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Irish English and Recent Immigrants to Ireland·

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Abstract

When Ireland became a country of net immigration in the 1990s, the varieties of English spoken on the island came to function as targets of language learning and were subjected to critical evaluation by people from a wide range of backgrounds. This paper explores newcomers' views on and attitudes towards Irish English based on interviews with 73 immigrants from a variety of national and social backgrounds. The analysis suggests that there is broad agreement about the nature of Irish English, but attitudes towards it and desire to identify with it are heterogeneous being influenced by a range of factors including people's alignment with Ireland, their views about variation and Irish reactions to its use.

1. Introducton

Although it is the second official language of the Republic of Ireland, English has been the most widely spoken language in the country for more than two hundred years. It is widely used in Irish homes, in public life and in professional contexts. It is also an important pillar of the Irish economy, attracting thousands of language learners to Ireland each year. Last, but not least, it is also the main medium of expression of Ireland's internationally renowned literary tradition. However, even 90 years after the formal end of British colonization, Irish society remains highly ambivalent about English. Irish state institutions, academics and the population alike continue to be hesitant about accepting English as a legitimate carrier of Irish culture, traditions and identity or as a distinctive feature of Irish ethnicity. Kallen (1988) suggests that this is partly due to a firm and wide-spread ideology that "associate[s] English with the colonial administration, in opposition to the native culture and political structure." (p. 130). In so doing, English became indexed with a particular ideological value, "with the opposite value adhering to Irish as the indigenous language of the Irish people." (p. 130). This ideology has largely stayed in place even though English has become the majority language. Even today, Irish (Gaelic), not English, is widely seen as an integral part of Irish identity, *the* true language of Ireland and the main medium for expressing valuable Irish traditions and culture – in short the most distinctive feature of Irish culture.[1]

Another factor contributing to the lack of overt recognition for the varieties of English spoken in Ireland is its divergent nature – with distinctions based on class and region. Irish English is widely seen as a set of oral varieties of English indexed with socially and regionally distinctive

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[1]The rapid growth in Irish immersion schools (gaelscoileanna) during the Celtic Tiger era when the Irish nation developed a new self-confidence can be seen as supporting evidence for this view.

populations and identities that do not easily lend themselves to positive identification for all Irish people. From the perspective of the state and Irish society, there is thus very little need for standardization of Irish English and its study is, if at all, mostly relegated to the domain of folkloristics, i.e. affirmation of regional or social identities (Kallen 1988: 127-128).[2]

From the 1990s until 2007 Ireland underwent rapid social change due to a booming economy fueled by easy access to credit, and immigration. At the height of the boom, the foreign population of Ireland nearly doubled within the space of four years: from 7% or 274,000 people in 2002 to 13%, or 420,000 people in 2006. Besides UK citizens who are the largest group of immigrants (Gilmartin & Mills 2008), newcomers came from a variety of EU 15 (e.g. France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands) and EU 25 (e.g. Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia) countries, and from countries outside of Europe such as Australia, the United States, Nigeria and India. Most immigrants are between the ages of 25 and 44 and are in the majority very well educated: "in 2006, 38.3 per cent of foreign nationals whose full-time education had ceased had a third level qualification compared with 28.2 of Irish nationals" (MCRI 2008: 57). Immigration certainly increased the social and linguistic diversity of Ireland and has been challenging (traditional) Irish social norms, views and life styles. However, to date little is know about its precise effect on Irish society and on the linguistic situation of Ireland in particular.[3] We have

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[2]I would also submit that as in the case of (spoken) Irish, standardization of Irish English is problematic because privileging (the features of) one variety over (those of) another undermines the ideology of Irish societal egalitarianism.

