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When there's more than one norm enforcement mechanism: Accommodation and shift among Irish immigrants to New York City[1]

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1.0 Introduction

This study focuses on four Irish immigrants to New York City, and explores the linguistic consequences of having substantial network ties with speakers of different varieties of English: in this case, Irish English (IE) and American English (AE). Although both terms encompass a broad range of variation, they make the relevant distinction between the varieties in question. Patterns of linguistic accommodation and shift to AE are analyzed using Giles & Powesland's theory of accommodation (1975) and social network theory. The remainder of this section will be devoted to background information on the linguistic variable examined in this study, the theories on which the analysis draws, and the methodologies employed. Linguistic findings will be presented in section 2. Section 3 will present the network data and introduce the network bias score. Section 4 will provide interview excerpts and section 5 will conclude.

1.1 The Linguistic Variable: Intervocalic and Prepausal /t/

Accommodation is quantified according to the variable realization of /t/ in intervocalic and prepausal environments. While the flap and unreleased /t/ are the most common variants in AE, IE has an additional allophone: an apicoalveolar fricative, which remains distinct from /s/, so that there are minimal pairs such as *pat : pass, letter : lesser*. A high rate of use of the fricativized variant in the speech of immigrants indicates adherence to IE norms, whereas a low fricativization rate, and correspondingly high rate of use of the appropriate AE variants, signals accommodation to AE.

Table 1 summarizes the three environments that will be considered in this paper. In fact the fricative is also possible in each of these environments

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after /r/, in words like *forty, sort of, support*, and for the purposes of this pa-
per the categories of preceding vowel and preceding /r/ are collapsed.

	Environment	Example	IE	AE
1	intervocalic within a word	wa<u>t</u>er	fricative	flap
2	intervocalic across a word boundary	grea<u>t</u> Irish	fricative	flap
3	prepausal	Righ<u>t</u>.	fricative	unreleased

Table 1: Main environments where fricativized /t/ can occur in Irish English

The fricative in Irish English has the same distribution according to stress as
the flap in American English, being allowed only before an unstressed
vowel. The /t/ of *Italy* can be fricativized in IE and flapped in AE, occurring
as it does before an unstressed vowel, but the /t/ of *Italian* cannot be frica-
tivized in IE nor flapped in AE, since it occurs before a stressed vowel. A /t/
between two unstressed vowels, as in the word *capacity*, can be fricativized
in IE and flapped in AE.

1.2 Theory and Methodology

I employ Giles & Powesland's Accommodation Theory, which is based on
psychological research, suggesting that the rationale for a speaker approxi-
mating the linguistic norms of the person he or she is addressing is the fol-
lowing: A will accommodate linguistically to B if A wants B's social ap-
proval, because A believes that reducing the dissimilarities between him or
her and B will result in A being more favorably evaluated by B (1975:233-
4).

I also draw on social network theory. As Mitchell (1969:4) explains, the
focus of a social network approach is "not on the attributes of the people in
the network but rather on the characteristics of the linkages in their relation-
ships to one another, as a means of explaining the behaviour of the people
involved in them." Studies of the social networks of speakers have demon-
strated the impact of interlocutors on linguistic behavior. Milroy (1987), for
example, shows that the more concentrated one's social network is in a
neighborhood-based community, the closer one will approximate the lin-
guistic norms of that community, i.e. the network will act as a norm-
enforcement mechanism. However, sociologists acknowledge an increasing
trend for people's social ties to transcend geographic boundaries, resulting in
"*freedom from a single group's constrictive control*" in Wellman's words
(Wellman 2001:36, my italics). While membership of multiple communities
or networks confers a certain freedom, I hypothesize that simultaneously
belonging to several communities involves juggling sets of norms, i.e. being

subject to the constrictive control of many groups.

In this study I investigated the influence of three kinds of ties on language: *interactive*, *affective* and *exchange*, by studying a subset of each informants' reported ties. I used the standard naming technique or "sociometry" methodology employed in many social network studies. Informants filled out a questionnaire providing basic information (e.g. nationality, country of residence, sex, relationship, frequency of interaction, frequency of meeting) on the seven people they interact with most frequently (interactive ties) and the seven people most important to them (affective ties). Finally, four hypothetical situations were presented to the informants, and they named people they would contact for everyday favors and advice (exchange ties), building on work by Fischer (1982), who showed that people with whom contact is likely to lead to rewarding exchanges are potentially very influential on ego's social behavior. Since informants were free to crosslist ties, informants differed on the number of individuals named; Jane and Kate each provided information on twelve ties, Dermot, thirteen and Sean, fourteen. Obviously these ties comprise only a subset of each informant's network, but it is hoped that the composition of this subset is reasonably representative of that of the informant's entire network.

