

ԲԱՆԱՍԻՐԱԿԱՆ**ECCLESIASTICAL IDIOMS IN MODERN EASTERN ARMENIAN**

The study of phraseology remains a consistently relevant and significant field, as it reveals innovative phenomena. In Armenian, there exist debates concerning the boundaries of ecclesiastical phraseology, the differentiation of expressions, and issues related to semantic, morphological, stylistic classification, translation, and other related matters.

Numerous specialized Armenian publications note that the term phrase (դարձուածք) originally encompassed meanings such as spoken word, dialect, speech, expression, among others, and has been used in both broad senses—including fixed collocations, proverbs, sayings, winged words, aphorisms—and narrow senses, referring solely to idiomatic phrases. Many Armenian scholars observe close relationships among phrases, sayings, proverbs, adages, winged words, and fixed collocations, hence proposing to collectively designate these linguistic phenomena as phrases. A significant number of these possess ecclesiastical significance.

Armenian scientists approach the characterization of ecclesiastical phrases from various perspectives. Within the Armenian scholarly tradition, the first definition of phrase was provided by M. Abeghyan¹. The eminent Armenian philologist defines a phrase as follows: “Not only does the meaning of individual words change, but also the combinations of words. These initially appear coincidentally with a new meaning, but when this new meaning is repeated, it becomes customary. Such semantically novel combinations of words are typically called phrases, which, however, acquire the meaning of a single word and can also be considered a compound word².”

In the Literary Dictionary by Ed. Jrbashyan and H. Machchanyan, all proverbs are regarded as concise and figurative expressions of artistic nature that hold significant cognitive value. They reflect the historical, domestic, ecclesiastical, socio-political conditions, relationships, personality traits, and temperamental characteristics of the people, as well as moral concepts, national customs, beliefs and religion, psychology, and worldview³. These expressions are characterized by comprehensibility, brevity, conciseness, clarity, and vivid imagery. The saying succinctly and expressively describes a certain aspect of life without resorting to rhetorical devices or metaphorical imagery, in a direct and straightforward manner.

E. Gevorgyan emphasizes the stylistic value of ecclesiastical phrases, particularly in artistic discourse. Beyond their purposeful use, these expressions demand special attention. He writes: “The description of various situations requires the selection and application of different phrases⁴.” The correct choice and use of the necessary phrase is a complex and challenging

¹ G. Jahukyan, E. Aghayan, V. Arak'elyan, and V. Khosyan, *Hayots' lezu*, vol. 1, part A (Yerevan: Yerevani hamalsarani hratarakch'ut'yun, 1980), pp. 472–475.

² Manuk Abeghyan, *Erker*, vol. 6 (Yerevan: YPH hratarakch'ut'yun, 2016), p. 124.

³ Ed. Jrbashyan and H. Makhch'anyan, *Grakanagitakan bararan* (Yerevan, 1989), p. 24.

⁴ Ye. Gevorgyan, *Hayereni dardzvatsknerē* (Yerevan: Luys hratarakch'ut'yun, 1969), p. 31.

creative task that demands profound knowledge.

Contemporary Armenian scholars regard ecclesiastical phrases as a distinct layer within the Armenian lexicon. They highlight that various stylistic functions can be realized through phrases. From the perspective of stylistics, phrases garner significant interest, but only when they perform a stylistic function⁵. Emphasis is placed on the correct usage of phrases. The purposeful and successful modification of a phrase activates its meaning, imparting freshness to the speech⁶. Appropriately used phrases ensure brevity, conciseness, and precision in discourse. The laconic form of proverbs and sayings is valued, as well as their strong imagery and the capacity to express profound philosophical, religious, and ecclesiastical ideas. The mixing of phrases, unnecessary personification using phrases, distortion of the lexical composition of phrases, unwarranted grammatical changes—such as replacing plural with singular or vice versa, incorrect alterations of connections, and the like—are considered unacceptable.

In our view, the comprehensive expressive characterization of the term phrase is as follows:

a) A phrase is inherently a multi-word expression; an individual word rarely possesses the value of a phrase on its own.

b) A phrase belongs to the category of fixed collocations, characterized by a strong or moderate fusion of components; semantically (content-wise), these components are inseparable, while structurally (form-wise), the components—or at least one of them—are irreplaceable.

c) Unlike a free (syntactic) collocation, a phrase is not created anew for each context but is reproduced as a ready-made unit with the same morphological composition.

d) A phrase carries a figurative meaning that endows it with imagery, mostly expressing the speaker's emotive attitude, thus functioning as a means of linguistic stylistic expression.

e) Formally, a phrase may coincide with a free collocation but essentially differs from it.

f) A phrase may derive from a free collocation but can also possess an independent formation.

g) Some phrases appear in the form of sentences.

h) Semantically, a phrase may relate to an individual word.

i) Formally, a phrase resembles coordinate compound structures, whereas the components of coordination can possess independent lexical meaning or lack it; however, the components of a phrase usually represent independently used word forms. The content of a coordinate compound stems from the meanings of its components, whereas the content of a phrase generally has a nominative value; its emotive expressiveness is weak, while that of a phrase is strong.

j) As linguistic units, phrases belong to specific layers of the lexicon and have their functional domains⁷.

