



Typology &  
Contact

R. Meyer  
(Oxford)

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Question

'Markedness'

Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

# The (Ir-)relevance of Typological Constraints in Language Contact

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# Outline

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- 1** Do typological constraints impact language contact?
- 2** Issues with 'markedness'
- 3** Hypothesis: 'anything goes in language contact' – but ...
- 4** Typology and pattern replication
  - Case I: Old Aramaic and Old Persian
  - Case II: Classical Armenian and Parthian
  - (Case III: NENA and the Kurdish dialects)
- 5** Centrality, Constancy, Consistency: a preliminary conclusion



# Typological constraints and language contact I

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**scope:** pattern replication, i.e. borrowing of syntactic patterns into L1, as per e.g. MATRAS (2009)

**terms:** 'constraints' are here taken to refer to relative disinclinations towards a process, rather than to absolute impossibilities

**issue:** opinions differ as to whether notions such as 'markedness' or 'typological distance' influence pattern replication (and borrowing in general)



# Typological constraints and language contact II

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- ▶ pro typological constraints:

**MEILLET (1921:87):** 'on n'emprunte une chose de ce genre [c.-à-d. la flexion] que si l'on emprunte tout le système d'un coup, c'est-à-dire si l'on change de langue.'

**GIVÓN (1979:26–7):** '... if conflicts of grammar [between L1 and L2] did arise, then rather than increase the markedness of his specific grammar by borrowing, the speaker is more likely to revert to the universal competence shared by all humans ...'

**THOMASON AND KAUFMAN (1988:194):** '... markedness considerations and typological distance are the major linguistic factors that determine the linguistic results [of language contact]. Universally marked features are less likely than unmarked features to be retained ...'



# Typological constraints and language contact III

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

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(Ir-)relevance?

- ▶ contra typological constraints:

**THOMASON AND KAUFMAN (1988:14):** '... as far as the strictly linguistic possibilities go, any linguistic feature can be transferred from any language to any other language.'

**HARRIS AND CAMPBELL (1995:149):** 'The moral for would-be constrictors of grammatical borrowing, then, is that given enough time and intensity of contact, virtually anything can (ultimately) be borrowed.'

**THOMASON (2003:695):** '... there are no absolute linguistic constraints on the kinds and degrees of linguistic interference that can occur. ... different probabilities can be established for different kinds of changes ... But in this domain everything appears to be possible, although some things are improbable.'



# Typological constraints and language contact IV

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

## Questions arising:

- ▶ What does 'markedness' / 'typological distance' refer to in this context?
- ▶ Does it affect the borrowability of syntactic patterns?
- ▶ If not, do typological considerations have any impact on pattern replication?  
(cf. SEIFART 2015 on affix borrowability)



# Issues with ‘markedness’ I

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Pattern replication

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- ▶ the term ‘markedness’ is problematic: too many uses (cf. HASPELMATH 2006 for thorough discussion)
- ▶ ‘markedness’ according to THOMASON AND KAUFMAN (1988:26–7) derives ‘primarily from typology (more widespread = less marked), and secondarily from first-language acquisition (first learned = less marked)’  
→ so both universal and relative in language contact?!
- ▶ in typology, a pattern A is marked in relation to pattern B, iff languages with A also *always* contain B, but not necessarily vice versa (cf. ECKMAN 1977:320; e.g. duals and plurals as per GREENBERG’s Universal 34).
- ▶ only relative ‘markedness’ is relevant in contact – correlations with L2 acquisition difficulties?  
(cf. ECKMAN 1996, 2004; RUTHERFORD 1982)



## Issues with ‘markedness’ II

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

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**thus:** expect: L2 patterns marked relative to L1 are not replicated

**but:** numerous counterexamples:

- ▶ 1.PL clusivity marking in Sindhi and Gujarati (both Indic) modelled on neighbouring Dravidian languages (EMENEAU 1962:56)
- ▶ creation of a gender system in proto-Chinookan ‘under heavy categorial influence from the languages surrounding on the coast [viz. Coast Salish languages]’ (SILVERSTEIN 1977:154)
- ▶ Asia Minor Greek: agglutinative morphology and word order changes (fixed SOV) modelled on Turkish (THOMASON AND KAUFMAN 1988:215–22)





# Issues with ‘markedness’ III

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

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(Ir-)relevance?

