Comparative Analysis of Amharic and Afaan Oromoo Proverbs:
A meta-communication perspective

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Abstract: Proverbs are timeless human wisdom in the form of concise figurative speech. They reflect the conceptual experience of the speakers, particularly the elders in speech communities. This study aims at presenting a comparative study between Amharic and Afaan Oromoo proverbs from the standpoint of meta-communication perspective. Meta-communication is conceptualized as communicating about communication. Communication is believed to have many things in common with culture in that it shapes and dictates the communication behavior of a given society. In verbal communication, the use of proverbs is quite often, explicitly to comment on communication behavior. Despite the multifaceted functions of proverbs in several disciplines, the focuses of this study are proverbs as sources of communication that are relevant in linguistics and anthropology. In so doing, sample proverbs have been purposively selected based on semantic criteria and analyzed by using psycho-analysis method. In the analysis of the proverbs, we built a cognitive model for their semantic relationships. This is because the proverbs have relatively stable, conventionalized and contextual meaning of form as continuum, residing in their common conceptual base. Above of all, they are metaphor-dependent as a common on conceptual base. Hence, there are a number of proverbs in Amharic and Afaan Oromoo as well that comment on importance of communication, communication behavior or processes, among others. In both ethno-linguistic groups, thus, employing such proverbs to comment on communication is quite common which tend to show the communication behavior of each group.

Keywords: Afaan Oromoo, Amharic, meta-communication, metaphor, proverbs

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1. Introduction

Communication in any society occurs mainly through language, where context plays significant role in linking the users. Language is the human vocal sound or the arbitrary symbolic representation of the sound, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for the purpose of communication. It is the fundamental means of communication, interaction and social integration among individuals in the society. This social tool must be conserved, persistent and accurately developed (MacCoinnigh, 2015).

Incontrovertibly, communication has long been determined to be part, and parcel of human life. Since human beings interact in social contexts, under normal circumstances, solitary life is seldom possible. That is why Dodd (1979) underscores as “[n]o one is an island”, and this is to reveal that we live in a world of communication where avoiding communicating is impossible. Whatever we do in our lives, we never avoid communicating. Rothwell (2000) also contends that the quality of human life is exceedingly determined in one way or another on individuals’ ability to interact with others or on how well one can skillfully do so. More often than not, the practical importance of communication is also being accentuated.

Communication is said to have many things in common with culture, and even many anthropologists contend that both are inexorably intertwined and intractably interwoven to the extent it is very difficult to single out one from the other. As Kottak (2003) also asserts, our culture influences our communication and our communication reflects our culture. Culture frames out communication patterns which in turn determine individuals’ communication styles. These are parallel with the norm, value and rules of one’s culture. This in turn dictates how to communicate what with whom and details of where and when to communicate. These issues are of overarching significance in envisaging the communication behavior of any society.

In communication, some expressions become more effective when they are supported with proverbs. Proverbs are rich words of wisdom which pass from generation to generation. They can be concise and condensed sayings in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs. In this study, therefore, an attempt is made to give a bird’s eye view of the communication behaviors of Amharic and Afaan Oromoo through the lens of the meta-communication of proverbs.

2. Statement of the problem

The purpose of this study is to have a closer look at the communication behavior of Amharic and Afaan Oromoo in respect to the meta-communication of proverbs. This unquestionably calls for establishing socio-cultural systems of both linguistic groups. Undeniably, the two groups are claimed to have coexisted for centuries and hence likely to
have many things in common. However, there is no wonder that oftentimes their differences can also be drawn along lines of linguistic, cultural or religious divergences. In this regard, some offending proverbs equate relation of Afaan Oromoo and Amharic speakers to that of relation between wolf and sheep. Further capitalizing the differences, Levine (2000:128) has the following to say.

The Oromo are in many ways the antithesis of Amhara. Not only did the two people confront one another for centuries as great historical antagonists, but the traditions they brought to the encounter contrast radically. Where the Amhara system is hierarchical, the Oromo is egalitarian. Where the Amhara is individualistic, the Oromo is solidaristic. Where religions and practical functions are segregated in Amhara institutions, for the Oromo they are fused. Where the Amhara historical project is to build an empire that of the Oromo is to maintain parochial tradition.

Linguistically, the Amhara belong to the Semitic stock who are said to migrate from South Arabia between 10th and 7th century B.C. (Hamdesa, 1982). They are also considered to be the bearer of Highland Christian culture. Albeit earlier scholars believe that traces the origin of Oromoo, parallel to that of Semitic stocks, a preponderance of evidence these days confirms it to be in Southern Ethiopia at a place specifically known to be Wollabu. Furthermore, Amharic has established a long literary tradition, whereas Afaan Oromoo, almost if not at all, has an oral tradition that passes from one generation to another. Besides, there are sizable differences of sociocultural systems that have exhaustively discussed by Levine. Such sociocultural systems unequivocally, in one way or another, can tremendously affect the communication behavior of any linguistic group. As Levine (2000) explicates, if, for instance, the Oromoo are egalitarian solidarity and the Amhara are individualistic hierarchical, this inevitably determines the manner in which each ethnic group is to interact. It is widely contended, for instance, that honorific languages are the commonest trait of hierarchically structured society which in turn determines the content dimension and the relation dimension of a message. Scupin and DeCorse (2004:293) have noted the following in this connection.

