A corpus-based and lexicographical analysis of Irish expletives in Irish English

Un análisis lexicográfico basado en corpus de los expletivos irlandeses en el inglés de la República de Irlanda

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Abstract: *The aim of this study is to analyse four different expletives in the Irish English variety, following a semantic and pragmatic approach. Thus, this paper observes the connection between individual expressiveness and Irish identity, through the use of Irish expletives. These pejorative terms are loanwords borrowed from Irish into Hiberno-English in the Republic of Ireland. The analysed terms belong to the semantic fields of geography, scatology and sex. Through a corpus-based analysis and lexicographical treatment, this paper identifies and examines these terms regarding the following parameters: degree of frequency, semantics, etymology and pragmatic move.*

Keywords: expletive, pejorative, identity, expressiveness, Irish

Resumen: *El objetivo de este artículo es analizar cuatro improperios en la variedad del inglés de Irlanda, siguiendo un enfoque semántico y pragmático. De esta manera, este artículo observa la conexión entra la expresividad del individuo y la identidad irlandesa, mediante el uso de términos despectivos en irlandés.. Estos términos peyorativos son préstamos lingüísticos del irlandés al hiberno-inglés de la República de Irlanda. Los términos analizados pertenecen a los campos semánticos de la geografía, la escatología y el sexo. Mediante un análisis basado en un corpus y tratamiento lexicográfico, este artículo identifica y examina estos términos observando los siguientes parámetros: su grado de frecuencia, su semántica, su etimología y su pragmática.*

Palabras clave: improperios, peyorativo, identidad, expresividad, irlandés

1. Introduction

> After that, the Irish people didn't know where they were going any more, because the names of the streets and villages were changed into English. […] My father says the Irish were all stumbling around, not knowing where they were or who they were talking to. They could not find their way home. They were homeless. And that was the worst pain of all, to be lost and ashamed and homesick.
> *The Speckled People* – Hugo Hamilton

"Jaysus, what the Jaysus" says the protagonist in Hugo Hamilton's biographic novel *The Speckled People* in order to be and feel Irish. This novel deals with the diverse implications of language, its relations with identity,

nationality, emotions and memory, particularly in the recent Irish and English context. Interestingly enough, the protagonist's conflict with his cultural identity starts when he hears an Irish man swear using this Irish slang expression: "What the Jaysus?". The child, a mixture of German, English and Irish cultures, identifies this expletive as the expression of Irishness itself, as the main core of what it feels to be Irish.

Language is inherently connected to identity and emotion. As the Irish writer Stan Carey (2020) stated, "language won't develop in a social vacuum". Language signals and shapes our identity as part of a group. We grow up in a community and learn to talk the way they do, in a certain dialect. A dialect is commonly defined as a variety of a language, whether that is in terms of geography, age, social class or gender, among other factors (Haugen, 1933). Likewise, as Contact Linguistics observe, languages influence each other, and Irish English, the set of English dialects in the island of Ireland, cannot be understood without the influence of Irish and Ireland's identity and culture.

According to the Irish Constitution, the first official language of Ireland is the Irish language, and English is an auxiliary language (Hickey, 2017). Nevertheless, the reality seems to be rather different and complex, as Irish is considered to be a minority language in the island (Hickey, 2012). While Irish has a great institutional and political support, its ethnolinguistic vitality, according to the different census (2006, 2011 and 2016) and reports, is quite low: only 6% of the population stated using Irish on a daily basis (Darmody and Daly, 2015). Interestingly enough, in spite of the pessimistic views on the survival of Irish shown by these reports, there has a been a positive change in the attitude towards Irish use these last decades (Atkinson and Kelly-Holmes, 2011). As expressed in the *Irish Times* ("How Did Irish End up at the Coolest Spot on the Dial?", 2006), Irish people and, particularly, the youth are reclaiming their identity, their "Irishness" in the language and, hence, "Irish has become a cult phenomenon".

As the protagonist of Hamilton's novel identified, slurs, pejorative and curse words are a considerable reflection of identity and expressiveness. Andersson and Trudgill (2007) observe this possibility in their definition of this linguistic phenomenon. In the complexity of swearing, this type of language is "used to express strong emotions and attitudes" (Andersson and Trudgill, 2007, p. 195). In addition to this, pejorative lexis also fulfils another interpersonal purpose: displaying and constructing identity, both in an individual and social sphere (Stapleton, 2010). We swear to present ourselves in a particular manner, to state group membership, to impose an out-group identity on others and, finally, to develop a sense of cohesiveness.