- ▶ counterexamples all show ‘marked’ additions (=borrowings), rather than the losses expected implicitly by GIVÓN, or lack of change

- ▶ concession: replication still more common where L1 and L2 are typologically close and/or speakers strongly bilingual

if typological constraints are at work in borrowing

either they can clearly be overridden by other factors

and/or they apply not at the borrowing stage, but later in pattern spread and retention

- ▶ How helpful is the concept of ‘markedness’ with this in mind?



# ‘Anything goes in language contact’ ... I

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Pattern replication

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(Ir-)relevance?

## ► **Assumption (THOMASON 2003:694):**

‘... any feature that can be code-switched from language A into language B can turn into a permanent interference feature in B, and the same is true for all the other mechanisms. More generally, any feature that can appear in a single person’s speech at any time – for example, in speech errors caused by fatigue or drunkenness or mere carelessness – can turn into a permanent change in the entire language ...’

## ► **Hypothesis:**

- (a) borrowing is not typologically (or otherwise) constrained  
⇒ (pro-active pivot matching in mental grammar)
- (b) spread and retention (grammaticalisation) of idiolect patterns, however, is regulated by an interplay of (at least): typological consistency; frequency of use; persistent contact/bilingualism  
⇒ (independent vectors)



# 'Anything goes in language contact' ... II

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian  
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(Ir-)relevance?

## Difficulties:

- ▶ apart from frequency of use, these features are difficult (but not impossible) to quantify or measure (cf. structural similarity scores, DRYER AND HASPELMATH 2011)
- ▶ esp. for historical languages, extant socio-historical data may be lacking or insufficient
- ▶ in many instances, it is difficult (if not impossible) to determine for certain whether language change is caused by / related to language contact, or purely internally motivated

## Caveats:

- ▶ the following example cases are presented under the assumption that in each instance, language contact was a decisive (if not the sole) motivating factor resulting in change
- ▶ other explanations exist and may explain the data similarly well



# Typology and pattern replication

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

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(Ir-)relevance?

## Three (very brief) case studies of historical languages in contact with Iranian languages:

- ▶ Old Aramaic *qṭyl l-* & Old Persian *manā kṛtam*
- ▶ Old Armenian periphrastic perfect & Parthian past tense
- ▶ (Northeastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) simple past & Kurdish dialects)
  
- ▶ all cases cases exhibit initial changes to morphosyntactic alignment of a subsystem
- ▶ these externally motivated alignment changes are levelled over time in favour of those occurring (natively) in the other subsystems



# Old Aramaic and Old Persian I

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

## Background:

- ▶ Old Aramaic: chancery language of the Achaemenid Empire  
thus prolonged contact with Old Persian (and other Iranian varieties)
- ▶ numerous lexical borrowings from Old Persian into Old Aramaic  
(cf. CIANCAGLINI 2008)
- ▶ to a lesser extent, morphosyntactic calques and pattern replication  
(e.g. OP *haya/taya*-phrases (NP-linking) rendered as OA *zy* instead of a construct chain; WHITEHEAD cf. 1978:128–35)



# Old Aramaic and Old Persian II

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(Ir-)relevance?

