

# Declension Class Change in Armenian

Robert C. Tegethoff, Universität zu Köln

Inflectional classes (in both nominal and verbal domains) are a near-ubiquitous phenomenon in the Indo-European sphere, but have received little attention from linguists, though they offer themselves especially to diachronic studies when a certain time-depth is given and representative corpora are available, as is the case with several Indo-European language branches, such as Armenian. So far, the study of inflection class change has been practically confined to the Germanic languages, where Thöny 2013 is notable.

In his study, Thöny shows that, additionally to systemic changes such as phonological mergers, morphological analogy among semantically linked lexemes is a driving force of declension class change: In the ancient Germanic languages, particularly body part terms tend to converge morphologically, and subsequently phonologically, often becoming neuter -n-stems by secondary analogy; curiously enough, some terms for animal young also converge, becoming neuter -s-stems. A preliminary survey of Armenian declension classes and their members, from Classical Armenian via (Cilician) Middle Armenian to Modern Western/Eastern Armenian, including 20<sup>th</sup> century dialects, aims to uncover the principles involved in declension class change in Armenian and contrast them with, among others, Thöny's findings for Old Germanic, and explore whether any more general statements can be made about the factors at work.

In this short talk, the rudiments of Armenian declension and its changes throughout the centuries shall be sketched, and first results of an empirical survey presented, with particular attention paid to morphological analogy and reassignment. The principal trends of semantically-driven class-change shall be addressed, alongside divergent developments attested in the numerous idioms of the Armenian language. It will be shown that, despite the commonly reproduced (mis-)conception that contemporary Armenian has become an agglutinating language, the declension system has not only suffered little change since the earliest attestations, but displays remarkable continuity, with most innovations being explainable based on a very limited number of analogies.

## References

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