

WILLIAM R. SCHMALSTIEG

OLD PRUSSIAN COMPARATIVES IN *-ais-*

In this paper I shall discuss those Old Prussian words in *-ais-* which are commonly considered to be comparative adjectives<sup>1</sup>. These forms are as follows: acc. sg. masc. *uraisin* 'elder', acc. pl. masc. *uraisins*, *uraisans*; (2) nom. pl. masc. *maldaisei* 'younger (ones); disciples', dat. pl. masc. *maldaisemans*, *maldaysimans*, *maldaismans*, acc. pl. masc. *maldaismans*, *maldaysins*, acc. sg. fem. *maldaisin*, (3) acc. sg., gender unknown, *ucka kuslaisin* 'weakest'.

Some scholars consider the suffix *-ais-* to be related to the Slavic suffix *-ějb* in which the suffix *-jes-* is added to an instrumental case in *-ē*<sup>2</sup>. The difference is that in Old Prussian the *ō*-grade of the suffix, rather than the *ē*-grade is posited. Old Prussian *-ais-* is thought then to derive from *\*-ō-is*. (The *\*ō*-grade is supported by a comparison with the Gothic suffix *-ōz-*.) Thus Old Prussian *maldaisin* is compared directly with Old Church Slavic *mladějb*.

André Vaillant maintains that the Old Prussian type *malda-* consists of the stem *malda-* plus the suffix *\*-yos-* which is found in the Slavic type *bol-jš-*<sup>3</sup>. In Old Prussian the ending *-ais-* instead of the expected *\*-ēis-* is a result of the comparative based on the stem in *-a-* of the positive degree.

I propose, however, that the suffix *-ais-* is actually a fossilized form of the stem in *-a* plus the nominative singular masculine form of the definite adjective *-is*. That the nominative singular masculine form of the definite article was indeed *-ais* seems to be supported by the Old Prussian nom. sg. masc. ordinal *pirmois* 'the first' which probably represents a phonemic (*pirmais*). (The orthographic *o* after the *m* is, of course, merely a German attempt at rendering the labialization of the consonant.) The form (*pirmais*) has the definite adjective ending *-ais*, cf. Latvian *mazais* 'the small'.

<sup>1</sup> R. Trautmann, *Die altpreußischen Sprachdenkmäler*, Göttingen, 1910, 247 ff.; Chr. S. Stang, *Vergleichende Grammatik der Baltischen Sprachen*, Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø, 1966, 268 f.; J. Endzelīns, *Senprūšu valoda*, Rīgā, 1943, 73 f.; E. Berneker, *Die preußische Sprache*, Straßburg, 1896, 210 f.

<sup>2</sup> E. Berneker, *op. cit.*, 211; J. Endzelīns, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Grammaire comparée des langues slaves*, II, Paris, Lyon, 1958, 568.

In the case of the definite adjectives mentioned in the first paragraph of this paper the endings added to the stem *-ais-* were merely the various case forms of the pronoun *-is*. Thus a form such as *maldaisin* is to be divided into the stem *malda-* plus the nominative singular masculine of the pronoun *-is-* plus the accusative singular masculine of the same pronoun, i. e. *-in*.

We should not be surprised at the doubling of the pronoun. According to Z. Zinkevičius, "In the old [Lithuanian – WRS] linguistic documents we find even more definite adjectives, the second member of which (the pronoun) is repeated two times, usually at the end of the word, e. g. *krikszaniszkasis*, *krikszanischkasis*..."<sup>4</sup> Such forms were surely used in the everyday spoken language since D. Klein gives the forms *gerasysis* from *gerasis* 'good', *mielasysis* from *mielasis* 'dear', *brangusysis* from *brangusis* 'dear'. These he terms Emphaticotera 'more emphatic' adjectives. In addition, according to Klein, such adjectives were in common use<sup>5</sup>.

It may perhaps be difficult to imagine how the nominative case would have become fixed as a stem form. The only Slavic example which I can find is the South Slavic name *Miloš* which may be derived from the definite adjective *\*milos-jis* 'the dear (one)'

M. Rudzīte reports on some Livonian dialects of Latvian in which the stem form *-aj-* has been generalized to form the definite adjective for many cases in which it did not have an etymological origin<sup>6</sup>. J. Endzelīns also mentions the same phenomenon is to be found in older grammars and in folk songs<sup>7</sup>.

Z. Zinkevičius states that in the Leipalingis dialect only the feminine gender has a nearly complete paradigm for the definite adjective<sup>8</sup>. In this dialect the definite adjective is usually used to name cows. Zinkevičius gives the following paradigm: nom. sing. *margój* (for standard *margoji*) 'the variegated (one)', gen. sing. *margōjos*/*margōsios*, dat. sing. *margójai*, acc. sing. *márgoja*/*márgaja*, instr. sing. *márgoja*, voc. sing. *márgoj*, nom. pl. *márgojos*/*márgosios*, gen. pl. *margūju*, dat.-instr. pl. *margōjom(i)*/*margōsiom(i)*, acc. pl. *márgojas*. Zinkevičius says that from the paradigmatic forms given one can see a clear tendency to assimilate the forms of the other cases to the nominative case by replacing the initial element of the ending by the vowel *o* from the nominative case, which along with the *j* creates the special suffix *-oj-*.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Zinkevičius, *Lietuvių kalbos įvardžiutinių būdvardžių istorijos bruožai*, Vilnius, 1957, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Z. Zinkevičius, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> M. Rudzīte, *Latviešu dialektologija*, Rīgā, 1964, 220.

