



**THE SEMANTICS OF BEING DIFFICULT: MAPPING ÓÐÆLL IN THE
ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR AND ÍSLENDINGAÞÆTTIR**

**LA SEMANTICA DELL'ESSERE DIFFICILE: LA MAPPAZIONE DEL TERMINE
ÓÐÆLL NELLE ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR E NEI ÍSLENDINGAÞÆTTIR**

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Abstract: This article examines the adjective *óðæll* in the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*, utilising the cognitive linguistic frameworks of Prototype Theory and Radial Networks to map its semantic range and its role in expressing social Otherness. Based on 54 occurrences, this study identifies maleness and higher social status as the most prototypical attributes, with *óðæll* functioning as a behavioural rather than inherent trait. More peripheral attributes include violent behaviour, physical strength, issues communicating and lack of communication. This article demonstrates the function of the adjective to mark individuals as challenging different social norms, highlighting how everyday life social Otherness is conceptualised in the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*.

Keywords: Saga literature, cognitive semantics, Otherness, normativity

Riassunto: Questo articolo esplora l'aggettivo *óðæll* nei testi *Íslendingasögur* e *Íslendingaþættir*, utilizzando i modelli linguistici cognitivi della Teoria dei Prototipi e delle Reti Radiali per mapparne il significato semantico e il ruolo nell'esprimere l'alterità sociale. Sulla base di 54 occorrenze, questo studio identifica la mascolinità e l'elevato status sociale come gli attributi più prototipici, con *óðæll* usato come tratto comportamentale piuttosto che intrinseco. Attributi più periferici includono comportamento violento, forza fisica, problemi comunicativi e mancanza di comunicazione. Questo articolo dimostra la funzione dell'aggettivo nel contrassegnare gli individui che sfidano le diverse norme sociali, evidenziando come l'alterità sociale nella vita quotidiana sia concettualizzata nelle *Íslendingasögur* e nelle *Íslendingaþættir*.

Parole chiave: letteratura delle Saghe; semantica cognitiva; alterità; normatività.

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Much scholarship has been devoted to describing and analysing the individuals and characters in the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir* whose foreign identity, ethnicity or non-human existence has pointed them out as somehow different, and ultimately Other.²

Much less attention has been paid to decidedly human characters and how their Otherness in the sociological sense of the concept may manifest within the boundaries of society, for example through behaviour that challenges social norms or expectations. Some scholarship has been devoted to examining norm-breaking behaviour that has legal consequences, such as for outlaws or vagrants – individuals whose behaviour or social status have led to them being excluded from the majority society (see for example Ahola, 2009, 2014; Cochrane, 2012). Yet norm-breaking or socially deviant behaviour does not always result in a life outside of or in the margins of society. This is the case for Helgi in *Vápnfirðinga saga* from the mid-13th century. The first description of him reads:

Helgi var mikill maðr ok sterkr ok bráðgörr, vænn ok stórmannligr, ekki málugr í barnæsku, ódæll ok óvægr þegar á unga aldri. Hann var hugkvæmr ok margbreytinn. (Jóhannesson, 1950, p. 23)

Helgi was a big and strong man and mature for his years, handsome and noble-looking, not very talkative as a child, and difficult and headstrong during his youth. He was watchful and unpredictable. (Tucker, 1997, p. 314)

This description makes it clear that he, though fully integrated into the community, is to be understood as deviating from social norms, that his behaviour may lead to him being read as somehow Other.

This study seeks to explore how adjectives used to describe characters like Helgi function as markers of everyday-life Otherness within the confines of society. The adjective *ódæll* is particularly relevant; translated as ‘difficult’ or ‘overbearing’ (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957, p. 659), it indicates some unruliness or lack of social rigor, making the character described as such problematic or disruptive.³ It does not, however, convey what makes the character difficult or

² See for example for analyses of ethnicity and “foreign” identities in Old Norse texts Sirpa Aalto’s (2010), Else Mundal’s (2011) and Solveig Marie Wang’s (2023) works, for non-human or norm-breaking characters Ármann Jakobsson’s (2008, 2011, 2013) or Rebecca Merkelbach’s (2019b, 2019a) works.

³ *ódæll* consists of the negative prefix *ó-/ú-* and the adjective *dæll*, stemming from *<*dālia- <*dēlia-*, from Germanic **dēla-*, potentially Indoeuropean **dhē-lo-* (Blöndal Magnússon, 1989, p. 142). Several etymologies and reconstructions have been proposed, as detailed by Bernard Mees in the context of the word **dalidun** found on the Tune memorial in Norway (Mees, 2022). The adjective *dæll* appears in all



overbearing. This leaves a certain room for interpretation for both reader and translator, and how one understands *ódæll* may also influence the larger context in translations, as identical passages in *Borsteins saga hvíta* and *Vápnfirðinga saga* seem to suggest, where the passage “ekki málugr í barnœsku, ódæll ok óvæginn þegar á unga aldri. Hann var hugkvæmr ok margbreytinn” (Jóhannesson, 1950, p. 23) is translated as “not very talkative as a child, and difficult and headstrong during his youth. He was watchful and unpredictable” (Tucker, 1997, p. 314) and as “[He] was not talkative in his early years, but even as a youth he was overbearing and headstrong. He was ingenious, but fickle” (Maxwell, 1997b, p. 310).

