



RESEARCH ARTICLE

BLESSINGS IN AFAN OROMO: MORPHOSYNTACTIC, SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

This study uncovered certain structural and functional aspects of blessings in Afan Oromo which have great intimacy with the cultural, social, political, economic and spiritual welfares of Oromo people. Accordingly, descriptions of prominent linguistic features and various functions of blessings were the objectives of the study. Macha, Tulama, Barentu and Borana-Guji dialects and their native speakers were selected using purposive and convenient and sampling techniques. Data collection instruments were contextualised elicitation, naturalistic data or spontaneous speech data and document analysis. The data gathered using the above scientific tools were analyzed through linguistic descriptive methods. The findings of the study showed that blessings of Afan Oromo have uncommon linguistic features which are rarely used in the ordinary communications of the speakers as the speech acts show structural forms which deviate from the common arrangement of words in the language. Morphosyntactically, inflectional morphemes which show tenses, moods, cases, numbers, persons and genders are identified in the expressions. They basically use second and third singular masculine persons in almost all blessing expressions of the target language. Semantically, blessings in Afan Oromo focus on peace, health, breeding, prosperity, good hopes, trust, power, growth and long life for elders. The pragmatics of the blessing speech in Afan Oromo show that elders/blessers are agents, the blessed or good doers are patients, the blessing expressions are locutionary acts, the benedictions are illocutionary acts and 'God's bestowal is the perlocutionary act.

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INTRODUCTION

The Oromo People and Their Language

The Oromo people constitute easily the most numerous among the many people living in the present day Ethiopia. As several sources indicate, Oromia (the land of Oromo) is the biggest region in the country. According to CSA (2007), the Oromo people account 40% of the total population of Ethiopia. This makes them one of the most numerous people in the whole Africa (Kebede 2009; Debela 2010). They are one of the Cushitic-speaking groups of the people living in Africa, and their language belongs to the Lowland Eastern Cushitic language family. Cushitic speakers have inhabited parts of northeast and east Africa for as long as recorded groups inhabiting the horn of Africa. Within Africa, Afan Oromo¹ (the Oromo language) is the language with the 3rd most speakers

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¹ Oromo speakers call their language *Afan Oromo*, so we use the name in this study.

after Arabic and Hausa. Afan Oromo is used as a language of inter-group communication in several parts of the country. It is most commonly written with a modified Latin alphabet called Qubee [k'ube]. Heine (1986: 3) states that "various versions of the Latin based orthography had been used previously, mostly by Oromos outside of Ethiopia and by OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) by the late 1970s." It is believed that more texts were written in Afan Oromo between 1991 and 1997 than in the previous 100 years. It is currently utilized by the Ethiopian government's state Radio and Television station, Oromia Radio and Television station, regional offices and news papers. Though there are a lot of controversies among scholars, the Oromo language has about six geographical dialects (clusters) which are identified till now in Ethiopia. These are Wolo-Raya, Tulama, Macha, Arsi-Bale, Hararge (Barentu, Asmarom 2006), and Borana-Guji (Bartels 1983; Kebede, 2009: 1; Feda 2015:7). The study focused on four dialects: namely, Macha, Tulama, Harer (Barentu) and the Borana-Guji dialects (clusters). Blessings in Oromo society are the aspects of language use in which the speech community shows its various social, religious, political and psychological make-ups. They are used to perform a lot of functions, such as giving directives, requests, promises, and apologies, influencing and

manipulating the users of the language. The speakers of the language use these language expressions in their conversations assuming many consequences. The assumptions behind the expressions are numerous. For instance, once the blessing is performed, the blessed feels strong in that he/she was given power through the language uttered. If the blessing is about wishing good day, the blessed feel the day will pass in good manner, and if the blessing is about wishing fine journey for the blessed, the blessed feel they face pleasant things through their journey. In general, every life aspect of the Oromo is bounded by blessings. This is due to the fact that the spiritual implication of the expressions affects the lives of the society in one or another way. The expressions also indicate that language has power to perform any activity assumed in the society.

Statement of the Problem

Blessing expressions are modes of speech that are widespread, but underappreciated techniques. They exist in all human languages, and perform certain functions that can inevitably be the objects of scientific study. Sociolinguistic/Anthropological linguistic research is needed to show the psychological, social, political, cultural, religious and philosophical reactions of speech communities who are proud of their language (Montagu 1973). As scholars usually claim, there are a number of social and linguistic motives for blessing, which might be quite deliberate and complex. For instance, elders bless people to wish good things asserting their identity in a group, to make them succeed in their career, to help them win in warfront, to make them wealthy, to indicate friendship, to mark social intimacy or social solidarity, etc. When blessings are used for such purposes, there is no necessarily any frustration or anger; rather, there will be hope, courage, happiness and motivation in the minds of those who are blessed (Bréal 1900). Along with the above factual claims, it is a fair guess that blessing has been around humans as long as speech although there are no written records. It is subject largely ignored in academic circles, but impossible to ignore in the human lives. Despite its prevalence, there has not been any research into blessings in Afan Oromo, and certainly its linguistic structures and functions in different social, political and psychological aspects of the speech community. From semantic and pragmatic view points, blessings are natural parts of our language, and they are undoubtedly one of the most efficient ways to do away with extra frustration or anger in difficult situations. It has even been suggested that they are factors in reducing stress, solving personal, social and institutional problems (Crystal 1995: 172). However, these speech acts have not been touched in the language. We (the researchers) have observed many people admitted to use blessings because they relate the assumed consequences to their supernatural power, Waak'a 'God'. Hence, we took such justifications to investigate these astonishing cultural expressions so that the findings would be uncovered to scholars in various disciplines and other ethnic groups of Ethiopia as well as the world.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the structural and functional aspects of blessings in Afan Oromo. The underlying specific objectives are as follows:

- Identifying different inflectional forms used to show tenses, moods, cases, numbers, genders and persons in blessings;

- Showing the social and affective meanings of blessings; and
- Describing the pragmatic features of blessings in Afan Oromo.

