On the transcription of the apico-alveolar fricative allophone of /t/ in Irish English in positions of high sonority, intervocally, as in city, or word-finally, pre-pausally, as in but.

The transcription introduced in Hickey (1984) and used since by this author is a [t] with a caret placed under it pointing to the fact that the tongue does not make contact with the alveolar ridge for this realisation of /t/ \(\ddagger\), i.e.:

\[ \ddagger \]

This transcription importantly shows that this sound is an allophone of /t/, the voiceless alveolar stop of English. The IPA transcription, favoured by Pandeli, Eska, Ball and Rahilly (1997), shows a voiceless interdental fricative [\(\theta\)] with a subscript line beneath it indicating retraction of the point of articulation (see IPA chart [revised to 2005] > diacritics, > retracted).

The linguistic objection to this transcription is that it implies the slit t of Irish English is an allophone of /\(\theta\)/ which is wrong. In fact, the dental fricative of many other varieties of English, which is phonologically /\(\theta\)/, is a dental stop in Irish English, i.e. the THIN and THIS lexical sets are generally realised with an initial [t-] and [d-] respectively.

Note: the slit t is not homophonous with s in Irish English, i.e. KIT and KISS are not homophones. The /s/ sound has slightly higher friction than the slit t and is also slightly longer.

References