Models for describing aspect in Irish English

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Descriptions of aspectual types in Irish English (northern and southern) have not been wanting with authors like Filppula, Harris and Kallen devoting much attention to the matter. A major difficulty in the linguistic treatment of aspect is determining how many types exist in Irish English and how best to describe them. But this question can only be answered by being explicit about what descriptive model one uses when dealing with the issue.

A number of models can be recognised in the literature, especially for dealing with the two main aspectual types, perfective and habitual. The number of subdivisions arrived at, especially for the perfective, depends on the model used.

1) The grammaticalisation hypothesis maintains that Irish speakers in the historical shift to English grammaticalised all the semantic/pragmatic categories which they could distinguish by using means from Irish and the input varieties of English.

2) The speech act view is not so much an hypothesis about how aspectual categories arose in Irish English as a model for describing the distinctions which can be recognised today.

3) The most flexible approach in the present writer’s opinion is that which avails of prototype theory (Hickey 1997) as it allows one to postulate a small number of central aspectual types and various subtypes which are located on the periphery of each major one. The purpose of this paper will be to present a critical discussion of the prototype approach and to illustrate the advantage of analyses within this framework.

1 Tackling perfectives

There are two basic types of perfective aspects in Irish English which have been commented on by many authors dealing with the matter. For those writing in the last decade or so (Harris, Kallen, Filppula) one of two terminologies has been adopted, the first from David Greene, an Irish scholar (see Greene 1979), and the second from James McCawley in an article on aspect in English (included in the collection McCawley 1976, see especially pp. 263-268; Harris and Kallen also draw on McCoard 1978). Greene refers to the perfective with after in English (and tar éis in Irish) as PI and to the perfective with the word order past participle + object as PII. The use of numbers after the letter P is of little help to those unfamiliar with Greene’s classification and this will not be adopted here. McCawley has various divisions in his classification of perfectives and has introduced the term ‘hot news’ to refer to the use of the English present perfect to convey new and unexpected information as in They’ve stolen my bicycle! This
terminology has been taken up by authors on Irish English and applied to the perfective with after, first by Harris (1984: 308; 1993: 160) later by Kallen (1989: 7-9) who follows McCawley’s divisions and discusses the subtypes he distinguishes in detail. McCawley recognised four kinds of perfect as follows

(1) McCawley’s distinctions for the perfect
   (a) ‘universal’ perfect     (b) ‘existential’ perfect
   (c) ‘hot news’ perfect     (d) ‘stative’ perfect.

Inasmuch as McCawley is not talking about tense distinctions in the use of the perfect in English, one can consider his treatment as concerning aspect, i.e. the manner in which a verbal action is completed or seen by those involved in it, who observe it or to whom it is communicated. Kallen (1989: 7) speaks of ‘a single Present Perfect TMA category’ in English. He found attestations in his corpus of Dublin English for each of the subtypes in (1), more on this below, (Kallen 1989: 13f.).

The approach adopted by the present author is that of a prototypical use of this perfective for immediate relevance with additional components which can be foregrounded in appropriate contexts. Two descriptive terms are to be used here which are found elsewhere (Hickey 1995) and which are self-explanatory. The first is the resultative perfective (also used by Harris, 1993: 160 and Trudgill 1986: 149f. though Kallen 1989: 17 uses the term ‘accomplishment perfect’ which is found among authors looking at aspect within the context of functional grammar, e.g. Brigden 1984). The second is immediate perfective referring to the after construction.

1.1 Resultative perfective

This is telic in nature (Dahl 1984) and stresses that a certain result has been reached due to the action expressed by the verb.

(2)  a. She has the table set.
     b. They have the house built.

It is subject to a degree of social gradation inasmuch as it is unusual in the supraregional standard of the south of Ireland for the object to be animate. A sentence like

(3) The women in our street has their children all reared.

is non-standard not least because of the animate object ‘children’ (note the use of singular ‘has’ with plural subject).

Irish English exploits the option of placing the past participle after the object to express this aspectual type (henceforth referred to as O+PP word order). This has sources both in input varieties of English and in Irish where the non-finite verb form follows any governed object. What Irish English does not show is the phenomenon found in many creoles where a verb meaning ‘done’ or ‘finished’ is employed as an indicator of perfective aspect (Jamaican and Krio with (English-derived) don and Haitian and Mauritian with (French-derived) fin are examples).

