

## Investigating the phonological history of southwest Tyrone English

Warren Maguire  
 University of Edinburgh  
 w.maguire@ed.ac.uk  
[www.lel.ed.ac.uk/~wmaguire/SwTE/SwTEIntro.html](http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/~wmaguire/SwTE/SwTEIntro.html)

### Traditional dialect research on English & Scots in Britain

#### Orton Corpus (1930s):

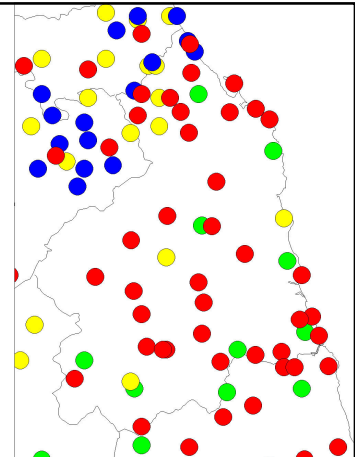
- 18 major locations across Northumberland, Tyneside, north Durham
- > 1000 phonetic transcriptions

#### SED (1950s):

- 311 locations across England, Monmouthshire, Isle of Man
- > 2000 phonetic transcriptions

#### LSS (1950s):

- 188 locations across Lowland Scotland, Berwick, east Ulster
- c. 1000 phonetic transcriptions



### Tyrone

#### Mid-Ulster English dialect

- the result of contact between English, Scots and Irish from the 17<sup>th</sup> C
- Irish survived in the county till the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century

Remote, rural county, far from urban influence

Where I'm from...

But traditional Tyrone English has been largely ignored by dialectologists



### Traditional phonological data for Tyrone

#### Staples (1896)

- c. 500 (not altogether trustworthy) phonetic transcriptions of uncertain location, described as pertaining to both Belfast and to Lissan on the Tyrone/(London)Derry border

#### *A Linguistic Survey of Ireland* (Henry 1958)

- 121 published phonetic transcriptions from Glenhull/Glenelly
- Unpublished data?

#### Other?

- *Tape-recorded Survey* (Barry 1981) data
- Not specifically a traditional dialect survey
- The data for the older speakers doesn't necessarily constitute a record of the most traditional forms current at the time
- Only small amount of data from scattered locations across Tyrone

### More recent studies of Tyrone English

#### Todd (1984) – east Tyrone

- Very interesting hypothesis, but almost no data or analysis published

#### Hickey (2004)

- Lots of data from Tyrone, but all read speech and mostly from young, urban speakers

#### Cunningham (2008, 2011)

- Only some data published, analysis focusses on speech of younger people

#### Corrigan (2010)

- Small number of recordings of speakers from across Tyrone, but not traditional speech

#### Connolly (2013)

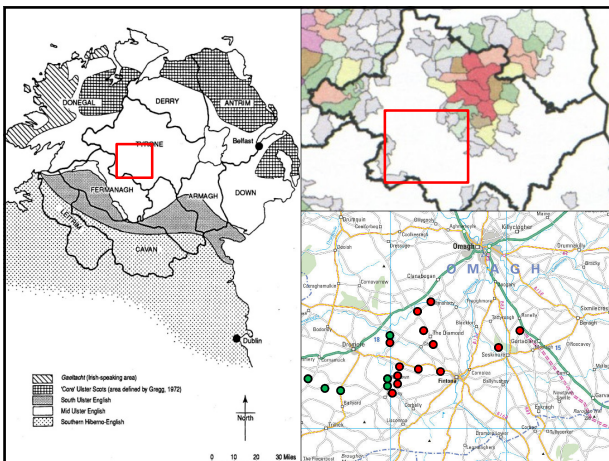
- Analysis of some phonological features in TRS data, plus new data from a range of speakers in north Tyrone, most of whom are younger, educated and urban

### Questions about Tyrone English phonology

#### Questions:

- What are/were the most traditional forms of Tyrone English like?
- What particular phonological features characterise traditional Tyrone English, and what is their nature?
- To what extent do they still survive?
- What are the phonological origins of Tyrone English?
- What input did English (including regional dialects), Scots and Irish have on its development?
- Are there differences between the traditional speech of Catholics and Protestants in Tyrone and, if so, is any of this ascribable to different (proportions of the) linguistic inputs to their speech (as per Todd)?

