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Elfdalian, the Vernacular of Övdaln

Ig [h]ar [h]ärt glâmås um mikid å landi
Så ir miog dält jär å Dalöfwes strandi
[H]ur jär ir fräkt nåd fok
Fläd äd giäf god någ miok
Kullur der omali låt snogt i straiten
Gosser min skäidum tag brindum å kåuten¹

Introduction

Elfdalian² (autonym *Övkallmål*, *Övdalsk* or *Dalska*, Swedish *Älvdalska* or *Älvdalsmål*) is a linguistic variety spoken by some 3,000 of the 5,000 inhabitants of the former parish of Övdaln³, situated on both banks of the Eastern Dala River in the Upper Siljan Region, Upper Dalarna⁴, Sweden (see Map 1). From historical, purely linguistic and sociolinguistic angles, which will be accounted for in this article, Elfdalian is unique among the Nordic varieties spoken in the territory of Sweden. With these features, Elfdalian seems to fill enough criteria to justify its recognition as an independent language, separate from Swedish⁵.

¹ Rendered in Björklund (1958: 9f) with his translation into Swedish. In English it would be: “I have heard in the countryside told many a thing; which is very pleasant here on the bank of the Dala River; how kind people are here; the cattle gives such good milk; girls play so nicely the horn; boys catch elks on the run with their skis.” The occurrences of <h> in the original are probably a result of Swedish interference in the spelling. Additionally, a nasal marker was added to the original text, namely <å>.

² The English name of the vernacular was introduced in Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2005). Retrieved from [http://www.ling.su.se/staff/tamm/The%20Resilient%20D_Reformatted.pdf] on November 1 2005.

³ This is the Elfdalian name of the parish, literally meaning ‘The River Valley’. *Älvdalen* is its official, Swedish name.

⁴ Dalarna is traditionally named Dalecarlia in English.

⁵ Currently, Finnish, Romani, Saami, Tornedalen Finnish and Yiddish are recognized as official languages in Sweden, according to the Council of Europe’s Convention on Regional or Minority Languages. Such languages are presupposed to have been (1) “traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State’s population; and (2) different from the official language(s) of that State.” It is up to the individual states to define which linguistic varieties are dialects and languages, respectively. Retrieved from Council of Europe (2005) [<http://conventions.coe.int/-treaty/en/-Treaties/Html/148.htm>] on November 1 2005.

The inhabitants of the villages within the old Övdaln Parish refer to themselves as *Övkallkelingger* (feminine) and *Övkaller* (masculine or mixed) and to their central village as *Tjyörtjbynn*¹ in their native tongue. Differences between Elfdalian spoken in various villages are minor and cause no intelligibility problems.

Together with the two former parishes of Särna and Idre, Övdaln makes part of the larger District of Älvdalen, populated by approximately 7,500 persons.

Various questions about Elfdalian may be raised: How could this vernacular, spoken by merely 3,000 people in the very heart of Scandinavia², preserve so many ancient linguistic traits, some of which no longer exist even in the otherwise very conservative Icelandic language? How could Elfdalian be so enduring and stiff-necked to withstand the sweeping influence of Swedish, or neighboring dialects, to a degree not only enabling it to preserve many of these ancient traits throughout the centuries, but even to develop new, distinct features? How could the Runic alphabet, which went out of use elsewhere in Scandinavia in the 17th century, remain in use by some in Övdaln until the beginning of the past century? And, returning to the present, how come this traditionally colloquial vernacular is slowly developing into a literary language? How come there are still children on both banks of the Eastern Dala River fluent in Elfdalian, a language totally incomprehensible to outsiders, while old vernaculars elsewhere in Scandinavia are singing their swan song?

Compared to Old Norse, Elfdalian has pursued a binary evolution that is conservative on the one hand and innovative on the other. Its conservatism is *inter alia* embodied in the preservation of such traits as the old syllabic structure, nasal vowels, /w/, and, to a large extent, the old inflection system. Its innovativeness is *inter alia* personified by secondary diphthongs, e.g. /aj:/ and /aw:/ from Old Norse /i:/ and /u:/, respectively. Likewise innovative is the highly complex, at the same time powerful, system of *vowel balance* (see 2.1.3), surmounting the traditional inflection patterns, which were, in turn, dictated by the original form of the root³. Additionally, it shows such innovative phenomena as *sandhi* and *conditional apocope*. However, it is probably the conservative

¹ Lit. ‘The Church Village’, as it is has the only church in the parish. Moreover, there are chapels in the villages of Ävesbjärr, Nuornes and Åsär. In Swedish, the central village is also called *Älvdalen*, just as the district.

² The number cannot have been much greater throughout the centuries, cf. Levander (1925: 4).

³ The traditional patterns of inflection are still valid in Swedish (in what is left of its complex inflectional system) and Icelandic. For instance, whereas Elfdalian masculine *est* /est:/ ‘horse’ has the plural *ester* /es:ter/, due to vowel balance rules in front of a Proto-Norse –R (see Nyström 2005: 49), Icelandic and Swedish *hest* : *hestar* ‘horse’ and *häst* : *hästar* ‘horses’, respectively, where the –ar marks that it belongs to nouns with an *a*-stem.

aspect of Elfdalian that has attracted the interest of linguists throughout the years. As Säve (1855) puts it: “[...] Övdaln is said to have preserved the old tongue in its greatest purity and originality” (English translation). Some went so far to describe it as “tasting blood and heathenism in the mouth”¹.

The current article is meant as a brief introduction to this interesting, yet relatively unexplored, language of Övdaln. To begin with, I will place Elfdalian on the geographical and the linguistic map (§1). Further, I will portray the history of the Dalecarlian dialects and Elfdalian and depict the current sociolinguistic situation of Elfdalian (§2). I will then briefly account for the phonetic, phonological, morphological and syntactical structure of the vernacular (§3) and likewise for the development of writing in Elfdalian and writing tradition in Övdaln (§4). I will finalize with acknowledgements (§5).

¹ Rendered e.g. by Björklund (1958: 1) and translated from Swedish.

1 Territory and Linguistic Affinity

Among the vastly varied parish vernaculars spoken in Upper Dalarna the dialect of Övdaln has an absolutely special position. Even to people in the closest neighboring parishes, Elfdalian may at times appear both archaic and difficult to understand.¹

Elfdalian is but one of many vernaculars spoken in Dalarna, the linguistically densest region in Sweden, where the dialect split has gone further than anywhere else in this country. Also within this linguistically varied region, Elfdalian holds a unique position, as it is hardly even understood by speakers of the neighboring parish vernaculars, if unaccustomed to it².

In Dalarna, sometimes referred to as ‘Sweden’s cradle’³, two big language families meet: the Finno-Ugric and the Nordic or Indo-European (see Map 2). The former consists of the currently almost extinct Southern Saami dialects in the northernmost part of Dalarna, whereas the latter consists of one Western Nordic dialect, the Särna-Idre dialects, and two Eastern Nordic dialect groups: (1) the Dalecarlian dialect group (or Dalecarlian Proper)⁴ in Upper Dalarna, i.e.

¹ Björklund (1958: 1).

² This is the case with speaker of other Northern Siljan vernaculars. Speakers of the Western Dalecarlian vernaculars, living as close as 70 kilometers from Övdaln understand practically no Elfdalian. Elfdalian speakers, on the other, have usually no great difficulty in understanding other Upper Siljan vernaculars today. Earlier, mutual intelligibility seems to have been relatively strong in Upper Siljan (see Levander 1925), but rather weak in different parts of the whole Dalecarlian speaking region. Cf. Säve’s (1855) report from the middle of the 19th century (English translation): “One should therefore not be taken aback that the inhabitants of the different parishes can barely understand each other, unless they occasionally seek their refuge in the Swedish language, which is understood and spoken pretty well by all, perhaps with the exception of old women and small children, who have not been hiking at the Rumbo track.” (Säve 1855: 34).

³ It was in Upper Siljan that Gustav Vasa was appointed a local commander in 1521, upon which he gathered men and began to organize the rebellion against the Danish King Christian II. In 1523, Gustav Vasa was elected King of Sweden, upon which he entered Stockholm. In 1528 he was crowned in Uppsala. Vasa is regarded as the founder of Modern Sweden. Ironically, his general centralization policy also led to highly centralized language policies in the centuries to come. These policies strongly affected the various vernaculars and languages of Sweden, including, of course, the distinctive dialects of Upper Siljan, the region where Vasa found his first supporters.

