of Teklehaymanot, the market and town of Hawariyat and the centre of Gurage zonal administration, Wolkite.

The participants used for the study were native speakers of Muher. Participants for the questionnaire were chosen randomly from Teklehaymanot, Hawariyat and Wolkite. Participants for interviews were chosen purposefully out of those who had lived in their respective area for a long time and spoke their language natively.

An equal proportion of men and women were considered. Key informants were selected based on their linguistic ability, and their social, historical and cultural knowledge. Accordingly, the people who were included in the key informants were elders participating in Yejoka k'it'f'a (assembly of cultural administration of Sebat bet Gurage which includes Muher Aklil, Ezha, Chaha and Gumer, Enemor and Ener, Endegagn, Gyeta, Moqorqor), as well as people working in language, administration, health, court, and the education sector. The selection and recruitments were made during the first pilot study trip 15 September 2017–14 November 2017, in areas where the sample languages are spoken.

For the study, purposefully selected Muher speakers were interviewed or asked to fill in questionnaires. The research questionnaires were distributed to sixty-five participants. Of these, thirty-two participants were male, and thirty-three female. From the total sample study, fifty-four were Christian and the remaining eleven were Muslim.

Nine key informants from Muher were selected. These key informants helped to gather and record spoken texts.

The observation process involved attendance of everyday activities in the home environment, at community gatherings, in places of worship (churches and mosques), market places, schools (elementary and high schools in rural and urban areas) and hotels.

The qualitative data were recorded with a digital recorder and, from all of the recorded audio data, the data which were helpful for the study were selected and used in the analysis. The descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data, which was used for the analysis of language use and language attitudes, and which was collected from questionnaires, were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis by means of SPSS 21 software.

## 4. Language knowledge and use

### 4.1 Language ability of participants

Fifty-eight of the respondents were Muher native speakers. For six of the respondents who were born in Ezha and married to a Muher spouse, Ezha was their L1, and one respondent who was born in Hawasa, Amharic was her L1. Her father was from Muher and her mother was from Ezha.

Regarding their L2 abilities, all the participants considered themselves multilingual. They spoke at least two of their neighboring languages, and Amharic, which is the official working language of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, as well as the working language of the Southern Nation, Nationalities, and Peoples'

regional state and the Gurage zonal administration. Amharic is also the working language of the target area of this research i.e. the Muher Aklil district. Due to different contact situations, the respondents name Afaan Oromoo, Sidamo, Hareri, Qebena, Wolene, Silte and other varieties of Gurage as their L2 ability. Educated people of Muher and Ezha have either Ezha or Muher as their mother tongue and learned Amharic and English as a subject or as a medium of instruction at different levels. Accordingly, most educated Muher and Ezha respondents knew at least one of the neighboring languages, in addition to Amharic, English and their L1.

**Table 3.** Second language ability

Second language ability	Number of participants	Percent
Amharic, English	2	3.1
Amharic	7	10.8
Amharic, Ezha, Mesqan, Soddo, Silte, Dobbi and Amharic	8	12.3
Amharic and Ezha	3	4.6
Amharic and Ezha	28	43.1
Amharic, Ezha, English	14	21.5
Amharic, Ezha, Wolene	2	3.1
Amharic, Ezha, Afaan Oromoo	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The data in Table 3 show that, for seven of the respondents, Amharic was their only L2; for twenty-eight of the respondents, Amharic and Ezha were their L2; for fourteen respondents Amharic, Ezha and English were their L2; for three respondents, who were women born into Ezha families and married to a Muher spouse, Amharic and Muher were their L2; for two respondents, Amharic and English were their L2; for eight respondents Amharic, Ezha, Mesqan, Soddo, Silte and Dobbi were their L2 and for the rest for five respondents Amharic, Ezha, Afaan Oromoo and Wolene were their L2.

