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Vernacular English in Ireland: History and Linguistic Overview

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Degree in English Studies

2018-2019

0.ABSTRACT

English has been present on the Emerald Island since about the 13th century, making Irish English the oldest of the vernacular varieties outside Britain. The purpose of this paper is to describe the conditions of the shift process from the former vernacular language – Irish Gaelic – to the input language – English – and present some of the most distinctive linguistic features, focusing on the phonology and grammar of the English dialect used in the Republic of Ireland as a linguistic area. With this aim in mind, the paper will introduce some of the terms that has been used to refer to this particular variety – Anglo-Irish, Hiberno English and Irish English – and explain the reasons for the selection of the latter, followed by a short presentation of the notions of the substratist and retentionist views and the processes of supraregionalisation and vernacularisation.

Following this, a review of the history of the shift to English will be done, based on Raymond Hickey's and Jeffrey Kallen's research. The shift took over eight centuries to be totally completed, and included the settlement of the Anglo-Irish, the assimilation of those by the Irish and the latter definitive conquest with the help of Oliver Cromwell's policies. Emigration and the Great Potato Famine helped this process reach its fulfillment in the nineteenth century.

The uneven nature of vernacular Irish English (accent) demands an explanation of the linguistic dialectal areas within the Republic of Ireland: east, south-west, west, midlands and transitional gap in the northern area of the country. The distinction in phonological variation is quite clear in each of these areas, as is shown in the presentation of the areal features. However, five phonological features will give an impression of Ireland as a linguistic area. The morphology and syntax of Irish English under the grammar section presents a small areal variation, thus only shared elements are explained in order to reinforce the idea of Irish English as a single variety in the Republic. Despite its varied nature, Irish English has many features that are shared all over the Republic, thus we can say that it represents an Irish identity.

Keywords: Ireland, Irish English, vernacular variety, language shift, linguistic area, dialect

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1 INTRODUCTION

The present paper is a descriptive study of the variety of English present in Ireland. Far from attempting to describe a standard variety, in this paper I will focus on the various features that characterize vernacular English used within the Republic of Ireland. Some of these features are shared with other varieties of English, and thus, although they may appear in the paper, there will not be a strong focus on them.

The paper is structured in the following manner: after the introductory paragraphs and some preliminary explanation of the context of English in the Republic of Ireland (sections 1 and 1.1), a clarification will be given in section 1.2 of the terminology used in different sources to refer to the variety of English this paper focuses on, in order to choose the most proper term. This will be followed by a brief explanation of the most relevant attitudes towards Irish English – substratism and retentionism – (section 1.3) and on the most relevant linguistic processes (section 1.4). Subsequent to this, the historical background of the language shift from Irish Gaelic to English will be the focus of section 2, in order to present the most relevant events from the 13th – when the first settlers arrived – to the 19th century – when the shift was completed. The section on phonological features of Irish English (section 3) will start by presenting the dialectal division inside the Republic of Ireland and, subsequently, it will present the most characteristic phonological features , firstly those of each of the dialectal areas, and then those that occur all across the island. To complete the linguistic features of Irish English, section 4 will focus on the grammar – morphology (section 4.1) and syntax (section 4.2) – of the Republic, analyzing those features that are shared in Irish English throughout all the dialectal areas. The paper will end with the conclusions reached over the three main elements presented in it i.e. historical background, phonological and grammatical features.

1.1 Preliminary issues

English has been present on the Emerald Island for about eight centuries, making the English language that developed there the oldest of the vernacular varieties outside of Great Britain. From the thirteenth century onwards, the language(s) that the Anglo-Normans brought to the island with their settlement has taken a path somewhat different to that of the area it derived from. The shift to English was not simply a matter of concerted effort on the part of the Anglo-Normans, but it also involved the acceptance

of some of the Irish population, i.e. the higher classes that would not lose their position for their patriotic identity and settlers would present a favourable attitude towards the Irish.

The Viking settlement might seem to be completely out of the equation when discussing the arrival and development of English in Ireland, and it surely had little to do with these matters in linguistic terms, but it must be taken into consideration at least in view of the fact that it was the Norse who established several coastal towns during their stay on the island, a fact "crucial for the development of relations between Ireland and the rest of Europe" (Kallen, 1994). By the time the first Anglo-Norman settlers set foot on Irish soil they found an Irish Gaelic language that had already been shaped by previous contacts with other languages, i.e. Scandinavian or Latin loanwords could be found in the native language of the Irish people, together with some English and French words as a consequence of the trade with speakers of such languages.

Contact with the overseas world was mostly done in the form of trade, in which Dublin played a major role from circa 1066 onwards. In the history of language shift, the Irish chapter occupies probably the largest of movements, backwards and forward, until they finally accepted the English language as part of their national identity. As Kallen (1994) says, "A complex series of population movements and language contacts lies at the heart of the history of Irish English". Even more significantly, Cambria (2014) adds: "Ireland appears to be a sort of battlefield where British colonial practices were experimented before exporting them overseas. Language […] is the battlefield where the fight for identity is most fought […] and [Irish English] is only one of the outcomes of this fight." Due to the uneven nature of the development of English in Ireland, it would be in some aspects inaccurate to talk about Irish English as a monolithic variety, since each area has features in their speech that would make us think of separate dialects. Nevertheless, we can also find that all of these dialects have some shared elements, which has led researchers to speak of it as a single variety.

According to Filppula (2004: 73) four main factors have affected southern and northern Irish English (IrE), thus distinguishing it from other dialects of British English:

a) Conservatism of old, or archaic, forms of English.

b) Contact with other dialectical varieties of English – Scottish English in particular is very relevant in Northern Ireland and some of the northern counties of the Republic.
c) Contact influences from Irish, the traces of which can be heard in most IrE varieties, even in urban settings. Moreover, this influence is far clearer in existing Irish-speaking areas, or Gaeltachts.
d) Universal features associated with second-language acquisition in […] intense language shift conditions.

1.2 Terminology

Among the research that has been done to date we can find different ways of referring to IrE, according to the perspective adopted by each author: Anglo-Irish, Hiberno-English and Irish English. This section will briefly comment on these terms in order to clarify and determine the most appropriate one.

One of the first terms used with this purpose is *Anglo-Irish*, which "points to the creation in modern rural Ireland of a new language based upon Irish or Gaelic and absorbing linguistic resources chiefly lexical from outlying forms of English" (Henry, 1985: 157). According to Henry we would be talking of a language which is "mainly Irish in syntax and phonology with an increasing English vocabulary and accidence". So, although it would have probably been a suitable term for a variety that was born centuries ago, when the English language was still working its way among the native Irish, it fails to represent what it is supposed to represent in recent studies – i.e. the variety of English spoken on the Irish island –, rather giving the idea that it is a variety of Irish.

