

Original

Discourses of Development in Gurage Proverbs
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*The purpose of this article was to investigate how Gurage people address development issues and inculcate them into the community through proverbs. The data was collected through elicitation and texts. The analysis method used was qualitative description, hence interpretive aspects of Wemaka 'proverb'. The proverbs were thematically grouped and the culturally and pragmatically constituted meanings were interpreted. The finding showed that Gurage people use proverbs to discourage laziness as in **niməsur bə-sur ji-bera** (lazy with-broken 3SGM-eat)² 'a lazy person eats with a broken utensil,' and to encourage hard work as in **b-əṭṭ ja-ṭəna bə-fəṭṭəna** (with-hand 3SGM-come with-happiness) 'a resource that comes through hard work makes someone happy'. The proverbs also indicated why the Gurage people are business oriented and mobile. The themes revolved around resource and time management, mobility, planning, independence, power relations, and the problems of corruption. Finally, the study recommended a further research on folklores of Gurage in particular and that of Africa in general.*

Keywords: Culture / Development / Discourse / Gurage / Proverb

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Gurage refers to the people of south Ethiosemitic language speaking groups living in the Gurage Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPR). The Gurage people share similar culture and languages. Their language; however, relatively vary in phonology, lexicon and a few morphological features. Based on such differences the languages are classified into three groups: the North, the Occidental and the Oriental Gurage. This study focuses on the *Wemaka* 'proverbs' from Occidental Gurage. The North and the Oriental Gurage use terms *Temsayt* and *Mekmachot*, respectively, for proverb. Proverbs generally play the roles of transferring indigenous knowledge and wisdom from generation to generation. They shape individuals in the community during their ages of socialization.

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² List of Abbreviations

1= First person 2=Second person 3=Third person SG=Singular
ACC= Accusative COND=Conditional F=Feminine M=Male
FOC=Focus marker GEN=Genitive NEG=Negative
PASS=Passive POSS=Possessive PST=Past

According to the Central Statistic Agency (2007, p.75), the total population of Gurage is 1,867, 377; of which 1, 030,621 speak Guragina natively (Samia, 2007, p. 201). The language of Gurage is called Guragina, which has about thirteen varieties ((Leslau, 1951; Hetzron, 1972). Most of these varieties are closely related, hence, can be understood by different ethnic groups within Gurage (Gebreyesus, 1991). However, there are a few languages that are not intelligible, such as Kistane and Welene to the other Occidental Gurage or the Sebatbet Gurage groups (Gutt, 1980; Fekede, 2013). The present article focuses on the proverbs of development discourses in Occidental Gurage.

Development is used in many contexts in economics, culture, biology, etc. Economic development is measured in many ways, such as Gross Domestic product (GDP), Human Development Index (HDI), which includes health-measured with life expectancy; knowledge - measured with adult literacy rate and the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary education; and a standard of living-measured with GDP, that is, income per capital.

Cultural development includes shaping and reshaping of cultures depending on the development level of a society, and of course preserving them. In this article, development is operationally used as an effort to make a socio-economic progress (in fact not measuring it in more technical terms used above) through resource saving, land use, resource management, working culture development and discouraging corruption and laziness. The attempt is to assess how the Gurage people inculcate development discourses into the society to achieve economic growth through their proverbs.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Communication through folklore is less studied in the context of Gurage in particular and in many of the Ethiopian languages in general. Therefore, it is less known how a certain language speakers communicate their wishes, aspirations, and lived experiences, and how they shape with it the everyday life their community of speakers. This study thus is aimed to partly fill in the existing gap. As the proverbs are so diverse and explore all issues of life, the article is delimited only to the discourses of developments in Occidental Gurage proverbs.

1.3 Objective of the study

The general objective of the study is to find out as to how Gurage people make use of proverbs to communicate development issues. The general objective is followed by the following three specific objectives:

- i) to find out whether the Gurage people's manner of entrepreneurs and mobility are reflected through the proverbs ;
- ii) to examine as to how the proverbs reveal the social roles men and women play among the people of Gurage.
- iii) to characterize the proverbs, stylistically, structurally and semantically.

