Neo-colonial mentalities in contemporary Europe? : Language and discourse in the construction of identities

Edited by

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Voices in other ears: "accents" and identities of the first- and second-generation Irish in England

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> The barrister apologised for losing the case [traffic offence] but said it was difficult for him because of all the Irish accents and that a well-spoken opponent might have won that. (Irish-born woman, London, 1995)[1]

> It just seems like people aren't comfortable with you saying "You know, I'm Irish" if you weren't born there or you haven't got the accent. (Second-generation Irish woman, London, 2001)[2]

1. Introduction

Irish people in England are identified by the English largely through the way they speak. This is homogenised by English hearers into the simplified description of an "Irish accent", prioritising differences in pronunciation, although in reality the Irish use a variety of regionally-varied English *dialects*.[3] Collapsing Irish dialects into a monolithic category is paralleled by stereotyping the speakers in long-established, negative ways. In fact these stereotypes rely heavily on language, including grammar and vocabulary, presenting "substandard English" as evidence of "stupidity".[4] In contrast to the role of "visibility" in signalling the difference of non-white groups, which has no relationship to cultural content and can clearly be discredited as a signifier of inferiority on rational grounds, the "audibility" of the Irish appears to reinforce legitimate grounds for racialisation. Constructed markers of difference are never fixed, of course, and at present sharply changing economic and political circumstances are altering ways in which younger and more prosperous Irish-accented populations in England are perceived. .However they remain deeply embedded in English culture, available to be drawn on in specific contexts.

The primacy of audibility in constructing this sharp distinction reflects the specific colonial relationship between Ireland and Britain, whereby the large-scale displacement of the Irish language was synchronous with the imposition of direct British rule after 1800. However the adoption of English as the first language of most Irish people is more complex than this. The intertwining of coercion and choice is beautifully illustrated in Brian Friel's *Translations*, which used the process of transliterating local Gaelic place names by the English Ordnance Survey in 1833 to explore the ambivalence between colonial imposition of the English language and its embrace by the Irish themselves for economic reasons.[5] This ambivalence is echoed in Seamus Deane's essay *Dumbness and eloquence: a note on English as we write it in Ireland,* in which he refers to evidence of recorded memories in the Irish Folklore archive in University College, Dublin showing that:

> It was the Famine Irish who testified most damagingly to the belief that the retention of the Irish language meant death and exile, poverty and economic disadvantage. It seemed it was in the language itself and in later attempts to revive it that the fatal flaw resided.[6]

But he also argues that the persistence of Irish language constructions underlies the incomprehensibility of the Irish accent to English ears and its consequent labelling as "bad grammar" and a sign of the "backwardness" of the speaker. [7]

Language is carried with the bodies of migrants, who left Ireland on a huge scale during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In contrast to those settling in the USA where Irish accents are often admired, and even acquired[8], they have specific consequences for those settling in England, the

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[1] Hickman and Walter, *Discrimination and the Irish Community*, 182.

[2] Irish 2 Project, Discussion Group 2. The website, which includes newsletters and a discussion of methodology is at http://www.anglia.ac.uk/geography/progress/irish2/.

[3] Trudgill, *On Dialect*; Walter, *Shamrocks*,59.

[4] Curtis, *Nothing but*, 94.

[5] Friel*, Translations*.

[6] Deane, *Dumbness*, 112.

[7] Ibid., 113.

[8] Search engines on the internet reveal many US websites offering advice on acquiring Irish accents, including 'Irish accent mouth spays'. An example is http://www.soyouwanna.com/site/syws/irishaccent/irishaccent.html.

colonial heartland. Here the powerful layering of "badge" of difference and "evidence" of inferiority draws tight boundaries around the Irish-born. Those inside the enclave are trapped in mainstream English constructions of their racialised ethnic identities, whilst those outside are cut off from their parents' origins. Thus English-born children are excluded from family ethnic identities in ways which are not extended, or allowed, to the second generations of "visible" minorities. The "lack" of an Irish accent is a key feature of the identities of second-generation Irish people in England.

