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How and why supraregional varieties arise

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For reasons best known to themselves, speakers often desire not to sound too local in their speech. Taken collectively, whole groups in society often want not to be too easily recognised as from a specific locality. Social pretension and the striving for social advancement are pretty solid reasons for this stance in western societies, seeing as how non-local features are highly valued in the leading sectors of such societies. So what do people in southern England undertake who do not want to be easily recognised as from a certain region or city? For such individuals the answer is straightforward: they adopt some form of Received Pronunciation which cuts them off from the moorings of their linguistic locality and allows them to float upwards on the social scale. But in the anglophone world, this situation is more the exception than the rule. What does, for instance, an Irish person do who is driven by the same desire not to be linguistically identified with his/her locality. He/she cannot simply adopt Received Pronunciation as this is not a viable option in an Irish context (either northern or southern), but he/she can use a regional standard which has developed over the past century and a half in Ireland and so avoid the stigma of being regionally pinpointed in speech. The current study is concerned with how such regional standards arise and looks at the wide implications of the process. To start with, some definitions and clarifications are called for.

1. The process of supraregionalisation

Supraregionalisation is an historical process whereby varieties of a language lose specifically local features and becomes less regionally bound. The upper limits of supraregionalisation depend on a number of external factors, such as the boundary of the state in which the set of varieties is spoken. Furthermore, if the state historically derives from a colony of another state, then there may be an (unconscious) wish within that state to maintain some linguistic distinctiveness vis à vis the varieties of the former colonising country.

For a discussion of supraregionalisation one needs the notion of *extra-national variety*. A variety is extra-national if it has significance in a country but stems from outside its borders. Extra-national varieties may be perceived as a single type, as with the perception of British English by many Irish who simply refer to someone speaking with 'an English accent'.

Supraregionalisation is a type of language change, despite the fact that the consciousness of scholars for it has not been very high. It too is subject to the phases of actuation, propagation and termination. The actuation is probably triggered by a consciousness of the provinciality of one's own language and the presence of more mainstream varieties, be these extra-national or not. There may be periods in the history

of a country when this consciousness comes to the fore, for instance in times of economic prosperity and contacts abroad, or when general education is introduced for the entire population. Both these factors have been operative in the history of Irish English and taken together have probably been responsible for the development of a supraregional variety of English in Ireland during the nineteenth century.

For the propagation phase there are two competing views of how the process takes place. The elimination of local features may be lexically abrupt with the substitution of local feature X by supraregional feature Y in all words in which it occurs. This corresponds to the Neogrammarian view of change. But equally a scenario is conceivable in which a local feature is replaced by a supraregional feature, if not word by word, at least not across the entire lexical board in one fell swoop. Lexical replacement of this kind would correspond to lexical diffusion as conceived of by scholars like Wang (cf. Wang 1969).

The conclusion of supraregionalisation is somewhat difficult to pinpoint. To establish whether a change has been completed it is necessary to recognise the goal, so to speak. But what would the goal be in a country like Ireland? Obviously not the wholesale adoption of forms of southern British English. Supraregionalisation can lose momentum on an S-curve just like any other change and the flattening off of the curve can be due to satisfaction by speakers that they have rid their speech of enough local features rather than that they have reached a pre-defined goal. Indeed the maintenance of differential linguistic features can be equally viewed as a goal vis à vis extra-national varieties of English.

Despite the question of conclusion one can in general recognise a conclusion for individual items within the process. Here is an example to illustrate what is meant. Going on prescriptive remarks by Thomas Sheridan in an Appendix to his *Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language* of 1781 it is known that the inherited /a/ in eighteenth century Irish English was pronounced as /ɛ/, at least in Dublin: Sheridan writes *cetch* for *catch*, *gether* for *gather*, etc. Unfortunately, we do not know how these pronunciations were eliminated – by lexical diffusion or not – because there are no instances of /ɛ/ for /a/ left, indeed the standard use of /ɛ/ in *many* and *any* is not generally found in the south of Ireland, instead one has [æ]. This item of supraregionalisation has been concluded, indeed it has overshot the mark somewhat, i.e. /æ/ tends to be very open in Irish English, a characteristic found frequently in supraregional varieties.

1.1. Retention of conditional realisations

Another aspect of supraregionalisation involves phonetically conditioned realisations. If for a given segment a realisation is used which is the normal allophone of another phoneme in more standard varieties, then this variant may be retained if the environment clearly defines it. The question here is whether the generalisation is valid that the loss of a feature follows a path through conditional realisation. Consider the following examples.

