Varieties of English around the World I

On Northern Irish English:
A Phonological and Morphosyntactic Description

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Abstract

The present paper reviews the phonological and morphosyntactic aspects of the Northern Irish English (NIrE) variety. NIrE is the dialect of English spoken within the region of Northern Ireland, which officially belongs to the United Kingdom. One of the main peculiarities of NIrE is the substrate influence it has undergone from the Irish language. However, in contrast to Southern Irish English (SIrE), what is distinctive in NIrE is the phonological substrate influence it received from Scots, which is a Celtic language that originated in Scotland, and came into contact with NIrE in the seventeenth century due to Scottish settlements in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, other factors such as the political situation in the twentieth century in Northern Ireland contributed to the peculiar development that NIrE underwent as opposed to SIrE in the Republic of Ireland. Due to the Enactment Act passed in 1920, which stated officially that Northern Ireland belonged to the United Kingdom, the northeastern part of the Emerald Island developed in isolation from other English-speaking areas within the Republic of Ireland such as Dublin. This isolation period implied a distinct linguistic tradition that was delimited to Northern Ireland, where Scots, Irish, seventeenth-century English, and Irish English co-existed. The combination of all these languages and varieties surfaced in the distinctive NIrE dialect, which has been usually tagged by linguists as a 'hybrid'.

This paper will present not only the main historical events that shaped the English spoken in Ireland, but it will also provide a linguistic description of NIrE. Thus, the main phonological and morphosyntactic characteristics of such dialect will be exhibited. As for phonology, NIrE features will be compared to the respective features in 'Received Pronunciation' (RP). Regarding morphosyntax, NIrE characteristics will be contrasted with those of Standard British English (StBE). The characteristics are provided first, and in some of the cases the possible substrate influence of Irish or Scots is given on the basis of previous studies (Corrigan, 2010; Filppula, 1999; Hickey, 2010).

Keywords: Varieties of English, Northern Irish English, substrate influence, phonology, morphology, syntax.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays it is widely accepted that English has become the 'universal' language per excellence (Crystal, 2003). This Germanic language is taught in virtually every classroom in the world, either as a First Language (L1), e.g. in North America, The United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland (ROI); as a Second Language (L2), e.g. in India, Nigeria, Ghana, Singapore; or as a Foreign Language (FL), e.g. in Spain, France, Italy.

Furthermore, it is common for foreign language learners (FLLs) to go abroad once they have acquired an 'acceptable' level of the English language, and thus improve it. Nevertheless, what these students often encounter is not what they would have expected. Firstly, English native speakers seem to speak incredibly fast. And secondly, their speech differs greatly from what language learners have learned at school (Hughes, Trudgill, & Watt, 2005).

According to these authors, the reason for this first impression can be explained by the fact that the accent presented in English courses as a model for FLLs is most typically, in Europe at least, 'Reiceived Pronounciation' (RP), also known as 'BBC English' or 'Queen's English'. Although students know that there are different countries where English is spoken as an L1, they seem to disregard that 'a different kind of English' is spoken in each one of them. I will put forward, then, that what students need is key notions in language variation. Undoubtedly, for obvious time-related reasons it would be unthinkable for language teachers to teach all the varieties of a given language to their students.

Therefore, as a proposal for those who would like to learn more about a specific variety of English, the dialect chosen for this paper is Northern Irish English (NIrE). Ireland is a typical destination for English learners, yet its northern part, which officially belongs to the UK, is often left aside as a destination to learn English because its accent is more difficult to understand.

Furthermore, the reason why I chose this specific variety of English is connected with personal experience. Being myself an English learner for several years now, I have always enjoyed the different accents of English. Yet, recently, in a trip I made to visit some friends from Northern Ireland, I experienced one of the major shocks I have ever

had. After just finishing the third year of the degree, and having lived in the United States for a year, I was spellbound to see that I was unable to understand a word of what my friends' relatives and acquaintances spoke. Fortunately, once I got accustomed to the accent, everything went smoothly. After this trip, I decided I would like to continue to find out more about their dialect.

The following paper is organized as follows: I begin by explaining how English was introduced in Ireland and the changes it underwent in society. Then, a short section describes the way in which Irish influenced the English spoken in Ireland. Furthermore, the effect of Scots on Northern Irish English is also presented. After this, a description of Northern Irish English will be provided. I will present its main phonological and morphosyntactic features, and the robust substrate[1] influence of Irish and Scots will be apparent throughout the examples given.

2.   The Spread of English across Ireland

2.1. Historical background

Throughout history, the different varieties of English that were spoken in Ireland have received different names: apart from Irish English (IrE), which is the most commonly used, Hiberno-English and Anglo-Irish have also been used to refer to IrE (Kirk, 1997). Because of its proximity to the United Kingdom, and due to the fact that Ireland was one of the first places where English settled, IrE has been considered as the oldest overseas variety of English (Kallen, 2012).

Authors differ in opinion as to the number of periods IrE underwent. Hickey (2010) defends that there are two main periods: the first period extends from the late-twelfth century to the seventeenth, and the second from the seventeenth century onwards. However, Kallen (2012) distinguishes six main periods: (i) the era before Irish; (ii) the introduction of English; (iii) the era of *Gaelicsation*; (iv) a rise in the status of English; (v) a popular shift to English; and finally, (vi) the current regime. To

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[1] "The 'substrate' signals the influence of a language formerly spoken by a community upon their current language or that of their descendants" (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008: 44).

explain the changes that English experienced, I will follow Kallen's (2012) division, as to my view it is more complete than Hickey's (2010).

Although English did not start gaining importance in Ireland until the early-twelfth century, it cannot be disregarded that prior to that time its status was considerably different. According to historical records, the first language that was introduced in Ireland by the Gaels circa 44 BC is Irish, also known as Gaelic (King, 2006). Furthermore, unlike English, Irish belongs to the Celtic family branch within the Indo-European languages. Irish was the main and only language spoken in Ireland until the English invasion in 449 AC. After this date, English, Anglo-Norman, Flemish, and Welsh came into use in the Emerald Island, which resulted in Irish having to coexist with all these languages. What is more, the use and influence of English at that time was not as strong as we imagine, as it was only used by the British minorities. Similarly, Flemish and Welsh decreased in use in Ireland. By contrast, Anglo-Norman continued to be used mainly by the aristocracy.

In the ninth century, Ireland was ravaged by the Scandinavian adventurers, and a new language, Old Norse, came into contact. Several authors (King, 2006; Filppula, 2006; Filppula, Klemola, & Palausto, 2008; Hickey, 2010) have examined this contact situation, and they have proposed hypotheses for an Irish/Old Norse bilingual situation. Nevertheless, they have not found strong evidence to prove it, since only minor loanwords were transmitted from Old Norse to Irish.

