Linguistic identity and the study of Emigrant Letters: Irish English in the making

Carolina P. Amador-Moreno
Kevin McCafferty

This paper builds on the findings from a larger research project that analyses written data extracted from a corpus of emigrant letters. This preliminary study is an exploration of the Irish Emigration Database (IED), an electronic word-searchable collection of primary source documents on Irish emigration to North America (USA and Canada) in the 18th and 19th centuries. The IED contains a variety of original material including emigrant letters, newspaper articles, shipping advertisements, shipping news, passenger lists, official government reports, family papers, births, deaths and marriages and extracts from books and periodicals.

The paper focuses specifically on the sections dealing with transcriptions of Emigrant Letters sent home and Letters to Irish Emigrants abroad, from which CORIECOR, the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence, is developed. Our study is intended as a first step towards an empirical diachronic account of an important period for the formation of Irish English. A close look at the ocurrence in the corpus of some features such as the use of the progressive form (e.g. I am reading) and the uses of will vs. shall reveals that these features were already part of what is known as Irish English nowadays. Our study covers the period from the early eighteenth century to 1840, a timespan that stretches from the beginning to the middle of the main period of language shift from Irish to English.

Keywords: emigrant letters, Irish English, Corpus of Irish English Correspondence, progressive, *will* vs. *shall*.

Identidad lingüística y el estudio de cartas de emigrantes: la formación del inglés de Irlanda. Este artículo se basa en los resultados de un proyecto de investigación que analiza los datos extraídos de un corpus de cartas de emigrantes. Este estudio es una exploración preliminar de la *Irish Emigration Database* (IED), una colección electrónica de fuentes relacionadas con la emigración irlandesa a América

del Norte (EE.UU. y Canadá) en los siglos XVIII y XIX. La base de datos IED contiene una gran variedad de material original que incluye cartas de emigrantes, artículos de periódicos, anuncios, noticias, noticias, listas de pasajeros, informes oficiales del gobierno, documentos familiares, partidas de nacimiento, matrimonio y defunción, y extractos de libros y publicaciones periódicas.

El presente artículo se centra específicamente en las secciones que se ocupan de las transcripciones de la correspondencia entre emigrantes irlandeses en el extranjero y sus familiares y amigos en Irlanda. Estos documentos constituyen la base de CORIECOR, the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence*. Nuestro estudio pretende ser un primer paso hacia un estudio diacrónico empírico de un período de gran importancia para la formación del inglés de Irlanda. Un análisis exhaustivo de el uso en el corpus de algunas características tales como el uso de la forma continua (por ejemplo, *I am reading*) y los usos de las formas *will* y *shall* demuestra que estas estructuras sintácticas formaban ya parte de lo que en la actualidad se conoce como *Irish English*. Nuestro estudio abarca el período comprendido entre principios del siglo XVIII hasta 1840, un lapso que abarca desde el principio hasta la mitad del período en el que el inglés vino a sustituir al irlandés como lengua principal.

Palabras claves: cartas de emigrantes, el inglés de Irlanda, el Corpus of Irish English Correspondence, formas continuas, *will* y *shall*.

1. Introduction

Private letters represent an invaluable source of historical and sociological evidence and are also unique records for the documentation of language development (Giner and Montgomery 1997). Written material of this type is in a sense a window into earlier generations. It allows for two types of tracing: on the one hand its portrayal of ordinary life as it was in the past provides the clues which enable historians to reconstruct certain contexts, and, on the other, it allows linguists to examine and trace the gradual development of linguistic features which may have been subject to change in the meantime.

The permanency of writing enables us to dissect texts and take a closer look at the way language was used in the past. The field of historical sociolinguistics has benefitted greatly from the study of personal and official letters. The work of Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1996, 2003), for instance, has shown how this type of written data can help in analyzing the correlation between social status, gender and other social factors and language change. Work in this paradigm shows how modern sociolinguistic methodologies capable of handling large amounts of

variable data can be applied to the study of the historical development of English and other languages. Personal letters have served to document the presence and development of specific syntactic structures (Bailey *et al*. 1989) and historical sound changes (Meurman-Solin 1999). Within this field of study, the value of emigrant letters for linguistic analysis has been highlighted in the work of Michael Montgomery, who claims that "no other type of document, be it dialect poetry, folk tales, or any other, reveals the speech patterns of earlier days nearly so well or as fully as family letters" (1995: 28). Indeed, emigration and letter writing often go hand in hand. Throughout history, letters have been considered important: for the emigrant they provided emotional support and were a way of preserving the memory of the homeland; for those who had stayed behind they helped to palliate absence. For these reasons, letters were often carefully preserved by addressees. The sentimental value of this material, as a result, guaranteed its survival, thus preserving a highly useful source for linguistic analysis.

In the context of Irish history, as Fitzgerald and Lambkin (2008) point out, emigrant letters had a great impact on rural Irish communities, where people who had had only limited access to writing were forced to write, or illiterate family members forced to dictate letters to others. In both cases the type of text produced is of great sociolinguistic interest, given their closeness to speech (see Schneider 2002: 75-76). In that sense, such documents have a very specific linguistic value, as they display spoken features which would have been spontaneously uttered and immediately recorded. The linguistic interest of this type of material, therefore, lies in its close reflection of the spoken usage of a particular community. As Biber (1991: 45) puts it, although they are written, personal letters "show oral situational characteristics for shared personal knowledge, effort expended to maintain the relationship and informational load". Hence they incorporate spoken features generally regarded as part of the colloquial register, such as contracted verb forms, non-standard spellings that match the pronunciation of certain dialectal words, local lexical items, malapropisms, non-standard grammar, etc. The dearth of recorded oral data available for Irish English (IrE) makes this type of written document useful in providing a full description of the English spoken in Ireland prior to the advent of recording equipment.

