

Modal uses of the imperfect in Classical Armenian

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1 Introduction

The syntax and even semantics of a number of tenses in Classical Armenian, an Indo-European language on its own branch and first attested in the fifth century CE, have been the subject of research since the beginning of the philological and linguistic tradition dealing with this language in the late nineteenth century. Some issues have been resolved and explained to the community's satisfaction, so for example the semantics of the periphrastic perfect¹, while others remain still disputed, so for instance the historical morphology of the past participle in *-eal*.²

The Classical Armenian imperfect tense, by contrast, has received relatively little attention. This is, at least in part, owing to its innovative (and historically non-transparent) morphology and its lack of 'grammatical sex appeal', not being particularly complicated or involved in a great number of complex syntactic constructions.

This paper seeks to somewhat remedy this lack of attention to the imperfect in considering its modal use in two distinct sets of text: the Armenian translation of the New Testament, often used as a basic corpus for linguistic studies; and autochthonous texts dating to the fifth and early sixth centuries CE.³ This study suggests that the main modal use of the imperfect is expression of present and past counterfactuals; the way in which it is used, however, is not uniform across the two corpora and adds to the ongoing discussion of the syntactic influence of Greek on certain registers of Armenian. Compared to other Indo-European languages, the use of the imperfect in counterfactuals is not surprising, but Armenian still stands out for its underdetermination of the difference between present and past counterfactuals.

After this introduction, §2 outlines some of the basic facts concerning the Classical Armenian imperfect, in particular as regards its non-modal uses. §3 then goes on to explain the use of the imperfect in counterfactuals in the New Testament corpus and compares this usage to Classical Greek. The pattern just laid out is then contrasted with the one found in autochthonous texts, which differs significantly, in §4. In the final discussion before the conclusion, §5 seeks to compare the Armenian pattern of counterfactuals and the use of the imperfect with similar patterns in other older Indo-European languages and some neighbouring non-Indo-European languages to determine what role inheritance and language contact play in this construction.

¹ Cf. MEYER (2023b); OUZOUNIAN (2001); SEMĚNOVA (2016).

² Cf. the appendix in MEYER (2023c) for an overview.

³ The authors studied are: Koriwn, Eznik Kołbac'i, Agat'angelos, P'awstos Buzand, Łazar P'arpec'i, and Elišē. Texts are cited according to the *Matenagirk' Hayoc'*.

2 The Armenian Imperfect in General

The Classical Armenian verbal system knows three synthetic and three analytical tenses: the present and imperfect (formed on the present stem) as well as the aorist (based on the aorist) stem on the synthetic side; and the perfect, pluperfect, and future perfect on the analytical side, all of which are formed with the past participle in *-eal* and a copula.⁴ A separate future tense does not exist.⁵

In terms of aspectual values, the present and imperfect refer to non-past and past imperfective actions respectively, whereas the aorist tends to describe perfective actions. The analytical tenses all have a stative-resultative value.

A morphological differentiation between active and medio-passive voice is made only in the present for *e*-stem verbs and in the aorist; elsewhere, the difference can be expressed only syntactically.⁶ Next to the indicative mood, a subjunctive and imperative exists in the present and aorist.

In what follows, the focus lies on the imperfect tense. Like much of the rest of the Armenian verbal system, it is an innovative formation without direct Indo-European ancestry, albeit morphologically similar in adding to the present stem what could be defined as secondary (non-present) endings.⁷ The qualities of this tense as well as its use cannot, therefore, be directly related to or compared with other Indo-European imperfects (e.g. that of Greek) other than by analogy or contact.

In most instances, the imperfect betrays its past imperfective character either as in relaying a past continuous (1), iterative (2), or habitual (3) action, or as an action contemporaneous with an event expressed in the aorist (4).

- (1) *ayl t'agawor=n Valēs nelēr z=k'ristoneic'*
 but king.NOM.SG=DET PN oppress.3SG.PST.IPFV OBJ=Christian.GEN.PL
žolovurd=n [...] ew et xraman t'agawor=n Valēs
 community.ACC.SG=DET and give.3SG.AOR order.ACC.SG king.NOM.SG=DET PN
 “But Emperor Valens kept oppressing the Christian community [...] and Emperor Valens gave an order.” (P'awstos Buzand IV.9)
- (2) *gayin hanapaz, patuirein nma, ew urax linein*
 come.3PL.PST.IPFV constantly order.3PL.PST.IPFV 3SG.DAT and happy be.3PL.PST.IPFV
 “They constantly came, kept giving him orders and were happy.” (Ezrik 244)
- (3) *hanapaz z=c'ayg ew z=c'erek i gerezmans ew i lerins*
 always at=night and at=day in tomb.LOC.PL and in mountain.LOC.PL
alatakēr
 cry.3SG.PST.IPFV
 “Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he would cry out.” (Mk 5:5)

⁴ For more on this construction, cf. MEYER (2023b,c).

