191   English in Ireland

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1   Introduction

Any treatment of the lexicon of Irish English, however brief, must begin with a basic distinction between lexical items which are retentions from the varieties of English brought to Ireland and those which can credibly be regarded as borrowings from Irish, the Celtic language which was formerly the native one of the majority of the population. The settlement of the country started in the late 12th century and continued in particular in the period of more intensive plantation of both the north and the south which set in, for the north from the Scottish lowlands, at the beginning of the 17th century and quite intensively for the south from the west and north-west of England towards the middle of that century, particularly as a consequence of the Cromwellian campaigns.

1.1   Northern and southern Irish English

The foundations for the linguistic distinction within Irish English on a north-south axis were laid with the large-scale settlement of the north-east corner of the country (more or less coterminous with the province of Ulster) at the beginning of the 16th century. Since then there has been a distinctive Scots element in the more conservative forms of Ulster English. This is known as Ulster Scots (occasionally as Ullans - also the name of a journal - in analogy to Lallans for Lowland Scots). Much research has been carried out on the lexicon of this variety with concentration on traditional rural terminology, see Adams (1978) Braidwood (1969) and Fenton (2001 [1995]); for lexical information on Donegal (Ulster, but outside Northern Ireland) see Traynor (1953).

1.2 Forth and Bargy

Among the earliest sources of material on Irish English are glossaries on the dialect of two baronies in the south-east corner of the country (Forth and Bargy - read: /bargi/ - in present-day south Wexford) where a survival of English from the period of initial settlement in the late Middle Ages was to be found. An antiquarian interest in this variety had existed for some time when Captain Charles Vallancey compiled a list of words in 1788. This was supplemented later by a Protestant minister Jacob Poole whose glossary was edited in 1867 by the Dorset poet William Barnes. The dialect died out at the beginning of the 19th century and has no reflex among the varieties of current Irish English so that its value is slight for contemporary studies. Among the lexical influences which Forth and Bargy showed are Irish and, to a much lesser extent, Flemish (stemming from a Flemish contingent among the original settlers of Ireland from Wales in the late 12th century).

1.3 Archaic and/or regional words in Irish English

By no means all the singular lexical items in Irish English are derived from Irish. Quite a considerable number represent archaic or regional usage which has survived in Ireland. For instance, the adjectives *mad* and *bold* retain earlier meanings of 'keen on' and 'misbehaved' respectively. In some cases the words are a mixture of archaicism and regionalism, e.g. *cog* 'cheat', *chisler* 'child', *mitch* 'play truant', while yet others are of foreign origin but entered via English, for example *hames* (from Dutch) 'curved pieces forming horse collar' but now a very general word meaning 'complete failure, mess'. Still further one can notice semantic extensions which have taken place in Ireland as with *yoke* with a general meaning of 'a thing/device'. An additional feature here is the confusion between items which are complementary in meaning: *ditch* is used for *dyke*; *bring* and *take*, *rent* and *let*, *borrow* and *lend* are often interchanged as are *teach* and *learn* (on a low stylistic level and only the latter for the former) a usage found in Shakespeare as well. In some instances a particular pronunciation of an English word adopts connotations not found elsewhere, e.g. *eejit* /iːdʒɪt/ for *idiot* has more the sense of 'bungling person'.

2 Irish loans in present-day Irish English

Although Irish today is spoken by less than one percent of the population and although the knowledge of Irish among the majority is, in general, very poor indeed, there is a curious habit of flavouring one's speech by adding a few words from Irish, what is sometime condescendingly called using the *cúpla focal* (lit. 'couple of words'). The words used are always alternatives to English terms readily available, e.g. *ciúineas* 'silence', *piseog* 'superstition' (Anglicised as *pishogue*) *sláinte* 'health' or *plámás* 'flattery'. Such incursions into the lexicon of Irish are brief and superficial. For instance, the common Irish word *seafóid* 'nonsense' is unlikely to be understood by any English speaker.

Mention should also be made of phraseological devices which are used productively by young urban speakers, that is by groups which would not necessarily show any particular concern to espouse an Irish linguistic identity. Examples of what is meant here would be the verb *give out* in the sense of 'complain, criticise', particular connotations of *man* and *one* with possessive pronouns or the use of a special

pronunciation of a general word as with [baul] for *bold* and [aul] for *old*, both pronunciations surviving from the first period of English colonialisation, i.e. from the time before 1600.

(1) a. *Your man*   'The (male) person currently being referred to'
     b. *Your one* [wan]   'Disrespectfully of a woman'
     c. *The bowl' Charlie* 'The bold Charlie (with sneaking admiration)'
     d. *The owl' car*   'The old car (said affectionately)'

There are restrictions on these terms and phrases, so much so that their correct application cannot simply be guessed and an incorrect use can betray one as non-Irish. An example is the word *crack*, here from Irish *craic*, itself a borrowing from English and which has the general meaning of 'fun, good time, enjoyment'. It can occur in various tenses, in a definite and an indefinite sense, but is not possible in an imperative or optative construction.

(2) a. *We had a great crack*   'We enjoyed ourselves'
     b. *How's the crack*   'Are you getting much enjoyment?' (out of life, etc.)
     c. **Have a crack this evening*, **Let's have some crack*

Instances like these show that despite the paucity of Irish words in Irish English the lexicon of this variety has a clear profile and it can fulfil the dual function of identification and demarcation vis à vis other forms of English; this 'local flavouring' is particularly common when speakers shift into colloquial registers. In some cases this function is fulfilled by words which are not Irish in fact but which are taken to have a specific Irish flavour to them, e.g. *bog(house)* 'toilet', *bogman* 'uncultured, coarse individual'.

The use of Irish terms is not exhausted by the above references. One matter which is noticeable in present-day Irish English is the number of Irish terms used in officialese, by ministries, government offices and semi-state bodies when coining names for new institutions and agencies. This is a corollary of the official attitude of the government and the lip service paid to Irish (constitutionally speaking the first language in Ireland, though this is, and always has been, wishful thinking). These are treated as opaque lexical items by the Irish, for instance the government employment and development agency is called *fás* but it is doubtul if the majority of the Irish are aware that this is simply the word for 'growth'. Equally names for political positions are often referred to by their Irish equivalents, for instance there is no prime minister or deputy prime minister in Ireland but a *taoiseach* and a *tánaiste*. The use of these terms should in no way be construed as allegiance to the Irish language, indeed the vast majority of Irish pronounce them using English phonetics, e.g. [tɪːʃəx] is the Irish pronunciation and [tiːʃək] the usual Irish English rendering.

On a more matter of fact level there are a small number of terms from Irish which have a specific meaning and are not alternatives to English determined by register and style. *Currach*, 'a wooden-framed boat covered with tarred canvas', *crannog* 'lake dwelling' and *carrageen*, 'edible seaweed', are examples of such words which are generally known to most of the Irish.

The influence of Irish on English during the spread of the latter in Ireland is not confined to the transfer of single lexical items. There are also instances which form the borderline between lexical and syntactic transfer. For instance a prominent usage is that with the reflexive pronoun in the sense of a boss or some important person as in *Is*

himself in today? (a calque on the Irish idiom *An bhfuil sé féin isteach inniu?*, lit. 'Is himself in today?'.

3   Irish loans in English outside of Ireland

The quantity of borrowing from Irish into mainland or overseas English has been very slight indeed (in the latter case probably because of the desire of emigrants not to associate linguistically with their background of poverty in Ireland). Most of the words are colloquial like *smithereens* 'broken pieces' from a diminutive of *smiodar* 'fragment'; *blarney* 'flattery, sweet talk' from a town near Cork; *brogue* 'thick, country accent of Irish English' from the word for 'shoe'; *gob* 'mouth'; *omadawn* 'fool' from Irish *amadán*. Some are now more or less obsolete in English like *shillelagh* 'cudgel'. The most significant loan must be the word *tory*, originally denoting Irish people dispossessed and outlawed by English settlers in the 17th century. Later a person opposing the exclusion of Catholic James II from royal succession; a supporter and later member of the British parliamentary party in favour of the established religious and political order which gave rise to the Conservative Party in the 1830's (the American usage refers to a colonialist loyal to Britain). The etymology is Irish *tóraidhe* 'a pursued person', cf. *tóir* 'to pursue'. Another unassailable loan from Irish is *bother* from *bodhair* 'deafen, annoy'. On less certain ground one has *shanty* 'hut, run-down house' which could be either from Irish *sean tí* (genitive of *sean teach* 'old house', here the oblique case militates against the Irish interpretation) or from Canadian French *chantier* 'lumberjack's cabin'. The word also occurred in the 19th century as an attributive adjective, tantalisingly with reference to two ethnic groups: *shanty Irish* 'poor Irish-Americans' and *shantyman* 'lumberjack' (Canadian, American). There are a few words, common in both American English and Irish English which might be from Irish but whose etymology is uncertain: *shibang* 'entire lot' and *shenanigans* 'trickery'. The word *phoney* 'not genuine' may also be of Irish origin, coming from Irish *fáinne* 'ring' and initially referring to the putative Irish practice of selling false jewellery in America. An Irish etymology exists for American English *so long* which could be from Irish *slán* [sɫɑːn] 'goodbye' where the velarised [ɫ] in Irish might well have suggested a disyllabic form to English listeners.