Some of my key informants also associated their multilingual abilities with their communications for different usages. For instance, one of my informants in Wolkite was 50 years old. His educational background was B.Sc. in Animal Science and M.Sc. in Land Ecology. Currently he is an instructor and researcher at Wolkite University. He spoke Ezha due to the neighboring community and his mother’s L1 also being Ezha. He also easily understood Cheha, due to having carried out his high school studies in Emdibir, and due to Cheha’s linguistic similarity to the Ezha language. He also easily understood Mesqan and Dobbi, because Mesqan and Dobbi also shared common features with Muher and Ezha. For official usage, he spoke Amharic. Professionally, he used English as a means of communication when he presented research works and in teaching at the university.

## 4.2 Language use of participants

Language as a communication tool is used in different domains: home, market, school, administration, religion, etc. It is necessary to understand and to differentiate the uses of language varieties in different domains for different purposes. In many parts of the world, it is a normal requirement of daily living that people speak several languages: perhaps one or more at home, another one in the village, still another for purposes of trade, and yet another for contact with the outside world of wider social or political organization (Wardhaugh & Fuller 2015: 91). Language contact and the level of multilingualism have a direct relationship with the domain of language use.

This section identifies the two generally established levels of language use (see Fishman 1972: 442): (1) informal usage at home, in the family and the near neighborhood, versus (2) formal usage, the language of education, the workplace, mass media and the language of government services. Accordingly, in the following section, both the informal usage domains of language use in family, market, religion and social affairs are discussed, as well as the formal usage of the language. i.e. in schools, health centres and in court.

### (1) Informal language use

#### a. *Language use with father*

In Gurage society, the father is considered to be the pillar of the family. In rural areas, children are viewed as direct decedents of their fathers and mostly speak their father's L1 as their own L1.

**Table 4.** Language use with father

Language use	Number of participants	Percent
Muher	55	84.6
Ezha	6	9.2
Amharic	2	3.1
Amharic and Muher	2	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As shown in Table 4, the majority of participants used their own L1 when communicating with their fathers. Accordingly, fifty-five of the participants use Muher, and six used Ezha with their fathers. The remaining two participants used Amharic, and two mixed Amharic with Muher with their fathers.

The data indicate that the majority of participants use their mother's L1 together with their father's L1. The majority L1 speakers of Muher were born in the Muher Aklil districts, as mentioned in the preceding chapter. Minority groups

who used Amharic or who mixed Amharic and Muher were children born in an urban area. This was due to the influence of the dominant language (Amharic), and members of urban societies who were predominantly speakers of Amharic. This shows that speakers from the rural area of the Muher Aklil district acquired Muher as their mother tongue, and children born in an urban area adopted Amharic, the most dominant and official language of the country, as their L1.

b. *Language use with mothers*

In Gurage society, women may marry speakers of their L1, or speakers of a language other than their L1. Most of their children speak the mother’s L1, and the mother may speak either in a way that mixes her children’s L1 with her own L1, or she may speak her L1 and they can understand each other, due to the effect of children bilingual ability.

Table 5. Language use with mother

Language use	Number of participants	Percent
Muher	52	80.0
Ezha	7	10.8
Amharic	2	3.1
Total	65	100.0

As shown in Table 5, the majority of participants used their own L1 (i.e. their father’s L1) when communicating with their mothers. Accordingly, fifty-two participants used Muher and 11 used Ezha with their mother. The remaining two used Amharic.

c. *Language use with children*

Table 6. Language use with children

Language use	Number of participants	Percent	
1	Muher	7	10.8
	Ezha	1	1.5
	Amharic	12	18.5
	Amharic and Muher	10	15.4
	No children	35	53.8
	Total	65	100.0

Table 6 shows that the majority of respondents, i.e., thirty-five participants, did not have children. Twelve respondents used Amharic with their children, ten

respondents mixed Muher and Amharic with their children and one respondent used Ezha with their children. The data shows that, in the towns of Wolkite and Hawaiat, Amharic was the mother tongue of the majority of the children of Muher parents. This was also confirmed by my observations in Wolkite and Hawaiat.

**d. *Language use with Muher husband and Ezha wife, and vice versa***

Muher and Ezha are connected to each other with common cultural values. Due to cultural ties and geographical closeness, Muher and Ezha are often interrelated by marriage. Most Muher men in the study were married to women from Ezha, and vice versa. Table 7 shows the language use of Muher husbands with Ezha wives.

