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Gender bias ideology as manifested in the grammar of Afan Oromo

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The purpose of this research was to investigate and explain how the grammatical structure of Afan Oromo reveals social gender bias ideology. Based on quantitative and qualitative data collected from primary and secondary sources of the Macha dialect, the grammatical structure of Afan Oromo was analyzed in the light of the socio-cultural lives of the language community. The theoretical base of this study was the dominance theory. As this study reveals the grammar of Afan Oromo distinguishes masculine and feminine gender systems. Nouns are assigned to one of the two genders based on semantic attributes and pragmatic knowledge. This linguistic principle is metaphorical conceptualization emanating from the social gender bias ideology of the society. In addition, the morphological, the syntactic, and the semantic structures of the language also reflect the social gender bias practices. In general, the grammatical conventions of Afan Oromo mirror the socio-cultural practices of the society: males and females are placed on superior and subordinate positions respectively.

Key words: Afan Oromo, grammatical gender, language conventions, gender bias, male dominance, socio-cultural practices.

INTRODUCTION

In common usage gender is the difference between men and women. It is also common to hear people use the term 'gender' interchangeably with 'sex' (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2007). Yet, in the field of social sciences gender refers to social rather than biological differences between men and women. For instance, according to Money (1994: 163), "In popularized and scientifically debased usage, sex is what you are biologically; and gender is what you become socially; gender identity is your own sense or conviction of maleness or femaleness."

Gender starts to be formed before one's birth and continues to develop in one's life time. Gender formation starts by parents and later every child takes up the responsibility of transforming it. Male and female transform gender in their everyday lives based on their

gender roles (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 15). According to Bonvillian (2000) one learns and accepts gender roles through a process called socialization.

According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2000) different societies determine people's memberships in gender order through sets of thought called gender ideology and they use it to explain and confirm people's membership in the society. Gender ideology is built as sets of principles among a society. These sets of principles explain the socio-cultural roles of men and women in the society and they are also used as criteria against what men and women are judged.

A society is an organized group of people functioning in the background of different customs, religious beliefs, taste, preferences, social institutions, etc. All of these influence the behaviors of individuals in the society (Sankaranarayanan, 2001: 1). According to Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000), as a product of social reality, language reflects the socio-cultural behavior of a community who speaks it. In other words, language

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reflects the thoughts, opinions, attitudes, and culture of its users.

Gender ideology influences linguistic conventions by setting rules for choice of orders. For instance the fact that we say “Mr. and Mrs. Jones” not “Mrs. and Mr. Jones” and “husband and wife” not “wife and husband” is a matter of convention (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2000). And this convention also gives primacy to males.

Language serves as a tool that facilitates the construction and sustainability of gender. This symbiotic relationship between language and gender sometimes directs us to the moments of historical changes of a society’s custom and philosophy. In these historical changes, language conventions tend to change along. For instance, the absence of title for woman without showing her marital status like Mr. for man in English language in the past and its invention today as Ms. may show this fact. In addition, language constrains its speakers’ thoughts through its patterned conventions, which were once shaped by the culture and politics of the society (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2000).

In the past many scholars believed that grammatical gender did not have any connection with social gender. However, recently researchers have started to come up with facts that reveal that grammatical gender systems are linked to social gender in a number of ways. For instance, Boroditsky (2000) showed that speakers whose dominant language is German assign male characteristics to masculine noun *der tisch*, ‘table’; whereas French speakers assign female characteristics to the same object, *la table* ‘table’ which is feminine noun in French. These activities show that speakers do relate grammatical gender with social gender ideologies. Regarding this, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2000) also argue that grammatical gender provides a convenient link to social gender for thinking and talking about things.

Language manifests gender bias ideology by its conventions. For instance, as Bonvillian (2000) argues, the grammar of English language encodes distinction in lexical classes (nouns, verbs, and adjectives). And its syntactic structure also manifests gender bias by placing the important segments earlier than they appear in unmarked sentences, as in placement of male before female.

The use of feminine marking morphemes, *-ette* or *-et* and *-y* or *-ie* for diminutive function, some male/female sets of paired words such as bachelor/spinster, the very meanings of ‘woman’ and ‘man’ and, lexical items derived from them may reflect the inequality between genders. What we see from this example is that the feminine term is typically marked morphologically and socially. As Bonvillian (2000) puts, the lexical items derived from the word ‘man’ are seen used positively (having good trait admired by society and representing humanity) while words derived from ‘woman’ like ‘womanish’ for instance, suggest traits not socially approved when used with man. According to Lakoff

(1975), some pairs of English words like, ‘bachelor’/‘spinster’ and ‘widow’/‘widower’ also show gender bias through their asymmetric meanings.

Gender bias is the reproduction and reinforcement of negative gender stereotypes which becomes internalized as negative symbols for both genders. Language or *la langue* persistently and covertly ascribes positive and normative qualities to males and negative or secondary ones to females and this becomes internalized through contemporary language or *la parole* (Bonvillian 2000). However, pertinent to this no linguist or social scientist has yet undertaken any research on Afan Oromo. Thus, this study intends to scrutinize how socio-cultural gender bias manifests through language structure and it explain the relation between the two. Specifically, it aims to investigate and analyze how the grammatical structure of Afan Oromo reveals social gender bias ideology.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study has been focused on the Macha dialect of Afan Oromo and it is based on quantitative data such as 1830 common nouns that were collected from Afan Oromo text books, dictionaries, grammar books and 1012 proper names collected from native speakers of the Macha dialect speakers of Dembi Dollo, Wollega. Furthermore, qualitative data like, gendered expressions, verbs and administration titles were also collected from the same primary sources. The selection of the research area and the dialect is based on the researcher’s acquaintances.

