

Հայերէն (Hayeren) : Armenian linguistic heritage in Brazil

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The history of the planet is characterized by contexts of immigration, in mass or not, for instance the Armenian diaspora communities living in America, mainly in the US. Most Armenian immigration began at the end of the 19th century and continued into the 20th century. The first moment was the consequence of Armenian persecution by the Ottoman empire in 1890; the second moment – still a persecution by the same empire – was the Armenian genocide which lasted from 1915 to 1922. In Brazil, the biggest wave of Armenian migration took place in the 1920s when many Armenians, mainly from Lebanon and Syria, who had survived the Armenian genocide settled in the São Paulo area. In this pilot study, we investigate the Armenian language as a heritage language in Brazil by carrying out a survey with Armenian Brazilians – people who are fully, partially, or predominant of Armenian descent, or Armenian immigrants in Brazil (GRÜN 1996). In general, the Western Armenian is the standardized form of Modern Armenian most known by the communities in Brazil, which is based mainly on the Istanbul Armenian dialect. Eastern Armenian is another standardized form which is mainly based on the Yerevan Armenian dialect (VAUX 1998). In Brazil, the language is spoken at home, cultural centers, and churches as the Armenian Cathedral of St. Gregory the Illuminator in Sao Paulo. The total of 15 Armenian Brazilians participated in our survey, aged 20 – 71 years old, from the state of São Paulo. The majority is great-grandsons/granddaughters or grandsons/granddaughters of Armenians. The participants were invited by social media to answer a survey on google forms. All subjects have higher education. Our results show that: a) the Western Armenian is the most known variety (68%) in the Armenian community in Brazil; b) following the categorization proposed by Dopke (1992), Armenian Brazilians are both receptive (40%) and productive (53%) speakers of Armenian language, as only one person (7%) said he did not know the language at all; c) the language was learnt both in Armenian school (53%), at home (20%) and some of them did not choose any alternative (27%); most Brazilian Armenians considered Armenian as their mother language (13%), their second language (20%) or their third or fourth language (40%). When the subjects were asked to explain briefly what speaking Armenian language means to them, the most frequent answer was related to *identity* followed by *a way to keep their culture, resistance, a way to continue the Armenian heritage, the history of their ancestors, to honor their ancestors, a means to communicate with their friends*, among others. This study is still ongoing and intends to be continued by investigating some

grammatical heritage language outcomes as there is a lack of studies on Armenian as a heritage language in Brazil.

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