

The Armenian Community of Glendale

Introduction

The United States of America is home to a number of different communities, which have enriched the place with their traditional lifestyle and languages. Be it the Spanish speaking communities of central America or the Vietnamese community in Orange County, each has added its flavor to make the US a culturally diverse state. One such community is the Armenian community concentrated in Glendale. This paper deals with the distribution of the Armenians in the US, history of their immigration and settlement in America, unique features of their Armenian language and its use by the Armenians.

Survey and Statistics

The Armenians form quite an integral part of the various communities residing in US and, more precisely, California. A survey conducted in 2011 by the US Census Bureau found that the total number of Armenians in the US is approximately 483,366 (US Census Bureau 2011). Most of these people are concentrated in Los Angeles, the number being about 450,000. Within Los Angeles, Armenians are mostly concentrated in East Hollywood, San Fernando Valley, Glendale and Pasadena (The Armenian Community in the Los Angeles Area). Apart from Armenia, Glendale hosts one of the world's largest populations of Armenians, the number centering around 80,000 of its total 200,000 residents (Armenians in Glendale, CA).

History of Immigration

The Armenians' love for adventure and curiosity enabled them to establish trading firms and colonies in America as early as 1660. By 1870, there were about 70 Armenians in the US, most of whom planned to return to their homelands at some point. Widespread immigration of Armenians into America, however, did not begin until the 1890s when large numbers of Turkish Armenians were massacred as an attack against Chinese minorities in the region. This was followed by two other periods of extensive immigration of Armenians into America immediately after World War I and World War II when Armenians in Turkey and the Middle East began facing increased Islamic fundamentalism. The period after World War II saw the largest number of Armenians migrating to the US and settling, especially in the Los Angeles area. Hence, Los Angeles is considered the 'first city' of the Armenian diaspora as it houses the largest Armenian population outside of Armenia (Takooshian).

Linguistic features

Armenian is an Indo-European language and borrows several features from Europe, Asia as well as Africa, due to the strategic location of Armenia. Contemplations have also been made regarding the sharing of origins of Armenian with Phrygian, Greek, Indic, Thracian and Albanian. The mother language of Armenian, however, is Proto-Indo-European which has also given birth to other languages such as Latin, Sanskrit and Hittite (Luc Vartan Baronian).

The Armenian alphabet was developed in 405 AD by a monk named St. Mesrop Mashtots. It has 36 letters and is written from left to right. It has seven vowel phonemes, two semivowels and six sonants. The words of the Armenian language have no gender differentiation and case endings change with the sentence structure with regards to plurality and tense. Adjectives are always placed before a noun and have no case ending. The genitive is also usually

placed before a noun. Prepositions are usually avoided and postpositions are preferred (Pisowicz).

The Armenian alphabet					
letter		transliteration	letter		transliteration
capital	lowercase		capital	lowercase	
Ա	ա	a	Մ	մ	m
Բ	բ	b	Թ	թ	y
Գ	գ	g	Ն	ն	n
Դ	դ	d	Շ	շ	sh
Ե	ե	e	Ո	ո	o
Զ	զ	z	Չ	չ	ch ¹
Է	է	ē	Պ	պ	p
Ը	ը	ē	Ջ	ճ	j
Թ	թ	t ¹	Բ	բ	f
Ճ	ճ	zh	Ս	ս	s
Ի	ի	i	Վ	վ	v
Լ	լ	l	Տ	տ	t
Խ	խ	kh	Ր	ր	r
Ս	ս	ts	Ծ	ց	ts ¹
Կ	կ	k	Խ	և	w
Հ	հ	h	Փ	փ	p ¹
Ձ	ձ	dz	Ք	ք	k ¹
Ղ	ղ	gh	Օ	օ	ō
Ճ	ճ	ch	Ֆ	ֆ	f

¹ The spiritus asper (') indicates aspiration.

Figure 1: The Armenian alphabet with the corresponding transliteration in English (Pisowicz).

Armenian has an agglutinative structure, meaning that the root of the sentence is lined up with a series of prefixes and suffixes. An example of an agglutinative phrase in Armenian is nav+er+u+n (“of the boats”) where the root nav (boat) is linked to a plural+dative+definite phrase. Armenian is also isolating where each word in a given phrase carries a different meaning, for example, siradz em (I have loved). The inflectional property of Armenian allows a single vowel of the word to be altered in order to denote the tense, for example, mayr/mor (mother/of mother) (Luc Vartan Baronian).