**Table 7.** The language use of Muher husbands with Ezha wives

Language use	Numbers of participants	Percent
Muher	17	26.2
Ezha	2	3.1
Each of them speaks their own language	44	67.7
Ezha and Muher	1	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As shown in Table 7, Forty-four participants responded that each of them communicated in their own mother tongue, seventeen responded that they communicated in Muher only, and one responded that they mixed Ezha and Muher when the Muher husband and his Ezha wife communicated with each other. In my research, I established that two participants responded that they communicated with Ezha. I also observed one couple from Ezha and Muher, to confirm that the majority of Muher spouses mixed Muher and Ezha or speak in Ezha with their spouse.

In contrast, my observations confirmed that the majority of Ezha men who married Muher women neither mixed Ezha with Muher nor spoke in Muher. Instead, they used their mother tongue with their Muher mate. The reason for their language choice is based on positive attitudes towards the use of their own language and their wife's language.

This result shows that Muher people have a positive attitude towards the Ezha language, but that Ezha people are more divergent in using Muher language and that they have a more positive attitude towards their mother tongue. One of my key informants from Teklehaimanot said that Muher daughters who married Ezha husbands would have completely switched to speaking Ezha when coming back to their family after a year. But Ezha women who married a Muher man never shifted to Muher. They kept speaking Ezha until their death. The informant reported that Ezha women cannot speak Muher and had no interest in speaking it.

The majority of my other informants also confirmed the above conclusion. One of my Muher-speaking informants from Teklehaimanot, who had been a married to an Ezha husband, is now a widow. She asserted that she spoke Ezha as soon as she married. Her reason for shifting language was that Ezha speakers were disgraced or dishonored when speaking their own language, Muher. She said that Ezha speakers would reject her, saying, in her own words, ‘your language is very hard, not palatable or delicate, that was why I completely shifted to speak Ezha.’

e. *Language use of Muher with rural and urban relatives*

Gurage society is mobile by nature and socially interactive, both in rural and urban areas. In rural areas, people interact or support each other in different cultural ceremonies. The majority of the younger generation migrates to urban areas in search of a better life. Gurage people are known as traders in the towns of different parts of Ethiopia. They are also known to support their family in cultural ceremonies. The language use of Muher and Ezha people with their rural and urban relatives differs.

The participants were asked about their language use with rural and urban relatives.

Table 8. Language use with rural relatives

Language use	Numbers of participants	Percent
Muher	54	83.1
Ezha	3	4.6
Amharic	1	1.5
Ezha and Muher	3	4.6
Amharic and Muher	4	6.2
Total	65	100.0

The majority of the participants used their L1 with their rural relatives. Table 8 shows that fifty-four participants used Muher and three used Ezha to communicate with their rural relatives. Four respondents mixed Amharic and Muher with their rural relative, three participants mixed Ezha with Muher and one respondent used Amharic with their rural relatives. For language use with urban relatives, Amharic is dominant.

Table 9. Language use of urban relatives

Language use	Numbers of participants	Percent
Muher	1	1.5
Amharic	49	75.4
Mixing Amharicand Muher	15	23.1
Total	65	100.0

As the data show in Table 9, the majority of the respondents, i.e. forty-nine participants, used Amharic with their urban relatives, fifteen respondents mixed Muher and Amharic with their urban relatives and only one respondent used Muher with their urban relatives. The data and the observations show that literate people in urban areas or who returned from urban to rural areas mostly used Amharic with their rural or urban relatives.

The majority of Muher key informants also confirmed that many people use or mix Amharic with their urban relatives. A 65-year-old farmer informant from Teklehaimanot said that the youth moved to urban areas for different reasons. However, when they returned to rural areas, they had shifted to speaking Amharic. In cultural meetings, to hear a person who speak in Muher from the beginning to the end of a conversation is a very rare event. Many people continuously used Amharic. He indicated that people in urban areas did not speak Gurage languages, and they think that Muher, in particular, is disgraceful to speak. The key informant reports that, even in an urban area, when Muher speakers say '*m<sup>w</sup>am<sup>w</sup>ədərīx-əmwe?*' 'Good morning' to their relatives in Muher, the relatives will respond '*indəminadərīh?*' 'Good morning' in Amharic.