To explain how Afan Oromo grammar exhibit gender bias ideology, common nouns have been examined for their gender assignments in different contexts. Afan Oromo proper names, administration and profession titles, and verbs that express socio-cultural practices were analyzed for their semantic connotations and their morphological structure in light of the past and the present socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic structures of the society. This has involved comparison of gender roles in the past and the present social structure of the language community and how they manifest in the language.

A significant library research was also done to see how the grammars of the other dialects of the language distinguish gender. Then the findings were compared with the Macha dialect. Figurative expressions were examined for their semantic connotations based on participatory observation. Since the researcher is a native speaker of the Macha dialect of the language, he has also used introspection as a supplementary means of data collection and analysis. The theoretical base of this study is the dominance theory of gender which states that gender bias in language is the product of male dominance in society (Lakoff, 1975).

GENDER BIAS IN THE GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE OF AFAN OROMO

This section discusses how gender bias manifests through the grammatical structure of Afan Oromo. The section begins by depicting the general sociolinguistic picture of Afan Oromo and its grammatical gender. Then it discusses how gender bias manifests through gender categorization of nouns, administration and profession titles, gendered terms, loss of feminine forms of some

Table 1. Gender dichotomy at third person personal pronoun

Topic subject	Non-topic subject	Absolute	Possessive
[ise:n/iʃe:n] 3F	[ise:/iʃe:] 3F	[ise:/iʃe:] 3F	[ise:/iʃe:] 3F
[inni] 3M	[isa:] 3M	[isa] 3M	[isa:] 3M

terms, verbs proper names and figurative uses of nouns referring to men and women.

Afan Oromo (literally Oromo Language) is one of the Lowland East Cushitic languages that fall among the Cushitic language family of the Afro-Asiatic Phylum (Baye, 1986). It is one of the major Ethiopian languages and the third most widely spoken language in Africa after Arabic and Hausa (Gadaa, 1988). It is spoken in an area which extends from Wallo in the Northern Ethiopia to Mkilifi in the Northern Kenya and from Wollega in the Western Ethiopia to Harar in the Eastern Ethiopia (Gragg, 1982).

According to the 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia (CSA), the total number of Afan Oromo speakers in the country is 25,489,024, which accounts for 34.48% of the whole population of Ethiopia. In addition, Afan Oromo has a significant number of speakers in Kenya and Somalia too (Gragg 1982, Griefenow-Mewis, 2001). The major dialects of Afan Oromo are: Borana, Guji (both Southern), Arsi-Bale (South Eastern), Hararge (Eastern), Bati, Rayya (both Northern), Tulama (central), and Mecha (Western) (Gragg, 1982).

Presently, Afan Oromo is used as the official language of Oromia Regional State (one of the regions of Ethiopia). It uses *Qubee Afaan Oromoo* (Afan Oromo Alphabets) which is adapted from the Latin script. In addition, in Oromia Afan Oromo is the medium of instruction in elementary schools (Grades 1 to 8), the regional colleges, and as a school subject in elementary and secondary schools (Grades 1 to 12). It is also taught as a major field at BA and MA levels in six universities of the country. Furthermore, Afan Oromo is widely used in many electronic and written presses.

Gender in Afan Oromo

In Afan Oromo most nouns are not overtly marked for gender. According to Nordfeldt (1947); Clamons (1992) and Griefenow-Mewis (2001), a small closed set of nouns are marked overtly as feminine or masculine, with feminine gender marker [-ti:/tti:] and masculine gender marker [-sa/ssa] or [-u:] and with the masculine [-iʃʃa] and feminine [-itti:]. In addition, male and female proper names may also be distinguished by morphemes [-a:] for male and [-e:] for female.

Morphemes [-a] and [-itu:] also distinguish male and female names respectively. Definite marker [-iʃʃa] and [-itti:] may also be suffixed to some animate nouns, and to some adjective stems to indicate that a specific individual

is being referred to distinctly for male and female (Griefenow-Mewis, 2001).

Some names of animals can be differentiated with respect to their gender by adding the words [korma], 'male' and [ɗaltu:], 'female' (Griefenow-Mewis, 2001). In addition to suffixing different gender markers gender is also assigned covertly for some nouns by using agreement markers with modifiers, anaphors, and verbs (Clamons, 1992). Personal pronouns are distinguished by gender in the third person singular forms (Clamons, 1992; Griefenow-Mewis, 2001) (Table 1).

Most adjectives are marked morphologically as feminine or masculine in agreement with the nouns they modify. Griefenow-Mewis (2001:28), classifies Afan Oromo adjectives into four groups based on the gender markings they take. The first group distinguish masculine by [-a:] and feminine by [-o:]. The second group identifies masculine by [-a:] and feminine by [-tu:]. The third group is marked by [-ssa] and [-tti:] or by [-iʃʃa] and [-tti:] to distinguish masculine and feminine respectively. According to Clamons (1992), this class is productive and can be used as nouns, so that [hiʃʃe:-ssa] can stand alone as a referring expression for a poor male and [hiʃʃe:-tti:] for a poor female. The fourth group of adjectives is the one that is non gender distinctive. Adjectives in this group are used with both masculine and feminine without any morphological change. According to Griefenow-Mewis (2001), this group of adjectives terminates with [-e:], [-i:] or [-a].

