



Images of Children in Amharic and Tigrigna Proverbs

Article

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ABSTRACT

This paper comparatively investigated images of children in Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs. Employing conceptual metaphor and critical discourse analysis, the study examined societal beliefs, values, and presumptions about children. Accordingly, it is found that children are commonly portrayed as naïve, honest, lovable, and malleable to any behavioral shape. Still, they are believed to take after their parents' characters, skills, and actions. Additionally, children from economically advantaged families are seen as destined to succeed, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds are perceived as doomed to suffer. Also, children and women alike are at times viewed as incapable of managing their dispositions. Stepchildren are even more negatively treated and judged by their stepfathers or stepmothers. Children born out of wedlock are considered bad children. Furthermore, authoritarian control over children is considered a good way of correcting children's misbehavior. Thus, the study suggests that curriculum designers, authors, media outlets, policymakers, and NGOs should promote positive views of children and rectify the damaging negative views.

Keywords: Children, Conceptual Metaphor, CDA, Proverbs, Amharic, Tigrigna



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INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are considered widely used discursive events in both Amharic and Tigrigna-speaking communities. In both linguistic communities, proverbs are used as a significant means of carrying shared beliefs and constructing meanings that can shape attitudes. In day-to-day conversation or written discourses of the two speech communities, proverbs are integrated to reflect different lines of thought and drive some messages home.

Given these, as pointed out by different authors, proverbs present normative values, beliefs, and experiences about different aspects of life. As explained by Etta and Mogu (2012) and Chintya, Jumino, and Purwarno (2019), a proverb is a form of expression that constitutes social practices, life lessons, knowledge, facts, and moral values passed down through generations. It is a concise and catchy discursive form that holds cultural beliefs. In the same vein, it is described as an important discursive tool that provides insight into the different dimensions of a communal way of life, mystical practices, social demeanors, cultural ethos, didactic instructions, and historical accounts (Kaçmaz & Baykara, 2022; Sefa Dei, 2013).

Even though they play such roles, chances are many such discursive events can convey negative stereotypes that can affect a specific segment of society. In particular, these discursive events can pervade various social issues and construct society's long-standing beliefs. Among other things, such linguistic devices may foster prejudice against children or construct positive values based on age as a labeling mechanism, and can indicate the perceived characters and image of children within the two Amharic and Tigrigna-speaking societies.

However, few studies have been conducted regarding the images of children in Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs. Accordingly, it is important to investigate these discursive events based on the ensuing research questions:

- 1) What beliefs, values, and underlying views of children are held in the proverbial expressions?
- 2) How are children viewed in the proverbs?
- 3) What are the distinguishing features of children in Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs?

Conceptual Framework

This study examines Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs to see images of children constructed through societal beliefs, values, and presumptions concerning children. It elucidates how children are perceived in these discursive events and explores the distinguishing features of children. To do so, the study used a qualitative approach and interpreted the discourse devices in the proverbs to see the images of children in the selected proverbs.

Children are perceived and positioned based on the common views of their age. As stated by Schapiro (1999), they are considered under seventeen as may be stipulated by positive laws and from the perspective of the state. They are crudely regarded as persons whose lives are led and whose choices are made by others. The point that children have distinct positions other than adults is conspicuous. As

indicated by the same author, they are persons whose immature situation demands the involvement of others to responsibly defend, foster, correct, and instruct.

For this to happen, underlying views, values, and beliefs shared by a given community play a crucial role. The sets of these views, values, and beliefs—ideology— as a practice are expressed in discourse (Hyland, Paltridge & Wong, 2021). Through the discourse, ideology serves as a regulative thought about the characteristics of people and institutions. It gives a window into their world and frames how the world should look (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Among others, genres such as proverbs carry the systems of these beliefs that dictate actions and reflect images or representations of individuals or groups and their world. Thus, to see the communicative events critically is to investigate discourse tools or devices and contextually analyze the constructed social conventions that delineate the cultural lives (Hyland, Paltridge & Wong, 2021).

In light of the above concepts, the study uses conceptual metaphor and critical discourse analysis to look into the images of children comparatively in Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs.

The crux of metaphor is to comprehend and experience one form of an object in place of another. This happens through an organized way of language use that conveys facets of concepts. Metaphors are found to be extensively present in day-to-day life in language uses as well as in acts and views. Perceptions, relations among people, and getting around in the world are organized by the systems of ideas. The order of discourse, as much of metaphorical expression, plays a crucial part in describing the day-to-day thoughts, involvements, and activities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Accordingly, looking into conceptual metaphor plays a crucial role in explicating a given discourse. A conceptual metaphor means comprehending such thoughts and engagements in place of other thoughts and activities — a conceptual domain understood in terms of another (Kövecses, 2010). In this regard, the abstract thought that needs to be understood, that is, the target, is conveyed with the source domain, which is the vehicle expressed in concrete terms (Landau, 2017; Kövecses, 2010).

Expressing the target domain through concrete terms can be realized through conceptual mapping — drawing related attributes between a tenor or target and source or vehicle. It is a way of relating a body of attributes of a conceptual domain with apparently different features of another (Landau, 2017; Kövecses, 2010).

A conceptual metaphor, as a framework, helps to explicate metaphors, and so does critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is employed to analyze the language used in texts, including metaphors. CDA, as an approach, searches for disclosing morals, power hierarchy, and interests in the context of institutions and social history wherein persons employ and explicate language (Hyland, Paltridge, and Wong, 2021).

