Don Santiago 'a Catholic from conviction and an Old Bachelor from necessity': A historical sociolinguistic analysis of James J. Wright's letters.

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Abstract

Historical sociolinguistic studies of the Irish abroad have examined both anglophone (Amador-Moreno, 2019; Amador-Moreno & Ávila-Ledesma, 2020) and non-anglophone contexts, including the Caribbean region (Brehony & Finnegan, 2019; González García, 2020). In the latter, however, most research has been conducted within the field of migration history, with little attention to language use. This paper builds on this scholarship by analysing the correspondence of Dublin-born enslaver and slave-trader, James Jenkinson Wright (1788-1845), who emigrated with his family from Ireland to the United States but spent most of his adult life in Santiago de Cuba. In the Caribbean country, James Wright became a leading coffee planter and merchant. His 37 surviving letters, written between 1833 and 1845, offer a rare insight into the discourse style, stance taking and identity work of this Irish English speaker. This study applies the *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count* (LIWC-22) tool, specifically the *Cognition* category, to uncover patterns of linguistic involvement and assess how these contribute to the construction of Wright's Irish diasporic identity. The findings show that Wright's use of personal pronouns, mental verbs and memory-related lexis functions as a key resource for negotiating belonging and diasporic identity formation in his letters. By focusing on a non-anglophone setting, the chapter extends the scope of historical sociolinguistic research on Irish English and provides new perspectives on how identity is negotiated in Irish emigrants' letters.

Keywords: James Wright's letters, Cuba, Irish English, diasporic identity, LIWC-22

1. Introduction

On March 12, 1843, Thomas Brooks, an Englishman who became James J. Wright's closest business partner, wrote to the New York financier Moses Taylor:

> Our 'valiant and respected' chief writes in great spirits [...] **Don Santiago** has great confidence in our tobacco operations in this country [United States], if we are only firm in holding for the proper time [...]. (Thomas Brooks, Philadelphia, to Moses Taylor, New York, 12.03.1843)

Brooks' use of quotation marks in the original correspondence introduces a degree of ambiguity. Rather than simply describing James J. Wright as valiant and respected, the

use of quotation marks suggests some distance from the evaluation, whether through irony or by signalling that the words were reported rather than authored by Brooks himself. This is particularly interesting given that Wright, an Irish emigrant, had by this point become the head of one of the most important commercial firms in eastern Cuba. Perhaps even more striking in this letter is Brook's reference to James J. Wright as *Don Santiago*. As Rodgers (2008, p. 31) observes, "Irish names mutated strangely into Spanish" when Irish emigrants settled in non-anglophone regions. In some cases, such translations were associated with more complex shifts in their identities, such as religious conversion or changes in political affiliation.

In Wright's case, becoming not just Santiago Wright, but *Don Santiago*, was symbolic of his adoption of a specific lifestyle as a Spanish-Creole plantation-owner who was an integral member of the slave-holder class. His new name encapsulated his transformation from Irish emigrant into a transnational and trans-imperial actor. In line with Al-Ali and Koser's (2002, p. 10) observation that "transnational migrants maintain economic, political and social networks that span several societies," Wright's position reflected simultaneous relationships with three different societies: the land of his birth (Ireland), the land where his father and siblings lived (the United States), and the land of his adoption and residence (Cuba). Born Irish and Quaker, Wright became a United States citizen and later adopted Spanish subjecthood through naturalisation and conversion to Catholicism. Professionally, he was a merchant, a coffee planter and British Pro-Consul in Cuba. These overlapping affiliations are vividly conceptualised in his personal correspondence, which provides a valuable lens for examining the interrelationship that exists between migration, language and identity in the Irish diaspora context.

