

**Productive Engagement with Linguistic Diversity in tension with Globalised Discourses in Ethiopia**

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**Abstract** (approx. 250–300 words):

Language policy and planning tension, between concerns for ethnolinguistic self-determination and the accommodation of plurality on the one hand and participation in global discourses on the other hand, characterises the last two decades of debate in Ethiopia. The discussion in this paper draws attention to linguistically diverse language planning processes in Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries of the world. In particular it will demonstrate that clear policy and guidelines from above, when unfettered by an over-emphasis of Western models, and coupled with decentralised implementation, allows some degree of localised language planning, or language planning from below (cf. Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Hogan-Brun, 2010). Such practice may result in surprisingly swift and diverse regional responses which accommodate linguistic pluralism over a ten to fifteen year timeframe (early 1990s to 2004/5). Decentralisation of educational authority to eleven Regional Education Bureaus in Ethiopia has served to encourage capacity building and increase local and regional participation in educational and language planning and development activities. However, in the absence of clearly formulated implementation plans at federal level, a change in political leadership with a turn towards 'international' advisors and educational models, demonstrates the vulnerability of regional and locally implemented policy. In the Ethiopian case, the goal of linguistic diversity has become obscured by the allure of English and there has been a 'washback effect' of this through the system, effectively reversing earlier progressive achievements in the expansion of multilingual education throughout the country.

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**Productive Engagement with Linguistic Diversity in tension with Globalised Discourses – a case of language planning in Ethiopia****Introduction**

Language policy and planning tension, between concerns for ethnolinguistic self-determination and the accommodation of plurality on the one hand and participation in global discourses on the other hand, characterises the last two decades of debate in Ethiopia. The discussion in this paper will draw attention to linguistically diverse language planning processes in Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries of the world. In particular it will demonstrate that clear policy and guidelines from above, unfettered by an over-emphasis of Western models, and coupled with decentralised authority for implementation allows for some degree of localised language planning, or language planning from below (cf. Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Hogan-Brun, 2010). This has resulted in surprisingly swift and diverse regional responses which accommodate linguistic pluralism over a fifteen year timeframe (1991 to 2006). Decentralisation of educational authority to eleven Regional Education Bureaus in Ethiopia has served to encourage capacity building and increase local and regional participation in educational and language development activities. However, in the absence of clearly formulated implementation plans at federal level, a change in political leadership with a turn towards 'international' advisors and educational models, demonstrates the vulnerability of regional and locally implemented policy. What appears at first sight as an apparently benign shift in policy to adjust towards global participation through English as the international language of wider communication resulted in one or two seemingly minor policy decisions which have slowed down the development and use of multiple Ethiopian languages as set out in the Education and Training Policy (Ministry of Education, 1994). A slight change of emphasis, firstly to

introduce an English Language Improvement Programme into teacher training institutions and colleges in 2002, and secondly to remove an English language foundation programme for first year university students, has led to an increase in the expectations of English language proficiency of secondary school students. This expectation, in turn, has had a 'washback effect' (cf. Messick, 1996) on the multilingual education policy of the country since 2004. It is the sequence of consequences following relatively minor policy decisions which demonstrate the fragility of system-wide policy implementation when not clearly mapped out.

While these consequences were taking on a life of their own, another change in leadership of the Ministry of Education resulted in an evaluation language education policy and implementation from 1994 to 2006 in a: *Study on Medium of Instruction in Primary Schools in Ethiopia* (Heugh, Benson, Bogale & Gebre Yohannes, 2007). This evaluation drew attention to the 'washback effect' of the shift of focus towards English from 2002. At the request of the Ministry, it also included a set of recommendations to realign implementation and planning activities with the trilingual education policy which had been promulgated in 1994, and confirmed in the 1995 Constitution of the country and also in *The Implementation of the Education and Training Policy* (Ministry of Education, 2002). The policy includes: local/home language instruction for local horizontal socio-economic participation; the national 'working' language (Amharic) for regional and inter-regional participation; and English for higher education and international communication. In practice this means that students who have Amharic, the national 'working' language as their home/first language, need only learn Amharic and English in school. They thus have a bilingual education. In theory, it was intended that the 73% of students who have Ethiopian languages other than Amharic as their home/first language would have a trilingual education: local language, Amharic for wider national communication and English.<sup>1</sup>

The Ministry of Education in Ethiopia had intended to modify language education policy subsequent to the completion of a Report on the Medium of Instruction in Ethiopian Primary Schools (Heugh, Benson, Bogale and Gebre Yohannes, 2007). However, this has been shelved and the consequences of the emphasis towards English have become increasingly apparent.

## **Background**

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<sup>1</sup> I should like to acknowledge the helpful comments and suggestions of two reviewers on an earlier draft of this article; and also Carol Benson, Berhanu Bogale and Mekonnen Alemu Gebre Yohannes, who were co-researchers on a country-wide study of language education in Ethiopia during 2006.

In post-colonial Africa, while most countries have followed European or North American trends, there have been at least three significant examples of linguistically diverse, system-wide, school education policy and planning activities. Each of these has emerged from socio-political considerations within its specific ecology. They are: South Africa from 1955 – 1975; Guinea-Conakry from 1968 – 1984; and more recently, Ethiopia from 1991<sup>2</sup> onwards. In each of these cases, linguistic diversity was or has been implemented in the form of first /local language (usually known in African countries as ‘mother tongue’, ‘langue maternelle’ or ‘lingua materna’) medium education for eight years of school.<sup>3</sup> In the South African example, this was implemented swiftly, at minimal cost, with lexicography and terminology development, text-book translation, and teacher education (Mahlalela-Thusi & Heugh, 2002). However, in case of both South Africa and Guinea-Conakry, policy and implementation were also very much part of authoritarian political agendas (discriminatory and segregationist in South Africa; a totalitarian version of socialism in Guinea-Conakry). In these two examples, policy was accompanied by a combination of vertical and horizontal language education plans which privileged the speakers of the language/s used for high status functions of political-economic control while limiting the functional use of horizontal languages and hence their speakers, in high status domains beyond school education. In South Africa, access to power was via the vertical language of rule (Afrikaans and/ or English) rather than any of the indigenous African languages. Thus, within two decades, civil society rejected the educational emphasis on horizontal linguistic diversity (multiple use of local languages/mother tongues) on the basis that this was a ruse for political and economic exclusion. In the case of Guinea Conakry, the opposition was to Sekou Touré’s style of governance which was intimately associated with his heavy-handed rejection of all things French (White Oyler, 2001). Civil society in each case came to associate access to the vertical language/s of power and capital as possible only if local languages were de-emphasised or removed from the educational equation. Given obvious signifiers of privilege attached to the language of power, citizens recognised that any inclusive and symbiotic relationship amongst the languages of their linguistic repertoires held little cachet in economic, political and other markets of prestige at state, regional or international levels. Political leaders and high-profile business persons conduct(ed) their business in an international language of wider communication. Despite the expectation of civil society and despite each country having a colonial history of English or French administration, wider access

