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### Abstract

In this paper, we provide a brief historical, linguistic, and literary guide to Hiberno-English, or Irish English, for teachers of English as a Foreign Language who use literature in their classes. We discuss the historical and social development of this dialect and relate it to the works of such authors as Joyce, Synge and Kennelly. Then we describe certain linguistic and cultural features of it which appear in literary texts and could lead to misinterpretations if they are not taken into account. Finally, we discuss how to use works written in non-standard varieties of English, like Hiberno-English, in the classroom, basing our discussion on an early twentieth century play, *The Tinker's Wedding* by Synge, and a current novel and film, *The Snapper*, by Doyle.

**Key words:** Hiberno-English, Irish Literature, Language and Literature, Literary Dialect, Teaching Literature in EFL.

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## 1. Introduction

In our education and training as teachers of English, we become quite familiar with the best-known and most influential varieties of English, such as British and American English, along with the variety (or varieties) of English we speak in our home country if it is also one in which English is used as a *lingua franca*. However, we get little exposure to other lesser known varieties of English. Because of this, we may feel comfortable teaching British and American literature as well as our own national literature, but when we face the task of teaching works from countries and regions where a different variety of English is used, we might feel intimidated by the language and pass over it, to concentrate solely on the literary aspects of the works. Obviously, by doing so we are not getting all the meaning we can out of the texts.

The reader of Irish literature<sup>1</sup> will eventually encounter literary works written in Hiberno-English (hereafter HE), which is the variety of English most widely spoken in the Republic of Ireland and the one we will deal with in this paper. In order to fully understand these works, s/he needs to be aware of the fact that HE is characterized not only by a set of linguistic features but also by the cultural and historical associations deeply embedded in them. In addition, it is also characterized by irony and ambivalence, which are fundamental aspects of discourse, both spoken and literary, in HE. This is brought to the fore by the frequent use of the expression «moryah» in colloquial discourse, meaning «if you believe that». It is an expression based on the Gaelic «mar dheat», which means «like double» (Bruce Stewart, personal communication), a hint to look for at least two meanings in what has been said.

In this paper we place HE within the context of the other dialects of English spoken in Ireland and give an overview of the historical and sociolinguistic factors which gave rise to it. Then we discuss some of the linguistic features which characterize it and which find their way into Irish literature. This means that not all the typical features of HE will be discussed in depth, since many of them are difficult to represent in print and therefore do not appear in literature. Finally, we discuss why texts with HE and other varieties of English should be included in EFL classes in which literature is an important component. We also offer suggestions for classroom activities which would promote students' awareness and understanding of the linguistic and cultural features found in such texts, using an excerpt from an early twentieth century play and a recent Irish novel and film as examples.

1. There has been a continuing controversy over the past two hundred years as to how to term literature produced by Irish writers in English. It has been called «Anglo-Irish literature», «Irish literature written in English», and simply «Irish literature». All three terms have certain drawbacks. We chose the last one for the sake of simplicity. For an in-depth discussion of the controversy, see Croghan (1988) and Stewart (1993).

## 2. Hiberno-English: context and history

The varieties of English spoken in Ireland are divided into two main groups, depending on the socio-historical and linguistic factors that shaped their development. *Planter English*, which is in turn comprised of *Ulster Scots* and *Anglo-Irish*, is the term which categorizes the varieties spoken by the descendants of the Scottish and English settlers sent to Ireland in the 17th century to ensure the island's loyalty to the English crown. *Ulster Scots* is mainly spoken in a crescent of land covering a swath of northern and eastern Ulster, where the large numbers of settlers from the Scottish Lowlands concentrated upon their arrival. *Anglo-Irish* describes a variety of English which is spoken throughout Ireland and which developed from the different dialects brought over by the English settlers, who established themselves in many areas of the island.

*Hiberno-English* is the other broad category of English and is also spoken throughout the island. It is the variety of English which arose among the native Gaelic-speakers as they made the language shift from Gaelic to English, which occurred at an especially fast rate in the 19th century. It is also composed of two dialects, the northern and the southern variety, with the dialectal boundary approximately corresponding with the political border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

HE shows further differentiation in both social stratification and rural versus urban dialects. The rural varieties show a greater influence from the Gaelic substratum than the urban varieties. This seems to be due to two factors: urban speakers have less contact with the Gaelic substratum, and speakers in larger cities have more contact with speakers of non-Hiberno varieties of English, such as British and American English (Filppula, 1991, cited in Gramley and Pätzold, 1992: 324).

The most concise general description of the features of HE is probably that of Bliss (1984: 150), who sums them up in the following terms:

In the pronunciation and vocabulary of Hiberno-English it is possible to trace the influence of older strata of the English language and of the Irish language; in grammar, syntax and idiom the peculiarities of southern Hiberno-English depend exclusively on the Irish language. (Cited in Gramley and Pätzold, 1992: 324)

Northern HE can also be characterized in the same way as above, however with a difference: it is marked phonologically and lexically by its contact with Ulster Scots and therefore shares a number of features with Scots English. However, it is also heavily influenced by the Gaelic substratum language. As Todd (1984: 26) says:

One can [...] make a good case in support of the thesis that Gaelic was not so much replaced by English in rural areas in Northern Ireland, as that Gaelic was probably relexified towards English while the phonology, idioms and sentence patterns of the native people remained Gaelic.

The «influence of older strata of the English language» mentioned in the Bliss quotation makes reference to the fact that many aspects of HE reflect features of Early Modern English. This is due to the fact that after the massive migration of English and Scottish settlers to Ireland in the 17th century, no further migration of a significant magnitude took place in that direction. Thereafter, the direction of migration was from Ireland to Great Britain. Thus, there was no steady widespread exposure to more modern forms of English until the advent of audio-visual mass media in the twentieth century.

The anglicization of Ireland began in the 17th century, when Lord Cromwell confiscated large amounts of land throughout the country and gave them to loyal, English-speaking subjects from Scotland and England. In a short time, as the Gaelic-speaking former land-owners were forced to migrate to other areas of the island, English could be heard over large areas of Ireland. In the 18th century, the Penal Laws were enacted, prohibiting any expression of Irish national identity, especially the use of the Gaelic language, and effectively entrenching the native Irish in poverty. This accelerated the abandonment of Gaelic in favour of English, and by the end of that century nobody who had attained, or hoped to attain, a high position in life spoke Gaelic as his first language (Todd, 1989: 14). Gaelic, as Edwards (1989) explains, became associated with poverty, and parents preferred that their children spoke English so that they would have a better chance in the labour market.

In the 19th century, two factors further hastened the switch to English and caused the almost total abandonment of Gaelic. First came the establishment of National Schools in 1831, which large numbers of pupils were obliged to attend and which had English as the language of instruction and all communication. The use of Gaelic was strictly punished. Then came the Potato Famine, which halved the population of the island, either through death or emigration, and which especially affected the impoverished Gaelic-speaking population, who ultimately came to feel it was a curse to be Irish and to speak Gaelic (Todd, 1989: 15).

Several sociolinguistic factors obtained in 19th century Ireland which would ultimately foster the transfer of Gaelic features from all linguistic levels into the English acquired by the Gaels and their descendants: high numbers of Gaelic-English bilingual speakers; little or no formal education among them; and a certain perception among them that English and Gaelic were similar in many ways (Odlin, 1991). It is also argued that the variety of English that the Gaelic speakers had exposure to in the 19th century was not the main variety spoken in England at the time but rather an already Gaelic-influenced variety (Bliss, 1972; Sullivan, 1980). This variety had arisen from contact with the Planters and their Early Modern English from the 17th century on. In the 19th century, it would become even more influenced by Gaelic as it acquired greater numbers of bilingual speakers.

All of these factors in conjunction probably resulted in extensive transfer of Gaelic features into the bilingual English of Ireland. This variety of English then became the input for future generations. As Bliss (1972: 63) explains:

Because of the social conditions existing in Ireland, Irish speakers rarely had the opportunity of prolonged contact with speakers of Standard English, and learned their English from those whose English was already less than perfect; so that the influence of the Irish language was cumulative, and remains strong even in those parts of Ireland where Irish has long ceased to be spoken.

Lee (1993) argues that the way in which the language shift took place has left the Irish with a sense of lack of dignity and self-respect. As Bernstein (1994) explains, by being forced to speak English, the Irish population internalized the colonizer's values, according to which they were an inferior race. In this way, the association between the Gaelic language and inferiority referred not only to their economic and social situation but also to something inherent in them, the «mere Irish», as the British called them (Leerssen, 1996).

Thus the language shift left the Irish in a very ambivalent position: on the one hand they were ashamed to use Gaelic, since it was associated with poverty and defeat, but on the other hand, their English was not «proper» and they felt insecure with it, a fact that may also have contributed to maintaining their sense of inferiority. As Edwards (1989) points out, in spite of the warmth and nostalgia that Gaelic was supposed to have inspired among the Irish population, the general ambivalence felt towards it is illustrated by the lack of official support given to the Gaelic League in its efforts to revive this language at the end of the 19th century.

Likewise, the Irish also have an ambivalent attitude towards the English language. As Lee (1993: 669) points out, in spite of their bitter resentment towards all things English including the language, they also show admiration and envy. He quotes Douglas Hyde's famous remark that «The English are the people we love to hate but never cease to imitate». In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce (1983: 172) illustrates the uneasiness that Stephen Dedalus feels when speaking his own language, that is, English: «The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine... I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech».

A number of different strategies have been adopted by Irish writers over the last century to deal with the English language. Synge and other writers in the Literary Revival of the late 19th and early 20th centuries attempted to appropriate the English language and adapt it to the culture of the Irish people, incorporating Gaelic words and expressions into the language (either through direct borrowings or through calques and loan translations) and

using the HE speech of the people in their works.<sup>2</sup> Beckett refused to go on writing in English and turned to French instead, while Joyce experimented with language in such a way that he led the critic David Norris to comment on his desire to take revenge on the English language (Bernstein, 1994: 269). Indeed, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, which is written in HE and actually makes most sense when read with HE intonation and pronunciation, is perhaps the maximum expression of English turned inside out. Finally, Brian Friel suggests in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, a play of language, that silence and music are the best means of communication.

### 3. Features of Hiberno-English in Irish literature

Although linguists tend to reject literary dialect as a reliable source of linguistic evidence, the Irish literary tradition shows many realistic features of HE.<sup>3</sup> Since it is through literature that many people have their main (if not only) contact with HE, it is worthwhile to bring to the fore the features which different authors have tried to recreate. We cannot hope to compile a thorough, accurate description of all the features found in the different varieties of HE, as they do not all find representation in literary works. Furthermore, many excellent descriptions of this kind can be found in linguistics literature (e.g., Barry, 1984; Bliss, 1984; Harris, 1984, 1993; and Gramley and Pätzold, 1992). This section simply provides non-specialist EFL teachers with a rough guide to the linguistic phenomena they can expect to encounter in Irish texts.

#### 3.1. Phonology

In HE, the voiced and voiceless dental fricatives, [ð] and [θ], have merged with the stops [d] and [t], respectively. Although native speakers of this variety still make some distinction between the two sound classes, it is so slight that outsiders may not notice it. This phonemic merger is captured in literature in <t> and <d> spellings instead of standard <th> spellings. This can be seen in the following lines from the poem «madmanalive» (Kenelly, 1991: 39), written phonetically to reflect how Dubliners talk.