Hiberno-English is considered a rather obsolete term, although it can still be read in recent papers[1]. The main issue with this term would be that the Latin term '*hiberno*' can make it obscure in a way that not every reader would immediately understand.

[1] In my experience I have found that many of my Irish friends and acquaintances also use the term "hiberno" to refer to not only their language but to other inherently Irish things as well.

Kallen (1994) shows how these two terms have taken completely different paths depending on whose ideas are being put into the paper: the author “Henry […] suggests a division between *Anglo-Irish* as the term for English spoken in areas which have only recently become predominantly English-speaking and *Hiberno-English* as a term denoting urban varieties with a longer history” where “Todd […] uses these two terms with virtually the opposite signification” (Kallen, 1994). Other views on these terms include ‘Anglo-Irish’ as a variety of English in Ireland in the Middle Ages and ‘Hiberno-English’ as both the modern variety and the field of research (Kallen, 1994).

Irish English is the most widely used term due to, as Kallen (1994: 148) puts it, its simplicity “to denote the English language as spoken in Ireland”. As other parallel terms used for other varieties of English, e.g. Australian English or American English, it leaves no place to doubt as to what we are referring to.

In order to avoid any confusion, it is the last term, Irish English (IrE), that I will be using in this paper to refer to this variety, due to its simplicity and accuracy. Regarding other languages apart from English, we will encounter mentions of the branch of Gaelic spoken in Ireland, which will be referred to simply as *Irish*.

1.3 Substratism and retentionism

The history of Irish English studies has given rise to two main points of view. First, some writers – e.g. Joyce, P.L. Henry and Hogan – assumed that every feature that had a parallel in Irish (Hickey, 2004b) must have been derived from that parallel. This is what is known as substratism, which was very popular in the mid 1980’s. Then we have those who, according to Hickey (2004b), “saw the input varieties of English in modern Ireland as the source for the features hitherto accounted for by contact”, which are known as retentionists. From the 1990’s onwards, studies have taken more of a balanced point of view, considering both ideas as valid, distancing themselves from ideology. According to Cambria (2014), “Markku Filppula (1990, 1993, 1999) and Raymond Hickey (1995) took into account the seminal work on contact by Thomason and Kaufman (1988) and convergence became a possible scenario, a scenario where retention and contact occupy places of equal standing.”

The nature of a contact variety resides mostly in the clash of identities, a battle for keeping one`s linguistic identity, but also the necessity to communicate with the other. This is especially true in the case of Irish English, in which we can also see how identities have differed regarding their socioeconomic status or geographical situation. We have to bear in mind that during the language shift in Ireland the transfer from the source – i.e. Irish – to the target language –i.e. English – happened in an unguided adult second language acquisition manner (See Hickey, 2007a: 125-126), which obviously had an important effect on the later syntax, phonology and morphology of the target language, which was the fundamental seed to what we know today as Irish English or Hiberno English. This effect, the features that transferred from Irish or those which stuck in the language from earlier forms of English, is what constitutes the linguistic choice the Irish have made during centuries, and consequentially, their choice of identity. As it will be observed later in the paper, some linguistic levels have been more affected than others.

1.4 Supraregionalisation and vernacularisation

In the story of varietal development there are two main paths the features of a variety can take. A particular vernacular feature can either transcend to the rest of the country, making it a supraregional feature, or what is considered a supraregional feature can be omitted in a certain area, so that it is relegated to the more local parallel, that is, making it a vernacular feature.

2 HISTORICAL REVIEW

The arrival of the Anglo-Normans was not such a violent invasion in terms of armies clashing or swords swinging as the Norman invasion of England had been. Thus, when making a historical review of how the English language entered Irish society, we must think of it as a non-systematic invasion (Hickey, 2002: 7), due to the slow introduction of an Anglo-Norman population into Irish land – as opposed to a single victory in warfare. There is also the fact that English was not the only language – having even a considerably low status, since the reality was that the Normans occupied the higher positions in both Ireland and England (Hickey, 2002: 10) – that these settlers brought with them, and thus, the early competition of this language with an English variety of French, as the main tongue of the Anglo-Normans, and with the language of the church, Latin, is a fact that helps to explain why English did not penetrate into Irish society as fast as was intended, or indeed not at all, until later developments.

The process by which Ireland changed its language from Irish to English can be broadly divided into two periods (Hickey, 2004a: 25): the first period starting from the late 12th century – the medieval period – and the second beginning in the early 17th century – early modern period. The nature of this process is that of a struggle between identities, which was not completely resolved until the 19th century.

This first stage of English in Ireland begins with the arrival in 1169 of a group of 300 adventurers from South Wales and Pembrokeshire – a 'very motley crew' in the words of Curtis (1919: 235; cited in Kallen, 1994: 150) – to Wexford, in assistance of a local war-chief. This was the start of the troubled political relations between Ireland and Anglo-Norman England, and, although "'invasion' is a label that must not be interpreted in any modern logistic sense" (Hickey, 2002: 7) as has been mentioned above, this settlement has been traditionally labelled as the "Anglo-Norman Invasion". The Irish natives had notably inferior battle power to that of the settlers, and in a very short time the East and South East of the Irish coast became of Anglo-Norman property. Soon after its conquest, Dublin was occupied by the English. Their language has been present in the city and the surrounding area, known as the *Pale,* since then. The settlement continued expanding to the west and south, primarily to the urban areas of Cork, Limerick and Galway, but they missed most of the rural areas.

Little can be said about the first period in terms of language shift, mainly because the linguistic evidence is scarce and the 'old English', as the first settlers and their descendants were known, were almost totally assimilated by the Irish, as the preamble to the Statutes of Kilkenny notes: "Many English ... forsaking the English language, fashion, mode of riding, laws and usages, live and govern themselves according to the manners, fashion, and language of the Irish enemies" (Berry 1907: 431; cited in Kallen, 1994). A Waterford ordinance of 1492-3, acting as a response to this, reads:

> "no manere man ... of the citie or suburbs duellers [dwellers], shall enpleade nor defende in Yrish tong ayenste ony man in the court, but that all they that ony maters shall have in courte ... shall have a man that can spek English to declare his matier, excepte one party be of the countre; then every such dueller shalbe att liberte to speke Yrish." (Gilbert 1885a: 323; cited in Kallen 1994: 152)

Due to the loose connection with England and religious differences, these settlers felt more connected with the Irish natives, regardless of the efforts of the English crown to assert their Englishness by their presence on the island – Henry II visited Ireland in the 12th century with this purpose, as did John in the beginning of the 13th century and Richard II in the late 14th (Hickey 2002: 9). Thus, by the end of the 15th century those who became the military leaders during the first settlement "had been completely absorbed by the Irish" (2004b: 26). This process of assimilation is known as Gaelisation.

