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**Irish English and Irish Studies: Exploring Language Use and Identity
through Fictional Constructions of *laddism***

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The construction of a linguistic collective identity uses a pool of conscious and unconscious elements that deal with age, gender, or ethnic belonging. In the Irish communicative system, one present-day type of collective masculine identity is that of “the lads” (Jeffries, 2020). Previous studies on “laddish” behaviour and performance from literary or social perspectives explored conduct in contexts such as sports, violence, sex, or alcohol (Doyle, 2018). To encourage interdisciplinary research in the field of Irish Studies, this paper analyses the language of “the lads” in literary discourse through corpus linguistics as a contribution to the field of digital humanities. Fourteen novels make up the specialised corpus on which the analysis is based paying attention to verbs of speech and adverbs. The verbs show utterances by “the lads” illustrating and providing aggressiveness and adverbs provide a second layer of meaning. Finally, a number of power struggles these characters experience in interaction are studied to differentiate the status quo of “the lads”.

Keywords: Corpus Linguistics; Irish Studies; Masculinities; Irish English; Lads.

1. Introduction: Adding a linguistic perspective to the literary study of male discourse

Being one of “the lads” is a prominent collective masculine identity in Irish society which provides a sense of group belonging in certain contexts. It is an identity which encourages some young Irish men, especially when in groups, to perform a toxic brand of masculinity. Despite studies being made in the sociological, psychological, or educational fields,¹ the representation of this masculine identity can also be found in literature; thus, the study of this identity’s portrayal can be expanded upon by a linguistic analysis of the same. In using language, speakers express a unique individual identity, conveying a speaker’s character or personality, but also a collective identity (e.g., age, gender, socio-economic class, ethnic belonging).² Linguistic analysis identifies patterns of language use intricately related to such

identity constructions. Thus, in present-day Irish English everyday discourse, for example, the term “lads” can function as a vocative.³ It has the status of representing a particularly frequent familiariser used by young males. Murphy and Farr, in a study of everyday language use, find that “lads” is commonly employed by young males in their twenties when referring to each other as a collective group, thus signalling its use as a tool for marking “shared social practices which play a part in binding them together,”⁴ as well as being the preferred form (over “guys” or “boys”) reflecting Irishness.

The particular focus of analysis in the present paper is on how the collective identity of “the lads”⁵ is depicted in Irish English literature. The linguistic methodology employed in the present context is that of corpus linguistics. Corpus linguistics allows a quantitative and qualitative analysis of large collections of digitalised data (corpora) with the purpose of investigating language use. The corpus underlying the analysis is *The Corpus of Male Irish Writers*, a specialised corpus, which comprises fourteen novels. The analysis provides an insight into the collective identity of “laddism” in Irish society, supporting previous conceptualisations of this identity construction and bringing further aspects of laddism in Irish society to light.

The construction of laddism relates closely to gender identity construction. Research on gender and language shows that, as elsewhere in Western societies, men (to keep it to the binary perspective) in Ireland use language differently to women. Men, for instance, tend to use more dialectal forms than women. Women tend to be at the forefront of prestigious change so that new pronunciations which have emerged in the past two decades, for example, have appeared and continue to appear in female speech first (e.g., a centralised diphthong in GOAT⁶ or a lowered vowel in DRESS).⁷ Also, vocatives⁸ and other discourse-level features, such as hedges, vague category markers, amplifiers, boosters, and taboo language, have been shown to play a role in gender socialisation and identity construction in the Irish context.⁹ To

date, the bulk of research on linguistic gender constructions focuses on gender differences, with the study of all-male talk in its own right representing a research gap. As Murphy, referring to Coates (*Men Talk*) states: “[a]ttention to male discourse seems to generally arise through empirical studies which focus on gender differences in their investigations and descriptions of both genders”.¹⁰ Addressing this research gap on male discourse is therefore a fruitful endeavour and one we aim to engage with in the present study.

Scholarship on the collective identity of laddism has to date focused predominantly on “laddish” behaviour and performance in sociology, education, and even cinema, as mentioned before. Such studies have explored the conduct of “the lads” in relation to sports, violence, sex, or alcohol.¹¹ Linguistic studies focused on laddism in Ireland (cf. Murphy and Farr) are limited, as is interdisciplinary research on laddism in Irish English literature or indeed interdisciplinary research on male discourse in general in Irish English literature. Tully (2020) is one exception. Her study examines vocatives in Seán O’Casey’s early 20th century plays: *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), compiled in what is known as the Dublin Trilogy. Vocatives are the linguistic means by which characters are addressed. The analysis focuses on vocatives to male characters and uses corpus linguistic methods to showcase how a working-class masculinity is represented in language by the author. In so doing, Tully throws light on male working-class identities in Irish society at the start of the last century. The present paper builds on and adds to interdisciplinary research, such as Tully’s, on male discourse in Irish literature. Specifically, it adds a linguistic perspective to the analysis of “laddish” behaviour in literary texts written by Irish authors. We illustrate how corpus linguistics can serve as a quantitative entry point to further qualitative analysis in a study on identity construction in literary texts. Such analysis allows us to delve deeper to examine how this collective identity is represented in fiction.

