

## **New speakers of Irish English: Usage, Self-identification and Social attribution**

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### **Abstract**

This paper’s aim is to establish whether newcomers to Ireland (those born and raised outside Ireland and now resident in Ireland) can be designated as “new speakers” of IrE. The term “new speakers” is generally associated with later acquisition of a language. We extend it here to include new speakers of *varieties* of a language (IrE) in order to explore speaker identity in relation to IrE. Criteria identified by Jaffe (2015) to define new speakers include usage, self-attribution (identifying oneself as a speaker of a variety) and other-attribution (being recognised as one by some other group). Our main dataset consists of data gathered through semi-structured conversation-style interviews and follow-up sessions with 14 newcomers (both L1 and L2 English speakers) representative of the adult immigrant population in the Mid-West region of the Republic of Ireland. The interviews allowed both for the collection of naturally-occurring speech data, as well as eliciting speakers’ orientation and commitment to Ireland. In follow-up sessions, the participants identified features (pragmatic, grammatical, lexical and phonological) that they associated with IrE and reported their usage of such features. From this dataset, four participants were selected for in-depth analysis, two L1 English speakers (from USA) and two L2 English speakers (from Brazil). These pairs were chosen as they have similar language and cultural backgrounds. Both datasets were analysed qualitatively for evidence of self- and other-attribution as well as the features associated by the participants with IrE, and their naturally-occurring usage of these features. The findings revealed that participants both use and acknowledge their use of IrE features in particular contexts; they also report the ratification of their use of IrE features by others. However, there is a tendency to distance themselves from identifying as IrE speakers. This demonstrates how self- and other-attribution as regards usage of these features does not necessarily equate with self-identification as an IrE speaker.

**Keywords:** Irish English; new speaker; self-identification; other-attribution

## **1. Introduction**

Ireland's linguistic environment has changed dramatically in recent decades due to net immigration, with over 16 per cent of the population of the Republic of Ireland (RoI) being classified as “non-Irish” in April 2025 (CSO, 2025). This change has given rise to research on the relationship between immigrants to Ireland and Irish English (IrE), for example, Migge (2012), Corrigan and Diskin (2020) and Diskin-Holdaway (2021).

The focus of this paper is on establishing whether newcomers to Ireland (i.e. those who were born and raised outside Ireland and have become resident) can be designated as “new speakers” of IrE. The term “new speakers” (see Section 2.1 below) is generally associated with later acquisition of a particular language. However, in this study, we extend the concept to include new speakers of *varieties* of a particular language, in this case IrE, in order to explore how language identity relates to use of this variety.

Among criteria identified by Jaffe (2015) to define new speakers are usage of the language/variety, self-identification (identifying oneself as a speaker of a variety) and social attribution (being recognised as one by some other group). We will investigate the following questions in relation to these criteria: Do the newcomers use/see themselves as using IrE features? Do others see them as using such features? If so, does this necessarily lead to them having an identity as an IrE speaker?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. The concept of “new speaker”**

The concept of the “new speaker” has been more commonly associated with minority language contexts, or with later acquisition of a language (O'Rourke & Walsh, 2020). As outlined above, our study extends the new speaker concept to include new speakers of

*varieties* of a language, in our case IrE.

The term “new speaker” has been defined as “adults who acquire a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence and practice in the variety in question” (Jaffe, 2015, p. 25). It is important to point out that, for this study, acquisition relates to the specific variety of English (IrE) rather than the English language in general. This extension of the concept means that “new speaker” includes those who may already speak another variety of English as L1 or L2. For example, a new speaker of IrE could have previously acquired, or even be a native speaker of a different variety of English (e.g. North American English). Jaffe (2015) proposes the following criteria in defining the new speaker: (1) age of acquisition; (2) sequence and manner of acquisition; (3) type and level of linguistic and meta-linguistic competence; (4) frequency and type of use, and as previously referred to (5) self-identification and (6) social attribution. The focus of this paper is on Jaffe’s final three criteria (4) usage (5) self-identification and (6) social attribution, the final two of which we will discuss now.

