Taping Ireland

A fresh look at our English

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Preface

This book arose out of my experiences collecting data on the English language in Ireland. Over a period of several years, I travelled to all parts of the country, north and south, recording English as used by the local population. Covering such a wide variety of places and people naturally meant getting to know my own fellow countrymen and countrywomen in a manner which had been hidden from me up to then. To those friends and relatives I talked to about the project, the events which took place and the stories of encounters seemed worth writing down and conveying to the general public.

One thing that was brought home to me on my travels around Ireland is the great interest of the Irish public in all matters concerning language. So by combining stories of recording people with facts about the English language in Ireland, I thought I could provide an accessible introduction to this topic, spiced with anecdotes of what befell me when out and about with a tape recorder and microphone.

Written by a linguist for non-linguists, this book is entirely non-technical and does not use special symbols or terms which only linguists are likely to know. There is, however, a short glossary at the end of the book in case anyone is interested in pursuing questions of language further. There are also tips for additional reading in case the subject of linguistics captures the imagination of any readers.

For the present story I have compressed a number of the journeys I made so as to produce something like a continuous narrative. The trips around Ireland which are recounted here did indeed take place as did the various incidents which are related. Because surveys of language are always anonymous, I have not used the names of any of the individuals I met on my travels. Here and there I invented a few names for the purpose of a story.

All in all, nearly 1,200 people across the 32 counties of Ireland were interviewed and I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them who cooperated so willingly and who made the project of taping Ireland such an agreeable experience.

Raymond Hickey
September 2005

I By way of introduction

What is a linguist?

The simple answer to the above question is: someone who studies language. Now there are various ways of studying language. You can spend years in libraries consulting books and journals and reading what other people have said before you. Indeed most linguists start off doing just that in order to bootstrap themselves into a position where they can say something of reasonable value about language. But in many cases one reaches a point where the books and journals are not enough. One is, in a very real sense, up against a stone wall. For instance, if as a linguist you are interested in the speech of a particular country, then you must rely on descriptions of the language spoken there. Now something will always be available and, in the case of the English language in Ireland, quite a considerable amount has been written over the past hundred years or so with a particular flurry of activity in the past 30 years. But in some respects there are gaps: information about spoken English in Ireland is not completely covered by descriptions in print (especially true of the south). A survey was started in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s but unfortunately that remained incomplete so that there is nothing like complete coverage for the entire island of Ireland.

In such a situation there is really only one ultimate solution. This is to rise out of your metaphorical armchair, go out on the street and record real-life speakers of the language yourself. This measure is definitely recommended if the language you are interested in is changing at the moment. To anyone living in present-day Ireland it is very obvious that the speech of the Irish is undergoing change. Just listen to any member of the younger generation, preferably a female, and you will realise immediately that the pronunciation of English in Ireland has been altered radically in recent years.

What are linguists interested in?

When people find out I am linguist they often react by saying some like the following: ‘Oh, you must meet my uncle Malachy, he has a funny way of pronouncing English, I am sure you’d be interested in listening to him’. To the dismay of the general public, linguists don’t usually react with enthusiasm to such generous and well-meant offers. The reason is that in linguistics it is the community that matters, not the individual. Now if 50,000 other people speak like your uncle Malachy then that puts a very different complexion on the matter.

So if not, we will just let Malachy live his life undisturbed by strange oddballs like linguists and continue pronouncing English in his very own way.

And while I am at it, I should point out that linguists don't want to know who you are, rather they support the club called *Informants Anonymous*. This does not stem from a disinterest in one's fellow human beings, but simply from the concern with the community again. It is the social group that matters because only groups of some considerable size can effect the way a language develops. An individual has never made a language change. And it is language change which makes the linguist's heart beat.

How to go about a survey

If you want to do a survey, and in particular if you are going to do it yourself, then the first step is to sit down with a map of the country in question and work out exactly where you would have to go, the distances involved, the time it would take, etc. When looking at something like English in Ireland then it only makes sense if it covers the entire country. This means from Malin Head at the tip of Co. Donegal to Mizen Head in South-West Cork. From the East coast to the West Coast and of course taking in everything in between.

The necessary equipment

For linguistic surveys you obviously need some necessary equipment. A good tape recorder that you can hold in, and operate with, one hand is essential. A linguistic atlas with sound is rightly expected nowadays to be available on CD-ROM so you must have equipment for digitising the sound recordings. But a couple of other things are also required. Consider for a moment the people who are taking part in the survey. Above all bear in mind that you will have both young and old. The second group requires special attention (something which I didn't think about at the very beginning and later regretted). This has to do with eyesight. On my first trip I met a number of people quite willing to help me with a recording but they didn't have their glasses with them at the time. So before the second trip I made sure to have what was necessary. I remember one day going to an optician's in the city in Germany where I live. On entering the premises the door set off an automatic bell and the lady optician came forward standing to attention both hands placed in readiness on the glass case containing various types of spectacles and waited politely for me to tell her what strength glasses I required. Without heeding the large range of neatly displayed wares I simply asked her if I could have four pairs glasses of four differing strengths: 1, 2, 3 and 4. Polite as the Germans are, she said 'Of course you may' and proceeded to lay out in front of me four sets of glasses. I am sure that she had customers previously who bought more than one set of glasses, with different frames, or different sizes, in different colours, especially as glasses in recent years have become an item of fashion. But my request seemed to be definitely unusual. I

could sense that something was itching her. Finally, her curiosity won over her natural German reserve and by way of apologising she began by asking:

'I know it's none of my business, but what one earth do you need four different strengths of glasses for?'...

The mobile recording studio

I am sure you have seen a television or radio van pitch camp somewhere for a certain event, like a sports fixture or a political meeting. To broadcast live they need quite an amount of equipment. To do a tape-recorded survey one admittedly needs less, but there is nonetheless a fair deal of machinery involved. For the linguistic road show I carried all this around with me in the car and when I stopped somewhere for the night, usually a bed and breakfast, I had to take in all the equipment and make backups of the day's recordings, transfer the material to the computer, digitise the audio data, check it for quality, burn it onto CD-ROMs, etc. This meant that whenever I settled down in a B & B for the night I invariably dragged in several metal reinforced cases with electronic equipment into the house even if I was only staying for a single night.

Invariably such a strange guest aroused the curiosity of the lady of the house where I was staying. Sometimes there was no comment, the lady probably thinking to herself 'It takes all types'. But on more occasions than one, I was asked politely the following morning just what business I was on. On a few occasions the curiosity was obviously overwhelming for the lady of the house. Once out in the countryside in Co. Clare I knocked on the door of a B & B, was shown the room, accepted, exchanged a few words with the lady of the house and said I would take my things in from the car. I had to make several runs, each time lugging in some strange heavy case, through the hall, past the open door of the kitchen where the lady of the house glanced out at me furtively and gave a slightly embarrassed smile when our eyes met. Then I disappeared up the stairs. I think during the third run, she came out into the hall to meet me and offered me a cup of tea.

'Yes, that would be grand, I'm a bit thirsty after a long day'. 'I'll come down to you in a moment', I offered.

'No bother', she replied 'I can bring it up to you'.

'Well, whatever you like'.

A few minutes passed and I realised I had forgot a connecting cable in the car. It took a little while to find it and when I came back the door of the bedroom was open. A tray with a pot of tea and a few biscuits was on the bed and standing in front of the side table was the lady of the house with wide open eyes marvelling at the collection of equipment — tape recorder, computer, backup system, headphones, microphone, various bits of wiring and cable.

'You're not some sort of spy, are you?' she asked hesitatingly.

'No, no, I'm afraid I'm not that important at all.'

Where to waylay your victim

When carrying out a survey one must always rely on the willingness of the general public to cooperate. The trick is to find a situation where people are maximally likely to participate. In this case as all the informants were anonymous and the survey was carried out in public, I usually ended up on the main street of a town of village, asking passers-by if they had a moment to spare. But modern life being what it is, most people are in a rush so one has to put a considerable amount of effort into planning the approach to potential informants. Where should one position oneself for such a task? The local post office is still your best bet. Sure, there are plenty of people in supermarkets, but on the way in there are in a hurry to get inside and on their way out they are laden down with purchases and in a hurry to get home.

So what about the post-office? If you think about it, the post-office is virtually the only 'shop' in a town where you go in with more than you come out with. So people on the way out have not only done what they went in for, but also are much the lighter for it. At most, they might have a newspaper under their arm or a pack of cigarettes in their hand. People also experience a sense of satisfaction in visiting the post-office, a feeling of having set a process in motion, the transport of the letter or parcel, and that they need not worry about it any more. From here on, the postal service will take care of it. Now the trick is to capitalise on the 'feel good' factor of the person leaving the post office.

Would you mind stepping into the car?

Assuming that you find someone who is willing to help, the next hurdle to be taken is to get them into your car. What sort of behaviour is that you might think. Well, the simple reason for asking people to step into the car is that it is quieter inside and hence any recording made will be of a much better quality than outside on the street. But nowadays people are rightly wary of any stranger who approaches and asks them to get into his car. So how do you allay people's fears? One technique I used was to park the car right beside where I was standing with the passenger door facing onto the footpath and slightly ajar. I put the keys of the car in a very visible spot on the dashboard so that anybody thinking about whether they should get in or not could see that the car was open and the keys were not in the ignition. This wasn't always enough to convince people, particularly females for understandable reasons. But it worked often enough to get a large number of recordings of good audio quality.

How quiet is modern Ireland?

You might ask why it is not possible simply to do the recordings outside on the street. It is not until you begin such a survey that you realise how much ambient noise there is in the present day world. Of course, if somebody said they felt

more at ease doing the recording outside rather than inside the car then I didn't press them on the matter. The eternal Irish wind was not in fact the greatest obstacle to a good recording — nor was the eternal Irish rain, more on this presently. What all too often brought a promising start to an abrupt end was a 40-ton juggernaut which decided to stop just beside me with its engine running.

Doing work like this has the peculiar side-effect of shredding myths you might have about the Irish. How often did I find that the legendary Irish roadworker was not leaning on his shovel and deliberating about the job to be done with at least three others but diligently using his pneumatic drill as if he was being paid some huge bonus for the whole he was drilling.

Anonymous linguistic surveys can only be done in public places, but you don't always have to be out in the open. There is one type of large building which turned out to be very suitable. This is that most American import, regretted by so many people in the western world today, the shopping mall. You see the thing about the shopping mall is that people have to get from one shop to the next and do so by walking along a corridor or, if the shop they are going to is on another floor and the lift isn't working (something which is often the case), by using the stairs. So what you can do is waylay a victim in the staircase or hang about and look innocent in the corridor of the mall and pounce on your victim when he or she tries to move from one shop to the next. This technique does have its own drawbacks of course. Again if you stop to think about it, shopping malls are in fact very loud places. You have no idea of the noise made by ventilators or air-conditioning systems. Equally, for some reason better understood by statisticians and those who concern themselves with the laws of probability, someone is very likely to push by metal trays on wheels or walk by with clacky shoes at the right wrong moment. And I often thought that I should have carried a little can of oil for the squeaky doors which swung to and fro so irritatingly.

Last but not least one should mention the very high likelihood of somebody's mobile going off in their handbag or backpack in the middle of a recording. Reactions to this situation varied: some people gave an apologetic smile, turned their mobile off and resumed the recording straightaway. Of course there was always the possibility of someone accepting the incoming call along the lines of:

'Hiiiii, guess what! He said he's going to come this evening. That's, like, real cool...'.

My young female informant would then slowly wander off, engrossed in a telephone conversation with her best friend, and now blissfully unaware of the recording she had just promised to do for me.

II The linguistic road-show

Getting started

The doggy badge

There are a few golden rules to observe when carrying out surveys and which prospective surveyors should take note of at the beginning. Do not impose yourself on people, always take 'no' for an answer and of course make sure that people can clearly identify who you are. In order to ensure the latter I made myself a big badge, in a plastic cover on a chain, which I hung around my neck. The badge displayed in large letters my name, place of work and what the purpose of the present survey was. Now not all members of the public like people doing surveys. This was particularly true in Northern Ireland where what one could call 'survey fatigue' had set in due to the number of British and American sociologists who have tried to discover the real reasons for the Troubles by running around the streets with microphones and tape-recorders and accosting housewives with bags of shopping and men seriously negotiating the shortest distance between home and the local pub.

But there was one serious drawback with saying honestly who I was and what I was doing: many people immediately started to question the value of my survey and were more than forthright in saying that I shouldn't be up to this. This reaction cost me many a good recording and forced to me to rethink my strategy quite early on. So what to do? Well the answer was quite simple: to claim that I was sent out to do this work by a merciless slave driver who took no consideration of the sensitivities and feelings of his conscientious assistant. My colleague XY from Z was blamed for my predicament. It was clearly his fault that I was annoying members of the public, intruding on their privacy, poking a microphone in their face and asking them to read out a long list of nonsense sentences and keeping them from whatever important tasks they had to do for something close on two minutes. This ploy worked perfectly: if anyone complained, showed some reluctance, displayed signs of aggression or just plain impatience, I simply added: 'I'm only doing my job'. If I felt that my victim was a particularly good representative of local speech then I could move the sob story up a notch or two: 'I have to do this to keep body and soul together', 'You know what inflation is like, the price of things has gone through the roof', and 'I'm doing this in the hope of getting a permanent job', etc, etc. When you sense that the person in front of you is a good dialect speaker then you are prepared to do ***anything***. Persuade, convince, cajole, plea, beg. The main thing is you get the

recording. Any pangs of conscience about unethical behaviour are instantly suppressed internally by your saying to yourself: 'It's all very innocent'.

The only question I'm allowed to ask

Writers on Irish literature frequently remark on the sense of place which Irish writers show and that this reflects a deep rootedness in the Irish character. I am quite sure that there is much truth to this and one of the present-day consequences of this is that people automatically expect you to know where they hail from.

