Transliteration of Blin from Ge'ez Script to Latin

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Transliteration is a process by which a letter or word written in a given script is transposed or pronounced in the script of another language. Transliteration converts texts from one script to another based on the phonetic similarity. Transliteration, like translation does not tell the meaning of a word. However, it tells how a word is pronounced, when it is written in the script of another language. It means it represents words and phrases of one language by the script of another language. Libraries use transliteration for processing of textual data. Restaurants use it to present their menus in different languages and scripts. Transliteration also enables the use of a keyboard in a given script, to type in a text or script of another language. For example, with the technique of transliteration, we are able to use the QWERTY, which is the primary keyboard layout for the Latin alphabet, in order to type a text in Ge'ez or other scripts.

Blin is one of the nine languages of Eritrea, and it is a Cushitic language belonging to the Agaw language family. When mother tongue education was introduced in Eritrea, after its independence in 1991, the Eritrean government adopted a Latin alphabet for Blin mother tongue education, which was implemented in 1997. The Blin language, however, had a tradition of being written in Ge'ez script for over 150 years. Giuseppe Sapeto wrote the first small Blin vocabulary, in Latin and Ge'ez scripts in 1857. Leo Reinisch wrote four books including a Blin dictionary between 1882 and 1887. He was the first person to use the Ge'ez script extensively for Blin. He translated the Gospel of St. Mark into Blin, using the Ge'ez script. After the second half of the 20ᵗʰ century, and especially after 1990, Blin speakers wrote many books in Blin, and all the books were written in Ge'ez script, with the exception of some elementary school textbooks. Because of this tradition, Blin speakers who had their primary education in Ge'ez script before 1997 still use the Ge'ez script to write in Blin. The present generation of Blin speakers, who got their primary education after 1997, cannot write or read in Ge'ez script, and thus, they use the Latin alphabet to write in Blin. This shows that transliteration of Blin speech sounds between these two scripts is of paramount importance. It can help Blin speakers to write their language in both scripts (Ge'ez and Latin) effectively, and can gradually decide which script is more practical for their language in the future. It can also help for researchers who are interested to study the Blin Language.

Most Latin letters have similar phonetic counterparts in Ge'ez script. Examples of consonants are: b በ, d ደ, f ፈ, g ገ, h ሀ, j ጀ, k ከ, l ለ, m መ, n ነ, p ፐ, r ረ, s ሰ, t ተ, v ቨ, y የ, z ዘ, and examples of vowels are; a አ, e ኤ, i ኢ, u ኡ, o ኦ . In spite of the phonetic similarities of Latin and Ge'ez letters, it has to be noted that the basic characters of almost all of the *Abugida,* or Ge'ez letters, is a consonant followed by a particular vowel. That means each symbol represents a consonant plus a vowel. The Blin language, as well as other Cushitic and Semitic languages of Eritrea have many ejective plosives and other speech sounds, which have well developed letters in the Ge'ez script, but the Latin or Romanized alphabet does not have original letters for such sounds. However, phoneticians have always been studying the different speech sounds of the world languages, and adopting additional letters based on the Latin alphabet, by modifying the existing letters, adding diacritic marks or by combining letters and creating diagraphs or trigraphs. After the establishment of the International Phonetic Association (IPA) in 1886, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was devised as a standard representation of speech sounds in written form. Examples of such devised IPA letters, which correspond to the phonetic letters of the Ge'ez script are: [tʼ] ጠ, [sʼ] [tsʼ] ጸ, chʼ [tʃʼ], [tʃ] ጨ, [pʼ] ጰ, [č] [ch] ቸ, [kʼ] ቀ, [qʼ] ቈ, [kh] [x] ኸ, [ħ] ሐ, [ʕ] [ʿ] ዐ, [ŋ] [ng] ኘ, [ɲ] ኛ, etc. According to the Latin-based alphabet writing of Blin in Eritrea, known as "Xaleget", [ħ] ሐ is transcribed as **x**, and [kʼ] ቀ as **q**, [ŋ] ኘ as **ñ**, [tʼ] ጠ as **th**, and [ʕ] (ʿä) ዐ as **c**. (Another non-IPA symbol for ጨ is [čʼ])

