



Dublin English

Evolution and change

Raymond Hickey

John Benjamins Publishing Company



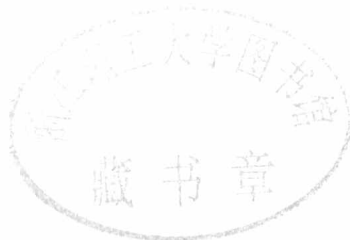
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Preface

The intention of the present book is to describe the English language as spoken by different groups in Dublin, the capital of the Republic of Ireland, and to outline the history of English in that city since its first arrival several hundred years ago.

There are many reasons for wishing to describe English in Dublin. The most obvious is that there is no published book on the subject to date and so the present work can hopefully fill a gap in the literature on modern varieties of urban English. Another reason is that a major change in the pronunciation of non-local Dublin English has taken place recently, and by extension in other parts of Ireland influenced by this speech. Such change can throw light on the mechanisms of language change in general, particularly because the socio-linguistic situation of Dublin is similar, but by no means identical, to that in many other English-speaking capitals around the world.

This book is divided into two broad sections, one on present-day Dublin English (II) and one on the history of English in the capital (III), with an initial section (I) on the methods used for collecting data. The core of the book is section II. Section III connects to it and tries to trace historical English in Dublin in reverse chronological order. Here historical material has been examined which consists in the main of emigrant letters or local letters by Dubliners and literary attestations of Irish English by Dublin writers as well as prescriptive comments on language in the capital by various authors such as the elocutionist Thomas Sheridan.

The section on modern Dublin English deals with the current changes in pronunciation which have characterised the development of Dublin English in the past decade or two. To this end the data from a broad-based survey of Dublin English is presented and analysed. There are also chapters dedicated to the grammar and vocabulary of Dublin English.

A CD-ROM accompanies this book and contains a suite of flexible programmes with all the recordings of Dublin English used for the current study. The data consists of over 300 sound files, over 200 survey questionnaires and informants' maps and over 100 spoken assessment tests. By means of the supplied software users can examine the original data on their PC (see section IV *Guide to the CD-ROM* for technical information). The programmes offer an easy gateway to the data in the form of a tour of Dublin English, a subset of the data files and much background information on English in Dublin as well as overview information on the English language in the rest of Ireland. The CD-ROM also contains a Java version of the software with which all the data and additional information can be viewed on virtually any computer,

including an Apple *Macintosh*. This can be done without installing any software or copying sound files to the hard disk of a computer.

By offering the data on which this study is based it is hoped to reach new levels of accountability for a sociolinguistic investigation of this nature. Because the data on the CD-ROM is central, there are references to individual sound files throughout the book which allow users to hear directly the phenomena which are being discussed at the particular point in the text. These sound files can be accessed by clicking on the items in the tables under the tree node *Sound files referred to in book* (in the *Java* version) or by clicking on the menu option with the same name in the *Windows* software version, called *Discover Dublin English* (both on the accompanying CD-ROM).

In the genesis of this book the author has received much support from many informants in Dublin, who for reasons of anonymity, cannot be mentioned by name. Suffice it to say that this project was only made possible by the willing help given over the years by many individuals, speakers of different forms of Dublin English, who in many conversations provided attestations of the English language in their city. Beyond this smaller group is a much a larger one, consisting of those who cooperated in the large-scale surveys *A Sound Atlas of Irish English* and *A Survey of Irish English Usage* (see Hickey 2004d for details) and who helped in their recordings to back up, or in some cases, refute assumptions about Dublin English.

My thanks also go to Prof. Edgar Schneider for his advice and constructive criticism on this book at earlier stages and for his readiness to accept it into the series *Varieties of English Around the World*. Finally my thanks go to Kees Vaes at John Benjamins who was a friendly and competent editor providing valuable assistance during the production phase of the book.