Because of the openness to interpretation, this study seeks to examine the semantic implications of the adjective *ódæll* and what the most common or prototypical applications and meanings are. This is done by studying the prototypical referents, namely the characters. In other words: what defines the characters as *ódæll* in the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*?

Scandinavian languages at least at some point in time: Otto Kalkar’s *Ordbog til det ældre Sprog*, focusing on the Danish lexicon from between 1300 and 1700, lists the adjective as *dæl*, meaning ‘skikket, passende’ (suitable, appropriate) (Kalkar, 1976), similarly, *Moths Ordbog* for historical Danish from 1700 accounts for *dæl* as meaning ‘det som er bekvemt og dygtigt’ (that which is convenient and skilful) (Moth, 1700). Similarly, Ivar Aasen lists the adjective as *dæl* in his Norwegian dictionary from 1873, meaning ‘tilgængelig, let at komme til’ (accessible, easy to get to) (Aasen, 1873, p. 122). However, the derivative adjective *ódæll* does not seem to be as productive in the Scandinavian languages. Neither Danish nor Norwegian historical dictionaries account for a derivative form, though Icelandic, Faroese and some Swedish dialects seem to have retained both forms. In Faroese, both the adjectives exist, as *dællur* (Poulsen & Zachariassen, 1998a, p. 210) and as *ódællur*, meaning ‘óargaligur, ólagaligur, óflýggjaligur, óreinur, óviðeiriligur’ (unruly, unlawful, unscrupulous, unclean, improper) (Poulsen & Zachariassen, 1998b, p. 861), as well as in Icelandic as *dæll* meaning ‘vingjarnlegur, þægilegur’ (friendly, pleasant) and as *ódæll* meaning ‘sem lætur illa, óstýrilátur’ (who behaves badly, unruly) (Jónsdóttir & Úlfarsdóttir, 2020). The Swedish dialect lexicon by Johan Ernst Rietz, *Svenskt dialektlexikon*, published 1862–1867 lists the adjective *odäl* with the variants *odält* (Mora region), and *odell* (Floda & Nås region) as meaning ‘dyster, sträng, svår’ (gloomy or sombre, strict, difficult) (Rietz, 1962–1867, p. 481). The database Syd- och västsvenska dialektord lists the adjective *odäl* as present in the regions Bohuslän, Dalsland ‘mörk, dystert, hatfull, svårmedgörlig’ (dark, gloomy or sombre, hateful, stubborn), and ‘svårhanterlig, svår att ha att göra med, dystert och ensint’ (unmanageable, difficult to deal with, gloomy or sombre and single-minded). Both *däl* and *odäl* also appear in *Ordbok över folkmålen i övre Dalarna*, accounting for dialectal words from the upper-Dalarna region in Sweden: *däl* is listed as meaning ‘som gör ett angenämt intryck, trevlig, behaglig / nice, pleasant’ (Levander & Björklund, 1965, p. 389), and *odäl* as meaning ‘obehaglig, motbjudande; lortig / unpleasant, repulsive; dirty’ and ‘henskt, farlig / awful, dangerous’ (Levander & Björklund, 1986, p. 1762). At least *däl* has also found its way into fiction writing, with Swedish author August Strindberg referencing *en däle klocka*, ‘a nice clock’ in his play *Gustavus Vasa* from 1899 (SAOB, 1923, column D 2508).

What does the characters' attributes imply for the meaning of *ódæll*? And in what ways does *ódæll* function as an indicator for nonconformity and Otherness?

In order to analyse the meaning of the adjective *ódæll* and its prototypical meanings and uses across the genre of *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*, this study takes as theoretical starting points Prototype Theory as first developed in the 1970s by Eleanor Rosch (Rosch, 1973) and Radial Networks as developed in the 1980s by Claudia Brugman and George Lakoff (Brugman & Lakoff, 2006). Both frameworks are based on the idea that words function as conceptual categories consisting of different members – word meanings – which requires an examination of how words function in context rather than in isolation.

Prototype Theory was developed in the 1970s by Rosch in order to study how people categorise objects and, more abstractly, concepts. Rosch's research showed that some members of a category – object or concept – are perceived as more typical for the category as a whole than other members. Using the example of birds, this means that some birds, such as robins, are perceived as more "bird-like" than others, such as penguins or emus even though biology verifies that all these species are birds (Geeraerts, 2006, p. 149–50; Rosch, 1973). Rosch and subsequent researchers were thus able to show that the membership to linguistic and conceptual categories is not inclusive/exclusive, but exists on a spectrum, with categories having more central, and therefore more prototypical, members and peripheral, with therefore less prototypical members.

