

Translating Attraction: Free Relative Clauses in Classical Armenian

‘Insufficient strength to defend its case’

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1 Armenian Relative Clauses

Classical Armenian is an Indo-European language first attested in the early fifth century CE. Although initially thought to belong to the Iranian branch, it has been evident since the seminal work of HÜBSCHMANN (1875) that Armenian constitutes its own branch in the Indo-European family tree; its closest relatives are Greek, Albanian, and Phrygian (the Pontic Group; but cf. CLACKSON 1994 for a relativisation of the closeness of Armenian and Greek).

Armenian lexicon, phraseology and parts of its syntax have undergone significant influence from Greek (see §2 below), Iranian (cf. SCHMITT 1983; MEYER fthc. 2016 for overviews), and to a lesser extent from Syriac.

Greek influence, in particular in translated texts, led to the creation of what can be called two different Armenian grammars: standard and Hellenising (see §3 below; cf. LAFONTAINE AND COULIE 1983; COWE 1990-1; MEYER fthc. 2014).

1.1 The Basics

Likely owing to word-final apocope in its prehistory, Armenian does not have a GENDER category. Nouns, pronouns and adjectives inflect for NUMBER and CASE only. Adjectives only agree with their head when following it (and sometimes in hyperbaton). In the SG, there is no morphological distinction between NOM and ACC; definite direct objects may be marked with the proclitic *z=*.

The table below provides a (simplified) paradigm of the Armenian relative pronoun.

CASE	SG	PL
NOM	<i>or</i>	<i>ork^ʿ</i>
ACC	<i>or</i>	<i>ors</i>
GEN	<i>oroy</i>	<i>oroc^ʿ</i>
DAT	<i>orowm</i>	<i>oroc^ʿ</i>
LOC	<i>orowm</i>	<i>ors</i>
ABL ¹	<i>-ormē</i>	<i>-oroc</i>
INS	<i>orov</i>	<i>orovk^ʿ</i>

Especially in the NOM.PL, corresponding forms of the interrogative pronoun *ov* are occasionally found.

1.1.1 Etymology(?)

It is as yet unclear, whether relative *or* and interrogative *ov* derive from PIE *k^wi-/k^wo- or *ye/o-; evidence for both sound changes involved is weak. MARTIROSYAN (2010) favours *ye/o-, whereas KÖLLIGAN (2006, 2012) suggests *k^wi-/k^wo- to be more likely. The latter assumption finds some corroboration in typological parallels (cf. LEHMANN 1984:325; MEYER fthc. 2016).²

1.1.2 Wackernagel Clitics

Armenian relative clauses may further contain a Wackernagel clitic =s, =d, or =n (otherwise used as DET with a proximal, medial, or distal deictic connotation); DE LAMBERTERIE (1997:318) suggests that both usages are related, and that DET is used in a relative clause if its pivot is definite.³

1.1.3 Morphosyntactic Alignment

In most respects, ‘typical’ Armenian relative clauses hardly behave differently from most of their Indo-European counterparts. Potential confusion may arise only when the verb in the relative clause is in the periphrastic perfect. Since the Classical Armenian perfect shows tripartite morphosyntactic alignment (GEN-agent, ACC-object), relative pronouns in GEN may denote the subject of the relative clause (cf. MEYER fthc. 2015).

(1) Mt. 25:24

Matowc’éal ew oroy z=erkows k’ahk’ars=n areal
 approach.PRF.PTCP and REL.GEN.SG_a OBJ=two_o talent.ACC.PL=DET receive.PRF.PTCP
ēr, ew asē.
 be.3.SG.PST and say.3.SG.PRS

‘The one who had received the two talents approached and said.’ (lit. ‘Having approached, (he) who received the two talents, said.’)⁴

1.2 Headed Relative Clauses

The typical headed relative clause in Armenian construes similarly to those of many other Indo-European languages.

