



## One Language, Many Voices: Interactions between Eastern and Western Armenians in Budapest

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*Egy nyelv, megannyi hang: Interakciók keleti és nyugati örmények között Budapesten.*

**Absztrakt:** Ez a munka egy mikroszintű szociolingvisztikai tanulmány, amelynek célja annak feltárása, hogy az örmény nyelvváltozatok milyen összetett módon nemcsak hogy egymás mellett léteznek, de a mindennapi interakciók során dinamikusan hatnak egymásra. A kutatás félig strukturált, narratív diskurzuson, valamint budapesti örmény és örmény diaszpórabeli hallgatókkal készített kérdőívek alapján készült. A kutatás tárgya a Libanonból, Szíriából, valamint az Örmény Köztársaságból és az Arc'ah Köztársaságból (Hegyi-Karabakh Köztársaság) származó, Magyarországon, Budapesten élő és tanuló örmény hallgatók nyelvhasználata. A tanulmány rávilágít azokra a különleges kihívásokra, amelyekkel a keleti és nyugati örmények szembesülnek, amikor az örmény nyelv mellett gyakran használnak arabot és orosz is, és kapcsolatba kerülnek az akadémiai és kulturális hagyományokkal. Lexikológiai elemzés segítségével a tanulmány bemutatja, hogy a nyelvi interakció hogyan haladja meg a pusztá kommunikációt, és hogyan szolgál a kulturális kifejezés és csere csatornájaként.

A tanulmány megírása nagy inspirációt jelentett számomra, mert a diákok nyelvi környezethez való viszonyának elemzése mellett a saját perspektívámat is be tudtam hozni. Nem csupán külső megfigyelőként közelítettem meg a témát, hanem egy kicsit más kulturális háttérrel és dialektussal rendelkező közösség tagjaként.

### Abstract

This work is a micro-level sociolinguistic study aimed at revealing the complex ways in which Armenian linguistic variants not only coexist but also dynamically influence one another through daily interactions. This research is based on semi-structured, narrative discourse and questionnaires conducted with Armenian and Armenian-diaspora students in Budapest. The object of the research is the language use of Armenian students from Lebanon and Syria, as well as from the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh/Arc'ax (Nagorno-Karabakh Republic), who are living and studying in Budapest, Hungary. The study elucidates the unique challenges encountered by speakers of Eastern and Western Armenians as they engage with academic and cultural traditions, frequently using Arabic and Russian alongside Armenian. Through lexicological analysis, the paper shows how language interaction goes beyond mere communication, serving as a channel for cultural expression and exchange.

Writing this paper was especially meaningful to me because, beyond analyzing how students perceived and responded to this linguistic environment, I also was able to contribute my own perspective. Rather than merely being an external observer, I approached the study as an insider, a member of this community who comes from a slightly different cultural region and dialectal background.

### 1. Introduction

Budapest offers a distinctive context for examining interactions between Eastern and Western Armenian (EA and WA) speakers. As a city with a historically multicultural character, it has long functioned as a meeting point for various diasporic communities, including Armenians, whose presence in Hungary dates back centuries. Today,

Budapest continues to contribute to this diversity, hosting a growing population of Armenian students—those from the diaspora, from the Republic of Armenia, and from Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh. This environment facilitates natural linguistic and cultural exchanges, making it an ideal location for exploring how Armenian linguistic variants coexist, influence one another, and evolve within diasporic settings.

The Armenians who arrived in Hungary were part of larger migratory waves. The first wave comprises the descendants of Armenians who migrated from Transylvania to Hungary during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The settlement of Armenians in Transylvania took place in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where their language and culture were significantly influenced by the region's political and constitutional changes (Kovács, 2018, 82). Following this settlement, Armenians gradually lost their language and, to some extent, their religious identity, particularly among Armenian Catholics of the Armenian rite (Kovács, 2019, 124). From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onward—as Armenians gained the freedom to relocate not only within Transylvania but throughout Hungary—their local connection also disappeared step by step (Tamáska, 2018, 32).

The second wave of Armenian migrants settling in Hungary can be attributed to two distinct migratory waves: the first following the Armenian genocide of 1915, and the second resulting from the economic and political challenges in post-Soviet Armenia (Matevosyan, 2016, 172).

