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Classical Armenian: Phonology

Part 3 – Stress, Syllable Structure

Classical Armenian: Phonology 3

- Vowel alternations and stress
- Final stress; exceptions
- Classical vs. postclassical pronunciation
- Consonant clusters and epenthetic schwa
- Syllable structure

Vowel alternations and stress

- The last lecture introduced vowel alternations between final and nonfinal syllables.
- The generally accepted view is that these alternations reflect the treatment of **stressed** and **unstressed** vowels, respectively.
- Vowels and diphthongs were retained in final syllables, which were stressed.
- In pretonic position, i.e. in nonfinal syllables,
 - **i* and **u* were weakened to \emptyset ;
 - **ey*, **ew* were weakened to *i*, *u*.

Vowel alternations and stress

Nonfinal	Final
* <i>i</i> > \emptyset	* <i>í</i> > <i>i</i>
* <i>u</i> > \emptyset	* <i>ú</i> > <i>u</i>
* <i>ey</i> > <i>i</i>	* <i>éy</i> > <i>ē</i>
* <i>ew</i> > <i>u</i>	* <i>éw</i> > <i>oy</i>

- (*ea* does not fit into this scheme, since it does not go back to a PIE diphthong, but results from contraction of vowel sequences.)

Further evidence for stress: apocope

- Further evidence for the position of stress is **diachronic** in nature: *all* vowels in PIE word-final syllables were lost (apocope), presumably in posttonic position.
- aor.3sg. *eber* ‘brought’ < **ebére* < PIE **éb^heret*
- *mard* ‘human’ < **márdos* < PIE **mṛtós* ‘mortal’
- *ewt’n* ‘seven’ < **éβtan* < PIE **septm̥*
- *owt’* ‘eight’ < **útu* < PIE **oḱtów* ‘eight’
- *hayr* ‘father’ < **háđir* < PIE **ph₂tér*
- gen./dat./loc. *hawr* ‘father’ < **háđr-os/ey/i* < PIE **ph₂tr-ós/éy/i*

Postlexical final stress

- Classical Armenian therefore had postlexical **final stress**, much like modern French.
- Despite periodic claims, no good evidence for any indirect survivals of PIE lexical stress, e.g. in the form of conditioned sound changes.
- Armenian thus cannot contribute to the reconstruction of the PIE accentual system.

Exceptions to final stress

Practically the only exceptions to final stress (as determined by vowel reductions and the traditional pronunciation) are:

- 1) **demonstrative** pronouns and adjectives
 - *ay-s* 'this' (with near-deictic *-s*):
 - gen. *áysr* < **áy-s-or*, dat. *áysm* < **áy-s-um*
 - gen. *áysor-ik*, dat. *áys-m-ik* (emphatic)
 - *áys-pēs* 'so, in this way'
 - 2) **interjections**, many also with demonstrative value
 - *aháwa-s-ik* 'see here!' (with near-deictic *-s-*)

Classical vs. postclassical pronunciation

- The traditional (church) pronunciation of Classical Armenian reflects several changes of postclassical date:
 - initial [e-] > [je-], e.g. երկու [jer'ku] 'two'
 - initial [o-] > [vo-], ոչ [voʃʰ] 'not'
 - final -ay, -oy > [-a], [-o] (except in monosyllables, e.g. *Hay* 'Armenian')
 - nonfinal oy > [uj]
 - diphthongs [iw], [ea] > [ju], [ja]
 - ր [ɾ] > [ɣ]
 - initial [j-] > [h-]

More postclassical changes: \bar{e} and \bar{o}

- In addition, the following postclassical changes affected the vowels.
- 1. \bar{e} merged with e except in initial position: \bar{e} - [e-] vs. e - [je-].
- In Old Armenian manuscripts, \bar{e} is often written for e before a vowel:
 - $\bar{e}in$ for ein ‘be-IMPF.3PL’;
 - $Galil\bar{e}\bar{e}$ for $Galile\bar{e}$ ‘Galilee-ABL’.
- 2. $aw > \bar{o}$, written with the new letter O o from the 12th c. onwards.
 - $h\bar{o}r$ for $hawr$ ‘father-GEN/DAT/LOC.SG’
 - $ays\bar{o}r$ for $ays-awr$ ‘today’ (lit. ‘this-day’)

More postclassical changes: \bar{e} and \bar{o}

- The letter Է Է \bar{e} was replaced with *e* in the Soviet Armenian orthographic reform of the early 1920s. Hence e.g. հայերէն for traditional հայերԷն *hayerēn* ‘Armenian language’.
- In Modern Eastern Armenian, \bar{e} and \bar{o} are used only to indicate word-initial [e-] and [o-], respectively, e.g.
 - Էջմիածին *Ējmiacin*,
 - օպտիկա *optika*.
- \bar{e} is also retained in Է \bar{e} ‘is’ (cf. Էմ *em* ‘am’).

When did weakening happen?

- The weakening of pretonic vowels was relatively late, since it affected loanwords from Iranian and Syriac, but only after the earliest Armenian borrowings in Old Georgian.
- Syriac *ihūdāyā* → pre-Arm. **Hureay* → OGeor. *Huria(y)* ‘Jew’
(Arm. *Hreay*)
- Middle Persian *spētak* → pre-Arm. **spētak* → OGeor. *sp’et’ak’i* ‘white’
(Arm. *spitak*)

Consonant clusters...on paper

- The change of pretonic **i, *u > *∅* produced some impressive consonant clusters, at least orthographically, e.g.
 - *bžškem* ‘heal’,
 - *jnjem* ‘destroy’.

- Addition of prepositions also produced consonant clusters, e.g.
 - *c'-nosa* ‘to them’,
 - *z-bžišk* ‘doctor (definite accusative)’.

Consonant clusters and epenthetic schwa

- However, manuscripts and the traditional pronunciation indicate that such clusters were pronounced with epenthetic schwa [ə].
- The letter ը ə is written only
 - **word-initially**, e.g. *əmpem* ‘drink’, *ənt’ernowm* ‘read’; and
 - at the end of a **hyphenated** word, e.g. *sər|boy* for *srboy* ‘holy-GEN.SG’, *gə|rem* for *grem* ‘I write’.
- Elsewhere it was not expressed in writing because it did not contrast with [Ø], i.e. its occurrence was automatically predictable.

Syllable structure

- Classical Armenian had a **maximal syllable template CVCC**.
- Word-initial sequences of consonants were realized as $[C_1əC_2-]$, except sequences of sibilant (S) + stop (T), which were realized as $[əST-]$.
 - *bžškem* [bə.žəš.kem] ‘I heal’
 - *grem* [gə.rem] ‘I write’
 - *jnjem* [dʒən.dʒem] ‘I destroy’
 - *spitak* [əs.pi.tak] ‘white’
 - *zgenowm* [əz.ge.num] ‘I put on (clothes)’
 - *c'-nosa* [tʰə.no.sa] ‘to them’

Syllable structure

Complex codas consisting of sonorant or sibilant + stop were allowed (falling sonority).

- With sonorant + stop:
 - *mard* ‘human’
 - *drand* ‘threshold, doorframe’
 - *an-yatt* ‘invincible’

- With sibilant + stop:
 - *ost* ‘branch’
 - *azg* ‘people’

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Thank you for your attention!