⁴ The term ‘Dalecarlian Proper’ (Swedish ‘Det egentliga dalmålet’) is used to distinguish these dialects from the Dala-Bergslag dialects in Southern Dalarna.

the center and a part of the northern part of the county and (2) the Dala-Bergslag (Dala-Bergslagsmål) dialect group in the south. As mentioned above, the dialect split in Dalarna has been immense. According to Levander (1925), the Dalecarlian dialect group is divided into three subgroups (Levander 1925: 19ff): (1a) the Upper Siljan dialect subgroup (Ovansiljansmål), spoken north of Lake Siljan. Elfdalian is one of three main Ovansiljan dialects, the remaining two main dialects being those of Orsa and Mora, (1b) the Lower Siljan dialect subgroup (Nedansiljansmål), spoken south of Lake Siljan and finally (1c) the Western Dalecarlian dialect subgroup (Västerdalmål), spoken in the center-west and northwest of Dalarna.

Levander reports that the population of the twenty-one parishes in which Dalecarlian Proper was spoken amounted to 100,000 persons in his day, around 90% of whom spoke the Dalecarlian dialects. Today, 80 years later, the rough number of Dalecarlian speakers can be estimated at 10,000 persons approximately, most of whom speak a strongly Swedified variant of it and are elderly. However, no exact data as to the number of Dalecarlian speakers are available.

If Upper Siljan vernaculars are regarded as Dalecarlian *par preference* (Nyström 2004: 9), Elfdalian should be regarded as Dalecarlian *par excellence*, due to its archaically Dalecarlian, distinctive and highly independent character¹.

But first, some words about Sweden's linguistic situation: The most common means of communication in today's Sweden in most linguistic domains is Standard Swedish². Although regional differences within vocabulary, morphology and syntax are minor, the pronunciation of Standard Swedish may very well vary to different extents from 'High Swedish' pronunciation³. The written language is however practically uniform throughout the country. Genuine dialects, if not totally extinct or on the edge of extinction, are often strongly influenced by Standard Swedish. Nonetheless, whereas the tendency toward dialect leveling in most parts of Sweden began in the 18th century, in the

¹ Interestingly, within the territory of the modern District of Älvdalen alone, three different language or dialect groups are found: Finno-Ugric dialects (South Saami), Western Nordic dialects (Särna-Idre) and Dalecarlian dialects (Elfdalian).

² Exceptions to this are English, conquering more and more linguistic domains, especially within IT and science on one hand, and minority languages, such as Saami, Finnish, Tornedalen Finnish, Romani and immigrant languages, on the other, mostly used in the home.

³ By 'High Swedish pronunciation' I mean the modern way of pronouncing Swedish in Stockholm and in the regions around it, often used television and in the radio, and by some regarded as 'correct'.

Dalecarlian area not only had dialect leveling not occurred, but dialect split and innovations even persisted for a couple of centuries more until reaching stagnation¹. This is hardly surprising, taking into account the strong pressure exercised on deviating dialects and minority languages until recently. Imposing the national language on the whole population of a country is one of the strongest and most effective instruments used by authorities throughout the European continent in order to unify the inhabitants of the national state. Today, Europe is fortunately showing tolerance and openness towards dialects and minority languages, although, for some of them, it is far too late.

The Dalecarlian dialect group has traditionally been regarded as part of the Sveamål dialects, albeit with an exceptional position (see Wessén 1954). Others suggest distinguishing between Dalecarlian and the rest of the Sveamål. Reitan (1930) suggests treating Dalecarlian as a separate language. Elert (1994), taking his point of departure in contemporary circumstances, treats the dialects spoken in Dalarna and part of Västmanland as Bergslagstalspråk ‘Colloquial language of Bergslagen’ or Dala-Bergslagssvenska ‘Dala-Bergslagen Swedish’. The inclusion of Dalecarlian within Sveamål can again be ascribed to the strong focus on archaism in traditional linguistics. Synchronically, taking into account the Dalecarlian innovations on the one hand, and the growing Swedish influence on the other dialects on the other, I am of the opinion that Dalecarlian can be classified as a separate dialect group, where Elfdalian constitutes its most distinctive member². Combining this argument with sociolinguistic arguments, Elfdalian can be regarded as a separate language.

¹ Staffan Fridell by personal communication.

² This can be motivated by purely linguistic and sociolinguistic criteria alike. Today, the dialect leveling has reached the Dalecarlian area, too, implying strong Swedish interference on the local vernaculars, as well as a decreasing number of speakers. Among sociolinguistic criteria, important factors are the documentation of Elfdalian, the publication of belles lettres, and measures taken within language planning, such as the standardization of the orthography.

Map 1 The Övdaln Parish in Scandinavia¹



¹ Map courtesy of Östen Dahl.

Map 2 The Linguistic Map of Dalarna¹



¹ Map courtesy of Östen Dahl.

2 Elfdalian – Past and Present

This (i.e. good preservation of the flexion system) becomes especially evident, if one observes the difficulties that small children have with this flexion system and how they gradually overcome these difficulties, so that their speech is usually fully correct by the age of 6 to 7.¹

2.1 The Consolidation of Dalecarlian

Elfdalian, together with the remaining Upper Siljan vernaculars, belong to the Dalecarlian dialect group, going back to the presumed common Dalecarlian ancestor. The accepted theory today, relying on Levander (1925), is that Dalecarlian evolved from Old Norse around the 14th century. Levander bases his theory on a phonological development, the Dalecarlian diphthongization process. He argues that several early Christian terms were subjected to diphthongization in Dalecarlian. As the Dalecarlian-speaking region had not become Christian until the end of the 12th century, he induces that diphthongization must still have been productive at that time. On the other hand, words based on Low German lexical elements have not undergone diphthongization. As Low German influence can be dated to the second half of the 14th century at the earliest, Levander deduces that diphthongization could no longer be productive at that time. Hence, Levander's conclusion is that, due to the central position of diphthongization in Dalecarlian, Dalecarlian had entered a period of stability in the 13th century (Levander 1925: 37–43).

It should be observed that, as Levander formulates it himself, this is his estimation of the period when Dalecarlian became consolidated, *nota bene* not when it began to distinguish itself from Old Norse. Further, the lexical elements from Low German could date back to the 14th century at the earliest, but they could also be later than that, a factor that could actually postpone the assumed final limit of the diphthongization process. Moreover, Levander's takes his point of departure merely in a sole phonological development, namely the diphthongization process. Admitting its central importance in Dalecarlian, it could be a late process compared to other, not only phonological, but also

¹ Levander (1909b: 59)

morphological, lexical and syntactical developments. Dalecarlian should thus be regarded as the sum of a great deal of additional developments, developments that have not been taken into account in Levander's argumentation.

Moreover, observing the first written records in Elfdalian, dating back to the early 17th century, including Prytz' relatively long passage rendering contemporary Elfdalian speech (see §4.1 and Björklund (1956)), that language is obviously very close to what was spoken in Övdal as late as a hundred years ago¹.

Due to the significant distinctions from Old Norse in the 17th century and the strong similarity to Elfdalian in the 20th century, it seems plausible that the process of dichotomization of Dalecarlian dialect groups from Old Norse began much earlier than the 14th century, probably in a larger territory, as early as the 11th century, when Danish versus Swedish dialect groups began to distinguish themselves from each other².

Three Dalecarlian dialect groups became salient: the Northern, Southern and Western. Within each of them, additional dialectal splits occurred, of which Elfdalian is but one offspring of the Northern group. Such developments are long-termed, a factor that confirms the assumption that the development and consolidation of Dalecarlian should have taken place earlier than in the 14th century.

2.2 Dalecarlian – From Stability to Dissolution

Helgander (2004) distinguishes between three different periods in the history of the Dalecarlian vernaculars, which he studies from a sociolinguistic angle: (1) the agrarian period, (2) the breach period, and (3) the revolution period. During the agrarian period, until the end of the 19th century, people had their contacts usually within the village, thus accelerating internal developments within their village vernacular and extending the split vis-à-vis other vernaculars. The breach period is characterized by contacts outside the village. Between the end of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th century, modernity and industrialism

¹ As Levander (1925) himself puts it: “[...] we know that [...] the Upper Siljan vernaculars existed in the beginning of the 17th century as independent dialects and that they, in all most crucial points, had the same shape as today. Without risking mistaking, we may assume that the dialectal situation in Upper Dalarna in the 16th century was essentially the same as in our days, naturally disregarding the devastation of the past half a century” (Levander 1925: 39).

² Levander (1925; 38f) raises the possibility that Dalecarlian could have emerged in the 8th or 9th century, but rejects it later, arguing that the region of Upper Dalarna was hardly populated at that time.

were introduced in Dalarna, leading to immigration and an inevitably greater exposure to Swedish, in its turn causing changes and increasing Swedish interference in the respective vernaculars. The revolution period is characterized by the disappearance of limits, due to developments in all fields of life as well as urbanization, through which migration was further accelerated. This period marked the clear ending of the agrarian society. Contacts between the generations decreased, the pressure from Swedish increased and many families chose to raise their children in Swedish and not as previously, in their own vernacular. (Helgander 2004: 16ff). These factors, combined with the introduction of compulsory school attendance and mass-media, have brought about immense changes to the disfavor of the Dalecarlian vernaculars. Moreover, the number of speakers has diminished and an even stronger Swedish interference has been observable.