## **2.2. Self- and other-attribution**

The concept of the new speaker can be associated with a social status or identity that is “the dynamic product of both self- and other-attributions and stances” (Jaffe, 2015, p. 29). Jaffe (*ibid.*, pp. 29 -30) argues that self-identification is “conditioned” by other-attribution. The extent to which speakers see themselves as a speaker of a given language or variety will depend to some degree on their recognition as such by others. However, all self-attributions are not necessarily ratified by others. Perceived speaker competence in the particular variety can have an impact on such recognition. Jaffe (*ibid.*) observes that the perception of competence in a variety for a speaker may depend on the evaluative framework of the ratifier. “Sometimes, relatively limited linguistic tokens are ‘taken as’ indices of significant competence; on other occasions relatively substantial tokens are

misrecognized or ignored” (ibid., p. 30). The identification by the self and the other of the linguistic tokens that represent IrE for them can shed light on the factors that give rise to self-identification and social attribution. The concepts of language ownership and authenticity are relevant to such representations.

### **2.3. Ownership and authenticity**

Ó Murchadha et al. (2018, p. 4) observe how the term “new speaker” refers to those who use and claim ownership of a language that is not seen as belonging to them, or to “people like them”. This designation encapsulates the concepts of self-identification (using and claiming ownership of a language or variety) and other-attribution (not) perceived as belonging to them). The notion of ownership of a language or variety also relates to that of authenticity as regards new speakers of that variety. Woolard (2008, p. 304) contends that, according to the ideology of authenticity, the value of a language lies in its relationship to a community. Its perception as authentic depends on it being perceived by its speakers as being “from somewhere” as opposed to anonymity, as “being from nowhere” (Woolard, 2008, 2016). Therefore, if the variety cannot be linked to a social or geographical “somewhere”, it may be perceived as lacking authenticity and value. The distinctiveness of IrE as a variety linked to this geographical “somewhere” (the island of Ireland) strengthens its authenticity and its value as a symbol of Irishness.

However, newcomers may feel a lack of ownership of IrE and therefore believe that their use of IrE is not authentic. It has been observed that newcomers to a particular country may be reluctant to use the language or variety of that country as they believe they do not sound “natural” or “real” (McEwan-Fujita, 2010, p. 29; O’Rourke, 2011). Coupland (2003) attempts to examine how authenticity is interpreted in sociolinguistic research by proposing a typology of sociolinguistic identities, which allows us to consider

traditional notions of what “authentic” language is. This typology includes what he refers to as “fully owned, unmediated language” and also “language indexing personal authenticity” (Coupland, 2003, p. 421). This requires that to be “authentic”, speakers must “be themselves”. (ibid., p. 424). This may pose a dilemma for newcomers in that they may believe that by using IrE features, they are compromising their identity. However, identities can be context-dependent and the role of speaker agency is crucial in this, as we discuss below.

#### **2.4. Speaker agency**

The notion of the role of speaker agency in variety choice and its relationship with identity is particularly pertinent to this study. Speaker agency is the focus of Eckert’s (2012) third wave of variation studies. Eckert (ibid.) identifies three co-existing “waves” of variation studies. In the first two waves, variation was seen as marking social categories. With the third wave, however, the focus moved to speaker agency and stylistic practice and the way in which linguistic variation is used by speakers to construct a particular identity. In the third wave, speakers are seen “not as passive and stable carriers of dialect, but as stylistic agents, tailoring linguistic styles in ongoing and lifelong projects of self-construction and differentiation” (Eckert, 2012, pp. 97-98). This suggests that speakers have agency over their identities and that these identities are not static but may be context-dependent.

As regards what motivates newcomers to Ireland to “style” themselves as speakers of IrE, such motivations can be instrumental (e.g. to gain employment) or symbolic (based on the potential of language for integration and identification (Ó Murchadha et al., 2018, p. 5)). As Jaffe (2025, p. 29) points out, we need to consider speakers’ personal choice and agency in relation to external factors such as those associated with pressures relating to education, family or profession. Arguably, the acquisition of IrE by migrants, as

opposed to another variety of English, may be seen as less important for gaining employment than for social integration or identity motivations. A study by Debaene and Harris (2013) on the use of English by Polish migrants in the RoI found that while Polish migrants in Ireland were aware of having acquired IrE accent features, the majority claimed that they did not consciously aim to acquire an IrE accent, but rather had a more pragmatic goal of communicative proficiency in English.

