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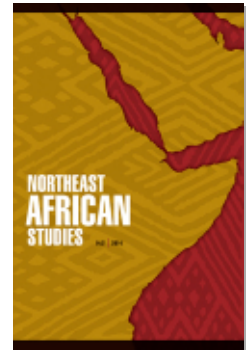
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Linguistic Analysis of the 1994 Ethiopian Census

Grover Hudson

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The first national census of Ethiopia was conducted in 1984 and the second in 1994, with some recounting in Afar and Somali regions in 1996. In addition to information on age, gender, marital status, education, migration patterns, housing, and economic activity type, the 1994 census includes considerable information of interest concerning language (Office of Population and Housing Census Commission 1998). Numbers reported in the census are not actual counts of census takers, but projections based on statistical regularities observed in the actual counts. Information on language was collected in even fewer households than other sorts of information, so it is derived even more as statistical projections (Office of Population 1998, 1:1–5).

In seeking linguistic data, census takers had to overcome politically significant ethnolinguistic sensitivities, as well as confusion presented by the varying names of Ethiopian ethnic groups and languages, and logistical difficulties of reaching and objectively sampling the diverse, multilingual Ethiopian population. In fact, the *National Population Policy of Ethiopia* (Office of the Prime Minister 1993) says nothing that assigns importance to Ethiopian linguistic or ethnolinguistic differences, which would necessitate the collection of linguistic information by the census. Thus, it is a pleasant surprise to find so much linguistic information in the 1994 census, and important also to observe that this information is generally quite consistent with our usually unquantified and often rough intuitive knowledge of the complex Ethiopian linguistic scene.

Linguistically relevant information is tabulated in six tables in vol. 1 of the national census, *Results at Country Level*:

- 2.14. Population size of regions by ethnic group and sex, urban and rural (66–78)
- 2.15. Population size of regions by mother tongue and sex, urban and rural (79–88)
- 2.16. Population size of regions by second language spoken and sex, urban and rural (89–98)
- 2.17. Population size by ethnic group and mother tongue (99–108)
- 2.18. Population size by ethnic group and second language spoken (109–18)
- 2.19. Population size by mother tongue and second language spoken (119–28)

Vol. 2, *Summary Reports at Country and Regional Levels*, adds little to the above, and discussion here is based on the above tables except as noted. Population sizes of ethnic groups given in Table 2.14 equal those of Table 2 of the *Summary Reports* but differ by seemingly insignificant amounts from those given in Table 2.17, which equal those of Table 2.18. For example, for the five most populous ethnic groups, Tables 2.14 and 2.17 give the size of total populations as follows:

Ethnic Group	Table 2.14	Table 2.17
Amharic	16,007,933	16,010,894
Oromo	17,080,318	17,088,136
Tigraway	3,284,568	3,284,443
Somali	3,160,540	3,139,421
Sidama	1,842,314	1,842,444

Ethiopian Languages of the Census

The most important linguistic information abstracted from the 1994 census tables is provided in Tables 1a and 1b: the 77 named languages of the census plus “other languages,” their number of mother-tongue speakers, and their number of ethnolinguistic group members. The census defines a mother tongue as “the language used by the child for communication with his family” (Office of Population 1998, 1:11). Table 1a orders the languages by number of mother-tongue speakers, while Table 1b orders the languages alphabetically.

Table 1a. Mother-tongue Speakers of Ethnolinguistic Groups and Ethnic Group Members, Ordered by Number of Mother-tongue Speakers*

C, N, O, S = Cushitic, Nilosaharan, Omotic, and Semitic, respectively.