2. Methods

In this article discourse, which is also used as a methodology and critique of social constructivism, is understood as the study of language use. This assumption is based on Fairclough's (2003, p.4) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which assumes that "...language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language." It is assumed that a discourse used at a given period of time filters and interprets human experience. Discourse constructs the ways people think and responds to the realities and situations in that given period. The interpretive model followed here falls under the critical discourse analysis (CDA) in which perceptions and underlying assumptions of the individuals and the society are considered important. Such perceptions of individuals and the society are influenced by social norms, status, gender, political and social powers and societal values (Plack, 2005). Thus, *such an interpretive* aspect of discourse is used as a methodology.

The data for the study were collected through elicitation from key informants and texts during a linguistic field works in Gurage area in the years 2010 to 2012. A few examples were also adapted from Tenkir (1999) and Gurage Zone Bahil Tourism (2012). The data were analyzed and presented thematically based on the meanings the proverbs encode about development issues. The themes were further categorized to show relationships that revolve around the theme 'development'.

3. Result

This part of the study deals with the analysis of the development proverbs.

3.1 Discourses of Working Culture

This sub-section discusses proverbs that encourage hard works and those discourage laziness. As most of the proverbs are poetic and rhythmic, the Guragina proverbs are transcribed with IPA symbols as they are actually uttered and used. The transcribed proverbs are glossed word for word in brackets and then their transliterations are given using single quotation. When a single word of Guragina represents more than a word of English equivalent, the different English words are hyphenated to show that they are represented by a single highly inflected Guragina word. Finally, the contexts the proverbs are used and the messages anticipated to be transferred to interlocutor(s) are provided.

3.1.1 Encouraging a hard work

Among many others, seven proverbs that encourage hard work are given as follows:

(1) **misə-h^jta tabə-na gonə-h^jta jərətəbə-na**

husband-3SGF.POSS gave-3SGF farmyard-3SGF.POSS supplies-3SGF. ACC

'The harvest from her farmyard worth what her husband supplies her'

This proverb encourages a woman to work harder by herself and to be independent rather than just waiting for what her husband offers her. It encourages autonomy of women on one hand and the importance of helping one another in a family on the other.

(2) **səb t-e-h^wəri tə-səb e-t-h^jəri**

person 3SG-NEG-be with-person NEG-3SG-known

‘Before someone becoming wealthy s/he neither has the chance to be introduced to very important persons nor to be well recognized by others’

Being human³ is equated with having a resource or being rich. So, one who is poor is not considered respected human being; hence, has no the opportunities to introduce himself to important people in the society or to be recognized as important person. In other words, for someone to have or have not wealth determines his social status in the society and thereby to be respected or not among the people.

(3) **səb jibir firənə b-əḏ b-e-nə b⁴-agənə**

person calls mad at-hand COND-NEG-there COND-problem

‘A person is called mad if s/he does not have resource at hand and if s/he is in trouble’

A person without enough economic resource that enables him or her to live ‘proper’ life is considered mad. So, Gurage people have to work hard to win their bread and not to be considered a mad person.

(4) **bə-ḏoḏi ji-wəre wijə b-an⁵-ḏoḏi ji-h^wəri giḏə**

COND-worked 3SG-eat honey COND-NEG-worked 3SG-happen dog

‘If one works hard, s/he eats honey; if not, s/he is considered a dog’

Honey is one of the delicious foods that the wealthy people can eat. Thus, those who work hard can eat honey while those who do not work hard are like a dog, which is dependent on others for its food and as a result considered a beggar. It is important here to consider the semantics of a dog in different culture. For Western community dog is a guard and hunter, for some other culture it is a delicious food. In Gurage context, dog is a just parasitic animal and given less attention. It is this negative connotation that is given to a person who does not work hard.

³ The fact that wealth is associated with the state of ‘being human’ is also common in Amharic as in the saying: *zare səw honə* (this.days-human-became) ‘now that he became human’ implying that his status has changed from the poor to the rich.

⁴ {bə-} is used as conditional marker and as prepositions, such as with and in. There is an instance of homophony. The same is true of {jə-} which marks genitive possessive and accusative case with animate and definite nouns (cf. Fekede, 2002). The vowel sounds of these prefixes may be deleted in a word boundary if the root of the affix begins with a vowel.

⁵ Negation is marked with {e-} in imperfective and with {an-} in perfective aspect.