Raymond Hickey
Essen, April 2005

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
I Investigating Dublin English	1
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Matters of terminology	2
1.2 The city of Dublin	5
1.3 Classifying Dublin English	6
2 Collecting data	8
2.1 Change in Dublin English: Collecting the data	9
2.2 Initial methods used	10
2.3 Conducting the interviews	13
2.4 Results of the data collection	16
2.5 Data and figures	18
2.6 Increasing the data base	20
2.7 Aim of the recordings	21
2.8 Organisation of the recordings	23
2.9 Obtaining recordings for Dublin English	23
2.10 Sample sentences with lexical sets	24
2.11 Free text	25
2.12 Word list	26
II English in present-day Dublin	27
1 Introduction	27
1.1 How can one tell a moderate Dublin accent?	28
1.2 The status of Received Pronunciation	33
1.3 The local Dublin speech community	34
1.4 Features of local Dublin accents	35
1.5 Additional data for local Dublin English	39
1.6 Markers of local Dublin English	42
2 Recent changes in Dublin English	45
2.1 Before and after the changes	45
2.2 In the beginning was Dublin 4	46
2.3 Why 'Dortspeak' failed	47
2.4 Demotic developments: the 1990s vowel shift	49

2.5	Details of the vowel shift	51
2.6	Arguments for and against the shift	57
2.7	Phonological interpretation	59
2.8	Participants in the vowel shift	61
2.9	Propagation of sound change	62
2.10	More on dissociation	67
2.11	The New Pronunciation	72
2.12	Irish, British and American English	79
2.13	Uncontentious features in Dublin English	81
2.14	The spread of new Dublin English	86
2.15	The gender issue	88
3	Attitudes to Dublin English	92
3.1	Assessment of speaker accents	92
3.2	Assessment results	95
3.3	Perception of dialect regions	99
3.4	Results of dialect divisions	102
3.5	Evaluation of dialect regions	105
4	The wider context	107
4.1	English in Belfast	108
4.2	English in Derry	109
4.3	Dublin and northern cities	110
4.4	Dublin and London	111
4.5	New towns and new suburbs	113
4.6	Non-native Dublin English	114
5	The grammar of Dublin English	115
5.1	Morphology	116
5.2	Syntax	117
5.3	<i>A Survey of Irish English Usage</i>	125
6	The vocabulary of Dublin English	133
6.1	Studies of the Irish English lexicon	135
6.2	Treatment of English lexis	135
6.3	Productive morphology	138
6.4	Vernacularity in Dublin English	140
6.5	Loanwords from Irish	141
6.6	Phrases and expressions	143
7	Placenames in Dublin	146

III Reaching back in time	149
1 The history of English in Ireland	150
1.1 The coming of the English	151
1.2 Spread of English	152
1.3 The situation in medieval Ireland	154
1.4 Renewed dominance of English	155
1.5 The eighteenth century	156
1.6 The nineteenth century	157
2 Letters as linguistic evidence	158
2.1 18th century letters	160
2.1.1 The Mahon letters	160
2.2 19th century letters	162
2.2.1 The Owens Letters	164
3 Literary texts as linguistic evidence	166
3.1 The plays of Dion Boucicault	167
3.2 The plays of Sean O'Casey	173
4 Prescriptive comments by Dublin authors	178
4.1 Thomas Sheridan	178
4.1.1 Sheridan's system of pronunciation	179
4.1.2 Non-standard vowel values	181
4.1.3 Conditioned realisations	183
4.1.4 Word stress	186
4.1.5 Summary	187
4.2 Swift and Irish English	188
5 Early modern Dublin English	189
5.1 Parodies of Irish English	189
5.1.1 Stereotypical speech features	192
5.2 Municipal records from Dublin	193
6 Medieval Irish English	194
6.1 The <i>Kildare Poems</i>	194
6.2 The dialect of Fingal	196
6.3 The dialect of Forth and Bargo	198

7 Supraregionalisation	202
7.1 Vernacularisation	204
7.2 Extinct features	205
7.3 Retention of conditional realisations	207
7.4 Supraregional variety as standard	208
IV Guide to the CD-ROM	211
1.1 The Discover Dublin English programme	211
1.2 Other programmes in the suite	218
1.3 Troubleshooting file	219
1.4 Java version	221
V Lexical sets for Dublin English	225
VI Glossary	233
Maps	239
References	243
Index	261
Sound files referred to in book	269

