

**Fast Linguistic Assessment
of Multilingualism in Ethiopia (F.L.A.M.E.):
A Progress Report**

Aklilu Yilma

**SIL International
2002**

Contents

- 1 Rationale for Devising the Test of Multilingualism
- 2 Sentence Repetition Tests (SRT)
- 3 Validation of SRT Tests
- 4 Research Assistants as “Raters”
- 5 The Test Sentences
- 6 Oromo SRT
- 7 Practical Problems
- 8 Notes on the Preliminary Set of SRT Sentences
- Appendix: Preliminary Form of the Amharic SRT Test

1 Rationale for Devising the Test of Multilingualism*

Ethiopia is a linguistically diverse nation, in which more than seventy languages are spoken in different parts of the country. In a country like Ethiopia, detailed information and reliable data on multilingualism are needed to design language policies and make decisions on issues related to education, administration, and communication in general. Studies on language use and assessment of multilingualism may reveal the profile of bilingualism in a community.

Various methods and techniques have been developed to assess bilingualism; and it is true that each of the methods has its own shortcomings to obtain rich and reliable data. The methods or techniques employed to measure second language proficiency depends on the goal of the study.

2 Sentence Repetition Tests (SRT)

In order to measure community bilingualism in Ethiopia, this study makes use of a technique known as the “Sentence Repetition Test” (SRT), which is developed by Carla Radloff and others (Carla F. Radloff, 1991, “Sentence Repetition Testing”, Dallas). The SRT makes use of a number of tape-recorded sentences in the second language which must differ in content, length, and complexity and are unrelated in meaning.

The second language speaker, whose proficiency is to be tested, is guided to listen carefully to each tape-recorded sentence and then to repeat the sentences immediately after hearing them.

3 Validation of SRT Tests

A more direct assessment technique, which is called “Reported Proficiency Evaluation” (RPE), is used to calibrate scores on the SRT. The RPE technique makes use of “educated mother-tongue speakers” or “raters” to evaluate and grade a number of second language speakers with whom they are well acquainted, well enough to measure their levels of proficiency in that language.

The native speakers use a standard set of proficiency criteria to measure language skills such as accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

This standard set of proficiency criteria (Radloff 1991, sections 6.5.1 to 6.5.5) has been translated into Amharic to be used in the second step of SRT development, i.e., by the “raters” who evaluate their acquaintances. These acquaintances should ideally be friends with whom the “rater” speaks regularly.

4 Research Assistants as “Raters”

In this assessment of bilingualism in Ethiopia, two major languages, Amharic and Oromo, which have wider communication, have been selected. In order to develop the SRT tests in these two languages, fifteen “educated mother-tongue speakers” of Amharic, and ten “educated mother-tongue speakers” of Oromo have been interviewed (most of them graduate students at the Addis Ababa University), and of these twenty-five people, six were finally selected as “assistants” to help in the development of the tests: three for Amharic, and three for Oromo.

First, the three “educated mother-tongue speakers” of Amharic were given an orientation regarding the kind of test which was to be developed. Then each of them was instructed to gather twenty sentences, written in Amharic script or “fidel”—either constructed by the speakers themselves, or selected from newspapers, or gathered from any other source.

5 The Test Sentences

Each of the sentences was cross-checked for naturalness by each of the native speakers and the principal researcher. (Sentences which were “too funny”, “too political”, “offending”, etc., were eliminated in this way.)

An attempt was made to check excessively long sentences. Since there was no good tape recorder available to record the sentences, one of the three native speakers was asked to read each sentence aloud and to repeat it without reading it again. In addition, the principal investigator checked the length of the sentences with the other two educated mother-tongue speakers of Amharic by reading the sentences aloud and requesting them to repeat each of them. Those sentences in which more than two errors had been made were automatically rejected, and those with

*An earlier version of this report appeared in Survey of Little-known Languages of Ethiopia (S.L.L.E.). Linguistic Report 5, March 1993. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Summer Institute of Linguistics.

only one or two mistakes were retained on the assumption that a few difficult sentences might be useful in distinguishing second language speakers with high proficiency.

