From conjoined to particle comparative in Lithuanian

1. This paper aims to display the source of the Lithuanian comparative suffix -iau. I will advance the thesis that -iaũ (OLith. -iau-s, e.g. geriaus 'better') goes back to the postponed focus particle -jaũ functioning as a marker of emphatic assertion of identity (König 1991; Ostrowski forthcoming), cf. Germ. eben, Eng. exactly. Grammaticalization of -jaũ has taken place in sentences consisting of juxtaposed and contrasted clauses, i.e. so called conjoined comparative in Stassen’s terms (Stassen 1985: 38, 44), cf.:

(1) Kaw-ohr nah Waraka, kaw naха Kaywerye (Hixkaryana)

tall-no he-is Waraka tall he-is Kaywerye

‘Kaywerye is taller than Waraka’.

2. In Old Lithuanian texts (XVI th cent.) -jaũ is combined with anaphoric words tas ‘this, that’, toks ‘of this kind’, cf. (2) from Dauksza’s Postilla (1599):

(2) Bat’ toʃ-iáu nę-gédž-ios ák-is / (...) tie pát-is

but that:N.PL.F-FOC NEG-shy:N.PL.F eye:NOM.PL the same

o ne kit-ɪ pa-kěl-s kąncž-ią (...) and NEG other:N.PL.M PRV-experience:FUT3 torture:ACC.SG

‘But exactly those shameless eyes (...), the same, not other ones will experience the torture (...’

A final consonant /-s/ in -iiaũ-s is an etymologically heterogeneous element, appearing optionally in such lexemes as e.g. Lith. dial. nět-s’even’: nět’even’. The primary contrastive function of the suffix -iau-s can be compared to Old Greek -τερος, e.g. δεξίτερος ‘right(-hand)’, emphatic non-σκαιός ‘left(-hand)’, cf. atgal-iau-s (3) (1579):

(3) A Herod-as (...) ir siunt-e ghy atgal-iaus Piloto-p.

and Herod:N.SG and send:PST3 he:ACC.SG.M back:CMP Pilate:ALL.SG

‘(...) and sent him back to Pilate’ (Luke 23, 11)

literally: ‘Herod (...) sent Jesus back to Pilate (although he could have let Jesus stay at his court)’.

3. While analyzing Old Lithuanian texts we may note that the Lith. comparative -iau-s betrays a strong predilection for the comparative constructions with connectives containing negation, e.g. nei-g ‘than’ (4):

(4) Bet esch daug-iaus dirb-a-u / nei-g kurs-ai isch yû (VEE 102: 16-17)

but I a lot:CMPR labour:PST-1SG than anyone-PRT from you:GEN.PL

‘but I laboured more abundantly than they all’ (1 Corinthians 15:10)
Some of the connectives have been recorded in the function of sentence negation, e.g. OLith. neįg ‘than’ (4), resulting from conflation of nei ‘and not, nor’ and FOCUS PARTICLE -gi, appears in (5) in a juxtaposed clause expressing contrast to the preceding one (1579):

(5) Saka-u yumus tas-ai nu-eja
    tell:1SG you:DAT.PL this:PRT PRV-go down:PST3
    ap-teisin-t-as nam-ūsna sawa nei-g anas.
    PRV-justified:PTC.PST PASS.-NOM.SG.M house:ILL.PL his NEG-FOC other

‘I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other’ (Luke 18:14)

Conclusion. The comparative suffix -iau has been grammaticalized in sentences consisting of juxtaposed and contrasted clauses. The primary state of affair can be noted in (6):

(6) Ne-im-k milt-ų iš virš-aus,
    NEG-take:IMP2SG flour:GEN.PL from top:GEN.SG
    im-k duob-iaũ (…) (Ulvydas 1971: 479)
    take:IMP2SG hollow:CMP

‘Do not take flour from above, take from more below (…)’

References