Similarly, as pointed out by Fan (2019), CDA gives attention to disparity and unfairness in the social order; it discloses the systems of beliefs, values, ideas, and dynamics of power implicitly expressed in discourse. Likewise, CDA as an interdisciplinary approach helps to see language uses in context and

guides to observe the dynamics and acceptability of power in discursive practices (van Dijk, 2015). It unpacks discourse tools, including metaphors that contain the body of thoughts and normative values practiced by a given speech community (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017).

In essence, understanding discourse tools or devices contextually is indispensable to critically undertaking discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In this regard, context, which is the association between the aspects of language uses and non-linguistic elements, is considered to influence customs, moral values, and experiences. Equally, discourses as objects of interpretation affect the setting in which the discourses are positioned (Hyland, Paltridge & Wong, 2021).

To investigate cultural practices, including the images of children, CDA gives attention to contexts that can guide the observation of the landscape of language uses, and examine commonly held basic schemes of views, and discourses dealing with disposition (Wodak, 2001; Van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1995).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This paper examines images of children comparatively as constructed in Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs. It looks into the beliefs, values, and underlying views of children held in the proverbial expressions, identifies the distinguishing features of children, and examines how children are viewed in Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs. In so doing, 54 Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs that can give insight into images of children have been selected. Accordingly, it considers three books of proverbs (one from Amharic and two from Tigrigna) as a source of data to conduct the analysis. These related proverbs were identified and organized based on the specific children-related themes identified. To understand the contexts of the proverbs selected for analysis, the paper considered ten key informants (five for the Amharic proverbs and another five for Tigrigna). These key informants are considered based on their cultural competencies, which supposedly give insight into the context for meaning.

Therefore, the study investigated these proverbs based on context and scrutinized the ideational functions (views, beliefs, and values) of children. In addition, it looked into the communicative events and explored the implicit and explicit meanings concerning the images of children. What is more, the proverbs have been translated and provided in brackets next to the original texts; they have been given to linguistic professionals at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, Mekelle University, to verify their translation. Also, the Amharic proverbs, along with their translation, have been numbered to ease the organization and analysis of data.

Analysis of Data and Interpretation

In the ensuing paragraphs, detailed analysis and interpretations of the selected proverbs have been made to explore the culturally constructed images of children through the conceptual metaphor and critical discourse analysis as a framework.

The Images of Children within the Aging Continuum

Proverbs included in the analysis of the images of children tend to be originally tendentiously male-gendered. Accordingly, all subsequent proverbs in this section are translated and interpreted based on the male gender perspective as is. Note that the Amharic proverbs are presented with the Prefix A as in A1, which represents the first Amharic proverb, whereas the Tigrigna proverbs are presented with the prefix T as in T1, which represents the first Tigrigna proverb.

Children could go wild and need to contain their wildness through punishment

T1) ቁልዓ፡ ሃራሚኡ ይፈቱ። (A child likes the one that beats him.)

Traditionally, in Tigray, beating, pinching, spanking, and slapping a child are considered normal ways of disciplining. Families, neighbors, churches, and schools believe physical punishment is a solution to correct misbehavior. That is why the proverb promotes beating as an appropriate means of correction and sends a predetermined message that appreciates an authoritarian approach to maintain a hierarchical relationship and meet the constructed expectations and presumptions of society. But why does the proverb justify that the child likes the one who beats him? It does not mean what it says. Ironically, it suggests that beating is a good way to control a child and set a warning boundary against misbehaving. It conceives the child as one who lacks the disposition required to make a self-directed correction. It does not appreciate children's agency and capacity to manage themselves. It takes that a child is likely to do wrong and believes physical punishment is the right way to correct and make him decent or obedient. This dictating view can frame users to conceive negative images of children. The belief that children cannot responsibly build their disposition and should be disciplined through physical punishment is also reflected in the following proverbs:

T2) ቁልዓን ሰበይቲን ወቓዒኦም ይፈትዱ። (A child and a woman like the one who beats them.)

As stated in the above proverb, the belief that a child and a woman alike cannot control themselves and should be disciplined through physical punishment is deep-rooted. As an institutional practice, the proverb justifies punishment as an appropriate way of correcting a misbehaving child, and woman, and making them obedient. The juxtaposition of a child with a woman reflects that age is not a factor for a woman to escape physical punishment. This cultural discourse fosters control and power over a child and a woman and imposes inappropriate instructions that can implicitly rationalize might is right. Additionally, it perpetuates a negative view that children and women alike cannot manage their dispositions.

A1) የማይመቱት ልጅ ቢቆጡት ያለቅሳል። [An unpunished child will cry when you get angry with him.]

T3) ዘይተቐፅዐዎ ውሉድስ፡ እንተኸረኸሉ ይበኪ። [An unpunished child will cry when you get angry with him.]

The above proverbs take the presumption that physical punishment can save a child from being spoiled. They imply that the children, if not disciplined, will become easily sensitive to verbal corrections and angry responses, and can simply be driven to start crying in reaction to these corrections. The belief in the consequences of not punishing a child is more palpable in the following proverbs:

A2) ያልተቀጣ ልጅ፡ ያልታጠበ እጅ። [An undisciplined child, an unwashed hand.]

T4) ዘይተገሰፀ፡ መሓዲ ወለዱ ረገፁ ወፀ። [An undisciplined child disrespects a family recipe.

