

DEFINITENESS IN ARMENIAN AND BULGARIAN: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This study presents a contrastive analysis of the category of definiteness in Armenian and Bulgarian – two Indo-European languages that independently developed suffixed definite articles. Although both languages employ postposed markers that originate from demonstratives, their systems diverge in terms of structure, function, and historical development. The Armenian article system (*-n/-li*) arose through internal phonological processes. In contrast, the Bulgarian definite article developed within the Balkan Sprachbund through the contact-induced grammaticalization of demonstratives, becoming morphologically bound, gender- and number-sensitive, and syntactically conditioned. The study further examines the phonological and morphological rules governing article selection, highlighting the phonetic conditioning in Armenian and the more complex morphophonological and syntactic conditioning in Bulgarian. The findings support the hypothesis that both languages exemplify distinct stages of the universal grammaticalization pathway from demonstratives to definite markers, revealing the interaction of internal development and areal influence. This comparison contributes to a deeper understanding of typological variation and convergence in the expression of definiteness.

Keywords: definiteness; articles; Armenian language; Bulgarian language; contrastive analysis; linguodidactology

1. Introduction: beyond Standard Average European

Definiteness is a category that can have different realizations in different languages. In large parts of Europe, definite articles are separate words distinct from demonstratives. Languages with definite affixes are relatively common in peripheral parts of Europe, such as in the languages of Scandinavia in the north, in the Balkan area in the Southeast, in the Middle and North-West Caucasian languages, and in Basque.

The so-called “big” and best-studied languages either have articles-words like in English, German, French, among others, or don’t have articles at all like in Russian and

Polish. This affects expectations and the processing manner of the people when they encounter a language with an affixed definiteness. It also influences the way speakers perceive and recognize their languages as different, unique, and exotic in comparison with other languages they know, if the languages have some rare phenomenon. The relative infrequency of expression of the definiteness with an affix in terms of popularity and number of speakers of the respective languages in the Western world is a reason to consider it as distinctive and exotic. As a prominent Bulgarian linguist Ivan Kucarov wrote, “The category (of definiteness) is one of the exotic features of contemporary Bulgarian ... From a formal perspective, the Bulgarian category differs significantly from the same (or similar) category in the aforementioned (West-European) languages. ... The expression of the marked meaning is within a synthetic word form, i.e., there is a higher degree of grammaticalization.” (Kutsarov, 2007: 449) All in this citation is equally true about Armenian. The positive article seems exotic from the perspective of Standard Average European (Haspelmath, 2001) and is one of the distinctive manifestations of both contemporary Armenian and Bulgarian. The grammatical marking of definiteness constitutes one of the most intriguing contrasts between these two languages that have independently developed overt article systems within the wider Indo-European family. Despite superficial similarities, such as the use of enclitic or suffixed forms - these systems differ in structure, semantics, and historical origin.

Scope of the study, research questions, data, and methods

The aim of this research is to conduct a contrastive analysis of the definite articles in Armenian and Bulgarian. The scope of this type of analysis, when applied to languages that are not closely related, is theoretical with a strong focus on linguistic understanding. By comparing and analyzing the same features in non-relative languages and non-closely relative languages, we can gain a clearer understanding of the characteristic features of each language, which can lead to better descriptions and analyses. This is done by looking at the structural similarities and differences of the studied languages.

There are very few comparative and contrastive studies of Armenian and Bulgarian (Goliyski, 2018; 2022; 2023). The Armenian language has a long and stable presence in Bulgaria, but its study is mostly oriented toward historical, cultural, and ethnolinguistic research. The Armenian and Caucasian Studies is a part of the Department of Classical and New Philologies at Sofia University.

Research questions

This article addresses the following research questions:

– What is the grammaticalization status of the postposed definite article in Bulgarian and Armenian, respectively, when evaluated against established grammaticalization criteria (phonological reduction, morphological integration, syntactic fixation, and semantic bleaching)?

– To what extent do the Bulgarian and Armenian definite articles exhibit comparable formal and functional properties, despite their independent diachronic development?

– To what extent do the Bulgarian and Armenian definite articles differ in their behavior across linguistic levels – phonological, morphological, syntactic, and discourse-pragmatic?

