PREAMBLE

If a name had to be given to the relatively youthful
tradition of which the present study is part, then I suppose
socio-historical linguistics (Romaine 1982) would be as
concise as any.   Briefly put, the main aim of this
tradition has been to integrate the fields of historical
linguistics and sociolinguistics.   The latter term can be
taken here to refer loosely to 'variationist' approaches to
linguistic analysis;   that is, to studies which focus on the
variable and dynamic aspects of language, in contrast to the
categorical and essentially static orientation of modern
theoretical linguistics.   The seeds of socio-historical
linguistics were already present in the work of such
pioneering linguists as Gauchat (1905) and Wyld (1920), but
it was not until Labov's seminal study of Martha's Vineyard
(1963) that a rigorous application of sociolinguistic methods
to the analysis of language change was undertaken.   That
study and Labov's subsequent work have inspired many to adopt
and develop further a variationist perspective on historical
linguistics.   This approach has proved beneficial in at
least two ways.   It has made valuable contributions to a
general theory of language change;   and it has shed new
light on many substantive issues in the history of particular
languages.   In this book I seek to show how a detailed
variationist study of a particular nonstandard variety,
English as it is spoken in Ireland, can be utilised to offer
further insights into a number of these theoretical and
substantive questions.
        Before the advent of variationist studies of language

change, the primary task of historical reconstruction in
phonology was to establish relations of correspondence
between temporally separate, cognate segments.   Answers to
the question of how the transition from one correspondence
pole to another occurred depended largely on the theoretical
persuasion of the historical linguist.   According to the
post-Bloomfieldians, structural changes at the phonological
level were triggered by an accumulation of gradual shifts at
the phonetic level (e.g. Hockett 1965).   The classical
generative view (as expressed for example in Postal 1968 and
King 1969) was the opposite of this: low-level phonetic
changes were triggered by categorical rule changes at the
phonological level.   Until the work of Labov and others, no
direct evidence was available which could be brought to bear
on the transition issue: 'no one had seen a rule added to
a grammar, any more than anyone had seen an allophone drift'
(Lass 1976a: 221).   Although solid real-time evidence of
how change proceeds is still lacking, we now have, thanks to
variation studies, considerable evidence from 'apparent
time';   that is, from socially and geographically
differentiated variation which can be taken to reflect
temporal variation.   Much of this evidence confirms the
view that sound change involves subphonemic shifting by small
increments or across phonetic continua (e.g. Labov et al 1972).
(Whether this drifting occurs in response to higher-level
rule change, as Labov (1981) contends, or itself triggers
higher-level responses remains an open question.)
     One type of change which apparent-time evidence does show
to involve discrete input and output categories is the
redistribution of phonemes across the lexicon.   Strictly
speaking, this doesn't constitute phonological change proper
(although it may eventually have phonological consequences).
The phenomenon generally occurs in response to exonormative
pressures and in traditional terms would be called borrowing.
However, the latter term with its connotations of sporadic
superficial change is hardly appropriate for describing the
massive adaptive redistribution that is to be observed in

conservative dialects whose phonemic incidence is markedly
different from standard patterns (see especially J. Milroy
1980).   The effects of genuine 'evolutive' sound change
and phonemic redistribution can often be very similar, with
the result that the differences between them may be masked
by traditional methods of historical reconstruction which
deal only with correspondences between discrete input and
output categories.   One of the things that quantitative
analysis of phonological variation has allowed us to do is
show that the two types of change are qualitatively different
and clearly distinguishable while they are in progress.
Sound change proper is typically reflected in variation
across phonetic continua; phonemic redistribution typically
involves alternation between phonetically quite discrete
variants.
     Another major contribution of variation studies to
historical linguistic theory has been to deepen our under-
standing of the sorts of linguistic and extralinguistic
constraints that operate on phonological change.   This has
been accompanied by a disconfirmation of the neogrammarian
hypothesis that sound change occurs in a completely regular
fashion in response to universal phonetic laws.   We now have
evidence that sound change may be sensitive to a whole range
of internal (phonological, grammatical, lexical) and external
(social, geographical) conditioning factors besides phonetic
ones.   Through the application of quantitative methods, it
has been shown that phonological variation can be constrained
by features of the morphosyntactic environment (e.g. Labov
1972b: ch 3) and can be subject to selective diffusion through
the lexicon (e.g. Wang 1969).   In the same way, it has been
possible to test the extent to which covariation between
different changes may be determined by higher-order
phonological constraints (such as 'space' or 'economy' -
see Labov et al 1972) which control the avoidance or
implementation of phonemic mergers.   This is not to deny
the importance of phonetic factors as determinants of
phonological variability.   In fact, methods of implicational

