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# **Changing Attitudes Towards Syntactic Vernacular Structures of Irish English: an Investigation**

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## Introduction

In this dissertation, I will analyse the attitudes displayed by Irish people towards vernacular syntactic structures of Irish English, using data that I have collected in two surveys, one carried out online in 2015, which collected a total of 89 surveys after cleaning the data, and one carried out in a primary school in Co. Longford in 2017, with a total of 46 questionnaires returned.

Despite representing a heritage and expression of Irish culture, Irish vernacular features, that is features of spoken Irish English which diverge from Standard British English, are often excluded from spoken Irish English. Throughout the ages, the two languages have had a long history of contact, which has influenced the modern developments of the variety of English spoken in contemporary Ireland. During my years of residence in Ireland, I have noticed first-hand that Irish English differed from the standard British variety I had studied at school. Many structures were so different that they were initially difficult for me to understand. I found this fact fascinating and I wanted to know more, which led me to ask my interlocutors for explanations. In these instances, I noticed that often, during a conversation, when people became aware of having just used an Irish English structure with a non-native speaker, they tended to correct themselves and to apologize for not speaking *properly*. The reactions made it easy to perceive a sense of embarrassment on their side, and a definitely negative attitude towards their native linguistic structures. This attitude has prompted me to consider what could be the possible behind it.

In this dissertation, I propose to analyse some of the most prominent syntactical structures of Irish English. Due to the different nature of its development, Ulster English will be considered here only marginally, and my study will concentrate on vernacular structures that are widespread in the Republic of Ireland. I will focus on the work by Raymond Hickey and in particular on *A Survey of Irish English Usage*, published in 2004. I will then compare Hickey's survey to the results of the survey I carried out in 2015, to evaluate the levels of linguistic awareness and eventual changes in attitudes towards vernacular structures. I will particularly focus on the role played by gender and by age range in the discrimination of vernacular Irish English structures. I will then consider the survey I carried out between April and May 2017, in an attempt to pinpoint a possible genesis of the above-mentioned awareness, to investigate the role played by the education system in the development of

such attitudes, and to probe the influence of gender in vernacular awareness at a young age. In my conclusion, I will speculate on the possible future position of English as a non-official language in Ireland, and I will consider the possible evolution of the role of English and of Irish English in a post-Brexit Europe.

## Chapter One

### A Brief History of Linguistic Contact Between English and Irish

#### 1.1 Early Medieval Period: The Initial Contact

The influence exerted by England on Ireland has shaped its culture and language. England's claim on Ireland is a very ancient matter, which can be dated back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. After a period dictated by the transcription of religious texts in the Latin tongue, monastic culture adopted a more secular approach, recording legends, sagas and poems in Irish. Instead of being erased, the ancient pre-Christian culture and heritage were being preserved in monasteries, and several non-religious books were written in Irish, such as the Trojan Wars or the Roman Civil War. The freedom enjoyed by the scribes was an aspect of the distance which the Irish Church kept from the Church of Rome: there are no records of correspondence with Rome between 640 and 1080, and no Irish armies joined the crusades. The Irish Church was distant from European religious means, and was heavily influenced by Gaelic culture, and its eclecticism represented a source of concern for the Church of Rome. In 1150 Cardinal Paparo was sent to Ireland with the task of reorganizing the Irish Church according to Papal lines. A central source of authority was necessary for these changes to last, but Ireland was still fragmented into 4 kingdoms and ruled by four kings, often fighting one another, so the idea of a unified source of power was unthinkable. Therefore, in 1155 Pope Adrian IV, the only English Pope in history, bestowed the Lordship of Ireland unto King Henry II, by the papal bull *Laudabiliter*, which gave the Pope the right to appoint temporal sovereignty over all islands who had converted to Christianity, and thus setting the foundations for England's formal pretense on Ireland (O'Beirne Ranelagh, 37-40).

However, a first linguistic contact between the Gaelic-speaking Irish and the English can be traced back to the second half of the twelfth century (Hickey 2007:30). One year after *Laudabiliter*, the high king of Ireland, Turloch O'Connor, died (O'Beirne Ranelagh, 40). The King of Leinster, Diarmaid Mac Murchadha, had given his support to the losing contentent to the high throne of Ireland, and in addition a feud between Mac Murchadha and Tiernàn O'Rourke, Prince of Breffny, raised over the involvement of former with the latter's wife, which provided the perfect ground for an invasion. In 1166 O'Rourke and his allies attacked Mac Murchadha, who fled to Wales and after

swearing fealty to king Henry II, returned in 1167 with a contingent of Normans and Welsh. His attempt to reassert his power failed, but one year later he managed to secure a base in Wexford. Through an alliance with the Norman warlord Richard Fitzgilbert De Clare, known as Strongbow, solidified with the promise of Mac Murchadha's daughter Aoife in marriage, and of the inheritance of his kingdom over his male sons, Mac Murchadha was granted the support of a strong Welsh and Norman force, which landed in Wexford in May 1169. In 1170, after marrying MacMurrough's daughter, Strongbow advanced on Dublin and seized the city. The city was besieged by the leader of the Irish forces, Rory O'Connor, but after MacMurrough's death in 1171 Strongbow inherited his titles, and O'Connor yielded the towns of Dublin, Wexford and Waterford. This occurrence solidified the Norman presence in Ireland, and opened the doors for the English Monarch Henry II who, with subsequent visits, affirmed his control of the territory (O'Beirne Ranelagh, 40-43; Ó hEithir, 14; Coohill, 13). From a linguistic perspective, this initial foreign presence, composed of an Anglo-Norman, a Welshman, and in minor part a Flemish component, represents a first instance of contact between Irish and English speakers. However, there are almost no linguistic traces left in Irish English by this first contact with the Welsh and Flemish tongues (Hickey 2007:30-31).



Figure 1.1 The Charter of Dublin, 1171-72. Dublin City Library and Archive. Image Source Dublin City Council website.

The arrival of King Henry II in Ireland is in contrast a relevant event. The city of Dublin, originally a Viking settlement, thanks to its favourable position on the coast, its proximity to the plain in the surrounding area, and the fluvial access, had already established itself as the capital; not long after its acquisition, it was occupied by the English, and in 1172 King Henry II issued the Charter of Dublin (fig.1.1), marking the beginning of the presence of the English language in Ireland (Hickey 2007:31-32). The strong English presence in the city generated what has become known as the Pale. This area under English influence and control, the size of which varied throughout the centuries , but which always included Dublin at its centre, was known as *the Pale* (fig.1.2). The term stems from the Latin word *palus*, meaning 'fence' or 'boundary', in reference to the fortified wall of wood



and earth raised around the city (Ó hEithir, 15-16), and later separating metaphorically the areas under English control from the areas in the hands of the uncivilized native Irish ( The presence of the English language coincided therefore with the areas where the English political influence was strongest. The fact that the Pale was permanently under English control can explain the constant presence of the English language in Dublin (Hickey 2007:31-32).



Figure 1.2 The Pale is outlined in red (c.1170).  
Image source AngliaCampus.

The spread of English in Ireland was however limited and not continuous during the twelfth century. The only areas significantly settled were along the eastern coast (Amador Moreno, 17), and despite settlements appearing after the twelfth century in cities in the south and in the west, such as Cork, Limerick and Galway, the linguistic impact of English on the Irish speaking population was minimal. At the time the English language was in competition with Anglo-Norman, and both languages were outnumbered by the copious majority of Irish speakers (Hickey 2007:31-32), to the point where, in the centuries following the first settlement, a phenomenon of gaelicisation occurred.

French speaking Anglo-Normans, together with English speakers, being numerically inferior and separated from

larger linguistic communities speaking their own tongue, shifted to the use of the Irish language: a consequence of this was the sharp decline of the number of English speakers in Irish society, even in the English-speaking areas of the Pale (Hickey 2007: 32,130,132). The influence wasn't only on a linguistic level. Especially beyond the Pale, outside the area with an English cultural and linguistic predominance, the Normans were gradually assimilated into Irish society, adopted Irish culture, and became 'more Irish than the Irish themselves' (Barberis 2000: 196). The *Statutes of Kilkenny*, passed in 1336, bear witness to the extent of this phenomenon, and to how the Anglo-Norman gaelicisation represented a threat for the English rulers. The Statutes of Kilkenny condemned any manifestation or adherence to Irish culture, such as playing the harp, playing hurling, wearing clothes according to the Irish custom; they also banned marriage between Anglo-Normans and Irish, and, most relevantly for our discourse, they forbade Anglo-Normans from using the Irish tongue. Despite being in force until 1613, the Statutes of Kilkenny proved impossible to

fully enforce, and cultural assimilation continued unabated (Coohill, 15; Amador-Moreno, 17; O'Beirne Ranelagh, 47-49).

The distance from England favoured a high degree of independence for the settlers, mercenaries whose fidelity to the English crown was only alleged, to the point that formal royal visits were occasions to reassert the Royal power over the Irish settlements. The decline of the English language in Ireland continued through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and it reached its peak in the first part of the sixteenth century, with the advent of the Reformation and the adoption of Protestantism: the old English settlers were Catholic, and so was the Irish population at large (Hickey 2007: 32).

The situation was quite different in concern to the Anglo-Norman language. Positions of power such as high clergy and leadership were held by the Anglo-Normans, whereas the English were mainly their servants, a circumstance which mirrored the situation in England at the time of the invasion, and which explains the low status enjoyed by the English language at the time. The presence and the high status enjoyed by the Anglo-Norman language between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, on the other hand, is attested to by surviving poems such as *The Entrenchment of New Ross* and *Dermot and the Earl*, and by Kilkenny court proceedings, which were written in Anglo-Norman. This last instance exemplifies the role of Anglo-Norman as a language of law, a status which was kept until the fifteenth century, as evidenced by the 1472 Acts of Parliament, which were written in Anglo-Norman. The eminence of the Anglo-Norman language had a strong influence on Irish, providing in particular a vast number of loanwords to the Irish language (Hickey 2007: 33).

As mentioned above, Irish was spoken by the vast majority of the population. Another important ethnic and linguistic component at the time was represented by Vikings. The initial contact between the Irish and the Vikings happened during the Viking raids along the coast of Ireland in the second part of the eighth century, and involved men primarily coming from the coasts of Norway (Edwards, 172; Haigh, 73). The Viking fleets reached the coast of Co. Antrim probably during their activity in the Scottish isles. In the ninth century multiple settlements were created, both on the coast and inland, including the city of Dublin (Edwards, 172). After three centuries of Viking domination, which was ended in 1014 in the Battle of Clontarf, the Vikings remaining in the

country were quickly assimilated by the native Irish population, as was the case in other countries which were exposed to Scandinavian raids and colonization. Old Norse had indeed an impact on Irish, especially in the area of lexis, but there is no evidence confirming a situation of bilingualism in the second part of the twelfth century (Hickey 2007: 33). However, Viking settlements and towns on the coast were of paramount importance in opening the way for relations between the Irish and Europe (Hogg, Blake, Burchfield, Lass and Romaine 1992: 150). Irish proved to be a tenacious and vigorous language in medieval Ireland. Proceedings from the municipal archives of Waterford demonstrate that Irish was allowed in court in those cases where one of the litigants was Irish, and a 1541 bill in the Dublin parliament, claiming Henry VIII as the king of Ireland, had to be translated into Irish for the Norman aristocrats attending the session by the Earl of Ormond, the only person present who could understand English. Such instances would be unthinkable of in a later context such as the 17th or 18th centuries, especially when considering the harsh punishments issued by the Penal Laws for speaking Irish, and undoubtedly were a reason for concern and suspicion for the English, who were not regarded favourably if they spoke Irish. The advent of the Reformation provided another reason to view manifestations of Irishness with suspicion, and as a potential sign of popery (Hickey 2007:33,37; Amador-Moreno, 19).

## **1.2 The Tudor Era**

During the Tudor period the Irish came to be seen by the English as a nation of wild savages, an inferior race of men fighting each other and living in a state of chaos (O'Beirne Ranelagh, 56-57;). The imposition of English laws and systems, of the English language and of the Protestant religion on the unruly Irish, was regarded almost as a moral duty and a spiritual mission, as well as a way to ensure public order. This attitude is very evident in the writings of the time dealing with Irish matters, and is found in abundance in authors and poets such as Edmund Spenser. (Hickey 2007: 34-35).

The anglicization of Ireland was regarded by the Tudors as a matter of importance, especially by Henry VIII and thereafter by his daughter Elizabeth I (Coohill, 37-38). The attitude of Queen Elizabeth I is said to have been rather amicable. It was reported that the Queen expressed interest towards the understanding of the Irish tongue, and in order to provide the Irish with a translated copy of the Bible, in the pursuit of the goals of the Reformation, she appointed Irish bishops with

the task of translating the Holy Scriptures, and she supplied a printing press with Irish fonts in order to complete the work. However, the most meaningful event in terms of anglicization in the Tudor era was the organized settlement of the Irish landscape, or 'plantations', which were accountable for the installation of a large English presence across Ireland. The first instance of this type of colonization took place from 1549 to 1557, with the settlement of Co. Offaly and Co. Laois in the centre of Ireland. However, the most relevant examples of plantations are the Munster plantation and the Ulster plantation (Hickey 2007: 34-35).

Plantations were methodically projected and designed by the English government. Henry VIII was the first English monarch to extend English rule beyond the Pale and to apply it to all of Ireland: this circumstance set the foundations for the establishment of plantations, an intention which was realised by Henry's daughter, Mary Tudor (O'Beirne Ranelagh, 56; Coohill, 38-39). The spark igniting the process however was the defeat of the Fitzgeralds, Earls of Desmond in north Munster. As a consequence, in 1584, over 500.000 acres of land were confiscated by the government, who decided to divide it into allotments, known as *seignories*. The seignories were then entrusted to Englishmen denominated as 'undertakers', who were charged with the task of recruiting more English settlers. A number of settlers was then assigned to each seignory, and the land was subsequently subdivided among them. Larger seignories hosted dozens of families: the largest Munster seignory in 1586 accommodated 91 families. The process to realize a seignory was set to be carried out over a period of about 7 years. Old English settlers were granted the possibility to take part in the plantation, while Irish natives were excluded from the process. English poet Edmund Spenser was among the English settlers allotted land in Munster, where he received 4000 acres of land. (Hickey 2007: 36; O'Beirne Ranelagh, 58-59).

Matters however turned out differently than expected: many English settlers who moved to Ireland between 1586 and 1592 were absorbed by the Irish majority, the English population didn't grow significantly, and the undertakers failed to honour their commitments (Hickey 2007: 36). The decisive blow which led to the collapse in 1598 of the already rickety situation in which the Munster plantation dwelled, however, came from the Irish rebellion lead by the Earl of Tyrone Hugh O'Neill, which took place that same year. O'Neill asked Catholic Spain for support, and he received a contingent of armed men. The circumstance represented a considerable threat for the English government, who feared the possible collapse of English rule in Ireland. The rebellion was quashed, and in 1601 the Irish and the Spanish were defeated at Kinsale, Co. Cork, and later, at the

battle of Mellifont in 1603, O'Neill accepted his defeat (Coohill, 38-39; O'Beirne Ranelagh, 59-60). Despite its failure in 1598, the Munster plantation proved to the English that plantations could be used as a tool to force English authority on the Irish, and to promote the anglicization of Ireland. From a linguistic point of view, the small number of English settlers, together with the short duration of the Munster plantation, did not influence significantly the nature of the variety of English spoken in Munster (Hickey 2007: 36-37).

### 1.3 The Seventeenth Century and Plantations

Due mainly to the political turmoil, the sixteenth century marks a hiatus in the development of Irish English. Following the rebellion of 1598, the Irish were defeated by the English at the Battle of Kinsale, near Cork, in 1601. The desertion of Irish leaders from the North of Ireland in 1607, romantically dubbed *The Flight of the Earls*, left a political void which was quickly filled by the English (O'Beirne Ranelagh, 60-62; Coohill, 39-40). Plantations also continued during the first years of the seventeenth century: more settlements were created in Munster during the reign of Queen Mary, but the plantation of Ulster, created under James I, was the most extensive as well as the most successful, counting over 20000 English and Scottish settlers in the first part of the 1620s (Hickey 2007:37; O'Beirne Ranelagh, 62-63; Amador-Moreno, 19).

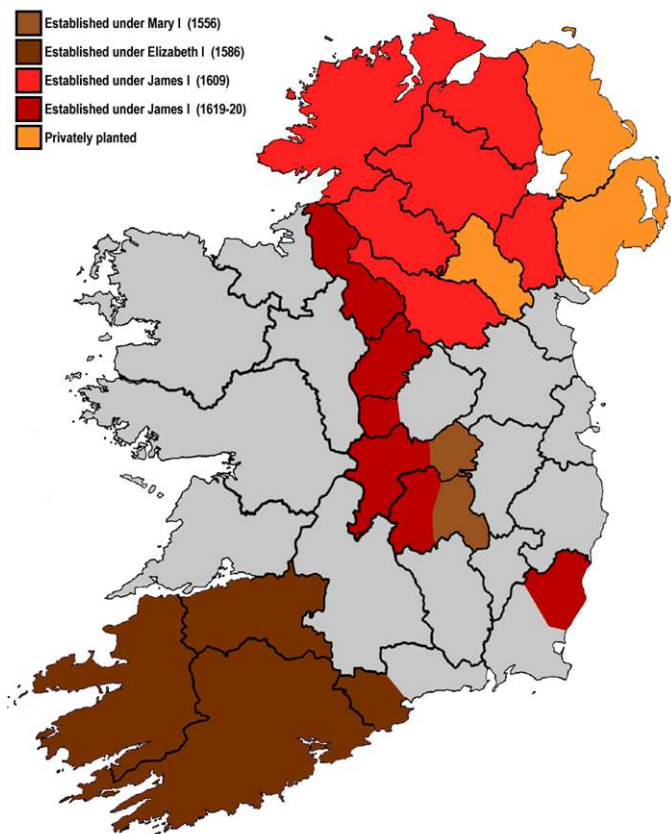


Figure 1.3 Plantations in Ireland between 1556 and 1620. Image from Wikipedia.

From the late sixteenth century, the Irish increasingly came into contact with the English language, mainly due to the continuous increase of the English population in the southern part of the country. The diverse provenance of the English settlers, however, probably failed to provide a phonological model for the Irish to look towards to when speaking in English, therefore, particularly regarding the rural settlements in the south-west of

Ireland where the exposure to the English language took place from the second part of the sixteenth century, the variety of English spoken was highly influenced by the sound system of Irish, especially given the non-prescriptive nature of the learning process, and the language acquisition taking place in adulthood. Due particularly to their numeric inferiority, planters had a minimal role in the formation of Irish English. The variety of English spoken by seventeenth century planters was indeed influenced by Irish, but the main contribution to the transfer of Irish features into English came from the extensive Irish speaking community who switched from Irish to English between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century. This shift can be ascribed to several motives, for instance the use of Irish was repressed and punished by the Penal Laws. However, a vast component of native Irish speakers spontaneously switched to English, as the knowledge of the language increased their social opportunities. Of course, the variety of English spoken by the planters had some impact on the language acquisition of the Irish shifting to English, as in their learning the Irish community drew on the varieties of English they were exposed to. However, the main influence was the variety of English which had been present since the early period of settlements on the east coast and towns across Ireland. Considering contemporary Irish English, the language has developed quite homogeneously, and it is currently impossible to pinpoint the diverse origins of the speakers. The situation developed however quite differently in Ulster, where seventeenth century settlers coming from Scotland contributed to the genesis of Ulster Scots (Hickey 2007:38).

#### **1.4 Cromwell's Influence: Transplantation and Transportation**

Oliver Cromwell had a relevant role in the increment of anglicization in Ireland. In 1642 the English parliament decreed that 2500000 acres of valuable Irish land was to be seized and given to 'adventurers' who would be willing to invest money. The aim was an attempt to rule Ireland in an orderly manner, to reorganize the country in an attempt to make it demographically and culturally English (Hickey 2007:37,40). This scheme was continued by Cromwell. After defeating the Irish in the late 1640's, he enacted a land settlement. The English finances at the time of his victory weren't particularly florid, so he embraced the alternative to grant land to his soldiers as a form of recompense. He proceeded to seize the property of Catholic landowners whose loyalty to the Cromwellian cause was doubted, and he gave it to those Catholic landowners who had not taken part in the Irish Rebellion of 1641-42. The new owners were coercively moved to the region of Connaught, located in the west, the poorest region of Ireland, in particular to County Clare, which is one of the least arable lands in the country. Catholic landowners were thus given the choice to go

‘to hell or Connacht’, risking death or deportation to the colonies if they refused to yield their land. The atrocities carried out during the Cromwellian regime have had such a strong impact on Irish Folk memory, that in some parts of the country the imprecation *mallacht Chromail* (the curse of Cromwell), is still being used nowadays (O’Beirne Ranelagh, 69-74; Coohill, 41-42; Ó hEithir, 17-18) . The policy became known as *transplantation*. Despite the failure of the initial goal of transplanting all the Catholics to the west of Ireland, it is nevertheless estimated that between 1654 and 1658 hundreds of thousands of people were torn from their home and their land (Hickey 2007: 37-39).

In 1660 the English crown was restored, and King Charles II came to power. However, the Cromwellian transplantation plan was not repealed, and Catholic landowners were not returned their lands (O’Beirne Ranelagh, 74-75). Land that was cleared in this period was given to English settlers, who brought a significant linguistic input to the development of Irish English, to the point that many academics consider this new input as the germ of modern Irish English.: the conditions of bilingualism enforced by the transplantation of native Irish landowners, created the perfect ground for the creation of a language blending Irish structures with the new linguistic input brought by English settlers. This was one of the most influential periods in Irish history for the development of the variety of English spoken in Ireland today (Amador-Moreno, 19-20; Hickey 2007:39-40).

Another aspect of the Cromwellian regime in the 1650’s was the *transportation* of individuals regarded as undesirable, such as members of the Catholic clergy, prisoners, and vagrants among others, who were transported overseas. A major turning point came in 1690, when William of Orange defeated King James II at the battle of the Boyne, and then achieved a major military victory at the battle of Aughrim. As a consequence, a Protestant monarchy was re-established, and Catholic King James II fled to France. This event marks the beginning of the Catholic exclusion from society and from political influence, which meant that the anglicization of the country continued unabated (Hickey 2007:39-40; Coohill, 43-44).

## 1.5 The Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century is the century that marks the beginning of the decline of the Irish language, together with a gradual transition of native Irish speakers to the English language. The penal laws, a set of measures which excluded the Catholic Irish from social and political life, played a relevant role in the linguistic shift, since they condemned and punished the use of the Irish language, and at the same time they took away any possibility of influence from the native population (Hickey 2007: 37, 41; Ó hEithir, 19-21 ). Until the early part of the nineteenth century, Catholics were also excluded from education. The only access they had to literacy and culture was through the attendance of ‘hedge schools’, where migrant teachers travelled across rural Ireland and provided their service to individuals or to small groups. Lessons were often conducted outdoors in order to evade the detection of the English authorities, hence the name, but later, when the laws against Catholic education were not enforced as strictly, they were moved indoors in huts or cabins (Dowling ,45-46). Among the subjects taught to the native Catholics was the English language. Despite teaching English however, teachers were not native speakers of the language, and it is speculated that this may have influenced the rising of non-standard stress patterns in Irish English. (Hickey 2007:44).

Hedge schools were not an officially recognized institution, therefore there are no confirmed figures regarding the amount of pupils attending, but they are known to have flourished in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.(Hickey 2007: 44; Dowling, 21). Dowling (1935) noticed in his study of the hedge schools a surge in attendance in the second half of the century, partly because of the population growth and because of a more relaxed approach to laws against education (Dowling, 52), particularly in the south-west of Ireland, where the larger presence of hedge schools in the mid eighteenth century is corroborated by the annotations of travellers to Munster (Dowling,45-51), a region where, perhaps not coincidentally, the tradition of Irish poetry was the most vigorous in the early modern period (Hickey 2007: 45).

In 1824 a survey of schools attested the presence in the country of more than 500000 pupils attending 11823 schools out of which at least 7600 and 8000 were ‘Pay Schools’. (Dowling, 52). The beginning of the nineteenth century saw the rise of Pay Schools, independent schools which were privately organized for a public of Catholics wealthy enough to afford the fees to school their



children there. Catholic lay-teachers taught many subjects, which reflected the preoccupations of the paying public, many of whom were interested in entering the priesthood. Classical languages were therefore a common subject (Dowling, 48, 52-53). However basic English literacy was key to the syllabus: the importance of a good knowledge of English to facilitate social advancement had indeed become evident. It has been theorized that these schools held a role in the later development of Irish English forms. (Hickey 2007: 45).

The eighteenth century was a relatively peaceful period for Ireland: there were no major military campaigns challenging English rule for over a hundred years, from the defeat of the Jacobites in Ireland by William of Orange in 1689-1691, to the United Irishmen rebellion in 1798. Yet it was also a period marked both by prosperity and liberty, and at the same time by oppression and recession. On the one hand, the protestant middle and upper class thrived in this century, a period of wealth to which the magnificent Georgian buildings in Dublin bear witness (Hickey 2007:41). On the other hand, the native population was notably underprivileged. The Penal Laws enacted in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, stunted the participation of Catholics in social life, excluding them from public offices and positions, and restricting their possibility to own land (Coohill, 44-46). Not only did they not share the wealth enjoyed by the protestant part of the population, but native Catholics were also crushed by famines, of which the 1740-1741 famine, which killed between 400.000 and 500.000 people, is a harsh example (O'Beirne Ranelagh, 123-124). Remarkably however, the dire conditions didn't discourage literary production, and Irish literature thrived in this period, in particular poetic production in Irish was abundant in the region of Munster. The century also gave birth to Turlough Carolan, the legendary blind harpist who embodied the ancient figure of the wandering bard, recalling in the collective imaginary the bygone Gaelic order which had existed until the beginning of the seventeenth century (Hickey 2007:41-42).

Dublin became a cultural centre almost comparable to London, boasting intellectuals such as writer Jonathan Swift, philosopher Bishop Berkeley, political theorist Edmund Burke, grammarian Thomas Sheridan and his son, dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan (Hickey 2007:41). Writers in Irish were also present in the city, especially in the early part of the century, when Jonathan Swift was the prime literary exponent of English literature in Ireland. Authors such as Seán o' Neachtain in *Stair Eamuinn Uí Chléire* (The Story of Eamonn O' Cleary), where the attempts of the Irish to speak in English, together with the influence of Irish syntax, are ridiculed, provided jokes and puns

for a bilingual public, pointing to a probable coexistence of English and Irish literary cultures in Dublin in the early eighteenth century (Hickey 2007:42).

It should however be remembered that Irish people and the Irish features that were present in their speech were subjected to prejudice. In *Tales From the Hanging Court*, Hitchcock and Shoemaker exemplify how the Irish became the scapegoats during a protest which took place in London on Monday 26th July 1736. Prime Minister Robert Walpole had passed some unpopular laws, among which was the Gin Act, which aimed at reducing the consumption of this spirit via heavy taxation. The high number of Irish immigrants coming to the city seeking employment just added to the discontent, especially when, during the rebuilding of the medieval church at St Leonard's Shoreditch, English workers asking for higher wages were replaced by Irishmen who were paid significantly less. Not long after a broadsheet was spread around the area, fomenting hostility against the Irish and recalling their alleged violent character. This resulted in a mob of 4000 gathering in Shoreditch, screaming 'down with the Irish!' and ravaging and destroying Irish homes in the areas of Shoreditch, Spitalfields and Whitechapel for days, to the point that not even the public reading of the Riot Act could stop them. A man witnessing the scene, Richard Burton, went to Mr Allen's house to warn him of the impending danger, but he was caught by the mob at the door of the house. He tried to convince them that he was the new owner of the house, in a last attempt to avoid any damage. The mob did not believe him and expected him to step aside: 'They said they knew I was not Irish by my tongue, and I should not be hurt' (Hitchcock and Shoemaker 99-101).

Another instance from the Old Bailey Proceedings is the case of James Fitzgerald. Hitchcock and Shoemaker state that, as there were no lawyers, it was normal for trials to start with declarations from the victim or prosecutor, whose testimony was normally dealt with respectfully. They also point out that in cases where prosecutors were victims of a theft while visiting a prostitute, they were regarded as deserving their misfortune, and they would eventually be mocked and humiliated. In Fitzgerald's case, his Irish accent and use of vernacular structures were used with this aim in the Proceedings.

"James Fitzgerald depos'd to this Effect: On the 25th of February last, about 11 at Night, O' my Shoul, I wash got pretty drunk, and wash going very shoberly along the Old-Baily, and there I met the Preeshoner upon the Bar, as she wash going

before me. I wash after asking her which Way she wash walking: And she made a Laugh upon my Faush, and told me to Newtoner's-Lane. Arrah Joy, (shaid I) you should always have Somebody with you, when you go sho far alone. She told me she would be after taking me with her, if I would give her any Thing. Arrah, my dear Shoul, (said I) you shall never fear but I will give you shome thing, if I have got nothing myself. Sho we went together; but not having any Deshign to be consherned with her, I paid her Landlady a Shilling for a Bed. For it ish my Way to make Love upon a Woman in the Street, and go home with her, whenshoever I intend to lie alone. But ash to the Preceshoner, she wash after making me shit upon the Bed with her, and sho tumble together; but I wash after shitting in the Chair, and then she was coming to shit in my Lap; but I would not let her, and sho she shit beside me; and then I wash hoping that she would be eashy; but for all that she would not let me shit at quiet, for she wash after being concerned with my Breeches, and got away my Watch whether I would or no; and I pulled, and she pulled; and sho for fear she should get it from me, I let go my Hold, and went for a Constable, and he carried her to the Watch House, where he took the Watch upon her. He found it in a Plaushe that my Modesty won't suffer me to name; for ash I am a living Chreestian, she had put into her \*\*\*.” (Hitchcock and Shoemaker 180-183)

The accused, Susan Grimes, a native of London, where the Old Bailey was located, probably spoke with a strong cockney accent, yet her speech was not distorted in the proceedings, and the conventional spelling gave her words more credibility than Fitzgerald’s ridiculed statement. The publisher surely used the established anti-Irish prejudice to entertain his readers. The Jury probably considered both witnesses, a prostitute and an apparently drunken Irishman (an impression surely strengthened by the mutation of ‘s’ in ‘sh’ in the man’s deposition) as questionable, and Grimes was acquitted on a technicality, since according to the proceedings she had been accused of a wrong charge (Hitchcock and Shoemaker 180-183). It is possible that this disposition contributed both to the development of a negative attitude towards vernacular structures, and to the increasing rate of anglicization in Ireland.

The dominant Protestant class which was present in Irish society in the 18th century was known as ‘ascendancy’. Empowered by the expropriation of land formerly belonging to the native Catholics,

and by the enforcement of the Penal Laws, the ascendancy class was considered to have strong sympathies towards England (O'Beirne Ranelagh, 77). Despite their identification as a collective, the implied unity within the ascendancy class may not have been a reality. While making no attempt to maintain an isolated dialect, they probably played a part in the evolution of middle-class Irish English, and in its supraregionalisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The emancipation of the native Catholics in the nineteenth century, however, led to a decline of the ascendancy class, which collapsed in the aftermath of the Easter Rising of 1916, with the destruction of houses and mansions, which were seen as symbols of Protestant dominance in Ireland. Contemporary Irish people still view the ascendancy class with indignation and suspicion. In contemporary Ireland, however, the reminiscence of this class has had an influence on the contemporary Irish Protestant middle-class accent (Hickey 2007: 42-43). The preoccupation of speaking the correct variety of English (*prescriptivism*) and of using a 'proper' accent (*elocution*) which developed in the eighteenth century, and which was also supported by Irish scholars such as Thomas Sheridan (Hickey 2007:44) led to an even higher development of linguistic awareness of vernacular structures in the Irish.

### **1.6 The Nineteenth Century: *An Gorta Mòr* and the Decline of the Irish Tongue**

Two major circumstances in this century were responsible for the increased pace of the decline of the Irish language. In 1801 Ireland was annexed to England, without any relevant effect from a linguistic perspective. However, the protest by Catholics led by Daniel O'Connell, asking for equality, which resulted in the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, had a determinant effect on the process of anglicization. Indeed, O'Connell championed the acquisition of the English language for his compatriots, in order to promote better possibilities of social advancement, and discouraged them from holding onto the Irish language. The Catholic Emancipation Act generated the rise of a system of national schools in 1831, to provide the Irish with basic primary education, where instruction was held in English, a circumstance which sped up the waning of Irish and the anglicization of the native Catholics (Hickey 2007: 45-46; Amador-Moreno, 22-23).

