



# RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

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

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program  
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

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# Language of Tigrinya



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Source: Google Images

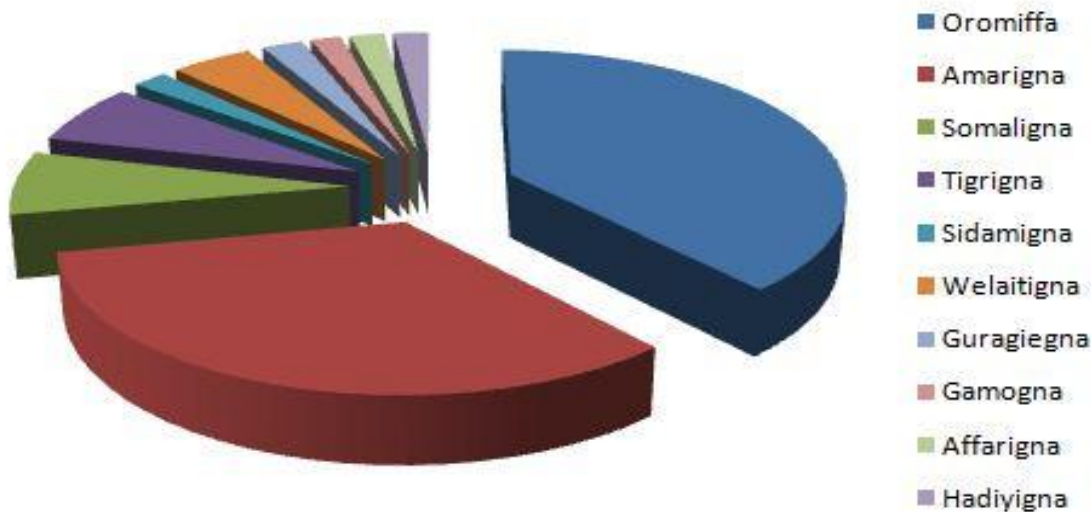
## **Short History of Tigrinya**

- **Tigrinya is one of the official languages of both Eritrea and Ethiopia. In Eritrea, Tigrinya is spoken by approximately 1.2 million people and forms a dialect continuum rooted in Ethiopic (Ge'ez). In Ethiopia, Tigrinya is spoken by approximately 3.2 million people. Tigrinya is sometimes confused with the distinct, but related language Tigre.**
- **Eritrean history is one the oldest in Africa and possibly in the world.**
- **The earliest written example of Tigrinya is a text of local laws found in the district of Logosarda Southern Eritrea which dates from the 13th century.**
- **The history of the two countries--Ethiopia and Eritrea--is closely linked, although beginning in the late 1800s, Eritrea was colonized by Italy. Eritrea was an Italian colony until 1941, then the British controlled it until 1951. Following the British occupation, the United Nations made it a federated autonomous territory with Ethiopia, until Ethiopia decided to annex it as a province in 1962.**

## Tigrinya Language:

- Most Eritreans speak more than one local language and a few also speak Italian and English. Tigrinya is thought to have descended from the ancient language of Ge'ez. It has over 200 characters in written form, each with a distinctive sound. Although Tigre is also descended from Ge'ez, it is not similar to Tigrinya. Tigre's pronunciation and usage also varies between geographic regions.

- Not all sounds in English can be rendered in Ge'ez, just as all sounds in Tigrinya cannot be presented by the English alphabet. In particular, Ge'ez does not closely pronounce:

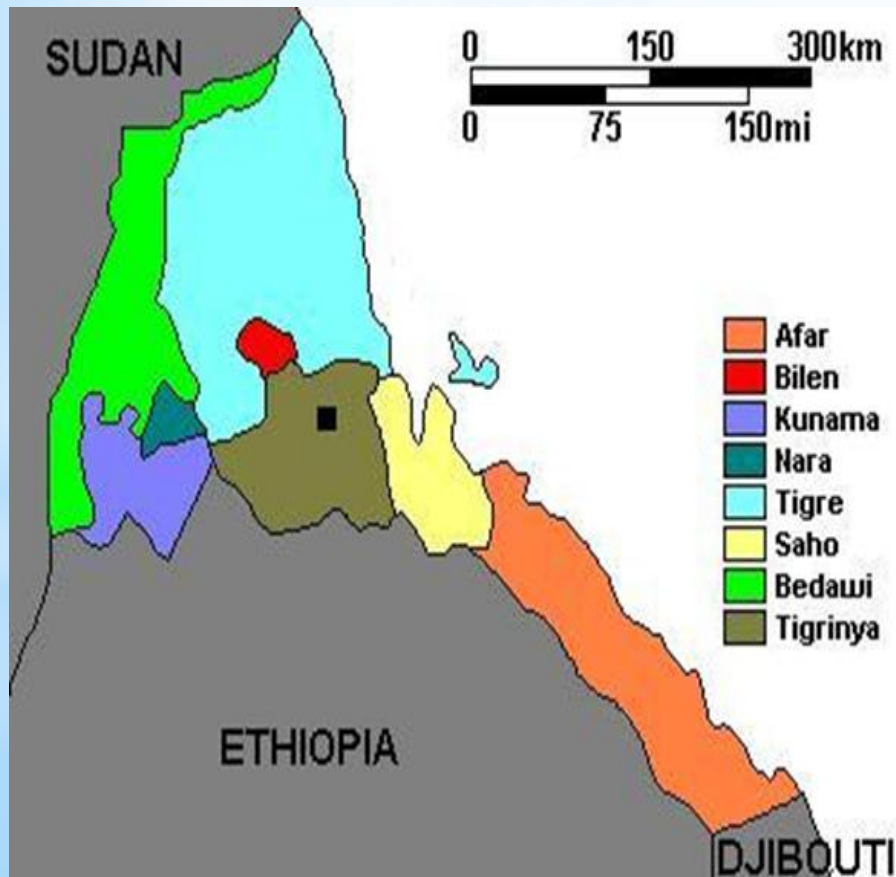


OO as in BOOK

TH as in THING

## Tigrinya Language Continued:

There are nine languages in Eritrea. Tigrinya (50%) and Arabic are the working languages. The other languages are Tigre (40%), Afar (4%), Saho (3%), Bega (Beja), Bilen, Nara and Kunama. English and Italian are also widely understood.



## Speakers of Tigrinya:

### Consonant and vowel phonemes

- **Labials** are consonants articulated either with both lips (bilabial articulation) or with the lower lip and the upper teeth (labiodental articulation). English [m] is a bilabial nasal sonorant, [b] and [p] are bilabial stops (plosives), [v] and [f] are labiodental fricative
- **dental consonant or dental** is a consonant that is articulated with the tongue against the upper teeth, such as /t/, /d/, /n/, and /l/ in some languages. Dentals are primarily distinguished from sounds in which contact is made with the tongue and the gum ridge, as in English (see Alveolar consonant), due to the acoustic similarity of the sounds and the fact that in the Roman alphabet they are generally written using the same symbols (t, d, n, and so on)
- **Post alveolar consonants** are consonants articulated with the tongue near or touching the back of the alveolar ridge, placing them a bit further back in the mouth than the alveolar consonants, which are at the ridge itself, but not as far back as the hard palate (the place of articulation for palatal consonants).
- **Velars** are consonants articulated with the back part of the tongue (the dorsum) against the soft palate (the back part of the roof of the mouth, known also as the velum).
- **pharyngeal** consonant is a type of consonant which is articulated with the root of the tongue against the pharynx.

