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## **Grammatical and Sociolinguistic Aspects of Ethiopian Languages**

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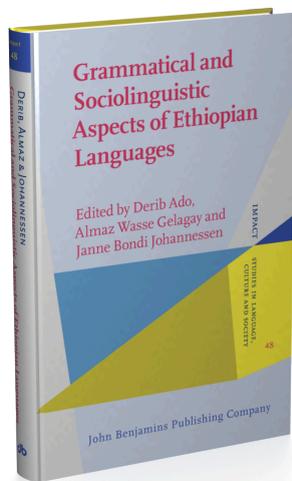
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# Sociolinguistic functions of the secret language of Gurage females

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This paper is concerned with the sociolinguistic functions of the secret language spoken by a minority group within the Gurage,<sup>1</sup> namely the Fedwet. This is the name of the speakers and the linguistic variety, mainly used by women who were followers of a former local religious tradition in Gurage found in southern Ethiopia. The qualitative approach of data gathering and analysis was used. Primary data were gathered by elicitation of words, recording of free texts and interviews. A total of 20 consultants participated in the interview, 12 of them also participating in the elicitation of words and the performance of texts. The interview responses were quantified for a descriptive statistical analysis. It was found that the sociolinguistic functions of Fedwet include the establishment of a secret communication among young girls to form a specific identity, and for various religious purposes. The motive for using it is related to the social position of women and the traditional belief system of Gurage.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistic function, gender, secret language

## 1. Introduction

The discussion of sociolinguistic function begins with some attempt to define 'sociolinguistic' and 'function'. According to Wardhaugh (2006: 13), sociolinguistics is concerned with the investigation of the relationships between language and society with the goal of a better understanding of the structure of language and of how languages function in communication. The Fedwet group selectively use a secret language instead of their basic language, Chaha, on different occasions or when they need to hide their information from outsiders. It is important to find the function and the motive for using this secret language.

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1. The term Gurage has been used to designate Semitic-speaking groups surrounded by Cushitic-speaking people

This study focuses on the sociolinguistic functions of the secret language used by the group called Fedwet (a social variety mainly used by females following former local religious tradition) of the Gurage society in the area of Chaha found in Southern Ethiopia. The name Fedwet refers to females who were followers of the Damamwit ‘female cult’ traditional belief. Their secret language took its name, Fedwet, from the Fedwet girls who use it, although the Fedwet are part of Gurage society and speak one of the ‘regular’ Gurage languages, in this case, the Chaha language. Several studies exist on the Chaha language. In the Fedwet secret language, little research is available apart from Leslau (1964) and Sentalem (2005), which only focus on the description of the ‘language’ and cultural practices, not analyzing its sociolinguistic functions.

As Christianity and Islam replace the local religious systems, spoken Fedwet is becoming lost. The goal of this study is to investigate the sociolinguistic functions of the Fedwet who live in the Chaha area, Chaha being their natural language. Specifically, to identify the functions for which it is used and the motivation for using Fedwet, a cultural trait unique to the Gurage, before it totally vanishes.

To facilitate this analysis, the research is divided into the following sections: Section 2 presents the practice of Gurage religion and the Damamwit cult, in which Fedwet is related to the traditional belief system; Section 3 discusses related literature and the conceptual framework and Section 4 presents methodology. Subsequently, Section 5 presents the motive for using a different language, and Section 6 addresses the functions of Fedwet, which is analyzed in subsequent examples and also considers interview responses.

## 2. Religion and the Damamwit cult

The Gurage people are followers of Muslim and Christian religions, such as Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic, as well as traditional religious beliefs. Shack (1966: 173–176) stated that there is no discrimination in terms of religion; the people live together peacefully. Both Christianity and Islam are outside religions imposed on the Gurage by invasion. Many people also participate in traditional religious practices alongside their systematized religion,<sup>2</sup> such as offerings to a divinity called Damamwit ‘the female cult’. All the followers of this traditional belief are females, except their leader, who is a male called *dam<sup>w</sup>am*. According to Shack (1966: 187–190), this cult was hierarchically structured, the central position being occupied by a female deity nobody has ever seen. The Gurage believed that

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2. Systematized religion is governed by institution and is recognized by government as being different to traditional belief system.

Damamwit understood the multiple expressions of her supernatural power to inflict harm.