<i>Ethno- linguistic group</i>	<i>Mother- tongue speakers</i>	<i>Ethnic group members</i>	<i>Ethno- linguistic group</i>	<i>Mother- tongue speakers</i>	<i>Ethnic group members</i>
Amara S	17,372,913	16,010,894	Dasenech C	32,064	32,014
Oromo C	16,777,975	17,088,136	Sheko O	24,106	23,772
Tigraway S	3,224,875	3,284,443	Saho C	22,759	23,258
Somali C	3,187,053	3,139,421	Harari S	21,283	22,884
Gurage S	1,881,574	2,290,332	Dizi O	21,075	21,888
Sidama C	1,876,329	1,842,444	Dorze O	20,782	28,969
Wolayta O	1,231,674	1,268,445	Mello O	20,151	20,181
Afar C	965,462	972,766	Shinasha O	19,734	32,660
Hadiyya C	923,957	927,747	Suri N	19,622	19,616
Gamo O	690,069	719,862	Oyda O	16,597	14,059
Gedeo C	637,082	639,879	Mesengo N	15,152	15,329
Kafa O	569,626	599,146	Nyangatom N	14,177	14,201
Kambaata C	487,654	499,631	Mao O	13,657	16,226
Awngi C	356,980	397,494	She O	13,116	13,164
Kulo O	313,228	331,477	Argobba S	10,860	62,912
Goffa O	233,340	241,818	Zayse O	10,172	10,842
Bench O	173,586	173,149	Fadashi N	8,715	7,323
Ari O	158,857	155,065	Tsamay C	8,621	9,699
Konso C	149,508	153,407	Zergula O	7,625	390
Kamir C	143,369	158,225	Chara O	6,932	6,976
Alaba C	126,257	125,894	Mossiyya C	6,624	9,205
Gumuz N	120,424	121,481	Dime O	6,501	6,189
Berta N	116,084	118,670	Bodi N	4,570	4,685
Koyra O	103,879	107,586	Arbore C	4,441	6,622
Timbaro C	82,803	86,499	Nao O	3,656	4,004
Yemsa O	81,614	165,770	Mursi N	3,278	3,254
Nuer N	64,907	64,527	Kachama O	2,682	2,735
Basketo O	57,805	51,089	Kunama N	1,883	2,003
Mocha O	54,894	53,846	Kemant C	1,650	172,324
Male O	53,779	46,458	Koma N	1,435	1,522
Me'en N	52,015	52,808	Ganjule O	1,390	1,142
Gidole C	50,328	54,339	Mer O	989	1,195

continued on next page

Table 1b. continued

<i>Ethno-linguistic group</i>	<i>Mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>Ethnic group members</i>	<i>Ethno-linguistic group</i>	<i>Mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>Ethnic group members</i>
Konta O	48,987	49,625	Shita N	301	290
Anywak N	45,646	45,656	Gamili N	144	184
Hamer O	42,838	42,448	Guagu ?	103	165
Maraqo C	36,612	38,093	Kwama N	99	140
Qabena C	35,783	35,065	Gebato N	78	67
Burji C	35,731	46,552	Mabaan N	25	21
Gawada C	32,698	33,945	Other langs	139,047	110,555

*Office of Population and Housing Census Commission 1998, Tables 2.15 and 2.17.

Table 1b.

Mother-tongue Speakers of Ethnolinguistic Groups and Ethnic Group Members, Ordered Alphabetically by Name*

C, N, O, S = Cushitic, Nilosaharan, Omotic, and Semitic, respectively.

<i>Ethno-linguistic group</i>	<i>Mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>Ethnic group members</i>	<i>Ethno-linguistic group</i>	<i>Mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>Ethnic group members</i>
Afar C	965,462	972,766	Konso C	149,508	153,407
Alaba C	126,257	125,894	Konta O	48,987	49,625
Amara S	17,372,913	16,010,894	Koyra O	103,879	107,586
Anywak N	45,646	45,656	Kulo O	313,228	331,477
Arbore C	4,441	6,622	Kunama N	1,883	2,003
Argobba S	10,860	62,912	Kwama N	99	140
Ari O	158,857	155,065	Mabaan N	25	21
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Berta N	116,084	118,670	Tigraway S	3,224,875	3,284,443
Bodi N	4,570	4,685	Me'en N	52,015	52,808
Burji C	35,731	46,552	Mello O	20,151	20,181
Chara O	6,932	6,976	Mer O	989	1,195
Dasenech C	32,064	32,014	Mesengo N	15,152	15,329