# Writing System:

## Punctuation

፣	።	፥	፥	፥	፥
comma	full stop / period	colon	semi-colon	preface colon	question mark (no longer used)

ብመንፅር ክብርን መሰልን ኩሎም ሰባት ክንትውለጹ ነፃን ማዕረን ክኖሩ።  
 ምስትውዳልን ሕልናን ዝተዳደሎም ብምኽናም ብሕውነታዊ መንፈስ ክተሓላዩ ክለዎም።  
<http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/>

Translation (same for both texts)

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

(Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

## Ethiopian Semitic languages:

### Grammatical:

- Tigrinya nouns have plural, as well as singular, forms, though the plural is not obligatory when the linguistic or pragmatic context makes the number clear. As in Tigre and Ge'ez (as well as Arabic), noun plurals may be formed through internal changes ("broken" plural) as well as through the addition of suffixes. For example, ፈረስ färäs 'horse', ኣፍራስ 'horses'.

- Verbs are based on consonantal roots most consisting of three consonance {*sbr*} 'break', ሰበረ säbärä 'he broke', ይሰብር 'he breaks', ምስባር 'to break'.

- Tigrinya has an unusually complex tense/aspect system, with many nuances achieved using combinations of the three basic tense/aspect forms (perfect, imperfect, gerundive) and various auxiliary verbs including the copula (እዩ ጭህህ, etc.), the verb of existence (ኣሎ 'allo, etc.), and the verbs ነበረ näbärä 'exist, live', ኮነ konä 'become', ደገሎ 'stay'*

*\* The symbols shown on this page are as in the document source, but are not correct renditions of actual Tigrinya script; they are in error created through an incorrect font substitution.*



## Possible Difficulties in English Continued:

### Subject Pronouns

- **Usage in Tigrigna**

Subject pronouns are used in the exact same way as in English; however all subject pronouns are divided by person, number and gender (with no exceptions). So, you will see that Tigrigna sometimes will use a couple of words where there is only one English equivalent.

- **Verb in Tigrigna**

The verb ኣሎ is to be used when you are describing the location a person or object. This is different from the last verb you learned (ኣዩ) which is used for describing a person or object. In English both meanings are conveyed with the single verb: 'to Be,' while in Tigrigna there are two separate verbs for these two separate meanings. This verb is (like all Tigrigna verbs are) divided by person, number and gender.

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## Possible Difficulties in English Continued:

**Noun** :Tigrinya nouns are either masculine or feminine and are inflected for number. Gender is not marked on the noun, but on nominal dependents like articles and adjectives. Verbs agree with their subjects and objects in person, number, and gender. Verbs are also marked for aspect and mood.

### ● Usage in Tigrigna

Like in English a small change is made to denote a plural in Tigrigna, a lot of nouns just need "ታት" as a suffix; e.g. ከባቢ region - ከባቢታት regions.

However here are some additional rules:

1. If the noun ends in the 3rd form (ጸዕሪ effort), then the last letter should be changed to the 6th form and "ታት" should be added (ጸዕርታት efforts).
2. If the noun ends in the 6th form (ፈደል letter), then the last letter should be changed to the 4th form and "ት" should be added (ፈደላት alphabet).

Again, as in English, there are many nouns which form the plural irregularly with the noun gaining/losing a prefix/suffix, and/or small changes within the noun itself.

### ● Usage in Tigrigna

Demonstratives are used in the almost exact same way as in English. The only difference is that with Tigrigna there is an additional differentiation for gender. This doubles the amount of demonstratives from four in English to eight in Tigrigna, with one male and female version for each of the English ones.

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## Grammatical Difficulties in English, Students with first language of Tigrinya:

- A verb is a very simple concept to describe; it is an action word. An example of a verb in a sentence would be: "John grabbed the keys." In English, the verb ('grabbed') always goes after the subject ('John'). Word order: [Subject] [Verb] [Object]. This is different in Tigrigna, where the verb always goes after the object. Word order: [Subject] [Object] [Verb].
- All verbs go at the end of a statement unlike in English where verbs are placed in the middle of a statement ([Subject] [Verb] [Object]), Tigrigna places its verb at the end ([Subject] [Object] [Verb]); observe the correct and incorrect examples.
- ኢዩ is used for defining something, not for its location. In English the verb "to be" can be used for describing something, and for the location of it; in Tigrigna there are two separate verbs for these purposes. ኢዩ is only used for defining something.
- Conjugate for person, number, and gender like with subject pronouns, Tigrigna verbs are conjugated to agree with the subject in person, number, and gender.