In my survey the only question I asked people is where they came from. The reason was simply to determine if their speech was typical for a particular area. There was no problem here. Everybody gave a proper answer. But no matter where their home was, everybody just gave the name and assumed that I knew where that was. Often we were dealing not with cities or towns or even villages but just townlands. Now urban dwellers do not generally realise that there are literally tens of thousands of townlands in Ireland (about 40,000 in all). A townland is usually just a few square miles (smaller than a parish) with a couple of houses and a scattering of farms (the 'town' in the word is misplaced here, as the term refers specifically to the countryside). There may or may not be a natural border between townlands, say a river or a hill, but that doesn't have to be the case. Furthermore, if you buy a map of Ireland or part of the country, no matter how detailed, the townlands are rarely if ever entered. Townlands in Ireland represent a sort of secret geographical code which only the locals, and indeed only some of the locals, know. Frequently the name of the townland might not even be available in a written form. A good example of this is *Gregoritheragh* (is that the correct spelling?) near Dunmore East in Co. Waterford. Its main claim to fame for those who live near by is the number of short syllables in the word and the long straight country road to be found there. It would be interesting to know whether the inland revenue people or the post office know all the townlands. At any rate, my knowledge of, and respect for, the multitude of townlands in Ireland increased dramatically when doing the linguistic road-show.

When the Irish meet up

You can tell different nationalities by how they react on meeting a fellow national. This can be observed very easily on holidays, for instance. If two French meet up there are likely to talk about the number of courses in the evening meal, the range of wines available and the selection of cheeses. Two Germans have no difficulty in conversing because they can always discuss the punctuality of the local transport services or the number of times per week they get fresh towels and their rooms are cleaned.

So what do the Irish do? The answer may come as a surprise to foreigners: they question each other intensely until they find a common relative. If not that,

then at least a common acquaintance. If not even that, then at least someone who they both once met. This is a serious enterprise on the part of the Irish and it is not until the matter is resolved that the atmosphere relaxes.

The public behaviour of the Irish has to do with establishing a social link between speakers. And social interaction by the Irish is characterised by the personal contact, so if one is not immediately apparent, as with strangers, one must find one so as to feel at ease with a stranger. It has to do with expectations. When one Irish person meets another, we expect to have something in common, however slight, preferably on the personal level. Foreigners don't have such expectations, they are quite content to meet perfect strangers and to leave it at that. After all, you can't know everybody. But in a society which has strong roots in rural communities — and this is still true for the Irish — one expects to find a communal link with a stranger, no matter how irrational this expectation might be.

And who would you be?

There is, however, one difficulty with this behaviour when one is doing an anonymous survey. People who partook in the survey very often were curious to know who I was. Given the principle of anonymity I was not allowed to ask them their name, nor did I want to in this context. But some people could not be stopped and insisted on telling me who they were. Some Irish people today find this behaviour intrusive or annoying, but I was quite pleased to chat to my informants, once the tape recording was done and the recorder was turned off. And then some curious facts came to light.

The funny thing about the Irish search for a common acquaintance on social encounters — particularly in the countryside or in smaller towns — is that most of the time this really works. If you interview over 1,000 people, then you are bound to strike on some curious cases. There was the man in Dungarvan who was interested to know where I originally lived.

'I was born in Dublin, but I grew up in Waterford', I offered.

'And what's your father?', the man insisted, 'He isn't a doctor by any chance?'.

'Yes he is, as a matter of fact', I replied. My informant felt that he was on to something here.

'And did he work in the regional hospital?', the man kept probing.

'Right, yes, he did'.

'Well there you are, I was patient of his 30 years ago when I was living in Waterford'.

Another thing I forgot to say about Irish social interaction: you need a good memory for it. Often the common link is a situation which lies several decades in the past. In fact this is highly regarded, one person can show another just how important the link was and still is.

Distance from home base does not seem to matter in the search for a

common link. One time I was down on Dingle peninsula, on the north side, in a small town called Castlegregory. I met a lady in her seventies who obliged with a recording and sat into the car for it. Naturally curious, she was asking me how I came to be doing this and where I was from. Once I mentioned Waterford, her ears pricked up. Aha, there was the link, she was obviously thinking.

'I used to live in Waterford', she said without any inquiry on my part. 'I suppose it has changed a lot since those times, this was just after the war when I was a young woman, not married yet.'

'Indeed, it really has changed. Come on a lot now, with the centre done up. But of course there's a lot of building on the edge of town.'

'So where do you live in Waterford?', she continued with rising curiosity.

'Well, you might not know the street, it's called John's Hill, where the old Infirmary Hospital used be'.

'Know it!', she exclaimed, 'I used to live there, on the right-hand side as you go up, just before the nurses' home'.

I stopped in my metaphorical tracks and gasped, replying in an astounded voice:

'What? We live on the other side of the road!'

Small world, as the man says.

I'm not trying to sell anything!

The pace of modern life means that at least in cities the amount of time people have to stop and talk to strangers is ever more limited. In addition they nowadays have certain ideas about people who stand in public places with clipboards. They often rightly assume that these individuals are trying to sell something. The trick to avoid such people addressing you is to avoid eye contact and whisk by quickly. But how do you counter this strategy if you yourself are the surveyor?

Well, it all boils down to timing. You have about 2.5 seconds (real seconds, not Irish ones) to address a passer-by and catch his or her interest. So when out and about I practiced various ways of addressing people. 'Always be polite', I thought, 'that's a good start'. So I thought I could begin with something like: 'Excuse me for bothering you, but I wonder if you would have a moment to spare, please?'. If you say this too slowly your 2.5 seconds are used up and the potential informant has passed you by and it remains for you to enjoy the sight of his or her back receding into the distance.

Okay, so a little faster, 'Sorry, can I speak to you?'. This takes less time but it is lacking in one essential piece of information. So I varied it to render the following:

'Sorry, can I speak to you? I'm not selling anything!'

This had a remarkable effect. Suddenly the number of people who stopped increased dramatically. And they stopped with their own explanation:

'Oh, you're not selling anything, then you must be from a religious sect'.

'No, not that' — even more far out — 'I'm a linguist'.

Once people stop, you more or less have them. So I could then proceed to explain what I was up to.

It only takes a minute!

Modern life being what it is, we all have no time. So I always had to allay the fears of potential informants about how long this survey was going to take. All the phrases which I asked people to read were on a single page and I always added reassuringly: 'It only takes a minute'. Now living in Germany has made me aware that different nationalities take units of time seriously to varying degrees. Standard Irish reassurances such as 'I'll be back in two secs' don't generally go down well on the continent, because the continentals reflect for a moment and consider what one could possible achieve in precisely 2,000 milliseconds, particularly if the action the individual is about to undertake has an average duration of, say an hour or so, like going off for a meal.

But on the Emerald Isle references to units of time are still characterised by imaginative power and fictional creativity. For instance, if the driver of a jam-packed bus on a rainy day in Dublin refuses to let you on board with the candid remark that another bus for the same route will be along 'in a minute', you had better not hold your breath.

This flexible conception of time can work in one's favour. When negotiating with potential informants I pronounced solemnly, looking them straight in the eye, that the recording took exactly one minute. This is technically speaking true, assuming that one has a very fast rate of delivery and indeed there are Irish people who speak very quickly (and I am one of them). But most people needed just under two minutes. Fortunately, our own sense of just how long a minute is varies greatly and it would seem that for the recordings a minute could be stretched a bit like a rubber band, but without it rebounding on me in the form of protests about the length of time the task took.

What's in a name?

Identifying oneself when initiating the conversation for a survey can provoke an unexpected reaction as I discovered once when out and about in Athlone. I was in the new Athlone Institute of Technology and looking for a few young speakers from the area. The cafeteria in such cases always offers a good place to find willing informants. So I am approached a table with five male students sitting together, talking away to one another. Standing near their table, I turned to one of them and holding up my badge of identification, proceeded with my usual introduction:

'Hello, my name is Ray Hickey, I'm doing a survey about accents of English in Ireland'.

On this the other four lads burst out laughing, pointing and guffawing at the

chap I had addressed. He reacted in a surly manner, and chipped back at me:

'What? Is this some kind of joke?'

More than a bit taken aback, I protested my innocence: 'No, honestly I'm just doing a survey'.

Reluctantly he seemed to accept my account of the matter and so I pressed him on this: 'So where's the problem?'

'Nothing', he replied grumpily, 'I'm Ray Hickey too.'

The English language in Ireland

What will we call it?

There are various words to describe the English language in Ireland. Some are academic, some are more down-to-earth, but they all have their difficulties. Take 'Hiberno-English' for instance. This is a term beloved of academics, but unfortunately you have to explain it to most people before you can use it. as the first part of the word comes from the Latin word for Ireland, *Hibernia*. The latter term probably derives from the name of an early tribe in Ireland but the popular view is that it rests on the Latin word for 'winter'. In fact Julius Caesar, after conquering England, decided not to push on to the Emerald Isle because somebody had told them that there was only 30 days of light in Ireland per year. This reluctance of the Mediterranean Caesar to visit the damp and soggy home of the Celts on the edge of north-west Europe has meant that, although we have many historic monuments strewn around the countryside, there are no Roman roads or aqueducts or baths for the tourist industry to entice foreigners with.

Another label used is *Anglo-Irish*. This enjoys favour with many writers across the Atlantic, for instance the Canadians, when referring to Irish speech. It's also used by people working on literature and of course it is found in all sort of political contexts. But that's the difficulty for the linguist: a term which is used so widely is likely to have shades of meaning which are not intended in a discussion of language. So *Anglo-Irish* is out. Equally terms which refer to a supposed part of Irish society are not appropriate, so things like *Ascendancy accent, Protestant speech, Castle Catholic lingo* just won't do.

There may be words used for a section of the population. Perhaps the best example of this is the term *cant* which is found especially with reference to the language of the travelling people in Ireland. It is probably from Old French (coming ultimately from Latin *cantare* 'to sing') and not from Irish *caint* 'talk' (although both derive from the same root very far back in time). This case is similar to that of *shanty* which was thought to derive from Irish *sean tí* 'old house' but which, given that the Irish is in the genitive, is unlikely to be the source.

Now there are other labels for English in Ireland. Take *brogue* and *blarney*, for instance. Blarney is not just the speech of the Irish, but refers more to flattering talk to achieve an objective one does not want to be open about. The term of course comes (according to popular myth) from the Castle of Blarney, just outside Cork. Legend has it that in 1602 one Cormac McCarthy agreed grudgingly to give up Blarney Castle as part of a 'surrender and regrant' scheme whereby he was to regain the castle as a loyal retainer of Queen Elizabeth I.

McCarthy prevaricated and haggled so that the queen in desperation is said to have exclaimed: 'This is all Blarney — he never means what he says, he never does what he promises'. To succeed in frustrating the English monarch to this extent, McCarthy is thus reputed to have been particularly eloquent. And it may well be regarded as typically Irish to use verbal eloquence to outsmart a more powerful opponent. Well over a century later the locals decided to cash in on this story and established the practice of hanging visitors dangerously over the battlements (you get nothing for nothing in this life). Leaning out with their heads downwards visitors are allowed to kiss the ***Blarney Stone*** which is reputed to impart powers of eloquence on those who undergo this ordeal.

Another word which is seen as somewhat foolish by the non-Irish is ***blather*** 'nonsense, rubbishy talk'. This is not actually Irish, but from English ***bladder***. Nonetheless, the Irish show a particular partiality towards using the word, very often with reference to one another.

The term ***brogue*** is a different kettle of fish, so to speak. As all the Irish know, this is the word for 'shoe' in the Irish language, and was known to the Elizabethan English — Shakespeare used it this sense on one occasion in the play *Coriolanus*. But it could also refer to a lump in one's throat from another Irish word meaning 'grip'. The first mention of the term 'brogue' would appear to be by John Skelton in a piece called ***Speke, Parrot*** from around 1525 in which a parrot imitates various languages and dialects, including that of Ireland. The contemporary use of ***brogue*** is rather vague. It implies a low-status accent of English in Ireland, typically a rural dialect. The term has never achieved any national identity function in Ireland certainly because of its negative connotations.

But we haven't come to the end of the list yet. There is the more positive word ***lilt*** which is occasionally found to refer to an Irish accent, typically by the non-Irish favourably disposed to it. I remember giving a talk once in the southern United States some years ago. A neatly dressed lady came in and sat down in the first row and promptly fell asleep leaning over slightly in her chair as she breathed somewhat heavily. I don't know if you have ever been in such a situation but it is somewhat disconcerting. When the talk was finished, she suddenly woke up and then came up to me and thanked me. I couldn't help asking her had she actually taken any notice of what I said, but she replied quite confidently: ***Oh ye-e-e-s, I just lo-o-ove listening to the charming Irish lilt.*** If someone in England said that to me I'd say they can go take the mickey out of someone else, but the Deep South of the USA is a different matter.

On the subject of accents, one should perhaps mention the Irish word for ***blas*** 'taste' which is occasionally found in the sense of a pleasant tone of voice.

Ullans

Funnily enough, one form of English on this island does have a name, given in the heading for this section. Don't worry if you have never heard this before and

haven't a clue what it means. Most people don't. But what the term refers to is Ulster Scots, a form of the original Scots language (or dialect depending on what you think of it) which came over with the settlers from the Scottish Lowlands in the early 17th century. It supporters — who to a man belong to one ethnic group in Northern Ireland — claim equal status for their dialect with the Irish language and see it as a counterweight to the cultural gravitas of the former native language of the Catholics in Ireland. These aficionados of their linguistic creation take the matter very seriously and spend their time, stuck in their studies or labouring away in libraries, inventing new terms to cope for the various aspects of modern life, e.g. *heich heid yin*, lit. 'high head one' for *director* which is a classic case of creating a term which is maximally different from that in the language one sees oneself as struggling with for independence, in this instance, standard English. The enthusiasts then compose official documents, pronouncements, broschures in their new tongue and — yes, how could it be otherwise? — have reached for the poet's quill and offered the world lyrical gems in this undefiled, unspoiled and, rather unfortunately for them, unused language. Perhaps the best comment on Ullans would be to relate the story of the town in Co. Antrim where the county council saw fit to put up road signs in Ullans. The locals — hardcore Ulster Scots — smelt a rat and, not understanding what was written on the new signs, promptly proceded to daub them with paint, assuming that the words must be from the hated Irish language.