As regards newcomers to Ireland who already have English as their first language (L1) e.g. speakers of General American or British English, these varieties of English may be seen by the L1 newcomers as having more linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 18) than IrE. It could be argued that newcomer English L2 speakers have more to gain than their L1 counterparts from acquiring IrE, as the variety of English associated with their birth country may have less linguistic capital. On the other hand, L2 speakers may want to retain or acquire an arguably more prestigious or “standard” variety of English than IrE e.g. General American or British English, and may dissociate from IrE. Such motivations may impact their self-identification in relation to IrE.

### **3. Data and method**

This study is based on two datasets: 1) the *Orientation to Ireland* interviews and 2) the *IrE Awareness and Use* interviews. Participants in both datasets include 14 newcomers (i.e. those who have arrived after the age of 18 and have lived in Ireland for more than 12 months), currently living in the Mid-West region of the RoI. This includes speakers with English as L1 as well as those for whom it is an L2. The *Orientation to Ireland* interviews are semi-structured conversation-style interviews (20 minutes approximately). Each participant engaged in two such interviews, one with the L2 English speaker researcher and a second, immediately after the first, with the IrE speaking researcher. These interviews took place on a third level college campus in Limerick City. The purpose of

the two interviews was to allow for examination of accommodative phenomena in further research. In addition, the two interviews allowed for the collection of data with less risk of social desirability bias i.e. Participants may have felt pressure to be more positive in their comments about Ireland with the native IrE speaker. For the purposes of this study, we combined the two interviews for each participant. The aim of these interviews is, on the one hand, to allow for the collection of naturally-occurring speech data, and, on the other hand, to elicit the speakers' attitude, orientation and commitment to long-term residence in Ireland.

Interview questions (similar for both interviewers) centered on topics including participants' reasons for coming to Ireland (to ascertain the extent to which they had agency in the decision), their expectations prior to arrival, what they saw as the main differences between Ireland and their home country, their likes and dislikes in relation to Ireland (to investigate attitude to Ireland), their work/study in Ireland and their plans for the future (to examine their commitment to life in Ireland). The semi-structured nature of the interviews was designed to put the participants at ease and to enable the researchers to follow up on potentially sensitive issues, such as identity.

The interviews were complemented by *IrE Awareness and Use* interviews, which were conducted online. Each participant took part in just one such interview, which was conducted at least one week after the *Orientation to Ireland* interviews with both researchers present. The participants were asked (without prompting from the interviewers) about the features that they associated with IrE, as well as the extent of their use of such features and the contexts in which they use them (if any). The online forum (Teams) was chosen for these follow-up interviews for the participants' convenience.

All recordings were transcribed using *Whisper* transcription software, which was manually checked for accuracy by the researchers. The data was stored on a password-

protected cloud platform. The participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. The choice of pseudonym was based on names associated with the participants' country of origin.

Both sets of recording transcriptions were manually analysed to look for evidence of self- and other attribution. Identification of self-reported features (lexical, grammatical, phonetic and pragmatic) that the participants associated with IrE, and their naturally-occurring usage of these features was analysed with the aid of the corpus linguistics software i.e. *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al., 2004, 2014).

For the purposes of this study, four participants were selected for in-depth analysis. These comprised two L1 English speakers (from USA) and two L2 English speakers (from Brazil). This selection was based on the similar language and cultural backgrounds of the pairs of participants and also its representation of L1 and L2 English speakers. In addition, according to the 2022 RoI census of population (CSO, 2022), Brazilian citizens were among the groups which increased by the biggest numbers in the RoI since 2016, while those with dual Irish-American citizenship were among the largest groups of dual Irish citizens (CSO, 2022). While efforts were made to select a comparable sample of participants, we acknowledge that the sample differs in age ranges, genders and lengths of residence (amongst other social characteristics), and that these factors may well have an impact on how newcomers choose to style themselves or on how they are perceived by others. Table 1 below illustrates the metadata collected for the participants.

