

# Evaluating the Capabilities of Large Language Models for Multi-label Emotion Understanding

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## Abstract

Large Language Models (LLMs) show promising learning and reasoning abilities. Compared to other NLP tasks, multilingual and multi-label emotion evaluation tasks are under-explored in LLMs. In this paper, we present **EthioEmo**, a multi-label emotion classification dataset for four Ethiopian languages, namely, Amharic (amh), Afan Oromo (orm), Somali (som), and Tigrinya (tir). We perform extensive experiments with an additional English multi-label emotion dataset from SemEval 2018 Task 1. Our evaluation includes encoder-only, encoder-decoder, and decoder-only language models. We compare zero and few-shot approaches of LLMs to fine-tuning smaller language models. The results show that accurate multi-label emotion classification is still insufficient even for high-resource languages such as English, and there is a large gap between the performance of high-resource and low-resource languages. The results also show varying performance levels depending on the language and model type. **EthioEmo** is available publicly<sup>1</sup> to further improve the understanding of emotions in language models and how people convey emotions through various languages.

## 1 Introduction

In today’s digital age, individuals freely express their feelings, arguments, opinions, and attitudes on websites, micro-blogs, and social media platforms. This situation has increased interest in extracting user sentiments and emotions towards events for various purposes such as decision-making, product analysis, customer feedback analysis, political promotions, marketing research, and social media monitoring (Kusal et al., 2022).

Emotion classification is one of the most challenging NLP tasks, where a given text is assigned

to the most appropriate emotion(s) that best reflect(s) the author’s mental state (Tao and Fang, 2020). It poses more challenges than similar NLP tasks, such as sentiment analysis. The challenges of emotion classification as a task worth exploring include many classes, the possibility of a single text expressing multiple emotions, and the cultural and language differences inherent in interpreting or transferring emotions (Kusal et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024b).

Multi-label Emotion Classification (MLEC) considers all emotions expressed in a text, which is a more challenging but essential NLP task, as a text can express multiple emotions simultaneously (Ameer et al., 2020; Deng and Ren, 2020). Multi-label classification enables an instance to have any combination (none, one, some, or all) of labels from a given set of emotions.

This work intends to create and evaluate a multi-label text emotion dataset for the following Ethiopian languages: Amharic (amh), Afan Oromo (orm), Somali (som), and Tigrinya (tir), with an available English dataset for evaluation. As it makes the task more intricate and reflects the complexity often found in real-world data (Liu et al., 2023), we follow the multi-label emotion classification approach.

The main contributions are summarized as:

1. We introduce EthioEmo, a new multi-label emotion benchmark dataset for four Ethiopian languages.
2. We explore popular Afri-centric encoder-only models that include most of our target languages in the pre-training phase and show fine-tuning performance.
3. We evaluate the effectiveness of popular encoder-decoder and decoder-only models for multi-label emotion classification and examine the role of few-shots in improving the task.
4. We present detailed results and error analyses

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<sup>1</sup><https://github.com/Tadesse-Destaw/EthioEmo>

across languages, data sources, LLMs, and the effects of the translation test set.

## 2 Related Work

Emotion recognition involves identifying an underlying emotional state of individuals based on their verbal and nonverbal cues, including text, facial expressions, body language, and speech (Dadebayev et al., 2022; A.V. et al., 2024). LLMs are showing promising results for the downstream NLP tasks. Based on the training setup, the model architecture, and the use cases, LLMs can be broadly classified into encoder-only, encoder-decoder, and decoder-only types. In the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the release of decoder-only LLMs at an industry scale, and extensively used for sentiment analysis (Zhong et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024b). We explore emotion classification works in the following categories.

**LLMs for text emotion classification:** Sabour et al. (2024) proposed EmoBench to evaluate the emotional cause recognition of LLMs in English and Chinese. Liu et al. (2024) proposed EmoLLMs by fine-tuning various open-sourced LLMs for affect analysis and emotion prediction. However, these works are limited to predicting a single emotion class and lack content from languages other than English. Cageggi et al. (2023) fine-tune MT5 and evaluate FLAN and ChatGPT using few-shot prompting approaches for multi-label emotion prediction. Apart from this, the performance of other LLMs has not been assessed for multi-label emotion prediction.

**Multi-label emotion classification (MLEC):** To predict all possible emotions from a text, the following popular datasets were compiled: GoEmotions Demszky et al. (2020), Balanced Multi-Label Emotional Tweets (BMET) Huang et al. (2021), Romanian emotion dataset (REDv2) Ciobotaru et al. (2022), Multilingual Emotion Prediction (XLM-EMO) Bianchi et al. (2022), WASSA2023 Shared-Task 2 Ameer et al. (2023), and SemEval-2024 Task 3 (Wang et al., 2024a). Nowadays, MLEC tasks also include the corresponding intensity of each identified emotion, such as SemEval-2018 task 1 (Mohammad et al., 2018), multimodal multi-label emotion, intensity, and sentiment dialogue dataset (MEISD) (Firdaus et al., 2020), and EmoIn-Hindi (Singh et al., 2022).

**Emotion for Ethiopian languages:** Emotion detection in the context of Africa generally, for

Ethiopian languages specifically, has not been studied yet, except for a few sentiment analysis (negative, positive, neutral) tasks (Yimam et al., 2020; Tela et al., 2020; Muhammad et al., 2023).

**Limitations of existing emotion works:** Although there have been several efforts in constructing benchmark datasets and evaluations for text emotion, the existing efforts have the following shortcomings.

- The emotion research is mainly focused on English or a few other high-resource languages (Singh et al., 2022).
- Textual datasets are mostly taken from a single source, such as either news headline (Straparava and Mihalcea, 2007), YouTube comments (Sarakit et al., 2015), Twitter (X) tweets (Mohammad et al., 2018), SMS (Ameer et al., 2023), or Facebook comments (Laabar and Zaghoulani, 2024). We might not get all basic emotions from a single data source, and it is hard to generalize about emotion in this case.
- The evaluation experiments are focused on classical machine learning and deep learning approaches (Maruf et al., 2024), the current state-of-the-art LLMs' multi-label and multi-lingual emotional understandings are under-explored.

Towards this end, we create a multi-label EthioEmo dataset, which is constructed from various sources (news headlines, Twitter (X) posts, YouTube comments, and Facebook post comments), and each instance is annotated with one or more emotion classes. We also conduct rigorous evaluation experiments that classify emotions in multi-label settings using state-of-the-art encoder-only, encoder-decoder, and open-sourced decoder-only LLMs.

