

# A Study of Linguistic Taboos Related to Woman and Their Euphemistic Expressions in Oromo Society

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**Abstract:** This paper is an attempt to describe the linguistic taboos related to woman and their corresponding euphemistic expressions in Oromo societies within the framework of face and polite theory. Focus group discussion and interview were used to gather the data of this study. Taboo is any word or expression that if mentioned in public causes embarrassment and feeling of shame or sense of shock, and offending the hearer's sensibilities or beliefs; while euphemistic expression is the substitution of an offensive expression by another softer, more ambiguous expression or a periphrastic one to avoid these taboo expressions which offend the hearers. In Oromo society, there are words/expressions considered as taboo related to woman. In this paper, Linguistic taboos related to the word *dubartii* 'woman' itself, virginity, pregnancy, delivery and menstruation are considered. This study paves the way to inform the reader about taboo words/expressions related to woman and the mechanism of substituting them by polite expressions in Oromo. If this norm is violated/the direct taboo words or expressions are spoken in front of the woman, she may be shocked or feel embarrassment. This circumstance again raises another conflict among speaker and hearer. In order to avoid this problem, this paper contributes a great role for everybody comes from different culture and wants to know taboos related to woman and how to substitute polite expressions instead of these forbidden words/expressions.

**Keywords:** Oromo, linguistic taboo, politeness, euphemism and face.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Oromo people are native African ethnic group found in Ethiopia and to smaller extent in Kenya and Somali. Gragg (1982:xiii) reports "the Oromo live over a large area stretching from close to the Sudan border in the West, through Addis Ababa, and beyond Harari in the east, from the northern Kenya in the South and east of Rift Valley, to Wollo in the north". Kebede (2009:1) says in Ethiopia, Afaan Oromoo (Oromo language) speakers live in an area extending from Tigray (Raya) in the north to Kenya in the south (Waata), and from Wollega in the west to Hararghe in the east with Addis Ababa at the intersection of the two axes.

Oromo language (self name Afaan Oromoo) is one of the languages of the Lowland East Cushitic within the Cushitic family of the Afro-Asiatic Phylum (Bender and Mulugeta, 1976:166; Gragg, 1982: Xiii; Baye, 1986:8). According to GadaaMalbaa (1988:9) and Mahdi Hamid (1995: xi), Afaan Oromoo is the third most widely spoken language in Africa after Arabic and Hausa. Within the present day Ethiopia, Afaan Oromo is spoken by about 40 percent of the population and is used as a language of inter-group communication in several parts of the country (Kebede, 2009:1).

Oromo people speak different dialects in different Zones of Oromia<sup>1</sup>. But, due to the fact that Oromo dialectology has not been studied exhaustively, there is no clearly defined dialect of Oromo. However, different scholars have been classified it

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<sup>1</sup>Oromia is one of the regional state of Ethiopia

as follows. Bender and Mulugeta (1976:1-2) have classified Oromo into eight dialects. They are: Mecca (Western), Tulama (Central), Wallo and Rayya (Northern), Arusi, Guji and Borena (Southern) and Hararghe (Eastern). However, in this paper the detail classification of Oromo dialect is not the main focus; but this issue is only explained to show the dialect (area) the study was limited on. In this paper, I focused on Oromo societies live in Oromia region, in Bale, Wollega and Hararghe zones. Hereafter when I compared the three areas of taboo words/expressions and their corresponding euphemistic expressions, I used the name of areas to refer the Oromo societies live in the stated place.

This paper examines taboo words/expressions related to woman and their corresponding euphemistic expressions in Oromo society, in case of the stated three zones of Oromia region. This paper is very important for people come from the entire the world and want to know/learn about Oromo society's culture in general and linguistic taboos related to woman in particular.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Human languages are regarded as the most important instrument for communication. It conveys vital messages about life, character and personality. Indeed, these messages are generally interpreted differently because of the impact of our culture which dictates how we think and behave in various situations. In a general sense, language occupies a vigorous place to influence people's views and concepts about their world. By means of language, individual identities become explicit since it mirrors their social status and environment (Babou-Sekkal, 2012:17).

The language of a particular society is an integral part of its culture, so it is impossible to understand language comprehensively without considering the context of culture and the context in which communication takes place. We communicate with each other using different words and sentences of a language to deal with social context and social values.

Trudgill (1986:5) says that it is the society which affects language and its environment. According to this person the most interesting way in which society affects its language is through the phenomenon known as "taboo". According to Steiner (1967: 143) a taboo is any prohibitions which carry no penalties beyond the anxiety and embarrassment arising from a breach of strongly entrenched custom. As Allan and Burridge (2006:1) say "taboos arise out of social constraints on the individual's behavior where it can cause discomfort, harm or injury". Tabooed subjects can vary widely: sex, death, excretion, bodily function, religious matters and politics.

