

In: Donka Minkova (ed.) *Phonological Weakness in English. From Old to Present-day English*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 116-129.

## Weak segments in Irish English

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### Abstract

The varieties of English spoken in southern Ireland are noted for the reduction in the articulation of alveolar segments, chiefly /t/. This has a long history and is amply attested in the textual record. Vernacular speech in the capital Dublin shows alveolar stop lenition to a more considerable degree than do less regionally bound varieties of Irish English. This lenition is clearly organised as a cline on which lenited segments increase in sonority. The precise manifestation of lenition depends on syllable position, being disfavoured in onsets but also in covered positions such as immediately before stops. There are also manner restrictions on lenition prohibiting it before /s/ because sequences of two fricatives are not legal. On the cline of lenition there are different realisations and the extent to which a variety shows these depends on its degree of vernacularity. The range is from non-lenition (faithful representation of segments from the lexical input) to deletion of segments. There are furthermore lexicalised instances of advanced lenition which occur in the supraregional variety of English in Ireland which normally only shows the first stage of lenition, i.e. frication of stops with the retention of all other articulatory features. In this contribution both a phonetic analysis of lenition and a consideration of the external factors (degree of vernacularity) which determine the range of lenition is offered.

### 1 Introduction

The purpose of the present chapter is to look at a phenomenon in Irish English and consider its significance for phonological theory. The phenomenon in question is the weakening of consonants in specific environments. This weakening can also be termed 'lenition'. The latter label is used widely to denote a series of phenomena which are to be found on different levels of language. For instance, in the Celtic languages, such as Irish and Welsh, lenition plays a central role in the morphology, distinguishing such central categories as grammatical gender or number with nouns or the present and past tense with verbs (MacEoin 1993). Of course, the grammatical lenition of the Celtic languages has its roots in low-level phonetic phenomena which became phonologised over time (Hickey 1995a). Furthermore, it may well have had an influence on the phonetics of languages which were in contact with members of the Celtic group, e.g. Western Romance and Continental Celtic (Martinet 1952) or Old English and British Celtic (Hickey 1995b).

The weakening, or lenition, which is the focus of attention for this chapter is found in varieties of English in Ireland. The English language has many different forms here. There is a basic split between the north and the south which roughly corresponds to the division between the Republic of Ireland (in the south) and Northern Ireland (a part of the United Kingdom in the north). The linguistic and

political divisions of the country are not identical, however. The county of Donegal in the north-west is part of the republic but linguistically goes with Northern Ireland. There are also some border counties with Northern Ireland, which are in the Republic and which are linguistically close to the north, forming a broad transition band between the north and the south. From the strictly linguistic point of view it is probably better to divide Ireland into the province of Ulster (consisting of nine counties, six of which are in Northern Ireland) and the remaining three provinces which comprise the republic and which contain 23 counties.

Within the south there are also important dialect divisions. These have to do on the one hand with the original settlement patterns of the English who arrived in Ireland in the late 12th century and on the other with the areas where the Irish language was spoken longest. These two facts are related as the older varieties on the east coast are different from the somewhat newer varieties which arose due to language shift from Irish in other parts of the country.

Although the phonetic phenomenon of lenition is found in both Irish and English its occurrence in both languages would not seem to be directly related. At most what there may have been is a transfer of a phonological directive, from Irish to English<sup>[1]</sup>, to weaken segments in position of high sonority, e.g. intervocally or between a vowel and before a pause. This would have applied among the speakers who learned English as adults in a non-prescriptive environment. The majority of the population between roughly the early 17th and the late 19th centuries acquired English in such an environment. This would mean that the presence of lenition in present-day forms of Irish English may well have its source in the transfer of a phonological directive to weaken consonantal segments.

Whether lenition can be traced to bilinguals in the historical language shift is a matter which cannot be definitively decided today. However, what is certain is that the range of lenition in non-local varieties of southern Irish English today is considerably less than that in vernacular forms of Irish English on the east coast, that is in the oldest forms of English on the island of Ireland.