Only with detailed records of the most old-fashioned forms of Tyrone English can we hope to begin answering these questions



**SwTE corpus – 35 hrs of audio recordings (so far)**

- Legacy recordings from the late 1980s and early 1990s of a number of old speakers in the community born in the early 20th century (2 hrs 50 mins)
- One-to-one interviews (typically involving discussion of local life and history, farming practices, and superstitions) with 21 conservatively spoken current residents of the area born in the early and mid 20th century, made between 2003 and 2015 (25 hrs)
- Answers to the *Survey of English Dialects* questionnaire by two speakers (CM39 and PM43, neighbours), made between 2004 and 2015 (5 hrs 30 mins)
- Range of wordlist and reading tasks designed to investigate various aspects of the phonology of the dialect, especially the MEAT-MATE (near-) merger (1 hr 25 mins)

Speaker	Occupation	Speaker	Occupation
PM00	†farmer	PF40	domestic worker
PF14	†housewife	PF41	farmer
PF19	†farmer, housewife	PM42	farmer
PM23	†farmer	PM43	farmer, salesman
PM24	†farmer	CM44	farmer, labourer
CM26	farmer	PM45	unemployed
PM26	†farmer	CM47	farmer, digger-man
PM29	farmer	PF49	office worker
CM32	lorry driver	PF50	caterer
CM36	farmer	PM50	farmer, postman
PM38	farmer	PM54	farmer
CM39	farmer	PM55	unemployed
PF39	farmer	PM75	farmer

**Examples**

See transcriptions on the handout

- PM00
  - Remembering news of the hanging of Joe Moan, the ‘Trillick Murderer’, in 1904
- CM26
  - Telling about the cutting down of a special bush
- PM43
  - Answering SED questions IV.4.1, IV.4.2, IV.4.4 (*lice/louse, nits, fleas*)
- PF50
  - MEAT-MATE minimal pairs

**The MEAT lexical set**

MATE-like pronunciations of MEAT in Irish English (including SwTE)

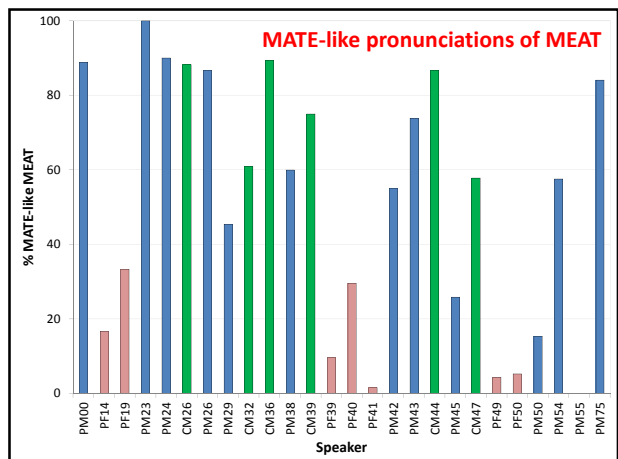
- e.g. *beak, beat, cheap, concrete, decent, easy, eat, flea, Jesus, meat, peas, speak, tea, teacher, weak*

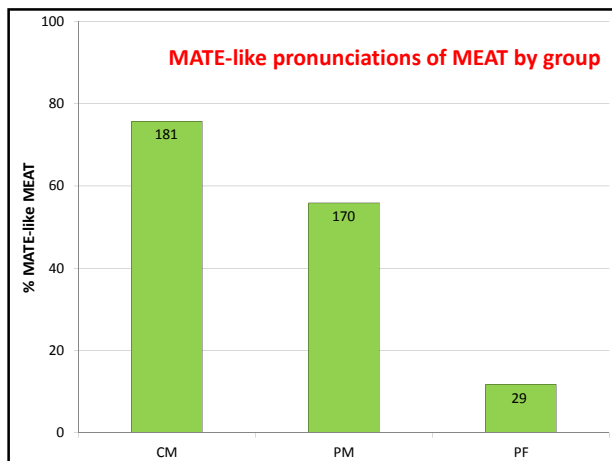
Milroy and Harris (1980) and Harris (1985):

