Contact and language shift

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1 Introduction

Among the many contact situations those which involve language shift occupy a special position. All language shift scenarios have in common that at the outset there is one language and at the end another which is the majority language in the community which has experienced the shift. This is true now and must also have been in history and pre-history when countless cases of shift occurred. Just consider the early Indo-European migrations. Movements of sub-groups of this family into new geographical locations usually meant that the pre-Indo-European populations were ‘absorbed’, i.e. that they shifted in language (and culture) to the branch of Indo-European they were confronted with. This shift may be partial or complete, for instance, on the Iberian peninsula it was partial with Basque remaining but in the British Isles it was complete. The shift may have lasted into history, making the ‘absorption’ more visible, as was the case with Etruscan in Italy. Whether the Indo-European branches still show traces of this early contact and shift is much disputed (see Vennemann this volume for relevant comments). But going on shift scenarios today and assuming that the same principles of contact applied then as now, one can postulate the influence of earlier groups on later groups if the size of the shifting population was sufficient for the features of its shift variety to influence the language they were shifting to as a whole. This is not always the case, however, so a note of caution should be struck here. Moving forward to recent history one can see in the anglophone world that language shift did not always leave traces of the original language(s). The considerable shift of native Americans to English has not affected general forms of English in either the USA or Canada. What may occur is that the shift variety establishes itself as a form in its own right, focussed with a stable speech community, cf. South African Indian English (Mesthrie 1992), but even then there is usually a further approximation to supraregional forms of English which dilute the specific profile of the shift variety, cf. Australian Aboriginal English and Maori English.

1.1 Motivation for shift

The motivation for language shift and the circumstances under which it takes place will of course vary from case to case but there is sufficient common ground for generalisations to be made about language shift and for the analysis of a single instance to be of broader value to the study of language shift as a whole.

For the following discussion the language shift which took place in Ireland, roughly between the early seventeenth century and the late 19th century will be considered. This is a shift from the original language of the vast majority in Ireland, Irish, to English, a language which was imported to Ireland in the late twelfth
century and which is now (early twenty-first century) the language of over 99% of the Irish population, in both the north and south of the country.[1]

English has not always been the dominant language in Ireland. Initially, this was Anglo-Norman (Cahill 1938) and then Irish so that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, English had receded to the east coast and was only found in any strength in the towns. But after significant victories for the English at the beginning of the seventeenth century, after the settlement of the north with Lowland Scots and with people from northern and north-western England and after the Cromwellian campaigns and settlements of the 1640s and early 1650s, the fortunes of the Irish language and culture declined and were to wane steadily in the centuries between that time and the present. Currently, Irish is spoken natively by not more than 50,000 (probably by much less) in three main pockets on the western seaboard. The Irish spoken by these individuals is very strongly influenced by English and it will be considered at the end of this chapter. But in the main, the chapter will deal with the rise of vernacular varieties of Irish English during the shift period of the past few centuries.

The information presented here is intended to highlight key aspects of language shift. For reasons of space nothing like a comprehensive treatment can be offered. A much more detailed analysis of contact phenomena can be found in the central section of Hickey (2007).

1.2 The nature of the shift

The shift in Ireland must have involved considerable bilingualism over several centuries. The native language for the majority of the population was initially Irish and recourse to this was always there. English would have been used in contact with English speakers (administrators, bailiffs or those few urbanites who only spoke English). There was also considerable interaction between the planters and the native Irish, certainly in the countryside where this group of English speakers had settled. Indeed there may be grounds for assuming that a proportion of the planters by the mid 17th-century would have had at least a rudimentary knowledge of Irish. They would have been a source of bilingualism for the native Irish population, at the interface between themselves and those planters without any Irish. However, this source of bilingual interaction should not be overestimated. There would seem to be little evidence for the view that key features of Irish English arose through the interaction with bilingual people of English origin. The planters in the south of Ireland[2] numbered a few thousand at the most while there were several million Irish speakers, probably as many as seven million before the onset of the Great Famine (1845-8). Furthermore, the view that the planters were cared for by Irish nurses and had contact with the children of the native Irish is supported by authors like Bliss (1976: 557). The ultimate effect of this would have been to render the language of the planters more like that of the native Irish so that no specific variety of planter English arose.

The language shift did not progress evenly across the centuries. Major external events, chiefly famine and emigration, accelerated the pace. During such setbacks, Irish lost ground quickly which it was not to recover. Famine struck throughout the 18th century, especially in the 1720s and emigration from Ulster was
considerable during this century, though this largely involved settlers of Scottish origin who moved to North America.