## 3 EthioEmo Dataset Construction

This section describes the construction of the EthioEmo dataset in detail. The driving force behind creating this dataset is the lack of an available emotion dataset in Ethiopian/African languages. Evaluating LLMs in multi-lingual and multi-label emotion understanding is another under-explored area. Moreover, emotion is language, culture, and other circumstances dependent (Sailunaz et al., 2018). EthioEmo is a new multi-label emotion dataset for four Ethiopian languages, two languages written in Ethiopic Ge'ez (gez) script (amh and tir) and two languages in Latin script (orm and

som). We used Ekman’s (Ekman, 1992) six basic emotion labels (anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise) plus neutral class.

### 3.1 Lexicon Collections

Lexicon entries are emotion keywords that are used to filter instances from millions of collected corpus for annotation. Based on our previous lexicon creation experiences within the Ethiopian context for sentiment analysis (Yimam et al., 2020) and hate speech (Ayele et al., 2023), we create a list of lexicon entries for each emotion class and language to ensure that each emotion class dataset is balanced and comprehensive. For example, lexicon entries of Joy emotion are “happy,” “excited,” and “thanks” in English. This is a step to balance the dataset by taking equal proportions from each emotion class for annotation. The Lexicon entries are adapted from an English source, NRC EmoLex (Mohammad and Turney (2013), with additional manually created emotion keywords. We obtain the emotion lexicon entries in the following ways:

- Translate the English NRC EmoLex (Mohammad and Turney, 2013) lexicon into Ethiopian languages with the help of Google Translate and native speaker validations (incorrect translations are discarded).
- Collect additional emotion lexicon entries using nearest neighbors of the emotion lexicon entries from available Word2Vec and FastText word embedding models that include our target Ethiopian languages (Yimam et al., 2021; Belay et al., 2021).
- We manually add the remaining basic emotion lexicon for each language and emotion class.

We used 293 amh, 275 orm, 283 som, and 280 tir emotion query entries for six basic emotion classes. We will open-source these lexicons along with the dataset.

### 3.2 Data Collection

The datasets have been collected from various sources such as news portals, X/formerly Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook.

The sources are selected since they have been common data sources for previous emotion classification works and contain rich content for Ethiopian languages (Mohammad et al., 2018; Laabar and Zaghouani, 2024). These diverse sources are selected to rate the emotions that persist within texts across the sources. The statistics of the data and

Data sources	amh	orm	som	tir
Twitter (X)	2000	2700	2400	3100
Facebook	1500	600	900	600
YouTube	2000	2000	2000	2000
News headline	500	500	500	500
<b>Total</b>	<b>6000</b>	<b>5800</b>	<b>5800</b>	<b>6200</b>

Table 1: Data sources and sample amount taken from each source: Twitter (X) posts, Facebook post comments, YouTube video comments, and news headlines.

the sources are presented in Table 1. As part of the data preprocessing technique, language detection is applied using GeezSwitch (Gaim et al., 2022) for Ge’ez scripts and pylcd3<sup>2</sup> for Latin scripts languages. We masked user names and URLs to prevent data privacy and confidentiality. For annotation, we select text length with a minimum of 15 characters and a maximum length of a tweet (280 characters).

Regarding the period of the collected data, for Facebook, comments from posts between September and December 2023 were extracted as the data was collected at this time using the comment scraper tool<sup>3</sup>. For news headlines, we pulled all available BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/x>, where x is the name of the language) news headlines using Python script<sup>4</sup>. For Twitter (X), we used data scraped from 2014 to 2022 using Twitter API for academic research. For YouTube, we did not consider time span; we collected comments under the playlist/video with the most comments for the specific language using YouTube API. We applied text preprocessing such as language detection, username, URL anonymization, and over-repeated character normalization.

### 3.3 Data Annotation

For the data annotation, we employed native speakers for each language. Annotators were provided annotation guidelines with text examples and emotion label(s), hands-on practical training, and pilot tests before the main annotation. We compensated annotators with a payment of roughly \$6 per hour on average, nearly the same as the hourly wage of Master’s degree holders in Ethiopia. The detailed backgrounds of the annotators are shown in Appendix B.

We customize the POrtable Text Annotation

<sup>2</sup><https://pypi.org/project/pylcd3/>

<sup>3</sup><https://exportcomments.com/>

<sup>4</sup>[https://github.com/keleog/bbc\\_pidgin\\_scraper](https://github.com/keleog/bbc_pidgin_scraper)

TOol (POTATO) (Pei et al., 2022) for our in-house annotation platform. A minimum of three annotators annotated each instance. The data is annotated in multiple batches by assessing the data quality and annotators’ performance, including control questions and agreements in each batch. Disagreed instances were re-annotated by new annotators, and if no agreement was reached again, the instances were excluded from the dataset. The final gold label was determined based on agreement by at least two annotators for each emotion class.

### 3.4 Inter-Annotator Agreement (IAA)

The most common IAA measurements, such as Cohen’s kappa (Cohen, 1960), Fleiss’ kappa (Fleiss, 1971), Krippendorff’s alpha (Krippendorff, 2011), and bootstrapping method (Marchal et al., 2022) do not support multi-label with multiple annotators at the same time. We adopted a multi-label agreement (MLA) method proposed by Li et al. (2023) to obtain the multi-label agreement among all annotators. We also computed free marginal Randolph’s Kappa scores (Randolph, 2005), a metric well-suited for measuring inter-annotator agreement in tasks involving multiple annotators.

Language	MLA	Cohen’s K.	Free M.
Amharic	0.50	0.52	0.65
Afan Oromo	0.64	0.66	0.76
Somali	0.51	0.50	0.66
Tigrinya	0.53	0.57	0.68

Table 2: IAA of the EthioEmo Dataset. Multi-label Agreement (MLA) is a direct agreement between the multi-label classes and all annotators. Cohen’s Kappa is a pairwise agreement between two annotators, and the result is an average pair-wise of the three annotators. Free Margin (Free M.) is calculated as a pairwise agreement between two emotion classes and takes an average.

According to the work of Sánchez-Velázquez and Sierra (2016), the IAA results in Table 2 show moderate and above agreement as Cohen’s Kappa score ranges from 0.41-0.60 is moderate. For further analysis of IAA, we observe Cohen’s kappa agreement for four main emotion classes (Anger, Disgust, Sadness, and Joy), and the results are Amharic: 0.74, Afan Oromo: 0.81, Somali: 0.75, and Tigrinya: 0.77, showing significantly higher scores than the scores obtained from the total of seven classes. This shows that IAA scores vary with the number of classes, as more classes gener-

ally increase the complexity of annotation, often lowering agreement scores (Stefanovitch and Piskorski, 2023). Based on Cohen’s Kappa value, our IAA result is also comparable with related works, as the GoEmotion (Demszky et al., 2020) dataset IAA is 0.29 for 27 emotion classes. The highest agreement scores are reported for Afan Oromo. We manually go through the annotator-level data and observe that most of the annotators selected single emotions during the annotation, the reason for Afan Oromo having a better agreement score. This shows that the number of annotated labels by each annotator is inversely proportional to the agreement score. The overall IAA agreement score shows multi-label emotion task difficulty, a condition where an instance can have none, one, two, or all emotion classes with multiple annotators.

