



Subjecthood in Armenian

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What characterizes a subject in Armenian?

- Coding properties?
 - case
 - word order
 - agreement
- Behavioural properties?
- Semantic properties?
- Pragmatic properties?



A few facts on Armenian

- Indo-European language
- Attested since early 5th c. AD
- Written in an own alphabet

	Western	Eastern
Old	–	Classical Armenian (from early 5th c.)
Middle	Cilician (12th - 18th c.)	–
Modern	Standard Western Armenian (from 18th c.) Diaspora	Standard Eastern Armenian (from 18th c.) Republic of Armenia



Classical Armenian as a corpus language

- Tradition starts with the **NT translation (5th c. AD)**
- Translated from a Greek (Syriac) original
- The NT translation has influenced all later written Armenian
- Challenge: **Influence of the Greek language**, especially in
 - syntactic constructions
 - word order (!)
 - pragmatics
- The "best" examples are therefore those deviating from the Greek original



Subjecthood in Armenian – Traditional view

What characterizes a subject according to the reference grammars?
(Jensen 1959, Meillet 1913, Schmitt 1981)

Coding principles:

- **Nominative** (*ayr* 'man', *ayr-k'* 'men')
- But pro-drop of the verbal subject (*sirē* 'he/she/it loves')
Personal pronouns only in emphatic/contrastive use
(Latin, Greek)
- **Agreement** in finite verbs (active / passive voice)
- No fixed position (OVS, SVO, SOV, narrative VSO)



The subject – object interface

	Nouns		1st/2nd pronouns			
	singular	plural	singular		plural	
subject	<i>ayr</i>	<i>ayr-k'</i>	<i>es</i>	<i>dow</i>	<i>me-k'</i>	<i>dow-k'</i>
object (new)	<i>ayr</i>	<i>ayr-s</i>	–	–	–	–
object (given)	<i>z-ayr</i>	<i>z-ayr-s</i>	<i>z-is</i>	<i>z-k'ez</i>	<i>z-mez</i>	<i>z-jez</i>

Singular:

- **No markedness opposition subject : object**
(except 1st/2nd pronouns, cf. English, Scandinavian, French)
- **DOM:** Differential object marker *z-* coding given objects

Plural:

- Note that NOM.PL *-k'* is a marker of plural, not of subjecthood!



Agreement

Finite verbs : Agreement (diathesis)

- (1) es ałač'ec'-ic' z-hayr ew ayl mxit'arič' [PRO]
I.NOM ask-1.sg.a Z-father and other helper
ta-c'ē jez
give-3.SG.A you.PL.DAT
'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper'
(Jh 14.16)



Agreement

Participles: No agreement

(2) a. aṛ-eal manowk mi kac'oyc' ï mēj
 take-PTC child INDEF put.3.SG.AOR.A in middle
 noc'a
 their

b. lab-ôn paidion estêsen auto
 take-PTC.A.SG.NOM child.ACC put.3.SG.AOR.A him
 en mesôï autôn
 in middle their

'Taking a child he put him in the midst of them' (Mk 9.36)



Position

Animate PRO-SUB with animate object:

- (3) a. Darjeal aṛak'eac' aṛ nosa ayl caṛay
again sent to them other servant
- b. palin apesteilen pros autous allon doulon
again sent to them other servant.SG.ACC
- c. Darjeal na mi owriš caṛay owlarkec'
again he INDEF other servant sent

'Again he sent to them another servant [and they struck him on the head ...]' (Mk 12.4)



So, how is subjecthood coded in Armenian?

- By case?
No markedness opposition in singular (except pronouns)
- By agreement?
No diathesis in infinite verbs (participles)
- By sentence position?
No fixed word order (in translated texts following Greek)

So, what about non-canonically marked subjects?



Absolute genitive constructions

- (4) a. oč' z-gir-n z-ayn ic'ē ənt'erc'eal jer
 not Z-scripture-DEF OBJ-that is.CJ read.PTC you.GEN
- b. oude tēn graph-ēn tautēn anegnôte
 not the scripture-SG.ACC this read.2.PL.PF.ACT
- c. **Dowk'** č'-ēk' kardac'el Grk'-i ayn
 you not-be.2PL read.ptc.pf Scripture-DAT that
- 'Have you not read this Scripture?' (Mk 12.10)



Oblique subjects in genitive

With participle (no diathesis):

- (5) a. gteal Yisows-i ēš mi nstaw ĩ veray nora
 find.PTC Jesus-GEN donkey INDEF sat on it
- b. heurôn de ho Iêsous onarion ekathisen ep'
 find.PTC but the Jesus.NOM donkey sat on
 auto
 him
- c. Yisows mi ēš gtnelov nstec' nra vray
 Jesus INDEF donkey find.PTC sat it on
- 'And Jesus found a donkey and sat on it' (Jh 12.14)



Oblique subjects in genitive

With participle (no diathesis):

- (6) a. aṛjn-oy-n aṛeal kin meṛaw anordi
 first-GEN-DEF take.PTC woman died sonless
- b. ho prôtos labôn gunaika apethanen
 DEF first.NOM take.PTC woman.ACC died
 ateknos
 sonless
- c. aṛajin-ə kin aṛaw ew anžarang meṛaw
 first-DEF woman took and sonless died

'The first took a wife, and died sonless.' (Lk 20.29)



Oblique subjects in dative

- (7) a. part ē nma ert'al y-Erowsakēm
necessity is him go.INF in-Jerusalem
- b. dei auton eis Hierosoluma apelthein
is necessary him to Jerusalem go.INF
- c. pētk' ē or ink'ə Erowsalēm gnay
need is REL himself Jerusalem goes
- '[Jesus explains that] he must go to Jerusalem.' (Mt 16.21)



Oblique subjects in dative

- (8) a. č'-ēr hnar anc'anel owmek'
not-was means pass.INF anyone.DAT
- b. mê iskhuein tina parelthein
not can.INF anyone.ACC pass.INF
- c. mēkə č-ēr karol anc'nel
anyone not-was able pass.INF
- 'Noone could pass [by that way]' (Mt 8.28)



Pro-drop subjects in coordinated clauses

- (9) a. *agarak gneç'i ew hark ē [PRO] elanel tesanel*
 field I bought and tax is go.INF see.INF
- b. *agron êgorasa kai ekh-ô anagkên ekselthôn idein*
 field I bought and I have need going see
- c. *agarak gneç'i ew pētḱ' ē [PRO], or gnam tesnem*
 field I bought and need is who I go I see
- 'I have bought a field, and I have need to go and see.' (Lk 14.18)



Pro-drop subjects in coordinated clauses

- (10) a. owrax linel ew xndal part ēr [PRO]
glad be.INF and rejoice duty was
- b. euphranthênai de kai kharênai edei
be glad.INF but and rejoice.INF was necessary
- c. pētk' ēr owrax linel ew c'ncal [PRO]
need was glad be.INF and rejoice
- 'We had to be glad and to celebrate' (Lk 15.32)



Summary and Interpretation

- "Canonical" coding of subjects (NOM) is not sufficient
- Classical Armenian:
 - At least three types of non-canonical subjects:
 - Genitive subjects
 - Dative subjects
 - Pro-drop subjects in coordinated clauses
- Modern Armenian:
 - finite verb
 - personal pronoun (unmarked)



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