(1)		Previously	Now	
	Raising of /a/ to [æ, ɛ]	Unconditional	Only before /r/	<i>park</i>
	Raising of /ɛ/ to [ɪ]	Unconditional	Only before nasals	<i>pen</i>

The reason for such a situation might be that conditional realisations are not salient and so survive longest. Recall that the alveolar realisation of the dental stop /t/ in *athlete* is

not stigmatised in Irish English but the unconditional shift of /t̪/ to /t/ in a word like *thick* [tɪk] is (Hickey 2000a).

The retreat of salient non-standard forms might be used to explain phonetically unexpected distributions, such as vowel raising before /r/ whereas one normally has retraction of /a/ to /ɑ/ before /r/ as in very many varieties of English.

A former widespread distribution can also take another path, as an alternative to conditional realisation or parallel to it. This is where individual lexical items with the former realisation become confined to a specific register, usually a more colloquial one. Hence the general raising of /E/ to /I/ has been retained for many forms of English in the south-west of Ireland, but the non-conditional realisation, i.e. not pre-nasally, is normally excluded from supraregional varieties and is only found in a few lexicalised items such as *divil* for *devil* in the sense of ‘rogue’.

1.2. Supraregional variety as standard

To return to the general perspective again: one can often view the supraregional variety of a country as the national standard of that country, even if this has not been formulated explicitly as is true for the south of Ireland. The features of this variety are not immutable but non-regionally bound speakers in the south know what belongs to the standard: features may be added, such as the retraction of low vowels and diphthongs typical of present-day fashionable Dublin English: *mild* [mAlld] for [maɪld]. Equally speakers know what does not belong to the regional and supraregional forms in the south: *h*-dropping, glottalisation of alveolars and syllable-final deletion of /r/ are not features of southern Irish English (bar some few varieties of popular Dublin English). Indeed they could be used in a negative definition of Irish English.

The standard of the south of Ireland is a typically fuzzy, non-binary phenomenon, it is not orthographically encoded and does not seem to figure high in the consciousness of speakers. But that should not deter one from trying to come to grips with it. Speakers can move up and down on a stylistic cline for whatever reason, e.g. vernacularising their speech in, say, a family context or a familiar Irish environment. But there are a large number of speakers from the Republic of Ireland whose default speech style consists of the employment of non-regional phonological, syntactic and lexical features on which there is much unconscious agreement.

2. Historical background

Any consideration of the history of English in Ireland shows that there was not only 1) internal change within the English brought to the country as of the late twelfth century and 2) influence from Irish during the long period of language shift from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth century but also – significantly – 3) a large degree of superimposition or adoption of more standard forms of English due to considerable exposure to forms of British English.

This superimposition has led to ‘layering’ in Irish English where remnants of former distributions, such as the presence of unshifted Middle English /ɛ:/ (open long mid front vowel) or /u/ (unrounded, unlowered Early Modern English /u/), have become confined to certain registers and/or are indicative of strongly localised varieties (such as those in Dublin). In its turn, superimposition of more standard forms has indirectly led to the process of supraregionalisation. The question which is of particular linguistic interest

is whether generalisations in this process are recognisable. For instance, major vowel deviations among earlier forms of Irish English have been largely ironed out but consonantal peculiarities have been retained in the supraregional variety of the south.

2.1. First period

The history of English in the south of Ireland can be divided into two periods. This is justified on both language internal and external historical grounds. The first period dates from the late twelfth century to about 1600 and the second from the latter date to the present-day. The division between the two periods rests on the external events at the end of the sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century when a vigorous policy of forced settlement took place in Ireland, establishing the dominance of English which has increased ever since, much to the detriment of the native Irish language.

The centuries after the coming of the Normans in 1169 were characterised by Gaelic resurgence which led to the decline of English (and Anglo-Norman) in the entire country by the early sixteenth century with the exception of Dublin and its immediate surroundings. The Irish borrowed many words from the foreigners in this early period. Most of these are from Anglo-Norman but there are some from English, e.g. *whiting* gave *faoitín* both with /i:/ in Irish which shows clearly a pre-Great Vowel Shift pronunciation of *i* in Irish English because *ao* in the borrowed word was definitely pronounced /i:/ in Irish. Pre-Great Vowel Shift values are also to be found in words like *bácús* ‘bakehouse’, *slísín* ‘slice’ (< *slice* + *ín*), *túr* ‘tower’.