<i>Ethno-linguistic group</i>	<i>Mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>Ethnic group members</i>	<i>Ethno-linguistic group</i>	<i>Mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>Ethnic group members</i>
Dime O	6,501	6,189	Mocha O	54,894	53,846
Dizi O	21,075	21,888	Mossiya C	6,624	9,205
Dorze O	20,782	28,969	Mursi N	3,278	3,254
Fadashi N	8,715	7,323	Nao O	3,656	4,004
Gamili N	144	184	Nuer N	64,907	64,527
Gamo O	690,069	719,862	Nyangatom N	14,177	14,201
Ganjule O	1,390	1,142	Oromo C	16,777,975	17,088,136
Gawada C	32,698	33,945	'Other langs'	139,047	110,555
Gebato N	78	67	Oyda O	16,597	14,059
Gedeo C	637,082	639,879	Qabena C	35,783	35,065
Gidole C	50,328	54,339	Saho C	22,759	23,258
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Guagu ?	103	165	Sheko O	24,106	23,772
Gumuz N	120,424	121,481	Shinasha O	19,734	32,660
Gurage S	1,881,574	2,290,332	Shita N	301	290
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Kafa O	569,626	599,146	Tsamay C	8,621	9,699
Kambaata C	487,654	499,631	Wolayta O	1,231,674	1,268,445
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Kemant C	1,650	172,324	Zayse O	10,172	10,842
Koma N	1,435	1,522	Zergula O	7,625	390

*Office of Population and Housing Census Commission 1998, 1: Tables 2.15

It has long been said, as an approximation, that Ethiopia has over 70 languages (cf. Bender et al. 1976, 13), and both the number of languages and the number of speakers reported by the census seem reasonably consistent with what Ethiopianist linguists might have expected; see, for example, the 71 languages and their number of speakers estimated over 25 years ago by the *Language Survey of Ethiopia* (Bender et al. 1976, 15–16), a list that included two Eritrean languages, Tigre and Beja, no longer significantly spoken in Ethiopian territory. I have failed to identify only one ethnolinguistic group named in the census, “Guagu,” which

the census reports as having only 103 mother-tongue speakers distributed in four regions and Addis Abeba thusly: 5 in Amhara, 2 in Benishangul-Gumuz, 32 in Oromiya, 46 in Southern Nations, and 18 in Addis Abeba.

In a few cases, I have changed language names and spellings of language names of the census to those more common in the linguistic literature, for example, “Berta” for “Jebelawi” of the census, and “Kafa” for “Keffa.” The well-established name Berta seems unobjectionable for the people newly referred to in the census as Jebalawi, which seems to mean “[people] of the hills,” and the *f* of Kafa is not phonetically long, which writing *ff* wrongly suggests. While for present readers such changes from census usage are probably appropriate, in some instances the census may have employed preferred names.

Cushitic, Nilo-Saharan, Omotic, and Semitic Languages

Information not in the census has been included in Tables 1a and 1b as the codes C, N, I, and S for Cushitic, Nilo-Saharan, Omotic, and Semitic respectively. These are language “families,” “genetically” defined, that because of shared linguistic features not attributable to diffusion or universal tendencies are hypothesized to descend from a common ancestor language. Cushitic, Omotic, and Semitic are subgroups of the greater language family Afro-Asiatic, which in frequent European usage is known as Hamito-Semitic. Afro-Asiatic is a language family of greater diversity and time-depth than the Indo-European family. Nilo-Saharan is a family of diversity and time-depth roughly similar to that of Afro-Asiatic. Following are totals of mother-tongue speakers for languages of the four groups, plus, in parentheses, the 1994 census total for the most populous language of each group:

Cushitic	26,469,394	(Oromo	16,777,975)
Nilo-Saharan	482,212	(Gumuz	120,424)
Omotic	3,989,694	(Wolayta	1,231,674)
Semitic	22,511,505	(Amharic	17,372,913)

The Language and Dialect Problem

Careful comparison of the 77 named Ethiopian languages included in the census with a list of all language names that arise in Ethiopian linguistic liter-

ature would be useful. Unfortunately, matching language names is problematic owing to difficulties concerning whether a named variety of speech is a language, a dialect of a language, and/or an ethnic group, and whether a reference overlaps with another name. Certainly there are problems for classification because dialects may be incorrectly treated as languages and different languages treated as a single language. To clarify these terms: for linguists a *language* is a variety of speech mutually unintelligible with other varieties, while *dialects* are regional and mutually intelligible subvarieties of a language. Any geographically extensive and populous language consists of a number of dialects, which may or may not be named consistently and may or may not coincide with established or emerging ethnic differences.

