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The Pragmatics of Irish English and Irish

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Abstract The Irish and English languages are spoken by groups of people who belong to the same cultural environment, i.e. both are Irish in the overall cultural sense. This study investigates whether the pragmatics of the Irish language and of Irish English are identical and, if not, to what extent they are different and where these differences lie. There are pragmatic categories in Irish which do not have formal equivalents in English, for instance, the vocative case, the distinction between singular and plural for personal pronouns (though vernacular varieties of Irish English do have this distinction). In addition there are discourse markers in Irish and Irish English which provide material for discussion, e.g. augmentatives and downtoners. Historically, the direction of influence has been from Irish to English but at the present the reverse is the case with many pragmatic particles from English being used in Irish. The data for the discussion stem from collections of Irish and Irish English which offer historical and present-day attestations of both languages.

1. Introduction

The aim of the present chapter is to outline the salient pragmatic features of Irish and Irish English. It offers an overview of features from both languages, first English in Ireland (section 2) and then Irish (section 3), proceeding to discuss the possible connections between these features, i.e. considering the likelihood of historical relatedness (section 4). In addition, the view is proposed that common cultural norms for the population of Ireland, at least for the south of Ireland, are reflected in common pragmatic conventions. These are expressed differently in the two main languages, Irish and Irish English (IrE), given their very different structures on all linguistic levels, but in terms of content and function similarities can be recognised.

In present-day Ireland¹ the Irish and English languages are spoken by groups of people who belong to the same cultural environment, i.e. who are all Irish in an overall cultural sense. However, the structural differences

¹ The reference here is to the Republic of Ireland. The situation in Northern Ireland is somewhat different not least because of its different demographic composition, consisting of groups of both Scottish and largely northern English origin. See Corrigan (this volume) for information on the pragmatics of Northern IrE.

between the two main languages spoken by the Irish-born population² make the question of shared pragmatics between the linguistic communities of Ireland especially relevant to larger considerations of how pragmatics varies across communities and countries (Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron and Schneider 2009). Examining shared pragmatics will demand a consideration of its genesis and in the Irish context this inevitably involves looking at the historical language shift (Hickey 2007: 121-144) which has been the dominating linguistic event for the past few centuries in Ireland. During the last hundred years or so the reverse influence – of English on Irish (Stenson 1991, 1993) – has affected Irish considerably. Nonetheless, despite the interaction of both languages there remain significant structural differences between them, including some of relevance to pragmatics, e.g. the presence in Irish of a morphologically marked vocative case (though there are functional equivalents in IrE (see Clancy, this volume; Murphy and Farr 2012)).

Before discussing the pragmatics of Irish and IrE it should be pointed out that the remarks in this chapter refer to vernacular discourse in both languages.³ In their formal written forms colloquial pragmatic markers (PMs) are generally absent and the contexts and situations in which specific pragmatic elements are employed, e.g. downtoners, attention-seizing and agreement-seeking devices, are normally not found in the written domain of either language, though in fictional literature this may be the case (see Amador-Moreno 2005).

There has been a mutual influence operating between Irish and English over the centuries, not least in the realm of language use. This can be captured by the term *Sprechbund* (German for *speech federation*) referring to the “shared ways of speaking which go beyond language boundaries” (Romaine 1994: 23). The *Sprechbund* contrasts with the *Sprachbund* (German for *language federation*), which refers to “relatedness at the level of linguistic form” (Romaine *loc. cit.*). As the names suggest, a *Sprechbund* is about speech, and how languages are used, while a *Sprachbund* is about the inherent structure of languages (Campbell 2006).

Not only is there shared use of language in Ireland but there are common metalinguistic elements. These are PMs which, according to Brinton (1996), are words or short phrases that have a metalinguistic function in discourse. They serve several purposes, typically to express the

² The reference here is to those people who were born and who grew up in Ireland, i.e. who acquire forms of IrE natively. On the situation with those people living in Ireland for whom this is not the case, see Nestor and Regan (this volume). Investigations of other locations with large emigrant populations and their descendants have shown that such groups use pragmatic markers with different frequencies to non-emigrant populations (see Torgersen, Gabrielatos, Hoffmann and Fox 2011).

³ There is a considerable body of popular literature on vernacular forms of IrE (see Murphy and O’Dea 2004; Share 2006); some of this material includes references to Irish, e.g. Bannister (2008).

relevance of a present contribution to what has preceded and what is likely to follow in the discourse. They can also convey an attitude to, or solicit agreement from, the hearer. Because of this, such markers are not usually part of the syntactic structure of the sentence in which they occur. A deletion test will normally show that the sentence without the PM is still well formed. The metalinguistic nature of PMs, and much of pragmatics in a more general sense, helps to account for the similarities in this sphere between Irish and English in Ireland. Metastructural features of language are anchored in shared values and norms and social behavioural patterns in a cultural area, largely independent of what specific languages occur there (other illustrations of this situation would be Scots and Scottish Gaelic in Scotland, Welsh and Welsh English in Wales or Breton and French in France).