## 3. TABOO RELATED TO WOMAN

Everything related to women is subject to taboo including dress, speech and behavior. According to Sadiqi (2003:78), Arab societies have made some topics taboo in order to protect women. In this respect, she claims that: "The use of taboo to protect collective and public identities, as well as property and social identity, is a peaceful, but very powerful means of keeping women invisible and legitimizing their exclusion from what culture considers 'serious' domains". She explains three major tabooed topics related to sex in the Arab world including virginity, menstruation and menopause.

Furthermore, virginity is a symbol of honor of both girls and their family as it has been noted by Sadiqi (ibid: 80) when she writes: "Virginity symbolizes the honor of both girl/women and her family. Just as motherhood is venerated after marriage, virginity is venerated before marriage. The great value attributed to virginity is attested in the fact that girls are more watched than boys before marriage".

On the other hand, menstruation, for over decades, has been considered as something unclean, dirty and embarrassing. In some societies, for example, women are treated as untouchable during their menstrual period. According to Brown and Levinson (1978: 67), menstruation is usually considered as a face-threatening act since "it involves different degrees of embarrassment according to the people who mention it".

As menstruation, menopause is an important step in the lives of women since they fear it and tend to hide its beginning. Indeed, some women even try not to discuss the problem. This psychological step leads into a moral crisis including sadness and anger.

#### 4. POLITENESS THEORY

In linguistics, politeness is the act of using polite speech during a conversation. First it introduced into linguistics by Goffman (1967) on the study of face, politeness only gets interest in linguistic studies in 1987 when Brown and Levinson successfully attempt to develop a theory that could help understand the principles of politeness and at the same time, account for framework in any study regardless of religion, culture or language. Central to this framework two concepts, namely face and euphemism are emphasized (Alix, 2012:22).

##### *Face*

Face, by definition, is the personality or self-image that every person seeks to project to the society. According to Brown and Levinson (1987:61), face is “the public image that every member wants to claim for himself”. The notion of face can be studied from two standpoints, namely positive face and negative face. A positive face projects a self that identifies with the society, in the form of “we”, “us”. In this line of thought, Brown and Levinson (1987) define positive face as “the want of every member that his/her wants be desirable to at least some others” or alternately, the desire of interactants to be liked, desired, appreciated and approved of by one another. Simply stated, positive face refers to self-esteem. The negative face, which is related to the person's freedom of action and freedom of speech, means to be free to utter any term without any consideration of its negative effect on the hearer/speaker's face or feelings.

##### *Euphemisms*

The aim of politeness or euphemism is essentially to provide conditions for smooth flow of communication between the sender and receiver. As verbal politeness, as a common conversational strategy in cooperative communicative interchanges, constitutes a basic principle to analyze language as a social phenomenon and stands out as an integral part of the different pragmatic theories which deal with conversation analysis (Crespo, 2005).

In Oromo society, there are different taboos words/expressions related to woman which people considered as taboo and prohibit from mentioning them in public/directly. In this paper, the derogatory names attached to dubartii ‘woman’, taboos related to virginity, menstruation, pregnancy and delivery. To avoid the direct/taboo expressions attached to the mentioned issues, Oromo societies who live in Bale, Wollega and Hararghe zones are use polite expressions instead of these offensive/forbidden words/expressions.

#### 5. RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, descriptive qualitative method was employed. It is a better method to be used in order to collect data to specify, delineate, or describe naturally occurring phenomena without experimental manipulation (Seliger and Shohamy (1989). Qualitative research allows the researcher to gain access to the motives, meanings, actions and reactions of people in the context of their daily life. In essence, qualitative research is oriented toward the search for meanings, that is, the interpretation and meanings people give to events, objects, other people, and situations in their environment Ghounane (2013). The primary data of this paper was collected through focus group discussion and interview from the Oromo societies live in Bale, Wollega and Hararghe zones of Oromia region.

#### 6. ANALYSIS OF DATA

##### *Taboos related to woman and its euphemistic expressions in Oromo*

Oromo societies had been living and are still living by respecting one another throughout their life. This deference encompasses children, youth, old people, males and females without any exclusion. Based on their culture and custom, these social groups have their own norms that they respect to one another. If they fail to respect these norms, they will be blamed for using taboo words, or violating the norm. However, in this paper only the taboos related to woman dealt with in depth according to informant's elaboration. Taboo expressions that depict woman among the Bale, Wollega and Hararghe Oromo are comparatively analyzed hereunder.

##### *Taboos related to the word dubartii ‘woman’ itself*

Oromo societies consider some words/expressions that are corresponding to the common name dubartii or ‘woman’ as taboo when they are improperly used. Oromo society use the word dubartii ‘woman’ in their day to day discourse or

communication in different contexts, however, sometimes we observe that when it creates a sort of confusion by distorting the meaning and becoming taboo when they use it out of the real context. Among these, the followings are typical ones:

### *Durbummaa dhabuu 'disvirginity'*

Calling a girl or a bachelor *dubartii* 'woman' is shameful or a taboo in Oromo culture. Despite the word *dubartii* denotes the entire feminine gender; it also has the following implied (taboo) meanings:

- ❖ Who doesn't have virginity/who is not virgin
- ❖ Who is already married; so, if somebody calls Oromo girl by *dubartii*, she will be offended and be quickened to quarrel as I have understood from the group discussion.