scaling (e.g. Bailey 1973) and Labovian variable rule analysis
have increased our awareness of how different phonetic
constraints interact to condition variation.   The inter-
pretation of these findings in the light of recent progress
in experimental phonetics and psycholinguistics promises to
deepen our understanding of the role played by articulatory
and perceptual factors in phonological change (e.g. Ohala
1974a, Janson and Schulman 1983).

Of the external dimensions across which phonological
change proceeds, it is the geographical that has the longest
history of study (at least since the days of nineteenth-century
dialectology).   Thanks to recent sociolinguistic research,
we are now also in a position to understand more fully than
before the social dimensions of linguistic change.   Quantita-
tive work which has appeared since Labov's (1966) study of
New York City has consistently demonstrated correlations
between linguistic variation and differences in style, class,
age, sex and ethnic group.   In some cases, variation of this
sort reflects no more than stable social grading.   In others,
however, socially stratified variation can be considered
symptomatic of change in progress, provided the pattern of
differentiation can be checked against whatever real-time
documentary evidence may be available.   Findings such as these
have contributed much to our understanding of the influence
that social and political pressures exert on the propagation
of linguistic change.   Previously, it was felt that the
prestige which attaches to varieties spoken by economically
powerful elites was the overriding social factor that dictated
the direction of linguistic change (e.g. Bloomfield 1933:
476ff).   This was the usual reason cited for the decline of
traditional rural dialects in the industrialised world (idem).
However, more recent sociolinguistic investigations of newly-
evolved urban vernaculars have demonstrated clearly that overt
prestige is only one of a number of social factors that
determine the direction of linguistic change.   At least as
significant in this respect are pressures of group loyalty
which ensure that the covert prestige which attaches to local

vernacular norms is often powerful enough to override
considerations of overt prestige.   Rather than nonstandard
varieties being swept away in an inexorable tide of
standardisation, the indications are that urban vernaculars
are maintaining a vigorous existence and are expanding at the
expense of traditional rural dialects (Labov 1972a: 324,
1980a: 252).   Having established this, our task now is to
investigate the sorts of social and linguistic factors which
determine the outcome of competition between conflicting
local covert norms.

     One of the spin-offs of the detailed studies of modern
English vernaculars that have been conducted over the last
couple of decades has been to throw new light on a number of
substantive issues in the history of the language.   This 'use
of the present to explain the past' (Labov 1975) has served to
reopen enquiries in several areas which remained untouched
for some time for want of sufficient evidence.   The majority
of major works on the recent history of English have been
concerned almost exclusively with the development of the
Southern Standard.   (A notable exception is Luick 1921.)
This emphasis is understandable in view of the fact that most
of the available historical documentary evidence deals with
this variety.   Moreover, sporadic references to 'vulgarisms'
in the work of early orthoepists are difficult to interpret
without a wider knowledge of earlier forms of nonstandard
English.   However, this concentration on the standard
language has robbed historians of English of much important
evidence which could have been used to illuminate a number
of well-known unresolved problems.   Fragments of this evidence
have been available at least since the first appearance of
work on English rural dialectology in the late nineteenth
century.   Now thanks to more recent, systematic research into
rural dialects and urban vernaculars, there is a wealth of
material on nonstandard English at our disposal.   Through
careful application of the comparative method, this material
can be brought to bear on some of the hitherto unresolved
problems of English historical linguistics.   It should be

clear that this sort of evidence is indispensable to a study
of the history of the Southern Standard (SSE), since this
variety evolved from and has been in continuous contact with
certain regionally restricted dialects.   Just as important
is the light that this evidence can shed on the history of
nonstandard English itself, an area that is only beginning
to be explored in a systematic way.   Initial results of
studies which deal with the subject of time-depth in vernacu-
lar varieties are very encouraging (e.g. Labov 1975, Lass
1976b, J. Milroy 1983).   One type of English which, because
of its characteristic conservatism, is an ideal candidate for
this sort of investigation is the variety spoken in Ireland
(Hiberno-English).