(2) Mt. 26:36

yaynžam gay Yisows and nosa i get mi
 then go.3.SG.PRS Jesus with DEM.ACC.PL into village.ACC.SG INDF.ACC.SG
orowm anown ēr get’samani
 REL.DAT.SG name be.3.SG.PST Gethsemane

‘Then Jesus went with them to a village whose (lit. ‘to which’) name was Gethsemane’

¹In Classical Armenian, the ABL only occurs after prepositions such as *i/y=* ‘away from; by’ or *z=* ‘concerning, about’.

²In some languages with *k^wi-/k^wo-, interrogative, relative and generalising pronoun are built on the same stem: Lat. *quis, qui, quisquis*; Osc. *pis, pui, pispis*; Hitt. *kuis, kuis, kuis kuis*. As this series runs *ov, or, ok’* in Armenian, it seems plausible that the same pattern may be at work.

³For a relativisation of this claim, see MEYER (fthc. 2014).

⁴The word order of this passage is unusual and distinctly unidiomatic. It results from strict adherence to the Greek original, in which both relative clauses are rendered as participles.

Despite tendencies of Armenian translations of Greek to be very close to the original, relative attraction proper is never employed in headed relative clauses (*pace* JENSEN 1959:210).⁵

(3) Lk. 2:20

<i>ew</i>	<i>darjan</i>	<i>hoviwk' =n</i>	<i>p'arawor</i>	<i>arnēin</i>	<i>ew</i>	<i>ōrhnein</i>
and	return.3.PL.AOR	shepherd.NOM.PL=DET	glorious	make.3.PL.PST	and	praise.3.PL.PST
καὶ	ἐπέστρεψαν	οἱ ποιμένες	δοξάζοντες		καὶ	αἰνοῦντες
<i>z=Astowac,</i>	<i>vasn</i>	<i>amenayn</i>	<i>z=or</i>	<i>lowan</i>	<i>ew</i>	
OBJ=God.ACC.SG	because	everything.GEN.SG	OBJ=REL.ACC.SG	hear.3.PL.AOR	and	
τὸν θεὸν	ἐπὶ	πάντων	οἷς	ἤκουσαν	καὶ	
<i>tesin,</i>	<i>orpēs</i>	<i>patmec'aw</i>	<i>noc'a.</i>			
see.3.PL.AOR	as	tell.3.SG.AOR.PASS	DEM.DAT.PL			
εἶδον	καθὼς	ἐλαλήθη	πρὸς αὐτοῦς			

‘And the shepherds returned, glorified and praised God because of everything that they had heard and seen, as it was told to them.’

Curiously, some passages present relative pronouns in unexpected cases not attributable to attraction. One such passage, shown below, is likely based on an erroneous reading.

(4) Lk. 3:23

<i>ew</i>	<i>ink'n</i>	<i>Yisows ēr</i>	<i>amac' ibrew</i>	<i>eresic'</i>	<i>skseal</i>	<i>oroc'</i>
and	INT	Jesus be.3.SG.PST	year.GEN.PL like	30.GEN.PL	begin.PRF.PTCP	REL.GEN.PL
Καὶ	αὐτὸς	ἦν ὁ Ἰησοῦς	ὡσεὶ ἐτῶν	τριακοντα	ἀρχόμενος	ὧν
<i>orpēs</i>	<i>karcēr</i>	<i>ordi</i>	<i>Yovsep'ay</i>	...		
as	think.3.SG.PST	son	Joseph.GEN.SG			
ὡς	ἐνομιζέτο	υἱός	Ἰωσήφ	...		

‘And Jesus himself had begun to be c. 30 years of age (of which?), as it was reckoned, [he] the son of Joseph ...’

The translator likely mistook Gk. ὧν ‘being’ (PRS.PTCP.NOM.SG) for the pronominal form ὧν ‘whose’ (REL.GEN.PL). No other constituent can account for this form, nor do variant readings offer any help.