The four immigrant informants whose data will be reported in this paper are Jane, Kate, Dermot and Sean. All grew up in middle class parts of Dublin and are speakers of the middle class Dublin variety of Irish English. They are aged between 26 and 35 years old, have each lived in the United States for between six and twelve years, and are all visa holders. Jane is married to an American man, while the other three are single. In contrast to the more insular lives led by many illegal Irish immigrants living in ethnic enclaves, my informants all have substantial social ties with Americans, and are involved in mainstream New York City life through their professional and social activities. The immigrants' patterns of /t/ allophone use are compared to those of same-sex non-immigrant controls. The non-immigrant controls are aged 26 and 27. Like the immigrant informants, they grew up in middle-class areas of Dublin. They are controls in the sense that they live in Ireland and have no ties with Americans.

Data were gathered from sociolinguistic interviews and a reading task, consisting of a passage on Irish immigration to the U.S. & a word list. This is a small study based on just four Irish immigrant informants, speaking a single variety of IE, a subset of their social networks, and a single linguistic variable. As such, findings reported here are, at most, suggestive, and would benefit from corroboration from larger-scale studies.

2.0 Findings

Data were analyzed using GoldVarb V2.1[2]. While internal factors such as stress, morphology and preceding environment were considered, they were generally found not to be significant, and they will not be discussed further here. Since speaker and style were significant, this paper will focus on the immigrants' rates of use of Irish and American English variants (Figures 1-3) and the effect of style (interview vs. reading, Figure 4). Figures 1-3 are based on interview data only. Please refer to Table 2 at the end of section 2 for total token numbers relevant to each figure.

Figure 1 below summarizes the informants' rates of use of the allophone of /t/ more typical of Irish English (i.e. the fricative or "IE variant") and those allophones more typical of American English (i.e. the flap and unreleased /t/ or "AE variants") across the three phonological environments identified in Table 1 above[3].
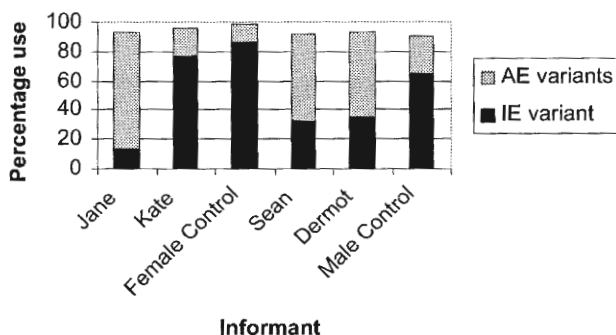

Figure 1: Informants' rate of use of IE and AE /t/ allophones

As we can see, the female and male controls use the fricative variant more than same-sex immigrant informants. However, the female control and, indeed, one of the female immigrant informants (Kate), have much higher rates of use of the fricative than the male control, suggesting a possible sex

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[2] Variable Rule Analysis for the Macintosh, based on programmes by David Sankoff, Pascale Rousseau, Don Hindle & Susan Pintzuk, adapted for the Macintosh by David Rand.

[3] Rates of use of allophones of /t/ other than those identified as typical of IE and AE are not included here.

difference in the use of fricativized /t/. To avoid obscuring this apparent difference between females and males's use of /t/ allophones, findings for females and males are presented separately: Figure 2 illustrates the females' rates of use of IE and AE /t/ allophones while Figure 3 shows the same information for the males. In addition, since following phonological environment was also found to shape the patterns of variation observed, both figures also break down the data for each informant by phonological environment.

