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The sociolinguistics of language use in Ireland

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The present chapter deals with language use in Ireland. It addresses the question of whether Irish English reveals particular patterns of language use across the sociolinguistic parameters of region, age, gender, social status and ethnic identity. It also presents the findings of an empirical study on tag question use according to region studied on two levels: as compared to British English, and in terms of variation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Tag question use according to gender is also investigated, as is the interplay of gender and region. As such, the study addresses the dearth of research on the effect of several macro-social factors on language use including also the interaction of several macro-social factors.

1 Introduction

While the study of Irish English (IrE) on the phonological, grammatical and lexical levels is long established (cf. Hickey 2011: 13-14), the study of variation in language use in IrE is a recent endeavour (cf. Vaughan and Clancy 2011: 47). IrE is not exceptional as a variety in this regard, dialectological research in general having long concentrated on synchronic variation at the level of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. In pragmatic research too, variation in language use according to macro-social factors, such as region, age, socio-economic class, ethnicity – and gender to a lesser extent – have been largely neglected. However, in recent years variational pragmatics has emerged as a research field, making intra-lingual pragmatic variation according to these five macro-social factors the focus of systematic analysis (cf. Schneider and Barron 2008, Barron and Schneider 2009, Holmes 2010: 449; Schneider 2010; Placencia 2011; Barron 2014, forthcoming). This research field propagates intra-lingual pragmatic research adopting the methodological principles of empiricity, comparability and contrastivity (cf. Schneider 2010; Barron 2014). In other words, research should be contrastive between varieties and use comparable data since it is only such data that can highlight the similarities and differences between varieties on any level.

In line with these developments in variational pragmatics, the study of pragmatic variation in IrE has also enjoyed increased interest. This has been aided by concentrated efforts to further research in the area (Barron and Schneider 2005, cf. also chapters in Migge and Ní Chiosáin 2013), by a recognition of the level of pragmatics in textbooks on IrE (Amador-Moreno 2010) and also by the emergence of corpora, such as the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE) (Barker and O’Keeffe 1999), A Corpus of Irish English (Hickey 2003), the Irish component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-Ireland) (Kallen and Kirk 2008), SPICE-Ireland (Systems of Pragmatic Annotation in the Spoken Component of ICE-Ireland) (Kallen and Kirk 2012) and the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence* (McCafferty and Amador-Moreno in preparation). To date, variational pragmatic research on IrE has focused predominantly on language use relative to other inner circle varieties, and primarily relative to British English (BrE), and to a lesser degree American English (AmE) (cf. also Elwood 2010 on IrE vs. New Zealand English). Studies of language use within IrE itself according to macro-social factors, such as gender, socio-economic class, age and ethnic identity are less frequent.

The present chapter first gives an overview of research on language use in IrE focusing first on region and then on the remaining macro-social factors. Following this, a corpus study of tag questions (TQs) in IrE across region (Northern Ireland (NI)/Republic of Ireland (ROI)/Great Britain (GB)), gender and across region and gender is presented. The empirical study adds to the language use research in IrE on regional and gender variation and to the dearth of research integrating a number of macro-social factors. The paper closes with an outlook to the future.

2 Language use in Irish English

The following overview of language use in IrE focuses first on patterns of language use particularly common in and also specific to IrE relative to BrE and AmE. Variation between Southern and Northern IrE – i.e. between language use across the political divide on the island of Ireland – is then addressed (2.1), as is research on language use in relation to the remaining macro-social factors other than region (2.2).

Given space constraints, the overview is not exhaustive but purposely restricted to variational pragmatic research adopting the methodological principles of empiricity, comparability and contrastivity (cf. also O’Keeffe 2011; Vaughan and Clancy 2011 and Schneider 2012 for further overviews of language use in IrE). Indeed, Vaughan and Clancy (2011: 50) comment on the value of the variational pragmatic framework for structuring a research agenda for the study of language use in IrE. Variational pragmatics distinguishes five levels of analysis. These are the formal, the actional, the interactional, the topic and the organisational levels (cf. Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron and Schneider 2009; Schneider 2010; Barron 2014, forthcoming). This framework informs the following overview and structures section 2.1.

2.1 Language use in Irish English: Focus on region

Analyses on the formal level focus on the communicative function of individual forms. They frequently employ corpus data. A recent analysis of the discourse marker *now* by Clancy and Vaughan (2012) is a case in point. Their analysis of the LCIE shows *now* to have additional pragmatic functions in IrE. In addition to its use as a discourse marker, functioning to mark a new phase of discourse in formal contexts as in BrE, *now* is frequently used in IrE in clause-final position in informal contexts. In this position, it functions to downtone assertions and to mark events as completed. Furthermore, when clustering with expressions of time, it functions as an approximator marking the vagueness of time reference. Clause-final *like* is a further discourse marker which has been the subject of several studies. Kallen (2006) highlights the uniqueness of this discourse marker to IrE using a contrastive analysis of the comparable corpora ICE-Ireland and the British ICE component (ICE-GB) (cf. also Lucek 2011). Other analyses on the formal level include Pandarova’s (in preparation) analysis of the semantics and pragmatics of the pragmatic marker *sure* across IrE, BrE and AmE and its historical development, Kallen’s (2005a) contrast of *you know*, *I’d say*, *I say* and *I mean* in ICE-GB and

ICE-Ireland (ROI and NI), O’Keeffe and Adolphs’ (2008) corpus analysis of response tokens in IrE and BrE, a study of TQs by Barron et al. (2015) using ICE-Ireland and ICE-GB (cf. 3 below) and Hickey’s study of the development and specifically Irish pragmatics of *grand* (Hickey in press).