[3]We know that more than 200 languages are spoken in Ireland today, however, we know very little about their speaker numbers, their regional and social distribution in Ireland and how they are practiced.

some knowledge about migrants' language practices based on reports from interviews. MCRI (2008: 137-139), for instance, suggests that maintenance of so-called first languages is high among persons originating from China, India, Lithuania and Nigeria. They are used in the home and with friends; only Nigerians appear to also make regular use of English in these contexts. In the work environment and in public contexts it is English that is most widely used. Interviewees reported varying degrees of fluency in written and spoken English while knowledge of Irish tends to be rare among newcomers. Research on Poles in Ireland paints a similar picture and suggests that Poles are acculturating to varying degrees to Irish English and are increasingly also practicing English in the family context (cf. Nestor & Regan 2011: 40).

Although public debate is very much focused on immigrants' relative integration and immigrants' English language skills in particular, there is relatively little research on this issue to date. The Trinity Integration Initiative has made available excellent applied work that aims to facilitate primary and secondary school children's educational integration (see http://www.elsp.ie/tii.shtml), but there is little or no published research on how children and adults are actually using language and the factors that play a role in their linguistic integration. Traditionally, differences in the rate of acculturation are attributed to different patterns of contact with members of the target or local language and community, and to different levels of education and prior competence in the target language (see Winford 2003). However, recent research in second language acquisition (Norton 2000) strongly suggests that subjective factors such as people's views about the target language, its speakers and their culture are instrumental in promoting or hampering linguistic integration. To date, however, the latter issues and migrants'

views about language in Ireland, and varieties of Irish English in particular, have received little attention.[4]

This paper investigates newcomers' views on English in Ireland. It discusses migrants' perception of the structure and nature of English as spoken in Ireland and their alignment with Irish English. Immigrants appear to agree on the (distinctive) features and more specifically the structure of English in Ireland. However, their social assessments and feelings about adopting it are more diverse and appear to be influenced by factors such as their knowledge and views about other varieties of English and their speakers, attitudes towards Ireland, views about language variation, and their reason for coming to Ireland. The data consists of semi-guided interviews with sixty recent immigrants focusing on their experiences in Ireland.[5] Participants had either arrived in 2004 or in 2007 and were identified using three key methods: snowballing, flyers, and online recruitment via a number of on-line forums for expatriates. Most participants were interviewed twice over a period of two years and interviews lasted about an hour. Participants are representative of Ireland's immigrant population. Interviewees' ages ranged from 23 to 68 years of age, with the overwhelming majority in their twenties and thirties. Thirty six of the interviewees were women and twenty four were men. Interviewees originated from different

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[4]During 2008 and 2009 David Singleton of Trinity College and his associates explored this issue for Polish migrants in Ireland in two conference presentations (Kopečková 2009; Debaene 2009).

[5]The IRCHSS-funded project was entitled *Towards a dynamic approach to research on migration and integration* (PI: Mary Gilmartin, University of Maynooth) and ran from December 2008 to December 2010.

European countries,[6] Australia, North America, India, Uganda and South Africa, and lived in a variety of locations throughout Ireland. Most of the interviewees had completed third level education or had had professional training prior to arriving in Ireland; a small number also held a fourth level degree. Table 1 gives a breakdown of their occupations in Ireland. While some interviewees worked in the same sector as in their country of origin, others initially had to work in jobs below their level of qualification and experience.

Table 1: Occupation of interviewees at time of interview

Construction	5	Architect, engineer, technician, administrator
Wholesale and retail trade	3	Sales
Hotels and restaurants	6	Porter, waiter, receptionist, bar staff
Banking and financial services	4	Bank, insurance, administrator
Real estate, renting and business activities	11	Administrator, call-centre operative, IT project manager
Education	6	Lecturer, teacher, administrator
Health and social work	4	Doctor, nurse, therapist
Other community, social and personal service activities	4	Childcare, trade union, charity

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[6]They came from the France, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and UK.

Students	7	Part-time work in childcare, retail
Other	3	Consultant, business owner, artist
Not employed	7	Homemaker, retired, asylum seeker

Some of the data come from another research project that focused on African immigrants to Ireland.[7] For the second project, thirteen people living in the Dublin area were accessed through a variety of community groups and interviewed once. Interviewees worked in retail, community services, were full time students or did voluntary work because as asylum seekers they were barred from working. All interviewees lived in the Dublin area.

