Dartspeak and Estuary English
A Tale of Two Cities

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Why consider forms of English spoken in these two capitals?

The two cities are major anglophone metropolises with a complex social structure.

This social structure is reflected in a dynamic use of language by different groups within both cities.

The insights for sociolinguistics to be gained by examining language in London and Dublin are significant.
Some generalisations about urban sociolinguistics and language change
Is language change accidental and without direction?

To answer this question consider there there is always variation in language. This variation can be determined by internal phonetic factors, e.g. raising of back vowels, fronting of /u:/ and /au/, velarisation of /l/. Whether this variation becomes significant for a community is determined by external factors, i.e. social factors, and the results can be one of the following:

1) Accommodation: groups approximate to each other
2) Dissociation: groups distance themselves from each other
3) Compromise forms between two extremes arise
Large cities consist of different groups:

1) Local groups (speakers) of the traditional vernacular
2) Speakers of non-vernacular varieties (generally middle class, often lower middle class)
3) Newer groups, usually inmigrants from outside the cities or indeed foreign immigrants
Vernacular and non-vernacular speakers are quite different culturally and general are linguistically separate too. In Dublin this divide is strengthened by the north-south divide, in London by the east-west division.
View of Dublin down the River Liffey
Basic split in Dublin

North Side

South Side
English in London
St Mary Le Bow

A church in East London. Cockney, the native, local dialect of the capital, is spoken by those living within earshot of its bells.
In reality, Cockney speakers often live in tower blocks in socially deprived areas of London.
Received Pronunciation

Received Pronunciation is a term introduced in the early 20th century by Daniel Jones (1881-1967) for the publicly accepted form of English pronunciation. In London speakers of RP tend to live in desirable residences in the West End.
The Middle of the Road

How do middle-class people in a typical semi-detached house somewhere on the edge of London speak?
Estuary English
English Dialects

London and the Home Counties

Newcastle

Hull

Manchester

Norwich

Bristol

Home Counties
1: Berkshire
2: Buckinghamshire
3: Hertfordshire
4: Essex
5: Surrey
6: Sussex
7: Kent
The term ‘Estuary English’ was invented by the language teacher David Rosewarne in 1984 and has since been taken up by journalists and public alike (Coggle 1993: 24-35). It is the label for a variety of English intermediate between RP and Cockney. It makes a vague reference to the Thames estuary, implying that the variety is spoken in counties which border on this river and, of course, that it is spoken in London. The term is something of a misnomer as its features are found outside the Home Counties, particularly in the triangle drawn by the three cities Cambridge (north), London (south) and Oxford (west). It is also found along the coastal south and south-east, areas which are not adjacent to the River Thames.

So why the label ‘Estuary English’? Answer: the English like alliterations, just think of road rage, lager lout, canteen culture, cold calling, gas-guzzler, loony left, mattress money.

Estuary English does not have immediate class implications, for instance, many inhabitants of the south-east which could be classified conventionally as middle-class – non-manual workers of various kinds – speak a variety which shows the features which Rosewarne, and those who followed him, saw as typical of Estuary English.
### Estuary English / RP vs. Cockney

