
Tigrinya Orthography: Materials on Written Tigrinya Language Standardization

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Abstract

This research focuses on the orthographic features of the Tigrinya language both in Ethiopia/Tigray and Eritrea. It has been carried out by means of analysis, comparison and systematizing of the relevant fragments of the modern written Tigrinya texts. The written literature, the press and legal documents served as sources of data collection. Almost all the materials included in this research were obtained by the author during his long-term lexicographic practice. The primary aim of the acquired data is to provide the adequate means for further standardization of the written Tigrinya language that will enable, above all, to create morphological analyzers which will help to properly develop and use electronic, digital and online dictionaries, translators, including automatic translators and translators by means of scanning. All of these tools are readily available for the largest and the most developed languages of the world. In 2015 the author handed over this work to Dr. Daniel Teklu, the head of Tigray languages Academy for further work on standardization of Tigrinya language orthography. The present version is a slightly updated and supplemented one, and it was presented by the author at the 20th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Mekelle, Tigray, 1 – 5 October, 2018. The author does not directly suggest that certain form or variant must serve as a standard, rather systematically and objectively sheds light on the current situation. In Tigrinya there are no capital letters. Direction of Tigrinya (Geez) script is analogous to the direction of European scripts. In Tigrinya, as in other languages using Geez script, there are no gemination marks. Special marks (like " mark above a geminated letter) occasionally used in linguistic works.

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1. Introduction

Tigrinya is the official language of Tigray regional state of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and it is spoken as a native language by 95% of this state’s population. Moreover, Tigrinya is the largest language of the State of Eritrea, and the most important of the three working languages of the country. It is impossible to tell now the precise or especially reliable total number of speakers of the language, but it can be estimated to be approximately 10 million.¹ Tigrinya belongs to a northern subgroup of Ethio-Semitic group of Semitic branch within Afro-Asiatic language family. Although Tigrinya is one of the oldest and widely spoken languages in the Horn of Africa, its evident written tradition is relatively young, but some unverified sources state that certain inscriptions in Tigrinya are known from the 13-th century.

At present Tigrinya orthography is on an intermediate stage of the standardization process, it is in transition. The unrestricted orthography, often stipulated by rich dialectology, regularities of colloquial language, Amharic influence and other factors, goes along with unrestricted orthoepy.

Unrestricted orthography goes in Tigrinya of Ethiopia and Eritrea so far that in some cases the same word is spelled in many different ways. For instance, the word ምጹጽላይ məşuṣəllay «a kind of marten», «squirrel» can also be spelled as ምጹጹላይ məşuṣullay, ምጽጽላይ məṣəṣullay, ምጽጽላይ məṣəṣəllay, ሙጹጽላይ muṣuṣəllay, ሙጽጹላይ muṣuṣullay, ሙጽጽላይ muṣəṣullay and ሙጽጽላይ muṣəṣəllay.

2. Order Transitions

Transition of the Order №...	Into the order №...	Example
Transition of the 6th order into the 2nd order and vice versa:		
6	2	ምምላእ → ሙምላእ məmlaʔ → mumlaʔ «to fill up»

		ግሁር→ሙሁር məhur→muhur «educated»
2	6	ሉቺ→ለቺ luči→ləči «light»
Assimilation of the labiovelars to the non-labiovelars and vice versa:		
1	7	ተሐጎሰ→ተሐጎሰ täḥagg ^w äsä→täḥaggosä «to rejoice» ቁልቋል→ቆልቆል q ^w älq ^w al→qolq ^w al «euphorbia»
7	1	ጎማ→ጎማ gomma→g ^w amma «rubber; tyre»
6	2	ኩሉ→ኩሉ k ^w əllu→kullu «all» የሐጎሰ→የሐጎሰ yähägg ^w əs→yähäggus «he makes glad» ይጎግዝ→ይጎግዝ yəgg ^w əʿaz→yəgg ^w əʿaz «he travels»
Transition of the 3rd order into the 6th order and vice versa:		
3	6	a) when suffixes or postpositions are added: ሐላፊነት→ሐላፍነት ḥalafinnät→ḥalafənnät «responsibility» ሱዳናዊያን→ሱዳናውያን

		<p>sudana wiyan → sudana wyan «the Sudanese» ወሊዲኻ → ወሊድኻ</p> <p>wälä ddiḳa → wälä ddəḳa «your (m.) parents» ሕጂ'ውን → ሕጅ'ውን</p> <p>həjji'wwən → həjjə'wwən «and now, again» እዚ ጥቕሲ'ዚ → እዚ ጥቕስ'ዚ</p> <p>əzi tə፱si'zi → əzi tə፱sə'zi «this quotation»</p> <p>However normally there's non-occurrence 3 → 6 order transition when personal names or loanwords involved: ወይንን መሐሪን</p> <p>wäynin → mäḥarin «Weyni and Mehari»</p> <p>b) in compound words: ወዲ ተባዕታይ → ወድ ተባዕታይ</p> <p>wäddi täba'tay → wäddə täba'tay «male»</p> <p>c) other cases: ዓብዩ → ዓብይ</p> <p>ʿabəyi → ʿabəy «big»</p> <p>ናባዩ → ናባይ</p> <p>nabayi → nabay «caring» (not to be confused with ናባይ nabay «towards me»)</p>
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6	3	<p>a) many various cases: ብተይ→ቢተይ bətäy→bitäy «suckling calf» ዓብዩ→ዓቢዩ ‘abəyi→‘abiyi «big» ጸላኢቲ→ጸላኢቲ ṣäla’ti→ṣäla’iti «enemies» እዩ→ኢዩ əyyu→iyyu «[he, it] is» b) often before «ያ»: ፋንድያ→ፋንዲያ fandəya→fandiya «equine manure, dung»</p>
<p>Transition of the 1st order into the 5th order and extremely rarely vice versa:</p>		
1	5	<p>ወሳኒ→ወሳኔ wəssanä→wəssane «decision»</p>
5	1	<p>ብሄር→ብሀር bəher→bəhär «nationality, ethnic group»</p>
<p>Transition of a letter (most often of the 1st order) into the order of the adjacent letter (most often of the 4th or the 7th order) (one of the most incorrect cases):</p>		
1	4	<p>መሳኻቲ→መሳኻቲ mäsaḳutti→masaḳutti «windows»</p>
1	7	<p>ለጃታ→ለጃታ läጃota→loጃota «skin bag»</p>

		ኮቕብ→ኮቕብ koqäb→koqob «star»
6 unique cases: 6 1	4 4 4	ይጉዳዝ→ይገዳዝ yəggʷəʼaz→yəggʷaʼaz «he travels» ማዕድን or መዓድን→ማዓድን maʼdən or mäʼadən→ maʼadən «mineral»
Transition of a letter of the 1st order into the 7th order and vice versa in Tigray (also dialectal):		
1	7	አደ→አዶ addä→addo «mother» ይፈቱ→ይፎቱ (or ይፎቲ) yəfättu→yəfottu (or yəfotti) «he likes (loves)»
7	1	ሎግግመን→ለግግመን lo m z ä m ä n→lä m z ä m ä n «this year»
Transition of a middle radical of the perfect verb with final guttural from the 6th order into the 1st order in Tigray:		
6	1	በለፀ→በለፀ bälʼä→bäläʼä «to eat» አብዘሐ→አብዘሐ abzəḥä→abzähä «to multiply»
Transition of a letter in the 1st order into the 6th order and vice versa before gutturals:		
1	6	ደአ→ደአ

		dä'a→də'a «now then»
6	1	ይምሃር→ይመሃር yəmməhar→yəmmähar «he learns (studies)» ይውሓጥ→ይወሓጥ yəwwəḥaṭ→yəwwähəṭ «it (he) is being swallowe d» ይክአል→ይክአል yəkkə'al→yəkkä'al «it is possible (allowe d)» ዚርአ→ዚረአ zirrə'ä→zirrä'ä «that is seen (visible)» ይጉዓዝ→ይጉዓዝ yəggwə'az→yəggwä'az «he travels»

3. Various Transitions

TRANSITION OF ... (incl. order №)	INTO ... (incl. order №)	EXAMPLE
Transition of ጥ or ጸ into ቦ, and extremely rare transition of ቦ into ጥ:		
ጥ or ጸ	ቦ	ጥኮ→ባኮ pakko→bakko «packet» ፖሊስ→ቦሊስ or ቡሊስ polis→bolis or bulis «police» ጴጥሮስ→ቤጥሮስ pēṭros→beṭros «Petros (Peter)»
ቦ	ጥ	ታቤላ→ታጥላ

