Supraregionalisation

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1 Introduction

The process to be discussed in this chapter is one which has occurred frequently in many regions and countries of the anglophone world but which has not received due attention from scholars. There are a number of reasons why this is the case, chief of which is the location of the process between new dialect formation (Hickey 2003a) and vernacular varieties on the one hand and standardisation (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 18-23) on the other. There has been a lack of recognition that these processes form two ends of a scale which involves other intermediary developments. The name for the process in question is ‘supraregionalisation’ and reasons for the choice of this term are given in the following.

Supraregionalisation is an historical process whereby varieties of a language lose specifically local features and become less regionally bound. The upper limits of supraregionalisation depend on a number of external factors, such as the country in which the set of varieties is spoken. If this country was historically a colony of another, then there may be an (unconscious) wish within this country to maintain some linguistic distinctiveness vis à vis the varieties of the former colonising country (Hickey 2007: 309-15). Such ‘extranational’ forms of a language are significant in a country although they stem from outside its borders. In a way they act as a brake on supraregionalisation because structural distance must be maintained to them. Common examples of extranational varieties of languages in Europe would be German for the Austrians, French for the Walloons and Dutch for the Flemings.

A region within a state may also show supraregionalisation, often a region which has a geographical and cultural identity of which speakers are aware. The north of England (Wales 2006) is just such a case. There is clearly a northern type of accent in England and this arose through a set of local features being used across the subregions of the north and maintained by non-local speakers for identification purposes vis à vis the south of England.

Supraregionalisation in Northern England

| Supraregional (non-local) features | [a] in BATH lexical set | [u] in STRUT lexical set |

Apart from features which are found across a region there may well be features which are confined to either a subregion within a larger one or which are associated with strong vernaculars across the entire region and hence not part of a supraregional
variety. In the case of north England, the unshifted long vowel – /uː/ – in the MOUTH lexical set would be one such example. It is furthermore typical of supraregional varieties that they tolerate vernacular features in lexically confined instances, for example the unshifted vowel in *the town* [tuːn] as a local reference to the city of Newcastle with supraregional speakers who otherwise have /au/ in the MOUTH lexical set.

### 1.1 Suppression and selection

Supraregionalisation is achieved by the twin processes of *suppression* and *selection*. These show a certain overlap with processes during standardisation, as formulated in the well-known table by Einar Haugen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Society</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Codification</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
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(Haugen 2003 [1964]: 421)

What is missing in supraregionalisation is codification, because the supraregional variety does not generally have a codified written form used for official purposes.

It is obvious that suppression in the opposite of selection. Although one could say that with standardisation there is passive suppression (by the avoidance of local features), during supraregionalisation suppression is a much more active process and may consist of additional sub-processes such as the deliberate relegation of local features to vernacular modes to which supraregional speakers may switch by conscious decision (see example of /uː/ in MOUTH referred to above).

If countries in which supraregional varieties have arisen develop into independent states then such varieties can form the basis for a standard of the new state. After this has happened codification usually takes place, e.g. in the United States in the 19th century. Whether this kind of codification occurs depends on external factors, such as the relationship with the former colonial power. Where this relationship has been fairly close codification may not take place to anything like the same degree as in the case of Canada.

In order to illustrate how supraregional varieties arise (Hickey 2003b) examples from Irish English will be offered below. Such instances can presumably be replicated across the anglophone world, although differences in local conditions means the manifestation of supraregionalisation varies.

### 2 The process of supraregionalisation

A consideration of the history of English in Ireland shows that there was not only influence from Irish during the long period of language shift from the 17th through to the 19th century (Hickey 2007: chapter 4) but also a large degree of superimposition or adoption of more standard forms of English due to exposure to forms of British
English. This superimposition has led to layering in Irish English where remnants of former distributions have become confined to certain registers and/or are indicative of strongly localised varieties. This is true of unshifted ME /æt/ in the MEAT lexical set or /u/ in the STRUT lexical set (in local Dublin English).

