The pragmatics of the *be* + *after* + V-*ing* construction in Irish English

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Abstract

This paper looks at a well-documented form in Irish English, 'be after + Verb-ing' (e.g. 'He's after forgetting to pay her') which roughly equates to the present perfect aspect in Standard English. The structure, a calque on an Irish form, has been used in the past in literature and cartoons to both characterise and stigmatise Irish English. This paper tests the hypothesis that this structure is still widely used in Irish English today because it has acquired pragmatic specializations which do not have an equivalent in the Standard English form. This paper draws on one million words of Irish English recorded in different parts of Ireland to form the Limerick Corpus of Irish English, recorded between 2001 and 2005. All of the occurrences of the form in the corpus were isolated and analysed in context. A number of pragmatically specialised functions were identified and discussed. The distribution of the form across gender and particularly across a range of age groups, especially among young adult speakers, suggests that the form is robustly placed within Irish English. It is concluded that because its pragmatically specialised functions do not have an adequate equivalent in Standard English, it has and will remain as part of the core grammar of Irish English.

1.   Introduction

Irish English has been analysed from many different perspectives, with a variety of approaches, aims and methods. As far as the lexis is concerned, a general look at the large body of dialect word lists in Ireland reveals an interest in the Irish English (henceforth IrE) lexicon as far back as 1557 with Stanishurt's brief lexicon of the archaic dialect of the baronies of Forth and Bargy in Co. Wexford and Fingal in Co. Dublin. The majority of these compilations consist of glossaries and word lists of Irish Gaelic influence on the English spoken in different areas of Ireland, a tradition that continued up until the nineteenth century. Many of these glossaries have been used in more recent years and are important contributions not only to dictionaries dealing with IrE (cf. Traynor 1953; Macafee 1996; and Dolan 1998/2004), but also to more general dictionaries such as the *English Dialect Dictionary* (Wright 1905).

Miscellaneous other publications based on IrE lexis have also appeared, some of them in Irish (Ó hAnnracháin 1964). Other research has dealt exclusively with IrE words drawn from literary sources (Bliss 1972a; Wall 1986). The study of IrE syntax, on the other hand, has yielded interesting scholarly findings in the fields of historical linguistics, second language acquisition and creole studies, to quote but a few theoretical frameworks. In comparison with the domains of lexis and phonology (cf. for example Ní Chasaide 1979; Adams 1986; Hickey 1986, 2004), it can be safely stated that the syntax and grammar (Filppula 1999) of IrE has been much more productive to date from an academic point of view.

The pragmatic aspects of this variety, however, remain relatively less explored. In a recent publication on IrE, Hickey (2007: 370-376) gives a brief overview of some of the pragmatic issues of relevance to this variety. He points out that pragmatics is one of the areas that remains to be researched (Hickey 2005: 37). Barron and Schneider (2005a) is to-date the only volume to dedicate itself to the pragmatics of IrE. It presents an eclectic range of

contexts for the study of IrE in use: teacher education (Farr 2005), radio phone-in (O'Keeffe 2005), family discourse (Clancy 2005), service encounters (Binchy 2005), literature (Amador 2005), everyday communication (Barron 2005a and Schneider 2005), advertising (Kelly-Holmes 2005), business communication (Martin 2005; Cacciaguidi-Fahy and Fahy 2005), and a variety of contexts from ICE-Ireland (Kallen 2005). Another study which provides a pragmatic focus on the use of Irish English in context is Farr et al. (2002). This article details the design of the Limerick Corpus of Irish English and gives pragmatic examples from the data, such as, for instance, the use of *like*. They also illustrate how this material can be used to promote language awareness.