**TABLE 1*****Participant metadata***

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Nationality and Birthplace</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>First language</b>	<b>Accent/dialect (self-declared by the participant)</b>	<b>Length of time in Ireland</b>	<b>Other languages</b>	<b>Other relevant information</b>
Fernanda	Brazil	30-35	Brazilian  Portuguese	“American  English with  Irish English  influence”	7 years	English	Irish partner
Lucas	Brazil	30-35	Brazilian  Portuguese	“American  English”	7 years	English;  French	
Kathy	USA	50-55	English	“North  American  English- New  York”	24 years	French;  basic Czech	Irish partner;  children born  and raised in  Ireland
Molly	USA	35-40	English	“Hodgepodge”	5 years	Basic  Spanish and  basic Irish	

The metaadata included nationality and birthplace, age, first language, self-declared accent/dialect (i.e. accent/dialect as described by the participants themselves in the profiling questionnaire), length of time in Ireland, other languages and any other relevant information, e.g. the participant having an Irish partner.

## 4. Findings and analysis

In our examination of the data, we use Jaffe's (2015) criteria of participants' usage of the variety, self-identification and social attribution (see Section 2). In relation to usage of IrE, we look at speaker claims of use of IrE features and self-reported contexts of use. We also examine the features identified by the speakers as representing IrE for them, as well as their naturally-occurring use of IrE in the speech data. In investigating self-identification, speakers' attitude as regards ownership of IrE, their self-identification (attribution) with IrE, as well as their commitment to long-term residence in Ireland are examined. Finally, to establish social (other) attribution, we look for evidence of ratification of such use by others i.e. members of the IrE speech community and those external to that community. We look first at the L1 speaker data.

### 4.1. Irish English Usage, Self-Identification and Social Attribution in L1 speakers

The L1 speakers chosen for analysis are both USA born and raised. As seen in Table 1 (Section 3), Kathy (age 50-55) was born and raised in New York and had been living in Ireland for 24 years at the time of the study. She has an Irish husband and two children, both of whom were born in Ireland. Kathy describes her accent/dialect as "North American English/ New York". Molly is in the 35-40 age-bracket, was born and raised in the mid-west of the USA and had been living in Ireland for just 5 years at the time of the study. Her self-declared accent/dialect is a mix of accents which she describes as "hodgepodge".

#### 4.1.1. Usage of Irish English with reference to L1 speakers

Molly claims that she is competent in using Irish English (Example (1) below). She reports using IrE phrases in her text messages like *Ah shur look it's grand*. Molly also refers to her self-awareness of using IrE features in examples (1) and (2) below.

1. I'm now freakishly good [at Irish English].
2. ...there's a few times where even I'll be like, oh, man, that was real Irish

Kathy also reports self-awareness of her use of IrE features in examples (3) and (4).

3. I can remember quite clearly yeah when they said 'your one' or 'your man' it took me ages to figure out who are you talking about and now I do the same thing
4. I picked up the [Irish] T

Molly identifies a number of features that represent IrE for her. They are mainly prosodic (e.g. she refers to the speed, lilt and melodic nature of IrE) and lexical (e.g. using *so* at end of sentence, using *grand*, *craic* and *girl* (in addressing a female of any age) and using *shur*, *come on*, *you know yourself* (see Dolan, 2004)). In the course of the interview, she uses words associated with IrE (highlighted in bold in examples (5) and (6)).

5. I chose Ireland just because I met some people when I lived in Australia, and they were great **craic**.
6. Everything else is **grand**.

In the above extracts, Molly uses the IrE words *craic* and *grand* naturally in the course of the conversation. She also uses other words and expressions associated with IrE, but these are used more as exemplifications. In (7) below, for example, she uses IrE-associated words (in bold) to refer to how she typically responds to attempts on the part of Irish people to engage her in conversation about the weather, a trait which is stereotypically associated with Irish people (Rowley, 2024).

7. and I can only talk about the weather for so long. I'm like **shur** look I'm out of here <\$/E>laughs</E> ah yeah its lashing **grand** gotta go

As regards external pressures to use IrE (Jaffe, 2025, p. 29), Molly identifies a need to adopt IrE features when socialising.

8. But at the pub I definitely do it like if some guy was being, like, sassy to me, I'd look at him and I'm like, ah, shur, come on

When asked what features represent IrE for her, Kathy identifies both phonological (e.g. slit-T (see Hickey, 1984)) and lexical features of IrE (e.g. *your man/your one* to refer respectively to any specific male or female (Dolan, 2004, p. 258)). She also refers to pragmatic features (e.g. frequent use of politeness forms such as *sorry* (Vaughan, 2024, p. 455) and frequent use of taboo language (Schweinberger, 2018)).

