An assessment of language contact in the development of Irish English

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1 Introduction

Accounting for unexpected features of extraterritorial varieties of English is a task which automatically involves assessing the role of contact and conservatism and the interplay of these two factors. In addition, other independent developments, which cannot be satisfactorily traced to either of the two elements just mentioned, must also be considered. The differences of opinion arise in the evaluation of possible causes for the features registered for a particular variety. The purpose of the present study is to present an objectively stated and soundly based case for attributing contact a central role in the development of Irish English. Care should be taken to note that the concern in the present paper is with the origin of features of Irish English and not with their further development in latter-day non-contact situations (see Kallen, 1986, 1989 for recent ramifications of original contact phenomena).

It may well be asked if such a plea for the importance of contact is necessary in the first place. The present state of research, however, demands that the balance which has been tipped against contact as a source of marked features be redressed somewhat. What one has at the moment is a common situation in any branch of linguistics. A recent group of authors introduce their contributions to the field with a negative review of all work up to the present, with the implication that their studies contain the only real insights in the field.

Given the fact that there has been considerable expansion (to use a less euphoric term than progress) in the area of linguistics in recent decades, any author engaged in a particular field will naturally have a more varied reservoir of research to draw on and will have been in contact with a wider range of directions within linguistics than a former colleague writing in a period in which the field was much more constrained. The critical assessment of past research which is carried out in such situations has inherent dangers, the most serious of which is that one frequently throws out the child with the bathwater, so to speak. Above all, criticism of previous research tends to confuse obsolete terminology with lack of linguistic insight. In many instances re-phrasing leads to a recognition of the relevance of former work and would often avoid cases of reinventing the wheel.

But even in instances where criticism is justified, caution is called for not to reject a hypothesis because it has been unsatisfactorily argued for and presented in the past. Applying this to the matter at hand, one can note that much criticism of the contact hypothesis with regard to the genesis of Irish English involves wholesale rejection of the standpoint on the grounds of its insufficient treatment in earlier work. In fact, the contact hypothesis is frequently dismissed off-hand by such authors as Harris (1991a:191; 1991b:46) and Kallen (1989:10) as being ‘anecdotal’ or ‘non-committal’, to use
much-laboured epithets, without their scrutinizing it closely to see whether the contact position per se has explanatory value or not.

1.1 The treatment of Irish and varieties of Irish English

An added complication in the objective assessment of the contact hypothesis is that more recent authors who have been involved in Irish English would appear not to have the necessary knowledge of Irish and tend to shy away from a comprehensive evaluation of possible Irish source structures for syntactic features of Irish English. Kallen (1991:61), when considering the origin of perfective constructions with after (more on which below), simply makes a vague reference to language contact in previous centuries without following up the matter any further. Yet another complication is the deliberate ignoring of differences between southern and northern Irish English. Harris repeatedly talks of Hiberno-English (i.e. Irish English) when in fact he means northern Irish English. Indeed in one study (Harris, 1987:272) he takes Mid Ulster English as a representative of Irish English; this is a very restricted variety, spoken by at most a few percent of the entire population of both parts of the country. It may be understandable that a linguist wishes his work to appear to have a larger scope than is in fact the case, but by refusing to distinguish between the two major variety groups of English on the island of Ireland, Harris makes himself guilty of the type of underdifferentiation for which he reproaches others.

Southern and northern Irish English are quite distinct variety groups of English. The latter is to be found in the state of Northern Ireland and in the adjoining counties in the province of Ulster. The former in the remainder of the country, i.e. in all counties south of a curve from Sligo through Longford to Louth. In the phonology of the north and south there are a number of features which clearly differentiate the two groups from each other. For instance, the retroflex /r/ which is characteristic of large parts of the North, the lowering of short front high vowels and its intonational patterns are not to be found in the south. Contrariwise, the lenition of the stops /t/ and /d/ in phonetically weak positions (between vowels and word finally, see below), which is such a marked feature of southern Irish English, is only found in the Republic. Historically, these differences can be explained in terms of the parts of mainland Britain from which the immigrants to Ireland came (basically lowland Scotland for the north; the West Midlands and the Mid North for the south of Ireland, see Adams (1958:61ff.) on northern Irish English). In addition, the varieties in the south are much older than those currently present in the north which go back to the intensive plantation of Ulster in the Cromwellian and post-Cromwellian era as opposed to those in the south, which at least for the towns of the east coast, have roots reaching back to the late Middle Ages (Bliss, 1984:27-31).

1.2 Sources for material examined

Much of the rejection of the contact hypothesis has to do with the manner in which previous authors have derived their statements on Irish English. In most cases the source for observations made is not specified; as authors like Henry and Hogan are/were native speakers of Irish English many of their statements are based on mother-tongue intuitions (Hogan, 1927; Henry, 1957). More recent authors have used a corpus-based approach, e.g. Kallen (1989) in his investigation of syntactic patterning in Dublin English or Filppula (1986, 1991) in his work on topicalization in Irish English. However, for the
assessment of the role of contact in the development of Irish English a corpus-based approach could only take written documents as its material. These are not available in any satisfactory quantity throughout the history of Irish English. Authors who have used Irish English as a medium for artistic expression, like Synge and O’Casey (in their different ways) have engaged in much too much poetic license for their works to be of statistical value and these are of far too late a date for them to be used when investigating the genesis of features of Irish English syntax.

2 A sketch of Irish English

The beginnings of Irish English cannot be given an historical date. Instead one refers to the coming of the English to Ireland in 1169 (Moody and Martin, eds. 1967:127-134) and the ensuing years as marking the beginning of English influence in Ireland. At this early stage the linguistic situation of the country was much more diversified than at present.

Firstly, both Anglo-Norman and English were introduced into Ireland and co-existed side by side for at least two centuries Curtis (1919:234). This is apparent from many historical documents, most of all in the famous Statutes of Kilkenny issued in 1366 which, while written in Norman French, admonish the native Irish to speak English (Lydon, 1973:94ff.).

Secondly, the dominance of English over Irish is by no means a continuous progression, driving back the native Celtic language to the Atlantic coast. English was subject to various vicissitudes in the early period of the colonization of Ireland. Indeed it only survives without a break in Dublin and perhaps in a few other cities of the East coast such as Wexford and Waterford.

During the four centuries from the initial invasions to the military defeat of the Irish by English forces in the Battle of Kinsale in 1601, English lost ground continuously as a consequence of Gaelic resurgence. Indeed the Old English, as these original settlers are termed, assimilated to the native Irish population, something which was facilitated by the lack of religious differences in these pre-Reformation times. Historical references such as those of Stanihurst (1577) attest to the domination of Irish over English up to the beginning of the 17th. century. The defeat of the Irish forces and the political vacuum caused by the emigration of Irish leaders to the continent in 1607 (known somewhat romantically as the Flight of the Earls) weakened the position of the Irish language. With the energetic plantation in wide parts of the country in the course of the 17th. century (Moody and Martin (eds.), 1965:189-203), English not only re-gained ground but also spread to parts of the western and southern seaboard which were hitherto entirely Irish-speaking. The forced settlement of English mercenaries and their families in the Cromwellian and post-Cromwellian periods led to English adopting a superstrate position vis à vis Irish leading to a linguistic situation which the native Irish were never either able or willing to reverse.

Although the relationship of English to Irish since the beginning of the 17th. century is clearly defined in terms of superstrate versus substrate, one should not imagine that the supplanting of Irish by English was either sudden or complete. In the four hundred years up to the present day, English has not succeeded in ousting Irish entirely, at least in the Republic of Ireland. Even as late as the end of the 19th. century, there were as many as half a million native speakers of Irish (O’Cuiv, 1969).

The decimation of the native Irish population is something which occurred in the mid 19th. century with the Great Famine and the ensuing large-scale emigration, chiefly to the new world (de Fréine, 1966, 1977). This leaves a period of two to two and a half
centuries in which English was in the process of establishing itself slowly throughout Ireland. It is this period of transition from substrate to superstrate which is of greatest interest for the genesis of Irish English.

Unfortunately, the documents for this stretch of Irish history are scanty and would seem to be confined to literary parodies of Irish English (Bliss, 1979; Sullivan, 1980). In essence what one is left with, from the point of view of the present-day set of varieties, is a series of unexpected features in Irish English many of which have parallels in Irish. The intention of the remainder of this paper will be to examine a number of these to determine the probability of their representing transfer phenomena.

3 The switch-over from Irish to English

Here one must bear in mind the linguistic situation of the Irish in the early modern period. As the switch-over from Irish to English was gradual over such a large time span one is justified in assuming that bilingualism was the rule for the majority of the population. Not only that, for the rural population, a pidgin-like situation must have obtained where they only used English when in contact with urbanites with poor knowledge of Irish or with English-speaking officials such as land administrators and bailiffs.

Under such circumstances incomplete acquisition of English would have been the rule rather than the exception. With a slow change over to another language by adults (needless to say, without any formal instruction) structural transfer is at its most likely. The acquisition of the second language is then characterized by the expectation of equivalents to the various lexical and syntactic categories known in the first language. If these are not found then the step taken by adult learners is usually a kind of improvisation to attain an acceptable equivalent in the second language. When the categories expected but not found are central to the first language, here the aspectual distinctions of Irish, then the likelihood is quite considerable, that speakers will hit on similar equivalents in the second language and that these will diffuse throughout the speech community and subsequently gain acceptance.

The pre-condition for successful structural transfer from one language to the next is that the new structure coined in the second language be immediately recognizable to all speakers in the community of second language learners. In syntax, recognition implies the use of key elements or a special word-order which unambiguously represents the target category from the first language and, importantly, that the disruption of the syntax in the second language is kept to a minimum.

3.1 Typology and language contact

The typological differences between Irish and English are more considerable that between any two Germanic languages or English and a Romance language, situations which are historically attested for instance for South African English in contact with Afrikaans (Lass and Wright, 1986) or the English of Spanish emigrants in the south-west of the United States (Toon, 1982:219ff.).

Irish has the unmarked word order VSO and a good deal of incorporation, particularly in the area of prepositions in combination with pronouns. These synthetic forms play a central role in Irish syntax, for example the form *ann* (literally ‘in-it’) is used with the copula to denote existence and has led to imitative constructions in Irish English.
Lá breá a bhí ann.
(fine day that was in-it)
‘It was a fine day that was in it’.

In addition Irish syntax is heavily noun-oriented and makes use of synthetic forms in a
directional sense to convey meanings which in English use simple verb forms. An
instance of this is the verb *owe* in English which is rendered in Irish with a series of
incorporated forms (Hickey, 1983b:198).

Tá sé amuigh aige ort.
(is it out at-him on-you)
‘You owe it to him’.

In view of the typological distance of Irish from English, features suspected of stemming
from an Irish original, are quite conspicuous given the relative unlikelihood of their
transfer into English. Indeed the fact that transfer took place at all is an indication that the
extent of contact must have been very considerable and points to a long period of
bilingualism enabling the contact phenomena, which we observe in Irish English today, to
become established.

4 Perfectives in Irish and Irish English

There are two major aspectual types in Irish, the habitual and the perfective. Both occur
frequently and show no restriction to any subset of verbs. The habitual will be broached
below (see section 6.), here the concern is with the different kinds of perfective.

Resultative perfective. This emphasizes that the state which is envisaged as the end point
of an action has indeed been reached. It is a telic construction (Dahl, 1985) much like the
telic Aktionarten of German as with verbs like *aufessen* ‘eat up’, *aufbrauchen* ‘use up’
which imply arriving at a pre-defined endpoint (here: eating everything that can be eaten;
using up all the material). Examples of the resultative perfective in Irish English are:

(3) a. *He has the job done.*
b. *They have the house built.*

Given the telic nature of the resultative perfective construction, it is not applicable to
sentences with stative verbs (Harris, 1984:312), so that an example like the following is
impermissible:

(4) *I have something about Russian grammar known.*

Immediate perfective. Here the stress is placed on the fact that the action denoted by the
verb has just taken place.

(5) a. *He’s after breaking the window.*
b. *She’s after finishing her dinner.*

The difference between the two types of perfective can be seen if one alters the sentences
offered above.
(6)  a.  He has the window broken.
    b.  He’s after doing the job.

The first sentence now implies that the subject has fulfilled his intention of breaking the window. Here the telic aspect of attaining a set goal is obvious. The second sentence carries the implication that the job has just been done and would be typically used in a narrative situation. It is not the attainment of a goal which is stressed but the fact that the action has just been completed.

5 Remarks on types of transfer

Going on the assumption that a language is a self-contained structural network, the possible addition of elements from a further language is most likely in a situation where speakers of one language are learning another and mix elements of their first language into that which they are acquiring. Here the motivation is strongest for transfer between languages. The situation of imposition or voluntary adoption of extraneous structure into a language, without the donor language necessarily being acquired, also exists (compare the flood of English vocabulary into present-day German), however, it is usually confined to open classes such as the lexicon or the area of set phrases and idioms which can be incremented at will without any re-structuring of the language being required. Such lexical transfer is attested for Irish English but as it is of no theoretical relevance it will not be dealt with here. In one respect, however, transfer into open classes deserves comment. Such imports into a language are accompanied by a degree of awareness on the part of native speakers which is not necessarily true of the types of transfer to be discussed presently (see 5.1. and 5.2.). For instance, Germans are quite aware of what words are loans from English, if only for phonological reasons. As an example, the English word *match* ‘match’ is pronounced with the mid central vowel [e] as opposed to the German word *Matsch* ‘slush, mush’ which has the native [a], thus hiving the former word off from the phonological norm of the language.

5.1 Low-level transfer

The briefest consideration of transfer will reveal that certain items are not of linguistic significance and do not affect the structure of the variety arising in a particular contact situation. This type of transfer is what I term *low-level transfer*. The area in which it is most clearly to be seen is that of phonology.

Pronunciation habits die hard and so it is not surprising that these are carried over into the target language in a contact situation. Take as an instance the vowel epenthesis which is widespread in (southern) Irish English. It has lead to a short unstressed vowel being inserted in clusters consisting of two heterorganic sonorants, giving pronunciations like [ærəm] for *arm*, [fɪlm] for *film*. Epenthesis would seem to be a feature with areal properties which effects languages spoken in a certain district or country. For instance similar vowel epenthesis to that just described holds for Dutch and the adjoining dialects of Rhenish German (Hickey, 1986). It is also transferred into High German by speakers of Rhenish German when they attempt to speak the standard language in a manner similar to that which can be assumed for historical Irish English and which is attested for present-day contact Irish English (Hickey, 1985:87-97).
Low-level transfer can in principle be found on any level of a language. A simple case from the area of syntax is the use of the article which has a direct equivalent in Irish.

(7) *The both of you.*  
    An beirt agaibh.  
    (the both at-you)

Here its use is idiomatic. It is also found before nouns in a generic sense, much as in German, leading to constructions like the following.

(8) *How’s the health with you?*  
    Cà bhfuil an tsláinte leat?  
    (how is-RELATIVE the health with you)  
    ‘How is your health?’

Again this and similar phenomena do not lead to systematic re-structuring of the target variety, here Irish English.

5.2 Systematic transfer

Any type of transfer which leads to an addition to a closed class of elements in a language, such as the set of permissible syntactic structures, can be designated systematic. The process here can either (i) involve re-interpretation and/or re-structuring of constructions already possible in the language subject to transfer or (ii) be realised by the speakers devising an entirely new structure, modelled on one in the donor language, and successfully introducing it into the second language. Here one can see that despite the inherent stability of the structure of a language this can be de-stabilized by adult speakers learning it imperfectly and without undue motivation towards completeness of acquisition.

Both of the above sub-types of systematic transfer are clearly to be seen in Irish English. Re-interpretation can be observed in the use of the preposition on with a personal pronoun to express the relevance of an action to an individual (for further comments, see 8. below).

(9) *They crashed the car on me.*  
    ‘They crashed my car, the car I was looking after, etc.’.

The prototypical instance of a new structure being introduced into Irish English is that of the immediate perfective with after (see 4. above). One cannot claim that there was any model for this present in the input varieties of English so that the transfer led to a net gain in the syntactic constructions permissible in Irish English.

(10) *Tá sí tar éis a dinnéir a ithe.*  
    (is she after her dinner eat-NON_FINITE)  
    *She is after eating her dinner.*
5.3 The mechanism of structural transfer

When dealing with language contact to talk of permeability as Lass and Wright do (1986:203) would seem to imply that the language (L1) of one group of speakers is penetrated by speakers of L2 imposing some structure or other. The essential error in this mode of argument and thought, at least for the genesis of varieties of English which historically involved a language switch, concerns the groups of speakers. In a situation in which a language is adopted in a prolonged process over many generations one has one group adopting the language of another. Two basic kinds of process can be observed here. The first is the use of ingrained habits (for instance phonetic) when using the new language (see remarks on low-level transfer above). The second is the unwitting re-moulding of aspects of the new language to attain the types of categories (above all syntactic) which one expects from one’s native language. This is the case with the aspectual distinctions in Irish English. The extent of the re-moulding depends entirely on the structure of the original and the new language. It can range from simple re-codification (no formal change in syntax, but a new or augmented semantic interpretation as in the case of the post-object past participle to indicate the resultative perfective in Irish English) on the one hand, to considerable syntactic alteration to arrive at a structure felt by native speakers to be equivalent to the structure in the original language on the other.

This latter type is clearly illustrated by the immediate perfective in Irish English with after. It is essential to note in this connection that the degree of formal correspondence between the structure in the original language and that in the new language is not of any principle relevance. What is decisive is the extent to which the re-moulded structure of the target language is felt to be equivalent to that of the original. Recall the case of the immediate perfective in Irish English which, compared with other varieties of English, avails of a very idiosyncratic construction.

(11) Tá Seán tar éis an teach a dhíol.
(is John after the house sell-NON_FINITE)
John is after selling the house.

The semantic equivalent of the Irish immediate perfective was reached in Irish English by the use of after (a direct translation of tar éis, phonetically [treʃ]) with a present participle. Apparently the non-finite verb form in English was felt to correspond to the non-finite form in Irish (though their respective scopes are somewhat different).

It betrays a basic misunderstanding of the mechanism of transfer for authors to express reservations (as does Harris (1991a:205), quoting Boretzky, 1986) because the order of non-finite verb form and object is different in Irish and English in constructions like those in (11) above. The degree of formal match is not a consideration in the contact situation. The sole aim is to arrive at a construction which is functionally equivalent to that in the original language which one wishes to emulate in the target language. A word order such as that in John is after the house selling. would not only unnecessarily flout the sequence of verb and object in English (unnecessary as it would not convey additional information) but also give rise to possible confusion with the resultative perfective which in Irish English is realised by means of a post-object past participle (see below).

In the transfer of structure from one language into another one which is to be acquired, it would seem both necessary and sufficient to achieve correlates to the key
elements in the source structure. Another instance of this principle can be seen with the post-object past participle of Irish English. Consider the following example with a resultative perfective.

(12) Tá an obair déanta acu.
    (is the work done at-them)
    ‘They have the work done.’

Essential to the effectiveness of the Irish construction is the order object - verb; consequently this is the order which is realised in the Irish English equivalent. The synthetic form acu plays no role in the formation of the resultative perfective in Irish, but is just a corollary of the means of representing a past tense verbal construction in Irish. As this is incidental to the perfective aspect expressed in the sentence, it is neglected in the Irish English construction.

6 Usurpation of available structures

In those instances in which direct structural transfer into a second language does not result in an equivalent to some structure in the first, alternative structures are likely to be formed.

To illustrate this take the example of the habitual aspect. In accordance with recent literature (e.g. Brinton, 1988:140ff.) I take the term habitual to refer to a repeated action of some duration whereas the term iterative denotes a repeated punctual action. The latter aspectual type is to be seen in English in the use of the simple present as in The government introduces a budget (every spring).

In Irish the distinction between punctuality and duration is codified in the verbal system. The following two sentences are examples of the distinction between these two semantic components of a verbal construction.