The linguistic situation of the Dalecarlian speech community has thus shifted from monolingually Dalecarlian into Swedish-Dalecarlian diglossy, and is now heading towards being monolingually Swedish, if immigrant and foreign languages are ignored. For an exhaustive report on the linguistic situation of the Dalecarlian vernaculars during the past centuries and until the 1980s see Hultgren (1983) and Levander (1925).

2.3 The Dissolution of Elfdalian

The percentage of Elfdalian speakers among the traditional Elfdalian speech community diminishes the further down in age one goes, although this curve might be changing. Teachers now working in preschools in Övdaln report that they have never had so many children who had Elfdalian from home as they do today. However, the grammar and pronunciation of younger speakers of Elfdalian is usually more simplified and more influenced by Swedish than what is used by elderly. Even though practically all speakers of Elfdalian nowadays also have a good command of Swedish, Elfdalian is still spoken by the majority of the inhabitants of Övdaln and is understood by most of the remaining population.

As mentioned above, the transformation from a more or less homogeneous Elfdalian language community into a heterogeneous one, some of whom speak a mixed variety of Elfdalian and Swedish, took place along with the process of consolidation of the national state and the transition from an agrarian society into an industrial society. The causes of the transformation are manifold: the oppression of Elfdalian by the authorities, an ever growing dominance of

Swedish, immigration to and emigration from Övdaln and, until recently, feelings of shame among the native speakers causing many of them to refrain from using the language or transmitting it to their children or causing the children to conceive it as a language not worth learning.

As depicted by Helgander (2004), the dissolution of Elfdalian is not only embodied in the diminishing number of Elfdalian speakers, but also by the gradual loss of many native words and grammatical categories among the speech community. This inner dissolution is partially due to the lack of a standard orthography as well as the impossibility of learning, or even using, the native language in school from approximately the turn of the 20th century until a couple of decades ago¹. One of the consequences of this dissolution is that today's Elfdalian differs more significantly between generations than between geographical varieties, resulting in a greater variation among individuals than earlier, likewise in differences in grammatical forms and in the degree of Swedish interference. However, early 20th century Elfdalian, also named 'Classical Elfdalian', still constitutes for many, both scholars and laymen, the model for 'genuine' or 'correct' Elfdalian. This is the Elfdalian used in grammars, teaching books and some children's books.

As early as in the 1930s, pleas were made to include Elfdalian in the school curriculum (Hultgren 1983: 37), pleas that to date have gained little attention and led to few concrete measures. Many native speakers of Elfdalian born before 1950 could not understand a word of Swedish before attending school. At school start, everything was suddenly in Swedish, and the use of Elfdalian was banned. This sometimes resulted in ridiculous situations where Elfdalian-speaking teachers exclusively used Swedish with their Elfdalian-speaking pupils. Today, children who speak Elfdalian at home already speak Swedish at school start. Some of them quit using Elfdalian for good upon starting school, not to use active Elfdalian ever again. However, due to an increasingly positive attitude towards Elfdalian in recent years among the school authorities in Älvdalen, a growing use of Elfdalian at school can be registered. All the same, schools are for the time being not obliged to offer instruction in or through Elfdalian to their pupils.

As of the middle of the 20th century, Elfdalian was no longer the natural

¹ According to different reports, it seems like the Dalecarlian vernaculars were still dominant in school until the turn of the 20th century, in spite of the attempts from the part of the authorities to impose the exclusive use of Swedish in school (Hultgren 1983: 20f). Such use gradually became the norm in Upper Dalarna after the turn of the century (see e.g. Levander (1909a: 41)).

means of communication in Övdaln. In the modern society, competing with the Swedish language, which dominated schools and the mass media, the chances of Elfdalian survival were minimal, and the process of dissolution continued even more fiercely than before.

2.4 The Revival of Elfdalian

Every now and then, a group of enthusiasts in the remote parish of Övdaln of Upper Dalarna meet some evening for a *glåmåkweld* ‘Talk Evening’, organized by *Ulum Dalska*¹, the Association for the Preservation of Elfdalian. Here, they have the chance to proudly discuss Elfdalian in Elfdalian.

Witnessing the imminent extinction of their native tongue, should nothing be done to save it, a group of Elfdalian speakers assembled in 1984 to discuss how to reverse this process. The result was the establishment of that very association. Ever since, Ulum Dalska has been a catalyst in the reawakening process of Elfdalian, not only in the satellite villages around Tjyörtbyenn, but even in Tjyörtbyenn itself, the bastion of Standard Swedish during the 20th century, where Elfdalian can today be heard at school and at the local supermarkets. Besides conversation evenings, Ulum Dalska has been organizing many activities and projects in and about Elfdalian throughout the years, such as storytelling hours for children in Elfdalian, the publication of a biannual newspaper in Elfdalian, recording native speakers of Elfdalian, assisting scholars who wish to do research on Elfdalian, arranging the first conference about Elfdalian in 2004, with the cooperation of SOFI² and Uppsala University. Likewise, it has been supporting other activities and projects, such as the publication of books in Elfdalian, organizing Elfdalian courses as well as translation circles, and assisting in cultural activities, such as Lena Werf Egardt’s musical *Oðerwais* ‘Otherwise’ in 2004, the first musical ever to be performed Elfdalian or in any vernacular in Sweden. But, most importantly, Ulum Dalska gave the speakers of Elfdalian their pride back.

The founding of Ulum Dalska marks a renaissance in the history of Elfdalian. Shortly after its establishment, the first children’s books in this language were published, as well as Steensland’s (1986) small Elfdalian-Swedish, Swedish-Elfdalian dictionary and Åkerberg’s grammar (2004)³.

¹ Elfdalian for ‘We shall, or let us speak, Dalecarlian or Elfdalian’.

² The Institute for Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research.

³ See also §4.3.

3 The Structure of Elfdalian

Growing up in Åsär in the 1940s, Elfdalian was my natural language, the language I used with my family, with other children in the village and with strangers. Moving to Stockholm in 1949, I could not understand Swedish¹.

The phonological, morphological and syntactic structure of Elfdalian has changed considerably during the past century. These changes can be mainly ascribed to the growing dominance of Swedish in Övdaln. As mentioned in the previous chapter, that growing dominance could proceed practically unhindered, due to the exclusive status of Swedish within church, schools and as a written language, on the one hand, and the low status of Elfdalian, its absence from school instruction and the lack of a written norm, on the other. Through increasing Swedish interference, internal changes within Elfdalian have inevitably taken place. The structure of Elfdalian gradually became more simplified inflectionally and drawn closer to Swedish in its phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon. These changes mark the shift from ‘Classical Elfdalian’ into ‘Modern Elfdalian’, Elfdalian as it is used today². Modern Elfdalian, however, is much less explored and documented than its classical counterpart. The current paper focuses on Classical Elfdalian.

3.1 Phonetics and Phonology

3.1.1 Syllable Length

Elfdalian has preserved all three Old Norse syllable types (see Table 1)³, i.e. (1) short syllable, consisting of a short vowel plus a short consonant; (2) long

¹ Gudrun Björklund, born in 1942 in the Älvdalen village of Åsär, by personal communication. Levander has based a large part of his research on Elfdalian on his studies of the Åsär vernacular. In 1909, Åsär is reported to have had 433 inhabitants, 412 of whom were native and 21 migrants (Levander 1909a: 41).

² The term ‘Modern Elfdalian’ is problematic, as there is no survey describing contemporary Elfdalian. Moreover, the changes that have taken place are far from uniform or general to the whole speech community, as opposed to the relatively stable ‘Classical Elfdalian’.

³ Here, their most common root syllable structures are accounted for.

syllable, consisting either of (2a) a short vowel in front of a long consonant, (2b) a short vowel in front of a cluster, or (2c) a long vowel in front of a short consonant; (3) overlong syllable, consisting of a long vowel in front of a long consonant. This is one of the few Nordic linguistic variety where all three original syllable lengths are preserved.

