1   Introduction

You just can nae but help but speak your mother tongue.

(Joan Dewar, 67, CMK)[1]

This book is about the roots of language and how they are reflected in the way
the language is spoken from one place to the next and from one generation
to the next. The particular language I focus on is English. As English becomes
the dominant global language, its development and the changes it is undergo-
ing are dramatic. Which changes are the legacy of its origins and which are the
product of novel influences in the places to which it was transported? This book
provides a unique perspective on these questions by going back to where the
roots still show – dialects spoken in remote areas of Northern Ireland, Lowland
Scotland and north-west England as represented by lengthy conversations with
elderly people in selected communities in these areas. Each community is situ-
ated within the counties that were heavily implicated in migrations to other
locations in the world during the early colonization period. The interesting
and uncommon features of English found in these locales may contribute to a
greater understanding of the English language, how it has changed over time
and why. Indeed, I argue that these dialects provide a window on the past –
hence the *Roots of English*.

In order to give readers a profound sense of the dialects that are the sub-
ject of this book, I have sprinkled the chapters with quips, stories and inter-
changes from the conversations upon which the linguistic analyses are based.
In many cases, readers may notice a relationship between the excerpt and the
topic of discussion – sometimes they will contain an illustrative example of
the linguistic feature. In other cases, I have simply chosen a poignant quote
that illustrates a particular dialect word or expression that arose spontaneously
in the conversations, e.g. *weans* and *it's a good job* in the quip below. Every
one of these excerpts comprises innumerable linguistic features typical of the
community. I have made note of some of them in the notes to each excerpt.
Many of the features are ubiquitous, well known across English vernaculars,
including regularized pasts, e.g. *knowed*, *come*, past tense *seen* and *done*,
among others (Trudgill, 2004: 14–15; Wagner, 2004: 169–70). Others, such

1

2   Introduction

as 2nd person plural *youse*, *till* for 'so that', punctual *whenever*, sentence-final *but*, *for* as a conjunction and plurals such as *sheafs* are reported to be typical of Ireland or Scotland (see Trudgill and Hannah, 1985). Many features can be found in compendia of varieties of English (e.g. Britain, 2007; Kortmann, Burridge, Mesthrie and Schneider, 2004; Milroy and Milroy, 1993; Trudgill, 1984, 1990). A few have only rarely been reported and offer readers fresh new possibilities for investigation. Some of the features in the quotes are examined in depth in this book; others are still in the long queue of features awaiting study in my research lab.

Weans

Aye, they just come on the phone– 'Morag could you come out the night there's some-body, ken. Such and such a body can nae manage yin'. 'Aye, Aye, I'll just come out aye'. She's just leaving the dogs. Says I, it's a good job it's no weans you've got for you would nae– could nae go! (Elizabeth Stevenson, 78, CMK)[2]

This book comprises a series of linguistic studies that draw on the theory and practice of several sub-fields of linguistics: sociolinguistics, dialectology and historical linguistics. Some of the terminology and technical terms may not be familiar to every reader. Therefore, I have also included, at relevant points in the discussion, definitions of the technical terms and notes explaining concepts. To further bolster the argumentation, I have on occasion added a claim or observation from an expert in the field, labelled 'words from the wise'.

The chapters are organized as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and situates the analyses that follow. Chapter 2 discusses the justification for studying dialects as a window on the past. Chapter 3 describes the distinctive archive of dialect materials used as a reference database and resource for the present book – The Roots Archive and The British Dialects Archive. Chapter 4 explains the methodology employed to explore the linguistic features of the dialects. While descriptive reports of words, features and phonological differ-ences are common in traditional studies of dialect, the approach I take in this book is to uncover the underlying patterns in the grammar. This requires a quantitative approach and the set of methodological practices that have come to be known as 'comparative sociolinguistics' (Poplack and Tagliamonte, 2001; Tagliamonte, 2002a). Chapters 5–8 present case studies of key linguis-tic variables from morphology to discourse-pragmatics. Each chapter intro-duces the variable(s), considers where the variation may have originated (a historical perspective) and where the variation is reported in the present day (a synchronic perspective). Then, I problematize what hypotheses can be put forward to examine the feature in the archive of data and the most appropriate method for studying the feature. Each analysis proceeds first by assessing the distribution of the linguistic feature by community and, where possible, the patterns underlying the use of the linguistic feature across communities. Each

section ends by providing an answer to the question 'What does this feature tell us about dialects and history?' Chapter 9 synthesizes the results from all the features and offers an interpretation based on comparative sociolinguistic principles. Chapter 10 offers some overarching interpretations that explain and evaluate the legacy of British and Northern Irish dialects.

