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**Author**

Ghazaryan, Lilit

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“Speak Beautifully” -

Language Policies and Practices

In Public Kindergartens in Armenia

A master’s thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Anthropology

by

Lilit Ghazaryan

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Speak Beautifully” -

Language Policies and Practices

In Public Kindergartens in Armenia

by

Lilit Ghazaryan

Master of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Erica Cartmill, Chair

Kindergartens in Armenia are the first state institution children encounter, and where they are first formally exposed to the language policies of the country. This thesis, based on ethnographic field work in 2 public kindergartens in 2019, examines the way state language policies and ideologies influence everyday teacher-child interactions in Yerevan, Armenia. The data corpus for this project consists of video recordings (40 hours in total), participant observations, and interviews. The focus is on child-directed corrections used by teachers as a means to implement state policies regarding the desired linguistic register – literary Armenian. During corrections, teachers encourage children to ‘speak beautifully’ (i.e., using the literary Armenian register) and avoid markers of conversational Armenian and foreign language borrowings, particularly from Russian. Kindergartens serve as a site of contemporary geopolitics, where teachers reinforce state expectations of using literary Armenian by

aligning it with the ideology of ‘speaking beautifully,’ thereby creating the possibility of discrimination against other codes and registers used in the community. Using the theoretical frameworks of language socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), language ideologies (Irvine, J.T. & Gal, 2000; Kroskrity, 2004, 2015; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994), and conversation analysis (Schegloff, 1992; Schegloff et al., 1977), this thesis illustrates how children are being socialized into hegemonic ideologies of language and nationality through correction and repair in kindergarten classrooms (Friedman, 2010b; Jefferson, 1987; Macbeth, 2004; Mchoul, 1990).

The thesis of Lilit Ghazaryan is approved.

Alessandro Duranti

Elinor Ochs

Marjorie H. Goodwin

Erica Cartmill, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

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## Introduction

During the 1920s Armenia became part of the Soviet Union, and from then until 1991 (the collapse of the USSR), Russian was the lingua franca within the USSR, Armenia included. In 1961 the Minority Policy of the Soviet Union was constituted by the Party Programme (Kalniņš, 1971). It talked about wiping out national differences, chiefly the linguistic ones. The goal was to speed up the national inclusion of non-Russians into Russian culture and community. Russian was envisioned to become the ‘second mother tongue’ of all non-Russians and serve to pave the way for the disappearance of non-Russian national and popular cultures and traditions. Irvine and Gal (2000) discuss the *one nation one language* phenomenon through the lens of iconization, where there is a connection being built between the language and the territory. In a territory like the USSR, where there was a big diversity of nationalities, cultural traditions, and languages, Russian was meant to be the language that would unite them all. Union was meant to be accomplished through an ideological relationship between language, population, and territory, which is an example of iconization, but it could only be successful by modifying the linguistic situation, removing multilingualism and variation from the picture, thus through erasure (Irvine & Gal, 2000). While Russian was meant to be the language to unite all the Soviet Republics, there was also a strategy to suppress national ideologies held by the Republics, which resulted in intensive monitoring of all the aspects of cultural materials, from literature to scholarly work, to make sure they did not contain national propaganda. As highlighted by Irvine and Gal, multilingualism is an indication of multiple loyalties and thus a temperamental flaw, therefore language became one of the vehicles for the Communist Party to build trust and control over such multilingual and multiethnic empire. Ukraine and Kazakhstan under the rule of the USSR are discussed by Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) as examples of linguistic oppression through Russification. Within the USSR, Russian became the language through which power and authority was held, by making the empire linguistically as homogenous as possible.

Armenia also went through the phase of Russification, yet, like several other countries, nationalistic ideologies and thoughts were never fully suppressed and emerged in various forms throughout the Soviet

rule and became freely expressed after the collapse of the USSR. The newly independent Republic of Armenia was free to recreate its own identity through nation-building efforts. Language played a key role in reconstructing the Armenian national identity, manifested through language policies that was largely influenced by language purity ideologies. In Armenian kindergartens, language purism is showcased through teacher corrections and government regulation regarding the literary Armenian register. The educational system at large, and the kindergartens in particular, are the institutions where this valued linguistic practice is maintained. As is universally the case, schools become sites of standardization, exercising hegemony over the definition of the community's norm (Silverstein, 2018). While conversational Armenian is the register used by the community throughout their daily routine, kindergartens are the sites for promoting the use of literary Armenian.

### **Kindergartens and Language Ideology**

The language policies within the Armenian kindergartens are based on the larger ideology of language standardization and the ideology of 'speaking beautifully', a phrase often used by teachers as a reminder following corrections of other languages or informal registers. In the Armenian classroom, speaking beautifully is understood as speaking in the literary register: the pure Armenian that is free of any foreign language borrowings, which is similar to Debra Friedman's findings in Ukrainian classrooms (Friedman, 2010a, 2010b, 2016) . Several of the teachers I observed, including those who did not work in the same kindergarten, used phrases like "speak beautifully" or "we speak beautifully" after correcting a child's language. The use of such assessments, especially right after a correction, reinforces the idea that beautiful language is the literary register. This, in turn, implies the existence of non-beautiful registers, such as the ones for which the children are being corrected. Hence, beyond learning structures and uses of the formal register, children are being socialized into the mainstream ideology of beautiful speech. Kroskrity (2018) introduces the concept of *language ideological assemblage*, which includes the larger belief system and internal and external influences that have shaped language ideologies. This project

shows how kindergarten teachers in Armenia apprentice children into language ideologies along government-designed language policies. Bernard Spolsky identifies language ideologies as one of the three important components of language policy in a speech community, the other two are language practices and language management (McCarty & May, 2017; Spolsky, 2019). While the language practice in Armenian community favors the conversational Armenian register, the ideology deems literary Armenian as the desirable language behavior. Within the kindergarten setting the government policies in large and the teachers in practice take upon the management of the language policy. As a result children are influenced by the government policies, that are designed based on the community ideologies, while teachers, through corrective practices, act as agents of those policies.

One of the main strategies of implementing language policies in kindergartens is child-directed corrections. Teachers are expected by the government policy to monitor their own speech as well as children's speech and provide corrections for the 'problem sources', which are lexical tokens of either Russian or conversational Armenian. As highlighted in Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), there is a preference for self- over other-correction in social interaction, even when the repair is being initiated by someone other than the speaker (Schegloff et al., 1977: 362). The authors note that one exception to this norm is in adult-child interactions, where other-correction is not only more common but is also a vehicle for socialization. This holds for classroom interactions, where teachers and students have the relationship of experts and novices. In ordinary conversations, it is preferred that people initiate and repair their own speech errors (Schegloff et al., 1977). In classroom settings, however, other-initiations and other-repairs are more common and usually done by the teacher (Mchoul, 1990). In other words, ongoing corrections and repairs by teachers are exactly the speech practices that mark the interaction as a classroom one (Macbeth, 2004). Conversation analysis methods help to show how learning takes place, as understanding is often expected to be displayed (Macbeth 2011).

While there is a robust literature on teacher-student interactions around the world, studied through conversational analysis framework (Bateman, 2013; Bateman & Church, 2016; Burdelski, 2020a, 2020b;

Cekaite, 2020; Cekaite & Ekström, 2019), there is no similar work done within kindergarten settings in Armenia. This thesis aims to analyze teaching practices surrounding a specific linguistic code at the start of formal schooling in Armenia and the ways in which these practices are influenced by national language policies. I examine teachers' corrections of their students' language and register. My focus is children's socialization into the language ideologies surrounding proper language use through teacher's corrections. Feedback practices reflect underlying cultural beliefs and values, and corrective feedback routines socialize children into social roles and relationships and what constitutes appropriate language behavior (Friedman, 2010b; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). I combine a classroom interaction framework with the lens of language socialization to analyze routine classroom corrections using conversation analytic methods.

### **Teacher Corrections**

For a close analysis of child-directed corrections, I rely on Jefferson's definitions of embedded and exposed corrections as "devices for repairing a problematic item in ongoing talk"(Jefferson, 1987: 97). The embedded corrections occur without disrupting the flow of the conversation and incorporate the correction into the ongoing talk. The exposed corrections isolate the correction and make it the main focus of the talk, which provides room for what Jefferson calls "accounting", sets of activities such as explanation, apology, ridicule, which become possible once the correction is exposed. Of the 38 cases of kindergarten teacher corrections I observed, there were 13 cases of exposed corrections and 25 cases of embedded corrections. Given that teachers' attention at a given time is occupied by other activities, it is not surprising that the majority of the corrections are embedded and occur without disrupting the flow of the conversation.

