Historical input and the regional differentiation of English in the Republic of Ireland

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1 Introduction

A quick glance at a map of Ireland reveals a number of prominent facts about the country’s physical and political geography which are linked essentially to the country’s history. The country is politically divided into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the latter a state deriving from the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 which was passed by the British parliament following the turbulent years after the Easter Rising of 1916 in which the Irish strove to gain independence from England. Northern Ireland is often referred to as Ulster which strictly speaking is incorrect as the latter label refers to an historical province in the north of the country which consists of nine counties, only six of which are contained within Northern Ireland. The most noticeable absence in the latter state is Donegal which is a very prominent part of Ulster. From a linguistic point of view, Donegal is part of the Ulster area, both in the Irish which is still spoken there and in the varieties of English to be found in the county. In term of features, the north of the country is quite distinct from the south, accents of northerners being immediately recognisable to southerners. A dividing line can be drawn roughly between Bundoran in south Co. Donegal and Dundalk on the east coast just below the border with Northern Ireland (Ó Baoill 1991). North of this line the accents are distinctly Ulster-like showing the northern elements outlined below. South of this line the northern features rapidly give way to southern values. The transition can be seen clearly moving down the east coast: Dundalk has a northern flavour to its speech but this is lost by the time one reaches Drogheda travelling southwards.
The regional differentiation of English in the north of the country (all nine counties of Ulster) has been the subject of many studies for at least a century and it would be quite redundant to offer a treatment of these here. The situation for the south is quite different. Reasons can be found for this quite quickly. The authors who concerned themselves with English in the south of the country were not usually interested in regional differences or indeed with sociolinguistic differences in the urban settlements of the south. Thus there is no linguistic investigation of Cork speech,1 which for a city of its size, is quite remarkable, given the number of investigations of comparable cities which are available in the north of Ireland and throughout the rest of Britain (Foulkes and Docherty, eds, 1999). Equally there is no treatment of the English spoken in Limerick or Galway and for Waterford and Dublin on the east coast only recently have treatments become available (Bertz 1975, Hickey 1998, 1999a, 2001).

The situation for the rural areas of the south of Ireland is no better. There was a promising start in the late 1950’s undertaken by Patrick L. Henry of the University of Galway, but this project never got beyond the ambitious outline in Lochlann (Henry 1958). Attempts at remedying this situation have been made, above all with *The Tape-Recorded Survey of Hiberno-English Dialects* prepared by the English Department of Queen’s University in Belfast. This survey deals fairly comprehensively with the north but the material gathered for the south is not complete by any means. Furthermore, the sound files are not in the public domain and so will not be
considered here. It is, however, likely that this situation will improve in the near future. *A Sound Atlas of Irish English* is being prepared by the present author and will cover the entire island of Ireland offering sample sound files for all the major varieties of English both rural and urban covering both sexes and at least three generations (Hickey fc., b).

The slight interest of scholars in regional differences of the south can be traced to their opinion that these are minimal anyway. Hence the concentration of regional studies in the north and in the south on historical developments in key areas of syntax, such as verbal aspect.2 The view that differences within the south of Ireland are slight cannot be taken at face value. Any objective consideration of speech from, say Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Galway will show that there are indeed significant phonological differences to be observed. These, and some morphosyntactic elements, will form the main concern of the present paper.

Before considering possible divisions within the south, it is necessary to consider the transitional features to be found in the band along the southern border of Ulster. These have been dealt with by two authors (Barry 1981; Ó Baoill 1991) and are offered in summary form here. A more detailed discussion would have to take the internal linguistic composition of Ulster into account, especially the relationship of Ulster Scots to other forms of Ulster English and the special position of the capital Belfast.

Northern features found in the transition zone between the south and north of Ireland

1) Use of interdental fricatives for dental stops in the south.
2) Use of a fronted allophone of /u:/ and /u/, i.e. [ɯ(ː)].
3) A reduction in vowel length distinctions.
4) Use of a retroflex [ɻ] in syllable-final position.3
5) Use of a rising intonation at the end of a declarative sentence.
6) Greater allophony of /æ/, e.g. raised variants in a velar environment *bag* [bɛg] and a retracted realisation in a nasal environment *family* ['fæml] .
7) Recessive occurrence of glides after velars and before front vowels, often used as a stereotype of a northern pronunciation as in *Cavan* ['kjævən] (a border county).

