The Spread of Irish English

- Newfoundland, 18c and early 19c
- East coast of the United States, late 17c and 18c → 19c and early 20c (also to Canada)
- Eastern Caribbean, mid 17c to 18c
- Australia and New Zealand, 18c and 19c
The concern of my talk today

1) How was Irish English transported overseas during the colonial period? How does this link up with the spread of English in general in this period?

2) Can we identify the shape of Irish English at its source or sources?

2) How do varieties mix and gain a clear profile at the new overseas location, i.e. become focused?

3) What features from the source varieties survive and what ones disappear in this process?
Reasons why people left Ireland in previous centuries

1) Some were deported as a punishment, e.g. to the West Indies in the 17th century or to Australia in the late 18th century.

2) Some went as indentured labourers (slightly better than slaves, but not a whole lot), early emigrants to the West Indies (Caribbean area).

3) Others left to gain religious freedom and/or greater prosperity (Ulster Scots in the 18th century).

4) Still others were involuntary emigrants, driven by famine and destitution from their homeland (19th century Catholic emigrants),
Transportation of Irish English overseas in the colonial period

The Caribbean
(names of main anglophone pidgins are shown in red)
Transportation of Irish English overseas in the colonial period
Transportation of Irish English overseas in the colonial period

East coast of the United States, late 17c and 18c
Transportation of Irish English overseas in the colonial period

Australia / New Zealand, 18c and 19c
Transportation of Irish English overseas in the colonial period

United States / Canada, 19c + early 20c
The development of the English language in Ireland
In Ireland the Celtic language Irish has been spoken for about two millenia. Nowadays the language only survives in a few small pockets on the western and south-western seaboard.
Irish-speaking areas in present-day Ireland

The areas in Ireland today in which native speakers are found in historically continuous communities. Some areas are in a stronger position than others, e.g. North-West Donegal and West Galway have the most vibrant communities whereas North-West & South Mayo, West Kerry, Cape Clear and West Waterford are in a much weaker position. Rathcainn is an entirely transported community (from Galway in the early 20th century).
Initial settlement of eastern Ireland by Anglo-Normans from Wales as of the late 12th century
Migration of Lowland Scots to Ulster in the 17th century
The spread of Ulster Scots (with northern varieties of English) throughout Ulster from the early 17th century onwards.

The spread of English from the east of Ireland westwards from the late 12th century onwards.
Periods in the development of Irish English

1) **First period**  *Late 12th century to 1600*

Establishment of English on the east coast in a band from Dublin down to Waterford. English is above all present in the towns; Anglo-Norman — and of course Irish — in the countryside. Increasing Gaelicisation in the centuries after the initial invasion led to the demise of English outside the major towns. The low point for English is reached in the 16th century with Irish in a correspondingly strong position.

2) **Second period**  *1600 to present-day*

This begins with a decisive military defeat for the Irish. The north of the country is particularly affected with settlers from Lowland Scotland moving to Ulster and establishing a firm presence there. Later on in the 17th century there are vigorous plantations of the south of the country (under Cromwell). By the end of the 17th century, the position of English is unassailable and the general decline of Irish sets in with events like the Great Famine in the late 1840’s and the ensuing mass emigration dealing a final blow to the language.
The English language in Ireland

After the accession of James VI of Scotland as James I to the English throne a vigorous policy of plantation was pursued in Ulster, filling the geographical and political vacuum left by the defeated Irish with settlers from Lowland Scotland and also from other parts of Britain, mainly northern Britain. These settlers are the ancestors of the current Protestant population in Northern Ireland.

The two new groups in 17th century Ulster led to a linguistic landscape in which Ulster Scots on the rim of the province and Mid-Ulster English further inland became the dominant varieties of English. Ulster Scots has retained its specific profile to this day and has been strengthened by official recognition in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) which was adopted by the government of the United Kingdom in 2001.

The English language in major cities of Northern Ireland has undergone specific developments which have been investigated by sociolinguists, above all by James and Lesley Milroy.
The English language in Ireland

In the south of Ireland the development of English was characterised by the major language shift which took place approximately between the early 17th and late 19th century. In this period the rural population abandoned their native Irish and increasingly adopted English as their first, and later their only language. During this process many features, above all in pronunciation and grammar, were transferred as part of the new variety of Irish English.
Irish English: some features

Prominent features of the Irish pronunciation of English include the lack of interdental fricatives (no ‘th’-sounds), a fricative t in open positions (cat, put) and the continuing presence of historical r (as in car, card).

