

The pragmatics of blessings in Gedeo (south Ethiopia)

Tesfatsion Petros Golle, Ongaye Oda Orkaydo and Yetebarek Hizekeal Zekareas

The Gedeo, a Cushitic-speaking group in southern Ethiopia, have a long tradition of blessing expressions ingrained in their native cosmology. The pragmatics of the Gedeo people's blessing utterances are examined in this article. Pertinent information was gathered from knowledgeable senior community members through interviews, and focus group discussions conducted between November 2020 and December 2021. The technique of gathering data also included non-participant observations. We have thematically analysed the data based on the situations in which the blessings are expressed and used to convey the intended meanings in the specific contexts. The expressive functions of blessings in Gedeo vary from context to context as would be expected, but, interestingly, they frequently revolve around praising *Mageno* 'the Creator,' shielding fellow community members from harm, boosting the land's productivity, safeguarding the environment, and upholding the general well-being of the community. We conclude that, while blessings have diverse meanings depending on the context in which they are expressed, their overall purpose is to preserve communal harmony and order.

Keywords: Gedeo, blessing expressions, pragmatics, *Mageno*

1. Introduction¹

In the social and religious lives of many African cultures, pronouncing and requesting blessings are extremely important. These blessing statements are ingrained in native cosmology, which governs their way of life daily. Few African groups record their blessings in writing, but the bulk of it passes down orally from one generation to the next (Ashenafi and Eba 2017; Ashenafi 2014). In most communities in the world, "the pronouncer" of the expressions of blessing is frequently an elder member of the community in respect to age and/or other social statuses (Ekeke 2011). For example, among the Kazakh and Kirghiz, two pastoralist tribes of Central Asian Turkic peoples, have a similar

¹We thank Dilla University for funding the project on which this article is based. We would also like to thank our study participants: Tilahun Ebido, Worraassa Tekko, and Mengesha Sheebbo, for their dedication and sharing with us their native insights. Any remaining errors are exclusively ours.

practice of elders assuming responsibility for blessing the young (Laude-Cirtautas 1974). In African communities, performing “good deeds” that are culturally defined for the benefit of others results in blessing, whether on an individual or community level (Baye 1998; Luter and Mathewos 2019). Although the linguistic expressions of blessing vary from one community to another, the overall objective fundamentally remains the same: to promote societal harmony by conveying specific values to both the pronouncer and recipient (Ekeke 2011).

Early in the 20th century, social scientists became interested in blessing, and it made its way into academia (Westermarck 1926; Evans-Pritchard 1956; Crawley 1929; Kratz 1989). Since then, several studies have been conducted on various blessing-related topics, including their significance, forms, functions, and so forth (Ashenafi and Eba 2017; Ekeke 2011). In his extensive investigations on the meaning and social functions of blessing among the three generations of Bedouin women in Israel, Alhuzail (2014), for instance, stated that blessings fulfill the function of providing existential security and protection against the forces that could imperil women. Likewise, Daniel and Gizaw (2020) stress the critical part that blessing and cursing customs play a crucial role in resolving intra- and inter-group conflicts among the Hadiya in southern Ethiopia.

The primary aim of this article is to characterize these gravely endangered Gedeo expressions of blessing. The Gedeo are a Cushitic-speaking people who live in southern Ethiopia. The Gedeo language, Gede'uffa, is rich in expressions of blessing mainly due to Gedeo's strong social bonds, and human-nature relationship. The pragmatics of these blessings are intriguing because they have different expressions depending on the circumstance and social intentions. Among these social goals include conversing with *Mageno* 'Creator,' helping the poor, healing the ill, settling disputes, and wishing newlyweds well. Although native expressions of blessing are still used in Gedeo, there is a general decline in the appreciation and use of this heritage. Different causes of the fall were cited, including urbanization, advent of “modern” religions (mostly Protestant Christianity), and political pressures (Wondimagegnehu 2018; Tesfatsion *et al.* 2021). Although they are in grave danger, these cultural assets have not yet been researched and recorded. Our study is a response to this.

For a study that seeks to learn facts and uncover experiences, a qualitative descriptive method is preferable (Creswell 2003; Dawson 2007). Empirical data were gathered from Dilla Zuria, Bule and Gedeb districts in the Gedeo zone from November 2020 to December 2021. We purposefully chose to conduct our fieldwork in these districts because they are recognized for significantly surviving the current pressures mentioned above, as well as because they fairly represent the Gedeo in terms of geographical distribution (Ayalew *et al.* 1996).

We have used three data collection tools: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participant observations. In-depth interviews were the primary data collection instrument. Group discussions and observations were employed to diversify our data from interviews, and triangulate findings from different sources. We interviewed 18 senior knowledgeable cultural consultants and local leaders selected via snowball sampling. A total of six group discussions, two in each selected district, were held with a total of 46 study participants. Observations were made during the gatherings of the council of elders in two native administrative spaces, locally known as *songo*: Wochema Songo and Fisehagenet Songo. Non-participant observation was conducted during the Daraaro festival, the Gedeo New Year celebration.

This article is organized into four sections. After the introduction, we discuss the types, actors and contexts of expressing blessings in Gedeo in section two. Section three presents the pragmatics and social functions of blessing among the Gedeo. Section four provides the conclusion.

2. Types, actors, and contexts of blessing

Expressions of blessing inherently require actors (the blesser and the blessed), and the specific contexts in which they are uttered. In other words, many blessing expressions may be identified on the basis of who speaks and to whom, and the situation in which they are uttered. What is more, blessings are classified into various types depending on the contexts they are practiced. Along these lines, Ashenafi and Eba (2017) state that blessing expressions are primarily grouped under commissive or performative types of speech acts depending on the goal they sought to accomplish. Among the Gedeo, all blessing rituals begin with the praise for their ancestor's deity, *Mageno*, albeit they differ in terms of the "who," "why," and "how" of blessing statements. To make it easier to analyze the Gedeo blessing expressions, we have classified them into three general themes based on the major characters, the setting in which the blessing is performed, and, most importantly, the goal intended for accomplishment. These are expressions of blessing used at the familial, village, and community levels. Each category will be covered in further detail below.

2.1. Expressing blessing at the family level

Within the Gedeo, as elsewhere, family is the smallest social unit in which the expressions and practices of blessings begin. The family head, elderly person or a temporary visitor are the key characters (blessing givers) for expressing blessing at the family level. At the family level, the intention of blessings ranges from a more general blessing from the blessing provider to a more focused blessing

from senior family members that targets family members, such as grooms and brides, for example. Expressing blessings at the family level has various sub-categories. These are stated and explained in detail below.

2.1.1. Blessing at *Qorciisa*

The Gedeo have a custom where the entire family seeks blessings. The head (the patriarch) of the family initiates the *qorciisa* ceremony after consulting about the event with his family. The entire family gets up early in the morning and travels to *Qorciisa /k'orc'iisa/*, a place covered with thick grasses. On their way to the location, their walk is strictly age-based: the oldest man takes the lead, and the youngest takes the last position. When they arrive, except the head of the family, everybody else sits down. For a moment, they keep silent, and then, the head of the family starts the blessing by offering thanks to the Creator. After that, he offers his family the blessing as shown in 1.

1. a. *goroodhdhoole daboole ba'at*²
goroodhdh-oole dab-oole ba'a-t
transgress-COND.3M make_mistake-COND.3M forgive-2M
'Forgive them if they transgress and commit sins'

- b. *baro yo'oka hulluuqqe*
baro yo'o-ka hulluuq-'e
season bad-OBJ pass-2PL.JUSS
'May you endure the bad season'

- c. *fuggoxxi ha'noo uuddoqqe*
fuggo-xxi ha'no uud-t-o-qqe
danger-DET 2PL see-3F-3M-NEG
'May the bad omen never get hold of you'

² In this article, we provide four lines if the utterance contains phonetic elements. The first line contains forms with phonetic forms; the second line contains only phonemic forms; the third line is interlinear glossing; the fourth line is translation. For the most part, we have maintained the IPA symbols. However, in the view to benefiting the native speakers of the language, we have used letters used in the native writing system. Thus, long vowels and gemination are marked by doubling the first symbol. <dh> stands for a voiced alveolar implosive; <sh> for a voiceless alveo-palatal fricative; <y> for a voiced palatal glide; <j> for a voiced alveo-palatal affricate; stroke (') for a voiceless glottal stop; <q> for a voiceless velar ejective; <x> for a voiceless alveolar ejective; <c> for a voiceless alveo-palatal ejective; <ph> for a voiceless bilabial ejective.

- d. *tarkaafatte*
 tarkaafat-'e
 walk-2PL, JUSS
 ‘May you become successful’ (lit. “May you walk”)

2.1.2. Blessing at wedding

Marriage is highly regarded in Gedeo. When a son grows up, his parents begin to fret significantly about his marriage. This leads them to begin looking for a suitable girl for their son. In the search, they consider a variety of norms and characteristics. The first and foremost is that the girl must not have blood relationship with the family. In Gedeo, as it is the case in many other ethnic groups (for example, the Konso in Ethiopia)³, it is an abomination for a man to marry a woman from his own clan. The other element is the socio-economic standing of the girl's parents. An ideal girl is one whose parents get well along with the neighbors, that she is impartial and quite good at home management. Hard working is at the core of home management. This is because the Gedeo abhor laziness as the following adage illustrates:

2. *are jololte aro'o kanna jolol assitaan*
 are jolol-t-e aro'o kanna jolol assi-t-aan
 wife be_lazy-3F-REL husband and be_lazy make-3F-PRES
 ‘A lazy woman makes her husband lazy’

The future husband's parents obtain enough knowledge from neighbors and individuals they believe are knowledgeable about the girl's personality, her parents' social standing, and their acceptance. The boy's parents decide to marry the girl for their son if the evidence obtained indicates that she is worth marrying. To do so, they send go-betweens to begin mediation with girl's father and his kinsmen. The girl's parents then raise several issues to the go-betweens such as availability of plots of land, neighbourhood relations, work ethics, and family cohesion. At a later stage, the girl's parents make similar inquiries directly to the boy's parents (see Kiphe *et al.*, 2008). A wedding day is set if both families have consented.

³ One of the authors is a native member of the Konso society.

Both parents arrange a wedding ceremony once all requirements and procedures are complete. Wedding ceremonies never go without offering blessings to the bride and groom in the Gedeo culture as in many other cultures such as the Guji, Borana, Sidama, Hadiya (Ashenafi and Eba, 2017; Luter and Mathewos, 2019). Among the Gedeo, there are four stages of blessings during wedding rituals. The first stage of blessing is conducted by the bride's family. This is followed by the blessing of elders from the groom's clan to the pair and the girl's parents. At the third stage, the bride's mother blesses her daughter. Finally, the bride and the groom receive blessings from the groom's parents or other senior members of the clan. The details of each stage are presented below.

On the wedding day, the soon-would-be-husband arrives at the bride's house with his parents, siblings and friends, and takes the bride from her parents. The bride's father, village elders and members of the bride's family bless the pair when they arrive at the bride's parents' house. Depending on lineage hierarchy, the blessing is retained. Her grandfather first gives the pair his blessing. Then, the family of her grandfather, who are of a comparable rank, perform the blessing. They are then blessed by her father and her uncles. They smear butter on the forehead of the couples and their friends while offering them blessing. Also, the bride's oldest brother blesses both couples. However, the oldest brother is not allowed to smear butter unless their father passes away. In 3., we present expressions of blessings by the bride's family during the wedding ceremony.

3. a. *belto ha'no'a horto*
belto ha'no-'a hor-t-o
 daughter 2PL.BEN bear-3F-PRES.JUSS
 'May our daughter bear many children'
- b. *galle hosse*
gal-'e / hos-'e
 spend_night-2PL.JUSS spend_day-2PL.JUSS
 'May you live long'
- c. *araddake'n fishshe*
aradda-ke'n fish-'e
 community-PP smell-2PL.JUSS
 'May you give happiness to the society'

Following the blessing from the bride's family, the groom's family takes the turn to bless the bride's family. In 4., we present the expressions of blessing by the groom's family.

4. a. *ulfaatte*
ulfat-'e
 honour.PASS-2PL.JUSS
 'May you be honoured'
- b. *gammashshot dangannoke kadowwaal*
gammashshho-t dag-n-annoke kadowwaal
 be_happy-PP come_back-1PL-COMP be.3M
 'May God help us to come back with joy'

As mentioned earlier, the bride's mother blesses her daughter as the couple prepares to leave. Before the mother begins blessing her daughter, she smears her daughter's head with butter as a symbolic representation of security and harmony. The expressions of blessing the bride's mother offers are presented in 5.

