

# Tonal accent variation in Upper Siljan: the dialect of Våmhus

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## Abstract

During almost a century, linguists believed that the dialect of Våmhus, an archaic Dalecarlian language variety, was characterized by the same kind of one-peaked word accents as most other varieties of Upper Siljan. E. A. Meyer recorded speakers from all corners of Dalecarlia, but not a single speaker from Våmhus found their way to Falun, where he did his pioneering work on the Dalecarlian word accents in 1919. It was not until 2017 that the first instrumental phonetic study was undertaken in Våmhus, and it was discovered that the dialect had no word accent distinction.

In the present paper, we try to understand how the lack of accent distinction in Våmhus could go unnoticed for so long. Words in the Våmhus dialect were consistently annotated as having either accent 1, accent 2 or level accent, for example in the dictionary *Ordbok över folkmålen i övre Dalarna*. Did the dialectologists of the 20th century hear distinctive tonal accents where there were none? This question is addressed through an acoustic investigation of annotated accents in two recordings from the dialect archives (from 1935 and 1970). The study has implications for how annotations in the dialect archives can be understood and used.

## Introduction

### The archaic dialects of Upper Siljan

In the northern part of Dalecarlia (Sw. *Dalarna*), in the region of Upper Siljan (*Ovansiljan*), several archaic Scandinavian dialects are spoken. Among the preserved archaic properties of the varieties are verbal inflection in number and person, a three-case system (Garbacz et al., 2026), segmental features such as nasal vowels, the consonants [w] and [ð], and prosodic features such as two or three syllable lengths in stressed syllables (Boëthius, 1922; Levander, 1925, 1928; Garbacz & Bondi Johansson, 2015).

Levander distinguished between seven dialects or vernaculars of Upper Siljan in 1925: (1) the variety of Mora, (2) the variety of Ore, (3) the variety of Orsa, (4) the variety of Sollerön, (5) the variety of Venjan, (6) the variety of Våmhus and (7) the variety of Älvdalen (Elfdalian or Övdalian). A hundred years later, all seven varieties are still spoken in the region, but the number of speakers has rapidly decreased. The varieties are estimated to have a total of 5.600 speakers. The smallest of the varieties, the Ore dialect, has no more than 30 speakers, whereas the Våmhus dialect is used by approximately 350 speakers (Ringmar & Olander, 2020; Garbacz et al., 2026). Figure 1 shows where the varieties are spoken.

Attempts to strengthen the Våmhus dialect through, for example, word lists and grammars (Ask, 2000), pod casts (Slethei, 2024-present) and language courses are being made (Landgren, 2026). However, the variety does not enjoy the same visibility in the municipality of Mora (in road signs and alike) as for example Övdalian does in the municipality of Älvdalen.



Figure 1. Geographical distribution of the varieties in Upper Siljan.

Övdalian, the northernmost variety of the Upper Siljan varieties, has for a long time been considered the most archaic of the seven varieties. Albert Engström, a Swedish painter and writer born in the 19th century, allegedly described Övdalian as “leaving a taste of blood and paganism in one’s mouth” [author’s translation]: “*den smakar blod och hedendom i munnen*” (Ringmar, 2005: 15). The variety is recurrently referred to as the language of the Vikings in the media (see examples in Ringmar, 2005 and Kristoffersen, 2021). Nevertheless, recent research has challenged the view of Övdalian as the most archaic variety. When it comes to the use of case forms, for example, the Våmhus, Orsa and Ore dialects appear to be more conservative (Ringmar & Olander 2020).

### Tonal accents in Scandinavia

The preservation of archaic features that have disappeared elsewhere in mainland Scandinavia, makes the varieties in Upper Siljan valuable for our understanding of Scandinavian language history and development. The varieties of Upper Siljan have, for example, contributed to our understanding of tonogenesis, the development of distinctive tonal accents (see for example Riad, 2006 and Kristoffersen, 2021). Tonal accents appeared in Scandinavia about 1.000 years ago and are geographically distributed as shown in Figure 2.

Based on the accent contours by, among others, Meyer (1937, 1954) Gårding (1973) identified ten dialect types in Scandinavia, out of which five can be found in Sweden: Type 1a and 1b dialects (with one-peaked accents), Type 2a and 2b dialects (with a two-peaked accent 2) and Type 0 dialects (with no tonal accent distinction).