Superimposition of more standard forms has led in its turn to the process of supraregionalisation. Part of this process is, for instance, the ironing out of non-standard vowel features among earlier forms of Irish English, e.g. the replacement of /u:/ by /au/ in words like *down*, *crown*, *about*, etc. It is important to grasp that the appearance of /au/ in the MOUTH lexical set is not the result of internal change in Irish English. Rather it is due to the adoption of a pronunciation from British English, i.e. it is due to the superimposition of a pronunciation variant from outside the country.

Supraregionalisation must be carefully distinguished from dialect levelling or the formation of compromise forms. For instance, in late medieval Irish English there is some evidence that a middle way was chosen among competing morphological forms from different dialect inputs of British origin: the quantifier *euch(e) ‘each’ was seen by Samuels (1972: 108) as a hybrid between *ech(e) and *uch(e) both of which were probably represented in the initial input to Irish English.

2.1 Reduced variation in supraregional varieties

Because a supraregional variety is not locally bound it can never serve the identity function which the vernacular fulfils for members of social networks (L. Milroy 1976; J. Milroy 1991). For that reason supraregional varieties tend not to show the degree of phonological differentiation present in the vernaculars to which they are related. For instance, in local forms of Irish English, both urban and rural, there is a distinction between short vowels before historic /r/, i.e. the vowels in *term* and *turn* are distinguished: *term* [tɛr̩m] versus *turn* [taɹm]. In the supraregional variety, however, a single vowel is found in both cases, namely schwa [ə].

Another feature, which shows that supraregional varieties are less differentiated than their related vernaculars, is so-called *t*-lenition (Hickey 1996). In supraregional Irish English *t*-lenition is nearly always realised by the apico-alveolar fricative [t]. But in local Dublin English, there is a range of realisations, from [t] through [t, h?] to zero (Hickey 2009).

2.2 How supraregionalisation is triggered

In Ireland, and presumably in other European countries, the main trigger for supraregionalisation in the late modern period was the introduction of general schooling and the rise of a native middle class during the 19th century. The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 was passed after political agitation under the leadership of Daniel O’Connell (Connolly (ed.) 1998: 75+399f.). Shortly afterwards, in the 1830s, so-called ‘national schools’, i.e. primary schools (Dowling 1971: 116-8), were introduced and schooling for Catholic children in Ireland became compulsory and universal. The experience of general education for the generation after this increased their acceptance in the higher classes of Irish society (Daly 1990).
class came into existence with all that this meant in terms of linguistic prejudice
towards vernacular varieties of English. It is thus no coincidence that the
disappearance of certain features of Irish English is located in the mid to late 19th
century (Hickey 2008). These features were largely replaced by the corresponding
mainland British pronunciations. An instance is provided by unshifted ME /æ:/ which
was a prominent feature up to the 18th century. For instance, George Farquhar in his
play The Beaux’ Stratagem (1707) has many of the stereotypes of Irish pronunciation, including this one: Fat sort of plaace (= [pla:s]) is dat saam (= [sazm]) Ireland? ‘What sort of place is that same Ireland?’ Somewhat later, Jonathan Swift
used end-rhymes which indicate that for him words like placed and last rhymed. At
the end of the century, Thomas Sheridan criticised the Irish use of /æ:/ in matron,
patron, etc. But by the mid 19th century there are no more references to this. Dion
Boucicault (1820-1890), who does not shy away from showing phonetic peculiarities
in his dramas, does not indicate unshifted ME /æ:/ when writing some eighty years
after Sheridan. This kind of development can be shown to have applied to a number
of features. For instance, SERVE-lowering – the realisation /sərv/ rather than /særv/
– appears to have died out during the 19th century and by the beginning of the 20th
century the feature had all but disappeared. The same is true of ASK-metathesis
which is attested in many representations of vernacular Irish English in the 19th
century.