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estuary English / RP</th>
<th>Cockney</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no H-dropping</td>
<td>H-dropping, e.g. hand [ænd]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no TH-fronting</td>
<td>TH-fronting, e.g. think [fiŋk]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no MOUTH- monophthong</td>
<td>MOUTH-monophthong, e.g. town [tε:n]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no intervocalic T-glottaling</td>
<td>intervocalic T-glottaling, e.g. pity ['pi?i]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Estuary English / Cockney vs. Received Pronunciation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estuary English / Cockney</th>
<th>Received Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>variable HAPPY-tensing, e.g. pretty ['priti]</td>
<td>no HAPPY-tensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocalisation of preconsonantal, final /l/, e.g. spilt [spiŋt]</td>
<td>no vocalisation of preconsonantal, final /l/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final T-glottaling, e.g. cut [kaʔ?]</td>
<td>no final T-glottaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yod coalescence in stressed syllables, e.g. tune [tʃu:n]</td>
<td>no yod coalescence in stressed syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some diphthong shift in FACE, PRICE, GOAT, e.g. [faɪs], [prɪdɪs], [ɡɔt]</td>
<td>no such diphthong shift</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The intermediate position of Estuary English on a scale of relative standardness in south-east British English may well be the result of two social tendencies: the first is the desire of local speakers to lose some of the more salient features of their speech. This applies particularly to non-binary features such as diphthong shift in the FACE, PRICE and GOAT lexical sets as speakers can move up and down this scale continuously. The second trend is the opposite: the wish on the part of RP speakers to be more contemporary and less posh in their speech. This involves the adoption of certain, but by no means all, features of Cockney as shown in the above tables.

Some lexicalised features may also appear in the speech of Estuary English speakers, e.g. the pronunciation of final /-k/ in words ending in -thing, e.g. something [ˈsʌmθɪŋ]. Cluster simplification may also be found as in /nt/ > /n/ intervocally, e.g. twenty ['tweni], plenty ['pleni].

Of all the features listed above, the two, which could be highlighted as the most salient trends in the speech of middle-class south-east British, are (i) T-glottaling, both word-finally and, increasingly, intervocally, e.g. but [bʌʔ] and butter ['bʌʔə] and (ii) L-vocalisation as in milk [mɪŋk], help [heɪp]. Stigmatised Cockney features, such as H-deletion, do not show signs of being adopted into the speech of middle-class speakers.
Spread of Estuary English (and Cockney) features

Estuary English is regarded as acceptable by the urban communities where it occurs. For this reason it shows a clear tendency to spread. One can see that it already encompasses not just the Home Counties but the Thames Valley and is found in many urban centres north of this, such as those in the West Midlands, the Mersey areas and as far north as Tyneside.

Cockney features have also spread through so-called cascade diffusion (from city to city), e.g. TH-fronting – [fɪŋk] for [θɪŋk]. H-dropping is an older features which is shared by nearly all urban varieties of English.
References for Estuary English


The English language in Dublin
Location of Dublin with its hinterland
Contemporary Dublin

The city of Dublin lies at the mouth of the river Liffey in the centre of the east coast, and spreads along the shores of the horseshoe shape of Dublin bay.

The suburbs, which have increased dramatically since the 1960’s, reach down to Bray and beyond into Co. Wicklow in the south, to the West in the direction of Maynooth and to the north at least to Swords, the airport and beyond.

The Dublin conurbation now encompasses about a third of the population of the Republic of Ireland.
Areas in Dublin

Like any other modern city Dublin shows areas of high and low social prestige. Within Dublin there is a clear divide between the north and the south side of the city. The latter is regarded as more residentially desirable. Within the south there is a cline in prestige with the area containing key complexes like the Royal Dublin Society (an important exhibition and event centre in the capital), the national television studios (RTE) and of the national university (University College Dublin) in Belfield being especially important. This entire area is known by its postal code, Dublin 4. Indeed this number has given the name to a sub-accent within Dublin English which has been known as the ‘Dublin 4 Accent’, or just ‘D4 English’ or ‘Dartspeak’.
The prosperous area and postal district "Dublin 4" from which an extreme form of fashionable Dublin English formerly took its name, now often in a shortened form as in "She speaks with a D4 accent". More recently the label "Dartspeak" has come to be used, referring to the parts of the city served by this suburban railway.
Varieties of Dublin English

Any discussion of English in Dublin necessitates a few basic divisions into types. The first group consists of those who use the inherited popular form of English in the capital. The term ‘local’ is intended to capture this and to emphasise that these speakers show strongest identification with traditional conservative Dublin life of which the popular accent is very much a part.