2.2. Second period

The second period in the history of Irish English begins in the seventeenth century with the widespread plantations, starting in earnest in the north in the earlier part of the century and occurring in the south with renewed determination by the late 1640s and 1650s. Speakers from the west midlands and to some extent from the north of England moved over to Ireland, many of them mercenaries who received land in return for military service during the reign of Cromwell. Their speech, combined with what had survived on the east coast from Dublin down to Waterford, provided the backbone for the anglophone tradition which was to continually gain in strength throughout the following centuries.

The linguistic group which would have been responsible for the transfer characteristics of Irish to Irish English is the large section of the Irish-speaking community which switched from Irish to English from the early seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. The local population was soon determined to change over to English for social advantage. Indeed this was advocated by Irish leaders in the nineteenth century. This fact, together with the major famine of the 1840s and the subsequent largescale emigration from rural Ireland, led to a rapid decline in the numbers of Irish speakers and a corresponding rise in those who used English as their only language.

3. Examples of supraregionalisation

3.1. The lexicon

Equipped with this historical information, it is now possible to move to a discussion of the effects of supraregionalisation in Ireland. The lexicon is the easiest case to begin

with. Supraregionalisation here, as one might expect, involved the replacement of words. The interesting cases, however, are not those where one lexical item is later used for a completely different former one. For instance *chisler* is an older word for ‘child’ and *cog* for ‘cheat’. Older senses may still be found, however, where there is no replacement of forms, e.g. *mad* and *bold* retain the earlier meanings of ‘keen on’ and ‘misbehaved’ respectively.

The examples to be discussed here are those where the newer form is phonetically related to the older one. When a form is replaced by its supraregional equivalent, one of two situations can arise. The first is simply that the older form disappears. The second results in the confinement of the older version to a more colloquial register with a restricted meaning. The restriction is due to focussing. The form is used in specific situations with specific reference which sharpens the meaning whereas the supraregional form is all-purpose and unconfined. The process of reduction to a colloquial register is what one can call *vernacularisation*. Here are some instances to illustrate what is meant:

Reflexes of o before velar l. *Bold* and *old* have supraregional pronunciations with a mid back vowel which is the equivalent of RP /əʊ/, i.e. [bo:ld] and [o:ld] respectively. There is an older pronunciation deriving from early modern English which shows diphthongisation before a former velarised [ɫ] and with deletion of the post-sonorant stop, i.e. [baʊl] and [aʊl] respectively. The meanings are approximately [baʊl] ‘sneaking admiration’ as in *The [baʊl] Charlie has got away with it again* and [aʊl] ‘old, but viewed affectionately’ as in *The [aʊl] boiler won’t last the winter*.

Reduction of final /ou/. *Fellow* has final /ou/ in the supra-regional standard. But a reduction of this vowel to /ə/ is well attested from early modern Irish English as in *yellow* [ˈjələ]. There is now a semantic split with *fellow* such that the older pronunciation [ˈfələ] means something like ‘young man, potential boyfriend’ in colloquial Irish English.

Unshifted front mid vowels. *Cratur* /kre:tər/ is used in the sense of an ‘individual worthy of pity’, whereas the pronunciation /kri:tʃər/ of the same word has the expected meaning of ‘being’. Equally, the pronunciation *Jaysus* [dʒe:zɪz] only occurs as an expletive.

Final devoicing after sonorants. This devoicing is an established feature of Irish English and occurs automatically in the appropriate environment. With the word *grand* it has led to the particular meaning of ‘keeping well, fine’ as seen in *We’re [grænd] in the new house*.

The restriction of meaning on the establishment of more general pronunciations with words from the same root is a process which can be seen in the history of English in general. A few examples to illustrate this can be quoted here: *dough* : *duff* ‘type of pudding’ [northern English]; *tan* : *tawny* ‘orange, yellow-brown colour’; *paralysis* : (*cerebral*) *palsy* ‘spastic movements due to brain damage’; *person* : *parson* ‘minister’.

3.2. Phonology

The point of departure for a consideration of phonology and supraregionalisation is a sound system of English which developed on the east coast of Ireland over many

centuries and which by the end of the eighteenth century had achieved a phonetic profile which was, and is, quite unique among varieties of English. Again going on the work of Sheridan (1781) one can make some justified statements about the vowel system of late eighteenth century Dublin English. The supraregionalisation which set in during the nineteenth century and which gradually spread to the rest of the country has eliminated many of the idiosyncratic features of Dublin English and resulted in the supraregional standard which existed for most of the twentieth century, being only recently modified by current changes in Dublin English.