As noted above, the Amharic proverb maps the image of an unwashed hand to represent an undisciplined child. Dirty hands can cause unhealthy conditions. Metaphorically, an undisciplined child is believed to be the same as dirty hands. Likewise, in the Tigrigna proverb, an undisciplined child is metaphorically described in terms of disrespecting a family recipe. Such a child is likely to behave against norms that set social limits. As both proverbs imply, an undisciplined child, like an unwashed hand, or one who disrespects a family meal, is believed to cause antisocial conditions. The importance of setting limits for children is also reflected in the following proverbs:

A3) ውሽ ከሸሹለት፡ ልጅ ከሳቁለት፡ ያ ኣይመለስ፡ ያ ኣይታገስ። [If you run away from a dog, it will not back away; if you laugh at a child, the child will insist and pester.]

T5) ንቁልዓ ኣይስሓቕሉ፡ ንሽልቢ ኣይጉዩሉ። [Do not laugh at a child, and do not run away from a dog.]

These proverbial expressions take the assumption that children are demanding. They imply that children may not have legitimate reasons when demanding something. If they do not learn to abide by a set limit, they may badger their parents into getting something they want. They may even insist or cry out loud until the point of exhaustion. In light of this, these proverbs state this meaning in juxtaposition with a chasing dog. A chasing dog does not back away if a person keeps running away from it. In much the same way, the proverbs believe that children do not stop pestering unless they are given a boundary. If children are not under such a boundary, they will be spoiled and rigidly persist in behaving in an ill-mannered way.

T6) ሕንቁቕያ ቁልዓስ፡ እንተቃባጠርካሉ ይበኪ። [A spoiled child cries despite cajoling.]

A4) ያሞላቀቁት ልጅ፡ ኣይሆኑም ወዳጅ። [A spoiled child cannot be affectionate.]

Traditionally, spoiled children are believed to receive too much care. Such children ask for things and receive a positive response at their disposal. Their request is not shrugged off. Their misbehavior is also overlooked. Given that, such children, as displayed in the above Tigrigna proverb, will refuse to listen and to be convinced once they start crying. Cajoling will not bend their stubborn reaction. Similarly, as described in the Amharic proverb, a spoiled child will end up unaffectionate. Both proverbs send a message that lenient parenting amounts to a negative result —a bad character. They imply that children can develop a negative character unless they are disciplined and forced to behave within social norms.

The importance of setting a boundary or reasonable distance between a child and adults to help a child build socially acceptable behavior is also signified in the following proverb:

A5) ከልጅ ኣትጫወት፡ ይወጋሃል በንጫት። [Play not with a child, lest he pierce you with a stick.]

T7) ምስ ቁልዓንያ ኣይትምከር፡ ምስ ከልብን ኣይትተሓባእ። [Counsel not with a child, hide not with a dog.]

T8) ምስ ቁልዓዖ ዝዓርኽስ፣ እናሓደረ ይሓንኽ። [One who befriended a child will be bashful over time.]

If a grown-up spends time playing with children, as indicated in the 5th Amharic proverb, chances are the children become close and familiar, which in turn causes them to disrespect the grown-up. The proverb views that playing with children and becoming familiar with them would cause the grown-up to experience sharp pain. This piercing pain is metaphorically equal to the pain one receives when pierced with a stick. In this regard, the proverb signals a warning note to a grownup to avoid playing and familiarity with them so long as they can be a cause for spoiling healthy relationships. Adults should maintain their authority over children and shape children's discipline accordingly. Likewise, the 7th and the 8th Tigrigna proverbs place more weight on keeping distance from children. To maintain confidentiality and avoid negative consequences, adults should refrain from consulting children or keeping company with them.

Against this backdrop, the following proverbs warn against any negative actions that can give rise to a child's strong dislike:

T9) ድዓብይ ቁልዓ ኣይፅላእኹ። [A growing child should not hate you.]

A6) የሚያድግ ልጅ ኣይጥላህ፥ የሚሞት ሽማግሌ ኣይርገምህ። [A growing child should not hate you; dying elderly should not curse you.]

A7) የሚያድግ ልጅ ኣትበድል፥ የሚሞት ሽማግሌ ኣታቃልል። [Do not mistreat a growing child; do not demean dying elderly.]

Any grown-up person deserves respect, and so does a child. The above Tigrigna and Amharic proverbs suggest that children may grow up harboring resentment toward those who mistreated them. Where this is the case, the child is believed to become physically strong as he grows up and can challenge or retaliate against those who maltreated him. The proverbs indicate that the current power holders can be challenged by the child, as he can have prospective power. The above two Amharic proverbs describe the instruction in analogy with belittling the dying elderly. The proverbs instruct that demeaning or hurting the elderly will amount to detrimental effects, for the elderly's subsequent death can cause the impertinent individuals to have no recourse to ask for forgiveness.

Seen from a child's perspective, the following proverb conversely views a child as one who knows the preferred qualities of human personality: T10) ቁሎዓ፥ ፈታዊኡ ይፈቱ። [A child likes anyone who likes him.] A child responds positively to those who have a welcoming approach and a caring and nurturing personality. Within the religious milieu, children are considered innocent and pure. Accordingly, adults who pay close attention, give smiles, express warmth, embrace with open arms, and look at them with loving eyes are duly loved by children. The view that children are pure is taken for granted. Based on this view, parents view childhood as the right age to foster good discipline through close contact and affection. The intensity of love for children is more noticeable in the following Amharic proverb:

A8) የልጅ ፍቅር፣ የሴት ከንፈር፣ እናትን ኣያስቀብር። [A love for a child and a kiss to a woman's lip are even harder to leave and attend a mother's funeral.]