According to Clamons (1992) a small group of adjectives is also marked for gender with [-a:] and [-o:ftu:]. Except for the group of adjectives discussed above, the other adjectives in Afan Oromo are marked for agreement. In Afan Oromo plural verbal inflections do not show gender distinction (Clamons, 1992). The form is the same regardless of the gender of the subject nominals, or their order in coordinate constructions.

Gender categorization of nouns based on attributes of the referents

This section discusses how the grammar of Afan Oromo manifest gender bias via categorization of nouns under one of the two grammatical genders based on semantic criteria.

In the past scholars like Ibrahim (1973) believed that grammatical gender does not have semantic function. Yet, according to Castellino (1975) who carried out

research on nominal classification in Cushitic languages, grammatical gender is semantically not empty as it reveals a multifaceted reality which passes through language in association of different categories arranged in sets of oppositions. This in fact is not restricted to the Cushitic languages. It is the characteristics of the other Afro-asiatic languages too. For example according to Diakonoff (1988: 58-59) cited in Clamons (1992), “females, diminutives and objects that play a passive role in society are characteristics of feminine nouns in Afro-asiatic languages.

According to Clamons (1992) in Afan Oromo gender categorization is based on grammatical information and pragmatic knowledge. Subsequently, this study discusses how gender bias ideology manifests through categorization of nouns under different genders based on semantic criteria. These semantic criteria are size, power, and social value.

Gender categorization of nouns based on the relative size of the referents

Size is the measurements or amount of something, degree of largeness or smallness. In Afan Oromo entities that are relatively small in size are referred to as feminine, while the ones that are relatively large are referred to as masculine. Consider the following examples.

- (1)
- a) [indʒidʒdʒi: -n rife:nsa -tti si matt'an -ti]
nit NOM hair POST you sticks 3F
'Nit sticks to your hair.'
- b) [k'ub -i mogg -e: gaba:b -tu: -ɗa]
finger NOM end 3F short 3F COP
'The little finger is short.'
- c) [burk' -itu: -n kun goga: dʒir -ti]
stream 3F NOM this drying being 3F
'This stream is drying.'

In the above sentences feminine nouns such as [k'uba mogg-e:] 'the little finger', and [burk'-itu:], 'stream' are overtly marked with feminine marking morphemes, [-e] and [-tu:] respectively. While [indʒidʒdʒi:], 'nit' is referred to as feminine covertly by the agreement marking morpheme [-ti] suffixed to the verb. On the contrary, the following sentences show how entities that are relatively larger in size are referred to as masculine.

- (2)
- a) [arb -i bine:n -sa gudd -a: -ɗa]
elephant NOM beast 3M big 3M COP
'Elephant is a big beast.'

- b) [abbu:ddu -n k'uba gudd -a: -ɗa]
thumb NOM Finger big 3M COP
'Thumb is a big finger.'
- d) [gala:n -ni waa -n ba:je: of- ke:ssa: k'ab -a]
sea NOM thing NOM many REF in has
3M
'The sea contains many things in.'

The subjects of the above sentences are referred to as masculine by the agreement marking morphemes on the adjectives and verbs in the sentences. In examples (2a) and (2b) the adjective [gudd-a:], 'big' is marked with a masculine gender marker [-a]. In example (2d) [kab-a], 'contains' is marked by masculine gender marking [-a].

The categorization of nouns under one of the two grammatical genders in Afan Oromo depending on the size of the references reflects the unequal social status of male and female in the language community. In Oromo society male and female are socio-culturally placed on inferior and superior positions respectively (Negaso, 2000; Wondwesen, 2000). Some proverbs of the language also show this fact. For instance observe the following.

- [dubarti: -n furd -o: male: gudd -o: ?in- k'ab -t -u]
woman NOM fat 3F PART big 3F NEG has 3F NEG
'There is only woman of fat kind and never of respectable one.'

The above proverb shows how men view women in the language community. In this proverb the use of the adjective [gudd-o:], 'big 3F' to express social value may show the existence of psychological association of physical world with the mental world. Therefore, it would be self contradiction if the mental world reflects something positive and the language reflects its opposite. In other words, the concept of measurement in the grammar of Afan Oromo is a mirror image of the socially constructed gender ideology of the language community.

Gender categorization of nouns based on the relative power of the referents

In Afan Oromo some nouns are categorized under masculine or feminine gender categories based on the power associated with the referents. Powerful entities are categorized under masculine gender while the powerless or the relatively weak ones are categorized under feminine gender. Consider the following examples.

- (3)
- a) [ibidd -i nama gub -a]
fire NOM person burns 3M
166 J. Lang. Cult.

'Fire burns one.'

- b) [abba: -n simbo: adurre: ?in- soda:t -u]
father NOM grace cat NEG afraid 3M
NEG
'Graceful' (a new type of mouse) is not afraid of cat.'
- c) [le:nc'c' -i ?in- baro:d -a]
lion NOM FOC roar 3M
'Lion roars.'
- d) [hantu:t -i bo:lla -tti gal -ti]
mouse NOM pit POST get in 3F
'Mouse lives in a pit.'
- e) [kurup'p'e: -n marga ña:t -ti]
antelope NOM grass eat 3F
'Antelope feeds on grasses.'

In (3a) and (3c) above, the verbs [gub-a], 'burns 3M', [baro:d-a], 'roars 3M' are marked with masculine gender marker [-a] and in (3b) the verb [?in-soda:t-u] 'not afraid 3M', is marked with masculine agreement maker [-u] for agreement. This indicates that the subjects of the above sentences are categorized under masculine gender. The categorization of the subjects of the sentences under examples (3a) and (3c) under masculine gender is based on the relative power of the referents. The referents are considered to be powerful in relation to the other entities in their classes or entities in the other classes as a result the nouns that represent the referents are assigned masculine gender.