3.1   Scottish Gaelic or Irish as source

In a few instances it is not certain whether the source has been Gaelic in Scotland or in Ireland as the phonetic form of the words would have been more or less identical in both languages. *Galore* 'plentiful' < *go leor* 'enough'; *dig* (usually the American form) *twig* 'understand' from *tuigim* 'I understand'; *sonsy* 'agreeable in appearance, comely' from *sonas* 'good fortune' is almost certainly Scottish Gaelic, cf. *unsonsy* 'unlucky' as well. *Whiskey* lit. 'water of life' has been borrowed from both forms of Gaelic (the Scottish spelling is *whisky*).

3.2   Irish and international usage

Some few Irish words have become international terms. These are not necessarily borrowings from Irish but eponyms deriving from surnames: *to boycott* comes from one Captain Charles Boycott (1832-1897) an English land agent in County Mayo, who resisted the demands for reform by the Irish Land League (1879-81) and was blacked by

Irish peasants and artisans, and whose name stands for a policy of deliberate and wholesale non-cooperation; *to lynch* may come from the name of a mayor of Galway city in the 13th century who acquiesced to the execution of his own son for crimes committed, though this term could also stem from Captain William Lynch (1742-1820) of Virginia who set up and presided over tribunals outside the judicial system. The term *leprechaun* comes from an Irish word meaning 'fairy dwarf'. The expression *beyond the Pale* 'socially unacceptable' derives from the fortification around the medieval English-speaking area enclosing Dublin and some of the east coast; the area beyond this was regarded as barbaric.

3.3   Irish names in English

Proper names from Irish enjoy a considerable popularity as firstnames, especially in America and not only among the Irish section of the population. *Patrick* is probably the most common; its diminutive *Paddy* is derogatory and, in England, is a generic term of disrespect for the Irish. Others firstnames are *Kevin*, an Irish saint, *Desmond*, lit. 'South Munster' (an area controlled by a Norman family which adopted the geographical designation as its name); *Moira < Máire* (Irish) *< Maria*; *Maureen* is a diminutive from *Máirín < Máire + -ín* where the latter is a productive diminutive suffix. This is also found in *colleen* 'small girl' *< cailín*, morphologically *cail + ín*, found as a firstname. *Shawn < Seán* (Irish) is etymologically interesting as it derives from Anglo-Norman *John*, the Latin form *Johannes* having resulted in the earlier form *Eoin* in Ireland (*Ian* in Scotland and *Owen* in Wales). *Kelly* is an American first name and stems from the Irish surname *Ó Ceallaigh*.

4   Studies of the Irish English lexicon

The study of Irish English vocabulary from a more or less linguistic perspective can be said to begin with Joyce (1910) and Clark (1917). The first work is more general in its scope and rests on Joyce's considerable knowledge of Irish and local history. Clark's study is a single piece of scolarship from a writer about whom little is known. In later work on Irish English, such as Hogan (1927) there are remarks on vocabulary. It was not until after the war with the work of Patrick Leo Henry, somewhat dated now but seminal at the time, that renewed interest in the vocabulary of Irish English was registered. During the 1960's focus shifted to the north with studies by Adams and Braidwood (see reference section). Towards the end of the decade Alan Bliss in Dublin began his series of many articles on Irish English - including lexical questions - which established his reputation in the field. The 1970's and 1980' saw a few reprints (of Barnes/Poole's glossary and Clark 1917). The 1990's has seen a considerable expansion in this field. Christensen (1996) Dolan (2005 [1998]) Moylan (1996) Ó Muirithe (1996a, 1996b and 1997) and Share (2003 [1997]) continue the tradition of word-collecting (of these Doland and Share are the most thorough). Görlach (1995) and Kallen (1996 and 1997) have participated in the research into the Irish English lexicon, Kallen's contributions being the linguistically most significant of all recent publications.

For the north of Ireland the situation has also taken a turn for the better. Starting with Todd (1990) and continuing through various articles up to the dictionary by Macafee (1996) a steady improvement in the quality and scope of lexical studies of the north can be observed.

4.1 Folk linguistics and the Irish English lexicon

Apart from the studies listed above there are many collections of words from Irish English compiled out of an interest in the folk knowledge embodied in the vocabulary. Such studies go back at least to the middle of the last century when vocabulary of a local or specialist nature was collected and published in the form of word-lists mainly in Irish journals dedicated to matters of local interest. It is not possible to list many of the large number of studies which have appeared in many minor journals in the course of more than a century. A fairly complete list of -these can be found in the relevant sections of Hickey (2001).

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