Phonological supraregionalisation has been characterised by the suppression of some features from local varieties of Dublin English. Those which have remained are not just tolerated but maintained and form part of the individual shape of supraregional Irish English. To illustrate what is meant here a selection is offered which can be taken as representative.

In the area of vowels one finds that the centralisation of /ai/ and the fronting of /au/ are substituted by realisations which have a mid starting point so that *time* [təim] is pronounced [taim] and *down* [dɛʊn] is pronounced [daʊn]. The high rounded vowel in *Dublin* is replaced by a lower version, though still distinct from RP /ʊ/ [ä], i.e. [dʊblən] is realised as [dʌblən].

3.2.1. Archaic pronunciations

Apart from global changes like the Great Vowel Shift there are a number of archaic pronunciations which were still to be found in Irish English at the end of the eighteenth century. Two instances can illustrate this well. The word for *gold* still had the pronunciation *gould* /gʊld/ (as did *Rome*) in late eighteenth century Ireland (a pronunciation criticised by Walker). The word *onion* /ʌnjən/ was /ɪnjən/, an archaic pronunciation attested up to the present century with Joyce (1910). This was recorded by the lexicographer Bailey in 1726 but was not typical of mainstream pronunciations as Walker notes at the end of the eighteenth century (Joyce 1910: 99). The quantifiers *many* [mæni] and *any* [æni] did not, and sometimes do not yet, show the raising to /e/ which is characteristic of their pronunciation elsewhere. The retraction of /a/ after /(k)w/ was apparently not present in eighteenth-century Irish English either as shown by pronunciations like *squadron* [skwadrən].

Archaic pronunciations which involve the reversal of a process are seen in cases like *sarch* for *search* or *sarve* for *serve*. Here the early modern lowering of /e/ before /r/ is seen to have a much wider scope than in southern British English where it is not quite as widespread or has been reversed.

Cases where Irish English did not have *r*-lowering are seen in words like *door* /dʊr/, *floor* /flʊr/, *source* /sʊrs/, *course* /kʊrs/, *court* /kʊrt/ which, according to the Appendix to Sheridan's *Grammar* (1781: 137-55), were typical Irish pronunciations. This means that the southern mainland English lowering of back high vowels before /r/ had not occurred in Ireland by the late eighteenth century.

In almost all the above instances lexical replacement has occurred in the supraregional variety of the south with mainland British English pronunciations replacing the specifically Irish ones when the latter were out of step with developments in England.

3.2.2. Consonants

In the area of consonants one finds that the use of alveolar stops for both alveolars stops

and interdental fricatives in English has been substituted by a system which makes a distinction in place so that [t] and [t̪] correspond to [t] and [θ] as realisations in the respective lexical sets, cf. *thinker* [t̪ɪŋkər] and *tinker* [tɪŋkər] (historically the dental stop may have been adopted from many migrants from the west of the country during the nineteenth century who would have had this realisation from the dental allophone of /t/ in Irish).

The area of coronal stops in Irish English highlights an important aspect of the present complex. An essential consequence of supraregionalisation is the attachment of stigma to those features which have not been incorporated into the supraregional variety. Hence the use of alveolar stops for both alveolars and dentals, that is homophony between *thank* and *tank*, is stigmatised in Irish English although the supraregional standard of the south of the country does not itself have the interdental fricatives of more standard forms of English. Perhaps the cue here lies in the phonetic salience of the merger of dental and alveolar stops. The resultant homophony may have been what speakers noticed and hence avoided. Support for this claim lies in the fact that another peculiarity of Irish English has survived into the supraregional standard and it would seem precisely because it is purely allophonic.

In weak positions, intervocally and word-finally, /t/ is realised not as an apico-alveolar stop but as a corresponding fricative, as seen intervocally in *pity* [pɪt̪i] and word-finally in *what* [ʌɒt̪] for example.

3.3. Morphology and syntax

The conclusion from the above considerations is that salience determines what elements survive the process of supraregionalisation. But that just begs the question of what salience is. For phonology one can postulate that homophonic merger results in salience. But what about the examples from morphology and syntax? Consider the following examples in this respect.

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|--------------|-------|--------------|------|---------------------|
| (2) | a | <i>youse</i> | [juz] | 'you'-PLURAL | | |
| | b | <i>yez</i> | [jiz] | | | |
| | c | <i>ye</i> | [ji] | [jɪ] | [jə] | 2nd person plural |
| | | <i>you</i> | [ju] | [jʊ] | [jə] | 2nd person singular |

The form which enjoys a much greater degree of awareness is that with an added plural {S}, phonetically [z]. This can be appended to either the standard *you* or the archaic form *ye*.

