

Inflection in Classical Armenian

In English, the meaning of a sentence is largely dependent on word order (Subject – Verb – Direct Object), with prepositions that are needed to express relationships between words. English has many prepositions, usually with narrower meanings (i.e., “to” and “from” have very different meanings).

You – Give today – our everyday Bread – to – Us.
Subject – Verb – Direct Object – prep. – Indirect Object
(with adv.) (with poss. pron. & adj.)

In Classical Armenian, the meaning of a sentence is largely independent of word order. The words themselves are often sufficient to express relationships with other words, without the need for an actual preposition. In the instances where they are necessary, Armenian prepositions usually have broader meanings (i.e., ի has a number of meanings).

Չհաց մեր Հանապազորդ տո՛ւր մեզ այսօր:
Bread our everyday [You] Give to Us today.

Inflection is a system in which the nouns, pronouns, adjectives and participles are organized in specific categories, called “cases”, that define a word’s specific function within the grammatical structure of a sentence.

Classical Armenian has seven inflected cases:

- Nominative
- Locative
- Accusative
- Ablative
- Genitive
- Instrumental
- Dative

Inflected cases can be illustrated with the following sentence in English:

The great quarterback of the Giants took the snap from the center in the 4th quarter, and threw the ball with great accuracy to the receiver of his team at the 5-yard line.

the great quarterback • **Nominative** – Subject
of the Giants • **Genitive** – expresses possession or origin – often “of” – sometimes rendered as a possessive, i.e., “the Giants’ quarterback”
took ◦ verb
the snap • **Accusative** – Direct Object
from the center • **Ablative** – expresses separation away from something – often “from”
in the 4th quarter • **Locative** – expresses location in space or time – often “in”, “on”, “at”
and ◦ conj.
[he] • **Nominative** – Subject
threw ◦ verb
the ball • **Accusative** – Direct Object
with great accuracy • **Instrumental** – expresses how something happens – often “with”, “by”, “through” – sometimes rendered as an adverb, i.e. “accurately”
to the receiver • **Dative** – Indirect Object – often “to”, “for”
of his team • **Genitive** – possession, i.e., “his team’s receiver”
at the 5-yard line • **Locative** – location

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In Classical Armenian, certain inflected cases are designated using a specific suffix type appended to the root word, with singular and plural forms. Some cases have more than one suffix type, depending on the type of word (i.e., -ով and -եամբ are both instrumental singular). Some suffix types apply to more than one case (i.e., -աց can be genitive, dative or ablative, plural), with the case determined by context or with the use of a preposition.

When pronouns, adjectives or participles are used with a noun, they share the same inflected case as the noun, as well as the same number (singular or plural). For example, each of the following has the word “great” in a different form:

the great quarterback	Nominative singular	մեծ գնդակարկուն
of the Giants (“great men”)	Genitive plural	մարդոց մեծաց
with great accuracy	Instrumental singular	մեծաւ ճշդութեամբ

Inflection of personal pronouns may be confusing at times, because a pronoun’s genitive case becomes the nominative case of its corresponding *possessive* pronoun. For example, the nominative pronoun մենք, “we”, has the genitive form մեր, “of us”, which can be used as the possessive pronoun “our”. When մեր is used as “our”, it becomes nominative singular, and has its own inflected forms, such as the instrumental singular մերով, “with our (thing)”, the genitive plural մերոց, “of our (things)”, or the ablative singular ի մերմէ, “from our (thing)”, to name a few. While this may be confusing at first, it becomes easier to understand when one remembers that the case and number of the possessive pronoun matches the case and number of the noun to which it refers.

The following line from the well-known Table Blessing contains five of the seven inflected cases:

Ճաշակեսցուք խաղաղութեամբ զկերակուրս որ պատրաստեալ է մեզ ի Տեառնէ:

Let us eat this meal in peace, which is prepared for us by the Lord.

--	[we]	• Nominative pronoun, implied by verb person/number
ճաշակեսցուք	may eat	◦ verb (sbjv.1per.pl.)
խաղաղութեամբ	with peace	• Instrumental noun
զկերակուրս	this meal	• Accusative noun, with deictic “this”
որ	which	• Nominative pronoun, corresponding to “this meal”
պատրաստեալ	prepared	• Accusative participle from verb
է	is	◦ verb (pres.3per.sg.)
մեզ	for us	• Dative of pronoun մենք, “we”
ի Տեառնէ	from the Lord	• Ablative noun

It should be noted that the English rendering has three prepositions, but the Armenian has only one actual preposition (ի), with a meaning that is determined by the case of the following word.