Data and methods

The present study adopts a qualitative, contrastive linguistic methodology grounded in typological comparison. The analysis is based on multiple types of linguistic evidence: descriptive grammars and reference works on Armenian and Bulgarian, including diachronic descriptions where suitable and illustrative examples are selected from both languages. This study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven approach and therefore does not provide a quantitative, corpus-based analysis of definite article usage, nor does it exhaustively cover dialectal variation. Its primary goal is theoretical and comparative.

3. The Armenian article system

In Armenian, there are particles used as articles that function like pronouns or add definiteness to a word. These particles are *u*, *η*, *ւ*, and *ը*. They are attached to nouns, some pronouns, and other parts of speech used as nouns, for example: գիրք-*u* (girk'-s, 'my book'), տուն-*η* (tun-d, 'your house'), սպակի-*ւ* (apaki-n, 'the glass'), աշխարհ-*ը* (ashkharh-ə, 'the world'), բոլոր-*u* (bolor-s, 'all of us'), ոչ մեկ-*η* (voč' mek-d, 'none of you'), կարմիր-*ը* (karmir-ə, 'the red')¹.

According to their meaning, articles are divided into four types.

3.1. Possessive articles indicate to whom a given person or object belongs

By their meaning, they are equivalent to the genitive forms of the first- and second-person personal pronouns, as in the following գիրք-*u* = իմ գիրք-*ը*, մայր-*η* = քո մայր-*ը* (girk'-s = im girk'-y, my book; my mother, mayr-d = k'vo mayr-y). These possessive articles function in the sentence as genitive clitics.

3.2. Deictic (or personal) articles, when attached to the name of a person or object, give it the meaning of the first or second person

Երեխաներ-*u* անտառի այդ բացատը այդպես էլ չգտանք: Երեխաներ-*u*=մենք՝ երեխաներ-*u*: Մեծեր-*η* պետք է պաշտպանեք փոքրերի-*ւ*: Մեծեր-*η*=դուք՝ մեծեր-*η* (Yerekhaner-s antarri ayd bats'aty aydpes el ch'gtank': Yerekhaner-s=menk', yerekhaner-s: Metser-d petk' e pashtpanek' p'vok'rer-i-n: Metser-d=duk', metser-d -We children never managed to find that clearing in the forest. You grown-ups must protect the little ones. Grown-ups-you = you, the grown-ups.'').

3.3. Definite articles are ը and ի, pronounced [ə] and [n], respectively

When attached to the name of a person or object at the end of the word, they convey definiteness - that is, they indicate that the person or object is known to

the speaker or the listener. Ձի-ն խելացի կենդանի է: Գետ-ը վարարել է (Dzin khelats'i kendani e: Gety vararel e The horse is an intelligent animal; The river has flooded).

The article *ը* is used after a consonant, and the article *ն* is used after a vowel. Often, when a word ending in a consonant is followed by a word beginning with a vowel, the article *ն* is used for example, Դաս-ն ավարտվեց (Das-n avartvets – The lesson ended).

3.4. *The demonstrative article is u, which is used with the meaning of the demonstrative pronoun “this”, for example Օրեր-ս = այս օրերը (Orer-s = ays orery these days).*

4. The Bulgarian article system

The system of articles in Bulgarian has fewer members than Armenian as it has only articles in the field of definiteness: definite, indefinite and zero article. Even the use of indefinite article is traditionally neglected and not ubiquitously accepted in Bulgarian linguistics.

4.1. Definite articles

In Bulgarian the grammeme of definiteness expresses the specificity of referents. This specificity can take three forms: individual definiteness, quantitative totality, and generic definiteness. (Kutsarov, 2007, p. 452). Other linguists (Stankov, 1995, Marovska, 2017, among others) systematize definiteness as one-sided and two-sided, with each type including submeanings of individuality, genericity, and quantity.

The most comprehensive and multidimensional account of determination appears to be the one that integrates semantic, pragmatic, and referential dimensions, as such an approach captures not only the inherent meaning of determiners but also their contextual functions and their role in establishing and managing referential relations within discourse. Zidarova suggests three «principal lines of semantic description that have emerged in contemporary research on determination: the logico-semantic, the referential, and the pragmatic. “The category is too complex and multifaceted to be adequately described through a single approach”. (Zidarova, 2020, pp. 204 – 211).