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<sup>2</sup> In this case, implementation preceded policy, which was formalised in 1994.

<sup>3</sup> While sociolinguists in western countries have come to problematise the term, ‘mother tongue’ or ‘mother language’, as one which in its literal sense is a misnomer, linguistic communities in developing countries use the term in more figurative, often plural, ways. For this reason, the term will be used here as reflected in the discourses of the speech communities.

to power has not followed the return to English-mainly education in South Africa or French-mainly education in Guinea-Conakry. Similar language education practices which accord greater emphasis to English, French, Portuguese or Spanish have not yet deepened democratic access anywhere else in Africa.

Ethiopia and Eritrea<sup>4</sup> are the most recent examples of the accommodation and promotion of linguistically diverse education systems, sensitive to both the horizontal and vertical use of languages in the country. Policy and implementation are very much part of a nation-building agenda in Ethiopia, and they are particularly instructive as they coincide with significant changes within the international community between 1990 and 2010. Ethiopia is the only country in Africa which, except for two short periods of Italian occupation, has never been colonised and does not have a history of colonial rule accompanied by an international language of administration. Thus, policy decisions have been framed from within Ethiopia rather than from without, and education has taken a path quite different from other African countries. This does not mean that Ethiopia is immune to the influence and allure of international languages of wider communication; but it does mean that the preferred international language, English, has very limited functional use in the country. Its reach does not compare with that in countries which experienced long periods of British rule or post-colonial continued use of English for high level functions of legislation, politics, education and administration.

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries of the world, and is situated in the Horn of Africa in the North East corner of the continent. Government has implemented an Education and Training Policy (Ministry of Education, 1994) designed to accommodate nation-building, ethnolinguistic self-determination, and an international language of wider communication. It foregrounds the extended use of the local or regional language (also known as mother tongue) in addition to the further development of the national 'working' language, Amharic, and English, within a bilingual and multilingual system. Although the implementation of this policy has been complicated, vexed, and often convoluted, it nevertheless offers compelling evidence that it is possible to establish a contemporary bi/multilingual education system, even in a poor country. Recent critiques and analyses of this policy include Wagaw (1999), Cohen (2008) and Smith (2008). Wagaw and Cohen express reservations about this policy and the likelihood that it might privilege more powerful and numerous ethnolinguistic communities, and thereby marginalise others. Ongoing debates in the country attest to this but also to other positions.

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<sup>4</sup> Owing to ongoing civil strife in Eritrea, implementation has been very uneven and delayed or derailed, and this case is not discussed here.

Both Cohen and Smith acknowledge that the policy has resulted in higher primary school enrolment and retention. Smith also offers a nuanced critique of the complex politics of language in which she points towards both positive and negative aspects of policy in relation to a broadening of civil society participation. In 2006, the Ministry of Education commissioned a *Study of Medium of Instruction in Ethiopian Primary Schools*, the Report of which evaluates the implementation of the policy through the education system and provides recommendations for further adjustments to policy and planning (Heugh et al., 2007). Data collected from fieldwork in eight of the nine regions and one of the two city states during the course of this study, triangulated with system-wide assessment of educational achievement in 2000, 2004, and with subsequent data in 2008, show positive educational outcomes for students in a multilingual education system. It is argued in Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas (2010) that the Ethiopian case offers the international research the most comprehensive data on the relationship between medium of instruction and learning achievement to date, specifically in relation to: language policy and planning theory; and theory of first language / mother tongue, bilingual, multilingual and minority education.

The discussion of language education planning in Ethiopia, in this article, does not focus on the educational achievements found in the study *per se*, since these are discussed elsewhere (cf. Heugh, Benson, Gebre Yohannes & Bogale, 2010). Instead, the discussion here uses the educational achievement as a backdrop against which to distinguish between ‘forward’ and ‘reverse’ planning. Forward planning refers to the identification of planning activities which are designed to implement explicit policy, while reverse planning refers to planning activities which undermine and/ or negatively alters the trajectory of the ‘overt’ policy as set out in legislation. Data collected during the study referred to above will be discussed in order to draw attention to the vulnerabilities of language policy once a chain reaction of reverse planning comes into play. The discussion will conclude with a set of suggested language planning instruments and strategies which might strengthen or realign the explicit federal state and regional policies.

### **1. A brief sociolinguistic description of Ethiopia**

According to the latest census data, the population of Ethiopia is 73.9 million (Population Census Commission, PCC, 2008), making the country the second most populous in Sub-Saharan Africa. A majority, 85%, make their living from agriculture and Ethiopia has a significantly large pastoralist (nomadic) community (PACT Ethiopia, 2008) that traverses at least five of the Eastern regions of the country. Linguistic and ethnic diversity is a distinguishing socio-cultural

and political characteristic of Ethiopia. Different sources show that the country is comprised of no fewer than 80 ethnic groups with distinct languages and/or dialects and cultures. The major ethnic groups include Oromo (34.5 %), Amhara (27 %), Tigray (6 %) and Somali (6%) (Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia, CSA, 2008). Approximately 75% of the population, therefore, has one of the corresponding languages, viz. Oromifa/Afan Oromo, Amharic, Tigrinya and Somali as mother tongue. The table below provides data on major Ethiopian ethnic groups which are regarded as closely aligned with corresponding languages.