This group's traditional belief system is different from other cultural and traditional belief practices of the Gurage. All group members who are followers of the Damamwit cult are called Moyet. In addition, this term is also the name of the spirit of Damamwit. Within the group, however, there is a special sub-group who speak a different 'language' through training, called Fedwet (Leslau 1964: 14–17), in order not to be understood by outsiders.

According to Shack and Habte-Mariam (1974: 38), Gurage women have, in the past, had a special style of chant sung in praise of Damamwit, the chants presented by women and girls, Damamwit is the female's protector of the traditional belief of Gurage, associated with health well-being for the community, fertility of the females and punishing irrational men.

Gebreyesus (1991: 140–143) states that the Damamwit was driven out from the Muhar area and arrived in the land of Chaha, communicated through a spirit. Shack (1966: 177–185) states that, of the many ritual ceremonies in the Gurage calendar, the Damamwit in particular is exclusive to Gurage females. Females who attend the rituals expect to receive benefits such as being cured of illness. During the festival, each of the chiefs of Moyet leads his group of females in the Fedwet songs and dancing for the honor of Damamwit. On that day, the chief has the privilege hitting with his stick anyone who misbehaves in an unacceptable way. During the festival, if the chief happens to kill someone, no punishment is imposed because it is accepted that it is an act of Damamwit and that the spirit empowered him. This exemption is only observed during the festival, and does not function other days.

### 3. Related literature and conceptual framework

There are very few studies available on secret language in the Ethiopian context; however, there are some articles that have covered these areas. Leslau (1952: 102) works on Ethiopian minstrels' 'azmari' argot. He states that the main characteristic of this argot is distortion of the root of their basic language, Amharic, using metathesis, augmentation, reduplication, substitution of a radical and shortening procedures.

Anbessa (1987) writes about 'women's speech among the Sidama'. He states that, in traditional Sidama culture, a woman is not allowed to mention the names of her in-laws, her husband, the sub-clan of her husband or words that have the same initial syllable as any of these three. To avoid these taboo words, the women use different methods, such as circumlocutions, synonyms and initial syllable substitutions. These women's speech systematically varied from the speech of men.

Outside Ethiopia, Manfredi (2008), describes Rendók, a secret youth language of Sudan, which is an Arabic-based secret language. He argues that the secrecy of Rendók is performed through morphological manipulation of the Sudanese Arabic lexicon. Linguistically, it represents approaches of phono-morphological manipulation like metathesis, phonotactic adaptations, ungrammatical affixation and word truncation. The sociolinguistic function of this argot is used for expressing urban youth culture.

Wolfer (2011: 44) has researched 'Arabic secret languages' and states that secret languages reflect rich tradition and culture, as well as ethnic and religious diversity.

The conceptual framework applied here is based on the sociolinguistic functions of the secret language of Fedwet, thus, concepts that are related to this study are raised and discussed. Mainly, language has two key functions, which are interactive, and symbolic (Evans & Green 2006: 1). Edwards (2009: 55) also classified language into symbolic and communicative functions. The distinction between the communicative and symbolic functions lies in the differentiation between language in its usually understood sense as an instrumental tool and language as a sign or symbol.

The function of language goes beyond being a communicative instrument in multilingual communities in which, with its language, a group distinguishes itself. Therefore, language has social meaning, social connotation and is linked with identities. When we look at Fedwet, it is used more for communication, to transmit hidden information and to disclose identity. Group members used their language to categorize themselves, so that a girl who speaks the Fedwet 'language' identifies as part of the Fedwet group, using it for group membership and identity formation in addition to communication.

Lewis and Simons (2016: 16–17) define shared identity by stating that it is a community referring to any group that is unified by a sense of shared character. They also discuss how language and identity link strongly, and assert that language variety is associated with a group's identity. Also, language is so tightly bound to identity that a group may be identified by the name of their language and, their language may be identified by the name of the group or the location in which they live. The Fedwet are identified by the name of their 'language', 'Fedwet', and their language also identified by the name of the group; they use the same word for both. Thus, we can understand that language has a stronger connection with identity, in addition to other issues.

Generally, in this research, sociolinguistic functions are considered in related to culture, social change and the real situation of society.

#### 4. Method of data collection and analysis

In this study, the qualitative and quantitative approaches of data gathering and analysis were used. The targeted population were women who identified as group members of Fedwet, both when they were young and now that they were older; with no upper age limit. In another work, Leslau (1964: 2) states that, previously, girls join the group and learn Fedwet secret language when they are young, usually joining the group when they are 13 and above.