Consequently, these historical migration patterns have resulted in the formation of two distinct Armenian communities in Hungary. The first group is rooted in the Transylvanian diaspora, perceiving Transylvania as its homeland, and lacking proficiency in the Armenian language. I would argue that this group demonstrates a significant disconnect from the language, as Armenian is no longer spoken among them. The second group emerged from the adversities of the Armenian genocide and the sociopolitical challenges of post-Soviet Armenia, for whom Armenia is regarded as the homeland, and the knowledge of the Armenian language is significant.

While language preservation is a cornerstone of Armenian diasporic identity, the case of the Transylvanian Armenians in Hungary represents a unique exception. Due to early settlement and deep assimilation into Hungarian society, they had completely lost the Armenian language by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast, more recent Armenian migrants have maintained their linguistic heritage, making Budapest an unusual case where the Armenian language is preserved not by the historical diaspora but by newcomers. However, the long-term sustainability of Armenian language preservation among these migrants remains uncertain, as there are no structured community programs or educational initiatives in place to support Armenian language maintenance. As a result, children born into this community in Budapest are increasingly assimilated into Hungarian society, with limited opportunities to learn Armenian or develop a strong connection to their linguistic heritage. It is very rare to find families in which the children in the household can speak Armenian.

Despite a general sense of separation, both groups today represent the Armenian community in Hungary, albeit through different organizations and ideologies. However, it is noteworthy that the new wave of Armenian students in Budapest does not appear to recognize this division and can easily engage with both groups in both Armenian and broken Hungarian. It is also worth noting that as part of the university curriculum, Hungarian language instruction is a mandatory requirement for these Armenian students.

Given these dynamics, this study focuses on Armenian students in Budapest, examining their linguistic interaction. Particular attention is paid to how speakers of EA and WA construct communication, and how these linguistic variants coexist and influence one another in the diasporic setting.

## 2. Research Topic

Eastern Armenian and Western Armenian represent two manifestations of a single national language, having developed as distinct yet interconnected dialects, each influenced by unique factors. These dialects facilitate both written and oral communication among the Armenian-speaking populace.

The aim of this work is to examine how EA and WA interact in parallel; how students from Lebanon, Syria, the Republic of Armenia, and Artsakh communicate with each other through their dialects; and how they expand their interactions and mutually benefit from the peculiarities of the language, especially the vocabulary.

The division of the new or modern Armenian language into two branches—Eastern and Western—has, besides historical circumstances (Ačaryan, 1951, 435), linguistic causes, as the dialectal bases of the two literary languages are different. EA is based on the Araratian, or *-nuł /-um/*, branch, while WA is based on the Constantinopolitan dialect, or *-lq /-kə/* branch (Avetisyan, 2007, 9). Moreover, the other variant under discussion, which is the largest living dialect of the *-um* branch, is the Łarabał or Arc'ax dialect (or extreme North-Eastern intergroup) (Martirosyan, 2019, 228)—one of the most well-known and widespread dialects of the Armenian language. It was primarily spoken in the Republic of Artsakh until the 2023 eviction and, subsequently, by Artsakh Armenians worldwide.

These students live together and attend common cultural events within the Armenian community. Most of them study in Budapest at the Department of Armenian Studies at Pázmány Péter Catholic University and share a dormitory. The Department, established in 2016, belongs to the Institute of History, and it offers undergraduate (BA), master's (MA), and doctoral programs, with instruction conducted in English (Vámosy, 2024). Students have this opportunity through the Scholarship Programme for Christian Young People (SCYP), provided by the Hungarian Government's Hungary Helps Agency. Thus, dormitory and joint study programs are unique linguistic

platforms—a “*specific micro-environment*”—where Western and Eastern Armenians, in foreign surroundings, use the Armenian language.

WA serves as the primary language of communication among diaspora Armenians. Specifically, students from Syria, particularly Damascus, speak Standard Western Armenian (SWA) as their native language (Dolatian, 2024, 655). In contrast, Eastern Armenian—not the Standard but the Ararat dialect (Martirosyan, 2019, 223)—is the predominant language of communication among students from the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh. In Artsakh, while the primary mode of communication was the Łarabał/Arc‘ax dialect, literary Armenian was also employed as (and continues to be) the mother tongue, as it functioned as the official language of the region. Thus, despite being two branches of a common language, EA and WA have not only orthographic but also phonetic-pronunciational, morphological, and syntactic differences representing speech variations (Spolsky, 1998, 9), which can lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, this study examines how EA and WA interact in daily communication among Armenian students living in Budapest and what linguistic adaptations and challenges emerge in this specific micro-environment.