I also examined corrections in terms of the targeted practice or structure the child is being asked to avoid. Most of the corrections I observed targeted either Russian word tokens or lexical items in conversational Armenian. In both of these cases, teachers provided substitutes in literary Armenian. Out of the 38

corrections, 16 are for Russian lexical items, and 22 are for conversational Armenian lexical items (including two non-Russian foreign borrowings that were treated as markers of conversational Armenian). When comparing categorizations of the types of corrections (embedded, exposed) and the targets of corrections (Russian, conversational Armenian), there was not a clear preference to use one type of correction in a particular context. Of the 38 corrections, 7 were exposed corrections of conversational Armenian, 6 were exposed corrections of Russian, 15 were embedded corrections of conversational Armenian, and 10 were embedded corrections of Russian. More corrections occurred during class time than free play time. This is likely because of the strict monitoring of the speech that teachers do during the class, and the limited (not completely absent) teacher-child interaction during free play time.

Teachers are vigilant about monitoring children's speech, and most of the 'problem sources' are corrected during structured class-times and child-teacher interactions in and out of classrooms. There is only one example of a non-Armenian word token being left uncorrected, which is due to there being no equivalent in Armenian. In the example, the child is recounting his visit to a circus to the class. He uses the Russian word *самокат* *samokat* (scooter) when telling about the tricks the clown was performing. The teacher replies 'uhum' and lets the boy continue. On the video it appears that the teacher opens her mouth to start an utterance then hesitates and simply says 'uhum', probably not being able to find an equivalent substitute for the Russian word token. While you can see the hesitance in her face at the moment as she presses her lips together, it is clear that she cannot correct the child for the Russian utterance unless she can provide an Armenian equivalent to substitute the word.<sup>1</sup> For words like these that are comparatively recent, Russian or English borrowings fill the gap much faster than the invention of Armenian equivalents.

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<sup>1</sup> During my field work my own 4-year-old started using the word *samokat* instead of scooter herself, which in her case was a potential a language shift from English to Armenian. Having no concept of the fact that the word is actually in Russian, she heard it from the kids playing outdoors and her new friends, so adopted the term assuming it is in Armenian.

The potential ‘problem sources’ in conversational Armenian sometimes left uncorrected are one of two types: (1) the conversational yes (*huu* – ha) is not substituted with the literary yes (*ujn* - ayo), and (2) the conversational auxiliary verb *uu* - ‘a’ is not substituted by the literary equivalent of *t* - ‘e’. These are the two most common markers of the conversational Armenian and happen to be also the most common ‘errors’ made by children as well as the most commonly used by teachers in non-formal settings, such as when talking to one another rather than the children. Both cases are sometimes corrected, but when a potential ‘problem source’ is left uncorrected, it is one of these two types. The data include examples of both types being corrected by teachers, both through exposed and embedded corrections, as well as teachers themselves using the tokens, and instances of the tokens being left uncorrected. The latter is most likely because of how integrated both subtle markers are in everyday speech.

Based on these observations, I conclude that a conversational Armenian form is not corrected either (1) when it does not occur in the structured in-class environment, but rather happens in a more casual informal setting or (2) when there is a focus on another correction at the moment, or another non-linguistic matter all-together, such as dealing with an argument that children are having. In the latter case, the focus and attention of the teacher is taken by the matter that is more crucial, either a non-linguistic event that requires their full attention, or another code error that is deemed more crucial to correct, such as a Russian word token. These two conditions are not mutually exclusive and can occur together. However, most instances when ‘problem sources’ are left uncorrected happen during free play time, not in the structured in-class setting. The same is true for teachers themselves using conversational Armenian or Russian word tokens in teacher-child interactions (the use of Russian by teachers, however, is less common than by children).

Teacher corrections in public kindergartens in Armenia reveal larger existing ideologies in the country - mainly the goal of maintaining linguistic purism as a means of national identity. Given the geopolitical past of the country, language has become one of the means of identity maintenance for Armenians, which nowadays in Armenia, in the context of the Soviet past, goes hand in hand with rejecting anything

Russian, such as Russian borrowings. To better situate the current language policies and their implications in practice within the public kindergartens, it is important to know the historical context that explicitly puts language on such a pedestal. These strong ideologies are directly linked with the colonized history of Armenia under direct political-military domination by foreign powers, genocide, and ongoing fight for independence.

## **II. Historical Context and Background**

### **Nationalism and Nation Building in Armenia during the Soviet Era**

From 1375 to 1918, Armenians lacked their own independent state and learned to survive and flourish under the rule of multi-ethnic states like the Ottoman, Persian, Russian, and Soviet empires (Rutland, 1994). After a brief period of Independence (1918-1920), Eastern Armenia was taken over by the Red Army and became part of the USSR. By then, the western territories of Armenia, under the rule of the Ottoman empire, were emptied out of Armenian population after the massacres that led to the Armenian Genocide from 1915 to 1923 and the mass migrations of those who had managed to escape.

In this historical context, Armenians developed a strong sense of national identity, which was also a tool of survival and means of heritage maintenance when overruled by other empires for centuries. There are several factors why nationalist identity was so strong among Armenians. Armenia is one of the most homogenous of the former Soviet republics, both ethnically and linguistically (Newcity, 2014; Rutland, 1994). Rutland discusses the common history and the struggle of national extinction as one of the factors that served as a motivating force for the further development of the nationalist identity in Armenia (Rutland, 1994)<sup>2</sup>. The long history of living under constant foreign threat resulted not only in the strong

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<sup>2</sup> In June 1945 the newly elected Katholikos Kevork VI sent a petition to Stalin with a clear suggestion for further action to “realize the national reunion of the Armenian people by reuniting the lands of Turkish Armenia and the Soviet Armenia and by organizing the return of the Armenians to their motherland”. These lines are quite outspoken about Armenian national interest (Verlag, 2011)

sense of nationalism but also in well-developed strategies to survive while both pleasing the foreign rulers and maintaining a national identity. During the Soviet-era, Armenia successfully incorporated nationalist and socialist elements, described by scholars as “Soviet Hybrid” (Johnson, 2019) and “Apricot Socialism” (Lehmann, 2015). In the latter, the reference is to the Armenian national symbol of its famous fruit – the apricot.

Some of the political events during the Soviet era that made Armenian nationalism even more evident were WWII and the territorial conflict over Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh) with Azerbaijan<sup>3</sup>. In 1965, a large demonstration took place commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the genocide, followed by the opening of the memorial to the victims of the genocide in Yerevan in 1967 (Lehmann, 2015). The demonstrations of 1965 took place in the Lenin square, in Yerevan. The opening ceremony took place on November 29, the day that Armenia joined the USSR. Thus, both the local authorities and the demonstrators managed to keep the balance between communism and nationalism (Saparov, 2003). Armenian party leaders, similar to those in Kazakhstan and Ukraine, endorsed the local nationalist interpretations of the Soviet ideologies (Verlag, 2011). All this visible symbolism of Armenian nationalism, however, was followed by place-renaming campaigns of 1967 and 1968, a strategy often used by Bolsheviks to establish soviet consciousness, which was used in Armenia in the years 1945 to 1950 as well, as a result of another wave of raising nationalism in the aftermath of WWII (Saparov, 2003).

A key role in the development of the Armenian nationalist consciousness during the Soviet era, while also showcasing the narratives of socialism and nationalism side by side, was played by writers and intellectuals like Vahan Totovents, Derenik Demirchian, Stepan Zorian, Paruyr Sevak and others, many of whom did not survive the Bolshevik censorship and paid greatly for their ideas (Lehmann, 2015; Verlag, 2011; Wilkinson, 1981). Armenian language has also historically been a crucial element of ethnic

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<sup>3</sup> The ongoing conflict culminated in a recent 40-day war in September 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the latter had the full support and back up of Turkey, military support and aid from Israel and the US.



and national identity. Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan were the only three republics in the Soviet Union that retained the state language articles as a result of protests that took place in Yerevan and Tbilisi in April 1978 (Saparov, 2003). In his article “Speaking Soviet with an Armenian Accent” Johnson discusses the reforms implemented by the Soviet authorities, such as the orthographic reform between 1922 and 1924, which was meant to simplify the spelling of words by ignoring their historical and etymological roots. These changes were not adopted by the Armenian diaspora, which resulted in further divergences between the Eastern and Western varieties of Armenian. Another reform took place in 1940s, with the goal of undoing some of the earlier changes in light of the raising nationalism in Armenia during and after the WWII. The underlying goals of these reforms were contradictory, on the one hand trying to create a new social reality through new language, on the other hand making the political messages accessible to the population through the use of the traditional Armenian spellings and grammatical forms (Johnson, 2019).

### **Russification in Soviet Era**

During the 1930s there was state-sponsored propaganda presenting Russian as superior to all the other languages that existed within the USSR, the gateway to the heights of Soviet and world culture. In 1938 teaching Russian became obligatory in the schools of all Soviet Republics (Bilinsky, 1981; Pavlenko, 2006). As stated by Stalin himself, the goal was to create the necessary environment for all the nations’ “fusion into a single, common culture with a single common language” (Stalin 1930). In the early 1930s the Russian language became one of the means of emphasizing the unity of the Soviet Union, rather than its diversity, the language’s role of authority was claimed through the writings of Lenin and Stalin, which, of course, were in Russian. Thus, knowing the language was part of being a good Soviet citizen and sharing the political ideas of the leaders (Friedman, 2010a). Some methods of this strategy, which came to be known as Russification, were the military, television and radio, government, mixed marriages, and, of course, schools. The Soviet language policies were directly connected to educational contexts, such as the

Minority Policy of 1961, which had the goal of eliminating national differences, particularly linguistic ones (Kalniņš, 1971).