⁵ Armenian instead uses the subjunctive, largely of the aorist; cf. Meillet (1911:118); Jensen (1959:118, 120); Tumanjan (1971:363–4)

⁶ This is achieved by the inclusion of a prepositional phrase with *i* + ABL or for an agent or a pure INS for instruments.

⁷ Cf. e.g. GODEL (1975:113), KÖLLIGAN AND KIM (fthc.).

- (4) *ew minč' der anc'anēr and ayn Yisus zhet elen nora*
 and while pass.3SG.PST.IPFV along DEM PN.NOM.SG after become.3PL.AOR 3SG.GEN
koyrk' erku alalakēin ew asēin
 blind.NOM.PL two cry.3PL.PST.IPFV and say.3PL.PST.IPFV
 “And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, and they shouted and said.” (Mt 9:27)

Beyond these aspectual uses, the imperfect features in three more complex sets of expressions: past fulfillable (*realis*) conditionals (5); unfulfillable wishes (6); and unfulfillable (counterfactual, *irrealis*) conditionals (see §3 below).

- (5) *isk yet mahu=n k'ahanayapeti=n t'ē arnēr ok'*
 but after death.GEN.SG=DET chief_priest.GEN.SG=DET if do.3SG.PST.IPFV INDF
hangist alk'atac'=n mec patižs krēr i
 solace.ACC.SG poor.DAT.PL=DET great punishment.ACC.PL bear.3SG.PST.IPFV from
t'agaworē=n
 king.ABL.SG=DET
 “But after the death of the chief priest, if (=whenever?) anyone gave solace to the poor, he received a severe punishment from the king.” (P'awstos Buzand V.31)
- (6) *et'ē gitēir du gonē y=awurs y=aysmik z=xatalut'iwn=n*
 if know.2SG.PST.IPFV 2sg.NOM only in=day.LOC.PL in=such OBJ=peace.ACC.SG=DET
k'o
 2sg.POSS.NOM
 “If only you knew of the peace open to you (lit. your peace) in these days.” (Lk 19:42)

While it may seem counter-intuitive at first glance that one grammatical form, the imperfect, should mark both fulfillable and unfulfillable conditional constructions, this is not unheard of (see §5 below). Of greater interest, by contrast, is the way in which the imperfect is used in unfulfillable, counterfactual conditionals.

3 Modal uses of the Armenian Imperfect: Counterfactuals

Traditionally, the term ‘counterfactual’ or ‘irrealis’ refers to a particular set of conditional clauses, usually composed of a matrix clause (apodosis) and a subordinate clause (if-clause, protasis), in which actions or states are described that are unfulfillable or unfulfilled. Modern Indo-European languages can clearly distinguish between present (unfulfillable) and past (unfulfilled) scenarios by morphosyntactic means, as (??-??) illustrate.

- (7) Present, unfulfillable counterfactuals
- Sie *läse* das Buch, *wäre* es nicht so spät.
 - She *would* read the book, if it *weren't* so late.
 - Elle *lirait* le livre, s'il n'*était* pas si tard.
- (8) Past, unfulfilled counterfactuals
- Sie *hätte* das Buch *gelesen*, *wäre* es nicht so spät *gewesen*.
 - She *would have* read the book, *had* it not *been* so late.

c. Elle *aurait lu* le livre, s'il n'*avait été* si tard.

In German, both apodosis and protasis use the general subjunctive (Konjunktiv II) of the present or past, depending whether present or past counterfactuals are to be expressed. English, by contrast, employs the present or past conditional in the apodosis, but the imperfect or pluperfect indicative in the protasis.⁸ French follows the same pattern.

Mixed clauses exist, too, in which a past condition and present hypothetical are relayed.⁹ Here, apodosis and protasis follow the same pattern as laid out above for their respective time reference.

