

Full Length Research

Awi School Communities' language attitude as a medium of instruction

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Accepted 14 December 2020

This study showed the nature of language attitude of Awi language speakers. The theoretical frame work is a concept from sociolinguistics called language attitude. Data were obtained from students, teachers and parents. The study focused on grade five and grade six students as samples to know the present attitude of students, teachers and parents towards Awi as a medium of instruction. Since Awi Language is used as medium of instruction up to grade six, grade five and grade six students were taken as a sample. The research design was exploratory as the researcher used more of qualitative data. Primary and secondary sources of data were used to obtain appropriate data. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the research area because from other varieties of Awi language like Qimant and Xamtagna Awi is used in education in the Zone. The data gathering instrument was questionnaire and interview. So, Closed ended questionnaire and semi structured interview was used so as to get accurate data. Simple descriptive and thematic data analysis method is used as a means of data analysis technique. The findings of this research reveal that parents, teachers were not interested for Awi Language being used as a means of instruction. Parents want their children to study in Amharic /lingua franca in Ethiopia. Teachers need more training and awareness on mother tongue education in general and how to teach in Awi in particular. Students showed interest to learn in Awi Language, but their parents are influencing them to study in Amharic. Generally, the school communities in Awi administrative zone developed negative attitude towards Awi Language.

Key words: Awi, Mother tongue education, language attitude, School community

Cite This Article As: Amare, E. (2020). Awi School Communities' language attitude as a medium of instruction. Inter. J. Eng. Lit. Cult. 8(7):200-205

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Language is a crucial tool for the development of education at school. The educational quality is language dependent. Wolff (as cited in Heugh et'al, 2007:8) states, "Every language is not everything in education, but without language everything is nothing in education". This is to mean that the language used at school determines each learning and teaching activity. The previous and the

present governments in Ethiopia have designed different language policies for day to day communication and for instructional purpose at school. For example, the federal government of Ethiopia tried to formulate the right of speakers to use their language as medium of instructions in elementary schools (article 39:2). The government has designed a new policy called Education and Training Policy which declares the use of nationality languages as a medium of instruction for primary school education.

Cohen (2006), the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1994) enhances the use of mother tongue for educational medium for two reasons. These are: using the first language of a child is pedagogically important which feels him or her appropriate to understand the concepts, and using mother tongue as a tool to get knowledge at school is the human right of self expression which is declared under the constitution of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is a linguistically diversified country where different languages and language families are spoken. Among those, Cushitic language family is the one. Awi language is a Cushitic language family which has different languages spoken in northern Ethiopia particularly in Amhara region of Ethiopia (Cohen, 2006). Agew/Awi areas have been split into small islands namely, the Bilen in Eritrea, the Qimant in Begemider, Xamta in Lasta, and Awgni in Gojjam. Awi zone is the southern island of Agew.

Most of the speakers of these languages (Bilen, Xamtanga, and Qimant) are shifting to Amharic except speakers of Awi of Amhara region where Awi is used as a medium of instruction for primary education (Cohen, 2006). So, Awi is the one which is serving as a language of teaching and learning process for its native speakers.

As to, (Bender et al 1976). Awi zone is the southern island of Agew. This zone is found at the South Western part of Amhara region/ Ethiopia

This zone is bounded to the North and East by West Gojjam and North Gondar zone to the South by West Gojjam zones and Oromia region, and to the West by Benshangul Gumuz region. The capital town is Injibara. Now a day, both Awi and Amharic are spoken in distinct domains in the areas of the zone. It has at least half a million native speakers (Joswig and Mohammed, 2011); both Awi and Amharic are used as a medium of instruction at different primary schools in different woredas of Awi zone.

Having this knowledge of Awgni language, the present researcher has conducted a research on school communities' attitude towards Awi language as a medium of instruction with reference to Awi zone's primary schools.

According to Ngidi, (2007), language attitude is a positive or negative feeling that users have towards a language they are using. This is inevitable that the language which has been using as a medium of instruction at school may be perceived positively or negatively by students, teachers and parents.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

People have attitudes/feelings/beliefs about language in general, their language in particular, and the language of other people. They may feel that an unwritten language is not a 'real' language. They may feel shame

when other people hear their language. They may believe that they can only know one language at a time. They may feel that the national language is the best language for expressing patriotism, the best way to get a job, the best chance at improving their children's future. Attitudes cannot be observed directly but are demonstrated through actual behavior – for example, how people treat speakers of other languages (avoidance, approach), or in their desire (or not) to learn another language/their language. The convergence of one's speech to conform to another's speech suggests a "positive attitude" toward the other's speech. By the same token, divergence suggests an intention for the opposite outcome. So, in this study Awi school communities' attitude about their language was explored. The theoretical frame work for this study is a concept from sociolinguistics called language attitude. In this research school communities include Students, Teachers and Parents of a school.