A clear linguistic border exists between the Eastern and Western Armenian languages. The present tense differs in both languages, with [gë] being the present tense for Western Armenian (for example, gë sirem ‘I love’) and [-um] being the present tense for Eastern Armenian (for example, sirum em). The ablatives for both languages are also different, [-e(n)] being the ablative for Western Armenian and [-its] being the ablative for Eastern Armenian. There are also a number of dialects that possess features of both the Western and Eastern Armenian languages, for example, the Van dialect, the Gyumri dialect, and the Sebastia dialect (Luc Vartan Baronian).

Language use and Language Maintenance

The Armenian language has undergone a number of changes and today, it is quite different from its earlier version. The original language, also called Krapar, is now used only in religious gatherings. Among the evolved versions of the language, the Eastern Armenian is spoken by Armenians in Iran, Armenia, and the post-Soviet nations, which constitute about 55% of Armenians in the world. The Western Armenian is spoken in the Middle East, Europe and America, which constitute the remaining 45% of Armenians in the world. Although both these versions have evolved from the same language, the pronunciation is different and speakers of both languages need to make an effort to understand the other version (Takooshian).

Armenians who live outside their homeland, especially in Southern California, have mixed opinions about the necessity of keeping the language alive. Some fear its extinction, whereas others do not feel the need for teaching and promoting Armenian. Although about 94%

of Armenians in Southern California feel that their children should learn the language, only 12% of the Armenian children can actually speak Armenian. This may be because out of the entire Armenian population of America, only about 150,000 Armenians speak their mother tongue at home (Takooshian).

It is quite disheartening for most Armenians to see their language placed on the endangered list of languages developed by the UNESCO. However, recent news reports say that the demand for Armenian language skills is steadily increasing in Southern California. A lot of people feel that Armenian is a practical language and is of use in both professional and social lives (ArmenPress 2013). On a larger scale, the Los Angeles election materials and ballots, which are already available in six different languages, might end up including Armenian as one of them. This is already true of election materials in neighboring cities of Glendale where the Armenians account for a quarter of the total population (Behrens 2012).

A recent attempt to withdraw the single Armenian television station had brought the local Armenians on the street as a sign of protest. Horizon TV was the only Armenian 24x7 station and by pulling it back, the only link of the Armenian community with their language was being mutilated. People in Glendale organized a protest as a sign of trying to keep their language and culture alive (Villacorte 2013).

Direct communication with native speakers of Armenian reveals strong feelings of bonding with their homeland associated with the use of their language. An interview with an Armenian lady living in Glendale found that when she spoke with her family and friends in Armenian, she felt that she was back in Armenia enjoying her traditional Armenian rituals (Tavitian 2015). Another interview with a young student found that he felt at home speaking his language with his friends. He also confessed that he would be most comfortable if his spouse knew Armenian and he could converse with her in his language (Mirzoyan 2015).

Today, the language is taught at quite a few American educational institutions including Harvard University, Stanford University, University of Pennsylvania and University of Michigan. Areas which have a large Armenian population also have library collections in Armenian. Libraries in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland have good literature in the Armenian language (Takooshian).

Conclusion

Although the Armenians have sought refuge in the US in times of desperation, they have not only made it their home, but also contributed to the country in all aspects. They have strongly held on to their traditions, culture and language and have instilled all their ancestral qualities in their children. The Armenian language, in spite of having undergone numerous changes over the years, continue to bind Armenians together all over the world.

Works cited

- “Armenian American’s Immigration to California.” *Armenian American’s Immigration to California*. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- “Armenian Language.” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- “Armenians in Glendale, CA.” – *Hayk the Ubiquitous Armenian*. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- “Glendale protest planned over removal of Armenian TV station from cable network’s lineup.” *Glendale protest planned over removal of Armenian TV station from cable network’s lineup*. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- “Increased demand for Armenian language skills in Southern California.” *Armenpress.am*. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- “L.A. Councilmen seek to add Armenian language to ballot.” *KCET*. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- “Luc Vartan Baronian – Armenian linguistics.” *Luc Vartan Baronian – Armenian linguistics*. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- Mirzoyan, Fahim P. Telephone Interview. 11 December 2015.
- Tavitian, Fabiola S. Personal Interview. 11 December 2015.
- “The Armenian community in Los Angeles.” *The Armenian community in Los Angeles*. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- “Your geography selections.” *American FactFinder*. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.