Possible phonological parallels between Irish and Irish English

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It is standard procedure in all the works on Irish English (= IrE) to attach considerable importance to the influence with the Irish language has had on the emergence of English in Ireland, particularly in the area of phonology. Various authors (Bliss, 1972, 1979; Henry, 1957, 1958; Hogan, 1934; Joyce, 1979 [1910]; Sullivan, 1976 and others) rightly see traces of interference from Irish in IrE. The contention, however, concerns just how and to what extent this influence has been effective. At this point, it may be useful to draw a number of distinctions in order to render statements made in various contexts comparable. Firstly, there is a considerable difference between varieties of IrE found in the 17th and early 18th centuries, viz. in the decisive period for the linguistic Anglification of Ireland, and those spoken today (see Bliss, 1979; Sullivan, 1976). Secondly, one cannot treat present-day IrE as a single unified variety as the diatopic variation which it exhibits is considerable. Thirdly, one must bear in mind the linguistic division of the country. The political division of Ireland into the Republic of Ireland and (the State of) Northern Ireland has not only a political basis but a linguistic one as well. The varieties of English in the North (Northern Ireland and the three border counties Donegal, Monaghan, and Cavan which are politically part of the Republic) are largely based on dialects of Lowland Scotland and the North of England (Adams, 1964; Gregg, 1972) which are quite different from those which form the basis for the English of the Republic of Ireland. A number of largely phonological features renders it possible to draw a fairly clear division between the northern and southern varieties of English in Ireland (see Barry, 1981 for a list and discussion of these features).

In the present paper I intend to examine urban middle-class English, a generalization I use to cover both what Bertz (1975: 78f.) calls General Dublin English and the variety of English used by educated speakers in other urban centres of the Republic. This variety has a general distribution throughout the whole country, nowadays largely owing to its use in radio and television. It is strongly oriented towards Dublin usage and indeed some traits of lower-class Dublin speech are to be found in this supra-regional variety (see comments on the fricativization of alveolar stops below). Urban middle-class English in the south is furthermore well differentiated from the urban varieties of the north of Ireland, and in neither of the two states in Ireland is it considered desirable to emulate the phonological norm of the other. When using the term IrE below I will be referring to the phonological norm of the Republic of Ireland.

The influence of the Irish language is greatest today in those areas in which English is in contact with Irish (see Lunny, 1981). These are not the areas adjacent to the Gaeltacht but the the Irish-speaking areas themselves. However, English is spoken throughout all of these areas and there are practically no examples of purely Irish-speaking districts, with the possible exception of the two minor Aran Islands and Tory Island off the north-west coast of Donegal. If there are traces of Irish influence elsewhere in the Republic then this is not on-going and, if anything, is recessive. The other ‘established feature’ of IrE which accounts for its derivation from StE,
particular non-rhotic forms such as RP, is the late ME and EmodE vowel system which is the basis for that of IrE today (see Bliss, 1979: 198-225 and, for Ulster English, Braidwood, 1964: 46-67 for a treatment of the vowels of the 17th century IrE, where they take the assumed earlier values as their point of departure), and which has been retained almost unchanged, lending considerable conservatism to these varieties of English (Wells, 1982: 418). The conservative vowel system has resulted in a maximal set of contrasts before /r/ as for instance in the difference between the vowels in hoarse /hoːːs/ and horse /hoːːs/.

Despite the fact that the vowel inventory of IrE is largely that of the imported variety of English of the 17th century there are nonetheless aspects of it where one can suspect, if not demonstrate, connections between it and that of Irish.

1. The vowel inventory

In this and the following sections I will not attempt to prove that interference has taken place between Irish and IrE. In fact this is impossible; no matter how likely it may seem that a language A has a certain feature from a language B, with which it is or has been in contact, one cannot prove that interference has taken place. One can at best indicate the probability of interference having occurred (see Hickey (1986) in reply to Lass (1985) where theoretical points of interference theory are discussed). As a matter of procedure I will list those features of IrE which have parallels in Irish and leave it to the reader to decide how great the probability of their having their source as interference phenomena is. Needless to say a comparison between Irish and the varieties of IrE which are at present in contact with Irish would provide the most evidence for interference. But for the present discussion I have chosen to look at urban Southern IrE and so must leave specific comparisons between Irish and contact IrE aside. For features of this latter variety of IrE I refer to Hickey (1984b, Part I).

1.1 Diphthongs

In Irish phonemically long monophthongs show no tendency to diphthongize, thus /eː/ is [eː], /oː/ is [oː], etc. In IrE the equivalents of the RP diphthongs /ei/ and /ou/ are only very slightly diphthongized, if at all: train [treːn] ~ [treːni]; boat [boːt] ~ [boːut].

Furthermore, the inherent diphthongization of long vowels such as is found with phonemic monophthongs like /iː/ (= [ii]) in RP (Gimson, 1980: 102) and /uː/ (= [ou]) Gimson, 1980: 122) has no counterpart in IrE: beat [biːt] boot [buːt]. An exception to this is, however, found in lower class Dublin English where diphthongization of all monophthongs is normal (see Hickey (1984b: 293ff.)).

This situation in IrE would appear to be a matter of conservatism, reflecting an earlier stage of the vowel system of StE. One can hardly appeal to Irish as a source for diphthongization. It is true that if Irish had diphthongization of all long vowels as an inherent feature (like say Swedish), then the inherited situation in IrE would probably not have survived. At best then one can speak of preservative interference: an agreement between some feature of the new language and the original language is unlikely to lead to this phonetic feature being changed. For the influence of Irish on English this is as far as one can go with regard to long vowel realization.