A case of different Ethiopian languages treated as a single language concerns “Gurage.” What the census and also much traditional usage terms Gurage is not a single language but at least five languages. Indeed, there are more than 15 identified varieties of speech commonly known as Gurage, many of them mutually intelligible and hence more correctly categorized as dialects. When these dialects are subsumed under the name of a prominent dialect, which is assigned as the language name of the group, Gurage languages are at least five—Soddo (Kestane), Chaha, Inor, Silte, and Zay. Vol. 1 of the census, however, gives numbers only for “Gurage,” as did the *Language Survey of Ethiopia* (Bender et al. 1976, 15; but the *Survey* provides clarification, 28).

Vol. 2 of the census divides the number of ethnic Gurage who are inhabitants of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Region, as follows:

Sebatbet Gurage—“Gurage of the Seven Houses”	721,171
Soddo (Kestane) Gurage	191,331
Silte Gurage	734,423
Total	1,646,925

The census implicitly recognizes that Gurage represents not a language but a group of languages by reporting 25,827 mother-tongue Gurage speakers who also speak Gurage as a second language (Office of Population 1998, 1: Table 2.19; see discussion of second language knowledge below). A number of groups identified as Gurage would not ordinarily be counted as Sebatbet, Soddo, or Silte Gurage. The tradition of the “Seven Houses” of Gurage includes only the

groups known as Aklil, Ezha, Chaha, Gyeta, Gomera, Inor, and Muher (Leslau 1979, xv). Gurage groups recognized in the literature and not included in Sebatbet, Soddo, or Silte include Endegenya, Enar, Gogot, Gura, Magar, Masqan, Mesmes, Wolane, and Zay. Indeed, the numerically significant Siltes assert their non-Guragehood (Drewes 1996, 72), as do the Soddo (Goldenberg 1968, 62). The Gurage problem is exemplary, and similar though less understood, and even perhaps unrecognized problems of ethnic group and language nomenclature complicate a complete and reliable interpretation of linguistic information contained in the census.

A problem of the opposite nature is exemplified by the census listing of Saho and Afar as different languages. Certainly the Saho and Afar peoples differ as ethnic groups, and Saho and Afar speech differ as well, but only debatably to the extent of mutual intelligibility (Bliese 1976, 133). Given their recognized “ethnic” distinctness, it is natural that Sahos and Afars should consider themselves in the popular sense to speak different languages.

A similar problem in the census list of languages is the separate listing of Hadiyya and Maraqqo languages. In fact, mutual intelligibility is a continuum, and linguists have proposed no objective basis for making a clear distinction between languages (mutually unintelligible) and dialects (mutually intelligible) on this continuum. The difficulty concerns not just the fuzziness of the language-dialect continuum, but also the lack of sufficiently detailed knowledge about forms of speech of ethnic groups and the names of these.

Endangered Languages

Assuming that a language with fewer than 10,000 speakers is endangered, or likely to become extinct within a generation or so, Table 1a reveals 22 endangered languages in Ethiopia, from Fadashi with 8,715 speakers to Mabaan with only 25 reported. If the last-listed category of Table 1a, “other languages,” contains languages with even fewer mother-tongue speakers than Mabaan, the endangered languages of Ethiopia are even more numerous. Such a language not listed in the census is Ongata, north of (Lake) Chew Bahir, which is reported to have only eight speakers (Savà and Tosco 2000).

At the top of Table 1a, 24 languages have more than 100,000 mother-tongue speakers and are presumably safe, at least for a few generations, but only seven

languages have more than a million mother-tongue speakers. Clearly, the expected death of 22 out of some 80 languages means a significant loss to Ethiopian linguistic diversity. Loss of languages along with their characteristic linguistic phenomena may seem of interest only to linguists and anthropologists; but that such loss occurs is also of wider interest because of what it may reveal about ethnic and societal integration and homogenization in Ethiopia (see Dorian 1993; Ladefoged 1992; Hayward 1998).