It would appear that in the course of Irish English a contrast developed whereby the two alternatives for the order of past participle and direct object can be exploited semantically.
(4)  
   a. Have you read any of his early novels?
   b. Have you the book I lent you read?

The first of these questions is general, i.e. the action could have taken place any time. The second has a much more definite time focus. The person asking the question is inquiring whether the action which is assumed to be recent has in fact been completed.

   Note the causative use of have as in *He had a new garage built* is underrepresented in Irish English and does not show any overlap with the resultative perfective.

**O+PP word-order and the retentionist standpoint** The word-order with the non-finite verb form placed after the object is not particularly common in 16th century English; recent studies such as van der Wurff and Foster (1997) regard it as ‘exceptional’. Where it occurs it is characteristic of verse (in Shakespeare for instance, Franz 1939: 577) and is used to highlight the verb by end position (van der Wurff and Foster 1997 who only quantify its frequency in verse). Furthermore, it is found most often in verb groups with a modal or auxiliary and in these constructions there are more pronominal than nominal objects. Its occurrence in literary writing would imply archaïcness so that the conclusion that it was even less common in spoken language would appear to be justified. One question remains unanswered, namely whether O+PP word-order was more frequent in western and north-western varieties of English. If this were the case then it could have had an influence on the emergent varieties of modern English in Ireland as of the 17th century.

1.2 Immediate perfective

This is an aspectual type which is uniquely Irish in its expression. The model for it is definitely to be found in Irish as the outset language and the motivation for its formation is the search for an equivalent to this aspectual category in English as discussed above. As might be expected it is attested early: by 1690 it had appeared in texts illustrating Irish English. The semantic essence is the notion of immediacy which connects the action reported to the current discourse.

(5)  
   We’re after finishing our dinner.

Initially this construction was found with future reference and both Greene (1979: 126) and Bliss would seem to be baffled by this use though Bliss admits that this is not just a mistaken representation on the part of an English author. The instances in question are combinations of irrealis and perfective which have receded in Irish English since (Bliss 1979: 299-301).

(6)  
   a. You will be after being damn’d.
   b. He will not be after hanging his Countrymen.

Kallen (1994: 173) touches on the use of *after* in sentences with future or irrealis reference and suggests that this arose from the merger of inherent features of English *after* (as in *He’s after a good job*) with universal principles of TMA systems under conditions of language contact and variability. The more restricted use of *after* nowadays is viewed by Kallen as ‘a sort of decreolisation in which the variable range of
significance for after is limited in accord with the demands of the English TMA system.’ This is a rather vague interpretation. For one thing the use of after in the sense of ‘looking for’ is not common in Ireland (although it could conceivably have been) and for another it is uncertain what is meant by the ‘demands of the English TMA system’. The more probable reason is that the use of the after perfective in Irish includes the future but that the English has a normal future which covers this option and with time the immediate perfective settled down as a contrasting aspectual type to the resultative perfective. One should also mention that the use with future reference is not illegal in present-day Irish but it is less common. However, given an appropriate context it is perfectly acceptable as in the following example. Equally the resultative perfective can also show future reference.

(7)  a. If you don’t hurry up, they’ll be after leaving by the time you get there.  
    b. I’ll have the book read by tommorrow, I promise you.

2 The grammaticalisation hypothesis

One of the interesting observations of Greene (1979: 128f.) in his discussion of perfectives in Irish and Irish English is that the use of tar éis ‘after’ with a non-finite verb form was restricted initially (in the early modern period of Irish) to reporting events of immediate relevance and that it evolved afterwards into a more general perfect form whereas the Irish English use of after, which is plausibly derived from the Irish model, did not experience such a broadening of its range of applications.

Kallen (1990) has taken up this point and proposed a hypothesis whereby the Irish who were learning English grammaticalised all the semantic/pragmatic categories they could distinguish using the means available from both Irish (by calquing) and from the input varieties of English. This view stresses the independence of speakers in the language shift period attempting to reach one meaning: one form by creating distinctions from the options available in both the outset and target languages.

Recall that Kallen (1990: 122f.) recognises four categories of perfect (sic!) which he classifies as follows, linking up with McCawley’s classification.

(8)  a. extended present I know him for a long time.  
    b. be perfects Are they gone yet?  
    c. after perfects He’s after losing the keys.  
    d. accomplishment perfect He has the book read.

Kallen proceeds to scrutinise both contemporary evidence from his own Dublin corpus and historical evidence from Bliss’s collection of early modern texts (Bliss 1979) examining his own initial assumption that ‘every surface marker of the Hiberno-English perfect encodes a distinct semantic/pragmatic category’. His conclusion is that neither the contemporary nor the historical material confirms the grammaticalisation hypothesis which he sees as not sufficiently ‘subtle and complex’ (Kallen 1990: 132).

In my opinion the negative conclusion reached by Kallen is correct given the attempt to discover watertight distinctions between perfectives in Irish English. However, the linguistic behaviour of speakers in the early modern period, just touched upon by Kallen, offers a powerful explanation for the manifestations of aspectual categories in Irish English. In a situation of prolonged uncontrolled second language acquisition (Schumann 1978, Andersen (ed.) 1983) it is quite plausible that speakers arrived at a configuration
of aspectual categories which was fed on the one hand by distinctions in the Irish substrate and on the other by settings present in the input varieties of English.

The principle on which the aspect system functions is seen differently in the present paper and the following section is intended to show how an alternative interpretation can offer a more appropriate and fitting framework for the classification of aspectual distinctions.

3 Speech act view

This view of aspect distinguishes various subtypes within a major aspectual type and attempts to offer a taxonomy in which each subtype is seen as instantiating a particular speech act. Kallen (1991) is a treatment along these lines. It is an examination of the social significance of the kind of structure seen in *He is after eating his dinner*. Kallen begins by listing four main aspectual types which he recognises for Dublin. He rejects semantic values which are ‘inadequate to account for its use’, i.e. that of *after*, and sees it as dependent on a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic factors, the most important of the latter being the degree of formality of the discourse in which the structure could occur. This aspect has been well understood by Kallen who offers a classification according to speech acts (1991: 64ff.). He points out that the *after* construction is frequent in narrative situations, going on the attestations which were to be found in his corpus of Dublin English.

Although it is not made quite explicit, the seven different usage categories for the *after* aspect which Kallen lists are supposed to represent speech acts which are realised by means of this structure. These are as follows; the examples are from the Dublin corpus (Kallen 1991: 66).

(9)  I  Giving out (i.e. reproach and chiding - RH)
     *You’re after breakin the gate!*

     II  Announcement
     *I’m after spilling a drop of that in the saucer.*

     III Report
     *She’s only after joining.*

     IV  Comment
     *It’s after gettin real long.*

     V  Narrative
     *I was just after saying to Aine...*

     VI  Non-factual
     *A student will be after accomplishing an academic task*

     VII Reported speech
     *I wouldn’t want you coming over and sayin, ‘Look, what you’re after doin’ to it?’*

No principles are listed by which Kallen objectively arrived at these categories. Rather the group seem to have resulted from his own assessment of what examples were present in his corpus. Furthermore different phenomena have been confused here. The semantics of the *after* perfective — the notion of immediacy — is one matter, the pragmatic framework in which it occurs is another. Hence the types V to VII (*Narrative, Non-factual, Reported Speech*) have to do with types of discourse and not with special subtypes of the *after* perfective. Type VII is no different from III for instance: it is simply
that the instance here is embedded in a reported speech structure. What is more, types II to V (Announcement, Report, Comment, Narrative) can be collapsed into a single semantic component of the after type, namely high informational value, which in its turn is derived from its recency, it is after all an immediate perfective. The element of chiding, indicated by Kallen in subtype I ‘Giving Out’, is indeed a separate component of the after type. It is an option probably historically derived from recency, an extension in the semantics of this aspect: something which has just happened came to be seen as something for which the interlocutor is responsible.

A revised deconstruction of the after perfective would look like the following.

(10) Semantic components of the after perfective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Immediacy, recency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Derived</td>
<td>High informational value, reporting function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>Reproach, chiding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such a view of this aspectual type provides the vantage point from which to describe it within an established semantic framework, that of prototype theory. Information can be more highly valued in some cases so that although the situation is not one of immediacy in a temporal sense, the after perfective is nonetheless used because it highlights the novelty of the information.

(1) She’s after writing a book about the Haughey affair.

4 Prototype interpretation

One observation made by authors on the aspectual distinctions in Irish English is that it is difficult to state just exactly what the meaning of a particular type is and that one and the same semantic type can be found in different tense/aspect configurations. This overlap would seem to be a source of puzzlement to scholars. The reason for this lies in a misunderstanding of the semantics and the syntax of aspectual categories. A different interpretation of aspect which does not insist on static links between form and meaning is more likely to be able to handle real-life attestations such as those in Kallen’s Dublin corpus or in The Tape-Recorded Survey of Hiberno-English Speech or the Belfast material gathered under the guidance of the Milroys and exploited by Harris (1984: 306).

First of all one must note that there are two basic perfective distinctions in Irish English, the immediate and resultative mentioned above. The ‘extended present’ and ‘be perfect’ are temporal phenomena and should not be confused with aspect. The sentence I know him for ages has no additional aspectual connotation compared to its more standard equivalent I’ve known him for ages. Equally They’re gone to get some milk has no further aspectual implication beyond the more standard sentence They’ve gone to get some milk. Indeed if one looks at other languages one finds that the temporal range covered by a tense can vary, e.g. German where there is no present perfect like that in English and where the present is used with future reference also, Ich kenne ihn seit einer sehr langen Zeit. ‘I’ve known him for a long time’; Ich reise nach Israel. ‘I’m going to Israel’.

The two perfective aspectual types are first and foremost semantic categories in Irish English. They indicate the manner in which an action is viewed by a reporter and the
relevance it has for the current discourse. These are two axes along which aspect can be distinguished, irrespective of the manifestation in a particular context. Note that both aspectual types apply only to dynamic verbs hence the illegality of sentences like I’ve known or I’m after knowing German.

It is convenient to conceptualise aspectual distinctions as consisting of prototypes which can be more or less matched by actual sentences. They can be treated in a manner similar to that of lexical semantics in the classical expositions of prototype theory (Rosch 1977, 1978; Taylor 1989) where a particular token (of, say, a bird) can be regarded as a prototype of a class. Other tokens may, however, deviate from this and be located towards the periphery of the semantic space occupied by the item in question. Prototype theory can be extended far beyond simple lexical items. A brief illustration of this can be given with the notion of ‘possession’. Prototypically this indicates a state whereby an object is the property of a certain individual as in My new car has got air-conditioning. This central conception of possession is furthermore expressed using specific personal pronouns. Now consider the following sentences where the notion of possession is looser, to say the least, but where possessive pronouns are still found.

   ‘The way I see things.’
   b. My Ireland.
   ‘The Ireland I know.’
   c. My shoe size.
   ‘The size shoe I take.’

These instances of possession are peripheral as they have nothing to do with the notion of property but rather of association with an individual. Furthermore, languages may conceive of possession as a phenomenon which is alterable and hence not demand possessive pronouns when possession is not a matter of volition or choice, this resulting in the distinction between alienable and inalienable possession, which is formally coded in German, cf. Mein neues Auto ‘My new car’ but Sie hat sich am Bein verletzt ‘She injured her leg.’

Returning to aspect in Irish English, one can put the two major perfective types in relation to the major temporal divisions in the past. Recall that time anterior to the point of discourse has two divisions in recent past and remote past. The two basic distinctions in perfective aspect in Irish English can be seen as in part parallel to the recent — remote divide. The immediate perfective corresponds to the recent past and the resultative perfective to the remote past.

(12) Categories of tense and aspect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past tense</th>
<th>Perfective aspect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recent</td>
<td>Immediate perfective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Resultative perfective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second aspectual type is the easiest to deal with as the match between manifestation and prototype is closest. It is used to inform an interlocutor that an action has been carried out. No information is conveyed on how this happened or about its relevance to the present discourse apart from the fact of informing someone that the action has been successfully completed.
In his consideration of the resultative perfective Henry talks about the verb-final construction as being subjective, Greene (1979: 132) with reference to Visser (1973: §2001) to their being an emotional interest in the result reached. Perhaps this can be put in more objective terms. With this construction there is a degree of expectancy that the action described by the verb will indeed have been carried out and its use in a sentence is to convey precisely this information.

(13)  *They’ve the car fixed now.*

4.1 The immediate perfective

The manifestations of this aspectual prototype shows a much greater range than the resultative perfective. As Kallen (1991: 62f.) has shown from his corpus of Dublin English, the *after* variable as an aspectual marker occurs in different types of context. But some uses are more central than others. Common to all instances is the notion of immediacy, hence its classification as the aspectual counterpart to the recent past.

4.2 Relevance to present

The chief application of this aspectual type is to denote immediate relevance of a recent action to the time of discourse. It is normally found in reported speech and has a high frequency of occurrence with *on* and a personal pronoun which expresses the notion of disadvantage.

(14)  *She’s after eating the yoghurt on me.*

4.3 Information and reproach

The *after* construction is frequent when the speaker is chiding his/her interlocutor in an exchange (Kallen 1991: 66). This component of its use can be seen as an extension of the relevance element. Note that this accounts for its frequent occurrence in reported speech and its rarity in more formal styles. What is remarkable with this usage is that the action is being repeated verbally for the hearer who in this case is the perpetrator.

(15)  *You’re after ruining the stew on me.*

4.4 Use in the negative

The relative infrequency of the negative with the *after* construction lies in its function of reporting a matter of relevance to an interlocutor. The situations in which such a report is required in the negative are rare but there are clear instances where negation occurs.

(16) a.  *You shouldn’t take out the car at night when you’ve only a provisional licence.*

   b.  *Don’t worry, I’m not after crashing it.*
4.5 Pragmatics and discourse restrictions

There is a high informational value associated with the *after* construction. This semantic component may give the clue to analysing the differentiation made by speakers in their use of the immediate and resultative perfect. The latter implies that the speaker was aware the action was either being carried out or at least pending\(^2\). This does not hold for the immediate perfective which is apparently why the term ‘hot news’ enjoys such popularity among authors on the subject.

(17) a. Maire is after wetting herself.
    I know.

b. I’m after finishing my homework.
    Ah, you don’t say.

There are shades of meaning involved with both types of perfectives which make them mutually exclusive in certain situations. For instance an implication of the resultative perfect is that the goal of the action is intended and, importantly, known to the person(s) listening whereas the immediate perfective often contains an element of surprise, hence the ungrammaticality of the first of each pair of the following sentences. Outside of Irish English it would be usual to find some other element, such as a qualifying adjective, to convey the element of surprise or dismay.

(18) a. *He’s the soup bowl dropped.
   He’s after dropping the soup bowl. Irish English
   He’s dropped the goddamn soup bowl. non-Irish English

b. *They’ve the window broken.
   They’re after breaking the window. Irish English
   They’ve broken the beautiful window. non-Irish English

4.6 Less central applications

Recall that the resultative perfective implies that the action completed was the definite intention of the person(s) carrying out the action. This element of intention is so strong that when describing an event in the past for which this does not necessarily hold the immediate perfective is used instead. Here one has a less central use of this perfective.

(19) They’re after giving the staff a pay rise already this year.
    *They’ve a pay rise given to the staff already this year.

Indeed the element of intention can determine which of the perfectives is to be used in a given context.

(20) a. They’re after putting up street lights.
    (in the process of building the housing estate)

b. They’ve the street lights put up now.
    (this was the work they set out to accomplish today)

It was noted above that the resultative perfective has a narrow range of applications. This is now understandable given the less central uses of the immediate perfective.
The middle of the field, as it were, is occupied by an extension of the immediate perfective to include relatively neutral reports as the examples (17) and (18a) above have shown. Hence there is no necessity to extend the scope of the resultative perfective. It is true that such instances of the immediate perfective do not have the high relevance for the hearer, which a sentence like *Your after ruining the stew on me* has, but they are still instantiations of the category ‘immediate perfective’, just as much as a flightless bird is of the category of bird. It may not be near the prototype but that by no means expels it from the category.

4.7 Aspect and metaphorical change

If one considers the development of the *after* construction above from a temporal construction to an aspect marker then one might be tempted to view it as a case of grammaticalisation as this phenomenon has been discussed intensively in recent years (Traugott and Hopper 1993; Traugott and Heine (eds) 1991). However, caution is required here. There is a limited sense in which the development of a temporal into an aspectual marker can be regarded as a case of grammaticalisation. The reservation derives from the fact that one does not have the rise of a bound morpheme from a free lexeme and furthermore not all cases of *after* undergo the process in question.

But what one does have in present-day Irish English is a change which definitely post-dates the rise of the aspectual marker. Here one has a development in the semantics-pragmatics of the immediate perfective marker. To approach this matter, consider for a moment how Traugott and König (1991: 207-9) view the three main tendencies in semantic-pragmatic change.

(22) **Semantic-pragmatic tendency I**
Meanings based on the external described situation > meanings based on the internal (evaluative/perceptual/cognitive situation).

**Semantic-pragmatic tendency II**
Meanings based in the described external or internal situation > meanings based in the textual situation.