Based on the interconnection that there is between linguistic identity and expressiveness, this paper aims to identify and examine expletive loanwords that Hiberno-English, also known as Irish English, has borrowed from Irish. For the analysis stage, I will examine the pragmatic force and the semantic load of

the expletives in a given context. The loanwords, subsequently examined in the NOW Corpus (see Methodology section for more details), are analysed on the planes of Pragmatics and Semantics, following Cruse's (1986, p.1) contextual approach, which reflects the semantic properties the word contracts with actual and potential contexts. Therefore, I primarily intend to unravel their semantic extensions, their etymology, and their use in context. The motivation for this study comes from the necessity of research in this field, due to its novelty and low prestige, as stated by many of the authors mentioned (Atkinson and Kelly-Holmes, 2011; Vaughan and Clancy, 2011). Throughout this research paper, I will also deal with the issue of identity reclaiming through linguistic borrowing, despite their inability of speaking fluent Irish. Particularly, I will focus on the Irish English of the Republic of Ireland, for the influence and presence of Irish is stronger there than in Northern Ireland, where the influence of British English plays a greater role (Darmody and Daly, 2015).

To this end, this research paper will start by describing the state of the art and the main concepts that should be taken into consideration to examine the words in depth. The following section examines the methodology followed to collect and process the data from the corpus. Then, the subsequent part will focus on the main results, in which each expletive is examined in detail. Finally, I will provide some conclusive remarks on the discussion of findings of this paper.

2. Theoretical framework: pejoratives

Pejoratives are evaluative words which convey a negative meaning and are mainly used to negatively refer to an individual or a group, or to express the speaker's emotional state (Colomina Almiñana, 2014, p. 64). Likewise, the term "expletive" refers to obscene or profane words or phrases, sometimes exclamatory (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Since expletives are generally spontaneous, colloquial and taboo, they may be harder to study in academic and written contexts, since they occur more often in natural, spoken environments. Likewise, they also pose the challenge of being dependent on a series of aspects, such as context, collocations, speech genre or ethnographic features, among others (Sánchez Fajardo, 2021).

There are three types of expletives that are discussed in this paper: swear words, slurs and insults. Firstly, swearing consists in the use of taboo language to communicate and express the speaker's emotional state, usually asserting the speaker's frustration or condemnation (Jay and Kristin, 2008, p. 268). On the other hand, slurs are pejorative words which are employed to degrade a target and the individuals that belong to that group because of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender or possessing a particular condition (Colomina Almiñana, 2014, p. 64). Lastly, insults manifest a negative attitude or antipathy towards a specific target or individual.

Heretofore, pejorative lexis have been largely studied on the levels of psycholinguistics and pragmatics to fulfil an essential function of expressiveness (Auckle, 2017; Jay and Kristin, 2008; Van Lancker and Cummings, 1999). Similarly, sociolinguistic studies have dealt with their ability to promote and enhance group identity, cohesion and identity construction (Schweinberger, 2018). These relations occur both in the first, second and other languages of the speakers, even though the effect is not equal between these (Dewaele, 2010, p. 207).

Thus far, attitudes towards swearing and cursing have been mainly negative, often considered impolite, offensive, blasphemous and, in some cases, even subject to religious censorship (Horan, 2013). Thereupon, it is no surprise that speakers lean on borrowing from a second language in order to distance themselves from expletives, since it is less anxiety-provoking than using them in their first language (Javier and Marcos, 1989, p. 467). This is the case even when speakers are not proficient in that second language, but they are familiar with the taboo or pejorative words. Dewaele's (2004, 2010) extensive study of these phenomena showed that speakers felt some "detachment" when performing in second languages, which can hinder or favour the use of expletives, depending on the context. Codeswitching and linguistic borrowing are particularly analysed in Ireland because of the notable power dynamics between Irish and English (Atkinson and Kelly-Holmes, 2011). As it will be developed further on, Irish does not enjoy the prestige that English has as a language in the Republic of Ireland, but it does have a strong connection with the Irish identity and culture.

As previously mentioned, expletives fulfil an expressive function. Many linguistic theories, such as Jakobson's and Halliday's models, classify language into broad functions or metafunctions. Primarily, Jakobson (1960) produced one of the most well-known model of language functions, basing his six functions of language (referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual and poetic) on the six constituent elements of the acts of communication (thus context, addresser, addressee, message, code and channel). He would describe function as the way people use language, the properties and purposes of language. On the other hand, Halliday's model (1975, p. 33) is also especially prominent, in which the social role of communication is emphasised. Accordingly, Halliday distinguished seven basic functions of language: instrumental 'desires and needs', regulatory 'rules, orders, suggestions', interactional 'patterns such as greeting, thanking or excusing', personal 'talking about oneself and one's feelings', heuristic 'asking questions', imaginative 'suppositions, creations and hypothesis' and informative 'statements'. Bearing this in mind, pejorative words are mainly concerned with the speaker, their perspectives and emotions, thus they generally perform the emotive and personal function of communication.

The process of borrowing that comes about from Irish to Irish English may well be regarded as case of intimate borrowing. Pursuant to the analysis of borrowings by Bloomfield (1933, p. 461), an intimate borrowing occurs when "two languages are spoken in what is topographically and politically a single community". As previously stated, Irish and English coexist in the Republic of Ireland, though there is a discernible difference in use and prestige. In this case, while English is considered the "upper" or "dominant" language, Irish is the "lower" language, in Bloomfield's terminology. He observed that, generally, the borrowing of words goes from the upper to the lower language, because of its prestige and privilege. However, in the case that is under study in this paper, there is a combination of different linguistic and sociological phenomena, which might impel borrowing Irish expletives to reclaim their Irish identity while expressing themselves with the emotional shield of detachment from a second language. For instance, this paper will look into the use of the Irish expletive *feck* as a cathartically swear word, instead of the English equivalent *fuck.*

In doing so, this paper will consider the connection between pragmatics and social identity. Pragmatics is the theory of communicative systems that brings together the various forms of human behaviour (Mey, 2001, p. 20). Thus, when humans act in the different societal contexts through the use of language, we are creating a "user identity" or social identity. This concepts connects with the speaker's age, gender, education, community or nationality, among many variables.

Nevertheless, the complexity of these linguistic phenomena cannot be fully developed in this paper due to its extension and limitations. Further research regarding using pejorative lexis in a second language and its relation to in-group identity, particularly in the Irish context, may be interesting to expand and observe.

3. Methodology

This study will analyse semantical and pragmatically some of the main expletive terms borrowed from Irish and used in Irish English. To this end, I manually compiled from the dictionaries listed below a group of four pejorative terms, based on their frequency and the semantic fields more prone to the use of expletives. These terms can be classified in the three categories previously mentioned: insults, swear words and slurs. After collecting and classifying the loanwords in their different categories, the selected terms are to be checked in different English and Irish dictionaries and slang dictionaries, such as the *New English-Irish Dictionary*, *Lexico.com* (an online dictionary created by *Dictionary.com* and *Oxford University Press*), the *Collins English Dictionary*, the *Brewer's Dictionary of Irish Phrase and Fable* and the *Green's Dictionary of Slang.* Hence, it is possible to observe the origin and meaning of the four expletive terms.

Subsequently, the terms will be pragmatically considered based on data drawn from the *News Of the Web* (NOW) Corpus. The NOW Corpus comprises "12.0 billion words from web-based newspapers and magazines" (available at https://www.english-corpora.org/now/). This online corpus allows the user to analyse words in terms of use, country and time, since it contains documents from 2010 to present time[1].

Once the loanwords are compiled, they are semantically and pragmatically analysed by following a set of parameters: (i) degree of frequency, (ii) semantic extension, (iii) etymology and (iv) pragmatic move. In this analysis, I will apply a lexicographical treatment of the terms, since I will be comparing the various lexicographical entries on the different resources mentioned. Both dictionary-based senses and corpus-based contexts guarantee that the words under study can be classified more accurately. To help readers understand the pragmatic use of these loanwords, I will illustrate my arguments with corpus-based contexts.