Thee and thou

But see villages such as them, Dearham, where our Robert comes frae, they do– they're 'thee/thou'. Well the older, you divn't hear it now as much, eh. But they use lots of 'thee' and 'thou' and 'eh'. (Janice Mortimer, 60, MPT, 012)[3]

Legacies of English

It is fascinating to consider why the many varieties of English around the world are so different. Part of the answer to this question is their varying local circumstances, the other languages that they have come into contact with and the unique cultures and ecologies in which they subsequently evolved. However, another is the historically embedded explanation that comes from tracing their roots back to their origins in the British Isles. Indeed, leading scholars have argued that the study of British dialects is critical to disentangling the history and development of varieties of English everywhere in the world (Hickey, 2004; Montgomery, 2001; Trudgill, 1997: 749; 2004). Thus, another goal of this book is to contribute new evidence to the debates about why and how world Englishes differ (Mufwene, 2001).

   Research exploring the transatlantic relationship between British and American dialects is now nearly a century old. Tracking the origins of North American English, in particular, has emerged as an important focus of research in language variation and change (Clarke, 1997a, b; Hickey, 2004; Jones and Tagliamonte, 2004; Montgomery, 2001; Poplack, 2000). Critical evidence for this enterprise comes from the original input varieties, many of which were from Ireland, Scotland and England:

Understanding the character and evolution of American English, as well as its regional differences and much else of interest to linguistics, cultural historians, and others, rests, among other things, on *an adequate account of its antecedents from the British Isles.* [Italics mine] (Montgomery, 2001: 87–8)

There are several problems with this prescription. First, there is a longitudinal lack of awareness of northern English dialects, both in the British Isles themselves (Wales, 2006), but most acutely in North America. Second, in considering the relationship between British and transplanted dialects, many previous investigations have relied on secondary source materials (dialect grammars and literary works) for comparison (see, e.g., Hickey, 2004; Kurath, 1964), with only rare exceptions (see Kurath, 1964, who based his research on Lowman's

fieldwork in England). The problem is that dialectological reports are often selective and tend not to provide reliable structural analyses. Even in the case where investigations have targeted more informal sources (personal letters and court records), there is always the question of whether or not these materials approximate the spoken language and to what degree. Third, as Montgomery (2001: 95) admonishes, the reference point in the British Isles must 'be understood within proper sociohistorical contexts' to which he adds that much more information is needed from 'specific communities'.

Bake turf[4]

They done what they call bake turf. Did you ever see bake turf? [Interviewer] No. [018] Well, the bake turf is er- they cut a big hole. And 'tis filled with water, you know what I mean. And they shovel this stuff in till it, do you know what I mean, like. Til it's like a slurry. Then it's lifted out. It's shovelled out on till a flat surface. And a man goes across like that and he shapes it, like that there. Makes like a track, like a trough. Then when it's all dried in the summertime, it can be lifted in a real turf … They dig them out with it, with the spades … But they were very very hard and long burners too like, you know. Like one of them calls flow turf and this other's bake turf, you know what I mean, the bake turf. (Alec Murray, 88 CLB 018)[5]

There is already an extensive body of work on northern Englishes. Indeed, innumerable dialect studies have been conducted of communities in Scotland (e.g. Dieth, 1932; Macafee, 1992b; Miller, 1993), Ireland (e.g. Corrigan, 2010; Filppula, 1999; Harris, 1993; Hickey, 2006), and England (e.g. Beal, 1993; Dyer, 1891; Hedevind, 1967; Masam, 1948; Shorrocks, 1998a, b; Wright, 1892). A corresponding wealth of information can be found on dedicated websites.[6] Nevertheless, the available literature contains some key lacunae. There is still relatively little comprehensive data from dialects in the specific source regions of North American migrations (Montgomery, 2001: 90). This gap is telling, especially since many of the linguistic features that have figured prominently in the North American literature can still be observed in Northern Ireland and Britain. The presence of archaic forms in the existing dialects presents an invaluable opportunity to bring new evidence to bear on the transmission of language in time and space. In addition, the nature of these materials as community-based projects using sociolinguistic interviewing techniques offers a substantial body of materials for analysis. Finally, there is the intrinsic value of adding these regions to the available pool of traditional dialects before they are gone forever.