(5) **b-inim mir ti-t'əra jə-rməsür bura**

with-all what 2SG-hate GEN-lazy voracious

‘What do you hate most; I hate most the voraciousness of a lazy person’

This proverb shows that Gurage people discourage laziness. For a hard worker, to eat a lot or be a voracious may be acceptable as she or he can afford the resource. It is believed that eating much makes the hard workers physically strong thereby more productive. However, for a lazy person to eat a lot is culturally the most hated. In short, for someone to eat the amount he wants, he has to work hard and produce much.

(6) **jə-ƣotə nəkka-m j-an-ƣotə fəkka-m**

GEN-plough settle-PST GEN-NEG-plough immigrate-PST

‘One who ploughed settled in his place/country but one who did not plough immigrated’

This proverb compares one who farms and the other who does not. The hard worker has an opportunity to settle in his area as he has enough food for himself and his family. To the contrary, one who does not farm his plot well has to immigrate since he has no food to feed himself and his family. In this proverb, immigration is evaluated negatively. Though, as the article will discuss later, mobility of a person is considered an asset in other contexts.

(7) **məngəs ti-ƣən zənga bə-dən**

winter 3SGM-come conflict in-belly

‘In winter, one has to avoid conflict and control his emotions’

In Gurage area, winter is a time of harvest; hence, everyone is busy mowing wheat and barley, trashing cereals, transplanting Ensete plant (*Ensete Ventricosum*), etc. During this period one has to avoid conflict; be it with neighbors or family members not to waste time in solving conflicts. Thus, focusing on work, being peaceful with everyone is recommended. This can be shared at large to other community of Ethiopia to promote and sustain development. Peace and development are inseparable. Absence of peace does not only take the time of work, but it also consumes lots of unwisely spent money.

3.1.2 Laziness and poorness

Laziness and its effect poorness are extremely discouraged by Gurage society as can be demonstrated in a number of proverbs discussed below.

(8) **k'iraf' bet jə-k'əp^w ə kərə awsa jə-məkwəri kərə ji-bsiwə**

fleas house 3SGM-cleaned day lazy 3SG- advised day 3SGM-worse

‘Fleas become worse when a house is cleaned, and a lazy person becomes worse when s/he is given advice’

Like fleas tend to bite human beings when a house is cleaned, a lazy person becomes stingy when s/he is advised rather than listening to the advice and making use of it.

(9) *j-awfa t'aməʒə j-ak^wi bə-məʃə*

GEN-lazy barely 3SGM-eaten in-winter

‘A lazy person’s barely is eaten during winter as soon as it is harvested’

Temezhe is a variety of a barely which can be roasted without being pound as it has no husk. It, therefore, does not require a labor to process it. A lazy woman roasts and finishes it rather than saving it for the rainy days. What is important here is that the other varieties of barely that the lazy woman may have are not supposed to be finished at the same period because they require the woman to process them: pounding, roasting and re-pounding.

(10) *t'əme bə-sur ti-bəra*

potter with-broken 3SGF-eat

‘A she-potter eats with a broken utensil’

In the Gurage culture, it is not customary to eat or drink with a broken or partly damaged utensil. A person who eats food or drinks a drink with such broken utensils is considered as despised class. Potters in Gurage are often females. A potter woman is therefore not expected to eat with broken tools unless she is lazy to make one, or she is from a despised class.

This proverb is also used to show unused potential or a resource in the same sense as the Amharic proverb ‘*ja-baj liḳ wuha t'əma-w*’ (GEN-Nile son water trusty-3SGM) ‘a person from the Nile is trusty of water’.

(11) *j-orəfe warə-ḫi-m waga ti-gəba ḳipə wətərə-ḫi-m*

3SG-go go-3SGF-PST cows 3SGM-come.home mat stretch-3SGF-PST

‘Having she gone elsewhere during the day, she stretches a mat to make it when the cows come home’

A dexterous woman in the Gurage culture is expected to complete her chores during the day time. It is not encouraged for a woman to make a mat during the evenings. Evenings are meant for making coffee and serving dinner. Thus, a woman who is wandering here and there during the day hence not completing her duty before the cows come home is considered lazy, and such a woman is discouraged.

(12) *t'uri mena ji-ḫin awfa wəret ji-ḫin*

dexterous work 3SGM-like lazy sleep 3SGM-like

‘A dexterous person likes work but a lazy person likes sleep’

Someone who likes work is considered dexterous but a person who often tends to spend his time sleeping is considered lazy. Thus, the proverb discourages over sleeping.