In this paper we will look at one syntactic structure, the *be + after +* Verb-*ing* (cf. below). This is a structure which is specific to IrE, a national variety of English (see section 3). We look at this dialectal feature from the perspective of its use in context within IrE. Our focus is on the pragmatics of its use. In other words, we are looking at a feature of a dialect from within. We are not assuming IrE to be a monolithic variety, but are rather looking at this structure intra-lingually to see how its use varies across many contexts of use, ages and genders. This follows the work of Barron and Schneider (2005b). As Barron (2005b) observes, research in dialectology has not paid much attention to variation in language use. Instead, it has concentrated overwhelmingly on regional and social variation on the phonological, syntactic and lexical levels of linguistic analysis. As a result, Barron notes, there is a general dearth of research in pragmatics and in dialectology and therefore, we do not know very much about the systematic nature of intra-lingual variation (cf. also Barron and Schneider 2005b). Barron and Schneider (2005b) give coinage to the term *variational pragmatics* and it is within this intra-lingual framework that we approach this topic (see also Schneider and Barron 2008).

The express aim of the paper is to test the hypothesis that the *be + after +* V-*ing* construction structure is still widely used in Irish English today across all age groups due to

the fact that it has acquired specialised pragmatic functions which do not have an equivalent Standard English.

2.   The origins of Irish English

The history of the English language in Ireland has already been dealt with in depth by many scholars (cf. for instance, Hogan 1927; Ó Cuív 1980; Quin 1959; Braidwood 1964; Risk 1968-1971, Adams 1986; Bliss 1979; Sullivan 1980; Barry 1981, 1996; Edwards 1984; Harris 1991; Filppula 1999; Hickey 2007). English was brought to Ireland by the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century. However, they assimilated so well into the native community that many of them acquired their language. As Barry puts it, "the evidence suggests that the Anglo-Normans and their English followers were absorbed by the Irish in rural areas and only remained as a distinctive group in the fortified towns" (1980: 151)[1]. 'The Statutes of Kilkenny', which were passed in 1366, were an attempt to proscribe the use of Irish among the English or Norman colonists living in Ireland, among other prohibitions. In spite of measures like this, Irish flourished throughout the fifteenth century, but by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the English language managed to secure a foothold in the main towns as well as in some baronies[2]. However, the English spoken in Ireland at that time was already divergent from that spoken in England. As Adams puts it, "[t]hrough isolation from the English of England these early Anglo-Irish dialects, which were off-shoots mainly of south-western English, had developed certain distinctive features of their own" (1986: 23).

The position of English at the end of the sixteenth century is not very clear. Ó Cuív remarks that "with the exception of a small number in parts of Leinster and in certain urban areas, the people of Ireland were Irish-speaking and Irish-speaking only" (1980: 14). However, as Kallen points out (1994: 155), it would be difficult to talk about the total disappearance (or 'extinction') of Irish, instead, a "transitional period in which modern Irish English developed in a situation of interdialectal, as well as interlinguistic contact" appears a more realistic explanation (Kallen 1994: 169).

The linguistic pattern of Ireland was affected again by new waves of English-speaking settlers in the sixteenth and seventeen centuries. During the Tudor-Stuart period, a series of acts were passed against the use of Irish. However, the Reformation itself is often alluded to as one of the main reasons for the slow spread of English in Ireland. The first plantations, whereby English settlers were allotted land "in an attempt to ensure Ireland's loyalty to the monarchy and to the newly established faith of England" (Barry 1996: ix), took place at this time. The plantation schemes of 1586 affected Ulster in particular (where many Scottish settlers went), but it was the "Cromwellian Plantations", as shown in previous research (see Gregg 1972, Bliss 1972b, Adams 1971, Barry 1996), that caused the most significant change in the linguistic pattern of Ireland. The dispossession of their lands and their consequent isolation (social, political and geographical) had an impact on the acquisition of English by the native Irish. As Bliss indicates:

> This seventeenth-century English was acquired, gradually and with difficulty, by speakers of Irish; and in the process of their acquisition of it they modified it, both in pronunciation and in syntax, towards conformity with their own linguistic habits. Because of the social conditions existing in Ireland, Irish speakers rarely had the opportunity of prolonged contact with speakers of Standard English, and learned their English from those whose English was already less than perfect; so that the influence of the Irish language was cumulative, and remains strong even in those parts of Ireland where Irish has long ceased to be spoken. (Bliss 1972b: 63)

The linguistic consequence of these plantations was, therefore, the introduction of different varieties of English which came into contact with the Gaelic language spoken by the indigenous population. The long-established contact between Ulster and Scotland, and the insertion of new forms of English brought about with the seventeenth century plantations, is what gives grounds for the present-day methodological differentiation between Southern Irish

English and Northern Irish English. In this paper, we use the term Irish English (IrE) to refer to both.