In the twelfth century, little did the King of Leister know that the status of Irish would start to decrease after he asked Henry II of England for a favor. In 1169, the King of Leister was losing his territories, a vast area that expanded from Dublin to Waterford, known as "the Pale", and asked Henry II for his assistance to make him victorious in that battle (Hickey, 2010). Thus, Henry II recruited Anglo-Norman and Flemish mercenaries to help the King of Leister. After two years of battling, the Kingdom of Leister was lost, yet one of the Anglo-Norman mercenaries recruited by Henry II, Richard De Clare, claimed the kingdom for himself (King, 2006). For this reason, Anglo-Norman became the main language spoken by the aristocracy until the fourteenth century. To guarantee that Anglo-Norman would not be lost, the *Statutes of Kilkenny* were written in 1366, a document that banned the use of French and Irish in public. In fact, the use of these languages were severely punished (Hickey, 1997). As it

is common in these diglossia[2] situations, although Irish did not continue to be used in public, it kept on being used in private settings, which resulted in the adoption of several loanwords from Anglo-Norman.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, religion became a crucial aspect for the development of Irish and English. The government at that time was Protestant, yet the new English settlers saw more similarities in identity with Catholics, who spoke Irish. Thanks to this relationship this period saw the revival of Irish.

However, it was during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the status of Irish and English switched for the last time. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, English colonists settled in Ireland with the intention of staying. Once they reached Ireland, they congregated in communities which were called "plantations". Several plantations were implemented, from which we distinguish the Early Plantations, in the counties of Laois and Offaly (1556-1576), the Munster Plantation, in the counties of Kerry, Cork and Limerick (1586 onwards), the Ulster Plantation, in Northern Ireland (1606 onwards), and later plantations, in the counties of Leitrim, Longford, Weistmeath, Offaly and Laois (1610-1641) (Corrigan, 2010).

At the end of the nineteenth century Irish Catholic rebels decided to go against English Protestant occupants, and a war that lasted nine years began. As the English won, the Protestant government enforced laws that banned the use of the Irish language. Consequently, Irish speakers started to learn English as an L2.

During the nineteenth century, it was English that started to be used in education in Ireland, and this made Irish speakers realize that they would really need to acquire English in order to achieve a better life (Harris, 1991). This process is known as the "Emancipation of Catholics", who gave up speaking Irish and adopted English. Furthermore, the Great Famine which struck Ireland between 1845 and 1849 killed approximately two million Irish speakers, which caused a significant decrease in the use of this language and gave rise to the complete resurgence of English (Görlach, 1997). Nowadays, Irish is only spoken as a native tongue by 1% of the total Irish population although both languages have an official status.

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[2] A situation in which there are two different languages used by a community, used in different social situations (Coulmas, 1997).

3.   Northern Irish English

3.1. Introduction

Like in other English-speaking countries, more than one English dialect is spoken in Ireland as well. The major dialects and areas are three: (i) Western Irish English, spoken west of Galway and on the Aran Islands; (ii) Southern Irish English (SIrE), spoken within the historical territory of Munster; and (iii) Northern Irish English (NIrE), found in the historical territory of Ulster (Hickey, 2010) (see Figure 1). In this paper, a description of the latter will be provided.

Figure 1. The major dialect zones of Ireland (Hickey, 2010: 82)

The Northern Irish English variety is spoken in the northern part of Ireland. Not only does NIrE expand over the six counties that form Northern Ireland (NI), i.e. Fermanagh, Armagh, Down, Antrim, Derry and Tyrone, it is also spoken in the bordering counties of Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, and Monaghan, which officially belong to the Republic of Ireland (see Figure 2). Politically speaking, NI belongs to the United

Kingdom after the Enactment Act of the Government of Ireland was passed in 1920 (Corrigan, 2010).

Figure 2. The major dialect zones of Northern Ireland (Hickey, 2007a: 442)
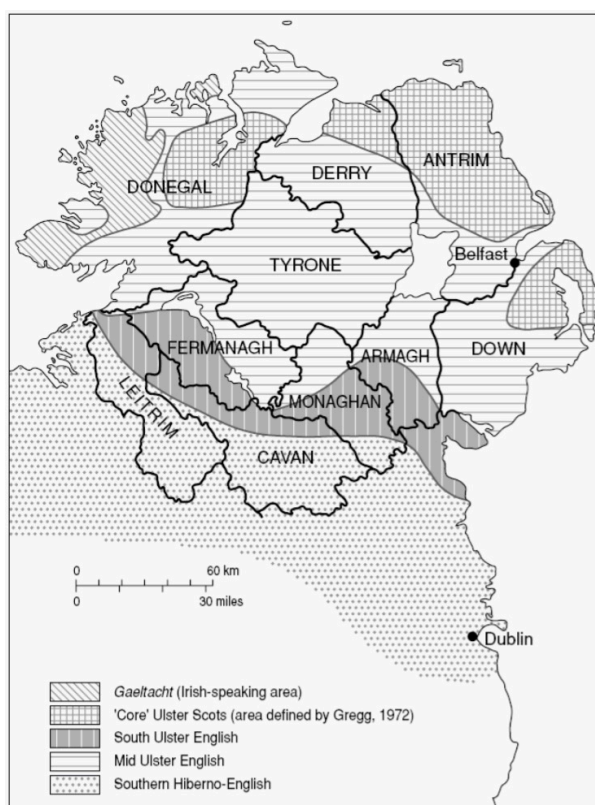
As it is shown in figure 2, NIrE comprises two sub-varieties: Mid-Ulster English and South-Ulster English. Although these two varieties are different from each other, they do not differ considerably. Wells (1982) provides a contrastive description of Mid-Ulster English and South-Ulster English, and according to him, only minor phonological differences are given. It is for this reason that the description of NIrE in this paper is not based on a particular variety; the features presented in this paper belong to the two sub-varieties of NIrE.

As it has been mentioned previously, NIrE emerged as a mixture of the languages spoken in NI for several centuries. These languages were Scots, Irish, seventeenth-century English, and Irish English. Each language affected NIrE in a different way; while Irish influenced the morphology and syntax of NIrE, Scots and Middle English had an effect on the phonology of NIrE (Corrigan, 2010).

This core section on NIrE will be structured as follows: first, the influence that Irish and Scots had on NIrE is described. Second, the phonology of NIrE will be presented, and the vocalic and consonantal peculiarities are given; also, the distinctive intonation of NIrE is explained. Afterwards, the description of some characteristic morphological and syntactical features will be provided. As a concluding point, it will be shown that the substratum influence of Gaelic and Scots on NIrE is still robust in multiple morphosyntactic elements.

