The Dublin Vowel Shift and the historical perspective

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1 The background

The present contribution is concerned with examining a major change in the English spoken in the city of Dublin, a change currently in progress and which has become evident to the author in investigations of present-day Irish English over the last decade or so. I have given it the working title the Dublin Vowel Shift and will present details in the course of this article which will hopefully show that it is of comparable status to other major attested vowel shifts in the history of English and that it has a significance which goes beyond any local interest in the pronunciation of Dublin English.

To all appearances the Dublin Vowel Shift is something which started less than 20 years ago and has not yet reached phonological stability. In essence this externally motivated change involves a retraction of diphthongs with a low or back starting point and a raising of low back vowels. Specifically, it affects the diphthongs in the TIME and TOY lexical sets and the monophthongs in the COT and CAUGHT lexical sets.

(1) Dublin Vowel Shift, principal movements

a) retraction of diphthongs with a low or back starting point

\[
\begin{align*}
time & \quad [\text{taim}] \rightarrow [\text{taim}] \\
toy & \quad [\text{tai}] \rightarrow [\text{tai}], [\text{toi}] \\
\end{align*}
\]

b) a raising of low back vowels

\[
\begin{align*}
cot & \quad [\text{koit}] \rightarrow [\text{koit}] \\
caught & \quad [\text{kot}] \rightarrow [\text{kot}],[\text{kot}] \\
\end{align*}
\]

As a change in progress the Dublin Vowel Shift is of particular interest to historical linguists as it offers evidence for the mechanisms of actuation and propagation in sound shifts. Because it has not yet become stable one can observe how and to what extent it is being picked up by speakers from various groups within Ireland and in this respect it is parallel to, but of course not identical with, current changes among the short tensed
vowels in the northern cities of the eastern United States (see various discussions in Labov 1994). Observations concerning the change show that it has a distinct social distribution: it would appear to emanate from those social groups in Dublin which choose not to identify themselves linguistically with popular Dublin English, more on this presently.

1.1 Historical remarks on Irish English

The history of English in the south of Ireland can be divided into two periods. This is justified on both language internal and external historical grounds. The first period dates from the late 12th century to 1600 and the second from the latter date to the present-day. The division between the two periods rests on the external events at the end of the 16th century and in the 17th century when a vigorous policy of forced settlement took place in Ireland, establishing the dominance of English which has increased ever since much to the detriment of the native Irish language.

The centuries after the coming of the Normans in 1169 were characterised by Gaelic resurgence which led to the decline of English (and Anglo-Norman) in the entire country by the early 16th century with the exception of Dublin and its immediate surroundings, known as the Pale from the fortifications which separated it from the rest of the country under the control of the native Irish. The latter borrowed many words from the foreigners in this early period. Most of these are from Anglo-Norman but there are some from English, e.g., *whiting* gave *faoitín* in Irish which shows clearly a pre-Great Vowel Shift pronunciation of *i* in Irish English because *ao* in the borrowed word was definitely pronounced */iː/ in Irish.

The result of the Gaelic resurgence in rural Ireland before the 17th century is that Dublin English today is the only substantial variety of English in Ireland which can claim continuity from the time of the original settlers. This fact is of no socio-linguistic relevance today but it is responsible for certain features of Dublin English which are not found in the rest of the country such as the lengthening of many short vowels and the breaking of long vowels, more on this in a moment.

1.2 Documentation of Dublin English

The documentation of Dublin English is unfortunately quite scanty. What little material there is can be found in documents such as city records. These offer a glimpse of some archaic features of Dublin English, for instance the deletion of post-sonorants stops as in */pʰəʊn(?)*/ pound with a glottal stop at most as a trace of the former alveolar plosive (still a feature of popular Dublin English). The Dublin Records from the 15th century show this deletion in words like *stone* ‘stand’, *strone* ‘strand’.

Apart from non-fictional prose documents there is the language of authors from Dublin. However, this is not necessarily Dublin English. Certainly for authors of the early modern period (from the mid 17th century onwards) one cannot assume that their language was by any manner or means a reflection of the popular speech of the capital. Authors like Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) or Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) wrote in standard English. Nonetheless there are glimpses of what Irish English, if not Dublin English, can have been like in previous centuries. Swift wrote two small pieces which purport to represent the English of the native Irish and the English planters of the early 18th century (*Irish Eloquence* and *Dialogue in Hybernian Stile*, Bliss, 1976:557).
Quite a number of dramatists of the Restoration period (after the return of Charles II to the throne in 1660) parodied Irish figures and their speech in their plays and this casts some light on Irish English of the late 17th century. In addition the father of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, one Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788), was something of an authority on language matters in the late 18th century and also a well-known elocutionist who travelled widely. Sheridan is the author of *A Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language* (1781) which includes an appendix on the language of educated Dubliners which he examines and corrects (laying out a series of rules to be observed by the Irish in order to speak English properly). This brief treatment is a valuable source of information on the state of upper class Dublin English two centuries ago. Among the features remarked on by Sheridan are the following.

a) The pronunciation of *a* was /a:/ and not /e:/ in words like *patron*, *matron*.

b) A pronunciation of English /ai/ from ME /i:/ was found as [ɔɪ] (assuming a correct interpretation of Sheridan’s spellings) and this tallies with what is known from present-day Dublin English, e.g. *mine* [maiõ] for [main].

c) There was an unshifted realisation of ME /e:/ and /e:/ as [ɛ:] in words like *beat*, *leave*, *meet* which is in agreement with local Dublin English usage up to the beginning of the present century. This vowel is still found as a caricature of a former Irish pronunciation of English, e.g. in *Jesus* [dʒɛ:zi], *decent* [dɛ:sɪnt]. Today unshifted ME /e:/ is a deliberately archaic vowel realisation in Dublin English.

d) A realisation of /a:/ before former liquids as /ɔ:/ as in *psalm* [sɔ:lm], *balm* [bɔ:lm] appears to have been current. This pronunciation is unknown nowadays though the back vowel before velarised /ɾ/ probably resulted in the pronunciations /bɔul/ and /aul/ still found for *bold* and *old* colloquially.

### 1.3 Superimposition of more standard varieties

The various comments on Irish English since the 16th century and the limited non-fictional documents which are available from the 15th century onwards and show that the Great Vowel Shift was only partially carried out in Ireland. This is of course due to the fact that the varieties brought to Ireland as of the late 12th century obviously could not have had the shift and that it was later only adopted in part. In particular the lack of diphthongisation of /i:/ to /ai/, the lack of raising of /a:/ to /e:/ and the absent shift with both /ɛ:/ and /e:/ to /i:/ are noticeable. Of these shifts only that of /ɛ:/ and /e:/ to /i:/ is still missing in local Dublin English, though here the lack of shift is recessive.