The implication of the above informant's anecdotes is that the Muher language is in the process of change. Due to intergenerational transformation, the use of the Muher language is decreasing.

#### f. *Language use in the market*

To know the language preference of Muher and Ezha speakers, participants were asked to explain the language use of these speakers when they communicate in the market.

**Table 10.** Language use in the market

Language use	Numbers of participants	Percent
Muher	12	18.5
Ezha	1	1.5
Amharic	26	40.0
Amharic, Ezha and Muher	12	18.5
Amharic and Muher	12	18.5
Amharic and Ezha	2	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The data in Table 10 show that most Muher participants use Amharic in the market, i.e. twenty-six used Amharic, followed by twelve who used Muher, twelve who mixed Amharic and Muher and twelve who mixed Amharic, Muher and Ezha. Finally, two participants mixed Amharic and Ezha as a means of communication



in the market. Muher participants only used Muher with other Muher speakers; they shifted to Ezha with Ezha speakers and shifted to Amharic with Amharic and other speakers. This was confirmed in participant observation and in interviews with key informants.

One of my key informants, who was also the Yejoka elders' representative of Muher, asserted that Muher men used Amharic and the women used their own mother tongue in different markets. For example, in Bozəbar market, Muher speakers used Amharic, Muher or Ezha, and other Gurage varieties in the market. But speakers of Wolene, Ezha, Silte and other languages speak their own L1 in the market. Muher women also used Ezha, Wolene, Silte and other Gurage varieties with respective speakers.

My own observations confirmed that Muher people shifted to Ezha and other Gurage varieties, while Ezha people mostly used their mother tongue when interacting with speakers of Muher and other Gurage varieties in the market of Teklehaimanot, Hawariyat and Wolkite. This shows that Muher people are more accommodating in using Amharic and Ezha, but that Ezha people diverge more in using Muher.

Cooper (1976: 254) first noted the technique of systematically observing language use as it happens, as developed for the study of language usage in the market place; this seems to be a promising technique. First, it can be used as a survey method in settings in which household interviewing is not possible. Second, where such interviewing can be performed, the present technique makes it possible to compare a group's self-reported language usage (i.e. which language people claim to use in particular social contexts or for particular purposes) with actual usage.

Using the above approach, I observed two market days each in Bozəbar, Hawariyat, Teklehaimanot and Wolkite to observe transactions and language-use patterns. My observations confirmed that Bozəbar and Hawariyat market are the most multilingual, and that Wolkite is also a multilingual market area. By contrast, in Bozəbar and Hawariyat, commodities, materials and domestic animals are delivered from a similar area, and language use also correlates with the place of origin of the commodities or materials found in the markets. For instance, Muher, Wolene, Silte and Gumer sell domestic animals (horses, donkeys, cows, oxen, sheep and goats), animal products (butter and cheese), potatoes, cabbage, peas, beans, barley and other temperate-zone products. Most male Muher speakers used Amharic or mixed Amharic, Ezha, Wolene and Silte, based on their linguistic ability. Those trading with Muher used their own L1. The buyers or sellers in this case would be Ezha, Mesqan, Dobbi, Soddo or Amharic speakers, who came from Addis Ababa, Butajira, Wolkite and other urban areas.

Speakers of Mesqan and Dobbi sell fruits and grains like tomato, onion, chili/red peppers, maize, sorghum, local alcohol and bole (a salt block for cattle) using

their L1. Speakers of Muher, Ezha, Silte and Wolene used their own language in trade and transactions. Muher speakers might mix their language with Mesqan or Dobbi. Wolene and Silte speakers were neither mixing nor using Amharic. This is due to the attitude that Muher people assume that they understand Amharic and other Gurage varieties, while other Gurage assume that the Muher language is hard to understand and speak.