In the area of grammar several features are present which can be traced to the language shift or to the retention of earlier English input to Ireland. Here are some instances:

They’re after selling their house ‘They have just sold their house’
She has the work done ‘She has now finished the work’
He likes the life in Dublin ‘He likes life in Dublin’
Where are ye/youse going? ‘Where are you going?’
[more than one person intended]
He does be at home in the morning ‘He is always at home in the morning’,
They didn’t cause no trouble ‘They didn’t cause any trouble’.
Possible sources of features in Irish English

1) Transfer from Irish

2a) Dialect forms of English

2b) Archaic forms of English

3) Features deriving from the context in which English was learned (adult second language acquisition)

4) Features with no recognisable source (independent developments)
Dialect areas in present-day Ireland

- **Ulster Scots**: brought by seventeenth-century planters.
- **Mid-Ulster English**: areas with largest Irish-speaking populations.
- **Forth and Bargo**: archaic dialect, died out early nineteenth century.
- **East coast dialect area**: area of original settlement in late twelfth century by Anglo-Normans.
- **South-west and west**: Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Limerick, Galway, Sligo, Dundalk, Derry, Belfast, Donegal.
Irish English Resource Centre

Themes

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Discover Irish website
The colonial enterprise and the spread of English
A New and Accurate Map of the World (1627) by the English cartographer John Speed
The colonial world in the late 18th century
The colonial world in the late 19th century
Spread of English in colonial period

Routes taken during the spread of English from the British Isles in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries by the English, Scottish and Irish
Two halves of the anglophone world

Anglophone Northern Hemisphere
Settled from c. 1600 onwards

Anglophone Southern Hemisphere
Settled from c. 1800 onwards
Some major differences

The northern hemisphere was settled first (after 1600) while the southern hemisphere was settled much later (after 1800). This means that forms of English there are closer to English in south-east England today, e.g. in not having syllable-final /-r/ in words like car or card.

Other major differences between the two hemispheres involve the pronunciation of vowels, e.g. the short front vowels (as in bad, bed, bid) have a raised pronunciation whereas the long vowels and diphthongs (as in tape, time, toy, taught) tend to be lowered and/or retracted.
Main blocks of the anglophone world

- North America
- British Isles
- The Caribbean
- West Africa
- Southern & East Africa
- Australia & New Zealand
- Pacific
Several factors are responsible for the types of English which have arisen outside Europe during the colonial period, roughly from the early 17th to the late 19th century. Early settlers went to the New World, first to the Caribbean then to eastern Canada and the later United States (to form the original 13 colonies). Some people left the British Isles of their own free will, some were forcibly deported, some served as indentured labourers.

At the new locations, settlers sometimes mixed with indigenous peoples, with other settlers or with slaves from Africa. This mixture had an effect on the forms of English which arose at the new locations.
The Caribbean Sea with its islands
Main periods in the history of the Caribbean

• Pre-Columbian Period
  (before 1492)

• The Spanish Period
  (after 1492)

• British Involvement
  (from the early 1600s onwards)
Source and destination of slave transportation

Caribbean, destination of slave transport

West Africa, source of slaves
The Trade Triangle

Caribbean goods produced by slaves
1) Tobacco
2) Cane Sugar
3) Cotton (later southern USA)
The first Caribbean islands to be settled by the British were St Kitts (1623/4) in the north-east and Barbados (1627) in the south-east corner of the Caribbean Basin. When this island filled up, English-speakers left for other locations, especially for Jamaica after it was taken by the British in 1660.

Initially, the Caribbean was populated by whites, during the so-called ‘Homestead Phase’, later by blacks taken from West Africa as slaves and transported across the Atlantic along the infamous Middle Passage.

Many other smaller islands were populated by English-speakers and many changed hands between the colonial maritime powers, namely England, France, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. Most of these islands gain their independence in the mid 20th century.

In the late 17th century a number of Caribbean slaves were transported to the south-east of the United States to work on the large cotton plantations. Later slaves were transported directly. The system of slavery lasted until the end of the American Civil War (1860-65).
Major English-speaking Caribbean islands

Jamaica

Barbados
Anglophone locations in the Caribbean

The Caribbean

(names of main anglophone pidgins are shown in red)

Anglophone settlement after mid 17th century

first English settlers arrive in 1620s
Montserrat was first colonized in 1632 by Irish and English Catholics fleeing persecution on nearby St Kitts. Later more Irish settlers came from the Virginia colony on the American mainland. Plantations to grow tobacco, later sugar and cotton, were set up; from 1664 slaves were imported from Africa to work them.
The settlement of North America

1) Newfoundland (eastern Canada)
2) East coast of the later United States
Newfoundland is the oldest English colony in Canada. It was settled at least two centuries before the United Province of Canada was set up in 1841 with the Dominion of Canada following in 1867. The province was independent until it decided by a narrow majority to join the Canadian Federation in 1949, after having experienced considerable economic difficulties (with technical bankruptcy in 1934) and direct administration by Britain until shortly after the Second World War.
Europeans reach Newfoundland

Newfoundland was (re)discovered in 1497 by John Cabot, seeking like Columbus before him, a short route to Asia.