- In Belfast, MEAT and MATE are in a situation of near merger
- [iə] preferred in MATE, [e] in MEAT

In the SwTE corpus:

- High levels of MATE-like pronunciations of MEAT
- A good barometer as to how traditional the speech of the speakers in the corpus is
- High levels of MATE-like MEAT correlate strongly with high levels of other traditional features





### Phonological origins of SwTE

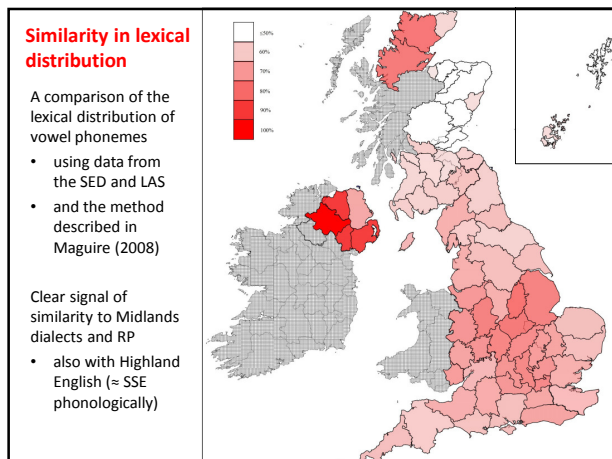
Harris & Milroy and Labov (1994) take the MEAT-MATE near-merger as evidence of a similar near-merger in Early Modern (standard) English pointing towards the English origins of most features of SwTE

In terms of its lexis, syntax, morphology and lexical distribution of phonemes, SwTE, like other MUE varieties, is essentially a Midland English dialect in origin

- probably quite close historically to the ancestor of modern Standard English (cf. "Tyrone dialect is like the language of Shakespeare")
- though in many respects an archaic one (rhoticity, MEAT-MATE, /ɛr/ > /ar/ in words like *search*, FOOT=STRUT)

The dialect also shows plenty of obvious evidence of Scots influence at all linguistic levels

The degree of influence from Irish is less clear



### Input from Scots

Obvious input from Scots at all levels, especially lexically and phonologically

- *birl* 'turn round and round', *crabbit* 'bad tempered', *dwalm* 'be sick(ly)', *weak*, *fash* 'get sick of something', *footer* 'fiddle about', *haet* 'single thing', *hirple* 'to limp', *hogo* 'stink, smell', *oxter* 'armpit', *pegh* 'cough weakly', *scunner* 'get sick and tired of something', *sleekit* 'sly', *sproghel* 'sprawl, stagger', *thole* 'bear, put up with', *thrawn* 'stubborn' etc. etc.

Many phonological features of Scots origin, including:

- SVLR (*bite/tide-tied/size*, *boot/brood-brewed/bruise*, *feet/greed-agreed/seize*)
- /a(:)/ in LOT/CLOTH next to labials (*fond*, *drop*, *off*, *soft*, *top*)
- /ɹ/ for /r/ after /l(h)w/ (*whiskey*, *window*, *winter*)
- Distinction between /ei/ and /ae/ in morpheme final position (*die-dye*, *eye-I*, *lie-lie*)
- /i/ in *king*, *swim*, *women*
- Fronted GOOSE vowel ([ɥ]), lowered/centralised KIT vowel ([ɛ̃]/[ɜ])

### Input from Irish

Input from Irish to SwTE is less obvious

- small number of lexical borrowings (*cailey* 'social visit', *greeshog* 'ashes', *keeney* 'whine, cry', *paltogue* 'lazy being', *plattyn* 'round deposit of dung', *prawkis* 'mixed up mess of food', *scraw* 'sod of earth', *shannagh* 'hearty conversation')
- morphosyntactic parallels, some of which may admit to other explanations (e.g. subordinating *and*, *yous*, habitual *be*, *after* perfect, *have it ate* construction, *what name's on him?*)