The nature of discourse in both Irish and IrE would seem to have its origins in the rural background out of which modern Ireland emerged in the twentieth century. Communication mostly took place in small communities in which the members knew each other and largely shared values, attitudes and opinions. This situation shaped discourse organisation and strategies and was applied to less familiar situations, typically in urban contexts, although on a local level similar patterns of discourse could be observed to that originating in the rural sphere. Furthermore, in more formal situations there are often attempts to render the exchange more familiar and hence promote agreement among interlocutors. The main mechanism employed here is vernacularisation (Hickey 2007: 303-309, 371) by which elements of speech are introduced which make the conversation more colloquial. In IrE, for instance, there are alternative pronunciations of some words which help to add familiarity to a conversation, e.g. the words *old* and *bold* are usually [bo:ld] and [o:ld] respectively but have the vernacular pronunciations [baul] and [aul] which are often used to appease one's interlocutor, e.g. *the ol' lad will get here soon; the bol' Mike will do it alright*.

Because agreement among participants in conversation was traditionally highly valued they are expected to support each other. Both Irish and IrE conversation shows a lot of backchannelling for this purpose. For instance, repetition of *yeah, right, sure, of course*, while the other is speaking, is viewed positively as is interspersing one's own contributions with phrases expressing gratitude like *thanks a million!* or reassurances like *just a sec* or *I'll be with you in two minutes* while waiting. Of course, such features of conversation are regarded as essential to cooperation among participants in general and are by no means restricted to IrE.

Contradiction is not generally welcome and must be couched in weak terms. Equally, direct criticism is avoided (Hickey 2007: 370-376). The friendliness of exchanges is achieved by supporting the views of one's interlocutor. The origin of agreement-based exchanges lies in the type of discourse used by relatives, friends and acquaintances. Here there is a large degree of agreement and the exchanges serve the important function of

maintaining social ties. This immediately creates difficulties for those exchanges which involve disagreement or demands from the addressee which he/she cannot or does not wish to fulfil. There are different ways of packaging such contents without overtly threatening the face of the other (Brown and Levinson 1987). However, when discourse is characterised by disagreement, internally or by external reference, then impoliteness markers come to the fore. IrE has a rich range of vocabulary for such purposes, some items of which are diagnostic of the variety, especially of local forms of English in Dublin (Hickey 2005: 133-146). Some of the augmenting adverbs found in IrE are shared by other varieties, e.g. *bloody stupid*, *fucking awful*. But the term *feck*,⁴ available in various forms as a weaker equivalent to *fuck* (Dolan 2004: 91; Murphy and O’Dea 2004), would seem to be specific to Ireland, e.g.: *Your man is fecking useless, Listen, feck off, will ya! What the fecking hell is he up to?*

1.1 Research background: variational pragmatics

The pragmatic profile of IrE has come under close scrutiny in the past decade or so (Barron and Schneider 2005). This is perhaps not surprising given that other linguistic levels – pronunciation, grammar⁵ and vocabulary – had been fairly exhaustively described for IrE since the 1970s. The interest in the pragmatics of this variety was furthermore fuelled by the rise of the research paradigm “variational pragmatics” (Barron 2008; Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron and Schneider 2009; Vaughan and Clancy 2011).

Statements about the pragmatics of a variety are generalisations over the behaviour of entire communities and can encompass characteristics which have to do with relative frequencies rather than just the presence or absence of a category. Similar conceptions of politeness and appropriateness (Haugh and Schneider 2012; Schneider 2005, 2008, 2012a), levels of politeness marking, e.g. frequencies of *please* and *thank you* in service and non-familiar encounters, the relative use of response tokens, the manner in which discourses or sections of these are completed, would all be aspects to be covered by variational pragmatics.

The value of such generalisations is not diminished by not applying to all persons using a variety. Individuals will differ in their use of pragmatics and variation on this level can also form part of an individual’s style, much as sociolinguistic variation can manifest itself on an individual level as part of a person’s linguistic persona (Eckert and Rickford 2001). Other factors critical to variational pragmatics are age and gender. Nonetheless, there are

⁴ The verb *feck* ‘to steal’ is unrelated to this use. The meaning probably stems from *effect* (by deletion of the initial syllable and in the meaning of possession (Dolan 2004: 91).

⁵ The examination of syntactic features which have a pragmatic dimension is outside the scope of this study, but see Beal (2012) for a discussion of clefting in IrE which is a widespread phenomenon in colloquial speech as well as O’Keeffe and Amador-Moreno (2009).

enough common pragmatic features among speakers of IrE to justify claims about the pragmatics of this variety, at least in its vernacular forms. The reference here to vernacular language is deliberate: it reduces the differences between rural and urban forms of language (Hickey 2012) and would exclude more formal registers of English in Ireland.

2. The pragmatics of IrE: recurrent themes

A glance at the table of contents of the current volume reveals that certain themes recur in the pragmatics of IrE. There are four papers dealing with focuser *like* and two concerned with hedging *now*. The use of vocatives in IrE, sentence-initial adverbs, turn openers and tag questions are other matters addressed in individual contributions in the volume. Hence it would seem that there are recurrent issues in the pragmatics of IrE and in the following sections the more prominent of these are discussed in a manner commensurate with the summary nature of the present chapter.

