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Russian (1917-1918) and Armenian (1922) Orthographic Reforms. Assessing the Russian Influence on Modern Armenian Language*

Consuetudo certissima est loquendi magistra[1]

Marcus Fabius Quintilianus

Today, a discussion on the linguistic, cultural, and political implications of the 1922 reform of Armenian orthography[2], in relation to the Russian one (1917-1918), proves to be a complex, yet a delicate and urgent matter. Indeed, the 1922 reform of Armenian orthography generated a decades-long controversy within the field of Armenian Studies that is still going on in the present days. Notably, political implications are attached to this debate, which involves the history of the Armenian language and its pluricentric nature[3]. Actually, it is possible to arrange this language diachronically, distinguishing between Classical Armenian (400 A.D.-1100)[4], Middle Armenian (1100-1700), and Modern Armenian. Moreover, Modern Armenian is characterized by a marked diatopy, which is realized through the existence of Eastern Armenian (formerly known as 'Armenian of Russia')[5], and Modern

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[1] "Usage is the best language teacher".

[2] Note on transliteration. Names and surnames of Armenian scholars are reported as they appear in their works, unless directly transliterated from Armenian. Direct transliterations from Armenian are given according to the Library of Congress system. Russian transliteration is given according to the scientific system.

[3] Linguists (Comrie 1981, 1987; Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1984; Fortson 2010: 383) consider Armenian an independent branch of the Indo-European language family. Closely related to Greek (Pedersen 1924; Meillet 1925, 1936; Solta 1960; Hamp 1983, but cfr. Clackson 1995), Armenian presents a large number of loan words borrowed from Indo-Iranian languages, notably Parthian and Persian. On the classification of Armenian within the Indo-European language family, see now Martirosyan 2013.

[4] Also known as Grabar (literally 'literary', 'through using letters', 'written'), this is the older form of the language. It is still used by the Armenian Apostolic Church.

[5] This is the official language of the Republic of Armenia and of the Nagorno-Karabakh *de facto* (unrecognized) Republic. It is also spoken in the Eastern Armenian diaspora, mainly located in Russia, in enclaves in Azerbaijan and Iran (Persian Armenians). Modern Eastern Armenian is more conservative than the Western variety.

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Western Armenian (formerly known as 'Armenian of Turkey')[6]. The birth of two formal, literary varieties of Modern Armenian[7] is inextricably linked to the history of the country. During the nineteenth century, Armenia was under the rule of two empires: the Ottoman in the West and the Russian in the East (1828-1917). Such dismemberment determined the parallel, yet different development of Modern Eastern and Western Armenian. On the one hand, Eastern Armenian would be based on the dialect of the Ararat plain and on the language spoken by the Armenian *intelligencija* in Tbilisi, Georgia. On the other, Western Armenian would be based on the dialect of Constantinople (Istanbul).

The two sets of Soviet reforms (1922-1924 and 1940) further widened the distance between Eastern Armenian – the official language of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (1920-1991), – and the Western variety. Such changes are more evident in orthography, although they can also be observed in phonetics, morphology and syntax[8]. These reforms, which were part of the *ликбез* (*likbez*) policy[9] carried out by the Soviets, have deeply affected not only the Eastern Armenian alphabet, but also the set of rules and conventions governing writing and word formation.

To delve into this problem, this essay will retrace the fundamental phases of the reform, focussing on the two decades that go from the early 1920s to 1940, i.e. the year when the second orthography reform was promulgated. The Armenian case is undoubtedly a very peculiar one amongst the constellation of the linguistic reforms decreed in the Soviet countries outside Russia. In fact, unlike other Soviet republics, where numerous alphabets underwent a process of Latinization and Cyrillization, Armenia kept its own writing system[10]. Nonetheless, the contact between Armenian and Russian fostered the development of the former, especially from a diastratic perspective. This phenomenon, however, occurred not only in Armenia, but it also involved other languages of the Soviet Union.

In nowadays Armenia, the 1922 orthography reform is still perceived as a heavy burden, insofar as it undermines the relationship between the two diasporas and the homeland. Furthermore, its legacy destabilized and still influences the Russian-Armenian relations. Indeed, according to Mark Malkasian, the Russian ingerence in the linguistic field, which intensified during the Soviet period, produced a sense of cultural inferiority in Armenians (1996: 111). Yet, in recent years, the situation seems to have changed. In this

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[6]   Mostly spoken in the Western Armenian diaspora, this language developed in the historical Western Armenia and Cilicia. These territories are now part of Turkey.

[7]   Modern Armenian is also collectively called *Ashkharhabar* (or *Ashkharhapar* in Western pronunciation), meaning 'through/of the world', 'worldly', 'laic').

[8]   For example, in Eastern Armenian the indefinite article precedes the noun, whereas in Western Armenian it follows the noun.

[9]   Russian abbreviation for *likvidacija bezgramotnosti* (*ликвидация безграмотности*), i.e. 'elimination of illiteracy'.

