

## **Irish English modal verbs in the 18th and 19th centuries**

*Marije van Hattum (University of Manchester)*

([marije.vanhattum@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:marije.vanhattum@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk))

Irish English, generally considered a contact language (Filppula 1993, Hickey 2007), is said to be the oldest variety of English outside Britain (Hickey 2007), resulting from an at least 800-year contact with the Irish language. The origins of many Irish English verbal constructions have been subject of debate among leading scholars in the field (see, for instance, Bliss 1979, Harris 1991, Filppula 1999, Hickey 2007). However, to the best of my knowledge, no extensive study into the usage of Irish English modal verbs has been carried out hitherto (but notice Filppula, Kallen and Kirk's work in progress).

My paper will fill this gap. The aim is to investigate whether – and to what extent – the use of modal verbs in Irish English differs from other varieties of British English. Evidence will be based on a self-compiled corpus of texts written from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, retrieved from (a) *The Old Bailey Corpus* and personal letters from David Fitzpatrick's *Oceans of Consolation*, as well as (b) a control corpus of texts from other British varieties of English. The analysis is two-fold. Firstly, following Coates (1983), I will offer a detailed linguistic classification of the data regarding (i) the properties of modal auxiliaries (negation, inversion, no non-finite forms, etc.), and (ii) root vs. epistemic modality; both syntactic and semantic criteria will be taken into consideration. Secondly, from a sociolinguistic approach, I will assess the influence of factors such as gender, age, social class and region on language usage over time. All in all, it is hoped that this research will provide a starting point for future research into the origin and development of Irish English modal verbs.

### **References**

- Bliss, A. (1979), *Spoken English in Ireland: 1600-1740*, Dublin: Dolmen Press.
- Coates, J. (1983), *The semantics of the modal auxiliaries*, London: Croom Helm.
- Filppula, M. (1999), *The Grammar of Irish English*, London: Routledge
- Fitzpatrick, D. (1994), *Oceans of Consolation: personal accounts of Irish migration to Australia*, Cork: Cork University Press.
- Huber, M. (2008) *The Old Bailey Corpus: spoken English in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries*, 1 January 2009, University of Giessen  
< <http://www.uni-giessen.de/oldbaileycorpus/index.php> >
- Harris, J. (1991), Conservatism versus substratal transfer in Irish English. In Peter Trudgill & J.K. Chambers (eds), *Dialects of English: studies in grammatical variation*, 192-213. Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- Hickey, R. (2007), *Irish English. Its history and present-day forms*, Cambridge: University Press.