However, categorisation is not always as straightforward as it may be in the case of birds and the boundaries between categories and what belongs or does not belong to a category can be fuzzy. Even in the case of concrete objects, differentiating between a specific object and similar objects, such as the difference between a cup, a mug or bowl, proves difficult (Labov, 1974). However, and especially in the case of more abstract concepts, the boundaries of a category can be hard to define, as shown by Beverly Fehr and James A. Russell in their 1991 study of the prototypicality – and "fuzziness" – of love (Fehr & Russell, 1991). The conceptual boundaries of LOVE, COWARDICE or DIFFICULT are much harder to define than concrete categories such as birds, and what is conceptualised and understood as, for example, love may vary even between native speakers of the same language (Fehr & Russell, 1991, p. 429–30). But



it is not only individual judgements concerning conceptual boundaries that can lead to differences in categorisation or indeed word meaning: diachronic linguistic developments can change word meaning, thus obscuring earlier meanings or developing new meanings, which may manifest in differently depending on time, genre and general context, as for example Hans-Jürgen Diller's study on the Old English adjective *mōdig* showcases (Diller, 2014, p. 149–57). Despite the “fuzziness” of these more abstract categories and changes in word meaning, our understanding of words is ultimately dependent on the mental representations of the category, which in part is shaped by the most central, most prototypical members.

Prototypes and prototypical meaning do not necessarily need to be understood as a spectrum, but the framework was further developed by Claudia Brugman and George Lakoff as Radial Networks. Like Prototype Theory, Radial Networks works with the premise that members of a category can be more central or more peripheral and thus are more or less prototypical. However, a focus on the radial aspect of these conceptual categories display the category as structured around the most central member, the prototype, with the more peripheral members interconnected in a network. The more peripheral members of a category are either variants of the prototype and thus directly connected to the prototype or are variants of variants (Brugman & Lakoff, 2006, p. 109). This radial aspect takes into account the “fuzziness” of categories, especially more abstract ones, which Maarten Lemmens illustrates with the example of the adjective *warm*. The most central and prototypical meaning of *warm* is related to temperature, but other, more peripheral but interconnected members in the category are metaphorical in nature such as *warm voice* or *warm feelings* which themselves are interconnected (Lemmens, 2015, p. 95). According to Lakoff's later works, the distinct meanings, or senses as he terms them, of a category are stored schematically in the semantic memory. This has been criticised by Dominiek Sandra and Sally Rice for the lack of systematic criteria for distinctions, as well as later by Vyvyan Evans, in part due to the difficulty of discerning what constitutes distinct senses (Sandra & Rice, 1995, p. 92; Evans, 2019, p. 433–34). Nevertheless, Radial Networks are useful as tools to understand a conceptual and linguistic category by examining the category's members and their relationships with each other.

Both Prototype Theory and Radial Networks are thus models offering insights into how word meanings are structured—from central, prototypical meanings to more peripheral

ones—but also providing a methodological framework for analysing semantic expressions and variations. In this study, they are used as tools to map and analyse the traits and attributes associated with the adjective *ódæll*, in order to determine which traits and behaviours are more or less prototypical for the characters it describes.

Material

The data for this study is comprised of instances in the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir* where the adjective *ódæll* is used. The first source for instances is the electronic database of the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP) which collects and makes available Norwegian and Icelandic prose texts from between 1370 and 1540. As of 2025, the database consists of 65,000 keywords and 840,000 quotes from prose texts.

In ONP's database, the adjective *ódæll* is listed as appearing in 57 quotes with differing orthographies⁴ across eleven genres⁵ that ONP has identified. Since the aim of this study is to examine the use and prototypical meaning of the adjective in *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*, only the entries pertaining to these genres were recorded and analysed, which in ONP are categorised as “slægtssagaer // family sagas” and “þættir // þættir” respectively. It is however noteworthy that *ódæll* is overrepresented in some genres, namely *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir* in relation to ONP's expected number of citations per genre, which is based on an even distribution of the words across genres in relation to the genre's representation in the corpus. The distribution across genres indicates an underrepresentation of *ódæll* in religious works with three quotes, legal works, learned works, and charters without any quotes, which suggests that “being difficult to deal with”, being *ódæll*, is to be interpreted as a social judgement and not a legal or moral-religious judgement. This seems to be validated

⁴ Form.: ódæll (20); odæll (6); vdæll (5); vdëll (4); ódælir (3); v dæll (3); vdællt (2); odælðz (2); odælla (1); ódælasti (1); odell (1); ódælli (1); udæll (1); ódælt (1); ódæll (1); odëll (1); o dællt (1); udëll (1); v-dæll (1); odøla (1); ódælan (1); vdælsti (1); ódælla (1); (<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o58289>, accessed 04.02.2025)

⁵ The genres considered by ONP are: family sagas, contemporary sagas, historical works, þættir, religious works, legendary sagas, romances, learned works, legal works, unclassified, and charters (<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o58289>, accessed 13.01.2025)



by the fact that the second highest number of quotes containing *óðæll* (10) is found in the *Samtíðasögur*, thus highlighting that *óðæll* is most often used in indigenous genres of literature.