Therefore, instead of calling a virgin girl by *dubartii*, Oromo have alternative expressions that are commonly used in place of the taboo word. These are:

#### (1)

- a. *Durba, shamarree* 'alternative names to say a girl' ( Bale)
- b. *Durba qarree* 'virgin girl', *durbaduudaa* 'untouched/virgin', *mucayyoo* 'little/young girl' (Wollega)
- c. *Durba/dubra* 'girl' (Hararghe)

When we address them as expressions in (1), we get acceptance in the actual context of the society. Being out of these contextual expressions, if we call a girl who has a virgin by *dubartii* or woman it is derogatory expression because she considers as we degraded or dishonored her. Thus, this is a very serious embarrassment and may cause other influential effects among the girls of the pre-marriage age.

The expression in (1a), *durba, shamarree* 'alternative names to say a girl' and *durba qarree* 'virgin girl' and the metonymic expressions in (1b), *durbaduudaa* 'untouched/virgin' clearly indicate a virgin girl, unmarried and doesn't have any contact with any man or boy. For instance, the expression '*durbaduuda*' shows that the girl has never had sexual intercourse with anyone yet. This means, her virgin is kept safe- it is as it was created, or she has taken care of her virginity.

On the other hand, there are words related to the word *dubartii* that distort the meaning when used in the wrong context. To cite some examples among such words:

#### (2) *intaloo/beera/nadhoo* → *durba/shaamara*

Calling a virgin Oromo girl by the names *intaloo/beera/nadhoo* is taboo, or it will be taken as violating her adolescence right. So instead of these words Oromo people should use the euphemistic expression '*durba/shaamara*' which mean bachelor or virgin girl.

Though the above listed words that Oromo people use to describe a girl literally indicate the female sex, they do have hidden meaning that creates a big problem when they are used irrespective of Oromo society's norm.

For instance, in Bale Oromo, words like *nadhoo* and *beera* refer to a married woman or a girl who doesn't have virgin while *intaloo* refers to the aimless girl who wonders here and there for prostitution. Moreover, calling a girl by such name is considered as denying her virginity or it is equal to making lose her virginity.

From these aforementioned expressions, we can understand that if we call unmarried girl erroneously or knowingly by *intaloo, beera/nadhoo* and *dubartii* we transgress the norm of the society and the girls who are addressed this way will be offended for it contradicts the actual norms of the society.

On the other hand, using these taboo words in the right time and context doesn't have any problem and can convey meaning without any confusion. According to discussants elaboration, sometimes the virgin girl herself and the male scold one another using these taboo words.

Besides, we deal with words related to the word *dubartii* 'woman' which convey negative or taboo meaning as in (3) and (4):

**(3) *niitii* ‘Wife’ → *haadha-manaa* ‘house wife’**

The word *niitii* ‘wife’, expresses a woman who has got married or coupled with a man as her husband. Though the term ‘*niitii*’ is equivalent to the English word ‘wife’, it has negative connotation in Oromo women's context. If an Oromo woman is called *niitii*, she considers as she is degraded or undignified. Because of this Oromo women are offended when someone, even their husbands call them *niitii* ‘wife’ or *niitii abaluu* ‘somebody's wife’. So, preferably Oromo societies call a married woman or a legal wife as *haadha-manaa* ‘house wife’, or *haadha-manaa abaluu* ‘somebody's house wife’. Moreover, Oromo people can call their wives by the first born child. For example, if their first born son's name is Gemechu, they can call by Gemechu's mother.

**(4) *dhaltuu* ‘birth giver’**

This word, *dhaltuu*, denotes femininity, but Oromo societies understand it negatively. It will be perceived as taboo because the societies use the term *dhaltuu* to identify animals' sex/gender not human being (woman). Like, for example, *re'ee dhaltuu* ‘female goat’, *quruphee dhaltuu* ‘female antelope’, *harree dhaltuu* ‘female donkey’ and etc.

On the other hand, the term ‘*dhaltuu*’ culturally refers to the ability/potential of a woman only giving birth, or rearing children. When we use this word to a woman, it is taboo for it lacks proper meaning. Because, it denies the roles that women play/have in the society.

***Taboos Related to Virginity and its euphemistic expressions***

In Oromo culture, girls are expected to stay virgin, or take care of their virginity before marriage. Due to this, virginity is acceptable and meaningful to all Oromo society. The Oromo take virginity, or being virgin as a criterion to evaluate unmarried girls before they get married. Since they know, or believe that any unmarried girl has a virgin, the Oromo people respect virginity as a virtue of a girl to be married. Therefore, the Oromo males use this criterion as an important criterion when they choose a girl to make their marriage partner, or wife.

