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It's gems like this that make me wish I hadn't left Ireland: humorous representations of Irish English and their role in diasporic identities

Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Vaughan, Elaine;Moriarty, Máiréad
Citation	Irish Identities: Sociolinguistic Perspectives Hickey, Raymond & Amador-Moreno,Carolina P. (eds);chapter 10, pp. 198-219
Publisher	Mouton de Gruyter
Download date	2026-06-09 08:29:54
Item License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/10344/9190

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It's gems like this that make me wish I hadn't left Ireland!: Humorous representations of Irish English and their role in diasporic identities.

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Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss the role of humorous texts in bringing to our attention aspects of perceived identities that have resonance at local, regional and national levels in Ireland, and beyond. In doing so, we assert the rich potential of these texts to bring into the foreground evidence of the sorts of sociocultural understandings required for humour to operate, and emphasise the potential of performative data to enhance our awareness of language practices around ideologies and identities (Moriarty 2011: 550). Humour is a complex phenomenon in social life more generally, and a pragmatically powerful and polyvalent resource in interaction more specifically (Vaughan and Clancy 2011). We present and analyse extracts from a series of animated cartoons, *Martin's Life*, and build on our previous research which focuses on representations of voices within the Irish (English) mediascape (Vaughan and Moriarty 2018). What these representations can offer in terms of insights into conceptions of 'Irishness' vis-à-vis the constellation of semiotic resources invoked to index aspects of identities is explored. The locus of humour in these texts, and the use of marked phonological, lexical, pragmatic, and other discursive features, in combination with other semiotic modes (Bateman 2008), questions can be asked and answers essayed on the ways in which these are used to perform and hence provide a visible indexing of (perceived) sociocultural traits and identities. The response of the audience is a crucial dimension in our analysis, and we include discussion of YouTube comments beneath the videos as an example of a key contemporary "reflexive arena" where "the use of heterogeneous stylistic resources, context-sensitive meanings, and conflicting ideologies...can be examined critically" (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 60) in that the performances can be commented upon, ratified and contested within these discursive spaces. We take up the ethnolinguistic approach to identity exemplified in Atkinson and Kelly-Holmes (2011), and similarly explore how 'comedy constructs the audience in relation to identity and language and in particular whether the messages of the comedy appear to subvert or legitimise dominant beliefs and practice as regards identity and language ownership in Ireland' (p. 251), albeit from the point of view of Irish English identities, rather than ownership and control of the Irish language in Ireland.

The nature, role and impact of media on representations, perceptions and revitalisation, *inter alia*, has been a consistent line in the research on the Irish language in mediated contexts (e.g. Atkinson & Kelly-Holmes 2011; Cotter 1999, 2001; Moriarty 2009, 2011, 2015; Kelly-Holmes e.g. 2006, 2011; Kelly-Holmes & Atkinson 2017; Ó hÍfearnáin 2008, 2010). For example, Moriarty (2009, 2011) illustrates how the Irish language television station, TG4, has had a positive impact on both the use and the ideological standing of the language. Where Irish English in literary media is concerned, there is a strong tradition of harnessing literary dialect, or fictionalised representations, as linguistic data (see overview in Amador-Moreno 2005: 76–79). Much of Amador-Moreno's work on Paul Howard's Ross O'Carroll-Kelly series of novels (2012, 2015, 2016) has highlighted the congruencies between naturally occurring language data and its fictionalised counterpart(s), where discrete, complex linguistic features such as pragmatic markers testify to a representation's faithfulness to the variety it is reflecting. Amador-Moreno and Terrazas-Calero (2017), also in relation to the Ross O'Carroll-Kelly series of novels, plot variation over time of particular key words, themselves enregistered features of Dublin English (cf. Agha 2003). There are also studies of alternative sources on the cline of literary media, such as graphic novels, to wit, Walshe's (2012) study of the representation of Irish characters in Marvel comics, and how their speech is represented. There is in-progress work on the representation of a localised variety, Limerick English, in a recent graphic novel,

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Savage Town (Barrett *et al.* 2017), set in Limerick city (Vaughan 2018; Vaughan & Clancy 2018).

Of the work focusing on the presence of Irish and Irish English in mainstream media, Kelly-Holmes' has noted the adoption of the Irish language and Irish English in advertising to 'fetishise' and commodify (Kelly-Holmes 2005, 2011). O'Sullivan (2013, 2015, 2018) has focussed on Irish English in radio advertising, and change over time in the use of certain phonological features, while O'Sullivan and Kelly-Holmes (2017) explore the growing vernacularisation of Irish radio advertising, and the ideological significance of the different voices in a corpus of radio advertisements. Walshe (2009, 2016, 2017) has looked at the representation of Irish English in films, identifying key features of Irish English taken up by scriptwriters, and the relationship between authenticity and representations of varieties. Vaughan and Moriarty (2018) analyse the performances of a duo from Limerick city, the Rubberbandits, construing their comedy sketches as a challenge to hegemonic discourses surrounding Limerick city and ideologies of class distinction.