3.2. The substrate influence of Irish and Scots on NIrE

It is not my intention to provide a comprehensive description of the influence of Irish and Scots on NIrE. The next section will be used for that purpose, as the main features in current NIrE will be presented. As it will be illustrated, some of the linguistic characteristics are directly related to the substrate influence of either Scots or Irish. The subtratum influence Irish had on NIrE affected mainly its grammatical structure, whereas in the case of Scots, it only affected the phonology of NIrE.

- **Substrate influence of Irish on NIrE:**

The substratum influence Irish has had on the English spoken in Ireland is applicable to both the northern and the southern variety of Irish English.

Not only did English adopt several loanwords from Irish, which is completely understandable considering the contact situation they were in, but also several unique grammatical structures found in NIrE bear a striking resemblance with the Irish language. As defended by Todd (1999: 76), this is due to a process called *relexification*:

> Relexification is a widespread process in communities where one group of people tries to learn the language of another under conditions of pressure or segregation. By this process, the Irish produced a form of English that reflected Irish influence at every linguistic level from the sound patterns and the rhythms, to the vocabulary, the idioms and the sentence structure.

As previously stated, the aim of this paper is to describe the main phonological and morphosyntactic characteristics of NIrE. It is true that the way in which Irish had an influence on NIrE lexicon is worthy of attention, as there are hundreds of borrowings in

NIrE adopted from Irish. Nevertheless, as a description of the lexical aspect would be lengthy, I have decided to include only a minor explanation of it within this section, as I also believe that it is a linguistic aspect that should not be disregarded.

o *Transmission of lexicon:*

It is not surprising that due to the constant contact situation English and Irish had, English ended up absorbing certain words from Irish. Table 1 shows several loanwords adopted in NIrE which belong to several aspects of everyday life.

Table 1. Borrowings from Irish into English (adapted from Corrigan, 2010: 93-98)

Semantic field	Spelling in NIrE	Definition in NIrE	Spelling in Irish	Definition in Irish
Fauna	barneagh	'goose barnacle'	*bairneach*	'limpet'
Drinks	brooteen	'mashed potatoes'	*brúitín*	'mashed potatoes'
Pastimes	camogie	'ladies' hurling game'	*camógai*	'ladies' hurling game'
Land use	ballyboe	'land division'	*baile bó*	'townland of a cow'
Tools	bacan	'a peg'	*bacán*	'a hook'

- **Substrate influence of Scots on NIrE:**

Scots did not come to be into contact with IrE until the era of the Ulster Plantation, i.e., circa 1606. As it has already been mentioned, British citizens that emigrated from the UK to settle in Ireland came from different areas within the isle, mostly from Northern England and Scotland. If we take into consideration that Scotland is in the most northern area of the UK, it should not be surprising that at the time of traveling from the Lowlands or Highlands, Scottish settlers decided to settle in the northeastern part of Ireland, historically also known as Ulster. Figure 3 shows the way in which the English and Scottish settled in Ulster.

Figure 3. English and Scottish settlement in Ulster (1630) (Corrigan, 2010: 119)
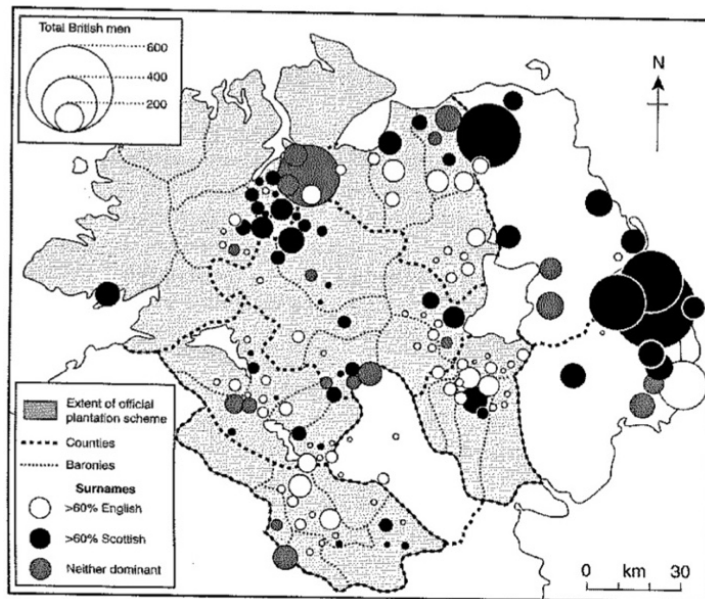
According to Wells (1982) and Corrigan (2010), the substratum influence Scots had on NIrE was reflected on the vocalic system, as both NIrE and Scots share the same vowels. According to Wells (1982), it is easier to alter the production of sounds than the production of complete sentences.

As for other substratum features that are considered, the most prominent one is the transmission of certain lexicon, e.g. *laddie* (for 'boy'), *lassie* (for 'girl') and *wee* (for 'small') among others (Corrigan, 2010).

3.3. Phonology

3.3.1. Vowels

According to Wells (1982), Northern Irish English has seven short vowels /ɪ, ɛ, ʌ, a, ɔ, ʉ, ə/, and one long vowel /ɔ:/, which is only kept in certain areas such as Larne. The most striking phenomenon regarding the vocalic system of NIrE involves the almost complete absence of long monophthongs, as most of them have undergone processes of shortening and/or merging. With regard to diphthongs, Wells (1982) points out that there are three: /aɪ, ɔ̈y, aʉ/.

An important point to consider is the similarity between the Scottish vocalic

system and that of NIrE. As previously explained, Scots had a great influence on the phonology of NIrE, and the reason why NIrE underwent processes of shortening in its vowels is due to the Scottish Vowel Length Rule, which states that vowel length is conditioned by the phonemic environment, and vowels generally get shortened (McCafferty, 2007).

Other phonological changes that are typical of NIrE are the merger of /æ/ and /aː/, the tendency towards centralization of the monophthongs /ʊ, ɪ/ and the diphthong /ɔɪ/, the process of shortening of the long vowels /ɔː, ɜː/, and the monophthonging of the diphthongs /eɪ, əʊ, eə/.

3.3.1.1. The merger of /æ/ and /aː/

In the study that Corrigan (2010) carried out, she found that as a general norm, /a/ is used where /æ/ or /aː/ should go. However, she points out that /æ/ is more probable to be used when it precedes the consonants /p, t/. Therefore, words such as *palm* /paːm/, *pass* /paːs/ and *pat* /pæt/ in RP, are pronounced as /pam/, /pas/ and /pæt/ in NIrE.