As a result of this, if a girl loses her virginity before marriage, the girl as well as her parents will be ashamed of it and be disrespected in the society. The word *durbummaa* ‘being a girl/virginity’ has great esteem in Oromo society; even they call it by honoring name expressed in (5).

**(5) *durbummaa* ‘virgin’ → *mirgadubartii* ‘the girl's attribute’.**

Oromo considers the virgin as it is proud of the girl and as it is her private property. Being out of virgin is taboo for unmarried woman; especially Hararghe Oromo strictly consider it as a shame not only for her parents but also for whole community in her village.

Among Hararghe Oromo a male adolescent could never do the following on engaged girl:

- ❖ Trying to tease her for sexual harassment, do evil to her
- ❖ Touching her with his hand
- ❖ If he touches her, the neighbor, or the society punish/beat him
- ❖ Even if the adolescent plays ‘*shagoyyee*’ which means ‘special peer group's game/dance’ with her, he never touches, or approaches in between her legs, or near her sexual organ
- ❖ Whoever male or boy she goes with, never touches her

If a girl fails to be virgin before marriage, it is considered as shameful act, or seen as a taboo. Therefore, old people have their own means/mechanism by which they detect whether the girl has virgin or not. For instance, in Wollega they identify by using spin while in Hararghe, they check by putting special wild fruit called *hiddii* ‘wild fruit’ in it, or old people can easily recognize just by looking with their naked eyes.

As to Bale Oromo, if a girl got married without virginity, she will be beaten and be torched with iron. In wollega, beating and sending her back to her family by putting her on donkey's back is common. Among the Bale Oromo, if a girl is married without virginity, they will beat her, but they won't send her back home. Furthermore, some other bitter actions, or punishments such as: tearing the cloth she is wearing, making her pour *farsoo* ‘local beer’, or ordering her to serve/host

guest, returning her back to her parents by putting on donkey's back, and torching ... etc will be taken upon her. All these sanctions show how much this society valued being virgin.

On the other hand, if a girl is found to be faithful to her husband and gave her virgin legally for him, saying *durbummaa gattee* 'she lost her virginity and *uramt-e* 'disvirgin' is taboo/forbidden word; instead of this there are expressions that the society uses. Some of these are:

**(6)**

- a. *Uramt-e* 'disvirgin' → *Sabbata hiikkatte* 'She untied/lose her girdle' (in Bale)
- b. *Uramt-e* 'disvirgin' → *gulantaa baate* 'she is promoted to the next stage or  
→ *qarree buufatte* 'She no more shaves the hair of her back(in Wollega)
- c. *Uramt-e* 'disvirgin' → *mirga ishee keyniteef* 'she gave her virgin' (in Hararghe)

Expressions in (6a), (6b) and (6c) indicate the reverence Oromo societies have for girls. For example, the expression in (6b), *gulantaa baate* means she obeyed and fulfilled what the society and her husband expected from her. Similarly, the expression, *qarree buufatte* refers that she puts down all her burden that she had been carrying before an age of marriage. In Oromo, virgin girls have special girdle that they tie/wear round their waist. This girdle helps them as a belt to strengthens, or tightens the body; hence this girdle is a token for her virginity. She will never untie this girdle until she gets married. Therefore, the expression in (6a) refers to being faithful to her husband; because the girl took care of her virgin until their wedding day and give it to her husband.

However, Oromo people use the taboo words/expressions *uramte* or *durbummaa gate* to indicate the girl lost her virgin before wedding: The phrase *durbummaa gattee* 'lost her virginity' refers to the girl lost her virgin at inappropriate place or gave to an improper person.

To show whether the newly married girl is virgin, or not, there is a symbol/sign that is culturally used in the Oromo society. That is, if she doesn't have a virgin, they pin bread at its center and make it open then show to people as well as they send it to her parents. On the other hand, if she is a virgin, they never pin/break in the center of the bread. If she is a virgin thereafter she will be loved and respected not only by her husband but also among the boy's and the girl's family.

In addition, Oromo society uses the words like *konkaa* 'empty' (in Bale), *uraa* 'hole/opening', *banaa* 'open', *nadheen* 'woman' (in Wollega) and *fafee* 'unabashed' (in Hararghe) to describe girls who lost her virgin before marriage.