<sup>7</sup> J. Endzelīns, *Latviešu valodas gramatika*, Rīgā, 1951, 468.

<sup>8</sup> Z. Zinkevičius, *Lietuvių dialektologija*, Vilnius, 1966, 282.

In the region of Gelvonai we find the nominalized definite adjective form *žalieji* 'kind of winter apple' (usually used in the nom. pl. form) where the nominative plural has been chosen as a stem upon which the other forms of the paradigm are based: nom. sing. *žaliejis*, gen. sing. *žaliejo*, dat. sing. *žalieju*, acc. sing. *žaliejį*, instr. sing. *žalieju*, loc. sing. *žaliejy* (*žaliejij?*), nom. pl. *žalieji*/*žaliejai*, gen. pl. *žalieju*, dat. pl. *žaliejam*, ac. pl. *žaliejus*, instr. pl. *žaliejais*, loc. pl. *žaliejuose*<sup>9</sup>. Another example in which the nominative plural ending *-ie* forms the stem for other cases is furnished by the example: *tėvas lengviejus (=lengvuosius) ir sunkiejus (=sunkiuosius) dárbus dirba*. Similar innovations are found in folk songs: *ši pirmàsi jòsim in karùžę, mèlynàsį pas jáuną mergùžę... o margàsį in žãlią lankėlę* "on the first one we shall ride to the war, the blue one will take us to the young damsel, ... and the varicolored — to the green meadow". In the words *pirmàsį* 'first', *mèlynàsį* 'blue' and *margàsį* 'varicolored' it is the nominative singular masculine form *pirmas*, *mèlynas* and *margas* which has functioned as the stem to which the accusative pronoun form [j]i was added.

Lithuanian dialects then furnish formal parallels for both the use of the doubled form of the personal pronoun to form emphatic adjectives and the use of the nominative case as a stem to which the final personal pronoun can be added.

I should then like to point out a semantic parallel. According to the Lithuanian Academy grammar the pronoun *pats* or the genitive plural of the pronoun *visas* (which then serves as a particle) can be used with the definite adjective to express the superlative degree<sup>10</sup>. The example given in the grammar is: *O patys gerieji ir ilgieji rąstai ju už didelius pinigų parduodami laivams statyti* 'But the very best and longest beams are sold for large amounts of money to build ships'. An example from a Samogitian dialect is: *Stasis buvo visu gražiasis* 'Stasis was the most handsome'. Similarly in Latvian *vis-labais* (the definite form of the adjective preceded by *vis-*) has the same meaning as *labākais* 'the very best'.

For some of the meanings of the Old Prussian words in question the assumption of the nominalization of a definite adjective seems to be as reasonable as supposing a comparative degree. Thus the word *urs* 'old' would have as its definite form *ur-ais-* which could presumably be translated as 'the old (one)', hence 'parent'. Similarly a form *mald-ais-* could mean 'the young (one)', hence 'disciple'.

In sum, then, there seems to be sufficient evidence within Baltic to explain the Old Prussian suffix *-ais-* as a purely Baltic phenomenon, i.e. a special form of the definite adjective.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., 283.

<sup>10</sup> K. Ulvydas, ed. *Lietuvių kalbos gramatika*, I, Vilnius, 1965, 524.

## ADDENDUM

It is interesting to note that Endzelīns suggests a pronunciation *mazais* for the Old Prussian word *massais* which is usually translated as 'less'<sup>11</sup>. This Old Prussian word occurs once in the following phrase: Teinu adder Deiws Tāws vissas etnīstis bhe engraudīsna swaian Soūnon Christon stēismu gāntsan swītan bhe tīt dijgi stēimans malnijkikamans ni massais kai stēimans uremmans potaukinnons bhe pertenginons ast... = Unnd aber Gott der Vater aller Genaden und Barmherzigkeyt seinen Sohn Christum der gantzen Welt unnd also auch den Kindlein nicht weniger denn den Alten verheissen unnd gesandt hat... 'And, however, god the father of all mercies and compassion has promised and sent his son to the whole world and therefore also to the children not less than to the adults...'

The word *wenig* apparently originally meant 'little, small', cf. the Middle High German *daz wēnege kint* 'the small child'<sup>12</sup>. I propose then that when Abel Will used the word *weniger*, the Old Prussian informant became confused at the complicated syntactic construction with the meaning 'to the children not less than to the parents' and thought that the word *weniger* had something to do with the children. He therefore translated it with the definite form of the adjective, the word which for him meant 'the small one' or perhaps 'the child'. Thus *massais* has nothing to do with the comparative degree and Endzelīns' proposed pronunciation of the word, *mazais* corresponds very nicely to Latvian *mazais* '(the) small'.

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<sup>11</sup> J. Endzelīns, *Senprūšu valoda*, Rīgā, 1943, 208.

<sup>12</sup> George O. Curme, *A grammar of the German language*, 2nd ed., 7th printing, New York, 176; Hermann Paul, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 5th ed., Halle (Saale), 1956, 735.