The second major circumstance which led to the dramatic decline of the Irish language, and compelled the language shift to English was the tragic Great Famine, known in Irish as *An Gorta Mór*. Blight, a fungus, spread to potato crops, which at the time was the staple of the majority of Irish peasantry, across the country, with particular severity between 1845 and 1847. Ireland had

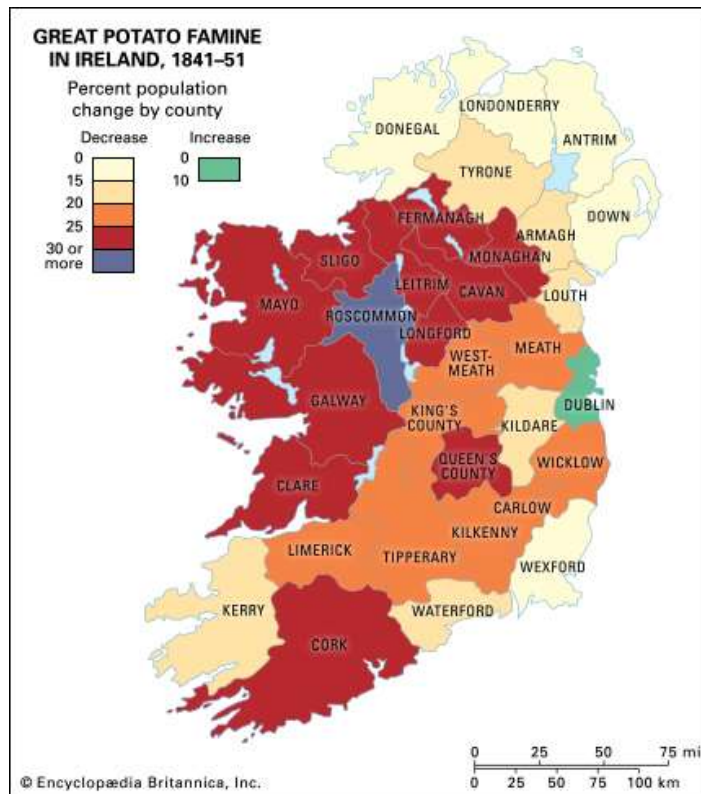


Figure 1.4 Population change after the Great Famine that struck Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century. Image source Britannica Kids.

known famine several times before, but none of the previous events were as tragic as this (O’Beirne Ranelagh, 123-125). What probably caused such an elevated death toll was the almost complete reliance of the Irish on potatoes in the 1840s, a condition which wasn’t as present during previous famines (Kelly, 3). Before the Great Famine struck, the population of Ireland was around 8.2 million: after the most severe years and their aftermath, ranging from 1845 to 1855, the population had decreased by one third (fig.1.4). Around 1.1 million people are estimated to have died of starvation, the majority of whom were in rural areas, particularly in the west and in the south, where the Irish

tongue was still prevalent; 2 million people emigrated, particularly to England or North America, often leaving family and friends behind, breaking bonds which were so strong and important in Irish culture (Kelly 2; Hickey 2007:46). The very fabric of Irish society and culture was severely weakened. In his book *The Graves are Walking*, John Kelly states that “In the pestilential hospitals and workhouses, the weekly death rate rose into the thousands; in the crowded port towns, emigrants fought each other for space on the teeming docks. After two years of famine, people were no longer leaving Ireland, they were fleeing, the way a crowd flees a burning building” (1). Kelly (2013) adds that the March 1847 issue of *Cork Examiner* stated that “They are now actually *running away*” (2). Oxford former professor Terry Eagleton has defined the Great Famine” the greatest social disaster of nineteenth century Europe – an event with something of the characteristics of a low level nuclear attack” (Kelly 2013: 2).

Death and emigration swept away about two million native Irish speakers, striking the western part of the country, where the Cromwellian Plantations had coerced the majority of the Irish speaking population, and where the rate of poverty was higher, the hardest (Hickey 2007:47; Amador-Moreno, 25). In such a scenario where emigration meant a possibility of survival, the importance of knowledge of English became evident. Irish continued to decline throughout the second part of the nineteenth century. The remaining Irish speaking areas kept shrinking. By 1881 they had already reduced to three separate zones, which withered even further during the following century. At present, there are three Irish speaking areas, or *Gaeltachtaí*, left in Ireland, all of them situated along the west coast of the country, where the amount of native Irish speakers is estimated between 30,000 and 40,000 individuals, and where the use of a different dialect in every region makes it difficult to establish a standard variety of modern Irish. It is interesting to examine the results of the first census to consider the number of Irish speakers, which was taken in 1851, that is after a great number of native speakers were lost. This census revealed some interesting data: not only did the Irish support the linguistic shift, but a comparison with later censuses shows a larger number of individuals who spoke only Irish, despite the decline experienced by this category in the nineteenth century. This would suggest that many people denied their monolingualism and their bilingualism was exaggerated (Hickey 2007:48). It is my opinion that this attitude of denial, probably fuelled by the negative reinforcement received during the centuries in concern to the use of Irish, and the punitive measures endured, could be connected with today's attitudes of linguistic awareness concerning vernacular Irish English structures.

## Chapter Two

### Irish English Syntax: A comment on Hickey's *A Survey of Irish English Usage*

As has been highlighted above, the historical emergence of Irish English rests on a variegated background of linguistic and cultural influences. Contemporary Irish English syntactical structures have been influenced in particular by Anglo-Norman, old English and Irish (Filppula, 4; Hickey 2007:121). The linguistic shift process, which as has been seen happened over the period of over two and a half centuries, first involved cities on the east coast, and then spread to rural areas, the west coast being the last part of the country to be reached (Hickey 2007: 121; Filppula, 7-10). It is speculated that the two languages coexisted in a situation of bilingualism for some centuries (Hickey 2017:122, Filppula, 8), albeit many bilinguals were actually illiterate (Hickey 2007: 125). Initially English would have been used in situations involving English authorities and landlords, but Irish people would have spoken Irish with each other (Hickey 2007:122; Filppula, 7). After the Great Famine, which had erased about two million Irish speakers in under a decade, those who remained felt the importance of knowing English in order to have more opportunities should they too have had to emigrate in a world where the language was increasingly spoken (fig. 2.1) (Hickey 2007:123; Amador-Moreno, 22-23). English was associated with success, opportunity and emancipation, whereas Irish had become to represent a past of poverty and subjugation (Amador-Moreno, 22; Wall 1969:85; Filppula, 9).

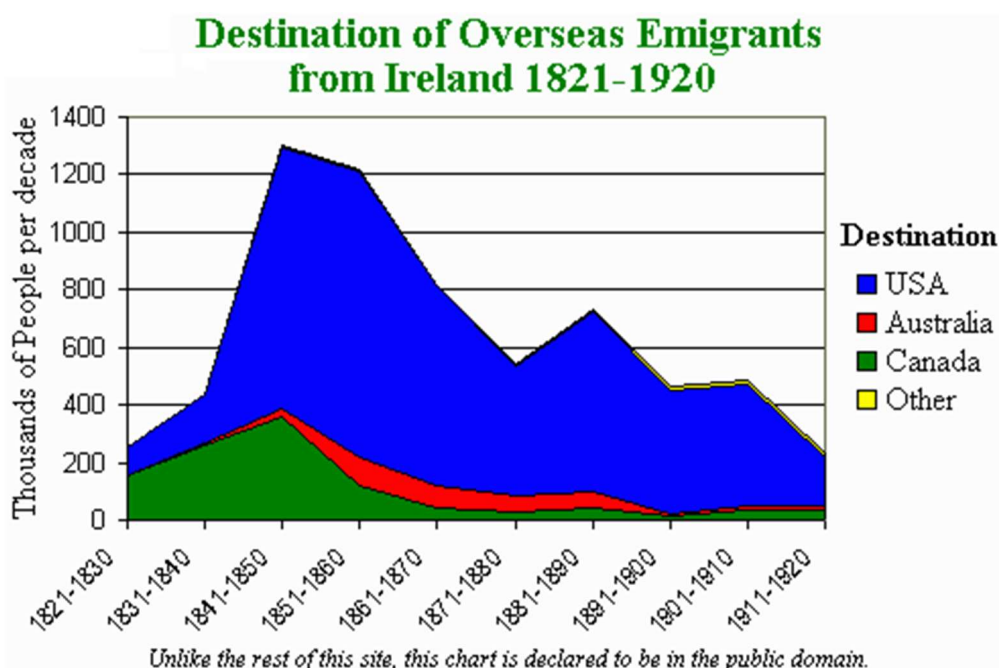


Figure 2.1 The high number of Irish people emigrating to English-speaking countries made the knowledge of English a matter of utmost importance. It is to be noted that the graph does not include destinations within the UK. Image source <http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/famine/emigration.html>.

The Irish who acquired English, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, learnt it from other fellow countrymen who had acquired the language through exposure, therefore in an imperfect way and in a non-prescriptive environment. As seen, Irish Catholics didn't have access to standard education until the 1830s, therefore there was no formal control or restriction on the use of non-standard forms deriving from an interference of Irish structures. Academics state that this modality of learning can be regarded as a 'collective second language acquisition', which took over two centuries and a half to develop, and where linguistic transfer from Irish or retention of Early Modern English structures were used for a sufficiently extended timeframe, so that they became standard traits of the variety of English spoken in Ireland (Hickey 2007:124-125).

## **2.1 Structures Present in Hickey's Survey**

Below is an analysis of the structures considered for my survey, together with the results obtained by Hickey in his *A Survey of Irish English Usage*, which was carried out in 2004, and which collected 1017 completed questionnaires from all over Ireland (Hickey 2015:108), sampling the perception of salient Irish English features among Irish English native speakers. I will then introduce three features of Irish English which were not included in Hickey's survey, but which I experienced during my stay in Ireland and which I have decided to investigate.

### **2.1.1 Verbal Concord**

The presence of non-standard verbal -s inflection in Irish English is a phenomenon well attested throughout Ireland (Hickey 2007: 181). Despite the structure being widespread in the north of England, according to scholars such as Godfrey and Tagliamonte (1999) the presence of this structure in Irish English is imputable to contact with settlers from the south-west of England during the early centuries of settlement. Therefore, the non-standard verbal -s inflection in Irish English appears to be ascribable to early input varieties to the east and south-east coast of Ireland, which were later generalized to the areas with a predominance of Irish speakers in the southern part of Ireland, such as the south, the west and south-west (Hickey 2007: 180; Godfrey and Tagliamonte 1999:87-121). The Mahon Letters and plays by Sean O'Casey are evidence of the use of this structure respectively in the mid-18th century and in the early 20th century. In Northern Ireland,



the influence appears to have been acquired from northern Middle English and Middle Scots (Hickey 2007: 180).

In contemporary Irish English, the structure is rarely found with the first and second person plural, as the pronouns appear to block the verbal *-s* inflection, while it is most commonly encountered in a third person plural context, particularly with non-pronominal subjects (Hickey 2007: 182). Loebell and Boch (2003) argue that the presence of *-s* on a noun facilitates the mechanism of verbal concord, acting as a type of priming effect (Loebell and Boch 2003:791-824). It is important to point out however that there are many factors and rules conditioning the occurrence of the verbal *-s* concord, that are rather variable: it is therefore difficult to precisely delineate the circumstances for its occurrence. Hickey (2007) states that scholars have identified two main types of variable influencing the presence of the verbal concord: the type of subject and distance between the subject and the verb. Hickey believes that the inflection can be activated by various types of subjects, but it seems to be discouraged by a personal pronoun immediately preceding it (Hickey 2007: 179-180), as shown in the following example:

The girls bees chatting all the time

They be chatting all the time.

Another form of verbal concord is the use of existential *there + was* in a plural context, a structure which is widely spread throughout Ireland (Hickey 2007:184), and which appears to be the most common occurrence of the plural concord (Filppula 1999:155). Despite the widespread use of *was* in positive clauses, however, its use in negative clauses is fluctuating (Hickey 2007:185).

It is believed that the higher acceptance rate of this structure in the north and in the east of Ireland occurs because these regions presented the oldest (in the east) and most extended (in the north) English settlements. The structure was probably a feature of the English input to these areas. The south-west and the west are areas where Irish was spoken the longest; having been exposed to English at a later date, the influence they received about the use of *is/are* and *was/were* was closer to that in standard English. This occurrence is demonstrated by the lower acceptance rate for this structure in these areas in Hickey's survey (Hickey 2007: 184-185).

Visser (1963-1973), among other scholars, supports the theory of a northern origin of the verbal concord, which in his view gradually spread across Ireland, although it was relegated mainly to colloquial contexts (Visser 1963-73: 71-73). Filppula (1999) sees the verbal concord as originating from a mix of northern Middle English and Scots elements, and from the use of universal -s in southern British English, used with all subjects, and points to the lack of usage of the verbal concord with the first person singular in Irish English as a salient difference between the Irish English and the British English model (Filppula 1999:157-158).

Hickey highlights how verbal -s inflection in the third person plural is a common vernacular feature both in Ireland and in Britain (Hickey 2015:106). In his survey, Hickey noticed that his sentence sampling the existential *there*, *There was two men on the road*, received a mean acceptance rate of 51%, demonstrating the widespread use of the structure across Irish English varieties. However, the sentence with a compound plural subject, *John and his wife plays bingo at the weekend*, scored a mean acceptance rate of 39%, possibly for the presence of a singular substantive immediately before the verb. The sentence assessing the plural nominal subject, *Some farmers has little or no cattle*, had the lowest mean acceptance rate, scoring only 16%: Hickey states that the lower acceptance rate with a plural nominal subject demonstrates that this is a vernacular feature (Hickey 2015: 107-108)

### **2.1.2 After Perfective**

Also identified as immediate perfective, the construction *be+after+ verb* in a continuous form has mainly a past reference in contemporary Irish English, although it can occasionally be found bearing a future perfect usage (Hickey 2007: 197). More specifically, the after perfective is used to indicate the recent happening of an action, that such action was unwanted or unexpected, or that the sentence bears a high informational value (Hickey 2007: 192). Henry (1957) explains how the structure is used to refer to a state which begins with the conclusion of an action (Henry 1957:77). Hayden and Hartog (1909) point to the fact that the structure describes a completed past, but not a remote past (Hayden and Hartog 1909:933). The immediacy of the structure is rendered in the present perfect in standard British English by adding adverbs such as 'just' or 'recently', as in *she has just finished her homework*, which would be rendered as *she's after finishing her homework* in Irish English (Brinton 1988:10).

The structure is believed to originate from Old Irish *iar* (after)+ verbal noun, a structure which was used to present non-finite adverbial clauses of time. In early Modern Irish, from 1600 onwards, the structure was used in reference both to the past and to the future (Hickey 2007:200; Filppula 1999:101-102). O'Corràin (2006) argues that in early Irish English the structure was also used in reference to the future, as he testifies with examples taken from the Bible in Irish, dating back to a period spanning from 1603 to 1845 (O'Corràin 2006:154-156). Moreover, O'Sé notes that in early Modern Irish *ar* had also a retrospective use (O'Sé 2004:186-194). In support of the theory of an Irish origin is the fact that there is no corresponding structure in standard British English (Amador-Moreno 39), and the existence of a parallel structure in Hebridean English (Filppula 1999:106), which according to Sabban (1982) is of Gaelic origin (Sabban 1982:163-164).

In the early Modern period, however, the structure went through a metamorphosis: *iar* (after) was phonetically reduced to *ar*, which was a homophone and homograph with the preposition *ar* (on). In the 18th century *ar* came to be replaced with *tar éis* or with *i ndiaidh*, both meaning *after* (Hickey 2007: 198). The past and future reference of this structure however is prescribed to indicating just an action completed recently, or immediate perfective. Both O'Sé and O'Corràin believe that this restriction of use is linked with the advent of a resultative perfective structure in Irish, as Irish grammarian O'hEodhasa mentions in his *Rudimenta Grammaticae Ibernica* (Fundamentals of Irish Grammar) in 1610 (Hickey 2007: 199-200).

Despite it being one of the most salient and tell-tale features of Irish English, Hickey noticed that native speakers had little awareness that the after-perfective structure was a non-standard structure. He observed a mean acceptance rate of 88% for the sentence *She's after spilling the milk* in 24 locations, with a higher acceptance rate of over 90% received outside of Ulster. He explains the high rate as depending on the fact that, given the ancient origins of the structure and its extensive use, when supraregionalisation happened in the 19th century, it wasn't recognized as a vernacular structure (Hickey 2015:108-109).

### 2.1.3 Resultative Perfective

A structure identified by the object being followed by a past participle, the resultative perfective is present also in standard British English, where it represents a causative function, expressing an action delegated to someone else e.g. *I had my hair cut yesterday*. In Irish English however, the past participle put after the object indicates that a planned action is completed (Hickey 2007:208), e.g. *I had the table set before he arrived*, or a certain situation is a result of a previous action (Amador-Moreno 2010:41). The strong focus on the result of the action has lead Brinton (1988) to refer to this structure as resultative perfect (Brinton 1988:11). The construction thus involves two different subjects in standard British English, that is the one delegating the action and the one completing it, while in Irish English the structure presents only one subject (Hickey 2007:211).

The structure postponing the past participle to the object was present in British English in the past, but it had become rare and archaic by the fifteenth century. It became relegated just to a literary use, particularly in verse, and it was even more uncustomary in spoken English (Filppula 1999:110-113; Hickey 2007:211). According to Hickey (2007), it is therefore unlikely that the Irish English structure would have been acquired by contact with fifteenth century settlers, an occurrence very unlikely especially during the major language shift which took place in the nineteenth century, where contact with this archaic English structure would have been even more improbable (Hickey 2007:211). In his view, the structure is likely to derive from the transfer of an Irish structure. In Irish in fact the past participle is always placed after the object in the presence of a transitive verb. It is possible that during the language shift individuals explicitly learnt the word order placing the past participle before the object, but many among them maintained the word order used in Irish (Hickey 2007:211), and as a consequence the Irish structure was transferred to Irish English.

To support Hickey's view is the fact that Irish displays a very similar construction. It should be noted that Irish does not have a corresponding verb for *have*, but uses instead the verb *tà* 'be', both to indicate a possession, as in *tà cat aige* ('she has got a cat', literally 'is a cat at her'), and to indicate an action taking place, as in *tà cupàn tae againn* ('we have a cup of tea', literally 'is a cup of tea at us'), which according to Bliss (1972), in consideration of the fact that in Irish English the order of the constituents remains the same, supports the thesis of a linguistic transfer from Irish (Bliss 1972:73-74). Some scholars support an origin from early Modern English, where the

structure can be found, but Filppula (1999) feels that the evidence is too scant to support this theory, and states that Irish played a major role in the linguistic transfer, rather than a reinforcing one ( Filppula 1999:112,116). In Hickey's survey the resultative perfective showed an acceptance rate of 85% or more in 24 counties, 10 of which showed an acceptance rate of 96% or more (Hickey 2015:110). The large acceptance of this structure shows that the structure is barely perceived as being vernacular.

#### **2.1.4 The *Do Be* Habitual and the Inflected *Be* as a Habitual Form.**

##### 2.1.4.1 The *Do Be* Habitual

In contemporary Irish English the construction *do+be+progressive* form of the lexical verb is used to express habitual actions, whereas in standard British English such function would be expressed with the use of the simple present and of an adverb of frequency. The origin of the structure however is still under discussion. According to Hickey (2007) he form seems to have accessed Irish English through another syntactical structure used to express habitual actions, the periphrastic *do* (Hickey 2007:220).

During the early modern period, the use of periphrastic *do* to express habitual actions was widespread in south-east and in south-west England; however, the structure went into decline in south-east England in the first part of the seventeenth century (Hickey 2007:218), while in the south-western part of England, which is the area of the country to have exerted an influence in the genesis of Irish English, its use is still well preserved (Harris 1986:187). The south-west of England was source of linguistic input since the late Middle Ages and over a number of centuries, it can therefore be said that it was the place of origin for the periphrastic *do* in Ireland. There isn't much evidence in early modern Irish English texts to attest the use of the periphrastic *do*: of the first attestations of the periphrastic *do* in Irish English dates to the late seventeenth century (Hickey 2007:218, Filppula 1999:137-138). The periphrastic *do* is believed to have acted as an intermediary for the emergence of the Irish English *do be* habitual structure (Hickey 2007:218).

Other scholars believe the structure is of Irish origins. Whereas in south-west British English a habitual action is expressed with the periphrastic *do*, e.g. *she do study a lot*, in Irish English the structure displays a progressive form on the lexical verb, e.g. *she does be studying a lot*. Amador-Moreno (2010) underlines how, according to Sullivan (1980:202-203), there are three distinctions in the present tense in Irish: a simple present form (*siùlaim*, ‘I walk’), a compound present (*tà si ag siùl*, ‘she is walking’) and a consuetudinal present (*bíonn sé ag siùl*, ‘he does be walking’). The latter instance would support the theory of linguistic transfer. Bliss (1972:75) states that a native Irish speaker would have felt the need for a consuetudinal present when switching to English (Bliss, 1972:75). Hickey (2007) agrees that, to produce this form, an Irish structure has been transferred to Irish English, thus producing the *do be+verb+ing* form which has been extensively used to express habitual actions since the mid nineteenth century. In Hickey’s view, the Irish origin of this structure is likely to be the negative imperative. The negative form *do+neg+be+ing* would in fact appear to be the negative counterpart of the *do be* habitual form, but it appears to be a completely different structure (Amador-Moreno 2010:37). Hickey (2007) points to the fact that the Irish language possesses two forms of the verb *to be* in the present tense, one used for actions happening at the moment (*tà*) and one for the expression of habitual actions (*bí*), constructed with a form of the verb to be (*bí*) (Comer, 99-100). The latter form is used in the present simple affirmative form *bíonn*, and followed by a progressive form used to indicate the habitual function conveyed (Hickey 2007:222).

Bíonn sé ag tiomáint a ghluaisteán go minic.

[Be habitual+he+ing +drive the car+often]

The continuous form following the lexical verb is always necessary in the habitual in Irish (Hickey 2007:223). However, looking at textual evidence from the nineteenth century, such as the works of Maria Edgeworth and of William Carleton, it is possible to notice the *do be* construction in the presence of the negative imperative., as in the following instance taken from Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (Hickey 2007:222):

‘Don’t be talking of punch yet a while...’

Always followed by a verb in the progressive form, the negative imperative is a salient feature of Irish English. The structure originates from Irish, where the imperative is expressed with the habitual verb form *bí*, and as a habitual form, as mentioned above, it is always followed by a verb in

the continuous form (Hickey 2007:222-223). Hickey (2007:224) theorizes that the negative imperative acted as a gateway for the entrance of the *do be* habitual form into Irish English. It is therefore possible that the *do be* habitual form appeared in Irish English as a generalization of the above mentioned Irish structures, and the *do* habitual which probably originated from south-west England (Hickey 2007:224). Numerous attestations in nineteenth century literature reporting the speech of Irish characters, as well as emigrant letters, demonstrate that by half of the nineteenth century the structure was widely established, despite there being evidence of its use at the end of the eighteenth century (Hickey 2007:225). A prominent feature of Irish English according to Hickey, the *do be* habitual structure seems to be considered a vernacular feature by speakers. In his survey Hickey noticed that fifteen locations had an acceptance rate of 25% or more, the maximum acceptance score being in Co. Louth with 53% (Hickey 2015:105-107). The generally low acceptance rate shows that the structure is fairly perceived as vernacular.

#### 2.1.4.2 The Inflected *Be*

As has been seen above, the *do be* habitual form is widely used in southern Ireland to express a habitual action. In Northern Ireland, the form used to express a habitual action is *bees*, and it is first attested at a later stage, in the first half of the nineteenth century, some decades later in respect to its southern counterpart. Montgomery and Kirk (1996) state that O'Donovan (1845) had supported an Irish origin in concern to this structure in his 'A Grammar of the Irish Language' of 1845, where he postulates that 'The Irish attempt to introduce this tense even into English, as "he bees", "he does be", &c.' (Montgomery and Kirk 1996: 308-334). There is however no evidence of this form prior to the nineteenth century (Hickey 2007:226).

Montgomery and Kirk (1996) believe that the habitual form *do be* which had established in other Irish English varieties before, served as a model to Northern Irish people to develop the form *bees* to express a habitual action. (Montgomery and Kirk 1996: 308-334). On the other hand, the opinions of other scholars differ in concern to the origin of *bees*. Traugott (1972:89,191f) for instance believes the form originates from Scots. She also regards the form as a continuation of the distinction of the Old English form *beon* to express habitual actions, as opposed to the generic form *wesan*. However, the scant textual evidence of this form makes it difficult to postulate a conclusion with a margin of certainty (Traugott 1972: 89,191f).

There appears to be evidence of the form *bes* in text from the early and mid-Middle English period, from England and particularly from the north of the country, which was later replaced by *is*. Inflected form of the verb *be* (*beon*) is found in medieval Irish English, but once again there is no evidence showing a persistence of the form after the seventeenth century. It is however interesting to note that, in contrast to what is commonly believed, there may be evidence of an inflected *be* form in the south-east of Ireland, possibly indicating that the structure was used to some degree in this area in the past (Hickey 2007:227). Considering the evidence, some of which coming from emigrant letters, proving the existence of the structure in Northern Ireland from the nineteenth century, it is likely therefore that the inflected *be* structure with a habitual meaning rose in the nineteenth century, as no trace of it seems to exist before this period (Hickey 2007:230).

In 'A Survey of Irish English Usage' Hickey received an acceptance rate for this structure close to zero in southern Ireland, whereas in Northern Ireland the acceptance rate was relevantly higher, with an acceptance rate in Co. Antrim and in Belfast of 22%, and of 17% in Co. Derry. Significantly, Co. Wexford in southern Ireland scored an acceptance rate of 17%, which would confirm the hypothesis of the existence of this vernacular structure in the county. However, Hickey realized that the low acceptance rate for his phrase *they bees up late at night* could be motivated by the fact that the inflection of *be* seems to be suppressed by the presence of a pronoun beforehand. He therefore proceeded to run a second survey, only in Northern Ireland and on a smaller number of respondents (67 informants against the initial 227 people who responded the first survey in Northern Ireland), this time replacing the pronoun in the phrase. The smaller number of participants meant that individuals had a higher influence on the percentage rates. The new sentence *the kids bees up late at night* scored a mean acceptance rate of 37% in Co. Antrim and of 44% in Belfast, against the 22% observed in the first survey, and of 38% in Co. Derry against the 17% in the initial survey. The figures obtained in this second survey confirm the results of the first one, and demonstrate that *bees* is recognized as a vernacular structure in Northern Ireland, while it is generally not accepted in the south of Ireland, with Co. Wexford being an exception (Hickey 2007: 235-236).



### 2.1.5 Extended Present Tense

The use of simple present in Irish English differs from the common usage in standard British English. Whereas in Irish English simple present is used to express a repeated action or a routine, a widespread non-standard use of the structure can be also found. The use of present simple is, in Irish English, also extended to cover a time span from a starting point in the past to the present, where present perfect would be used in standard British English (Filppula 1999:123; Hickey 2007:196). According to Filppula (1999), in the use of the extended present in Irish English, a time adverbial expressing duration must be always present (Filppula 1999:123).

Due to the existence of many parallels, pinpointing the exact roots of this structure is not an easy task. Hickey believes that the construction derives from old Germanic (Hickey 2007:196). As exemplified below, the extended use of present simple in Irish English is consistent with the use of the present tense in modern German:

German:

Frank studiert seit drei Jahren Französisch

[Frank studies for three years French]

Irish English:

Frank studies French for three years now

Hickey postulates that the structure probably reached Ireland during the early Modern Period, when the construction may have still been used in early Modern English varieties, which served as input for the absorption of this feature in Irish English during the language shift. The structure was likely to have been well accepted and chosen over present perfect during the shift, becoming a salient feature of Irish English, because in Irish there is no equivalent to the auxiliary verb *have*, as well as there is no equivalent to the present perfect tense. It is likely therefore that during the language shift, especially considering the non-prescriptive and uncontrolled nature of the language acquisition process, Irish speakers favoured a structure which was closer to constructions they were familiar with (Hickey 2007:196).

Despite the instances of the extended present in early Modern English, Filppula is prone to support a Celtic origin. Hebridean English Shows evidence of a parallel use for this structure, which Sabban (1982) observes also in Gaelic, ‘Anglo-Irish’ and early English (Sabban 1982:99). A corresponding use has been observed in Irish by O’hUrdail (1997) with the preposition *le* (‘with’) (O’hUrdail 1997:188). To further support the theory of an Irish genesis, it is important to consider that the use of the extended present tense is more frequent in the areas contiguous to the *Gaeltachtaí* (Filppula 1999:128).

This positive reception would be confirmed by the high acceptance rate received by this structure in Hickey’s survey, reaching over 80% for 13 of the 32 counties (Hickey 2015:108).

### **2.1.6 Non-Standard Reflexive Pronouns or Unbound Pronouns**

The non-standard use of reflexive pronouns in Irish English is such a salient feature that it is nowadays regarded by native speakers as stereotypical and as such it tends to be avoided (Hickey 2007: 243). In standard British English reflexive pronouns are ‘bound’ to a nominal element, and need to be placed in its proximity in order for the connection to exist (Filppula 1999: 77-78). In Irish English, reflexive pronouns can be used without such reference, they can stand on their own or in the place of the subject, and are thus ‘unbound’ from other elements of positions, leading to their naming *unbound pronouns*. (Filppula 1999:79-80). Unbound reflexive pronouns can be used to emphasise the subject of the sentence, or to stress a particular person in a group (Filppula 1999:81; Hickey 2007:138-139), however Amador-Moreno argues that they can be used both in an emphatic and a non-emphatic way (Amador-Moreno 2010:34)

A scant presence of this structure in Shakespeare’s work, and the attested presence in earlier English, lead to suppose an English origin behind this structure. It must be noted, however, that the use of reflexive pronouns in early English is limited if compared to the use in Irish English. According to Hickey, the major focus given to one person, leads to a higher occurrence of the reflexive pronoun in the third singular person (Hickey 2007:243). Filppula (1999) observed that reflexive pronouns are more accepted in the West and in the South-West of Ireland than they are in the East, and that in Dublin and in Wicklow there is a strong preference for first or second person pronouns, whereas in the West, third person pronouns are used just as often (Filppula 1999: 83-87).

Only himself turned up at the meeting.

I don't like that kind of stuff myself.

Reflexive pronouns are used in similar fashion in Hebridean English, where the structure is believed to have Scottish Gaelic origins (Amador-Moreno 2010:35). In Gaelic the element *féin* ('self'), together with a personal pronoun (*sì féin*, literally her self) is used to give emphasis, and its use dates back to the eighth century, a fact which makes Macafee and O'Baoill (1997) presume an early Gaelic Origin (Macafee and O'Baoill 1997:271; Hickey 2007:138-139). The evidence suggests therefore a Celtic origin of this feature, probably backed by the similitude with the occasional early English use of reflexive pronouns (Filppula 1999:87).

It is interesting to note that the prosodic pattern of the Irish structure forms a WS foot (e.g. *sì féin*), and that the same prosodic structure is present in standard British English reflexive pronouns (e.g. *herself*). It is likely that during the language shift speakers interpreted the prosodic pattern of *herself* as a correspondent of the Irish structure, a fact which facilitated the absorption of the structure in Irish English (Hickey 2007:138-139).

In *A Survey of Irish English Usage*, Hickey proposed the sentence *Himself is not in today*, which received a mean acceptance rate of 22%. The counties where the structure received an acceptance of 25% or more were seven: Armagh, Galway, Limerick, Kerry, Kilkenny, Tipperary and Waterford. The fact that the structure received its lowest acceptance in the Ulster-Scots counties of Antrim and Down supports the belief that the unbound reflexives in Irish English are of Irish origin (Hickey 2007:244).

### 2.1.7 Second Person Plural Pronouns

While in standard British English *you* is both the singular and the plural second person plural pronoun, Irish English makes a distinction between the singular second person pronoun *you* and the plural second person pronoun, which exists in the forms *ye*, *youse* (also spelt *yous*) and *yez* (also spelt *yeez*) (Filppula, 55; Hickey 2007:237). The most recurring form in superregional Irish English, particularly in the south, is *ye*. Hickey states (2007:237) that the fact that *ye* is the least phonetically salient among the plural second person pronouns in Irish English, makes it less detectable as a non-standard form. In Hickey's A Survey of Irish English Usage, the pronoun *ye* received a high acceptance rate of over 90% in 14 counties (Hickey 2007:238). According to Amador-Moreno (33), the pronoun *ye* represents the retention of an archaic form, which is well attested through emigrant letters from the mid-nineteenth century (Amador Moreno, 33; Hickey 2007: 238).

Looking back at the Old English period, between 500 CE and 100 CE, *thou* was used as a singular second person pronoun, and *ye* was used as a plural second person pronoun. The pronoun *ye* represented the nominative case, while the accusative or objective case was expressed with the pronoun *you* (Amador-Moreno, 34). Braidwood (1964:88) states that around the fourteenth century this distinction began its decline, and by the sixteenth century the use of *you* as the subject form had become customary. The pronoun *ye* was relegated to archaic, literary or religious use. However, in Ireland *ye* survived and maintained its nominative plural function (Amador- Moreno, 34).