On the contrary, nouns which denote powerless or relatively weaker entities are categorized under feminine gender. As a result they occur with adjectives and verbs that are marked for feminine gender. Regard the examples (3d) and (3e) above. The subjects of the above sentences are marked for feminine as signaled by the agreement marking elements [-ti], which is affixed to the verbs [gal-ti] 'lives' and [ña:t-ti] 'feeds' respectively.

If we compare the subjects of the sentences in examples (3a-3c) with the subjects of the sentences under examples (3d) and (3e) above, we can see that the former ones are relatively powerful or believed to be so than the later. For instance the subject of (3b), [abba:simbo:] 'graceful' is believed to be powerful relative to [hantu:ta], 'mouse' (3d).

[abba:simbo:] is a kind of mouse that the language community, specifically in Dembi Dollo area believe to have come from Europe or North America with the sacks of wheat which were once sent to the area as an aid during famine. It is a destructive mouse compared to [hantu:ta], 'the local mouse'. Regarding how powerful [abba:simbo:], 'graceful' is the name given to it can show. Literally, [abba:simbo:] means owner/father of grace or graceful. This name was given to it as a kind of respect

for the mouse. This is done commonly with other powerful animals too; because the society believes that avoiding the names of powerful entities may prevent the destruction that they may cause. Hence, [abba:simbo:] 'graceful' is referred to as masculine and it is not categorized with [hantu:ta] 'the local mouse' which is less destructive.

The Oromo also perceive [ibida] 'fire' (3a) and [le:nc'c'a], 'lion' (generic) in (3c), as powerful entities, and they refer to them as masculine. On the other hand, [kurup'p'e:], 'antelope' (3e) are perceived as powerless entities, relative to [leinc'c'a], 'lion'. So, in general expressions the former are assigned masculine gender while the later are assigned feminine gender.

As discussed so far, in Afan Oromo some nouns are assigned grammatical gender on the bases of the relative power of the referents they represent. Nouns that represent referents which are relatively powerful are assigned masculine gender while those that represent relatively powerless referents are assigned feminine gender.

In Oromo society women are considered as physically weak individuals compared to men. This ideology commonly manifests through different expressions that involve comparisons of man's strength with woman. For instance, they say, [nam-iffa kana dubarti:n ille: ?in-re:b-ti] 'Even a woman can beat this man.' This expression shows that the society perceives women as physically weaker than men.

This shows that the practice of gender categorization of nouns on the bases of relative power of the referents in Afan Oromo reflects the social gender ideology of the language community.

Gender categorization of nouns based on the social values of the referents

In Afan Oromo some nouns are categorized under feminine gender based on the negative social values of the referents. Nouns that denote human referents with undesirable social characters are categorized under feminine gender. These nouns are either overtly or covertly marked for agreement. Observe the following examples.

- (4)
- a) [buda: -n idzo:lle: ña:t -ti]
evil eye NOM infants bewitches 3F
'Evil eye bewitches infants.'
- b) [hat -tu: -n k'abe:ñña ke: hat -ti]
thief 3F NOM property your 1S steals 3F
'A thief steals one's property.'
- c) [addagg -e: -n nama ?in- kabadz
-t -u]

vagabond 3F NOM person NEG respected
 3F NEG
 'A vagabond does not respect one.'

In the above examples the subjects of (4a), [buda:], is covertly marked for gender with agreement marker [-ti] while the subjects of sentences (4b) and (4d) are overtly marked with feminine agreement markers [-tu] and [-e]. This shows that in Afan Oromo nouns or nouns that denote referents with negative social values are marked for agreement with feminine gender markers.

To sum up, under section 3.2, how gender bias ideology is manifested through gender categorizations of nouns on the bases of semantic criteria has been discussed. As we have seen in this section gender assignment of nouns in Afan Oromo reflects the social gender bias ideology in the language community. In the past it was widely believed that grammatical gender has nothing in common with social gender. However, recently some researchers have proved that grammatical gender has a link with social gender. For instance, Boroditsky (2001) has found out that speakers whose mother tongue is German assign male characteristics to masculine nouns while other speakers whose mother tongue is French assign female characteristics to feminine nouns. Based on this finding one can deduce that polarized gender categorizations in language conventions originate from the social gender stereotypes.

In Oromo society women are perceived as mentally and physically weak individuals. For instance in the proverbs of the language we find [dubarti:n be:ka: dalti male: be:ktu: ?in k'abtu], 'woman is not wise; she only gives birth to wise male'. According to this proverb in Oromo society women are perceived as people with weak mental capacity. In another instance we find [kan dande:ssu da:ni d?enna:n gowwa:n gale: ni:ti: da:ne], 'told to beat somebody he could; a fool man went home and beat his wife'. According to this proverb, women are assumed to be physically weak people.

The perception of the society on women expressed above, correlate with the habits in gender assignments of nouns. So, plausibly the criteria for gender categorization of nouns in Afan Oromo are psychologically associated with the gender stereotypes of the society.

Gendered administration and profession titles

This topic discusses the origins and historical evolution of gendered administration and professional titles in Afan Oromo. Nouns referring to administration posts and professions are mostly masculine, and feminine nouns which could have become parallel to those masculine nouns are missing in most cases. To show the significance of this problem the discussion has been divided into two parts. Thus, section (Administration titles during the Gada administration system) deals with nouns

obtained from traditional Oromo administration system called Gada system. And section (Administration and profession titles after the decline of the Gada administration system) deals with administration and profession titles after the decline of Gada administration system including the present sociopolitical life of the language community.