This paper examines a total of 37 letters (approx. 33,308 words) written by James J. Wright which are included in the *Cuba Ireland Digital Archive* (CIDA) collection.[1] Wright's letters are a rare case of Irish English in the Hispanic Caribbean regional context as not many examples of the correspondence of Irish emigrants to Cuba have survived. In this sense, they are unique artifacts that showcase the inner world of an Irish coffee planter far removed from Ireland but still a full participant in the Atlantic world and economy. The present analysis explores how language use reflects Wright's negotiation of diasporic identity and shifting social affiliations across Ireland, the United States and Cuba. In particular, the paper addresses the following research questions: (i) how do linguistic markers of stance, self-reference and cognition contribute to the construction of diasporic identity in James J. Wright's letters? and (ii) How can a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach enhance our understanding of Irish emigrants' epistolary discourse in non-anglophone contexts? These issues are explored in the sections that follow. In this regard, Section 2 briefly reviews relevant scholarship on migration, language and identity, while Section 3 introduces the data and methodology. Section 4 then presents the preliminary results and Section 5 concludes with the discussion and final remarks.

2. On migration, language and identity in the Irish context

As Auer and Thorburn, (2022, p. 4) rightly point out, "the focus on language in relation to migration and identity in the broad field of linguistics" has been "anchored in a range of linguistic sub-disciplines and therefore apply very different approaches" ranging

[1]The *Cuba Ireland Digital Archive* is an open access digital archive compiled by Margaret Brehony, Giselle González García, Cristian Sánchez and Mercedes Varona, which is hosted at the University of Galway. For more information, see https://exhibitions.library.universityofgalway.ie/s/cuba-ireland/page/wright

from "historical sociolinguistics combined with contact linguistics to interactional (socio)linguistics to Critical Discourse Analysis". In the Irish context, current (socio)linguistic research on migration, language and identity has explored a wide range of topics. Recent work, for example, has examined the acquisition of Irish English by immigrants to Ireland (cf. e.g., Diskin-Holdaway, 2023), the linguistic dimensions of Brexit, border and belonging in Northern Ireland (Dunlevy, 2021), and the sociolinguistics of globalisation and migration in Northern Ireland (Corrigan, 2020). Other studies have focused on the language of the Irish diaspora (e.g., O'Brien, 2017; Musgrave & Burridge, 2023). These have also included historical (socio)linguistic analyses of emigrants' letters (Amador-Moreno, 2019; Ávila-Ledesma & Amador-Moreno, 2023), as well as comparative examinations of historical and contemporary diasporas drawing on letters and interviews respectively (Amador-Moreno et al., 2021), among other topics.[2]

Within the historical (socio)linguistic field, research on Irish emigrants' letters has approached the relationship between migration, language and identity from different methodological perspectives, using various corpus and computational methods. Drawing on the letters written by two of the Lough sisters who migrated from Ireland to the United States, Moreton and Culy (2019), for example, have shown how themes of homesickness, separation, recollection and reunion emerged in the late nineteenth-century correspondence. Such topics have been traced using the *Interesting Items Visualisation Tool* (IIVT) (Moreton & Culy, 2019) and Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2004) and revealed the ways female migrants negotiated distance and belonging through

[2]For space limitations, the present paper only includes a selection of studies published on migration, language and identity in the field of Irish English. For further discussions, see Hickey (2023).

language. Building on this line of research, Krawatzek and Moreton (2025) comparatively study Irish and German migrant correspondence in the United States, examining how *home* was linguistically constructed across a large body of letters written over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This study shows that references to *home* were significantly more frequent and emotionally loaded in the Irish letters than in the German corpus, where *heimat* was used less often and more narrowly. That is, while German writers tended to conceptualise the United States relatively quickly as *home*, Irish migrants overwhelmingly continued to locate *home* in Ireland, often expressing a desire to return.