The addition of a plural *-s* suffix onto the regular pronoun *you* produces both the pronoun *youse* and *yez*. The acceptance rates for *youse* and *ye* appear to be related: In Hickey's survey, the use of the pronoun *youse* received a mean acceptance rate between 70% and 90%, with a higher acceptance rate in Ulster (Hickey 2007:239). Hickey's survey suggests that those counties outside of Ulster that spoke Irish the longest have a better acceptance for *ye*, while in the centre and in the east the preference goes to *youse* (Hickey 2007:239). Amador-Moreno (2010) points to the fact that both forms tend nowadays to be associated with Dublin English, and as such tend to be stigmatized by Irish English speakers (Amador-Moreno, 34). In Hickey's survey, the plural pronoun *yez* received a very low acceptance rate in the west of the country, ranging around an acceptance rate of 30%, whereas on the east coast and in Ulster the acceptance rate was over 50% (Hickey 2007:239). It is

not always clear whether *youse* and *yez* refer to a singular or a plural person, and it is not uncommon to find the pronoun's plural reference strengthened by expressions such as *the both /the two/ the pair of youse/yez* (Hickey 2007:241).

There are two factors that, according to Hickey, suggest an Irish genesis for the second person pronouns *youse* and *yez*. On the one hand, the analysis of letters from the late sixteenth century to the late seventeenth century show no presence of *youse* or *yez*, which would, in Hickey's view, contribute to exclude an English origin behind the structure (Hickey 2007:240). On the other hand, Hickey (2007:240) states that the Irish origin of *youse* is confirmed by the presence of this form in the UK only in areas which witnessed a considerable Irish immigration, such as Liverpool, Tyneside, Glasgow and central Scotland (Hickey 2007:240). *Youse* appears to be a relatively new occurrence. Analysing Maria Edgeworth's 1801 novel *Castle Rackrent*, for instance, where she attempts to report typical Irish speech in a realistic manner, there are many instances of *ye*, but none of *youse* can be found. This in Hickey's opinion suggests that the emergence of this pronoun took place between 1800 and 1825 (Hickey 2007:240). It is interesting to note that, analysing William Carleton's works it is possible to notice a higher recurrence of *yez* compared to *youse*. Hickey (2007:241) believes that, according to this evidence, the form *yez* appeared before the form *youse* (Hickey, 2007:41).

However, the evidence provided by textual records is not sufficient to allow the pinpointing of a precise date marking the genesis of this pronoun. It is believed that the structure wasn't present in Irish English before the nineteenth century, and the fact that *youse* can be found in Anglophone countries other than Ireland, such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, suggests that the genesis of *youse* predates the mass emigration which took place in the nineteenth century, and that the pronoun reached other anglophone locations through the flow of immigrants. This hypothesis is corroborated by emigrant letters dating to the second part of the nineteenth century, particularly a letter written in 1960 by an educated 59-year-old Protestant from Fermanagh, Hickey (2007:242) theorizes that the presence of *youse* in his writing indicates that the structure had taken root some generations before the time when the letter was written (Hickey 2007:242).

## 2.2 Structures not present in Hickey's survey

I have decided to add to my survey some features of Irish English which were not analysed in Hickey's survey. The reason is that I have had occasion to notice the widespread use of such structures during my stay in Ireland, and I have decided to analyse them from an academic point of view.

### 2.2.1 Responsives

In his book *Irish English – history and present day forms* Hickey (2007) underlines how Irish Gaelic lacks words corresponding to *yes* and *no*, and points to how a positive or a negative answer is given by the reiteration of the verb contained in the interrogative sentence, which is repeated in the affirmative or in the negative form according to the intended polarity of the answer (2007:59), as confirmed by Filppula (1999:160). See the following examples.

1- A: Linda is a very clever girl, isn't she?                      B: She is, she will fly through the exam.

2- A: Does he eat lamb?    B: He doesn't, he's a vegetarian.

Mac Eoin (1993) underlines how Irish repeats the verb contained in the question using the shortest available form, in place of the particles *yes* and *no* (Mac Eoin 1993:141). O'Siadhail (1989) explains as an alternative the auxiliary *déan* ('make do') can be used to replace other verbs in responsives in Irish, but states that its use varies depending on the variety of dialect spoken. The copula *is* can also be used to replace the verb in Irish responsives (O'Siadhail 1989:303). Hayden and Hartog (1909) point to a similar pattern in Irish English, and consider that, in the rare occurrence of the use of *yes* and *no*, a brief sentence of affirmation or of denial is generally added (Hayden and Hartog 1909: 934-935). Filppula (1999) states that there are other ways in Irish English to answer so called 'yes /no' questions, such as giving lexical cues in the answer to imply the intended polarity (1999:63-64)

3- A: Do you think Mary likes flowers?

B: I wouldn't have a clue.

4- A: Does it often snow in winter here?

B: I guess it does happen.

Greene (1972) noticed the repetition of the verb in the sentence in an affirmative or negative form, to express consent or dissent, in Old Irish and in medieval Welsh, a feature which appears to be common among Celtic languages (Greene 1972: 59-67). Greene (1972) also considers the possibility that this structure has influenced responses in British English, where *yes* and *no* can be omitted before modals, and before *be* and *do*:

1- A: Do you feel tired?

B: I do.

2- Will you tell her the news?

B: I will.

Considering the influence played by Celtic structures on British English, it can be considered that the influence may also have extended to Irish English (Greene 1972: 59).

### 2.2.2 Emphatic Tags

Another structure widely used to emphasise the message given by the sentence is formed by *so* followed by the repetition of the subject and the auxiliary or modal verb of the sentence, using the same polarisation of the phrase it is reinforcing. See the following examples:

He works very hard so he does.

That's unfair, so it is!

Don't worry, I will post that letter for you, so I will!

Despite having witnessed the widespread use of the structure during my stay in Ireland, I barely found any reference to them in books. The only instance I could find was a hint in *T. P. Dolan, A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English*, under the entry *So* (220-221), and a recording on the British Library website (<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/text-only/ni/lissummon/>), in a section dedicated to regional varieties of English, which contained the expression and defined it an *emphatic tag*. The recording dates back to 1999, and in it a student from Lissummon, Bernice Rafferty, talks about the experience of being involved in a car accident. The phrases containing the structure, *I was a back-seat passenger in a car accident, so I was* (00:00-00:05) and *there's not really anything else for it, so there is* (02:20-02:24) show how the young woman uses these structures to emphasize her statements in concern to a severe car accident which caused her to lose her mobility and completely changed her life. Upon further analysis, more instances were found in the corpus of recordings collected on the British Library website.

The structure is found in the recording of Mr James McIlhatton from Ballymoney, a labourer born in 1941 (<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/text-only/ni/ballymoney/>). The 1998 recording, where Mr McIlhatton describes his experiences as an emigrant, contains the following phrase: *I set sail first of all to...to the midlands, and I spent many...I spent a...a good many years there, so I did* (03:08-03:16). Also, the recording of student Barry Greene from Downpatrick, born in 1980, contains the structure in two instances (<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/text-only/ni/downpatrick/>). When talking about his experience of growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, Greene states: *Yeah, sure, they would have given me a scalp and a smack, but at the same time, you know, I was allowed to, you know, have a bit of freedom, so I was* (03:39-03:49). About receiving pocket money, he adds: *As concerns pocket money, yes, I would have got, maybe, a couple of pounds a week, but my dad, he would always slip me a few wee pound behind my mum's back so he would* (05:54-06:03). The structure doesn't appear in the recordings from Belfast, Bleanish Island and Derry.



The recording however is part of a corpus analysing language varieties in the UK, so the occurrence of this structure is attested as a typical feature of Northern Ireland, but there is no data concerning the Republic of Ireland. However, an instance of this structure could be found in the chorus of an old Irish folk song, *The Little Skillet Pot*, where the form is used to emphasize the statement preceding it: ‘Yes you did, so you did, so he did and so did I[...]’ (Leonard and Loesberg, 24-25). In my survey, I have sampled the reception of this structure in Eire, and in the next chapter I will try and use the received data to analyse the geographical distribution of the structure across the four regions of Ireland, Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connaught.

## Chapter 3

### The First Attitude Survey

In Summer 2015, during the preparation of a project for a linguistic assessment, I decided to investigate further the attitude I had so many times noticed on the side of Irish people towards Irish English vernacular structures. In order to collect data necessary for evaluating the development of de-vernacularisation of Irish English, I created a survey consisting of 21 sample sentences displaying what are, according to Hickey, salient Irish English structures. I added two structures which I have noticed during my permanence in Ireland. The participants of the survey had to decide whether each of the structures proposed would be acceptable in all context, acceptable only in an informal context, or not acceptable at all. Participants also had to specify their gender, their level of education and profession, the county they were from, and the age range. Age has been divided in five groups: a first group, comprising respondents up to 17 years of age, categorises people who haven't finished secondary education yet, followed by a second group, comprising subjects between the age of 18 and 30, characterising people taking their education to a higher level or joining the work force. A third and fourth group, including respondents aged respectively 31 to 40 and 41 to 50, represents individuals who have reached a certain level of work experience, and a fifth group involving people aged 51 or above, represents people who are approaching or who have reached retirement.

The survey was online from August 2nd, 2015 to August 9th, 2015, and it was diffused through social media and Facebook groups. Unexpectedly, I gathered 105 responses, which gave a good snapshot of how people perceived the proposed structures. Of the respondents, 44 were males and 51 were females. All four Irish geographical regions were represented in the survey, with a large number of participants from Co. Dublin (29), Co. Cork (14), Co. Limerick (7), Co. Galway (6), Co. Clare (6) respectively. The level of education ranged from Leaving Certificate to third level education, with a presence of 15 Bachelor's degrees, 9 Masters of Arts and 3 PhDs. Professions were likewise varied, with 3 unemployed, 8 teachers, 3 psychologists, 3 researchers, 3 people working in finance and 3 working in customer service. Also, an archaeologist, a carpenter, a child minder, a Garda (police officer), a nurse, a midwife, a retired, a tour guide, a travel agent, a stay at home parent, a sports instructor and a night club worker took part to the survey. The survey results

presented therefore representatives from all layers of society. Also, the high presence of students was noticeable (15).

However, it was not possible to use these parameters to judge trends in the survey, given the limited questionnaires which have been completed and the tight timeframe the survey was carried out on. This study was rather a snapshot of a syntactic trend rather than a thorough analysis, which would have required a larger number of questionnaires. The background of the participants was included in order to highlight the objectiveness which was attempted in this survey. The analysis proposed in 2015 was rather superficial also due to time restraints related to the project. What I propose to do in this dissertation is to re-propose a comparison with Hickey's results after cleaning the data with stricter parameters. I will also further analyse the data collected in 2015 with a particular focus on gender and age. and to examine in depth the results obtained to attempt to pinpoint a trend.

The results will then be compared to another survey carried out in Spring 2017 in two 5th grade classes of St Colmcille National School/Scoil Naisiunta Naomh Colmcille in Aughnaclyffe, Co. Longford. My goal in concern to this second survey is to investigate the age at which a somewhat negative attitude towards vernacular structures set root, and to investigate possible motivations behind this phenomenon.

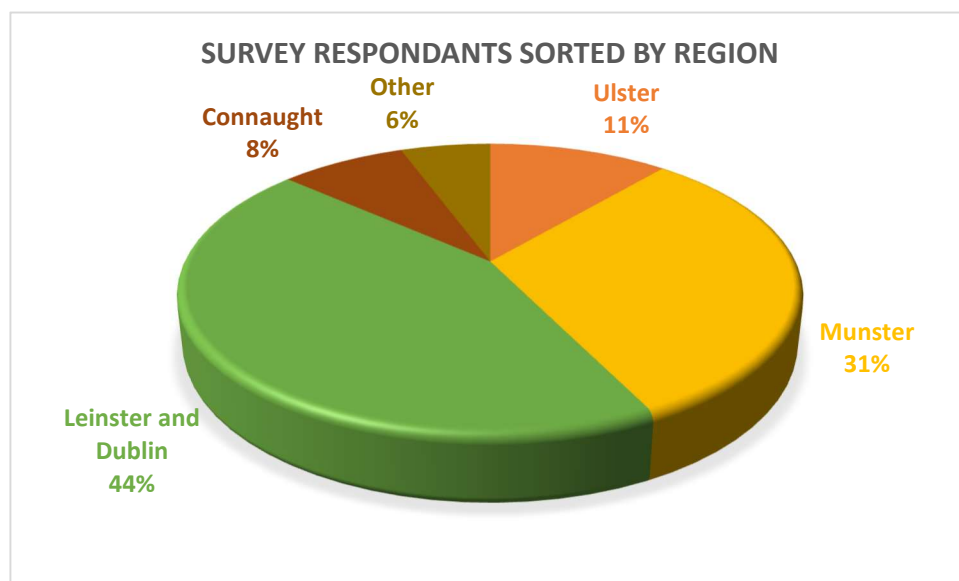


Figure 3.1 Survey respondents sorted by region

Out of the 105 initial surveys collected in 2015, I have cleaned out the bad data, that is incomplete answers, together with missing information on age and gender. The data of the remaining 89 surveys was then subdivided in categories based on gender and on age range. Given the telematic means through which the data was collected, the respondents were scattered throughout Ireland, with a considerable majority of the surveys being completed in Dublin and in Munster. On the other hand, there was insufficient data to yield a significant pattern for the regions of Ulster and Connaught, with respectively only 10 and 7 respondents (fig 3.1): this led me to the decision to put aside my initial intention to analyse data also from a geographical perspective. Therefore, I have included in my study 5 surveys which were previously discarded, where the respondents inserted *Ireland* (indicated as *other* in figure 3.1) as a region of provenance. In order to sample the attitude towards the proposed structures, some of the most salient features were represented by two sample sentences, one set in an informal context, and the other set in a formal or work-related context.

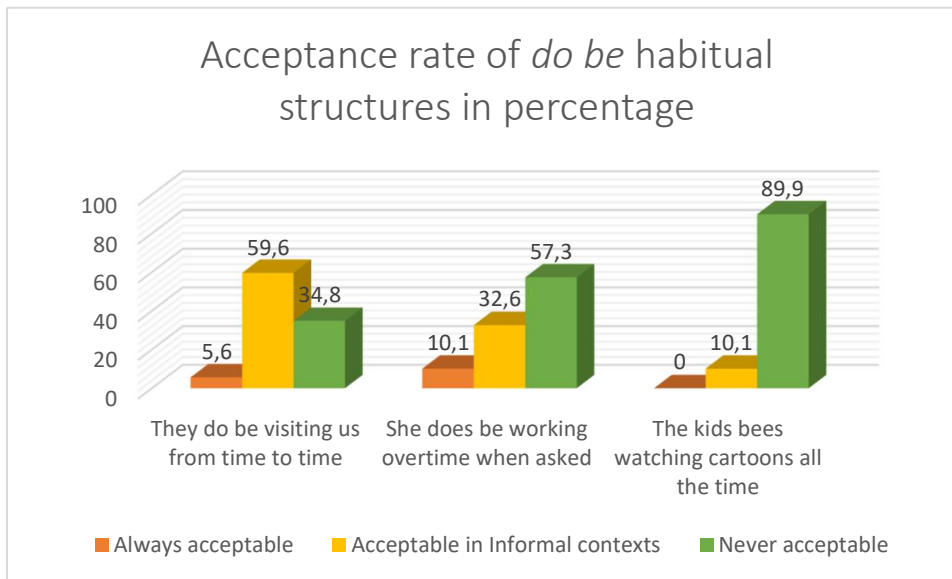
### **3.1 Generic Analysis and Comparison with Hickey's results in *A Survey of Irish English Usage***

#### **3.1.1 The *Do-Habitual***

A prominent feature of Irish English according to Hickey, the do-habitual structure seems to be considered a vernacular feature by speakers. In his survey, Hickey noticed that 15 locations had an acceptance rate of 25% or more, the maximum acceptance score being in Co. Louth with 53% (Hickey 2015:105-107).

In my survey, the mean acceptance rate for the phrase *They do be visiting us from time to time* is 63.5%, with a 59.6% considering the form suitable in only informal contexts. In a more formal sample sentence however, the acceptance rate diminishes drastically. The phrase *She does be working overtime when asked* received only 42.7% total acceptance, of which a majority of 32.6% considered the expression suitable to informal situations only. This would confirm the perception of this structure as a vernacular one, rejecting its presence in formal contexts. It is interesting to note the even lower acceptance rate of the typically northern form for describing habitual actions *bees+* continuous verb form, represented in my survey by the sample phrase *The kids bees watching*

*cartoons all the time*, which scored only a 10.1% acceptance rate, all of which referred to an informal usage.



The results yielded by my survey confirm therefore that the complete acceptance of this structure is quite low, as noticed by Hickey. However, it appears that the structure receives more

Figure 3.1.1 Acceptance rate of *do be* habitual structure in percentage in my 2015 survey

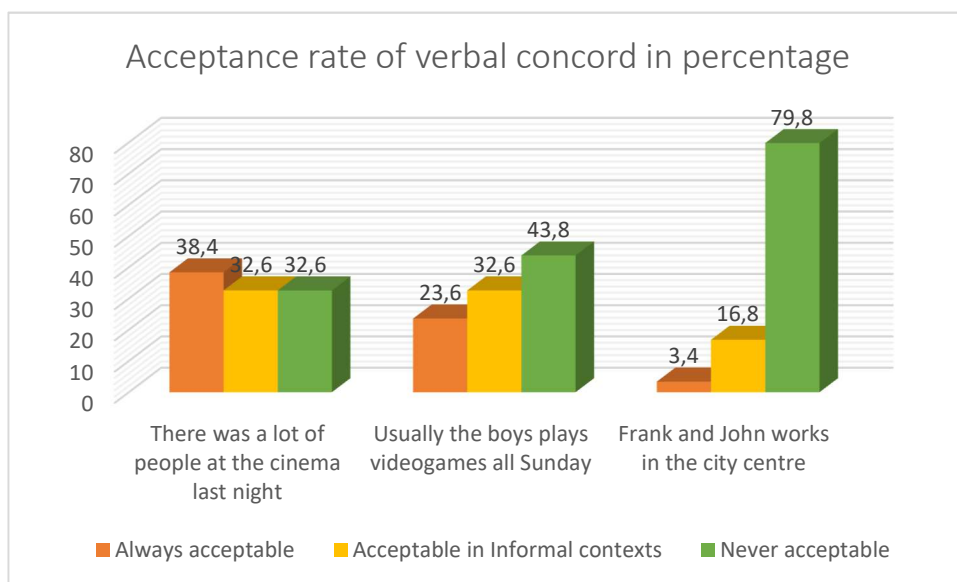
acceptance in informal contexts. This is confirmed by the opposite rates present in the sample sentences set in a formal and in an informal context: as can be seen in the graph above, the figures are inverted (fig. 3.1.1): the sample sentence set in an informal context (*They do be visiting us from time to time*) is accepted only in informal contexts by 59.6% of respondents, and regarded as never acceptable by 34.8% of respondents. The sentence set in a work-related environment instead (*She does be working overtime when asked*) reached 32.6% acceptance in informal contexts, and 57.3% of respondents regarded it as never acceptable. The structure *bees*, represented by the sample phrase *The kids bees watching cartoons all the time*, is instead regarded by the majority of respondents as not acceptable (89.9%), confirming thus the low acceptance noticed by Hickey, who noticed a maximum acceptance of 22% in two counties of Northern Ireland, and of 9% or less in the Republic of Ireland (Hickey 2007:236).

### 3.1.2 Verbal Concord

As in *A Survey of Irish English Usage*, three sample sentences were included in my survey. The first, *There was a lot of people at the cinema last night*, to test existential *there* in a plural context; the second, *Usually the boys plays videogames all Sunday*, to sample a plural nominal subject; the third, *Frank and John works in the city centre*, to evaluate the acceptance of a plural verb inflection

with a compound subject. It has been seen how Hickey realized that his sentence sampling the existential *there* received the highest mean acceptance rate (51%), compared to the sentence containing a compound plural subject (39%), while the plural nominal subject received the lowest mean acceptance rate of the three structures (16%) (Hickey 2015:106-108).

In my survey, the sentence with the existential *there* received a high acceptance rate: 60 people out of 89 regarded this structure as acceptable, scoring a mean acceptance rate of 67.4%. Stuningly, a majority of 31 people (34.8%) regarded this structure as acceptable both in formal and informal contexts. Similarly, the sample sentence with a nominal plural subject scored a mean acceptance rate of 56.2%, with 23.6% (21 people) considering the use of this structure as appropriate both in



formal and informal context. However, the sentence containing a compound plural subject scored a mean acceptance rate of 20.2%, with only 3.4% considering the structure adequate to all contexts (fig.3.1.2).

Figure 3.1.2 Acceptance rate of verbal concord in percentage in my 2015 survey

It can be noted how the higher acceptance rate for the existential *there* subject followed by a singular inflection is present in both surveys. It is however interesting to note how the acceptance rates have capsized in concern to the other two forms. While Hickey received an acceptance rate of 39% for the compound plural subject, this rate dropped in my survey to only 20.2%. Similarly, Hickey obtained a mean acceptance rate of 16% for the nominal plural subject, while in my survey the figure raised to 56.2%.

### 3.1.3 Extended Present Tense

A structure where present simple is used where non-Irish native speakers would use present perfect, the extended present tense received high acceptance rates in Hickey's survey, ranging over 80% for 13 of the 32 counties (Hickey 2015:108-110). In my survey, it is possible to notice a

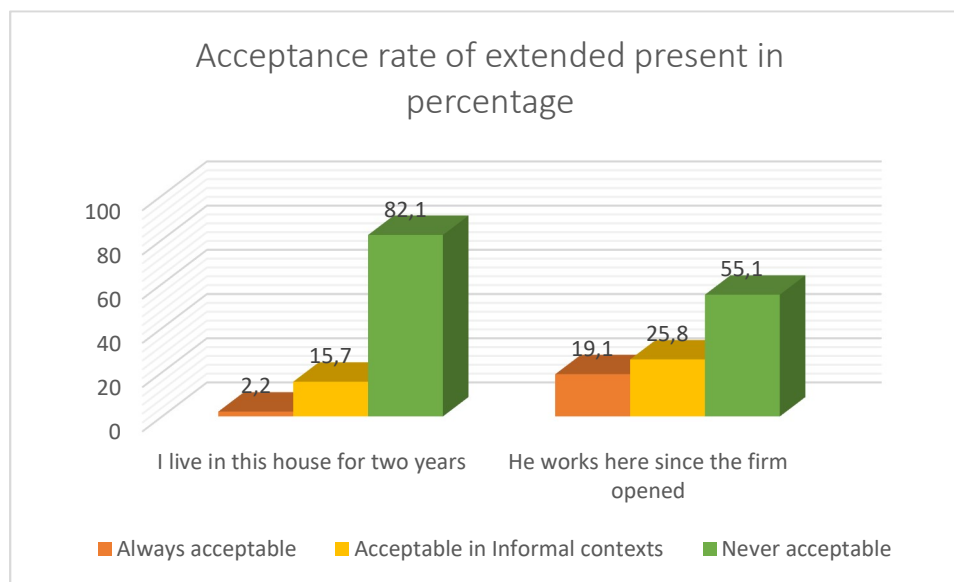


Figure 3.1.3 Acceptance rate of after perfective structure in percentage in my 2015 survey

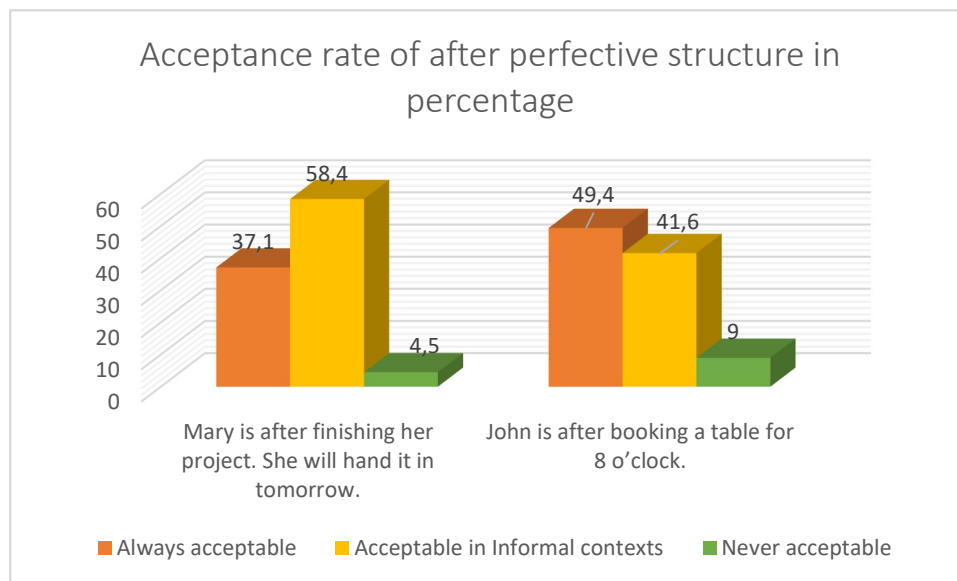
change. I have included in my sample phrases two sentences using the extended present tense, one of them set in an informal environment, the other set in a more formal, work-related context. The sample sentence *I live in this house for two years* received only 17.9% mean acceptance, of which only 2.2% in all contexts (fig. 3.1.3). The decreasing trend is confirmed by the second sample question using extended present tense *He works here since the firm opened*, which scored a mean acceptance rate of 44.9%, of which 19,1% sees the structure fit for all contexts.

change. I have included in my sample phrases two sentences using the extended present tense, one of them set in an informal environment, the other set in a more formal, work-related context. The sample sentence *I live in this house for two years* received only 17.9% mean

### 3.1.4 After perfective

Despite it being one of the most salient and tell-tale features of Irish English Hickey noticed that native speakers had little awareness that the after-perfective structure was a non-standard structure. He observed a mean acceptance rate of 88%, and he explains the high rate as depending on the fact that, being the structure very old, it wasn't recognized as vernacular (Hickey 2015:108-109).

In my survey, I inserted two sample sentences, one of them set in a work-related context and one with a more informal reference. The first, *Mary is after finishing her project. She will hand it in tomorrow*, scored a



95.5% mean acceptance rate, out of which 37.1% concerns the usage of the structure in all contexts. The second sentence that was used is *John is after booking a table for eight o'clock*: the sentence was regarded as appropriate by 91%

Figure 3.1.4 Acceptance rate of after perfective in percentage in my 2015 survey

of participants, with a remarkable 49.4% considering the structure appropriate in both informal and formal contexts (fig. 3.1.4). Despite the lower number of adhesions to my survey, it is still possible to notice and confirm the trend underlined by Hickey. There either is little awareness of the vernacularity of the structure, or there is an acceptance of the structure in a superregional register.

### 3.1.5 Resultative Perfective

A structure identified by the object being followed by a past participle, the resultative perfective in Irish English indicates that a planned action is completed, while the same structure would represent a causative function in standard British English. In Hickey's survey, the resultative perfective showed an acceptance rate of 85% or more in 24 counties, 10 of which showed an acceptance rate of 96% or more (Hickey 2015:110-11).

The high acceptance rate of the resultative perfective is confirmed in my survey. The first sample sentence used *I have the housework done, now I can finally relax* recorded a mean acceptance rate of 97.8%, of which 66.3% considers the structure fit for both formal and informal contexts. Likewise, the second sample sentence *Susan had the dinner cooked when they arrived* gathered a



mean acceptance rate of 94,4%, of which a remarkable 69,7% regards the structure as suitable in

both formal and informal contexts (fig. 3.1.5). My results therefore can only confirm the acceptance of this structure that Hickey had observed.

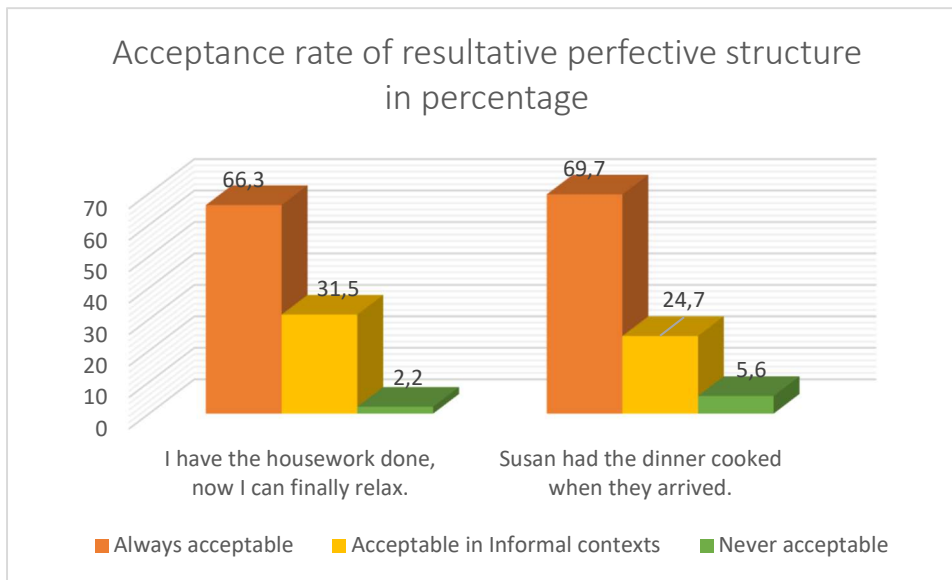


Figure 3.1.5 Acceptance rate of resultative perfective in percentage in my 2015 survey

### 3.1.6 Second person plural pronouns

In vernacular Irish English second-person plural pronouns are used. There are two main second person plural pronouns used, pronoun *ye* coming from a historical form, and *yous(e)*, pronoun *you*

with a plural suffix added, reflecting the difference in Irish Gaelic between singular second person pronoun *tú* and plural second person pronoun *sibh*. There also exists a combined form, which can be found written as *yez*, *yeez*, *yees* or *yees* (Hickey 2015: 111). In his

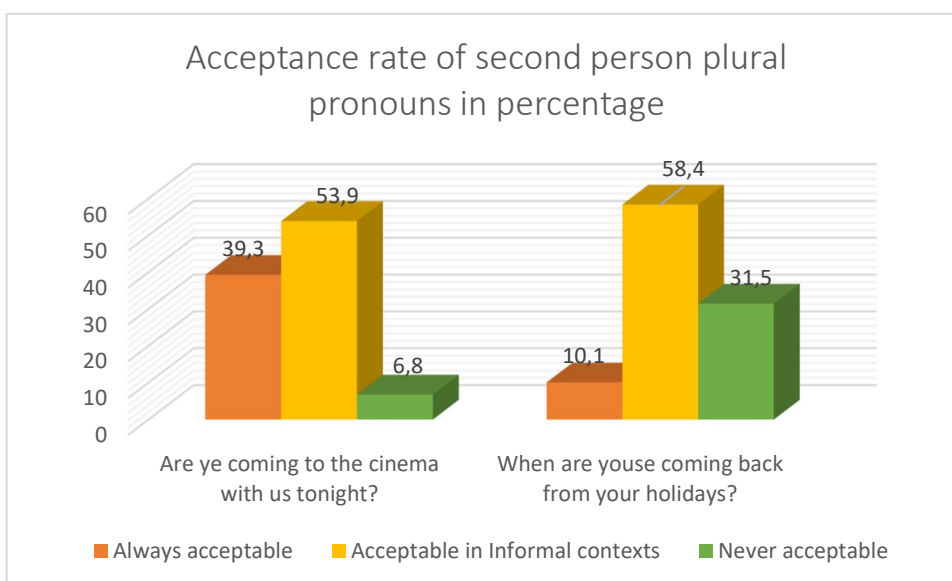


Figure 3.1.6 Acceptance rate of second person plural pronouns in percentage in my 2015 survey

survey Hickey noticed how the historical form *ye* was more accepted, scoring rates between 100%

and 90% in 14 counties. He noticed instead a higher awareness concerning the vernacularity of the plural form *youse*: only 6 counties scored an acceptance rate over 90%, and none reached 100% (Hickey 2015:111-112).

In my survey, the sample sentence presenting the historical form *ye*, *Are ye coming to the cinema with us tonight?* shows a mean acceptance rate of 93.2%. However, the 53.9% acceptance in only informal contexts suggests an awareness as to the vernacularity of the structure. The lower acceptance of the form *youse* noticed by Hickey was confirmed in my survey: the sample sentence *When are youse coming back from your holidays?* received a mean acceptance rate of 68.5%, of which only 10.1% regards the structure as suitable to both formal and informal contexts (fig.3.1.6), showing hence a higher awareness that the structure is vernacular.

