



Irish loanwords in English varieties

Emma Fristedt

English 61-90, 30 credits

Halmstad 2015-01-26

Irish loanwords in English varieties

Emma Fristedt

Halmstad University

English 61-90

Fall Semester 2014

Supervisor: Jenny Hartman

Abstract

This essay will discuss and research the width and frequency of Irish loanwords in contemporary English varieties. The meanings, uses, differences, similarities and collocations of selected words will be discussed and analyzed in order to find answers to the research questions asked.

The methods used are quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative method will measure the frequency of the selected words in each of the selected varieties and the qualitative method will discuss the meanings and uses of the words in the different varieties.

Each word has its own section which discuss meanings, developments and instances in which the words can be found in the different varieties. These sections are summarized at the end of the essay and the conclusion states that Irish loanwords in contemporary English varieties are not greatly widespread compared to the frequency of the same words in Irish English. A few of the words have been able to develop their meaning and use through time, but most instances of the words show the original meaning and use.

Keywords

Irish loanwords, English varieties, Collocations, Word use, Language Contact.

Table of contents

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction	4
2. Historical background	4
3. Method and data	6
4. Irish loanwords	8
4.1 Leprechaun	8
4.2 Shamrock	11
4.3 Blarney	14
4.4 Craic	17
4.5 Brogue	19
5. Summary and conclusion	21
5.1 Summary	21
5.2 Conclusion	23
6. References	24

1. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to study the meaning, use and development of selected Irish loanwords and to find out how widespread they are in different English Varieties. Since Ireland became an English speaking country, a selection of words from Irish Gaelic has been borrowed in to the Irish English language variety and passed on in to other English varieties. For this essay five Irish loanwords have been selected; *leprechaun*, *shamrock*, *blarney*, *craic* and *brogue*. The aim of the essay is to answer the questions of how widely the selected Irish loanwords have been transferred in to different English varieties and if the loanwords have similar meanings and uses in the different varieties.

The essay begins with an historical background explaining the development of English in Ireland and changes in the language that constructed the Irish English language variety. The historical background is followed by a methodology section which includes quantitative and qualitative research methods. The discussion of Irish loanwords begins in section 2 and is aimed to discuss the meanings, uses, differences, similarities and collocations of the selected loanwords. This is followed by a summary of the discussion and finally a conclusion with answers to the research questions.

2. Historical background

Irish Gaelic is a member of the Celtic languages in the Indo-European language family and according to the Site for Language Management in Canada (SLMC) around 95% of Irish citizens speak English as their first language, while approximately 1.1% speak Irish Gaelic as their first language (Site for Language Management in Canada n.d.). Gillian Sankhoff writes that linguistic minorities could be found in almost every country in the world at the start of the 21st century. These minorities have been formed through immigration and language adoption from languages that have not been spoken by the local population before (Sankhoff in Trudgill, Chambers and Schilling-Estes 2001: 638-668). The Celtic languages were once widespread through Europe and Irish Gaelic took over from Middle Irish around the 16th century (Slocum 2014). However, the Irish population were influenced strongly by the British and the English language slowly but surely replaced Irish Gaelic in Ireland. Some Irish Gaelic words have been adopted into the Irish English language and they were passed on into American English, at least to a certain degree, when the Irish population started to immigrate to America because of the Famine.

According to Sankhoff (2001), this was due to the fact that people who are bilingual often let

their two languages influence each other. This is also where etymology comes in to the picture, languages constantly change and one word which has originated from Irish Gaelic in the past may not necessarily have stayed the same throughout history. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, etymology is not the definition of words, it is the history and development of words. Etymology is mainly focusing on where they came from, what they meant and how they were spelt (Harper 2001-2014).

As mentioned very briefly, language contact is a big factor when it comes to loanwords. However, the impacts of language contact can have various outcomes, in some cases several words might be borrowed into a language and in some cases almost no words at all. This usually depends on the amount of contact and length of contact between different social groups. It also depends on the languages, how similar they are to each other and the functions of communication between the people speaking them (Winford 2012).

Arguably, Irish English accurately symbolizes the social history of the country. The English language was brought in to Ireland in the twelfth century by invaders from West Wales who spoke Norman French, the settlers who followed them were English speaking. However, the French and English languages had a hard time establishing outside of towns and hardly made it in to any rural areas, except for two, one of them being Wexford in the south of Ireland, and the second, an area in north Country Dublin known as Fingal (Monasterio León 2012: 24-26).

In the sixteenth century there was a decline of the English language. The Reformation took place and Irish Gaelic was made the official language in Ireland and Irish Catholics refused to speak English to any British officials who were visiting. It would take a whole century before Old English managed to survive in any of the Irish towns after the Reformation. During the regime under James I, Scottish settlers brought their Scottish accents into Ireland and the accent is still acknowledgeable in Irish English today.

The sounds and pronunciations that the Irish had difficulties with while speaking English were often substituted with Irish sounds and pronunciations and these substitutions still exist in Irish English. Over time, the influence from Irish Gaelic grew larger in the Irish English language. However, at the very beginning English words and expressions were strongly preferred even among the Irish people. As time passed these were replaced by Irish expressions and the influence became very obvious, this also resulted in the creation of idioms that had never been present in the English language before (Monasterio León 2012: 24-26). However, there were a few issues relating to the development of English in Ireland. For example, the Irish people had trouble learning English from standard speakers, perhaps due to difficulty in understanding English phonetics. In an attempt to find a solution to this problem, more English schools were built but the problem persisted as the

English-speaking teachers did not speak standard English, therefore, the influence of Irish grew larger as time passed. This is very noticeable in word stress in Irish English compared to word stress in Standard English. This differentiation in word stress could be the result of a misinterpretation by the teachers who did not speak Standard English and therefore could have been teaching it wrong to the students, without realizing it (Monasterio León 2012: 24-26).

The fact that a few Irish loanwords spread to England, Wales and Scotland is no great surprise, seeing as Irish is a Celtic language similar to Welsh and Scots Gaelic. Ireland is also the neighbor of all three countries. However, the Irish loanwords existing in other types of English varieties such as American, Australian and Canadian English, are more interesting as they may have a strong connection to Irish history and language contact because of immigration from Ireland to other English speaking countries in the past. Between 1848 and 1950 over six million people emigrated from Ireland, most of them due to reasons such as poverty, the land system and crop failure which eventually led to the Great Irish Famine. The potato crop was the main source of food in Ireland and as the crop continued to fail, the Irish emigrants made an attempt to escape starvation and the diseases caused by it. Many people emigrated to Canada but the vast majority of emigrants went to the United States of America (Cobh Heritage Centre n.d.). This may be one of the most important reasons as to why Irish loanwords can be found in English varieties in today's society.