As shown in the above, the transliteration attempt of the ABUGIDA or Ge'ez letters here is based on IPA and non-IPA transliteration. The phonology of the Blin language has a great deal of resemblance to the phonology of Tigrigna and Tigre (F.R. Palmer 1960). Some speech sounds like [z] ዘ, [sʼ] ጸ, [pʼ] ጰ, [č] [ch] ቸ, [ž] ዠ, [v] ቨ are not part of the native Blin phonemic inventory. However, almost all of the Ge'ez letters either are

used to write original Blin sounds, or borrowed words from other Semitic languages. One unique Blin speech sound, which is not found in neighboring Semitic languages, is the voiced velar nasal [ŋ] **ፘ** and its labialized form **ፘ** [ŋʷ], which are also written by using the diagraph **ng** and trigraph **ngʷ**. The unlabialized velar nasal sound is very common in English language, as we can see it in words like, so**ng**, stro**ng**, bri**ng** etc. The Blin language has seven vowels, and they are, ä **አ**, u **ኡ**, i **ኢ**, a **ኣ**, e **ኤ**, ə **እ**, o **አ**. The mid central vowel sound [ə] **እ**, is sometimes represented with the close central unrounded vowel [ɨ] (Paul D. Fallon 2006). The same sound [ə] **እ** is written with acute accent diacritical mark over the letter **e** like this [é], according to the Latin-based alphabet used in Blin mother tongue education in Eritrea.

As most Latin alphabet letters have similar but alphasyllabic phonetic letters (**ፊደላት**, *Fidälat*) in the Geʾez script, especial focus is given here to the afore mentioned ejective plosives in Blin and other Semitic and Cushitic languages, like [tʾ] [th] **ጠ**, [sʾ] [tsʾ] **ጸ**, [chʾ] [čʾ] **ጨ**, [pʾ] [p] **ጰ**, etc. The IPA (International Phonetic Association) always makes some modifications to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), and one has to be aware of the outdated transliterations. For example, transliterations like [ḳ] **ቀ** and [p̣] **ጰ** are older, while [kʾ] **ቀ** and [pʾ] **ጰ** are modified and newer. Despite such modifications from time to time, it is not easy for ordinary people to know all the modified letters or symbols. Besides, some symbols or IPA letters are not always available in all keyboards. Thus, it is sometimes preferable to use combination of letters (diagraphs) and simpler diacritic marks like the above to transliterate some sounds. This is very common in English, as we can notice it in words like, "fini**sh**", "chur**ch**", "stro**ng**" etc.

The first chart below shows the alternative transliterations of ejective plosives and other sounds, which are very common in Blin and other Semitic and Cushitic languages. The alternatives show the old IPA and non-IPA letters and the new or modified ones, and the Latin-based alphabetic letters adopted for Blin mother tongue education in Eritrea. Frequently used diagraphs are also presented as another alternative.

Table 1: Transliteration of Blin Phonemes

Phonetic Transcription	ABUGIDA ፊደል	Phonetic Transcription Transliteration Alternatives	Preferred Alternative for Blin	Remarks
ħ	**ሐ**	ḥ, ħ, x	ħ, x	**X** (**ሐ**) used by Latin based Blin mother tongue education.
š	**ሽ**	š, sh, ʃ	š, sh	**sh** is a diagraph, practical for ordinary daily writing.
kʾ	**ቀ**	ḳ, kʾ, q	kʾ	
kʷʾ	**ቈ**	ḳʷ, kʷʾ	kʷʾ	
qʾ	**ቐ**		qʾ, q	
qʷʾ	**ቘ**	qʷʾ	qʷʾ	
x	**ኽ**	x, kh	x, kh	**kh** is usually used for writing the **ኽ** sound in Blin and other Eritrean languages
xʷ	**ኹ**	xʷ, khʷ	xʷ, khʷ	
ŋ	**ፘ**	ŋ, ng	ŋ, ng	**ng** is used for writing the same sound in English words like bri**ng**, stro**ng** etc. **ŋ** is not available in most keyboards. It can be used as an alternative, for example in dictionaries.

