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The politics of language and representative bureaucracy in Ethiopia: the case of Federal Government

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Building an inclusively representative and equitable bureaucracies in a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural polity is a challenging phenomenon. Being one of such polities, Ethiopia embarked upon multinational federal nation-building policy exactly two decades ago through a constitutional reform. Accordingly, nine regional states and two chartered cities bureaucracies were established besides the federal bureaucracy. It is obvious that in addition to professionalism, civil service jobs generally require knowledge of certain official working language. Regions have chosen their own official working languages for their respective civil service institutions which have been reiterated as the major opportunity brought by the multinational federal policy of the country. This paper emphasizes on the bureaucracies of the Federal Government where Amharic is retained as the sole working language. From the outset, we ask questions: How could it be possible to build representative civil service institutions in multilingual polities? What are the roles of federal restructuring and official working language? What are the challenges that Ethiopia is facing at the federal level in terms of building a representative bureaucracy? This piece uses government reports of five years (2003-2008) and other theoretical literature to lay out Ethiopia's (re)quest for building equitable federal bureaucracies. Overall, the finding show that even though it may be different for political positions; the Amharic monolingual language policy of the federal government has ensured inequitable access to the federal civil service institutions thereby posing challenges to the constitutional vision of building equitable and multicultural bureaucracy.

Key words: Federal bureaucracy, official working language, representation.

INTRODUCTION

The role of reasonable working language and representative civil service institutions in the management of ethno-national diversity has often been overlooked in

the scholarly debates on Ethiopia's federalism. Employing these lenses, the paper examines the extent to which the Federal Government's bureaucracy is

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equitably representative of “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia”. Ethiopia is a common home to diverse groups; particularly its ethno-linguistic division has significant influence on the country’s political, economic, social and cultural structures (Levine, 2000). Currently, the number of languages spoken in Ethiopia is estimated to more than eighty, where the choice of official working language at the federal level would exactly pose a challenge. The new Constitution of Ethiopia (Federal Government of Ethiopia, 1995) selects Amharic as the sole “working language of the Federal Government” (Art.5). Official language, Fernand de Varennes (2012: 4) defines, “is a form of legal recognition of an elevated status for a language in a state or other jurisdiction”. Due to disagreements on the use of the term, this paper makes use of “official working language” to refer to the language that offices (public or private institutions) adopt to use in their daily functions and correspondences.

The major achievement of the contemporary Constitution, as compared to previous ones, is the inclusion of the provision that bestowed opportunity to Member States of the Federation to determine their respective official working languages. In spite of this success, the framers of the Constitution seem to have neglected the factual numerical status of the other competing languages particularly Afan Oromo in the choice of federal official working language. The very preservation of monolingual government for multilingual polity suggests discrimination. With regard to the selection of Amharic, the conventional justification of the formulators of the Constitution was that “Amharic has become the most widely spoken language due to historical accident” (Aberra, 2009: 105). Often it is also suggested that economic rationale (i.e. cost of adopting two or more languages) justifies the choice. Can these shallow views be convincing reasons where there had been civil wars for decades largely due to ethno-linguistic domination, exclusion and marginalisation?

Modern multiethnic state of Ethiopia was created by wars of conquest which has resulted in manifold ethno-national problems that were and are shaping and reshaping the successive generations, creating a link between past, present and future. More precisely, the Ethiopian empire-state was created in the second half of the nineteenth century, mainly through the use of force. The subsequent evolution of the Ethiopian polity proved national domination and consequently, the independence of various ethnic groups including the largest ethnic group of the country, the Oromo, was forcefully taken away. These vanquished ethno-linguistic groups were subjected to domination and exploitation; and their cultures and languages were suppressed and the dominating ethnic group’s culture and language-Amharic was imposed on the conquered peoples. From the 1960s onwards, various forms of national resistance by the subjugated people started to

shake the empire state of Ethiopia. The 1974 revolution ended the county’s feudal-assimilationist regime but unable to resolve the ‘nationalities question’ (language being the core) because the revolution as well as its promises was hijacked by the military junta (Merera, 2003).

Since the demise of the military regime in May 1991, there has been an attempt to democratise Ethiopia’s divided polity and society along ethno-linguistic federal arrangement and multi-party democracy. There are some visible efforts to reorganise the Ethiopian state and society as parts of democratisation particularly in view of regional language questions. Since then, Ethiopia is a multilingual country with monovocal Federal Government.

MATERIALS AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

This paper uses both primary and secondary sources of data. Two interviews were conducted, one with opposition party and the other with government official. As far as secondary sources are concerned, five years annual reports of the government (2003-2008) were intensively used for time-series comparative analysis. But also domestic legal documents as well as literature on the politics of representative bureaucracy and language policies with international experiences have been utilized. These legal and theoretical frameworks were instrumentalized for the analysis and interpretation of data. Accordingly, this piece has got threefold purpose: First, to sketch theoretical frameworks and international experiences of bureaucratic linguistic regimes and representations; second, to examine the constitutional-legal foundations of Ethiopia’s federal language choice and representative civil service; and third, to reveal the extent to which the federal language regime is serving as a means to marginalize non-Amharic speakers in the federal bureaucracy of Ethiopia.

INSTITUTIONS, LINGUISTIC REGIMES and REPRESENTATION: A THEORETICAL SKETCH

It is often argued that the politics of representative bureaucracy is about institutional change; in other words, it is the expression of how institutions such as the civil service apparatus evolve over time in a context of deep diversity. It is also about policy change, since the bureaucracy in that context is the object of policymaking. Especially relevant in the context of the politics of multilingual states is the ‘neo-structuralist’ work of Erk and Koning (2010) on federalism. For them, policy change is the result of attempts to make the institution of federalism congruent with the linguistic make-up of any given federation. As such, the

existence of different 'bureaucratic linguistic regimes' in multilingual countries could be seen as a reflection of the demographic make-up of those countries. Such an approach certainly explains part of the story behind the adoption of different representative mechanisms in Belgium, Canada and Switzerland (Turgeon and Gagnon, 2013: 411).

It is also claimed that the type of representation is influenced not only with the societal diversity, but with its political institutions. According to such a perspective, in a country like Belgium, representative bureaucratic measures cannot be dissociated from the country's consociational system, as the bureaucracy is also central to the country's grand political bargain (Hood, 2000: 183). There is great merit to this perspective, as it stresses that measures adopted to ensure a more representative bureaucracy cannot be separated from the working of the rest of the political system, and the different (perceived) interests of actors involved in the political bargain. Representations of a political community are the object of political debates and conflicts. Specific representation may threaten the vision of the country of some actors and/ or their perceived interests, political or professional. As argued by Jenson (1989: 238), "as actors with a variety of collective identities co-exist in the universe of political discourse, their practices and meaning systems jostle with each other for social attention and legitimacy". The capacity of certain actors to ensure the adoption and implementation of policy proposals that correspond to their representation of the political community and/or their perceived interest is influenced by the institutional setting in which they operate (Turgeon and Gagnon, 2013: 412).

In their comparative analysis of Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, Luc Turgeon and Alain G. Gagnon (2013) demonstrated that different types of 'bureaucratic linguistic regimes' have been adopted in the three polities to ensure a fair representation of their main linguistic communities in the federal public administration. They identified three main aspects influencing hiring practices and the day-to-day working environment of bureaucrats: the existence (or not) of quotas in hiring, the linguistic prerequisites for civil servants, especially at the senior level, and the extent to which those requirements have been implemented successfully (ibid.).