Table 1 Elfdalian Syllable Lengths

Syllable type	Structure	Example
(1) Short syllable	V + C	<i>al-</i> as in <i>ali</i> /eɽɪ/ ‘tail’
(2a) Long syllable	V + C:	<i>kall</i> /kæl:/ ‘man’
(2b) Long syllable	V + cluster	<i>est</i> /ɛs:t/ ‘horse’
(2c) Long syllable	V: + C	<i>mun</i> as in <i>muna</i> /mỹ:ne/ ‘mother’
(3) Overlong syllable	V: + C:	<i>ni'tter</i> /nɪ:t:ɛr/ ‘downwards’

3.1.2 Word tones and stress

Swedish and Norwegian standard languages as well as many Nordic dialects in Sweden and Norway possess two word accents, so-called word tones¹, a system inherited from Old Norse. The realization of the word tones varies geographically. The Elfdalian tones or melodious accents, grave and acute, can be roughly described as follows: The grave accent has a falling tone on the first and a rising tone on the second syllable, as in *kulla* /kyl:ɐ/ ‘girl’, whereas the acute has a rise on the first and a fall on the second syllable, as in *fistjin* /fɪstsm/ ‘the fish’. The falling and rising curves are similar to those of Stockholm Swedish grave and acute accents, although the timing of their tonal peaks is different².

The Elfdalian grave accent is realized in various additional ways depending on the syllable length of the words in question. One such subtype, the *level stress* (Swedish *jämviktsaccent*), is applied to words with two short syllables.

¹ These word tones are substituted by a glottal stop, or the lack of it, in Danish dialects and are totally absent in many Finland Swedish dialects.

² Gunnar Nyström and Olle Engstrand by personal communication.

The tone on both syllables is high and level, as in *fårå* /fɔrɔ/ ‘go’¹. For a detailed account of the Elfdalian accent system, see Åkerberg (2004: 21–38).

Following the traditional Germanic pattern, Elfdalian stress falls on the first syllable. But just as in other Germanic languages and dialects (with the exception of Icelandic), *ex externo* words (i.e. words formed on a non-native base, so-called loan-words) and prefixed words may have the stress elsewhere, as in *akudira* /ɛkv’dɪrɪ/ ‘to talk’ (ultimately based on French *accorder*) and *fesiktug* /fɛ’siktɥ/ ‘careful’ (immediately based on Swedish *försiktig*, ultimately on Low German).

Just like the tonal system, the Elfdalian stress system is dynamic, and its balance is prescribed by the syllable length. For example, words consisting of two short syllables have level stress, implying that both syllables have equally high tones and are equally stressed. The accent and tonal system in Elfdalian appear to be so closely linked to each other that it may seem appropriate to treat jointly.

3.1.3 Vowel Balance

Vowel balance (Swedish *vokalbalans*) is a system through which the syllable length of the root modifies the quality of the vowel in the last syllable of the word. These are the two main occurrences of vowel balance can be seen in (1) and (2).

- (1) *i/e*, as in *eri* /ɛrɪ/ ‘hare’ whose final *-i* is due to the short root syllable *er-*. On the other hand, *brinde* /brɪn:dɛ/ ‘elk’ has a final *-e* due to the long root syllable *brind-*.
- (2) *å/a*. Declining the two weak masculine nouns in (1) in the default case, we get *erå* /ɛrɔ/ and *brinda* /brɪn:dɛ/, respectively.

The tones are affected by syllable length. Hence, *eri* and *erå* automatically take level stress, due to their short root syllable, whereas *brinde* and *brinda* take the archetypical grave accent, due to their long root syllable.

The vowel balance does not affect all vowels and not even all endings. Historically enclitic suffixes containing a vowel are not submitted to vowel balance, e.g. the postponed definite *-eð*, as in *net* ‘net’, but *neteð* ‘the net’, and

¹ More on level stress can be found in Nyström (1991), and likewise, in this volume, in Bye (2005), Kristoffersen (2005).

not the vowel balance prescribed form **netið*. This is also the case with dative plural suffix *-um*¹. On the other hand, the dative singular ending is subjected to vowel balance, yielding *neti* ‘net’ /nɛtɪ/ (in the dative) and *ause* /aʊ:se/ ‘house’ (in the dative). For a more exhaustive report on the Elfdalian vowel balance, see Nyström (2005).

3.1.4 Vowel Harmony

Unlike vowel balance, vowel harmony constitutes the assimilation of the last vowel in the word through the influence of the root vowel (thus not to the syllable length of the root). Elfdalian shows evident tendencies towards vowel harmony in words with short syllable roots. Vowel harmony can be ascribed to the generally strong assimilation tendencies occurring in this type of words: as seen above, two consecutive short syllables take the level stress, resulting in turn in two equally high tones and equal stress on both syllables, as in *åka* /ɔkɔ/ ‘hook’ (in the default case), *båka* /bɔkɔ/ ‘to bake’ and *båkar* /bækær/ ‘bake’ (in pres. sg.). Besides paradigmatic changes, vowel balance has also taken place in individual forms, such as Old Norse *yfir* > Elfdalian *yvyr* /yvyr/ ‘over’ and Old Norse *nykil* > Elfdalian *nytyl* /nytsyl/ ‘key’².

3.1.5 Sandhi

The consonants /ð/, /r/ and in some cases /ɣ/ are omitted through external sandhi, i.e. in word-final position, and through internal sandhi, i.e. word-medially in compounds and derivations. Moreover, unisyllabic pronouns and short adverbs beginning with /d/ are pronounced /ð/ when the previous word ends in a vowel. That <d> /d/ goes back to an original <þ> /θ/, as in *Ig war dar dǫ* /ɪ wa ða: ðõ/ ‘I was there then’³.

3.1.6 Apocope

The rules for Elfdalian apocopation are too complex and manifold to be included here. For detailed descriptions see Levander (1920: 21–28) and Åkerberg (2004: 8–11).

¹ See Nyström (2005: 48).

² See also Riad (2005).

³ See also Levander (1928: 11f), Åkerberg (2004).

Through Elfdalian apocopation some morph final and word final vowels are omitted, either through diachronic development or through synchronic paradigmatic changes. Within a complex word, e.g. a compound, the last morph vowel of a long or overlong syllable is apocoped, as in *sturkull* /styryl:/ ‘big girl’ of *stur* + *kulla*. Vowels in long or overlong syllable words within the phrase (i.e. not in the final position) are as well subject to apocopation, e.g. *Mass bellde it kåyt strai’tt* /mæs: bɛl:d it kɔyt straj:t:/ ‘Masse could not run quickly’ for *Masse* + *bellde* + *itte* + *kåyta* + *strai’tt*.

3.2 Elfdalian Speech Sounds

Table 2 Consonants

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar
Plosive	p b			t d			k g
Nasal	m			n			ŋ
Trill				r			
Flip or flap					ɽ		
Affricates						tʃ ¹ ʤ ²	
Fricative		f v	ð	s ³			ɣ
Approximant						j	
Lateral approximant				l̥ l			

Labiovelar
w

¹ In order to simplify the phonetic transcription, this consonant will not appear with a diacritic in the rest of this article.

² See note 1.

³ See note 1.

Table 3 Monophthongs

/ɪ/	as in <i>kripp</i> /kɾɪp:/ ‘child’; <i>miða</i> /mɪ:ðe/ ‘waste’
/ĩ/	as in <i>wind</i> /wĩn:d/ ‘wind’; <i>wɪster</i> /wĩ:ʂ:ter/ ‘left’ (direction)
/ɛ/	as in <i>eri</i> /ɛɾɪ/ ‘hare’; <i>fera</i> /fɛ:rɛ/ ‘ferry’
/ẽ/ ¹	as in <i>kennde</i> /kẽn:de/ ‘knew; felt’; <i>wɛsa</i> /wẽ:ʂɛ/ ‘to breathe’
/æ/	as in <i>djävå</i> /dʒævɔ/ ‘to give’; <i>ära</i> /æ:rɛ/ ‘ear; to hear’
/e/; /a:/	as in <i>kapp</i> /kɛp:/ ‘cup’; <i>dal</i> /da:ɾ/ ‘valley’
/ẽ/; /ã:/	as in <i>kamb</i> /kẽmb/ ‘comb’; <i>kam</i> /kã:m/ ‘came’
/ɣ/	as in <i>kulla</i> /kɣl:ɛ/ ‘girl’; <i>luv</i> /ɾɣ:v/ ‘permission; leave’
/ỹ/	as in <i>kullu</i> /kɣl:ỹ/ ‘the girl’ (default form); <i>nu</i> /nỹ:/ ‘now’
/y/	as in <i>byddja</i> /bydʒ:ɛ/ ‘dwell; build’; <i>tjyr</i> /tʂy:r/ ‘cow’
/ỹ/	as in <i>bynn</i> /bỹn:/ ‘the village’; <i>tjy’mm</i> /tʂỹ:m:/ ‘to cows’
/œ/	as in <i>rövin</i> /rœvĩn/ ‘the fox’; <i>öve</i> /œ:vɛ/ ‘river’
/õ/	as in <i>sömt</i> /ʂõmt/ ‘sewn’; <i>söma</i> /ʂõ:mɛ/ ‘to sew’
/ɔ/ ^{2 3}	as in <i>kold</i> /kɔl:d/ ‘cold’; <i>oga</i> /ɔ:ɣɛ/ ‘eye’
/ɔ/ ^{4 5}	as in <i>båkå</i> /bɔkɔ/ ‘to bake’; <i>gås</i> /gɔ:ʂ/ ‘goose’
/ɔ/ ⁶	as in <i>gåmal</i> /gɔmɔɾ/ ‘old’; <i>åm</i> /ɔ:m/ ‘straw’

¹ The vowels /ẽ/ and /ẽ:/ are used exclusively in some parts of Övdaln, whereas /æ/ and /ã:/ are used in other parts (Nyström 1995).