2.3 How supraregionalisation proceeds

Supraregionalisation is a type of language change. It too is subject to the phases of
actuation, propagation and conclusion. The actuation is probably triggered by a
consciousness of the provinciality of one’s own language and the presence of more
mainstream varieties, be these extranational or not.

For the propagation phase there are two competing views of how the process
takes place. The elimination of local features may be lexically abrupt with the
substitution of local feature X by supraregional feature Y in all words in which it
occurs. This corresponds to the Neogrammarian view of change. But equally a
scenario is conceivable in which a local feature is replaced by a supraregional
feature, if not word by word, at least not across the entire lexicon at once. Lexical
replacement of this kind would correspond to lexical diffusion as conceived of in

An example of this would be the following. In the south of Ireland remnants
of the previously widespread diphthongisation of former /ɔː/ before velar [h] + /d/ are
found with old [auld] and bold [bauld]. But historically, this pronunciation is
recorded for many other words, like cold, hold, sold. The pronunciation would seem
to have applied previously to all words which matched the phonetic environment.
The replacement of [-aul] by [ɔːl] would appear to have proceeded by a process of
lexical diffusion. The same would seem to have applied in the north of Ireland to
Belfast (J. Milroy 1981: 28f.). Furthermore, the words with the /au/ pronunciation
(with deleted final /-d/) have retreated into more colloquial forms of speech so that
now there is a lexical split between old /aul/, /ɔːld/ and bold /baul/, /boːld/: the form
/aul/ for old implies a degree of affection and /baul/ for bold a sneaking admiration as
Nothing beats the /aʊə/ pint; The /bəʊə/ Charlie is some crook (the adjectives in these senses only occur attributively).

The conclusion of supraregionalisation is somewhat difficult to pinpoint. In the case of Ireland it cannot be the complete adoption of English pronunciation norms. Indeed, differential linguistic features vis à vis extranational varieties of English are maintained, not just in Ireland, consider Scotland and its supraregional variety Scottish Standard English (Abercrombie 1979, Stuart-Smith 2008) which, for instance, shows a clear non-prevocalic /-t/ in strong contrast to southern British English.

Speakers would seem to be unconsciously aware of supraregional varieties, that is there is unconscious consensus about what features are characteristic of them. An essential part of being a native speaker lies in knowing what features are part of the supraregional variety and what are not. For instance, native speakers of Irish English are aware that t-lentition, as in city ['sɪti], is permissible in the supraregional variety but that the extension of lenition to a glottal stop, as in city ['sɪʔi], is not. A case from grammar would be the after-perfective, as in He’s after breaking the glass, which is acceptable in the supraregional variety, whereas the do(es) be habitual, as in He does be mending cars in his spare time, is not.

The features of a supraregional variety are not immutable but at any given time speakers know what belongs to it: features may be added, such as the raised back vowels or retroflex /r/ of recent Dublin English (see below). Equally, speakers know what does not belong to the supraregional variety (of Irish English): h-dropping, or syllable-final deletion of /r/, for instance.

2.4 The paths taken by supraregionalisation

Apart from the question of actuation, propagation and conclusion, the paths which supraregionalisation can take are of linguistic interest. In the Irish English context the following paths are attested.

1) Entire replacement of vernacular features

A number of archaic pronunciations are to be found in early modern documents of Irish English. For instance, the word for gold still had a pronunciation with /uː/ (as did Rome) in late 18th century Ireland: goold /gʊːld/, a pronunciation criticised by the prescriptivist John Walker (Walker 1791). The word onion /ɒnɪn/ had /ɒnɪn/, an older pronunciation mentioned by P. W. Joyce at the beginning of the 20th century (Joyce 1979 [1910]: 99). This was recorded by the lexicographer Nathan Bailey in 1726 (Universal Etymological English Dictionary) but was not typical of mainstream pronunciations as Walker notes at the end of the 18th century.

