Linguistic Borders in Ireland

A description and attempted analysis
Language varieties in Ireland

Irish
- Northern
- Western
- Southern

English / Scots
- Southern Irish English
- Ulster English
- Ulster Scots
Questions concerning language relationships in geographical areas

To what extent can one expect regional differences in one language (English) to coincide with those in another language (Irish)?

Do dialect coincidences presume bilingualism and a common speech community?

Can features spread across languages without bilingualism?

If so, can such features be classified structurally, e.g. as prosodic (intonational or stress patterns) or realisational (occurrence of different /r/ types, e.g. uvular /R/)

Is not just the occurrence but the absence of features of significance?

Do dialect differences coincide with natural borders, e.g. rivers, mountain chains, etc.

Are political borders, above all that between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, relevant to the discussion.
Questions concerning language relationships in geographical areas

Are dialect boundaries sharp, i.e. without any noticeable or ascertainable transition?

Do dialect boundaries refer to all levels of language, i.e. pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary?

What features are retentions and what are innovations?

Does it make much sense to speak of isoglosses (dividing lines between areas with contrasting features). Whose speech is supposed to represent the two sides of any particular isoglossic divide?

Does the contrast of urban and rural language play a role in mapping out the dialect geography of Ireland?

Did the language shift from English to Irish have any effect on dialect regions in Ireland?

How have recent developments in Dublin English and supraregional southern Irish English affected the dialect geography of Ireland?
English and Scots in Ireland
The dialects of English in Ireland
East coast dialect region
Prominent features of east coast varieties

1) Lack of lengthening of /a/ before voiceless fricatives (not in evidence in Dublin English, given general lengthening of low vowels).
2) Fronting of /au/ to /æu/, /εu/]
3) Centralisation of /ai/ to /ei/]
4) Overlong realisations of long vowels (with disyllabification in Dublin English)
5) Retention of short vowel distinctions before tautosyllabic /r/
6) Lack of an alveolar / dental distinction in the THANK and TANK lexical sets.
7) Stop deletion after nasals, e.g. pound [pευn]
English and Scots in Ulster
Scots settlement areas in Ulster after Gregg (1972)

1) A broad band including most of County Antrim (except the south approaching Belfast and the north-east corner) and the north-east corner of County Derry.

2) North County Down, most of the Ards peninsula and a section of the mainland on the west bank of Strangford Lough.

3) An area flanked on the east by the River Foyle and extending in the north central part of County Donegal.
West and South-West of Ireland
Borders versus enclaves

Location of baronies of Forth and Bargy (dialect died out in the early 19th century)
Where can remnants of formerly widespread features still be found?

Locations where uvular /ə/ was recorded in Irish and Irish English
Linguistic features in Ireland seen geographically
Prosodic patterns in Ireland

Sharp fall-rise on short stressed vowels

Undulating intonation over longer stretches of speech
Fronted /u/ with words of the GOOSE lexical set.

Vowel may be short in local Ulster varieties.
PEN – PIN merger in south-west Ireland with the raising of /e/ to /i/
The Irish language in the late modern period
Pre-Great Famine (1845-1848) Irish-speaking areas by district electoral divisions, based on 1911 population aged 60 and over (after Fitzgerald 2005: 16, Map 1)
The distribution of Irish immediately after the Great Famine (1845-1848) going on the 1851 census
Areas in which Irish was still spoken at the beginning of the twentieth century
Division of Ireland by density of Irish speakers in the mid nineteenth century
Spread of varieties of English in Ulster (dark arrows) and in the south of Ireland (light arrows) during Irish histor
Dialect areas for Irish in present-day Ireland

- Donegal, North-West
- Donegal, South-West
- Mayo, North-West
- Mayo, South
- Galway, North
- Galway, West (with Aran Islands)
- Kerry, North-West
- Kerry, West
- Cork, South-West
- Cork, Cape Clear
- Waterford, West

[Rathcairn]
Three main dialect regions for Irish in present-day Ireland
Division of Irish dialects by stress type and realisation of the vowel in saol ‘life’

Initial stress for virtually every word

\(<AO> = /i:/\)

\(<AO> = /e:/\)

Stress on non-initial long vowels or /æ/
Division of Irish dialects by the realisation of low vowels before ‘tense’ sonorants

\[\text{Division of Irish dialects by the realisation of low vowels before ‘tense’ sonorants} \]

\[\text{other southern features} \]

\[\text{final } /g/ \text{ for } -(a)idh, -(a)igh} \]
\[\text{/rev/ for raibh, dhein ‘did’} \]
\[\text{/madn/ for maird, [v] for } /\nu/ \text{ past autonomous in } /-x/ \]
\[\text{do with all verbs in past} \]
\[\text{verbal nouns in } -nt \text{ (e.g. tógaint)} \]
Main isoglosses separating Munster Irish (south-west) from Connacht Irish (west)
Relative degrees of phonetic palatalisation / affrication for /t^j/ in Gaeltachtaí and former Irish-speaking regions (Co. Clare, south Co. Mayo)
Reconstructed distribution of 
<ao> realisations on 
the basis of placename 
evidence