6 Oromo SRT

Regarding the development of the preliminary version of the SRT tests in Oromo, which started a little later than the Amharic one, around sixty sentences have been constructed and collected from newspapers and teaching materials, and they have also been cross-checked by the three “educated mother-tongue speakers” of Oromo. The sentences have been written in Latin script or “Qube Afaan Oromo”. Most of the Oromo sentences have also been translated and transcribed in phonetic script. The translation and the transcription will be needed to allow for normal testing procedures.

7 Practical Problems

In the middle of preparing the SRT tests both in Amharic and in Oromo, the normal teaching and learning programmes at the Addis Ababa University were disrupted and—with the exception of administrative work—the university was closed down. Now all except one of the Amharic assistants have left the University and have been difficult to find in order to continue the preparation of the SRT; and this has affected the research in general. Attempts are made to find other “educated mother-tongue speakers” to continue developing the tests.

[A problem which had not been anticipated is that the “raters” had no acquaintances of low proficiency. There are many testees of high range proficiency (3+, 4, 5) but hardly any of the low range (1, 2, 3-). We hope to take care of this by establishing contact with “raters” outside the campus and outside the city. K.W.]

8 Notes on the Preliminary Set of SRT Sentences

The revised Amharic preliminary form (forty-seven sentences) with elaborated transcription is listed in the appendix. The list here is given to invite comments and suggestions for improvement.

[Note: the final form of the test will consist of only fifteen sentences: those sentences which, by means of statistic screening, prove to be the best indicators of second language proficiency. K.W.]

Appendix: Preliminary Form of the Amharic SRT Test

The transcription follows the IPA, but the following conventions should be noted: double consonants (CC rather than C:) indicate gemination; **ä** **ī** stand for the high and mid central vowels, **ñ** **c** **j** are palatals, **w** and **y** are the semivowels, “ ’ ” is the glottal stop, and **p’** **t’** **c’** **k’** **s’** represent the ejective consonants.

[With apologies to Aklilu Yilma, his very detailed phonetic transcription had to be simplified in some points: some of the special symbols were not available for printing. We thank Simon Gardner and Bekele Desta for assistance with the proofreading. K.W.]

1 mäskotun bittikäftaw, yäs'ähay birhan ligäba yicilall

the-window if-you-open of-sun light to-enter it-can

If you open the window, the sunlight can come in.

2 ändih kähonä, bät'am t'änkiräh mäsrat alläbbih

like-this if-it-is very you-strong to-work must-you

If it is like this, you have to work very hard.

3 tühürt mannñawinim ciggir maswäggäja mäsariya näw

education every-even problem to-dispose-of tool it-is

Education is an instrument to settle every problem.

4 yalä tühürt idgät, yalä mäsrät bet aynorim

without education development without foundation house not-exists

There is no development without education, nor a house without a foundation.

5 yämäkinaw mäggalbät' astämariw lay käftäñña sibbirat askättäläbbät

for-the-car to-turn the-teacher on high breaking caused-to-follow-him

That the car turned over caused the teacher to suffer severe fractures.

6 bittamīnum battamīnum, yih k'wat'īñ käsāmay yāwārrādā nāw

if-you-believe if-you-disbelieve this rock from-sky which-descended is

Whether you believe it or not, this rock fell from the sky.

7 hullum nāgārocc bāzīrrzīrr lāmāglās' gizem botam yat'rall

all things in-detail to-describe time-and space-and is-short

To discuss all things in detail, there is not enough time and space.

8 yallāfāw sammīnt mätt'ītāh bihon noro ihītīhīn tagāññat nābbār

the-past week you-come it-happen were, your sister you-to-meet was

If you had come last week, you would have met your sister.

9 mannīm sāw bihon, mābtīnna gīddetawīn awk'o mānor allābbāt

every man if-is, right-and obligation-his conscious to-live it-has-to

Every person has to be aware of his rights and his obligations.

10 lebīnnāt bāhībrātāsābaccīn zānd asnāwarinna tāk'ābayinnāt yālellāw sīra nāw

theft in-our-country too shameful-and acceptability which-hasn't deed is

In our society, theft is a shameful and unacceptable deed.