- (9) a. Sie *läse* (jetzt) das Buch, *hätte* sie es nicht (zuvor) im Büro *vergessen*.
b. She *would read* the book (now), *had* she not *forgotten* it in the office (earlier).
c. Elle *lirait* le livre (maintenant), si elle ne l'*avait pas oublié* au bureau (auparavant).

A very similar constellation can be found in Classical Armenian, summarised by JENSEN (1959:§583γ) as follows:¹⁰

Im Nebensatz Indikativ eines Vergangenheitstempus, im Hauptsatz desgleichen. Durch diese Konstruktion werden irreal Bedingungsverhältnisse ausgedrückt. [...] Zum Ausdruck der Irrealität der Gegenwart dient das Imperfectum sowohl im Nebensatz wie im Hauptsatz. [...] Die Irrealität der Vergangenheit kann durch das [...] Plusquamperfectum [...] ausgedrückt werden, das entweder in der Protasis oder in der Apodosis auftritt, während im anderen Gliede ein gewöhnliches Vergangenheitstempus genügt. [...] Doch genügt in diesem Falle bisweilen die [Gegenwarts-]Konstruktion

JENSEN indicates that, like in German, Armenian uses the same form for the present counterfactual, namely the imperfect; at the same time, he underlines that the past counterfactual is less clearly defined in that the pluperfect can but need not occur, and that at times the past and present counterfactual cannot be formally distinguished. The latter underdetermination will turn out to be of interested (see §4 below).

First, however, it will be useful to exemplify the standard patterns set out by JENSEN. Example (1) is a present counterfactual with two imperfect forms, *ēr* and *gitēr*; (2), in turn, is a past counterfactual with two pluperfects, *lieal ēir* and (*č'*)*ēr mereal*; finally, (3) is a mixed counterfactual, with a general-state present-reference expressed by the imperfect form *sirēik*⁴ in the protasis and a past-reference form *lieal ēr* in the apodosis.¹¹

⁸ Originally, of course, the protasis would have used the subjunctive as the form *were* still indicates; since only the verb *to be* retains a morphologically distinguishable subjunctive form. For the purposes of syntax, however, this distinction is synchronically moot.

⁹ In principle, the converse pattern (present condition, past hypothetical) are grammatically possible, but owing to the linearity of causation rarely found. Consider, e.g., *If you ate your vegetables today, it would not have rained yesterday*.

¹⁰ "In the subordinate clause, the indicative of a past tense is used; the same goes for the main clause. This construction expresses *irrealis* conditional relations. [...] To express the *irrealis* of the present, the imperfect serves both in the subordinate clause and in the main clause. [...] The *irrealis* of the past can be expressed by the [...] pluperfect [...] which occurs either in the protasis or in the apodosis, while in the other member an ordinary past tense suffices. [...] But in this case sometimes the [present] construction is sufficient."

¹¹ Given the context and forms involved, (3) could also be read as a past counterfactual ("If you had loved me, you would have rejoiced"), but the Greek original (εἰ ἦγαπᾶτέ με ἐχάρητε ἄν) is a mixed conditional.

	standard	non-standard
present counterfactual	14	0
past counterfactual	4	1
mixed counterfactual	9	0

Table 1: Standard and non-standard counterfactuals in the Classical Armenian New Testament translation

- (1) *sa t'ē margarē ok' ēr, apa gitēr t'ē ov*
 3SG.NOM if prophēt.NOM.SG INDF be.3SG.PST.IPFV then know.3SG.PST.IPFV COMP who
kam orpisi ok' kin merjenay i sa
 or what_kind INDF woman.NOM.SG approach.3SG.PRS to 3SG.ACC
 “If he were really a prophet, he would know who and what kind of woman approaches him.” (Lk. 7:39)
- (2) *tēr et'ē ast lieal ēir, elbayr=n im*
 lord.NOM.SG if here be.PTCP be.2SG.PST.IPFV brother.NOM.SG=DET 1SG.POSS.NOM
č'=ēr mēreal
 NEG=be.3SG.PST.IPFV die.PTCP
 “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (Jn. 11:21)
- (3) *et'ē sirēik' z=is, apa urax lieal ēr jez*
 if love.2PL.PST.IPFV OBJ=1SG.ACC then happy be.PTCP be.3SG.PST.IPFV 2.PL.DAT
 “If you loved me, you would have rejoiced (lit. it would have been happy for you).” (Jn. 14:28)

Descriptions of Classical Armenian grammar are traditionally based on the New Testament corpus. In observing the occurrences of counterfactuals in this corpus, it is noteworthy that almost all conform to the ‘standard’ as laid out above, with present and past counterfactuals being clearly separated. Table 1 provides detailed figures.¹²

Even the non-standard pattern can be explained not as free variation as suggested by JENSEN, but as the result of particular translation practices.