In this chapter two main varieties will be examined which represent the two groups just discussed. Forms of (southern) Irish English which are not strongly local and which are used by educated speakers, not part of a vernacular network, belong to what can be termed supraregional Irish English. This is not a codified standard pronunciation, like Received Pronunciation in England, but speakers are nonetheless aware of what phonetic realisations are acceptable in supraregional Irish English and what are not. In the current context it is important to point out that speakers know quite clearly what stages of lenition are possible in supraregional Irish English and what are not.

The second variety to be considered here is popular Dublin English, a strongly local form of English which has a history going back to the 13th century (Hickey 2005: 150-55). This represents the opposite extreme in terms of vernacularity: Stages of lenition are manifest here which are not found elsewhere. These stages reach far down, or up, the scale which stretches from non-lenition to zero. The conditions for and the manifestations of this lenition form the backbone of this chapter.



(4)	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3
	V C [alveolar] #	>	V C [glottal] #	>	V Ø #
	[but]		[buʔ]		[bu] <i>but</i>

The clue to understanding glottalisation as a stage on the path to deletion lies in the option of reducing the glottal stop further before deletion. This can, and indeed in Dublin English is, fricativised to [h] and then deleted so that one has a sequence like the following.

(5)	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
	[but]	[buʔ]	[buh]	[bu] <i>but</i>

This type of trajectory is not imperative. Some languages have weakening of /t/ to /s/, i.e. without a shift in place of articulation. This is true of Finnish, for example (see the morphological alternations discussed in Karlsson 1998: 7). It is also true historically of Romance languages such as Italian where there is no shift in point of articulation to the glottal region, cf. Latin *dux* ‘leader’ and Italian *duce*. This is not found in Irish English where weakening involves the removal of the oral gesture.

The Romance languages furthermore show that weakening can involve a change in articulation from an internally complex segment to a simple one, e.g. with the development of affricates to fricatives, cf. Middle English *chase* with /tʃ-/ (from an Old French input) and modern French *chasser* with /ʃ-/.

The internal structure of segments is difficult to reconcile with a simple view of weakening. If one considers affrication again, one sees that in its initial stages this process leads to greater phonetic complexity as the outcome if a sequence of stop and fricative from an input which consists solely of a stop. Examples of this abound diachronically, e.g. in the affrication from /t/ to /ts/, as in the High Germanic Sound Shift, cf. English *tide*, German *Zeit*.

### 3 Weakening and syllable structure

The various processes just remarked on show certain sites in the syllable (Blevins 1995) where they occur preferentially. The affrication of /t/ to /ts/ is common in syllable-initial position, perhaps because it maintains the initial stop and so a phonologically strong segment which is preferred in initial position. The weakening typical of Irish English is found in syllable-codas. Medial and final positions, i.e. the syllable rhyme (Zec 1995), are preferred sites for the simplification which consists of the loss of constituent elements of a cluster. It is also the position in which voicing and segment deletion, via fricativisation, can occur. If either voicing or deletion occur syllable-initially then they usually have their source in external sandhi which operates across word boundaries rendering a syllabic-initial segment intervocalic. This has happened historically in the Celtic languages in which grammatical words ending in a vowel induced voicing or fricativisation with the initial segments of lexical words with which they stood in a relationship of external sandhi. This can still be seen in those cases of initial mutation (MacEoin 1993: 103) where the triggering element still ends in a vowel, e.g. *a chuid* [ə χɪdʲ] < *a + cuid* [kɪdʲ] ‘his’ + ‘part’.

#### 4 Weakening and secondary articulations

There are various trajectories which weakening can take. Apart from those discussed above, there is another one which is of interest in principle as it is frequently attested and would seem to be unidirectional. This is where the weakening begins as a secondary articulation which develops with the segment in question. A good example of this is provided by the velarisation of /l/.