To address the research question, I conducted two online questionnaires in English among students who participated voluntarily.<sup>1</sup> As an insider in this student community for many years, and having participated in daily interactions in Armenian—whether in my native Arc‘ax dialect, the Yerevan dialect, or my non-fluent WA—I was able to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of these linguistic dynamics. This research does not seek to distinguish between the two literary languages or highlight their differences. Instead, it aims to elucidate, through interviews, questionnaires, and personal interactions with students from the regions, how these language variants interrelate within the same environment and how students perceive this coexistence.

### 3. Classification

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<sup>1</sup> These questionnaires were designed and distributed via Google Forms for this study. One was addressed to speakers of Eastern Armenian and Arc‘ax dialect, and the other to speakers of Western Armenian. Both questionnaires were available in English from January to March 2025, and each contained approximately 23 questions, including both closed- and open-ended items. The surveys explored participants’ linguistic background, language use at home and in everyday communication, and attitudes toward the use and mixing of EA and WA (with Russian or Arabic, respectively). Participation was voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent before completing the forms. Although the questionnaires were not anonymous, all participants’ responses are cited anonymously in this article. In total, 30 students filled out the questionnaires, and their responses were used exclusively for this small-scale sociolinguistic study. For reference, participants from the first questionnaire are cited as EA respondents (students from the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh), and those from the second as WA respondents (diaspora Armenians).

To comprehend the linguistic dynamics among Armenian students from diverse backgrounds, it is essential to analyze both phonological and morphological variations between EA, WA, and the Arc'ax dialect. Phonological classification facilitates the examination of differences in the consonant system across these dialects, which influence pronunciation and intelligibility. This is particularly significant for students engaged in daily interactions, where phonetic shifts can impact communication. Morphological classification, conversely, clarifies structural differences, such as the formation of the present tense, reflecting more profound grammatical divergences. By employing both approaches, this study not only identifies linguistic distinctions but also elucidates how these variations shape language use, adaptation, and cultural and lexical exchange within the same environment.

### 3.1. Phonological Classification

Phonological classification allows the comparison of dialects for various purposes. In this study, it is supposed to compare pronunciation variations in the consonant system that can cause difficulties in communication and comprehension. Consequently, it helps to identify potential areas of misunderstanding and facilitates communication across dialect boundaries. To illustrate the phonological distinctions between consonants in EA, including the Arc'ax dialect, and WA, this study employs explanatory tables as an effective methodological approach.

Eastern Armenian	Western Armenian		
	initial	internal	final
b/g/d	p'/k'/t'	p'/k'/t'	p'/k'/t'
p/k/t	b/g/d	b/g/d	b/g/d
p'/k'/t'	p'/k'/t'	p'/k'/t'	p'/k'/t'

Table 1: WA plosive consonants compared to EA

Eastern Armenian	Arc'ax		
	initial	internal	final
b/g/d	p/k/t	p/k/t'	p/k/t'
p/k/t	p/k/t	p/k/t/	p/k/t
p'/k'/t'	p'/k'/t'	p'/k'/t'	p'/k'/t'

Table 2: Plosive consonants in the Arc'ax dialect compared to EA (based on Davt'yan, 1966, 53–63)

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the differences between the Arc'ax, EA, and WA dialects, which belong to two separate branches (-նւմ /-um/ and -կը /-kə/). Concerning the differences between EA and WA, it should be noted that the voiced b/g/d in WA are usually

pronounced as the aspirated  $p'/k'/t'$ , while aspirated consonants in WA do not experience a change. As for voiceless consonants, they are usually pronounced as voiced consonants in WA. Regarding the differences between the consonant system of the Arc'ax dialect and that of the literary EA, it should be noted that in the Arc'ax dialect, voiced consonants tend to turn into voiceless and aspirated consonants, while voiceless and aspirated consonants do not undergo changes.

It should be clarified that tables 1 and 2 present the basic principles of consonant shift, which are not unambiguous, as numerous words do not follow these patterns. They serve to illustrate the primary distinctions between plosive consonants that can lead to misinterpretation among students of EA and WA.