Scope of the Study

The study was delimited geographically and conceptually. Geographically, it covered only Macha, Tulama, Harer (Barentu) and Borana-Guji dialects of Afan Oromo. Conceptually, it focused only on commissive/performative type of speech acts in which the inflectional forms of verbs, social and affective meanings, and pragmatic features of blessings are revealed. Other types of speech acts like assertive, directives and expressive, are not covered here. Furthermore, aspects like rituals, ceremonies and contexts of blessings are out of the scope of the study.

Significance of the Study

This study is meant to be available as a basis for development, and to serve as a document in Afan Oromo in various studies and other cross-linguistic comparisons. It also contributes to the discovery and preservation of the linguistic, anthropological, social and other facts of Afan Oromo that can serve as a reference and point of departure for future developments in linguistic and other disciplines in the area. The study further helps to fill the gaps in our knowledge of Cushitic, and serve as a document reflecting the linguistic and cultural profiles of its speakers. It can, even, provide useful information for historical and comparative studies in the field of Cushitic languages. Furthermore, it contributes to an increase in our knowledge of the barely studied blessings in various Ethiopian languages by furnishing new data on Afan Oromo.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

The study design was predominantly ethnographic because most of the data were collected from the natural settings. The assumption here was that ethnographic study provides a valid and important way to find out what is happening in the speech community. Since the focus is explicitly on linguistic and functional aspects of the language, we purely used qualitative method through different processes in the study.

Subjects and Procedures

The subjects are in effect the population of Afan Oromo native speakers (dominantly elders) of Macha, Tulama, Harer/Barentu and Borana-Guji dialects. So, it is necessary to ensure that the data collected from a smaller number of speakers is representative of the whole group. Some areas, especially those where there is some systematicity, require specialized expressions. The recorded texts were transcribed with the necessary transcription system developed for the purpose. Large portions of the work were carried out with a small number of elders from different geographical areas of Afan Oromo speaking community. The total number of elders selected was 48 from four major study geographical dialects: Macha (around Jimma Zone, Horro Guduru Wollega and West Shoa), Tulama (North Shoa), Barentu/Harer (East and West

Harerge Zones) and Borana-Guji (Borana and Guji Zones) dialects, and 8 co-workers were selected from the four dialects.

Sampling Techniques

The selection of informants/elders was done using purposive, convenient and snowball sampling techniques. We selected the four dialects purposively due to following reasons: the dialects can represent other dialects both geographically and demographically; Macha dialect could be representative of the western and central clusters; Tulama dialect was representative of the northern; Borana-Guji could be representatives of southern and south-eastern clusters; and, Harer/Barentu was representative of eastern clusters. On the other hand, convenient and snowball samplings were used in the selection of key informants. The first technique helped us to ask for speakers who just happened to be available. The samples were selected because they were convenient for us. In the second technique, we collected data on the few members of the target population. Then, we asked those individuals to provide information needed to locate other members of that population whom the sample speakers locate- snowballing.

Data Collection Instruments

We used contextualised elicitation in collecting data from the native speakers. The selected speakers were asked to provide contexts in which blessings are performed. They were asked to utter/perform the discourse. They gave explanation about when the blessing expressions were provided, to whom they were provided, and why they were provided. Then, we translated the given utterance/expression or discourse into English with our co-workers. Naturalistic or Spontaneous speech was used to collect data from the informants, where the communicative events were observed. In fact, introspective method was also implemented here because we were part of the speech community. The last method we used for data collection was semi-structured interview which was held the semantics of blessings in various social, religious, political and other aspects and its dynamicity.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis was done using linguistic descriptive approach and discourse. In this approach, the different inflectional forms of verb paradigms were identified. In addition, the social and affective meanings of blessing expressions are described. From the different approaches of discourse analysis, conversation analysis was used to show the pragmatic features of blessings. Moreover, the analysis of linguistic items was done on texts, to provide adequate contexts for understanding constructions and larger units of discourse. Examples of possible subjects within each section were provided where necessary.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

The Concepts of Speech Acts

Speech act is the act of communication which is intended by the speaker (locutionary act), assumed by the listener (illocutionary act) and understood among the communicators (Interlocutors), which is called perlocutionary act. It is one of the fundamental language uses in modern linguistics and a term derived from the work of the philosopher J. L. Austin (1911-1960), and now used widely in linguistics, to refer to a

theory which analyses the role of utterances in relation to the behavior of speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication (Austin 1962: 61; Crystal 1995: 427). Based on Searle (1968)'s idea, speech act is "the minimal unit of communication". As stated by Austin (1962) and Searle (1968), speech acts provide verbal interactions to the speakers of particular languages based on the culture of the language. Speech acts indicate very substantial essences of cultural themes. When speech acts are performed, it is obvious that they explicitly reflect the culture of the particular language. Accordingly, they can show the concept of offering, committing the speaker or the listener of somebody else to an action, ask questions, request greet, assert, express, declare and direct/command. All sorts of things are done with words in any language. Statements, requests, interrogations, orders, promises, thanks, apologies, and many other communicative aspects are all accomplished through speech. Austin described that when a speaker utters a word, he/she intends to accomplish or do something. For example, if somebody says "I promise that I will come early", he/she is supposed to perform the act of promising which is opposed to making a statement that is judged as true or false. As per the arguments of Austin, most speeches or utterances are considered as performatives in nature due to the fact that they mostly indicate actions to be performed sooner or later. That is, the speakers are nearly always doing a certain action by saying something. For Austin and Searle, speakers constantly create social realities in their contexts through which the actions are performed.