Another measure of linguistic viability is the number of mother-tongue speakers who are members of other ethnic groups. A language with more mother-tongue speakers than ethnic-group members has a recognized usefulness that encourages its acquisition beyond its ethnic group. Amharic is such a language, and the census reveals its continuing role as Ethiopian lingua franca, apparent in its number of urban speakers in all regions. Twenty-two other languages in Tables 1a and 1b also have more mother-tongue speakers than ethnic-group members, but many of them only marginally so. Zergula, an Omotic language spoken west of Lake Abaya, is the most impressive case, with 7,625 mother-tongue speakers but only 390 ethnic-group members.

The opposite condition of more ethnic group members than mother-tongue speakers yields some surprising cases. The most dramatic is Kemant, a Cushitic Agaw language spoken north of Lake Tana, with only 1,650 mother-tongue speakers but 172,324 ethnic group members (Zelalem 1998a, b). Of particular interest is how the Kemant preserve their ethnic identity in the face of the loss of their language, usually the most important ethnic-group marker. A similar case is Argobba, a Semitic language spoken in the region of Ankober, Shoa, with only 10,860 mother-tongue speakers but 62,912 ethnic-group members. One probable factor in Argobba ethnic preservation in the face of language loss is their merchant Muslim identity in an otherwise agricultural Christian Amhara area (Abebe 1992).

Three ethnic groups are reported in the census (e.g., in Table 2.14) to have no mother-tongue speakers and so do not appear in Tables 1a and 1b. These are:

<i>Ethnic Group Members</i>	<i>Principle Mother Tongue</i>
Falasha (Beta Israel) 2,306	Amharic, 2,209 speakers
Wayto, 1,631	Amharic, 1,519
Werji, 20,480	Oromo, 14,066

The Falasha, north of Lake Tana, once spoke the Agaw (C) language Qwara (Appleyard 1998). The Wayto, of the Lake Tana shore, probably also spoke an Agaw language (Gamst 1979). Both now mainly speak Amharic. The Werji are neighbors to the Silte and perhaps were Semitic “East Gurage” speakers (see Cerulli 1930, 14–15). They now mainly speak Oromo.

Amharic and Oromo

Amharic and Oromo are unquestionably the only truly national languages of Ethiopia, as shown in Table 2, which reports mother-tongue speakers of Amharic and Oromo in the nine provinces, Addis Abeba, and Dire Dawa. The table distinguishes urban and rural speakers, according to the census. I do not see in explanations of the census a statement of the basis for its distinction of urban and rural.

Table 2. Mother-tongue Speakers of Amharic and Oromo in the Nine Regions, Addis Abeba, and Dire Dawa*

<i>Region and total pop.</i>		<i>Amharic mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>% of total pop.</i>	<i>Oromo mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>% of total pop.</i>
All regions	Total	17,372,913	33 %	16,777,976	32 %
53,130,779	Urban	4,129,694		1,267,309	
	Rural	13,243,219		15,510,667	
Tigray	Total	93,258	3 %	3,047	0 %
3,136,267	Urban	31,420		455	
	Rural	61,838		2,592	
Afar	Total	68,968	7 %	7,157	0 %
1,051,643	Urban	45,710		3,251	
	Rural	23,258		3,906	
Amhara	Total	12,896,955	93 %	402,683	3 %
13,834,297	Urban	1,200,429		16,180	
	Rural	11,696,526		386,503	
Oromiya	Total	2,062,175	11 %	15,648,643	85 %
18,473,820	Urban	865,632		937,828	
	Rural	1,196,543		14,710,815	
Somali	Total	27,919	1 %	70,264	2 %
3,144,964	Urban	26,671		13,039	

<i>Region and total pop.</i>		<i>Amharic mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>% of total pop.</i>	<i>Oromo mother-tongue speakers</i>	<i>% of total pop.</i>
	Rural	1,248		57,225	
Benishangul-Gumuz	Total	104,773	23 %	73,046	16 %
460,459	Urban	16,895		9,169	
	Rural	87,878		63,877	
SNNP**	Total	438,403	4 %	169,850	2 %
10,371,192	Urban	280,326		26,904	
	Rural	158,077		142,946	
Gambella	Total	13,713	8 %	10,470	7 %
162,397	Urban	5,213		5,762	
	Rural	8,500		4,708	
Harari	Total	48,484	37 %	65,296	50 %
131,139	Urban	47,716		13,403	
	Rural	768		51,893	
Addis Ababa	Total	1,534,758	73 %	211,438	9 %
2,112,737	Urban	1,526,385		192,950	
	Rural	8,373		18,488	
Dire Dawa	Total	83,508	33 %	116,081	19 %
251,864	Urban	83,299		48,367	
	Rural	209		67,714	