The provinces of Ireland

> 'The Munsterman's speech is tuneful but inaccurate; the Ulsterman is accurate but tuneless; the Leinsterman's speech has neither flavour nor accuracy; the Connachtman has both accuracy and tunefulness.'
>
> *An anonymous view of Irish speech from the 18th century*

There is, sadly or not, no way in which linguists nowadays could accept such statements. A basic principle of linguistics is that language is neither good nor bad, neither pleasant nor unpleasant to the ear. Language is like organic material, like your blood, it doesn't have any aesthetic value. What people often confuse of course is language and attitudes to people who use language. When someone complains to a linguist about some form of language what they are really saying is they don't like the people who use this type of language. However, the matter does not stop there by any means. The development of language is determined by society at large and not by a few scholars who think that they know more than the rest of us. For instance, if people in the south of Ireland do not as a rule like the pronunciation of English in Northern Ireland, and vice versa, then there is little likelihood that they will be mutual influence between the two major types in

Ireland. Indeed history bears this out. Apart from a border area running approximately from Bundoran in southern Co. Donegal in the north-west to Dundalk in Co. Louth on the east coast, the forms of English in the South and those in the North are quite distinct from each other.

There were originally five provinces in Ireland as the Irish name for the province implies, *cúige*, literally 'one fifth'. What we nowadays call Meath and Westmeath were a separate province but this came to be incorporated into Leinster. There were also some larger stretches of land with names not represented in any of the present-day counties, e.g. Breiffny in the area of Sligo and Leitrim or Oriel along the present-day border between Ulster and the South i.e. the counties Fermanagh, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth.

The names for the provinces of Ireland are a curious mixture of Scandinavian and Irish elements. The *-ster* in *Ulster, Leinster* and *Munster* derives from a form the Vikings used meaning something like 'place, area', the first part of the word being from Irish of course. The fourth province *Connaught* has a name which is completely Irish, meaning the land of Conn.

Leinster

In horse country: Kildare

Co. Kildare is typical Dublin hinterland. It has a character of its own from the time when Dublin was still far away and when it involved something of a journey to get there. But since the dramatic expansion of the capital large numbers of people have come to live there who commute into Dublin every day. In fact some towns on the north of the county, close to Dublin, have now almost become parts of the capital. It is true that towns like Celbridge and Leixlip are technically in Co. Kildare but for all intents and purposes they are suburbs of Dublin.

Kildare has also some interesting placenames. If you arrive at a village called *Suncroft* you might be forgiven for expecting a change from the usual damp Irish weather. And you might be tempted to move to the village of *Prosperous* to improve your economic circumstances.

Traditionally, Kildare is known for horse-breeding. The flat grassy plains of the country have been ideal settings for studs for several centuries now. The mention of *horse* brings me to a linguistic characteristic of hinterlands, just like Co. Kildare. What happens here is that pronunciations from the capital fan out into the countryside behind it, sometimes covering over local speech as it does, at least for certain sections of society. A good example of this is provided by the word *horse*. In fashionable Dublin English this is pronounced the same as *hoarse*. But for locals in Co. Kildare these are different words. That is generally true for traditional dialects of English around Ireland, so that phrases often included in advertising slogans, like *just 4 u*, do not work here as *4*, i.e. *four*, is

pronounced differently from *for*. Another of this kind of distinction which is present locally but generally lost by young Dubliners is that between *which* and *witch*. The first word has a slight whistling sound at the beginning while the second one does not. This means that for traditional Irish English the phrase *Which witch do you mean?* the first two words are pronounced differently.

By leaps and bounds

If commuters and people in contact with recent varieties of Dublin English carry it out into the countryside by moving there you could imagine fashionable speech from the capital spreading out like ripples on a pond when a stone is thrown in. But there is much debate about whether this means — sensibly called the 'wave model' — is the only means by which change spreads. If one looks at the way changes diffuse through space then it might be that they move by leaps, at least from one urban centre to the next, perhaps because young people in towns, especially females, are quick to pick up new speech and so what you then have are centres of change across the country with areas in between which still retain local pronunciations.

Is the box to blame?

By and large linguists believe that for languages to change speakers must come in direct contact with each other and so it is not enough for them to be exposed to different speech in television, or to a much lesser extent, in radio and the cinema. Certainly it is true, that despite the amount of American films which are shown throughout the British Isles there is no tangible influence of United States English on forms of British or Irish English, except for a few words, like 'cool' or 'gross', which have become popular.

But the situation in Ireland during the 1990s may require that we linguists revise our ideas somewhat. The rapid spread of features of fashionable Dublin English to all parts of the Republic of Ireland cannot be explained solely by slow fanning out from Dublin, nor by leap-frogging from town to town.

Now the features of Dublin English such as a dark *l*, the perky *r*, the high back vowels as in <ko-irk> for *Cork*, the front pronunciation like <re-oond> for *round*, are all features which one can hear with TV announcers and newscasters on national television, RTE. In addition, radio announcers and commentators also use this type of pronunciation, often loosely referred to as a 'D4' accent, just listen to programmes like *AA Road Watch* which gives traffic news every morning.

The upshot of this is that, while television and radio may not be important in bringing foreign accents to a country, they may be significant in the spread of changes within a country, especially if there is in practice only one television service for the entire country.

In the Wicklow Mountains

Dublin has different types of hinterland. The flat expanses of Kildare and Meath are areas which are quickly filling up with commuters trying to find affordable housing. But to the south one has mountainous Wicklow where settlement patterns are a bit different. So what do people speak like there? To find an answer to this question I set out one day and drove up to Roundwood. I parked the car and wandered down the main street. About half way down I had to walk under scaffolding because a couple were busy painting the front of their house and making the most of the good sunshine for drying. The woman stopped for a moment and wiped back the hair from her forehead with the back of her hand.

'Great daying for painting', I said with a nod of the head.

'Oh, you said it', she replied, 'we've been at it since early this morning'.

'Would you have a moment to talk to me, give yourself a break for a moment?' I suggested in a forward sort of way. A bit curious the woman said she would and asked me into the house to hear what my business was.

It turned out that the lady was a native of Roundwood, 'Wicklow born and bred, never left The Garden of Ireland', as she proudly proclaimed. She had a local accent which for the life of me sounded like that of popular Dublin, although she didn't go to the city very often. When I asked her about people living in Roundwood these days and how times had changed over the years, she told me about all the well-off commuters who had moved there with their posh Dublin accents and pushed up the price of houses so the locals found the going tough, especially the young people.

Now why should this lady's accent sound like that in Dublin, even though she did not associate with the capital but with her own neck of the woods in the Wicklow mountains? The reason is that popular Dublin English and the accents within striking distance of the city are fairly similar, as you might expect: vernacular speech in a geographical area tends to be fairly uniform. Because this lady identified with her locality she used the local pronunciation. Importantly, she did not want to sound like the posh Dubliners who were muscling in on the Wicklow property market.

The ladies of Arklow

Usually when you meet strangers on the street, you meet them one at a time. Sometimes in twos, if it's a couple you hit on. But in Arklow, along the south Wicklow coast I had the good fortune to come across three women all at once, three generations from a single family. It happened because the first, the oldest lady, was walking up a hill and happened to pause for breath where I was standing and said 'hello'.

'I have to do this in bits', she said with good humour, 'it keeps me fit, I do this a couple of times a day'. She looked around her as if waiting for someone.

'My daughter and granddaughter should be coming soon, I'll wait for them, they went in to chemists to get something'.

Like many old people, the lady offered lots of information without my prompting her, but that was fine by me and we struck up a conversation. 'From Waterford, you are? We used go down there for holidays, to that lovely beach in Tramore'. One thing led to the next and the lady and myself were soon talking about local words and phrases, the things people used to say when she was young and the like. To give her legs a rest, she sat on the passenger seat of the car with the door open. Suddenly she looked past me and called: 'Bridie! Here I am. Come here till I tell to you. This young man is looking at the way people speaks around here'. Her daughter turned out to be just as good company and just as talkative while the teenage daughter displayed a typical air of boredom. The two eldest women kindly did a recording for me and then the mother tried to get her teenage daughter to do one too. The teenager was less than enthusiastic and I told the mother not to bother, it didn't really matter. But the teenager said enough, while trying to get her mother to stop pushing her, for me to realise what her speech was like.

Now the puzzle here was: the speech of all three women was different, the greatest difference being between the younger daughter and her mother. If all came from the same town and all were female, why should they have sounded differently? To answer this question just bear in mind that when children are growing up, they start speaking like their parents. By the time they are teenagers, however, their take their cues from their peers. Even more, they start changing their speech and using features which are deliberately different from those of their parents. This stands to reason when you think about it. Teenagers do *not* follow their parents. They wear different clothes, listen to different music, go different places on Saturday night, etc. This is part of a natural weaning process. On the linguistic level we can see that one way language changes is by each generation speaking a little differently from the previous one. For instance, the youngest member of the Arklow trio pronounced the town name something like <awrklow> while her mother said <arklow> and the eldest lady said <ahrklow>.

The baronies that time forgot

If you have ever thought of visiting the extreme southeast tip of Ireland the piece of land which lies immediately south of Wexford then you will find that it is one of the most inaccessible parts of the country. This is very surprising on first sight, after all it is a relatively flat area. You would expect places which are difficult to find to be maybe up in the mountains of western Galway or on the slopes of Carrauntouhill on the main Kerry peninsula or in the depths of central Donegal. But no, the prize for inaccessibility definitely goes to south Wexford. And this although that part of the county includes one of the longest and straightest roads in Ireland, that between Wexford and Dungannon through

Wellington Bridge. But it is the section of land between this and the coast to the south which I'm referring to. It is known to all students of the English language in Ireland because in this pocket of the country a dialect of English managed to maintain itself from the late medieval period right up to the early 19th century. It is known from the name of the two baronies here, Forth and Bargy (read the second word with a hard *g* like in *get*). The dialects died out in the 19th century, all speakers of its changing over to more general forms of English in Co. Wexford. So how do we know what the folk speech of Forth and Bargy was like? Well, as so often in Irish history, the credit goes not to an Irishman but to an Englishman, in this case to a member of the military and to a member of the church. One Charles Vallancey was a retired English general with an antiquarian interest in language and he investigated the speech of Forth and Bargy and produced one of the very first publications of the Royal Irish Academy in 1788 which consisted of a small glossary of words written in this dialect. The second source of information about speech in this corner of Ireland is a glossary which was compiled by a Quaker minister by the name of Jacob Poole who worked in the area at the turn of the 19th century. His glossary was later edited by the Dorset poet William Barnes in 1867.

The rain in Dundalk

There are days when you wake up and you feel things are going to go wrong. A premonition, a feeling in your bones, that whatever obstacles can arise will do so. Just one of those days. If into the bargain it is pouring rain, the sort of rain you know is just not going to stop, then your thoughts confine themselves to limiting the damage and you look forward to the evening so that you forget this day and start afresh tomorrow.

When I walked out on the street in Dundalk early one October morning I felt this was one of those days. I was wet before I could get my coat on. I got pushed out of the way by a barman who was sweeping the grit from the floor of his pub out onto the street. 'No use feeling sorry for yourself', I thought and stood on the corner with the rain dripping off my nose and chin waiting for some passers by. 'I wonder how long I'll stick this?' 'Maybe your man has finished cleaning the pub and I can go back for a drink', I consoled myself. But that wasn't necessary because, lo and behold, somebody comes up to me and offers their help. And after him another, and then one more. 'Ah, the Irish have a soft heart after all' and my faith in humanity was restored. You see, people have pity on you when you stand in the rain and look a picture of misery.

Was it just the people of Dundalk? Who knows. But the way they speak is interesting. Now why is that? The answer is that Dundalk is a border town and it is where two types of speech meet, like two weather fronts which rub up against each other. On the one hand there is a very old north Leinster type of pronunciation — more on that in the next paragraph — which has managed to hold on in the region between the north of Dublin and the border with Northern

Ireland. On the other hand their is the general Ulster pronunciation of English which is pushing down from the north. And like the two weather fronts, it can go both ways: bits of then northern pronunciation can reach down into the south and a little of the southern speech can seep into the north (though not much of that has happened).

What is the most prominent feature of Ulster pronunciation? It is difficult to say what gets the prize, the sing-song pronunciation, the manner of their 'r', the way they lower their vowels and say things like 'bed' for 'bid' as in ***He made a bed at the auction***. There is one other feature and that is the very front 'u' the northerners have, think of the way they say ***soon***, almost like a French person. This front 'u' is definitely a northern feature — you have it in Scotland as well — but it reaches far beyond the political border between north and south. I remember meeting a farmer from Julianstown in Co. Meath who had this front 'u'. What we can say here is that speech traits can cross political borders and reach far into the country on the other side.

How many ways can you say 'square' in Drogheda?

When I was finished all the recordings for the sound atlas, an Irish colleague of mine who lives in Scotland asked me what the most interesting discovery I made was. I didn't have to think long about this. The answer is: just how special the accent of north Leinster is. You might be thinking now: why on earth north Leinster? Surely, West Cork or Kerry or Donegal or North Antrim are much more likely candidates for this distinction. True, these areas have their own accents and people around Ireland know about them. But the most unusual and the most unexpected is still north Leinster.

Just think for a moment: there are three ways of saying a word like 'square' in this region. To show this, consider how I fared in Drogheda. 'Drogheda?', you say. A medium-sized town half way between Dublin and the border with the north. Nothing special. True, the town is a very old settlement and plays a role in Irish history, unfortunately a sad one, due to the deplorable behaviour of Cromwell's men there. But the clue lies in the age of the settlment. Bear in mind that the Normans settled in the east of Ireland in the late Middle Ages and English began to establish itself in towns along the east coast without ever completely dying out there throughout the long history of the region.

Now to the *r*'s. The first person I met in Drogheda was a man in his fifties. He pronounced the word ***square*** as you would expect any southern Irish person of his age, nothing out of the way, something like like 'squa-uhr'. The next person was a young woman who was working in the Bank of Ireland and when out on her lunch-break kindly helped with a recording. Her *r* was the new 'perky' *r* which has been spreading so quickly from the Dublin area, she said something like 'squa-ir'. The third person was a young man of not more than 20 who was strolling along the main street and with little else to do, decided to do a recording for me. He was a local and worked parttime in the building trade.

This I found out later, because when listening to him I thought he was a foreigner who was staying in Ireland. Why? Because he said the word ***square*** like a French person with a so-called uvular ***r*** at the end, a bit like the sound at the back of the mouth as in the Irish word ***teach*** 'house'.

The uvular ***r*** found in north Leinster is apparently a relic of the older pronunciation of English in Ireland. How do we know that? Because it is not found anywhere else to any appreciable extent, just a few reports further down the east coast, for instance, in Waterford. And only country people or local inhabitants in towns can be found to use it. The reason this old speech has managed to survive in north Leinster is that it is squeezed between Dublin on its southern and Ulster on its northern flank and the local people in north Leinster have managed to keep something of their speech identity by still using this type of ***r***.