2.1 *Setting in IrE discourse*

Discourse situations in IrE, as in other varieties, are broadly non-confrontational and are by default based on consensus among interlocutors who share norms of interpersonal communication. Agreement-rich exchanges are easy to realise in discourse, especially if the subject matter is innocuous (like the weather) or there is agreement among interlocutors (both wish to do the same thing). However, if this is not the case, then there are strategies for maintaining the face of participants in an exchange. One of these is to explicitly locate the cause for disagreement at some external source. That way, no interlocutor can be held personally responsible (see the data and discussion in Hickey 2007: 371-373).

Participants in an exchange can use various means to construct agreement. They can emphasise the common ground they share (Kallen 2005: 139), e.g. *Sure, we all have to pay these fierce Euro prices, don't we now?* (WER, M50+)⁶ (this is frequently the case when *sure* is in absolute initial position with a brief pause before the rest of the sentence). Speakers can also send out appeals for agreement. Tags are a well-known means of

⁶ The sample sentences provided in this chapter stem from various data collections of the author, both for Irish and for English. These are the following: CCE = *A Collection of Contact English*, DER = *Dublin English Recordings*, WER = *Waterford English Recordings*, RL = Ross Lake, Co. Galway. The letter 'F' stands for 'female' and 'M' for 'male'. The digit following this letter indicates the assumed age of the speaker. TRS-D = *Tape-Recorded Survey of Hiberno-English Speech – Digital*. RnG = Radió na Gaeltachta ('Irish-language radio'), *Ardráthnóna* is a phone-in program about local matters in the Irish-speaking regions and is quite colloquial in its presentation and language.

doing this in English. In IrE (Diamant 2012), they are often reinforced by *though* which in this context does not signal a contradiction: *It's grand to have company, though, isn't it?* (WER, F55+), *He was in some pain with that though I'd say* (WER, F85+).

If a speaker is not sure how the addressee will react to what is said, then strategies for “feeling one’s way forward” can be employed. In IrE such attempts at sounding out the situation are usually tentative. The prominent use of *would* as a hedging device in such contexts has been noted (Farr and O’Keeffe 2002).

The type of agreement-rich exchanges favoured by the Irish imply that the interlocutors are on a comparable social level. Because of this, highlighting social differences in an exchange is generally frowned upon. Where there is an undeniable social cline between interlocutors the one with higher social status may downtone his/her parts of the exchange and background his/her social position (Farr and O’Keeffe 2002: 42).

The expression of consent in a discourse context is realised in IrE by sentence-final *so* which indicates acquiescence to an explicit or implied proposal: *I'm just putting on the kettle. (RH) I'll have a cup of tea so* (WER, F55+) and may well be an equivalent to Irish *más ea* “if-that-is so”, which is also found sentence-finally: *Beidh cupán tae agam más ea*, lit. “will-be cup tea-GEN at-me if-that-is so”.

Sentence-final *then* is also common in IrE to signal tacit agreement after receiving information from one’s interlocutor. This use of *then* does not contain a temporal reference, e.g. *I suppose it might be safe, then.* (DER, F60+).

A mild contradiction or a turn in conversation can be indicated in IrE by *just* in absolute initial position or introduced by a dummy *it*, e.g. *Just, he won't go for the job if he has to move house* (DER, M50+), *It's just that the girls are gone by six o'clock so you'll have to get the key from someone else* (WER, F55+), *Just, he wasn't going to pay for it after all* (F60, Limerick).

An additional device for furthering agreement among participants is to make occasional references to individuals not taking part in the discourse in question. There are a number of somewhat belittling if not insulting references which are employed for this purpose, e.g. *your man* as a reference to an unnamed male individual who is the present focus of the discourse, *Who's your man over there with the pint in his hand?* References to females can include *your one*, pronounced [wan], which is generally not respectful, e.g. *Look at your wan chatting up the lads.* In this context, vernacular pronunciations of standard words have a long tradition in IrE, e.g. *eejit* [i:dʒət] for idiot, e.g. *That eejit of a garda [= Irish policeman] wouldn't let me park there (near the grounds of a stadium, RH)* (DER, M55+). Examples from literature in IrE are the following: *...he was the very same as him: leppin, and eejitin' about and actin' the clown* (Brian Friel, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*); *He's a fuckin' eejit, Joey, Deco shouted.* (Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments*); *...but that didn't make him an eejit*

because they didn't know about those kinds of things in those days (Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke, Ha! Ha! Ha!*).

External reference can often be indeterminate and again has the function of augmenting agreement among participants in discourse. This is, of course, a very common feature of discourse in many languages and varieties so its presence in both Irish and IrE is not diagnostic for either, e.g. Irish: *Nil an bóthar deisithe acub fós*, IrE: “They haven’t finished repairing the road yet”. Indefinite reference to groups is also common in both languages, e.g. *An dream sin* “That lot”.

Related to external reference is that to the inevitable or unavoidable nature of circumstances. This can be a way of exculpating one speaker when refusing another’s wish or request. In this respect both Irish and IrE provide expressions which serve this purpose (Murphy, this volume), e.g. Irish: *Sin an chaoi a bhfuil sé* “That’s the way it is”, Irish: *Nil neart agam air* [is-not strength at-me on-it] “It can’t be helped” or *D’fhéafadh sé bheith níos measa* [could it be more worse] “It could be worse”.