The secondary articulation of /l/ can be one of two types. Either the [l] sound is spoken with increasing palatalisation and ultimately merges into [j], as has happened historically in Spanish, for example, or the [l] sound is articulated with an increasing degree of velarisation, leading ultimately to [ʊ], as has occurred historically in Polish, for instance. The option of secondary articulation is given because the tongue configuration can be raised or lowered while maintaining apical contact and lateral release for the [l] sound. The trajectory consists of an increasing phonetic domination of the secondary articulation with the final loss of the primary articulation, here apical contact. Once this has been lost, it cannot be recovered by later generations of language learners, hence the unidirectionality of vocalisation due to the promotion of secondary to primary articulation.

- (6) a. /l/ + [velarisation] > /ɫ/ > loss of apical contact > [ʊ]  
 b. /l/ + [palatalisation] > /lʲ/ > loss of apical contact > [j]

In terms of weakening it is only the final stage – loss of apical contact – which can be interpreted as weakening as the development of a prominent secondary articulation can hardly be regarded as weakening, indeed if anything it is the opposite as greater articulatory effort is required to move the tongue either further downwards or upwards to achieve the acoustic effect of noticeable velarisation or palatalisation respectively.

With specific regard to Irish English one can note that the use of clear /l/ [l] has long been a feature of this variety of English. However recent changes in Dublin English (Hickey 1999, 2005) have led to velarised [ɫ] occurring in non-local Dublin speech. This pronunciation spread very rapidly during the 1990s so that velarisation is typical of younger non-local speakers throughout the Republic of Ireland and is presently one of the chief distinguishing features between younger and older speakers. As yet there are no signs that apical contact is being lost, i.e. that [ʊ] is developing out of [ɫ] as it has done in popular London speech, for instance, but this may be a future development.

#### 5 Weakening and sonority

Any discussion of weakening must take the phenomenon of sonority (Rice 1992) into account. It has long been accepted that sonority plays a role in syllable structure, both in diachronic developments, including weakening, and in synchronic processes, especially those which derive from historical processes which have been functionalised in a language and raised to the level of morphology, e.g. the initial mutations of Celtic (Fife and King 2001: 478-83). It is also true that there have been discussions of whether sonority and values attributed to specific segments are

independent of the data to which they apply, i.e. that they have some kind of absolute value. The opponents of this view see sonority as a number of generalisations made across sets of data, but without a separate existence. For the present treatment it is sufficient to recognise that sonority does exist, either independently or as an epiphenomenon of data taxonomy. Furthermore, values for sonority can be assigned to segment types, depending on their behaviour in diachronic processes of weakening. These values may also depend on their behaviour in synchronic processes which represent petrified diachronic developments that may have undergone re-adjustment due to their functionalisation.

If the greatest degree of sonority is represented by zero and decreasing amounts by increasing numerical values then one can propose an initial hierarchy as follows.

(7) Sonority hierarchy for Irish English		
(vowels	0, greatest degree)	
approximants	w, j	1
liquids	r, l	2
nasals	m, n, ŋ	3
fricatives, voiced	v, z, ʒ	4
fricatives, voiceless	f, s, ʃ, h	5
plosives, voiced	b, d, ɖ, g	6
plosives, voiceless	p, t, ʈ, k	7

If such a scale is to be of any practical value when accounting for developments in the sound systems of languages then manner of articulation alone cannot be sufficient for determining relative sonority. Place of articulation plays a role here as well. For instance, /s/ is of relatively low sonority whereas /h/ has a much higher value, given that a commonly attested weakening in language histories is the shift from /s/ to /h/ as in Greek or Andalusian Spanish.

## 6 Sonority and markedness

Given that (voiced) vowels are inherently more sonorous than consonants then those consonants which are closest to vowels on the sonority scale preferentially show voicing as well. By ‘preferentially’ one means here that voice is ‘unmarked’, i.e. statistically more frequent across languages and that, all other things being equal, diachronic changes favour a movement to voiced segments with those which are high up the sonority scale.