According to de Fréine (1977: 73), Irish still enjoyed a strong position as a vernacular in general on the island of Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century. However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the use of the Irish language began to decline (although situations of bilingualism still survived especially in rural areas), and the language shift from Irish to English was set in motion. English henceforth became the language of prestige and power. Among the reasons which are often alleged for the rapid shift from the vernacular language to the language of the planters, are the progress of the railway connections between the two major English-speaking towns, Belfast and Dublin, the influence of schools (where the use of Irish was banned), high emigration to English-speaking destinations, such as the UK and the USA, and the deaths caused by the famines (cf. Barry 1983: 92).

This long-lasting contact between the Irish and the English languages is still very much noticeable in the English spoken – and sometimes written in Ireland. This is apparent in the present paper, the focus of which is the structure *be + after* + V-*ing,* a structure which comes from the Irish language. We have chosen it because its use comes with intriguing ambiguities. It both characterises and caricatures the English that is spoken in Ireland. It is a structure which has robustly survived even in contemporary Ireland where English is open to global influences and trends of usage.

3.   The *be + after* + V-*ing* construction in Irish English

The *be + after* + V-*ing* construction is a calque of an Irish (Gaelic) form (Harris 1984; Filppula 1999; Hickey 2007 among others) and there is a long lineage of work on it (cf. for example Joyce 1991 [1910]; van Hamel 1912; Henry 1957). The structure is used to express perfect aspect in Irish. It can manifest with either of two synonymous prepositions meaning *after,* namely *tar éis* and *i-ndiaidh.*

(1) a. Tá   mé   tar éis an nuachtáin   a léamh

       V + S +   Prep.   +   N (O) +   part.- V

       IS - I   AFTER   THE NEWSPAPER READING

       'I've just read the paper'

     b. Tá sé   i ndiaidh   gluaisteán   a cheannach.

       V + S +   Prep.   +   N (O) +   part.- V

       IS - HE   AFTER   A CAR   BUYING.

       'He's just bought a car'

Given the absence of an equivalent form in English, the *be + after + V-ing* structure has been seen as a way of expressing that sense of recency or immediacy in Irish English. The closest Standard English (StE) structure is the *have just + past participle*, i.e. perfect aspect, but this does not capture the same level of immediacy. Nor, we will argue, does it have the same pragmatic effect.

Most of the studies on this structure look at its usage in literary works (Hayden and Hartog 1909; van Hamel 1912; Taniguchi 1972; Bliss 1979; Wales 1992). A number of works discuss its subversive use as a means of characterising Irish peasants pejoratively, particularly in the 1880s (Bartley 1954; Zach 1988; Croghan 1990; McCafferty 2003a, b, fc.). Most of the work on Irish English in general, and hence also on this particular widely studied form, is within the area of historical linguistics and sociolinguistics. This research bears out the existence of substratum influence on the existence of this form, traces its existence historically to different parts of Ireland and evinces its widespread use (cf. Kallen 1981; Adams 1985; Harris 1984, 1993; Todd 1989; Filppula 1991, 1995; Hickey 1995; Moylan 1996).

This study differs from others on the *be + after + V-ing* construction in that it is based on a large contemporary corpus of mostly everyday spoken Irish English, namely on the one

million word Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE) (cf. Section 4). A further differentiating feature is its focus on how the form functions pragmatically.