1.3 Relative-Correlative Clauses

Relative-correlative structures as known from Vedic, Avestan, Greek and other Indo-European languages also occur in Armenian. In them, the relative clause precedes the matrix clause, and is coreferential with a pronominal pivot in the latter.⁶

(5) Lk. 8:12

<i>ew</i>	<i>ork'</i>	<i>ař</i>	<i>čanaparhaw=n,</i>	<i>aynok'ik</i>	<i>en,</i>	<i>or</i>
and	REL.NOM.PL	by	path.INS.SG=DET	DEM.NOM.PL	be.3.PL.PRS	REL.NOM.SG
οἱ δὲ		παρὰ	τὴν ὁδόν		εἶεν	οἱ
<i>lsen=n...</i>						
listen.3.PL.PRS=DET						
ἀκούοντες		...				

⁵Ex. 3 may, of course, better be grouped with semi-free relative clause in that its pivot is quantifying adjective emphasising the maximalising semantics of the relative clause; cp. PROBERT (2015:140–2) for Greek.

⁶Relative-correlative structures are less common in Armenian than in the other named languages. The data collected suggests, however, that like their Greek counterparts, they too are inherently maximalising; cf. PROBERT (2015:128–32; 142–4).

‘Those, who [are] by the wayside, they are the ones who listen.’

It in the context of relative-correlative sentences, it is worth mentioning instances with an incorporated ‘antecedent’, i.e. the occurrence of the logical (pseudo-)pivot within the relative clause.

(6) Elishē, *Vardan...* 33

Ew oroy astowcoy ararack' =n apakanelik' en ew
 and **REL.GEN.SG** **God.GEN.SG** creature.NOM.PL=DET corruptible.NOM.PL be.3.PL.PRS and
etcanelik', nma anelc Astowac č' =mart'i
 destructible.NOM.PL DEM.DAT.SG indestructible God.NOM.SG NEG=be-possible.3.SG.PRS
asel
 say.PRS.INF
 ‘The creatures of which god are corruptible and destructible, him one cannot call an
 indestructible god.’

Both of these types are essentially semi-free relative clauses in that the pronominal element in the matrix clause is semantically vacuous; it is only tradition and the position of the relative clause that set them apart.

1.4 Free and Semi-Free Relative Clauses

Free relative clauses are subject to case-matching constraints:⁷ their occurrence is restricted to situations in which the case of REL as determined by relative clause syntax is identical to that of its logical pivot in the matrix clause.

(7) Mt. 14:21

ew ork' keran =n Ø ēin ark' ibrew hing hazar.
 and **REL.NOM.PL**_i eat.3.PL.AOR=DET e_i be.3.PL.PST man.NOM.PL like 5 thousand
 οἱ δὲ ἐχθίοντες ἦσαν ἄνδρες ὡσεὶ πεντακισχίλιοι
 ‘And [those] who ate were about five thousand men.’

While free relative clauses are frequent in both the New Testament translation and original Armenian literature, semi-free relative clauses, i.e. those with a cataphoric pivot in the matrix clause, are almost absent from the New Testament, but common elsewhere.

(8) *Agat'angelos, Patmowt' iwn Hayoc' 9,13*

nok'a z =merks zgec'owc' anen, ew z =aynosik, ork'
 DEM.NOM.PL OBJ=naked.ACC.PL dress.3.PL.PRS and OBJ=DEM.ACC.PL **REL.NOM.PL**
melōk' =n en merkac' eal əst nmanowt' ean =n Adamay, ...
 sin.INS.PL=DET be.3.PL.PRS undress.PRF.PTCP in likeness.LOC.SG=DET Adam.GEN.SG
 ‘They dress the naked, and those who through sins have become naked in the likeness of Adam,
 ...’

This type of relative clause is usually employed where case-matching constraints prevent free relative clauses.

⁷For the most part; see §3 for a minority pattern of non-case matching relative clauses.

2 Brief excursus: the so-called *Hellenising School*

A sizeable amount of Armenian literature consists of translations from Greek; the texts translated were largely of a philosophical, scientific, or religious nature.

‘Translation’ may in fact be an unfortunate choice of word, since according to NICHANIAN (1989:135) these texts “ne servai[ent] à transmettre le sens, mais à transmettre la lettre”. As shown most recently by MURADYAN (2012), morpheme-by-morpheme calques of Greek words into Armenian are extremely common, as are unusual case usage, and close adherence to original word order; even the creation of artificial gender distinctions can be observed.

