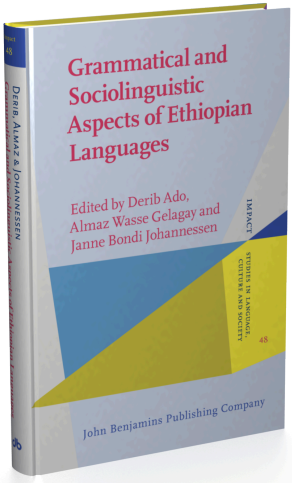
IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society 48

Ethnolinguistic perception and identity in Gurage

Emebet Bekele Birkie | Hawassa University

https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.48.04bek



Pages 91–118 of
Grammatical and Sociolinguistic Aspects of Ethiopian Languages
Edited by Derib Ado, Almaz Wasse Gelagay and Janne Bondi Johannessen †
[**IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society**, 48]
2021. viii, 415 pp.

Ethnolinguistic perception and identity in Gurage

Emebet Bekele Birkie
Hawassa University

This study was conducted with the objectives of exploring the perceptions and attitudes of speakers towards language use and ethnolinguistic identity within the complex sociopolitical and linguistic milieu of the Gurage people in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) of Ethiopia. In so doing, five out of twelve groups with relatively different backgrounds were systematically selected for the study. Data was collected concurrently via questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews involving a total of 386 participants. Respondents were asked to express their perceptions of the associations of language and ethnicity, and feelings about belongingness to the Gurage identity. The concurrent research design was informed by pragmatism as a theoretical framework, so findings of the mixed methods approach were integrated at the end for comparative descriptive analyses. The empirical data reveal that there is an observably different pattern of perceived association of language and ethnicity and varying senses of belongingness to the common Gurage identity across sampled groups.

Keywords: Gurage groups, ethnolinguistic perceptions, ethnic identity and belongingness

1. Introduction

After explaining the majority perception about ethnicity as a significant divisive political tool in many parts of the world from Europe to the Americas and Africa, Leach et al. (2008: 759) argue that it may be difficult to separate modern politics from either identity politics or ethnicity exemplified by the very establishment of modern European states. They also question whether it is the ethnic identity or politics that results in conflicting intergroup relations and conclude that the political context determines the impact of ethnic identity. As the home of people speaking more than 80 different languages, Ethiopia is rightly described by Zahorik

https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.48.04bek

(2013) as one of the most heterogeneous countries in Africa when it comes to ethnolinguistic diversity. The country is divided into eleven administrative units, nine regional states and two city administrations, basically formulated on ethnic federalism during the last three decades. According to Kassaw (2017), 'Ethnic federalism provides ethnic groups the right to administer themselves, exercise a greater degree of command over their own resources, and maintain their own cultures and languages'. In fact, ethnolinguistic identity is not only an aspect of distinction among Ethiopians; it serves as the fundamental means of access to or denial of power and self-determination. However, the emphasis put on ethnicity as a leading political ideology of Ethiopian federalism has resulted in the struggle for identity and self-determination 'where people may protest against the ethnic category into which they had been previously put' best exemplified by the case of 'the Silt'e in Gurageland', Zahorik (2013: 94).

All 'nations, nationalities and peoples', the official reference to ethnolinguistic groups in Ethiopia, are granted the right to have their own 'Zone' or 'Special Woreda/District' in the regional constitution that underlines distinctness according to Beken (2007). However, having 56 ethnolinguistic groups, it became impossible to maintain congruence between the number of administrative Zones/Districts and the groups they host in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) where the Gurage people are located. Consequently, only certain ethnic groups have realised this right and a number of the several ethnic groups are 'a minority in a Zone/Special Woreda dominated by a particular group and that the remaining ethnic groups are living together in multi-ethnic Zones', (Beken 2007). The Gurage Zone is one of the multi-ethnic Zones in the region hosting the dominant Gurage people and two non-Gurage groups known as Mareqo and Qabena. This is just a glimpse of the broader political context of Ethiopia where ethnolinguistic identity determines people's livelihood in sociopolitical and economic aspects in particular.

Gurage is a term that ambiguously means three things: the people, the place where those people live (Gurage Zone) and the language(s) they speak. Peoples of the ethnolinguistic group officially known as 'Gurage' enjoy a favorable national recognition for their remarkable culture and dominant business activities across Ethiopian urban centres. The Gurage make up around two million of the country's population and they speak twelve varieties of a South Ethio-Semitic 'language' known by the umbrella name 'Guragina' in Amharic. These spoken Gurage varieties are controversially classified into language clusters and dialect continua by different linguists to date, but the most widely accepted categorisation is that of Hetzron (1972, 1977). Hetzron (1972) argues against the use of *dialect* in reference to the varieties since they have significant differences that do not fit the definition. He rather suggests the use of: 'East Gurage – dialect cluster, Northern

Map of the SNNPRS (Source: www.snnprboefd.gov.et)

Gurage – language cluster, Masqan – language, Central Western Gurage – dialect cluster, and Peripheral Western Gurage – dialect cluster' for descriptive conveniences, conceding a certain degree of arbitrariness in the classification.

In addition to having multiple spoken varieties, the Gurage people are said to have varying historic origins that may influence patterns of ethnic identity formation across groups. Meyer (2011) points to the historical origin of some of the Gurage people as being 'from Semitic-speaking people of the northern parts of Ethiopia who migrated into the south and settled there' based on oral traditions. There are claims by some Gurage groups about originating from the northern highlands of Eritrea, Tigray and Gondar while others were from eastern Ethiopia particularly Harar (Dinberu et al. 1987). Such narratives have created various kinds of identity formation observed among the Gurage since it is 'only the so-called *Sebat bet Gurage* comprising the Chaha (and Gumer), Ezha, Geyto, Muher (and Aklil), Inor, Endegegn (and Ener) and Meqorqor', who call themselves 'Gurage', (Meyer 2011: 1220). The other groups (namely Kistane (Soddo), Mesqan, Dobbi, Silt'e, Wolene and Zay) refer to themselves by their respective spoken varieties according to Meyer (2011). It is observable from this account that the spoken Gurage varieties exceed twelve in number since some varieties have more dialects and identity construction is further complicated by the varying histories of origin.

Fekede (2013) provides a tripartite category of Guragina as: East Gurage, encompassing Wolene, Silt'e and Zay; West Gurage, comprising Chaha, Endegegn, Ener, Inor, Ezha, Gumer, Gura, Muhir and Mesqan; and Northern Gurage, consisting of Kistane/Soddo and Dobbi. He also refers to this conglomeration of languages or dialects as 'Gurage language varieties' to avoid the endless debate over whether

to consider them languages or dialects of a language. Similarly, 'Gurage varieties' was adopted for use in this study for simplicity's sake since the number and classification of Gurage language(s) is not part of our objectives. In other words, the people are ethnically referred to as 'Gurage' and their language varieties, except Silt'e and Zay, are officially known under the umbrella term 'Guragina'. Vaughan (2003) points out the fact that the Silt'e group was formerly a part of the Gurage ethnic group until it reconstructed a distinct ethnolinguistic identity and succeeded in forming a separate administrative Zone in July 2001. Following the split, Silt'e is officially recognised as a distinct language symbolically representing the brand new ethnolinguistic group named after it, and does not politically belong to the Gurage language(s) at the moment. Besides, speakers of Zay do not have any administrative or geographical connection with other Guragina speakers, so neither outsiders nor the people themselves consider them ethnically Gurage. These realities, then, leave Wolene as the only representative of East Gurage and Masmas as an extinct member of Peripheral West Gurage (Hetzron 1972) to be included in this study. Three other varieties, Chaha, Inor and Dobbi, were also included as representatives of the Gurage clusters known as Central Western Gurage, Peripheral Western Gurage and Northern Gurage, respectively.

Amharic, which is also a federal working language of Ethiopia, serves as the working language of Gurage Zone (and the SNNPR) while other minority languages have recently been in official use for mother-tongue education, local broadcast media and public administration. The split of Silt'e from Gurage is believed to have raised fear of disintegration among the remaining members of the Gurage group by creating a sense of economic marginalisation and minoritized status though they are one of the major ethnic groups in the region.

The following sections present research questions, objectives and methods; a precise review of literature on ethnicity, language politics and belongingness; presentation of data and discussion under two themes; and summary of main points and conclusions drawn from the analyses of empirical data.

2. Research questions, objectives and methods

2.1 Research problem and questions

The constitution of FDRE grants all nations, nationalities and peoples the right to develop and use their language and culture in Article 39 (2), so a number of minority languages have recently begun to benefit from constitutional provisions. There have been desperate desire and continuous efforts to develop the Gurage language(s) and to start mother-tongue education in elementary schools across Gurage

Zone for many years now. However, the Gurage people could not realise their language rights because of linguistic diversity further complicated by wavering ethnic identity formation and extra-linguistic factors that at times threaten intragroup unity. Besides, the fact that language is usually considered a major component and determinant of ethnic identity in current Ethiopian politics is understandably a powerful reason of heightened ethnic consciousness among the general public at large. The Gurage people are unique, surrounded by intricate narratives of ethnolinguistic identity with a high level of linguistic diversity for a small population, occupying a small geographical area, sharing many cultural aspects and a single nationality. Considering different sociolinguistic and extra-linguistic realities on the ground, two major challenges of the Gurage people become visible: (1) a threat of disintegration following linguistic lines in the era of heightened language and identity politics, and (2) a threat to language development and preservation in the long run, even if disintegration is avoided by retaining use of Amharic as a neutral medium. In other words, the diversity of spoken varieties, historical backgrounds [both fictive and real] and the sociopolitical circumstances of the time have complicated ethnolinguistic consciousness and patterns of self-identification in Gurage. Therefore, linguistic diversity and accompanying issues needed deeper understanding to manage consequences of intergroup strife. Among the important issues are the speakers' perceptions of language and ethnicity as well as their attitude towards the common Gurage identity. Even if there is a great deal of literature on the description and classifications of Gurage varieties, there is a serious research gap on sociolinguistic aspects in general and ethnolinguistic identity in particular. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gap by examining empirical data on the following research questions:

1. How do speakers of different Gurage varieties perceive the association of language use and ethnicity?
2. How do speakers of different Gurage varieties identify themselves and express their feelings of belongingness to Gurage ethnic identity?

2.2 Objectives

This study has two objectives regarding the Gurage people and their language(s):

1. To examine speakers' perception about the association of language use and ethnic identity
2. To comparatively delineate patterns of ethnolinguistic self-identification and sense of belongingness to Gurage identity across the sampled group.

2.3 Research design and tools

Creswell et al. (2010) explicate that social inquiry is targeted towards various sources and many levels that influence a given problem, so employing mixed methods can help in understanding them better. The aim of this research is delineating speakers' perception about the link between language and ethnicity, the impact of language use on their ethnic identity, as well as expressed patterns of self-identification and sense of belongingness to Gurage identity across groups. In so doing, a concurrent integrative research design was used in which both quantitative and qualitative methods were mixed. Data collection was done in Amharic for both the questionnaire and interviews by the researcher, assisted by trained data collectors for the survey. Quantitative data was collected using self-reported questionnaires with the aim of comparative assessment from a total of 363 participants across five Gurage groups. Participants were randomly selected from speakers of four Gurage varieties (Chaha, Inor, Dobbi and Wolene) and an extinct variety (Masmas) to represent the major language/dialect clusters in Gurage, and all were residents of Gurage Zone. The number of participants in the survey across groups was 95 Chaha, 94 Inor, 83 Wolene, 81 Dobbi and only 10 Masmas. At the same time, qualitative data was collected using audio-taped, semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to explore respondents' thoughts, beliefs and perceptions about the aforementioned issues involving a total of 23 interviewees (six from Chaha, five from Inor, four from Wolene, five from Dobbi and three from Masmas). The research participants included people from all walks of life in terms of age, gender, religion, education and occupation. The raw data was translated into English, processed by SPSS 20.0 for the questionnaire, thematically organised and analysed separately and merged at the end for integration of results in the discussion.

According to Greene (2007), mixed methods research is preferred by many because it helps them to take dialectal or pragmatic positions that would bridge extremely varying worldviews. Because of the context-driven nature of language use and ethnicity, the main research paradigm that has shaped this study is pragmatism with its basic philosophy, 'that truth is found in "what works" and that truth is relative to the current situation', (McCaslin 2008: 672). In other words, the ethnolinguistic consciousness of a group and identity formation do not have fixed or universal meanings or values, so pragmatic assessment of what works in the actual Ethiopian context was considered a sound philosophical perspective in this study. In addition, Dornyei (2007) characterises concurrent research designs by using two methods in a separate parallel manner and integrating results during the interpretation phase with the purpose of broadening research perspective or testing how the findings complement or corroborate each other. In this regard, concurrent designs are invaluable when we examine a phenomenon that has several levels, and

they help researchers to combine macro and micro perspectives about broad trends in social life and how they are perceived by the individual (Dornyei 2007: 154). This study deals with the broad ethnolinguistic politics in an Ethiopian context and its specific impact on Gurage people's language use patterns and senses of ethnic belongingness. Therefore, data from both methods were separately organised under common themes and mixed at the stage of interpretation to analyse for patterns, comparisons and contrasts.

3. Ethnicity, language politics and belongingness

Ethnicity is an elusive term to conceptualise because of the dynamic nature of social concepts in general and its extreme contextuality in particular. There have been a number of attempts to define the term though none of them succeeded according to Fought (2006). Besides, the term is usually used as an exchangeable concept with ethnic identity in the literature because they have so much in common, particularly the significance of language in their formation. Even if different elements combine to form ethnic identity, it seems that language always makes an important part of it. Fishman (1999) notes that,

> Language is seen as the storehouse of ethnicity: Each ethnic group expresses and identifies itself by the language it speaks, and its cultural paraphernalia is shaped by its language. Sameness of language and ethnicity creates a bond of acceptance and provides a basis for togetherness, for identity, for separateness, for solidarity, and for brotherhood and kinship. (Fishman 1999: 353)

Such a strong association between language and ethnicity is documented in a large body of literature under disciplines in the humanities such as social psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science and sociolinguistics. Identity theory has been evolving since the formulation of Social Identity Theory and Social Categorisation Theory by Tajfel & Turner during the last quarter of the 20th century further developed into the Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (ELIT) of Howard Giles and colleagues. Sachdev (1995) underlines the substantial body of literature that suggests that language is among the most salient dimensions of group identity identified by many in the analyses of ethnic and national groups. Phinney (1990) defines ethnic identity as 'a subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the feelings and attitudes that accompany this sense of group membership', based on the ideas of Tajfel & Turner (1986).

In addition, Gudykunst & Schmidt (1987: 157) deem the relationship of language and ethnic identity as being reciprocal in that language usage influences the formation of ethnic identity, and ethnic identity also influences language attitudes

and language usage. Clément and Noels (1992) explain that the link is caused by the important symbolic and instrumental functions language plays in the evolution of human societies in general and ethnic collectivities in particular. Cargile et al. (1995) outline three roles that language plays in ethnic relations and identities as: articulating existing conditions; serving as a marker of group boundaries people can use to establish and refute claims of ethnic group membership; and a means of negotiating group identities as it not only assists in ethnic categorisation, but helps establish and display the meaning of those social categories. Clément and Noels (1992: 204) suggest ethnolinguistic identity to be, 'situationally bound, such that individuals slip in and out of particular group memberships as required by immediate contextual demands', following points suggested by Collier & Thomas (1988), Liebkind (1989) and Okamura (1981).