Finally, on a broader, more superordinate level, analysing male discourse in literature published in Ireland, addresses the traditional general lack of communication between the linguistic study of Irish English and Irish English literary scholars. Irish English scholarship focuses on linguistic analyses of the English language used in Ireland. Although long a vibrant field of study,¹² Irish English linguistic scholarship has remained on the margins of the broader area of Irish Studies. This status is reflected in the absence of a linguistic perspective on Irish English in the recently published *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies*.¹³ In addition, a recent report on Irish Studies in Continental Europe conducted by the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS) shows literature, at 23% of membership figures, to be one of the better represented disciplines within the umbrella organisation. In contrast, linguistics accounted for only 6% of EFACIS membership. After adjustment to take account of colleagues in the linguistics of Irish, it becomes clear that the representation of Irish English linguistic scholarship within Irish Studies is currently marginal. The present paper aims to bring the disciplines of literary studies and linguistics within Irish Studies closer together and thus foster interdisciplinary research between Irish English linguists and literary scholars within Irish Studies. Identity construction is a shared topic of interest in both the disciplines of linguistics and literary analysis and thus an ideal focus for such an endeavor.

2. “Laddism”: A Research Perspective

According to Phipps et al., “laddism” has been recognised as a “problematic form of masculinity” since the 1970s.¹⁴ While not exclusive to Irish English, the term “lad(s)” as used in this variety, may have specific connotations that are worth exploring from a linguistic/sociopragmatic point of view, due to the fact that research regarding this term is insufficient. It needs to be acknowledged, evidently, that “lad” as a term of address is used outside contexts of toxic masculinity as well. However, it is this specific context we examine

here. Male discourse and representations of the Irish male “lad culture” at its peak performance encourages a model of masculinity focused on sports, alcohol, violence, and sex as well as “pack behaviour,”¹⁵ something that will be pointed at in the initial analysis of the corpus in 3.2. Being young is an essential factor to belonging to a group of “lads” – and behaving “like a lad” is “knowingly enacted,”¹⁶ that is, consciously performed. Belonging to “the lads” and behaving in a “laddish” manner involves pejorative connotations linked to a hegemonic and toxic masculinity that tries to oppress and surrender young Irish men into a culture dominated by peer pressure and hypermasculinity. Young men in these “laddish” groups often present themselves as rebels against conventions¹⁷ who also rely on banter, jokes, and identity-search through these interactions. These young men, through the exploration of the “laddish” identity, are introduced to adult-like talk and situations (alcohol, sex, drugs) as a coming-of-age ritual before perhaps moving into another identity that suits them better in their adult status.

Prior studies on “lad talk” have looked into real-life conversations regarding women, sports, or alcohol ;¹⁸ however, an interesting addition to those perspectives can be made from an analysis of the representation of this identity in literature as an extended image of a stock Irish character, that is, the stereotypical representation of Irishness. Hence, we ask whether “laddism” is represented in contemporary Irish literature and if so, how Irish English encapsulates “laddish” behaviour in a literary context. In the following section, the data will be presented, and the corpus linguistic methodology employed introduced, with particular emphasis on Sketch Engine, the online corpus linguistic toolkit used for the analysis.

3. The Study: The Linguistic Representation of “Laddism” in Irish English Literature

3.1 The Corpus of Male Irish Writers and Sketch Engine

The Corpus of Male Irish Writers (CMIW) is a compilation of fourteen novels written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with over one million words. The novels are written by male Irish authors and they have male protagonists.¹⁹ The male characters in this corpus represent different age groups, sexual orientations, and social status groups. Access to some of the texts was granted by the publishers or the authors themselves and it was compiled in the online software Sketch Engine.²⁰

Sketch Engine is an online tool used in corpus linguistic analysis. The main features used in the current study are Word Sketches, concordance lines, and CQL (Corpus Query Language). Word Sketch is a “one-page summary of a word’s grammatical and collocational behaviour”²¹ and these are used in the initial analysis of how frequent the word “lad” is in the corpus and how it behaves in it. Concordance lines, as a further step in our research, display a list of instances of the specific search word(s) in question in their original context of use.²² CQL queries are an advanced feature of the concordance lines search which assist the analyst in searching for in-depth patterns of attributes and values vis-à-vis their search term.²³ In the present context, CQL queries were used in an in-depth analysis of the verbs of speech that some male characters considered to be “lads” used in the corpus. The distinction between “laddishness,” or lack of it in this in-depth analysis of speech verbs, was conferred by the characteristics mentioned above regarding youth, drinking, and the context in which interaction amongst “lads” took place. In the following, we turn first to the initial insights that the data revealed on the nature of “laddish” behaviour and on potential analytical foci (3.2), and following this, to an in-depth analysis of verbs of speech which throws further light on “laddism” (3.3).

3.2 Initial Analysis

An initial search of the use of “lad” in *The Corpus of Male Irish Writers* (CMIW) returned a description of the linguistic context in which the lexis “lads” is used in the corpus. The overview shows, for instance, the modifiers used with “lad” (e.g., “young lads”), the verbs with “lad” as object (“ask the lads”) or subject (“lads got”), as well as “lad” as a single noun or combination of nouns and adjective predicates of “lad” (e.g., “lad is bad”). This linguistic description of the linguistic company which the lexis “lad” keeps, reveals initial insights into the characteristics of “lads” and “laddish” behaviour. Some of these insights supported previous descriptions of laddism (cf. 2); others brought forth new insights, and yet others opened new doors of analysis (cf. 3.3).