11 kātāma yāmmīttīhed kāhonā yīhīn dābdabe īgrā māngādīhīn wīsādillīñ

town if-you-go if-happen this letter foot-of way-your take-for-me

If you are going to town, take this letter for me on your way.

12 yīhīn sīra alwāddādkutīm nāgārgīn yātācalāññīn yahīl lāmāsrāt īmokīrallāhu

this work I-did-not-like-it however which-I-can amount to-work I-will-try

I did not like this job, but I will try to do whatever I can.

13 antā lij! yīhīn īnc'āt tāšākīmāh wādā 'īne bet wīsād

you boy this wood carrying to me home take

You boy! Carry this wood to my home!

14 yāmāndāru sāwwocc tāsābsībāw yācīgīrun mānsī'e kātāwāwayyu bāhwala māftīhewīnim t'āk'umāwall

of-the-neighbourhood people gathering of-the-problem cause discussed after the solution pointed-out

The people of the neighbourhood, having gathered together, pointed out the solution after discussing the problem.

15 bāwāt'at'innāt gīze t'ānkīro māsrāt yāwādāfit yānuuro huneta liwāssīn yīcīlall

adulthood time hard to-work of-future -of-life condition determine it-can

Working hard in adulthood can determine the condition of life later on.

16 bahunu gīze fillagote sīra yīze īrasenīnna betāsāboccen mārdāt nāw

at-present time my-wish work holding myself-and my-family to-help it-is

At present, my wish is to get a job to support myself and my family.

17 arogitwa mīnimm yālellaccāw dāha naccāw gīn mālāmmān bāfiss'um ayfällīgum

the-old-woman nothing who-does-not-have poor she-is but to-beg absolutely does-not-want

The old woman is one who does not have anything; but she will never beg.

18 yayyāru huneta c'īgagamma kalhonā, awroplanu bole ayyār marāfiya yarfall

of-the-air condition foggy if-not-occur the-plane Bole airport will-land

If the weather is not foggy, the plane will land at Bole airport.

19 bāk'āt'ārowaccīn k'ān yāmannīggānaññ kāhonā zāmādoccīhīnna gwadāññoccīhīn yākābbārā sālamta ak'īrbīllīññ

on-appointment day that-we-not-meet if-occur your-relatives-and your-friends respectful greeting present-for-me

If we are not going to meet on the day of our appointment, present my respectful greetings to your relatives and friends.

20 k'īrswoccaccīnīn tānkābakībonna t'ābk'o lātātākkiw tīwlīd masrākkāb yāhībrātāsābu halafinnāt nāw

our-heritage taking-care-and maintaining for-the-replacing generation to-deliver of-the-society responsibility it-is

It is the responsibility of the society to take care and maintain our heritage and transmit it to the coming generation.

21 tūmhīrt bāsīnt sā'at īndāmmīabāk'a sīlāmmalawk' dāwlu īskīdāwwāl dīrās māt'ābbāk' allābbīññ teh-bell

lesson at-how-much hour it-stops since-I-do-not-know till-it-rings until to-wait I-have-to

Since I do not know at what time the class ends, I have to wait until the bell rings.

22 līju fitun tat'ībo k'ursun kābālla bāhwala wādā tūmhīrtī- bet hedā

the-boy his-face washed his-breakfast eaten after to school- house he-went

The boy went to school after he had washed his face and eaten his breakfast.

23 šīmagīlew wātt'atun, sīlā hīywāt tarīkīh bītīnāgīrāññ, bāt'am dāss yīlāññall alut

the-old-man to-the-young-man, about life your-story if-you-tell-me very happy I-will-be he-said

The old man said to the young man, "I will be very happy if you tell me the story of your life."

24 bārgīt', antā tolo kalmātt'ah betāsābaccīn kāftāñña cīggīr lay īndāmmīwādīk' yīssāmmaññall

actually, you quickly if-you-do-not-come our-family high problem on that-it-falls-down I-feel

Actually, if you do not come quickly, I feel that our family will face a serious problem.