Overall, formal analyses of IrE reveal that variety-preferential uses are common, with particular forms being preferred/dispreferred in one variety over another. In addition, we have a variety-specific use of forms involving the emergence of related senses not present in other varieties (cf. Foolen 2011: 221-225, cf. also Pandarova in preparation). Also, despite a lack of variational pragmatic research on the issue, there is some evidence for the existence of variety-specific forms, such as the *sure*-tag in IrE (*sure* + pronoun + operator) (cf. Hickey 2007: 276-277; Barron in press). Such new senses and forms carry social meaning and may be employed as local identity markers (cf. Schneider 2012: 481). Finally, as Foolen (2011) also notes, it is possible that a particular function is realised using different forms across varieties. We return to this in the discussion of TQ use in 3.3.

Research on IrE on the actional level has focused predominantly on speech act data elicited by means of production questionnaires (cf. Barron forthcoming). Analyses centre on pragmalinguistic questions relating to speech act strategies and their linguistic realisations. Sociopragmatic questions, such as when and where which speech act and strategy is used, are also addressed. The range of speech acts analysed in IrE includes compliment responses (Schneider 1999), expressions of gratitude (Elwood 2010, 2011), offers (Barron 2005b, 2011), requests (Barron 2008a, b) and responses to thanks (Schneider 2005). Variety-preferential uses of language are common on this level, with particular strategies or linguistic realisations preferred in one speech community to a greater extent than in another (cf. Barron 2005a). However, variety-exclusivity is also found in some of the forms and functions identified. An example of such a variety-exclusive form is seen in Barron’s (2011) analysis of the offer strategy “question future act of speaker” in ICE-Ireland and ICE-GB. In both BrE and IrE, this strategy is realised by the conventionalised pattern AUX *I* + actional verb? but the modal verb employed differs. While *shall* is exclusively used in BrE (as in *Shall I pour out your water?*), *will* is used in its place in IrE. Similarly, Schneider (2005) in a study of thanks minimisers in English English (EngE), IrE and AmE finds the NO PROBLEM tokens *you’re grand* and *no bother* to be exclusive to IrE in his data.

Scholarship pointing to a variety-preferential use of particular strategies and linguistic realisations in IrE is frequently concerned with issues of directness and indirectness and also with the question of whether the use of strategies and linguistic forms are more or less diverse – and consequently therefore more or less conventionalised. Turning firstly to the degree of variation, Schneider (1999) in an analysis of compliment response strategies in IrE and AmE using production questionnaire data finds IrE strategies to be more diverse. He reports a similar finding in a 2005 study of thanks minimisers in IrE, EngE and AmE also using production questionnaires (cf. also Barron 2005b for similar findings on offer strategies in IrE relative to EngE). In addition, on the level of form, Elwood (2011) finds routine realisations of “thanks” to be more varied in the Irish soap opera *Fair City* relative to the British program *EastEnders* (however, cf. Burmeister 2013 below on death announcements for conflicting findings). Further research is required on this level.

As far as levels of directness are concerned, somewhat contradictorily both directness and indirectness have been found to characterise IrE on the actional level (Amador-Moreno 2010: 115; cf. also Kallen 2005a on directness on the formal level). Barron (2008a, b), for example, in an analysis of requests using production questionnaires finds IrE speakers to be more indirect as compared to EngE speakers. Specifically, IrE speakers employed more external modifiers in the standard situation analysed in which role relations were clear and more internal mitigation and a lower level of upgrading than EngE speakers in non-standard situations. On the other hand, however, Barron (2005b) found IrE speakers to choose a range of more direct offer head act strategies than EngE speakers in particular situations (cf. also Clancy 2005 on directness in IrE family discourse). Such contradictory findings point to the dangers of associating language use in IrE with negative politeness strategies alone (cf. also Barron 2012 and Kallen 2005b: 131). They furthermore underline the need to take a differentiated view of language use. In particular, speech act, situational constellations and also genre (cf. Barron 2012) need to be taken into account.