I Investigating Dublin English

1 Introduction

As an English-speaking metropolis Dublin enjoys a unique status. It is the capital city of the oldest English colony outside of Britain (Aalen and Whelan eds 1992; Brady and Simms eds 2001; Clarke, Dent and Johnson 2002; Cosgrove ed. 1988; Ossory-Fitzpatrick 1977). For more than 800 years the English language has existed in the city where it has evolved in a manner largely independent of other varieties of English. It is true that during the centuries of its history, Dublin English has experienced the superimposition of more standard varieties of English. But on a vernacular level, English has continued a more or less unbroken development for centuries, a fact which has led to a unique mixture of features. There are other reasons for regarding Dublin English as *sui generis*. It has developed an implicit standard and has gone through internal stages of standardisation and variety separation without the external influence of a national standard of English as in Britain.

As long as there have been records of Dublin English there has been evidence of sub-varieties within the city (see section 1.3 *Classifying Dublin English* below). The vintage of Dublin English has meant that the colloquial forms have evolved a distinct phonetic profile over the many hundreds of years during which these developed. The speech of the better-off inhabitants of the city would seem from early on to have been in a double-bind: on the one hand this section of the population sought means to distinguish itself from the socially lower-placed members of the city's population (dissociation) and on the other hand there was no ready-made standard which they could adopt (any norms were extra-national). The reason for the latter is that in Ireland, more or less from the very beginning of the English involvement in the country, the option of simply emulating the linguistic norms of England was open to the population as this would have meant accepting the preferred form of language in a country which was regarded by many as having imposed its language on Ireland.

Another reason why the evolution of Dublin English is of general interest is that it offers insights into historical processes which are assumed to have taken place in the history of English, but where the time depth is difficult to determine. For instance, the lack of rhoticity: in conservative vernacular Dublin English would appear to be a phenomenon of considerable age as would the use of glottal stops for /t/ in intervocalic and final, open positions.

All of the issues just hinted at here are the subject of dedicated sections in this book. Readers should bear in mind that, for contemporary Dublin English, all the statements made in print can be corroborated by listening to the sound files on the accompanying CD-ROM where the features in question can be heard clearly. Bear in mind also that there is much general information on Irish English (with maps and sound files) on the CD-ROM along with all the Dublin questionnaires from *A Survey of Irish English Usage* (over 200 in all).

1.1 Matters of terminology

Any discussion of Irish English, and by extension of Dublin English, demands that questions of terminology be clarified, as far as possible, at the outset. The general term *Irish English* in this book is intended as a cover term and not as a reference to a specific variety of English on the island of Ireland. The most common term used for English in Ireland in the past has been ‘Anglo-Irish’. This term is also applied to the literature written in English by authors born in Ireland and it is found as a reference to politics involving Ireland and England. Strictly speaking, the term refers to a variety of Irish, if one interprets the modifier ‘Anglo-’ as qualifying the head ‘Irish’. But even disregarding this technical matter, the term is not very suitable because of its use – with different meanings and connotations – in other spheres of study. General dissatisfaction with the term led in the past few decades to the use of ‘Hiberno-English’ as a label. This derives from *Hibernia*, the Latin word for Ireland, which takes on a form with final *-o* as a qualifier in the new compound. This term enjoyed brief popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, especially since the pioneering works of Alan Bliss gave currency to the label. It has been used by many authors since, notably Filppula and Kallen. This has in turn led to many non-Irish writers – such as Lass (1990) – adopting the term, assuming that one should follow local usage in terminology. In recent years, the term has fallen somewhat into disuse, not least because of its overly Latinate form (but see Dolan 1998 who continues the term). The attempts by some authors, such as Henry (1977) and Todd (1992), to introduce and establish a clear difference in usage between ‘Hiberno-English’ and ‘Anglo-Irish’ have not resulted in general acceptance among the scholars in the field, not least because these two authors define the terms in diametrically opposing fashions.