2.1 Findings by sex and following phonological environment

From Figure 2 we see that both Jane and Kate use AE variants more than the female control in each phonological environment. However, Jane's rate of use of AE variants far surpasses Kate's, suggesting that she may be accommodating a great deal to AE. All three female informants use the fricative most in prepausal environment, and least across a word boundary.
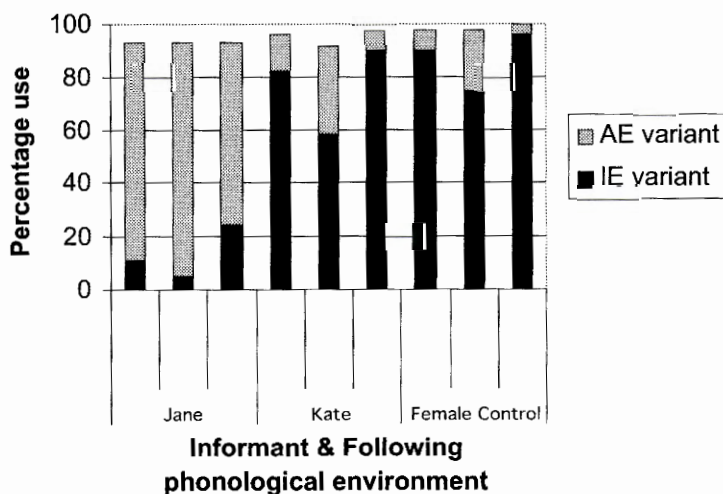

Figure 2: Females' rates of use of IE and AE /t/ allophones

The favoring influence of a following pause on fricativization is also evident for the males (see Figure 3). However, the word boundary does not seem to disfavor fricativization for males to the extent that it did for the females; indeed, Sean fricativizes more in this environment than word-internally. I leave investigation of the questions of why a word boundary would disfavor

fricativization and whether a sex difference exists in this regard for future research.

From Figure 3 we see that both Sean and Dermot's rates of intervocalic flapping (i.e. the AE variant) are considerably higher than the male control's, suggesting that they may be accommodating to AE. Dermot uses unreleased /t/ (the AE variant) in prepausal environment more than the control, but his rate is still low (15%), while Sean's rate of use of unreleased /t/ is very similar to the control's (6% vs. 2%).
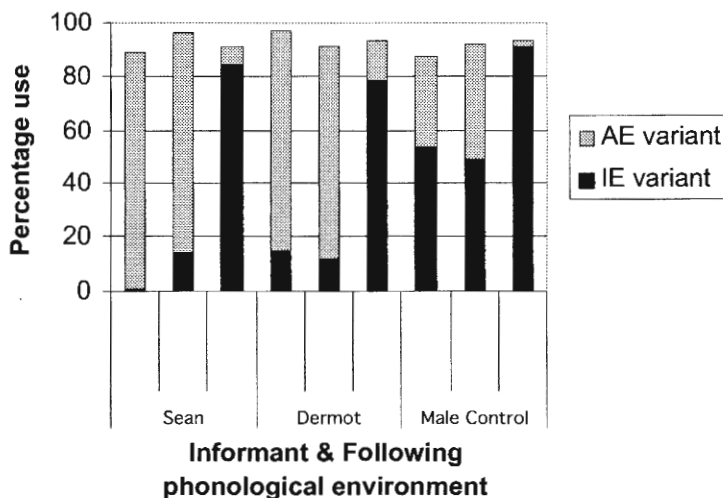

Figure 3: Males' rates of use of IE and AE /t/ allophones

2.1.2 Discussion

We have seen that even the female control does not fricativize categorically. The flap is present in Irish English, and is used by both male and female controls in both intervocalic environments. Comparing the female and male controls' "word-internal" and "across word boundary" bars in Figures 2 and 3, we see that the male control flaps much more than the female control. However, if we compare the controls' rates of use of unreleased /t/ in prepausal environment, we see that their use of this variant is negligible. So in order to approximate AE norms of intervocalic /t/, Irish immigrants can simply increase their rate of use of a variant that already exists in their system, i.e. the flap. However, if they want to approximate AE /t/ allophone

distribution as a whole, they will need to acquire a new variant for prepausal environment: unreleased /t/. As we can see from Figures 2 and 3, only Jane manages to do this convincingly.

2.2 Effect of Style

Figure 4 illustrates the effect of style on rate of fricativization across environments. As Figure 4 shows, females fricativize more in reading style, while males fricativize either at the same or at a lower rate. This stands at odds with Hickey's finding that "in formal styles, such as reading a text aloud, Irish English speakers only have a stop realization of /t/...fricativization is on the other hand always present in conversational speech" (1984:237)[4]. A study of stylistic variation in IE is sadly lacking.
There is a general consensus that AE variants are less appropriate in reading style. Like females, males use the AE variants less when reading, but unlike the females, males do not use the fricative more.
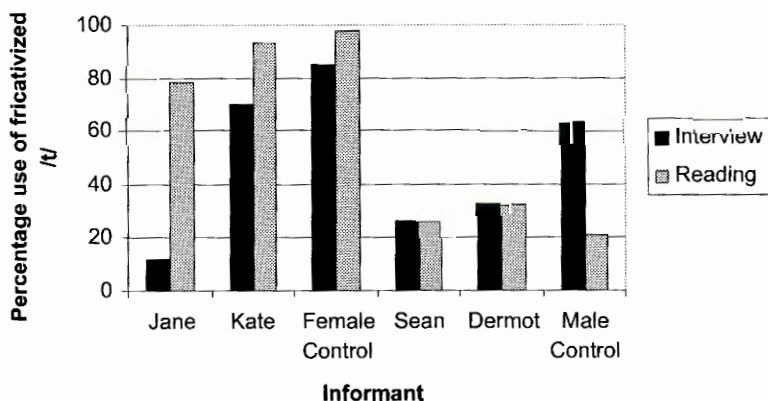