It is at the intersection in the study of mediated performances of Irish English and how these performances reflexively index aspects of identity, mainly via language but also other semiotic resources, that the present chapter makes its contribution. As mentioned previously, we are focusing on a series of digitally produced and circulated animations, which are broadcast on YouTube. Audience reaction to these animations is analysed via the comments left on the YouTube pages for each of the animations. The capacity for individuals to create and circulate such animations is enabled by the changes brought about in accessing media production in what Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2011, 2013) call "the performance era," an era in which there is unprecedented access to new media spaces through the decentralisation of media production. Digital technologies and social media sites give access to new "performance domains" (Bauman 1986) and in the case we present enable a reconfiguration of the value ascribed to a local vernacular speech style, and the identities this style indexes. This is another interesting departure from research on the sociolinguistic impact of the current phase of globalisation, where the spread of global languages is perceived to be impacting negatively on so-called 'small' languages and on local vernaculars. Yet, as we document in our analysis, social media sites provide a platform for the performance of a local variety of Irish English, namely Cork Irish English, and enables, through the knowing humour typical of communities.

Cork is located on the South coast of Ireland. It is the second largest city in the Republic of Ireland with a population of approximately 220,000. Humorous media representations of Cork play on the idea that people from Cork have an air of superiority and are organising themselves to make a play for independence from the rest of the country. Such play has been commodified with many T-shirts, mugs etc. available bearing the slogan 'The People's Republic of Cork'. Typical linguistic features associated with the Cork variety of Irish English include phonological features such as a 'large intonational range' and '... a very open realisation of the vowels in the LOT and THOUGHT lexical sets which is seen in (often stereotypical) pronunciations of the city's name, [kark]' (Hickey, 2003: 75). The Cork accent is often described as having a 'sing-song' quality which lends itself to humour in mimicry of the accent.

The sociolinguistics of performance and the performance of identities

We characterise the animations as metalinguistic acts, "meaningful behaviours that typify the attributes of language, its users, and the activities accomplished through its use" (Agha, 2007: 17). These are the features that are metapragmatically salient and allow us to bridge our analysis to key theoretical tropes of enregisterment and stylisation. In our analysis we position these animations as sites of oral vernacular play and the comments as examples of written vernacular play. The *Martin's Life* animations are intended to be funny, of course, but the humour is contingent upon taken-for-granted everyday assumptions of local sociolinguistic realities: for the humour to work, the audience needs to recognise these realities being 'staged'. In this way

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the study fits under the wider rubric of what has been called the sociolinguistics of performance (Bell and Gibson 2011). While the concept of style has underpinned sociolinguistic research for many decades (cf. Labov's (1966) New York department store study) the concept of stylisation within the sociolinguistics of performance seeks to capture the human ability to knowingly adopt the language pattern of another. In particular, we are interested in adding to the growing body of work that focuses stylisation as a type of language play in media settings (cf. Woolard, 1988; 1998; Jaffe, 2000, 2015; Hill 2008; Vigouroux, 2015). We align ourselves with Coupland's (2001) definition of stylisation as "culturally familiar styles and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking contexts" (p. 345). This change in orientation from style to stylisations draws on Bakhtin's work on voicing. According to Bakhtin (1981) stylisation is characterised by its "multivoiced" nature and includes a type of language play or "an artistic image of another's language" (p. 361). From this perspective, voice is understood to be audience designed and indexed. Such performances are "designed for the enactment of the experience of their audience" (Bauman 1975: 178). The ability for an audience/listener to understand and make sense of this language play is dependent on the ability for linguistic resources to evoke ideas of characterisation to such resources. This idea is captured in the sociolinguistic concept of enregisterment i.e. that point at which a "reflexive model of behaviour recognised as normal or typical by (at least some) actors as the norm for the them" (Agha, 2007: 126). In what follows we highlight the localised styling of Irish English and Cork Irish English in the cartoons and how these stylisations index the identity of the returned immigrant and the stereotypical image of the Irish mammy. Also, in an attempt to uncover the audience reaction to the stylisations we draw on comments from YouTube to assess to extent to which the audience views these stylisations as successful. Prior to providing this analysis, we offer a contextualisation and description of the animations.

The context of *Martin's Life*

The *Martin's Life* animations we discuss here were published to the user-generated content video site, You Tube, by its creator/performer between September 2014 and February 2016.¹ The term 'creator/performer' is a deliberate choice: in common with the performers discussed in Vaughan and Moriarty (2018), the Limerick comedy duo The Rubberbandits, the creator/performer of *Martin's Life* prefers to remain anonymous although his identity is known.² The animated series invites the viewer to "follow the non-adventures of returned emigrant Martin as he struggles to adjust to life back in Ireland. He has moved in with his parents 'for the time being'."³ The title images depict Martin, the central character and Martin's family home, a detached house in the countryside in the ubiquitous Irish rain. Both of these images appear in every animation. Image 1, a screen capture from one of the animations we discuss, *Skinny Jeans*, shows how Martin and his parents are represented. The semiotic resources that are drawn on to mark Martin as a cosmopolitan youth are worth noting, and are achieved visually in his hairstyle, and his tight clothing, particularly his 'skinny jeans,' which phenomenon is explicitly commented on as part of that animation.