The language policies were directly linked to educational reforms, as classrooms were the setting where good Soviet citizens were being educated and raised. In 1979, in Tashkent (capital of Uzbekistan), a large group of politicians, educators, scholars, and administrators gathered together for a 3-day long conference on "The Russian Language – the Language of Friendship and Cooperation of the Peoples of the USSR". The main agenda of the conference was to intensify the teaching of the Russian language in all levels of educational institutions, from kindergartens to higher education, to train better Russian language teachers, and to publish more Russian textbooks (Bilinsky, 1981; Solchanyk, 1982). Introducing the teaching of Russian language in the kindergartens of all the non-Russian republics was one of the major recommendations at the conference, with the argument that kindergartens represent the first stage of public education. Only a year before the Tashkent conference, in 1978, the Council on Questions of the Secondary General Education School of the USSR Ministry of Education had already approved several proposals regarding the improvement of the teaching of the Russian language within the national republics (Solchanyk, 1982). As these events happened only a few years before the Soviet Union collapsed, some scholars argue that the given reforms were meant to use the Russian language to reinstate unity among the nations, and therefore the youngest children became the target, out of fear that Russians were losing their authority and majority status within the USSR.

Though there were many politicians at the Tashkent conference, in order to avoid a new language protest demonstration—similar to the ones that took place in Tbilisi and Yerevan in 1975-1976, and in April 1978—the three Transcaucasian (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan) Party leaders were not invited. Those earlier demonstrations were in fact successful, as Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan were the only republics in Soviet Union that retained their state language articles (Bilinsky, 1981; Saparov, 2003). In 1970s Armenia, Russian was universally taught as a second language, starting from the first grade, and about 8.4-15% of children attended Russian schools, as many parents saw Russian education as a path to

better careers for their children (Rutland, 1994; Solchanyk, 1982). In 1970, about 23.4% of Armenians claimed fluency in Russian; by 1979 that number rose to 34.6%.

### **Derussification in the Post-Soviet Era**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet countries found themselves in a variety of different situations regarding language use and language policies, and the maintenance or transmission of Russian language. Aneta Pavlenko (2008) discusses four factors that have influenced the situation in each country: 1) the ethnic and linguistic makeup of the population; 2) existing ideologies influencing attitudes towards Russian language; 3) educational, employment policies and opportunities; 4) the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious orientation of the country. Belarus is the only post-Soviet country, outside of Russia, where Russian is still the dominant language in the country and in the education system, while Ukraine went through and still is undergoing derussification and Ukrainization, where classrooms are being used as sites of socializing children into the nationalist identity through the teaching of the knowledge and use of ‘pure’ Ukrainian (Friedman, 2010b; Pavlenko, 2006, 2008). Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan adopted Russian as the official language, while Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan show the lowest levels of Russian maintenance among all the post-soviet countries. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia adopted single-language policies.

Armenia adopted the single language policy in 1991, and Armenian was established as the national language, with Russian functioning in some public contexts. Language planning was directed towards the development and purification of Armenian (Pavlenko, 2006, 2008; Petrossian, 1997). On April 17, 1993, the Law on Language was adopted, which declares that the state language of the Republic of Armenia is Armenian, and the official language is *literary*<sup>4</sup> Armenian (Republic of Armenia, 1993), which is also the language of teaching and education (art. 2). According to Article 3, in official speech, where the context

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<sup>4</sup> գրական ‘grakan’

is of formal nature, citizens are obliged to ensure the purity of the language (Newcity, 2014). Even in the law, literary Armenian is distinguished from informal Armenian as the official language and is tied to educational and institutional contexts and official speech. *Official* speech refers to the language used in formal settings, especially when the country is being represented, such as the government meetings, news broadcasts. This process is similar to the one that occurred in Ukraine but is much less radical in its form based on the history and relationship each country has with Russia. In Armenia, aside from the linguistic changes, the nationalist views were also becoming more open. Those changes were visible in various spheres. In education, for example, the history textbooks went through a transition process and the historical narratives that had been constructed around the Soviet ideologies and propaganda, were re-centered around the Armenian nation and nation state (Zolyan & Zakaryan, 2008). In the music industry, the majority of Armenian popular singers in the post-Soviet era had songs in their repertoire dedicated to Armenia, with music videos that were rich with patriotic and national symbolism (Adriaans, 2016).

While Armenian became the national language, Russian-Armenian bilingualism was very high, and it was estimated that around 90% of the adult populations spoke both languages (Gevorgyan, 2006). Given the political and geographical position of Armenia, especially with Turkey<sup>5</sup> and Azerbaijan, Armenia continued to keep its close ties with Russia, even after the collapse of the USSR, and this played a major role in maintaining the Russian fluency in Armenia in the early 2000s (Pavlenko, 2008; Rutland, 1994).

Soon after the collapse of the USSR, English gained popularity among the Armenian youth. Many aspired to be fluent in English with plans of eventually migrating to other countries permanently. English fluency became a way to show status and prestige, along with political alignment towards the West, the democratic, the modern, while also providing access to the global internet (Pearce & Rice, 2014). Parental influence played a big role, as most Armenian parents prefer bilingual or trilingual education, thinking

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<sup>5</sup> Russian troops continue to guard the Armenian-Turkish border up to this day. The most recent development between the countries was the 40-day war, when Azerbaijan with Turkey's back up attacked Artsakh on September 27, 2020. One of the stands according to the peace agreement that was signed between Armenia and Azerbaijan, moderated by Russia, was the placement of Russian peacekeeping troops in Artsakh, on the border with Azerbaijan.

that it constitutes the best preparation that they can give their children to ensure their future success (Petrossian, 1997; Sougari & Hovhannisyan, 2013). As during the soviet era, when parents chose to take their children to Russian schools for future career and economic success, soon after the Soviet Union's collapse, parents started promoting English fluency among their children for the same reasons. The educational trends regarding foreign languages, especially the choices that parents make in choosing specific schools or kindergartens for their children, say a lot about the overall political and economic state of those languages in Armenia, and the larger region. Recently, there have been concerns about the Armenian population losing the proficiency in Russian, due to the popularity and prestige that English has gained in the country, and less time dedicated to Russian at schools (Pavlenko, 2008).

I focus on the language policies in public kindergartens to reveal the influence of historical and political factors in modern-day kindergarten education in Armenia, particularly the ways in which nationalism manifests itself through language purism within educational contexts.

### **History of Kindergartens in Armenia**

When Armenia was under the rule of Tsarist Russia, there were no kindergartens. They were established in 1921 after Armenia became part of the USSR. In the early 1920s, children would attend kindergarten from the ages of 3 to 8. The main function of the kindergartens at the time was to free the parents, primarily mothers, from childcare labor so that both parents could work outside of the home instead of one of them taking care of the young children (Wilcox, 1928). Later, kindergartens became recognized as the first level of public education and were targeted for introducing Russian language teaching as part of the larger Russification project. Thus, the Soviet Armenian citizen was not only being shaped by discourses from above but also by the experience of the classroom from below (Johnson, 2019). The kindergartens were transformed from being simply a caretaking facility into a setting where children were being socialized into a Soviet citizen identity, with the teaching of Russian in the Soviet era. Now in the same setting, children are being socialized into a modern day Armenian citizen identity by means of

literary Armenian. In Armenia, nowadays, kindergartens are still an important site, as they are the first institution where children are exposed to the existing language policies and language ideologies of the larger community.

While kindergartens have been considered an important setting for introducing children to the broader ideologies and standards of the given society in Soviet and post-Soviet times, there has been little or no research about the current language policies and practices of language teaching in public or private Armenian kindergartens. This study indicates how the existence of language purism as an ideology within the society at large is implemented in language policy making within educational contexts and how the practice of language purism appears in everyday interactions between students and teachers, mostly seen through child-directed corrections that target certain lexical items.

### **III. Language Policies and Practices in Public Kindergartens**

#### **Methods**

During the summer of 2019, I carried out a research project in Yerevan, Armenia, in three kindergartens (2 public, 1 private), where I conducted participant observation, video-recorded children's spontaneously-occurring conversations during play time and their interactions with teachers inside and outside of the classroom. All three kindergartens were in the central region of the capital city. While the private kindergarten directors have the authority to give permission to researchers to conduct observations within their facilities, to have access to the public kindergartens I was first granted a permission from the Yerevan City Municipality to video record in the public kindergartens before reaching out to the specific kindergarten directors.