5. a. *bulteti gulfaatte*
bulte-ti gulfaat-'e
 marriage-PP be_satisfied -2PL.JUSS
 'May you be happy with your marriage'
- b. *cinaachchi ququuqoqqe*
cinaachchi ququuqo-qqe
 ribs be_coarse-NEG.2PL.JUSS
 'May you not lose your comfort' (*cinaachchi* 'ribs' is used here metaphorically: just as when sleeping ribs need a comfortable place, the bride's mother wishes the couple a pleasant and trouble-free life)

The blessing for the couple continues as well when the couple travel to the groom's home. After arrival, the groom's parents or any clan representative (if the parents are deceased) bless the union with expressions such as those given in 5.a. and in 6. below.

6. a. *qelle*
qel- 'e
 be_multiplied-2PL.JUSS
 ‘May you bear [more children]’
- b. *finnik firik fishshe*
finna-ik fira-ik fish- 'e
 children-PP relatives-PP smell-2PL.JUSS
 ‘May you enjoy with children and relatives’
- c. *anna ama ege 'ne*
anna ama egen- 'e
 father mother know-2PL.JUSS
 ‘May you respect your father and mother’
- d. *bulteti le 'we*
bulte-ti lew- 'e
 marriage-PP enjoy-2PL.JUSS
 ‘May you enjoy your marriage’

2.1.3. Blessing by the guests

The Gedeo cordially welcome guests into their houses (interview with Worraassa Tekko, Gedeb district, May 2021). Our cultural consultant from the Bule district is worth citing at this point: “Serving guests at home is a tradition that we inherited from our forefathers; we have always protected this great heritage” (interview with Gammada Girsu, Bule district, June 2021). The study participants further explain that the host extends warm hospitality to guests until they depart his house. It is customary for guests to bestow blessings on the host family when they intend to leave the host’s house as shown in 7.

7. a. *mine konne'a eloxxi yaane duuchcha kaddowwaal*
mine kone- 'a elo-xxi yaane duuchcha kad-t-owwaal
 house DEM.PRON-PP good-DET things all be-3F-JUSS
 ‘May every good thing come to this house’

- b. *ittinaaka gophphinoqqe no'o itissineen*
it-tinaaka gophph-noqqe no'o itiss-neen
 eat-2PL.PRES lose-2P.NEG 1PL feed-2PL.PASS
 'As you fed us, may you not come short of food'
- c. *ha'witinaaka gophphinoqqe no'o ha'wisineen*
ha'w-tinaaka gophph-no-qqe no'o ha'w-sineen
 drink-2P.FUT lose-2PL-NEG 1PL drink-2PL.PASS
 'Like you quenched our thirst, may you not run out of liquid'
- d. *no'o'a uwtine xe'ishineexxe bakka'n ha'no'awonsho*
no'o-'a uw-tine xe'ishi-ne-'xe bakka-'n ha'no-'a wonsh-'o
 2PL-BEN give-2PL shortage-2PL-PP place-PP 2PL-BEN fill-3M.JUSS
 'May He [the Creator] fill you with his blessing since you fed us'
- e. *heddinebaaxxi ha'no'a wo'mito*
hed-'ne-baaxi ha'no-'a wo'm-'ito
 think-2PL-NEG.2F 2PL-BEN full-2F.JUSS
 'May you be filled with countless blessings'
- f. *eebisemme*
eebisem-'e
 bless-2PL.JUSS
 'May you be blessed'
- g. *no'o ulfeesitineen ha'noonna ulfaatte*
no'o ulfees-tineen ha'no-na ulfaat-'e
 1PL- respect-2PL 2PL-also respect.PASS-2PL.JUSS
 'You honoured us – may you be honoured'

- h. *belti ha'noo ulfeesso*
belti ha'noo ulfees-'o
 son 2PL.OBJ respect-3M.JUSS
 'May your son respect you'
- i. *beltiinxi ha'noo ulfees'to*
beltint'i ha'noo ulfeesi-to
 daughter-in-law 2PL.OBJ respect-2F.JUSS
 'May your daughter-in-law respect you'
- j. *qoqqobbi ha'nok wo'm gophphinoqqe*
qoqqobbi ha'nok wo'mo gophph-no-k'e
 kitchen 2PL.POSS let_it_be_full lose-2PL-NEG.JUSS
 'May your kitchen always be full'
- k. *barikinna barrati gewwe*
bari-kina bara-ti gew-'e
 season-PP.also day-PP rich-2PL.JUSS
 'May you live more years and seasons'

2.2. Blessing at the village level

The village is included in blessing customs and emotions that go beyond family boundaries. Elders are the primary players at the village level. They offer blessing services to various village residents under various conditions. These situations include, among others, when a villager is gravely ill, during celebrations of land inheritance or a housewarming. Let's talk about each of them in more detail.

2.2.1. Convalescence

The Gedeo are well known for their wide variety of traditional healing techniques, just as other Ethiopian societies. Our research participants claim that the Gedeo use herbal remedies, healing through breathing, and other methods in addition to traditional physical therapy for physical injuries especially for bone fracture and joint dislocation (interview with Tilahun Ibido, September 2021).

According to the study participants, people who become ill and do not recover fast are forbidden from consuming certain foods and beverages. They are also banned from going to specific locations, such as markets, assemblies etc., and not permitted to stay in noisy environments. Even once they recover from their illnesses, they are not immediately permitted to reintegrate into society. This is because it is thought that they still harbor the spirit that gave them their disease, and that that spirit needs to be cleansed. Elders cleanse and bless the recovering person to help them reintegrate into everyday community life.

The ritual process of blessing practice goes as follows: First, elders take the convalescent to a sacred space named *lagoti bakka*, put him/her under the local tree called *cosiiqaa* /c'osiik'aa/, and let him/her wash him/her with water and the leaf of *cosiiqaa*. Once the washing process is done, the elders throw the leaf into the river. Except for the elders and the convalescent, it is strictly forbidden to enter *lagoti bakka* /*lagoti baka*/ (isolation place). After performing the ritual at the sacred space and blessing the convalescent, the elders allow the recovered patient to join the community, eat and drink food and drinks he/she was prohibited from. According to our study participants, there are several blessing expressions uttered during the cleansing ritual for the convalescent. These are presented in 8.