[10]   The Armenian alphabet was also the official script for Kurdish in Soviet Armenia from 1921-1928.

respect, the effects of the Soviet orthography reform in Armenia should be regarded as an issue concerning Russian Studies.

1.   *The 1922 Reform of Armenian Orthography: Brief Historical Background*

Between 1922 and 1924, Eastern Armenian underwent an orthography reform that modified both the alphabet and the spelling. This process[11] was initiated on January 1921, when the historian Ashot Garegini Hovhannisyan[12] (1887-1972), then Minister of Education of Armenian SSR (1920-1921), organized an advisory meeting to encourage education and fight illiteracy, as required by the *ликбез* policy[13]. During this consultation, the linguist and philologist Manuk Abeghyan (1865-1944) proposed a number of orthographic changes that denoted a radical departure from the general norm in use since the Middle Ages. Abeghyan's position was not new: in fact, he had written extensively on the issue since the late 1890s. Indeed this document, which was accepted by a special committee in 1921, presented the same theses of another paper Abeghyan read eight years earlier in Ēchmiadzin during a commemoration of the 1500th anniversary of the creation of the Armenian alphabet.

Hovhannisyan's successor, the translator and journalist Poghos Makints'yan (1884-1937), continued to work in this direction, forming a new committee in February 1922. Instead of transmitting the committee's conclusions, Makints'yan directly presented Abeghyan's proposal to the Soviet of Popular Commissars. On March 4, 1922, under the chairmanship of Alek'sandr Myasnikyan, the Soviet officially decreed the reform. Abeghyan's paper was published in the same year with the title *Guide to the New Orthography of the Armenian Language*.

This reform was intended "ostensibly to make the orthography of Armenian more phonetic" (Sanjian 1996: 361), thus adopting the same principle *писать, как говорят* ('to write the way one speaks') that laid at the heart of the most crucial linguistic debates of Eighteenth and Nineteenth century Russia. Nonetheless, it met immediate, unfavourable reactions. Notably, the poet Hovhannes T'umanyan, chairman of the Union of Armenian Writers, expressed his discontent in a letter to the Soviet of Popular Commissars, written in May 1922. Later on, many objected to the reform, asking the restoration of what they regarded as 'traditional' Armenian spelling. Not surprisingly, the term *традиция* ('tradition') plays a key role in Ch.S. Sarkisyan's request to correct the mistakes of the 1922 reform: "Armenian spelling now urgently needs the elimination of the mistakes made in 1922, that is, the abolition of those changes that were introduced into the alphabet"[14] (Sarkisyan 1940: 116).

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[11]   Some linguists consider this phase as the third stage of development of the Armenian language (Gyulbudaghyan 1973; Sanjian 1996: 360).

[12]   From 1922 to 1926 he was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia.

[13]   For further insights on the Soviet language policy, see Weinreich 1953; Lewis 1972; Kirkwood 1990; Collins 1998; Smith 1998; Leprêtre 2002; Dietrich 2005.

[14]   "[н]астоятельной потребностью армянской орфографии в настоящее время является упразднение ошибок 1922 года, т. е. упразднение тех изменений, которые были внесены в азбуку".

As a consequence, on August 22nd, 1940, the linguist Gurgen Sevak (1904-1981) promoted a second reform of Armenian orthography, which marked a partial return to Mesropian spelling. This kind of spelling is the one in use today in the Republic of Armenia, as well as among the communities of the so-called 'internal' diaspora[15].

2.   *Reforming the Alphabet*

As it happened with Slavic languages, the appearance of the Armenian alphabet was tightly linked to the introduction of Christianity[16]. This form of written codification intended to preserve the Armenians living in proximity of the Byzantine borders from linguistic and cultural assimilation (Zekiyan 2004: 161-181). Moreover, it eased the translation of the Holy Scriptures from Greek by adapting the phonetics of the original tongue. Presumably derived from the Greek, the Armenian alphabet was introduced in 405-406 A.D. by Saint Mesrop Mashtots', a prominent scholar and official in King Vṛamshapuh's chancellery[17]. The alphabet originally consisted of thirty-six letters. Two more letters, <o> and <f>, were added during the Middle Ages, raising the number to thirty-eight (Ouzounian *et al.* 2000: 88). Because of its antiquity *aybuben* – i.e. the Armenian word for 'alphabet' – has always been considered one of the most important cultural monuments of this civilization. This perception is particularly evident from writer Andrej Bitov's words:

> [i]n the Armenian letter there is the grandeur of a monument and the tenderness of life, biblical antiquity, the contour of lavash and the pungency of the green pointy pepper, the curliness and transparency of grapes and the slenderness and severity of a bottle, the soft curl of sheep's wool and the solidity of the shepherd's staff, and the shoulder line of the shepherd ... and the line of his neck ... And all this exactly corresponds to the sound the letter depicts[18] (Bitov 2002: 425).