The upshot of this situation is that many, if not most, authors (see Kallen 1994, 1997) have reverted to the simpler ‘Irish English’, quietly distancing themselves from ‘Hiberno-English’ and definitely from ‘Anglo-Irish’. The label ‘Irish English’ has many inherent advantages: it is parallel to ‘Australian English’, ‘Canadian English’, etc. and is readily understandable to

scholars outside the field. Further subdivisions can then be introduced much as with American English, which is further differentiated in individual studies.

The above remarks demonstrate clearly that the labels for English in Ireland are by no means fixed. This fact should also be seen in a broader non-linguistic context: there is no popular term for English in Ireland, let alone for Dublin English. For example, no equivalent to Cockney, Scouse or Geordie is found either in the north or south of the country. The term 'brogue' is a special case as it refers (historically) to a salient Irish pronunciation of English and is quite restricted nowadays, being generally negative and disparaging (in an Irish context, but elsewhere, e.g. in the Ocracoke context, North Carolina, this is not necessarily the case, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1997).

The lack of a local label can be linked to the fact that English in Ireland has never received popular recognition as the language of Irish cultural heritage, although it has been the native language of the majority of the Irish population since at least the mid-19th century. This distinction is reserved for the Irish language, a branch of Celtic which has been on the retreat for several centuries but which still enjoys a cherished position in the affections of the Irish from the south and those from the north of a nationalist persuasion.

The status of the Irish language has meant that nothing like Henry L. Mencken's *The American Language* could ever have been written on the English of Ireland, let alone popularly accepted. The Irish are somewhat uncomfortable about their acknowledgement of a specific variety of English because the popular conception of language as the property of a nation would imply undue acceptance of the role of England in the genesis of such a variety. A corollary of this attitude, which has been of importance in the development of a supraregional standard in the Republic of Ireland, is that standard British accents of English are not emulated in the south. Instead a non-localised variety has arisen, roughly based on the speech of middle-class Dublin, but without too many specifically Dublin features. One could perhaps use a term like 'Irish Standard English', in analogy to 'Scottish Standard English' which would refer to varieties spoken with the grammar of standard British English but with an Irish accent to a greater or lesser degree, see Abercrombie (1979), Stuart-Smith (1999: 202) on Scottish Standard English. However, no such label has ever been proposed and it is uncertain whether it would be accepted given the lack of identification which the Irish show with varieties of standard English, no matter how much they may use forms approximating to these themselves.

The clear division between Irish and English in Ireland has meant that no attempt was ever made to regard Irish English as an embodiment of Irishness. There are no ethnical reminiscences or ideologies concerning English in Ireland, unlike the situation in the United States with African American English which is generally seen as a carrier of African American culture (Rickford and Rickford 2000).

The above remarks apply most clearly to the Republic of Ireland. The north of the country is in a different situation, given that, as the state of Northern Ireland, it is part of the United Kingdom and given that it has a significantly different history determined mainly by the settlement in the early modern period of large numbers of speakers from Scotland and northern England. The immediate descendants of this group spoke, and to a much reduced extent, still speak what is termed 'Ulster Scots', the variety of Scots taken to Ulster and which has developed there over the course of the last three centuries or so. As a summary one can list the various terms found in Ireland which relate to language, geography and ethnic affiliation.

Table 1.1 *Linguistic and geographical terms in Ireland*

<i>Irish English</i>	Cover term for English in Ireland which can be more closely specified when needed.
<i>Hiberno-English</i>	Latinized term for English in Ireland; similar to above.
<i>Anglo-Irish</i>	Older term for English in Ireland. Still found overseas as a linguistic term, e.g. in Canadian usage. Also a term in literature and politics.
<i>Southern</i>	A qualifier used to refer to that part of Ireland which excludes the province of Ulster.
<i>Northern</i>	A reference to the north, north-east of the country, intended frequently to be co-extensive with the province of Ulster and/or the state of Northern Ireland (which does not contain the north-west county of Donegal).
<i>Ulster</i>	One of the four provinces of present-day Ireland (along with Connaught, Leinster and Munster) located in the north of the country. It now comprises nine counties, six of which form the state of Northern Ireland, the remaining three being Donegal (north-west Ulster), Cavan and Monaghan (south Ulster).