The most significant blow to the Irish language was the Great Famine of the late 1840s which hit the poorer rural areas of Ireland hardest. The twin factors of death and emigration reduced the number of Irish speakers by anything up to two million in the course of less than a decade. The famine also brought home to the remaining Irish speakers the necessity to switch to English to survive in an increasingly English-speaking society and to prepare for possible emigration.

2 What can be traced to contact?

It goes without saying that there is no proof in contact linguistics. If a structure in one language is suspected of having arisen through contact with another, then a case can be made for contact when there is a good structural match between both languages. Take as an example the phrases at the beginning of the following sentences[3] which have an exact equivalent in Irish.

(1) a. More is the pity, I suppose. (TRS-D, S42, M)
   Is mór an trua, is dóigh liom.
   [is big the pity, is suppose with-me]

   b. Outside of that, I don’t know. (TRS-D, W42-2, F)
   Taobh amuigh de sin, nil a fhios agam.
   [side out of that, not-is know at-me]

   c. There’s a share of jobs alright. (TRS-D, S7, M)
   Tá roinnt jabbana ann, ceart go leor.
   [is share jobs-GEN in-it right enough]

However, the case for contact as a source, at least as the sole source, is considerably weakened if the structure in question is attested in older forms of the language which has come to show it. Many of the features of Irish English are of this type, that is they could have a source either in older forms of English taken to Ireland or in Irish through contact. An example of this is provided by doubly marked comparatives. In Irish, comparatives are formed by placing the qualifier níos ‘more’ and inflecting the adjective as well. For instance, déanach ‘late’, which consists of the stem déan- and the stem-extending suffix -ach, changes to déanaí in the comparative although the comparative particle níos is used as well.

(2) Beimid ag teacht níos déanaí. ‘We will be coming later.’
   [will-be-we at coming more later]

This double marking may have been transferred in the language shift situation. But such marking is also typical of earlier forms of English (Barber 1997 [1976]: 200f.) and may well have been present in input forms of English in Ireland. It is still well attested today as in the following examples.

(3) a. He’s working more harder with the new job. (WER, F50+)

   b. We got there more later than we thought. (DER, M60+)
In such cases it is impossible to decide what the source is, indeed it is probably more sensible to postulate a double source, and to interpret the structure as a case of convergence.

3 The search for categorial equivalence

Before broaching the details of the case for contact, it is important to consider the difference between the presence of a grammatical category in a certain language and the exponence of this category. For instance, the category ‘future’ exists in the verb systems of both English and Irish but the exponence is different, i.e. via an auxiliary will/shall in the first language, but via a suffix in the second language. This type of distinction is useful when comparing Irish English with Irish, for instance when comparing habitual aspect in both languages, as can be seen from the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Exponence in Irish English</th>
<th>Exponence in Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Habitual</td>
<td>1) do(es) be + V-ing</td>
<td>bionn + non-finite verb form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They do be fighting a lot.</td>
<td>Bionn siad ag troid go minic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) bees (northern)</td>
<td>[is-HAB they at fighting often]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The lads bees out a lot.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) verbal -s (first person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I gets tired of waiting for things to change.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Category and exponence in Irish and Irish English

3.1 Category and exponence

When shifting to another language, temporarily or permanently, adults expect the same grammatical distinctions in the target which they know from their native language. To this end they search for equivalents in the target to categories they are familiar with. This process is an unconscious one and persists even with speakers who have considerable target language proficiency. If the categories of the outset language are semantically motivated then the search to find an equivalent in the target is all the more obvious. Here is an illustration. In Irish there is a distinction between the second person singular and plural pronoun but not in standard English. In the genesis of Irish English, speakers would seem to have felt the need for this non-existent distinction in English and three solutions to this quandary arose.

(4) a. the use of available material, yielding you # ye
     (ye available from early English input)
 b. the analogical formation of a plural: you # youse < you + {S}
    (not attested before early to mid-nineteenth century)
c. a combination of both (a) and (b) as in you # yez < ye + {S}  
(not found before mid-nineteenth century)

In all these cases the search for an equivalent category of second person plural was solved in English by the manipulation of material already in this language. At no stage does the Irish sibh [siːv] ‘you-PL’ seem to have been used, in contrast, for instance, to the use of West African unu ‘you-PL’ found in Caribbean English (Hickey 2003).