The question as to whether the situation in Ireland is characterized by parallelism as opposed to transfer arises when considering aspects of individual vowels.
1.2 /ʊ/ and /ʌ/

A prominent feature of the vowel phoneme inventory of English is the existence of a back unrounded short vowel which derives from an earlier /u/. It is regarded (Dobson, 1968: 585ff.; Jespersen, 1909: 338ff.; Walsh, 1978: 213f. and 234) as having arisen from the unrounding and subsequent lowering of the short vowel. What is important here is not the sequence but the supposed dating. If one assumes (Dobson, 1968: 586) that it began in the 16th century (or possibly slightly earlier) and was completed, at least in the London area, by the mid-18th century, then it was an on-going process in the areas the settlers came from, or had in fact not properly begun, at the time of the extensive Anglification of the south of Ireland.

Now in Irish there was a parallel development where /ʊ/ was lowered and unrounded to /ʌ/. This fact has been obscured by a lack of treatment of this change in works on the phonetics of Irish. The chief studies of Irish phonetics, starting from ó Cuív (1944: 20 and 22) for the South-West (Muskerry, Co. Cork) through the seminal studies of de Bhaladraite (1945: 14f.; 1953: xx) for Western Irish (Cois Fhlaire, Co. Galway) to the later studies of de Búrca (1958: 14f.) and Mac an Fhailigh (1968: 16 + 18) for Northern Galway and Northern Mayo respectively, all use the transcription /u/ or /o/ for cases of /ʌ/. Following these Bliss unfortunately uses /u/ also (1972: 65), adopting uncritically the statements of the above-mentioned studies of Irish (see Hickey, 1985b for a detailed criticism of these analyses of Irish).

In EModE the unrounding of /ʊ/ did not normally take place after labials and before /ʃ/ or /s/ (= [ʃ]); examples for the retention of /ʊ/ in both these environments are to be found in IrE just as in StE: push [puʃ]; bush [buʃ].

In Irish /ʊ/ has been retained between velar consonants at least as an optional variant of /ʌ/: muc [maʃk] ~ [muk] ‘pig’.

There is no possibility of dating this change in Irish because there were no attempts to indicate it orthographically nor were there any contemporary orthoepists whose statements might be used for determining the beginning and course of this change.

The remarkable fact for present-day Irish (Western and Southern at least) is that the realization of IrE and Irish /ʌ/ are exactly the same, as in: rud /rʌd/ = [rʌd] ‘thing’; cut /kʌt/ = [kʌt]. In both cases /ʌ/ is realized as a slightly centralised short back unrounded half-open vowel.

1.3 Back and central vowels

The position of /ʌ/ within the phoneme system of vowels in Irish needs to be considered a little more closely before looking at the development of other vowels in IrE. The system of back and central long and short vowels in Irish is as follows: long: /uː/, /oː/, /ʊː/; short: /ʌ/, /a/ (/a/).

The schwa vowel only occurs in unstressed syllables and so can be left out of the present discussion. What is noticeable with the vowel system just presented is that there is no /ɔː/ and no /ɔ/. The original /ɔ/ has fallen together with /ʌ/ as /ʌ/. This can be seen from toponomastic evidence: the name of the city of Cork has /ɔ/, which reflects
the Irish /ɔ/ of Corcaigh before its development into /ʌ/ (the present pronunciation is /kɔɾki:/ from a (much) earlier /kɔɾki/).

Now granting substitution of Irish vowels to have been a possibility in all cases except those where there were environmentally-conditioned realizations, e.g. /ɔː/ and /oː/ before /r/, the question then arises, what substitution would the Irish have made for /ɔ/ and /oː/? An answer to this must take account of the fact that in Irish as in English there is a phonemic distinction in vowel length so that the substitution of /ɔː/ by a phonemic short vowel or /ɔ/ by a long one is unlikely.2

Returning to the question above one can assume, given the inventory presented above, that the substitution would be as follows: /ɔ/ → /a/; /ɔː/ → /oː/.

I have neglected the possibility of /ɔ/ having been substituted by /ʌ/. For this one can offer two (related) reasons. Firstly, /ʌ/ is out on its own in the phoneme inventory of Irish, it is phonologically a ‘marked’ element (as roundness with back vowels is marked if it has a negative value, see Chomsky and Halle, 1968: 408f.). Secondly, /a/ and /ʌ/ in Irish pair as phonemes, being low vowels, and if a substitution of vowels occurs then it is more natural for one pair (/a/, /ʌ:/) to be substituted for another pair (/o/, /ɔ/). Thus the scheme above is phonologically more natural than the following: /ɔ/ → /ʌ/; /ɔː/ → /oː/.

Two other facts must be borne in mind here. The low central phoneme /a/ in Irish has a front and central allophone as in fear [fæ:r] ‘man’; ba [ba:] ‘cows’. The distribution here is determined by the quality of the preceding consonant: after palatal consonants one has the front allophone and after velars the central one. There is no back allophone of /a/ in Irish (except in the extreme South-West, see Ó Cuív, 1944: 18f.). Secondly the short phoneme /a/ tends to be realized as long, at least today in Western dialects, such as that of Cois Fhairre (de Bhaldraithe, 1945: 13) so that the distinction between /a/ and /ʌ:/ is one of front/central versus back quality rather than of quantity.

One may now ask whether the substitutions represented in the scheme /ɔ/ → /ʌ/; /ɔː/ → /oː/ and commented on above have actually taken place. The most general situation is the following one: /ɔː/ → /oː/, caught [kɔtː]; /ɔ/ → /o/, cot [kɔt]. This is complemented by the following distribution of StE (i.e. RP) low vowels.

1.4 Low vowels

In the area of low vowels IrE does not differ very radically from RP. The long and short vowels of these two varieties respectively are: /æ/ → [æ], flat [flæt]; /a:/ → [a:], last [laːst].

It is difficult to regard the above substitutions as having arisen from phoneme substitution from Irish, as it has neither /a/ nor /o/. Unless one regards the substitution of Irish /ɔ:/ for English /ɔː/, which involved lowering, as having also caused the lowering of /ɔ/ to /o/.

One aspect of vowel realizations in IrE which it does have in common with Irish is a fourway distinction among open vowels, which can be seen by viewing the vowels in IrE caught, cot, flat, last. But this fact may just be a parallel between the two languages. One should be careful about assuming that resemblances among languages are due to interference from one to the other. A case in point is presented by French and German which are geographically contiguously and which both have front rounded
vowels but obviously from different sources. The same is true of German and Hungarian which border on each other in a much smaller area but which also share front rounded vowels and are alone in central-eastern Europe in doing so. These are obvious cases of parallel situations due to the separate developments.

1.4.1 Diachronic considerations

By considering the IrE vowel system as a largely independent development, in Ireland, of that of EModE one arrives at a more natural system of low vowels.

Consider first of all the case of /ɔː/. This vowel arose from ME /au/ (and /a/ before /r/), which by the early 17th century (Dobson, 1968: 786ff.; Wehna, 1978: 219ff.; Jespersen, 1909: 110ff.; Ekwall, 1975: 20) had assumed the value /oː/. It was later raised to /oː/ and coalesced with ME /ɔ/, /ɔː/, /oː/, and even /uː/, before /t/ to give RP /ɔː/ which is the only present-day realization of the vowels from these sources (Gimson, 1980: 118). In view of the conservative nature of IrE, it is natural to assume that it retained the value for ME /au/ which this had in the 17th century. This would establish /ɔː/ as the equivalent of ModE /oː/ in Ireland without any appeal to the vowel system of Irish. By the 17th century the identification and pairing of ME (short) /ɔ/ with the (long) vowel which arose from ME /au/ is evident (see Dobson, 1968: 576ff. for support of this view) to the exclusion of ME /oː/ which, as part of the Great Vowel Shift, had been raised to /oː/. What this suggests is that ME /ɔ/ had been lowered somewhat to /n/ and, importantly, was now paired with the monophthong /ɔː/ from earlier /au/. One can safely assume then that the later long-short vowel phoneme pair /ɔː/ and /ɔ/ had lower and more open values in the 17th century, a hypothesis which agrees with IrE usage to this day.

1.4.2 Lengthening of /æ/

Turning to the low central vowels, one is faced with a somewhat complex situation. To begin with take StE /ɑː/ as it developed from the sequence /a/ + /t/ (Dobson, 1968: 517ff.). Here IrE also has an /ɑː/ vowel but with the /t/ retained as in barn [bɑːn] which shows the lengthening of ME /a/ before /t/ and the latter’s retracting influence. Here StE and IrE are parallel except for the maintenance of the /t/.

The lengthening of 17th-century /æ/ before voiceless fricatives led to a long central vowel /aː/ which is to be seen in IrE: path [paːt]; glass [ɡlaːs]; staff [staːf]. This lengthened /aː/ is not, however, characteristic of all varieties of urban IrE but merely of the supra-regional middle-class variety which is taken as a point of departure for the present article. In lower-class Dublin English the /aː/ vowel from an earlier /a/ before a voiceless fricative exists, but only because Dublin English has a general process of lengthening of low vowels (Hickey, 1984b: 331ff.). In the remaining (lower-class) urban dialects of the south there is no such phonological process and the original short /a/ before voiceless fricatives is still to be heard, cf. Cork and Waterford pronunciations such as bath [bæt], glass [ɡlæs].

The long low vowel as seen in cast [kɑːst] for example is also found as the reflex of ME /au/ before nasals; this was monophthongized and retracted to /aː/ in StE (Ekwall, 1975: 25ff.) as in branch [braːŋ]; aunt [aːnt] and in those cases where it occurs before an [i] which was lost as in half [haːf].
1.4.3 Retraction of /a/

Where ME has undergone a phonotactically conditioned shift (usually retraction), IrE also has this shift in accordance with the principle that it has undergone all the conditioned shifts since the 17th century or those which had been established by then. There are two specific instances here. The first one involved the vocalization of [ɪ] to [u] in the 15th century (Dobson, 1968: 553), which was a shift established before the widespread Anglification of Ireland in the 17th century. There is no question of any dialectal remains of velar [ɪ] which then later vocalized as nowhere in Ireland is a velar [ɪ] to be found; therefore developments such as /mɪlk/ → /muːk/ characteristic of some dialects of BrE with syllable-final velar [ɪ] do not occur: talk [tɒ:k]; all [ɒ:l].

The vowel in both the above forms is what one expects as the outcome of ME /a/ plus [ɪ] which later coalesced with late ME /au/ and shared the development of this to /ʊ:/ in the 17th century, giving present-day IrE /ʊ:/ as in caught above.

According to orthoepic evidence (Dobson, 1968: 716ff.) labials began to have a rounding influence on low central vowels in the mid-17th century, a development which is definitively recorded in the latter half of the century. This labialization has continued within IrE to yield the same result as in StE. The actual realization of post-labial vowels from earlier /a/ is the same as the context-free realization of /ʊ:/ and /o/ given above: want [wɒnt]; war [wɔːr]; warm [wɔːrm]. The lack of this shift before velars (Dobson, 1968: 717) is also attested in IrE: wag /wæg/, wax /waeks/.

The retraction of low central vowels after labials is something which is attested for a number of languages, such as Hungarian, where the /a/ → /ɔ/ shift is a result of the labialization of short vowels (Benkő/Imre, 1972: 62ff.) or Swedish where Old Swedish /aː/ developed into /ɑː:/ and later to /oː:/ (Eliasson, 1986) initiating the Central Scandinavian Sound Shift. Thus it is not justified for Bliss to maintain that Irish influence (Bliss, 1979: 211) was operative in the development of ME /a/ to /ɑː:/ in a form such as wars /waːrz/ in the IrE text he discusses. One should add that IrE /r/ has a distinct velar quality (Wells, 1982: 431ff.) which would have added to the tendency to retract /a/ to /ɑː:/.

Again parallels to this are found in other languages, for example in Dutch where short /a/ has been retracted to /a/ probably due to the retracting influence of velarized [ɪ] and [n] (cf. Holland [hɔlənd]), this retracted vowel then spreading by analogy (Hickey, 1985c).

The point here is that there is an essential difference between similarities postulated as due to transfer and those which can be accounted for by reference to natural phonetic processes such as rounding of vowels after labials, retraction after velarized consonants, etc. The difficulty is with those phenomena which can be explained by reference to both of these factors. This is the case with Irish /ɑː:/, the long vowel which Bliss postulates to have existed in earlier contact IrE. It is not possible to decide however which of these factors (transfer or coarticulation) is responsible, or indeed whether both are. But one can adopt the standpoint that those phenomena which can be due either to interference or to natural phonetic processes are to be accorded correspondingly little importance when the interference hypothesis is considered. The reason for this is that, because one cannot prove interference to have occurred, the likelihood of interference being a source for a given phenomenon is drastically diminished when this phenomena is also probable due to its being phonetically natural.
Returning to post-labial vowels from earlier /a/, one sees that the vowels it illustrates have a different phonemic affiliation from those of the forms of path and branch above. It would seem most appropriate to regard them as belonging to the context-free /o:/ and to view the /a:/ as the long low vowel phoneme in IrE. This would leave one with a retracted velar variant before /r/ as in car [ka:ɾ] and card [ka:ɾd]. The tendency of the velar IrE /r/ to retract and close vowel realization can be seen in the closed allophone of /o:/ before /r/, so that there are two parallel cases, namely /a:/ → [d:] and /o:/ → [dː:].

Note that this shift also preserved a perceptible degree of articulatory difference between both vowels before /r/. If one only had retraction with /a:/, then words like lard and lord would have pronunciations which only differ in the roundness of the vowels (/laːrd/ versus /lɔːrd/) which would be tantamount to a phonetic merger as mere roundness with low back vowels is scarcely perceptible. One should remark here that IrE, in sharp contrast to RP, does not have any of the homophony of the latter which has arisen later than the Great Vowel Shift. This is due in all cases to the retention of /r/ and the maintenance of a maximal differentiation of vowel quality before /r/ in IrE.

1.5. Differences among varieties of IrE

1.5.1 Unrounding of /ɔː/

The variety of IrE for which the preceding comments are valid is that which I take to be characteristic of urban middle-class English in Ireland. But within this narrow framework one must distinguish varieties with differing features. I wish to turn my attention briefly to two of the latter as they are relevant to the discussion here. The first feature to be discussed can, however, be taken to lie just outside the framework set, though the second is firmly within it.

In colloquial Cork English there is a tendency to unround and front /ɔː/ and /ɔː:/ in a not unsimilar way to that in which it has occurred in large parts of AmE (for a brief comment see Cassidy, 1982: 203 and, for fuller comments, Wells, 1982: 473ff.). This unrounding has in fact caused a merger at one point; consider the following forms: Cork [kɑːk]; park [pɑːk]. A similar unrounding is found in parts of Northern Ireland and as a consequence in sections of the Republic in the immediate border area.

As a general rule for the educated Irish the lack of retraction of /aː/ before (r/) is stigmatized as socially unacceptable. The unrounding and fronting of /ɔː:/ is regarded as a feature of Cork and this fact is often recognized by using the pronunciation of the city’s name with /a/ when referring to it. Where the unrounding alone takes place, forms with /ɔː/ and /aː/ are kept apart before /r/ by an absence of fronting for those with /ɔː:/ so that words like born /bɔːrn/ and barn /bɑːrn/ are not homophones.

The position with the unconditioned vowel realizations is a little different, as /aː/ is always realized as quite a forward vowel with /ɔː:/ midway between [ɑː] and [ɒː:]. This means the phonemic distinction between lost [lɔːst] and last [lɑːst] is maintained.

When considering transfer from Irish as a source for this feature, one is confronted with the familiar difficulty sketched above. /ɔː/ → /a/ could be the result of transfer from Irish. Henry (1957: 26) registered the realization [a] for StE /ɔː/, Hickey has [æː] for /ɔː/ in Inis Meáin Irish loan-words from English (/æː:/ is the low vowel phoneme in this dialect, Hickey, 1982: 141). The Irish of (West) Cork county, however,
has both /a/ and /á/ (Ó Cuív, 1944: 17ff.), the latter only occurring in a velar environment. Of course Cork has not been Irish-speaking for centuries so one cannot say what the constellation of open vowels was like at the time of the existence of contact English in Cork. But going on the West Cork Irish vowel system there would have been an /a/ vowel which could have been used for English /o/ (assuming a velar interpretation of the flanking consonants of English words by contact English speakers). This would not explain the fronting of /o/ to /a/. Furthermore the vowel length distinction found in present-day Cork Irish tends to be lost for open vowels on colloquial Cork speech.

If anything these facts go to show that, for many varieties (particularly urban varieties) of present-day IrE, postulating interference as a source of many phenomena proves to be far too tenuous and speculative for lack of firm evidence. An additional complication is that EModE pronunciation frequently shows the feature under consideration. For the matter at hand one sees that 16th- and 17th-century English had a tendency to lower ME /o/ and front it to /a/ (Dobson, 1968: 578) so that a definitive account in terms of contact or conservatism is impossible.

1.5.2 Raising of /o:/

The second phenomenon to be remarked on here is in fact the reverse of that just considered. Among educated young speakers in Dublin there is a tendency to close the /o:/ vowel much as in StE, but with no loss of /r/, so that instances of /o:r/ and /o:r/, which form such a prominent aspect of the IrE vowel system, may be very nearly if not entirely neutralized with the raising /o:r/ to [oːr] as in for [foːr] and four [foːr] (Bertz, 1975: 100).

This raising also applies to non-rhotic contexts, but there the slight diphthongization of long half-closed vowels keeps it clearly apart from the close realization of /o:/, cf. caught [koːt] and coat [ko:ut].

1.6 Substandard features of urban varieties of IrE

Before concluding this section on vowels, I should like to look at a number of aspects of IrE which are slightly substandard (again assuming ‘urban middle class’ to be the standard here). The first can definitely be excluded from any changes which might be traced back to Irish influence.

1.6.1 Absent shifts: /u/ and long front vowels

In popular Dublin English there is usually no /ʌ/ sound (unless by approximation to middle-class speech) so that late ME/EModE /u/ remains unsplit as in the popular pronunciation [dublɪn] and a large range of other forms.

Again also in popular Dublin speech not all instances of StE /i:/ have correspondences with /iː/. Notably ME /e:/ is retained, cf. beat [beːt] and meat [meːt] while /eː/ is also found with the earlier value: street [stɛːt] and sheet [ʃeːt].

There is frequently confusion between [ɛː] and [ɛː] and for many speakers; [ɛː] is the only vowel possible on forms which did not undergo the Great Vowel Shift. It
would then seem that there is a sociolectal difference between [ɛː] and [eː] quite apart from that between both of them and [iː]. To speak of Dublin speech forms as not having undergone the Great Vowel Shift is perhaps a rather strange way of putting it, especially if it is taken to suggest that the Great Vowel shift was operative in Ireland. This may not in fact have been the case, as Dublin was one of the few areas of Ireland which had been Anglicized in the later ME period so that the values of the vowels given above along with the absence of the split of /u/ could well be archaic features from what was called in Ireland the ‘Old English’ period (i.e. before the Elizabethan era when the English aristocracy in Ireland was Catholic). The influence of Irish cannot be shown here for two main reasons. Firstly, Irish has not been spoken in Dublin (as the first language of the city’s population) for centuries. Secondly, Irish has itself a split of /u/ (or rather a shift, see remarks above) and has no /eː/ vowel phoneme so that its influence on Dublin speech in these respects cannot be uncritically assumed. Of course one does not know what the vowel system of the variety of Irish was which was last spoken in Dublin so that the possibility of the retention of /u/ and the presence of /eː/ cannot be excluded. However the fact that English had both /u/ (to the exclusion of /a/) and /eː/ would suggest English rather than Irish as a source of these vowels in Dublin English.

1.6.2 Short vowel contrast before tautosyllabic /r/

The second set of peculiarities of vowel realization is as follows. Firstly the maintenance in non-standard IrE (both rural and lower-class urban varieties) of a distinction between /ʌ/ and /e/ before /r/. Normally IrE like StE has only one realization of the set of sequences from pre-18th century English which consisted of /e/ + /r/, /i/ + /r/ and /ɒ/ + /r/. While /e/ and /ɪ/ lost their distinctiveness in pre-rhotic, tautosyllabic positions, the basic distinction back ~ front was maintained in forms such as the following: *fern* [fərn], General IrE [fərn]; *turn* [taːn], General IrE [tərn].

The /ɒ/ of the second word just quoted has been shifted to /ʌ/ but not centralized to /ə/. Equally ME /e/ has been retained before /r/. Both these pronunciations are stigmatized as rural or lower-class urban (particularly when combined with epenthesis, see below). Their survival into present-day IrE may have been supported by the essential distinction between front and back articulation of short vowels on Irish. What is more, in Irish the vowels /e/ and /ʌ/ morphonemically alternate with each other so that a merger of the two would, for the Irish speaker, be tantamount to the neutralization of a morphological contrast, as in: *cúir* /kər/ ‘put’; (ag) *cur* /kər/ ‘putting’.

1.6.3 Centralization of diphthongs

The vowels which are of concern here are /aɪ/ and /au/. In rural pronunciations, the starting point for these diphthongs is in the region of schwa, giving for example: *die* [dəɪ] and *down* [daʊn].

The diphthong /aɪ/ is found in Irish also, for example in the South-West (Kerry and rural Cork, Ó Cuív, 1944: 27); Ó Cuív has a more complicated system for Irish than occurs in IrE with not only /aɪ/ but also /æɪ/, /aʊ/ (but no /əʊ/); these are also
found in the Irish of Waterford (along with [ɔu], see Breatnach, 1947: 23ff.); in Western Irish (except for Cois Flairrge, see de Bhaldraithe, 1945: 23ff. who only has [ai] and [ɑu]), see de Búrca (1958: 20f.); and in northern Western Irish, see Mac an Fhailigh (1968: 22ff.). Wagner also mentions [æt] (1979: 69) and [ɑʊ] (1979: 54) for Donegal Irish which is in the Ulster area from the point of view of its English dialect grouping. [æt] (along with [ai], however) is also characteristic of Scotch Irish in Ulster (see Gregg, 1964: 165). The ubiquity of raised and centralized diphthongs in Irish might suggest that the rural IrE varieties which have these may have them as the result of Irish influence. Equally they could be a conservative characteristic of the 17th century IrE. After all ME /i:/ underwent the shift to [ɜi] and [ʊi] as part of the Great Vowel Shift and has the latter value for the 17th century (Dobson, 1968: 661). It is fairly certain that the diphthongization of ME /i:/ involved the centralization of the beginning of the vowel to [æt], for otherwise if this was lowered to [ɛt] and [ɑʊ] on the way to [æt], later [æt], then it would have merged with ME /ai/ which was being raised through [ɛt] and [ɛt] to [ɛt] as Dobson rightly points out (Dobson, 1968: 660). Thus whether present-day rural IrE [æt] and [ɑʊ] are the result of conservatism or interference is a matter which can scarcely be decided. Again it may well just be a case of parallelism.

1.6.4 Vowel epenthesis

The last aspect of the vowel system of IrE to be treated would appear to be a definite contact phenomenon, albeit a rather low-level one. In Irish there is a very rigid system of vowel epenthesis (for details of this, see Hickey, 1985c) whereby a vowel is inserted between consonants which cannot form a (final) cluster within a single syllable. The unacceptable clusters are ordered, starting with a sonorant and a sonorant and continuing on a descending sonority scale to a sonorant and a voiced stop. In IrE only the top of this scale has epenthesis, that is, only occurs between sonorants (which are heterorganic): film [film]; arm [æɾm]; burn [bʌɾn].

But even this group needs to be graded. The epenthesis between /l/ and a following sonorant is found everywhere in IrE. Because of the phonological structure of actual English words this sonorant is only represented by /u/: where /u/ is the sonorant it is homorganic with /l/ and so the condition for epenthesis is not met (cf. kiln [kɪln]), and where it is /ŋ/ there is always an unstressed vowel before it in StE (and a morpheme boundary after the /l/ e.g. in spilling /spɪlŋ/). The remaining sonorant /r/ is homorganic with /l/ and anyway never occurs without a preceding unstressed vowel either (e.g. miller [mɪlɐr]).

The forms in arm and barn sow the two possibilities of post-/r/ epenthesis. The first, where the /r/ and the following sonorant are not homorganic, is relatively common. The second is socially stigmatized and regarded as characteristic of rural speech. /r/ is the only sonorant which may have an epenthetic vowel between it and a following homorganic sonorant. Note that where epenthesis is present for this type of cluster there is also a retracted realization of general IrE /ʌ/, deriving from an earlier /u/. Equally the opposition to a front vowel is usually maintained where there is epenthesis, cf. girl [gɜrl] and fern [fɛɾn], these phenomena acting together as characteristic of uneducated rural IrE, particularly of the West and South-West.
2. **Consonants**

In the area of consonants the influence of Irish, if any, is slighter than in that of vowels. The possibilities of influence are, in all cases but two, preservative.

2.1.1 **/r/**

IrE along with other non-southern BrE dialects has maintained pre-consonantal and post-vocalic /r/ which is also found in Irish in these positions. Furthermore the allophones of /r/ are similar in both languages, that is they are frictionless continuants. In other positions there are different allophones: for example, post-consonantly Irish frequently has a flap allophone of /r/ as in bron [bro:n] ‘sorrow’. If it is the case that the Irish substituted one of the /r/ phonemes for English /r/, then it is the velar phoneme that was used for this; the palatal /r̩/ of Irish is never found in IrE.

2.1.2 **Allophones of /l/**

Of the two allophones of /l/ common to RP only the alveolar /l/ is found in urban Southern IrE. In the Republic of Ireland the velarization of /l/ is not to be found. There are three conceivable exceptions to this statement: (i) those cases where speakers have deliberately adopted RP or something close to it, (ii) those varieties of IrE which are spoken near the border with Northern Ireland and which may have a velarized [H] from the Scotch Irish based varieties north of the border, (iii) those varieties which are spoken in actual contact areas where the velar /H/ phoneme of Irish is used in some cases. The latter situation is a special one, however, as it is characterized by phoneme substitution alone, as shown in Hickey (1982: 153) for English loan-words in Irish.