The collected data include approximately 42 hours of video-recordings, 21 hours from the two public kindergartens combined, and 21 hours from the private kindergarten. Recordings were done with a GoPro camera. Since children were constantly moving within each location, I followed them with the GoPro in

my hand for three-four hours a day. I would usually visit the kindergartens interchangeably, since they all had a similar timeline and schedule of activities. In the public kindergartens, I began recording in the early morning when children finish their breakfast and have an hour of class time, followed by 1 or 2 hours of free play, depending on the schedule of the other activities of the day, which teachers had the autonomy to change depending on the weather or the number of children who were present on a given day. Some days there would be other activities as well, such as reading time, storytelling, structured outdoor sports games, nearby field trips. I left the kindergarten at children's nap time, after lunch. In the private kindergarten I spent the same amount of time, from breakfast to lunch, but the activities there were different, including science experiment hour, special events like sports competitions and theatre plays, yoga class, and English language class. In the summer, in both the private and the public kindergartens, the schedule was not the same as during the academic year (September – May). The summer schedule included more free play and activities, and fewer, if any, classes. The public kindergarten did not have any of the regular language classes, instead, the one-hour morning classes consisted mainly of review and did not contain any new materials. In the private kindergarten, the one-hour English language classes were still being taught, but most of the day again included more free play, and special summer activities like the outdoor science experiment hour.

In addition to kindergarten observations, I also conducted interviews to gain a better understanding about the kindergarten structure and the existing language policies. The interviewees include a private kindergarten director, public kindergarten teachers, a private kindergarten teacher of Russian, a Yerevan City Municipality representative, a regional council representative of the department responsible for kindergartens, a parent of a kindergarten-aged boy, and a parent of a kindergarten-aged girl. I was not able to conduct interviews with most of the participating children's parents, which is something I intend to include in future work. Some interviews were audio-recorded, others were video-recorded, depending on the interviewees' wishes. The interviews were conducted in accordance with the method of person-centered interviews with semi-structured questions (Briggs, 1986; Hollan, 2001; Levy & Hollan, 1998). This method allowed me to follow the interviewees' train of thought, while giving them the freedom to

express themselves without restrictions. All the interviews were conducted in Armenian and later transcribed and translated into English. The interview excerpts included in the paper will be presented in the English translation.

For the analyses in this paper, I focus on the video data from the two public kindergartens and the interviews with the government representatives and public kindergarten teachers.

### **Current Language Policies**

The public kindergarten curriculum in Armenia is developed and monitored by the government, whereas the private kindergartens follow certain national guidelines but can develop their own curriculum and policies. Each group (group divisions are based on children's age) within the private kindergarten consists of approximately 20 children, while the number is closer to 30-35 in public kindergartens. Unlike the public kindergartens, private kindergartens are quite expensive and therefore accessible only to people of a certain socioeconomic status. In terms of quality of education, however, public kindergartens are ranked higher by both the state and the parents and tend to have long waitlists. The families that choose to send their children to public kindergartens come from a wider range of socio-economic status.

Current language policies within the kindergartens in Armenia are regulated by the Law on Language, discussed earlier. Based on this Law, literary Armenian – *grakan hayeren* (գրական հայերեն) – is the register that is used in formal settings, news broadcasts, official representation of the country, within educational contexts. The alternative is the informal register that people use in their daily life, referred to as conversational Armenian – *khosakcakan hayeren* (խոսակցական հայերեն). The terms literary and conversational will be used throughout the paper to refer to the two main registers, which are the terms used both by people and the government officials.

While all public educational institutions in Armenia need to follow these policies, the language policies vary greatly within private kindergartens. Private kindergartens have a certain autonomy and the authority



to develop their own curriculum and program, aside from following some general standard guidelines imposed by the government. This freedom reflects on the language policies as well. While Armenian still needs to be taught as the official language of the country, the choice of which other languages will be taught, teaching methods, number of hours or level of depth dedicated to each language is left to the private kindergartens' directors and curriculum developers. All the public kindergartens, on the other hand, are strictly regulated by the government and need to follow the same program and curriculum developed by the state. Public kindergartens of the capital are monitored by the Yerevan City Municipality and the regional councils of each region of the capital, accordingly. In the interview excerpt #1 below, the regional council representative discusses government observations that take place at kindergartens, which are open to public as well as government representatives. Aside from such scheduled visits, random observations are also carried out by the government to monitor the work at the public kindergartens.

**Excerpt 1: From an interview from a regional council representative of the department responsible for kindergartens:**

There are open classes, during which anyone, parents, representatives of the local council come to watch the open classes where children showcase their knowledge and what they have learned at the kindergarten. Specialists regularly visit the kindergartens, conduct observations to make sure that everything is according to guidelines.

Strict regulations are also imposed on language use, which is established through the Law on Language, monitored by the Yerevan Municipality, and further inspected by the regional council, and finally, the directors of each kindergarten. During my interview with the head of the department of general education

at Yerevan Municipality, she talked about the importance of teaching the literary Armenian to children from as early as kindergarten-age, as illustrated in the excerpt 2 below.

**Excerpt 2. From an interview with the head of the department of general education at Yerevan Municipality:**

Regardless of whether the educational institution is public or private, in Armenia the mandatory language is the native language, and the *literary* native language.

It is very important, because regardless of what language the parents speak in the family, with what approach, the child is attending an Armenian kindergarten, she must start learning the native language.

At the end of the day you know not all families use *literary* Armenian, but the educational institutions have the obligation to use *literary* Armenian, especially the teachers must speak in *literary* Armenian. We have the native language as the main language, and then the foreign languages are supplementary educational services.

The importance of teaching children literary Armenian is taken as the responsibility of the government and the education system, regardless of what language/register children are exposed to at home, and regardless whether they attend a private or a public kindergarten. And this obligation is especially put on teachers, who are expected to use literary Armenian with the children. Aside from monitoring their own speech while talking to children, teachers are also expected to monitor the children's speech and correct it when necessary. As highlighted by Schegloff et. al. (1977), other-correction is a "a device for dealing

with those who are still learning or being taught to operate with a system which requires, for its routine operation, that they be adequate self-monitors and self-correctors as a condition of competence”. The expectation of speech correction was discussed during the interview with a regional council representative, which further explains the expectation put on teachers by the government regarding the language policies.

**Excerpt 3. From an interview from a regional council representative of the department responsible for kindergartens:**

If a child makes a mistake uttering a word, the teachers and instructors have to correct the child, not strictly but through play, and in a kind manner. Children need to be taught to speak correctly. The speech corrections are done throughout the day not just during the classes. Teachers also need to return to the mistakes, repeat the corrections so that the child truly learns the right way of uttering the word or constructing a sentence.

While the interviewee in excerpt 3 does not use the term literary Armenian, her phrase “to speak correctly” contains the assumption that the correct register is the literary Armenian. As she mentions how children need to be taught to speak correctly, the connotation, again, is that the teachers, kindergartens, and the larger education system are responsible for teaching children how to speak correctly. Putting this responsibility on teachers rather than the family and caretakers was a common theme discussed both at the city and the regional governing levels. The regional council representative goes into more detail discussing the specific methodologies of how the speech monitoring and corrections need to be done by the teachers, which highlights the degrees of monitoring based on the hierarchical level of the given

governing body. The speech monitoring instructions get even more detailed at the specific kindergarten level, as the teachers get their instructions from the directors. Despite personal opinions, which at times might differ slightly from the state mandated regulations (as seen in the excerpt 4 below), all teachers follow the policy, as seen throughout the observations in the public kindergartens, and monitor both children's and their own (when talking to the children) speech strictly.

**Excerpt 4. From an interview with a public kindergarten teacher:**

The teachers must speak only Armenian with the kids, even if they [teachers] know Russian, all the classes need to be done in Armenian, and Russian needs to be done by payment. During the class if you say one word in Russian that is already not right.

They just say it is wrong, if you are providing Armenian, it needs to be clean Armenian, and if it is Russian then it must be clean Russian.

In public kindergartens, the use of Russian and English are limited to the specific language class times, approximately 30-40-minute-long classes that meet two to three times a week. The foreign language classes are taught by designated language teachers that visit the kindergartens only for the language classes. The payment that the public kindergarten teacher mentions in the Excerpt 4 above refers to the payment that parents pay for the language classes, which even though voluntary by design, are attended by all children, as I learned from talking to the teachers and the government representatives. The monetary payment is small in its amount, and the government has a program that pays for those children whose family wants them to participate in the foreign language classes but cannot afford it. Private

kindergartens, on the other hand, do not have to follow the rules established for the public kindergartens. This has resulted in more diverse exposure to foreign languages in private kindergartens through interactions both inside and outside the classroom. In the public kindergartens, the policies regarding literary Armenian combined with the strict no foreign languages outside of the foreign language classroom rule, results in the strict monitoring of the spoken language in the kindergartens by teachers.