* Office of Population and Housing Census Commission, 1: Table 2.15

**Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region

Of the stated 53,130,779 total population of Ethiopia, Amharic and Oromo mother-tongue speakers are 34,150,888, or 64 %. An interesting urban/rural contrast is presented by Amharic and Oromo (cf. Bender et al. 1976, chap. 12, esp. 242). Of the stated 2,112,737 population of Addis Abeba, 73 % are mother-tongue speakers of Amharic (versus 10 % speakers of Oromo). Of the total Ethiopian rural population of 45,816,037, 34 % are mother-tongue speakers of Oromo (versus 29 % speakers of Amharic). In five of the nine regions, Amharic is more populous in urban than rural areas, whereas in eight of the nine regions Oromo is more populous in rural than urban areas (the exception is Gambella; see Table 2). Numbers of second language speakers of Amharic and Oromo will be discussed below.

Language Diversity of the Regions.

While Article 5 of the 1994 Constitution of Ethiopia (Nahum 1997, 213) makes Amharic “the working language of the federal government,” it also states that “all Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition.” Article 39 defines “Nation, Nationality or People” as “a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.” Article 39 also gives to “every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia . . . the right to speak, to write, and to develop its own language” (Nahum 1997, 229–30), a decision that has naturally resulted in considerable stress in the practice of regional government, particularly in education.

Abbink (1997, 166–67) discusses the potentially problematic legal nature of such a definition of “nation, nationality or people”; and Abbink (1998), Brenziner (1997), and Markakis (1998) have examined some of the problems resulting when local majorities have asserted their constitutional rights over local minorities, seeking education in their language against the preference of local minorities for education in Amharic. In the Kambaata-majority *woreda*, for example, minority Alaba speakers opposed the use of Kambaata in education.

Table 3 reports languages with more than 100,000 mother-tongue speakers and languages with 50,000 to 100,000 mother-tongue speakers in the nine established regions plus Addis Abeba and the Dire Dawa Provisional Region. The Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region shows great linguistic diversity compared to the relative linguistic homogeneity of most other regions.

Table 3. Languages with More than 100,000 Mother-tongue Speakers and with 50,000–100,000 Mother-tongue Speakers in the Nine Regions, Addis Abeba, and Dire Dawa*

<i>Region</i>	<i>Languages with more than 100,000 speakers</i>		<i>Languages with 50,000– 100,000 speakers</i>	
Tigray	Tigrinya	2,993,390	Amharic	93,258
Afar	Afar	996,698	Amharic	68,968
Amhara	Amharic	12,896,955	none	
	Awngi	337,034		
	Kamir	130,782		

<i>Region</i>	<i>Languages with more than 100,000 speakers</i>		<i>Languages with 50,000– 100,000 speakers</i>	
Amhara	Oromo	402,683		
Oromiya	Amharic	2,062,175	none	
	Gedeo	176,189		
	‘Gurage’	154,959		
	Oromo	15,648,643		
	Somali	128,201		
Somali	Somali	3,017,344	Oromo	70,264
Benishangul- Gumuz	Amharic	104,773	Oromo	73,046
	Berta	114,186		
	Gumuz	106,449		
Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP)	Amharic	438,403	Basketo	57,743
	Alaba	116,984	Gidole	50,091
	Ari	158,521	Male	53,762
	Bench	173,037	Me’en	51,879
	Gamo	676,694	Timbaro	82,245
	Gedeo	460,682	Yemsa	52,292
	Gofa	232,832		
	‘Gurage’**	1,526,826		
	Hadiyya	885,603		
	Kafa	542,298		
	Kambaata	451,227		
	Konso	140,371		
	Koyra	102,956		
	Kulo	274,276		
	Oromo	169,850		
	Sidama	1,855,610		
	Wolayta	1,196,811		
Gambella	none		Nuer	64,509
Harari	none		Oromo	65,296
Addis Abeba	Amharic	1,534,758	none	
	‘Gurage’	184,595		
	Oromo	211,438		
	Tigrinya	114,346		
Dire Dawa	Oromo	116,081	Amharic	83,508