Vowels before /r/ provide further instances where Irish English was out of step with developments in England. R-lowering did not occur in words like door /dʊər/, floor /flʊər/, source /sɔːrs/, course /kɔːrs/, court /kərt/ which, according to the Appendix to Thomas Sheridan’s Rhetorical Grammar (Sheridan 1781: 137-55), were typical Irish pronunciations. This means that the southern mainland English lowering of back high vowels before /r/ had not occurred in Ireland by the late 18th century but was introduced in the following century by lexically replacing those pronunciations which conflicted with mainland British usage.
2) **Restriction to a specific phonetic environment**

When a local feature is being removed from a supraregional variety then there may be a phase in which the feature goes from being unconditional to conditional. This is clearly recognisable if the conditional realisation is still attested. Consider the case of short E-raising in Irish English. This is recorded in many environments in historical documents but later texts show a restriction to pre-nasal environments (as found nowadays in south-west and mid-west varieties). Another instance is the metathesis of a vowel and /r/. In the 19th century and earlier it is attested in stressed syllables but later only in unstressed ones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Pre-20th century</th>
<th>20th century and later</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) /e/ to /i/ raising</td>
<td>unconditional</td>
<td>only before nasals (south-west)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>t</strong>oguther, <strong>yis</strong>, <strong>g</strong>it</td>
<td><strong>pen</strong> [pɪn], <strong>t</strong>en [tɪn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) metathesis</td>
<td>in stressed syllables</td>
<td>only in unstressed syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>pur</strong>ty ['pɜː.tɪ] 'pretty'</td>
<td><strong>modern</strong> ['mɒdrən]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One explanation for the survival of features as conditional variants is that these are less salient (Hickey 2000a, Kerswill and Williams 2002) than unconditional ones. If a feature like short E raising is restricted to a pre-nasal position, a phonetically preferred environment for this raising, then it is automatic (for the variety which has this raising) and so less salient for speakers. Similarly, if metathesis is confined to unstressed syllables then it is less acoustically prominent and again less salient and hence less likely to be removed by supraregionalisation.

3) **Relegation to colloquial registers**

Although the supraregional form of English is the native style of many speakers in Ireland, they may deliberately manipulate salient features and adopt a vernacular pronunciation, for example for the purpose of caricature or when style-shifting downwards (Labov 2001). Simple instances of this are the replacement of you by youse, the use of [leɪp] for leap [lɪp] or the high vowel in get as in **Get** [gɪt] **out of here!**, all typical of colloquial registers of Irish English.

In the course of its development, Irish English has evolved a technique for attaining local flavouring. This consists of maintaining two forms of a single lexeme, one a standard British one, adopted during supraregionalisation, and another an archaic or regional pronunciation which differs in connotation from the first (see also the discussion of old and bold above). The second usage is always found on a more colloquial level and plays an important role in establishing the profile of vernacular Irish English. The following are some typical examples to illustrate this phenomenon.

**Eejit** ['ɪdʒɪt] for idiot (Dolan 2004: 83f.) has adopted the sense of a bungling individual rather than an imbecile.

**Cratur** ['kreɪtər] shows a survival of the older pronunciation and denotes an object of pity or commiseration. Indeed for the supraregional variety of the south,
unraised /e/, ɛ:/ automatically implies a vernacular register. Other words which, colloquially, still show the mid vowel are Jesus, decent, tea (represented orthographically as Jaysus, daycent, tay). In these cases the replacement of an older pronunciation by a more mainstream one has led to the retreat of the former into a marked style, here one of local Irishness.

Fellow has final /ou, o:/ in the supraregional standard. But a reduction of the final vowel to /a/ is historically attested in Irish English as in yellow [jelə]. There is now a lexical split with the first word such that the pronunciation [felə] means something like ‘young man, boyfriend’ in colloquial Irish English.