Searle (1968) described three characteristics, or acts, of statements that involve beginning from the speech production up to the end of the effect of the speech on the interlocutors. These are locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. On any occasion, the action performed by producing an utterance will consist of these three related acts. There is first a locutionary act, which is the basic act of utterance, or producing a meaningful linguistic expression. Locutionary acts are roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a 'meaning' in the traditional sense. They have something to do with the intention of the speaker. If we have difficulty with actually forming the sounds and words to create a meaningful utterance in a language, then we might fail to produce a locutionary act. The second dimension is illocutionary act, and is performed via the communicative force of an utterance. Illocutionary acts are speech acts such as informing, ordering, warning, etc.; utterances which have a certain (conventional) force. These acts indicate understanding the message through the utterance/spoken text. Searle also claimed that the illocutionary act is the minimal complete unit of human linguistic communication. Whenever people talk to each other, they are performing illocutionary acts. The third acts are perlocutionary acts which show what is to be brought or achieved by the utterance, such as to convince, to persuade, to deter or to surprise the speaker or somebody else relevant. We do not, of course, simply create an utterance with a function without intending it to have an effect, and this is the perlocutionary act (Austin 1962; Yule 1996: 48). Scholars categorize speech acts in different ways based on their own schools of thought and ideology. The most common types of speech acts in different cultures are the ones which are identified by Searle (1968: 22). These are those which speakers use to make statements (Representatives or Assertive), ask questions and give orders (Directives), express wishes and promises (Commissives or Performatives), apologize or greet (Expressives) and declare (Declaratives). And in the

performance of these five acts, speakers usually make other speeches to mention or designate certain object, and to predicate the expression the object referred to (Yule 1996: 53-54; Crystal 1995: 27).

From the several types of speech acts, this study focused on blessings- commissive/performative. Blessing is the invoking of God's favor upon a person. It should be mentioned that blessing is classified as commissive/performative speech acts because it is related to some future actions; this is why some similarities can be found between cursing, blessing and threats for instance. Blessings often function as performatives, which when uttered alters some state of affairs in the world. For example, if a religious leader states, *I pronounce you husband and wife*, then a marriage has been socially established. Similarly, if a father says to his son, *I promise I will buy a bicycle to you*, then a promise has been made. Extensively, blessings function as performatives, in that the utterance of the requisite expression precipitates a change in spiritual state of the participants. Commissives are speech acts whose illocutionary point is to commit the speaker to some future course of action. The expressed psychological state is the intention to do what is promised, and the direction of fit is world to words. They are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to some future actions. They are promises, threats, refusals, pledges, curses, blessing, etc. (Ries 1987).

Blessings: Existence in Formulaic and Formal Expressions

Blessings are performative speech acts which have linguistic features of formal and formulaic structures. Despite their prevalence in all religious activities, they are highly associated to ordinary expressions and politeness formulas of daily conversations. Pragmatically, they are accompanied by specific metalinguistic/nonlinguistic features, such as gestures (laying hands, looking up, sitting in circle, etc.), objects (stick, leaves and branches of particular trees) and substances (butter, milk, food, coffee, etc.). After all, these and other requirements are fulfilled, elders or respected guests from religious or cultural leaders utter out the linguistic expressions which the blessed groups receive and respond in some patterns. The contexts show that mastery of the linguistic formulas cannot be sufficient for the successful realization of blessings. The existence of an extralinguistic institution, such as family, descent group, religious institution, etc. with differentiated social roles and statuses for the blesser and blessee(s) is a necessary precondition to an authentic and valid performance of the act. Only certain individuals may principally utter out the blessings (Westermann 1978; Sharifi & Amir 2012). Structurally, blessings are marked by the use of a special language which is highly formal as the utterances are rhythmic in their natures. In addition to their specific content, linguistic features such as repetition, special prosody and fixity of pattern distinguish blessings from other types of speech and contribute to their formal and formulaic character. Semantically, blessings are concerned with the bestowal of divine favor or benediction through the utterance of prescribed words. Hence, they represent instances of the belief in the magical power of words. They are also used by non-specialists to solemnize, and/or mark the boundaries of social events. Common to all is fixity of form and the strict association of specific texts to specific occasions. As in many other performatives, blessings operate properly only within a context of social and cultural norms and institutions, which are necessary for their

realization and to legitimate and maintain their force. They are evident in the politeness formulas and parenthetical expressions of everyday conversation: in greetings, thanks, and leave-takings, blessings are exchanged between interlocutors and, although they may literally express a wish for supernatural benefits, their primary communicative function is as highly conventionalized markers of social and/or interactional status. Therefore, they function as expressions of solidarity, approval and goodwill (Matisoff 1979; Brown & Stephen 1987).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part focuses on the analysis of blessings of Afan Oromo. It is divided into three sections. The first section deals with structural or morphosyntactic descriptions of the utterances. Accordingly, inflectional morphemes which show tenses, moods, cases, persons, numbers and genders of subjects/agents are illustrated. The second section deals with social/affective meanings of blessings, and the last section presents the pragmatic features in Afan Oromo.

Morphosyntactic Aspects of Blessings

Blessings have structural features in which they are identified from any other forms of expressions in Afan Oromo. These structural aspects can be viewed as morphosyntactic dimensions, and have affixes which show tenses, cases, persons, number and gender of the core participants in the context. As the utterances/sentences in blessings commit Waak'a 'God' to do orders after the blessings are completed, the tenses in all blessing expressions are in future tenses, and the mood is mainly jussive. The inflectional forms of blessing are illustrated as follow. In Afan Oromo, blessings have inflectional morphemes which show tenses and aspects of verbs, case, gender, number and semantic roles of the participants and the supernatural power Waak'a 'God' to whom the blessing speech acts are uttered. The examples² below reveal such features.