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[15]   Ishkanian makes a distinction between 'internal' (Eastern) and 'external' (Western) diaspora. "The first", writes Ishkanian, "is called 'internal' because, until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it consisted of the Armenian communities outside Soviet Armenia but within the same overall state (i.e. the USSR)" (2008: 136). 'External' diaspora includes those communities in the Middle East, Europe and the Americas. Western Armenian diaspora rejected this reform and kept using the pre-reform spelling. Even though Iranian Armenians write in Eastern Armenian, they too continued to use the Classical Armenian orthography almost in the same way as Western Armenian communities do. The Armenian Apostolic Church adopted the same conservative position.

[16]   On the origins of the Armenian alphabet, cfr. Maksoudian 2006; Seibt, Preiser-Kapeller 2011.

[17]   Before then, Armenian had been written with scripts that were similar to cuneiform writing. On the Armenian letters, cfr. Müller 1864, 1888-1890; Nersoyan 1985-1986.

[18]   "[в] армянской букве – величие монумента и нежность жизни, библейская древность, очертаний лаваша и острота зеленой запятой перца, кудрявость и прозрачность винограда и стройность и строгость бутыли, мягкий завиток овечьей шерсти и прочность пастушьего по-

Armenians kept the alphabet unchanged for one thousand five hundred years. There lie antiquity, history, the fortress and spirit of the nation. Up to now, the handwritten letter does not differ from the printed sign, and even in books the typographic font preserves the inclination of the writer's hand. The manuscript turns into a book, almost without undergoing graphic metamorphosis. And this is wonderful. The progress, that bursts into vocabulary, spelling, unification of rules, simplification of inscription, is useful for general literacy, but not for culture. Protection of language from economic pretensions is just as necessary as protecting nature and historical monuments[19] (Bitov 2002: 426).

As a matter of fact, Abeghyan's reform altered this millennial monument. Starting from 1921, Abeghyan suggested a series of changes[20] (Sarkisyan 1940: 115-116; Gyulbudaghyan 1973; Sanjian 1996: 361), which can be summarized as follows:

(i)   elimination of the letter ‹o›, to be replaced by ‹n›;

(ii)   elimination of the letter ‹է›, to be replaced by ‹ե›;

(iii)   elimination of the letter ‹ւ› before vowel, where it acquired the value of [v], and its replacement by the letter ‹վ›;

(iv)   introduction of the digraph ‹ու› as an independent "letter", and adoption of the spelling ‹ույ› for the diphthong /uj/. The letter ‹ւ› would appear only in the digraph ‹ու›;

(v)   elimination of the ligature ‹և›;

(vi)   the diphthong ‹եա› changed to ‹յա›;

(vii) the diphthong ‹իւ› changed to ‹յու›;

(viii) the initial ‹Յ› changed to ‹Հ›;

(ix)   elimination of the silent ‹յ› at the end of a word.

Some examples:

соха, и линия плеча пастуха… и линия его затылка… И все это в точности соответствует звуку, который она изображает".

[19]   "Армяне сохранили алфавит неизменным на протяжении полутора тысяч лет. В нем древность, история, крепость и дух нации. До сих пор рукописная буква не расходится у них с печатным знаком, и даже в книгах, в типографском шрифте существует наклон руки писца. Рукопись переходит в книгу, почти не претерпевая графических метаморфоз. И это […] замечательно. Прогресс, врывающийся в словарь, в правописание, унификация правил, упрощение начертаний – дело, полезное для всеобщей грамотности, но не для культуры. Охрана языка от хозяйственных поползновений так же необходима, как и охрана природы и исторических памятников".

[20]   See also Weitenberg 1991; Khacherian 1999.

	Classical spelling	Reformed spelling	Meaning
(i)	խ**ո**սել	խ**ո**սել	'To speak'
(ii)	հայեր**է**ն	հայեր**ե**ն	'Armenian'
(iii)	բաց**ու**ել	բաց**վ**ել	'To bloom'
(iv)	ք**ո**յր	ք**ու**յր	'Sister'
(v)	Երևան	Եր**և**ան	'Yerevan'
(vi)	Սարգս**եա**ն	Սարգս**յա**ն	'Sarg(i)syan'
(vii)	ազատութ**իւ**ն	ազատութ**յու**ն	'Liberty'
(viii)	**Յ**ակոբ	**Հ**ակոբ	'Jakob'

According to Sarkisyan, though, some changes are unacceptable, insofar as they "*violate the wise principle of unity of the norms of pronunciation, interrupt the continuity of written traditions, change the alphabet*"[21] (1940: 116. Emphasis in the original). As a result, the 1940 reform reinstated the ligature in point (v), as well as the letters described in points (i) and (ii)[22].