Apart from restructuring elements in the target, speakers can transfer elements from their native language. This transfer of grammatical categories is favoured, if the following conditions apply.

1) The target language has a formal means of expressing this category  
2) There is little variation in the expression of this category  
3) The expression of this category is not homophonous with another one  
4) The category marker in the outset language can be identified – is structurally transparent – and can be easily extracted from source contexts

Table 2. Factors favouring transfer of grammatical categories

Before looking at a case where transfer did actually take place, one where it did not is presented as it can be seen that the complete lack of equivalence precluded any transfer to English. Irish has a special form of the verb, known as the ‘autonomous’, a finite verb which is not bound to a particular person, i.e. which is agentless.

(6) a. Táthar ann a cheapann go bhfuil an ceart aige.  
[is-AUT in-it that think that is the right at-him]  
‘There are people who think he is right.’

b. Bristear an dlí go minic.  
[break-AUT the law often]  
‘The law is often broken.’

c. Cailleadh anuraidh í.  
[lost-AUT she last-year]  
‘She died last year.’

d. Rugadh mac di.  
[born-AUT son to-her]  
‘She bore a son.’

Neither in present-day contact English nor in the textual record for Irish English is a direct transfer of the autonomous form of Irish attested. Agentless finite verb forms are unknown in English and, furthermore, the means of expressing agentivity in Irish, via a compound form of preposition + pronoun – see example (d) above – is not available in English either. Instead the internal means found in English, the passive, generic sentences with there, are and were used.

3.2 Attested cases of shift

Where transfer is attested it is worth considering just how this may have taken
place. In a language shift situation, transfer must first occur on an individual level, perhaps with several individuals at the same time. But for it to become established, it must be accepted by the community as a whole. If such transfer is to be successful, then it must adhere to the principle of economy: it must embody only as much change in the target as is necessary for other speakers in the community to recognise what native structure it is intended to reflect.

To illustrate how this process of transfer is imagined to have occurred in the historical Irish context, consider the example of the immediate perfective formed by the use of the prepositional phrase *tar éis* ‘after’, which is employed temporally in this case.

(7)  
*Tá siad tar éis an obair a dheanamh.*  
[is they after the work COMP do]  
‘They are after doing the work.’, i.e. ‘They have completed the work.’

The pivotal elements in this construction are listed below; the complementiser *a* is of no semantic significance.

(8)  
  a.  adverbial phrase *tar éis* ‘after’  
  b.  non-finite verb form *déanamh* ‘doing’  
  c.  direct object *obair* ‘work’

It would appear that the Irish constructed an equivalent to the output structure using English syntactic means. Item (a) was translated literally as ‘after’, (b) was rendered by the non-finite V- *ing* form yielding sentences like *They’re after doing the work*. With a translation for *tar éis* and a corresponding non-finite form the task of reaching a categorial equivalent would appear to have been completed. Importantly, the Irish word order ‘object + verb’ was not carried over into English (*They’re after doing the work*).

In put the case against transfer Harris (1991: 205) argues that the order of non-finite verb form and object is different in Irish and English and hence that transfer is unlikely to have been the source. However, the aim in the contact situation was to arrive at a construction which was functionally equivalent to that in the outset language. A word order such as that in *John is after the house selling* would not only unnecessarily flout the sequence of verb and object in English (unnecessary as it would not convey additional information) but also give rise to possible confusion with the resultative perfective which in Irish English is realised by means of a past participle following its object.

In the transfer of structure during language shift, it would seem both necessary and sufficient to achieve correlates to the key elements in the source structure. Another instance of this principle can be seen with the resultative perfective of Irish English.

(9)  
*Tá an obair déanta acu.* ‘They have finished the work.’  
[is the work done at-them]  
IrEng: ‘They have the work done.’

Essential to the semantics of the Irish construction is the order ‘object + past participle’. Consequently, it is this order which is realised in the Irish English
equivalent. The prepositional pronoun *acu* ‘at-them’ (or any other similar form) plays no role in the formation of the resultative perfective in Irish, but is the means to express the semantic subject of the sentence. As this is incidental to the perfective aspect expressed in the sentence, it was neglected in Irish English.

