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ABSTRACT

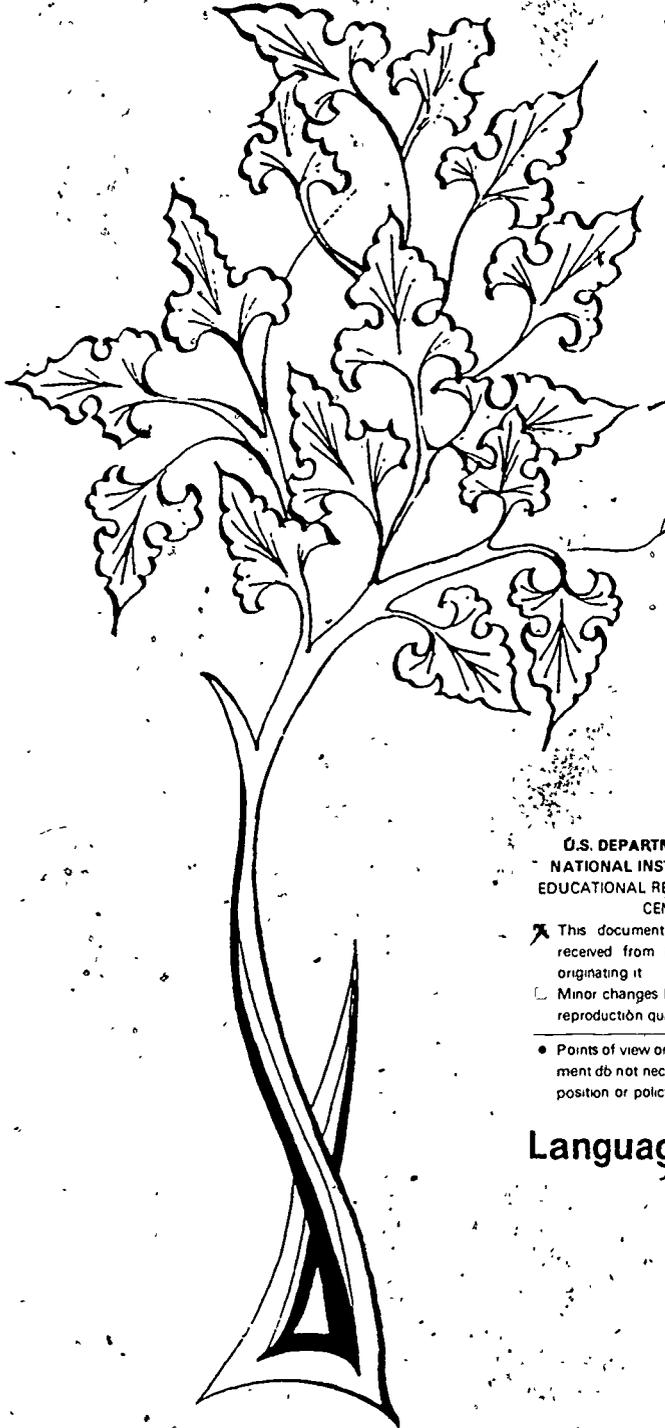
As an introduction to Armenian refugees in the United States, this report discusses various aspects of Armenian life both in the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The general introduction includes a review of migration patterns, religion, arts, names, and social structure. Within the discussion of Armenian cultural background, Armenian history, geography, employment, and language are reviewed. The section on educational background reviews the Armenian school system, higher education, and implications for education. A review of Modern Eastern Armenian points to possible problems for the Armenian English as a second language student. Based on this review of Armenian culture and language, implications for refugee orientation are discussed. (JK)

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Fact Sheet Series #6

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The Armenians

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Language and Orientation Resource Center
 Center for Applied Linguistics
 3520 Prospect Street, NW
 Washington DC 20007
 (800) 424-3750 (toll-free)
 (800) 424-3701 (toll-free)
 (202) 298-9292 (in Washington, D.C.)

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Refugee Fact Sheet #6: The Armenians

The purpose of the Refugee Fact Sheet Series is to provide background information on certain refugee groups that have recently arrived, and are still arriving, in the United States. Unlike the refugees from Indochina and the entrants from the Caribbean, these refugees have arrived in much smaller numbers; however, they still face many of the same problems with language, education, employment, and cultural adjustment.