### **Policies in Practice**

Conducting observations and video-recordings at the kindergartens gave me the opportunity to see the implementation of the language policies in practice. As I will illustrate below, teacher corrections are the main strategy for the application of the language policies in the children's daily routine. All the transcripts will be presented in a three-tier structure, where the first tier will be the utterance in the Armenian script, the second tier will provide the Armenian utterance in the Latin script, and the third tier will provide the English translation. Transcriptions follow the conversational analysis conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (2004). The full list of the conventions used in this thesis is available in the Appendix.

Based on observations and video data, I noticed that teachers strongly monitor children's and their own language both in and out of the classroom whenever they were interacting with the children. During free play time, especially when outdoors, children's peer interactions are less constrained since teachers are not monitoring the whole group close enough to be able to regulate their speech. However, even during the outdoor free play time, the children's speech is corrected whenever the teachers are at close proximity to children or are directly addressed by the children. When talking to one another, or when addressing me, teachers would often switch to the conversational register instead of using literary Armenian, whether outside or inside the classroom.

**Excerpt 5. From an interview with the head of the department of general education at Yerevan**

**Municipality:**

Look, if we are declaring a language day<sup>6</sup>, demanding that our children speak *clean* Armenian, it is an obligatory condition and we need to speak literary Armenian starting from the kindergartens.

Discussing the importance of speaking literary Armenian from the kindergarten age, the interviewee uses the terms ‘literary Armenian’ and ‘clean Armenian’ almost synonymously. The word ‘clean’ (maqr – մաքուր)<sup>7</sup> is often used to describe the literary Armenian register, highlighting the expectation of not using any foreign borrowings. The conversational register, on the other hand, is rich with foreign borrowings. This stance echoes the ideology of language purism, which has been described as motivating the omission of foreign borrowings from the language. Robert Trask, in his “Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics” defines purism as “the belief that words (and other linguistic features) of foreign origin are a kind of contamination sully the purity of a language” (Trask, 1999). Endre Brunstad (2016) highlights that in standard definitions, “linguistic purism is regarded as a language planning ideology involving resistance to foreign elements” (Brunstad, 2016: 52). In her study of the bilingual indigenous community of Rapa Nui, Miki Makihara defines linguistic purism as “an insistence on purity or correctness of linguistic forms” (Makihara, 2007: 50). In the case of Rapa Nui, as shown by Makihara’s study of the process of ‘cleaning’ the language from Spanish, there is insistence on an avoidance of Spanish influence. In the case of literary Armenian, there is active avoidance of Russian borrowings and influence. Russian is being targeted more than the other languages that have historically influenced the

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<sup>6</sup> Refers to the International Mother Language Day, which was approved at the 1999 UNESCO General Conference and has been observed throughout the world since 2000 on February 21, and in Armenia since 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Մաքուր (adjective) - clean, neat, proper, pure, nice; unstained.

Mesrob G. Kouyoumdjian, A Comprehensive Dictionary Armenian-English. Beirut: Atlas Press (1970): p. 496

Armenian language (such as Turkish, Arabic, Farsi), as the Russian borrowings are comparatively fresh and more salient within the speech. The notion of language purism as a larger ideology that exists within the society is evident from the existing language policies, both in the broader case of Law on Language, discussed above, and particularly within the language policies in educational institutions. In the Armenian kindergartens, language purism is showcased through the teacher corrections. The daily teacher-child interactions provide evidence of purism in practice by making it possible to analyze how purism as an ideology manifests itself in practice in public kindergartens through language monitoring and child-directed corrections.

In her study of the revitalization of Ukrainian, Debra Freidman takes a language socialization approach to examine the role of teacher corrections in the “language and literature” lessons, where most corrections targeted Russian or Russian-influenced words. In Friedman’s data the terms ‘Russian’ or ‘Russianism’ are routinely used by teachers as a label equivalent to ‘incorrect’, which is similar to the term ‘clean’ being used as an equivalent to literary Armenian. Even though the Armenian case carries a positive rather than negative connotation, the emphasis of excluding foreign borrowings and the implications against Russian are similar in both cases. Friedman’s analysis revealed how “corrective feedback is socializing children into speaking pure language and into dominant Ukrainian language ideologies that proscribe language mixing as a violation of the natural boundaries between languages” (Friedman, 2010b). While the history, context, and the linguistic similarities of Russian and Ukrainian are different from the case of Armenian, (the historical context between Russian and Ukrainian is addressed by Friedman, 2016; Pavlenko, 2008) there are still some similarities in the teacher corrective strategies and the ideologies. Both standard Ukrainian and literary Armenian assume avoiding using Russian borrowings. Instances of teachers correcting children’s speech in Armenian kindergartens proved how Russian is being targeted, rather than treated as part of children’s speech, and teachers offer Armenian substitutes to be used instead. Below is an example of one such instance. During the morning class time after breakfast, the teacher recaps their previous day, shares with children the class plan of the day, and the children are given the

opportunity to share *anything* they would like in a free interactive setting. One of the kids shares their upcoming plans of family vacation and the fact that they bought a new suitcase.

Transcript 1. “Suitcase”

1. CHILD: գիտես? մենք գնացել էինք чемодан<sup>8</sup> արևելու

gites? menq gnacel einq chamadan<sup>9</sup> arnelu

you know we went to buy a suitcase (Russian)

Russian borrowing

2. TEACHER: Ճամպրուկ էք անել?, ուր? էք գնում

Substitution: *Russ* → *Arm*

Champruk eq arel? ur? eq gnum

You bought a suitcase (Armenian), where are you going

In her utterance in line 1, the child uses the Russian word for suitcase (chamadan/chemodan). The teacher substitutes the Russian word with the Armenian (champruk) and continues the flow of the conversation following up with a question. This is an embedded correction, as the teacher corrects the ‘problem source’ without disrupting the flow of the conversation and the “utterances are not occupied by doing of correcting, but by whatever talk is in progress” (Jefferson, 1987). Such corrections targeting Russian tokens take place routinely, as using Russian words is a common feature of the conversational Armenian, the register that children are exposed to at home and out of classroom interactions. Another example of such a correction can be seen in transcript 2, which took place during a class discussion about fruits and vegetables.

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<sup>8</sup> While in conversation analysis underlining denotes a raise in volume or emphasis, I use it to emphasize the given word for analysis, not to imply that the word has been emphasized by the speaker.

<sup>9</sup> ‘chamadan’ here is used with the pronunciation of the word adopted to Armenian. While the Russian word *чемодан* is pronounced *chemadán*, the first vowel has undergone a change as a borrowing in Armenian and has transformed to *chamadán*.



Transcript 2. “Summer House”

1. CHILD: մեր дача-ում կա ծիրանի ջեմ

Mer dacha-yum ka tsirani jem

There is an apricot jam in our summerhouse (Russian)

2. THEACHER: ամսնաւնցում ունեք

*Russ → Arm*

amaranocum uneq

You have in your summerhouse (Armenian)

In this example as well, the teacher provides the correction by substituting the Russian word for summer house (дача) with the Armenian (ամսնաւնց) in the context of a turn that appears to be an ordinary and apparently natural “expansion” of what the child has just said. There is not explicit framing of the correction, as in “you mean...” or “you should have said ...” or “use the Armenian word ...”. This is also an example of an embedded correction, as the child then proceeds and the conversation flow is not disrupted by exposing the correction (Jefferson, 1987). Furthermore, the teacher’s utterance does not have a question intonation but appears instead as a statement that contains the corrected version of the problem source.

The most common type of purism is directed at the lexicon, and direct lexical loans are the first target (Brunstad, 2016). In his study of language ideologies among the Arizona Tewa people, Paul Kroskrity has documented that the maximal ideological monitoring occurs at the level of the lexicon, with the aim of controlling and minimizing borrowings from other languages (Kroskrity, 2004). In both examples illustrated above, teachers are targeting Russian loan words. Most of these Russian lexical items, even though not part of the literary Armenian register, are commonly used in the conversational register, at times even by the teachers themselves outside their formal role of a teacher. Even inside the kindergarten, teachers switch between the two registers depending on the interaction, particularly the interlocutor,

whether it is a child or an adult. As mentioned above, the literary Armenian register is always used with children, and any formal interactions in the kindergarten, while the conversational register teachers often used in social interactions with each other or me. I document this as teachers switching between the literary and conversational registers, as Russian borrowings are commonly used in conversational Armenian. While teachers always maintain the literary Armenian register with the children, their interactions with colleagues or a visiting researcher, like me, switches back to the conversational register. There are instances however, when teachers use the literary Armenian amongst themselves too, for example if the conversation is meant for the observance of the children, such as two teachers leading a class together or modeling a certain behavior. My first interaction with one of the kindergarten directors during my first visit to their kindergarten was also in the literary Armenian; but gradually as we got to interact more often and our conversation topics also became more casual, the speech would be in the conversational register instead of the literary register. The other public kindergarten's director, on the other hand, used conversational Armenian with me from our very first interaction and overall insisted on casual relations to make me feel comfortable there. The choice of the literary or conversational register of each director was an indication of a certain type of relationship between me and each of the directors. While the first one started off more formal and eventually became more or less casual but still holding the authoritative stance based on her position, the second director established more casual relations from our first meeting, both verbally insisting on it and by choosing the use of the conversational Armenian, instead of literary.