8. a. *lago ate'n higoqqe*
lago *ate-'n* *higo-qqe*
isolation 2SG-PP come_back-2M.NEG.JUSS
'May you become free from isolation'
- b. *itate'n ke'isso*
ita-te'n *kess-'o*
food-PP begin-3M.PASS
'May you eat much'
- c. *ha'wa'n ke'isso*
hawa-ken *ke'is-'o*
drink-PP begin-3M.PASS
'May you drink much'

- d. *midha wode'e sifeefat*
midha wode'e sifeefat
 food water be_satisfied.2SG,JUSS
 'May you be satisfied with food and drink'

2.2.2. Blessing at the housewarming

The Gedeo engage in cooperative house building, like many African cultures. All neighbors and family members offer assistance when someone is building a house. From the time they start chopping the wood until the house is finished, they are involved. Both men and women have distinct but complementary roles in the building industry. Women indirectly assist in construction by providing food and drink for those in charge, while males work directly on the project. They build the house in a few of days thanks to this division of labor. The house could be built in little more than three days. After building is complete, the participants and elders celebrate with food and beverages; elders bless the home's owner before anyone consumes food or beverages. In 9. we provide a few of such blessing expressions.

9. a. *kunni mine galde hossattoke kadowaal*
kunni mine gal-de hoss-attoke kad-owhaal
 DEM.PRON house spend_night-2SG spend_day-2SG be-3M.JUSS
 'May this house be a house of long living'
- b. *maattemayi atiki nage'ik hedhaake kadowaal*
maattemayi atiki nage'a-'k hedhaake kad-owhaal
 generation 2SG.POSS peace-PP let_live.3M be-3M.JUSS
 'May your generation live with unlimited peace'
- c. *mine kunni hortetike kadowaal*
mine kunni horte-tike kad-owhaal
 house DEM.PRON fertile-PP be-3M.JUSS
 'May this house be a house of many children'

- d. *ille qarre horre*
il-'e qar-'e hor-'e
 bear-2PL productive-2PL fertile-2PL.JUSS
 'May you bear more children, let you be productive and fertile'
- e. *qore hanqatee'na hochchik qoodde*
qore hanqatee'-na hochchik qood-'e
 wooden_bowl get_short-also leave.PP serve-2PL.JUSS
 'May the wooden plate be inadequate, so you serve food [with ensete leaf]'
- f. *mine konne'n sifoofatte*
mine konne-'n sifoofat-'e
 house DEM.PRON-PP satisfy-2PL.JUSS
 'May this house give you satisfaction'
- g. *mini kunni jila jildinaake kadowaal*
mini kuni jila jildinaake kad-owwaal
 house dem.PRON celebration celebrate.2PL be-3M.JUSS
 'May this house be a house of joy and celebration'
- h. *qe'ya gophphoxxe*
qe'ya gophph-oxxe
 nail lose-2PL.NEG.JUSS
 'May you not encounter shortage of cattle'
- i. *dalla'i ati'a fademo*
dalla'i ati-'a fad-emo
 fence 2SG-BEN be_wide-DAT
 'May the fence be extended for you'

- j. *fuggoxxi hurrok ati'a hanqato*
fuggo-xxi hurro-k ati-'a hanqato
 evil-2F.DET disaster-2M.DET 2SG-PP get.NEG.2M.JUSS
 'Be safe from evil and disaster'

- k. *eege gophphoxxe*
eege gophph-oxxe
 tail lose-2PL.NEG.JUSS
 'May you not encounter shortage of domestic animals'

Idiomatic expressions are used in this blessing expression as well. These idioms could have serious implications. Unless one is familiar with the culture, not everyone will be able to understand the message of blessing expression. It is vital to know not only the culture but also the language of the culture to understand the meanings of the blessing expressions. If he or she is unsure, he or she may inquire as to what the expression implies. For example, in the expressions in 9., the words 'nails,' 'tail,' and 'fence' have different meaning in the expression. The first two words represent cattle and the last word is equivalent with the shelter for cattle. Gedeo elders bless the house owner with such idiomatic expression.

2.2.3. Blessing at land property inheritance event

The Gedeo people follow the custom of passing down property, primarily land. It is the vertical, linear, or direct transfer of property from parents to children (Goody 1970). The Gedeo practice of passing down land has two dimensions. The first is the transfer of land ownership while the parents (father) are still living, and the second is the transfer of land ownership after the parents have passed away. In the first instance, a parent gives a portion of his land to his son upon his marriage. The boy's father will give him a piece of land on the left side of his house if he is the firstborn.

However, when parents pass away, their kin, community leaders, and other lineage elders gather to divide the land among the boys of the deceased parents. The local leaders, elders, and kin bless the person who possessed the land after the inheritance process is complete. Illustrative examples are given in 10.

10. a. *shiixxonxe uuneenen barakattowaal*
shiixxo-nxe uunee-nen barakat-t-owaal
 small-3F give-1PL bless-3F-JUSS
 ‘We give you small; may it be blessed’
- b. *konnee fichcha huccitine galle*
konnee fichcha hucc-tine gal-’e
 DEM.PRON farm work-2PL spend_night-2PL,JUSS
 ‘May you work on the farm and have a long life’
- c. *itina’ne mudoqqe*
it-t-ina’n mud-oqqe
 eat-3F-3PL be_finished-2NEG,JUSS
 ‘May you not encounter shortage of food even if you eat [more]’
- d. *ila ilatee dhalchisse*
ila ila-tee dhalchis-’e
 generation generation-PP transfer-2PL,JUSS
 ‘May you transfer [your land] from generation to generation’

2.3. Blessing at the community level

The highest social organization in which Gedeo blessing practices are held is the community. In this situation, the goal of blessing is to alleviate social evils at the community level. Disasters, conflict, plunge, and other problems impacting society are the targets of blessing at the communal level. Leaders of the Baalle system play an important role in running the blessing practices. Some community blessings are performed in sacred sites.

Sacred spaces, whether natural locations acknowledged as sacred by indigenous and traditional peoples or natural sites recognized as sacred by organized religions or faiths as places of worship and remembrance, are common throughout the world (Gonzalo et al. 2005). According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), there are six types of protected spaces: strict nature reserves, wilderness areas, national parks, natural monuments of feature, habitat or species management areas, protected landscape or seascape, and protected area with proper use of natural resources. The classification is based on the size of the protected area and/or the level of protection. Sacred spaces

are currently severely threatened around the world and can only be found in areas with intact religious practices and/or indigenous knowledge.

There are many sacred sites in Gedeo, mainly in Wogida Amba and Ejeersa villages in Yirgachefe district, Birbirota village in Dilla Zuria district, and Kil'awwe village in Bule district. The sacred spaces are highly respected because the Gedeo believe that the spirit of Magano is always present there. As a result, these sites often serve as a ritual space for blessing individuals or groups. The Gedeo people have three different names for sacred spaces: *ulfoti bakka* 'sacred place,' *woyyoti bakka* 'place of spirit,' and *lagoti bakka* 'isolation space.' Even though the terms are different linguistically, their meanings and their very purposes are similar (see also Tadese 2016; Wondimagegn2018; Tesfatsion *et al.* 2021). The primary purpose of these spaces is to bless people. Although blessing is practiced in all these spaces, there is a slight variation in whom to bless there. The first two spaces are used for blessing warriors, and the last one is used for blessing someone recovered from illnesses after being isolated from the society (that was discussed earlier). Different variants of blessing practices at the community level are discussed below.