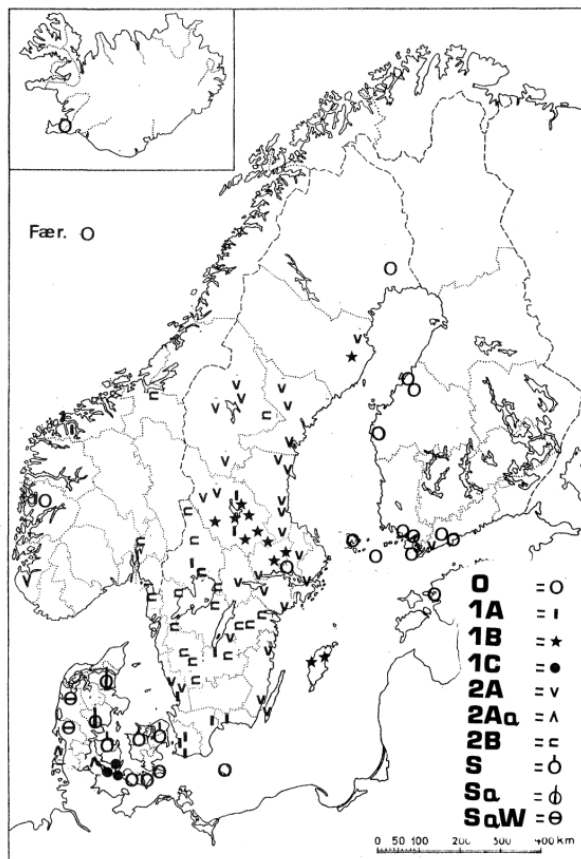


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of the accent types (from Gårding 1973: 55).

There are two competing hypotheses about the origin of the Scandinavian accents. The most widespread hypothesis proposes that the accent pattern in two-peaked (Type 2) dialects is the one that most closely resembles the original accents (Riad, 2006). Kristoffersen (2021) has made the opposite claim in what he calls the ‘Type 1 first’ hypothesis.

Interestingly, an isogloss separating Type 2 dialects from Type 1 dialects runs east-west through Upper Siljan. The northern variety, Övdalian, pertains to the Type 2 varieties, whereas all other varieties in Upper Siljan examined by Meyer (1937) are examples of Type 1 dialects. Riad (2006) mentions the conservative two-peaked Övdalian as support of his hypothesis, and Kristoffersen (2021) finds support of his hypothesis in the tonal variation of the one-peaked varieties of Upper Siljan. The tonal variation in Dalecarlia, from clear timing differences in the south to absence of timing differences in Våmhus, is interpreted by Kristoffersen as evidence of a distinctive tonal contrast gradually spreading northwards.

### Tonal accents in the Våmhus dialect

The first mention of the accents in the Våmhus dialect appears to have been made by Eenberg. Two of his handwritten manuscripts have been transcribed and made accessible to interested parties by Ringmar and Steensland (2011). Eenberg was born in Orsa in 1660, lived in Mora for several years and subsequently worked as a university librarian in Uppsala. After a visit from king Karl XI, Eenberg was inspired to write about Dalecarlian. In his manuscript from 1702, he describes the language of the people of Dalecarlia as a rich and variable language as

seen in the number of words and their inflections but, in particular, in the accents and speech sounds. He goes on to mention Garsås and Våmhus (spelled *Wamhuus*) as examples of varieties that differed substantially, although both varieties pertained to the same parish at the time (Eenberg 1702: 63). It is difficult to tell if Eenberg understood and used the term accent in a similar way as we do today, but there is some support to suggest that he did. Nevertheless, he did not discuss the accents’ contrastive function.

Kristoffersen (2017) has claimed that the absence of a tonal word accent distinction in Våmhus was not known until 2017. It is not entirely true since the same claim was made in 1868 but appears to have fallen into oblivion. Rydqvist mentions the tonal accents in the Våmhus dialect in *Svenska språkets lagar*. He claimed that the dialects of Orsa and Mora, including Våmhus, only had one (acute) type of accent. He described the accent as having a high tone in the accented syllable, followed by a lower tone in the subsequent syllable, and compared it to the accent type used in for example Finnish: “*Mera betänklighet väcker det, att i vissa trakter af Österdalarne, kanske mest i Orsa och Mora (med inbegrepp af Våmhus), hög ton (akut accent) är ensamt rådande, liksom i Tyskan, Italienskan, Finskan och åtskilliga andra språk; i alla af olika art, men deri ense, att tonen i den accentuerade stafvelsen ligger betydligt högre än i den följande*” (Rydqvist, 1868: 218).