Sociolinguistics have found that a number of languages contain honorific forms that determine the use of grammar, syntax, and other word usage. Honorific forms of language are used to express differences in social levels among speakers and are common in societies that maintain social inequality and hierarchy. Honorific forms can apply to the interaction between male and female, kin and non-kin, and higher- and lower-status individuals.

Predicated on this, communication behavior of both linguistic groups can, therefore, unequivocally exhibit some sort of divergence. Irrespective of this, the two linguistic groups are said to have many converging cultural traits as they have long been come into contact and have coexisted and hence assumed to have been enormously intermingled. Upon contact, the exchange of some cultural, linguistic, social and political elements is
inevitable. There are also converging points in communication styles including the amazing similarity in the way proverbs are made use of. At the heart of this study, there is an identification of how do proverbs that are spoken on communication look like. In so doing, it therefore, attempts to answer the following questions.

- Are there proverbs that serve meta-communication purpose?
- Are the proverbs promoting or detrimental to communication?
- Is there any converging point in the use of proverbs between Amharic and Afaan Oromoo?

3. Research methodology

Two data collection methods were employed to collect data for the study. These two are elicitation and document analysis. Elicitation was carried out by selecting native speakers of the two languages (four from each language) purposively on the basis of their deep knowledge of the socio-cultural context and oral tradition of the society. On the other hand, document analysis was made on Wasane (2016) and Berhanu (2002). With these two methods, forty (40) relevant proverbs were collected. In addition to the two books above, document analysis has been extensively being employed in this study. In doing so, reading into different literatures has been made.

Cross-culturally equivalent Amharic and Afaan Oromoo proverbs which related to the concept of meta-communication of the eight native speakers and the two proverb books were chosen as the corpus of the study. We have checked the authenticity of the proverbs throughout the sources and chose the relevant ones for analysis. The proverbs in the two languages were cross-checked through judgmental evaluation by the informants as well as through introspection as we are the native speakers of Afaan Oromoo and near-native speakers in Amharic. In Addition, one of us is Afaan Oromoo instructor and the other has qualification in Amharic.

The discussion was made by checking against our lived experiences and based on the assumed realities on the ground as seen from outside in. Since proverbs are such a fluid and context-dependent folklore genre, objective interpretation is seldom possible. During the analysis, albeit cumbersome, equivalent English translation was given as much as possible.

4. Conceptual framework

Prior to embarking on to the discussion of what the usage of proverbs in the communication behaviors of two linguistic groups, namely Oromoo and Amhara looks like, it appears of great importance to shed light on some conceptual aspects. In so doing, the elucidation of meta-communication, meta-proverbs and proverbs, proverb as high-context communication, double bind message inter alia will be taken care of in what follows.
4.1 The conception of meta-communication

Meta-communication can roughly be conceptualized as communicating about communication. According to Schoop & Christoph (2000), the research on meta-communication has not yet received much explicit attention and hence is at infancy level. Calhoun (2002) reveals that Gregory Bateson, which stands for the dimension of human communication that involves setting the terms through which communication is to take place, instigates the term for the first time. Calhoun (2002:307) then contends the word “meta-communication is the reflection upon or framing of communication that accompanies communication”. According to Schoop & Christoph (2000:131), meta-communication can be understood as in the following.

“Meta-communication” is the general term for communication about communication that in everyday life is often part and parcel of any conversation. A simple request “can you repeat that?” is already a kind of meta-communication, and so are requests for clarification and dialogue management functions such as “let us come to a conclusion.

Melowsky also rightly discusses by referring to other writers that communication takes place on two different levels: communication and meta-communication. He also goes on to note that:

Communication involves a first order message while meta-communication—that is, communication about communication—involves a higher-order message that serves to qualify the original message. When these two levels are in agreement, the total message is considered logically consistent. However, when the second-order message contradicts the primary message, the communication is said to be logically inconsistent. At this point, the receiver does not know to which message he should respond. (Melowsky, 1978:2)

Such mismatch in sending messages is referred by Olson & DeFrain (2000) as double bind. The possibility of accurately discriminating the message or commenting on it can therefore unbind the message and clarify the misperception. Yetim (2004) distinguishes between three different types of meta-communication: Ex-ante-meta-communication (taking place before action), meta-communication in action (taking place during action), and Ex-post-meta-communication (taking place after action).

4.2 Meta-communication and double bind

From the outset, it should be noted that meta-communication oftentimes presupposes double bind message. It is contended that meta-communication comes into view as a primary way of preventing or unbinding a double bind message. If communication is conceptualized as sharing meaning between groups, it is said to exceedingly depend on both encoding and decoding message skillfully. Olson & DeFrain (2000:280) contends that when we communicate, we send out mixed kinds of messages where the gap between our verbal and nonverbal messages might emerge as acute perplex. As one can pretty sure
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determine, if these two sources of messages are incongruent, it inevitably turns out to be incomprehensible to fittingly decipher the message. Such confusion then calls for clarification or some sort of further explication which technically known as meta-communication. Illuminating the point, Olson and DeFrain reveal that “[t]he receiver is in a double bind when the speaker creates a situation – legitimate or not – that calls into question the type of relationship the receiver has with the speaker”.

