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Classical Armenian: Phonology

Part 2 – Segmental Phonology: Vowels

Classical Armenian: Phonology 2

- Segmental phonology: vowels and diphthongs
- Vowel alternations
- Apparent exceptions; rare alternations

Segmental phonology: vowels

- Classical Armenian had six vowel phonemes: *i*, *ē*, *e*, *a*, *o*, *u* <ow>.
- There was also a vowel *ə*, which will be discussed in the next lecture on syllable structure.

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u <ow>
High-Mid	ē		
Mid	e	ə	o
Low		a	

Diphthongs

- Classical Armenian also had the following **diphthongs**:
 - falling: *ea*
 - rising: *ay, oy*
 - rising: *aw, ew, iw*

- There were also rare instances of the **triphthongs** *eyay* and *iyay*, e.g. *Hreyay* ‘Jew’, *miayn* ‘alone’.

Vowel alternations

- A well-known feature of Classical Armenian is the alternation of vowels in **final** and **nonfinal** syllables.

Final	Nonfinal
<i>i</i>	∅
<i>u</i>	∅
<i>ē</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>oy</i>	<i>ow /u/</i>
<i>ea</i>	<i>e</i>

- The vowels *a*, *e*, and *o* are stable.

Vowel alternations

- These alternations are **fully productive** and represented by dozens of examples each. Typical are:
 - inflected case forms of nouns, as well as (suffixed) derivatives and compounds; and
 - the aorist outside the active 3sg., as well as derived verbal stems.

Vowel alternations

- Examples involving $i \sim \emptyset$ and $u \sim \emptyset$:

nom.sg.	gen.sg.	aor.3sg.	aor.1sg.
<i>sirt</i> 'heart'	<i>srt-i</i>	<i>egit</i> 'found'	<i>gti</i>
<i>amis</i> 'month'	<i>ams-oy</i>	<i>elik'</i> 'left'	<i>lk'i</i>
<i>inc</i> 'leopard'	<i>anc-ow</i>		
<i>k'own</i> 'sleep'	<i>k'n-oy</i>	<i>emowt</i> 'went in'	<i>mti</i>
<i>bazowm</i> 'many'	<i>bazm-i</i>	<i>ekowl</i> 'swallowed'	<i>kli</i>
<i>dowstr</i> 'daughter'	<i>dst-er</i>		

Vowel alternations

- Examples involving $\bar{e} \sim i$, $oy \sim ow$, and $ea \sim e$:

nom.sg.	gen.sg.	aor.3sg.	aor.1sg.
<i>mēg</i> ‘fog’	<i>mig-i</i>	<i>ēj̄</i> ‘climbed down’	<i>ij̄i</i>
<i>sēr</i> ‘love’	<i>sir-oy</i>	<i>edēz</i> ‘piled up’	<i>dizi</i>
<i>loys</i> ‘light’	<i>lows-oy</i>	<i>eboyc</i> ‘nourished’	<i>bowci</i>
<i>hamboyr</i> ‘kiss’	<i>hambowr-i</i>	<i>ij̄oyc’</i> ‘made climb down’	<i>ij̄owc’i</i>
<i>matean</i> ‘house’	<i>maten-i</i>	<i>sireac’</i> ‘loved’	<i>sirec’i</i>
<i>sireal</i> ‘loved’	<i>sirel-oy</i>		

Apparent exceptions

- *i* and *u* are not affected (at least in spelling) if they are **word-initial** and followed by a single consonant:
 - *iž* ‘snake’, gen. *iž-i*;
 - *ows* ‘shoulder’, gen. *ows-oy*;

- or in **hiatus**:
 - *ji* ‘horse’, gen. *ji-oy*, compound *ji-a-wor* ‘horse rider’;
 - *jow* ‘egg’, gen. *jow-oy*.

- But note *t’iw* ‘number’, gen. *t’ow-oy* [tʰəˈwoj].

Rare alternations

- Apparent alternations of *ew* ~ *iw* reflect a recent prehistoric change of $\hat{e} > e / _ w$ (Matzinger, *Fs Pisowicz* [2006]). The sequence <ēw> does not occur in Classical Armenian.
 - *dew* ‘demon’ (< **dēw* ← Midlr. *dēw*) ~ gen. *diw-i*;
 - *ewt* ‘oil’ (< **ēwt*?) ~ gen. *iwt-oy*.

- The rare triphthongs *eay*, *iay* alternate with *e*, e.g. in
 - *Hreay* ‘Jew’ ~ gen. *Hre-i* (< **Hreyi*), *Hre-a-stan* ‘Judea’;
 - *miayn* ‘alone’ ~ *men-a-stan* ‘monastery’.

Consequences for phonology

- Note as a result that:
 - \emptyset in a nonfinal syllable can be underlyingly either /i/ or /u/; and
 - *i* in a nonfinal syllable is underlyingly /ē/, and *u* <ow> in a nonfinal syllable is underlyingly /oy/ (except in the cases just seen).

- *e* is different: the great majority of *e* are stable /e/, and only a few alternate with *ea* (most importantly in the weak aorist *-ec'* ~ *-eac'* and gerund *-el-* ~ *-eal-*; see Verbal Morphology).

Vowel alternations in later Armenian

- The merger of \bar{e} and e (except in initial position; see the next lecture) and other changes obscured the alternations $\bar{e} \sim i$, $oy \sim u$, and $ea \sim e$ in later Armenian.
- However, $i \sim \emptyset$ and $u \sim \emptyset$ remain productive in the modern language:
 - *mis* ‘meat’ \sim gen. *ms-i*,
 - *sowrb* ‘holy’ \sim gen. *srb-i*.

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Thank you for your attention!