Administration titles during the Gada administration system

According to Negaso (2000), until 1880s the Western Oromo people used to be administrated by a traditional socio-political system called Gada. This administration system was democratic for the male while it marginalized women (Negaso, 2000). In addition to historical literature different administration titles during Gada administration system also show the male domination in the socio-political arena. For example administration titles such as [abba: gada:] 'leader of the Gada council', [abba: du:la:] 'war leader', [abba: dubbi:] 'chief speaker of the Gada council', and [abba: c'affe:] 'chairman of the legislative assembly' reflect male domination in the Gada administration system.

In Gada administration system women were not allowed to be leaders therefore; they did not have parallel feminine administration titles. In fact one cannot judge the past with the present mentality since every period in human cultural evolution has its own philosophical dimension. However, sometimes the past mentality is reflected in the present life style of a society. As Bonvillian (2000) argues, language convention is the carrier of this mentality. This argument is true to Afan Oromo too. Consider the following section for detail.

Administration and profession titles after the decline of the Gada administration system

The western Oromo started to abandon the Gada administration system in 1880s (Negaso, 2000). Yet, this transformation did not bring women to leadership. The then titles also attest to this fact. For example, masculine administration titles, [mo:ti:] 'king', [go:fta:]/[go:fti:] 'lord' do not have parallel feminine forms. This shows that there was power imbalance between male and female of the language community. The last noun [go:fta:]/[go:fti:], 'lord' seem to have [gi:fti:] 'lady' as its parallel. However, since 'lord' and 'lady' are not equal in status the titles are also not symmetric. In Oromo society, someone who used to be addressed by the title [go:fta:] or [go:fti:], 'lord' was a male leader while [gi:fti:], 'lady' was only the title of a lord's wife and woman addressed with this title did not have the power to lead.

Later in around 1885 the western Oromo lost the war with Minilik II, the first Ethiopian king. Because of this

they were forced to totally abandon the Gada administration system and adopted the feudal administration system (Negaso, 2000). Regarding gender balance in administration the feudal system by its nature was not a good political system elsewhere. Hence, it encouraged the continuity of male domination in administration arena. Nouns referring to administration posts of the time also verify this fact. For example, [abba: lafa:] 'land lord', [abba: k'oro:] 'land owner' do not have parallel feminine nouns.

This gender bias was transferred to the present (21st century) through the favorable ground laid for it by the past political systems. Even if it has not totally changed, the present seems to be relatively better for women in Oromo society.

Now a few women are seen on administration posts, yet as the grammar of the language shows, the past male dominance in political and social arena still manifests through nouns reference to administration posts and some profession titles. For examples masculine nouns [dura ta:ʔ-a:] 'chairman', [bulɫf-a:] 'administrator' [abba: ganda:] 'chairman of a village', and [abba: se:ra:] 'judge' refer to administration and profession posts in the present lives of the language community. These masculine nouns do not have feminine forms, in spite of the fact that today women are allowed to hold the posts and the grammar of the language also allows the formation of parallel feminine titles by alternating feminine morphemes with masculine ones. For instance, [abba:] 'father' can be substituted with [ha:da] 'mother' to form [ha:da ganda:] 'chairwoman' of a village' or [ha:da se:ra:] 'judge 3F'. In addition, feminine gender markers [-e:ssu:] and [-itu:] can be altered with the masculine gender marker [-a:] to form feminine titles [dura t-e:ssu:] 'chairwoman' and [bulɫf-itu:] 'administrator 3F' for female referents.

The absence of parallel feminine forms for the titles under the above examples today show the fact that the posts had been held executively by male in the past. And this shows how old practices (experiences) shape language conventions. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2000), these kinds of language conventions constrain our thoughts and practices. Hence, the fact that the above administration titles in Afan Oromo do not have parallel feminine forms can influence the younger generation to think that leadership is exclusively the duty of male. Hence, the above titles in Afan Oromo need consideration.

Gendered terms which define the male gender as normative

This section discusses how some terms in Afan Oromo define the male gender as normative or generic in light of the socio-historical lives of the language speakers. According to Alpher (1987), it is the dominant gender that becomes the normative (generic) form. In other words, if

a society is patriarchal, generic forms of different terms would be the masculine forms. According to Asmarom (1973); Mohammed (1990); Clamons (1992); Negaso (2000) and Wondwesen (2000) Oromo is a patriarchal society.

In the traditional Oromo society, [abba:] 'the patriarch' was the head of his family. He was in command of political, social, and economic lives of his family in particular and the society at large (Negaso, 2000). Today, this image of the male in the traditional Oromo society reflects through some indefinite terms formed from the word [abba:] 'father' in Afan Oromo. The term [abba:], 'owner/oneself' stands as generic term. The use of this term as generic form has resulted from women's exclusion from leadership and property ownership. In the traditional Oromo family the patriarch was in command of every important property. Women had no valuable property (ibid). Hence, it may be logical to argue that one of the senses of the word [abba:], 'owner' has originated from the past exclusive property ownership of the patriarch in the language community.

In the traditional Oromo family it was only the patriarch or the eldest son in the family that used to represent the family in any domestic and public affairs (ibid). Therefore, the generic use of the masculine word [abba:], 'oneself' might have originated from this past tradition of representation by male.