**Table 1: Ethiopian Census Data 1994 and 2007 compared**

**Percentage Distribution of Major Ethnic Groups: 2007**

Ethnic Group	2007		1994	
	Population		Population	
	Number	%	Number	%
Oromo	25,488,344	34.5	17,080,318	32.1
Amhara	19,867,817	26.9	16,007,933	30.1
Somali	4,581,793	6.2	3,160,540	5.9
Tigris*	4,483,776	6.1	3,284,568	6.2
Sidama	2,966,377	4.0	1,842,314	3.5
Gurage*	1,867,350	2.5	2,290,274	4.3
Welaita*	1,707,074	2.3	1,269,216	2.4
Hadiya	1,284,366	1.7	927,933	1.7
Afar	1,276,372	1.7	979,367	1.8
Gamo	1,107,163	1.5	719,847	1.4
Note: * There are various different spelling conventions used for Ethiopian peoples and languages.				

(Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia, CSA, 2008, Table 2.2, p 16).

Although Wagaw (1999) argues that most of the 75% of Ethiopians with languages other than Amharic are able to communicate in this language, other data suggest that this is unlikely since formal education was limited to urban settings and generally in decline prior to 1994, with the majority of people sparsely distributed across vast expanses of rural and semi-desert environs.

English, as the country's preferred international language of wider communication, is spoken by 0.3% of the population (CSA, 2007). It is seldom encountered outside of federal government offices and then in the context of communication with development agency personnel, diplomats, advisors and consultants from elsewhere. It is also found in universities where it is the medium of instruction in practice. Its use in school education is characterised more by wishful thinking than functional efficacy. Unlike French in most of West Africa or English in many other African countries, English does not function as a second language, even in the urban areas. It has no widespread functional use in domains beyond overly optimistic attempts to use it in formal education.

## **2. Brief History of Language Education Policy and Implementation in Ethiopia 1900-1990**

Despite a long history of education and literacy in the ancient sacred (Semitic) language of Coptic Christianity, Ge'ez, which dates back to at least the second century CE, literacy practices remained the purview of a minority of educated, usually religious, leaders prior to the establishment of the first school, Menelik II Primary School, in Addis Ababa in 1908. Secular education was opposed by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on the grounds of possible disruption to religious and social norms and thus state provided educational expansion was only possible after political changes in the mid-1950s. Ethiopia is distinct from other African countries in that it was never colonised, although it did experience two short periods of Italian occupation, hence it does not have a colonial attachment to a European language. Early attachment to English was circumstantial and compounded after the British participated in the termination of the second Italian Occupation, 1935-1941. Under the Italians, however, a regional diversification of seven languages of instruction was introduced between 1935 and 1941 (Pankhurst, 1972). Political changes in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were accompanied by the elevation of Amharic as the language of legislation, administration and education during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1955-1974). Speakers of other languages, particularly Oromifa (also known as Afan Oromo) who outnumbered first language speakers of Amharic, felt particularly aggrieved and marginalised. A socialist regime, the Dergue, came into power in 1974, claiming to support ethnic and linguistic diversity, but this did not dislodge Amharic medium education for the minority of students who accessed formal education until the early 1990s. In fact, during this period, the expansion of education which occurred during the period of Haile Selassie's rule, atrophied (cf. Smith, 2008). However, it was under the Dergue that non-formal education received attention. Several mass literacy campaigns beginning in the mid-1970s involved the development of orthographies in Amharic script for Amharic, Tigrinya,

Oromifa (Afan Oromo), Somali and Afar, and this was expanded to include fifteen languages by the early 1980s (Markakis, 2003). While these, like other mass literacy campaigns (e.g. in Mozambique at the time), had little residual longevity or success, the processes paved the way for later developments in formal education (Smith, 2008: 221).

### **3. A Decade of Linguistic Diversity in Education 1994-2004 – An Ethiopian Plan**

The last two decades of education and planning in Africa need to be understood against a backdrop of factors which coalesced from the early 1990s, including:

- rapid globalisation and spread of the ideology of a Western political-economy;
- the unprecedented spread of English as the foremost International Language of Wider Communication in tandem with the revolution in information technology;
- significant political change in many parts of the world including most African countries;
- the international acceptance of frameworks for educational reform and development subsequent to the UNESCO *Education for All* Conference in Jomtien in 1990.

In regard to the last of these, UNESCO's Millennium Development Goals include ones for universal primary education (UPE) and equal access to education for girls. These goals are particularly relevant for Ethiopia since the country experienced a very low general enrolment rate for primary education (GER 1); and owing to abductions, early marriage and domestic duties, a particularly high rate of attrition of girls prior to the end of primary school.

In Ethiopia, fifteen years of repressive rule of the Dergue came to an end in 1990; and the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) came to power in 1991. The TGE immediately set about implementing nation-building strategies, including the right to ethnolinguistic self-determination and a federal style of government with nine regions (Afar; Amhara; Benishangul Gumuz; Gambella; Harari; Oromiya; Somali; Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples/SNNPR; and Tigray) and two city-states, administratively treated as regions (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa). Each region was divided into zones, which in turn were subdivided into woredas, and these further subdivided into the smallest unit of local government, kebeles.

Immediately, from 1991, and prior to the formalisation of policy, Amharic, Oromifa, Tigrinya, Wolaita and Sidama (five) languages were introduced as languages of teaching and learning in the regions or zones where these languages were in use. Orthographic conventions for Cushitic

languages (e.g. Oromifa) changed from those developed in Amharic (a Semitic language) script during the literacy campaigns of the Dergue (Smith 2008:222). Plans were developed for the inclusion of Somali, Kambatta, Hadiya and Gedeo as languages of teaching and learning by 1993. The TGE formulated the National Education and Training Policy (Ministry of Education 1994) which sets out the language policy, and this was further formalised in the Ethiopian Constitution of 1995. Once education policy had been set at federal level, the eleven Regional Education Bureaus were given the authority to implement policy according to the principle of self-determination and right of communities to decide the languages of instruction.