This study explores generational differences in the reception of voices — the "accents"–of Irish first and second generations in England, and their effects on assignment, and senses, of ethnic identities. It draws on two research studies on the Irish in Britain, outlined below, which did not specifically focus on language, but in which voices emerged as a powerful underlying theme. The analysis builds on an earlier publication by the author, especially by extending the discussion to those of Irish descent.[9]

2. Irish difference in England

Broader questions raised by this topic include, firstly, ways in which *audibility* is subordinated to *visibility* in discourses of racialisation. In Britain a very high priority is given to physical appearance in the categorisation of ethnic groups. Often the shorthand "visible minorities" is used, implying that skin colour is synonymous with, and hence explains, cultural difference.[10] Much less attention is paid to labelling by voices, which may be just as essentialising in class as well as ethnic terms. This hierarchy reflects the primacy of the "gaze" in modernist constructions of identity. Perhaps voices unsettle the dualism of bodies and minds, through their attachment to and production by bodies, but their function of expressing thoughts and feelings of the "mind".[11]

Irish people are conscious that their voices produce similar reactions to those accorded to "visible minorities". As Martin, an interviewee said to Mary Kells during her research with professional Irish migrants in London in the 1980s: "The thing about being Irish in England is that they don't realise you are black until you open your mouth".[12] But the "whiteness" of the large majority is a major reason why the Irish are excluded from most research of racialisation.[13] In our discussions with second-generation Irish people, some mused about how differently they would be received if they had green skins. Pauline, a professional woman in London, said:

> I do remember thinking, I can't put a specific instance to it. But it's just as well we haven't got green skin because, (...) probably thinking well, you know, the people who are black or Asian, I mean that is just such a badge and I think (...) before people open their mouths.[14]

The second issue which underlies the discussion is that of the links between Irishness and social class in England. Historically, strong associations have been made in English society between Irish backgrounds and working-class positioning, so that the two are unconsciously linked and may even appear synonymous. For example, sociologists in the 1960s, who produced community studies of working-class communities in English cities, often unwittingly selected predominantly Irish neighbourhoods without noting the ethnic background of the population in their analyses and indeed drawing conclusions about "English working classes"[15] At an individual level Irish accents may trigger this association, drawing in middle class Irish people. In Kells' research in London in the 1980s, Alan, an accountant from Dublin, related that he was frequently mistaken for a building labourer because a number of Irish labourers were working locally.[16]

This slippage between ethnicity and class in England was illustrated in the 2006 film distributed in Britain as *Notes on a Scandal*, based on the book of the same name by Zoe Heller.[17] The scandal in question is an affair between a middle-aged, middle-class English woman teacher and a 15-year old working-class male pupil in a North London state-funded comprehensive school. In the book the boy has an Irish name — Steven Connolly, the surname denoting Irish descent which would be wholly in

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9 Walter, *Shamrocks*.

10 For example, Ballard, *Negotiating race and ethnicity*, 3-33.

11 Walter, *Shamrocks*, 60.

12 Kells, *Identity*, 33.

13 Hickman and Walter, *Deconstructing whiteness*, 6.

14 Irish 2 Project, Discussion Group 2.

15 For example, Kerr, *People of*; Spinley *The deprived*.

16 Kells, *Identity*, 31.

17 Heller, *Notes*. The film was distributed in the USA under the title *Why did she do it?*

keeping with the ethnic background of the area — but there is no indication that he is intended to represent anything other than a "white" English adolescent. Even his description by Barbara, the diarist, as a "coarse-looking fellow, with lank hair the colour of pee" reinforces this.[18] However in the film he is portrayed by an Irish actor with a very strong Irish accent[19] and stereotypically "Irish looks" — black hair and blue eyes. It is interesting to speculate on how this character is received by different audiences. In England does this added ethnic referent simply reinforce the class difference, or does it emphasise the boy's exotic Otherness? Perhaps US audiences see only the Irish difference and not that of class, which was a key part of relationships in the narrative.