2.2 Highlighting and hedging in discourse

2.2.1 Focuser like

In all varieties PMs also have the important function of highlighting elements. The word *like* (Amador-Moreno and McCafferty, Corrigan, and Schweinberger, this volume) is frequently used in both Northern and Southern IrE discourse for this purpose.⁷ In vernacular varieties the indigenous use is as a focuser. Quotative *like* is also found, particularly in young people’s speech and has probably been imported from American English (Buchstaller 2013), e.g. *I’m, like, “No way will my parents pay for that!”* (F16, Limerick). Focuser *like* is found in all age groups and is particularly common in explanatory contexts as the following attestations show.

Table 1. *Focuser like in recordings of IrE*

<i>They’d go into the houses, <u>like</u>, to play the cards.</i> (TRS-D, M42)
<i>’Tis quality now, <u>like</u>, and all this milk and everything. You’re getting paid on the quality of your milk, <u>like</u>, and you could lose, <u>like</u>, you know...</i> (TRS-D, M64-1)
<i>He’s producing, <u>like</u>, we’ll say, at a lesser expense.</i> (TRS-D, M64-1)
<i>I’m just telling you what I heard, <u>like</u>.</i> (TRS-D, M64-2)
<i>Nowadays, <u>like</u>, the kids have new suits now for every week.</i> (TRS-D, L4-1)
<i>If they don’t do their sums they’re not slapped, <u>like</u>, they try to explain.</i> (TRS-D, L4-1)
<i>I think, <u>like</u>, the full-timers doesn’t work half as much as the part-timers, <u>like</u>.</i> (TRS-D, U19)

⁷ For a more general discussion of the use of *like*, see D’Arcy (2007).

And she was looking for someone, like, to do some housework for her. (TRS-D, U19)
Do they look like you? (RH) *Well, kinda, like.* (WER, F55+)

2.2.2 Non-contrastive reflexive pronouns

One common means of highlighting either the addressee in IrE discourse, or sometimes the speaker, is to use a non-contrastive reflexive pronoun. This element can indeed carry sentence stress but it does not show an implicit contrast with another person as in standard English *I'll do it myself in that case*. The non-contrastive reflexive pronoun of IrE is frequently redundant as a deletion test would show, e.g. *What are you doing [yourself] these days?* In other instances it can be substituted by the corresponding simple pronominal form, e.g. *Can I speak to yourself (> you) for a moment.*

The use of non-contrastive reflexive pronouns in IrE can be traced to Irish. Here there is a focuser clitic which is frequently added to a preposition or compound prepositional pronoun to highlight it in a discourse, e.g. *Agus ba mhaith leo obair liomsa ar an jab* [And would like with-them work.NON-FINITE with-myself on the job] “And then they would like to work with me on the job” (RnG, *Ardráthnóna*). In this case *liomsa*, consisting of *liom* “with-me”+ emphatic *sa*, is used. Similar forms exist for the other pronouns, e.g. *leatsa* “with-you” < *leat* + emphatic *sa*, etc. Irish can also use the unbound form *féin* (roughly meaning “self”) together with a pronoun, e.g. *Ba mhaith léi caint leat féin / leatsa* which historically would have lent additional support to the use of non-contrastive reflexive pronouns in English, cf. *She wanted to speak to yourself* as an equivalent to the Irish sentence just given.

2.2.3 Hedging and terminative now

A PM which in both Irish and IrE is used over and beyond its function as a temporal adverb is *now* (Clancy and Vaughan 2012; Migge, this volume). As opposed to focuser *like*, which does not have a direct formal equivalent in Irish, *now* (= Irish *anois*) in its function as a PM is found in Irish as well. The following attestations illustrate some exemplary usages in both languages.

Table 2. *Hedging and terminative now in IrE and Irish*

You're grand, now. Stay where you are. (WER, F85+)
I suppose, now, the mother will want to go to early mass. (WER, F55+)
Níl seans ar bith, anois. Sin an chaoi a bhfuil sé. (RnG, *Ardráthnóna*).
 [not-is chance at all now. that the way that is.RELATIVE it]
 “There is no chance, now. That is the way it is.”
Slán leat anois a Shéamuis, slán anois. (RnG, *Ardráthnóna*).

[goodbye with-you now James.VOCATIVE goodbye now]
Okay, I have to go, goodbye now. (F55, Limerick)

When considering examples such as the first Irish one or the second English one in Table 2 one should note that the temporal aspect of *now* was not of concern. In neither case did the context assume a contrastive use of *now* as a temporal adverb, hence the interpretation as hedging *now*. In addition, the last Irish and English sentences illustrate a further terminative use of *now* in both languages, i.e. as a marker which concludes a discourse, often with a hedging effect.