However, after a visit to Upper Siljan in 1880, Noreen (1881) claimed that people from Våmhus and Bonäs spoke Övdalian. Among the characteristics that he listed for the variety was that it had two different accents, one of which was “broken”, that is two-peaked. Noreen also claimed that the variety of Våmhus, Bonäs and Älvdalen in this respect differed from the Mora and Orsa dialects, which he believed only had one single, falling accent. In other words, he made the same claim as Rydqvist about the dialects of Mora and Orsa, but he reclassified the Våmhus and Bonäs dialects as pertaining to the two-peaked (Type 2) variety of Älvdalen.

Boëthius (1922) objected to Noreen’s view a few decades later and claimed that the Orsa dialect had two distinct falling tones, although easily perceived as one and the same by a listener unfamiliar with the dialect. Levander (1925) went even further and argued that all the dialects of Upper Siljan had two distinctive word accents. He reclassified the dialects of Våmhus and Bonäs and their word accents as belonging to the same (one-peaked) type as the word accents of the Mora dialect.

During almost a century, until Kristoffersen (re)discovered that the Våmhus dialect had no word accent distinction in 2017, linguists believed that the dialect of Våmhus was characterized by the same kind of one-peaked word accents as the Mora dialect. Kristoffersen’s discovery was surprising given the amount of data collected in Våmhus during the 20th century that suggested that the dialect has (or at least used to have) a tonal accent distinction.

### Våmhus accents in *Ordbok över folkmålen i övre Dalarna*

Levander initiated the intensified and expanded investigation of the vernaculars of Dalecarlia that resulted in both the grammar *Dalmålet: beskrivning och historia 1*

and 2 (Levander, 1925, 1928) and the dictionary *Ordbok över folkmålen i övre Dalarna* (Levander & Björklund, 1961-2021). The collections of words done in the 1930s, after the grammar was published, contributed the majority of the words in the dictionary (Levander & Björklund, 1961: 5).

In the dictionary, Våmhus words are consistently described as having either accent 1, accent 2 or level accent (Sw. *jämviktsaccent*). Even some accentual differences within the Våmhus dialect are described, as in the following word. It is pronounced with accent 2 in Våmhus and level accent in Bonäs (4 km away):

- (1) **målad-skrinda** f. IV a mǎ̀rads-krynnda Våmh. mǎ̀rads-krynnda Våmh. (Bon.) ‘färgrikt målad kyrksläde med fasta medar / gaily-painted sledge with fixed runners, used for going to church’. Syn.: se grannskrinda m.fl.

Level accent, also termed level stress (Kristoffersen, 2008), is an accent type found in dialects that have retained short stressed syllables.

### Material and methods

Did the dialectologists of the 20th century perceive distinctive tonal accents where there were none? To answer this question, the tonal correlates of words in two recordings annotated by collaborators on the dictionary *Ordbok över folkmålen i övre Dalarna* have been examined.

### Speakers and recordings

#### *Rombo Filip Eriksson (Bonäs)*

The Institute for Language and Folklore describes Rombo Filip Eriksson as one of its most productive Dalecarlian informants (Hugoson, 2023). He produced over 400 dialect and folklore records for the Uppsala archives. He was born in the village of Bonäs, in the parish of Våmhus, in 1901. In the recording of Rombo Filip Eriksson (accession numbers Gr 171a1 and Gr 171a2), he tells the story of a boy who married a troll girl. It is a 3 minutes and 20 seconds long recording containing 126 words annotated as accentuated by Bror Lindén: 52 words with accent 1, 55 words with accent 2 and 19 words with level accent. (Four words (one accent 1 word, two accent 2 words and one word with level accent) were eliminated from the study due to laryngealizations.) The recording was made in 1935.

#### *Ada Rytta (Våmhus)*

Gullo Ada Andersson was born in Våmhus in 1895. At the age of 16, she travelled to Stockholm by train with a dozen other girls to sell hairwork jewellery. Many years later, fashion had changed, demand dropped, and hairwork jewellery was becoming a forgotten art form. However, Rytta (née Andersson) managed to turn the tide by arranging a course in hairwork together with a friend. Lennart Hyland heard about it and invited them to participate in his television program, which led to a boost for the art form (Insulander, 2025).

In 1970, Rytta was interviewed twice about her first trip to Stockholm as a 16-year-old girl. The interview examined here is from the dialect archives of the Institute for Language and Folklore. It is 2 minutes and 50

seconds long and a part of longer recording (accession number Bd 2557). It contains 151 words that have been annotated as accentuated by Stig Björklund. In 23 words, no F0 peaks could be discerned due to creaky or breathy voice. Thus, 128 words were available for examination: 61 words with accent 1, 58 words with accent 2 and 9 words with level accent.