Each Fact Sheet is divided into approximately five sections:

1. General Introduction
2. Cultural Background
3. Educational Background
4. Implications for Learning English as a Second Language (ESL)
5. Implications for Orientation.

The cultural background section of each Fact Sheet is the most inclusive; it contains information on the history, geography, language, religion, food, values and customs of the specific refugee group.

We wish to thank all of those without whose research and assistance we would not have been able to put this Fact Sheet on the Armenians together. We are especially indebted to Mr. Larry Crehan, Director of the Armenian Assembly in Los Angeles.

We would also like to thank Stemmer House Publishers, Inc., for permission to use the cover design, as originally published in Traditional Designs of Armenia and the Near East, by Ramona Jablonski.

HIGHLIGHTS

Refugees

Pursuing greater freedom and escaping the harassment they face in the Soviet Union, thousands of Armenian refugees have left their homeland -- the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic -- for the United States and other countries. Between 4,000 and 5,000 Armenian refugees were admitted into the U.S. from October 1, 1980 to September 30, 1981, but additional numbers have entered the U.S. under other immigration categories.

In the U.S.

There are approximately 500,000 people of Armenian descent in the United States. Larger communities are found in the Boston and New York areas, Philadelphia, Detroit and Chicago. The largest, however, and the fastest growing, is in Los Angeles, where the Armenian population is estimated to be 150,000.

Armenians

With a known history of several thousand years, the Armenians have maintained a sense of nationalism in spite of having been forced from time to time to become citizens of other countries created by changing political borders. Since 1920 the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic has been one of the most economically successful republics in the USSR, rapidly developing from an agrarian into an industrial economy.

History

Recent Armenian history centers on the killing of 1.5 million by the Turks in 1915. Armenians had previously been the victims of similar attacks, due largely to their geographic location. As a result, the Armenians have traditionally been forced to relocate from country to country to avoid persecution, 300,000 to 500,000 having been driven into the USSR in the early 20th century.

I. Introduction

Except for the years 1918-1920, the Armenians have not possessed an independent nation since 1375. Accordingly, their history is one of constant migration, although until the early 20th century they generally stayed within their "homeland" in the area of Turkey and Russia. This homeland was inconveniently located in the path of various conquering armies, resulting in the persecution, exploitation and forced migration of the Armenians throughout history.

This history of migration has led to the Armenians being a fiercely independent, proud people with a distinct cultural, linguistic and religious identity. Such an identity has been necessary for them to maintain a sense of nationhood while being a minority group in various countries.

The most recent migration has been from the Soviet Union, specifically the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. Those who are able to leave are most likely to come to the United States, where they join the half-million Armenians already in this country.

In a large number of cases, the refugees were not born in the USSR but instead migrated into that country after World War II. Many were persuaded to enter by a Soviet propaganda campaign encouraging them to "return to their homeland" in the ASSR. This campaign, based primarily on the Soviet's need for manpower in the newly-industrialized republic, was often successful in its appeal to the Armenians' nationalism.

Many of those who entered the Soviet Union at this time were disappointed with what they found. Being unable to fit into that country's economic or political system, they have attempted to leave the Soviet Union for the following reasons:

1. A search for total religious freedom. A Christian people for almost 1,700 years, the Armenians place great value on their religion. Many fear that in the future their freedom may be restricted, so they leave the Soviet Union to insure that their religious practices can continue without government interference.
2. Persecution in a communist country. Traditionally an economically independent people, Armenians (like other Soviets) are discouraged from participating in "capitalistic" ventures.
3. A search for freedom. Unwilling to live under the repression they perceive in the Soviet Union, thousands come to live in the U.S. and other free countries even if they have not themselves been victims of persecution.

There are some Armenians entering the United States from other countries -- specifically the Middle East -- but the numbers are small and many of these are not classified as refugees but are instead (for example) immigrants joining families in the United States.

The number of Armenian refugees entering the United States is difficult to determine because of legal classifications (similar cases may be categorized differently) and the failure to differentiate among Soviet refugees of different ethnic groups other than "Jewish" and "non-Jewish." A U.S. State Department report indicated that the number of refugees from the Soviet Union in the year ending September 30, 1981 was 28,798; of which 5,524 were "non-Jews, principally Armenians." Accordingly, this would place the number of Armenian refugees entering the U.S. between 4,000 and 5,000.¹ Estimates by Armenian groups tend to be higher.

