Differential Object Marking in Old Armenian and Middle Iranian

Contact, catalysis, or chance?

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Outline

DOM in Old Armenian

Origin and function of *z*=

Origins of DOM

Iranian parallels?

Conclusions

DOM in Old Armenian

Context

- The Old Armenian nominal system does not make a morphological distinction between NOM.SG and ACC.SG
  (but: NOM.PL often *-kʿ*, ACC.PL *-s*)
- In view of relatively free constituent order, this is prone to cause ambiguities.

DOM

- Thus, Old Armenian uses the *nota accusativi z=*, graphically joined to the word/phrase it modifies, to mark *specific* direct objects.
- This includes: definite direct objects & indefinite specific direct objects.
- For details and discussion: Müth (2011), Müth (2014) and Scala (2022).

Some examples I

(1) High-definite, specific

… zi ***z=jer*** ***awandut‘iwn=n*** *hastatic‘ēk‘*
CONJ **OBJ=2PL.POSS tradition.NOM/ACC.SG=DET** set.2PL.PRS.SBJV
‘… that you may keep your tradition.’ (Mk. 7:9)

(2) Low-definite, specific

ew patmeac‘ mez orpēs etes ***z=hreštak=n*** *i tan*
and tell.3SG.AOR 1PL.DAT how see.3SG.AOR **OBJ=angel.ACC.SG=DET** in house.LOC.SG
iwrum
REFL.POSS.LOC.SG
‘And he told us how he saw an angel in his house’ (Acts 11:13)

Some examples II

(3) Indefinite, specific

ew kočʻecʻeal arʻ inkʻn ***z=mi*** *i caṙayicʻ=n …*
and call.PTCP to REFL.NOM/ACC **OBJ=INDF** from servant.GEN.PL=DET
'And he called to himself one of the servants …' (Lk. 15:26)

(4) Indefinite, non-specific

ew berin aṙaǰi nora ***xul mi*** *ew hamr*
and bring.3PL.AOR before 3SG.GEN **deaf INDF** and dumb
'And they brought before him a deaf person with a speech impediment' (Mk. 7:32)

Questions arising I

1. Why did *z*= come to mark specific objects?
   ⇒ Etymology, other functions?

2. Is this a typical background and/or trajectory for developing DOM?
   ⇒ Where do other DOM-markers arise from?

3. Is this a development internal to Armenian?
   ⇒ Can contact with West Middle Iranian be excluded?

Other uses of *z=*

As preposition (Jensen 1959: 129–30)

- + ABL ‘about, concerning’
- + INS ‘around; with, by’
- + LOC ‘towards; by’

- Some instances are essentially the pure case functions, others more nuanced.

Other remarks

- In its function as *nota accusativi*, *z= can* (but need not be) be repeated as a quasi-agreement marker, incl. of sentential constituents like relative clauses.
- For details and a tentative analysis: Meyer (2023a).

Some examples I

(5) + ABL

luaw *kin* *mi* ***z=nmanē***
hear.3SG.AOR woman.NOM.SG INDF **about=3SG.ABL**
'a woman heard about him' (Mk. 7:25)

(6) + INS

katakesc'en ***z=novaw***
mock.3PL.AOR.SBJV **about=3SG.INS**
'they will laugh about him' (Mk. 10:34)

(7) + LOC

... zi *mi* *erbēk harc'es* ***z=k'ari*** *z=otn* *k'o*
so that NEG ever strike.2SG.AOR.SBJV **at=stone.LOC.SG** OBJ=foot.NOM/ACC.SG 2SG.POSS
'... lest you ever set your foot against a stone' (Mt. 4:6)

Some examples II

(8) OBJ + AGR marking

varesc‘ē ***z=tiezerakan*** *išxanut‘iwn=d* ***z=or*** *awandeal*
use.3SG.AOR.SBJV **OBJ=comprehensive** power.ACC.SG=DET **OBJ=REL.NOM.SG** give.PTCP
ē *dma* *y=Astucoy*
be.3SG.PRS 3SG.DAT by=God.ABL.SG
‘He will use his comprehensive powers, which were given to him by God’ (Ełišē II.130)

Etymology of *z=*

- /z/ could regularly derive from
  - *intervocallic* (!) *-ǵʰ-
    e.g. Arm. *ezn* ‘ox’, Skt. *ahî* ‘cow’, MIr. *ag* ‘ox, cow’, Welsh *ael*
    Examples are few (Greppin 1980)
  - an Iranian loanword
    e.g. *bazum* ‘much’, cp. Av. *bąz-* “width”, Man. Sogd. *δβ’nz* ‘thick’, Bal. *bāz* “much” (archaic), *băz* “thick”, etc.

- The connection with OCS, Russ. *za* “to, towards; for”, Lith. *ažù* “behind, after”, Latv. *àiz* “behind, beyond < *ǵʰóH-” vel sim. is not straightforward (*pace* HAB),

BUT Hill et al. (2019) propose that *z=* was a ditropic clitic before becoming a proclitic, explaining the intervocallic treatment of *-ǵʰ-

Questions arising II

- Given that all Armenian prepositions are polyvalent as regards case, was the original function of *z=* prepositional or that of the *nota accusativi*?
  ⇒ Unlikely, since no reconstructed for PIE.
  ⇒ Primarily likely to be a directional marker.