¹ *Martin's Life* on You Tube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbLkpKbhzwarki6PziEGBLVg?reload=9> [available when accessed 8/5/2018].

² <https://www.independent.ie/regionals/corkman/news/gearing-up-for-cork-person-of-the-year-awards-35342177.html>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbLkpKbhzwarki6PziEGBLVg/featured>

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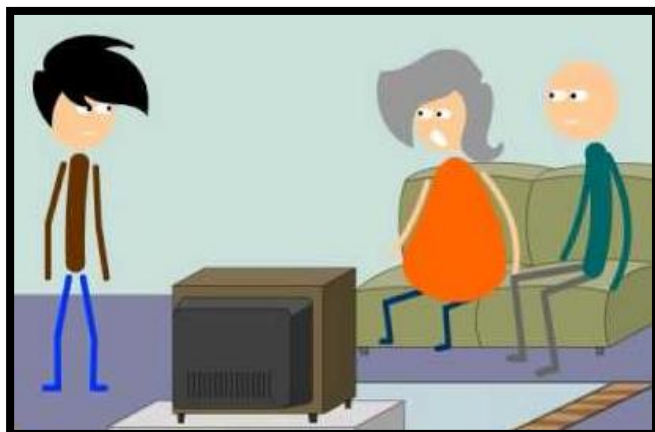
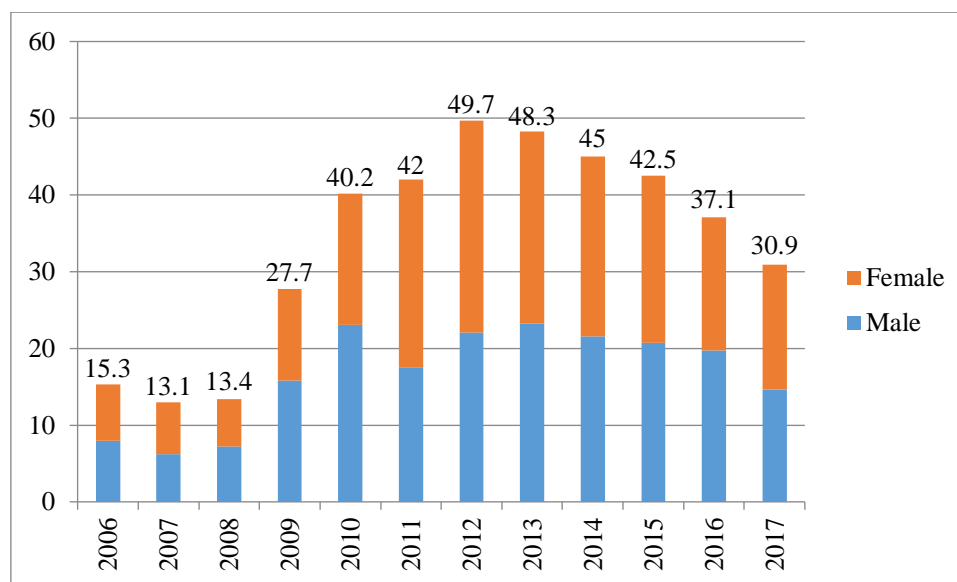


Image 1. Martin and his parents *Skinny Jeans*, 18/3/2015.
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfHwqfft3bA>

The context within which *Martin's Life* takes place is a simulacrum of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, where the ebbs and flows of enforced and voluntary migration and immigration have created a new sociocultural reality; an Ireland that is ethnically more diverse, that has weathered (and is still weathering) a serious economic recession, with Irish nationals still emigrating, though at lower rates, and with returning migrants adjusting to life in this new Ireland – an Ireland that is arguably quite different to the one they left. Ireland has a long history of being an emigrant nation, from the key exoduses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the mass emigration due to famine in the 1840s, and various national and global events resulting in peaks and troughs in emigration into the twentieth century (Fitzgerald and Lamkin 2008; Amador-Moreno and McCafferty 2015; McCafferty 2017). Emigration was simply a fact of life, notably again in the 1980s, until the 1990s and the period of dramatic economic growth, the 'Celtic Tiger'. During this time, emigrants returning home to visit family and friends were encouraged to return permanently via pro-active campaigning and recruitment on the part of Irish state agencies (Hayward and Howard 2007; Ralph 2009). Consequently, the return to high levels of emigration in the aftermath of the global economic downturn in 2008 represented a schism in national narratives of 1990s/early 2000s prosperity, and new realities of austerity replete with a significant wave of emigration replaced them. This wave of emigration peaked in 2012, and though it appears now to be declining, this current 'Generation Emigration,' as the weekly column in the national newspaper *The Irish Times*, puts it, is one with a complex identity, both for those who continue living abroad, and for those who return.

