Language Colonization and English Hybridization: The Use of Irish English Lexis in Twentieth Century Irish Drama

Fabio Luppi
Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italia

Abstract Irish English, albeit a variant of the language of the colonizer, can be considered an important identitarian element in twentieth century Irish literature. By taking into account Irish English terms in a selection of Anglo-Irish plays (with particular focus on the titles), this paper examines the lexical choices that contribute to rendering cultural, geographical and political meanings – some of which are derogatory, patronizing and pejorative. The conclusion, with reference to Brian Friel's *Translations*, reflects on the implications of the dominance of English in Ireland following its replacement of Irish Gaelic. The various loanwords and calques from Irish Gaelic found in these plays thus acquire a cultural and political significance that is specific to the Irish context.

Keywords Irish English. Drama. Lexis. Language Colonization. Cultural Identity.

Summary 1 English Linguistic Imperialism and Ireland. – 2 Geographical Connotations: Belonging to a Place. – 3 Derogatory and Patronizing Words Referring to People's Actions / Behaviours. – 4 Language and / Is Politics. – 5 Language, Progress and Identity. – 6 Conclusions.

1   English Linguistic Imperialism and Ireland

English political and economic dominance in Ireland was matched by a cultural and linguistic exploitation with the imperialistic aim of assimilating the Irish ethnic group which was to be absorbed into the dominant (English) culture and language, while possibly remaining subordinate to the colonizers. By the end of the 19th century, this also produced two literatures of modern Ireland that, paradoxically, emerged from the translation movement – the translation of early Irish literature into English (cf. Cronin 1996, 138). Mediating between the two languages,

> translation [meant] an act of pillage and conquest, or [maybe] a bisociative shift towards a newer, more exciting synthesis. (Cronin 1996, 142)

From the Renaissance, and the Republican experience (with Oliver Cromwell), knowledge of English was increasingly necessary to

> deal with local administrations and courts of law, to follow national politics and to communicate with landlords who were mainly English-speaking Protestants. (Binelli 2010, 38)

As bilingualism became a necessity, Irish became more and more marginal. Undoubtedly, the National Schools System of 1831, which had banned Irish from schools, had an enormous impact. This trend increased significantly during the Great Famine, when whole swathes of the population died from starvation and thousands of families (many of whom were Irish Gaelic speaking) were forced to emigrate. In these years (1845-1849) at least 1.5 million native speakers either emigrated or died. Furthermore, as Eagleton (1995, 12) reports, while there were still many areas of rural Ireland after the famine where Irish was spoken, it was often eschewed as it was thought to bring bad luck. Moreover,

> children who spoke their native tongue were routinely punished and made to wear a "tally stick" around their neck which counted the number of times they had accidentally reverted to their mother tongue. This led to the stereotyping of the Irish language as backwards and associated with the lower classes. (Ní Scolláin 2017, 240)

In conclusion,

> the major reason for the advance of English and the contraction of Gaelic – the two processes were practically if not necessarily

linked – was the desire to survive in the modern world, or better still to improve one's lot. (MacDonagh 1983, 104)

In Ireland, English was increasingly perceived as "a fateful necessity for progress" (MacGiolla Chríost 2005, 101) and "a symbol for opportunity and success" (Filppula 2002, 9).

The Empire recognized British Standard English as the sole variety for administrative and official purposes, while the two main regional variants in Ireland – Ulster-English in the North and Hiberno-English in the South – had no official recognition, though they were spoken and extensively used in literature. Hiberno-English was heavily influenced in its vocabulary, pronunciation and syntax by Irish Gaelic, that found some redress over the language of the colonizer, adapting it to the new colony and its linguistic needs. This was the case with the emergence of culture-bound words – terms encoding typical or valid information within a specific culture (place and time).[1] Indeed, the assumption that there is a fundamental link between language and culture is what underpins the present paper.

However, Irish Gaelic could also influence the language of the colonizer:

Even in the parts of Ireland where Irish has long been extinct its unconscious influence still controls the usage of speakers of English. (Bliss 1984, 150)

Furthermore,

Hiberno-English has evolved a vocabulary of its own that reflects every aspect of life in Ireland. (Wall 2001, 13)

The inclusion of Irish loanwords in Irish English had been an ongoing process in the bilingual Irish context since the Middle Ages. Though Irish-born speakers could not seamlessly shift between Irish and English, they could combine

elements from both languages for the purpose of mutual comprehension by the Irish and English populations. (Cesiri 2012, 39)

Thus, even though Irish Gaelic had to bow to English as the dominating language, it also had its linguistic rearguard revenge, hybridizing English, and enriching the language of the colonizers through borrowings, calques and loanwords that were common in the Irish English variant.