While Kathy's speech data reveals use of accent features such as slit-T, unlike Molly, there is no evidence of Kathy's naturally-occurring use of lexical features associated with IrE. However, at the pragmatic level, the use of *sorry* "whether or not it is required" has been cited as characteristic of IrE (ibid., p. 455), and this is notable in Kathy's speech data (examples (9) and (10)). This aligns with the findings of Debaene and Harris's (2013) who found that Polish migrants in Ireland used more politeness forms in Ireland than is customary in Poland due to differing politeness norms in the two contexts.

9. Oh sorry- still thinking in miles

10. I'm sorry the story does have a point

The next section examines self-identification in L1 speakers.

#### 4.1.2 *Self-identification with reference to L1 speakers*

As regards identifying as an IrE speaker, Molly is quite forceful in distancing herself from ownership of IrE.

11. am my speech patterns my personality I'm very direct and assertive and that's not the Irish way <SE>laughs</SE>

Molly acknowledges that she has “distant” Irish ancestry, is involved in cultural events and has acquired basic Irish language.

12. my experience was very much Irish culture like weekends away we'd be at trad festivals or am at the Fleadh or like a few weekends ago I went back to - for a Feis

However, she is reluctant to claim Irish identity, due to what she sees as the “stigma” of Americans claiming Irish heritage.

13. but you know there's that stigma in Ireland that's hilarious that Americans come over and we're always like ah yeah I'm Irish ... so I try to stay away from that one ...I'm like I'm just gonna keep living there and not tell anybody I'm Irish <SE>laughs</SE>

When asked if she felt Irish in any way, Molly responded:

14. okay yeah but I've been here long enough that it's in my bones like I love Ireland and I love so many of the things here but I still am very much a social outlier ... I think that the societal and cultural differences definitely make me feel like a social outlier

In relation to her commitment to Ireland, Molly did not see herself as remaining in Ireland long-term, citing the weather as a deterrent. However, she did not have a desire to return

to the USA, expressing a preference for Europe, Australia or Canada.

Turning to self-identification in relation to Kathy, her lack of agency in using IrE features is clear, not only from her responses in the profiling questionnaire in which self-declared accent/dialect is “North American English - New York”, but also in her statements in (15), (16) and (17), in relation to her use of features of IrE; these examples show a lack of agency and ownership in her use of these features, as indicated in phrases in bold.

15. am but the accent kind of **changed on its own**

16. Interestingly something I had two things I had noticed and interestingly <name> pointed out <E>laughs</E>to me I picked up the [Irish] T and I **can't seem to undo it.**

17. I can remember quite clearly yeah when they said “your one” or “your man” ... and now I do the same thing **-not very often.**

This lack of agency is also evident in Kathy’s reference to familial pressures to change her vocabulary from that associated with the USA to the Irish terminology.

18. Oh definitely expressions and they changed more once I had kids. I think it's because they were unaccepting of me saying things. <E>laughs</E> like trash can they were like no that's a bin so it was actually probably easier to just say bin

Kathy also expresses confusion in relation to her identity.

19. cos I don't know what I am anymore. <E>laughs</E> I don't know what I am now I'm Irish I'm American I'm all over the shop

In speaking about commitment to long-term residence in Ireland, Kathy does not see a

return to the USA as a real possibility.

20. am but yeah <math>\Rightarrow</math> I I I <math>\Rightarrow</math> ah it's very hard to see myself going back ..  
am I've been other places but and then for a while I thought I'd live here for  
five years and then go back then I guess when you start to have kids ... ... and  
now yes I miss my friends but I don't know it's very crowded in New York

The example suggests an element of ambiguity, resignation and a lack of agency in Kathy's decision to stay in Ireland.

#### *4.1.3 Social attribution with reference to L1 speakers*

Turning now to social attribution, Molly refers to ratification of her use of IrE features by ratifiers who are both internal to the IrE speech community and external to it. Interestingly, in example (21), she does not accept the ratification of her Irish accent by her friends and family when she returns to the USA.

21. Especially being home when I use them, I get called out on having an Irish accent now and I'm like that's not intentional. It's just the things that go in with it, like the lilt and the speed and all of that kind of combines, where people then think I have an accent, but I don't.

She also refers to how her friends notice changes in her text messaging style when she moves between the two locations.