Now take two examples which concern aspectual distinctions in Irish English. The first involves the use of non-emphatic *do* for habitual aspect and the second a use of *after* for the perfective aspect.

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------------------------------------------------|
| (3) | a | <i>She does be worrying about the children.</i> |
| | b | <i>He is after buying a new car.</i> |
| | | 'He has just bought a new car.' |

What is curious here is that the structure in (3b) is not stigmatised in Irish English whereas that in (3a) is. Equally the use of *ye* for *you* plural is not frowned upon whereas that of both *youse* and *yez* is. The form *ye* and the perfective with *after* both exist in the supraregional standard of the south of Ireland.

Now there must be some principled reason for the exclusion of the habitual with *do* and affixed plural personal pronouns. The suggestions put forward here may go some way to understanding their suppression in the supraregional standard. The affixation of {S} on the personal pronouns is a transparent process which is easily recognisable for speakers whereas *ye* is a lexicalised form and perhaps because of this there is low salience.

The habitual with *do* represents a restructuring of input English in which non-emphatic *do* was present and which was re-deployed as an equivalent of the habitual aspect of Irish, the native language of the majority of the population during the period of language shift in Ireland between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (Hickey 2000b).

The use of *after* for the perfective is not restructuring, as with the second person plural forms [juz] and [jiz] or the habitual with *do*, but a grammaticalisation of the temporal use of the adverb into a perfective sense.

- (4) Grammaticalisation of *after*
 locative → temporal → perfective

Restructuring of a section of grammar is an operation which does not usually allow any transitional stages in form. But grammaticalisation normally results from a metaphorical extension of a literal use of a category (Hopper / Traugott 1993).

The low salience of grammaticalised structures may account for their ready adoption across varieties, consider Newfoundland English, for example, where the perfective with *after*, while originating in the Irish-based communities of the island, has become a feature of the speech of the English-based section (mainly West Country) as well (Clarke 1997: 280).

4. The recent wave of supraregionalisation in Ireland

The remarks made so far apply to the supraregional variety of Irish English as it existed up to the late 1980's. Since then there has been considerable movement in the language of the capital Dublin (Hickey 1998, 1999) which has led in the last five years or so to the rise of a new supraregional standard which is very rapidly spreading throughout the entire country given the dominant position of Dublin (Hickey in press).

Whereas for studies in the early and mid 1990's (by the present author) a pattern of lexical diffusion of new pronunciations – that is, for certain key words – was much more common (Hickey 1998), in the past year or two (2000/1) during systematic collection for *A Sound Atlas of Irish English* this sporadic distribution has become recessive and a general adoption of fashionable Dublin English features is presently widespread among certain sections of the younger population as will now be explained.

Apparent time study of Irish English shows that female speakers over 30 do not always, and those over 40 rarely, have the features which are so indicative of the New Pronunciation of Dublin English (cf. outline below). In the recordings for *A Sound Atlas of Irish English* nearly all females under 25, whose self-image, as this could be judged by the present author during data collection, was one of modernity and sophistication, had the New Pronunciation. This has become so widespread over the entire south of Ireland that for the author, when he was collecting the data for the sound atlas, it became a purely academic exercise to ask a young female urbanite to read the sample sentences used as a basis for collecting the data. The pronunciation used was that outlined below.

Because the key features of this accent of English can be easily classified and, more importantly, because these tend to occur as a group of innovative features, they will be referred to collectively as the *New Pronunciation* of southern Irish English. The use of capital letters is intended to stress the fact that one is dealing here with a fairly unified, structural re-alignment of the entire accent of southern Irish English and not just one or two minor changes in pronunciation.

4.1. Six features of modern Southern Irish English pronunciation

The New Pronunciation of southern Irish English involves above all the realisation of vowels and of the liquids /l/ and /r/. Other segments do not seem to be affected by the shift in pronunciation. Specifically, the complex area of coronal segments (Hickey 1984) has not been altered to any significant extent. However, two points should be emphasised in this context: 1) the dental stop realisations of the THIN and THIS lexical sets, which has been part of the supraregional variety of English in the south of Ireland since at least the beginning of the twentieth century, are maintained in the New Pronunciation. 2) among young female speakers, especially in Dublin, there is a slight affrication of /t/ and /d/ in syllable-initial position. This may be an age-grading phenomenon which disappears with full adulthood. It is certainly sub-phonemic at the present. However, it is notoriously difficult to predict the course of such developments. After all, the lenition of alveolar stops in positions of high sonority, which led to the weakening of intervocalic and word-final/pre-pausal /t/ being realised as a fricative, probably started in a similar sub-phonemic fashion.