- (1a) *nagaja-n nu ol -i-te nagaja-n nu bul -i*
 peace- us pass_day- peace-PART us pass_ PART 2S.JUSS- 2S.PFV night- 2S.JUSS
 'Pass the night peacefully as you passed the day in peace.'
- (1b) *nagaja-n nu bul -i-te nagaja-n nu ool -i*
 peace- us pass_night- peace- us pass_day PART 2S.JUSS- PART -2S.JUSS 2S.PFV
 'Pass the day peacefully as you passed the night in peace.'

In examples (1a) and (1b), the blesser utters the sentences to Waak'a 'God' by addressing him as second person singular masculine subject (nominative case). The morpheme *-i* in *ol -i* 'pass the day' and *bul -i* 'pass the night' shows second person subject and jussive mood. The perfective aspect is marked by the morpheme *-te* being attached to the verbs *ol -i-te* 'you passed the day' and *bul -i-te* 'you passed the night'. The blesser is part of the blessed ones as he uses first person plural pronoun *nu* 'us' for the benediction. In what follows, the act of blessing is addressed to the blessed as plural audiences. The blesser is uttering out the performative speech act by committing Waak'a 'God' to certain future actions. The

² The data of the target language are written using phonemic transcription as it is almost equivalent to orthography of Afan Oromo.

addressees are second person plural objects (benefactive case) who are bestowed with benediction.

- (2a) *raf-aa ab uu k'ab-aa aa*
 sleep-2P.JUSS dream have-2P.JUSS-COP. IMPF
 'Have nice dream in your sleeping.'
- (2b) *adeem-aa milkii k'ab-aa aa*
 go-2P.JUSS luck have-2P.JUSS -COP.IMPf
 'Have good luck/fate in your journey.'

Examples (2a) and (2b) have two affixes to express person, number, mood and aspect. The morpheme *-aa* is attached to verbs *raf-* 'sleep' and *k'ab-* 'have, owe' to show second person plural subject and jussive mood, and the morpheme *-aa* is copula which expresses imperfective aspect and plural subjects. The two sentences are uttered to the blessed to show the wish/goodwill of the blesser to be accomplished from the supernatural Waak'a 'God'. Blessings can also be performed to bestow individuals using ordinary conversations. In this case, the blesser addresses the supernatural Waak'a 'God' as third person singular masculine, and the blessed are addressed as second person masculine/feminine singulars.

- (3a) *waak'-ni c'imina sii-f haa kenn-u*
 God-NOM strength you-let give-3S.IMPf.JUSS
 BEN
 'May God give you strength.'
- (3b) *hajjummaa-n waak'a si haa hooggan-u*
 wisdom-NOM God- yo let guide-
 POSS u 3MS.IMPf.JUSS
 'Let God's wisdom guide you.'

In examples (3a) and (3b), the blesser addresses Waak'a 'God' in the form of indirect speech, not as imperative form. The suffixes *-ni* and *-n* which are allomorphs of the nominative case marker *-n* are attached to nouns *waak'a* 'God' and *hajjummaa-* 'wisdom' respectively to show the agent of blessing. The affix *-f* indicates the benefactive case marker on patient *si* 'you' as the bestowed of God's gift of strength in (3a). As Waak'a 'God' is the one who is expected to give all the benedictions after the blessing, the suffix *-u* is attached to the verbs to function as third person masculine subject (nominative case), imperfective aspect and jussive mood. In general, blessing expressions show different inflectional forms on their structures as in any ordinary forms in the language. These forms are (imperfective) aspect, (nominative, accusative and benefactive) cases, persons, numbers, genders and mood markers. The structural differences between ordinary speeches and blessings are grammatical moods, intonation and sentence lengths. In ordinary speech, there are indicative, subjunctive, imperative/jussive, optative and declarative moods, but blessings use only jussive/imperative mood. Intonation wise, blessing expressions use raising intonations by making the last voice louder. They also use relatively short and poetic sentences instead of long and prose sentences.

Semantic Aspects of Blessings

Sentences/utterances of blessings have semantically goodwill/wishes of the blessers in which the events/happenings mentioned will be performed by Waak'a 'God' to the blessed in the future. Accordingly, several social (affective) meanings are indicated in blessings of Afan Oromo, among which health and peace, breeding and prosperity, avoidance of displeasure and exclusion are repeatedly mentioned in the utterances. The Oromo people ultimately seek *nagaa/nagaja* 'peace' as the essential key to all cosmic and human orders more than

anything else. The concept and practice of *nagaa* 'peace' is rooted as one of the core elements of Gadaa system, and it is based on traditional values and beliefs anchored in the Oromo politico-military and ritual system (Tenna 2008). Within the context of blessings, *nagaa* 'peace' is used to make, restore, maintain and promote the wellbeing of the society. In what follows, the blesser reflects sense of harmony and peace for the neighboring villages in Borana dialect of Afan Oromo.

- (4a) *warra doojjoo deebanoo nagaja*
 family Doyo Debano peace
 'Peace to the people/families of Doyo and Debano (villages in Borana).'
- (4b) *warra sa a nam-ni isaa deeban-u*
 family cow man-NOM his breed-3MS.IMPf
 'People of whose cattle and descendant multiply'
- (4c) *warra ariiroo nagaja*
 family Ariro peace
 'Peace to the people/family of Ariro'
- (4d) *warra nagaa-n wal ariir-u*
 family peace-NOM each_other follow-3MS.IMPf
 'People who follow each other on the road to peace.'