The overview presents “laddish” identity as fulfilling many of the previously mentioned concepts relating to “lad” (cf. 2): a group defined as young (“the young lads”), prone to drinking (“drink, lad”), and as a non-descriptive group that accompanies a leader (“Alec and the lads”). Furthermore, there were several instances of verbs of speech (e.g., “ask,” “call,” “say,” “tell”) that suggested that interaction amongst lads in the group was a relevant aspect. We deal with these insights in the following sections: we begin here by looking at features of laddism apparent in the data and focus then in 3.2 on the interaction between “lads”.

Fig. 1. Initial Search of “lad” through Sketch Engine in the CMIW.²⁴

[PLACE FIGURE 1 HERE]

In the novels compiled in the CMIW, there seems to be a division between the individual who is indexed as part of this identity group (e.g., “drink, lad,” “easy, now, lad,” “ask the lad”) and who may behave as a leader of sorts (“Alec and the lads”) and the general mention of a group of boys who conform to the definition of what “lads” are (“the young lads,” “say, lads”) (cf. Fig. 1). Identifying individuals as (part of) “the lads” seems to serve the purpose of establishing a hierarchy in conversation, as seen in “go now, good lad” (Fig. 1, “verbs with

'lad' as object") when talking to a small boy, and also in the use of the more general "the lads" when talking to a group.

As mentioned in section 2, performing belonging to this group traditionally involves boastful, violent, and "pack mentality that ruthlessly polices the maintenance of a normative masculinity".²⁵ Instances in which this is seen are the following:

(1) [...] "Why upset the old lad?"

"Because maybe that's what the graffiti was meant to do. Maybe it had nothing to do with you."

"It was just lads acting the bollix."²⁶

(2) Lads do be on bicycles doing devilment, creeping around all night.²⁷

These two examples show how "pack" behaviour involves doing irresponsible actions. Example (1) excuses the lads "acting the bollix" as normal behaviour for groups of youngsters, but that would not happen were they on their own. This example also shows the differentiation of "lad" in singular form ("old lad") as a referential term of address of endearing characteristics, that is, the speaker might not want to address the person directly as an "old man" perhaps due to the stigmatisation of old age.²⁸ Example (2) also shows the generalisation of lads "doing devilment" as something non-specific to a group of young people the speaker may (or may not) know, again as a generalisation and representation of "pack" behaviour. What is more, people around them who see this behaviour know how not to pay more attention to it as it is something temporary in the life of a young man. The generalisation that comes along with "lads" shows, firstly, how peer pressure works its way until a whole group acts as one, and secondly, how the performance that goes along with it reassures a hegemonic position of the speaker in the conversation, as they feel they are backed

up by a group of peers. Therefore, a leader may behave as the speaker for the whole group and become the “top lad”.²⁹

3.3 Verbs of Speech

The aim of this analysis is to examine verbs of speech and adverbs used in the representation of “laddish” behaviour in order to see how this works in the fictionalisation and characterisation of Irish English. After an initial examination of the results regarding verbs that accompany “lads,” it was found that the most frequent subject used in the description and conversations amongst lads was that of proper names as these were the only way speakers could distinguish themselves when they were in a pack. In order to carry out this search then, four formulae were developed using the advanced option of CQL (Corpus Query Language) in Sketch Engine³⁰.

CQL1. [tag="NP"] [tag="V.*"]

CQL2. [tag="V.*"] [tag="NP"]

CQL3. [tag="NP"] [tag="RB.?"] [tag="V.*"]

CQL4. [tag="NP"] [tag="V.*"] [tag="RB.?"]

The formulae yielded patterns with NP (proper names) alongside a verb (V) (CQL1) (“he said”), patterns in which NP (subject) appeared after the verb (CQL2) (e.g., “said Jimmy”) and instances in which there was an adverb (RB) either before or after the verb of speech (CQL3 and CQL4). The whole corpus was searched using these formulae as all novels included young male characters that could fall into the definition of what a lad is. These searches yielded 17,691 concordance lines in total. In a second step, those concordance lines including verbs of speech were isolated for further analysis and concordance lines with all other verbs were deleted. This second step yielded 1,987 concordance lines in total. In a third

step, the results were narrowed down to situations of “laddish” behaviour with some stand-out speakers like Jimmy or Deco in *The Commitments*, Alec in *The Dead School*, or even Patrick Ryan in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, despite him being older than the usual “lad”. The criteria to discern which of the patterns were employed by characters who were “lads” or not were the ones mentioned above: male, young, with some drinking involved, and belonging to a group. There were instances in which women were also involved in an interaction, as can be seen in Fig. 2, line 24, but these were not considered in the current study; however, some older characters, as will be shown later in example (4), retain some laddish behaviour to appear younger than they actually are, perhaps as a response to the stigma of ageing. The results are displayed in Tables 1 and 2, which show respectively the most frequent verbs of speech and adverbs that accompany these verbs in the CMIW regarding laddish behaviour. The results have been normalised³¹ per 1,000 words in Table 1.

