

Language Pollution Persists

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(Keghart.com Editorial)

In early and mid 19th century great efforts were made by dedicated Armenian scholars and writers (Khachadour Apovian, Alishan, Mekhitarian Brotherhood - Մխիթարեան Միաբանիւն etc.) to remove foreign, particularly Turkish and Persian words, from Eastern and Western Armenian. In the previous several centuries Persian and Ottoman occupation had degraded the language to a point where it could no longer be called Armenian. Thus many of Sayat Nova's "Armenian songs (in late 18th century) were a mishmash of three or more languages... "*Qalam sireh; daftar sireh; hayat sireh...*" sang the great Armenian poet and troubadour so as to be understood. Apovian, Alishan and Co. were mostly successful in removing the foreign detritus. The cleansing of the spoken language(s) helped in the flowering of modern Armenian in Constantinople and in Tbilisi. Unfortunately, the 19th century reawakening of Armenian literature wasn't bestowed with a name-unlike the previous renaissances (the Golden Age in the 5th century and the Silver Age in the 12th).

During Soviet rule once again unwelcome foreign words began to creep our language - Eastern Armenian of Armenia because of Russian and Soviet influence (*kolkhoz, gomgous, bardya, brosbekt, respublica, parlament, kultura* etc.). The invasion of these offensive words became so acute that some Diaspora Armenians had difficulty comprehending Eastern (Soviet) Armenian. Understanding "*Yerevann eh Khosoum*" radio station's programs could sometime become a challenge to Armenians living away from the homeland.

With Armenia's independence, it was natural for Diaspora Armenians to hope and expect that the intrusive foreign words would be expunged from Eastern Armenian. The mop-up would serve two main purposes: purify the language; improve communication between the speakers of Eastern and Western Armenian.

Sadly, that expectation was premature. Not only has the Republic of Armenia neglected the important -if not sacred - mission but it has added any number of new alien words. These days apparently no one can speak on Armenia TV or radio

without inserting words "*termin, tema*" and "*actsia*" and other lexicological carpetbaggers. Such words as *akter, norm, normativ, etnikakan, kenetikakan, academiakan, radio, dekhnikakan, practikan, fizkulturayee, sportee, mandatner, ...* These intruders are not culled from Yerevan newspapers or the conversations of Yerevan residents. Believe it or not, they are in ARMENIA'S CONSTITUTION which declares Armenia to be a sovereign state right at the outset. What better signal that the RoA government has no interest in reversing the alien lexical tsunami?

The Armenian language, like other languages, has over the centuries absorbed many non-Armenian words. It has a vast number of Persian/Iranian words (see Adjarian's "Dictionary of Word Roots") mostly because Persia, for centuries, occupied or dominated Armenia. As late as the early 19th century there was such an abundance of Persian words in our language that some Western scholars believed Armenian was an offshoot of Iranian. The Armenian language, like other languages, has also borrowed words because we didn't have the Armenian equivalents. But after a quarter century of independence and a huge native vocabulary the government of the Republic of Armenia has no reason to use alien words.

More than most other nations, Armenians consider their language an essential element of their identity. Latin Americans speak Spanish, Portuguese and English; North Americans speak English and Spanish. Many sub-Sahara Africans mostly speak English or French. The languages used in the Americas and in the sub-Saharan countries are tertiary to the identity of the speakers. Armenians are not in the same boat: a tiny nation like Armenia needs every help to protect its identity.

We are lucky to have our own indigenous language: a language we have nursed and enriched for three millennia - at least. It's a beautiful, logical and agile language which a number of linguists in the 19th and 20th centuries nominated as the ideal international language. Why go and pollute the masterpiece that's the Armenian language? Why stain the language St. Sahag, St. Mesrob, Kachn Vartan, and Raffi spoke?

It's, of course, glaringly ironic that this is written in non-Armenian. Diaspora's recent and unfortunate history compels us to use English, French, Arabic, and Spanish to be understood by

fellow Armenians. However, the situation is not the same in Armenia. The Armenian government, educational establishments, and citizens are under no pressure to use *odar* (foreign) words.

It's an oft-repeated ominous forecast that, according to the United Nations, the endangered Western Armenian will die within 50 years. If the science-based prediction becomes reality, it makes it even more imperative that Eastern Armenian retain its purity. If some Armenians in Armenia believe that using foreign words makes them sophisticated, "international, progressive, broad minded... they're grossly mistaken. Every time they insert a foreign word in the language Artashes, Dikran, Vahan, Ashod, Roupen, and Antranig proudly spoke they betray their forefathers and compromise their identity.



Խմբագրութեան կողմէ.- Կը քաջալերենք մեր ընթերցողները, որ ազատ զգան իրենց կարծիքը յայտնելու վերոյիշեալ այժմեական նիւթի շուրջ և կատարելու իրենց շինիչ առաջարկութիւնները:

Editor's note: We invite our readers to respond to our articles dedicated to the Armenian language in question.

"THE ARMENIAN LANGUAGE CANNOT BE WORN OUT; ITS BOOTS ARE STONE. WELL, CERTAINLY, THE THICK-WALLED WORD, THE LAYERS OF AIR IN THE SEMI-VOWELS."

Osip Mandelstam
"Journey to Armenia"

"Although I write in English, and despite the fact that I'm from America, I consider myself an Armenian writer. The words I use are in English, the surroundings I write about are American, but the soul, which makes me write, is Armenian. This means I am an Armenian writer and deeply love the honor of being a part of the family of Armenian writers."

William Saroyan
Armenian-American writer
(1908-1981)



On 5th December 1816, in a letter to Mr. Moore, Lord Byron wrote:

By way of divertisement, I am studying daily, at an Armenian monastery, the Armenian language. I found that my mind wanted something craggy to break upon; and this - as the most difficult thing I could discover here for an amusement - I have chosen, to torture me into attention. It is a rich language, however, and would amply repay any one the trouble of learning it. I try, and shall go on;- but I answer for nothing, least of all for my intentions or my success.