---

1 Cf. Binelli 2013, 102-5.

Nevertheless, English was increasingly perceived in the last century as a means of getting on, and necessary when encountering the practicalities of public life. The symbolic dominance of English over its next-door colony/neighbour did not prevent a strong identitarian linguistic sense from persisting, even in the English variety defined as Hiberno-English, Anglo-Irish or Irish English. With the Celtic Revival the question of language became culturally crucial – with George Moore celebrating Irish as a language fresh from the Middle Ages and W.B. Yeats noting that English was the language of newspapers and materialism.

By providing an analysis of occurrences of Irish English words from a selection of Irish plays written in different moments of twentieth century, this paper aims to demonstrate how lexical choices imply deliberate political, cultural and social meanings. The examples taken into consideration can be divided into five categories:

1. *loans from Irish* (in texts adapted to English orthography);
2. *retention of ME or EModE terms* (words that had become obsolete in England);
3. *English words with a different meaning to the one they had in England* (often influenced by Irish);
4. *words borrowed from other varieties of English* (generally from Scots or northern English dialects);
5. *hybrid forms with an English stem and an Irish suffix*.[2]

In the following sections I will provide non-systematic illustrations of these items.

2 Geographical Connotations: Belonging to a Place

The use of words of Irish origin with strong geographical connotations denotes intentional stress on national belonging and identity. This is exemplified in the titles of two masterpieces of Irish theatre: John Millington Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903) and Marina Carr's more recent *By the Bog of Cats* (1998). A *glen* is "a secluded narrow valley" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary) or a "deep narrow valley, especially among mountains" (Cambridge Dictionary). Its origin is "late 15c., from Scottish, from Gaelic *gleann* 'mountain valley' (cognate with Old Irish *glenn*, Welsh *glyn*)" (Online Etymology Dictionary) and, more specifically, "from Scottish Gaelic & Irish *gleann*, from Old Irish *glenn*" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The word is not simply synonymous with 'valley'. Indeed, had Synge desired, he would have undoubtedly chosen the more common English word. On

---

2 Cf. Cesiri 2012, 37.

the contrary, the author's specific intention was to connotate the setting geographically.

Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* echoes Synge's title, even if it cannot be considered a precise equivalent, as the word *bog* is English and so can refer to English places too. However, the etymology of the word is Irish Gaelic: the Middle English *bog* actually derives from the Irish and Scottish Gaelic *bogach* (soft, boggy ground) from the Old Irish *bog* (meaning *soft*). Though the word *bog* might technically be excluded from our discourse as it only obliquely comes from Gaelic, its use in Carr's title recalls Synge's title in both its rhythm and structure. Both titles open with a preposition of place indicating the setting, and they both exploit the same syntagmatic sequence comprising a head ("shadow" / "bog") and a post-modifier: a prepositional phrase modifying the noun ("glen" / "cats"). This is a particularly appealing choice with regard to titles. In a list of Irish plays staged and written in the twentieth century, these two titles are the only instances (excluding proper names of places or people) that follow this structure and include geographical (though unspecified) references. Significantly, the only similar titles in the aforementioned list of approximately 1,000 plays listed in the well-documented website www.irishplayography.com are:

- *The Moon in the Yellow River* (Denis Johnson, 1931) where the reference to a place is vague and there is no Irish origin to the terms used. While it might be argued that there is a geographical connotation, the title is, in fact, a quote from Ezra Pound and does not refer to specific Irish contexts;
- *The Grand House in the City* (Brinsley MacNamara, 1936), which does not contain a reference to an Anglo-Irish word, though the expression *Grand House* clearly indicates the Big Houses of the Ascendancy in Ireland;
- *Down the Heather Glen* (Joseph Tomelty, 1953) where, despite the reference to *glen*, there is no real post modifier;
- *I'm Getting out of this Kip* (Heno Magee, 1972), a title that is different from those discussed here. The interesting feature here is the use of the Irish slang *kip*, meaning either a "dump of a place" or "to sleep". Its Irish origin and early use in fictional works are of interest, and are worth quoting:

It was first recorded in the middle of the eighteenth century as an Irish slang term for a brothel. The earliest example known is from Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*. As Goldsmith was Irish, educated in Dublin, the implication is that the word was first used in that city. It has long continued to be used there in that way."[3]

---

3 From worldwidewords.org.

3 Derogatory and Patronizing Words Referring to People's Actions / Behaviours

Two other interesting play titles including Gaelicisms refer to people's actions. In so doing they contribute to giving a negative view of Irish society, focusing on elements that convey a sense either of dishonesty or of irresponsible behaviour. The first example of a play with such a title is Dion Boucicault's *The Shaugraun* (1874). The Anglo-Irish word *shaugraun* (also spelt shaughraun, shoughraun, shaughrawn) comes from the Irish *seachrán*, also *seacharán*, meaning *a wanderer*, *a vagabond*, though it can refer to wandering mentally too. It can also be used in the form of *to be on the shaugraun* ('to wander' cf. Dolan 2006, 205).[4] The title character of Boucicault's play is a roguish poacher and very much a comic figure – he is not a negative character, although he responds to the stereotype of the Irish hustler with his typical Stage Irish or Paddywhackery. It is an image that is informed by patronizing and at times contemptuous colonial attitudes.

Another play title that exploits an Irish English term is R.J. Ray's *The Gombeen Man* (1913), *gombeen* (man) being a Hiberno-English term used to describe small grocers, hucksters or moneylenders, who profit from the misfortunes of others during times of shortage.[5] Its origin is the Irish word *gaimbín*, meaning monetary interest. The term originally referred to a moneylender and then became associated with the shopkeepers and tradespeople who exploited the starving during the Famine by selling much-needed food and goods on credit at ruinous interest rates. It is thus a pejorative word, and, significantly, has given rise to the expression *Gombeneesim* and *Gombeenery*. As the term has evolved and acquired a specific meaning in a precise historical context, it should be viewed from a cultural rather than an etymological perspective (bearing in mind Raymond Williams' seminal *Keywords*). The word *gombeen man* has been

> more recently applied to a small-town or rural entrepreneur involved in a number of enterprises, and to the type of political and economic opportunist who emerged following the struggle for Irish independence. (Welch 1999, 186)

The word stands for a criminal, a usurer, but also for the typical person who made a fortune at the time when Ray was writing his play. This clearly indicates that the author himself was drawing a negative portrait of a particular Irishman, a fraudster taking advantage of others' misfortunes. In historical periods such as the Great Fam-

---

[4] Cf. Wall 2001, 305.

[5] Cf. Welch 1999, 64 and Richards 2016, 116-17.

ine or the years preceding Irish independence, such dishonest, or simply selfish, conduct reflects an anti-nationalist attitude, and demonstrates disrespect for the safety and welfare of the community. A similar case is found in Edward F. Barret's play *The Grabber* (1918), a *grabber* being a person who "took over the land of an evicted tenant farmer, esp. during the Land War, 1879-82 (pej.)" (Wall 2001, 189). Its source is evidently English[6] but its distinctive use in Ireland is closely linked to a specific moment of Irish history.

Both Boucicault's *The Shaugraun* and Ray's *The Gombeen Man* – referring to people and their anything but edifying behaviour – exploit negative colonial stereotypes of supposedly typical subaltern (colonized Irish) characters. The former adopts an apparently benevolent (though actually patronizing) attitude towards the title character. The latter realistically portrays the miseries of the new Irish landowners who did not manage to keep hold of their properties, falling victim to opportunistic moneylenders. Here the use of Irish English apparently helps to consolidate negative stereotypes, suggesting that certain misconduct is typically Irish[7] and conversely stigmatizing certain characters who do not support Ireland in times of uncertainty. Such stereotypes have long been the focus of sociolinguistic studies. Labov defines them as

> variants that are readily perceived and commented on (rightly or wrongly) as salient in the speech of particular social or ethnic groups, nationalities, etc. (Labov in Furkó 2013, 124)

The term is similarly defined in social psychology, that is, as a set

> of beliefs shared by in-group members about how one's own and other groups are characterized by certain traits or behavioural tendencies which may be positive or negative. (Bourhis, Maass 2005, 1587)

It is clear that the Irish English variant is used here as a way to

> categorize events, infer intent, and derive expectations about what [stereotyping] is likely to ensue. (Gumperz 1982, 130)[8]

---

6   This particular word has remained almost unchanged since Proto-Indo-European (source also of Sanskrit, Avestan, and Old Persian) through to Germanic languages and hence English (cf. Online Etymology Dictionary: `https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=grab`).