2 Differentiating Southern Irish English

Scholars have rightly seen the major divide in English in Ireland as running
horizontally between north and south. The north has been well investigated and several varieties or groups of these have been identified and classified. For the south one has such works as Henry (1957), Moylan (1996) and Lunny (1981). However, these are not concerned with placing the variety investigated in a framework of varieties for the south. Furthermore, many of the differences concern prosodic matters such as articulatory setting which are often regarded as vague and difficult to describe accurately. But such references are valid and indeed it is they which lay speakers avail of intuitively when locating a speaker geographically within the south of Ireland.

The written records available to an author investigating regional differences in Ireland have to be treated with considerable caution. The most common type is the word list (see the many entries in section 1.9 Non-linguistic studies and section 1.10.8 Non-linguistic works in Hickey 2002a) in which writers offer words from a region they happen to know well, frequently words which have a putative Irish source, Mhac an Fhailigh (1945-7) and Ó hÉaluighthe (1944) are typical examples of this approach.

When discussing data from a regional point of view one must also recognise that some studies happen to be based in a certain locale without this location being of particular relevance to the study, whatever its merits are, see Fieß (2000) as an instance of this.

3 The East Coast

The east of the country stretches from the town of Drogheda somewhat north of Dublin down to Waterford in the south-east and includes such towns as Carlow, Kilkenny, New Ross, Wexford. This is the area which was first settled by the English from the late 12th century onwards and it is roughly coterminous with that which was encompassed by the Pale, the region of English influence in the late medieval ages, at its greatest extension (Dudley-Edwards 1981[1973]: 91). The reason for treating the east coast as a separate region within the Republic of Ireland lies on the one hand in its different external history and on the other hand — more importantly — in the fact that the Anglophone input to this area stemmed from south-west England. The consequence of this has been that certain features of the south-east, such as variable use of suffixedal -s throughout the present tense verb paradigm and unmarked _do, be_ and _have_ in auxiliary function, can be traced to south-west English input (Hickey 2001). As the east coast is the area of Ireland settled earliest by the English this is understandable as the source for the English in the first period was the
south-west of England. This original input did in fact survive in altered form until the beginning of the 19th century in the archaic dialect of Forth and Bargy (Hickey 1988) which was recorded by a few glossary compilers before it finally ceased to exist (Vallancey 1788, Barnes 1867).

**East band from Dundalk down to Waterford and including the capital Dublin**

**Phonology**

1) Fortition of dental fricatives to alveolar stops (also south), e.g. *think* [tʰiŋk]

2) Lack of low vowel lengthening in the BATH lexical set (not Dublin), e.g. *path* [pæθ]

3) Front onset of /au/, e.g. *town* [tʰaʊn] (Dublin)

4) Centralised onset of /ai/ (also south), e.g. *quite* [kwəɪt] (Dublin)

5) Breaking of long high vowels (especially Dublin), e.g. *clean* [kliːn]

6) Fortition of alveolar sibilants in pre-nasal position with auxiliary verbs, e.g. *isn’t* [ɪdʒt] 4

7) No lowering of early modern /u/ (only Dublin), e.g. *done* [dʌn]

8) Glottalisation of lenited /v/, e.g. *foot* [fʊt] → [fu[t] (supraregional) → [fu?] → [fuɬ].

**Syntax**

1) Uninflected auxiliaries *do, be* and *have*

2) Verb deletion in a range of contexts (as copula, in existential sentences, etc.)

*She Ø a teacher in the tech. There Ø no hurry on you.*

3) Cliticisation of *do* on *be* — as [də'bi] — for habitual aspect

4) Variant use of suffixal -s in the present tense (depending on type of subject, number and person), chiefly in the first person singular and the third person plural.

4 The South and West

The first point to note about the south and west of the country is that this large region, from Co. Cork up to Co. Mayo was that in which Irish
survived longest. As rule of thumb one can say that Irish receded from east to west (Ó Cuív 1969). Furthermore, in this western and southern half of the country there is no survival of English from the first period with the possible exception of very small pockets in the major cities Cork, Limerick and Galway. Hence the English which developed here was that of the early modern period which arose through uncontrolled adult second language acquisition on the part of the rural inhabitants who represented the vast majority of speakers. Furthermore, the regional English input of the early modern period was of a largely West Midlands character. This fact is of importance when considering the realisation of habitual aspect in the south and west. Here do + be provides the normal means of forming the habitual whereas on the east coast there is also the option of using inflected bees as already noted by Joyce at the beginning of the 20th century (Joyce 1910: 86f.).

The south and the west can also be distinguished from each other, at least on phonological grounds. The major segmental feature is the raising of /e/ → /i/ before nasals in the south and southwest. This phenomenon is not spectacular in itself and is found in many varieties of English, most notably in the Lower South of the United States. But a consideration of the history of Irish English shows that this raising was of a more general type previously. If one looks at the many literary satires which contain Irish English — for instance in the collection by Alan Bliss (1979) or in A Corpus of Irish English (Hickey fc., a) — then one sees that formerly the raising occurred in non-nasal environments as well, e.g. ‘divil’, ‘togithir’, (from Dion Boucicault’s play Arragh na Pogue, 1864). What would appear to have happened in late 19th century, early 20th century Irish English is that the raising came to be restricted to environments in which it was phonoeti
cally natural, i.e. before nasals as these often trigger vowel raising due to their formant structure (Fry 1979: 118f.). This would mean that the situation in the south and south-west of Ireland (roughly the counties of Cork and Kerry) is a remnant of a much wider occurrence of /e/ → /i/ raising.

A suprasegmental feature of the south, especially of the city of Cork is the large intonational range characterised by a noticeable drop in pitch on stressed syllables. This intonational pattern is shared by Cork Irish, in the remnants which are still extant, so that this prosodic feature can be viewed as an areal feature of the south/south-west. The city of Cork also has a very open realisation of the vowels in the LOT and THOUGHT lexical sets which is seen in (often stereotypical) pronunciations of the city’s name, [kaak].

A distinctive feature of the west is the use of dental stops in the THINK / THIS lexical sets. In vernacular varieties in the east and south,
alveolar stops are employed here. Now in the history of Irish English one can assume that Irish speakers switching to English would have used the nearest equivalent to English /θ, ð/ which are coronal stops. These stops in Irish were alveolar in the east and south, but dental in the west (de Bhaldraithe 1945) so that speakers used /t, d/ as equivalents to the English dental fricatives in their second language English. This dental pronunciation of the west has become that of the supraregional variety of Irish English, itself deriving from vernacular usage in Dublin and spreading then throughout the country. But in colloquial Dublin English the realisation of dental fricatives has been as alveolar stops so it is not clear how vernacular speakers in Dublin came to use dental stops. One view is that they picked this articulation up from the many immigrants into Dublin in the latter half of the 19th century, because it (i) allowed them to dissociate themselves phonetically from colloquial speakers in the city and (ii) permitted a reversal of homophony in the words thinker and tinker (Hickey fc., c).

The south and west from Cork through Limerick up to Galway and Sligo (transition to north)

Phonology
1) /ɛ/ → /t/ before nasals (south/south-west)
2) Tense, raised articulation of /æ/ (also east)
3) Considerable intonational range (only south, south-west)
4) Open realisation of LOT vowel, i.e. [a] (Cork especially)
5) Dental stop realisation in THINK, THIS lexical sets (especially west)
6) Sibilant shift /s/ → /ʃ/ stop [ʃtɒp] (highly recessive)

Syntax
1) Preferential use of do + be for habitual aspect

Literature on English in the south and west of Ireland is scarce, if not to say non-existent. The only book-length study from the south-west is Lunny (1981) which was unfortunately never published. This study is explicitly concerned with looking at a variety spoken in an area which was Irish-speaking until fairly recently. Lunny concludes that the English of Ballyvourney, West Cork is a type of seventeenth century English reproduced in terms of the Irish phonemic system. Ó hÚrdail (1990) is a very brief discussion of possible mergers. Bairéad (1956) is a collection of phrases from older speakers in this country parish in Co. Galway in the west of Ireland. The book is arranged with the Irish English phrases noted, a more or less standard English equivalent and the Irish original from which the author believes the Irish English forms to have stemmed.
5 The Midlands

The centre of Ireland is a flat expanse bordered by the hills and mountains which occupy the coastal regions of the country (Mitchell 1976). In general the term ‘Midlands’ is used in Ireland to describe an area west of Co. Dublin as far as the Shannon and including its western shore linking up with east Clare, Galway and Mayo and on a north-south axis delimited by the border with Northern Ireland in the north and to the south by a line running roughly from Limerick across to Dublin. In this sense the Midlands actually refers to the north-central part of Ireland. Its extension to the south is limited and does not stretch far down into Co. Tipperary, certainly not beyond Nenagh. The counties which are regarded as typically part of the Midlands are Westmeath, Longford, Offaly, Laois along with west Kildare and Meath, south Roscommon and north Tipperary. The main town in the Midlands is Athlone, situated on the Shannon about half way on its north-south course.

