

Kaghakatsi- The endangered Armenian Variety of Jerusalem

em.Prof. M.Stone (Dept. of Indian, Iranian and Armenian Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem) proposed J. Dum-Tragut to work on the highly endangered Armenian variety of Jerusalem. This variety which is usually called "*Kaghakatsi*" (townsman) is one of the most interesting Armenian varieties (rather grouped with Western Armenian).

The Armenian community in Jerusalem was first established between the 3rd and 5th centuries and since that time has remained relatively isolated from the other speakers of Armenian. It has also been subjected to a degree of Arabic influence that is usually uncommon in Armenian linguistic communities. This variety, which is also unique because of its lexicon, is a distinctive variety of Armenian that has emerged in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. It is strictly separated from the other Armenian varieties and speakers in Jerusalem, both socially and linguistically.

This Armenian variety has never been thoroughly studied by armenologists or linguists and is generally not known outside of the Armenian community in Israel.

The first step to make the Jerusalem Armenian dialect known in a broader, particularly scientific public, was an initial report prepared by the Prof. B. Vaux, whose three-week survey produced a report that is being published in the volume *Armenians in Jerusalem and the Holy Land* (Vaux, B. (2002): *The Armenian dialects of Jerusalem. In: Armenians in the Holy Land.* ed. Michael Stone. Louvain: Peeters, p. 231-254) This report is rather superficial and gives an introduction to the history of Jerusalem Armenians, into the sociolinguistic status quo and an overview of the sound system, some lexical items and sayings, as well as sporadic indications of some morphological and syntactic features, mainly taken from Arabic or Turkish.

The recording work was carried out by Armenologist Prof. Th.M. van Lint (Oxford); he conducted tens of interviews with native speakers still alive in the Armenian Quarter. These were recorded on audio disks.



The fact that the interviews were conducted by a distinguished armenologist does however not necessarily imply that the recorded material really meets the demands for recording in linguistic fieldwork and for a grammar-like description of a dialect. There must be sufficient and adequate linguistic material in order to describe the dialect as a whole. Thus it was absolutely conceivable that more elicitations and interviews have to be recorded.

A sociolinguistic survey of Kaghakatsi families and further interviews and recordings were led by J. Dum-Tragut in November 2009. The main reason for this field work was to study the sociolinguistic setting of the view remaining kaghakatsi in the Old City of Jerusalem, but also to collect more recorded material, particularly based on giving special linguistic impulse material in form of pictures and picture

stories.

The goal of this project is the detailed description of the Armenian Kaghakatsi variety of Jerusalem, as a kind of reference grammar, but also in the frame of a holistic sociolinguistic study.

This unique Armenian variety is nowadays highly endangered and will most probably not be spoken anymore in a few years.

See: <http://www.kaghatzi.org/jasmine.htm>