3.   *Assessing the Effects of the 1922 Orthography Reform in Armenia*

3.1.   *Comparing the Russian and the Armenian Orthography Reforms*

Most probably, the Soviet influence functioned as a co-factor for the modification of orthography, as similar debates were already sparkling in Armenia during the years preceding the reforms. Sarkisyan, for instance, viewed the orthographic reform as an expected step for the written language to keep pace with the natural development of its spoken counterpart:

> [t]he discrepancy between letter and pronunciation, the lack of correspondence between them is a phenomenon peculiar to almost all languages. One of the reasons for this difference is that language grows and changes phonetically, whereas the graphical fixing of its norms remains the same. When discrepancy or lack of correspondence reaches such an extent that it hinders an easy perception of the letter, it is time for a spelling reform, i.e. a reform of the norms of writing[23] (1940: 111).

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[21]   "*наруша[ют] мудрый принцип единства норм произношения, прерыва[ют] непрерывность письменных традиций, изменя[ют] азбуку*".

[22]   After the second orthographic reform, the letters ‹օ› and ‹է› appear only at the beginning of a word or in compound words. The only exceptions are 'ով', 'who', 'ովքեր' 'those (people)', and the present tense of the verb 'to be', with the exclusion of the third person singular.

[23]   "[н]есоответствие письма произношению, расхождение между ними – явление, свойственное в той или иной мере почти всем языкам. Одной из причин этого расхождения является то, что язык фонетически растет и изменяется, а графическое закрепление его норм остается прежним, традиционным. Когда несоответствие или расхождение доходит до такой

Despite his substantial criticism, in his 1940 article Sarkisyan compares the Russian and the Armenian orthographic reforms. While the Russian orthographic reform is sustained by the "principle of unity of the norms of pronunciation"[24], the Armenian reform was based on the "principle of full correspondence of letter to the sound, of the grapheme to the phoneme"[25] (1940: 111). Indeed, according to Sarkisyan, "[t]he orthography of the Armenian language was reformed according to the principle of full correspondence between the letter and the sound (one letter, one sound)"[26] (Sarkisyan 1940: 112). In addition to this, Sarkisyan underlines the effect of the Russian orthographic reform, which aimed at simplifying official and everyday writing: "[n]othing has changed from this reform, nothing has suffered from it, it simply became easier to write, it became easier to teach how to write letters"[27] (1940: 112).

On the one hand, the changes introduced into the Armenian alphabet actually simplified writing; for example, the alternation of the letters <օ> and <ո> inside words was finally regulated. On the other hand, however, the introduction of a diphtong and the suppression of a ligature lengthened the text[28].

3.2. *Avoiding the Danger of Latinization or Cyrillization*

During the 1920s-1930s the Soviet general linguistic policy fostered the adoption of the Latin alphabet to write the languages of the Soviet Union[29]. This latinization campaign (*латинизация*) aimed to create Latin-script based alphabets for languages that did not have a writing system. Even languages with a quite well rooted written tradition, as, for example, Komi, underwent a process of latinization (Toulouze 2010).

Ethnic and linguistic homogeneity[30], as well as the existence of a large diaspora[31] (Grenoble 2003: 122), have presumably prevented the substitution of the Armenian al-

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степени, что препятствует легкому восприятию письма – настает момент необходимости реформы орфографии, т. е. реформы норм письма".

[24] "принцип единства норм произношения".

[25] "принцип полного соответствия письма звуку, графемы фонеме".

[26] "[п]о принципу полного соответствия письма звуку (одной букве – один звук) была реформирована орфография армянского языка".

[27] "[о]т этой реформы ничего не изменилось, ничего не пострадало, только стало легче писать, легче стало обучать письму".

[28] On the contrary, the Russian orthographic reform shortened texts by 1/30.

[29] At a conference in Moscow, Makintsʻyan presented a paper entitled "On an Uniform Latin Alphabet for the People of the Socialist Federative Soviet Republic of Russia" (1919). On a unified, Pan-Soviet language, see Suchotin 1932.

[30] In Soviet times, as well as today, Armenia was labelled as the 'mono-ethnic' republic, because the vast majority of its inhabitants were ethnic Armenians.

[31] "The existence of the diaspora, coupled with Armenia's own troubled history with Turkey, has had an impact on Soviet policy in Armenia, at least indirectly, in terms of both Soviet attitudes toward Armenia, as well as initial Armenian attitudes toward the Soviet government" (Grenoble 2003: 122).

phabet with Latin[32] or Cyrillic[33] scripts. In keeping with Grenoble, other factors, such as a well-established literary tradition, high educational and literacy rates, and a strong ethnic pride played a key role in this respect (2003: 123). Arguably, also the 1922 linguistic reform helped avoid the substitution of the Armenian alphabet, insofar as it actually demonstrated to Soviet authorities the will to modernize language.

3.3. *Impulse Towards Armenization*

Whereas the 1922 orthography reform was met with hostility, which led to its partial revocation in 1940, other linguistic policies were received in Armenia with particular favour, insofar as they promoted the exaltation of 'Armenianness' right after the terrible years of the genocide. Indeed, as Grenoble explains,

> [i]n the early years of Soviet rule in Armenia, the nativization policy (*korenizatsiia*) was in full force [...] For this reason, tolerance for very open nationalist sentiments was high in the region, and hand in hand with this, for the nationalist hopes of the Armenian intelligentsia. Armenian nationalism was at least tolerated until the Great Purge of 1936-38, when official policy reversed, and charges of nationalist sentiments were used to explain the purges of party officials and intelligentsia alike (2003: 122).