The policy effectively has three categories of languages for use in education:

- The regional/local language of the community (which may be Amharic for about a quarter of the student cohort across the country, but mainly in Amhara and Addis Ababa) is to be used throughout eight years of primary education (which is divided into two cycles: Primary Cycle I, grades 1 to 4; and Primary Cycle II, grades 5-8).
- The national working language, Amharic, is to be taught as a second language for wider inter-regional communication and access to socio-political-economic goods at a federal level (usually beginning in grade 3 in regions where Amharic is a second language).
- An international language for wider communication, English, is to facilitate access to the global community and higher education (taught as a subject from the first grade and intended as a medium of instruction from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade; i.e., beginning of secondary school).

This means that speakers of Amharic are required to learn Amharic and English, whereas 73% of students who are speakers of other languages are expected to learn three languages, mother tongue/home language plus Amharic plus English. In practice, though, mother tongue provision does not reach all of these students, and where no provision is made (for between 13 and 15% of students), Amharic is the default language of instruction in Ethiopian state schools.<sup>5</sup> Since, the constitution also allows for regional and ethnolinguistic self-determination, there are differences in how the two or three language formula is interpreted and implemented across the country (see Benson, Heugh, Bogale & Gebre Yohannes, 2010). The policy is also thus geared towards a mix of horizontal and vertical language use where:

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<sup>5</sup> These students are members of small minorities in SNNPR as well as speakers of Afar in Afar Region. Current developments in Benishangul Gumuz, include the development of and introduction of languages of this region into early primary. However, since this is in its early stages, students in this region are included in the 13% who do not currently access mother tongue education.

- Regional or national languages are used and developed for horizontal communicative functions of daily transactions and local agriculture and economic activity.
- The national working language is intended to facilitate linguistic portability across and amongst regions. This constitutes a vertical shift up one level in the hierarchy of language use, but the fairly widespread use of Amharic in the urban areas of all regions means that it functions as a lingua franca and thus serves many horizontal communicative functions. At the same time, since power still resides within Amharic dominant parts of the country; particularly, in Addis Ababa, the federal capital, Amharic continues to be associated with vertical use at the federal level and potential exclusion.
- English is prioritised as the language of secondary and higher education, and access to the international community. English is thus associated with access to scarce, difficult to reach resources and prestige, and particularly, with access to global goods and capital. Since few will reach the upper levels of socio-economic leverage, English is thus also associated with a re-hierarchisation of society towards global networks but within a narrow set of vertically arranged functions for practical purposes across much of the country. In practical terms, English is a foreign language to the majority of Ethiopians and seldom encountered in daily life.

This policy, a choice of three languages for most students and two for those who speak a national language of wider communication (Amharic), coincides with Laitin's predictive theory of language policies in multilingual societies, particularly in South Asia and Africa (Laitin, 1992). Laitin posits in order to ensure the communicative mobility of citizens, they are likely to require two languages if their home language is a language of wider national communication (i.e., the national language plus an international language of wider communication). Three languages are required by citizens whose language is a regional language different from the national language; and four languages are required by those who use a minority or local language other than the regional or national language. Laitin's formula is known as the 3+/-1 policy (see also Kamwangamalu, 2011; Baldauf & Chua, 2011).

### **3.1 Implementation of policy in the school system**

The policy was easier to implement in some regions than others, and earlier language development activities facilitated swift implementation, with the greatest advantage retained by Amharic. In Amhara Region and Addis Ababa, implementation was interpreted to apply to

the dominant ethnolinguistic community, viz. the Amhara (and for a few other communities in Amhara Region). It needs to be noted, however, that approximately 50% of people in Addis Ababa Region are speakers of languages other than Amharic, yet the education bureau in this city-state offers only Amharic medium in primary. Thus about half of the students receive second language medium education in Amharic, which is clearly inequitable, particularly as the city-state has greater access to resources for language development than other regions. Surprisingly, even though Amharic had a head start on other languages, and was initially sustained for eight years of education in Amhara Region, no attempt was made to implement more than six of the eight years of Amharic medium primary education in Addis Ababa, or in those regions in which Amhara is the de facto second language used as medium of instruction (viz. Afar and Benishangul Gumuz, see below). While Amharic was used for eight years of primary education in Amhara Region from 1994-2006, its use was reduced to six years for some subjects from 2006 onwards (see further discussion below).

Three regions with languages other than Amharic have implemented and continue to implement eight years of mother tongue medium education: Oromiya, Tigray and Somali. The conditions in these regions are conducive to greater synchrony with policy. There are more speakers of Oromifa than any other linguistic group, and this group has been more politicised along ethnolinguistic lines than others because of marked marginalisation and subjugation by Amharic speaking administrations since the reign of Haile Selassie. Speakers of Oromifa were, thus, anxious for the opportunity to use and extend this language in formal education. The earlier use of Amharic orthography during the literacy campaigns of the Dergue was rejected and Oromifa-speakers insisted on a Latin based orthography.

Somali Region borders Somalia, a country which engaged in systematic language education development in Somali language in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Thus this region has benefitted from being able to borrow language development resources from across the border (despite ongoing military conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia). However, with the exception of the capital, Jijiga, the population is sparsely dispersed across a large area of semi-desert. Provision of school beyond primary has only been possible in Jijiga, and thus limited. In Jijiga itself, there is evidence of a class divide where children of the relatively well-to-do attend private English medium schools, even if they are speakers of Somali, while economically less well-off children attend Somali medium primary schools. Tigray, the region from which the political rebellion against the Dergue was led in the early 1990s, is highly politicised and committed to the use of Tigrinya as the medium of instruction in schools. Student achievement across the curriculum, in system-wide assessments in 2000, 2004 and 2008, is higher in Tigray

than in any other region (MoE/NOE 2001, MoE/NOE 2004, GEQAEA 2008, Mekonnen Alemu Gebre Yohannes, 2009).