ŋʷ	**ኞ**	ŋʷ, ngʷ	ngʷ	
tʼ	**ጠ**	tʼ, ṭ, th	tʼ	**th** is used by Latin based Blin mother tongue education.
čʼ, tʃʼ	**ጨ**	ç, čʼ, chʼ, tʃʼ	čʼ, chʼ	**ch**ʼ is an easy alternative to type in all keyboards.
pʼ	**ጰ**	p, pʼ,	pʼ	
tsʼ	**ጸ**	tsʼ, ṣ, sʼ	sʼ	
č, tʃ	**ቸ**	č, ch	č, ch	**ch** is an easy alternative to type in all keyboards.
ʒ	**ዠ**	ž, zh	zh	
ǧ, dʒ	**ጀ**	dʒ	dʒ, j	
ñ	**ኝ**	ñ	ñ, ny, **gn**	**gn** is based on Italian orthography as in Tigri**gn**a
ʔ, ʼ	**አ**	ʼʔ, ʼa, ä	ʔ, ʼ	1. **አ** = ʔä, **ኣ** = ʔa, **እ** = ʔə , ʔè 2. **አ** = ʼä, **ኣ** = ʼa, **እ** = ʼə , ʼè
ə	**እ**	ə, ɨ, è	ə	**è** is used by Latin based Blin mother tongue education. ɨ sometimes is used as another alternative to ə.
ʕ, ʻ	**ዐ**	ʕ, ʻ , c	ʕ, ʻ	1. **ዐ** = ʕä, **ዓ** = ʕa, **ዕ** = ʕə , ʕè 2. **ዐ** = ʻä, **ዓ** = ʻa, **ዕ** = ʻə , ʻè **c** is used by Latin based Blin mother tongue education.

The second chart below on page 4 and 5 shows the transliteration of almost all the ABUGIDA or Geʼez letters, which are relevant for writing original Blin sounds or for the writing of borrowed words in Blin.

Table 2: Transliteration of Blin Letters

IPA	ግዕዝ 1st	ካዕብ 2nd	ሣልስ 3rd	ራብዕ 4th	ኃምስ 5th	ሳድስ 6th	ሳብዕ 7th
	+ ä	u	i	a	e	ə	o
h	ሀ hä	ሁ hu	ሂ hi	ሃ ha	ሄ he	ህ hə	ሆ ho
l	ለ lä	ሉ lu	ሊ li	ላ la	ሌ le	ል lə	ሎ lo
ħ	ሐ ħä	ሑ ħu	ሒ ħi	ሓ ħa	ሔ ħe	ሕ ħə	ሖ ħo
m	መ mä	ሙ mu	ሚ mi	ማ ma	ሜ me	ም mə	ሞ mo
s	ሰ sä	ሱ su	ሲ si	ሳ sa	ሴ se	ስ sə	ሶ so
r	ረ rä	ሩ ru	ሪ ri	ራ ra	ሬ re	ር rə	ሮ ro
š, ∫	ሸ šä	ሹ šu	ሺ ši	ሻ ša	ሼ še	ሽ šə	ሾ šo
kʼ	ቀ kʼä	ቁ kʼu	ቂ kʼi	ቃ kʼa	ቄ kʼe	ቅ kʼə	ቆ kʼo
kʷʼ, kʼʷ	ቈ kʷʼä, kʼʷä	-	ቊ kʷʼi	ቋ kʷʼa	ቌ kʷʼe	ቍ kʷʼə	-
qʼ, q	ቐ qʼä	ቑ qʼu	ቒ qʼi	ቓ qʼa	ቔ qʼe	ቕ qʼə	ቖ qʼo
qʷʼ, qʷ	ቘ qʷʼä	-	ቚ qʷʼi	ቛ qʷʼa	ቜ qʷʼe	ቝ qʷʼə	-
b	በ bä	ቡ bu	ቢ bi	ባ ba	ቤ be	ብ bə	ቦ bo
t	ተ tä	ቱ tu	ቲ ti	ታ ta	ቴ te	ት tə	ቶ to
n	ነ nä	ኑ nu	ኒ ni	ና na	ኔ ne	ን nə	ኖ no
ʔ, ˀ	አ ʔä / ˀä	ኡ ʔu / ˀu	ኢ ʔi / ˀi	ኣ ʔa / ˀa	ኤ ʔe / ˀe	እ ʔə / ˀə	ኦ ʔo / ˀo
k	ከ kä	ኩ ku	ኪ ki	ካ ka	ኬ ke	ክ kə	ኮ ko
kʷ	ኰ kʷä	-	ኲ kʷi	ኳ kʷa	ኴ kʷe	ኵ kʷə	-
x, kh	ኸ xä, khä	ኹ xu	ኺ xi	ኻ xa	ኼ xe	ኽ xə	ኾ xo
xʷ, khʷ	ዀ xʷä, khʷä	-	ዂ xʷi	ዃ xʷa	ዄ xʷe	ዅ xʷə	-
w	ወ wä	ዉ wu	ዊ wi	ዋ wa	ዌ we	ው wə	ዎ wo
ʕ, ˁ	ዐ ʕä / ˁä	ዑ ʕu / ˁu	ዒ ʕi / ˁi	ዓ ʕa / ˁa	ዔ ʕe / ˁe	ዕ ʕə / ˁə	ዖ ʕo / ˁo

