Who Speaks Amharic?
Amharic is a Semitic language that is also known as Amarigna and it is one of the major languages in Ethiopia. It is spoken by up to 35 million people who constitute about one third of Ethiopia’s population. The origins of the language are traced back to the 1st millennium B.C. when immigrants from southwestern Arabia crossed the Red Sea into present-day Eritrea and mixed with the Cushitic population. New languages like Ge’ez were formed as a result of the union. Ge’ez was the classical language of the Axum Empire of Northern Ethiopia. It existed between the 1st Century A.D. and the 12th Century A.D. When the power base of Ethiopia shifted from Axum to Amhara between the 10th and the 12th Century A.D., the use of Amharic language spread its influence, hence becoming the national language.

Interesting Facts about Amharic Culture
- The Amharic people are believed to be descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.
- The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has dominated religious life in Ethiopia since the fourth century.
- The southern region of Kefa claims to be the original home of coffee, and the bean has been grown in Ethiopia since 1000 A.D.
- During the reign of Emperor Menelik II, Ethiopian successfully resisted the attempt by Italy at colonization thereby making it one of the two African countries that were not colonized by Europeans.
- After the Battle of Adwa, Russian Tsar Nicholas II donated a full orchestra of instruments to Ethiopia, leading to the integration of orchestral themes into Ethiopian music.
- The hominid fossil of Lucy (called Dink’nesh in Amharic) is preserved in the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa.

Some Famous People of Amharic Descent
Tilahun Gessese: king of music
Tewodros Kassahun/Teddy Afro: pop star
Abebe Bikila: the first black African Olympic gold medalist
Ejigayehu Shibabaw: musician
Mesfin Woldemariam: human rights activist and author
Mulatu Astatke: father of Ethiopian Jazz
Abiy Ahmed: Nobel Peace Prize laureate
Yeshihasab Abera: journalist, activist, and writer

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Haile Selassie, the last emperor of Ethiopia. He belonged to the Solomonic dynasty whose lineage is traced to Emperor Menelik I, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.
Why Study Amharic?

In addition to being the working language of the federal government and some regional governments, Amharic is one of the most widely studied languages in Ethiopia. It is a field of study at the B.A., M.A. and Ph.D level, and it is also taught as a subject in most elementary and secondary levels of education. In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city, and in most major towns, it is the medium of instruction for primary level education. Because of its past and present role, Amharic is also a medium of study of Ethiopian culture and society. Knowledge of Amharic language is essential to understanding Ethiopian culture.

Amharic is very useful to scholars in anthropology, history, archaeology and linguistics since Ethiopia is a land of great history and treasures. The discovery of Lucy, the three-million-year-old skeleton called Dink’nessh (You are Wonderful) in Amharic in what is now the Afar area of eastern Ethiopia, was a momentous event in the history of Ethiopia, and world archeology.

Ethiopia provides a rich resource to geologists and biologists. Massive erosion over the years on the Ethiopian Plateau has created Simien National Park, one of the most spectacular landscapes in the world. With jagged mountain peaks, deep valleys and sharp precipices dropping some 1,500 m, this area is home to many rare animals such as the Gelada Baboon, the Simien Fox and the Walia Ibex, a goat found nowhere else in the world. Therefore, knowledge of Amharic will be very helpful to tourists visiting Ethiopia.

Several other people can also benefit from learning Amharic. International non-profit groups such as The Red Cross, Peace Corps, SIDA and IFESH as well as United States diplomats and advisors continuously work in Ethiopia and require language training in Amharic.

Learn these everyday Phrases!

- Welcome: Enkuan dehina metah (male), Enkuan dehina metash (female), Enkuan dehina metu (elderly) Enkuan dehina metachihu (plural)
- Well done: Melkam
- How are you?: Endemin neh? (m), Endemin nesh? (f), Endemin nachihu? (e), Enkuan dehina metachihu (p)
- I am fine: Dehinan negni
- Thank you: Ameseqinalehu
- Goodbye: Dehina hun (m), Dehina hugni (f), Dehina hunu (p)
- Morning greeting: Endemin aderk (m), Endemin adersh (f), Endemin aderachihu (p), Endemin aderu (e)
- Afternoon greeting: Endemin walk (m), Endemin Walsh (f), Endemin walachihu (p), Endemin walu (e)
- Evening greeting: Endemin amesheh (m), Endemin ameshesh (f), Endemin ameshachihu (p), Endemin ameshu (e)

Amharic Language Map

Studying Amharic in the United States:

Please check the “Language Inventory” menu on NALRC website.