### Transcription principles and transcribers

#### *Accent 1, accent 2 and level accent*

The examined transcriptions were made with the Swedish dialect alphabet (for an overview, see Eriksson, 1961). The stressed vowels of words with accent 1 are marked with the diacritic ´, the stressed vowels of words with accent 2 are marked with ` och the stressed vowels of words with level accent are marked with ``. No distinction is made between accented and focussed words, that is between ‘word accents’ and ‘sentence accents’ (Bruce, 1977) or between ‘word accents’ and ‘focus accents’ (Heldner 2001).

#### *Bror Lindén*

Lecturer and associate professor Bror Lindén was born in 1901 on the island of Sollerön, south of Mora (Ståhl, 1982). From 1928 to 1936, he was a collaborator on the dictionary *Ordbok över folkmålen i övre Dalarna*. He defended his doctoral dissertation in 1947 and was appointed associate professor in Nordic toponymy (place-name research) in 1948. Bror Lindén transcribed the recording made of Rombo Filip Eriksson in 1935.

#### *Stig Björklund*

First archivist and associate professor Stig Björklund was born in 1919 in Nor, Värmland (Bergfors 2001). He defended his doctoral dissertation on Övdalian in 1956 and was appointed associate professor in Scandinavian languages in 1966. From 1961 to 1996, he was editor of the dictionary *Ordbok över folkmålen i övre Dalarna*. Stig Björklund transcribed the dialect recording made of Ada Rytta in 1970.

### Acoustic and auditory analyses

Digitized versions of the recordings were manually labelled and segmented in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2026). The words annotated as accented in the above-mentioned transcriptions were identified in the recordings and labelled for accent type (accent 1, accent 2 or level accent). The data were also labelled for stressed vowel onset and stressed vowel offset. The position of F0 peaks was marked and subsequently calculated relative to the stressed vowels’ onset (in milliseconds and in percentage of the vowel duration).

In some previous studies of accent peak location, for example in Fransson and Strangert (2005), the F0 peaks’ position were measured relative to the VC boundary. In test words with phonologically long vowels (for example *Polen – pälen*), the VC boundary coincides with the syllable boundary. However, in spontaneous speech, the syllable boundary is a difficult reference point to use, since the syllable rhymes vary greatly in duration due to the stressed vowel’s phonological length and the number of following consonants, especially when the data, as in this case, include monosyllabic words. Therefore, we followed Bruce (1977) and observed and calculated the

F0 peaks' position relative to the stressed vowel's onset in the present study. An F0 peak occurring before the onset of the vowel resulted in a negative value, and an F0 peak occurring after the boundary resulted in a positive value. Peak positions were not always easy to identify. Several words in the Våmhus recording annotated as accented were in fact deaccentuated and had no F0 peak, and voice quality changes made some F0 peaks difficult to identify reliably. Because of the small number of level accents in the data, only the timing of F0 peaks in words with accent 1 and 2 is reported here.

## Results

### F0 peak timing in the Bonäs recording

There is a small difference in timing between the F0 peaks in words annotated as accent 1 and F0 peaks in words annotated as accent 2 in the Bonäs recording. The F0 peaks in accent 1 words are on the average found 57 ms into the vowel of the stressed syllable (SD= 37 ms), whereas the F0 peaks in words with accent 2 are found 82 ms into the vowel (SD=30 ms), see Figure 3. The stressed vowels in accent 2 words are shorter than the vowels in the accent 1 word in the data. Expressed in percentages, the F0 peaks in words with accent 1 are found 49 % into the vowel, and in words with accent 2 they are found 88 % into the vowel. About a fourth, 28%, of the F0 peaks of words annotated with accent 2 were found in segments following the stressed vowel (n=15). In words annotated with accent 1, only 10 % of the F0 peaks were found in the syllable following the stressed syllable (n=5). Examples of the timing of F0 peaks in the speech of Rombo Filip Eriksson are given in Figures 5 and 6.