4.   Data and methodology

The Limerick Corpus of Irish English (henceforth LCIE, cf. Farr et al. 2002) is a collection of one million words of Irish English, involving over one hundred hours of recordings from around the Republic of Ireland. The recordings span the time period 2001 to 2005, with the majority of the data collected between 2002 and 2004. The recordings were transcribed to form a corpus. While the aim of the corpus was not to create a sociological or geographical representation of IrE, every attempt was made to achieve a range of samples across age, gender, socio-economic background and geographical location. The primary aim of the corpus was to represent spoken English as it is used in mostly everyday contexts in contemporary Ireland and also to build a corpus which paralleled the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE, as detailed in McCarthy 1998). Recordings took place mostly in family homes and accommodation shared by friends (these are categorised as 'intimate'). Such recordings account for 79 per cent of the data. There are also recordings between friends situated in social contexts, such as pubs and restaurants (categorised as 'socialising'). These recordings account for three per cent of the data. In addition, it also contains data recorded in more formal settings, for example in the workplace ('professional'), in shops ('transactional') and also in lecture halls and university classrooms ('pedagogical'). Table 1 provides a breakdown of these 'interactional categories', as well as examples from each category and also the percentage of each type of data in the corpus. The three spoken genre categories of information provision, collaborative idea and collaborative task from McCarthy (1998) were used to complete the matrix of interactional type versus genre.

Table 1.   *Interactional relationship types (adapted from Farr et al. 2002).*

	% of data	Information-provision	Collaborative idea	Collaborative task
Intimate	79	A friend telling a group of friends a story	Family members chatting	Family members putting up the Christmas tree
Socialising	3	Interview, informal chat	Friends discussing football	Friends fixing a computer printer
Professional	8	Report at appraisal	Team meeting at work	Waitresses doing the dishes
Transactional	3	Tupperware presentation	Chatting with bus driver	Eye examination
Pedagogic	7	Teacher-training feedback session	Student and teacher chatting	Individual computer lesson

The corpus software *Wordsmith Tools* (Scott 1999) was used to automatically retrieve all instances of *be after +* V-*ing* from LCIE by entering the search item *after *ing.* This generated concordance lines of all the occurrences. From these, all non- *be after +* V-*ing* uses were eliminated (e.g. *After opening the door…*). The remaining concordance lines were then used for detailed analysis. Corpus software allows the researcher to retrieve the source file of any one line from a set of concordances and this facilitates instance by instance analysis. Each transcribed recording in the corpus is logged in a database so that any one occurrence of the form can be traced back to such details as age, gender, address, educational background, setting of recording, number of speakers or date of recording.

5.   Findings and discussion

In total, 95 occurrences of *be after* + V-*ing* were found in one million words of the LCIE spoken corpus. No negative forms of the structure were found in the results. Each of the forms was then categorised according to its functional context. Four main functional contexts were identified. The four functions were 1) the immediacy/recency function, 2) the narrative function, 3) the news marking function, and 4) the scolding function. These were distributed as follows:

6.   Table 2.   Breakdown of functional analysis of 95 occurrences of 'be after + V-ing'.

Function	Percentage
the immediacy/recency of outcome function	32
the narrative function	32
the news marking function	26
the scolding function	10

6.1.   *The immediacy /recency of outcome function*

The immediacy function has been well-documented (see for example Filppula 1999: 99-116; McCafferty 2004, and Ronan 2005) and it refers to actions, events or changes of state that have happened in the very recent past. 32% (n=30) of all uses of the structure fall into this category. Typical examples from our data are:

(2)   (LCIE) [talking about a baby]:

He's **after getting** up a load of wind

(3)   (LCIE)

A: *Will I cut some more tart?*

B: *No thanks. I've just barely=*

A: *Your tart is just **after falling** down your lap. Are you going staying tonight are*

        you? What are you going doing?