4.3 Meta-proverbs and proverbs
As has already been mentioned, meta-communication can roughly be understood as communicating about communication. By extending this conceptualization of meta-communication, proverbs that comment on or enlighten another proverb can possibly be termed as meta-proverb. “… when a person makes a direct comment about someone else’s communication behavior, meta-communication has transpired” (Wilmot, 1980:63). In a well-known proverb of Chinua Achebe that goes: “[p]roverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” would epitomize meta-proverb. In Guji Oromoo too, the proverb ḋabbiin bifa kormaati dubbiin bifa mammaaksaați roughly means “proverb shapes a speech as calf takes shape of the bull” also serve similar purpose. Such proverbs as in (1 and 2) from Amharic and Afaan Oromoo also communicate similar meaning.

As to what exactly proverb is, there seems to be no single all-encompassing and all satisfying definition is forwarded yet. Nevertheless, there are some converging points on what should be the constituents. For Finnegan (1976:393), “[i]t is a saying in more or less fixed form marked by ‘shortness, sense and salt’ and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it.” Viewed in the same light, Hasan-Rokem (1992) also contends that a proverb is seldom more than a long sentence and often express one main idea. Okpewho (1992) similarly spells out that “a proverb may be defined as a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm”. Differently treated by Miruka (1994), various definitions as many as seven by different scholars have been presented and the salient features of all definitions are provided as follows. From those definitions, he thus pinpoints that a proverb is short, terse or brief; indirect, obscure or gnomic; relatively invariable/fixed; statement; and full of wisdom, truth or meaning.

4.4 Context for proverb
Proverbs are not used in vacuity, but they are performed in a certain context, at any definite point in time and for distinct purpose. To that end, an attempt will be made to elucidate who uses proverbs with whom, why, where and when. Addressing these issues is not a trouble-free business. It appears to be contentious and scholars have held assortments of stances. For instance, Finnegan (1976:394) asserts that “[t]his question is made more difficult because proverbs often have no specialized occasion for their usage”. Contrarily, scholars, such as Miruka (1994) and Okpewho (1992) argue that even if it is difficult to
determine where and when of proverbs are used, the situation in which they are used, who
address them and to whom they are addressed can be explicated.

In most cases, there is an inclination that elders are more qualified and privileged to use
proverbs. Okpewho (1992:230) justifies this and says that “mainly because it is assumed
that their age and experience put them in a better position to understand the full
implications of the wisdom and truth contained in the proverbs and so to impart on the
younger members”. By implication, using proverbs has got something to do with social
status (from a socially superior to a subordinate) (Yankah, 1994). In a patriarchic society,
females are less privileged to use proverbs and the same may also go with younger
members. “Younger members may use proverbs freely among themselves, but they are not
expected to use proverbs in the presence of elders without prefacing such use with courtesy
like ‘as you, our fathers, have said…”’ (ibid).

According to Miruka (1994:39), there is no fixed rule as to when (time and day) and the
place where a proverb is to be used. “It is not even predictable that proverbs will certainly
be used on any particular occasion. The place and the time of rendition of proverb,
therefore, are fluid.” Nonetheless, one can speak of the situation in which proverbs are used.
In characterizing the situation, Okpewho (1992) figures out the following three major
points: speech-act situations, formal performance (such as storytelling), and performance of
chants of a somewhat ritual kind. In the same vein, Hasan-Rokem (1992:129) contends
“proverbs are usually applied in situations characterized by conflict, skepticism, or other
kind of oppositionally structured mental dispositions”. In African context, however, it is
argued by Finnegan (1976) that proverbs can refer to practically any situation. It is widely
contended that proverbs are terrifically context bounded and any attempt to interpret them
highly depends on context. In this connection, Finnegan (1976) divulges that it is
impossible to have any definitive treatment of the allusive content of the proverbs without
the study of their situation as the actual import depends on the context of use. Concerning
this, Rothwell (2000:15) notes that “[c]ontext is the environment where communication
occurs: who (sender–receiver) communicates what (message) to whom (receiver–sender),
why a message is sent (purpose), and when (timing) and how (channel) it is transmitted.”

Altogether, proverbs are used contextually to make the communication successful.

4.5 Proverb as high-context communication

As mentioned earlier, communication style is highly influenced by the culture in which
individuals were born and brought up. One way of explaining the variations in styles is
supposed to be along the lines of low-context and high-context communication. In this
respect, Gudykunst et al. (1996:511) illustrate low-context communication as the use of
explicit and direct messages in which meanings are contained mainly in the transmitted
messages; whereas high-context communication, in contrast, involves the use of implicit
and indirect messages in which meanings are embedded in the person or in the sociocultural context.

Predicated on this, one can pretty determine which communication style goes to or is best for the use of proverbs. Hence, it is crystal clear that proverbs are metaphorical and interpreted implicitly or indirectly, and they would be accorded with high-context communication. To Yankah (1994:3386), “… since face to face communication carries considerable hazards for both speaker and addressee, various strategies have to be deployed to minimize such risks, and these include the use of indirection of which proverbs are typical examples.” He also goes on to accentuate that, “[s]ince most proverbs are metaphorical in their application to situations, delicate matters may be discussed more conveniently with little or no treat to face” (ibid).