Eastern Armenian	Western Armenian	Arc'ax
$b - p - p'$	$p' - b - p'$	$p - p - p'$
$g - k - k'$	$k' - g - k'$	$k - k - k'$
$d - t - t'$	$t' - d - t'$	$t - t - t'$
$j - c - c'$	$c' - j - c'$	$c - c - c'$
$\check{j} - \check{c} - \check{c}'$	$\check{c}' - \check{j} - \check{c}'$	$\check{c} - \check{c} - \check{c}'$

Table 3: Plosive and affricative consonants in EA, WA, and the Arc'ax dialect

The phonological variations among EA, WA, and the Arc'ax dialect pose considerable challenges to mutual intelligibility, particularly in the realization of plosive consonants and affricates (table 3). EA voiced plosives ( $b/g/d$ ) undergo distinct transformations in WA and Arc'ax: the former converts them to aspirated voiceless consonants ( $p'/k'/t'$ ), whereas the latter renders them as plain voiceless consonants ( $p/k/t$ ), whilst a series of voiceless aspirates remain stable everywhere, for example, EA *barev* (բարև 'hello'), WA *p'arev* (փարև), and Arc'ax *parev* (պարև).

A parallel phenomenon occurs with affricates, where WA introduces aspiration and Arc'ax neutralizes voicing, for example, EA *jyun* (ձյուն 'snow'), WA *c'yun* (ցյուն), and Arc'ax *cün* (ծւն).

These systematic phonological shifts result in pronounced differences that can hinder effective communication between speakers of these dialects, as words sharing common etymological roots may exhibit markedly different phonetic realizations across dialectal boundaries. As mentioned above, such differences occur primarily in several consonants between EA, WA, and the Arc'ax dialect, except for a few other rules related to the positioning and sound change of these consonants, which are not discussed in this article. In any case, these patterns are the basics for understanding the degree of dialectal differentiation among students and the phonetic "obstacles" they face.



### 3.2. Morphological Classification

Morphological differences can significantly affect speech intelligibility between speakers of various dialects. Understanding these differences is key to effective communication, as variations in word formation, verb conjugation, or case usage may lead to misinterpretations or difficulties in comprehending intended meanings. The morphological classification within the framework of the Armenian language and its dialects—primarily developed by Ačāryan and Łaribyan—is based on the formation of the present indicative. In EA and Arc‘ax, it is formed with a participle (originally, the dative-locative case) and a copula, while in WA, it utilizes the *kə* present formative particle with a finite verb (Martirosyan, 2019, 169).

	Eastern Armenian	Western Armenian	Arc‘ax
Sg.	kardum em	kə kardam	kart‘um əm//um
	kardum es	kə kardas	kart‘um əs
	kardum ē	kə karday	kart‘um a
Pl.	kardum enk‘	kə kardank‘	kart‘um ənk‘
	kardum ek‘	kə kardak‘	kart‘um ək‘
	kardum en	kə kardan	kart‘um ən

Table 4: Present indicative paradigm of kardal ‘to read’ in EA, WA, and the Arc‘ax dialect (Avetisyan, 2007, 168–173; Davt‘yan, 1966, 155–157)

Table 4 provides the conjugation of the present indicative tense of the verb “to read” in EA, WA, and the Arc‘ax dialect. In EA, the verb has the structure *kardum* + auxiliary verb, while in WA, the construction includes the preverbal particle *kə* followed by the verb root. The Arc‘ax dialect resembles EA only in the phonetic distinction of the auxiliary verb (*e* > *ə*).

This example is particularly significant because in a questionnaire, an Armenian student from Damascus claimed: “I use verbs with -um ending”, indicating that even in the indicative present tense, some speakers have begun to substitute the *kə* particle with the -um particle. Thus, the -լը /-kə/ branch can be conceptualized as encompassing all Western dialects that do not recognize the participle -ում /-um/ and form the present indicative and imperfect tense with the *kə* particle. Consequently, the -um branch comprises seven dialects, including the Łarabał dialect (Ačāryan, 1951, 324–356).

For some Middle Eastern students, this is already a familiar phenomenon, as they lived in Yerevan before moving to Budapest and got used to it. Nevertheless, this linguistic shift is not unidirectional: EA and Arc‘ax Armenian speakers also occasionally adopt structures characteristic of WA, particularly in contexts where speakers of different dialects interact.

