



# Multilingual and multiscrptual writing, publishing and knowledge production in Ethiopia

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In April 2026, the Mouth Journal and the Department of Linguistics and Philology of Addis Ababa University organized an international conference with the theme “De-monopolizing and de-hegemonizing academic publishing: critical perspectives on language and knowledge production” in Ethiopia. This event aimed at critically discussing established academic publishing practices, such as the monopoly and gate-keeping of high-ranking journals, the problems of peer-reviewing practices, the limits of the genre of academic writing in presenting diverse knowledge and the role of language. There are many ways in which dominant academic publishing culture limits knowledge production and excludes non-dominant forms of experiencing and understanding, and the privileging of English as language of academic writing is one of them. What happens to diverse, indigenous, socio-cultural forms of knowledge when they have to be translated into academic English? And what about the visibility of knowledge production in other, indigenous or marginalized languages?

Ethiopia is a country that looks back at centuries of multilingual and multiscrptual writing and knowledge production. While, like in most societies, oral ways of expressing and transmitting knowledge have played a significant role in the east African country as well (for example through the rhetoric concept of ሰምና ወርቅ *sāmanna wärq* ‘wax and gold’, which is an important rhetoric device of creating ambiguity through semantic layering, see Levine 1965, Mattausch 2006, Hollington, forthcoming), the country can look back at centuries-old practices of writing and written knowledge production – in many languages and different scripts. The written documents, manuscripts and practices are manifold and provide insights into many domains, historically in particular in royal, academic and religious contexts. The

abundance of Ethiopian written sources and writing practices has become the subject of entire study programs and scholarly careers, and yet contributions like PhD theses written in Amharic are largely marginalized in global academic discourses. In an attempt to create some visibility for the diversity of writing practices and knowledge production in Ethiopia, this blog post presents a few (and by far not exhaustive) insights.



Figure 1: Historical publications shown at the anthropological museum, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University (2026)



Figure 2: Historical techniques of knowledge production and publishing shown at the anthropological museum, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University (2026)

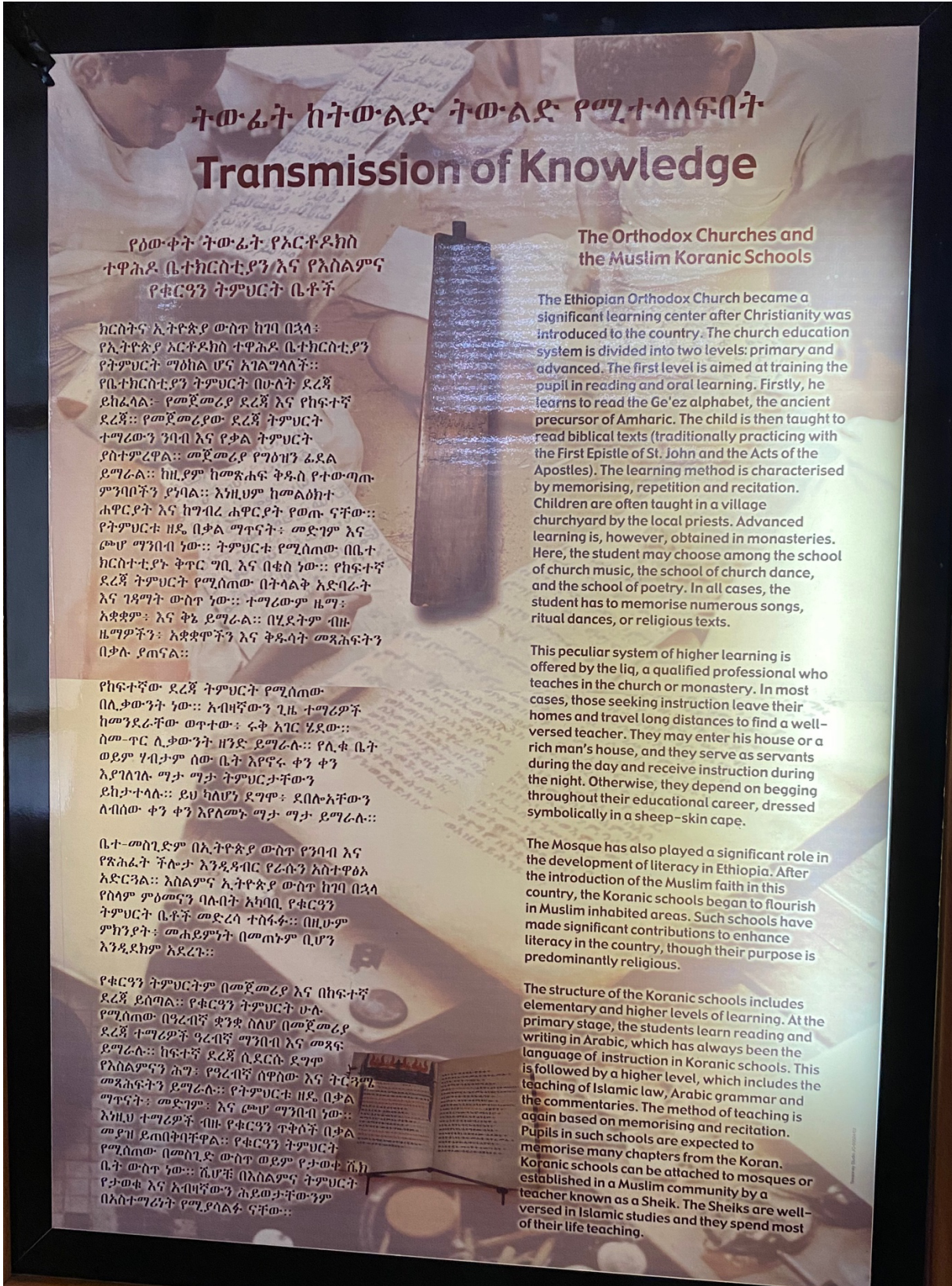


Figure 3: Transmission of knowledge explained at the anthropological museum, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University (2026)

In the long history of writing practices in Ethiopia, different techniques of producing written documents have been used, from handwritten parchments made from goat

skin, to digital printing and online publishing. While historically, certain languages like Gə'əz, Arabic or Amharic have been privileged in the politics of writing and publishing, many languages and multilingual practices can be found in the linguistic landscapes and publishing culture in Ethiopia today. Children's books, novels, school books and other forms of literature can be found in different Ethiopian languages, and seeing publications in Fidel (the Ethiopian-Eritrean script) and Latin script next to each other on book shelves in libraries and shops is common. Students studying philology at Addis Ababa University often submit trilingual PhD theses in order to do justice to the complex historical and contemporary linguistic situation (e.g. Gə'əz as language of the historic manuscript, English as the globally dominant academic language and Amharic to annotate cultural conceptualizations). As Zelealem (2026) explains, this also illustrates the problematic status of and relationship to English as academic language in the country: while on the one hand, students, instructors and the education system strive for using English as language of papers and theses (based on the global academic status of English), on the other hand problems are caused by the fact that English is not as strongly implemented in the country (as, for instance, in countries where English is a colonial language) and by the problems that arise when trying to translate Ethiopian historical and cultural knowledges into English, as compared to, for instance, Amharic, which is preferred - or even necessary - to grasp the cultural meanings of the topics under study in the historical documents. This points to the challenges of linguistic-epistemological questions with regard to writing and publishing, but also to the many solutions and experiences that Ethiopia can offer with regard to critically reflecting on the hegemonies and power regimes of writing, publishing and producing knowledge.



Figure 4: Display of multilingual academic publishing at the book shop of Addis Ababa University (2025)