Section Two presents people's language repertoires, their practices in Ireland, and discusses immigrants' linguistics integration into Ireland. Section Three examines immigrants' views about the nature of Irish English and section Four explores newcomers' attitudes to Irish English. The final section summarizes the findings and discusses their implications.

2. Newcomers' language background and linguistic integration

Interviewees generally had very little or no precise knowledge of the linguistic situation in Ireland nor of Irish varieties of English when they arrived in Ireland, but they differed with respect to their language background and practices. People who originated from North America, Australia and the UK (with the exception of two interviewees) tended to present themselves as

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[7]The project funded by the UCD Seed funding scheme was entitled *Linguistic practice and social identity in the context of migration in contemporary Ireland* and ran during 2006.

monolingual in (a variety of) English. By contrast, interviewees from India and Africa had received all or part of their education and training through English, but also asserted using one or more other languages in their home country and, though in fewer contexts, also in Ireland. Migrants from continental Europe, francophone Canada and China typically learned English as a foreign or second language in their country of origin. They had varying degrees of competence in English prior to arriving in Ireland and use it in different ways in Ireland. A francophone Canadian interviewee, for instance, reported that he was educated through French, but attended English classes throughout school and later received his university education through English. In Ireland, he interacts through English without any problems or regrets (2007CAN01). Other interviewees said that they are comfortable using English at work and with some of their friends, but also asserted regularly using their 'mother tongue' with friends, their partner (e.g., 2007GER02, 2007IT02, 2007IT03, 200IT04) and/or their children (e.g. 2004NL01, 2004IN02) and/or other family members (2007SLK01). Yet others make relatively little use of English. For example, an Italian interviewee who had relocated to Ireland for her husband's job had studied English in Italy and Ireland. However, after three years she still struggled with spoken and written English and preferred to speak Italian (2007IT02). Most people's experiences, however, resembled that of one of our Polish interviewees who had learned English in school, and said: "I thought I had English when I came here but like I said it was really a small disaster, my ears were really big for a good few weeks" (2004POL04). Only a small number of interviewees had minimal or no knowledge of English when they arrived in Ireland. They had either failed to learn it: "I had some classes to be honest after 3 years I knew how to say hello and goodbye. […] I didn't realize it was going to be necessary in my life. That was the problem" (2004POL02), or

they had never received any instruction in English at all. These interviewees quickly learned to communicate in English, but still struggled with writing in English.

Both speakers of English and those who learned English later in life recounted initially having difficulty understanding the English spoken in Ireland. For some people it initially presented a barrier to integration which they were only able to overcome with the help of a broker: "The language was a bit of a barrier at the beginning and I would say if I didn't have this friend at the beginning it would probably have been a bit more difficult" (2004IT03). Others explained that they got accustomed to Irish English over time through a concerted effort on their part and interaction with Irish people: "When I initially came there were times during conversation when all I was doing was trying to keep up with listening and I would need to say, 'sorry say that again.' But my ears seem to have gotten used to it" (2007SA01). At the time of the interview, most interviewees were confident that they were proficient enough in Irish English in order to manage their lives in Ireland. However, conversations among Irish people still presented a challenge for a number of the interviewees: "So even now, because I go to the canteen with a lot of Irish people and it is very difficult to understand them when they are talking between them" (2004IT04). Interviewees generally found Irish people to be very accommodating towards newcomers' difficulties with local language practices, but they were found to be less willing to concede that immigrants' comprehension problems could be due to the divergent character of (some) varieties of Irish English.

> […] the English [of the North] is quite strange and sometimes it is really difficult to understand them and even the Irish people in my office don't understand them sometimes. But when they don't understand it means that there is something wrong

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with the person but when I don't understand there is something wrong with my English, so that is a little bit frustrating. (2007POL01)

Interviewees who felt that their competence in English was insufficient when they arrived in Ireland cited interaction with speakers of English – Irish people but also others – as the most useful way to improve their English:

Interviewer 2: […] So how did you learn English then?