There is not a vast body of linguistic evidence left for the early developments of English in Ireland, and, regarding the Early Modern period, "most of the satirical pieces were written by Englishmen so that one is dealing with an external perception of Irish English at the time" (Hickey 2016: 10; 2004b: 69). These satirical plays are considered a stigmatisation and mockery of the Irish accent in English and, although they might represent some of the features present at that time, they are not taken into account by most scholars as it is considered an unreliable source. Then, the evidence left is almost entirely confined to a collection of 16 poems called the *Kildare Poems* (Hickey 2012b; 2007b). Other shorter pieces can also be taken into consideration for this matter, for example, Giraldus Cambrensis' version of *Expugnatio Hibernica* or the English translation of *Secreta Secretorum* by James Yonge. In Hickey's (2007) words, "If the

language of the *Kildare Poems* is a genuine representation of medieval Irish English, then it would seem that an amalgam of the different varieties which were spoken by English settlers had arisen by the thirteenth century”

The 16th century saw the separatists’ movement fall and many of the ‘Old English’ flee during its first years. This led to new English leaders loyal to the crown to fill the gap left by the native leaders (Hickey 2002: 11). This movement is better known as Plantations, that is, the movement of British settlers into Irish land “in order to reinforce the English presence there” (Hickey 2004a: 26). The measure was attempted twice in this century, but both times the settlers were assimilated. With such a landscape, English language seemed doomed in Ireland, but

> “however weak English was in terms of the whole country, it was relatively strong on the east coast. Within this region, English was widespread not only in the towns but also in some rural areas, as testified by the two language enclaves, the baronies of Forth and Bargy in the extreme south-east corner in county Wexford and the area named Fingal, immediately north of Dublin. These areas retained their features well into the early modern period. The major towns of this eastern area are Waterford, Wexford, New Ross, Kilkenny, Kildare and of course Dublin.” (Hickey 2007a: 52)

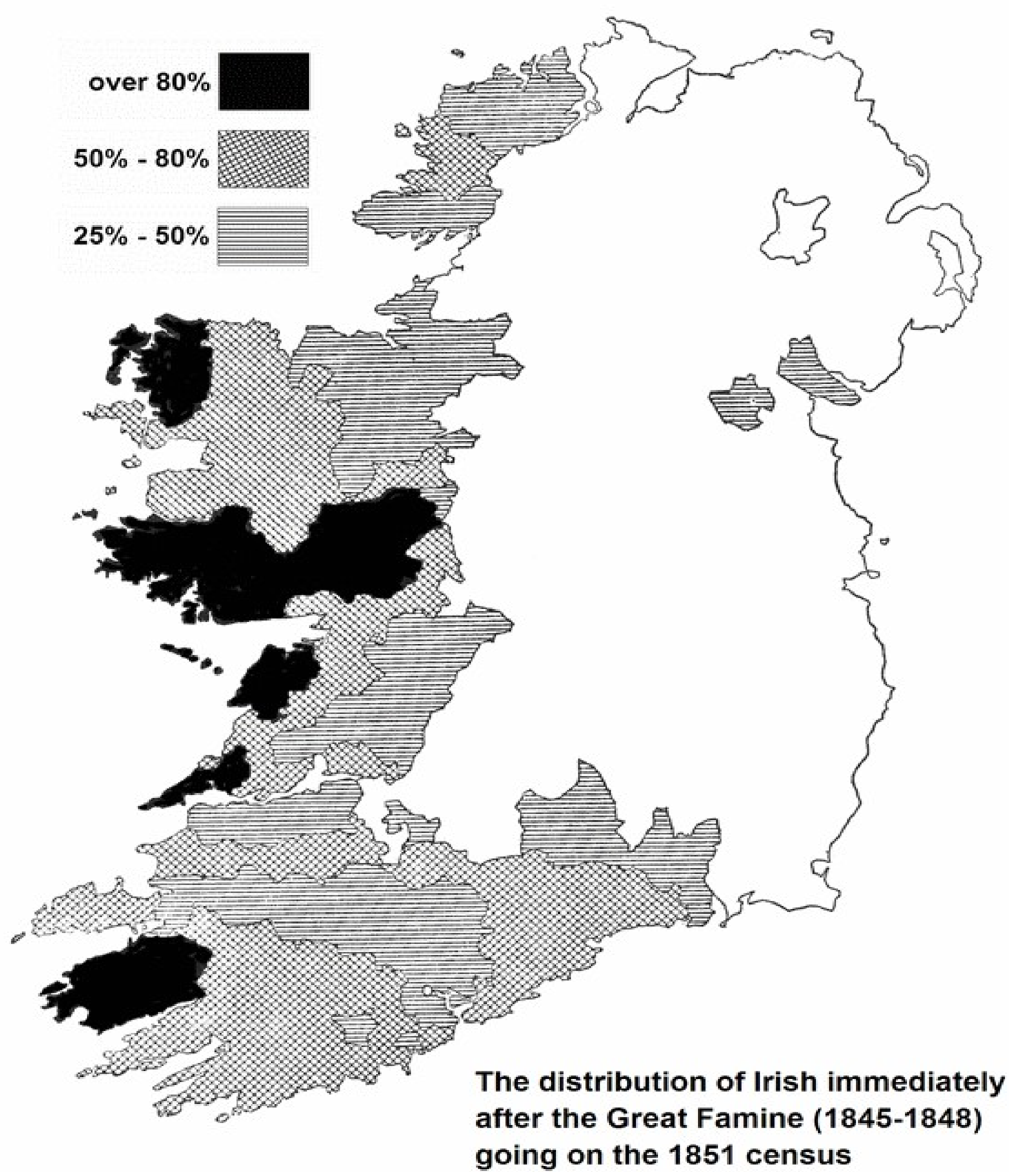
It was not until the reign of James I, former king of Scotland, and the victory of Oliver Cromwell over the Irish rebellion that the Plantations became successful, marking the start of the second period, the Early Modern stage, when the language shift gained momentum. The idea behind the second wave of Plantations “was to push the Irish further west and the reallocation of freed lands to those loyal to the crown – overwhelmingly English settlers – led to increasing anglicization.” (Hickey 2007a: 37). Thus this measure, better known as Transplantation, established a British ascendancy in Ireland. Due to the decrease of Irish natives in the south during the Cromwellian period as a consequence of war, the potato famine, and transportations, which consisted in the movement of ‘undesirable’ people (Hickey 2007a) e.g. Irish prisoners of war and Catholic clergy, overseas – the Americas and Australia in great degree, where many Irishisms are found – the Irish language suffered a great decline. While only west midland/south west English accents had been present until this moment, many varieties of English affected the country during this period – “Scots in the north-west; north