The immediate perfective with *after* does not appear to have had any model in archaic or regional English (Filppula 1999: 99-107). With the resultative perfective, on the other hand, there was previously a formal equivalent, i.e. the word order ‘object + past participle’. However, even if there were instances of this word order in the input varieties of English in Ireland this does not mean that these are responsible for its continuing existence in Irish English. This word order could just as well have disappeared from Irish English as it has in forms of mainland English (van der Wurff and Foster 1997). However, the retention in Irish English and the use of this word order to express a resultative perfective can in large part be accounted for by the wish of Irish learners of English to reach an equivalent to the category of resultative perfective which they had in their native language.

Another issue to consider is whether the structures which were transferred still apply in the same sense in which they were used in previous centuries. It would be too simplistic to assume that the structures which historically derive from Irish by transfer have precisely the same meaning in present-day Irish English. For instance, the immediate perfective with *after* has continued to develop shades of meaning not necessarily found in the Irish original as Kallen (1989) has shown in his study.

### 4 The prosody of transfer

The case for contact should be considered across all linguistic levels. In particular it is beneficial to consider phonological factors when examining syntactic transfer (Hickey 1990: 219). If one looks at structures which could be traced to transfer from Irish, then one finds in many cases that there is a correspondence between the prosodic structures of both languages. To be precise, structures which appear to derive from transfer show the same number of feet and the stresses fall on the same major syntactic category in each language (Hickey 1990: 222). A simple example can illustrate this. Here the Irish equivalent is given which is not of course the immediate source of this actual sentence as the speaker was an English-speaking monolingual.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A... don’t like the new team} & \quad \underline{\text{at all at all}}. \quad \text{(WER, M55+)} \\
\text{Ní thaitníonn an fhoireann nua le hA...} & \quad \underline{\text{ar chor ar bith}.} \\
\text{[not like the team new with A... on turn on anything]} \\
\end{align*}
\]

The repetition of *at all at all* creates a sentence-final negator which consists of two stressed feet with the prosodic structure WSWS (weak-strong weak-strong) as does the Irish structure *ar chor ar bith*. This feature is well-established in Irish English and can already be found in the early 19th century.

Consider now the stressed reflexives of Irish which are suspected by many
authors (including Filppula 1999: 77-88) of being the source of the Irish English use of an unbound reflexive.

(11) An ‘bhfuil sé féin, is tigh in’niu? ‘Is he himself in today?’

[INTERROG is he self in today]
IrEng: ‘Is, him’self in to’day?’

The strong and weak syllables of each foot are indicated in the Irish sentence and its Irish English equivalent above. From this it can be seen that the Irish reflexive is monosyllabic and, together with the personal pronoun, forms a WS foot: sé ’féin [he self]. In Irish English the equivalent to this consists of a reflexive pronoun on its own: ’himself, hence the term ‘unbound reflexive’ as no personal pronoun is present. If both the personal and reflexive pronoun were used in English, one would have a mismatch in prosodic structure: WS in Irish and SWS (’he, ’himself) in Irish English. One can thus postulate that the WS pattern of ’himself was interpreted by speakers during language shift as the prosodic equivalent of both the personal pronoun and reflexive pronoun of Irish ’féin and thus used as an equivalent of this.[4]

Another example of prosodic match can be seen with the immediate perfective of Irish English, discussed above, which corresponds, in the number of stressed syllables, to its Irish equivalent.

(12) a. She’s after breaking the glass.

Tá sí tréis an ghloine a bhriseadh.

b. He’s after his dinner.

Tá sé tréis a dhinnéir.

This consists in both languages of three or two feet depending on whether the verb is understood or explicitly mentioned (it is the number of stressed syllables which determines the number of feet). In both languages a stressed syllable introduces the structure and others occur for the same syntactic categories throughout the sentence.

A similar prosodic correspondence can be recognised in a further structure, labelled ‘subordinating and’ (Klemola and Filppula 1992), in both Irish and Irish English.

(13) a. He went out ’and’ it ’raining.

‘He went out although it was raining.’

b. Chuaigh sé amach ’agus ’é ag cur ’báisti.

[went he out and it at putting rain-GEN]

Again there is a correlation between stressed syllable and major syntactic category, although the total number of syllables in the Irish structure is greater (due to the
number of weak syllables). The equivalence intonation ally is reached by having the same number of feet, i.e. stressed syllables, irrespective of the distance between them in terms of intervening unstressed syllables. And again, it is a stressed syllable which introduces the clause.

Another case, where prosodic equivalence can be assumed to have motivated a non-standard feature, concerns comparative clauses. These are normally introduced in Irish by two equally stressed words \( 'ná 'mar \) ‘than like’ as in the following example.