As part of the *korenizacija* (nativization) and *nacional'noe stroitel'stvo* policy, support for the development of national languages was granted to all the peoples of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the strengthening of the Soviet power in Armenia went through other channels involving the use of language. These include what can be described as a "toponymic overhaul" (Smith *et al.* 1998: 147), where names of cities were either sovietized or armenized.

For instance, the ancient city of Kumayri, now known as Gyumri, in 1837 was renamed as Aleksandropol' in honour of Aleksandra, the wife of Tsar Nicholas I. To sweep away the memory of the Tsarist rule, which was evident in this Russian-flavoured denomination, from 1924 until 1990 it was renamed as Leninakan. This case clearly shows the happy marriage between sovietization and armenization, insofar as the name of the great leader of the 1917 Revolution was fused with the typically Armenian suffix *-akan*, often used to form relational adjectives from nouns (Jahukyan, 1998: 5-48; Dum-Tragut, 2009: 665). This word-formation process reminds the case of Leningrad, where the name of the leader fuses with the ending *-grad* (from OCS *gradŭ*)[34].

3.4. *Development of the Armenian Language. The Role of the Russian Language*

According to Grenoble, "the net impact of Soviet language policy on the Armenian language was minimal" (Grenoble 2003: 123). The sovietization wave, however, did intro-

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[32]   On the latinization of Russian and other alphabets, see Jakovlev 1930; Nurmakov 1934; Alpatov 2001, 2002, 2015.

[33]   On the cyrillization policy, see Frings 2012; Tomelleri 2015.

[34]   Cfr. Fortson 2010: 423.

duce critical changes in linguistic, cultural and even political terms[35]. Indeed, the 1922 reform undoubtedly paved the way towards the modernization of Armenian, not only in terms of norms or status, but also in terms of language productivity. According to Weitenberg, in this specific period of time, "[t]he influence of the Russian language on Eastern Armenian has been enormous"[36] (2006: 1900). Likewise, Dum-Tragut holds that "[d]uring the Soviet era, Eastern Armenian was definitely shaped in the most significant and fundamental way" (Dum-Tragut 2009: 4). Dum-Tragut[37] summarizes these changes as follows:

(i)   Explicit description, definition and labelling of the specific linguistic functions in Modern Eastern Armenian language in various grammars (codification);

(ii)   Modern Eastern Armenian acquired new linguistic functions related to the political, administrational, juridical, scientific and economic domains;

(iii)   Modern Eastern Armenian acquired the status of an official national language.

The active language reforms conducted in Soviet Armenia stimulated progress in the fields of word formation and terminology building (Weitenberg 2006: 1900)[38]. This is not surprising, bearing in mind that by 1923 political power in Soviet Armenia was closely linked to the Soviet government. Subsequently, according to H. Ačarjan, the contact "[w]ith the more civilized and educated Russian people, as well as with its advanced elements, with Russian literature, Russian press, Russian school and Russian theater, [...] shook off the dust of antiquity [from the Armenian language, which] assimilated new and free ideas that penetrated into its life, literature and language"[39] (1951: 527). Looking at the rapid evolution of terminology in the fields of Chemistry, Medicine, Mechanics, Politics, but also in cooking and everyday language (Ačarjan 1951: 588-589), it is possible to assert that Russian did perform the function of a catalyst for the growth of Armenian[40]. Notably, an acceleration of the process took place under Stalin's rule, when Russian acquired the status of *lingua franca* in the Soviet Union. In Ačarjan's words,

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[35]   Compare, for instance, Grenoble's position with Dum-Tragut's: "[t]he constant strengthening of MEA [i.e. Modern Eastern Armenian, I.M.] as the main means of communication in Soviet Armenia was heavily disturbed and even undermined by a rigorous Russification policy by central Moscow" (Dum-Tragut 2009: 5).

[36]   Cfr. Nalbandov's (2016: 264) position: "[t]he Soviet years extended the severe Russification processes implemented in Armenia by the Russian/Soviet imperial government".

[37]   Cfr. Dum-Tragut 2009: 4-5. For a concise yet general discussion on the Russian influence over the Armenian language, see Dum-Tragut 2009: 5.

[38]   See also Weitenberg 1991.

[39]   "с более прогрессивным и культурным русским народом, а также с его передовыми элементами, с русской литературой, [армянский язык] стряхнул с себя пыль древности и востринял новые и свободнолюбивые идеи, которые проникли в его жизнь, литературу и язык".

[40]   See also Matossian 1962; Abrahamyan 1973.