The Rackrents of Longford

There are many novelists in the British Isles who concern themselves with the life and times of a particular region, one need only think of writers like the Brontë sisters or Thomas Hardy. They are rooted in a tradition which actually goes back to an Irish author, Maria Edgeworth, who was the first regional novelist in English and greatly admired by her colleagues such as the most famous Scottish author of his day, Sir Walter Scott.

The novelist Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) was born in England at Black Bourton near Reading, the third child of Richard Lovell Edgeworth by his first wife. She started her education there and finished it in London after which she moved together with her father to her family's estate at Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, in 1782. Her father married several times and Maria, who shared his liberal ideas on education, was involved in the teaching of his later children. She was encouraged to write by her father and his influence is obvious in works such as ***The Parent's Assistant*** (1796), children's stories in a didactic vein. Her next work ***Practical Education*** (2 vols. 1798), was a collaborative publication with her father in which they recommended learning through recreation. Further books for children followed, notably ***Early Lessons*** (1801), ***Moral Tales*** (1801) and other collections of stories. This series continued for over two decades as can be seen by the later ***Harry and Lucy*** (1825).

The Edgeworth family was viewed favourably by the local population, a fact which meant that, during the United Irishmen's Rebellion of 1798, the estate was spared by rebels and not looted and burnt like so many others. At the turn of the 19th century, Maria Edgeworth published the book which was to represent her main claim to fame for later generations, ***Castle Rackrent*** (1800), and which can fairly be termed the first regional novel in English. It influenced other writers, most notably Sir Walter Scott who praised its fresh approach.

Later in her life, Maria was concerned with the management of the family estate and with organising relief for those suffering from poverty and famine.

This can be clearly seen in her final work, *Orlandino* (1848), which was written for the Poor Relief Fund. In her later correspondence she often showed disillusionment and despondency concerning the state of Ireland, especially after the union of England and Ireland.

Castle Rackrent is set in Ireland 'before the year 1782'. The story is narrated by the old retainer Thady Quirk and relates the eccentric excesses of three generations of the Rackrent family, a group of Anglo-Irish landowners. The book falls into two parts, the first recounting the exploits of the early generations of Rackrents, called O'Shaughlins originally. The tone is satirical throughout: Sir Patrick, noted for his lavish entertaining, drinks himself to death. Another, the miserly Sir Murtagh, dies in a fit of rage at his enemies. A third character, Sir Kit, is a gambler with a Jewish wife who he keeps in seclusion. He dies after a duel, being brought home mortally wounded in a wheelbarrow. The second part of the novel concerns Sir Condy, a figure with little education but political ambitions who sees himself as heir to the disasterous temperament of Sir Patrick. He marries a wealthy woman at the toss of a coin, but she abandons him, leaving him destitute. The satire reaches new heights when Sir Condy simulates his own death in order to witness his own funeral wake, but does indeed die in a bout of drinking in which he attempts to match the stamina of Sir Patrick. Thady's Quirk son Jason gains possession of the estate illustrating the decadent and destructive nature of the Rackrents. In its picture of the decline of an Anglo-Irish landowning family, *Castle Rackrent* is a typical 'big house' novel and established a tradition which continued well into the twentieth century as witnessed by many novels on similar themes, such as those by Molly Keane (1905-1996), e.g. *Good Behaviour* (1981).

The local flavour of *Castle Rackrent* is realised in two ways. The first is the portrayal of specifically Irish traits in the characters, implicitly contrasted with the English. The second is the use of Irish English sayings and expressions. The features Edgeworth chose are genuine, indeed most of the features are still found today. Just think of expressions like 'I'm bothered to death this night' or the use of 'ye' as in 'Didn't ye hear it, then?' or the Irish way of using 'and' to link parts of a sentence, for instance, 'I was coming home that same time from Biddy M'Guggin's marriage, and a great crowd of people too upon the road coming from the fair...'

The cats of Ireland

We tend to think of Ireland as a country of dogs, more accurately of big dogs, i.e. hounds. Everyone called *Murphy* reminds us of this as the word means 'hound of the sea', and *Dunphy* means 'hound of the castle'. And of course Cú Chulainn's own name means the 'Hound of Culann'. And then there is the Irish wolfhound, the favourite dog of Maud Gonne.

But what about the cats of Ireland? They are actually mentioned quite early on. There is a charming and anonymous verse in Old Irish, called *Pangur Bán*,

which runs something like the following: 'Me and White Pangur are each of us at our task; he had his mind on hunting and I have my mind on my work'.

And then of course there are the Kilkenny cats who fight to the bitter end. Speaking of Kilkenny brings me to a particularly feline character from that city.

Dame Kyteler in Kilkenny

This good lady is said to have lived in Kilkenny in the early 14th century. She is supposed to have married five times and her menfolk were involved in a primitive form of banking. Her main claim to fame nowadays is the assertion that the good lady was a witch, something which Holinshed in his *Chronicle of Ireland* relates. Apparently she was accused by the then Bishop of Ossory along with two other ladies of being involved in activities befitting only to a witch, nightly meetings in which spirits were called on and animals were sacrificed, the usual sort of thing for ladies of this persuasion. The accusations of the bishop were viewed differently by different people and some of her fellow nobles helped Alice escape to England after which we lose trace of her. Unfortunately, one of her supposed fellow witches met a more tragic fate: her maid Petronella was burned at the stake, a sort of proxy punishment for her mistress. As was so often the case with witches the accusation most probably had a different motivation: Dame Alice may well have been envied for her forthright manner and critical attitude towards the church. In order to substantiate the case against her it was maintained that after her flight a picture of the devil was found in her room (rather flimsy as criminal evidence goes nowadays). Alice's house is probably the oldest in Kilkenny and is now a restaurant and bar — Kyteler's Inn — with a black cat as its symbol.

Other happenings in the 14th century

Late medieval Kilkenny is known for something else as well. In the year 1366 the famous Statutes of Kilkenny were issued. All the Irish have heard about them, but just what were they about? The idea was to proscribe all manners and customs which were too Irish. The English government wanted to regulate all aspect of social and private life, even specifying that people had to ride horses in the English manner. And of course everbody was to speak English. But to make sure that they got the message, the statutes were written in Anglo-Norman, a type of medieval French.

From a linguistic point of view the statutes were not very successful. Ireland in the 14th, 15th and most of the 16th century became increasingly Gaelicised. The Normans lived out in the countryside and switched to Irish without too much fuss and gave the Irish many common words in the process, e.g. *páiste* 'child' from *page* and *garsún* 'boy' from *garçon*. The sphere of influence of the English shrank and it was not until the 17th century that the

position of English improved again due to vigorous and aggressive plantation policies of the English crown in Ireland.

What the Statutes of Kilkenny go to show is that you cannot determine language use by decree. If a community does not want to use a language, then you cannot force them. This fact is all too clear with the current demise of the Irish language in the west of the country. If Irish is not 'cool' young people won't speak it.

It is slight comfort that we are not alone in the lack of success in language planning. For instance, the French have an academy which tries to stop English words entering the language. But this is like trying to stop the tide coming in. It just won't work.

Voices from the past: A shopkeeper in Carlow

All counties of Ireland, no matter how small, have a main town which often carries the same name. There are exceptions to this, for instance, there is no town called Louth or Meath or Kerry, but there is a main town in each of the counties with these names. One of the smallest counties is Carlow on the east coast and it has a main town of the same name. There are five main towns on the east/south-east coast, namely Dublin, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford and Waterford, and these are among the oldest settlements in Ireland, certainly they are among the first places the English settled in. So Carlow was definitely on my list of places to go for recordings. And one day I was out and about there and happened to be standing on the main street in front of a shop. An elderly lady came out and stood on in the doorway of her family premises, a butcher's, and gave me a friendly greeting. We got into conversation and she said she would help me and asked me to come inside. Despite the sounds of customers in the shop and the occasional thuds from her grandson chopping meat on a heavy wooden table with his butcher's hatchet I managed to get a good recording. The lady was a mine of local lore, telling me about life in Carlow in the old days, and told me without asking that she was 82 and had lived in the town all her life.

Now you might think that someone like that, entertaining as they are in a general sense, would not be of great help in a language survey. Not so. Older people are indeed a great source of information. The reason linguists are interested is because of the way we learn language. As we heard above, everyone learns their native language in childhood and their pronunciation is fixed by the time they become teenagers. If there are no great upheavals in our later lives, like emigrating or switching to another language, then we keep the pronunciation which we acquired in our youth. That means, of course, that if you are speaking to someone in their eighties, you have a glimpse of what the pronunciation of their language must have been like 60-70 years before.

So what about the lady in Carlow? Two things were obvious. She pronounced the word 'north' as if it were <nahrth> with a very open vowel and she did not say 'nine' like <nahne> as many young people do today. What we

can see here is that the pronunciation of vowels has changed in Ireland over the past few decades. Indeed if one looks at the speech of someone in their middle age, say in their fifties, then you also find that they do not say <nahne> although they may not quite say <nahrth>. This shows us that the changes in vowels is even more recent because people who were determining their pronunciation 30-40 years ago (those now in their fifties) don't have this new pronunciation.

You might object to this way of probing into the past which linguists use. After all, you say, people do change their pronunciation and adapt their way of speaking during their later lives. Well, not quite. If mature people react to a new pronunciation, they usually do this with certain words but not with all of them. Here is an instance of this. The <nahne> type of pronunciation is a recent Dublin feature which is spreading. People outside of Dublin who don't have this may pick it up, but only in a handful of words, the most common of which are *Ireland* and *Irish* which they may pronounce as <ah-reland> and <ah-rish>. But they will still tend to use their old pronounciation for all the less common words which are written with <i> like *side, wide, prize*.

Munster

The city of Waterford, 'Urbs intacta'

In a way it all started in Waterford. We know that the Normans landed in 1169 at Bannow Bay behind the Hook peninsula and quickly proceeded to Waterford. In brief the background is as follows. Dermot MacMurrough, a local Irish warlord went into exile to Bristol after difficulties at home, particularly with Rory O'Connor, the then High King of Ireland. He asked for help from the English (then Normans, direct descendents of the French who came the century before), a step which led to him being later branded as a traitor par excellence. Dermot returned to Ireland with some Normans. Shortly after the first group arrived, Richard de Clare, better known as 'Strongbow', the then Earl of Pembroke (in south Wales) came. Strongbow intervened militarily to support Dermot's reinstatement. The payback was made in the form of Dermot's daughter Aoife who Strongbow married in Waterford. By these means he became heir to the kingship of Leinster which he inherited on Dermot's death in 1171. But it wasn't enough just to take Waterford, Strongbow proceeded to march on Dublin in autumn 1170. His sweeping success in Ireland alarmed the English king, the Norman Henry II, who insisted he show loyalty to the crown which he did begrudgingly. Strongbow died in 1176 and was buried in Christchurch Cathedral in Dublin.

The connections between the south-east of Ireland and England at this early time were concentrated on south Wales and the south-west of England. Henry III gave a special concession to the city by issuing a charter to Waterford in 1232 which allowed it to import wine and only pay half the tax normally levied. It exported wool and hides and in return imported wine (from France via

England). From very early on the contacts between Waterford and Bristol were quite intensive. In 1393 Bristol even had an Irish mayor.

This fact is of interest when one looks at language in the city. The local dialect of Waterford shows many traits of English in the south-west of England. For instance, people don't use *has* or *does*, instead they say *have* and *do* as in *He have a new job at the glass* or *She do be out at the weekends*. They also pronounce words like *isn't* as if written with a *d* as in *He idn't in form today*. These features are also typical of south-west English dialects and even found as far afield as the southern United States.

If you look at the coat of arms for Waterford, you see it says in Latin *urbs intacta* 'the intact city' and you might then wonder how this label came about. This goes back to 1534 when Silken Thomas, son of Garret Mór Fitzgerald, rebelled against Henry VIII. William Wyse was mayor of Waterford at the time and maintained the city loyal to the English king, i.e. kept it 'intact'.

There are other things you might not wonder about in connection with this city. Take its name, for instance. It looks fairly simple, *Waterford* 'the ford at the water'. But in fact that is not its original name.

Like so many of the Viking settlements around Ireland the city is situated at the estuary of a river, in this case the river Suir, where it has easy access to both the hinterland and the open sea. In the 9th century the Vikings gave it the name *Vaderfjord* 'inlet of the wethers, i.e. castrated rams' referring to the shipping of these animals from this region. So it is the city of rams, not of water. The English rendering with the element 'water' happened because the word sounded like the Viking word for 'ram' and also made sense as the city was on an estuary.

Linguists call this kind of twist to a word's meaning a *folk etymology* (etymology is the history of words) and there are masses of them in Ireland. Especially when an English name for a town or part of the country was 'created' from an Irish original. I came across a good example of this in Co. Donegal once. Driving along the countryside I arrived at a place called *Bonny Glen*. You might first think: sure, we are up in Donegal so the influence of Scotland — in the use of the word *bonny* 'attractive' — is not surprising. But the Irish name for the place is *bonn an ghleann* 'the bottom of the glen' and the person or persons who 'made' the English name either did not know this or just ignored it. Another example of this kind of thing is *Annestown*, a seaside town on the Waterford coast. The town has nothing to do with someone called Anne, this element in the name comes from Irish *abhann* 'river' and indeed a river flows into the sea at that point on the coast.

Incidentally, the Irish word for Waterford has nothing to do with the Viking name. The Irish term for the city is *Port Láirge*, literally 'river bank of the haunches', and is probably a reference to the low-lying hills which reach down on both sides to the embankment of the river. You can see this very clearly if you stand at Reginald's Tower at the east end of the quay and look up towards the bridge. The hills coming down on both sides do indeed look like haunches.

There are many Irish towns and places which have Viking names, particulary along the east coast, just think of Wexford, Arklow, Skerries, Howth, Dalkey. They provide further examples of misunderstandings of the Viking originals, the best example being the name of the little island to the north of Howth in Co Dublin called Ireland's Eye. The name is a misnomer, however, because the second element derives from Viking *øy* 'island' and is unrelated to the word for 'eye'. Nonetheless, the Irish felt that the word 'eye' was a likely name for a small island and so interpreted the Viking name as meaning just that.