Armenian refugees from the ASSR spend three months in Italy for processing before they enter the United States. The majority have settled (and continue to settle) in the Los Angeles area, but many enter the New York metropolitan area, Chicago, and the Boston area, where there are large Armenian communities.

Religion

The importance of religion in Armenian history is reflected in their possessing the oldest Christian church in the world, a cathedral built by St. Gregory the Illuminator in 303. It is in Echmiadzin, near Yerevan, and is considered to be the center of Armenian Christianity.² It is the seat of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the official state religion since 301. There is also a significant Protestant population and a small number of Roman Catholics. Any American city with a sizable Armenian population will have at least one Armenian Apostolic Church and usually an Armenian Protestant Church as well.

Although religious practice is tolerated in the ASSR; there may be state sanctions against it. For example, a religiously active individual may be passed over for a job or may have difficulty obtaining adequate housing. Therefore, many refugees seek complete religious freedom by leaving the Soviet Union.

Perhaps the single most important element of Armenian life, the Church provides much of the basis for not only religious but social and cultural activities as well. Therefore, the Church can be an important source of support in the resettlement of newly-arrived Armenian refugees in the United States.

Arts

The Armenians enjoy an extensive literary history, much of their literature being nationalistic and historical in nature. Reading for not only educational and religious but also recreational purposes is an important cultural value, and the literacy rate has always been high. Important works in English about Armenians include those by William Saroyan, who was known for his short stories, plays, poems, and essays. Michael J. Arlen's works, such as Passage to Ararat, have a very strong nationalistic flavor. The best-known Armenian composer, Aram Khachaturian, is similarly very nationalistic in his work.

Traditional folk arts such as singing, dancing and crafts continue to thrive, promoted largely through religious and social organizations in the U.S. as well as in the ASSR.

Names

Armenian names are easily recognized. As in America, the family name is last, the given name first. Dicran Hagopian: Hagopian is the family name, Dicran the given name. Middle names are very rare. Family names almost always end in -ian (meaning "son of"), -yan or -y.

Social Structure

Like the rest of the Soviet Union, the ASSR is a relatively classless society, at least in its formal social structure. The main hierarchy exists in its government positions, which sometimes may be denied to religiously active people. Because of Armenian respect for the church, however, clergy are deeply respected and have considerable influence on their parishioners. Priests are therefore leaders of the social as well as religious community, although they may have little overt political influence. Secular leaders are more likely to derive power from their political success.

Much of the Armenians' success over the centuries has been attributed to the strength of their family system. "The Armenians had strong family loyalties and easily identified their welfare with that of their group... The Armenian had every reason to work hard and save, since economic self-sufficiency was a family incentive."³

The basic unit is the nuclear family, as in the United States, but ties with the extended family are also powerful. Great value is placed on "taking care of ourselves," not only within the family but within the Armenian community as a whole. It is therefore very important to arriving refugees to resettle with any relatives they may have in the U.S.

Armenians in the United States tend to be hard-working, independent and successful. "The simple fact is that Armenians like to work, especially for themselves."⁴ There is a powerful adherence to the work ethic, many Armenians fitting into the common pattern of immigrants who come to the United States impoverished but become economically successful within a relatively short number of years. This is particularly true of Soviet Armenians who arrive with marketable skills, even though they may experience initial underemployment due to the language barrier. Not surprisingly, the Armenians tend to be politically conservative, especially those who came to escape from communism.

U.S. Armenians divide into several political camps based on their views and hopes regarding the "Armenian question" of independence and cultural preservation. The issues surrounding the different viewpoints are complicated and not readily defined. In general, loyalty to specific political perceptions are reflected primarily in the refugee's choice of church to attend.

In spite of these political differences, Armenians are supportive and devoted to the concept of "us as Armenians." There is general agreement that their culture must be preserved, the only disagreement being how best to achieve that goal.

II. Cultural Background

The Armenian people, generally believed to be of Indo-European stock, can be tracked back to 2350 B.C. Since before the birth of Christ they have inhabited the general area bordered by Turkey on the West, Iraq to the South, Iran to the East and Russia to the North. However, the actual location, size and shape of the Armenian Empire has varied drastically from the thousand-mile long empire of Tigran the Great in 70 B.C. to the current Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic with 11,500 square miles.⁵

History

In spite of being over 3,000 years old as a people, the Armenians view their history and tradition as Christian. In fact, their self-description as "the first Christians," while technically inaccurate, is supported by their being the first nation to declare Christianity as its state religion. This declaration occurred in 301, when, according to legend, Gregory the Illuminator exorcised demons that had possessed Armenia's king, Teridate III.⁶ Christianity remains an extremely important part of Armenian tradition and day-to-day life and continues to be tolerated by the USSR.