> [f]or all of us Russian language serves as an international language. With its help we communicate with all neighboring peoples [...]. Russian language is needed not only within Russia, but also in the whole world. Not all of us know French, German, English, and through them get acquainted with world literature. Russian literature has given voluminous translations from European and non-European languages. Through these translations we can get acquainted with the masterpieces of all literatures[41] (Ačarjan 1951: 587-588).

Yet, before the 1922 Reform, the weight of Russian in the evolution of the Armenian language was already considerable. For instance, in 1919 Manuk Abeghyan published his Russian-Armenian pocket dictionary of juridical terms (*Rus-hayeren iravabanakan aṙdzeṙn baṙaran*). This dictionary, which was unique in its genre, has significantly contributed to the development of Armenian legal language.

4.   *The Legacy of the Soviet Linguistic Reforms in Today's Armenia*

As several letters characteristic of Classical Armenian (and of Western Armenian) ceased to be used in Modern Eastern Armenian, and the gap between the two variants of Modern Armenian deepened, the break with tradition became more evident (Weitenberg 2006: 1900). This rupture with the past was undoubtedly in line with the Soviet mindset, which made the effacement of the Imperial heritage one of its priorities.

On April 17, 1993, an Armenian Language Law was passed. According to it, the official language is standard Armenian in its Modern Eastern Armenian variant. Therefore, since the early Nineties, the state has been pursuing a centralized Armenian language policy (Zakarian 1996; Dermergueryan 1997:26; Donabedian 1998) characterized by conservatism and a 'puristic' attitude toward the restoration of Armenian (Weitenberg 2006: 1900). As the Article 3 of the Armenian language law reads, "[i]n official conversation, citizens of the Republic of Armenia shall be obliged to ensure the purity of language"[42].

Nowadays, 'purism' has become the arena where the battle for the Armenian language is fought. "Various efforts" explains Weitenberg, "have been made to abolish the spelling reforms. On the one hand, the reforms were simply identified with Communism and rejected on political grounds; on the other hand, it is recognized that the new orthography (which is not at all radical, but rather moderate and prudent) creates a barrier between Eastern and Western Armenian" (2006: 1900-1901). Although the process of separation

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[41]   "[р]усский язык служит международным языком для нас всех. С его помощью мы общаемся со всеми соседними народами [...]. Русский язык нужен не только в пределах России, но и в пределах всего мира. Мы все не можем знать французский, немецкий, английский языки и посредством их знакомиться с мировой литературой. Русская литература дала объемистые переводы с европейских и неевропейских языков; посредством этих переводов мы можем знакомиться с шедеврами всех литератур".

[42]   <http://www.parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=1793&lang=eng> (last accessed: 24.04.2017).

between Eastern and Western Armenian can be dated back to the Medieval Ages, the existence of two variants of Armenian orthography is widely perceived as a crucial factor dividing the homeland, Armenia, and its diasporas (Khachatrian 2002; Melkonjan 2006; Abrahamian 1998; Abrahamian 2006: 339-341). Such barrier parting the Armenian people thickened after the 1922 orthography reform. In this respect, Zakarian maintains that "the existence of two branches of Literary Armenian and the diversity of Armenian dialects are circumstances that compromise national unity" (1996: 359). According to Nalbandov, the arguably "whole new" language was created by "[Soviet language architects] [i]n order to separate Soviet Armenians from the 'corrupting influence' of the West" (2016: 264). Furthermore, Nalbandov blames the Soviets for the present situation: "the Armenian nation became divided along ideological lines when the land became Soviet" (*ibidem*).

In today's Armenia the attitude towards Western and traditional orthography has become one of the key linguistic issues. This problem, however, is not exclusively a linguistic one, as Dum-Tragut holds: "Armenian [...] became the centre of attention not only of overzealous Armenian linguists, but also of historians and politicians" (2009: 5). On the fate of Modern Armenian there actually exist two positions[43], one supporting (i) the reinstatement of the Classical spelling in Armenia, the other favouring (ii) the adoption of the Eastern Armenian spelling system in the 'external' diaspora. A compromise between these two positions is "impossible and senseless" (Khachatrian 2002). In Khachatrian's words, "it would mean creating a third orthography with additional problems. [...] [W]e must make a decision: either we all adopt the classical spelling system, or we all use the new one" (2002).

To Melkonjan (2006), the return to Mesropian orthography would mean the preservation of national values, a privilege that, so far, has been an exclusive of Western Armenians and the Church. In addition to this, Melkonjan agrees with Weitenberg (2006: 1900) in considering Western Armenian as an endangered language[44], due to the official status of the Modern Eastern Armenian. Hence, the disappearance of Western Armenian would mean a new genocide (Melkonjan 2006).