The boat from Passage East

The area of Waterford is of interest to the linguist not only because of its early history but on account of much later developments. Emgiration from Ireland to the New World has a long history and in general the Irish think of the millions who went to the United States after the Great Famine. Those from the north may think of the Ulster emigration in the 18th century. But there was another significant wave of emigration from the south-west of Ireland, this time to eastern Canada. The background is as follows.

The island of Newfoundland (the locals stress the word on the last syllable) on the east coast of Canada was first discovered by the Vikings around 1000 AD. Then the first Englishman called John Cabot arrived there in 1497, only five years after Columbus landed in the Caribbean. Cabot was actually an Italian called Giovanni Cabote, but we don't want to put too fine a point on the matter here. The main thing is that the English took Newfoundland and after more than a hundred years, in the course of the 17th century and then even more in the 18th century, they started settling Newfoundland. Its attractiveness then and later was of course the great stocks of fish, above all cod, to be found on the continental shelf off the coast, the so-called *Grand Banks*. This actually gives the Irish name for Newfoundland, *Talamh an Éisc* 'the ground of fish'.

The first European to go fishing there were Basque and French, but the English soon got in on the act, especially from various ports in the south-west of England, in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. Now fishing is labour-intensive so the English on the way to Newfoundland, stopped off on the Irish coast to fill up their stocks of food and water for the transatlantic journey, but also to take across young Irishmen willing to work in fishing in Newfoundland. The English dropped into various ports along the south-east coast, for example at Youghal and also at Passage East. Word would get around before the English boats arrived and many able-bodied young men would then walk the distance to Passage East in a day or so and hope to be taken across to Canada for the fishing season during the summer. Later in the 18th and in the first few decades of the 19th century people began staying in Newfoundland and settling there permanently, especially after the building of St. John's, capital of the province, in the fine natural harbour on the Avalon peninsula. This led to the interesting situation that the population of Newfoundland is of mixed south-east Irish and

south-west English origin. The Irish in St. John's and long the South Shore of Avalon are nearly all from a radius of some 30 miles around Waterford.

This is linguistically a very interesting situation and you find that many Irish turns of phrase are readily understood and used by the Newfoundlanders, e.g. *Paddy's after eating his dinner* means for them and for us that Paddy has just eaten his dinner. There are also words in Newfoundland speech which come from Irish. The best one of these is ***hangashore***. A typical term for a fishing community where everyone is expected to go to sea. The word actually comes from Irish ***ainniseoir*** 'mean person' where the ***h*** was added on, maybe by English people, who did not know if it was there in the first place.

Out and about in County Waterford

What do we know about County Waterford? Well, consider its scenery: picturesque coastlines with long beaches and impressive cliffs on the south and mountains to the north and the northwest. It is also interesting linguistically for a number of reasons. It contains one of those few enclaves which we would like to think of as still being Irish-speaking. The parish of Ring (Irish ***An Rinn***), a few miles to the south of Dungarvan, was certainly one of the areas where Irish was maintained into the 20th century, part of the older Deise Irish which was once spread over a much wider area. The language is more or less gone as a day-to-day language but the parish does contain a college where Irish is the medium of instruction. But west Waterford is interesting from another point of view: it represents the transition from the old East Coast dialect area to the southwest of Ireland which is quite different and which is recognisable on the spot. Once you get beyond Youghal you find a very distinctive intonation in speech, the singsong of English in the southwest of Ireland is something people always notice. And speaking of Youghal reminds me of an experience I had there.

Out of the mouth of babes

Children are often more curious than adults, or at least they give this curiosity freer reign than do their elders who have learned to hold back somewhat in this respect. This became clear to me one day in Youghal on the border between Waterford and Cork. While standing on one of the main streets a young boy about 10 years old comes up to me and asks straight out: 'What are you doin', mister?' 'Nothing which matters to you really', I reply. As kids never take 'no' for an answer, he continued: 'Are you taping people? Come on, let me do it for you'. 'Lookit thanks, but nothanks. Maybe you can just push along', I say keeping my eye out for a willing adult passing by. All of a sudden the kid jumps into the car, where he sees the tape recorder. 'Ah, come on mister, let me do it'. At the sight of an unknown child in my car, I exclaim: 'For God's sake will you get out of the car, you'll have me arrested'. 'Ah, it's okay, mister', the child reassures

me, 'that's me mother coming towards us at the back'. My concern mounts to panic as I see a woman in her thirties with shopping approaching the car, obviously looking for her child. I immediately launch into an elaborate defence: 'Listen, missis, it's not what you think it is, your kid just jumped into my car before I could stop him and ...'. But before I could continue she added calmly: 'Ah sure, don't worry, he's always talking to strangers, and I keep telling him to stop that. But tell us, what are you doing yourself?'. I explain the innocence of my work and the woman adds helpfully: 'Listen, Larry will do a recording for you, he finds anything like that great fun'. Finally, I am reassured and taped the kid. That's how I came to have an eleven year old informant, the youngest in my survey.

Educated Cork

As the second city in the Republic of Ireland, Cork has a special status. True it is number two, and always has been, indeed this has become even more the case in recent years with the enormous expansion of metropolitan Dublin. Nonetheless, the inhabitants of Cork have a consciousness that their city is something special and when the Bells of Shandon ring out clearly and echo proudly through the Lee valley they warm the cockles of the hearts of all true Cork people.

And talking of the people of Cork reminds one of course of George Boole (1815-1864), the founder of symbolic logic which he outlined in *The Mathematical Analysis of Logic* (1847). It is just this logic is the basis for all computers today — all programmers know what Boolean operators are. Boole was actually born in Lincoln but spent his adult life in Cork where he was professor of mathematics at Queen's College (later University College Cork). A little further back in time we have the 'father of chemistry' Robert Boyle (1627-1691) who is immortalised today in 'Boyle's Law', a central principle of chemistry which states that the pressure of a given mass of an ideal gas is inversely proportional to its volume at a constant temperature. Boyle was the 14th child of Richard Boyle, the first Earl of Cork and so is associated with this part of Ireland. He was actually born at Lismore, in west Co. Waterford but it would be petty-minded to deny him his Cork associations because of that.

On meeting a lady in Cork one-day, who I wanted to provide me with a recording, I remarked on the beauty of her native city and congratulated her on being a genuine Cork woman. 'Flattery will get you everywhere', I thought to myself and proceeded to tell her that she had a very clear delivery of English. 'Yes', she replied immediately, 'that is because I had elocution lessons when I was young'.

What is this thing which we call elocution? To the linguist it is a strange outgrowth of society. Why should we employ people to change the pronunciation of others, assuming that these unfortunates cannot speak the standard version of their language properly? This benighted attitude led to generations of Irish

children being told to repeat sentences like *How now brown cow* in a manner which is assumed to be socially acceptable by people who did not share their social background or cultural assumptions. To be honest about it, elocution is linguistic snobbery at its very worst. It is based on the assumption that the speech of some people is bad and needs improvement in the eyes of the society they live in. And these eyes are invariably middle-class eyes.

Elocution is also a colonial hangover. Why on earth should we try to imitate the pronunciation of our language as spoken in another country? The only explanation I can think of is that we have internalised the attitude that the English language — which is our mother tongue and has been so for a couple of centuries — is somehow or other the property of the original colonisers. But language is not the property of a people. If by some fluke of historical development large swathes of English people became native speakers of Irish, say in the Home Counties around London, then the Irish language would be theirs just as much as it is that of the tiny minority of people who still speak it natively on the western seaboard of Ireland.

If we now try and find someone to blame for elocution then we are likely to be quite disappointed. The reason is simply that elocution is very much a home-grown product in Ireland, very much 'guaranteed Irish'. Perhaps the most important elocutionist ever was Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788), the father of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan. He was born in Co. Cavan and died in London. His career was quite varied, covering activities as a writer, actor and lecturer on elocution. He is the author of one play *Captain O'Blunder or The Brave Irishman* (1754) and editor of the complete works of his godfather Jonathan Swift in 18 volumes. In the history of Irish English Sheridan is remembered as the author of *A Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language* (1781) which contains a section on the Irish pronunciation of English. He is also the author of *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762).

Sheridan devoted enormous time and effort in trying to convey to the Irish (and incidentally also to the Scottish) that the manner in which they spoke was unacceptable in the hub of United Kingdom, that is in London and the Home Counties. In his grammar he railed against the Irish for their mispronunciation of the English language. What an act of linguistic treason! Why didn't he stand up for our pronunciation of English as something which is our very own and is as much a part of Irishness as our music or literature is? Matters did not stop there either. Sheridan's ideas were taken up by many English people, such as Thomas Walker, another famous elocutionist who explicitly adopted Sheridan's views and tried to make them known to an even wider audience.

Yes, you may be thinking that the present author was also subject to elocution. True, if only for a brief spell. Our teacher was one Miss Prendergast (God rest her soul) who dressed primly and viewed the lads of our boys school with eyes with exuded disapproval. No wonder we called her 'Miss Ghastly' and maintained that she gave us 'electrocution' classes.

Colourful Cobh

Anyone who was travelled around Ireland at regular intervals over the past 20 years or so will not fail to have noticed that people have gone to considerable trouble to improve the appearance of their towns and villages. This may initially have been triggered by the *Tidy Towns Competition* but the desire to improve the appearance of Irish towns has long since taken on a life of its own.

This attitude is nowhere more in evidence than in the town of Cobh, the famous port on Great Island between Cork and the open sea. Cobh is dominated by the large grey granite church which overlooks the town beneath it. All the shopfronts have been done up, the walls and the woodwork freshly painted and decorated with flower boxes.

I ended up in Cobh late one bright spring morning and thought it would be a good idea to get a speaker from this town which has been so important in the emigration of the Irish from southern Ireland for several centuries. At that time of day the sun was shining straight on the slope on which the houses are located and I thought that, as lunchtime was coming up, I might get a few sandwiches and something to drink and combine a recording with my lunch break. To purchase my lunch, I entered a small shop, a newsagents selling sandwiches and drinks and commanding a splendid view over Cobh harbour. I stood unsuspectingly in a small queue. The customer in front of me a man about 40 in a white overall covered in blobs of paint. He was also getting something for his lunch and when I had got my order and was leaving the shop, we both stood for a moment on the steps and remarked on the fine weather.

'Great weather for paint drying', he says, 'if it was like this everyday my work would be much easier'.

'Oh, right you are, better to make the most of it', I replied. I thought myself: 'will I ask him for a recording?', but that wasn't in fact is necessary, because his own natural curiosity had got the better of him.

'And what brings you would down here to Cobh?'

'Perfect', I thought for myself: 'I have him now'. 'Well you know, I'm doing this survey about the way people speak English in Ireland.'

'Really? Well you're in the right part of the country, if you want to hear our Cork sing-song.'

'Would you fancy giving me a sample of it. All you have to do is to step into the car for a moment.' 'Only takes a sec', I added reassuringly and before he had time to consider it, I opened the passenger door and invited him to sit in. And sure he did and in two minutes of recording gave me probably the best example of a Cork accent which I have ever got.

The lads of Bruff

In order to convince people of the harmlessness of stepping into the car with me for a recording I put the keys on the dashboard in full view of the informant.

Indeed in some cases I actually gave the keys to someone else if the person doing the recording was already in the company of others when I first asked him or her. 'Safety in numbers' usually meant that if there was more than one person present then I got a recording from one of them.

Handing over the keys to someone who waited outside the car proved disastrous in one instance, however. I was making my way through south-west Limerick and stopped in a small town called Bruff. As it happened a group of schoolboys in their early teens came by where I had just pulled up. As linguists always want to know what the younger generation speak like I thought this would be a good chance to get a recording. After a lot of jostling and joking on the part of the lads, I managed to get one of them to step into the car for me and read my text. In order to convince him, not of the lack of danger in this, but just to do the recording in the first place, I handed the keys to one of the other lads, who looked fairly responsible, told him he could hold on to them until we were through.

Inside the car I was concentrating on the recording and hadn't noticed that things had gone quite outside. On getting out of the car when I was finished recording, my heart sank. The main street of Bruff was as empty as if there was a soccer final on television. I turned to the young lad who was now feeling that he was going to get the blame for this. 'Where the feck have they gone to?', I asked in a tone which made clear that this was not the time for games. 'I don't know mister, I'm telling you, I don't'. 'Okay, I want those keys back and I want them now. Where the hell have those eejits gone to?' The lad had decided he should cooperate and suggested they had probably gone down the street, then to the left, across the field, over towards the houses where most of them lived. I started to run, calling behind me: 'You get moving too and try and find these boyos'.

Down the street I hurled, around the corner leading in left. The view across a field on the side of a river: not a soul in sight. The path through the field wound across to the right and disappeared in a clump of trees. Two seconds of indecision and I decided to dash that way, they probably had sought refuge under the cover of the trees and had made towards the houses. I sprinted across the field — as fast as my 47-year old legs would carry me — just in time to see one of the lads run behind the wall of a house on the estate. When they saw me arrive panting they realised I was not a danger and three of them came out on the street and tossed the keys to and fro between them, taunting me as they did so. I mustered up enough strength to make one last attempt to catch them and lunged forward at one of them. This was a signal for the lads to call it a day and skidaddle. The one I had set my sights on threw the keys high in the air over a nearby wall, crying 'Here, catch!' as he did. All the lads ran off laughing and I was left to climb over the wall, down a slippery slope to search, for at least a quarter of an hour, in the undergrowth before finding the keys. Arriving back at the car afterwards, cold, miserable and with chestpains from the exertion, I couldn't help feeling sorry for myself and thinking that there must be an easier way of earning a living.

In the kingdom of Kerry

There is no doubt but that Co Kerry occupies a special place in Ireland. It has a mild climate and some of the most beautiful scenery in the country. It is a rural county with no city and this lends a distinctive attachment to the countryside among those who live there. Kerry people are soft-speaking and polite, admirable characteristics which have led the non-Kerry Irish to make fun of them. But the inhabitants of Kerry are well-balanced enough not to be in the least offput by the rest of the country poking fun at them: 'that's their problem' was the simple answer I once got from a Kerry landlady in a B & B who was asked by another guest if she minded all the Kerry jokes the others made.