Possible phonological features involving Irish input include:

- Epenthesis in liquid+C clusters
- Pre-R Dentalisation
- Velar Palatalisation (/k/, /g/ > [c], [j] before front/low vowels; *car*, *cape*, *cat*, *gate*, *get*, *give*, *guide*, *keep*)
- Palatal Velarisation (/tj/, /dj/ > [c]/[k], [j]/[g]); *Christian*, *furniture*, *idiot*, *Indian*, *question*, *stupid*, *tune*)

### Input from Irish

Input from Irish to SwTE is less obvious

- small number of lexical borrowings (*cailey* 'social visit', *greeshog* 'ashes', *keeney* 'whine, cry', *paltogue* 'lazy being', *plattyn* 'round deposit of dung', *prawkis* 'mixed up mess of food', *scraw* 'sod of earth', *shannagh* 'hearty conversation')
- morphosyntactic parallels, some of which may admit to other explanations (e.g. subordinating *and*, *yous*, habitual *be*, *after* perfect, *have it ate* construction, *what name's on him?*)

Possible phonological features involving Irish input include:

- **Epenthesis in liquid+C clusters**
- **Pre-R Dentalisation**
- Velar Palatalisation (/k/, /g/ > [c], [j] before front/low vowels; *car*, *cape*, *cat*, *gate*, *get*, *give*, *guide*, *keep*)
- Palatal Velarisation (/tj/, /dj/ > [c]/[k], [j]/[g]); *Christian*, *furniture*, *idiot*, *Indian*, *question*, *stupid*, *tune*)

### Epenthesis in liquid+sonorant clusters

A well known, stereotyped feature of IrE

- *film* ['fɪləm], *farm* ['fɑrəm], (*corn* ['kɔrən], *girl* ['gɜrəl])

Almost exclusively ascribed to Irish influence:

- e.g. Barry (1982), Corrigan (2010), Cunningham (2011), Ó Baoill (1997), Ó hÚrdail (1997), Pilch (1990)
- Hickey (2004: 41): “Areal feature of both Irish and English in Ireland”

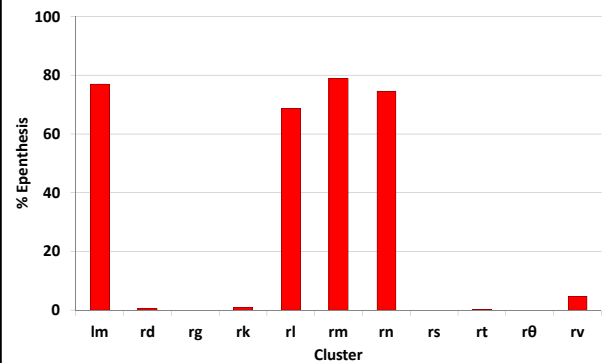
SwTE (relevant words are rare in the corpus):

- Epenthesis in /lm/ (*elm*, *film*) is obligatory for all speakers
- Epenthesis in /rm/ (*farm*, *firm*, *warm*) is less common, confined to older, most traditional speakers (Ps and Cs)

Similar patterns are found in Scots and English dialects

- epenthesis in Irish is a much wider phenomenon

### Epenthesis in Scots (Linguistic Survey of Scotland)



### Epenthesis in English

Macafee and Ó Baoill (1997: 266):

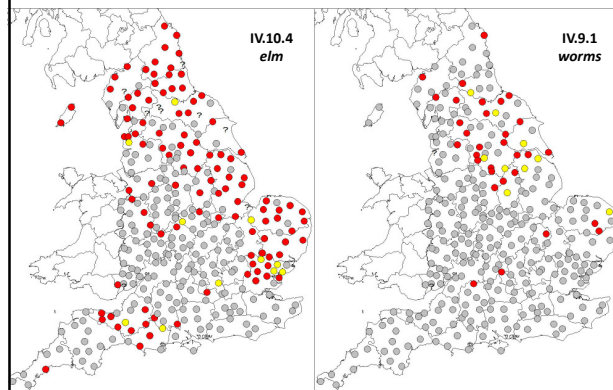
- “This is by no means confined to Scots, being recorded by Wright (1905: §234) for most counties of England”