### 3.1.7 Stressed Reflexive Pronouns

The use of reflexive pronouns to emphasise the subject of the sentence can be traced back to the use of the element *féin* (“self”) in Irish Gaelic (Hickey 2007:138). Hickey analysed this feature in his survey, with the sample sentence *Himself is not in today*. The sentence received a mean acceptance rate of 22% across the country, with only seven counties scoring a mean acceptance rate of more than 25% (Hickey 2007:243-244).

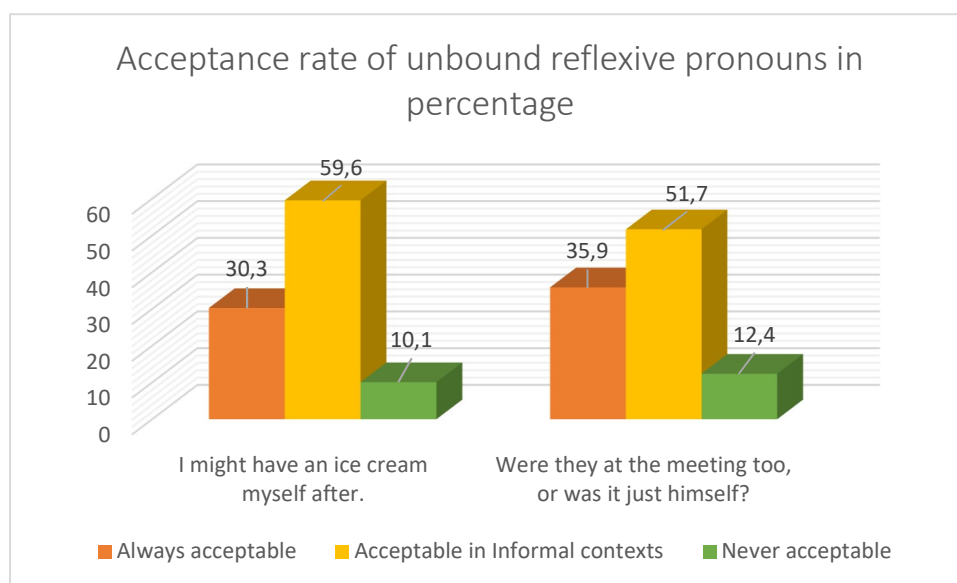


Figure 3.1.7 Acceptance rate of reflexive pronouns in percentage in my 2015 survey

In my survey, I included two sample sentences using the stressed reflexive pronoun. The first sentence, *I might have an ice cream myself after* scored a mean acceptance rate of 89,9%, with 30,3% considering the structure fit for both

formal and informal contexts. The second sentence, purposely set in a work related context, was

*Were they at the meeting too or was it just himself?*, and it registered a mean acceptance rate of 87.6%, of which 35.9% considered the structure suitable for both formal and informal contexts (fig. 3.1.7). The high rate certainly shows that the structure is well accepted; however, the fact that respectively 59.6% and 51.7% of participants considered the structure more suitable to informal contexts may show that there is some awareness that the structure is in fact vernacular.

### 3.1.8 Responsives

Whereas in standard British English it is common to answer a question using *yes* or *no*, in Irish English speakers tend to omit these words in the answer, and reply by reiterating the auxiliary present in the question in the polarity intended in the answer. As seen previously, this structure derives from a lack of a word for *yes* or *no* in Irish, while the answer is given by a repetition of the verb in the question in the intended polarity instead.

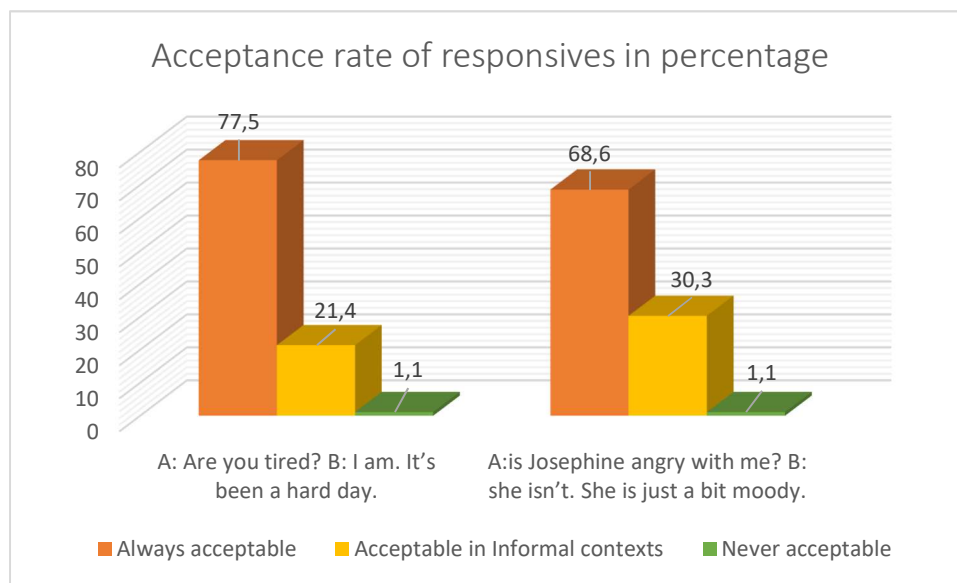


Figure 3.1.8 Acceptance rate of responsive structures in percentage in my 2015 survey. These structures were not included in Hickey's survey

Responsives were not considered in Hickey's survey, yet I have included this structure in my survey with two sample sentences in the form of mini dialogues, one with a positive answer and one with a negative answer. The positive instance, *A: Are you tired? B: I am. It's*

*been a hard day*, realized a mean acceptance rate of 98.9%, with 77.5% of respondents who regard the structure fit to be used both in formal and in informal environments. Likewise, the negative instance, *A: Is Josephine angry with me? B: She isn't. She is just a bit moody*, received a mean acceptance rate of 98.9%, with 68.6% of respondents considering the structure as suitable to be used in all contexts (fig.3.1.8). The high rate certainly shows that the structure is well accepted; the fact that respectively 21.4% and 30.3% of participants considered the structure more suitable to informal

contexts may show that there is a slight awareness that the structure is in fact vernacular. Yet, the high rates of respondents considering the structure fit for all contexts, together with the almost absent rate of refusal (in both sentences, only one person regarded the structure as not acceptable), may suggest that the structure is in fact mostly supraregionalised.

### 3.1.9 Tags with Emphatic Use

Despite frequently noticing this structure during my stay in Ireland, and despite finding evidence of it in the British Library recordings, it was impossible for me to find any reference addressing this linguistic feature. Despite the structure not being included in Hickey’s survey, I have added three sample sentences using this structure in my work. The first sample sentence targeted the use of the auxiliary *have*: *He has already finished the book you gave him, so he has*. The sentence received a mean acceptance rate of 80.9%. The second sentence was constructed with the auxiliary *be*, was *I am really happy with the project, so I am!*, and it received a mean acceptance rate of 75.3%. The third sample sentence used the auxiliary *do* in the past simple tense, and was intentionally set in a work-related context: *Mary worked really hard to finish the project in time, so she did*. This third

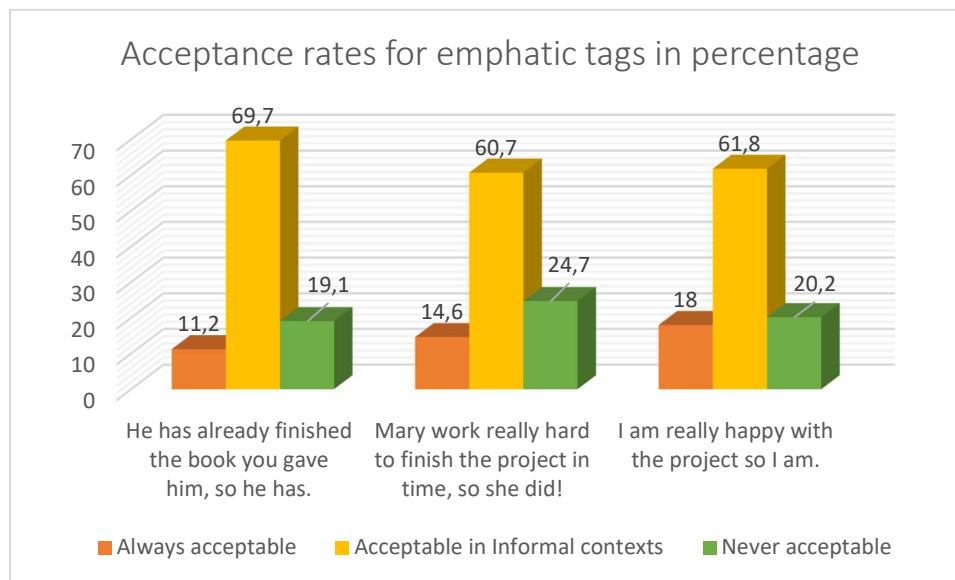


Figure 3.1.9 Acceptance rates for emphatic tags in percentage in my 2015 survey. This structure was not included in Hickey’s survey

sentenced recorded a mean acceptance rate of 79.8% (fig.3.2.2).

The high rates show that the structure is accepted by Irish English speakers.

However, similarly to the other emphatic structure above, the stressed reflexive

pronouns, the fact that, for all sentences a rate of respectively 69.7%, 60.7 % and 61.8% of participants thought that the structure was more fit to an informal context, shows that speakers are aware that the structure is vernacular.

### 3.2 The Role of Gender in Linguistic Attitudes

In my survey analysis, I have included an investigation into the influence played by gender in the attitude towards vernacular structures of the speaker. In her contribution to *Language, Society and Power*, Shan Wareing (2009) points out how men enjoy an advantaged position compared to women: they have more prestigious positions, they are better paid, and they own more property (76). The fact that most men are physically stronger than women, gives them also a physical power that, in Wareing's view, is connected to the higher rates of domestic abuse perpetrated by men against women than viceversa (Wareing, 76-77).

The disadvantaged position of women is reflected in the asymmetry present in the lexis of the English language, where terms referring to women often bear an unequal, a sexual or a derogatory connotation (Wareing, 77-82). For instance, unmarked terms which in a professional environment are used both for men and for women, such as *doctor* or *nurse*, are still often accompanied with a word specifying the gender of the person (*a lady doctor*, *a male nurse*), is an indication in Wareing's opinion that men are regarded as the "normal" occupants of high-status jobs, whereas it is implied that a lower-status job such as nurse is normally carried out by a woman (Wareing, 80). The term used to specify a person's gender is also to be considered: Wareing points out how it is normal to say a *lollipop lady*, but it would be very strange to hear *lollipop lord* or *lollipop gentleman* instead of *lollipop man*. This is linked to the fact that terms referring to women often have a derogatory or sexual connotation: Wareing points out how *master* indicates a boss or a person who is in charge, whereas *mistress* often indicates an illicit lover, implying as such a status of impotence and a sexual connotation, characteristics which are shared also by the word *woman*, but not by its masculine counterpart *man* (Wareing, 77-82).

An interesting aspect of this disparity is represented by the amount of time men and women talk. Stereotypes depict women as talking much more than men, and the use of words indicating conversation among women, such as *nag*, *chatter*, *gossip*, *yap*, imply a conversation with a very poor, if present at all, content (Wareing, 86). Interestingly, research carried out in several English-speaking countries proves that men talk approximately twice as much as women (Wareing, 86), and tend to interrupt women in a conversation much more than they interrupt men, and much more than women interrupt both women and men (Wareing, 87). The uneven time filled by each speaker is

also evident in schools, where boys tend to talk much more than girls do, and they receive more of their teacher's attention than girls (Wareing, 87). Female speakers therefore feel that they are in a disadvantaged position and feel they need to give as good an impression of themselves in the minor amount of time available to them.

Due to their disadvantaged social position, women appear to be more receptive to linguistic norms, and tend to display a hypercorrect linguistic behaviour (Coates, 61). Research carried out in English speaking locations by Trudgill (1972, 1974a) has shown that female speakers prefer the overt prestige of standard British English forms, while male speakers tend to favour what Coates calls the *covert* prestige of non-standard and vernacular forms (Coates, 62-65).

A possible explanation of this phenomenon is suggested by social psychologists, according to whom the higher prestige enjoyed by RP in respect to regional and non-standard varieties rewards the speaker who uses this variety of a higher status: 'speakers are perceived as being more ambitious, more intelligent and more self-confident' (Coates, 66), whereas the choice of a non-standard linguistic norm makes the speaker appear as more attractive, humorous and talkative (Coates, 66). Research carried out (Elyan et al. 1978), where a group of women were rated by judges according to the linguistic norm they used (RP or Lancashire accent), shows that women speaking with an RP accent were regarded as being more intelligent, independent, self-confident, and more *feminine* than women using a non-standard accent (Coates, 66). Judges also had to decide speakers' masculinity or femininity on a 9-point scale, and they rather contradictorily rated women speaking in RP as being more *masculine* than women speaking with a regional accent. This phenomenon is called *psychological androgyny* (Bem 1974, 1975), and it is a behaviour offering women several benefits in a contemporary society where their status is still underprivileged (Coates, 66). On the other hand, sociological research (Gough and Edwards 1998: 411) shows that male speakers use non-standard forms and other linguistic signals, such as swear words, to express solidarity with each other (Coates, 67).

Penelope Eckert (1990, 1998, 1999) proposes a different explanation. In research she carried out at a high school in Detroit, she noticed a discrepancy in the dichotomic *male/female* trend, as the data displayed different attitudes within the group of female speakers, who showed a more extreme usage of linguistic norms than boys. As a matter of fact, the results yielded show that jock girls, that

is girls who showed a high interest in and high participation to school activities and showed an interest in continuing their education, were more linguistically conservative, and that burnout girls, that is girls who reject school as an important part of their lives, and who care more about external activities interest in school activities were fluent users of new vernacular forms: in both cases girls were at the extreme points of the scale (Coates, 67). Eckert points out that, in what she defines *linguistic markets*, material capital is in the hands of males, and how women are allowed to accumulate only a 'symbolic' type of capital. In this scenario, the use of language acts as an important part of the above-mentioned symbolic capital in a world where the norm is dictated by males, both professionally, socially and linguistically, and females only occupy a marginal and secondary position both

in society and in the linguistic marketplace (Coates, 67-68).

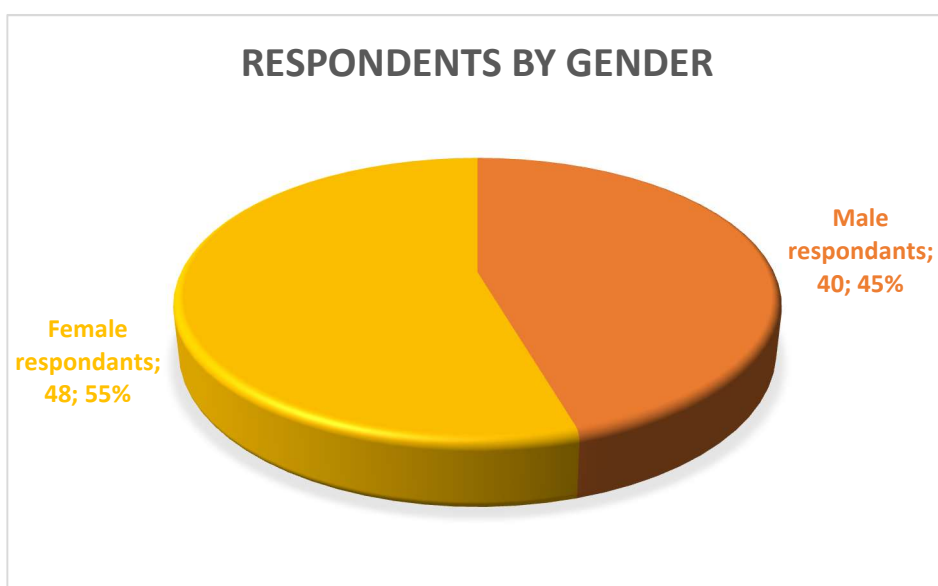


Figure 3.2 Number of respondents to my 2015 survey divided by gender

In my survey, the difference between attitudes displayed by male and by female respondents is evident. Female respondents show a higher awareness of non-

standard forms compared to their male counterpart, which would suggest, as Elyan (1978) found in her research, that female speakers privilege a standard linguistic variety. Out of the 89 total respondents to my survey, 40 were males and 49 were females, granting a similar quantity of contribution to the results.

### 3.2.1 The *Do* Habitual

The two sentences I have included in my survey to represent the *do* habitual structure are set in different contexts. The sentence set in an informal context, *They do be visiting us from time to time*, showed a mean acceptance rate of 70% by male speakers, of which 10% see the structure as suitable

in all contexts, while 30% regarded the structure as never acceptable. The acceptance displayed by female speakers is slightly inferior: the mean acceptance rate is 59.4%, out of which only 2% see the structure as fit to be used in all contexts, and the structure is refused in all contexts by 38.8% of female respondents.

The difference in the acceptance of the *do* habitual becomes stronger when we analyse the sentence set in a work-related environment, *She does be working overtime when asked*. The mean acceptance by male respondents drops to 47.5%, with 12.5% regarding the structure as suitable to all contexts, and 52.5% seeing the structure as not acceptable. For female respondents, the mean acceptance rate is 38.8%, with 8.2% considering the structure as suitable for all contexts, and a staggering 61.2% seeing the structure as not acceptable.

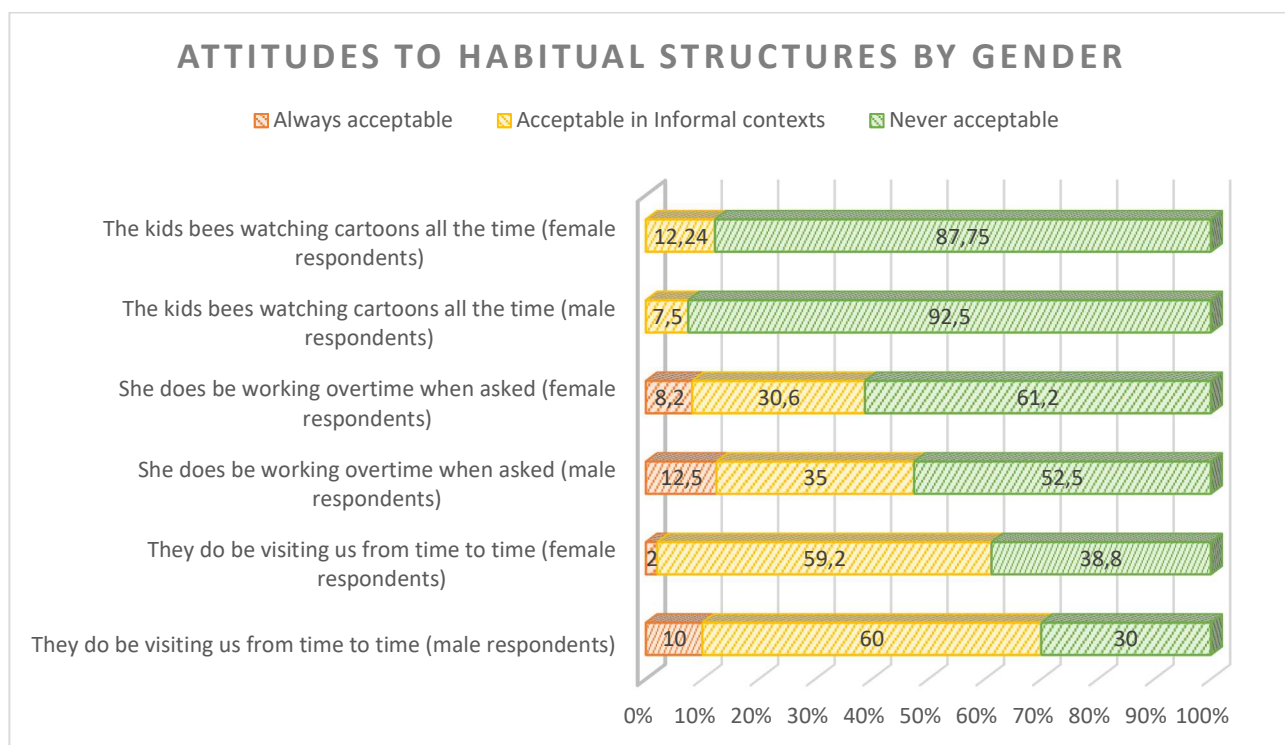


Figure 3.2.1 The graph represents the different attitudes to habitual structures sorted by gender according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

The third phrase present in my survey to express habitual actions contains *bees*, and surprisingly the structure has received slightly more acceptance by female speakers. It is important to underline that the structure was not well accepted by speakers: both groups scored a total acceptance of 0%. Yet, 12.3% of female respondents accepted the structure in an informal context, against the 7.5% scored



by their male counterpart, and 87.7% female respondents completely refused the structure, compared to a higher refusal rate of 92.5% by male respondents.

The higher acceptance of *do* habitual structures on the part of male speakers confirms Elyan's thesis that female speakers favour standard varieties while penalizing vernacular ones. The fact that more female speakers seem to accept *bees* more than male speakers may support Eckert's view, or it could be related to the extremely low mean acceptance of this structure: to have a clearer perspective more research should be carried out in concern to this structure, including more parameters such as age range and geographic location, being the structure prominent in Northern Ireland.

### 3.2.2 Verbal Concord

The results yielded by the analysis of attitudes towards verbal concord are interesting. The sentence containing the existential *there*, *There was a lot of people at the cinema last night*, has received a

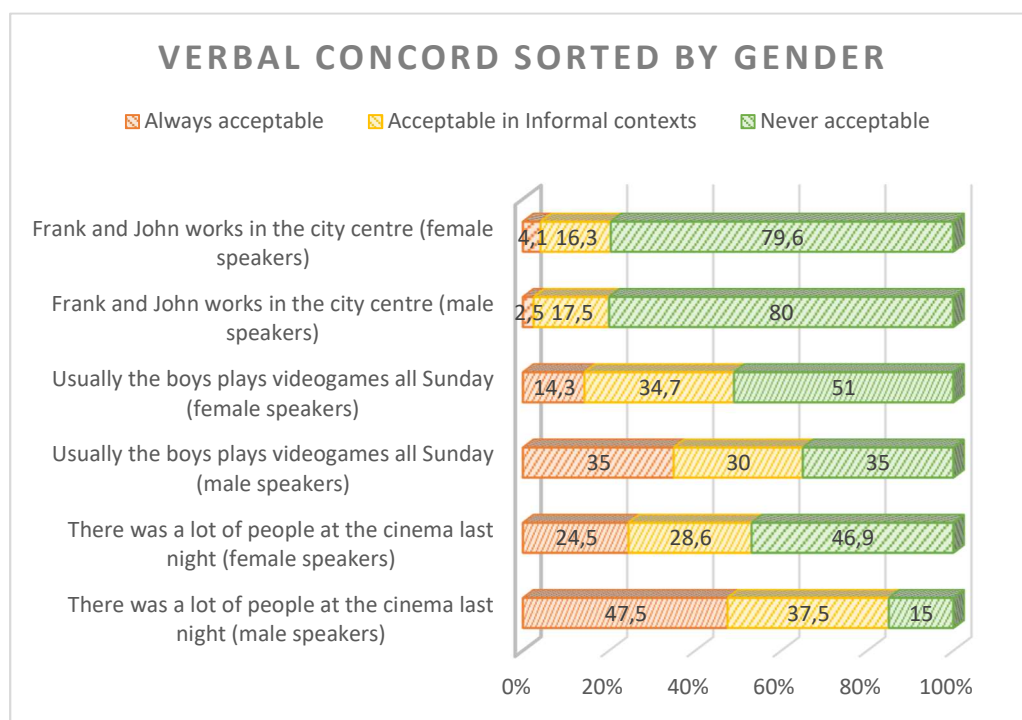


Figure 3.2.2 The graph shows the different attitude towards non-standard verbal concord sorted by gender according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

mean acceptance rate of 85 by male speakers, with a majority of 47.5% considering the structure as suitable for all contexts, and only 15% regarding it as incorrect, showing thus a large acceptance overall. Female speakers gave the existential *there* a mean acceptance

rate of 53.1%, with only 24.5%, half of their male counterpart, considering the structure as suitable for all contexts, and a majority of 46.9% refusing the structure as acceptable.

The structure sampling the plural nominal subject, *Usually the boys plays videogames all Sunday*, gave similar results. Male respondents gave the structure a mean acceptance rate of 65%, out of which a majority of 35% judged the structure as suitable in all contexts. Another 35% regarded the structure as not acceptable. The mean acceptance rate of female speakers is lower, at 49% of which only 14.3% considered the structure as suitable to all contexts, and an important 51% considered it never acceptable.

The acceptance of the sample sentence containing an instance of a compound subject, *Frank and John works in the city centre*, which received an overall low acceptance rate, differs from the previous structures. Male speakers showed a mean acceptance rate of 20%, of which a mere 2.5% accepted the structure in all contexts, and a staggering 80% considered the structure as not acceptable. Female speakers gave a similar acceptance: out of a mean acceptance rate of 20.4%, 4.1% considered the structure as suitable to all contexts, and 79.6% regard it as not acceptable. It is interesting to note how, once again, a structure which has received an overall lower acceptance, seems to be more tolerated by female speakers than by male speakers.

### **3.2.3 Extended Present Tense**

The data collected for the sample sentences containing the extended present tense does not differ greatly between male and female respondents. However, it is worth noting that the structure scored an overall low mean acceptance rate, and that once again female respondents seem to be slightly more accepting of the structure than their male counterpart.

The first sentence, testing the structure in an informal context, *I live in this house for two years*, scored a mean acceptance rate of 15% among male respondents and of 20.4% among female respondents, 2% of male respondents considered the structure as suitable to all context, similarly to the 2.5% scored by their female counterpart. However, 18.4% of female respondents regards the structure as appropriate to use in an informal context, against the 12.5% of male participants to the survey, and 75% of female respondents consider the structure not acceptable, as compared to 85% of their male counterpart.

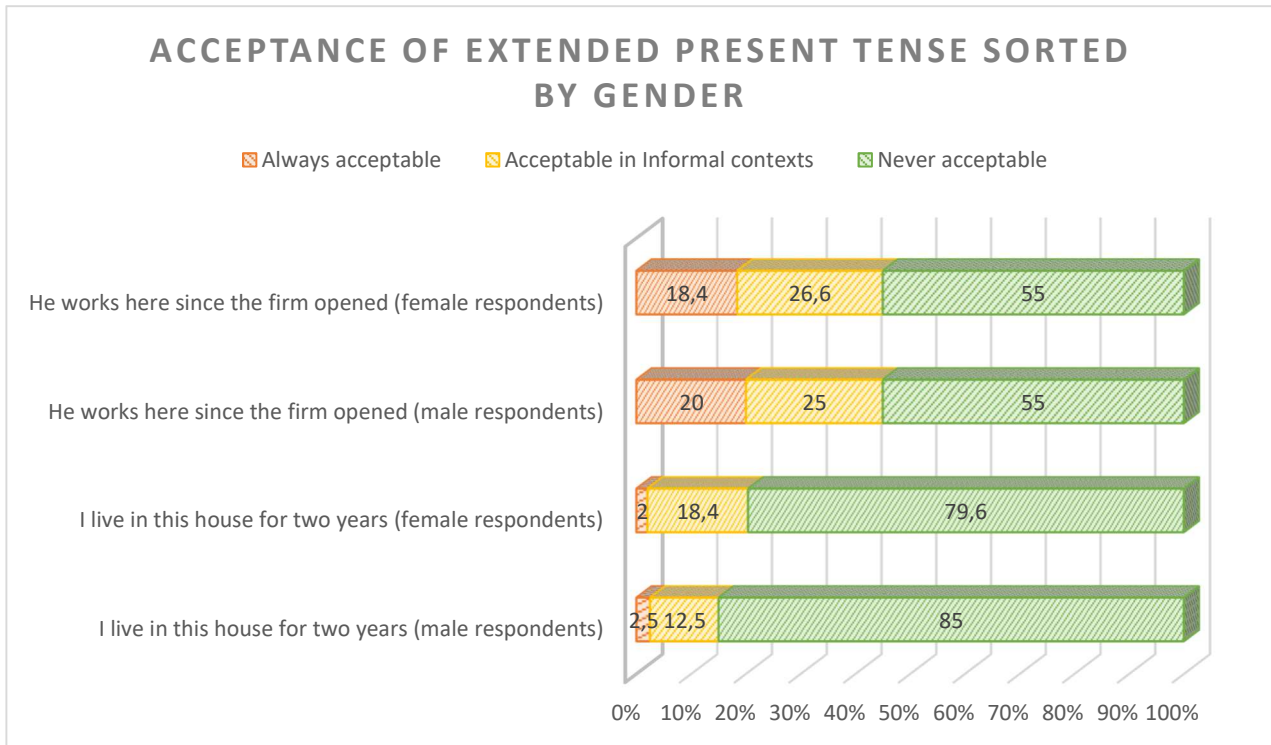


Figure 3.2.3 The graph shows the acceptance rates of the extended use of present tense sorted by gender, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

The acceptance rates for the second structure, *He works here since the firm opened*, exploiting a formal context, does not show relevant differences. The mean acceptance rate is 45% for both male and female respondents, of which 20% of men and 18.4% of women consider the structure as suitable to all contexts, 25% of males and 26.6% of females regard it as suitable to informal contexts only, and 55% of both males and females see it as not acceptable. Despite the homogenous results between the two groups, it is interesting to note once again in both instances a slightly higher acceptance on the side of women of a structure with an overall low acceptance rate.

### 3.1.4 After Perfective

The *after*-perfective structure scored significantly high mean acceptance rates. The first sample sentence, testing the use of the structure in an informal context, *John is after booking a table for 8 o'clock*, realized a mean acceptance rate of 95% among male respondents, and of 87.7% among female respondents. It is important to note that male respondents display a more accepting attitude towards this structure, whereas female respondents seem to see it more suitable to an informal

context. Indeed, 60% of men and 40.8% of women consider the structure as suitable to all contexts, while 35% of men and 46.9% see it more apt to informal contexts. Also, 5% of male respondents and 12.3% of female respondents do not accept the proposed structure in any context. It appears that, despite an overall high acceptance, women feel that the structure is better suited to an informal or colloquial scenario, possibly feeling it as indicating some level of vernacularity.

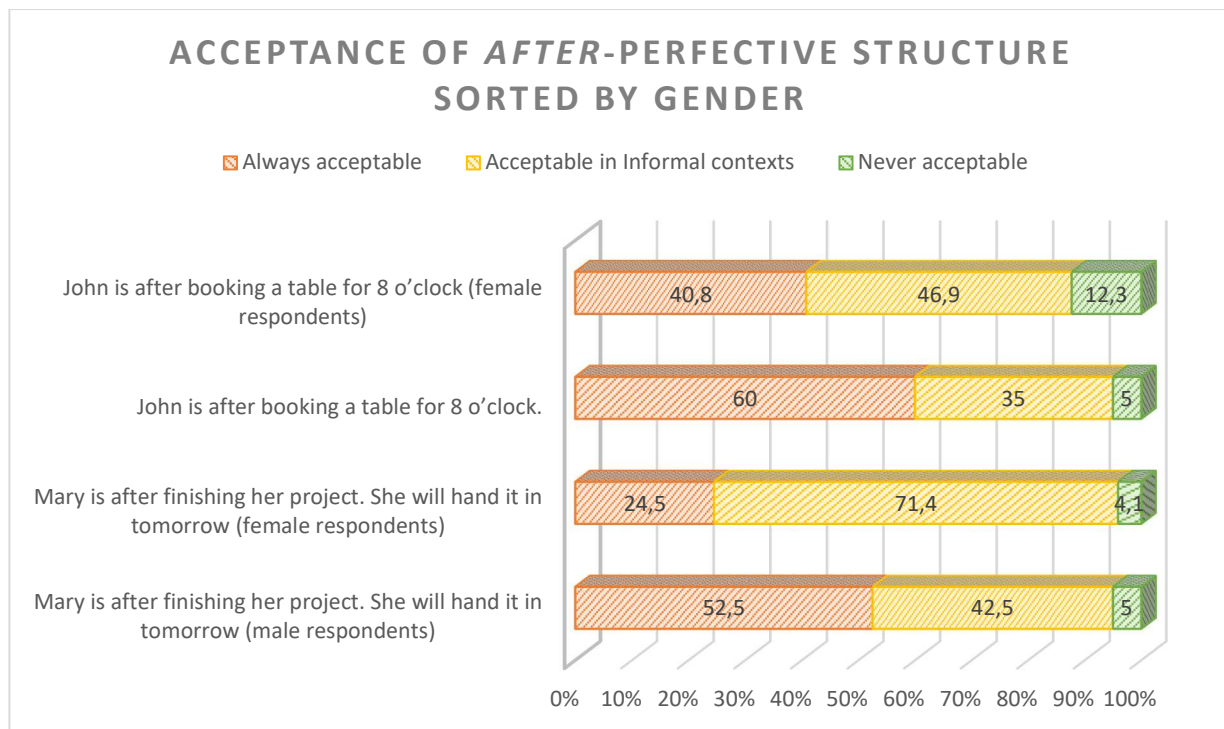


Figure 3.2.4 The graph shows the acceptance rate of the after-perfective sorted by gender, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

The second structure which I have proposed in my survey, *Mary is after finishing her project. She will hand it in tomorrow*, tests the structure in a work-related context. Once again, the structure has received a high mean acceptance rate, namely a staggering 95.9% by female speakers and 95% by male speakers. It is interesting to note that 52.5% of men and 24.5% of women regard the structure as apt to all contexts, while 42.5% of men and an impressive 71.4% of women consider the structure as suitable to informal contexts only. Just 5% of male respondents and 4.1% of female respondents see the structure as not acceptable. Once again, the results suggest that, despite the structure being widely accepted by both groups, women perceive its vernacularity more than men do.