In summary, the *original* source dialects of emigrants out of Ireland, Scotland and England no longer exist, and the fragments that remain are often insufficient for large-scale comparative analyses. However, the descendant dialects endure, spoken widely and proudly in the homelands of many of the early migrants. Most importantly, they retain many of the same features they had at earlier points in time. This means that analysis of the contemporary varieties

may provide insight into the original source dialects that were transported to other places in the world.

Words from the wise

'Old English and old Norse were so closely related that there were no significant differences in the inventory of morphological categories between the two languages.' (Trudgill, 2010:25)

Background

Youse go paddle your ain canoe. (Robin Mawhinney, 55, PVG)[7]

In historical linguistics, the study of peripheral dialects is considered to be one of the most informative means to shed light on the origins and development of languages (Anttila, 1989: 294; Hock, 1986: 442). Because of their geographic location or isolated social and/or political circumstances, dialects tend not to be affected by some of the changes that their cohorts in mainstream communities undergo. Conventionally, however, data from regional dialects has been the province of the dialectologist, and traditional practice has been heavily descriptivist, with a focus on word choice and traditional vocabulary items. In contrast, historical and comparative linguists have typically resorted to historical written sources and formal theories for their interpretation, while focusing on syntactical phenomena. However, recent research suggests that dialect data can contribute fruitful evidence for many types of linguistic inquiry – the study of language structure and meaning (Henry, 1995, 1998), language contact (Chaudenson, 1992; Mufwene, 1996) and dialect endangerment (Mufwene, 2001: 145–66; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 1995), in addition to the more common studies relating to linguistic change over time and space (Labov, 1994b; Trudgill, 1983). Moreover, researchers have shown that dialect phenomena provide ideal evidence for viewing intralanguage variation in universal grammar (Trudgill and Chambers, 1991: 294) and the effects of competing linguistic systems (Labov, 1998), and can reveal important insights into the links between diachronic and synchronic linguistic inquiry (Labov, 1989; Trudgill, 1986, 1996). All these studies highlight the important contribution that dialects can make to ongoing developments in a number of diverse fields of linguistics. Such materials can be useful to much current research whose ability to address many of the new questions (more) adequately has been handicapped by the absence of large corpora of synchronic dialects.

Norwegian

Because it was always said, you know, round here that a lot of our dialect was Norwegian, you know, I mean, a lot of words as 'flate', and 'flay' and 'yam' and all this sort of stuff. (Andrew Meyers, 63, MPT)[8]

2 Dialects as a window on the past

Aye, you know, it's good history here.

(Harry Caddell, 83, CLB)

In this chapter, I deepen the argument that dialects in Northern Ireland, Lowland Scotland and northern England are a particularly important and interesting test site for the study of English. They also have implications for the study of language variation and change more generally. For simplicity, in this book I will refer to these dialects as 'northern' following a long line of researchers who have considered the northern climes of England, Lowland Scotland and Northern Ireland to be a broadly cohesive region in terms of language use (Beal, 1993, 1997; Wales, 2000).

There is extensive discussion in the literature about the so-called 'north–south divide' in Britain. The boundary where north begins and south ends differs depending on the point of view of the beholder and the chronological year. Moreover, the location of this watershed has changed from one time to the next (for lively discussion, see Wales, 2006). This is due, at least in part, to the fact that the dividing line between north and south is not definitive. Dialectologists differ in their views and so do laypeople. Moreover, the boundary seems to have moved further north in recent decades (Trudgill, 1990: 33–4, 63–5). This highlights the complex cultural base for any claims regarding a north–south dichotomy (Wales, 2006). Nevertheless, a general consensus arises suggesting that a gross southern British vs northern English distinction is reasonably valid (Montgomery, 2001: 145; Wales, 2006). As Weinreich (1954: 397) cogently argued, the study of borders and centres in dialectology is imminently linked to 'culture areas' and as Wales (2006: 24) contends, 'Northern English is as much a cultural construct as it is a reality.'

Miners

But whippets and greyhounds, these were the kind of things miners had. (William Burns, 82, CMK, 037)

Thus, the long history of the British Isles presents a strong case for believing in a north–south dichotomy for the use of one form or another, or more

6

important, as we shall see, a distinction in the relative frequencies of one form or another. An ideal means to test this is to conduct a comparison across representative dialects. The Roots Archive along with the British Dialects Archive permit investigation of north–south differences since they comprise two communities situated in the south and six in what can reasonably be construed to be 'north'.

One of the fundamental axioms of language change as well as an 'essential ingredient of most work in historical linguistics' (Hopper and Traugott, 1993: 38) is the Uniformitarian Principle – the idea that 'knowledge of processes that operated in the past can be inferred by observing ongoing processes in the present' (Christy, 1983: ix). Contemporary dialects offer an important adjunct to this, particularly those spoken in isolated communities. Such communities, because of their peripheral geographic location or isolated social and/or political circumstances, tend to preserve features typical of earlier stages in the history of a language. They are essentially relic areas as far as the process of linguistic change is concerned (Anttila, 1989: 294; Hock, 1986: 442), and their use in tracking historical change follows from a long tradition begun in Germany and continued by dialectologists in the twentieth century (Kurath, 1949; Orton and Halliday, 1963).

Words from the wise

'The most acute problem of all language historians … [is] the lack of evidence of the spoken language of the past.' (Rissanen, 1994)

British roots; American soil

During the eighteenth century, at least 275,000 people left the British Isles for North America (Bailyn and DeWolfe, 1986; Fischer, 1989: 609; Montgomery, 2001; Wood, 1989). Although these migrants came from many different locales, the vast majority who immigrated between 1717 and 1775 originated from Northern Ireland (Ulster in particular), the Lowlands of Scotland and the northern counties of England (Campbell, 1921: 51; Fischer, 1989: 619; Landsman, 1985: 8).

American transplants

And I think when they were going to America they had to bake enough oatcake to keep them going on the boat, hadn't they? [008] Oh aye, them days it was desperate getting to America. You see with that long in the boat, six-to-eight weeks in the boat, you know. Mind they suffered something them'uns went away there too. And there's Irishmen and Irish people everywhere in America. (Rob Paisley, 78, CLB, 003)[1]

The main North American destinations of these emigrants were southwestern Pennsylvania, western parts of Maryland and Virginia, North and

South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky and the Appalachian Mountains (Crozier, 1984: 315; Fischer, 1989; Leyburn, 1962: 184–255). While many areas involved British settlers from a wide range of other dialect regions (McDavid, 1985), census data reveals that the emigrants from Northern Ireland and northern Britain – groups referred to as 'northerners' – (Fischer, 1989) often vastly outnumbered other population groups. In fact, in some regions these emigrants were so numerous that they are said to have established a 'cultural hegemony' (Fischer, 1989: 635). Montgomery, in particular (Montgomery, 1997; 2001: 128, 134), notes 'the Scotch-Irish element is quite broad and deep'. In Montgomery's extensive study of verbal –s in third person plural contexts he argues strongly for linguistic lineage:

the remarkable retention of linguistic patterns and constraints across more than four centuries and two continents in the evolution of Scottish English into Scotch-Irish English into Appalachian English. (Montgomery, 1997: 137)[2]

Such large-scale demographic trends suggest that there are socio-historical links between Northern Ireland, Lowland Scotland and northern England and the mid- to southern United States (Fischer, 1989). Indeed, Montgomery (2001: 145) argues that the speech of the Ulster Scots emigrants 'is responsible for much of the diversity of present-day American English grammar'.

Muck, scunner

Having been born and raised in Scotland, two of the words were dear to my heart. The first was 'muck' as in to muck out a room or closet etc, meaning to give it a good cleaning. The second was 'scunner', meaning a pest or nuisance, or to take an aversion to something. Both of these were common words in the part of Scotland in which I grew up, and I was astounded to learn that they are used in northern Ontario. I can't help but wonder if they are remnants of language from Scottish settlers in the area. (email from a listener, Northern and Southern Expressions, *Ontario Today*, CBC Radio 1, Canada 18 October 2011)[3]

Muck out

Aye, used to get up early on a morning and feed up and then er if I was back in reasonable time on a night, which wasn't very often, I used to muck out. Feed on a night and then muck out, you see. (Harry Stainton, 59, YRK, 013)[4]

Muck in

We just built it with lads out ot club. 'Cos there's plumbers and electricians and builders. And they all just mucked in together and that was it, aye. (Janice Mortimer, 60, MPT, 012)[5]

Tangled roots

Unfortunately for the enterprise of transatlantic comparison, the relationship between Northern Ireland, Lowland Scotland and English locales and

particular dialect regions where the varieties of English was transported is complicated by extreme dialect mixture. In the United States in particular, some researchers have argued that the contact from so many disparate varieties makes comparison virtually impossible (see Montgomery 2001: 86–151). This is because the early colonial days of settlement in the United States not only had in-migration from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but also indigenous populations and migration from Europe. Most importantly, there was also the mass importation of African slaves (Wood, 1974). This language-contact situation has led to the most heated sociolinguistic debate of the last century. Among the varieties of English that arose from the colonial southern United States is that spoken by the contemporary descendants of the African populations – often referred to as African American Vernacular English or by its abbreviation AAVE. This variety is quite distinct from Standard North American English. One of the most vexed questions of modern North American sociolinguistics is why this is the case. Early African American slaves would have acquired their variety of English either en route to the United States or more likely on the plantations and homesteads of the American South. But it is necessary to determine the nature of the varieties to which they were exposed. The fact that AAVE is so different has often been traced to the dialects from Northern Ireland, Scotland and England. However, they have as often been traced to African and Caribbean creoles. There is a long history of overly simplistic dichotomies on this issue which can be summarized as follows: (1) a 'creole origins hypothesis', based on linguistic parallels between AAVE and Caribbean creoles; (2) an 'English dialect hypothesis', based on linguistic parallels with the Irish and British dialects spoken by early plantation staff. In reality, the answer probably lies somewhere in between. Many arguments prevail based on one line of evidence or another. Perhaps the most damning is the lack of evidence of which populations were where and under what circumstances.

The debate over the origins of AAVE still rages on with no consensus in sight (see, e.g., Rickford, 2006). It is therefore both timely and relevant to present the language materials from the Roots Archive and the British Dialects Archive since they offer a crucial piece to the puzzle: robust linguistic evidence from people who currently live in the original dialect regions of the migrants to North America in the early settlement days. Of course, it is necessary to question whether the language spoken by elderly individuals from these dialect regions today can be taken to represent the language of their ancestors two or three hundred years ago. Moreover, due to the complex settlement patterns and contact situations of the early colonial days, now remote in time, it becomes critical to carefully scrutinize the linguistic evidence that remains. I now consider a case study as a model for exploring dialect affinity across time and space.

Digging deep

Harris (1986: 193) once asked what predisposed certain salient nonstandard British features to became widely established in Atlantic contact vernaculars while other dialect features from the same locales did not. In this case, he was referring to preverbal *do*. Subsequently, other regionally delimited dialect features have been discovered which offer key insights into the links between and across dialects.

Definition

'Vernacular' is a term that is used to describe the basic language of a population – 'real language in use' (Milroy, 1992: 66). It is the way people talk when they are not paying attention to how they *should* be talking.

The use of *did* in affirmative periphrastic constructions came to light in a study of Samaná English (SAM), a variety spoken in the Samaná peninsula of the Dominican Republic, as in (1) (Poplack and Sankoff, 1987; Tagliamonte, 1991):

(1)   a. They had a little road way out there what they *did go* over. (SAM/S)
      b. I *did like* to eat the sugar. I used to like to eat the sugar. (SAM/J) (both from Tagliamonte, 1991)

Some time later, the same rare and fading dialectal feature was found in Wincanton (Somerset), as in (2) (Jones and Tagliamonte, 2004).

(2)   a. And mi husband always used to tell me I *did* always *speak* before I *did think*. (WIN/d)
      b. 'Cos the nineteen-twenties and thirties was, well like 'tis now, farming *did* hardly *pay*. (WIN/g)

Further scrutiny of these two dialect corpora revealed that Somerset and Samaná shared numerous conservative features including perfective *be*, as in (3), pronoun exchange and *have* regularization, as in (4), bare past temporal reference verbs, as in (5), irregular verbs, as in (6), existential *it*, as in (7), *for to* complementizers, as in (8), and invariant *be*, as in (9).

(3)   a. I'm glad I'*m not got* that sort of worry. (WIN/e)
      b. You see coffee, I'*m got* it there by the bag, look at it there. (SAM/M)

(4)   a. And *her* have the pointer. She used to use it instead of a cane. (WIN/001)
      b. She lives in the central street, number nine, though in the same street *her* have number nine. (SAM/S)

(5)   a. I used to catch 'em with a stick and a rope, put on their horns, and once you held 'em a couple times they *fell* down. They'd stop soon as they *see* you coming. (WIN/g)