



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports

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Tigre language Information Report

By

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Tigre Language Facts

- Tigre (also known as Khasa and in Sudan, Xasa) is spoken by about 800,000 people living in Eritrea and parts of Eastern Sudan.
- There are nine different languages in use in Eritrea. The nine different languages originate from three language families, to include Latin-based alphabet, a consonantal Arabic alphabet script and a Ge'ez syllabic script. Forty percent of Eritreans speak Tigre.
- The Tigre language derived from the ancient Semitic Ge'ez language, now only spoken as the liturgical language of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Churches.
- Tigre is spoken mainly by Muslims and also Christians
- Tigre-speaking societies include the Beni 'Amer, Bet Asgäde, Mänsa' and Marya.
- The main dialect is Mansa'/Mensa.
- The Tigre culture and language have been influenced by both Muslims and Christians.

Map of Tigre speakers

Tigre is spoken in Northwestern Eritrea and the bordering parts of Sudan



“...it may well be useful to think about the Tigre area as forming part of a broader frontier space or a meeting place of peoples in which geographic, economic, political and cultural borders were usually not clearly defined.”

Miran, Jonathan, “Constructing and deconstructing the Tigre frontier space in the long nineteenth century,” (http://modaina.com/files/history_and_language_of_the_tigre.pdf)

Tigre language

Example of the spoken Tigre language

Toguruba Tigre Poem by Idris Alisheik <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7EuZUZN2s&feature=related>



http://www.modaina.com/imagebrowser/po42_5_oo_7.html

Tigre is often a second language for many in this region for commerce and trade.

Arabic and Tigre Languages

“The matter is not without its particular complexities since both languages are Semitic, signifying that similarities are not necessarily due to borrowing, but may reflect more remote affinities in the course of the evolution of both languages.”

Miran, Jonathan, “Constructing and deconstructing the Tigre frontier space in the long nineteenth century” (http://modaina.com/files/history_and_language_of_the_tigre.pdf)

Literacy

Ge'ez Script

- Muslims are found writing Tigre with Arabic script, while Christians and the Eritrean government use a Ge'ez or Ethiopian alphabet.
- Tigre was not an established written language until the 19th century. In 1889 the first book written in Ge'ez was published.
- European missionaries played a big role in bringing about literacy for the Tigre-speaking people.
- Additional languages which use the Ge'ez alphabet are: Amharic, Argobba, Awngi, Blin, Chaha, Dizin, Harari, Inor, Silt'e Tigrinya and Xamtaga
- Eritrea has a 66.6% literacy rate, Sudan has a 70.2% literacy rate.
- Many Tigre-speaking people believe that teaching content in the Tigre language to children is not useful because it can not be used outside its borders for employment.
- Over the last 150 only about 100 books have been published in Tigre.

| Tigre Ge'ez Script | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| | ሐ | ሀ | ለ | ሎ | ሮ | ሪ | ዐ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ |
| ሐ | ሀ | ሁ | ሂ | ሃ | ሄ | ህ | ሆ | | | | | | |
| ለ | ሎ | ሌ | ሎ | ሎ | ሎ | ሎ | ሎ | | | | | | |
| ሮ | ሪ | ሪ | ሪ | ሪ | ሪ | ሪ | ሪ | | | | | | |
| ዐ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | | | | | | |
| ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ |
| ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ | ቀ |
| ብ | ብ | ብ | ብ | ብ | ብ | ብ | ብ | | | | | | |
| ተ | ተ | ተ | ተ | ተ | ተ | ተ | ተ | | | | | | |
| ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | | | | | | |
| ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ | ኅ |
| ነ | ነ | ነ | ነ | ነ | ነ | ነ | ነ | | | | | | |
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| ዐ | ዐ | ዐ | ዐ | ዐ | ዐ | ዐ | ዐ | | | | | | |
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| ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |
| ጠ | ጠ | ጠ | ጠ | ጠ | ጠ | ጠ | ጠ | | | | | | |
| ጨ | ጨ | ጨ | ጨ | ጨ | ጨ | ጨ | ጨ | | | | | | |
| ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | | | | | | |
| ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | ጸ | | | | | | |
| ፈ | ፈ | ፈ | ፈ | ፈ | ፈ | ፈ | ፈ | | | | | | |
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| ሐ | ሀ | ለ | ሎ | ሮ | ሪ | ዐ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ | ዐገ |

Distinctions

- Aspects in Writing
 - Tigre-speaking students learning English as a second language, who use Roman scripts to write Tigre, will learn English more quickly than those using Arabic script to write Tigre.
 - Students learning their L1 using the Ge'ez script need to learn over 200 fidels (symbols) whereas those who use Roman or Arabic script only have to learn about 30 alphabet. Those using the Ge'ez script do not learn to read many words or phrases by the end of the 1st grade; Roman and Arabic learners can read words and phrases by the end of 1st grade.
 - Most basic consonants transliterate without problems into the Roman alphabet.
- Phonemes
 - Consonant length can change the word meaning in Tigre, as in Arabic. English consonants do not change the word meaning
 - Three consonants, /p, p', x/, are seen only in borrowed words and not in Tigre.



Distinctions

- Grammar Points /Vocabulary
 - The personal pronouns in Tigre have feminine (f) and masculine (m) forms for the second person (you), and both singular(s) and plural(p), and the third person singular/plural (she/he/they).
 - The verb of existence “to be” is placed at the end of the sentence.
 - In English uncle and aunt are used for equally for both from the father's and mother's side, but in Tigre there is a differentiation
 - The determined form of the noun denoted in English by the definite article "the" is expressed in Tigre by a prefix element "le" attached to the noun
 - “To” & “For” have the same meaning.
 - The simple present expresses habitual action, or every day action. (As used in English)
 - The marker of determination is gender independent and is the same for female and male . (As in English)

Education

- Many Eritreans (Tigre speakers included) are illiterate (about 45%).
- School is taught in Tigre to promote the local culture and native languages.
- Students begin learning all subjects in just English by the seventh grade.
- An educated person is highly respected. Elders encourage and respect education due to former Colonial influence, which prevented higher education.
- There is only one university in the capital of Asmara, although many find work in labor jobs, such as farming.
- Children are beginning to attend school more regularly, but there is often a struggle between going to school or doing household chores.



Communication & Culture

- Tigre-speakers usually keep a respectful distance between males and females.
- When approaching an elder, one must bow their head. If one presents a shy manner, the elder will begin to ask if he or she needs help.
- Eritreans are friendly people who greet with a smile and a handshake. When close friends, one might kiss several times on the cheek. Men will often touch shoulders a few times when greeting.
- Seniors are respected over everyone. Seniors are those who have religious, social and familial standings.
- Boys are expected to work in the fields or other labor jobs, while girls are expected to do domestic duties.
- Tigre-speaking men usually make all the important decisions.
- Generally boys are favored over girls. Girls can marry as early as fourteen.
- Italy ruled Eritrea for over 50 years. Then England ruled for another 10 years. European-style restaurants are found in Tigre-speaking regions. Coffee is an important part of their day.

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