[PLACE TABLE 1 HERE]

According to Caldas-Coulthard,³² direct speech verbs can be divided into five categories which appear in Table 1: *neutral verbs* in which the intended meaning has to be derived from the dialogue itself (“say”); *structuring verbs* which fit into a sequence of speech acts (“ask” / “reply” / “answer”); *direct speech descriptive verbs* which describe the manner in which the utterance is made (“laugh” / “shout” / “roar”) and which have been identified as of particular importance in characterisation;³³ *illocutionary reporting verbs* with “explain” in the subcategory of metapositional-assertive verbs and “call” being metapositional-directive; and *discourse signalling verbs* with verbs that are related to other parts of the discourse like “repeat” or “add,” and verbs that help the development of the discourse (“pause” or “hesitate”). Given the fact that Caldas-Coulthard does not mention how certain body language verbs might play a part in speech representation, the appearance of “smile” as a verb of speech was analysed as described by Zwicky. This verb belongs to *manner-of-*

speaking verbs as they are “intended acts of communication by speech and describ[e] physical characteristics”.³⁴ Taking this division into account, the verbs of speech presented in Table 1 raise the question of how it is that descriptive verbs which convey attitude like “shout” or “roar” appear as frequent as neutral and structuring verbs such as “say,” “ask,” or “reply”. Descriptive verbs portray a character that is speaking aggressively, whereas the neutral and structuring verbs conform to the average interaction among two characters. However, when looked at in more detail and in context, most of the instances of “shout” occur in one of the novels in which the protagonists are a group of lads and there is banter happening in interaction. Fig. 2 below shows several concordance lines in which an NP is followed by “shout”. This verb, as a description of how the utterance is performed in the conversation, has been selected to point to the characterisation process which characters undergo to represent a specific type of masculinity in conversation. In lines 19, 22, and 23, for instance, the male character is making fun of a situation by shouting a retort and lacing the joke with expletives. During these instances, the male character speaking becomes a fleeting pseudo-leader of the “lads” as he is the one who makes the funniest intervention. In a similar fashion, “roar” is used to describe a loud laugh and the participation in the bantering and joking by other members of the group of “lads,” e.g., “‘Onion Bhaji!’ Frank roared with delight.”³⁵ Although the presence of aggressive descriptive verbs might point towards the aforementioned violence regarding the group of “lads,” these instances, when looked at in context, suggested that at least some of the outwardly “violent” interactions were part of a complex system of exchanges. In these exchanges, the “lads” can both be the offender and the offended in their jokes, without actually taking any offense, as any topic or insult is fair play. In the aforementioned line 19 in Fig. 2 (below), the exchange may seem at first outwardly aggressive when Deco, a band member of The Commitments, shouts “You’re fucking taller than him!”³⁶ to one of the girls in the band for kissing a fifty-year-old musician. However, this

statement is softened by the comedic relief of the next sentence: “This went against nature,”³⁷ a comment from the narrator which shows the ridiculousness of the interaction. Deco is the only one to shout in this situation, but the other band members act as a chorus and together they joke about the height of the older member, as a way of coming to terms with the fact that a young and pretty woman could flirt with someone older.

Fig. 2. Concordance Lines of “proper noun + shout”.

[PLACE FIGURE 2 HERE]

So far, the verbs might show a sliver of what could take place during a conversation amongst group members in which there is teasing and playful interaction. Yet, when the adverbs that accompany these verbs were analysed, these showed how the verbs that were initially thought to be ordinary and average like “say” or “reply,” in fact only present a first layer of meaning in the communication. With the addition of an adverb to the main verb of speech, the interaction describes in more detail the speaker’s tone, feeling, and intention. The neutrality of the main verb is thus expanded upon with extra undertones such as “aggressively,” “gently,” or “violently,” as shown in Table 2. The adverbs were qualitatively looked at in context and the ones highlighted show the two most frequent tones in interaction amongst “lads”: aggressiveness and banter. Hence, “angrily” is highlighted as well as “playfully”. Other adverbs that fall into these categories were examined and excluded as they did not belong to the speech of “the lads”.

[PLACE TABLE 2 HERE]

Table 2 shows in bold a number of adverbs that appeared in “lad talk” and could initially be considered aggressive or playful when added to a verb of speech such as the ones listed. As can be seen from the table, verbs like “say” and “ask” are the most frequent ones to have an adverb that provides a second layer of meaning to the utterance of the male character.

However, when examined in context, not all of these adverbs were used as openly aggressive and confrontational. In some of these instances, the environment might be that of playful teasing when in the company of other members of the group. Example (3), for instance, illustrates a situation in which the verbs of speech are accompanied by adverbs to strengthen the implied meaning of the interaction in order to play down a tense moment without success. One of the “lads,” Droyd, is trying to cheer Frank up because he has been dumped by his girlfriend, and as the description of some ideal holidays – the epitome of a “lads’s vacation” – does not succeed, Droyd loses his patience:

(3) “Ibiza,” **Droyd said authoritatively**. “One of these days Frankie and me are goin to Ibiza, aren’t we Frankie?”

“Ah yeah,” Frank said.

“One of these days,” Droyd yawned, stretching his arms wide, “we’re just goin to say fuck this, we’re off, see yiz later yiz bollockses... On the beach all day drinkin cans, down the clubs at night ridin all the birds, am I right Frankie?”

