The Forms of the Indefinite Article in Eastern Armenian
Pre-Modern, Early and Colloquial Eastern Armenian Sources

Hasmik Sargsyan
Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Universität Hamburg;
Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Deutschland

Abstract   This paper studies the formal distinction of the indefinite article from the quantifier 'one' in Early and pre-Modern Armenian texts by three 18-19th century authors as well as in a colloquial Modern Eastern Armenian dialogue. The key question is whether these sources use the same forms for both functions. The paper gives typological, diachronic, and areal perspectives to the analysis of non-standard data rarely included in discussions of the historical grammar of Armenian. It also touches upon some general issues of grammaticalization of the forms of 'one' as an indefinite article and the use of numeral classifiers in colloquial Eastern Armenian.

Keywords   Indefinite article. Numeral 'one'. Eastern Armenian. Historical grammar. Pre-modern Armenian. Colloquial Eastern Armenian. Abovyan. Gilanentz. Erewantsi.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Indefinite Articles in the World's Languages. – 3 The Indefinite Article in Armenian: Early and Pre-Modern Eastern Armenian Data from a Diachronic Perspective. – 4 Conclusions and Future Prospects.

1 Introduction

While there are a few studies on the indefinite article or at least mentions of it in grammars of the standard varieties of Armenian (Classical, Eastern and Western), its use in modern and historical non-standard varieties has hitherto never been touched upon. Non-standard varieties often show a different linguistic picture than standard varieties and, thus, their study may contribute to a fuller understanding of the diachronic processes of grammaticalization paths of certain grammatical units and language change in general. The choice of non-standard texts of Armenian from a period that is linguistically understudied, namely post-Classical and pre-Modern (roughly 12th-19th cc.), aims to contribute to filling this knowledge gap.

The paper is organised as follows. The next paragraph will include a brief introduction to the relevant terminology and a typological perspective on the formal distinction between the indefinite article and the numeral 'one' based on evidence from other languages.

Paragraph 3 discusses the data from three 18th-19th-centuries Armenian texts (Abovyan, Erewantsi, Gilanents) and compares it with a colloquial Modern Eastern Armenian dialogue. A summary of the main results is given in section 4. A list of abbreviations not included in "Leipzig Glossing Rules"[1] in section 5 and a list of references in section 6 conclude the paper.

2 Indefinite Articles in the World's Languages

To put the notion of 'indefinite article' into a wider perspective, it is worth giving definitions of the terms 'reference', 'definiteness', 'indefiniteness', and 'specificity'.

Reference in linguistics can be described semantically or pragmatically. *Semantic reference* (something *expressions* do) can be ascribed to morphemes, phrases, and even whole sentences. *Pragmatic reference* is what *speakers* do, and in this understanding, only noun phrases[2] can bear reference (Gundel, Abbott 2019, 2). Reference in the latter sense (i.e. as a speech act) is the speaker's ability to draw on discourse participants (humans, objects, notions) that have either already been mentioned in the given discourse or are general knowledge and are as such present in the discourse universe (Germ. *Redeuniversum*). By referring to speech units, the speaker can assume that the hearer knows the referent that is invoked, in which case the

---

[1] See https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing–Rules.pdf.

[2] Nominal phrases, NPs, or determiner phrases, DPs, according to different linguistic approaches.

referent is at least pragmatically *definite*. The referent is on the contrary at least pragmatically *indefinite* if the speaker assumes that the referent is new to the hearer.

NPs with an indefinite status can still be of different types. Indefinite discourse units that the speaker can refer to are often divided into *specific* and *nonspecific* ones. Although specificity is not the focus of the present research, definitions of specific and nonspecific indefinite articles will also be given.

In the present paper, these two terms are used in the following sense, mostly relying on Heine 1997 (see also below): *specific* referents apply to those discourse participants that are identifiable for the speaker, but not for the hearer. *Nonspecific* referents still imply individual representatives or instances of a concept (humans, objects, notions), but neither the speaker nor the hearer know them, nor is it relevant for the given discourse if they do. A further distinction can be made between nonspecific and *generic* referents, the difference being that the latter type applies a concept and not individual representatives or instances thereof. Consider the following examples:

(1)   German (a), English (b)
      a. ***Eine Frau***, die ich nicht kannte, war gestern hier. Sie war Ingenieurin.
      b. ***A woman***, whom I did not know, was here yesterday. She was an engineer.

(2)   German (a), English (b)
      a ***Eine Frau*** war gestern hier und kein Mann.
      b. ***A woman*** was here yesterday, not a man.

(3)   German (a), English (b)
      a. ***Eine Frau*** war gestern hier. Hat meine Nachbarin gesagt.
      b. ***A woman*** was here yesterday, said my neighbour.

In each of the examples, the sentences a. (German) and b. (English) have the same meaning and represent the same type of indefinite NPs (in italics) that are, with the exception of the second indefinite NP in (1a), marked with the indefinite article 'eine' in German and 'a(n)' in English.

In example (1) the NPs Germ. '*eine* Frau' and Eng. '*a* woman' refer to a certain, identifiable woman, as becomes evident from the subsequent context. We can say the NPs in question in (1) are *specific*. Another type of specificity are the examples in (2): '*eine* Frau' and '*a* woman' still refer to an identifiable woman, but as opposed to the examples in (1), her identity does not matter and is only incidental for the given context (cf. Givón 1981, 36-7). The NPs in question in (3) also refer to an identifiable woman; however, neither the speaker nor the hearer know her, only a third person (the 'neighbour') who conveyed the information on the given context to the speaker. This type can be called *cited specificity*.