“The use of the definite article is still not fixed within a system of rules. Researchers identify certain cases in which the article is required or prohibited, but no unambiguous framework has been established.” “The reasons for this may be twofold: 1) researchers are unable to isolate and formulate such rules; or 2) such rules simply cannot be established. In our view, the second reason is more likely. A typologization of utterances is impossible” (Zidarova, 2017, p. 43).

4.2. Indefinite articles

The indefinite articles *един (edin)*, *една (edna)*, *едно (edno)* for masculine, feminine and neuter respectively, and *едни (edni)* for plural designate a specific individual existing in the real or in a possible world, whose individual properties

are unknown to the hearer and in actual speech are most often known to the speaker. In reported speech these individual properties are most often unknown to the reproducer of the original message (Nicolova, 2107: 150)

4.3. Zero article

“The basic meaning of the zero article is non-specific reference; the speaker emphasizes only the generic properties of the referent and abstracts away from its individual properties. Before the present-day Bulgarian system of determination by means of articles was developed, noun phrases without articles were the only option (if we exclude pronominal determiners). Then came the opposition between them and the forms with the definite article, which makes it possible to speak of a zero article. Later appeared the opposition edin - zero article, which is not yet absolutely stable in all cases” (Nicolova, 2017, pp. 156 – 157)

5. Diachronic aspects: origins and development

5.1. Armenian

The emergence of the definite article *-ը* in Armenian is considered in Armenian linguistics to be a result of the language’s internal regularities and natural development. This is evidenced by the fact that no grammatically related particle exists in any of the languages related to Armenian. In Armenian linguistics, the origin of the definite article *-ը* has been examined in the comparative-historical studies of the late 19th century and in the structural linguistic studies of the 20th century. Hrachia Ajarian (1911, p. 21) considered the origin of the definite article *-ը* within what he termed “phonetic transformation,” reasoning that the definite article *-հ* in Classical Armenian was not used consistently, which therefore led to the development of two forms in the modern language - one being *-հ*, which was assigned “to words ending in vowels, and the other, *-ը*, was assigned to words ending in consonants. Beyond this, the full and systematic usage of the definite article was established.” (Ajaryan, 1911, p. 21).

It is known that word-final positions in Armenian have not been stable and have almost always undergone changes within the context of general historical phonetic transformations. Analyses show that the article in Armenian has a syncope-vowel origin and is directly conditioned by the phonological changes that occurred at the end of words. In the pre-written and early written stages of Armenian, the word-final position was an excluded position for the vowel sound *ը*, and therefore, the *-ը* article could not have existed in those language phases. But the nasal allomorph *-ւ*, which historically had the function of the definite article, remained and it could appear after both vowel- and consonant-final stems.

According to the evidence, the vowel *ը* in Armenian emerged under the influence of strong stress: the Middle Persian words *nisan* and *Tirdat* became *nshan* (sign) and *Trdat* in Armenian. We believe that the *ը*, which arose from the weakening of vowels in the first syllables within words, spread analogically to other consonant

clusters inside words, including between final -n and the preceding consonants. According to Aytinyan's interpretation: "In Armenian, words ending in -ըն lose their final -ն sound due to being unstressed- ձուկն>ձուկը (dzukn > dzuke 'the fish'), եօթն>եօթը>յօթ yot'n > yot'e > yot 'seven'). By analogy, consonant-final words replace their final definite -ն with ը" (Aytinyan, 1866).

The transition from -ն to -ը, as described by A. Aytinyan, initially "...was at times an insignificant addition," which gradually spread more widely due to analogy. The -ը article, of dialectal origin, came into formal contrast with the -ն article. A well-established fact is the presence of the non-stressed vowel ը, forming a hidden syllable between two final consonants in words like տունըն (tunən, 'the house'), բանըն (banən, 'the word'), թագաւորըն (tagavorən, 'the king'), ծառըն (tsarən, 'the tree'), ազգըն (azgən, 'the nation'), and similar phonological structures. Due to being preceded by a consonant, the ը in consonant-final words was pronounced as -ən, then evolved into a full vowel and, after the fall of -ն, assumed the function of the definite article. A. Aytinyan also alludes to the fact that ը was vocalized in Classical Armenian: "The unstressed final ը appears only in the modern language in place of the Classical Armenian syllable -ən: մարդը (mardə, 'the man') (Aytinyan, 1866). This shows that the nasal allomorph -ն maintained its function in unstressed positions especially after consonants. Its loss created the structure in which the schwa allomorph -ը could stabilize in Modern Armenian.