This situation points clearly to the superimposition of more standard varieties at various stages in the development of Dublin English. The peculiarities which Sheridan referred to concern educated Dublin English pronunciation, so that in the course of the 19th century ME /a:/ must have receded entirely in favour of /e:/ in words like *take*, *matron*. Furthermore, the hypercorrect forms such as *prey* [pri:] and *convey* [kən'vi:], noted by Sheridan, died away, being replaced by pronunciations with /e:/.

Other features of Dublin English are recorded by Sheridan, but not found
anywhere today. For instance there seems to have been a general lowering of ME /e/ to /a/ before /r/ as seen regularly in English words like barn, dark from earlier bern, derk. Sheridan notes pronunciations like

(2) sarch for search, sarve for serve, etc.

Again the superimposition of more standard layers of English has been responsible for their disappearance since.

1.4 Lexical extinction

Words such as tea [teː] or please [pleːz] may serve as fossilised retentions of an early stage in the variety which has been superseded by another. But the frequent claim that [ɛː] is used for /iː/ betrays an undifferentiated perspective on Dublin English. With Hogan (1927) one already has references to the recessive nature of the mid vowel realisation and its confinement to keywords in lower registers. The number which exhibit the earlier vowel realisation has been constantly reduced up to present-day English and if the process of lexical extinction of these realisations is carried through there will be no record of this earlier vowel value left in Dublin English.

1.5 Divisions in Dublin city

Like any other modern city Dublin shows areas of high and low social prestige. The city lies at the mouth of the river Liffey in the centre of the east coast, and spreads along the shores of the horseshoe shape of Dublin bay. The suburbs which have increased dramatically since the sixties reach down to Bray and beyond into Co.Wicklow in the south, to the West in the direction of Maynooth and to the north at least to Swords, the airport and beyond. The Dublin conurbation now encompasses about a third of the population of the Republic of Ireland, i.e. over one million speakers.

Within Dublin there is a clear divide between the north and the south side of the city. The latter is regarded as more residentially desirable (with the exception of Howth and its surroundings on the peninsula which forms the north side of Dublin bay). Within the south there is a cline of prestige with the area around Ballsbridge, Donnybrook (and somewhat further away from the centre Foxrock) enjoying highest status. This is the area of certain key complexes like the Royal Dublin Society (the most important exhibition and event centre in the capital) and the national television studios RTE (Radio Telefís Éireann, ‘Irish Radio and Television’) and of the national university (University College Dublin) in Belfield. This entire area is known by its postal number, Dublin 4. Indeed this number has given its name to a sub-accent within Dublin English known as the ‘Dublin 4 Accent’ which shows the vowel shift in its more extreme form. The less prestigious parts of the city are known by their district names such as the Liberties in the centre of the city, immediately north of the river Liffey and Ballymun, the only suburb in Ireland with high-rise flats and which is associated with adverse social conditions.

1.6 The supra-regional variety of English

In the Republic of Ireland, that is, excluding the north which because of its different demographic history is quite separate from the rest of the country, there is something like a supra-regional standard which is characterised by the speech of middle-class urbanites.
This can be classified into different sub-varieties on the basis of features which are found in one and not the other. For instance the urban speech of Cork may show a tendency to raise /e/ before nasals and that of Dublin may raise and lengthen /o/ before voiceless fricatives.

Nonetheless there is a core of common features which can be taken as characteristic of general middle-class speech of the south and it is these which the non-Irish use as clues for identifying an Irish accent, e.g. rhotism (with a velarised [x]), dental stops for dental fricatives, fricativisation of /t,d/ in open position (intervocically and word-finally before a pause as in butter and cut), monophthong equivalents to the Received Pronunciation diphthongs /ei/ and /æo/ and the lack of any significant lexical distribution of long and short vowels in the BLAND and GLANCE lexical sets (as the length and quality difference in these vowels is so slight) to mention just some of the more prominent examples.

1.7 The status of Received Pronunciation

For an anglophone country like Ireland the relationship to other larger English-speaking countries plays a significant role, one which naturally has a linguistic dimension as well. In this connection the question arises whether the less regionally bound varieties of any of these larger countries act in any sense as a guideline for the Irish. In practice the only two countries which are involved here are the United States and Britain. There is considerable exposure to forms of English from America in the media, above all through films, but whatever accents may be represented here they have no effect on language behaviour in Ireland with the exception of some lexical items which may be adopted.

The situation with Britain is different given the geographical proximity and the close economic and cultural ties which it has with Ireland. This is a complicated issue as the history of Ireland often dictates a sceptical and critical attitude to Britain while contemporary social conditions in Ireland are such that there is much contact with Britain due to Irish people working there and the general orientation towards this country, though there has been a certain re-orientation as a result of membership in the European Union in the past decade or so. However, linguistically Britain is and will remain Ireland’s powerful and dominant next-door-neighbour. Hence the valid question concerning the status of standard forms of British English in Ireland needs to be asked.

It may well be part of the colonial legacy in Ireland that speakers are very sensitive to the danger of being seen to have a thick, boorish Irish accent, particularly because a condescending attitude to the Irish has a considerable tradition in Britain. However, here as in other spheres of life, one notices the ambivalence of the Irish relationship with Britain. On the one hand the Irish do not want to be all too readily regarded by the British as having an unacceptable accent, on the other hand they would regard it as pandering to the British to adopt an accent approaching Received Pronunciation.

Hence it is true to say that speakers from the Irish Republic do not emulate Received Pronunciation. Instead the supra-regional standard of Dublin origin provides an orientation for the southern middle-class Irish. Certain characteristics of this speech, such as rhotism, alveolar /l/ in all positions, monophthong long mid vowels, centralised /æ:/, plosive equivalents to /θ,ð/ and the retention of /w/ (Hickey, 1984) are so obvious that no possibility of confusion with the southern British standard is possible.

A major reason for the lack of influence of Received Pronunciation on the supra-regional standard of the south is the attitude of the population to England and
English society. It would not befit any nationalist-minded Irishman to imitate an English accent. Although the vast majority of the Irish speak English as their native language, using an English accent approaching Received Pronunciation is regarded as snobbish, if not to say unpatriotic, and usually evokes derision from one’s fellow countrymen. It is this which is scorned as a *grand* [grænd] or *posh* or *lah-di-dah* accent, an outward manifestation of pretentiousness and social condescension.