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Figure 1. Numbers of Irish emigrants 2007-2017 (in '000s) (CSO, 2011; CSO, 2017)



Ralph (2009), discussing emigrants returning to Ireland from the United States having left during the mid-to-late 1990s, and the lack of attention to the returning emigrant at that time in migration studies, notes that the occasional appearance of the returnee in Irish literature is “often deployed as a foil with which to explore the normative socio-cultural expectations of the home country” (p. 186). The perspectives of ‘home and return’ present in media commentary and personal narratives of the current Generation Emigration often articulate explicitly the nature of these sociocultural expectations: “Travelling and living in other countries makes us look at Ireland in a new way, sometimes in a more positive light and sometimes with a more nuanced appreciation of how conservative and unyielding the pillars of our society truly are” (Ní Shúilleabháin 2014). Personal narratives of all types have provided rich perspectives into the lived experiences of diasporic generations – the first-person narratives of the Generation Emigration series of articles, for example, or the interviews conducted by Ralph (2009) in the contemporary era, and studies of historical documents such as emigrant letters from a historical perspective. McCafferty and Amador-Moreno (2012) describe the creation of the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (CORIECOR), a database which contains a large body of letters to and from emigrants from the mid-eighteenth to early twentieth century. Studies such as Amador-Moreno and McCafferty (2015a, 2015b) have underlined the value of CORIECOR and the personal letters therein as oral text types for diachronic studies on the development of Irish English, but also their potential as windows on diasporic identity creation, and personal meanings around notions such as *home* and *country* (Avila-Ledesma and Amador-Moreno 2016), pivotal concepts for emigrants in negotiating diasporic identities.

Narratives of emigration and return, and how they are played out in the media are the subject of McDaid (2014) and O’Leary and Negra (2016). The latter study collates perspectives on sources such as tourism campaigns like *The Gathering* (2013), columns like the aforementioned *Irish Times* fixture, *Generation Emigration*, and particularly surprise homecoming videos, in which they note the centrality of the Irish Mammy. The Irish Mammy, they assert, should not be underestimated as “the central figure of emotional authority and

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authenticity”, and a persistent “rhetorical trope of family and nation” (ibid: 134). This is of particular relevance to the humorous texts we present here, as the mother figure, more so than the father, occupies a similar role in terms of authority, although in this case that authority is leavened by gentle (we argue) contestation of that authority and the sociocultural norms it represents in broader societal terms. McDaid discusses the representation of the emigration in Irish television advertising, emphasising the importance of advertisements as cultural artefacts and as evidence of a hegemonic encoding of response to emigration and return and “how society negotiates its complex relationship with identity, belonging and diaspora” (McDaid 2014: 41). Amongst the advertisements that McDaid discusses is an ESB⁴ advertisement that was first shown in 1988. It is set to the tune of Dusty Springfield’s version of the song “Going Back”. A young man is shown arriving home, presumably from abroad, and being collected by his father at the train station. Their journey home along country roads and passing small towns, illuminated by electricity is intercut with scenes of the mother preparing for the son’s return, in a glow of warmth and domesticity. An early sketch by the creator of *Martin’s Life* is a parody voiceover of the ESB advertisement, which was aired again in 2011 during the peak of the post-Celtic Tiger recession (ibid.). In a sense, in the same way that advertisements can show what we would gloss *capsule ideologies*, or “socially and politically laden” texts, as Callier (2014: 582) puts it, the *Martin’s Life* series are capsule representations of complex sociocultural realities.

The character of Martin fits into a profile of the returned emigrant that it is possible to construct using available CSO data for example, and reports in the national broadcast media, as well as others. The Dublin-based Crosscare Migrant Project reported that of the some four hundred respondents to its 2017 survey, *Home for Good*, on the experiences of migrants returning to Ireland, 41% had returned from Australia, and over 60% were aged between 26 and 35 (32.3% 26-30 and 28.4% 31-35), the generation arguably most impacted by the conditions created by the economic recession between 2008 and 2016 (Crosscare Migrant Project, 2017: 5). Martin, it is implied, has returned from Australia, where we learn his sister is still living, and appears to fit into the 26-30 age bracket. Martin is from County Cork, and although the specific location is never mentioned, it is possible to surmise that he lives in a town close to Cork city.⁵ We learn that although Martin has recently returned to Ireland, his sister is still living in Australia. His mother and father are presented as typical, small town Irish parents, in fact, are presented as a trope of Irish parenthood – they are vaguely aware of and *almost* au fait with twenty-first century Ireland, though they struggle to understand, for example, new technologies and social mores. There are seven short animations, each around one minute long, which resemble the multiple videos apparently covertly recorded with the home environment and uploaded to You Tube by mischievous youths. These videos usually foreground a parent or parents’ stupidity/unintentional hilarity and are published to the site with an actual or implied eye roll to the audience by the person recording, indicating that person’s savviness and sophistication by comparison. Situationally, *Martin’s Life* is similar: the episodes take place in a domestic environment – in the kitchen, or in the living room when the family are watching television. Table 1 details the episodes of *Martin’s Life* in the order in which they were published to You Tube, and includes details such as the number of views, comments and likes for each individual episode. Cumulatively, the videos (at the time of writing) have been viewed over 5.2 million times, and have over a thousand comments.

⁴ ESB: Electricity Supply Board, the state power company in Ireland.

⁵ When asked by his mother, ‘Are you going to town?’, Martin replies, ‘No, I’m going to Cork’ (*Martin’s Life*: ‘Skinny Jeans’).

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Table 1. *Martin's Life* series details⁶

Date	Title	Time	Views	Comments	Likes
19/9/2014	<i>It's a small world</i>	1:03	873,737	145	3.7k
8/10/2014	<i>Game of Thrones</i>	1:05	995,768	178	4.2k
18/3/2015	<i>Skinny Jeans</i>	1:05	991,258	159	3.5k
15/5/2015	<i>Referendum</i>	0:55	1,070,701	177	4k
28/10/2015	<i>Skyping the Sister</i>	1:01	543,682	182	2.4k
25/12/2015	<i>Christmas</i>	0:55	459,258	202	2.3k
3/2/2016	<i>Martin is Cork Person of the Month</i>	1:05	278,737	218	2.1k
		6:29	5,213,141	1,261	22.2k

Discussion

What follows is a discussion of excerpts from our transcriptions of the animations, and a dataset comprising the YouTube responses to the performance of Irish identities on display, as well as the particular attention given to creating authentic social actors – and, obliquely, what is understood as the source of the humour. In broad terms, the semiotic resources drawn on to generate authenticity for the performances are located in staging and styling recognisable social personae, tropes of some longevity such as the *Irish Mammy*, and the *Returned Immigrant*, using localised language features and connecting them to social roles. In each of the animations key phrases appear that strictly mark the variety used as located in Ireland, including contractions such as *c'mere 'til (we look at you)*, the use of *them* for *those*, or pragmatic markers, such as *sure*, transcribed below as *shur* to reflect the phonological reduction related to its function in context (see Vaughan & Clancy 2016). The producer uses these elements to mark the language use as located in Ireland, and in Cork specifically. While language produced in fictionalised contexts is often considered less authentic than 'real-life' interactions, in creating these animations the producer is relying on the use of agreed upon socially recognisable sets of linguistic features that cross regional, gender and age boundaries. Our analysis was divided into three connected parts: firstly, we focused on the oral vernacular features that are drawn on to create the identities required for the humour to carry. Secondly, we looked at how these are enregistered to index a local identity, and finally how reflections of these enregistered vernacular features are projected in the written comments that accompany the *Martin's Life* animations. To lay this out more systematically, in the following discussion we develop a description of the social personae derived from their performance in the animations, highlight the various linguistic resources the creator draws on in stylising tropes of the Returned Immigrant but particularly the Irish Mammy, and then how the audience for the animations comment on the performances. We find themes and patterns in the comments, such as explicit praise for the performance, the positive evaluations implicit in simple repetition and quotations, and the connection of identity to understanding and appreciating the humour by invoking conceptualisations of shared identity.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbLkpKbhzwrki6PziEGBLVg?reload=9>; figures those available on 8/5/2018.

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In the *Skinny Jeans* animation we eavesdrop on a 'typical' interaction between the parents and Martin who though living at home is now an adult, and yet still experiences the endless parental questioning normally associated with adolescence. For example, in Line 2 the character Mam orders Martin to come into the sitting room before he goes out so she can look at what he is wearing, an infantilisation of the character of Martin. Within her turns in Lines 2–14, Mam is asking Martin questions. In this extracts from the transcripts of the animations (1), aspects of the language particularly associated with Irish English, or local references, are underlined; in italics sayings that are localised.

(1) *Skinny Jeans* transcript excerpt

1. <M> I'm heading out there <M>
2. <Mam> **C'mere 'til we have a look at you. Are you going to town?** <Mam>
3. <M> No I'm going to Cork <M>
4. <Mam> **At this hour of the night?** <Mam>
5. <M> It's only five o'clock <M>
6. <Mam> **And what are you doing in Cork?** <Mam>
7. <M> I'm meeting someone <M>
8. <Mam> **A girl?** <Mam>
9. <M> Yeah <M>
10. <Mam> **And where'd you meet her?** <Mam>
11. <M> Online <M>
12. <Mam> **Online? On what line?** <Mam>
13. <M> The internet <M>
14. <Mam> **The internet? *Shur*** she could be anyone <Mam>
15. <M> What? <M>
16. <Mam> ***Shur*** you don't know her from a crow <Mam>
17. <M> I do <M>
18. <Dad> Is she one of them transvestites? <Dad>
19. <M> What? <M>
20. <Dad> There was a thing about them there on the telly the other day <Dad>
21. <M> About who? <M>
22. <Dad> The transvestites. They said they could be watching you or anything from that aul internet <Dad>

Most of Mam's utterances are in phrased as direct or indirect questions, and her over-solicitousness – the way she interrogates Martin on the legitimacy of his date, arranged online – serves to highlight the generational divide in terms of contemporary dating norms. In this way, we see where the construction of the text and its micro-level linguistic choices reconstitute the macro-level socially understood category of the Irish Mammy (cf. also Johnstone 2011: 665). The stereotype of the Irish Mammy is one that has dominated cultural texts produced in and about Ireland for many decades, from the abiding image of 'Mother Ireland' in early Irish fairy tales, for example, or more recently comedian Brendan O'Carroll's character of Mrs Brown. The Irish Mammy is, as Ging (2017: 176) argues, "(...) a conservative, over-nurturing and sexless figure who considers men to be helpless, childlike and in constant need of care, yet fully accepts their patriarchal domination of her". The Irish Mammy is typically represented as being fully devoted to her son, she is doting yet dogmatic and brutally honest in her opinion and prone to saying things that seem outlandish. In the *Martin's Life* animations, this trope of the Irish Mammy is very much played on. For example, in (2), also from the *Skinny Jeans* animation, we see the dotting mother who is overly concerned with her son's clothing, while also learning new terms, seen in her repetition of 'skinny jeans':

(2) Over-dotting Mammy: Excerpt from *Skinny Jeans* transcript

23. <Mam> Are them jeans a bit too small for you? <Mam>

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|--|
| 24. <M> No. They're meant to be like that. They're meant to be too small. They're skinny jeans
<\M> |
| 25. <Mam> Skinny jeans. And have you any underpants on you? <\Mam> |

The potential for the parents to express very non-politically-correct statements is evident in Dad's innocent though wildly inaccurate notion of transvestites and the Internet in (1) (in the exchange in Lines 18-22). The character of Dad across the animations is portrayed as an individual hopelessly out of touch but trying gamely to navigate these cosmopolitan times. In his introduction of the term *transvestite* (line 18), the indication is that he is trying too hard to be cool: again, across the animations, this is often signalled through the use of a varietal feature with a modern referent – *them transvestites* (Line 18), *that aul internet* (Line 21). Mam's assertions are far sharper and more conservative, though played humorously – *Shur she could be anyone/Shur you don't know her from a crow* – showing her ignorance of the modern dating scene, as well as indexing 'typical' maternal disapproval of any romantic partner a son might choose. Through the Irish Mammy, brutal honesty is dispensed, though her voicing of comments that are both ignorant and prejudiced is somehow softened via the connection to the trope itself, as well as the humour poked at it. In the *'Tis a Small World* animation the brutally honest trope is evident in a very typical post-haircut interaction between a mother and son in (3): Lines 18-24 – the comment *he didn't take much off it* an evaluation of the haircut itself, establishing the context and setting the scene for the pointed humour that follows around the new diversity and liberalism in Ireland. Mam refers to the new hairdresser as *the Arab* and Martin's response, *He's from Iraq*, suggests that in this exchange we are being called upon to notice and contrast Mam's quasi-racist labelling and Martin's implied rebuke. In case the point is lost, we hear Mam's voicing of racist stereotypes associated with 'Arabs' in the outlandish comment in Line 24: *Iraq? You're lucky he didn't cut the head off you*.

(3) The brutally honest Irish Mammy: Excerpt from *'Tis a Small World* transcript

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|--|
| 18. <Mam> <i>'Tis a small world all right. I thought you were getting a haircut</i> <\Mam> |
| 19. <M> I did get a haircut <\M> |
| 20. <Mam> <i>God</i> he didn't take much off it. Who'd you go to? <\Mam> |
| 21. <M> The new fella downtown <\M> |
| 22. <Mam> Who? The Arab? <\Mam> |
| 23. <M> He's from Iraq <\M> |
| 24. <Mam> Iraq? You're lucky he didn't cut the head off you <\Mam> |

This stylisation of the Irish Mammy in *Martin's Life* provides an antidote to the Celtic Tiger 'Yummy Mummy,' indicating that the traditional conception of the Irish Mammy has retained its power. In a way the animations celebrate this Irish Mammy, indexing a type of fixed normativity from which youth in diaspora can draw a sense of feeling that despite their own condition of fluidity that there are core aspects of their identity that will stay the same and serve to anchor them in times of uncertainty during periods of migration. The following example from our corpus of audience reaction to the animations, (4), this one posted under the animation *Game of Thrones*, but referring to *'Tis a Small World* as well as *Marriage Referendum*, captures both an implicit comment on the accuracy of the presentation, but also a suggestion about why the humour is not problematic. The suggestion is that the traditional tropes of Irish parenthood reflect a stereotype of people who are ignorant rather than malicious, and this mitigates their more outlandish pronouncements.

(4) Audience Reaction to *Martin's Life*: YouTube comments under *Game of Thrones*

Getnasty08

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What I LOVE about this is that it captures how un-PC some Irish parents can be without any real malice. It's just so funny cos my Mam would ask the exact same thing you find in these videos about the gays, dwarfs, the "Arabs", but she's seriously one of the most live and let live people on the planet. It's just some of the things she'd say. I remember two friends from Canada thought she was an outrageous character altogether.