2.1.3 **/h/**

A preservative influence of Irish may have been operative in two other instances. The first is that of /h/ which is not dropped in any variety of IrE. As with velarized [H] there is a conceivable exception to this. In contact areas /h/ may be dropped in initial position as an Irish speaker would not expect it in this position (usually Irish only has /h/ as the result of a sandhi process which does not occur in absolute initial position, see de Bhaldraithe, 1953: 289ff.). In fact its distribution can be seen to be more extensive than in StE (Wells, 1982: 432f.) if one allows the Anglicized forms of Irish place and personal names as evidence, these having medial and final /h/: Neenagh /niːnaːh/, Clogher /klɒhr/ (place names); Cahy /kæhiː/ (personal name).

2.1.4 **/w/**

The second instance concerns the voiceless labio-velar fricative, which is maintained in the entire IrE area and can be seen contrasting with /w/ (see Hickey, 1984c) in a minimal pair like which [wɪtʃ] \(\neq\) witch [wɪtʃ].

The most obvious reasons for the survival of [ʍ] would be that the voiced/voiceless distinction is central to the consonant inventory of English anyway,
having for instance maintained the distinction between /θ/ and /ð/ although the functional load of the latter is minimal. But this fact has not prevented the merger of [w] and [v] in RP to give the voiced phoneme alone. A case could perhaps be made for [w] having been maintained as a result of the existence (allophonically) of [f] in Irish which, bar velar friction, is the same as [w]. Certainly the equivalence of the two sounds could be supported by onomastic evidence where Irish /v/ (→ [f]) is represented as [w] in Anglicized forms of Irish names, cf. Ó Faoláin → Wheelan (Bliss, 1979: 229; 1983: 15). It is quite natural that the non-palatal /f/ of Irish should be used as the equivalent, in loan word phonology, of [w] as well. The equivalence can be seen with loan words such as fuip [fju:p] (→ whip) and faoitín [fau:itín] (→ whiting) (Bliss, 1979: 229; 1983: 15). Here the [f] corresponds to the voicelessness and labiality of [w] and the velar glide [u] after it to the velar element in [w]. But the preservative influence which Irish non-palatal /f/ might have had on the retention of [w] in IrE would have been removed with the reduction in the area of contact English in Ireland. A more natural explanation for the retention of [w] is a phonological one. [f] can be shown to consist phonologically (Hickey, 1984c) of a sequence /hw/. Its existence in IrE would match that of /hj/ as in huge /hju:d/ (phonetically [cu:d]). With phonetic [w] a variety of English then has a balance in the phonotactic distribution of phonemes: not only do vowels and /j/ occur after /h/ but /w/ also, that is all vowels (Gimson, 1980: 240) and both semi-vowels occur after /h/.

2.2.1 Ambidental fricatives

The realization of ambidental fricatives in IrE offers somewhat sounder evidence for the interference hypothesis. They are usually realized as dental stops in initial position. Medially and finally they may alternate with fricatives, as in think [tʃɪŋk]; pithy [pɪθi]; teeth [tiːt] ~ [tiːθ].

Now for contact English (Henry, 1957: 55ff.) only stops are found. In Irish there are no alveolar, only dental stops so that the fortition of RP /θ/ and /ð/ to /t/ and /d/ may well have been due to transfer. This view is supported by the following fact. Before /r/ in contact English StE /t/ appears as [t] as in water [wɔ:tə] and drink [drɪŋk]. The /t/ is furthermore realized as a trill ([r]). Now what is of interest here is the dental realization of /t/. No phonetically natural process would dentalize /t/ before /r/, nor can conservatism be appealed to account for this. But looking at Henry’s description of contact English (1957: 55ff.) (in fact a fairly recently Anglicized area in North Roscommon), one sees that dental stops are found for all realizations of ambidental fricatives and before /r/, irrespective of whether the sound in RP is an alveolar stop or an ambidental fricative (e.g. in weather [ˈweðər]). In other positions, except before /r/, the alveolar stops of RP have an alveolar articulation in this dialect. What this suggests is that originally both alveolar stops and ambidental fricatives of English were realized as dentals and that later alveolars were given an alveolar articulation with the progressive distancing of IrE from Irish except where they were followed by /r/. Here /r/ exercised a conservative influence (as it did for vowels which preceded it, see above) so that the original dental realization (a transfer phenomenon) was retained for this phonotactic environment. This distribution of [t] and [d] is found
not only in contact English or rural IrE but also in colloquial Dublin, for example, something which bears witness to the early appearance of this phenomenon in IrE.

2.2.2. Fricativization of alveolar stops

The last phenomenon I wish to discuss is difficult to locate in terms of its genesis. Consider first its manifestation in words like *tit* [tɪt]; *trout* [traʊt]; *tart* [taːt]; *Italy* ['ɪtli]; *Italian* ['ɪtliən]; *mad* [mæd]; *madder* [mædə].