### 1.8 How can you tell a moderate Dublin accent?

The supra-regional accent of English in the south of Ireland is derived ultimately from a conservative southern urban pronunciation as found in Dublin. However, as with any metropolitan accent one finds certain popular features represented to a limited degree in educated non-localised forms of the city variety. This is what is termed a ‘moderate Dublin accent’ and the term could be equally applied to other capitals such as London where, for example, a diluted form of the Cockney vowel values is typical of the speech of educated non-working class Londoners.

Dubliners can be distinguished from urbanites from the rest of the Irish Republic by characteristic pronunciations. For instance there is a general fronting of the /au/-diphthong which results in realisations like *house* [hæus] for [haus]. Another trait is the lengthening of low back vowels. Thus words like *lost* are pronounced [lɔst] rather than [lost]. This feature can lead to a merger of pairs like *horse* and *hoarse* under [hoːrs] which are normally kept apart in general urban Irish English.

A further characteristic of Dublin English is its rhotacism. Unlike England there is no prestige variety of Irish English which is non-rhotic. The fact that syllable-final /r/ should be maintained so consistently, especially in Dublin English, is not an accident. Lower-class Dublin English is non-rhotic as pronunciations like [pɔɾta] for *porter* testify.

In this respect Dublin English is similar to New York. In both cities rhoticism is prestigious as lower class speech lacks syllable-final /r/. Dublin has, however, departed from the general velarised r of the rest of the country and developed a retroflex [ɾ] so that a word like *for* [foɾ] is pronounced as [foː]. This realisation is connected with the raising of back vowels, again characteristic of Dublin English.

Apart from such specific features, Dublin English shares the typically Irish traits of pronunciation such as the weakening of alveolars in an intervocalic or word-final position: *night* [naiɾ], *fighting* [faɾtιŋ]. It also shows ubiquitous yod-dropping after alveolar sonorants: *news* [njuɾ], *neuter* [nuɛɾ]. However, yod-deletion after non-sonorants, e.g. /stuɔpid/ would be understood as a deliberate imitation of an American accent.

Note that the features just mentioned do not have any significance as social markers. They show a minimum of variation stylistically and generally enjoy only low awareness with speakers. Equally variables such as (h) and (æ) are not markers of high or low social position, as they frequently are in British English: *h*-dropping is unknown in Irish English and there is no differential use of /æ/ versus /æː/ (as with RP *bland* and *glance* mentioned above) because these vowels are only weakly distinguished. Both are realised as a long low central vowel, [æː]: [blænd] and [glæns] respectively.

Apart from segmental features such as those just discussed one should mention that Dublin English shows a number of allegro phenomena which spread across groups of
words. They are phonologically non-systematic but nonetheless contribute to the impression of a slurred pronunciation which the non-Irish sometimes associate with Irish English; a case in point would be the procope of pre-stress syllables or the reduction of consonant clusters as in

(3) procope of unstressed syllables

\[ 'membər \] (remember), \[ 'mɪər \] (= come here)

consonant cluster simplification

\[ 'rɛkənaɪz , monks \]

1.9 How do you recognise a lower class Dublin accent?

Moving down the social scale in the capital facilitates the task of recognising Dublin speech. There are obvious features in morphology and syntax such as the agglutinative plural for second person pronouns, either youse or yez, the latter consisting of the inherited archaic ye and the productive plural suffix \{S\}. Another indicator is the use of unstressed do for an habitual aspect as in She does be worrying about the kids all the time.

The pronunciation of Dublin English has equally unambiguous features. In the area of vowels the clearest of these are the centralisation of the /ai/ diphthong, the fronting of /au/, the over-long realisation of phonemically long vowels, often with disyllabification as a result, the realisation of historically short vowels before /r/ and that of early modern English short /ə/.

(4) Centralisation of /ai/

\[ \text{time} \] [ˈtəim] — [ˈtajəm]

Fronting of /au/

\[ \text{down} \] [dəʊn] — [dəʊn]

Over-long vowels with frequent disyllabification

\[ \text{school} \] [skʊˈl] — [skʊːl] — [skʊːwəl]

\[ \text{mean} \] [miːn] — [miːən] — [miːjən]

Historically short vowels before /r/:

\[ \text{circle} \] [sɜːkl]
\[ \text{first} \] [fɜːst(t)]

Early modern English short /ə/:

\[ \text{Dublin} \] [ˈdʌblən]

In the area of consonants there are equally clear indications of popular Dublin English. Some are unique to lower registers and others are extensions of features found in more accepted forms of Dublin English. Unique features include the simplification of consonantal syllable codas, particularly of stops after fricatives or sonorants. Intermediate registers may have a glottal stop as a trace of the stop in question.

(5) pound [pʊn(ʔ)]

\[ \text{last} \] [læːs(ʔ)]

Extensions include the lenition of /t/ in a weak position beyond the initial stage of apico-alveolar fricative to /ɾ/ then to /h/ with final deletion as in the following instance.
Finally mention should be made of the merger of dental and alveolar stops in lower-class Dublin English. Although it may seem to non-Irish ears that ambi-dental fricatives are always realised as alveolar stops this is by no means the case. There is a clear distinction between the dental stops [t] and [d], which are the equivalents of English [θ] and [ð] respectively, and the alveolar stops [t] and [d] which correspond to those in non-Irish varieties. Irish ears are tuned to this difference and the retraction of the dental stops to an alveolar position is immediately noticeable and hence stigmatised as typical of low-prestige speech.

1.10 The lower class Dublin community

Looking at lower-class Dublin English from a broader perspective one immediately recognises its conservative character. Its salient features are those which were in all probability established in the first period of English in Ireland and it has, generally speaking, survived the later superimposition of more standard forms of English in the last two centuries which eliminated many of the characteristics of middle-class speech in the city.

The conservative profile is in keeping with the notion of network strength within a closely-knit community which inhibits change and the relative homogeneity of lower-class Dublin English should be seen within the context of shared values in this stratum of society.

Furthermore the focussed nature of the lower-class community is attested in the amount of synchronically opaque forms which represent fairly complex variation which is not readily accessible to those outside the community. For instance the realisation of historic short vowels before /r/ is unpredictable for middle-class speakers, e.g. one has

\[
(8) \quad \text{circle} \quad [\text{ski:d}] \quad \text{but} \quad \text{bird} \quad [\text{bu:d}]
\]

This group has the merger of /i/ and /e/ before /r/ and so the distinction is no longer recoverable for them whereas it is an integral part of lower-class speech.