As mentioned, the StE equivalent for each of these examples is the present perfect with *just* (*He's just got wind up*; *Your tart has just fallen down you lap*). However, the use of the *be after + V-ing* structure focuses more on the recent outcome of the past action, event or change of state while the present perfect + *just* focuses more the recency of the time reference. The present perfect relates the event to the present time (the time-frame reference of the present perfect). The *be after + V-ing* structure relates the outcome (rather than the event) of a recent event in past time to the present. In other words, there is a difference in the time-frame of the two structures. Compare the following:

(4)   a. (LCIE)

        A: *Helen it's bitterly cold when you open the door.*

        B: *I will.*

        A: *You know I'd say tonight **is after getting** colder.*

    b. (fabricated)

        A: *Helen it's bitterly cold when you open the door.*

         B: *I will.*

        A: *You know I'd say tonight **has just got** colder.*

(4a) focuses on the outcome, the changed temperature, whereas (4b) emphasises the time-frame of the change of temperature, relating recent past to present time (as is the function of perfect aspect). This contrast brings into relief the fact that the *be after + V-ing* structure can modalise the speaker's reference to an action in time. It is the speaker's perspective of the action, event or change of state which is marked rather than the time.

We also found examples where the *be after + V-ing* structure was used with *only* as an intensifier within the speech act sequence of offering - refusing. This was always in the

context of offers of food. The *be* (*only*) *after* + V-*ing* structure is used to refuse the offer by foregrounding the recency of the addressee's last meal. For example:

(5)   (LCIE)

    A: *Siobhan do you want a cup of tea?*   (offer)

    B: *No I'm fine.* **I'm only after having** *my breakfast.*   (refusal)

(6)   (LCIE)

    A: *You not gonna have some cake?*   (offer 1)

    B: *No. I I I I'm fine I+*   (refusal)

    A: *A biscuit?*   (offer 2)

    B: +**I'm only after eating** *before I came down like.*   (refusal)

The use of the *be* (*only*) *after* + V-*ing* structure here brings focus to the inference that *I am full* – the outcome of having just eaten.

6.2.   *The narrative function*

Kallen (1991) noted the frequent use of *be after* + V-*ing* in narrative situations as a pragmatic issue which merits further research. 32% (n=30) of all occurrences of the *be after* + V-*ing* structure in this study were found in the context of narratives. Let us focus on two examples:

(7)   a. (LCIE)

    *They were coming out there by Kiely's cross. They were just **after coming** up the main road, next thing they saw these legs sticking out across the road…*

(8)   a. (LCIE)

    *These crowd were going down from Ennis **they were after leaving a christening** in Ennis. The fella who was coming up against him he veered across the road.*

Use of the *be after* + V-*ing* structure in narrative contexts is not surprising as it is a powerful narrative device in more than one respect. It focuses on the event in the past and foregrounds it, and it also heightens 'immediacy' in the past. Because it focuses on the event which usually comes before the main event, it acts as a metalinguistic trigger, or primer, for the

listener, trying to keep him/her engaged in the story. In narratives, the *be after + V-ing* structure is substitutable by the past perfect in Standard English:

(7)   b. (fabricated)

*They were coming out there by Kiely's cross. They **had been coming** up the main road, next thing they saw these legs sticking out across the road…*

(8)   b. (fabricated)

*These crowd were going down from Ennis **they had left a christening** in Ennis. The fella who was coming up against him he veered across the road.*

However, this substitution changes the meaning. Because one of the functions of perfect aspect is to background events (while using a simple tense to foreground a main event [cf. Carter and McCarthy 2006]), it has the opposite effect to the use of the *be after + V-ing* structure. Compare for example:

(9)   (fabricated)

   (pre-foreground event)   (foreground/main event)

*She **was after driving** as far as Galway when she **heard** the news of the accident on the radio.*

   (background event)   (foreground/main event)

*She **had driven** as far as Galway when she **heard** the news of the accident on the radio.*

In the first example, *She was after driving…*, the *be after + V-ing* structure acts as a metalinguistic trigger or primer. It primes the listener that something 'is' about to happen. The use of the past perfect in the second example *She had driven…* backgrounds the event and does not offer the same level of narrative engagement and vividness.

The use of *be after + V-ing* is very effective therefore in a narrative because it allows speakers to foreground an event in the past which is not the main event but which is strongly sequentially linked to the main event. As such, the structure functions to herald or metalinguistically trigger the main event. As soon as the listener hears, for example, …*they were just after coming up the road* or *she was after driving…,* they know that the main event

is about to be announced. The drama is thus heightened. The use of perfect aspect has a close temporal link to the foregrounded event, but it does not have the same dramatic effect.