Cabot departs from Bristol  Cabot's ship, the Matthew

Newfoundland later formally annexed for Britain by Sir Humphrey Gilbert in 1583.
Early map showing Newfoundland (with Grand Banks)

The Grand Banks are fishing grounds off the south-east coast of Newfoundland which gave the Irish name for the island: Talamh an Éisc ‘Ground of Fish’
Relevant locations for English in Newfoundland

Newfoundland

Seasonal migration with later settlement from:
1) West country of England
2) South-east of Ireland
The Avalon Peninsula in South-East Newfoundland
St. John’s, capital of Newfoundland (view from Signal Hill)
How was English taken to Newfoundland?

Transatlantic route for seasonal fishing on the Grand Banks
Journey from S-W England to S-E Ireland, then to Newfoundland
Linguistic features

Second person plural forms

There is a gap in the personal pronouns of standard English: there is no special form for the second person plural. But virtually all varieties of English have some means of distinguishing formally between the singular and plural in the second person.

Newfoundland English is no exception in this respect and has at least the forms ye and youse (along with the much more recent American import, you guys).

Ye is an older English form (actually the original second person plural personal pronoun). Youse is an Irish form consisting of you + plural s, created by speakers when shifting from their native language Irish to their new second language English.
## Linguistic features

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish English</td>
<td>thou (N), thee (W, SW)</td>
<td>you, ye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish English</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>ye, youse, yez</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newfoundland English</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>yous, yous yins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern American English</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>ye</td>
</tr>
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<td>African American English</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Caribbean English</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>you, y’all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South African English</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>unu, wuna, yina, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian English</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>youse, y’all</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand English</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>youse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Creole English</td>
<td>yu</td>
<td>yupela, yumy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Second person pronouns in varieties of English*
Linguistic features

Demonstrative *them*

The use of *them* for *those*, *Them shoes are cheap*, is ubiquitous in vernacular forms of English deriving from settler varieties, including English in Newfoundland (both varieties). This usage was, however, found in careful and formal usage up to the seventeenth century and only disappears from such registers during the following century with the rise of prescriptivism.

So demonstrative *them* is a typical example of a feature which was transported to many overseas locations and which has survived in vernacular forms of speech there.
After-perfective

After is a temporal adjective which can have a prospective use, as in current standard English *He is after a new car*, i.e. ‘He is looking for a new car’ or a retrospective use as in vernacular Irish English, *He is after breaking the glass* ‘He has just broken the glass’. The latter usage is easy to understand by reversing the direction in which *after* is interpreted. The cognitive ease with which this can be done explains why the structure spread from the Irish community in Newfoundland to the English one as well.
Dialect regions of Canada

Regions of Canada

- Nanavut
- Western Canada (British Columbia)
- Ottawa
- Quebec
- Newfoundland
- Toronto
- Prince Edward Island
- Nova Scotia
- Central Canada (Ontario)
- (The Maritimes)
Ottawa Valley had a considerable Irish settlement during the 19th century and traces of an Irish accent remained among Canadians in the area well into the 20th century.
Emigration to the United States

During the 18th century upwards of a quarter of a million Scots and Ulster Scots emigrated to the east of America. They settled in states along the coast from Pennsylvania down to South Carolina. Many of them also settled in the Appalachian mountains and the speech of this region shows many traces of Scots input to this day.

Later in the 19th century many millions fled Ireland as a result of famine (e.g. the Great Famine of 1845-8). These largely Catholic emigrants settled in the cities of the north-eastern United States, such as New York and Boston. Because they were considerably later than the Scots their speech did not have a comparable effect on American English, though locally there are traces of this Irish English input.
East Coast of United States (roughly from Pennsylvania down to South Carolina). Destination of many Ulster Scots emigrants in the 18th century (up to 250,000)
Note the concentration of dialect different in the eastern United States which is due to the diverse nature of early emigration to this area.
The Southern Hemisphere

The anglophone southern hemisphere consists primarily of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. These are countries where ‘settler English’ continues.

Irish input to South Africa was minimal but quite significant in Australia where many Irish were deported in the early days of the country as a penal colony (in the later few decades of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries). Later there was normal emigration to Australia and to New Zealand where mass emigration began after the treaty of Waitangi between the British and the local Maori in 1840.
The early anglophone settlement of South Africa

Western Cape, settled as of 1795

Eastern Cape, settled in 1820's
The transportation of speakers from India to Natal

Shift of population from India to South Africa (Natal) due to shortage of labour after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834. Transportation took place between 1860 and 1911, mainly of speakers of Bhojpuri. Their descendants are speakers of South African Indian English.
Transportation to Australia / New Zealand

Return route with grain in emigrants ships (clippers)

Settlement of Australia from 1788 onwards, first with convicts later with regular emigrants. New Zealand is settled somewhat later (mid 19th century).
Both Australia (1788 - ) and New Zealand (1840 - ) had considerable Irish input (between 25% and 30% of the original settlers). However, their speech was not continued at either location, probably because of the dominance of English speech models, given that both countries were colonies of Britain.
And what about Britain?
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