Of the 57 quotes containing *óðæll* in ONP's corpus, 30 quotes are attributed to the genre of *Íslendingasögur*, whereof 2 were duplicates of the same entry and thus the number of entries taken into account for this study was 29. Additionally, 6 quotes in ONP's corpus are attributed to texts belonging to the classification of *Íslendingaþættir*. These in total 35 instances served as the first source of data.

ONP's corpus is not a complete representation of all Norwegian and Icelandic prose texts, and especially manuscripts from after 1540 are missing. To compile a more complete dataset than ONP was able to provide, all *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir* that are digitally available via *Netútgáfan* on *snerpa.is* were searched individually using the search term "*óðæl**" to account for all declensions and variants of the adjective. Since all texts available on *snerpa.is* are normalised into modern Icelandic, all instances where *óðæll* appeared were then cross-referenced with the normalised Old Norse editions published in *Íslenzk fornrit*. The manual search in *Netútgáfan* resulted in an added 19 entries. Thus, the adjective *óðæll* appears in 54 instances across the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*.

Method

Since both Prototype Theory and Radial Networks rely on the specific linguistic environment in which the words are used in, the analyses in this study are based on the precise linguistic environment that the adjective *óðæll* is found in in the selected material, namely the *co-text*, instead of the information conveyed outside of the text, the *context*, such for example genre conventions, or general world knowledge. While studies focusing on genre-based differences in word meaning benefit from taking into account the larger context (Diller 2014), for this study, due to the sole focus on the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*, the analysis of a more narrowly defined linguistic environment was found to be more suitable. Essentially, since 'difficult to deal with' or 'being overbearing' does not directly indicate *how* a character is difficult to deal with being overbearing, other adjectives and nouns used to describe the characters, as well as general circumstances appearing in the *co-text* need to be considered in order to reach conclusions on more or less prototypical meanings of the adjective *óðæll* in the

Íslendingasögur and *Íslendingaþættir*. For this, the co-text of all quotes was read closely to identify general features or specific categories of traits or properties that individuals described as *ódæll* have.

Results

There are three more general, and therefore more prototypical characteristics that are attributed to most of the individuals described as being *ódæll*, as well as four narrower thematic categorisations of properties visible in the material. In the following, the more general characteristics will be discussed first, before going on to the narrower categories. Given the scope of the material, this discussion is limited to selected examples which most clearly demonstrate the attributes identified.

PROTOTYPICAL CHARACTERISTIC 1: MALE

Of all 54 occurrences that form the dataset for this study, all but one of the characters described as *ódæll* are male. The only woman who is attributed with the adjective, Hléguðr in *Stjörnu-Odda draumr*, is explicitly said to be not very woman-like:

Pau áttu eina dóttur barna, sú hét Hléguðr; frá hennu er svá sagt, at hán var ólát í æsku sinni, ok var ávalt því ódælli sem hón var eldri; þat var ok sagt, at hón vildi ekki kvenna sið fága í sínu athæfi. (Vigfússon, 1860, p. 107)

Their only child was a daughter, Hlegunn. It is said that she was a difficult child, and her disposition only grew worse as she grew older. It is also said that she had no intention of cultivating ladylike pastimes. (Taylor, 1997, p. 448)

While Hléguðr having “no intention of cultivating ladylike pastimes” may not explicitly be the reason why she is difficult, the reference in combination with her being the only woman in the material attributed with the adjective indicates that being *ódæll*, being difficult or overbearing, is reserved for men or male-coded individuals. The prototypical character described as *ódæll* therefore seems to be male. Gender alone does not, of course, constitute any grounds for being treated differently, or being treated as Other for the characters being described as *ódæll*. The defining characteristics of what makes these characters difficult to deal with and thus Other must therefore be found elsewhere.



PROTOTYPICAL CHARACTERISTIC 2: A BEHAVIOURAL TRAIT

Despite the example of Hléguðr being difficult since childhood, being *ódæll* does not necessarily seem to be an entirely inherent or static trait. The description of Þórir in *Gull-Þóris saga* notes explicitly that “hann giordizt illr ok vdæll vidskiptis æ þvimeir ær hann ældizt meir” (Kålund, 1898, p. 47), that Þórir “became meaner and harder to deal with the older he grew” (Maxwell, 1997a, p. 359). That one can become *ódæll* implies that being difficult to deal with or overbearing is not conceptualised as a fixed characteristic but as a first and foremost behavioural trait that may change over time.

PROTOTYPICAL CHARACTERISTIC 3: RELATIVELY HIGH SOCIAL STANDING

Additionally, all characters that *ódæll* is used for, seem to be of relatively high social standing. The data includes no occurrences where the mentioned character is a thrall or simple vagrant. The characters described are for example “höfðingi” (Þórólfsson & Jónsson, 1943, p. 126), “chieftain” (Regal, 1997, p. 332), “stýrimaðr” (Sveinsson, 1939, p. 47) – “sea-faring merchant” (Cook, 1997, p. 48), “farmaðr” (Sveinsson, 1954, p. 105) – “skipper” (Wawn, 1997, p. 22), or “raðamaðr” (Gering, 1879, p. 62) – “foreman” (Kennedy, 1997, p. 253).