As indicated in the proverb, the scale to measure love for children is congruent with the pleasure derived from kissing a woman's lip. The pleasure individuals derive from their children's love is signaled to be equal to the desire they quench kissing a woman's lip. It is also described analogically that children's love would not let individuals go away from them to attend their mother's funeral.

Children are tender and malleable; they can bend and align with social values and expectations

The following proverb indicates the belief that children should be bent on the right discipline timely:

T11) ቈልዓ ብንኡሱ፣ ቆርብት ብርሑሱ፣ እቲ ይቕለስ እቲ ይጥቕለል። [A child can be molded when he is little, a raw skin can be rolled when it is wet.]

A9) ትምህርት በልጅነት፣ ኣበባ በጥቅምት። [Education should be at an early child's age, a flower in October.]

T12) ንቈልዓ ዝነገርካዮ፣ ኣብ እምኒ ከም ዝፀሓፍካዮ። [Telling a child is like writing on a rock.]

In the 11th Tigrigna proverb, tenderness, softness, or wetness are attributes that help to conceptualize the abstract quality of a child's behavior and the features of raw skin. These attributes are keystones to contain the behavior of the child and the features of raw skin. Time as a measuring line metaphorically defines aging as a lack. It portrays that over time, the child and the raw skin lose their malleable and flexible nature.

In this way, the child's behavior is set in parallel with the quality of raw skin. The proverb imports people's experience with raw skin. After the skin is removed, people can roll the skin with reasonable effort. They can give it whatever shape they desire as long as it maintains its softness, moisture, or wetness. However, once the moisture or wetness is gone, it is not possible to roll or keep it even. It is likely for the skin to dry out and wrinkle up, or shrink. By the same analogy, a child's behavior can be molded early in the age continuum.

However, the proverb implies that over time, children can be rigid. They can lose their tenderness and open-mindedness, and it may not be easy to shape or improve their behavior in line with expected attitudes or traits.

Similarly, both the 9th Amharic and the 12th Tigrigna proverbs indicate that an early age is favorable for children to take lessons easily. Children are believed to be open-minded and tender and can take whatever lesson or behavior is desired. As indicated in the Amharic proverb, they can flourish like October flowers. In the Tigrigna proverb, in like manner, children can retain lasting lessons. Their memory does not fade away like a piece of writing on a rock. In this way, adults can reinforce any desired knowledge or trait in children.

Implicitly, the proverbs warn that the children's behavior should be reinforced in time. Early in the aging continuum, making efforts and giving enough attention and instruction to children can improve their knowledge and behavior, and mold their traits in a desired way. As time passes, the proverbs

indicate, children can lose their flexibility like the raw skin that is left unattended. Even so, some other proverbs belittle a child's personality and effort:

Children's capability is limited to the childhood boundary until they come of age

T13) ቈልዓ እንተለበመስ፡ ኣብ መንገዲ ምሻን ኣይሓድግን። [A child can be wise; even so, he will not stop passing urine on the way.]

T14) ቈልዓስ፡ ደጐዪ እምበር ኣይቕድምን። [A child can run but never run faster than adults.]

A10) ልጅ ደሮጣል እንጂ ኣባቱን ኣይቀድምም። [A child can run but never run faster than his son.]

T15) ቈልዓ እንተዓበየስ፡ ዝሓየለ ይመስሎ። [When a child grows up, he thinks he is mightier.]

T16) ቈልዓ እንተፀገበስ፡ ዘይጠሚ ይመስሎ። [When a child is full, he thinks he will not be hungry.]

As indicated in the 13th proverbial expression, a child can be wise. Yet, the proverb reflects that a child is a child; he cannot avoid childish behavior, such as passing urine on the way. Why does such a child stop being wise when it comes to passing urine? What does the proverb want to indicate? As the societal normative practice shows in Tigrai, a wise child is one who diligently pursues his schooling and works hard. Such a child obeys his parents, school teachers, and his elders and makes everyone in the neighborhood happy. As a model, such a child takes note of what is good and what is bad. He observes what is right and what is wrong, and behaves accordingly. Given this, the proverb views a wise child as ceasing to behave prudently when it comes to passing urine. Passing urine in public spaces is wrong. However, the proverb maps this misbehavior to measure a child's maximum level of wisdom. It signifies a child's wisdom as it does not go up to controlling his natural urge to pass urine.

Such negative mapping of a child is also reflected by the 14th - 16th Tigrigna and the 10th Amharic proverbs indicated above. In these proverbs, a child is metaphorically viewed as a limitation. As pointed out in the 14th Tigrigna and the 10th Amharic proverbs, a child cannot run faster [than adults] despite his determination and efforts. The proverbs draw the experience of running as a mapping line. Running is demanding and needs a lot of effort. This being considered, the proverbs view a child as incapable of succeeding without the support of others. They indicate that a child cannot turn out competent and succeed on his own. Similarly, the 15th and the 16th proverbs negatively qualify a child as one who makes a wrong self-assessment. Accordingly, the proverbs respectively view a child as one who does not see how strong he is physically, and as one who has an erroneous view that current satisfaction lasts long. Both proverbs indicate the underlying view that a child is naïve and has limitations in discernment about his self-affairs.