## 4 Evaluation Settings

Training and testing LLMs such as GPT-4 (OpenAI et al., 2024), Mixtral 8x22B (Jiang et al., 2024), PaLM-340B (Anil et al., 2023), and LLaMA-405B (Dubey et al., 2024) are often not feasible for academic researchers and companies with limited resources. As a result, there has been a shift towards smaller language models (Chen and Varoquaux, 2024). Our experiment includes pre-trained encoder-only, encoder-decoder, and medium-size parameter decoder-only models for scientific reproducibility. We fine-tune encoder-only models using the EthioEmo training dataset and evaluate zero-shot and in-context learning predictions with LLMs. The statistical distribution of the EthioEmo and English datasets is shown in Table 3.

Language	Train	Test	Dev	Total
Amharic	2,614	1,309	437	4,360
Afan Oromo	2,598	1,300	435	4,333
Somali	2,087	1,045	349	3,481
Tigrinya	2,865	1,435	479	4,779
English	6,327	1,232	845	8,404

Table 3: Statistics of train, test, and dev sets for EthioEmo along with SemEval-2018 Task 1 English dataset. We randomly stratify to split the EthioEmo dataset into train (60%), dev (10%), and test (30%) sets. These statistics are without the Neutral class as our overall experiments do not include Neutral class in the evaluation. Final annotated dataset statistics with no emotion or Neutral class are Amharic: 5,891, Afan Oromo: 5,690, Somali: 5,631, and Tigrinya: 6,109, a total of 23,321 instances were annotated.

#### 4.1 Afri-centric Encoder-only Models

Considerable efforts have been dedicated to creating multilingual BERT-based encoder-only models for African languages. We select encoder-only models based on popularity, and models include at least two languages from our target languages.

We make zero-shot and fine-tuning evaluations using the following Afri-centric pre-trained language models. **AfriBERTa** (Ogueji et al., 2021) pre-trained on 11 African languages. It includes our four target languages. **AfroLM** (Dossou et al., 2022): a multilingual model pre-trained on 23 African languages, including amh and orm from Ethiopian languages. **AfroXLMR** (Adelani et al., 2024a): adaptation of XLM-R-large model (Conneau et al., 2020) (has two versions: 61 and 76 languages) for African languages including the four Ethiopian languages and high-resource languages (English, French, Chinese, and Arabic). **EthioLLM** (Tonja et al., 2024): multilingual models for five Ethiopian languages (amh, gez, orm, som, and tir) and English.

#### 4.2 Open Source Decoder-only Models

From the family of decoder-only LLMs, we work with instruction-tuned versions of popular open-source models. Namely, Llama-2-7b (Touvron et al., 2023), Llama-3-8B (Meta, 2024), Llama-3.1-8B (Dubey et al., 2024), Gemma-1.1-7b (Gemma et al., 2024), and Gemma-2b (Gemma et al., 2024). From encoder-decoder, we evaluate Aya-101 (Üstün et al., 2024) — fine-tuned from mT5 (Xue et al., 2021). It is a multilingual 13B parameter model that follows instructions in 101 languages, including amh and som. We choose these models based on their popularity in the open-source community and serve as a baseline for similar NLP task evaluation. From closed-source LLMs, we include GPT-4o-mini in our evaluation as it is cost-efficient and easy to reproduce (OpenAI, 2024). We used English-based prompts for evaluating LLMs following the work by Zhang et al. (2024a); Agarwal et al. (2024) as English prompts work better than in-language prompts.

#### 4.3 Translate Test Experiments

Following the work by Etxaniz et al. (2023), one approach to improve the performance of multilingual language models is to translate the data to English using existing machine translation systems. Our approach involves translating the EthioEmo test

dataset to English to determine if English-centric models can solve the task efficiently. For the translation, we used the NLLB-200-3.3B multilingual machine translation model (Team et al., 2022).

#### 4.4 In Context Learning (ICL)

One approach to improve the performance of LLMs is to show them examples of the task. Following the work of Zhang et al. (2024a); Agarwal et al. (2024), we use in-context learning to teach the models about the task without parameter updates by showing them input and output examples. We work with 2, 4, 6, and 8 demonstrations in our experiment and compare them with zero-shot experiments. We increase the number of contexts (k shots) by two to show the slightly increasing effects of examples. For our k-shot experiments, we applied randomly selected in-language examples from the dev set, which remained consistent across models. We used log likelihood-based evaluations using lm-evaluation-harness<sup>5</sup> by Gao et al. (2023) for zero-shot and few-shot LLMs experiments.

### 5 Results

#### 5.1 Fine-tuned Encoder-only Models

Results of fine-tuned encoder-only models are shown in Table 4. Based on the results, AfroXLMR-76L outperforms for amh and orm with a 69.9% and 72.6% F1 score, respectively, as both languages are included in the pre-training. Examining the overall encoder-only results, AfroXLMR families perform better for the target languages. We observe that languages included in the pertaining phase perform better. Although encoder-only models demand more training data and computational resources, they still have significant room for improvement in tackling multi-label emotion classification tasks. **Pre-training is important for multi-label emotion classification task.** This is evidenced by the F1-scores we present, where the highest score is achieved by the orm language from AfroXLMR-76L with a score of 72.6%.

#### 5.2 Zero-shot Experiments

We conduct a zero-shot evaluation and make the following observations, as summarized in Table 5.