		tabela→tapela «signboard, plate»
Transition of ጸ into ቀ (rare):		
ጸ	ቀ	ጸውሎስ→ቃውሎስ pawlos→qawlos «Pawlos (Paul)» ጸጉመን→ቋጉመ ጸገግጫን→ቋገገጫ «Pagumen, Additional 5-6 days month of Ethiopian calendar» (typically colloquial language influence; concomitant changes involved)
Transition of ቨ into ቦ:		
ቨ	ቦ	ቨታሚን→ቦታሚን vitamin→bitamin «vitamin»
Transition of ብ into ፍ preceding voiceless consonant:		
ብ	ፍ	ከብቲ→ከፍቲ käbti→käfti «cattle, livestock» አብቲ→አፍቲ abti→afti «in the...; there» ናብታ→ናፍታ nabta→nafta «to the...» (not to be confused with ናፍታ nafta «diesel fuel»)
Extremely rare transition of ወ into ፍ or ብ preceding voiceless consonant:		
ወ	ፍ or ብ	ሐውቲ→ሐፍቲ or ሐብቲ

		ḥawti→ḥafti or ḥabti «sister»
Transition of ʔ into ʕ or vice versa preceding a bilabial ɸ:		
ʔ	ʕ	ተንበሐኸ→ተጸበሐኸ tānbārkākā→tāmbārkākā «to kneel down»
ʕ	ʔ	ሓጸበሰ→ሓንበሰ ḥambāsā→ḥanbāsā «to swim»
Transition of ʕ into ʔ preceding ʕ:		
ʕ	ʔ	ዓጸዲ→ዓንዲ ʿamdi→ʿandi «column, pillar»
Dropping (elision) of initial ḥ- or ḥ- or (rarely) ḥ- of a word preceded by another word, and its substitution with apostrophe or no sign. Dropping (elision) of initial ḥ?:-		
ḥ- or ḥ-	'	ክፍት ለዩ→ክፍት'ዩ kəfut əyyu→kəfutə'yju «it is closed» ጠጽዮ ለሎኹ→ጠጽዮ'ሎኹ ṭāməyā alläku→ ṭāməyā'lläku «I am hungry» ዕዳጋ አጣል→ዕዳጋ'ጣል ʿədaga aṭal→ʿədaga'ṭal «goat market» ከመይ ለከ→ከመይ'ለ kämäy ilä→kämäy'lä «how do I...»
ḥ- or ḥ-	∅	አብ + ለዚ→አብዚ ab + əzi→abzi «in this...; here» ዓዲ አሓ→ዓዲሓ

		‘addi aḥa→‘addiḥa «cow country», «Addiha» (a toponym)
እን-	Ø or ’	እንታይ→ታይ or ’ታይ əntay→tay or ‘tay «what» እንተ→ተ or ’ተ əntä→tä or ‘tä «if» እታ→ታ or ’ታ əta→ta or ‘ta «that (f.)» እንዳ→[እ]ዳ or ’ዳ ənda→[ə]da or ‘da «house» እንዳ-→ዳ- or ’ዳ- ənda-→da- or ‘da- «while» (a prefix adjusted to a perfect verb to form adverbial participle or adverb) (dialectal, parts of Tigray)
Transition of a letter in 6 th order + -ይ into the letter in 3 rd order:		
6 + -ይ	3	ህይወት→ሂወት həywät→hiwät «life» ርእይቶ→ርኢቶ rə’əyto→rə’ito «opinion»
Transition of a letter in 6 th order + -የ into the letter in 5 th order:		
6 + -የ	5	ድልየት→ድሌት dəlyät→dələt «wish»
Non-observance of spirantization «rule» for non-geminate φ and h in the intervocalic position:		

ቆ	ቆ	ሰሓቆ → ሰሓቆ säha፳ä → sähaqä «to laugh»
ኸ	ኸ	ንሱ ኸመጽእ እዩ → ንሱ ኪመጽእ እዩ nəssu kime፳፳ə' əyyu → nəssu kime፳፳ə' əyyu «he will come»
Spirantization «rule» for non-geminate ቆ and ኸ in intervocalic position normally does not cover the loanwords, but in some cases it is possible:		
ቆ	ቆ, sometimes ቆ	ዲያቆን → ዲያቆን diyaqon → diyaqon «deacon», but መዝገበ ቃላት → መዝገበ ቃላት and መዝገበ ቆላት mäzgäbä qalat → mäzgäbä qalat and mäzgäbä ፳alat «dictionary»
ኸ	ኸ, sometimes ኸ	ቲኪት → ቲኪት tiket → tiket «ticket», but ጉምሩክ → ጉምሩክ and ጉምሩኸ gumruk → gumruk and gumruk «customs»
Transition of initial ኣ into የ and ኢ into ይ influenced by colloquial language (one of the most incorrect cases):		
ኣ-	የ-	ኣዕሩኸ → የዕሩኸ a'ruk → yä'ruk «friends» ኣእተኸ → የእተኸ a'täka → yä'täka «you (m.) inserted»