Research on the remaining levels of analysis, i.e. on the interactional level (level of sequential patterns), the topic level (level of discourse content) and the organisational level (level of turn-taking), represents a research desideratum in IrE. On the interactional level, Schneider (2008) has examined the opening turns of small talk in England, Ireland and the U.S.A. While EngE speakers were found to start small talk at a party with a greeting, IrE speakers did so with an assessment of the party, and AmE speakers preferred to introduce themselves. In addition to such sequential differences, differences were also found in the frequency and realisation of speech acts. On the organisational level, O’Keeffe and Adolphs (2008), in a study of IrE and BrE using two comparable sub-corpora of the LCIE and the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (*CANCODE*) corpora, find response tokens to be used considerably more frequently by BrE speakers. No differences were recorded on a functional level, convergence and engagement tokens being the most frequent types in both sub-corpora.

Finally, as is evident from the overview above and as also noted by Vaughan and Clancy (2011: 51), “spoken Irish English has dominated the pragmatic research agenda thus far”. Indeed, Burmeister (2013) on death notices in Scotland, Wales and the ROI is a noteworthy exception on this level (cf. also Barron 2012). Despite many similarities across the three varieties, notable differences were also recorded. Expressions of gratitude to institutional carers were frequent in IrE notices relative to the other varieties. Information on the funeral was more detailed in the IrE texts, as was the description of the circumstances of death. The inclusion of religion-inspired sayings or proverbs was also limited to IrE. On the level of form, IrE death notices were more routine – in contrast to the finding for spoken speech act realisations detailed above.

Thus far, the focus has been on contrasts between IrE and other varieties. Studies on variation in language use within the geographical island of Ireland are extremely rare despite the fact that they offer much potential for research. Kallen and Kirk (2008: 30), for instance, hypothesise that the political border between the ROI and NI may be reflected in linguistic differences and indeed Vaughan and Clancy (2011: 15) suggest that North/South research on a pragmatic level may aid in easing social dissonance by increasing awareness that misconceptions and

conflict can result from differing language-use conventions (cf. also Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 101). Kallen (2005b) is one of those rare studies that includes a ROI/NI contrast. He investigates the use of *I mean* and *you know* and *I say* and *I'd say* in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland and finds *you know* to occur more often in the NI sub-component, a fact which shows more similarities with the ROI than with the GB data. By contrast, however, the use of *I say* in NI shows a pattern more similar to the GB data.

Finally, a further research desideratum is the study of pragmatic variation across constituencies of a particular region or indeed across the urban/rural divide. Schweinberger (2009) represents one of the limited studies on this level, looking at variation across county (Down, Fermanagh, (London)Derry, Tyrone) in the use of traditional clause-final *like* and the innovative clause-medial *like* within Northern Irish English.

2.2 Language use in Irish English: Focus on age, gender, social status, ethnic identity

We now turn to research on IrE taking the macro-social factors ethnicity, age and gender into account. To the best of our knowledge, no variational pragmatic study on IrE has yet focused on socio-economic class and research on the remaining macro-social factors is also limited. Ethnicity is a case in point. To date only Clancy (2011a, b) has taken up the topic with regard to the traveller community in an Irish context. His research focuses on hedging and on the use of kinship terms in naturally occurring data from one traveller family and one settled family from the Limerick city area with the same gender profile. He finds the settled family to use more hedging and the traveller family in contrast to make more use of kin titles rather than first names. He suggests these findings to reflect a higher value placed on individuality in the settled family and on collectivity and family in the traveller community while at the same time recognising that the data underlying the analysis are not comparable on all levels leading to a possible influence of age, socio-economic status and level of education as well as ethnicity. Further research is required.

The influence of age and to a lesser extent gender on language use in IrE has been the focus of research by Murphy (2010). Using a corpus of everyday conversations, she analyses a range of hedging devices, taboo language, amplifiers, boosters and vague category markers in a female language corpus consisting of three sub-corpora of 20-29 year olds, 40-49 year olds and 70-80 year olds. A male corpus is used for comparative purposes. Among the findings, women in their 20s and 40s are shown to use more hedges than 70-80 year olds. Also, while the 20s preferred the forms *like* and *actually*, the 40s females preferred *you know* and *I think*. Findings are explained as a product of different conversation types which speakers at different ages engage in, younger women engaging in more face-threatening discussions relative to older speakers. Males were also found to use hedges less with increasing age, a feature also explained with reference to length of acquaintance. Murphy (2012) is a further corpus analysis of language use in IrE focusing on age and gender and the use of response tokens. Findings are complex and point to the importance of taking speaker role, background context and speaker

relationship into account in analyses of gender. Farr and Murphy (2009) also look at age and gender as they relate to the use of religious references to express emotions. They find men, particularly older men in the 70-80 age group, to use religious references most frequently. Preference for specific forms also varies by age and gender (cf. also Murphy 2009 on the pragmatics of FUCK in IrE by age and gender). Finally, Schweinberger (2013) in an analysis of ICE-Ireland finds gender differences in the use of clause-final *like* among older speakers, with men employing this form more than females. The peak age for use of clause-final *like* was 26-33 years, cf. also Schweinberger 2009 on age and gender and *like* in the Northern Irish Transcribed Corpus of Speech (NITCS).