A search of contemporary reviews of the film revealed that this switch in ethnicity was not noted by professional or amateur commentators.[20] However it was raised in a series of interviews with the director, Richard Eyre, the screenwriter Patrick Marber and the actor himself, Andrew Simpson.[21] Interestingly Richard Eyre was asked directly: "Does the fact that he's Irish have any significance in the script?" His reply suggested that he was not conscious of the impact, although he recognised that the accent was an important issue, and drew parallels between the comprehensibility of "Irish" and "working class British" accents for US audiences.

> Not really. In the school in which we were filming, it would be completely unexceptional for the boy not to be from North London. There were kids there…there's a huge immigrant population; Serbians, Bulgarians, Eastern Europeans, Somalis, Sudanese, even a couple of Americans. Somebody who came in who was Irish wouldn't be completely implausible. Of course we were a bit anxious in case people couldn't understand a word he said, but surprisingly, in all the screenings in the states, there have been no complaints. Given that they always complain about British working class accents!

Patrick Marber was asked a similar question "What about the angle with the school kid — did that change a lot?" The response was simply "We just cast an Irish kid because he was the best". However the actor, Andrew Simpson, added further light on this answer, which either sidesteps or is unaware of the issue of ethnicity. The interviewer asked him: "In the original book, your character is from North London but you play him as Irish…." and his response suggests that the accent was indeed significant in the casting.

> He was originally London in the script but Patrick Marber rewrote it for a Northern Irish kid. I asked if I could try on a London accent but they said the Northern Irish accent *added a little something to the character*, so they wanted to keep it. Some people like the Northern Irish accent but I had to make sure it was understandable for American listeners. So it was clearer and more delivered than I usually do. (Author's emphasis)

By adding an Irish dimension, intentionally or unconsciously, the film introduces the complexities of racialised difference and illustrates simultaneous presence of contempt and admiration. As Avtar Brah argues "racism inhabits spaces of deep ambivalence and desire".[22] The English have long envied the stereotypical "Celtic" qualities of easygoing sociability, artistic expression and emotional freedom, in contrast to the perceived restrictions imposed by the Protestant work ethic.[23] Irish voices can therefore signal verbal fluency, a greater range of emotional registers and warmth, summed up in the notion of "the craic". This may also help to explain the recent explosion over the last decade of Irish accents in the English media as presenters of current affairs, gardening and travel programmes. Many surveys show that ironically "Southern" Irish accents are now amongst the most popular for English audiences.[24] The more positive term "brogue" is often used to describe these acceptable Irish accents.[25]

English reactions to Irish voices are therefore in constant flux, strongly associated with political and economic contexts. The current acceptability of, and indeed preference for, Irish voices in the media may reflect the recent "Celtic Tiger" economic expansion in the Irish Republic as well as the reduced political instability in Northern Ireland following the Belfast Agreement of 1998. However there is a long term underlying trend of anti-Irish racism in England, dating from well before the nineteenth century where it surfaced most visibly in well-known racist *Punch* cartoons.[26] Negative images

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[18] Heller, *Notes*, 26.
[19] A Donegal accent, apparently the most liked Irish accent in Ireland.
[20] For example, see http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/notesonascandal/
[21] http://www.totalfilm.com/features/notes_on_a_scandal
[22] Brah, *Cartographies*.
[23] Buckley , *Sitting*, 87.
[24] Trudgill, *On dialect*; Thorne, *Brummie*; Dobson, *Scottish and Irish;* Independent*, Scottish and Irish.*
[25] Croghan, *The Brogue.*
[26] Curtis L.P. *Anglo-Saxons and Celts*; Curtis L.P. *Apes and Angels*; Walter, *Gender, race and diaspora*, 343.

drawing on well-understood representation of violent ape-like characters remained available and re-emerged forcefully during the Troubles of the 1960s to 1990s.[27]

3. Qualitative research findings: first- and second-generation experiences

Data exploring Irish people's experiences of living in England was generated from two sources. The first is a survey carried out for the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) which was published in the report *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain* (1997). It included structured interviews with 86 Irish-born people in London and Birmingham. The second was an ESRC-funded project (2000-2) which followed up and extended the CRE study by exploring the identities and social positionings of second-generation Irish people, that is those born in Britain to one or two Irish-born parents.[28] The data analysed here was produced by 13 group discussions in four English sites–London, Manchester, Coventry and Banbury, chosen to represent a spread of region, settlement size and history of Irish immigration.[29]

The CRE research was carried out in response to demands from a beleaguered Irish population suffering a backlash of "guilt by association" with IRA bomb attacks in English cities.[30] It was finally funded in 1994 to an outpouring of British media disapproval. The tabloid press was outraged that research on the issue of anti-Irish discrimination should receive public funds. *The Sun* newspaper printed a page of 47 anti-Irish jokes, most of which revolved around misunderstandings of the "English" language by "Mick" or "Paddy", automatically indicating stupidity.[31] Some "quality" broadsheets also based their disparaging comments around the anti-Irish joke, the *Daily Telegraph* claiming that the CRE wanted to "legislate against laughter".[32] Three years later, when the report was published, similar press hostility appeared. The substantial catalogue of anti-Irish attitudes documented in the report was reduced to offence being taken at "jokes", and the Irish were blamed for their lack of sense of humour.[33] These responses illustrated the extreme resistance in England to accepting that stereotyping Irish people, and the consequences for their employment opportunities and health, was a form of racial abuse.

Data generation for the research was both quantitative, drawing in detail on the 1991 Census of Great Britain, and qualitative. In total, 88 in-depth interviews were carried out in London and Birmingham, using systematic matching sampling to maximise representativeness and an unbiased selection of respondents.[34] The report demonstrated that anti-Irish racism in England was widespread and taken-for-granted.[35] The most frequent form was verbal abuse triggered by hearing and identifying Irish accents. Altogether 80% of people interviewed reported being subjected to anti-Irish comments at work. Most did not challenge these remarks and, when asked for examples, they replied "Oh, just the usual".[36] Again middle-class professional people were not exempt. A higher education lecturer in Birmingham described the lack of awareness amongst her English colleagues that mockery of her voice was offensive:

> In meetings people are always saying 'We don't say that', 'It's those Irish people, we never know what they are going to say', 'We don't use that word like that'. Everyone, as soon as I open my mouth, gets laughing and says 'Let's be jolly'. People mimic my accent or sing snatches of Irish songs.[37]

Unlike skin colour, accents can, with great difficulty, be hidden or changed. At times of extreme anti-Irish tension, such as during IRA bombing campaigns in the 1970s, 80s and early 90s, many people kept quiet in public places so that their accents could not be identified. Women who needed to interact with the majority English population were most at risk, as two CRE participants explained:

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[27] Curtis L. *Nothing but the same old story*, 54-63.

[28] Irish 2 Project.

[29] The large population of Irish descent in Scotland has significantly different experiences, especially in relation to religion, and is examined elsewhere.

[30] Hillyard, *Suspect community*.

[31] *Sun*, "The all-time greatest Irish jokes", 9. See also *Daily Mail*, "Who's taking the Mickey?", 1.

[32] *Daily Telegraph*, "Question: why can't they make icecubes in Ireland?", n.p.

[33] *Sunday Times*, "Racism? Sure, it has to be an Irish joke", 5; *Eastern Daily Press*, "Race board", n.p.; *Daily Mail*, "Heard the one", 1; *Belfast Telegraph*, "Are the Irish really an ethnic minority?", n.p.

[34] Hickman and Walter, *Discrimination*, 156-160.

[35] Ibid., 234.

[36] Ibid., 234.

[37] Ibid., 187.

In the early 1970s the Birmingham bombs–the wave of anti-Irishness was horrific. I was refused service in a shop. I was made to feel that being Irish was a bad thing. I tried to hide my accent.[38]

When there was bombing here, I always kept quiet on buses and trains. I was careful — I knew they would recognise my accent.[39]

Many Irish people spoke of their relief at being able to use supermarkets at such times, where speaking was not required. Others were advised to "lose" their accents, especially in order to gain promotion at work. An Irish-born man in London said:

When I went for the supervisor's job [gravedigger] I was told I might be wise to get elocution lessons.[40]

Although hostility had greatly intensified at times of IRA bombings, there is a much longer history of anti-Irish abuse in England. Maude Casey, in her autobiographical novel *Over the Water*, describes her mother's crippling fear in London in the 1950s:

Mammy knows no one in our road. She is so afraid of scornful glances at her Irish voice that she opens her mouth to no one. She says we should do the same.[41]

Thus second-generation Irish people grew up in households with Irish-accented parent/s, but by their adulthood, if not well before they themselves had "lost" any differentiation detectable to English ears. All those who took part in the discussion groups had "English" accents with a variety of regional intonations.[42] The importance of accents was raised by participants very early in the discussions. They reported that having an English accent had important consequences for their identities in three major ways.

First, the second-generation participants agreed that English people did not accept their claims to be Irish when they heard their accents. Like the woman in the opening quotations, they explained that English people were puzzled by a "white" person who spoke with an English accent, but claimed an Irish identification. They could not understand why it would be mentioned. The same attitudes did not appear to apply to other European nationalities. One man pointed out that boys of Italian parentage in his London school were automatically assumed to be Italian, especially because they were known to speak Italian at home.[43] Ian, in Banbury, described how he was challenged if he made a claim: "For me to say 'I am Irish', they will say 'You don't sound Irish'".[44]

Ironically their "lack" of accents meant that the second generation could be more exposed to anti-Irish comments. The discussion group of London professional women, agreed that anti-Irish attitudes were still common in middle-class society in 2001, and that being assumed to be English meant that they were more likely to overhear them. In the following exchange, participants showed how this crossed two generations. Jane described how her boss, in a high-status job, often made anti-Irish remarks. She continued:

Jane: And, but it's the same with my mother, 'cause when she, she came when she was very young and her accent was drummed out of her. They said get, lose it otherwise you'll never fit in.
Kate: Your mother was the Irish one?
Jane: Yeah. So she had to lose her accent and, and so she encountered it, obviously, you know, people would actually confide in you more if they, you know, if they don't hear the accent, you're going to experience it even more. [45]

The second category of experiences was in many ways even more painful. This was the rejection in Ireland, and sometimes even by Irish people in England, of second-generation assertions of Irish identities. The epithet "Plastic Paddy" was used to remind people of the inauthenticity of such claims. English accents were equated with "being English" often with negative consequences. When they opened their mouths to speak they were given a cold reception or shunned. The following discussion took place in a Manchester discussion group:

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[38] Ibid., 207.
[39] Ibid., 208.
[40] Ibid., 194.
[41] Casey, *Over the Water*, 2.
[42] In the discussion groups, which I facilitated, *we* all spoke with English voices.
[43] Irish 2 Project, Banbury Discussion Group 2.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Irish 2 Project, London Discussion Group 2.

Gerry: The worst racism I have encountered is in Ireland itself, with Irish people having a go at me about being English, that has happened on three or four occasions. Maybe it's been out in the town on a Saturday night, high spirits, but that is where I have encountered the problems.
[Teresa agrees]
I: Is this hearing your accent?
Gerry: Yes, automatically you are English.[46]

Teresa, a member of the same group, talked about how she had considered moving to Ireland, but said she was anxious because of "the racism thing, I have had quite a few experiences, having an English accent. I don't think I would. I keep it just for holidays".[47] A Banbury participant reported a similar experience when he played Irish music in Ireland.

When I went to the toilets, one of them [member of the audience] stood next to me and said, 'You like this stuff do you?' I said 'Yes, I enjoy playing it'. That was it, he didn't say another word to me and just walked out. It was pretty obvious he thought I was Irish, until I opened my mouth. He realised I wasn't, so that was it, he wasn't interested in anything I had to say.[48]

The strength of this antipathy towards English accents in Ireland was illustrated by a London discussion group member, Antoinette, who talked about her mother-in-law being angry that her third-generation Irish grandchild was hearing nursery rhymes sung with an English accent:

And I was playing little songs and even when he was small and then I got this, it didn't work very well, it was nursery rhymes. But my partner's mum was over from Limerick and she was listening to the nursery rhymes and it was kind of like Little Jack Horner, you know, very like English voices. And she just didn't like it at all, she said 'Haven't you got any Irish ones?' (…..] And she said 'Oh I'm going to get him some Irish ones'. And I was thinking well, you know, well I don't know what kind of she wanted, you know, someone going 'Little Jack Horner' [in an Irish accent], you know.[49]

The third type of response was from second-generation people who had themselves internalised these attitudes, and reluctantly accepted that their accents precluded them from claiming an Irish identity. Greta, in Manchester, said "I think, like you, it is difficult to say you are Irish, because you are so obviously not when you speak, and it does seem fraudulent".[50]

The particular problem faced by most second-generation Irish people in the discussion groups was confrontation by a rigid binary and the consequent unavailability of hybrid identities. One solution was to adopt a *local* identification which avoided the impossibility of joint national identities. Many people agreed that they felt comfortable describing themselves as regional English varieties of Irish.[51] This clearly signalled to Irish-born people that they were not attempting to claim "equal" ethnic status, and at the same time aligned the second generation with a section of the English population which whom they had grown up in shared neighbourhoods and schools. Eilish, a young woman in Manchester, said:

I know I identify myself as being of Irish descent, and in Manchester that is great. When I go to Ireland I am still Irish descent would never do anything British or support England. But I am proud of being from Manchester, but in the Irish network. I would never say an English Manc, but I am proud of being from Manchester. I would never develop an accent over there, as I do like my accent anyway.[52]

Like Eilish, other participants felt strong loyalty to the English towns in which they had been raised. Only in the small town of Banbury where the Irish population was too small for specific neighbourhoods or institutions to have developed, was the notion of a named local Irish identity missing.[53]

Overall therefore second-generation Irish people presented a picture of a disjuncture between their senses of belonging to a distinctive cultural background and their entitlement to express this publicly. Privately many would describe themselves as Irish. Maura, in Coventry, said:

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[46] Irish 2 Project, Manchester Discussion Group.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Irish 2 Project, Banbury Discussion Group.
[49] Irish 2 Project, London discussion Group.
[50] Irish 2 Project, Manchester Discussion Group.
[51] Hickman et al., *Limitations*, 172-3.
[52] Irish 2 Project, Manchester Discussion Group.
[53] Walter et al., "Family stories", 204.

I have put down Irish [on a census-based form]. From what I said earlier, that would be the one that I would feel more comfortable with, more so than British, that was my ethnic group. It is the one I identify with most strongly, I feel quite strongly about that, that I identify with the Irish more so than British or English. Even aspects of my personality, like you said about going to Ireland, *so many aspects of my personality that are inherently Irish, even though I speak with an English accent.* I am totally uninhibited, I am a bit of a talker at time (but that isn't why I have a sore throat). I am very sociable, gregarious and outgoing, I'm not saying English people aren't, but I do feel that English people are a bit inhibited at times. (Author's emphasis)[54]

However many felt that they were being forced into accepting English identities by the dual pressures of denial of their difference by English people and a refusal to accept their sameness by the Irish-born. Only in very specific Irish cultural contexts did their parents' Irish background override the message conveyed by their English voices. One example was given by Kate, a professional woman in London, whose involvement in step-dancing gave her the opportunity to be recognised as Irish. In other situations her experiences mirrored those of other participants. Indeed, like Greta, she reluctantly acquiesced in this categorisation ("that is what I am to a certain extent") although she later admitted that she "felt like herself" in a situation where her Irish parentage was acknowledged. Nevertheless this was very unusual for her, indeed step dancing was "the only place" she experienced this.