Figure 4: Effect of style on rate of fricativization across environments

In fact, all three males increase their rate of use of aspirated release in reading style. The fact that the sex-style interaction illustrated here is consistent for non-immigrant controls as well as immigrant informants suggests that this pattern of variation exists in Ireland. As Figures 1-4 illustrate, patterns of fricativized /t/ use differ for males and females, contrary to Hickey's claim

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[4] Hickey is also reporting on Irish English as spoken by the urban middle class. Age and sex of informants is not provided.

that /t/ lenition does not have "any significance" as a social marker (1996:85), again signaling the need for a variationist study of IE in Ireland.

		Jane		Kate		Female Control	
		n	%[1]	*n*	%	*n*	%
Fig.2	*Word internal*	71	23	94	22	63	19
	Across word boundary	150	49	236	57	168	50
	Prepausal	84	28	87	21	106	31
Figs. 1 & 2	*Interview total*	305	100	417	100	337	100
Fig. 4	*Interview*	305	93	417	88	337	86
	Reading	23	7	57	12	57	14
	Total tokens	328	100	474	100	394	100
		Sean		Dermot		Male Control	
		n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Fig. 3	*Word internal*	111	33	62	21	46	33
	Across word boundary	147	44	146	48	53	37
	Prepausal	75	23	93	31	43	30
Figs. 1 & 3	*Interview total*	333	100	301	100	142	100
Fig. 4	*Interview*	333	85	301	84	142	71
	Reading	57	15	57	16	57	29
	Total tokens	390	100	358	100	199	100

[1] Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 2: Token numbers and percentages by speaker,
phonological environment and style

To summarize the immigrants' degrees of accommodation and shift: We have seen that Jane displays the greatest use of AE /t/ allophone norms. Kate's language shows little influence from AE, with a rate of use of AE norms only slightly higher than the female control. Compared to the male control, Dermot and Sean have high rates of intervocalic flapping, but, like the control, they have low rates of prepausal lack of release.

The schematic in Figure 5 shows the relative positions of the informants on a continuum whose poles are Irish English, as spoken by non-immigrant controls, and American English as spoken by native speakers.
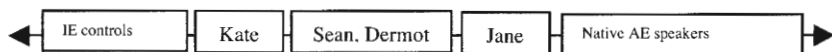

Figure 5: Immigrants' relative degree of AE norm approximation

3.0 The Network Data

The use of scores and indices to quantify informants' networks is familiar from the work of Bortoni-Ricardo (integration and urbanization indices, 1985), Gal (peasantness scale, 1978) and Milroy (network strength score, 1987) among others. All of these scales were designed to predict an individual's propensity to converge towards one set of linguistic norms and diverge from another. Implicit in all of these studies is recognition of the fact that a tension exists between social forces promoting linguistic change and those inhibiting change. As Milroy notes: "the extent to which [linguistic changes] are successful depends on the interplay of …two sets of social influences – those that encourage maintenance (or stability), on the one hand, and those that encourage change (or divergence), on the other" (J. Milroy 1992:10). This study seeks to acknowledge that interplay explicitly. Accordingly, the network bias score proposed below attempts to formalize the tension between those two sets of social influences on an individual speaker.

The main hypothesis of this study is that two norm enforcement mechanisms operate like the opposing teams in a tug of war, with both number and strength of team members determining the contest's outcome. For example, Immigrant X in Figure 6 has twice as many strong ties with Irish people as she does with Americans. I predict that her linguistic behavior will be more constrained by her Irish English norm enforcement mechanism, whereas for immigrant Y (Figure 7), the opposite is the case.