While this spread suggests that being *ódæll* is not limited explicitly to one occupation or one socio-political position, it does imply that the individuals described as *ódæll* have a certain influence on their (social) surroundings. Chieftains as socio-political leaders were able to exert influence over the people in their following and care (see e.g. Byock, 1988, p. 113–114), skippers are able to command respect on their ship and foremen are able to influence the individuals that work for, or with them. It seems therefore likely that characters who are *ódæll* are also in social or political positions that allow them to exert influence over others, thus being difficult to deal with or being overbearing due to this heightened influence. Since not all characters’ occupations or socio-political positions are stated as explicitly as in the examples mentioned above, it is not possible to ultimately verify if being in positions where it is possible to exert influence over others is prototypical for characters described as *ódæll*. However, the lack of entries featuring characters in explicitly lower social standings suggests that having a position where a character can be difficult to deal with without having to fear social or legal repercussions may be prototypical for characters described with the adjective.

THEMATIC CATEGORY 1: VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR

While being *óðæll* is prototypically tied to the attributes of maleness and social importance, and is conceptualised as a changeable behavioural trait, the specific behaviours attributed can be categorised thematically. A significant number of entries in the dataset also allude to transgressive, specifically violent behaviour, as is illustrated in the table below, showing the co-text alluding to potentially violent behaviour, as well as the number of instances within the entries the specific linguistic material appears in.

Linguistic material in entries describing characters as <i>óðæll</i> alluding to violent behaviour	Frequency across entries
<i>hólmgǫngumaðr</i> : 'a champion of holm-gang' (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957)	1
<i>víking*</i> : <i>víkingr</i> , 'a freebooter, rover, pirate'; <i>verit í víkingu</i> , 'had been on a freebooting voyage, piracy' (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957)	3
<i>garpr</i> : 'a warlike man' (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957)	4
<i>víga*</i> : as part of name: <i>Víga-Hrapp</i> ; 'Killer-Hrapp'; <i>vígamaðr</i> , 'a fighting man, one ever at war, one who kills many men'; <i>víga sakir</i> , 'some killings' (Faulkes, 2016, p. 8)	5

Table 1. Linguistic material alluding to violent behaviour

That a total of 13 of 54 entries directly allude to (deadly) violence, such as being a *garpr*, a *vígamaðr*, or a *hólmgǫngumaðr*, or behaviour that by implication results in violence or warlike behaviour, such as being on viking raids (see table 1.: *víking**), implies that *óðæll* at least partially refers to the capacity of violence in the characters described as such. Them being difficult to deal with or being overbearing is tied to their either explicitly violent behaviour or their overt capacity for violence; it is the danger that proceeds from them that makes them *óðæll*. This capacity for violence or explicitly violent behaviour impacting people in their surroundings could be grounds for these characters being perceived as dangerous or Other.

This is seemingly also illustrated by the fact that it is the social standing of these characters that is somewhat compromised by them being *óðæll*. Hávarr in *Fóstbræðra saga* has



to leave the Akranes district due to killings that are implied to be a result of his violent behaviour that makes him difficult to deal with:

Hávarr hét maðr: hann var Kleppsson. Hann bjó á bæ þeim, er heitir at Jökulskeldu. Hávarr var kynjaðr sunnan af Akranesi ok hafði farit þaðan fyrir víga sakar, því at hann mikill vígamaðr ok hávaðamaðr ok ódæll. (Þórólfsson & Jónsson, 1943, p. 123)

There was a man named Havar, the son of Klepp, who lived at a farm called Jökulskelda. Havar originally came from Akranes in the south but had left there on account of some killings. He loved fighting, and was a boisterous and overbearing man. (Regal, 1997, p. 330).

Hávarr being both *mikill vígamaðr*, ‘a fighting man’, and *hávaðamaðr*, ‘a haughty person’ (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957) seems to be the reason as to why he is seen as *ódæll*. Even more poignant is the example of Víga-Hrappr in *Laxdæla Saga*, as he not only has to flee the district he lived in but the country due to his violent behaviour:

Hrappr var Sumarliðason ok kallaðr Víga-Hrappr; hann var skozkr at fòðurætt, en móðurkyn hans var alt í Suðreyjum, ok þar var hann fœðingi; mikill maðr var hann ok sterk; ekki vildi hann láta sinn hlut, þó at mann munr væri nokkurr; ok fyrir þat er hann var ódæll, sem ritat var, en vildi ekki bæta þat, er hann misgerði, þá flýði hann vestan um haf ok keypti sér þá jörð, er hann bjó á. (Kålund, 1889, p. 23)

Hrapp was the son of Sumarlidi and was called Killer-Hrapp. He was of Scottish descent on his father’s side but his mother’s family had lived in the Hebrides, where he was born. A big, strong man, he was never willing to back down, even when facing an opponent who was considered more than his equal. He had fled there to Iceland and purchased the farm where he now lived because the same belligerence had led him to commit misdeeds for which he refused to make retribution. (Kunz, 1997, p. 9).