     It is not my aim to provide a unified history of the
English language in Ireland, since this has already been
undertaken elsewhere (e.g. Hogan 1927, Bliss 1977, 1979,
Barry 1982).   Rather I wish to concentrate on a number of
specifically phonological developments which will form the
basis for discussion of the theoretical and substantive issues
just referred to.   For various reasons, the focus is for the
most part on northern Hiberno-English, although I draw on
comparative material from southern dialects throughout the
book.   Firstly and most importantly, northern dialects, in
contrast to the relative homogeneity of southern Hiberno-
English, exhibit a good deal of diversity within a fairly
small geographical area (Adams 1977: 56).   This makes the
north of Ireland an ideal place to investigate the manner in
which competition among conflicting local linguistic norms
resolves itself in conditions of dialect contact.   A second
reason for my concentration on northern dialects is that the
detailed historical accounts of Hiberno-English phonology
that are already available deal almost exclusively with
southern varieties (e.g. Hogan 1927, Sullivan 1976, Bliss
1979).   Thirdly, most of my own research has been undertaken
in the north, particularly while I was working on the project
Sociolinguistic variation and linguistic change in Belfast
(see Appendix 1 for details).   I have also been able to draw
on my own experience as a native of Belfast.

Preamble

Almost everything that has ever been written about Hiberno-English (henceforth HE) stresses the effects of contact with Irish Gaelic on its development. I take up this issue in a treatment of HE consonant phonology in Chapter 3 and give it more detailed attention elsewhere in a discussion of the growth and structure of the HE verb phrase (Harris 1984b). Although this is clearly an important area, it has been much discussed and it is not my intention to go over the same ground here. Rather the focus in this book is on two other aspects of language contact in the north of Ireland. Firstly, I examine the linguistic developments that have arisen from contact between the typologically divergent phonological systems of English and Scots dialects. Secondly, I attempt to isolate changes which appear to reflect contact between nonstandard HE and modern standard British varieties.

Chapter 1 is primarily descriptive and is intended as a necessary scene-setter for the historical developments that are discussed in the later chapters. It provides outline phonologies of the main types of northern HE that can be identified according to the different ways in which the tensions between English and Scots norms have been resolved. The conditions of contact are in many ways similar to those that obtained in the early days of British settlement in North America. It therefore comes as no surprise to discover close linguistic parallels between certain United States and Canadian dialects on the one hand and northern HE on the other. These similarities also reflect the fact that the major British colonisation of Ireland was roughly contemporary with that of North America. Hibernian and American dialects of English display many common seventeenth-century features which have since been lost from standard British varieties.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I identify several areas of northern HE phonology where change can be shown to be in progress and attempt to disentangle the various linguistic and extra-linguistic factors that constrain its direction and rate. Some changes appear to reflect adaptive shifts in the direction of external, standard norms. Others are more likely to