### F0 peak timing in the Våmhus recording

In the Våmhus recording, the difference in timing between F0 peaks in words annotated as accent 1 and F0 peaks in words annotated as accent 2, is even smaller than in the Bonäs recording. The F0 peaks in accent 1 words are on the average found 31 ms into the vowel of the stressed syllable (SD=26 ms), and the F0 peaks in words with accent 2 are found 41 ms into the vowel (SD=39 ms), see Figure 4. Expressed in percentages of the stressed vowel's duration, the F0 peaks in accent 1 words are found 25 % into the vowel, and in accent 2 words they are found 30 % into the vowel. None of the F0 peaks of words annotated as accent 2 are found in segments following the stressed vowel. Examples of the timing of F0 peaks in the speech of Ada Rytter are given in Figures 7 and 8.

## Discussion

### Tonal accents in the Bonäs recording

A small F0 peak timing difference was found in the Bonäs speaker's recording. The F0 peaks in accent 1 words were, on the average, found 35 ms earlier than the F0 peaks in accent 2 words. In an overview of peak shift perception experiments in English, German, Italian and Swedish, House (1999) concludes that sensitivity to peak shifts requires timing differences of about 50 to 70 ms.

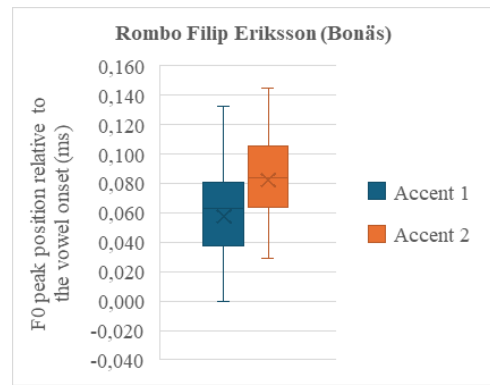


Figure 3. F0 peak position relative to the vowel onset in the Bonäs recording.

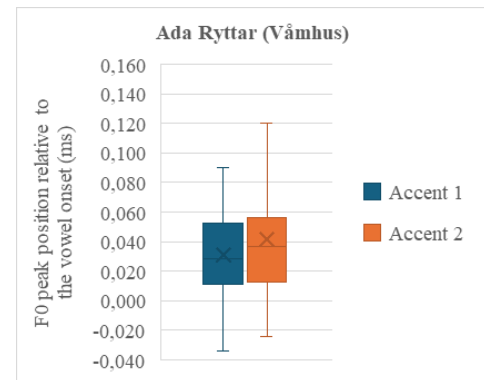


Figure 4. F0 peak position relative to the vowel onset in the Våmhus recording.

A 35 ms peak timing difference would then not be large enough to explain the transcriber's annotation of early-peaked accents as accent 1 and late-peaked accents as accent 2. However, the peak timing difference can also be understood as a difference of the timing of the F0 fall following the peak. House (1999) reports that a greater timing sensitivity (of around 30 ms) has been found in a perception experiment investigating F0 falls. The experiment was undertaken by Bruce (1977) and investigated perceptual boundaries for Central Swedish word accents. Thus, it cannot be ruled out that the transcriber perceived the speaker's small timing difference when annotating the recording.

In conclusion, the Bonäs data do not support the hypothesis that the transcriber annotated a non-existent timing difference in F0 peaks. However, the question of whether a word accent distinction is and/or has been maintained in Bonäs, cannot be answered by examining the limited data in the present study. The observed variation in peak position within the assumed accent categories is large. Further studies of both new recordings and recordings from the dialect archives and perception experiments are warranted to unambiguously determine whether the variety is or has been a Type 1 dialect. Noreens's (1881) claim that the dialect spoken in the village of Bonäs had a two-peaked accent 2, that is pertained to the Type 2 dialects, has no support in the present study. There is not a single example of a two-peaked accent in the examined recording.

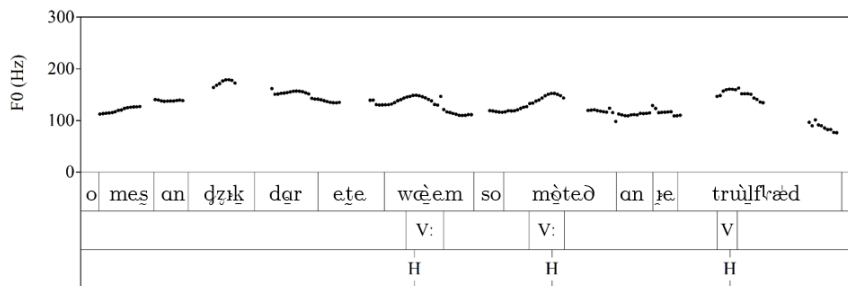


Figure 5. F0 contour of Rombo Filip Eriksson saying *o mes an dʒɪk dɑr eɛe wæ̃em so mōteð an ɛe trũflræð* ‘and as he walked there along the road he met a flock of trolls’. The vowels of the stressed syllables and the positions of the F0 peaks in the accented words are marked. The transcriber has annotated three words as pronounced with accent 2. The variation in the timing of the F0 peaks is considerable.