4.1.1. /ai/-retraction

In mainstream Irish English, the form of supraregional English used in the Republic of Ireland up to recently by the younger generation and still found with speakers of the middle and older generations, the diphthong /ai/ is realised as [aɪ]. But an essential feature of fashionable Dublin English is the retraction of this vowel to a value like [aɪ̠]. The exact pronunciation varies here. In the recordings made so far for *A Sound Atlas of Irish English* the retraction was greatest before /l/ as this tends to be somewhat velarised in the New Pronunciation (cf. below). Thus words like *style* and *Ireland* show a clearly retracted vowel.

4.1.2. Back vowel raising

Fashionable Dublin English shows clear low vowel retraction and low back vowel raising. The only exception to this general movement in vowel space is the non-rhotic long low vowel in the BATH and DANCE lexical sets. This vowel is always [a:] in Irish English. A retraction to [a:] would be seen as an adoption of an English accent and has always been regarded as unacceptable for the native Irish indeed speakers with this retraction are ridiculed as having a ‘grand [gra:nd] accent’. Probably, for this reason it has not been participating in the general retraction and raising of fashionable Dublin English.

When comparing the New Pronunciation with conservative mainstream Irish English it is remarkable that a merger has occurred, the lack of which has hitherto been a prominent feature of Irish English. This is the *for/four*-merger where the formerly distinct

vowels /ɔ:/ and /o:/ have collapsed due to the raising of the former to [ɔ:] and then to [o:], its realisation in fashionable Dublin English today.

4.1.3. /au/-fronting

In Dublin English, and indeed in traditional east-coast varieties of Irish English in general (Hickey 2001), the vowel in the MOUTH lexical set has a front starting point, either [æ] or [ɛ]. A realisation as [au] is more conservative in Dublin. In rural areas it is traditionally typical of the south-west and west of Ireland. The fronted onset of the /au/ diphthong has not been the subject of sociolinguistic censure in Dublin and so has migrated into the New Pronunciation via fashionable Dublin English where it is regular for words of the MOUTH lexical set. Indeed a fronted and somewhat raised starting point as [ɛ] is common among fashionable urbanites and is one of the features which is criticised in the *Dart accent* or *Dartspeak*, a somewhat vague reference to the speech of those who live in southern parts of the city which are served by the suburban railway known as the *Dart* (an acronym deriving from *Dublin Area Rapid Transport*).

4.1.4. SOFT-lengthening

Here one is again dealing with a traditional feature of Dublin English. The vowel of the LOT lexical set, when it occurs before a voiceless fricative, is lengthened. This in its turn is in keeping with the general Early Modern English lengthening of /a:/ before such fricatives and is seen in words like *staff*, *pass*, *path* in southern British English (Wells 1982: 203-6). In conservative mainstream Irish English *soft*-lengthening (to use a cover term with a typical word involving this lengthening) is not found, but again because it is present in fashionable Dublin English, it is spreading to the rest of the country.

4.1.5. /r/-retroflexion

Traditionally, the realisation of /r/ in southern Irish English is as a velarised alveolar continuant, a pronunciation found in western and south-western varieties of Irish to this day and so it can be assumed that this type of /r/ resulted in Irish English from transfer of the Irish realisation of the same phoneme (Hickey 1986). In Northern Ireland, a retroflex /r/ is to be found, a parallel with Scotland, which may well have been the source for this realisation, coming into the north with the large-scale settlement of Lowland Scots at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In current fashionable Dublin English a retroflex /r/ – [ɽ] – is also to be found, though definitely independently of the occurrence in Northern Ireland as varieties of English there have played no role in the shaping the speech of fashionable urbanites in Dublin. Dissociation from the traditional velarised realisation is most likely the reason for the retroflex [ɽ] which has become so widespread throughout Ireland among younger female speakers. A slightly raised /a:/ ([æ:], [ɛ:]) co-occurs with the retroflexion of the /r/ so that one has pronunciations like *card* [kæ:ɽd] for *card*.