Concerning social identity formation, Diaz (2014: 63) maintains that, 'individuals are born into or ascribed particular social categories' about which they develop an awareness of membership and an emotional attachment to their 'ingroup'. Diaz deems social identity a fundamental aspect of a person's self-concept internalised through time that influences relations to others on the basis of their belonging to a certain social category. This declaration applies to ethnic identity since it is also a part of social identity. Because ethnic federalism has already institutionalised ethnic groups as fundamental constituents of the state, Habtu (2003) points out the nature of ethnic categorisation in Ethiopian context as an 'obligatory ascribed status'. 'Ethiopian citizens are required to state their ethnic affiliation, 'correct' affiliation being one based on identification with one of the 84 officially given ethnic categories; and 'correct' identification itself is based on mother tongue or household language use or descent' Habtu (2003: 21). However, Noels (2014) considers the assumptions of homogeneity within such large categories as well as expectations of a necessary correspondence between ascribed categories and self-reports of ethnic identity to be problematic. Ethnolinguistic identity is rather one kind of social identity, defined as 'that part of the individuals' self-concept that derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership', Noels (2014: 89). Moreover, though the terms ethnic and ethnolinguistic are often used interchangeably in the pertinent literature, Vincze (2013: 15) distinguishes them as they are defined by Reid & Giles (2009): an *ethnolinguistic group* is regarded as an ethnic group defined by its language, whereas *ethnolinguistic identity* is seen as an ethnic identity defined by language.

The official reference to ethnolinguistic groups in Ethiopia is 'nations, nationalities and peoples' who are 'bearers of sovereign power' to use the words of Beken (2007) in the country's constitution. Záhořík and Teshome (2009: 94) describe this reference based on the definition provided in the constitution as 'a group of

people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory'. According to Abbink (1998: 62), 'a new ethnic-based map of Ethiopia and its regional states was introduced already in 1991' under the Transitional Government of Ethiopia where *language* was taken as the chief criterion for boundaries and ethnic identity (emphasis in original). The realisation of the overemphasised place language has in the formation of ethnic identity for Ethiopians can be taken as a context that makes ethnic identity synonymous with ethnolinguistic identity.

The significance of ethnolinguistic identity in Ethiopian contemporary politics is typically described by Smith (2007) and other critical observers as a uniquely bold approach to solving ethnicity-based conflicts in the modern period. Smith (2007: 573) states that, 'Few states in the world, and none in sub-Saharan Africa, have taken the formalisation of sub-national or ethnic identities to the same level as Ethiopia'. Abbink (1997: 160) also explains the extremes of politicised ethnicity in contemporary Ethiopia stating that, 'the discourse of ethnicity has become strongly politicised, more so than ever before, and has created "realities" which did not previously exist'. Thus, ethnolinguistic perception can be conceptualised as the consciousness level or subjective understanding of members of a group about the relationship of language and ethnic identity, which are all contextually bound.

Accordingly, ethnolinguistic identity in Gurage is also directly impacted by the ethnic federalism of the country at large which prioritises language as a major factor in ethnic designation or boundary formation. Gurage was 'widely accepted to consist three major groups of people – Sebat Bet, Soddo Kistane and Silt'e until the split of Silt'e in 2001' Nishi (2005: 158). Based on Shack (1966) who had written about 'the common set of artifacts, technology and mode of production as a people of "ensete culture complex" of southern Ethiopia', Nishi (2005) also mentions the existence of extensive intermarriage between the groups resulting from geographic proximity. Therefore, it is not surprising to question modes of Gurage identity formation among the different linguistic groups and people's attitude and perceptions concerning language use and ethnicity after the 2001 incident of identity reconstruction of the Silt'e. Woldesilassie (2015: 8) takes the politics of Silt'e identity as an interesting case that demonstrates, in a particular way, the commonplace assertion of ethnicity in the literature as a socio-political construct instrumentally used to achieve political and economic gain particularly in the context of change related to the state. Woldesilassie further notes the possibility of social and political contexts as important explanations for the distinction between belonging and identity formation, thereby belonging may function 'as a cultural and symbolic resource, as a marker of identity rather than serving as an identity itself'.

Howard (2000) explains the central tenets of social identity theory as being focused on two quite inseparable dimensions along which individuals define their identities: the social and the personal. Therefore, this study merges both issues of self-identification and subjective perceptions and sense of belongingness across Gurage groups to their official ethnolinguistic identity. Edwards (2009: 22) declares that the course of human history, and its implications for every *individual*, is by and large fuelled by perceptions of *groups* while explaining the relationship of individual and group identities of a person. According to Royce (1982: 7), people obtain their personal ethnic identity from two sources: the ethnic group itself based on how the group defines itself, and the sense of solidarity that devolves upon groups that find themselves to be different from other groups or cut off from society. Llamas et al. (2007: 78) similarly remark on the permeability of socio-cultural and linguistic boundaries asserting that, 'Historical circumstance, social hierarchy, patterns of internal and external interaction, and ideology all help determine the construction of ethnolinguistic identity'. In conclusion, ethnolinguistic perception and self-identification are two sides of a coin in that they are strongly shaped by the sociopolitical and economic contexts beyond kinship and geographical factors.

4. Presentation of data and discussion

Creswell et al. (2010) note that integration of qualitative and quantitative data maximises the strengths and minimises the weaknesses of the data. They add that integration can be achieved by 'reporting results together in the discussion section of a study, such as first reporting the quantitative statistical results followed by qualitative quotes or themes that support or refute the quantitative results' (Creswell et al. 2010: 5). Data in this study was, therefore, organised with this principle in that percentage values of each item with total average are presented in tables and quantitatively described first. Then, qualitative data from the in-depth interviews are presented for comparative discussion of findings. Employing mixed methods was deemed important to meaningfully address the exploratory research questions in this study. Accordingly, this section presents results for both research tools in a way that the quantitative data precedes the qualitative one in which findings are to be compared. In some cases, however, the quantitative data appears more dominant in the description of findings whereas the reverse is true in others, which means that the primacy of quantitative or qualitative data varies depending on the nature of questions under discussion.

4.1 Ethnolinguistic perception among the Gurage

The main issues covered under this theme were the perceived connections between language and ethnic identity and the perceived impact of speakers' language use on their ethnic identity. Five interrelated questions in the survey questionnaire assessed these points. Some of the questions were posed directly while others were indirectly related to respondents' ethnolinguistic consciousness. In addition to the quantitative data, respondents' multilingualism and its impact on ethnolinguistic identity construction were assessed based on relevant explanations collected using the semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The first question raised in this regard was whether respondents believed their ethnic identity and language were related. Three options, 'Yes', 'No' and 'I do not know', were given for them to choose from in the survey, and the results from the sampled Gurage varieties are presented in Table 1.1 with percentage values of responses from each group and the total average for all.

Table 1.1 Do you think your ethnic identity is related to language?

EIRL	Chaha	Inor	Wolene	Masmas	Dobbi	Total avg. %
Yes	74.5	83.0	94.0	90.0	63.0	80.9
No	21.3	13.8	4.8	10.0	35.8	17.1
I don't know	4.3	3.2	1.2	0	1.2	2.0

The result for this question shows that respondents are highly aware of a strong link between language and ethnic identity since a total average of 80.9% answered 'Yes', only a small portion of participants (17.1%) said 'No', and an insignificant number (2%) did not know the relationship. This is an indication of heightened ethnolinguistic awareness fuelled by its significance in people's everyday interaction with the national context of ethnic federalism. Considering the contextual role of language as the most obvious symbol of ethnic identity, it would be inconceivable to expect otherwise. However, this question was raised to analyse the perception of the link between language and ethnic identity across speakers of different Gurage varieties and to see whether there is any pattern to be observed. Accordingly, those who think language and ethnic identity are connected appear proportionally high for the respondents of Wolene, Masmas and Inor covering 94%, 90% and 83% of total participants, respectively. On the other hand, respondents of Dobbi and Chaha varieties constitute the highest proportion (35.8% and 21.3%, respectively) of the entire sampled population who perceive no connection between language and ethnic identity whereas respondents of Wolene share the smallest proportion (4.8%) in this regard. Therefore, it can be argued that participants' perception of the

connection between language and ethnic identity is not uniform across speakers of different Gurage varieties.