The above overview has revealed that research on the pragmatics of IrE is alive and well. We have seen that the focus of research to date has been on spoken language and in particular on the formal and actional levels of analysis. In addition, it has been shown that despite some studies on age, gender and language use within IrE, the vast majority of studies focus on language use on a regional level, and within this factor particularly on variation in language use on a national level, with IrE compared to BrE and AmE. Studies of regional pragmatic variation on a more subordinate level, as for instance, across province, across the rural/ urban divide represent a research desideratum, as does also research on pragmatic variation across the geographical island of Ireland, particularly across the North/South political divide. The following empirical analysis on the formal level addresses this latter research gap by investigating TQ use in the ROI and NI while also comparing findings to ICE-GB (cf. 3.1). In addition, gender (operationalised as sex) and TQ use is analysed (3.2) and we also look at how region interacts with gender in TQ use (3.2). As such, the study also addresses the need for studies focusing on the interplay of macro-social variables.

3 A corpus study: Tag questions across region and gender

Tag questions (TQs), such as *Mary is a doctor* [anchor], *isn't she?* [tag], are formed by a combination of two clauses, an anchor and a tag uttered by the same speaker. The anchor can be a declarative, imperative, exclamative or interrogative clause (cf. Axelsson 2011: 30). The tag hosted by that anchor, on the other hand, is invariably a clause with interrogative syntax consisting of a finite operator and a pronominal subject. In canonical TQs, such as (1), these typically agree with the subject and finite operator in the anchor. In invariant TQs, such as in (2), in contrast, the interrogative tag is not dependent on the syntactic properties of the anchor (cf. Andersen 2001: 104).

- (1) B: Pauline your tea's not too hot is it
 A: That's lovely <#> No it's fine it's lovely
 (S1A-008)
- (2) Ha you've to go earlier and spend quality time with mother is it
 (S1A-042\$D)

TQs can be described both formally and functionally, and a number of studies taking a contrastive approach have investigated both formal and pragmatic variation in TQ use as conditioned by region (cf. Algeo 1990; Tottie and Hoffmann 2006; Allerton 2009 on BrE and AmE; Cheng and Warren 2001, Wong 2007 on Hong Kong English; Borlongan 2008 on Philippine English). Age and gender have also been investigated within particular varieties of English (cf. Tottie and Hoffmann 2006 on age), with gender research suggesting TQs to serve different communicative and interactional purposes in women's and men's speech (Cameron et al. 1989; Coates 1989; Holmes 1995). This form-functional line of variational research has recently also been applied to TQs in IrE as, for example, in Barron (in press), an analysis of a service encounter corpus from the Southwest of Ireland, and Barron et al. (2015), a corpus study of IrE and BrE private conversations.

Data for the present study were obtained from ICE-Ireland, a corpus which allows detailed insights into the occurrence of TQs in a variety of discourse contexts, as well as access to speakers' demographic information. Since TQs are predominantly a feature of spontaneous dialogic discourse (cf. e.g. Kimps et al. 2014: 66), the analysis is limited to the ICE-Ireland text types face-to-face and telephone conversations. Using an extraction methodology described in Barron et al. (2015) and controlling for the two relevant social variables, regional background and sex of the speaker, a total of 241 TQs were identified in the speech of NI and ROI males and females taken together.¹ Relative frequencies were calculated on the basis of the total number of words produced by these speakers (cf. Table 1). Statistical significance tests² were calculated based on the concept of speech unit. Speech units in ICE-Ireland are utterances corresponding roughly to sentences but also including clauses or phrases incomplete due to "interruption, hesitation, false start, etc." (Kallen and Kirk 2008: 17-18). Each speech unit is marked by the symbol '<#>' and may in principle contain only one TQ. Thus, it is possible to quantify and compare TQ and non-TQ speech units in the data.³ The results of the study are presented in the following. Invariant TQs in the data are relatively infrequent, amounting to 2.4% of all NI TQs and 7% of all ROI TQs.

Table 1. Composition of the ICE-Ireland S1A sub-corpus comprised of speakers of NI/ROI background with TQ raw and mean relative frequencies per 10,000 words.

¹ Twenty-four TQs uttered by speakers of mixed geographical background between NI and ROI or between Ireland and a non-Irish jurisdiction have been omitted from the present analysis (cf. Kallen and Kirk 2008: 31). Also, one ROI speaker whose sex is unknown is omitted. This speaker did not produce any TQs.

² The statistical measures are Pearson's chi-squared test and Fisher's exact test with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons.

³ Many thanks to Martin Schweinberger for extracting the word and speech unit counts per unique speaker computationally and making these available online (cf. Schweinberger 2014).