On the other hand, in Oromo culture a virgin girl is allowed to kiss a man/a boy. This means she can have a boyfriend. But he can't have any sexual intercourse/contact with her except kissing; because it is taboo; even it is unthinkable. In Oromo, mentioning the direct word *dhungatte* 'she kissed' also seen as a taboo; instead of this, alternatively Oromo people of the study areas use the following expressions:

**(7)**

- a. *Qabdo teesse* 'she sat down with her friend for kissing' and *goolii dhaqte* 'she went to kissing' (in Wollega)
- b. *hammatte* 'she embraced/hugged him' (in Hararghe)
- c. *jaallatte* 'she loved' (in Bale)

In Wollega Oromo context, when the girl sits for *qabdo* 'kissing', her friends follow her at staying on a short distance and they carry a stick with them. This is because if the boy strives to do any harm to her virgin, she cries for help and they will defend her. Even if they beat him severely, culturally the boy/man never attacks them to defend himself. If he defends them, it considered as he violates the social norm.

***Taboos Related to Pregnancy and their euphemistic expressions***

A pregnant woman has reverence and acceptance among the Oromo society. People respect her everywhere; for example, while she walks along the streets and in market places. If they don't do this, it is considered as they fail to respect the norm of the society. According to discussants, the people respect the pregnant woman thinking, or believing that the fetus she carries may bear wise/brilliant enough to govern the country, or who may become the leader and who will have big

knowledge and popularity. In Oromo, a lot of things are considered as taboo regarding pregnant women. Even directly describing her pregnancy, delivery and labour are taboos among the society.

In the areas of this research undertaken, the society uses various euphemistic expressions instead the term, *ulfa* 'pregnant'

For example, Oromo of Bale express as:

**(8)**

- a. *quufa qabdi* 'she is satisfied'
- b. *mataa lama* 'two heads'
- c. *garaatii qabdi* 'she has something inside/in stomach'
- d. *lubbuu lama* 'two souls'

When we have a look at these substituted words/expressions, for instance, they use the metaphoric expression in (8a), *quufa qabdi* 'she is satisfied' by associating with a satisfied man feeling shame of directly saying *ulfa* 'pregnant'. This is because when a man satisfies, his stomach swollen forward being filled with food. Interchangeably Bale Oromo also use the metaphoric expressions in (8b) and (8d) show that she carries both her life and the fetus in her womb. Similarly, the literal meaning of the expression given in (8c), *garaatii qabdi* 'she has something inside/in stomach' shows something exists in her stomach. But in this context, it is nothing but the baby she carries in her stomach.

Similarly Wollega Oromo uses the expressions below:

**(9)**

- a. *dadhabbi qabdi* 'she is weary'
- b. *garaatti baatti* 'she carries something inside'

While Hararghe Oromo uses as:

**(10)**

- a. *dadhabbi qabdi* 'she is exhausted'
- b. *garaatii qab-di* 'she has something inside/in her belly'
- c. *itti teesse* 'she sat down for it and'
- d. *waan ijoollee-tu itti jira* 'she is concerned about a baby'

However, if she conceived or if the egg is fertilized, they are commonly and preferably used the expression *garaa-tti haf-e* 'she has conceived' instead of saying *ulfa* 'pregnant'

Additionally, the metaphoric expression in (9a) and (10a), *dadhabbi qab-di* 'she is exhausted' which Wollega and Hararghe use in common refer that exhaustion which is one of the features that entails pregnancy. The society agreed to use this expression for this purpose, but it is literally used to describe a man who was working hard, or who was walking for long distances. The two abstraction expressions, *garaatti haf-e* and *garaatti baatti* literally imply that something is left in her and she carries something inside her. However, in this context the expression is used to describe a woman who became pregnant for the first time and who is about to give birth. Additionally, the expression *garaa-tti haf-e* 'she has conceived' also indicates her menstrual which was absent from discharging; it remained inside. When they say *garaatti baatti* 'she carries something inside' they meant that it is different from what she carries at hand, on head, on her shoulder. They are clearly saying that she carries in her stomach rather than saying in her womb.

In Bale Oromo, pregnant woman is highly respected. If someone says a woman is *ulfa* while expectant mother is around, he/she will be sanctioned in the context of Bale Oromo culture. He/she will be hated, made outcast, and ostracized by the society. Particularly, if the person who says '*dubartii ulfaa*' is unmarried male no one gives him/her daughter in marriage since they consider that the offender is rude and will not be respectful to his wife when she becomes pregnant.

***Taboos Related to delivery and their euphemistic expression***

Likewise, taboo terms are there to express a pregnant woman, there are also words/expressions which culturally taken as taboos while and after child delivery. Hereunder, taboo word related to labour and delivery is mentioned within their euphemistic expressions.

***Taboos Related to ciniinsuu 'labour'***

There are forbidden actions which are considered as taboo if performed in front of a woman who has already started labour. For instance, the man shouldn't stand in front of her wearing his belt after the woman started to labour for different reasons. First, it is believed that when he stands in front of her tying his belt, the labour will become very hard to her. Perhaps, if conditions compel him to stay with her, he has to untie his belt. It is assumed that as soon as he loses his belt, the labour pains will be minimized for her. Similarly, the other women also never fasten their waist with girdle in front of the woman on labour of delivery. If they do this, the society culturally believes that the labour is serious to her.