22. So when I go back home, my texting, Yeah, completely changes, to the point where my Irish friends will know when I'm back home just based on my text. Oh, yeah. And then, like my best friend who lives back home, when I come back here, she'll notice the change when I'm back here.



## 4.2. Irish English Usage, Self-Identification and Social Attribution in L2 speakers

The L2 participants (see Table 1 in Section 3), Fernanda and Lucas were both born and raised in southern Brazil, with Brazilian Portuguese as their L1. They were both in the age range 30-35 and had been living in Ireland for 7 years at the time of the study. Fernanda's self-declared accent/dialect is "American English with IrE influence", while Lucas's is "American English". Fernanda has an Irish partner. The following sections will examine the findings in relation to usage of IrE, self-identification and social attribution with reference to these speakers.

### 4.2.1 Usage of Irish English, self-identification and social attribution with reference to L2 speakers

Lucas speaks about how he is aware of his use of IrE features when with his Irish friends and housemates.

25. when I'm with my Irish friends I don't know why but like my English changes  
<\$E>laughs</\$E> **but when I use it (IrE) I don't think it's like natural...it's a different feeling you use it and then you stop for a while and you say like oh I just said that you know**

26. It's like when I'm with ..my Irish housemates.

Umm, I think probably sometimes I say things like **them but not the way they sound.**

Lucas identifies mainly lexical features that he associates with IrE, including *grand*, *craic*, *ye* (Dolan, 2004) but also grammatical, for example, the after perfect (Filppula, 2002) (e.g. *I'm after cleaning the car*), and pragmatic, for example, *now/there* as discourse markers (e.g. *I'll be with you there now in a minute*) (Clancy et al., 2023)). While he claims to use some IrE features in certain contexts, his naturally-occurring speech data

does not show any usage of IrE features.

Fernanda also acknowledges that she uses IrE features, particularly when with her Irish partner's friends. She identifies lexical features, for example, *lads* to include male and females (Murphy & Farr, 2012), *your one, me (my) one, ye*, phonological features, for example, use of dental stops for dental fricatives (Kallen, 2012, p. 32) and pragmatic features, for example, the frequent use of *you know* (Diskin-Holdaway, 2021) as representing IrE for her. Her naturally-occurring speech data reveals use of slit-T and also frequent use of *you know*, but no lexical features.

Although in the initial profiling, Lucas declares his variety of English to be “American English”, when asked in the interview how he would categorise his English, he responds:

27. am yeah I don't know yeah its it's ah yeah let's see a a type of Brazilian English <math>\langle \text{\\$E} \rangle \text{laughs} \langle /\text{\\$E} \rangle

Lucas distances himself from ownership of IrE as demonstrated in qualifying phrases, expressing his feeling that his use of IrE is not natural (see bold text in extracts (25) and (26) above). As regards commitment to Ireland, when specifically asked about long-term residence in Ireland, he said that he would consider it, but also was open to returning to Brazil to teach, as well as to opportunities in other countries.

Fernanda, on the other hand, displays more self-attribution as regards ownership of IrE. Her self-declared accent/ dialect is “American English with IrE influence”. However, in reflecting on her decision to come to Ireland, Fernanda expresses a desire to dissociate from the American accent.

28. perhaps I wanted to get away from the American accent I know I knew I didn't want to go to America so maybe the accent kind of influenced it a bit I never thought about it that way but yeah

Fernanda's identification with IrE is also seen in her positive attitude to IrE features (e.g. She comments that the second person plural "ye" is a "great feature") and also to the Limerick accent, as demonstrated below.

29. I can handle the Limerick accent now <E>laughs</E> so maybe maybe I'm biased that way that's my favourite

Mentioning that her partner is from Limerick, she is unambiguous in declaring self-identification as "a Limerick girl".

30. Oh yeah I'm a Limerick girl now <E>laughs</E>

Fernanda also demonstrates much less ambiguity than Lucas in her commitment to long-term residence in Ireland.

31. I don't see myself moving back (to Brazil) either you know ah short term midterm or long term I really like am the life I've created for myself here

This aligns with Debaene and Harris's (2013) study which found that levels of satisfaction with life in Ireland was a factor influencing conscious attempts by Polish immigrants to Ireland to acquire IrE.