By the same principle, the nasal -ն was pushed out of word-final position in a number of Classical Armenian words such as եզն (ezn 'the goat'), մուկն (mukn, 'the mouse'), գոնն (garn, 'the lamb'), ոտն (ot'n, 'the foot') and in words with the suffix -ումն -(umn), like շարժումն, (sharzhumn, 'movement'), ուսումն (usumn, 'study'), դեգերումն (degerumn, 'wandering'), which were also pronounced like consonant-final words with a definite -ն article, where a semi-vowel ը vocalized between the two consonants. These patterns demonstrate that the nasal allomorph -ն and the schwa allomorph -ը emerged from different phonetic environments but finally formed a certain system: -ն after vowels, and -ը (historically -ən) after consonants.

5.2. Bulgarian

Unlike Armenian, the development of the definite article in Bulgarian is considered in Balkan linguistics mainly because of areal convergence within the Balkan linguistic union (Balkan Sprachbund). Languages like Albanian, Romanian, and Aromanian also use enclitic definite articles, indicating that language contacts reinforced the development in Bulgarian and Macedonian article systems (Friedman & Joseph, 2025, pp. 65 – 96). The reasons for its appearance can be viewed as double-sided: from one side the congenital features of Indo-European languages and from the other side - further influence by the areal Sprachbund languages.

The definite article in Bulgarian has its historical roots in the anaphoric demonstrative pronoun of the Proto-Slavic and Old Bulgarian (Old Church Slavonic) period. Over time, this demonstrative – originally used to refer to known entities in discourse – became grammaticalized into a postposed article, meaning it is placed after the noun, unlike in most Indo-European languages where the article precedes the noun. The Bulgarian and Macedonian definite article developed from demonstratives like *мѣ* (*tə*), *ма* (*ta*), *мо* (*to*), which correspond to *that* in English. These forms gradually lost their full deictic force and became clitics, then suffixes, bound to the noun although there are still some disputes among linguists whether the definite article in Bulgarian is a clitic, an affix, or an affix with some features of clitic-like behavior. Most of the contemporary Slavic languages as well as Proto Slavic and Old Church Slavonic do not have articles at all. Among Slavic languages, only Macedonian shares this postposed article system with Bulgarian.

Furthermore, some linguists associate the emergence of the article system in Bulgarian and Macedonian with the loss of the case system, which existed in earlier stages of these languages and is still preserved in other Slavic languages (see the discussion in Wahlström, 2015, pp. 170 – 182). Similar processes of case loss and article development can be observed in the Romance and Germanic languages – those most closely aligned with the Standard Average European type and the most extensively studied. The Armenian model clearly demonstrates that the interdependence between case loss and article emergence is not a universal Indo-European process, unlike the development of the definite article from demonstrative pronouns, as discussed above.

On the contrary, Armenian definite articles were smoothly integrated into the existing case system and did not lead to its simplification or disappearance. The article is added to the case form as an enclitic affix, as can be seen in declension:

Table 1. Declension of Armenian nouns with indefinite and definite forms

	Indefinite form	Definite form
Nom. Sg.	տուն (tun) 'house'	տունը (tun-ə) 'the house'
Gen. Sg.	տնի (tni) 'of a house'	տնին (tni-n) 'of the house'
Nom. Pl.	տներ (tner) 'houses'	տները (tner-ə) 'the houses'

Thus, the definite article in Armenian neither replaces nor simplifies the case endings. It is attached to the declined noun form, leaving the case inflection intact. The article follows the case marker and functions as a clitic indicating definiteness.

The grammaticalization hypothesis: demonstratives to definite articles

The development of definite articles from demonstrative pronouns is a cross-linguistically widespread phenomenon that have evolved independently in several branches of the Indo-European family, including Armenian and Bulgarian. The

process of grammaticalization of the demonstrative pronouns into definite articles, which in some languages as Armenian can be further grammaticalized, was first identified by Greenberg (cited in Hodgson 2022, p. 130). This model, shown in Table 2, provides a well-established and widely recognized point of reference for cross-linguistic comparison of definite article systems.