On the other hand, as one of my interviewee<sup>2</sup> from Wollega around Horro Guduru, explained, "To reduce the pain of the woman, culturally the society makes a coffee and boils up and pours it in front of her, when she sees this event, the baby will hurry to come out/of the womb". Because, culturally, the society believes that when a woman sees the coffee boils up from the coffee pot at the period of her labour, similarly, the baby comes out from her womb rapidly.

***Taboo related to a word dhalte 'delivered or gave birth' and its euphemistic expressions***

After a pregnant woman gave birth it is a taboo to express her by the word dhalte 'she bore a baby'. The word dhalte 'she gave birth' often works for wild or domestic animals, not for a human being. After she gave birth, Oromo society uses appropriate euphemistic expressions instead of using the direct expression dhalte as follows.

**(11)**

- a. *deesse* 'she has delivered child', *hiikam-t-e* 'she is relieved', *ofkalte* 'she is saved', *milli walqixxaate* 'her leg has become equal' (in Bale)
- b. *deesse* 'she has delivered baby', *hiikamte* 'she is relieved', *ofkalte* 'she is saved', *milli wal qixxaate* 'her leg has become equal', *lama taate* 'she is doubled' (in Wollega)
- c. *deesse* 'she has delivered', *hiikamte* 'she is relieved' and *adda baate* 'she is separated' (in Hararge).

In all these three Oromia zones, the societies are commonly ashamed of calling the word dhalte and use these alternative terms.

These euphemistic expressions in (11) connote something. For instance, the metaphoric expression *hiikamte* 'she is freed/relieved' implies things that a pregnant woman prohibit; for example, she cannot take drinks of her interest, can't run as she likes, it is considered as she had been imprisoned. Because of this when she gets a relief/ becomes free from this imprisonment, the people will congratulate her by saying *hiikamte* 'she is freed'. The other is the word which Bale and Wollega use in common, *ofkalte* 'she is saved' it shows as the woman was rescued/saved from all the hardships that encounter a pregnant woman on deliverance. Additionally, Bale and Wollega Oromo use the expression *miilli walqixxaate* 'her leg has become equal' to refer to the freedom of walking the woman gets after she gave birth; because a pregnant woman doesn't walk freely as other time.

***The ritual/action taboos related food eaten by woman after gave birth***

A mother of new baby fasts water and other food stuff after she gave birth. The food that she is allowed to eat is porridge. She eats the porridge for the first time without chewing in between her teeth; if she chews it is considered as taboo; due to this; she swallows without chewing. This is because they believed that if she swallows the porridge by chewing, the next labour will be aggravated to her. Next to this, we will see things that are taken as taboo if they left to be done to a woman gave birth.

- ❖ Her husband is expected to buy her a new cloth
- ❖ *qaayya qaayyachuu* 'she should be steamed with traditional steaming' (to make her injury dried soon)

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<sup>2</sup> Olani Tucho

- ❖ Culturally, starting from the time she gave birth whichever home she goes, they should paint her hair butter. If they fail to do this, not only it will be a taboo but also they believe that they will be attacked by rats.

Furthermore, a new baby mother is forbidden the following activities:

- ❖ She shouldn't be let out, or shouldn't be seen outside. She must stay at home, or inside up to a minimum of 40 days
- ❖ She doesn't clean the ash. If she did so, she will be supposed thankless
- ❖ She doesn't drink water thinking that it will hurt her womb
- ❖ She doesn't go to the market since she is the mother of a little baby
- ❖ She doesn't have to speak aloud, or shout

If she performed these aforementioned rituals just after her deliverance, it is considered that she violated the norm of the society. To the worst, the informants explained that she may encounter some hazards. After she is strengthened, a new baby mother starts performing some activities. There are some special activities that she should perform for first time. These are:

- ❖ As to the Bale Oromo, she will look after calves.
- ❖ As to the Wollaga Oromo, she will start milking cow from one or two teat of a cow. If she did any action before this, it is taboo or it will be seen as she contradicted the norm of the society. However, these things are not known among Hararghe Oromo.

Furthermore, a recently delivered woman shouldn't be bitten by her husband or by anyone else. If someone bites her, he will be hated in the society. Even if a husband bites his wife while she is lying in bed after her deliverance, especially when she wear a sort of cultural ornament which is called *qanafa* in Afaan Oromoo on her forehead, the neighboring women will come together carrying their *siinqee* "thin stick" and give him some sort of punishment. Culturally, the man cannot refuse the punishment given for him. This sanction may be slaughtering a bull. Unless he did this, he cannot be free from this guilt thing he has performed.