Wright (1905):

- *film* with epenthesis: Westmorland, south Staffordshire, south Oxfordshire, west Somerset, south Somerset, east Devon, southwest Devon
- *warm* with epenthesis: north Cumbria, northwest Yorkshire (+ *harm* in Sussex, *storm* in Leicestershire)

cf. northeast English *film* (not from Irish English influence!)

### Epenthesis in the Survey of English Dialects



### Epenthesis in Irish

/r/, /l/, /n/ + non-homorganic consonants (except voiceless stops), when not preceded by a long vowel

- rb, rg, (rf), rx, rv, rm (cf. Tyrone Irish *deirfiúr* ‘sister’ [d’ɛr’əɪr])
- lb, lg, lx, lv, lm
- nb, nx, nv, nm
- ALSO: rn

No epenthesis in:

- rd, rt, rk, rd, rl (but not found in final position; *urlár*)
- lp, lt, lk
- nt

Underlined: possible final cluster in SwTE (with or without epenthesis)

Red: epenthesis in SwTE

Italics: epenthesis in Scots/English

### Epenthesis compared

Cluster	SwTE	English	Scots	Irish
n + other	-	-	-	Y
r + other	N	N	N	Y
rv	N	N	N (~)	Y
rl	N	N	Y	(N)
rn	N	N	Y	Y
rm	Y	~	Y	Y
lm	Y	Y	Y	Y
l + other	N	N	N	Y

### Epenthesis – questions

If Irish caused epenthesis in /rɪ/ and /lɪ/, why is there no epenthesis in SwTE in /rɪ/ (*disturb*), /rɪ/ (*serve*), /lɪ/ (*bulb*), /lɪ/ (*twelve*) and /rɪ/ (*corn*)?

SwTE only has epenthesis where Irish, Scots and English have it

- But why no epenthesis in /rɪ/?

Loss of schwa generally in /rən/ and /rəl/ sequences:

- *currant* (/kʌrɪn/), *herring* (/hɛrɪn/), *Warren* (/wɔːrɪn/)
- *barrel* (/bɑːrəl/), *Harold* (/hɑːrəl/), *peril* (/pɛrəl/)
- cf. *Arab*, *Corrib*, *sheriff*, *Olive*, *bailiff* without schwa loss

In that case, is Irish necessary if Scots and English together, along with subsequent schwa loss in homorganic sequences, gets us the SwTE situation?

### Pre-R Dentalisation

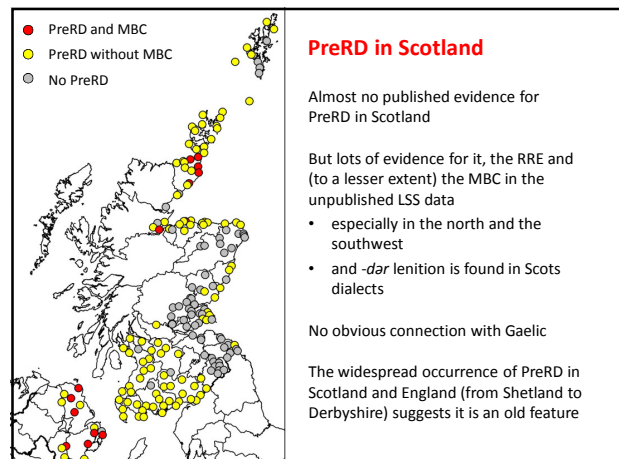
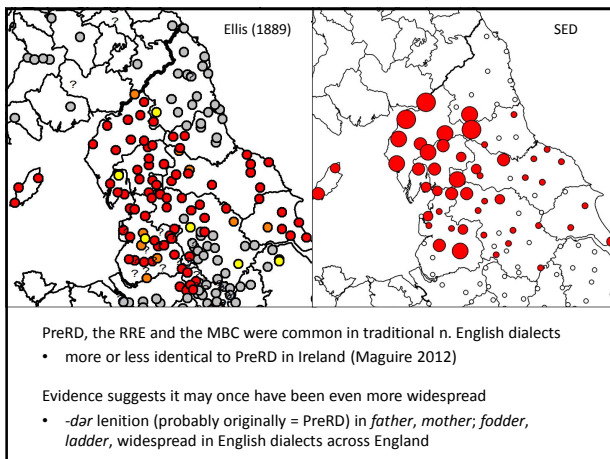
Another well known and stereotyped feature of Irish English, including SwTE (Harris 1985, Maguire 2012)

