Postnominal Relative Clause Development in Classical Armenian
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The Data: Classical Armenian

- OV Indo-European language, attested from the 5th century CE.
- Two relativization strategies:
  A. Adjoined correlative constructions using relative/interrogative pronoun.
  B. Postnominal embedded relative clauses (RCs) using the relative/interrogative pronoun or the complementizers *z* or *et'e*.

Postnominal RCs From Proto-Indo-European?

- The only securely reconstructible RC strategy for PIE is the correlative construction, which appears in almost all of the daughter branches.
- Many daughter languages have postnominal RCs without PIE.
- Classical Armenian postnominal RCs cannot be inherited from PIE.

Proposed Postnominal RC Development Pathways

**Possible language-internal developmental pathways for Armenian postnominal RCs:**

A. **Directly from the correlative construction** (Lehmann 1974)
   - PIE is thought to have left-adjuncted correlatives only.
   - Many daughter languages show a left-adjoined construction, and could also right-adjoin correlatives.
   - Right-adjoined correlatives could have eventually become embedded after nominals.
   - However, in languages that develop postnominal relatives, they always coexist with left-adjoined correlatives for a time.

B. **Syntactic extension** (analogy) (Harris & Campbell 1995)
   - Assuming PIE had participial RCs, their adjunction distribution would likely be similar to correlatives.
   - Bare participles could also directly modify nominals.
   - Correlative adjunction distribution was extended to postnominal position by analogy with bare participial adjunction placement.
   - Postnominally adjoined correlatives were reanalyzed as embedded RCs.

C. **An intermediate headless relative stage** (Hendery 2012)
   - However, both relativization strategies were already available, including the relative/interrogative pronoun or.

D. **Completely independent development** (Hendery 2012)
   - However, both relativization strategies were already available, including the relative/interrogative pronoun or.

**Reason #1: Patterns of Language Contact**

**Proposal**

Classical Armenian modeled its postnominal relative clauses on those of Middle Iranian, with which it was in close contact for hundreds of years while Armenia was ruled by the Persians.

**Reason #2: Persian Influence on Armenian**

- Armenia was ruled by the Achaemenids and later the Arsacids for several hundred years prior to Armenia’s first attestation.
- Middle Persian and Parthian heavily influenced Armenian, to the point that it was considered an Iranian language until the late 1800s.

**Reason #3: Persian and Armenian RC Similarity**

- Middle Persian and Parthian both had postnominal relative clauses practically identical to those found in Classical Armenian.
- Both used their relative/interrogative pronoun as a relativizer.

**Conclusion: Armenian Borrowed Postnominal RCs**

- From its correlative construction, Pre-Armenian had the exact machinery necessary to replicate the postnominal relative clause construction of Middle Persian.
- Armenian modeled its postnominal relative clause construction on that of Middle Persian.

Syntactic Similarities

- To demonstrate the similarities between these constructions, I have presented two of many possible syntactic analyses below.
  - In (4) I adopt the analysis of Dayal (1996), in which the correlative construction base adjoins to IP.
  - Note that, aside from syntactic embedding, the necessary elements present in the postnominal RC are already present in the correlative.

Open Questions & Future Research

1. I have argued that postnominal RC development in Pre-Armenian is due to heavy influence from Middle Persian, and have briefly attempted to demonstrate the similarities between Armenian RCs and correlatives.
   - In doing so, however, I have passed the buck for postnominal relative clause development back a step to Middle Iranian.
   - Many other Indo-European subfamilies also developed postnominal relative clauses.
   - How and why these parallel developments occurred independently throughout Europe and Asia remains one of the biggest unanswered questions in diachronic syntax.

2. I have only attempted to account for Armenian RC development through the classical period. I hope to do a similar analysis for the development of Modern Armenian, in which I account for the development of prenominal participial RCs as well as the loss of correlatives.

Selected References


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