#### ***Expressions of congratulating a woman given birth***

A woman recently given birth will be congratulated by near and distant relatives. During this time, according to the culture, the societies use the following expressions to express their happiness to the woman as follow: For example,

Bale Oromo expresses as:

(12)

- a. *Ulumaa leencaa ciisi* 'have a good rest, just like that of a lion'
- b. *Baga hiikamte* 'happy relief',
- c. *Baga miilli kee walqittaaxe* 'happy success'
- d. *Dabalee siif haa kennu* 'may He give you more'
- e. *Gurra siif haa ciniin-tu* 'let he or she bite an ear' (Wishing them grow)

As to the information from the discussion group, when we look into the meaning of these expressions, for example, the metaphoric expression in (12a), *ulumaa leencaa ciisi* refers to a lion gives birth to a cub she will never show strange behavior which is different from her usual feeling of tiredness. Therefore, the people express this metaphorically by associating it with the freedom that a lioness has she bears her offspring. Wishing this for her, they say to the delivered woman may you be peaceful or feel no exhaustion, or pain.

Wollega Oromo expresses as:

(13)

- a. *Ulumaa leencaa ciisi* 'have a good rest, just like that of a lion'
- b. *Baga hiikamte/ofkalte* 'happy relief/rescue'
- c. *Baga miillikee walqixxaate* 'happy success'

- d. *Siree cabsii ka'i* 'get up by breaking the bed', meaning be strong.
- e. *Yeebboo dhiitii ka'i* 'get up kicking the wall'
- f. *Dugdi kee haa jabaatu* 'may your back be strong'
- g. *Mucaan haa guddattu* 'let the baby be grown'

The expression in (13d), *siree cabsii ka'i* has the implication be fat or put on weight until the bed fails to carry you. On the other hand, the phrase in (13e), *yeebboo dhiitii ka'i* refers to be strong or may you be strong enough to kick and break the wall of a house. In most cases while and after deliverance the women's back will be delicate/loosen. Knowing this people ironically say may you have strengthened backbone. Besides, after the baby is born, until s/he reaches some age level, it will be doubtful that the baby can be a man, or will develop. Therefore, to encourage the mother of the baby, or to make her free from this doubt/fearing, they use the expression in (13g), *mucaan haa guddattu* 'let the baby be grown'.

As we can see the expressions they greet, or praise woman who gave birth and who is lying in bed by saying so. Using out of these listed expressions in congratulating a delivered woman according to the three Oromo societies is taboo or a big shame. For this reason, these expressions should be used in the real context of the society with proper care.

#### ***Taboos related to menstrual and its euphemistic expressions***

There are taboos related to the natural woman's monthly menstrual cycle that is called in Afaan Oromoo *laguu dubartii* that are common among Wollaga, Hararghe and Bale Oromo. *Laguu* 'menstruation' comes not by willing of a woman. People have different attitudes towards this menstrual cycle. This approach or attitude is attributed to the cultural and religious attitudes of the people towards menstruation. While a woman is in her menstruation period, culturally people do not have good attitudes towards her; they consider her as impure. Because of this she will be forbidden from doing some activities.

The menstruation doesn't have naturally any problem by itself, but due to the cultural influence they even take care calling the word *laguu* considering as a taboo. Therefore, they use the euphemistic expressions to call it indirect way.

Hereafter, based on the outlook and belief of the Oromo society, some connotative expressions that are used to replace the cultural taboo word, *laguu* 'menstruation' were analyzed:

#### ***Euphemistic expression used to replace laguu 'menstruation'***

In Oromo if a woman is under her menstruation period, it will be never told that there is blood on her. If someone says so it, he/she is out of norm or it is violating the societal custom. Due to this Oromo societies use euphemistic expressions instead of saying *dhiiga qabdi* 'she has a blood' to refer to the woman menstruation/period. Bale Oromo use the expressions below:

#### **(14)**

- a. *Dugda irra jirti* 'she is on back'
- b. *Ayidii qabdi* 'she is impure'
- c. *Geettuudha* 'she is matured'
- d. *Garaatu irra jira* 'she begins to menstruate'
- e. *Daraaraa baatii* 'monthly flower'

Each of these expressions has their own connotative meanings which can be culturally defined. For instance, the expression in (14a) associated with the severe pain that woman feels on her back at this moment. Bale Oromo interchangeably use the word in (14b), 'ayidii' which is derived from Arabic language which means period (menstruation). Muslim Oromo use the word to refer menstruation indirectly to diminish its tabooeness according to the discussants elaboration. The expression in (14c) literally expresses the girl who is matured enough to engage; but in this context it refers to a girl is aged to see menstruation or able to give birth. The phrase in (14d) expresses belly ache which is one of the symptoms that women feel during their menstruation. Finally, they use the expression *daraaraa baatii* 'monthly flower' to express the similarity of the flower which will be developed to fruit and the menstruation/monthly flower which is left from coming to be changed to fetus or refers the conceived woman. On the other hand, since

menstruation has a bad odour and flower has a good smell and colour, people use the antonymous expression to make the communication smooth or to maintain the psychology of the woman by associating to a flower.