A11) የልጅ ነገር ሁለት ፍሬ፡ ኣንዱ ብስል ኣንዱ ጥሬ። [A child is but two grains, one ripe and the other unripe.]

A12) የልጅ ነገር፡ ጥሬ በገል። [A child is but grains on a shard of clay pot.]

Traditionally, children are considered to have limited capacity in all aspects of life. They are negatively viewed and positioned to have little contribution. As pointed out in the above proverb, their value is

measured against the scale of two grains, one ripe and the other unripe. Or, they are metaphorically mapped with the value of grains on a shard of clay pot. This proverbial expression brings an image of a child who is immature and incapable of assuming responsibilities. It underestimates the role of a child with this negative presumption that can promote a disservice to a growing child.

A13) ልጅ ያባካው ለራት አይበቃ። [The dough mixed and kneaded by a child is not enough for a dinner.]

Baking the Ethiopian injera, a round and flatbread, needs kneading and baking skills. It is traditionally prepared by young adults and adult females. Through practice, girls gain the experience of kneading skills, and measuring the appropriate size of the flour, sourdough, and water to make enough dough for a meal. Mixing sourdough left from previously raised dough with the appropriate amount of flour, women are considered to have the skill to measure the size of the dough and knead teff or sorghum flour by hand in a wooden bowl and leave it for some time to rise. However, as indicated by the proverb, children are considered incapable of preparing enough dough for dinner. By extension, children's work is perceived as inadequate and unsatisfactory. They are metaphorically considered shortsighted and incapable of foreseeing and planning. The view that children have limitations in achieving what they intend is also reflected in the following proverbs:

A14) የልጅ ተሟጋች ጧት ሰማይ ሰማይ፣ ማታ ምድር ምድር ያይ። [A litigant child looks up to the sky in the morning, and looks down at the ground in the evening.]

As stated by the proverb, looking up is considered a surefire sign of confidence. The morning is a metaphorical indication of the beginning. In this regard, the child at the start looks like a surefire winner of a contentious issue. In contrast, the evening is metaphorically considered the final event where the result is to be known. At this time, the child looks down at the ground, which is a sign of failure and sadness. In light of this, the proverb indicates that the child is incapable of winning arguments. Making a wrong self-assessment and imagining that he can argue to win, the child positions himself as a potential winner, only to fail finally. The proverb carries this meaning to indicate that mere self-confidence at the beginning may not guarantee success at the end. Still, it accentuates the limited capacity of children to achieve on their own. The view that a child is a complete dependent is further reflected in the following proverb:

T17) ቈልዓ ብዘይ ወላዲት ገዛ ብዘይ ጉልላት። (A child without a mother is a house without a capital.)

A15) አባት የሌለው ልጅ፣ ሙዝጊያ የሌለው ደጅ። [A child without a father, a house without a door.]

The above Tigrigna proverb imports two important points to give the image of a child. One is the irreplaceable role of a mother to her child, and the other is the role of a capital of a pillar. A circular house whose top (roof) is cone-shaped is common in Tigray. In this kind of house, one principal component is a pillar that stands in the center of the house and supports the wooden ceiling. The topmost part is the capital of a pillar that supports the wooden ceilings. The role of a mother is correspondingly presented with this graceful and prominent element of a house. Like the capital, a mother is considered the crown and the most supportive member. It is believed that a mother, more

often than not, puts the interest of her child above her own. As duly expected, she invests all her days in nurturing and bringing up her child. In this regard, the proverb emphasizes the view that a child is completely dependent on his mother and cannot stand without her support.

Likewise, the above 15th Amharic proverb signifies the indispensable role a father plays for a child. The father's contribution is measured against the value of a door. As displayed in the proverb, a house without a door is insecure, and so is a child without a father. It is vulnerable to theft and burglary. By the same analogy, the child will lack protection and face difficulty, as there will be no father's role to safeguard and nurture the child with due expectations.

Like father, like son; like mother, like daughter.

A16) የፋቂ ልጅ ሰነፍ አንዱን ሳይፍቅ፡ አንዱን ይዘፍቅ። [A son of a fur Skinner is a sluggard; he soaks one without removing the fur from the other.]

Traditionally, it is believed that a father is influential in a family. A son takes after the father's role and character. In much the same manner, the above proverb draws on this belief in analogy and indicates the working behavior of a son of a fur Skinner. In the course of preparing skin for different purposes, such as skin sacks, the fur Skinner is expected to skillfully scrape off any flesh, remove the fur, rinse or soak it in water, stretch it, etc. Conversely, the son of a fur Skinner, as displayed by the proverb, is located as a sluggard who is taken for granted to be disorganized. Such a child is qualified through the image of the father as an example of poor working behavior.

A17) የእቡይ ልጅ ወዳቂ፡ የዘማ ልጅ ሳቂ። [An arrogant man's child is a failure; an adulterer's son easily laughs.]

T18) ወዲ ትዕብተኛ ወዳቂ፡ ወዲ ዓጣሪት ሰላቂ። [An arrogant man's child is a failure; an adulterer's is laughing.]