Furthermore, she adds that there is a typical variant for /æ/ shared by the older population in the Derry area. In these speakers' speech, the mid open front unrounded vowel /æ/ undergoes a process of raising and lengthening, resulting in /ɛː/. Consequently, a word such as *bag* is pronounced as /bɛːg/ (Corrigan, 2010: 36).

3.3.1.2. Centralization of /ʊ/, /ɪ/, and /ɔɪ/

- Centralization of the high back vowel /ʊ/

Corrigan (2010) points out that the centralization of the high back vowel /ʊ/ is due to the fact that /ʊ/ has very little lip rounding in NIrE, thus resulting in its centralized variant /ʉ/. This phenomenon has an effect on any instance where /ʊ/ is produced, thus affecting both monophthongs and diphthongs.

As a result, words such as *book* /bʊk/ and *out* /aʊt/ are pronounced as /bʉk/ and /aʉt/ in NIrE (Corrigan, 2010: 35-37). A speaker that is not used to hearing this phoneme would get the impression that this sound is closer to the sound /ɪ/ than to /ʊ/.

- Centralization and opening of the high front vowel /ɪ/

In NIrE, the usual realization of the high front vowel /ɪ/ is /ɨ/, a more open and centralized variant (Wells, 1982). Nevertheless, depending on the linguistic context and the formality of the setting, the realization of the phoneme /ɪ/ varies along the continuum /ɪ/ – /ï/ – /ë/ – /æ̈/ (Corrigan, 2010). The most open sound /æ̈/ appears in the urban speech of Belfast, and it is particularly produced before /l/.

Corrigan (2010: 35) found in her study that words such as *big* /bɪg/, *something* /ˈsʌmθɪŋ/ or *fill* /fɪl/ in RP, are pronounced as /bɨg/, /ˈsʌmθën/ and /fæ̈l/ in NIrE.

• Centralization, closing and rounding of the diphthong /ɔɪ/

There are three different processes to be explained with regard to the diphthong /ɔɪ/. First, the onset of the diphthong, /ɔ/, is centralized, and it turns into /ö/. Secondly, the process that the offset of the diphthong, /ɪ/, undergoes consists of two parts: on the one hand, it becomes closer, and on the other one, it is rounded, resulting in the close front rounded vowel /y/ (Corrigan, 2010).

Therefore, words such as *boy* /bɔɪ/, *oil* /ɔɪl/, *coin* /kɔɪn/ in RP, are pronounced as /böy/, /öyl/ and /köyn/ in NIrE.

3.3.1.3. Shortening of /ɔː/ and /ɜː/

• Shortening of the open-mid back rounded vowel /ɔː/

Long vowels become short in NIrE because of the Scottish Vowel Length Rule (also known as Aitken's Law). Aitken (1984) states that by means of this rule a vowel will become short unless it precedes a voiced fricative or a word boundary. For that reason, as a general rule, NIrE speakers merge the open back rounded phoneme /ɒ/ and the close-mid back rounded phoneme /ɔː/ into the open-mid back rounded sound /ɔ/ (Corrigan, 2010). However, regional variation is found with regard to the long phoneme /ɔː/, since in certain areas such as Larne, the long version is kept (Wells, 1982).

Therefore, words such as *awe* /ɔː/, *bought* /bɔːt/ and *cod* /kɒd/ in RP, are pronounced as /ɔ/, /bɔt/ and /kɔd/ in NIrE.

• Shortening and lowering of the mid central unrounded vowel /ɜː/

As far as the mid central unrounded vowel /ɜː/ is concerned, Corrigan (2010) notes that this phoneme has undergone a process of shortening and lowering in rural areas of Northern Ireland. Thus, /əɹ/ is used with words that have <er> spellings, e.g. *herd* /həɹd/, and /ʌɹ/ is used with words that have <ir> and <ur> spellings, e.g. *girl* /gʌɹl/, or *absurd* /əbˈsʌɹd/.

3.3.1.4. Monophthonging of /eɪ/, /əʊ/ and /eə/

- Monophthonging of /eɪ/

Regarding the diphthong /eɪ/, the degree of formality of the conversation as well as the ethno-linguistic background of the speaker determines whether this diphthong will undergo any significant changes or not. In her study, Corrigan (2010) reports that this diphthong shows no variation when produced in formal situations. McCafferty (1998) observes that in less formal situations the diphthong /eɪ/ turns into the monophthong /ɪ/. Therefore, a word such as *face* /feɪs/ and *main* /meɪn/ in RP, are pronounced as /fɪs/ and /mɪn/ in NIrE.

Another feature associated with this diphthong is epenthesis, i.e. the insertion of a new sound within a word (Wells, 1982). In this case, epenthesis involves the insertion of /ə/ after /ɪ/ (Corrigan, 2010). It needs to be stated that this phenomenon has been apparent mostly in the last decades, and especially among younger Protestants. However, McCafferty (2007) and Hickey (2007a) note that young Catholics produce the /ɪə/ variant as well. Consequently, words such as *face* and *main* can be pronounced either as /fɪs/ or /fɪəs/ and /mɪn/ or /mɪən/ in NIrE (Hickey, 2007a: 117).

- Monophthonging of /əʊ/

According to different authors such as Wells (1982), Hickey (2007b) and Corrigan (2010), NIrE shares the pronunciation for the diphthong /əʊ/ with Scots, which is realized as /ɔ/. This is due to the influence of the already explained Aitken's Law.

Therefore, words like *boat* /bəʊt/, *goat* /gəʊt/ and *so* /səʊ/ in RP tend to be pronounced as /bɔt/, /gɔt/ and /sɔ/ in NIrE.

- Monophthonging of /eə/

In the study that Corrigan (2010) conducted, she found out that a fairly high percentage of the total population of NI pronounces the diphthong /eə/ as /ɛ/. As a result, words such as *bear* /beə/ and *square* /skweə/ in RP, are pronounced as /bɛɻ/ and /skwɛɻ/[3] in NIrE.

3.3.2. Consonants

3.3.2.1. Approximants

- Realization of /w/:

Unlike RP speakers, speakers of NIrE make a distinction between the realizations of the spellings <w> and <wh>. According to Wells (1982), in more rural areas initial <wh> remains as phonetic /ʍ/, i.e. the labio-velar fricative realization, as opposed to the RP labio-velar approximant sound /w/. Corrigan (2010) adds that the use of /ʍ/ has spread among the young, middle-aged, and old generations outside the metropolitan areas.