² In order to simplify the phonetic transcription, this vowel will not appear with a diacritic in the rest of this article.

³ This set of vowels is realized in some parts of Övdaln as /u/ and /ũ/, respectively. In other parts they are realized as /ō/ and /ō̄/.

⁴ The vowels /ō̄/ and /ō̄:/ are used exclusively in some parts of Övdaln, whereas /ɔ̄/ and /ɔ̄:/ are used in other parts (Nyström 1995).

⁵ See note 2.

⁶ See note 3.

Table 4 Diphthongs

/aj:/; /āj:/	as in <i>ais</i> /aj:s/ ‘ice’; <i>dai</i> /dāj:/ ‘your’ (f.sg.)
/aw:/	as in <i>maws</i> /maw:s/ ‘mouse’
/iɛ/, /īɛ:/; /iɛ:/, /īɛ:/	as in <i>iett</i> /iɛ:t/, <i>ienn</i> /īɛ:n/ ‘iron’; <i>diel</i> /diɛ:r/ ‘part’, <i>bien</i> /bīɛ:n/ ‘leg’
/uo/, /ũo/ ¹ ; /uo:/, /ũo:/ ²	as in <i>guott</i> /guot:/ ‘good’, <i>uott</i> /ũot:/ ‘woolen glove’; <i>ruo</i> /ruo:/ ‘silence’, <i>tuom</i> /tũo:m/ ‘empty’
/yœ/, /ỹœ:/; /yœ:/, /ỹœ:/	as in <i>byörk</i> /byœrk/ ‘birch tree’, <i>byönn</i> /byœn:/ ‘bear’, <i>tjyöt</i> /tsyœ:t/, <i>myöta</i> /mỹœ:ta/
/ɔy:/	as in <i>pâyk</i> /pɔy:k/ ³

Table 5 Triphthongs

/juo/; /jũo/ ⁴	<i>liuos</i> /ljuo:s/ ‘light’; <i>snjuosteð</i> /snjũosteð/ ‘snowbank’, <i>jyot</i> /jũo:t/ ‘hither’
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3.2.1 Consonants

As can be observed in Table 2, Elfdalian has 23 consonant speech sounds. The speech sounds /ŋ/, /v/, /ð/, /ʁ/, /j/, /r/ and /w/ can only occur as short. The remaining consonants may occur as short or long. Elfdalian lacks the voiceless fricative glottal /h/, a speech sound that is reportedly still difficult to pronounce for some Elfdalian speakers. However, /h/ occurs today in Elfdalian loan-words and proper names.

In some Elfdalian villages, /ð/ and /r/ merged into /r/⁵. Thus, *auseð*⁶ ‘the house’ is pronounced /aũeð/ or /aũser/. In some villages /l/ is pronounced /sl/, as in *slaik* /slaik/, elsewhere realized as /laik/ ‘such, one like this’¹.

¹ This set of vowels is realized in some village vernaculars as /ʏæ/, /ʏǣ/.

² This set of vowels is realized in some village vernaculars as /ʏǣ/, /ʏæ:/.

³ This diphthong is realized in some villages as /ɔj/.

⁴ This set of triphthongs is realized in some dialects as /jʏæ/, /jʏǣ/.

⁵ The merging of these two consonants is old, as may be observed from 17th century texts.

⁶ From Old Norse *hūsit*.

Elfdalian has two voiced fricatives, /ð/ and /ɣ/. As Noreen (1903: 415) and Levander (1909b: 58) report, the bilabial fricative /β/ still existed, but were dying out, in their day, e.g. in *åvå*² /ɔ̥βɔ̥/ ‘to have’, today realized /ɔ̥vɔ̥/. This speech sound is presumed to have existed in Old Norse. Remnants of this consonant still exist in Elfdalian in the form of a non-plosive /b̥/, when /v/ precedes /d/, as in *Övdaln* /œb̥ˈda:ɾn/ ‘Övdaln’³.

The consonants /ʃ/, /tʃ/ and /ç/ are normally realized as apico-alveolar in Elfdalian. The former is thus realized more or less as Danish or Icelandic /ʃ/.

Swedish interference in the pronunciation of Elfdalian is notable among a portion of the speakers, especially the younger.

3.2.2 Vowels

The description of the vowel system is rather demanding, as their position on the scale is more difficult to identify and define, and, further, due to differences between village vernaculars and generations. The following description should therefore be seen as a rough overview of the Elfdalian vowel system.

As can be seen from Table 3, Elfdalian lacks the otherwise extremely common vowels /i/ and /i:/.

Every Elfdalian oral vowel has a corresponding nasal vowel, except for /ɛ/ and /æ/, which have a common corresponding nasal vowel, realized as /ẽ/ or /æ̃/⁴, as well as /o̥/u/ and /ɔ̥/, which share a common corresponding nasal monophthong, realized as /õ̃/ũ̃/ or /õ̃̃/⁵. Nasal vowels are clearly distinct from the oral counterparts, which can also be shown by minimal pairs, such as *ås* ‘ridge’ : *ås̃* ‘neck’ (Nyström 1995). Vowel nasality is obligatory when a vowel precedes a nasal consonant, as in /ir̃m/ ‘we are’, but may also occur when no nasal consonants are close, as in /gõ̃:ʃ/ ‘goose’ (see Levander (1928: 213–216) and Åkerberg (2004: 8)). For further reading about vowel nasality in Elfdalian, see §3.2.2.2 and Noreen (1886).

¹ From Old Norse *slīkr*.

² From Old Norse *hafa*.

³ Gunnar Nyström by personal communication.

⁴ The pronunciation varies geographically.

⁵ The pronunciation varies geographically.

3.2.2.1 Monophthongs, Diphthongs and Triphthongs

Elfdalian monophthongs can be short or long (see Table 3). Elfdalian diphthongs¹ vary in length patterns, i.e. some can only occur long, others both short and long (see Table 4). Additionally, Elfdalian has two triphthongs, which can be short or long (see Table 5).

3.2.2.2 Nasal Vowels

The existence of vowel nasality is peculiar to Övdaln and two nearby villages among Nordic linguistic varieties². The existence of frontal nasal vowels, as in /wĩ:s:tər/ ‘left’, /tsỹ:m:/ ‘cows’ (in the dative plural) is probably peculiar to Elfdalian on the linguistic map of Europe. Comparing with three other languages with nasal vowels, Portuguese, Polish and French, the former two lack frontal nasal vowels entirely, whereas the latter’s /i/ and /y/ are lowered into /ẽ/ and /œ/ if nasal, e.g. *vin* /vẽ/ ‘wine’ and *lundi* /lœdi/ ‘Monday’.

3.3 Phonological Development

3.3.1 Vowel Shifts

As mentioned above, Elfdalian is a mixture of old and new features. Phonology accounts for an important part of the innovations, especially in respect to the development of the Old Norse vowels. Nevertheless, having such shifts in mind, one can fairly well refer back to the Old Norse system. The following account is partially based on Björklund 1958.

Old long *o*, *u*, *i*, *y*, *ø* became diphthongized in Elfdalian into *uo*, *au*, *aj*, *åy* and *yø*, respectively, as in (3)–(7).

- | | | |
|------------------|---|------------------------|
| (3) <i>bōk</i> | > | <i>buok</i> ‘book’ |
| (4) <i>hūs</i> | > | <i>aus</i> ‘house’ |
| (5) <i>knīfr</i> | > | <i>knaiv</i> ‘knife’ |
| (6) <i>hỹsa</i> | > | <i>åysa</i> ‘to house’ |
| (7) <i>møta</i> | > | <i>myöta</i> ‘to meet’ |

¹ As /j/ is considered a consonant, diphthongs where it occurs are not presented in this overview, except when they are considered to be prominent in Elfdalian phonology.

² Besides Övdaln, it is found in the vernaculars of the Ovan Siljan vernaculars of Våmhus and Bonäs. See Levander (1928: 213ff).

The old diphthongs *au*, *æi*, *øy* have been revocalized in Elfdalian, resulting in the monophthongs or diphthongs *o* /o:/, *ie*, *ä* /æ:/, as in (8)–(10).