## Review: OP *manā kṛtam*

- ▶ construction: direct object + GEN-DAT pronoun + PST.PTCP.NOM.SG.N
- ▶ restricted to one verb √kar-
- ▶ selected discussions: BENVENISTE (1952); HAIG (2008); JÜGEL (2015)

- (1) *ima taya manā kṛtam pasāva yaḏā*  
 DEM.ACC.PL.N REL.ACC.PL.N 1.SG.GEN-DAT do.PTCP after when  
*xšāyaḏiya abavam*  
 king.NOM.SG.M  
 'These [are the things] which I did after I became king' (DB I.27–8)



# Old Aramaic and Old Persian III

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Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian  
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(Ir-)relevance?

## OA *qṭyl l-*:

- ▶ construction: PTCP + PREP + agent (pro-)noun + direct object
- ▶ OP as model suggested by PENNACCHIETTI (1988:104), CIANCAGLINI (2008:32)

(2) *'r]ṭhy yd'                      ṭ'm-'                      znh*

PN    know.3.SG.M    command-EMPH    this

'Arṭhaya knows this command.' (TAD A6.10; Driver 7; Pell. Aram. I)

(3) *w-k'n    tnh    kn    šmy'    l-y*

and-now here thus **hear.PTCP to-1.SG**

'And now, thus have I heard here, [that] ...' (TAD A6.10; Driver 7; Pell. Aram. I)

- ▶ like OP GEN-DAT, OA *l-* does not mark passive agent, but recipient
- ▶ resultative perfect in OA, initially restricted to verbs of perception



# Old Aramaic and Old Persian IV

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Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

## Development:

- ▶ construction persists and changes in later Aramaic languages (Syriac, Mandaic, etc.)
- ▶ applied to wider circle of verbs, transitive and intransitive (cf. NÖLDEKE 1904:§279)
- ▶ use of *l-* extended to mark objects, too

(4) *kaḏ 'asīr l-eh l-sāṭānā b-šēšaltā*  
 CONJ **bind.PTCP** **to-3.SG.M** **to-Satan** with-chain.PL  
 'for he had bound Satan with chains' (am 3, 595, 13)

- ▶ construction never achieves great frequency (compared to other tenses)





# Old Aramaic and Old Persian V

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Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

## Summary:

- ▶ OA *qtyl l-* modelled on OP
- ▶ transitive agent (and later intransitive agent, transitive object) receives explicit marking – as opposed to other subsystems

but the pattern does NOT result in ergative alignment – (SO)A – in the perfect

- ▶ instead, the logical agent marker *l-* is extended to all arguments
- ▶ argument order determines grammatical function (O-final)

- ▶ typology did not constrain pattern replication

but low frequency and system pressure (or system harmony, cf. HAIG 2008) contribute to levelling the replicated pattern – despite ongoing contact with (then Middle) Iranian



# Classical Armenian and Parthian I

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

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NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

## Background:

- ▶ Armenia(ns) ruled by Iranians for c. 1,000 years, c. 400 of which by Parthians

thus intensive and extensive contact between ruling-class Armenian and Parthian speakers (incl. intermarriage, inter-clan tutelage system), likely (late) bilingualism

- ▶ large amounts of lexical, derivational morphological, and phraseological borrowings (cf. SCHMITT 1983; MEYER 2013)



# Classical Armenian and Parthian II

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

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Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

## Review: Parthian past tense

- ▶ Parthian (like Middle Persian) has morphological split-ergative alignment
- ▶ transitive construction: (pro-)nominal agent (+ direct object) + PTCP + non-3.sg copula
- ▶ verbal agreement with object (3.sg: Ø), pronominal agents in oblique form (no case marking in nouns)

(5) *byc 'w's cy=m dyd 'yy 'w=m*  
 but now COMP=1.SG.OBL see.PTCP be.2.SG.PRS and=1.SG.OBL  
*tw (s)wn šnwd Ø*  
 2.POSS speech hear.PTCP Ø

'But now that I have seen you, and have heard your speech ...'  
 (MKG 1398–1400)



# Classical Armenian and Parthian III

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

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(Ir-)relevance?