Interviewee: By spending time with native speakers. (2004POL02)

Others pointed to a combination of strategies, such as the use of media in English, interaction through English and being open and forthright about one's problems and needs.

[…] I kept asking questions from people and I found the Irish people really patient. If they didn't understand what I was saying they were just saying, 'say again, say again, say again.' And I just kept on learning the language. (2004FIN01)

[…] I go to the cinema about twice a week because I am a big cinema fan and I had to pick it up from the cinema as well, […]. The other thing is DVDs, I have a collection of about 300 DVDs in the house so I watch them all the time, all in English and that helped me too. (2004POL03)

Language classes presented another, though less favoured, option for improving English language skills. Most of the interviewees either never attended courses in Ireland or quickly gave them up because they did not find them useful. A few, usually those who chose to come to Ireland because they wanted to improve their English, took English classes throughout their stay in the country and also sat English proficiency exams because they felt that some aspects of English such as grammar and formal English could only be learned through formal instruction. Attending English language classes and completing standard proficiency tests, which generally required significant financial investment, also served professional goals. As one of the interviewees explained, he hoped that they would improve his employment prospects locally and elsewhere:

> This is my first thing to do, […] because after this certificate [for English language proficiency] I can work [unclear] I am a teacher and I have a good level of English so wherever I go I can say, look here is my experience, here is my CV, I can teach English or teach whatever. (2007SPN01)

Besides English language classes, interviewees also found subject-based classes such as a course on computer skills or aid provision useful for improving their ability to communicate through English (2007IT02; 2004POL02; 2004POL05).

While insufficient competence in English was sometimes perceived as an obstacle for making contacts or for obtaining qualified employment in the beginning (e.g. 2004POL04, 2004FIN01, 2004IT01, 2004IT02), it was generally discounted as impacting negatively on their lives and careers once they had spent some time living in Ireland. Only one of the interviewees from

France felt that people still struggled to understand him: "I still have a strong accent. […] it is still hard for me to get understand from other people, if they are not used to me they have problems to understand me" (2007FR02).

3. English in Ireland: the views of immigrants

Interviewees spontaneously confirmed local perceptions (see Hickey 2007) that Irish English is regionally and socially variable. They typically suggested that varieties of English in Ireland fall into two broad categories, those that are difficult to understand and those that pose no problem for comprehension. Among the varieties that were identified as "difficult or impossible to understand", people typically cited the English spoken in Cork, Donegal and in the North of Ireland, but Kerry, Sligo, Galway and north Dublin English were also mentioned:

> Especially like the north Dublin accent where most of [my husband's] family you know has a north Dublin and that was really really difficult but having you know been here 2 years Dublin accents are no problem I can understand. Then I went to Kerry and no clue what they were saying. No idea yes. (2007US02)

In terms of groups of speakers, interviewees tended to associate "difficult to understand English" with particular occupations, age groups or places, such as bus or taxi drivers (2004IT03, 2007CAN01), builders (2007GER02), people employed in the service industry, particularly shops and department stores, or with older people (2004POL01) and teenagers from inner city

social housing (2004POL01). "Easy to understand English" is never explicitly regionally identified, but is linked to education and professionals:

> Yes, simple people ["who have not had a lot of studies probably"], nice people, but I saw the difference, for example when I went for the interview with people of some level in the office, you can understand better, the English is more clean and sometimes when you are talking with normal people it is more difficult. (2004IT04)

This suggests that, like Irish people, newcomers associate the term Irish English with divergent, marked and non-standard forms of English rather than using it as a cover term for all varieties of English spoken in Ireland. English as used by professionals in Ireland is somehow perceived as non-indigenous and conforming to external norms which are also seen as unmarked and proper. Some of the interviewees also suggested that Irish English and unmarked or international English are poles on a continuum and that different points on that continuum relate to different socio-political orientations as well as different social groups within Irish society.