The Irish language has a long tradition in Kerry and many of the finest poets of our literature hailed from there. There was also a flurry of writing from various inhabitants of the Blasket Islands off the tip of Dingle peninsula in the early twentieth century and these books give a cherished glimpse of the life of people who lived in a close-knit Irish-speaking community far removed from the Anglicised urban Ireland of today.

There are many effects which the Irish language had on the type of English which the Irish fashioned for themselves when switching over to the new language in the past few centuries. By and large, linguists think that when people are shifting to a new language they search for all the ways of expressing distinctions which they know from their first language. A good example of this can be seen in the manner in which one can stress in Irish that something is done repeatedly. The linguists use the term 'habitual' for this, from 'habit' of course and that can be seen in an Irish sentence like ***Bíonn sé amach go luath gach maidin***. In the speech of rural Kerry people this would be rendered by a sentence like ***He does be out early in the morning***. What you can see here is that those forms of Irish English which use such structures actually are more expressive than standard English in that they can make an additional distinction not available in the standard.

This is actually a very important point about dialects. By and large, educated speakers disdain dialects and react unfavourably to all the expressions they contain which are not in the standard version of a language. But frequently dialects actually allow distinctions which the standard does not permit, like the example just given. It is important to stress that there is nothing 'wrong' with a sentence like ***He does be out early in the morning***. Quite the opposite, it adds to the expressiveness of English grammar.

There is another point worth making here. Why should people use such structures now although the majority no longer speak Irish? The answer is simply that it is part of the way they speak English. We all identify with the form of language which we learned in our childhood and youth and so we use those expressions which we know best. Our type of language is part of our identity and, all other things being equal, we keep to it throughout our lives.

Chasing a blacksmith

Sometimes it is not that easy to keep up with informants in a survey. What do I mean by that? Just what it says, in a literal sense. Take the morning when I was standing on the main street in Dingle town, hoping for a recording. Coming up on my left I noted a sturdy Kerry man, in his sixties probably, but strong and fit and with a healthy complexion. When he was about to pass me, I addressed him and asked if he would help. He was very friendly, no doubt, only he kept on walking, half turning around to see if I was following him to talk with him. This I did and he kept moving along the street at a brisk pace with yours truly trailing behind him, tape recorder and clipboard in hand, hoping that he might come to a stop and do the needful for me with my recording. But he was not going to stop. It wasn't that he was rushing somewhere. He probably just felt that if I wanted something from him it was up to me to keep pace with him. I noted he was carrying a sack with things inside, I couldn't tell, maybe bits of wood or the like. Anyway, he turned into into a side street and finally decided that he would oblige. 'Arrah, I'll do your recording for you. I suppose there's nothing wrong with it', he said with a certain gruffness, 'hold onto this sack for me', he asked holding it out with one arm for me to take. I reached for the sack, he let go and it fell on my feet with a thud. The thing was full of horseshoes! The weight of them hitting my toes gave me pains in my feet for hours afterwards. If the man could carry that weight with one hand then it is true that the Kerrymen are sturdy into old age. After the recording I was curious to know just what the man did, he was talkative no bother. After he picked up his sack of horeshoes he walked along on his way and I accompanied him for a good bit. It turned out he was a farmer from a few miles outside Dingle and worked as a blacksmith on the side. He was in town to meet someone who wanted him to fit new hooves to one of his horses. He liked the mixture of farmer and blacksmith. 'When I have the milking done I go off to some other places and can do new hooves for some horses. The main thing is to have the work finished early in the morning and then I have plenty of time to travel around if needs be.'

There was one thing about this man's speech which struck me at that moment but which neither he nor any others who have noticed. He stressed the fact that each morning he had some work to do on the farm and one he had finished that, he was free to drive off somewhere else. Now in Irish English we have a special way of expressing that we have done something which we set out to do. Say, for example, I lent a friend of mine my copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and meet him two weeks later, I am likely to ask him: 'Have you *Ulysses* read?' What's unusual about that, you might think? Nothing of course in the Irish context. But an English person would be more inclined to say 'Have you read *Ulysses*?' However, to an Irish person this question would mean: 'Have you ever read the novel?' whereas the first form of the question implies that someone had set out to do something and I am inquiring whether this has

been completed. So in Irish English we have a neat contrast between a sentence in which the object comes before the verb — indicating an action which is consciously completed — and a sentence in which the object comes after the verb — indicating a very general statement. My blacksmith-farmer set out every morning to milk his cows early and when this work was completed he was free to leave the farm so it was natural that he said 'When I have the work done' rather than 'When I have done the work'.

Why Kerry is different from the rest of Ireland

It can't be denied that people in the countryside are often more curious than those in cities. Or maybe they just give their natural human curiousity freer rein. At any rate this can lead to interesting experiences and I had one of these when out and about on the Dingle pensinsula when doing my survey. It was around lunchtime and I was sitting in the car with the door open and drinking a cup of tea from my flask. A man came along the street and stopped when he was level with the car. 'Lovely day, now', he says, looking up at the bright sky. 'And what brings you out here', he asked immediately. 'Just having a bit of a break', stating the obvious, but willing to converse with the man who had come over to me. He held the end of a long stick with both his hands against his chest and leant on it, brushing the ground with his right shoe as he chatted to me. After explaining what I was up to, he got interested and starting telling me about the people who come down to Dingle peninsula in the summer. 'It's quite enough now, but when June / July comes, this place fills up real quick. Those new houses you saw on the road into here, there're all holiday homes. And lots of the people around hre take in students for a few weeks. You know, young fellows and girls who want to brush up their Irish for school.' I was wondering whether he was an Irish speaker and asked him about this. 'Oh, indeed I am', he says. 'Myself and my wife we both true Irish speakers. Sure, come along here and I'll introduce her to you', Seamus — as the man was called — offered.

I walked the hundred yards or so back to his house and followed Seamus inside. His wife Máire was busy preparing lunch and with all the hospitality of genuine country people in Ireland, insisted that I stay and eat with them, which I did gladly. After we finished, Seamus said he would do a recording for me. It turned out a little bit different from the others because when he began with the sample sentences he translated them into Irish, rather than just reading them out in English! I let him carry on for a while but had to stop him after a bit. He wasn't a bit put off and just said: 'Read them in English? Sure that's easy', probably expecting that I had a more difficult task for him.

Now a foreigner might be forgiven for thinking that Seamus was not an Irish speaker. Why so? His English sounded too good. He didn't speak with a strong Kerry accent. In fact he sounded quite standard in his speech. Is this strange? Well, from the linguistic point of view it is not. Indeed his kind of standard speech is often the sign of a genuine Irish speaker. The reason is that

native speakers of Irish use this as their first language in their childhood and English comes second. All the nuances of accent and expression go into their Irish and their English remains a bit uneventful — standard if you like. This applies to people from different parts of the country. For example, a friend of mine from Connemara is a native speaker of Irish but when he speaks English you could not for the life of you tell he was from Co Galway.

Passing through Limerick

Foreigners tend to associate Limerick with poetry. At least that it the impression I get from Germans who have ever had occasion to mention the city. The reason lies of course in the rhyming verse which bears the name of the city. The Limerick is a five line jingle with the characteristic rhyming scheme of AABBA. The first limericks are recorded in *The History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women* (1820) and *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* (c 1821). But it was the poet Edward Lear (1812-1888) who popularised the form in his *A Book of Nonsense* (1845) which he wrote for the grandchildren of the earl of Derby. The poems appear to have been first offered at parties and after reciting the verse a chorus would sing 'Will you come up to Limerick?'. Why they (English people) should sing just this is unknown but from this line the name for the verse arose and it was kept thereafter. The Irish never took particularly to this verse form and most of the limericks — whose authors are known — have been written by English people.

Limerick has come on by leaps and bounds in the past decade are so and every time I go there to visit one of my sisters I see improvements in the city. But there are parts of it where people tell you not to go if you don't have to and if you say that sort of thing to linguists, then that is the very place they will head for. One morning between 10 and 11 I drove into a housing estate known for being not the best part of town (to use a euphemism). There weren't many people around. The men were at work and the women were too or our at the supermarket or inside their houses. So I scoured the place hoping to find someone for a recording. After a while I found three young lads holding up the wall as the man says. They were standing at the end of a street leaning against the gable end of a house. 'Aha, here we go', I thought. I parked the car, got out and approached them: 'Well lads, how's it going?'. 'Great, what are youse up to yourself?' was the friendly reply. I explained my case and asked one of them to do a recording. 'No problem', say the others and push their friend towards me. 'He'll do it for you, won't you Mick'. Before Mick could reply they had him on the passenger seat in the car and they sat into behind. 'No harm in that', I think. The lads get quite euphoric. 'Hey this is great, you're taping people around Ireland, that's cool'. 'Well, yeah, that's my job', I reply prosaically. Suddenly one of the chaps behind me starts to get second thoughts: 'I don't think you should be doing this'. 'Sure it's all very innocent', I reassure him. But by now both he and his friend were getting decidedly aggressive. 'Listen you bugger,

what the — do you think you're doing poking that thing into Mick's face!' and one of them punches me in the neck. The time had come to terminate the recording prematurely. 'Mick, get out of the car' I said in as decisive a tone as I could muster. Out I hop myself and pull the back door open. 'And as for you b—s, get the f—g hell out of this car right now or I'll change the shape of your faces for ye'. Not having much practice at playing the tough guy, I wasn't sure that my French (to use another euphemism) would work. But it did, probably just about. They got out, I got back in — presto style — locked the car from the inside and to a stream of abuse which I could hear through the closed windows of the car, tore off out of the estate. 'So that's what junkies are like when they pumped full', I thought to my innocent self when I was speeding out of Limerick as fast as I could on the motorway to Galway.

A helpful man in Clare

Sometimes a situation which begins quite innocently can become suddenly difficult. This happened in a very unsuspecting way for me in a small town in Clare which will remained unnamed. I met a man, in his fifties I suppose, walking along the street and asked him if he would help with a recording which he said he would gladly do. When he realised there was something to read, he stopped and said he didn't have his glasses (it was this event which lead me later always to have reading glasses in the car). 'No bother he says, I live down the road to the left'. We can drive back and we'll do the recording in the kitchen in our place'. 'If that's no putting you out', I said offering him the chance to retract his friendly offer. 'Not at all, you can have a cup of tea as you're at it'. We arrived at the house and Dermot proceeded into the house ahead of me and led me into the kitchen. Then behind us a woman appeared who was obviously his wife. 'What's that fellow doing here', she shot out aggressively. 'I met him in the village, he's doing a survey on English in the country'. 'You mean he wants to tape you?', she gasped. 'Sure there's nothing to it and if you don't mind I'm making the two of us a cup of tea'. By this time the wife had moved her tone a couple of notches. 'Dermot Kelly, you're not doing no recording for nobody'.

With the temperature close to boiling point, I decided this was the time for me to be off. 'Listen folks, I'm sorry to have been such a bother. I'll be on my way now'. Dermot stretches out his left arm in front of me, facing his wife. This was obviously a marital confrontation. 'No bother, Ray, I said I'll do the recording for you and do it I will'. Someone had to back down here. 'I'm after telling ye I don't want no strangers in my kitchen', the wife tries next. 'I'll ask whoever I likes into this kitchen and bother my barney about what you thinks of it'.

'Really, it's not that important, thanks all the same', I intervene feebly. But Dermot wasn't listening to me at this stage. 'Well you done it once too often now. I amn't going to let you take this lying down, I tell ye', she threatened and ran out the kitchen, giving the door an almightly slam in the process.

Now you should understand that linguists are not interested in marital rows per se but there is one advantage — linguistically speaking — from such scenes. When people get angry or really involved in a topic they stop checking their speech and fall back to their most natural mode of speaking. In the case of the couple just mentioned I could see that both of them spoke very good country dialect while arguing with each other. Doing the recording and talking to Dermot afterwards (I did stay for the cup of tea in the end) I noticed that his speech had become a bit more standard.

Linguists have observed this behaviour for a long time and one of the common techniques in interviews is to ask people about something which really captures their interest, such as a near death experience, the price of living, the level of taxes or the like. You could of course start an argument with someone to get them to forget their speech, but this is thin ice to be treading on.

Kiltartanese

For both English writers and Irish writers not primarily concerned with matters Irish, there existed a repertoire of stock features which were generally assumed to be representative of Irish English. For instance, in his *Soldiers Three* (1890) Rudyard Kipling avails of two devices to add Irish flavour to direct speech as in 'Those are the Black Oirish and 'tis they that bring dishgrace upon the name av Oirland' where the spelling *dishgrace* implies that the first syllable was pronounced like the word *dish*. The spellings *Oirish* and *Oirland* suggest a traditional pronunciation in Dublin where the vowel starts far back in the mouth. This was something for which the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan was ridiculed by Fanny Burney (1752-1840) at the beginning of the 19th century. George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) used such features occasionally in his plays. For example, in *John Bull's Other Island* he writes *i* for *e* in many words (especially before *n*) as in 'I'm taking the gintleman that pays the rint for a dhrive'. This pronunciation is still typical of counties Cork and Kerry.

A quite different stance towards Irish English was taken by those authors directly involved in the Irish Literary Revival from the 1880's onwards. A good practitioner of a radically different representation of Irish speech was Lady Gregory who wrote dramas about the Irish peasants in her neighbourhood. The setting for these works was often Kiltartan, a district not far from Coole Park (just outside the town of Gort) in south County Galway, the home of Lady Gregory who was among the first to produce a specific kind of Irish English for her dramas in local settings. This type of English came to be referred to disparagingly as 'Kiltartanese' by those who felt that it was artificial. However, it was to reach new heights and a different quality in the plays of Synge at the beginning of the 20th century.

The flavour of this speech can be glimpsed from the sentences which Lady Gregory put into the mouths of the characters in her plays. For instance, a peculiar feature is seen in the following example *It's a pity some honest man*

not to be the better of that. This became known as the ‘Kiltartan infinitive’ and is a calque on Irish as can be recognised from the equivalent *Is trua fear cneasta gan a bheith níos fearr*. But many of these features came to be regarded as ‘Stage Irishisms’ and people avoided them which is why not all of them have survived today.

Discover Dublin English

Och Dublin City, there is no doubtin'
Bates every city upon the say
'Tis there you'll see O'Connell spoutin'
An' Lady Morgan makin' tay
For 'tis the capital of the finest nation
Wid charmin' pisintry on a fruiful sod
Fightin' like divils for conciliation
An' hatin' each other for the love of God

Ballad from the early 19th century

There is a problem when talking about English in Dublin: there is no name for it. This is quite surprising. After all, many other prominent forms of English do have their own names. The genuine Londoners speaker Cockney, the real Liverpool people speak Scouse, the Newcastle locals speak Geordie.