**Encoder-only models still have an advantage over the recently popular open-source decoder-only models for low-resource languages.** We

<sup>5</sup><https://github.com/EleutherAI/lm-evaluation-harness>

Model name	amh	orm	som	tir
<i>Fine-tuned encoder-only models</i>				
EthioLLM-small	65.3	69.4	47.1	55.7
EthioLLM-large	64.2	67.4	38.0	56.7
AfroXLMR-61L	68.3	66.5	<b>64.2</b>	<b>62.4</b>
AfroXLMR-76L	<b>69.9</b>	<b>72.6</b>	62.6	58.1
AfroLM-active-1	65.4	67.7	52.0	53.2
AfriBERTa-large	51.6	71.4	63.2	60.7

Table 4: Weighted-averaged F1-score results from fine-tuned pre-trained language models. The light-gray shows the model does not include the languages in the pre-training.

compare zero-shot results of LLMs with zero-shot and fine-tuned encoder-only models, and LLMs under-perform compared to encoder-only models. This is likely due to their initial multilingual setup of encoder-only models for low-resource languages. Cohere-aya-101 outperforms all decoder-only models with an average score of 46.12% as it is designed for multilingual and officially includes amh and som languages. Looking at the target languages, the closest performance we see between encoder-only and encoder-decoder models is in the amh language, with a score difference of 8.9% between AfroLM and Cohere-aya-101. For the encoder-only model, we can see AfroXLMR-76L takes the lead, which explains its top performance in the fine-tuning experiment. From zero-shot evaluations, Cohere-aya-101 consistently outperforms in all languages except orm. In general, the result shows how fine-tuning smaller and more efficient pre-trained language models can still outperform zero-shot performances of LLMs, which have room for improvement in multi-label emotion classification. Considerably, zero-shot or in-context learning of LLMs is not comparable with the BERT family’s pre-trained model that has already seen the language in the pre-training phase. However, we compare only according to the resources that LLMs consume to fine-tune, and we expected LLMs to perform better based on their size.

### 5.3 Translate Test Experiments

**The models struggle to classify multi-label emotions even after translating the test set to English.** We conduct an experiment using the translation of the test set to investigate the reasons for poor performance in decoder-only models, as discussed in Section 4.3. Our findings reveal that even after

the test set is translated into English, these models still struggle to identify emotions accurately compared to English. In particular, Cohere-aya-101 performs poorly in all EthioEmo translation test set evaluations compared to a near similar size LLaMA-3-8B-Instruct model. This might be due to either the limitations of the machine translation system employed (we do not have ground truth for further translation quality checking) or the inherent complexities of the emotion task that may not carry the same meaning across languages in the translation.

### 5.4 In-Context Learning Results

We do in-context learning experiments because fine-tuning LLMs can incur enormous computing costs. This approach helps improve the model’s understanding ability without any parameter update.

**All models benefit from two-shot examples compared to zero-shot tests.** Based on the results shown in Figure 1, all our models benefit from two-shot contexts. Looking at the Ethiopian languages, we can see that they all improved their scores by showing two examples compared to zero-shot tests. However, this improvement is not shown in Gemma-1.1-7b-it, which already had good scores in the zero-shot experiment across languages. Among target languages, orm gains the highest scores in the zero-shot experiment with Gemma-1.1-7b-it model. The same pattern does not apply to som — it uses Latin script as orm, which requires further investigation. For English, Gemma-1.1-7b-it at four-shots has a better comparable result to the zero-shot.

**Examining the impact of increasing the number of shots by two examples is not guaranteed to improve performance.** We observed that the improvement was inconsistent and could not be guaranteed. However, there are clear performance gains from 0 to 2 shots, 2 to 6, 2 to 8, and 4 to 8 shots. This is particularly evident in all languages. The encoder-decoder Cohere-aya-101 model has a comparable best result for low-resource languages to the commercial GPT-4o-mini. **Encoder-decoder Cohere-aya-101 model outperforms the open-source LLMs.** The exception for the lowest performance for tir is that it is not included in the pre-training of the Cohere-aya-101 model. Another observation is that improvements in results are associated with the sizes of the models’ size or parameters, such as from Gemma-2b-it to Gemma-1.1-7b and from LLaMA-2-7B to LLaMA-3-8B.

Pre-trained LMs	amh	orm	som	tir	eng	Average
<i>Zero shot for encoder-only</i>						
EthioLLM-small	31.72	12.88	30.88	32.09	37.76	29.07
EthioLLM-large	14.38	32.35	10.53	10.94	37.87	21.21
AfroXLMR-61L	22.05	39.68	21.12	22.30	43.00	29.63
AfroXLMR-76L	28.62	35.81	14.86	15.94	24.38	23.92
AfroLM-active-l	39.91	25.60	15.92	<b>35.63</b>	33.93	30.20
AfriBERTa-large	25.67	15.57	19.98	35.39	26.38	24.60
<i>Zero shot for decoder-only</i>						
Gemma-2b-it	10.22	7.81	14.26	7.87	46.4	17.37
Gemma-1.1-7b-it	27.94	34.87	25.87	19.55	65.73	34.79
LLaMA-2-7b-chat-hf	17.35	19.24	22.05	12.97	54.07	25.14
LLaMA-3-8B-Instruct	28.18	26.91	29.29	19.73	66.74	34.17
Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct	20.58	24.10	22.07	10.28	51.17	25.25
Cohere-aya-101	48.80	33.65	43.00	38.97	66.20	46.12
<i>Zero shot for closed models</i>						
GPT-4o-mini	53.86	47.84	52.04	35.47	70.98	52.04
<i>Zero shot for decoder-only translated to English</i>						
Gemma-2b-it	30.91	28.66	31.43	22.54		28.39
Gemma-1.1-7b-it	45.05	47.86	44.72	35.35		43.25
LLaMA-2-7b-chat-hf	35.48	34.27	34.58	25.19		32.38
LLaMA-3-8B-Instruct	48.26	48.55	46.46	40.93		46.06
Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct	28.59	34.43	32.28	21.66		29.24
Cohere-aya-101	44.95	43.39	41.52	31.63		40.37
<i>Translated zero shot for closed models</i>						
GPT-4o-mini	55.89	51.59	51.14	47.60		51.56

Table 5: Zero-shot experiment results from encoder-only and decoder-only models (weighted-averaged F1-score) across languages. The translated test is by translating EthioEmo test set to English. The light-gray background indicates AfroLM does not include the languages in the pre-training.