The physical flatness of the Midlands is its main topographical feature. Demographically the chief fact about the Midlands is that it contains no city. Towns like Mullingar or Athlone have nothing like the significance of Galway, Limerick or Waterford, let alone Cork or Dublin. There is a general assumption in areal linguistics that flat regions with a fairly scant and scattered population do not show great linguistic variation (Nichols 1992). This fact is true of Ireland just as it is of the American Midwest to mention just one well-known parallel region of the Anglophone world. To the north the Midlands show the transitional features of the north-south divide (Ó Baoill 1991) such as u-fronting, the use of dental fricatives for stops in the THINK / THIS lexical set or a retroflex [ɾ] for the more general, traditional velarised [ɣ] of the south. The single most obvious feature of the Midlands is the shift of /tʃ/ to /k/ in intervocalic position as in fortune [ˈfɔrkən], already mentioned in the 19th century, see Burke (1896). Other features are shared by adjoining varieties. There are no separate studies of Midlands Irish English, apart from a brief consideration of the special sub-area of Emper by Nally (1971) where a number of Irish-speaking families were transplanted in the later 1930’s in an attempt to revive the language (Hindley 1990: 131).

6 Contact Irish English

In present-day Ireland there are only a few small remaining enclaves
scattered along the western seaboard where Irish is still spoken as a native language in a situation of unbroken historical continuity. In principle this setting should be the one in which the language shift scenario of previous centuries (Hickey 1995) is replicated, thus enabling linguists to view the process of language contact and transfer in vivo. Despite this fact there are virtually no investigations of contact Irish English today although Irish in contact areas has repeatedly being the subject of investigation, e.g. Stenson (1991). One notable exception to this is Ní Chasaide (1979). This study was carried out on seven informants from the north west of Ireland (Co. Donegal) to see what kind of /l/ sounds they showed in English. To this end their Irish was investigated. This variety of Irish shows three types of /l/-sound: a velarised [ɭ], a palatalised [ʎ] and a (lenited) neutral [l]. It turned out that the speakers used the last sound as the realisation of English /l/ in all positions (bar before /j/ as in million /ˈmɪljən/ = [mɪʎən]) which tallies with the realisation of /l/ in the rest of the country where this was decided a century or two ago.

7 Areal features of Irish English

The features listed above are those which are distinctive for particular regions. But of course there are just as many if not more features which occur in vernacular English spoken throughout the entire country. So when treating features of Irish English a view of the country as a whole can be useful, that is rather than stressing differences one could examine the features common to most or all varieties and indeed go a step further and compare these to parallel structures in Irish. This approach is largely typological and sees Ireland (north and south) as a linguistic area (Hickey 1999). It has actually quite a distinguished pedigree and antedates the recent interest in Irish English of the past three decades. In the 1950’s Heinrich Wagner published a monograph in which he attempted to link up the common structures among the languages of the British Isles (Wagner 1959). While one can be critical of Wagner’s method his main thesis that these commonalities (especially in the verbal area: aspactical distinctions and the existence of continuous forms) are not the product of chance but of prolonged contact has received support in recent areal studies, e.g. in Vennemann (2000). For the south of Ireland (and in many instances for the north also) one can note the following features shared by all vernacular varieties (not all of these are strongly diagnostic of Ireland as a linguistic area as they are also found in forms of mainland English).
Shared features in vernacular varieties of (southern) Irish English

Phonology
1) Lenition of alveolar stops in positions of high sonority, e.g. city [sɪtɪ]
2) Use of clear [l] in all positions in a word
3) Retention of syllable-final /ɾ/
4) Distinction of short vowels before /ɾ/
5) Retention of the distinction between /ʍ/ and /w/

Morphology
1) Distinction between second person singular and plural
2) Epistemic negative must, e.g. He musn’t be Scottish.
3) Them as demonstrative, e.g. Them shoes in the hall.

Syntax
1) Perfective aspect with two sub-types:
   a) Immediate perfective, e.g. She’s after spilling the milk.
   b) Resultative perfective, e.g. She’s has the housework done.
      (OV word order)
2) Habitual aspect, expressed by do + be or bees (characteristic of northern varieties) or inflectional -s in the first person singular
   a) She does be reading books.
   b) They bees up late at night.
   c) I gets awful anxious about the kids when they’re away.
3) Reduced number of verb forms, e.g. seen and done as preterite, went as past participle
4) Negative concord, e.g. He’s not interested in no girls.
5) Clefting for topicalisation purposes, e.g. It’s to Glasgow he’s going.
6) Greater range of the present tense, e.g. I know him for more than six years now.
7) Lack of do in questions, e.g. Have you had your breakfast yet?
8) Be as auxiliary, e.g. They’re finished the work now.
9) Till in the sense of ‘in order that’, e.g. Come here till I tell you.
10) Singular time reference for never, e.g. She never rang yesterday evening.
11) For to infinitives of purpose, e.g. He went to Dublin for to buy a car.
12) Subordinating and (frequently concessive), e.g. We went for a walk and it raining.