The animations are funny and fascinating as a window on the Irish identities, or the “characterological figures,” the audiences for these animations recognise (Bell and Gibson 2011: 562). As Rampton (2006: 225) suggests, the stylisations played out in these animations invite audiences to use their wider understanding to engage with questions of authenticity. This is achieved on two levels, firstly on an evaluative level, i.e. is it any good, and secondly on the level of accuracy, i.e. how fit for purpose the stylisation is (*ibid.*). Ultimately, it is the audience that authorises the relevance of these animations. With this in mind, audience reactions and comments on the *Martin's Life* animations were collected from public postings underneath each of the animations on YouTube. Particular themes, which chime with Rampton's commentary on the audience's perceptions of stylisation, emerged from the dataset of YouTube comments. Broadly, these are declarations of authenticity and/or familiarity, with some explicit comments relating to the ‘Irishness’ of the identities on display, and evidence of uptake via quotation, repetition or creative re-stylisation. As the extracted comments show (5), audience reaction explicitly references the identity work in the performances (*If your from Ireland This is the funniest thing ever [sic]*), and shows how familiar Irish people are with social personae, such as the Irish Mammy, and tropes of the uncouth parents – mothers and fathers who are direct in what they say with blatant ignorance or disregard for sensitivities around different cultures, different gender identities and so on:

(5) YouTube Comments Corpus: Evaluation via declarations of authenticity and/or familiarity

1. I'm from Cork and I loved it
2. This brilliance! You've captured the Cork/Irish perfectly- so funny!
3. Can't stop watching these.. they're spot on like.. :-)
4. On what line? You wouldn't know her from a crow!! Irish and proud
5. If your from Ireland This is the funniest thing ever . What line ,lol?.

Another level that can be identified is audience uptake of the stylised Cork Irish English features, categorised in our corpus of YouTube comments as audience reaction under a theme of uptake via orthographic representation, which follows a three step evaluation process of *reaction* which can be overtly evaluative, as in (6) Line 1; repetition e.g. via direct quotation or reference to performances, as in (6) Line 3; and reflection, quotation plus individual creativity around the resources used in the performances, as in (6) Line 6. All of these could be construed as positive evaluations (+). There were no negative (-) comments recorded, rather unusually – although given the nature of the medium, these may have appeared since.

(6) YouTube Comments Corpus: Uptake via orthographic representation and evaluation

1. By jesus this is f**king hilarious (Reaction +)
2. Great *schtuff* (Reaction +)
3. The poor *auld* dwarfs (Reflection/Repetition +)
4. Skittin (Reaction +)
5. *Myartin* (Reflection +)
6. Ah *shtop* lads. I'm *feckin dyin*. Me sides are *killin* (Reflection +)

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These examples of audience engagement with, and reaction to, the *Martin's Life* animation exemplify the link between heteroglossic performances and 'indexical icons' (Silverstein 2000). Hillewaert (2015) reports on an extensive study of writing practices on Facebook and the use of features from Swahili dialects in Kenya's Lamu archipelago which are stigmatised in spoken interaction. Although the context of her study is quite different to the present study, a number of her observations are strikingly germane to the nature of the online commentary generated by the *Martin's Life* series. Firstly, while we would argue that Irish English is not stigmatised in the same way as the vernaculars she discusses, it is arguably globally peripheral. In common with the young people she discusses, the commenters on the social network – in this case, YouTube, in Hillewaert's case, Facebook – harness the potential of digital orthography on social media to "reinvent (social and political) geographies," inscribing new values to local varieties, and even creating spaces to ensure their preservation (*ibid.*: 209). Further to that, there is the public nature of posting online, which leads individuals to perform their social ties in particular ways for others, as in (6) above. In combing through the comments attached to the different animations in the *Martin's Life* series, a feature that is interesting is that the commenters not only invoke their identity along national lines, but also along more regional and localised lines. (7) shows all elements of individual comments under the animation, *Skinny Jeans*, that explicitly reference national/regional/local identities, showing how the original performance is evaluated, and valorised for what it displays for and means to its audience.

(7) *Skinny Jeans* categories of commentary: Invoking explicit markers of identity

1. these are so much better if your irish and you have parents like them
2. You can only understand them if your Irish
3. [On what line? You wouldn't know her from a crow!!] ☺Irish and proud
4. I miss being in West cork
5. Pennies will probably be closed though since its already 5
6. Ugh the irony of the irish accent ☺
7. Irish ppl rule I'm irish too this is hilarious
8. Who here is actually Irish and knows what penny's is it is a shop
9. I'm from Cork
10. I am Irish you dublin
11. I love these it makes it better if your Irish
12. Is it penny's or Guineys? Just a brilliant show
13. Little Cork gems, simply hilarious .
14. I'm from Ireland to
15. If your from Ireland This is the funniest thing ever . What line ,lol?.
16. It's gems like this that make me wish I hadn't left Ireland!
17. Lol I'm irish.so funny
18. I'm Irish it true look at me name