The linguistic construction of *home* has already been the focus of earlier historical sociolinguistic analyses of Irish emigrants' letters. Ávila-Ledesma and Amador-Moreno (2016), for example, provided an in-depth corpus-pragmatic examination of *home* in post-famine Irish emigrants' letters. Their study indicated that *home* was a highly salient and emotionally charged term, but one which was constructed differently by male and female writers. These insights were later extended by Amador-Moreno and Ávila-Ledesma (2020) in a comparative analysis of Irish emigrants' letters from the United States and Argentina. Their findings showed that — although both diasporas engaged in similar identity-making processes — important differences emerged across contexts, particularly in the conceptualisation of *home*. In the Irish Argentine correspondence, *home* continued to be anchored primarily in Ireland, signalling attachment and ongoing negotiation of national belonging. In contrast, letters sent from the United States more readily extended *home* to the host country, specifically in internal Quaker correspondence, which reflected a stronger orientation towards settlement and adaptation.

The body of work described here demonstrates the analytical potential of Irish emigrant correspondence for examining how identity, belonging and social positioning are constructed through language. While recent studies have begun to extend this line of inquiry beyond traditional anglophone contexts (cf. e.g., Brehony & Finnegan, 2019; González-García, 2020), historical sociolinguistic research on Irish emigrants in Latin America remains very limited. Existing analyses based on emigrants' letters have tended to focus on specific destinations — most notably Argentina — and on recurring thematic concerns, such as the conceptualisation of *home* described above. Much less attention has been paid to the correspondence of individual Irish emigrants in other Spanish-speaking destinations or to how self-reference and social positioning were enacted in their epistolary exchanges.

The present paper addresses this gap by examining the letters that James J. Wright sent to his family in Ireland. In doing so, the analysis centres on linguistic expressions of cognition, specifically on the use of personal pronouns and mental verbs associated with cognitive processes (e.g., *think*, *believe*, *know*, *hope*) and memory-related lexis (*forget*, *remember*, *recollect*), as these linguistic choices constitute sites "where identity and relational functions of language are evident" (Palander-Collin, 2009, p. 106). Such features will be explored through the *Cognition* category in the *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count* (LIWC-22) tool (Boyd et al., 2022). The following section outlines the main characteristics of this text analysis tool as well as the historical material under study.

3. Data and Methodology

As Table 1 indicates, Wright's correspondents were his father's sister, Martha Wright (1780-1865), another aunt Rachel Jenkinson (1757-1837), who may have been the sister or sister-in-law of his mother, Mary Jenkinson (1754-1790), and his cousin Jonathan Wright (1793-1879), all of whom resided in Dublin. Although primarily addressed to these specific relatives, these letters were most likely shared among the rest of the immediate family in Ireland, as was customary at the time (Gerber, 2000). The replies from his aunts and cousin, unfortunately, did not survive and the letters that Wright likely wrote to members of his family in the Ohio frontier settlement, if they exist, were not retrieved for this research.

TABLE 1

James J. Wright's letters chronological distribution and general information.

Year	Sender's name	Origin of letter	Recipient's name	Location of recipient	Relationship	Number of words
1833	J.J. Wright	USA	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	622
1834	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Rachel Jenkinson	Ireland	nephew-aunt	552
1834	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	605
1835	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Rachel Jenkinson	Ireland	nephew-aunt	220
1835	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	730
1835	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	743
1835	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Rachel Jenkinson	Ireland	nephew-aunt	302
1835	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Jonathan Wright	Ireland	cousins	374
1836	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	651
1836	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	1138
1836	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Jonathan Wright	Ireland	cousins	709
1837	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	603
1837	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Jonathan Wright	Ireland	cousins	357
1838	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	824
1838	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	957
1838	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Jonathan Wright	Ireland	cousins	723
1839	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	653
1839	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	755
1840	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	601
1840	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	487
1841	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	1740
1841	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	1048

1841	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Jonathan Wright	Ireland	cousins	931
1842	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	944
1842	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	1234
1842	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	1294
1842	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	892
1842	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Jonathan Wright	Ireland	cousins	1108
1842	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Jonathan Wright	Ireland	cousins	2647
1842	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Jonathan Wright	Ireland	cousins	978
1843	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	1081
1843	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	958
1843	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	1091
1843	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Jonathan Wright	Ireland	cousins	1094
1844	J.J. Wright	Cuba	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	979
1844	J.J. Wright	USA	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	1472
1845	J.J. Wright	USA	Martha Wright	Ireland	nephew-aunt	1211

Methodologically, the letters were analysed using LIWC-22.[3] In general terms, this tool consists of two main components: the processor, which is the programme itself, and the dictionary. As explained by Chung and Pennebaker (2019, p. 155), "the processor counts words in the category entries listed in the dictionary, and reports on the percentage of words in each text file that represents each dictionary category." More specifically, the dictionary contains "over 80 categories, including function word categories (e.g., articles, negation, pronouns, etc.), and content word categories (e.g., positive and negative emotion words, cognitive mechanisms, social words, etc.)" (ibid).[4] For this paper, we have used the *contextualiser* tool on LIWC-22, which displays all the words and phrases assigned to a selected category together with their immediate context, providing the number of occurrences of a given category in a text (Boyd et al., 2022). In this regard, LIWC-22 was first employed to extract and analyse all personal pronouns in our dataset, which provided an initial perspective on Wright's self-positioning in the letters. In a second step, we used the *contextualiser* tool to explore the

[3]For further information see https://www.liwc.app.

[4]While some language dimensions such as pronouns or prepositions are straightforward, other categories like emotion words, for example, are more subjective and require scholarly judgement to be classified accordingly. For a detailed description of the selection process that was followed to create the dictionary categories see Tausczik and Pennebaker (2010).

items classified under the LIWC-22 category of *cognition*, which captures cognitive processes and memory words that "reflect people's references and attention to their memories, beliefs about memories and the processes of recall and forgetting" (Boyd et al. 2022, p.18). All instances retrieved via the *contextualiser* tool were then compiled into an Excel file and manually verified against the original letters. Finally, the qualitative phase of the analysis concentrated on usage and meaning. Our goal was to examine how these forms functioned in context and what they revealed about Wright's stance, patterns of self-reference and engagement with memory.

4. Results

When the corpus is subdivided by intended addressee (i.e., letters to the aunts, Martha and Rachel, vs. letters to his cousin Jonathan), the comparison of personal pronoun use reveals both substantial overlap and systematic differences. In terms of overlap, and as Table 2 illustrates, nine out of the top ten personal pronouns were common to both lists, with the exception of *him,* which appeared more often in the letters to the aunts, while *them* was used in those sent to Jonathan Wright. The high frequency of the first and second person pronouns *I* and *you* in both datasets was unsurprising given the text type, as personal correspondence typically unfolds "between *I*, the writer, and *you* the recipient" (Nurmi & Palander-Collin 2008, p.34). Despite the essentially monologic nature of letter writing, which Dossena (2012, p. 49) describes as "an in absentia dialogue" produced by a single encoder, meaning is constructed through sustained interpersonal orientation, which is reflected in the dense use of personal pronouns. A closer examination of the distributions of the personal pronouns, however, pointed towards clear addressee-related variation. With the exception of *your*, the overall frequency of first person singular and second person pronouns was consistently higher

in the correspondence with women, which may be an indication of greater emotional involvement when writing to his aunts. This tendency aligns with findings reported by Nurmi and Palander-Collin (2008, p. 38) who observe that "both women and men refer to themselves more frequently when addressing a female recipient than a male recipient." Conversely, the pronouns *we* and *our* occurred more frequently in the letters to Jonathan Wright. Contrary to our initial hypothesis, the use of such pronouns did not involve a bond between the writer and the addressee but rather acted as exclusionary *we* and generally referred to groups including James and others, whether it was discussing business matters, experiences in Cuba or shared hardships.