The present study analyses written data extracted from a corpus of emigrant letters: CORIECOR, the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence* (McCafferty and Amador Moreno in preparation). The letters come from the Irish Emigration Database (IED), an electronic word-searchable collection of primary source documents on Irish emigration to North America (USA and Canada) in the 18th and 19th centuries. The database contains a variety of original material including not only emigrant letters, but also newspaper articles, shipping advertisements, shipping news, passenger lists, official government

reports, family papers, births, deaths and marriages and extracts from books and periodicals. This paper focuses specifically on the sections dealing with transcriptions of Emigrant Letters sent home and Letters to Irish Emigrants abroad. Our study builds on the findings from a larger research project that traces the historical development of certain features of Irish English, and is intended as a first step towards an empirical diachronic account of an important stage in the formation of this variety of English. It covers the period from the early eighteenth century to 1880, a timespan that stretches from the beginning to the middle of the main period of language shift from Irish to English. In order to show how the material left by the movement of Irish emigrants can inform (socio)linguistic studies, two features are selected for the present paper: the use of the progressive form (e.g. *I am reading*) and the use of *will* as opposed to *shall* with first-person subjects. A close look at the ocurrence in the corpus of these two features reveals that they were already part of what is known as Irish English nowadays.

2. Irish emigration and letter writing

Although the claim has often been made that the Great Famine of the 1840s was the cause of a significant increase in emigration from Ireland, it has been pointed out that 'mass' migration was already underway from 1825 (Coleman 1999: 107). Historians have argued that the era of Irish emigration had already started during the pre-famine years (Mokyr 2006: 47). Poor harvests and the subsistence crisis caused by the Napoleonic Wars were responsible for a a steady outflow of emigrants well before the Great Famine, which was to further accelerate the rapid depopulation of Ireland in the 19th century. Full passenger lists and port records of this period are not available, which means that the actual total numbers of emigrants can only be estimated. Thus, the total number of emigrants from Ireland to North America between 1700 and 1775 is thought to have been between 100,000 and 250,000, whereas in the period between 1800 and 1845 "just over a million emigrants left Ireland for North America and about half a million for Britain" (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 2008: 162). During the Great Famine decade the flow increased to 2.1 million, and to somewhere between 4.1 and 4.5 million between 1856 and 1921, according to Miller (1985). As the tradition of emigration developed, a number of ports in Ireland, including Belfast, Dublin, Derry, Sligo and Cork, as well as Liverpool started offering direct transatlantic passages. Many of those who initially went to Britain were in fact in transit to America, which adds to the difficulty of calculating exact numbers. Chain migration, particularly during the Famine period, became very common. As is the case with emigrants from other countries (Haugen 1969), the Irish tended to cluster in certain areas. As Hickey puts it:

28

> Those who went first passed the message about where they had settled back to those in the area they came from. Others then followed on, going to the same area at the overseas location. In the case of the recruitment of emigrants the same should have applied: the recruiters in the homeland would have had contacts to specific points in the overseas locations. (2004: 12).

That these emigration patterns were built on well-established routes and tended to have particular associations with certain areas is also highlighted by Fitzgerald and Lambkin, who state: "the Irish diaspora of 1800 is best analysed as an aggregate of local diasporas constituted by the networks of relationships between the peoples of particular townlands, parishes, towns and counties and their emigrants" (2008: 142).

Communication between emigrants and their families/friends was by letter. For this reason, literacy needs to be briefly mentioned here (cf. McCafferty 2011; McCafferty and Amador Moreno 2012). According to Fitzpatrick (1994: 500), the proportion of Irish emigrants able to read and write rose significantly with emigration, and this seems to have been particularly true of women migrants, who were particularly "keen to acquire literacy before leaving school" (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 2008: 195). Also, we have to bear in mind that of all the regions of Ireland Ulster kept up a strong flow of emigrants from the start and that a great proportion of the pioneering migrants to America were Ulster Presbyterians with relatively high levels of literacy. This in part explains why the great majority of the letters that we have analysed so far come from Ulster.

The corpus of letters contained in our CORIECOR database shows how the emigrants stayed in contact with home. In general, there are a number of aspects common to all the letters: requests for replies, apologies for not having written sooner, concern for the welfare of people at home, references to farming, and to money sent by those abroad, mention of people who have died, etc. From a more linguistic point of view, they show lack of punctuation, non-standard spellings and spelling mistakes, unintelligible words that the transcribers have guessed at and indicated with question marks, and of course, a number of stylistic features typical of letter writing.

The most interesting aspect from a sociolinguistic point of view, as stated in the introduction, is that, given their personal, unselfconscious and spontaneous nature, these letters are a good source of data for linguistic analysis. In Schneider's categorization of the relationship between a speech event and its written record, they belong to the realm of the imagined:

> [c]learly, letters do not represent spoken utterances; but when persons who have had but limited experience in writing and exposure

to the norms of written expression are forced to write nevertheless, their writing reflects many features of their speech fairly accurately: what they do is put their own "imagined" words on to paper, if only with difficulty. (Schneider 2002: 75-76).