The reverse of this is ‘non-local’ which refers to sections of the metropolitan population who do not wish a narrow, restrictive identification with popular Dublin culture. This group then subdivides into a larger, more general section, labelled ‘mainstream’ and a currently smaller group which actively rejects a confining association with low-prestige Dublin.

1) *local* Dublin English
2) *non-local* Dublin English — a) *mainstream* Dublin English
   b) *new* Dublin English
Contemporary Dublin English shows a set of vowel shifts which represent the most recent phonological innovation in Irish English. Dublin is a typical location for language change given the following features.

1) The city has expanded greatly in population in the last three or four decades. The increase in population has been due both to internal growth and migration into the city from rural areas.

2) It has undergone an economic boom in the last 15 years or so (up to 2008), reflected in its position as an important financial centre and a location for many computer firms which run their European operations from Dublin.

The increase in wealth and international position has meant that many young people aspire to an urban sophistication which is divorced from strongly local Dublin life. For this reason the developments in fashionable Dublin English diverge from those in local Dublin English, indeed can be interpreted as a reaction to it. This type of linguistic behaviour can be termed *dissociation* as it is motivated by the desire of speakers to hive themselves off from vernacular forms of a variety spoken in their immediate surroundings.
Variation and Change in Dublin English

Sound shifts of the 1990s
Most recent changes
All sound files
Glossary (essential to consult)

This website has been constructed by the author as part of the project Variation and Change in Dublin English which began in the mid 1990s (but not originally under that name) and which culminated in the book publication Dublin English: Evolution and Change (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005). The project has, however been ongoing and the author has continued to collect speaker data from Dublin and other parts of Ireland to monitor the manner in which speech variation, especially among young speakers, is leading to phonetic change.

Sound shifts of the 1990s

The initial impetus to examine Dublin English stems from the changes which took place in Dublin in the late 1980s and early 1990s — the original 'Dublin 4' accent. Initially, these changes were confined to a relatively small area of south Dublin. However, due to the unprecedented economic growth which began in Ireland in the early 1990s the change in pronunciation became more general as those speakers who shunned a too close association with the old, and in their view, backward-looking culture of popular Dublin began to dissociate themselves from those people they regarded as belonging to this local culture. The disassociation which set in manifested itself on different levels of society: people changed their lifestyles, the places they spent their leisure time and the destinations they chose for their holidays. And they changed their speech, adopting pronunciations which were unconsciously different from those found in local Dublin English. The details of these developments are given in the module Sound Shifts of the 1990s.

The changes of the 1990s were at first innovations leading to change which then established itself as the new mainstream form of Irish English. Through the process of superregionalisation advanced Dublin English spread out from the capital and its features were adopted by young accentual speakers, first females, then males, throughout the Republic of Ireland.

Most recent changes

Although advanced Dublin English of the 1990s became mainstream it did not cease developing and in the past couple of years it has begun to show hitherto unrecorded features, above all the lowering of short front vowels. This is the latest development and is discussed in detail in the module Most Recent Changes.
Variable features in Dublin English

T-lenition

The clearest phonetic feature of southern Irish English is the realisation of /t/ as a fricative with identical characteristics of the stop, i.e. an apico-alveolar fricative in weak positions. This cannot be indicated in English orthography of course but vacillation between $t$ and $th$ for /t/ is found already in the *Kildare Poems* (probably early 14th century) and would suggest that it was a feature of English in Ireland before 1600 (the beginning of the early modern period).