An example:

(9) Dionysios Thrax, *τέχνη γραμματική* §13 (ADONTZ 1970:30)

<i>ew anowan</i>	<i>hast(at)adrowt'iwnc'</i>	<i>en</i>	<i>erkow,</i>	<i>nergorcowt'iwnc'</i>	<i>ew</i>
and noun.GEN.SG	disposition.NOM.PL	be.3.PL.PRS	two	agency.NOM.SG	and
Τοῦ δὲ ὁμόματος	διαθέσεις	εἰς	δύο,	ἐνέργεια	καὶ
<i>kir.</i>	<i>ew nergorcowt'iwnc'</i>	<i>ē</i>	<i>ibr t'e</i>	<i>datawor,</i>	
patience.NOM.SG	and agency.NOM.SG	be.3.SG.PRS	like	judge.NOM.SG	
πάθος,	ἐνέργεια μὲν		ὡς	κριτής	
<i>antrawl.</i>	<i>ew kir</i>		<i>ibr t'e</i>	<i>dateal,</i>	
judge.PRS.PTCP.NOM.SG	and patience.NOM.SG		like	judge.PRF.PTCP.NOM.SG	
ὁ κρίνων,	πάθος δὲ		ὡς	κριτός	
<i>datec'eal</i>					
judge.PRF.PTCP.NOM.SG					
ὁ κρινόμενος.					

‘The dispositions of the noun are two, agency and patience. Agency, such as “judge”, (viz.) who is judging. Patience, such as “judgeable” (lit. “judged”), (viz.) who is judged.’

Ex. 9 adheres strictly to Greek word order and shows a variety of ‘translation mechanisms’, e.g.:

- (a) strict calquing – *nergorcowt'iwnc'*, like *ἐνέργεια*, consists of three morphemes, *ner-* ≈ *ἐν-* ‘in, inside’, cp. Arm. *nerk'o* ‘under, in’; *gorc* ≈ *ἔργον* ‘work, action’; and *-owt'iwnc'* ≈ *-ια* as an abstract suffix.
- (b) approximate calquing – this type is more variable: e.g. *datawor* ≈ *κριτής* ‘judge’, containing a lexical root and a suffix, the latter of which differs in function in both languages.⁸ Where morphological parallels are unavailable, approximations are attempted, e.g. *dateal* ≈ *κριτός* – Armenian does not have a verbal adjective to support the meaning of *-τός* denoting an accomplished action; a secondary PRF.PTCP built on the present stem is used.⁹
- (c) redefinition – an existing lexeme is used in order to render the Greek, often by extending its original meaning, so for example in *anowan* ≈ *ὄνομα* ‘noun’, *kir* ≈ *πάθος* ‘suffering; patience’.

Traditionally, the New Testament translation has not been counted as belonging to the Hellenising School, since it exhibits far less calquing (cf. MANANDYAN 1928). More recent studies of biblical texts

⁸Gk. *-τής* functions solely as an agentive suffix (KÜHNER-GERTH 1869:694), whereas Arm. *-wor* < PIE **-bhorā* (AJELLO 1971:61) originally and synchronically still means ‘imbued with, possessing’, cp. *t'agawor* ‘king; lit. who bears the crown’, *melawor* ‘sinner; lit. who is imbued with sins’.

⁹The contrast *κριτός*, *κρινόμενος* cannot be rendered properly in Armenian, since participles are unable to reflect aspect; there is further no semantic difference between *dateal* and *datec'eal* – the latter is built on the aorist rather than the present stem, both of which variations are common (JENSEN 1959:105) – but assuming this variation to be an attempt at rendering aspects seems plausible.

argue, however, that other grecising features are well-represented (esp. word order, case usage, idiom; cf. COULIE 1994-5:43; LAFONTAINE AND COULIE 1983:129–30; COWE 1990-1).
Can the usage of relative clauses corroborate this argument?