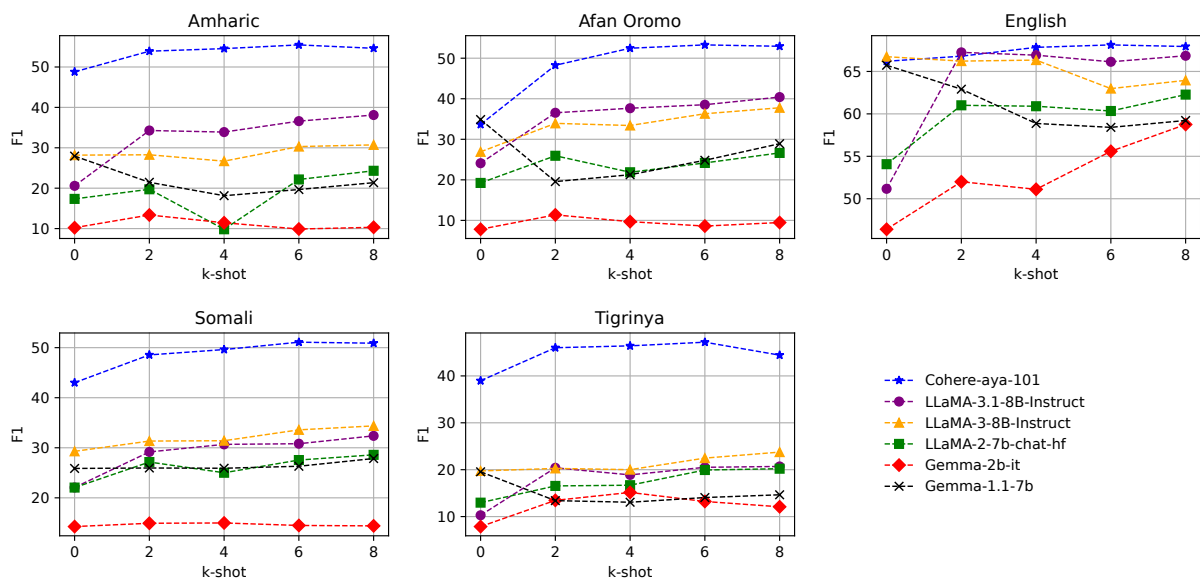


Figure 1: In-context learning (ICL) experiments with k-shots and languages.

## 5.5 Prompt Sensitivity Experiment

**Role-based prompt gained more results from LLMs.** A drawback of the prompting evaluation is the model sensitivity to prompts, where slight changes in instruction can lead to large differences in performance (Sun et al., 2023). To handle this, we use the following three prompts: (1) **generic**: a prompt which does not give information about the task, used in (Liu et al., 2024); (2) **task-based**: describes the given task (Edwards and Camacho-Collados, 2024); (3) **role-based**: a new prompt which gives more information, including "You are a helpful AI assistant that can identify emotions from text". All prompting results presented in this paper are averages of the three prompts. For reproducibility of the experiment, the prompts are shown in Appendix 2, and the results of each prompt are presented in Appendix G.3.

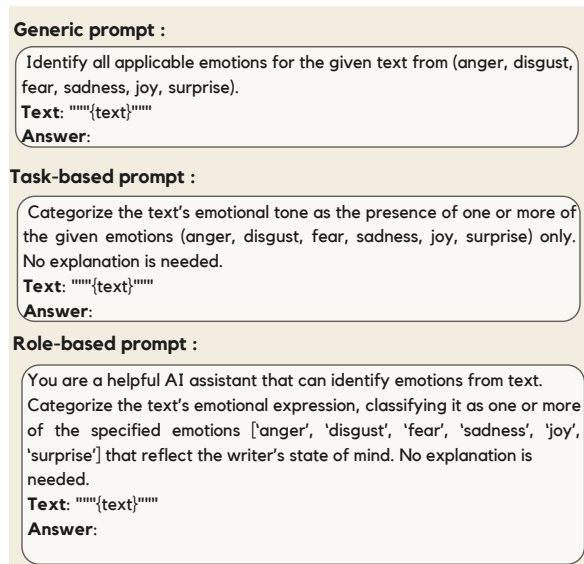


Figure 2: The three prompts used for decoder-only zero-shot and in-context learning experiments

## 6 Error Analysis and Discussion

**Task difficulty:** Our analysis shows that the task is not easily solvable by any of the methods. This shows the significance of this task in evaluating the existing models and observing that multi-label emotion classification needs more exploration, even for high-resource languages such as English. Some of the difficulties include 1) inability to know the exact feelings of the writers in sarcastic texts — needs context, and 2) ambiguity between some emotion classes such as Anger and Disgust (for example, in 61 instance annotations, Anger and Disgust ap-

pear together from 85 disagreed amh instances). The fact that the task is difficult also means a great deal of work to advance further research in emotion detection and analysis, which shows that EthioEmo dataset is a useful contribution to evaluating the upcoming advanced models.

**Data sources from news headlines mostly exhibit none of the six basic emotion classes, while other sources are better for the basic emotions.** We visualize the statistics of emotion distributions across languages and data sources are shown in Appendix F; instances sourced from news headlines are almost Neutral - do not have any of the basic emotions. Emotion classes such as Anger, Disgust, and Joy are shared on Facebook comments and Twitter (X) posts. YouTube comments include all basic emotions — a better source for Ethiopian languages' emotion data that has the rare Surprise emotion class. The statistics of emotion distributions across languages and data sources are shown in Appendix F.

**Challenges in emotion annotation :** Obtaining consistent annotations for an NLP dataset, especially for emotion, is challenging. This is due to several reasons, including 1) difficulty in knowing the exact feeling of the writers in sarcastic texts, 2) differences in human experience that impact how they perceive emotion in text, 3) sometimes annotators depend only on emotion keywords present in the text during annotation, 4) ambiguity between some emotion classes such as *Anger* and *Disgust*, and 5) reports of third person sayings as the writer's emotion are some of the challenges encountered during the annotation.

**Experiment error analysis:** Regarding the dataset emotion distribution, the dataset has more Anger and Disgust. Firstly, this is common also in other emotion datasets (Mohammad et al., 2018; Demszky et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2024a). Secondly, one reason is because of the conflict situations (in the year 2023) in some parts of Ethiopia and in the global context, such as the Hamas-Israel and Russia-Ukraine wars.

We go through the predicted test file from the best-performing encoder-only model, AfroXMLR-76L, with the help of experts from each language. The following are the most common cases of the incorrect prediction of emotions. 1) While the gold labels of an instance have more than one emotion, the models predict a single emotion label and vice versa — a common issue in a multi-label classifi-



cation problem. 2) The model classifies based on some emotion keyword/emojis in the text, not the whole context. **This shows that text with emojis is straightforward for the models to predict emotions** and is aligned with the work of [Lieg and Furtner \(2024\)](#). 3) The model fails due to incomplete text and grammatical errors. This is mainly due to the limited length of tweets and the informal writing style of social media ([Belay et al., 2022](#)). 4) The model fails to categorize a text into specific emotion classes, resulting in nothing predicted. This problem is shown in encoder-decoder models. In multi-label classification, encoder-only works in OneVsRest (One vs other) approach ([Goštautaitė and Sakalauskas, 2022](#)) which is predicting whether each emotion is present or not separately, for instance, Anger or Not anger, Fear or Not Fear. When the model responds Not for all emotions, the result will be nothing predicted. On the other hand, decoder-only models such as GPT-4o-mini ([OpenAI et al., 2024](#)) show an over-predicted problem, assigning more emotion classes while most of the instances have a single emotion class. For these above-mentioned cases, emotion instance examples are shown in Appendix E for the corresponding language and case number.