Compare further the following examples:

(4)   German (a), English (b)
   a. Ich lese gerade *ein Buch*. Es geht darin um die Komponistinnen des 19. Jh.
   b. I am reading *a book*. It talks about 19th century composers.

(5)   German (a), English (b)
   a. Jeden Abend liest sie *ein Buch*. Am liebsten liest sie Krimis und Reiseberichte.
   b. She reads *a book* every evening. She likes crime thrillers and travel reports the most.

(6)   German (a), English (b)
   a. *Ein Buch* muss die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns. (Kafka)
   b. *A book* must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. (Kafka)

The indefinite NPs in (4) refer to a certain identifiable book, so that '*ein* Buch' and '*a* book' are specific again. One interpretation of the indefinite NPs in (5a) and (5b) can be that they are *nonspecific*, since they refer to not just one but several representatives of the category of books. Another possible interpretation would be that the indefinite NPs in (5) are nonspecific and *generic*, or just generic since they might also refer to the category itself. However, '*a* book' in the examples in (6) can only refer to the whole category of books, not to identifiable representatives of it, which makes the indefinite articles 'a' and 'ein' in (6) nonspecific and *generic*, or just generic. If both (5) and (6) are interpreted as nonspecific, then (5) can be seen as less nonspecific than (6). In fact, in some contexts it is hard to decide whether a specific, nonspecific, or generic use of the indefinite article is employed, and it might be handier to think about specificity as a continuum.

The terms 'definite' and 'indefinite', as well as 'specific', 'nonspecific', and 'generic', can either be understood as only concerning "the informational status of the referents of the nominals" (Khan 2001, 85) or as grammaticalized categories. Pragmatically definite or indefinite NPs do not have to be marked as such formally, morphologically, or otherwise. This is true both cross-linguistically and regarding different kinds of (in)definiteness within individual languages. Thus, some languages express (certain) definite or indefinite meanings formally, others do not. For instance, while English and German differ only in marking a nominal predicate referring to a category as in 'Ingenieurin' vs '*an* engineer' in example (1), other languages might mark the other types of specific indefinite NPs in (1)-(3) differently, or even further types not discussed here. The same might apply to examples (5) and (6).

Strategies of expressing definiteness and indefiniteness can be grammaticalized to different degrees in different languages (see below). Under the term 'indefinite article', Heine includes:

independent words, particles, clitics or affixes; they may be seg-
mental or suprasegmental; and they may precede or follow the
noun they determine. (Heine 1997, 67)

Heine (1997, 72-6) and Heine, Kuteva (2006, 104-5) propose five stag-
es of grammaticalization of the indefinite article starting from the
numeral for 'one'. Languages at the first stage lack indefinite arti-
cles and the numeral for 'one' is used only as a quantifier. The sec-
ond stage is called the "presentative marker stage" (Heine, Kuteva
2006, 104), a stage at which the speaker introduces to the hearer or
into the discourse new discourse participants that are going to be
"taken up as definite in subsequent discourse" (Heine 1997, 72). At
stage 3, the numeral for 'one' functions as a *specific marker*, with its
use being extended to any participant in discourse whom the speak-
er assumes to be unknown to the hearer, whose identity matters and
who is not incidental to the given discourse. At stage 4, the *nonspe-
cific marker* introduces even discourse participants whose identity is
known neither to the speaker nor to the hearer.[3] At stage 5, the use
of the *generalised article* implies that it "is expected to occur on all
types of nouns", even nouns in the plural (Heine, Kuteva 2006, 105).

The *World Atlas of Language Structures Online* (WALS; Dryer 2013)
lists 214 languages that have indefinite articles (out of a total of 534),[4]
among them 102 (first type) that are said to have an indefinite article
which is different from the numeral for 'one' (regardless of etymolo-
gy). In 112 languages (second type), the numeral for 'one' is used as
an indefinite article. Languages are treated as having only one form
for both the quantifier 'one' and the indefinite article if the difference
between these two functions is only stress (like e.g. German) or if the
indefinite article has a different syntactic position in the noun phrase
(like e.g. Turkish or Classical Armenian).[5] Some other languages use
a morphophonologically reduced form of 'one' as an indefinite article

---

3   The use of an indefinite article is obligatory in Street Hebrew if the discourse par-
ticipant remains "salient", as opposed to cases where "*pragmatically*" their "exact iden-
tity is *incidental* to the communication" (Givón 1981, 36-7; italics in original). Street
Hebrew would, therefore, be at stage 3, and any language that uses indefinite arti-
cles also for discourse participants whose identity is incidental to the communication,
would be at stage 4.

4   Among the remaining 320 languages, 24 have an indefinite affix on nouns, 98 have no
indefinite article but a definite article, and 198 languages have neither; see Dryer 2013.

5   Some of the languages included in WALS are treated there as using the numeral 'one'
also as an indefinite article although the grammatical descriptions of these languages
lack such information. The authors of the Atlas have included these languages in the
second type (i.e. languages that use 'one' for both functions), if at least in some contexts
described in the grammars of these languages English would use an indefinite article
and not the numeral 'one'. Especially salient is the use of 'one' as an indefinite article
in languages that allow a marker of indefiniteness in plural noun phrases (Dryer 2013).