TABLE 2

Personal pronoun use in James J. Wright's letters

To aunts Martha and Rachel (Tokens 24,084)		
Word	**Frequency**	**NF (per 1,000 words)**
I	913	37.90
You	353	14.65
My	287	11.91
Me	200	8.30
He	116	4.81
Your	114	4.73
His	101	4.19
Him	68	2.82
Our	65	2.69
We	61	2.53

To cousin Jonathan (Tokens 8,818)		
Word	**Frequency**	**NF (per 1,000 words)**
I	258	29.26
You	109	12.36
My	86	9.75
Me	58	6.58
Your	56	6.35
Our	44	4.99
We	33	3.74
His	31	3.52
He	25	2.84
Them	22	2.49

On the other hand, the examination of the LIWC category of *cognition* indicated that mental verbs were particularly frequent in Wright's letters. This is a rather expected

result since, as discussed in Quirk et al. (1985, p. 1180-1182), epistolary discourse favours the use of verbs that express intellectual states that are not observable and, therefore, private. In our corpus, the cognitive verb *think* stood as the most salient verb with 71 occurrences, 43 of which collocated with the first-person singular pronoun and eight with the second person reference. Of those collocating with the first-person pronoun, 38 were in the affirmative and five in the negative form (e.g.,'*I don't think I could bear up against your fifteen hours a day of employment*'). A closer look at the examples of *I think* revealed that the construction was mainly used as an epistemic modality marker and occurred in sentences where the writer was either expressing opinions as in (1) or sharing information about life in the host country. Furthermore, the verb *believe* was used in a similar manner. It appeared 51 times in our dataset, 26 of which occurred with the first-person singular pronoun as in (2) and one with the second person subject. The remaining examples of *believe* were either in the infinitive form or employed in the closing formula '*believe me to remain your affectionate nephew/cousin*'.

1. **I think** Aunt Martha's removal to Thomas Street a prudent determination she is getting too advanced in life to reside so far away from you all. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Jonathan Wright, Ireland, 08.07.1842).

2. **I believe** I didn't advise you in my last, that I have been appointed United States Consul at Santiago de Cuba by the President and Senate, which office I enter upon, immediately on my return to Cuba. (James J. Wright, USA, to Martha Wright, Ireland, 01.03.1845).

In the particular case of *know*, the analysis yielded 44 occurrences, 18 of which collocated with the first-person reference and nine with the second person pronoun. A detailed examination of *I know* indicated that just over half of those instances appeared in projecting structures and often explicitly addressed the recipient of the letter*, you*, as

in (3). In line with Moreton (2016), the *I (do not) know* constructions not only projected the author's epistemic stance and point of view, but they also seemed to anticipate potential reactions and invite a response from the addressee, thus contributing to the dialogistic nature of Wright's letters (4).

3. We are now incomparably ahead of any house here, in extent of capability and credit both at home and abroad, and I tell you this because **I know** it will gratify you. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Martha Wright, Ireland, 05.06.1843).

4. **I don't know** whether you are aware that her father James Gregg lives in Warsaw Illinois, which of course is her home, for she is here only on a visit. (James J. Wright, USA, to Martha Wright, Ireland, 01.03.1845).

Finally, the verb *hope* appeared 26 times in the corpus, 21 of which collocated with the first person *I*, three with personal, indefinite and relative pronouns (e.g., *we*, *some*, *who*), and two in the phrase '*let us hope*'. The majority of the *I hope* instances occurred in projecting structures such as *I hope that our correspondence may not be permitted to drop*, which, in some cases, functioned as indirect commands that generally required a non-verbal response from the receptor. Instead, they seemed to place a mild obligation on the reader to perform specific actions that usually involved letter writing, as in (5). In this example, Wright expresses the hope that any anxiety caused by the absence of letters will be resolved when he receives a long reply by the next packet. This formulation indirectly places responsibility on the addressee to write, creating a sense of obligation that is inferred pragmatically, rather than marked grammatically.

5. I most sincerely **hope** that any fear, which the non arrival of letters from you as it relates to yours may have given rise to will be proven entirely unfounded by my receiving a long one from you by the next packet. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Martha Wright, Ireland, 01.10.1841).