Ezha and Gyeta speakers sell clothes, pottery, artifacts, mat, coffee beans and *k'otff'o* (cultural food made of Enset or false banana) using their mother tongue during the transactions. Kambata and Hadiyya speakers sell sugarcane using Amharic. Therefore, Bozebar was the most multilingual market, in which Amharic, Muher, Gumer, Ezha, Geto, Soddo, Mesqan, Wolene and Silte languages are spoken.

In Wolkite town, the most dominant language is Amharic. But Ezha, Cheha, Enemor, Muher, Quebenna, Afaan Oromoo and Haddiya are also spoken in the market.

#### *g. Language use in church*

Language use in church could be identified both by observing language use while the minister is preaching and language use during the sanctification of the Mass (congregation), which is different. During the sanctification of the Mass, the languages used in church were Amharic and Geez. While preaching, the language used was Amharic, and sometimes a mixture of Amharic and Muher in rural areas of Muher. Only Amharic was used in urban areas, i.e., in Wolkite and in Hawariat.

**Table 11.** Language use in church

Language use	Numbers of participants	Percent
Muher	6	9.2
Amharic	39	60.0
Geez	4	6.2
Amharic and Muher	6	9.2
Amharic and Ezha	1	1.5
Amharic, Muher and Geez	5	7.7
Amharic and Geez	4	6.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As shown in Table 11, thirty-nine of the total participants responded that Muher people used Amharic in church, followed by six participants, who responded that Muher people used Muher in church, and six who responded that Muher people mixed Amharic and Muher. Five of the total participants responded that Muher people mixed Amharic, Muher and Geez, four responded that Muher people mixed Geez and Amharic, four responded that Muher people used Geez and one

of the total participants responded that Muher people mixed Amharic and Ezha in church. Geez is now a dead language that no one speaks as a mother tongue. It is only used in church as a heritage language.

#### h. *Language use in mosques*

Language use in mosques was similar to language use in church. The Quran was recited in Arabic and Amharic. Amharic was used for preaching in Wolkite and Agena. The language used for preaching in rural areas of Muher involved a mixture of Amharic and Muher.

My data indicated that thirty-three of the participants responded that Amharic was used by Muher people in mosques. Eleven respondents replied that Arabic was used by Muher people in mosques for sanctification. Two of the respondents replied that Muher people mixed Amharic with Muher in mosques, one replied Ezha, one reported a mix of Arabic and Muher and one replied that Arabic and Amharic were used by Muher people in mosques. Twelve of the respondents from Muher replied that there was no mosque in Muher area. But, while there was no mosque in the highlands of Muher, there was in fact a mosque in the lowlands of Muher, around the Aklil area.

Romaine (2010: 320) discussed that usage declined in domains where the language was once secure, e.g. in churches, in the workplace, in schools, and most critically, in the home, as growing numbers of parents no longer transmit their language to their children.

The dominant language, Amharic, was used for preaching in church and in mosques dominantly, and Geez and Arabic were used for sanctification in church and in mosques, respectively.

#### i. *Language use in other social domains*

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, all the members of *Sebat bet Gurage* are governed by the cultural laws of *jəɖzokak'itʃa* (Cultural law of cultural assembly of Sebat bet Gurage), in addition to governmental laws (Gebreyesus 1991: 10; Werku 1983 E.C.:26). Therefore, *Sebat bet* inter-tribal and inter-clan relations are dealt with at the council assembly called *jəɖzoka*. At *jəɖzoka*, the representatives of all *Sebat bet*, i.e. the clan chiefs, meet primarily to enact laws, which, with the passage of time, become customary rules of conduct controlling the behavior of Gurage (Shack 1966: 161). Issues of death, marriage, land boundaries conflicts, infidelity and highways (roads) between houses (*dʒefwəro*) are decided in *jəɖzoka*. All *Sebat bet* members have the right to use their own L1 in meetings, but rules and regulations are written, printed and distributed in Amharic, the official language of the country. All members also have the right to solve any problem within their

district, within tribes and clans. If the issue is beyond the capacity of the groups, it can be brought to *jədzoka* to be solved by the general assembly. As members of *Sebat bet*, Muher people are governed by *jədzokak'itʃfa*, and they have their own system and practice that descends from *jədzoka*. There are also other social and cultural institutions that are known in other Gurage varieties and practiced by Muher. Some of them are discussed in the following.