Hrappr’s capacity for violence is made explicit by his nickname *Víga-Hrappr* (see table 1), as well as the description of him “never willing to back down”, being belligerent and his refusal to pay retribution, which directly indicates his willingness to kill. More importantly however, this excerpt’s authorial comment makes clear why Hrappr is considered *ódæll*. While Kunz chooses to not translate the authorial insert, the comment that Hrappr “var ódæll, sem ritat var”- “as it was written” is crucial as the comment makes abundantly clear that it is precisely Hrappr’s attributes and behaviour that are listed before this comment that are the reason Hrappr is considered *ódæll*. Crucial in this co-text is that Hrappr does not back down from a fight “even when facing an opponent who was considered more than his equal”, showcasing his refusal to adhere to societal conventions, or even logical conditions.



Additionally, his being *ódæll* is also referred to as the reason why Hrappr refuses to make retribution for his misdeeds, demonstrating his disregard for the legal framework of society.

While being *ódæll* is not directly tied to being or becoming an outlaw, the violent behaviour that is the reason as to why a person is described as *ódæll* can ultimately lead to social expulsion and outlawry for the characters. In short, being *ódæll* does not make one an outlaw, but if the reason for being *ódæll* is the capacity of violence, the socially and legally transgressive behaviour may have social and legal consequences, such as outlawry.

THEMATIC CATEGORY 2: PHYSICAL STRENGTH

The previous instance in *Laxdæla saga* also describes Hrappr's physical appearance: he is "mikill maðr var hann ok sterkr", "a big, strong man". In 13 entries, the characters described as *ódæll* are also described as *sterkr*, 'strong'. This does not seem to correlate directly with the characters' potential for violence, though. Only Hrappr is described with both the adjective *sterkr* and one of the terms indicating explicit violent behaviour as collected in table 1. Other entries allude to some potential violent behaviour, such as in the following example from *Fóstbræðra saga*:

Sá maðr var til skips kominn, er Gautr hét; hann var sonr Sleitu. Hann var náinn at frændsemi Þorgilsi Márssyni, er Þorgeir hafði vegit. Gautr var mikill vexti ok sterkr at afli, ódæll ok harðfengr. Hann hafði sér fari tekit af stýrimanni ok vissi engar vánir til þess, at Þorgeirr ætlaði þar útan at fara. Hann færði brún á nef við kvámu Þorgeirs, ok sýndisk þeim nakkvat vandræði vera, at þeir sé samskipa við þat skaplyndi, sem hvárr þeira hafði. Skip var albúit ok bundinn búlki ok vara Gauts komin í búlka. (Þorólfsson & Jónsson, 1943, p. 157–158).

A man named Gaut came down to the ship. He was the son of Sleita and a close relative of Thorgils Masson, whom Thorgeir had slain. Gaut was a large, powerful and overbearing man and a hard fighter. He had been taken aboard by the skipper and had no idea that Thorgeir was along for the journey. He grimaced with anger when he saw Thorgeir arrive, and both men saw that being aboard the same vessel was bound to be difficult on account of their temperaments. The ship was ready and the hold secured, with Gaut's goods inside it. (Regal, 1997, p. 347).

Gautr being described as *harðfengr*, which here is translated as 'a hard fighter', but may also be translated as 'hardy, valiant' (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957) may imply some potential



for violence, but the co-text makes it clear that Gautr does not react violently, despite having to share close quarters with a man who had killed his relative. Gautr being overbearing or difficult to deal with seems therefore not to be overtly tied to a capacity for violence, but rather to his physical strength.

THEMATIC CATEGORY 3: ATTITUDE AND ISSUES COMMUNICATING

Similarly, other examples indicate physical strength without necessarily stressing the potential that this physical strength may be used for violence. This is the case in *Njáls saga*, where Sigmundr Lambason is described as physically strong and big, “mikill ok sterkr”, without being attributed directly with any physically violent behaviour:

Sigmundr hét maðr; hann var Lambason, Sighvats sonar ins rauða. Hann var farmaðr mikill, kurteiss maðr ok vænn, mikill ok sterkr. Hann var metnaðarmaðr mikill ok skáld gott ok at flestum iþróttum vel búinn, hávaðamaðr mikill, spottsamr ok ódæll. (Sveinsson, 1954, p. 105).

There was a man named Sigmund; he was the son of Lambi, the son of Sighvat the Red. Sigmund was a great sea-faring merchant, a courteous and handsome man. He was full of ambition and a good poet and skilled in most sports; he was boisterous, sarcastic and overbearing. (Cook, 1997, p. 48).