### 3.2.5 Resultative Perfective

Once again, analysing the data returned for this structure in my survey, it is possible to notice that women appear to be more sensitive to vernacularity than men. The first sentence I have included, *I have the housework done, now I can finally relax*, has received a mean acceptance rate of 100% by male speakers, out of which 70% regard the structure as suitable to all contexts. The female mean acceptance rate, despite being still high (95.9%), shows signs of awareness of the vernacularity of this structure: 63.3% of female respondents feel that the structure is suitable to be used in all contexts, while 32.6% regards it as suitable just to informal contexts, and 4.1% perceives it as unacceptable.

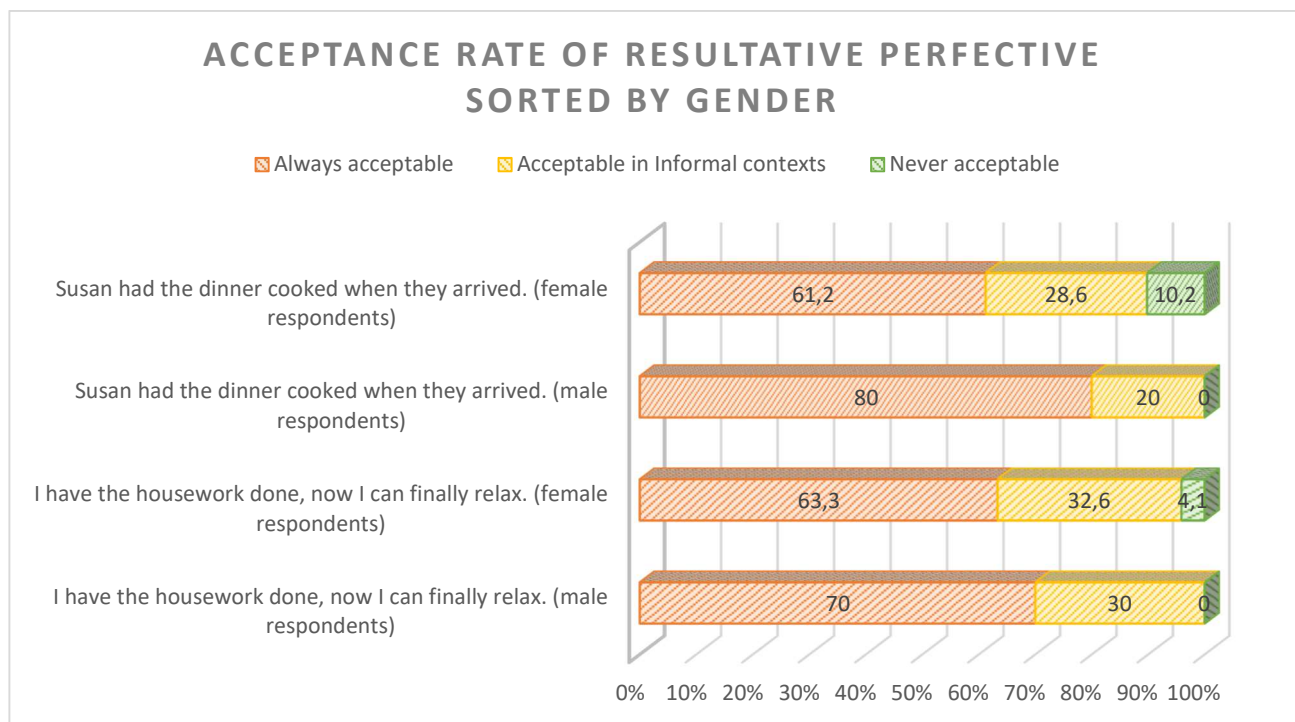


Figure 3.2.5 The graph shows the acceptance rate of the resultative perfective sorted by gender, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

The results for the second sentence I have inserted in my survey, *Susan had the dinner cooked when they arrived*, have showed similar results. Men showed a mean acceptance rate of 100%, with 80% of respondents regarding the structure as suitable to all contexts. Women on the other hand gave a mean acceptance rate of 89.8%, with 61.2% of respondents considering the structure as suitable to all contexts, 28.6% feeling the structure is more suitable to an informal context, and 10.2%

regarding it as not acceptable. Despite acceptance rates which are overall very high, showing that the structure is well accepted and that possibly supraregionalization is taking place, the fact that women’s acceptance was lower shows that female respondents are once more sensitive to language varieties, and several of them perceive the structure as being vernacular.

### 3.2.6 Second Person Plural Pronouns

The analysis by gender of the acceptance rate of second person plural pronoun *ye* has not yielded any important difference between the two groups. The sentence *Are ye coming to the cinema with us tonight?* has received a mean acceptance rate of 92.5% by male speakers, of which 35% consider the structure as suitable to all contexts and 57.5% think it best suited to informal contexts, while 7.5% consider it not acceptable. Similarly, female respondents display a mean acceptance rate of 93.9%, of which 42.9% consider the structure apt for all contexts, 51% see it as suitable for informal contexts, and 6.1% regard it as not acceptable. Despite the large acceptance, this structure appears to be considered suitable to informal contexts by a majority of both groups, hinting at a perception that the pronoun is in fact vernacular.

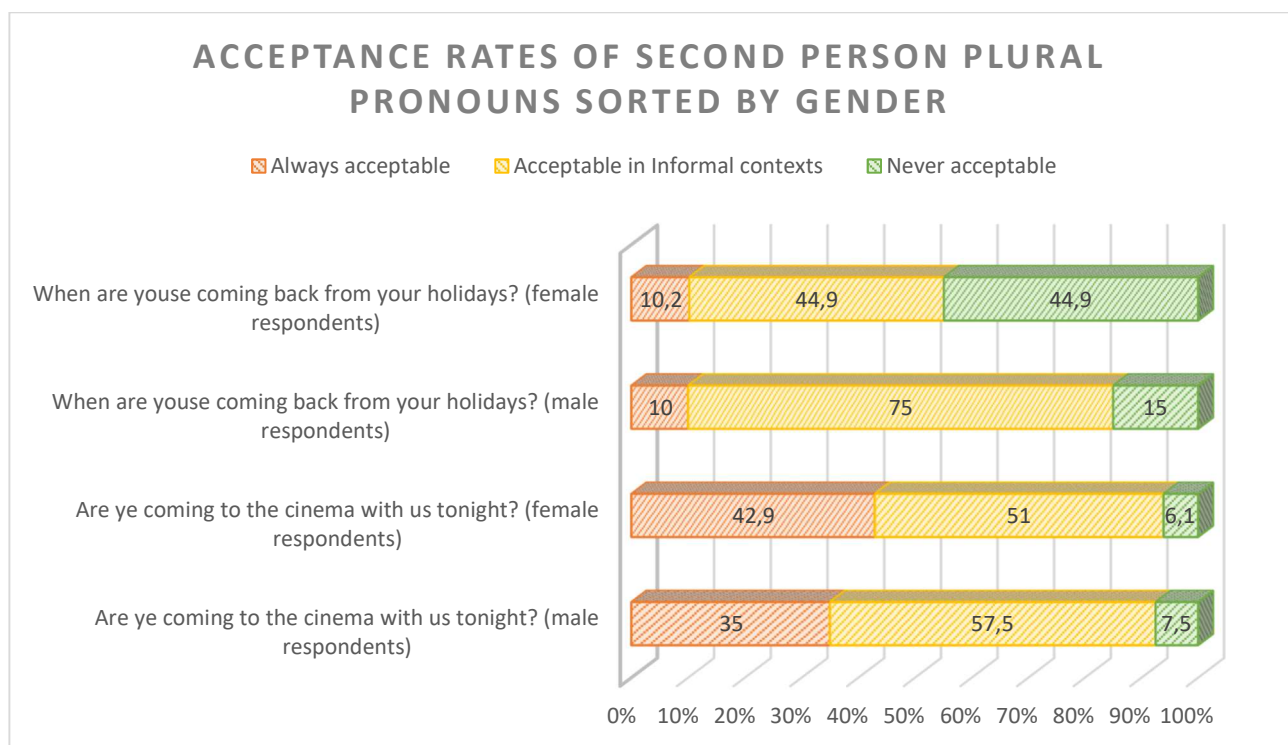


Figure 3.2.6 The graph shows the acceptance rate of the resultative perfective sorted by gender, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

Results are not as homogenous for the pronoun *youse*, presented to respondents in the sentence *When are youse coming back from your holidays?*, which has received a mean acceptance rate of 85% by male respondents, and of 55.1% of female respondents. The pronoun appears to be perceived as vernacular: only 10% of men and 10.2% of women regard its use as suitable to all contexts. Interestingly, 75% of men consider it as more apt to informal context, a perception which is shared by only 44.9% of women, and while only 15% of men consider the use of this pronoun as not acceptable, the number of women refusing this structure is a staggering 44.9%. These results confirm not only that this structure is perceived as being vernacular by both groups, but also that, once again, women appear to be more sensitive to non-standard linguistic varieties.

### 3.2.7 Stressed Reflexive Pronouns

The analysis of the acceptance rates of stressed reflexive pronouns shows once more a higher linguistic sensitivity from female respondents. The first structure proposed, *I might have an ice cream myself after*, sampled the acceptance of the use of stressed reflexive pronouns in an informal context. The mean acceptance rate yielded by male respondents is 95%, of which 40% regarded the

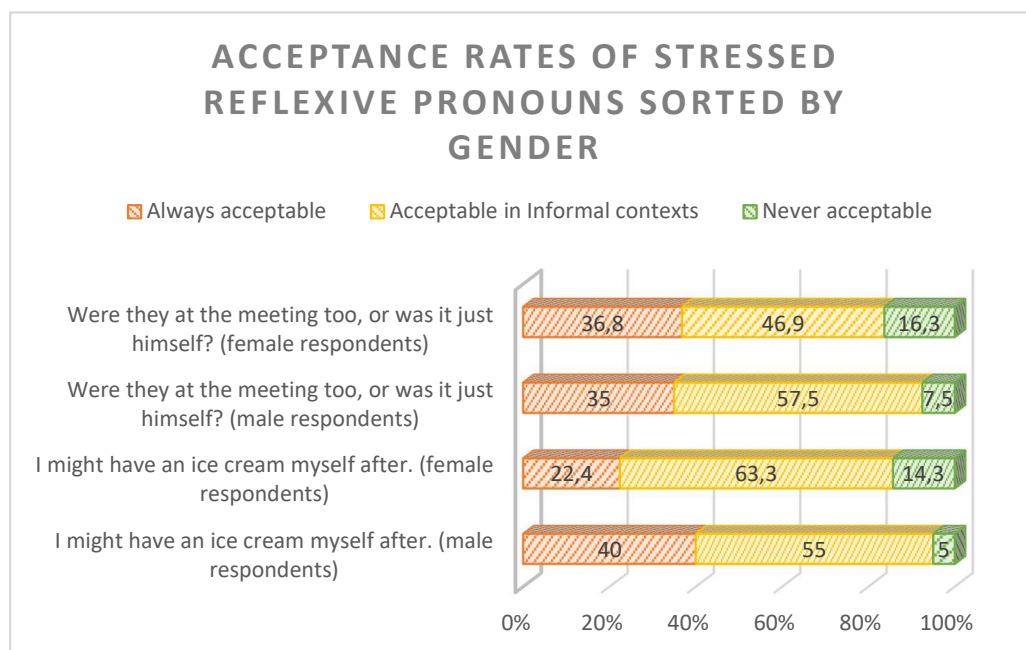


Figure 3.2.7 The graph shows the acceptance rate of stressed reflexive pronouns sorted by gender, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

structure proposed as suitable to all contexts, and 55% considered it more apt to informal contexts. Only 5% of male respondents considered the structure not acceptable. The rates for female speakers shows a

different attitude towards the structure: the mean acceptance rate is 85.7%, of which only 22.4% regard the structure as suitable to all contexts, and a majority of 63.3% feels that the structure is

suitable to an informal conversation. Also, 14.3% of women perceive the structure as not acceptable, almost three times as many as male respondents.

The second structure which was proposed in my survey is set in a work-related context, *Were they at the meeting too, or was it just himself?*, and it has shown similar results. The mean acceptance rate received by male respondents is 92.5%, of which 35% feel that the structure is fit for all contexts, and a majority of 57.5% believe it is better suited for an informal context. The rate of male respondents refusing the subject is once again very low, ranging at 7.5%. Once again, the mean acceptance rate by women is lower, 83.7% of which 36.8% see the structure as suitable to all contexts, 46.9% prefer its use in informal contexts, and 16.3% perceive it as not acceptable. The structure is overall well accepted, however the higher number of people in both groups favouring its use in informal contexts show that stressed reflexive pronouns are indeed perceived as vernacular structures by both genders, with female speakers being once again more sensitive to a non-standard form.

### 3.2.8 Responsives

Responsive structures have received an overall high acceptance rate from both groups. However, it is possible once more to notice a higher sensibility from the results of women. The first sample dialogue, giving the respondents an affirmative instance, *A: Are you tired? B: I am. It's been a hard day*, has received a mean acceptance rate of 100% by men and of 98% by women. While 85% of men regard the structure as suitable to all contexts, and 15% have a more vernacular perception of it, female respondents perceiving the structure as suitable to all contexts was 71.4%, visibly less than their male counterpart, while 26.6% perceive it as more apt for an informal context. Also, 2% of women regard the structure as not acceptable.

The second sample dialogue proposed, exemplifying a negative response, *A: is Josephine angry with me? B: she isn't. She is just a bit moody*, mirrors the results of the first one. Once again 100% of men accept the structure: 77.5% feel the structure is apt to be used in all contexts, while 22.5% regard it as better suiting an informal context. Despite 98% of female respondents accepted the structure, and 61.2% of respondents feel that the structure is suitable to all contexts, a higher



number of women (36.8%) are more inclined to regard it as more appropriate for an informal context, and 2% feel that it is not acceptable. It is possible therefore to witness also in this case a higher sensibility to non-standard linguistic features in women.

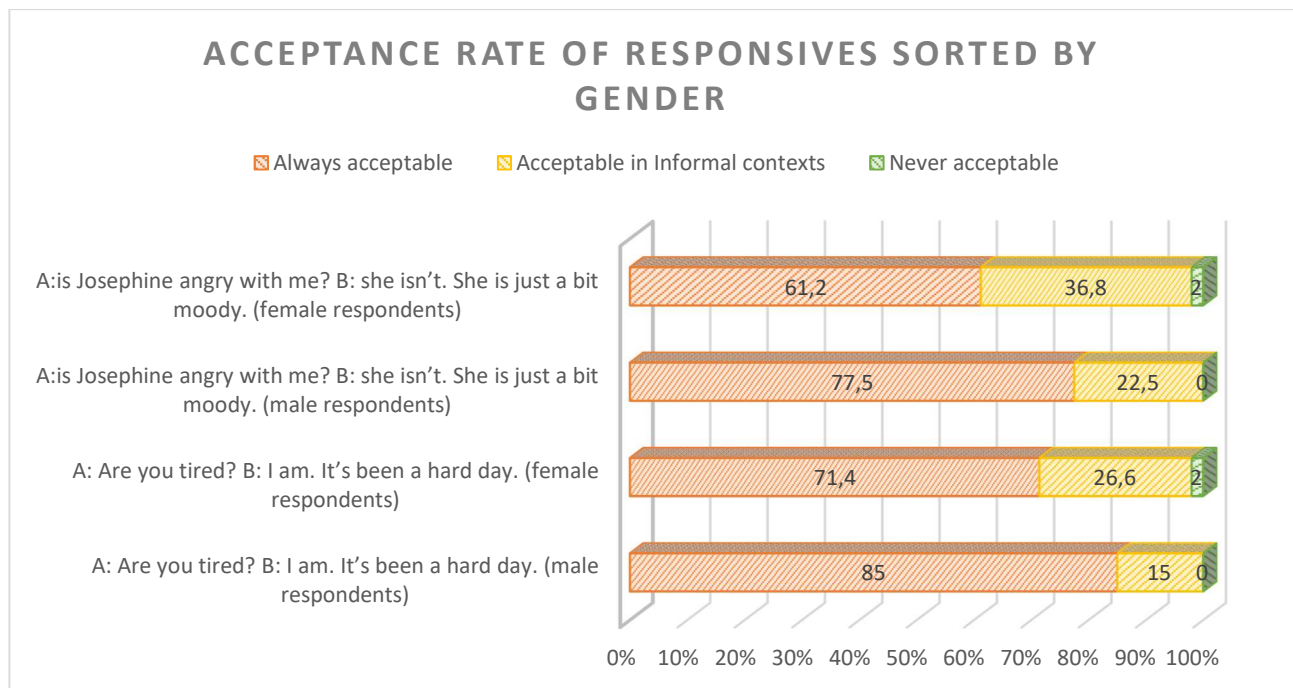


Figure 3.2.8 The graph shows the acceptance rate of responsives sorted by gender, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

### 3.2.9 Tags with Emphatic Use

Despite being overall well accepted, there is a stronger perception of the vernacularity of this structure in both groups. The first sample sentence, He has already finished the book you gave him so he has, has received a mean acceptance rate of 80% by male speakers, but a mere 15% are inclined to use the structure in all contexts, and 20% consider it as not acceptable. Similarly, the mean acceptance rate manifested by female respondents is 81.4%, but only 8.2% would use this structure in all contexts, and 73.4% regard it as being more suitable for an informal context, and 18.4% of women regard it as not acceptable.

This attitude does not appear to differ in the other two sample sentences, both set in a work-related context. The sentence *Mary work really hard to finish the project in time, so she did!* has received a mean acceptance rate of 72.5% from male respondents, and of 77.6% from female respondents. The

percentage of people considering the structure as suitable to all context is respectively 17.5% for men and 12.3% for women, while 60% of male respondents and 63.3% of female respondents are inclined to see it used in an informal context. Also, 20% of men and 20.4% of women consider the structure not acceptable.

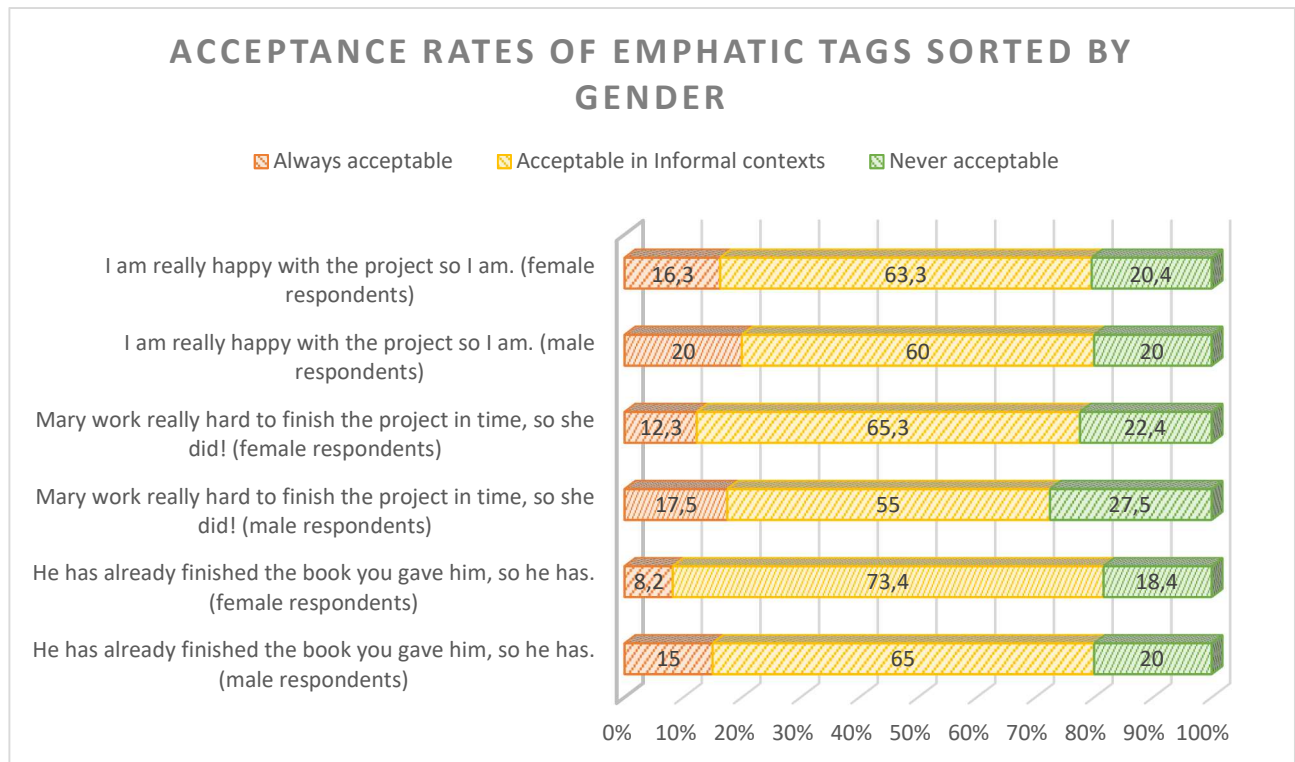


Figure 3.2.9 The graph shows the acceptance rate of emphatic tags sorted by gender, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

The last sentence given in the survey to exemplify the use of emphatic tags depicts once again a possible work-related scenario. *I am really happy with the project so I am* received a mean acceptance rate of 80% from male speakers and of 79.6% from female speakers. 20% of men and 16.3% of women would use the structure in all contexts, while 60% of male respondents and 63.3% of female respondents regard it as more suitable to informal contexts. 20% of men and 20.4% of women consider the use of emphatic tags not acceptable. From the analysis of this data a trend appears: the structure is equally accepted by both groups, but both men and women seem to regard it as a vernacular construct, and to see it fit to be used in informal situations.

### 3.3 Linguistic Attitudes in Different Generations

Language, society and culture are tightly interconnected. Alessandro Duranti stresses how social interactions would be unthinkable without language, and how language allows humans to codify inputs coming from the external world, and to investigate the internal dimension of the psyche and of spirituality (Duranti, 1997: 337-338). He adds that 'linguistic anthropologists have been moving toward a notion of language as an aggregate of features, tendencies, and acts that are sometimes the background and other times the foreground for the constitution of the social world in which we live.' (Duranti, 1997: 338). These concepts were observed by Boas in his work on Native American languages, where he realized that languages are the only tools to truly study and understand the cultural systems that they express (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2004: 7). Another eminent anthropologist, Kroeber, states that:

'in short, culture can probably function only on the basis of abstractions, and these in turn seem to be possible only through speech, or through a secondary substitute for spoken language such as writing, numeration, mathematical and chemical notation, and the like. Culture, then, began when speech was preset; and from then on, the enrichment of either meant the further development of the other.' (Kroeber, 1963:102)

With these notions in mind, it becomes evident how social changes are easily reflected in language. Irish society has gone through relevant changes in the past one hundred years. In 1916, the Easter Rising started a process which led to the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, followed by civil war in 1922-1923, until the country was declared a republic in 1948 (O'Beirne Ranelagh, 2012: 395). For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ireland struggled with a rickety economy (Smyth, 2012:132) and high unemployment rates (Keogh, 2005: 95, 159-218, 349-378), which led development organization *Trócaire* to point out the similitudes between poverty in Ireland and in the Third World (Keogh, 2005: 302-303).

The economy improved dramatically in the 1990's, a phenomenon that was to become known as the 'Celtic Tiger'. Cultural, political and social changes were brought forward (Keogh, 2005:352). From 1993, the bleak situation Ireland had been in began to see improvements, and by the end of

the millennium the country had become one of the strongest European economies. Foreign investments and the outsourcing of many major IT firms such as Microsoft and Dell, Intel, IBM, companies in the chemical and biotechnology sector, such as Pfizer and Shering Plough, and call centers providing customer service and technical support, such as Ebay/ Paypal and Lexmark, brought high rates of employment and the birth of multilingual working environments (Keogh, 2005:356-357). Investments came also from within the country, as the success of Michael O’Leary’s no-frills airline, Ryanair, has demonstrated (Keogh, 2005: 357). The emigration flow reversed: from a past of massive emigration, Ireland became a destination for immigrants, to the point that in 2007 it is estimated that over 10% of people residing in Ireland were born in another country (Smyth, 133). In the 1990s major school reforms were brought forward, with the aim to promote students’ interpersonal skills, spirit of enterprise and of initiative, and to encourage their professional abilities (Fahey et Al., 2007: 146-147).

However, in 2008 the economic boom collapsed almost as quickly as it had appeared. The Celtic Tiger economy was however, built on sand, strongly relying on foreign investment, and with an excessive investment in property development, which promptly contributed to high inflation rates and as a consequence weakened the shaky economy even further. The Credit Crunch quickly developed into a Financial Crisis and to the Global Recession. From a sociolinguistic perspective, it is important to consider how the swift changes of the past fifty years have influenced the generations who went through them. In this section of my dissertation I will analyse the data I have collected based on the age ranges of the respondents.

Initially, I had divided the age ranges in my survey into five groups: one first group, comprising respondents until the age of 17, was supposed to comprise people who were still attending school; the second group, including people between the age of 18 and of 29, intended to isolate people who were either taking their education to a higher level, or beginning to enter a profession; the third group covered an age range of between 30 and 39, meaning to group respondents who were consolidating their working position and career; the fourth group, comprising respondents between 40 and 49 years of age, indicated speakers who had possibly stabilized their career; the last group, including respondents aged 50 and more, aimed at categorizing that part of the population who was heading towards retirement.

Upon analysis of the results obtained, I saw that the number of respondents were quite uneven: while the groups including an age range of 19-29, 30-39 and 40-49 counted 25 respondents, 35 respondents and 15 respondents respectively, the groups comprising individuals until the age of 17 and aged 50 or more, had only 3 and 7 respondents respectively. In order to use the data, not in a thorough way, but at least to have a snapshot of the linguistic attitudes of different generations, I have decided to group the data differently: one group includes respondents until the age of 30, a second group comprises the middle section of respondents aged between 31 and 40, and a third section represents respondents aged 41 or more. The first group represents the later stages of education, namely secondary school and university, and the beginning of work experience, including the generation who attended school after the Celtic Tiger. The second group comprises the section of the population who is consolidating their working position, and who, having attended school in the eighties and nineties, have been more exposed to school reforms and have been more influenced by the Celtic Tiger. The third group includes individuals who have either a consolidated work experience and work position, or who are heading towards retirement, and comprises the section of the population who attended school before the Celtic Tiger and the economic boom, at a time when education was still mainly in the hands of the Catholic Church.

After regrouping the data and keeping the initial criteria indicating the perception of vernacular structures (*always acceptable, acceptable only in informal occasions, never acceptable*), I was unable to pinpoint a trend. Upon analysing the mean acceptance rates to the structures against the rates of rejection, and looking for a difference of at least 5% between the results compared, I came across a number of trends. The acceptance rates of some structures did not show any change across the three age groups analysed. Other structures showed an increased acceptance, while some displayed an increased rejection from respondents of different generations. A very singular phenomenon was noticed in the acceptance rates of some structures: the group of respondents under the age of 31 and the group aged 40 or more had higher mean acceptance rates for this structure than the group of respondents aged between 30 and 39. This points to consider that this middle group comprising respondents who were affected by the Celtic Tiger the most, is the area where linguistic change took place, either confirming or condemning vernacular structures. Such part played by the group of respondents aged between 31 and 40 could be related to the higher professional and economic possibilities which possibly made language users feel that they needed to review the way they spoke, and eventually adopt a linguistic variety which they regarded as

prestigious and successful, and which could help them to reach or to consolidate a more successful position in the new situation they were experiencing.

### 3.3.1 Do Habitual

The analysis of the data for the *do*-habitual structures by age group shows interesting developments in the perception of the structure. The first sample sentence, *They do be visiting us from time to time*, received a mean acceptance rate of 60% by people aged 40 or more. The rate remained quite stable in the group of respondents aged 31 to 40, at 58.3%, and the acceptance surged in the youngest group, reaching 78.6% mean acceptance rate, 18.6% more than the oldest generation under analysis. Similar results were observed for the second sample sentence presented in the survey, *She does be working overtime when asked*. The older group scored a mean acceptance rate of 32% for this structure, while 38.9% of respondents in the group of respondents between 31 and 40 considered the structure as acceptable. Once again it is possible to witness a surge in the acceptance of this structure in the younger generation, where the structure is accepted by 57.1% of respondents, 25.1% in respect to the oldest generation. In both cases it is evident that the structure is becoming more accepted by speakers.

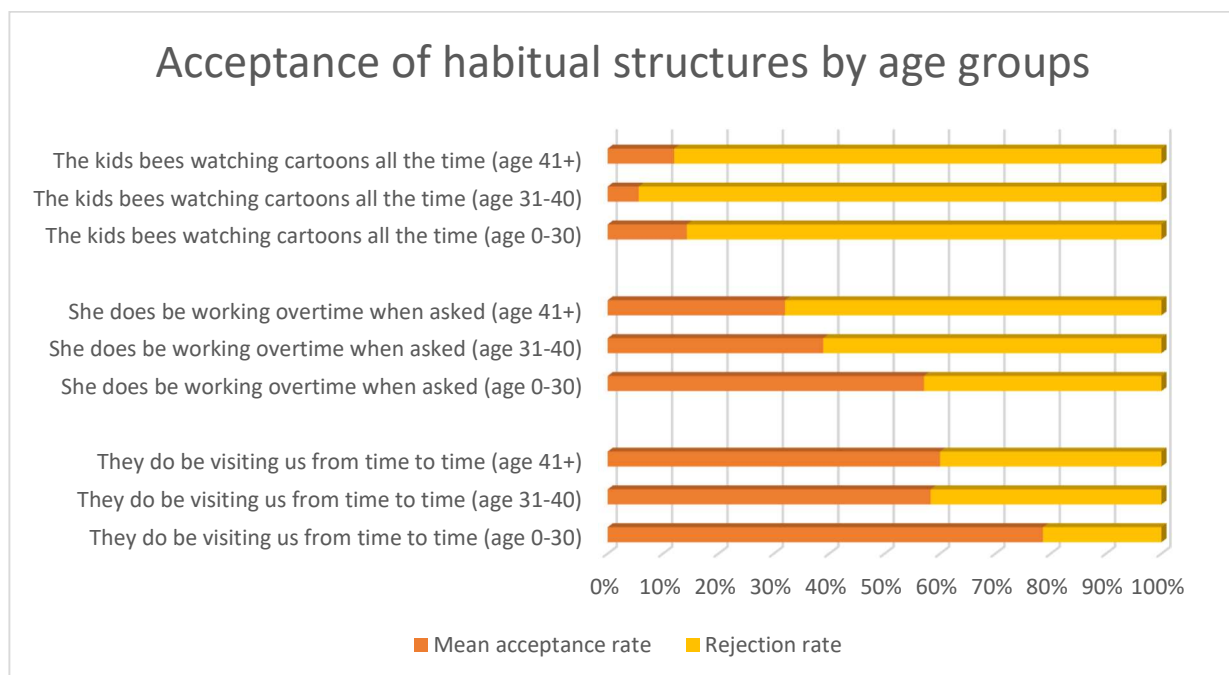


Figure 3.3.1 The graph shows the acceptance rate of habitual structures sorted by age groups, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

The situation is singular for the *bees* habitual structure, a structure generally not well accepted by native Irish English speakers, represented in my survey by the sentence *The kids bees watching cartoons all the time*. The oldest group scored a mean acceptance rate of 12%, a percentage which decreased to as little as 5.6% in the middle group aged 31-40, but which promptly surged again to a 14.3% mean acceptance rate in the youngest group. The fluctuation in the percentage could mean that the structure is repressed by the generation of respondents mostly affected by the economic boom of the nineties, who felt it as an inconvenient linguistic model to be repressed. The younger generation possibly doesn't feel the same level of pressure in the usage of the structure, and the acceptance rate has slightly increased.