y, j	�የ yä	�ዩ yu	�ይ yi	ያ ya	ዬ ye	ይ yə	ዮ yo
d	ደ dä	ዱ du	ዲ di	ዳ da	ዴ de	ድ də	ዶ do
j, ğ	ጀ jä, ğä	ጁ ju	ጂ ji	ጃ ja	ጄ je	ጅ jə	ጆ jo
g	ገ gä	ጉ gu	ጊ gi	ጋ ga	ጌ ge	ግ gə	ጎ go
gʷ	ጐ gʷä	-	ጒ gʷi	ጓ gʷa	ጔ gʷe	ጕ gʷə	-
ŋ, ng	ኘ ŋä, ngä	ኙ ŋu	ኚ ŋi	ኛ ŋa	ኜ ŋe	ኝ ŋə	ኞ ŋo
ŋʷ, ngʷ	ኰ ŋʷä	-	ኲ ŋʷi	ኳ ŋʷa	ኴ ŋʷe	ኵ ŋʷə	-
t'	ጠ t'ä	ጡ t'u	ጢ t'i	ጣ t'a	ጤ t'e	ጥ t'ə	ጦ t'o
č', ch'	ጨ č'ä, ch'ä	ጩ č'u	ጪ č'i	ጫ č'a	ጬ č'e	ጭ č'ə	ጮ č'o
č, ch	ቸ čä, chä	ቹ ču	ቺ či	ቻ ča	ቼ če	ች čə	ቾ čo
ñ, y, gn	ኘ ñä	ኙ ñu	ኚ ñi	ኛ ña	ኜ ñe	ኝ ñə	ኞ ño
z	ዘ zä	ዙ zu	ዚ zi	ዛ za	ዜ ze	ዝ zə	ዞ zo
z'	ዠ z'ä, ʒä	ዡ z'u	ዢ z'i	ዣ z'a	ዤ z'e	ዥ z'ə	ዦ z'o
s'	ጸ s'ä	ጹ s'u	ጺ s'i	ጻ s'a	ጼ s'e	ጽ s'ə	ጾ s'o
p'	ጰ p'ä	ጱ p'u	ጲ p'i	ጳ p'a	ጴ p'e	ጵ p'ə	ጶ p'o
f	ፈ fä	ፉ fu	ፊ fi	ፋ fa	ፌ fe	ፍ fə	ፎ fo
p	ፐ pä	ፑ pu	ፒ pi	ፓ pa	ፔ pe	ፕ pə	ፖ po
v	ቨ vä	ቩ vu	ቪ vi	ቫ va	ቬ ve	ቭ və	ቮ vo