Although interviewees tended to rate the English spoken in Ireland as unique, they generally struggled to pinpoint specific linguistic features. Among the features that initially appeared most unusual to people were Irish personal names: "What I found very difficult was the Irish names and my very first job for the first few months was in recruitment and I had all these Irish names and I had no idea how to pronounce them but I learned quickly" (2004NL01). Predictably, lexical features including phrasal expressions figured prominently in people's descriptions as they are most salient. One North American woman pointed to common lexical differences between North American and European English as salient aspects that may, in some cases, even

lead to miscommunication: "I'd say just different terms and things like that, chips instead of french fries, biscuit instead of cookie, kind of little things like that, […] Like you will say a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and they are like, jelly, and I am like, jam. So it changes things" (2007US06). However, it is exclamations such as "oh Jesus" and agreement elements such as "grand" that appear to embody Irishness in the eyes of non-Irish:

Sometimes [my Irish husband] says, 'oh you sounded really Irish then,' because, 'oh Jesus,' or something like that. (2007US06)

When I go back to Wales people think I sound Irish, I think I have picked up a few Irish expressions like 'grand', that is a very common one isn't it. (2004UK03)

Interviewees also remarked on pragmatic aspects. Many felt that swearing is a salient aspect of language use in Ireland: "there is too much swearing here" (2007UG01); "they have lots of bad language, fucking, fucking, too many fuckings" (2004CH01). People from continental Europe, in whose languages intimacy is conveyed through the use of bald on record statements (Wierzbicka 1991), sometimes remarked that language use in Ireland is exaggeratingly deferential or distance-oriented because Irish people use negatively polite forms such as "sorry" at a high frequency. However, people equally pointed to the frequent use of positively polite forms: "they are very endearing, 'take care now, mind yourself'" (2007US08). These forms boost people's positive face and promote positive relations, but, as one German interviewee observed, they tend to be formulaic in nature because they are generally not designed to elicit a real answer:

And the Germans always think that if you pop a question that you want to hear an answer but if you ask 'how are you?' you don't really want to know.

(2007GER02)

An interviewee from the UK remarked on the use of tentative language to convey non-tentative or definite meanings: "But the use of language like saying, 'I would have' when they mean 'I had' and things like that. It is not important, but it is because 'I would have' to me is more tentative than 'I had'" (2004UK06).

UK interviewees also highlighted differences between Irish and UK English in the use of discourse markers. One person pointed out that *so* is frequently used at the end of yes/no questions in some parts of the country and that tag questions tend to be invariable in Irish English: "the use of the word 'so' at the end of things is something that, like, 'is your tummy sore so?' Or, the pain is in your tummy, is it?" (2007UK05). Another interviewee found the distribution of *now* in Irish English salient: "Oh yes, like if you are handing somebody something you just say, 'now'" (2004UK03).

Structural aspects predictably figured less frequently in people's descriptions because they tend to be less salient to non-linguists. Nevertheless, two interviewees noted that there is variation between inter-dental fricatives and stop sounds in Irish English and that this variation is situationally conditioned: "Like they can't say th's but they can when it is not supposed to be there" (2004UK05). Another interviewee remarked on the differences in vowel sounds between Canadian and Irish English (2007CAN01). Only one interviewee who has had training in language-related issues commented on morphosyntactic differences, namely the much discussed 'hot-news or *after* perfect' in the literature on Irish English (cf. Filppula 2004: 330) and the

different use of the temporal subordinator *since*: "and sometimes they make me laugh like, 'I am just after getting the cake out of the oven.' The ways of phrasing things. And another one is the way people say how old someone is, 'she is 4 since September.' That would be quite different" (2007OZ01).

4. Attitudes to Irish English

People's attitudes about the English spoken in Ireland were diverse suggesting that interviewees have different language ideologies. Language ideologies have been defined as "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests" (Irvine 1989: 255). They are "beliefs, or feelings, about languages as used in their social worlds" (Kroskrity 2006: 498). This includes beliefs about the superiority or inferiority of a given language (variety) or beliefs about the (in)appropriateness of a language (variety) in a certain situation or among certain groups of speakers. Language ideologies have to be conceived of as multiple because groups of people tend to be characterized by various degrees of heterogeneity and therefore typically involve different kinds of positionality and produce different kinds of perspectives on the same issue. Members of social groupings also do not tend to be homogeneous with respect to their awareness of local language ideologies. Language ideologies mediate between social structure and forms of talk, and play an important role in creating and representing social and cultural identities. They are always interested, serving the needs and ideas of specific social groups (Kroskrity 2006: 501-510).