Being high-context communication aspect, proverbs are metaphors which assert wisdom, truth, morals and indigenous views in metaphorical, fixed and memorable forms in common sense or the practical experience of human beings. In any cultural groups, they are handed down from generation to generation within local communities. They, thus, are used by speakers as a way of saying something gently, in a veiled way. They may sum up situations, pass judgments, recommend a course of action or serve as a past precedent for the present action. Fundamentally, they portray the culture of the society, so individuals can emphasize feelings of togetherness.

5. Results and discussion
Proverbs are dynamic in their evolvement, vast in imagery, familiar and easy to learn and understand. Despite their cultural domains, they slightly change and their lifespan also varies enormously due to social and ideological changes in a certain linguistic groups. In this study, therefore, we collected Amharic (Amh) \( ^\dagger \) and Afaan Oromoo (AO) proverbs which are related to meta-communication functions in order to reduce and manage its scope. Accordingly, the meanings of the proverbs with semantic implications are analyzed. As already explained in the methodology section, the data are few and limited to 40 proverbs for both languages which are divided into six thematic subsections. The first subsection deals with the general meta-communication purposes of proverbs in the languages. In the second subsection, proverbs which endorse communication are presented along with their semantic features. Then, there are proverbs which deal with the importance of perception in communication. The next subsection, discusses proverbs which show dilemmatic situations in communication. Subsection Five describes communication demeaning proverbs. In the last subsection, we analyze those which are used to sign off

\( ^\dagger \) Throughout this paper, Amh stands for Amharic and AO stands for Afaan Oromoo.
5.1 Proverbs: Meta-communication perspective

Before we move on to the analysis of the proverbs, it appears of overarching importance to point out their functions. In this regard, Miruka (1994), for example, discusses such functions of proverbs as aesthetic, reflecting, summative and normative. It is, therefore, quite clear that proverbs are considered as the most attention grabbing expressions since they tend to possess literary quality and abbreviate long speech more to the point. Such functions of proverbs seem mostly valued by both ethno-linguistic groups under consideration. The following proverbs can be sited as illuminating cases in point.

(1) nagər bɔ-missale t'ay bɔ-birille. (Amh)
thing with-example local.drink with-glass
‘As tej (local beer) is served by birille (glass), speech does by proverb.’

(2) a. dubbii-n mammaka kɔm ossoogidda n mammaka-ti.
speech-NOM proverb without salt without
‘A speech without proverb is a stew without salt.’
b. jabbii-n bifa kormaa-ti dubbii-bifa mammaka-ti. (AO)
calf-NOM color bull-COP speech-NOM color proverb-COP
‘A calf takes the shape of the bull, as proverb shapes the speech.’

In the cultures of many ethnic groups in Ethiopia, such as Amhara, t'ay ‘local beer/drink’ is a typical drink. It is occasionally prepared during different rituals. This drink is served to guests in a cup of glass called birille, which signifies the status and prestige of the drink. Likewise in communication, elders in the cultures prefer to utilize proverbs as in (1) to sharpen their messages or to reveal the direction of their speeches. Equivalently, Afaan Oromoo speakers use proverbs which are linguistically different from (1), but pragmatically the same. In (2a) above, the proverb describes that a speech cannot be conceptually strong and fruitful without proverb as a stew is not delicious without salt. In this proverb, soogidda ‘salt’ and mammaka ‘proverb’ are correlated as the source and target of the metaphor. Another proverb with the same function is mentioned in (2b). Here the speakers of the language make a claim that the message of a particular speech relies on the proverb that precedes it as a calf resembles bull (considering the bull a father). Hence, there is a strong link between the presupposing proverbs in the context of particular

① The data presentation for both languages has three rows. The first row presents the proverb in the phonemic transcription using IPA symbols. The second row gives morpheme-by-morpheme glossing, and the third is free English translation. In the transcription, gemination and vowel lengthening are represented by doubling consonant and vowel phonemes respectively.

② t'ay is cultural drink which is made of honey, malt and buckthorn in Ethiopia.
communication.

From the three proverbs presented above, the speakers of both languages utilize proverbs in their everyday communication to facilitate their conversations. The proverbs primarily increase the focus on the substantive knowledge and understanding of a speech, by providing a concrete information in an easy, focused and context aware manner to support the communication. Despite having slightly different cultural orientations, the speakers of both languages share the same view and feelings towards the objective world. Thus, they accomplish their day-to-day activities on the basis of their similar experiences. So, from this perspective, Amharic and Afaan Oromoo speakers use proverbs metaphorically to express the same meanings in their conversations. However, though the proverbs in the two languages linguistically describe different state-of-affairs as source domains, they are identical in meaning. The proverbs in this category are limited in number. In the next subsection, we show proverbs which endorse communication.

5.2 Proverbs of communication endorsement

In Amhara and Oromoo societies, being an orator accords oneself with a privilege and high status in social hierarchy. Such individuals, no doubt, play crucial role in settling disputes, solving problems, arranging marriage and directing rituals among others. It is plain enough that no human being by nature wants to be bestowed unprivileged or low social status. To this end, fluency in speech/communication is exceedingly encouraged in both linguistic groups. The encouragement is done through such folklore genres as proverbs. Among the many proverbs spoken to highlight communication, the following can be taken as illustrative examples.

(3) a. hɨməm-um jəmmajinnaggər bəfittəŋə fəws-u məggαŋγən. (Amh)
   sickness-POSS-ACC not.speak patient heal-POSS disease
   ‘Unless you unveil your problem, you remain with it.’

b. zimmita lə-bogim al-bəjat aərahulst hona and nəbər fay-ət. (Amh)
   silence for-sheep NEG-serve twelve COP one tiger hurt-FEM
   ‘Silence didn’t help even the sheep; being twelve a tiger ate them all.’

c. kala-mənnagor dəyazmacinnot jik ərəd. (Amh)
   without-speaking military missed
   ‘Failure to speak, results in missing a position.’

d. isrəggə wiha jikərrafəd. (Amh)
   stagnate water stink
   ‘Stagnated water stinks.’

(4) a. kan duute kan afaan-iin duute. (AO)
   what died what mouth-with died
In (3a-d), the proverbs entail that whatever encountered, need to be communicated, unless expecting solution would be ludicrous and even might end up creating more complicated ones. Further, they tell us no matter how big the sum is, if you fail to communicate, express your feeling, or unveil your problem, it is evident that you will be completely besieged. Oftentimes, as a result of paying no attention to being communicant, one can miss a golden chance. They convey important triggering message to communicate, typically for those whose nature of work necessitates building strong relations with individuals from diverse background; and perhaps for those who are longing much to quench their voracious appetite for position. Most importantly, to trigger one to speak or to assert that silence is not that praiseworthy or to provoke someone, the following proverbs can be employed by the above Amharic proverbs.

Similarly, the examples of Afaan Oromoo in (4a-c) promote self-expression to know one another better. Concomitantly, shyness is extremely crestfallen as it is believed to erect a hurdle against effective communication. To that end, the proverb in (4c) can be used in Afaan Oromoo to help boost up audacious behavior. This is to mean, unless you are bold enough to share confidently your idea, you can even get hurt by your own kith and kin. On the other hand, in (4a), one can imagine how being able to communicate has been accorded equivalent status with ones being alive. The proverbs in (3a) and (4b), in addition to the message they unveil, are linguistically approximately the same. All of the above proverbs, despite their structural variations, are utilized by the speakers of both languages to encourage individuals to express their ideas or themselves.

5.3 Proverbs of perception in communication

Sizable proverbs from Amharic and Afaan Oromoo that convey a message emphasizing on the importance of perception or correct interpretation are also worthwhile mentioning. Regarding this, Gudykunst et al. (1996:9) reports “[i]nterpreting message is the process of perceiving and making sense of the messages and other stimuli from the environment we receive through our senses.” The following proverbs can substantiate this argument.

(5) a. monnagar saj-assihu milac’ mosab saj-allimu. (Amh)
    speaking without-thinking trigger pull without-targeting
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‘Speaking before thinking is like pulling a trigger before aiming.’

b. ko-mananagor maddamot’ ka-mawat’ mallamot’. (Amh)

from-speaking listening from-swallowing chewing

‘Better to listen than to speak, and chew perfectly before swallowing.’

(6) a. osoo hin-ubatiin k’ubaa hin-gubatiin. (AO)

if NEG-understand finger NEG-burn

‘Unless you understand clearly, don’t get into trouble.’

b. dubbi gayn kaa’e gowwaan k’ubaa kaa’e. (AO)

speech witty put fool finger insert

‘What a witty man avoids, the foolish considers.’

In conversation, if speakers need to achieve their target, they must think before they speak as illustrated in (5a) of Amharic proverb above. The proverb associates targeting an object to properly shoot with thinking how to utter and what to say prior to speaking. On the other hand, the Amharic proverb in (5b) proposes listening prior to speaking as simulated with chewing prior to swallowing. Likewise, in Afaan Oromoo, understanding is considered as the fundamental precondition to accomplish an activity, as shown in (6a), which advises not to take risk unless we understand the scenario of a conversation. Afaan Oromoo proverb in (6b) contrasts the reservation of witty man on speech and the quickness of foolish person in speech. It means that a wise person does not hurry to speak first in communication; he/she rather prefers to understand the context. However, unwise person becomes the first to speak. The four proverbs, (5a&b; 6a&b), in both languages propose understanding the context of conversation and listening well before the communicators forward their ideas. Thus, all the aforementioned proverbs appear to have converging meaning, which underscores the significance of precise comprehension or interpretation of message prior to be engaged in it. Failure to do so, then, would prone to a danger as expressed in the Amharic proverb below.

(7) c’imc’imta kifigna jas-matta. (Amh)

gossip seriously CAUS-hit

‘Hearsay causes hardest hit.’

Contrary to the advises expressed in (5&6) above, the one in (7) threatens that if someone speaks in a conversation using rumor information, it is dangerous for his/her interpersonal relation in the communicative group. The other members of the communication group all argue against the speaker due to the unconfirmed information comprehended. Altogether, Amharic and Afaan Oromoo speakers use proverbs, such as the above, to advise speakers to take much time in listening, perceiving and understanding the themes of communication before taking the chance to speak.
Besides the above ones, there are proverbs in both languages showing the importance of perception in communication. The following proverbs, thus, bear a message that our senses are continually engaged in receiving and sending massages; be it verbal or non-verbal.