Table 2. Greenberg’s universal process of grammaticalization of definite articles

stage I demonstrative pronoun →	> stage II definite article →	> stage III specific article →	> stage IV noun marker
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In Armenian “the development of the definite article into a marker of specificity, as seen in Old Georgian, represents stage III in Greenberg’s universal process of grammaticalization patterns of definite articles” (Hodgson 2022, p.130, 143)

Analyzing the position of Armenian and Bulgarian within the grammaticalization process we can make a conclusion that these two languages are on different stages of the proposed scheme: corresponds broadly to stage II, whereas Armenian has progressed beyond this point and now is on the stage III. However, it may be hypothesized that the Bulgarian definite article has not yet fully stabilized even at stage II, given its continued semantic and pragmatic variability and the relative lack of systematic structuring discussed in Section 4.1. The semantic and pragmatic fluidity (Kutsarov, 2007; Zidarova, 2017; Georgieva, 2020) and some features of clitic-like behavior support the hypothesis that the transition to a fully grammaticalized stage II system is still underway.

The differing stages of definite article development can be further evidenced by the periods of their respective formation processes. As will be discussed in the following section, the formation of the definite article in Armenian began in the period of Classic Armenian (5th–11th c.). In contrast, the development of the Bulgarian definite article occurred several centuries later, roughly between the 13th and 15th centuries.

7. Synchronic aspects: formation of definite forms in Armenian and Bulgarian

Although both Armenian and Bulgarian employ suffixed or enclitic forms to express definiteness, their systems differ in structure and function. Armenian attaches a phonologically conditioned enclitic that arose from demonstrative particles and retains multiple functions beyond definiteness. It does not agree with the noun in gender or number and can signal pragmatic focus or possession. Bulgarian, by contrast, uses morphologically bound suffixes that agree with the noun and whose primary function is to mark definiteness within the noun phrase.

Functionally, Armenian definiteness marking interacts closely with discourse and syntax. The presence of **-ը/-ի** may indicate not only that a referent is specific

or known but also that it is topical or central to discourse. The enclitic's use in nominalization and argument marking further blurs the boundaries between definiteness and grammatical function. In Bulgarian, definiteness is primarily referential and syntactic: it serves to distinguish between known and unknown referents. Nevertheless, both systems show a convergence in developing morphological strategies for definiteness - through grammaticalization of demonstratives and through postpositioning of the articles.

7.1. Armenian

The fundamental distribution of the definite article is governed by the final segment of the base noun to which it is affixed. As is known, for both vowel-ending and consonant-ending words, definiteness in earlier stages of the Armenian has been expressed by the *-û* article. In the later stages of the development of Armenian, the emergence of the *-ը* article is conditioned by the loss of the final *-û* definite article in words ending in consonants. The functions of this lost *-û* began to be carried out by the vowel *ը* that had been vocalized between the final *-û* and the preceding consonant but was never morphologically marked.

The article has two main forms: *-ը / -û* (in Eastern Armenian) and *-ը / ի / -ըն* (in Western Armenian). The selection of the appropriate allomorph is determined by the phonological properties of the noun's final segment and is therefore phonologically conditioned. As a result, the phonological conditioning for word formation is as follows:

- For vowel-final stems: If the base noun ends in a vowel, the consonant (nasal) allomorph is selected (արև *-արև-û* (arev *-arev-n* 'the sun'), գինի *-գինի-û* (gini *-gini-n*, 'the wine'), գլուխ *-գլուխ-ի* - գլուխի-û (glukh *-i* - glukhi *-n*, 'the head (gen.)')
- For consonant-final stems: If the base noun ends in a consonant, the schwa allomorph is used. example տուն *-տուն-ը* (tun *-tun-y*, 'the house'), դուռ *-դուռ-ը* (durr *-durr-y*, 'the door'), ջուր *-ջուր-ը* (jur *-jur-y*, 'the water'), մարդ *-մարդ-ը* (mard *-mard-y*, 'the man').