Table 3: Transliteration of some Blin words from Ge'ez Script to Latin

IPA	Ge'ez- Blin letters	Blin words in Ge'ez script	Blin words in Latin script		Meaning
ħ	ሐ	ሐሰብና	ħassäbna		to think
		ሐውይና	ħawyna		to burn
		ሐንደካ	ħandäka		palm leaf mat
		ሕብር	ħəbər		colour
		ሐጀብ	ħoğäb	(ħojäb)	eyebrow
š, sh	ሸ	ሸብ	šäb	(shäb)	milk
		ሸርና	šärna	(shärna)	to swear
		ሹር	šur	(shur)	weapon, instrument
		ሺንሻ	šinša	(shinsha)	fly (insect)
		ሸብክ	šəbək	(shəbək)	hair
k'	ቀ	ቀመድና	k'ämädna		to burn
		ቁሻ	k'uša	(k'usha)	sand
		ቂጠራ	k'iťora		chair
		ቃፍ	k'af		bark
		ቅሮረት	k'ərorät		bottle
kʷ'	ቈ	ቈንሸላ	kʷ'änšäla	(kʷ'änshäla)	fox
		ቊልና	kʷ'alna		to see
		ቍራ	kʷ'əra		boy
		ቍሽትፄ	kʷ'əštəŋ	(kʷ'əštəng)	hole
		ቍምባ	kʷ'əmba	(kʷ'èmba)	nose
x, kh	ኸ	ኸኸስና	käxäsna	(käkhäsna)	to yawn
		ነበኺ	näbäxi	(näbäkhi)	dream
		ኽኺን	kəxin	(kəkhin)	clever
		ኽኻን	kəxan	(kəkhan)	marriage
		ኽኻንትና	kəxantna	(kəkhantna)	to marry
xʷ, khʷ	ኹ	እኹና	'əxʷina	('əkhʷina)	woman
		ድኻራ	dəxʷara	(dəkhʷara)	donkey
		ኪያዋኹ	kəyawaxʷ	(kəyawakhʷ)	ugly
		ኻኹራ	kwaxʷra	(kwakhʷra)	crow
ŋ, ng	ፘ	ለፘታ	läŋäta	(längäta)	seven
		ለፗ	läŋa	(länga)	two
		ኮድፗ	kodəŋa	(kodənga)	advice
		ኮድፗና	kodəŋna	(kodəngəna)	to advise
		ግድፗ	gədəŋ	(gədəng)	dog
ŋʷ, ngʷ		ብፘ	bəŋʷa	(bəngʷa)	liar
		ብፘትና	bəŋ ʷitna	(bəng ʷitna)	to lie
		ስፘ	səŋ ʷ	(səng ʷ)	name
		ዱፘና	duŋʷə na	(dungʷəna)	to finsh
		ኻፘና	kwaŋʷna	(kwangʷna)	to chew
t'	ጠ	ጠብጥ	t'äbəť		sharp
		ጠዓድ	t'äʕad, t'äʔad		popcorn
		ጠዓምብና	t'äʕambəna	(t'äʔambəna)	to hit, beat
		ጠበስና	t'äbäsna		be wet through (of rain water)
		ጣፊሕ	t'afiħ		even, plain, ready

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tʃʼ, čʼ, ch'	ጨ	ጨበርና	čʼäbbärna	(ch'äbbärna)	to wait
		ጨማም	čʼämam	(ch'ämam)	deaf
		ጨድፍ	čʼädəf	(ch'ädəf)	precipice, ravine
		ጪዋ	čʼiwa	(ch'iwa)	family
		ጬዕዓኹ	čʼaʕdaxʷ	(ch'aʿədakhʷ)	white
pʼ	ጰ	ጰጳስ	pʼapʼas		pope
ʔ, ʼ	አ	አርብ	ʔärəb	(ʼärəb)	1. Friday 2. grave 3. funeral
		አዊል	ʔäwil	(ʼäwil)	where
		አኹር	ʔaxʷär	(ʼakhʷär)	head
		እድ	ʔəd	(ʼəd)	door
ʕ, ʻ	ዐ	ዓቁ	ʕaqʷʼ	(ʼaqʷ)	water
		ዓመቅ	ʕamäqʼ	(ʼamäqʼ)	dirt
		ዓምብላ	ʕambəla	(ʼambəla)	buck, male goat
		ዕል	ʕəl	(ʼəl)	eye