The same question during the in-depth interview produced a significant pattern of reactions across speakers of different Gurage varieties as well. In an overall view, it is clear that people have been made aware of the significance of ethnolinguistic identity in which language is the primary signifier in their identity construction and entire sociopolitical lives. It was found among interviewees that the majority perceived a strong connection between language and ethnic identity. However, these perceptions appeared with heightened protective sentiments among groups who feel threatened by their neighbors like the Wolene and Dobbi compared to Chaha and Inor. One of the Wolene respondents (WO1) states that, 'An issue of ethnic identity begins with language as it is the most important determinant of people's identity'. He adds his observation of how serious the Wolene speakers are about maintaining their tongue as an arsenal of their ethnic identity when he was asked how a person would be treated in Wolene society if he/she does not speak the language as follows:

> Especially after the advent of ethnic politics, people have grown very serious about language use. A person cannot claim Wolene identity without speaking the language in our community. But I do not think there are people who do not speak Wolene at all being a member of the community though there may sometimes be a problem of fluency. Such tradition of extreme efforts to avoid language loss is a new arrival with the emergence of the new government structure of EPRDF where the basic ingredient of nations and nationalities' rights is having a language. There was not such a thing before as far as I know. (WO1, Nov. 15/2017, Wolkite)

A similarly strong reaction was voiced by another interviewee of the Wolene variety when asked the same question as to how members would feel if someone does not speak his/her heritage tongue saying;

> That is quite serious. They consider such a person ignorant of his/her identity and culture, so it is hard to be in that position! Once I remember that the community elders declared a serious rule about speaking only Wolene amongst the members. This trend was even in place during the Dergue regime. There were community police who would see to it that every member of Wolene community communicates with each other *only* in Wolene language or they would charge anyone who fails to do so. That regulation is not openly practiced at the moment, but its impact is already persistent till now. My children, for instance, spoke Amharic first because we live in town and Amharic is predominantly spoken in Wolkite. However, I taught them to speak Wolene and they are now bilinguals. I think this is a common practice in our community. (WO3, Nov. 15/2017, Wolkite)

On the other hand, speakers of Dobbi variety demonstrated a slightly lesser emphasis on language as an identity marker at the onset of our discussions. That stance, however, starts to shift towards a strong defensive sentiment of maintaining their tongue as part of their identity particularly when they think of assimilation with the neighboring Mesqan. One of the interviewees (DO1) pointed out the fact that Dobbi people use their language until the present time, but they are now more inclined to speaking Amharic. He adds that, 'The issue of language and its link to identity is not easy for me to understand. I know that Amharic and Guragina are closely related languages, but speaking Amharic does not affect my Gurage identity'. However, a second interviewee mentioned a recent experience of the Dobbi speakers in connection with language as an identity marker when they faced a sense of being assimilated to Mesqan variety saying:

> The Mesqan people have their own language, culture and identity and so do the Dobbi people. There was once an attempt made to teach Mesqan language at school and the Dobbi speakers openly resisted the attempt. There was a serious conflict between speakers of the two languages. People raised an issue that they are not Mesqan even though the district council approved of the plan to teach elementary school children of both Dobbi and Mesqan in Mesqan language. Then, the plan was forced to be dropped. The languages are actually different and communication is somehow difficult between speakers of the two varieties.
>
> (DO2, Dec. 10/2017, Butajira)

According to his points, the idea of assimilation was more worrying to the Dobbi speakers than the difficulty of language comprehension which would ensure Mesqan dominance in all of the administrative and socioeconomic sectors. He pointed out the fact that the entire political and economic administration of the district is dominated by Mesqan speakers starting with the name of the district where Dobbi is excluded. This has resulted, according to the respondents, in a serious grievance among Dobbi speakers who feel discriminated against and marginalized, even when they are prosperous in economic terms and contribute significantly to the area's development in the investment sector. A third interviewee from Dobbi underlined the points raised by the two former consultants, saying that, 'When we think of ethnic identity, what is most important is that the majority should not oppress the minority groups (clans) that make up the larger whole of Gurage people. They must avoid looking down on others in social relationships, and treat them as equals', DO5 (Dec. 11/2017, Dobbi). This remark can be taken as an expressed fear of assimilation and marginalisation of the group in sociopolitical and economic spheres of the speakers rather than a basic worry of language loss equated with identity loss among respondents of Dobbi variety.

The perception of interviewees from Masmas variety, on the other hand, is somehow divergent from the previous views we have discussed about the link between language and ethnic identity. According to one of the interviewees, 'the Masmas people speak the languages spoken around them and live in the same culture as their neighbors except that they most importantly stick to their Orthodox Christian faith. Language is not a matter of serious concern, so children are not pressured to learn the vernaculars', MA (Oct. 27/2017, Shumoro). In fact, other interviewees from the Masmas group raised their concerns about the decline of Guragina varieties even if they prioritised learning Amharic as a language that determines Ethiopian identity. This would not come as a surprise considering the lost and forgotten variety they are named after which could make them feel differently from their neighbors.

In a related second question, respondents were given five alternatives to express their perception of the level of language-ethnicity connection from the range of 'Inseparably connected', 'Highly connected', 'Somehow connected', 'only slightly connected', to 'Not connected at all' with a descending order of importance. This question was raised as a means of evaluating respondents' perception beyond the 'Yes' or 'No' responses concerning their perceptions of the language-ethnicity connection in the survey, presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 How strongly do you think your language and ethnic identity are connected?

EILC	Chaha	Inor	Wolene	Masmas	Dobbi	Total avg. %
Inseparably connected	35.8	34.0	34.9	50.0	27.2	36.5
Strongly connected	25.3	31.9	56.6	20.0	30.9	32.9
Somehow connected	16.8	22.3	3.6	10.0	9.9	12.5
A little related	4.2	0	0	10.0	2.5	3.3
Not related at all	11.6	4.3	1.2	10.0	7.4	6.9
Left unmarked	6.3	7.4	3.6	0	22.2	7.9

The result of this question also confirms the former result since the majority (69.4%) of respondents from all varieties perceive a strong connection between language and ethnic identity while an insignificant share of the total participants think otherwise. What is interesting in this case, though, is the fact that the proportion of respondents who said 'No' or 'I don't know' when asked if they thought language and ethnic identity were related in the former question is not matched by those who evaluate the link as either 'not related at all' or left it unanswered. That is, the former respondents constitute 19.1% of the total sample while the second case covers only about 14.8%. This inconsistency can still be understood as an indicator of a dilemma in the respondents' understanding of how much it is really important to assume language as an identity marker if any challenge arises along the way.

A third point closely related to the connection of language and ethnic identity was asking respondents whether they thought that speaking other languages would affect their ethnic identity. They were similarly given three choices, 'Yes', 'No' or 'I don't know', and the result shows that nearly equal proportions of the respondents agree and disagree with the idea, 47.7% and 49.8%, respectively, that speaking other language(s) might affect the speakers' ethnic identity. However, the responses are not uniform across the groups since Wolene speakers demonstrate the highest share (71.1%) followed by Inor (52.1%) speakers who answered 'Yes' whereas Chaha speakers had the highest share (67.4%) saying 'No' followed by Dobbi (59.3%). This observation is somehow confusing coming from the highly multilingual society of Gurage to perceive speaking other languages as damaging to one's ethnic identity.

The respondents were then given additional perspective on this issue and they were asked to evaluate the effect of speaking others languages on their ethnic identity by choosing from five scales given in the questionnaire if they answered 'Yes' before. The result of their evaluation is presented in Table 1.3 with percentage values for each Gurage variety.

Table 1.3 Do you think speaking other languages has any influence on your ethnic identity?

LOLE	Chaha	Inor	Wolene	Masmas	Dobbi	Total avg. %
Ext. damaging	5.3	20.2	56.6	50.0	21.0	30.6
Very damaging	14.7	21.3	7.2	0	7.4	10.2
Affects only a bit	27.4	22.3	21.7	0	24.7	19.2
Not that much	21.1	19.1	7.2	10.0	19.8	15.4
Not at all	31.6	17.0	7.2	40.0	27.2	24.6

When considered cumulatively, only 40% of all participants perceive that speaking other languages does not affect one's ethnic identity and nearly the same proportion (40.8%) perceive rather a damaging effect. The middle level of effect represented by 'It affects only a bit' reflects the remaining 19.2% of all participants. Interestingly, respondents who answered 'No' for the first question covered 49.6%, and those who answered 'I don't know' shared 2.5% that appeared disproportionate against the 40% who perceive either insignificant or no impact of speaking other languages on their ethnic identity. This inconsistency is again an additional indicator of lack of clarity on the link of language and ethnic identity among the respondents.

Finally, the participants were asked to express their level of agreement with a given statement on five scales ranging from 'I strongly agree', to 'I agree', 'I am not sure', 'I disagree', and I strongly disagree'. The statement ran, 'It will be alright if Amharic or Oromo languages totally substitute your language since that does not affect your ethnic identity'. This was another question posed to test the respondents' commitment to their belief concerning the connection between language and

ethnic identity one more time, long after the previous questions were dealt with. Table 1.4 presents the result of this question in percentages of the whole sample.

Table 1.4 It is all right if other languages substitute yours

OLSN	Chaha	Inor	Wolene	Masmas	Dobbi	Total avg.%
I strongly agree	5.3	4.3	2.4	20.0	2.5	6.9
I agree	6.3	7.4	2.4	0	8.6	4.9
I'm not sure	8.4	7.4	6.0	0	18.5	8.1
I disagree	30.5	35.1	15.7	20.0	43.2	28.9
I strongly disagree	49.5	45.7	73.5	60.0	27.2	51.2

A significant majority of respondents (80.1%) chose either 'I disagree' or 'I strongly disagree' for the above statement; only 11.8% of all participants chose either 'I agree' or 'I strongly agree'; and 8.1% were not sure about the statement. The cumulative result once again confirms the respondents' strong belief that language is directly related to ethnic identity. However, there is still an observable pattern of assuming a strong connection between language and ethnicity among the Wolene, Masmas and Chaha groups, respectively in a descending order. Consequently, it is not easy to delineate the perception of respondents about the link of language and ethnicity in a clear pattern. The inconsistency observed above could then be an outcome of the people's exposure to multiple languages in their daily interactions, with the felt need to maintain their language(s) and identity which they feel is constantly threatened in many instances.

4.2 Self-identification and belongingness to Gurage identity

The pattern of self-identification and feelings of belongingness to Gurage identity among participants of this study were assessed through both direct and indirect questions included in the survey as well as the semi-structured interviews. To begin with, both the questionnaire and interview entries have an open question for respondents to name their ethnic identity as part of their biographical background. This is considered an indirect form of assessment since the respondents would answer it without serious consideration as it is a common practice in Ethiopia even for issues completely unrelated to a study of ethnicity. Then, other questions were added to further understand respondents' self-identification and sense of belongingness to the officially recognised common Gurage identity. In other words, five closely related questions were raised at different points in the questionnaire after the first point of self-identification reported at the beginning of the entire data collection. The results of these variables are discussed one by one in this section by

adding relevant points of discussion from the interview data. First, the pattern of self-reported ethnolinguistic identity of respondents for the questionnaire survey from all five Gurage varieties is presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Participants' self-reported ethnic identity

EID	Chaha	Inor	Wolene	Masmas	Dobbi	Total avg. %
Gurage	93.7	93.6	0	30.0	95.1	62.5
Specific Variety	0	6.4	98.8	70.0	1.2	35.3
Ethiopian	6.3	0	1.2	0	3.7	2.2

Considered from a total average point of view, only 62.5% of the total participants reported 'Gurage'; 35.3% answered with names of their respective Gurage varieties and a small portion (2.2%) of them wrote 'Ethiopian' as their ethnic identity. The overall picture only shows a mixed pattern of self-identification among speakers of different Gurage varieties, but there is a clear pattern of divergence across different groups when examined separately. For example, nearly all of Dobbi (95.1%), Chaha (93.7%) and Inor (93.6%) respondents reported 'Gurage' as their ethnic identity, whereas only 30% of the Masmas participants and none of the Wolene speakers share the same self-identification pattern with the rest. On the contrary, almost all of the Wolene respondents (98.8%) had identified themselves with their language variety, Wolene, followed by 70% of Masmas participants who usually refer to themselves as *Masmas Bahire-work*.

On the other hand, only 6.4% of Inor, 1.2% of Dobbi and none of Chaha participants mentioned the name of their respective Gurage varieties as synonymous with their ethnic identity. What is more, 6.7% of Chaha, 3.7% of Dobbi and 1.2% of Wolene participants mentioned 'Ethiopian' as their ethnic identity which is not legally considered an ethnic identity at all. The only indication this kind of self-identification has is when respondents are either uncomfortable with or against the way of ethnic identity assignment from available alternatives in the process that they do not approve of. It is a common trend among Ethiopians who are disappointed by ethnicity politics that they feel is discriminatory and contribute negatively to their citizenship in general.

Consistent with this pattern are the responses of participants of the in-depth interview, but the Masmas interviewees demonstrated a tendency of considering themselves one of the clans of Gurage people, not a different ethnic group, unlike the Wolene. One of the interviewees said, 'there is something called *Masmas* as a clan among the Gurage, but the language is not clearly known and it is said to be Kambata. Indeed, the clan does not have a specific language of its own that is known to the people at the moment' (MA1, Oct. 26/2017, Shumoro). He added that the

presence of multiple Gurage varieties is perceived by Masmas people as nothing more than little differences in speech instead of being bases for ethnic differences. A second interviewee from the same group (MA2) said that there was a language the Masmas people were said to have spoken in old times that he heard of on the radio broadcast sometime in the past, but he could not remember its name, 'except that the people had totally shifted to speaking Hadiyya language through time'. From these points of views, it is possible to conclude that the self-reported ethnic identity of different groups within Gurage is not uniform or clear across speakers of all varieties.

Another point included with the aim of understanding respondents' pattern of self-identification in reference to their language was asking them to name their mother tongue. This point was raised with the assumption that it helps in indirectly assessing the pattern of identity construction based on the fact that the Gurage people have a tradition of naming groups of people and districts after their spoken varieties within the Gurage Zone. The results are presented in Table 2.2 below:

Table 2.2 Participant's mother tongue

MT	Chaha	Inor	Wolene	Masmas	Dobbi	Total avg. %
Guragina	83.2	83.0	–	100.0	24.7	58.2
Individual Variety	2.1	13.8	95.2	–	45.7	31.4
Amharic	14.7	3.2	4.8	–	27.2	10.0
Other langs.	–	–	–	–	2.5	0.5

All of the Masmas participants, the majority of Chaha (83.2%) and Inor (83%) participants reported 'Guragina' as their mother tongue, whereas none of the Wolene and only 24.7% of the Dobbi respondents mentioned 'Guragina' as their mother tongue. Here, it is understandable that there is a visible difference in the pattern of self-identification and sense of belongingness to Gurage identity while identifying their language across speakers of the sampled Gurage varieties. Among the obvious trends in this case is the fact that speakers of Chaha variety appear to embrace their Gurage identity as closely as their Inor and Dobbi counter-parts. On the contrary, speakers of Wolene variety appear to make sure that they avoid being identified as 'Gurage' as much as possible or considering their vernacular as 'Guragina'. The case of Masmas group is, in fact, unique as they do not have a variety to consider solely their identifier or even believe that they had one in the past. Nearly all of them belong to speakers of Inor, Ener and Endegegn varieties, so this point somehow reflects their sense of belongingness in terms of naming their mother tongue as 'Guragina', rather than referring to the varieties separately.

One of the direct questions posed to participants in relation to their feeling of belongingness was if they believed speakers of all Gurage varieties belong to one

ethnic identity, 'Gurage'. Three alternative answers, 'Yes', 'No' and 'I don't know', were given in the questionnaire for participants to choose from. Table 2.3 presents the result of this query for the sampled Gurage varieties:

Table 2.3 Do speakers of all Gurage varieties belong to one ethnic identity?