In examples (4a) through (4c), the blesser mentions the neighboring villages, such as *doojjoo* 'Doyo', *deebanoo* 'Debano' and *ariiroo* 'Ariro' in his blessings, and asks Waak'a 'God' to give *nagaa/nagaja* 'peace' to their families/people and cattle. As in any society, peace has great value and respect in Oromo people, and the speakers always use the concepts of peace in their conversations or in any other contexts they are in group. Therefore, the social meaning of affection and inclusion are reflected in the above blessings of the speakers. Along with the demand for peace, blessings serve as means of avoiding discomforts in people's life, and can also be used to prevent or avoid displeasure and to exclude evil spirits among the Oromos. The following examples illustrate blessings as mechanisms of avoiding displeasures.

- (5a) *nagaa nu guut-i*
 peace us fill-2S.JUSS
 'Fill us with peace.'
- (5b) *nu k'ark'aar-i nu danda -i*
 us help-2S.JUSS us tolerate-2S.JUSS
 'Help us under your guidance and tolerate us.'
- (5c) *duraa duubaa-n nu eeg-i*
 front_back-NOM us protect-2S.JUSS
 'Protect us from the front and the rear.'
- (5d) *mirgaa bitaa-n nu eeg-i*
 right_left-NOM us protect-2S.JUSS
 'Protect us from the right and the left.'
- (5e) *k'att'aamur c'ufaa-n nu tiks-i*
 cross close-NOM us herd-2S.JUSS
 'Protect us from the dangers that come from all sides.'

As illustrated in example (5a), the blesser requests Waak'a 'God' to fill the blessed with *nagaa* 'peace'. The blesser also explains human beings as defective in nature who need further help from the above (Waak'a 'God'), and asks the supernatural to help his people by uttering *nu k'ark'aari* 'help us', *nu danda i* 'tolerate us', *nu eegi* 'protect us' and *nu tiks-i* 'herd us' in examples (5b-e). The protection is completely from all kinds of evil things and doings, including the attack of enemies; such wholeness of protection is described by phrases such as *duraa duubaa* 'from front and back', *mirgaa bitaan* 'from left and right' and *k'att'aamur c'ufaan* 'from all sides'.

Breeding and prosperity are other important aspects of societal norms in Oromo people. The next excerpt is taken from the blessings which commit Waak'a 'God' to breeding and prosperity of the blessed.

- (6a) *sa ii-n* *keessan* *haa* *bik'il-u*
seed-NOM your let grow-
3MS.IMPF.JUSS
'Let the seeds you plant grow.'
- (6b) *bik'ilaa-n* *keessan* *haa* *lalis-u*
seedling-NOM your let mature-
3MS.IMPF.JUSS
'Let your seedlings have fruits.'
- (6c) *t'innaa-n* *keessan* *haa* *gudd-at-u*
small-NOM your let big-MID-
3MS.IMPF.JUSS
'Let your children grow.'
- (6d) *guddaa-n* *keessan* *haa* *bul-u*
big-NOM your let pass_night-
3MS.IMPF.JUSS
'Let the adults live long.'
- (6e) *sa a* *namaa-n* *nu* *hor-siis-i*
cow people-NOM us breed-2S.JUSS
'Make our cattle and people breed.'

In Oromo culture, breeding is highly respected custom, and someone who has no children is socially considered as fugitive. This view of the society is indicated in blessings. In examples (6c-e), the bleaser bestowed the blessed by mentioning *t'innaa* 'children', *guddaa* 'elders' and *namaa* 'people' so that the children are hoped to grow, the elders to live long, and the women to give birth. Along with breeding, prosperity is considered as indicator of social prestige, and it is obtained through cultivating agricultural products and breeding cattle, which are both described as *sa ii* 'seed, clan', *bik'ilaa* 'seedling' and *sa a* 'cow, cattle' in examples (6a), (6b) and (6e).

The practices of breeding and prosperity are worthless unless there are trusts, good hopes and wishes in addition to the existence of peace among the members of Oromo people as in any other society. The goodwill for such social positivities are described by the blessings mentioned below.

- (7a) *akkii* *nu* *keessaa* *baa-s-i*
doubt us in go_out-CAUS-2S.JUSS
'Keep doubt out of us.'
- (7b) *ifa* *nuu-f* *kenn-i*
light us-BEN give-2S.JUSS
'Keep light around us.'
- (7c) *dukkana* *nu-rraa* *k'ab-i*
darkness us-from have-2S.JUSS
'Keep darkness afar away from us.'
- (7d) *or-tuu* *nu* *keessaa* *baa-s-i*
jealous-DIM us in go_out-CAUS-2S.JUSS
'Keep evil out of us.'

Examples (7a-d) reveal that a bleaser performing blessing speech acts to avoid bad lucks and evil deeds from the blessed. The blessing is directly addressed to Waak'a 'God' as second person masculine singular subject to commit himself in removing, taking out and keeping away displeasures, such as *akkii* 'doubt, distrust', *dukkana* 'darkness' and *ortuu* 'jealous' which create societal destructions (7a, 7c and 7d). Instead, *ifa* 'light', which is the symbol of good hope/bright future and trustworthiness is wished by the bleaser as in (7b). From several ways of communication, there is nothing as language to perform any activity in a society. From language elements, blessing is the main expression which has great power to serve as seek of health, power, good luck and love. The following examples show the power of blessing as performing such activities.