IE norm enforcement
mechanism:
8 strong ties
with Irish people

AE norm enforcement
mechanism:
4 strong ties
with Americans

Figure 6: Immigrant X

IE norm enforcement
mechanism:
4 strong ties
with Irish people

AE norm enforcement
mechanism
8 strong ties
with Americans
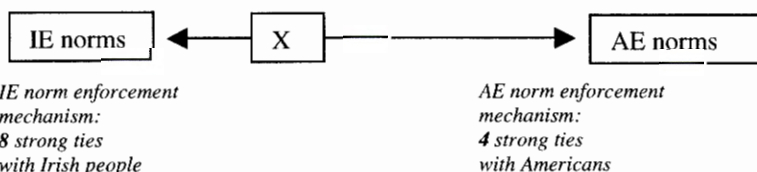
Figure 7: Immigrant Y

There are many possible ways of quantifying the potential strength of each norm enforcement mechanism. It might be the case that the nationalities of an immigrant's affective ties, for example, predict language behavior better than any other tie type, in which case we can create a ratio of the number of American affective ties to the number of Irish affective ties for each immigrant informant and then compare the informants' ratios. However, ratios based on the tie types and combinations of tie types shown below do not predict the hierarchy of degree of accommodation that we saw in figure 5, i.e. that Jane's language approximates AE norms best, Kate's least, and Dermot & Sean's intermediately: interactive, affective, exchange, interactive and affective, interactive and exchange, active (characterized by frequency of interaction once or more a week) and passive (characterized by frequency of interaction less than once a week). While the nationalities of an immigrant's affective & exchange (but not interactive) ties predict language behavior reasonably well, *the best fit is found when all three tie strength characteristics are considered*, i.e. interactive, affective and exchange. The network bias score does exactly that.

Tie strength characteristic	Subcategories	Points
Frequency of Interaction	Every day	16
	At least once a week	8
	At least once a month	4
	Once every few months	2
	At least once a year	1
Tie listed as affective?	Yes	16
	No	0
Tie listed as exchange?	Yes	16
	No	0
Relationship	Kin or Friend	16
	Work friend	8
	Work colleague or Acquaintance	4

Table 3: Calculation of tie strength scores

The **network bias score** is conceived as a ratio of potential influence from American ties to potential influence from Irish ties and considers both *number* and *strength* of ties with people of each nationality. A network is *biased* towards American influence when there are many more strong ties with Americans than with Irish people. I use Granovetter's definition of tie strength:

> "the **strength of a tie**   is a (probably linear) combination of the *amount of time*, the *emotional intensity*, the *intimacy (mutual confiding)* and the *reciprocal services* which characterize a tie." (Granovetter 1973:1361, my italics).

Tie strength is quantified as shown in Table 3. It is assumed that all tie strength characteristics (i.e. frequency of interaction, whether or not the tie is listed as affective, whether or not it is listed as exchange, relationship) are potentially equally important. Some categories are binary, while others are more nuanced. In future work, I hope to have data that will allow subtler nuancing of all categories. Finally, I distinguish between three relationship types (see Table 3), since certain relationship types have been shown to be more influential than others.

Tie strength scores are calculated for each of the informants' ties with Americans and Irish people. A ratio is then calculated for each informant, indicating the extent to which the informant's network is biased towards American or Irish people (see Table 4):

Network Bias Score = Sum of American tie strength scores
Sum of Irish tie strength scores

A network bias score of 0 reflects a network that consists exclusively of Irish ties, and is thus fully biased towards Irish influence, such as those of both controls. A score between 0.01 and 0.99[5] reflects a network that is open to some AE influence, but biased towards IE influence. A score of 1 reflects a network that seems equally open to influence from AE and IE.

Following Milroy (1987), a Spearman rank order correlation was conducted to establish the relationship between network bias scores and linguistic behavior.

Informant	Network Bias Score	Interpretation
Jane	0.98	Reasonably balanced, with considerable potential for influence from both Irish and American people
Kate	0.19	Strongly biased towards (predisposed to) Irish influence
Sean	0.85	Quite open to American influence, although a slight bias towards Irish influence remains
Dermot	0.74	Open to some American influence, but still biased towards Irish influence
Controls	0.00	No potential American influence

Table 4: Network Bias Scores

[5] Network Bias Scores are correct to two decimal places.