Midland varieties in the south" (2004a: 26) – this renewed Anglicisation led to the substitution of the varieties that were introduced in the first period (Bliss 1977, 1984; cited in Hickey, 2012b). However, there is one region in which a continued south-west variety of English had been present since the first contact: the *Pale.*

The eighteenth century in Ireland is described by Hickey (2002: 14) as "a period of blossoming and decline, of liberty and oppression". This draws the picture of a land divided in two very different states: on the one hand we have the ascendancy of the Protestant ruling classes, which enjoyed a time of prosperity, both economically and culturally. On the other we find a much poorer native population that was being ravaged not only in terms of coin and identity, but also in terms of hunger, since a famine struck in 1740-1. Education was another issue that the native Irish struggled with. The Irish Catholics, a great majority among the natives, were banned from education until the 19th century. This led to the beginning of the system known as 'hedge-schools' (see section 2.3.1 in Hickey, 2002), where the native population could learn about various subjects, including English – although it was learned from 'teachers' that did not know the language very well themselves.

The shift was almost completed by the 19th century. The Irish people did not seek identity in their native language anymore and instead moved towards political resistance and independence. Daniel O'Connell, a political leader that gained important victories for the Catholics and Irish natives, became a very influential character among these, and urged them to abandon the Irish language since English would be their tool for success in this new Ireland. Apart from this, there is the fact that the Great Famine decimated the Irish population in the south-west, which signified the rapid decline of Irish speakers (see Map 1).

Map 1: The distribution of Irish immediately after the Great Famine (Hickey, 2019)



3 PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES OF ENGLISH IN IRELAND

Because of the varied or uneven nature of English in Ireland, it is difficult to make a satisfactory list of the phonological features of Ireland as a homogeneous linguistic area. With this in mind, this section will address the most prominent features throughout the island, preceded by an introduction to the areal features – regarding the dialectal division in the section 3.1 below. These features can be considered the touch stone of what would be considered an Irish accent, and the use of features as "r-lessness" can be taken as a symptom of Irishness (Hickey, 2004b), i.e. the lack of these in our speech would distinguish an Irish person from one that is not Irish.

As we said before, the linguistic landscape of Northern Ireland is very complex in itself due to the different historical varieties the area contains and I will only include the specific cases of those features that also occur in other areas within the Republic – e.g. in Co. Donegal, Co. Cavan and Co. Monaghan –, saving space for the varieties inside the Republic.

3.1 Areal distribution

Linguistically, the island of Ireland has traditionally been divided into two main areas: North (Ulster) and South. Since this paper focuses on the varieties of English used in the Republic, I will only consider Northern Ireland for specific purposes – e.g. the features that occur on the north-south split fringe mentioned in section 3.2.3 below – since it would take another full paper to talk about the linguistic situation of this area. The Republic of Ireland could be divided easily into three linguistic areas, which would broadly take the west, south and east of the Republic, respectively. As a further division, we can also mention other linguistic areas: A wide fringe in the north colliding with Ulster – Co. Sligo, Co. Cavan, Co. Monaghan, etcetera – and a midland area dividing west and east.

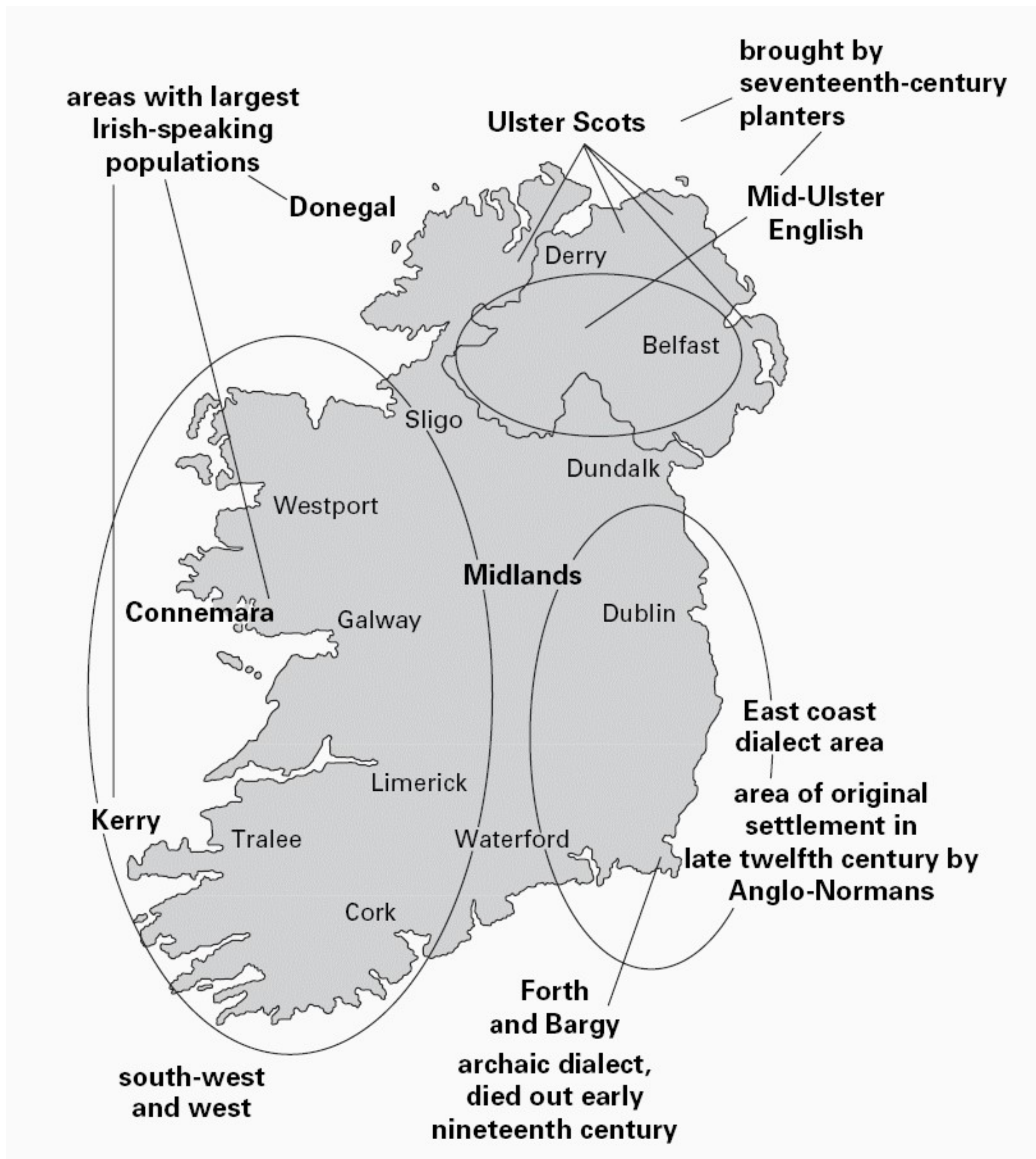
According to Hickey (2004: 24), the south of Ireland, which is the focus of this paper, can be divided into two broad areas (see Map 2). The west area extends from Waterford to the north of Dublin and has been in a situation of uninterrupted input of English since the late 1200's. A second area includes most of the south and south-west of the Republic. This is the latest area to pick English as their main language (circa