7   However, despite the use of stereotyped Irish characterization, Boucicault revolutionized the way Irish people were portrayed on the British stage. The author's cautious political position towards Irish Nationalism clearly emerges from such characterization. One more necessary remark is that his plays were not specifically meant for an Irish audience.

8   Cf. Furkó 2013, 125.

Another title based on an idiomatic expression to refer to a person is Lennox Robinson's *The Whiteheaded Boy* (1916). *White-head* (-headed, cann-a-bawn, ceann ban) means 'favourite, i.e., it is a calque (or loan-translation) from the Irish *ceann-bhán*, meaning white (fair) head.[9] In the play, the young man Denis Geoghegan – who has always been overprotected as the youngest child of the family – tells his older brothers that he wants to live his life his own way. Denis feels that he needs to be self-sufficient, without any family demands. "I want to be independent" he says, and adds later, "I only want to be able to do what I like with my own life" (Robinson 1982, 112). His brother Duffy comments on this, adopting a telling simile:

> Free?... Bedad, isn't he like old Ireland asking for freedom, and we're like the fools of Englishmen offering him every bloody thing except the one thing? (Robinson 1982, 114)

The relationship between Denis and his family mirrors Ireland's claim for independence and British rule. The title, like that of Boucicault's play, presents a stereotype of something that is typically Irish. The connotations are that Ireland itself cannot yet be self-sufficient: it is like a young boy, the youngest of the family, who must be protected / directed – and implicitly patronized and controlled.

4   Language and / Is Politics

Language is politics: two other examples from Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) can be quoted here. They both refer to words that do not derive from Gaelic, but are of particular interest when used in a specifically Irish context as they communicate political ideas and intent. In order to be fully understood, these terms require the reader / audience to be aware of a specific historical period. The female protagonist, Pegeen Mike, says that if she had a brave fiancé like Christy Mahon in her house, she "wouldn't be fearing the loosed khaki cut-throats, or the walking dead" (Synge 2008, 78). While it can easily be inferred that the expression *khaki cut-throats* refers to violent people of some sort, the reader might think that the 'khaki' refers to the uniform of convicts or some other kind of *persona non grata*. In fact, Italian translators have often mistaken or simplified this item, interpreting it as a reference to criminals and their prison uniform. They failed to grasp, or perhaps decided that it was impos-

---

[9]   Cf. Wall 2001, 363-4. A similar title is Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* (1860). This expression means *a girl*, *a young woman*, deriving from the Irish *cailín bán*, meaning *fair girl* (cf. Dolan 2006, 60; Wall 2001, 116-17).

sible to convey, that 'khaki' is a reference to British soldiers. When the play was written, the connotations were so clear that Lady Gregory (one of the directors of the Abbey Theatre) mentioned a request from the English censor to remove all reference to it from the text because it was considered derogatory to His Majesty's Armed Forces (Gregory 1977, 55). The expression, therefore, makes Pegeen Mike's political stance crystal clear.

In the same text, Pegeen Mike and others use a similar expression that also has political overtones: *peeler*.[10] According to Collins dictionary, this is a (old-fashioned) British and Irish slang word for *policeman*, derived from the surname of Sir Robert Peel,[11] founder of the Royal Irish Constabulary, one of the two police forces active in Ireland from 1822 until 1922. This expression occurs twelve times in Synge's play, and it is also mentioned by Christy in an utterance that is very similar to the one quoted above. He says:

> Oh, glory! It's late for knocking, and this last while I'm in terror of the peelers, and the walking dead. (Synge 2008, 83)

Considering the contexts in which the word occurs, and the adjectives associated with it, what clearly emerges is that (British) authority is seen with mistrust and fear (the word fear and its synonyms are associated with the expression *peeler* on three occasions),[12] but also defiance: Christy's father was taken to an asylum for "battering peelers" (82) while a man Pegeen admired is said to have "knocked the eye from a peeler" (70). Generally speaking, however, the term signals punitive authority.[13] It is thus possible to conclude that in an Irish context both terms (*khaki cut-throats* and *peeler*) are extremely partisan and have strong connotative meanings that go beyond any simple reference to the thing described. Indeed, such expressions position the characters who use them politically.

---

[10] Cf. Wall 2001, 267-8.

