

## **Review of the PhD thesis**

### **The Agents (Students, Parents and Teachers) of Multilingualism in Oromia, Ethiopia**

This is my second review of Merga Feyera Wekjira's thesis. First, I will summarise my general impressions of the thesis, as well as my impressions about the revision made following the initial review. Then, retaining the points of my previous review, I will examine a few specific points.

In its current form, the dissertation has definitely changed for the better and is now more tightly structured than the version I reviewed for the mock exam. A newly included presentation of the researcher's positionality, details on the data collection process, and other changes, such as summaries of each chapter's objectives and a stronger internal structuring have improved the accessibility and readability of the text. The final version of the dissertation clearly shows the significant effort invested and the author's remarkable intellectual achievement. Each and every change made by the author enhanced the text, even if, perhaps due to time constraints, relatively few changes were made at the sentence level. This is why there are still some points that would have benefited from more attention.

As summarised in my previous review, the dissertation presents findings on language use, language proficiency, language attitude, and the multilingual personality of three groups of respondents approached with a questionnaire. The research questions and hypotheses were clearly developed, even in the previous version, and the methodology was well defined. In the present version, the objectives are also clearly presented due to a newly inserted introductory chapter (1.1 Framing the Study: Multilingualism and Educational Agents in Ethiopia). This thought-provoking chapter points out that the questions raised in the thesis stem from the contradiction that while language policy tends to be formulated from the top down, language practices are shaped from the bottom up. Agents of multilingualism have to navigate in this pulsating field of contradictions. These lines were also instructive for me because they clarified what I, as a reader and supervisor, should expect from the text. The introductory chapters of the previous version gave me the impression that recommending language policy guidelines was one of the main focuses. However, in the current version, it is clear why this is not the case and that the focus is on presenting the practices and ideologies of these multilingual agents. The simplified title of the dissertation greatly helped clarify these questions.

Overall, the main criticism of the line of argument in the thesis being underdeveloped was addressed in several ways. The narrative that I had missed, which makes the thesis more comprehensible, has now been constructed. I am pleased that the new version includes the circumstances and context of data collection, as well as the participants' introductions that I requested. The chapter on research ethics has also been appropriately revised. Unfortunately, it seems that there is no energy or time left to expand the conclusion. In my previous review, I wrote that the conclusion (Chapter 6) is less than two pages long and contains some generalities. Here, a sentence to which I directly objected, has been supplemented, but no other changes have been made.

Below, I will review the changes, based on certain points of my previous review.

1. My first comment was on the lack of coherence in the introduction. As already mentioned above, there is a clear and precise new subchapter (1.1), formulating research objectives and delivering a structural overview of the following chapters. The cohesion of the introduction was also improved by the fact that Merga removed a section of approximately one and a half

pages, presenting details about Ethiopia. I think these were very good decisions that addressed my concern on the introduction. I also wrote that a coherent historical overview with data and details, as well as a narrative description of political developments and language-policy transformations, which show the reader how the country's current ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity was achieved, should be provided at a later point. Although the information has now been consolidated in one place, as far as I can see, the text has not been substantially revised in this regard.

**2.** I missed a researcher positionality statement in the text. This is also addressed: now, Chapter 1.2 begins with a short paragraph of this kind, while in Chapter 1.3 there is more personal information about the linguistic background, the professional lifespan, and the affiliation of the candidate. The reader also receives information about his attitude towards multilingualism in his own teaching practices as a lecturer at Adigrat University in Ethiopia. This is a well-written, interesting, and meaningful new part of the thesis.

Just a remark at this point: Merga writes that in his everyday practices as a lecturer, he „attempted to explain lessons using multiple languages and allowed students to express themselves in the languages they were most comfortable with” and he ”required them to transcribe their responses into English, to align with academic standards”. He adds that ”today these practices are considered translingual pedagogy” (Canagarajah, 2013; García & Wei, 2014). I think that translingual pedagogy is much more than that; it is a pedagogical stance based on the innovative theoretical concept of the unitary linguistic repertoire, with far-reaching consequences in language philosophy and language pedagogy.

**3.** In the first review, I wrote that little was revealed about the research site and the respondents' socio-cultural and linguistic background. I suggested including a chapter, or sections within a chapter, on these issues to provide a detailed explanation of these factors. There is a relatively short new text in Chapter 1.6 ”Significance of This Study”, with some information on the above topics.

**4.** As already mentioned, Sections 3.4 (Methods of Data Collection), 3.5 (Ethical Considerations), and 3.6 (Limitations of the Methodology) are appropriately revised. Thank you for making these changes.

**5.** I drew attention to the fact that the thesis focuses on English, Amharic, and Afan Oromo, and it does not consider less widely spoken languages in Ethiopia. While it is now clear why this focus is relevant and legitimate, less widely spoken languages are still mentioned in passing without any attempt to include them in the presentation of the situation or the analysis.

**6.** I noticed that the thesis contained passages and statements that are considered not being specific enough or lacking a clear connection to the research questions. I gave an example and asked questions that could have helped to clarify the statements. Merga solved this problem by deleting some of the mentioned, specific sentences from the text. I have not encountered many sentence-level modifications, by the way.

**7.** Repetitions and recurrent phrases are now filtered out (e.g., the information that the study focuses on three agent groups, on teachers, parents, and students), the text is also much more concise and coherent in this regard. Thank you for working on the issue!

**8. and 9.** Chapter 2 (Review of Literature) is very ambiguous for me.

On the one hand, it is very rich: it is well structured, with subchapters about multilingualism in general, about African multilingualism, and the situation in Ethiopia. There are two further subchapters about "factors affecting multilingualism" and "agencies and multilingualism". Merga keeps individual and community perspectives in mind throughout the entire chapter. In a new chapter at the end of the literature review, it is stated that the conceptual model of the study is *"grounded in a combined framework that integrates three levels of multilingual experience. First, the Policy-Level Multilingualism, reflected in national and regional language policies that shape language use in education and governance. Second, the Institutional and Community-Level Practices, such as language use in schools, families, and peer networks. Last, the Individual-Level Perceptions and Traits, including attitudes, proficiency, emotions, and multilingual personality characteristics."* I think that such a thorough collection and review of the relevant literature, as well as the establishment of such an impressive conceptual model, are definitely noteworthy.

On the other hand, when I examine the Chapter 2 (Review of the literature) at the sentence level, I experience that the author summarises pieces of literature in a way that focuses on the whole without having a specific point of view. Some similar problems arise in paragraphs where multiple works were quoted, almost each in a sentence. Some of the sentences that were highlighted in the previous review have been deleted, and others that I specifically objected to, have been revised by the candidate. However, the overall impression remained unchanged.

In summary, this thesis is a valuable piece of work. Its structure has improved significantly during the revision process. The author now effectively guides the reader through the text. The newly added sections are of an excellent standard. I would like to emphasise that the data collection and processing were thorough and multifaceted. This dissertation fills a gap in the literature because it addresses a new context in an original way. Another strength of the thesis is the conceptual thinking that characterises the theoretical sections. However, this is partly offset by the fact that the author has not made sufficient substantial changes on the sentence level during the revision. Considering this, and in view of its undoubted merits, I recommend that the thesis be submitted for public discussion, and suggest that Merga should be awarded the PhD degree.

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