

# On the etymology of the Latvian comparative *vaīrs*

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## Summary

It is a well-known fact that comparison of adjectives is sometimes linked with the grammatical phenomenon of suppletion ; this is especially the case with the commonest adjectives that belong to the core lexicon, such as “good” / “better”, “bad” / “worse” or “much” / “more”. In the Baltic languages, Lithuanian does not present any kind of suppletion whatsoever, even in the core adjectives *gėras* “good” (compar. *gerėsnis* “better”, superl. *geriáusias* “best”) and *blōgas* “bad” (compar. *blogėsnis* “worse”, superl. *blogiáusias* “worst”) or in the most frequent adverb *daūg* “much” (compar. *daugiaū* “more”, superl. *daugiáusia* “most”). At first glance, Latvian seems to present a similar state of affair, since the core adjectives *labs* “good” and *slikti* “bad” do not present any suppletion in their comparative and superlative forms (comparative *labāks* “better”, *sliktāks* “worse”, superlative *vislabāks* “best”, *visliktāks* “worst”). But a suppletive variation is still preserved between the adverb *daūdz* “much” and its comparative counterpart *vaīrs* or *vaīrāk* “more”. The question arises whether this composite paradigm is an innovative feature of the Latvian language or could be traced back to Proto-Baltic, and any answer to this question is strongly dependent on how we explain the origin of the Latvian comparative *vaīrs*. The aim of this paper is to propose a new etymology for *vaīrs* and to shed some light on the prehistory of this suppletive variation that appears to be untypical in the Baltic languages.

**Key words** : Latvian+historical linguistics+etymology+suppletion+comparative