## 7 Conclusion and Future Work

In light of the growing interest in creating challenging NLP tasks to assess the abilities of LLMs, language- and culture-specific datasets are becoming crucial ([Wang et al., 2024c](#); [Adelani et al., 2024b](#)). This work presented a multi-label emotion dataset (EthioEmo) and an evaluation of multi-label emotional understanding of encoder-only, encoder-decoder, and decoder-only language models. The dataset provides diversity regarding the data source (X/Twitter posts, YouTube comments, Facebook comments, and news headlines) and four Ethiopian languages with available English dataset for evaluation). We reported strong baseline results using various experimental settings such as fine-tuning encoder-only models, translated test sets, prompt sensitivity, zero-shot, and impacts of increasing the number of shots for in-context learning evaluations. Encoder-only Afri-centric models that include target languages during the pre-training phase are the best for the classifications of the EthioEmo dataset. In general, the results show that fine-tuning encoder-only language models can still outperform the few-shot approaches of LLMs. The

open-source Cohere-aya-101 model outperformed other LLMs next to the commercial GPT-4o-mini. This paper focused on evaluating state-of-the-art open-source LLMs with the least parameters for scientific reproducibility. Fine-tuning open-source and evaluating closed-source LLMs are out of the scope of this work and are the next works. We believe this dataset and results can be employed as a baseline in the future for better multi-label emotion classification tasks. Resources such as lexicons, annotation guidelines, and datasets are publicly available for further investigation.

## Limitations

In this work, we present and evaluate the EthioEmo dataset using Afri-centric pre-trained language models and open-source LLMs. Despite our efforts, the following are limitations of this work.

**Imbalanced data:** Even if it is impossible to balance emotion data, we tried to balance the emotions using lexicon entries. One of the limitations of this work is that the distribution of the emotion classes is imbalanced. Having more balanced data would be better. However, the nature of the task itself makes it challenging to balance each emotion class because all emotions are not expressed equally in the data source platforms.

**Translation effect on emotions:** To evaluate generative models, we translate the EthioEmo test dataset to English to know if the prediction difficulties come from the task’s nature or language understanding. However, this translation will have quality and context effects on the emotion itself as emotions are culture and language-dependent.

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## A EthioEmo Languages

There are more than 2000 languages spoken in the African continent, and more than 80 of them are spoken in Ethiopia<sup>6</sup>. Amharic, Afan Oromo, Somali, and Tigrinya are the top four languages in Ethiopia by the number of speakers.

**Amharic** (amh): is a Semitic language written in Ge'ez script, known as Fidel, which consists of 33 primary characters, each with seven vowel sequences. It is the second most widely spoken Semitic language, next to Arabic.

**Afan Oromo** (orm): is an Afro-Asiatic language written in Latin script. It is the most widely spoken language in Ethiopia and the third most widely spoken in Africa, next to the Arabic and Hausa languages. It is mostly spoken in the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia alone.

**Somali** (som): is an Afro-Asiatic language belonging to the Cushitic group. It is spoken in Ethiopia, Somaliland, Kenya, and Somalia. It is the third most widely spoken language in Ethiopia.

**Tigrinya** (tir): is a Semitic language spoken in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and Eritrea. The language uses Ge'ez script with additional Tigrinya alphabets and is closely related to Ge'ez and Amharic (Eberhard et al., 2024).

## B Annotators Background

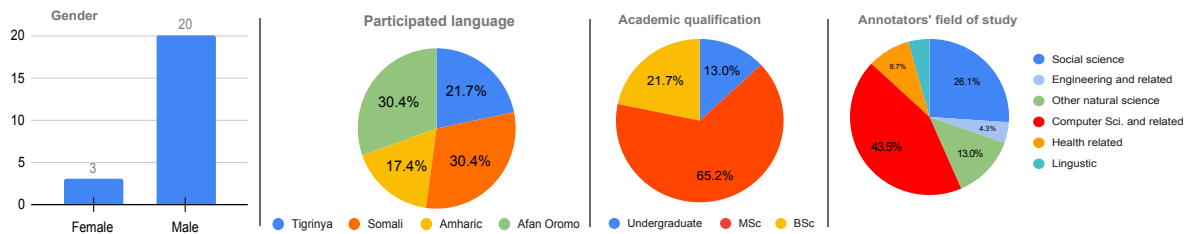


Figure 3: Backgrounds of Annotators: gender, language participated, academic qualification, and field of study.

## C Number of Emotion Labels Per Instance

Figure 4 shows the number of emotion label(s) distribution across languages. As we can see, most of the dataset for all languages has a single emotion class. Of the amh dataset, 88% has a single label, 11.7% has two emotion labels, and 0.17% has three labels. In the orm, 92.9% has a single label, 6.9% two labels, and 0.17% three labels. In som, 94.8% has single labels, 5.7% two labels, and only three instances have three labels. In tir, 82.3% has single labels, 12.4% two labels, and 0.36% three labels. EthioEmo dataset is also used for multiclass emotion classification for future work as instances with more than two labels are less.

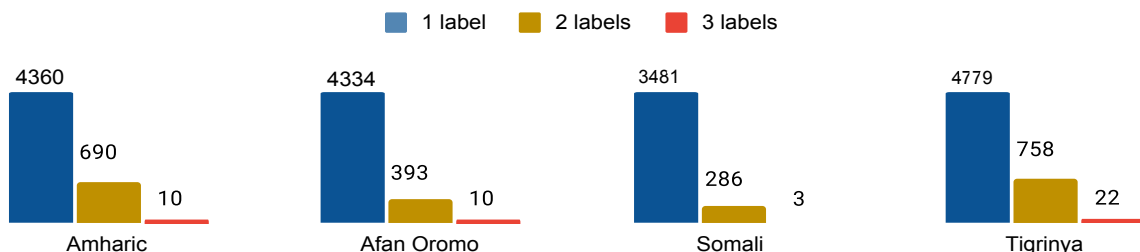


Figure 4: Number of emotion labels per instance across languages

<sup>6</sup><https://www.statista.com/statistics/1280625/number-of-living-languages-in-africa-by-country/>  
3536

## D Experiment Hyper-parameters

We make fine-tune encoder-only models using FLAIR framework (Akbik et al., 2019) with the following hyper-parameters: model\_max\_length = 512 (except AfroLM model\_max\_length is 256 as the models built it up), learning\_rate = 5.0e-5, mini\_batch\_size = 8, and max\_epochs=3, as recommended in the BERT paper (Devlin et al., 2019). We test decoder-only models with temperature = 0 and batch\_size = 1.