	Face-to-face and telephone conversations in ICE-Ireland					
	NI speakers			ROI speakers		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Overall number of speakers	48	121	169	33	137	170
Number of speakers uttering a TQ	18	46	64	19	67	86
Word count	22,478	60,115	82,593	15,824	79,394	95,218
Speech unit count	3,386	8,496	11,882	2,313	11,654	13,967
TQ count	23	60	83	38	120	158
Relative frequency of TQs per 10,000 words	10.23	9.98	10.05	24.01	15.11	16.59

The initial quantitative analysis shows that overall use of TQs differs significantly across NI and ROI (cf. Table 1). Fewer NI speakers use TQs relative to ROI speakers (64/169 (37.87%) vs. 86/170 (50.59%)). The difference between ROI and NI is statistically significant if we compare the number of speech units containing a TQ to those that do not ($\chi^2 = 13.0143$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000309^{***}$). In terms of relative frequencies, NI speakers use only 10.05 TQs per 10,000 words, or approximately 40% less frequently than ROI speakers, whose relative frequency is 16.59. Interestingly, Barron et al. (2015) find TQ use in corresponding data from ICE-GB to be as high as 25.42 TQ per 10,000 words. These findings suggest that despite the political separation between NI and ROI and NI's political affiliation to GB, the frequency of TQs in the NI ICE sub-component is more similar to that in the ROI sub-component than it is to TQ use in ICE-GB.

Beyond frequency comparisons, however, it is also interesting to look at *how* different groups use TQs. This we do in the following, with Sections 3.1 and 3.2 focused on region and gender respectively.

3.1 Tag question function across region

The present discussion of function is based on the functional coding scheme employed in Barron et al. (2015) in the context of their description of TQs in ICE-Ireland and ICE-GB. The scheme draws on insights from previous work by Algeo (1990), Axelsson (2011), Holmes (1995), Kimps et al. (2014) and Tottie and Hoffman (2006) and is at the same time adapted to describe the corpus data. Following Kimps et al. (2014), who focus on the interactional functions of TQs, two overarching categories are distinguished, information-oriented TQs, including questions, statements and statement-question blends, and desired action-oriented TQs, such as requests, offers and suggestions.⁴ Their proportional use in private

⁴ As noted by Tottie and Hoffmann (2009: 141), "it is important to keep in mind that the pragmatic functions of tag questions form a continuum and that functions overlap and

conversations in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland as reported in Barron et al. (2015) is given in Table 2.

Table 2. The interactional functions of tag questions and their proportions in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland private conversations (Barron et al. 2015).

	ICE-GB N=244		ICE-Ireland N=248		Statistical significance
Exchanging information					
Questions	52	21.31%	85	34.27%	$P_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.01^{**}$
Statements	97	39.75%	73	29.44%	$P_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.05^*$
S-Q blends	92	37.70%	87	35.08%	n.s.
Negotiating desired action	3	1.23%	3	1.21%	n.s.

Table 3. The interactional functions of tag questions and their proportions in private conversations of NI and ROI speakers.

	NI speakers N=81		ROI speakers N=157		Statistical significance
Exchanging information					
Questions	29	35.80%	54	34.39%	n.s.
Statements	34	41.98%	37	23.57%	$P_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.01^{**}$
S-Q blends	18	22.22%	63	40.13%	$P_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.05^*$
Negotiating desired action	—	—	3	1.91%	n.s.

3.1.1 Information-oriented TQs

Information-oriented TQs are involved in the exchange of information between speaker and addressee and are further differentiated according to two main, interdependent criteria: the relative knowledge status of the interlocutors (based on contextual clues) and whether or not a response is projected (Kimps et al. 2014: 69-71). Based on these criteria, three major types of information-oriented TQs are differentiated in the present context: questions, statements and statement-question (S-Q) blends.

Question TQs convey the speaker's uncertainty about the truth of the information contained in the anchor and frame it as a B-event, i.e. as something known to the addressee (Labov and Fanshel 1977). Question TQs are information-seeking and naturally seek a response, a next turn in which the addressee is expected to restore the knowledge imbalance. Relevant examples are (1) and (3).

shade into one another". This is especially true when TQs are studied in corpus data lacking prosodic and paralinguistic mark-up, as is the case in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland. Based exclusively on contextual clues found in the corpus transcriptions, the present functional analysis should therefore be seen as reflecting tendencies in the data.

- (3) Johnnie doesn't drink does he <#> Or does he
(S1A-043\$B)

As Table 2 shows, Barron et al. (2015) found question TQs to represent over one third of all TQs in private conversations in ICE-Ireland and to be significantly more frequent in parallel data from ICE-GB. Question TQs were also the most frequent group in Barron's (in press) analysis of TQs in service encounters recorded in the Southwest of ROI.⁵ Interestingly, however, they were used at a significantly higher level in the service encounter sample (48.5%) relative to ICE-Ireland ($\chi^2 = 4.635$; $df. = 1$; $p = 0.031^*$), a finding which raises the question as to whether question TQs are more typical of ROI speakers than of NI speakers. The results displayed in Table 3 for NI and ROI speakers however reveal that question TQs are employed to an almost equally high extent by NI and ROI speakers relative to ICE-GB and rather suggest that the higher proportions in the service encounter sample may be genre-specific.