To sum up, under this section we have seen how some masculine indefinite terms formed from the word [abba:], 'father' in Afan Oromo delineate the masculine gender as normative. According to scholars, this usage may cause two problems. First, it may confuse people as to whether one is referring to male alone or both male and female (Schneider and Hacker, 1973). Second, this practice causes females to understand that they are unrepresented (Harrison 1975; Martyna, 1978).

The reduction of some feminine terms from the Western dialect of Afan Oromo

This section deals with how the Western dialect of Afan Oromo manifests gender bias by reducing feminine forms of first and second person singular possessive pronouns, the interrogative 'which' the relative pronoun 'that', some anaphoric forms, and the feminine form of 'person/body'.

According to Clamons (1992) and Griefenow-Mewis (2001) in the Southern, and Eastern dialects of Afan Oromo first and second person singular, and first person plural possessive pronouns, the interrogative 'which' the relative pronoun 'that', and some anaphoric forms are distinctly marked for gender by an initial [t-] for feminine and [k-] (in Southern dialects of Afan Oromo) and [x-] (in Eastern dialects of Afan Oromo) for masculine. In the Central (Shawa) dialect of Afan Oromo too feminine and masculine are respectively distinguished by [k-] and [t-].

Nevertheless, in the Western dialect of Afan Oromo at

the present, there is only the masculine form [k-] which is used with both genders. In Western dialect of Afan Oromo the feminine forms of first person singular possessive pronoun, [t-ijja/t-oo] 'my F' and first person plural possessive pronoun [t-e:nna] 'our F' are replaced by the masculine forms [k-o:] 'my M' and [k-e:ñña] 'our M' to refer to female. The feminine form of the interrogative [t-am] has also been replaced by the masculine form, [k-am]. In addition, in the relative pronoun 'that' has only the masculine form [k-an] for both genders while the Southern dialects of Afan Oromo and the Eastern dialects of Afan Oromo have distinct form [t-an] for feminine. Furthermore, in Southern dialects of Afan Oromo the near demonstrative 'this' is also distinguished for masculine and feminine referents with [k-un] and [t-un] respectively while in Western dialect of Afan Oromo the feminine form has been replaced by the masculine form.

Besides, in Western dialect of Afan Oromo we do not find the definite feminine form of [nama] 'person/body' which is distinguished for gender in the Southern dialects of Afan Oromo by suffixing [-itʃʃa] for male and [-itti:] for female as in [nam-itʃʃa] 'the person 3M' and [nam-itti:] 'the person 3F'. In Western dialect of Afan Oromo [nama] 'person' either stands as generic representing both men and women as in [nam-ni tokko-lle: ?in-dʒiru] 'There is nobody' or it only represents man when marked with any of the gender markers as in [nam-itʃʃa] 'the person 3M' or [nam-itti:] 'the person 3M diminutive'.

According to Alpher (1987) cited in Clamons (1992) this kind of linguistic practice may be attributed to the linguistic practice of patriarchal society. According to Asmarom (1973), Baxter (1978), and Negaso (2000), the Oromo are patriarchal and patrilineal people. So, it could be argued that this process of reducing the feminine forms of different terms has started as using the male forms as generic.

Verbs hauling socio-cultural gender bias

This section discusses how gender bias ideology manifests in Afan Oromo through mandatory and exclusive grammatical collocation of some verbs that express socio-cultural practices with nouns referring to woman or man.

In Afan Oromo, some verbs are grammatically obliged to take exclusively certain nominal arguments referring to either female or male human. The grammatical obligation of the verbs to collocate only with nouns that refer to man or woman referent has resulted from the socio-cultural practices that the verbs express. For instance, the verbs [he:rumu:] 'to be given in marriage' / 'to be sold' [mana-tti hafu:] 'to be left unmarried' can only take nouns or pronoun referring to female human as their arguments. This grammatical rule of word collocation has been set by the socio-cultural practices of the language community. In Oromo society women get married in a way which is

equivalent to 'getting sold'. When women get married, their parents are compensated with bride price. This is done to replace the physical labor that the woman used to render at her parents' home (Negaso 2000). The verb [he:rumu:] which has a literal meaning, 'to be sold' expresses this cultural practice too.

The verb [he:rumu:] takes only feminine nouns as its argument. The parallel verb for male is [fu:du:] 'to take woman for marriage' and it only takes masculine nouns as its argument. In addition, the verb [fu:du:] also expresses the power relation between man and woman in Oromo society. This verb takes only masculine nouns as its argument as in [gurba:-n hintala fu:de] 'The boy took the girl for marriage'. If it takes feminine noun as in [hintall-i gurba: fu:te] 'The girl took the boy for marriage.', it is interpreted as 'The girl is physically or economically more powerful than the boy and she agitates him.' In Oromo society, it is the man that is supposed to be more powerful and lead the woman in the way he fancies. Therefore, the utterance augments the social status of the girl and at the same time it demeans the social status of the boy.

In Oromo society women get married only when chosen by men. The verb [haftu: ta?u:] 'to be left over/not chosen for marriage' shows this socio-cultural bias in the language community. If a woman is not chosen for marriage she is denoted as [haftu:] 'leftover'. This phrase has a negative social meaning and the absence of a parallel word that could denote a male that is left unmarried by any chance, may also show linguistic bias. In Oromo society, if his economy allows him the male has the right to marry as many women as possible. He also has the right to marry any girl he wants any time (even in his old age) if he could afford the bride price (Wondwesen 2000). However, a female has no such rights.

According to Negaso (2000), one of the duties of women in Oromo society is rearing as many children as possible because children provide the husband with manual power. The phrase [idʒo:lle: abba: mana:-f horu:], 'to give children to the father of the house/husband' also shows the power imbalance between the husband and the wife which is reflected by the giver-taker position assumed in the phrase. In this particular case she is at the serving position and he is at the position of getting served.