Recent developments in Irish can be interpreted as the establishment of unmarked values for certain segments. A conservative feature of Irish English is the use of a voiceless approximant [ɰ] in words spelt with *wh* (Hickey 1984b), something which is shared by Scottish English and some forms of American English. However, in recent forms of Irish English, especially supraregional forms emanating from Dublin the approximant in question is increasingly voiced. The removing of voice from [ɰ] is such a development, at least in a statistical sense, because [ɰ] is cross-linguistically less common than [w] (a point noted in Minkova 2004: 35).

## 7 Lenition in Irish English

The term ‘lenition’ refers to phonetic weakening, that is an increase in sonority with a given segment. In terms of the hierarchy given in (7) above, lenition leads to a movement upwards on the scale. If there is no vertical movement, then at least there is a movement in point of articulation, above all from the oral to the glottal area.

Lenition normally consists of several steps and diachronically a language may exhibit a shift from stop to zero via a number of intermediary stages. Attested cases of lenition are represented by the Germanic sound shift (stop to fricative), West Romance consonantal developments (Martinet 1952) such as lenition in Spanish or more dialectal phenomena such as the *gorgia toscana* in Tuscan Italian (Rohlf 1949; Ternes 1977) or lenition in Canary Spanish (Oftedal 1986).

If one looks at English in this light one can recognise that the alveolar point of articulation represents a favoured site for phonetic lenition (Hickey 1996). Alveolars in English can involve different types of alternation (Kallen 2005), three of which are summarised below, the labels on the left indicating sets of varieties in which these realisations are frequently found.

(8)	<i>Variety or group</i>	<i>Lenited form of stop</i>	<i>Example</i>
a.	American English	Tap	<i>water</i> [ˈwɑːrɾ]
b.	urban British English	Glottal stop	<i>water</i> [ˈwɔːʔə]
c.	southern Irish English	Fricative	<i>water</i> [ˈwɑːɾ̪]

1) *Glottalisation of /t/* Glottalisation involves the removal of the oral gesture from a segment. The realisation of /t/ as a glottal stop [ʔ] is a long recognised feature of popular London speech but it is also found widely in other parts of Britain (including Scotland) as a realisation of intervocalic and/or word-final /t/. This does not hold for supraregional varieties of Irish English, either in the north or south. The south has a fricative [ɾ] in these positions while the north frequently has a flap, cf. *butter* [bʌɾ̪ɪ] versus [bʌr̪ɪ]. As a manifestation of lenition, glottalisation occurs in vernacular Dublin English, e.g. *butter* [bʊʔv], *right* [rɪʔ]. This fact may explain its absence in non-vernacular Dublin English, despite the change in this variety in recent years. Glottalisation does not occur in southern rural forms of English either. Nor is it found in Irish so that transfer from the substrate, either historically or in the remaining Irish-speaking areas, does not represent a source.

Glottalling can in principle apply to labials, alveolars and velars but for those varieties of English best known for it, e.g. popular London English, it is characteristic of alveolars, both intervocalically, as in *bottle* [bɒʔl], *butter* [bʌʔə], and word-finally position as in *but* [bʌʔ], *that* [ðæʔ].

2) *Tapping of /t/* Tapping can also be classified as lenition as it is a reduction in the duration of a segment. Tapping can only occur with alveolars (labials and velars are excluded). Furthermore, it is only found in word-internal position and only in immediately post-stress environments. As tapping is phonetically an uncontrolled articulation, it cannot occur word-finally (except in sandhi situations, e.g. *at^all*) and cannot initiate a stressed syllable. For some younger non-local speakers in Ireland, it is fashionable to use tapping as an alternative to frication, e.g. *Waterford* [ˈwɔːrɾ̪fɔrd], *better* [ˈbɛr̪ɾ̪] (Hickey 2005: 77f.).