(such as Dutch); these are treated in the WALS map as having two distinct forms for the indefinite article and the numeral for 'one'.[6]

3   The Indefinite Article in Armenian: Early and Pre-Modern Eastern Armenian Data from a Diachronic Perspective

The starting point of this research was the unexpectedly high number of occurrences of *mēk* մէկ 'one' in Abovyan (see below) also functioning as an indefinite article. Example (7) is an instance of such a use.

(7)   Abovyan

Էս մէկ ադաթ էր. աչքը բաց էր արել, էնպէս էր տեսել

ēs	**mēk adat'**	ēr;	ač'k'-ə	bac'	ēr
DEM1[*]	a habit	COP.3SG.PST	eye.ACC-POSS3[**]	open	AUX.3SG.PST

[*]   DEM1: Demonstrative pronoun, proximal; DEM3: demonstrative pronoun, distal.

[**]   Possessive pronoun, third person singular.

ar-el,	ēnpēs	ēr	tes-el
do-PRF	SO.DIST	AUX.3SG.PST	see-PRF

'This was **a habit**; he had seen it so since he was born, that […]'.
(Abovyan 1-1: 53 - Abovean 1858, 17)

This use is unexpected because of what we know about the forms of the indefinite article in Eastern Armenian (see below). From here, the following questions arise: where does the use of *mēk* մէկ as an indefinite article in Abovyan come from? What possible implications does this have for the use of indefinite articles in Armenian from a diachronic perspective?

To start with, all the forms of the indefinite article in Armenian go back to one or another derivation of the numeral for 'one', something that is most of the times (if not always) the case also in other languages of the world. The three standard varieties of Armenian, Classical, Eastern and Western,[7] are said to make a formal distinction between the quantifier 'one' and the indefinite article, be it via its position in the noun phrase or (additionally) via the form of 'one'.

---

[6]   See Heine, Kuteva (2002, 220-1) for further examples from the world's languages where the numeral for 'one' functions as an indefinite article.

[7]   Due to the scarcity of evidence and lack of study on Middle Armenian (also called Cilician Armenian), as well as the lack of consensus as to whether there was a standardised variety of it, Middle Armenian will not be included in the present analysis.

However, at least for Eastern Armenian, this seems to be only true for its standard variety (see below). According to previous research, the following variants of the numeral 'one' are employed in the function of an indefinite article in the standard varieties of Armenian.

In Classical Armenian, *mi* մի as a quantifier is preposed to its head and as an indefinite article is postposed to it and unstressed.[8] According to Müth (2014, 16) the use of *mi* մի in Classical Armenian is restricted to only singular NPs.[9]

Standard Western Armenian possibly continues the grammaticalization path of Classical Armenian. More specifically, it retains a postposed albeit phonetically reduced form of *mi* մի as an indefinite article, namely *mə* մը, as opposed to the numeral for 'one' which has the form *mēk* մէկ.[10] The latter can be traced back to *miak* միակ 'only, sole', where *-ak* -ակ is a diminutive suffix. As distinct from standard Eastern and Classical Armenian, the indefinite article *mə* մը in Western Armenian can also determine noun phrases in the plural (cf. Feydit 1948, 274). Together with the reduced form of *mi* մի (i.e. *mə* մը) appearing as an indefinite article, this might indicate that Western Armenian is in a more advanced stage of grammaticalization compared to standard Eastern and Classical Armenian. Unfortunately, Western Armenian must remain beyond the scope of the present paper and can only be dealt with on another occasion.

WALS classifies Eastern Armenian (along with Western Armenian) as a language that distinguishes between the numeral for 'one' and the indefinite article without mentioning the source of this information (Dryer 2013). The forms of the numeral for 'one' and the indefinite article are *mek* մեկ[11] and *mi* մի respectively in Eastern Armenian. Some grammars of Armenian, like e.g. Petrosyan (1987) and Movsessian (cf. 1959, 255 ff.), lack any mention of the 'indefinite article' as a grammatical category in Eastern Armenian. Malxaseanc' (1944, 3: 314, 319) ascribes both meanings to both forms.

---

8   Cf. Künzle 1984, 2: 464 ff.; Meillet 1936, 22; Müth 2014, 17; Minassian (1976, 51) contains two contradictory statements: on the one hand that Ancient (= Classical) Armenian does not have indefinite articles, and on the other hand that the numeral for 'one', *mi* մի, when postposed, can function as an indefinite article or an adjective.

9   According to Künzle (1984, 2: 472), *min* մին 'the one, one of' (*mi-n* 'one' + def. art.) is used only in opposition to *miws-n* միւս-ն 'the other'.

10   Cf. Movsessian 1959, 38; Feydit 1948, 48, 65, 274; Gulian 1902, 4-5.

11   *Mēk* մէկ and *mek* մեկ are merely orthographic variants, the latter being written in modern orthography introduced in Soviet Armenia in the 1940s.

Table 1   The numeral for 'one' and the indefinite article in the standard varieties of Armenian

	'one'	**indef.art.**
Classical Armenian	*mi*	*mi* POSTP
Modern Eastern Armenian	*mēk / mek*	*mi*
Modern Western Armenian	*mēk*	*mə* POSTP

According to Müth (2014, 19), *mēk* մէկ functions as the quantifier 'one' and *mi* մի as an indefinite article in the Modern Eastern Armenian written standard. The same author (2014, 16 ff.) also argues that the distinctive features of the indefinite article, namely its position within the noun phrase and its accentuation, are not consistent in Classical Armenian. She assumes that the preposing of the indefinite article has led to the introduction of a new form of 'one' (spelt as *mēk* մէկ or *mek* մեկ, see footnote 11 for the orthographic difference) as a numeral in Eastern Armenian. On the other hand, the postposed and, at least supposedly, unstressed indefinite article մի *mi* of Classical Armenian has developed into *mə* մը in Western Armenian.