(13) *jə-t'uri bə-fat j-awfa bə-mdad*

GEN-dexterous in- grain.store GEN-lazy.woman in-oven

‘A harvest of wise woman is kept in the grain store, but that of lazy woman is roasted in an oven’

We learn from this proverb that laziness is associated not only with working habit but also with the ability to manage a resource. In this case storing and saving the harvest as opposed to roasting and finishing it without keeping at least some for the future is considered wrong.

(14) *niməsur h^wet gam^wə ji-jin b^wire-m t-iwri giwem t-iwri*

lazy.person two times 3SGM-happy be.eaten-and 3SGM-said be.entered 3SGM-said

‘A lazy person is happy in two conditions: when he hears let it be eaten and when he hears let work is abandoned and then goes for home’

This proverb is often used during work to discourage people who tend to abandon their work before completing the task at hand. The principle behind is that one who does not like working should not love eating.

(15) *b-awfa wusaḡa k'imar ji-k'amwir-p^wə*

during-lazy.person scraping.turn louse 3SGM-killed-3SGM)

‘During the Ensete scraping turn day of a lazy woman, the workers kill their lice rather than scarping the stem of the Ensete plant.’

The meaning behind this proverb is that a lazy woman does not encourage the woman who is scarping her Ensete plant to make *Wusa*, ‘bread of the Ensete plant’. Her laziness transcend to the other women who are scarping the plant. The day, therefore, is spent on jokes. In fact, the killing process of lice during a work is metaphorically used as people do this when they are idle.

(16) *b-awfa tifiṛ t'at'ara e-bəhwir*

in-lazy.woman's nail leftover NEG- not.find

‘In the nails of a lazy woman, it is uncommon to find a leftover of *Wusa*’

A lazy woman is not neat and does not clean her hands after a work, and she does not cut her nails before they grow to the extent of harboring leftovers of *Wusa*-bread of Ensete. This proverb cautions women in Gurage to make themselves clean, to cut their nails so that they may not be considered ‘lazy’ and they can be healthy. The core of the proverb is to show that a lazy goes to the extent for someone not removing dirt on her/his body.

3.2 Mobility as a Means of Success

The proverbs in Gurage encourage someone to be mobile; and for someone to sit idle, be it in his vicinity or outside Gurage area, is not recommended. In fact, mobility is considered as a source of treasure as can be observed from the following Gurage *Wemaka*:

(17) *kʷin zega; əgír dāngānə*

buttock poor; leg rich

‘A buttock is poor; a leg is rich’

Buttock as an organ of sitting is metaphorically used to express a person who is a poor, and leg which is an organ of movement is used to represent a rich person. The implication is that a person who sits idle is poor while someone who travels and works is considered rich, at least potentially. In this proverb, the Gurage people encourage the society not to limit their entire fate with the resource of their home town/village. Thus, to fight poverty one needs to travel to the different regions of the nation/Ethiopia. That is probably why the people of Gurage are seen making business almost everywhere they go.

(18) *b-an-ikʷurəkʷ r-I tikə-m e-ŋʷani*

COND-NEG-move-3SG child-FOC NEG-bear-PASS)

‘If movement is not made, a child cannot be born’

Here, the proverb is used to indicate the importance of mobility. Mobility is not only helpful to make money and accumulate wealth but also to bear a child. One who sleeps idle at bed will possibly not bear a child, which is considered wealth as well.

(19) *bə-ŋona ʒəhʷərə j-orə kʷəwərə*

from- sit elephant 3SGM-travell fox

‘A mobile fox is better than an idle elephant’

A mobile fox is more advantageous than an idle elephant. Unless the elephant goes out and collect its food, the small size fox that goes for hunting and bringing its food worth the huge elephant without food. The implication is that a Gurage person should go out and come back with treasure. This has been specifically expressed in another proverb given in (20).

(20) *j-ar əgír gem e-j-adir*

3SGM-travel leg without.food NEG-3SGM-spend.night

‘A leg that travels never spends a night without dinner’

Here, leg represents a person. Thus, a person who is not idle goes out and comes home with something to be eaten for a dinner. In fact, he never spends a night without a dinner also signifies that he feeds his family as well.

3.3 Resource and Time Management

This sub-section discusses proverbs on resource and time management. Such proverbs focus on how resources should be wisely used and what negative effects unwise resource and time use may have in economic development and in the lives of individuals.