In this exchange of opinions, observations, requests and hopes, modal verbs also played an important role. As Nurmi and Palander-Collin (2008, p. 39) point out, "their varying uses in negotiating possibilities, obligations and predictions often have a hedging function in discourse softening a command or request and, in their epistemic sense, making a prediction or assumption more vague." This is particularly useful in the epistolary genre where modal verbs help shape the illocutionary force of the predication. In our corpus, the most frequently occurring modal verb was *will* with 138 instances followed by *may*, *shall* and *would* with 128, 88, and 72 examples respectively. Closer inspection of *will* and *shall* revealed that the use of *shall* with first person pronouns predominated in the data with 73 examples of *I shall* and only 16 of *I will*. Here, *I shall* was often used to express determination and inclination, and most examples were found in sentences highlighting the relevance that letters from Ireland had for the author (6).

> 6. I direct this under cover to Aunt Martha to be delivered to you but if you wish to point out any particular channel through which you are desirous that either letter or means shall reach you, please to point it out and **I shall** conform myself to your wishes. **I shall** anxiously await a reply to the present and shall continue my correspondence with you with much satisfaction. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Rachel Jenkinson, Ireland, 28.02.1834).
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> 7. As soon as you advise me therein that you will commence the geneological [sic] quest, **I will** transmit you a small draft on London to meet expences as they arise postage etc. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Jonathan Wright, Ireland, 08.07.1842).

On the other hand, the frequency of *will* in letters as in (7) seems to increase over time, coinciding with a decline of *shall*. This development aligns with a well-documented diachronic shift in English, whereby *will* progressively replaced *shall* with all persons at least in colonial English (Dollinger 2008; McCafferty & Amador-Moreno 2014). Within Irish English correspondence in particular, Amador-Moreno and McCafferty's (2012, p.

35) findings showed that *will* increased from 27% in the late eighteenth century CORIECOR letters to 55% in the 1830s, and to 81% by the 1880s.[5] The qualitative inspection of *I will* constructions in Wright's letters indicated that, with very few exceptions (n=2), these forms did not function as markers of future time. Instead, they predominantly retained a volitional meaning and expressed willingness/commitment as in example (7) or refusal in response to the addressee's requests. Finally, other modal verbs retrieved from the study were *should* which occurred 50 times, followed by *must* and *can* with 42 and 41 occurrences. These forms are not analysed in detail here due to space constraints, but they will be examined in future work.

With regard to the *memory* subcategory, the verb *remember* appeared 21 times, 12 of which occurred in the imperative phrase '*remember me affectionately / (most)kindly / warmly to*' and four in sentences where Wright was reporting a third party's wish to be remembered (8). In the remaining five occurrences, see for example (9), the author reassured the recipient of the letter that family members and friends were still remembered, while recalling the routines and actions of others.

> 8. Nehemiah still entertains the hope of visiting Ireland, which he repeated to me this morning, when desiring his love to be **remembered** to thee, and assuredly if it ever comes to pass I will not suffer him to go alone, the two remaining brothers, if God permit, will touch their natal soil once more in company. (James J. Wright, USA, to Martha Wright, Ireland, 01.03.1845).

> 9. Do **I remember** my Cousins Margaret & Abby Watson? How could **I forget** them? I was received in their Mother's house and treated with every kindness when I was I may say a desolate orphan, and **I recollect** well both of them, and making battle in their defence when escorting them home. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Martha Wright, Ireland, 04.09.1836).

[5] For more information on CORIECOR, the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence*, see McCafferty and Amador-Moreno (2012).

In addition, the analysis of the main findings revealed a relatively high frequency of the verb *recollect* which occurred 14 times in the dataset. While it was generally used in phrases like *'as near as I (can) recollect'* and *'if I recollect right'*, in which the act of recollection was more oriented towards the exchange of information about previous letters and family news, we also found five instances where the writer seemed to engage in what Rodgers (2008, p. 31) describes as "systematic memory work" in a conscious effort to demonstrate that the shared past had not been forgotten (10) and to nurture family relationships.