(14) \( Tá \ sé i bhfad níos fearr anois \ 'ná mar a bhi. \)
\[ 'is it further more better now not like COMP was] \]

‘It’s now much better than it was.’

Several speakers from Irish-speaking regions, or those which were so in the recent past, show the use of \( than \ what \) to introduce comparative clauses.

(15) a. \( It's far better than what it used to be. \) (TRS-D, W42-1, F)

b. \( To go to a dance that time was far better than what it is now. \) (TRS-D, W42-1, F)

c. \( Life is much easier than what it was. \) (TRS-D, W42-1, F)

d. \( They could tell you more about this country than what we could. \) (TRS-D, S7, M)

It is true that Irish \( mar \) does not mean ‘what’, but \( what \) can introduce clauses in other instances and so it was probably regarded as suitable to combine with \( that \) in cases like those above. From the standpoint of prosody \( 'than \ what \) provided a combination of two equally-stressed words which match the similar pair in equivalent Irish clauses.

The use of \( than \ what \) for comparatives was already established in the 19th century and is attested in many emigrants letters such as those written from Australia back to Ireland, e.g. the following letter from a Clare person written in 1854: \( I have more of my old Neighbours here along with me than what I thought \) (Fitzpatrick 1994: 69). It is also significant that the prosodically similar structure \( like \ what \) is attested in the east of Ireland where Irish was replaced by English earliest, e.g. \( There were no hand machines like what you have today. \) (speaker from Lusk, Co. Dublin).

5 Coincidental parallels

Despite the typological differences between Irish and English there are nonetheless a number of unexpected parallels which should not be misinterpreted as the result of contact. Some cases are easy, such as the homophony between Irish \( sí \) /\( t[i:] \) ‘she’ and English \( she \) (the result of the vowel shift of /e/ to /i:/ in early modern English). A similar homophony exists for Irish \( bí \) ‘be’ and English \( be \), though again the pronunciation of the latter with /i:/ is due to the raising of English long vowels.

Other instances involve parallel categories, e.g. the continuous forms of verbs
in both languages: Tá mé ag caint léi [is me at talk-NON_FINITE with-her] ‘I am talking to her’. Indeed the parallels among verbal distinctions may have been a trigger historically for the development of non-standard distinctions in Irish English, i.e. speakers during the language shift who found equivalents to most of the verbal categories from Irish expected to find equivalents to all of these. An example of this is habitual aspect, which is realised in Irish by the choice of a different verb form (bíonn habitual versus tá non-habitual).

(17) Bionn sé ag caint léi. ‘He talks to her repeatedly.’
    [is-HABITUAL he at talking with-her]
    IrEng: ‘He does be talking to her.’

Another coincidental parallel between the two languages involves word order, despite the differences in clause alignment which both languages show. In both Irish and English prepositions may occur at the end of a clause. A prepositional pronoun is the most likely form in Irish because it incorporates a pronoun which is missing in English.

(18) An buachaill a raibh mé ag caint leis.
    [the boy that was I at talk-NON_FINITE with-him]
    ‘The boy I was talking to.’

Further parallels may be due to contact which predates the coming of English to Ireland. For example, the use of possessive pronouns in instances of inalienable possession is common to both English and Irish.

(19) Ghortaigh sé a ghlúin.
    [injured he his knee]
    ‘He injured his knee.’

This may well be a feature of Insular Celtic which was adopted into English, especially given that other Germanic languages do not necessarily use possessive pronouns in such contexts, cf. German Er hat sich am Knie verletzt, lit. ‘He has himself at-the knee injured’.

6 What does not get transferred?

If the expectation of categories in the target language which are present in the outset language is a guiding principle in language shift, then it is not surprising to find that grammatical distinctions which are only found in the target language tend to be neglected by speakers undergoing the shift.

The reason for this neglect is that speakers tend not to be aware of grammatical distinctions which are not present in their native language, at least this is true in situations of unguided adult learning of a second language. What is termed here ‘neglect of distinctions’ is closely related to the phenomenon of underdifferentiation which is known from second language teaching. This is the situation in which second language learners do not engage in categorial distinctions which are present in the target language, for instance when German speakers use the
verb ‘swim’ to cover the meanings of both ‘swim’ and ‘float’ in English (schwimmen is the sole verb in German) or when they do not distinguish between when and if clauses (both take wenn in German). This neglect can be illustrated by the use of and as a clause co-ordinator with a qualifying or concessive meaning in Irish English (see remarks on subordinating and above).