In contrast to questions, statement TQs do not seek but give information. Broadly speaking, their purpose is to communicate directly or indirectly facts, personal beliefs, assessments and positive or negative attitudes towards a certain topic or towards the addressee (Barron et al. 2015). In this sense they are rhetorical (cf. Axelsson's 2011 rhetorical TQs). This makes them A-events or, alternatively, if the information is shared between speaker and hearer (e.g. via world knowledge), AB-events. The addressee is not expected to supply an answer, although, as Kimps et al. (2014: 77) note, unsolicited responses, such as backchannels, acknowledgements or disagreements, may occur. Barron et al. (2015) distinguish four distinct subtypes of statement TQs: TQs stating a fact/opinion, as in (4-5), TQs acknowledging the addressee's preceding assertion (6), challenging TQs which undermine the addressee's positive face and demonstrate power (7), and, lastly, TQs used in conversational joking (8).

- (4) D: What was it called <#> Operation uhm
F: Oh uhm <,> hold on <unclear> 1 syll </unclear>
D: May was it <#> Something May
(S1A-002)
- (5) Mm <,> well I don't lose mine at all <#> But then again now I only bring them into college <,> so <,> you can't really go too wrong <,> can you
(S1A-059\$B)
- (6) C: She always gets out of everything
A: Yeah she does doesn't she <#> She's always complaining <#> Yeah well no she wouldn't do it she said to save her life
(S1A-075)
- (7) C: Oil on my jeans you mean
A: Your jeans were they
(S1A-080)

⁵ Note that Barron (in press) uses the term "confirmation-eliciting" in place of question TQs.

- (8) A: Right <#> How long were they here for
 B: Oh they stayed for weeks
 A: Right
 B: Finally they got tired and wanted to go back to their city life you know
 A: Yeah <#> Suppose it would be quiet <,> would it <&> laughter </&>
 <#> So did you ever keep in touch with them or
 (S1A-029)

Barron et al. (2015) found that IrE speakers in general use a significantly lower amount of statement TQs than BrE speakers (cf. Table 2). However, as seen in Table 3, there is highly significant variation within ICE-Ireland itself, with NI speakers using over 18% more statements than ROI speakers ($\chi^2 = 8.6501$, $df = 1$, $p_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.01^{**}$). Indeed, NI speakers' use of these TQs is more similar to that of BrE than to ROI speakers.

The final information-oriented category, statement-question blends (S-Q blends), displays characteristics of both questions and statements (Kimps et al. 2014: 77-79). They are employed when the speaker is more or less certain of the truth of the proposition but nevertheless requires a confirmatory response from the addressee. S-Q blends involve an AB-event, where knowledge is shared by both speaker and addressee, or an A-event, where the speaker “projects that s/he expects the co-participant(s) to catch up with this information and reduce the knowledge imbalance” (Kimps et al. 2014: 77). Barron et al. (2015) distinguish three subtypes of S-Q blends: TQs seeking to (re-)establish knowledge, evaluations and opinions as common ground, e.g. the two items in (9), conversation- or topic-initiating TQs (10), and TQs expressing a surprised reaction towards what another speaker has just said and inviting a confirmatory response (11).

- (9) B: Yeah this this guy was like twenty-two or three was he
 C: Mm
 B: And uh would put a pizza in the microwave <,> and eat it off this paper plate <,> and use the plastic knife and fork and then like just throw it in the bin
 D: Oh God
 B: No washing up <#> No mess <#> Nothing
 D: Great idea
 B: They were so they were very tidy weren't they
 C: That's true
 (S1A-056)
- (10) B: Then he's two sisters <#> One of them lives in the South and the other one lives in England
 A: Terry's sisters
 B: And his brother lives in the South <#> So he was the only one up here <unclear> 4 sylls </unclear>
 B: Nice bread that wasn't it
 A: That was lovely Caroline

(S1A-009)

- (11) C: He's probably still in England
 B: Oh I think he's at home
 C: He's at home is he
 B: Yeah I think he's at home
 (S1A-087)

The proportions of S-Q blends in IrE and BrE are rather similar (Table 2). However, there are differences within ICE-Ireland, with ROI speakers producing significantly more S-Q blends than NI speakers (40.13% vs. 22.22% respectively; $\chi^2 = 7.6302$, $df = 1$, $p_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.05^*$) (cf. Table 3).

3.1.2 Desired action

The second major functional category is that of desired action TQs. In contrast to the categories discussed so far, these TQs are employed not in the exchange of information but in the exchange of goods and services (cf. Axelsson 2011; Kimps et al. 2014). Included are commissives and directives, such as requests, commands, offers, advice and suggestions, all of which project a verbal or a non-verbal response in compliance with the action under negotiation (Kimps et al. 2014: 81).

In the present data, desired action TQs are very rare, as also in previous findings (cf. Barron et al. 2015 for an overview). Only three items were identified – two requests, e.g. (12) and a command, all uttered by an ROI speaker (1.91%).