There have been five different Armenian Kingdoms in the last 2,500 years, but none since the year 1375 A.D. (other than the very short-lived Armenian Republic in 1918 - 1920). At that time they were invaded by the Ottoman Turks and became a minority within Turkey and Persia.⁷

The greatest problem faced by the Armenians under 14th century Turkish domination was the opposition of their Christianity and the Turks' Moslem beliefs.⁸ Still, the Armenians were "the Turks' favorite minority, ... valued not only for their loyalty but for the services they performed for the Turks" as a skilled working class within the Turkish economy.⁹ "Their existence side by side on the same soil for five centuries unmistakably indicates their interdependence and mutual interest."¹⁰

This peaceful coexistence ended in the late 19th Century however, with a series of events that led to one of the most severe massacres in human history.

Rather than any specific development, growing Turkish nationalism and religious fervor are seen as the initial cause of the first massacre, which took place in 1895-96. Between 100,000 and 200,000 Armenians were killed, and more would have died had it not been for the voiced outrage of England, France and Russia. Describing this as the first attempt to commit genocide, historian Arnold Toynbee states that, "The (Turks') scheme was nothing less than the extermination of the whole Christian population within the Ottoman frontiers. Nothing remained but to use the opportunity and strike a stroke that would never need repetition."¹¹

A few years of peace followed until 1909, when 30,000 were killed in the area of Cilicia. Again, no apparent event caused the massacre other than the increasing animosity between them, and growing Turkish determination to exterminate the Armenians.¹²

The final massacre, which exterminated almost two-thirds of the Armenian population, occurred in 1925 and is commemorated each year on April 24. Turkey's stated reason for the persecution was that it was a response to acts of treason against the Turkish government by the Armenian community. Historians, however, view the massacre as having resulted from the anti-Armenian stance of the Turkish government at that time, based more on ethnic dislike than on actual provocation by the Armenians.¹³

The first people to be killed were the intellectuals and clergy, leaders of the community. The resulting social disorganization prevented any resistance by the Armenians.¹⁴

The final stage of the massacre was a two-pronged deportation. Armenian soldiers -- who had formed a large part of the Turkish Army -- in effect became prisoners, their weapons confiscated. Civilians were forced to leave their homes and march in the general direction of Russia. While most deaths resulted from exposure and deprivation, hundreds of thousands were killed by either the Turks or by tribes in the area who robbed the exiled Armenians before murdering them.

By the end of the massacre, 1.5 million people were killed. In fact, this event was often used by Adolf Hitler as proof of the world's tolerance of brutality and genocide.

The collapse of the Transcaucasian Federation in 1918 led to the establishment of the first independent Armenian Republic since 1375.¹⁵ Although finally recognized as an independent state by the Allies of World War I, Armenia was much smaller than the original homeland, both in size and population.

The independent republic was short-lived, however, as international support for it waned. In 1920, Armenia was absorbed into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as the ASSR.

Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic

The smallest of the 15 republics in the USSR, the ASSR has a population of approximately three million, 90% of whom are Armenian. Russia had historically been a haven for Armenians escaping persecution in other lands, so there was a sizeable Armenian population even before the exodus resulting from the 1915 massacre.

The ASSR was originally rural and agricultural, but since the 1930's it has become increasingly urban, with 62% of the population now residing in cities. The largest city and capital is Yerevan, with a population of close to one million.

While agriculture continues to be successful, 73% of the ASSR's economic value is now in industry and the republic is a major supplier of industrial goods to the rest of the USSR. In fact, it is the most economically successful republic.¹⁶ Much of the population is accordingly highly educated.

The relationship of the Armenian people and the USSR can be best described as an uneasy coexistence. The USSR permits religious practice -- perhaps fearing that forbidding it would lead to civil unrest due to the importance of religion to the Armenians -- but subtly harasses those who are active members of

their churches. There are also subtle attempts to "de-nationalize" the Armenians so that they will identify more closely with being Soviets than Armenians, but such attempts have thus far not been particularly successful. Because of their history as a persecuted people who have had to move from one area to another, the Armenians are particularly sensitive to and aware of indications of impending persecution, sometimes resulting in uncertainty and anxiety even at relatively calm, peaceful times.