What one is dealing with here is the fricativization of alveolar stops in a post-stress, intervocalic or postvocalic/final position. The fricatives which result from this process are exactly the same as the stops from which they derive except for their being continuant so that [t̚] is a voiceless apico-alveolar fricative and [d̚] a voiced one (the symbols are my own as the IPA does not have appropriate ones to represent this articulation, see Hickey, 1984a for a discussion of the transcription offered here). This development has no parallel in any dialect of English and there is no indication that the variety of English brought to Ireland and disseminated in the 17th century had it either. Of course the difficulty here is that the orthography of English obviously makes no provision for representing such fricativization. Bliss in his study of 17th- and early 18th-century texts, which were supposed to represent IrE (or rather to parody it), does not mention this phenomenon at all, not even to say that there is no evidence of it. And yet in present-day IrE this is the most widespread feature in the entire Republic, apart from post-vocalic/pre-consonantal /r/ and syllable-final alveolar /l/.

For the issue at hand the question is whether, as Wells (1982: 429f.) suggests, this is an example of lenition which would then be an instance of interference from Irish, a carrying over of a phonological process. Two minor facts may support an interference hypothesis.

Firstly, intervocalic /t/ in IrE (though not /d/) may at times be reduced beyond [t] to [h] as in *matter* [ma̞tər] ~ [mæhər]. This is something which is common in popular urban speech, particularly on the East coast. Now here the reduction arrived at is identical with the lenited form of /t/ in Irish (see below). Its frequency however is far less than that of the [t̚] allophone which is more extensive in its diatopic distribution and above all in its presence in lento speech style, something which is not possible for [h].

Secondly, as mentioned above, the ambidental fricatives in IrE are realized as dental stops. In Irish coronal stops are also dental so that there is a parallel here, as mentioned above. However, if one sees the realization of ambidental fricatives as an interference phenomenon then one could also maintain that the realization of alveolar stops was subject to interference and that the fricativization of /t/ and /d/ in a position between continuant segments and after stress is a correlate of lenition in Irish.

There are, however, at least three difficulties with such a view. The first is that lenition no longer acts as a natural process in Irish but has largely been denaturalized and is now determined (and had been by the 17th century) by morphological factors, i.e. by the necessity to indicate grammatical categories. The second is that the lenited forms of /t/ and /d/ in Irish are not [t̚] and [d̚] but [h] and [ɣ] respectively, and thirdly, lenition (if /t/ → [t] and /d/ → [d] is lenition) is nowhere else to be found in IrE, whereas in Irish lenition affects all independent phonemes. Unless it can be shown that the English dialects of the 17th century which formed the basis of then contemporary IrE also had this fricativization, then one must assume that its development is neither the result of
conservatism nor of interference, but an independent phenomenon peculiar to Southern Ireland and by extension to parts of South Ulster.

Notes

1) When examining the vowel systems of either Southern IrE or Northern IrE, all authors take as their point of departure the vowel system of middle class London, which leads more or less directly to the RP of today, and neglect all other dialects of English. This procedure is problematic as the comparison is then between two varieties of English (Southern/Northern Irish and Elizabethan London English) which have little or nothing to do with each other, especially as in Ireland (both North and South) the variety which developed out of Elizabethan London English (in its phonological aspects) does not enjoy the status of a present-day standard. But because of the lack of extensive descriptions of other varieties of EModE one must be content with comparing varieties of IrE with East Midland (i.e. London) English while nonetheless remaining aware of the pitfalls inherent in such comparisons.

2) Bliss demonstrates this fact in more places than one and uses unsubstantiated views on the vowel system of Irish in order to back up his postulations about that of 17th-century IrE. For example he maintains that ‘there may be random (sic!) variation in the realization of short vowels phonemes between consonants of unlike quality’ (1979: 251). In Hickey (1985b) I have gone to some lengths to show that this is untrue; the variation is in fact eminently predictable.

3) In fact /a/ was probably lengthened earlier than the end of the 17th century when the lengthening is first firmly recognized (see Dobson, 1968: 525 and 527 for this view). Thus one can take it that it was present in IrE in the early 17th century.

4) Although this statement is true, two common forms have pronunciations which can be most easily explained by assuming a velar [l]: old [aul], bold [baul] (there also exist normal pronunciations as [o:ld] and [bol:d] as well). But as these are the only forms with diphthongization before /l/ and as they are bound to an affective use of these words, they can hardly be offered as evidence that [l] was generally found in IrE previously.

5) The actual realization of this diphthong (and that of [u] for those dialects with this) is, as with all vowels in Irish, dependent to some extent on the palatal or non-palatal quality of the consonant (if any) preceding it. This is commented on by all the authors quoted below. As adjustment to the preceding consonants is automatic the variations in diphthong realization would be irrelevant to substitution in IrE if one assumes that this took place.

6) Bliss has devoted an article to this sound (Bliss, 1983). The difficulty with this treatment is that he is inaccurate with regard to phonetic realization. For example he regards [hw] as a possible phonetic sequence and describes [w] inaccurately (Bliss 1983: 15). Additionally, he postulates a phonological distinction between /w/ and /hw/ which is untenable. In Hickey (1984c) I offer a fuller criticism of this standpoint.

7) It is represented orthographically in Sean O’Casey’s plays as th and dh when he depicts lower-class Dublin speech at the beginning of the century, and is commented on by various authors, cf. Joyce (1979 [1910]: 2) who also notes its distribution.

8) English has been spoken in Dublin since the late Middle Ages. The de-Anglification which set in in large parts of the country with the resurgent Gaelicism of the late 16th century did not succeed in eliminating English from the capital so that the phenomenon under discussion here could be of a very old date indeed.
References