1600[2]), taking the place of Irish. There are nowadays isolated 'pockets' – mostly in the counties of Kerry, Galway and Donegal – where Irish is still present in daily life of the Irish people[3]. Apart from these two broad areas we can also observe a Midlands region, which has an indeterminate, mixed, accent. This extends from southern Offaly and Laois to Cavan and Southern Leitrim. Another transitional line – an area with an undetermined accent, which picks features from two or more different bands – can be found in the area between Sligo in the west and Dundalk in the east which "show[s] mixed accents which have adopted features from both northern and southern types" (Hickey 2004b: 30)

These areal boundaries are mostly noticed when regarding accents and lexicon, although internal migration and other factors, such as the effect of globalization, are probably blending them.

[2] Although, as mentioned in section 2, a complete shift to English did not happen until the 19th century.
[3] These 'pockets' consist in small areas scattered across the island and each of them is called a Gaeltacht – Gaeltachtai being the plural form of this term in Irish.

Map 2: Dialectical distribution in Ireland (Hickey, 2007b: 143)



3.2 Areal features of vernacular dialects

This section contains a summary of the main features in each of the dialect areas. All the tables in this section are a condensed version of the tables in Hickey (2004: 30-34).

3.2.1 East

The East coast was the first area to be settled by the Anglo-Normans. This area runs from Co. Louth (from the south of Dundalk) "down to Waterford, including Carlow, Kilkenny, New Ross and Wexford" (Hickey, 2004b). Some of the standardized 'East band' features are shown in the following table:

Table 1: Areal features in the East of Ireland (from Hickey: 2004a)

Fortition of dental fricatives to alveolar stops (also south), e.g. *think* [tɪŋk]
Lack of low vowel lengthening before voiceless fricatives (not Dublin), e.g. *path* [pat]
Front onset of /au/, e.g. *town* [tæʊn], [tɛʊn]
Centralised onset of /ai/ (also south), e.g. *quite* [kwəɪt]
Breaking of long high vowels (especially Dublin), e.g. *clean* [klijən]
Fortition of alveolar sibilants in pre-nasal position, e.g. *isnt* [ɪdn̩t]
No lowering of early modern /u/ (only Dublin), e.g. *done* [dʊn]
Glottalisation of lenited /t/, e.g. *foot* [fʊt] → [fʊt̞] → [fʊʔ] → [fʊh].

3.2.2 South-West

The south-west area is probably the largest linguistic area in the republic. It extends broadly from Co. Cork in the south to Co. Mayo (and some of southern Co. Sligo and northern Co. Roscommon), in the northern part of the west coast, and is the area in which Irish has survived the most. The language of the Old English period did not survive in this area but for some small pockets in the major urban areas (Cork, Limerick and Galway). Thus, as Hickey (2004) states, the English that arose in this area comes from the early modern period, and it was developed in an uncontrolled adult

second language manner i.e. the English that was being learned at the time was mostly passed from adults who had learned the language in their late adulthood and by necessity to their youngest. This area could be further divided into two smaller areas, as it is shown in the tables below.

Table 2: Areal Features in the South-West and West of Ireland (from Hickey: 2004a)

South and west from Cork through Limerick up to Galway and Sligo
/ɛ/ → /ɪ/ before nasals
Tense, raised articulation of /æ/ (also east)
Considerable intonational range (only south, south-west)

Table 3: Areal Features in the West of Ireland (From Hickey: 2004a)

West
Dental stop realisation in THINK, THIS lexical sets
Low central onset for /ai/ and /au/, e.g. *quite* [kwaɪt], *town* [taʊn]

3.2.3 North

Some of the features proper to the Northern Ireland historical varieties also occur to some extent in some of the provinces of the Republic (Hickey 2004a, 2004b). In the northern part of the country, where the Republic meets Northern Ireland, we find a 'zone' that crosses from west to east (Hickey 2004a, 2004b). Including the northern side of Co. Sligo, Co. Leitrim, Co. Cavan, Co. Monaghan and, to some extent, Co. Louth (up to Dundalk), this area shows a mixture of accents of both northern and southern varieties. In the following table we can see some of the features proper to the Northern accents that occur in this 'transition zone' (Hickey, 2004a):

Table 4: Areal features in the North of Ireland (from Hickey: 2004a)

Use of interdental fricatives for dental stops in the south
Use of a fronted allophone of /uː/ and /u/, i.e. [ʉ(ː)]
A reduction in the vowel length distinctions
Use of a retroflex [ɻ] in syllable-final position
Greater pitch range between stressed and unstressed syllables
Greater allophony of /æ/, e.g. raised variants in a velar environment *bag* [bɛg] and a retracted realisation in a nasal environment *family* [ˈfɑmli]
Recessive occurrence of glides after velars and before front vowels as in *Cavan* [ˈkjævən] (a border county)

3.2.4 Midlands

The zone in the mid-north of the country or, in another way, the "counties regarded as typically on the midlands: Westmeath, Longford, Offaly, Laois along with the west of Kildare and Meath, South Roscommon and north Tipperary" (Hickey, 2004b) have features that are mostly shared by the varieties of the adjoining counties. Thus, in this area we find a very uneven reality; the north of the midlands shows northern /u/-fronting and dental fricative stops in the THINK-THIS lexical set, and southern retroflex [ɻ]. The most distinctive feature in the midlands is the realization of /tj/ as /k/ in intervocalic position, as it is shown below:

Table 5: Areal features in the Midlands (from Hickey: 2004a)

Midlands
Shift of /tj/ to /k/ in word-internal position, e.g. *fortune* [ˈfɔrkuːn]

3.3 Supraregional features

It has been shown above how, depending on the area we are in, we will come across different accents. However, some phonological features are shared among the different varieties and can be heard all over the island. Hickey (2012), in an attempt to support the idea of a standard variety of the English that is used in Ireland, proposes a list of "four [features] that are uncontroversial" within vernacular Irish English varieties. Nevertheless, the following list will consider six phonological features – which include the four mentioned by Hickey – that appear to occur throughout the entire republic. The list below only contains one vocalic feature, from which one can suggest that vowel variation throughout the island is a big phenomenon in IrE.