Commonly, fathers are believed to shape their children in their image. At times, they may also go to the extent of imposing their interests upon their children. If a father is arrogant, as the proverb indicates, he causes his son to fail as he takes after his attributes. Chances are, children try on their father's character traits, take their roles, and acquaint themselves with their father's skills. In this regard, like their father, they may set an obstinate way that never changes and a mindset that disrespects or despises others and belittles useful advice. Equally, an adulterer's son (daughter) is perceived to take on the same loose behavior, one of which is considered laughing loudly. Adulterers are believed not to mind their giggling or cackling as they have a scheme to attract others. Likewise, irrespective of the social norms that rule over loud laughing in public, the children of such a person, as pointed out in both proverbs, may break the social norms and uncommonly break into laughter out loud in public. Such practice is also reflected in the ensuing proverb:

T19) ወዲ ለይባ፡ ንባዕሉውን ለይባ ከይኑዩ ዝረአየካ። [You see the son of a thief as if he were a thief.]

Children who grow up with an immoral father are believed to take on negative role models that put their lives at risk. A thief father sets a bad example for his children and eventually leads them to practice amoral activities and influences society to negatively judge the children. In the same light, the proverb indicates that a thief's child is perceived as a thief. This point is further confirmed in the following proverb:

T20) ወዲ ተወሊዱ እንተዘይኮነ ከም ኣባኡ፣ ጡጥ ኣቕርቡሉ ይፍተል ክምንኡ። [If a son does not take after his father, provide him cotton and let him spin the cotton yarn like his mother.]

Spinning cotton yarn is considered a woman's chore. Traditionally, women take the responsibility of spinning white cotton to make threads that can produce cloth for the husband and other family members. In this case, the proverb views a son who does not take the role of his father —activities in the public sphere as one who is unfit for his father's social position and should take his mother's role — spinning cotton. It views the child in terms of a biased gender perspective.

Children as recipients of attributes from their parents are also described in the ensuing proverbs:

A18) የኣርበኛ ልጅ ይዋጋል፣ የኣሮጌ ልጅ ያወጋል። [A patriot's son fights, a son of an aged talks.]

T21) ወዲ ሃርበኛ ይወግእ፣ ወዲ ኣረጊት የውግዕ። [A patriot's son fights, a son of an aged talks.]

A19) የቀጂ ልጅ፣ ጠጪ። [A child of a drinks attendant drinks too much.]

A20) የስሱ ልጅ ስሱ፣ ሙደቆሻ ሲልስ ተሰበረ ጥርሱ። [A stingy child from a stingy parent; he breaks his teeth when licking the runner stone.]

As described in the 18th Amharic and the 21st Tigrigna proverbs, a patriot's son is thought to take the role and the qualities of his father and may have the will to fight for his country. To earn a patriot's social position, a son willingly sacrifices all that it takes to succeed as a brave, disciplined patriot. In contrast, a son of an aged person invests his time, as the proverb indicates, in talking. The aged are deemed as idle, and accordingly, the son is believed to take after his father.

In the same manner, as is shown in the 19th Amharic proverb, the son of a drink attendant is likely to be exposed to drinks while the attendant fills and serves alcohols such as honey wines, and tela, [a local beer]. The constant exposure of a child to such settings will arouse interest and urge the son to consume alcohol. In this way, the son is believed to end up a heavy consumer of alcohol.

Likewise, the 20th Amharic proverb views that a stingy parent brings up a stingy child. The child will take the character of a stingy parent and be similar to practically exercising the parent's greedy deeds. As an ill-bred child, he resembles the stingy parent when treating himself and others.

Lenient parenting breeds delinquency, which in turn breaks parent's hearts.

As described in the following proverbs, if parents set a bad example or do not discipline their children, it is likely for children to spoil their character traits.

A21) ኣሳዳጊ የበደለው፣ ለክፋት ያደለው። [An ill-bred child unfortunately becomes delinquent.]

A22) የከፋ ልጅ እናት፡ ሁል ጊዜ ታለቅስ። [A delinquent child's mother is always in tears.]

The 21st proverb points out that a child who lacks proper guidance or constructive criticism is likely to be ill-behaved. The negative consequence of lacking in discipline will lead the child to be delinquent. In this regard, parents are considered responsible for disciplining their children all along their childhood. Like the adage: Spare the rod and spoil the child, the proverb indicates that the child, at some point, will let down himself and his parents for his spoiled character. As in the 22nd proverb, the negative consequence will also severely affect the mother. Such a mother will always receive blame that breaks her heart because of her son's wrongful acts.

Bad parenting subjects (step) children to risks and painful experiences.

Conversely, children may suffer from the wrongful actions of their parents. The following proverbs tell the repercussions of a father's unfair act that can seriously affect children.

A23) ኣባት ያጠፋው፡ ልጁን ያላፋው። [A wrongful act committed by the father wears out the son.]

Parents in all walks of life are morally responsible for maintaining their familial well-being. They have to work to ensure smooth interactions among family members and make optimum provisions to meet the needs of the family. The father, akin to the mother, is more responsible for taking care of the family. Even so, as indicated in the 23rd Proverb, a father may neglect his duty and damage the family's well-being. Worse than this, an immoral father can conversely get his son into trouble, as described in the proverb. Because of the father's wrongful actions, the son may be deemed to be worn out going through all the hurdles his father caused and may toil to fix such actions. The issue becomes a formidable hurdle and a weighty burden when it comes to children born out of an unfaithful marriage, or wedlock, as described in the following proverb.

A24) የልጅ ክፉ፡ ዲቃላ። [A bastard is a bad child.]

