# The origins of epenthesis in liquid+sonorant clusters in Mid-Ulster English

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Map legend:
- Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking area)
- 'Core' Ulster Scots (area defined by Gregg, 1972)
- South Ulster English
- Mid Ulster English
- Southern Hiberno-English

# Mid-Ulster English

Originated in contact between English, Scots and Irish in the 17th and early 18th centuries

As a result of the Plantations of Ulster and subsequent settlements and movements (Bardon 2011, Braidwood 1964, Corrigan 2010, Robinson 1984)

Irish spoken by the native Irish, though this was the beginning of a long language shift, completed by the mid-20th century in NIr, with areas of native Irish still surviving in Donegal

See Harris (1985) for a phonological overview of MUE
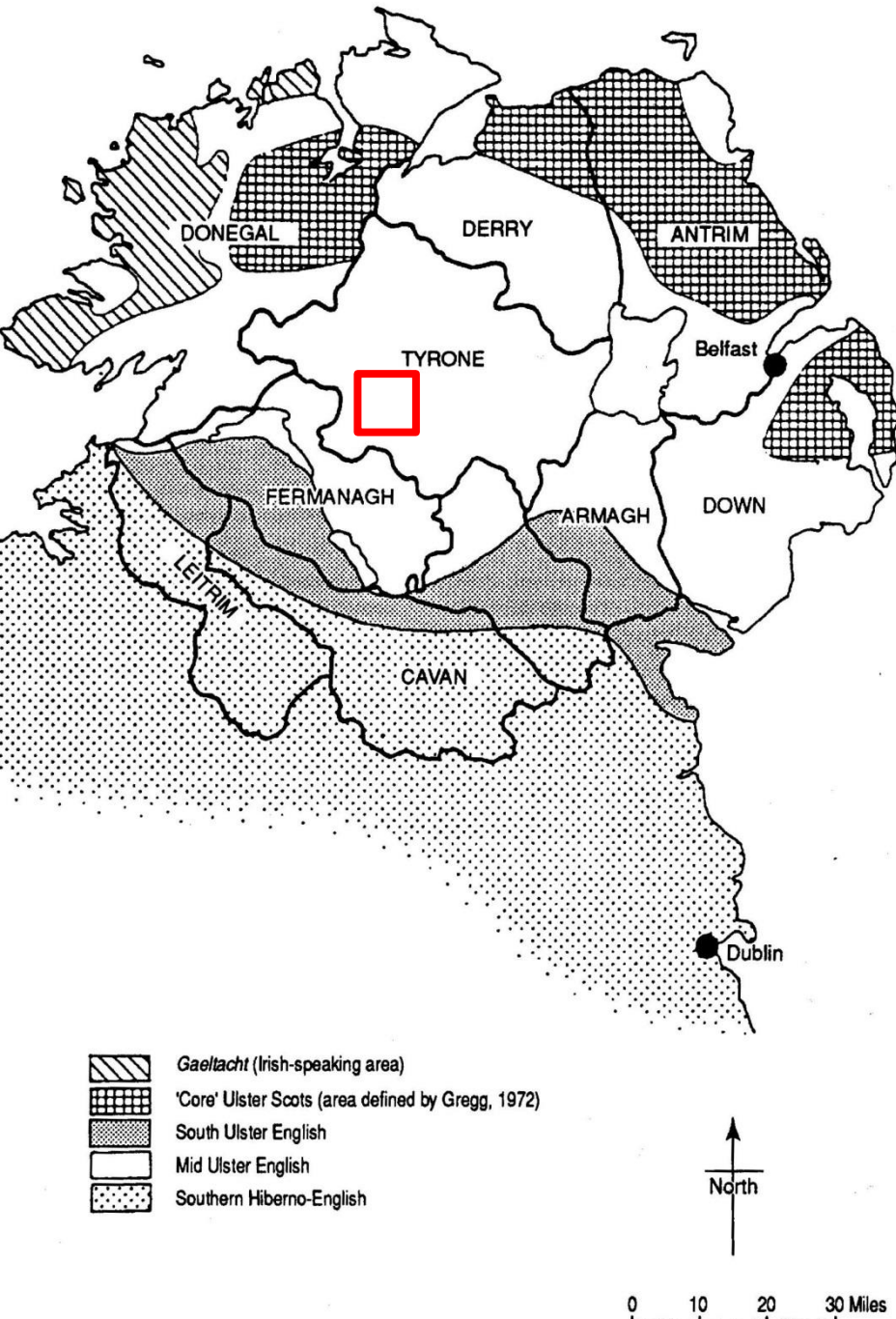
# English, Scots and Irish input to MUE

MUE is an English dialect of a Midland type (with retention of many archaic features; closely related to the ancestor of Standard English)

