
Amharic

by Yekaterina Lassinskaya

Amharic is a Semitic language, related to Hebrew and Arabic. Like these other languages, Amharic has its own very old writing system. This system is called "Ge'ez." Modern Amharic is spoken by more than 23,000,000 people and is the official language of Ethiopia. Below are some words in Amharic written in the traditional way, and translated into English. At the bottom, the same Amharic words are given in a Roman transcription that reflects their pronunciation (the Roman alphabet is the one that English is based on). The capital letters G, T, K and C represent special sounds of Amharic. These are very different from g, t, k, and c. In most cases the special sounds are pronounced farther back in the mouth than the ordinary ones are. The transcriptions are in random order. This distinction is very important in Amharic.

1. Match the transcriptions below with the Amharic words in the following list:

	Amharic Word	Roman Transcription	English
a.	ኮክ	koke	my peach
b.	ጌታ	Geta	master
c.	ቤቱ	betu	his house
d.	ለባ	laba	fuzz
e.	ቆቆ	KoKe	my partridge
f.	ፒያኖ	piyano	piano
g.	ጎጦ	GaTe	my stall
h.	ቆቆቶ	KoKoCu	his partridges
i.	ጣቱ	Tatu	his finger
j.	ዚፕ	zipe	my zipper

Roman transcriptions (in random order):

GaTe, koke, betu, KoKoCu, laba, Tatu, zipe, KoKe, piyano, Geta

2. Now, fill in the gaps in the following table. Draw the Amharic characters carefully – you can do it!:

	Amharic Word	Roman Transcription	English
k.	ፓፕጅ	papaya	papaya
l.	ጠቶቹ	TatoCe	my fingers
m.	ክክ	koku	his peach
n.	ዛቦቹ	zaboCu	his bridles
o.	ዛቡ	zabu	his bridle
p.	ጋጠቹ	GaToCu	his stalls
q.	ኩዞቹ	kuzoCu	his mugs
r.	ጋዜጣ	GazeTa	newspaper

3. Explain your solution: