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Gender and Mutation in Irish: a Preliminary Account for Further Investigation

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Abstract

Standard Irish is the outcome of language planning and as such it significantly diverges from the three main spoken dialects of the language (or traditional Gaeltacht varieties) that provided the basis for its creation. It is also expected to differ, in its codified form, from the way it is actually employed within the small, usually urban communities of bilinguals who employ standard Irish and not some form of Gaeltacht Irish as a second language. The reason why such difference is expected is that the language planners codified as part of the standard many complex structures that had already been abandoned in the spoken dialects, basing their reconstruction on historicity rather than actual usage (especially as the actual usages were far from uniform). In this article, which presents part of the work involved in my currently ongoing research, some such complexities are presented which pertain to grammatical gender.

1   Introduction

In this article I present some preliminary work carried out as part of my research in progress (Frenda, forthcoming), which is going to be concerned with a survey of grammatical gender systems in minority-language contexts, with particular attention paid to the evolution of this category as a new standard of the minority language is created in order to promote its diffusion. The context for my overall analysis is provided by two Celtic languages, Irish and Welsh, which have been selected to represent the two branches of the Celtic family, traditionally known as Q-Celtic and P-Celtic, respectively. Of these two, however, only Irish is going to concern us here.

As a starting point, we can take an observation by Jim McCloskey (reported by Pullum, 2004): he observes that traditional Gaeltacht Irish will meet certain death "in the next 30 years or so", because its transmission as a first language has now completely ceased. But, he observes,

> what is unique in the Irish situation, I think, has been the creation of a
> second language community now many times larger than the traditional
> Gaeltacht communities (I think that 100,000 is a reasonable estimate for the

size of this community). And being a part of that community is a lively and engaging business. A friend of mine who produces a weekly current affairs program in Irish on TV reports that it is always possible to do a report on whatever topic they like in any part of the country and find people who are willing and able to do the business in Irish. And it is true that certain recent developments have boosted this community and its self-confidence—the success of some poets (Celia de Fréine) and musicians (Liam Ó Maonlaí, John Spillane, Larry Mullen), the availability of an Irish TV channel, a vigorous presence on the net […] (McCloskey in Pullum, 2004)

As McCloskey further points out, "[t]here is a great range of varieties called 'Irish' in use in this community", from what can be defined "a close approximation of traditional Gaeltacht Irish" to a series of "new urban calques, heavily influenced by English in every way", to such an extent that McCloskey does not hesitate to speak of pidginization and creolization for the varieties in use by those schoolchildren who go through Irish-medium education, or to define as completely bidialectal those teenagers who are able to switch from more traditional Gaeltacht varieties that they may hear from their parents to the "new urban varieties in use among their peers".

Language-contact situations, when there is asymmetry between the two varieties spoken on the territory, often record ongoing structural simplifications in the variety spoken by the minority. This has been reported about a number of Aboriginal languages: Dyirbal, for instance, is of particular interest here on account of the simplification of its gender system, reported by A. Schmidt (cited in Aikhenvald, 2000: 390; and in Corbett, 1991: 17f.). In its traditional variety, Dyirbal has four genders and a rather complicated, semantically-driven attribution system; in the younger generations' variety it only has three semantically straightforward genders reminiscent of the three-way distinction of English (*he/she/it*), which happens to be the displacing language. "Loss of constructions through simplification for the benefit of non-speakers" is reported for Kayardild, another Aboriginal language of Australia, by Evans (2001: 263).

In the case of Irish extensive language-contact phenomena have taken place in the history of the contact with English: Stenson (1993) examines a number of such phenomena. But the Irish of McCloskey's "second language

community" is not simply the result of some form of pure Irish interspersed with Anglicisms: it is the product of a language-planning effort. As Dorian (1994: 484f.) points out, the project of revitalizing Irish (which started after the political independence from Great Britain) implied the creation of a new standard. A compromise between the three main spoken dialects was necessary, since they all had the same weight in terms of prestige and number of speakers and selecting one of them as the standard would have incurred in its rejection by the speakers of the other two. A new language was created that sought to be a happy medium between the existing norms of usage and that would seek "simplicity and regularity in all cases of rule formation" (Ó Baoill, 1988: 117). This met with hostile reactions on the part of the native speakers:

> To speakers of living Irish dialects, however, the result is *Gaeilge B'l' Ath'* 'Dublin Irish', a stilted, unnatural form of Irish (Dorian, 1994: 485)

The conservativism of such speakers, observes Dorian, corresponds to the different conservativism of the language planners, who had tried to do away with regional and dialectal forms but had not been too keen to renounce "the grammatical complexities of conservative forms of the language" (Dorian, 1994: ibid.). Complexities that, as Ó Baoill (1988: 117) observes, were already largely disregarded even in the language(s) of the native speakers— and many more, continues Ó Baoill, will inevitably be lost.

What are we to expect, then, from McCloskey's "second language community"? Will their members conform to prescriptive norms already dismissed by the Gaeltacht dialects, or will their language follow a similar evolutive pattern and eventually do away with (some of) them, as Ó Baoill foresees that will happen if Irish is to become a "viable means of communication among the general population" (1988: 125)? This is precisely the issue that I will address in my research, aiming to provide a description of the status quo in the micro-domain of grammatical gender by analyzing a corpus of texts, both written and spoken, produced by this L2 community.

It is particularly interesting that among the complexities explicitly mentioned by Ó Baoill are initial mutations, which play an important role in

the expression of gender agreement within the noun phrase. Gender agreement and the role initial mutations play in it are considered in this article.

2   Initial mutations and the realization of gender agreement

A variety of lexical items in Irish shows agreement in gender, whose surface realization is, in morphological terms, twofold: by means of word-final adjustments (endings) and word-initial adjustments (initial mutations). In the case of pronominal agreement, the choice of different lexical items might also reflect gender agreement. Initial mutations are common to all Celtic languages and perhaps among the most widely-known features thereof (Hamp, 1951: 230).

Historically, initial mutations represent the petrified reflexes of sandhi phenomena. Sandhi phenomena are non-distinctive modifications of certain sounds occurring across word boundaries and determined by the phonetic properties of the context; when the context that triggered the modification has ceased to exist, the modifications may linger on—they have become what is known as initial mutations. In the Celtic family, the absence of the triggering context is caused by the historical loss of word-final unstressed syllables (apocope).

Some examples will help to make the point clear. A well-represented mutation, in the inflection system of Celtic, is lenition, a cover term for a number of sound changes that affect the articulation of a consonant or consonant cluster, normally in a way that may be impressionistically described as "making it weaker" (Giannelli & Cravens, 1997: 35; Kirchner, 2004: 313). A particular kind of lenition is spirantization, a sound change whereby an occlusive is turned into its homorganic fricative. This is a common enough process which we find, for instance, in the variety of Italian spoken in Florence (Giannelli, 1997; Kirchner, 2004: 316–20; Loporcaro, 1997). Here, the word *prato* "lawn" may be realized as [praPθo] (or even [praPho]) rather than as [praPto] as in standard Italian. A lenited occlusive, in this case [t], becomes its fricative counterpart (i.e., the homorganic fricative [θ]). The lenition of [t] is triggered by its intervocalic position.

Intervocalic lenition in Florentine may take place not only word-internally, but equally well across word boundaries, affecting the initial consonant of a word in a way that is quite similar to what initial mutations do. The sequence *la casa* "the house", which in standard Italian is realized as [laˈkaːsa], is heard in Florence as [laˈxaːsa] or [laˈhaːsa]. Here the voiceless occlusive /k/ lenites to its fricative counterpart [x]. (As it happens, both /t/ and /k/ can be further reduced to [h] and thus neutralized in faster and less monitored speech registers: cf. Kirchner, 2004: 319). However, the phrase *a casa* "(at/to) home" sounds [aˈkːaːsa] in Florence and in the standard language alike. Lenition of /k/, which would be legitimately expected in view of its intervocalic position, is blocked by historical reasons: *a casa* is the modern reflex of Latin *ad casa(m)*, with an assimilated consonant cluster /dk/ > /kk/ phonetically realized as lengthened [kː] (*raddoppiamento fonosintattico*: cf. Loporcaro, 1997: 42; Rohlfs, 1966: 235–38). As Bechert (1990: 133) puts it, one effect of sandhi phenomena is surely that "they make the word group stand out more clearly against the single word"—from a synchronic point of view, i.e. in the absence of historical information about why *casa* is pronounced [xaːsa] in *la casa* but [kːaːsa] in *a casa*, only the salience of the phonological word can make the speakers prolong two different realizations that are devoid of any functional load.[1] There is in Florentine no phonological opposition of [k] and [x], the latter being a context-determined allophone of /k/. It is to be remarked that the context may or may not be synchronically evident: it is evident in the case of intervocalic lenition in [laˈxaːsa], but not in the case of the phonosyntactic doubling and lack of "intervocalic" lenition in [aˈkːaːsa].

While the initial mutations of the modern Celtic languages lack synchronic motivation too, they give rise to phonemic, not merely phonetic, oppositions: in other words, after apocope had deleted the word-final segments that triggered the mutations, the once allophonic alternation was made phonemic (Hamp, 1951: 239–42; Kortlandt, 1982). Hamp (p. 241) provides the following illustration, where the initial sound of the adjective

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[1] Cf. Skousen (1989) and his proposed theory of analogical modelling of the language, based on the how salient and frequent the occurrences of different tokens are in the usage.

bodi- "blond" lenites to [v] in intervocalic position, while staying [b] in non intervocalic contexts:

(1)   Proto-Goidelic   Old Irish

                *wir-uP   <u>b</u>odi-u: [v]   >   fiur   <u>b</u>uidiu /v/

                man-DAT.SG   blond-DAT.SG

                "blond man" (dative)

                vs.

                *wir-as   <u>b</u>odi-as /b/   >   fer   <u>b</u>uide /b/

                man-NOM.SG   blond-NOM.SG

                "blond man" (nominative)

                (Hamp, 1951: 241, adapted)

Old Irish orthography is inconsistent in showing lenition (hence the need to add the actual sounds in phonemic transcription). Old Irish corresponds to a post-apocope period of the language: we can see that the once allophonic [v] has now become a phoneme in its own right, in that its distribution is no longer context-determined, and, as shown below, the opposition can now be used distinctively to convey a difference of meaning.

Another common initial mutation of Celtic is the so-called *nasalization*, which would historically involve sound change across word boundaries triggered by the presence of a nasal segment. Nasalization as a synchronic (i.e., contextually activated) feature can be observed in Modern Greek (cf. Bechert, 1990: 133), where, for instance, the cluster /-n # p-/ is realized as [-m # b-]. In Proto-Goidelic, nasalization worked along the same lines, being phonetically determined by a word-final nasal; after apocope, the nasalized version of the following segment was retained in the new context as a new phoneme of the language (cf., again, Hamp, 1951: 239–42; Kortlandt, 1982).

Nasalization poses different problems, in that its realizations are more varied than those of lenition both within a dialect and across different dialects. Roughly speaking, nasalization in Irish is about turning voiceless oral segments into their voiced counterparts (assimilation in sonority, as in the Greek example) and voiced oral segments into nasal (nasalization proper); as to "nasalized" vowels, it must be observed that these are not in

fact nasal vowels but simply vowels to which *n-* has been prefixed. The details will be discussed below.

One interesting feature of agreement marking by initial mutation is that it challenges an assumption commonly entertained about canonical agreement (in the sense of Corbett, 2006): that the controller and target of agreement are two distinct entities. The facts about Celtic initial mutation seem to blur this distinction. A clear example is given in (2):

(2)   *béal* /b′ɛːl/ (m.) "mouth" →   *an béal* "the mouth"
             bean /b′an/ (f.) "woman" →   *an bhean* /van/ "the woman"

The lexical entries *béal* and *bean* both begin with the same phoneme, /b′/. However, when preceded by the definite article (*an*), *béal* stays the same, while *bean* undergoes lenition. Of all nouns beginning with /b′/, all masculines behave like *béal* and all feminines like *bean*: their distribution is grammatically conditioned. Now, gender is inherent in the noun, not the article: therefore the noun, not the article, is the controller. But agreement is marked on the controller, or so it seems. The case can be made that Irish is a head-marking rather than a dependent-marking language, but is it really so? A closer look suggests that the answer is no. To begin with, this would not be the case if the target was an adjective, as can be seen from (1), or in modern standard Irish, (3):

(3)   (a)   béal   bocht
                    mouth(M)   poor.M
                    "poor mouth"[2]
             (b)   bean   bhocht /v/
                    woman(F)   poor.F
                    "poor woman"

In (3), it is obviously the dependent and not the head that is marked.

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[2] Part of an Irish idiomatic expression, made famous by the title of Flann O'Brien's satirical novel *An béal bocht*.

The problem posed by (2) can be resolved if we assume two synchronic forms of the article: an_1 (masculine, non-leniting) and an_2 (feminine, leniting); adopting a notation common in Celtic linguistics, one can represent them as *an* and *an*^{L} respectively. This representation is historically more accurate in that it reflects the two distinct, earlier forms of the article that motivate the initial mutation. In Hamp's (1951) terms, *an* and *an*^{L} are distinguished by the absence/presence of the final morphophoneme /^{L}/, which is responsible for the triggering of the initial mutation in the following word:

(4)	NP realization	Underlying representation	Surface
	an béal	/aɴ b′ɛːl/	[a(ɴ) b′ɛːl]
	an bean	/aɴ^L b′an/	[a(ɴ) van]

This way, it is the article that shows agreement—namely, the feminine form is marked by the suffixing of the leniting morphophoneme—and it is only an accident that the controller is affected by the latter. Morphophonemes like /^{L}/ are understood by Hamp to be part of the inventory of morphemes, although phonetically they do not correspond to any set of sounds; they rather constitute functions whereby certain following phonemes are changed according to regular patterns. Synchronically, this interpretation has to rely on underlying representations (and orthography is in this regard misleading in that it ignores morphophonemes and just records the mutation); notwithstanding, it captures the historic truth, namely the fact that two separate forms of the article once existed whose continuators are no longer distinguished by the ending but only by the final morphophoneme.

A different analysis of initial-mutation triggers has been proposed by Green (2006), who sees mutations as not pertaining to phonology at all and therefore refuses the morphophonematic interpretation. According to Green, all mutated forms of a lexical entry are stored in the lexicon and activated by the context, in the same way as different case forms are in Latin or German (i.e., by a form of government relation). His motive in proposing a lexical analysis is the observation that the changes involved in most contexts of

initial mutation not only in Irish but in the Celtic languages more generally are too irregular and to account for them by posing ad hoc morphophonemes ("floating autosegments") would require too high a number of them. Morphophonemes are only postulated for the purposes of explaining initial mutations and there is in the language no independent evidence of their existence. The phonological changes that they induce are not always easily amenable to straightforward sound-change pattern: so for instance lenition in Irish turns stops into homorganic fricatives, except for the dentals /t/ and /d/, which are debuccalized (see discussion below). Green's attractive analysis presents the distinct advantage of doing without any specially posited theoretical constructs, while at the same time providing an alternative analysis that is consistent with a typologically well known and widely attested phenomenology. In what follows I shall continue, for the sake of simplicity and brevity, to make use of the standard symbolism associated with the morphophonematic analysis as a convenient shorthand, in pretty much the same way as one would use the notation ad^{ACC} to signify that the Latin preposition *ad* governs in the accusative case. I am therefore not committing myself to the theoretic framework criticized by Greene.

Initial mutations as markers of agreement can also be found on adjectives, as seen in (3). In what follows, we will point out how initial mutations contribute to the functioning of the gender opposition in modern standard Irish.

3   Realization and scope of gender agreement in Irish

Irish has two genders, masculine and feminine. Initial mutations in Irish belong to three basic types (Ó Siadhail, 1989: §6.2): besides lenition and nasalization (or "eclipsis") we also have *h*-prefixing (or "provection"). A fourth type of initial mutation, the prefixing of *t*-, is less general and may in fact be triggered only by the article (see below); it is however crucial in terms of gender marking. It is crucial to keep in mind that initial mutations are selective as regards the phonemes that they may affect, and that constraints blocking the mutation of otherwise "mutable" phonemes may apply, which will in turn affect the expression of gender agreement.

3.1   Lenition

Lenited plosives turn into homorganic continuants (except for dental plosives /t d/, which turn into the back fricatives /h ɣ/); lenited /l/, vibrant and nasals become [− TENSE] (Ó Siadhail, 1989: 111); lenited fricatives /s/ and /f/ turn into /h/ and ∅, respectively. A prospect of lenition in Irish is given in (5):

(5)   Lenition in Irish (source: Ó Siadhail, 1989: 112)

Basic consonant	Lenited consonant	
	(phonemic transcription)	(spellings)
plosives		
c /k k′/	/x ç/	*ch*
g / g g′/	/ɣ j/	*gh*
t /t t′/	/h h′/	*th*
d /d d′/	/ɣ j/	*dh*
p /p p′/	/f f′/	*ph*
b /b b′/	/w v′/	*bh*
fricatives		
s /s ʃ/	/h h′/	*sh*
f /f f′/	/ ʲ/	*fh*
nasals		
n /N N′/	/n/	*n*
m /m m′/	/w̃ v′/	*mh*
lateral		
l /ʟ ʟ′/	/l l′/	*l*
vibrant		
r /R R′/	/r′/	*r*

As Ó Siadhail (1989: 112–14) points out, lenition may be blocked in certain phonological contexts (a certain degree of inter-dialectal variation applies). This is relevant to our investigation in that, where lenition is the only marker of gender agreement, its blocking will of course result in the loss of the gender distinction. Ó Siadhail lists the following relevant points:

(i)   ***r-***: its lenition is realized as palatalization (as in the Dunquin and West Muskerry dialects); it is however a feature preserved almost only by older Munster speakers—elsewhere, lenition of /r/ is inaudible (note that it is not represented orthographically);

(ii)   initial *n-* and *l-*: their lenition corresponds to a loss of tension; however, since tense *n-* and *l-* (/N L/ respectively) only appear in Munster, there is no audible lenition of these segments in dialects other than Munster (again, orthography does not represent their lenition);

(iii)   initial *f-*: its lenition is rather unstable in some dialects, e.g. in that of Cois Fhairrge;

(iv)   lenition between two dental segments (i.e. lenition of a dental preceded by another dental) may be blocked in certain contexts, e.g. after the article, as in (6):

(6)   an$^{(L)}$ diabhail
           ART.GEN.M.SG devil.GEN.SG
           "of the devil"
           (Cois Fhairrge dialect, Ó Siadhail, 1989: 113)

(Parentheses indicate blocked lenition.) However, lenition between two dentals may be preserved in case of compounds or habitual collocations, as in (7):

(7)   sloítin^{L} **dh**raíocht
           cane.DIM   magic.GEN.SG
           "magic wand"
           (Cois Fhairrge dialect, Ó Siadhail, 1989: 113)

(v)   lenition in English **loan-words** is limited; in particular /ṭ/ and /ḍ/, as well as /s/ and /f/, remain unlenited in this particular class of nouns.

3.2   Nasalization

Only plosives and the fricatives /f f'/ can be nasalized; as to words beginning in a vowel, nasalization consists in the prefixing of *n-*. In fact, the term nasalization would properly cover only the mutation of voiced plosives, which turn into homorganic nasals; voiceless plosives are not nasalized but turned into their voiced counterparts (sonority assimilation), while /f/ and

/f′/ are turned into /w/ and /v′/ respectively.[3] A table of the relevant modifications is provided in (8).

(8)   Nasalization ("eclipsis") in Irish (source: Ó Siadhail, 1989: 112)

Basic consonant	Nasalized consonant	
	(phonemic transcription)	(spellings)
plosives		
c /k k′/	/g g′/	*gc*
g /g g′/	/ŋ ŋ′/	*ng*
t /t t′/	/d d′/	*dt*
d /d d′/	/N N′/	*nd*
p /p p′/	/b b′/	*bp*
b /b b′/	/m m′/	*mb*
fricatives		
f /f f′/	/w v′/	*bhf*

3.3 h-*prefixing ("provection")*

According to Ó Siadhail (1989: 122), the prefixing of *h-* to a word-initial vowel falls within the scope of initial mutations as a case of no sound-change: *h-* is inserted before two vowels to mark hiatus, i.e. to avoid vowel elision, as in

(9)   na   **h**amadáin
           ART.PL fool.PL
           "the fools" (cf. *amadán* "fool"; *h-* prevents the outcome
           n'amadáin)
           (Ó Siadhail, 1989: 123)

However, continues Ó Siadhail (ibid.), *h-*prefixing may serve the purpose of grammatical functions which are "largely shared by dialects". As we shall see below, these include realizing certain gender distinctions. Remarkably, in those dialects where /h/ is regularly dropped between two vowels (cf. Ó Siadhail, 1989: 81f.), a redundant *h-* (i.e. a non-distinctive one) might be

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[3] Only in a limited number of dialects is eclipsis of /s s′/ found, realized as /z j/ respectively (Ó Siadhail, 1989: 114).

dropped, while a grammatically functional *h-* is more stable: compare the "certain amount of hesitancy" between *ní hiad ~ ní iad* (Cois Fhairrge dialect) "it is not them", where *h-* is redundant (i.e. its presence/absence carries no meaningful distinction) to the more stable *h-* in *a **h**athair* "her father" (vs. *a **a**thair* "his father")—where *h*-prefixing distinguishes the gender of the possessor pronoun.

Gender agreement in Irish is reflected by a number of targets, which will be examined in turn. The situation we are about to describe conforms with Greenberg's (1966: 95) Universal 37, with the marking of gender opposition, where present, being limited to the singular and never interesting the plural.

3.4   Article

Irish has only a definite article, which agrees with the head noun in gender, number and case. Gender is relevant only in the singular and is completely neutralized in the plural. The forms of the article in the standard language are given in (10):

(10)   Article paradigm in Standard Irish: singular forms (cf. Mac
                Congáil, 2004: 20–23)

	Masculine	*Feminine*
Nominative	an^T	an^{L+T}
Genitive	an^{L+T}	na^H
Prepositional I	an^N	an^N/an^{L+T}
Prepositional II	an^L	an^{L+T}

The following should be noted:

   (i)   *t*-prefixing in the nominative masculine applies to nouns beginning in vowel, e.g. *an t-asal* "the donkey".

   (ii)   Lenition is blocked if the noun begin in a dental, cf. (6).

   (iii)   The genitive masculine and the nominative feminine forms of the article are syncretic. In both forms, *t-* is prefixed to a lenited *s-*, i.e. in a cluster *s-* + sonorant (V or *l, n, r*), but not to nouns beginning in a vowel. In this case, lenition of *s-* is not realized in the usual way (i.e. as *h-*)—in fact, it is simply dropped, and *t-* is prefixed to

the noun: e.g. *an tsúil* /ən ˈtuːl′/ "the eye", *an tsrón* /ən trɔːn/ "the nose" (Mac Eoin, 1993: 113; Ó Siadhail, 1989: 127).[4]

(iv)   *h-* in the genitive feminine is prefixed to a noun beginning with a vowel, e.g.

(11)   na   **h**abhann
            ART.GEN.F.SG river(F).GEN.SG
            "of the river"

(v)   The prepositional forms of the article are used after a preposition.[5] They can be distinguished into two subtypes, that we suggest should be called "prepositional I" and "prepositional II", in terms of the initial mutation they trigger in the following noun. Roughly speaking, prepositional I nasalizes the following noun, while prepositional II lenites it, *irrespective of grammatical gender*; as usual, lenition is blocked before dentals (except for *s-*, see below); nasalization, in standard Irish and at least in Connacht, is blocked before *t-* and *d-* (Ó Siadhail, 1989: 127), and does not, in any case, affect initial vowels (Mac Congáil, 2004: 22):

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[4] From the historical point of view, lenited *s-* is not dropped: it is the encounter between the historical ending *-d* of the article and the *h-* resulting from the lenition of *s-* that yielded the *-t-* in the sequence *an t(s)úil*: /nd#h/ > /n#t/ (cf. Ball & Müller, 1992: 48).

[5] This case is sometimes called "dative" (cf. *Graiméar*, 1960: 48; Mac Congáil, 2004: 30, 32). However, the label "prepositional"—as found in Ó Dochartaigh (1992)—seems to be more appropriate, in view of both historical and synchronic considerations. Synchronically, as explained in the text, the prepositional case is differentiated in two subtypes on the basis of initial-mutation patterns: these are in turn selected by the preceding preposition, with a certain degree of inter-dialectal variation (see §4). Historically, this reflects the fact that, in Old Irish, some prepositions would govern dative NPs, others accusative NP, and yet others both cases (cf. Thurneysen, 1961: §§249, 251). So prepositional I continues the accusative, whose ancient ending *-n* justifies the nasal mutation, and prepositional II continues the dative, which would end in a vowel and therefore trigger lenition.

(12) ag an^N ngeata *vs.* ag an$^{(N)}$
 doras

at ART.PREP_I gate   at ART.PREP_I door

"at the gate"   "at the door"

(Mac Congáil, 2004: 22)

(13) de-n^L bhord *vs.* de-n$^{(L)}$
 diallait

from-ART.PREP_II table   from-ART.PREP_II
 saddle

"from the table"   "from the saddle"

(ibid.)

(14) ó-n$^{(N)}$ iasc

from-ART.PREP_I fish

"from the fish" (ibid.)

Gender opposition can only be maintained in the case of nouns beginning in a cluster *s-* + sonorant, which are not mutated if masculine, and undergo lenition and *t*-prefixing, if feminine (as shown in (iii) above); in this case, prepositional I and prepositional II behave in the same way:

(15) Prepositional I

M: ó-n^N **sagart**

from-ART.M.PREP_I priest

"from the priest"

F: ó-n$^{L + T}$ **tseilf**
 /t′el′f′/

from-ART.F.PREP_I shelf

"from the shelf"

(16)   Prepositional II

    M: do-n$^{(L)}$ **sagart**

        to-ART.M.PREP_II   priest

        "to the priest"

    F: do-n^{L+T} **tseilf**

                        /t′el′f′/

        to-ART.F.PREP_II   shelf

        "to the shelf"

So, as far as the article is concerned, the possibility of gender agreement being realized at surface level is constrained by the following conditions: (a) the controller is singular in number; (b) in the nominative, the noun must begin in either a consonant that may undergo lenition, or a vowel; (c) in both prepositional I and II, the noun must begin in a sequence *s-* + sonorant. If condition (a) is not met, agreement is not possible (the plural forms of the articles are gender-neutral); if either condition (b) or condition (c) is not met, agreement will apply vacuously, i.e., will not have any possible surface realization. From what has been observed, it follows that only in the genitive singular is agreement realized regardless of phonemic constraints, since the forms of the article are different in both their stems and their mutational morphophonemic endings.

3.5   Adjectives

Gender agreement with adjectives is limited to the attributive position in the singular:[6] predicative adjectives are not inflected (Mac Eoin, 1993: 115). Adjective inflection is realized word-initially (initial mutations) and word-finally (inflectional endings); the following illustrates the prescriptive standard use (the examples are modelled on, and partly drawn from, Mac Congáil, 2004: 89f.):

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[6] The basic word order in the Irish NP is noun + adjective. Only a few adjectives may precede the head noun, in what Ó Siadhail (1989: 118) regards as formation of compounds: e.g. *seanfhear* "old man" (*sean* "old"), but they do not agree with the noun. Lenition of the noun, unless phonologically constrained (e.g. *seanscéal* "old story (*scéal*)"), normally applies. Other adjectives must precede the head noun: these include numerals (see below), interrogatives, and certain indefinites (cf. *NIG*, 2004: 60). These do not mark gender agreement.

(17)   Nominative

        M: an   fear   **mór**   (*unmarked*)

             ART   man   great

             "the great man"

        F: an   bhean **mhór**   (*lenition*)

             ART   woman great

             "the great woman"

(18)   Genitive

        M: an   fhir   **mhóir**   (*lenition, palatalization*)

             ART   man   great

             "of the great man"

        F: na   mná **móire**   (*palatalization, suffixing*)

             ART   woman great

             "of the great woman"

(19)   Prepositional I

        M: leis   an   bhfear   **mór**   (*unmarked*)

             with   ART   man   great

             "with the great man"

        F: leis   an   mbean   **mhór**   (*lenition*)

             with   ART   woman   great

             "with the great woman"

(20)   Prepositional II

        M: do-n fhear **mór**   (*unmarked*)

             to-ART man   great

             "to the great man"

        F: do-n bhean **mhór**   (*lenition*)

             to-ART woman great

             "to the great woman"

(21)   Vocative

        M: a   fhir   **mhór**   (*lenition*)

              oh   man   great

             "(oh) great man"

        F: a   bhean **mhór**   (*lenition*)

             oh   woman great

             "(oh) great woman"

In examples (17)–(21) the adjectives were chosen so that both initial mutations and inflectional ending might be visible where relevant.

Let's now take a closer look at word-final inflection. Standard grammars posit a number of adjective declensions, the realization of agreement depending on what class the adjectives belong in. The number of classes varies from description to description: of two recent prescriptive grammars, the *New Irish grammar* (*NIG*, 2004: 63ff.) posits eight classes (not counting adjectives ending in a vowel or those undergoing syncopation), while Mac Congáil (2004: 86ff.) has three in total. At any rate, final inflection is mainly brought about by two strategies, which can be used separately or combined: (a) switching the [± PALATAL] feature in the final consonant, and (b) adding a final vowel (unstressed /ə/, spelled *-a* or *-e*) (Ó Siadhail, 1989: §6.3.1, and p. 148). Strategy (a) is traditionally referred to as broadening/slendering.[7] Since the prepositional case is only differentiated from the nominative in terms of initial mutation, it follows that we are only going to be concerned with differences in the realization of the genitive.

(22) is an attempt to put together the *NIG* eight-class analysis with Mac Congáil's three-class analysis. Adjectives of the first declension form the genitive masculine form by slendering the final consonant (cf. *bán* /bɔːn/ "white" → *báin* /bɔːn′/). If the latter is already slender, it undergoes no change (*glic* /gʹlʹikʹ/ → *glic* /gʹlʹikʹ/ "clever"). Certain monosyllabic adjectives ending in a tense consonant (orthographically a geminate, e.g. *mall* "slow") or *-ch(t)* /x(t)/ (e.g. *nocht* "naked") have unaltered genitive masculine. Their genitive feminine form is formed by adding *-e* /ə/ after the final consonant, which must be made slender (or be originally slender): e.g. *maille* (/ʟ/ made slender → /ʟ′/), *maithe* (/h′/ originally slender). Adjectives of the second declension have unaltered genitive masculine and form their

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[7] Cf. Ó Siadhail (1989: §6.3.1). "Slendering" a non-palatal ("broad") consonant means to palatalize it; "broadening" a palatal ("slender") consonant means, on the opposite, to make its articulation non-palatal. Orthographically, palatalization is represented by <e> and <i>, which must precede or follow (or precede and follow, word internally) the consonant grapheme. So for example the sequence <ona> is orthographically correct, while the sequence <ina> is not, because it is not clear whether the palatal /n′/ or the non-palatal /n/ is meant.

genitive feminine by making final -*l* or -*r* broad and adding a final vowel /ə/. Finally, adjectives of the third declension, i.e. those ending in a vowel, are indeclinable except for *breá*, which has a distinct genitive feminine form *breátha*.

(22)   Adjective declensions according to *NIG* (2004: 63ff.) and Mac Cóngail (2004: 86ff.)

NIG				Mac Congáil
Nominative	Gen. m.	Gen. f.		
bán "white"	*báin*	*báine*	(1)	
díreach "straight"	*dírigh*	*dírí*	(2)	
bacach "lame"	*bacaigh*	*bacaí*	(3)	**1st declension:** adjectives ending in a consonant, except those in the 2nd declension.
mall "slow"	*mall*	*maille*	(4)	
maith "good"	*maith*	*maithe*	(5)	
buíoch "grateful"	*buíoch*	*buíthí*	(6)	
gnách "usual"	*gnách*	*gnáthaí*[8]	(7)	
leisciúil "lazy"	*leisciúil*	*leisciúla*	(8)	**2nd declension:** adjectives ending in -*(i)úil* and **some** adjectives ending in -*(a)ir*.

Adjectives ending in a vowel (Mac Congáil's 3rd declension)
rua "red" (Nom., gen. m., gen. f.)
Exception: ***breá*** "nice" (Nom., gen. m.), *breátha* (gen. f.)

Adjectives that undergo syncopation: a subset of Mac Congáil's 1st declension. Some bisyllabic adjectives which form the gen. f. by adding a vowel (i.e. an extra syllable) drop the central syllable in the same form (so they remain bisyllabic). E.g. **ramhar** "fat", gen. m. *ramhair*, gen. f. **raimhre** (< *ramh(ai)re*); **íseal** "low", gen. m. *ísil*, gen. f. **ísle** (< *ís(i)le*).

Vocative: the vocative masculine form of a first-declension adjective is identical to its genitive masculine, the vocative feminine to the nominative feminine.

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[8] Irregular: Ó Dónaill (1977: s.v. *gnách*) has the regular *gnáiche*.

A few observations can be made about the grammar of adjective inflection:

(i)   In the nominative, masculine and feminine are opposed by the presence/absence of lenition alone: lenition characterizes the adjective as well as the head noun.

(ii) In the genitive, both lenition and final inflection play a role in gender agreement: the masculine is lenited, while different endings distinguish the masculine from the feminine (see below).

(iii) In the prepositional, the norm prescribes unmarked masculine and lenited feminine, without distinction between prepositional I and II; however, dialectal variation plays quite an important role in this regard (see §4).

(iv) No gender opposition is found in the vocative, as both masculine and feminine adjectives are lenited.

The above can be represented as follows:

(23)   Expression of agreement in Irish adjectives

	← 3rd declension		
		← 2nd declension	
			← 1st declension
Lenition	/ə/-suffixing	Palatalization	
−	−	−	• Nom. m. sg. • Prep. m. sg.
+	−	−	• Nom. f. sg. • Prep. f. sg. • Voc. m. & f.
−	+	+	• Gen. f. sg.
+	−	+	• Gen. m. sg.
−	−	+	(Not found)
−	+	−	(Not found)
+	+	−	(Not found)
+	+	+	(Not found)

By looking at the diagram in (23) two syncretic expressions of agreement immediately stand out, namely (a) unmarked form for nominative and

prepositional in the masculine and (b) simple lenition for the nominative feminine, prepositional feminine and vocative (both genders). We also see that the three formal features (lenition, palatalization and /ə/-suffixing) can only occur on their own (lenition) or in pair (palatalization + suffixing, lenition + palatalization), but never simultaneously.

Another interesting observation that (23) enables us to make concerns which distinctions are more at risk of being lost on account of their dependence on lenition as a means of expression: when the adjective begins in a non-mutable sound, there certainly will be no distinction between masculine and feminine in the nominative singular. Furthermore, (23) is sensitive to differences between adjective declensions. The first declension may exploit all of the three formal devices—"may", as for instance adjectives ending in a palatal consonant in the citation form (the nominative singular) cannot further exploit palatalization, while monosyllables ending in a tense consonant or /xt/ never palatalize (see above). The same holds true of the second declension, whose adjectives all end in a palatal consonant in the nominative; while the third declension does without either palatalization or /ə/-suffixing. This is illustrated by the arrows drawn on top of the diagram, which show the expressive power of each declension according to the standard account. So, for instance, the third declension can only rely on lenition: hence, in case of non-mutable initial, adjectives belonging to it will be indeclinable; under the same circumstances, second-declension adjectives may still oppose masculine to feminine in the genitive, and first-declension ones may further distinguish the genitive masculine from the nominative, prepositional and vocative forms thanks to palatalization.

However, it should be noted at this point that final inflection as a means of marking gender and case agreement is on its way out. The paradigms just shown are referred to as "classical" by Ó Dochartaigh (1992: 56; 74), who points out the rapid change towards simplification that this class is undergoing in modern Irish; and it has been pointed out that inflection of the attributive adjective

> continued to be the norm in the literary language until very recent times, though there was a considerable reduction of form in use. In the modern spoken language,

> declension of the adjective in the singular has largely been abandoned, though old forms survive in many set phrases (Mac Eoin, 1993: 115f.)

What's more, continues Mac Eoin (ibid.: 116), the little adjective inflection surviving is threatened by the gradual decline of the attributive position altogether, which tends to be avoided in speech and is felt to be "bookish". "Various stratagems are used to ensure that the adjective is usually in predicative construction" (H. Wagner, cited in Mac Eoin). Therefore, the tendency seems to be for the adjective to become a completely indeclinable element. The comparative and superlative forms of the adjective, whether regularly or irregularly formed, are not inflected either (*NIG*, 2004: 70–72).[9]

3.6   Attributive nouns

Nouns used in attributive position (N_2) to modify the preceding head noun (N_1) may undergo lenition. There are various and rather idiosyncratic rules, in some cases depending on the gender of the head noun, so that lenition can be legitimately taken to mark gender agreement. Not all such cases, however, have to do with gender proper, as they instead may involve other forms of noun classification, based on different criteria, like proper vs. common nouns, definiteness vs. non-definiteness. The following description is based on Ó Siadhail (1989: 119–21), Mac Congáil (2004: 58–60), and the *NIG* (2004: 15f.), which all provide further details on the issue.

Nouns which immediately follow the head noun (and modify, determine, or specify it, are—at least traditionally—regarded as being in the genitive case.[10] The familiar rule blocking lenition between two dentals generally applies and is therefore to be regarded as a constraint on gender agreement when this is relevant.

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[9] For the sake of completeness we shall note that the comparative and superlative are identical to the genitive singular feminine form, preceded by various particles (depending on degree of comparison and tense of the verb) (*NIG*, 2004: 70f.).

[10] Some nouns do not have a distinct genitive form, e.g. those whose nominative ends in a vowel; other nouns are understood to be genitive in function, although nominative in form, when they are followed by a further (definite) noun in the genitive form (cf. *NIG*, 2004: 30–32; chapter 7).

A distinction is to be made between definite and indefinite N_2's: for the purposes of this rule, the former are either made definite by virtue of their being proper names (personal names, place names, etc.), by a following genitive phrase, or by a cardinal numeral used as an ordinal (cf. *NIG*, 2004: 25f.). These normally lenite, the trigger for lenition being definiteness and not gender.[11] As to indefinite nouns, they lenite after a feminine singular N_1, *provided that the latter is not itself in the genitive*:

(24)   (a)   aimsir$_1$ **bh**áistí$_2$
                 weather(F)   rain.GEN
                 "rainy weather"

         (b)   an   ghaoth$_1$ **Mh**árta$_2$
                 ART.F   wind(F)   March.GEN
                 "the March wind"

         (c)   cúis$_1$ **gh**áire$_2$
                 cause(F)   laughter
                 "reason for laughter"

         (*NIG*, 2004: 15)

There are certain exceptions to this latter rule, some semantically and some syntactically motivated. The following have to do with semantic reasons (apart, once again, from the phonetic constraint of lenition between dentals): a feminine N_1 does not trigger lenition of N_2 if it

- "denotes excess, part, want" (*NIG*, 2004: 15) ("quantity", cf. Mac Congáil, 2004: 59): e.g. *barraíocht$_1$* **c**ainte$_2$ "too much talk (lit. excess of talk)", *breis$_1$* **b**ainne$_2$ "extra milk (lit. addition of milk)", *easpa$_1$* **c**odlata$_2$ "lack of sleep", *roinnt$_1$* **b**agúin$_2$ "some bacon (lit. portion of bacon)";
- names a part of a person's or animal's body or a part of a thing or apparatus, e.g. *cos$_1$* **p**áiste$_2$ "the foot of a child", *cluas$_1$* **c**upáin$_2$ "the handle (lit. ear) of a cup" (Mac Congáil, 2004: 59);

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[11] Although a noun phrase can be made definite by the presence of an article, a possessive (see below), or a quantifier (e.g. *gach* "every"), these precede N_2, which therefore does *not* immediately follow N_1. Therefore, lenition of N_2 in such instances is *not* covered by the rules we are now examining.

- is followed by a partitive genitive (which may also function as an apposition), or a genitive of material, e.g. *scuaine₁ caorach₂* "a flock of sheep" (Mac Congáil, 2004: 59), *óinseach mná* "a fool of a woman" (Ó Siadhail, 1989: 121);

- denotes something owned by, or meant for, N₂ (the latter being a common noun, cf. Mac Congáil, 2004: 60): *culaith₁ fir₂* "a man's suit", *bróg₁ páiste₂* "a child's shoe";

- is grammaticalized into a compound preposition (compound prepositions are comprised of a simple preposition + N₁ and are followed by a genitive) and N₂ is *not* a proper name: cf.

(25) (a) *Compound preposition + (lenited) proper name:*

as   cionn₁   [**Gh**arrdha na Raithní]₂

out of   head.DAT   [Garrdha na Raithní].GEN

"above Garrdha na Raithní"

(Ó Siadhail, 1989: 120)

(b) *Compound preposition + (unlenited) common noun:*

i   láthair₁   **m**úinteora₂

in   presence   teacher.GEN

"in the presence of a teacher"

(Mac Congáil, 2004: 60)

- is a verbal noun:[12] e.g.

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[12] However, Ó Siadhail (1989: 121) observes how all dialects have a selection of set phrases in which nouns following feminine (and masculine) verbal nouns *do* lenite: e.g. *ag fáil₁ bháis₂* "dying (lit. finding of death)". Ó Siadhail adds as "noteworthy" that "there is a core of phrases common to all dialects" where lenited nouns follow a verbal noun: among these are the aforementioned *ag fáil bháis, ag cur₁ fhataí/(phr(e)ataí)₂* "sowing of potatoes", and others. It would appear that "many such phrases contain common verbs such as *fáil* 'get', *cur* 'put' and the lenition serves to bond the phrase with a particular meaning."

(26)   (a)   ag   baint₁   **m**óna₂

at   extracting(F)   turf.GEN

"digging out turf"

(*NIG*, 2004: 15)

(b)   beannacht₁   **b**aintrí₂

blessing(F)   widow.GEN

"a widow's blessing"

(Mac Congáil, 2004: 60)

As to the syntactic restriction, N₂'s fail to lenite when followed by an adjective qualifying them:

(27)   oíche   **g**aoithe   móire

night(F)   wind.GEN   great.GEN

"a night with a high wind" (Ó Siadhail, 1989: 121)

Given the complexity of the rules governing lenition of attributive nouns, it will be particularly interesting to investigate the extent to which they are observed in the actual usage.

3.7   Demonstratives

There is a three-term set of deictic particles corresponding to *proximal* (*seo* "here, this"), *distal₁* (*sin* "there, that"), and *distal₂* (*siúd/úd* "yonder, that over there").[13] They are indeclinable per se, and can stand on their own as pronominal elements:

(28)   **seo**   mo   mháthair

this   POSS:1SG   mather(F)

"this is my mother"

(Mac Congáil, 2004: 111)

They may also be accompanied by pronouns which are marked for gender (see below):

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[13] The labels *distal₁* and *distal₂* are chosen purely out of convenience and are not meant to allude to any theoretic framework.

(29)   (a)   **seo**   **í**   mo   mháthair

                    this   3SG.F POSS:1SG mother

                    "this is my mother"

      (b)   **seo**   **é**   do   sheans

                    this   3SG.M POSS:2SG chance

                    "this is your chance"

      (Mac Congáil, 2004: 111)

As adjectives, they follow the noun and require that it be accompanied by the article; again, they do not inflect, but the accompanying article does, in the ways we have already seen:

(30)   (a)   **an**   fear   **seo**   (b)   **an^L**   bhean **sin**

                    ART.M man this   ART.F woman that

                    "this man"   "that woman"

      (ibid.)

3.8 Numerals

Numeral adjectives (whether cardinal or ordinal) precede the head noun and do not inflect for gender. Standard Irish has a special set of numerals for use with personal nouns (nouns denoting humans) when counting from two ("2") to ten ("10"). Within this range, personal nouns require a special set of numeral elements which are sometimes called "personal numbers" but are really nouns followed by a partitive genitive, the resulting construction thus literally meaning "pair of *x*'s", "triplet of *y*'s", and so forth. The two sets are compared in (31):

(31)   Common and "personal" numerals in Irish (cf. Mac Congáil, 2004: 190, 194)

Number	Non-personal (adjectives)	Personal (nouns)
2	*dhá* bhád "two boats"	*beirt* bhan "two women"
3	*trí* bhád "three boats"	*triúr* ban "three women"
4	*ceithre* bhád "four boats"	*ceathrar* ban "four women"
5	*cúig* bhád "five boats"	*cúigear* ban "five women"
6	*sé* bhád "six boats"	*seisear* ban "six women"
7	*seacht* mbád "seven boats"	*seachtar* ban "seven women"
8	*ocht* mbád "eight boats"	*ochtar* ban "eight women"
9	*naoi* mbád "nine boats"	*naonúr* ban "nine women"
10	*deich* mbád "ten boats"	*deichniúr* ban "ten women"

The following should be observed:

(i)   In the *non-personal* series, the numerals are followed by the noun in the singular. While this is obligatory with "2", optional with subsequent numerals (cf. Acquaviva, 2006). What initial mutation specifically follows each numeral has also nothing to do with gender.

(ii)   Personal numerals are followed by the genitive plural. As we have already said, these are in fact numeral nouns: they have a gender of their own (*beirt* is feminine, *triúr* to *deichniúr* are masculine), which is reflected in the use of the article preceding them (e.g. an^L *bh*eirt *bhan* "the two women", but an^T *t-ochtar bhan* "the eight women (lit. the octet of women)") (Mac Congáil, 2004: 194f.).

(iii)   Note that the lenition of the genitive noun after *beirt*, which is feminine, appears to contradict the tendency for partitive genitive not to undergo lenition (see above): this corroborates the impression of high complexity governing the mutation of attributive nouns noted above.

3.9   Possessives

Although we will not enter the question whether possessives should be considered, from a synchronic point of view, adjectives or genitival forms of the personal pronoun, it must be observed that their pronominal force is notable in constructions with verbal nouns (see (33) below), where these forms are used for the semantic role of object (i.e. the role fulfilled by an accusative pronoun with a finite form of the same verb; see below).[14] The possessive series is characterized at the surface level by a mutational pattern which, at any rate, has grammatical function only in the third person, where the mutational morphophonemes distinguish masculine from feminine and singular from plural. This is shown by the table in (32):

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[14] Evidence in favour of their pronominal nature seems to come from the behaviour of the emphatic suffixes, which agree in person, number and gender with the possessive as they do with the pronoun, although they do not attach to the possessive but to the intervening noun (see discussion in §3.10).

(32)   Possessives in Irish

Person	Possessive	Example
1SG	*mo*^{L}	*mo*^{L} **bh**á*d* "my boat"
2SG	*do*^{L}	*do*^{L} **bh**á*d* "your (SG) boat"
3SG.M	*a*^{L}	*a*^{L} **bh**á*d* "his boat", *a*^{L} *athair* "his father"
3SG.F	*a*^{H}	*a*^{H} *bád* "her boat", *a*^{H} **h**athair "her father"
1PL	*ár*^{N}	*ár*^{N} **m**b*ád* "our boat"
2PL	*bhur*^{N}	*bhur*^{N} **m**b*ád* "your (PL) boat"
3PL	*a*^{N}	*a*^{N} **m**b*ád* "their boat"

As can be seen in (32), if deprived of their final morphophonemes the third person possessives would be *a* /ə/ regardless of number and gender.

Irish possessives mark agreement with the grammatical gender of the possessor, not the possessum: there are no distinct forms of the possessive depending on whether the head noun is masculine (e.g. *carr* "car") or feminine (e.g. *carraig* "rock"): cf. *a*^{L} *charr* "his car" ~ *a*^{H} *carr* "her car", just like *a*^{L} *charraig* "his rock" ~ *a*^{H} *carraig* "her rock".

Synchronically, a separate set of forms is used for third-person possessives with verbal nouns. This includes *á*^{L} (masculine singular), *á*^{H} (feminine singular), and *á*^{N} (plural): while the mutational pattern is shared with the other series, the difference between the two series involves the stem vowel, which is /aː/ instead of /ə/: the former is structurally "heavier" in that it corresponds to the sequence preposition (*do* "to" or *ag* "at") + possessive which is found in all other persons: compare (33) to (34):

(33)   do/ag   **mo**   mholadh
          to/at   POSS:1SG   praising
          "praising me (lit. to/at my praising)"
          (Mac Congáil, 2004: 107)

(34)   **á**^{L} **mh**oladh
          to.POSS:3SG.M praising
          "praising him"
          (Mac Congáil, ibid.)[15]

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[15] The form *á* represents the phonetic development of the forms *ag a, do a* with lenition of /d/ and /g/ (through the forms /aɣa/, /ɣa/) (cf. Ó Cadhlaigh, 1940: 48–50; I am grateful to Damian McManus for this reference).

3.10 Personal pronouns

There are two sets of personal pronouns: subject pronouns and object pronouns (three sets if one considers possessives as genitive forms of the personal pronouns). All two (or three) of them can take emphatic particles. Again, it is only the third-person singular pronoun that has distinct forms for the masculine and the feminine gender. These are *sé* (m.), *sí* (f.) for the subject series, and *é* (m.), *í* (f.) for the object series. The emphatic suffixes m. *-s(e)an* (/sən/ or /ʃən/), f. *-se/sa* (/ʃə/ or /sə/) attach to them: *(s)eisean* "himself", *(s)ise* "herself".

   Prepositional phrases with suffixed pronominal endings (the so-called "prepositional pronouns") behave correspondingly: gender is marked on the third person singular only, and emphatic suffixes preserve the distinction of gender (*NIG*, 2004: 82–84): e.g. *aige* "at him" (*ag* + 3SG.M) vs. *aici* "at her" (*ag* + 3SG.F), emphatic forms m. *aigesean* "at himself", f. *aicise* "at herself".

   Note that emphatic suffixes mark gender agreement in the third person singular even when they are not suffixed directly to the pronoun but to some intervening constituent:

(35)   (a)   a^L   chota-**san**
              POSS:<u>3SG.M</u>   coat-EMPH.<u>3SG.M</u>
              "his coat"
       (b)   a^H   bróg   bheag-**sa**
              POSS:<u>3SG.F</u>   shoe   small-EMPH.<u>3SG.F</u>
              "her small shoe"

4   Dialectal variation and double gender

Dialectal variation with respect to grammatical gender involves at least three distinct aspects, to which we shall turn in this section:

(i)   syntactic constraints on the surfacing of agreement, depending on the possibility for a preposition to govern noun phrases standing in different cases in different dialects;

(ii)   idiosyncratic gender assignment at the lexical level, depending on the different linguistic varieties;

(iii)   anaphoric agreement, which may vary across the dialects.

We shall consider each of these three points in turn.

4.1 Syntactic constraints

At the level of **syntactic constraints** on agreement, the northern dialects of Irish stand out on account of their treatment of prepositional case. The distinction between prepositional I and prepositional II is only possible when the article is present: a noun immediately following a preposition mutates according to the preposition itself (lexical trigger, syntax-independent). Jackson (1942: 272f.) points out that the treatment of nouns within determiner phrases (ART + NP) diverges widely from the standard account, depending on the dialects. In the standard model, it is expected that the article will ordinarily nasalize the noun unless the latter begins with *d-* or *t-* (phonological constraint); after the preposition *de* or *do*, the noun will instead be lenited. Jackson outlines the following, threefold situation, which is motivated on a dialectological basis:

- Ulster and West Mayo (northern dialects): only lenition, no nasalization;
- Aran Islands (west): compliant with the above standard grammar generalizations;
- Most of County Clare (west): differing from the standard account in that nouns beginning with *d-* and *t-* nasalize too.

O'Rahilly (1932, cited in Jackson, 1942: 273) and Ó Siadhail (1989: 127–29) give us the following picture. Prepositional II is generalized with all prepositions in the northern dialects (Ulster and West Mayo). Elsewhere, prepositional I is the norm with only *de* "from" and *do* "to" regularly taking prepositional II. However, in Waterford and some parts of Kerry (Munster dialects, south), and in some parts of northern Connacht (western dialects), even *de* and *do* may take prepositional I. Some West Munster dialects (e.g. County Clare, as mentioned above) may extend nasalization to nouns beginning with the dentals *t-* and *d-*. In West Munster, the preposition *i*(*n*) "in" ordinarily takes prepositional II; elsewhere, it takes prepositional I.

The above dialectal differences are not—per se—significant from the point of view of gender marking, insofar as they apply across the board to

both masculine and feminine nouns. However, there are two gender-motivated phenomena that intersect with dialectal boundaries: the first concerns the particular behaviour of a restricted class of feminine nouns in Connacht (phonologically defined as beginning in *s-* + V or *s-* + *-l-, -r-, -n-*), where, as observed by Ó Siadhail (1989: 127), the leniting form *an t-*/ənt^L/ of the article (nom. f. sg.) is generalized as with all prepositions (36):

(36)   faoin^L tsúil

                              /tuːlʹ/

             under.ART   eye(F)

             "before the eye"

             (Ó Siadhail, 1989: 127)

(Compare *faoin^N* **mb**ean (f.) "before the woman" with nasalization and *faoin$^{(N)}$* *sagart* (m.) "before the priest", with no mutation.) The second of these gender-relevant phenomena has to do with cross-dialectal differences, in that the choice of prepositional I or prepositional II may be relevant in terms of the marking of gender agreement on post-nominal adjectives, at least if we go by the standard account (*NIG*, 2004: 17f.), whereby

(i)   an adjective following a feminine noun in the prepositional II is lenited, as in (37):

(37)   do-n^L bhean   **bh**eag

             to-ART.PREP_II woman(F).PREP_II   small.PREP_II.F/M

             "to the small woman"

             (*NIG*, 2004: 17)

(ii)   an adjective following a masculine noun in the prepositional II *need not* (but *may*) be aspirated, so both examples (a) and (b) in (38) are grammatical:[16]

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[16] There are however, according to the *NIG* (2004: 18), certain circumstances in which the masculine adjective is ordinarily unlenited, namely when the noun itself is not lenited: e.g. *ar an **h**ata* (M) **d**ubh "on the black hat". In other words, masculine adjectives will not ordinarily "outmark" the noun. According to the *NIG* (2004: 17), there is a further complication regarding masculine definite noun phrases in the prepositional II: an adjective following the

(38)   (a)   do-n^L   fhear   **mh**ór

                to-ART.PREP_II man(M).PREP_II   big.PREP_II.F/M

                "to the big man"

        (b)   do-n^L   fhear   **m**ór

                to-ART.PREP_II man(M).PREP_II   big.PREP_II.M

                "to the big man"

        (*NIG*, 2004: 17)

(iii)   an adjective following a feminine noun in the prepositional I must be lenited, as shown in (39):

(39)   as   an^N   gcoill   **mh**ór

              out.of ART.PREP_I   forest(F).PREP_I   big.PREP_I.F

              "out of the big forest"

              (*NIG*, 2004: 17)

(iv)   an adjective following a masculine noun in the prepositional I, on the other hand, does not undergo either type of initial mutation, as shown in (40):

(40)   as   an^N   mbád   beag

              out.of ART.PREP_I   boat(M).PREP_I   small.PREP_I.M

              "out of the small boat"

              (*NIG*, 2004: 17)

To summarize, the prepositional-I case, with its unmarked masculine adjectives and its lenited feminine adjectives, has a stronger potential of gender distinction than does the prepositional-II case, where both masculine and feminine adjectives may take initial lenition. It follows that dialects such as the northern ones, in which the use of prepositional II is extended to all prepositions, have a weaker potential of gender distinction by means of initial mutations than do other dialects. Of course, one must always bear in mind that gender distinction by means of initial mutation is constrained by

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noun "need not" be lenited if the preposition heading the PP is either *de*, *do*, or *i*(*n*); but it must be lenited if the PP is headed by any other preposition.

the usual phonological factors, i.e. the fact that only a limited number of initial phonemes may undergo lenition.

As can be seen from the above, in standard modern Irish gender agreement in the adjective is characterized in terms of lenition versus no lenition: nasalization is not employed as a contrastive device.

Analyses conducted at a more local level show an even more irregular picture. Two studies conducted in the Munster dialectal area, namely Breatnach's (1958–61) on Déise Irish (i.e. the variety spoken in West County Waterford and South Tipperary) and Jackson's (1942) on Peig Sayers's (†1958) corpus of folk tales, both focussing on the variable occurrence of nasalization and lenition in prepositional phrases, show that the same preposition may at times command different cases (prepositional I or II) depending on phonological factors—e.g. whether the preposition in question ends in a vowel or a consonant and whether the noun begins with a voiced or a voiceless consonant; which in turn may affect the post-nominal attributive adjective (Jackson, 1942: 274f.).

Therefore, gender agreement with adjectives depends on a number of factors: syntax, dialectal variation and phonological idiosyncrasy. I will be particularly interested in observing whether a corpus of data from actual usage will offer a picture that is different, perhaps in terms of simplification and regularization, from the complex and multifaceted one presented by both the standard and the local varieties.

4.2   Lexical idiosyncrasy and double gender

A second, interesting effect of dialectal variation has to do with a set of phenomena referred to by Ó Siadhail (1984: 174; 1989: 145) as double gender (henceforth, DG). Ó Siadhail distinguished two distinct instances of double gender agreement, which he simply terms "1" and "2". Both DG1 and DG2 consist in pairs of inconsistent gender agreement forms: DG1 nouns command masculine agreement with the article but feminine agreement with the attributive adjective, as in (41); DG2 nouns, on the other hand, may control (consistent) masculine gender agreement when in the nominative and

(consistent) feminine gender agreement when in the genitive, as in (42), or the other way round:

(41)   Cois Fhairrge dialect

      (a)   an^T **t-**eolas

           ART.M knowledge(DG1)

           "the knowledge"

      (b)   eolas   **mh**aith

           knowledge(DG1)   good.F

           "a good knowledge"

      (Ó Siadhail, 1984: 174)

(42)   Gaoth Dobhair dialect

      (a)   an^T **t-**am

           ART.NOM.M   time(DG2)

           "the time"

      (b)   i   rith **an**   ama

           in   flow   ART.GEN.M   time(DG2).GEN

      (c)   i   rith **na**^{H} **h**ama

           in   flow   ART.GEN.F   time(DG2).GEN

           "all the time"

      (Ó Siadhail, 1984: 175)

This kind of variation is both lexical and dialectal, in that the status of DG noun may pertain to different lexical items in different dialects: so *leoraí* "lorry" is DG1 in Gaoth Dobhair; *aistir* "journey", *méid* "amount" and *eolas* "knowledge" are DG1 in Cois Fhairrge; and *radharc* "sight" is DG1 in Kerry (Ó Siadhail, 1984: 174; 1989: 146). A dubious point and one which will be worth investigating further concerns which gender agreement form will be controlled by DG1 nouns when the article and the adjective co-occur, as Ó Siadhail (1989: 174) admits to not having found any such co-occurrence in his corpus.

      Other nouns are double gender in a broader sense, that is they may control consistent agreement within a single dialect but be assigned to different genders in different dialects. Some such examples include *paróiste*

(Donegal *paráiste*) "parish", which is masculine in Connacht and Kerry dialects, feminine in West Muskerry and Donegal; *mí* "month", masculine in Munster dialects but feminine in Connacht and Donegal; *gaineamh* "sand", which is masculine in Connemara[17] and Donegal, feminine in Erris (Mayo) and Munster, and various others (Ó Siadhail, 1989: 147).

Cross-dialectal fluctuation in terms of gender might also be explained, for certain items, as reflecting "a certain hesitancy in assigning a gender and inflectional pattern" to ancient neuters (Ó Siadhail, 1984: 175): nouns like *ainm* "name" and *dlí* "law" provide a good example, being treated as masculine in standard Irish but not in Kerry, where they are feminine; and similarly *loch* (m.) "lake", which is reported by Wagner (1958: 69, cited in Ó Siadhail, 1989: 147) to have both feminine (*na locha*, *na loiche*) and masculine (*an locha*) forms in the genitive singular "with no discernible pattern".

4.3 Anaphoric agreement

Finally, we turn to the cross-dialectal differences in **anaphoric agreement**. Here we shall observe that with inanimate referents there is remarkable scope for variation (all of the following examples are drawn from Ó Siadhail; reference will therefore be made by indication of year of publication and page only). *Leabhar* (m.) "book" is an apt example of inconsistent gender agreement across dialects, as reference to it may optionally be expressed by a feminine pronoun "in all major dialects" (1989: 146). Its peculiar behaviour pattern in terms of gender agreement is further complicated by the fact that in the spoken usage of Rannafast Irish (Donegal) an altogether new declension has been developed for *leabhar* and now flanks the old one: in the new declension, which is used with feminine forms of both the article and adjectives, a new genitive singular *leabhra* established itself at the expenses of its standard opponent *leabhair*, which might have been felt to be

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[17] These examples, as acknowledged in the text, are drawn from Ó Siadhail (1989). In his book, *gaineamh* is quoted as "Cn", which in his abbreviation table corresponds to "Connacht". However, there are in the table two abbreviations for Connacht, the other being "C", while Connemara does not appear on the list. Ó Siadhail (personal communication) confirmed my doubt that a typographical error had occurred and that "Cn" was actually meant to correspond to "Connemara".

masculine in view of its being formed by palatalizing the ending of the nominative, according to the typical first-declension (hence masculine) pattern (1989: 146). Two very basic dimensional terms, both feminine—*áit* "place" and *uair* "hour; time, occasion"—are commonly referred to by a masculine anaphoric pronoun in Kerry and Cois Fhairrge (1984: 175).

The picture presented thus far, unsystematic as it is and made up of isolated lexical items, seems to reflect a rather idiosyncratic situation in which long-established and so-to-speak unchallenged irregularities are interspersed in the spoken usage of some dialects. However, it would appear that a different states of affairs characterizes the Irish of Gaoth Dobhair, where a masculine pronoun is used as the appropriate anaphora for all inanimate referents (Ó Siadhail, 1984: 175). Such usage is, observes Ó Siadhail, well established even among the older members of the Gaoth Dobhair community (some of whom in their late eighties) and might therefore not be (at least in Gaoth Dobhair) a recent development due to the influence of English (contrary to the opinion of other scholars, among whom Greene, 1979: 124, cited in Ó Siadhail, ibid.). However, it remains to be seen whether or not the data point to a similar situation outside Gaoth Dobhair.

5   Conclusions

As we have seen, speaking of Irish as a whole means, in many respects, dealing with a rather abstract generalization. Irish is not a monolithic entity: far from it, it is rather a label for different although obviously related models or varieties of Irish. In the first instance, the Irish spoken by the few surviving native speakers: three macro-dialects (Ulster, Connacht, Munster), further subdivided at county or even town level; then we have standard Irish, a language created in the effort of revitalizing the language and promoting its use after the Independence; finally, the same standard language as actually employed by its L2 users, through both the spoken and written medium.

The resulting picture, when one investigates any given structure of the language, is therefore far from uniformity, resulting as it does in a collation of the particular usages of each micro-system. While coherence must be sought at precisely this level, it is still possible that the micro-system of L2

users' Irish, in the sense defined by McCloskey and cited at the beginning of this article, may be more flexible and less codified than any other established variety, still in its fieri so to say, and that different tendencies towards simplification may be identified and described within it. This is precisely the aim of my research project.

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