The culture of Moyet was practiced widely for a long time in the Gurage area; however, today most of the society rejects Fedwet in relation to its traditional belief. As a result, Fedwet is only known by adults who were Fedwet girls when they were young and who can recall it. Today, it is not used by the younger generation.

This study focused on primary data collection. The instruments used were sociolinguistic interviews and elicitation, both of which were recorded.

##### 4.1 The sociolinguistic interview

I used the technique of sociolinguistic interview to elicit information about why subjects preferred to use Fedwet alongside their ordinary language, for which functions they are used, and why Fedwet is endangered.

Labov (1981: 8) states that sociolinguistic interview is governed by a number of goals, including its use to obtain the full range of demographic data necessary for the analysis of sociolinguistic patterns (age, residential, school, group members), to obtain comparable responses to questions that define contrasting attitudes and experiences among various sub-cultures, to trace patterns of communication among members of the neighborhood and to establish the position of the speaker in the community.

Sociolinguistic interview is used for linguistic data in different speech contexts. It comprises an informal part consisting of free conversation for eliciting language or local use, and a formal part. However, it has some limitations. According to Wolfson (1976), interview has the following limitations: it is time-consuming, small scale, has the potential for subconscious bias and potential inconsistencies. In addition, the naturalness and certainly the informality of recorded speech can be called into question, thus the interviewer needs to make the speaker feel comfortable with the situation.

Regarding the sampling method, Ilker et al. (2016: 2) stated that purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique, it is the deliberate seeking out of participants due to the qualities of the participants. It pairs with nominated sampling, in which participants are found by asking Chaha speakers to identify those

who speak Fedwet. Speakers of Fedwet do not have the confidence to say ‘I can speak Fedwet’ because they are fearful of the attitude of society towards their systematized religion.

## 4.2 Elicitation

In spite of the problems pointed out in the literature, I found elicitation very useful for this study because it helped to collect linguistic data examples and sociolinguistic function. It was applied by sitting down with one consultant at a time and asking them to say Chaha equivalent words with their language. In addition to that, I asked consultants to say texts and songs in their secret language, while they tried to recall the texts (see Section 6).

The consultants included for elicited texts were 12 women who were part of the culture and speak Fedwet. In addition to these 12 consultants, eight other consultants were included who were Fedwet but who had forgotten the language. Thus, a total of 20 consultants participated in the interview to address the sociolinguistic functions, and a sample of 12 consultants participated in the elicitation of words and texts. The speakers were from the ages of 38 to 70, and above. The other eight consultants who were added for interview were women elders above the age of 70. Finding a significant number of consultants who could speak Fedwet was difficult. In order to minimize this problem, I tried to use different methods to help get better data. The first method established contact people who were accepted in the society and tried to get the data through discussion and by using relatives (researcher’s relatives) who live in the area to reassure the consultants that they could have confidence in the researcher. Different works of literature, like Leslau (1964) and my elder consultants, argued that *Yəbit’arə* is the birthplace of Moyet practice.

The researcher tried to visit most Chaha districts and villages to gather data, however, it was difficult to find the data because of its endangerment. However, the researcher got better data at *Yəbit’arə* and *Mokjərər* Chaha villages, where people have tried to remember Fedwet because they see themselves as its cultural owners. Thus, the researcher obtained most of the linguistic data in these two villages after several trips in difficult situations. In addition, the age of the consultants and restricted use also affect the linguistic data, and it is collected by elicitation, i.e. no actual communication situation is recorded because the practice becomes devastated throughout the year. The researcher speaks Chaha as an L2 advanced speaker, and communicating with the consultants was not difficult.

To check the data, three key consultants were identified who spoke Fedwet better than the others and the researcher talked with them on the recorded data. My key consultants are Almaz (46, born in Mokyerer. Chaha is her mother tongue

and she is a housewife) Berko (62, born in Yəbit'arə village. Chaha is her natural language and she is a housewife) and Dulat Bireda (52, born in Yabit' are, but now lives in Amoramedā village, Chaha district. She is participating with the culture and tourist office). She was supportive and had good know-how on the Fedwet secret language, as well as the culture. I selected these women as main consultants because of my assistant's advice, and also because they were Fedwet when they were young. They are also active members of the community, and I was asking them to identify others who speak Fedwet. They were cooperative and supportive during my data collection. I also used consultants who were speakers of the social variety, who attempted to remember when I asked them, and were also cooperative in giving the required information. However, I was not able to get as many consultants who could speak the social variety of Fedwet as I had hoped.