These 'imagined' words in the letters we have analysed have a clear identity hallmark, as they represent the English spoken in Ireland at the time of writing. Although we do not claim that letters are in any way a substitute for speech, they are a good source for the study of language at a time when no other sound recording evidence is available. Certain genres of writing, such as electronic mail, letters or postcards, show that the channel of communication can be made to operate in such a way that the interactive aspect is more salient. Following the same train of thought, a number of corpus-based studies of the history of English in the last 500 years have shown private correspondence to be consistently more vernacular and more sensitive to linguistic change than other text types (e.g., Kytö 1991; Nurmi 1996; Meurman-Solin 2002; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003; Fritz 2007; McCafferty and Amador Moreno forthcoming), so part of the motivation for developing CORIECOR is that the kind of data included there is more vernacular than most other data that might be studied for historical linguistic purposes, and might therefore give a better indication of the development and use of IrE in the formative period of this variety.

3. Using the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence to trace IrE

The *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence* (CORIECOR) contains a large body *of* letters written by Irish people and sent between Ireland and other countries (primarily the United States and Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia) from about 1700 to approximately 1940, which covers the period of the emergence of IrE. It incorporates the letter collection of the *Irish Emigration Database* and a couple of smaller collections, comprising just under 5000 texts, of which approximately 4300 are letters. The database as a whole contains about 3.1 million words (2.7 million words in letters). As Figure 1 shows, coverage is good from 1780 to 1920, with a minimum of 50,000 words per 20-year sub-period.
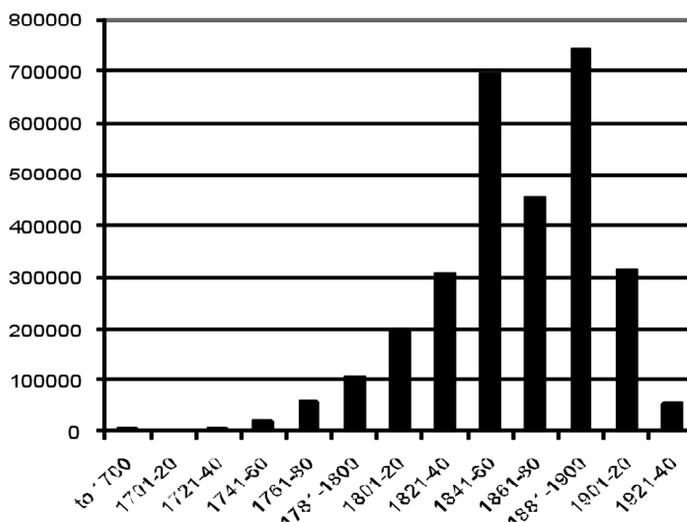
Figure 1. *IED/CORIECOR words per decade*

One of the aims of developing CORIECOR is to allow for a systematic analysis of written evidence for earlier IrE at a scale that permits us to thoroughly trace the emergence and development of this variety of English through time. Relatively few diachronic studies attempt to trace the emergence and evolution of either IrE as a whole, or linguistic traits of IrE through time. Historical accounts tend to be narrowly focused case studies, concentrating on certain linguistic features, literary representations, and particular, shorter periods. The lack of historical accounts of IrE presents a number of problems. It means that researchers interested in this variety do not have a clear picture of its past, and how it became what it is today. The creation of a corpus like CORIECOR means linguists will be able to compare earlier IrE to other varieties. Given that this corpus of relatively vernacular documents will represent speakers from all over Ireland, it will also allow researchers to trace IrE through time, as well as studying stylistic, regional, and social variation along the lines of the historical sociolinguistic survey reported in, e.g., Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003). Such studies would be interesting in themselves as documentation of the history of a variety of English which is often claimed to be responsible for a number of changes affecting other varieties. Some of the changes attributed to IrE include the two features discussed below as examples of how correspondence can reveal the material residue of a variety in the making. These are the use of the progressive form (e.g. I am thinking), which has increased dramatically, especially during the Late Modern English period, i.e., from about 1700 onwards, and the replacement of

first-person *shall* by *will* in expressions of future time, a change which can also be observed in American English (AmE), and in BrE. Both changes are often attributed to IrE influence (e.g., Kytö 1991; Dollinger 2008).

3.1. *Shall/will* in Irish English

As is well known, in standard English the use of *shall* and *will* to express futurity is differentiated by grammatical person: *shall* is used with first-person subjects (*I/we shall*) and *will* with other grammatical persons (*you will, they will*, etc.). Although *will* is becoming more frequent in certain contexts, it is generally considered less formal when used with *I* and *we* (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 632-633). One of the most intensively studied differences between BrE and AmE (Krogvig and Johansson 1981: 32), variation between *shall* and *will* is not an issue in the variety of English spoken in Ireland nowadays. In present-day IrE, future *shall* is virtually non-existent, as noted in recent general discussions (Hickey 2007: 179; Corrigan 2000: 37, 2010: 65; Amador-Moreno 2010: 44-45). One of the biggest semantic differences is that in standard English the use of *will* in the first person singular indicates volition (i.e. that the act will be carried out) whereas the Irish use *will* as a marker of prediction without necessarily implying volition. That the Irish used *will* instead of *shall* with first-person subjects was a favourite complaint of normative grammarians (cf., Beal 2004: 96-97). Nineteenth-century accounts of IrE single out this feature for strong prescriptivist criticism (Biggar 1897: 46-47), and accounts from the early twentieth century (Joyce 1910/1991: 74-77) to the present day (Dolan 2006: xxv-xxvi; Hickey 2007: 179; Walshe 2009: 67-68; Corrigan 2010: 64-65) continue to associate this use with IrE. Recent corpus-based comparative research between IrE and British English carried out by Kallen and Kirk (2001) seems to confirm the preference for *will* in IrE. Thus, in line with the prescriptive observations of normative grammarians and other commentators, we might assume *shall* has simply never been used in IrE.