3.3.1 Resource management

This study will analytically group proverbs showing resource management into proper management, mismanagement, and corruption.

3.3.1.1 Proper management of resources

A proper management of resources here means a wise use of the resources including saving and appropriate utilization of them. As many of the proverbs focus on mismanagement of resources, the paper will provide a couple of examples for proper management and move onto the mismanagement discourse.

(21) *bə-wizkipər e-səre an-awəne e-wəre*

in-regret NEG-reachNEG-saved NEG-eaten

‘One cannot reverse his/her regret and one cannot eat what s/he did not save’

This proverb encourages people to save what they have produced or money that they made. It warns that if someone does not save his resources for rainy seasons, s/he cannot reverse his regret of not saving and subsequent result of that.

(22) *t-anə nik’ dibir t-irsəta a-tawt’a int’ar*

while-there big forest from-smaller NEG-cut stick

‘While there is a big forest, do not cut a stick from a shrub’

This proverb is used to express concern on forest management. It is also used, by extension, to seek resources from where they are plenty rather than spending all the meager resources at hand.

3.3.1.2 Mismanagement of resources

Proverbs on mismanagement of resources are concerned with unused potentials and unwise use of the existing resources. A few examples of these are given below.

(23) *bə-bar fona-ŋi-m əwa nasə-ŋi-m*

in-lake sit-3SGF-PST dew lick-3SGF-PST

‘She sat on a lake, but she licked dew’

This proverb is used to show that there is an untouched resource or material wealth but it is not used or under used; hence, one is in scarcity. This may include situation like an available fertile land is not ploughed hence there is no food to eat.

(24) *b-e-nə bad inj'im təbat*

from-NEG-there land all male

‘In the absence of plot, the children born are all males’

In the pre-existing culture of the Gurage, it was only a male that used to heir the lands of his father. Girls were not allowed to heir a land as they left their parents home when they were married. Thus, for someone to bear many males while he has no enough land to offer to his sons was considered unwise.

(25) *məhəna e-ʃən barə-ʃi-m watar-əh'ta mək'ərə-ʃi-m*

winter NEG-come say-3SGF-PST scraping.pole-3SGF.POSS bur-3SGF-PST

‘Assuming that a winter will not come back, she burnt her scrapping pole’

In Gurage, Ensete plant is not scrapped during rainy season (summer) as at this period good harvest of the Ensete plant product is not expected. It is rather scrapped in the winter when it is sunny. A lazy woman may burn her scrapping pole, which is made by a carpenter, during the summer season. As a result, she may not find one during winter; hence, she may have to repay for the carpenter so that he may make one for her or should borrow one from her neighbor. In fact, the proverb is used in a broader context to express something unwisely spent or used while there was an option.

3.3.2 Corruption

Corruption refers to illegal and immoral acts or behaviors of people. It is often associated with acts and behaviors that people in power demonstrate. Corruption in the Gurage is often expressed metaphorically with what animals do. The commonly used animal in this regard is a hyena- a voracious animal, and in a few cases a horse. Below are a few examples that express corruption.

(26) *b-imar basər ʃ'arim g'ənʃə gəkit b' arim*

on-donkey meat laden hyena accompany ordered

‘Meat is laden on a donkey back, and a hyena is ordered to accompany/see off the donkey’

This is the case that one observes in many corrupt societies whereby people in power are told not to corrupt in de jure but things are ready, directly or indirectly, for them to exploit them in de facto. In the proverb, meat which is laden on donkey is something that hyena wants to eat; the donkey itself is an animal that a hyena wants to chase and eat. Yet, the proverb tells that the hyena has got permission, by the one who lets him to see off the donkey, to eat the laden and the loaded.

(27) *jə-g^wənɣə et wəhət-ata wəka-h^wəni-m; ank'a-ta ; ank'a-fə-ta b-okah^wə-n abətath^wə-n-im*

GEN-hyena which part-3SGM stab-3SGM-PST; mouth-3SGM; mouth-FOC-3SGM COND-stab-3SGM widen-3SGM-PST

‘Which part of the hyena did you stab; its mouth. In that case, you widened its mouth’

This proverb expresses the condition in which corrupt people are given a kind of punishment and yet they are kept in power. The insignificant punishment rather makes them to corrupt more and more in a systematic and invisible ways as far as they are in power.