> 10. […] present other in my name to Aunt Martha, with hopes that they may be found good, I regret that we have no variety here, so as to enable me to force you oftener to **recollect** me, which you cannot fail to do, when you have such little mementos on the table before you, for it is more natural for me isolated as I am, to think of my native land and family frequently and strongly, than for you to bear a stray individual in remembrance. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Jonathan Wright, Ireland, 29.10.1843).

The importance of conscious memory work is further attested in the conceptualisation of the verb *forget*. Interestingly, of the 11 occurrences retrieved from the study, seven were in the past participle form (11), three in the negative form (12) and the remaining example was in the interrogative form (9). Regardless of the grammatical form, the ultimate aim of the author remained the same, i.e., to stress that the shared experiences in the homeland could never be forgotten and to highlight the emotional value of the epistolary exchange.

> 11. I hope that it will reach its destination safely and be productive of satisfaction to thee, were it only as a sign that years long past are not **forgotten** and that thy more than Motherly care and attention are still borne in mind by those towards whom they were exercised. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Rachel Jenkinson, Ireland, 02.01.1835).

> **12. I do not forget** Jonathan Hill's School, nor my relations nor playmates of my days of boyhood, how could I? impressions at that period of life are generally indelible even

> to the latest stages of life. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Jonathan Wright, Ireland, 27.12.1835).

During the examination of memory-related terms described earlier, the noun *home* and the noun phrases *natal soil* and *native land* repeatedly appeared in the immediate co-text of verbs such as *remember*, *recollect* and *forget* as shown in examples (8) to (10) above. While *natal soil* and *native land* were used consistently and unambiguously to refer to Ireland as in (13), the meaning of *home* proved more complex and context-dependent, which prompted a closer examination of *home* in the final part of the analysis, despite it not being part of the initial set of terms under investigation.

> 13. I feel sorry that it was not in my power to realize my expectations of the past year so as to have paid a visit of some length at least, if not to have finally fixed myself for the rest of my days in my **native land**. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Martha Wright, Ireland, 12.05.1839).

Of the 18 instances in which Wright used the term *home*, eight referred to *home* as household, where the term denoted the domestic space of relatives or acquaintances, including his aunt's, cousin's, niece's, nephew's or a guest's *home*. On the other hand, *home* meaning Cuba was also attested in our dataset with five instances, as opposed to only two examples of *home* referring to Ireland. In the case of Cuba, *home* was associated with residence, return, professional life and settled routine, while the two examples of *home* as Ireland were reinforced by the use of *native home* or *Fatherland* as in (14). Overall, although the number of tokens of *home* is limited, the distribution and usage of the term suggest that to Wright, Ireland was his natal soil, whereas Cuba functioned as his home in terms of everyday residence and the land of his adoption (15). Finally, three examples conceptualised *home* metaphorically as a euphemism for death through expressions such as *last/final home*, as in (16).

> 14. They are to run twice each month to & from each of the named quarters, on the 1st of October of the present year, thus presenting from that date great facility for those who wish to visit the Fatherland, even via the United States passage both together for the run **home** would not average more than 22 days, how wonderful! (James J. Wright, Cuba to Martha Wright, Ireland, 06.05.1841).
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> 15. We have more security for life and property than you have in Ireland and although this is a free and rapidly improving Country admired by almost everyone, nevertheless I by far prefer the tranquility of my own **home** in Cuba to it. (James J. Wright, New York, USA, to Martha Wright, Ireland, 06.10.1833).
>
> 16. I have perused and reperused all you have said about my Dear Aunt's death with sympathy and interest, and it is a source of consolation that she departed from us without sufferance and was respectably attended to the last **home** of all. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Martha Wright, Ireland, 28.02.1838).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out (i) to examine how linguistic markers of stance, self-reference and cognition contribute to the construction of diasporic identity in the letters of James J. Wright and (ii) to assess how a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach can enhance the analysis of emigrants' correspondence in non-anglophone contexts. The findings demonstrate that Wright's epistolary discourse offers a revealing case of how language mediates belonging and diasporic identity formation within a complex transnational setting in the early nineteenth century.