25 bānazīret kātāma yāhīzbu k'ut'īr īyyāc'āmmārā sīlāhedā yātālāyāyyu mās'īhetoccīnna gazet'occ īt'rāt taytwall

in-Nazareth town of-the-people number increasing because-it-goes different magazines-and newspapers scarcity is-seen

Because the population in Nazareth is increasing, there is a scarcity of magazines and newspapers.

26 balām kallut hagārocc wīst' yābunna tākil yātāgāññābbat yāmājāmmāriyawa ityopp'īya nat

in-world found countries in of-coffee plant which-was-found-in-it the-first country Ethiopia she-is

Ethiopia is the first country of the world to discover the coffee plant.

27 īnnāzzīhīn tīnīnnīš lījocc wādā šīrrīšīrr bīt wāsājīllīññ mīsganaye bāt'am kāff yalā yīhonall

these small children to picnic if-you-take-for-me-my-thanks very high which-is it-will-be

I shall be grateful if you take these children to a picnic for me.

- 28 ya mängäd lay siyaläkk'is yänäbbäräw wätt'at iwīnätun binägrän noro, innirädaw näbbär**
that street on crying who-was young-man the-truth if-he-old-us exist, we-help it-was
If the young man who was crying on the street had told us the truth, we would have helped him.
- 29 bāk'i limdīnna iwkw'ät bälelaccäw yämändär hakimocc yämmisät'äw hikkimīnna kät'ik'imu gudato yamāzīnall**
enough experience-and knowledge who-do-not-have village physician which-is-given treatment of-its-advantage the-damage weighs-more
Treatment given by village doctors who don't have enough experience and knowledge does more harm than good.
- 30 bärgit' and säw kollej gäbto kaltamarä münimm iwkw'ät yällawīm malät ayyīccalīm**
actually one man college entering if-not-educated none knowledge he-has-not to-say it-is-impossible
Actually, it is impossible to say that a person who has no college education has no knowledge.
- 31 bahunu wäk't bädänninna durarawit lay yämmikkahedäw gädäb yälläš c'iffc'äfa ijjiḡ asassabi honwall**
at-the-present days forest-and wild-animals on going-on limit has-not destruction very-much critical has-become
Nowadays the boundless destruction of forests and wild animals has become very critical.
- 32 yähagäraccin yägibrīna wīt'et babzaññaw gize yähibrätäsäbun yämigib fillagot bämarmat lay täwäsino yiggāññall**
our-country of-agriculture production at-most time of-the-society of-food need satisfying on limited it-is-found
Most of the time, our country's agricultural production is limited to satisfying the society's needs for food.
- 33 ya yämmittayyāw fok' bet yaggote sihon, at'ägäbu yallāw gojjo bet yakiste näw**
that which-is-seen storey house of-my-uncle while-it-is near-to-it which-is cottage house of-my-aunt it-is
While that house with several storeys is my uncle's, the cottage beside it is my aunt's.
- 34 yäsīnā hiywät t'ibäb hiywät ballaccäw nägärocc lay t'inat yämmikkahed yäsayīns zärf näw**
of-science life art life at-which-have things on study which-deals of-science branch it-is
Biology is a branch of science that studies living things.
- 35 bīzuwun gize kakkababiw gar yämmitāwawwäk'äwīnna yämmigbabaw bammistu yäsīmet hīwasat amakayīnnät näw**
most time man his surroundings with what-he-becomes-familiar-and becomes-acquainted of-five of-sense organs by-means it-is
Most of the time a human being becomes familiar and acquainted with his surroundings by the help of his five sense organs.
- 36 k'idamenna ihud hullum irāft lay naccäw; antä gīn bīccahīn yämmitsāraw lāmīn indāhonā aygābaññim**
Saturday-and Sunday everybody rest on they-are you but alone that-you-are-working why as-it-occurs I-do-not-understand
I do not understand that YOU work, while everybody else rests on Saturday and Sunday.
- 37 bāgāt'āru akkababi säfa yalä yät'ena tīmhirt balämässät'ātu abzaññaw hīzb lätälalafi bäsīta yätägallät'ä näw**
at-rural area wide which-is of-health education not-given the-majority people contagious disease exposed it-is
The majority of the people in the countryside are exposed to contagious diseases because health education is not widespread.

38 baddis abāba kātāma nuro bāt'am widd bihonim mannīñawim it'yop'iyawi addis abāba mānor yifälligall

in-Addis Ababa town life very expensive even-if-it-is, every Ethiopian Addis Ababa to-live he-wants
Even though the cost of living is very expensive in Addis Ababa, every Ethiopian wants to live in Addis Ababa.

39 hagāraccin yābārkatta hayk'occinna jiratooc balābet bittihonim yammiggāññaw yasa mirt gin bāt'am zikk'itāñña nāw

our-country of-many lakes-and rivers owner if-she-is which-is-found fish product but very low it-is
Even though Ethiopia has many lakes and rivers, her fish production is very low.

40 yākrīstīnna haymanot tākättayoc hulgize bäyyāsammintu ihud s'ālot kāmadrāgaccāwim bālay yāmās'ihaf k'idus tīmhirt yikkātattālallu

of-Christian religion followers always at-every-week Sunday prayer at-performing above of-book holy lesson they-follow
Besides praying, the followers of Christian religion attend Bible study every Sunday.

41 and ityop'iyawi k'es mistu mīnimm c'āk'c'ak'a bittihonimm lifātat aycilim, mīknīyatum yāhaymanotu higgīnna bahilu ayfāk'idillātīm

one Ethiopian priest his wife nothing nagging if-she-is to-divorce he-cannot because of-the-religion law-and the-tradition it-does-not-allow-him
An Ethiopian priest cannot divorce his wife, however nagging she may be; the reason is that law, religion, and tradition do not allow him to.

42 abzaññaw yāityopp'iya hīzb yāmmīnorāw bāgāt'ār īndāmmāhonu māt'ān mättādādāriyaw bāršanna bākābt īrbata lay yātāmāsārātā nāw

most of-Ethiopian people that-they-live rural as-it-is extent means-of-subsistence by-farming by-cattle breeding on based it-is
Since most of the Ethiopian people live in the countryside, their means of subsistence is based on agriculture and cattle breeding.

43 yāityopp'iya mālka mīdir wātt'a gābbanna tārarama bāmāhonu wānzocwa lām afār t'ārargāw wādā gorābet agār yīwāsdallu

of-Ethiopia face-of land up down-and mountainous so-it-is her-rivers fertile soil eroded to neighbouring country they-take
Because the landscape of Ethiopia slopes and is mountainous, the rivers erode the fertile soil to the neighbouring countries.

44 bādīredawa kātāma wīst' yāmāngād lay lijoccin yāmmiasābassīb and dīrijīt tāk'wak'umo sīrawīn yājāmmārā māhonun bāzena massārac'awoc tīgāllās'ā

at-Diredawa town in of-street on children which-gather one organization established its-work which-started its-being by-news transmitters has-been-announced
It was announced by radio that in Dire Dawa an organization has started to work which was established to take care of children in the street.

45 tinantīnna kaddis abāba bahīrdar yīggwaz yānābbārā and awtobus bāmāggālbāt'u and wāt'at simot sost setoc kīfuñña k'oslāwall

yesterday from-Addis Ababa Bahir-Dar travelling which-was one bus because-it-turned-over one young-man while-he-died three women badly have-been-injured
Yesterday a young man died and three women were badly injured because a bus, which was going from Addis Ababa to Baherdar, turned over.

46 ya yämmittayyāw räjjim säwīyye ityop'iyawi bihonim käljinnātu jämmiro wicc' agär silānorä amarīñña männagär fäss'imo aycilim

that whom-you-see tall man Ethiopian although-he-is from-his-childhood started out country since-he-lived Amharic to-speak absolutely he-can-not

Although that tall man whom you are looking at is an Ethiopian, he does not speak Amharic at all, for he has lived abroad since his childhood.

47 t'ābbak'i yälellāw insäsa bäsālam sarun gitt'o wihawin t'ätt'ito mata wädä betu mägbat aycilim

keeper which-has-not animal in-peace the-grass grazing the-water drinking evening to its-house to-enter it-can-not

An animal which does not have a keeper cannot graze and drink in peace and go to its stable at night.