The speech of the middle-classes on the other hand is more indicative of supra-local varieties which tend towards koinés and are simpler in structure than more local varieties because, for the higher social groups, variation no longer shows any in-group function; this could go part of the way in explaining why the merger of short vowels before /r/ was accepted by socially prestigious, but weakly networked groups, which originally did not have the merger (as Sheridan shows) during the later superimposition of standard varieties.
2 What is the Dublin Vowel Shift?

For the remainder of this article I will be concerned with describing the Dublin Vowel Shift in some detail and analysing it within a broader linguistic framework. Let me begin however with some remarks on the present position of the capital city Dublin.

Dublin is a modern metropolis with over a million inhabitants and shows a clear social structure, stretching from the poor, lower-class city-centre and northside to the considerably more affluent middle-class south side. Local varieties of Dublin English are associated with the less well-off parts of the city so that the adoption of a sophisticated accent in Dublin serves the dual purposes of hiving oneself off from the poorer elements and associating oneself with the more affluent sections of the capital’s population.

2.1 Fashionable and local Dublin English

For the linguist describing different kinds of Dublin English the question arises: how does one refer to the participants in the modern urban setting of Dublin? One could start with traditional terms which refer to class. Class definitions typically involve education, occupation and relative wealth. The middle classes would have all these attributes to a positive degree and one could say that they are the group which sees itself as separate from the lower classes.

However, the matter is not that simple. For instance air hostesses, bank clerks, company secretaries, people from the world of film and fashion are not necessarily regarded as belonging to the middle class but they certainly come from a section of the population which does not want to be identified with an all too localised form of Dublin English. One could say that it is the group of those aspiring upwards — the socially ambitious — which is the motor behind the changes in Dublin English. Certainly this group belongs to those partaking in the changes. However, social movement is not in my opinion the defining factor for assignment to the group which is the driving force behind the Dublin Vowel Shift. Rather it is an attitude of condescension and snobbishness towards the low-prestige and linguistically salient sections of the capital city. These are certainly ‘below’ in a vertical interpretation of social structure and the former group can be thought of as ‘above’, at least in a metaphorical sense of those who look down on others.

A common means of referring to middle class speakers is to speak of them as ‘educated’; again this term is not accurate enough for the matter at hand. The determining factor for active participation in the Dublin Vowel Shift is the extent to which speakers espouse urban sophistication. This can be seen as a rejection of an all too local identification with Dublin and a conception of self as a player on a (fictional) international stage. Such an understanding of the motivation explains why the Dublin Vowel Shift is found among groups which have not enjoyed tertiary education and who are not necessarily among the more prosperous — air hostesses, company secretaries, up-market shop assistants. It further accounts for why many established professionals - genuinely educated speakers in any sense of the term - such as doctors, teachers, lecturers, do not necessarily show the Dublin Vowel Shift or only the weakened form with lexical keywords (more on this in a moment). Indeed if there is a strong sense of local bondedness among such speakers then they may evince a high degree of popular Dublin features and none of the signs of the vowel shift.
2.2 The variable (ai) in Irish English

Let me now turn to the description of the Dublin Vowel Shift. The first point to note is that a conservative pronunciation of (ai) in Dublin is maintained in lower-class speech as [aɪ]. There is historical documentation of this realisation which is particularly revealing as it shows that it was typical of the middle classes in late 18th century Ireland. For instance Fanny Burney (1752-1840), in her reminiscences of famous individuals she knew, imitates the Irish accent of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) by referring to his pronunciation of kind as [kaɪnd], indicated orthographically as koind. This pronunciation seems to have become part of the stereotype of an Irish accent and authors such as Kipling used the oi spelling to indicate this as in woid Oirland.

Now the superregional variety of the south has for (ai) a diphthong which has a low mid or low front starting point, i.e., either [aɪ] or [æi]. This realisation tallies with that in many varieties of Irish, although the position in Irish is of no relevance to the Dublin Vowel Shift. What is significant here is that a non-central starting point is the commonest one for non-regional varieties of Irish English. This pronunciation would seem either to have developed independently in the capital or to have been adopted from the large influx of rural speakers, most of whom would have had the [aɪ] realisation. Recall that in the latter half of the 19th century at a time when the population of Ireland sank by several millions, that of Dublin actually increased by almost 10%.

If one now considers local Dublin English one finds that its realisation for (ai) as [æi] is quite stigmatised in Dublin. One can maintain that the greater the phonetic separation of middle class Dublin English from more local forms in the capital grew, the more the corresponding forms of the lower social classes became stigmatized.

However the matter does not end there. For middle class Dubliners the [aɪ,æɪ] pronunciations sufficiently delimit them from popular Dublin English. But increasingly a back starting-point is being used with this diphthong, i.e. for a word like style the pronunciation is not [staɪl] but rather [staɪl]. This retracted starting-point is particularly noticeable before /r/ so that the name of the country is realised as [ɑɪɭænd] rather than [ɑɪɭænd].

The social group which most clearly shows this pronunciation is that referred to above and their variety is that which I choose to term ‘fashionable Dublin English’ as this term best captures the element of vogue which is associated with pronunciations within Dublin which are maximally distinct from the conversative and strongly local forms.

2.3 Distribution of the shift

The fact that the Dublin Vowel Shift is not that old offers the linguist the opportunity of observing a change in its initial stages and provides evidence for how a change begins to spread through the variety in which it occurs. In this connection it is relevant to consider the distribution of the segments affected.

The most noticeable aspect of the shift is that is does not apply to all possible inputs as can be seen from the following words with (ai).

The generalisation here is that retraction to [ɑɪ] only occurs before voiced segments. This makes phonetic sense: the retracted onset of the diphthong requires that the tongue travel a longer distance from a rest position than for the unshifted realisation [aɪ]. In this respect the restrictions on the diphthong shift are similar to those on diphthong realisation in Canadian English, commonly known as Canadian Raising. Here a centralised onset is used for the diphthongs /ai/ and /au/ before voiceless segments, before voiced ones an onset in the region of /a/ is found.

(10) Canadian Raising  

This distribution shows that the Canadian phenomenon is not an instance of raising but rather of vowel lowering (from /ɑ/ to /æ/) before voiced segments, i.e. the tongue can travel from a central to a low position before those segments which are relatively long phonetically.

The argumentation used here is phonetic and would appear to offer the best chance of accounting for apparent counter-examples to the distribution assumed. Thus many speakers have the shift in words like crisis [kraɪsɪz] /krai.sɪz/.

On closer consideration the explanation would seem to be that the shift is found before voiced segments and in open syllables. This also accounts for its occurrence in final position, e.g. in bye [bɑɪ] and July [dʒuɪl] as well as in isolated instances where /ai/ occurs before a voiceless segment in a closed syllable but in a strongly stressed position at the end of a phrase, e.g. in Your man is so nice ['naɪs]. Stress positioning plays a further role: The shift is not in evidence in unstressed syllables or those with secondary stress because of their inherent phonetic shortness.