Geography

Armenia contains some extensive mountain ranges with arable valleys, but most of the ASSR is a dry plateau. The climate is less than pleasant, with short, hot summers and long, severe winters. While the success of agriculture is more a reflection of the skill of the farmers than the quality of the land, the mineral wealth of the ASSR is an important part of the republic's industrial success.¹⁷ Culturally if not physically, the most striking geographic feature of the Armenian homeland is 17,000-foot Mt. Ararat, the legendary site of the landing of Noah's Ark. While it is in Turkey, the peak is clearly visible from the ASSR.

Employment

It is difficult to generalize about the employment of the Armenians because of the occupational diversity in the ASSR that resulted from its transition from an agricultural to an industrial society. Those who leave Armenia to come to the U.S. are generally skilled workers or professionals representing virtually every field.

Language

The Armenian language is generally divided into two dialects; the Armenian alphabet of 38 letters is used by both East Armenian speakers in the USSR and West Armenian speakers in the Middle East. The two dialects are mutually intelligible and communication can easily take place between speakers of each.

There is more diversity in spoken dialects, however, of which there are 50. Some of these are sufficiently different to prevent cross-communication, but the lesser dialects are rarely used and are typically confined to small villages.

III. Educational Background

Armenians, like other Soviet groups, have a high level of education; particularly when compared to refugee groups from other countries. The literacy rate of Soviet adults is over 99%,¹⁸ certainly among the highest in the world.

Armenian School Systems

Because of the linguistic diversity in the Soviet Union, schools use Armenian as the language of instruction, although the study of Russian is compulsory.

Children are often placed in nursery schools at the age of three months and pre-schools -- comparable to American day-care centers -- at three. Education is universal and compulsory from the ages of 7 to 15, when students attend primary schools that emphasize reading and other basic skills. Secondary school starts at 14 or 15, lasting two to four years depending on the student's area of specialization.

There is some local control of schools by the equivalent of an American school board within each republic. Thus, education in the ASSR is largely controlled by Armenians, although they are, of course, answerable to the national authorities and must follow policies dictated by them.

Higher Education

A youth who has completed secondary schooling may either start working or enter a university, institute, or polytechnic institute. Admission policies favor students who have worked for a few years before furthering their education, encouraging them to work after finishing secondary school.

There are three types of higher education available to the student:

1. Universities, which emphasize the humanities and pure sciences;
2. Institutes, which are specialized schools in one field such as law, economics, medicine and music, similar to American professional schools;
3. Polytechnic institutes, which differ from institutions in that "several studies will be grouped together on a broader scientific base."¹⁹

Sixty percent of university students are "worker students" who hold outside jobs and (typically) attend school part- rather than full-time. This tradition is strongly encouraged as a means of bolstering the work force as well as broadening the students' experience. In fact, legal sanctions exist to insure

that employers and universities allow the employee/student adequate flexibility to meet both responsibilities.

Implications for Education

USSR educational practices help prepare Armenians for life in the United States, largely through familiarizing them with the educational practices and traditions of an industrialized society. Adjustment to school is therefore not as difficult as it is for many other refugee groups.

Particularly helpful is the use of bilingual education in Soviet schools which provides the students with the experience of learning a second language. This will ordinarily facilitate their learning English in the United States (although relatively few arrive with prior knowledge of the language).

Finally, the tradition of working while in school helps prepare refugees for the necessity of working while attending language classes, since few will be able to postpone working until they have learned English.

The solid educational background of most Armenians, and their extremely high literacy rate, then, are important strengths facilitating their adjustment to life in the United States.

IV. Implications for Learning English as a Second Language (ESL)

Armenian belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, sharing a common, although remote, ancestry with English. Armenian forms an important branch of the Indo-European language family, parallel to other branches such as the Slavic, Iranian, Germanic, Celtic, and Romance (Italic). Classical Armenian, also known as Grabar, was spoken as early as the Fifth Century.

The two principal dialects of contemporary Armenian are known as Modern Eastern Armenian, spoken in the ASSR and other republics of the USSR, as well as in Iran and other areas of Western Asia; and Modern Western Armenian, formerly spoken widely in Turkey and now used in Lebanon, parts of Western Europe, and in North America. Most of the Armenians who settled in the United States prior to World War II speak Western Armenian, while recent arrivals from the Soviet Union speak Eastern Armenian. The literary forms for Eastern and Western Armenian are fairly similar; however, the colloquial forms of the two dialects differ significantly, although there is mutual comprehension between dialects.