*iddir*, which is known to have its origin in urban areas and is now widespread in Ethiopia, is practiced all over Muher Aklil and Ezha. In rural areas, *iddir*, as explained by Getu (2012: 54), is a village/neighborhood-based mutual-support association, which is mainly concerned with funerals, but also involved in house construction and in providing financial support to members who have suffered the loss of cattle or other assets.

*ik'k'ub* is also a common voluntary form of mutual support association, which is established by members mainly based on business interests; it serves the main purposes of mutual aid in matters related to creating access to savings and credit services for members. It is an informal financing system that provides basic savings and credit services to members through a rotational lottery-based system involving regular compulsory saving and nominal service charges, but with no interest, except under certain circumstances. In rural areas, contributions may be made in kind (for instance, in milk, by a group of women's collect milk or butter *ik'k'ub*). This is called *widzo* or *damada*, which means 'collection of the same kind'. *Widzo* or *damada* is collected for the *Məsk'al* ('the findings of True Cross') ceremony and for wedding ceremonies.

**Table 12.** Language use in other social domains

Language use	Numbers of participants	Percent
Muher	30	46.2
Ezha	2	3.1
Amharic	16	24.6
Amharic, Muher and Ezha	2	3.1
Amharic and Muher	15	23.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As shown in Table 12, thirty participants responded that Muher people used Muher and two responded that Muher people used Ezha in these social and cultural institutions. Sixteen participants responded that Muher people used Amharic; fifteen responded that Muher people mixed Amharic and Muher, and two responded that Muher people mixed Amharic, Muher and Ezha. When compared to rural and urban areas, the mother tongue was used more in rural areas than in urban areas.

(2) Formal language use

a. *Language use in courts, health centers and in villages*

Language use outside of the ethno-linguistic influence refers to language use in formal domains. As stated in the preceding sections, Amharic is the official language at several levels: in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; in the Southern Nations, Nationalities Peoples’ Regional state; by the Gurage Zonal Administration; and by Muher Aklil district administration, as well. The target language (Muher) is also highly influenced by Amharic. Due to similar results in formal language use in health centers and other sectors of administration, language use in court is presented as the only example:

**Table 13.** Language use in court

Language use	Numbers of participants	Percent
Ezha	1	1.5
Amharic	61	93.8
Amharic and Muher	3	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As shown for courts in Table 13, sixty-one participants responded that Muher people used Amharic in court, fifty-eight responded that Muher people used Amharic in health centers, fifty-five participants responded that Muher people used Amharic in school, and forty-six responded that Muher people used Amharic in district administration. The media used only Amharic to present different programs to Gurage society. This data shows that the Muher people have an interest in and the ability to speak the official working language, Amharic.

b. *Language use in schools*

Gurage languages are not used as the language of education for different reasons. Currently, the language of education is Amharic in elementary schools and English in secondary schools. The language that was used in the schools of Muher was also Amharic.

**Table 14.** Language use in schools

	Numbers of participants	Percent
Muher	2	3.1
Amharic	55	84.6
Amharic, Ezha and Muher	1	1.5
Ezha and Muher	5	7.7
Amharic and Muher	2	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As the data in Table 14 indicate, the majority of respondents, i.e. fifty-five participants responded that Amharic was used in school. Five participants responded that students mixed Muher and Ezha, two used Amharic, two mixed Amharic with Muher and one mixed Amharic, Ezha and Muher in school. Muher was not a language of education, in line with other Gurage varieties. The dominant language in Muher Aklil schools was Amharic.

In my study, I observed school communication between students and teachers, and between teachers in Teklehaimanot elementary and secondary schools. Accordingly, in Teklehaimanot elementary and secondary schools, students and teachers never used Muher in the class room. They communicated formally in Amharic or in English, based on the formal medium of instruction.