- Given the lack of Armenian-internal information, can typology help in establishing a probable trajectory?

⇒ Given the historical morphology of Armenian (final apocope, case syncretism, etc.), DOM seems *a priori* a secondary phenomenon correlated to such changes (đisambiguation), suggesting a grammaticalisation path ADV → PREP → DOM

DOM

Generally

- Synchronically, DOM can be triggered by a number of different features including but not limited to specificity, number, animacy, uniqueness, discreteness, discourse roles, TAM, etc. (Witzlack-Makarevich and Seržant 2018)
- Sinnemäki (2014) indicates that "classical" features (like animacy, definiteness) are cross-linguistically less common causes of DOM.
- Dalrymple and Nikolaeva (2011) suggest that information structure is a key motivator in the development of DOM (similarity of topical object and subject vs. less canonical objects).
- Key principles, as already suggested, are disambiguation in combination with economy of markedness (cf. Swart 2007: 87–94).

Specifically

- Both adpositional and specific case marking of objects are widely attested, e.g. in Turkish, Hindi, Spanish, Coptic, pre-modern Japanese, etc.
- See recent case studies in Seržant and Witzlack-Makarevich (2018).

Examples I

(9) Spanish (Melis 2018: 98)

a. *Traj-eron* ***a*** *un* *amigo con* *ellos.*
bring-PFV.3PL **DOM** ART.INDF friend with 3PL
'They brought a friend with them.'

b. *Traj-eron* ***Ø*** *una* *maleta* *con* *ellos.*
bring-PFV.3PL ART.INDF suitcase with 3PL
'They brought a suitcase with them.'

Examples II

(10) Hindi (Montaut 2018: 283–4)

a. *kisī* ***ko*** *bulāo!*
INDF **DOM** call.IMP
'Call somebody!'

b. *mainẽ* *Dilīp* ***ko*** */ (*Dilīp) / Kalkattā dekhā*
1sg.ERG Dilip **DOM** Dilip Calcutta see.PFV
'I saw Dilip / Calcutta.'

(11) Turkish

çay-ı *içtim* || *çay içtim*
tea-DOM drank.1SG.PST tea drank.1SG.PST
'I drank the (cup of) tea. || I drank tea.'

Implications

- Although broad motivations are perhaps clear, DOM marking is cross-linguistically too diverse to draw indicative conclusions as to simple developmental paths (cf. e.g. Hindi *ko* < Skt. *kakṣe* 'armpit', LOC.SG; cf. Reinöhl 2016).
- Directionality seems to be one (among many) potential origins.
  ⇒ This seems to be the most promising trajectory for Armenian given the prepositional functions of *z=*.

- Cf. other uses of ACC (manner, duration) marginally retained with *z=*:
  z=ays ōrinak 'in this manner', *z=amenayn awurs* 'for all days, forever'.
- Did PArm. have directional *z=* + ACC, which ceded its directional functions to *i* and *aṙ* to take on DOM?

Why seek Iranian parallels?

- While there is internal motivation for the development of DOM, it is limited (only NOM.SG = ACC.SG, excluding personal pronouns).
- The West Middle Iranian languages are well known to have exerted considerable influence on the Armenian lexicon (Hübschmann 1875; Hübschmann 1897; Bolognesi 1960), morphology, phraseology and syntax (Meyer 2023b).
- It stands to reason that potential similarities are worth investigating, whatever be their status (model, influence, parallel, …).
- **Caveat:** most WMIr. texts of greater syntactic complexity postdate the earliest Arm. texts; a few long contemporary inscriptions exist.

Example: quotatives I

- WMIr. uses the complementiser *kw* /kū/ to mark both direct staments and direct questions (incl. those with *wh*-words).
- Etymology: originally interrogative/relative 'where(?)', cp. GAv. *kū*
- Although it is very common, it is not obligatory with direct speech/questions.

(12) Standard COMP

ud kaδ tūrān šāh dīd ***kū*** *kirbakkar abar āxāšt*
and when Tūrān king see.PTCP **COMP** benefactor up rise.PTCP
'And when the king of Tūrān saw that the benefactor had risen, …' (Pth.; M8286/I/R/1–3)

Example: quotatives II

(13) Direct speech

u=š *wāžēd* ***kū*** *āfrīd* *bawāh*
and=3SG.OBL say.3SG.PRS **QUOT** bless.PTCP be.2SG.SBJV
'And he says to him: Blessed be you!' (Pth.; M8286/I/V/7–14)

(14) Direct question with *wh*-word

wasnāδ bat zarād ***kū*** *čē* *wasnāδ druwišt nē* *būd*
because PN be-angry.PTCP **QUOT** what because well NEG become.PTCP
'Because of Bat he was/became angry [saying]: Why (lit. because of what) has he not become well?' (Pth.; MKG 1210–11)

Example: quotatives III

- A very similar constellation (though with different non-quotative functions) is found in Old Armenian with the complementiser *(e)t‘ē*.
- Armenian also uses COMP to mark indirect speech/questions; these are less common and frequently difficult to tell apart from direct ones.
- For reported speech in Classical Armenian in general, cf. Ouzounian (1992).