Belgium's regime is based on the notion of equality at the senior level and monolingualism of civil servants. Belgian civil servants are assigned to separate linguistic registers (French and Dutch). Positions in the civil service have a specific language attached to them (Dutch or French). As a result, for instance, only a French speaking Belgian can apply for, or be promoted to, a position that has been classified as French. There are important differences, however, in the proportion of

positions assigned to each linguistic group. For lower levels of public service, representation of each group is a function of the estimated work handled in each language in each department. In the upper echelons of the federal public service (from the position of director and above), strict quotas have been adopted, with 50% of positions assigned in a given department to Dutch-speakers and 50% to French-speakers. Since French-speaking Belgians constitute a minority of the overall population (around 40–45%), this means that they are slightly over-represented in the upper echelons of the federal administration. While bilingualism has increasingly been promoted, there is no requirement for public servants to master the second language (Turgeon and Gagnon, 2013: 409).

Canada's regime is found out to be somehow the opposite of the Belgian case (ibid.). While it is an objective of the federal public administration to reflect the linguistic duality of the country, it is strictly forbidden to set or implement quotas. To ensure a fair representation of French-speaking Canadians, who were historically significantly under-represented in the federal public administration, the federal government has made knowledge of both official languages (French and English) an element of merit in the selection of candidates. Specific regions were designated bilingual in the 1970s, in which both English and French were to be the languages of work for civil servants, including the National Capital Region (Ottawa-Gatineau), and in which some key positions were declared to require the knowledge of both official languages. Since a higher proportion of French-speaking Canadians are bilingual, such measures contributed to augment their presence in the public service and brought a fairer representation of both language groups in federal institutions. Regulations were passed in the early 1980s establishing that all senior management positions in a bilingual region would henceforth be designated bilingual (ibid.).

Turgeon and Gagnon situated the Switzerland's regime between Belgium's and Canada's approaches. While there are neither formal quotas nor restrictions as to who can apply for a position, the recently adopted 'ordinance on national languages' stipulates that departments must attain a specific 'representation level' (70% German-speakers, 22% French-speakers, 7% Italian-speakers and 1% Romansh speakers).

Moreover, the ordinance stipulates that every employee of the federal administration must have a written and oral comprehension of a second language, and that senior civil servants must have a good active knowledge of a second language and a passive knowledge of a third language (ibid: 410).

Finally, in three of the above countries, federalism and its subsequent institutions have positively affected representation reforms of the federal institutions to accommodate the building block linguistic communities.

ETHIOPIA'S BUREAUCRATIC LANGUAGE and REPRESENTATION: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

According to the national census of Ethiopia (Federal Government of Ethiopia, 1994), the country's population was 53,132,296 composed of Oromo (32.1%), Amhara (30.1%), Tigrayan (6.2%), Somali (5.9%) and other nationalities. Although the Oromo constitute the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, for reasons such as assimilation policies, the number of Afan Oromo speakers [as mother tongue] was 31.6% of Ethiopian population, preceded by Amharic with its corresponding percentage to be 32.7%. The two languages were equally contending languages for similar status though Afan Oromo was deliberately disregarded during the making of the new Federal Constitution.

The formulators of the Constitution, Constituent Assemblies, who designated Amharic as the sole language of the Federal Government, did not pay any consideration to the linguistic profiles of the country. They talked merely about the forceful expansion of Amharic at the expense of non-Amharic languages; but they did not make any effort to question whether the imposition of Amharic succeeded to become the language of several ethnic groups of Ethiopia. The designers of the new Constitution took the so-called "historical accidents" justifications for granted, which claims that Amharic expanded across the country ever since the formation of modern Ethiopia through what they call "accidents of history" and thus designated as the sole federal official working language (Federal Government of Ethiopia, 1994). Thus, they ignored all guiding democratic principles of working language choice in multilingual countries. Thus, Pool (1991: 495) correctly concluded that "In a world with thousands of languages, the choice of official language is a natural politics". The selection of Amharic could be seen as the continuity of the discriminatory monolingual policies of previous regimes of Ethiopia. While protesting against the controversial Addis Ababa Master Plan in April and May of the 2014, I remember, the Oromo students have demanded "Afan Oromo to be the working language of the Federal Government of Ethiopia".