The transliteration of Blin from Ge'ez script to Latin, as presented here is based on my previous experiences and skills. In 1992 I wrote my first book called *"Blin Language, Introductory Phonetics and Grammar"*. In 1994 I co-authoured, together with Dr. Kiflemariam Hamde and Mr. Fessehazion Zemichael, a paper called *"Some Standardization of Blin"*. Later, in 2007, I wrote my second book called *"Blin Animal Fables and Riddles"*. However, the initiative of transliterating Blin was suggested by Mr. Daniel Yacob. It has to be recalled that Mr. Daniel, a member of The Ge'ez Frontier Foundation in the USA, had already contributed a lot for the development of the writing of the Blin language in Ge'ez script. He was the one who designed the Blin-styled version of the Blin-Ge'ez letters, with my collaboration in 2004, and helped for the registration of Blin in the Unicode Standard, Unicode 4.1. Mr. Daniel is now planning to develop a software for the transliteration of Blin, and he consulted and motivated me to write this Blin transliteration paper. I express my deep gratitude to him for his contribution with very important remarks, and I hope that I have fulfilled his expectations. I also express my deep gratitude to Dr. Paul D. Fallon (Associate Professor of Linguistics, University of Mary Washington), for his very important remarks. It has to be recalled that Mr. Paul had studied the Blin language and contributed with many important articles, including, *"Blin Orthogaphy: A History and Assessment"*, which he wrote in 2006. I also extend my deep gratitude to Dr. Kiflemariam Hamde for contributing with some very important remarks. Even though I am a Blin speaker with an earnest interest to develop the Blin language, my knowledge of linguistics is limited, and I take full responsibly for any inadequacies.

Example Passage

Table 4: Transliteration of a passage from Abrehe Ammar's Blin poems collected by Kiflemariam Hamde.

Blin Ge'ez	Blin Transliteration
አብረሄ ዓማርዲ ጨፈራ	ʔabərähe ʕamarədi čʼäfära
ሰኃግረሪ እንትቲ እና ይና በለድል፣	säŋägəräri ʔənətäti ʔəna yəna bälədəl :
ቃበበዋ እንቃቅማ ቃበብሰዋ ቄራቀኁር፣	kʼabäbäwa ʔənəkʼakʼəma kʼabäbəsäwa kʼurakʷʼur :
አባጢሕሲ ማነየጋ ላሪ ሸኸኒ ሓኹር፣	ʔabatʼiħəsi manäyəga lari šäxəni ħäkʷər :
ነዋ ይና ሰበትድ ዋኺተነኹ ይነከል፣	näwa yəna säbätəd waxitänäkʷə yənäkəl :
ሸማግለ ትወነኹ ዋኺተውድ ነበከል፣	šəmagəlä təwänäkʷə waxitäwəd näbäkəl :
ኩማል እዊስኖካ ግን የሃ እንቲ ቀኁሪኸር፣	kumal ʔəwisənoka gən yäha ʔənəti kʷʼurixər :
እንቲ ደኹስረው ድዊ ናዃበራ ናደንበር፣	ʔənəti däkʷəsräw dəwi nağäbära nadänəbər :
ሰዃ ኪሳ ገበታ ለኛ ልዊ መትሉኸር፣	säga kisa gäbäta läŋa ləwi mätəluxər :
አነኹ ቅርሽ ግባሩ ናዳገላ ሸኹኹር፣	ʔanəkʷa kʼərəš gəbaru nadagəla šäkʷäkʷər :
እኹርዳካ ኒኹና ሓረስዳኸር ግን ፍነጢር፣	ʔəxʷarədaka nixʷina ħäräsədaxər gən fənətʼir :
ሺብሮ ድኹስተውማ አኾ፣	šibəro dəŋʷəsätäwəma ʔaxo :
አን ነል ደኹሶ ህምበው ቅብጢር፣	ʔan näl däkʷəso həməbäw kʼəbətʼir :
ንስኝ ጂባኹማ ዋነ ፋይሕል ፊኹ ና ምስጢር።	nəsəŋ ğibaxʷəma wanä fayəħəl fixʷə na məsətʼir.

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