2.3.1. Blessing the warriors

The tradition of blessing the warriors has historical roots in Gedeo oral tradition. The oral account goes as follows: before the Gedeo moved and settled in their current area, they lived in Harsu, located in Oromia National Regional State. From there, they trekked to the south and east, and met with a different group of people (Tadesse 2002). The contact became confrontational rather than cooperative. When the fighting became intense, they decided not to directly confront the new group by deploying a large portion of their fighters, but rather tactically used other strategic locations to counterattack and defeat the adversary. At the end, this worked out effectively and efficiently, and resulted in defeating the adversary. After they won the battle, they took control of the whole areas and named the strategic locations *ulfotibakka* and *woyotibakka*. After the battle was over, they made a gathering at the strategic locations to remember those who sacrificed their lives, and blessed those who returned victorious. Then they considered the strategic locations sacred spaces.

The Gedeo have continued the practices of blessing warriors in the sacred areas through *woyyo* (a spiritual leader) and *hayyichcha* (traditional leader). The blessing is performed with the belief that the spirit of *Magano* that protected their ancestors always protects them. 11. presents expressions of blessing after victory.

11. a. *fuggoxxi geltoqqe*
fuggo-xxi gelt-oqqe
 evil-DET.3F touch-2NEG,JUSS
 ‘May bad things not approach you’
- b. *yo’oxxenaan’ fulle*
yo’o-xxe-naa’n ful-’e
 evil-DET.2F-PP get_through-2PL-JUSS
 ‘May He [: the Creator] hide you from evil’
- c. *ate ha’nonna sa’so*
ate ha’no-na sa’s-’o
 2SG 2PL-also pass_through-3M,JUSS
 ‘May He [: the Creator] allow you to pass through [difficulties]’
- d. *injifattine higge*
ijifatti-ne hig-’e
 defeat-3PL return-2PL,JUSS
 ‘May you return victorious’

The warriors head to battle after receiving their blessings. However, the blessing is not restricted to before the battle. It also continues with the arrival of the warrior's aftermath. When fighting is over, the fighters return from the battlefield and go to the sacred areas to get blessing from the elders. This is known as a *mulqeca* (“cleansing”) blessing, where the council of elders cleanse the warriors for purity.

According to our consultant, the Gedeo believe that even if a person is an enemy, his soul is pure before *Mageno* (interview with Worraassa Tekko, 2021, Gedeb district). As a result, it is believed that soldiers have killed humans, and they must be purified to obtain *Mageno*'s mercy through blessings. As a result, elders bless returned warriors and beseech *Mageno* to forgive their misdeeds. 12. presents such expressions of blessings.

12. a. *anga sa'atotixinna hexxaan mageni gattowaal hiyyo*
anga sa'a-to-xxina hexaan mageni gat-t-owaal hiy-'o
 hand stretch-2M-DET be.3F creator forgive-3F-JUSS say-3M.JUSS
 'May the Creator forgive you; since you would kill by stretching out your hands'
- b. *ate huluuso*
ate huluus-'o
 2SG go_through-3M.JUSS
 'Let Him [the Creator] purify you'

2.3.2. Blessing at Songo

Songo is the administrative pivot of the Gedeo indigenous governance system (Balle; see Wondimagegnehu 2018; Fekadu and Hawilti 2019; Tesfatsion *et al.* 2021). *Songo* is a sacred and vital venue since it is where every part of society is critically addressed. Gedeo has a total of 525 *Songo* institutions. This total of *Songo* institutions were derived from the fact that Gedeo has seven clans, each of which has seventy-five *Songos*. Every *Songo* has a leader (*hayyichcha*). The *hayyichcha* serves two purposes: leadership and judgment. To put it another way, he is tasked with leading the people within his region and administering justice in the event of a conflict or dispute.

Songo is utilized for ceremonies, resolving individual and group issues, learning socialization from elders, and so on. It is primarily a political, spiritual, and cultural institution (Kiphe 2002; Kiphe *et al.* 2008; Yetebarek *et al.* 20018). Of course, rituals are performed by the Sidama and Oromo in cultural locations such as *Songo* (see Markos 2014; Ashenafi and Eba 2017; Luter and Mathewos 2019). At the *Songo*, elders undertake two types of blessing rituals: blessings to resolve a problem or argument and blessings to restore after a disaster: *mulqa* /mulk'a/.

Conflict resolution and mediation are common cultural practices in Gedeo. Depending on the complexity of the problem, there are nine stages in mediating a disagreement between individuals or a group of individuals (for details, see Wondimagegnehu 2018). Whatever the nature of conflict, offering blessings at the end of mediation or resolution is an integral part of the process. The elders begin the blessing with a prayer to *Mageno* for providing them with an insight to resolve a conflict.

13. a. *ha'no'a eloxxi calli leelito*
ha'no-'a elo-xxi cali leel-ito
 2PL-PP good-DET only see-3F.JUSS
 'May you always meet with good things'
- b. *welti galle hosse*
welti gal-'e hos-'e
 together pend.night-2PL spend_day-2P.JUSS
 'May you stay together in harmony'
- c. *welti xemifatte*
welti xemifat-'e
 together sweet-2PL.JUSS
 'May you be sweet to each other'

The second type of Songo blessing is performed when the society suffers from disasters such as war, drought, communicable diseases, and so on. People who take part in the ritual cut tree branches, hold them in their hands, go around their homes three times, run to the Songo, and then throw the leaves over the cliff. This is known as *mulqa/mulk'a/* (self-disclosure). Elders bless the people after throwing the leaves. 14. presents the different blessing expressions used during *Mulqa*.

14. a. *yo'oxxena'n gatte*
yo'o-xxe-na'n gat-'e
 bad-DET.2F-PP save-2PL.JUSS
 'Let you be safe from danger'
- b. *bala saxxowwaal*
bala saxx-owwaal
 accident pass-3F.JUSS
 'Let disaster go away'

- c. *foggo saxxowwaal*
fuggo saxx-owwaal
 danger pass-3M.JUSS
 ‘Let bad things go away’
- d. *mageno nagees*
mageno nage’a-es
 God peace-3M.JUSS
 ‘Let the Creator give us peace’

2.3.3. Blessing at Dararro

The Gedeo, like other Cushitic peoples, have an egalitarian governance system. Various rituals are carried out under this indigenous governance system. For example, the Oromo celebrate Irreecha and the Sidama celebrate Fiche Cambalaalla, and people in south Ari celebrate Dishta Gina (see also Amare 2020; Serawit 2018).

Daraaro, a thanksgiving festivity warmly celebrated as a new year ritual, is the prominent ritual of Gedeo's traditional governance system. The festival takes place in the middle of February. However, the precise date is unknown. The specific day is decided by the elders. During the Dararro celebration, the Gedeo people gather at Oda Ya'a to offer gifts to Aabba Gada (the head of the Baalle system) and to receive blessings from Hayyichcha (Balle system leaders) and Woyyo (Baalle system spiritual leader) (Kiphe, 2008; Kiphe et al. 2008; Alabama and Yimam 2020; Tesfatsion *et al.* 2021).

The celebration begins with the Baalle leaders' prayer. In Gedeo's indigenous governance system (*Baalle*), the elder's council prays and blesses the people in accordance with their hierarchy. The prayer is followed by blessings for the people. In the Baalle system, the council of elders blesses the people in turn, according to their hierarchies. There are two kinds of blessings. First, the Balle system's leader, Abba Gada, and other traditional leaders bless the public. Finally, the spiritual leader (Woyyo) blesses the people, as shown in 15.

15. a. *aradda nagees*
aradda nage’a-es
 people peace-CAUS
 ‘May He [the Creator] make the people peaceful’

- b. *boga nagees*
boga nage'a-es
 land peace-CAUS
 'May He [the Creator] make the land peaceful'
- c. *barikina waggati gewwe*
bari-ki-na wogga-ti gew-'e
 season-PP year-PP reach-2PL,JUSS
 'May you live long'
- d. *fichchik horik daraar*
fichch-ik hor-ik daraar
 farm-PP cattle-PP be_flowered.2SG,JUSS
 'May you be blessed with farm and cattle'
- e. *finnik daraar*
finnik daraar
 children.PP be_flowered.2SG,JUSS
 'May you be blessed with children'
- f. *mittunte birasa's*
mittunte birasa's
 oneness multiply.3M,JUSS
 'May He [the Creator] strengthen the unity [of the people]'
- g. *fuggoxxi bagakenaa'n ba'owwaal*
fuggo-xxi boga-kenaa'n ba'-owwaal
 evil-DET.2F land-PP disappear-3M,JUSS
 'May the evil disappear from the land'

- h. *eloka xeena no'o'a uww*
elo-ka xeena no'o-'a uww
good-PPrain 1PL-PP give.2M
'May You [the Creator] provide us with good rains'

Certain specific individuals lead the spiritual aspects of the Baalle system. Woyyo is the local term for such leaders. Their main duty is to bless or curse. Their blessing or curse is thought to always have unavoidable consequences (see Tesfatsion et al. 2021). During Dararro, the Woyyo blesses the assembly, as shown in 16.

16. a. *koreeri ba'owwaal*
koreeri ba'-owwaal
diarrhea disappear-3M.JUSS
'May diarrhea disappear'

- b. *karra wisowwaal*
karra wis-owwaal
wealth abundant-3M.JUSS
'May you have abundant wealth'

- c. *banqotenaan gat*
banqo-tenaan gat
thunder-2F.PP be_safe.2SG.JUSS
'May you be safe from thunder'

- d. *diidallo booyye yo'ochchi tuqoqqe*
diidallo booyye yo'o-chchi tuq-oqqe
wind cold bad-DET touch-3M.NEG
'May heavy wind and extreme cold not attack you'

3. The interpretation and social functions of blessing

From the comprehensive list of blessing typologies above, blessing practice has different social functions. From the outset, a blessing is a cultural communication tool between the Gedeo and Mageno.

The elders often praise Mageno before commencing any relevant activity that may range from resolving conflicts at the individual level to solving inter-group conflicts. The purpose of blessing Mageno are twofold: first, blessing serves as a recognition to Mageno as their God as He was the God of their ancestors. Second, blessings refer to confirming that all things that the Gedeo have, including themselves, are the gift from Mageno. Moreover, the Gedeo believe that if they solve some of their problems, such as solving a conflict, they recognize the wisdom for such achievement is from Mageno. Ashenafi and Teresa (2017) reported similar blessing expressions among the neighboring Oromo community. Illustrative examples are given in 17.

17. a. *yaane tikendaashsha gargaar*
yaane tinkendaashsha gargaar
 dispute be_solved.2F.PASS help.2M
 ‘May you help us to solve the problem’
- b. *mageno ati nage’a uww*
mageno ati age’a uww
 God 2M peace give.2M
 ‘May you give us peace’

Blessing can also be used to maintain social harmony. Gedeo people place a high value on social interaction. A social interaction frequently begins at home (*hado*) and progresses to *Ya’a*, the highest political organization (see also Kippie 2000; Kippie *et al.* 2008; Wondimagegn 2018; Tesfatsion *et al.* 2021). Elders bless individuals and society as a whole, allowing them to live in harmony with their families and the larger community. When elders bless individuals or the entire community, they frequently bless them to cultivate a sense of living, collaboration, and respect for one another. Such blessings are frequently performed at social institutions such as Songo and public rituals such as Daraaro, weddings, and so on.

18. a. *jaalalati weli galle*
jaalala-ti weli gal-’e
 love-PP together spend_night-2PLJUSS
 ‘May you live in love’

- b. *welt xe'me*
welt *t'e'm-'e*
 together be_sweet-2PL,JUSS
 'May you be sweet to one another other'

- c. *mittunte birasa's*
mittunte *birasa's*
 oneness multiply.2M,JUSS
 'May God strengthen the unity [of the people]'

The message of 18a. and 18b., for example, is dual: the first blessing by elders from the bride's family seeks social harmony between the couple, while the latter by elders from the groom's family seeks social harmony between the two (groom's and bride's) families. In both cases, the blessers extend their wish to have a harmonious life among the couples and the two families. The desire of the groom's family is not only to get a wife for their son but rather to add a new family to the already existing kinship ties. That is why they express their desire by blessing the bride's family. Similarly, at the *Daraaro* ritual the cultural elders bless the large community to have unity, love and lead a colorful life. In 18c., the elders bless the *ya'a* 'assembly' wishing the people oneness and unity. All blessing utterances in different occasions are extended wishing the large community to have harmonious social life.