- (10) *ew asēk et'ē ēak' y=awurs harc'=n meroc'*
 CONJ say.2PL.PRS if be.1PL.PST.IPFV in=day.LOC.PL father.GEN.PL=DET 1PL.POSS.GEN
 καὶ λέγετε εἰ ἡμεθα ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν
oč' halordēak' arean margarēic'=n
 NEG shed.1PL.PST.IPFV blood.GEN.SG prophet.GEN.PL=DET
 οὐκ ἂν ἡμεθα αὐτῶν κοινωνοὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι τῶν προφητῶν

¹² The occurrences are as follows. Present counterfactuals: Mt 12:7 Mt. 24:43, Lk. 7:39, Lk. 12:39, Lk. 17:2, Jn. 4:10, Jn. 5:46, Jn. 8:19, Jn. 8:39, Jn. 8:42, Jn. 9:41, Jn. 14:7, Jn. 15:19, Jn. 18:30, Jn. 18:36; past counterfactuals, standard: Mt. 11:21~Lk. 10:13, Jn. 11:21~Jn. 11:32; past counterfactual, non-standard: Mt. 23:30; mixed counterfactual: Mt. 11:23, Mt. 26:24, Mk. 13:20, Mk. 14:21, Jn. 15:22, Jn. 15:24, Jn. 19:11, Jn. 21:25, Jn. 14:28.

Data based on the gospels; corpus to be expanded

	Classical Greek	Classical Armenian
present counterfactual	imperfect–imperfect + ἄν	imperfect–imperfect
past counterfactual	aorist–aorist + ἄν	pluperfect–pluperfect imperfect–imperfect *pluperfect–imperfect/aorist/perfect *imperfect/aorist/perfect–pluperfect

Table 2: Counterfactuals in Classical Greek and Classical Armenian (protasis–apodosis; * = not attested in the NT translation)

“And you said: ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have shed the blood of the prophets.’” (Mt. 23:30)

As the translation and context of (10) suggest, only a past counterfactual reading is plausible here. Yet, the Armenian version uses two imperfect forms, *ēak*‘ and *halordēak*‘, contrary to expectations based on the rest of the New Testament translation. The reason for this lies in the Greek original, in which the imperfect form of εἰμί ‘to be’, ἦμεθα, is used in both instances (with ἄν in the apodosis) since this verb has no aorist form.

This reliance on and grammatical *verbum pro verbo* imitation of a Greek original is well documented in the early history of Classical Armenian, first admonished by MEILLET (1903:3) as a ‘slavish’ adherence to the Greek. The manifestations of this so-called *Yunaban dproc*‘ (‘Hellenising School’) vary from genre to genre and between periods and have been a subject of intense interest since the early twentieth century,¹³ while the New Testament translation is not usually considered as part of this ‘School’, recent studies have illustrated a number of particular grecising characteristics on the syntactic level.¹⁴

It is, therefore, not far-fetched to entertain the possibility that this close adherence to Greek norms elsewhere might also be reflected in the construction of counterfactuals, in particular given the similarities between the Armenian and Greek patterns as outlined in Table 2. These patterns are further illustrated in examples (11–13).

- (11) οὗτος εἰ ἦν προφήτης ἐγίνωσκεν ἄν
 DEM.NOM.SG if be.3SG.PST.IPFV prophet.NOM.SG know.3SG.PST.IPFV PTC
 τίς καὶ ποταπὴ ἡ γυνή
 INTERROG.ANIM.NOM.SG and what_kind.NOM.SG DET.NOM.SG woman.NOM.SG

¹³ The idea of the so-called Hellenising School goes back to MANANDYAN (1928), who divided texts into four categories according to their time of composition. This division is no longer believed to be accurate, and the different manifestations of Greek influence on Armenian depend on other factors, esp. the genre of text translated. While not historically counted as part of this School, the New Testament translation is increasingly regarded as the earliest expression of this influence. For an encyclopaedic overview of these grecisms, cf. MURADYAN (2012); for different perspectives on the earliest other text translated from Greek into Armenian (the τέχνη γραμματικὴ attributed to Dionysios Thrax), cf. CLACKSON (1995); DE LAMBERTERIE (2022); MEYER (2023a).

¹⁴ For a discussion of relative clause syntax, cf. MEYER (2018); an issue of mis-translation that illustrates the dependence of the Armenian version on the Greek original is discussed in MEYER (2023d).

ἤτις ἄπτεται αὐτοῦ.
touch.3SG.PRS 3SG.GEN

“This man, if he were a prophet, would know what kind of woman was touching him.”
(Lk. 7:39)

- (12) ὅτι εἰ ἐν Τύρῳ καὶ Σιδῶνι ἐγένοντο αἱ δυνάμεις
for if in Tyre.DAT.SG and Sidon.DAT.SG happen.3PL.AOR det.nom.pl great_deed.NOM.PL
... πάλαι ἄν ἐν σάκκῳ καὶ σποδῶ μετενόησαν.
long_ago PTC in sackcloth.DAT.SG and ash.DAT.SG repent.3PL.AOR

“For if the[se] great deeds had happened in Tyre and Sidon, [...] they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago.” (Mt. 11:21)

- (13) εἰ ἠγαπήσατέ με ἐχάρητε ἄν.
if love.2PL.PST.IPFV 1SG.ACC rejoice.2PL.AOR PTC
“If you loved me, you would have rejoiced.” (Jn. 14:28)

These similarities raise the question whether the behaviour described by JENSEN for Classical Armenian is restricted to the autochthonous texts, and to what extent the Greek-style pattern established above can be found in these texts as well. A second question concerns the equation of the Greek aorist and the Armenian periphrastic perfect, which have different aspectual values and thus make an unusual pair, esp. given the existence of an aorist in Armenian.

4 Armenian Counterfactuals: Issues

The counterfactuals occurring in the autochthonous texts initially do not paint a radically different picture. Here, too, many instances adhere to the Greek-style pattern laid out above; these are illustrated, in the same order as above, by (14–16).

- (14) *bayc' t'ē gitēi t'ē y=aysm hetē kayc'ē*
but if know.1SG.PST.IPFV COMP from=DEM.ABL.SG after remain.3SG.SBJV.PRS
y=uxtin imum [...] arjakēi z=na xalalut'eamb
in=covenant.LOC.SG 1SG.POSS.LOC send.1SG.PST.IPFV OBJ=3SG.ACC peace.INS.SG
y=iwr ašxarh=n
in=3SG.POSS.ACC realm.ACC.SG=DET

“But if I knew whether he would keep his covenant with me hereafter [...] I would send him in peace to his own realm.” (P'awstos Buzand IV.54)

- (15) *zi et'ē kac'eal ēak' i patuirani=d k'um,*
for if remain.PTCP be.1PL.PST.IPFV in commandment.LOC.SG=DET 2SG.POSS.LOC
tēr, [...] šnorheal linēr k'o mez z=keans
lord.NOM.SG grant.PTCP be.3SG.PST.IPFV 2SG.GEN 1PL.DAT OBJ=life.ACC.PL
anc'aws
painless.ACC.PL

“For if we had observed your commandment, Lord, [...] you would have granted us life without pain” (Agat'angelos §76)

- (16) *zi t'ē mardoy p'rkeal ēr z=jez i carayut'enē [...]*
 for if man.GEN.SG save.PTCP be.3SG.PST.IPFV OBJ=2PL.ACC from servitude.ABL.SG
i mec barkut'iwn brdēik' z=arajin tēr=n jer
 into great anger.ACC.SG provoke.2PL.PST.IPFV OBJ=first master.ACC.SG=DET 2PL.GEN
 “For if a man had saved you from servitude [...] you would provoke your first master
 to great anger.” (Elišē III, p.56)

A further, unsurprising similarity is that, like in the New Testament, the autochthonous texts also employ the imperfect to express unfulfillable wishes.

- (17) *zi law ēr inj mah*
 how good be.3SG.IPFV 1SG.DAT death.NOM.SG
 “How sweet would death be for me!” (P'awstos Buzand VI.9)

Upon closer inspection, however, this impressions changes radically, since the number of instances where these patterns do not apply outweighs the rest. Below are some examples of counterfactuals with an ‘unexpected’ aorist (18) and perfect (19), just as described by the ‘past tense’ umbrella of JENSEN.

- (18) *uraxut'iwn patrastec'er, et'ē kac'eal ēak' i*
 happiness.ACC.SG prepare.3SG.AOR if remain.PTCP be.1PL.PST.IPFV in
patuiranin
 covenant.LOC.SG
 “He would have granted [us] happiness, if we had observed the covenant [with him].”
 (Agat'angelos §75; expect PLPF for AOR, cp. (15) above)
- (19) *t'ē jer srti mtōk' ē tueal z=erdumn, ziard*
 if 2PL.GEN heart.GEN.SG mind.INS.PL be.3SG.PRS give.PTCP OBJ=oath.ACC.SG how?
karēr [...] p'axč'el
 be_possible.3SG.PST.IPFV flee.INF
 “If you had given the oath wholeheartedly, how was it possible to flee?”
 (P'awstos Buzand IV.16; expect PLPF for PF)

While there are only very few instances like (18, 19) above, in which tenses are used that fall outside the parameters described by JENSEN, another pattern not found in the New Testament but mentioned by him consists of the imperfect being employed in both protasis and apodosis in counterfactuals that, judged by context, must be past, and where accordingly pluperfects would be expected.

- (20) *zi et'ē oč' bacaw ač'awk' tesanēin z=yoyis=n xndalic', ew oč' karēin isk*
 for if NEG open.INS eye.INS.PL see.3PL.PST.IPFV
gorcel z=aynpsi mec arak'inut'iwn
 OBJ=hope.ACC.SG=DET joyous and NEG be_able.3PL.PST.IPFV do.INF OBJ=such great virtue.ACC.SG
 “If they had not seen with open eyes the joyous hope, they would not have been able
 to do such great good deeds.” (Elišē VI, p. 125; expect PLPF)

	Greek standard	non-standard apodosis	non-standard protasis	both non-standard
present counterfactual	19	0	0	0
past counterfactual	1	15	0	6
mixed counterfactual	7	1	1	0

Table 3: Occurrences of counterfactuals in autochthonous texts

As the data in Table 3 below illustrates, occurrences of this kind, and such where the apodosis of a past *irrealis* is expressed by an imperfect, are not infrequent.

The data suggests that the construction portrayed by JENSEN as the norm for past counterfactuals is, in fact, overall less common. Example (21) illustrates the more frequent patterns with an imperfect in the apodosis and a pluperfect in the apodosis.

- (21) *et'ē ēak' kac'eal miabank' [...] canuc'anēak'*
 if be.1PL.PST.IPFV remain.PTCP united.NOM.PL show.1PL.PST.IPFV
ekeloc'=n i veray mer t'ē
 arriver.DAT.PL=DET on above 1PL.GEN COMP

“If we had remained united [...], we would have shown to those coming on top of us, that ...” (Łazar P'arpec'i III.32)

It emerges, therefore, that the use of counterfactuals in Classical Armenian autochthonous texts differs not insignificantly from that in the New Testament translation. The latter almost uniformly employs a pattern analogous to that found in Classical Greek, whereas the former shows greater variety in the construction of past counterfactuals, with a little more than a quarter of instances not employing the pluperfect, otherwise the key marker of the past counterfactual. In general, it appears that past counterfactuals are not systematically differentiated from present counterfactuals and are thus morphosyntactically underdetermined, with only context allowing for a clearer differentiation between past and mixed counterfactual.

It stands to reason, therefore, that the more restricted pattern as found in the New Testament translation is indeed the result of syntactic interference of Greek in the variety of Armenian used, as proposed already for other constructions. This highlights once more the importance of treating separately translated and non-translated texts when conducting research on (or writing grammars of) a language such as Classical Armenian, in which translation literature plays an important role early on.

Two questions remain at this point: the one already mentioned above concerning the equivalence between the Armenian pluperfect and the Greek aorist; and the question of the status, or better ‘fit’, of the Classical Armenian counterfactuals among the constructions of the other older Indo-European languages. Concerning the first question, a straightforward answer is not easy to come by, since in other contexts, too, the Greek aorist is translated by a variety of different past tenses. Assuming that the key deciding factor is an aspectual one, it could be argued that the Armenian aorist is ‘less perfective’ than the Greek one and relates not past completed actions, but simply past actions without an interest in their internal structure or

duration; the pluperfect is therefore preferred since it relates past completed actions (with a specific result). Alternatively, given the fact that the periphrastic perfect and pluperfect constructions in early Classical Armenian were still in the process of grammaticalisation,¹⁵ perhaps the use of the pluperfect is an extension of the non-Greek use of the imperfect in both protasis and apodosis in these past counterfactuals and the not-yet-grammaticalised participle; as such, the counterfactual present use of the imperfect could be analysed as MOD_{tense} + IPFV_{stem} (= present, unfulfillable), whereas the pluperfect / imperfect + participle would be seen as MOD_{tense} + PFV_{participle} (past, unfulfilled). This would suggest that the imperfect, in general, had a particular modal (= counterfactual) value.

5 Counterfactuals in Other Indo-European and Neighbouring Languages

It remains, then, to enquire into the construction of counterfactuals in other older Indo-European languages and the languages that have been in contact with Classical Armenian and thus might have influenced the way it constructs counterfactuals.

The pattern for Greek has already been laid out above in Table 2 and examples (11–13). Another older Indo-European language with a well-developed pattern of counterfactuals is Latin. Whilst Greek counterfactuals employ the indicative and the modal particle *ἄν* in the apodosis, Latin uses the subjunctive of the imperfect for present counterfactuals and the subjunctive of the pluperfect for past ones. Examples (22–23) illustrate this use.

(22) *Si scriberem ipse, longior epistula esset.*
 if write.1SG.IPFV.SBJV self.NOM.SG longer.NOM.SG letter.NOM.SG be.3SG.IPFV.SUBJ
 “I wrote myself, the letter would be longer.” (Cic. Att. 7.13a.3)

(23) *Si Romae fuisset, te vidisset coram=que gratias egisset.*
 if Rome.LOC.SG be.1SG.PLPF.SBJV 2SG.ACC see.1SG.PLPF.SBJV face-to-face=and
 thanks.ACC.PL do.1SG.PLPF.SBJV
 “If I had been in Rome, I would have seen you and thanked you in person.” (Cic. Fam. 13.73.1)

A less clear pattern arises in Hittite. All counterfactuals contain the modal particle *man*. For present counterfactuals, the (first) protasis uses a preterite form, but all subsequent clauses—whether further protases or apodoses—employ present forms. Past counterfactuals seem to be more clear-cut in that both protasis and apodosis use preterites. These patterns are illustrated in examples (24–25).¹⁶

(24) *mam=man=za=kan kuiški É-er tamaiš arnut man zik ūL aršanieše*

“If someone else were to confiscate your house, would you not be upset?” (ABoT 65 rev. 5–6 (MH/MS))

¹⁵ Cf. MEYER (2023b).

¹⁶ Cf. HOFFNER AND MELCHERT (2008:422–423).

(25) *man=kan m̄n ANA ^mAttaršiya h̄uišwetenn=a k̄āštīt=a=man ākten*

“Even if you had survived Attaršiya, you would have died of hunger.” (KUB 14.1 obv. 12 (MH/MS))

In Sanskrit, the last of the older Indo-European languages to be considered here, no particular distinction between different types of conditional clauses seem to be made; forms of the subjunctive and optative are used to indicate the irrealis of the expression, but a more specific interpretation—*potentialis, eventualis, irrealis*—can only be expressed through adverbs.

On the basis of these Indo-European cousins, it seems Armenian is in good company using (a) an imperfective form to express counterfactuality; (b) using the same form in protasis and apodosis. It stands out, however, that unlike the other languages outlined above, Armenian uses neither a subjunctive form nor a modal particle to differentiate real from unreal expressions.

The main potential contact languages remain to be investigated briefly for their potential influence. The usual suspect, Parthian,¹⁷ can however be ruled out as a potential source, since both Parthian and Middle Persian differentiate real and counterfactual conditionals by using indicative and optative, respectively.¹⁸ Urartian, likewise, can be ruled out for the underdetermination of different kinds of conditional clauses; the marks of conditional clauses, other than the subjunction *aše* ‘if’, is the lack of ergative marking on transitive subjects and the use of imperfective forms marked *-u-li(-e)*.¹⁹ The use of an imperfective form is, of course, evocative, but has little bearing on the situation in Classical Armenian. Old Georgian, likewise, is not a plausible source, since here counterfactual protases use the subjunctive followed by a conditional in the apodoses.²⁰

For Syriac, the situation is potentially more promising. Here, a participle and past (or more precisely: perfective) form of the copula are used to express counterfactual conditionals;²¹ this construction thus resembles the Classical Armenian pluperfect. Example (26) illustrates this construction at the same sentence as (2) above.

(26) *’lw tnn hwyt l’ m’t hw’ ’h=y*
 if here be.2SG.PF NEG die.PTCP.ACT be.3SG.PF brother.SG=1SG.POSS
 “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (Jn. 11:21)

To make matters more complex, however, the same construction is used for both present and past counterfactuals as illustrated by (27), paralleling (3) above.

(27) *’lw rhmyn hwytwn l=y h̄dyn hwytwn*
 if love.2PL.ACT.PTCP be.2PL.PF OBJ=1SG rejoice.2PL.ACT.PTCP be.2PL.PF
 “If you loved me, you would have rejoiced” (Jn. 14:28)

Syriac thus shares with Classical Armenian a degree of underdetermination in the distinction of present and past counterfactuals. The parallels between some of the forms used—both

¹⁷ For an overview, cf. SCHMITT (1983), MEYER (2023c:ch. 2).

¹⁸ Cf. DURKIN-MEISTERERNST (2014:444–452).

¹⁹ Cf. SALVINI AND WEGNER (2014:62).

²⁰ Cf. HEWITT (1995:585–586).

²¹ Cf. MURAOKA (2005:§86)

p.c. Antonia Ruppel; ref.s to be found.

Labouring under the assumption that Modern and Old Georgian behave alike for lack of a better source.

composed of participles and copulative verbs in a past / perfect form—must also be noted. There is, however, no clear parallel between the Armenian imperfect used in present counterfactuals and the Syriac imperfect, which occurs in real conditionals.²² Whether the use of the pluperfects in conditionals can be linked to Syriac or not must remain open for the time being. It seems unlikely, however, that the complex pattern of counterfactuals in Classical Armenian was based wholesale on that of Syriac.

6 Conclusion

Based on the two corpora of Classical Armenian texts surveyed here and with the help of comparisons with other languages, Indo-European and otherwise, three separate conclusions can be produced.

The use of the imperfect in Classical Armenian as a marker not only of past, incomplete actions but also as the tense expressing counterfactuals is entirely in keeping with the other older Indo-European languages and indeed with some modern ones, as §3 has illustrated. Two things stand out, however: in contrast to the other Indo-European languages surveyed, Classical Armenian relies only on the imperfect itself to fulfil this function, whereas other languages have either added a modal marker (Gk. *ǎv*, Hitt. *man*) or changed the mood of imperfect to the subjunctive (as, e.g., in Latin). Secondly, outside the New Testament translation, a differentiation between present and past counterfactuals, in both of which the imperfect can be used as the sole marker of counterfactuality, is not possible. This, again, stands in contrast to the other Indo-European languages surveyed, where such a differentiation is made systematically. Finally, the use of imperfects—whether inherited or innovative as regards their morphology—in these languages for expressing counterfactuality suggests that, even on the Proto-Indo-European level, the imperfect may have had this modal function or one like it.

The second conclusion concerns the marked differences between autochthonous Classical Armenian and the translation of the New Testament, at least as regards the use of different tenses for counterfactuals. It emerges that in the New Testament, Armenian closely follows the Greek original and produces a regular distinction between present and past counterfactuals as might be found in Greek. The pattern in the autochthonous texts is far less clear-cut, with a number of different tenses used for the past counterfactual, including constellations identical to present counterfactuals. This highlights once more the importance of distinguishing these two text categories when conducting linguistic research, and the influence which the Greek original has had on the New Testament translation.

The third conclusion, and the most tentative, concerns the origin of marking past counterfactuals with the pluperfect, particularly in the New Testament. A Greek model can be excluded here. Two potential explanations suggest themselves based on the data discussed above: an aspectual one, where the contrast between imperfect and new pluperfect was established at a time when the copulative perfect and pluperfect were still in the process of grammaticalisation, and both tenses were thus essentially marked by a verb in the imperfect tense, but with perfective/resultative marking on the participle in the case of the new pluperfect; alternatively, an explanation might be sought in contact with Syriac, in which a construction

²² Cf. MURAOKA (2005:§82).

resembling the Armenian pluperfect is used in some of the same New Testament passages as in Classical Armenian. This latter suggestion should, however, be taken *cum grano salis* since morphosyntactic borrowings from Syriac in Armenian are not otherwise known.

A number of open questions remain, inevitably, not only regarding the definitive origin of pluperfects in past counterfactuals, but concerning the choice of other tenses in these counterfactuals. Whether they can all be explained on the basis of aspectual fit or whether this is a case of free variation remains yet to be determined.

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