**Semantic-pragmatic tendency III**
Meanings tend to become increasingly situated in the speaker’s subjective belief-state/attitude toward the situation

It is obviously the last of these tendencies which one sees in Irish English. Here the immediate perfective has become increasingly a vehicle for expressing speakers’ attitudes and/or assessment of a situation as evidenced in the uses for information and reproach discussed above (see 4.3). This type of development is metaphorical change and not grammaticalisation (Traugott and Heine 1991: 4). It can be put in the framework of semantic change which assumes a scale such as person, object, space, time, process, quality (Heine, Claudi and Hünnemeyer 1991) or linked to the cline temporal > causal > concessive which one can see in the development of *while* in the history of English from the original form Old English *hwilum* ‘at times’.
4.8 Sociolectal differences

Lastly one should remark that there are differences in the use of after constructions across the social spectrum. While it is slightly less stigmatised than the use of do to form an habitual its use does nonetheless taper off towards the higher end of Irish English registers as Kallen (1990: 134) rightly notes. What is obvious when comparing sociolects within Ireland is that certain co-occurrence restrictions hold for the upper group of sociolects. For instance the combination of after and being (as in He’s after being here all day) is not so common in the supra-regional variety of the south. This is not by any means to say that the after construction disappears so that the comments above on range and application nonetheless have validity for supra-regional forms of Irish English.

5 Describing the habitual

In those instances in which direct structural transfer into a second language does not result in an equivalent to some structure in the first, alternative structures are likely to be formed. This simple fact can be taken to have applied to Irish English in the main period of language shift between the 17th and the 19th centuries.

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

Apart from the perfective, dealt with above, the other major component of the Irish English TMA system is the habitual. They are clearly two sources for it. On the one hand there is an obvious Irish model which is expressed by a form of the verb bí ‘be’. This contrasts with the verb tá ‘be’ which tends to indicate location, existence or state in a general sense.

(25) a. Bíonn siad amuigh ag iascaireacht (go minic).
[be-habitual they out at fishing (often)]
‘They are out fishing very often.’

b. Tá siad amuigh ar farraige anois.
[be they out on the sea now]
‘They are out at sea now.’

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

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

(23)  
\[ \text{He does be in his office every day.} \]
\[ \text{She did be weeding in the garden.} \]

Before dealing further with the habitual a few words on its realisation are called for. It is one of the great parallels between Irish English and various creoles that it uses an unstressed form of *do* along with the verb *be*, or occasionally of inflected (unstressed) *do* alone, to express habitual aspect.

(26)  
\[ \text{They do be out fishing often.} \]
\[ \text{She does come over to our place after dark.} \]

There are two questions which need answering here. Firstly, did this type of structure arise in Ireland and, secondly, why were these means of forming an habitual chosen by the Irish?4

The first question allows of no definite answer. There is evidence for south-west English input for the habitual with *do*. Older sources such as Barnes (1863) and Elworthy (1877) and, in the middle of this century, Ellegård (1953) remark on this (as Harris has noted, 1986:186-189, see also Wakelin 1977:120f., Ihalainen 1976 and Weltens 1983). The instances which have been found on mainland Britain cluster in the south-west and this is, along with the general west, a key area for input varieties of English in Ireland. If one were so inclined one could push back the contact case to mainland Britain and postulate that it was Celtic influence in Cornwall which originally led to the appearance of an habitual with *do* there. Indeed there have been isolated cases of authors suggesting an influence of P-Celtic on mainland British English (see Dal 1952 and Poussa 1990 for examples). There is ultimately no satisfactory answer to this question as there is no way of tracing any kind of historical continuity and so it will not be pursued here.

The second question concerns the reason why *do* was recruited for the purpose of indicating an habitual in English. Recall that affirmative, declarative *do* is a feature which dropped out of English in the 17th century. It was retained longer in western varieties and writers like Shakespeare evince a consistently high use of it (Hope 1995). Bear in mind also that western and south-western varieties of English formed the input to (southern) Irish English in the early modern period. One can thus take it that periphrastic *do* was on the decline in 17th century English but nonetheless present. The scenario which I am assuming for Irish English is one where periphrastic *do*-forms did in fact occur in the input varieties but were semantically empty (affirmative *do* peaked around 1580 in England but then dropped off, Denison 1985, Kroch 1989, Ogura 1993). Unlike the emphatic *do* or the *do* forms in marked sentence types like interrogatives and negatives, their presence in declarative sentences alongside simple types without *do* would have shown to the speakers of Irish in the process of learning English that the formally more complex sentence types with *do* were semantically non-functional.