With the other census (2007), the population of Ethiopia increased to 73,750,932; of which the Oromo are 34.5% followed by Amhara (26.9%), Somali (6.2%), Tigrayan (6.1%) and Sidama (4.0%) making the top five largest ethnic groups in the country. By this census the numerical size of speakers of Afan Oromo has reached 33.8% of the total population of Ethiopia followed by Amharic (29.3%), Somali (6.2%), Tigrayan (5.9%), and others (ibid.).

The discrepancies between the numerical size of ethnic groups and their corresponding languages could explain both continuity and change of language policies and practices. The decline in the percentage of

Amharic shows that Amharic linguistic assimilation project of previous regime has been contained which could arguably be one of the outcomes of the post-1991 multinational federal restructuring particularly with its regional language policies. The discrepancies also suggest some signs of continuity. For instance, 433,332 populations of Oromo do not speak Afan Oromo; and 1,364,980 populations of Ethiopia are Amharic speakers but are not Amhara. This depicts that some of the previous regimes' *modus operandi* such as linguistic assimilation policies have continued unabated (Asafa, 2010).

The Constitution of Ethiopia promises equity of benefits and representations for all nationalities (Government of Ethiopia, 1995). Its preamble promises "to build a political community founded on the rule of law...to live together on the basis of equality and without any sexual, religious or cultural discrimination; ... rectifying historically unjust relationship". The constitution is somewhat inconsistent for the other Article of the same constitution (Article 5) allows historical linguistic injustices to perpetuate. On the other hand, the constitution aims to build equitable and representative bureaucracies: "Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in state and Federal governments" (Article 39(3)). Likewise, Article 41(3) of the Constitution provides that "Every Ethiopian national has the right to equal access to publicly funded social services," and Article 43 of it requires:

The Peoples of Ethiopia as a whole, and each Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia in particular have the right to improved living standards and to sustainable development. Nationals have the right to participate in national development and, in particular, to be consulted with respect to policies and projects affecting their community... The basic aim of development activities shall be to enhance the capacity of citizens for the development and to meet their basic needs (Federal Government of Ethiopia, 1995).

The Constitution thus strictly forbids any form of marginalisation or exclusion of ethnic groups from policy making and publicly funded social services. As far as the principles for national defense is concerned, the constitution declares "The composition of the national armed forces shall reflect the equitable representation of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia" (Article 87(1)). Furthermore, Article 89(1&2) states: "government has the duty to ensure that all Ethiopians get equal opportunity to improve their economic conditions and to promote equitable distribution of wealth among them". Participation in practical

sense is not only to elect or to be elected but it means sharing in the public wealth which include, inter alia, employment, prestige and positive symbols of the society through language. Numerous international and regional legal instruments that Ethiopia has already adopted also advocate non-discrimination on the basis of language by declaring that all human beings have certain inalienable political, economic, and social rights which are forms of participation.

Finally, the constitution Ethiopia calls for inter-ethnic equitable representations in both Federal and Regional governments. Ethiopia's approach in principle seems to resemble with Swiss "representation level". But the same constitution designates Amharic as the only bureaucratic linguistic regime. Except for this guiding principle, there is no particular legislation meant to regulate the fairness of federal civil servants in terms of ethnic representation.

Linguistic regime and marginalization in federal bureaucracy

The following opening excerpt shows the determinant role of proficiency in certain shared language in every activity including, but not limited to, competition over access to public institutions in multilingual polities.

Al and Bo grew up learning different mother tongues. At some time later stage, Bo learns Al's, while Al does not learn Bo's. They can now communicate with one another. Not quite on an equal footing, of course- Al tends to have the upper hand in any argument they might have with one another and in any competition in which they might have to take part using the shared language- but nonetheless with significant benefits, both material and non-material, accruing to both... So far, therefore, so good enough- except perhaps that the cost of producing this benefit, though enjoyed by Al with greater comfort and with the bonus of some pleasing by-products, is borne entirely by Bo. Is this nothing to worry about...? (Van Parijjs 2003: 153).