### 3.3.2 Verbal Concord

The acceptance rates for the sentences exemplifying the use of verbal concord has instead declined in the three groups analysed. The first sample sentence, *There was a lot of people at the cinema last night*, depicting the use of the existential *there*, realized a mean acceptance rate of 76% in the group aged 41 or more, a rate which decreased to 69.4% in the group aged 31- 40, and which dropped even further in the youngest group, scoring 57.1% mean acceptance rate. Similarly, the structure demonstrating a plural verb inflection with a compound subject, *Frank and John works in the city centre*, experienced a mean acceptance rate of 36% in the group aged 41 or more. The mean acceptance rate dropped to 13.9% in the group of respondents aged 31- 40, and stabilized at 14.3% in the youngest group.

On the other hand, the sample sentence investigating the usage of plural concord with a plural nominal subject, *Usually the boys plays videogames all Sunday*, did not experience relevant change. The group aged 41 or more expressed a mean acceptance rate of 52%. The acceptance rate slightly increased in the group aged 31- 40, reaching 58.3%, and then stabilized at 57.1% in the youngest group. It is therefore possible to state that the verbal concord with the existential *there* and with a compound subject has experienced a lower threshold of tolerance during and after the economic boom of the nineties, while the use of verbal concord with a plural nominal subject has not experienced any major changes.

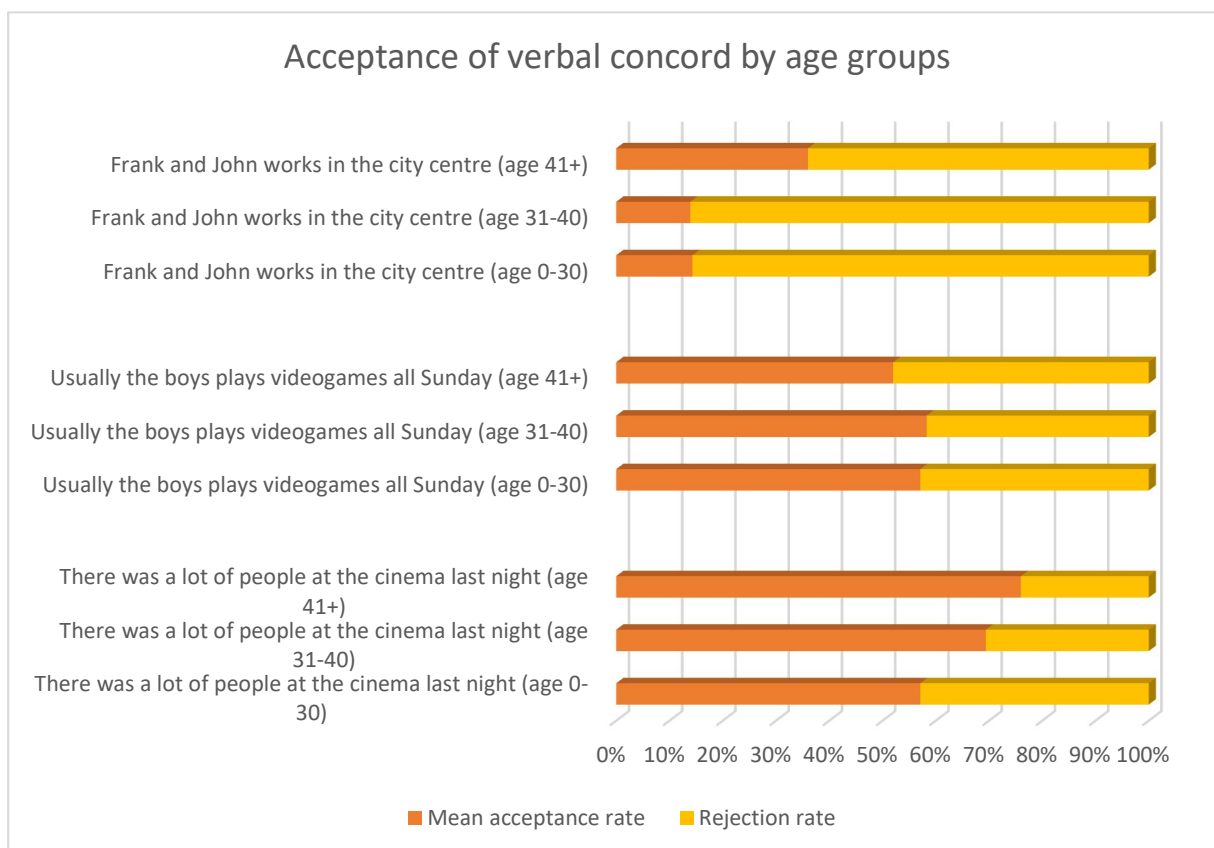


Figure 3.3.2 The graph shows the acceptance rate of verbal concord sorted by age groups, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

### 3.3.3 Extended Present Tense

Comparing the results of the generations who experienced education before, during and after the Celtic Tiger, it is possible to notice a decrease in the acceptance of the extended present tense. The first sample sentence presented in the survey, *I live in this house for two years*, was accepted as correct by 24% of respondents over 41. The acceptance rate decreased to 13.9% in the group of respondents aged 31-40, and slightly increased to 17.9% in the youngest group of respondents.

The second sample sentence, *He works here since the firm opened*, realized a mean acceptance rate of 48% in respondents aged 41 or more. The acceptance dropped to 44.4% in respondents aged 31-40, and decreased even further to 42.9% in the group of respondents until the age of 30. The



acceptance of both structures has therefore slowly but steadily decreased in the years across the economic boom.

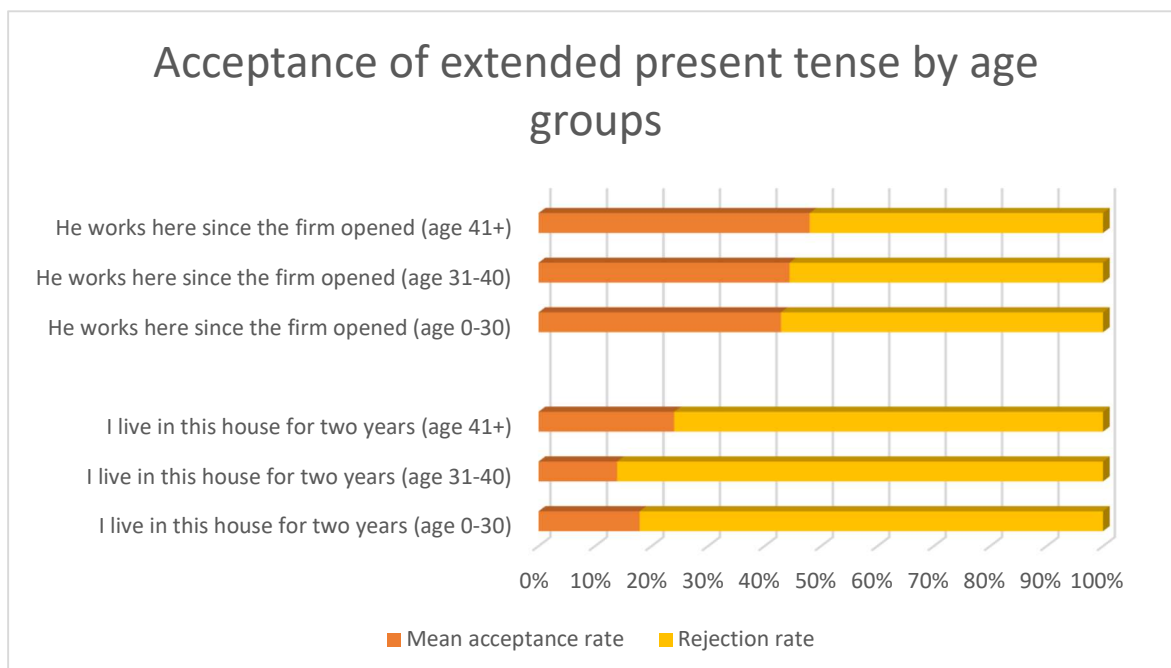


Figure 3.3.3 The graph shows the acceptance rate of the extended present tense sorted by age groups, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

### 3.3.4 After Perfective

The acceptance rates in my survey point to an important change in the perception of the *after* perfective. The first sample sentence, *John is after booking a table for 8 o'clock*, received a mean acceptance rate of 84% from respondents aged 41 or more. The rate increased to 91.7% in the respondents aged 31-40, and rose even higher to a mean acceptance rate of 96.4% in respondents aged 30 or less.

The trend is confirmed in the second sample sentence, *Mary is after finishing her project. She'll hand it in tomorrow*. Despite being set in a formal context, the sample sentence was accepted by 84% of respondents over 41, and by 100% of both respondents aged 31-40 and respondents under 31. Clearly, the economic boom, international contacts and changes in the education system did not undermine the high acceptance of this structure.

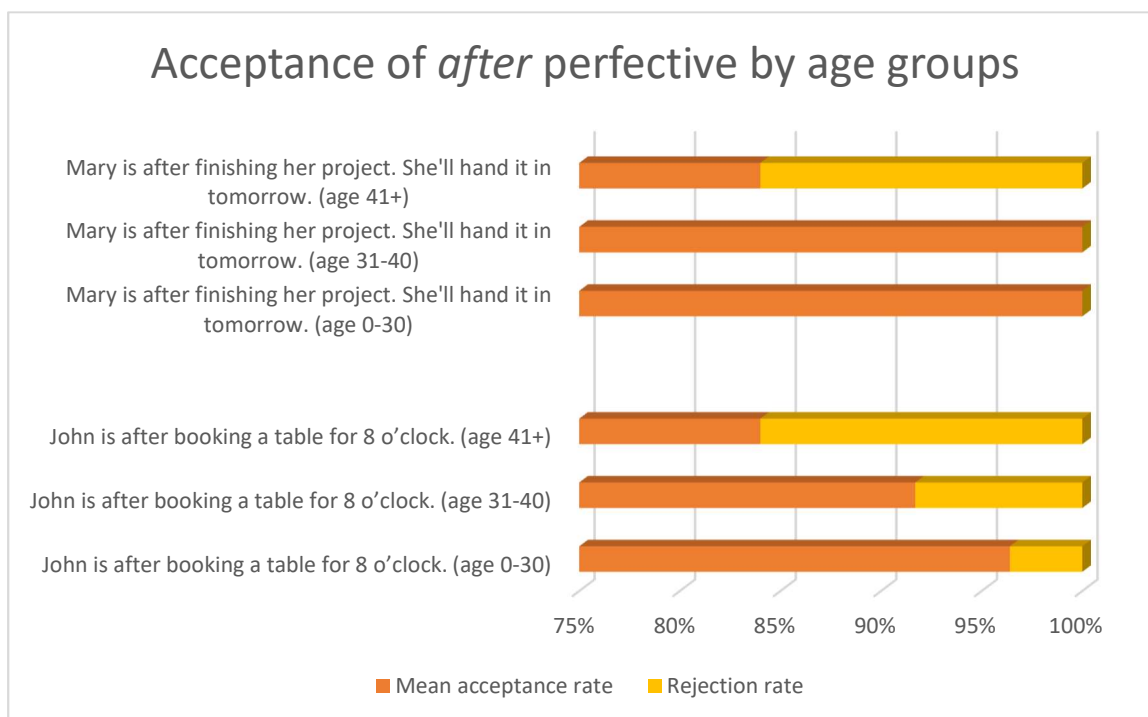


Figure 3.3.4 The graph shows the acceptance rate of the *after* perfective sorted by age groups, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

### 3.3.5 Resultative Perfective

Similarly to the other vernacular perfective structure used in Irish English, the *after* perfective, the resultative perfective received a high mean acceptance rate, which was only confirmed in the younger generations. The first sentence analysed in my survey, *I have the housework done, now I can finally relax*, scored a mean acceptance rate of 96% among respondents aged 41 or more, a value which was confirmed in the group of respondents aged 31-40, whose acceptance rose to 97.2%, and which increased even further to 100% among respondents under 31.

## Acceptance of resultative perfective by age groups

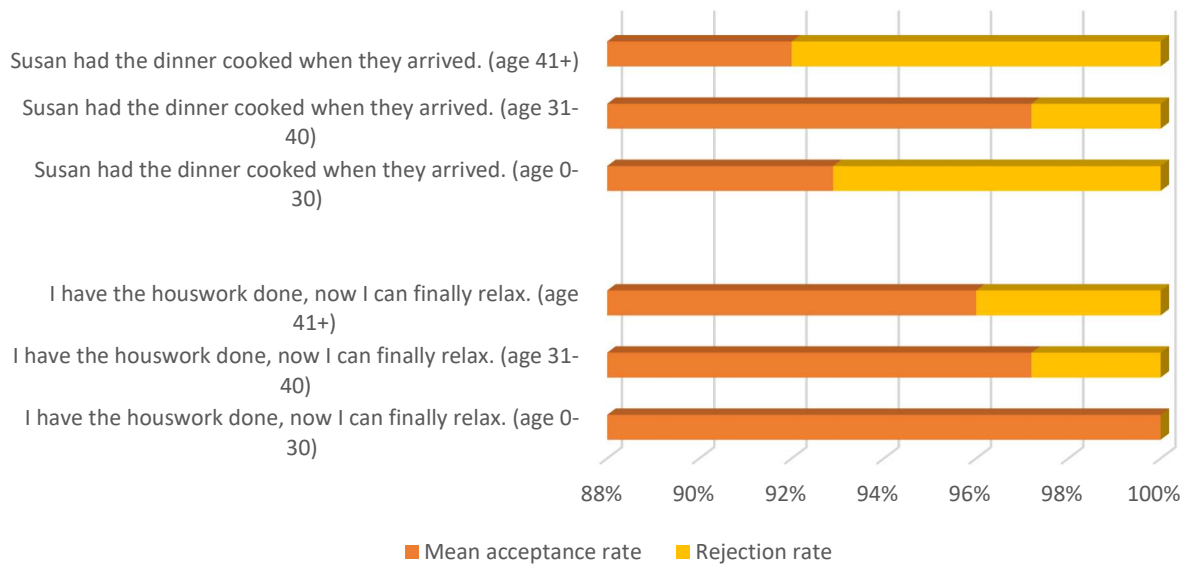


Figure 3.3.5 The graph shows the acceptance rate of the resultative perfective sorted by age groups, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

The perception of the second sentence presented to native Irish English speakers, *Susan had the dinner cooked when they arrived*, doesn't display relevant changes. The structure was considered correct by 92% of respondents aged 41 or more. The acceptance rate increased to 97.2% among respondents aged 31-40, and stabilized at 92.9% among respondents under 31. It is possible to confirm the stable or increased acceptance of this vernacular structure, despite the economic boom and school reforms.

### 3.3.6 Second Person Plural Pronouns

In my survey I have investigated two instances of the usage of second person plural pronouns *ye* and *youse*. The acceptance rate to the first sample sentence, *Are ye coming to the cinema with us tonight?* did not manifest relevant changes within the time frame analysed. 92% of respondents aged 42 or more considered the structure as correct. The acceptance rate slightly increased to 94.4% among respondents belonging to the second group, and stabilized at 92.9% among respondents under 31 years of age.

## Acceptance of second person plural pronouns by age groups

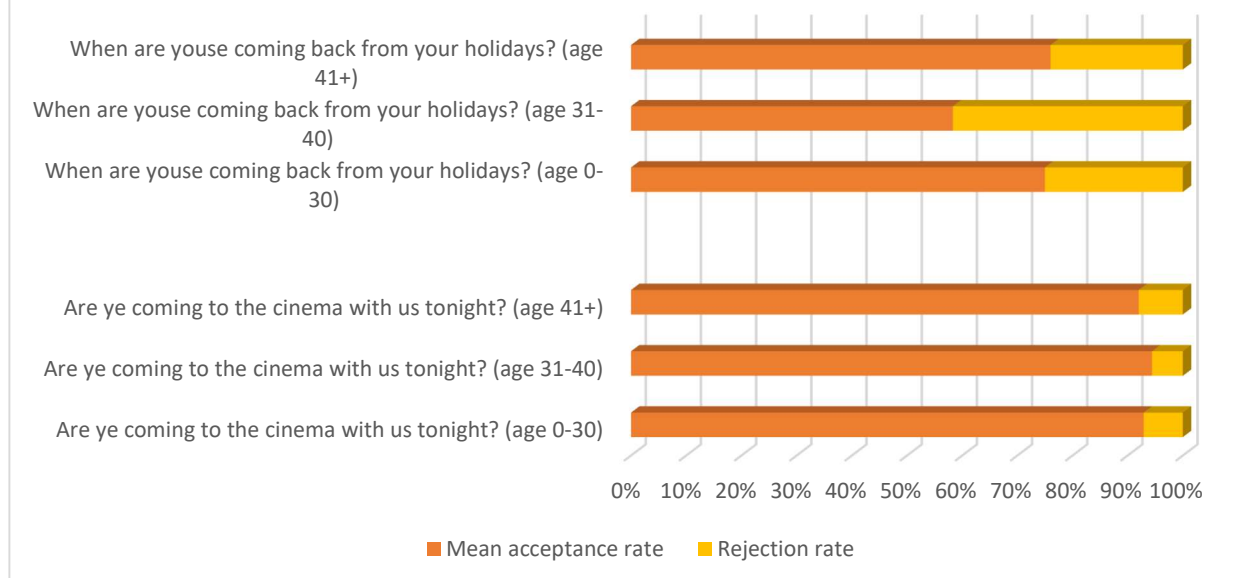


Figure 3.3.6 The graph shows the acceptance rate of second person plural pronouns sorted by age groups, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

The acceptance rate observed for the pronoun *youse* shows a wavering pattern similar to that previously seen in *bees*. The sentence *When are youse coming back from your holidays* was accepted as correct by 76% of respondents aged 41 or more, while the acceptance rate dropped to 58.3% in respondents between the age of 31 and 40. Acceptance rose back to 75% in respondents aged 30 or less, suggesting once again that the structure went through a phase of ‘refusal’ by speakers, possibly due to its vernacular salience, and is still regarded as inconvenient by the generation who attended school during the years of the economic boom.

### 3.3.7 Stressed Reflexive Pronouns

After passing through what can be referred to as the ‘filter’ represented by the cultural impact that the Celtic Tiger had on Ireland, the attitude displayed by Irish English speakers towards stressed reflexive pronouns has shifted towards a higher level of acceptance of this vernacular feature. The first sample sentence I have included in my survey, *I might have an ice-cream myself after*, realized

a mean acceptance rate of 84% among respondents aged 41 or more. The rate rose to 88.9% in respondents aged 31 to 40, and further increased to 96.4% in respondents under 31. The second sentence presented in my survey, *Were they at the meeting too or was it just himself?*, showed a similar pattern. 84% of respondents aged 41 or more accepted the structure, and the acceptance rate increased to 86.1% in respondents between 31 and 40 years of age, and to 92.9% in respondents under 31. The raising trend which can be observed in both cases, points to a higher acceptance of the structure, which despite being vernacular, was not affected by the competition with standard linguistic varieties possibly felt during the years of economic growth.

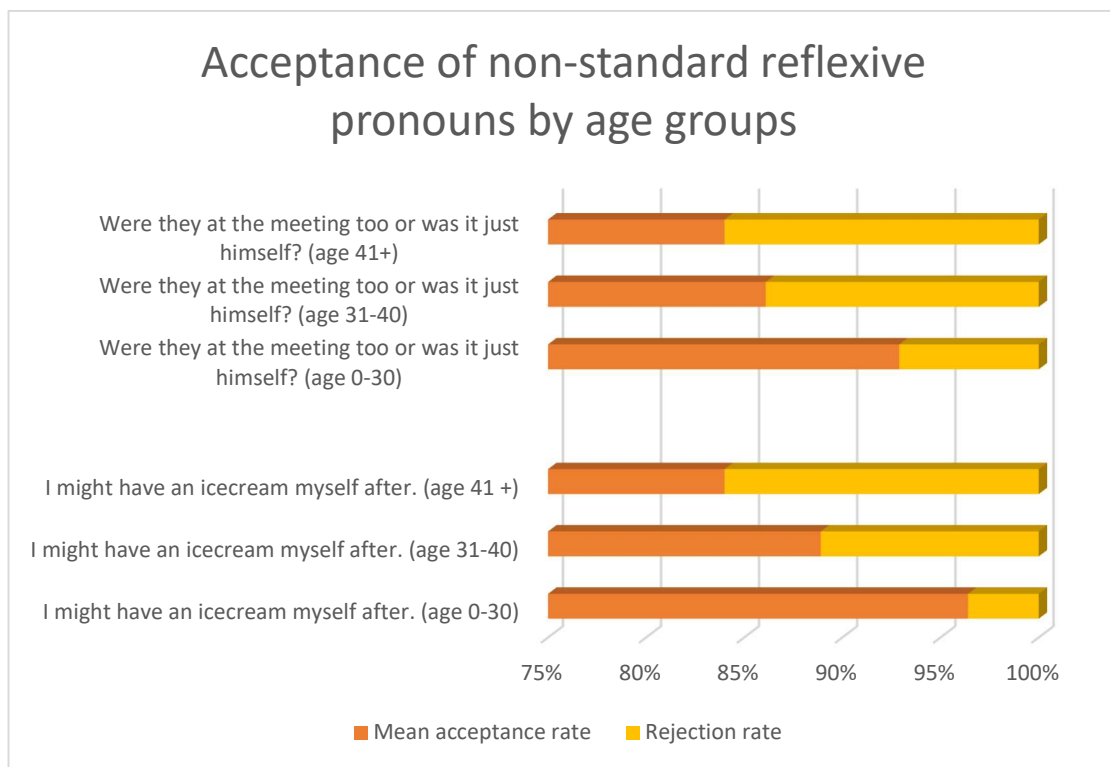


Figure 3.3.4 The graph shows the acceptance rate of non-standard reflexive pronouns sorted by age groups, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

### 3.3.8 Responsives

Responsive structures are very well accepted by native Irish English speakers of all ages. There appears to be a further increase in the acceptance of this vernacular structure in the two age groups comprising speakers who attended school during or after the economic boom. In fact the first

sample dialogue, *A: are you tired? B: I am. It's been a hard day*, scored a mean acceptance rate of 96% among respondents aged 41 or more, and the acceptance increases to 100% for respondents aged 31-40 and less than 31. The second sample dialogue presents a similar pattern: *A:is Josephine angry with me? B: she isn't. She is just a bit moody* received a mean acceptance rate of 99% from respondents aged 41 or more, and once again the acceptance rate increases to 100% for the other two groups, comprising respondents aged 31-40 and under 31 years of age. Responsives are therefore part of the structures which have not been affected by the economic growth of the country, or by the education reforms enacted in the nineties.

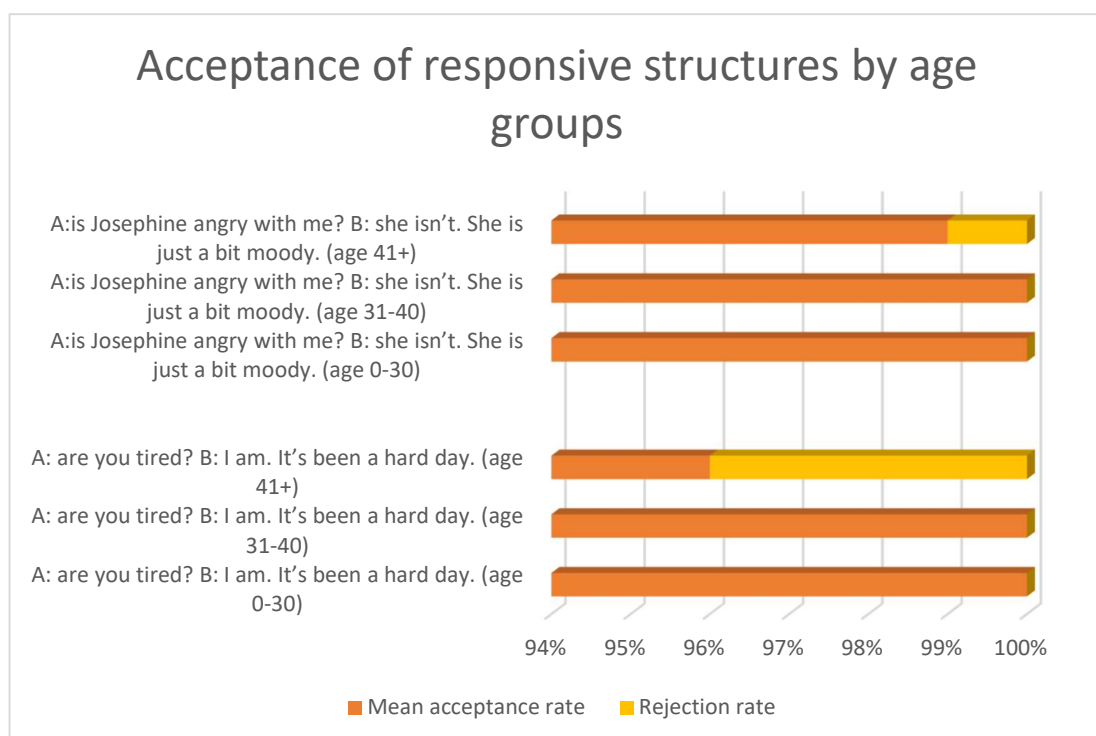


Figure 3.3.8 The graph shows the acceptance rate of responsives sorted by age groups, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

### 3.3.9 Emphatic Tags

Considering the scarce analytic evidence concerning this structure, its examination has been particularly interesting, as the results have presented a large and increasing acceptance of this vernacular structure, confirming its widespread use not only in Northern Ireland, where it had been observed during some recordings carried out by the British Library, but also in the Republic of

Ireland. Particularly of interest is the way the structure has become more accepted from the generation touched by the Celtic Tiger onwards, among the age ranges analysed in this survey.

The first sample sentence included in my survey, *He has already finished the book you gave him so he has*, scored a mean acceptance rate of 72% among speakers aged 41 and above. The acceptance rate steadily increases of about 9 points per group, first to 80.6% among the respondents aged 31-40, who were affected in greater measure by the economic growth, and raised even further among the youngest group of respondents, aged 30 or less, touching an acceptance rate of 89.3%.

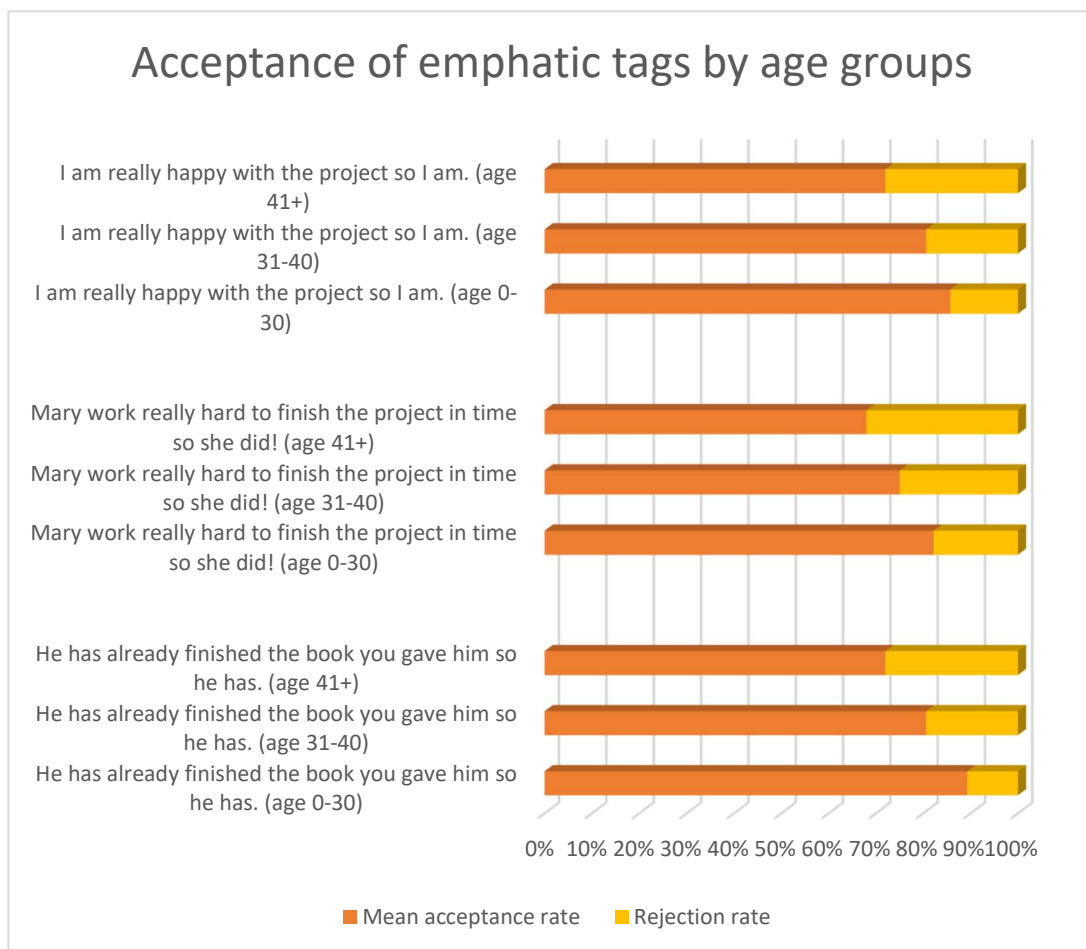


Figure 3.3.4 The graph shows the acceptance rate of emphatic tags sorted by age groups, according to the data collected in my 2015 survey.

The second sample sentence analysed followed a similar trend. *Mary work really hard to finish the project in time so she did!*, obtained a mean acceptance rate of 68% from respondents aged 41 or more. Once again, the acceptance rate increased of 7 points in the group of respondents aged 31-40, reaching a mean acceptance rate of 75%, and acquired 7 more points in the acceptance rate of 82.2% expressed by the group of respondents aged 30 or less.

The third sample sentence, *I am really happy with the project so I am*, confirms what previously observed in the other two sample sentences. The sentence was accepted by 72% of respondents aged 41 or more. The acceptance rose to 80.6% among respondents aged 31-40, and reached an acceptance rate of 85.7% among respondents aged 30 or less. The results observed in the different age groups confirm the increased acceptance of this vernacular structure in the age group which attended school during the economic boom, and by the age group which attended school in its aftermath. It is therefore possible to speculate that this vernacular structure was not influenced by the linguistically selective environment possibly brought on by the Celtic Tiger, which has led respondents to an increased rejection of other vernacular structures.



## Chapter 4

### The Second Attitude Survey

In light of the findings yielded by my 2015 research, I decided to run a second survey in an attempt to pinpoint the possible emergence of the attitudes observed, and to consider the possible evolution of linguistic attitudes in newer generations, and the eventual role played by the education system in the development of sensitivity towards syntactic non-standard structures. I have collected the structures used in my 2015 survey, and, in order to facilitate the cooperation with teachers who would adhere to my project, I have created just one sample sentence per structure, adapting the context to one that primary school children could be familiar with. The age range targeted was between 9 and 12 years. Categories specifying the perception of a certain structure were simplified as well. Respondents were asked to read the sentences, and decide whether, in their opinion, the sentences represented an instance of *good English* or of *bad English*. I decided to restrict my area of analysis to Co. Longford, in consideration of the rural nature of the area, and the distance from big cities.

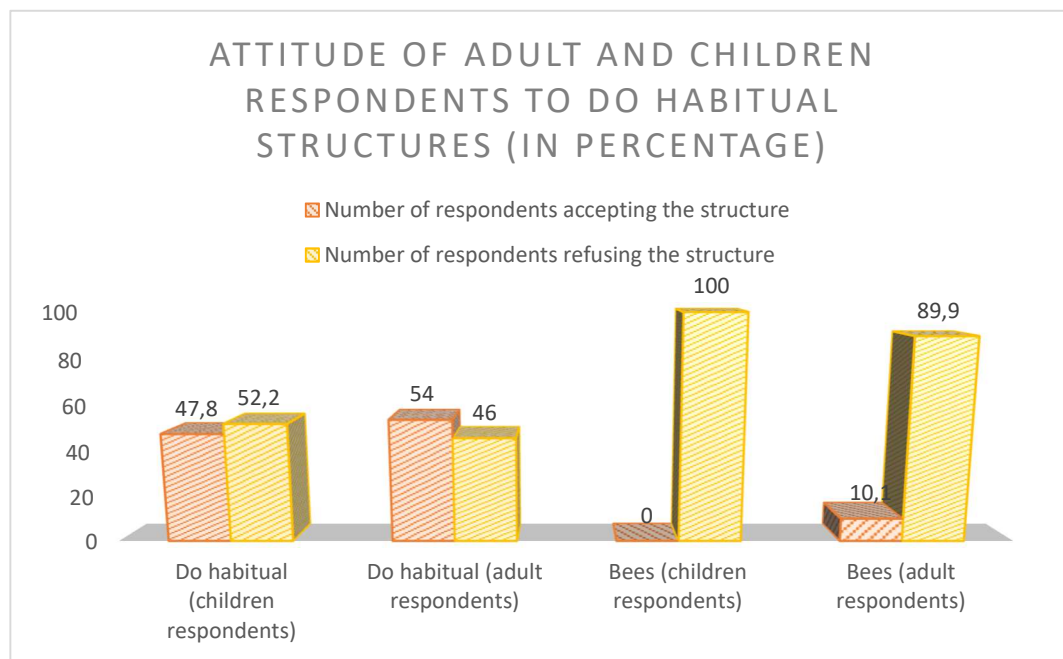
After contacting over 40 schools by mail with no results, I finally managed to get in contact with St Colmcille National School/Scoil Naisiunta Naomh Colmcille in Aughnaccliffe, Co. Longford. The surveys were emailed to teacher Geraldine Kiernan, who ran the surveys on two groups of children aged 9-12. The survey presented to children had a total of eighteen questions, of which two open questions investigating gender and age, and sixteen multiple choice questions analysing the attitude towards salient vernacular structures. Of these, four questions were ‘dummy’ questions, to check that respondents weren’t answering randomly. Dummy questions proved that the students read the questions and did not answer casually, and the teacher reported children giggling when they came across the sentence which contained some obvious mistakes. A total of 46 surveys were collected, of which 25 were completed by boys and 21 by girls. An initial analysis of the responses showed some interesting findings. A number of children would change their mind about the correctness of the structures proposed, which would suggest an uncertainty or an attitude not yet fully developed. One boy in particular, not satisfied with the two options *good English* and *bad English*, added a third one of his own, *good enough*: this would once again prove that the children’s linguistic sensibility is still under development.