## Classical Armenian perfect:

- ▶ transitive construction: (OBJ-marker + ) ACC direct object + GEN agent + PTCP (+ 3.SG copula)

(6) *ew gteal Yisusi ēš mi*  
 and find.PTCP PN.GEN.SG donkey.NOM-ACC.SG INDEF

'And Jesus found a donkey' (Jn. 12:14)

(7) ... *zi ēr paheal z=mez amenazawr*  
 ... for 3.SG.PST preserve.PTCP OBJ=1.PL.ACC almighty  
*aĵoyn*  
 right.GEN.SG

'... for his almighty right [hand] has preserved us'  
 (Agat'angelos §186)



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Pattern replication

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## Development:

- ▶ replication of ergative pattern from Parthian (see ex. 6 above)
- ▶ begin of levelling: introduction of OBJ-marking (→ tripartite)
- ▶ further: spread of intransitive construction (NOM-subject + copula agreeing with subject) to transitive (= levelling with non-perfect subsystems)

(8) *ew z=ays amenayn lueal manuk=n Yusik i*  
 CONJ OBJ=this all hear.PTCP young=DEF PN.NOM.SG from  
*hreštakē=n*  
 angel.ABL=DEF  
 'And young Yusik heard all this from the angel' (PB III.5)

- ▶ previous, non-contact explanations struggle to explain co-existence of transitive and intransitive constructions, form of copula (cf. e.g. BENVENISTE 1952; MEILLET 1936; STEMPEL 1983; WEITENBERG 1986)



# Classical Armenian and Parthian V

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Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

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(Ir-)relevance?

## Summary:

- ▶ Armenian borrows split ergative alignment from Parthian (prior to literary attestation)
  - ▶ perfect develops tripartite alignment (NOM subject, GEN agent, ACC object) in analogy with other NOM-ACC subsystems
  - ▶ later develops NOM-ACC alignment by 8<sup>th</sup> century
  - ▶ again, typology did not constrain pattern replication
- but system pressure resulted in adaptations to replicated pattern (ERG-ABS → trip. → NOM-ACC)
- ▶ latter change preceded by (likely) loss of contact / bilingualism – correlation or coincidence?



# NENA and Kurdish dialects I

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

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(Ir-)relevance?

## Background:

- ▶ varieties of Northeastern Neo-Aramaic in close contact with Kurdish dialects, e.g. Muslim Sulemaniyya Kurdish speakers in touch with Jewish NENA-speaking neighbours (late 18<sup>th</sup> ct. – c. 1952; cf. KHAN 2004)
- ▶ contact-induced changes include phonological aspects (e.g. [ʔ], [d̪] > [l]), loss of grammatical gender
- ▶ problem: 'Kurdish and Aramaic speech communities maintain highly complex historical relationships, of which much is still obscure and perhaps will remain forever so ...' (NOORLANDER 2014:203)



# NENA and Kurdish dialects II

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

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(Ir-)relevance?

## Review: (Sulemaniyya) Kurdish past tense

- ▶ this variety is split-ergative (ergative in the past)
- ▶ construction: affix type and order

(9) *a-mir-in* || *mird-in*  
PRS-die.-2.PL die.PST-.2PL

'You are dying. || You died.'

(10) *a-tān-kuž-ē* || *kušt-tān*  
PRS-2.PL.OBJ-kill-3.SG kill.PST-2.PL.OBJ

'He is killing you. || You killed him.'