This description of physical strength goes untranslated in Cook’s translation of *Njáls saga*, but the co-text makes clear, that Sigmundr being *ódæll* in no way is connected to the capacity for or willingness to use violence, or even to refuse submission as in the case of Víga-Hrappr. Sigmundr being big and physically strong seems incidental rather than an attribute of being *ódæll*. In his case, being strong and big seems to be in line with the rather positive first part of his description; he is *farmaðr mikill*, ‘a great sea-farer’, *kurteiss maðr*, ‘a courteous man’, and *vænn*, ‘promising, fair to behold’ (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957). It is only in the second half of the description that it becomes clearer why Sigmundr is considered *ódæll*, despite the rather positive characteristics attributed to him in the first part of the description. Since being a good poet or being skilled in sports are not legitimate reasons that could explain why Sigmundr is considered *ódæll*, it must be the very last descriptors in the co-text that make him difficult to deal with or overbearing. Sigmundr is *hávaðamaðr mikill*, ‘a very haughty person’ (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957), and *spottsamr*, ‘mocking or sporting’ (Cleasby & Vigfusson 1957). It seems therefore most likely that *ódæll* refers to Sigmundr’s attitude and issues communicating in a

socially accepted manner. Sigmundr is not the only character being described as having some form of issue communicating in connection to being *ódæll*, as is illustrated in table 2. below, collecting the various forms of deviating attitude and communicative issues visible in characters described as *ódæll*,

Linguistic material in entries describing characters as <i>ódæll</i> alluding to attitude or issues communicating	Frequency across entries
<i>fálátr</i> : 'silent, cold' (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957)	4
<i>ekki málugr</i> : 'not talkative, communicative' (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957)	2
<i>þaugull</i> : 'silent, of silent habits' (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957)	1
<i>spottsamr</i> : 'mocking, sporting' (Cleasby and Vigfusson, 1957)	1
<i>hávaðamikill</i> : 'haughty, boasting; <i>hávaðamaðr</i> , 'a haughty person' (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1957)	4

Table 2. Linguistic material alluding to attitude or issues communicating

THEMATIC CATEGORY 4: LACK OF COMMUNICATION

As illustrated in table 2, the entries of characters described as *ódæll* include both issues concerning the lack of communicative abilities as well as issues concerning the manner of, or attitude when communicating. Six of the 54 studied entries explicitly state that the characters are notably lacking communicative skills or refusing to employ them by stating that the characters are *fálátr*, 'silent', 'cold', *ekki málugr*, 'not talkative, communicative', or *þaugull*, 'silent, of silent habits'. The frequency of references to being not talkative or silent in the context describing characters as *ódæll* suggests that being noticeably silent or lacking communicative skills is not only less socially acceptable but also a reason as to why characters might be difficult or Other.

It is not only the lack of communicative skills that seems to imply socially unacceptable behaviour, but also the manner of communication. While only one character is described as *spottsamr*, 'mocking, sporting', namely the previously mentioned Sigmundr in *Njáls saga*, four



characters are called *hávaðamaðr*, 'a haughty person', or are described as *hávaðamikill*, 'haughty, boasting'. Noticeably, the manner of communication in all cases is indicated by nouns or adjectives that imply an inflated sense of self, and/or behaviour that may be insulting or hurtful to others. It seems therefore likely that the characters described as such are perceived as difficult to deal with because they do not adhere to the verbal social norms concerning social status or whose behaviour is detrimental to the honour of their surrounding social environment. This pattern suggests that deviations in normal verbal behaviour, either through attitude and manner, or through silence, are not incidental, but central to how these characters are perceived and why they are difficult. Since lack of communication and the specific mode of communicating appear 12 times in the data, both the lack of verbal communication and the non-adherence to verbal social norms should be seen as more central to the prototype of *ódæll*, as well as connected to each other. Issues communicating or the near total lack of communication does seem to deviate from social norms and would impact how the characters are perceived by their social surroundings.

Conclusion

To summarise, some attributes and traits seem to be more generalised and more common among characters being described as *ódæll* in the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*, thus making them more prototypical than other, less common traits and attributes. The three most general attributes or basic principles offer an insight into the most prototypical characteristics.

Firstly, the adjective *ódæll* in the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir* is primarily attributed to male characters, which suggests that being *ódæll* is predominantly associated with men, or in the case of Hlèguðr, with a woman exhibiting masculine traits. The prototypical referent is therefore male. Secondly, since characters do not seem to necessarily be born as *ódæll*, but can become *ódæll* over time, it can be assumed that *ódæll* is bound to behavioural attributes rather than to congenital traits. Thus, being a man, or simply being tall and strong does not suffice for being perceived as *ódæll*, other attributes and traits have to be present. Thirdly, the characters described as *ódæll* are most often of higher social status and frequently in positions that allow them to exert influence over others, thus being overbearing or difficult to deal with for their subordinates, and to be difficult and overbearing without being subjected

to immediate social or legal consequences. Thus, the prototypical referent is of higher social status. In its most prototypical meaning, *óðæll* therefore refers to male, higher social status individuals that become *óðæll* over time.

Apart from those most prototypical attributes, the dataset for this study also shows that *óðæll* is connected to other, more peripheral attributes and traits, namely violent behaviour, physical strength, attitude and issues communicating and lack of communication. In the case of characters described as *óðæll* exhibiting violent behaviour or a capacity for violence, the characters exhibit an unwillingness to conform to societal norms which regulate brutal behaviour and may therefore be subject to social and legal consequences. This violent behaviour and its legal or social consequences may also impact the character's standing, for example through outlawry, thus illustrating that even though a higher social status is a prototypical attribute of being *óðæll*, it does not necessarily protect the individual from consequences impacting his social status.