(11) headline  [ˈhedlæm]  
nationwide  [ˈneɪʃənˌwɔrd]  

It is difficult to predict whether this distribution will remain typical for the Dublin Vowel Shift. It may very well be that it is only characteristic of an initial phase and that the shift will spread to all instances of /ai/, masking the present distribution. Or it may freeze at this stage, as has been the case with Canadian Raising. And of course the shift may peter out and an unretracted [aɪ] pronunciation may be re-instated for all instances of the diphthong.

2.4 General shift of low vowels

The Dublin Vowel Shift is not just confined to the realisation of (ai). As might be expected other vowels in the area of this diphthong are affected. The elements in question are the diphthong /ɔɪ/ and the low and mid vowels /ɔ/ and /ɔː/. Now it should be noted that in Irish English these vowels have a generally lower realisation than in southern British English.

(12)  

boy  /ɔɪ/  →  [bɔɪ]  
pot  /ɒ/  →  [pɒt] — [pɒt]  

law  /ɔː/  →  [lɔː]
These realisations show that the change has the characteristics of a chain shift, a major shift, far more than anything found currently in Received Pronunciation, e.g., the fronting of /u:/ or the lowering of /æ/. It can be compared in its breadth to the Scandinavian vowel shift of the late middle ages which led to a shift backwards, upwards and forwards for all vowels from /a:/ to /u:/.

2.5 Lack of stylistic variation

The *Dublin Vowel Shift* is a set of changes which do not appear subject to any appreciable stylistic variation. The reason is probably that, as a set of changes (relaxed jaw setting, retraction of low vowels, except /a:/, and raising of back vowels), showing stylistic variation would involve altering the whole set. Stylistic variation with (ng) /ŋ/ or /n/ is to be expected as it involves a single feature which is easily reversible. The same applies to the agglutinative plural second person pronoun, *youse* or *yez*, instead of *you*.

2.6 Fashionable Dublin: how to avoid local features

The retraction of low vowels is the most acoustically salient feature of fashionable Dublin English and it is this which constitutes the core of the *Dublin Vowel Shift*. However, the story does not end there: other avoidance strategies used to maximally differentiate fashionable forms from local forms of Dublin speech are found.

(13) **Fashionable Dublin features**

a) Strict avoidance of retraction of /i/ before /r/ in *third*, *first*, i.e. [ʈʰːd] [ʃːst] and not [tuːd] [fuːs(t)]

b) The local back rounded /o/ is replaced by an unrounded front vowel which is almost /u/, as in *Sunday*.

c) Local Dublin English has a distinction between historic back and front short vowels before /r/, [ɛː] and [uː]. But because the open front realisation is so stigmatised (so typical of local Dublin English), there is a migration in fashionable Dublin English of historic front long vowels to the central rhotic type as seen in examples like *care* [kʰːr] and *pear* [pʰːr].

d) A retroflex /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, only have a weak syllable-final /ɾ/.

2.7 Relative chronology

Given the lack of work on Dublin English it is difficult to pinpoint when the vowel shift began. The use of central rhotic vowels for historic long mid vowels before /ɾ/ (in words...
like *care*, *pear*) has been a feature for a few decades as has the occurrence of general lengthening and raising of */a:/ as in *lost* [loʊst] and of */ɔ:/ as in *morning* [moʊˈnɪŋ] (see the rather loose set of comments in Wells 1982:418-428).

Wells (1982:426) mentions that there is an educated Dublin variant of the */ai/* vowel [æi]. He refers to Bertz who sees this realisation as typical of Dublin. But Bertz has no inkling of the *Dublin Vowel Shift* and does not attempt any systematic distinction between local Dublin English and fashionable Dublin English despite his long taxonomies of every conceivable vowel quality which he thinks he has heard in Dublin. The remarks by Bertz stem from research carried out in the early 1970’s and those of Wells from work in the late 1970’s (publication dates are 1976, 1987 and 1982 respectively) so that the value of their fleeting comments lies in the apparent existence of retracted realisations of */ai/* twenty years ago. The reports are tantalisingly slight so that it is difficult to say whether the *Dublin Vowel Shift* had started by the 1970’s. Certainly by the mid to late 1980’s when the present author began his own scrutiny of Dublin English the shift had reached considerable proportions with definite patterning and distribution.

There is a further reason for rejecting too early a dating, apart from its going unrecognised. This is that its distribution is scant among middle-aged or older speakers in present-day Dublin. If these were exposed to it in their youth then it would be reasonable to assume that they would retain it. Furthermore, many speakers of middle age and onwards have the vowel shift in lexical keywords and not with the general distribution one would expect if they were motivated participants, for instance, among the author’s recordings, a number of speakers over 40 had the vowel shift in *Irish* and *Ireland* but not in the numerals *five* and *nine*.

3 Arguments for and against the shift

3.1 Is there a shift at all?

At this point it is sensible to consider the arguments against the Dublin vowel shift: it could be maintained that all one has is a gradual approximation to more standard forms of southern British English due to the strong influence of England on Ireland through travel and the media. This looks like the simplest and most convenient explanation for developments in Dublin. After all there is a lexical influence on Irish English, in the use of many buzz-words and semantic shifts such as the use of *joy* in the sense of *success*. However, the imitation view can be dismantled very quickly. Bear the following facts concerning the Dublin vowel shift in mind.

1) If British influence was making itself felt, then one would expect other features to be adopted, such as */æ:/ for long *a*. But this is out of the question. Words of the GLANCE lexical set have [æ:], i.e. [klæ:s]. Indeed the low back realisation is used by the Irish to ridicule a plummy British accent by referring to someone as having ‘a [gɹænd] accent’ (although the Received Pronunciation form of the word is [ɡrænd]). The normal form of the word is [ɡrænd]). The normal Irish pronunciation is [ɡrant] with a low central vowel.

2) There is no tendency in Irish English to drop syllable-final */r/*. If British English influence was operative then one would expect non-rhoticism to be spreading into
fashionable Dublin speech. One could of course say that conversative local Dublin English was and to some extent still is non-rhotic; the middle classes cling to rhoticism as a demarcative feature.

3) Most importantly, however, if southern British influence were operative in Dublin one would expect a generalised, or at least sporadic retraction of /ai/ to [əɪ]. But the retraction shows a phonetically determined distribution: only before voiced segments and in open syllables.