- various phonetic features, core phonology, morphology, syntax and lexis

Input from Scots is obvious at all linguistic levels

- quality and quantity (SVLR) of vowels, lexical distributions of certain vowels, various morpho-syntactic features, numerous lexical borrowings

Input from Irish to MUE is less clear

- most place-names, some dialect words, a number of morpho-syntactic patterns (though alternative explanations are possible for some)
- the influence of Irish on the phonetics/phonology of MUE is less obvious, despite numerous claims that this or that feature has its origin in Irish
- one of the most promising (and generally assumed) candidates is **Epenthesis** in liquid+sonorant clusters

# Epenthesis in Irish English

A well known, stereotyped feature of IrE

- *film* ['fɪləm], *farm* ['faɹəm], (*corn* ['kɔɹən], *girl* ['gɛɹəl])

Almost always ascribed to Irish influence:

- e.g. Adams (1948), Barry (1982), Corrigan (2010), Cunningham (2011), Hickey (1986), Joyce (1910), Ó Baoill (1997), Ó hÚrdail (1997), Pilch (1990)
- "By a sort of hereditary custom this peculiarity finds its way into our pronunciation of English." (Joyce 1910: 96)
- Hickey (2004: 41): "Areal feature of both Irish and English in Ireland"
- however, Braidwood (1964) and Harris (1997) note similarities with epenthesis in English and Scots

# Epenthesis in Mid-Ulster English

Consistently recorded in /lm/, often in /rm/, and with occasional records of it in /rn/ and /rl/ (though no detailed study of the phenomenon)

In the South-west Tyrone Mid-Ulster English (SwTE) dialect:

- no epenthesis in /rn/ and /rl/
- epenthesis in coda (morpheme-final) /lm/ (*elm*, *film*) is obligatory
- epenthesis in coda /rm/ (*farm*, *firm*, *warm*) occurs but is much less common; in 5% of relevant tokens in the SwTE corpus, but readily produced by older speakers under direct questioning about it; confined to older, most traditional speakers (no difference between Ps and Cs)
- epenthesis only occurs in coda position (i.e. usually morpheme-finally)
- so not in *Almer*, *Gilmour*, *helmet*, *Wilma*; *army*, *German*, *Norman*, *sermon*, *turmit* 'turnip', *vermin*; but epenthesis is possible in *Armstrong*
- but it occurs before morpheme boundaries (*filming*, *farmer*)
- as in English and Scots dialects, /ln/ is traditionally absent (*kiln* 'kill')

# Epenthesis in Irish
## (O'Rahilly 1932, Ó Siadhail 1989, Ní Chiosáin 1999, 2000)

/r/, /l/, /n/ + non-homorganic consonants (except voiceless stops), regardless of syllable structure; unless preceded by a long vowel or followed by two or more syllables

- <u>rb</u>, <u>rg</u>, (<u>rf</u>), rx, <u>rv</u>, **rm**          (cf. Tyrone Irish *deirfiúr* 'sister' [d'ɛrf'ər])
- <u>lb</u>, lg, lx, <u>lv</u>, **lm**
- nb, nx, nv, nm
- (<u>rn</u>)

No epenthesis in:

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

<u>Underlined</u>: possible coda cluster in SwTE (with or without epenthesis)
**Red**: epenthesis in SwTE

# Epenthesis – questions

If Irish caused epenthesis in /rm/ and /lm/, why is there no epenthesis in MUE in the other epenthesising clusters in Irish?

- /rb/: *barb*, *disturb*, *gorb* (< Ir. *gorb*)
- /rg/: *Derg* (< Ir. *dearg*), *morgue*
- /rf/: *scarf*, *turf* (but cf. Tyrone Irish *deirfiúr* 'sister' [dʼɛrfʼər])
- /rv/: *curve*, *nerve*, *serve*, *starve*
- /lb/: *bulb*
- /lv/: *selves*, *shelves*, *solve*, *twelve*
- /rn/: *barn*, *learn*, *turn*

And if Irish caused epenthesis, why is there none in morpheme internal position in these clusters (or in /lm/, /rm/)?

- *barber*, *Lurgan* (< Ir. *An Lorgain*), *elbow*, *silver* (nor in *vulgar*)
- *Gilmour*, *helmet*; *German*, *turmit*

# Epenthesis in Scots

Epenthesis in certain linguid+consonant clusters is also a well known feature of varieties of modern Scots

- e.g. [fɛ̆ɫəm] *film*, [eːɾəm] *arm/airm*, [boɾən] *born*, [kʌɾəɫ] *curl*

We find evidence of epenthesis in the *Linguistic Atlas of Older Scots* (15th century), revealing that it has a long history in the language
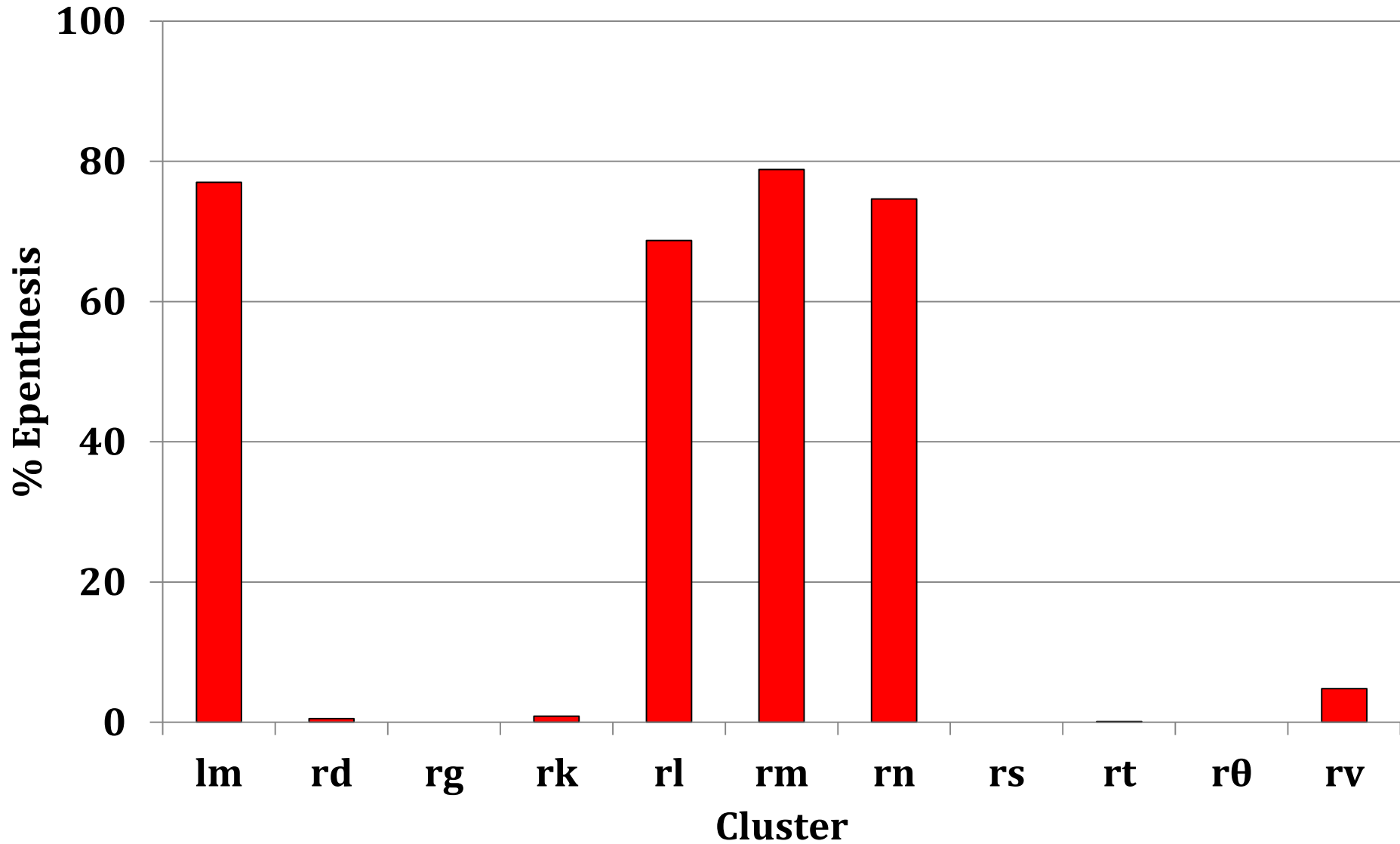
- in /rm/ (*firm*), /rn/ (*turn*), /rl/ (*earl*), /rz/ (*Thursday*)
- no evidence for /lm/

Macafee and Ó Baoill (1997) note that epenthesis in Scots is rather different than epenthesis in Scottish Gaelic and is probably not connected with it
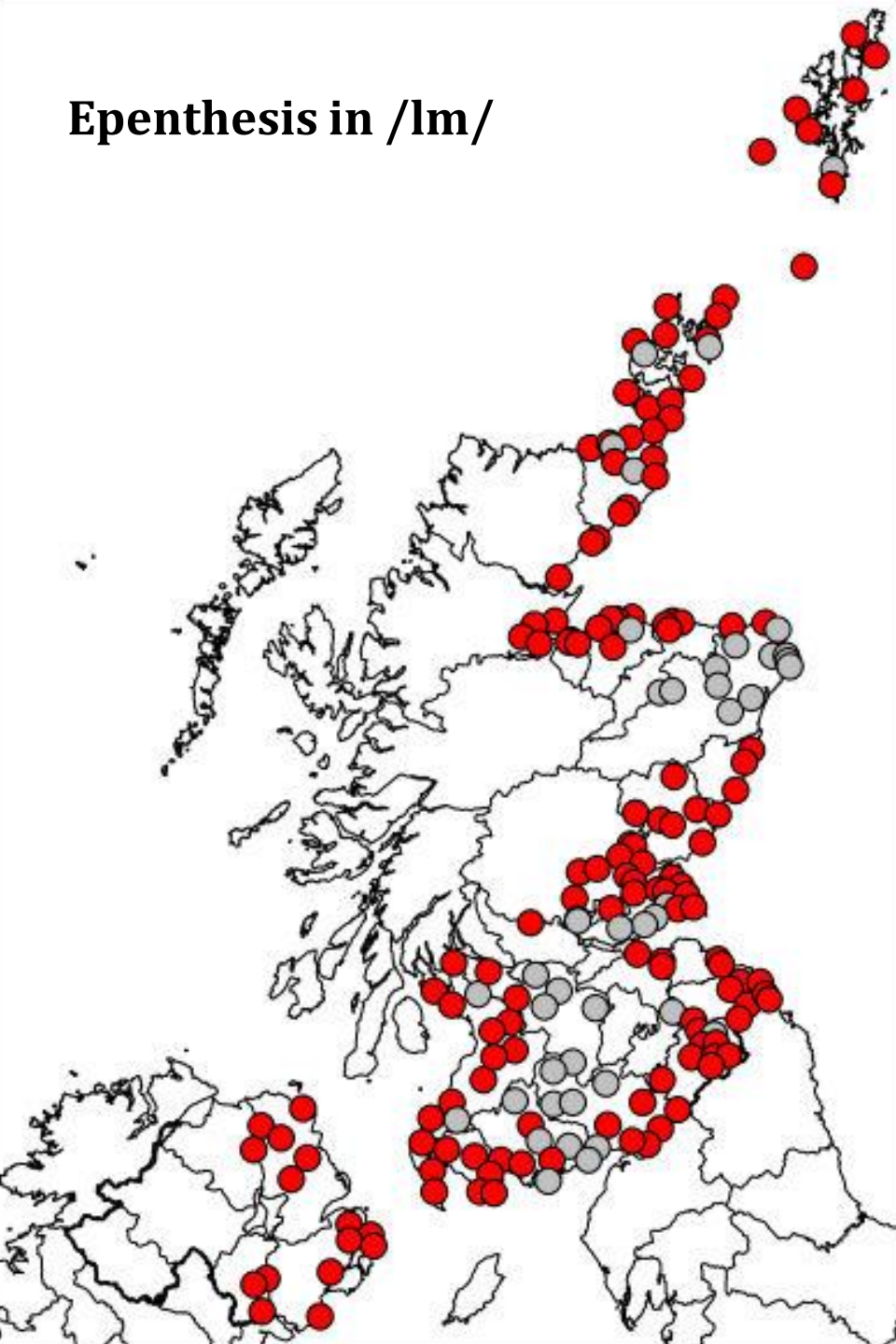
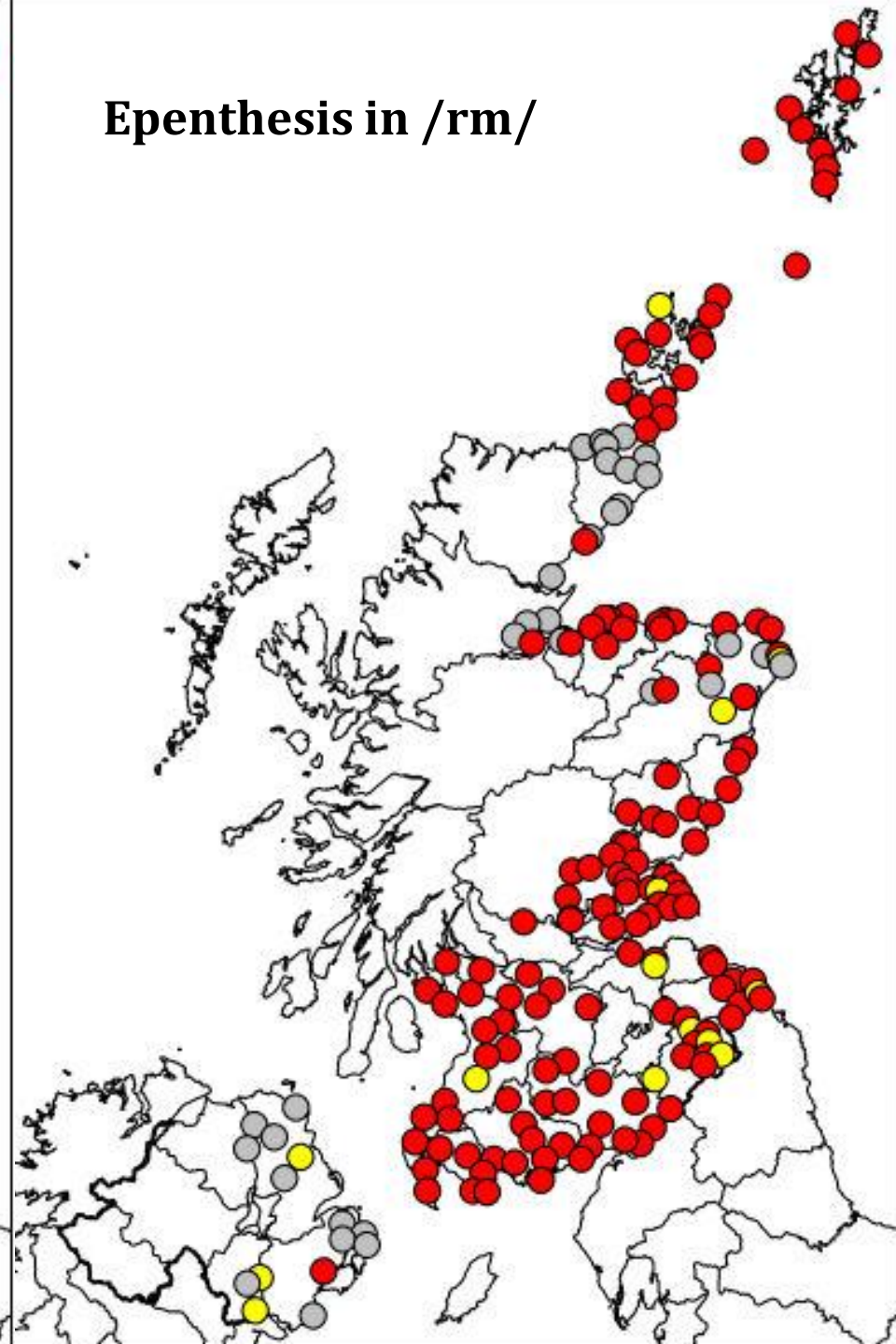- rather they connect it with epenthesis in Middle English (see also Maguire 2017)

**Epenthesis in the *Linguistic Survey of Scotland***
(Maguire 2017)

Epenthesis in /lm/       Epenthesis in /rm/

# Epenthesis in English

English (in England) may not seem like the most obvious place to look for the origins of epenthesis

- a feature which is absent from mainstream varieties of English outside of Ireland
- and which has almost universally been explained as a result of contact with Irish by previous researchers
- but Irish English is, first and foremost, a variety of English...

In fact, epenthesis in liquid+consonant clusters has a long history in English, extending back to the Old English period (Campbell 1959: 150-1; Hogg 2011: 230-5)

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"
- see also Braidwood (1964) and Harris (1997)

# Epenthesis in Middle English

Lass *et al.* (CoNE; 2013), 'Sonorant cluster vowel epenthesis' (SCVE)

- insertion of an epenthetic vowel between two consonants, one of which must be a sonorant
- *arm* (<arum>), *bairn* 'child' (<baren>, <barin>, <beren>), *churl* (<cherel>, <cherril>), *corn* (<coren>, <keren>, <koren>), *earm* 'poor, wretched' (<arem>, <erem>), *forth* (<foret>), *north* (<norit>), *word* (<pored>), and *worm* (<worem>, <woreim>, <purem>)
- i.e. epenthesis is found in the clusters /rm/, /rl/, /rn/ and /rθ/ (or perhaps /rt/) in morpheme-final position (no data are given for /lm/)

# Epenthesis in Middle English

The *Middle English Dictionary* (*quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/*) reveals that for almost every word with a liquid+sonorant cluster (except /ln/) in morpheme-final position, spellings indicative of epenthesis are common

- /lm/: *elm* (<ellem>), *whelm* (<quilum>)
- /rm/: *alarm* (<alarom>), *arm* (<arum>), *farm* (<verem>), *harm* (<harem>), *storm* (<storem>), *worm* (<wirem>)
- /rl/: *churl* (<cherel>), *earl* (<erel>), *pearl* (<perel>), *smerl* 'ointment' (<smerel>), *thirl* 'hole' (<thirile>), *whirl* (<whoril>)
- /rn/: *barn* (<baren>), *bairn* 'child' (<berun>), *corn* (<coren>), *fern* (<feren>), *morn* (<moren>), *quern* (<queren>), *scorn* (<scoren>), *sharn* (<sherren>), *stern* (aj.) (<steren>), *thorn* (<thorun>), *urn* (<urin>), *warn* (<waran>)
- occasionally in other clusters (e.g. in /rd/ in *word*, in /rk/ in *mark*)

These forms are from all over England (not just the East Midlands, as suggested by Dobson 1957: 913 on the basic of Jordan 1934)

# Epenthesis in Early Modern English

Much less evidence for epenthesis once we get to the Early Modern period (not surprising given standardisation in spelling practices), but there is some

Kökeritz (1953), Dobson (1957):

- in addition to his famous *alarum-bell*, Shakespeare spells 'film' as *philome* in *Romeo and Juliet* (I.4.63)
- William Bullokar (1580, *Booke at Large*; East Anglia) records epenthesis in *carl*, *elm*, *helm*, *storm* and *turn*
- Philip Henslowe (Sussex, London) spells *warm* as <warem> in his diary (late 16th/early 17th centuries)

# Epenthesis in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century English dialects

19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century evidence for epenthesis in /rn/ and /rl/ in English dialects is sparse (away from NE England, where epenthesis is/was common in /lm/, /rm/, /rl/, /rn/, /rd/ and /rz/, see Rydland 1998)

- Ellis (1889) and Wright (1905) records sporadic instances, especially in the N and SW, in *girl*, *hurl*, *twirl*, *world*
- the *Survey of English Dialects* (SED, Orton & Dieth 1962-71) only records single instances of each (*fern* and *girl*) outside of NE England
- Hedevind (1967) and Barth (1968) record consistent epenthesis in /rl/ in Dentdale (Yorkshire) and Naunton (Gloucestershire) respectively

Epenthesis in /rm/ and, especially, /lm/ is well attested however

- Ellis (1889) and Wright (1905) record it in /rm/ in the far north and sporadically in Leicestershire, Dorset and Sussex
- they frequently record epenthesis in /lm/ across England
- Ellis (1889) *elm*: www.lel.ed.ac.uk/EllisAtlas/elm.html

# Epenthesis in the *Survey of English Dialects*



IV.10.4 *elm*

IV.9.1 *worms*
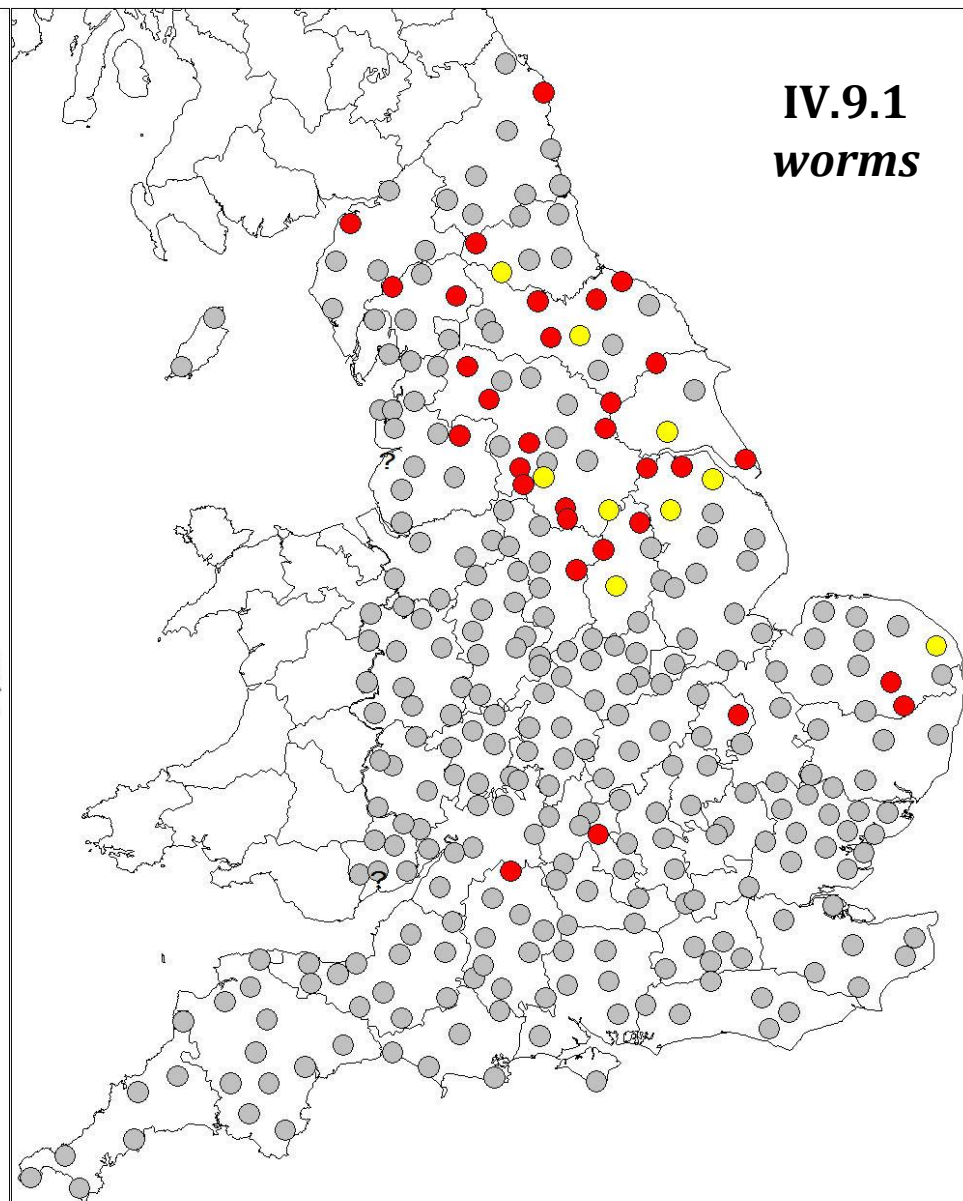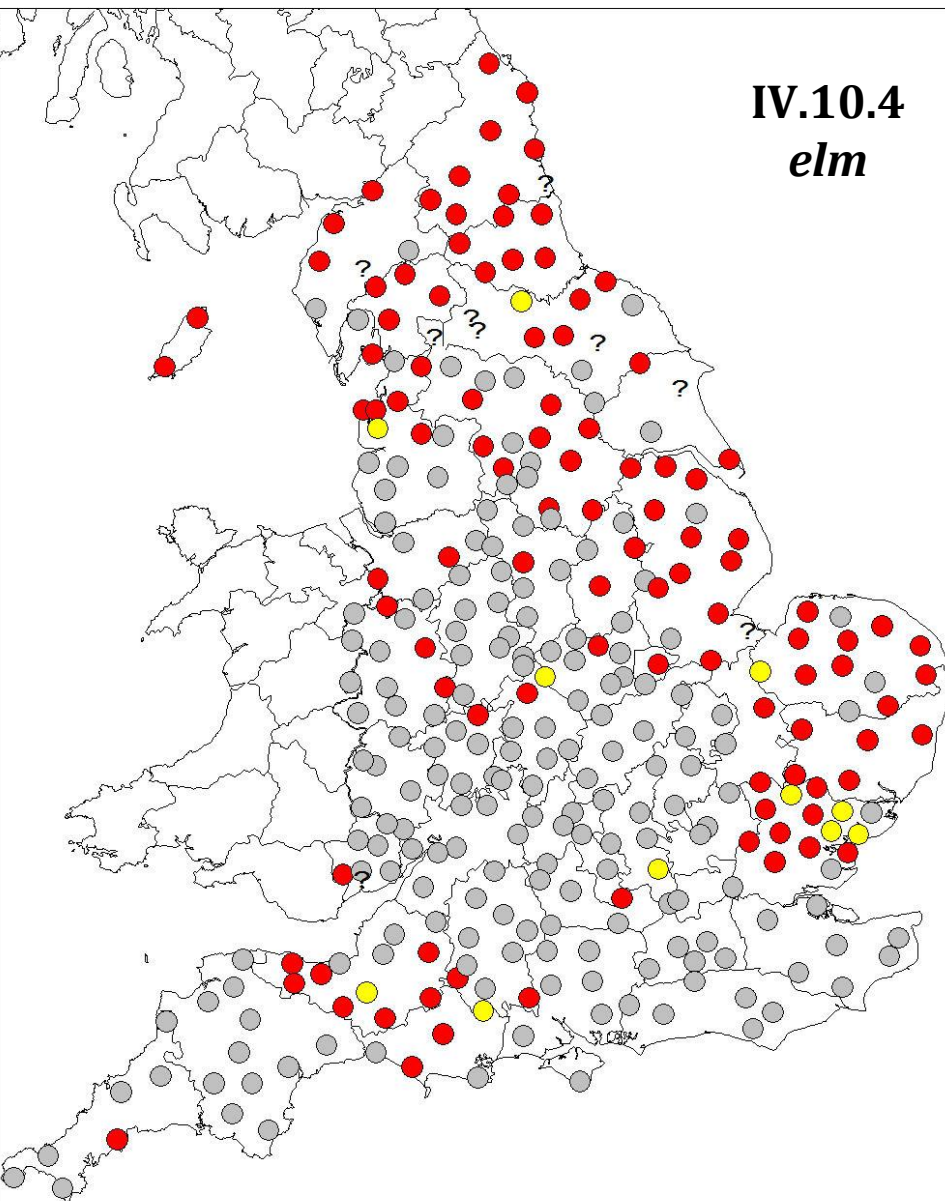
# Epentheses compared

| Cluster | SwTE/MUE | 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 | ~ |
| rm | ~ | ~ | Y | Y |
| lm | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| l + other | N | N | N | Y |

# Epenthesis – summary of patterns

MUE only has epenthesis where Irish, Scots and English all have it

- in fact, exactly where English has (or had) it, with limited evidence for epenthesis in /rl/ and /rn/, which also occurs in Scots and historically in English

Constraints in MUE epenthesis:

- these appear to match the constraints on epenthesis in English and Scots
    - epenthesis in *coda position only (i.e. almost always morpheme finally)*
- but not the constraints on epenthesis in Irish (Ní Chiosáin 1999)
    - which also has *epenthesis in these clusters morpheme internally, including across syllable boundaries*
- this suggests that the similarities in epenthesis in MUE and Irish are superficial and that its epenthesis shares more in common with epenthesis in English and Scots

But why does MUE usually have no epenthesis in /rn/ and /rl/?

# Lack of epenthesis in /rn/ and /rl/

Traditional MUE dialects, including SwTE, have typically lost schwa in /rən/ and /rəl/ sequences:

- *currant* (/kʌrn/), *herring* (/harn/), *Warren* (/warn/)
- *barrel* (/barl/), *Harold* (harl/), *peril* (/pɛrl/)

Thus we'd hardly expect epenthesis to create these sequences

- though it may have done in the past and been reversed

This process doersn't seem to have affected other /rəC/ sequences

- cf. *Arab*, *Corrib*, *sheriff*, *Olive* without schwa loss

# Did Irish play a role?

Given the close similarity between epenthesis in MUE and in English/Scots, but the dissimilarities between it and epenthesis in Irish, did Irish play a role in its development (as is generally assumed), and how?

Irish English (including MUE) is usually considered to show substantial evidence of Irish influence as a result of language shift, leading to transfer/imposition of Irish features

- e.g. Bliss (1984), Filppula (1999), Hickey (2007b), McColl Millar (2016: 97-105), Thomason (2001: 79), Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 43), Winford (2005)
- "In interference through shift, if there is phonological interference there is sure to be some syntactic interference as well, and vice versa." (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 60)

# Reinforcement?

Shifting speakers would have increased the proportion of the population who had epenthesis in /lm/ and /rm/ (and perhaps /rn/)

- so that although there was variation in the amount of epenthesis in these clusters in English, and although general trends in English may have been for it to disappear, it may instead have been ***reinforced*** in Ulster (and elsewhere in Ireland)
- see also Filppula (1999), Siegel (1999), Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 58, 242), Trudgill (1986, 2004)

Epenthesis in other clusters (e.g. in /lv/, /rb/) would have received no support from English (or Scots)

- and thus would have been levelled, not becoming part of MUE more generally (cf. Siegel 1999)

# Problems

But would this really give a different result than Irish having no influence?

- the majority of English/Scots speakers would have had epenthesis in /lm/, perhaps also the majority would have had it in /rm/
- i.e. reinforcement is a rather weak explanation if it doesn't seem to change anything; how would things have turned out anyway?

Is Irish necessary if Scots and English together, along with subsequent schwa loss in homorganic sequences, gets us the MUE situation, and if the constraints in MUE match English and Scots but not Irish?

- cf. Thomason (2001: 93-4): "we must prove that the shared features - the proposed interference features - were not present in the receiving language before it came into close contact with the source language. That is, we have to prove that the receiving language has changed by innovating these features."

# Epenthesis without input from Irish

The development of epenthesis in MUE does not require input from Irish

- suggesting that Irish may not have been an important input to MUE phonology generally (given that epenthesis is one of the most likely candidates for such influence)

Is this partly the result of a gradual language shift in Ulster, with Irish speakers becoming bilingual and shifting in small numbers over centuries?

- "if the shift takes place over long centuries, then the shifting population is likely to be truly bilingual in the TL. In such a case there is no imperfect learning, and consequently no interference in the TL." (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 41; see also Corrigan 2010: 121)

Cf. Lass (1990: 148), who suggests that, phonologically, *Southern* Irish English is "not as a 'contact English' in any important sense ... but as a perfectly normal first-language, internally evolved variety, with only marginal contact effects."

# Conclusions

Epenthesis, one of the phonological features of Irish English (including MUE) most frequently assumed to be of Irish origin, bears only a superficial resemblance to epenthesis in Irish

However, epenthesis in MUE is very similar to epenthesis in English and Scots, not only in the clusters it affects but also in the constraints on it

At most, Irish only played a reinforcing role in the development of epenthesis in MUE, but even this can't be certain since nothing changed phonologically

Has the role of Irish in the formation of the phonology of MUE has been overstated?

- If Irish is not responsible for this most 'Irish-like' phonological pattern in MUE, what is it responsible for?
- What consequences does this have for our understanding of language contact in Ireland?

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