

NEW NAKHICHEVAN DIALECT AS AN ELEMENT OF THE ARMENIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Abstract

The formation of the Armenian Diaspora was specifically crucial for the Armenian people and the Armenian language. Armenians worldwide have expanded the range of the Armenian language, exerting great efforts to preserve the integrity of the language. Conditioned by this, one noticeable problem for the literary language has emerged; as much as foreignisms are dangerous for the language, purisms are equally dangerous.

The article is dedicated to one of the critical elements of self-determination of Armenians living in the region of New Nakhichevan; the current language status of the Armenian dialect, the scope of its use and the preservation of the national face through language.

In order to avoid the danger of assimilation, especially the representatives of the Western dialect group create Armenian morphemes and try to translate all the words indiscriminately, even internationally acceptable terms, which signals the fear living in the subconscious that the distortion of the language will lead to the distortion of the national identity.

Dialects also evince features in semantics. In the article, we have presented several words used in the dialect, which, compared to other Armenian dialects, coincide in terms of expression but differ in terms of content.

Keywords: New Nakhichevan dialect, identity, semantics, foreignism, purism, Russophilia, bilingualism.

Introduction

Every nation at first has the right to self-determination and then the right to preserve its identity: The problem of preserving national identity is relevant nowadays, especially in the era of globalization. Nations differ from each other in their individuality, and as Yervand Bozoyan (1995) notes: “There is a constant struggle between the ‘tribal’ and the ‘universal’ in the nation. The tribal seeks to spread its consciousness over the nation, making it a “closed” system and a single moral-political unit, the universal, in turn, works to “open” that system. The absolute

predominance of either of these two components of the nation will lead to national disaster. The victory of the universal means the elimination of the nation, the victory of the tribal means the dangerous moulding-encapsulation of the nation” (p. 27).

“The word “identity” is ambiguous and can have different meanings in different philosophical contexts. There are two main understandings. The first one is related to “distinguishing oneself from others, being one’s self (in this case, the following group of terms is used (Ego, Ich, Selbst, Selbigkeit, Self, Selfness, etc.), the second one emphasizes the concentration of identi-

ty by recording the identity of the states (the term “identity”, *identität*, *идентичность* correspond to such cases)” (Voskanyan, 1995, p. 11).

Apart from the fact that nations have an identity that distinguishes them from other nations, they also have the problem of preserving their identity. This problem is evinced among those who are geographically far from their motherland and establish permanent or temporary residence in a foreign environment.

“National character is an expression which describes forms of collective self-perception, sensibility, and conduct which are shared by the individuals who inhabit modern nation-states. It presupposes the existence of psychological and cultural homogeneity among the citizens of each country, as well as the idea that each nation can be considered a collective individual, with characteristics analogous to the empirical individuals who are its inhabitants” (Neiburg, 2001, p. 8807).

Depending on the environment, the problem of preserving the identity of the given nation can be combined with the coercive or voluntary violation of the right to identity. Sometimes, not perceiving the foreign environment as a “new homeland”, a person is nevertheless forced (and this mostly happens unconsciously) to “bow down” to the laws of that new homeland, and the language itself takes the first impact. Language is not only the most essential guarantee of self-recognition but also contributes to the recognition of the national profile in all environments, in the homeland or outside its borders.

A language can be considered thoroughly studied if the dialects of that language are also inspected. Armenian, being one of the ancient Indo-European languages, a separate language branch in that language family, has undergone changes at all linguistic levels over the centuries.

Armenian is rich in dialects, which is a result of not only linguistic but also extralinguistic factors. Due to fate, the Armenian people did not have a unified language; it was constantly subjected to repressions by foreign invaders, which directly affected all linguistic levels. Apart from

that, the Armenian people, experiencing cultural and social ascents, had active contacts with the neighbouring states, which caused language penetrations, many borrowings, and unacceptable foreignisms.