- ▶ in past, OBL-form of clitic as agent, logical object marked like subject as DIR (3.SG is Ø)





# NENA and Kurdish dialects III

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Question

'Markedness'

Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

## NENA replica:

- ▶ inherited pattern in the intransitives, replicated in the transitives

- (11) *mel-etun* || *mīl-etun*  
die.PRS-2.PL die.PST-2.PL  
'You are dying. || You died.'
- (12) *qāṭil-* *laxun* || *qṭil-* *laxun*  
kill.PRS- 2.PL.OBJ kill.PST- 2.PL.OBJ  
'He is killing you. || You killed him.'
- (13) *baxt-āke* *barux-āwal-i* *garš-* *á-* *lu*  
woman-DEF friend-PL-1.SG.POSS pull.PRS- 3.SG.F- 3.PL.OBJ  
'The woman pulls my friends.'
- (14) *baxt-āke* *barux-āwal-i* *gərš-* *í-* *la*  
woman-DEF friend-PL-1.SG.POSS pull.PST- 3.PL- 3.SG.F.OBJ  
'The woman pulled my friends' (DORON AND KHAN 2012)





# Centrality, Constancy, Consistency: a preliminary conclusion I

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- ▶ multiple cases speaking in favour of hypothesis: typology does not *constrain* pattern replication
- ▶ typologically 'distant' / 'marked' patterns are replicated but after replication, they are subject to internal (typological) pressures → adaptations
- ▶ these pressures are the same applying to all patterns in a languages, whether internally or externally motivated
- ▶ frequently used patterns (Arm. & NENA vs OA) seem to withstand adaptation more readily
- ▶ similarly, loss of contact / bilingualism *may* negatively impact the ability of a typologically divergent pattern to resist adaptation / rejection



# Centrality, Constancy, Consistency: a preliminary conclusion II

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Pattern replication

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## Suggestions (in lieu of further conclusions):

- ▶ typology is *not* irrelevant in pattern replication  
but it does not constrain the process, but influences its results
- ▶ three key factors / vectors for the 'afterlife' of replicated patterns:
  - Centrality:** frequency of use of replicated pattern
  - Constancy:** maintenance of contact / bilingualism with donor language
  - Consistency:** replicated pattern is typologically consistent with target language
- ▶ these factors are independent and can counteract one another
- ▶ problems: lack of quantifiability, historical data, and test cases



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Grazie per la vostra attenzione!  
Merci de votre attention!  
Vielen Dank für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit!  
Thank you for your attention!



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Typology &  
Contact

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Question

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian  
NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

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Typology &  
Contact

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Hypothesis

Pattern replication

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Classical Armenian  
NENA

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R. Meyer  
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Question

'Markedness'

Hypothesis

Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

NENA

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Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

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# Addendum I: Mental grammar and pivot matching

Typology &  
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Question

'Markedness'

Hypothesis

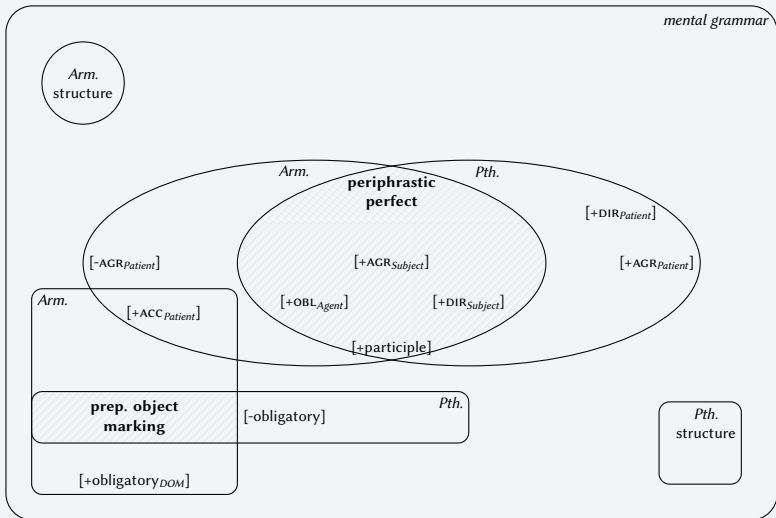
Pattern replication

Old Aramaic

Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?





# Addendum II: Grammaticalisation of replicated patterns

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Question

'Markedness'

Hypothesis

Pattern replication

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Classical Armenian

NENA

(Ir-)relevance?