(28) *ji-bəra fəraz tə-lg^wamə-ta ji-bəra*

3SGM-eat horse with-halter-3SGM.POSS eat

‘A horse which is accustomed to eat can eat while its mouth is halted or tied’

This proverb is used to express situation in which despite possible cares, legally or by concerned people, have been made to control or avoid corruption, the corrupt person still manages to abuse public resources.

(29) *bə-sij-e mənz ; b-asj-e gənz ; sin kəfət-ə-m j-af-e j-ibs*

from-bought-1SGM.ACC Menz.man ; from-sold-me Genz.man tooth open-3SGM-PST 3SGM-see-1SGM.ACC 3SGM-worse

‘From the man of Menz to whom I was sold, and from the man of Genz who ‘sold me’ to the Menze man, the most evil is the person who saw my teeth opening my mouth’.

This proverb expresses an abuse of human right during the period of slavery rather than the abuse of resources. As slaves were sold like any other commodity, it was relevant to check whether a slave was young and muscular. The age was estimated by opening the slave’s mouth and looking at his teeth, the same way animal traders do these days. The speaker in the proverb is narrating his pains, here exceptionally, in the first person point of view.

3.4 Time Management

Time is one of the resources we have and that it has to be properly managed. Things have to be done in their real time. Any action undone or delayed may bear negative result. Below are a few examples on time (mis) management.

(30) *bə-m^wətə-naj jə-fəg^wəre bə-tih^wə-naj jə-ɣefate*

after-death-3SGF.POSS to-witchcraft ; after-poured-3SGF.POSS to saucer

‘She went to a wizard after her beloved was dead; she looked for a pot placing saucer after the content of the pot was already poured’

In this proverb, the woman was expected to go to a wizard so that she might save the person before his death. Similarly, she was expected to put the pot

on a pot placing saucer before its content has been poured. Both actions she has done are out of time and will not bring change. So, Gurage people use this proverb to talk about irreversible actions and that one should not spend his or her time unwisely.

(31) *b-orə-huta at-timat'ət' ; b-ıfən-huta at-tibərət'*

in-past-thing NEG-regret; in-comes-thing NEG-fooled

'Do not regret on what has gone, and don't be behind others (be fooled) on what it comes'

This proverb is used as an advice to use the future and to forget a past mistake. It urges a person not to regret on what has not been done or was wrongly done in the past. It also leads to a competition in life that s/he should not lag behind from the others in the future.

(32) *bə-him t-atərə ; amf jə-bətərə*

in-there 3SGM-spent.night ; mouth 3SGM-advanced

'From a person who spent a night with the people from whom he seeks something to get, a person who came late but spoke first has got what both persons were looking for'

This proverb is used to show that one has to communicate an issue he wants without spending much time. Often first come and first serve works in the Gurage community. Thus unwisely spending of time, in this case delay to express needs, costs much.

(33) *bə-gizjə jə-ıfənə bazera ərbat manze ji-bera*

on-time 3SGM-come guest dinner fat 3SGM-eat

'A guest who comes on time eats a dinner of fat meat'

A similar first come and first serve principle is witnessed in (33). A guest who comes home on time has the chance to eat dinner of fat meat with the family, but one who comes late may not get even a left over. Thus, Gurage people encourage things to be done on time.

(34) *gijə mət' jə-ft'əre barə-m ; furt' ıfənə-m*

bitch labor 3SGM⁶-fast say-PST blind give.birth-PST

'Thinking of giving birth faster; a bitch gave birth to a blind puppy'

This proverb differs from those that have been seen so far. It is about being hasty. One should do what he has to do on time but s/he should not be so hasty not to produce something defective or less quality. The assumption is that 'had the bitch taken enough time for labor, it would not have given birth to a blind puppy'. So, allocating appropriate time is as important as doing something on time.

⁶ In Gurage languages, animals are considered masculine though biologically they are feminine. In fact, nouns in Gurage distinguish gender if they refer to human.

3.5 Power Relation and Independence

In every society, community and family, there is a power relationship. A number of factors contribute for power difference including age, gender, wealth, status, etc. The power relations are often reflected in language. Here, proverbs concerned with power difference due to wealth will be discussed. The difference in wealth leads to power struggle between the-haves and the have-nots. This may lead to the quest for independence.