(13) a. Tá sé san oifig gach lá.
    ‘He is in the office every day.’
    (iterative aspect expressed by Tá)

b. Bíonn sé san oifig gach lá.
    ‘He is in the office every day for a certain length of time.’
    (habitual aspect expressed by Bíonn)

Turning to the development of Irish English one can maintain that when coping with the habitual aspect of Irish it would not have sufficed for speakers to use the simple present of English merely because the simple present is used in Irish. This would just have rendered the iterative aspect but not the habitual. For example, a sentence like the following He visits his grandmother every evening expresses a repeated action but not that it lasts for a certain period each time it is carried out (the habitual aspect).

In order to achieve precisely this effect, speakers of Irish would seem, while acquiring English, to have usurped syntactic means available in English at the time. Recall that in the 17th and 18th centuries the use of do as an emphatic in present-tense declarative sentences (as in I do like linguistics) was not yet definitely established. Thus syntactic material was available which in its itself was still in the process of becoming identified with a specific function. The trade-off in terms of disruption of English syntax was thus minimal, allowing speakers to use the verb do for the habitual aspect and thus formed structures like the following.
(14)  a. He does be in his office every day.
    b. She did be weeding in the garden.

This use of habitual do must be regarded as receiving its prime impetus from contact with Irish as it is not present in mainland British English and as it corresponds semantically to the aspectual category of Irish.

(15)  Bíonn sé san oifig gach lá.
       (is-HABITUAL he in the office every day)

7 Deciding on the source of deviant features

With any unexpected feature in a variety of a language A which has a definite parallel in another language B with which the former was in contact over a period of time it is probable, ceteris paribus, that the deviant structure in A arose through modelling on an equivalent structure in B. However, it is never possible to prove such transfer. This is a banal observation and nonetheless many authors act as if transfer probability were in fact proof. As this is unreachable, contact hypotheses concerning features of varieties of a language remain matters of belief. Presenting the facts is all one can do. It is up to the reader to accept one’s standpoint or not. This situation is bad enough for putative instances of transfer which are observed synchronically but much worse with instances which are suspected of have arisen diachronically.

For an assessment of the role of contact in the genesis of Irish English an additional difficulty arises. This is to be seen with the many unexpected features of the dialect which could in principle be either the result of transfer from Irish or a relict from an earlier variety of English which served as input for Irish English. A few instances are clearly to attributed to the latter situation. For example the lack of lengthening with low vowels before voiceless fricatives is very definitely an archaic feature which has nothing to do with Irish, e.g. [baθ] for bath, [glas] for glass, etc. and is still to be found in urban centres on the east coast such as Wexford and Waterford which not only show no contact with Irish for centuries but also represent the oldest varieties of Irish English dating from the Old English period of initial settlement.

In many instances the answer to the question concerning the role of transfer is not necessarily simple. With several features present in the original varieties of Irish English, these may have received retentive support from contact with Irish and thus survived in the language. Perhaps the most obvious example of this situation is to be seen in the area of personal pronouns. Irish English tends to retain a distinction between second person singular and plural by using a form for the plural which is different from the general you [ju] form found in the singular. The actual manifestation of this plural pronoun can vary from ye [ji] to yez [jiz] to youz [juz] (Hickey, 1983a) and is irrelevant to the matter at hand. The point here is that a distinction between second person singular and plural is made in Irish and thus the distinction in Irish English in all probability received support from language contact. Indeed the irregular forms yez [jiz] and youz [juz] would seem to point to a degree of juggling with the plural morpheme of English to achieve a distinctive plural form in Irish English in the period of transition from Irish to English.
7.1 Endogenous features

One of the weaknesses of former research on Irish English is that nearly all unexpected features of Irish English were attributed to substratum influence from Irish. This is a standpoint taken by Bliss in many publications (see Bliss (1972) and (1984) as representative examples) and rightly criticized by others (Harris, 1987:270). Such a stance leaves no room for inheritance from the initial varieties of Irish English nor for endogenous features.