In Oromo society, male and female are at the superior and subordinate positions respectively. He is the administrator while she is the administered (ibid). The verb, [dʒala bulu:] 'to be administered' as in [abba: mana: dʒala bulu:] 'to be administered by husband' shows the bias in the socio-cultural lives of the society.

To sum up, according to Negaso (2000), in traditional Oromo society the patriarch is the member of the family with the highest socio-cultural hierarchy. He controls and exploits his wife and children. He is always expected to be the leader in his family and the wife is at the

subordinate position. She is considered as his property. Afan Oromo verbs that express marriage related activities and gender roles of husband and wife also reflect this fact.

Proper names in Afan Oromo

This section deals with the ideology of gender bias manifestation in Afan Oromo proper names. In the past proper names were believed to be arbitrarily given only to denote their bearers. However, today many researches reveal that they also have semantic contents that show the “socioeconomic and political situations” of different societies (Zealelem, 2003: 183).

In Afan Oromo too proper names may reveal connotations related to the social, cultural economic and political situations of the society, especially during the birth of the bearers or semantic connotations related to the sexes of the bearers in accordance with their socio-cultural positions.

Afan Oromo Proper names manifest gender bias ideology first, through semantic connotation of male and female names associated to gender preference, and second through the absence of parallel feminine names that have sociopolitical connotations associated with the gender ideology of the society. These circumstances occur from the fact that the Oromo are patrelineal and patriarchal society. The Oromo society gives more values to male children. The male lead their own families and the society. According to Negaso (2000), in Oromo society almost all social and political leadership is controlled by the male. In addition, male children are expected to expand their fathers’ and forefathers’ bloodlines by forming their own family. Because of this belief the society craves to rear male children. When women get pregnant the parents wish it to be a male. When their expectation fails (the child turns out to be female) they name the female child with names that connote this event. For instance [hata:tu:] ‘let her be’ is one of these names. As the bearers of this name explain the name has a sense of compliant. It means ‘it is against our will but since we cannot change the occurrence of the female child we accept it as it is’. A feminine, name [jo:fete:] ‘okay’ also has similar connotation.

On the other hand, the Oromo society show their gender preference by giving male children names that have semantic connotations associated to expectation of male child. For instance, the name [galata:] ‘thanks’, and [wa:k’ga:ri:] ‘God is good’ may be given because the parents think that God has fulfilled their desire for which they are thankful. And the name [tole:ra:] ‘it has turned out well’ and [taʔe:ra] ‘it has happened as expected’ are given to male children to show their satisfaction with the fulfillment of their desire that is the birth of male child.

If parents desire to have a male child but fail to have at once or beget after two, three or more female children,

the male child may be named with names that connote this event. For example the name [tokkiʃʃa] ‘the only’ has semantic connotation that is interpreted as ‘the child is the only child in the family’ in spite of the presence of female children prior to the birth of the male child. However, the only female child in a family is not seen as a special event and commonly not named with a name implying this event.

The male names, [k’oritʃʃa] ‘medicine’ and [fajjisa:], ‘savior’ is names that show that the Oromo is a patrelineal society. Both of these names have semantic sense ‘curer’ to mean that the bearers ‘have cured or saved especially their fathers. The ideas of curing and saving have come from the fact that the society counts its blood lines though male. So, the semantic connotation here is that the births of the bearers of the names have ‘saved’ their fathers’ and their forefathers’ blood line from discontinuing. The names [abba: dɪbba:], ‘hundred note’, [dɪbbisaa] ‘thousand maker’, and [kumarra], ‘better than thousand’ have also semantic connotations related to the patrelineality of the Oromo society. As the connotations of the names indicate the bearers of these names are expected to expand the blood lines of their fathers.

In addition to the semantic connotations of male and female names explained above, the absence of female names parallel to some male names show the gender bias ideology in the Oromo society. In different societies some male names do not have parallels for female. For example among the Amharic speaking societies some male names with socio-political semantic connotations do not have parallels for females (Zealelem, 2003). In spite of the fact that the Amharic grammar rule permits the production of female names parallel with the male names like [mængistu] ‘his government’ and [mærra] ‘he led’ we do not find parallel female names because of the male dominance in the Amharic speaking society (Zealelem, 2003).

Similarly in Afan Oromo, in spite of the fact that the morphological rule of the language permits the formation of some female names parallel to male names, masculine names like [bulʃʃ-a:] ‘leader 3M’ and [abbo:m-a:] ‘commander 3M’ do not have parallel feminine forms because of male dominance in the society.

Figurative use of nouns referring to female and male

In Afan Oromo some nouns that refer to female are figuratively used to express different concepts that have negative social values. On the contrary some nouns that refer to male are figuratively used to express concepts that have positive social values. Look at the following expressions.

- (5)
a) [dubarti: -n kun dɪ:ra]
woman NOM this male

Lit: 'This woman is male.'
'This woman is heroes.'