(8) a. ḳoro 끼’Nom 葭 s 葭’Ngb. (Amh)
   ear NEG-fasting eye NEG-satisfied
   ‘Ear doesn’t fast, eye never be satisfied.’

   b. qa-gobo ḳbbu ḳa-sdratu ḳr-fari ḳbbu ḳr-fitu. (Amh)
   POSS-brave heart from-chest POSS-coward heart from-face
   ‘Cowardice can be recognized from face, bravery from chest.’

(9) a. dubbii-n ḳurra ḳak’-t’ii ḳagalee-n ḳa’an ḳak’-t’ii. (AO)
   speech-NOM ear go-COP voice-NOM mouth go-COP
   ‘Speech goes to ear and food goes to mouth.’

   b. waan nam-ni ḳoksu ḳuulatu ḳin. (AO)
   what person-NOM hide face tell
   ‘What a person hides, the complexion reveals.’

Basically, ears and mouth (including all speech organs) are the principal sense organs involved in oral communication. However, there are other organs, such as eyes, heart, face, etc. which contribute to the effectiveness of communication. Likewise, example (8a) above describes the non-fasting of ear to listening and the non-satiating of eye to seeing. In (8a), the message is all about communication in conversation. On the other hand, (8b) associates cleverness/bravery with heart or recognition in communication, and cowardness/foolishness to face or understanding of explicit message. In Afaan Oromoo, similarly, there are proverbs which use different organs aside from ear and mouth. For example, (9a) considers ear as the goal of speech and mouth the destination of food. It means communicators must listen to the speech of others carefully as they eat food for their consumption. Another proverb, (9b), takes face as one of the participants in communication, From the examples we can understand that participation of several body parts and perception play significant roles for the success of communication. In the same way, the following proverbs bring to one’s attention the significance of considering context of the communication.

(10) ḳr-mijat’agib ḳiŋara ḳa-mit’ad ḳaṣtawik’al. (Amh)
   what-satisfy bread from-griddle known
   ‘The bread that satisfies is known from the griddle.’

(11) buddeen-ni ḳana ḳuabsu ḳeelee-rratti ḳeekama. (AO)
   bread-NOM person satisfy griddle-on known
   ‘The bread that satisfies is known from the griddle.’
The examples in (10&11) are semantically and metaphorically the same. They both take mit’ad /eelee ‘griddle’ and impọra /buddeena ‘bread’ as source metaphors of speakers and the speech/utterance in in the proverbs. From these proverbs, one can surely be informed that oftentimes, one can determine indubitably what is going to happen from what is happening now. In context of communication, one can plausibly pre-calculate what a person is going to speak or what kind of issue is going to be raised. In a context when someone fails to understand from the situation, the following proverb from Afaan Oromoo can be used.

(12) kan haalaa-n hin-beek-ne itti himan-uu hin-beek-tu. (AO)
what situation-with NEG-know-PFV with tell-to NEG-know-FEM

’S/he, who fails to know from situations, cannot understand even if told directly.’

In (12), the proverb typically expresses speakers who want to talk before any other speakers in a particular communication. For such speakers, the situation of others in the conversation may describe whether or not someone should take the chance to speak. The situation can be showing ignorance face, whispering to disturb the communication, etc. If ignorant speakers do not consider the context of others in the communication, he/she does not understand even if you stop him/her not to speak, as denoted in the proverb. In this proverb, it can be concluded that being watchful to receive message from scenarios and reach conclusion seems to be indispensable.

5.4 Proverbs of dilemmatic situation

Proverbs, which are basically timeless in their existence, are wise words which are used in communication. Being short in structure, they briefly put the theme of conversation, vibrantly indicate facts in a memorable way, and are comfortable among people regardless of their religious persuasion (Bynum, 1987; Yankah, 1989). In Amharic and Afaan Oromoo, they are regarded for their high-teaching values. Among the various meta-communicative functions of the proverbs in the two languages, some metaphorize the situation in which communicators appear to situate half way between the paradoxical decisions. For instance, the following proverbs from Afaan Oromoo could be taken up as a case in point, when both alternatives appear to be equally dilemmatic.

(13) a. dubbatan duubbii-n lama c’allisan ergarama. (AO)
spoke speech-NOM two kept.quite challenge
‘If spoken two meanings are potential, if kept quite challenge crops up.’

b. dubbatan buubbee c’allisan buk’ee. (AO)
spoke hurricane kept.quite pumpkin
‘If one speaks called hurricane, if silent called block-headed.’

In (13a), we get that a speaker is confused to choose either to speak or to keep silent. If
he/she speaks, the audiences could interpret in the direction they want, and if he/she keeps silent, problem/trouble will arise. Likewise, in (b), a speaker could be unable to speak because his/her speech could make trouble. Contrarily, if he/she keeps silent, the audiences may consider him/her a fool, as metaphorically associated with *buk’k’ee* ‘pumpkin’ (to refer to block-head/stupid person).