In Afar, a particularly poor and scarcely populated region characterised by predominantly pastoralist communities, Amharic (the second language) continues to be used as the medium of instruction in formal education. Efforts to develop Afar language for education have only reached the three years of alternative basic education designed for pastoralist (nomadic) communities which tend to be distant from the few urban centres of this region.

Gambella Region has implemented four years of mother tongue medium in Anguak, Nuer and Meshenger, followed by a transition to English medium in the fifth grade. This region shares a border with Southern Sudan, is beset with brigands, civil disturbance and tropical disease. Education provision succumbs to these difficulties and this may account for a lack of further language development.

The more heterogeneous regions are Benishangul Gumuz with at least five local languages, and SNNPR with more than 40 languages. Development in Benishangul Gumuz has been delayed, and it is only in the last few years that work has begun to develop languages of this region for use in early primary (assisted by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, SIL). The region has chosen thus far to default to Amharic for six years of primary.

One might have expected development to be particularly slow in SNNPR, the linguistically most heterogeneous of the regions, but this is not the case. Almost immediately after the Dergue regime ended, the region was able to allocate resources to the development of eight languages for the first six years of school, until 2006. The proximity and proliferation of ethnolinguistic groups in this region has drawn heated discussion and more apparent political debate on the language education policy than in other regions since 1994. This was particularly in relation to a proposed 'harmonisation' of four languages, Wolaita, Gamo, Gofa and Dawro, regarded by linguists as closely related, resulting in an ethnic-based civil revolt in 1999. In 2004, the Regional Education Bureau (REB) introduced another four languages, thus increasing the number of mediums of instruction in the first cycle of primary education (grades 1-4) to twelve. However, the REB simultaneously introduced an earlier (in grade 5) transition to English medium. REB officials accounted for this change of policy implementation as a result of an effort to circumvent linguistic rivalries as well as competition for scarce resources. The earlier move to English medium was also cast as responsive to the clamour for earlier English from some communities. There is a default to Amharic (second language) medium for the first four years of school in those communities which do not (yet) enjoy mother tongue medium.

Harari is a small region dominated by the relatively thriving city of Harar and surrounded by lush farmlands. The language policy is implemented via a mix of six (for some subjects) and eight years of mother tongue medium (for other subjects) in three language options (Harari, Oromifa and Amharic). There is an over-supply of early primary teachers who are also able to teach English as a subject at early primary level. Thus, the Regional Education Bureau has been able to provide additional English language teachers for students in the first grade of school (two teachers in place of one in many grade one classrooms), while maintaining a multilingual set of options throughout primary school.

It is clear that on the one hand, the implementation of a multilingual (trilingual) primary education system across Ethiopia has been complex and uneven. Just as Wagaw (1999) and more recently, Cohen (2008), have warned, several numerically small language communities have not yet received mother tongue education. Alternatively, Cohen argues that the quality of provision is variable and thus potentially inequitable. So the policy thus has the potential for exacerbating inequity or further marginalising smaller language communities as much as it did for broadening participation of larger communities. However, there has been a significant broadening of access to education for students in languages which they understand, and both Cohen (2008) and Smith (2008) point out that the policy has resulted in increased enrolment and retention in primary school. This has been particularly significant in relation to increased participation of girls in education. It also needs to be noted that the reach of home language education to about 87% of primary school students is far greater in Ethiopia than in any other linguistically diverse country at this time.

**Table 2: Language models represented by region from 1994 onwards**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Years of mother tongue medium</b>	<b>Grade in which there is a switch to English medium</b>
Oromiya* Tigray Somali Amhara (before 2006)	8	9
Amhara (since 2006) Harari	6 for maths and science; 8 for other subjects	7 maths and science; 9 other subjects

Addis Ababa Dire Dawa** SNNPR (until 2004)	6	7
SNNPR (since 2005/6) Gambella	4	5
Afar Benishangul Gumuz***	0 ( 6 years - L2 Amharic)	7

\* Afan Oromo/Oromifa is also offered in Oromifa-speaking streams in other regions where there are substantial numbers of speakers; e.g., Amhara region.

\*\* One subject, civics, is taught in MT for 8 years.

\*\*\* Three languages are currently being prepared for introduction in early primary.

[Adapted from Heugh, Benson, Gebre Yohannes & Bogale, 2010: 290].

### 3.2 Teacher education

Between 1994 and 2006, significant progress was made in terms of teacher education in multiple languages in Ethiopia. It was intended that the language of teacher education would correspond with the language of instruction in primary and secondary school. The regions which were able to support eight years of mother tongue medium (MTM) have also been those which have implemented a teacher education program to match the medium of instruction, viz. Amhara, Tigray, Oromiya and Somali. In SNNPR since medium of instruction was developed for the first six years of school in eight languages, teacher education did correspond with this provision until 2006. In the other regions, teacher education has been in the dominant regional languages in relation to the first four years of primary education (or Amharic in Benishangul Gumuz; with no teacher education available in Afar). Subsequent to changes in the Ministry of Education between 2002 and 2005 and to an increasing reorientation towards a more significant role for English, teacher education in Ethiopian languages appears to be changing direction towards earlier use of English medium teacher training. Since 2006, teacher education in Ethiopian languages has been reduced to match only the first four years of primary school in all regions except Addis Ababa. Here teacher training (even for early primary school teachers) is now entirely in English. This is despite the reality that student teachers for primary classes are generally students who exited from the school system after the 10<sup>th</sup> grade because they had not achieved high enough scores, particularly in English, to take them into the last two years of secondary school (known as preparatory years for university study). In other words, primary school student teachers enter teacher training

institutes and colleges with low levels of English language proficiency as well as a limited grasp of the secondary school curriculum.

