

Learner profile: Amharic

This guide presents common challenges faced by Amharic learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems. However, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging.



Facts

- **Language family:** An Ethiopian Semitic language.
- **Native speakers:** 22,000,000.
- **Second language speakers:** 4,000,000.
- **Location:** Amharic is the official language of Ethiopia.
- **Writing system:** The Fidäl abjad is written in the Ge'ez script.

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Pronunciation

- There are many similarities between the consonants in English and Amharic. However, some consonants, such as 'r', 'l', 'p' and 't', may be produced differently by native Amharic speakers.
- The sounds /ð/ (the initial sound in 'then') and /θ/ (the initial sound in 'think') are not sounds found in Amharic. The former may be produced as /s/ or /z/ by native Amharic speakers learning English and the latter may be produced as /s/, /f/ or /t/.
- Amharic speakers may struggle with consonant clusters in English.

Grammar

- Amharic is a subject-object-verb language (e.g. boy-the ball-the he-kicked) which may be transferred to English.
- In Amharic, questions are formed by inserting a question word directly before the verb in the sentence, without changing the word order.
- Personal pronouns can be omitted in Amharic and this may be transferred to English.
- The indefinite article is the same word as 'one' in Amharic. The indefinite article can be omitted in Amharic.
- It is not always necessary to use the plural marker in Amharic as the context makes the plurality obvious.

Writing

- The Fidäl abjad uses diacritics on the consonants to depict vowels. Using separate graphemes in English to depict vowels might be difficult.
- There is no differentiation between capital and lower-case letters in Amharic.
- Amharic punctuation varies greatly from English punctuation marks (፤ is used as a full stop, ፤፤ a question mark, ፤፤፤ a comma, ፤፤፤፤ a paragraph separator).
- Amharic occasionally uses Ethiopian numerals to write dates. ፩ is 1 and ፲ is 100.

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Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons

Some lessons which might help based on the above differences:

Beginner > A Few Basics > Personal Pronouns

Beginner > Letters & Numbers

Beginner > Phonics 1 > Additional sounds

Beginner > Phonics 2 > Initial 'R' clusters

Beginner > Phonics 2 > Initial 'L' clusters

Beginner > Phonics 2 > More initial consonant clusters

Beginner > Phonics 2 > 3-letter clusters

Beginner > Food & Drink > Articles

Beginner > Family, Friends & Pets > Plural nouns

Beginner > Holiday & Travel > 5 Ws

Beginner > English Language > Capital letters

Beginner > English Language > Simple sentences

Beginner > Punctuation