3. Method and data

There are two research questions for this essay.

1. How widely have the selected Irish loanwords been transferred into other varieties of English languages (e.g. British English / American English)?
2. Do the selected loanwords have similar meanings/uses in the different varieties of English?

In order to collect data for the analysis of loanwords in different English varieties the *Corpus of Global Web-Based English* was used. This corpus contains “1.9 billion words from 1.8 billion webpages from twenty English speaking countries” (Davies 2013). The *Corpus of Global Web-Based English* or GloWbE as it is also called, is related to two other corpuses and together they let their researchers compare and examine varieties in English languages by genre, dialect and over-time changes (Davies 2013). In this essay GloWbE was used to compare frequencies in the sub corpora and to access data for qualitative analysis, which resulted in the analysis being both *quantitative* (the frequency of the different words in different varieties) and *qualitative* (analyzing

whether or not the loanwords have similar meanings and uses in the different varieties). The results from the data collected from GloWbE was put together in an analysis of similarities and differences in the use of Irish loanwords in contemporary English varieties.

All the words were also searched for on the *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, in order to map out historical changes and meanings of the words, to see if the meaning of the word or the word itself has changed in any way throughout time.

Finally, the words were searched for collocations to see which words were most commonly occurring with the selected loanwords. This helped to strengthen arguments and instances of word use from the corpora in the way that it showed how the word was being used in relation to other words in the instances shown.

4. Irish loanwords

This section presents the results of the study and a discussion of each word together with examples of word use in the different English varieties. Each word selected for this study has been given its own section. The use of each word in American English (AmE), British English (BrE), Irish English (IrE), Australian English (AuE) and New Zealand English (NzE) are compared in a graph and the top three countries of word frequency are being discussed in each section. The information will be collected through the *The Corpus of Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE) and examples given from the instances listed in the corpus.

4.1 Leprechaun

Leprechaun is a word referring to a small human like creature that has its heritage in Ireland. One is considered very lucky to see a *leprechaun* and if you catch one, the tale says that the *leprechaun* has to give you his pot of gold. Another version of the tale is that at the rainbow's end you can find a *leprechaun's* pot of gold (Fox News 2010). According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* the word derives historically from the following Irish words:

in Ir. folk—lore, a pygmy sprite. XVII (lubrican). —

Irish: lupracán, leipracán, lioprachán,

Middle Irish: luchrupán,

Old Irish: luchorpán'.

The word was put together from the Irish word *lu* which means 'small' and *corp* which is the Irish word for 'body', in other words 'small body'. The pronunciation is very similar in both English and Irish; it is the spelling that varies the most.

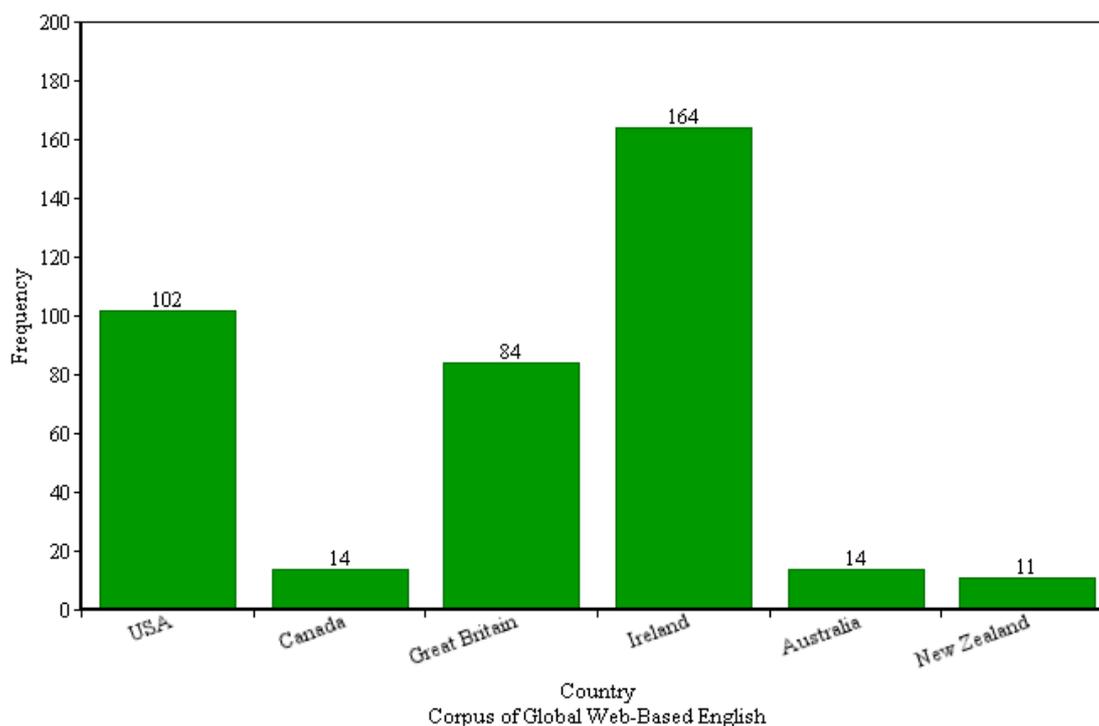


Figure 1: Frequencies in GloWbE of *leprechaun* in 6 varieties of English

Today the word *leprechaun* can be found in many different varieties of English. Figure 1 shows the frequency of the word and the displayed data was collected from GloWbE. *Leprechaun* is most common in Irish English (IrE) followed by American English (AmE) and British English (BrE). The three varieties have a lot in common when it comes to the use of *leprechaun* but there are also noticeable differences, the discussion that follows below regarding those differences does not exclude the possibility of the same use being present in all three varieties.

It was noted that a number of the AmE instances of the word *leprechaun* was in the form of a noun. However, *leprechaun* was used differently in some instances, as a way of describing *something* instead of referring directly to the creature of a leprechaun. For instance describing a way of doing something or what something looks like and not the creature itself. This would imply that *leprechauns* are familiar creatures among people and people therefore have the ability to use the word for different purposes. In other words, we can amend the use of the word to fit the purpose we intend to communicate and even though the word is used as a noun, it can be used as a noun in different ways as seen in examples (1) and (2) here below.

(1) Leon Cooper is short and stooped with a shock of gray hair and a peppy **leprechaun's** manner.¹

(2) The dude is drinking a concoction that looks like a **leprechaun** threw up in a glass.²

BrE has the third highest frequency and while comparing AmE and BrE there is a noticeable difference in genre. The American English genre “General” consists to a large part of blogs and movie summaries, while the British “General” category consists of quite a few newspapers, including *The Telegraph* and *The Daily Mail*, which are cited below.

(3) Any child can tell you that a pot of gold lies at the end of a rainbow, usually guarded by a crafty **leprechaun** who will try to trick you out of the loot.³

(4) I assume real grown up men find it a bit odd and uncomfortable? Sexy **Leprechaun**? Sexy Raincoat? Sexy Poppy?⁴

When reading through the key words in context in GloWbE it seems that BrE uses the word mainly in order to refer to actual *leprechauns* themselves. This differs from AmE where the word was used to describe features and qualities associated with *leprechauns*. IrE had the highest frequency, which is not a great surprise seeing as that is where the word originates from. In the corpus queries carried out in this study it is fair to expect that IrE will always have the highest frequency, no matter what the word is. The use of *leprechaun* seems to be rather mixed in IrE, it ranges from descriptions of leprechauns, to leprechaun's outfits and parables.

(5) Irish names for children in the United States are rising in popularity higher than a **leprechaun's** leap.⁵

(6) The Stag's Head, (just off Dame Street) a tavern almost as old as Guinness, and probably as close as you'll get to a proper traditional Irish pub - not a shamrock or **leprechaun** in sight.⁶

It is interesting to assume that *leprechaun* has a broad use in IrE, while AmE and BrE seems to be divided up in between different uses. As discussed above, AmE seems to use the word in order to

1 http://www.kcet.org/updaily/socal_focus/commentary/west-is-eden/quiet-service-and-qualities-that-matter.html

2 <http://blog.chron.com/tubular/2012/10/supernatural-i-do-a-lot-of-cardio/>

3 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2138323/Hard-gold-end-THIS-rainbow-Rare-solar-halo-dazzles-sky-China.html>

4 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/fashion/2012/nov/12/victorias-secret-playboy-lingerie>

5 <http://www.babynamesofireland.com/media-press-coverage>

6 <http://www.alchemyinthekitchen.ie/2012/09/guinness-chocolate-cake-piece-of-this.html>

describe manners and features. In BrE it seems as though the British mainly use the word as a noun, which it is in its' original intention, to refer to the actual creature of a *leprechaun*.

Setting the differences aside there are also uses of the word on GloWbE that are the same in all three varieties. One common use is the feature of a *leprechaun* creature in movies and stories. Seeing as a *leprechaun* is a fictional creature to begin with, it may be fairly easy to expand the use of *leprechaun* into all sorts of fictional works and build different story lines connected to the creature. This can again be an indication that the word is so familiar that people are able to elaborate and build on the use of the word to create meanings and identities of the creature to fit a particular purpose.

When searching for the most common collocations for *leprechaun* in GloWbE the top three are the words *little*, *museum* and *gold*. When constructing sentences including *leprechaun* the word *little* is used as a description of the creature, there is a leprechaun museum in Dublin which is a popular tourist attraction and at the end of the rainbow you can find a leprechaun and his (or her) pot of gold. The collocations for leprechaun go well together in sentences, for example; *Leprechauns are fictional creatures who have their heritage in Ireland, the legend states that at the end of the rainbow you will find a leprechaun and his pot of gold. Interested in learning more about these little creatures? Visit the Leprechaun Museum in Dublin.'*

To sum up the discussion of *leprechaun* briefly, there are differences in the use of the word between the different varieties of English. Although AmE, BrE and IrE all use *leprechaun* as a common noun there are still differences in the use of the word, such as the use of describing behavior or features which was noted in AmE. This does not mean that IrE and BrE never use *leprechaun* in the same ways as AmE, only that the particular instances were more noticeable in AmE. *Leprechaun* seems to be a familiar word, so familiar that people who use the word seem to be able to amend the use and sometimes even the nature of the word to fit particular purposes.

4.2 Shamrock

A *shamrock* is the classic symbol that many people believe represents Ireland and is also quite frequently seen as the 'national emblem of Ireland'. However, those who believe this is the case are slightly mistaken, because the national symbol of the country is the Celtic Harp. Back in the days the *shamrock* was said to have a magical meaning and the number three, which is the number of the shamrock's petals, was considered to be a very strong and lucky number. When Saint Patrick came to Ireland he used the *shamrock* as a symbol to teach the church's belief in the Trinity – The Father,

the Son and the Holy Ghost (Santry 2010-2014). The word *shamrock* comes from the Irish word *seamróg*.

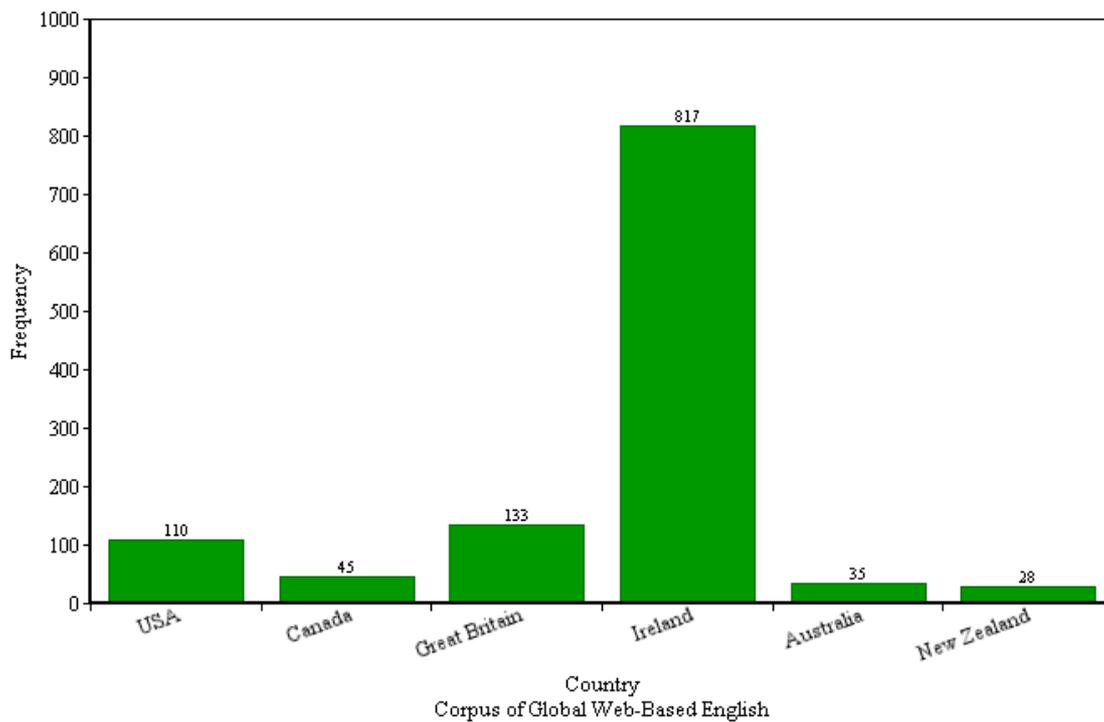


Figure 2: Frequencies in *GloWbE* of *shamrock* in 6 varieties of English

As seen in Figure 2, the top three varieties for *shamrock* in *GloWbE* are the same three English varieties as in Figure 1, however, this time BrE is in second place while AmE is in third. IrE is the top variety once again and as previously mentioned this could be expected. The word shows higher frequency in AmE and BrE than *leprechaun* did, however, the frequency of *shamrock* is lower in IrE than *leprechaun* was. The instances of AmE and BrE are very close to each other while IrE is still far ahead. This time the high frequency in IrE seems to be because of the referring to the football team Shamrock Rovers, one of the most well known football teams in Ireland, as seen in example (7) below.

(7) Their first opponents were Irish League Champions **Shamrock** Rovers.⁷

As mentioned earlier, the *shamrock* is a very Irish symbol and instead of using the country's name itself, different symbols can be used to identify and resemble the country. The Irish song cited below in example (8) is one instance of this. This use of the word is not unique in IrE, it is used in

⁷ <http://backpagefootball.com/harry-gregg-hero-of-the-munich-air-disaster/14023/>

all three of the varieties to refer to Ireland or Irish culture.

(8) Long years have now passed since with hearts full of sorrow, the land of the **shamrock** we left far behind; But oh how we'd like to go back there tomorrow.⁸

When looking at the uses of the word in BrE, it is quite varied. Everything from the Shamrock Rovers, Saint Patrick and Irish symbols to 'the Shamrock' as a bar name is mentioned. The use of *shamrock* as a name of something is quite common in all the varieties, example (9) here below is another instance of this, collected from the instances listed under BrE in GloWbE.

(9) Look at the clover-leaf. This is an important symbol for the Irish people and is sometimes called a **shamrock**.⁹

(10) Northern Ireland office officials hope that Obama will announce a flying visit to Belfast next month when he arrives in the UK for the G20 global economic summit. As he receives the traditional bowl of **shamrock** while wearing his green tie in honor of Ireland's national day.¹⁰

Again, *BBC* and *The Guardian* - Together with other recognized newspapers are among the sources of the instances of *shamrocks*, just as they were in the instances of *leprechaun*. AmE has somewhat changed its medium and referred mostly to sport sites. These sites are mentioning a UFC/MMA fighter named Ken Shamrock who did not seem to have any direct ties to Ireland in any way, possibly a range of older Irish relatives can be found in his family but this is not mentioned anywhere. Apart from this, the mentions of *Shamrocks* were limited in AmE and mostly referring to the clover itself and not to anything Irish or St. Patrick and is different from IrE and BrE in that sense. The instances found under AmE would conclude that *shamrock* is mostly used as a noun and is either used as name for something or someone and not typically recognized as a symbol of Ireland.

When comparing *shamrock* to *leprechaun* it is noticeable that *shamrock* seems to be more restricted in its meaning, there does not seem to have been much room for development in the meaning of the word either. While studying *leprechaun* it came clear that the word had developed and elaborated its meaning and use, however, *shamrock* seems to be more restricted both in its development and use. The top three collocations for shamrock in GloWbE are *Rovers*, *Ken* and

8 <http://brakn.com/mayo.htm>

9 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03g6vs0>

10 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/mar/15/ruari-o-bradaigh-ira-northern-ireland>

Irish. The collocations match the instances found and discussed in the analysis mentioning the Shamrock Rovers, Ken Shamrock and references to Irish and Celtic culture. Since sports are so popular in society it makes sense that the top collocations are from sport related words or teams as it is something that people like to watch, read and talk about in their spare time.

To conclude the section about *shamrock*, it is fair to say that the use is very limited compared to *leprechaun*. The most frequent instances of the word were found in names, in texts referring to Ireland or Irish culture or the *shamrock* itself, which also matches the top three collocations of the word. All of the mentioned were in the form of a common noun. People have not been able to amend or change the word in favor of particular uses, other than perhaps naming a bar or a pub, which is also an indication that the use of the word is limited.

4.3 Blarney

Blarney is originally a name of a castle outside of Cork, Ireland. Outside the castle there is a stone which is known as the *Blarney Stone* and if a person gives the stone a kiss that person is going to be given the gift of persuasive speech. This tale has made its way into the English language as an expression; to talk *blarney* basically means that one is trying to persuade, charm or flatter someone by talking them into something. *Blarney* is said to be typical for Irish people, *the Irish speak a load of blarney*. The following is an example of the use of the word in a sentence from *The Oxford Dictionary*:

(11) So he **blarneyed** his way into flight school and a couple of years later flew night missions over Vietnam in an F-4.

Blarney can thus mean to talk 'bullshit' and it is a common saying that *you are speaking a load of blarney*.

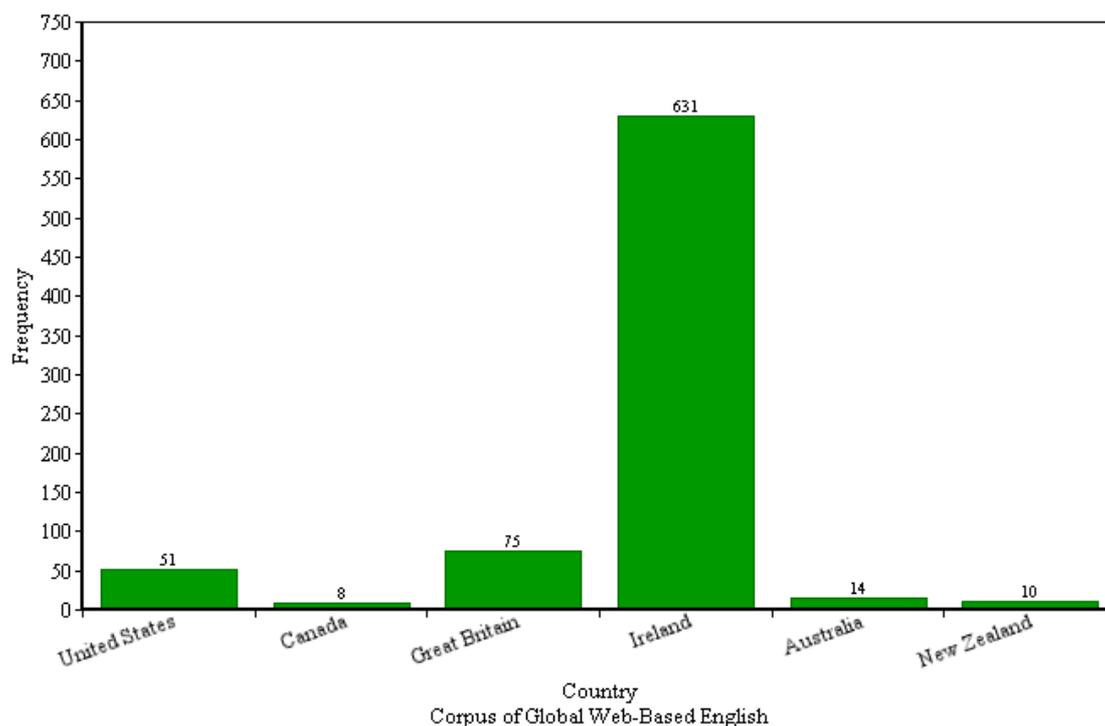


Figure 3: Frequencies in GloWbE of *blarney* in 6 varieties of English

Figure 3 shows data collected from GloWbE and BrE is once again ahead of AmE and IrE still has the highest frequency. It seems that the BrE instances are again found several times in newspapers, *The Guardian* has written the following:

(12) All I'm suggesting is some honesty instead of loads of woolly old **blarney**.¹¹

In the above example *blarney* is clearly used as a different expression for 'bullshit'. The Grimsby Telegraph follows the lead with the citation below:

(13) My opinion is that these developers are developing the greenfield sites, with the old **blarney** that they are " deliverable " in times of this so-called " housing shortage ", and say they are helping this council to fulfill its commitment under the " Local Plan "(...) ¹²

It seems as if BrE is using the word as the description mentioned earlier explained it. This is understandable seeing as Great Britain and Ireland are neighbors and BrE may be more familiar

¹¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2011/dec/09/human-ecology-archbishop-vincent-nichols>

¹² <http://www.thisisgrimsby.co.uk/8216-local-land-banking-plan-stopped-8217/story-17089327-detail/story.html>

with the word than other varieties. *Blarney* is such a limited and specific word in its meaning and use that it does not seem to have had a lot of room to change or develop. In both instances listed above the word is used as a noun.

When looking at the AmE instances of *blarney*, there seems to be two common uses. The first one being the original meaning of the expression *blarney* as the earlier example stated; *talks a load of blarney*. The other common use was stories or texts about the Blarney Stone and Blarney Castle. This could have been because Americans are more interested in Irish tourist attractions than the British, which is understandable seeing as Britain is a very short journey from Ireland while America is a good distance further away. This does not mean that the BrE instances never mention the Blarney Stone or the Blarney Castle but it may be a more common use in AmE. The top three collocations of *blarney* in GloWbE are *stone*, *castle* and *kiss* which all match the instances mentioning the Blarney Castle, Blarney Stone and if someone kisses the stone they will receive the gift of speaking *blarney*. Stories about these tourist attractions seem to be the most popular use of *blarney*.

(14) I've waited in line to see the Book of Kells, kissed the **Blarney** Stone, had more than a few pints in Temple Bar (...)¹³

(15) Maybe it's his jetlag, or maybe it's **blarney**, but he thinks startups are bucking the trend.¹⁴

Both AmE and BrE use the word as a noun just like IrE. As seen in Figure 3, over 600 instances of *blarney* were detected in IrE, not enough to beat *shamrock* but more than enough to be far ahead of *leprechaun*. The high frequency could be because IrE would use the expression more frequently on a day-to-day basis than the other words and varieties, mostly because it is an easier word to fit into a normal conversation in IrE. Tourist sites in Ireland are also more likely mention Blarney Castle and the Blarney Stone to attract visitors, this use of the word is also matching the top three collocations of *blarney*. When the word is used in a different context than referring to tourist attractions, it was mainly the same use seen in all varieties, the word has not had a lot of room to develop other meanings or other purposes than the original.

¹³ <http://magazine.nd.edu/news/33377/>

¹⁴ <http://gigaom.com/europe/we-back-people-who-want-to-be-rich-not-famous/>

4.4 Craic

Craic is an alternative spelling of the word *crack* and for the Irish this word typically refers to enjoyment or entertainment, one common expression is for example “*Last night was good craic*” which basically means “*Last night was good fun*”. When searching for *craic* on the *Oxford Concise Etymology Dictionary* there is actually no information about the word, which is very interesting. This could indicate that the word is not old enough to have any historical facts, it could be a very new and modern word in IrE.

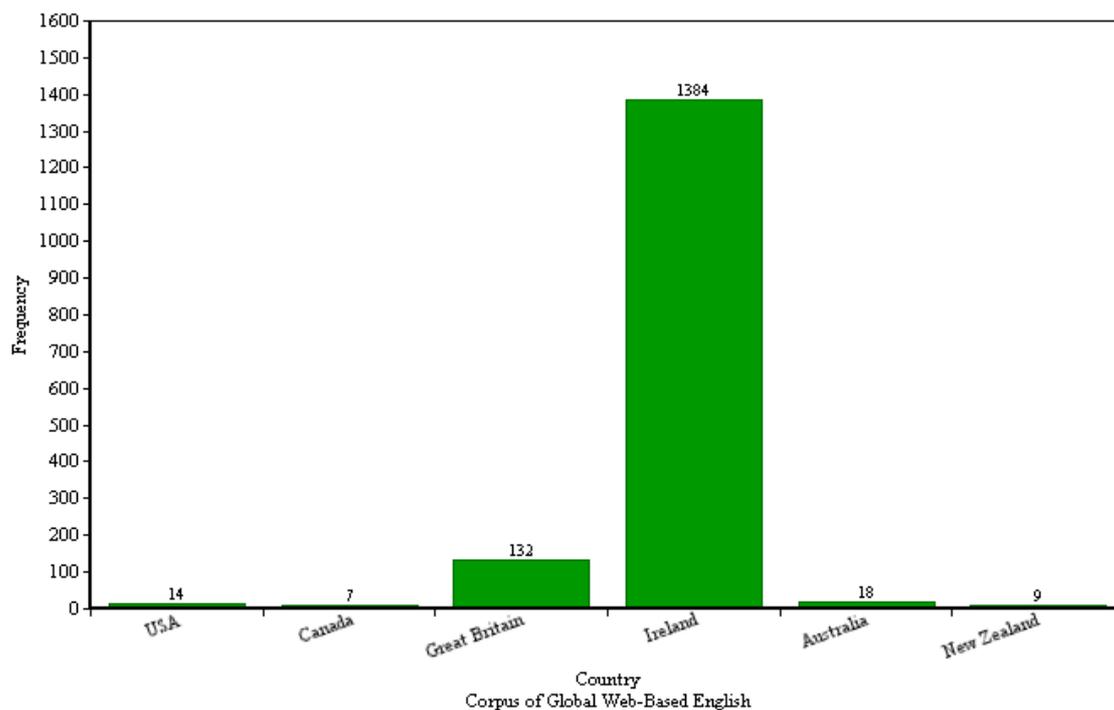


Figure 4: Frequencies in GloWbE of *craic* in 6 varieties of English

Looking at the statistics in Figure 4 it is evident that this is definitely a word with IrE origin with over 1,300 instances detected in the Irish sub corpus. BrE follows quite far behind with 132 hits and for the first time so far Australian English (AuE) is in third place with 18 detected instances. In IrE *craic* is used as previously described in the paragraph above and it also has the same use in BrE, however, AuE seems to be slightly different. In AuE quite a few instances of *craic* are used in sentences mentioning or referring to Irish culture or Ireland.

(16) It all seemed like mighty **craic** anyway... oh, to be back in college again.¹⁵

(17) The game has animation and guarantees good **craic** for a party, a family or a big or small group.¹⁶

The above examples (16) and (17) were found in GloWbE under IrE. *Craic* is being used the way it was described earlier, referring to an experience or event that was enjoyable, for example a party - *The party had good craic*. Which would mean that the party was entertaining and enjoyable, or in other words that the person had a good time at the party. The examples below (18) and (19) were found in the BrE instances and though the meaning is the same, the use of the word is slightly different than the IrE instances previously discussed. Below there are two instances where *craic* is the object the writer is referring directly to, *we enjoy the craic*, there is no other event such as a party or a night out - The *craic* itself is the actual event.

(18) It's in our nature to be friendly and helpful, and we enjoy the **craic** - Gaelic for chat and light hearted conversation.

(19) Four highly ranked universities -- to which, of course, we must add Dublin's world famous **craic**.¹⁷

As mentioned earlier, AuE has quite a few instances where the word was used together with sentences referring to Ireland or Irish culture. This is of course most likely to be the case with some of the BrE instances as well, but seeing as BrE had 132 detected instances and AuE only had 18 it is an interesting occurrence to look at.

(20) And whats the **craic** with the IRA killing people who were " unarmed -- of course "?¹⁸

(21) That's the main feature, but the ambiance of this cozy, two-roomed cafe is what sets the stage for such good " **craic** " as the Irish might call it.¹⁹

15 <http://212.78.238.223/news-politics/current-affairs/video-nui-galway-students-do-gangnam-style-in-the-middle-of-the-college-library-0030754-1>

16 <http://2fm.rte.ie/blogs/hector/>

17 <http://www.topuniversities.com/student-survival/student-life/college-culture-computers-and-craic-why-dublin-great-student-city>

18 <http://www.observationdeck.org/weblogs/the-shankill-butchers/>

19 http://www.beerandbrewer.com/_blog/Magazine/post/Travel_International_A_Beer_Lover's_Guide_to_Belgium/

The above examples (20) and (21) are taken from AuE instances and strengthens the previously made argument. Example (20) is particularly interesting, *whats the craic with the IRA killing people who were “unarmed – of course”?* In this sentence *craic* is not used as something enjoyable or entertaining. Even if someone used the expression “*What’s the craic?*”, which would basically mean; *What’s the story?* It usually refers to something entertaining or enjoyable but in example (20) it is not. This would mean that *craic* has potential to develop from a positive expression into a negative expression, which could also mean that *craic* has the potential to develop its meaning into different uses.

All in all, the uses of the word in all three varieties are mostly the same. Some uses need Irish references to back them up in order to be understood, such as *the famous Irish craic*.. The top three collocations for *craic* are *great*, *good* and *bit* and are mostly being used in sentences mentioning *good craic*, *great craic* or *a bit of craic*, which are positive uses of the word and the most common way of using it. The word seems to have the possibility to develop its meaning and use, seeing as it is not an old word compared to other words analyzed in this essay, it can still have a long way to go. It is a word that is used quite frequently in IrE on an everyday basis but the chance of it developing into everyday use in other English varieties may not be that great, seeing as it is yet to develop quite a bit in all English varieties before it reaches that stage. There seems to be potential to elaborate the use *craic* in to different purposes, seeing as AuE is using the expression negatively, when it is mostly used as a positive expression otherwise as seen in the word collocations as well. The word may not be typically widespread among the varieties apart from IrE but if it can develop further it may become a more common word for speakers in the other varieties as well.

4.5 Brogue

Brogue is a very interesting word because it has already expanded its meaning. *Brogue* was originally a word that described an outdoor boot that was worn by Irish and Scottish rural highlanders in the 1580's. Later *brogue* started to also refer to; *speech of those who call a shoe a brogue*. Those who called a shoe a *brogue* were the rural Celtic highlanders and therefore *brogue* came to describe their accent.

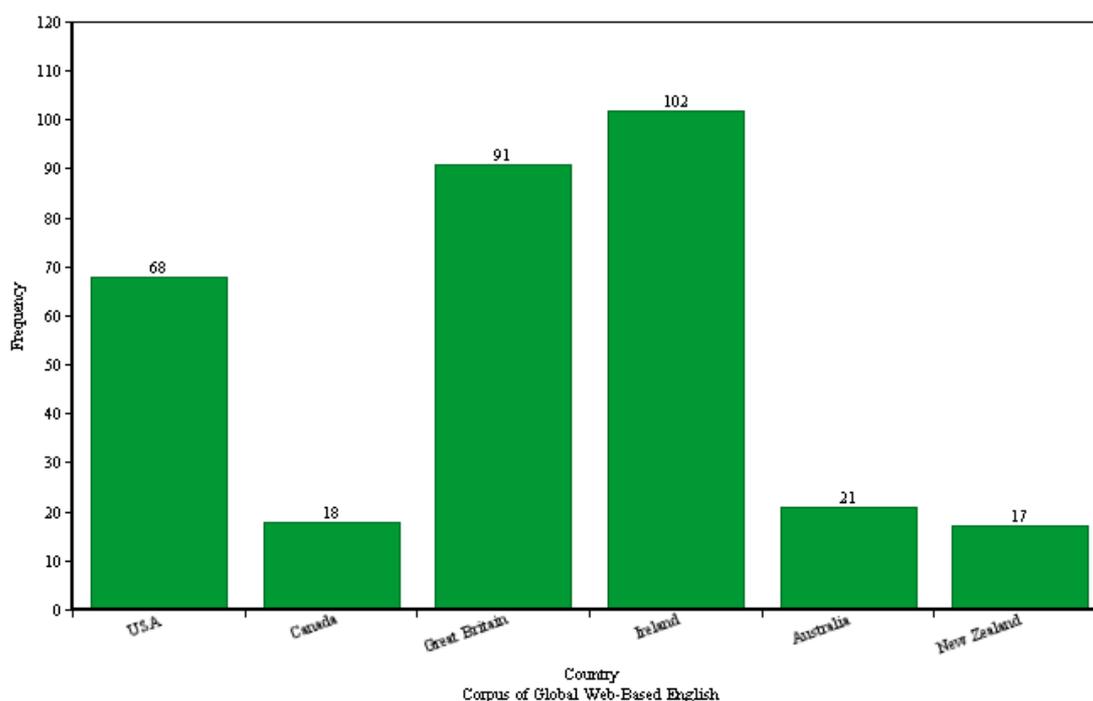


Figure 5: Frequencies in GloWbE of *brogue* in 6 varieties of English

Although *brogue* is not a very widespread word according to GloWbE, it is the one word where the frequencies of the top varieties are the closest to each other and where one variety is not greatly higher than the other varieties, as seen in Figure 5.

(22) Monaghan moved to the United States in the 1960s, but he still speaks with a lilting Irish **brogue**.²⁰

(23) When he finally came round in hospital, the delirious singer baffled medics with a countryside **brogue**.²¹

(24) Bridget Church came to America when she was 20 years old and never lost her **brogue**.²²

Examples (22), (23) and (24) are taken from AmE, BrE and IrE and there is a noticeable similarity

²⁰ <http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/21/us/joplin-tornado-one-year-later/index.html>

²¹ <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4434472/George-Michael-I-woke-up-from-coma-speaking-in-West-Country-accent.html>

²² <http://blog.discoverireland.com/2011/06/pictures-of-ireland/>

in word use between all three of them, *brogue* is used in the same way; to describe someone's accent or referring to their manner of speech. In GloWbE this seems to be the most common use of the word. Some instances referred to physical boots and quite a few, especially in AmE, referred to a *brogue kick* which is a type of kick that is common in boxing and WWE fighting, which made a great deal of sense seeing as it would technically mean *boot kick*. *Kick* is one of the top three collocations of *brogue*, together with *Irish* and *Scottish* which refer to accents.

It would seem that *brogue* has a great deal of potential to develop seeing as the word in reality means two things; *boot* (shoe) and *accent*. The word started its development early as the word was expanded in to a word for *accent*. The word seems to be able to develop within expressions that would normally include either *shoe*, *boot* or *accent* as a way of expressing a connection to a nationality or personality, to make something sound more interesting and unique. The word is not very widespread among the different varieties compared to other words that were studied in this essay. However, the frequencies in AmE and BrE are fairly close to the frequencies they have had throughout all the words that have been analyzed. The limitation may be due to the fact that even though people would know what the word means, it would not typically be used in an everyday conversation. It is a possibility that *brogue* is mostly used in writing, when describing something or trying to identify with something that is unique for a particular person, for example their accent.

5. Summary and conclusion

5.1 Summary

Ireland is historically known as a Gaelic speaking country, but different historical events eventually made Ireland turn bilingual with two official languages in the community. When learning English the Irish population sometimes had trouble with the pronunciation and the sounds of English words and it would have been there the Irish accent and Irish English language variety started. In the process of learning English some Irish words must have been adopted into the language, these are known as loanwords and they have later progressed into other English varieties on different levels and frequencies. The development of the words in other varieties would have depended on language contact between Irish English speaking people and speakers of different English varieties, an example for such an event could be immigration.

For this essay five research words were selected, their etymology was researched on the *Oxford Concise Etymology Dictionary* and their frequencies, uses and collocations in different English

varieties were researched on the *Corpus of Global Web-Based English*.

Leprechaun was the first word that was analyzed and some rather interesting instances were found, IrE had the highest frequency followed by AmE and BrE. Despite the word being a common noun in its original form, instances were found in for example AmE, where the word was used differently such as describing manners and features which is a different function of the noun. This could mean that people are so familiar with the word that they are able to elaborate it and not only find new uses and meanings, but also amend the form of the word to fit different contexts.

The *shamrock* is a classic symbol of Ireland, in all three of the top frequencies there were instances that used *shamrock* to refer or symbolize Ireland. *Shamrock* is a well known word, seeing as it is a plant, despite this the word was not very developed in its meaning and compared to *leprechaun* it was not very widespread among the instances. Most of the instances were either about *shamrocks* (as the plant) or referring to Ireland and Irish culture, in both instances the word was used as a common noun. IrE was the variety with the highest frequency again and followed by AmE and BrE and no great elaboration or development of use was seen.

The third word selected for this essay was *blarney*, the word comes originally from a castle that was named *Blarney Castle* which is located in Cork, Ireland. Outside the castle there is a stone, known as the *Blarney Stone* and whoever kisses the stone is said to receive the gift of speaking *blarney*. In other words, *blarney* basically means to talk 'bullshit'. Most of the instances found in the varieties were referring to Blarney Castle, the Blarney Stone or *blarney* as the way it was described above. Again IrE had the highest frequency and was followed by AmE and BrE, the two were quite close in their frequencies once again while IrE was significantly higher.

Craic came across as being a very new and modern word compared to the others, seeing as there was no etymology found for the word. A classic example of *craic* is the expression; *It was good craic!* Which basically means; *It was good fun!* This was the first and only word that had the third highest frequency from AuE and therefore replaced AmE, which was the variety that had previously been a part of the three highest frequent varieties in all words. Quite a few of the AuE instances referred directly to Ireland or Irish History, while most of the BrE and IrE instances used *craic* as described earlier in this paragraph. One thing that was noticed was the use of *craic* in a negative context, the word is mostly used in positive context but in AuE the word was used to refer to something negative. The change in use gave the indication that the word may have potential to expand its meaning and use even further among the different varieties, seeing as it is such a young word.

The fifth and final word in this essay was *brogue*, which back in the days referred to a strong boot that was worn by rural highlanders. It developed its meaning early, when it was used to

describe the accent which the rural highlanders spoke. Already there it was an indication that *brogue* had potential for development, just like *craic*. When looking at the frequencies, IrE topped the list again followed by AmE and BrE and most instances used the word to refer to either a boot or an accent, particularly Irish accents. Compared to the other words in the essay *brogue* was not very widespread, despite its early development and elaboration of use.

The collocations for the five words that were selected for the essay and summarized above, were words that had connections to the most common instances of the words in GloWbE. Those collocations were able to strengthen the arguments and discussions of word use in this essay. Although the words may not have spread widely among other varieties compared to IrE, it is not impossible that they at some point will, seeing as the language contact between English varieties has potential to develop even more with time.

5.2 Conclusion

Looking at the results in this study it would seem that the Irish loanwords analyzed in this essay are most common in IrE and they are not particularly widespread through other English varieties. The words are present in all of the varieties but not to the same degree as in IrE. This is clearly visible on the figures included for each word.

BrE would have been the variety that has been most influenced, seeing as the United Kingdom is so close to Ireland, a large amount of Irish people have immigrated to the United Kingdom throughout time. There is also history between Britain and Ireland, both between the languages Irish Celtic and English but also politically, seeing as Northern Ireland is still a part of the United Kingdom. When times were at their worst during the Great Irish Famine huge numbers of the Irish population immigrated to the United States of America hoping to lead a better life. Some Irish loanwords must have been adopted in to AmE from that historic event, seeing as quite many Americans identify themselves as Irish Americans and the Irish culture has been kept alive in American society. These would be the reasons as to why the Irish loanwords are mostly found in those varieties. However, in more recent times the immigration from Ireland to Australia has increased, this may be the reason as to why *craic* is more common in AuE than AmE, with the motivation that *craic* is such a modern word even in IrE.

The words did have similar meanings and uses in the different varieties. In three of the instances, *leprechaun*, *craic* and *brogue*, there were a few a noticeable developments of the words where they had been adapted to specific meanings or developed their uses further than the original meanings

and uses. However, most instances used the word in the way that the original use and meaning of the word indicated. The limitation of use in the different varieties could be due to the fact that few ways of developing these words have been possible and therefore they have mostly stayed in their original form and use.

6. References

Cobh Heritage Centre. n.d. *Emigration & the Famine*. [ONLINE] Available at:

<http://www.cobhheritage.com/emigration-famine/>. [Accessed 10 November 2014].

Davies, M. 2013. *Corpus of Global Web-Based English: 1.9 billion words from speakers in 20 countries*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://corpus.byu.edu/glowbe/> [Accessed 14 December 2014].

Fox News. 2010. *Leprechaun Lore: The History Behind the Famed Green Mischief-Makers*. Fox News. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2010/03/17/leprechaun-lore-history-famed-mischief-makers/>. [Accessed 14 December 2014].

Harper, D. 2001-2014. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. [ONLINE] Available at:

<http://www.etymonline.com>. [Accessed 10 November 2014].

Hoad, T.F. 2003. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Oxford University Press.

[ONLINE] Available at:

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192830982.001.0001/acref-9780192830982> [Accessed 14 December 2014].

Monasterio León, A. 2012. *Varieties of English: a study of some vocalic systems*. Universidad de la Rioja. [ONLINE] Available at: http://biblioteca.unirioja.es/tfe_e/TFE000344.pdf. [Accessed 10 November 2014].

Sankhoff, G. 2001. *Linguistic Outcomes of Language Contact*. Handbook of Sociolinguistics.

Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2001, pp. 638-668. [ONLINE] Available at:

<http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~gillian/Interlang.doc.pdf>. [Accessed 10 November 2014].

Santry, C. 2010-2014. *The Irish shamrock plant: all myth and marketing?*. Irish-Genealogy-Toolkit. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/shamrock-plant.html>. [Accessed 14 December 2014].

SLMC. n.d. *Bilingualism in Ireland and Language Promotion*. Site for Language Management in Canada – Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.slmc.uottawa.ca/?q=bi_ireland. [Accessed 10 November 2014].

Slocum, J. 2014. *Indo-European Languages: Evolution and Locale Maps*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/general/IE.html>. [Accessed 10 November 2014].

Winford, D. 2012. *Languages in Contact*. Linguistic Society of America. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/languages-contact>. [Accessed 14 December 2014].

Emma Fristedt is studying the Modern Languages programme - English at Halmstad University. While currently living in Dublin (Ireland) the subject of this essay was selected due to curiosity of the relation between Irish Gaelic and English in contemporary society.



PO Box 823, SE-301 18 Halmstad
Phone: +35 46 16 71 00
E-mail: registrator@hh.se
www.hh.se