reflect competition between more English-like and more Scots-
like patterns.   While the outcome of such competition hinges
to a large extent on sociolinguistic forces, the rate at which
the changes in question diffuse appears to be subject to
phonological conditioning.   Nowhere is the tension between
English and Scots patterns more noticeable than in the area
of vowel phonology.   Some HE dialects display a typically
English system in which vowel length is largely phonemic.
That is, in these varieties it is possible to identify one
subsystem of lexically long nuclei and another of lexically
short ones.   In characteristically Scots dialects, on the
other hand, vowel length is to a large extent phonetically
conditioned.   Between these two types lies a range of 'mixed'
dialects which show varying degrees of compromise between
phonemic and positional length.   The diffusion of the English
and Scots length patterns across different dialects manifests
itself in a series of lengthening and shortening processes
which are consistently subject to a hierarchically ordered
range of phonological constraints.   The ranking of constraints
is reminiscent of results obtained elsewhere through methods
of variable rule analysis or implicational scaling.   In
Chapter 2, I attempt to interpret this ordering in terms of
a hierarchical model that has been developed within phonologi-
cal theory.   The application of theoretical principles to
the study of phonological variation of this sort, I argue,
takes us on the first step towards understanding why the
ordering patterns are as they are.   They can be shown to be
governed by natural phonetic factors, specifically certain
articulatory and aerodynamic constraints that are inherent
in speech production.
     In Chapter 3, I turn my attention to the sociolinguistic
factors that appear to dictate the direction of linguistic
change in northern HE.   I attempt a partial reconstruction
of the internal history of Belfast Vernacular with particular
reference to how the tensions between older rural and newer
urban norms are being resolved.   By inspecting present-day
sociolinguistic variation for signs of change in progress and
checking the results against historical records, it is

possible to identify the main phonological developments that
have been occurring over the last century or so.   Compara-
tive material from the city's rural hinterland dialects and
from the descendants of the original British source dialects
allows us to chart the continuing competition between English
and Scots linguistic features.   It is also possible to offer
a fairly clear picture of the sorts of adaptive change that
have been taking place in the vernacular as a result of
contact with external standard norms.

In the final two chapters, I discuss a number of theo-
retical problems associated with phonological merger against
the background of an examination of a couple of specific
issues in the history of English.   Thanks to its conservative
nature, HE provides the historical linguist with an invaluable
store of archaic patterns of distribution which were once
current in Early Modern English but which have since disappeared
from standard varieties.   Through direct observation of
this material it is possible to gain fresh insights into
some of the well-known problematical areas of English
historical phonology.   One of these, which I take up in
Chapter 4, concerns the fate of Middle English (ME) /ɛ:/
(as in meat) in Southern Standard English.   According to
some interpretations, it merged with ME /a:/ (as in mate),
only to reseparate and undergo merger with ME /e:/ (as in
meet).   Belfast Vernacular is one of several modern dialects
in which these vowels, at least potentially, remain three-way
distinct.   Comparative reconstruction of the changes that
have produced the current reflexes in these dialects contri-
butes to our understanding of what might have happened to ME
/ɛ:/ in the Southern Standard.   In addition, the results
have a bearing on the wider issue of the sorts of strategy
that can be implemented to avoid merger during chain-shifting.
In Chapter 5, I examine the other side of the coin.   I
identify ways in which phonological merger is achieved and
suggest how these might be modelled in terms of rules and
representations.   I take up the issue of falsely reported
mergers and discuss some of the theoretical and methodological
implications.

1 OUTLINE OF NORTHERN HIBERNO-ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

1.0   Most attempts at drawing the major dialect boundaries
within HE have been based on differences in vocabulary,
vowel quality, consonant phonetics, or the lexical distri-
bution of phonemes (e.g. Henry 1958, Gregg 1972, Barry 1981a).
However, from the point of view of historical reconstruction,
a more satisfactory classification is one which is based on
vowel-length differences.   This allows us to discern more
clearly the competing influences of English and Scots source
dialects on HE.   According to the typology adopted here, HE
dialects can be characterised as 'more English' or 'more
Scots'.   Dialects that are English in type display phonemic
vowel length, having one set of lexically short and one of
lexically long phonemes.   In typically Scots dialects, on
the other hand, vowel duration is to a large extent phoneti-
cally conditioned.   The manner in which the English language
was transported across the Irish Sea has meant that the
geography of the Scots-English divide in Britain has broadly
speaking been reproduced in Ireland.   Thus southern HE is
essentially English in type, while the dialects spoken in
the extreme north of the island are Scots in type.   Between
these two lies a range of transitional dialects with vowel-
length characteristics that exhibit in varying proportions a
compromise between the English and Scots systems.   This
chapter provides brief phonological descriptions of the three
main dialect-groups in the north of Ireland that can be
identified on the basis of the vowel-length typology: a
north Ulster Scots type, a south Ulster English type, and
a 'mixed' type spoken in mid Ulster.