4.1.6. /l/-velarisation

One of the sample sentences used for the recordings of *A Sound Atlas of Irish English* was *There's a gap in the field*. The reason for this was to check the pronunciation of

syllable-final /l/. Traditionally, Irish English has an alveolar [l] in all syllable positions. A velarised [ɫ] is really only a feature of contact Irish English, i.e. of the English of native speakers of Irish, and this was confirmed by recordings in two Irish-speaking regions made for the current sound atlas. However, the recordings for young female speakers with the New Pronunciation show a definite velarisation of /l/ in this position: [fi:ɫd]. This was not due breaking of the long high vowel /i:/. It is true that this occurs in local Dublin English, e.g. [fijəld] for *field*, but this breaking is not a feature of fashionable Dublin English. Quite the opposite is the case: it is avoided as too strong an indicator of local speech in the capital, i.e. a word like *school* would not be pronounced as [skuwəl] by fashionable urbanites. The velarised [ɫ] has the additional advantage that it is different from the alveolar [l] found in traditional accents of Irish English, above all in rural ones.

5. The spread of fashionable Dublin English

If the observations of the present author in his studies of Dublin and Irish English in general during the 1990s are correct, the New Pronunciation managed to establish itself among the young female generation in less than a decade. The rapidity of this development gives rise to a number of questions. The adoption of a new pronunciation implies fairly extensive exposure to this accent. Traditional accounts of the spread of change would see the New Pronunciation emanating out of Dublin in wave-like form to gradually encompass the entire Republic of Ireland. But there are two serious objections to this view of the change. The first is that traditional accents of Irish English in the counties surrounding Dublin, namely Wicklow, Kildare and Meath, as used by the male and older female section of the population there do not show the shifts typical of the New Pronunciation, a fact confirmed by recordings for *A Sound Atlas of Irish English*. The second objection to the wave model has to do with the time-scale. A gradual diffusion would take decades before reaching the edges of Ireland. But, for instance, in the recordings for Kerry, a considerable distance from Dublin, the same New Pronunciation was found among younger females as, say in counties Carlow or Offaly which are less than 100 kilometres from Dublin.

If one dismisses gradual diffusion through speaker contact without speaker movement (the wave-model), then there are two remaining options. The first is that there was considerable speaker movement with large numbers of young fashionable Dubliners carrying their pronunciation to remote parts in the south-west and west of Ireland. But that is entirely improbable and there is no evidence of such demographic movement. The second option is that the mass-media have played the decisive role. In general sociolinguists do not attribute media, such as television or radio, a major role in the spread of change. However, the situation in contemporary Ireland is different. One should remember that the changes in Dublin English are clearly in evidence in the speech of newscasters and programme presenters in the national television network, RTE (< *Radio Telefís Éireann* 'Radio and Television of Ireland'). This network is located in the part of Dublin which first began to show the shift in the 1980's. And, of course, the employees of such an institution would be just the sector of the population which one would expect to find dissociating themselves from the putatively narrow confines of local Dublin speech. With regard to the dissemination of the New Pronunciation, one should note that exposure to the national television network is universal in the Republic of Ireland. As the presenting staff of the three English-speaking channels which exist nearly all exhibit the New Pronunciation, this accent reaches audiences in parts of the

country distant from Dublin which would otherwise have only limited opportunities to realise what fashionable Dublin English is like.

6. The upper limits of supraregionalisation

If the removal of strongly local features give the impetus for the process of supraregionalisation, the question arises as to what represents the end-point. The perception of local features as salient seems to be the driving factor in supraregionalisation. Hence one would expect every salient element to be weeded out through a processes of competition and selection. But that is clearly not the case. And it is not so because supraregional varieties have a Janus-like function. On the one hand they avoid the unwanted association of being too regionally bound and on the other they serve the function of delimiting a group or community from another much larger one, frequently a neighbouring powerful country, as is also the case of Austria vis à vis Germany, for example. So a degree of difference, a sense of otherness, is intentional. And it is these two conflicting aims which lead to the balance of power in supraregionalisation. It can be seen in the development of supraregional forms of both Irish and Scottish English vis à vis southern British English; it can also be observed in the many overseas forms of English, some of which are fairly recent, such as the southern hemisphere varieties, all of which have a distinct linguistic profile of their own which, however much this might be distinguished from strongly local varieties in the country in question, is nonetheless an integral part of the identity of the country's inhabitants.

7. A comparison with new dialect formation

The mention of overseas varieties of English provides the link to the present section in which supraregionalisation outside the British Isles is considered, in this instance the situation with New Zealand English. Commentators on present-day New Zealand English agree that, with the partial exception of rural Southland, which has the vestigial Scottish feature of a syllable-final /r/ (Bauer 1994: 411ff.), there is considerable uniformity in the English spoken throughout the country (Bayard 2000). Assuming that the regional clustering ~~was~~ correlated with a predominance of accents of the ethnic groups involved and given the fact that present-day New Zealand English shows virtually no regional variation, some process must have occurred whereby distinctive dialect features, especially of the Irish and Scottish emigrants throughout the rest of the country, must have been levelled out with a phonetic pattern reminiscent of the south-east of England prevailing (Hickey 2003).