As regards social attribution, there is no evidence of this in the data for Lucas. However, Fernanda reports ratification of her accent by members of the IrE speech community.

32. but now people tell me I have an Irish accent or a Limerick accent yeah

In contrast to Molly (Section 4.1.3), who does not accept the ratification of her Irish accent by her friends and family when she returns to the USA, Fernanda appears to have a positive attitude to this ratification by the IrE speech community as demonstrated in her declaration of identity as a "Limerick girl" in example (30) above.

## 5. Discussion

The analysis of the data shows that all four speakers are aware of using IrE features. They all identified features (including pragmatic, lexical, phonological and grammatical) that represent IrE for them, and reported that they use IrE in particular contexts. All participants, apart from Lucas, displayed some naturally-occurring use of these features in their speech data, including phonological (e.g. slit -T) and pragmatic (e.g. frequent use of *sorry; you know*). Interestingly, Molly was the only speaker who displayed uniquely IrE lexical features in her naturally-occurring speech (e.g. *craic*).

As regards contexts of and motivation for use, both L1 and L2 speakers identified external factors relating to social and familial pressures. Notably, educational and professional pressures were not mentioned. This suggests that instrumental motivation (Ó Murchadha et al., 2018, p. 5) for becoming a new speaker of IrE, as opposed to another variety of English, may be seen as less important than motivation relating to social integration.

As Jaffe (2015, p. 29) argues, taking up identity as a new speaker can be associated with a “display of commitment” and is related to sociolinguistic indexicality. The four speakers demonstrated varying types and levels of commitment to Ireland. Predictably, those with long-term Irish partners (i.e. Kathy and Fernanda) showed more commitment to long-term residence in Ireland than those without familial ties. However, Fernanda showed more agency in her commitment than did Kathy, who projected more passivity in her decision to remain in Ireland. Molly, while actively involving herself in Irish cultural events and learning the Irish language, which could be taken as a display of commitment, did not see herself as remaining in Ireland in the long-term.

As regards self-identification in the L1 speakers, Kathy was tentative in her identification as an IrE speaker, with qualifying statements in relation to features, such as not being able to undo a feature or not using it very often (Examples (16) and (17) in

Section 4.1.2). Kathy showed concern about the indexicality of a particular feature (*th* pronunciation) in relation to how her children might be negatively perceived in the USA if they used this feature (Example (24) in Section 4.1.3). She also expressed confusion and ambiguity as to her identity (Example (19) in Section 4.1.2).

As referred to above, Molly is the only speaker of the four who displayed lexical features which are unique to IrE (e.g. *craic*) in her naturally occurring speech. However, her relationship with IrE is complex. Despite her Irish heritage and her active involvement with the Irish language and culture, she sees herself as a “social outlier” due to “societal and cultural differences” (Example (14) in Section 4.1.2). She perceives claims of Irish identity by North Americans as stigmatised by Irish people, so she tries to “stay away from that” (Example (13) in Section 4.1.2). This relates to the observation by Ó Murchadha et al. (2018, p. 4) that new speakers “use and claim ownership of a language that is not, for whatever reason, typically perceived as belonging to them, or to ‘people like them’”. Molly appears to use IrE features strategically to actively “style” her identity (Coupland, 2014, p. 292) so as to show her awareness of the ingroup style in order to give her authority in particular social contexts. However, she appears to be rejecting ownership of IrE, as she sees it as not belonging to people like her (in other words, Irish Americans i.e. Americans with Irish lineage) and as indexing this “stigmatised” Irish American identity.

Turning now to the L2 speakers, although Lucas acknowledges that he uses IrE in certain contexts, he describes his use of the variety as “not natural” and not sounding like that of his Irish friends (Examples (25) and (26) in Section 4.2.1). As observed by McEwan-Fujita (2010, p. 29) and O’Rourke (2011), newcomers to a country may be discouraged from using the language or variety of that country due to their perception of not sounding “natural” or “real”, as the notion of “naturalness” is linked with authenticity (Coupland, 2003; Jaffe, 2015). Notably, unlike Fernanda, Lucas, in categorising his

accent/dialect, does not mention IrE, but rather “American” and “Brazilian English”. In contrast, Fernanda appears to actively embrace her identity as a “Limerick girl” (Example (30) in Section 4.2.1). She also expresses positivity in relation to certain features of IrE (such as the use of *ye*). In addition, she self-declares her accent/dialect as “American English with IrE influence”. In reflecting on her motivations for coming to Ireland, she suggests that it may have been motivated by a desire to “get away from” an American accent (Example (28) in Section 4.2.1), although she does not expand on her motivations for this. This resonates with Debaene and Harris (2013) and Toth and Riordan (2024) who report on the influence of the cultural capital of a language on attitudes towards that language (or variety).