There are probably fewer than four million speakers of Armenian today, the majority living in the USSR.

Modern Armenian (both Eastern and Western) is written in an alphabet that was devised in the fifth century. It is not certain whether the Armenian alphabet was modeled on the Greek or the Syriac form of writing. The written system goes from left to right and a distinction is made between capital and small letters. Punctuation marks are used, but these differ from those found in English. The symbol (:) is used at the end of all sentences. Questions are indicated by a special symbol (◌?) that is placed over the question-word or the item that is being questioned. Interrogative sentences also end with the symbol: (◌.). A comma is used much like in English. A period is used in written Armenian where English would use a colon or semi-colon as well as in abbreviations. Although the notion of punctuation will transfer from Armenian to English, the specific marks used in English will constitute potential problems, particularly the period.

Most ethnic-Armenians speak Armenian in the Soviet Union. Armenians are very proud of their language and have succeeded in maintaining it under difficult circumstances. Armenian-speakers are highly influenced by Russian, however, the de facto national language of the Soviet Union. Therefore, most Armenians coming from the Soviet Union are apt to be fluent in both Armenian and Russian. Since Armenian is of limited use outside the USSR, a knowledge of Russian is a requirement for economic survival elsewhere in that country. In addition to Russian, other languages specific to the Soviet Union may also be known (such as Georgian, Ossetic, etc.).

This knowledge of the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet will facilitate learning the English writing system since many of the letters in both Russian and English have similar shapes: A, B, C, E, K, M, O, P, T, X, Y. However, some of these letters have different sound values in Russian than in English: B is pronounced as v; C is always pronounced as ss; P has the value of r; X has the value of a strongly pronounced h; Y has the value of oo; etc.

A sample of printed Armenian appears below. Note in particular the punctuation:

Կարճ ժամանակ նայեց ինչ զարմացած. նետո ուսերը թռթոզեց սարակուսանքով և զլուխը նորից կտիեց զլեզի վրայ, առանց թոյլն ոչ մի խոսք արտասանելու ըստ երևույթին, ուզում էր հասկացնել, որ հանգիստ թողնեմ իրեն և նեղանամ.

Բայց նա համառորեն կանգնած էր նրա առջև և ակամա նիսնում էի, զհետևով նրա գեղեցիկ զլուխը շատ հարուստ, փափուկ և փայլուն ձագերով. որոնք նոր ծագած աչիկ թից հառապայթիւրի սակ ընդմազան երանգներ էին ընդունում...

— Այտեղ նայեցեք, — ասացի, տեսնելով, որ զլուխը չի ուզում զլեզի վրայից բարձրացնել, նայեց.

Ճակատս զրի հրացանիս փողի ծայրին, իսկ սառ շնիկի վրա:

Modern Eastern Armenian (MEA) has six distinct vowels and 30 separate consonants. The vowels are similar to those in Spanish: [a], [i], [e], [o], [u]; there is a sixth vowel, [ɛ], that is similar to the vowel in English cut. The MEA consonantal system is quite complex. MEA has a three-way distinction in its stop consonants (stops are sounds like English t, k, p, etc.), whereas English has a contrast between voiced, aspirated voiceless stops and glottalized voiceless stops, (p/b, t/d, k/g), MEA has a distinction between voiced, aspirated voiceless stops and glottalized voiceless stops. Aspirated stops are similar to the stops made in English in such words as pay, tie, key (a tiny puff of air is released after the stop is made). Glottalized stops, which do not occur in English, are made when the vocal cords are closed then released as the stop is released (if you try doing this, you may hear a popping sound when pressurized air is released).

b	d	j	g	(voiced)
p"	t"	ch"	k"	(voiceless and aspirated)
p'	t'	ch'	k'	(voiceless and glottalized)

Eastern Armenian-speakers learning English will not have much of a problem learning to pronounce English stops since the aspirated stops are fairly close to voiceless equivalents in English. MEA has a series of affricates that will not be a source of problems for the learners: ts", ts', and dz.

The following fricatives occur in MEA: f s sh kh (voiceless)
v z zh gh (voiceless)

Kh and gh represent sounds that do not occur in English. Zh is like the 's' in

pleasure. MEA has the following sonorants: m, n, h, ɣ, l, and two types of r - sounds: one similar to English 'r', and another similar to Spanish or Italian trilled (rolled) 'r'.