On the other hand, the city itself has two names: the first ***Dublin*** means 'black pool' from Irish ***Dubh Linn***, a term used particularly by the Vikings and Anglo-Normans, the Anglicisation of which gives us the English name of the city. The second, and that used in Irish today, is ***Baile Átha Cliath*** which means 'town at the hurdled/fortified ford'. The Vikings established the modern settlement of Dublin in the late 10th century. The English reached the city by 1170 and since then the English language has been present there. The vintage of Dublin English in certainly responsible for its phonological profile which is unique among the varieties of present-day English.

New English in Ireland

Anyone over 40 in present-day Ireland cannot fail to have noticed that the pronunciation of English has changed markedly. The changes which have taken place all emanate from Dublin and have been picked up with great enthusiasm by certain sections of the population and have become characteristic of the speech of the younger generation.

Before looking at the nature of these changes, one should pause to consider why speech should change anyway. Linguists have observed on many occasions that at times of social change, language is also altered. Now the changes in Ireland in the past two decades have been very dramatic and nowhere is this to be more clearly seen than in Dublin. A new jet set has arisen and the people working in information technology have reached levels of wealth which the Irish

previously could only have dreamed of. This has levelled off since about 2001, after the dot-com bubble burst. But throughout the entire 1990s Ireland experienced an unprecedented economic boom.

The new generation of Irish are sophisticated, urbane, international in their outlook and definitely do not want to be associated with what they see as a backward Irish way of life. In Dublin the trendy people do not want to be associated with lower-class Dubliners and avoid the local accent like the plague. In order to dissociate themselves from others, speakers often change their speech to make it even less like that of those they wish to distance them from. That is the origin of the new pronunciation of English in Ireland. Fashionable Dubliners developed new modes of speech which were diametrically opposed to those of the locals.

'Go right at the Cork roundabout'

Just take the way people pronounce a word like 'Cork' nowadays. Traditionally the word is spoken with an open vowel, indeed the local pronunciation is very open, so that the word sounds as if it was written *Cark*. This open vowel is part of a traditional pronunciation of English in all of the south of Ireland whereby back vowels were pronounced quite openly. This pronunciation goes back a long way. For at least two centuries, the open back vowels have been a clear indication of an Irish accent.

So what the fashionable Dubliners did was to raise the vowel, that is pronounce it as a closed vowel, so that you end up with something one could write as 'ko-irk'. There are many reactions to this and to understand them allow me to make a few general remarks first.

When language changes people react to this in predictable ways. Invariably speakers regard language change as language decay. This has always been the case and will always be so. It probably has to do with our natural reluctance to accept change in general. Furthermore, people tend to associate their disliking for individuals with the way the latter speak. What happens then is that certain individuals find that the 'ko-irk' pronunciation gets up their noses perhaps because they don't like the younger urban generation which uses this type of pronunciation.

Language change is rarely confined to one item of pronunciation. And in the current changes in Dublin English a number of changes have taken place together. Most of these can be seen in the heading for the present section. Fashionable Dubliners say <go-oo> rather than <go>, they tend to say <rahght> rather than <right> and most obviously they tend to have a very front vowel in words like roundabout so that the pronunciation is something like <re-oond abe-oot> so that the whole sentence would sound like <go-oo rahght at the ko-irk re-oond abe-oot>.

The perky 'r'

Linguists have a funny habit of referring to people's accent as being *r*-ful or *r*-less. What they mean here is that some individuals pronounce the <r> after a vowel in a word like <card> and some don't. This distinction is important in England where the prestigious forms of speech don't have the <r> after a vowel and more rural forms of English, including all forms of Scottish English, which do pronounce the <r>.

In Dublin English this is an important consideration. Local speech has only a weak <r> so that words such as *car* and *card* are pronounced like <kah> and <kahd>. Now remember that the new pronunciation is aimed at increasing the distance to local pronunciation in Dublin, so the fashionable speakers exaggerate the <r> and say things like <ka-ir> and <ka-ird>. In the present book I refer to this pronounciation as 'the perky *r*' because is has a very clear quality and is produced by curling the tip of the your tongue backwards towards the palate.

How dark is your 'l'?

I wonder if you ever noticed that younger people have begun to pronounce *l* differently from the older generation? Traditionally, Irish English was known for what is called a clear *l*. By this is meant that a word like *field* is spoken using a long clear vowel followed by *ld* without any change in pronunciation. This was so typical of Irish English that linguists always remarked on it as being a good way of distinguishing our form of English from that in other countries. But part of the recent changes in Dublin English and something which has spread like wildfire throughout the entire republic of Ireland is the use of a so-called dark-*l*. What is meant here is that the *l* has a dark, hollow sound which is very noticeable if it is preceded by a high front vowel. So the new pronounciation of *l* would mean that a word like *field* would be spoken as <fee-uhld>.

There is no doubt that this is a feature of Dublin English which has spread throughout the country (see the discussion of spread below). There is no record of a dark *l* anywhere in the south of Ireland. The reason for this is that the Irish seemed to have used the clear *l* from the Irish language when they transferred to English over the past few centuries. The dark *l* of Dublin English derives from the speech of early English settlers there. But because English in Dublin acts as a model for the rest of the country, this has then spread out from the capital.

What is our slit-t?

Before looking at where the changes I have been discussing might have come from, it should be said that there are many features of Irish English which characterise our speech and make it different from that of other English-speaking countries. Perhaps the best example of this is the way we pronounce *t* at the end

of a word or in the middle when it is between two vowels. A word like *cat* or *better* is spoken with what one could call a slit *t*. By this is meant that that we don't quite press our tongue against the ridge behind our teeth as we do when the t is before a vowel as in *two*. The sound we produce is a slight whistling sound. When foreigners notice this they sometimes think that we are saying *s*. But any Irish person can confirm that *s* and the slit *t* are very distinct. After all, for us the words *kiss* and *kit* do not sound the same.

The slit *t* is not found in any other English-speaking country, with the exception of Canada where in Newfoundland on the Atlantic coast this sound is also used, most probably an inherited feature from the many emigrants there from the south-east of Ireland in the 18th and early 19th century.

'He puh his fuh in ih'

One important point to note from the last section is that a variety may have a feature not found in others but this does not have to be stigmatised. It is true we (and our Newfoundland relatives) are the only English speakers with the slit *t* but that does not mean that people avoid it in Ireland. There is nothing whatever wrong with pronouncing *t* this way for use. But, but, you must not take the matter too far. The slit t is produced by not touching the tip of the tongue against the ridge behind the upper teeth (as the English do, for instance). However, if you withdraw the tongue further and basically just produce a *h* for *t* then you will be immediately frowned upon, that is if you say something like *He puh his fuh in ih* for *He put his foot in it*. What is the difference in saying *h* instead of *t* from a linguistic point of view? Nothing whatever, they are both just sounds. What is the difference in terms of social acceptance in Ireland? An enormous amount, unfortunately. To illustrate this I once did a survey where people were asked to assess various accents of English in Ireland. They were played a short tape recording in which six different accents from around Ireland (along with an English and an American accent for good measure). They were then asked to assess the speakers in terms of intelligence, education and reliability. Sadly, the Dublin speaker who said *He puh his fuh in ih* scored by far the lowest mark of all. There was nothing whatever in the recordings which indicated intelligence, education or reliability. The pernicious fact which came to light is that people (over 200 test persons to be precise) associated this type of speech with a lack of the charactistics just listed, although there was no evidence whatever for this in what they heard.

Is it the fault of the English?

Often when I discuss recent changes in Irish English, people react by blaming someone else: it could be due to English influence. These young people are aping the English and adopt pronunciations like <go-oo> for *go*. Fair enough, this is one case where prestigious forms of British English and the new

pronunciation of English in Ireland coincide. But other features of English from across the Irish Sea do not turn up here. Saying <ka-ird> for *card* — as the younger generation in Ireland now do — definitely un-English. And we certainly don't pronounce a word like *plant* as <plahnt>. To do so would be to speak with a <grahnd> accent.

Are the Americans to blame?

The pernicious influence of the Americans, particularly through films and pop music, is another favourite theory about change in Irish English. Again we can see that there are elements which new English in Ireland shares with American English. The <ka-ird> for *card* pronunciation is characteristic of American speech, but saying <to-ee> for *toy* is not.

The upshot of all this is that the new English is home-grown Irish. It may have a few parallels with British or American English but this is largely coincidence. Furthermore, linguists do not believe that films or pop music change the speech of a community. True, the speech of one group can lead to change with another, but there must be face to face contact. The only exception are words and phrases. There are a fair smattering of these in Irish English, as in other varieties of English, just think of all the young people who find some things *cool* and other things *gross* (like the behaviour of their parents).

Why 'Dortspeak' did not catch on

The changes which have taken place in Dublin English started out in the 1980s and were perceived as typical of people living in the upmarket area of the city, Dublin 4. However, during the late eighties and into the nineties a more negative attitude developed towards the whole Dublin 4 set. This meant that their pronunciation, or rather what people regarded as typical of their pronunciation was not regarded as worthy of imitation. There used to be expressions like *A glahss of Hahrp at the bahr* to poke fun at the Dublin 4 set. Later on people referred to their type of speech in a more general way as 'Dortspeak', i.e. a posh accent which people used in the leafy suburbs on the south side of Dublin which were serviced by the Dart suburban train.

Once the Dublin 4 accent came to be regarded as snotty and snobbish its days were counted. And its use by people working in radio and television did not help it much either. But what has remained in a much more toned form of the Dublin 4 accent, latterly referred to simply as a 'D4' accent. The back pronunciation indicated by the spelling 'Dortspeak' is all but gone. However, the high vowels in words like *Cork* and *toy* have remained, indeed they have been pushed a bit further by the younger generation.

Dublin and the rest of Ireland

Ireland is one of those countries, which for better or for worse, consists of a capital and the rest of the country. If anything, this situation has become more pronounced in the past decade or so, with nearly one third of the entire population of the Republic of Ireland living in the Dublin metropolitan area.

There are many consequences of the mighty influence of Dublin on everywhere outside of the capital. And of course of these involve language as well. Any change which happens in Dublin English will transfer to the other towns and then to the countryside quickly, more likely sooner than later. The changes which I have been describing here have already been picked by young people around the country. I remember recording two schoolgirls down in Dingle who could barely be distinguished from others of their age from Foxrock in Dublin. They had all the features one now associates with trendy Irish English, the high back vowels, <e-oo> in words like *town*, a dark *l* in *field* <fee-uhld> and, of course, the perky *r* as in *fork* <fo-irk>.

Data from Dublin

Because of the importance of Dublin for social trends in Ireland it seemed a sensible thing to start a survey of Irish English from the capital. This was back in the early 1990s when the boom was really taking off. The fashionable Dubliners were making their presence felt in the city and, as a linguist would expect, they were beginning to spread their kind of speech and others were beginning to notice it. I think the first item I noticed was the pronunciation of keywords like *Ireland* and *Irish* with a back vowel, pushing the tongue down and back and producing a kind of <awh> sound. As linguists are always interested in what groups do, I decided it was time to do a mini survey and see if this speech was regularly found in a particular group in Dublin society.

Who rolls the ball the most?

If you were asked what group in society you think might be first to partake in a sound change, I wonder what you would say? The people at the high end of society, the big earners? Those at the lower end, who unfortunately don't have too much monetary clout? Well, neither of those groups are particularly active in change. The lower group because it uses its local pronunciation as an unconscious badge of identification. People keep their social ties in a good condition by using an accent of their own. What about the high-enders? Well, they don't rely on accent for social networking. Their sense of community is often quite weak and involves people who move across various levels in society and who are not always direct neighbours, indeed these are usually in the minority.

So this leaves those inbetween. To be precise, those who are at the lower end of the middle class are the most active in language change. It's as if they see in change a way of moving ahead and advancing socially and so not slipping down into the working class which they certainly do not identify themselves with.

Now there are differences of opinion about how you define class, an essential issue in the present context. But it is fair to say that in western style societies people who use their hands working, and get dirty in the process, are regarded as working class. The amount of money one earns seems not to be the crucial issue and one can see that many workers and tradespeople are better off than typically middle-class groups like teachers, doctors or lawyers and certainly have more money than those in the characteristic lower-middle class occupations such as clerks, office staff, shop assistants, etc. Whatever way one defines class, it is clear that there is a group at the interface of the working and middle class and that this group wishes to move upwards and hence avoids like the plague anything which might lead to its being confused with the lower class.

Ladies first!

All the investigations into language in society and change in speech which have been carried out in many countries during the last 50 years or so have concluded that of all sections of society it is younger women who are most active. This is a bit paradoxical if one stops to consider it. After all linguists have always maintained that women use more standard forms of language. Really earthy dialect is a province of the males of the species. It is in keeping with the 'rough and tough' image of males that they use a gritty form of local speech. Conversely such language is frowned upon when used by women — especially various forms of 'bad language'.

Now all this is true, women do indeed tend to use more standard forms of speech. But if there is a change going on then women, and most certainly young women from the lower middle classes, are very active is pushing the change through. Why is this the case? Well, the answer the linguist gives has to do with power in society. By 'power' linguists (and sociologists) mean position and status in society. It is certainly true that traditionally women did not have prominent positions of high status, their role was rather in the domestic sphere. This is changing fortunately, but there is still a clear male majority in leading positions in all western societies. The conclusion is that using standard forms of a language can help one gain status in society, because the more powerful sections use this standard.

This brings us to change. Assume that people with less status than others have an antenna for anything which is connected with status, such as language. This means that if the language starts to shift, then the low-status group notes this first. Now substitute 'women' for 'low-status group'. Add to this the fact that people's perception of language is generally unconscious and so change can

move along imperceptibly and not be stopped by people noticing it all the time.

The upshot of all this is that women, especially younger women, pick up changes, adopted them swiftly and unconsciously into their own speech because — according to the view just outlined — being at the vanguard of change in society increases one's status and prestige.