These proverbs unequivocally entail that interpretation or meaning sometimes goes out of way as any utterance bears two different meanings: connotative and denotative meaning. As a result, any message can possibly be given negative interpretation, which would inevitably roughen the relation between individuals. On the other hand, it seems clear that avoiding speaking or communicating is quite impossible. Such dichotomy then, calls for a compromise between silence and speaking. It is unfortunate that we could not get similar proverbs from Amharic.

5.5 Proverbs of communication demeaning

So far, an endeavor has been made to reveal that in some contexts listening or silence happen to be much more preferable to speaking in communication/conversation. Human beings in any societal group most commonly recognize the best mechanism to express the intended meaning of ideas irrespective of its verbal or non-verbal nature. Proverbs mirror society’s expectations of different personalities and views. In communication, speech and silence are within speakers’ utterances, so the speakers may substitute these when needed. The preference of silence over speech depends on the subjective judgment and personality of the speaker who is engaged in the communication (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Rescher, 1998; Zuo, 2002).

Truly speaking, there are contexts where silence can be taken up as the best alternative. Here, we shall consider some more proverbs that would serve such purpose in Amharic and Afaan Oromoo. Proverbs that are spoken to deter communication or that dishearten someone from speaking can possibly be looked at from two different but similar stances: total silence and partial silence. Stated differently, some Amharic and Afaan Oromoo proverbs are found to trivialize speaking in favor of silence, while still some are found to enhance speaking, but only to a certain limit. For instance, the following Amharic proverbs are of such type.

(14) a. *mennago* bIRR nəw zimmita wərk’ nəw.* (Amh)
    speaking silver COP silence gold COP
    ‘Silence is gold, speaking is silver.’

    b. *zimm balo af zimb aji-gəbbaḥatin.* (Amh)
    silent said mouth fly NEG-emte
    ‘Closed mouth never let fly in.’
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c. ka-məməna-rəru jiffalal t’om madəru. (Amh)
from-speaking better fasting passing.night
‘Better fasting than speaking.’
d. bo-lojolləsu be-ʔaf jit’ʃu. (Amh)
by-tittle.tatting by-mouth disappear
‘Tittle-tatting hurts oneself.’

On the basis of their cultural norms, Amharic and Afaan Oromoo speakers consider calming down and being silent at the early stage of conversations as signs of wisdom. They assume it as non-verbal communication which disengages unwise speakers from communication. In (14a), the proverb would tantamount to both speaking and silence is valued, but off-centered to silence, which could be discernible from the value of gold and silver they are likened to. It could slightly mean that speakers should limit their levels while expressing the ideas. In a different way, those in (b-d) are found to problematize speaking. Thus, complete silence is favored in the proverbs.

On the other hand, the following proverbs from both linguistic groups are found to be benignly preach silence and its positive upshots. It can also be inferred that it fosters speaking or communication but seems more skewed towards silence that can be asserted reasonable as talking too much may end up embarrassingly. The following can then be illustrative cases in point.

(15) iʃəgga wətət k’ibe iiwot’wal. (Amh)
coagulate milk butter come.out
‘When coagulated, milk will be churned into butter.’

(16) a. hunda hin-dubbatanii dugda hin-d˚agatani. (AO)
all NEG-speak back NEG-kiss
‘All cannot be communicated, as the back cannot be kissed.’
b. kan gabaabsee dubbatee-fi kan dearessee mure hin-gaabbu. (AO)
what shortening spoke-CONJ what lengthening cut NEG-regret
‘He who speaks in short and cut in long never regret.’

Unlike the proverbs in (14), which fundamentally favor silence over speech, those in (15&16) refer to briefness in conversation. In (15), we get Amharic proverb that metaphorically describe that if milk is coagulated, it gives butter at the end. So, wətət ‘milk’ is symbolized to represent speech, and k’ibe ‘butter’ is the message (output of the speech). In the same token in Afaan Oromoo, (16a) explicitly mentions that speakers should make their talks brief, and should not utter out all they have in mind. Again, if speakers become highly selective and precise in their conversation, they do not regret. This is substantiated by the proverb in (16b). In all of these proverbs, calmness and precision are
recommended in both cultural groups.

As silence and briefness are favored in the proverbs of the two languages, those who fail to do so face bad or unnecessary consequences. The following proverbs appear to give warning signal or entail the negative outcome of unrestrained talk or unreserved conversation.

(17) doro c’ira c’ira marayawan awɔt’迎接.
hen scratch knife make.come.ut

‘Having scratched more and more, the hen came up with which to be slaughtered.’

(18) a. hindaak’k’oon haatee haatee waan k’alaniin baaft. (AO)
hen scratch thing slaughtering.with make.come.out

‘Having scratched more and more, the hen came up with which to be slaughtered.’

b. dubbataa-n k’ulaa haadaa hima. (AO)
speaker-NOM nudity mother tell
‘S/he who talks much publicize secret.’

The proverbs in (17) from Amharic and in (18a) from Afaan Oromoo are completely the same structurally and functionally as they both take hen (doro and hindaak’k’oon) as their source metaphor for a speaker in a particular communication. Their implication reveals that in talking too much, one can find himself lost in identifying what is the secret and what is not. Similarly, the one in (18b) degrades speaking by saying dubbataan k’ulaa haadaa hima which roughly means “s/he who talks much publicize secret”. Hence, the proverbs serve as analogue to speech. Furthermore, the following proverbs advise to be held in reserve.

