An Uncomfortable Compromise:
Armenian and the τέχνη γραμματική

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Armenia & Byzantium: Perspectives on Cultural and Political Relations
23 March 2019

1   Background & Overview

§1: Dionysios Thrax, the τέχνη γραμματική, and the Յունաբան Դպրոց

The τέχνη γραμματική, or *The Art (or Skill) of Grammar* is a fairly concise[1] treatise on the Greek language and its component parts, historically attributed to Dionysios Thrax (*c.* 170–90 BCE);[2] Dionysios was a pupil of Aristarkhos of Samothrace (*c.* 217–145 BCE), an Alexandrian philologist and editor of Homer. The τέχνη for a long time had the distinction of being the first 'grammar book' - at least the oldest to survive in Western culture.

To scholars of Armenian, the τέχνη is best known as one of the earliest secular works to be translated from Greek into Armenian, and for its 'hellenising' use of the Armenian language. As multiple scholars have pointed out,[3] the form of Armenian used in this—and other similar translations, historically attributed to the so-called 'Hellenising School' or Յունաբան Դպրոց—uses a number of strategies to render the Greek *Vorlage* into Armenian as faithfully as possible, including calques, semantic extensions, and outright borrowing.[4] The result is frequently difficult to understand in its own right, without the Greek original at hand.

Accordingly, the question has arisen what purposes such 'translationese' texts served, if even speakers of Armenian would have had difficulty understanding them. In this regard, the *status quaestionis* currently still sides with Terian (1980; 1982), who suggests that

> the translations of the [Hellenising] School would represent the kind of texts used for certain structured courses of learning during the School's period of activity (Terian 1982: 182)

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[1] The whole treatise is no longer than *c.* 3,000 words.

[2] Dionysios lived and worked in Alexandria (and later Rhodes), but receives the designation ὁ Θρᾷξ from his father Teros.

[3] Cf. Akinian (1932); Bolognesi (2000); Calzolari (1989); Clackson (1995); Coulie (1994-5); Cowe (1990-1); Jahowkyan (1954); Lafontaine and Coulie (1983); Manandyan (1928); Mercier (1978-9); Meyer (2019); Mowradyan (1971); Muradyan (2012); Nichanian (1989); Terian (1982)

[4] For an extensive treaty, cf. Muradyan (2012). The Greek ἐνέργεια 'activity; active voice' might serve as an example; it is rendered into Armenian morpheme by morpheme, thus as ներգործութիւն: ներ- ≈ ἐν- 'in, inside', cp. Arm. ներքը 'under, in'; գործ ≈ ἔργον 'work, action'; and -ութիւն ≈ -ια as an abstract suffix.

and thus effectively functioned like an *aide-mémoire* rather than an independent translation. This is also reflected, to a certain extent, by many later commentaries on such texts, e.g. by Dawitʿ Anhałtʿ, which frequently take the shape of lessons and provide further lexical help.

§2: Questions of Authorship & Dating

While there is no doubt that Dionysios was the author of *a* grammatical treatise of some importance,[5] numerous factors speak against attributing all of the τέχνη to him:[6]

- text-internal evidence: the outline given in περὶ γραμματικῆς (§1) does not correspond to the actual structure of the τέχνη;

- questions of transmission: passages after περὶ ῥαψῳδίας (§5) are only quoted from the 4th century CE onwards; the first manuscript dates to the 5th century;

- text-external evidence: quotations of Dionysios in later authors, e.g. in Apollonios Dyskolos, allege he did not make grammatical distinctions expressly made in the τέχνη.

For present purposes, however, this is only mentioned for completeness' sake, since

> The *Art of Grammar* that has come down to us under his name may or may not be authentic, but it is certainly representative of the grammatical knowledge of the time. It is a rather schematic overview of the tasks of the grammarian and the parts of speech, with many subclassifications (van Bekkum et al. 1997:205).