3.3.1 Alveolar /l/

All across the Republic of Ireland [l] is used in all positions, 'field' [fi:ld] (Hickey, 2011). That is, /l/ would have a clear realisation either in initial, middle or final position. Although this only really occurs in conservative varieties (Hickey, 2007), and the tendency is that new generations are more inclined to a velarized [ɫ], it is included here as a feature that does not depend on geographical boundaries within IrE. The source for this feature might come from the Irish use of non-velar, non-palatal /l/[4] (Hickey 2012a, Ó Baoill 1991).

3.3.2 Retention of syllable-final /r/

With the exception of some Dublin English, all varieties within the Republic are rhotic (Hickey, 2004), and, consequently, /r/ is present in coda position e.g. *board* [bo:rd] The source of this might be the convergence of the input of English and the retention of Irish, explained by the fact that Irish was a rhotic language and so was English when it came into the island.

3.3.3 Distinction of short vowels before /r/.

The contrast between *term* [tɛɹm] and *turn* [tʌɹn] is also explained by the convergence of the input and the home languages. "The vowels in Irish are dependent

[4] Ó hÚrdail (1997), who saw this feature gaining momentum, throws some light on how the use of this feature affects pronunciation in a cluster position, preceded by a vowel, attributing it to the insertion of an extra vowel inside some clusters—like *rm* or *lm*—which can also be tracked to Irish.

on whether the following consonant(s) are palatal (with /e/) or non-palatal (with /u/)" (Hickey, 2012: 90)

3.3.4 Retention of the distinction between /ʍ/ and /w/

There is a clear distinction between the first sound of *witch* [w] and *which* [ʍ]. In Irish the realisation of /v/ in open positions is /ʍ/ and also the realisation of /f/. The allophone [ɸ], in this position, has a phonetic similarity with the sound of /ʍ/, an equivalence that can be seen in how English language rendered the Irish surname Ó Faoláin as Wheelan (Ó hÚrdail 1997, Hickey 2012). From this we can assume the origin of this feature from Irish language in convergence with the input language.

3.3.5 Lenition of alveolar stops

In positions of high sonority, alveolar stops, i.e. [t] and [d], are lenited towards a fricative as in *city* [ˈsɪɾi] / [ˈsɪt̞i]. Where the apico alveolar fricative [t̞] is the most conservative feature, the alveolar tap – or flap – [ɾ] is more popular among young speakers, especially in an intervocalic context. However, in a syllable coda position it appears [t̞] is the norm (Hickey, 2004: 59). This feature occurred probably as transfer from the Irish language.

3.3.6 Dental/alveolar stops for fricatives

The THIN-THIS lexical sets show fricatives in all Ulster but in Donegal, probably because of contact with Irish. Ó Baoill (1991) explains how the *thin/din* contrast is maintained in both halves of the island, but that in the south it is transformed into alveolar and dental stops (/d̪/ and /d/) respectively, adding that in some areas a merger raises, not making a distinction in the realization of the initial consonant of the aforementioned pair. According to Ó Baoill (1991: 584) "This type of pronunciation is widespread throughout much of Munster and South Leinster and is found in areas east of the [river] Shannon as far as north and County Longford". Nevertheless, Hickey (2004a) states that these kinds of stops are distinctive in either west –as dental– or south and east – as alveolar. The idea of these counting as a single feature seems to come from the assumption that both come from the same source, that is, the coronal stops [d̪, t] used in Irish. Of this pair, the supraregional realization would be dental, even in Dublin, where the colloquial realization had always been alveolar (Hickey, 2004b).

4 GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF ENGLISH IN IRELAND

According to Filppula (2004: 73) "The morphology and syntax of Irish English (IrE) follow in the main the patterns found in other British Isles Englishes". However, while this stands true for 'educated' IrE, vernacular varieties, such as regional dialects or urban working-class varieties, present features that fall somewhat far from this statement. This section will focus on the some of the most relevant vernacular features of the morphology and syntax of Irish English, and it is based to a great extent on the work by Filppula (2004) and Hickey (2007a, 2007b, 2011, 2012a).

4.1 Morphology

The most striking morphological features of vernacular Irish English are encountered in the personal pronoun area as can be seen in the following subsections. From the morphological features that appear in this paper, only one is not related to this area.

4.1.1 Demonstrative 'them'

The pronoun *them* has a clear function in Standard English as an object, whereas in IrE the "use of *them* as a determiner or 'demonstrative adjective' in colloquial speech" (Filppula 2004: 92) is quite common. This is not a unique feature to IrE, it also occurs in African American Vernacular English, for instance.

> *'...that time the people were rich that used to live in* ***them*** *houses.'* (Filppula, 2004)

> '***Them*** *are the ones you need*' (Hickey, 2012)

4.1.2 Second person plural/singular distinction

Probably the most striking feature in the personal pronoun area, is the morphological distinction between the second person singular and second person plural personal pronouns. That is, *yous/youse/ye(z)* – depending of the vernacular variety – would replace *you* in its plural form. The origin of this feature is quite clearly Early Modern English since in Irish English as "in many dialects of English around the world, the historical loss of the second person singular/plural distinction that went with the loss

of *thou/thee*[5] has been repaired by the introduction of new second person plural pronouns, such as *youse"* (Trudgill and Chambers, 1991: 8)

4.1.3 'Absolute' uses of reflexive pronouns

In Standard English the rule is that a reflexive pronoun is normally following an antecedent nominal element, with which it is coreferential, whereas IrE has a tendency to use these reflexive pronouns on their own.

