

# The influence of the languages of Ireland and Scotland on Linguistic Varieties in Northern England

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28 June 2004

## *Lenition in Irish English    Implications for Liverpool?*

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### *1. Cross dialectal influences    methodology*

Montgomery 2000: 242 :

a. 'that full, explicit descriptions of the form or feature within each variety are made, on a quantitative basis if possible'

b. 'that the linguistic features in question should be as closely confined to the varieties concerned as possible' ... 'in other words we should rule out alternative sources as far as possible'

c. the principle of accountability requires ' a identifying the form and meaning of each linguistic feature, b specifying the linguistic environment s in which it occurs, c tabulating the frequency of its variant forms and d considering the interrelation of the feature under study with others in the grammar'.

### *2. What can you do in Ireland with syllable final English /t/?*

Dublin data reported in Kallen in press includes data from 'Westland Row' study with Seán Devitt and unpublished studies by Pardy 1987 and Byrne 1996 .

#### ☞ Voicing

[r] tap flap ([d], [ɾ], [ð]), etc.      **letters, getting, greatest, lottery, get into, out of**  
Noted by Leahy (1915), Bertz (1975); common feature in UlsterE (Harris 1984, Kingsmore 1995); not featured in Henry's (1958) survey of traditional rural dialect.

[ɹ] T to R rule Wells 1982      [wəɹ ɪz ɪh pɛh] 'what is it, pet?'  
Noted for Dublin (Hickey 1999), not by Bertz (1975) or Henry (1958).

#### ☞ Glottalisation

[ʔ] glottal replacement      **right, boot, little, that was, that owns, out of, want**

[ʔt] pre glottalisation      **but, out, water, certainly**

Glottal replacement noted by Bertz (1975); prominent in Coleraine, especially among younger speakers (Kingsmore 1995); not noted by Henry (1958). On history, diffusion, and phonetics of glottal replacement and glottalised articulations of stops see Wells (1982), Milroy, Milroy, and Hartley (1994), Collins and Mees (1996), Docherty, Foulkes, Milroy, Milroy, and Walshaw (1997), Trudgill (1999), and Docherty and Foulkes (1999).

#### ☞ Frication

[ɹ̥] lenition lowered /t/, retracted /s/, etc.  
20+ different ways to transcribe      **boot, skating, pity, letter, rabbit, lottery**



4. *What are the structural constraints on /t/ lenition?*

- \* Preceding syllable is stressed
- \* Syllable final position
- \* Simple syllable coda
- \* Virtually in complementary distribution with deletion

This analysis depends, as argued in Kallen in press, on the analysis of syllable structure and re-syllabification as put forward by Selkirk 1982; see also Blevins 1995. Resyllabification attaches a consonant to the coda of a stressed syllable which precedes an unstressed syllable. Though resyllabification violates the Maximal Onset Principle, which all things being equal prefers open syllables to closed syllables on universal grounds, the analysis fits the data extremely well. Formally, Selkirk's rule is as in 1 and 2 Selkirk 1982: 366-367:

$$X \begin{bmatrix} [-\text{cons}] \\ [+ \text{cons}] \end{bmatrix} [-\text{syll}] \begin{bmatrix} [+ \text{syll}] \\ [- \text{stress}] \end{bmatrix} Y$$

(1)

1            2            3            4            5    □    1 2+3    ∅    4    5

2

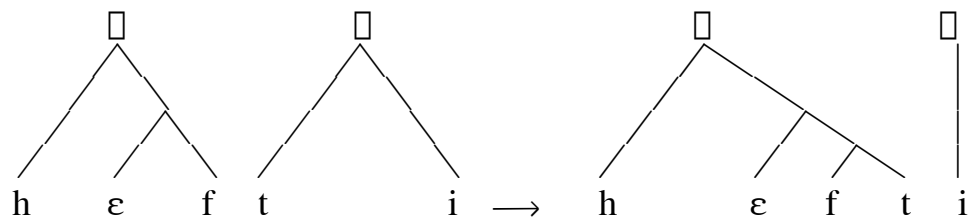


Table 1: realizations of /t/ for middle class Byrne 1996 and working class speakers in Westland Row study divided according to occurrence in simple codas only /t/ and complex codas including at least one other consonant. *Complex coda* two groups virtually identical; choice is realisation as t or deletion, though some intermediate forms occur rarely. *Simple coda* lenition favoured for both groups, especially Westland Row speakers; deletion extremely rare. Argument that lenition is a 'cline' through various degrees of lenition to deletion Hickey 1999 does not fit the facts.