Notable is also that violent behaviour does not correlate with physical strength, as only one character is described as both physically strong and violent. Physical strength and violent behaviour are therefore most likely not conceptually connected with each other. Physical strength also appears to be the most incidental attribute, as it is the attribute most likely to appear together with one of the other categories. Five instances of physical strength appear together with another attribute, whereof four instances fall into the communications category. Thus, physical strength appears to be more connected to communicative attributes than to violence.

In addition to physical and strictly behavioural traits, issues with verbal communication are a common denominator for referents. Both the lack of communicative skills and modes of communication that are understood as arrogant or insulting are emphasised, and the frequency with which these appear suggests that communication issues are more central to the prototype of *óðæll*.

The figure below exemplifies the more central and more peripheral meanings of the adjective *óðæll* according to the co-text of the descriptions of characters that are referred to as *óðæll*. The figure does not show the precise number of individual characters which are ascribed

with the various attributes and is thus not to be seen as a representative figure showcasing a Radial Network model, but it illustrates how the more prototypical attributes and the more peripheral attributes relate to each other, with the more prototypical attributes being situated in the middle and bigger, and the more peripheral attributes being smaller and situated in the periphery.

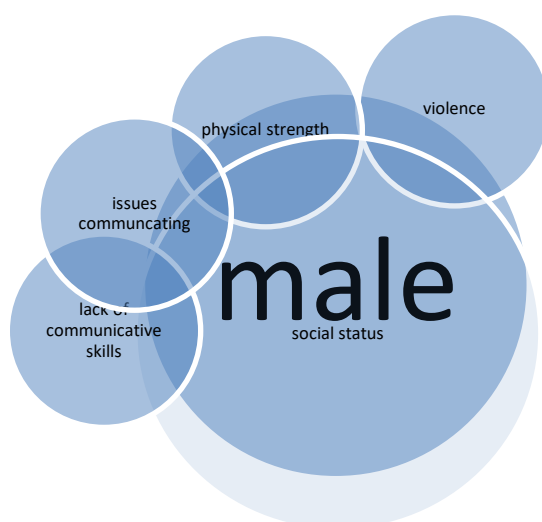


Figure 1. Schematic relationship between prototypical and peripheral attributes

The members of the category *óðæll*, being male and of higher social status are in the centre, thus more prototypical, while other meanings of *óðæll* are situated farther away from the centre, thus more peripheral. These more peripheral attributes pertaining to the meaning of the adjective are partly and partially overlapping; physical strength is more likely to overlap with issues communicating or the lack of communicative skills than with the member violence. In terms of Radial Networks, the radial aspect of the category *óðæll* is not very prominent, meaning that the more peripheral members are not interconnected and few variants of variants are visible. Violence for example is split into different variants, as is illustrated in table 1, but the dataset has not shown any more prominent variants of the different variants collected. Since the dataset only shows a slight radial character in the analysis of the category *óðæll*, the overlap between the different peripheral members are of special interest.

The table below illustrates the overlap between the four peripheral members of the category *ódæll*. Important to note is that the table does not account for the number of entries in the dataset, but for the number of entries containing linguistic material alluding to one or several of the attributes.

	Lack of communicative skills	Issues communicating	Physical strength	Violence
Lack of communicative skills	6	0	2	1
Issues communicating	0	6	2	1
Physical strength	2	2	13	1
Violence	1	1	1	13

Table 3. Overlap between peripheral attributes

As table 3 illustrates, overlaps between these peripheral attributes are few and no character is ascribed all attributes. Lack of communicative skills, such as being taciturn, and attitudes impacting communication are mutually exclusive; someone who is taciturn is not arrogant or boisterous in their communication. Both lack of communicative skills and issues communicating are, however, partially overlapping with physical violence. Violence seems to be a more isolated member in the category, as it only overlaps one time each with each of the other three members.

Overall, the adjective *ódæll*, being difficult to deal with or being overbearing is a complex descriptor that encompasses more central, and therefore more prototypical traits, such as being male, and being of higher social status. Slightly more peripheral characteristics are different issues communicating and violent behaviour, as well as physical strength. Being difficult to deal with is ultimately a societal judgement and the characters show difficulties in conforming to societal norms through actions, general temperament or means of communication. The limited overlap of categories indicate that being *ódæll*, being difficult cannot be understood as rooted in only one cause but is indicative of a broader



conceptualisation and meaning of the concept. The more prototypical attributes of being *óðæll*, such as being male and being of higher social status do not seem to indicate norm-breaking or Other behaviour or attributes, but the more peripheral attributes, such as violence, lack of communicative skills or issues communicating have to be understood as potentially socially transgressive or non-conforming. While being socially transgressive or being perceived as non-conforming does not necessarily entail social Othering or exclusion from society, the attributes indicate a general Otherness of the characters described as being *óðæll*, thus highlighting the many different facets of everyday Otherness in the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*.

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