However, a closer look at the use of the indefinite article vs the quantifier 'one' in a sample corpus search shows that the differences are not as clear-cut in Eastern Armenian. This has also been pointed out by Dum-Tragut (2009, 105-8), who provides a more detailed account of the use of the indefinite article in Eastern Armenian. According to her, *mi* մի is used for both functions and *mek* մեկ is only used as a quantifier 'one' and is in general very rare in the colloquial language.

As several authors have pointed out (Breu 1994, 53; Heine, Kuteva 2006, 108), involving non-standard varieties into the research may reveal a picture of the use of the articles that is different from that of the standard varieties. The present study will, therefore, also look at three forms of the numeral for 'one' that appear in three Eastern Armenian texts from the 18th and 19th centuries as well as in a Modern Eastern Armenian text from the EANC, namely, *mi* մի, *mēk* մէկ, *min* մին,[12] as well as *mi hat* մի հատ lit. 'one piece' for Modern Eastern Armenian.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the quantifier 'one' and the indefinite article in a sample oral text in colloquial Eastern Armenian (8,844 tokens) [table 2]. The chosen text is a dialogue, rich in new stories (and thus in new discourse participants) that the dialogue collocutors exchange and introduce all the time.

---

12   *Min* մին is a form of *mi* մի extended by the definite article *-n* -ն; see also footnote 9.

Table 2 *Mi*, *mek* in a colloquial EANC text (polylogue 076, 2006)

	mi			
	mi hat		remainder	
total number	54		92	
'one'	*2*	*ca. 4%*	*20*	*ca. 22%*
indef. art.	**26**	**ca. 48%**	**11**	**ca. 12%**
other uses*	26	ca. 48%	61	ca. 66%

* These include *mi* մի functioning as an adverb 'circa, like, etc.', *mi erku* մի երկու 'several', *mi hat* մի հատ as a particle (cf. Ger. *mal*), or adverbials like *mi k'ič'* մի քիչ 'a little, some', *mi k'ani* մի քանի 'a few, some', *mi tesak* մի տեսակ 'kind of', *mi kerp* մի կերպ 'somehow', *mi hat* (*ēl*) մի հատ (էլ) 'once (again)'.

It is important to bear in mind that the numbers in the table indicate only tendencies since the assignment of the exact function of the given forms of 'one' remains a matter of interpretation. The following remarks are based on my own reading of those functions.

Not represented in the table are 15 instances where *mek* մեկ is the first component of the adverbial *mek ēl* մեկ էլ 'then, suddenly, also, etc.'

As the table shows, indefinite articles are mostly expressed by means of *mi hat* մի հատ, with 26 instances of which only two might be interpreted as nonspecific. Three or four instances of *mi* մի might as well be interpreted as nonspecific. (8) is an example of a specific use of *mi hat* մի հատ.

(8) Colloquial Eastern Armenian (EANC)
Մի հատ աղջիկ էր, երկար սև մազեր ուներ

mi **hat** **ałjik** ēr,   erkar sew maz-er   une-r
one grain girl COP.PST.3SG long Black hair-PL have-PST.3SG
'It was **a girl**, (she) had long black hair'. (EANC, polylogue 76, 2006)

According to the table, 20 cases of the quantifier 'one' are expressed by means of *mi* մի; however, this number needs some explanation. For one, *mi* մի appears with mensural numeral classifiers[13] like, e.g. *mi bažak ǰur* մի բաժակ ջուր 'a glass of water'. The only few instances in which *mi* մի appears as a bare numeral are those with nouns denoting time (*mi tari* մի տարի 'one year', *mi rope* մի րոպե 'one minute', *mi šabat'* մի շաբաթ 'one week' etc.) or measurement (*mi metr*

---

[13] *Mensural* numeral classifiers are those that occur with nouns of low countability, like 'water', 'sand', 'ink'. By contrast, *sortal* numeral classifiers are those that are used with nouns of high countability, such as 'child', 'book', 'cat' (cf. Gil 2013).

մի մետր 'one meter', *mi santimetr* մի սանտիմետր 'one centimeter', *mi tak (ktor)* մի տակ (կտոր) 'one fold (of fabric)', etc.).

Another type is cases where *mi* մի appears with a negated verb, as in example (9):

(9)   Colloquial Eastern Armenian (EANC)
      մի տեղ մի բան չկա իրա մասին

mi	**teł**	mi	ban	č'-ka	ira	masin
even_one	place	even_one	thing	NEG-exist.3SG	REFL.3SG.GEN[*]	POSTP.about[**]

'There is *nothing* about him **anywhere**'. (EANC, polylogue 76, 2006)

[*] REFL: reflexive pronoun.
[**] POSTP: postposition.

A further 15 instances of մի *mi* include nouns denoting time, thus forming temporal adverbials in which they do not function as numerals, like *mi ōr* մի օր 'one/some day', *mi pah* մի պահ '(for) a moment', *mi angam* մի անգամ 'once (upon a time); the other day'. The meaning of *mi* մի in these phrases is not transparent and it is hard to decide whether it has the function of an indefinite article there.

The following conclusions can be drawn from these observations.