Extensions include the lenition of /t/ in a weak position beyond the initial stage of apico-alveolar fricative to /r/ then to /h/ with final deletion as in the following instance.

\[
\begin{align*}
/t/ & \quad \rightarrow \quad [r] \quad \rightarrow \quad [h/?] \quad \rightarrow \quad \emptyset \\
\text{water} & \quad [\text{wa:}\text{tə}] \quad \rightarrow \quad [\text{wa:}\text{rə}] \quad \rightarrow \quad [\text{wa:}\text{h/?ə}] \quad \rightarrow \quad [\text{wa:}\emptyset] \\
\text{put} & \quad [\text{puːt}] \quad \rightarrow \quad [\text{puː}] \quad \rightarrow \quad [\text{puːh/?}] \quad \rightarrow \quad [\text{pu}] 
\end{align*}
\]
Features of local Dublin English

Breaking of long vowels in closed position

- clean [kliːn]
- fool [fuːl]

Central onset for /ai/ diphthong

- time [tɜːm]
- fly [fləi]

Fronting of /au/ diphthong

- down [dəʊn]
- bout [bəʊh]

Historically short vowels before /r/

- circle [sɛːkl]
- first [fɔːst]

Early modern English short /u/

- Dublin [dəblən]
Dissociation: How to avoid local features

Speakers of both mainstream and new Dublin English generally avoid the local features I have already mentioned.

But the speakers of new Dublin English have developed strategies for maximising the phonetic differences between realisations typical of their own variety and those of local Dublin English. This has been achieved by moving away — in phonological space — from the realisations found locally.

The following list gives some indication of what is involved here.
a) Local Dublin English has a distinction between historic back and front short vowels before /r/, in the NURSE and GIRL lexical sets, [nʌː(r)s] and [gɛː(r)l] respectively. But because the open front realisation is so typical of local Dublin English, there is a migration in fashionable Dublin English of historically front long vowels to the central rhotic type as seen in words from the SQUARE lexical set like *carefully* [kɛː:fəli] and *daring* [dəːrɪŋ]. This realisation has no precedent in the history of southern Irish English.
**Dissociation: How to avoid local features**

b) Connected with the previous feature is the strict avoidance of schwa retraction before /r/ in NURSE words such as *third* [tɛːrd], *purse* [pɜːrs], not [tu:(u)d] and [pu:(u)s].

c) The local back rounded vowel /u/ in the STRUT lexical set is replaced by an unrounded front vowel which is almost /ɪ/, as in *Sunday* [sɪ-nde].

d) A syllable-final retroflex /r/, [ɾ], is used which has the advantage of marking the /r/ even more clearly vis-à-vis the popular forms of Dublin English which, if at all, have only a weak syllable-final /r/.
The Dublin Vowel Shift
Summary of recent shifts in Dublin English

a) retraction of diphthongs with a low or back starting point

  time \([\text{tæɪm}] \rightarrow [\text{tæɪm}]\)
  toy \([\text{təɪ}] \rightarrow [\text{təɪ}], [\text{tɔɪ}]\)

b) raising of low back vowels

  cot \([\text{kɒt}] \rightarrow [\text{kɒt}]\)
  caught \([\text{kɔːt}] \rightarrow [\text{kɔːt}], [\text{kɒːt}]\)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
0\text{i} & 0:\text{i} \\
\uparrow & \uparrow
\end{array}
\]

Raising

\[
\begin{array}{lll}
\circ\text{i} & \circ & \circ:\text{i} \\
\uparrow & \uparrow & \uparrow
\end{array}
\]

Retraction \(\text{ai} \rightarrow \text{aɪ}\)
Changes in vowel constellations in Dublin English

Vowel space of older mainstream speech

Vowel space of new pronunciation

goose

caught, cork

toy
Features of mainstream and new Dublin English (excluding raising of movements among back vowels)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mainstream Dublin English</th>
<th>New Dublin English, ‘Dartspeak’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>velarised /r/</td>
<td>retroflex /r/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alveolar /l/</td>
<td>velarised /l/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>central onset in MOUTH set</td>
<td>fronted onset in MOUTH set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retracted /a/ before /r/</td>
<td>fronted /a/ before /r/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no T-flapping</td>
<td>some T-flapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no FOR/FOUR-merger</td>
<td>FOR/FOUR-merger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unrounded vowel in SQUARE set</td>
<td>rounded vowel in SQUARE set</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender and language change
An important insight of recent sociolinguistics:
Young females lead the way, the males lag behind
1) GOAT *diphthongisation*  
(new feature)

[goʊut] versus [gout]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n = 40, 40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18 (45%)</td>
<td>22 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34 (85%)</td>
<td>6 (15%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test sentence: *They had a GOAT on their farm.*

2) R-retroflexion  
(new feature)

[nɔːt] versus [ndːt]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n = 40, 40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17 (43%)</td>
<td>23 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36 (90%)</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test sentence: *They’re travelling up NORTH.*

3) T-flapping  
(traditional feature)

[ -ʈ- ] versus [ -t- ]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n = 40, 40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28 (70%)</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15 (38%)</td>
<td>25 (62%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test sentence: *There’s a LETTER for you today.*
new features:

C1 - GOAT_diphthong (f) (85%)
C2 - GOAT_diphthong (m) (45%)
C3 - NORTH_retroflex-/r/ (f) (90%)
C4 - NORTH_retroflex-/r/ (m) (43%)

traditional feature:

C5 - LETTER_T-flapping (f) (38%)
C6 - LETTER_T-flapping (m) (70%)
Perception of change by the general population

When language variation proceeds towards language change it becomes more and more noticed by the general population. In this situation the change is universally condemned (true for all instances). In the case of Dublin English negative references abound to the front vowel in a word like *roundabout* or the sharp ‘r’ in a word like *Cork* or the high vowel in a word like *toy*. Sometimes a label arises for the new pronunciation. This happened in Dublin where it came to be called ‘Dartspeak’.

But people can get used to anything, including a new pronunciation, and with time the excitement and the condemnation subsides and the ‘new’ becomes ‘normal’ until the next set of changes comes along.
The New Pronunciation spreads throughout Ireland
Spread of changes from the capital:

In certain circumstances, where there is one media network and all speakers (newsreaders, continuity announcers) have the new pronunciation then this can spread to locations outside the capital without having to travel through intervening areas.
Supraregional varieties

Historically, supraregional varieties have arisen through the suppression of vernacular features leading to forms of a language in which there is less variation than in local speech, e.g. general northern British English.

A supraregional variety can also arise through the adoption of a geographically confined variety by sections of a population spread over a much larger area. In such cases the variety which triggers this process stems from a source which has prestige in the society in question, typically the capital of a modern nation state. This is what has happened in the Republic of Ireland over the past 20 years or so where changes in Dublin English have spread to the entire country.
The way forward?

Short front vowel lowering:
No variety is static and in advanced Dublin English spoken by young women there is a new tendency to lower short front vowels.

DRESS = [drɛs] ~ [dræs]
TRAP = [trap] ~ [trɒp]
In the above spectrogram F1 and F2 are progressively closer to each other from left to right due to the raising of F1; this is a clear indication of increased lowering of the DRESS vowel from left to right for the three instances from the above three speakers (slight, moderate and extreme respectively).
Estuary English and Dartspeak
- Similarities and Differences -
### Dartspeak (DS) and Estuary English (EE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DS feature</th>
<th>status</th>
<th>EE feature</th>
<th>comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>back vowel raising</td>
<td>innovation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOAT-diphthongisation</td>
<td>innovation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAPPY-tensing</td>
<td>continuation</td>
<td></td>
<td>not RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yod deletion</td>
<td>continuation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>not RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yod coalescence</td>
<td>continuation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>not RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>velarised [i]</td>
<td>innovation</td>
<td>[i] vocalisation</td>
<td>partially RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retroflex [ɻ]</td>
<td>innovation</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-flapping</td>
<td>continuation</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>T-glottalling finally</td>
<td>partially RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>linking-r</td>
<td>RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>MOUTH-fronting</td>
<td>Cockney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>FACE-lowering</td>
<td>Cockney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>H-deletion</td>
<td>Cockney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>TH-fronting</td>
<td>Cockney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>T-glottalling internally</td>
<td>Cockney</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

The metropolitan regions of Ireland and England have shown parallels and differences. Social motivation lies behind the developments in both cases. The Irish situation is different from that in England as no standard of English in Ireland was readily available for those speakers who, in the 1990s, wished to move away from more local forms of speech in the capital. A variety arose based on dissociation from more local varieties.

In south-east England the situation was different: a standard pronunciation was available, but was viewed as increasingly inappropriate for the modern world. A movement towards the local vernacular took place and is still ongoing. The newer, demotic variety of toned-down RP has served as a bridge between social groups and may continue to do so. The increasing adoption of local features into varieties higher up the scale seems to be a definite tendency.

This does not appear to be the case in Dublin English, most probably because people feel that a new Ireland has arisen and is here to stay (the pace of recent change in Ireland has been much greater than in England). The altered conception of themselves, which non-vernacular speakers in Ireland now have, or at least had up to 2008, would militate against the adoption of local features into newer varieties in Ireland.
The essential point about Estuary English is that it not a case of language change. Consider that there is no lead group here. One cannot say that young females lead in the use of Estuary English. Rather it is a compromise form between Cockney and RP. The name ‘Estuary English’ somehow implies that there exists a discrete and separate entity but it is a range on a continuum.

‘Dartspeak’ on the other hand consists of items of linguistic change, i.e. it contains features which did not exist before in Dublin English, high back vowels, retroflex /ɻ/ (along with some local features such as velarised /ɬ/ and /au/-fronting). Dartspeak does have a lead group, young non-vernacular females and is not a compromise variety but a new one which arose through dissociation from local Dublin English.
Recent literature on Dublin English and Irish English in general
English Today
The International Review of the English Language

Irish English in Today's World

Present and future horizons for Irish English
- Victories fastened in grammar: historical documentation of Irish English
- 'Irish isn't spoken here?' Language policy and planning in Ireland
- What is Irish Standard English?
- Grammatical variation in Irish English
- The pragmatics of Irish English
- Ireland in translation
- Teaching and Irish English

An Introduction to Irish English
Carolina P. Amador-Moreno
The vocabulary of Irish English

A DICTIONARY OF HIBERNO-ENGLISH

SLANGUAGE
A DICTIONARY OF IRISH SLANG

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[ about this website ] [ help ]

Discover Irish website
Variation and Change in Dublin English

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This website has been constructed by the author as part of the project Variation and Change in Dublin English which began in the mid 1990s (not originally under that name) and which culminated in the book publication Dublin English: Evolution and Change (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2003). The project has, however, being ongoing and the author has continued to collect speaker data from Dublin and other parts of Ireland to monitor the manner in which speech variation, especially among young speakers, is leading to phonetic change.

Sound shifts of the 1990s

The initial impetus to examine Dublin English stems from the changes which took place in Dublin in the late 1980s and early 1990s – the original ‘Dublin 4’ accent. Initially, these changes were confined to a relatively small area of south Dublin. However, due to the unprecedented economic growth which began in Ireland in the early 1990s the change in pronunciation became more general as those speakers who shunned a too close association with the old, and in their view, backward-looking culture of popular Dublin began to dissociate themselves from those people they regarded as belonging to this local culture. The distortion which set in manifested itself on different levels of society: people changed their lifestyles, the places they spent their leisure time and the destinations they chose for their holidays, and they changed their speech, adopting pronunciations which were unconsciously different from those found in local Dublin English. The details of these developments are given in the module Sound Shifts of the 1990s.

The changes of the 1990s were at first innovations leading to change which then established itself as the new mainstream form of Irish English. Through the process of superregionalization advanced Dublin English spread out from the capital and its features were adopted by young acrolectal speakers, first females, then males, throughout the Republic of Ireland.

Most recent changes

Although advanced Dublin English of the 1990s became mainstream it did not cease developing and in the past couple of years it has begun to show hitherto unrecorded features, above all the lowering of short front vowels. This is the latest development and is discussed in detail in the module Most Recent Changes.