The realisation of /t/ and /d/ (and sometimes /n/) as [t̪], [d̪] ([n̪]) before /r/ and /ər/

- *try* [t̪r̪ə-e], *dry* [d̪r̪ə-e], *better* 'more good' ['bɛt̪ə], *wonder* ['wɔːnd̪ə], *hunder* 'hundred' ['hʊnd̪ə]
- R-Realisation Effect: /r/ pronounced as tap after dentals (cf. *cry* [kɹ̩ə-e])
- Morpheme Boundary Constraint: PreRD blocked by Class 2 morpheme boundaries (cf. *better* 'one who bets' ['bet̪ə], *spreader* ['spɹ̩ɛd̪ə])

Origin?

- Irish: Ellis (1869), Adams (1967), Ó Baoill (1991), Ó hÚrdail (1997)
- English: Harris (1985), Maguire (2012)



### Pre-R Dentalisation and Irish?

Irish has a phonemic opposition between broad (dental) coronal stops /t/ and /d/, and slender (non-dental, palatalised) coronal stops /tʲ/ and /dʲ/

- not conditioned by /r/
- nothing like the MBC
- i.e. dental /t/ and /d/ can essentially occur anywhere

An RRE-type effect does occur in Irish as a result of the requirement for consonant clusters to agree in terms of broad/slender quality

- *trá* [tʲr̪ˠa:] vs. *trí* [tʲr̪ˠi:]
- the sequence [tʲr̪ˠ] is close to SwTE [t̪r̪] ([tʲr̪i:] is much less like it)

Compatibility?

- Speakers of Irish would have been sensitive to the distinction between dental and non-dental variants in English
- But is that enough to have played any role in PreRD in SwTE or elsewhere?

### Further complications revealed by the SwTE corpus

- PreRD can apply across stressed vowels (*start* [st̪ɑːt], *turn* [t̪ɜːn]) (cf. spellings such as *thurn* in the dialect poems of W. F. Marshall, 'Bard of Tyrone')
- Frequent TH-stopping before /r/ (*three* [t̪ri:]) reduces the functional load of the opposition between [θ] and [t̪] to almost nothing ([ˈnəhən]), making SwTE even more similar to southern Irish English phonemically
- PreRD does not operate across word boundaries, but the RRE can (*better at that* ['bɛt̪ər ət ðæt], *down the road* [dəʊn ðə roʊd] vs. *go to Rome* [gəʊ tə roʊm])
- The RRE doesn't always apply (*try* [t̪r̪ə-e]), and sometimes /r/ is elided with the dentalisation remaining (*try* [t̪ə-e])
- There is a degree of non-rhoticity in unstressed syllables in SwTE, and this does not block PreRD (cf. the similar situation in northern England, Maguire 2012), e.g. *better than that* ['bɛt̪ə ðən ðæt]
- There are low levels of dentalisation, especially of /t/, in other positions (mostly word-finally), e.g. *out* [əʊt̪], especially in the speech of CM39

## Summary

Epenthesis in /rɪm/ and /lɪm/

- close parallels in English, Scots and Irish, i.e. in the majority of input varieties
- epenthesis in other clusters (e.g. /rɪg/, /rɪv/; /rɪl/, /rɪn/) did not survive either because it was only found in one input (Irish) or because of schwa loss in SwTE (*barrel, herring*)
- rather than having its origin in Irish, Irish learners of English increased the number of speakers with epenthesis in /rɪm/ and /lɪm/, supporting its survival in the new dialect rather than causing its development