In response to the first research question, the analysis shows that Wright's use of personal pronouns, mental verbs and memory-related lexis played a central role in the construction of a diasporic self in his letters. Regarding personal pronouns, the more intimate and emotionally-engaged style adopted in the letters to his aunts, particularly to Martha Wright, reflects the way James maintained family ties across distance. His cousin Jonathan noticed this shift, prompting Wright's revealing response:

> I shall be governed by what you say in not permitting myself to use **too free a style** in addressing Aunt Martha, but you must bear in mind, that I have now been living more than a quarter of a century, where the ladies permit themselves, with perfect freedom to talk to men upon any subject, without intending anything loose thereby. (James J. Wright, Cuba, to Jonathan Wright, Ireland, 05.04.1842).

This exchange shows that Wright himself understood his epistolary style as shaped by his life in Cuba. By explaining his "free style" of address in terms of local social practices, he explicitly links the way he writes to the Cuban social and gender norms, which included more relaxed gender dynamics and contrasted sharply with Irish Quaker traditions. Despite being his aunt, Martha was only eight years older than Wright, fostering a generational closeness which he did not share with Jonathan, who was fourteen years younger than her. Their shared upbringing and worldview likely deepened their bond, evinced by Wright's more domestic, personal letters to Martha, compared to Jonathan's business-focused correspondence.

On the other hand, the examination of cognitive- and memory-related verbs further illustrates how Wright negotiated identity through language. In line with Palander-Collins (2009) and Moreton and Culy (2019), verbs such as *think*, *believe*, *know* and *hope* were not merely markers of cognition but functioned pragmatically to express epistemic stance, anticipate the addressee's reactions and, therefore, sustain the dialogic nature of the letters. Similarly, the recurrent use of *remember*, *recollect* and *forget* with noun phrases such as *native land/home* and *natal soil* points towards a deliberate memory work through which Wright reaffirms family ties and emotional continuity across distance.

In the case of *home*, while previous work has shown that Irish emigrants in non-

anglophone contexts like Argentina frequently anchored *home* in Ireland, Wright's usage is rather different. His emotional and symbolic attachment to Ireland seems to coexist with a practical view of Cuba as his everyday home. Interestingly, there was no mention of the United States as *home* in the letters. Indeed, his personal relationship with this country is only permeated through his relationship with his father Joseph (1757-1844), stepmother Hannah Green (1757-1805) and at least nine siblings. James Wright first arrived in New York at the age of 14 and briefly lived with his father in a new Quaker settlement in present-day Belmont County, Ohio. At 19, Wright worked in Baltimore before emigrating to Cuba, making his time in the United States both formative and short. Throughout his life, Wright kept a connection to the United States only facilitated by family letters and business interests.

Turning to the second research question, the study demonstrates the value of combining quantitative corpus tools with close qualitative analysis in the study of historical correspondence. In this regard, the use of LIWC-22, and, in particular, the *contextualiser* module, provided a systematic overview of patterns of self-reference, cognition and memory across the corpus. Additionally, the manual inspection of the concordance lines allowed these patterns to be interpreted within their epistolary and sociohistorical contexts. By foregrounding stance, cognition and memory rather than specific structural features of Irish English, the present investigation shows how language functions as a key resource for negotiating belonging and self-positioning across multiple societies.

All in all, James J. Wright's letters offer a valuable addition to the growing body of historical sociolinguistic research on Irish emigration. Labelled by his

contemporaries as “Don Santiago,” Wright’s integration into Cuban planter society profoundly reshaped his sense of Irishness. Wright never returned to Ireland, where, as a Catholic merchant and enslaver, his lifestyle diverged sharply from that of his Quaker relatives. He did return briefly to the United States, where ideological liberties allowed such contradictions to coexist. In 1845, while on his journey back to Cuba, Wright died in New Orleans, leaving behind a correspondence that reveals the complex negotiation of transnational identities within the nineteenth-century Irish diaspora.

Archival Materials

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