New discourse referents and the specificity distinction:
The pragmatics of overt indefiniteness marking in Classical Armenian

Angelika Müth

Classical Armenian has a full developed system of three *definite* articles being used i.a. to refer back to discourse referents that have earlier been introduced into the context. On the other hand, there exists no corresponding *indefinite* article which undertakes the function of encoding referents that are new within the context and therefore not identifiable for the reader/audience.

Instead, there exist some adnominal determiners, namely the cardinal *mi* 'one', the indefinite pronouns *omn* 'some' and *okʻ* 'any', and the indefinite *inčʻ* 'something, somehow'. Overt indefiniteness marking is, however, quite rare: Taking a random sample of 4404 non-definite NP's from the Classical Armenian New Testament translation, only 3% of them are explicitly marked by one of these markers, the major part (97%) are bare NP's (zero-marked).

Overt indefinite marking seems at first instance to be motivated by a semantic-pragmatic *specificity* distinction. Cf. the following examples of human NP's in subject position:

(1)   *Zinčʻ   awgowt ē **mard-oy Ø**   etʻe z-ašxarh šahescʻi   ew z-anjn iwr*
         What benefit is **man-OBL INDEF** if   OBJ-world gain.SUBJ and OBJ- himself

           korowscʻē   kam towžescʻi ?
           loose.SUBJ   or   is lost.SUBJ

           'For what does it profit **a man** if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?' *Lk 9:25*

(2)   *Ew aha ēr **ayr mi**   y-Erowsałém oro   anown ēr Simeovn ew   ēr*
         and see was **man SPEC** in Jerusalem whose name   was Simon   and was

           ayr-n   ayn ardar   ew   erkiwłac.
           man-DEF this rightous and devout

           'And see, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout.' *Lk 2:25*

The context of (1) suggests a non-specific reading of *mardoy* 'man': The NP's reference is understood to represent any possible value ('any man, somebody') and the NP is thus not determined by any overt indefiniteness marker. The NP in (2), in contrast, introduces a new discourse referent, which is epistemically specific (i.e. identifiable to the narrator). The NP *ayr* 'man' is hence marked by the explicit indefiniteness marker *mi* 'one' (and in the following picked up anaphorically by the definite article *-n* and demonstrative *ayn*).

There are, however, many cases, where a clearly specific NP occurs zero-marked. It seems that overt indefiniteness marking is still optional in this early stage of Classical Armenian.
In my talk I want to investigate in how far other means, such as word order or Differential Object Marking, are involved to establish new discourse referents and which other criteria eventually might play a role for distinguishing between specific and non-specific referents.