The historical relationship between Irish and IrE with respect to hedging *now* is unclear. There is no diachronic investigation into the use in either language, indeed no research has been done into the evolution of PMs (Mosegaard Hansen and Rossari 2005) in either Irish or IrE (but see the research agenda outlined in McCafferty and Amador-Moreno 2012). Furthermore, for Irish there are few sources which one can resort to when seeking an answer to how this usage arose. However, one useful source is the Irish language corpus, *Corpas na Gaeilge, 1600-1982*, published in 2004 by the Royal Irish Academy. This contains 4,297 instances of *anois*. To confirm the prior existence in Irish of a usage of *anois* “now” similar to that in vernacular forms of IrE today, it would be necessary to find instances where *anois* “now” clearly collides with another temporal adverb in a clause as in the following line from early nineteenth-century folk poetry from west Cork (Ó Muirthe in *Corpas na Gaeilge*; see also Ó Muirthe 1987).

- (4) *Do chualag scéal duit anois go déanach*
 “News was heard by you now of late” (Cois an Ghaorthaidh)

But apart from one or two similar cases all the instances of *anois* “now” in *Corpas na Gaeilge* have a temporal sense.

2.2.4 *Approving and reassuring grand*

A specifically IrE feature is the use of *grand* as an expression of the speaker’s subjective assessment of a discourse situation. This is labelled “approving *grand*” by the present author (see Hickey, in press, for a detailed discussion). There has also been an extension of it to include attention to the face and image needs of the addressee in discourse. This latter use is here labelled “reassuring *grand*” and is a case of intersubjectification in the sense of Traugott (2003).

Table 3. *Approving and reassuring grand in IrE*

Approving *grand*

A: *So, how's it going?* B: *I'm grand, how are you yourself?* (WER, F55+)
They did a grand job on the roundabout. (F55, Limerick)

Reassuring *grand*

You're grand, now. Stay where you are. (WER, F85+)
That dress looks grand on her. (F55, Limerick)

Both these usages arose due to an increasing subjectification of *grand* in the history of Irish English along the following trajectory non-subjective > subjective > intersubjective (Traugott 2003: 134).

Table 4. *Assumed chronology of non-subjective, subjective and intersubjective uses of grand*

(before 1800) non-subjective	21 st century

subjective (early to mid 19 th century)	

intersubjective (20 th century)	

The diachrony of approving *grand* in IrE can be traced using historical texts such as those contained in *A Corpus of Irish English* (Hickey 2003a). In summary, the situation is as follows. Before 1800 the following uses of *grand* are attested.

Table 5. *Uses of grand in IrE prior to the nineteenth century*

1) exalted, elevated <i>grand</i> <i>William the <u>Grand</u>, The <u>Grand</u> Inquisitor, The <u>Grand</u> Master, The <u>Grand</u> Opera, The <u>Grand</u> Hotel, The <u>Grand</u> National, The <u>Grand</u> Parade, <u>a</u> <u>grand</u> jury</i>
2) comprehensive <i>grand</i> <i>the <u>grand</u> total, the <u>grand</u> sum</i>
3) impressive <i>grand</i> <i>They put on a <u>grand</u> banquet for the guests. It was a <u>grand</u> day for the races.</i>

Approving *grand* would seem to be an extension of impressive *grand* by highlighting the speaker's subjective assessment of a discourse situation. Consider the following instances from two novels by Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849):

... and there was open house kept night and day at Castle Rackrent, and I thought I never saw my lady look so well in her life as she did at that time; there were *grand* dinners, and all the gentlemen drinking success to Sir Condy till they were carried off; (*Castle Rackrent*, 1801)

There's to be famous doings upon the Downs, the first of September; that is *grand*, fine. In short, what does it signify talking any longer, Patty, about the matter? Give me my bow, for I must go out upon the Downs and practise. (*The Parent's Assistant*, 1796)

There are similar examples in the middle of the nineteenth century, for instance, in the plays of Dion Boucicault (1820-1890): "It's a *grand* weddin' ye'll have, my lady" (*Arrah na Pogue*, 1864). By the beginning of the twentieth century approving *grand* was firmly entrenched in IrE, as the following quotation from John Millington Synge readily documents.

'You'll be saying one time, "It's a *grand* evening by the grace of God," and another time, "It's a wild night, God help us, but it'll pass surely." (*In the Shadow of the Glen*, 1903)

There followed an extension of syntactic contexts after the semantic expansion to approving *grand* which could, and still can, occur in absolute initial position as shown in examples from the plays of Sean O'Casey (1880-1964), who also has instances of predicative *grand* indicating positive assessment (third example below).

MRS MADIGAN *Grand, grand*; you should folly that up, you should folly that up. (*Juno and the Paycock*, 1924)

MOLLSER *Grand*, Fluther, *grand*, thanks. Yis, milk. (*The Plough and the Stars*, 1926)

BESSIE They'll go *grand* with th' dhresses we're afther liftin'. (*The Plough and the Stars*, 1926)

Reassuring *grand*, which represents a highlighting of the position and face of the addressee, appears at the beginning of the twentieth century as the following example from Synge shows (though its appearance in spoken Irish English can be taken to pre-date the textual record).

MARY DOUL You'll be *grand* then, and it's no lie. (*The Well of the Saints*, 1905)

Approving *grand* is not connected with any feature of Irish. Nonetheless,

equivalents may be found in present-day Irish usage. For example, the phrase *tá tú ceart* [are you right] (< *tá an ceart agat* [is right at-you]) “you’re grand” can be used in situations where reassuring *grand* would naturally occur in IrE. Reassuring/approving *grand* is, of course, also available in Irish through code-switching (on the latter, see Ó Curnáin 2012).

The different uses of *grand* (see Table 5 above) are attested in the *ICE-Ireland* corpus (Kallen and Kirk 2008), such as “exalted *grand*” as in <S2B-014\$A> *Cork farming representatives reacted strongly this morning to plans to cover Ireland in a grand afforestation plan*. But by far the most common type is “approving *grand*”, of which there are 51 instances in 26 of the 150 texts of the spoken section for the Republic of Ireland (see Hickey, under review, for a discussion of differences between the south and north of Ireland).

2.2.5 Capturing attention

To capture the attention of another participant in discourse or to highlight necessity or obligation the sentence-initial phrase *lookit* is found in IrE, e.g. *Lookit, you’re going to have to pay whether you like it or not*. *Lookit* is a grammaticalised attention-grabber in IrE because it cannot be analysed as *look + it*. In that respect it has developed along lines similar to *let’s* in more general varieties of English (Traugott 2003: 130) which cannot anymore be broken down into *let + us*, e.g. *Let’s both of us go together*. Irish does not have a single-word equivalent to *lookit* but the phrase *éist anois* [listen now] is used in comparable contexts.

Although *lookit* is particularly common in IrE, its origin lies in English English where the contraction would appear to derive historically from a longer transparent phrase *Look to it* (Brinton 2008: 196).

2.2.6 Tag questions

Tags in English are an early modern development, with attestations beginning in earnest in the second half of the sixteenth century (Tottie and Hoffmann 2009). They only assume anything like their modern distribution from the late eighteenth century onwards. Tag questions in present-day IrE are comparable to those in more standard forms of British or American English. They generally keep to the practice of reverse polarity between anchor and tag, e.g. *Her mother is a great singer, isn’t she?* (WER, F55+).

One respect in which IrE differs from other varieties is in the use of *is it?* as a question tag (see Barron, this volume), something which is attested abundantly from the eighteenth century onwards. If one considers the situation with English in England then the relative scarcity of *is it?* as a question tag is obvious. There are just two instances in Shakespeare’s plays,

one is in the “Four Nations Scene” of *Henry V: It is Captaine Makmorrice, is it not?* and one in *Twelfth Night* (Act I, Scene V): *From the Count Orsino, is it?* Neither the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (early modern section) nor the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler* has any instances of *is it?* as a tag. This contrasts strongly with the textual record of IrE. With major Irish prose writers of the early nineteenth century one finds that *is it?* occurs abundantly as a general question tag.

Table 6 . *Is it? as a general question tag in early nineteenth century IrE*

‘Where did - I come from, is it?’; ‘How am I coming on, is it?’; ‘Will I give you the shovel, is it?’ (William Carleton, *Ned M’Keown*)
‘So Ireland is at the bottom of his heart, is it?’; ‘So this is Lord Clonbrony’s estate, is it?’; ‘So then the shooting is begun, is it?’ (Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee*)
‘Myles of the ponies, is it?’ (Gerald Griffin, *The Collegians*)
‘...a regiment of friars is it?’; ‘That fools should have the mastery, is it?’ (Samuel Lover, *Handy Andy, A Tale of Irish Life*)

The Irish model for such usage is the general question tag *an ea?* “is it?” which can be placed at the end of a sentence or phrase, e.g. *Nil sé agat, an ea?* [is-not it at-you, is it] “You don’t have it, is it?”. Irish *is ea* has many functions, for instance, in copulative sentences, e.g. *Múinteoir is ea é* [teacher is it he] “He is a teacher” (Ó Dónaill 1977: 467). It is also used to open a sentence, e.g. *Is ea anois, a chairde, tosóimid* [is it now, friends.VOCATIVE, begin-we.FUTURE] “Alright, friends, we’ll start now” (Christian Brothers 1960: 213). It is even used as an opener in questions, e.g. *Is ea nach dtuigeann tú mé?* [is it that not-understand you me] “Don’t you understand me?” (Ó Dónaill 1977: 468). Such instances would seem to be the source of a similar usage in nineteenth-century IrE, as attested by many authors, especially in drama: (i) *Is it a cripple like me, that would be the shadow of an illegant gintleman...*, (ii) *Is it for this I’ve loved ye?*, (iii) *Is it down there ye’ve been?* (Dion Boucicault, *The Colleen Bawn*, 1860); (iv) *Is it that I vexed you in any way?* (v) *Is it that you went wild and mad, finding the place so lonesome?* (vi) (Lady Gregory, *Hanrahan’s Oath*).

The use of *is it* in sentence-initial and sentence-final position has fared differently in later IrE. Its occurrence at the beginning of a sentence is not that common, perhaps because it is felt to be stage-Irish, at least typical of writers like Gregory and Synge. At the end of a sentence *is it* can be found quite commonly. Consider these attestations from the author’s data collections: *Ye’re going to Spain for a few weeks, is it?* (WER, F50+), *They’re issuing new [parking] discs, is it?* (WER, F75+), *So, he wants to sell the garage, is it?* (DER, M35+), *She wants to study in Dublin, is it?* (RL, F55+).

3 The pragmatics of Irish: noteworthy features

Very little research has been done on the pragmatics of Irish although there is a considerable body of scholarly literature dealing with other levels of language. Pragmatics is not dealt with in any of the grammars (e.g. Christian Brothers 1960; Ó Siadhail 1989) or in the dialect studies of Irish (see the overview in Hickey 2011: 88-104) nor has it been considered in any of the literature dealing with the history of Irish (see McCone, McManus, Ó Háinle, Williams and Breatnach 1994). There are two studies – O'Malley Madec (2001) and Ó Curnáin (2012) – which deal with pragmatic issues and it is indicative that both are concerned with codemixing and bilingual usage among Irish speakers. It would seem that pragmatics is not viewed as a matter of concern when describing the language use of monolingual speakers but only of relevance in the context of the heavy influence of English on Irish in recent times.

As mentioned in the introduction, the pragmatics of Irish and IrE are largely similar. This has to do with the common history of both linguistic communities in Ireland and their shared cultural norms. Nowadays the similarities are due to the fact that the vast majority of Irish speakers are bilingual and hence know and use the pragmatics of IrE which stems from the monolingual speakers of English in Ireland. Despite the structural differences of the two languages, there are related means of organising discourse. For instance, in Irish there are stock phrases which are used in similar contexts to English, indicating agreement with one's interlocutor, e.g. *Cinnté dearfa* [certain positive] "True indeed", *D'fhéadfá a rá* [could.2_PERSON_SING_SUBJ COMP say] "You can say that again!", and which are employed as back-channelling devices. Equally, where disagreement is foregrounded Irish, like IrE, has a range of expressions. However, exact equivalents are not always found, e.g. there is an Irish word *fuilteach* "bloody", but this has the literal meaning of "having to do with, showing blood" and is not used for negative reinforcement. What Irish has additionally, and IrE like other Englishes much less so, is a range of curses (and, conversely, of wishes), often with a religious reference, e.g. *go hifreann leat!* "to hell with you", *d'anam don diabhal* "your soul to the devil", *loscadh agus dó ort* "scorching and burning on you". Curses like these have a quaint and somewhat old-fashioned ring about them, certainly those which invoke religious punishment, and are not common in present-day colloquial IrE. An exception to this are expletives which may still contain a religious reference (Farr and Murphy 2009) and which are common to this day, e.g. *Holy (Bloody) Mary*, *God (almighty)*, *Jesus* (pronounced with an unraised long mid vowel: [dʒe:zəs]). Four-letter words are as widespread in IrE as in other vernacular varieties of English (Gramley 2012: 446-456). Some of these have been calqued in Irish such as *focáil leat* "fuck off".

3.1 *PMs, borrowing and code-switching*

The long-term contact between Irish and English has been responsible for a persistent influence of the latter on the former. This effect continues unabated to the present-day (Stenson 1993). Whereas in earlier stages of the language lexical borrowings from English were the main manifestation of this influence, it is syntactic transfer, direct calquing and code-switching⁸ which are the prevalent forms today. Among the many English elements entering the language are some which are pragmatically relevant, e.g. manner adverbials such as *just*, *anyway*, *somehow*, and responsives such as *well*, generally written *bhuel* in an attempt to reflect the English pronunciation via Irish orthography (on English discourse markers in Irish, see O'Malley Madec 2001).

In a very few instances the borrowing has gone in the opposite direction, i.e. from Irish to IrE. A special case is that of a borrowing into Irish which has been re-imported back into English in Ireland. This is the word *craic*, from English *crack* (Dolan 2004: 64), which is now used in IrE in the sense of social enjoyment. It is typical of a vernacular mode of speech, cf. *The craic was mighty/fierce/brutal last night.*⁹

3.2 *Augmentation in Irish*

In spoken discourse augmenting elements are common for the purpose of highlighting, thus focussing the attention of the hearer on what is being said. Apart from various adjectives and focuser *like*, IrE also has a particular use of stressed *some* (Hickey 2007: 376) to highlight an element in a sentence, e.g. *We had /some night at the party.*¹⁰ In Irish, structurally different means are used to achieve the same effect, cf. the augmenting prefix *an-* which would be expected in an equivalent to the IrE sentence just given: *Bhí an-oíche againn ar an chóisir.* [was AUGMENT.night at-us on the party]. *An-* can be prefixed to virtually any noun or adjective, cf. *Is cáilín an-deas í Nóra* [is girl very-nice she Nora] “Nora is a very nice girl”. Other prefixes

⁸ Code-switching is especially common in colloquial speech and may well be an indication of the socially weak position of Irish (see Dorian 1994 for a similar view of Scottish Gaelic). Among the many words found in colloquial code-switching in Irish are terms referring to male or female private parts, e.g. *balls/bollocks*, *prick*, *cunt* (the latter three can be used metonymically for an individual). Sometimes Irish words are employed in comparable discourse situations, e.g. *tóin* ‘backside’ (not used metonymically).

