Invariant Tags in Irish English: A Corpus based Analysis

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Discourse Markers

• Contribute to discourse coherence (Schiffrin (1987))

• Some work has been done here on historical Irish English (Amador Moreno (2005) which focussed on literature
Invariant Tags

- Far less robust than utterance-initial and -medial discourse markers

- Some necessary and sufficient requirements from extant literature (Columbus (2009a, 2009b)):
  - (1) it is a tag to an utterance, concept, or construction;
  - (2) it elicits a response;
  - (3) the propositional meaning is not changed when it is removed; and
  - (4) it does without verb forms.
Theoretical Background

- Quirk, et al. (1985)
  - InTs as informal conversational phenomena
  - Result of contact
  - “we always tend to impose our native phonological pattern on any foreign language we learn” (p. 27)
Tags in Irish (I)

- Hickey (2007) provides evidence of a “similar system of tags” to that of English (p. 152)

- Question tags: “Is deacair an obair í, nach ea? ‘The work is difficult, isn’t it?’”

Tags in Irish (2)

• Kallen (2006) shows utterance-final “moryah, which could be translated to ‘as it were’ in English, but which has no ready equivalent in most varieties of English” (p.1)

• Also gives example of “ar chor and ar bith, each of which can plausibly be translated as at all” (p.2) which shows up in reduplicative “at all, at all” in Irish English
Previous InT Studies (I)

- Anderson (1997)
  - Corpus of London Teenagers (COLT)
  - Syntactic and Pragmatic functions of *innit*
  - Presents an in-process grammaticalisation of *innit* from canonical tag to InT
  - InTs seen as a marginalised linguistic feature, used by lower social class teenagers and ethnic minorities; non-standard English
Previous InT Studies (2)

- Anderson (1998)
  - COLT database used to analyze InT usage amongst teenagers in London
  - Investigation into the nature of ‘invariancy’
  - Tag questions that are not responded to in teenage speech; cease to be questions
Previous InT Studies (3)

- Columbus (2009a, 2009b)
  - ICE corpora investigated to show frequencies of InT usage in diverse varieties of English
- Defining of InTs through investigation
- Frequencies described in 5 varieties of English based on ICE corpora - representations of “standardness”
ICE-Ireland

- Following the standard ICE conventions
- Added features make it the Prosody-Pragmatics-and Discourse (PPD) corpus
Research Questions

• How frequently do IE speakers use InTs?
• What does that tell us about IE and World Englishes?
Methods

• Concordance searches of ICE-Ireland Face-to-Face Conversation data
• 200,000 words
• Manual checks of ICE-Ireland data
Results of ICE-Ireland Data: Frequency (I)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invariant tag</th>
<th>Number of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>like</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you know</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yeah</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you see</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Results of ICE-Ireland
Data: Frequency (2)

British (244)  Indian (257)  New Zealand (82)  Singapore (447)  Hong Kong (210)  Ireland (479)

Original in Columbus (2009a)

right  you know  TOTAL  yeah  you see
Results of ICE-Ireland

Data: Frequency (3)

• These data do not show the full picture:
  • Dominant tags are missing:
    • Indian ‘no’
    • New Zealand ‘eh’
    • Singapore ‘lah’
    • Ireland ‘like’
  • When ‘like’ is included, Ireland has the most InTs
Multiple Tag Environments

- *Like*: 82 occurrences in multiple tag environments (MTEs) in non-final position

- `<P1A-020$A> <#>` Well he said, you know “och, well, I mean, girls like to be asked *like*, you know.”

- `<P1A-089$C> <#>` He’s a bit of a mope *like*, yeah?

- 26 occurrences with *you know*

- *N.B.* 4 occurrences of *like* as the final tag in MTEs
Implications for Irish English within Models

• Do tags exist as a contact phenomenon?

• How does this fit with the story of Irish English (IE)?

• Long-term contact

• Existence in Irish of InTs
# Where IE fits in Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Görlach</th>
<th>McArthur</th>
<th>Kachru</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish English</td>
<td>Sub-regional Semi-Standard</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>Outer Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British English</td>
<td>Regional National Standard</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>Inner Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand English</td>
<td>Sub-regional Semi-Standard</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>Inner Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Standardising</td>
<td>(Expanding Circle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian English</td>
<td>Sub-regional Semi-Standard</td>
<td>Standardising</td>
<td>Outer Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore English</td>
<td>Sub-regional Semi-Standard</td>
<td>Standardising</td>
<td>Outer Circle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problems with the models

• Kachru places NZE alongside BE but IE is one step removed using ENL, ESL, EFL basis

• Görlach uses speakers’ perception of a discrete variety, but places too much emphasis on ‘standards’

• Static
Problems with IE within the Models

• Bauer (2002) identifies the questions of “how much is intended to be included under ‘UK’, or where the English of Ireland is supposed to fit into the general picture” (2002, p. 22) (cf Bruthiaux (2003) who has no hesitation in placing Ireland alongside the other ‘Inner Circle’ countries)

• What requirements for a ‘standard’ variety?
Conclusions

• InTs are a feature of standard IE
• Contact seems to be key
• Each variety has a preference for at least one specific dominant InT
• Need for better comparison tools for World Englishes: ICE
References