**Table 15.** Language use of students during break time

Language use	Numbers of participants	Percent
Amharic	32	49.2
Muher and Amharic	7	10.8
Ezha and Amharic	1	1.5
Muher, Ezha and Amharic	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

By contrast, the data in Table 15 indicated that, during their break time, thirty-two used Amharic, twenty-four used Muher, seven mixed Muher and Amharic, one mixed Amharic and Ezha and one participant responded that students mixed Amharic, Ezha and Muher.

The following summaries from the interview conducted with participants from the education sector are aimed at explaining the language use situation in schools. A 60-year-old key informant, who was a senior supervisor in the Wolkite zonal administration education office, asserted that school teachers and students in the Gurage area communicated in a formal way only in the official language, Amharic.

A 52-year old Teklehaimanot elementary school teacher, who taught grades one to five, explained that he never used Muher to help his students. He used only the medium of instruction, which is Amharic. But he mixed Amharic and Muher during break time.

In my research, I also observed informants responding in the field, and I observed that Ezha elementary teachers sometimes used Ezha to help their students. Muher elementary teachers only used Amharic.

## 5. Analysis

Muher is a native language of the people of Muher and Aklil in Muher Akli district. It is relatively the least studied and most endangered language among other Gurage varieties. The migration of people to urban areas in search of a better life, the influence of the official working language of the country, the regional state and the zonal administration, Amharic and the influence of the neighboring language Ezha and the people attitude towards their L1 and L2 contribute to the endangerment of the language.

As Benmamoun et al. state (2013: 6), heritage speakers are those who are early bilingual in a dominant language and whose native language is a minority language. In contrast to this idea, Muher is the dominant language and Ezha and Amharic are in the minority group in Muher Aklil district. Amharic and Ezha also influence the native language Muher, and the people have shifted their L1 to Ezha and Amharic.

The main cause for the language shift is a need for a high second language learnability. As stated by Weinreich (1953: 1), Thomason (2001: 1) and Clyne (2003: 1), more than one language is spoken in Muher at the same time by people from different language backgrounds. Muher was dominantly used in the home in rural areas of Muher, Amharic was dominantly used in the home in the towns of Wolkite and Hawariyat and mixing Muher, Ezha and Amharic was spoken, in the market and in others social domains. Muher speakers were bi/ multilingual in Amharic and Ezha languages at individual and community levels. As Myers-Scotton state (2006: 132), people will accommodate their speech to other people they like or who they wish to be liked by, and they tend to diverge from those they do not like. Accordingly, Muher people are accommodating with any neighboring Gurage varieties, and Ezha people are very divergent in their use of the Muher language.

This shows that the people of Muher have positive attitude toward using the dominant language and the neighboring language Ezha and their dialect varieties, Mesqan, Chaha, Gumer and Gura. On the contrary, Ezha people in Muher market and Ezha women who married Muher men never shifted to Muher and never mixed Ezha with Muher or Amharic. This was due to negative attitude among Ezha people towards the people and language of Muher. This negative attitude was developed due to the history of border conflict between Muher and Ezha people dating back more than one hundred years, as a result of which, Ezha people were defeated by Muher people. Due to the defeat, the people of Ezha developed negative attitudes toward both the language and the people Muher.

Children born to Muher parents in urban areas and among literate people were dominantly L1 speakers of Amharic. Traders who migrated to urban areas in search of a better life also shifted their L1, Muher, to the dominant language, Amharic. The new generation in rural areas of Muher were also bi/multilingual speakers of Muher, Amharic and Ezha.

As stated by Lewis and Simons (2016: 4), an intergenerational shift occurs prototypically over three generations in which grandparents are largely monolingual speakers of the heritage language, the parents (the childbearing generation) are bilingual in the heritage language and a dominant language, and the children (the grandchild generation) are largely monolingual in the dominant language. Accordingly, children born in urban areas are becoming monolingual speakers of the dominant language Amharic.