3) *Frication of /t/* Of the three main options for the lenition of /t/ across varieties of English, frication is the most straightforward in terms of increasing sonority. The alveolar stop shifts to an alveolar fricative with no change in place of articulation or secondary articulation. The details of this shift will be considered below but before this it is necessary to understand the context in which this shift takes place, i.e. the set of coronal segments in Irish English.

## 8 Coronal segments in Irish English

The area of coronal obstruents, those in front of the palate and behind the lips, is the most complex in Irish English phonology (Hickey 1984a). In most varieties of English the segments of this area look like the following.

- (9) a. ambidental fricatives /θ/ : /ð/  
 b. alveolar stops /t/ : /d/  
 c. alveolar fricatives /s/ : /z/

In supraregional Irish English the situation is complicated by the fortition of the ambidental fricatives. This means that there is a systemic distinction between dental and alveolar stop articulations: *thank* [t̪æŋk] versus *tank* [tæŋk]. The fortition of ambidental fricatives to dental stops can be interpreted as a result of language contact: the Irish used the nearest phonetic equivalent to the English sounds, i.e. the dental stops of Irish as in *tuí* [t̪i:] ‘straw’ and *daor* [d̪i:r] ‘expensive’. However, an additional factor could have been the non-prescriptive language acquisition scenario for the majority of the population during the historical language shift. In such situations ‘natural sound change’ (Blevins 2006: 10-12) would be favoured. Given that ambidental fricatives are ‘highly marked sounds’ and ‘are rare in the languages of the world and learned late by children’ (Dubois and Horvath 2004: 411) it is not surprising that fortition of these to corresponding stops should have taken place during the unguided second language acquisition of the language shift, irrespective of the phonology of the background language Irish.

## 9 Allophony of alveolar stops

A further complication with ambidental fricatives is due to the allophony of /t/ and /d/. These segments only have a stop realisation when they are in one of the following positions (Hickey 1996).

- (10) a. immediately before a stressed vowel in word-initial position: *tea* [ti:], or word-medially: *titanic*. [tai'tæŋk]  
 b. immediately before or after a non-vocalic segment:  
*lightning* [laɪtnɪŋ], *bent* [bent]

In all other positions<sup>[2]</sup> alveolar stops are realised as apico-alveolar fricatives.<sup>[3]</sup> According to a transcription introduced in Hickey (1984a: 235), this fricative is

indicated by placing a subscript caret below the relevant voiced or voiceless stop, i.e. [t̪] or [d̪]. Instances of these fricatives can be seen in the following.

- (11) a. *but* [bʌt̪]                      b. *butter* [ˈbʌt̪əɪ]  
       c. *educate* [ˈɛdʒuke:t̪]            d. *wood* [wʊd̪]

The fricative realisation of alveolar stops is particularly audible with /t/, given the fortis nature of this consonant. Because of the sensitivity of frication to stress and syllable-position, lenited and non-lenited realisations may be found within a pair of morphologically related words, e.g. *Italy* [ˈɪt̪ɪli] vs. *Italian* [ɪˈt̪æljən].

As [t̪] and [d̪] are apical fricatives they are kept clearly apart from the corresponding laminal-fricatives, /s/ and /z/, and from the alveolo-palatal fricatives, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. The sets of forms in the following are thus not homophones.

- (12) a. *puss* [pʌs]                      b. *putt* [pʌt̪]  
       c. *push* [pʊʃ]                      d. *put* [pʊt̪]

The distinction between the final sounds in (12a) and (12b) is between a laminal and an apical articulation and in (12c) and (12d) between a broad-grooved fricative and an apical articulation. In addition, the lip-rounding accompanying /ʃ/ is lacking with [t̪]. The realisations of /s/ and /z/ and of /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ in Irish English are essentially the same as in other varieties of English as are the realisations of the affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/.