In order to test this hypothesis we turn to the CORIECOR data to see if it can offer an account of the diachronic development that might reveal something in relation to its use in letters in the past. We look at first-person *shall / will* in IrE in three CORIECOR subperiods: 1761-90, the 1830s and the 1880s, and compare usage in our own data with Early Modern English (Kytö 1991; Nurmi 2002, 2003), early American English (Kytö 1991), and the surveys of eighteenth-century North-West English and early Canadian English reported in Dollinger (2008: 227-248). All these studies, like our own, are based on letter corpora compiled for diachronic linguistic study.

Before turning to the results found in CORIECOR, a look at the state of these forms in Britain before the expansion into the Atlantic seems necessary. While research into the occurrence of these forms indicates fluctuation in the use of *will* and *shall* in English since the

twelfth century, the undeniable trend until the mid-seventeenth century was for *will* to replace *shall* in all grammatical persons, as shown in Figures 2 and 3 (after Kytö 1991: 274). This trend was reversed after 1640, but only in first-person usage – with second- and third-person subjects, *will* continued to replace *shall*.
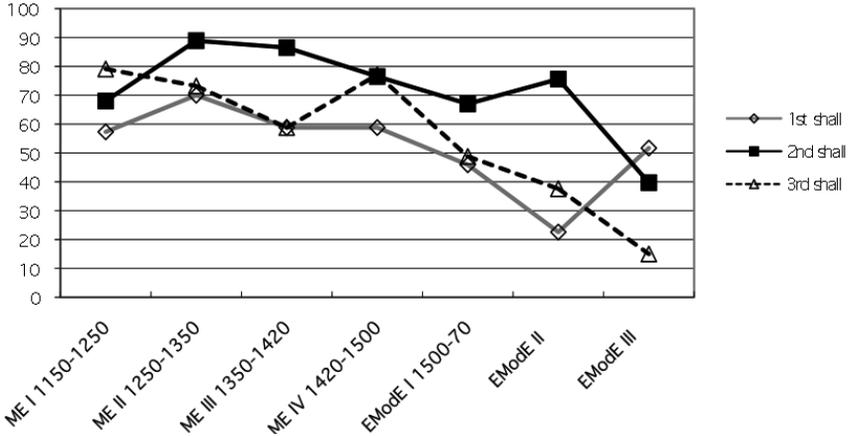

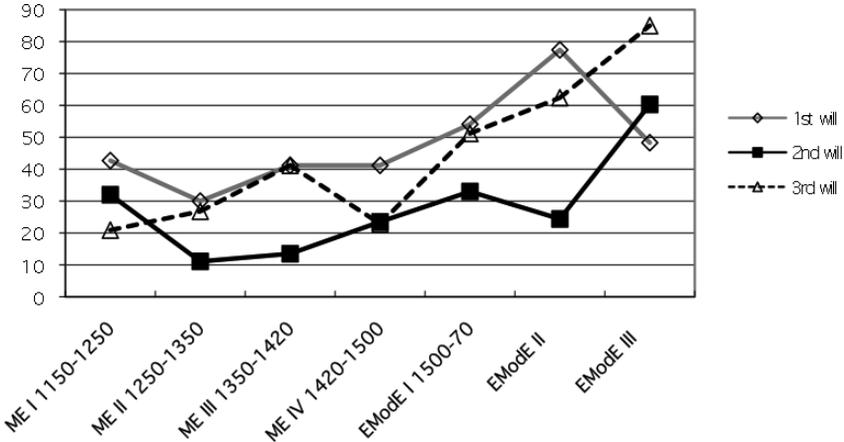Figure 2. Shall *by grammatical person in ME and EModE (percentage, after Kytö 1991:274, Figures 1-3)*

Figure 3. Will *by grammatical person in ME and EModE (percentage, after Kytö 1991:274, Figures 1-3)*

The turn to first-person shall in British English during the seventeenth century does not only coincide with the period when the southern British English rule was first formulated, it was also precisely the period when English-speakers began settling in large numbers in Ireland (in the

33

Midlands, Munster and east Ulster during the late sixteenth century, in the rest of Ulster from 1608), and North America (Virginia from 1607, Massachusetts from 1620). The timing of this linguistic turn of events is significant for the development of IrE. If we assume that the appearance of this usage in writing came some time after it began in speech, the main settlement of Ireland occurred just as *shall* began to be used with first-person subjects in (southern) British English, and the large-scale settlement of Ireland continued until the end of the seventeenth and into the early eighteenth century (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 2008).

Dollinger's (2008) study of the emergence of Canadian English (CanE) in the period 1776-1850, based on newspapers, diaries and letters concludes that CanE was slightly more conservative in maintaining first-person *shall* than American English (AmE); compared to Kytö's (1991) findings from letters written a century earlier, Dollinger's American data shows increased use of *will* in AmE that points to the general trend that is inferable from present-day evidence (Dollinger 2008: 236-237). Dollinger indicates that, from a present-day perspective, late eighteenth-century CanE is most conservative, followed by AmE, while North-West British English is most advanced in using *will* instead of *shall* in the late eighteenth century (2008: 237). The position of IrE (shown in Figure 4 below) indicates that it was just as conservative as CanE in the late eighteenth century.
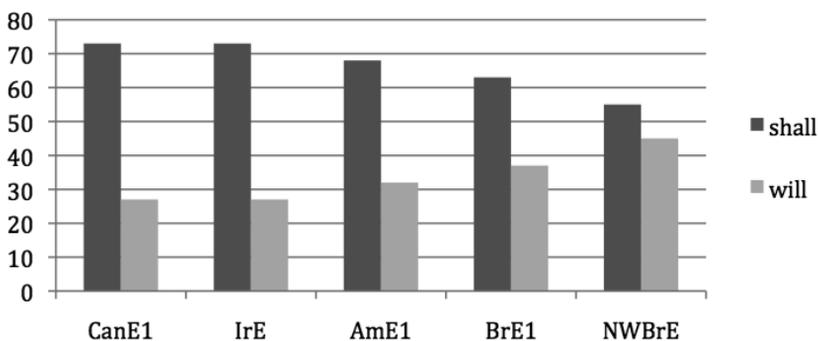