Most of the consonants in MEA enter in clusters and occur at the end of words in a manner similar to English. Consequently, the Modern Eastern Armenian speaker should not have a major problem learning English consonants. The only areas of difficulty are:

1. MEA l is pronounced like English l in late; the l sound in bill will be a major problem for the learner;
2. The two sounds in English thy and thigh will be a major problem since sounds like these do not occur in MEA.

Because English has more vowel distinctions than MEA, Eastern Armenian-speakers learning English will have problems with some of them. The following distinctions will probably present major problems: the vowel in cat, caught, put and the difference between beet/bit, bet/bait, should/shoed, bought/boat, bet/bat, cot/cat.

Most words in MEA are stressed on the final syllable, unless the final syllable has the vowel [ɛ], in which case stress falls on the next-to-last syllable. This means that English stress will be a problem, particularly where English distinguishes between words on the basis of stress: éxport (noun) vs. export (verb).

MEA, as well as Modern Western Armenian, has been influenced by surrounding languages. Turkish, the South Caucasian languages and Iranian in particular have modified not only Armenian vocabulary but also pronunciation and syntax (the rules for constructing sentences). Some of the characteristics of MEA are therefore unusual compared to other Indo-European languages. Some of these characteristics that may be the source of problems for the Eastern Armenian-speaker learning English are:

1. MEA has an equivalent to English 'the'; however, what corresponds to the definite article is a suffix (either [-ɛ] or [-n]) that is added to the noun:

wine	[gini]	the wine	[gini-n]
meat	[mis]	the meat	[mis-ɛ]

2. MEA has no direct equivalent to English indefinite articles (a, an, some, any).

If a noun does not have the definite suffix, then it can be assumed to be indefinite:

[mís] 'meat' or 'some meat'

[ch"ěkhghakhót'] 'a cigarette', 'cigarette'

[ch"ekhghakhót'-ě] 'the cigarette'

English indefinite articles will probably be a source of problems for the Eastern Armenian learning English.

3. There are two ways to indicate possession in MEA. One way, somewhat similar to English, involves a possessive pronoun (similar to my), except that the noun being possessed has to have the definite suffix attached to it:

[im anún-ě] (my - name - definite suffix) 'my name'

The other way is to attach a suffix to the noun to indicate the possessor:

[anún-ēs] (name - possessive suffix) 'my name'.

4. The third person singular pronouns will be a particular source of problems since MEA does not have gender distinctions in its pronoun system. This means that MEA has one pronoun that corresponds to the English he/she/it. The third person singular possessive pronoun ir can be deleted, leaving the noun - definite suffix to indicate third person possession:

[ir anún-ě] his/her/its-name-definite suffix means 'his/her/its name'.

However, [anún-ě] without the possessive pronoun can also mean 'his/her/its name' as well as 'the name.'

5. Present tense in MEA is indicated by the following pattern:

verb stem - um - present tense forms of BE

gēm- um em = [gēm-úm em]

The MEA equivalent of 'to be' is used in forming the present tense and a form like [gēm-úm em] is equivalent to English "I go," "I am going," "I do go." Since MEA does not have a distinction between simple present and progressive forms and forms of the MEA verb meaning 'to be' are used in the present tense formation in MEA, the Armenian-speaker learning English will have problems learning the present tense as well as the difference between progressive and nonprogressive forms of the verb.

6. In general, MEA does not use subject pronouns unless special emphasis is being placed on them. English always requires a pronoun to appear.

Thus English subject pronouns will be a source of problems for the learner. Note further that given the case that MEA marks the verb with specific pronominal suffixes, the subject pronoun is not really needed.

7. MEA marks plural in essentially the same situations as English except in cases in which a plural number is used with a noun, in which case the noun is in the singular.

[t'as t'ari] (ten-year) 'ten years'

8. MEA uses two structures that correspond to English relative clauses. One of the two structures is similar to the English and is placed after the noun that is being modified; the alternated structure is participial in nature and, unlike English, it is placed before the noun that is being modified.
9. Modern Eastern Armenian generally uses subject-object-verb order, although other patterns also occur. Because English generally uses subject-verb-subject word order, additional practice will be needed.

V. Implications for Cultural Orientation

Armenian refugees bring with them many strengths and advantages which will facilitate their adjustment to life in the United States.