“Ah yeah,” Frank repeated plaintively, scrunching his can and dropping it to the floor. Droyd turned around [...]. “For fuck’s sake,” he said. [...] “She’s only a bird, Frank.”³⁸

“Repeat” as a *discourse signalling verb*³⁹ refers to other parts of the discourse or indicates the development of the same. Although this verb did not appear in the most frequent list of verbs related to “lad talk,” in the example above, it highlights Droyd’s authoritative effort to convince Frank through a hypermasculine performance. This seems to involve getting over a previous partner although Frank does not seem keen to enjoy the comfort of some holidays. What is more, when the correct show of manliness is not acted out by Frank, Droyd stops being playful and rejects any form of weakness or softness by his friend. Despite “the lads” belonging to a group and some friendship being involved in it, there are limits to what is

appropriate to exhibit and share in terms of feelings and emotions. Still, when there is alcohol involved, these boundaries regarding Irish “lad culture” are somewhat vague as the drinking allows for “displays of affection, intimacy, and emotionality, spheres and aspects that in this cultural setting are much more taboo than political incorrectness”.⁴⁰

[PLACE FIGURE 3 HERE]

Another interaction that evolves into confrontation is presented in example (4). Perhaps as another taboo topic in the sphere of male interaction is that of having children because, in a way, by having children, adult men might lose their youth and stop being “lads.” In this example, Patrick Ryan, an adult who is unable to settle and wanders around the county doing odd jobs, still behaves and speaks as if he belonged to the “lads.” After having some glasses of whiskey, Ryan asks rather aggressively why Ruttledge, who is much younger than Ryan but is no longer part of “the lads” since he got married, has not had children so far. These two characters do not conform to the norm in terms of being young and reckless and belonging to “the lads” but when they get together and alcohol is involved, they transform their language, and their interaction reflects that of their younger selves. Ruttledge does not have to construct himself as a lad all the time as Ryan might have to by using aggressive manners. However, when provoked, Ruttledge might return to his old ways as a “lad.” In example (4) below, Ruttledge uses a “soft” adverb and a neutral verb (“said quietly”). This presents a threat underlying in the utterance which is further tangible in the phrase “with an edge of steel”:

(4) “Do you miss not having children?” **Patrick Ryan asked aggressively** as if sensing the evasion.

“No. You can’t miss what you never had. It’s not as if there aren’t enough people in the world.”

“Was she too old when you started?”

“No, Patrick. She wasn’t too old,” **Ruttledge said quietly** but with an edge of steel.⁴¹

In summary then, such qualitative analysis revealed how adverbs that did not point towards aggressiveness like “quietly,” “softly,” or “gently,” also signify more aggressive communication than what might be expected at first. Of course, these interactions can also be accompanied by modifiers like the one presented in example (4) above “with an edge of steel.” As a further illustration of this, example (5) shows a moment of banter amongst a group of “lads” who have found out that a girl whom Outspan liked has been going out with an older member of the group, Joey:

(5) –Look, righ’, you could’ve tried to click with her yourself. But yeh didn’t. An’ Joey did. So fair fucks to him.

–Still, though, said Derek. [...]

–Na’ hlie got off with HIM, said Bernie.

They still laughed.

–Why? **Outspan asked gently**. –Why, Nat’ lie?

–Yeh fuckin’ slut! **Deco roared**. [...]

–Yis’re disgusted, aren’t yis? said Imelda.—She likes him, yis stupid fuckin’ saps.

–We all like him, said Outspan.—But we’re not queuein’ up to get off with him.

They all laughed. Outspan had to think back to see why, but then he grinned.⁴²

Amongst all the joking and teasing, Outspan, truly hurt, asks Natalie in a gentle manner why the girl kissed an older man. However, his feelings are not something to consider and discuss and he is quickly drowned in banter happening around the topic, as can be seen from Deco’s roar and the continuous laughter across the room. Hence, the analysis of the verbs of speech and adverbs show that the banter and teasing found in “lads” interaction and behaviour is reinforced by a second layer of meaning through adverbs, many of which may not at first

seem openly violent. In a way, the repression of emotional outbursts, whether they are violent or not, is related to societal censorship regarding masculine expressions of feelings. This suppression is also something that is subtly enrooted in these interactions as if the speaking of taboo topics such as feelings, emotions, growing old, or having children, are not possible unless the boundaries amongst “the lads” are softened by drinking, despite some exceptions as in example (5) above where there was no drinking involved. Problematic restrictions embedded in the portrayal of a hypermasculine identity amongst “lads” are still being legitimised and even respected by peers by means of speech in order to successfully secure a place amongst that community of “the lads.”⁴³ Nevertheless, new aspects regarding “lad talk” and “laddishness” are being included, such as the inclusion of women in the banter as happens in *The Commitments*, with three of the band members being girls, or the absence of drinking to interact with each other. Perhaps in this manner, the portrayal of hypermasculinity is shifting alongside society towards new and more inclusive models of masculinity.

4. Conclusion

The present paper has provided a sample of how “laddism” is represented in contemporary Irish literature and it has discussed how Irish English encapsulates “laddish” behaviour in a literary context. The paper has offered an analysis of the construction of the collective identity of “the lads” in Irish discourse by means of a corpus analysis of literary texts. Specifically, we have focused on the representation of the Irish “lad” through the analysis of that same term in collocation with different verbs and adverbs, thus illustrating how authors portray collective identities in fiction. Using the software tool Sketch Engine, *The Corpus of Male Irish Writers* was searched for instances in which male characters bantered and argued. The investigation of verbs of speech and adverbs in interaction has shown that, despite “lads” being presented in the literature as unruly youngsters who act in “pack mentality” and take part in disruptive behaviours, “lads” use language as a performative act in order to participate in community

membership that eventually fades away. That is, they might participate in banter with the description of their utterances depicting violence and aggressiveness, but this does not mean that they act up in that violence. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that adults who have been part of “the lads” in their youth, can potentially recover that audacity and nerve when needed, as was the case of Ruttledge in example (4). Furthermore, this “laddish” identity can include women in the banter (as seen in the examples in *The Commitments*). Other times, this identity can also be present when there is no alcohol involved in interaction or even, when adult characters tap into “laddish” features in order to construct and reconstruct their ever-changing identity depending on the context. This would indicate that further research is needed into the fictionalisation of Irish identity in literature and other disciplines within Irish Studies.