By keeping this hypothetical example in mind, this section deals with the official working language problems of the Federal Government of Ethiopia. The Constitution of Ethiopia orders access to Federal Government services and employment opportunities through Amharic; which means denial for non-Amharic languages. The disentanglement of the largest language in Ethiopia, Afan Oromo, from the federal official status might have caused a systematic marginalization of the Oromo. This study argues that conscious choices between several competing languages have vital political, economic and social costs, particularly when language skills are unevenly distributed. Language choice remains one of the political weapons at the leaders' disposal as a means of exclusion or inclusion

of linguistic groups in government.

For obvious reasons, if a language is selected for official purposes from among several languages, the group who speaks it as its native is advantageous over others. From the outset, it could be argued that, the government of Ethiopia chose Amharic to resolve what it perceives as communication problems, which affected 'patterns of participation in power, wealth and prestige' (Weinstein, 1983: 82). This discloses the real politics of language in Ethiopia where linguistic, political, social and economic interests are interwoven.

According to the annual government reports, it appears that the largest ethnic group, the Oromo, is systematically marginalized in the expanding bureaucracies of the Federal Government. It is at this juncture that we need to observe the determinant role of language as the main gate-way to the state. It is invariably constant that across years Amhara share more than half of the federal employees, where it was expected to be shared public institutions. Suggesting the severity and intolerability of the official working language problems, Abraham (1990: 71) comments:

As soon as you designate one language the official/national language, you thereby give a major competitive advantage... to the native speaker of that language. You also, at the same time and by the very same act, disenfranchise the speakers of all the others language in the nation. You eliminate or heavily constrain their access to education, to employment, to information in general and to power and prestige in many forms.

As a result, the rest of the linguistic groups would be marginalized; and this is apparently against the very principles of federalism that Ethiopia adopted. Laitin (1977) has also similar conclusion in that if the language of former colonial power is chosen as the official working language, those groups which had greater access to the state, or which are in favor of past systems, will be in a privileged position. The selection of Amharic as a sole federal official working language of Ethiopia has been benefiting those who speak it as their native language (Table 1).

These government employment statistical reports suggest who enjoy more and who enjoy less access to the federal civil service institutions in the country. For instance, if we compare the percentages of Amhara and Oromo employees, the former group are included in the federal bureaucracy threefold do the latter mainly due to the official working language problem. Nevertheless, Yonatan (2009: 150-151) appears to have denied these discriminatory linguistic formula when he views that "It is not all clear how the language policy will have the effect of compromising the capacity of individuals from non-Amharic speaking groups to

Table 1. Federal Government permanent employees by ethnic group.

Ethnic groups	Employee percentage				
	2003	2004	2006	2007	2008
Amhara	52.65	54.44	46.85	50.15	50.29
Oromo	17.90	18.88	17.42	17.75	18.30
Tigrayan	7.52	6.43	6.69	8.70	7.79
Gurage	4.75	4.56	4.21	4.26	4.27
Wolaita	1.02	1.15	1.30	1.37	1.45
Sidama	0.38	0.36	0.39	0.39	0.41
Somali	0.12	0.14	0.09	0.09	0.12
Not stated	11.73	9.95	19.22	13.52	13.05
Others	3.96	4.07	3.83	3.77	4.33
Total in No.	45514	46184	52833	56911	57012
Total in %	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Federal Government of Ethiopia, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, and 2009.

access the state thereby continuing their historical marginalization. In fact, the reverse seems to be true in present day Ethiopia". Had the official working language choice been democratic, reasonable and justifiable, all ethnic groups could have enjoyed fair access to the federal bureaucracies. The knowledge of Amharic language remained essential factor to get employed in the federal institutions. Weinstein (1983: 81) aptly argues that "Everywhere the official language is the property of those who use it as a mother tongue or who can learn to use it as well".