(20) Chuaigh sé amach agus é ag cur báistí.
went he out and it at putting rain-GEN
IrEng: ‘He went out and it raining.’
‘He went out although it was raining.’

To account for the neglect of distinctions in more detail, one must introduce a distinction between features which carry semantic value and those which are of a more formal character. Word order is an example of the latter type: Irish is a consistently post-specifying language with VSO as the canonical word order along with Noun + Adjective, Noun + Genitive for nominal modifiers. There is virtually no trace of post-specification in Irish English, either historically or in present-day contact varieties of English in Ireland. The use of the specifically Irish word order would, per se, have had no informational value for Irish speakers of English in the language shift situation.

Another example, from a different level of language, would be the distinction between palatal and non-palatal consonants in Irish phonology. This difference in the articulation of consonants lies at the core of the sound structure of Irish. It has no equivalent in English and the grammatical categories in the nominal and verbal areas which it is used to indicate are realised quite differently in English (by word order, use of prepositions, suffixal inflections, etc.).

An awareness of the semantic versus formal distinction helps to account for other cases of non-transfer from Irish. For instance, phonemes which do not exist in English, such as /x/ and /ʃ/, have not been transferred to English, although there are words in Irish English, such as taoiseach ‘prime minister’, pronounced [ˈt̪̂iːθəʃ], with a final [-k] and not [-x], which could have provided an instance of such transfer. Although the /k/ versus /x/ distinction is semantically relevant in Irish, it would not be so in English and hence transfer would not have helped realise any semantic distinctions in the target language.\(^5\) A further conclusion from these considerations is that the source of a sound like /x/ in Ireland can only be retention from earlier varieties of English. This explains its occurrence in Ulster Scots and in some forms of Mid-Ulster English, but also its absence elsewhere, although it is present in all dialects of Irish.

7 Interpreting vernacular features

There has been much discussion of the role of English input and transfer from Irish in the genesis of Irish English, most of which has centred around suggested sources for vernacular features. Some developments in English ran parallel to the structure of Irish and so appeared in Irish English, not so much by transfer, which implies a mismatch between outset and target language, but simply by equivalence. One such development of the later modern period (Beal 2004: 77-85) is the be + V-ing
construction as in *What are you reading?* This would have represented an appropriate equivalent to Irish *Ceárd atá tú a léamh?* [what that-are you COMP reading] or *Ceárd atá á léamh agat?* [what that-is at-its reading at-you]. Another development is the rise of group verbs (phrasal verbs – transitive and intransitive, prepositional verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs, Denison 1998: 221). These types of verb occur widely in Irish, e.g. *Ná bí ag cur isteach orthu* [not be at put in on-them] ‘Don’t be disturbing them’. Indeed calques on the English phrasal and prepositional verbs are a major source of loans from English into Irish today (see below).

The cases just cited represent instances of convergence, i.e. developments in two languages which result in their becoming increasingly similar structurally. Convergence can be understood in another sense which is relevant to the genesis of specific features of Irish English. This is where both English input and transfer from Irish have contributed to the rise of a feature. This applies to the *do(es) be* habitual where English input provided periphrastic *do* and Irish the semantics of the structure and its co-occurrence with the expanded form.

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1a) **Source 1 (English) independent of Source 2 (Irish)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English development</th>
<th>Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>What are you reading?</em></td>
<td><em>Ceárd atá tú a léamh?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[what that-are you COMP reading]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcome in Irish English: Continuous verb phrases maintained

1b) **Source 1 (English) independent of Source 2 (Irish)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>older English input</th>
<th>Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Are ye ready?</em></td>
<td><em>An bhfuil sibh réidh?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[INTERROG are you-PLURAL ready]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcome in Irish English: Distinct second person plural pronoun maintained

2) **Source 1 (English) provides form and Source 2 (Irish) semantics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English input</th>
<th>Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(periphrastic/emphatic)</td>
<td><em>Bionn sé amuigh ar an bhfarraige.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[is-HABITUAL he out on the sea]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcome in Irish English: Habitual is established, *He does be out on the sea.*

3) **Failed convergence:**

**Source 1 (dialectal English) shares feature with Source 2 (Irish)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English input</th>
<th>Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>They were a-singing.</em></td>
<td><em>Bhí siad ag canadh.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[were they at singing]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcome in Irish English: *A*-prefixing does not establish itself