The jewellers of Grafton street

If one has an assumption that young women from the lower middle class are the most active group in language change, how would one go about showing that this is true? The linguist would answer by designing a survey of the speech of this group to see what it is like. Any survey must be objective so that the data are reliable. Now, how does one go about this? In my case I thought I would do a survey in upmarket shops to see what the speech of the assistants is like. Why choose this group? The answer is that employees often adopt the type of speech which they assume is desirable in their work surroundings. So in fashionable shops in a good part of town you would expect the shop assistants to use a fashionable accent, no matter what their background is.

So I chose my shops — this time in Grafton Street, a largely upmarket shopping area, just south of the centre of Dublin. In this case, only jewellery shops were chosen. The reason for this is that this type of shop caters for the better off sections of society, however, the employees are usually younger women who frequently come from a lower middle-class background. This is a scenario in which one finds the employees adapting their behaviour, linguistic and otherwise, towards that of their clientele and the general perception of the shop they work in.

As part of my plan I chose a time of day when the assistants were likely to be on their own, or at maximum one or two other customers in the shop. So the interviews were typically conducted early in the morning or during lunchtime, when business was slightly slacker. The strategy employed was the following: I entered the shop with the obvious intention of buying some jewellery. Approached by a shop assistant, I then asked for earrings with a Celtic design. This ensured that the word ***design*** occurred several times in the ensuing conversation. The reason for this? The word ***design*** contains a vowel which was changing in pronunciation, i.e. people had begun to say <des-ah-gn> with a back vowel.

You may well ask how I knew that the shop assistants were likely to use the new pronunciation. I didn't in every case but it is possible to provoke this. How? By deliberately using the low prestige popular Dublin pronunciation. This I did by saying that I was looking for earrings with a Celtic <des-uh-gn> like a true Dubliner. And why can one provoke the new pronunciation this way? Because the origin of the change lies in the desire for people to dissociate themselves from too strongly local Dublin speech and so they are likely to use the new pronunciation when confronted with someone using the colloquial one.

My interpretation of fashionable Dublin pronunciation was confirmed one time during data collection when I was in a Grafton Street jewellery shop early one morning. There was no-one in the shop apart from myself and a single shop assistant. After engaging in conversation on the matter of earrings for a few moments, I was presented with a few pairs which were prohibitively expensive. The assistant obviously noted the expression of surprise and dismay on my face and, as if to apologise for the pricing policy of her employers, immediately fell back into her native pronunciation, a clear local Dublin accent (she was from Raheny on the north side), and commented profusely on the cost of living and inflation in present-day Ireland. In this particular case it was plain that the young woman had adopted the new pronunciation which she felt was expected of her in her work environment. When talking to someone with a local accent and when her boss was not listening she fell back into her natural pronunciation.

Linguistic surveys often have unintended side-effects. The most obvious one is that in the shops I entered, the assistants rightly assumed that I wanted to buy jewellery. So you might be wondering how I got away with buying nothing — which is true. The answer is simple: after looking at a large variety of earrings (and taking a mental note of the pronunciations I heard) I bowed out gracefully by saying that my wife only likes earrings with clips, that is for unpiereced ears — which is also true — and practically no jewellers had these. With the one or two who had I simply said the design was not quite what I was looking for and left the shop saying thanks all the same.

What I don't know is whether the shop assistants from various jewellers ever met each other and talked about the weirdo going around to every shop in Grafton Street asking for clip earrings with Celtic designs for his German wife.

Which witch do you mean?

By and large people don't notice the details of others' pronunciation. They will of course register that X has a different accent from Y but they are rarely able to put their finger on it. And very often they are somewhat surprised at their own pronuciation. Here is an example to show what I mean. As part of my survey I asked a number of young people in Dublin to read out a few words I had printed on a sheet of paper. In this case there were just two words per line and these could be different in pronunciation, but did not have to be. On one line of the list were the words *witch* and *which*. Now when people read words slowly they tend to notice what they are saying, I suppose because there is no broader context, like a whole sentence, for them to concentrate on. Many Dubliners do not distinguish between these two words in pronunciation. But the curious thing is that virtually no-one knew that they didn't pronounce them differently. Often when someone was reading the list they would say *witch* and then *which* in exactly the same way. Sometimes they might give a little laugh or say 'oh' or on occasion say something like 'Hey, there the same, that's weird' as if for all the

years of their lives they had being pronouncing two words the same which are written differently and never realised it.

Just 4 U

Another example of one pronunciation for two words can be seen in the heading for this section. But this only works for some people in Ireland. By and large one can say that rural people and many older people in the cities would not accept the above as representing *Just for you*. Why? Because they would pronounce *for* and *four* differently (this includes myself, by the way). Now the new pronunciation of the younger generation in Ireland has led to various vowels being pronounced less open and one consequence of this is that the word *for* — and all others like it, such as *corn, cord, sort* — are pronounced with a higher vowel than in more traditional varieties. This make for sound identical to *four*. Does it matter to language if words are no longer distinguished in pronunciation? The answer to this is 'not really'. There is always enough context for meanings to be clear. A sentence like *There is room for four of them* does not cause difficulty in interpretation, even if *for* and *four* are pronounced the same because the first instance must be a preposition and the second must be a number, i.e. *There is room four for of them* is not a possible sentence in English.

The upshot of this is that people should have a very laid back and objective view of change in their language. Unfortunately this is more often than not the case. What happens frequently is that someone notices a change, like the merger of *for* and *four*, and then picks on this as a sign of general moral decline in society, blissfully unaware that this has always happened in the development of languages. People who complain about change like this would do well to remember that they embody many examples in their own speech, e.g. the words *meet* and *meat* were once pronounced differently but now are not. Because the change lies some distance in the past, people have stopped commenting on it, but you can rest assured that when it was happening — several centuries ago — they were those around who found it a sign of the degenerate times they lived in.

Softly, softly

Some sections back I said that British English has not had any appreciable influence on the development of Dublin English. This is definitely true and the simple reason is that the Irish are not interested in adopting the speech of the English. But looking at Dublin English one can see that it contains pronunciations which were once common in England but which have died out. Linguists called this phenomenon 'colonial lag', a reference to the fact that away from the centre some features of speech may be retained which are lost, by being replaced by newer ones in the source land for a language. There are examples of this in American or Canadian English, in South African English and in Australian or New Zealand English.

Examples from Irish English can also be found. Take for instance, the way people from Dublin pronounce a word like *soft* as in the sentence *You should go soft on him.* This was one of the test sentences for my survey and I found that Dubliners consistently pronounced it with a long vowel, as they did other words like *cross, frost*, etc. The reason for this is that this long vowel is an older pronunciation taken to Ireland by early settlers. The pronunciation stuck in Ireland, but later on English starting using a short vowel in this and similar words.

This instance is particularly interesting because people from the countryside in Ireland do not use a long vowel in these words. You might be thinking, 'If the older speech of Dublin has long vowels, then surely this would apply to rural speech as well'. The reasoning is alright, however, English in Dublin is much older than in the coutryside in Ireland. Here Irish was spoken by the majority of the population up to the beginning of the 19th century. It was the Great Famine and the subsequent emigration which dealt the death blow to Irish. Now when rural inhabitants started learning English in large numbers they were exposed to a much later form of English than were the Dubliners, significantly they leared a variety of the language in which the vowel in *soft, cross, frost*, etc. had already been shortened.

The slangy Dubs

The discussion so far has been about pronunciation, but you may well be asking yourself what about the all the words and phrases of Dublin English. Indeed, the vocabulary of the capital is a field of its own. The Dubs have words which are unique to the city and which they use to great effect. This vocabulary is not to everyone's taste as it is fairly earthy to put it mildly. A lot of it is frankly homophobic and mysogynist and explicit with regard to various bodily functions. So not for the faint-hearted.

A Dublin contribution to World English

It might seem somewhat ridiculous to use the above heading in this discussion but it would appear to be justified on one count. There is a report that Richard Daly (d. 1813), actor and manager of the Crow Street Theatre in Dublin, made a bet in 1791 that he could add a new word to the English language overnight. The following morning there was a strange piece of graffiti — showing the word *quiz* — on many walls in Dublin and Daly won the bet and the English language was made richer by a word which has proved popular since and which it has exported to many other languages.

Irish and international usage

Some few Irish words have become international terms. These are not

necessarily borrowings from Irish but eponyms deriving from surnames: *to boycott* comes from one Captain Charles Boycott (1832-1897), an English land agent in County Mayo, who resisted the demands for reform by the Irish Land League (1879-81) and who was blacked by Irish peasants and workmen, and whose name stands for a policy of deliberate and wholesale non-cooperation; *to lynch* may come from the name of a mayor of Galway city in the 13th century who acquiesced to the execution of his own son for crimes committed, though this term could also stem from Captain William Lynch (1742-1820) of Virginia who set up and presided over tribunals outside the judicial system. *Hooligan* is a term for some who behaves violently and comes from the name of a boisterous Irish family in a song. *Limerick* is a reference to a type of doggerel verse with the rhyming pattern AABBA. All these words have spread from English to other languages, for instance, *Hooligan* (noun), *Limerick* (noun), *boykottieren* (verb) and *lynchen* (verb) are current in German with the meanings they have in English. Other terms may be known to speakers of English outside of Ireland, e.g. *shebeen* 'country pub'.

Because of the considerable Irish immigration to the United States since the early 18th century a number of words entered English there which could well be of Irish origin. Two of these which are current in Ireland also but whose etymology is uncertain are *shibang* 'entire lot' and *shenanigans* 'trickery'. Two further words/phrases, this time not found in native Irish usage are *so long* and *phoney*. The first may derive from Irish *slán* 'goodbye', assuming that the velarised [ɫ] in [sɬɑ:n] might have been interpreted as syllabic with the semantic link between 'goodbye' and 'so long' not too far-fetched. The word *phoney* is taken to derive from the Irish word *fáinne* 'ring' which goes back to the practice of (Irish) vendors of smuggling bogus rings among good ones when selling to their customers in north-eastern American cities where the Irish chiefly settled.

Technical terms

On a more matter of fact level there are a small number of terms from Irish which have a specific meaning of a rather technical nature and, importantly, are not alternatives to more standard English words and which might be used for local flavouring. In the following a short representative list of such words is given.

Aisling	vision poem from 18th Ireland in which the country is symbolised as an airy woman.
Bog	marsh or moor, frequently cultivated for the harvesting of peat. From Irish *bog* 'soft', i.e. 'soft ground'.
Carrageen	edible seaweed from the name of a village in west County Waterford (south, south-east).
Clan	extended family, from Old Irish *clann*, a borrowing from Latin *planta* (with loss of final vowel and cluster simplification) at an early stage when /p/ was still shifted to /k/ in Q-Celtic.

Comlech, dolmen	megalithic structure consisting of flat stone placed horizontally on two or more stones fixed vertically into the ground.
Crannog	dwelling on an artificial island or stilts in a lake.
Crubeen	pig's foot (← Irish *crúibín*).
Currach	a wooden-framed boat covered with tarred canvas, can be launched from a strand and was used in the west for sea-fishing.
Drisheen	a sausage like substance made by inserting blood into sheeps' intestines.
Drumlin	small rounded hill or island resulting from glacial drift (derives from Irish *droim* 'back').
Dulse	an edible seaweed, russet in colour.
Esker	ridges of gravel resulting from glacial movement (← Irish *eiscir*).
Gallowglass	mercenary, particularly of Scottish origin, from Irish *gall-óglach* 'foreign warrior'.
Gansey	knitted jersey (← Irish *geansaí*, derived ultimately from the name for the Channel Island Guernsey).
Glen	narrow or small valley (← Irish *gleann*).
Hurling	game with curved stick of ash and a small ball of leather played on a football pitch with goals at either end. The instrument used is termed a *hurley*; the ball is called a *slither* from Irish *sliothair*.
Liss, rath	ring fort (← Irish *lios*, *rath*).
Lough	lake (← Irish *loch* /lɔx/).
Poteen	illegally distilled whiskey.
Sally	willow (← Irish *saileach* from Old English *sealh*).
Soogawn	rope of straw used in making chair (← Irish *súgán*).

Irish names in English

Proper names from Irish enjoy a considerable popularity as firstnames, especially in the United States and Canada and not only among the Irish section of the population there. *Patrick* is probably the most common; its diminutive *Paddy* is derogatory and, in England, is a generic term of disrespect for the Irish. Other firstnames are *Kevin*, an Irish saint, *Desmond*, lit. 'South Munster' (Irish *deas* 'south' + *Mumhan* 'Munster' + epenthetic /d/ after the final nasal), an area controlled by a Norman family which adopted the geographical designation as its name; *Moira* ← *Máire* (Irish) ← *Maria*; *Maureen* is a diminutive from *Máirín* ← *Máire* + *-ín* where the latter is a productive diminutive suffix. This is also found in *colleen* 'small girl, Irish girl' ← *cailín*, morphologically *cail* + *ín*, found as a firstname. *Shawn* ← *Seán* (Irish) is etymologically interesting as it derives from Anglo-Norman *John*, the Latin form *Johannes* having resulted in the earlier form *Eoin* in Ireland (*Ian* in Scotland and *Owen* in Wales). *Kelly* is an American firstname and a surname in Ireland and stems from the Irish surname *Ó Ceallaigh*, another such case is Casey. Extensions of Irish firstnames

are also found in America, e.g. *Brianna* as a girl's name from *Brian* (the only Irish form). In Australia a *Sheelagh* is a general term for a girl deriving from the Irish girl's name *Síle*, itself from *Cecilia*.

Within Ireland there are some names which are used as generic terms for groups. The term *Jackeen* refers to someone from Dublin (*Dubs* is also found), a *West Brit* is an Irish person with strong English leanings, *Castle Catholic* is a loose term for Catholics with class pretensions and a condescending attitude to their fellow Irish. The term *Emerald Isle* for Ireland stems from William Drennan, first used about 1800.

Irish or Scottish Gaelic

In a few instances it is not certain whether the source for a word has been Gaelic in Scotland or in Ireland as the phonetic form of the words would have been more or less identical in both languages. *Galore* 'plentiful' ← *go leor* 'enough'; *dig* (usually the American form), *twig* 'understand' from *tuigim* 'I understand'. *Sonsy* 'agreeable in appearance, comely' from *sonas* 'good fortune' is almost certainly Scottish Gaelic, cf. *unsonsy* 'unlucky' as well. *Whiskey* lit. 'water of life' has been borrowed from both forms of Gaelic (the Scottish spelling is *whisky*).