5.1 Why are non-functional elements maintained?

Historical inertia is responsible for the maintainence of many afunctional features in language (Lass 1990: 100). By inertia I take it that Lass means that such features are
successfully transferred from one generation to the next in the process of first language acquisition. This is the case because children can manage a great deal of complexity and do not seem to concern themselves with functional necessity. This unconscious stance is why such highly complex systems with such low functional load as the gender system of German have managed to survive for so many centuries unscathed.

The position with a language learned in adulthood is different in principle. Here one must indeed question the relationship of effort and reward: if effort is involved in mastering categories which speakers recognise as functional in the second language then they are usually prepared to expend the effort. The more so if the categories correspond to similar categories in their native language. Indeed an impasse arises if distinctions expected because of the native language are not found in the second language. This leads directly to the search for categorial equivalence.

5.2 A functionality and social relevance

It is uncontested that many elements which do not have a grammatical function may have a social one and may become indicators, if not markers, in a community. This may well have been the case for speakers which still had unstressed affirmative *do* in the varieties of English which were brought to Ireland as of the beginning of the 17th century. Such social indexicality, if present, would have applied to the English-speaking planters and not to the Irish learning English as adults. Hence there is no necessity to maintain that usurpation (see following section) overrides social function.

5.3 Usurpation

The instance of periphrastic *do* adopting an habitual function in Irish English offers a good illustration what I have termed in another paper usurpation (Hickey 1995). By this is meant that speakers in an interlingual context functionalise elements in the target language for their own ends. In this context one should mention the term *exaptation* used by Roger Lass (1990: 79-82) which he defines as ‘the opportunistic co-optation of a feature whose origin is unrelated or only marginally related to its later use’. This is quite similar to my ‘usurpation’. However the latter refers to afunctional elements of the target language being put to some use in the contact variety which is motivated by a grammatical category in the outset language, here habitual aspect (in this respect usurpation could be viewed as a special instance of exaptation). For this to happen the language learners must realise, usually unconsciously, that some element is present but becoming increasingly afunctional in the target language (the present view assumes that speakers intuitively recognise the statistical frequency, the central or peripheral status and the functional load of elements in a target language, and in their own of course). And this is precisely what the situation of periphrastic *do* must have been in the western varieties of English which provided the input to Irish English in the south in the 17th century.

For usurpation to occur speakers must realise that a form or structure is waning but still present in the linguistic input they are exposed to. It would thus not seem correct to postulate, as Guilfoyle (1983) and Harris (1986) do, that simple and periphrastic *do*-forms occurred as random surface variants in the input varieties for Irish English at the beginning of the early modern period. Decline of a feature does not mean that it occurs randomly and, if anything, sociolinguistics has shown that at any given point in
time there is a relatively stable statistical occurrence of forms, whether on the increase or decrease, seen diachronically.

The stance taken by Guilfoyle was that the Irish imposed order on the random occurrence of *do* by the application of Lightfoot’s Transparency Principle (see Lightfoot 1979 and Romaine’s criticism 1981) whereby children attempt to establish derivational regularity by reanalysis if the former derivational path is no longer retrievable for them. Now whatever the merits of this principle are, it is taken to apply to cases of reanalysis where the original and the new interpretation are semantically linked such as with the by now classic case of the English modals which derive from former lexical verbs with full inflectional paradigms (as still to be seen in modern German, for instance). But it is not obvious that *do* should be used for indicating an habitual aspect. In fact many varieties of English use it to express a perfective as in *He done stole the car*. Furthermore the change in the application of *do* is not from one function to another as with the modals but from afunctionality (hence the demise of periphrastic *do* in standard forms of English) to a new specific function, here the exponent of an habitual aspect.

If speakers intuitively grasp what variants are on the decline then it is additionally understandable that they should have hit on periphrastic *do* as the form to usurp and employ as a formal equivalent for the Irish habitual aspect. Note furthermore that the lack of stress on *does* is a requirement for those varieties which use it as an habitual marker. This is a remnant of the 17th century situation before *do* was used for emphatic purposes (this also applies to (Caribbean) creoles, Holm 1994: 375).

The connection between Irish English and creoles, above all of the Caribbean, in this respect would appear to be multi-facetted. On the one hand one can assume a degree of historical continuity, especially as Irish immigrants to Barbados in the mid 17th century are likely to have carried the habitual use of *do* plus *be* with them and from there one knows that later there was a not inconsiderable dissemination of English to other parts of the Caribbean and indeed to the coast of South Carolina possibly supplying superstrate input for Gullah, the sea island creole of this area (Hancock 1980; Littlefield 1981).