Armenian researchers consider the translation of ecclesiastical idioms as a stylistic challenge. Primarily, idioms are translated within the same language — referring here to idioms

⁵ T. Shahverdyan, *Ojagitut'yun* (Yerevan: Lusakn hratarakch'ut'yun, 2010), p. 135.

⁶ Yu. Avetisyan, *Hayots' lezu yev Khosk'i mshakuyt'*, vol. A (Yerevan: YPH hratarakch'ut'yun, 2014), p. 110.

⁷ H. Petrosyan, *Hayerenagitakan bararan* (Yerevan: Hayastan hratarakch'ut'yun, 1987), p. 175.

with lexical synonyms. These idioms acquire stylistic value in the language and are used for imagery and intensification of meaning. More valuable for the language are those idioms which are untranslatable and explained descriptively. Untranslatable idioms, which are considerably fewer in number compared to the former, introduce new concepts, thereby significantly enriching the lexicon⁸.

G. Jahukyan and F. Khlghatyan note that idioms are unique expressions that cannot be translated literally⁹. Armenian scholars have identified specific principles and methods for idiom translation. Several approaches are distinguished during idiomatic translation: a) equivalent (adequate) translation, including both absolute and approximate (relative) equivalence; b) idiomatic correspondence; and c) descriptive translation. Equivalence may be complete or partial — if all the multiple meanings of an idiom are replicated, the equivalence is complete; if only one meaning is conveyed, it is partial. In the case of idiomatic correspondence, the translator has a choice: often one or more components are replaced, but the core meaning remains unchanged. As L. Ezekyan writes, “A considerable portion of idioms across languages are translated only by their conveyed meaning, but with different lexical components which precisely and correctly express the same meaning¹⁰.” Extreme caution is required when employing form copying, interpretation, free, or literal translation. The descriptive principle of idiomatic translation applies when there is no idiomatic equivalent, even approximate or partial, available.

Lack of an equivalent unit in the target language system may result in numerous distortions, including stylistic ones. Therefore, it is advisable to consider the context. The context determines the degree of ‘narrow’ or ‘broad’ meaning that words should have in the translated text, thereby composing the sentence expressing the intended meaning. It highlights the specific content and expressiveness of a word, collocation, phrase, or idiom. Context plays a crucial role, especially in the translation of idioms and polysemous words.

During idiomatic translation, a profound mastery of both source and target languages is essential, alongside knowledge of cultural, ecclesiastical, and religious values. Expertise in history, literature, church matters, customs, and beliefs is also necessary, as linguistic and extralinguistic factors must be taken into account. The presence of these factors contributes to more successful translations. Finding an equivalent idiom in another language that fully conveys the meaning of a source idiom poses a significant difficulty. Often, the idiomatic equivalent in different languages, due to varying perceptions and semantics, is expressed through entirely different components¹¹. Identifying such equivalents requires considerable creative insight and thorough familiarity with both languages. Such translation is a complex and responsible task. Accurately conveying their meaning and the nuanced stylistic shades from the source to the target language complicates the work of researchers and translators alike.

H. Acharyan was the first Armenian scientist to undertake the classification of the lexicon

⁸ Ye. Gevorgyan, *Hayereni dardzvatsknerč*, p. 39.

⁹ G. Jahukyan and F. Khlghatyan, *Hayots‘ lezu: Ėndhanur gitelk‘ner: Ojabanut‘yun* (Yerevan: Luys hratarakch‘ut‘yun, 1976), p. 98.

¹⁰ Levon Yezekyan, *Ojagitut‘yun* (Yerevan: Yerevani hamalsarani hratarakch‘ut‘yun, 2007), pp. 195–196.

¹¹ Ye. Gevorgyan, *Hayereni dardzvatsknerč*, p. 43.

into semantic (thematic) groups. G. Jahukyan divided the Armenian vocabulary into 23 semantic (thematic) groups, with the 22nd group designated as religion and prejudice. The folk speech of the Armenian people is rich with numerous proverbs, sayings, idioms, and words that carry moral, religious, ecclesiastical, theological, mythological, and similar meanings.

Due to the historical background of the Armenian people, the lexicon predominantly features words and expressions related to pagan, Christian, and Islamic religions. The semantic group of religious vocabulary was enriched notably after the state adoption of Christianity in 301 AD¹². Many words related to Christianity entered the Armenian language through the 5th-century translation school.