3 Non-Case Matching in Free Relative Clauses

3.1 New Testament translation: REL ⇒ pivot

The standard grammar of Classical Armenian prescribes case-matching constraints as mentioned above. This is distinctly not the case for the Hellenising grammar, esp. in the New Testament translation. Here, REL may take the case required by matrix clause syntax; such patterns occur in both Greek and Armenian (ex. 10), but also independently just in Armenian (ex. 11).

(10) Lk. 23:41

<i>ew mek´</i>	<i>y=iravi,</i>	<i>zi aržani</i>	<i>oroc´</i>	<i>gorcec´ak´=n</i>
and 1.NOM.PL	in=justice.LOC.SG	because worthy	REL.GEN.PL	do.1.PL.AOR=DET
καὶ ἡμεῖς μὲν	δικαίως	ἄξια γὰρ	ὧν	ἐπράξαμεν
<i>arñoumk´</i>	<i>z=hatowc´owmn</i>			
take.1.PL.PRS	OBJ=compensation.ACC.SG			
ἀπολαμβάνομεν				

‘And we justly take compensation worthy of what we have done.’

(11) Act. 22:15

<i>zi elic´es</i>	<i>vkay</i>	<i>nora</i>	<i>ar</i>	<i>am(enayn)</i>	<i>mardik,</i>
for become.2.SG.AOR.SBJV	witness.NOM.SG	DEM.GEN.SG	to	all	mankind.ACC.SG
ὅτι ἔειπεν	μάρτυς	αὐτῷ	πρὸς	πάντας	ἀνθρώπους
<i>oroc´</i>	<i>teser=n</i>	<i>ew lowar.</i>			
REL.GEN.PL	see.2.SG.AOR=DET	and hear.2.SG.AOR			
ὧν	ἑώρακα	καὶ ἤκουσα			

‘For you shall be his witness to all mankind of what you have seen and heard.’

In ex. 10, GEN is dependent on *aržani* / ἄξια; the relative clause verb requires ACC, which is not realised in either sentence.

In ex. 11, GEN is licensed in Greek both by relative clause syntax (ἀκούω + GEN)¹⁰ and the matrix clause (adjunct to μάρτυς). In Armenian the latter situation obtains, too, but the verbs in the relative clause demand ACC.

Non-case matching free relative clauses most commonly occur as translations of Greek articular phrases (e.g. with participial or adverbial determinands). In such instances, the Armenian REL renders the Greek DET.

¹⁰The Classical Greek distribution of ἀκούω + GEN [+human], but ACC [-human] is not stringently maintained in (post-)Hellenistic Greek.

(12) Mt. 5:42

orowm	<i>xndrē</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>kēn,</i>	<i>towr,</i>	<i>ew or</i>	<i>kami</i>
REL.DAT.SG	ask.3.SG.PRS	from	2.ABL.SG	give.2.SG.AOR.IPV	and	REL.NOM.SG want.3.SG.PRS
Tō	αἰτοῦντί		ce	δός	καὶ τὸν	θέλοντα
	<i>p'ox arnowl i kēn,</i>		<i>mi</i>	<i>darjowc'aner</i>	<i>z=eres=s.</i>	
	loan take.PRS.INF from 2.ABL.SG	NEG	turn.2.SG.PRS.IPV	OBJ=face.ACC.SG=DET		
	ἀπὸ τοῦ δανείσασθαι		μὴ	ἀποστραφῆς		

‘Give to him who asks you, and don’t turn your face from him who wants to take a loan from you.’

This example further illustrates the optional nature of ‘attraction’: in the second relative clause of the passage, REL exhibits the case expected by the relative clause; the matrix clause would call for ABL. A similar situation can be observed in semi-free relative clauses.

(13) Rom. 1:7

<i>amenec'own</i>	oroc'	<i>ēk'</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>Hrov̄m</i>	<i>sireleac'</i>	<i>a(stowco)y,</i>
all.DAT.PL	REL.DAT.PL	be.2.PL.PRS	in	Rome	beloved.GEN.PL	God.GEN.SG
<i>πᾶσιν</i>	τοῖς	<i>οὔσιν</i>	<i>ἐν</i>	<i>Ῥώμῃ</i>	<i>ἀγαπητοῖς</i>	<i>θεοῦ,</i>
<i>koč'ec'eloc'</i>	<i>srhoc'</i>	...				
call.PRF.PTCP.DAT.PL	holy.GEN.PL					
<i>κλητοῖς</i>	<i>ἀγίοις</i>					

‘To you all who are in Rome, beloved by God, called [to be] Saints...’