Consequently, words such as *wheep* /wi:p/ and *what* /wɒt/ in RP, tend to be pronounced as /ʍɪp/ and /ʍɔt/ in the rural areas of NI.

- Realization of /ɹ/:

As NIrE is a rhotic variety of English, the /ɹ/ sound is pronounced in post-vocalic positions. Comparing the place of articulation of such sound in RP and NIrE, Hickey (2007a: 321) explains that in the case of NIrE this phoneme is realized as a retroflex sound /ɻ/ when it is in post-vocalic position, in contrast to the RP approximant sound /ɹ/. He reports that a word such as *north* /nɔ:θ/ in RP, is pronounced as /nɔɻθ/ in NIrE.

Furthermore, in rural Ulster, Wells (1982) identifies trilled /r, ɾ/ in a context where these approximant sounds are preceded by the voiceless alveolar plosive sound /t/. As a result, words such as *trick* /tɹɪk/, *train* /tɹeɪn/ and *attract* /əˈtɹækt/ in RP, are pronounced as /trɪk/, /trɪn/ or /trɪən/[4] and / əˈtrakt/ in NIrE.

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[3] In NIrE, /ɻ/ is the retroflex variant of the sound /ɹ/ used in post-vocalic positions (see §3.3.2.1., p. 13)
[4] Monophthonging of /eɪ/ and ə epenthesis (see §3.3.1.4., pp. 12-13)

- Realizations of /l/:

Ordinarily, it is said that NIrE has a clear /l/ sound in all environments (Wells, 1982). However, McCafferty (2007) mentions that in areas such as Belfast and Derry the darkening of such phoneme occurs, resulting in /ɫ/. Although this feature is not applicable to every NIrE speaker, in these areas it is sensitive to social factors such as age, gender and religion. Hence, whereas in formal contexts Belfast Catholics shift towards dark /ɫ/, Protestants shift towards the use of clear variants. For that reason, a word such as *pull*, /pʊl/ in RP, is pronounced as /pʉɫ/ by Belfast Catholics, but /pʉl/ by the Protestants.

Furthermore, the dentalization of /l/ is another feature that has to be mentioned. Corrigan (2010) reports that /l/ is realized as a dental sound /l̪/ in rural environments in Belfast. Consequently, a word such as *shield* /ʃi:ld/ in RP, is pronounced as /ʃɪl̪d/[5] in NIrE.

3.3.2.2. Velar sounds

- Realization of /k g/

Wells (1982), McCafferty (2007) and Hickey (2007a, 2008) note that /k g/ usually are palatalized in NIrE. Therefore, a word such as *cat* /kæt/ in RP, is pronounced as /kjæt/[6] in NIrE (Hickey 2007a: 115). Several theories have been put forward to explain this phenomenon, but an agreement has not been reached yet. While Adams (1986) states that this is due to Irish substrate influence, Harris (1986) argues that this comes from the superstrate[7], given its presence in other varieties of English such as earlier metropolitan English and British English.

- The retention of the velar sound /x/

The appearance of the voiceless velar fricative /x/ in NIrE derives from Ulster Scots (Wells, 1982). However, the use of this phoneme is restricted to certain names

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[5] Apart from the dentalization of /l/, its darkening has also been applied in this transcription.
[6] In this case, /æ/ is maintained due to the fact that it is followed by /t/ (see §3.3.1.1., p. 10)
[7] "The 'superstrate' refers to the language that is spreading; it is usually a language of power and influence that replaces other languages" (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008: 45).

such as *Maghera* /ˈmaxəɹə/ and words such as *loch* /lɔx/ and *thought* /θɔxt/ (McCafferty, 2007: 127).

3.3.2.3. Alveolar stops

Hickey (2007b) reports that alveolar plosive stops /t/ and /d/ become dental especially before /ɹ/, and when these sounds are followed by an unstressed /ə/ that precedes an /ɹ/ sound. For example, words such as *offenders* /əˈfendəz/ and *track* /tɹæk/ in RP, are pronounced as /əˈfen̪d̪əɹz/ and /t̪ɹak/ or /t̪rak/ in NIrE.

Furthermore, there is a process known as *T-Voicing* by which the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ is produced as the voiced tapped sound /ɾ/. Wells (1982) explains that nowadays *T-Voicing* is common in intervocalic environments, and it might lead to neutralization of the /t/–/d/ opposition.

Therefore, Harris points out that a word such as *writer* /ˈɹaɪtə/ is pronounced as /ˈɹaɪɾəɻ/ in NIrE. Similarly, a word such as *rider* is a homophone of *writer* in NIrE, as it is also pronounced /ˈɹaɪɾəɻ/ (as cited in McCafferty, 2007).

3.3.2.4. Clusters

A consonantal set, or cluster, in final position tends to be simplified in NIrE. Thus, words such as *kept* /kept/, *hand* /hænd/ and *old* /əʊld/ in RP, are pronounced as /kep/, /han/ and /əʉl/ respectively in NIrE (McCafferty, 2007: 126).

3.3.3. Intonation

RP speakers use falling intonation in statements and rising in questions. In NIrE, intonation patterns are slightly different. NIrE speakers utter questions, statements and commands with a rising intonation (Wells, 1982).

However, echo questions and exclamations are produced with a falling intonation (Corrigan, 2010; Hughes *et al.,* 2005). Figure 4 shows an example of some contrasting intonation patterns in Belfast English and RP.

Figure 4. Typical Belfast sentence intonation patterns and equivalents in RP (Wells, 1982: 448)
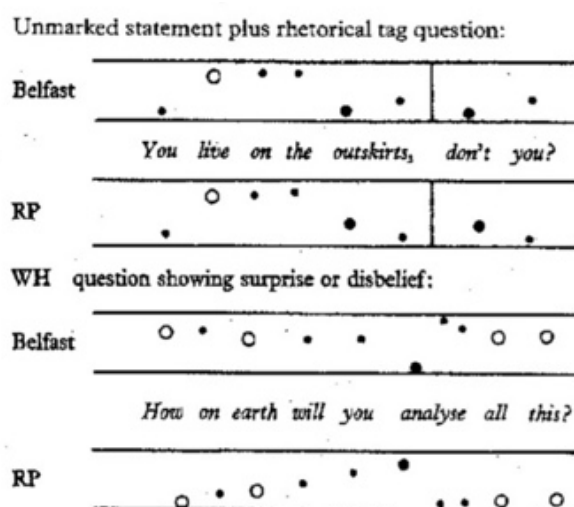
3.4. Morphology & Syntax

3.4.1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing debate regarding which language features are 'global' (or internationally shared) and which are just 'local' (or geographically restricted) and therefore particularized to a single community within the vast English-speaking territory (Filppula, 2006). This seems to be relevant due to the lack of richness of the English language as far as its morphology and syntax is concerned. Filppula *et al.* (2008) debate whether the morphosyntactic features presented in the broad field of "varieties of English" can be individualized to a given community, or whether they originated in a particular variety of English, and later developed different characteristics. This might be the main reason why NIrE morphosyntactic features have been disregarded, as they were always considered as 'minor' variants of Irish English.