Though they have nothing to contribute to their situation, such children will be named bastards and pushed away too much from social positions. They face all-time negative discourse attitudes that will cause them to suffer a lifetime. They have to carry the burden of being labeled as illegitimate children. In addition, remarriage can negatively affect children coming from both sides. This is evident in the following proverbs:

T22) ወዳ ብፅጋብ፡ ወዲ ስብኣያ ብጥምየት ቀቲላኛም፡ ንኸልቲኦም ጎዲኣኛም። [Her son is killed by overindulgence, and her stepson by hunger.] excess

T23) ወዲ ሰበይቲኽ፡ ንኣኽ እንታይኽ? [Why do you care for your wife's son [stepson]?]

T24) ወዲ ሰብይቲኽ ንቐደም እኽልኽ ይብልዕ ድሓር ዝብኣ የብልዕ። [Your wife's son first eats your grain and then lets the hyena eat.]

As described in the 22nd Tigrigna proverb, mothers side with their children over their stepchildren. The proverb points out that such mothers overfeed their children and let their stepchildren go hungry.

It criticizes that both deeds are wrong. It instructs parents to put the balancing act. This view is not only for mothers; the 23rd proverb reveals that a father is also uncaring for his stepson. It indicates that such a father is not concerned about the stepson as much as it matters to his son. As with the 23rd proverb, children in the 24th Tigrigna proverb signify a stepson for a husband as a heavy consumer and irresponsible. Such a stepson is believed to carelessly give out the food to others. This suggests the stepson is portrayed as wasteful and careless with household resources, unlike biological children, who are viewed as more responsible.

The haves have more often than not, and the have-nots lose what they have.

Still, children do not only take their parents' roles and character. They not only suffer from their parents' wrongful acts. But they also get access to and favor from their parents' social power and resources as described in the following proverbs:

A25) የሃብታም ልጅ ሲጮወት፣ የድሃ ልጅ ይሞታል። [When the child of the wealthy plays, the child of the poor dies.]

T25) ወዲ ሃፍታም ሰሰነ፣ ወዲ ድኻ ማሰነ/ሰንሰነ። [The son of a wealthy prospers; the son of a poor becomes miserly.]

A26) የነብር ልጅ አይታቀፍ፣ የጮዋ ልጅ አይነቀፍ። [The cub of a tiger is not hugged; the son of the well-mannered is not criticized.]

T26) ወዲ ጮዋ አይነቀፍ፣ ወዲ ነብረ አይሕቁፍ። [The cub of a tiger is not hugged; the son of the well-mannered is not criticized.]

As in the 25th Amharic and the 25th Tigrigna proverbs, the children of the wealthy, unlike the children of the poor, whose lives are miserable, will get all the facilities and meet their needs. They have the opportunity to play and enjoy life. Unlike the children in the family setups of the poor, the children of the wealthy will have economic security and can achieve all desirable goals. They can have everything their needs deserve; unlike the children of the poor, whose lives are miserable. Similarly, as stated by the 26th Amharic and the 26th Tigrigna proverb, children from well-behaved parents will receive a proper upbringing. Such children will not be exposed to censure. They are protected from letdowns and negative remarks. As the proverbs show, they are feared and respected as a cub of a tiger whose protection is surefire secure.

It takes a community to raise children.

Outside of the familial circle, children's care is considered a core value within a neighborhood and community.

T27) ወደደ ክድሕንለይ ወዲ ጎረቤተይ ይድላኑለይ። [Let the son in the neighbor be saved, to save my own.]

T28) ወዲ ሕድርኸ ሓንግሮ፣ ወዲኸ አታትዮ። [Give an entrusted son a shoulder ride and walk your son.]

A good neighborhood is considered a core value to maintain security and peaceful social interaction. For this reason, people in a neighborhood care for each other in the neighborhood. Members work for the common good of the community. One such thing is caring for children. As described in the 27th proverb, people believe that the safety of others is their safety. The security of children in the neighborhood is the security of their children. More weight is given to entrusted children. When children are given to parents to give custody, they are responsible for fulfilling their needs better than they do for their children. The 28th proverb illustrates such circumstances. The proverb instructs the parent in charge to give an entrusted son a shoulder ride, which symbolically signifies that the issue of such a child is a serious matter that needs extra care—a responsibility weightier than one can give to one's child.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the images of children in Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs comparatively. It investigated the selected proverbs and explored the common and distinctive features of children between the two speech communities. Accordingly, the study finds that the proverbial expressions in both speech communities describe physical punishment as an appropriate corrective measure to discipline children. These proverbs take the assumption that the authoritarian approach is the right way to maintain children's good behavior and obedience.

In light of this, the cultural discourse fosters control and power over children and indicates that children can be easily disciplined at an early age because they are considered malleable. Similarly, Olajimbiti and Adesina (2021) indicate that children are considered flexible and can be effortlessly affected and managed by grown-ups. Conversely, if they are not disciplined, they are believed to turn out delinquent and can bring damaging effects to their parents. Accordingly, setting a limit for children is reflected as a solution.

Even so, the proverbs in both speech communities warn that mistreating children has a negative consequence. In the course of aging, the physical power holders will lose their position, and the growing children will take them over. In this light, the proverbs warn that those who are in power should not mistreat lest they receive mistreatment later.