As already indicated in examples (4 and 5) above, one of the core cultural wisdoms of the Oromo people is *nagaa/nagaja*

'peace'. In addition to peace, they pray to Waak'a 'God' for *fajjaa* 'health' because people lead their lives properly only if they are healthy (8b). Another important element is *aangoo* 'power' as people respect their societal norms and rules set by the rulers/leaders when they are bestowed with power. As there are conflicts among the different neighboring villages due to land or any other factor, the Oromo usually pray to Waak'a 'God' for power to win their enemies (8c). It is assumed among them that if there is no luck in people's day-to-day activities, they may fail to achieve their goals in agriculture or nomadism, which could be due to natural disasters, such as draught or storm, so the elders always bless their people to have *c'arraa* 'good luck' (8d). Beyond these, societal harmony indicator which the Oromo need to have is *aalala* 'love' (8e). When there is love among the members of a family, a village and a society at large, the relationship between them is strong, and enhances their motivation for better achievement. Therefore, the Oromo bless themselves and others to have these societal indicators.

- (8a) *nagaa* *k'ab-aa- aa*
peace have-2P.JUSS-COP.IMPF
'Have peace.' (Be peaceful.)
- (8b) *fajjaa* *k'ab-aa- aa*
health have-2P.JUSS-COP.IMPF
'Have health.' (Be healthy.)
- (8c) *angoo* *k'ab-aa- aa*
power have-2P.JUSS-COP.IMPF
'Have power.' (Be powerful.)
- (8d) *c'arraa* *k'ab-aa- aa*
luck have-2P.JUSS-COP.IMPF
'Have luck.' (Be lucky.)
- (8e) *aalala* *k'ab-aa- aa*
love have-2P.JUSS-COP.IMPF
'Have love.' (Love each other.)

Pragmatic Aspects of Blessings

Blessings are common speech acts seen in many languages, including Afan Oromo though not investigated well. Pragmatically, using blessing expressions like any other speech acts as linguistic elements, communicators perform three actions: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The first act deals with uttering the speech, the second involves the intended meaning through the utterance, and the last has to do with the effect of the speech on the addressee (Yule 1996: 48). As indicated in conceptual frameworks, blessing expressions are categorized under commissive/performative kinds of speech acts, which commit the participants to certain future actions. These future actions are promises, hopes, protections, good wishes, threats on enemies, pledges, etc. Considering these assumed consequences, this section deals with the pragmatic analysis of blessings in Afan Oromo. Accordingly, theta roles/semantic roles of the speech acts are identified in the analysis, and interpretations are given including pragmatic implications. The following data indicate blessing speech acts performed at the beginning of new year/usually autumn among the Oromo people.

- (9a) *barr-i* *nagaa/nagaja*
season-NOM peace
'Peace to the season.'
- (9b) *barii-n* *nagaa/nagaja*
dawn-NOM peace
'Peace to the dawn.'
- (9c) *araddaa-n* *nagaa/nagaja*
region-NOM peace
'Peace to the region/area.'
- (9d) *bobbaa-n* *nagaa/nagaja*
pasture-NOM peace
'Peace to the pasture.'

In examples (9a-d), the blessing speech acts are performed by the Oromo people at the beginning of new season/year. The syntactic structures of the expressions in the above data are phrases because some blessing speech acts can lack overt verbs. The Borana Dialect of Oromo uses short forms of various utterances, of which blessing expressions are some. The clause *'let there be'* is omitted from the blessing locutionary acts, which are understood between the agent and the respondents (interlocutors). The elder/agent utters out the blessing locutionary acts and the respondents reply to him by repeating the last word of each phrase, such as *nagaa/nagaja* 'peace' in most of the above locutionary acts. The agent/elder, who utters out the blessing locutionary acts summons good hope, wish, plan and protections to the audiences or addressees for the new season from the supernatural Waak'a 'God'. The illocutionary acts/functions in the blessing locutionary acts are making farewell to the summer/rainy season, and hoping, wishing good, planning and having protection in the new season. The perlocutionary acts/future implications are that the local communities/addressees expect better things in the new season than the past summer and try to achieve their goals.

The Oromos use blessings not only at the beginning of new years, but also they use in everyday conversation at any time anywhere without any certain occasion. Thus, the blessings indicated below show request of Waak'a 'God' for protection throughout life.

- (10a) *waak'a gudoo waak'a ba aasoo*
 God beloved God affectionate
 'Oh! Beloved God, the affectionate one.'
- (10b) *nagaa nu guut-i*
 peace us fill-2S.JUSS
 'Fill us with peace.'
- (10c) *nu k'ark'aar-i nu danda -i*
 us assist-2S.JUSS us bear-2S.JUSS
 'Assist us under your guidance and bear with us.'
- (10d) *duraa duubaa-n nu hora -i*
 front_back-NOM us protect-2S.JUSS
 'Protect us from the front and the rear.'
- (10e) *mirga bitaa-n nu hora -i*
 right_left-NOM us protect-2S.JUSS
 'Protect us from the right and the left.'

The illocutionary acts/functions of the utterances in examples (10a) through (10e) are related to wellbeing, health and protection of the local communities by the power of the supernatural Waak'a 'God'. Syntactically, the blessing locutionary acts are performed to second person singular masculine. The type of speech act is imperative, which politely orders the supernatural power to guard or protect the local community, which shows seek of protection from their Waak'a 'God'. The locutionary acts request Waak'a 'God' for his protection over the local community. The agent role is assigned to the elder who dominantly utters out the locutionary speech acts, and the patient role is given to the local communities or respondents/addressees.

In addition to the need for protection, in some instances, due to social interaction and need for better neighborhood relation, the Oromo speakers express their good wishes to their neighboring villages through the blessing expressions as indicated below.

The examples in (11a-d) present speech acts which indicate participants using blessings in certain occasion or ceremony that request Waak'a 'God' *nagaja/nagaa* 'peace' and stability

to the neighboring communities. The agents in the blessing locutionary acts are elders as in many other blessing speech acts of Afan Oromo.

