

A NOVEL INITIATIVE TO TEACH EASTERN ARMENIAN

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By **Arus Karapetyan**, Toronto, 16 July 2020

The Armenian has been spoken for millennia. An Indo-European language, it has two branches, Eastern and Western. Both are spoken in many countries.

A large portion of contemporary Armenian Diaspora emerged following the Genocide of 1915. The survivors of the horrendous crimes were forced to leave their native land and were dispersed around the globe. The next surge of widespread emigration out of Armenia occurred in the past 30 years. It was the result of corruption and lawlessness in Armenian governance following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

It is estimated that there are 7-11 million Armenians in the world. Only three million of the total lives in Armenia. Thus, a heavy burden falls on the Diaspora to sustain and nurture the Armenian language.

Many Armenian communities have had success in creating schools and teaching Armenian. In places where it is not viable to establish schools and individuals are scattered, on-line options and other methods become vital. Whatever venue is used it's essential to have textbooks. **Mary Hakobyan** of Toronto has come up with a unique way to instruct Armenian. She is the author of the [Eastern Armenian Textbook](#) written for adults.

It was a pleasure to interview Ms. Hakobyan on-line.

Ms. Hakobyan, please tell us about yourself. What led you to write an Eastern Armenian language book?

After graduating from Yerevan State University I started to teach Eastern Armenian to Diasporans and foreigners at [Birthright Armenia](#). I greatly enjoyed teaching but struggled with the books and materials available to teach Armenian. I had to write texts, exercises, create games, and activities for every lesson. Soon, I realized that I had a lot of material and experience. In 2013 I started to design the main body of the textbook and then added the lessons one by one. By that time, I had grasped the challenges of the learning process and designed the book to allow the students to overcome them with confidence. In 2014 I used the first draft of the book for teaching lessons - correcting, editing, and evaluating it with my students. Soon I decided to design, illustrate and record the dialogues to get the full potential of this method of teaching. I couldn't find any sources to finance this effort. I experienced a great deal of disappointment after applying to several Armenian education development-focused organizations and being rejected by all. In 2016, through self and family financing, I finally launched the design process. The textbook got published in 2018; it immediately gained significant popularity.



Who is the book mainly written for?

It's for adult English speakers, however, it also can be used for teenagers at schools. The textbook was evaluated and approved by the Institute of National Education of Armenia as a highly qualified textbook for learning Eastern Armenian at schools and educational centers abroad.

What is the reason behind the book's success?

It teaches Eastern Armenian with modern and internationally recognized methods by focusing on all four aspects of the language equally: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Since most of the other Eastern Armenian textbooks lack the equal focus of these methods, this textbook stood out. This is a new style in learning Eastern Armenian. The implemented method helps the students gain knowledge of the language with more ease by turning the learning experience into a game. The succession of grammar and vocabulary and their combination together make the learning process smooth and simple. With the help of illustrated stories, entertaining exercises, and listening assignments, the students learn grammar and vocabulary faster, easier, and creatively. In addition, the textbook is designed to help students recognize common knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral patterns of the Armenian people. The Eastern Armenian textbook is being used in different educational institutions worldwide, and I have received a lot of letters of appreciation from the instructors and students.

Please tell us more about your online program.

I offer online classes for those who want to study Eastern Armenian from the comfort of their home. These are private lessons organized according to the knowledge, needs, and abilities of the student. The lessons are conducted with the help of the Eastern Armenian textbook. We do not spend time checking the homework during the lesson, instead we focus on listening and speaking skills. The student emails me the homework after the lesson, which is checked, commented, and emailed back to the student before the next lesson. Those who are interested in taking online classes can contact me [through the website](#).



Who are the buyers and students of your book and program?

They are spread out globally. Since the book is sold not only in the bookstores in Armenia but also on Amazon and eBay, I can see where the book goes. It has already been distributed to over twenty countries around the world. Sometimes I am surprised to see interest in our language from such countries as Japan, Malta, South Korea, Sweden, Czech Republic, Ireland, Poland. Those who buy the Eastern Armenian textbook, prefer to have the lessons with the author of the textbook. That is why I started my online lessons, which proved to be very effective, creative, and fun. Most of my present students are adults who are either interested in Armenian or they have an Armenian family member.

What do you think about having the Armenian language taught in Universities here?

I do believe that including Armenian language education in Universities in Canada would prove

effective for not only preserving and spreading our language but also for the Armenian – Canadian community to feel more recognized and familiar for other Canadians. Language is the first and best way to tell about you, your culture and history. I do not know whether Canadian institutions have made any effort in this regard, but I believe that we need to take action.

What are your thoughts on the sustainability of the Armenian language in the Diaspora?

The Armenian communities worldwide are quite different and thus challenges are varied. However, a constant connection with Armenia should be each community's priority. In general, the Armenian Diaspora has always done its best to sustain and preserve our language, culture, and history. We can see the fruits of these efforts in the Armenian youth who speak Armenian, who are interested in their identity, culture, who want to visit, invest, and live in Armenia.

Ms. Hakobyan, thank you for sharing your experience, insights and suggestions.

There are no comments yet.