- b) [nam -ni daga: kana ol ka:su dī:ra]
person NOM stone this up lifts male
Lit: 'Anybody that could lift up this stone is male'
'Anybody that could lift up this stone is so strong.'
- c) [nam -ni ga:ffi: kana de:bisu di:ra]
person NOM question this answers male
Lit: 'Anybody who could answer this question is male.'
'Anybody who could answer this question is so clever.'
- d) [gurba: -n kun akka dubarti: bak'at -a]
boy NOM this like female retreats 3M
Lit: 'This boy retreats like a female.'
'This boy is a coward.'
- e) [nam -iffja kana dubarti: -n -ille: ?in- re:b -ti]
person 3M this woman NOM even POS beats 3F
Lit: 'Even a woman could beat this man.'
'This man is weaker than woman.'
- f) [nam -iffj -i kun akka dubarti: odu: funa:n -a]
person 3M NOM this like women rumor collects 3M
Lit: 'This man collects rumor like woman.'
'This man is a rumormonger.'
- g) [gurba: -n sun akka duraba: sa:lfat -a]
boy NOM that like girl becomes shy 3M
Lit: 'That boy is as shy a girl.'
'That boy is too shy.'

In the above examples the term [dī:ra] 'male' is used figuratively to express concepts such as 'heroism', 'cleverness', 'strength' and 'bravery'. On the contrary, terms such as [dubarti:], 'woman' and [durba], 'girl' are figuratively used to express negative concepts like cowardliness, rumormonger, weakness, and shyness. This practice is linguistic sexism as it augments one gender and demeans the other. According to Spender (1980:141) cited in Sunderland (2006:15) the availability of sexist language in one's culture may force one to view reality in a biased way. Therefore, the existence of sexist language in Afan Oromo can influence the language community's thought negatively.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The grammatical gender bias in Afan Oromo is the product of the past social, cultural and political lives of the

society. Today, the life structures of the society have changed pertaining to the social gender bias. However, we still see the linguistic gender bias thriving through the socio-culturally shaped grammatical conventions. As the life style of the language community continues to change through time the creation of new linguistic elements becomes necessary. Since this process has to follow the already existing language conventions, the already laid down gender bias ideology in the language convention can influence the language speakers to continue categorizing new words under different genders. As Bonvillian (2000) argues, gender bias in language becomes what Bourdieu calls a "habitus" which is the process of internalizing "the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product." This internalization process of the past is facilitated by the interdependent nature of *la langue* (the underlying, socially established system of linguistic units and rules according to Bonvillian (2000). Therefore, to deal with bias in language, scholars need to consider a joint study of the language conventions and the language used in daily lives.

Many psycholinguistics are revealing facts that suggest that habits in language encourage habits in thought. For instance, Boroditsky (2001) and Gordon (2004), argue that language practice may shape human thought. Therefore, the gender bias in the grammar of Afan Oromo especially, in the area of gender categorization of nouns can influence its speakers' thoughts on gender equality.

For the reduction (if possible the elimination) of the bias in the grammar of Afan Oromo, different linguistic and non linguistic solutions can be recommended based on the nature of the gender bias. Some of the gender bias manifest in *la parole* and some others manifest in *la langue*. Hence, the possible solutions vary like their sources.

In Afan Oromo, the gender biases that manifest through *la parole* are the ones that indirectly originate from socio-cultural gender ideology. These biases need non linguistic solutions. For instance, noun categorization based on semantic features of references and figurative use of nouns referring to women and men manifest mostly in speeches. These practices trace their roots back to the unequal values given to men and women in the language community and they manifest at the level of thought. Lakoff (1975) also argues these kinds of language biases are clues which show that some external situations need changing. Therefore, to stop or reduce these biases it may be mandatory to deal first with the gender inequality in the socio-cultural lives of the society.

For the gender bias that is manifested at the level of language conventions, there are some possible linguistic solutions. For instance, the gender bias in Afan Oromo administrative and profession titles may be done away with by substituting gender neutral terms in place of masculine terms. One may also suggest that the use of

Table 2. How to replace gender biased administrative titles with neutral ones.

Old masculine administrative and profession titles	Possible gender neutral titles
a) [dura ta: -ʔa:] front sitter 3M 'chairman' [abba: ganda:] father village 'chair man of a village'	[dura ta:-ʔo:] lead sitter 3P 'leader' [gan- durs -o:] village leader 3P 'leader of a village'
b) [bultʃ -a:] administr 3M 'administrator 3M'	[bultʃ -o:] administer 3P 'administrator'
c) [abba: se:ra:] father law 'judge 3M'	[nama se:ra:] person law 'judge'

the feminine forms of those masculine administrative and profession titles for female referents may solve the problem. However, this suggestion cannot solve the problem completely. This is because of the fact that in languages (like Afan Oromo) that function on binary gender system speakers would be forced to use one of the two forms (masculine or feminine) as generic in general expressions. And this by itself would be considered as gender bias. For example if we suggest that the title [dura ta:-ʔa:] 'chairman', can be substituted by its possible feminine form [dura te:-ssu:] 'chairwoman' for female referent, then we are leaving the language speakers with no option of avoiding the gender bias that appear as a result of using one of these forms as generic form.

Therefore, it can be suggested that possible gender neutral terms be introduced to replace the gendered titles in Afan Oromo. For instance, by replacing the masculine gender marking morpheme [-a:-ʔa:] with third person agreement marker [-o:-ʔo:] which is gender neutral we can avoid the present gender bias and the possible gender bias that may occur in general expressions. For terms which do not follow this morphological pattern new gender neutral terms can be coined based on the old terms. Instances in Table 2, above could be some possibilities.

Using the neutral terms suggested above or any other possible neutral terms we can reduce the gender bias in the language. However, changing the linguistic practice alone may not be enough to deal with the gender bias ideology in the society. Regarding this Lakoff (1975) metaphorically says, "A competent doctor tries to eliminate the germs that cause measles rather than bleach the red out with peroxide." Therefore, the roots of the bias in the socio-cultural lives of the society should be attacked to change the gender ideology.

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