We also found that 43% (n=13)of all the occurrences of the structure within narratives were in the context of reported speech, either as part of the reported speech itself (10) or within the reporting verb structure (11):

(10)   (LCIE)

> *...he said to her one day 'I am very troubled I **am after making** an awful mistake' and she said 'what **what are you after doing'**. **'I'm after doing** something I shouldn't have done at all' he said so he ...*

(11)   (LCIE)

> A: *We were in the pub and dancing and all and she was dying mad to get with any old eejit[3] that'd have her and **I was after saying** hello to Declan.*
>
> B: *Oh my poor Declan.*
>
> A: *And am that was grand anyway…*

Here again, the structure acts as a narrative device heightening the focus on the pre-foreground events in the build-up to the main event.

Another interesting pragmatic aside is the frequent use of the *be after* + V-*ing* structure with a subject not present in the conversation. The use of the form with the 'non-present other' is not very surprising given that the narrative genre includes gossip (cf. Eggins and Slade 1997).

6.3.   *The news marking function*

26% (n=25)of all occurrences of the *be after* + V-*ing* structure were found in a news marking context. That is where it marked new, often surprising information between the speaker and the listener(s).[4] While it could be argued that this function is similar to the narrative function described above, we treat it separately because it occurs outside of narratives. Rather than functioning as a narrative device, it operates more akin to a discourse marker because it flags

up new information for the listener. Examples range from new information which has been hitherto outside of the shared knowledge of the interlocutors to snippets of gossip (equating with the 'hot news' function as identified by others, e.g. Harris 1984) to general exciting news. The structure therefore acts as a pragmatic marker in this context both marking new information and also intensifying it for the listener.

(12)   (LCIE) ['over there' refers to the United States of America]

*...my Dad's over there and my sister's over there and **my brother's after moving to San Francisco** so I'll be at home on my own.*

[the speaker marks this new information for the listener]

(13)   (LCIE)

A: *Who's going to bring me for a driving lesson tonight*

B: *Kieran.*

A: ***I'm after having two driving lessons this week*** *and I could go for another one tonight.*

[the speaker marks this new information for the listeners]

We also find an example where it is used in the context of hyperbole:

(14)   (LCIE)

*He's gifted like **I'm after watching it about nine times** and I went to see it in the cinema you know.*

If the present aspect were used in Example 14, it would change the meaning and make the utterance plausibly literal: …*I've* (*just*) *watched it about nine times*. The present perfect focuses on the time, relating something that has just happened to the present whereas the *be after + V-ing* structure operates as a pragmatic devise marking and intensifying new information for the listener(s).

6.4.   *The scolding function*

10% (n=9) of all of the occurrences were found in a negative context. We use the collective term 'scolding' here, but in many cases the 'scolding' is self-inflicted or self-deprecating. The *be + after* + V-*ing* structure is also used to mark mock-scolding where speakers make fun of themselves or others. Kallen (1989) also finds examples with a "distinct performative value, especially in the act of 'giving out' or chastising [...] in which the speech act is not purely referential but involves both an element of social control and sociolinguistically intimate variable" (Kallen 1989: 11). In our examples, the speakers use the structure as a metalinguistic trigger or pragmatic marker of this scolding.

(15)   (LCIE) [working on a computer]

A: *Make sure you do put that one in.*

B: *Must go back to it again oh **I don't know what I'm after doing** now at all* [sound of cutlery hitting plate] *see I don't know what we have I'll just save it all*

(16)   (LCIE)

... there's no way [Dept of] *revenue can go through a phone bill and say **that's not a business call you're after making***.