Instead of mistreatment, the proverbs indicate that children deserve love, as children are pure and capable of responding to love with reciprocity. Parents are believed to render too much love for their children. In light of this, these proverbs reinforce the view that children should be cared for and nurtured with love. Consistent with this, Arega (2017) finds that children in Wolaita proverbs are considered lovable and sweet like honey, and should be nourished and nurtured. Mamatova (2021) similarly indicates that children are lovable as sweet in English, and sweet and honey in Uzbek proverbs.

In addition, both Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs state that children are viewed as incapable of succeeding without the help of others, especially without a parent. They point out that children are positioned as naïve, shortsighted, and incapable of foreseeing and devising a plan. They underestimate

the role of children with this negative presumption that can promote a disservice to growing children. Likewise, Olajimbiti and Adesina (2021) find that children are considered immature, naïve, and inexperienced in settling their matters. In the same vein, Dogbey and Sapaty (2019) find out that children, though they are considered an indispensable part of grown-ups in society, are low-grade, unformed, reliant, feeble, and shy. Similarly, Arega (2017) points out that children are deemed as unsatisfactory, incompetent, and uncaring whose work never achieves success. Even so, when children get maturity later, they can become a sign of life continuity, more knowledgeable, and better positioned than their fathers. Akin to this, Yakub (2022) observes that children show a significant extent of aptitude, though they could at times act as uninformed and innocent.

Still, both the Amharic and the Tigrigna proverbs state the belief that children resemble their parents, particularly their father, in some ways. They indicate that children, especially sons, take the personality, skills, and manners of their parents and act in light of their parent's actions. They are likely to absorb their opinions and attitudes that shape them in like manner. In line with this, Olajimbiti and Adesina (2021) find that children are the result of their upbringing. They resemble, in traits and activities, their fathers and mothers, or other caregivers.

As children imitate their parent's qualities, they also obtain opportunities that are passed down from them. Proverbs from both speech communities indicate that children from well-to-do parents can have enough access to meet their needs and satisfy their appetites. Equally, Mamatova (2021) discovers that children can receive protection through their father's position. Conversely, the Amharic and the Tigrigna proverbs indicate that children from the poor are subject to a miserable life.

As described in the Amharic proverbs, children who grow up under permissive parenting are likely to turn out delinquent. As a result of children's delinquency, parents, especially mothers, will face emotionally damaging consequences, and children themselves can be exposed to worse situations that can put their lives at risk. In the same way, bad parenting is likely to set a bad example for children and cause children to suffer from the repercussions. In line with this, Arega (2017) corroborates that children could cause parents to face difficulties. If left without their father, they could lack instruction and may fall into indecency and face challenges.

Furthermore, as pointed out by Tigrigna proverbs, children and women alike should be physically punished and disciplined when misbehaving. These cultural discursive events foster control and power over a child and a woman. They perpetuate a negative view that children and women alike cannot manage their dispositions. The proverbs view a son who does not carry out activities in light of his father as unfit for his father's social position and should take his mother's role. Also, the proverbs signify that stepchildren are negatively treated and judged by their stepfathers or stepmothers. Unlike in the Tigrigna proverbs, in the Amharic, children born out of wedlock are deemed to be bad children.

Lastly, the Tigrigna proverbs instruct a parent in charge of giving an entrusted child a special favor—a shoulder ride, which symbolically signifies that such a child deserves special care and attention. What is more, members of a community are considered collectively responsible in the Tigrigna proverb to

bring up children. It is believed that mentoring and disciplining children come from every member of a community. Unlike this, Arega (2017) reflects that their own children are favored over the children of other people.

CONCLUSION

This study explores children's representation in Amharic and Tigrigna proverbs. By looking into these proverbs, this study has attempted to lay bare the underlying views, values, and systems of ideas that shape the conception of children. Within the continuum of age, children are portrayed as having little wisdom that does not go far, and their perspectives are overlooked. Children are considered malleable and need the support of others. However, negligent parenting leads them to be delinquent and causes parents to face emotionally damaging consequences, and children to put their lives at risk. Based on this view, physical punishment is taken as an early means of disciplining children. Even so, if not from a disciplining perspective, mistreating is indicated to have a negative consequence later.

Furthermore, children are regarded as pure and honest to welcome those who treat them in a positive light. Still, they are believed to look like their parents, particularly their father; they take after their characters, skills, and actions. Also, children's living conditions depend on their parents' economic and social position. Those from the haves will have, and those from the have-nots will receive nothing.

Still, children are affected by tendentious gender views. Children and women alike are viewed as incapable of managing their dispositions. Also, children should take after their parents' traits based on their gender category: like father, like son, and like mother, like daughter. Worse than this, stepchildren are negatively treated and judged by their stepfathers or stepmothers. Children born out of wedlock are deemed to be bad children.

Thus, the study suggests that curriculum designers and authors should bring up positive views that can be integrated into school textbooks and help undermine the negative views that can affect children and promote the positive ones. Additionally, media outlets, policymakers, NGOs, associations, and advocacy groups should promote positive views of children and rectify the damaging negative views that do a disservice to children. In light of this, other researchers can use this research to look into public views of children.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Ethical approval is not applicable to this manuscript.

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Contribution of Authorship

Both authors contribute the same to the introduction, framework, methods, analysis, discussion, and conclusion. On the data collection and selecting the key informants to put context and meaning, Tesfaye works on the Tigrigna part, and Derib on the Amharic.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the author.

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The authors declare that no AI-assisted technologies were used during any stage in the preparation of this article.

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