The latter are those which are (i) not attested in the input for later varieties nor (ii) in the contact language. As Lass and Wright (1986:202f.) rightly point out, such features may be latent in a variety which is exported from the mainland and come to the fore under conditions of isolation. Even allowing for the latter case when considering Irish English, there are still some features which cannot be traced back to any of the above-mentioned sources. In such an instance one is justified in assuming that the features in question are endogenous.

As always, the situation requires further differentiation. A development within a variety may have no source in either the input variety or a contact language. However, it may be characteristic of a type of change or process which is to be found in either of these sources. Again there are good examples of this to be found in Irish English.

The clearest instance involves the fricativization of alveolar stops. Here the concern is with an allophone of /t/ which occurs after a vowel and before another vowel or a pause (i.e. in an environment of phonetic weakening). This allophone is to be found in the entire Republic of Ireland (with the exception of the north) as the realisation of /t/ in the positions just described (/d/ has a similar allophone, [d]). This sound will be indicated by the transcription introduced in Hickey (1984a), viz. [t]. Because of the inadequacy of the orthography in this respect its origin in the history of Irish English cannot be traced with any certainty.

(16) a. poet [po:t]  
b. butter [buə]  
c. putty [pu:ti]

This allophone of /t/ is one of the auditively most salient features of southern Irish English. In the literature it has been frequently referred to as a flap, but in fact it is a controlled articulation which results from the tongue being held just below the alveolar ridge to produce an apico-alveolar fricative rather than a stop (a similar allophone was in all probability the intermediary stage in the development of German /s/ from Germanic //t/, indicated in the orthography of Old High German as 3, see Hickey, 1984b). Now while this phonetic development is unique to Irish English (or to varieties of English which have been under heavy influence from southern Irish English, such as Scouse, see Knowles, 1978; Trudgill, 1990:70f.) and is not to be found in Irish, the kind of development it represents is quite typical of Irish. Phonetically it represents a weakening, the lenition of a stop to a fricative. As such it is a typical manifestation of a phonetic aspect of Irish dialects which are noted for the degree of phonetic weakening of consonants. This has a very long tradition in Irish (Thurneysen, 1948) and was de-naturalized and morphologized already in the Old Irish period. As a generic feature in Irish, lenition is well attested in present-day Irish, see de Bhaildraite (1945) for multitude examples.
8 Epilogue: Differences and contrasts between varieties

The position of present-day speakers of Irish English is characterized by a consciousness of features of both standard British English and Irish English syntax. This leads in quite a number of cases to situations in which (i) ambiguity may arise or (ii) a deliberate contrast can be exploited by juxtaposing structures from both quarters.

In section 3.1. above reference was made to the synthetic forms of prepositions and pronouns in Irish. These have led to carry over into Irish English at a number of points, the most prominent of which is what is termed the pertinence dative.

(17) The soup boiled over on me.
Chuaigh an t-anraidh thar fiuchadh orm.
(went the soup over boiling on-me)

Taking a non-Irish interpretation of the above sentence would imply that the soup spilt on the subject (skin, clothes or whatever). The Irish English reading which is derived from the Irish structure as given in the gloss is that the soup which I was attending boiled over and I am the individual affected by this action (but not physically).

The immediate perfective which in Irish English, as discussed above in 4., is formed with after can be used without a verb form. Even in such cases the Irish English interpretation is preferred to the exclusion of any non-Irish reading. Thus the following sentence is taken to mean that the subject has just finished his dinner and not that he is seeking it.

(18) He is after his dinner.

The interplay with supra-regional standards which do not have a perfective construction can lead to a contrast which Irish English speakers are able to exploit consciously. To illustrate this phenomenon take the instance of the resultative perfective again.

(19) a. Have you read Finnegans Wake?
b. Have you Finnegans Wake read?

In the first of these sentences a normal non-Irish interpretation is usual. In the second, however, the individual addressed is asked whether he/she has completed the task of reading the book. With a suitable context one can see how these two options for object-verb word-order can be exploited to be more precise. Not only that, the first construction gains an additional connotation in Irish English when juxtaposed with the option in the second sentence, namely whether the person addressed has ever read the novel in question.

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