4. The study

The four selected pejorative terms may be divided in the different taboo areas that they deal with (Diaz-Legaspe, 2020): geographical pejoratives (*jackeen* and *culchie*), sexual expletive words (*feck*) and scatological expletives (*gobshite*). This taxonomy facilitates the analysis of the different terms, though other categories can be found or be blurry, such as *gobshite*, which stems from a scatological (and hence taboo) etymon, and it is pragmatically used to disparage politicians. Accordingly, the study subsections correspond to the different semantic fields. The following graphic displays the four terms regarding their frequency of use according to the NOW Corpus (*Fig. 1*).
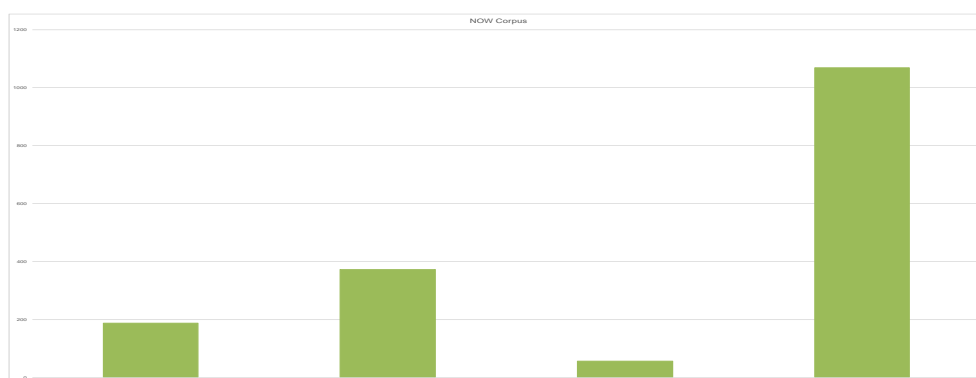

Fig. 1: Frequency of use

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[1] It should be noted that because of the limitations of the NOW Corpus, the sociolect, age and gender of the users will not be considered, since the corpus does not provide sociolinguistic traits, apart from the country of origin of the source. Thus, the conclusions could differ in youth language or in the different areas. Future research could include the impact of Irish expletives using the variables of "type of user" and "means of communication" in order to analyse any possible correlations between kind of words and youth language, for instance.

4.1. Scatological field

To start with, the expletive *gobshite* is defined by the *New English-Irish Dictionary* as a quite informal and pejorative noun meaning "fool" or "contemptible person". It can also be found on the *Green's Dictionary of Slang* meaning "a fool" or "a dupe", as its allomorph *gabshite.* This derogatory term is a closed-form compound formed by the Irish word *gob*, which is the beak or bill of a bird, and refers in a figurative sense to a person's mouth (*Green's Dictionary of Slang,* henceforth GDS) and the word *shite*, Irish variation on the English *shit*, which can be used as a noun, verb and adjective. Because of its etymology, *gobshite* can still be found conveying the sense "one who talks nonsense" (GDS). It is within the taxonomy of insults because it is used to express a negative feeling or condition towards a specific target.

There is no consensus on the geographical origin of *gobshite*. While it is now considered Irish slang, *Lexico* and the *Historical Dictionary of American Slang* note that it was first found in 1919 to refer to a seaman in the US Navy. *Lexico* attests its coinage in Irish English slang since 1948, with the previous mentioned meanings. In spite of this controversy, *gobshite* is often said to have a 150 year history, regaining its popularity in our days thanks to the Irish sitcom *Father Ted* (1995), and it got to be printed in the *New York Times* for the first time in 2020, becoming a symbol, as the term *eejit*, of the reclaiming of the Irish English variety (O'Connor, 2020).

The *News Of the Web* (NOW) Corpus yields 188 hits in the *News Of the Web* (NOW) Corpus corresponding to the Republic of Ireland. In every sample, *gobshite* works as a noun in singular with the different meanings previously developed, as in the following example (1).

(1)   "Having landed on Tiger island and subsequently alienating everyone on there because he was an arrogant GOBSHITE" (*The Daily Edge*, 2019).

Besides describing someone pejoratively, it is also commonly used in the vocative case, showing direct address towards a target or as a term of abuse, like in the following examples (2) and (3).

(2)   "She said the man shot out the window and said: 'Go on, ya GOBSHITE!'" (*thejournal.ie*, 2018)

(3)   "That's the Irish word for idiot, you public-school GOBSHITE" (*Irish Examiner*, 2018).

The high number of hits in the NOW Corpus might be due to the fact that the corpus is composed by news from online journals and newspapers, and this pejorative term is quite frequently used in relation to politicians, politics and sports (common topics on journals and newspapers). There are 28 out of

the 188 hits referring to politics (4) or addressing politicians (5), and 25 belonging to the field of sports (6).

(4)   "A younger man just starting out in his career as a GOBSHITE - a newly elected TD, say" (*Independent*, 2017).

(5)   "his opinion of Bertie Ahern, entered the annals of audacious bad taste when he said the then Taoiseach was 'a GOBSHITE!'" (*The Southern star*, 2017).