Christian religious vocabulary can primarily be subdivided into several categories: a) terms related to Christian doctrine; b) words denoting places of worship and parts of ecclesiastical structures; c) ecclesiastical and ritual terminology; d) terms denoting clerical ranks (hierarchies); and e) words designating church feasts¹³.

Particularly widespread in Armenian are expressions formed with the component God (Astvats). This word belongs to the native layer of the Armenian lexicon, characteristic of all developmental stages of the language, although some scholars suggest that the word Astvats has Phrygian origins¹⁴. In Armenian literature, the word Astvats has been used with high frequency, and numerous idioms, oaths, blessings, curses, and well-wishing expressions are formed with it. Astvats symbolizes goodness but, within the lexicon, it can also acquire positive, negative, and neutral connotations. Proverbs and sayings featuring the component Astvats number around 200 in the Armenian Proverbs collection¹⁵. Below are examples of Armenian ecclesiastical expressions along with their English equivalents:

Աստծու սիրուն (Asttsu sirun) – for God’s sake

Մարդ Աստծոյ (Mard Asttso) – Good God! O my God

Յա՛, տէր Աստուած (Ya, Tēr Astvats) – Good God! My God! Good (ness) Gracious!

Աստծուն է միայն յայտնի (Asttsun e miayn haytni) – it’s on the knee/lap of God

Աստուած գիտէ (Astvats gite) – God knows

Աստուած լինի քեզ օգնական (Astvats lini k’ez ognakan) – God help you

Աստուած հոգին լուսասորի (Astvats hogin lusavori) – God rest/repose his soul

Աստուած մեծ է (Astvats mets e) – God is almighty

Աստուած չանի (Astvats ch’ani) – God forbid

Աստուած չար աչքից հեռու պահի (Astvats ch’ar ach’k’its’ heru pahi) – God save from evil eyes

Աստուած պահի (Astvats pahi) - God save

Աստուած տայ (Astvats ta) – God willing

¹² Haykanush Mesropyan, *Kronayekheghets’akan barapasharē hayereni barbarnerum* (Yerevan: Asoghik hratarakch’ut’yun, 2016), p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–33.

¹⁴ Hrach’ya Acharyan, *Hayeren armatakan bararan*, vol. 1 (Yerevan: Yerevani hamalsarani hratarakch’ut’yun, 1926), pp. 279–280.

¹⁵ A. Ghanalanyan, *Haykakan Aratsani* (Yerevan: HSSR GA hratarakch’ut’yun, 1951), pp. 5–8.

Աստուած ամէն մարդու իր սրտի համեմատ կը տայ (Astvats amen mardu ir srti hamemat kta) – God gives everybody according to his heart

Աստուած մի դուռ բացում է, միւսը՝ փակում. Աստուած ցարը տալիս է, դեղն էլ հետը (Astvats mi dur bats‘um e, myusë – p‘akum; Astvats ts‘avë talis e, degħn el hetë) – God makes the back to the burden

Աստուած ջահելներին/լաւերին է տանում իր մօտ. ում Աստուած շատ է սիրում, շուտ է իր մօտ տանում (Astvats jahelnerin/laverin e tanum ir mot; um Astvats shat e sirum, shut e ir mot tanum) – whom God loves, die young

Աստծուն ապաւինի՛ր, բայց յոյսդ ֆեզ վրայ դի՛ր (Asttsun apavinir, bayts‘ huysd k‘ez vra dir) – put your trust in God but keep your powder dry

Աստուած արդար է (Astvats ardar e) – God’s truth

Գողը գողից գողացաւ, Աստուած տեսաւ, զարմացաւ (Goghë goghits‘ goghats‘av, Astvats tesav, zarmats‘av) – thief robbed thief; to deceive a deceiver is not deceit; the deceiver is deceived; a thief is in grief, he’s been robbed by a thief; a thief stole from another thief, God saw it with disbelief

Աստուած դարդը տալուց դարմանն էլ է տալիս (Astvats dardë taluts‘, darmann el e talis) – along with grief, God gives us relief

Աստուած հարուստի կողմից է (Astvats harusti koghmits‘ e) – God takes the side of the rich

Աստուած մահ տայ, բաժան-բաժանութիւն չտայ (Astvats mah ta, bazhan-bazhanut‘yun ch‘ta) – better God give us death than divorce

Աստուած միշտ ուժեղի կողմից է (Astvats misht uzheghi koghmits‘ e) – God is always on the side of the big battalions; God sides with the strongest

Աստուած վկայ, ճիշդ եմ. Տէրն է վկայ (Astvats vka, chisht em; Tern e vka) – God witness; God and my right

Աստուած փրկի հիմարից, անգէտից (Astvats p‘rki himarits‘, angetits‘) – God deliver me from fools

