

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE IN EASTERN ARMENIAN:

GRAMMATICAL CONSTRAINS AND PRAGMASEMANTIC FUNCTIONS.

1. The current discussion on possible interrelations between grammaticalization and pragmatization can help to reconsider some well-known phenomena, which traditionally are treated as a “pure” grammatical despite the numerous controversies and deviations and without any consistent explanations for them. The interplay between various grammatical (morphological and syntactical) and pragmatic (discursive, contextual, referential and anaphorical) factors can be a key for the understanding of such a grammatical category, as definite/indefinite/zero postpositive articles in modern Eastern-Armenian. This category is addressed by all the existing grammars as a morphological category of noun; the general understanding with some slight differences can be summed up as follows :

Modern Eastern Armenian distinguishes definite and indefinite nouns. Definiteness is marked by suffixing the definite article -ը -ը/-ն -n to the noun. Indefiniteness appears unmarked by using the bare noun and as marked by using the preposed indefinite article մի mi “a”. The unmarked, i.e. bare or zero form of a noun denotes the general meaning of a noun without determining it more closely or without constraining its meaning¹. It is used if the speaker refers for the first time to a person/object, i.e. it is completely unknown and unspecific to both speaker and hearer (Jasmine Dum-Tragut. Armenian Modern Eastern Armenian. John Benjamins Publishing, 2009: 102)

As usual, after such a definition a long list of the various usages is followed, and most of them are not in compliance with it.

2. First of all, this opposition has a very restricted scope of operation: it may be expressed only by two cases out of five (nominative and causative).

Secondly: the proper distinction between definite/indefinite modes of noun usage can be expressed only in case of direct object (accusative/nominative for in-animate and accusative/dative for animate), and, mostly, for the of in-animate nouns: գրեցի նամակ vs գրեցի նամակը (grets 'i namak vs grets 'i namak՝, I wrote a letter vs I wrote the letter); for the animate nouns this distinction usually is expressed by using forms of causative instead of dative: կանչեցի բժշկին vs կանչեցի բժշկ (kanch 'yets 'i bzhshkin vs kanch 'yets 'i bzhshk, called the doctor vs called a doctor).

3. In all the other cases there are

1) no possibility for alteration between this two forms
or/and

2) the meaning is other than an expression of definiteness/indefiniteness.

Thus, in the nominative, the "definite" article/marker is obligatory, if noun performs its main syntactic function to be sentence subject (exempt constructions with cardinal numerals). Nouns with zero marker are used as a vocative and, besides, in some peculiar constructions

¹ The usage of this article in Western Armenian is optional, so it can be ignored in this consideration.

(introducing or generalizing existential sentences). So, the syntactical constrains prevent possible alterations between them, they can substitute each other only in the very marginal case of nominative sentences. In accusative, the opposition between definite/zero markers correlates with the difference between object and point of destination: *սիրեց Մոսկվան – եկաւ Մոսկվա* (*sirets' Moskvan – yekav Moskva, he liked Moskow - he came to Moscow*). The semi-deviant *եկաւ Մոսկվան* (*yekav Moskvan*) is possible only when the opposite is rejected (*he came to Moscow, not to any other place*). This highlights the more basic function of the definite article then referring to definite objects, that is the prototypical function of topicalization or emphasizing the focus of an utterance.

4. The general solution can be found if one will concentrate on the very unusual functions of the definite marker. It can be also used in predicative constructions with nouns and adjectives, and even with some semantized postpositions (*under, on, with, etc*). These postpositions can be used with the definite marker if substitute the previously used noun phrase:

Գիրքը սեղանի վրա է, սեղանը դիր վրան (*Girk'ë seghani vra e – tetrë dir vran*) - it can referred both *to book* or *to table*: *The book is on the table. Put the notebook on it (on the book or on the table)*

or in the situation of the ostensive reference: *հետ գնա vs հետը գնա* (*het gna vs hetë gna; Go back vs Go with him/her*).

This anaphoric/ostensive relations usually can be specified properly only through context.

The third prototypical function of definite article can be revealed when it is attached to the noun or adjective in predicative position. In general, the interpretation and explanation of such cases depends on context and requires to explicate the underlying pragmatic presuppositions and conversational implicatures: *Նա վարչապետ է* (*Na varch'apet e; He is a prime-minister*), no additional information is needed, vs *Նա վարչապետն է*, *Na varch'apetn e; He is the prime-minister*) one needs to explain what it means (for example, is he, as a prime-minister, responsible for the crisis, or can he afford himself expensive watches, etc.). However, in some cases the semantic differences between usage and non-usage of definite article becomes rather clear: *Նա մեզանից խելոք է vs Նա մեզանից խելոքն է* (*Na mezanits' khelok' e vs Na mezanits' khelok'n e - He is cleverer than we are vs He is the only clever person among us*). In such cases, the definite article points out a unique object in some domain of reference which is common or familiar for the communicants and can not be used without such specification. These functions can be combined with above-mentioned functions of topicalization and ostensive reference, and it usually is accompanied with an inversion of words order and clefting.

5. Summing up: the so called definite article in Eastern Armenian performs different functions, and the expression of definiteness is only one of them. Their functional and semantic diversity makes rather difficult to identify one of them as a principal and coin more adequate term. However, having in mind the diachronic origin of definite article from the demonstrative/possessive pronoun *Նա* (*na*) and enclitic *-ն* (*-n*) in classical Armenian, it seems to be more adequate to treat it as a demonstrative determinant, which upon some grammatical constrains and pragmatic circumstances can have various manifestations and functions.
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