3.5.1 Power relation

The examples below show power relations caused by wealth:

- (35) *ja-nən t-e-nən dəwnət e-nən*
 3SGM-have 3SGM-NEG-have relationship NEG-have
 ‘The-haves do not have relationships with the have-nots’

This proverb is used to express a situation whereby rich and poor relatives may not have relationship in actual sense since the wealth difference creates status difference. They feel one another remote relatives or else as not related.

- (36) *waga e-nən inim təf^w esə-n*
 wealth NEG-have all looked.down-3SGM.ACC
 ‘A person without wealth is looked down by all’

This proverb is used to describe the situation whereby a poor person is downgraded by others by the very fact that he is a poor. His voice is not audible; he is not respected and represented in a number of social affairs.

- (37) *dəngənə jə-zega jəmir ji-grəmt’; zega jə-dəgənə jəmir j-aslamt’*
 rich to-poor why 3SGM-askance; poor to-rich why 3SGM-beseech
 ‘Why does a rich person looks askance to a poor person; why does a poor person beseeches to the rich person?’

The fact that rich and poor people do not have good relationships is well demonstrated in proverb (37). It questions, why the rich person looks sideway to the poor person and why the poor person beseeches the rich person? It is just because of the wealth that someone looks down the other while the other provides respect.

3.5.2 Independence

In Gurage, of course in many communities in Ethiopia, people who are poor have to share rooms with other fellows or relatives. A farmer who has not enough plots of land to plough often tills someone’s land and shares his produce equally to the land lord. The proverbs given below show the negative sides of these and the quest for independence.

- (38) *tə-dabra dibir*
 from-shared.room forest
 ‘From living with someone in a shared room, it is better to live in a forest’

Here the person expresses his/her feeling that sharing a room with other person is dependence and that from such dependency it is better to be homeless or to live in a forest.

(39) *jə-gipt jə-k'pərə ; j-ofənŋe jə-tgatarə*

for-share 3SGM-planted ; at-entrance 3SGM-slept

One who ploughed for equal share is more like someone who slept at home's entrance'

In Gurage, huts have only one entrance. If family members occupy the entire sleeping space at night, someone- a guest or a relative, may be forced to sleep around the gate of a hut. In that case, the person has to be awakened up now and then as the people have to go in and out of the house. The situation is compared with tilling a land of someone and planting it for an equal share. As the one sleeping at the entrance is insecure, the person working for a share is considered dependent and who is at risk.

(40) *f'ak^waf manze ebəra*

beggar fat.meat NEG-eat

A beggar never eats fat meat'

In (40) the proverb discourages the poor to limit his power. It is often used by the-haves to indicate that the poor should live up to his standard and he should not aspire something that is meant for rich person. A fat meat is thus for the wealthiest person and not for the poor, metaphorically expressed as beggar.

The development discourses of *Wemaka* are schematically presented as shown below:

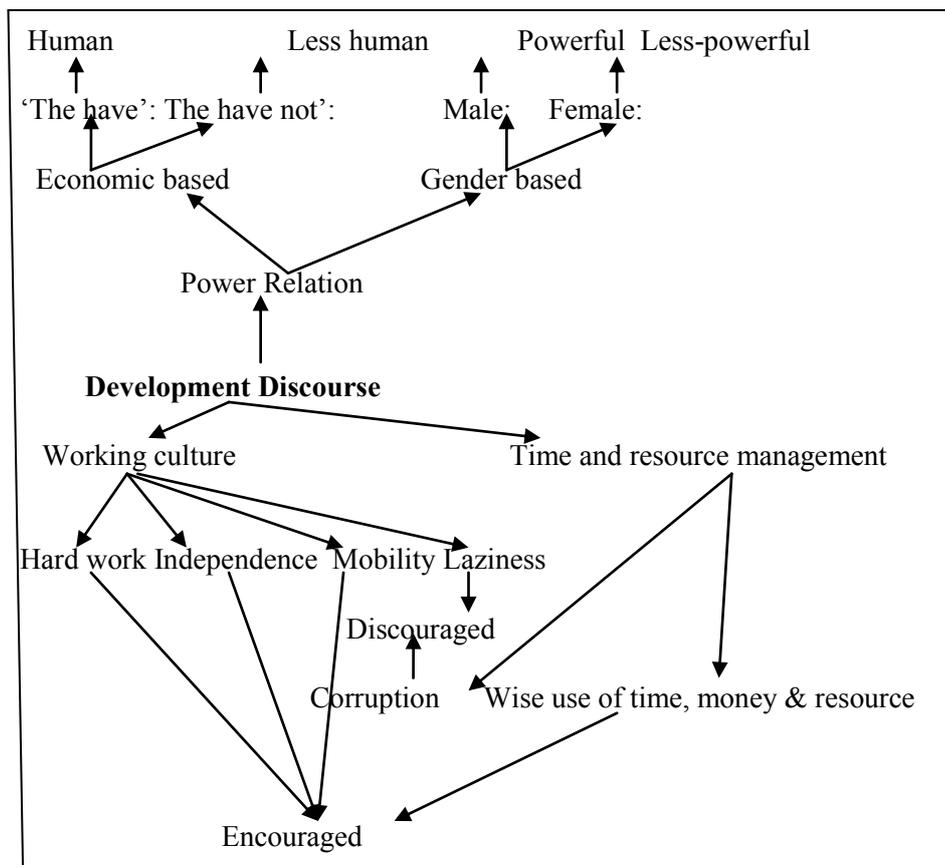


Figure 1.1: A Model of the development discourses of Wemaka

3.6 Characteristics of Gurage Wemaka

In terms of point of view, Gurage *Wemaka* 'proverbs' are narrated impersonally from third person point of view. Stylistically, most of the proverbs are rhythmic. Structurally, they often consist of simple sentence though there are a few compound sentences. Semantically, the proverbs express direct or literal, metaphorical, and pragmatic meanings. Gender roles are reflected in the languages used. Most of the proverbs related to power, farming, and corruption are narrated in terms of masculine whereas proverbs related to house chores, processing food, and saving of a produce are narrated in terms of feminine. Metaphorically used proverbs that use different animals are narrated in masculine, which is the default gender. Nouns in Gurage languages do not distinguish grammatical genders of animals and of course inanimate beings; yet, such nouns are recognized as having a masculine gender. The absence of feminine gender in most nouns could be associated with the general male dominance that exists in the community of the speakers.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to uncover how Gurage people address development issues and inculcate them into the community through proverbs. It further aimed to correlate if the discourses inculcated has influenced the life style of the people, for instance in job preference and performance.

The finding showed that there is a correlation between being entrepreneur and mobile and what has been inculcated to the Gurage community to be mobile and to be hard workers through their proverbs. In fact, it appeared that, people believe in what they have repeatedly heard and experienced; what they believe in turn influences what they might do. This is in conformity with Fairclough's (2003) claim that discourse used at a given period of time filters and interprets human experience.

The finding also complies with Plack (2005) who asserted individuals and societal perceptions are influenced by social norms, status, gender, political and social powers and societal values. The proverbs clearly showed that men's and women's roles are demarcated. In terms of power, male are more powerful and have upper hand in economic and social affairs. The haves have more social power over the have not. Societal values, such as hard work, mobility, independence, wise use of money and time were encouraged, and corruption was negatively valued.

The finding further enabled to characterize the proverbs structurally, semantically and stylistically. It was found that the proverbs are simple in structure, impersonal dominantly in point view, and literal, metaphorical and pragmatic in meaning.

5. Conclusion

The indigenous knowledge of Gurage people as expressed in development discourse of *Wemaka* showed that Gurage people should work hard and avoid *nīmāsurñət* (M) or *awjīñət* (F) 'laziness'. To be effective in their endeavor to success, they have to manage their time properly. Hard work and good management of time are not considered enough by themselves. Gurage people also have to manage their resources wisely and fight against corruption to succeed in

the economic development. It is in such a well managed condition that Gurage people can live a prosperous and an independent life.

This study has contributed to our understanding on how what has been communicated through proverbs in particular and a language in general shapes our perception of reality and there by our ways of life. It has also showed that proverbs in certain language are structurally patterned and follow certain regularities.

As the present study has been focusing only on proverbs concerned with development discourse, a further investigation in relation to governance, child care, environment and other areas of social life may uncover a lot about humanity. Communication through folklore is less studied in the Gurage in particular and in many of the Ethiopian languages in general; more in-depth study in the area may show the wisdom, knowledge and culture of the various ethno-linguistic groups of Ethiopia and of the continent-Africa.

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