The formation of the Armenian Diaspora was specifically crucial for the Armenian people and the Armenian language. Armenians worldwide have expanded the range of the Armenian language, exerting great efforts to preserve the integrity of the language. Conditioned by this, one noticeable problem for the literary language has emerged; as much as foreignisms are dangerous for the language, purisms are equally dangerous.

Purism is distinctive to the Western dialects of the Armenian language, but in the Eastern dialects, especially in recent times, several internationally acceptable words are widely used, which cannot be considered foreignism.

Dialects are the most important components of the language, which are not only the linguistic wealth of the nation, but also reflect the spiritual and cultural characteristics. As Edward Harutyunyan (2019) mentions: “The temperament of a nation is determined not only by its genealogical qualities, but also by its geographical environment, culture, moral and legal systems, traditions of coexistence, etc.” (p. 7). Language conditions the existence of the above, as the components representing national values are created in the mother tongue, from the Constitution to works of art. Nations differ from each other not only in language, but also in thinking, worldview, character traits, moral and ethical norms, traditions, culture, written and unwritten laws, etc. Moving to a new environment, a person begins to adapt to that environment, to the customs of a foreign nation, while remaining faithful to his identity and his roots.

We cannot fail to mention that the creation of literary works by Armenians living in Chaltir and the surrounding settlements, the existence of a school attached to the church are effective efforts from the perspectives of preserving the national identity. There is a museum in Chaltir, where Armenian cultural samples are presented. The

actions aimed at the preservation of Armenian art aim to preserve, first of all, the national image and the mother tongue, which is one of the important keys to the preservation of that image.

The Armenian language is the “passport” of the identity of the Armenian nation, which the Armenians took with them to all corners of the world. Armenians treat their language as sacred, constantly developing and enriching it.

Armenian is a language rich in dialects. Over time, Armenian linguists have made different classifications of dialects: phonetic, morphological and multi-characteristic. Gevorg Jahukyan made a multi-characteristic classification. According to G. Jahukyan’s statistical data, the number of Armenian dialects reaches 44.

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Most of the Armenian dialects have disappeared over time. “The decrease in the number of Armenian dialects is solely justified by the changes made and the destruction of a number of dialects during the Great Armenian Genocide. Today it is already difficult to specify the exact number of Armenian dialects, because after the statistical-multi-characteristic classification of Armenian dialects, there are no new statistical studies in that field” (Mkrtychyan, 2015, p. 10).

The Armenian dialects are divided into two groups: Western Armenian dialects (of the K branch) and Eastern Armenian dialects (of the UM branch). The basis of this classification is morphological. The classification is made according to the composition of the imperfect present tense of the borderline tense: [gnum em] and [k’ertam] (I am going).

The New Nakhichevan dialect belongs to the

Western group of Armenian dialects. The Armenians of Chaltir, Topti, Mets Sala, and Sultan Sala villages, living in the Rostov-on-Don region, mainly speak the New Nakhichevan dialect. The name of New Nakhichevan is associated with the name of a number of artists and writers. The Armenian colony concentrated in Chaltir has always been culturally developed. The local Armenians, migrating from Crimea, settled in a foreign environment, establishing an Armenian church, a school attached to the church, and a museum.

The only complete examination of the New Nakhichevan dialect is the study of the eminent linguist Hrachya Acharyan (1925). Over time, Armenian linguists made private references to the examined dialect, mainly citing the linguistic facts presented by Hr. Acharyan. For example, academician Gevorg Jahukyan (1972) referred to the dialect when performing multi-attribute classification, and Professor Ararat Gharibyan (1953) when performing phonetic classification, etc. In 2018, a two-volume explanatory dictionary of the New Nakhichevan dialect was published, the author of which is Gevorg Jalashyan (2018). In the introductory section of his dictionary, the latter referred to the current linguistic state of the dialect, presenting a general description of the dialect. Accordingly, the dialect underwent changes at all linguistic levels, from phonology to semantics and grammar.

Being one of the Western dialects of Armenian, the dialect of New Nakhichevan still shows a number of features compared to other dialects of Armenian, which also belong to the Western branch. For example, the purism mentioned above is not noticeable in this dialect. Native speakers of the dialect that we studied do not take significant steps to create new Armenian words, and in order to organize their lifestyle and livelihood without complications, the local dwellers prefer to enrich their active vocabulary with Russian words. Thus, during our studies, we did not notice a large number of Armenian innovations in this dialect-speaking area.

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Movses Demirchyan (2018) observes: “Social life is directly affected by modern globalization and scientific and technological development, and as a result, it changes rapidly, while people cannot change their mindset and value position towards the world as quickly. As a result, they prefer the escape to traditionalism rather than modernization” (p. 91). That “escape” also evinces itself in the case of language. In the dialect of New Nakhichevan, some elements of the old Armenian, Grabar, are still preserved, and the changes made in the modern Armenian, hardly “approach” the borders of the Armenian dialect. Over the years, the local Armenians not only destroyed their language system but also brought the dialect to possible destruction, signalling a clear path of retreat from their own identity. In this case, perhaps it would be better if the native speakers of the dialect preserved the Old Armenian elements in the language instead of taking the language assimilation to Russian.

From the point of view of preservation of national values, no matter how painful and unacceptable assimilation to a foreign nation and assimilation of their mother tongue to a foreign language is, altogether avoiding it is beyond reality and a happy self-deception. Living and creating in a foreign environment, Armenians living in Rostov-on-Don do all their writing in the official language of the Russian Federation, modern Russian. Especially in cases when a person who appears in a foreign environment, regardless of his will, gradually abandons his native language and gradually loses his own identity.

Dialects, in general, have a problem with preservation. The current retreat of the native indicates its imminent demise. During the historical development of the language, there were many cases when dialects ceased to exist and were pushed entirely out of use. Especially the dialects outside the borders of the motherland are in danger of assimilation. Dialects can also be assimilated into the literary language over time, which, however, does not have as significant an impact on national identity as the assimilation of a dialect to a foreign language. In this case, the strong

foundations of the national identity weaken, and the steps aimed at its preservation are not able to carry out their “mission”. For example, in Chaldir, we met many Armenians who replaced their Armenian surnames with Russian ones or gave Armenian names a Russian phonetic tone; we even encountered cases when Armenians ultimately refused Armenian names in order to integrate with a foreign environment, as well as for commercial, work and other goals. The index of self-determination that has undergone linguistic change, the name-surname, best shows the way of retreat, sometimes even causing the elimination of ancient family names. It is noteworthy that this dialect is widely used among people of an older age group: young people use it less, preferring Russian. This might have pernicious consequences. If the dialect is not passed down from generation to generation, it can disappear, as in some Armenian dialects. Besides that, because of the use of two languages, the connection between language and thinking is gradually broken, and bilingualism gives rise to mental delays, because of which a person begins to suffer from linguistic eclipse, not possessing any of the languages perfectly. Although there is a school attached to the church in Chaldir, the primary language of education is Russian. Russian is also a language that creates perspectives and opportunities for local Armenians, so no matter how worried they are about preserving national values, in order to avoid difficulties in the future, children are taught Russian as their mother tongue. The few lessons in Armenian are only about recognizing national roots, preserving identity, and maybe not such useful efforts. It should be noted that literature is created in this dialect both in the past and in now, where the influence of Russian is more prominent. The influence of Russian is noticeable in the dialect of New Nakhichevan. Our studies have shown that over time the phonetic system of the dialect has changed, there have been changes in the vocabulary, new grammatical phenomena have appeared, and a number of previously widespread phenomena have simply been pushed out of use. If the changes

occurring in the phonetic system, however, do not deepen the mother language by several degrees, then the lexical changes, word copies, semantic changes and other linguistic transfers related to lexicography disrupt the full description of the language and create a very unsuitable environment for the development or at least the preservation of what is there. The scope of language mastering is narrowed, and various complications arise in human thinking, directly affecting national identity preservation.

Having developed far beyond the limits of mastery of the mother tongue, in many cases, the dialect has broken the connection with mother the tongue, and lexical differences are also evinced in comparison with other Armenian dialects. The words of the Armenian dialects with their expressed meanings (in all dialects) are presented in the dialect dictionary of the Armenian language. In the New Nakhichevan dialect, we have come across several words, as evidenced in the dictionary mentioned above, but the meaning expressed in the New Nakhichevan dialect is not presented next to other meanings. For instance:

[BALAKH]- in different Armenian dialects, this word expresses different meanings, in the New Nakhichevan dialect, it means pants, which is also confirmed in the dialect dictionary of the Armenian language (2001-2012, p. 172).

[KHEY] - in the Armenian dialects it means if, whether (A dialect dictionary of the Armenian language, 2001-2012, p. 772), but in the New Nakhichevan dialect it means dung.

[LAY] - in different Armenian dialects, expresses different meanings. For example, a layer of brick or stone in the Artsakh dialect. In the Goris dialect, a layer of mowed grass (A dialect dictionary of the Armenian language, 2001-2012, p. 651), and in the New Nakhijevan dialect, a layer of dirt - caused by microbes.

[MAMUZ] - in Khoturjur tender form of addressing mothers (A dialect dictionary of the Armenian language, 2001-2012, p. 1330), a claw on a bird's leg in the New Nakhichevan dialect.

[PUL] - in different Armenian dialects, it expresses different meanings; for example, in the

dialect of Van, mound, in the dialects of Khoturjur, Dersim, the collapsed side of a high rock (A dialect dictionary of the Armenian language, 2001-2012, p. 2667), and in the New Nakhijevan dialect, it means fish scale, thin, small and round jewels on the bride's veil.

[ADA] - in the Armenian dialects, inflectional form, in the Nor Nakhichevan dialect it means island (borrowed from Turkish).

This series can be continued, because such words are often found in the New Nakhichevan dialect.

Conclusion

From the perspective of preserving the identity of nations, language and culture are of primary importance. The language contains the description and characteristics of both the individual and the nation in general. Along with the development of the individual, the language is also developing. The language is constantly developing and changing along with the development of the nation, and the current issue of preserving the national identity is directly related to the preservation and dissemination of the national language, literary works created in that language.

Armenians living in the Rostov-on-Don region and speaking the New Nakhichevan dialect have preserved their dialect over time, but not completely. Since Armenians who migrated live in Chaltir, the movements contributed to enriching the dialect with many borrowings, among which Turkish borrowings dominate, and recently the influence of Russian has become clearly noticeable both on the phonetic system (which we covered in separate articles), both lexical and grammatical.

Studying the vocabulary of the New Nakhichevan dialect, we recorded such words that are common and used in Armenian dialects, but express different meanings from the meanings used in the New Nakhichevan dialect, which means that the vocabulary of the dialect we studied is somewhat different from the vocabulary of other Armenian dialects.

These changes are fixed in the language over time and the dialect shows differences from the Western Armenian dialects of both in writing and especially in speaking. The influence of the Russian language on the language of the speakers of the dialect also affects the issue of national identity preservation. Especially among young people, it is more common to speak in Russian or Russian-mixed Armenian, which means that after years the dialect may be among the disappeared Armenian dialects and the Don Armenians, will lose the main elements of their national identity. For this reason, we cannot fail to pay attention to those people, cultural and spiritual figures, writers, and generally representatives of the intellectual class, who take practical steps in the direction of preserving the dialect and passing it on from generation to generation.

In the actions aimed at preserving the national identity, the preservation and transmission of the language and the literature created in that language from generation to generation should be primary. In Chaltir or ensembles representing different branches of art, which are the spreaders of the national elements, make the national culture recognizable and play a crucial role in the preservation of the national identity in the modern period.

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