In the corpus of teacher corrections, in addition to implicit corrections targeting Russian loan words, there were many examples of corrective feedback towards conversational speech. While purism has traditionally been defined by the resistance towards foreign borrowings, "the more comprehensive definition of purism includes resistance also to dialectisms and other non-standard elements" (Brunstad, 2016). In this respect, language purification is broader than just the elimination of foreign elements (Nicoline van der Sijs, 1999). As examples of other undesirable features aside from foreign elements,

Thomas brings up dialects, sociolects, and styles of the same language (Thomas 1991: 12). Transcript 3 presents an example that occurred during a class discussion about fruits and vegetables.

### Transcript 3. Cabbage

1. THEACHER: ինչ են պատրաստում կազամբից

Inch en patrastum kaghambic

What do people make from cabbage

2. CHILD: պատրաստում են երեխաների համար լիզը ճաշեր

Patrastum en erekhaneri hamar liqy chasher

They make ton/bunch of food for children

3. THEACHER: լիզը չենք ասում. ասում ենք շատ.

Liqy chenq asum. asum enq shat.

we don't say ton/bunch we say a lot

*Conversational* → *Literary*

In her first utterance the teacher asks what people usually make from cabbage. Her goal, as it becomes clear from the discussion that followed this interaction, was to explain how you can use cabbage to make various foods and use this vegetable in soups or salads, in fresh or cooked form, hence illustrating its versatility. One of the children replies with a broad answer, saying that people make a ton/bunch of food for children, using the Armenian word liqy (լիզը), which is a lexical item that is representative of the conversational register. To the use of the term *ton/bunch*, the teacher replies with a correction using the “X not Y” formula, substituting the term with the word from the literary Armenian register - *a lot*, shat (շատ), exemplifies an explicit correction as the correction is being isolated, “making it an interactional

business of its own” (Jefferson, 1987). This explicit error-correction in the “X not Y” formula happens frequently in corrections targeting Russian lexical items as well as conversational Armenian word tokens. The examples showcased illustrate that in the case of literary Armenian, purism means not using both (1) foreign language borrowings and (2) expressions from conversational Armenian. The practice of language- (or code-) correction deals with both another language and another register. At a closer analysis, however, the lines between the two are more intertwined than it might seem. Many historical borrowings from other languages than Russian, such as Turkish, Arabic, or Farsi, have become part of contemporary conversational Armenian and are most often treated as markers of conversational register rather than as foreign borrowings. The educational system in large, and the kindergartens in particular, are the institutions where this valued linguistic practice of using the literary Armenian is maintained. This setting, thus, becomes an example of standardization by acquiring an explicitly recognized hegemony over the conversational Armenian. When categorizing corrections by classifying them as either a correction of a foreign borrowing (dealing with Russian) or a conversational register marker, I considered the larger context aside from the pure linguistic origins of the given lexical items. Teachers target Russian borrowings a lot more than the borrowings from the other languages. In both kindergartens combined, there were 16 corrections targeting non-Armenian word tokens, 14 out of which were directed at Russian words, and only 2 corrections were for non-Russian foreign words. From the latter, one was for a Persian borrowing and the other for a Turkish borrowing, both of these examples will be discussed below. Given the difference of numbers and the frequency of the corrections targeting Russian and non-Russian foreign borrowings, I have chosen to include those two examples in the of correction altering conversational Armenian to the literary Armenian. Another reason for this choice is the age of the children and the generation they represent. Older Armenians can easily identify the Turkish, Persian, Arabic roots or borrowings used in conversational Armenian, due to the fact that many spoke those languages with different levels of fluency, and for those borrowings were more current and fresh, hence easier to identify. Younger generations, including the children in this study, can still identify the Russian borrowings since most if not all have a certain level of fluency and understating of Russian as the language is still

prominent in the country, and Russian borrowings are more salient in the language and easier to identify, compared to the older borrowings from the other languages.

The following example includes two corrections within the same interaction, one a correction from Russian to Armenian. The second correction addresses a lexical item that is Persian in origin, yet I have treated it as a marker of conversational register, given the discussion above. This interaction took place right after the class, as children were getting ready to leave the room and get ready for the outdoor free play time. As almost all children left to change their shoes, with the teacher following them, one of the boys approached the teacher, excited to share with her the news that his parents got him a new bag. This boy was five years old at the time, and the summer was his last at the kindergarten as he would be starting school that fall. The bag, most likely was purchased by the parents for school, and the child was eager to share that with the teacher.

#### Transcript 4. New Bag

1. Child: գիտե՞ք? իմ մաման ու պապան ինձ երեկ թազա սյմկա ու շորեր են առել

Giteq? im maman u papan indz yerek taza sumka u shorer en arel

you know my mom and dad bought me a new bag and clothes yesterday

2. T: պայուսակ. երևի.

Russ → Arm

payusak. erevi.

bag maybe

3. T: ↑նոր պայուսակ

Conversational (Turkish) → Literary

↑nor payusak

new bag

4. T: գեղեցիկ խոսի

geghecik khosi

speak beautifully

In line 1 the phrase *new bag* is the ‘problem source’, which later the teacher corrects in two subsequent utterances. She first reflects on the word for ‘bag.’ In line 1 the child uses the Russian word for bag *sumka* (сумка), which the teacher substitutes with the Armenian equivalent *payusak* (պայուսակ) in line 2. Her utterance in line 2 – ‘bag maybe’ – questions not the validity of the provided information, but the choice of the word token. In the subsequent line the teacher substitutes the word *taza* (թազա) with *nor* (նոր). This is an explicit correction as, again, the correction is being isolated and becomes the main focus of the talk. The teacher first provides the necessary substitutes for the selected word tokens and later reflects on the error in line 4, encouraging the child to “speak beautifully”. The word *taza* (թազա) is a Persian word (تازه tāza), meaning ‘fresh; new’<sup>10</sup>. In this context, however, I consider this lexical item not as a foreign borrowing, but as a marker of the conversational register. My choice within the transcription of depicting the Persian loan word with Armenian orthography is meant to differentiate it from the Russian word written in Cyrillic, since the first is being treated as a lexical item from conversational Armenian, while the second is being treated as a foreign borrowing. It is interesting that the teacher first corrects the Russian word token, and in the subsequent turn the Persian word. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know her exact motivations for this choice; a potential speculation could be that the Russian borrowing caught her attention much sooner than the other ‘problem source’. However, her choice might have been a simple coincidence or a matter of the word order, by which I mean the latest token might have gotten her attention first. Hence, in line 3 by using the phrase *nor payusak* (նոր պայուսակ) instead of *taza sumka*

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<sup>10</sup> تازه (p. 275) تازه tāza, Fresh; young; new, recent; raw

Steingass, Francis Joseph. A Comprehensive Persian-English dictionary, including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1892.

(թափա սւմկա), the teacher produces two corrections within the same correction sequence, giving examples of the two main categories: 1) corrections targeting Russian borrowings 2) corrections targeting expressions that are treated as words and expressions of conversational speech, mainly lexical items and in less common cases some grammatical features like the auxiliary verb or word particles. For the purposes of this paper we will focus mainly on corrections of lexical items, as those compile the majority of the data and illustrate the two main criteria for the identification of ‘pure’ Armenian in kindergartens.

Based on interviews with teachers and government representatives, along with my observations, it is evident that in the context of public kindergartens, speaking ‘pure’ Armenian means (1) not using any Russian lexical items, and (2) using a particular register of Armenian – literary Armenian. Furthermore, such language is often given an aesthetic evaluation by being labeled as ‘beautiful’ or as ‘speaking beautifully’ by teachers, as seen in the transcript 4 above. In the line 4, after completing the correction and substituting the targeted word tokens, the teacher finishes the interaction with the utterance ‘speak beautifully’. In Jefferson’s (1987) terms, the extension of this correction offers an ‘accounting,’ in this case a broader explanation of the correction. Several teachers, including those who do not work in the same kindergarten, use phrases like “speak beautifully”, “we speak beautifully”, “you’re old already you need to speak beautifully” after a correction. These directives, especially right after a correction, implicate the existence of non-beautiful registers, such as the ones children hear outside of the classroom and for which they are being corrected. Hence, aside from being socialized into a certain way of speaking and adopting the literary register, children are also being socialized into the State ideology of literary Armenian constituting beautiful speech.

### **The Ideology of ‘Speaking Beautifully’**

As noted earlier, the concept of language ideological assemblage (Kroskrity 2018) treats language ideologies as part of a larger belief system subject to both internal and external influences. Language

ideologies are never just about the language that is being targeted and they “posit close relations between linguistic practices and other social activities and have semiotic properties that provide insights into the workings of ideologies more generally”(Gal, 2005). The language policies followed in Armenian public kindergartens is based on the larger State ideology of language standardization, associated with the ideology of what it means to speak beautifully.