As far as , the researcher's knowledge is concerned, there is no research done on Awi school communities' language attitude about their language , but Adamu, (2002), conducted a research on students' attitude towards Sidama language as a medium of instruction as a correlate of academic achievement. He assessed the demographic factors like, age, sex, motivation, and the place where the students grew up, are the determinant elements for the attitude of students towards Sidama language as a medium of instruction which in turn have an effect on their academic achievement by using this language as a medium of instruction.

Therefore, the researcher conducted a research on the attitude of Awi language as a medium of instruction with reference to Awi zone primary schools. The reason that motivates the researcher to study students' attitude towards the language of teaching and learning process is the presence of negative or positive attitude of students, teachers and parents towards their language as medium of instruction. Hence, this study answered the following research questions.

1. What is the present attitude of students towards Awi language as a medium of instruction?
2. What is the attitude of teachers and parents towards Awi language as a medium of instruction?
3. What are the rationales for favoring or in favoring Awi language as a medium of instruction?

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study was describing' attitude of Awi language as a medium of instruction.

Specific objectives

1. To find out the attitude of teachers and parents towards

- Awi language as a medium of instruction.
2. To describe the reasons for favoring or in favoring of Awi language as a medium of instruction.
 3. To find out students' attitude about their language as a medium of instructions

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

After the study has been conducted, it will have different advantages. In a multilingual country like Ethiopia and nation like Amhara region, language choice for personal communication and for instructional purpose is inevitable. The language choice for the teaching and learning process may be carried out by the government. Therefore, during designing a language policy, the perception and feeling of speakers to whom the policy is designed should be taken in to consideration. Thus, the study will have the following advantages.

- Policy makers and/designers will use the study to be aware of the attitude of students, teachers and parents towards Awi language as a medium of instruction in particular and attitudes towards mother tongue education in general.
- The study will give information about the function of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction.
- The study will help to know the challenges of using Awi language in particular and mother tongue in general as a language of teaching and learning.
- Furthermore, the study will be used as a reference for other gap finders or researchers who want to conduct more research on the language.

Delimitation of the Study

The study scoped to some selected upper primary schools of some woredas in Awi zone. Based on language policy at school, mother tongue has been using as a medium of instruction starting from grade one up to four. But some nationalities including Awi zone have starting using mother tongue as a medium of instruction starting from grade one to grade six.

The study focused on grade five and grade six students as samples to know the present attitude of students, teachers and parents towards Awi as a medium of instruction by the virtue of expecting these students as efficient enough to give the required data for the stated problem.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design was **exploratory** as the researcher used more of qualitative data. This approach is important

method for descriptive study involving collecting data regarding opinions, attitudes and perceptions of language users. Many sociolinguistic researchers use this approach by its appropriateness to gather data from different parts of the society. According to (Ndamba, 2008), this method is a good approach to collect data from heterogeneous subjects like students, teachers and parents.

Source of the Data

The main sources of the required data were primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data was grade five and grade six students. In addition, teachers and parents were taken as subjects of the study by suggesting that the present attitude of students may interact with the attitude of their teachers and parents. Specifically, 21 students, 15 teachers, and parents who are participating as a member of the school community were taken as samples of the study. In addition to this one, different secondary sources like researchers done previously, different books written about Awi language and about the society were used.

Sampling techniques

The study has been conducted in Awi zone which is selected by using purposive sampling techniques. This zone is relatively near to Debre Markos / Ethiopia where the researcher is living and as it has been stated in the background, speakers of Awi languages like Qimant and Xamtangi speakers are using Amharic for educational and other functions rather than these two languages. But Awi is used in various socio-economic contexts. There are eleven Woredas in Awi administrative zone. In these Woredas, both Amharic and Awi language are being used as a medium of instruction in different primary schools. Among those, Injibara, Banja, and Chgni were taken as samples where Awi is being used as a language of teaching and learning. These three woredas were selected purposively, because most students are native speakers of Awi and, who use Awi language as a medium of instruction, were available in these woredas.

Data Gathering Instrument

Linguistic studies, as a human science, need the researcher and the participants to have a close contact during collecting the required data. By taking this principle into account, the researcher use questionnaire and interview; As Mahlangu (as cited in Ngidi, 2007), questionnaire is the most widely used instrument which is not time consuming. It is important to gather data from a

number of respondents. The questionnaires were close ended type so as to allow the respondents to have alternatives and to complete the questions without difficulty. Since the study is concerned with finding out the attitude of students towards a language as a medium of instruction, a five point likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) were used. This is because the researcher needs to know the exact attitude of students by responding as agree, strongly agree, disagree, strongly disagree and undecided.

Interview was also another instrument to collect data from the concerned respondents. The researcher used this instrument so as to strengthen the response gained from the distributed questionnaire .And also to get data for some questions which was not included from the questionnaire. The questions of the interview was semi structured so as to get deep explanations and descriptions from some selected samples like from teachers, students, parents and zonal education officers.

