

Blin Language

Blin (ብሊን) is one of the nine languages of Eritrea. It is spoken in the former *Senh'it Province* and present *Anseba Zone* of Eritrea. The town of *Keren* is the center of the Blin speakers, but the majority of the Blin people live in districts and villages around Keren and to the north of Keren in the H'alh'al region. Blin is a branch of one of the *Central Cushitic* languages called *Agaw*. It is classified as *Afro-asiatic, Cushitic, Central, and Northern*. That means *Afro-Asiatic* is the common ancestor of Blin and many other languages. From the Afro-Asiatic super family or *phylum*, Blin belongs to the *Cushitic family*. From the Cushitic languages, it belongs to the *Central Cushitic*, called *Agaw*, and from the Agaw languages, Blin is called *Northern Agaw*. Despite being a Cushitic language, Blin has much phonological and a little morphological affinity to its neighbouring Semitic languages of Tigre and Tigrinya.

The word "Blin" denotes both the language and the people who speak the language. It is the correct transliteration or designation by which the Blin people call themselves and their language. "**Belain ቤይን**" has also the same meaning as Blin people. It is mostly used in the spoken form of the language. "**Blina ብሊና**" is the singular form of Blin and Belain. Blina also means of the Blin, or belonging to the Blin.

In addition, the following other words are also used as a reference to the Blin people, to their land or to the area where the Blin people and others live.

Senh'it: 1. The Blin people, especially those who live in the town of Keren and its surroundings
2. The name of the former province of Eritrea, with the town of *Keren* at its centre.

Bogos: The area or the habitat of the Blin people in and around Keren. In olden days, the land of Blin, (*Blina Bra*) was called the *Bogos Land*. Bogos is also referred as one of the ancestors of the Blin people.

Different forms of spelling and pronunciation of the word Blin is used by non-Blin speakers. For example; Blen and Bilen are used by other Eritreans, especially Tigrigna and Tigre speakers and *Bilin, Bilene* and *Bileno* are used by foreigners. These different ways of spelling the same word are now gradually being replaced by the correct form used by the Blin people themselves.

The Blin language has two regional dialects, where few, mostly lexical variations are observed. The first, which is spoken in the town of Keren and its surroundings, is called **Blin Senh'itu** (Blin of the Senh't). The second which is spoken in the H'alh'al region, to the north of Keren is called **Blin T'aqurdu** (Blin of the T'aqur or T'aq^wr). In most cases, the Blin people are also bilingual or trilingual, and most of them speak Tigre or Tigrigna or both, in addition to their language. There has not been any reliable census, but the Blin population is variously estimated to range from 150,000 to 200,000.