Language ideologies governing the government policies are interactionally instantiated by teachers and kindergarten children. Below I analyze an example of a teacher labeling language as beautiful and the way in which children display their perception of the ideology. The interaction (full transcript available in the appendix) took place right after lunch time, when the children went back to their seats in the classroom, where they found their chairs set up in a semi-circle, leaving enough space for the teacher to sit in front of children and view the whole class. The teacher offered children fruits, one piece each, and placed a bowl on her chair where children were supposed to throw the seeds once they were done eating the fruit. After all the children threw the seeds in the bowl, the teacher picked up the plate and addressed one of the children instructing her to throw the seeds away. She then kept holding the plate high out of reach of the child and asked her where she was going to throw the seeds. The question prompted a follow-up discussion about the word *trashcan*. The teacher asks the question with the goal of testing what word token the child will use. The child uses the word *zibil*<sup>11</sup> (զիբիլ), which is an Arabic word that has entered Armenian through Turkish and is commonly used in conversational dialect. The teacher corrects her by providing two Armenian equivalents of the word as seen in line 1 of the transcript below: *aghbaman* (աղբաման) and *aghbarkh* (աղբարկղ), meaning ‘trashcan’ and ‘trash-bin.’ Literally translated, *aghbaman* (աղբաման) means ‘trash container’ / ‘plate,’ and *axgharkgh* (աղբարկղ) means ‘trash box’, the root *aghb* (աղբ) in both words means ‘trash.’ I have translated the word *zibil* as ‘garbage,’ to create a

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<sup>11</sup> From Ottoman Turkish زبیل (zibil) and in some dialects from Azerbaijani zibil, ultimately from Arabic زَبِيل (zibil). The Van dialect զըբիլ (zəbil) is probably borrowed via Northern Kurdish zibil



contrast between the English lexical items ‘garbage’ and ‘trashcan’ or ‘trash-bin’. The teacher’s correction sparks a discussion of word tokens tied to language ideologies examined in this thesis.

There are three participants in the interaction below. The girl who was addressed by the teacher and corrected for choosing the word token *zibil* is not included in the transcript, which depicts the follow up interaction sparked by the correction discussed above.

### Transcript 5. Trashcan

1. T: կամ աղբաման կամ աղբարկղ.

kam aghbaman kam aghbarkgh.

either trashcan or trashbin

2. T: երեխաներ արդեն մեծ եք պետք է գեղեցիկ լխուերք

erekhaner arden mets eq petq e geghecik [xoseq

children you are old already you need to speak beautifully

3. Child1: [զիբիլ] ↓պետք չի? սստլ

[zibil<sup>12</sup> ↓petq chi? asel

we shouldn’t say garbage (Armenian conversational)

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<sup>12</sup> [zi’bil] - from Ottoman Turkish زبل (zibil) and in some dialects from Azerbaijani zibil, ultimately from Arabic زبل (zibl).

4. T: բա ↑ոնց ենք սսոււմ նոր սսեցի

ba ↑vonc enq asum nor aseci

then how do we say it I just said it

5. T: ա::ղ-բա::-մա::ն

a::gh-ba::-ma::n ((some children say it with her))

trashcan (Armenian literary)

6. Child1: զիբիլ գեշ ա? (Armenian conversational)

zibily gesha?<sup>13</sup>

garbage (Armenian conversational) is ugly

(1.5)

7. T: հս շսս

ha:: shat

yes very

8. Child2: հսմ էլ էղ հսյերեն չի

[ham el ed hayeren chi

also it is not in Armenian

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<sup>13</sup> Not a question mark, marks rising intonation, which in this case is also indicating that the utterance is a question

9. T: ապրես հայերեն չի աղբամանն է

apres >hayeren chi<. aghbamann e

good job it is not in Armenian. trashcan (Armenian literary) is

After providing the two substitutes for the conversational register word *zibil* (զիբիլի) in line 1, the teacher follows up the correction with the utterance in line 2 encouraging children to “speak beautifully.” Similar to the previous example (Transcript 4), this is an explicit correction in which the teacher’s utterance addressing the trouble sources is followed by an explanation of the correction. One of the boys reflects on the teacher’s correction by jumping in and asking, “we shouldn’t say garbage?”. The talk shifts, and the correction becomes the main topic of the discussion. In Jefferson’s terms, the ‘correcting’ has become the business. This shift provides room for further accounting, which is possible regardless of how or by whom the correction was produced (Jefferson, 1987). In this example, while the teacher does the correcting, and provides an explanation, the accounting is taken even further by the children. This is a rare example when the teacher’s correction is questioned, or rather made explicit and put under examination by one of the children. In line 4, instead of directly answering the boy’s question, the teacher provides a follow up question prompting children to use the correct words by reflecting on the correction that she just made. She then proceeds to repeat the word *aghbaman* (աղբաման) in line 5 syllable by syllable encouraging children to repeat along with her. However, this response does not satisfy the boy, who rephrases the question in line 6 by asking “Is garbage ugly?”, thereby providing a potential explanation about why the word token should not be used. This query is followed by a relatively long pause (in conversational time) as the teacher hesitates to call the word ‘ugly’. Throughout fieldwork I never heard teachers use the label ‘ugly’ in reference to the conversational register or any register, dialect, or language variety. However, the label ‘beautiful’ is being constantly used when talking about the literary Armenian,

and in most, if not all, cases the label is used right after a correction. This practice, of course, creates the possibility of an ‘ugly’ register, which can be inferred by children as showcased when the boy questions whether the word should be avoided because it is “ugly.”

After a pause, the teacher says hesitantly, “yes very”, meaning ‘yes it is very ugly’, yet still not using the label *ugly* herself and lengthening the vowel in *yes* in a hesitant manner. In line 8 one of the girls jumps in with the utterance “also it is not in Armenian”. The teacher confirms this and gives affirmation to the girl in line 9. The discussion shifts back to the class material after this, and the word token or the larger questions regarding the language varieties are not discussed further.

There are also cases of certain tokens being left uncorrected within this example. In line 6 the child says *zibily gesh a?* (is garbage ugly), where the token ‘*a*’ (u) is the auxiliary verb used in conversational Armenian, the literary Armenian equivalent is ‘*e*’ (t). There are examples that show corrections of this token, yet, among ‘problem sources’ left uncorrected, it is one of the most common, especially when used in informal contexts and when the focus of the talk is something else at the time. This interaction took place during the beginning of the class time, right after lunch. All the children were sitting in the structured semi-circle with the teacher in the middle, so the setting is formal and structured. However, the focus of the talk at the time is on another correction, which is a much more important correction, as it deals with a lexical item rather than a smaller grammatical token. Further, the correction that the teacher provided in line 1 has been further expanded by the children, and the teacher is too occupied with the ongoing correction to introduce yet another one.

Later, in line 7 teacher herself uses a word token that is a marker of conversational Armenian. The word *ha* (huu-yes) is used by the teacher here, while at other times children get corrected when using it instead of the literary Armenian *ayo* (ujn-yes) . While there are still many examples of this token being corrected by the teachers, among the uncorrected examples this is the second common one. As the teacher’s focus is on the discussion of the original correction, she might not be as focused on monitoring the speech of the children or her own. At the same time this could be an echoing of the previous line 6, where the child uses

the conversational Armenian, and the teacher continues the conversation by picking up the shift introduced by the child.

This interaction highlights several key features of the language ideology, the teacher's way of employing correction as a strategy to implement the government language policies, and how the ideology and its practical execution intertwine and eventually are appropriated by the children. The fact that the teacher starts the interaction by prompting a child to test which word token she would use, suggests that the teacher was anticipating that the child might choose the word token marking the conversational register. It is possible that the given word has also been discussed previously as well. It was common for teachers to reflect back on a word token that they had corrected before to test if children had internalized the 'mistake'. The token that gets corrected has been assessed as wrong by the teacher purely on the basis of its register. Even though the referential content of the child's response was correct, the teacher corrects the register by providing the literary Armenian substitutes for the word. In my observations, Armenian children were routinely socialized into these types of corrections, and, in similar contexts, they learned how to shift to a different register rather than alter the referential content of their answers. Through participating in the corrective routines, children learn to monitor their speech and eventually not require other-correction, which is in line with Friedman's findings in language and literature classes in Ukraine (Friedman, 2010b). Similar to the classroom interactions in Ukraine, where children were socialized into language ideologies that define "speaking correctly" and monitoring their own speech to avoid use of Russian or mixed forms, in Armenian kindergartens *speaking beautifully* means avoiding foreign borrowings, particularly Russian, and markers of the conversational register.