Non-present others are also mocked using the structure:

(17)   (LCIE)

*you'd swear that **she was after performing** a miracle on him for the way he looked*

Age and gender were also taken into consideration in our study. Across the 95 utterances, we found the following breakdown. 73% of the occurrences were used by females and 27% by males. Since LCIE is designed to represent spoken language genres rather than as a sociolinguistic corpus, we draw no conclusions from this correlation in terms of the use of the structure and gender. On the topic of variation across age, the majority of recordings in the LCIE corpus were made between housemates and families. Therefore the age group with the largest representation in the LCIE corpus is the age group between 18 to 25.

Table 3.   *Breakdown of age and gender.*

	Gender %	Age range %		
		≤25	26-55	56≥
Female	73	72	16	12
Male	27	69	15.5	15.5

Again although no sociolinguistic conclusions can be drawn here because LCIE has not been designed as a sociolinguistically stratified corpus, the analysis does allow us one definitive conclusion – that the structure has a firm place in the variety. It is one which is very widely used by young educated speakers of IrE and is robustly placed within the core grammar of the variety.

7.   Conclusions

This paper set out to investigate one of the signature structures of IrE, *be after + V-ing*. It is a structure which has already received wide attention but mainly within the context of either attested quotations from literature, small corpora/casually collected data, single attested utterances or invented examples from intuition. In contrast, this study draws on a one million word corpus as its source and finds that there were 95 occurrences of this structure. The corpus of real data allowed us to look at how each of these occurrences was used in context. This facilitated a functional analysis which revealed a number of pragmatically specialised uses of the structure.

First of all, we were able to confirm the widely reported context of immediacy. On close analysis of our examples, it became clear that the structure marked immediacy in terms of the outcome rather than the time-frame. We also found a specialised use of this immediacy

outcome in the context of polite refusals to offers of food, where the addressee mitigates the refusal of the offer by focusing on 'being only after eating'. We also found the structure used very frequently in the context of narratives (stories, anecdotes, gossip). We argued that it is used as a metalinguistic trigger in such contexts, heralding the main event of the storyline. If we substitute it with the standard British English form in the context of narrative, the past perfect, we change the meaning by backgrounding the event. Consistent with the narrative genre (especially gossip), we found there to be frequent use of the structure with non-present others as the subject. In line with previous research, we also found the structure to have a news marking function. In a broader sense, we were able to show that it can be used as a pragmatic marker of new knowledge between the speaker and the addressee(s). Finally, we found a creative use of the form in the context of scolding and often mock scolding/self-deprecation.

The majority of the examples in our data came from users between the age of 18 and 25 and this pattern was consistent across genders.[5] This suggests that the form is very much alive in contemporary IrE. This is a very striking result given that Ireland is in a time of rapid economic change and prosperity, a time when speakers of this age group are open to global influences through English language mass media, such as television, music and internet. Yet, they hold on to a linguistic structure which is divergent from the norms of the language that they generally encounter in these global fora (and which is potentially stigmatising). This suggests that the form has pragmatic meaning that cannot be captured by any standard equivalent form and that it is valued as a membership marker for speakers of Irish English.

Notes

1. The arrival of this wave of settlers meant the introduction of not only English, but French too. The influence of French during this crucial period and its subsequent decline has been discussed, among others, by Barry (1983).

2. As Ó Cuív (1980: 22) explains, "the barony was the smallest unit of area for which separate language statistics were given" in reports up until 1901.

3. 'eejit' is widely used in IrE and means 'idiot'. This reflects how 'idiot' is pronounced in IrE /i:dʒit/.

4. Hickey (2000: 108) makes reference to this element of surprise when comparing the resultative perfect and the *after* construction (which he refers to as the immediate perfective): "an implication of the resultative perfect is that the goal of the action is intended and, importantly, known to the person(s) listening whereas the immediate perfective often contains an element of surprise hence the ungrammaticality of the first of each pair of the following sentences:

   *He's the soup bowl dropped

   He's after dropping the soup bowl.

   *They've the window broken

   They're after breaking the window."

5. We note that there was one 10 year old speaker who used the form. LCIE data are on the whole from speakers over the age of 18. However, there are occasions where recordings made in families involved some speakers below the cut off age of 18.

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