Blessing also serves another social purpose. It contributes to an individual's, household's, or community's well-being. Elders bless individuals and groups in various rituals, wishing them happiness, comfort, security, health, welfare, prosperity, fertility, and so on. Such blessings may be given in a variety of contexts, including, but not limited to, weddings, birth-giving days, *Daraaro* rituals, Songo, housewarmings, and so on. The other for such blessing by elders is a patient who has fully recovered. Elders frequently bless the recovered patient by ensuring that his or her health remains good.

19. a. *mine konne'n sifoofatte*
mine *kone-'n* *sifoofat-'e*
 house DEM.PRON-PP satisfy-2PL,JUSS
 'May you get unlimited satisfaction in this house'

- b. *karrati daraar*
karra-ti daraar
 wealth-pp flower.3M
 ‘May you flower with wealth’

Another social function of blessing is to use it as a shield against attack. The Gedeo have no history of plotting wars with other peoples. However, this does not mean that their history is free of conflict. According to historical records, the Gedeo have been involved in numerous defensive wars whenever neighbouring groups attack them (see Tadesse 2002 and Tesfatsion *et al.* 2021). Before engaging in defensive wars, elders gather all warriors in specific locations and bless them. It is believed that the blessing of elders is used as a shield against an enemy in the context of an external attack.

Similarly, a blessing is used to protect against sudden disaster and disease caused by man-made or natural causes. Songo is a well-known and widely practiced blessing context for protection from such disasters. Other contexts include weddings, housewarmings, land property inheritance, and so on. The blessing is intended for various members of the public, including warriors, illness survivors, couples, land property recipients and the public, as, for example, the mother-in-law’s blessing after her son arrives with the bride.

20. a. *fuggoxxi geltoqqe*
fuggo-xxi gelto-qq’e
 evil-DET.2F touch-3F.NEG
 ‘May bad things do not touch you’
- b. *tenne yaanenaan ate huluuso*
tenne yaane-naa’n ate huluuso
 DEM.PRON things-PP 2M go_through.3SG.JUSS
 ‘May God help you to overcome these things [attacks]’

Cf. also 5.b., repeated herebelow:

5. b. *cinaachchi ququuqoqqe*
cinaachchi ququuqo-qqe
 ribs be_coarse-NEG.2PL.JUSS
 ‘May you not lose your comfort’ (*cinaachchi* ‘ribs’ is used here is used here metaphorically: just as ribs need a comfortable place during sleeping, the bride’s mother wishes the couples a pleasant and trouble-free life)

Ribs represent life, while coarse stands for evil or disturbance. Hence, with this blessing the mother-in-law wishes the couple a harmless and comfortable life. Along these lines, one of our key informants from the Bule district, Mengesha Sheebbo, observed that ‘just as someone will be disturbed to sleep properly when something coarse his/her ribs; it is also impossible to have a satisfying life when evil disturbs.’

Blessing serves the purpose of preserving harmony with nature. The expression of the Gedeo’s blessing in various contexts reveals that the blessings address not only humans and their properties but also the natural environment. Animals, plants, seasons, the sun, rain, farmlands, and so on are all part of the natural environment. The following blessing expressions, performed at various rituals, demonstrate the extent to which Gedeo blessings address the natural environment around them. The elders bless nature for it to be friendly to humans.

21. a. *fichchi haanjedhowaal*
fichchii haajedhowaal
 farm.DET let.it.be.green.3M.JUSS
 ‘Let the farm be fruitful’
- b. *buno misis*
buno mis-is
 coffee bear_beans-CAUS
 ‘May He [: the Creator] make your coffee trees bear plenty of beans’
- c. *fuggoxxi ha’noo uuddoqqe*
fuggo-xxi ha’no uud-t-o-qqe
 danger-DET 2P see-3F-3M-NEG
 ‘May the bad omen never get hold of you’

Cf. also 15.b., repeated herebelow:

15. b. *boga nagees*
boga nage'a-es
 land peace-CAUS
 'May He [the Creator] make the land peaceful'

The first two expressions are all about the land's productivity. Such blessings are frequently given at *Daraaro* rituals. 21c. has two interpretations. First, it refers to someone who violates natural law. The Gedeo people have the custom of planting a new tree before cutting down an old one (see Tadesse 2002, Tadesse *et al.* 2008, Asebe *et al.* 2018). Whoever breaks this cultural law is considered evil. In other words, anyone who causes harm to the environment is considered evil. Second, it refers to natural and manmade disasters that disrupt societal stability. In 15.b., *boga* 'land' represents both the land physically and the human beings in Gedeo. Elders bless both the land and the people to live in harmony in the blessing. The final two blessings are blessing nature to provide abundant rain and wind for the people.

4. Conclusion

The Gedeo have always included blessing in their daily lives. They are a part of their everyday language and act as the social glue that holds them all together. The head of the household, elders, guests, or leaders like *Abba Gada* all offer blessings on individuals, groups, the entire community, or even on the surrounding natural environment. The blessing pronouncer is anticipated to be a senior member of the family, kin, or lineage and/or have a spiritual authority, regardless of the recipient. Blessings serve a variety of societal purposes, from wishing well a sick family member's up to wishing well the entire community's safety from natural disasters through *Mageno's* intervention. Blessing is used to create healthy harmony between people and their surroundings.

Based on the context in which they are used, the data we gathered from various sources reveals a complex pragmatics of blessing that can be categorized into three categories: blessing at the family level, blessing at the village level, and blessing at the community level. Depending on the setting, goal, and principal participants in the manifestations of blessing, the message can vary. The same expression might have several meanings depending on the situation. One similarity is that the opening of the blessing rite in every circumstance involves thanking *Mageno*. The elders acknowledge that *Mageno* is the originator and provider of all visible and invisible things in the Gedeo cosmology while honoring him.

With the advent of urbanization, secular education, and exogenous religious practices, the societal significance of blessing has been eroding. Along with this, modern religions like Islam and Christianity, which are both practiced in the study region, have their own blessing packages that differ in certain ways from those of the native people. Protestantism played a significant role in the dynamics of blessing expressions in the study as it was the dominant denomination in rural Gedeo. We urgently urge concerned government bodies to work toward their restoration given their variety of social purposes.