<i>Ulster English</i>	1) A cover term for various forms of English used in Northern Ireland. 2) A specific reference to English brought to Ulster from the north of England and separate from the Scots element in the province.
<i>Ulster Scots</i>	A continuation of the varieties of (western lowlands) Scots brought to Ireland chiefly in the 17th century.
<i>East-coast</i>	A reference to the area from Dundalk – Drogheda (north of Dublin), including the capital, and down to Waterford on the south-east which was the original area of settlement by English speakers in the late Middle Ages. English in this region shows features not found in the rest of the country.

A few other terms should be mentioned here as they may be found in the body of this book. The label ‘Irish’ refers to the native inhabitants of Ireland and to the language spoken by the majority in the country before the arrival of the English. In Ireland it is not normal to refer to the Irish language as ‘Gaelic’ as many foreigners do. The label ‘Ireland’ is used to refer to the entire island which politically consists of two states, The Republic of Ireland (from 1949) and Northern Ireland (part of the United Kingdom from 1921 onwards). *Éire* is the official name of the southern state, in the Irish language, as specified by the constitution of 1937.

1.2 *The city of Dublin*

Dublin has the official Irish name *Baile Átha Cliath* ‘the town at the ford of hurdles’. There is a second Irish name *Dubh Linn* ‘dark pool’ which was the source for the anglicised form *Dublin*. It is the capital of the Republic of Ireland and seat of government along with all major Irish administrative organisations, three universities and various colleges of higher education (Bennett 1991, 1994, Boran 2000, Kelleher 1972, McCormack 2000, Moore 1965).

Dublin is located in the centre of the east coast facing the Irish Sea in a county of the same name bounded by the flat counties of Meath and Kildare which form its hinterland to the north and west and by the mountainous county of Wicklow to the south. Co. Dublin has an area of 920 sq km (355 sq mi) and a population of 1,058,300 (1996). The main topographical feature is Dublin Bay into which the River Liffey flows. On the southern border in Wicklow are the Dublin Mountains. The county boundary runs through the southern

suburbs. The town of Bray is strictly speaking in Co. Wicklow but now it is virtually a suburb of Dublin and served by the city's railway network. To the north, Dublin extends at least to the airport near Swords and on the north coast beyond Howth though the indented coastline means that it does not continue along the coast in the same manner as on the southside. To the west the city has extended considerably in the past 20 years or so. Parts of north-east Co. Kildare are now suburbs of Dublin with the extensive settlement of the Liffey valley westwards in the direction of Lucan, Leixlip and Dunboyne.

The population of the city is some 481,600 (1996) but a truer figure is that of 953,000 (1996) for Greater Dublin which consists of seamless suburbs fanning out from the centre around the mouth of the Liffey in the centre of Dublin Bay. The population figures are by now (2004) already an underestimate, particularly because of the influx of young, professional workers in the 1990s participating in the economic boom which gave rise to the epithet 'Celtic Tiger' for Ireland. During the 1900s much of the city was restored, for example the Temple Bar district between Dame Street and the Liffey. The International Finance Centre beyond the Customs House on the north bank of the Liffey estuary expanded considerably on the derelict grounds of the former docklands.

There is an appendix to this book in which a number of maps can be found which show the location of Dublin and its wider setting. These maps are also on the accompanying CD-ROM.

1.3 Classifying Dublin English

In the introduction above reference was made to sub-varieties of English within Dublin. As might be expected of any capital city, different varieties can be recognised and in this section reasons for the labelling followed in this book are given.

When describing different kinds of Dublin English one can choose from a variety of parameters to delimit the various groups of speakers in the city. One could start with traditional terms which refer to class. Class definitions typically involve education, occupation and relative wealth. The middle class – with professionals like doctors, lawyers, teachers – would have all these attributes to a positive degree and one could say that it is the group which sees itself as separate from members of the working class.