An interesting grammatical particle has also emerged in mutual communication, used by some Eastern Armenians to express the meaning of the present continuous tense in colloquial WA—namely, the լոր /-kor/ particle, which was adopted into

Armenian from Turkish (Malxaseanc', 1944, 476; Avetisyan 2007, 173); for example, *kə kardam kor* 'I am reading'.

This phenomenon suggests a dynamic process of mutual adaptation rather than a unidirectional convergence. Instead of indicating a threat to dialectal distinctiveness, these linguistic adjustments represent a *communicative strategy* aimed at enhancing *mutual intelligibility*. Thereby they reinforce the adaptability of Armenian dialects while maintaining their strong linguistic and cultural foundations.

#### 4. Joint Academic Experience, Cultural Events, and Language Dynamics

In a sociolinguistic description, it is necessary to deal with activities which are, in some recognizable way, bounded or integral. From the standpoint of our framework, bounded activities such as the academic environment, cultural events, study trips, and shared dormitory are essential and may be regarded as speech situations (Hymes, 1972, 56). Joint academic experiences play a crucial role in enhancing the understanding and collaboration among students from different Armenian communities. Shared classes and study trips give Armenian students opportunities to integrate more effectively with one another, providing platforms for sharing scientific knowledge, fostering dialogue, and creating a unified academic community. By incorporating these collaborative academic experiences into the broader context of cultural events and linguistic dynamics, it offers a comprehensive framework for understanding, evaluating, and addressing the complexity of the Armenian linguistic community.

During community meetings and events, the interaction between students from different EA and WA communities unfolds into a fascinating exchange of unique cultures in which language plays a key role. As one student from the Republic of Armenia mentioned:

"Cultural events and joint academic experiences are a way to know another group of Armenians for who they are. I never thought that we would be so different, and it is an important experience for me to observe how they think, how they explain their thoughts, how they make jokes and so on." (EA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025)

The interactions and linguistic dynamics observed during these encounters provide a valuable perspective for the study of sociolinguistics—the examination of language within its social context. It is interesting how members of a speech community recognize and respond to subtle differences in language use. To deepen this understanding, findings from the conducted online surveys provided further insights into how students experience and navigate communication difficulties.

One student from the Republic of Armenia noted:

"It is not so difficult, but sometimes they need to repeat their sentences or speak in English. I'm confident that I won't encounter significant issues with Western



Armenian in the future, as my fondness for it surpasses even that of Eastern Armenian.” (EA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025)

Similarly, a student from Damascus shared:

“Occasionally, when I use Western Armenian, others have difficulty understanding me. Likewise, I struggle to understand individuals speaking Eastern Armenian because certain words carry different meanings in both language variants. Furthermore, when students from Artsakh converse rapidly, I often find myself unable to follow their speech.” (WA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025)

Another student from Artsakh emphasized the impact of linguistic differences, stating, “Sometimes language interferes with our communication, the reason is misunderstanding of words” (EA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025).

Differences within the Armenian language, particularly between EA and WA, can result in communication challenges. However, shared linguistic exposure in a multilingual environment facilitates adaptation and convergence over time. Yet, the continual interaction between people representing these linguistic variations serves as a dynamic mechanism of adaptation and better understanding. As evidence to this, a student from Damascus stated: “In the first year, it was difficult to communicate with students from Armenia because I didn’t use to listen to much Eastern Armenian before, but year by year I understand substantially better” (WA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025). Another student from Artsakh wrote: “I studied Western Armenian at university in Artsakh, it was difficult to memorize, but now I feel it helps me in understanding” (EA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025).

This is quite a natural reality for students, since they were all born and raised in different environments and speak different dialects. Naturally, having initially heard a dialectal variant that differs in both sound and vocabulary, it is certainly difficult for them to immediately enter this language environment and adapt to it. But it is all a matter of time, because with constant communication, they find ways to interact more easily. Besides, they do not learn a new language, as it is still Armenian, only with slight differences. In contrast, communication between students from different regions—such as Lebanon, Syria, the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh—is more dynamic when all parties use EA, though it can be just as effective when Middle Eastern Armenians speak their own dialect when communicating with Eastern Armenians.