Frication is a type of lenition which is in fact a cline, with a stop at one end and zero at the other. For the supraregional variety of southern Irish English it really encompasses only one sound, [t̪], with [d̪] occurring very occasionally. The fricative [t̪] is maintained through different style levels and functions as an indicator of Irish English. However, in more colloquial urban varieties of the east coast (including Dublin) the points further to the right on the scale of lenition in (13) are attested. These other realisations are sociolinguistically sensitive markers and do not occur in more formal speech styles.

- |      |                       |  |            |   |              |   |              |   |             |
|------|-----------------------|--|------------|---|--------------|---|--------------|---|-------------|
|      | No lenition           |  | Lenition   |   |              |   |              |   |             |
| (13) | t                     |  | t̪         | > | h            | ~ | ʔ            | > | Ø           |
|      | <i>tea, lightning</i> |  | <i>but</i> |   | <i>water</i> |   | <i>water</i> |   | <i>what</i> |

The removal of the oral gesture, as seen in glottal realisations of /t/, can result in either a glottal fricative [h] or glottal stop [ʔ]. The latter is less frequent and practically confined to local Dublin speech. An alveolar [ɹ], as a further reduction of [t̪], also occurs in local Dublin English, especially as a sandhi phenomenon across word boundaries, e.g. *Get off, will you!* [gɛ.ɪ nɔf wɪl jə]. This can be interpreted as a stage before the complete loss of the oral gesture, i.e. it is less than [t̪], as it involves a frictionless continuant, but more than [h] or [ʔ] which have no oral component.

In one or two words, a lenition stage is lexicalised. Thus the colloquial pronunciation of *Saturday* is commonly [ˈsæhɜːde], even with supraregional speakers

who do not lenite beyond [t̪]. This pronunciation has perhaps resulted from that of the Irish word for ‘Saturday’ which has medial [h]: *Sathairn* [ˈsahəɾnʲ].

### 9.1 Syllable position and structure

From the above discussion it is obvious that Irish English lenition is found in syllable codas. But to account for attestations exhaustively, the nature of the coda must be taken into account. The fricative realisations of lenition are found where the input /t/ comes after a vowel and immediately before a further vowel or is word-final (1 and 2 in Table 1 below). If the /t/ is followed by a consonant, in effect by a syllabic /l/ or /n/, then a glottal stop or /h/ is permitted in vernacular Dublin English, but not usually any continuant realisation of lenition like [t̪] (3). The same is true in post-consonantal position (4) although here a slow release may lead to slight affrication: [-tʰ], cf. *bent* [bentʰ]. This is phonetically a prolongation of articulation and hence does not have to be classified as lenition. In the position after /r/, e.g. *cart*, *port*, fricative realisations are often to be found because of the continuant nature of /r/.

Table 1 *Syllable position and lenition in Irish English*

<i>Position</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Permitted realisations of lenition</i>	
		<i>all varieties</i>	<i>only vernaculars</i>
1) intervocalic	<i>pity</i>	t̪,	h, ʔ, Ø
2) word-final	<i>pit</i>	t̪,	h, ʔ, Ø
3) pre-consonantal	<i>little</i> [-t̪]		ʔ, h, Ø
4) post-consonantal	<i>spent</i>		ʔ, Ø ([-tʰ])

It is true that lenition, of the type discussed above, does not occur in syllable-initial position. What one does find, especially among younger female speakers in Dublin, is a slight affrication of /t/ in pre-vocalic initial position, e.g. *two* [tʰu:], *town* [tʰæʊn]. This is independent of the realisations of lenition in syllable codas and may well be an age-grading phenomenon as it is not represented among middle-aged or older female speakers.

Lenition in Irish English is of interest as a general phenomenon which shows several stages with specifiable conditions for their occurrence. In the following the different types of lenition are classified according to the type of change made to underlying stops which provide the input. There are two default environments for lenition (i) intervocalically, (ii) post-vocalic and pre-pausal. These can in fact be collapsed to a single environment: open or no articulation on both flanks of the input segment, here /t/. This will allow lenition in *putty*, *putt*, but block lenition which retains an oral gesture in words like *belt*, *bent*, *fact*, *cupped*, *button*, *little*. However, lenition which involves the removal of the oral gesture, i.e. types (4) and (5) in the Table 2 below, can occur post-consonantly and pre-consonantly (before syllabic [l] or [ŋ]), e.g. *fact* [fækʔ], *little* [lɪhʲ].