Figure 4. Shall/will *in 5 late-18th-c. Englishes*
(after Dollinger 2008:236, Figure 9.4, 301, Appendix 9.1, CanE n=30, AmE n=22, BrE n=40, NWBrE n=237, IrE (CORIECOR) n=254)

The conservatism of CanE and IrE did not last long – in the early nineteenth century, CanE showed a marked decline in *shall* use, from 73% to 48% (statistically significant at 95% level), while British English (BrE) *shall* actually increased over the same period (from 63% to 75%, not sign. at 95%) and AmE remained stable, so CanE was diverging

from both AmE and BrE in this period (Dollinger 2008: 238). Although Dollinger's study is based on a very small corpus, he argues that the change in CanE is due to the large influx after 1815 of speakers from Ireland, Scotland and the North of England, who either triggered or drastically accelerated the change towards first-person *will* (2008: 238-240).

Our initial analysis of the first-person data in CORIECOR shows a considerable decline in the frequency of *shall* use and a corresponding increase in *will* over the 130-year period from 1761-1890. In the late eighteenth century, *shall* predominated in the letter data we have studied, accounting for 73% of all first-person tokens. This dropped to 45% by the 1830s, and even further to 19% by the 1880s. *Will*, on the other hand, increased from 27% in the late eighteenth century letters, to 55% in the 1830s, and to a near-categorical 81% by the 1880s (see McCafferty 2011).

More detailed analysis of the IrE data seems to show that a number of linguistic and social factors in relation to the use of *shall* and *will* may be at play: as argued in McCafferty and Amador-Moreno (2012), the use of *shall* in eighteenth-century IrE appears to be constrained by geographical origin – users from the larger urban areas, Belfast and Dublin, and rural Tyrone, are more likely to use *shall* than others, whereas letter writers from Antrim, Down and Derry disfavour *shall*. Male correspondents are more likely to use *shall* than females, but do not weight heavily in favour of *shall*. Also, the effects of intimacy/formality seem consistent with a linguistic change from below, i.e., the spread of a more colloquial or vernacular, even stigmatised, form. In this case, *will* was replacing *shall* in more informal contexts (i.e., people addressing a social superior are much more likely to use *shall* than correspondents addressing close nuclear family, more distant family, close personal friends, or more distant addressees).

3.2. The Progressive in Irish English

Little empirical work has been done on the progressive in IrE – exceptions are Ronan (2001), Filppula (2003), Filppula, Klemola & Paulasto (2008: 176-181)– although its use in IrE is said to differ from other Englishes in a number of respects.

First, the progressive is said to be more frequent in IrE than in mainstream standard Englishes (e.g., Hayden and Hartog 1909; van Hamel 1912; Dennis 1940; Henry 1957; Arnaud 1998). Some, like Arnaud (1998) and Filppula et al. (2008: 180), attribute rapid increase in the use of the progressive in English in general during the nineteenth century to Irish immigration into other English-speaking territories.

Second, the "wider range of use of the Progressive" – specifically, the use of stative verbs – as in *I'm liking this* and *What are you wanting?*

(Kortmann 2008: xxvi), is said to be characteristic of Irish English (e.g., Henry 1957; Ronan 2001; Filppula 2001, 2003, 2008) and other 'Celtic Englishes' (e.g., Beal 1997: 372-323; Johnston 2007: 120; Miller 2008; Pitkänen 2003; Paulasto 2006).

Third, the progressive is claimed to be especially more frequent in IrE and other Celtic Englishes in combination with another modal auxiliary (Filppula *et al*. 2008: 176ff.).

Fourth, it is said to be more common in IrE to express habitual meanings where *be + V-ing* combines with *would/'d* or *use(d) (to)* (e.g., Filppula 2003; Filppula *et al*. 2008: 176-181; Ronan 2001; Pitkänen 2003; Paulasto 2006). For this and the previous category, Filppula *et al*. (2008: 176ff.) report densities of usage in IrE (and Hebridean English) that are three to four times higher than in other Englishes.

Finally, the present or past progressive –like the simple present and past can be used in Irish English for functions where mainstream Englishes would normally use the perfect: *I am looking for A letter from some of you this long time* (Elizabeth Boardman, Canada, to James Boardman, Armagh 18/06/1821).

An initial survey of the overall frequency of the *be + V-ing* construction, summarised in Figure 5, shows that the rate of use in Irish English letters increases a great deal from c. 1700 to 1840. Use of the progressive, measured in tokens per 100,000 words doubles from the 1760s to the 1770s and largely continues on quite a steep upward trajectory, until the 1830s at least, by which time it is four times as frequent as before 1760.
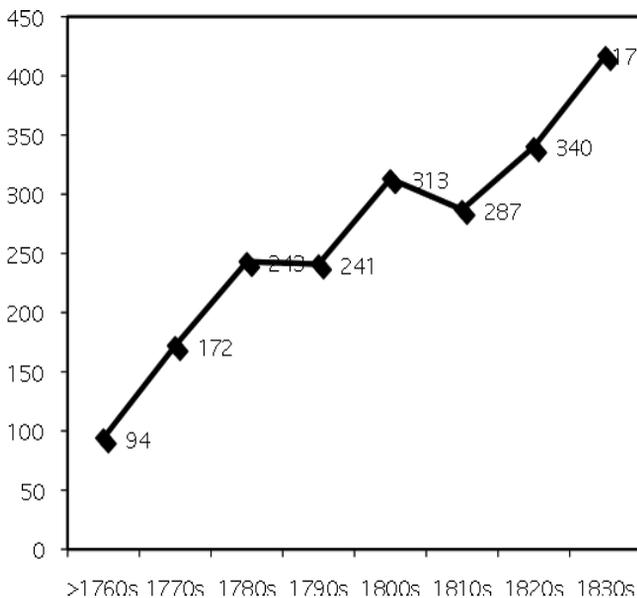

Figure 5. *Progressives in IrE letters in CORIECOR (per 100k words), to 1840*

A comparison of the IrE results from CORIECOR with the results of all –as far as we are aware– available corpus-based studies of the progressive up to 1800, reveals that the progressive is not particularly more frequent in the Irish data for the period to 1770. For the late eighteenth century, similar data is available in the *Corpus of Late Eighteenth-Century Prose* (van Bergen and Denison 2007), which consists of personal letters from the north-west of England. This corpus is a good match for our data in text type and time period, so that we can compare use of the progressive in both corpora over the same three decades. As Figure 6 below shows, in the period 1761-90 the progressive was twice as frequent in IrE as in the British letter data.
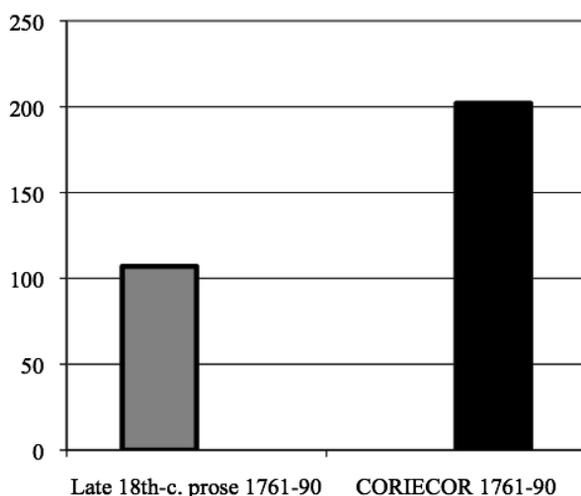

Figure 6. *CORIECOR in historical context – comparison with Corpus of Late Eighteenth Century Prose*

However, comparing IrE up with letter data from other diachronic studies of nineteenth-century Englishes (McCafferty and Amador-Moreno 2012, forthcoming) we notice that other varieties of English only approach the 1830s Irish density towards the end of the nineteenth century. Its use increased more rapidly in nineteenth-century IrE than in any other variety for which data is available: Australian English (Fritz 2007), British English (Smitterberg 2005), or British and American English (Arnaud 1998). In this case, IrE might have contributed to the spread of the progressive where the Irish emigrated and settled.

Turning now to the question of whether particular uses might account for higher density and the more rapid rise of the progressive in Irish English, let's look first at stative verbs. For statives, we find examples such as:

37

> My father saw Sam Riddle in Belfast he **was wanting** him to go to Comber to see his wife (*Prudence Love, 06.08.1821*)

Stative verbs in the progressive have considerably higher density and account for a higher percentage of all progressives throughout our period than any of the other supposedly Irish uses checked. Statives also increase nearly fourfold from the 1770s to the 30s and are more frequent in the nineteenth century than in the eighteenth.

As for collocations with modal auxiliaries (e.g. I am going to write him a letter **he may Be looking** for it, *Elizabeth Boardman, 18.06.1821*), in our CORIECOR data, the progressive is very infrequent with either a modal auxiliary in general (see McCafferty and Amador-Moreno 2012) or more specifically with *would/'d/used to* (e.g. we thought your progress must have been much slower than you expected, as you supposed you **would be passing** Cork at the time, *Rosa Marshall, 16.08.1838*). Filppula *et al.* (2008) reported that the IrE rates for this and the former category were 53 and 31 per 100,000 words, respectively, which was well in excess of the rates for English English, Welsh English and Early Modern English, and rivalled only by another Celtic-influenced variety, Hebridean English. In contrast, CORIECOR on the one hand shows a slight increase in general modal auxiliary use, but negligible use of *would/'d/used to* plus *be+V-ing* to 1840. If these uses are especially typical of IrE and other Celtic Englishes, then these results suggest they have arisen in IrE only sometime since the 1840s. This is also true of the progressive used as an extended-now perfect (e.g. **she is walking** this good while, *John McBride, 05.04.1824*), which in our data only comes into use sometime after 1840.

Our results offer empirical support for the view that some of the growth of the progressive in Late Modern English might be due to Irish immigrants. Our findings seem to confirm Fritz's conclusion that the Irish used more progressives than other ethnic groups in nineteenth-century Australia, and suggest that IrE speakers *were* likely to have been using the progressive with considerably greater frequency in time for the onset of mass emigration to North America, Great Britain and the southern hemisphere, which is dated by Fitzgerald & Lambkin (2008) to 1800 rather than the traditional date of the start of the Great Famine. However, more studies of the progressive in varieties other than (standard) British and American English in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would be needed to be able to establish comparisons that will allow us to trace the development in more vernacular varieties of most colonial Englishes, and in the varieties spoken in England itself.