> '*And by God, he said, ... he'd be the devil, if* ***himself*** *wouldn' make him laugh'* (Filppula, 2004)

> *'And d'you hear me, you didn't know the minute they'd burn* ***yourself*** *an' the houses'* (Filppula, 2004)

Some researchers state that Irish has a similar absolute reflexive feature involving the emphatic pronoun *féin* but there are also examples of absolute reflexives in Shakespeare's works, which gives an idea that they were also used in earlier English (Henry, 1957: 120-121; cited in Filppula, 2004).

4.1.4 Epistemic negative *must*

In British English the standard form to express non-existence or non-applicability would use the modal *can* in its negative form (Hickey, 2012). An Irish speaker however would choose the negative form of must for the same purpose. Therefore, where a British speaker would say something like '*He can't be Scottish'* in Ireland you would hear:

> '*He* ***musn't*** *be Scottish*'.

[5] Second person singular/plural morphological distinction in Early Modern English.

4.2 Syntax

In this subsection I will go through a number of shared features that occur in (Southern) Irish English based on the list elaborated by Hickey (2011). For more information in other popular features in IrE see Filppula (2004).

4.2.1 Verbal Area

4.2.1.1 Perfective aspect

Two features are present in this area that would substitute the standard forms of the perfect aspect: (a) The *immediate perfective* and (b) the *resultative perfective*. However, the norm is still the StE "have" perfect, which holds all the meanings of the other "perfects" used in IrE. Although other features, as the 'extended now' or the 'be' perfects (see Filppula, 2004: 74-76) are also quite popular in some vernacular varieties of IrE, they will not be explained in this paper.

(a) Better known as the *'after' perfect*, the *immediate perfective* alludes to a recent event or state happening at some recent point – or rather immediately – before this event (Filppula, 2004). This feature is composed by the verb *to be* in present form followed by *after* and a verb in *ing* form. Although the origins are not completely clear, it seems more than likely that it parallels the Irish perfect construction with *tar éis/tréis*[6]. According to Filppula (2004), "the *after* perfect is clearly the most stereotypical and is avoided by educated speakers at least in formal contexts and by working-class and rural speakers in all parts of the country" (Filppula, 2004). A StE speaker would choose '*you have just ruined me*' to mean the same as an IrE speaker in the first example:

*You**'re after ruinin'** me* (Filppula, 2004)

*She **is after spilling** breaking the glass* 'She has just broken the glass' (Hickey, 2012)

(b) The *resultative perfective* focuses, as the name denotes, on the result of an activity or action that has been previously planned. The structure of this form

[6] *Tá sí tar éis an gloine a briseadh* [is she after the glass breaking] (Hickey, 2012)

places the object just before the participle of the perfect[7], as can be noticed in the examples. Word order in Irish would come as a parallel to this feature; therefore, although it could not be the only source, it appears logical to think that contact with Irish is to some extent responsible for this feature[8] (Hickey, 2012).

*She'**s the housework done*** (Hickey, 2011) 'She has done the housework'

*She **has the book read*** 'She has finished reading the book' (Hickey, 2012)

4.2.1.2 Habitual aspect

The expression of habituality – an action, state or activity that is iterated or extended over a period of time – is achieved in southern IrE by the construction *do(es) be+V-ing/adverbial*[9]. This feature is considered "one of the hallmarks of vernacular IrE" by Filppula (2004: 78) and is similarly presented by Hickey (2012) as a special feature within the rest of the British Isles, where this feature cannot be found[10]. Although it has been stigmatized and it is avoided by educated speakers, habitual *do be* can still be heard in urban working-class contexts and in the southern rural areas (Filppula, 2004: 79). Hickey (2011) suggests that the origin of the habitual aspect could be found either in the "convergence with South-West English input […] with influence from Scots" or in categorical transfer from Irish.

*She **does be reading** books* 'She is [continually] reading books' (Hickey, 2012)

*They **do be lonesome** by night, the priest does, surely* (Filppula, 2004) 'They are [normally] lonesome…'

4.2.1.3 Extended range of the present tense

Also known as *extended now,* this feature takes the place of the 'present perfect', that is, it refers to a state or event that started at some point in the past and is not yet finished by the time of the utterance (Filppula, 2004). As shown in the examples below the feature simply uses a present tense and extends the duration of that activity to a

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[7] O+PP word order

[8] *Tá an leabhar léite aici* [is the book read at-her] (Hickey, 2012)

[9] The form *bees* is exclusive to northern Irish English

[10] It occurs in other vernacular varieties in America though, e.g. Newfoundland or African American Vernacular English.

point which is normally stated in the utterance. The source of this feature is probably transfer from Irish[11].

*I **know** him for more than six years now* (Hickey, 2012) 'I have known him for more than six years now'

***I'm not** in this (caravan) long* (Filppula, 2004) 'I have not been in this caravan long'

4.2.1.4 Reduced number of verb forms

What Hickey (2012) understands as a reduction of "parts of strong verbs" Ó hÚrdail (1997: 192) explains as the "underdifferentiation of […] past-tense and past-participle forms" while both authors acknowledge the commonality of this feature in many dialects of English. Therefore, *seen* and *done* would be used with a 'past simple' meaning and *went* as a participle.

*I could have **went** for a deficit* (Dublin prominent politician cited in Ó hÚrdail, 1997: 192) 'I could have gone for a deficit'

*I **done** it* (Hickey, 2012) 'I did it'

*I **seen** it* (Hickey, 2012) 'I saw it'

4.2.2 Auxiliaries

Some features could have entered this subsection that have been left out for both space issues and the fact that, although strikingly usual in most of the island, they are not considered as shared features in all the vernacular varieties of Southern IrE. To mention one, it is curious how the modal auxiliary *Shall/Shan't* is almost completely inexistent in both vernacular and educated speech and *will* is used instead (see Filppula, 2004).

4.2.2.1 *Be* as an auxiliary

As we have seen previously, the verb *be* has a strong presence in verbal features – e.g. the *after perfect* and the *do be* habitual – and it is used in quite a varied number of verbal constructions. The "continuing use of forms of *be"* (Hickey, 2012), transferred probably from Irish, as other features that use this verb as an auxiliary – in sentences

[11] *Tá sí ag obair ó mhaidin* [Be+non-past she at working from morning] (Harris, 1991: 206)

that would normally use other auxiliaries, e.g. have – Filppula (2004: 74-75) writes about the *be* perfect, which is an intransitive form inside the perfective aspect focusing in the result of an action and which is used with verbs of motion or change as it is shown in the examples.

*They**'re finished** the work now* (Hickey, 2011) 'They have finished the work now'

*I think the younger generations **are gone** idle over it* (Filppula, 2004) '…have gone idle over it'

4.2.2.2 Lack of *do* in questions

Have works generally as a substitute of the auxiliary verb *do* in interrogative sentences. Thus, a sentence like *Do you have the pencil?* would be rendered as *have you the pencil?* all across the country (Hickey, 2012).