Finally, the present study added an interdisciplinary perspective to the study of laddism specifically and to male discourse more broadly in Irish English literature. The potential synergies between Irish English linguistic scholarship and literary analysis within Irish Studies are many. We hope to have shown the interdisciplinary perspective which corpus linguistic techniques in particular offer as a useful complementary analysis of literary texts. Corpus linguistic methods and tools are, however, ideal not only for analyses of literary texts. Rather, they are ideal for analysing large quantities of any text types, and thus of potential use to many scholars working with textual evidence. Interdisciplinary opportunities for the exploitation of corpus linguistic methods in further fields within Irish Studies, such as history or sociology, thus also exist and are beginning to be exploited outside of Irish Studies.⁴³ In the face of the marginal status of Ireland on a global level, and also in the light of an increasing focus of scholarship within English departments on postcolonial Englishes and on English as a Lingua Franca, interdisciplinary collaboration within Irish Studies on an international scale is crucial to the future development of Irish Studies and might aid in preventing Irish Studies

being viewed as an “...unnecessary frill(s) that should be shed whenever there is a need to cut ...”, as Pilný puts it.⁴⁴ This paper has shown how closer linguistic investigation can provide interesting complementary analyses to the study of Irish literature.

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Declaration of interest

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Notes

1. See more on education in Kehily and Nayak, “‘Lads and Laughter’: Humour and the production of heterosexual hierarchies” and in Phipps and Young, “Neoliberalisation and ‘Lad Cultures’ in Higher Education;” on sociology in King, “The Lads: Masculinity and the new consumption of football” or Gough and Edwards, “The Beer Talking: Four lads, a carry out and the reproduction of masculinities,” and in Ging’s *Men and Masculinities in Irish Cinema*.
2. Cf. Bucholtz and Hall, “Locating Language in Identity”; Hickey and Amador-Moreno, *Irish Identities: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*.
3. Murphy and Farr, “The Use of Vocatives”.
4. Ibid., 214.
5. Curtin and Linehan, “Where the Boys Are,” 65; Jeffries, “Pull without Being Nasty,” 908.
6. Hickey, *Dublin English*, 90.
7. Hickey, “Yes, That’s the Best,” 10.

8. Murphy and Farr, "The Use of Vocatives".
9. Murphy, *Corpus and Sociolinguistics*.
10. Ibid., 23.
11. See for instance Doyle, "'Male Trouble: Writing about Men in Feminist Times'" or Jeffries, "'Is It Okay to Go Out on the Pull without It Being Nasty?': Lads' Performance of Lad Culture."
12. Cf. Hickey, "Irish English Studies".
13. Fox, Cronin and Ó Conchubhair, *Routledge International Handbook*.
14. Phipps et al., "Rape Culture, Lad Culture," 1; Jackson, "Motives for 'Laddishness,'" 583.
15. Doyle, "Male Trouble," 138; Jeffries, "Pull without Being Nasty," 909.
16. Johnston and Morrison, "The Presentation of Masculinity," 667.
17. Coates, *Men Talk*, 2.
18. Cf. Coates, *Men Talk*, 56; Dempster, "Having Balls, Having All?," 481; Jeffries, "Pull without Being Nasty," 916.
19. This corpus was compiled by Tully (2021) as part of her PhD thesis. The corpus is not publicly available, as there are copyrighted materials and restrictions on the re-use of third-party data apply. Many thanks to the authors and publishers who granted access to the novels in online format and the copyrights to analyse their novels: John McGahern's publisher Florence Rees, Paul Murray, Roddy Doyle, and Dermot Bolger. The fourteen novels are: Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home* (2003), *The Valparaiso Voyage* (2002), *New Town Soul* (2010); Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* (1987); John McGahern's *The Leavetaking* (2009), *That We May Face the Rising Sun* (2009), *The Dark* (2008), *Amongst Women* (2008/1990); Paul Murray's *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* (2004); Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart* (2012), *All We Shall Know*

(2016), *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018); Patrick McCabe's *The Dead School* (1996); and finally, Sebastian Barry's *The Temporary Gentleman* (2015).

20. Kilgarriff et al., "The Sketch Engine," 7. Both institutional ethical guidelines and international codes of conduct and guidelines on legal issues related to intellectual property rights and ownership were followed in the usage of these texts.
21. Ibid., 8.
22. Evison, "Basics of Analysing a Corpus," 129.
23. Jakubíček et al., "Fast Syntactic Searching," 741.
24. Fig. 1 shows a number of descriptors that accompany "lad". These include adjectives like "bad" in the sentence "lad is bad," a description which a contextual analysis shows to refer to the physical state of a particular male character when hospitalised. There is also the aforementioned drinking in the sections with modifiers and verbs that accompany the searched word, e.g., "drink, lad," or instances in which "lad" works as a subject: "the lads bounced" or "lads started".
25. Jeffries, "Pull without Being Nasty," 910.
26. Bolger, *The Valparaiso Voyage*, 297.
27. Ryan, *All We Shall Know*, 137.
28. Cf. Tully, "Stuck in the Old Times," 128.
29. Jeffries, "Pull without Being Nasty," 922.
30. Jakubíček et al., "Fast Syntactic Searching," 741.
31. Normalisation consists of extrapolating raw frequencies from different-sized corpora so that they can be shown by a common factor (Evison 126). The results can be expressed by occurrences per thousand or million words. In order to do this, the raw frequency of the token that is shown is divided by the total amount of words of the

corpus and then multiplied by 1,000 or 1,000,000 respectively; thus, showing how frequent a particular word is in the corpus.