2.5 Further issues in supraregionalisation

Mergers Sociolinguistic research on vernacular forms of English in Belfast (see J. Milroy 1981) has shown that non-standard phonology is more complex than standard phonology and that mergers are more common in standard and koiné varieties. At first sight this might seem to hold for southern Irish English as well. For instance, there is no distinction between historically different short vowels before /r/. Hence one has a single rhotacised vowel [ɔ] in the supraregional variety but in vernacular forms /e/ and /ə/ are kept distinct before /r/ as in girl [gərl] and burn [bərn].

There is an apparent contradiction here because with dental stops in the THIN (and THIS) lexical sets, a shift to an alveolar articulation is found in many vernacular varieties. This leads to merger with the alveolar stops in the TWO lexical set (cf. thinker and tinker, both [ˈtɪŋkər]) which is stigmatised in Irish English. However, stigma or acceptance of mergers in vernacular varieties depends crucially on whether the merger is unconditional or not. With the single rhotacised vowel [ɔ] one is dealing with a merger in a specific phonological environment, namely before tautosyllabic /r/. With dental vs. alveolar stops on the other hand one finds that it is the unconditional merger, leading to noticeable homophony, which is stigmatised.

Hypercorrection In the Ireland of the 18th and early 19th centuries, when many of the pronunciations discussed above were not confined to specific styles, hypercorrection was common. Both Sheridan (1781) and Walker (1791) remark on the fact that the Irish frequently say greet ‘great’, beer ‘bear’, sweer ‘swear’, unaware of the fact that these words had /e:/ rather than /i:/ although by the 18th century the majority of words in the MEAT lexical class already showed the /i:/ vowel. However, before tautosyllabic /-r/ and in a few lexicalised cases like great, break, steak, the shift to /i:/ had not taken and was not to take place. This fact was not recognised by speakers shifting from their native mid front vowel to the presumably universal /i:/ in the MEAT lexical class, hence the instances of hypercorrection just quoted.

In his Rhetorical Grammar, Sheridan also has /ə/ in the words pudding and cushion. This could be explained, not only as hypercorrection, vis à vis mainstream English but also with regard to local Dublin English which now, and certainly then,
had /ʊ/ in these and all words with early modern English /u/.\textsuperscript{1} Indeed, according to Sheridan, /ʌ/ was found in foot, bull, bush, push, pull, pulpit, all but the last of which have /ʊ/ in (southern) Irish English today.

Hypercorrection would appear to die away with supraregionalisation. This stands to reason: if local features are replaced by more standard ones then later generations master the correct distribution of sounds immediately.

\textit{Unaffected features} Supraregionalisation does not appear to be something which speakers are aware of, e.g. no comments on how it was occurring in Irish English are recorded. There is no possibility of it being a planned process and so some features, which might have been affected, are not involved. An example of non-participation in the process is provided by the shortening of late modern English /u:/, seen in words like took and look, which now have short /ʊ/, despite the spelling which suggests a former /u:/ in (southern) Irish English today. In supraregional Irish English, a long /u:/ before /k/ has been retained in some words where this was later shortened in British English, e.g. cook [ku:k] and sometimes book [bu:k].

The shift from long to short vowel probably took place in England by lexical diffusion and in Ireland not as many words have been affected by this process. It is most likely that Irish English speakers did not proceed with the shift to the same extent as those in England because the long /u:/ was not stigmatised, i.e. a pronunciation like cook [ku:k] was, and is, not used in Ireland to assess a speaker socially.

3 Other scenarios for supraregionalisation

The discussion so far has been of supraregional varieties which have arisen through the suppression of vernacular features leading to forms of a language in which there is less variation than in local speech. There is, however, not just one source of supraregional varieties. A supraregional variety can arise through the adoption of a geographically confined variety by sections of a population spread over a much larger area. In such cases the variety which triggers this process stems from a source which has prestige in the society in question. A clear example of this type of development can be seen in the Republic of Ireland over the past 15 years or so where changes in Dublin English have spread to the entire country.