As the author argued elsewhere (Milkessa, 2011) the language policy of Ethiopia in the federal domain is completely unsound and its employment consequence is not only unreasonable but it can be potentially prejudicial. These facts lay evidences for the 'structural discrimination and exclusion' ensuring that certain groups are permanently deprived of access to the state and thus, permanently dominated. Weinstein (1983:82-83) once suggested:

Domination is an outcome of deprivation because if one is poor, weak, and disdained, one is dependent on others. Without power one needs direction and protection; without wealth one needs financial support from others; and without prestige one believes in the natural superiority of others to lead. At the basis of domination and participation are deprivation and access.

In this regard, only very few ethnic groups happen to share the Ethiopian federal resource, which precisely reflects absence of inter-ethnic equity, justice, and public power sharing (Benti, 2001). Strictly speaking, the collective power and resources were expected to be shared among all ethnic-groups of Ethiopia fairly. Ideally, the Oromo would have shared greater part of

the cake. Cohen (2000: 108) observes:

"Single language policy inevitably favors the group that speaks the chosen language as a mother tongue."

This confirms that the participation of the Oromo in the federal public institutions is adversely affected by this linguistic arrangement. One of the risky political strategies in Ethiopia has been such seemingly systematic exclusion of certain groups from the state. Turgeon and Gagnon (2013: 407) upholds that "the exclusion or under-representation of national minorities in government administrative positions can be a major source of conflict and resentment since such positions are often considered desirable because of the salary or benefits they guarantee". The lethal effects of official working language problems in job markets, political participation and generally democratic power sharing among ethnic groups suggest the centrality of language in the nationalities question of access to the state. Patten and Kymlicka (2003: 16) observe:

[T]he very process of selecting a single language can be seen as inherently exclusionary and unjust. Where political debate is conducted in the language of the majority, linguistic minorities are at a disadvantage, and must either invest the time and effort needed to shift as best they can to the dominant language or accept political marginalization.

Similarly, sources from Ethiopia's Federal Civil Service Agency show that:

It is unquestionable that knowledge of the official working language is the dominant way to the state's employment opportunities. No matter how we master the required profession and knowledge from the

universities, official working language incompetence limits us from communicating it out when necessary. The processes and procedures of recruiting employees for the federal institutions, as we know, are conducted in Amharic language except for limited offices. Specifically, written exams and interviews are carried out in the medium of Amharic. This apparently prevents those graduates and others who are unable to explain their knowledge in Amharic from access to public offices.¹

This demonstrates how much the knowledge of Amharic remained significant to access federal public offices in Ethiopia. The fundamental trouble predicted is that “if the principle of fair employment of ethnic groups ... is disregarded, those underrepresented groups feel excluded ... which is politically dangerous state of affairs” (ibid.). This discloses the future political dangers of excluding certain ethnic groups from the state on the basis of such flawed official working language policy. Turgeon and Gagnon (2013: 407) contended: “A weak representation of members of national minorities in the bureaucratic machinery and the inability of members of a linguistic minority to be served in their own language can lead to serious challenges to the legitimacy of the state”. It was argued that the lack of representation of Franco phones in public service was one of the factors that contributed to the rise in support for Quebec independence in the 1960s (ibid.). Yared (2009: 215) has once warned:

Focusing on their own languages, as important as it is to maintain a distinct identity, might lock non-Amharic linguistic groups up in regional politics and matters since Amharic is the language of the federal government and business in Addis Ababa where the bulk of the government's currency circulates.

Yared's thesis misses the point that the exclusion of some nationalities from the Federal Government is not caused by focusing on one's own language, but by the official working language problem. The government policy that does not address the principles of equitable participation of ethnic groups in power and resource sharing tends to sponsor conflicts. McGarry et al. (2008: 45) have notably stated that “A state that serves the interests of one (or some) nationality, religion, ethnicity or language will promote the counter mobilization of the excluded communities, and hence conflict”. According to the Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (Government of Canada 1969: 95):

The possibility of national disintegration has forced a re-

examination of the linguistic policies of the Public Service. The debate is no longer about efficiency, merit, patronage, and representation, but rather between thoroughgoing reform and schism. Change is imminent and no institution requires reform more urgently than does the federal administration.

Let us sum up with Merera's language policy concern: Learning in one's own language and competing for jobs in another language amounts to a denial to constitutional equitable opportunities and representations.² There is no fair competition between the speakers of the federal working language and non-speakers, which demonstrates the bureaucratic mono-linguistic regime problem in multilingual societies.

Conclusion

The paper suggests that the choice of Ethiopia's federal working language and access to its bureaucracy is surrounded by politics of marginalization, not representation. This is apparent, especially, when the status of Afan Oromo at the federal level comes to the picture. The designation of Amharic as the sole Federal linguistic regime has resulted in the perpetuation of the age-old marginalization of non-Amharic speakers in the state bureaucracy. Despite the fact that regional policies encourage the development of non-Amharic languages at the regional level, non-Amharic speakers remain subjected to discriminatory linguistic formula of the Federal Government of Ethiopia.

The new Constitution of Ethiopia has retained Amharic linguistic status quo which is determining who should have to have access to institutions of the Federal Government. This in turn has led non-Amharic speakers, especially the Oromo, the largest ethnic-group in Ethiopia, to continue suffering from marginalization in the Federal Government. First, the federal official working language choice was flawed and undemocratic due to the unconvincing criteria used. No guiding democratic principle of official working language choice in divided polities was considered; rather the designers of the new Constitution pronounced historical reason. The old-attitude that treats Amharic as a unifying language and non-Amharic languages as divisive and disintegrative has impact on the federal official working language choice. Second, the results of disregarding Afan Oromo from federal official status have been severe for the Oromo ethnic group. The federal official working language policy of Ethiopia continued serving as a means of marginalization of the

¹ Federal Government of Ethiopia, Public Relations Service Head of the Federal Civil Service Agency. Interview, November 5, 2010. Addis Ababa.

² Merera Gudina, Opposition Chairman of the Oromo People's Congress (OPC), and Vice Chairman and Chairman of the Organizational Affairs Committee of the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Forum. Interview, November 23, 2010. Addis Ababa.

non-Amharic speakers. For instance, on average, while the Oromo access the Federal Government by half percentage of their population size, the Amhara access the same government twice their population size. Such marginalization has national policy implications for the future conflicts.

The main questions thus remain: Should the existing monolingual policy of the Federal Government be retained? Is not there an option to address the structural employment discriminations mainly caused by flawed language choice? Should particularly the largest language, Afan Oromo, continue to be precluded from the linguistic profiles of central government of Ethiopia? What lessons could Ethiopia draw from the international practices of multiethnic polities? These and other questions, in fact, call for radical rethinking of the choice of the federal official working language through comprehensive realistic approach. This paper believes that adopting Afan Oromo as a co-equal federal language with Amharic may minimize the conflicts associated with the working language. Bilingual Federal Government is an ideal for Ethiopia since the two linguistic groups constitute 2/3 of the population of the country. There must be equitable representation of all national groups in the Federal Government as the Constitution requires. Furthermore, such decisions would tame Oromo nationalism and thereby promote national consensus and unity. Finally, national negotiation on the federal official working language questions would enable to build better understanding of language politics in Ethiopia and come up with better inclusive language policy suggestions for the future multiethnic Ethiopian federation. Exclusion of any ethnic group from public power, resources, and prestige will never bring peace and development to a country. Generally, official working language choice in a multiethnic polity must be participatory, fair, democratic and reasonable. And the civil service institutions of a given shared government should be genuinely representative of all groups.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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