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## Communication:

- In Eritrea, communication is not only confined to verbal conversation. For example, approaching an elderly person and bowing down one's head, not making eye contact, and showing signs of shyness, could mean the person needs something important or is simply being humble.
- Eritreans are very friendly and hospitable people. In formal situations, Eritreans shake hands with each person with a big facial smile, asking about their health and detailed situation of each member of their family. Close friends greet each other by kissing several times on both cheeks. Most men greet each other by joining their shoulders three or more times. Giving a hug is common among friends. Seniors are greeted with high respect and in most cases bowing down one's head and handshaking with both hands simultaneously is a sign of great respect for an elder.
- When there is a fight between two young adults, one of them will turn their body, lift their leg and show the other person the bottom part of his/her leg. This is an expression for telling the other person to shut up his/her mouth.

## Perspectives for non-Tigrinya Speakers:

- When people meet or want to get someone's attention, they will generally say "Selam", a word that, in its literal translation, means peace. It is an expression equivalent to saying hello.
- Historically, women have been relegated to child rearing and housekeeping and have been denied education as a result. Thanks to the gains achieved during the long years of struggle for liberation, in which women contributed enormously (women accounted for 30% of the Liberation Army), they have come out on a better footing and are in a position to change that legacy.
- Eritrean culture accepts authority that comes as a result of one's profession. Teachers, priests, and medical doctors garner a high degree of respect and acceptance for their job title and position.
- Use of the left hand to greet, eat or hand something to someone is considered very dirty. When handing something over, using both hands is accepted and even seen as respectful, but not using the left hand alone.

# DIALOGUE

## Selam'ta “Greetings”

In the following Dialogue you should be able to:

- use some personal pronouns (I, you, etc.) \*
- form the present tense of the verb 'be'(I am, you are, etc.)
- form some simple possessive phrases (my, your, etc.) \*
- use some simple formal and informal greetings \*



(photos.igougo.com)



(google images)

## A Formal meeting

Mr.(ato) Jemal and Mrs.(wey'zero) Letay meet. They do not know another very well.

T'Ena y'habeley ato Jemal! Hello Mr. Jemal! kemey aleKum? How are you?

## An informal meeting

ig'z'her y'mesgen. Thanks God. ane-win S'buq aloKu. I am fine, too.

nisu-win S'buq alo. He is fine too.

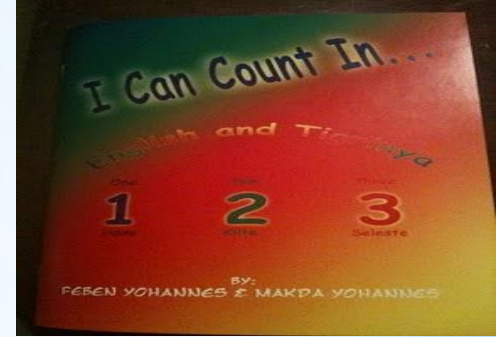
aboKanadeKan kemey allowu? Are your father & mother well?



# Resource Materials for ESL teachers:

(<http://eritreanrefugees.org>)

- “I can count in... English and Tigrinya”



This is a children’s book dedicated to teaching English and Tigrinya numbers.

- Tigrinya - English picture dictionary

Uses pictures to bring meaning to every day events.

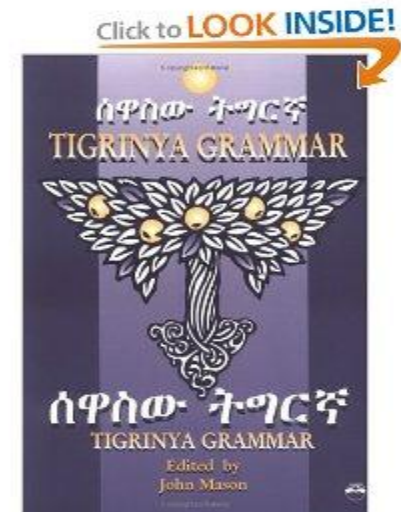
- Tigrinya Grammar helps student transition to English.