*Office of Population and Housing Census Commission 1998, 1: Table 2.15

**See section 3, above, for languages of ‘Gurage’ sub-groups in the SNNP Region.

Second Language Knowledge

The 1994 census also reports second language knowledge of Ethiopians, defining “second language” as “an additional language used by the respondent” (Office of Population 1998, 1:11). Table 4 presents the 35 languages with 40,000 or more mother-tongue speakers and the three second languages most reported by their speakers. Numbers of mother-tongue speakers of the 35 languages are given in Tables 1a and 1b and are not repeated here. As seen at the top of Table 4, Amharic and Oromo are of course the most common second languages, and “Gurage” is third. English is fourth with 169,726 second language speakers and Tigrinya fifth with 146,934. Second language knowledge often results from bilingual homes, the acquisition of a “trade-language” or *lingua franca*, or the acquisition of an important neighboring language. Perhaps puzzling in this regard are the 2,235 Afars who report second language knowledge of Berta (Jebelawi), a language whose mother-tongue speakers live on the Ethiopia-Sudan border over 250 miles west of Afar territory.

Table 4. Major Second Languages of Speakers of Major Mother Tongues* (Languages with 40,000 + Mother-tongue Speakers)

<i>Mother tongue (MT)</i>	<i>1st second language and number of speakers</i>	<i>2nd second language and number of speakers</i>	<i>3rd second language and number of speakers</i>
All MTs	Amharic 5,104,149	Oromo 1,535,434	‘Gurage’ 208,358
Afar	Amharic 30,841	Tigrinya 16,824	Oromo 8,702
Alaba	‘Gurage’ 12,815	Amharic 7,061	Kambaata 4,490
Amharic	Oromo 988,037	English 148,564	Tigrinya 103,763 ¹
Anywak	Amharic 9,400	Nuer 958	Oromo 381
Ari	Amharic 17,258	Hamer 2,629	Goffa 2,189
Awngi	Amharic 97,115	Gumuz 1,846	Tigrinya 1,276
Basketo	Amharic 5,043	Goffa 4,299	Mello 1,384
Bench	Amharic 13,446	Kafa 13,109	Sheko 3,199 ²
Berta	Oromo 8,671	Amharic 3,113	Fadashi 120
Gamo	Amharic 94,902	Wolayta 7,626	Zergula 1,489
Gedeo	Oromo 124,162	Amharic 71,446	Sidama 2,083
Gidole	Amharic 5,641	Oromo 3,409	Konso 556
Goffa	Amharic 29,519	Basketo 4,786	Mello 3,014

<i>Mother tongue (MT)</i>	<i>1st second language and number of speakers</i>		<i>2nd second language and number of speakers</i>		<i>3rd second language and number of speakers</i>	
Gumuz	Oromo	26,541	Amharic	2,987	Jebalawi	2,111
'Gurage'	Amharic	790,110	'Gurage'	25,827 ³	Oromo	23,789
Hadiyya	Amharic	191,404	Kambata	42,648	Wolayta	36,910
Hamer	Ari	1,677	Tsamay	914	Amharic	666
Kafa	Amharic	102,696	Oromo	18,081	Bench	8,731
Kambaata	Amharic	130,330	Hadiyya	70,298	Alaba	9,891
Kamir	Amharic	51,354	Tigrinya	9,615	Oromo	25
Konso	Oromo	6,656	Amharic	5,472	Gidole	599 ⁴
Konta	Amharic	4,631	Kafa	1,604	Kulo	390 ⁵
Koyra	Amharic	15,402	Oromo	4,325	Burji	1,095
Kulo	Oromo	13,917	Amharic	4,592	Kafa	2,861
Male	Goffa	3,470	Gamo	2,610	Ari	1,233 ⁶
Me'en	Bench	2,095	Amharic	2,060	She	510
Mocha	Amharic	13,283	Oromo	3,239	Kafa	1,134
Nuer	Amharic	1,191	Anywak	1,160	English	565
Oromo	Amharic	2,320,759	Somali	74,366	Sidama	41,572
Sidama	Amharic	205,740	Oromo	17,212	Wolayta	3,458
Somali	Oromo	184,688	Amharic	41,659	English	6,796
Tigray	Amharic	413,580	English	3,399	Saho	3,283
Timbaro	Amharic	13,977	Hadiyya	11,086	Wolayta	5,236
Wolayta	Amharic	225,700	Hadiyya	9,294	Sidama	5,839
Yemsa	Oromo	23,164	Amharic	18,753	'Gurage'	243

