Imperfective Modalities in Classical Armenian:

the Case of the *Irrealis*

According to traditional grammars of Classical Armenian (e.g. Jensen 1959:§§586–7), two types of *irrealis* conditional clauses can be differentiated: a present type, in which protasis and apodosis both make use of imperfect indicatives (1); and a past type, which employs periphrastic pluperfect indicatives (perfect participle + imperfect of an auxiliary verb) in both clauses (2).

(1) *et'e Astuac ēr   hayr jer,   sireik'   ardeawk'*
     if   God   be.3.SG.IPFV father 2.PL.POSS love.2.PL.IPFV truly
     z=is
     OBJ=1.SG.ACC
     "If God were your father, you would truly love me" (Jn 8:42)

(2) *et'e ast leal   eir,   ełbayr=n   im   č'=ēr*
     if   here be.PRF.PTCP be.2.SG.IPFV brother=DET 1.SG.POSS NEG=be.3.SG.IPFV
     mer̄eal
     die.PRF.PTCP
     "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." (Jn 11:21)

This binary classification of *irrealis* conditionals into present and past aligns well with similar patterns found in other older Indo-European languages, such as Latin and Greek. Classical Armenian sets itself apart, however, since unlike Latin it does not use the subjunctive of the imperfect or pluperfect to express *irrealis* notions (Menge 2009:§562), nor is the apodosis marked by a modal particle like Gk. ἄν (Horrocks 1996).

Further complications arise when taking into account sentences where the imperfect is used to denote a past *irrealis* with another imperfect (3) or an aorist in the protasis (4).

(3) *sa   t'e margarē ok'   ēr,   apa gitēr ...*
     3.SG.DEM if prophet INDEF be.3.SG.IPFV then know.3.SG.IPFV
     "If he were a prophet, he would have known ..." (Lk 7:39)

(4) *et'e ekn,   sakayn   partaworeloc'   ēr*
     if   come.3.SG.AOR nevertheless condemn.FUT.PTCP be.3.SG.IPFV
     "If he had come, he would have had to be condemned nevertheless." (EK §268)

The occurrence of divergent patterns, and the lack of marking when compared to its Indo-European cousins suggests that a new investigation of present and past *irrealis*

conditionals in Classical Armenian is due. In view of recent work on the influence of Greek on Armenian in general, and the Bible translation in particular, the evaluations of traditional grammars and other secondary literature, which are largely based on said translations, can no longer stand (Coulie 1994-5; Weitenberg 1993); in describing and analysing Armenian grammar, translated and original texts must be treated separately.

On the basis of two corpus studies of Armenian conditional clauses—translated texts (New Testament) and original texts (5th-century historical texts)—, this paper proposes that a differentiation between present (imperfect indicative) and past (pluperfect indicative) *irrealis* in the apodosis has arisen only secondarily in Armenian under Greek influence. This finds expression in the significantly lower incidence of pluperfect past *irrealis* conditionals in original texts when compared to translated texts. The presumed original pattern (imperfect) has, however, not been replaced entirely in translated texts, as (3) above illustrates.

If this analysis is correct, it suggests that Classical Armenian may not have differentiated *irrealis* conditionals prior to Greek influence. Accordingly, the Armenian imperfect indicative originally covered not only declarative and evidential modal categories of incomplete actions, but also the *irrealis* category—that is *incompletable* actions—irrespective of tense.

References

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