- (8) *auga* > *oga* ‘eye’
 (9) *heim* > *iem* ‘home’
 (10) *høyra* > *ära* ‘to hear’

Old short *a* developed into *a* or, in some circumstances, *o*, e.g. *want* > *wattn* ‘water’, but *gakk* > *gokk* ‘go’ (imperative singular).

Old long *a* evolved into *å*, as in *bātr* > *båt* ‘boat’. Short *e* has retained its quality, as in *net* ‘net’, or undergone breaking, resulting in *jä*, as in *eta* > *jätå* ‘to eat’ and *fēll* > *ffjäll* ‘fell’ ‘fell’ (imperfect of ‘to fall’).

Old *a* may be subject to regressive umlaut caused by /ɪ/, as in **haRi* > *eri* (historical umlaut) ‘hare’ and *far-* : *ferið* ‘go : went’ (umlaut within the paradigm). Further, umlaut within the paradigm causes the shifts *uo* > *yö*, e.g. *buok* – *byöker* ‘book – books’ and *au* > *åy* and *maus* > *måyser* ‘mouse – mice’.

Vowel nasality is one of the classical markers of Elfdalian. Elfdalian often has nasal vowels preceding a historical, now deleted, *n*, as in *ǫ̃* for Old Germanic **ana-* ‘on’ and *gǫ̃s* for Old Germanic **gans-* ‘goose’. As a rule, a vowel in front of a nasal consonant automatically becomes nasal, as in *ausum* ‘houses’ (in the dative plural). Moreover, vowel nasality may also occur after nasal consonants, especially if the vowel is long. Finally, vowel nasality may be historically and phonotactically unpredictable, as in *wið* ‘we’¹ (see also §3.2.2.2).

3.3.2 Consonant Shifts

Old *h* was disappeared in Elfdalian, as in Old Norse *hān/hōn* > Elfdalian *ǫ̃* ‘she’ and *hūs* > *aus* ‘house’. In contrast to Swedish and Icelandic, old *w* is preserved in Elfdalian, as in *wīndR* > *wind* ‘wind’ and *hwī* (*swā*) > *wiso* ‘why’².

Old short *l* is often realized as /ɾ/. Dalecarlian vernaculars have the peculiarity of having /ɾ/ even word-initially, as in *luv* /ɾɣ:v/ ‘permission’. The clusters *sl*, *tl* have evolved into *sl*, pronounced as a voiceless lateral approximant, as in *slīkr* > *slaik* /ɬaɪk/ ‘such, one like this’ and *wætli* > *wessleð*

¹ Levander (1928: 213ff).

² See Levander (1928: 30ff).

/wɛlːlɛð/ ‘the bed spread’. Old *l* has disappeared before *g, k, m, p, s, f/v* was omitted, as in *mjǫlk* > *mjok* /mjo:k/ ‘milk’, *sjalfr* > *siuov*¹.

The clusters *ld, nd, mb, rg, gd* and *ng* /ŋg/ have been preserved in Elfdalian with a prolonged first consonant in postvocalic positions, as in *kveld* > *kweld* /kwɛl:d/ ‘evening’.

Old word initial *wr* has undergone metathesis, resulting in Elfdalian *rw*, as in *wriða* > *rwaiða* ‘to turn (something)’².

Elfdalian *ð* corresponds in most cases to old *ð* or postvocalic old *t* in suffixes, as in *rauðr* > *roð* ‘red’, *bakat* > *båkáð* ‘baked’ (past participle) and *húsit* > *auseð* ‘the house’. This consonant, too, is strictly limited among Dalecarlian dialects.

Old *g* and *k* are palatalized in front of *i* and *y* and old *e* > *jä*, thus resulting in /ɕ/ and /tɕ/, respectively, as in (11)–(12). The change also occurs paradigmatically, as in (13).

- (11) *gefa* > *djävå* /ɕævɔ/ ‘to give’
 (12) *kȳr* > *tjyr* /tɕy:r/ ‘cow’
 (13) *drukkinn* > *druittjin* /dryts:i:n/ ‘drunk’ (past participle of *drikka*).

Old *r* has undergone assimilation in Elfdalian in front of *l, n* and *s*, as can be observed in (14)–(16)³.

- (14) *karl* > *kall* ‘man’
 (15) *stjarna* > *stienna* ‘star’
 (16) *fyrst* > *fuost* ‘first’

¹ See Levander (1928: 51–57).

² See Levander (1928: 104–108).

³ See Levander (1928: 76–81).

3.4 Inflection

3.4.1 Nouns, Adjectives, Adverbs and Pronouns

Elfdalian has preserved all three genders: masculine, feminine and neutral, two numbers: singular and plural, and three to four grammatical cases: nominative, accusative, dative and genitive¹. Elfdalian nouns are either weak or strong.

Nouns and adjectives are either definite or indefinite, e.g. *rakke* ‘dog’, *rattjin* ‘the dog’ and *liuot* ‘ugly’, *liuotn* ‘the ugly one; the Devil’.

Indefiniteness in Elfdalian is marked either by zero or by the indefinite article, but may in some cases (e.g. for collective nouns) be marked by the suffix usually denoting definitiveness, e.g. *ig al fã wattneð* ‘I will have some water’ (*wattneð*, definite form of *wattn*).

Nouns and adjectives agree in gender, number and case. The noun declension is divided into strong and weak nouns and further according to their root syllable, long and short. Moreover, the modern genitive case² cannot be governed by a verb or a preposition like the accusative or dative cases. Three noun declensions are presented below: the declension of the strong long-syllable masculine *est* ‘horse’, of the weak long-syllable feminine *kulla* ‘girl’ and, finally, of the strong short-syllable neutrum *net* ‘net’³ (see Tables 5–8) (Levander (1909b)).

Attributive adjectives often form a compound with the noun they determine, e.g. *sturkull* ‘big girl’ from *stur* ‘big’ + *kulla* ‘girl’. Nouns and adjectives agree in gender, number and case, e.g. *estn ir stur* ‘the horse is big’, *kullq ir stur* ‘the girl is big’ and *buordeð ir sturt* ‘the table is large’.

Adverbs often have an identical form as the neutral form of the adjective they are derived from, e.g. *straið* (basic form) ‘quick, speedy’, *strai’tt* (neutral form) and *strai’tt* (adverb) ‘quickly, speedily’.

¹ The old genitive is only preserved in some fixed idioms, such as *et lands* ‘by land’ and *et friðs* ‘at peace, satisfied’. As argued by Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2005), Elfdalian has no productive morphological genitive case. The so-called genitive case is formed by the addition of a suffix to the dative form of the noun. All the same, the genitive form will be presented in the tables below.

² See note 1.

³ Levander (1909b) lacks genitive forms for neutral nouns.

Adjectives and adverbs can be declined in the positive, comparative and superlative forms, e.g. *straið* ‘quick’, *strai’tt* ‘quickly’ – *straiðer(a)* ‘quicker; more quickly’ – *straiðest* ‘quickest; most quickly’.

The cardinal numbers 1–4 are declined according to gender and case, e.g. *twer ester* (m.) ‘two horses’, *twar wikur* (f.) ‘two weeks’, *tau aus* (n.) ‘two houses’, but *Påytjin sir tjo esta* ‘The boy sees two horses’.

The personal pronouns in the nominative are: *ig* ‘I’, *du* ‘you’ (sg.), *an* ‘he’¹, *ǫ* ‘she’, *eð* ‘it’, *wið* ‘we’, *ið* ‘you’ (pl.), *dier*. Among the personal pronouns, the accusative and dative cases are not formally distinct.

3.4.2 Verbs

Elfdalian verbs follow the Germanic verbal system to a large extent and are divided into weak and strong verbs. The strong verbs, in turn, are divided into seven ablaut groups and characterized by the lack of a dental suffix in the imperfect and perfect tense. The weak verbs are characterized by a dental suffix in the imperfect and perfect. Nyström & Sapir (2005a) divide the weak Elfdalian verbs into five classes.

Elfdalian verbs are conjugated in the indicative and imperative moods, active and passive voice, present, imperfect and perfect tense. They are further conjugated in the singular, 1st person plural, 2nd person plural and plural 3rd persons. Below, the conjugation of two modal verbs, *wårå* ‘to be’ and *åvå* ‘to have’ is provided, as well as the conjugation of one long-syllable weak verb *dalska* ‘to speak Elfdalian or Dalecarlian’ and one short-syllable weak verb *spilå* ‘to play’. Finally, the conjugation of the short-syllable strong verb *kweðå* ‘to sing’ is presented (see Table 9).

The passive voice is marked by *-s*, as *bjärå* ‘to carry’, *bjärås* ‘to be carried’. This suffix is also used to denote a reciprocal action, as in *råka* ‘to meet’ (with direct object), *råkas* ‘to meet’ (one another) or deponent verbs, such as *uogas* ‘to take care of’.

