

LEARNER PROFILE: ARMENIAN (հայերեն)

This guide presents common challenges faced by Armenian learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems; however, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging.



Facts

- **Language family:** A separate language in Indo-European language family.
- **Native speakers:** 6.7 million
- **Dialects:** Eastern and Western Armenian
- **Location:** Armenian is an official language in Armenia and Artsakh. Eastern and Western Armenian are spoken by Armenian diaspora communities across the world.
- **Writing system:** Armenian alphabet



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Pronunciation

- The sounds /ð/ (the initial sound in 'then') and /θ/ (the initial sound in 'think') are not found in Armenian and may be tricky for students with Armenian as a first language to articulate.
- Armenian is a syllable-timed language which places the syllable stress on last syllable of a word, except for some specific cases and when there is a definite article. English is a stress-timed language and native Armenian speakers may have difficulties adopting English stress patterns.

Grammar

- Questions can be formed in four ways in Armenian. Firstly, Armenian can invert the verb and the subject ('Eat you bread?'). Secondly, affirmative sentences can be made into questions using intonation ('You eat bread?'). The third way is putting the pronoun last ('Eat bread you?') and, finally, using tag questions to form questions. Armenian does not have a do-support construction for forming questions, as in English, 'Do you eat bread?'
- Negative sentences are formed by attaching the letter 'չ' to the auxiliary of the verb (so 'ես' becomes 'չես'), or to the main verb (so 'նստեցիր' becomes 'չնստեցիր'). The negative particle is attached at the front of the verb, rather than after, as it is in English.
- Armenian has seven cases (nominative, accusative, dative, instrumental, locative, genitive and ablative). Armenian pupils may find the grammar of modern foreign languages easier to understand by showing the mapping of Armenian grammar to the MFL. The inflectional morphology means Armenian has a freer word order.
- In Armenian grammar there are no gender distinction on personal pronouns. The pronoun 'նա' can be used for 'he', 'she' or 'it'. The referent can be ascertained through context.



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Writing

- Armenian has its own alphabet made of 39 letters. It was created in 405 AD. Initially, there were 36 letters, but, in the 12th century, the last 3 letters were added. Every letter of the Armenian alphabet has a numerical value. Interestingly, the traditional Armenian names of the 7 prehistoric metals (gold, silver, tin, copper, lead, iron and mercury) all have a numerical value which corresponds to their atomic number; a discovery recorded almost 1500 years later.
- In Armenian, each sound has a corresponding letter. This means there are no digraphs; the 'sh' sound, which, in English combines the letters 's' and 'h', has just one letter, 'շ', in Armenian.
- There are two accepted written forms of Armenian – Eastern and Western Armenian. Eastern Armenian is based on the Ararat dialect and has around 4.3 million speakers. Western Armenian is based on the Istanbul Armenian dialect and has about 1.4 million speakers.
- The Armenian mijaket (միջակետ, .) is used where a semi-colon might be used in English, and the verjaket (վերջակետ, :) is used where a full stop might be used. The hartsakan (հարցական նշան, ?) is used as a question mark.
- Quotation marks in written Armenian are written as « ... ».
- In Armenian, question, exclamation and stress marks are placed above the word to be emphasised, whereas in English, we put them in the end of the sentences.

False friends between English and Armenian

- English 'love' sounds like the Armenian word 'lav' (լավ), which means 'good'
- English 'hi' sounds like the Armenian word 'hay' (հայ), which means 'Armenian person'
- English 'leaf' sounds like the Armenian word 'liif' (կրծքկալ), which means 'bra'
- English 'yes' sounds like the Armenian word 'yes' (ես), which means 'me'
- English 'inch' sounds like the Armenian word 'inch' (ինչ), which means 'what'
- English 'car' sounds like the Armenian word 'car' (ավտոմեքենա), which means 'stone'
- The English word 'bud' sounds like the Armenian word 'bud' (բըձյուղ), which means 'duck'

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Cultural differences

- Since 2011, chess has been made a compulsory subject for primary school pupils. Many world-famous chess players come from Armenia.
- Russian is also widely used in Armenia and translanguaging between Armenian and Russian is common. Pupils can watch cartoons and Soviet Union time movies in Russian.
- In the 5th AD century, the first school was opened in Amaras by Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian alphabet. In a short time, the monastery became one of the main religious, cultural and educational centres of Armenia. After that, schools and educational institutions were opened next to churches. Education is valued by Armenians and families feel responsible to provide their children with the best education possible.
- Armenians use lots of body language during conversations. Eye contact is also expected. Armenians tend to use lots of exaggerations and idioms in daily communication too.

Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons

-  Beginner > A few basics > Personal pronouns

-  Beginner > Phonics 1

-  Beginner > Phonics 2

-  Beginner > Letters & Numbers

-  Beginner > Punctuation > Full stops

-  Beginner > Punctuation > Semi-colons

-  Beginner > Punctuation > Inverted commas

-  Intermediate > Career & Studies > Must vs. Have to