The position and setup of the chairs of the other children and location of the teacher and the first girl whom she addresses in relation to the rest of the class are also crucial. The teacher asks her question in a loud performative stance. Even though directed to one girl, it was meant to be overheard by the other children. As the teacher was standing in the middle of the semi-circle in full view of the rest of the class, she called out to the girl, who also joins her in the center, hence their interaction is in full view of the

class and becomes the focus of everybody's attention. As discussed by Ekaterina Moore (2013) in her study of directives and their use by Russian preschool teachers to socialize children into becoming members of the preschool setting, directives can be a multi-party activities where others can participate through eye-gaze and conduct mutual-monitoring. In the interaction depicted in transcript 5, while the directive produced by the teacher is addressing only one girl, all the other children in the class are participating through their eye gaze. This participation is taken even further when children other than the girl initially being addressed intervene in the interaction verbally. Moore discusses this phenomenon as "co-participation in the production of evaluations", where "children hear and observe what is being done and told, and try to co-participate, understand, create and recreate the realities that are demonstrated by the adults" (E. Moore, 2013).

Unlike most of the kindergarten interactions containing corrections, this example is unique in that it expands into a discussion about the corrected word token, thereby revealing ideologies surrounding the correction. As the boy asks why they should not use the word *zibil* (garbage), he also further unpacks the question of the word token possibly being ugly. Later, another girl intervenes by proposing that the word token is also not in Armenian. As revealed by Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), corrective feedback practices transacts underlying cultural beliefs and values and orients children to appropriate language use is (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Friedman (2010a: 206) illustrates this point by stating that "classrooms do not exist in a vacuum, but are situated within a web of cultural, social, and ideological beliefs and practices that shape both classroom routines and the way that these routines are interpreted." From the opinions voiced by the Armenian kindergarten children, we see that they have come to the conclusion that a certain word should not be used if (1) it is not considered an Armenian word, and (2) it, is "ugly," which means it is not the literary register. Aside from paying attention to a specific token that is the target of correction, children also begin to piece together the larger ideologies surrounding the different languages, registers, and codes. Once children grasp the idea of what beautiful language constitutes and start comparing the given standard with other codes, the possibility of the existence of non-beautiful languages becomes apparent. Often, the non-beautiful or "ugly", as the boy put

it, language is the language used by the children's parents, the language that they hear from their friends, or the dialect that they use with grandparents when they visit them in their village. Teachers used to tell me anecdotal stories of how children change the way they speak when they first start attending kindergarten, and sometimes even go home and correct their parents. Teachers used to tell these stories with a certain pride, humor, feeling gratified that their work was producing results. And while it is essential to be able to skillfully acquire and learn how to navigate all the existing languages, codes, and registers in the child's environment, assessing one variety as beautiful ranks it as better and higher than the others, creating the possibility of others being not beautiful, hence ugly.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis situates *kindergartens as a site of contemporary geopolitics*, where language policies and practices reveal the larger ideologies that exist in the country, along with the efforts of creating a national identity, and steering towards the derussification movement that the larger post-Soviet region has been undergoing since the early 1990s. The language policies following the Law on Language that was established along with Armenia's independence from USSR aims to assist the formation of the Armenian nationalist identity, which goes against the Soviet, and in turn the Russian identity. In defining themselves against the hegemonic past, Armenians themselves hegemonically reinforce certain ideas about what being Armenian means. Language is a major part of this identity, but not just any variety: the pure literary Armenian that is 'untainted' by Russian borrowings and markers of conversational Armenian, which in turn includes various older foreign borrowings.

The implementation of the language policies is seen in practice through the data corpus of participant observations and video-recordings of teacher-child interactions in public kindergartens of the capital Yerevan. By strictly monitoring children's speech, teachers provide child-directed corrections and serve as agents of children's socialization into the existing ideologies of 'speaking beautifully'. The corrections, either embedded or exposed, mostly occur in structured class time. Children are not just passive recipients

of this information but rather are active participants in enforcing the ideology and even questioning it at times. The stance taken by the state in large and teachers in kindergartens in particular provide room for potential discrimination against other existing registers and varieties within the community which children are exposed to. The formation of an Armenian identity against a Russian identity is enacted through linguistic policies and practices in kindergartens, the first state institution where children are socialized into ideologies of the country.



## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Transcript Conventions**

[ ]	Square brackets show where speech overlaps
> <	Arrows showing that the pace of speech has quickened
< >	Arrows showing that the pace of the speech has slowed down
(( ))	An entry requiring comment but without a symbol to explain it
(0.0)	Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time by tenths of seconds
↑	Rise in intonation
↓	Drop in intonation
?	Sharp rising intonation
.	Final falling intonation
wo::rd	Colon indicates prolonged vowel or consonant

### **Conventions modified**

Underlining	While in conversation analysis underlining denotes a raise in volume or emphasis, I use it to emphasize the given word for analysis, not to imply that the word has been emphasized by the speaker
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## Appendix B: Full Transcript for Transcript 5 excerpt

*T – teacher*

*G – girl, numbered in the order of speaking in the video*

*B – boy, numbered in the order of speaking in the video*

T:     սս վերցրու  
          sa vercru  
          this take (2<sup>nd</sup> p, sing, present)  
          take this

T:     որտեղ ես քցելու  
          vo^rtex           es                           qcelu  
          where           verb (2<sup>nd</sup> p, sing)           throw (future)  
          where are you going to throw it ((teacher holds the plate high, out of the child's reach))

→ G1:   զիբիլ<sup>14</sup>  
          zibily  
          garbbage (nom)  
          in the garbbage (arm inform)

T:     այ իսկ  
          ay [isk  
          and but

CHILD: տրա...  
          [aghba  
          tra... (arm form)

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<sup>14</sup> [zi'bil] - from Ottoman Turkish ذبیل (zibil) and in some dialects from Azerbaijani zibil, ultimately from Arabic ذبيل (zibil).

T:     ննց ենք ասում  
 vonc    enq                            asum  
 how    aux verb (1<sup>st</sup> p, pl)        say  
 how do we say it            ((child reaches towards the plate then brings the arm back down))

B1:    սղբաման  
 Aghbaman  
 trashcan

→ T:   սղբամանը ասրես            տար  
 aghbamany    apres                    tar  
 trashcan        good job            take (2<sup>nd</sup> p, sing)  
trashcan (form arm V1) good job take it ((teacher gives the plate to the child))

T:     տար սղբարկող քցի  
 tar                            aghbarkghy    gci  
 take (2<sup>nd</sup> p, sing)        trashbin (nom) throw (2<sup>nd</sup> p, pl)  
 take it throw it in the trashbin (arm form V2)

T:     կամ սղբաման կամ սղբարկող  
 kam aghbaman kam aghbarkgh  
 either trashcan (V1) or trashbin (V2)

→ T:   երեխաներ արդեն մեծ եք պետք է գեղեցիկ խոսերք  
 erekhaner arden mets    eq                    petq    e                            geghecik xoseq  
 children already old    aux v (2<sup>nd</sup> p, pl) must    aux v(3<sup>rd</sup> p, sng)        beautiful talk (2<sup>nd</sup> p, pl)  
 children you are old already you need to speak beautifully

T: էղ ինչ բան է ինչ խոսք ասես ինչ բան ասես չեք օգտագործում  
ed, inch ban e inch khosq ases inch bar ases cheq ogtagortsum  
that what thing is (3<sup>rd</sup> p, sing) what phrase say what word say aux v(2<sup>nd</sup> p, pl, neg) use  
what is that you use such words and phrases

T: ուրեմն  
[uremn  
so

→ B2: զիբիլ պետք չի ասել  
[zibil petq↓ chi? asel  
garbage must not say  
we shouldn't say garbage (arm inform)

T: բա ոնց ենք ասում նոր ասեցի  
ba vonc↑ enq asum nor aseci  
but how aux v (2<sup>nd</sup> p, pl) say just say (1<sup>st</sup> p, sing)  
then how do we say it I just said it ((walks towards the boy))

T: աղ-բա-բան  
a::gh-ba:::-ma:::n (some children say it with her)  
trashcan (arm form)

T: բոլորս միասին  
<bolors miasin>  
all together

CHILDREN: աղ-բա-ման  
a::gh-ba:::-ma:::n  
trashcan (form arm) ((moves hand up and down with each syllaby))

B2: զիբիլը գեշ ա (arm inform) *aux verb in informal, no correction*  
zibily gesha?  
garbage ugly aux v (3<sup>rd</sup> p, sing)  
garbage (arm inform) is ugly

(1.5)

T: հա շատ  
ha::: shat  
yes very

B3: զիբիլը գեշ ա  
zibily [gesh a *inform aux verb, no correction*  
garbage(nom) ugly aux verb (3<sup>rd</sup> p, sing)  
garbage (arm inform) is ugly

G2: համ էլ էլ հայերեն չի  
[ham el ed hayeren chi  
also that Armenian to be (3<sup>rd</sup> p, sing, neg)  
also it is not in Armenian

T: սալբես հայերեն չի աղբամանն է  
apres >hayeren chi< aghbamann e  
good job Armenian to be (3<sup>rd</sup> p, sing, neg) trashcan(nom) to be (3<sup>rd</sup> p, sing)  
good job it is not in Armenian trashcan (arm form) is

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