1.   In the spoken standard of Modern Eastern Armenian, *mi* մի as a quantifier is usually accompanied by numeral classifiers, including mensural ones like 'glass' (of water), 'fold' (of fabric), etc., or the sortal numeral classifier *hat* հատ 'grain' that has been grammaticalized as a universal numeral classifier. Modern East Armenian also makes use of *mi hat* մի հատ (lit. 'one grain') as an indefinite article in addition to *mi* մի (cf. Stilo 2018; see below).

     In general, the spoken standard of Modern Eastern Armenian does not seem to use bare numerals and *mi* մի seems to be used rather as a bound form. However, more research regarding these two issues is needed.

2.   Further, the spoken standard of Modern Eastern Armenian does not seem to make much use of *mēk/mek* մէկ/մեկ, neither as a numeral 'one' nor as an indefinite article (there are no instances of *mēk* մէկ in these functions in the colloquial text, as mentioned above).

In this light, the functions of *mēk* մէկ as both an indefinite article and the numeral 'one' in Abovyan's *Wounds of Armenia* come all the more as a surprise. In addition to Abovyan, two other primary sources written in spoken varieties that are closer to the Modern Eastern (rather than Western) Armenian standard from the 18th century were analysed in an attempt to shed more light on the forms of the indefi-

nite article in Eastern Armenian dialects before its standardisation in the 19th century.

Here is a short description of the three Early and pre-Modern Armenian texts from the 18th and the 19th century that are used for my analysis and their authors:

A:[14] Khachatur Abovyan's historical novel *Wounds of Armenia* (Abovean 1858), colloquially known as *Vērkʿ* Վէրք, is considered to be the first written record of Modern Eastern Armenian. At first glance, its language seems to be much closer to today's spoken standard than to the written one. Abovyan (1809-1848) himself was a native of what is now a suburb of Erevan (*Kʿanakʿeṛ*). He worked as a translator of Russian and Persian and learned German and French along with other languages during his later studies in Tartu (Dorpat), Estonia.

E:[15] Abraham Erewantsi's *History of the Wars* (Čemčemean 1977) is an account of the events in the South Caucasus and Iran at the beginning of the 18th century. Little is known about the author, only that, as his name indicates, he should have been a native of Erevan, too. His text is composed in a mixed language, Classical Armenian with Eastern Armenian influences.

G:[16] As its title states (*Chronicle by Petros di Sargis Gilanentz Written in the Dialect of Julfa*), this chronicle (Gilanēncʿ 1863) is written in a variety that was spoken by Armenians in New Julfa (*Nor J̌uła*), Iran, at the beginning of the 18th century. No further biographical details are known about the author of the *Chronicle* (except that he died in a battle in Rasht in 1724).

---

[14] 88,821 tokens in total.

[15] 132,833 tokens in total.

[16] 14,080 tokens in total.

Table 3 Distribution of *mi*, *mēk* and *min* in A, E, G, sample search

		mi		*mēk*		*min*	
A	*analysed*	*54*		*199*		*5*	
	'one'	*2*	*3,7%*	*71*	*ca. 35%*	-	-
	indef. art.	5	**c. 9,2%**	56	**c. 28%**	-	-
	other	47	c. 87%	72	c. 36%	5	100%
E	*analysed*	*54*		*10*		*97*	
	'one'	*2*	*3,7%*	*2*	*20%*	*12*	*ca. 12%*
	indef. art.	47	**87%**	**2**	**20%**	68	**c. 70%**
	other	5	9,2%	6	40%	17	c. 18%
G	*analysed*	*3*				*86*	
	'one'	*2*	*c. 67%*			33	*c. 38%*
	indef. art.	-				31	**c. 36%**
	other	1	c. 33%			22	c. 26%

Table 3 shows the functional distribution of the forms of the numeral 'one' in Abovyan, Erewantsi, and Gilanentz [table 3].[17] To exclude ambiguities as much as possible, NPs like *mēk/min angam* մէկ/մին անգամ 'once', *mēk/min ōr* մէկ/մին օր 'one day', *mēk/min k'ani* մէկ/մին քանի 'some, several', *mēk/min pok'r* մէկ/մին փոքր 'a little bit', etc.[18] were excluded from the analysis, since the meaning of the forms of 'one' is not transparent in these phrases. However, the numbers given in table 3 are, again, to be understood rather as tendencies.

The key observation here is that all three texts have one main form for expressing both functions of interest. In Erewantsi, those passages that are closer to Classical Armenian in their language prefer the form *mi* մի while those that are written rather in the vernacular of the author tend to contain *min* մին for both functions, so that the difference in usage of these two forms is rather stylistic as examples (10) and (11) show.

(10) Erewantsi

գնաց եհաս Սալհայվայ կասեն, մին գեղ այ, որ նորա մէջի մարդն փախել էր ի մէջ Հայմայդան

gnac'	ehas	Salhayvay	k-ase-n,	**min**	**geł**	ay,
go.AOR.3SG	reach.AOR.3SG	Salhayva	HABIT-say-3PL	a	village	COP.3SG

---

[17] Total numbers of *mi* մի: 142 in **A**, 129 in **E**, and 3 in **G**; of *mēk* մէկ 1,189 in **A**, 10 in **E**, and 0 in **G**; of *min* մին 5 in **A**, 271 in **E**, and 86 in **G**.