Lines 1-18 are both standalone comments, but more frequently elements from longer comments which praise the performance in and of itself (*so relatable/'Tis gas shtuff/brilliant/unreal/class/totally addictive*), its accuracy of portrayal (*the typical Irish parents/this is litterely my parents/he sounds just like me father*), and quotation (see (5) and (6) above), are explicit invocations of identity. These can be simple statements of nationality (*I'm Irish*), more specific local references (*Penny's/Guiney's*), and statements around needing to be Irish to understand the humour 'properly' – in other words, laying claim to something that is valued. Johnstone's (2011) study of dialect stylisation in comedy sketches on radio extends the purview of its discussion by showing how dialect stylisation can project more than one set of meanings, depending on the interpretive repertoires of the (in this case, listening) audience. By focusing on what the self-selected commenters, a subsection of the viewing audience, decide to bring forward for attention in their implicit and explicit evaluations, we can highlight what is being particularly attended to in the performance, and what makes it successful (and by extension, if

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required, unsuccessful). The ways in which the commenters reference and discuss identities lends a new lens with which to view the authenticity of the performance (cf. Rampton 2006).

Conclusion

The overall aim of the chapter is to examine novel use of a specific variety of Irish English, namely Cork Irish English, to illustrate the opportunities afforded to local language varieties in the context of globalisation, and to discuss what the function for the use of varieties in these spaces may mean in terms of sociolinguistic identity. The examination of quotidian media texts allows us to examine, simultaneously, acts of stylisation (Coupland, 2007) and acts of identity (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985). We characterise the *Martin's Life* animations as a creative hybrid of semiotic resources where there is both visual and audible semiotic play in the construction and performance of Irish identities. Here, we focus only on the linguistic play in our discussion and analysis but we do acknowledge that there is a complex interconnection with the visualities used. In looking at the *Martin's Life* animations we are interested in analysing the possible intended social actions the producer aimed to comment on and what perhaps is accomplished, especially in the context of cosmopolitan identity that many young Irish adults who migrated directly following the economic crash desire, but simultaneously reject. Our analysis shows the characterological figure of the *Irish Mammy* is primarily foregrounded in each of the animations created. The use of certain resources, often in a playful manner, index common sociocultural stereotypes (Agha 2007) such as is the case with the deployment of certain resources of (Cork) Irish English in the *Martin's life* animations. This can be explained on the ideological level through iconisation, a process through which we link linguistic features with social groups: “as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence” (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37). As Johnstone (2011) argues in the context of her work on Pittsburghese is that ultimately we are examining what Agha refers to as registers that link “cultural models of action that link diverse behavioural signs to enactable effects including images of personas, interpersonal relationships and type of conduct” (Agha 2007: 145). We argue that this approach to the sociolinguistics of performance enables the upscaling of local vernacular speech particular in these new performance domains created by digital technologies. In times of global mobility of people, languages, semiotic resources, we conceptualise things along a continuum of fixity to fluidity (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010). As Hastings and Manning (2004: 301) suggest, “stereotyped, essentialised voices of exemplary others are crucial to anchoring the linguistic system by which speakers index their own situational and social positions”. This affords the sorts of possibilities Hillewaert (2015) observes in the amplification of the value of local vernaculars in particular modes (e.g. writing online), allowing for what she calls a rooted cosmopolitanism, which foregrounds a renewed value in and pride of origin, particularly for those living in diaspora. In situations of diaspora there is a need for what was left behind to stay the same. It is through this fixing that we orientate our own nostalgia, but also our own sense of authenticity and self.

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- The tings that Máiréad wants to say here...
- A position of privilege: economic migration
- Themes of emigration and the returned diaspora – resonate for 1980s Ireland, and post-Celtic Tiger Ireland
- Normative ideologies: reified in via advertisements
- Sociolinguistic reflexivity
-
-

Evaluations of the stylized features (Reaction; Reflection; Repetition)

Orthographic representation of IrE

- By Jesus this is f**king hilarious (Reaction +)
- Great *schtuff* (Reaction +)
- The poor *auld* dwarfs (Reflection/Repetition +)
- Skittin (Reaction +)
- *Myartin* (Reflection +)
- Ah *shtop* lads. I'm *feckin dyin*. Me sides are *killin* (Reflection +)
- *Martin's Life* as a space that **amplifies** recognisable social personae
- **Pride and commitment** to the local; salient linguistic features evoke a certain social image; redefining **the value of IrE** and what it encodes
- Performances of **locality and belonging**: Particularly important for **youth in diaspora**?

1. Anyway. Isn't he a friend of John's <M>
2. <Mam> He is not <M>
3. <M> He is. They're going out together <M>
4. <Mam> Going out where? <Mam>
5. <M> Going out with each other <M>
6. <Mam> Where? <Mam>
7. <M> Anywhere. They're a couple <M>
8. <Mam> A couple of what? <Mam>
9. <M> A couple of gay people <M>
10. <Mam> John and the Iraqi? <Mam>
11. <M> Yeah <M>
12. <Mam> They are not <Mam>
13. <M> They are <M>
14. <Mam> Go 'way <pause> isn't it a small world <Mam>