Աստուած օգնում է նրանց, ովքեր օգնում են իրենից իրենց (Astvats ognum e nrants‘, ovqer ognum en irenk‘ irents‘) – God helps those who help themselves; Heaven helps him who helps himself

Բոլորի յոյսը Աստուած (Bolori huysë Astvats) – (every man for himself and) God for us all

Ինչքան մօտ են եկեղեցուն, այնքան հեռու են Աստծուց (Inch‘k‘an mot en yekeghets‘un, aynk‘an heru en Asttsuts‘) – the nearer the church, the farther from God

Վտանգն անցաւ, «Սուրբ Աստուած»-ը մոռացաւ (Vtangn ants‘av, “Surb Astvats”ë morats‘av) – the danger past and God forgotten

Տուն քանդողի տունը Աստուած կը քանդի (Tun k‘andoghi tunë Astvats kk‘andi) – God destroys the home of those who destroy the home of others

The sacred religious component also enjoys high frequency of use. There are various

accounts in Armenian literature and scholarly sources regarding the etymology of the word, associating it with meanings such as water, to wash with water, pure, bright, and healthy. According to H. Acharyan, the word Holy (surb) is indigenous to Armenian and in modern usage conveys meanings of purity, incorruptibility, and sanctity, having had an earlier proto-form *subr*¹⁶. As a term and as a morpheme, *surb* appears in words related to Christian doctrine such as the Holy Trinity (Surb Yerrordut‘yun), the Holy Spirit (Surb Hogi), the holy liturgy (*surb patarag*), Christmas (Surb Tsnund), Resurrection (Surb Harut‘yun), Christ’s 12 holy apostles, Saint Hripsime (*surb Hrip‘sime*), the Vardanank saints (*surb Vardanank‘*), among others. Notable idioms include *surb yerkir* (the Holy Land, Palestine) and *surb kaghak* (the Holy City, Jerusalem for Christians; Mecca for Muslims). The expression *surb girk* (the Holy Book; the Bible) is also widespread.

In language use, internationally recognized ecclesiastical idioms have spread and gained common recognition across many languages worldwide. These idioms typically pass from one language to another through literature and the press, often as direct borrowings. Examples of internationally known ecclesiastical idioms with their translations include:

Փառք Ալլահին կամ փառք Աստծու (Pařk Allahin kam pařk Asttsu) — God be thanked

Ասագ հինգշաբթի (Avag hingshabt‘i) — Holy Thursday

Ազիզ օր, տոն օր (Aziz or, ton or) — a red-letter day

To foster interest in ecclesiastical matters among Armenian students, contemporary Armenian publications often include explanations of numerous small religious narratives. Here are some of the favorite little ecclesiastical stories.

Treasures In Heaven

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Gospel of Matthew 6

Don’t swear at all

Listen also to what it was said in ancient times. “Do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool”. And do not swear by your head, simply let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no.

Gospel of Matthew 5

Reading such passages is highly significant. It is evident that students read these texts with great interest and enthusiasm, afterwards discussing and interpreting important parts. This presents an excellent opportunity to guide students towards the church, promoting ecclesiastical vocabulary, expressions, and discourse.

This study highlights the enduring significance of ecclesiastical idioms in contemporary

¹⁶ Hrach‘ya Acharyan, *Hayeren armatakan bararan*, vol. 4 (Yerevan: erevani hamalsarani hratarakch‘ut‘yun, 1926), pp. 255–256.

Armenian language and culture. These idiomatic expressions not only enrich the Armenian lexicon but also serve as a vital link connecting the linguistic heritage with spiritual, historical, and cultural identity. The challenges posed by translating such idioms underscore the intricate relationship between language, religion, and culture. Therefore, preserving and promoting ecclesiastical phraseology is essential for sustaining Armenian religious discourse and cultural continuity. Encouraging the study and use of these expressions among younger generations will help maintain their relevance and deepen the communal understanding of Armenia's rich ecclesiastical tradition.

Abstract

This paper explores the presence and significance of ecclesiastical idioms in contemporary Armenian language and culture. It examines the definition, classification, and stylistic features of idioms, particularly those with religious and ecclesiastical origins. Drawing on the work of prominent Armenian linguists and philologists, the article analyzes how these expressions reflect the spiritual, cultural, and historical context of the Armenian people. The study also addresses the challenges of translating ecclesiastical idioms into other languages and discusses the strategies for preserving their stylistic and semantic depth. Through the analysis of common idiomatic structures featuring the word “God” (Astvats) and sacred terms such as “Holy” (Surb), the paper demonstrates how ecclesiastical idioms enrich the Armenian lexicon. Finally, it emphasizes the role of idioms in fostering religious education and ecclesiastical discourse among pupils and the broader Armenian-speaking community.

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