4. Conclusions

This paper has shown how the tracing of a particular variety of English can be achieved through corpus analysis. Emigrant letters, as discussed throughout the paper, can provide useful evidence for the development of linguistic features such as the progressive and the use of *will* and *shall*. As mentioned above, the spread of the progressive and of first-person *will* in American English and from there to British English have been attributed to the influence of Irish immigrants. Our analysis shows that while this might well be true to some extent for the progressive, it is also evident that the peculiarly Irish characteristic uses of the progressive (i.e. with stative verbs and modal auxiliaries) are late developments. The IrE use of first-person *will* is shown in our data to have been largely a development of the nineteenth century, implying that the eighteenth-century grammarians' accounts were inaccurate. The shift towards first-person *will* in IrE seems to have been affected by sociolinguistic factors such as intimacy, gender and geographical distribution.

We have argued for an empirical diachronic approach to the study of IrE in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when IrE itself evolved and the Anglophone settlement of North America and the southern hemisphere colonies led to the development of Irish, American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and other colonial Englishes. Accurate accounts of the Irish input to new overseas varieties are dependent, first, on reliable historical accounts of the historical situation in British Englishes prior to overseas expansion, and second, on empirical accounts of IrE in its formative period and in the periods before and during large-scale Irish emigration.

In the same way that e-mail and instant messaging might now be used to examine the use of different language varieties, private correspondence allows us to trace the use of linguistic features in the past as they emerged and evolved or disappeared. In this sense, the availability of corpora such as CORIECOR can be of great benefit to linguists. The analysis of linguistic features based on this type of corpus can throw much light on the study of an interesting variety of English like IrE, and can contribute to fuller and more accurate accounts of other varieties in which IrE was part of the input as a result of the long-term mass migration of Irish people.

Carolina Amador
Departamento de Filología Inglesa
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Avda. Universidad s/n
10071 – Cáceres - España
camador@unex.es

Kevin McCafferty
Department of Foreign Languages
University of Bergen
PO Box 7805
N-5020 – Bergen – Norway
kevin.McCafferty@if.uib.no

Notes

[1] The *Irish Emigration Database* is hosted by Queen's University Belfast's Centre for Migration Studies at the Ulster-American Folk Park, in Omagh, Co. Tyrone. We are grateful to the centre's director, Dr Brian Lambkin, and Dr Patrick Fitzgerald, for access to the databse and permission to incorporate it into a linguistic corpus.

References

Amador-Moreno, C. P. 2010. *An Introduction to Irish English*. London: Equinox.

Arnaud, R. 1998. "The development of the progressive in 19th century English: a quantitative survey". *Language Variation and Change*, 10. 123-152.

Bailey, G., N. Maynor and P. Cukor-Avila. 1989. "Variation in subject-verb concord in Early Modern English". *Language Variation and Change*, 1. 285-300.

Beal, Joan C. 1997. "Syntax and morphology". In: *The Edinburgh history of the Scots language*, Charles Jones (ed.), 335-377. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Beal, J. C. 2004. *English in modern times 1700-1945.* London: Arnold.

Biber, D. 1991/1988. *Variation across speech and writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Biggar, F. J. 1897. *Our Ulser Accent and Ulster Provincialisms.* Belfast: Religious Tract and Book Depot.

Carter, R. and M. J. McCarthy. 2006. *Cambridge Grammar of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coleman, D. A. 1999. "Demography and migration in Ireland, North and South". In: *Ireland North and South: Perspectives from Social Science*, A. F. Heath, R. Breen and C. T. Whelan (eds.), 69-116. Oxford: OUP.

Corrigan, K. P. 2010. *Irish English, volume 1 – Northern Ireland*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Corrigan, K. P. 2000. "'*What bees to be maun be*'. Aspects of deontic and epistemic modality in a northern dialect of Irish-English". *English world-wide*, 21. 25-62.

Dennis, L. 1940. "The progressive tense: frequency of its use in English". *PMLA*, 55. 855-865.

Dolan, T. P. 2006. *A dictionary of Hiberno-English*. Second edition. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Dollinger, S. 2008. *New-dialect formation in Canada. Evidence from the English modal auxiliaries*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Filppula, M. 2003. More on the English progressive and the Celtic connection. In: *The Celtic Englishes III*, Hildegard L. C. Tristram (ed.), 150-168. Heidelberg: C. Winter.

Filppula, M., J. Klemola and H. Paulasto. 2008. *English and Celtic in contact.* London: Routledge.

Fitzgerald, P. and B. Lambkin. 2008. *Irish Migration 1607-2007*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fitzpatrick, D. 1994. *Oceans of Consolation. Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.

Fritz, C. W. A. 2007. *From English in Australia to Australian English, 1788-1900*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang.

Giner, M. F. García-Bermejo and M. Montgomery. 1997. "Regional British English from the Nineteenth Century: Evidence from Emigrant Letters". In: *Issues and Methods in Dialectology*, Alan Thomas (ed.), 167-83. Bangor: Department of Linguistics, University of Wales Bangor.

Haugen, E. 1969. *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingualism Behavior*. Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press.

Hayden, M., and M. Hartog. 1909. "The Irish dialect of English: its origins and vocabulary". *Fortnightly Review*, new ser., 85. 775-785, 933-947.

Henry, P. L. 1957. *An Anglo-Irish dialect of North Roscommon. Phonology, accidence, syntax.* Dublin: Department of English, UCD.