4.2.3 Negative concord

Iterative use of the negative is a common feature in IrE as in many other vernacular varieties. In Standard English this is prohibited or considered ungrammatical due to the – misguided – assumption that a double negative would cancel each other in a sentence and "result in a positive statement" (Hickey, 2012). Although Hickey (2011) notes a convergence of the input language and Irish, Filppula (2004: 82) considers it a universal feature.

*you've **not** heard of that **nothing?*** (Filppula, 2004: 82) 'you have not heard anything'

*You **didn't** see **no** dunkey* (donkey)*?* (Ó hÚrdail, 1991: 194) 'didn't you see any donkey?'

*He's **not** interested in **no** cars* (Hickey, 2011) 'He's not interested in cars'

4.2.4 Clefting for topicalisation purposes

Focusing devices emphasize certain elements of an utterance or clause. We could either choose the prosodic option of stressing the item we wish to highlight or we could choose to use structural ones, that is, 'clefting' (or cleft construction) (*It was the*

table John lifted) ‘pseudo clefting’ (*what John lifted was the table*) or ‘fronting’ (also known as ‘topicalisation’) (*The table John lifted*). In IrE we find a characteristic “tendency to favour clefting and fronting over ‘simple’ sentence stress” (Filppula, 2004). Clefting is widely used in Irish and other Celtic languages although these are not only used for the sake of prominence, but they can also introduce “answers to specific questions” (Filppula, 2004) for instance. The great range of clefting structures that Irish English admits makes this feature stand out in comparison with the standard forms of it (Hickey, 2012). That is, “IrE (like Irish) allows part of a VP in the focus position of clefts (so-called VP-clefting)” (Filppula, and, most strikingly, it allows the fronting of prepositional phrases – as shown in the example below – where in StE this would be inappropriat. This greater scope is likely to be transferred from the flexibility these kinds of constructions have in Irish[12] (Hickey, 2012).

It’s flat *it was* (Filppula, 2004: 96)

Is to Galway *they are going* (Hickey, 2012)

4.2.5 Clause structure

4.2.5.1 *Till* in the sense of ‘in order that’ / ‘so that’

Across the Republic, the vernacular contraction of *until* acquires an additional meaning of ‘so’, ‘so that’ or ‘in order that’ as shown in the example (Hickey, 2012)

Come here ***till*** *I tell you* (Hickey, 2011)

4.2.5.2 *For to*

Instead of the standard forms *to*+infinitive or *in order to*+infinitive used to express purpose – e.g. *I studied all night to pass the exam –*, *for to*+infinitive is used in both halves of the Irish island (Hickey, 2012; Filppula, 2004). This feature occurs also in other regional varieties outside of Ireland as well as in earlier forms of English, thus the source is likely to be the input of English.

I think it was a penny or halfpenny we used to bring to school ***for to see*** *the Punch an’ Judy Show* (Filppula, 2004)

He went to Dublin ***for to buy*** *a car* (Hickey, 2011)

[12] *Is go Gaillimhe atá siad ag dul* [is to Galway that-are they going] (Hickey, 2012)

4.2.5.3 Subordinating *and*

A distinctive feature in this area with a clear Irish source[13] (Hickey 2012) is the use of *and* when introducing a subordinate. According to Filppula (2004) "the subordinate clause most often contains a subject noun or pronoun (either in objective or nominative form) followed by the *–ing*". However, the subordinate clause is not relegated to this form in this position as can be noticed in the second example.

They went out for a walk ***and*** *it raining* (Hickey 2012)

'he said you could hear them [strange noises] *yet, inside in his own house* ***and he in bed.'***

4.2.6 *Never* with singular time reference

The time adverbial *never* is usually connoted with an absolute lack of time reference – or rather a non-finite amount of negation. However, in vernacular Irish English, the time denoted by *never* stretches until a point that can refer to a single occasion (Hickey 2012a). Thus, *She never called us* would appear to mean that there were many occasions in which 'she' could have called, but instead it refer to a specific time. Hickey (2012a) explains that this can be clarified by adding specification of time – *she never called us that evening* –, although it is not mandatory.

[13] *Chuaigh siad amach agus é ag cur báistí* [went they out and it at putting rain]

5 CONCLUSIONS

The features that have been considered show how, despite the uneven nature of the English dialect spoken in the Republic of Ireland, we can consider Irish English as a single variety due to the number of shared features that appear to mark, among other things, an Irish identity, clearly disassociated from the language of the early settlers. The variability of the language can easily be explained by the constant internal movements, the variety of vernacular Englishes that entered the country during the settlement and the long term shift from Irish Gaelic to English that the Irish inhabitants suffered for about eight centuries. We have to take into account that two shifts took place in Ireland's linguistic landscape: first to Irish on the part of the first settlers, and back then to English after Cromwell's Transplantations. Having English language moving back and forth during such a span of time introduced features that speakers interiorized before these happened to change in the origin country, therefore passing those old features to the younger generations in an unguided manner – e.g. by speakers that did not have a profound knowledge of the language that had just received. Moreover, after the shift was completed the Irish achieved independence from their former settlers, and we could say that "the Irish successfully transferred their linguistic identity from the Irish language of their forebears to forms of English which they now speak and which are sufficiently distinct from other varieties of the language to function as the bearers of an Irish linguistic identity." (Hickey, 2016) English was the tool to their survival and Irish was the symbol of their identity. By putting these together, they achieved a tool for the survival of their cultural identity.

Irish English is nowadays highly influenced (as many other varieties of English) by American speech. This is mainly due to the young people looking up to soap operas' and TV series' language as a means of style (Amador-Moreno, 2007), but what Dolan thinks will happen is "that this will simply be a rite of passage and eventually the young people will go an revert back to the real root of their language, in search of, and confirming their identity", something that I can myself see happening among the Irish people with whom I share time. So, the future of Irish English will most probably follow the path it has already been following, that is, a mixture of internal (from Irish and traditional varieties of Irish English) and external (Other varieties of English, mostly American in the media and other British varieties) influences if ,of course, a resurgence of Irish does not happen.

It is quite unlikely for IrE to acquire new elements from Old or Middle English or, at least, it would be quite an awkward situation in which a speaker would be seeking for an archaic feature to use in order to sound sophisticated. Thus, it will most probably be contact with other varieties that will transform Irish English from now on. Personally, I would like to see Irish gaining ground over English and see how the former vernacular would develop in this reality.

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