3.1 Varieties of Dublin English

Before discussing details of change, a few basic groupings of speakers in Dublin must be made. The first group consists of those who use the inherited popular form of English in the capital. The term ‘local’ is intended to capture this and to emphasise that these speakers are those who show strongest identification with traditional conservative Dublin life of which the popular accent is very much a part. The reverse of this is ‘non-local’, a label which refers to sections of the metropolitan population

\textsuperscript{1} The situation in Belfast where [ʌ] in words like pull, bush, would can be found is separate from that in Dublin and derives from an overgeneralisation of the lowering of early modern English [ʊ] to [ʌ].
who do not wish a narrow, restrictive identification with popular Dublin culture. This group then subdivides into a more general section, labelled ‘mainstream’ and an increasing significant group which rejects a confining association with low-prestige Dublin. This group can be simply labelled ‘new’.

Table 3  
Divisions of Dublin English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) local Dublin English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2) non-local Dublin English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) mainstream Dublin English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) new Dublin English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A central issue in contemporary Dublin English is the set of vowel shifts which represent the most recent phonological innovation in Irish English. This is not surprising as Dublin is a typical location for language change given the following facts.

1) The city has expanded greatly in population in the last three or four decades. The increase in population has been due both to internal growth and migration into the city from the rest of the country and from abroad.

2) It has undergone an economic boom in the last 15 years or so. The increase in wealth and international position has meant that many young people aspire to an urban sophistication which is divorced from strongly local Dublin life. For this reason the developments in new Dublin English diverge from those in local Dublin English, indeed can be interpreted as a reaction to it.

This type of linguistic behaviour can be termed local dissociation as it is motivated by the desire of speakers to hive themselves off from vernacular forms of a variety spoken in their immediate surroundings (Hickey 2000b).

3.2 How dissociation works

Speakers of both mainstream and new Dublin English generally avoid local features. What distinguishes the latter from the former group, however, is that it has developed strategies for a maximisation of the phonetic difference between realisations typical of their own variety and that of local Dublin English. This has been achieved by moving away – in phonological space – from the realisations found locally. The following list gives some indication of what is involved here.

a) Local Dublin English has a distinction between historic back and front short vowels before /r/, in the NURSE and GIRL lexical sets, [nuːː(r)s] and [geːː(ə)r] respectively. But because the open front realisation is so typical of local Dublin English, there has been a migration in new Dublin English of historically front long vowels to the central rhotic type as seen in words from the SQUARE lexical set like carefully [kɜːfɔːli] and daring [dərɪŋ]. This realisation has no precedent in the history of southern Irish English.
b) Connected with the previous feature is the strict avoidance of schwa retraction before /r/ in NURSE words such as third [tɜːd], purse [pɜːs], not [tʊ(ə)d] and [pʊ(ə)s].

c) The local back rounded vowel /ʌ/ in the STRUT lexical set is replaced by an unrounded front vowel which is almost /ɪ/, as in Sunday [sinde].

d) A syllable-final retroflex /ɾ/, [ɾ], is used which has the advantage of marking the /ɾ/ even more clearly vis-à-vis the popular forms of Dublin English which, if at all, have only a weak syllable-final /ɾ/.

Apart from the above features there has also been a shift of vowels (Hickey 2005: 45-91). The most important part of which is the raising of low back vowels and the retraction of diphthongs. The raised realisation of vowels in, say, the THOUGHT lexical set – [tʰəʊt] in local Dublin English and [tɔt] in new Dublin English – illustrates this particularly well as do other instances of vowel raising such as that in the CHOICE lexical set, e.g. toy [tɔɪ] in local Dublin English and [tɔɪ], [tɔɪ] in new Dublin English.

### 3.3 Local Dublin English features in the new supraregional variety

Although the motivation for the shifts in Dublin English has been dissociation from local speech, there are a number of common features found in both local and new varieties. These have all become part of the supraregional variety of Irish English which has arisen in recent years due to the spread of new Dublin English.

**MOUTH-fronting** In Dublin English the vowel in the MOUTH lexical set has a front starting point. A realisation as [au] is more conservative in Dublin and in rural areas it has been traditionally typical of the south-west and west of Ireland. The fronted onset of the /au/ diphthong has not been the subject of sociolinguistic censure in Dublin and so has migrated into the new pronunciation where it is regular for words of the MOUTH lexical set.

**SOFT-lengthening** Here one is again dealing with a traditional feature of Dublin English. Recall that the vowels of the CLOTH and BATH lexical sets, i.e. low and low back vowels before voiceless fricatives, showed lengthening which started in the early modern period. In England the lengthening was retained in the BATH set (Wells 1982: 203-6) but reversed in the CLOTH set. Earlier Dublin English adopted and kept the lengthening in both these cases so that today words like SOFT show a long vowel, i.e. soft = [sɔft]. The long vowel in the SOFT group did not spread to the entire country previously but is doing so now due to the adoption of new Dublin English by speakers outside the capital.

**L-velarisation** Traditionally, Irish English has an alveolar [l] in all syllable positions. A velarised [l] is really only a feature of contact Irish English, i.e. of the English of native speakers of Irish, and of local Dublin English. However, new Dublin English
show a definite velarisation of /l/ in this position: [fiːɔld]. This velarised [ɨ] has become all but universal in young people’s speech in Ireland.

3.4 Loss of distinctions in the new pronunciation

When comparing new Dublin English with conservative mainstream Irish English it is remarkable that a merger has occurred, the lack of which has hitherto been a prominent feature of Irish English. This is the for/four-merger where the formerly distinct vowels /ɔː/ and /oʊ/ have collapsed before /-r/ due to the raising of the former to [ɔː] and then to [oʊ], its realisation in new Dublin English today.

Another merger which is found in new Dublin English is that of /hw-/ [ʍ] and /w-/ [w] as in which and witch respectively. Irish English has traditionally maintained the distinction between these sounds, as have other conservative varieties of English, such as Scottish English (in various forms).²

This loss of phonetic distinctiveness in new Dublin English and by extension in the emerging supraregional variety is not of any sociolinguistic consequence, given that supraregional speakers generally belong to weak-tie social networks which do not place any store on strongly vernacular norms (L. Milroy 1976). This means that phonetic distinctions which could be instrumental in the maintainance of such norms are not necessary for such speakers. For further instances of a loss of distinctions, see section 2.1 above.

3.5 The spread of the shift

Because of the status of Dublin, non-vernacular speech of the capital acts as a guideline for the rest of the country when others, outside of Dublin, are seeking a non-local, generally acceptable form of Irish English. This has meant, for instance, that the retroflex [ɻ], used by fashionable speakers in Dublin, is spreading out of the capital, especially with younger urbanites from different parts of the country.

The spread of features of new Dublin English has accelerated considerably in the past few years. Whereas for studies by the present author in the early and mid 1990s a pattern of lexical diffusion of new pronunciations – that is, for certain key words – was much more common (Hickey 1998), in the early 2000s this sporadic distribution became recessive and a general adoption of fashionable Dublin English features could be observed.

Given that supraregionalisation is a type of language change it is not surprising that young female speakers have most readily adopted the new Dublin pronunciation outside the capital. For instance, the use of a retroflex /-r/ is most common among young female speakers as the recordings for Hickey (2004) show conclusively. In fact for all female speakers under 25 this pronunciation has become the norm, irrespective of what part of the country they come from. The same is true for the raised vowels in the THOUGHT and CHOICE lexical sets as well as for velarised, syllable-final [ɨ].

It should be mentioned that not all features of a donor variety, such as new

² This merger is found in many other varieties of English, indeed would seem to be characteristic of standard varieties of English world-wide (Chambers 2002: 370).
Dublin English, are adopted into an emerging supraregional variety. Where there is internal variation in the source variety, a feature involved in this variation may not be sufficiently salient to be perceived by outsiders as part of the new variety. For instance, the rounding of the SQUARE vowel (see 3.2. above) or the retraction of /ai/ to [ar] are not found with all speakers of the new pronunciation and have not established themselves in the new supraregional variety.