The mention of America necessitates remarking on a salient difference between varieties of English in the north and south of Ireland. There is a well-known distribution of habitual *bees* in the north of the country and of *does be* in the south. This according to Rickford (1986) accounts for the differential distribution of the two habitual structures in Caribbean English, where southern Irish English existed in the 17th century and African American English which arose in the southern United States (in particular the south-east and its immediate hinterland, the Appalachians) which as of the late 17th century had a large contingent of immigrants from the north of Ireland, originally Scotch-Irish. Note here that as Holm (1988:160, quoting Rickford 1980) points out there is a case to be made for *bees* to be a derivative of *does be* with deletion of *does* as an internal development in some Caribbean creoles such as Bahamian.

Before closing this section it is necessary to point out that there is of course the possibility of a convergence of factors in the rise of habitual aspect in Irish English. The existence of special habitual forms in all varieties of Irish English would point to a strong substrate motivation for its occurrence. The dialects of Irish all have a use of the present of verbs with habitual force and show a special form of the verb *be* with precisely this semantic content: *bíonn* as opposed to *tá* which tends to indicate existence or state in a general sense (see examples above).
6 Conclusions

The present paper has dealt with two issues concerning aspect in Irish English, one concerning its origin and one concerning its contemporary interpretation. In conclusion the two matters can be summarised as follows.

1) **Prototype interpretation** This rests on a semantic theory which provides a means for describing accurately and elegantly the manner in which aspectual categories are handled by native speakers of Irish English today. It sees certain elements of aspectual types as central and others as peripheral, e.g. the element of immediacy is central to the immediate perfective with after and the element of intention/goal is central to the resultative perfective aspect with O+PP word order. Centrality and peripherality are not binary categories in prototype theory and they allow for a certain amount of overlap depending on whether a given instantiation of a category is a good example or not. Hence the puzzlement which certain scholars have experienced on finding overlap in actual attestations of aspect types is due to an expectation of binary dividing lines between aspectual categories but which turn out on closer inspection not to be cases of ‘either or’ but rather of ‘more or less’.

2) **Usurpation** This is a phenomenon of uncontrolled second language learning with adults. It refers to a process whereby learners in this situation seize on a structure of the second language which they intuitively realise is afunctional in that language and which they then employ as an equivalent to a category from their native, first language which is not readily available in the second language. This can be postulated as the reason behind the choice of do + V-ing on the part of Irish speakers changing to English in their adulthood in the main language switch-over period between the 17th and the 19th centuries: unstressed declarative do was still present — but afunctional — in English (especially in the west of England) in the first half of the 17th century, the period which saw a renewed and more vigorous importation of English to (southern) Ireland. This view of the do habitual sees the locus of its genesis firmly among Irish speakers engaged in the language switchover, something which furthermore explains why this structure has been less common in Ulster and east coast urban English (roughly from Dublin down to Waterford) where an inflected form of be was/is more common as a realisation of an habitual seeing as how this category was imported with Scots into Ulster and also inherited from the first period of English in the south (12th to 16th centuries).

**Notes**

1 The prototype interpretation outlined below allows for overlap in the realisations chosen. Hence the fact that Kallen found examples of after and V-ing for all four perfect types in McCawley’s classification is neither surprising nor does it invalidate the central semantic component of immediacy which is prototypical for this kind of aspect.

2 Kallen would seem to grasp this when he offers a classification according to
speech acts (1991: 64ff.) and when he points out that the after construction is frequent in narrative situations.

3 There is broad terminological agreement with regard to this aspectual type among scholars in the field. Kallen (1989: 4) uses the compound term ‘generic/habitual’ to encompass all the uses of this aspect which he registered in his corpus of Dublin English.

4 It would appear that the habitual nature of the English simple present as in She cooks for her sister at the week-end was not regarded as a sufficient equivalent by Irish speakers (Harris 1986: 177). Perhaps because the English structure is interpreted habitually by contrast with the progressive whereas the Irish structure with bí is inherently habitual and it was felt necessary to attain a dedicated equivalent to it.

5 This is generally acknowledged to have been transferred from Scots and that the latter has this form as a remnant of the distinction between forms of the verb wesan (for generic statements) and of beon (for habitual actions) which was clear in Old English though later lost in all but the extreme north, i.e. in Scots (Traugott 1972: 89, 191f.).

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