- Multilingual Negotiation Pack

by Shan Rees, Fou Fou Saitsky & Helen

Sunderland, eds.

A Collection of reproducible worksheets for negotiating the curriculum in ESOL translated into 17 languages.



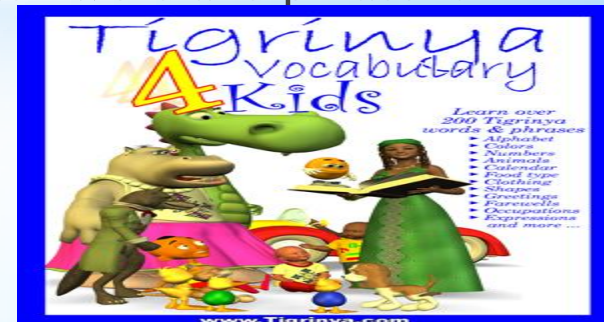
(<http://www.tigrinya.com/>)

# Materials for Educators of ESL Classroom

- Tigrinya The EZ Way -Audio CD contains four Audio CDs that you can play and listen using any CD player. The idea is simple, it will help you learn Tigrinya while you are in your car, office, out walking or any where you can take a portable CD player with you.
- Writing & Reading Tigrinya is a one of a kind book that teaches the beautiful art of Tigrinya writing. It also teaches the correct pronunciation of the Tigrinya alphabet using a unique approach developed by the authors of Tigrinya Language Multimedia Series (Writing & Reading Tigrinya through 104). In addition to this, you will learn new vocabulary words in Tigrinya.
- This is a colorful children's book that will teach kids over 200 Tigrinya words and phrases. It is 8.5 x 11 in size and has all full color pages. Each word and phrase is presented in Tigrinya with English translation.



<http://www.tigrinya.com/>





# Resources:

## Internet Sites

AbsoluteAstronomy. (2011). Tigrinya. *About Astronomy: Exploring the world of knowledge*. Retrieved from:

[http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Tigrinya\\_language](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Tigrinya_language)

Addicted to travel. (2012). Eritrea culture and traditions. Retrieved from:

<http://www.addictedtotravel.com/travel-information/eritrea-culture>

Advameg, Inc. (2011). Culture of Eritrea. *Countries and their cultures*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Eritrea.html>

Centre for Intercultural Learning. (2009). Cultural information: Eritrea. Retrieved from:

<http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=er#cn-2>

Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council. (2011). *Eritrean community*. Retrieved from:

[http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing\\_Action\\_Report/ERITREAN%20COMMUNITY.pdf](http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing_Action_Report/ERITREAN%20COMMUNITY.pdf)

Memhr. (2010). Eritrea dictionary. Retrieved from:

<http://www.memhr.org/tigrigna/chapters/1/tobe1.shtml>

UCLA International Institute. (n.d.) Tigrinya. *UCLA language materials project: Teaching resources for less commonly taught languages*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=18&menu=004>

# Resources Continued:

## Maps

Splinter, van der H. & Tzehaie, M. (2011). Languages in Eritrea. *Eritrea.be*. Retrieved from: <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-languages.htm>

## Images

The American team for displaced Eritreans. (2011). *I can count in... English and Tigrinya*. Retrieved from: <http://eritreanrefugees.org/NewArrivals.html>

Tigrinya. (March 2009). Learn to speak Tigrinya. Tigrinya: An interactive multi-media program that will teach you the Tigrinya language. Retrieved from: <http://www.tigrinya.com/>

Travelocity. (2011). Travel photos and pictures – IgoUgo. *Boys at school* [Photograph], Retrieved from: [http://photos.igougo.com/pictures-travel\\_photos.html](http://photos.igougo.com/pictures-travel_photos.html)

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