[11] Significantly, both slang terms for policemen, "Bobby" and "Peeler", derive from his name: Robert and Peel. Peel also established the Metropolitan Police Service in London in 1829.

[12] "The peelers is fearing him" (Synge 2008, 78); "If they're not fearing you, itself, the peelers, in this place […]" (78).

[13] Christy's antagonist tells him, "Come on to the peelers, till they stretch you now" (Synge 2008, 119); Christy himself tells his father that the crowd wants to take him to the police: "they're taking me to the peelers to have me hanged for slaying you" (120).

5 Language, Progress and Identity

When comparing English to Irish, a linguistic controversy with two opposing factions often arises: those in favor of the *new* language, who see it as a symbol of progress, and those who view it as a Trojan horse, helping the Empire to usurp – by means of language substitution – the Irish cultural identity. This controversy is made explicit in two other twentieth century Irish plays: George Shiels' *The New Gossoon* (1930) and Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980).

Luke Cary – the protagonist of Shiels' play – is the new (modern) *gossoon* (lad). He is sadly conscious of his origins: an old and morally conservative nation, albeit a young one. A sociolinguistic analysis of the title of this play reveals more than one might expect. The word *gossoon* is the anglicization of the Irish *gasún* or *garsún*, (supposedly from the Old French *garçun*, doublet of *garçon*).

> [I]t has been fancifully claimed that the French root of this word may indicate the practice of Anglo-Norman gentry calling their Irish serving boys *garçon*. (Dolan 2006, 112)

> [Yet,] the true Irish word is *gossure*, derived from *gos* [gas], a branch, and *ur*, [úr] 'young', and means literally *a young shoot*. (Dolan 2006, 104)

The fact that the lad is "new" means that he represents modernity. Indeed, the whole plot turns on the conflict between old and new generations. Peter Cary, the protagonist's uncle, is the representative of the old generation called in to rein in the youngsters (i.e., his nephew) and put a brake on corrupting progress, as represented by machinery, new means of transport, leisure and clothes brought in from the city. As he exclaims,

> This country's going to hell at a hundred miles an hour! Petrol and pictures and potheen[14] and jazz and doles and buses and bare legs and all sorts of foreign rascalities. (Shiels 1954, 259)

Luke's mother Ellen also constantly uses words that stress age differences, such as "my old-fashioned ears" (203) or when referring to herself as "the old-fashioned fool mother" (207). Moreover, Ellen highlights the different terms used by young and older generations:

---

14 The word *potheen* is also interesting here. An Irish English word deriving from the English word *pot*, it originally referred to the illegal Irish drink made from potatoes and brewed in the mountains. It was then used to describe any illegally distilled spirits. Potheen (poitín) was traditionally distilled in a small pot; the term is a diminutive of the Irish *pota,* meaning "pot" (cf. Binelli 2010, 47).

"Sally calls you a rotter. But I call you by the old Irish name – a rascal!" (207). It is not quite clear why Ellen says that the word *rascal* is Irish. What is clear is that she also plays the game of code switching to highlight the difference between what is new and what is old. And so significantly, the old name she uses is – in her view – Irish. For her and many others, things that are Irish are positive, while English words represent novelty and corruption.

While it is true that Luke represents immaturity, he also represents a chance for renewal, and although Peter and Ellen stand for wisdom, this also means stasis. Other characters render this apparently neat opposition in less obvious ways: Ned Shay, the serving man, says that

> the changes I see are all for the better. I like to see the big bus stopping at the end of the road to lift the kids for school. (Shiels 1954, 260)

Similarly, Sally Hamil, Luke's fiancée, is described as young and modern: the stage directions describe her as a twenty-year-old, wearing a "bright jumper and coloured skirt", with "newly waved" hair and "smoking a cigarette" (193). Yet it turns out that she is a responsible and serious young woman, the only one capable of putting Luke – and his carefree but aimless life – straight. In *The New Gossoon*, despite the common view that the young generation seems modern and careless, the young couple finally ends up following a conscientious disciplined life based on hard work and sanctified by marriage. In this case, the contraposition between Irish and English is softened by a happy ending.