As regards difference in motivations of L1 and L2 speakers of English, as discussed above, newcomer English L1 speakers, may see their own variety (e.g. British or General American English) as having more linguistic capital than IrE. This is evident in Kathy’s reluctance to have her children use the IrE feature of dental stops for dental fricatives. Newcomer L2 speakers, on the other hand, may have more to gain from acquiring IrE, as their own variety (i.e. Brazilian English) is less established on the World Englishes’ stage. On the other hand, newcomer English L2 speakers may want to associate with another recognisable variety of English e.g. “American” as in Lucas’s profile categorisation. This may impact their self-identification in relation to IrE.

As regards social attribution, Kathy, Molly and Fernanda all refer to ratification of their use of IrE features. Kathy and Molly recount experiences where their use is ratified both by members of the IrE speech community and those external to it (in their home country), while Fernanda’s ratification is from the IrE speech community. The features associated with this ratification mentioned by Fernanda are mainly phonological (her pronunciation of [t]). Kathy refers to lexical items noted by external ratifiers in the USA (e.g. *bin* rather than *trash-can*, which, of course, is not unique to IrE), but she refers

to phonological features which are remarked on by members of the IrE speech community (e.g. her [t] pronunciation). Molly refers to changes in lexical features in her text messaging which are noticed by her Irish and American friends when she moves between Ireland and the USA. This suggests that the features seen as “indices of significant competence” in a language or variety (Jaffe, 2015, p. 30) may vary according to the ratifier. While Fernanda displays a positive attitude to her ratification by members of the IrE speech community as an IrE speaker, proclaiming that she is now a “Limerick girl”, Molly rejects the external ratification of her Irish accent, claiming that she does not have an Irish accent (Example (21) in Section 4.1.3). Molly’s rejection of her ratification as an IrE speaker, however, must be considered in light of the fact that she has an already-established L1 identity. In addition, her perception of the Irish American identity as stigmatised impacts her acceptance of such ratification.

## **6. Conclusion**

Before drawing final conclusions, it is important to acknowledge the study’s limitations. The sample on which the study is based is small and includes only speakers from one L1 and one L2 English speaking context. Also, as mentioned in Section 3, the sample differs in several social factors which may impact the findings. Despite these limitations, the findings from this sample highlight the importance of distinguishing between self-attribution in terms of usage of a variety and self-identification as a new speaker of that variety. While all four speakers report that they use IrE features in particular contexts, they do not all self-identify as IrE speakers. Motivations for using the variety can be, for example, familial (Jaffe, 2025, p. 29) or social pressures rather than identity-related. As we have seen, Ó Murchadha et al. (2018, p. 4) refer to the use of and claim of ownership of a language as the most basic level of “new speaker” designation. However, despite all

four participants claiming that they use IrE in particular contexts, Fernanda is the only speaker who appears to claim ownership and self-identify as an IrE speaker. Concerns about naturalness and authenticity appear to affect self-identification. Furthermore, long-term residence in the adopted country is not sufficient for self-identification as a new speaker, as seen from Kathy's data. Other-attribution has also been argued to be a key criterion for new-speakerness (Jaffe, 2015). However, while Kathy, Molly and Fernanda cite examples of their ratification as regards the use of IrE by speech community members and/or those external to the that community, it would seem that for self-identification, such ratification must be accepted by the speakers themselves, as is the case with Fernanda. The question also arises as to whether ratification as a new speaker has more weight when coming from the IrE speech community itself. While the study cannot provide definitive answers to what determines designation as a new speaker, what is clear is that the factors determining this designation are highly complex and nuanced. This study, while small-scale, provides a blueprint for a wider-scale exploration of language identity in newcomers to Ireland, which would include participants from other L1 and L2 English-speaking contexts (e.g. United Kingdom, Poland), representative of the immigrant population in Ireland.

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