An *English Language Improvement Programme* (ELIP) was initiated by the federal ministry in 2002, the overt aim of which was to increase English language proficiency of teacher trainers and student teachers in the colleges of education. Each teacher-training college was required to establish an *English Language Improvement Centre*. According to the head of this centre at Kotebe College in Addis Ababa in 2006, one of his responsibilities was to monitor the use of English medium by his peers during their training of teachers (Personal Communication, October 2006). However, given the practicalities of effective communication with students, most teacher educators had been using Amharic or code-switching between Amharic and English. So, the monitoring process involved the rather ambiguous responsibility of noting non-compliance with the change of policy towards English as well as an understandable resentment from those being monitored. During field visits to Kotebe College in Addis Ababa in 2006, it was obvious to the visitors that student-teachers experienced great difficulty with English. A senior staff member commented that: “students pass through the college untouched” by the teacher-education curriculum (Personal Communication, October 2006). Even the head of the English Language Improvement Centre at the college is convinced that students leave the college unprepared to teach English as a subject or to teach through English as a medium of education.

A second strand to the *English Language Improvement Programme* (ELIP) was the conceptualisation in 2004 and roll-out of a cascade-model in-service teacher education programme to improve the English language proficiency of the 140 000 teachers in the Ethiopian system between 2005 and 2006. During this period, 42% of the entire federal teacher education budget was re-directed towards the ELIP-Cascade. The programme involved training of 200 trainers of trainers and 1000 trainers. The in-service teacher-training component comprised 200 hours: 120 hours of intensive contact time and 80 hours of distance education (McLaughlin, Woubishet, Fite & Kasa, 2005). The emphasis towards increasing the English language proficiency of teachers displaced the earlier emphasis on preparing teachers to teach the curriculum in Ethiopian languages. This practice contributed to the earlier use of English as the language of training teachers in the colleges of education for the second cycle of primary (grades 5-8), as previously discussed.

It needs to be noted here that the ELIP interventions were devised by UK consultants to the ministry. An analysis of the ELIP documentation shows no recognition of the different contexts

in which English functions as a second language (e.g., for migrants) in the UK, whereas in Ethiopia, it is a foreign language, where the language has almost zero diffusion or functional use. It needs to be further noted that the consultants proceeded with a cascade model of language training in this context although there is evidence of such models failing, even in second language contexts, e.g., the cascade model for curriculum change in South Africa between 1997 and 2005. ELIP documentation in fact encourages an unrealistic and unattainable position towards English in Ethiopia, as the “cornerstone in the development of Ethiopia’s commerce, communication systems, technology and education” (McLaughlin et al., 2005, pp. 1).

### **Terminology Development and Text book provision**

Until 2000, there were only two universities with departments of linguistics: Addis Ababa University and Alemaya (now known as Haramaya) University located between Dire Dawa and Harar. While there has been a rapid expansion of provision of higher education (state establishment of universities in each of the regions, and a proliferation of private institutions) the early development of languages used by smaller communities was mainly assisted from the Ethiopian Languages Research Centre based at the University of Addis Ababa. The linguists at this centre continue to work with communities across the country in the Regional Education Bureaus, the Zonal Educational Bureaus and at Woreda level. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) also supports language development, for example, in Benishangul Gumuz. In addition, the new universities established to provide higher education in each region, e.g., Mekelle University in Tigray, Jimma University in Oromiya, and Arba Minch University in SNNPR are able to support linguistic development activities closer to the Regional Education Bureaus. Although it will take some time to grow the necessary cohort of Ethiopian post-graduates and academics to fill university posts currently occupied by foreign academics, resources have nevertheless increased significantly, consequently providing greater access to higher education as well as community development services since 2000. The conditions for further language development and support are moving in a positive direction.

The Institute for Curriculum Development Research (ICDR) in Addis Ababa has been responsible for secondary school curriculum materials and English language materials for use in primary schools across the country. The responsibility for the development of other primary school materials has been decentralised to the Regional Education Bureaus (REBs). SNNPR, however, has used the Amharic versions of textbooks and translated these into the twelve languages selected for use in this region. Linguists have worked together with teams of

textbook developers and translators and the language planning activities have been further decentralised to Zonal and sometimes Woreda Educational Bureaus in this, the most linguistically heterogeneous region.

There has been criticism of textbook provision across the Ethiopian system (e.g. Smith 2008). There is undoubtedly unevenness in terms of timely delivery (books are frequently not delivered by the beginning of the school year, and usually not in sufficient numbers). This complaint, though, is one which is common across sub-Saharan African countries and it is not necessarily linked to the linguistically diverse or decentralised system. The content of the textbooks reflects the curriculum design, which is content-heavy. Given that these are regionally or locally produced materials, they do not have the user-friendly appearance of the glossy materials in evidence in resource-rich countries. However, during fieldwork and data collection in 2006 (Heugh et al., 2007), the research team examined textbooks in each of the 99 classrooms visited across nine regions. In almost every case, each student had at least one textbook to take home and use for homework tasks. While there are situations where students have to share textbooks, provision in Ethiopia appears to be more comprehensive than in many African countries which rely on multinational publishers and expensive textual materials. By way of comparison, in South Africa where the publishing industry produces very expensive, aesthetically pleasing learning materials, these seldom find their way into the hands of students. In this setting, poor rural and township students are almost never allowed to take books home for reading or homework tasks (e.g. Reeves et al., 2008). The Ethiopian situation, poor though it may be, is one in which decentralised production and local publishing and printing industries have managed to place (at least some) books into the hands of students to a far greater extent than in significantly wealthier South Africa. These books are not glamorous. They are printed on white paper with no illustrations in colour, yet they are functional and inexpensive. If students lose or damage them, replacement is not prohibitively expensive.

Interviews and focus group discussions with regional officials and community stakeholders gave the research team to understand that decentralisation of educational responsibility has contributed to capacity-building in regard to local and regional language planning and development activities, curriculum and textbook preparation, and printing and publishing (cf. Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Hogan-Brun, 2010).