Regarding the analysis of the interview questions, the consultants were asked to list the purposes for using Fedwet and then their responses are counted and marked according to the frequency of the answer. Finally, the collected texts were transcribed and analyzed with frequent examples.

## 5. The motive for using a different language

According to Lewis and Simons (2016: 126), the motive for using a different language is derived from the use of language for its associated functions. Community members must perceive that there are benefits that accrue when speaking the language in appropriate places to talk about appropriate topics with appropriate people. In addition, sociopolitical issues, economic status and language contact are factors that have contribution to language alteration. Newmeyer (2003: 20) writes about the roles of formal and functional factors for language change. Formal principles play a central role by governing the organization of grammar. A functional explanation refers to properties of language users, specifically their interest in producing and comprehending language properly. However, most linguists argue that both formal and functional factors have a great role in language change.

The Fedwet group choose to use their secret 'language' instead of Chaha on different occasions or when they need to hide their information from outsiders. It is important to discover the motive for using this secret language. To identify and categorize the reasons, the collected data was analyzed and the real situations of Fedwet were considered. There are different reasons that females have initiated to use a different variety instead of their basic language Chaha. The social position of females given by society has a great role in leading them to follow traditional belief and using a different 'language' in different instances. Religion also governs

the society in all aspects, including language. Thus, the social position of Gurage females and religious practices in Gurage may answer the question of why the Gurage females use a different 'language'.

### 5.1 Social position of Gurage females

The socio-cultural situation and attitude of a society are important in understanding women's social position in any society in general and in Gurage for this study in particular. A lot has been said regarding Ethiopian male-dominated social structure, and the position of females in Ethiopia also follows this line. Accordingly, the question for this research is why the Gurage females use a different 'language'. The answer might be multifarious, but the researcher hypothesizes that it is related to power. The social hierarchy in the country is male dominant, which has a predetermined unwritten rule that labels women as 'odd' when they are believed to be deviating from it.

In Gurage culture, when families think that a girl has reached marriageable age, they select a husband for her. They do not allow her to choose her partner. Previously, girls were not even allowed to go to school. Even today, they do not have the same right to education as boys, as high schools (9–12) are far from home, and girls are compelled to drop out from school at grade eight. Even if girls want to continue, families do not allow it because of distance, and also because of different perceived fears, so most Gurage female students do not have the opportunity to complete their high school education, let alone to attend institutions of higher learning.

In addition, women are excluded from decision-making processes. According to Bahru (2002), the Gurage have social institutions that are based on traditional rules and regulations that play significant role. Minor and major disagreements are solved in the context of Gurage traditional law by clan elders, who come together to agree on the fundamental rules governing their community. Traditional governance is dominated by males, as the Gurage is a male-dominated community in all regards. There are no women representatives in the assemblies, and they are rarely allowed to present their own cases themselves.

When it comes to property ownership and sharing of family inheritance, female members of Gurage society still do not have equal rights to land share and ownership. If a girl has brothers, property is shared among them, excluding her. Girls are expected to acquire home skills like fetching water, gathering wood, cooking food, etc. When a female is married, she carries out the work of childbearing, breastfeeding and caring for and handling family responsibilities confined to household management, but she is excluded from any other concrete family decisions. These situations of low societal position prompt Gurage women to become involved in different traditional belief systems, including their systematized religion.

My fieldwork interview response shows that the culture of Moyet allowed females the opportunity to enjoy the ceremony of Damamwit celebration days with their friends. On those days, a husband does not have power over his wife, and the woman has the right to come back home in the middle of the night. Thus, this study tried to find out why Gurage women use Fedwet in different situations, instead of their natural language, and has identified several explanatory reasons for it.

As we have discussed above, the low social status of females in society is the first and the most compelling reason to lead them to use a different 'language' that is not understood by the dominant group male, so that they used Fedwet in different circumstances when they want to hide their communication.

Texts and poems that are used by the Fedwet and in the practice of Moyet culture show the position of females and their role in society. In 'Gurage' society, talking about private issues openly is restricted, especially for females. Accordingly, they do not have the chance to talk openly with their family and friends, making it a good option for them to communicate secretly with group members.