- (14) Ivana will you turn off the soup will you
 (S1A-081\$D)

3.2 Tag question functions in women's and men's speech across region

Among the first researchers to focus on male/female uses of TQs, Lakoff (1975) claimed that TQs signal insecurity and are more frequent in women's speech. Empirical studies since have revealed the issue to be more complex. Dubois and Crouch (1975), for example, found TQs to be used by the less powerful independently of sex in an academic conference setting, while Cameron et al. (1989: 88) suggest that in conversational contexts involving unequal power relationships (e.g., interviewer – interviewee, teacher – pupil), TQs “function as an interactional resource of the powerful rather than the powerless” in the *Survey of English Usage* (SEU) (cf. also Holmes 1995). However, not only power but also sex and regional background play a role in TQ use. Holmes (1995) found women in her New Zealand data to use more TQs than men, while Cameron et al. (1989) observed the reverse tendency in their BrE data. That region is an important factor in TQ frequency is also borne out by the present data. It is to these data that we now turn.

Overall, men in ICE-Ireland are found to use more TQs than women. However, the results displayed in Table 1 point to important regional differences. ROI men

use most TQs, with 24.01 TQs per 10,000 words. ROI women are second, although the relative TQ frequency in this group is much lower (15.11). The difference in the number of speech units containing a TQ relative to speech units which do not is significant across ROI males and females ($\chi^2 = 6.4884$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.010858^*$). This is not the case on the other side of the border, however, where NI men and women use TQs at an almost equal rate (10.23 vs. 9.98 TQs per 10,000). These diverging findings confirm Holmes' (1995: 84-85) conclusion that the frequency of TQs used by men and women is variable and dependent on a variety of contextual factors, including region.

Leaving frequency aside, Holmes (1995) has pointed out that TQs may also serve different functions in women's and men's speech which are indicative of their different interactional styles. Women, for instance, have been found to employ more 'facilitative' TQs functioning to "invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse" and to indicate "concern for the needs of others", while men use more 'epistemic modal' TQs expressing "genuine speaker uncertainty" and "requesting reassurance or confirmation" (Holmes 1995: 81-83; for similar results, cf. Cameron et al. 1989; Coates 1989).

Table 4. The functions of TQs in women's and men's speech in ICE-Ireland according to regional background.

	NI speakers		Statistical significance	ROI speakers		Statistical significance
	Men (N=22)	Women (N=59)		Men (N=38)	Women (N=119)	
Questions	50.00%	30.51%	n.s.	39.47%	32.77%	n.s.
Statements	36.36%	44.07%	n.s.	28.95%	21.85%	n.s.
S-Q blends	13.64%	25.42%	n.s.	31.58%	42.86%	n.s.
Desired action	—	—	—	—	2.52%	n.s.

The present data do not confirm Holmes' assessment from a statistical perspective. However, some tendencies may be noted. Table 4 shows that on either side of the border, men use proportionately more questions (corresponding to Holmes' epistemic modal category) than women, whereas women use more S-Q blends (roughly equivalent to Holmes' facilitative category). Also, an in-depth analysis of sub-function reveals that the two sexes use statement TQs for different interactional purposes. Independently of region, men use more challenging TQs (50% in NI and 36.36% in ROI) than women (15.38% in both NI and ROI) ($\chi^2 = 5.6915$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.017047^*$). On the other hand, although not statistically significant, we see that women use more TQs to state a fact or express an opinion (53.85% in NI and 46.15% in ROI) than men (37.5% in NI and 27.27% in ROI). Finally, men do not use any TQs functioning as acknowledging responses at all in either the NI or ROI corpora. In contrast, acknowledging responses make up approximately one fifth of all women's TQs in NI (19.23%) and one third in ROI (30.77%). Such uses are consistent with Holmes' claim that women employ a more supportive style in conversation.

3.3 Discussion

The present analysis of TQ use adds to the research focusing on regional pragmatic variation in its focus on variation across the North/South political divide on the island of Ireland, i.e. across Northern and Southern IrE, as well as on pragmatic variation between language as it is used in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland. It also furthers the limited research to date on gender and language use in IrE and in particular on the complex interaction of macro-social factors, specifically in this case on the interplay of gender and region. In the following, we highlight a number of issues raised by the above analysis.

The first question concerns the relationship between TQ use in the ROI data, the NI data and the ICE-GB data. Barron et al. (2015) had shown that ICE-Ireland (ROI & NI) speakers used significantly less TQs than ICE-GB speakers. The present analysis sheds further light on this issue revealing that ROI speakers use significantly more TQs than NI speakers. This also applies to the interaction of gender and region. In other words, irrespective of sex, ROI speakers used more TQs than NI speakers. On the other hand, however, both varieties employ TQs to a lower extent than in ICE-GB. This lower use in the ROI – and particularly in NI – may be suggested to relate to a preferential use of linguistic forms other than TQs (cf. also Barron et al. 2015). Indeed, Tottie (2009: 361-362), discussing the lower use of TQs in AmE relative to BrE proposes, for instance, that epistemic particles, such as *probably*, *likely*, *presumably*, may on occasion be used instead of the canonical tag functions. Alternatively/in addition, it is possible that the lower TQ use recorded in IrE is due to an extensive use of TQs other than the clausal TQs containing interrogative tags focused on in the present study. Examples include concordant non-interrogative TQs with a declarative tag, such as those involving the typically Irish ‘*sure* + pronoun + aux + (*not/n’t*)’ tag (e.g. *It can’t be right, sure it can’t*, cf. Hickey 2007: 276-277; Pandarova, in preparation) and the ‘*so* + pronoun + aux + (*not/n’t*)’ tag (e.g. *She’s pretty, so she is*, cf. Asián and McCullough 1998: 49) as well as single-word tags, such as clause-final *like* (cf. Lucek 2011), phonological tags (e.g. *eh*), or fixed phrases containing lexical material, such as *you know?*. Indeed, the functional interplay of the whole range of TQs is an interesting research area particularly when viewed across cultures as a single function may be realised preferentially using a canonical tag in one society and using an invariant tag in another (cf. also Allerton 2009: 320; Barron in press; Tottie 2009: 361-362). Such questions remain ripe for further variational pragmatic research.

In terms of function, both the NI and the ROI speakers used questions to a similar extent and both groups used more question TQs than did speakers in ICE-GB. Interestingly, and as also mentioned in Barron et al. (2015), Tottie and Hoffmann (2009: 154) in a historical study of TQs, note that “In the 16CD data, confirmatory uses are the most frequent type, with over 60 percent of all cases, compared with 30–37% in PDE [Present-day English]. This suggests that confirmation seeking [equivalent to the present question category] may indeed have been the original use of tag questions”. Given differences in the underlying text types, such findings remain speculative. However, they do point to an interesting path for further research to investigate whether the higher level of question TQs in

the ROI and NI relative to levels in ICE-GB is due to retention in the former varieties or possibly also to convergence in the contact situation with the functions of TQs in the Irish language.

NI speakers were also found to employ more statements than ROI speakers. In this respect, they approached the ICE-GB data to a greater extent. ROI speakers, on the other hand, employed more statement-question blends and indeed showed more similarities in this respect to the ICE-GB data than to the NI data. Interestingly, the gender analysis threw some light on this divergence. While males and females across the two datasets do not differ significantly in their use of statements and statement-question blends, there is significant variation specifically in terms of women's preferences. NI women use more statements than statement-question blends, while ROI women exhibit the reverse tendency ($\chi^2 = 9.5414$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$, cf. also Table 4). Hence, the observed regional differences can be attributed to significant variation in NI and ROI women's TQ function preference. This example of the interplay of region and gender demonstrates the importance of considering gender distributions in future analyses of regional corpora.

4 Conclusion

The present review of language use in IrE, as also the corpus analysis of TQs, was situated within the variational pragmatic framework and thus focused on describing language use in IrE using contrastive comparable empirical data. Such contrasts give some insight into whether particular features of IrE or of a sub-variety of IrE (defined by gender/age/ socio-economic class/ethnicity) are similar to those of other varieties or sub-varieties, are preferred/ dispreferred in the (sub-)variety at hand (variety-preferential/variety-dispreferential) or indeed potentially particular to IrE or to a sub-variety of same (variety-specific). The overview leaves no doubt but that IrE has its own pragmatic profile, characterised by variety-specific forms and variety-preferential uses. In addition, language use is found to be dictated by the contradictory poles of directness and indirectness, and thus also by both positive and negative politeness, depending on situational constellations, speech act and genre.

Relative to the situation in the early 1990s, research on language use within IrE is alive and vibrant. This is not to say, however, that there is no scope for future study. On the contrary, research desiderata have been highlighted above on all levels of the variational pragmatic approach and concerning all macro-social variables. Also, as the tag question study shows, the study of the interaction of these factors can be particularly insightful.

Finally, on a more applied level, the overview points to the need to increase the awareness of IrE speakers themselves as to the pragmatic profile of their language use relative to other varieties of English. As O'Keeffe (2011: 63) states, "Pragmatics is a mine-field in a trans-cultural context and the better we understand the nuances of Englishes (or any other language used transculturally), the less we are prone to pragmatic failure ...". One might also add here "... and the less we are prone to the resultant social dissonance" (cf. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 101). The potential of research in language use to resolve misunderstandings was highlighted above in the case of NI. Taken further, it would seem beneficial to recognise and increase awareness of intralingual pragmatic variation not only on

the level of nation but also on the level of age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class and all levels of region. We look forward to future developments.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions

<,>	Short pause
<,,>	Long pause
<#>	Utterance initiation mark
<{> ... </{>	Initiation and completion of a stretch of text in which overlapping speech occurs
<[> ... </[>	Initiation and completion of an utterance which overlaps with another utterance. Subsequent overlapping utterances are numbered, as in <[1> ... </[1>, <[2> ... </[2>, etc.
<unclear> ... </unclear>	Unclear speech
<&> laughter </&>	Indicates laughter