In the following chapter, I will analyse my findings in comparison to those yielded by adult respondents. For this purpose, the results of my 2015 survey showing a positive attitude to the structure will be presented as a mean acceptance rate and as a refusal rate, in order to be consistent with the simplified options children could choose from. Where two sample questions were included in the first survey, an average mean acceptance rate will here be provided. After this analysis, I will compare the answers given by boys to those given by girls, with the objective to investigate the development of gender-based linguistic sensibility at an early age.

## 4.1 A Compared Analysis of Linguistic Attitudes of Children and Adults

### 4.1.1 *Do* Habitual

In order to sample the attitude of children to the *do*-habitual structure, I have included two sentences, the first testing *do* habitual, the second sampling the perception for *bees*. The first sample sentence, *We do be visiting grandma on Saturdays*, was regarded as an instance of good English by 47.8% of children, while 52.2% considered it as bad English. Comparing these results to those yielded by adult respondents, we can notice the attitudes towards the structure is different. Adults



appear to be more tolerant towards the *do* habitual, the average mean acceptance rate for the two sentences *They do be visiting us from time to time* and *She does be working*

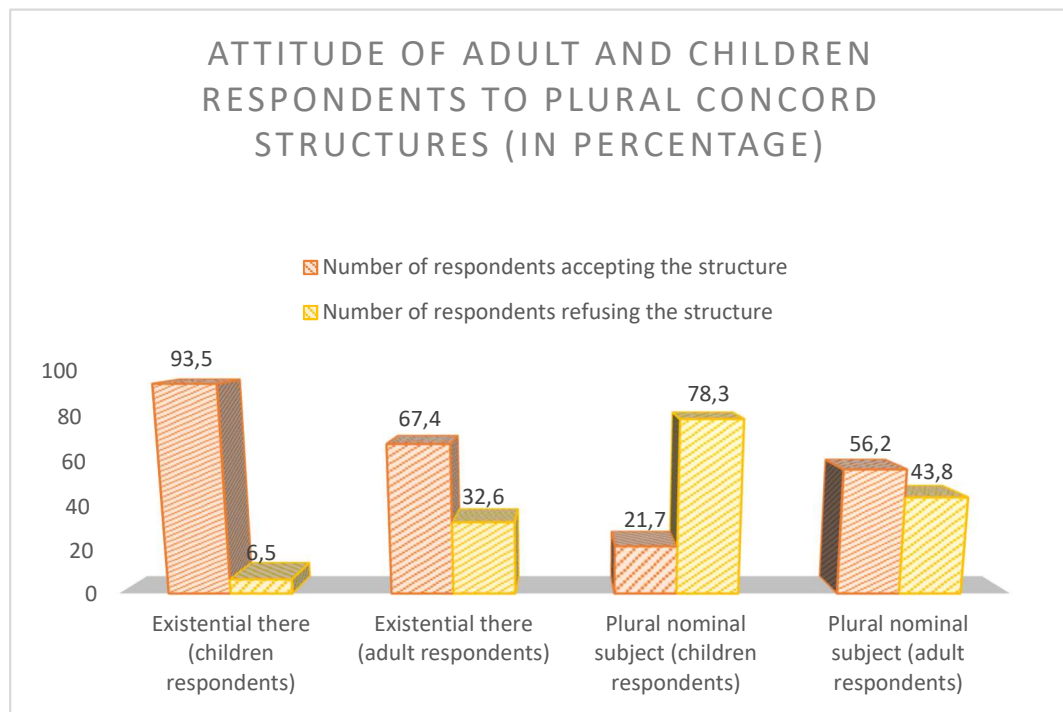
Figure 4.1.1 The graph compares the linguistic attitude of adult respondents to my 2015 survey to that of children respondents to my 2017 survey, in regard to habitual structures.

overtime when asked being 54%, against a refusal rate of 46%.

A slightly higher threshold of tolerance for vernacular structures in adults appears also from the analysis of the sample sentence using *bees*. The sentence proposed to children, *My friends bees playing football in the park in summer*, received a very poor acceptance. Whereas 100% of children feel that the structure is bad English, 10.1% of adults accept its use as exemplified in the sentence *The kids bees watching cartoons all the time*, and 89.9% regard it as wrong. The results concerning both habitual structures in Irish English show therefore how children have a higher linguistic sensibility than adult respondents.

#### 4.1.2 Verbal Concord

Differently from the research carried out on adults in 2015, I have decided, due to organizational restraints, to include in this survey only two instances of verbal concord. The first analyses the



perception of the existential *there*, and the second contains a plural nominal subject. In the first sentence, *There was a lot of people at the cinema yesterday*, the acceptance rate yielded by children is very high: 93.5% see

Figure 4.1.2 The graph compares the linguistic attitude of adult respondents to my 2015 survey to that of children respondents to my 2017 survey, in regard to plural concord structures

the structure as an example of good English, and only 6.5% consider it as bad English. A very similar sentence was proposed to adult respondents, *There was a lot of people at the cinema last*

*night*, which received a mean acceptance rate of 67.4%, significantly lower than children. 32.6% of adults regarded the structure as not acceptable, five times as much as children. A possible reason for the lesser awareness displayed by children could be the early stage of education of the respondents, together with the fact that the use of existential *there* is not a salient vernacular feature of Irish English.

A possible confirmation of this hypothesis is the much lower tolerance expressed by children for the verbal concord with a plural nominal subject. The sentence *My brothers plays videogames all afternoon* received an acceptance rate of only 21.7%, while 78.3% of respondents considered the structure as bad English. The linguistic sensibility shown by adult respondents is once again lower: the mean acceptance rate for the sentence *Usually the boys plays videogames all Sunday* is 56.2%, with 43.8% considering the structure as not acceptable. It is possible to notice how in children the acceptance rate has dropped drastically for a more salient structure like verbal concord with a plural nominal subject.

#### 4.1.3 Extended Present Tense

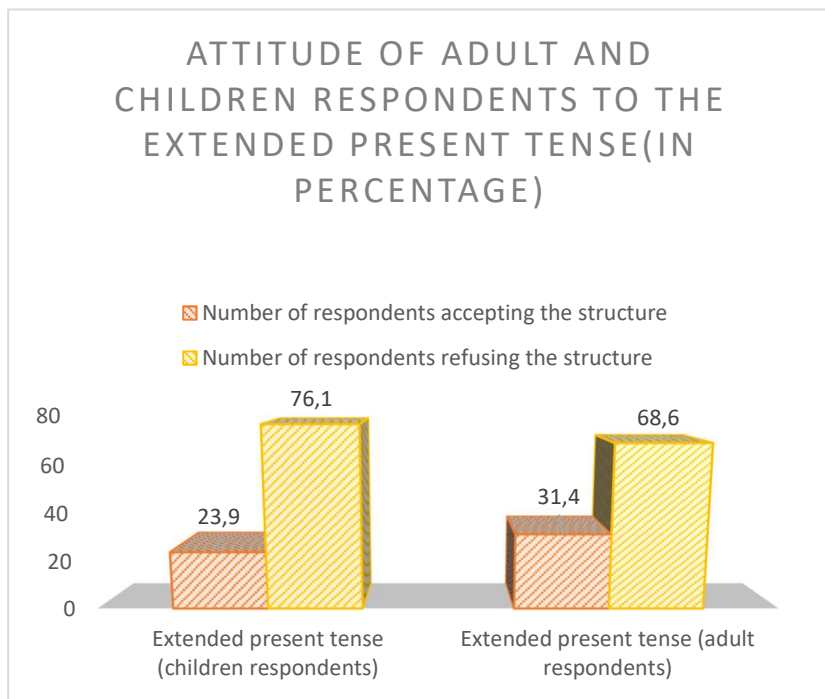


Figure 4.1.3 The graph compares the linguistic attitude of adult respondents to my 2015 survey to that of children respondents to my 2017 survey, in regard to the extended present tense

The extended present tense is another structure which presents an overall low acceptance rate. The average mean acceptance rate reached by the two sentences representing the extended present tense in my 2015 survey, *I live in this house for two years* and *He works here since the firm opened*, is 31.4%, while 68.6% perceived the structure as not acceptable. The acceptance rate drops even further in my 2017 survey to primary schools. The sample

sentence *I play the guitar since 2014* has received a mean acceptance rate of 23.9%, while 76.1% of respondents see it as an instance of an incorrect use of English. Once again it is apparent how the newer generations have a higher sensibility in the perception of vernacular structures.

#### 4.1.4 After-perfective

Despite being a salient vernacular structure, the after perfective has received a high acceptance rate in both surveys. In my 2015 survey I had included two sentences sampling this structure, *John is after booking a table for 8 o'clock* and *Mary is after finishing her project. She will hand it in tomorrow*, which received an average mean acceptance rate of 93.25%, while as little as 6.75% of respondents considered the structure

as incorrect. The survey I carried out on primary school children in Spring 2017 confirms this trend.

93.5% of students regard the structure as an instance of good English, while only 6.5% perceive it as incorrect. The results prove therefore that the *after-perfective* structure is widely accepted as being correct both by adults and by the newer generations, indicating that there is little awareness of this ancient vernacular structure, and that it is possibly being accepted in a superregional register.

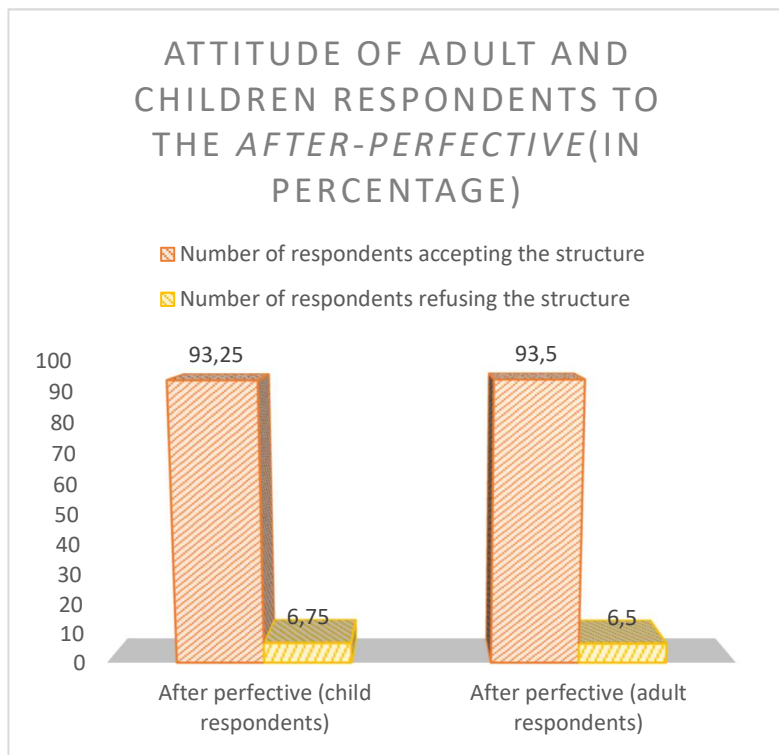


Figure 5 Figure 4.1.4 The graph compares the linguistic attitude of adult respondents to my 2015 survey to that of children respondents to my 2017 survey, in regard to the after-perfective

#### 4.1.5 Resultative Perfective

The high acceptance of this structure is once more replicated in my 2017 survey. In my 2015 survey the average mean acceptance rate of the two proposed sentences, *I have the housework done, now I can finally relax* and *Susan had the dinner cooked when they arrived* is of 96.1%, with as little as 3.9% considering the structure not acceptable. This trend is confirmed among school children: in my 2017 survey, the sample sentence *I'm after finishing my homework, can I watch TV now?* has received an acceptance rate of 91.3%, with only 8.7% of respondents labelling the structure as bad English. Once more, the high acceptance of this vernacular structure suggests either a very low level of awareness or a very tolerant attitude towards it.

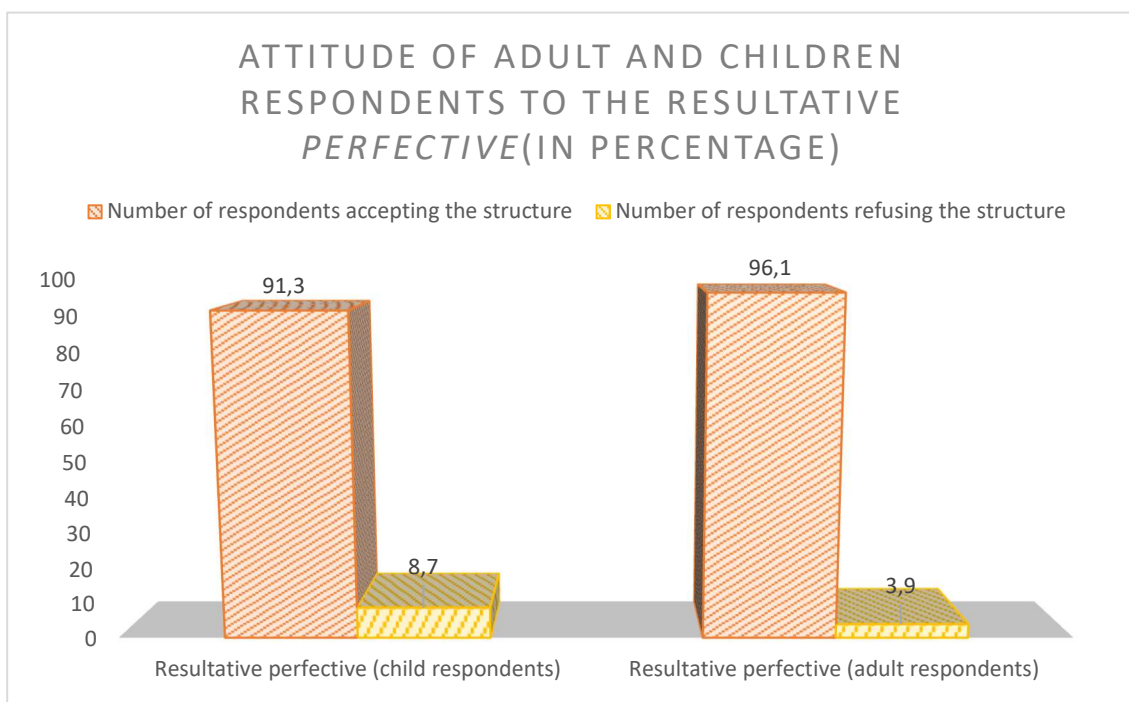


Figure 4.1.5 The graph compares the linguistic attitude of adult respondents to my 2015 survey to that of children respondents to my 2017 survey, in regard to the resultative perfective

#### 4.1.6 Second Person Plural Pronouns

In my first attitude survey, I included two sentences sampling the acceptance of second person plural pronouns in Irish English. The first sentence, *Are ye coming to the cinema with us tonight?* analysed the attitude towards the non-standard second person plural pronoun *ye*, and the mean acceptance rate it received was a notable 93.2%, a sign that the structure was well accepted. The

second sentence, *When are youse coming back from your holidays?*, investigated the perception of the vernacular form *youse*. The mean acceptance rate it received was 68.5%, showing a lower acceptance for this structure, and a higher awareness of its vernacularity.

The same pronouns were included in the survey I ran in 2017 on primary school children. The sentence exemplifying the pronoun *ye*, *Are ye coming to the cinema with us tomorrow?*, was accepted as correct by 34.8% of respondents, while 65.2% of children perceived it as incorrect, underlining a sharp decrease in the acceptance rate, and possibly a higher awareness of the vernacularity of this structure. Acceptance dropped even further for the sentence sampling the non-standard pronoun *youse*, *When are youse back from your holidays?:* only 17.4% of children responding to the survey marked it as correct, while a staggering majority of 82.6% considered it incorrect. In light of these results, it is possible to state that there is indeed a higher sensibility towards vernacular structures in newer generations.

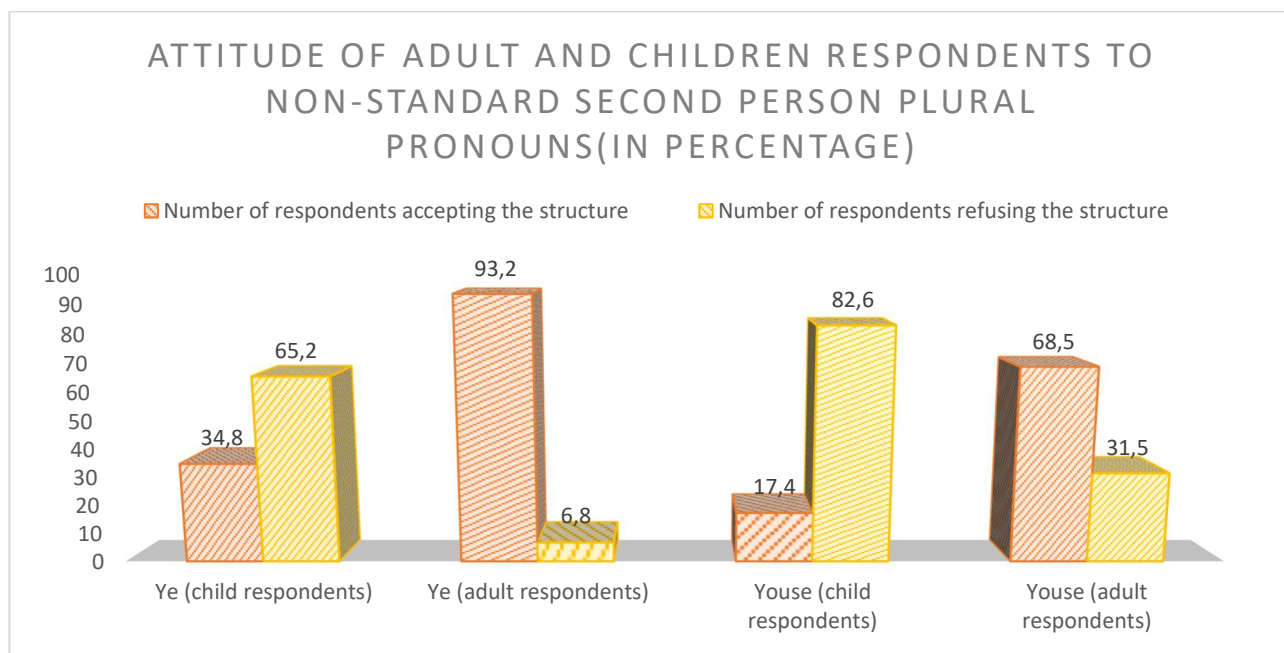


Figure 4.1.6 The graph compares the linguistic attitude of adult respondents to my 2015 survey to that of children respondents to my 2017 survey, in regard to non-standard second person plural pronouns

#### 4.1.7 Stressed Reflexive Pronouns

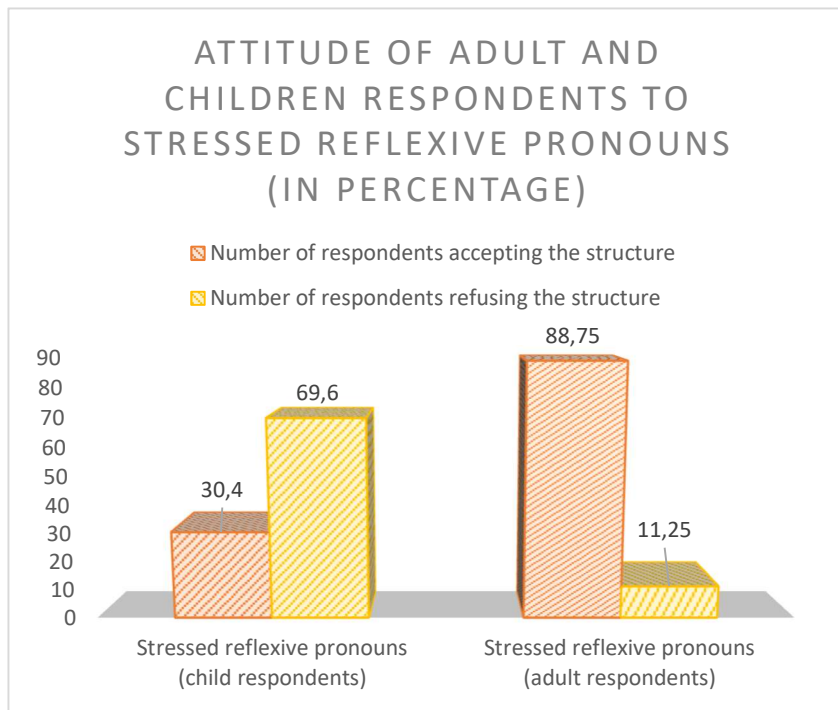


Figure 4.1.7 The graph compares the linguistic attitude of adult respondents to my 2015 survey to that of children respondents to my 2017 survey, in regard to stressed reflexive pronouns

The sentence I added to my 2017 survey to sample another salient feature of Irish English, that is the stressed use of reflexive pronoun, received an overall low acceptance. *I might drink some orange juice myself later* was regarded as good English by a minority of the children taking the survey (30.4%), while a majority of 69.6% considered the structure as incorrect. These results show a sharp decline in respect to the trend that appeared in my 2015 survey. The average mean

acceptance rate of the two phrases which were proposed, *I might have an ice cream myself after* and *Were they at the meeting too, or was it just himself?*, is a remarkable 88.75%, with only 11.25% considering the structure as incorrect. Once again, the results point to an increase in the linguistic sensibility among children between the age of 9 and 12.

#### 4.1.8 Responsives

In my first survey, responsives, that is expressions used in Irish English to express consent or dissent, while omitting the words *yes* and *no* which are instead normally used in standard British English, received a high mean acceptance rate. Initially two sample dialogues were included, the first sampling a positive answer (*A: Are you tired? B: I am. It's been a hard day*), the second exemplifying a negative answer (*A: Is Josephine angry with me? B: She isn't. She is just a bit moody*). The average mean acceptance rate observed in adults for this structure is 98.9%, with as little as 1.1% of respondents considering the structure as incorrect. It is interesting to observe that



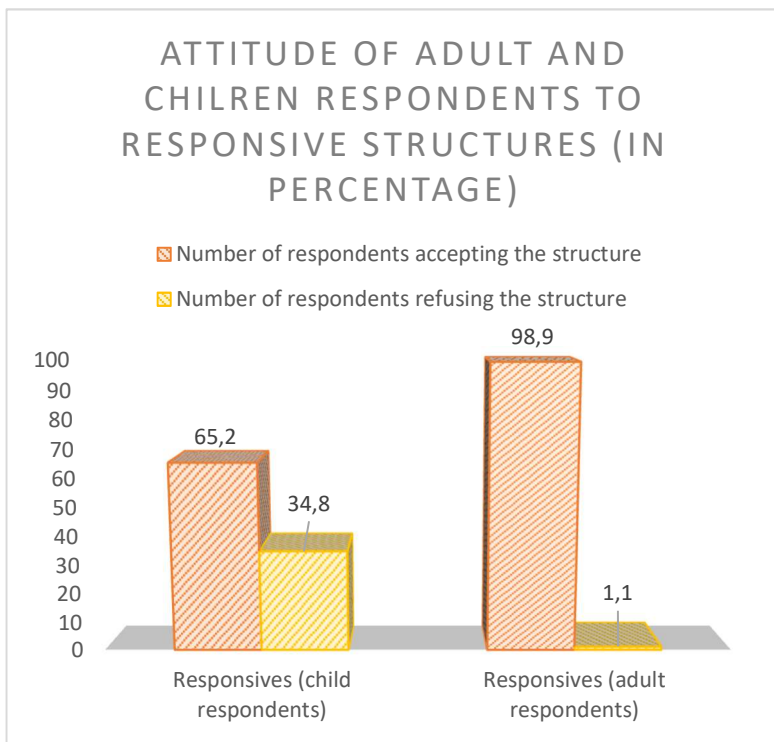


Figure 4.1.8 The graph compares the linguistic attitude of adult respondents to my 2015 survey to that of children respondents to my 2017 survey, in regard to responsive structures

once again the acceptance rate has noticeably dropped in the responses provided by children: the sample dialogue A: "Are you tired?" B: "I am. I have been studying a lot." Has received an acceptance rate of 65.2%, and a surprising 34.8% regard the structure as incorrect. Once again it can be observed that children have developed a higher linguistic sensibility towards vernacular structures than the older generations analysed in my 2015 survey.

#### 4.1.9 Emphatic Tags

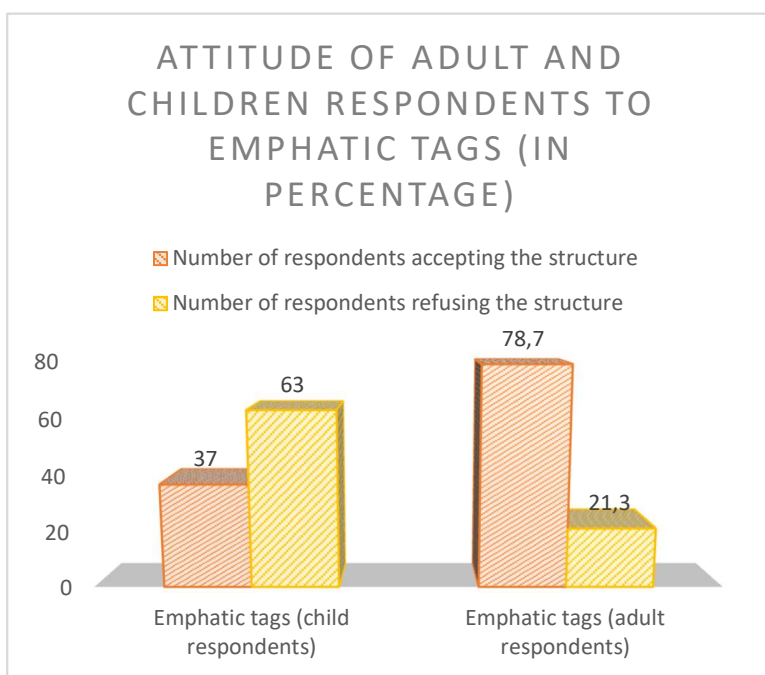


Figure 4.1.9 The graph compares the linguistic attitude of adult respondents to my 2015 survey to that of children respondents to my 2017 survey, in regard to emphatic tags

In my 2015 survey I had included three sentences containing emphatic tags, to analyse the attitudes towards this structure, which had not been analysed before, with the auxiliaries *do*, *be* and *have*. In the survey carried out on primary school children in 2017, I had to reduce the sample sentences to only one example, due to organizational constraints. The structure was well accepted by adult speakers: the average mean acceptance rate offered by the 89

adult respondents in 2015 is 78.7%, while 21.3% of respondents regarded the structure as incorrect. Only 37% of primary school children who responded to my 2017 survey instead decided that the structure is correct, while a majority of 63% consider it as not acceptable. The analysis of this vernacular structure too offers an instance of how the newer generations are becoming more sensitive to language varieties than adults, and how their attitude towards vernacular structures seems to favour standard linguistic varieties.

#### **4.2 The Role of Gender in Linguistic Attitude in Primary School Children**

As previously seen analysing the linguistic attitudes of adult respondents to my 2015 survey, males and females respond in different ways to linguistic varieties and to vernacular structures. Wareing (2009:77-82) described the disparity between sexes in the English language, and pointed to the inequality of speaking time between men and women, a pattern that can be seen also in school classrooms (2009:86-87). According to social psychologists, the higher prestige enjoyed by standard British English represents a tool for empowerment for women, who, when adopting RP are regarded as more self-confident, intelligent, competitive, and both more feminine and more masculine. This contradictory phenomenon is explained by Bem (1974, 1975) as a psychological androgyny which provides several benefits to underprivileged female speakers (Coates, 66). Male speakers instead appear to favour non-standard forms as an expression of solidarity with one another (Coates, 67).

Eckert points out that, according to her research, the attitudes within groups of females are not as homogenous as it seems, and believes that, within what she calls linguistic markets language represents a type of 'symbolic' capital that women are allowed to accumulate, while the majority of material capital is under male control. Owning more than one linguistic variety would therefore allow for a higher versatility and the possibility to seize better occasions and to adapt to the multiple roles demanded of women from society (Coates, 67-68).

In my 2015 survey I observed this same pattern among respondents: women were indeed more sensitive to linguistic varieties, and condemned vernacular structures more than men did. Upon investigating this same aspect in my 2017 research on primary school children aged between 9 and

12, I was surprised to find that the same linguistic awareness I had observed in adult women is already present. As will be seen in the analysis of the data obtained by the survey, girls between the age of 9 and 12 already display a higher linguistic sensibility towards non-standard structures than boys of the same age.

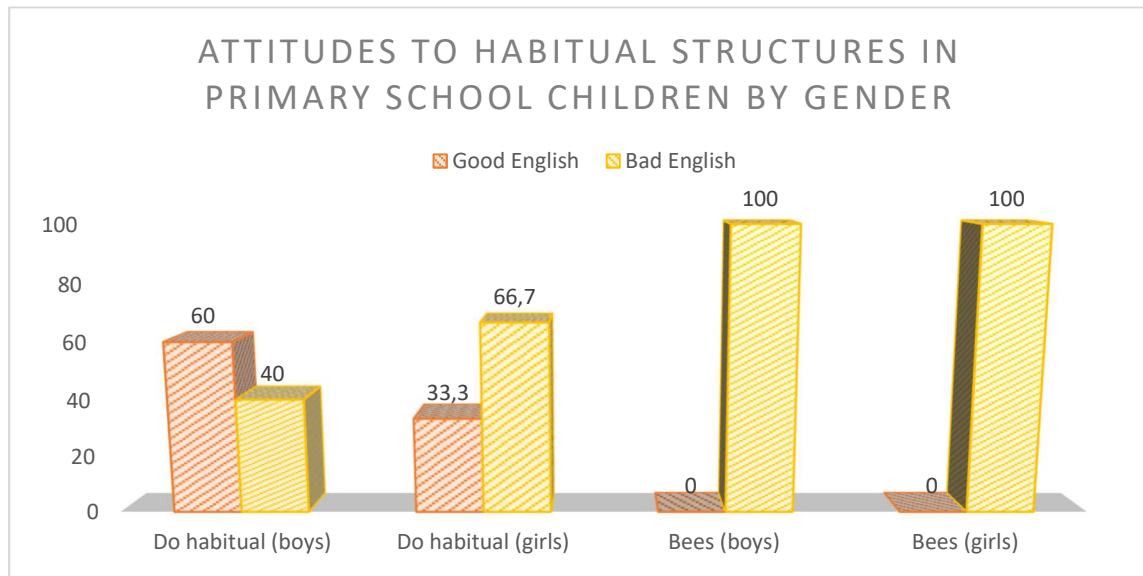


Figure 4.2.1 The graph shows the different attitudes of children respondents to my 2017 survey sorted by gender, in regard to habitual structures

#### 4.2.1 Do Habitual

In the survey presented to primary school children, two sample sentences exemplifying habitual structures were included. The first sentence, *We do be visiting grandma on Saturdays*, sampled the *do*-habitual structure. The overall acceptance rate for this sentence is 47.8%, while 52.2% considered the structure as incorrect. The division of the respondents in two groups based on gender, provides significant differences in the results. While the structure was regarded as ‘good English’ by 60% of the boys, only 33.3% of girls accepted it, and a majority of 66.7% rejected it as ‘bad English’. Girls taking the survey were therefore much more aware than boys that this structure is in fact vernacular. The results for the second sentence, sampling the use of *bees*, is much more homogenous. Both boys and girls as a matter of fact refused the structure completely.