Abbreviations

1	first person	DEM	demonstrative	PASS	passive
2	second person	DET	determiner	PL	plural
3	third person	F	feminine	POSS	possessive
BEN	benefactive	FUT	future	PP	postposition
CAUS	causative	JUSS	jussive	PRES	present
COMP	complementizer	M	masculine	PRON	pronoun
COND	conditional	NEG	negative	REL	relativizer
DAT	dative	OBJ	object	SG	singular

References

- Alhuzail, Nuzha. 2014. "The Blessing in the Lives of Three Generations of Bedouin Women." *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 29/1: 30-42.
- Amare Yaekob Chiriko, 2020. "Assessing the marketability of cultural resources as a tourism product: A case of cultural tourism resources in Sidama, Ethiopia." *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* 9/1: 1-16.
- Asebe Regassa, Abiyot, Legesse, Tema, Milstein and Ongaye Oda Orkaydo. 2017. "'Tree is life': The rising of Dualism and the Declining of Mutualism among the Gedeo of southern Ethiopia." *Frontiers in communication*. 2/7: 1-13.
- Ashenafi Belay and Teresa Eba. 2017. "The Poetics of Oromo Blessing Expressions: A Stylistic Analysis of a Verbal Art Genre." *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research* 32/1: 92-120.
- Ashenafi Belay. 2014. "Exploring Environmental Discourses in Oral Literature: Ecocritical analysis of Oromo proverbs." *Journal of Languages and Culture* 5/2: 24-35.
- Baye Yimam. 1998. *The Power of Language: Cursing Expressions in four Ethiopian Languages*. Addis Ababa University: Linguistic Department.

- Crawley, Ernest. 1929. *The oath, the curse and the blessing*. In Besterman. *Studies of savages and sex*. London, Methuen & Co.
- Daniel, Handino and Bekele Gizaw. 2020. “The Role of Blessing and Cursing in Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanism among the Hadiya People, Southern Ethiopia.” *PanAfrican Journal of Governance and Development* 1/2: 82-99.
- Eba, Teresa Garoma and Belay Ashenafi, Belay. 2017. “Blessings in Afan oromo: Morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects.” *International Journal of Current Research* Vol. 9/1: 45162-45171.
- Ekeke, Emeka. 2011. African traditional religion: a conceptual and philosophical analysis.” *Lumina* (University of Calabar, Nigeria) 22/2: 1-18.
- Evans-Pritchard, Edward. 1956. *Nuer religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fekadu, Israel and Abera Hawilti. 2019. “Elderly Care and Social Support Systems among the Gedeo of Southern Ethiopia: Socio- cultural Contexts, Forms, Dynamics and Challenges.” *African Studies Quarterly* 18/3: 15-28.
- Fekede Menuta. 2016. *The Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics of Greetings in Sidaama*. Hawassa University: School of Language and Communication Studies:
- Goody, Jack. 1970. “Sideways or Downwards? Lateral and Vertical Succession, Inheritance and Descent in Africa and Eurasia.” *Man* 5/4: 627-638.
- Kippie, Tadesse. 2002. *Five thousand years of sustainability? A case study on Gedeo land use*. PhD dissertation, Wageningen University.
- Kippie, Tadesse, Tilahun Ebido, Tsegaye Tadesse, Hailu Beyene and Shunte Lole. 2008. *የጎደዎ ትላቅ ታሪክ* (yägedeo biher tarik; “The History of the Gedeo Nation”). Addis Ababa: Birhan and Selam Publisher.
- Kratz, Corinne. 1989. “Genres of Power: A Comparative Analysis of Okiek Blessings, Curses and Oaths.” *Man* 24/4: 636-656.
- Laude-Cirtautas, Ilse. 1974. “Blessings and Curses among in Kazakh and Kirghiz.” *Central Asiatic Journal* 18/1: 9-22.
- Luter, Balcha and Woldegiorgis Mathewos. 2019. “The Pragmatics of Blessing Expressions in Sidaama Culture.” *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 24/8: 8-18.
- Serawit Bekele Debele. 2018. “Reading Prayers as Political Texts: Reflections on Irreecha Ritual in Ethiopia.” *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 19/3: 354-370.
- Tesfatsion Petros Golle, Yetebarek Hizekeal Zekareas and Ongaye Oda Orkaydo. 2021. “The practices and dynamics of *Baalle*, an indigenous governance system of Gedeo (Southwest Ethiopia).” *Kervan* 25/2: 127-152.
- Tsegaye Tadesse. 2016. “Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritages among the Gedeo People.” Paper presented at the 3rd National Research Conference of the Institute of Indigenous Studies at Dilla University, Ethiopia.
- Westermarck, Edward. 1926. *Ritual and belief in Morocco*. Vol. 1. London: Macmillan.

Wondimagegnehu Haile. 2018. *Conceptualizing Indigenous Notions of Peace among the Gede'o, Southern Ethiopia*. Unpublished MA thesis. Dilla University.

Tesfatsion Petros Golle is a fulltime researcher at Dilla University, Institute of Indigenous Studies. He has experience in teaching and research. He also presented his research work in National and international research conference. His research interest includes anthropological linguistics, Socio-linguistics, indigenous knowledge and practices folklore, mother tongue education, and oral literature and (co-) published articles in international journals. He can be reached at petrostesfatsion@gmail.com

Ongaye Oda Orkaydo is an Associate Professor of Linguistics at Dilla University, Ethiopia. He received his PhD in Linguistics from the University of Leiden in 2013. Currently, he is a researcher in the Institute of Indigenous Studies (IIS) at Dilla University. He has national and international teaching experiences in linguistics. He has written grammars of Konso (2013), K'abeena (2014), Silt'e (2018), Hoor (Arbore) (2021), and (co-)published several articles in reputable international journals, and in conference proceedings. His research interests include grammar writing, dictionary making, mother tongue education (planning, implementation and evaluation), language and nature, indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, cross-border trade, regional economic integration, and organizational performance. He was a visiting fellow at the University of Turin, 2016, and at the African Studies Centre, The Netherlands, 2018. He is a member of the scientific board of *Kervan*. He can be reached at: ongayeoda@yahoo.com

Yetebarek Hizekeal Zekareas is an Assistant Professor of Social Works, and a researcher in the Institute of Indigenous Studies at Dilla University, Ethiopia. He offered courses in the Department of Sociology at Dilla University, and has (co-)published articles in reputable journals. He also participated in several national and international research conferences. Currently, he is a Ph.D candidate in the Department of Applied Social Science (APSS) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Hong Kong). His research interests include, but not limited to, Africa-China relations, cultural contact and dynamics, cross-border socio-economic relations, and state-society relations. He can be reached at: yetebarek-h.zekareas@connect.polyu.hk