3.2 Original Texts: non-case matching without attraction

In the original texts, case-matching constraints are standardly observed or bypassed (e.g. with pronominal pivots).

One instance, however, shows a non-matching free relative clause without any surface connection to the matrix clause.

(14) Ehišē, Vardan... 131

<i>Ew yandiman</i>	<i>xōsēr</i>	<i>t'agawor=n,</i>	ork'	<i>ēin</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>tan=n</i>
and in-front-of	say.3.SG.PST	king=DET	REL.NOM.PL	be.3.PL.PST	in	house.LOC.SG=DET
<i>ark'owni,</i>	<i>et'ē</i>	...				
royal	COMP					

‘And before [those] who were at the royal court, the kind said that ...’

The preposition *yandiman* expects GEN, which is not realised anywhere; REL remains in NOM as required by the relative clause.

Conversely, in three very similar instances in Eznik’s *Elc Ałandoc'* (The Refutation of Sects), however, attraction of REL does occur – but only after a preposition.

(15) Eznik, *Etc Alandoc* 49 (cp. also 44, 51)

Na ew z=mardoy yirawi, asemk', krel patowhas
also concerning=man.ABL.SG justly say.1.PL.PRS endure.PRS.INF punishment.ACC.SG
and oroc' gorcic'e.
for REL.GEN.PL work.3.SG.PRS.SBJV

'We also say about man that he rightly endures the punishment for what he has done.'

The scope of this phenomenon (attraction in original texts) is limited: it only occurs in Eznik, one of the translators of the New Testament, and is restricted to three passages, following a preposition in each.

4 Causes & Implications

4.1 Hierarchies

Non-case matching relative clauses in the New Testament are a minority pattern, making up only *c.* 3% of all relative clauses studied (27 instances out of 947, excluding clauses with REL in NOM.SG).

Attraction routes are limited: NOM ⇒ ACC, DAT, GEN; ACC ⇒ GEN. These routes correspond neatly to the attraction hierarchy postulated by GROSU (1994:108), adapted below:

(16) NOM ⇒ ACC ⇒ DAT ⇒ GEN ⇒ ... ⇒ PRONOMINAL

In Armenian and other Indo-European languages, this hierarchy maps neatly onto the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy postulated by (KEENAN AND COMRIE 1977:66; adapted below), according to which a language's ability to relativise on a syntactic role in the hierarchy entails that all roles higher in the hierarchy can be relativised as well:

(17) Subject ⇒ Direct Object ⇒ Indirect Object ⇒ Oblique ⇒ Genitive ⇒ Object of Comparison¹¹

'Attraction' thus occurs from the more accessible (in Armenian: structural) case into the less accessible case / role. A plausible reason for this pattern: more accessible cases / roles are more readily understood by implication / context (cp. PROBERT 2015:196–7 on the situation in Greek).

4.2 Translating 'Attraction'

As suggested above, relative attraction proper, i.e. in headed relative clauses, does not occur.

New Testament Armenian only knows non-case matching phenomena in (semi-)free relative clauses. They are very unlikely to be internally motivated since

- they (almost) never occur in non-translated texts
- they are linked to relative clauses or articular phrases in Greek
- they closely imitate Greek case usage and word order

These (semi-)free relative clauses therefore serve as a valuable diagnostic tool, determining that

- (a) the Armenian New Testament translation, under influence from Greek, has developed a grammar partially different from that of original texts;

¹¹This, however, remains an abstraction; attraction is still constrained by morphological case rather than by syntactic role.

- (b) it is therefore not suitable as a linguistic representative of Classical Armenian;
- (c) even when ‘attraction’ occurs as a translation effect, the hierarchies postulated by GROSU (1994) and KEENAN AND COMRIE (1977) still hold.

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