32. Caldas-Coulthard, "Reported Speech," 153-63.
33. Ruano San Segundo, "Corpus-Stylistic Approach Dickens," 114.
34. Zwicky, "In a Manner of Speaking," 223.
35. Murray, *Evening of Long Goodbyes*, 106.
36. Doyle, *The Barrytown Trilogy*, 57.
37. Ibid.
38. Murray, *Evening of Long Goodbyes*, 264-65.
39. Caldas-Coulthard, "Reported Speech," 163.
40. Garcia, *Coping and Suicide*, 28.
41. McGahern, *Face the Rising Sun*, 54.
42. Doyle, *The Barrytown Trilogy*, 58.
43. Cf. History: Colella 2013, Pionke 2014, Liddle 2015; Sociology: cf. Rubtcova et al. 2015.
44. Pilný, "Irish Studies Continental Europe," 217-218.

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Tables with captions

Table 1

Most frequent V of speech with NP within “laddish” behaviour.

Verb of Speech	Hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words
Say	1567	1,4389
Ask	160	0,1469
Laugh	61	0,0560

Reply	53	0,0486
Shout	43	0,0394
Explain	26	0,0238
Answer	22	0,0202
Call	21	0,0192
Smile	19	0,0174
Roar	15	0,0137

Table 2

Adverbs in use with NP and the most frequent verbs of speech. Adverbs that show manner of speaking were highlighted.

Verb of speech	Adverb	Number of adverbs per verb
Say	Absently, adamantly , again, aggressively , agreeably, angrily , anxiously, appreciatively, authoritatively , back , barely, belligerently , bitterly, bleakly, briskly, brusquely , carefully, carelessly, casually, cautiously, combatively , confidently , constantly, curtly , darkly , decisively , defensively, defiantly , derisively, desperately, disagreeably, disapprovingly, dismissively, doubtfully, frilly, easily, emotionally, excitedly, expressionlessly, firmly , flatly, gently, gratefully, half-jokingly, happily, hardly, hastily, heavily, humorously, indulgently, irritably, jauntily, just, laughingly, lightly, loyally, matter-of-factly, mockingly , modestly, morosely, now, patiently, politely, provocatively , querulously, quickly, quietly, reflectively, reluctantly, reproachfully, resentfully, roughly , sarcastically,	92

	sharply , slowly, slyly, softly, solemnly, soon, sourly, stolidly, succinctly, suddenly, superstitiously, sympathetically, teasingly, testily , thoughtfully, tiredly, uncertainly, vigorously , violently	
Ask	Aggressively , anxiously, awkwardly, cautiously, finally, ironically, jocularly, laughingly , lightly, playfully , quietly, roguishly, sharply, tersely	14
Laugh	Again, carefully, gently, hollowly, incredulously, nearly, loudly , nervously, proudly, sympathetically	10
Reply	Absently, angrily, curtly , evenly, gently, innocently, ironically, quickly, sourly, trenchantly	10
Shout	Suddenly	1
Explain	Apologetically, patiently	2
Answer	Agreeably, bluntly , carefully, defensively, jauntily , quickly, readily, seriously, sourly, vaguely	10
Call	Again, back, softly, quaintly	4
Smile	Grimly, mockingly , quietly, warmly	4
Roar	-	0

Figures

modifiers of "lad"	verbs with "lad" as object	verbs with "lad" as subject	"lad" and/or ...	adjective predicates of "lad"
nothing ... you something for nothing , lad	ask ... ask the lad	bounce ... The lads bounced	Alec ... As Alec and the lads	bad ... lad is bad
young ... the young lads	call ... lad called	use ... lads were using	nothing ... you something for nothing , lad	
easy ... easy , now , lad	know ... know , lad	try ... lads trying to	drink ... drink , lad	
response ... response lads	say ... say , lads	do ... lad doing	lad ... great bunch of lads , Irish lads , you know	
baldy ... baldy lad	go ... go now , good lad	start ... lads started	place ... place , lad	
drink ... drink , lad	see ... saw a lad	tell ... lad there telling		
oul ... me oul lad	be ... was a lad	stand ... lad is standing		
Galway ... Galway lad	do ... did , lad	get ... lads got		