## 5.2 Religious practices of Gurage females

The traditional belief of Damamwit has a large role in Gurage society. Gurage women use their secret language for worship and for delivering their prayers to Damamwit. Gebreyesus (1991: 141) states that previously, many of the Gurage people believed that Damamwit was one of the three children of God the father. Damamwit is celebrated twice a year, in June and November, and only women and girls attend the ceremony. During these celebrations, tremendous amounts of donations are made. The group members of Moyet followed a local religious cult, whose former adherents have now become Christians or Muslims. Although they are part of the Gurage society and speak one of the 'regular' Gurage languages, they have also acquired a group-specific variety (Fedwet), which is not understood by outsiders.

The culture, in addition to the use of Fedwet, has become endangered because of the expansion of the systematized religious education (Islam and Christian) and modernization.

The low societal position of Gurage females compels them to observe different traditional beliefs in addition to their systematized religion. Religion also governs society in all aspects, including language. Group members also use their 'language' for the purpose of worshipping Damamwit. Thus, the social position of Gurage women and religious practices in Gurage answered for which specific purposes they use a different 'language.' If these are the cases that forced the Fedwet to use a different 'language', it is important to identify the usages of Fedwet. We will look at these by analyzing messages of the data that are collected through elicitation and the result of the interview.

## 6. The sociolinguistic functions of Fedwet

Gurage secret society uses Fedwet to communicate the private life of young girls. Trudgill (2000: 66) argued that taboo is one of the explanatory factors that separate language. Taboo has a powerful influence on the growth of separate sex vocabularies. If women are not permitted to use the original language term, then new words or paraphrases are used. In Gurage, using taboo words is strictly forbidden, especially for females. To address this restriction and be able to have a mechanism to express their feelings without exposing themselves to judgment by others, especially men, women are obliged to use different words or change phonological shapes to hide their speech from outsiders.

Fedwet is not a language on its own, rather it is fabricated from their first language Chaha through different modifications. The main areas of divergence are deformation of morphophonological patterns, divergence of lexical and manipulation of semantic areas (Etaferahu 2019). The Fedwet text examples below tell us that, in Gurage, males are the dominant group, which indicates that females are less influential. Therefore, women express this issue of discrimination and disempowerment by using Fedwet, through which they criticise others or talk to groups and friends freely.

- (1) Fedwet *gus-we* *axud-m* *ni-girafa-x<sup>j</sup>* *ji-birər-e*  
 man-DEF CONJ 1s-relationship:Jus-2SF 3SM-say:IMPV-1SO  
 Chaha *miswe* *axuwam axuwam* *nifirax<sup>j</sup>* *jibire*  
 ‘The man frequently asked me unwanted relationship now and again’

In Example (1), for instance, the text is produced to speak about private issues rather than discussing them openly in society. Thus, the Fedwet group expressed these types of issues by using a different ‘language’. The meanings of the words are not put (*not* on the actual *words*) as stated by the Fedwet, because they are taboo words.

- (2) Fedwet *j-firer-jə-xuta* *gurangur j-izaz-e*  
 3SM-be.pleasant:IMPV-DEF:3SM boy 3SM-see:IMPV-1SO  
*ji-fir-xuta* *ərɬj jaʒe*  
 ‘The handsome boy looks at me’

In Example (2), a discourse in which a girl is talking about different feelings with her mates when they are at the age of puberty is illustrated. The girl expresses this feeling openly to her female friends to get advice or simply to express her feelings.

In Example (3), the text shows that Gurage females have a special trust in the cult, believing that the Damamwit can do anything they ask her, and that the Gurage male is also afraid of her punishment.

- (3) Fedwet *nərwət tatf'inafaxə ginafire jat'abat'o atbirəre*  
*nərwət ta-tf'inafa-xə ginaf-r-e jat'abat'o*  
 Sprit-3FS 3SF-kill-3SM leave me-3MS-1s touch-ACC.-IPFV.  
*at-bir-ə-re*  
 NEG:2SM-say:IMPV-1SO

Chaha *Dəmamwit tik't'irxə gifire at'ibt'e.*

'It is a kind of cursing: Do not touch me *Dəmamwit* kills you'

The other function is to **exclude an unintended audience**. Trudgill (2000: 81) discusses language and context and asserts that the reason speakers use different language are not only social class, ethnic group and gender but also social context, which influences speakers to use an alternative language to pass their message to their intended specific group member. It is in this manner that speakers use Fedwet in the context of unintended audience presented.

The following text illustrates this reality:

- (4) Fedwet *izəzi əf jəgnafa efirer zadata firwə k'iraru*  
*izəz-i əf jə-gnafa*  
 look.at:IPFV:2SFS-3SMO 3SM-leave (INTR):JUS  
*e-firer zəd-əta firwə k'irar-u*  
 NEG:3SM-be.attractive:IMPV self-3SM ugly-ADJ:3SM thing-COP:3SM  
*əzi jədəfa gəgata efir k'aru.*

Gloss 'Look at him, leave aside, he is ugly, he is not attractive.'

In Example (4), the speaker talked in the context of unintended participant presented, and she talked to friend(s) about her feelings about the boy, that he may ask her for a relationship, and she is stating that she is not interested. She wants to express her feeling, because he is not handsome to her. She considers him ugly and has decided to reject him.

- (5) Fedwet *xədiwəf zewət nirwawət'inə gurmasijə jimrak'ate*  
*xədiwə-f zewət ni-rwawət'-nə gurmas-jə*  
 Interjection-3SF you:SF:VOC 1PL-run:JUS-1PL adolescent:M-DEF  
*ji-mrak'a-te*  
 3SM-come:IMPV-FUT

Chaha *xədəf gərə nit'anə wədəja jiftənte*

'Please let us move; an adolescent boy will come.'

- (6) Fedwet *zewət, gurmasjə g'ərjəta nafinakaxi burərem idzadzəgo burərem*  
*zewət, gurmasjə g'ərjə-ta na-finaka-xi burər-e-m*  
 You-3FS, boy-3SM house-3SM.Poss 3SM-go-2SM  
*idzadzəgo burərem*  
 say-1S-PAS pull-3SM-PAS

Chaha *gərə, wədəja betəta nafikaxi /nisdixi barem*

'You, he asked and pulled me to go with him to his home.'

In Examples (5 & 6), consecutive texts, observed that girls talk openly to each other about powerful boys. The law status of females in society is a burden to them; they shoulder this and discuss how to overcome this problem by counseling each other. The boys invade the girls' privacy without their permission and the girls share their feeling with each other, trying to hide themselves from the boys who attack them. The following is the continuation of the above conversation by the two girls.

- (7) Fedwet *jəfir adirargi binanə bəɖʒiɖɖaxi*  
*jəfir a-dirarg-i binanə bə-ɖʒiɖɖ-axi*  
 why NEG-2SF-hit:IPVF-3SMO be:COP:PFV:3SGM INS-hand-POSS:2SF  
 Chaha *jəmɪr atdərɟi banə bəɖɖaxi*  
 Gloss 'Why not you hit him by using your hand'

In Examples (6 & 7), when the girl spoke to her friend about the boy, she said, 'he tried to push her to go to his house without her permission'. Her friend also defended her, saying why not you hit him. This shows that even if males are dominant in society, some females attempt to oppose this culture, by criticizing each other.

In Examples (8, 9 & 10), the texts confirm the imbalance of power between males and females. The girls replay and discuss with each other the issue that was raised in Examples (5, 6 & 7) above.

- (8) Fedwet *binaj birerəm əzinanəfo birerəm g<sup>w</sup>ərjət nafiinakaxi burə-r-em*  
*binaj birer-ə-m əzinanəfobirer-ə-m*  
 no say:PFV-3SMS-PAS 1s-force:IPFV say:PFV-3SMS-PAS  
*g<sup>w</sup>ərija-ta na-fnaka-xi burərəm*  
 house-POSS:3SM 1s-go:JUS-2SFO say:PFV-3SMS-1SO-PAS  
 Chaha *be barəm əfinanəfem betəta nafikaxi barem.*  
 'He used force to make me enter into his house.'
- (9) Fedwet *əzararəfo tibrerxi binaj bureri binaj atbureri binanə*  
*ə-zararəfo ti-brer-xi binaj burer-i*  
 1s-force:IPFV SUB-3SM-say:IPVF-2SFO IDEO:no say:IMPV:2SFS-3SMO  
*binaj at-bureri binanə*  
 IDEO:no NEG-2SF-say:IPFV be.COP:PAS  
 Chaha *tijaʃinanfɪxi be bəji be atbi banə*  
 Gloss 'Say no, why you did not refuse him when he pulled you?'
- (10) Fedwet *fɪrwə jək'irarəmo jiwərə anxurərə*  
*fɪrwə jək'jrarəmo ji-wrər-e an-xurər-ə*  
 how 3SGM-win:IPVF 3SGM-say:IPFV-1SGO NEG-be.PFV-3SGM:Q  
 Chaha *məmɪr jik'jəme anxərə*  
 Gloss 'How? He has more power than me.'

In Examples (11 & 12), the girls are not only imposed on by the boys, but also society recognizes that males are more powerful than females, as illustrated in the examples. If a girl informs her parents that she has been abused by the boy(s), her family will punish her by forbidding her to play outside the home. The girl does not want to talk to her family about this issue, but rather prefers to go and play with her friends in this challenging situation. The following texts tell us this reality:

- (11) Fedwet *g<sup>w</sup>ərjaxi girabijəm jəmənaxi irwawədo burer-i-ja*  
*g<sup>w</sup>ərj-axi girəβ-jə-m jə-imən-axi*  
 house-POSS:2SF enter:IPFV:2SF-CONV GEN-mother-POSS:2SF  
*irwawədo burer-i-ja*  
 1S-tell:IPFV say:IPFV-12SF-3SFO  
*betaxi gibijəm jadotaxi odzja*  
 ‘go your home and tell your mother.’

- (12) Fedwet *zewət itfik’ijak’əre iwret’e tixurəre anriwawd*  
*zewət i-fk’ak’ər-e i-wret’e ti-xurər-e*  
 you:2SF:VOC 1S-play:IPVF-1S 1S-go.out:IPVF-1S 2SF-forbid:IPVF-1SO  
*a-n-irwawd*  
 NEG-1S-tell:IPFV

Chaha *gərə itfək’əre iwət’e tixərə anud*  
 ‘I do not tell; she will not allow me to go out and play.’

We have seen in the above examples that girls use Fedwet to discuss their issues with friends in order to overcome the problem when unintended audiences are present.

Fedwet is also used within the group for **the purpose of opposing the culture of early and unwanted marriage**. Girls express their feelings of discomfort and forced entrance into marriage by using Fedwet with their age mates. This has the intention of discouraging the act of the girl by insulting her and her husband through song.

Speakers of Fedwet not only use speech to express emotions, they also use song. The following is an example:

- |                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (13) Fedwet                   | Gloss                          |
| <i>abəja fedo</i>             | ‘friend’                       |
| <i>abəja fedo</i>             | ‘friend’                       |
| <i>girardo girardo</i>        | ‘alas’ (kind of interjections) |
| <i>bəxədə gufra jibinado</i>  | ‘they are taking bride there’  |
| <i>fəfəfə jiwrerjə</i>        | ‘say ‘fə’ (kind of insulting)  |
| <i>gurantf’im t’amburerjə</i> | ‘slaughtering meat’            |
| <i>gurəzif jagirabaxi</i>     | ‘old person get married you    |
| <i>bəzafzafujə</i>            | taboo                          |
| <i>fə bəfinaxi</i>            | ‘in your body part’            |
| <i>təfər jagunaf’wi</i>       | ‘tuck soil’                    |

In Example (13), the song tells us, the intention of girls in opposing early and unwanted marriage. In the Gurage area, most girls do not have the right to select their husband. Previously, families were even able to force girls to marry old men. Families mostly focused on the clan and wealth of the husband, and not the interest of their girl. Females were not influential, and so they have tried to express their feelings through chant with their friends, including criticizing and opposing the girl who married the old person, even though she did not have the power to refuse the unwanted/early marriage. The song is produced both to criticise a girl who married an old person and to criticize her husband too; in the belief that the girl addresses their message to her husband. In the above song, friends try to protest a girl's marriage because her husband is not of the same age.

Group members also used Fedwet as a means of **expressing emotion** towards the Damamwit cult.

- |      |                                    |  |
|------|------------------------------------|--|
| (14) | <i>xæde bifinakwi ejawo</i>        | when we go there                       |
|      | <i>tʃ'amiburj aabinak'wi ejawo</i> | we do not get meat                     |
|      | <i>jəʃ'ək'wəsne ejawo</i>          | we beg it                              |
|      | <i>jəʃ'k'uwak'əsne eejawo</i>      | we beg it                              |
|      | <i>jəʃ'wanərbini ejawo</i>         | where we put it                        |
|      | <i>xædʒwəʃ kote ataβink'ebi</i>    | please take care of me from bad things |

In Example (14), the song shows what happens in the ceremony of Damamwit, especially in the months of the true cross, they were begging for meat by moving door to door in the act of collection. Sometimes, if they did not get as much meat as they wished, group members would use Fedwet to express their sorrow for not achieving particular goals and also express their feeling to the cult through Fedwet.