8 Features no longer present

What the above list does not contain are those features which no longer occur in Irish English. Due to the adoption of more mainstream forms of
English during the 19th century, a number of previously attested features have disappeared entirely or have become severely restricted in their occurrence.

*Features now absent from Irish English*

1) Lowering of /e/ to /a/ before /r/, e.g. *search* [saːrtʃ].

3) Alternation of /ʌ/ and /e/, i.e. for early modern English /u, i/, e.g. ‘When I was crossing the *brudge* I dropped the sweeping *brish* into the *ruvver.*’ (Joyce 1910: 98)

4) Unshifted /æː/, e.g. *patron* [pætrən].

5) /ʊ:/ realisation for <oor>, e.g. *door* /duːr/, *floor* /flʊr/

*Features restricted in their distribution*

1) Unshifted early modern English /ʊ/, e.g. *done* [doʊ] (only popular Dublin English)

2) Unshifted /ɛː/, e.g. *meat* [meːt] (only in strongly localised varieties)

8 Supraregionalisation

Although the concern of this article is with the historical background to varieties of English in Ireland, mention should also be made of synchronic processes which are leading to the spread of a supraregional variety of English in the Republic of Ireland. By virtue of the status of the capital Dublin, the rest of the country is heavily influenced by the speech to be found there. This means that fashionable forms of English from the capital spread quite easily to the rest of the country. Due to the unprecedented economic and demographic changes in the capital new forms of English have arisen there, in fact a new kind of Dublin English can be heard which is diametrically opposed to more traditional pronunciations of English in the city. This fashionable form of English, which is often known as ‘D4 English’ or ‘Dartspeak’ (Hickey 2002b), is rapidly spreading to the rest of the country (Hickey fc., b), particularly among younger females who do not have a local orientation. Such speakers are the vanguard of the change in what one might term the unofficial standard of southern Irish English. It can be safely predicted that within a decade or so this new pronunciation will become the supraregional variety of southern Irish English and the many features which are different from the types of English discussed in this article will lead to a considerable change in the profile of Irish English generally.
9 Conclusion

In conclusion one can say that the Republic of Ireland shows a clear split into an east coast region (with Dublin) and a much larger south and west area with transitional features along the border with Ulster, the county of Donegal being linguistically part of the northern dialect area. The division into east and south/west reflects the historical development of English in the country. The language shift which lasted longest in the south, west and northwest is where the influence of Irish was greatest. The east coast provides data which is significant for the periodisation of Irish English. The standard wisdom (e.g. Bliss 1984) that the first period, from the late 12th century up until 1600, had no influence on the modern period, from 1600 to the present, is not tenable, given the features of the south-east which have counterparts in the south-west of England and hence can be traced to the first period of Irish English when this south-west input was initiated in the east of Ireland.

Notes

1 Apart from a very early non-linguistic treatment by Leahy (1915) and two later ones, by Gunn (1982) and by Murphy (1994). All three studies are unpublished M.A. theses.

2 Filppula (1991) does however, compare some corpus data from Dublin and Kerry in his consideration of Irish English syntax. The concern of the paper is, however, with the difference in principle between urban and rural Irish English and not with the regional differentiation of English in the south of Ireland.

3 The use of a retroflex [ɹ] is something which is not characteristic of traditional varieties of English in the south of Ireland. However, in more recent forms of fashionable Dublin English just such a pronunciation is to be found and furthermore this new pronunciation is spreading rapidly among the younger generation (especially female) across the entire Republic of Ireland as is well documented by A Sound Atlas of Irish English.

4 This feature is also recorded as widespread in the American lower South where it is not just confined to auxiliary verbs (Troike 1986).

5 Apart from this there is an increasing number of language enthusiasts who speak Irish as a second language and attempt to keep the language alive by using it as much as they can, frequently in an urban environment which is completely English-speaking.
Bliss (1972) is, despite its title, concerned with the historical development of English under the influence of Irish. Corrigan (1999) is a thorough investigation of contact and shift in an area just across the northern border where Irish was probably spoken until the beginning of the 20th century.

The use of a velarised [1] is becoming increasingly characteristic of more recent forms of fashionable Dublin English and is rapidly spreading throughout the country as a consequence of its fashion in the capital (see note 3 above). Again this feature is well documented by *A Sound Atlas of Irish English*.

The probable reason for this is that in Irish the short vowels /ʌ/ (back) and /e, ɪ/ (front) are often allophones of each other when they occur before a consonant contained in the same syllable. Then the front or back vowel realisation depends on whether the following consonant is palatal or non-palatal.

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