⁹ *Craic* in IrE is subject to various restrictions, for instance, it cannot be employed in an exhortative sense: **Let's have some more craic, will we?* Furthermore, its localisation in colloquial language means that it is not appropriate in less vernacular styles, cf. ?*We had some very nice craic yesterday evening.*

¹⁰ In standard varieties of British English stressing *some* serves to indicate a small quantity, e.g. *I like 'some kinds of fish*, or an unknown identity, e.g. *We spoke to 'some man at the station.*

are found which have a similar effect, e.g. *fior-*, which literally means “true”, as in *Bhí sé fíor-dheacair mar gheall ar an trácht*. [was it true-difficult because of the traffic] “It was really difficult because of the traffic”.

3.3 *The vocative in Irish*

The function of the vocative (Irish *an tuiséal gairmeach* “the vocative case”) is to address an individual and get his or her attention as in the English example *Michael, we have to leave soon*. This function is a matter of discourse which is why the vocative is located in pragmatics. However, as part of its Indo-European heritage, Irish has morphological marking of the vocative. The vocative has traditionally been treated as a grammatical case and appears in case listings in early grammars of classical languages and later, because of this tradition, in grammars of Irish.

In Irish, nouns in the vocative are always preceded by the particle *a* [ə] which triggers lenition of the following consonant and final palatalisation (sometimes applied redundantly) of the noun marked for the vocative, e.g. *A Sheáin* “John.VOCATIVE” (cf. *Séan* “John”); *Anois, a chairde, cad a dhéanfaimid?* “Now, friends, what will we do?” (cf. *cairde* “friends”). As an extension of its use in discourse, the vocative is also found as an opener in letters in Irish: *A dhuine uasail* [person noble.VOCATIVE] “Dear Sir”, *A chara* [friend.VOCATIVE] “My friend”. For a discussion of the vocative in IrE, see Clancy (this volume) and Murphy and Farr (2012).

3.4 *Forms of address*

Irish has a different morphology for forms of address compared to English. There are separate pronouns for the second-person singular and plural: *tú* “you.SING” and *sibh* “you.PLURAL”. The latter can only be used for more than one addressee because Irish, like English, has no T-V system,¹¹ unlike all other European languages.

Despite the differences in morphology there has been convergence between Irish and IrE in the discourse function of singular and plural address forms. The latter has a number of strategies for expressing a pronominal second-person plural – *ye*, *youse*, *yeez*, etc. – and uses these to realise a vernacular tone in discourse, e.g. *What are yeez up to? Where are youse going tonight?* For many vernacular varieties of IrE a specific form of the second-person plural is the default. Depending on the pragmatic situation, the non-salient *ye* can be used (by standard IrE speakers) or the more noticeable *youse* or *yeez* with a final sibilant (Hickey 2003b).

The three features looked at in the previous sections can be summarised in table form, showing what equivalents exist in IrE. The

¹¹ The symbol T stands for an informal pronoun, like French *tu* and V for a formal pronoun like French *vous* (Brown and Gilman 1960).

particular augmentative use of stressed *some* (Hickey 2007: 376) may have been influenced by Irish where the prefix *an-* is always stressed (see 3.2 above). Supportive transfer during the historical language shift may well have led to the retention of a singular/plural distinction for second-person pronouns with the sibilant-final forms arising from the suffixation of the morphologically productive {S}-ending of English (Hickey 2003b).

Table 7. *Irish pragmatic features with formal equivalents in IrE*

Irish	IrE equivalent
Augmentative prefix <i>an-</i>	stressed <i>some</i>
Morphological vocative	appellative use of common nouns or names
Distinction with second-person pronouns	varied use of <i>you, ye, youse, yeez</i> , etc.

4. Conclusion

This brief examination of the pragmatics of two structurally diverse languages spoken in a single geographical area has shown that the shared cultural norms of both speech communities in Ireland are matched by an equal degree of shared pragmatics. Indeed it is uncertain whether communities could share such norms and values while nonetheless showing distinctly different pragmatic patterns. There are differences, of course, on a micro level and in many cases these are in turn determined by the structure of the languages involved. The following table indicates how common pragmatic features of IrE match features in Irish and what the likely sources of the former are.

Table 8. *Equivalence of IrE PMs in Irish*

IrE	formal Irish equivalent	likely original source
Hedging <i>now</i>	Yes	Irish (word)
Use of tag <i>is it</i>	Yes	Irish (phrase)
Non-contrastive reflexives	Yes	Irish (phrase)
Highlighter stressed <i>some</i>	—	Irish (prosody)
Sentence-final <i>so</i>	—	Irish (prosody)
Sentence-initial <i>just</i>	No	English
Focuser <i>like</i>	No	English
Approving <i>grand</i>	No	English
External reference <i>your man/wan</i>	No	English
Attention capturing <i>lookit</i>	No	English

On the level of formal equivalence there is a fairly good match between IrE and Irish. More general pragmatic conventions, arising from the structure of discourse and strategies for dealing with face, show even more overlap between the two languages. The evidence coming from both Irish and IrE, and indeed from other pluricentric languages apart from English (see Schneider 2008, 2012a, 2012b), would imply that pragmatic norms are acquired during, and formed by, socialisation, this justifying the conclusion that pragmatics is not an inherent level of language, like morphology and syntax, but results from the socially and culturally determined interface of language structure and language use.

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