#### **Brief notes on achievement.**

The government of Ethiopia has been anxious to increase education provision and retention. During visits to schools across nine regions it was clear that all schools were monitoring school enrolments, and keeping statistical records of gender, retention and absenteeism. Since 2000, the federal ministry has insisted on regular system-wide assessments of students at grade 4 and grade 8, every four years. Student achievement across the curriculum shows that students who have eight years of mother tongue medium (MTM) education have higher achievement scores across the curriculum, especially in mathematics and science. Students who have six years of MTM demonstrate the next highest achievement, followed by students with four years of MTM; they are followed by students who only have Amharic as a second language medium prior to the switch over to English medium (Heugh et al., 2010). Students with three languages (local language plus Amharic plus English) have higher levels of achievement across the curriculum than those students with only Amharic and English. Only those students with eight years of MTM have a good chance of proceeding through secondary school and beyond. This appears so because, despite the emphasis towards English, limited functional use of this language means that it remains a foreign language in Ethiopia and its use as a medium of education blocks effective access to the curriculum.

#### **4. A Change of Direction – adjusting towards the global pull of English**

Changes of leadership in the Ministry of Education between 2002 and 2005 resulted in a series of significant changes for teacher education in general and in relation to English in particular, as previously indicated. There were two significant developments in 2002. The first is the publication of *The Education and Training Policy and its Implementation* (Ministry of Education, 2002), in which the eight years of mother tongue policy is defended with vigour, along with contemporary language acquisition and bilingual/multilingual educational theory. The second is a response to a growing perception that English as an international language of wider communication represents the key to global participation. It is not clear whether this is independent of or in tandem with the intervention of foreign advisors. What is clear is that foreign agencies have offered ill-conceived advice on how best to address this matter in Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup>

A 'silver bullet' solution to increase access to English was offered by consultants from the UK to the minister. This advice resulted in the minister's decision to initiate the two-pronged

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<sup>6</sup> It needs to be mentioned that there are several consortia of development agencies working in Ethiopia. Most of these are deeply sensitive to the complexities of the country and have made significant contributions to development. The criticism here is particularly in relation to advice given in relation to English language provision through education.

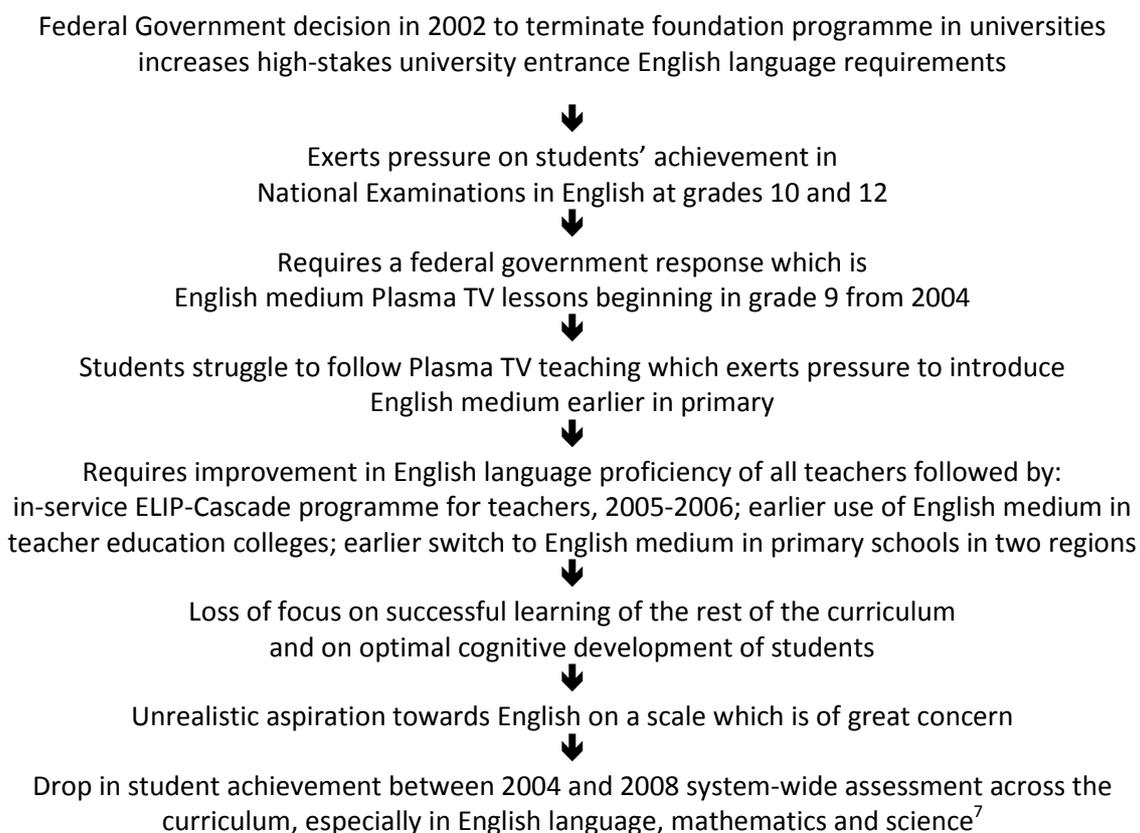
*English Language Improvement Programme* within teacher-education colleges and in the cascade provision of English to all teachers in the system. It was hoped that, once teachers' own proficiency in English had been enhanced, they would be able to teach students through English, effectively. This aspiration occurred in a context where only 0.3% of the population can communicate comfortably in English. To date, no evidence has materialised to demonstrate that this intervention has rendered a positive return on investment. Rather, the reverse appears more likely. Teachers have reported that they have been unable to sustain any progress they made in strengthening their English proficiency since they have few opportunities for communicative exchange with English speakers. As a result, communicative practices revert to local language use in school corridors, in teacher staffrooms, in classrooms and in the local communities. An unintended consequence of the English language cascade programme was that teachers came to believe this approach would equip them with the English language proficiency that would permit them to escape teaching, to enter university and to move on to higher paid employment. Student achievement since 2004 has declined across the board, particularly in English, mathematics and science, and few if any teachers have found their way to more lucrative endeavours.