The case of the Arc‘ax dialect is more complex, as it can also be incomprehensible to students from the Republic of Armenia. The difficulty mainly lies in vocabulary, sentence structure, and other linguistic features, so communication almost always takes place in non-standard EA. A student from the Republic of Armenia noted: “They have

so many words that they use in their Barbar<sup>[2]</sup> which I have never heard of, this is the only thing I can mention” (EA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025). Some students living with Artsakh students claim that, over time, they “got used to” the Arc‘ax dialect and began to understand whole sentences, sometimes even trying to use some words from the dialect.

For Middle Eastern Armenians, understanding Artsakh students is another challenge. When asked whether they experience difficulties communicating with Artsakh students, most responded honestly and directly with “yes”. A student from Aleppo explained: “Yes, it is tough for me to understand the Artsakh people, especially when they speak fast. They have a different dialect, which can make communication difficult” (WA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025). Similarly, a student from Damascus added: “The Arc‘ax dialect sounds very different to my ears, even though I lived in Armenia for nearly 4 years” (WA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025).

When I first moved to Budapest, I met many Middle Eastern Armenians, and although I had studied WA at Artsakh University, it was my first time hearing the language spoken in its natural form. Initially, I found it challenging to decide whether to speak EA or attempt my basic WA, especially since I unconsciously used Russian words in my EA. However, over time, I became more familiar with their speech, and they got accustomed to mine, until there were no longer any barriers to communication. As one student from Aleppo mentioned: “I think we’ve gotten used to each other’s way of speaking” (WA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025). Now, I enjoy learning new expressions from them and attempting to converse in their style, while also introducing them to words from my Arc‘ax dialect.

## 5. Borrowings as a Linguistic Exchange

Language contact and interaction among Armenian students from diverse backgrounds—Lebanon, Syria, the Republic of Armenia, and the Republic of Artsakh—create an active linguistic environment in which lexical borrowing emerges as notable feature of communication. Sociolinguistics investigates how language choice and variation are influenced by factors such as identity, community, and cultural history. Thus, the incorporation of Russian loanwords by Eastern Armenians and Arabic loanwords by Syrian and Lebanese Armenians demonstrates not only linguistic diversity but also the historical and social influences that have shaped their respective speech communities. For Eastern Armenians, Russian loanwords stem from the Soviet influence in Armenia and historical ties between Armenia and Russia, while Arabic

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<sup>2</sup> In Armenian linguistics, *barbar* (dialect) designates a regional variant of the Armenian language characterized by distinctive phonetic, morphological, and lexical features, while remaining mutually intelligible with the standard form.

terms in WA are rooted in centuries of interaction with Arabic-speaking communities in the Middle East.

It is also noteworthy that Western Armenians increasingly use Russian loanwords after interacting with peers from the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh, while speakers of the latter region, in turn, readily adopt Arabic words, especially in the process of intercommunication. This linguistic exchange highlights the transformative impact of constant cross-dialect interaction, demonstrating how people not only enrich their linguistic vocabulary over time but also deepen their understanding of the unique features specific to each dialect in this diverse linguistic community. Furthermore, Western Armenians corroborate the claim that acquiring Russian vocabulary often facilitates more comprehensible communication with Eastern Armenians, employing these terms exclusively in interactions with the latter group. As a Lebanese Armenian student noted: “Comprehension would be incomplete without this linguistic adaptation, as the majority of Armenians in Armenia communicate in this manner, analogous to our incorporation of Arabic terms in discourse” (WA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025).

The following section provides a lexical overview of words borrowed by Armenian students from one another in Budapest, categorized according to their source languages. However, this overview does not analyze the linguistic origins, etymology, or phonetic adaptations of these borrowings; rather, it presents them as components of natural linguistic exchange occurring within everyday student interactions.

Tables 5 and 6 show EA (including Arc‘ax) and Russian words and expressions, respectively, that Western Armenians have begun to incorporate into their daily communication, borrowed from students of the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh.