## 4.2.2 Verbal Concord

The two sample sentences proposed to children in this survey do not show discrepant results, but the sensibility to non-standard forms appears to be rather homogenous. The first sentence proposed, *There was a lot of people at the cinema yesterday,* sampling the existential *there*, has received an

overall acceptance rate of 93.5%, with only 6.5% of

respondents perceiving the structure as incorrect. Analysing the data by gender, we can see that the acceptance rate expressed by boys is 92%, while 95.2% of girls regarded the proposed sentence as correct and that 8% of boys and 4.8% of girls regard the structure as incorrect.

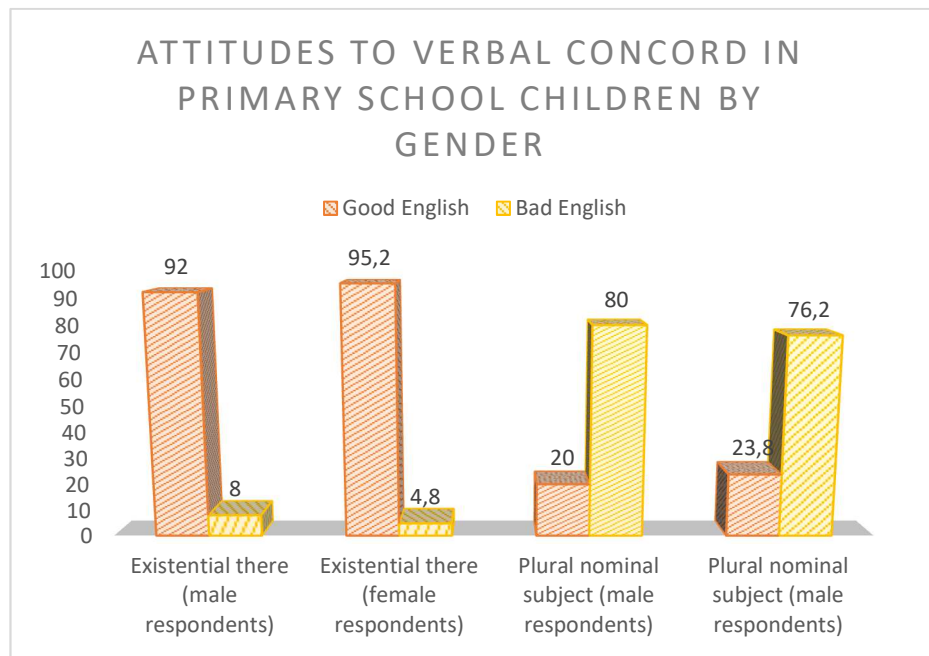
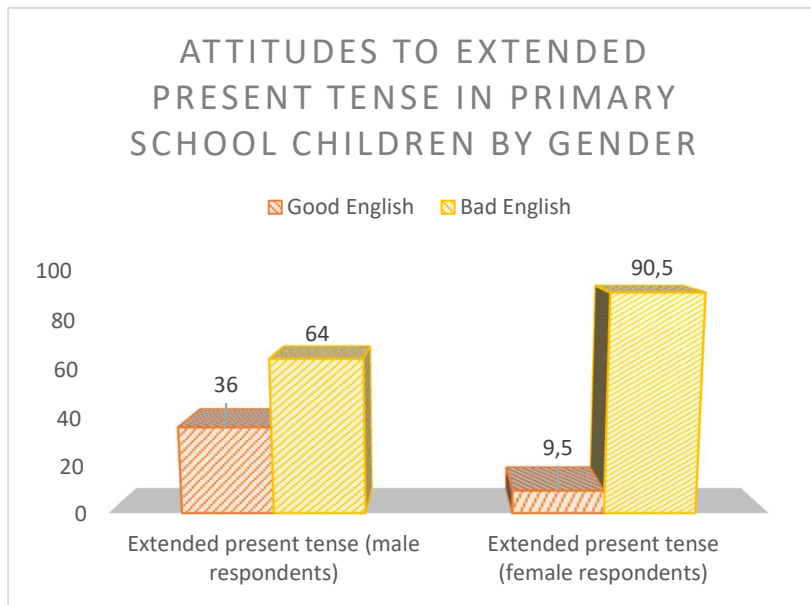


Figure 4.2.2 The graph shows the different attitudes of children respondents to my 2017 survey sorted by gender, in regard to verbal concord

The second sample sentence, *My brothers plays videogames all afternoon,* exemplified the use of plural accord with a plural nominal subject. The overall mean acceptance rate is 21.7%, and once again the data divided by gender is homogenous: 20% of boys and 23.8% of girls considers the structure as correct, while 80% of boys and 76.2% of girls regard it as ‘bad English’. Once again, there doesn’t appear to be a relevant difference in the perception of this structure based on gender.

### 4.2.3 Extended Present Tense

The extended use of the present tense was not well accepted by children. Only 23.9% accepted the sample sentence *I play the guitar since 2014* as ‘good English’, while a majority of 76.1%



considered it as incorrect. It is interesting to notice that, while 36% of boys accepted the structure, and a majority of 64% deemed it incorrect, only 9.5% of girls regarded it as ‘good English’, and a staggering 90.5% considered it as ‘bad English’. It is evident that girls perceive the vernacularity of this non-standard

structure much more than boys.

Figure 4.2.3 The graph shows the different attitudes of children respondents to my 2017 survey sorted by gender, in regard to the extended present tense

### 4.2.4 After Perfective

The high acceptance rate of the *after perfective* doesn’t show relevant differences of acceptance based on gender. The sample sentence *I’m after finishing my homework, can I watch TV now?* Received an acceptance rate of 93.5%. The structure was considered as an instance of ‘good English’ by 92% of boys and by 95.2% of girls, while only 8% of

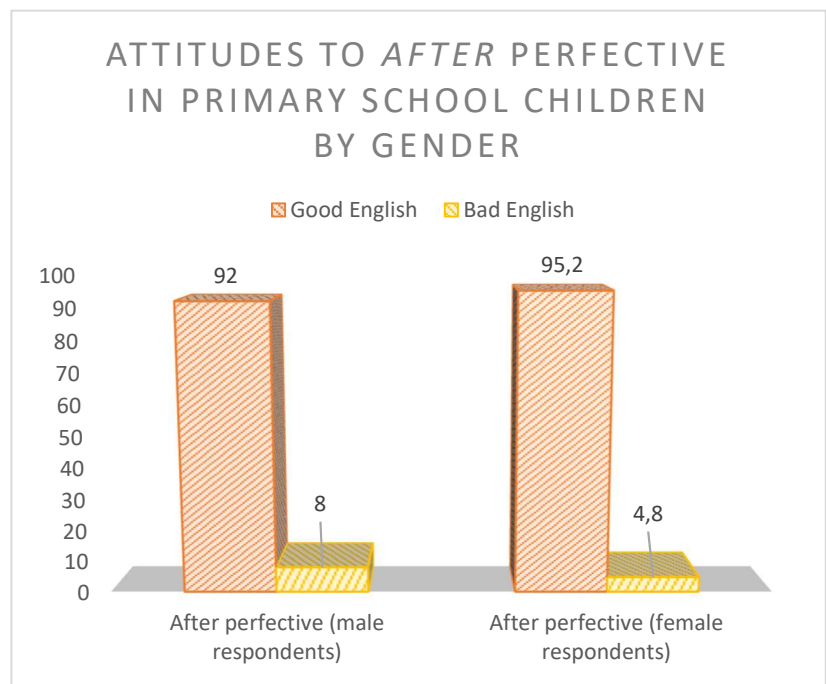


Figure 4.2.4 The graph shows the different attitudes of children respondents to my 2017 survey sorted by gender, in regard to the after-perfective

boys and 4.8% of girls considered it as incorrect. Based on these results it is possible to say that the attitude of children between 9 and 12 concerning the *after* perfective, an ancient tell-tale vernacular structure of Irish English, is homogenous and open.

#### 4.2.5 Resultative Perfective

Similar to the results observed for the *after* perfective, another salient feature of Irish English such as the resultative perfective, received a high and homogenous acceptance from respondents. The

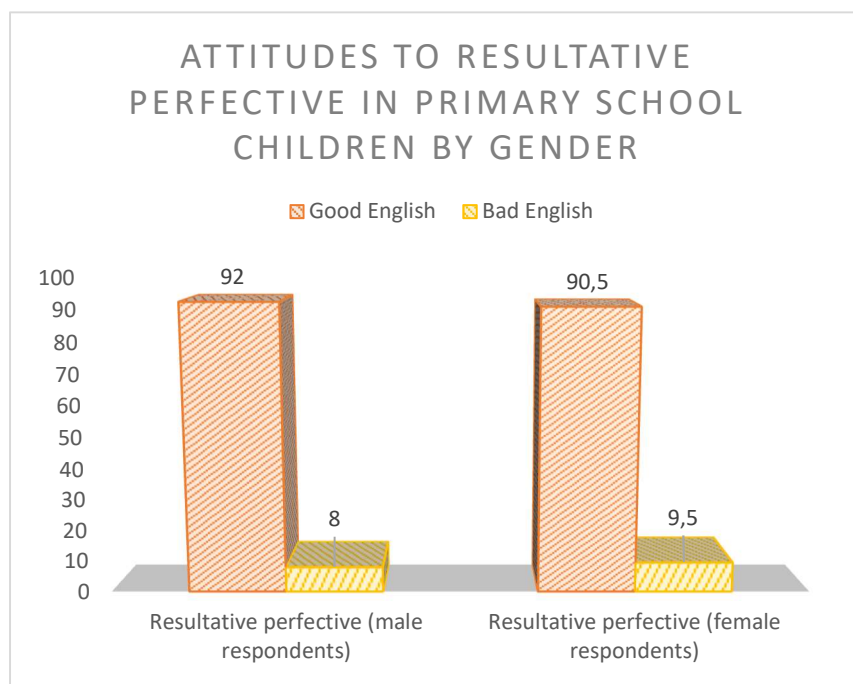


Figure 4.2.5 The graph shows the different attitudes of children respondents to my 2017 survey sorted by gender, in regard to the resultative perfective

sentence *When we arrived home mum had the dinner cooked* received an acceptance rate of 91.3%. 92% of boys and 90.5% of girls considered the structure as an instance of ‘good English’, while only 8% of boys and 9.5% of girls rejected it. It is interesting to note how both perfective structures are widely and homogeneously accepted by

children between 9 and 12, in contrast to the strong rejection given to other structures which are instead well accepted by adult speakers. This homogeneity can be considered a potential sign that both structures are in fact moving towards supraregionalisation.

#### 4.2.6 Second Person Plural Pronouns

As has been previously investigated, the use of second person plural pronouns is a salient feature of Irish English. Primary school students seem to be aware of the vernacularity of this structure, given the low acceptance rate for the sentences provided. The first sentence, sampling the use of the pronoun *ye*, scored an acceptance rate of 34.8% among children, while the second sentence, testing the attitude to the pronoun *youse*, realized an even lower acceptance rate of 17.4%

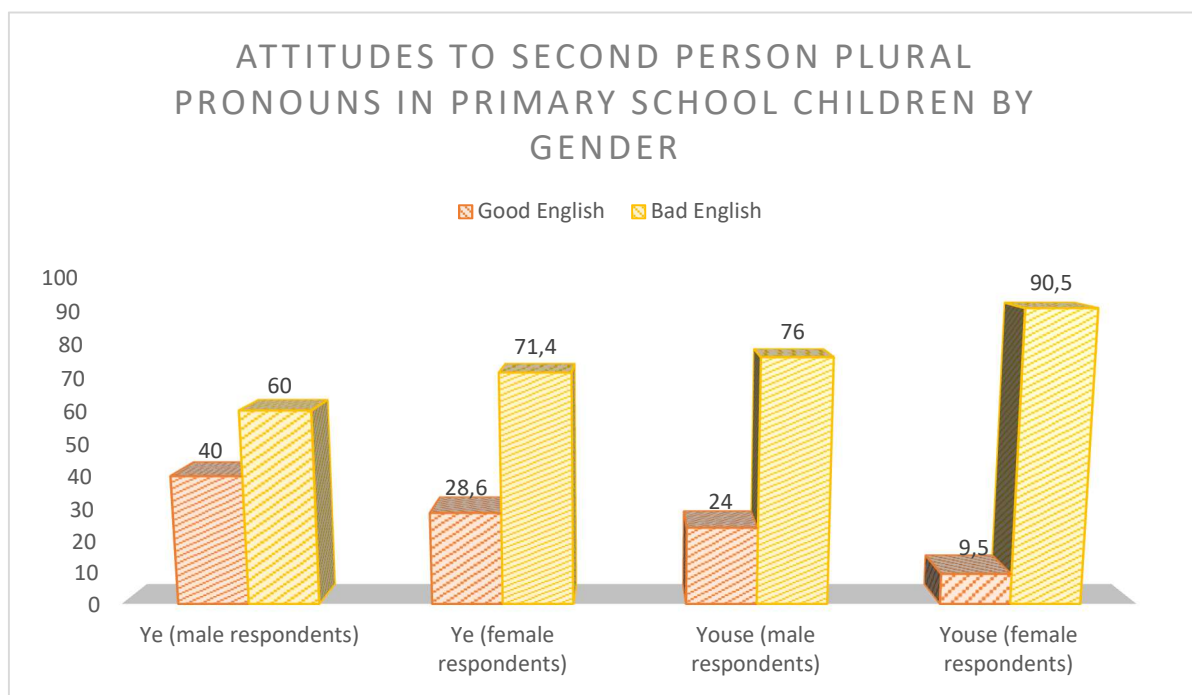


Figure 4.2.6 The graph shows the different attitudes of children respondents to my 2017 survey sorted by gender, in regard to second person plural pronouns

Upon analysis of the results by gender, important discrepancies can be seen in the attitude towards the two pronouns presented in the survey. The first sample sentence, *Are ye coming to the cinema with us tomorrow?*, was accepted by 40% of boys, but only by 28.6% of girls, and was rejected by 60% of boys and 71.4% of girls. The second sample sentence shows a similar pattern. The sample sentence *When are youse back from your holidays?* was regarded as ‘good English’ by 24% of boys and as ‘bad English’ by 76% of male respondents. Girls on the other hand showed an acceptance rate of only 9.5% for this pronoun, while an important 90.5% rejected the pronoun as incorrect. The previously noticed pattern indicating a higher sensibility of girls towards vernacular structures can therefore be confirmed once more.

### 4.2.7 Stressed Reflexive Pronouns

The attitudes displayed to the use of stressed reflexive pronouns in Irish English is another confirmation of the different attitudes of boys and girls towards non-standard linguistic features.

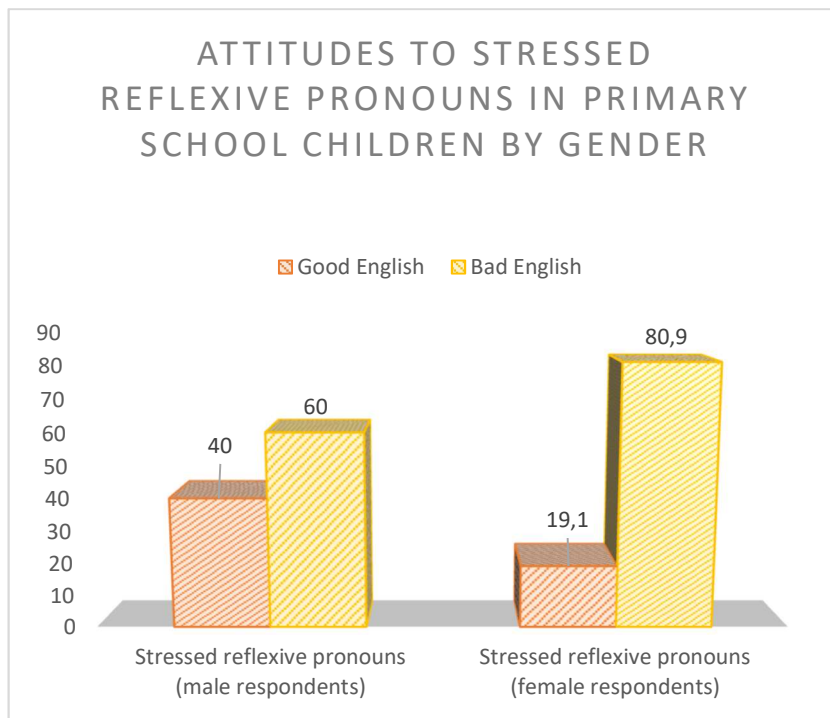


Figure 4.2.7 The graph shows the different attitudes of children respondents to my 2017 survey sorted by gender, in regard to stressed reflexive pronouns

The sample sentence presented in the survey, *I might drink some orange juice myself later*, has received an overall acceptance rate of 30.4%. The stressed use of reflexive pronouns was accepted by 40% of boys and rejected by 60%. Once again the acceptance rate for girls is visibly lower: only 19.1% of female respondents considered the structure as 'good English', and a majority of 80.9%

regarded it as 'bad English'.

Despite the young age, again female respondents show a higher sensibility to vernacular structures than male respondents.

### 4.2.8 Responsives

As has been previously said, the omission of yes and no from an answer is a vernacular feature of Irish English. In my 2017 survey I represented the structure with the sample dialogue A: "Are you tired?" B: "I am. I have been studying a

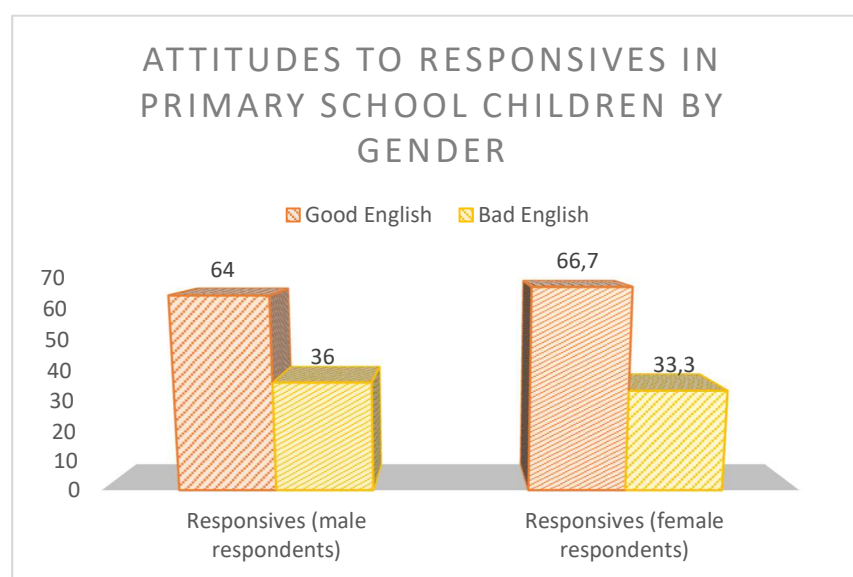


Figure 4.2.8 The graph shows the different attitudes of children respondents to my 2017 survey sorted by gender, in regard to responsives



lot.", which received an acceptance rate of 65.2%. The structure was homogenously accepted both by boys and girls alike. 64% of boys and 66.7% of girls considered the dialogue as an instance of 'good English', while 36% of boys and 33.3% of girls regarded it as incorrect. The structure appears therefore to be accepted by most respondents without any gender distinction.

#### 4.2.9 Emphatic Tags

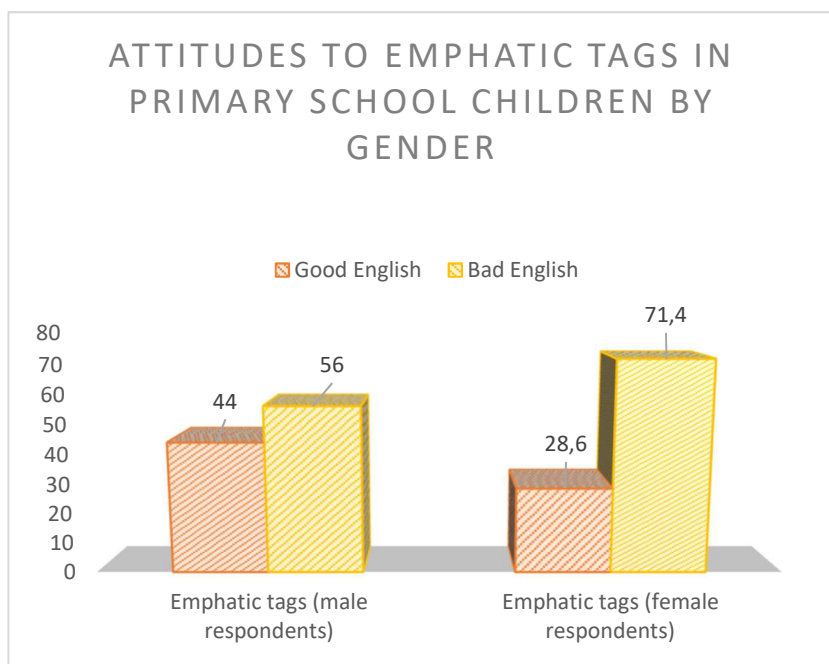


Figure 4.2.9 The graph shows the different attitudes of children respondents to my 2017 survey sorted by gender, in regard to emphatic tags

A structure that has been scarcely investigated, emphatic tags are used in vernacular discourse to stress and highlight certain information that is being transmitted. The low acceptance rate received by children (37%) demonstrates that the newer generations are aware of the vernacularity of the structure. It is interesting to observe that once more girls seem to have a stronger attitude towards a vernacular feature than boys. The

sample sentence *I am really happy with my grades, so I am!* has been accepted as correct by 44% of boys and by 28.6% of girls, while 56% of male respondents and 71.4% of female respondents reject it. This structure as well bears witness to the higher sensibility to linguistic varieties displayed by female respondents, even at such a young age.

## CONCLUSION

In my work I have considered the attitudes of native Irish English speakers towards the vernacular structures of their language. I have analysed the results yielded by a survey I carried out online in 2015, comparing my results to those obtained by Raymond Hickey's A Survey of Irish English Usage in 2004. My results were also analysed according to criteria such as gender and age range, and the analysis was complemented by a second survey that I carried out in spring 2017 on two classes of fifth graders of a primary school in Co. Longford, Ireland. The results of this second survey were analysed in comparison to the mean acceptance rate obtained in my 2015 survey, and to follow the answers provided by children were analysed according to the gender of the respondents.

The survey I carried out had a number of limitations: the sampling size is small compared to Hickey's and so it permits a smaller insight in the development of an awareness of vernacular structures. Also, the results might not be totally accurate as people may have felt under examination when completing the survey, and they might have resorted to a supraregionalised register. However, Hickey may have also incurred the latter problem. Another difficulty I encountered is my position in Italy which didn't permit direct questioning; on the other hand, I was able to use resources Hickey didn't have at the time: I was able to take advantage of social media as a tool, and this permitted the satisfactory operation of carrying out the survey without physically being in Ireland.

The comparison between my survey and Hickey's results yielded some interesting results, and showed that the attitude of Irish English speakers towards vernacular structures has partly changed since 2004. The positive reception of some structures, such as the *after*-perfective and the resultative perfective, was confirmed, while results for structures, such as the perception of the extended use of the present tense and the verbal concord, showed a higher refusal of the structures. The dropping of acceptance concerning these two forms indicates a change of awareness towards the vernacularity of structures. The reason behind this change could be an increased contact with other varieties of English, either due to emigration and immigration, or the change may have been influenced by non-Irish television and cinema.

On the other hand, an increase in the acceptance appeared in several structures, examples being the verbal concord and the stressed reflexive pronouns. This suggests a decreased perception of the vernacular origin behind these structures. It was also interesting to analyse structures which weren't mentioned in the sources used for this essay, but which I noticed several times during my stay in Ireland. However, while the responsive structures reached a high acceptance rate, that unawareness of the vernacularity of the structure may be suggested, the same cannot be said about what I refer to as *emphatic tags*: the high acceptance came in fact with an awareness that the structure is better suited to informal contexts. During my research it became evident that emphatic tags were barely mentioned in the literature. Evidence of the structure has been observed in some recordings made in Northern Ireland, which were part of a wider corpus of recordings of regional accents on the British Library website, as well as in the chorus of a folk song. However, I could not find any prior sampling of the attitude towards this structure, so my survey provided the occasion for a first analytical approach, which would be interesting to develop in the future.

I then proceeded to analyse the data collected in my survey, looking for a different perception related to gender. My results confirm that an overall higher awareness concerning vernacular structure can be observed in female respondents. This would confirm the observation of scholars, such as Coates, Trudgill and Elyan, who pointed to the overcorrectness of female speakers and their higher choice of standard linguistic features in respect to male respondents. The linguistic prestige connected to standard British English is possibly felt as an agent of empowerment and emancipation by female speakers, who may choose standard linguistic variety aiming at better social and professional possibilities, and for a higher level of consideration from their male peers.

The analysis carried out according to the age groups of the respondents pointed to some interesting results. The data was divided into three age groups, a first group collecting respondents up to 30 years of age, a second one grouping respondents aged 31 to 40, and a last one whose respondents were aged 41 or more. The group gathering respondents between the age of 30 and 39, was characterized by individuals who had attended school and who had begun their careers during the years of the economic boom known as the *Celtic Tiger*, which took place in Ireland from the 1990s to the economic crisis in 2008. This acted as a type of 'filter' in respect to the linguistic attitude manifested by the group of respondents aged 41 or more, strongly influencing the change of attitude in the following generations: results showed that this group had a strong influence on the preservation, the increase or the decrease of the acceptance in the group of respondents up to the

age of 30, pointing to a possible role played by the economic growth experienced by the country in the nineties, and by the increasingly competitive working environment which resulted as a consequence.

The data collected in my 2017 survey, carried out on my behalf by a teacher in a primary school in Aughnacliffe, Co.Longford, was analysed in comparison with the mean acceptance rate yielded by my 2015 survey. The comparison pointed to an overall higher awareness of vernacular structures in children aged between 9 and 12 than it is possible to notice in adults. An analysis of the results of this second survey according to the gender of the respondents, points to an even higher awareness in girls. The data suggests that female respondents feel the need to adopt a language variety that they consider empowering as early as in fifth grade. The tendency displayed by teachers to give more time to boys than to girls in class, which was pointed out by Wareing (2009), could be one of the reasons behind this behaviour, together with an increasing exposure to standard English varieties (British English or American English) via the media.

In an era characterised by globalisation, and in an environment which encourages social competitiveness, it is unavoidable that the vernacularity of languages is influenced, and models identified as successful are followed in order to increase one's acceptance and chances in society.

### **Considerations on Possible Future Developments.**

The linguistic situation in Ireland may receive some important influences from the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, commonly known as *Brexit*. In a referendum held in June 2016 British citizens voted to leave the European Union, a process which is currently being negotiated, and which should be concluded by March 2019<sup>1</sup>. With the departure of the UK, Ireland will be the only native English-speaking country in the European Union. A further complication is provided by the fact that the first official language of Ireland in the EU is Irish<sup>2</sup>, despite it being spoken by a

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<sup>1</sup> See *BBC*, 20 March 2017: *Article 50: Theresa May to trigger Brexit process next week*  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-39325561>

<sup>2</sup> See *Irish Times*, 28 June 2016. *European Commission rejects claims English will not be EU language*

minority of the population. This is because, when joining the EU, member states could specify only one official language each<sup>3</sup>: this rule made it impossible to state the bilingual reality present in Ireland.

The position of English as a working language within the EU is uncertain: Polish and French Members of the European Parliament have stated that, since the UK is not going to be part of the EU anymore, a different language should be chosen in the place of English<sup>4</sup>. The European Union has rejected this possibility, but the future is unclear. Perhaps a different language will be chosen, giving the vacant spot to another language from the member states of the European Community, or perhaps English will be confirmed as a working language in the European Parliament, in light of a newly acquired neutrality, given by the lack of a representing country. The linguistic influence of this scenario could mean an empowerment and an ennoblement of Irish English, as the only variety of English spoken in Europe together with Maltese English. However, the prestige covered by such position could have the opposite effect: people could develop a higher awareness towards vernacular elements, and move towards standard British English, a language which has been long associated with power and prestige.

The economic decline experienced in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum was a cause of concern for a number of British citizens: many of those with Irish ancestry applied for an Irish passport, in an attempt to have an open door to the EU should the economic situation go sour in the UK. Applications soared: in the first 6 months of 2017 the Irish state issued 500.000 Irish passports, twice as many as were issued in 2016. In a country whose population is 4.6 million, the impact is huge. Significantly, leading unionist Ian Paisley Jr. has recommended Northern Irish people who

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: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/european-commission-rejects-claims-english-will-not-be-eu-language-1.2702734>

<sup>3</sup> See *Irish Times*, 28 June 2016. *European Commission rejects claims English will not be EU language*  
: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/european-commission-rejects-claims-english-will-not-be-eu-language-1.2702734>

<sup>4</sup> See *Irish Times*, 28 June 2016. *European Commission rejects claims English will not be EU language*  
: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/european-commission-rejects-claims-english-will-not-be-eu-language-1.2702734>

identify as British to apply for an Irish passport<sup>5</sup>, and among the passports issued is that of Tory MEP Charles Tannock, who wanted to secure his position of EU citizen<sup>6</sup>.

It is interesting to consider what could be the linguistic effect of a potential migration wave, which could be the biggest linguistic migration since the age of the plantations, and could greatly influence the way English is spoken in Ireland. On the one hand, there could be a further ‘standardization’ of Irish English, possibly also encouraged by the social and professional competition which could develop as a consequence of a strong migration. On the other hand, the situation could give rise to a further hybridization of Irish English, or of a partial ‘Gaelicization of British immigrants, although, given the sense of disaffection and estrangement displayed by Irish people towards Irish Gaelic, the latter possibility is rather remote.

The alienation felt by Irish people towards their language is brilliantly depicted in the 2003 short film *Yu Ming is Anim Dom* (‘My Name is Yu Ming’), starring the late Frank Kelly. In the film, a young Chinese boy is unhappy with his life in China, and dreams of a brand-new start. He selects a random location on a globe, and he happens to choose Ireland as a destination of his new life. He begins researching on Ireland, and when he discovers that the official language of the country is Irish, he starts studying it intensively, until he reaches a good fluency in a very short time. His disappointment is great when, once arrived in Dublin, he realizes that nobody understands him. Finding a room is extremely difficult for him, and even more complicated is his search for a job. It is while trying to find employment in a pub, and of course failing to be understood by the Irish owners (who believe he only wants a drink), he happens to meet old Paddy (Frank Kelly), who is a fluent Irish speaker and explains to him the huge misunderstanding: it is not because of his bad Irish that communication fails, but because his Irish is much better than that of the majority of the Irish: as a matter of fact, despite Irish being the official language, and being present on road signs and public places, the vast majority of Irish people speaks only English. To highlight even more the sense of alienation of Irish people towards their language, the line uttered by the barmen watching

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<sup>5</sup> See *The Guardian*, 19 July 2017. *Irish passport rush: demand jumps 50% since Brexit vote*  
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jul/19/irish-passport-rush-demand-jumps-50-per-cent-since-brexit-vote>

<sup>6</sup> See *Independent*, 4 September 2017. *Tory politician gets Irish passport because he’s ‘quite ashamed to be British’ after Brexit*:  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-mep-charles-tannock-irish-passport-brexit-conservative-british-european-union-a7928011.html>

the old man fluently conversing with the Chinese boy: 'Here...did you know old Paddy could speak Chinese?!'<sup>7</sup> (10.18-10.20).

The feeling of estrangement, despite being theatrically and comically represented in the short film, can be witnessed in reality, and it forces one to wonder whether this disaffection towards the Irish tongue will have an impact on the variety of English spoken in Ireland in a post-Brexit Europe.

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<sup>7</sup> *Yu Ming is Anim Dom*. Dir. Daniel O'Hara. July 2003. YouTube, 30 September 2017.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqYtG9BNhfM>

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### **Source of Images:**

Fig. 1.1 Charter of Dublin, Dublin City Council

<<http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/content/RecreationandCulture/libraries/blog-images-2017/Henry-II-Charter.jpg>>

Fig 1.2 Map of the Pale in c.1170, AngliaCampus

< <http://www.jeron.je/anglia/learn/sec/history/partire/page04.htm>>

Fig. 1.3 Plantations in Ireland between 1556 and 1620. Image source: Wikipedia

< [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plantations\\_of\\_Ireland#/media/File:Plantations\\_in\\_Ireland.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plantations_of_Ireland#/media/File:Plantations_in_Ireland.png)>

Fig 1.4 Population change after the Great Famine that struck Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century

< <http://kids.britannica.com/students/assembly/view/107759>>

Fig 2.1 Graph illustrating the number of Irish emigrating overseas during the nineteenth century.

< <http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/famine/emigration.html>>