§3: The Structure of the τέχνη γραμματική and our Focus

The τέχνη is usually subdivided into 20 paragraphs (as per the standard edition of Uhlig 1883), which are arranged as follows:

1. περὶ γραμματικῆς On grammar	7. περὶ συλλαβῆς On the syllable	14. περὶ συζυγίας On conjugation
2. περὶ ἀναγνώσεως On reading	8. περὶ μακρᾶς συλλαβῆς On long syllables	15. περὶ μετοχῆς On the participle
3. **περὶ τόνου** **On tone**	9. περὶ βραχείας συλλαβῆς On short syllables	16. **περὶ ἄρθρου** **On the article**
4. **περὶ στιγμῆς** **On punctuation**	10. περὶ κοινῆς συλλαβῆς On 'common' syllables	17. περὶ ἀντωνυμίας On the pronoun
5. περὶ ῥαψῳδίας On recitation	11. περὶ λέξεως On the word	18. περὶ προθέσεως On the preposition
	12. περὶ ὀνόματος On the noun	19. περὶ ἐπιρρήματος On adverbs
6. **περὶ στοιχείου** **On elements**	13. περὶ ῥήματος On the verb	20. περὶ συνδέσμου On conjunctions

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[5]This piece, referred to in quotations as τὰ παραγγέλματα, *Precepts*, is discussed amongst others by Sextus Empiricus (*Adversus grammaticos* 57; 72; 250; on which cf. Schenkevald 1995).

[6]For a summary, cf. Law (2003:54–7); more detail can be found in di Benedetto 1958–9, 1990; Robins 1995.

Only those sections set in **bold** above will be discussed here. Two factors limit a fuller discussion: time, on the one hand; and the 'philosophical'[7] rather than linguistic nature of a number sections, esp. 1 and 12. The section περὶ ὀνόματος, in particular, is more of a nod to Stoicism in its attempt to order and classify all nouns according to a number of categories than a strictly grammatical discussion in the modern sense.[8]

§4: Relevant Aspects of the Յունաբան Դպրոց

The Յունաբան Դպրոց may be said to commence with the translation of the τέχνη in the late 5th century[9] and ends with the work of Stepʿanos Siwnecʿi in the early 8th century.[10] As popular and prevalent as the 'School' may have been, later mediaeval readers complain about the incomprehensibility of these translations, since many compounds and syntagmata were *ad hoc* and thus meaningless to later readers (TERIAN 1980:201), wherefore later commentaries expand on them (ADONTZ 1970).

These translations, which adhere strictly to Greek texts and still form a rather heterogeneous continuum, are the result of the strong cultural, political and religious influence of the Greek-speaking world on the Armenians; they have had considerable impact on literature and language, as has been mentioned above and will become clearer presently. The Hellenising style is often taken to stand in strong contrast with that of literature originally composed in Armenian, as well as that of the Armenian Bible translation, constituting the first text to be translated. This view, however, has been challenged in the recent past.[11]

As will become quite evident below, however, the τέχνη is not a particularly typical 'translation'.

2   Questions

§5: The τέχνη γραμματική - Translation, *Aide-mémoire,* or Adaptation?

As one—if not *the*—earliest secular translation from Greek into Armenian, the τέχνη may be able to shed a light on a number of questions. To make best use of it, however, it has to be considered not

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[7]The treatment of language as a concept predates purely grammatical writing by centuries. Already in Plato's *Kratylos* and in Parmenides' writing, the question of nomenclature is discussed. Aspects of the τέχνη's structure suggest a subscription to Aristotelian principles: the noun is treated before the verb since: ἁπλοῦν δὲ λέγω ὃ μὴ ἐκ σημαινόντων συγκεῖται, οἷον γῆ, that is it is 'atomic, not compounded out of meaningful parts' (Ar.*Poet.* XXI. 1457a) unlike the verb; contrast e.g. the perspective of Philoxenos (cf. ALLEN 1948:57, DE JONGE AND VAN OPHUIJSEN 2010:495).

[8]Note SLUITER's contextualisation: 'the Stoa is not a school of grammar. Their linguistic theory functions in the context of a whole philosophy [...] a description of Stoic grammar should do more justice to its connections with other parts of their philosophy. [...] later grammarians used the ideas they found in the Stoa as a starting-point from which to develop their more "technical" grammars' (1990:16).