The Gurage females also used their 'language' for **religious purposes**, such as worshiping Damamwit, praying, blessing and cursing, etc. In the Example (15), the Fedwet tried to worship their cult Damamwit through beautiful song. As we have said earlier, they believed that the female cult has the power to help them and protect them from various bad things. They express their admiration by saying *irki'ja guʃto* meaning 'great woman', *imənto* 'our mother' and express their feeling to her by saying 'please come here; 'on our village' *afini jəm'okijərər tʃafər*.

- |      |                                       |                     |
|------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| (15) | <i>əxo xo xo</i>                      |                     |
|      | <i>mʷəwəjəto mʷəwəjətoəxo xo xo</i>   | 'spirit of Moyet'   |
|      | <i>mʷəwəjəto irk'ja guʃto</i>         | 'great woman'       |
|      | <i>mʷəwəjəto imənto</i>               | 'Our mother'        |
|      | <i>jəm'okijərər tʃafər eəxo xo xo</i> | 'mokjərər land'     |
|      | <i>afini mijəto eəxo xo xo</i>        | 'Moyet rest'        |
|      | <i>mʷəwəjəto mʷəwəjəto</i>            | Moyet               |
|      | <i>bijəsa jədīmamədə eəxo xo xo</i>   | 'converge with red' |
|      | <i>o o o ejeje</i>                    |                     |

In Example (15), they express their admiration by saying *irk'ija gufto* 'great woman', *iməjto* 'our mom' and express their feeling to her by saying 'come here to our village' *afiri jəm<sup>w</sup>okijərər tfafər*.

In addition to the interpretation of examples discussed above, this study also uses interview in order to incorporate the functions of the Fedwet and triangulate the data obtained using the elicitation presented in the previous section. As discussed in the methodology section, consultants were asked to list functions for which they used Fedwet. Here is the result of the interview.

**Table 1.** Use of the Fedwet

Function	Number of times
To communicate private issues	18
To exclude unintended audience	16
To express feelings of emotion	12
To form identity	10
To insult others	3
To worship the female cult	7
To criticise the culture of early marriage	8

There were 20 total participants in the interview presented in the table above. Amongst them, most of the consultants responded that they used Fedwet for the purpose of communicating secret issues, which coincides with expressions obtained from the text data sources. However, in addition to the first function, it is also used to exclude unintended audience, as reported by several consultants. They also used it to express feelings and for identity formation. The service of Fedwet as a means to discourage young girls and also to express the undesirability of union with older men as an insult were also among the responses obtained from the interview data. In addition to the aforementioned functions, they also used Fedwet to worship their cult.

## 7. Conclusion

The finding of this study shows that, although Fedwet had symbolic and communication functions before, it does not have any function in the current situation. It is threatened and endangered because it has lost its functional stability in relation to the loss of the culture. The Fedwet used their secret language for a special in-group 'language' to express their feelings. These tactics helped them to escape the complex reality that they consider as a societal burden that they face because of their gender. The sociolinguistic functions of Fedwet in history were to hide the communication of females, to exclude unintended audience, to oppose unwanted

activities in the culture such as early marriage, to express feeling/emotions and for religious purposes. The motive for using Fedwet secret language was more related to the social position of females and pertained to the traditional belief system in the society. The implication of the sociolinguistic profile of the speakers tells us that Fedwet is not used by youths. Hence, the younger generation has no information neither about the culture and traditional belief of Moyet nor of the Fedwet. Thus, this study is used as a document for future research and gives information for the next generation.

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## List of abbreviations

1	First person	FUT	Future	O	Object
2	Second person	INS	Instrumental	P	Plural
3	Third person	IPFV	Imperfective	PAS	Past
ADJ	Adjective	JUS	Jussive	PFV	Perfective
CONJ	Conjuncton	LOC	Locative	POSS	possessive
COP	Copula	M	Masculine	S	Singular
DEF	Definiteness	NEG	Negative	VOC	Vocative
F	Feminine				

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