## E Emotion Examples for Error Analysis

#	Text	Gold	Pred.
1	<i>amh</i> : ጥንካሬሽ የሚገረም ነው በእባ ጨረሰኩት የሰው ጭካኔ ግን 🙄	sadness, surprise	sadness
	<i>orm</i> : Humni shiraan guddate shiraan jiraachuu filata . Haata'utii shirri qaama biraa irratti hojjata balleessa . Warri ODP amala badaa.	disgust	anger, disgust
	<i>tig</i> : አንታ እው ጭንቀት ሞይትና እናነበርና ናብ ዘይምንባር ተፀጊዕና ምስ ህዝብካ ኮይንካስ ኩሉ ትርኢ ሓደ ዓመት ሓሊፉና ኣሎ ትግራይ ትስዕር	fear, sadness	sadness, anger
	<i>tir</i> : ከምዚኦም ዝኣመሰሉ ደመኛታት ጸላእትና ኩላትና ተኣኪብና ብዓውታ ብዘይፍርሒ እንተዘይመኪትናዮምን ሓድነትና እንተዘይርእናዮምን ሃገርና		
2	<i>som</i> : USER Madoobow adeeer waaarimeyside war hakaaa haro magaaaladiii aaad dhaqaalaheecda intaaasooo sanadoood dhuuuqeysay iney sidaaas u burbursanaaato waaa kugu ceeeb dhowr laaammmi lama rabeec inta jid eee magaalada ka baxda ilaaa iyo kuwa Dhoobley iyo Afmadow tago ayaaa lagaaa rabay inaad laaammmi saarto	disgust	anger, disgust
	<i>amh</i> : የሰማይ የምድር ጌታ በቤታቸው በኑሮዎቻቸው በልጆቻቸው በዘመድ ባዝማዳቸው ችግር አዘን መከራ አዘን ይግባባቸው	disgust	sadness
	<i>orm</i> : Biyyyaaa Sanaaa keecesaaa seeeriii hin jiruuu kani kan godhuuu abbiyyyiiidha Ummmani Omoooo ganaaa fixxxxaaa Dinnaaaa fanaaa hiriruuraaa otttooo tokkkooyo tannneec dinnaaaa ofiraaa fincileee <b>gaaariiidha</b>	anger	joy, anger
	<i>orm</i> : Takele uma motumaan kun hin kufaa shakiin hin jiruu <b>wayyanenuu</b> hin kuftee sodaa lubbutiif jeteo umataa kee baldhaa hin ganiin dhugaa irraa dhabadhuu dinaa wajiin harkaa hin dhahiin URL	anger	disgust
3	<i>tir</i> : እስኪ ሓደሽ ድሃይ ሃብና እዚ ምድግጋም እንታይ ዋጋ ኣሎዎ ኣረ ብጭንቀት ከንመውት እና በጃኹም ድሃይ ሃብና	fear	sadness
	<i>amh</i> : ትክክል ነው የዘነገሩት ግን ይህ ሰው በሰልጣን ከቀጠለ ኣገርም ሊኖራቸው እንደማይችል ነው። የ USER ስጋት ለኣማራ ብቻ ነው የሚለው ስህ	fear	disgust, anger
	<i>tir</i> : ግፍግ ሰቃይ ስእነት ዋላከዋ ዘይደለ አንተ ኾነ ኣብ ? ጠራይ ከም ዝርከብ ገርካ ምግራምካ ገሪሙኒ ምናልባት ስደት	surprise	sadness

Table 6: Examples of emotion texts for cases discussed in the experiment error analysis, Section 6; amh, orm, som, and tir are the languages used in the example.

## F Data Source and Emotion Distribution

In this section, we visualize the EthioEmo dataset emotion distributions across data sources: Twitter (X), YouTube, Facebook, and news headlines and languages: amh, orm, som, and tir. Figure 5 shows general emotion distribution across data sources for the EthioEmo dataset. Figure 6 shows emotion distribution across languages. Figures 7, 8, 9, and 10 show emotion distribution across languages and data sources: Facebook comments, YouTube comments, Twitter (X), and news headlines, respectively. Figure 10 shows that the news headlines almost do not have any of the basic emotions.

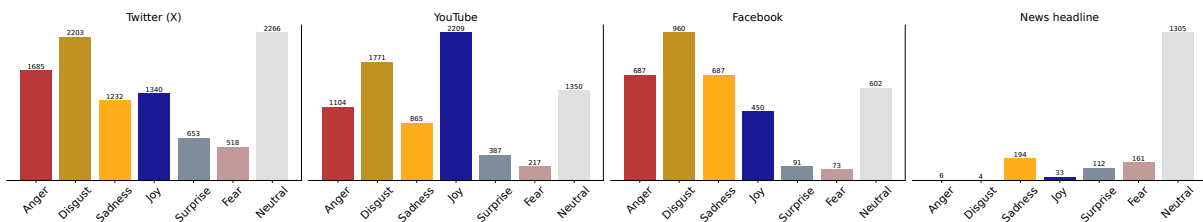


Figure 5: Emotion distribution in the data sources for EthioEmo dataset

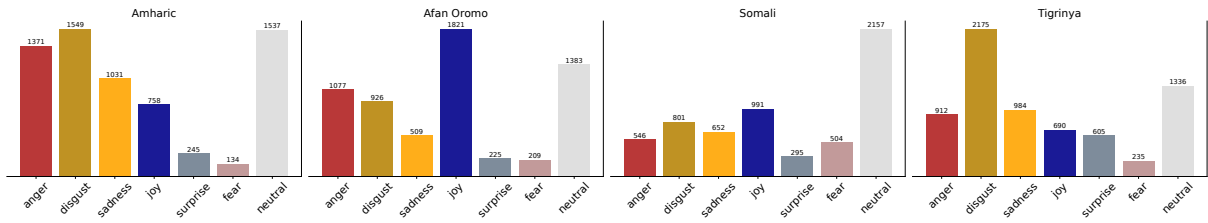


Figure 6: Emotion distribution for EthioEmo dataset across languages

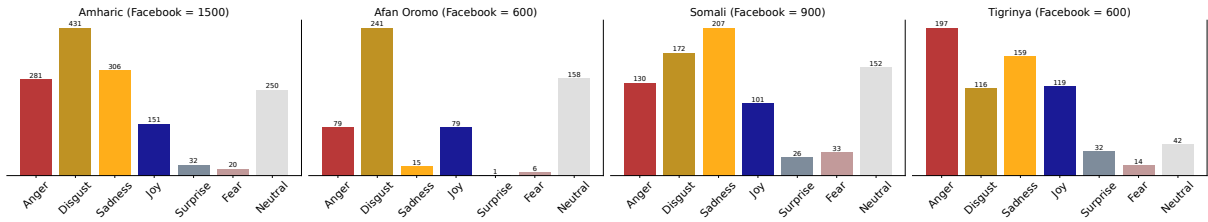


Figure 7: Facebook comment emotions distribution across languages from the given quota