[9]ADONTZ considers any dating impossible (1970:CXII). MERCIER (1978-9:59-61) and INGLISIAN (1963:163) prefer a later date, but produce no convincing argument in favour of this preference. MERCIER bases his judgement on relative chronology, having established that the *Refutation of the Council of Chalcedon* should have been translated before the Second Council of Duin in 555; the argument does not go beyond that, and remains weak. MURADYAN, whose introduction to her study of Grecisms in Classical Armenian comprises the most up-to-date and comprehensive discussion of the extant literature and opinions available, agrees with the 5th-century hypothesis (2012:3), without, however, giving any specific reason.

[10]Its creations are relevant even in medieval and modern varieties of Armenian, however, esp. as regards grammatical and philosophical vocbulary (CALZOLARI 1989:124). Similar calquing patterns continue to produce morpheme-by-morpheme calques in the modern language, e.g., under Soviet influence, on the basis of Russian as noted by COWE (1992:335).
It is further worth noting that many scholars now postpone the traditional end-date of hellenising Armenian, with good right certainly going as far as Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni (*c.* 990–1058).

[11]Note here the conclusions of COULIE: 'Aujourd'hui, plusieurs des résultats obtenus révèlent des contradictions que les critères traditionnels ne permettent pas de résoudre: des grécismes lexicaux et syntaxiques sont présents déjà dans les versions de l'époque classique, des formations jugées caractéristiques des traductions pré-hellénophiles se trouvent encore dans les productions purement hellénophiles' (1994-5:43); for similar perspectives and data, cf. LAFONTAINE AND COULIE (1983:129-30), MEYER (2019, fthc.), MURADYAN (2012:20).

only for its linguistic content (*qua* translation), but also for its metalinguistic content (what / how it translates).

- Is this a 'proper' translation?

- Is it a (barely) comprehensible *aide-mémoire*?

- Is it an adaptation of a Greek grammar for the Armenian language?

- Or is it something entirely different?

§6: Implications for Byzantine–Armenian relationship

The existence of the Յունաբան Դպրոց in itself speaks volumes about the Byzantine-Armenian intellectual relationship. Is it possible that the metalinguistic content of the τέχνη can provide further clarification? Is the adoption versus rejection of a particular kind of linguistic feature of Greek a concession to or rebellion against (perceived) early Byzantine 'cultural imperialism'? To what extent does Armenian preserve its own linguistic identity in this 'translation'?

3   Selected Data

§7: περὶ τόνου - Greek Accents only

τόνος ἐςτὶν ἀπήχηςις φωνῆς ἐναρμονίου, ἡ κατὰ ἀνάταςιν ἐν τῇ ὀξείᾳ, ἡ κατὰ ὁμαλιςμὸν ἐν τῇ βαρείᾳ, ἡ κατά περίκλαςιν ἐν τῇ περιςπωμένῃ.	Որրակ է բացագանչութիւն պատկանաւոր ձայնի, թէ ըստ վերասատութեան չեչտուեն, թէ ըստ Հարթութեան բթին, թէ ըստ պարբեկութեան պարուկան:

Tone [Accent] is the resonance [exclamation] of a voice endowed with harmony. It is heightened in the acute [emphasis > accute], balanced in the grave [level > grave], and broken in the circumflex [breaking > circumflex].

This is a basic but sensible description of the Greek accent categories, though of course not without problem.[12] Assuming a greater age for this paragraph, at the time of writing the description may still have been accurate; the second part of the τέχνη is likely to have been written in times post-dating the shift from pitch to stress accent (PROBERT 2006:55–7).

In either case, the Armenian translation stays very close in content and wording to the Greek *Vorlage*. It is, however, in no way a plausible description of the Armenian 'accent' or 'stress' pattern. Classical Armenian, and many modern varieties,[13] have word-final stress; for reasons of historical morphology, Proto-Armenian is likely to have stressed the penultima (cf. e.g. KORTLANDT 1980:103). Accordingly, this paragraph of the τέχνη is pure translation.