እ-	ይ-	እበልዕ→ይበልዕ əbälləʼ→yəbälləʼ «I eat»
vice versa cases are also possible: ይ-	እ-	ይበልዕ→እበልዕ yəbälləʼ→əbälləʼ «he eats»
Labialization of the vowel of a letter in 1st order (or 4th order for gutturals) preceding ω, with dropping of the latter:		
1 + ω	7	አተ ω →አቶ atäwä→ato «to enter» (not to be confused with አቶ ato «mister») ንየ ω →ንየ nəyāw→nəyo «there»
4 + ω	7	ዓወደ→ዖደ ʼa wädä→ʼo dä «to go around»
Rare transition of final ω of a verb in perfect into ʔ (also dialectal):		
ω	ʔ	ሸንደ ω →ሸንደ ʔ šändäwä→šändäyä «to throw out»
Rare transition of the final ʔ (in gerund of the verbs with a final ω) into ω, i.e. reversion to the original radical:		
ʔ	ω	ቀል ʔ →ቀለ ω qäləyu→qäliwu «while roasting»
Periodical transitions of ʔ into ኢ of agent (possibly dialectal):		
ʔ	ኢ	አሰናዳ ʔ →አሰናዳ ኢ

		assānada wi→assānadaʿi «preparer; compiler»
Periodical transitions of ʀ into ʁ and vice versa:		
ʀ	ʁ	θ-ʀገገ→θʁገገ ṣābri→ṣāmri «thin mud» (not to be confused with θʁገገ ṣāmri «wool»)
ʁ	ʀ	ʌʁገገመገገ→ʌ-ʀገገገ lämzämän→läbzäbän «this year»

4. Interchangeability

Interchangeability of ...	and ...	EXAMPLE
Interchangeability of ʁ and ʀ (regular) or ʀ (less common):		
ʁ	ʀ or ʀ	መጀመርታ↔መገገመርታ mäjämmä rta↔mäžämmä rta «beginning» ዝንጅብል↔ጅንጅብል zənjəbəl↔jənjəbəl «ginger»
Irregular interchangeability of ʀ and ṣ (also dialectal):		
ʀ	ṣ	ሰንደወ↔ሰንጅወ sändäwä↔šändäwä «to throw out» ሓሳዊ↔ሓሻዊ ḥassawi↔ḥaššawi «liar»
Irregular interchangeability of ṣ and ṣ (also dialectal):		
ṣ	ṣ	መጨረሻታ↔መጠረሻታ mäçä rraṣta↔mäṣä rraṣta «end» ሸንጥሮ↔ሸንጭሮ

		ጃጠጥጦ↔ጃጠጥጦ «valley»
Interchangeability of the letters of 2nd and 7th orders:		
2	7	ሐጸ↔ሐጸ ገሀጸ↔ገሀጸ «sand»
Interchangeability of the letters of 3rd and 6th orders:		
in case of some morphemes prefixed to the imperfect 3	6	ዚኸውን↔ዝኸውን zikäwwən↔zəkäwwən «intended, destined» ኪዓቢ እዩ↔ከዓቢ እዩ kiʿabbi əyyu↔kəʿabbi əyyu «he (it) will grow up» (first forms regularly used in Eritrea, while the second ones are typical of Tigray)
in loanwords: 3	6	ሩሲያ↔ሩሲያ rusya↔rusiya «Russia»
Interchangeability of the letters of 5th and 1st orders:		
in case of some morphemes prefixed to the imperfect 1	5	ክዕርፍ እዩ↔ከዕርፍ እዩ keʿərrəf əyyu↔ käʿərrəf əyyu «he (it) will rest» ዜጥፍእ↔ዝጥፍእ zeṭəffəʾ↔zäṭəffəʾ «disconnecting; distructing» (first forms used in the most of Eritrea, while the second ones are typical of Tigray)
in loanwords: 1	5	in Eritrea most often the 1 st order is used: መከሲኮ

		mäksiko «Mexico», while in Tigray it is usually the 5 th order: ሜክሲኮ meksiko «Mexico»; but, again, it is not a rule
<p>Interchangeability of «1st order + -ኛ», «6th order + -ኛ» or «4th order + -ኛ» and -ይና suffixes. And interchangeability of -ተኛ and -ተይና suffixes:</p>		
«1 st order + -ኛ», «6 th order + -ኛ» or «4 th order + -ኛ»	-ይና	ሹመኛ ↔ ሹመይና šumäñña ↔ šumäyna «chief» ትግርኛ ↔ ትግርይና təgrəñña ↔ təgrəyna «Tigrinya» ዳኛ ↔ ዳይና dañña ↔ dayna «judge»
-ተኛ	-ተይና	ሰራሕተኛ ↔ ሰራሕተይና särahtäñña ↔ särahtäyna «worker»
<p>Interchangeability of an agent's final letter in its inherent 3rd order and the letter in 4th order + -ይ:</p>		
3	4 + -ይ	ተምሃሪ ↔ ተምሃሪይ tämhari ↔ tämharay «student» ሰሓቢ ↔ ሰሓቢይ säḥabi ↔ säḥabay «attractive»
<p>Interchangeability of the labiovelars and the non-labiovelars with no order change:</p>		
3	3	ዙኪኒ ↔ ዙኩኒ zukkini ↔ zukk ^w ini «zucchini»

		<p>ዕንቀጥ ↔ ዑንቂ ʿənqʷi ↔ ʿunqi «pearl» (note also the above mentioned transition of the 6th order <i>o</i> into the 2nd order)</p>
4	4	<p>ትኸን ↔ ትኸን təkʷan ↔ təkən «bedbug» ጉድጓድ ↔ ጉድጋድ gʷədɡʷad ↔ gudgad «pit» ጽማቕ ↔ ጽግቕ ʃəmmaᶞʷ ↔ ʃəmmʷaᶞ «juice» (full vice versa case; typical of Tigray)</p>
<p>Interchangeability of spelling of the imperfect, imperative and jussive forms in Tigray; applied to the verbs with a weak final radical (in Eritrea only the first form is used):</p>		
2	6 + ው	<p>ይፈቲ ↔ ይፈትው yəfättu ↔ yəfättəw «he likes (loves)»</p>
3	6 + ይ	<p>ይስቲ ↔ ይስትይ yəsätti ↔ ysättəy «he drinks»</p>
1	1 + ይ	<p>ስተ ↔ ስትይ sətä ↔ sətäy «drink!»</p>
1	1 + ይ	<p>ይስተ → ይስትይ yəstä → yəstäy «let him drink!»</p>

5. Other Inconsistencies

<p>Inconsistency of spelling some words with original (or etymological) ሐ and ዐ which are changed correspondingly into ሀ and አ:</p>
<p>ሕይወት → ሀይወት ከሳይወት → ከሳይወት «life» መድሐኒት → መድሃኒት (Especially in Eritrea) mädhānit → mädhanit «medicine» እግዚአብሔር → እግዚአብሄር əgzi'abher → əgzi'abher «God» ረግዐ → ረግአ räḡ'ä → räg'ä «to congeal» ግዕዝ → ግእዝ gə'əz → gə'əz «Geez»</p>
<p>Free variation is possible in case of some, mainly auxiliary words and morphemes: ከአ and ከዓ, kā'a and kā'a «as, then, as for ...» ንዕኡ and ንእኡ nə'ə'u and nə'ə'u «him; to him» መአሰ and መዓሰ etc. mä'as and mä'as «when»</p>
<p>Inconsistency of spelling the 3rd person passive verb in perfect. Middle radical may take the 6th or the 1st order:</p>
<p>ተሰብረ and ተሰበረ etc. täsäbrä and täsäbrä «to be or to become broken»</p>
<p>Inconsistent occurrence of the initial አ in causative verbs prefixed with እና-:</p>
<p>እና- + አንቀጥቀጠ → እናንቀጥቀጠ ənna- + anqätqätä → ənnaḡqätqätä «while shaking» እና + አንጸባረቐ → እናንጸባረቐ ənna- + anṣäbaräገä → ənnaṣäbaräገä «while shining, reflecting»</p>

<p>but እና + አጉረምረመ → እናአጉረምረመ but ənna- + ag^wrämramä → ənna'ag^wrämramä «while grumbling»</p>
<p>Inconsistency of spelling the final letter (of 4th order) of a word when 3rd person possessive pronominal suffixes added. The letter normally takes the 6th order, but no change cases also occur:</p>
<p>ዕላማ + አ → ዕላምአ or ዕላማአ 'əlama + 'a → 'əlam'a or 'əlama'a «her aim»</p>
<p>Inconsistency of spelling the final letter (of 7th order) of the word when 3rd person possessive pronominal suffixes added. The letter takes the 2nd order or demonstrates no change:</p>
<p>አቦ + ኡ → አቦኡ or አቡኡ abbo + 'u → abbo'u or abbu'u «his father»</p>
<p>Inconsistency of spelling the final letter (of 2nd order) of the 1st person singular, the 3rd person male/common gender plural perfect verb, 3rd person male gerund and plural imperative when 3rd person objective pronominal suffixes added. The letter may take the 6th order, but no change cases also occur:</p>
<p>ወሰድኩዎ and ወሰድከዎ wäsädkuwwo and wäsädkəwwo «I took it» ወሰዱዎ and ወሰድዎ wäsäduwwo and wäsädəwwo «they took it» ወሰዱዎ and ወሰድዎ wäsiduwwō and wäsidəwwo «he has taken it » ወሰዱዎ and ወሰድዎ wəsäduwwo and wəsädəwwo «take (pl.) it!»</p>
<p>Inconsistency of spelling the final ም of 3rd person male/common gender plural gerund when 3rd person objective pronominal suffixes added. The letter may take the 2nd order, but no change cases also occur:</p>
<p>ወሰደምዎ and ወሰደሙዎ wäsidoṃəwwo and wäsidoṃuwwo «they took it»</p>

Inconsistency of spelling the compound words

(as separate words, hyphenated or as a solid word):

a) Loanwords from Geez or neologisms and other words:

ቤተ ክርስቲያን → ቤተ ክርስቲያን (ቤተ ክርስቲያን), ቤተ-ክርስቲያን or ቤተክርስቲያን

betä krəstəyan → betä krəstəyan (betä krəstəyan), betä-krəstəyan or betäkrəstəyan «church»

ዓለም ለኻዊ → ዓለም ለኻዊ, ዓለም-ለኻዊ or ዓለምለኻዊ

‘alām läkäwi → ‘alām läkäwi, ‘alām-läkäwi or

‘alāmläkäwi «international»

When spelled as a solid word, concomitant changes may occur:

ጻል አንስተይቲ → ጻለንስተይቲ

g^wal anəstäyti → g^walänəstäyti «a female»

ፎራ አምዑት → ፎራምዑት

čəra am[‘]ut → čəram[‘]ut «appendix»

b) Personal names are spelled usually as solid words:

ጊላ + ጋብር → ጊላጋብር

gila + gabər → gilagabər

«Gilagabir (lit. a servant of Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus)»

ለተ + ብርሃን → ለተ-ብርሃን

lättä + bərhan → lättäbərhan

«Letteberhan (lit. a daughter of light)»

ተወልደ + መድኅን → ተወልደመድኅን

täwäldä + mädhən → täwäldämädhən

«Teweldemedhin (lit. the Savior was born)»

But all other cases are still possible:

ጉብረ + እግዚአብሔር → ጉብረ እግዚአብሔር, ጉብረ-እግዚአብሔር or ጉብረእግዚአብሔር

gäbrä + əgzi’abher → gängzi’abher, gängzi’abher or

gängzi’abher

c) Toponyms are normally spelled as separate words:

ዕዳጋ ሐሙስ ‘ədaga ḥamus «Edaga Hamus (lit. Thursday market)»

<p>ን + ኣጣል → ነጣል nə + aṭal → näṭal «goats (<i>acc.</i>); to the goats» ብ + ኣምሳል → በምሳል bə + amsal → bāmsal «in the form of..., like» but ን + ኣብነት → ንኣብነት nə + abənnät → nə'abənnät «for example» ብ + ኣድጊ ኸደ → በኣድጊ ኸደ bə + adgi kädä → bə'adgi kädä «to ride a donkey» ብ + ኣጋጣሚ → በኣጋጣሚ or በጋጣሚ bə + aggaṭami → bə'aggaṭami or bäggaṭami «by accident»</p> <p>No change cases occur when personal names involved: ንኣቤል ሂቡኖ nə'abel hibatto «s he gave it to Abel» ኣቡኡ ንኣቤል abbo'u nə'abel «father of Abel»</p>
<p>In some dialects of Tigray ቐ and ኸ occasionally play role of independent phone mes, while normally being only allophones:</p>
<p>ቐርቢ ቆጻሾ instead of ቐርቢ ቀጻሾ «local currency, money» ኸኣናት ክግጠን instead of ኸኣናት ክግጠን «war»</p>
<p>Inconsistency of spelling the adjectives ending with ዊ and ዋይ:</p>
<p>ዘመናዊ zāmānawi and ዘመናይ zāmānay «modern» etc.</p>
<p>Inconsistency of designating the question mark:</p>
<p>In Eritrea it is «?» or (rarely) «:» In Ethiopia it is only «?»</p>
<p>Inconsistency of making space between the auxiliary words and other words or forms:</p>
<p>ብዘይ ፍልጠት and ብዘይፍልጠት bəzäy fəḷṭät and bəzäyfəḷṭät «without knowledge» ከም ዝነገረኒ and ከምዝነገረኒ käm zənägäränni and kämzənägäränni «as he told me» ምስ ተወድኦ and ምስተወድኦ məs täwäddə'ä and məstäwäddə'ä «when it is finished (over)» ምስ ሰብ and ምስሰብ or even ምሰብ</p>

occasionally occur in Tigray

b) In 1st plural and 2nd person the reduced forms are common:

ኔርና, ኔርካ, ኔርኪ, ኔርኪ-ም, ኔርኪን, ኔርኪትኩም, ኔርኪትኩን

nerna, nerka, nerki, nerikum, nerkən, nerkatkum, nerkatkən

«to be (*gerund*)»

ኩንና, ኩንካ, ኩንኪ, ኩንኪ-ም, ኩንኪን, ኩንኪትኩም, ኩንኪትኩን

k^wenna, k^wenka, k^wenki, k^wenkum, k^wenkən, k^wenkatkum, k^wenkatkən

«to become (*gerund*)»

The forms like ገይርካ gäyrka and ኮይንካ koynka are quite common in Tigray

6. Diachronic Changes

ጸ and ፀ, both standing for «ፍ», were used selectively depending on a word. Thus, for example, the words ፍፅረይ, ፍጻወ, ፀሓይ and ሕፃን were usually spelled as ጸፍረይ, ፍጻወ, ፀሓይ and ሕፃን accordingly.

Nowadays in all cases ጸ is used in Eritrea, while ፀ is used in Ethiopia:

ጸፍረይ, ፍጻወ, ጸሓይ, ሕፃን etc. (Eritrea)

ፀፍረይ, ፍፀወ, ፀሓይ, ሕፃን etc. (Ethiopia)

ፍፅረይ, ፍጻወ, ፍጻወ, ፍጻወ

«clean», «to close», «sun», «baby, infant»

ሐ and ኀ were united into ሐ, while ሠ and ሰ were united into ሰ (thus ኀ and ሠ were abolished):

ኀው → ሐው

ፃው → ሐው

ኣሥመራ → ኣሰመራ

asmära «Asmara»

The final radical guttural of the 3rd person perfect verb and (rarely) 1st person gerund changed its order from 5th into 1st:

ገፍሖ → ገፍሐ (3rd person perfect)

ገፍሖ → ገፍሐ «to be wide, widen»

ወደኤ → ወደኣ (3rd person perfect)

<p>wäddəʔe → wäddəʔä «to finish» አጥፍኤ → አጥፍአ (3rd person perfect) aṭfəʔe → aṭfəʔä «to switch off; to destroy» በጸሑ → በጸሐ or more often በጸሐ (1st person gerund) bäṣəḥe → bäṣəḥä or more often bäṣihä «I arrived (came)»</p>
<p>A guttural with an [a] vowel could take the 1st order. Nowadays it is only the 4th order:</p>
<p>ሐኪም → ሐኪም ḥakkim «doctor» ዐበረ → ዓበረ, ʿabärä «to grow thin, lose weight» ሀቀነ → ሃቀነ haqqänä «to try, attempt» ዚዐያ → ዚዓያ ziʿayya «those (f.) who work» ምውዐል → ምውዓል məwʿal «to spend a day (time)»</p>

7. Attachment

7.1. Dialectal Varieties

<p>እዚ, እዙ, እዙይ əzi, əzu, əzuy «this» እቲ, እቱ, እቱይ əti, ətu, ətuy «that» ሑዚ, ሕዚ, ሐዚ, ሕዪ, ሕጂ and even ኸዚ ḥezi, ḥəzi, ḥazi, ḥəyi, ḥəjji and even ḳäzi «now» ናብ, ላብ nab, lab «to, towards» ን-, ል- nə-, lə- «to» ዝ-, ል-, ድ- zə-, lə-, də- «that ...» <i>(a morpheme to form relative verbal forms)</i> ዘይ-, ለይ- zäy-, läy- «that not ...» <i>(a morpheme to form negative relative verbal forms)</i></p>
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እና-, እንዳ-, ላ-

ənnə-, ənda-, la- «while»

(a prefix adjusted to a perfect verb to form an adverbial participle or an adverb)

ናት-, ናይ-

nat-, nay- «of» *(used with suffixed personal pronouns)*

ንሱ, እሱ

nəssu, əssu «he»

ንሕና, ኣንሕና, ኣሕና

nəḥna, anəḥna, aḥna «we»

ሓጺን, ሓጪን

ḥaşin, ḥaçin «iron (*metal*)»

አገልግሎት, ግልጋሎት

agälgəlot, gəlgəlot «service»

አይ-, የ- (አይናተይ, የናተይ)

ay-, yä- «not ...» (aynatäy, yänatäy «not mine»)

አይ-...ን, አይ-...ይ, የ-...ን, የ-...ይ

ay-...n, ay-...y, yä-...n, yä-...y *(negation of perfect and imperfect)*

አይኮነን, አይኹነን, አይኹይ, የኹነን, የኹይ

aykonän, ay[ə]kōnän, ay[ə]kōnäy, yäkōnän, yäkōnäy

«he (it) is not»

እምበር, እምበይ

əmbär, əmbäy «but; otherwise»

የለን, የለይ

yällän, yälläy «there is not»

and many, many more dialectical varieties

7.2. Punctuation Marks

Punctuation in modern Tigrinya is not standardized.

Original punctuation marks

<i>Tigrinya mark</i>	<i>Approximate correspondence in European punctuation</i>
:	«,» (<i>coma</i>); previously used as word boundary mark, in that function it is substituted with space character
::	«.» (<i>full stop</i>)

⋮	«,» (coma), «:» (colon), «;» (semicolon)
⋮	«:» (colon), «,» (coma), «;» (semicolon)
⋮	«,» (coma, usually separating the clauses within a compound sentence), «;» (semicolon), «:» (colon)
⋮	«:» (colon), «←» (dash)
⋮	«?» (interrogation mark); used only in Eritrea, and is being substituted with «?» mark; a combination of «!:» also occasionally occurs

Borrowed punctuation marks and orthographic figures

Mark/Figure	Usage (indicated if unusual)
.	dot; used in acronyms and abbreviations
/	slash; used in acronyms and abbreviations
'	apostrophe; optionally appears at place of elision
()	parentheses
«»	quotation marks
?	interrogation mark
!	exclamation mark
-	hyphen
...	suspension points
—	dash
[]	square brackets

When a word breaks in the end of a line no mark is used (no hyphenation rules apply).

7.3. Inconsistency of Syntax

(Amharic influence)

ፍቻድ መዘወሪ and መዘወሪ ፍቻድ

**fəḫad mäzäwwäri and mäzäwwäri fəḫad «driving license»
 ማኪና ፅዕነት and ፅዕነት ማኪና**

makina ʃəʼnät and ʃəʼnät makina «truck»

ጸርሆ ማይ and ማይ ጸርሆ

därho may and may därho «waterfowl; duck etc.»

8. Conclusion

Major Points

- Modern Tigrinya orthography demonstrates a fair amount of inconsistencies;
- Inappropriate use of orders of the script;
- Flexible choice of a letter at nearly all levels of morphology;
- The same word can be spelled in many different ways;
- Tigrinya orthography is now in transition;
- It must be acknowledged, that few of the orthographic cases mentioned in this research are in fact clearly distinguished «misprints» regularly made to save time or deliberately used for the sake of simplification. It is especially so in the cases of omitting the spirantization mark. Those cases are included in this work to provide the fullest possible picture.
- It is possible to represent all the phonemes by means of the script used;
- It is possible to collect and comfortably systemize inconsistencies.

Recommendation

- Teams of expert linguists at language academies' level must make efforts for adaptation of the right and harmonious variants acceptable to the majority of the people;
- A change in the dialects should be minimal (it is impossible to totally avoid it unfortunately);

- Ethiopian and Eritrean experts are advised to coordinate this work together as much as possible.

Benefits

- Relative simplicity of the standardization process, at least at the early and intermediate stages;
- Ease of language learning and teaching;
- Ease of the language transfer;
- Ease of use of dictionaries and other reference materials;
- Creation of morphological analyzers which will help to properly develop and use electronic, digital and online dictionaries, translators, including automatic translators and translators by means of scanning.
- Successful standardization of the written Tigrinya will eventually favor the development of many fields of social life of the language speakers: education, literature, mass media, business and many others.

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