Hickey, R. 2007. *Irish English. History and Present-Day Forms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hickey, R. (ed.) 2004. *Legacies of colonial Englishes. Studies in transported dialects*. Cambridge: CUP.

Johnston, P. A. Jr. 2007. "Scottish English and Scots". In: *Language in the British Isles*, David Britain (ed.), 105-121. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Joyce, P. W. 1991/1910. *English as we speak it in Ireland*. Ed. and introduction Terence Dolan. Dublin: Wolfhound Press.

Kallen, J. L. and J. M. Kirk. 2001. "Convergence and divergence in the verb phrase in Irish Standard English: a corpus-based approach". In: *Language Links. The Languages of Scotland and Ireland*, J. M. Kirk and D. P. Ó Baoill (eds.), 59-79. Belfast: Cló Ollscoil na Banríona.

Kortmann, B. 2008. "Synopsis: morphological and syntatic variation in the British Isles". In: *Varieties of English 1. The British Isles*, Bernd Kortmann and Clive Upton (eds.), 478-495. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Krogvig, I. and S. Johansson. 1981. "*Shall, will, should,* and *would* in British and American English". *ICAME News*, 5. 32-56.

Kytö, M. 1991. *Variation and diachrony, with Early American English in focus. Studies on CAN/MAY and SHALL/WILL*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

McCafferty, K. and C. P. Amador-Moreno. (Forthcoming). "A Corpus of Irish English Correspondence, c. 1700 – 1900. Compiling and using a diachronic corpus to study the evolution of an early new dialect". In: *New Perspectives in Irish English*, Migge, B. and M. Ní Chiosain (eds.). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

McCafferty, K. and C. P. Amador-Moreno. 2012. "'I will be expecting a letter from you before this reaches you'. A corpus-based study of *shall/will* variation in Irish English correspondence". In: *Letter writing in Late Modern Europe*, M. Dossena (ed.). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

McCafferty, K. 2011. "English grammar, Celtic revenge? First-person future *shall/will* in Irish English". In: *Researching the languages of Ireland. A Festschrift for Hildegard L.C. Tristram*, R. Hickey (ed.). Uppsala: Uppsala University Press.

Meurman-Solin, A. I. 1999. "Letters as a source of data for reconstructing early spoken Scots". In: *Writing in Nonstandard English*, I. Taavitsainen, G. Melchers and P. Pahta (eds.), 305-22. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Meurman-Solin, A. I. 2002. "The progressive in early Scots". In: *English Historical Syntax and Morphology*. In: *Selected Papers from 11ICEHL*, T. Fanego, M. J. López-Couso and J. Pérez-Guerra (eds.), 203-229. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Miller, K. A. 1985. *Emigrants and exiles. Ireland and the Irish exodus to North America*. Oxford: OUP.

Miller, K. A. 2008. *Ireland and Irish America. Culture, class, and transatlantic migration*. Dublin: Field Day.

Mokyr, J. 2006. "Famine Disease and Famine Mortality". In: *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, C. Ó Gráda (ed.), 63-85. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Montgomery, M. 1995. "The linguistic value of Ulster emigrant letters". *Ulster folklife*, 41. 26-41.

Nevalainen, T. and H. Raumolin-Brunberg. 2003. *Historical Sociolinguistics. Language Change in Tudor and Stuart England.* London: Longman.

Nevalainen, T. and H. Raumolin-Brunberg. 1996. *Sociolinguistics and Language History: Studies Based on the Corpus of Early English Correspondence.* Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Nurmi, A. 1996. "Periphrastic DO and BE+ ING: interconnected developments?". In: *Sociolinguistics and language history. Studies based on the Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg (eds.), 151-165. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Nurmi, A. 2002. "Does size matter? The *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* and its sampler". In: *Variation Past and Present. VARIENG Studies on English for Terttu Nevalainen*, H. Raumolin-Brunberg, M. Nevala, A. Nurmi and M. Rissanen (eds.), 173-184. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique.

Nurmi, A. 2003. "*Youe shall see I will conclude in it*: sociolinguistic variation of will/would and shall/should in the sixteenth century". In: *English Modality in Context. Diachronic Perspectives*, D. Hart (ed.), 89-107. Bern: Peter Lang.

Pitkänen, H. 2003. "Non-standard uses of the progressive form in Welsh English: an apparent time study". In: *The Celtic Englishes III*, Hildegard L.C. Tristram (ed.), 111-128. Heidelberg: C. Winter.

Paulasto, H. 2006. *Welsh English syntax. Contact and variation*. Joensuu: University of Joensuu.

Ronan, P. 2001. "Observations on the progressive in Hiberno-English". In: *Language links. The languages of Scotland and Ireland*, John M. Kirk and Dónall P. Ó Baoill (eds.), 43-58. Belfast: Cló Ollscoil na Banríona.

Schneider, E.W. 2002. "Investigating variation and change in written documents". In: *The handbook of language variation and change*, P. Trudgill, J. K. Chambers and N. Schilling-Estes (eds.), 67-96. Oxford: Blackwell.

Smitterberg, E. 2005. *The Progressive in 19th-Century English. A Process of Integration*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

van Bergen, L. and D. Denison, 2007. *Corpus of Late Eighteenth-Century Prose*. Manchester: University of Manchester. <http://www.llc.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/lel/staff/david-denison/corpus-late-18th-century-prose/> [Downloaded February 2009].

van Hamel, A. G. 1912. "On Anglo-Irish syntax", *Englische Studien*, 45. 272-292.

Walshe, S. 2009. *Irish English as represented in film*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.