4) Lastly, many Irish involved in the shift push it further than the retracted vowel values typical of general southern British English. There are speakers who have, say, [əʊʊ] and others who have [əʊɪ] for annoy. This point is of theoretical significance and leads to the next matter to be considered.

3.2 Propagation of the shift

Now for the present analysis of the current change there is one essential premise which is made and that is that speakers are unconsciously aware of minute phonetic shifts which are taking place in the language around them and they themselves carry out such changes. Furthermore speakers recognise unconsciously the direction in which a change is moving and can thus force the change beyond the stage at which it is at currently. For instance if a speaker intuitively grasps that back vowels are being raised then he/she can actively participate in this process, e.g., by raising /a/ beyond /ɔ/ to /o/. In order to do this of course speakers must first of all realise that there exist gradations along a cline of pronunciations with divisions like conservative, moderate, advanced. Speakers are unconsciously aware of such a spectrum by exposure to variation in the community of which they are members and by noticing the relative frequency and the conditions of occurrence (situation, speaker group, etc.) of sets of pronunciations for phonological segments. They build up an awareness of variation and change which is part and parcel of their knowledge of their native language.

For the present author postulating such unconscious awareness on the part of speakers is an article of faith. Without this there is no principled and coherent way of explaining the origin and course of shift like the current one. Assuming unconscious awareness accounts for the non-random nature of change; it sees speakers as aware of the direction in which their language is moving. Speakers can jump on the band-waggon so to speak, they can put their foot on the accelerator or on the brake as they feel inclined. And they can do this without verbalising their linguistic behaviour for themselves or others.

3.3 Pushing the vowel shift

Speakers of fashionable Dublin English would seem to be aware of the trajectory on which the vowel shift is located even though their own personal realisation of key vowels may not be at the most innovative end of this track. Furthermore this accounts for why young speakers are seen to push the vowel shift. The trajectory for the shift is unconsciously recognised by speakers and they can not only move within a degree of personal variation on this curve but they can also shift their range of realisations in the direction of innovation, in this case backwards and upwards.

This assumption of speakers’ unconscious perception of the sound shift has one
great advantage for the linguist grappling with the mechanism of the change. It releases him/her from the necessity of imputing to the language a knowledge of the drift of things in Dublin English. Of course it is a convenient abstraction to talk of ‘Dublin English’ as if it were an independently existing entity, to reify it so to speak. But this is just a convenience as we tend to conceptualise phenomena, which we recognise as belonging together, as parallel to objects in the physical world as when we talk of the state, society, etc.

As mentioned above the vowel shift in the capital has gained a certain momentum and is moving beyond height values which are found in southern British English for corresponding vowels. This is particularly clear with the diphthong /ɔi/.

(14)  \[\text{[dɪ] } \rightarrow [\text{ɔi}] \rightarrow [\text{ɔi}] \quad \text{boys [botz] noise, [nɔɪz]}\]

An important point in this connection is that the shift for speakers with the above realisations at this level overshoots its goal so to speak.

There would appear to be a certain awareness of this behaviour in contemporary Dublin English as a term has emerged in recent years for a kind of exaggerated accent which is putatively typical of one of the more prestigious areas of Dublin, what is called a ‘Dublin 4 accent’ after the postal code number for a fashionable district on the south side of the city. Speakers with this accent are recognised as having more extreme vowel values for the vowel shift and are often ridiculed by more mainstream speakers. However, with time, such extreme values may come to be regarded as possible realisations for other groups of speakers if the latter no longer come to regard the speech of a small minority as unduly exaggerated.

3.4  Downward percolation

A change rarely remains restricted to one layer in a society. For the Dublin Vowel Shift a phenomenon can be observed, albeit embryonically, among local varieties of Dublin English. This is what I term ‘downward percolation’. It denotes the adoption of the shift by speakers who would not normally show it as they have come to realise that it is typical of more prestigious speech in the city, for instance in pronunciations like [stʊɪl], [tʊɪm], [mʊɪld], etc. If this happens on a broad scale, the ultimate fate of the shift is then uncertain. What has started as a feature unique to socially pretentious speakers in Dublin may well spread vertically in the city (as it is beginning to do regionally for many younger generation urbanites) and lose the significance it has at the moment as a delimiting factor vis à vis the lower classes in the capital.

4  Phonological interpretation

4.1  Vowel shifts and the notion of vowel space

The Dublin Vowel Shift can be seen to be taking place within a constellation of vowel values which have been affected by the re-shuffling of the initial shift, most probably the retraction of /ai/. Now there is historical support for the notion of vowel space, in the movements which constitute the English vowel shift, as has been discussed exhaustively. Recall that the articulatory positions for many vowels conflict with the traditional vowel
quadrangle used in phonetics, the vowel /e/ is slightly higher than /u/, /i/ much more so, while /o/ and /ɔ/ are on the same level, the latter somewhat more forward than the former (Lass 1984:119). However from an acoustic point of view there is more justification for the vowel quadrangle. If one plots the first formant on a vertical axis against the difference between the second and first formant on a horizontal axis then the result looks reasonably like a vowel quadrangle (again see Lass 1984:120f.), above all the correspondences in height seem to be what historical changes and synchronic alternations would lead one to expect, e.g., /e/ and /o/ are on the same level, which is in accord with umlaut rules like that of modern German (Sohn — Söhne) which is a fronting rule with no other change in the parameters for the vowel affected. This is true historically for the former English umlaut rule as in foot — feet and for changes such as the retraction of /e/ to /o/ in Irish (later unrounded to /ə/) as in eochair ‘key’ /exəɾ/, later /oxəɾ/, now /əxəɾ/.

The upshot of these considerations is that there is a certain validity to the claim that speakers are unconsciously aware of acoustic phonological space (irrespective of articulatory implementation).

4.2 Where can low vowels go?

One can say that if there is a shift in the onset of a low diphthong then one of three situations occurs

1) centralisation  /ai/ → /ɔi/
2) fronting  /ai/ → /ɛi/
3) retraction  /ai/ → /əi/

It is not possible to predict what track will be taken. Retraction of diphthongs and of low vowels in general is well attested. There is the retraction of /a:/ and raising of low back vowels with West Germanic /aː/ which travelled on a back track in English but on a front one in German and Scottish English, e.g. OE hæm /haːm/ to modern Received Pronunciation /hæm/ from earlier /hœm/ but Scottish /hæm/ and Modern German /haim/ from earlier /heim/.

Furthermore there may be a change in direction within a short period of time. If the observations on /æ/ in Received Pronunciation for the present century are correct (Bauer 1994: 120f.) then Received Pronunciation would seem to have gone through a raising phase at the beginning of the century and in the post-war period to have been subject to a tendency to lowering (going on evidence from Jones and Ward on the one hand and from Wells, Gimson and Bauer on the other).

In the opinion of the present author the motivation for shifts are to be found externally and the direction taken is also due to external stimuli, bearing in mind language-internal constraints, such as the occupation of vowel space, at the same time.

The vowel constellations in Dublin English and the shifts taking place at the moment show that there is no necessary correlation between the short and long low monophthongs /a/ and /aː/ and the starting point of the diphthongs /ai/ and /au/. These happen to be the same in the conservative supra-regional standard of the south, but in Dublin English the /au/ has a rather fronted starting point: [œu] or [ɛu] in more extreme forms and the /ai/ vowel has a centralised starting point in popular varieties of Dublin English and a retracted low back onset in more fashionable varieties.
The low monophthongs show no noticeable difference on a front-back axis, except that there is a retracted conditioned allophone before /r/ as in card [kɑːt]. In local Dublin English, if anything, there is a fronting of /æ/ especially before /r/ as in He parked the car [hɪ pærkt da kæ:]. This in fact runs counter to the statistically more usual retracted realisations of long /a:/. for instance in all European languages, bar Hungarian and Dutch. Educated speakers avoid such a fronted variant for the phonemically long low vowel, i.e. a tense, raised realisation such as [læ:s(t)] would be less acceptable than [lɑːst] for last.

5 Who is involved in the vowel shift?

All the remarks so far have concerned the linguistic behaviour of Dubliners, seeing as how it is their sound shift, so to speak. But in a country as capital-city-oriented as the Republic of Ireland the question must be asked to what extent speakers outside of Dublin are affected by changes in the English of the capital. The behaviour of speakers from other urban centres outside of Dublin — Cork, Waterford, Limerick, Galway, etc. — is particularly relevant to the issue at hand. There is strong motivation on the part of urban dwellers outside Dublin to imitate features of the capital city. After all these people could choose to remain non-participants as they have done with the retraction and rounding of /æ/ in northern Irish English (as in family [fəml]).

To handle the contrast of capital-city and other speakers descriptively a distinction, for which there would appear to be considerable justification, would seem necessary, that between MOTIVATED and DETACHED participants in a sound change.

5.1 Motivated participants

Motivated participants are those who are taking part in the shift in order to hive themselves off from the lower-classes in Dublin. Their behaviour provides the reason for the shift and this group comprises the initiators of the shift.

5.2 Detached participants

The second group is that of detached participants. They can be characterised as those speakers who have realised that there is a shift taking place but for a different motivation have decided to participate. Their motivation is secondary: it is to associate with the initiating group of speakers, and not, in the case of the Dublin Vowel Shift, to separate themselves from lower-class Dubliners in their speech. They are at one remove from the initiating group as they do not share their motivation for participation. It is a moot point whether detached participants are by definition outside of the geographical area where a change is taking place (for instance those Dubliners who do not share the pretentiousness of many would-be sophisticated urbanites and are hence not among the motivated participants may nonetheless become infected by the change). This is the case, however, with the Dublin Vowel Shift as the detached participants are those speakers outside of Dublin who are showing signs of the shift.

It is important to stress that the detached participants are reacting to a shift which has already been initiated, that is they have not started it. Furthermore, the prototypical
detached participant is an adult. However, it may be that the children among the detached participants (here: the urbanites outside of Dublin) are innovative themselves as they show vowel realisations which are frequently in the range of those of advanced motivated speakers (here: fashionable Dubliners). What may very well be the case is that the children have a better grasp of the thrust of the shift and, as opposed to the adults who perceive it in a lexically diffusional manner, recognise the trajectories of the shifting vowels and can thus push them further than the adults from whom they have picked up the change. This would be another instance of children in language acquisition overtaking their parents.

The distinction between groups of participants is important in itself but it is of further significance with respect to the linguistic manifestation of the shift which they display.

6 Propagation of sound change

6.1 Neogrammarian advance and lexical diffusion

The NEOGRAMMARIAN ADVANCE of a sound change implies that any input which matches the structural description for the change is affected, i.e. the change is phonetically gradual and lexically universal. In the present case this means that all instances of /ai/ are retracted. If this were the entire story then there would be no exceptions: we would have the much maligned Ausnahmslosigkeit. This is not quite the case, however, as there is the question of PHONETIC RECALCITRANCE with potential input to a change.

6.2 Phonetic recalcitrance

This acts as a brake on the Neogrammarian advance. If the input to a change has some feature which acts against the change then the input form is recalcitrant.

It would seem to be a frequent occurrence that a sound change in its initial period affects those segments which phonetically present a most natural input, or put the other way around, those words where some phonetic aspect would militate against a change are affected last, if at all. A good example of this is the 17th century lowering and unrounding of /u/ to /ʌ/. This did not occur in those words where the following segment had inherent lip rounding (a feature in common with /u/), e.g. pull, bull, push, bush versus pun, bun where the [ɨ] and the [H] prevented the shift (put and but are conflicting examples, however). The change later lost momentum and subsequent shortenings of /o/ as in took, cook did not undergo it.

With reference to the Dublin Vowel Shift the cases of phonetic recalcitrance are those where /ai/ occurs before a voiceless segment which because of its fortis quality results in a somewhat shorter vowel preceding it so that the tongue has less time to move down and back to the position for [aɪ].

Essentially the LEXICAL DIFFUSION hypothesis claims that a change starts with some words and spreads to others, encompassing the entire vocabulary of a language, given the important proviso that the change does not lose momentum, i.e. that it is carried through along the S-curve to 100%. With the lexical diffusion model, a question arises which is not of relevance with the Neogrammarian model, i.e. what words are affected
and is there any generalisation which can be made as to those which first undergo the change, that is how does the change progress through the lexicon.

6.3 Different participants and the progress of the sound change

Before continuing I should note that there is something like a standard wisdom on the occurrence of Neogrammarian advance versus lexical diffusion. Labov (1981:304) maintains that ‘low-level output rules’ typically show gradual change across the board (Neogrammarian advance) whereas ‘changes across subsystems’, e.g., long to short vowels, proceeds by a process of lexical diffusion. The latter contention would seem to be upheld by the many vowel shortenings in the history of English, for instance, that of /ɛ:/ before alveolars as in red, dead and the later shortening of /o/, again before alveolars (blood, flood), and still later that of /u/ before velars (look, look, cook). These are all instances of lexical diffusion as they have not encompassed every possible input.