3.6 Spread of features in present-day Britain

The spread of features from a leading urban variety can be seen elsewhere, e.g. in contemporary Britain. Here the vernacular varieties which stem from London and the Home Counties show glottalisation of /t/, typically in intervocalic and word-final position, e.g. water [ˈwɔtə] and cut [kʌt]. This has been picked up by supraregional speakers in northern Britain (Milroy, Milroy and Hartley 1994) where the glottal stop has been incorporated into ‘supra-local norms’. Even it is true that there is an independent origin for glottalisation in the north of Britain (Beal 2007: 39f.) the perception of it for present-day speakers as a feature of southern Britain remains. These remarks also apply to other features which have generally been assumed to have a southern origin in Britain, e.g. TH-fronting as in [fɪŋk] for think (Beal 2007: 37f.).

3.6 Supraregionalisation and heteronymy

The notion of heteronymy has been employed by linguists (Chambers and Trudgill 1999: 10-14) to refer to the fact that similar dialects in a geographical area can often be related to different standard languages, especially when a national border runs through the area in question. A well-known example for this is the German-Dutch border. Rather than just specifying the relationship of a dialect to a standard, one can express the relationship as one between a dialect and a supraregional variety. This captures the insight that speakers can shift away from their dialect by the adoption of less regionally bound features without necessarily switching to the codified standard of a country. Supraregionalisation would then exercise a pull in two opposite directions depending on the what the heteronymic relation is in the dialects of an area as show in the following map.
In the context of the current chapter, one can consider examples of heteronymic pull in varieties of Irish English. A good example for this can be found in south-east Ulster, an area which straddles the divide between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and which consists of counties Monaghan (Republic of Ireland), Armagh and south Down (the latter two in Northern Ireland). For speakers north of the border, the supraregional variety they gravitate towards is Northern Irish English whereas for those south of the border their guideline supraregional variety is that of the south of Ireland.
Local varieties of English in south-east Ulster share certain features, for instance an off-glide after the vowel in the FACE lexical set and the use of a dental stop and front [æː] in the BATH lexical set. Speakers of the supraregional variety north of the border retain the offglide in their speech because this is part of northern supraregional speech. Those south of the border drop the offglide as supraregional Irish English does not have this. In the BATH lexical set, supraregional speakers south of the border retain the [bæːt] pronunciation whereas those north of the border use a more central vowel followed by an (inter)dental fricative.

Table 4  

**South-east Ulster local and supraregional pronunciations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Pronunciation</th>
<th>South-east Ulster local pronunciations</th>
<th>Southern supraregional variety</th>
<th>Northern supraregional variety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACE lexical set</td>
<td>[fəːs]</td>
<td>[fəːs] (without off-glide)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BATH lexical set</td>
<td>[bæːt]</td>
<td>[bæːt] (front vowel + dental stop)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Conclusion

The consideration of supraregionalisation in this chapter has shown that it refers to both a historical process of the late modern period and a state which has been attained in countries like Ireland or Scotland and in regions of Britain such as northern England. The rise of these varieties is triggered by such factors as general education and the appearance of a middle class. The latter group then avoids features indicative of vernacular varieties by a process of suppression and selection. This generally leads to reduced variation in supraregional varieties, something which also shows that they are essentially different from vernacular varieties which maintain phonological complexity as a linguistic correlate of intricate social networks. At the opposite end of the social scale one finds a standard of a language with which a supraregional variety is not identical. The codification and the functional elaboration is missing with supraregional varieties. Frequently a country has a supraregional variety in phonological terms but avails of the standard in writing and largely in morphosyntax.

Supraregional varieties are not static and can alter if social developments trigger this. The recent changes in Dublin English show this: the features of a leading urban variety have in this case spread out from the capital to the rest of the country and have shaped a new supraregional variety which is fast replacing the established one.

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