Khachatrian, who considers himself an advocate of the new orthography, uses a straightforward example to illustrate a hypothetical return to Mesropian orthography:

> [l]et those who advocate classical orthography tell Italians: you break ties with your glorious Roman past, and in the name of restoration, adopt the Latin orthography. Or try to convince [...] the Russians to restore their old orthography, explaining to them that after the spelling reform in 1918 (also initiated by the Bolshevik government) they lost the spirit of their epics. [...] Your interlocutors will explain that the currently ap-

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[43]   It is beyond the scopes of the article to report all the positions of this debate. For further reading, cfr. Khachatrian 2002; Melkonjan 2006. On ethno-linguistic issues raised after the Soviet Union, see Tishkov 1997.

[44]   "[T]he very existence of a Western Armenian literary language was denied" (Weitenberg 2006: 1900).

plicable orthography does not at all prevent them from being aware of their old culture [...] (Khachatrian 2002).

Today this situation, mostly generated by the 1922 orthography reform, remains open.

5.   *The Legacy of the Soviet Linguistic Reforms and the Status of Russian in Armenia*

When Armenia gained its independence on September 21ˢᵗ 1991, processes of "de-russification" and "re-armenization" (Dum-Tragut 2009: 6) took place as a reaction against the ever-increasing importance of Russian in the Soviet age. As a consequence, the use of Russian language severely decreased, especially in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. All communication fields, particularly in the domains where Russian was more present during the Soviet period, such as administration, education, and military, witnessed a systematic elimination of Russian-influenced words. "In language corpora," writes Pavlenko, "some Russian neologisms were replaced with alternative terms" (2008: 9). This is the case, for example, of the word 'republic', *respublika* during the Soviet times, which returned to be called *hanrapetut'yun*. This process, which can be labelled as 'ethnic mobilization' ("*мобилизация этничности*", Guboglo 1998)[45], also entailed the reintroduction in Eastern Armenian of many archaic or obsolete Classical Armenian terms.

However, in latest years the situation has changed. In 2010 Russian language education was reintroduced in Armenia, and it is still the first foreign language taught in schools. In a recent meeting between the head of the Armenian Ministry of Education, Levon Mkrtchyan, the Special Representative of the Russian President for International Cultural Cooperation Michail Švydkoj, and the advisor of the Russian Embassy Oleg Šapovalov, Mkrtchyan discussed the difficulties in learning young Armenians are facing today. Among these, Mkrtchyan stressed the issues involving the knowledge of Russian language, as well as problems in finding professional literature in Armenia. Indeed, specific literature related to the field of medicine, technology etc. is not translated into Armenian. Therefore, students find it hard to get acquainted with the latest trends, especially in the scientific field. Support from the Russian part was granted, chiefly in the areas of Russian as a foreign language, joint programs and teacher training. Teacher training, in particular, is vital for the diffusion of Russian language in the former countries of the Soviet Union. To solve the issue of the status of Russian in Armenia, the first secretary of the Armenian Communist Party Tachat Sargisyan is encouraging a referendum, which would grant Russian the official status of second state language. In July, 2017 Vjačeslav Volodin, the speaker of Russia's State Duma put forward this suggestion, which, at the moment, met firm opposition in Armenia.

The present day situation suggests a shift in the position of Russian language in Armenia. Indeed, from a deliberate removal of its traces, Russian is now growing in importance. To better understand the mechanisms that regulate the presence of Russian in today's Armenia, it is hence crucial to assess the legacy of the Soviet language reforms.

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[45]   Cfr. also Kantemirov 2000.

6.   Conclusions

Russian language had already played a pivotal role in the development of Armenian in the decades preceding the Soviet phase[46]. Nonetheless, the 1922 reform of Armenian orthography, which was tightly linked in ideological[47] and linguistic terms to the 1917-1918 reform of Russian orthography, can be regarded as a crucial moment for Armenian language. Indeed, it acted as a catalyst in the development of the Armenian language, insofar as it put into effect some of the proposals of previous linguistic debates. Yet, in some respects, the 1922 reform was ephemeral, insofar as it did not introduce dramatic changes both into the alphabet and orthography. In addition to this, the 1940 reform partially restored the old rules. Considering the vast panorama of the linguistic reforms carried out on the whole territory of the Soviet Union, the Armenian case is undoubtedly among the less radical ones.

However, the 1922 reform also lead to profound consequences, which continue to unsettle the Armenian *archipelago*. In this respect, the question of identity is central, and it can be parallelled to the feelings the Russian diaspora had about the 1917-1918 orthography reform. Sentiments of betrayal and unfaithfulness bond part of the Russian and Armenian society still today.

Moreover, the legacy of the 1922 reform affects the status of the Russian language in today's Armenia. Thus, an in-depth study of this page of linguistic history should be of interest also to linguists and historians of the Russian language.

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[46]   Cfr. Khachaturian 2009.
[47]   On alphabets and ideology, cfr. Sebba 2006.