The data in this research shows that the younger generation tends to shift to the dominant language more than their parents. Romaine (2010: 321) notes that the dominant language tends to invade the inner spheres of the subordinate language, so that the domains of use of the latter become even more restricted. Fluency in the dominant language increases with age, as younger generations prefer to speak the dominant language to get a better life, because the dominant language is tied to socio-economic advancement. The linkage between the dominant language and social mobility, along with the prestige of the dominant language and its predominance in public institutions, also leads the community to devalue their own language, culture and identity as part of a process of symbolic domination. Language use with children and siblings show that the influence of the dominant language increases with the younger generation. Proficiency in the subordinate mother tongue is higher in the older generation and decreases with the younger generation.

## 6. Summary and conclusion

This research investigated language contact and its effect on language use in the Gurage varieties of Muher. A mixed research method was used for data collection and data analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected from participants residing in the market towns of Wolkite and Hawariyat, and the village of Teklehaimanot. A representative sample of 65 people were asked to fill out questionnaires and knowledgeable people were used as key informants, such as elders from the Yejoka cultural administration representative of Muher Aklil district, civil workers of courts, health centers and education institutions and farmers and home managers. Secondary data from different sources were also consulted. Introspection method was also used to cross check the data. The analysis shows that Muher was often used in the home and within the community. Muher was shifting to Amharic and the neighboring language Ezha. Most of the time, when Ezha and Muher speakers meet in the market and participate in social affairs, both communicate in Ezha or, sometimes, each speak their own mother tongue to communicate with each other. The observation of couples from Ezha and Muher shows that a Muher woman who married an Ezha man immediately shifted to Ezha, while an Ezha woman who married a Muher man never shifted to Muher.



Amharic was used in all official settings in Muher, such as in schools, in court, in health centre's and in administration. But people used their languages during their break times within different governmental institutions. Elders usually tend to use their mother tongues, while young people tend to mix their mother tongue with the dominant language or tended to speak Amharic.

Muher children were bilingual in Amharic prior to starting school, but, in the towns of Wolkite and Hawariyat, Amharic is the L1 for most of the children. There was a generational transformation in that Muher is decreasing in urban areas. Most urban Muher people used Amharic in the home and in social domains. Note also that most of the Aklil people of the Muher Aklil district have shifted to *ijja-bet* (the Ezha variety) due to the invasion history of Aklil by Ezha; when they married women from the nearby Ezha-speaking group, their children grew up to be bilingual. Currently, out of thirty village's administrations of the Muher Aklil districts, seven farmers' village administrations have completely shifted to *ijja-bet* (Ezha variety). The sociolinguistic and linguistic data shows that Muher is highly influenced by Amharic and Ezha.

To maintain the Muher language, the following measures must be taken by society and government:

1. Develop positive attitudes in the society towards the use and development of their own language. The Gurage people, including Muher, are very mobile in search of a better life. They also completely shifted to the language of the new working or living area. This has a negative impact on their mother tongue. If they develop confidence in the use of their mother tongue and develop positive attitudes towards using their mother tongue, they can maintain their language and culture and transfer them to the new generation. This awareness creation can be accomplished by arranging different conferences and symposiums through coordination of government and community associations.
2. Documentation of the culture and the language to revitalize. Material and folk culture of Muher is highly endangered. Especially in Muher, naming, songs and cultural ceremonies are either in Ezha or in Amharic. It is a very urgent undertaking to document folkloric and cultural elements of Muher in order to revitalize and transfer them to the next generation.
3. Develop orthography. All Gurage varieties including Muher lack orthography. Currently, Gurage Zonal administration culture and tourism office developed harmonized orthography for all Gurage varieties. The preparation of orthography is a good start for the development of Gurage language varieties, but it would be better to be revised by linguists and to start practically.
4. Mother tongue education. The best solution for maintaining Muher is to begin mother-tongue education at the elementary level. The Gurage zonal administration delayed for a long time beginning mother-tongue education for fear of

societal conflict if begun with some of the Gurage varieties. It would be better to prepare different meetings, symposiums and conferences with the people and different stake holders to bring mutual understanding and concision to speakers of different Gurage varieties.

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