Method of Data Analysis

The data analysis and interpretation methods were quantitative and qualitative. The data which was gathered through distributing questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively by using percentage (simple descriptive analysis method); while the data which was collected by interviewing some selected subjects was analyzed and interpreted qualitatively(thematic data analysis method).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this part of the study, an attempt is made to discuss the findings and the results of the study with reference to the basic questions and interviews that were forwarded for each school community (parents, students and teachers) and the result is summarized as follows

Teachers Attitude towards Awi language as a medium of instructions

Teachers did not agree the use of Awi Language as a medium of instruction in the primary schools of Awi zone; they added that as it is disadvantageous to use Awi as instructional language in the primary school. Teachers revealed that they were not trained in relation to on how to teach in Awi language. The lack of training seems to be one of the reasons for the rejection of using Awi Language as a medium of instruction in the primary schools.

They responded to the researcher that as they can speak and write in Awi Language, but they were not provided with trainings on how to teach in Awi language

as a result we are facing problems to teach in Awi language. Besides to these, parents are not willing to teach their children in this language. So, the researcher concluded that, teachers have negative attitude about the language as being medium of instructions. Furthermore, without the interest of the teachers, using Awi Language as a medium of instruction will not be effective.

Teachers were asked to respond if parents were willing to teach their children in Awi language. Teachers said that parents are not interested; instead, parents prefer their children to learn in Amharic language. The response of teachers regarding the interest of students, students would not register to a school using Awi language as a medium of instruction, if they get a chance of choosing Amharic as a medium of instruction in each primary school.

Parent's attitude towards Awi Language as a medium of instruction

As Fishman (1977) argues, the effectiveness of language policies in education is more determined by the attitude of communities more than other factors. The clear knowledge of the attitude of parents towards the language use for instruction is essential before implementing mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

Concerning their interest to teach their children in Awi language, the researcher interviewed 30 parents, and their responses are summarized as follows:

Out of the 30 parents, 7 (23.3%) want their children to learn in Awi Language, but 23 (76.6%) were not interested their children to learn using the mother tongue (Awi). Instead, parents prefer their children to learn in Amharic language which is the lingua franca / working language in Ethiopia and their reasons are presented below.

- Our children should know the national language of the country;
- If our children learn in Amharic, they will have better opportunity of getting jobs
- Awi language does not have any functions other than as a means of communication at home and they believed that their language is useless for national affairs.
- Awi Language is enough for means of communications at home; instead, our children must know Amharic, and they must be fluent in speaking the national language. Therefore, the researcher concluded that parents developed negative attitude towards Awi language as a medium of instructions. So, parents added as they feel shame when they speak their language, and when other people hear their language in

their area. Therefore, the researcher believed that, Parents were not convinced before Awi was used as a medium of instruction in the education of their children; the organizational structure of the woreda education offices and the zone education office were not adjusted to the new change; and above all the preparation stage of using Awi as a medium of instruction was not led by a well organized plan. As a result of this, the implementation of Awi is found at a weak condition from the beginning and its effects were reflected in all the activities of the implementation.

Student's attitude using Awi as a medium of instruction

The researcher also asked students, whether they prefer to learn in Awi language or not. Their response was 'no'. They said, "We prefer to learn in Amharic." Because in the home, our parents told us to learn in Amharic language, even, our parents forced us to speak in Amharic in home, and they told us as we will get better jobs if we study Amharic language because of this, we want to study in Amharic language.

So, the researcher found that students prefer to learn in Awi Language, but due to their parents influence, they want to learn in Amharic. It seems that the students are suffering from this contradiction. On one hand, the students are interested in their classroom lessons, because they learn in their mother tongue. On the other hand, their parents are telling them unless they speak and write in Amharic Language, they will not get better jobs in the future. Parents also told to their children as the national language is the best language for expressing patriotism, the best way to get a job, the best chance at improving their children's future.

It is unquestionable that the implementation of mother tongue as a medium of instruction requires prior planning and preparation. With this in mind, the preparation stage of the use of Awi as a medium of instruction was examined. Therefore, researcher found that enough time was not provided to those who prepared the curricular materials, teacher were not trained and prepared to teach in Awi; those who translated the curricular materials were not given any training before they were engaged in translations; Besides, the availability of curricular materials (textbooks, teacher's guides and references) is basic to implement mother tongue as a medium of instruction, but there was shortage of textbooks. During the preparation period of curricular materials, trained personnel to prepare and distribute teaching materials were not aware in advance i.e as the researcher observed some text books, the contents and some expressions were difficult for students to understand it.

Moreover, the textbooks which are prepared in Awi language were poor. The shortage of time during the preparation period and the nature of the translators seem to be the factors that affected the usability of the textbooks. The textbooks were written in difficult words, which are not up to the level of the students, the dialects used were not a standard dialect of Awi; instead it is a mixture of the highland and lowland dialects of Awi language. This also indicated that language research was not done before using the language as a medium of instruction. Furthermore, the researcher found that the schools were not provided with professional support from educational experts. Because the organizational structure and the personnel assigned in the woreda education office and the zone education department were not organized and assigned in line with the change. Hence, the teachers seem to be forced to confront the implementation teaching in Awi language without getting professional assistance from the experts.

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