There is a further condition on lenition which should be mentioned here: a phonotactic restriction on two homorganic fricatives will block lenition in cases like *cats*, *puts*, etc. because [-tʃs] is not a legal sequence in Irish English.

The third type of lenition in Table 2 is largely a sandhi phenomenon and occurs across word boundaries.

Table 2 *Classification of lenition alternatives in Irish English*

	<i>Type of change</i>	<i>Segment</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Environment</i>
lenition 1	reduction of effort	r	<i>sitter</i> ['sɪrə]	only intervocalic
lenition 2	stop to fricative	t̪	<i>sit</i> [sɪt̪]	(default)
lenition 3	stop to continuant	ɹ	<i>sit</i> [sɪɹ ʊp]	mainly sandhi
lenition 4	removal of oral gesture h, ʔ		<i>sit</i> [sɪh, sɪʔ]	(default)
lenition 5	segment deletion	∅	<i>sit</i> [sɪ]	(default)

default = (i) intervocalically or (ii) post-vocalic and pre-pausal

The overriding condition on lenition in Irish English, i.e. that it only occurs in syllable codas, holds for all the above types. This condition assumes that /t/ between two vowels belongs to the coda of the first syllable when this is stressed, e.g. *pretty* ['pɹɪt̪.i] but to the onset of the second syllable if this carries the stress, e.g. *pretence* [pɹɪ.'tɛns]. I acknowledge that the issue of internal syllable boundaries is much debated, but for the current purpose it suffices to distinguish between intervocalic /t/ after and before the stressed syllable of a word.

Lenition of stops at other points of articulation is not taken to occur in present-day Irish English. However, /k/ can be lenited to /x/ locally in Co. Limerick (mid-west coast of Ireland), e.g. *They had a live wake* [we:ʔx], *A bar of chocolate* ['tʃɔxlət̪] (on rural English in the mid-west of Ireland, see Hickey 2004: 32f.). Whether this is an independent development in the English of this area or a remnant of lenition with a wider scope is difficult to say.

## 10 Conclusion

Forms of Irish English are of general phonological interest in that they illustrate the different manner in which the lenition of alveolar stops can manifest itself. The disparate varieties of English in Ireland illustrate various types of lenition. These depend on vernacularity with local Dublin English showing the greatest degree of lenition and the supraregional form of English in (southern) Ireland showing the least. In addition, the range of lenition and the stages which are attested show that this is a cline stretching from a minimum of stop friction in non-local varieties to zero in the most vernacular varieties in urban centres on the east coast, especially Dublin. This fact furthermore shows that movement along clines of articulatory reduction can be arrested by notions of 'standardness' and the avoidance of merger with vernacular varieties. Thus Irish English represents a number of sociolinguistic scenarios in

which the interplay between internal and external factors pan out in different ways depending on whether prescriptivism acts as a brake on ‘natural’ developments such as segment weakening.

## Notes

- 1 Lass (1984: 179) mentions *t*-lenition in northern English. In locations with a high Irish input, e.g. Middlesborough, there may be a historical connection with the Irish English lenition.
- 2 These restrictions hold, despite the statements of Wells (1982: 430), Harris (1994: 121) and Bertz (1975: 278).
- 3 The fricative *t* of Irish English is sometimes referred to as ‘slit-*t*’. Some of the descriptions of this sound have unfortunately been inaccurate. The sound is not an affricate and it is always distinct from [s], i.e. word pairs like *kit* and *kiss* are always distinct, the first with an apico-alveolar fricative and the second with a lamino-alveolar fricative. On the question of transcription, see the discussion in Pandeli, Eska, Ball and Rahilly (1997).

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