- (11a) *warra doojjoo deebanoo nagaja*
 people Doyo Debano peace
 'Peace to the people of Doyo and Debano.'
- (11b) *warra sa a nam-ni isaa deeban-u*
 people cow duman-NOM his breed-
 3MS.IMPF
 'People/Family of whose cattle and descendant multiply.'
- (11c) *warra ariiroo nagaja*
 people Ariro peace
 'Peace to the people/family of Ariiro.'
- (11d) *warra nagaa-n wal ariir-u*
 people peace-NOM each_other follow-
 2MS.IMPF
 'People who follow each other on the road to peace.'

The patients/addressees are mostly the neighboring villages. Borana society in Oromo has many neighboring villages both in Ethiopia and in Kenya. In the above speech acts, *doojjoo* 'Doyo', *deebanoo* 'Debano' and *ariiroo* 'Ariro' are neighboring villages in Ethiopia. According to the above blessings, the illocutionary acts show that Borana of Oromo pray to Waak'a 'God' about *nagaa/nagaja* 'peace' and *nageenna/nagee a* 'wellbeing' of their neighbors. The harmony and strong relationship between the Borana of Oromo and their neighbors indicate the perlocutionary acts. Furthermore, Oromo people also bother about the peace and stability of all things in and around them (Hinnat 1977). Hence, they use the following blessing speech acts to get happiness and stability.

- (12a) *mooraan kun kolfaa-f gammat uu-n haa guut-am-u*
 village this laughter- happiness- let fill-PASS-
 CONJ NOM 3MS.IMPF
 'May these villages/walls be filled with laughter and happiness.'
- (12b) *kolfaa-f gammat lafaa k'ina haa gahu*
 laughter-CONJ happiness floor/earth roof let touch
 -NOM
 'May laughter and happiness reach from floor to rafter.'
- (12c) *lafaa-f waak'-ni isin wad in haa ta?-u*
 earth-CONJ sky/God- you with let be-3MS.IMPF
 NOM
 'May all good things be yours.' (lit. May Earth and God/sky be with you.)

The wellbeing of all things including cattle and family members is the concern of Oromo. The speech acts in the above examples (12a-d) reveal that elders who are called to the family bless the owner of the home or the blessed. So, the blessers/elders illocutionarily pray to Waak'a 'God' to offer the addressees happiness and stability. The structures of the utterances are all imperatives in that the blessers/elders address the request to Waak'a 'God' committing him for happiness and laughter to exist. As Oromos give value to all things around them regardless of whether they be humans or animals, animates or inanimate, large or small, old or young, or male or female, the value is seen in the blessings below.

Oromos give great value for cattle, and the value is expressed by several ways of which blessing speech acts are few. Elders on various rituals utter out the above locutionary blessing acts to bless cattle (13a-d). When elders perform the blessing speech acts, they categorically mention the various names of cattle of the owners. Since the life of Oromo is highly bonded with cattle, the addressees expect good products from the cattle after the blessings. The owners feel exited, stable, confident and comfortable about their properties after the blessing locutionary acts are performed because they feel that the speech acts have performative power of protecting the cattle

- (13a) *waak'-ni k'e ee kee a nagaa haa taa-sis-u*
 God- surrounding our peace let be-CAUS-3MS.IMPF
 NOM
 'May God make our surrounding/compound peace.'
- (13b) *waak'-ni sa a mirgis-tu nagaa nuu-f haa taa-sis-u*
 God-NOM cow/cattle milk_give-DIM peace we-BEN let be-CAUS-3MS.IMPF
 'God bless the cow/cattle that gives us milk.'
- (13c) *fardaa-f gaangoo kee a nagaa haa taa-sis-u*
 horse- mule our peace let be-CAUS-3MS.IMPF
 CONJ
 'God bless the horse and mule that we may ride.'
- (13d) *mooraa kee a haa guut-u*
 surround our let fill-3MS.IMPF
 ing
 'Let the whole compound/family be filled with cattle.'

and the whole properties in general. The structure of the speech acts is indirect because the agents/elders indirectly address request Waak'a 'God' as third person masculine singular grammatical nomination to have his protection over the cattle.

blessing locutionary acts or slightly different forms when the bride is taken out of her parents' home, and when the couple arrive in the home of the groom's parents, respectively. In examples (15a-c) above, the blessings are uttered by the agents to ask Waak'a 'God' to offer the bride and the groom

- (14a) *jaa waak'a karaa nagaa nuu-f go -i*
 oh God road peace us-BEN make-2S.JUSS
 'Oh God, bless our road, and make it peaceful.'
- (14b) *kan nu dank'uu-f kan nu mak'u nu-rraa k'ab-i*
 what us obstacle-CONJ what us deviate us-PART have-2S.JUSS
 'That calamity may not overtake us as we travel.'
- (14c) *mirga nu ool -i*
 right us pass_day-2S.JUSS
 'Let us pass the day being in right.'
- (14d) *nagaa-n nu baa-s-te nagaa-n mana kee a-tti nu deeb-is-i*
 peace-PART us go_out-CAUS-2S.PFV peace-PART house our-PART us reply-CAUS-2S.JUSS
 'May you return us to our home safely as you made us went out in peace.'

The Oromo worldview is related to luck in different situations, of which one is wishing good luck on travelling to different places for different purposes as in examples (14a-d). Agents in the blessing locutionary acts are elders, fathers or mothers, and they utter out speech acts to bless the one who goes out of home to market, funerals, relatives or any social gatherings. Patients are those who are blessed to be ready for journey or tour. The illocutionary acts are uttering the blessings for good fortunes to the person who travels so that his/her journey is expected to be very comfortable and successful. Likewise, as marriage or wedding is journey of life, blessing for good future of the newly married couples is performed among Oromo people. Thus, blessings are used on the ceremony of the weddings as shown below.

happiness, health, breeding (having children), bright future and avoidance of misfortunes or evils on their journey of life. Therefore, the bride and the groom hope that the future of their marriage will be very successful and full of happiness. The structure of the speech acts are all indirect speech acts because the agents address Waak'a 'God' as third persons singular masculine to provide the required effects on the addressees. In general, blessings are quite different from ordinary utterances in the language. Based on the various dialects of Oromo, the structures of blessings are different from the usually declarative or other speeches. Locutionarily, the agents use certain imperative forms in some fashion.