When I'm not with my family, if I was out somewhere and I think I'm just treated like an English tourist and I just think I can't do anything about that. I just, *that is what I am to a certain extent.* And the other thing is, I am a step dancer and it's the only, and I've only done that in the last few years. *It's the only place where, I mean people assume, even though I've got a English accent, they just assume you've got Irish parents. And it's the only place where I've ever felt like myself,* that I don't have to be trying to be Irish or English or anything.[55] (Author's emphasis)

Despite the sense of exclusion from a simplified, monolithic Irish identity, all the second-generation participants recognised that this simultaneously protected them from overt anti-Irish racism. They compared themselves with their own parents and agreed that their English accents placed them in a much safer position. Moira, in Banbury, explained that her mother took the brunt of English negative attitudes:

I know going back to the seventies–my dad not so much because he tended to work with people that were Irish–but my mum worked with a mixture. When things happened in Belfast, and were on the news, she wasn't given a hard time, but made to be accountable. Had to give reasons why they happened, and having to account for what happened in the news. We didn't because having an English accent nobody would know, and the people I grew up with were the same as me, with Irish parents. With her from Northern Ireland she had a strong accent, so it *was difficult for her, not for us.* (Author's emphasis)

Moira's account points to the gendering of English exposure to Irish accents. Whereas Irish men were often employed in Irish milieux, especially on building sites, Irish women's employment in caring professions and service industries located them in mixed or English-only workplaces.[56]

However the corollary of protection from hostility was anger and guilt about the parents' exposure to racism. Speaking about British Army road checks experienced in visits to her parents' birthplaces in Northern Ireland, Eilish said:

It makes my blood boil, as soon as you open your mouth and they hear an English accent, everything is hunky dory. If it was an Irish accent it would be different.[57]

But participants also recognised that there had been a change recently. Pauline, a member of the London professional women's group, spoke about her ability to speak more openly about her Irish background:

I think it is easier now, I mean it is fashionable almost to be Irish [….] but now I feel extremely proud and I don't know whether it's just over the last ten years or may be I'd like to think I like that but I, it wasn't like, things like that.[58]

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[54] Irish 2 Project, Coventry Discussion Group.
[55] Irish 2 Project, London Discussion Group.
[56] Walter, *Outsiders inside*, 166.
[57] Irish 2 Project, Manchester Discussion Group.
[58] Irish 2 Project, London Discussion Group 2.

An unspoken alignment between whiteness and Irishness is highlighted here. The same assumption is made by English people, to the point where visibility can override audibility in an irrational way. One respondent to the CRE survey, a young man living in Islington, London, from mixed Irish and West Indian parentage in Cork, described the extreme confusion this contradiction caused an English judge.

> I was stopped by the police, no MOT [Ministry of Transport certificate], no insurance, an Irish licence. The judge was totally baffled by my accent. I was trying to explain and he couldn't get out of his mind asking me where I was from. He looked at me and said "Irish, are you sure? With that accent you ought to be West Indian". He was totally taken away from the idea of the case. All the court laughed. So did the police — they were amazed. It's like I have to explain myself every time (Man in his 30s, Islington, London). [59]

4. Conclusions

Irish people's English dialects place them in racialised ethnic categories both in England and Ireland. Their pronunciation of English words and formulation of sentences provides the primary signifier of "who they are", overriding alternative sources of identification such as "blood" relationships or national affiliations. Whereas the Irish-born who retain their accents are stereotyped with a changing balance of negative and positive Otherness, their children are refused a cultural difference deeply ingrained through the private realms of family upbringing and kinship.

These historical residues continue to play out in the denial of difference to the second-generation Irish at the beginning of the twenty first century. Neo-colonial relationships have an ongoing impact in the former imperial "core" and in the colony itself. As Declan Kiberd points out: "The struggle for the power to name oneself and one's state is enacted fundamentally within words, most especially in colonial situations".[60] The evidence cited here suggests that this struggle continues for the second-generation Irish, giving weight to the categorisation of contemporary Irish-British relations as "neo-" as well, perhaps, as "post-" colonial.

Both the English and the Irish demonstrate a fear of diluting their national identities by admitting the hybridity of the second-generation Irish.[61] The English try to secure the boundaries of the white nation by refusing to recognise the continuation of Irish ethnic difference beneath the veneer of an English accent. The Irish deny authenticity even to the children of its core birth population in an attempt to shore up threatened national "purity". Language, especially the apparently minor aspect, pronunciation, continues to be the marker of these national anxieties.[62]

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[59] Hickman and Walter, *Discrimination*, 182-3.

[60] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*.

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