The situation described in Friel's *Translations* is much more complex. Furthermore, it can also provide theoretical underpinning to the examples under discussion. The play is built upon the same clash between modernity and the past, again reflected in the languages of colonizer and colonized. It is set in 1833 in the fictional Irish-speaking town of Baile Beag (supposedly in County Donegal). Two British soldiers, Lieutenant Yolland and Captain Lancey – in charge of mapping the Baile Beag area – are working with Owen, an Irishman. Owen has been taken on as an interpreter to help the soldiers rename local place-names by translating them into English, adjusting them semantically and/or phonetically as necessary. Significantly, Owen gives much credit to this operation:

> my job is to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King's good English. (Friel 2016, 442)

Hugh (the headmaster of the local hedge school[15] and Owen's father) is a wise man who loves languages (including Irish, Latin and Ancient Greek), but he is also resigned to the British operation of changing place-names. One of his speeches is worth quoting, in that he paraphrases from George Steiner's *After Babel* in a crucial passage:

> You'll find, sir, that certain cultures expend on their vocabularies and syntax acquisitive energies and ostentations entirely lacking in their material lives. […] But remember that words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen – to use an image you'll understand – it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of… fact. (Friel 2016, 457-9)

This very much mirrors Steiner:

> In certain civilizations there come epochs in which syntax stiffens, in which the available resources of live perception and restatement wither. Words seem to go dead under the weight of sanctified usage; the frequence [sic] and sclerotic force of clichés, of unexamined similes, of worn tropes increases. Instead of acting as a living membrane grammar and vocabulary become a barrier to new feeling. A civilization is imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches, or matches only at certain ritual, arbitrary points, the changing landscape of facts. (Steiner 1980, 21-2)

Maire, the local milkmaid and a student at the hedge school, also states explicitly that in her view Irish Gaelic is an obstacle to progress. She quotes the moderate Irish leader Daniel O'Connell who said that "the old language is a barrier to modern progress" (Friel 2016, 437). According to Owen and Maire, English is a symbol of progress and such imperialistic linguistic domination is for the better. However, real linguistic understanding, based on real linguistic (and sociolinguistic) awareness, is found in the character of Yolland. He realizes that a language is not an abstract code, but is imbued with the culture that has produced it:

> Even if I did speak Irish I'd always be an outsider here […] I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me […] The private core will always be… hermetic. (Friel 2016, 456)

---

15 Hedge schools were small informal illegal schools for children of non-conforming faiths (Catholic and Presbyterian). They emerged in the 18th century as a response to the prohibition of Catholic education in Ireland. Significantly, Friel's play is set in a hedge school, and its subject is the defense of Irish culture against a cultural (and linguistic) colonialism.

Given that language is rooted in a cultural tradition, there will always be an idiolect that remains obscure to the non-native speaker (cf. McGrath 1989, 41). Yolland anticipates Lotman's concept of semiotic space, or *semiosphere* (coined in 1984), where communication is seen as a unified mechanism (if not organism) implicit in a community that shares not only a linguistic code, but also the cultural means to decode all the signs that contribute, along with language, creating a cultural sphere. The perception of the world varies according to the language used, and even the same language in a variant form such as Irish English may well imply a different perspective of, and referentiality to, reality. This explains Hugh's comment that

> it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language. (Friel 2016, 490)

Yolland also realizes that "something is being eroded" (459) with the British operation of anglicizing place names and substituting Irish with English: this 'something' is the layered meaning that words have acquired over the centuries.

6 Conclusions

As we have seen, language is perceived as a fundamental identitarian feature expressed as a linguistic variant endowed with borrowings, calques and Irish English terms that necessarily refer to a specific Irish context. Sometimes it is also possible to find almost imperceptible traces in certain Irish English words that are permeated by the Gaelic substratum. These may have thus acquired a dual (or more complex) meaning that might well be opaque to non-Irish speakers. Such words create an ambiguity between *Standard* English and *Irish* English, thus producing specific nuances, which require investigation. Declan Kiberd provides an example of this, quoting from Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904). When a character (Bartley) leaves for a long and dangerous journey and does not take food with him, Nora (the protagonist) comments:

> And it's destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up. (Synge 2008, 20)

The adjective *destroyed* in Irish English has a milder meaning than in Standard English as it is influenced by Gaelic. In Gaelic it would merely mean

> being 'destroyed with hunger, thirst, work, etc.' a sense which normally denotes great discomfort. (Kiberd 1993, 81)

In English the word evokes much darker images, of dissolution and even death. In this context Synge uses a word that when read as Irish English does not sound particularly negative, but if read as Standard English prophetically foregrounds the inauspicious events of the whole play.