5. *What are the social constraints on /t/ lenition?*

Table 1: Byrne 1996 and Westland Row speakers show major differences on realisation of lenited /t/. Precise sociolinguistic significance of different choices has yet to be worked out as different experiments not strictly comparable; instrumental analysis may also yield further results. But overall picture shows:

- \* two groups converge on use of [ɾ]
- \* main realisations in Westland Row [ɾ] and [h] virtually absent in Byrne 1996
- \* main realisation in Byrne 1996 [ɾ] virtually absent in Westland Row
- \* strong evidence of social conditioning

<u>Complex coda</u>											
<u>Byrne (1996)</u> (e.g. <i>mart, went out, servant, must, breakfast, perfect, bereft</i> )											
	<b>t</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>ʔt</b>	<b>tʃ</b>	<b>ʔ</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>h</b>	<b>∅</b>	<b>Total</b>
N=	87	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	37	128
%	68	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	29	100
<u>Westland Row</u> (e.g. <i>start, short, went, sent, just, least, asked, fixed, kept</i> )											
	<b>t</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>ʔt</b>	<b>tʃ</b>	<b>ʔ</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>h</b>	<b>∅</b>	<b>Total</b>
N=	44	3	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	11	62
%	71	5	0	0	3	0	2	2	0	17	100
<u>Simple coda</u>											
<u>Byrne (1996)</u> (e.g. <i>right, sweet, ticket, merit, hermit, gett.ing, catt.le, lett.er</i> )											
	<b>t</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>ʔt</b>	<b>tʃ</b>	<b>ʔ</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>h</b>	<b>∅</b>	<b>Total</b>
N=	137	16	14	6	8	27	181	0	0	11	400
%	34	4	4	1	2	7	45	0	0	3	100
<u>Westland Row</u> (e.g. <i>right, street, alright, about, lat.er, putt.ing, litt.le, lett.er</i> )											
	<b>t</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>ʔt</b>	<b>tʃ</b>	<b>ʔ</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>t̥</b>	<b>h</b>	<b>∅</b>	<b>Total</b>
N=	17	10	1	0	39	8	1	3	38	1	118
%	14	8	1	0	33	7	1	3	32	1	100

Table 1: /t/ lenition according to syllable position (Dublin)

## 6. Where does Liverpool come in?

a. Irish English lenition is largely focused on a single element, /t/; lenition of /d/ is noted in, e.g., Henry 1958 but is much less common. Occasional lenition of other stop consonants does not appear to be related.

b. Several different systems of /t/ lenition to be observed. Place of traditional dialect *h* in system ≠ place of *h* in Dublin, either structurally or socially. E.g., Kallen in press contrasts *h* in Henry 1958, where occurrence is frequent in words undergoing resyllabification *bottom, butter, footed, letters*, etc. with Westland Row data, where *letter, later, better, athletics* all show other forms and *h* only occurs in underlyingly simple codas. Most speakers do not use all variants, but many variants are available so complex systems develop, conditioned linguistically and socially.

c. Strong tests of Irish influence:

i. lenition affects /t/ much more than any other phoneme; minor lenition of /d/ but non lenition or independently patterned lenition of other phonemes rules out general tendency with possible internal motivation

ii. lenited variants include *t̥* rarity in English outside of southern Ireland and Irish settled Newfoundland argues for specificity; not common in languages generally

iii. lenited variants include *h* violates general English syllable constraint, but is plausibly related to Irish, not as a general process but with regard to /t/ specifically. Difficult to see motivation for other dialects developing *h* as allophone of /t/.

iv. lenition is a syllable final process operating in simple codas as defined following Selkirk's resyllabification hypothesis other constraints imply other rule systems with other sources; especially true of syllable initial lenition

d. Detailed empirical work needed in Ireland and Northern England to ascertain if and how the patterns and constraints of Irish English lenition suggest convergence or divergence with those of the Northern cities and traditional rural dialects.

e. Concluding hunch: lenition in Irish English and Liverpool English are different in many important ways. Irish English may have had an effect in shaping the development of Liverpool English but it may be only one of many influences. Older forms of Liverpool English may have undergone some convergence with the speech of Irish migrants during periods of heavy migration, so the search may be for the convergent factors, not for transplantation as in Irish settled Newfoundland.

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