However, there are several blessing speech acts which indirectly present the request to Waak'a 'God'. Illocutionarily, the speech acts imply committing Waak'a 'God' to certain positive futures of the lives of the addressees, and perlocutionarily, the addressees feel that they are under the safeguard and protection of Waak'a in all aspects of their lives.

Summary

The study investigated the presence and all aspects of blessings in Afan Oromo. Blessings are not trivial since the language contains unrestricted kinds of speech acts in the area, which should be seen from the angles of various disciplines. However, we have presented the issues to be dealt with in this study categorizing them into morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects as the main goals of the study. Blessing is the concept of speech act which shows calling upon supernatural power to bestow good deeds for human beings. The study rationalizes that the issue should be investigated in Oromo so that the results of the study can bring about some inputs for the development of the language in one or the other way. Methodologically, purposive, convenient and snowball

- (15a) *waak'- c'i a keessan haa eebb-is-u*
 ni God- wedding your let bless-CAUS-2MS.IMPF
 NOM
 'May God bless your wedding.'
- (15b) *gaa ila nagaja haa taj-u*
 marriage peace let be-2MS.IMPF
 'Let it be marriage of peace.'
- (15c) *gamm malee jar-tuu-n isin hin- argiin*
 at uu happin but trouble-DIM-NOM you NEG-see
 'May you get nothing except happiness.'

In Oromo society, as in any other people, marriage is cultural and social institution in which male and female who marry each other live together for the rest of their life. To accomplish the fulfillments, there is a wedding ceremony which is arranged by the parents of the groom and the bride. On the occasions, various guests are called to celebrate with the parents of the couple. agents who are elders, fathers and mothers (parents) of the couples utter out either the same

sampling techniques were used to select the representative four dialects (Macha, Tulama, Barentu and Borana-Guji), and the informants from each dialect. To gather data from the selected dialects and informants, we used contextualised elicitation and naturalistic data' or 'spontaneous speech data'. The analysis was described to be done using elicitation and linguistic description, and speech act theory, in which morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic (locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts) are identified. From the data presentation and discussions, it is explained that blessings are highly valued and attached to the cosmological view of the people in Oromo culture, and they have psychological and moral impact in the daily life of the people. Morphosyntactically, blessings in Afan Oromo show inflectional forms for cases (subjects or nominative and benefactive), numbers, genders, persons, tenses, aspects and mood. Semantically, blessings are driving forces and means through which the peace and prosperity of the family, neighbors, homestead, and the country are maintained. The goals of blessings are to keep the peace and tranquility of the people and the land because *nagaa* 'peace' is a gift from Waak'a 'God' and the Oromo people pray for peace every day. The linguistic features of blessings reveal that the speech acts are quite unique because they show structural forms which deviate from the common arrangement of words in the language. They basically use second and third person singular masculine subject in almost all blessing expressions of the target language. There are also pragmatic aspects of blessings which are described though locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

Recommendation

It was concluded that blessing expressions are vital in the lives of Oromo people in any aspects: social, political, religious and economic lives of the people. They contribute a lot for the peace, wellbeing and phenomena of the speech community. However, they are ignored from most aspects of the society due to various reasons. Thus, the following are recommended to sustain these cultural aspects of the language:

- Since blessing expressions exhaustively touch the lives of Oromo people, they should be well practiced by all speech community regardless of religious view so that they can be retained.
- Blessing expressions should be studied from psychological, philosophical sociological and anthropological perspectives so that the findings can contribute to the development of theoretical backgrounds in relation to the speech acts of the language

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ACRONYMS

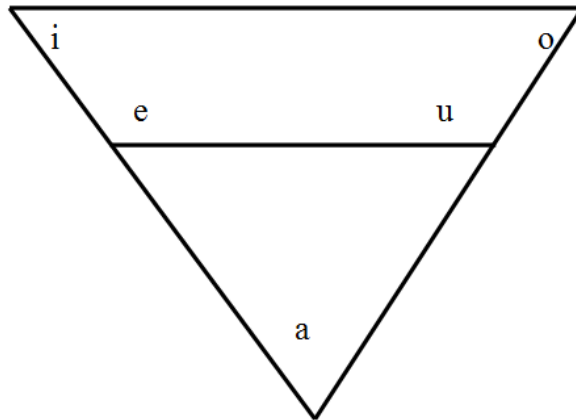
2P	2 nd person plural	JUSS	jussive mood
2S	2 nd person singular	MID	middle voice
3MS	3 rd person masculine singular	NEG	negative
BEN	benefactive case	NOM	nominative case
CAUS	causative	PART	particle (adposition)
CONJ	conjunction	PASS	passive voice
COP	copula	PFV	perfective aspect
DIM	diminutive	POSS	possessive
IMPF	imperfective aspect		

Appendix: Phonemic inventories of Afan Oromo

Table 1. Consonant phonemes of Afan Oromo

Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation							
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar		Alveopalatal	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	b		t	d			k	g
Implosive								
Fricative		f		s				h
Affricate								
Ejective	p'		t'			c'	k'	
Nasal		m		n				
Lateral				l				
Trill				r				
Glide		w					j	

*The symbols in the left corner show voiceless consonants and those in the right corner show the voiced ones.



*All vowel phonemes have long counter parts which are indicated by colon (:).

Figure 1. Vowel phonemes of Afan Oromo