15	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	en the guitar changed course a bit and stayed that way. </s><s>	James shouted	and huh-huhhed a while longer and then it faded out. </s><s> Jir
16	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	-I HAVE VISIONS O' MANY THING- INGS- -Sisters, Joey The	Lips shouted	, -Wha'? said Natalie. -I want you to come in there, okay? -How
17	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	AY- BEEE-Right, girls.-UUH-EEE-UUH-Wonderful, Joey The	Lips shouted	. </s><s> He meant it. </s><s> It had been woeful, but it was a st
18	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	sters. </s><s> The Commitmentettes got ready. -Rain, Joey The	Lips shouted	. </s><s> Billy gave him rain. -Thunder.-A bit less. </s><s> He n
19	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	i if she was? said Bernie. -You're fuckin' taller than him! </s><s>	Deco shouted	. </s><s> This went against nature. -So? </s><s> None of the la
20	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	ay whenever he wasn't needed for singing. -Come on, come on,	Deco shouted	.-Let's go. -Wha' 're we doin', Joey? </s><s> Outspan asked. </s>
21	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	The Lips. </s><s> He looked around, frowning. -It's hash.-Here,	Jimmy shouted	.-Who has the hash? -Me, said Billy. </s><s> Deco, Outspan, Dr
22	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	an empty 7-up can at Deco's head. -Wha' was tha' for? </s><s>	Deco shouted	.-I don't like yeh, said Jimmy.-An' I've a bit o' news for yis. -So y
23	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	lad just knocked over the snare drum. -He's a fuckin' eejit, Joey,	Deco shouted	.-Joey, said Billy.-I said it before, it's one o' the risks yis have to
24	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	o it easy. </s><s> For fuck sake! -I've an arse here yeh can kiss,	Imelda shouted	back from behind the door.-Can we come in? -No. -Enter, Sister
25	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	.-Can we come in? </s><s> A small boy stood at the door. -No,	Mickah shouted	down to him. -When? -When I say so. </s><s> Now shut the fuc
26	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	ody to get up off o' your seats an' (-Wha' fuckin' seats? </s><s>	Mickah shouted	.)-an' get your arms together an' your hands together an' give me
27	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	'E TO MAKE IT-A mike screeched. -Sorry 'bou' tha', they heard	Jimmy shout	.-My fault.-Won't happen again. </s><s> It did though. </s><s> §
28	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	he stood his ground at the front, leering at his audience. </s><s>	Billy shouted	:-Get ou' o' the fuckin' way. -Stay cool, said Deco. </s><s> He h
29	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#6	igh' an' have this ou'. </s><s> Deco left. -Watch ou' for the fans,	Derek shouted	after him. </s><s> Mickah let go of Billy. -He's ruinin' everythin',
30	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#7	He was only aware of Mona's frightened wailing in the bed when	Mahoney shouted	, 'You in the bed shut up before you get cause. </s><s> Shut up r
31	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#7	urity. </s><s> Everyone's looking for security,' the Reverend Bull	Reegan shouted	annually from the pulpit at every annual retreat. </s><s> Lives we
32	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#7	/s><s> That's what'll show them who has the brains round here,'	Mahoney shouted	as he read. </s><s> 'Congratulations,' he shook his hand in the n

12	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#8	d ourselves in his place.' </s><s> 'But we didn't,' Robert	Booth said firmly	. </s><s> At lunch he asked for a glass of wine, which we
13	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	I to know your name and I know nothing of your friend,'	Clancy said curtly	, starting up the slope towards Eburn who stood her grou
14	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	hrough ourselves.' </s><s> 'That's not going to happen,'	Clancy said curtly	. </s><s> 'Who says so?' </s><s> McGuirk retorted. </s><s>
15	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	is real. </s><s> 'Neither of your big mouths are helping,'	Clancy said quietly	. </s><s> McGuirk turned to him. </s><s> 'OK, but not nee
16	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	se?' </s><s> 'Eamonn Brogan was a bitter old fart,' Pete	Clancy said sourly	. </s><s> 'Only a fool would believe a word from his mou
17	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	lessing, 'I love you!' </s><s> 'There was no penetration,'	Clancy said testily	, jangling his car keys irritably. </s><s> 'Your father alway
18	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	and leave you in peace.' </s><s> 'Then do exactly that,'	Conor said angrily	. </s><s> 'Fuck you. </s><s> And fuck whoever's money i
19	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	mother miss your father?' </s><s> 'That's her business,'	Conor said brusquely	. </s><s> 'What's it to you?' </s><s> 'I knew them both...tf
20	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	not a problem.' </s><s> 'I'm not leaving without my dad,'	Conor said defiantly	. </s><s> 'Who says you're leaving?' </s><s> Clancy repli
21	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	:s> 'Ask him the real reason he doesn't want you to go,'	Conor said quietly	from the corner. </s><s> 'Eh?' </s><s> Slick turned, puzzl
22	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	e had men friends she kept them well hidden from me,'	Conor said quietly	. </s><s> 'I would have been hurt, I was very fixated abo
23	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#16	ating, Hen Boy?' </s><s> 'Don't you call my father that,'	Conor said sharply	. </s><s> 'Brendan is right,' Clancy interjected soothingly
24	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#9	aid Deco. -Fuck yourself, said Natalie. -Fuck yourself,	Deco said back	at her. </s><s> Natalie spat at his face. -Here! </s><s> Sl
25	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#2	be some sort of skinhead prison-island. </s><s> 'Ibiza,'	Droyd said authoritatively	. </s><s> 'One of these days Frankie and me are goin to
26	<input type="checkbox"/> ⓘ doc#2	iting him?' </s><s> I asked. </s><s> 'That bird was here,'	Droyd said disapprovingly	. </s><s> 'What bird?' </s><s> 'That bird with no tits,' he e

Figure captions

Fig. 1. Initial Search of “lad” through Sketch Engine in the CMIW.²⁴

Fig. 2. Concordance Lines of “proper noun + shout”.

Fig. 3. Concordance Lines of “proper noun + say + adverb”.