The question is whether Neogrammarian advance always applies to Labov’s ‘low-level output rules’. The level one is referring to here is that of phonetic realisation — call it low-level, allophonic, post-lexical or whatever. For a sound change in progress this is probably the only level which can be examined as a change in progress will not have reached phonological stability.

Now the current investigation of the Dublin Vowel Shift shows quite clearly that motivated participants — fashionable Dubliners — display the Neogrammarian advance for the shift whereas detached participants — socially conscious urbanites from outside Dublin — exhibit lexical diffusion.

With the group of detached participants the first word to show the Dublin Vowel Shift is Ireland and its derivative Irish. This is almost a test case, a keyword, for those speakers who are beginning to participate in the shift. Note that the word does not belong to the core vocabulary of the language like parts of the body or verbs denoting basic activities or whatever. But in an Irish context it stands to reason that the name of the country and its people, as it has a vowel which is a potential input to the vowel shift, is something of a keyword for the adoption of the change. The keyword view of lexical diffusion is closely linked to the notion of salience of certain words. Often the words are used as carrier forms for a characteristic pronunciation of a group. In this respect one can cite the high back /ʊ/ of local Dublin English which is frequently used when pronouncing the name of the city, i.e. as [dublon] by speakers who normally have [dʌblɒn], particularly in colloquial registers.

The process of lexical diffusion for the diphthong shift among detached participants can be taken as applying to keywords and particularly common lexical items, for instance:

1) the keywords Irish and Ireland
2) the numerals five and nine
3) various commonly occurring adjectives like wild, mild, kind;
   nouns like time, mind, side; verbs like rise, drive, hide, etc.

6.4 Types, tokens and lexical diffusion

The theory of lexical diffusion implies furthermore that not only does a certain change — a new vowel value — spread gradually through the lexicon of the variety/language affected, but also not all tokens of a given type (lexeme) exhibit the new pronunciation immediately. This is clear in the group of detached participants and, if the author’s
observations on the Dublin Vowel Shift are correct, it would seem that the older members of this group show the new pronunciation for given lexemes only for a percentage of tokens, e.g. the realisation [ɑːlənd] rather than [aːlənd] is found with only some tokens of the country’s name. Any situation like this with co-variants occurring alternatively implies that there is external conditioning on their occurrence. The circumstances for the use of the retracted diphthong in Irish English is something which is certainly sensitive to social factors in discourse settings.

6.5 Why is lexical diffusion typical of the detached participants?

The question arises from the observations made above as to why lexical diffusion is typical of detached participants. The answer lies in the lack of motivation. For urbanites outside Dublin there is no reason to use a different realisation from that which they acquired natively, i.e. [ɑː]. Hence they do not grasp the motivation among their metropolitan counterparts actively involved in the shift. They adopt the shift as they are confronted with it in words with high salience (Ireland and Irish) and/or high statistical frequency (numerals, common adjectives, nouns, verbs, etc.).

6.6 How long are there two types of propagation?

It goes without saying that a vowel shift must pass a perception threshold before it will be noticed by non-participants and these then become detached participants if the conditions are right — as they are in urban centres outside Dublin vis-à-vis the capital.

So how long are there two types of propagation? The distinction in the course of a sound change — Neogrammarian advance or lexical diffusion — would appear to hold most clearly while the shift is taking place. Furthermore depending on such aspects as the quantitative relationship of motivated participants to detached participants the latter may be marginalised by the former and the shift takes place fully. Or the level of exposure may lead to detached participants adopting an even increasing number of words with the new pronunciation and this may eventually lead to the demise for them of their old pronunciation as it does not survive anywhere in their lexicon. Both these situations would mask the stage of lexical diffusion and make the sound change appear to have proceeded by Neogrammarian advance.

6.7 Lexical diffusion or later superimposition of standard layers

Apparent later survival of lexical diffusion can have a variety of causes. One of these is seen in Dublin English and is a pitfall for the linguist. There was a raising of /æ/ to /e/ in Dublin English in the early modern period as in /ketʃ/ for catch (Sheridan 1781:144). This pronunciation has receded but is occasionally present in local Dublin English. The danger here is that one might be tempted to posit a general shift of /æ/ to /e/ which took place by lexical diffusion, encompassing words such as catch, but petering out before the entire inventory of lexical items with /æ/ was subject to the change. The warning which must be made here is to distinguish identifiable cases of lexical diffusion (vowel shortenings for example) from those of an earlier change being masked in its extent by the later superimposition of more standard varieties.
6.8 The termination problem

Concluding this paper it would seem advisable to address an issue briefly which is called the termination problem. It really involves two questions. The first is: when is lexical diffusion complete? The answer is simple: when no there is no instance of the original sound value left, e.g. when the shortening of English long /u:/ is terminated when there is no instance of it left, though new ones may later arise, just as new instances of long /a:/ arose in early Modern English due to lengthening before voiceless fricatives and before /r/ prior to this being lost.

The second question is when is a change, which is taking place by Neogrammarian advance, complete. The answer here is that there is no termination point. There is simply a stage when speakers regard the change as having crossed a phonological threshold, i.e. when a pronunciation is assigned to one phoneme as opposed to another. This is particularly clear when phonemic contrast either arises or is lost.

But when the new pronunciation is moving towards a value not already present in the phonological system of the variety concerned — as is the case with the new [ət] of the Dublin Vowel Shift — then there is no given end-point. Furthermore apparent end-points can be passed through with or without mergers — witness on the one hand the merger of /o:r/ (court) with /ɔ:/ (caught) and their later raising in advanced RP to [ɔ:] and on the other hand recall the diphthongisation of ME /i:/ and the raising of ME /ai/ with different results in modern English (though whether they intersected is a matter of much debate).

It is too soon to say what will happen to the Dublin Vowel Shift. For its continuation the behaviour of the motivated participants in the change is most important. Assuming that the unarticulated goal of these speakers is to evolve a form of speech phonetically distinct from that of local Dublin English, then that goal is all but reached. The shift has created new allophones [ət] for former [ət], [ɔt] and [ɔt] for former [nt] but there are no threatening mergers so that there is no system-internal pressure to continue on a shift cycle and to re-align phonemic oppositions which are under threat at the moment.

The present situation is one in which the change could simply fizzle out — the firework type of sound change. If this happens now or in the near future then we will be left with a situation like that in Canadian English: phonetically recalcitrant examples — /ai/ before voiceless segments — will not be subject to the shift. On the other hand the change may continue and regularise the allophony of the segments involved. But there is no internal reason for this, in the final analysis it rests in the unconscious judgement of the speakers who are the motor of the change to decide whether they have crossed the finishing line, indeed to decide if a finishing line exists at all.

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