* Office of Population and Housing Census Commission 1998, 1: Table 2.19

¹'Gurage' 102,522

⁴Gewada 542

²Me'en 3,089

⁵Oromo 386

³'Gurages' may speak other 'Gurage'

⁶Amharic 1,231

languages; see discussion in section 3.

Generally speaking, the more populous a language is, the less likely its speakers are to know second languages and vice versa. This is apparent in Table 5, which lists a random selection of 26 Ethiopian languages in order of decreasing number of mother-tongue speakers with second language knowledge. With prominent exceptions like Nuer and Mursi, the percentage of second language speakers clearly tends to rise as the number of mother-tongue speakers falls.

It is surprising to discover that in a nation we usually consider multilingual, with a reported total population of 53,130,779, only 16 % (8,371,518) report having second language knowledge (Office of Population 1998, 1: Table 2.19). If we consider persons for whom perhaps second language knowledge is most relevant—members of the population aged 9 and up (Office of Population 1998, 1: Table 2.9A), or 36,660,566 people—the percentage of those with second language knowledge rises only to 23 %.

Table 5: Percentage of Mother-tongue Speakers with Second-language Knowledge (26 Languages)*

<i>Language</i>	<i>1. Mother-tongue (MT) speakers</i>	<i>MT-speakers 2. with 2nd-lg. knowledge</i>	<i>% MT- speakers with 2nd lg. knowledge</i>
Oromo	16,777,975	2,613,703	16 %
Tigray	3,224,875	443,473	14
Sidama	1,876,329	232,060	12
Afar	965,462	64,830	7
Gamo	690,069	108,654	16
Kafa	569,626	144,161	25
Kambaata	487,654	226,999	47
Kulo	313,228	65,706	21
Goffa	233,340	43,979	19
Bench	173,586	35,056	20
Alaba	126,257	30,929	25
Koyra	103,879	21,231	20
Yemsa	81,614	43,198	53
Nuer	64,907	3,204	5
Gidole	50,328	10,064	20
Burji	35,731	12,555	35
Saho	22,759	10,826	48
Oyda	16,597	9,946	60
Zayse	10,172	2,980	30
Mossiya	6,624	3,551	54
Mursi	3,278	108	3
Kunama	1,883	837	44
Mer	989	94	10
Shita	301	127	42
Gamili	144	113	78
Gebato	78	39	50 %

*Office of Population and Housing Census Commission, 1: Table 2.19

In a nation where English has long been the language of instruction in secondary schools, it may also be surprising that only 169,726 report second language knowledge of English. This number may, however, be relevant only to those 1,982,284 Ethiopians with 12 years of education, who comprise only 8.5 % of the population (Office of Population 1998, 1: Table 3.1A). Such a low percentage may be the result of the census definition of second language as “an additional language used by respondents,” since English is surely known by many who have a high school education but who find no use for the language.

Population of Ethiopia in 2002

The 1994 census (Office of Population 1998, 2:15) provides mathematically projected estimated future populations of Ethiopia at one-year intervals up to 2030. The estimated 2002 population of 67,220,000 is based on the 1994 population of 53,132,276, plus 21 %. Thus, the numbers of speakers of Ethiopian languages might generally be increased by this percentage to approximate present populations, though as noted earlier some languages undoubtedly have increased their numbers at the expense of others since the census was taken. The 1994 census provided a surprising amount of information about language, and the 2004 census will hopefully yield as much, if not more, linguistic data.

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