Eastern Armenian and Arc‘ax	Transliteration	English
ախպեր	axper	brother
արա	ara	boy
այսպէս, այդպէս	aypes, aydpes	like this/that
էլի	ēli	again
լի/լիքը	li/lik‘ə	a lot
խի	xi	why
խորոված	xorovac	barbeque
ծխել	cxel	to smoke
հայավարի	hayavari	like an Armenian
հանրակացարան	hanrakac‘aran	dormitory
մաղադանոս	maładanos	parsley
ո՞նց էս	o‘nc‘es	How are you?
սաղ լա՞վ ա	sał la‘va	Is everything okay?
ճըղուպուր	čəłupur	walnut
փող	p‘oł	money

Table 5: EA and Arc‘ax words that Western Armenians have been incorporated into their speech circle

Russian	Transliteration	English
брат	brat	brother
вообще	voobše	in general
лекция	lekcîâ	lecture
ликвид	likvid	fail
мороженое	moroženoe	ice cream
на всякий	na vsâkij	just in case
презентация	prezentaciâ	presentation
помидор	pomidor	tomato
пока	poka	goodbye
привет	privet	hello, hey
просто	prosto	just
регистрация	registraciâ	register
спасибо	spasibo	Thank you.
картошка	kartoška	potato
холодильник	holodil'nik	refrigerator

Table 6: Russian words that Western Armenians have incorporated into their speech circle

Tables 7 and 8 present WA and Arabic lexical items, including verbs, that have been incorporated into the everyday communication of EA speakers, influenced by interactions with students from Lebanon and Syria.

Western Armenian	Transliteration	English
ադիկա	atiga	that, that one
անուշ	anush	jam
ապսպրել	apsprel	order
ասիկա	asiga	this, this one
ասկէ	asgē	starting from here
գիտնալ	kidnal	to know
գոց	kots'	closed
եգուր	ekur	come
ըլլալ	ëllal	to be
լման	lman	full
կոնակ	grnag	back
հագնիլ	haknil	get dressed
չէ նէ	ch'ē nē	otherwise
պտույտ	bduyd	walk, ride
սուղ	sugh	expensive
քուկդ	k'ugt	yours
օդակայան	ōtagayan	airport

Table 7: WA words that Eastern Armenians have been incorporated into their speech circle

Arabic	Transliteration	English
أَهْلًا	ahlan	Hello.
حَبِيبِي	ḥabībī	my dear/ darling / beloved
اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ	al-ḥamdu lillāh	Thank God!
خَلَصْ	ḵalaṣ	Enough!
مَكْتَبَة	maktaba	library
مَرْحَبًا	marḥaban	welcome
مَسَاءً اَلْخَيْر	masā' al-ḵayr	Good evening.
صَبَاحُ اَلْخَيْر	ṣabāḥ al-ḵayr	Good morning.
شَبَاب	ṣabāb	boys/grown up
شُكْرًا	šukran	thanks
يَلَّا	yallā	let's go
عَفْوًا	'afwan	you are welcome

Table 8: Arabic words that Eastern Armenians have incorporated into their speech circle

The presence of Russian loanwords among Eastern Armenians and Arabic loanwords among Western Armenians reflects their distinct linguistic histories, while the mutual borrowings between these groups in Budapest highlight the dynamic nature of language contact. Moreover, the passive or active vocabulary adoption by both sides serves as a tool to fulfill communicative needs. Within the Armenian diaspora, students from diverse regions bring their distinct linguistic backgrounds into shared spaces, including academic settings, where language mixing becomes an integral aspect of communication. This dynamic interaction fosters a micro-environment in which linguistic exchange occurs, reinforcing social bonds and highlighting the evolving nature of language as both a practical tool for communication and a marker of identity.

## 6. Global Diaspora Connection: Armenian Diaspora Unity and Language as an Identity Marker

The gatherings of students from different regions contribute to a sense of unity among the Armenian diasporas. Despite linguistic variations, the common bond of being Armenian prevails as well. A student from the Republic of Armenia mentioned:

“Cultural interaction is important because it fosters understanding, mutual respect, and the exchange of ideas, contributing to a more interconnected and harmonious global society. It helps to understand the Western Armenian (spyurk'ahay) culture and[,] in our case, the Arabic cultural background of the Diaspora Armenian students in particular. For them[,] it is a chance to explore the Soviet Russian heritage we carry.” (EA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025)

A student from Damascus mentioned: “It makes me know about Eastern Armenian more, and it is an entirely new experience for me”, and “It's interesting to know both

Armenian languages and learn to talk and communicate with one another using both” (WA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025).

Collaborative events, shared academic experiences, and regular interactions play a significant role in facilitating linguistic and cultural exchange among Armenian students. These interactions provide opportunities for students to familiarize themselves with the linguistic and cultural nuances of their compatriots, promoting the exchange of traditions and customs. For instance, as a consequence of this engagement, EA speakers develop an appreciation for WA music, which, in turn, contributes to their comprehension and acquisition of the WA dialect. Similarly, WA speakers demonstrate an increasing interest in EA culture, which further enhances their linguistic exposure and generates new dimensions of linguistic variation.

Language plays a crucial role in shaping both individual and collective identity, especially within diaspora communities. For Armenian students, the language they speak is not just a means of communication but a fundamental aspect of their cultural and personal identity. Their dialects reflect their regional roots, family heritage, and socio-cultural experiences. Language is inherently important, but it has been imbued with extra symbolic value in the process of nation-state building (Karapetyan, 2021), where it becomes a tool for preserving cultural heritage and reinforcing national unity. This process underscores what I refer to as the language-and-identity concept, which emphasizes the inherent emotional and spiritual connection between an individual and their native language, or, in some cases, the language of their immediate ancestors (Myhill, 1999, 34). This connection is not merely a communicative function but also a central element of one’s identity, enabling individuals to maintain a sense of belonging and continuity within the diaspora.

In the questionnaire, I asked the students: “How important is language to your identity?” One student from Aleppo responded: “Language is a big part of who I am. It’s how I connect with my family, friends, and my community. It helps to keep my tradition alive, and feel at home, no matter where I am” (WA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025). Another student from the Republic of Armenia wrote: “It’s important, especially now that I’m far from Armenia. Hearing Armenian spoken on the street makes me happier—it makes me feel that it’s important for me” (EA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025). An Artsakh student noted: “After the fall of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Artsakh dialect has become one of the most important markers of my identity, if not the most important. It connects me with my roots, my people, and the memory of Artsakh” (EA questionnaire respondent, January–March 2025).

For Armenian students, their language—whether WA, EA, or regional dialects like the Arc’ax dialect—serves as a vital link to their cultural roots, heritage, and sense of belonging.

Similarly, findings from the questionnaire conducted among students reveal that language use reflects these deep-rooted connections to identity. Western Armenians



predominantly use WA rather than Arabic in their family settings, while Eastern Armenians primarily communicate in EA, occasionally incorporating Russian elements. For students from the Republic of Artsakh, the Arc'ax dialect holds significant value, not only as a reflection of regional identity but also as a carrier of specific socio-cultural characteristics. These linguistic distinctions, however, do not impede mutual exchange; rather, they promote a dynamic process of heritage language negotiation (Valdés, 2001, 37), through which students share and adapt linguistic features across dialectal boundaries. This exchange further reinforces the idea that language is both a marker of identity and a tool for fostering solidarity among diverse Armenian communities.

## 7. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that these individuals originated from and developed within diverse societies, each characterized by distinct traditions and linguistic environments. Upon arriving in Budapest, the students encountered a novel milieu among Armenians, albeit with different linguistic backgrounds: the Armenians of Artsakh, the Armenians of the diaspora, mostly from the Middle East, and the Armenians of the Republic of Armenia, as they identify themselves, each presenting their own dialectal variations. Initially, comprehension among these groups posed a significant challenge, as evidenced by the difficulties experienced by Armenians from the Republic of Armenia in understanding the dialectal lexicon of Arc'ax, as well as the distinctive speech patterns of WA. However, this impediment was temporary, as increased interaction, explanation, and mutual listening facilitated improved comprehension, a phenomenon that can be considered natural in such circumstances.

This situation indicates that, although these linguistic communities are geographically separated, Armenian identity remains the unifying force. The shared linguistic foundation allows these linguistic variations to coexist within a single community, dynamically complementing one another without interference. Despite the phonological and morphological differences between WA and EA, these are not seen as problems to be solved, but rather as natural results of the separate development of the two literary languages. The most important thing the students do is *not to “resolve”* these differences but to embrace both WA and EA, acknowledging their distinctive characteristics and dialects, while viewing themselves as part of a unified Armenian community, rather than a divided one.

Mutual interest in each other's languages and cultural backgrounds fosters a unique bond, with language operating as a powerful bridge that connects people raised in different linguistic environments. The students' commitment to preserving and using their dialects—whether WA, EA, or the Arc'ax dialect—reflects the importance of language as a crucial element of their identity. Through cultural events and the

academic environment, this analysis provides an insight into how language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a space for cultural expression and exchange, helping us understand the sociolinguistics of language interactions specific to the global Armenian experience.

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