AEID	Chaha	Inor	Wolene	Masmas	Dobbi	Total avg. %
Yes	69.5	74.5	20.5	90	58.0	62.5
No	22.1	13.8	61.4	10	40.7	29.6
I don't know	8.4	11.7	18.1	–	1.2	7.9

On a cumulative average, a significant share of the entire sample in the survey covering 29.6% do not believe that speakers of all varieties share a single ethnic identity and 7.9% of the sample answered that they do not know. However, more than 60% of the total participants on average think that speakers of all varieties share one ethnic identity as people of Gurage. However, the responses from each variety in the survey are not close to one another on this topic. For example, the largest share of respondents who do not think that speakers of all Gurage varieties share one ethnic identity comes from Wolene at 61.4% followed by Dobbi (40.7%) and Chaha (22.1%) when individual groups are observed separately. This is interesting considering the trend of Dobbi speakers who embrace their official Gurage identity at the same time that they do not actually think speakers of all varieties belong to a single identity. On the other hand, the responses of Wolene speakers again show a certain level of paradox in this regard. Even though the majority of respondents are adamant about their ethnic distinctness from Gurage, more than 20% of them answered 'Yes' to the same question. Furthermore, the presence of more than 20% of respondents from Chaha variety who do not think that speakers of all Gurage varieties share a common ethnic identity is questionable considering their consistent embrace of Gurage identity. Even if the size of participants from Inor variety is smaller in this regard, it appears that the idea of differences is entertained across different Gurage groups on a different level. In other words, while there is a group that would like to be recognised as a distinct ethnolinguistic group, there are also others that are willing to compromise their differences and prefer to stay united within the common Gurage identity.

The same pattern was repeated by participants of the in-depth interview on their perception concerning the ethnic identity of speakers of different Gurage varieties. Most of the participants from Inor, Chaha, Masmas and Dobbi think that these people share the Gurage ethnic identity and the varieties are dialects of a given language. One of the Dobbi respondents (DO1) expressed his strong belief on the shared identity of speakers of different Guragina varieties hinting at the

people's origin that he knows. He said, 'As to me, Dobbi speakers are closely related to other Guragina language speakers. All the Gurage people claim descent from Atse Zereyaekob and Fasilladas, Gondarian kings. The legend of Gurage origin is related to Azmach Sibhat, so all Gurage people are closely related and belong to one ethnic identity', (DO1, Nov. 29/2017, Butajira). An interviewee from Inor (IN1) also pointed out that having dialectal differences was not a unique characteristic of the Gurage people which others might think. Rather, he explained the inherent feeling of belongingness to Gurage identity among the people in the following statements:

> The differences in linguistic forms do not reflect differences of the people. If I go to Kistane area, for example, they will accept me like one of them knowing that I belong to the *Sebat bet Gurage* even if it is difficult for me to speak and comprehend their Guragina properly. The same applies to someone who comes to Enemor from Kistane. The people do not prioritise their linguistic varieties when it comes to Gurage identity. (IN1, Oct. 27/2017, Gunchire)

However, another interviewee from Chaha answered the question with some level of insecurity in his voice referring to the fact that the speakers of all varieties have a national recognition as the 'people of Gurage'. He added, 'There is a sense of unity among the people as well; it is not just an external recognition', (CH3, Aug. 15/2015, Wolkite). Those participants who support the unity of the people instead of focusing on the differences of their linguistic varieties expressed their wishes and frustrations with diversity like this interviewee from Inor (IN2):

> I do not think Gurage identity is tied to the language at all. Having many languages among the Gurage would not have been a problem if there were studied and well organised efforts to unify those varieties. We could have seen some bright future for the language. There is also variety of languages among the Oromo, but they managed to be one and unified as a people unlike us.
>
> (CH2, Oct. 27/2017, Guncihre)

The confusion related to having multiple tongues and the controversy surrounding this fact had seemed to change respondents' stance at the beginning when they were asked the question of shared identity. Many would begin by stating that language and identity are inseparable, and later argue that Gurage identity should not be tied to the language which is a self-contradiction. The former interviewee from Inor (IN1), for instance, answered the question of whether linguistic diversity was a challenge to Gurage identity or not in the following statements: 'The linguistic diversity does not have any impact on the unity of Gurage people as an ethnic group. However, there are differences of treatment when the language varieties are used on broadcast media… Such things have a negative influence because they initiate inter-group competition among the people'. Though he claimed there was a

complete harmony of the Gurage people irrespective of their linguistic differences at the beginning, his own response to the second question betrays the first stance. This, in turn, is an implication of the public desire to maintain unity with different levels of conviction whereas language issues are stealthily deconstructing their inherent wishes. The caution respondents take in answering such sensitive questions related to language and identity alone is a demonstration of basic discomfort with the incompatible issues of ethnic group identity and linguistic identity that confront them in major socioeconomic aspects of life and political participation among Gurage people.

A similar sentiment was reflected by many of the interviewees from these varieties, but not everyone agrees on the same level both about the significance of language in ethnic identity construction and the challenges of linguistic diversity. Another interviewee from Inor (IN5) had a slightly different stance from the above respondents on the question of whether speakers of all Gurage varieties belong to one ethnic identity. She said that all Gurage people in *Sebat Bet* have the same origin as a group and that the multiple languages are spoken by branches of one big family. Then, she mentioned that she did not have a clear knowledge of the relationship of other Guragina speakers like the *Sodo/Kistane*, though she knew that they also speak a language that is quite close to the *Sebat Bet* Gurage. Moreover, she expressed her thoughts that the Wolene speakers sound really different if she were to compare. She said, 'I had many Wolene friends in Wolkite for five years while I was in high school, but I do not remember understanding a thing they said ever. Their language is quite different from other *Sebat Bet* Guragina as well as the "Sodo" Gurage', (IN5, Oct. 27/2017, Gunchire).

This interviewee did not seem to feel any connection between the Wolene speakers and the rest of Guragina speaking population though another interviewee from Chaha (CH6) thought their demand for a separate identity was politically motivated. He argued that he had read some historical literature on Gurage people, and all of them convinced him of their strong synchronised identity. He also claimed to have multiple opportunities to meet with speakers of different varieties such as Inor, Ezha, Endegegn and others, and the only challenge related to ethnic identity came from Wolene. In his view, speakers of other varieties normally cherish being identified as Gurage. He finally remarked that, 'in my understanding, the Wolene also have similar ways of speech, dressing style, cultural elements and their demand of a different identity is rather politically motivated than being a result of actual difference'. (CH6, Jan. 15/2016, Wolkite).

On the contrary, participants of Wolene had demonstrated a completely different stance on the same issue. Almost all of them claimed a distinct ethnic identity and language from the rest of the Gurage people with a strong conviction about

their views. The first interviewee (WO1) expressed his thoughts that it is impossible to unite people who cannot communicate properly in terms of language when asked if speakers of all Gurage varieties shared a single ethnic identity. He rather felt that the Wolene and the Gurage people were put together for ease of political administration rather than their shared identity. His stance would not change later when asked to point out distinct features of Wolene identity during our discussion. His response for the second question runs:

> First of all, the Wolene people are not well known to other people of Ethiopia except that one German scholar wrote about them a few years ago explaining that Wolene is different from Gurage. But they have not yet got official recognition as a distinct group of people. Most of the Wolene population lives in poverty and backward life style because they are dominated by others. They are still using domestic animals for transportation in the twentieth century. Moreover, the Wolene are still lagging behind the rest of Ethiopian nations and nationalities in terms of access to education and economic benefits. (WO1, Nov. 15/2017, Wolkite)

It is observable from his responses that the question of distinct identity was immediately met with grievances of the socioeconomic marginalisation of the Wolene people. Therefore, another question was posed to check his views further and understand the issue better: 'Do you think it is easy for the Wolene people to live with other Guragina speakers in harmony if all the socioeconomic problems you mentioned were solved?'. The respondent kept his firm stance saying 'No'. Rather, he equated considering Wolene and Gurage as one with mixing water and oil because of the differences between the two. He remarked that:

> They cannot be united. Even if the government does not want to recognise the Wolene as separate from Gurage, they will continue living in suspicion and disappointment instead of feeling a sense of harmony and belongingness. This is a matter of getting recognition because it is well deserved. The Wolene people are no less than anyone like the Gurage in many ways. They can fairly compete in terms of economic power and having educated and influential members who live in big cities like Addis Ababa in the same manner as the Gurage.
>
> (WO1, Nov. 15/2017, Wolkite)

This is a point that shows a strong conviction on the part of the interviewee that keeping the two peoples together with the claim of shared identity will always be met with grievances and resistance. It is an indication of the strongly felt desire to be recognised as a distinct ethnic group and enjoy every benefit that the recognition entails: social prestige, political participation, economic development, independent administrative unit, ensuring language rights and access to education. However, the ambition to acquire official recognition appears more powerful than the actual differences of the group from other Gurage groups.