The interviews suggest that views about English in Ireland depend on the social salience and perception of language variation in the region of origin, people's relationship and views about Ireland, their own identity, and their knowledge and feelings about other varieties of English and their speakers. For instance, the people who displayed non-committal or neutral views about Irish English were generally people who were either unable to distinguish between varieties of English or who came from countries where, according to them, dialect differentiation is socially not very salient. An Australian interviewee remarked on the great amount of regional differences in Ireland, in a descriptive rather than an evaluative way:

[…] and because accents in Ireland vary so widely whereas you wouldn't have that difference in Australia even though it is a much bigger country. […] In the 4 years I lived in Sydney it was only ever one person said to me, are you from Victoria. So the differences in accents would be very slight whereas here Limerick has got a different accent and Clare and then Galway has a different accent again. And even within Clare you can have a bit of an Ennis accent and then the country Clare accent. (2007OZ01)

Overtly positive views about Irish ways of speaking English were sometimes coupled with negative experiences or views about other varieties of English and their speakers. Some of the Polish interviewees, for instance, said that they value Irish English because they find it less pretentious and arrogant than British English and its speakers:

[…] for me it was much more easy to understand Irish English than British English.
I mean British English is like hot potato in mouth because they say something and
for me it is blah blah or so, so I don't like really British English and I said it would
be much more better for me to find some job in Ireland than in Britain. I don't have
personally anything against British, I was there just once as a tourist in London, but I
wouldn't feel happy in Britain because they have different mentality. They used to
think that they are still empire and that they are probably the best in the world
because a few centuries ago they used to own one third of the globe and I don't like...
(2007POL2)

Other interviewees simply preferred the actual nature of English spoken in Ireland to that in the
UK, because they felt that it was closer to their own pronunciation: "Yes it's because I don't
know how to pronounce the words in the proper British way like I say 'flot' which is not 'flot'
it's like 'flat'. It suits me I like it. […] I would prefer the Irish pronunciation" (2004POL02).

Negative views about English in Ireland, and about Ireland in general, were displayed by two
people from the UK with little or no close connection to Ireland beyond the fact that they worked
in the country. One of these interviewees rejected the notion that English spoken in Ireland is a
legitimate variety or set of varieties implying that it is just derivative of other varieties of
English. In his view, Irish varieties of English lack distinctiveness and individual character: "It's
simple enough to understand. It's not dialect; it's not Scots or anything"(2004UK01). Another
interviewee took the opposite approach. He did not accept that Irish English is a legitimate form
of English: "they don't speak English, they have a language all of their own." He essentially
described Irish ways of speaking as a low status or restricted code: "They just speak so fast and

they jumble all their words together and to tell you the truth I think they have a very limited vocabulary." In his view, Irish English contrasts so fundamentally from his own UK variety that he has "slowed down a lot and I have to think a lot, I mean there are a lot of words that I would normally use that I can't use because no one will know what I am saying" (2007UK03). Interviewees from the UK tended to find the notion that they might have adopted features of Irish English somewhat disconcerting, even if they did not display openly negative views about Irish English and Ireland. One interviewee suggested that this is because having an Irish accent undermines her English identity: "And I would get offended probably if somebody said to me I was getting an Irish accent, and that is honest. But that is because being English is an absolute part of who I am, I don't want it to go" (2004UK05). Those who harbored negative attitudes towards Ireland generally reject this possibility outright: "I haven't, I don't think I have" (2007UK03). Others expressed themselves more cautiously, but nevertheless, were ill at ease with the idea that they might engage in Irish English. The use of Irish English features was typically presented as non-deliberate and non-typical language use that occurs in exceptional circumstances only when conscious control is suspended:

Oh yes, like if you are handing somebody something you just say, now. I find myself doing that occasionally, a subconscious sort of a thing. (2004UK03)

Yes well when my son and daughter were here in October and we had one of those silly weekends where you drink a lot of red wine and you get very stupid. And [my son] was really into, 'how-ya how-ya how-ya.' And I didn't know that I was doing it, but I was doing it. He had noticed. We were at Mass on the Sunday and as we went

out somebody we knew was getting in the car and I said it, 'how are you?' only I must have said, 'how-ya?' I can't do it when I am trying to do it. But I must have said it like the locals because [my son] looked at me and I was trying to keep a straight face. And then I realised that I am saying it like the locals which I suppose is inevitable. (2004UK06)

Others suggested that active adoption and use of local features is acceptable and permissible for linguistically immature people such as children and people who have other mother tongues. One interviewees, for instance, was happy to admit that her young daughter had adopted Irish ways of speaking, but categorically rejected any influence from Irish English on her, her husband's and her teenage son's language use:

[…] obviously mine and [my husband] and [my son's] accents because of age are unaffected but [my daughter] would come out with some very Irish expressions and it had quite a strong influence on her accent. (2007UK02)

However, her answer to the question: "And did you find this strange?" suggests that she perceives her daughter's behavior as typically childish behavior.

We liked it, we thought it was funny, not her accent but some of the things she would come out with, she'd use some very [...] because one of her friends was looked after by her grandmother because her mother was out at work all day so [my daughter] would come out with some things that an Irish old lady would say. She would sort of

say, 'I can't get this yoke out of here,' or something, where did that come from, a 4 year old girl coming out with. She would come out with things that were alien to us like, 'oh I won't be bold mummy,' whereas in England she would say, 'oh I won't be naughty if I can have that,' things like that. But we just liked it, we thought it was cute. (2007UK02)

When pressed about the matter, one UK interviewee confirms that he considers people's adoption of (many) Irish English features unusual behavior and suggests that it might be indicative of a hybrid identity caused by unusual circumstance such as (long term) emigration or by an extreme desire to connect with people.

Interviewee: [….] But I suppose there are some people in work then like there was somebody like they would have taken on the accent a lot more like you know like some people like coming from Germany like and they had been here for a long time and they would have an Irish German accent and it's just like 'what's going on there'?

Interviewer 1: Do you think people from England or Wales are less likely to take on an Irish accent?

Interviewee: I don't know actually. I am not sure actually I don't know. I think maybe it's different kind of people like I think it's just. I don't know actually because I also know a lad from Manchester who has come over like he has been over here for a few years and he has got a kind of, he is kind of like he has taken on the accent a bit more like. I think it's just kind of different people like it's you know its maybe

some people are more susceptible to, maybe its people who talk more maybe. (2007UK01)

An entirely different approach was adopted by another UK interviewee. Based on his experiences in England and in Ireland, he maintained that (temporarily) adapting one's way of speaking towards that of the people around you is an important strategy for successfully negotiating one's integration and for showing respect:

Interviewer: So does that, do you think then that how you are in public places is quite different to how you would be in Liverpool?

Interviewee: Yes. [My Irish wife] would say that my accent changes when I go home. That the accent gets slightly thicker and I also I was conscious of it myself when I was working in a local authority that if I was doing work on, in certain estates, I would actually talk in a way that would be more attuned to the way that people would talk in that area. I suppose it was a means of communication that I would change the accent slightly. Not consciously but it would happen. Just I suppose it was a tool, and she says that I still do that. (2004UK02)

In contrast to people from the UK who tend to have quite an ambivalent relationship with Irish English, people from the US, like most people who are speakers of other languages, sometimes describe Irish English features as unusual and surprising, but do not appear to have negative feelings about them. One interviewee, for instance, finds Irish English features emotionally pleasing and is happy to embrace them:

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There are lots of things we joke about, we have adopted so much, just because we like the sound of it, I don't know, there is probably a million things, I am trying to think of them now. There is [unclear] I couldn't get over that, I felt oh my God, I thought someone was joking. So that I am still finding it peculiar. The other things, they are very endearing, 'take care now, mind yourself.' You hear a lot of elderly people in our area so I love hearing them talk, I love it. (2007US08)

For another US interviewee, Irish English does not carry an emotional value. She is nevertheless proud of the fact that she can, at times, fool Irish people into thinking that she is Irish. In light of the fact that she had big problems understanding Irish English initially, this is evidence of a personal achievement:

Interviewer 1: Do you think you have acquired an Irish accent?