PreRD

- exact parallels in (northern) English and Scots dialects, making an origin in Britain certain
- uncertain role for Irish, though the existence of a dental/non-dental distinction in Irish may have helped this complex feature survive the process of language and dialect contact

## Conclusions

Traditional SwTE, of a kind equivalent to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century English dialects recorded in the SED, is still spoken by some older speakers

- but many of its most divergent features (phonological or otherwise) are likely to disappear in the next 20-30 years (or less)

The SwTE corpus constitutes a unique and extensive record of conservative Mid-Ulster English

- including a detailed record of its phonology

The extent to which English (including regional dialects), Scots and Irish contributed to the phonology of SwTE still remains to be explored in detail

- SwTE is a divergent English dialect with considerable Scots phonological influence
- but an uncertain amount of Irish phonological influence, perhaps mainly in a supporting rather than causative role
- there are other differences between Protestants and Catholics however

## The future

More recordings

- Continuing fieldwork, particularly to record more Catholic and female speakers

Corpus construction

- Aligned orthographic transcriptions (ongoing)
- Transcriptions will be made available to other users

Analyses

- General description of the phonology of the dialect
- Detailed synchronic and diachronic analysis of particular phonological features of the dialect and identification of their likely sources
- Assessment of the extent of ethno-religious differences and whether these can be related to input varieties



## References

- Barry, Michael (ed.). 1981. *Aspects of English dialects in Ireland, Volume 1, Papers arising from the Tape-recorded Survey of Hiberno-English Speech*. Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies.
- Connolly, Patrick. 2013. Speaker engagement in language variation and change with specific reference to North Tyrone. PhD thesis, Queen's University, Belfast.
- Corrigan, Karen. 2010. *Irish English: Vol. 1 – Northern Ireland*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Cunningham, Una. 2008. Vowel quality and quantity in the English spoken in rural southwest Tyrone. *Nordic Irish studies* 7, 41-55.
- Cunningham, Una. 2011. Echoes of Irish in the English of southwest Tyrone. In Raymond Hickey (ed.) *Researching the languages of Ireland*, 207-221. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press.
- Harris, John. 1985. *Phonological variation and change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Henry, Patrick Leo. 1958. A linguistic survey of Ireland. Preliminary report. *Norsk tidsskrift for sprogvidenskap (Lochlann, A review of Celtic studies)*, Supplement 5, 49-208.
- Hickey, Raymond. 2004. *A sound atlas of Irish English*. Berlin/Boston: Mouton de Gruyter.

## References

- Mather, James and Hans-Henning Speitel. 1986. *The linguistic atlas of Scotland, Scots Section, Vol. 3, Phonology*. Beckenham: Croom Helm.
- Maguire, Warren. 2012. Pre-R dentalisation in northern England. *English language and linguistics* 16(3), 361-384.
- Maguire, Warren. In preparation. Pre-R dentalisation in Scotland.
- Marshall, W. F. 1983. *Living in Drumlister: The collected ballads and verses of W. F. Marshall 'The Bard of Tyrone'*. Belfast: The Blackstaff Press.
- Milroy, James and John Harris. 1980. When is a merger not a merger? The MEAT/MATE problem in a present-day English vernacular. *English World-wide* 1, 199-210.
- Orton, Harold and Eugen Dieth (eds.). 1962-71. *Survey of English dialects (B): The basic material*. Leeds: Arnold & Son.
- Rydland, Kurt. 1998. *The Orton Corpus: a dictionary of Northumbrian pronunciation, 1928-1939*. Oslo: Novus Press.
- Staples, J. H. 1896. Notes on Ulster English dialect for comparison with English dialects by the late A. J. Ellis, F.R.S., with samples in Palaeotype, comparison specimen and wordlist. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 23(2), 357-398.
- Todd, Loreto. 1984. By their tongue divided: towards an analysis of speech communities in Northern Ireland. *English World-wide* 5, 159-80.