By the same token, a second interviewee (WO2) explained all the constitutional requirements of a group of people to gain recognition as a distinct ethnic group as being fulfilled by the Wolene. Yet, he complained it was not successful in gaining the desperately desired official recognition when asked to mention distinct features of Wolene identity. Then, his argument for the distinctness of Wolene from the Gurage begins by referring to a point that the Wolene ethnic group started the struggle for official recognition in 1993 (25 years ago). 'Unfortunately', he said, 'officials in the zone always claim that they are the same with Gurage because they share a common history and culture though they differ linguistically. But that is not true at all. Our language does not share a single word with other Gurage languages. The culture is not shared either', (WO2, Nov. 15/2017, Wolkite). He added that having shared traditions with people living on the same border is natural, but that does not guarantee shared identity with their neighbors. The third interviewee (WO3) also had similar views about the distinct identity of Wolene instead of sharing it with speakers of other Gurage varieties. He pointed out the different historical origins of the two groups as a basic source of their difference claiming that the Wolene are more related to the Silte and Harari than their neighboring Gurage.

None of these interviewees deny the fact that the Gurage people are highly intermarried with the Wolene and they have lived together for many centuries. However, the arguments surrounding shared ethnic identity are soured by demands of official recognition and the socioeconomic benefits that follow for Wolene participants. On the other hand, those who feel they share ethnic identity with speakers of all language varieties including Wolene seem to compromise their knowledge of the differences for fear of disintegration. Therefore, both the quantitative and qualitative data reveal that not all of the speakers of different Gurage varieties feel belongingness to Gurage ethnic identity in the same way for complicated reasons.

Another direct question posed in this regard was how they would feel about being ethnically recognised as 'Gurage' assigned to all speakers of Gurage varieties as is the case when this study was conducted. Respondents were asked to choose from a range of five levels written in phrases that would best express their feelings starting from 'extremely happy' through steps to 'extremely sad' the results of which are presented in Table 2.4:

Table 2.4 How do you feel about being recognised as a Gurage person?

FGID	Chaha	Inor	Wolene	Masmas	Dobbi	Total avg. %
Extremely happy	75.8	66.0	3.6	100	48.1	58.7
Very happy	12.6	26.6	1.2	–	19.8	12.1
Nothing	10.5	5.3	–	–	22.2	7.6
Very sad	1.1	–	8.4	–	4.9	2.9
Extremely sad	–	2.1	86.7	–	4.9	18.7

It is observable from Table 2.4 above that respondents' reaction to the common Gurage ethnic identity assigned to speakers of all Guragina varieties has a different pattern across sampled groups. On the one hand, all of Masmas participants, the majority of Chaha, Inor and Dobbi speakers are predominantly in the 'extremely happy' and 'very happy' zone, whereas those from Wolene variety are dominated by reactions in the opposite zone of 'extremely sad' and 'very sad'. On the other hand, 22.2% of Dobbi, 10.5% of Chaha and 5.3% of Inor speakers are found to be neutral in their reaction to Gurage identity assigned for all. What is more, nearly all (95.1%) of Wolene participants reacted as quite sad to the Gurage identity assignment for speakers of all varieties while more than 20% thought that speakers of all varieties share the same ethnic identity earlier in the survey. Besides, though they expressed a high level of support (happiness) to be recognised as 'Gurage', a significant share of participants from Dobbi (40.7%), Chaha (22.1%) and Inor (13.8%) do not think speakers of all Gurage varieties belong to one ethnic identity. Still, the neutrality of reaction among speakers of Inor is significantly consistent with the majority (74.5%) reporting they think all variety speakers belong to the same ethnic identity compared to a few participants who think otherwise, and remain either happy or neutral to be recognised as 'Gurage'. The two closely related items examined above are central points that demonstrate the complicated and problematic situation of ethnolinguistic identity construction and feelings of belongingness among speakers of different Gurage varieties.

Another question then added to assess the perceived commonalities shared by the groups in this study was asking participants whether they believed their spoken Gurage varieties had shared linguistic features. The results are presented in Table 2.5:

Table 2.5 Do different Gurage varieties share common linguistic features?

LSFG	Chaha	Inor	Wolene	Masmas	Dobbi	Total avg. %
Yes	88.4	94.7	6.0	80	90.1	71.8
No	9.5	5.3	72.3	20	9.9	23.4
Don't know	2.1	–	21.7	–	–	4.8

Most of the participants from Inor (94.7%), Dobbi (90.1%) and Chaha (88.4%) believe that their spoken varieties share common linguistic features while the majority of Wolene (72.3%) think otherwise, and more than 20% of them do not know if that is the case or not. This point, once again, confirms the divergence of Wolene speakers from the general population of the study concerning the ethnolinguistic identity and commonalities of their spoken varieties as a group of people. They had again confirmed their consistent claim of distinctness from the Gurage people with their response to this question as well.

Again, because it is simple to answer a question with either 'Yes' or 'No' without further explanation, a closely related question was added asking participants to identify the reasons why they think their spoken varieties share linguistic features if they answered 'Yes'. A total of four alternatives were given to choose from and an open space left for them to fill in any other reason they thought of. The four given alternatives were: peoples' geographic proximity, close kinship ties among speakers, remote kinship ties among speakers and I do not know.

In their replies, half of the Masmas, 48.4% of Chaha, 47.9% of Inor, and 39.5% of Dobbi respondents think that the cause of shared linguistic features among different Gurage varieties is close kinship ties of the speakers. On the contrary, the majority (79.5%) of Wolene respondents left this question unanswered which can be understood either as part of their consistent claim that their variety does not share linguistic features with others or that they do not know about the linguistic features other Gurage varieties share. The other factor considered to be a reason for shared linguistic features among Gurage varieties was geographic proximity of speakers according to 44.4% of Dobbi, 38.3% of Inor, 37.9% of Chaha and only 6% of Wolene respondents in the survey. On the other hand, 40% of Masmas respondents think remote kinship ties of speakers is the reason for shared linguistic features among Gurage varieties. Finally, an insignificant number of participants from all varieties answered 'I do not know' for the same question.

5. Summary and conclusions

To summarise the main points of in this chapter, both the quantitative and qualitative data reveal that speakers of different Gurage varieties perceive language as strongly connected to their ethnolinguistic identity though there are certain differences of perception across different groups. There is a consistent perception of inseparable connections between language and ethnic identity among the Wolene group which indicates the speakers' desire to align their spoken variety with their ethnic identity as a central element in self-identification. In this regard, the central point emphasised by participants of this study was the significant role language plays in their identity construction serving as a shield from sociopolitical threats of dominance and discrimination by other groups. Most importantly, the participants from Wolene and Dobbi varieties clearly indicated the importance of language as an identity marker perceived from two differing perspectives. The Dobbi speakers demonstrated a strong desire to avoid assimilation with a neighboring dominant Gurage group on unequal terms while the Wolene speakers had a clear wish to acquire official recognition as a distinct non-Gurage ethnic group leading to the

constitutional rights of self-determination. The results also reveal the presence of public dilemma between deciding which group is actually fit to be considered 'Gurage' since they do not unanimously agree on the issue that speakers of all varieties belong to one ethnic identity. On the contrary, speakers of most varieties chose to compromise inter-group differences and let go of competitions for the sake of Gurage unity accepting the common identity although they feel the dilemma too. There are a number of factors that feed the public ethnolinguistic consciousness to appear this way. One sound reason could be the fact that ethnolinguistic identity is generally understood as formed based on blood ties, origins, common history, shared traditions and the psychological makeup of the people as a group in Ethiopian context. In conclusion, all of the above discussions demonstrate the lack of uniformity of public perceptions concerning the association of language and ethnicity, modes of ethnolinguistic identity construction and the nature of speakers' relationship as constituents of a given ethnic group, Gurage.

Acknowledgements

There are several people who deserve my heartfelt appreciation for contributing to the success of this study, but only a few are mentioned here: Fekede Menuta, Unn Røyenland, Janne Bondi Johannessen, Binyam Sisay, Ronney Meyer, Feyissa Sime and Derib Ado. I am also very thankful to the assistant research data collectors and the Gurage participants for their kind support and provision of honest information. In addition, I am very grateful for the financial and professional supports I was provided by Hawassa University, Addis Ababa University, the NORHED LCB project and Center for Multilingualism in Society Across the Lifespan (MultiLing) of the University of Oslo.

References

Abbink, Jon G. 1997. Ethnicity and constitutionalism in contemporary Ethiopia. *Journal of African Law* 41(2): 159–174. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021855300009372

Abbink, Jon G. 1998. New configurations of Ethiopian ethnicity: The challenge of the South. *Northeast African Studies: New Series* 5(1): 59–81. https://doi.org/10.1353/nas.1998.0013

Beken, Christophe V. 2007. Ethiopia: Constitutional protection of ethnic minorities at the regional level. *Afrika Focus* 20(1–2): 105–151.

Cargile, Aaron Castelan, Giles, Howard & Clément, Richard. 1995. Language, conflict and ethnolinguistic identity theory. <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/216308575> (15 August 2020)

Clément, Richard & Noels, Kimberly A. 1992. Towards a situated approach to ethnolinguistic identity: The effects of status on individuals and groups. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 11(4): 203–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X92114002

Collier, M. J. & Thomas, M. (1988). Identity in intercultural communication: An Interpretive perspective. In Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Series Eds.), *International and Intercultural Communication Annual*: Vol. 12. 99–120. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Creswell, John W. 2009. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed methods Approaches*, 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Creswell, John W., Klassen, Ann Carroll, Plano Clark, Vicky L., & Clegg Smith, Katherine. 2010. *Best Practices for Mixed Methods Research in the Health Sciences*. Bethesda MD: OBSSR.

Díaz, Félix. 2014. Category sets and category bound activities: Identity from the standpoint of members. In *The Discursive Turn in Social Psychology*, Nikos Bozatzis & Thalia Dragonas (eds). Chagrin Falls OH: Taos Institute Publications.

Dinberu Alemu, Hailemariam Mengistu, Hailemariam Fikre, Mekurya Tesfaye, Bireda Tezerach, Tilahun Girma & Teshome Mitiku. 1987. *Gogot: YeGurage Bihereseb Tarik, Bahilina Quanqua*. Wolkite: Artistic Printers.

Dornyei, Zoltan. 2007. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford: OUP.

Edwards, John. 2009. *Language and Identity: An Introduction*. Cambridge: CUP. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511809842

Epstein, Gil S. & Heizler (Cohen), Odelia. 2015. Ethnic identity: A theoretical framework. *IZA Journal of Migration* 4(9). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40176-015-0033-z

FDRE. 1995. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. *Negarit Gazeta*. Addis Ababa.

Fekede Menuta. 2013. Intergroup Communication among Gurage: A Study in Intelligibility, Inter-lingual Comprehension and Accommodation. PhD dissertation, Addis Ababa University.

Fishman, Joshua A. (ed.). 1999. *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*. Oxford: OUP.

Fought, Carmen. 2006. *Language and Ethnicity*. Cambridge: CUP. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511791215

Greene, Jennifer C. 2007. *Mixed Methods in Social Inquiry*. San Francisco CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Gudykunst, William B. & Schmidt, Karen L. 1987. Language and ethnic identity: An overview and prologue. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 6(3–4): 157–170. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X8763001

Habtu Alem. 2003. Ethnic federalism in Ethiopia: Background, present conditions and future prospects. *International Conference on African Development Archives, Addis Ababa, 11–12 June*. Paper 57. <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/africancenter_icad_archive/57> (15 August 2020).

Hetzron, Robert. 1972. Ethiopian Semitic: Studies in classification. *Journal of Semitic Studies: Monograph 2*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hetzron, Robert. (1977). *The Gunnän-Gurage Languages*. Napoli: Don Bosco.

Howard, Judith A. 2000. Social psychology of identities. *Annual Reviews Sociology* 26: 367–393. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.367

Kassaw Tafere M. 2017. Perceptions of Ethnic Federalism and the Ethiopian Diaspora Community in the US. PhD dissertation, Walden University, Minneapolis MN.

Leach, Colin Wayne, Brown, Liza M., & Worden, Ross E. 2008. Ethnicity and identity politics. In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace & Conflict*, Vol. 1, Lester Kurtz (ed.), 758–768. Oxford: Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012373985-8.00063-5

Liebkind, K. (1989). Patterns of ethnic identification among Finns in Sweden. In K. Liebkind (ed.), *New identities in Europe: Immigrant ancestry and the ethnic identity of youth*. 116–139. Gower.

Llamas, Carmen, Mullany, Louise & Stockwell, Peter (eds). 2007. *The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics*. New York NY: Routledge.

McCaslin, M. 2008. Pragmatism. In *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Lisa M. Given (ed.), 672–676. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Meyer, Ronny. (2011). Gurage, The Semitic Languages: *An International Handbook*. (Weninger, Stefan et al. (eds.)), 1220–1257. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co.

Meyer, Ronny & Crass, Joachim. 2011. Ethiopic-Cushitic language contact. In *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook*, Stefan Weninger (ed.). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Nishi, Makoto. 2005. Making and unmaking of the nation-state and ethnicity in modern Ethiopia: A study of the history of the Silte people. *African Study Monographs* 29: 157–168.

Noels, Kimberly A. 2014. Language variation and ethnic identity: A social psychological perspective. *Language & Communication* 35: 88–96. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2013.12.001

Okamura, Jonathan Y. (1981). *Situational Ethnicity, Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 4:4, 452–465. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796815588619

Phinney, Jean S. 1990. Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin* 108(3): 499–514. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.108.3.499

Reid, S. A. & Giles, H. (2010). Ethnolinguistic vitality. In J. M. Levine & M. A. Hogg (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of group process and intergroup relations*, 252–255. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Royce, Anya Peterson. 1982. *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.

Sachdev, Itesh. 1995. Language and Identity: Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. *The London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 11, 41–55. London: University of London.

Satched, Itesh. 1995. Language and identity: Ethnolinguistic vitality of aboriginal peoples in Canada. *The London Journal of Canadian Studies* 11: 41–59.

Shack, William A. (1966). *The Gurage: A People of the Ensete Culture*. London: Oxford University Press.

Smith, Lahra. 2007. Voting for an ethnic identity: Procedural and institutional responses to ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45(4): 565–594. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X07002881

Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C. (1986). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In: Worchel, S. and Austin, W. G., (Eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relation*. 7–24. Chicago: Hall Publishers.

Vaughan, Sara. 2003. Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia. PhD dissertation, The University of Edinburgh.

Vincze, László. 2013. *The Bilingual Screen: Ethnolinguistic Identity and Television Viewing among Three Language Minorities*. Helsinki: Swedish School of Social Science & University of Helsinki.

Woldeselassie Zerihun A. 2015. Ethnicity, belonging and identity among the Eastern Gurage of Ethiopia. *Ethnicities* 17(3): 418–440. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796815588619

Záhořík, Jan & Teshome, Wondwosen. 2009. Debating language policy in Ethiopia. *Asian and African Studies* 18(1): 80–102.

Záhořík, Jan. 2013. Ethnography of Ethiopian ethno-linguistic matters in a narrowing political space. *Annual of Language & Politics & Politics of Identity* 7: 93–102.