§8: περὶ ςτιγμῆς – Greek punctuation only

ςτιγμαί εἰςι τρεῖς· τελεία, μέςη, ὑποςτιγμή. καὶ ἡ μὲν τελεία ςτιγμή ἐςτι διανοίας ἀπηρτιςμένης ςημεῖον,	Կէտք են երեք. կետ աւարտեալ, միջակ, ստորակէտ: Կէտ է տրամախոհութեան յանդեցելոյ նչան.

[12] For general information about the Greek accent, its realisation and chronology, cf. PROBERT (2006).

[13] For qualifications and specifications, see VAUX (1998:132–6).

μέςη δὲ сημεῖον πνεύματος ἕνεκεν παραλαμβανόμενον, ὑποστιγμὴ δὲ διανοίας μηδέπω ἀπηρτισμένης ἀλλ᾽ ἔτι ἐνδεούсης сημεῖον.

 եւ միջակ՝ նշամ յոգի նակս ընդունելոյ. եւ ստորակէտ է ստրամախութեան չեւ եւս յանդեցելոյ, այլ եւս կարաւտացելոյ նշան:

> There are three punctuation marks: the full [completed] stop, the semicolon [middle], and the comma. The full stop denotes that the sense is complete; the semicolon is a sign of where to take breath; the comma shows that the sense is not yet complete, but that something further must be added.

The translation is faithful to the *Vorlage*, and in the omitted paragraph does not differ. Armenian, as is well known from early manuscript sources already, has a number of further signs used as meaningful punctuation marks, so for instance the **բութ** < ` >, the **պարոյք** < ՛ >, and the **շեշտ** < ՞ >; from amongst them, at least the **բութ**, which is an integral marker disambiguating Armenian syntax, might have been expected here.[14]

§9: περὶ стοιχείου - Armenian Adaptation of Greek Phonological Concepts

γράμματά ἐстιν εἰκοςιτέссαρα ἀπο τοῦ α μέχρι τοῦ ω. ... τὰ δὲ αὐτὰ καὶ στοιχεῖα καλεῖται διὰ τὸ ἔχειν στοῖχόν τινα καὶ τάξιν. τούτων φωνήεντα μέν ἐστιν ἑπτά· α ε η ι ο υ ω. ... ἔτι δὲ τῶν сυμφώνων διπλᾶ μέν ἐστι τρία· ζ ξ ψ. διπλᾶ δὲ εἴρηται, ὅτι ἓν ἕκαστον αὐτῶν ἐκ δύο сυμφώνων σύγκειται, τὸ μὲν ζ ἐκ τοῦ с καὶ δ, τὸ δὲ ξ ἐκ τοῦ κ καὶ с, τὸ δὲ ψ ἐκ τοῦ π καὶ с.

Գիր է երեսուն եւ վեց յայէք մինչեւ ց.քէ: ... Նա եւ նույնք իսկ տառք կոչին, վասն զի ունեն տարրումն իմն եւ դասութիւն: Եւ նոցա ձայնաւորք են ութ. ա, ե, է, ը, ի, ո, ւ, ω: ... Եւ կրկնակք են ի սոցանէ ութ. զ, լ, խ, ձ, ձ, ℓ, ռ, ց: Եւ կրկնակք ասեն, վասն զի մի մի իւրաքանչիւր ոք ի սոցանէ յերկուց ձայնակցաց բաղկանայ՝ զայն ի սէէ եւ զայն եւ խէն յերկուց քմակից քէից եւ շայն յերկուց սէից եւ ռայն յերկուց րէից: Նոյնպէս եւ այլքն մու մու յերկուց բարբառակցաց շարակացեալ են:

> There are twenty-four [thrity-six] letters from *alpha* to *omega* ... The same entities are called elements due to their occupying some 'place' [constitution] and 'position' [order]. ... Of these, seven [eight] are vocalic: α ε η ι ο υ ω [a e ē ə i o w ō]. ... Of these, three [eight] are double: *zeta, xi, psi* [z, l, x, š, č', ǰ, ṙ, c']. They are called 'double' because each one of them is composed of two consonants, because *zeta* is composed of *sigma* and *delta, xi* of *kappa* and *sigma*, and *psi* of *pi* and *sigma* [z < s + d, x < 2 adjoining k', š < 2 s, ṙ < 2 r. In like fashion the others are each built from two consonants.]

The passage adapts the *Vorlage* by altering the number of letters in general and in each category as appropriate not for Greek, but Armenian. Note that certain letters like ω are included in spite of not having a place in the written Armenian alphabet of the time; this could prefigure later օ.
The set of so-called double letters is expanded to include some that are clearly not single phonemes, unlike Greek /sd/, /ks/, and /ps/. It is most curious, indeed, that some letters very obviously representing

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[14]At the same time, since no written evidence from this period of time survives beyond lapidary inscriptions (Stone 1990–1; Stone et al. 1996–7), it stands to reason that Armenian punctuation may not yet have evolved beyond what was known from the relevant contact languages, in this instance Greek.

sounds that might be perceived as containing two sounds (e.g. the unaspirated non-sibilant affricate ձ /tʃ/, or the voiced sibilant affricate ձ /dz/) are not included in this list, whilst others are.

The passage also discusses vowel length, which Armenian does not distinguish.

§10: περὶ ἄρθρου - An Armeno-Greek Amalgam of Articles

ἄρθρον ἐστὶ μέρος λόγου πτωτικόν, προτασσόμενον καὶ ὑποτασσόμενον τῆς κλίσεως τῶν ὀνομάτων. καὶ ἔστι προτακτικὸν μὲν ὁ, ὑποτακτικὸν δὲ ὅς.	Յաղէ է մասն բանի հոլովական, նախադասեալ եւ ստորադասեալ ներխոնարհութեան անուանցն. եւ նախադասական է այս, որգոն ո. եւ ստորադասան է այս, որգոն որ:
παρέπεται δὲ αὐτῷ τρία· γένη, ἀριθμοί, πτώσεις.	եւ յարեւին նմա այսք. սեռք, թիւք, հոլովք:
γένη μὲν οὖν εἰσι τρία· ὁ ποιητής, ἡ ποίησις, τὸ ποίημα.	եւ են սեռք, որգոն արարապղ, արարած, արարուած:
ἀριθμοὶ τρεῖς· ἑνικός, δυϊκός, πληθυντικός· ἑνικὸς μὲν ὁ ἡ τό, δυϊκὸς δὲ τώ τά , πληθυντικὸς δὲ οἱ αἱ τά.	թիւք երեք. եզականն՝ այս, այդ, այն. երկուորականն՝ այսու, այդու, այնով. եւ յոգնականն՝ այնք, այդք, այնք:
πτώσεις δὲ ὁ τοῦ τῷ τόν ὦ, ἡ τῆς τῇ τήν ὦ.	եւ հոլովք՝ այս, այսր, այսմ, այսու, զայս, ով, այսք:

An Article is a declinable part of speech prefixed or subjoined to the various cases of nouns, taking, when prefixed, the form ὁ, and, when subjoined, the form ὅς.

It has three accidents: Gender, Number, and Case.

The Genders are three, as ὁ ποιητής, ἡ ποίησις, τὸ ποίημα.

The Numbers are three: Singular, Dual, and Plural - Singular, as ὁ, ἡ, τό; Dual, as τώ, τά; Plural, as οἱ, αἱ, τά.

The Cases are - ὁ, τοῦ, τῷ, τόν, ὦ; ἡ, τῆς, τῇ, τήν, ὦ; τό, τοῦ, τῷ, τό, ὦ.

This paragraph is the best indicator that the τέχνη may, at least in part, have served as an *aide-mémoire*. At the same time, without any explanation, numerous categories are inextricably and inexplicably mixed up here.

Armenian does not have a prepositive, independent article like Greek does, but instead uses the deictically marked enclitics *-ս*, *-դ*, and *-ն*;[15] this is not mentioned in the translation. Instead, interrogative pronounce (*ո*), relative pronouns (*որ*), and demonstrative pronouns (*այս*, *այդ*, *այն*) are given as equivalents. Only the latter has a similar function to the Greek article.[16]

Further issues lie in the inflectional categories mentioned with reference to the Greek article. Armenian has no grammatical gender, one fewer number, and two more cases than Greek.[17] The question of gender is simply ignored in the translation.[18]

In its translation of the gendered articles in the different numbers, the Armenian version uses the three deictic variants of the demonstrative, proximal *այս*, medial *այդ*, and distal *այն*. The forms of the dual are neologisms, but bear a passing resemblance to the instrumental case forms.

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[15]Cf. JENSEN (1959:§§213–14).

[16]It is worth noting, however, that the forms provided show significant phonological and/or functional parallels to those of the *Vorlage*, given that *որ* and ὅς serve as relative pronouns.

[17]Armenian does not distinguish a separate vocative case, but still retains a locative, ablative, and instrumental case from Indo-European times; their morphological realisations, however, are in part Armenian innovations; cf. OLSEN (1999).

[18]There are instances, however, in which a gender category is created for Armenian as part of translations within the Hellenising School, e.g. *սէ* for *սա*, *նէմա* for *նմա*, or *սոգա* for *սոցա*, all of which reflect forms of Gk. αὕτη; and indeed the triple *էդ*, *մու*, *մի* instead of *մի* reflecting Gk. εἷς, μία, ἕν MURADYAN (2012:91-3).

In the discussion of case, all paradigmatic forms are given, but only of one 'gender'.

If the Armenian version was used as an *aide-mémoire* or crib for reading the Greek original, the Armenian reader would surely have been more confused than helped by these renditions.

4 Preliminary Conclusions

§11: An Uncomfortable Compromise

The Armenian version of the τέχνη is, as regards its manner of approaching the Greek original on which it is based, a rather unusual 'translation' and indeed and unusual exponent of the 𝄞𝄞𝄞𝄞𝄞𝄞𝄞 𝄞𝄞𝄞𝄞𝄞. Unlike other texts counted amongst those pertaining to the so-called Hellenising School, or exhibiting particular linguistic trades of hellenising translations at any rate, this text stands out as being, in many regards, unfaithful to its *Vorlage*.

At the same time, as has been shown concerning the grapheme–phoneme correspondence and the article, this Armenian text is not strictly speaking an adaptation of the Greek either; this is not a grammar of Armenian according to Greek concepts in the same manner that many grammars of non-Indo-European languages were based on concepts of Latin grammar.

This text is an uncomfortable compromise. Metalinguistically, it serves neither the Armenian student of the original τέχνη, nor does it describe Armenian in its own right to a sufficiently faithful degree. What may, at least in περὶ ϲτοιχείου, begin to look like a grammar of Armenian, immediately reverts back to Greek, and makes both linguistic (formal) as well as metalinguistic (categorical) concessions to the original.

§12: A Sign of its Times?

Likely translated at a time of not insignificant malaise amongst the (broadly culturally and religiously speaking) hellenophile Armenians, the Armenian τέχνη is a sign of its times: of reiterating the cultural bonds with the neighbours to the West when faced with the Sasanian dominion.

While many differences between the Greek and Armenian language were simply ignored, its sound and writing system were (more or less) faithfully represented; in other instances, Greek 'rites' (e.g. of gender) have simply been adopted. As one of the carriers of identity and—if the anachronism is permitted—a sense of 'nation', the Armenian alphabet and the language it represents is one of the key defining factors of this people (cf., e.g., Panossian 2002; van Lint 2010; Zekiyan 2002).

In a small way, therefore, even in this very particular and indeed peculiar form, the Armenian 'self' reasserts itself against the Byzantine Greek (and equally Sasanian) 'other' in making space, even in a grammar of Greek, for its own identity – even if at the cost of 'sense' or comprehensibility.

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