As Milroy explains, "This test calculates how far the *rank order* of scores for each individual speaker on one factor (network) is similar to the rank order of scores on another (a linguistic variable). A statistic *r* is produced, which reflects how closely the rank orders of the two factors for all individual speakers match" (Milroy 1987:150). The rank order of informants' degree of approximation of AE norms shown in Figure 5 above and the network bias scores shown in Table 4 were used to calculate the Spearman rank order correlation between network bias score and relative degree of approximation of AE norms, which was $r_s = 0.9852$[6].

In the system of calculation of network bias scores outlined above, there is no way to express the bias of a hypothetical immigrant's network that consists solely of American ties. A preferable system would be one where scores range from -1 to 1, so that a score of -1 would represent total bias towards the Irish norm enforcement mechanism, 0 would represent no bias, and 1 would represent total bias towards the American norm enforcement mechanism. Let a = sum of American tie strength scores and i = sum of Irish tie strength scores. Instead of the original formula for the network bias score (a/i), we would use the following:

$$\text{Network Bias Score}_{\text{revised}} \quad = \quad \frac{a - i}{a + i}$$

This results in the following scores for our informants: Jane: -0.01, Kate: -0.69, Sean: -0.08, Dermot: -0.15, Controls: -1.[7]

Regardless of which network bias score is used, these results suggest that American ties do not need to *outweigh* Irish ties for Americanization of a native IE speaker's language to occur. In Jane's case, we might argue that while her Irish and her American norm enforcement mechanisms seem roughly equal in strength, her /t/ allophone use more closely resembles that of an American than that of an Irish person.

4.0 Interview Excerpts

We have established that certain network configurations leave the immigrant more open to influence from AE. However, there is an element of rational choice involved, meaning that each immigrant can, at least to some extent, choose to resist or embrace influence. The following excerpts shed some

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[6] Compare to the poor correlation between duration of stay in the U.S. and language behavior: $r_s = 0.5539$.

[7] This system was suggested collaboratively by Gregory Guy, John Singler and Lisa Davidson.

light on how each immigrant views his or her own behavior and identity.

Jane has shifted towards AE more than any speaker. Her motivations are clear:

> "I guess I just always, when I came over here, just felt right, sort of just clicked with it" (Jane)

The following excerpt explains Kate's maintenance of IE norms:

> "I actually think…it's a deep, deep psychological thing, you know, this accent thing…I think…really that's just got down to do with, in some way, some knowledge of who I am, or an identity, you know, that, like, somewhere really deep down…I have an identity that I really…connect to, and that, you know, I *don't really want to change*…for very much" (Kate, my italics)

Sean's maintenance of some IE norms can be explained by his desire to remain "different" expressed in quotes like the following:

> "I guess the accent has helped. you know, I think it has, it certainly gets people's attention … it is an advantage and I exploit it" (Sean)

> "I like being non-American in America, because I think it has, it does have its advantages, you're just different" (Sean)

Dermot, on the other hand, who is very similar to Sean linguistically, reports playing down his Irishness:

> "I actually avoid any conversations about being Irish or, you know, accents or anything like that … some people play that card a lot socially, I don't particularly enjoy doing that" (Dermot)

However, Dermot does not identify strongly with either the U.S. or Ireland. This may mean that he has no motivation either to approximate AE norms closely or to doggedly maintain IE norms, the result being a linguistic half-way-house: partial shift towards AE.

5.0 Conclusion

> [Y]ou kind of become that Mid-Atlantic, you know, thing, where you're neither here nor there (Dermot)

If we see Irish English and American English as extremes on a continuum, the immigrants' linguistic behavior places them neither at one end nor the other, but somewhere in between. All immigrants were subject to the norm enforcement mechanisms of their American and their Irish ties. All demonstrate higher rates of intervocalic flapping than same-sex non-immigrant controls. However, no-one has shifted completely to AE; all retain fricativized /t/ to some extent and, with the exception of Jane, none of the immigrants use prepausal /t/ much more than same-sex controls.

This study provides quantitative descriptions of /t/ allophone distribu
tion in IE and AE-influenced IE in both intervocalic and prepausal environ
ments. It also contributes to the sociolinguistic literature on language con-
tact, yielding a picture of how speakers who are subject to the normative
influences of more than one reference group negotiate complex social af-
filiations linguistically. Finally, the proposed network bias score provides a
new way of conceptualizing the potential influence of social ties representing
different norm sets on linguistic behavior in language contact situations. The
obvious direction for future research is to investigate the viability of the net-
work bias score as a predictor of linguistic behavior with larger samples and
different communities. This study also points to the need for a large-scale
quantitative study of regional, social and stylistic variation in Irish English.

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