In their discussion of focussing and new dialect formation Peter Trudgill, Elizabeth Gordon and their associates stress that this happened in the 'linguistic melting pots', the areas of settler density in New Zealand. In those regions where the density and – significantly – the diversity of speakers was less, there must have been a stage at which younger speakers adopted the embryonic variety of New Zealand English as we know it today, a variety spreading from the areas of higher density and itself the result of the focussing process described by Trudgill *et al.* (2000). Consider the remarks made when discussing their third stage of new dialect formation: 'the new dialect will appear as a stable, crystallised variety. This crystallisation is the result of a focussing process whose effects are very clear in modern New Zealand English, which has a remarkably small amount of regional variation' (Trudgill *et al.* 2000: 307). What is noticeable here is that

they seem to equate focussing with the lack of variation. The view adopted here is that this is due to supraregionalisation, the process where dialect speakers progressively adopt more and more features of a non-regional variety which they are in contact with. The contact does not have to be through speakers, indirect exposure to the non-regional variety can be sufficient. It should be stressed here that supraregionalisation is distinct from accommodation which does require such contact and it is different from dialect levelling in which the input varieties lose salient or minority variants, resulting in a new mixture not present before. Dialect levelling can be assumed to have taken place in the areas of higher density in New Zealand prior to both koinéisation and supraregionalisation.

Koinéisation is a process whereby a dominant variety comes to be used alongside vernaculars for means of general communication. It is the nearest of the traditionally recognised processes to, but not quite the same as supraregionalisation. In the latter speakers adopt features of an already present non-regional variety and by a process of lexical diffusion can replace vernacular pronunciations or grammatical structures more and more so that the original dialect loses its strongly local characteristics. There are many corollaries of supraregionalisation which may not have affected New Zealand English. For instance, in nineteenth-century Ireland vernacular pronunciations were replaced entirely in some cases, e.g. the lowering of /e/ to /a/ before /r/ alluded to above. But others were relegated to a local mode of speech and used for vernacularisation purposes, e.g. the use of *youse* (instead of *ye* or *you*) as a second person plural pronoun (though this is found in New Zealand, perhaps because of Irish influence, Bauer 1994). Another corollary can be a lexical split arising through the maintenance of an older pronunciation alongside the newly adopted supraregional one (cf. the discussion of *bold* above).

Vernacularisation and lexical splitting, of the type just described above, do not seem to have occurred in New Zealand English, perhaps because the supraregionalisation involved a variety from within the country, whereas in Ireland it was an extranational norm stemming from England. What would seem to have happened is the adoption of the focussed variety of New Zealand English from areas with varied settlement to areas of lower density, less varied settlement so that today there is no linguistic correlate of the regional clustering which occurred in the Irish settlement of nineteenth century New Zealand (Hickey 2002).

8. Conclusion

In conclusion one can attempt to delimit supraregionalisation from other processes in the development of dialects with which it might be confused.

- Supraregionalisation is separate from *koinéisation* which refers to the use of a prestige dialect across several dialect regions, especially for inter-dialectal communication purposes. For this reason it is particularly common in written forms of language as was the case with West Saxon vis à vis other dialects in the late Old English period (ninth and tenth centuries).
- Supraregionalisation is distinct from *dialect levelling*. The latter is a fairly early stage in new dialect formation and is driven by such factors as mutual comprehension and accommodation.
- Supraregionalisation, if it occurs, does so after *focussing*. Hence it cannot be seen in

varieties which as yet have not achieved a clear linguistic profile, for instance Falklands English (Sudbury 2004) or English on Tristan da Cunha (Schreier 2004).

From the examination of the data from Irish English one can see that supraregionalisation is a late process, that is it sets in, if at all, after the development of a clearly profiled dialect in a certain region or country. Its motivation is the desire by later generations of speakers to loose linguistic ties which they see as too strongly local through the abandonment of highly regional features and conversely the adoption of more standard forms. During this process former local features may become vernacularised, that is confined to colloquial registers and retained for temporarily adding local flavour to one's speech. The upper limits on supraregionalisation would seem to lie some distance away from the total adoption of the standard form of the language in question because supraregional varieties, despite their non-local character, still fulfill an important identification function for their speakers.

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