To conclude, we might paraphrase Loreto Todd's final remarks in her seminal work *The Language of Irish Literature*. Although Todd refers to broader linguistic features and not just to lexis, she notes that the selection of Irish English words is not a superficial linguistic choice, but the "expression of a world-view and a signal of national and cultural identity" (Todd 1989, 145) that is often opposed to colonialist or anti-nationalist language.

Bibliography

Binelli, A. (2010). "Irish English and Dublin English in Damien Dempsey's Lyrics". Palusci, O. (ed.), *English But Not Quite. Locating Linguistic Diversity*. Trento: Tangram Edizioni Scientifiche, 37-55.

Binelli, A. (2013). *Lingua, semiologia e traduzione dall'inglese*. Trento: Tangram edizioni scientifiche.

Bliss, A.J. (1984). "English in the South of Ireland". Trudgill, P. (ed.), *Language in the British Isles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 135-51.

Bourhis, R.Y.; Maass, A. (2005). "Linguistic Prejudice and Stereotypes. No. 155". Ammon, U.; Dittmar, N.; Mattheier, K.J.; Trudgill, P. (eds), *Sociolinguistics: An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society*. Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1587-602.

Cesiri, D. (2012). *Nineteenth-Century Irish English: A Corpus-Based Linguistic and Discursive Analysis*. Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Cronin, M. (1996). *Translating Ireland. Translation, Languages, Culture*. Cork: Cork University Press.

Dolan, T.P. (2006). *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Eagleton, T. (1995). *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger. Studies in Irish Culture*. London; New York: Verso.

Filppula, M. (2002). *The Grammar of Irish English: Language in Hibernian Style*. London: Routledge.

Friel, B. (2016). *Collected Plays 2*. London: Faber and Faber.

Furkó, B.P. (2013). "Irish-English Stereotypes. A Variational Pragmatic Analysis". *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, 5(2), 123-35.

Garvin, T. (1987). "The Politics of Language and Literature in Pre-independence Ireland". *Irish Political Studies*, 2, 49-63.

Gregory, A. (1977). *Interviews and Recollections*. Edited by E.H. Mikhail. London: Springer.

Gumperz, J. (1982). *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kiberd, D. (1993). *Synge and the Irish Language*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press.

Lotman, Y.M. (1984). "O semiosfere". *Sign Systems Studies* (*Trudy Po Znakovym Sistemam*), vol. 17. Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 5-23.

MacDonagh, O. (1983). *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1780-1980*. London: Allen and Unwin.

MacGiolla Chríost, D. (2004). *The Irish Language in Ireland: From Goídel to Globalisation*. London: Routledge.

McGrath, F.C. (1989). "Irish Babel: Brian Friel's *Translations* and George Steiner's *After Babel*". *Comparative Drama*, 23(1), 31-49.

Ní Scolláin, N. (2017). "Stereotypes and Linguistic Prejudices in Ireland". Dąbrowska, A.; Pisarek, W.; Stickel, G. (eds), *Stereotypes and linguistic prejudices in Europe. Contributions to the EFNIL Conference 2016 in Warsaw*. Budapest: Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 239-46.

Owens, C.D.; Radner, J.N. (eds) (1990). *Irish Drama, 1900-1980*. Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Richards, S. (2016). "'We Were Very Young and We Shrank from Nothing'. Realism and Early Twentieth-Century Irish Drama". Grene, N.; Morash, C. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 105-20.

Robinson, L. (1982). *Selected Plays of Lennox Robinson*. Gerrard Cross; Bucks: Colin Smythe.

Shiels, G. (1954). *Three Plays: Professor Tim. Paul Twyning. The New Gossoon*. Toronto: Macmillan.

Steiner, G. (1980). *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Synge, J.M. (2008). *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge*. London: Wordsworth Editions.

Tymoczko, M. (2014). *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*. London: Routledge.

Todd, L. (1989). *The Language of Irish Literature*. London: Macmillan.

Welch, R. (1999). *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dictionaries

De Bhaldraithe, T. (ed.) (1959). *English-Irish Dictionary*. Dublin: Angum.

Dineen, P. (ed.) (1904). *Folklóire Gaedhilge Agus Béarla*. Dublin: Irish Text Society.

OED (Oxford English Dictionary).

Quin, E.G. (ed.) (1983). *Dictionary of the Irish Language: Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials*. Compact ed. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.

Toner, G., et al. (eds) (2007). *eDil: Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*. Online: Royal Irish Academy.

Wall, R. (2001). *An Irish Literary Dictionary and Glossary*. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe.