

« IRISH ACCENTS DRIVE ME NUTS »: THE REPRESENTATION OF IRISH SPEECH IN DC COMICS

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Abstract

This article investigates the depiction of Irish speech and Irishness in American popular culture. It compares the language of Irish superheroes in the Marvel universe with that of Irish characters who appear in DC comics. It shows that the linguistic description of the characters hinges on perceived salient features and it discusses differences between the two comic-book worlds, as well as the question of to what degree the two representations are grounded in reality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the eighteenth century, the Irish have regularly featured in cartoons, comics and caricatures – first appearing in satirical publications such as *Punch* in Great Britain and *Puck*, *Harper's Weekly* and *Yankee Notions* in the USA. Irish characters in these magazines were typically modelled on the familiar figure of the Stage Irishman, who could be found treading the boards in theatres on both sides of the Atlantic at the time. Both on the stage and in print, these characters were depicted as ignorant simian-like figures, with a propensity to drunkenness, fecklessness and violence. Their appeal to local audiences, however, was not just their ridiculous appearance and behaviour, but also the way they spoke, as, according to Bourgeois, the typical Stage Irishman « has an atrocious Irish brogue, makes perpetual jokes, blunders and bulls in speaking, and never fails to utter, by way of Hibernian seasoning, some screech or oath of Gaelic origin at every third word » (1913 : 109).

However, Irish characters have not solely served as comic relief or appeared in only humorous comics and cartoons, but rather have featured in strips and stories where they were not intended to be figures of fun. Indeed, since the mid-twentieth century, they have increasingly appeared in serious roles in superhero comics, where they serve to bring an international dimension to crime-fighting teams, such

as the Leymen or the Global Guardians, or where they add ethnic flavour to communities in fictional cities such as Gotham and Blüdhaven. In light of these developments, this paper will examine the speech of six such characters from the DC universe – the setting of the stories in DC comics and the home of such famous figures as Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman and Green Lantern.⁷¹ The characters under examination will be The Gay Ghost, Jack O'Lantern, Bridget Clancy, Dudley Soames, Mrs McIlvaine and Donovan Flint. Their speech will be analysed to discover whether and how their Irishness is conveyed (phonologically, lexically and grammatically) and to establish to what extent it corresponds with existing portrayals of Irish English.

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

To date, research on the representation of the Irish in caricature and cartoons has largely focussed on political cartoons and comic strips from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and includes « From Shanties to Lace Curtains: The Irish Image in *Puck*, 1876–1910 » (Appel, 1971), *The Distorted Image: Stereotype and Caricature in American Popular Graphics, 1850–1922* (Appel & Appel, 1973), *Pat-Riots to Patriots: American Irish in Caricature and Comic Art* (Appel & Appel, 1990), *Das Bild der Iren und Irlands im Punch 1841–1921* (Weimer, 1993), *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Perry Curtis Jr., 1997) and « From Swarthy Ape to Sympathetic Everyman and Subversive Trickster: The Development of Irish Caricature in American Comic Strips between 1890 and 1920 » (Soper, 2005). These studies have predominantly focussed on how the Irish were initially portrayed as the « brogue-spouting, irresponsible, inebriated, recalcitrant, happy-go-lucky Irish Pat and Bridget » (Appel & Appel, 1990 : 8) and how that representation slowly changed over time. Those studies which focus on the Irish in the US show that as acceptance of the Irish grew around the turn of the twentieth century, « Micks, Bog Trotters, Queens of the Kitchen, and Knights of the Hod – a few of the nicknames applied to Irish immigrants – gradually metamorphosed in caricature from troublesome Pat-riots to blarneying but respectable working and middle class Irish-Americans, including winsome colleens and law-and-order enforcing cops » (Appel & Appel, 1990 : 10). It is this latter type of more positive portrayal of the Irish that can be seen in the comics under

⁷¹ The name of the publishing house has changed over time and although DC was not the company's name when the earliest comics from this corpus were published, it will be used throughout for the sake of simplicity, as is customary in comic studies (cf. Wright, 2001 : xix).

discussion, one in which their roles have changed but their Irish brogue remains well and truly intact.⁷²

When it comes to the representation of Irish speech in comics, there have been very few studies thus far. Weimer's aforementioned work, however, does dedicate a few pages to the topic. He offers a summary of the most salient features used in suggesting Irish speech in *Punch* magazine and explains that it involves respelling to suggest Irish pronunciation, as well as the use of typically Irish grammar and lexical items. With regard to pronunciation, he notes that the most common respellings are <oi> for <i> (*foine, Oireland*), <i> for <e> (*iligant, gintry*), and <a>, <ay> or <ai> for <ea> (*bastes, trayson, aisy*) (1993 : 465). When it comes to grammar, he notes that the use of Irish English (hereafter IE) grammatical forms (or those believed to be such) is rare and limited predominantly to the use of *them* rather than *those* as a demonstrative pronoun, the use of *what* rather than *who*, *which* or *that* as a relative pronoun, the use of *will* rather than *shall* as a modal when used with the first person singular in questions, the lack of subject-verb concord, and the use of the tag *is it?* to create questions (1993 : 466). Instead, the most frequent way to suggest Irishness is through the use of typical lexical items or expressions. These consist largely of euphemistic exclamations such as *bejabers*, *begorra*, *bedad*, *arrah*, *accushla*, *musha*, *troth* and *faix* or *faith*, which are usually used to emphasise the emotionality and wildness of the Irish (1993 : 466-7). Other religious oaths also appear regularly in *Punch*, with expressions such as *The blessed saints preserve us!*, *By St Patrick!*, or *By the soul of St. Pat!* featuring prominently (1993 : 471). Weimer concludes his summary by mentioning the presence of stereotypical expressions such as *the broth of a boy*, a typical form of praise for an Irishman, and *the top uv the mhornin' to ye* and *more power to yer elbow*, which are supposedly typical greetings (1993 : 470-1).⁷³

The first more in-depth study of the linguistic portrayal of Irish characters in comics or caricatures was this author's 2012 study « “Ah, Laddie, Did Ye Really Think I'd Let a Foine Broth of a Boy Such as Yerself Get Splattered...?”: Representations of Irish English Speech in the *Marvel* Universe ». It investigated the speech of Irish characters in Marvel superhero comics from the mid-twentieth to

⁷² Interestingly, Clancy and Mrs Mac, two of the characters in this study and both of whom were created in the 1990s, continue to occupy the traditional Irish female emigrant role of the housekeeper, even if Clancy's role has been elevated somewhat to that of the building's superintendent. What is more, Clancy's first name, like her Queen of the Kitchen forbears, is Bridget. Soames, another character under investigation, also fits into a role traditionally occupied by the Irish in America, namely that of a police officer.

⁷³ For the complete findings, see Weimer (1993 : 464-73).

the early twenty-first century, and was based on a corpus of 150 comic books (approx. 25,500 words), dating from 1967 to 2009, and featuring the characters Banshee, Siryn, Black Tom Cassidy, Shamrock and Irish Wolfhound. The study offered a representative overview of the speech of Irish figures in the Marvel universe, in that the comics were taken from 28 different series, such as *Uncanny X-Men*, *X-Factor*, *Generation X* and *Excalibur*, and were written by 28 different writers or writing teams, including such luminaries as Chris Claremont, Roy Thomas, Len Wein and Peter David. The study unearthed some very interesting discoveries, which are summarized below in some detail as they are also of import to the current paper.

In keeping with Weimer's observations for *Punch* magazine, the comics in the Marvel corpus contained very few grammatical features of IE. Those that did appear were either used incorrectly (e.g. the famous "after-perfect") or they were used so frequently in short spaces of time in the speech of individual characters that they drew negative attention to themselves (e.g. *it*-clefting). A further similarity to Weimer's observations concerned lexical items and expressions. Interjections and religious exclamations, particularly those relating to saints, were very common, while stereotypical terms such as *begorrah* and *top o' the morning*, although present in the corpus, occurred only rarely – three times and once respectively. Indeed, it turned out that the most frequent IE, or supposedly IE, terms used in the comics were the affirmative *aye*, and the vocatives *lad*, *laddie/laddy*, *lass*, *lassie*, *boyo* and *bucko*. These findings reflected a general tendency in the comics for speakers of foreign languages or varieties of English other than Standard American to be characterised by their use of code switches or dialectal words, particularly in the form of affirmatives, negatives, vocatives and exclamations. Thus, for example, French characters typically use terms like *oui*, *non*, *mon ami*, and *sacre bleu!*, while Germans use *ja*, *nein*, *mein Freund* and *mein Gott!*⁷⁴

Findings regarding the portrayal of Irish accent in the Marvel universe were also interesting in that the respellings indicated by Weimer as being common in *Punch* were almost completely absent with only one or two isolated occurrences in the 25,500 word corpus. What is more, even if one were to look beyond Weimer's study to find additional possible respellings that could have been used to represent IE, these were also absent. For example, Taniguchi conducted a study of the

⁷⁴ Foreign expressions are not always correct and often display errors in spelling or grammatical agreement. For example, in *Uncanny X-Men* #100, the German character Nightcrawler says « Ich verst'hen, Herr Doktor », thus not conjugating the verb, while in *Uncanny X-Men* #148, he says « Auf weidersehn », which is misspelled.

representation of Irish speech in plays and novels, but the respellings he mentions were present only a handful of times, if at all, in the Marvel corpus. Thus, there was no evidence of <s> being respelled as <sh>, as in *shtop* rather than *stop*, or of <j> being used instead of <d>, as in *projuce* rather than *produce* (cf. Taniguchi, 1972 : 239-41). What is even more surprising is that there was only one substitution of <t> for <th> in all 150 comics, despite the fact that this is always a salient feature in descriptions of Irish accents (cf. Amador Moreno, 2010 : 77). Instead, Irish accent was chiefly indicated via what Preston terms « allegro speech ». Allegro speech forms are those that « attempt to capture through the use of nonstandard spellings (some more traditional than others) the fact that speech is casual, not carefully monitored, relaxed – perhaps slangy » (1985 : 328). This is done chiefly via elision (e.g. the loss of the /v/ in *of* before consonants; Roach, 2000 : 143) and the use of weak forms (e.g. /ən/ or /n/ for *and*; Roach, 2000 : 114). While one could argue that these strategies are common in spoken casual speech and thus not out of the ordinary, they stand out in the comics in question as the Irish characters are indicated as using them much more frequently than other characters do.

One final finding from the study, and one which was particularly interesting, was that there was a tendency for the writers to confuse Irish speech with Scottish speech. Thus, Irish characters in the Marvel comics often use terms more commonly associated with Scottish English, such as *lassie*, *laddie*, *bonny* and *beastie* (cf. OED). Not only that, but they sometimes use Scottish negation, saying *nae*, *cannae*, *dinnae*, *didnae*, etc. (cf. Miller, 2004 : 303), or they make erroneous references to Scottish popular culture, such as the traditional Scottish song « The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond » or the movie *Brigadoon*.

In light of the findings for Irish speech as represented in Marvel comics, a number of research questions emerge that will be of interest with regard to the portrayal of Irish speech in DC comics. 1) In what ways is Irish speech most frequently represented in the comics? 2) Are features of IE grammar also rare, in keeping with both Weimer's observations and the findings of the Marvel study? 3) Which IE expressions or phrases are most frequent? Are they also affirmatives, vocatives and exclamations, as in the Marvel corpus? 4) Is Irish accent represented via respellings as in *Punch* and in many plays and novels, or is the focus mainly on elision and weak forms as in the Marvel comics? 5) Do Scottish features also occur erroneously in Irish speech in the DC corpus? Before those questions can be answered, however, a few words must be dedicated to the methodology used for the

current study, the composition of the corpus and the main characters whose speech will be investigated.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. THE CORPUS

Great efforts were taken to compile a corpus of DC comics that was as compatible as possible with the one from the Marvel study. To that end, the corpus for the current paper also comprises 150 comic books, this time from the DC publishing house. Again, the comics are taken from a broad range of series, 20 in total (including *Sensation Comics*, *Nightwing*, *Primal Force* and *Star Hunters*) and were authored by at least 20 different writers or writing teams (including Gardner Fox, Chuck Dixon and Steven Seagle). However, whereas the previous study focussed on five characters, this study by necessity examines six in order to achieve a corpus of 150 comics from the DC universe, where individual Irish characters recur less frequently.⁷⁵ The breakdown of appearances per character is as follows: The Gay Ghost (35), Jack O'Lantern (39), Bridget Clancy (31), Dudley Soames (31), Mrs McIlvaine (18) and Donovan Flint (8). Every utterance was transcribed for each character, regardless of whether it displayed features of IE, and the total number of words in the corpus amounted to approximately 36,650. This figure is greater than the 25,500 words of the Marvel corpus, due to the fact that some of the characters in the current study, such as The Gay Ghost, are the main protagonists in the stories they appear in, whereas their counterparts in the Marvel comics, despite perhaps being better known to the average comic reader, usually appear as members of teams, like the X-Men, and thus have to share speaking time. It should also be noted that, even within the DC corpus, there are substantial differences regarding the number of words spoken per character. For instance, some characters, such as Flint, have few appearances in total but speak a great deal, whereas others, such as Mrs Mac, appear more regularly but have less to say. The approximate word count per speaker is as follows: Gay Ghost (14,100), Jack (9,900), Clancy (3,700), Soames (3,100), Mrs Mac (650) and Flint (5,200). As in the previous study, I will not calculate the total number of occurrences of a linguistic feature in the corpus. Instead, each feature will simply be noted as either occurring or not occurring in a comic. The reason for this is that counting whether or not a feature occurs in a

⁷⁵ It should be noted that within those 150 comics some characters, e.g. Clancy and Soames, appear in the same issues and therefore when one totals the number of appearances per character the sum is actually greater than 150.

particular issue will better reflect how likely it would be for readers to encounter that feature if they were to consult any of the comics in the corpus. For example, the lexical item *lad* occurs in 32 of the 150 comics, meaning that one has a 21.3% chance of encountering it if one looks at any of the comic books (which, as it happens, is the same rate as for the Marvel corpus). If, on the other hand, one were to count the total number of appearances of *lad* in the entire corpus (including repeat occurrences in individual issues), it would add up to 60, almost twice that of the original findings. This is because a high rate of appearances of the feature in individual comics greatly skews the impression created for the whole corpus. This is nicely illustrated in *Nightwing #68*, where Soames speaks in only 10 panels, yet uses the vocative *lad* on 8 occasions in those brief exchanges:

1. Good t'hear, lad.
2. Dissension in the ranks, lad?
3. And when did I admit t'bein' a hero, lad?
4. We're gonna settle some scores, lad.
5. And what's so wrong with us makin' the rules, lad?
6. There's always goin' t'be crime, lad.
7. Now yer usin' yer brains insteada your fists, lad.
8. Y'test me, lad.

Such idiosyncratic overuse of a feature is very conspicuous and would inflate the numbers for the whole corpus, making them less reliable.

3.2. IRISH CHARACTERS IN THE DC UNIVERSE

The first Irish character to appear in the DC universe was The Gay Ghost, created by Gardner Fox and Howard Purcell in *Sensation Comics #1* (January, 1942). The Gay Ghost is the ghost of a nobleman who lives in Castle Connaught in the erroneously named County Ulster. He was murdered in cold blood in Ireland in the 1700s but remains on earth as a spirit who is able to possess the bodies of good men. In the 1940s, the period in which the comics are set, he assumes the body of the American fighter pilot Charles Collins and goes on to fight the Nazis and Japanese in World War II. Although he inhabits Collins' body, his speech can still be examined in this study, because whenever he leaves his host he continues to speak as he did in Ireland. This speech can vary greatly, however, depending on the

writer of the comic at the time.⁷⁶ For instance, the earliest representations show the Ghost speaking in a slightly antiquated and very formal manner, but rarely using any particularly Irish features. In this regard, his speech is greatly contrasted with that of the supporting cast of locals, whose Irishness is much more marked.⁷⁷ However, from *Sensation Comics #13*, his style of speaking changes dramatically and suddenly has an almost Shakespearean quality. It appears as though a new writer came on board and was told the premise of the comic but never bothered to read any back issues or else simply was not concerned about continuity. Examples of the kind of speech in that comic include

9. Marry come up, 'tis a sorry stew of things! Needs must I find a way hence!
Belike in the next room are keys to this dungeon keep!

or

10. 'Tis as yonder thieves said, he knows not their evil devices! Only one course can
I follow!

This speech style is not at all in keeping with what had come before in the series and must have been very jarring for regular readers at the time.

The next Irish character to appear in DC comics was Donovan Flint, created by David Micheline. He debuted in *DC Super Stars #16* (September, 1977) and is a trouble-shooter aboard a starship in the year 2128. Flint is described in this comic as speaking «with an unmistakable Irish brogue», a description which is superfluous as his Irish accent is immediately evident. He is a cocky character and very much fancies himself as a ladies' man. However, his attitude is not to everybody's liking and, in *Star Hunters #6*, he is described by another character as «an Irish ape». This description is interesting given that Irish Wolfhound, one of the heroes in the Marvel corpus, was exposed to a similar slur, namely «Gaelic Gorilla» (cf. Walshe, 2012 : 288). Such descriptions reflect traditional simian representations of the Irish, as testified to in the titles of both Perry Curtis Jr. and Soper's aforementioned works on depictions of the Irish in caricature.

A further Irish character is Jack O'Lantern, a superhero with a magic lamp that bestows powers on him. He was created by E. Nelson Bridwell and first appeared in

⁷⁶ It should be noted that, since writers were not credited in comics in the 1940s, there is no overt indication that a new writer has taken over. However, shifts in speech style in the comics usually make it very apparent that there has been a change.

⁷⁷ For example, a servant named Michael says «Wanderin' toughs, as me name is Michael O'Mara! After them, me lads!» or «The murtherin' rats! Me byes are after them now!» (*Sensation Comics #1*). It should be noted, however, that the speech of peripheral Irish characters, be they the locals in the Gay Ghost stories or Jack O'Lantern's Irish friends, is not included in the quantitative findings of this paper.

Super Friends #8 (November, 1977). Over the years, three different men have assumed the guise of Jack O’Lantern. The first, Daniel Cormack, is a poor farmer from County Cork. His speech is quite marked as being Irish, or what passes for Irish, with him being the only character in the entire corpus to use the stereotypical *begorra*, saying

11. Begorra! I’m thinking you’re right, me boy!

on his first appearance. However, as is usually the case, this main character’s speech is not as marked as that of the locals in his stories or that of the supporting cast, such as that of his leprechaun friend Fergus, for example. The second man to assume the mantle of Jack O’Lantern is Marvin Noronsa, who first appeared in *Justice League Europe Annual* #1 in 1990. Interestingly, he is not actually Irish, but rather an impostor from the fictional state of Bialya who has stolen Daniel’s lantern and costume and is impersonating him. However, he can be included in this study as he tries (successfully) to pass as the Irish superhero and thus speaks accordingly. Indeed, he bizarrely continues to speak that way even when talking to himself when there is nobody around, saying things such as

12. Ay, it’s a gay old game we’re playin’, Jack me boy! Ha! (*Justice League Europe* #30)⁷⁸

The third incarnation of Jack O’Lantern is Liam McHugh from Crossmaglen, County Armagh. He first appears in *Justice League Quarterly* #14 (Spring, 1994) and is Daniel Cormack’s cousin, who inherits the lantern when his kinsman dies. His speech also features a number of IE features, with those more frequently associated with Northern Ireland (e.g. *aye* and *wee*) being most prominent, as in the following example:

13. Aye, well, I’m not a wee little boy, so I can take care of my own time, thanks. (*Primal Force* #8)

Stories involving Batman’s sidekick Robin are significant in the DC corpus, as they happen to feature three recurring Irish characters: Bridget Clancy, Dudley Soames and Mrs McIlvaine. The first of these, Clancy, was created by Chuck Dixon and Scott McDaniel and first appeared in *Nightwing* #2 (November, 1996), a series dedicated to Dick Grayson, the former Robin, who has left Gotham City to pursue a new identity as the crime-fighter Nightwing in the city of Blüdhaven. It is noteworthy that in their depiction of Clancy the creators play with readers’

⁷⁸ This example employs *aye*, *it*-clefting, and the respelling of *my* as *me*, all of which are common indicators of Irish speech in the corpus.

expectations concerning the physical appearance of the Irish. It has previously been noted that comic book artists frequently include « phenotypic attributes that American audiences would expect » of their comic book characters (Dowling, 2009 : 185), and, as shown elsewhere (Walshe, 2012 : 268), this proved to be the case for Irish characters in the Marvel comics, where Banshee, Siryn and Shamrock were all frequently depicted with the red hair and freckles typically associated with the Irish.⁷⁹ Bridget Clancy, however, does not fall into this pattern, as she is of Asian appearance. Thus, an incongruity is created between the visual and aural representation of the Irish character. This incongruity is heightened in the *Nightwing* series by the fact that the first few times Grayson encounters her he does not see her face, as the artist makes a point of always concealing it, either behind a box, behind a door, or beneath a sink. Grayson can therefore only hear her voice and is immediately smitten with her Irish brogue, saying « Irish accents drive me nuts ». When Clancy finally reveals herself to him (and indeed to the reader) in *Nightwing* #6, she is in the company of a red-haired friend. Grayson (and probably the reader) erroneously assumes that this flame-haired colleen is the owner of « that Irish lilt that's been driving [him] crazy for weeks ». Reacting to Grayson's embarrassment at his racial profiling, Clancy responds by saying

14. Chill out, boyo. It's me who should be apologizin' [...] A cruel trick that... me lookin' like Kowloon and talkin' like Londonderry.⁸⁰

Another recurring Irish character in the *Nightwing* series is Detective Dudley Soames, a.k.a. Torque, a corrupt member of the Blüdhaven police department, who makes his first appearance in Chuck Dixon's *Nightwing* #1 (October, 1996). Although Soames is never explicitly identified as Irish, he shares many of the same linguistic features as Clancy and attention is drawn to the otherness of his speech by various characters.⁸¹ For example, in *Nightwing* #5, when he warns his boss about Grayson, saying

- 15.1. Don't be making the same mistake I made underestimatin' that lad, Chief.

the police chief replies

⁷⁹ In this regard, Appel and Appel comment on the fact that correspondence courses for would-be cartoonists actively perpetuated stereotypes, encouraging artists to « rely on evocative, symbolic, already widely-recognized models ». For the Irish, that meant that « “[t]ypical,” often-caricaturized Irish features included a heavy brogue, prominent chin, projecting jaw, pronounced eyebrow ridge, and red hair » (1990 : 12).

⁸⁰ In *Nightwing* #7, Clancy elaborates on her background more, saying : « You wouldn't be the first person to do a doubletake at a Chinese girl with a 'Derry brogue. I was adopted by a nice Irish family. I left Hong Kong when I was a baby. I came to America to go to college and never went back ».

⁸¹ *Nightwing* does so, too. In one exchange in which Soames has called him a « smart lad » twice on the same page, *Nightwing* responds by saying « But a smart lad like me...? » (*Nightwing* #2).

15.2. Just don't underestimate me, Soames. I'm deadly serious about wanting that « lad » eliminated.

The quotation marks in the chief's comments draw attention to the fact that Soames' use of the word *lad* was salient to him. Indeed, as we shall see, it is one of the most common features associated with the Irish in the comics corpora.

The third Irish character connected to Dick Grayson is Mrs McIlvaine, the housekeeper for Grayson's successor as Robin, Tim Drake, who was also created by Chuck Dixon and first appeared in *Robin III* #3 (February, 1993). Mrs McIlvaine comes from Kilkenny and is the female equivalent of the butler Alfred Pennyworth in the Batman comics, namely cooking for and caring for the young superhero. Given her more peripheral role, she also speaks much less than her compatriots.

Having briefly looked at the characters under discussion, we can now move on to the findings of the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first point of note about the findings of this study is that in all but 17 of the 150 comics some attempt or other was made to portray the speech of the characters as being Irish. The comics that do not contain any features are very often those in which the Irish characters have only a sentence or two of dialogue. This is very often the case for Mrs McIlvaine, for instance. The second, and perhaps more important, finding is that the results from the DC corpus displayed a great degree of parity with those of the Marvel one. This applies with regard to the phonology, grammar and terms and expressions that appear, all of which will be addressed in what follows.

4.1. PHONOLOGY

We will begin with phonology, as this was once again the aspect of speech that was most frequently used to indicate Irishness. This was to be expected as phonological differences between varieties are typically the most salient markers, since « syntactic structures are repeated less often than phonological ones and are thus less available for social assessment » (Hickey, 2000 : 61). What makes the phonological findings interesting, however, is the fact that the same strategies were used (or not used) as in the 2012 study. Thus, in keeping with the findings for the Marvel corpus, those strategies which had been described as common in Irish speech portrayals in *Punch* magazine were almost completely absent, while once

again allegro speech forms were the most common. The findings are described in more detail below.

4.1.1. Vowel and Consonant Substitutions

Unlike traditional portrayals of Irish speech, which have primarily involved the substitution of vowels and consonants to suggest the Irish brogue, the DC comics hardly ever resort to this. Thus, the respellings described by Weimer very rarely occur. As with the Marvel corpus, there is not a single instance of <e> being respelled as <i> in the speech of the major Irish characters in the DC corpus,⁸² nor of <ea> being rewritten as <a>, <ay> or <ai>. The same applies to respellings of <i> as <oi>. What is more, the types of typical respellings described by Taniguchi as being common in plays and novels are not evident either. Thus, there are no instances of <s> being replaced by <sh>, or of <d> being exchanged for <j>, and there is only one instance of <o> being written as <ou>. It occurs in the realization of *old* as /aʊl/, a common occurrence in colloquial Irish English (Hickey, 2007 : 75).

16. Don't try it out with *oul* Jack O'Lantern! (Jack, *JLA Classified #1*)

One of the respellings which one would definitely expect to find in fictional representations of Irish speech, the respelling of <th> as <t> or <d> to reflect the typically Irish pronunciation of the dental fricatives, is also extremely rare in the DC corpus, occurring only twice in the 150 comics. In those instances, the substitution is lexically bound to the word *thing* and comes from the pen of the same author. The examples are as follows:

17. Most hideous *t'ing* I've ever seen. (Mrs Mac, *Eighty Page Giant 1*)
18. *Anyt'ing's* possible now, isn't it? (Clancy, *Nightwing #3*)

The most common dialect respelling to occur in the corpus is one that is not mentioned by Weimer, although Taniguchi (1972 : 248) does include it, namely that of *my* being rewritten as *me*. This was also one of the most common respellings in the Marvel comics, appearing 45 times. It occurs in 28 of the DC comics, also occurring once in the word *myself*, as can be seen in the example below.

19. Faith an' ye're a man after *me* own heart, Sturm! I'm mighty fond o' them little liver sandwiches *meself!* (Flint, *Star Hunters #6*)

⁸² There were, however, two instances of such a respelling in the speech of peripheral characters in the comics. See footnote 7.

The rest of the sound changes which are indicated in the DC comics can be subsumed under the broad heading of allegro speech (i.e. elision and weak forms). As noted above, the use of allegro speech is by no means a strictly Irish phenomenon. However, it occurs more frequently in the speech of Irish characters than in that of non-Irish characters in these comics and thus would appear to be strongly associated with the Irish. This would correspond to Hickey's assertion that « there is a degree of indistinctiveness about southern Irish English, probably due to the amount of elision and assimilation found in the variety » (2007 : 11). What is more, a perceptual dialectology study conducted by this author (Walshe, 2010) revealed that when asked to describe features they typically associate with Irish speech, native speakers of English from Canada, the USA, Australia, the UK and Ireland tended to mention Irish people's quick speech and lack of clarity as being a defining factor of the variety.

Of the various forms of allegro speech that appear in the corpus, one of the most frequent is the respelling of <-ing> as <-in>. This change frequently applies to the progressive and gerund forms of verbs, as one would expect, but also to nouns such as *mornin'*, *evenin'*, *lightnin'*, *anythin'*, *nothin'* and *feelin'* and to adjectives such as *friggin'*, *bleedin'* and *interestin'*. Some examples of the phenomenon are given below.

20. Sure wish I knew what was *goin'* on here. We don't even know where we are, an' *somethin'* bad is *happenin'*. (Jack, *Primal Force* #3)
21. Most of the *buildin'* is empty. Folks're away for the *thanksgivin'* holiday. (Clancy, *Robin* #96)

4.1.2 Elision

As noted above, elision is the deletion of phonemes in rapid speech. The example of *of* was already mentioned above and is also the first one to be addressed below.

4.1.2.1. <o'> for <of>

The elision of <of> to <o'> is quite a common feature in the corpus, appearing in 31 of the comics. An example is:

22. Aye, an' that I was, Jake – in a manner *o'* speakin'! (Flint, *Star Hunters* #4)

4.1.2.2. <'tis> for <it is>

A further example of elision can be seen in the contraction of *it is* to <'tis> rather than <it's>. This form occurred 24 times in the corpus, with over half of the occurrences appearing in comics featuring The Gay Ghost. High occurrences in those comics were, however, to be expected, as although this form of contraction is

archaic in modern Standard English, it was common until the seventeenth century. The appearances in other comics can, however, be accounted for by the fact that most varieties of English in Ireland have not changed greatly since then (cf. Bliss, 1979 : 20) and many features such as this, which are obsolete in other varieties, continue to exist there. The aforementioned elision of the copula in the corpus is not restricted to the present tense but also occurs in the past, future and conditional tenses, with *it was* being realized as '*twas*', *it will* as '*twill*' and *it would* as '*twould*', as in the following:

23. Easy, lad. Easy. '*Tis a burden but 'tis also all in the past.* (Soames, *Nightwing* #55)
24. Hmm. '*Twould seem someone's had a bit much o' the grape t'night.* (Flint, *DC Super Stars* #16)
25. '*Twas a pleasure to work with him, Superman – as 'twill be a particular pleasure to team up with you!* (Jack, *DC Comics Presents* #46)

4.1.3. Weak Forms

4.1.3.1. <an'> or <'n'> for <and>

The use of the weak forms of *and* is a relatively frequent phenomenon appearing in 33 of the comics in the corpus, although that figure is considerably lower than the corresponding figure for the Marvel corpus, namely 59. Examples include:

26. Sure *n'* it's Mr Grayson out fer an evening stroll. (Clancy, *Nightwing* #6)
27. *An'* then I blow you all t'hell! (Jack, *Justice League Europe* #4)

4.1.3.2. <t'> or <ta> for <to>

Another common feature in the DC comics corpus is the use of /tə/, the weak form of *to*. This is achieved through the respelling <t'> and occasionally <ta>. These occur in a total of 53 comics, 48 and 5 respectively, slightly more than in the Marvel corpus. Examples can be found in 27 above and 28 and 29 below:

28. You've enough *t'worry* about, Mister Drake. And there's me cab. God bless all of you. (Mrs Mac, *Robin* #100)
29. That lunatic tried *ta* kill me – (Jack, *Primal Force* #8)

4.1.3.3. <ye> or <y'> for <you>

As was the case for the Marvel corpus, the weak form of *you*, indicated by the spellings <ye>, <y'> and <ya> is very common, appearing in a combined total of 88 comics. Of these, the <ye> spelling is slightly more common, occurring 34 times in contrast to the 30 occurrences of <y'> and the 24 of <ya>. The *ye* form is used to

suggest both singular and plural forms, although it is not clear whether the plural form is intended to be read as *ye* [jɪ], the second person plural form common in IE (cf. Hickey, 2007 : 238). Other possible ways of forming the second person plural in IE such as *youse* or *yiz/yis/yez* (cf. Hickey, 2007 : 239) occur only once, as can be seen below.

30. Sure an' I wish *ye* wouldn't say things like that, Pally. I frighten so easy, *y'know...* (Flint, *Star Hunters* #3)
31. An' I can kill *yez* all in a thousand more stupid, undignified ways! (Jack, *JLA Classified* #1)

Weak forms of *you* can also be found in related words such as *you're*, *your*, *yourself* and *yourselves*. The *you* in these words is respelled as <*yer*>, <*ye're*> and <*y'r*> in 31 comics in the corpus. Examples include:

32. Be warned *yerself*, bucko! *Ye're* talkin' to Donovan Flint! So *ye'd* better watch *yer* language before I stuff them fancy cannons where they'll be mighty painful to fire! (Flint, *Star Hunters* #6)
33. Ha! So *ye* find that *ye're* no match for the Gay Ghost, eh? Well – t'was better men than *you* that found out the same thing centuries ago! (Ghost, *Sensation Comics* #5)

Although the use of the strong form *you* in the last instance may appear to be inconsistent, given the <*ye*> spelling in the previous two instances, it is not inaccurate. Indeed, it would have been a mistake to apply the <*ye*> respelling across the board, as the final instance requires the strong form, as it is a stressed position. That is not to say that writers do not make mistakes, as the following example shows:

34. I know *yer* do *yer* best, boyos. (Soames, *Nightwing* #50)

The first instance of <*yer*> is wrong. Perhaps the American writer thought that intrusive /r/ was a feature of IE just as it is in some varieties of English in neighbouring Britain. However, this is not the case, as confirmed by Hickey, who states that « intrusive /r/ is not to be found in Irish English, northern or southern, where the only instances of /r/ are those which are historically justified » (2007 : 17).

4.1.3.4. <*fer*> for <*for*>

For undergoes a change similar to that of *your*, with its weak form being respelled as <*fer*> or <*f'r*>. Such respellings occur in 11 of the comics.

35. C'mon, ye black-hearted sons o' toads, if it's me skin ye want – ye'll have to work *fer* it! (Flint, *Star Hunters* #4)
36. Aye, but it does have its points of interest! *F'rinstance*, I remember readin' about these old anti-gray flitters. (Flint, *Star Hunters* #1)

4.1.3.5. <th> for <the>

The weak form of the definite article also occurs in the corpus and is represented as <th>. This is the case for 16 comics, with examples including:

37. That's not it. *Th'* buildin's damaged and I'm not sure you goin' up to your flat won't bring the house down. (Clancy, *Nightwing* #21)
38. Annie, I think the only way ta keep you an' *th'* people on this plane safe is for you to come with me. No tellin' what might be waitin' for ya at the other end. (Jack, *Justice League Quarterly* #14)

4.1.3.6. Summary

A summary of the findings for the representation of Irish accent can be found in Tables 1 and 2 below. Table 1 shows features that could have been expected based on the findings from Weimer and Taniguchi, while Table 2 includes the main features that actually occur in the comics. These and all the other tables that follow also offer figures from the Marvel corpus for comparison and include a calculation of occurrences per 100,000 words, based on the 36,650 word DC corpus and the 25,500 word Marvel one.

Feature	No. of comics in which feature occurred		No. of occurrences per 100,000 words in	
	DC	Marvel	DC	Marvel
<t> for <th>	2	1	5.46	3.92
<ou> for <o>	1	1	2.73	3.92
<i> for <e>	0	0	0	0
<a>, <ay> or <ai> for <ea>	0	0	0	0
<oi> for <i>	0	0	0	0
<sh> for <s>	0	0	0	0
<j> for <d>	0	0	0	0

Table 1 : Distribution of expected phonological features (based on Weimer, 1993; Taniguchi, 1972)

Feature	No. of comics in which feature occurred		No. of occurrences per 100,000 words	
	DC	Marvel	DC	Marvel
<ye>, <y’> or <ya> for <you>	88	75	240.11	294.12
<-in’> for <-ing>	77	78	210.10	305.88
<t’> or <ta> for <to>	53	48	144.61	188.24
<an’> or <’n’> for <and>	33	59	90.04	231.37
<o’> for <of>	31	43	84.59	168.63
<yer>, <y’r> or <ye’re> for <your> or <you’re>	31	30	84.59	117.65
<me> for <my>	28	45	76.40	176.47
<th’> for <the>	16	10	43.66	39.22
<fer> for <for>	11	26	30.01	101.96

Table 2 : Distribution of actual phonological features in the DC corpus

The results for the representation of Irish accent display several similarities between the Marvel and DC corpora. In each case, the writers have eschewed the kind of traditional respellings described by Weimer and Taniguchi (see Table 1) and instead have resorted to allegro speech forms (see Table 2). Although these latter forms are by no means exclusive to IE, they are used more in the speech of Irish characters than in those of other protagonists who appear with them in these comics. As noted above, these allegro speech forms appear to be used to reflect the common perception that Irish speech is faster and more indistinct than other varieties of English.

4.2. LEXICAL ITEMS AND EXPRESSIONS

Aside from representing the Irish accent, the writers of the comics use other strategies to convey the Irish speech of the characters, many of which will already have become clear to the reader from the examples above. One of these strategies is the use of lexical items or expressions associated with the Irish. As in the Marvel corpus, these fall predominantly into the categories of affirmatives, vocatives, oaths and exclamations and adjectives.

4.2.1. Affirmatives

The affirmative *aye* was the joint most frequent feature in the Marvel comics and it comes in a close second in the DC corpus, with appearances in 27 of the 150 comics. The use of *aye* seems to be a type of shorthand for conveying Irishness and also occurs in comics that have relatively few Irish features besides. Indeed, attention is drawn to the conspicuousness of the feature by the fact that non-Irish characters imitate Irish characters who use it. This happens, for instance, in *Primal*

Force #4, where the American superhero Meridian mockingly echoes Jack O’Lantern’s words.

39. Jack: Y’know, I think I know why he did it. *Aye!* I’m sure of it. Come on.

Meridian: « *Aye* »

Jack: *Aye!*

In addition to the use of *aye* for affirmation, there is a tendency for Irish characters in the comics to use the syntactical structure *That* + subject + verb to express agreement. This emphatic use of *that* has also been observed in IE by Taniguchi (1972 : 25) and Amador Moreno (2006 : 149) and was also evident in the Marvel corpus. Examples of the structure, the first in combination with *aye*, can be seen below.

40. *Aye, that I have.* Don’t know what it is, but I like it. (Jack, *Primal Force* #2)
41. *That I do,* Fergus! Come along if you like and see the spell I cast! (Jack, *Super Friends* #40)
42. *That I will,* Johny – go on about your job as if nothing has happened. (Ghost, *Sensation Comics* #32)

4.2.2 Vocatives

As was the case for the findings in the Marvel corpus, the most common means of conveying that a character is supposed to be Irish is through the use of vocatives. These can take a number of forms and include *lad*, *laddie*, *lass*, *boyo*, *bucko* and *laddie buck*. These terms can also be found in the corpus as descriptors rather than vocatives, albeit less frequently. The individual terms are described below with examples.

4.2.2.1. Lad

The most frequent lexical item used to suggest Irishness in the corpus is *lad*. It appears in 32 comics, the same number as in the Marvel comics, where it was the joint most common feature. It is spread widely across the whole corpus and is frequently used as a term of address, both in the singular and the plural. Despite its popularity, the use of *lad* in the vocative singular, as it mostly occurs in the corpus (see examples 1 to 8 earlier in this paper), is widely regarded as being Stage Irish. The vocative plural form *lads*, however, does not suffer from the same connotations and is frequently used in IE (cf. Walshe, 2009 : 141-2). An example is given below.

43. Well, *lads?* What are ye waiting for? (Ghost, *Secret Origins* #42)

4.2.2.2. Laddie/laddy

Laddie/laddy, which is related to the term *lad*, appears in 9 comics in the corpus, again the same number of occurrences as in Marvel. The use of this term, like the aforementioned vocative use of *lad* singular, has strong associations with Stage Irishness or indeed with Scottishness (OED) and occurs in the following examples from *Nightwing #11*.

44. There's some mistake here, *laddies* – I was expectin' Mr Desmond.
45. I dunno about that, *laddie*. (Soames, *Nightwing #11*)

A related term, *laddie buck* (see *bucko* below), also occurs in the corpus on 2 occasions.

46. Faith, now, *laddie buck*, you can surely find honest work without resorting again to crime! (Ghost, *Sensation Comics #28*)
47. Well, don't just flap yer capacitors, *laddy-buck* – out with it! (Flint, *Star Hunters #4*)

4.2.2.3. Boyo and bucko

Further vocatives that occur quite prominently are *boyo* and *bucko*, features that again were also common in the Marvel corpus. *Boyo* is described by the OED as being colloquial and dialectal and is regarded chiefly as an Irish feature. It means *boy* and is used « especially as a jovial form of address », appearing in 15 of the comics. *Bucko* is defined in Dolan's *Dictionary of Hiberno-English* as being « a young fellow » and consists of the Old English *buc*, a male deer, and the Irish suffix *-o*, which is used to suggest affection (Dolan, 2006 : 33). *Bucko* occurs in 5 comics in the corpus. Both *boyo* and *bucko* occur in the vocative in all cases and in the second of the examples below *bucko* is even used as a term of address by a character who is speaking to himself. What is more, both terms can also occur in the plural form as in example 34 above and example 50 below.

48. I'm a good Catholic girl, *boyo*. There's no « and like that » t'night. (Clancy, *Nightwing #31*)
49. Flint, me *bucko*, sometimes I wonder how ye get into messes like these! (Flint, *Star Hunters #7*)
50. Grab anything ye can, *buckos*, an' hit 'em hard! (Flint, *Star Hunters #7*)

4.2.2.4. Lass

Whereas Irish characters typically address male characters in the comics using the terms *lad*, *laddie*, *bucko*, *boyo* and *laddie buck*, female characters tend to be

addressed using the word *lass*. *Lass* is recognized as a feature of British dialects, particularly those in the north and midlands (OED), but is not attributed to IE. However, that does not mean that it is not associated with the variety. Indeed, the fact that the feature is strongly associated with Irish speech can be seen in *Nightwing #14*, where one of Clancy's American tenants, Mr Law, replies to her jokingly saying *That I am, lass*. The fact that he uses the term *lass* together with the aforementioned emphatic use of *that* just serves to underline its perceived Irishness. In total, the term occurs in 10 comics in the corpus, both as a vocative and as a descriptor as can be seen in the examples below.

51. Do ya know where your brother is, *lass*? Is he here? (Jack, *Primal Force #6*)
52. Poor *lass*, wonder what happened to her? (Ghost, *Sensation Comics #2*)

It should be noted that the related term *lassie/lassy*, which occurred in some comics in the Marvel corpus, does not appear in the DC corpus. This is a positive finding as *lassie* is actually a term associated with Scottish English (OED).

4.2.3 Exclamations and Oaths

Aside from characters using supposedly Irish forms of affirmation and vocatives, the findings of the Marvel corpus showed that a common way of indicating where a character is from is to have them emit oaths or exclamations that are associated with that place. This also proved to be the case in the DC corpus, with religious exclamations, in particular, playing a prominent role. This is to be expected as the use of such expressions has long been associated with the Irish. Indeed, as early as in 1610, it was commented on by Camden, who described the speech of the Irish as follows:

At every third word it is ordinary with them to lash out with an oth [sic], namely by the Trinity, by God, by S. Patrick, by S. Brigid, by their Baptisme [sic], by Faith, by the Church, by my God-fathers [sic] hand, and by thy hand. (Camden, quoted by Bartley, 1954 : 34)

The use of religious features in Irish speech continues to be prominent today and it has been shown that IE displays a larger and more varied use of religious expressions than other varieties of English (cf. Amador Moreno, 2010 : 69-70; Farr & Murphy, 2009; Walshe, 2009 : 129-37).

Within the DC corpus, just as in the Marvel corpus, references to saints are manifold, with examples including *By all the Saints, B-by the face of Ste. Brigid,*

Holy St Patrick, Blessed St. Patrick and Saint Patrick preserve me.⁸³ Additional religious exclamations include *Glory be, Sweet Mary, Sweet mother o' mercy, Sweet Mary and Joseph, By all that's holy, Holy Hell, Thank th' Lord, Praise the Lord, Oh my Lord, My sweet Lord, Bless me soul and Good Heavens*. Some of the most interesting religious oaths in the corpus, however, are those used by The Gay Ghost. They do not resemble those that occur in the other comics, in that, in keeping with the character's seventeenth-century origin, they are antiquated and more euphemistic. For instance, he uses terms involving *Gad* and *Od* (euphemisms for *God*) in a variety of phrases such as *Gad's my life* and *Od's blood*. He also says *Egads* or *Egad's* (probably euphemisms for *oh God*) as well as *Gadzooks* and *zooks* (perhaps from *God's hooks*, the nails of the Crucifixion) and *zounds* (a euphemism for *God's wounds*).⁸⁴ Finally, the use of the stereotypical oaths *faith, by my faith* and *by my troth* occur much more frequently in the DC corpus than in the Marvel one, mostly in the speech of the Gay Ghost and Flint, and can be seen in the examples below.

53. *Faith an' it's grand t'be wanted, warden – (Flint, Star Hunters #7)*

54. *By my troth, that was a narrow escape! (Ghost, Sensation Comics #24)*

4.2.4. Adjectives

One final group of lexical items that can be used to indicate Irishness is adjectives. Those which were most common in the Marvel corpus were *wee, grand* and *bleedin'*, and this also proved to be the case in the DC corpus. The findings are outlined below with examples.

4.2.4.1. Wee

Wee, meaning « small », occurs in a total of 17 comics in the corpus, almost three times as many occurrences as in the Marvel corpus, where it appeared in 6 issues. Commenting on its appearance in that corpus, I noted that it was out of place for the Irish characters who use it, as the feature is normally associated with northern varieties of IE, whereas all the characters were southern. In the DC corpus, in contrast, many of the characters are explicitly described as being from the north, which makes the higher frequency of occurrences acceptable (see example 13, for instance). Having said that, the southern characters do also use the structure, as can be seen below.

⁸³ Peripheral characters also offer a wide range of oaths and exclamations but those were not taken into account for the study. Some of them are pagan – as they are used by leprechauns. Examples include *By Finn's beard, By the hand of Finn, By Lucifer, and Shades of Abaddon!*

⁸⁴ All definitions come from the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

- 55. I was a *wee* bit judgmental myself, Mr. Drake. (Mrs Mac, *Robin* #49)
- 56. Aye, Missy, but what reason? Don't it strike ye as bein' a *wee* bit peculiar that we're out here searchin' for what might be the grandest discovery in history – (Flint, *Star Hunters* #2)

4.2.4.2. Grand

Although the use of *grand* to mean *fine* or *splendid* (cf. Dolan, 2006 : 114) is usually a very salient feature of Irish English speech, it occurs in only 5 comics, all but one of which feature Flint. Examples include

- 57. *Grand* night. The stars are brilliant! (Ghost, *Sensation Comics* #2)
- 58. Sure an' it's *grand* t'hear yer dulcet tones o' gratitude, missy – (Flint, *Star Hunters* #3)

4.2.4.3. Bloody, bleedin' and soddin'

The adjectives *bloody*, *bleedin'*, and *soddin'* are symptomatic of another phenomenon that was observable in both the Marvel and DC corpora, namely Irish characters' use of mild expletives not found in American English but that can be found on the other side of the Atlantic. These, together with terms like *bloke*, *blackguard* and *sod*, which are also not used in America, add an extra dimension of otherness or foreignness to the speech of these characters, even if terms like *sod* and *bloke* are actually more likely to be associated with British varieties rather than Irish ones (cf. Merriam-Webster). Some examples include

- 59. Tornado! What the *bleedin'* hell are you doin', man? (Jack, *Primal Force* #4)
- 60. Beaten up by *soddin'* gorillas. (Jack, *JLA Classified* #2)

The most frequent terms and expressions in the DC corpus to suggest Irishness are included in Table 3. Comparative figures for the Marvel corpus are also given.

Feature	No. of comics in which feature occurred		No of appearances per 100,000 words	
	DC	Marvel	DC	Marvel
<i>Lad</i>	32	32	87.31	125.49
<i>Aye</i>	27	32	73.67	125.49
<i>Wee</i>	17	6	46.38	23.53
<i>Bloody</i>	16	16	43.66	62.75
<i>Boyo</i>	15	24	40.93	94.12
<i>Faith</i>	15	2	40.93	7.84
<i>Lass</i>	10	14	27.29	54.90
<i>Laddie</i>	9	9	24.56	35.29
<i>Sure and...</i>	9	6	24.56	23.53
<i>Bucko</i>	5	4	13.64	15.69
<i>Grand</i>	5	4	13.64	15.69
<i>By my troth</i>	5	0	13.64	0
<i>Beastie</i>	5	4	13.64	15.69
<i>Bleedin'</i>	4	4	10.91	15.69
<i>Blackguard</i>	4	1	10.91	3.92
<i>Laddie-buck</i>	2	0	5.46	0

Table 3 : Distribution of the most frequent terms and expressions

The results display quite a high degree of parity between several of the lexical features used in the DC and Marvel comics. For example, the two most common lexemes used to convey Irishness were the same in each case, namely the vocative *lad* and the affirmative *aye*. However, some differences can also be observed in the corpora. A noticeable one is in the frequency of *wee*, which occurred in almost three times as many comics in the DC corpus. This higher rate of appearance can be attributed to the fact that the feature is more common in Northern Irish English and thus would be expected to occur more in the speech of characters who are explicitly identified as coming from the North, as is the case for many of the DC characters. Another striking difference between the corpora concerns the frequencies of the oaths *faith* and *by my troth*. This time the higher frequency in the DC corpus can be attributed to period rather than locale, as these particular oaths, as described above, were very frequent in Irish speech in the seventeenth century and thus could be expected of someone like the Gay Ghost, who hails from that period and who is responsible for the majority of the uses. One final point of note is that although the DC corpus does not display the same variety or number of Scotticisms as the Marvel one, which also included *bonny*, *lassie* and *laird*, other Scottish features nonetheless find their way into the Irish DC characters' speech. Thus, *laddie* appears in an equal number of comics in each corpus, with *beastie* even occurring in one more issue in the DC corpus than the Marvel one.

4.3. GRAMMAR

With regard to grammar, the features mentioned by Weimer once again do not feature very prominently. Thus, there were no instances of *will* being used instead of *shall* in questions in the first person, only two instances of the tag *is it?* used to create questions and only four cases each of *them* being used as a demonstrative (see examples 19 and 32) and of *what* being used as a relative pronoun, as in the example below:

61. Now, Doc, ye shouldn't go bein' so harsh. It ain't everyone *what* can be a successful drone – (Flint, *Star Hunters* #6)

Hickey describes this use of *what* as a relativiser, particularly with an animate antecedent, as being a stereotypical feature of IE, noting that respondents to his *A Survey of Irish English Usage* regarded it as sounding « Stage Irish » (2007 : 260).

Other non-standard grammar features in the corpus are those which can be found in many varieties of English, namely multiple negation (4 comics), a lack of subject-verb concord (6 comics), the use of non-standard verb forms (6 comics) and a lack of negator contraction (5 comics). The use of *ain't* for *am not*, *are not*, *is not*, *have not* and *has not* is one of the more conspicuous features, not only because it occurs in 13 comics, a relatively high rate of occurrence for any grammar feature in the corpus, but also because it is a feature not typically associated with IE. Indeed, the contraction of *am not* to *ain't*, which comprises 7 of these instances, does not occur in the variety and is even described by Hickey as one of the « definite signs that a speaker is not Irish », the others being h-dropping and r-lessness (Hickey, 2004 : 95).

One feature certainly recognised as Irish is the « *after-perfect* ». However, as in the Marvel corpus, it is not used correctly in its sole occurrence in the DC corpus. The *after-perfect* is a means of expressing the perfect and consists of a form of *be* + *after* + verb-*ing*. Thus, where speakers of Standard English would say *I have eaten my dinner*, speakers of IE tend to say *I'm after eating my dinner*. It is important to note that this structure does not signal intention, but rather that something has happened immediately prior to the time of speaking or time of reference. Those who are not familiar with IE, however, tend to assume that the structure does indeed have this meaning of intention, as shown by Harris (1993) in his survey of British respondents. This misunderstanding is also evident in the only example of the *after-perfect* in the DC corpus.

62. Do you know who *he was after killing?* (Jack, *Super Friends* #44)

In this sentence, Jack uses the structure to ask his uncle who the intended victim of a murder is. Thus, the meaning is one of intention and not of expressing the past as it would be in IE. Incorrect uses of the *after*-perfect by those who are not familiar with the variety are nothing new. Indeed, Hickey has previously commented on this saying that « it is often used by non-Irish speakers in syntactic frames that do not allow it, e.g. with stative verbs as in *She *after knowing Paddy for years* » (2000 : 58).

A possible reason for the structure being used incorrectly with stative verbs is that Irish English permits much more liberal use of the progressive form, including with stative verbs, particularly those of perception and cognition, such as *hear*, *want*, *wonder*, *know*, *think* and *believe* (cf. Harris, 1993 : 164). This was also reflected in the DC corpus, where progressive forms occur with stative verbs in 9 of the comics and is one of the most frequent ways of indicating Irishness on a grammatical level. Examples include

- 63. I should *be knowin'*. I'm the super, y'see? (Clancy, *Nightwing* #2)
- 64. To try to get us some help, if it's any of your business, which *I'm thinkin'* it's not. (Jack, *Primal Force* #11)

Another feature frequently associated with speakers of Irish English is repetition for emphasis (cf. Walshe, 2009 : 128). This usually involves the repetition of the verb or an auxiliary verb in a final tag and occurs in 6 of the comics in the corpus:

- 65. You're a wonder, *you are*. (Clancy, *Nightwing* #31)
- 66. It's t' laugh, *it is*. (Soames, *Nightwing* #50)

Numerous studies mention the use of *it*-clefting as being a common feature of IE and one that occurs more frequently and in more contexts in that variety than in other varieties of English (Filppula, 1999 : 248-56; Taniguchi, 1972 : 146-77). The structure does indeed occur, in 6 of the comics in the corpus, 2 examples of which can be seen below. One of these examples also features an instance of an unbound reflexive, which again is a feature commonly associated with the variety. However, unbound reflexives only occur in 2 comics in the DC corpus.

- 67. By all that's holy, *it's wrong I hope they are!* (Jack, *Super Friends* #37)
- 68. By all the Saints! *'Twas himself the coach appeared to!* (Jack, *Super Friends* #44)

The findings for the most common grammar structures used to suggest Irishness in the DC corpus are summarized in Table 4 below.

Feature	No. of comics in which feature occurred		No of appearances per 100,000 words	
	DC	Marvel	DC	Marvel
<i>Ain't</i>	13	2	35.47	7.84
Progressive with stative verbs	9	14	24.56	54.90
<i>It</i> -clefting	6	4	16.37	15.69
Repetition for emphasis	6	2	16.37	7.84
Lack of subject-verb concord	6	0	16.37	0
Non-standard verb forms	6	0	16.37	0
Lack of negator contraction	5	5	13.64	19.61
Multiple negation	5	0	13.64	0
<i>Them</i> as demonstrative pronoun	4	2	10.91	7.84
<i>What</i> as relative pronoun	4	0	10.91	0
Unbound reflexives	2	1	5.46	3.92
<i>Is it</i> as question tag	2	0	5.46	0
<i>After</i> -perfect	1	1	2.73	3.92
Scottish negation	1	6	2.73	23.53

Table 4 : Grammar features used to convey Irishness

The results for the grammar features display the greatest differences between the DC and Marvel corpora. Table 4 reveals that the Marvel comics on the whole tend to forego using grammar features to convey Irishness, apart from one unsuccessful attempt at the *after*-perfect, and the occasional use of *it*-clefting, the progressive with stative verbs and a lack of negator contraction. The most telling feature of Marvel's use of grammar features is the relatively high occurrence of Scottish negation. Although Scottish negation can occasionally be found in Northern Irish speech (cf. Kirk & Kallen, 2008 : 187), the characters in the Marvel corpus were all clearly identified as coming from the south and thus this feature should not be present in the corpus. DC comics, in contrast to Marvel, employ a wider range of grammar features, some of which are common in, but by no means exclusive to, IE. These include a lack of subject-verb concord and the use of non-standard verb forms. Other features regarded as being typical of IE, such as repetition for emphasis, *is it?* as a question tag and unbound reflexives, are also to be found in the corpus, albeit sparingly. Interestingly, the most common morpho-syntactical structure used in the DC comics is not a feature of IE at all. *Ain't*, as noted above, is actually regarded as an indicator that a speaker is not Irish.

5. CONCLUSION

From the above, it is clear that the representation of Irish speech in DC comics differs considerably from that described by Weimer in *Punch* magazine. Respellings to suggest different realizations of vowels and consonants are rare, with allegro speech features instead being the most common way of representing the Irish accent. This is in keeping with the findings in the Marvel comics corpus and may reflect the fact that respellings can often be confusing or difficult to read and can slow a reader down, whereas allegro speech features serve a function similar to eye dialect in that they are merely a visual signal that the speech in the text is in some way non-standard, but they do not slow the reader down too much or impede understanding. Another parallel between the findings in the DC and Marvel corpora was that the lexical features most frequently used to convey Irishness in both are primarily affirmatives, vocatives and exclamations or oaths, with a few adjectives completing the representation. In comparison to the Marvel corpus, however, the DC one displays fewer examples of stereotypical expressions such as *begorra*, and also fewer instances of confusion with Scottish English, with the terms *lassie* and *bonny*, for example, never occurring and Scottish negation being limited to one comic book in the corpus. Finally, salient IE grammar structures such as the “*after-perfect*” and unbound reflexives turned out to be rare in the DC corpus, with Irishness being suggested instead through non-standard features that are also evident in other varieties of English (and indeed through some features which do not occur at all in IE). On the whole, then, these findings, coupled with those from the Marvel study, offer some wonderful insights into American perceptions of Irish speech. They clearly show which features Americans believe (correctly or not) to be typical of the variety and they offer a rich body of examples that can be used in further comparative studies, perhaps for other comics or animated cartoons.

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