Realisations 
of <ao> vowel

/i:/
/e:/
/i:/
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/e:/
/i:/
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Nasal raising in Irish, e.g. *dhein* [jin] ‘did’, *nós* [nuːs] ‘custom’, *iontach* [uːntəx] ‘very’
Ireland as a linguistic area
Traditional island-wide features in Ireland (pronunciation)

1) Use of clear [l] in all positions in a word (field, meal)
2) Retention of syllable-final /r/ (sore, sword)
3) Distinction of short vowels before /r/ (tern versus turn)
4) Retention of the distinction between /w/ and /w/ (which versus witch)
Traditional island-wide features in Ireland (grammar)

1) Distinction in first and second person plural (you # ye, youse, etc.)
2) Resultative aspect with OV word order (She has the work done)
3) Immediate perfective (He’s after crashing the car)
4) Habitual aspect (She does be worrying about the children; John bees drinking a lot these days)
Habitual aspect via inherited ‘be’ verb of Old English. The other structure with ‘do’ + ‘be’ is a result of restructuring during the language shift from Irish to English over the past few centuries. The ‘does be’ habitual is most common in the south-west and west but is also found in the midlands and on the east coast of Ireland.
Linguistic borders today
Towards a more contemporary notion of linguistic border

Any discussion of linguistic borders nowadays must specify for what group in society they are supposed to apply: regional or supraregional speakers, urban or rural dwellers, monolinguals or bilinguals, one or more ethnic groups.

The older notion of isogloss as a line which separates one feature from another, a sort of linguistic fence running through a landscape really does not exist as feature borders are, if anything, fuzzy entities.

Paradoxically, a certain type of isogloss may exist within an urban area. But this is on a vertical social scale, e.g. the distinction between r-less and r-full pronunciations in Dublin English as in the NORTH lexical set where the r-less pronunciation [stæːt] is typical of local, lower-class speakers and the r-ful pronunciation [staːt] of non-local, more middle-class groups.
The absence of an obvious linguistic border within an area may nonetheless mean that speakers behave differently within the area. This has to do with differing heteronymy.

The term ‘heteronymy’ captures the insight that local speakers in a certain area with a political border within it may gravitate towards differing non-local, supraregional pronunciations when they shift away from the local dialect towards a more standard-type pronunciation.

A good example of this is provided in south-east Ulster, the geographical area encompassing Co. Monaghan, south Co. Armagh and south Co. Down. The latter two counties belong to Northern Ireland and the former to the Republic of Ireland.

Within this area the vowel of the FACE lexical set shows an off-glide, i.e. the pronunciation is [feːəs]. However, the words of this lexical set are not pronounced the same in the supraregional varieties on either side of the political border as seen in the following slide.
Relationship of local to supraregional pronunciations in south-east Ulster

South-east Ulster local and supraregional pronunciations

South-east Ulster local pronunciations
  FACE lexical set:   [feːs]

Southern supraregional variety
  FACE lexical set:   [feːs]  (without off-glide)

Northern supraregional variety
  FACE lexical set:   [feːs]  (with off-glide)
Differing heteronymy at the north-south border in Ireland

Direction of heteronymic pull on supraregionalisation

M = Monaghan
A = Armagh
D = Down

Northern Ireland
Belfast

South-East Ulster

Republic of Ireland
Dublin
Are there linguistic borders in present-day Ireland?

Yes, there are, but these are more transitions than sharp dividing lines and significantly involve the relationship of regional to supraregional pronunciations. If a traditional feature has been retained in a supraregional variety then it may contrast with another supraregional variety and so be a border-like phenomenon, e.g. lowering of short front vowels in northern Irish English which sets it off from southern Irish English.

The spread of features across the entire island of Ireland (the formation of a linguistic area) has militated against the formation or at least the continuing existence of linguistic borders within Ireland.

Borders may also not be clear because of enclaves, regions in which remnants of former features are still found, but which are geographically discontiguous.

The borders of Irish and English are largely independent of each other, except in the area of prosody. This fact is in keeping with the general insight that prosody is a linguistic level which is shared most easily across languages. Furthermore, distributions in Irish, e.g. that of nasal raising may indicate what distribution existed previously in English in Ireland.
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