However, the matter is not that simple. For instance, air hostesses, bank clerks, company secretaries, people from the world of film and fashion are not necessarily regarded as belonging to the middle class but they certainly come from a section of the population which does not want to be identified with all

too localised forms of Dublin English. One could say that it is the group of those aspiring upwards – the socially ambitious – which is the motor behind the changes in Dublin English which are to be dealt with in this book. Certainly this group belongs to those partaking in the changes. However, social movement is not necessarily the only or indeed the defining factor for this group. One can recognise their wish to dissociate themselves from the low-prestige and linguistically salient sections of the capital city (this can be seen in features of their speech). The two issues, upward social movement and dissociation from groups below (in the vertical social sense), may well go hand in hand, though this is not always recognised in treatments of socially motivated language change, e.g. Labov (1994, 2001), Guy (1990).

A common means of referring to middle class speakers is as ‘educated’. Again this term is not accurate enough for the current study. The determining factor for active participation in change in Dublin English is the extent to which speakers espouse urban sophistication. This can be seen as a rejection of an all too local identification with Dublin and a conception of self as a player on a (fictional) international stage. Such an understanding of the motivation explains why the changes in Dublin English have been found among groups which may not have enjoyed tertiary education and who are not necessarily among the more prosperous – air hostesses, company secretaries, up-market shop assistants. It furthermore accounts for why many established professionals – genuinely educated speakers in any sense of the term – such as doctors, teachers, lecturers, do not necessarily show the recent changes in Dublin English. Indeed if such speakers have a strong sense of local identity they may show features of popular Dublin English in their speech.

For the discussion of English in Dublin a twofold division, with a further subdivision, can be used. The first group consists of those who use the inherited popular form of English in the capital. The term ‘local’, as used already, is intended to capture this and to emphasise that these speakers are those who show strongest identification with traditional conservative Dublin life of which the popular accent is very much a part. The reverse of this is ‘non-local’ which refers to sections of the metropolitan population who do not wish a narrow, restrictive identification with popular Dublin culture. This group then subdivides into a larger, more general section labelled ‘mainstream’ and a second, burgeoning group which rejects an association with local Dublin. In previous publications, the author has used the label ‘fashionable’ to describe the speech of the latter group. In the context of Dublin English in the 1990s this term was justified. The original group to show the changes, which have taken place in the speech of the capital, especially in the area of vowels, was a relatively small one which was clearly aware of fashions and trends in Dublin life in general. According to analyses of mid-1990s Dublin English (see Hickey

1998 and 1999a as examples) the changes were most apparent in sections of the population, mostly female, which regarded themselves as part of new Dublin, however vague this term may be, and which wanted to hivy themselves off from traditional local culture in the capital. It was only in the late 1990s and into the 2000s that the changes in mainstream Dublin English spread rapidly and became typical of large sections of the city's population and of young people, especially females, throughout the Republic of Ireland in general. Given this situation, the speech of this group is, for want of a better term, simply labelled 'new'.

Table 1.2 *Divisions of Dublin English*

1) <i>local</i> Dublin English	
2) <i>non-local</i> Dublin English –	a) <i>mainstream</i> Dublin English
	b) <i>new</i> Dublin English

2 Collecting data

The present section offers background information on surveys carried out by the author on English in Ireland and on Dublin English in particular. It furthermore discusses and attempts to assess the methods employed in these surveys. There have been two projects within which all the data on Dublin English for this book was collected and which is contained on the accompanying CD-ROM.

- (1) a. *Change in Dublin English* (1994-1998)
 b. *A Sound Atlas of Irish English* (2000-2002)

The results from the first project were published in a series of articles in the late 1990s (Hickey 1998, 1999a, 2000c) and those from the second are available in Hickey (2004d). The first project was initiated after observations on changes in pronunciation in Dublin were made by the author from the late 1980s onwards. The appropriateness of such a project was confirmed with each passing year in which the new pronunciation in Dublin became ever more widespread. Because of the status of Dublin as capital of the Republic of Ireland, the new pronunciation disseminated from here to the rest of the country. The desire to record this spread was one of the main reasons for the second, larger project which followed after 2000.

The main purpose of the sound atlas project was to record, in as comprehensive a form as possible, the different varieties, both urban and rural,