Interviewee: I have been told I kind of do. […] Apparently on the phone I sound really Irish. I don't know why that is.

Interviewee: I ring into [my partner's] work and ask for him and they will say 'some Irish person is asking for you'. 'That's [my partner].' 'What?' so. (2007US02)

In line with dominant US views that cast diversity as a positive attribute, she does not perceive acculturation to Irish English as a threat to her North American identity, but as something that complements it: "Like certain words but I think probably you can tell that I am American you know or at least North American. (2007US02)."

Yet another US interviewee takes a very utilitarian view. She argues that adopting features from Irish English is natural and necessary for communicating effectively and smoothly with local people: "I guess it [Irish ways of expression] will come on eventually but you do have to change a bit here and there for people to understand you too because you will say something and people are like, 'what?'" (2007US06). While many of our interviewees were happy to adapt in part to Irish ways of speaking, this was not always appreciated by Irish people though. One US interviewee who worked as a teacher explained that students discouraged her from using Dublin associated expressions for humoristic purposes because they perceived it as demeaning:

But I do remember my students saying, 'no Miss,' because I was starting to speak Dublinese just to tease them and I forget now because I have been away from it, but you are wrecking my head. So I would say to them, you are wrecking my head. And they hated it, they would say, are you posh Miss? And they loved the way I spoke because the kids are really into American stuff, they are not of the, oh we won't go into the US because Bush is the president. (2007US07)

Interviews with people of African origin, however, suggest that Irish people are not only uncomfortable with humorous uses of Irish English by outsiders, but are also ambivalent about genuine uses, at least in the case of some groups of people. Africans interviewed during 2006 argued that it was very difficult for them – adults – to use (salient) features of Irish English because Irish people generally perceived such uses as mocking: "[…] like, you want to like, like, speak the way they speak, they think you are, like, making jest of them" (N I). These comments suggest that migrants' views about Irish English and consequently their relative use of it are not

simply a function of migrants' linguistic background, their views about Ireland and their relative degree and desire to integrate, but are also actively constructed in interactions with Irish people. By reacting to migrants' uses of features of Irish English, Irish people are playing an important part in shaping migrants' perceptions about Irish English and the rules of its appropriate use.

5. Conclusion

In the last ten years many people from all over the world have made Ireland their home. The newcomers surveyed here generally had little knowledge about the Irish linguistic context and local varieties of English on their arrival in the country and initially struggled to understand them. However, most interviewees quickly integrated linguistically developing views and attitudes about Irish English. Similar to Irish people, immigrants divide local varieties of English into 'unmarked' and divergent ones, associating the latter with rural and working class populations and the former with professionals and a weak Irish identity. Attitudes towards varieties of Irish English are diverse depending on a variety of factors such as national background, attitudes to variation and other varieties of English and their speakers. UK immigrants tended to be most ambivalent about them, feeling that their adoption of Irish English features would undermine their national belonging. By contrast, others such as those from North America, Australia and continental Europe generally displayed positive or non-evaluative views about English in Ireland. Some found it pleasing while others found its diverse nature interesting. Its use was felt to be natural, furthering integration and adding to one's identity. However, decisions to use (features of) Irish English and its social meanings are not only dependent on

newcomers, but are equally subject to licensing by Irish society. Locals' reactions to newcomers' use (and lack of use) of Irish English actively shapes immigrants views about Irish English and their uses thereof. This, in turn, impacts on local images of immigrants and local perceptions about their relative degree of integration (or integratability).

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