A third, related development in higher education, was the rapid expansion of the availability of universities through the regions and a resultant increase in the cost of higher education. One way of reducing costs was thought to be through eliminating the first year foundation programme, known as 'Freshman's English' or the 'Freshman's Programme'. Until 2002, first year university students were provided with a one year foundation programme during which time they were able to focus on strengthening their English language proficiency and develop academic skills. The effect of the elimination of this option exerted pressure downwards on the secondary school system to ensure that students exiting at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade had the English language proficiency to meet the requirements of undergraduate study. In turn, this development exerted pressure further down the secondary school system. In order to address the perceived deficiencies of teachers' English language skills in teaching students from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade onwards, it was decided to introduce 'Plasma television lessons in English' across the secondary school system.

This addition constituted an expensive plan to implement. Plasma TV lessons were sourced from South Africa, taught by teachers who were used to South African students who have English as second language and where English is used for multiple functions across the country. Thus, the speed at which the 'plasma teachers' speak, and the lexical and syntactic content of their discourse, does not match the needs of Ethiopian students (Heugh et al., 2007; Bitew,

2008). While this policy change shows little positive effect for students or the education system, it has nevertheless been lucrative for the South African programme providers and the multinational television supplier/s external to Ethiopia.

At the time that the Ministry of Education's *Study on Medium of Instruction in Primary Schools in Ethiopia* was underway, the research team identified the trajectory of what appeared to be a process of reverse planning in which the 'washback effect' (following Messick 1996) of English through the system was having a series of knock-on effects, with an incrementally evolving degree of pressure exerted on primary education as follows:



(Adapted from Heugh et al ., 2007: 110).

From a planning point of view, one or two apparently benign interventions from above, in the absence of a thorough analysis of their implications, can reverse the trajectory of policy and its implication. In this case, the original policy although followed by *The Implementation of the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia* (MoE, 2002) has been undermined at significant speed via a change to the provision of English language at university entrance and increasing pressure to enhance the English language proficiency of teachers. Although the policy

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<sup>7</sup> This last stage was predicted by the researchers in 2006, and evident in the subsequent 2008 assessment data (GEQAEA, 2008; Mekonnen Alemu Gebre Yohannes, 2009).

implementation document discusses and defends the original policy, it does not offer a robust set of guidelines and implementable plans accompanied by timeframes and procedures to strengthen the policy or to ensure that the English language initiatives synchronise with, rather than compromise, the multilingual objectives of the policy itself.

### **Resource options for further language planning in Ethiopia**

The progress made in developing Ethiopian languages as languages of teaching and learning between the early 1990s and 2006 was extraordinary in the context of a country which faced famine, regularly alternating drought and flooding, low levels of literacy (25% in the early 1990s), low enrolment in education, and few post-graduate academics. At the time of the *Study on Medium of Instruction* in 2006, 23 languages had been developed for use as mediums of instruction in primary education. By 2009, along with expansion of university provision to each region, and local expertise, development in another 13 languages for similar use was advanced. Decentralisation of educational planning, provision and responsibility was a driving force behind these developments. However, pressure for English, even in the face of a competing discourse favouring Ethiopian languages within the Ministry of Education, has resulted in a series of actions which have undermined many of the local and regional achievements of the first ten to fifteen years of a multilingual policy.

If one or two relatively minor strategies might undo policy, then it is possible that one or two other strategies might reposition policy along its original trajectory. The research team developed a set of language policy and planning recommendations for the Ministry of Education. These included status, corpus and acquisition planning actions, timeframes, agents/agencies and an indication of costs. Although Smith (2008) frequently cites cost as one of the limitations of the language education policy, she does not provide any analytical evidence of this or the comparative costs of alternative policies (e.g. Grin, 2005). Given the existing resources in Ethiopia and increased accessibility of universities and other support mechanisms, it is argued here that the cost of resourcing multilingual modes of education is less than that of resourcing an alternative, such as an English dominant system. The cost of the ELIP interventions (42% of the teacher education budget), and plasma television teaching, has not yet borne fruit (cf. also Bitew, 2008). What we know is that academic achievement has fallen across the board by several percentage points subsequent to the implementation of these changes. In other contexts, this might be considered wasteful expenditure.

The research team suggested that (minor) interventions might stabilise the pressure towards English and reverse some of the unrealistic expectations which have been driving education

practice towards increasingly impossible objectives. These suggestions attempt to refocus on objectives that might contribute towards a coherent and workable language policy and implementation plan, including:

- cognitive development and academic achievement across the curriculum,
- higher rates of throughput in primary and secondary,
- bilingual/multilingual assessment of grade 10 and 12 students, and
- a re-introduction of the foundation programme for undergraduate students, but with a more contemporary focus on English for academic purposes or academic literacy in English.

(cf. Heugh et al., 2007: 124-125).

##### **5. Relevance to the centre within the context of increasing diversification**

In the context of a more nuanced understanding of globalisation:

- increasing diversification of metropolitan centres and unprecedented migration;
- China's entry to the World Trade Organisation and greater participation in the global economy; and
- South / South-East Asian niched call-centre industries;

the role of English as an international language of wider communication is being reconfigured in ways quite different from the halcyon days of the UK-North American dominance. Models, policies and plans to remediate English language provision beyond the English dominant societies of the West are unlikely to meet local requirements or match existing linguistic ecologies. What is important for Ethiopia is that commitments to the UNESCO frameworks for education, particularly in regard to universal primary education, gender equality, and quality are met. What is important for the international community, in this period of increasing diversity, is evidence that it is possible to implement a linguistically diverse education system, even in a poorly resourced country like Ethiopia. Students in such systems appear to demonstrate higher academic achievement in system-wide assessments than students in systems which are insensitive to linguistic diversity. It is also salutary that, despite the construction and positioning of education as defective in Africa, there are contemporary educational initiatives that demonstrate local and regional planning activities and a broadening of civil participation which are instructive for the West, even in countries characterised by poverty, famine, and pastoralism. However, such initiatives are also vulnerable to

inappropriate advice from without. It is this vulnerability that raises questions of ethical practice from external agents/agencies.

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