(15) Standard COMP

k‘anzi gitemk‘ ***t‘ē*** *na ē čšmarit Astuac*
because know.1PL.PRS **COMP** 3SG.NOM be.3SG.PRS true God
‘Because we know that he is the true God.’ (Ag. §253)

Example: quotatives IV

(16) Direct speech

isk nokʿa asēin ***tʿē*** *cano mez ew hastatea*
PTC 3PL.NOM say.3PL.PST **QUOT** make-know.2SG.AOR.IMP 1PL.ACC and confirm.2SG.AOR.IMP
z=mits mer
OBJ=mind.ACC.PL 1PL.POSS
'Then they said: Inform us and confirm our minds …' (Ag. §245)

(17) Direct question with *wh*-word

ew … asē cʿ=na yoržam i parsik i hołoy=n i veray čemein
and … say.3SG.PRS IOBJ=3SG.ACC when in Persian in soil.LOC.SG=DET atop walk.3PL.PST
tʿē *əndēr? eɫer im tʿšnami, Aršak …*
QUOT why become.2SG.AOR 1SG.POSS enemy, PN …
'And … he said to him as they were walking on top of Persian soil: Why did you become my enemy, King Aršak …?' (PʿB IV.54)

Object marking in Western Middle Iranian

- Parthian, Middle Persian (and Bactrian) have object markers, all of which derive from adpositions.
- As with Armenian, their development is likely related to an increasingly diminished case system.

- Pth.(/MP?) *w* /ō/ 'to(wards)' (Durkin-Meisterernst 2014: 330–2)
- MP *r'y* /rāy/ 'for (the sake of)' (Jügel 2019)
- (Bactrian αβ 'to(wards)' (Gholami 2014))

- Note that object marking is not obligatory (= not fully grammaticalised) in WMIr. but that late MP shows early tendencies for DOM as regards definite and (mainly) animate objects; these are likely to be interpolations from NP speakers.

Examples

(18) Pth. *w* /ō/ – (D)OM

ud ham ***ō žīrīft****, čē pad frēštag-ān wifrāšt bawēd, isxandēnd, ud* ***ō***
and also **OBJ wisdom** REL by apostle-PL proclaim.PTCP be.3SG.PRS mock.3PL.PRS and **OBJ**
adāwīft *iškarēnd*
community-of-righteous prosecute.3PL.PRS
"and they also mock the wisdom, which is proclaimed by the apostles, and prosecute the Community of the Righteous" (MKG 1682-6)

(19) MP *r'y* /rāy/ – (D)OM

ud pas awēšān mazdēsnān, čiyōn=išān ān saxwan ašnūd, awēšān haft
and then DEM.PL Mazdayasnian.PL as=3PL.OBL DEM word.PL hear.PTCP DEM.PL seven
xwaharān rāy *hunsandīh dād*
sister.PL **OBJ** satisfaction give.PTCP
"And then those Mazdayasnians, as they heard these words, satisfied those seven sisters" (AW 2 §7)

Other uses of MP/Pth. *ō*

(20) Pth. *w* /ō/ – direction

ud ***ō*** *kū* *šawēh*
and **to** where go.2SG.PRS
"And where are you going?" (GW §12)

(21) MP *w* /ō/ – purpose

ud *abāg ardaxšīr* ***ō*** *kōxšišn ēstād*
and with Ardaxšīr **for** battle stand.3SG.N-PRS
"and he stood with Ardaxšīr [ready] for battle" (KAP 10,16)

Sufficiently parallel?

Pro

- Iranian–Armenian parallels are well established.
- Both languages have reduced the morphological transparency of their case system (to differing degrees).
- Both use an otherwise multifunctional preposition for (D)OM.
- The prepositions used in Arm. and MP/Pth. have a reasonable historical functional match (pivot matching; cf. Matras and Sakel 2007) assuming Hill et al. (2019) are right.

Contra

- Pth. and MP do not have obligatory (D)OM, for Parthian the question of feature (vs. position) differentiability is still open.
- The DOM features Jügel (2019) proposes for late MP *r'y* /rāy/ [+DEF, +ANIM] do not match those of Armenian [±DEF, +SPEC] (and are too late and spurious anyway.)

(Lack of definitive) Conclusions

- Both Armenian and West Middle Iranian develop (D)OM.
- These languages are known to have been in extensive contact, incl. pattern copying by Armenian of Iranian models.

BUT This is a *necessary* but not a *sufficient* argument for supposing a contact-related explanation of this phenomenon.

- Contact cannot be *excluded* as a motivating factor.

BUT The two patterns are not perfectly aligned in terms of the features marked.

- The lack of pre-contact data makes it difficult (if not impossible?!) to determine whether in a prior state, the two systems were more closely aligned as regards the use of these markers.
- Contact *could* be *one* (among many) reasons for the development of (D)OM (a catalyst for an incipient change?); very unlikely to be the sole reason.
- Parallel but independent developments *cannot* be excluded.

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