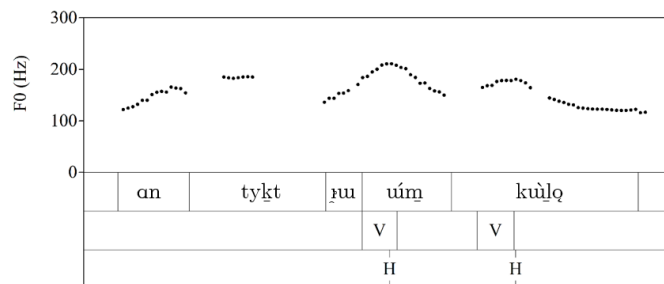


Figure 6. F0 contour of Rombo Filip Eriksson saying *an tykt ɹu ũm kũlo* ‘he liked the girl’. The word *ũm* is annotated as pronounced with accent 1 and *kũlo* with accent 2. In both words, the F0 peak is close to the vowel’s offset.

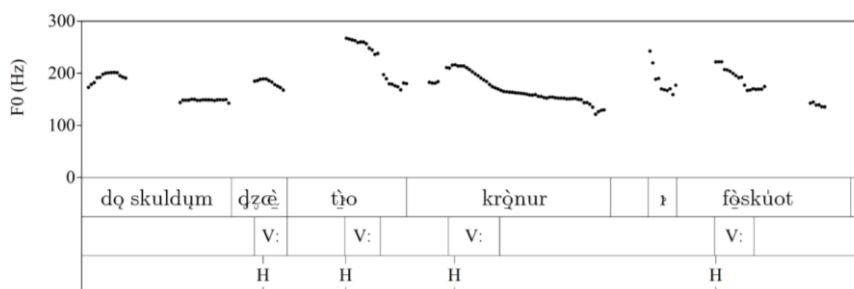


Figure 7. F0 contour of Ada Rytta saying *dɑ skuldum dʒæ̃ tjo krønur ɹ fōskuõt* ‘then we had to pay ten crowns in advance’. The transcriber has annotated four words as pronounced with accent 2. In all four words, the F0 peak is close to the vowel’s onset.

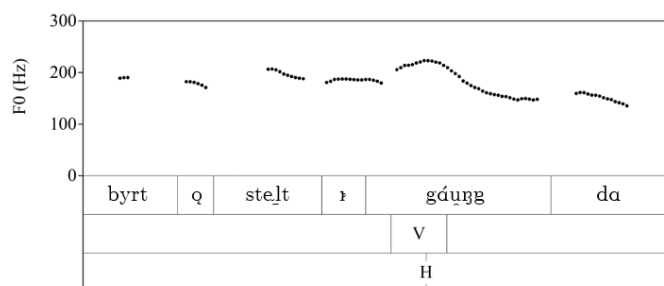


Figure 8. F0 contour of Ada Rytta saying *byrt ɑ stẽlt ɹ gáugg da* ‘begun to get started there’. The transcriber has annotated the word *gáugg* as pronounced with accent 1. The F0 peak is closer to the vowel’s offset than its onset.

### Tonal accents in the Vâmhus recording

The annotated recording of Ada Rytta supports the hypothesis that dialectologists of the 20th century perceived distinctive tonal accents in the Vâmhus dialect, even when the consulted or recorded informant did not distinguish between tonal accent 1 and 2. As shown by the variation in F0 peak positions in the investigated recording, Ada Rytta produced *some* early-peaked accent 1 words and *some* late-peaked accent 2 words. However, she also produced late-peaked accent 1 words and early-peaked accent 2 words, and many of the accents were

produced with an ambiguous F0 peak position. It is possible that Ada Rytta’s small number of accents produced in a manner typical of a Type 1 dialect, led the transcriber to believe that the speaker used distinctive accents throughout the recording. Expectation is known to influence perception, and the task of annotating recorded speech was considerably more difficult in the early 20th century than it is today. The recordings were made on gramophones, and the possibility to divide the speech into short passages and listen to them repeatedly was limited. The present study underscores the importance of returning to the recordings in the dialect archives to

control early claims and conclusions, when basing new dialect research on previous findings or annotations.

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