When an article is attached to a noun in Armenian, some phonetic changes may occur to smooth the pronunciation. The following phonological processes are triggered by article attachment.

- In consonant-final words, definite article- *ը* is often inserted to break up final consonant clusters տուն *-տուն-ը* (tun *-tun-y*, 'house - house'), քար *-քար-ը* (k'ar *-k'ar-y*, 'stone - stone').
- The final *-û* of Classical Armenian may be dropped in unstressed positions, especially after consonants, creating the environment for *-ը* to emerge ձուկ *-û* - ձուկ-ը (dzuk *-n* - dzuk *-y*, 'the fish'), նոտ *-û* - նոտ-ը (votn *-* vot *-y*, 'the foot').
- Weak vowels in unstressed syllables are often reduced, which influences the alternation between *-û* and *-ը*. գիրք *-û* - գիրք-ը (girk' *-y* - girk *-y*, 'the book') (unstressed syllable reduction in the base word)

– In some dialects, the article may trigger minor adjustments in consonant voicing or place of articulation to maintain smooth pronunciation. կաթ - կաթ-ը (kat' - kat'-y, 'the milk'), դպրոց - դպրոց-ը (dprots' - dprots'-y, 'the school') (slight palatalization in some dialects)

– The position of lexical stress can affect which allomorph is used and whether vowels are inserted, տուն - տուն-ը (tun - tun-y, 'house -the house') (final consonant cluster requires epenthetic vowel), տունն - տուն-ը (tunn - tun-y 'the house - the house') in some dialects (stress shift causes *-ü* to drop).

7.2. Bulgarian

The choice of the article form in Bulgarian is traditionally explained based on morphological rules: the choice of the definite article allomorph depends on the gender and number of the main word in the NP. The other possible explanation is phonological: “According to the phonetic principle, the article morphemes are attached to the nouns depending on their ending in most of the cases, regardless of gender and number (Nicolova, 2017, p. 96).

Both the morphological and phonological explanations, however, exhibit several groups of exceptions. The proposed above phonological explanation of word formation has several exceptions, such as feminine nouns ending in a consonant with article -та /-ta: сол – солта (sol – solta ‘salt – the salt’), есен – есента (esen – esenta, ‘autumn – the autumn’); words ending in -е / -e and -и / -i may have either a vowel-harmonic -те / -te or a non-harmonic article – то / -to, depending on number (singular / plural), i.e. градове – градове-те (gradove – gradove-te, ‘cities – the cities’), but кафе – кафе-то (kafe – kafe-to, ‘coffee – the coffee’).

Below we propose a model of phonological ending/allomorph choice in the formation of the definite form in Bulgarian.

Table 3. Bulgarian definite article allomorph selection model

Phonological ending of the word		Morphological conditioning	Article allomorph	Example
Vowel ending	-o -u	-	-то / -to	село-то (selo-to, 'the village') кенгуру-то (kenguru-to, 'the kangaroo')
	-e -i	Singular		кафе-то (kafe-to, 'the coffee') такси-то (taksi-to, 'the taxi')
		Plural	-те / -te	градове-те (gradove-te, 'the cities') жени-те (zheni-te, 'the women')
	-a	-	-та / -ta	жена-та (zhena-ta, 'the woman') села-та (sela-ta, 'the villages')
Consonant ending	Consonant	Feminine		есен-та (esen-ta, 'the autumn')
	Consonant historically non-palatal	Masculine	-а / -a	град-а (grad-a, 'the city')
	Consonant historically palatal	Masculine	-я / -ja	ден-я (den-'a, 'the day')
Glide	Glide	-		ра-я (ra-ja, 'the paradise')

Although few in number, there are also words ending in -a, that are not included in the Table 3, that add definite article -то / -to: спа – спа-то (spa – spa-to, 'spa - the spa (as a health, restorative or cosmetic procedures), also in па (pa, 'pa' - the pa as a ballet step), ла and фа (la and fa (musical notes), etc., as well as substantivized words such as ура (ura, 'hurrah') and да (da, 'yes').

The rules for definite article attachment for adjectives, pronouns, etc., are mostly the same with most prominent exception for consonant ending adding allomorph -ия / -ija. The definite article -ъ(т) selects the allomorph of the adjective which has the elongated form with: красив – красивия (krasiv – krasiv-ija, 'beautiful' 'the beautiful').

In Bulgarian there are also phonological processes triggered by the article attachment, such as yat alternation (свят – свет-а (sv'at – svet-a, 'world – the world), bleeding of word-final devoicing (под – под-а ([pot] – [pod-a], 'floor – the floor), and stress shift (захар – захар-та (zàhar – zahartà, 'sugar – the sugar').

In addition to the morphological system of definite article allomorphs, there are even more complicated rules with the masculine singular article choice depending on the syntactic function of the NP in written standard Bulgarian. The so-called “full” article is used in subject position, while the “short” article appears elsewhere, as in *Учител-ят влезе в стаята* (‘The teacher entered the room’) versus *Видах учител-я* (‘I saw the teacher’), where the subject NP selects the article -ят, while the object NP selects the article -я. This prescribed rule is syntactically motivated rather than phonologically or morphologically driven.

As a result, an allomorph selection in the definite article system in Bulgarian can be modeled as mostly but not entirely driven by transparent surface phonology. Phonological choices provide a strong default but are systematically overridden or refined by morphological categories (gender and number), historical palatality, and syntactic function as shown in Table 3. The Bulgarian article system therefore, exemplifies a complex interaction of phonological, morphological, and syntactic factors, rather than a single governing principle.

In conclusion, while both Armenian and Bulgarian use suffixal definite articles, the Armenian system is phonetic in origin and distribution, arising from historical sound changes and governed by the noun’s final segment. In the Bulgarian system, on the other hand, the article formation interacts with grammatical categories, phonological features, and syntactic function. Thus, Armenian represents a historically phonetic model of article formation, whereas Bulgarian exemplifies a complex, subject to multiple constraints system, regulated by rules, interacting between various levels.

7.3. Implications for language teaching and linguodidactology

Against the background of the synchronic analysis presented above, the contrastive findings also have clear implications for language teaching and linguodidactology of the definite article as a core grammatical category. As demonstrated in Sections 7.1 and 7.2, the Armenian and Bulgarian systems, although superficially similar in employing postposed definite markers, differ fundamentally in the principles of article formation and distribution. The contrast between a phonologically conditioned system (Armenian: alternation -ը/-ի) and a system that integrates complex morphological and syntactic constraints (Bulgarian: gender- and number-based allomorphy and the distinction between full and short articles conditioned by syntactic function) calls for methodologically informed instructional approaches. For learners of Armenian, pedagogical emphasis should be placed on perceptual and productive training that supports accurate recognition and use of article allomorphs, while for learners of Bulgarian, explicit instruction is required to address the realization of the definite article in different phonological, morphological, and syntactic contexts. More generally, the teaching of the definite article plays a crucial role in developing linguistic awareness and fosters not only linguistic competence but also logical and language-based thinking.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Armenian and Bulgarian definite articles reveals similarities and differences. Both languages employ suffixed or enclitic forms, demonstrating a shared strategy of grammaticalizing demonstratives into definite markers. While both languages employ postposed markers originating from demonstratives, their systems diverge significantly in historical evolution and structure.

From a diachronic perspective, the Armenian article system (-ի/-ն) arose primarily through internal phonetic transformations and phonological conditioning, particularly the vocalization of the schwa. In contrast, the Bulgarian definite article developed within the Balkan Sprachbund through contact-induced grammaticalization of demonstratives.

Synchronic rules for article attachment also differ; Armenian selection is strictly phonologically conditioned by the final segment of the base noun. Bulgarian allomorph selection is more complex, governed by morphological categories and syntactic functions,

Overall, this study illustrates that grammaticalization of definiteness - whether via internal development as in Armenian or contact-induced change and internal development as in Bulgarian – follows language-specific paths shaped by phonological, morphological, and discourse factors. These findings underscore the importance of cross-linguistic contrastive analysis in understanding both universal tendencies in article formation and the particularities that make each language system distinctive.

NOTES

1. As both Armenian and Bulgarian use non-Latin alphabets, all the examples are presented in the original script, followed by a Latin transliteration and the meaning or translation in single quotation marks, e.g. գիրք-ը (girk'-s, 'my book). The stem of the word and the affixed article are separated by a dash, e.g. жена-та (zhena-ta).

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