The use of the subjunctive mood is limited to *wäre*, the 3rd person present of *wårå* ‘to be’ and *edd*, *eddum*, *eddið*, *edde*, the imperfect subjunctive form of *åvå* ‘have’, as in *Ig edd að wilað*, lit. ‘I would have had wanted’, i.e. ‘I would like to have’.

For detailed descriptions of the Elfdalian inflectional system, see Levander (1909b) and Åkerberg (2004).

¹ Note that *an* is also used as the impersonal pronoun, ‘one’, Swedish ‘man’.

Table 6 Declension of the Strong Long-syllable Masculine *est*

	<i>Indefinite</i>	<i>Definite</i>
<i>Singular</i>		
Nominative	est	estn
Accusative	est	estn
Dative	este	estem
Genitive	estes	estemes
<i>Plural</i>		
Nominative	ester	estär
Accusative	esta	estą
Dative	estum	estum
Genitive	–	estumes

Table 7 Declension of the weak long-syllable feminine *kulla*

	<i>Indefinite</i>	<i>Definite</i>
<i>Singular</i>		
Nominative	kulla	kulla
Accusative	kullu	kullu
Dative	kullu	kullun
Genitive	kulles	kullunes
<i>Plural</i>		
Nominative	kullur	kullur
Accusative	kullur	kullur
Dative	killum	killum
Genitive	–	kullumes

Table 8 Declension of the Strong Short-syllable Neutral *net*¹

	<i>Indefinite</i>	<i>Definite</i>
<i>Singular</i>		
Nominative	net	neteð
Accusative	net	neteð
Dative	neti	neti
<i>Plural</i>		
Nominative	net	nete
Accusative	net	nete
Dative	netum	netum

¹ Following Levander (1909a), I exclude the neutral genitive forms from this table.

Table 9 The Conjugation of Some Elfdalian Verbs

<i>Infinitive</i>	wårå	åvå	dalska	spilå	kweðå
<i>Present</i>					
sg.	ir	ar	dalsker	spilär	kweð
1 st pl.	irum	amm	dalskum	spilum	kweðum
2 nd pl.	irið	avið	dalskið	spilið	kweðið
3 rd pl.	irå	åvå	dalska	spilå	kweðå
<i>Imperfect</i>					
sg.	war	adde	dalskeð	spiläð	kwað
1 st pl.	warum	addum	dalskeðum	spiläðum	kwaðum
2 nd pl.	warið	addið	dalskeðið	spiläðið	kwaðið
3 rd pl.	waru	adde	dalskeð	spiläð	kwaðu
<i>Imperative</i>					
2 nd sg.	wari	avi	dalske	spile	kweð
2 nd pl.	warið	avið	dalskið	spilið	kweðið
<i>Present part.</i>	wärend	avend	dalskend	spilend	kweðend
<i>Past part.</i>	werið	apt	dalskað	spiläð	kweðið

3.5 Syntax

Elfdalian is a head-first language with the usual constituent order AVO/SV. Even though it often behaves like other Nordic language varieties syntactically, Elfdalian shows several peculiar traits. Only a few of them will be accounted for here.

As mentioned in 3.5, nouns may take the definite form in Elfdalian even in cases, in which they do not denote definitiveness (see 3.4.1).

Attributive adjectives and their nouns often form compounds in Elfdalian, e.g. *sturauseð* ‘the big house’ big-house-DEF (see 3.4.1).

In the conjugation of the verb, Elfdalian has the peculiarity of omitting the pronoun in the first and second person plural, when the pronoun would normally precede the finite verb, e.g. *Irum i buðum* ‘We are at the summer pasture’, *Irið i buðum* ‘You (pl.) are in the summer pasture’. When the pronoun would normally be positioned after the verb, the pronoun *wið* is then used for the first person plural, but *ið*, the pronoun for the second person plural, is still omitted, i.e. *War irum wið?* ‘Where are we?’, but *War irið* ‘Where are you (pl.)?’¹.

Negation may occur several times in the same clause, e.g. *It sir ig inggan jär, itjä* lit. ‘not see I nobody here not’, i.e. ‘I do not see anybody here’. Likewise, the pronoun may be repeated several times in the same clause, e.g. *An al fy, an* lit. ‘He will follow (or join), he’, i.e. ‘He will follow (or join)’.

The infinite marker *te* ‘to’, the conjunction *at* ‘that’ and the relative pronoun *so* ‘who, which’ are often omitted in Elfdalian. See (17)–(19).

(17) *Eð ir guott livå* ‘It is good to live’

(18) *Ierk saggd an ulld kumå att* ‘Ierk said he would return’

(19) *Wen ulum wið djärå isa dågå amme?*

‘What shall we do during these days that we have?’

For further reading about Elfdalian syntax see Levander (1909b) and Platzack (1996).

¹ For a more detailed description see Nyström & Sapir (2005b).

3.6 Word Formation, Lexicon and Onomasticon

So far, little has been written about word formation in Elfdalian. In general, it seems to follow the traditional Nordic pattern of *ex interno reproductions*¹, mainly consisting of compounding and derivations, as in the compound *gęskull* ‘girl shepherd’, based on *gęsla* ‘shepherding’ + *kulla* ‘girl’, with the application of the apocope rules in compound. The adjective *kruokug* ‘crooked’ derives from *kruok* ‘hook; crook’. Words *reproduced ex externo*² are almost all based on Swedish or Swedish-mediated lexical elements, many of which are, in turn, based on Low German elements or internationalisms. This Swedish influence has enriched Elfdalian with a great deal of new lexical elements. Moreover, changes in the lexicon reflect changes in the society. The Elfdalian of the turn of the last century was rich with agrarian and artisan terms. In modern society, relevant concepts within technology, economics, IT, culture, politics and science require new terms. Further, speakers who ascribe a high prestige to a certain language often tend to use words from that language when using their own language. These factors, combined with the strong pressure from Standard Swedish have contributed to the many Swedishisms and are diffused within all domains in Elfdalian, including some numerals, adverbial phrases and fixed idioms. Some of the Standard Swedish innovations came to substitute the native forms, such as *olme* (Swedish *holme*) for the native Elfdalian *uom* ‘holm, islet’³. Others led to double forms, such as *ex interno older* and *ex externo aldri* ‘never’. Nevertheless, Elfdalian has succeeded in preserving a great deal of its native lexicon in cases where Swedish has lost them in the favor of *ex externo* elements, such as *spyra* ‘to ask’ (Swedish *fråga*) and *grann* ‘beautiful, nice’ (cf. Swedish nowadays poetic *grann*). *Ex externo* formations are often well-adapted and well-integrated into the Elfdalian phonological and inflectional system, as in *krytyr* /krytyr/ ‘animal’, *lkamira* /kə'mi:rə/ ‘camera’, based on Swedish and *swårugiet* /'swøryi:t/ ‘difficulty’, based on Swedish *kamera* /'kɑ:mərə/, *svårighet* /'svø:rihe:t/ and *kreatur* /kree'tyr/, respectively. Having said that, such good adaptations may at times render it difficult to determine whether a form is originally Elfdalian or a later reproduction of a Swedish element.

According to Levander (1909b), traditional Elfdalian word formation was still productive around the turn of the last century in Övdaln, such as *fårå* ‘to walk’

¹ This term is used here to refer to new words formed on the basis of preexistent native formatives.

² I.e., words based on non-native formatives.

³ Gunnar Nyström by personal communication.

> *fari* ‘a person who walks around restlessly’ and *maiga* ‘to urinate’ > *migi* ‘penis’.

Using different methods of measuring linguistic distance of the vocabulary, Dahl (2005) concludes that the distance between Swedish and the Upper Siljan vernaculars, to which Elfdalian belongs, is comparable to the one between Swedish and Icelandic or Faroese and is much greater than the distance between Swedish, Danish and Norwegian.

Also when it comes to names, Elfdalian has traditionally shown independence. First names, either inherited Elfdalian or reproduced from non-native names, usually had an Elfdalian form, such as the female names *Djertrauð* ‘Gertrude’, *Kestę* ‘Christine’ and *Katrqi* ‘Catherine’ and the male names *Andis* ‘Andrew’, *Ierk* ‘Erik’ and *Jugå* ‘John’ (Levander 1909b: 24, 36). However, these names gradually died out by the end of the 19th century (see Levander 1909a: 55). The church obliged people to christen persons with Christian Swedish names. All the same, Elfdalian names were still in colloquial use until around a century ago, but as time went by time Swedish names came to replace their Elfdalian equivalents in all situations.

As in the rest of Dalecarlia, farm names are still used colloquially, preceding the first name of the person, e.g. *Nemd-Ierk* ‘Erik from the Nemd farm’ or *Kuvå-Ingga* ‘Inga from the Kuvi farm’.