[18] In Abovyan, most of the cases of մի mi can be identified as what Heine, Kuteva (2006) call 'grammatical use patterns', namely in phrases that have a high frequency of occurrence and are loosely established without being grammaticalized.

or	nora	mēǰ-i	mard-n	p'ax-el	ēr	Haymaydan
that.REL	DEM3.GEN	inside-GEN	people-DEF	flee-PRF	AUX.3SG.PST	Hamadan

'He reached what is called Salhayva, **a village** whose inhabitants had fled to Hamadan'. (Erewantsi 8: 136)

(11) Erewantsi

ի վերայ նոցա զիշխան մի, Ֆրավոտոն անուանեալ, զօրավար կացուցանէր

i	veray	noc'a	**z-išxan**	**mi**	Fravōtōn
NL	on	PERS.3PL.GEN	NA-ruler.ACC	a	Fravoton
anuan-eal,	zōravar	kac'uc'anē-r			
name-PP	ruler	appoint-IPF.3SG			

'He appointed **a ruler** by the name of Fravoton upon them'. (Erewantsi 1: 151)

The indefinite articles identified in the three texts are mostly specific, with the exception of մէկ *mēk* in Abovyan: among the 56 instances of this element, 41 (!) nonspecific or generic meanings were identified. Cf. example (12) with examples (6a) and (6b) in Section 2:

(12) Abovyan

Մէկ ազգի պահողն էլ լեզուն ա ու հաւատը

mēk	**azg-i**	pah-oł-n	ēl	lezu-n	a
a	nation-GEN	keep-PTCP.SUBJ-DEF	and.CONTR	language-DEF	COP.3SG
u	hawat-ə				
and	religion-DEF				

'Language and religion are what keeps **a nation** alive'. (Abovyan Intro: 116 - Abovean 1858, 9)

A further crucial difference between the colloquial Eastern Armenian text discussed above and Abovyan is that the latter author provides only one instance of *mi hat* մի հատ (1-6 1.76) and one instance of *mēk hat* մէկ հատ (1-6 1.126), in both cases functioning as quantifier 'one'. On the other hand, what Abovyan and the colloquial text have in common is that in all cases *mi* մի occurs (probably, also as a bound form) with numeral classifiers as in example (13), that is, with nouns denoting time or measurement, and not as a bare numeral. Note that *mēk* մէկ still outnumbers *mi* մի in instances where the numeral 'one' is used with nouns denoting time or measurement.

(13) Abovyan

Սաքի որ շատ էլ մալ, դօվլաթ ունեցայ, աշխարքի տէր էլ դառայ, հօ էլի պտի խողը մտնիմ: Իմն ա մի բուռը խողը, մէկ գազ կտաւը

sakʻi	or	šat	ēl	mal	dōvlatʻ
if	SUB	much	even.ENCL	cattle.ACC	wealth.ACC
unecʻ-ay	ašxarkʻ-i	tēr	ēl	daṙ-ay,	
have-AOR.1SG	world-GEN	owner	even.ENCL	become-AOR.1SG	
hō	ēli	pti	hoł-ə	mtni-m.	im-n
after_all	still	DEB	DEB	enter-1SG	POSS.1PL-DEF
a	**mi**	**buṙ**	**hoł-ə,**		mēk
COP.3SG	one	handful	soil-DEF		one
gaz	ktaw-ə.				
gaz	linen-DEF				

'(Even if I had a lot of wealth and were at the peak of the world, I still have to die.) All I will take with me is **a handful of soil** and *a piece of linen*'. (Ch. 1, pt. 2, sentence nos 95-6; Abovean 1858, 32)

The data of tables 2 and 3 can be summarised as follows:

1. neither the colloquial Eastern Armenian text nor texts A, E, or G show a clear formal distinction between the functions of a quantifier 'one' and an indefinite article. What follows from the colloquial Eastern Armenian text and Abovyan is that մի *mi* does not appear as a bare numeral but instead accompanies numeral classifiers as quantifiers or appears with nouns denoting time, measurement, etc. to form adverbials. The distinction between *mi* մի and *min* մին in Erewantsi is rather stylistic. The formal distinction between the two functions in the literary languages – with *mi* մի being an indefinite article and *mēk* մէկ a quantifier 'one' – might thus be an artificial one, created during the standardisation of Eastern Armenian in the 19th century. Further, a general difference between these forms consists in the fact that, in contrast to *mi* մի, only *mēk* մէկ and *min* մին (as well as *mi hat* մի հատ) can be used as non-bound forms, i.e. as indefinite pronouns.

2. The use of *mēk* մէկ as an indefinite article, especially as a nonspecific or generic one, in Abovyan seems very non-typical compared to both standard and colloquial Modern Eastern Armenian varieties on the one hand, and to Gilanentz and Erewantsi on the other. What triggered this peculiarity is a question for further research involving additional data from Early Eastern (and Western) Armenian texts. The influence of Western Armenian, Classical Armenian, or other languages of the time that the scholars standardising Armenian were

aware of, like German or French or contact languages of Armenian, might also play a role.

The WALS map of distribution of different types of languages in terms of the use (or absence) of indefinite articles suggests no "strong areal patterns", but languages that do distinguish between a numeral 'one' and an indefinite article "are somewhat more common in Africa and Europe" (Dryer 2013). On the other hand, Heine and Kuteva consider language contact to be "a relevant factor in the evolution of articles in Europe" (Heine, Kuteva 2006, 109-10). This is true of several languages of Eastern Europe that "are on the way to acquiring articles in this way" (110). Especially evident is that articles are emerging only in those Slavic languages that have been in contact with strongly developed article systems (110, citing Putzu 2002, 250). Heine and Kuteva further observe that the evolution of the indefinite articles shows "a gradual geographic transition" in "the languages to the east of Romance and Germanic as well as to the north of Greek" (2006, 120).

Thus, it might prove worthwhile putting the grammaticalization of the indefinite article in Armenian, too, in the context of areal tendencies. For instance, Stilo (2018) discusses the use of a word for 'grain → piece, unit' as a (sortal) numeral classifier in a number of languages of the Araxes-Iran linguistic area,[19] in parts of which Armenian is also spoken. The same author (2018, 144) states that the word for 'grain' never appears with nouns denoting time and measurement, an observation that is confirmed by the data used in this paper.

A detailed comparison with the contact languages of Armenian is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, what follows is only a brief account of the most important contact languages.

Russian[20] and Georgian do not have articles and only rarely use the numeral for 'one' as an indefinite article; its use is, moreover, not obligatory in any context.[21] In Azerbaijani, the numeral 'one' *bi(r)* occurs as a marker of specificity (stage 3).[22] In Turkish, the numeral for 'one' *bir* has a different position in the noun phrase when functioning as an indefinite article (Dryer 2013). All these languages use the same form of the numeral 'one' as a quantifier and in the (rare) function of an indefinite article.

---

19 Persian, Vafsi, Tati, Talyshi and other Iranian languages; Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijani of both Iran and Azerbaijan, Turkish, Neo-Aramaic, etc.

20 According to Breu (1994, 53), in North Russian colloquial varieties, unlike standard Russian, definite articles are attested.

21 In Georgian, *erti*, the cardinal numeral for 'one' can be employed as indefinite article, if "there is felt to be a need to underline the indefiniteness of a noun" (Hewitt 1995, 62).

22 Personal communication with Murad Suleymanov.

Modern Persian has two different forms for expressing the indefinite article and the numeral 'one', which also occur in different positions within the noun phrase: the indefinite article -*ī* is enclitic, whereas the quantifier *ye(k)* 'one' is proposed to the head noun. The indefinite article -*ī* can further occur on nouns in plural.

Consequently, a formal distinction between the two functions in question seems indeed to be rare among the languages consulted in this paper, with the exception of Modern Persian (as well as Western Armenian). When it comes to the grammaticalization stage of the indefinite article in colloquial Eastern Armenian and in the first sources written in Eastern Armenian, this remains a matter for further study. Presumably, standard and colloquial Modern Eastern Armenian show differences here, too.

4　Conclusions and Future Prospects

The study of the development of indefinite articles has been one of the desiderata in the study of the Armenian language even for the standard varieties and especially from a diachronic perspective. A look into three non-standard texts from the 18th and 19th centuries and a colloquial Eastern Armenian text showed that the study of indefinite articles in Armenian would profit from including non-standard sources, too.

The present paper tries to demonstrate that standard and colloquial Modern Eastern Armenian show significant differences when it comes to the forms of indefinite articles used. Early and pre-Modern Eastern Armenian sources show further differences in comparison to the spoken and standard Modern varieties. One important conclusion is that *mi* մի does not seem to function as a bare numeral in colloquial Armenian and occurs mostly in NPs that also contain a numeral classifier (of which *hat* հատ is the most grammaticalized instance) or function as adverbials together with nouns denoting time or measurement. Further, *mēk* մեկ is only used in the modern standard language and its use in Abovyan might be an influence from Western Armenian or other languages that the scholars standardising Eastern Armenian were aware of and used as an example in the standardisation process. Including additional Early Eastern as well as Western Armenian sources will contribute to future research.

Another general conclusion is that the formal distinction between the functions of a quantifier 'one' and an indefinite article in standard Modern Eastern Armenian might be an artificial one that was introduced during the standardisation of Eastern Armenian. This assumption stems from the analysis of a colloquial dialogue in Modern Eastern Armenian and three texts from the 18th and 19th centuries (Abovyan, Erewantsi and Gilanentz). Neither of these sources shows a clear-cut distinction of the two functions distributed between two forms of 'one'.

The grammaticalization stage of the indefinite article in Modern Eastern Armenian and the syntactic environments in which one or the other form tends to be used in colloquial Armenian is a question for further study based on a larger and more heterogeneous corpus of Eastern Armenian, be it chronologically or register-wise. A corpus-based approach to the study of the indefinite articles in Classical and Western Armenian varieties may provide a more fine-grained picture of their use in all three standard (and colloquial) varieties of Armenian.

List of Glossing Abbreviations[23]

CONTR	contrastive
DEB	debitive
DEM1	demonstrative pronoun, proximal
DEM2	demonstrative pronoun, medial
DEM3	demonstrative pronoun, distal
ENCL	enclitic
HABIT	habitual
IPF	imperfect
NA	nota accusativi
NL	nota locativi
PERS	personal pronoun
POSS3	possessive pronoun, third person
POSTP	postposition
PP	past participle
REFL	reflexive pronoun
REL	relative pronoun
SUB	subordinator
SUBJ	subjective (participle)

Primary and web sources

A *Khachatur Abovyan* (Wounds of Armenia). Source: Digilib (Digital Library of Armenian Literature), available at `https://www.digilib.am`. Based on Abovean 1858.

E *Abraham Erewantsi* (History of the Wars). Source: Digilib (Digital Library of Armenian Literature), available at `https://www.digilib.am`. Based on Čemčemean 1977.

---

23 For abbreviations used in glossing and missing in the list, see `https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf`.

G   *Petros Gilanentz* (Chronicle by Petros di Sargis Gilanentz Written in the Dialect of Julfa). Based on Gilanēnc' 1863.