The areas covered in this section are the noun phrase, the verb phrase, prepositions, and constructions that go beyond the phrasal level.

3.4.2. The Noun Phrase

3.4.2.1. The definite article

NIrE is characterized by the extensive use of the definite article. Definiteness in NIrE seems to be highly affected by the substrate influence of Irish (Kirk, 1997). According to Hickey (2007a) and Filppula (1999), definiteness in Irish includes abstract nouns, as well as generic and impersonal ones. Furthermore, Corrigan (2010) notes that these features are transmitted into NIrE, as opposed to StBE, in which definiteness only denotes individuals with a definite form and spatial boundary. Table 2 shows examples of Irish influence on the use of the definite article in NIrE:

Table 2. <The> premodification (adapted from Corrigan, 2010: 53)

Semantic Field	Irish	NIrE	StBE
Place names	Contae **na** Gaillimbe 'county of the Galway'	*'**the** County Galway'*	Ø *County Galway*
Language names	**an** Béarla 'the English'	*'**the** English'*	Ø *English*
Weekdays	**an** Luan 'the Monday'	*'**the** Monday'*	Ø *Monday*
Branches of learning	**an** teangeolaíocht 'the linguistics'	*'**the** linguistics'*	Ø *Linguistics*

3.4.2.2. Pronouns

Regarding personal pronouns, the most characteristic feature of NIrE is the distinction between the singular and plural forms of the second person pronoun. Hickey (2002, 2007a, 2007b) reports that this is a shared feature with SIrE as well. Whereas both NIrE and SIrE speakers use the form *you* to refer to a singular individual, the plural forms *ye* and *yous(e)* are common in SIrE and NIrE respectively.

There are different theories that try to explain the etymology of the form *yous(e)*. Hickey (2007a) ascribes it to the influence of Irish, since this language differentiates the singular and plural forms of the pronoun *you*, being *tú* (*you* sg.) and *sib* (*you* pl.). Although it is true that the plural forms *sib* and *yous(e)* do not seem to be related as far as their forms, Hickey (2007a) defends that at some point in history, speakers of NIrE

replaced the form *sib* with *yous(e)* when they gave up speaking Irish and adopted English as their L1. Nevertheless, Mesthrie & Bhatt (2008) maintain that *yous(e)* appears to be a British dialect survival which is also reported in Scots as well as in other varieties of English.

Another interesting feature in NIrE is the 'absolute' uses of reflexive pronouns. In StBE, reflexive pronouns make reference to an antecedent in the sentence. However, NIrE speakers use the reflexive pronouns interchangeably as the subject pronoun (Filppula, 1999). Harris (1993) and Hickey (2007a) note that this use of the reflexive pronoun may be a L2 feature transferred from Irish, as can be seen in (1) (Hickey, 2007a: 244).

(1)	Irish	*An raibh*	*í*	*féin*	*amuigh*	*aréir?*
		was	*she*	*self*	*out*	*last night?*
	NIrE	'Was	**herself**		out	last night?'
	StBE	'Was	she		out	last night?'

3.4.3. The Verb Phrase

Two categories of the NIrE verb phrase system are worthy of attention: number and aspect. Regarding the former, the Northern Subject Rule is a pivotal aspect. As for the latter, what is special about NIrE is the distinctive uses that the perfective and habitual aspects adopt in contrast to StBE.

3.4.3.1. Agreement: Northern Subject Rule

The use of the Northern Subject Rule (NSR) describes the use of the verbal *–s* ending with plural subjects under certain conditions. According to McCafferty (2007), this can be traced to the syntactic system of Older Scots and Northern English dating back to the fourteenth century. The NSR imposes two constraints: (a) 'the subject type constraint', by which *–s* is used with all third person plural subjects other than the personal pronoun *they*, as in (2); and (b) the 'subject proximity constraint', which states that the verb separated from its subject by another sentence element might take verbal *–s*, regardless of subject, person and number, as in (3):

(2) […] Things **grows** here that ever I did see grow in England. (Montgomery, 1997: 132)

(3) They have behaved well in general and **is** clear of censure. (Montgomery, 1997: 136)

Likewise, Henry (1995) studied the concord system, but she focused on the English spoken in the Belfast area. She points out that in this area the use of the singular concord is optional. Therefore, it is possible for the plural subject to take a plural form, as it is shown in (4) and (5) (Henry, 1995: 27).

(4) The teachers **goes** and **tells** the Principal about it
(5) The teachers **go** and **tell** the Principal about it

However, according to Corrigan (2010), variants such as age, gender and class in urban communities may have an effect on the occurrence of the NSR. Therefore, a definite acceptability rate cannot be given to the manifestation of the NSR, making this feature an interesting line for future research.

3.4.3.2. Aspect

Aspect is the name of the grammatical category which expresses differences in the way time is presented in events (Saeed, 2009). Hence, in StBE we usually distinguish between the perfective aspect and the imperfective aspect. Saeed (2009: 125) provides examples such as the following:

(6) She **spoke** to me   = Perfective aspect
(7) She **is speaking** to me   = Imperfective aspect

Like the SIrE variety, NIrE uses the perfective and imperfective aspects differently from StBE. According to Ó Baoill (1997), this is most probably due to the evolution of SIrE and NIrE from a linguistic-contact situation between English and Irish, in which these aspects take different forms by contrast with StBE, as will be explained in the following lines.

- Perfective aspect

Regarding NIrE, there is no agreement on the number of categories of the *perfective* forms. For the elaboration of this paper, I have considered Corrigan's (2010) standpoint as the most accurate and efficient one (for a different viewpoint, see Filppula, 2008).

In the study that Corrigan (2010) conducted, she differentiates four constructions in NIrE for the perfective aspect to convey semantic nuances: such as (i) 'hot news', (ii) 'resultative', (iii) 'extended now' and (iv) 'indefinite anterior'. Corrigan (2010: 59) gives examples of such constructions:

(8) One of the farls[8] **was after** break**ing**   = 'hot news'

(9) He **had** the bargain **made**   = 'resultative'

(10) They**'re gone** now   = 'extended now'

(11) **I never heard** any name on it   = 'indefinite anterior'

Corrigan (2010) suggests that the "perfects" in (8)–(11) derive from earlier stages of English and Scots and adds that there are parallel constructions in Irish.