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Ա ա	Բ բ	Գ գ	Դ դ	Ե ե	Զ զ	Է է	Ը ը	Թ թ	Ժ ժ
այբ	բեն	գիմ	դա	եչ	զա	է	ըթ	թո	ժե
ayb	ben	gim	da	yeč	za	ē	ët'	t'o	že
a	b	g	d	e	z	ē	ë	t'	ž
[ɑ]	[b]	[g]	[d]	[ɛ/jɛ]	[z]	[e]	[ə]	[tʰ]	[ʒ]
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ի ի	Լ լ	Խ խ	Ծ ծ	Կ կ	Հ հ	Ձ ձ	Ղ ղ	Ճ ճ	Մ մ
ինի	լյուն	խե	ծա	կեն	հո	ձա	ղատ	ճե	մեն
ini	liwn	xe	ça	ken	ho	ja	ġat	če	men
i	l	x	ç	k	h	j	ġ	č	m
[ɪ]	[l]	[x]	[ts]	[k]	[h]	[dz]	[ʁ]	[tʃ]	[m]
20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	200
Յ յ	Ն ն	Շ շ	Ո ո	Չ չ	Պ պ	Ջ ջ	Ռ ռ	Ս ս	Վ վ
հի	նու	շա	ո	չա	պե	ջե	ռա	սե	վեվ
hi	now	ša	vo	ča	pe	je	ṙa	se	vev
y	n	š	o	č	p	ǰ	ṙ	s	v
[h/j]	[n]	[ʃ]	[vo/o]	[tʃʰ]	[p]	[ʤ]	[r]	[s]	[v]
300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000	2000	3000
Տ տ	Ր ր	Ց ց	Ու ու	Փ փ	Ք ք	և	Օ օ	Ֆ ֆ	
տյուն	րե	ցո	հիւն	փյուր	քե	և	օ	ֆե	
tyown	re	c'o	hiwn	p'yowr	k'	jew	ò	fe	
t	r	c'	w	p'	k'	ew	ò	f	
[t]	[ɾ]	[tsʰ]	[v]	[pʰ]	[kʰ]	[ev/jev]	[o]	[f]	
4000	5000	6000	7000	8000	9000	-	10000	20000	

Fig. 1
Modern Eastern Armenian

Աա	Բբ	Գգ	Դդ	Եե	Զզ	Էէ	Ըը	Թթ	Ժժ
այբ	բեն	գիմ	դա	եչ	զա	է	ըթ	թո	ժե
ayp	pen	kim	ta	yeč	za	ēh	ĕt	t'oh	zhe
a	p	k	t	e	z	ē	ë	t'	ž
[ɑ]	[pʰ]	[kʰ]	[tʰ]	[ɛ/jɛ]	[z]	[ɛ]	[ə]	[t']	[ʒ]
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Իի	Լլ	Խխ	Ծծ	Կկ	Հհ	Ձձ	Ղղ	Ճճ	Մմ
ինի	լյուն	խե	ծա	կեն	հո	ձա	ղատ	ճե	մեն
ini	liwn	xe	ça	ken	ho	ja	ġat	če	men
i	l	x	ç	k	h	j	ġ	č	m
[i]	[l]	[x]	[dz]	[g]	[h]	[ts]	[ʁ]	[ʤ]	[m]
20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	200

Յյ	Նն	Շշ	Ոո	Չչ	Պպ	Ջջ	Ռռ	Սս	Վվ
հի	նու	շա	ո	չա	պե	ջե	ռա	սե	վեվ
hi	now	ša	vo	ča	be	je	řa	se	vev
y	n	š	o	č	b	ǰ	ř	s	v
[h/j]	[n]	[ʃ]	[o/vo]	[ʧʰ]	[b]	[ʧʰ]	[r]	[s]	[v]
300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000	2000	3000

Տտ	Րր	Ցց	Իւ	Փփ	Քք	և	Օo	Ֆֆ	
տյուն	րե	ցո	հիւն	փյուր	քե	և	o	ֆե	
tyown	re	c'o	hiwn	p'yowr	k'	jew	ò	fe	
t	r	c'	w	p'	k'	ew	ò	f	
[d]	[r]	[tsʰ]	[v]	[pʰ]	[kʰ]	[ev/jev]	[o]	[f]	
4000	5000	6000	7000	8000	9000	-	10000	20000	

Fig. 2
Modern Western Armenian

Abstract

Irina Marchesini
Russian (1917-1918) and Armenian (1922) Orthographic Reforms. Assessing the Russian Influence on Modern Armenian Language

The Russian Orthographic Reform (1917-1918), which initiated the Armenian one (1922-1924, modified in 1940) has undoubtedly played a central role in the development of Modern Armenian. To support this thesis, the essay retraces the fundamental phases of the reform, focussing on the two decades from the early 1920s to 1940, i.e., the year when the second orthography reform was promulgated. The Armenian case is a very peculiar one amongst the constellation of the linguistic reforms decreed in the Soviet countries outside Russia. In fact, Armenian avoided both Cyrillisation and Latinization. Nonetheless, the effects of the 1922 orthography reform are still perceived as a heavy burden today. Ultimately, this essay aims at demonstrating that this issue should also be a concern for Russian Studies.