EANC   *Eastern Armenian National Corpus*. http://www.eanc.net/.

Bibliography

Abovean, X. (1858). *Vērk' Hayastani* (Wounds of Armenia). Tblisi: Nersisyan Gymnasium. http://haygirk.nla.am/upload/1512–1940/1851–1900/verq_hayast1858.pdf.

Breu, W. (1994). "Der Faktor Sprachkontakt in einer dynamischen Typologie des Slavischen". Mehlig, R. (Hrsg.), *Slavistische Linguistik 1993. Referate des XIX. Konstanzer Slavistischen Arbeitstreffens. Kiel 21.-23.9.1993*. München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 41-64. Slavistische Beiträge 319.

Čemčemean, S. (ed.) (1977). *Abraham Erewanc'i. Patmut'iwn paterazmac'n 1721-1736 t'ui* (History of the Wars, 1721-1736, by Abraham Erewantsi). Venetik: S. Łazar.

Dryer, M.S. (2013). "Indefinite Articles. Chapter 38". Dryer, M.S.; Haspelmath, M. (eds), *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Leipzig. https://wals.info/chapter/38.

Durmuş, N. (2021). "Kontroverse Analyse der Enkodierung von (In)definitheit im Deutschen und Türkischen". Coşan, L.; Tahir Öncü, M. (Hrsgg), *Jüdische Lebenswelten im Diskurs*. Berlin: Logos, 71-103.

Dum-Tragut, J. (2009). *Armenian. Modern Eastern Armenian*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/loall.14.

Feydit, F. (1948). *Manuel de langue arménienne. Arménien occidental moderne*. Paris: Libraire C. Klincksieck.

Gil, D. (2013). "Numeral Classifiers. Chapter 55". Dryer, M.S.; Haspelmath, M. (eds), *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Leipzig. http://wals.info/chapter/55.

Gilanēnc', P.d.S. (1863). "Žamanakagrut'iwn Petros di Sargis Gilanēnc'i ĵułayec'oc' barbařov grac" (Chronicle by Petros di Sargis Gilanentz Written in the Dialect of Julfa). *Křunk hayoc' ašxarhin*, 4(2-3), 81-112; 181-212. English translation: Minasian 1959.

Givón, T. (1981). "On the Development of the Numeral 'One' as an Indefinite Marker". *Folia Linguistica Historica*, 15, 35-54. https://doi.org/10.1515/flih.1981.2.1.35.

Gulian, K.H. (1902). *Elementary Modern Armenian Grammar*. London; New York; Heidelberg: Julius Groos.

Gundel, J.K.; Abbott, B. (2019). "Introduction. Chapter 1". Gundel, J.K.; Abbott, B. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Reference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1-8. Oxford Handbooks in Linguistics. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199687305.013.1.

Heine, B. (1997). *Cognitive Foundations of Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heine, B.; Kuteva, T. (2002). *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511613463.

Heine, B.; Kuteva, T. (2006). *The Changing Languages of Europe*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Oxford linguistics. `https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199297337.001.0001`.

Hewitt, G. (1995). *Georgian. A Structural Reference Grammar*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. London Oriental and African language library 2. `https://doi.org/10.1075/loall.2`.

Khan, G. (2001). "The Use of the Indefinite Article in Neo-Aramaic". Zaborski, A. (ed.), *New Data and New Methods in Afroasiatic Linguistics*. *Robert Hetzron in memoriam*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 85-94.

Künzle, B.O. (1984). *Das Altarmenische Evangelium. L'Evangile arménien ancien*. 2 vols. Bern; Frankfurt a.M.; New York: Peter Lang. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXI, Linguistik und Indogermanistik 33.

Malxaseancʻ, S. (1944). *Hayerēn bacʻatrakan baṙaran* (Explanatory Dictionary of Armenian). 5 vols. Erevan: Haykakan XSH GA Hratarakčʻutʻyun.

Meillet, A. (1936). *Esquisse d'une grammaire comparée de l'arménien classique*. 2ème éd. Vienne: Imprimerie des PP. Mekhitharistes.

Minasian, C.O. (1959). *The Chronicle of Petros di Sargis Gilanentz*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional.

Minassian, M. (1976). *Manuel pratique d'Arménien ancien*. Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck.

Moravcsik, E. (1969). "Determination". *Working Papers on Language Universals (Stanford)*, 1, 64-98.

Movsessian, P.L. (1959). *Armenische Grammatik. West-, Ost- und Altarmenisch*. Wien: Mechitaristen-Buchdruckerei.

Müth, A. (2014). *Indefiniteness, Animacy and Object Marking. A Quantitative Study Based on the Classical Armenian Gospel Translation* [PhD dissertation]. University of Oslo.

Petrosyan, H.Z. (1987): *Hayerenagitakan baṙaran* (Dictionary on the Study of the Armenian Language). Erevan: Hayastan.

Putzu, I. (2002). "Total/universal Quantifiers and Definite Articles in the Mediterranean Languages. A Typological, Diachronic, and Areal Point of View". Ramat, P.; Stolz, T. (eds), *Mediterranean languages: Papers from the MEDITYP Workshop, Tirrenia, June 2020*. Bochum: N. Brockmeyer, 247-57. Diversitas Linguarium 1.

Stilo, D. (2018). "Numeral Classifier Systems in the Araxes-Iran Linguistic Area". McGregor, W.B.; Wichmann, S. (eds), *The Diachrony of Classification Systems*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 135-264. Current Issues in Linguistic Theory 342. `https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.342.06sti`.