Wollega Oromo use the following expression to avoid the direct expression of *dhiga qabdi* 'she has a blood':

(15)

- a. *Laguu qabdi* 'she is on fasting'
- b. *T'uriirra jirti* 'she is impure'
- c. *Adafii qabdi* 'she is untidy'
- d. *Garaatu dhukkuba* 'she has got stomach ache'

Similarly, the literal metaphoric expression in (15a), *laguurra jirti* 'she is fasting' refers to some activities which the woman abstain from doing. But in this context it refers to the woman abstain from doing like sexual intercourse and integration to people to pray at the occasion of menstruation/period come. Wollega Oromo use the metaphoric expressions *xurii* and *adafii* to express uncleanness of the woman during the menstruation. They use the expressions in (15d) to express the pain the menstrual woman feels during her period; because during this time she faces pain of stomach ache.

Similarly, Hararghe Oromo use the following expressions instead of the direct expression *dhiga qabdi* 'she has a blood':

(16)

- a. *Sunnii qabdi* 'she has got period'
- b. *Daraaraa baatii irrajirti* 'she is under monthly flower'
- c. *Laguu/xurii qabdi* 'she is not cleansed'
- d. *Tirikadiimaa ibsite* 'she is lightning the red light/battery'

As one of my interviewee said, "the expression *tirika diimaa ibsite* 'lightening the red battery/light' shows the traffic rule which the red light symbolizes 'stop' likewise the woman and her husband who see her menstruation should stop sexual intercourse as soon as they see it."

#### ***Rituals/Actions a woman is banned from doing during her menstruation***

As it was explained in previous section, the attitude people have towards menstrual woman is not good; due to this the woman is forbidden from doing some activities during her monthly period. According to the discussants elaboration, the activities she is forbidden from doing are analyzed with their reasons as follows:

- ❖ She doesn't participate in crop production.

According to Oromo culture, the menstrual woman neither fetches seed to the field nor sows it. The reason is common in the three places of the research sites. As the menstruation fails to be developed to fetus, they also fear for the seed she touched not to fail to be sprout or grow up when it has sown into the field. In addition, they believe whatever things menstrual woman touches has never been blessed or it will be cursed. Due to this, for example, she never participates on works like weeding. If she participates on this work culturally they believe that crop will be damaged or cursed.

Likewise, in Hararghe Oromo, the menstrual woman is banned from touching the grain; because the grain she touched can't be blessed or it will be cursed. Additionally, in Bale Oromo the menstrual woman never makes dough of flour; because they believe as it will be soured or sprout fungus rapidly. Similarly Wollega and Hararghe Oromo believe as that dough will be cursed due to untidy of the woman; additionally, they believe that a person who eats the food prepared by menstrual woman will be sick.

- ❖ She can't do Sexual Intercourse

During menstruation despite the uncomfortable conditions for sexual intercourse; the person (husband) who did sex with her will be infected by serious of back pain or he scratches his sexual organ continuously. Due to this, male also fear doing sex with menstrual woman. Besides, the reason why they fear to do sex with her is the fear/doubt of the pregnant will be created out of womb; in fact, scientifically there is no pregnancy created during menstruation, however, culturally they believe as the woman will be conceived out of the womb.

## ❖ She doesn't participate in Religious Activities

The menstrual woman doesn't participate in religious activities. For instance, Muslim menstrual woman is banned from entering into mosque, praying, fasting, reading /touching Quran for she is considered as impure at this moment. Unfortunately, if her menstrual time and fasting season overlaps, she will replace on the other time by counting days she missed. Similarly, in Christian religion, she can't enter to the church, she is forbidden to read or touch the bible, she can't greet the priest of the church for the society considers her as she is contaminated.

In addition, she cannot braid her own hair and that of others. This is because culturally it is perceived that the hair will be uprooted/be shed. She will not sit/approach to a fire. This is because her body is delicate, so it will make a fire and cause danger as to the belief of the society. She won't go to her father-in-law; she doesn't prepare *farsoo* 'local beer' and *araqee* 'local alcoholic drink'. This is because they believe that the local beer *farsoo* and *araqee* will be tasteless. Also she won't milk a cow, she won't shut the gate of cattle, and she won't pour water to people's hands while her period is coming.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In this paper linguistic taboos related to woman and their corresponding euphemistic expressions are comparatively analyzed depending on the framework of politeness theory. Some of these taboos are attached to the word *dubartii* 'woman' itself, virginity, menstruation, pregnancy, and giving birth. To avoid taboo words/expressions, euphemistic expressions are playing a big role. If somebody speaks these taboo expressions related to woman without euphemizing, the expressions will create communication barrier or lead the hearers into conflict or feeling of embarrassment. Thus, an individual should use the appropriate euphemistic expressions instead of taboo words/expressions according to the specific norm of the society.

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