Elfdalian toponyms were often transferred into Swedish, often with the ambition to allude to the original Elfdalian name, though not always with great success. At times, toponyms were directly misinterpreted, such as Swedish *Hedbodarna*, lit. ‘The Meadow Chalets’ for Elfdalian *Äðbuðär*, lit. ‘The Summer Pasture on the Elevation’¹. Further, Elfdalian has a number of toponyms for places outside the parish. Steensland (2005) accounts for such toponyms.

¹ Gunnar Nyström by personal communication.

4 Writing Elfdalian, Writing in Övdaln

The farmers here in the parish, besides using Runic calendar sticks, still today write their names and owner's marks with Runic letters, which are visible on walls, net weights, bowls etc., a custom unknown to be practised any more elsewhere in Sweden¹.

The first written records from Övdaln, written in the Runic letters, date back to the 13th century, and render personal names (Gustavson 2004). Elfdalian is the first dialect in Sweden put in writing in a cultural context. Andreas Prytz' play about Gustav Vasa, in which five Dalecarlian men speak to their king in their own vernacular, later identified as Elfdalian, dates as far back as 1622. The passage, mainly consisting of lines in Elfdalian and stretching over six pages, has been transliterated and commentated in Björklund (1956).

Elfdalian is also the first dialect in Sweden in which poetry was put in writing. 26-year-old Samuel P. Elfving had written a long, comprehensive wedding poem in hexameter in Elfdalian on the occasion of his uncle's wedding. The wedding took place in Uppsala on February 11, 1668.

4.1 Elfdalian Runes – Övdaln's Own Alphabet

In the 17th century, when the Runic alphabet was already extinct in the rest of Sweden and the Dalecarlian variant of the Runic alphabet began to die out in the rest of Upper Dalarna as well, not only has it continued to exist in Övdaln, it has even developed into a separate variant, the Elfdalian Runes², used until the turn of the past century. Övdaln is thus the place in the world, where Runes were preserved longest.

The last inscription with authentic Elfdalian Runes was carved in Övdaln by Anna Andersdotter in 1900, a girl who worked at a summer pasture. Carved on a

¹ Linné [Linnaeus] (1734 [2004]).

² According to Gustavson (2004), the term *Dalrunor*, i.e. Dalecarlian Runes, is misleading, as one is led to assume that these were Runes used everywhere in Dalarna in olden times. But in its penultimate phase its use was limited to the Ovansiljan region and in the last phase, i.e. from the middle of the 17th century and onwards, it was used in Övdaln. Hence, they should be referred to as *Älvdalsrunor*, i.e. Elfdalian Runes.

wall of a hut in Gryvleån, the inscription reads (transliterated): ‘AAD gät¹ 1900’, i.e. ‘AAD (Anna’s initials) herded (cattle or alike) in 1900’ (Stålbom 1994).

Levander reports that he had personally encountered elderly persons in the Elfdalian village of Åsär in 1905, who could still read Elfdalian Runes (Boëthius, Levander & Noreen 1906: 75). However, Anna Andersdotter was evidently still young at that year.

The Runic alphabet has practically ceased to be used in Sweden in the 14th century. A crucial question within this context is whether Dalecarlian Runes constitute a continuation of the old Runes or an innovation. According to Gustavson (2004), a reorganization of the Runic writing system from the 16th century, through which the Latin letters acquired one-to-one Runic equivalents, brought about a Runic renaissance in the Upper Siljan region.

All the same, as Gustavson relates, an uninterrupted continuity in the Elfdalian Runic alphabet between the 16th and the 19th century is witnessed from inscriptions on around 350 objects studied.

Interestingly, most objects with Runic inscriptions found in Övdal between the 17th and 19th century are in Swedish, or at least strive to be in Swedish, which can be explained by the fact that Elfdalian had no standard orthography or Bible translation at that time. In general, the only written language that Elfdalians came across was Swedish (Gustavson 2004: 69). For more on Elfdalian and Upper Siljan Runes, see Gustavson (2004) and Hallonquist (2004).

4.2 Elfdalian – from Wedding Poems to Children Books

In spite of the existence of written records in Elfdalian from as early as the 17th century, both in the Latin and in the Runic alphabet, short and long alike, and a revival of Elfdalian writing during the past two decades, Elfdalian has been principally a spoken language. Legends, myths and ballads in Elfdalian have been delivered orally throughout the generations.

The first long continuous text in Elfdalian is Prytz’ passage from the 17th century (see above). From the 17th and 18th centuries, we find poems, mainly wedding poems, in Elfdalian. As writing in Elfdalian seems to have diminished later on, a growing interest in dialects emerged in Sweden between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Scholarly interest for Elfdalian reached its climax with Lars Levander’s (1904) doctoral thesis on the

¹ The word *gät* is realized as /gæ:t/.

morphology and syntax of the most conservative village vernacular of Övdaln, that of Åsär.

Due to its low status during the 20th century, written Elfdalian from the first three fourths of that century can be found almost exclusively in Övdaln's annual magazine *Skansvakten*, lit. 'The Fortlet's Sentinel', and even there only sporadically. As the phonetic and phonological structure of Elfdalian differs considerably from that of Swedish, Swedish orthography was difficult to employ when writing Elfdalian. The orthography used in Elfdalian texts is thus restricted by the Swedish orthographical norms and often individual.

After the establishment of Ulum Dalska in the mid-1980s, an increase in the publications in Elfdalian could be registered. Steensland's (2006) small Elfdalian-Swedish-Elfdalian dictionary was published shortly after. Olsson's (1996) *Mumunes Masse* 'Grandma's Pussycat', the first children's book in Elfdalian, followed¹.

4.3 Modern Elfdalian Orthography

As Elfdalian began to be employed as a written language and be taught in courses, a need for an Elfdalian orthography was created. A first attempt was made by Bengt Åkerberg (see Åkerberg 2004 and Åkerberg 2005) in 1999. Åkerberg's orthography was originally made for the non-native students of Elfdalian and was well-suited to this end. Nevertheless, it was experienced as very difficult by many Elfdalian speakers, probably due to its many diacritical marks and due to local features reflecting the Åkerberg's own dialect of the village of Loka. Besides being used in Åkerberg's grammar books and teaching books for Elfdalian, Åkerberg's orthography was likewise used in *Rattjin* 'The Dog'² and in some children's books written by Björn Rehnström³.

As of the time when *Fuost konferensn um övdalsku* 'The First Conference on Elfdalian' was held, June 2004, there was still no standard orthography for Elfdalian.

¹ See Olsson's (2005) own account about her writing in Elfdalian.

² A translation into Elfdalian of Kerstin Ekman's Swedish book *Hunden* 'The Dog'.

³ See Rehnström's (2005) own account about his writing in Elfdalian.

5 Final Words and Acknowledgements

What has been published about Elfdalian so far is almost exclusively written in Swedish. This is an attempt to provide an all-round and relatively up-to-date picture of Elfdalian, the traditional language of the Övdaln parish in Northern Dalarna. Hopefully, more people, layman and scholars alike, will become interested in this language. Elfdalian is so far relatively little explored. Hence, more studies and surveys about it from different angles are needed.

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Summary

The aim of the present paper is to provide a general, yet multilateral, introduction to the vernacular of Elfdalian. Elfdalian is spoken by some 3,000 speakers in the old parish of Övdaln in Northern Dalarna, Sweden. Traditionally regarded as a dialect, Elfdalian is nowadays treated by many as a distinct language, due to the considerable distance to Standard Swedish on the one hand and due to the successful attempts to preserve and standardize it on the other.

Elfdalian is a Nordic vernacular, which belongs to the Upper Siljan branch of the Dalecarlian dialect group. In this group, Elfdalian seems to be the most conservative one, preserving a great many traditional linguistic features within phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax. This, combined with many innovative features, contribute to the distance towards other Nordic dialects and standard languages. As the other Dalecarlian vernaculars, Elfdalian has likewise seen a decline since the turn of the last century. However, Elfdalian is now seeing a revival, which can be partially ascribed to the preservation attempts pursued since the 1980's. Today, the local authorities and schools also support the preservation and the promotion of the vernacular. Cultural activities in Elfdalian, documentation of the vernacular and research about it have received a boost during the past few years.

Written records in Elfdalian date back to the 16th century in the form of Runic inscriptions. The use of the Runic alphabet in Övdaln continued until the end of the 19th century. Thus, Övdaln constitutes the place in the world where the Runes have been most long-lived. The first long written passage in Elfdalian dates back to the 17th century. As of June 2004, there is still no standard orthography for Elfdalian.

Key words: Dalecarlian, dalmål, dalrunor, Dalecarlian Runes, Elfdalian, Ulum Dalska, Älvdalen, älvdalska, älvdalsmål, övdalsk, övkallmål