As far as the 'hot news' construction is concerned, its equivalent translation into StBE is <have just been> and as reported by Filppula (1999), it refers to an event or activity in the more or less recent past, whose effects persist in the present.

According to most experts, the 'hot news' construction originated in Ulster Irish, as it seems to be a calque of the perfective form used in that variety, as it is illustrated in (12) (Corrigan, 2010: 61):

(12) Irish   tá   sé   **i ndéidb   déanamb**

          is   he   after   doing

     NIrE   'he   is   **after   doing**'

     StBE   'he   **just   did**'

It is for its distinctive form and use that the 'hot news' construction has been paid most of the attention in sociolinguistic studies of Ireland (Milroy, 1991; Harris, 1993;

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[8] A word of Scottish origin that means "a small thin triangular cake or biscuit made especially with oatmeal or wheat flour." (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*)

Kallen, 2012). It is usually regarded as the most stereotypical Irish English perfect, and it is also the least used by educated speakers in formal contexts, whereas its recurrence in informal contexts is relatively high (Filppula, 2008).

The other construction which is worthy of mention is the '*resultative perfective*' due to its distinctive form in contrast with StBE. Harris (1983) and Corrigan (2010) point out that this construction is mostly used with dynamic verbs, whereas it is least favored with stative relational verbs and stative verbs of perception. Corrigan (2010: 62) provides examples of such constructions:

(13) I have my assessment **written**   = Dynamic verb of activity

(14) He has Labov's paradigm **licked**   = Dynamic momentary verb

(15) I have the paradigm **understood**   = Stative verb of perception

(16) They have zombies **resembled**   = Stative relational verb

Harris (1983) observed that 60 percent of the respondents of his research perceive the *resultative* construction as standard, thus receiving a much higher acceptability rate than the other perfective constructions. However, he also noted that the religious beliefs of Northern Irish speakers seem to be decisive as to this acceptability rate, since Protestants and Catholics exhibit remarkably different results in this section. This means that apart from the influence received from the substratum language, the linked cultural heritage may, or may not, trigger the use of this construction.

• Imperfective-Habitual aspect

The habitual aspect is used to depict events which occur habitually or regularly. In NIrE the main forms that this aspect takes are 'habitual be(s)' and 'unstressed do' although the latter is more common (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008; Filppula, 1999, 2008; Hickey, 2007b).

(17) A lot of them **be** interested in football matches. (Filppula, 1999: 136).

(18) They **did** trot down there the other day. (Filppula, 1999: 154).

A 'habitual be' construction like (17) is used as an uninflected form denoting habitual aspect, which means that the rate of frequency of the action described in this sentence is high.

In an 'unstressed do' construction like (18), *did* is unstressed, and it is not used to carry the counter-presupposition pragmatics of "I assert X though you might assume 'not X'" (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008: 70). According to these authors, the unstressed *do* is a free morpheme that marks the past in a transparent way. According to Filppula (1999: 154), "the function of *did* appears to be one of merely marking the tense rather than adding anything to the aspectual meaning of the verb phrase".

Kirk (1998) points out that the origin of this feature may be tracked down to Scots, because as previously stated, NIrE was greatly influenced by it. Nevertheless, he adds that there is no direct evidence of that.

3.4.4. Prepositions

In NIrE, the prepositions which differ in meaning and use are *on*, *in*, *with* and *off*. Due to length-related constraints and the fact that not all of them differ considerably from their StBE equivalents, I have decided to present only the uses of *on* and *with*.

3.4.4.1. The preposition 'on':

The distinctive way in which NIrE speakers use the preposition *on* is related to the notion of languages possessing different ways of seeing and perceiving events (Saeed, 2009). In this case, NIrE is affected by the substrate influence from Irish (Filppula, 1999).

In StBE, *on* is used generally in time clauses where a specific day of the week is being referred to, as in (19), and in place phrases, where 'on' means 'on top of' or 'on the surface of', as in (20):

(19) I'll ring you **on** Tuesday (Swan, 2005: 74)
(20) There is a big spider **on** the ceiling (Swan, 2005: 73)

Nevertheless, in NIrE, Filppula (1999) reports that the preposition *on* may perform four functions, two of which seem to be archaic forms that are no longer in use.

The first archaic function of *on* has the sense of "injury or disadvantage of some kind, a violation of right or claim" (Filppula, 1999: 220). He provides an example of such construction:

(21) James struck my dog *on* me

In sentence (21) Filppula (1999) explains that *on me* corresponds to the Irish prepositional pronoun *orm* and means "to my detriment, in violation of my right".

The second archaic function of *on* in NIrE comprises contexts where StBE would require some other preposition, or even an entirely different type of construction. Filppula (1999) reports that this second function is related to the first archaic form in terms of meaning, and provides an example to illustrate it:

(22) […] but he never learned it to 'em, for they'd play it back *on himself*. (Filppula, 1999: 222)

(*on himself* means that "*they'd play it back to him to his detriment*").

The two functions which are currently in use in NIrE are employed as a complement of the verb *be*. The first function is used to express physical and mental sensations, states or processes, typically negative. Filppula (1999: 220) gives an example of such function:

(23) The climate is fright **on** you. New York is a fright in the heat now.

According to Corrigan (2010: 56), this function of *on* is a direct calque of Irish:

(24) Irish   Tá   eagla **air**

              is   fear   on-him

    NIrE   'Fear's **on him**'

    StBE   'He's afraid'

The second distinct function of *on* which is currently used in NIrE has to do with possession, expressing an inherent physical or other property of the referent. Filppula (1999: 221) provides an example of such function:

(25) All the cattle had the horns *on them* that time.

3.4.4.2. The preposition 'with':

Before explaining the different uses of the preposition *with* in NIrE, it is important to bring to light the uses of this preposition in StBE, and later contrast it with

those of NIrE. Swan (2005) distinguishes the following uses that *with* takes in StBE: (i) 'to show emotions and sensations', as in (26); (ii) to mean 'against', as in (27); (iii) to refer to accompanying circumstances and reasons, as in (28); and to express possession, as in (29).