(19) k’-hod janorut jadinal jœnaggœøt jas-ɡuddiial. (Amh)
from-abdomen put save spoken CAUS-kill

‘What is kept in abdomen saves, what is spoken out causes death.’

(20) a. hundumaa dubbatan garaa-n k’ulaa-tii haafa. (AO)
all spoken abdomen-NOM nudity-with remain

‘If all is told, one will remain empty abdomen.’

b. garaa-n waa bedduu baata. (AO)
abdomen-NOM something many carry
‘The abdomen can carry many things.’

The example in (19) tells that the smartest/safest way to be secured in communication is being silent. Contrarily, if someone speaks, his/her speech could lead even to death. In (20), the proverbs recommend speakers to keep silent in order to be in the safest side of interaction in communication. The first, (a), advises someone not to speak out all what he/she knows, not to show his/her secret, whereas (b) reveals that our abdomen carries
many things, all of which could not be uncovered. It means that the complexity of human nature is so sophisticated that speakers should communicate only some of what they know.

5.6 Proverbs conversation ending

As has been explicated in the theoretical framework section, expressions like ‘let us come to a conclusion’, serves meta-communication purpose. Thus, to wrap up the speech, oftentimes, proverbs are made use of by both linguistic groups. Of such many proverbs, perhaps the following might potentially be employed to bring a conversation or a speech to an end.

(21) a. māfila-nna nāgor angōt ka-ʔangōt-u. (Amh)
    sorghum-CONJ talk neck at-neck-DEF
    ‘Sorghum and conversation affairs need to be cut at neck.’

b. nāgor bibozh ba-ʔahijja aj-ic’c’anim. (Amh)
    talk become.many by-donkey NEG-load
    ‘Too much talk, never to be loaded by donkey.’

(22) damma-jiuu osoo miʔauwu maragu. (AO)
    honey-even if sweet daub
    ‘Even honey is daubed though sweet.’

In agricultural context, the part of sorghum which bears seed is the upper part, particularly above the neck. In the context of conversation, accordingly, speakers should focus only on the main (topic) part, as metaphorically expressed in Amharic usage (21a). Another Amharic metaphorical proverb is used in (21b) to show that too much talk is unnecessary and boring to audiences. The same also holds true in (22) of Afaan Oromoo proverb. It means that even though interesting, the conversation needs to be brought to an end as one daubs honey though it is sweet. In a nutshell, it can be argued that the proverbs entail that too much talk would not be encouraged, hence, it is better to make a speech short or bring it to an end at reasonable length focusing on key points.

6. Conclusion

This study revealed some less acknowledged aspects of language and culture reflected in proverbs. The investigation of communication (linguistic) patterns hidden in the proverbs of the two different languages, namely Amharic and Afaan Oromoo, sheds light onto the conceptualization of meta-communication by the speakers of the two ethno-linguistic groups. The analysis was made as seen from outside in not inside out (or as interpreted by the writers), meaning, proverbs are not interpreted based on the natural context or setting in which they are performed; and the appropriateness of the proverbs is argued to have been determined by the social norms in specific cultural context.
As proverbs are metaphorically expressed, their interpretations demand germane cultural background. The bearer, then, knows how to dexterously use such proverbs. In fact, as Yankah (1994:3388) rightly spells it out, “[i]n various cultures, proverb use is governed by social norms; and a good proverb speaker does not only know its logical application and meaning but also its appropriate social use: which proverb to select and avoid in what situation, or whether it is discrete to use a proverb at all”. There is wide agreement that proverbs have got worldwide distribution. To this effect, the ways they are used by both ethno-linguistic groups under scrutiny, seem to exhibit many similarities with the following minute difference.

The proverbs considered in this study semantically entail various functions in a number of communication contexts in Amharic and Afaan Oromoo. While some of them metaphorically promote endorsing communication, others are devoted to ending certain conversation. In addition, the data at hand also present proverbs in both languages to be abstained from talking too much in conversation. Beyond these, dilemmatic situations and perceptual variations are revealed by the proverbs of Amharic and Afaan Oromoo, as shown in the discussion. Altogether, despite small number of representative proverbs, this can plainly be argued to have thrown a light on the use of proverbs by Amharic and Afaan Oromoo from meta-communication perspective.

In the main, the proverbs uncover that speakers of the two languages, which are apparently different, conceptualize engagement in conversation in different contexts of communication in a very similar manner. Though the proverbs are slightly structurally different cross-culturally and in some aspects, they reflect a communal sense of the speakers in both ethno-linguistic groups. As this study is not thorough enough to show all aspects of meta-communicative aspects of the speakers, research into the nature of language-culture relationship with the focus on proverbs can be furthered.

Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Meaning         |
|--------------|-----------------|
| ACC          | Accusative      |
| Amh          | Amharic         |
| AO           | Afaan Oromoo    |
| CAUS         | Causative       |
| COP          | Copula          |
| DEF          | Definiteness    |
| NEG          | Negative        |
| NOM          | Nominative      |
| PFV          | Perfective      |
| POSS         | Possessive      |

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