

English translation:

Another major tradition in Ethiopia is the way that elders are addressed. For example, in speech, if someone is older, the speaker uses special language to say hello to them or to address them. For instance, if I was to call my grandfather, I would refer to him as though he were more than one person – it we try to compare it to English. For example, to say “my grandfather”, I would say “they” and not “he.” If we say this in English, for example, instead of “he is my grandfather” I would say “they are my grandfather”. This construction is also found in Spanish. It’s like saying “*ustedes*” instead of “*usted*.”

There are other things that one does for someone older than they are. If a significantly older person walks into a house or walks into a room, everyone stands up for them. This is to show them respect. Another thing is that when people are eating together, the food is served to the elders first, then to the younger people. If an older person, like my grandfather were sitting down and they wanted something, and if there were kids in the room, then he wouldn’t go get whatever it was he wanted, he would ask them to do it. This shows the belief that younger children need to be obedient. In my case, I have younger sisters, and if we were I Ethiopia – this would never work in America – but if we were in Ethiopia, as their elder, if I wanted something, I would order them around and tell them to get me water or something. And they would obey me and go get the water because I’m older than them. This has negative and positive effects on society. It’s a good thing that people have a deep respect for their elders. But on the other side, if my grandfather and I were discussing something, and he said something is right that I didn’t agree with, I can’t really disagree outright. There’s a mindset that he must be right because he is older. And this sort of thing isn’t always good.

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