- (1) sumtimes ozzie get *ds* fierce urge  
ta go fast *tru* dublin really fast man

2. This movement was one of the first cases of extra-metropolitan acculturation of the English language, and would be followed later in this century by similar processes in Nigeria, South Africa, India, Jamaica and many other former British colonies (see Kachru (1986, 1990) for an interesting in-depth description of this facet of the on-going evolution of the English language). Our thanks to David Prendergast for pointing this out and encouraging us to look into this issue in other cultures.
3. Sullivan (1980) finds many accurate representations throughout the history of Irish theater, for example.

In Irish literature aspiration is sometimes alluded to through spelling as well. Although this feature does not figure prominently in descriptions of the dialect, Todd (1989: 37) mentions in passing that HE has a tendency to «use greater aspiration with /p, t, k/ in syllable-initial position and some aspiration in syllable-final position». The playwright, Sean O'Casey, gives numerous representations of aspiration, even of the voiced plosive [d]:

- (2) Irish Nannie. [...] Th' prison doct~~h~~or told me th' oul' heart was crocked, an' that I'd ~~d~~hrop any minute. [...] (O'Casey, 1984: 508-509)

Another distinctive feature of HE involves the sibilants /s/ and /ʃ/. These were considered to correspond with similar Gaelic consonants, and therefore Gaelic rules were applied to the pronunciation of words in English. The main result is the use of [ʃ] where other varieties would use [s], specifically in consonant clusters in which the final consonant is palatal, and in many words with initial <si-> spellings. This is reflected in the following extract:

- (3) *Shize* [size]? I should *sħee* [see]! (J. Joyce, 1992: 6)

In terms of vowels, HE did not raise /e:/ to /i:/ in words that had previously had an [ɛ:] pronunciation, most notably those with an <ea> spelling, like *tea*, *meat*, and *easy*. They are pronounced with an [ɛɪ] diphthong. Other words are also marked by this phenomenon, like *Jesus*, which is often spelled <Jaysis> to reflect everyday speech. This feature is represented in the title of the O'Casey play, «Juno and the Paycock». It is also used to set up a pun in the title «Finnegans Wake», as *wake* and *weak* sound the same in HE.

### 3.2. Morphology

In the area of morphology, it would appear that few features have been transferred from Gaelic to Hiberno-English. Todd (1989), Kiberd (1979), and Gramley and Pätzold (1992) only mention the diminutive ending, *-een*. Words ending with this suffix generally refer to unimportant things and usually convey a tone of contempt:

- (4) Widow Quin: «It isn't fitting», says the preisteen, «to have his likeness lodg-ing with an orphaned girl». (Synge, 1988: 190)

### 3.3. Lexicon

Most words and expressions in HE have the same meaning and usage as in other varieties of English. However there are also important divergences. There are archaisms from Middle English and Early Modern English, loans and calques from the Gaelic substratum, and a wide range of neologisms,





drowned 'very wet'	whisper 'listen'
elegant 'excellent'	wish 'esteem, friendship, respect'
(all from P. W. Joyce 1910 except "backward", "destroyed", "drowned" and "doubt," from Todd 1989: 34-5, 40)	

One set of words exhibiting semantic shifts deserves special attention. There are a number of HE deictic expressions which can lead to misinterpretations by speakers of other Englishes:

- (9) up/above 'northwards, in the north'      over 'eastwards, in the east'  
 below 'southwards, in the south'      back 'westwards, in the west'  
 (from Barry, 1984: 109; and Gramley and Pätzold, 1992: 326)

Also, the word «end» can mean the back part of a building, rather than any lateral extreme of it:

- (10) If this pig is not put out of the house at once, said she feebly from the bed *in the end of the house*, I'll set these rushes on fire and then an end will be put to the hard life in this house of ours [...] (O'Brien, 1988: 24)

Other commonly used HE words are:

- (11) eejit 'idiot, though with milder connotations'      chiselur 'child'  
 bollix 'testicles, often used as an exclamation'      snapper 'baby'  
 queer (many meanings, from 'strange' to 'quaint'  
 or 'funny')      culchie 'country bumpkin'

### 3.4. Grammatical features

The grammar of HE follows most of the same rules and patterns as other varieties of English. However, it also has its own special characteristics. We will follow a modified form of the organizational pattern of Harris (1993), as this will help teachers quickly find the facts and examples they might need for class. First we will present features concerning the noun phrase, then the verb phrase, and finally subordination.

#### 3.4.1. The noun phrase

In relation to the noun phrase, the definite article, *the*, is sometimes used differently than in standard English. For instance, it can appear with non-count nouns used for general reference (where standard English would have no article at all) and with nouns making reference to a non-specific entity (where standard English would use *a/an*). These uses are illustrated below:

- (12) I never did hear that anyone's shadow was effective as a shelter against *the* hunger. (O'Brien, 1988: 62)
- (13) Martin, isn't it *the* bad sign that the ducks are in the nettles? (O'Brien, 1988: 13)

Pronoun use in HE is interesting in a number of respects. HE differentiates between second-person singular and plural reference, using *you/ye/yeh* to address one person and *youse/yez/yiz/yis* to address more than one. With the loss of the *thou* paradigm and the loss of separate singular and plural verb forms in the Early Modern English period, many dialects adopted new ways to mark number distinctions in second-person address. In the case of HE, this was reinforced by the fact that Gaelic has both a singular and plural form of the second person pronoun. The following conversation opening, from *The Snapper* (Doyle: 1990: 50), illustrates this usage:

- (14) Sharon [...] went across to [...] her friends  
 —Hiyis, she said when she got there.  
 —Oh, howyeh, Sharon.  
 —Hiyeh, Sharon.  
 —Hiyis, said Sharon. [...] —Hiyeh, Jackie. Haven't seen *yeh* in ages.

Another interesting area of HE pronoun usage is that of reflexive pronouns, which in HE can refer to a noun phrase outside of the clause, or can even be used as the first reference to an entity in discourse. Often, assigning the referent to the pronoun depends entirely on the discourse context and the shared knowledge between the interlocutors. In the case of «himself»/«herself», the pronoun often has the meaning of «the man/lady of the house». The use of reflexives for extra-clausal referents also occurred in the English of Shakespeare (Harris, 1993: 147), but one can argue that it has been reinforced in HE by Gaelic pronoun usage. Gaelic has emphatic as well as non-emphatic pronouns, while English uses reflexive pronouns to perform this function. Gaelic can also make both the emphatic and non-emphatic pronouns reflexive by adding the marker *fein*, which also corresponds to *self*. These extra-clausal and emphatic uses are illustrated below.

- (15) Shawn Keogh (a fat and fair man, comes in as she signs, looks around awkwardly, when he sees she is alone): Where's *himself*? [i.e., your father?] (Synge, 1988: 176)
- (16) —But only for ten minutes, Molly, said Mrs Conroy. That won't delay you.  
 —To take a pick *itself*, said Mary Jane, after all your dancing. [i.e., to take a little pick at the meal only] (J. Joyce, 1973: 223)

### 3.4.2. The verb phrase

Regarding the verb phrase, HE offers some simplifications with respect to standard English, while also adding some complexities. The strong verb paradigm is simplified, with many three-member paradigms being reduced to two. For instance, the three forms, *go*, *went*, *gone* become just *go* and *went* in HE, while *do*, *did*, *done*, becomes *do* and *done*. However, this latter case only applies if *do* is used as a main verb. If it is used as an auxiliary, the form *did*

appears in the past tense, a distinction which is made in many non-standard dialects (Harris, 1993: 151-4):

- (17) —You're absolutely sure now? Positive?  
 —Yeah, I am. I *done*--  
 —*Did*, said Veronica.  
 —I *did* the test.  
 —The test? said Jimmy Sr. —Oh.  
 —*Did* yeh go in by yourself? (Doyle, 1990: 2-3)

While the system of verb forms may be simplified in HE, the tense-aspect system is more complex. HE has five different kinds of constructions equivalent to the use of the present or past perfect in standard English. Of these, one is worth discussing here, as it occurs frequently in texts and could easily be misinterpreted by students. It is what many linguists have termed the «hot news» perfect, which is used for events occurring immediately prior to the time of speaking or time of reference. It typically has the structure, *be* + *after* + *verb* (*-ing* form), as seen in example (18), although it can also be used in combination with a noun phrase, as in «I'm only after my dinner», meaning «I've just had dinner» (Harris, 1993: 160-161).

- (18) Juno: He wore out the Health Insurance long ago, he's *after wearin' out* the Unemployment Dole, an' now he's thrying to wear out me! [... he has just worn out the Unemployment Dole, ...](O'Casey, 1980: 7)

These usages are based on Gaelic structures with «*indiaidh*» or «*eis*», both of which mean «after». Readers unfamiliar with HE tend to give these structures a «future-of-intention» interpretation much like «she's only after your money», meaning «she's only trying to get at your money».

In the area of habitual aspect, HE explicitly indicates habitual states or actions through the use of *be* or *do*, respectively. A punctual «He is not sick» is distinguished from a habitual «He never be's sick» (Harris, 1993: 162) by the word *be/be's* to indicate a habitual state. Habitual actions are also signalled through the use of *do* plus a progressive construction, as in example (19), or a bare infinitive, as in «He does plough the field for me» (Harris, 1993: 163), which in standard English could be misinterpreted as a use of emphatic *do*.

- (19) Saint: Men who are dark a long while and thinking over queer thoughts in their heads, aren't the like of simple men, who *do be working* every day, and praying, and living like ourselves. (Synge, 1988: 169)

This feature is also due to the influence of Gaelic, which marks habitual aspect through the use of different forms of the verb *tá* («be»), attached morphologically to the main verb.

Another feature of HE is that it uses nominal structures with a greater frequency than in standard English. Todd (1989: 40) attributes this tendency to the fact that Gaelic is a «noun-centered language», and this has

influenced HE. Ideas that would be expressed by a verb phrase or an adjective phrase in standard English can be expressed in a nominalized form in HE, as seen in these two examples:

- (20) He made *a great run* out of the house without a cloth-stitch to *the sheltering of his naked nudity*, [...] [i.e., 'he ran quickly' / 'to shelter his naked nudity'] (O'Brien, 1967: 64)
- (21) It's only right to bring *the full of your pockets* when you're going to a hooley. [i.e., 'to bring your pockets full', or 'to bring full pockets'] (O'Brien, 1967: 117)

### 3.4.3. Subordination

In the area of subordination, HE has three ways of forming relative clauses: using a relative pronoun while also leaving a trace of the pronoun's referent («... the man *who* I saw *him* in Dublin»); omitting the relative pronoun completely; or forming a «quasi-relative» clause using *and*. The following excerpt gives examples of these latter two constructions:

- (22) Pegeen (with scorn): As good is it? Where now will you meet the like of *Daneen Sullivan* knocked the eye from a peeler; or *Marcus Quin*, *God rest him*, got six months for maiming ewes, *and he* a great warrant to tell stories of holy Ireland till he'd have the old women shedding down tears about their feet. (Synge, 1988: 177)

The first two examples are of instances in which the relative pronoun *who* has been omitted, while the last one shows the use of *and* in a context in which a speaker of standard English probably would have used «and who was...». The last one is also an example of a widely used HE pattern consisting of *and* plus a verbless clause. The *and* usually acts as a temporal subordinator and in most cases indicates simultaneity, like 'as', 'while', or 'with' in standard English, as seen in (23).

- (23) Shawn (uneasily): I didn't see him on the road.  
Pegeen: How would you see him *and it dark night this half hour gone by?* [i.e., ... with it being dark for the last half hour?] (Synge, 1988: 176)

Other subordinators could cause difficulties for speakers or learners of standard English as well. *Till* is often used to mean 'so, so that'; *the way*, *in a way*, *the ways* and other similar expressions involving *way* mean 'thus', 'so', or 'in that'; and *whenever* can be used to refer to a single event or situation as well as a recurring one:

- (24) Verger: Are youse comin' in *till* I shut the door? (O'Casey, 1984: 266)
- (25) Christy: Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, *the way* I'll go romancing through a

romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the Judgment Day.  
(Synge, 1988: 229)

In indirect questions, the verb-subject question order is usually not undone. Furthermore, if it is a yes-no question that is embedded, it is not normally introduced by *whether* or *if*. (Answers to yes-no questions will dealt with in the section on discourse features.)

- (26) Shawn (turning towards the door again): I stood outside *wondering would I have a right to pass on or to walk in and see you*, Pegeen Mike, [...] [i.e., ... if I should pass on or walk in and see you ...] (Synge, 1988: 176)

### 3.5. Discourse features

At the level of discourse and pragmatics, the answer to a yes-no question is seldom a simple *yes* or *no*, as this is considered impolite by many HE speakers. There are a wide variety of responses available for giving an affirmative or negative answer. This is probably due to influence from Gaelic, which has no single word for either «yes» or «no». In Gaelic, the speaker responds with *tá* or *níl* for affirmation or negation, respectively, plus the appropriate form of the verb in the question.

- (27) And isn't it a shameful, bad and improper state that ye're in here tonight?  
*'Tis true for you*, I replied to the gentleman, *but sure we can't help the bad state you've mentioned*. The weather is bitter and everyone of us must be inside from it, whether he has two legs or four under him.  
If that's the way it is, says the gentleman, wouldn't it be easy for you to put up a little hut at the side of the yard and it a bit out from the house?  
*Sure and 'twould be easy*, says I. I was full of wonder at all he said [...]  
(O'Brien, 1988: 20)

In response to the first question, the speaker supplies an elaborate answer, and to the second question he gives a simple affirmative, following the Gaelic pattern described above.

HE also has some typical discourse markers, which appear frequently in texts. They include *sure/surely*, which can occur at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of an utterance, and *but*, *so*, and *wha'*, which come at the end of an utterance. In addition to these single-word devices, HE also makes use of sentence-final tags, such as *so it is* and *so I did*. They all seem to put focus on some aspect of the speaker's message, such as the veracity of it, or the contrast it provides to what has preceded it in the conversation. However, *wha'* (which represents the pronunciation of *what*) focuses on the hearer, inviting him/her to react to what has just been said.

In addition, HE makes extensive use of fronting as a means of focalizing information. Although fronting is also a common device in standard English, in HE it occurs more frequently and in a wider range of contexts. This seems

to be due to influence from Gaelic. The two most common methods are *left-dislocation* and *it-clefting*. In *left-dislocation*, a sentence constituent is placed at the beginning of the sentence, as occurs in this example:

- (28) Irish Nannie: [...] They're not bringin' a chiselur to school when they're bringin' Nannie to the Polis Station. *Five o' them* it took, an' she shtrapped on a stretcher, th' last time to bring her in! (O'Casey, 1984: 509)

In *it-clefting*, the highlighted part of the utterance is embedded in an «it is...» construction, which begins the sentence. This is illustrated by the next example:

- (29) Pegeen: [...] *It's above at the crossroads* he is, meeting Philly Cullen [...] (Synge, 1988: 176)

Finally, HE speakers make ample use of expressions dealing with the Catholic religion. As exclamations, there are «Jaysus, Mary, an' Joseph», «God love him/her», «for God's sake», and as sentence tags, one can find «God help him/her» and «with the help of God». Although most of these expressions are used in other varieties of English, they are used with a high frequency in HE, along with many other references to the devil, the saints, the pope, and other aspects of religious life. In the poem «skool», Kennelly (1991: 42) mocks the ubiquitous use of *Jesus* in everyday speech while also satirizing the people's ignorance in religious matters:

- (30) dis *jesus* fella sez ozzie who was he / how de fuck do I know sez I / you went ta skool forra bit sez ozzie / didn't learn much dayre sez I / [...] / but everywun sez *jesus* dis and *jesus* dat / pay de *jesus* rent by us a *jesus* pint / till i get de *jesus* dole / but who de *jesus* hell was he sez ozzie / [...]

### 3.6. Rhetorical features

Poetry is deeply rooted in oral traditions, and Gaelic poetry, which shapes modern Irish poetry, was mainly oral. The rhetorical strategies found in Irish writing reflect the orality of traditional storytelling and poetry. In addition they reflect the sheer delight the Irish find in talking, in humour, and in being creative. Kennelly (1995: 14-5) describes Dublin as «probably the most garrulous city in Christendom», and describes Dubliners' use of English in the following terms:

Dubliners don't just speak English, their own brand of it, they wear it [...] They show off in it, preen and strut in it, [...] wave it like a football flag. [...] This is all fair enough. Language shouldn't just be an instrument of so-called rational and/or irrational communication. It should be aired, steered through pollution, allowed to swallow pubsmoke, trawl through Internet, [...]

The Irish delight in creativity, especially linguistic creativity. Kieley (1977: 95) quotes a controversial passage of Braidwood's *Ulster & Elizabethan English* in which he asserts that the writers of Elizabethan English and HE owe their literary creativity and uninhibitedness to the fact that their languages are not standardized:

Today probably only the Irishman, especially the Southern Irishman, and some Welshmen, work in the Elizabethan linguistic, mastering the language, where the rest of us, with pusillanimous notions of correctness and good taste hammered into us at school, let the language master us.

Here is a sampling of some of the rhetorical strategies employed by Irish writers. The first one is wordplay. There is an Irish game of rendering «sophisticated» words in their «Irish» form. This rhetorical device was very much used by Gaelic writers. Flann O'Brien was an expert at this game, and filled his columns with characters like *Des Demona* (from «Desdemona»), and *Mose Art* (from «Mozart»). Wordplay includes a tendency to sesquipadalianism (an appropriate term for 'the use of long words'), which both Joyce and Kennelly employ to comic and ironic effects.

Secondly, puns occur frequently in Hiberno-English, for comical effect, although there is a serious vein to them as well. In the following example Angela and Lizzie are discussing how the «Blesseds» have to work hard at answering people's prayers if they want to make sainthood. Angela is tired of having to hear a band practising a funeral march, hence her remark, and Beoman is a communist who does not like how the Catholic hierarchy oppresses the people of the town:

(31) Lizzie: Don't I know it! Th' Blesseds has to keep on their toes to get noticed, if they wants to be hoisted up into higher places.

Angela: Yis, among th' cymbals an' th' dh drums.

Beoman (with a snort of scorn): Th' harps an' th' *hoboes* —a' Phil th' Fluther's Ball! (O'Casey, 1984: 257)

Beoman makes a pun with *oboes/hoboes* and reinforces it with a reference to a rag-tag gathering (notice that *fluther* is really *fluter* with an aspirated *t*). Later in the play we see how the church officials of the town cause economic ruin to those who stray from the established line.

*Finnegan's Wake*, Joyce's well-known novel, is written in HE. *Wake* here means the traditional wake for the dead but also the HE pronunciation of *weak*, as noted in section 3.1. Therefore the title itself is a pun on the mythical Gaelic hero Finn. In fact, it could be interpreted as «*Finn Again is Weak*», indicating that the heroic, epic, moral fibre of Ireland is not what it should be.

A third strategy is the formation of portmanteau words. In the poem *A workable clarity*, Kennelly (1995: 75) blends words that traditionally have

defined opposed and mutually exclusive identities and, in doing so, deconstructs them:

- (32) [...] / *Sorth* and *Nouth*, territories occupied / in his wordscape by / *Protholics* and *Catestants* / as they live and die / in the shat-on beauty of their island. / *Noyalists* and *Lashionalists* picnic together / in all kinds of weather, / chewing tarpition [partition] sandwiches with sugto [gusto] / [...]

Another rhetorical feature is the use of appropriate nicknames, which is used extensively in traditional Gaelic literature. In *Behind the Green Curtains* (O'Casey, 1984), Dennis *Chatastray* («cat astray») is a Catholic industrialist who almost breaks free and begins to act on his own rather than following the dictates of the religious hierarchy. In *Finnegans Wake*, the protagonist, Mr. *Porter*, runs a pub, thus his name is appropriate because he carries crates of ale up and down the stairs all day. The novel revolves around a dream he is having, in which, among other episodes produced by his guilty conscience, he commits an immoral act in Phoenix Park, which becomes *Fiendish Park*.

Finally, exaggeration and humour in general, as we have already mentioned, are essential features of both Hiberno-English and Gaelic literature. However, it is not a facile type of humour, that only seeks to make people laugh. It is a humour that stems from taking on the language and cultural associations of an imperial power and bending and moulding them to fit one's own culture and personal identity. According to Bernstein (1994: 275), it is founded on «the ability to take serious matters and see the humour in them, to undermine their potentially devastating effects through a sense of humour that distances the immediacy and the impact. [...] [It is a two faced-mask, and] if there is a skull beneath this mask of Janus, it has the 'risus sardonius', the grim smile of the death mask».

#### 4. HE in the EFL classroom: some pedagogical considerations

Over the past two decades there has been a steadily growing interest in the use of literary texts in the foreign language classroom, as can be seen from the number of courses and workshops offered on this subject and from the wide variety of books published in this field (Carter and Long, 1987; Collie and Slater, 1987; Maley and Duff, 1989; McRae, 1991; Lazar, 1993; *inter alia*). For a more complete bibliography on the subject, see Trenchs (1997: 52).

Most texts which make their way into the EFL classroom are written in a standard variety of language. However, the use of texts written in non-standard language could provide a worthwhile complement to course content. From a linguistic point of view, the exposure of students to different types of expression can give them new insights into uses of literary and colloquial language as well as into standard and dialectal forms of expression. Also, a wider



variety of literary texts is likely to arouse students' interest in language and its multiple uses and shades of meaning, since they help them realize that language is not transparent. At the same time, from a cultural point of view, texts written in non-standard language may present new insights into the cultures of a country or region, which students might enjoy comparing with those offered in linguistically more standard texts.

Before introducing literary works written in non-standard varieties of English, teachers should sensitize students to the fact that non-standard vernaculars, which are generally perceived as low, easy, often comical kinds of language, are in fact as complex and systematic as standard languages (Harris, 1993: 181). Furthermore, vernacular languages are also symbols of local identity and, therefore, their use involves cultural and political implications. In the case of «other Englishes», it is necessary to sensitize students to the complexities faced by authors in writing in the language of the former colonial power. As seen in the case of Ireland, the complexity of attitudes involved in the use of English led many writers to adopt special measures. The issue of language loyalty is deeply felt by writers in lands in which English is in tough competition with the local language or languages. In addition, the weight of at least two cultural traditions is felt by such writers. They must mould the English language to the task of expressing meanings important to them or their culture.

We have chosen the opening scenes from J.M. Synge's play, *The Tinker's Wedding* (written in 1902, but first performed in 1909), and Roddy Doyle's novel *The Snapper* (1990), to develop a lesson plan and suggest guidelines and activities for helping students get into non-standard literature by developing their awareness of the presence of HE, its stylistic uses and cultural associations.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a time when Ireland was struggling for its political independence from England, Synge created a new literary dialect in HE which was very much inspired by Gaelic linguistic and poetic patterns and which displaced the simplistic, derogatory «brogue» that had characterised the stage-Irishman from the seventeenth century. However, Synge's plays caused riots in the streets on account of his unflattering portrayals of Irish rural life and the language of his characters. Until then, the Irish had internalized and identified with the seemingly flattering colonial stereotype of the «Celtic soul», according to which the Gaels were a pure, sentimental, feminine race, but, at the same time, were incapable of governing themselves. Synge's plays broke away from this paternalistic, disempowering vision of the Gaels. In *The Tinker's Wedding* he satirizes the policies of parochial clergymen in performing marriage ceremonies and in dealing with an outcast group in Ireland, the tinkers.

Doyle is the author of a popular trilogy (*The Commitments*, 1978, *The Snapper*, 1990, and *The Van*, shortlisted for the 1991 Booker Prize) about the lives of the Rabbittes, a typically large, working-class family in Barrytown, a fictional neighbourhood in Northern Dublin. The set formed by this

trilogy and its three respective film versions (also written by Doyle and very faithful to the texts) is an especially suitable tool for introducing students to contemporary Irish literature, both in its written and audio-visual forms. They are funny, entertaining, interesting, and up-to-date. They address many hard issues in the lives of modern working-class Dubliners without trying to soften or sugar-coat anything, especially the language.

Doyle's use of HE responds to his desire to portray his characters as vividly as possible in terms of speech and also in accordance with their ideological, social, cultural and historical determinants. Like Synge, he also shows that HE is as valid a literary dialect as the standard. Moreover, by using HE rather than a more standard English, he aligns himself with the values embedded in the sociolect of the working classes and undercuts and subverts official ideology and the ideas and mores on which it is sustained. As Doyle overtly claims, in his novels

[...] the attachment to the Church isn't there, neither is the attachment to the State and certainly the attachment to the language isn't there, although I think that's an awful pity. [...] I think also because we had a language before having another superimposed on us, we actually ended up with a language and a half. There's a healthy contempt for grammar that makes talking that little bit more interesting. (McArdle, 1995: 116)

*The Snapper* deals with the pregnancy of an unmarried, twenty-year-old woman and the struggle of her family, especially her father, to come to terms with it.

The use of HE may at first hinder the students' understanding of the texts. However, when they realize that it contributes to contextualizing the works (in geographic, historical and social terms) and gives an added immediacy to the characters, these «foreign» words acquire new, revealing meanings which give cohesion and reinforce the works' thematic interests. Therefore, in spite of, or rather, because of, the marked «local touch» of Synge's and Doyle's works, both in linguistic and cultural terms, students from all over the world are likely to identify with their characters and feel involved with the issues and themes raised in the works. They may even become interested in the contemporary situation of the Irish and the cultural changes they are undergoing.

The following extracts are from the opening scenes of *The Tinker's Wedding* (p. 109) and *The Snapper* (p. 1-6).<sup>4</sup>

*A village roadside after nightfall. A fire of sticks is burning near the ditch a little to the right. Michael is working beside it. In the background, on the left, a sort of tent and ragged clothes drying on the hedge. On the right a chapel gate.*

4. We leave it to the reader to test his/her skill at identifying the HE features in these texts. Many of them appear in section 3.

SARAH CASEY *coming in on right, eagerly*. We'll see his reverence this place, Michael Byrne, and he passing backward to his house to-night.

MICHAEL *grimly*. That'll be a sacred and a sainted joy!

SHARA *sharply*. It'll be small joy for yourself if you aren't ready with my wedding ring. *She goes over to him*. Is it near done this time, or what way is it at all?

MICHAEL: A poor way only, Sarah Casey, for it's the devil's job making a ring, and you'll be having my hands destroyed in a short while the way I'll not be able to make a tin can at all maybe at the dawn of day.

SHARAH *sitting down beside him and throwing sticks on the fire*. If it's the devil's joy, let you mind it, and leave your speeches that would choke a fool.

MICHAEL *slowly and glumly*. And it's you'll go talking of fools, Sarah Casey, when no man did ever hear a lying story even of your like unto this mortal day. You to be going beside me a great while, and rearing a lot of them, and then to be setting off with your talk of getting married, and your driving me to it, and I not asking it at all.

*Sarah turns her back to him and arranges something in the ditch.*

*Angrily*. Can't you speak a word when I'm asking what is it ails you since the moon did change?

SARAH *musingly*. I'm thinking there isn't anything ails me, Michael Byrne; but the springtime is a queer time, and it's queer thoughts maybe I do think at whiles.

MICHAEL: It's hard set you'd be to think queerer than welcome, Sarah Casey; but what will you gain dragging me to the priest this night, I'm saying, when it's new thoughts you'll be thinking at the dawn of day?

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— You're wha'? Said Jimmy Rabbitte Sr.

He said it loudly.

— You heard me, said Sharon.

Jimmy Jr was upstairs in the boys' room doing his D.J. practice. Darren was in the front room watching Police Academy II on the video. Les was out. Tracy and Linda, the twins, were in the front room annoying Darren. Veronica, Mrs Rabbitte, was sitting opposite Jimmy Sr at the kitchen table. Sharon was pregnant and she'd just told her father that she thought she was. She'd told her mother earlier, before the dinner.

— Oh my Jaysis, said Jimmy Sr.

He looked at Veronica. She looked tired. He looked at Sharon again.

— That's shockin', he said.

Sharon said nothing.

— Are yeh sure? said Jimmy Sr.

— Yeah. Sort of.

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— You should've come to us earlier — before, yeh know — an' said you were goin' to get pregnant.

The three of them tried to laugh.

— Then we could've done somethin' abou' it. — My God, though.

No one said anything. Then Jimmy Sr spoke to Sharon again.

— You're absolutely sure now? Positive?

- Yeah, I am. I done—
- Did, said Veronica.
- I did the test.

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Jimmy Sr looked at the two women. The crying had stopped.

- Will he marry you? Jimmy Sr asked her.
- No. I don't think so.
- The louser. That's cheatin', tha' is.
- It's not a game! said Veronica.
- I know, I know tha', Veronica. But it's his fault as much as Sharon's. Whoever he is. — It was his flute tha'
- Daddy!

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Jimmy Sr now said something he'd heard a good few times on the telly.

- D'yeh want to keep it?
- Wha' d'yeh mean?
- D'yeh — d'you want to keep it, like?
- He wants to know if you want to have an abortion, said Veronica. — The eejit.
- I do not! said Jimmy Sr.
- This was true. He was sorry now he'd said it.
- There's no way I'd have an abortion, said Sharon.
- Good. You're right.
- Abortion's murder.
- It is o'course.

Teachers may work with longer or shorter extracts depending on the students' linguistic competence.

The lesson plan we propose is divided into three stages: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. In the first stage, a point of entry into the texts could be a discussion of how ideas about marriage, sexual relationships, pregnancy, and other related issues have changed over the past one hundred years. This should be followed by cultural and historical background information relevant to the texts. For example, teachers should inform students of the socio-economic, political and religious factors that impeded young couples from marrying in mid-nineteenth century Ireland (familism, emigration, poverty). Similarly, students should be familiar with twentieth century facts about the country, such as the traditional ideas concerning marriage and the popular rejection of abortion. As far as language is concerned, teachers could select a number of words or sentences from the texts and present them to the students out of context in order to discuss how «acceptable» they are in English. Similarly, they could choose words from the text and ask students to guess what they mean.

In the while-reading stage, students should try to deduce the meanings of any expressions or words they do not know from the context. Teachers could help them cope with difficult vocabulary by means of various sorts of exer-

cises, such as multiple choice or matching definitions with lexical items. Students could also underline non-standard features of speech and discuss whether or not they are exclusively HE. Classifying HE features according to the areas that have been dealt with in this paper could help them consolidate an overview of the linguistic characteristics of HE. From a literary point of view, teachers should make sure that students perceive the humour and irony which pervade the scenes, and which are recurrent in Irish literature.

Finally, in the post-reading stage, teachers could help students to interpret the texts by emphasizing especially significant uses of language or stylistic features, and students could summarize the theme and plot of the extracts, or write extensions of them, detailing what will happen next. As language work, choosing non-standard uses of syntactic structures from the texts and having students rewrite them in a standard linguistic form, or having them write a reported-speech version of the dialogues, could help them with grammar and style. Finally, we suggest a comparison between the written and film version of *The Snapper*<sup>5</sup> as a further post-reading activity, since the film provides contextual information not given in the book. For instance, the opening scene captures the family atmosphere that pervades the novel. According to Thompson (1993: 65):

The smallness of the Curleys' [as they are called in the film] house is integral to their chaotic sense of community —the constant distractions of warring family members furnish vital perspective as well as extra stress in moments of crisis, but Frears [the director] does well not to overplay the closeness of their domestic environment.

As mentioned above, Synge's language sparked violence in his time. Nowadays, strong objections might be raised over the use of swear words throughout the text and film of *The Snapper*. However, this reflects the speech of working-class North Dubliners. By being exposed to such realistic uses of HE, the students' picture of the language is more complete, although how much «completeness» teachers want to, or can, give their students depends entirely upon their own criteria as well as the type of students they have and the type of institution they are teaching in. Doyle has often been accused of overusing bad language in his novels, yet he claims that:

That's the way the characters talk, it's plain and simple, what more can I say? Not all the characters use bad language. Pound for pound, *The Van* has more bad language than the rest, because it's largely Jimmy Sr's story, and he's a man who laces his language continually with four-letter words of various shapes and sizes, and I don't make any apology for that. I have no problem justifying the bad language. There's very little violence in it and it's not there

5. We have not been able to ascertain whether or not *The Tinker's Wedding* has ever been made into a film.

for shock value. In a culture where many films are created purely to shock people, trying to shock people by a choice of words doesn't work anymore. (McArdle, 1995: 113)

Similarly, Thompson (1993: 65) comments:

One of the main problems with today's TV drama is that it doesn't have enough swearing in it. Doyle's 'bad' language —the musical 'feck's and 'bollix's which score his characters' every move— is transparently good language, and credit is due to whoever decided it shouldn't be toned down.

After reading and commenting on both texts and the film, students could be asked to compare and contrast the positions taken on a number of social issues, such as sexual relationships, marriage, the Church, poverty, and drinking, in nineteenth-century and present-day Ireland. As a final post-reading activity, the class could debate what constitutes a literary dialect. What types of language are valid for literary expression and what types, if any, could not be used in literature?

## 5. Conclusion

This paper presents a description of HE through literary texts, which is of special interest to EFL teachers who make use of literary texts in the classroom. Using HE texts would be best for upper intermediate or advanced students, as they have enough command of the standard language to appreciate the novelties and nuances presented by the non-standard forms. The incorporation of non-standard literatures into the curriculum exposes students to new ideas and new uses of language and also broadens their cultural horizons. They gain new cultural referents and perspectives as they come to fully understand the text they are reading. One final benefit offered by this approach is that it promotes students' reading strategies and listening skills. As they are exposed to more and more non-standard varieties of English, they become better able to understand them. This is an increasingly important skill in an age of international English, in which more people speak non-standard varieties of English worldwide than standard varieties.

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