Perhaps the most important of these is the fact that most Armenians are literate and well-educated. Naturally, this will be of benefit to them in learning English, particularly since most have experience in learning a second language. Unlike refugee groups who do not have classroom experience, Armenians are familiar and comfortable with the demands of formalized education. These factors will ostensibly enable most refugees to adjust to life in the United States.

Similarly, most Armenian refugees are skilled workers or professionals, often possessing skills that are marketable in the United States. While underemployment may result from language problems or differences in licensing and professional standards, the future is still brighter for the refugee with skills that enable him or her to obtain relatively meaningful employment.

The centrality of Christianity to Armenian life cannot be overemphasized. Much of the Armenians' identity is based on their Christianity, and many left the Soviet Union to enjoy greater religious freedom. The church can therefore be an extremely important source of support in the U.S. For a newly-arrived refugee, joining a church can mean integration into the Armenian community.

This is essential to adjustment to life in this country in terms of potential social support.

Finally, most refugees enter areas such as Los Angeles where there is already an established community of Armenians. The more established Armenians can help the refugees in a number of ways: interpretation, orientation, social functions, English classes and other practical services in addition to providing general emotional support. Programs provided by organizations such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Armenian Assembly, the Armenian Evangelical Social Service Center and the Armenian Relief Society provide information, referral and social services to refugees and immigrants ranging from English classes to employment services to private elementary schools. Such groups provide invaluable services to incoming refugees by providing culturally-appropriate assistance that is usually of high professional quality.

Like all refugee groups, however, the Armenians face a number of barriers to their adaptation to life in the United States.

The language barrier is apparent as soon as the refugee steps off the plane and is often the first problem that must be overcome. Inability to speak English can affect all aspects of life, ranging from grocery shopping to seeking employment. In addition, inability to speak English brands the refugee as an "outsider," affecting his or her acceptance by Americans.

A second major problem is underemployment. Because of the language barrier, refugees often must accept a job far below their skill level and experience, e.g., a doctor working as a lab assistant. This results in extreme frustration and financial difficulty, often accompanied by the disappointment that results when one realizes that he cannot immediately find the success he came to this country to achieve. Even after the language barrier has been overcome, the refugee may remain underemployed because of differences in licensing and professional standards. In this way, the strength of past work experience can work against the refugee in the initial stages of resettlement.

As for all refugees, culture shock is an almost universal problem. Even though many refugees have not been in the Soviet Union all their lives, they are still "Sovietized" in many respects and have trouble adjusting to the freedom of making their own decisions. This sometimes results in an emotional immobilization that requires intervention and guidance from sponsors, service providers or others. Similarly, many are shocked by the "open society" of the U.S. and have difficulty accepting and joining the cultural diversity they find in this country.

In addition to these specific problems are the usual differences found in moving to a new country: differences in food, basic social practices, government systems, etc. force the refugees to change many aspects of their behavior to better fit in to the new society.

While the presence of an established Armenian community in the U.S. is an important resource, some members of this established community may not be receptive of the incoming refugees. Some nationalists feel that the refugees should stay in the USSR and fight for a free Armenia; others see the refugees as being an unpleasant reminder of their own past suffering; and some Armenians are worried that the incoming "Sovietized" refugees may harm the generally positive reputation that U.S. Armenians enjoy. While the existing community must be used as a resource, the sponsor or service provider cannot assume that every already-present Armenian is necessarily going to be willing to help incoming refugees. Care must be taken in mobilizing such resources to insure that only those with a sincere interest in helping actually become involved with the refugees.

Life in a new country is not easy for any refugee. The Armenians, however, bring with them many cultural and professional strengths that can be utilized to help them develop for themselves a successful life in the United States.

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Center for
Applied
Linguistics

For further information regarding the cultural and historical background of the Armenians and their resettlement in the United States, the following organizations work closely with Armenian refugees:

Armenian Assembly
California Council and Resource Center
4250 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, California 90010
(213) 933-5238

Armenian Assembly
National Office
1420 N St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 332-3434

Armenian General Benevolent Union
589 North Larchmont Blvd.
Los Angeles, California 90004
(213) 467-2428

Armenian Missionary Association of America, Inc.
140 Forest Avenue
Paramus, New Jersey 07652
(201) 265-2607

...and the staff of the Language and Orientation Resource Center of the Center for Applied Linguistics.