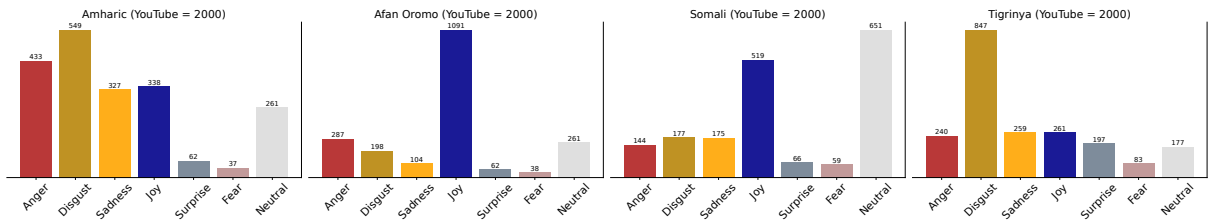


Figure 8: YouTube comment emotions distribution across languages from the given quota

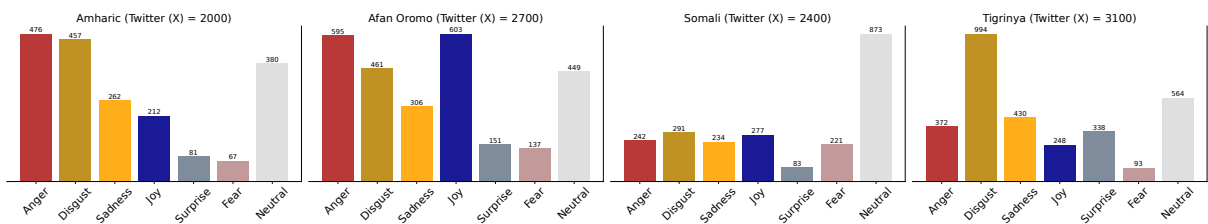


Figure 9: Twitter (X) post emotions distribution across languages from the given quota

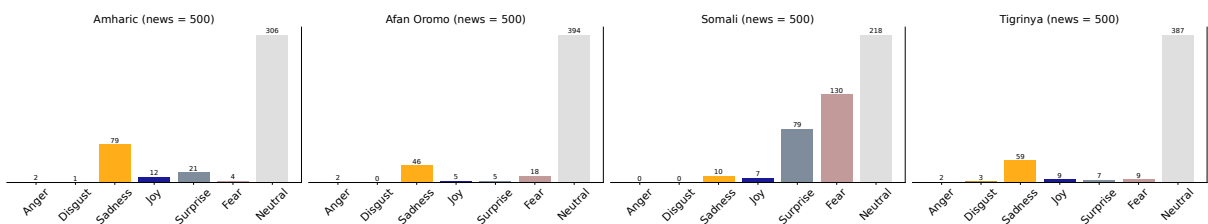


Figure 10: News headlines emotions distribution across languages from the given quota



## G Additional Results

### G.1 Encoder-only Experimental Results

We compared our experimental results using a weighted-averaged F1-score. Table 7 shows additional multi-label evaluation metrics such as multi-label accuracy, macro F1-score, and micro F1-score across languages and encode-only models.

Pre-trained LMs	Amharic (amh)			Afan Oromo (orm)			Somali (som)			Tigrinya (tir)		
	Acc	Mac F1	Mic F1	Acc	Mac F1	Mic F1	Acc	Mac F1	Mic F1	Acc	Mac F1	Mic F1
EthioLLM-s-70K	50.3	58.8	69.0	60.94	61.4	70.0	40.8	42.4	51.0	48.0	46.3	59.8
EthioLLM-l-70K	48.6	53.9	65.1	60.0	55.7	68.9	31.2	32.2	43.6	48.9	46.8	60.3
Afro-xlmr-large-61L	54.0	68.3	68.4	58.4	55.8	68.0	53.4	61.7	64.9	51.4	55.4	64.5
Afro-xlmr-large-76L	55.6	67.5	70.0	63.3	66.3	72.9	53.6	59.4	64.3	49.1	48.4	61.4
AfroLM-active-learning	50.0	60.7	65.6	59.1	52.2	66.2	40.9	48.2	53.2	36.6	33.8	49.5
AfriBERTa-large	67.5	64.2	67.7	62.4	63.7	71.8	53.7	60.1	64.5	49.3	52.8	62.6

Table 7: Additional results of encoder-only models. Acc - multi-label average accuracy, Mac F1 - macro F1-score, and Mic F1 - micro F1-score.

### G.2 Emotion Class-based Results

Table 8 shows class-level emotion results from the three encoder-only models. We discovered that the emotion class with less dataset distribution performs low, for example, Fear class in orm and tir languages. In overall performance across languages, som and tir have low performance; this might be because of the amount of corpus in the pre-training and the data in the emotion classes.

Emotions	EthioLLM-s-70K				Afro-xlmr-large-61L				Afro-xlmr-large-76L				AfriBERTa-large			
	amh	orm	som	tir	amh	orm	som	tir	amh	orm	som	tir	amh	orm	som	tir
Anger	56.3	55.1	10.0	19.5	59.6	55.1	41.1	25.6	58.7	61.2	30.2	20.2	58.3	57.4	39.7	29.2
Disgust	68.4	68.9	36.7	71.9	66.7	629	58.3	77.2	71.5	68.2	57.4	73.6	68.6	68.1	53.8	74.6
Fear	21.7	30.2	57.8	2.8	48.7	12.3	69.1	27.1	53.9	42.0	70.7	00.0	40.7	34.9	73.2	18.2
Sadness	74.7	55.2	53.7	53.9	75.0	54.1	71.4	62.9	77.8	63.1	68.7	58.4	74.7	62.0	70.4	61.7
Joy	71.2	85.6	72.4	56.9	82.3	84.2	77.5	63.2	81.2	87.0	79.8	64.2	76.9	87.5	79.0	60.9
Surprise	60.6	73.0	23.9	73.0	65.5	66.7	52.9	76.5	62.3	76.0	49.6	74.1	66.2	72.4	44.6	72.3

Table 8: Class-based emotion F1 results from selected fine-tuned encoder-only models