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Table 3. *Convergence scenarios in the history of Irish English*

Mention should also be made of features which exist in Irish and in non-standard varieties of English in England, but not, curiously, in Irish English. The best
example of this is $a$-prefixing. This is recorded for south-western British English, e.g. *I be a-singing* (Elworthy 1877: 52f., West Somerset). Such structures look deceptively Irish: the sentence could be translated directly as *Bím ag canadh* [is-HABITUAL-I at singing]. However, $a$-prefixing does not occur in modern Irish English and is not attested in the textual record of the past few centuries to any significant extent. Montgomery (2000) is rightly sceptical of a possible Celtic origin of this feature, contra Dietrich (1981) and Majewicz (1984) who view the transfer interpretation favourably.

8 The influence of English on contemporary Irish

The discussion thus far has concerned transfer from Irish to English during the formative period of Irish English. In present-day Ireland the Irish language has no influence on English but the reverse is very much the case. There are virtually no monoglots of Irish left, except perhaps for very few rural speakers of traditional dialect in the three remaining pockets of historically continuous Irish in the north-west, west and south-west of Ireland. The remainder of the native speakers are good bilinguals with a command of English almost indistinguishable from English speakers in Ireland.

Given that the social position of Irish is precarious, despite official support from the government and many additional institutions, the pressure of English on the language is very considerable. After all one has on the one hand a rural language spoken by less than 50,000 and on the other the dominant world language. This situation means that English exercises a considerable influence on the structure of Irish, something which set in during the nineteenth century (Stenson 1993).

For native speakers the influence is not so much felt in phonology or in morphology, given the considerable differences between the two languages on these levels. Furthermore, the lexis of Irish has many loans from English which go back to the late Middle Ages (Hickey 1997) and have been adapted to Irish. The lexical influence of English is obvious in code-switching (Stenson 1991), i.e. the direct use of English words in Irish sentences, and in obvious calques.

(21) a. *Níl muid an-happy faoi.*
   [not-is we very-happy under-it]
   ‘We are not very happy about it.’

   b. *Croí-briste a bhí sí mar gheall ar an toradh.*
   [heart-broken COMP was she on account of the result]
   ‘She was heart-broken over the result.’

Pragmatic markers, such as *well, just, now, really*, are commonly inserted into Irish sentences, either at the beginning or end or at a clause break.

(22) a. *Tá sé níos diocra, just, ná mar a cheap mé.* (CCE-W, M65+)
   [is it more difficult just than what that thought I]
   ‘It’s more difficult, just, than I thought.’

   b. *Well, tá mé ag súil leis an earrach now.* (CCE-S, M60+)
   [well is I at looking with the spring now]
'Well, I am looking forward to spring now.'

In syntax, the influence of English is strongest, despite the typological differences between the two languages. There are certain structural parallels between Irish and English which facilitate the transfer of English patterns into Irish. This has been registered for some time by Irish scholars, at least since the mid twentieth century, cf. Ó Cuív (1951: 54f).

English phrasal verbs and verbs with prepositional complements are particularly common in Irish (Stenson 1997, Veselinović 2006). Often they are translated (first sentence below) or they are integrated into Irish by having the productive verb-forming ending -áil attached (second sentence below).

(23)  a. Bhi si déanta suas mar cailleach. (CCE-W, F55+)
     [was she done up as a witch]
     ‘She was done up as a witch.’

     b. Sheasfadh sé amach i d’intinn. (CCE-W, F55+)
     [stand-COND it out in your mind]
     ‘It would stand out in your mind’

     c. Ná bí ag rusháil back amáireach. (CCE-W, F55+)
     [not be at rushing back tomorrow]
     ‘Don’t be rushing back tomorrow.’

Typical word order in Irish has changed in some cases under the influence of English. Previously, it was normal to find adverbials in phrase- and sentence-final position (indicated in parentheses below). Under the influence of English, adverbs (underlined below) are drawn closer to the elements they modify. This can be a verb (first sentence below) or a predicative adjective (second sentence below).

     [not saw I ever thing like that (ever)]
     ‘I never saw anything like that.’

     b. Tá a seanathair fós beo (fós).
     [is her grand-father still alive (still)]
     ‘Her grandfather is still alive.’

This pattern also applies to the order of verb objects. Direct objects previously occurred after prepositional objects in final position, but it is increasingly common to find the order typical of English, namely direct object + prepositional object.

(25)    Chonaic mé í thios ar an trá [í].
        [saw I her down on the strand (her)]
        ‘I saw her down on the strand.’

A further instance is the position of interrogative elements which can occur word-finally in English and are found ever more in this position in Irish.

(26)    a. Chun ceann nua a dhéanamh, nó céard?
        [in-order-to one new COMP do or what]
b. *Clúdóidh sé céard?*
[cov-COND it what]
‘It would cover what?’

The readiness of Irish to adopt syntactic patterns of English is also seen in direct translations of English idioms. These are usually translated word for word, something which is possible in quite a number of cases.

(27) a. *Thóg sé tamall fada, ceart go leor.*
[ took it time long right enough]
‘It took a long time sure enough.’

b. *Bhi orm súil a choinneáil ar an am.*
[was on-me eye COMP keep on the time]
‘I had to keep an eye on the time.’

c. *Caithfidh tú d’intinn a dhéanamh suas.*
[ must you your mind COMP make up]
‘You have to make your mind up.’

Sentence-initial clauses are also increasingly common, introducing a type of sentence construction which is more typical of English than of traditional Irish.

(28) a. *Ag fanacht san iarthar, dúirt an t-aire stáit inné go...*
‘Staying in the west, the minister of state said yesterday that...’

b. *Le bheith firinneach, níl ach droch-sheans ann.*
‘To be truthful, there is only a slight chance of it.’

The examples just discussed show how permeable the syntax of Irish is, despite the obvious typological differences between it and English (VSO word order, post-modification). Such examples have occurred between the two languages through contact, not through shift (they are found with speakers who continue to use their native language Irish). This situation of contact with the super-dominant language English has meant that Irish has been influenced in many subtle, infiltrating ways as well. Speakers establish lexical equivalences between Irish and English and this can lead to the English range and application of words spreading into Irish. A good example is the verb *faigh* ‘get’. The Irish word corresponds to the English word in its meaning of ‘acquire’ (first example below). But it is increasingly being used in the inchoative sense of ‘get’ which is ousting the Irish verb *éirigh* ‘rise’ which is traditionally used in this sense.

(29) a. *Fuair sí bronntanas óna máthair.*
[ got she present from-her mother]
‘She got a present from her mother.’

b. *Tá sé ag fáil níos fuaire anois.* (modern)
*Tá sé ag éirí níos fuaire anois.* (traditional)
[is it at getting/rising more colder now]
‘It is getting colder now.’
9 Conclusion

The data considered in this chapter shows how syntactic material can be transferred from one language to another. For the language shift scenario it furthermore shows how unguided second language acquisition means that a search for categories in the new language which speakers know from their first language is a dominant feature of the shift process. Where the equivalents reached by individuals or small groups are accepted by the community they can establish themselves as focussed features of a later shift variety. The situation of Irish and English today shows that, under pressure, a language can be infiltrated syntactically by the dominant language. In aggregate, these external influences can lead fairly rapidly to typological change and thus illustrates a scenario in which language convergence can take place.

References


Language Contact in Europe. Tübingen: Niemeyer.


[Footnotes]

~1 This figure excludes the many foreigners who are now living in Ireland, immigrants to the country from the 1990s and early 2000s. In practical terms, one can say that the 99% referred to consists of those people who are Irish and whose parents were Irish as well.

~2 The situation in the north of Ireland was quite different because there Scottish and northern English settlers had come in considerable numbers during the seventeenth century.

~3 The sample sentences provided in this chapter stem from various data collections of the author, both for Irish and for English. These are the following: CCE = A Collection of Contact English, DER = Dublin English Recordings, WER = Waterford English Recordings. In addition there are a few other abbreviations: M = male, F = female. Before a number, W = West, S = South. TRS-D stands for Tape Recorded Survey of Hibern-English Speech – Digital. This collection is based on recordings made by colleagues in the Department of English, Queen’s University, Belfast.

~4 Later, a distinct semanticisation of this usage arose whereby the unbound reflexive came to refer to someone who is in charge, the head of a group or of the house, etc.

~5 These remarks refer to language shift. Of course, in a borrowing situation, a sound can enter a language with word(s) which show it, e.g. nasal vowels in German which are contained in French loans. Furthermore, new phonotactic combinations may enter with loanwords, e.g. [ʃ] before an obstruent or nasal in words of Yiddish origin in English, cf. schmooze, schmuck.

[End footnotes]