(26) My father was trembling **with** rage (Swan, 2005: 619)

(27) Don't fight **with** him (Swan, 2005: 620)

(28) The runners started the race **with** a light following wind (Swan, 2005: 620)

(29) They've bought a house **with** a big garden (Swan, 2005: 620)

Corrigan (2010) points out that the Irish equivalent of *with* is *le*, which can also be used to convey meanings more closely associated with StBE prepositions 'by' and 'due to'. Additionally, she states that speakers of NIrE produce a literal translation of the respective Irish sentence, where *with* in NIrE covers all the semantics fields of *le*, and they use it in the same way an Irish speaker uses *le*. Corrigan (2010: 57) provides the following examples of the use of *with* in NIrE and *le* in Irish respectively:

(30) Irish *Trí*   *aon*   *pheachadh*   **le**   *hÁdhamb*

                because-of   one   sin   with   Adam

      NIrE   'because of   one   sin   **with**   Adam'

      StBE   'because of   one   sin   **by**   Adam'

(31) Irish ***Le***   *teann* *díomais*

                with   sheer   arrogance

      NIrE   '**with**   sheer   arrogance'

      StBE   '**due to**   sheer   arrogance'

3.4.5. Syntactic structures

In this section, I will focus mainly on constructions that go beyond the phrasal level. The main emphasis will be placed on the distinctive uses of imperatives, embedded indirect interrogatives, and infinitival complements in NIrE.

3.4.5.1. Imperatives

In NIrE the most distinguishable feature of imperatives is the use of the copula <be> + <V -ing>, as opposed to the bare form of the verb in StBE.

The reason behind the use of the copula is connected to the substrate influence of Irish on NIrE. According to Hickey (2007a), the progressive form that NIrE speakers employ has its origin in the Irish negative imperative structure, as can be seen in (32) (Hickey, 2007a: 223):

(32) Irish   *Ná*   ***bí***   *ag caint*   *liom!*

               not   be-IMP   at-talking   with-me

      NIrE   *Don't* ***be***   *talk**ing***   *with me!*

      StBE   'Don't Ø   **talk**   to me!'

3.4.5.2. Embedded indirect interrogatives

An embedded indirect interrogative is a type of question that is included in a declarative statement or in another question (Filppula, 1999). Whereas in StBE embedded questions do not inverse the subject-verb order, Henry (1995: 106) noted that NIrE favors auxiliary inversion, as it is shown in (33) and (34):

(33) She asked who **had I** seen

(34) They wondered what **had John** done

Corrigan (2010: 69) also points out that inversion is highly recurrent in embedded indirect questions, and suggests that the reason for this is because of the substrate influence of Irish, as this Celtic language has the same word order in both direct and embedded indirect questions. She offers the following examples of a direct and an indirect question respectively in Irish, NIrE and StBE:

(35) Irish   *An raibh*   *tú*   *sásta*?

               be-PAST   *you*   *content*?

      NIrE   'Were   you   content?'

      StBE   'Were   you   content?'

(36) Irish   *Chuir*   *sé*   *ceist*   *ort*   *cé acu*

               put-PAST *he*   *question*   *on-you*   *whether*

               an raibh   *tú*   *sásta*   *nó*   *nach*   *raibh*

               ***be**-PAST   **you**   content   or   not   content*

      NIrE   'He asked whether **were you** content or not'.

      StBE   'He asked whether **you were** content or not'.

3.4.5.3. Infinitival complements

Infinitival complements, which are also known as *for-to infinitives*, are characterized by the combination of <for-to> + *infinitive* in order to create an infinitival complement, as opposed to <to> + *infinitive* in StBE. McCafferty (2007: 133) reports that the use of this construction is a highly distinctive feature of the speech of NIrE older speakers. He offers the following example:

(37) They'd go up be Shankil *for to* close a gap.

Hickey (2007b) and Corrigan (2010) consider that this feature can be attributed to the substrate influence of Irish, which has similar structures for purposive clauses. Corrigan (2010: 75) offers an example in which the substrate influence of Irish on NIrE is shown:

(38) Irish   ***chun***   *scannán*   *a*   *fheiceáil*

             in-order   film   to   see

      NIrE   '**For** to see a film'.

      StBE   '(in order) to see a film'.

However, not only do NIrE speakers use infinitival complements with purposive clauses such as (37) or (38), but as Corrigan observes, they also employ such complements in non-purposive clauses like (39):

(39) This woman had expected her *for to* cure her (as cited in McCafferty, 2007)

4. Conclusions

In the first part of this paper I have focused on the evolution that the English language underwent since it was introduced in Ireland in the twelfth century. I have briefly described the main historical events that shaped the English language spoken in Ireland and shown that the English variety of Northern Ireland was not only affected by Scots, but also developed under the substratum influence of Irish.

The core of this paper is a linguistic description of NIrE. I have presented the main phonological features of this variety, and as I have shown, strong similarities with the vowel system in Scots are found nowadays. With regard to the vowels of NIrE I have explained the following: the merger of /æ/ and /a:/ into /a/, the centralization of the phonemes /ʊ/, /ɪ/ resulting respectively in /ʉ/ and /y/. Besides, I have also shown the centralization of the diphthongs /ɔɪ/ and /au/ resulting in /ɔ̈y/ and /aʉ/. I have pointed out that due to the influence of the Scottish Vowel Length Rule the shortening of the long sounds was given. Consequently, the long sounds /ɔ:/ and /ɜ:/ turned into /ɔ/ and /ʌɹ/. Following the same rule, several diphthongs underwent monophongization; thus, /eɪ/ turned into /ɪ/, /əʊ/ into /ɔ/ and /eə/ into /ɛ/.

Regarding consonants, I have commented on the following features: the labio-velar realization of /ʍ/, the retroflex realization of /ɻ/, the darkening of /ɫ/, the palatalization of /k/ and /g/, the realization of the lost phoneme in StBE /x/, the dental realization of /t/ and /d/, and finally, the cluster simplification in specific environments.

As for the characteristic morphosyntactic features of NIrE, I have explained the following ones: the extensive use of the definite article, the appearance of new person pronouns, the Northern Subject Rule, the distinctive uses NIrE speakers make of the perfective and imperfective aspects, the different uses that the prepositions 'on' and 'with' have in NIrE, and finally the interesting constructions NIrE speakers employ to refer to imperatives, embedded indirect interrogatives, and infinitival complements.

Due to space-related constraints, I have not covered several other interesting linguistic aspects such as the relationship between ethnicity and phonology in Northern Ireland. Religion is a crucial aspect in Northern Ireland, and I believe this is a possible branch for future research where a contrastive speech analysis of Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants could be carried out.

Last but not least, I would like to dedicate these last words to acknowledge some people who have been the reason why I decided to get immersed and do a study on the phonological and morphosyntactic features of NIrE: this goes to all my friends from Maghera and nearby towns who study at the University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast. *Go raibh maith agat!*[9]

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[9] "*Thank you*" in Irish.

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