(6)   "Who appointed this GOBSHITE as captain?" (*SportsJOE.ie*, 2017).

4.2. Geographical field

Apart from the field of scatology and politics, another topic that generates a high number of pejoratives is that of geographical identity. As it happens in many other nations, belonging to one part or other of the Emerald Isle forges an identity on the individual, usually confronting the topical rural/urban characteristics. In this case, the west coast of the island and the Gaeltacht (the Irish-speaking regions) are associated with the countryside and its stereotypical negative connotations. In contrast, the east coast of the Republic of Ireland, particularly its capital Dublin, is claimed to be looking to the United Kingdom for guidance and lead. This old cultural battle generated two different slurs: *culchie* and *jackeen*, respectively. Among Irish people, they are sometimes not as derogatory today as they used to be in the 19th century, but they are more of playful, even sometimes affective terms. They have been partly reclaimed and are now used as "a tribal badge" and a "cultural marker in Ireland" (Carey, 2019). Nevertheless, this is not always the case, for their derogatory meanings still prevail, as it will be developed forthwith.

Starting with *culchie*, the slur is defined as an informal Irish noun that is used to describe "an unsophisticated country person" (*Lexico*) or "a rough or unsophisticated country-dweller from outside Dublin" (*Collins English Dictionary*, henceforth CED). This slur is particularly used from the point of view of a Dubliner (Carey, 2019). In terms of etymology, *Lexico* and the CED support the main theory, which allocates its etymon on *Kiltimagh*, the alteration of the name of an Irish small town, Coillte Mach, which belongs to County Mayo in Ireland, a county seen as distant and provincial. Furthermore, the name *Coillte Mach* means "woods of the plain". Alternatively, the *Dictionary of Hiberno-English* (Dolan, 2020) suggests that it might have stemmed from the etymon being *coillte* "woods" or *coillteach* "wooded", and be used in university slang to describe agricultural students at University College in Galway, as the GDS also acknowledges. This dictionary also notes another etymological possibility for *culchie* from the Irish phrase *cúl a' tí*, which refers to the backdoor of a great house, to which poor, country people and peasants would be directed. Besides, *culchie* can also be found on its variations *culchy* and *culshie*.

Additionally, this slur is quite frequent, which might be owed to the loss of part of its derogatory meaning. It has even appeared in recent popular culture, such as in the Irish novel by Sally Rooney (who is also native from Country Mayo) and its homologous Hulu series *Normal People*. The main character originates from Sligo, a city and county in the west of Ireland and has, therefore, a thick, distinctive accent. The sociolinguistic differences between him and the people he meets in Dublin are commented on conversation. Eventually, he is pejoratively described as a "milk-drinking culchie" by a Dubliner, because of his countryside origins.

Besides, its presence on the corpus is quite substantial, with 372 hits on the NOW Corpus. Among these hits, it is possible to observe the flexibility of the term, as there are samples with the discussed original pejorative meaning (7), some used neutrally or descriptively (8), and others which have acquired an expressive tone (9).

(7) "CULCHIE, you are parked on private property. You are parked in a residence car space. This is not the wild west, you cannot do what you like here" (*JOE*, 2017).

(8) "Words and phrases that are different or even exclusive to CULCHIE accents suddenly begin to decline and then disappear completely" (*universitytimes.ie*, 2020).

(9) "My sister, a fellow CULCHIE in Dublin, noticed a certain correlation between hurt feelings and Dublin origins" (*universitytimes.ie*, 2020).

Though being classified as a noun, the hits show an abundance of both nominal and adjectival uses of *culchie*. This can be illustrated in (10), showing a nominal use, and (11), which displays its conversion into an adjective.

(10) "Being a bit of a CULCHIE, I will unashamedly admit that when I'm visiting a city I will look for the largest green area I can find and head there to escape the concrete jungle that makes up so many cities nowadays" (*universitytimes.ie*, 2020).

(11) "On the other hand, CULCHIE lads were reared on it" (*offalyexpress.ie*, 2020).

Contrary to *culchie*, the slur *jackeen* defines a city dweller, usually a Dubliner, as opposed to a country person (GDS). *Lexico* specifies that it is a derogatory Irish noun, and the *Collins English Dictionary* adds to its definition that it refers to "a slick, self-assertive lower-class Dubliner". Its etymology corresponds to the most common way of forming diminutives in Irish, that is, through the original suffix *-ín*, spelled *-een* in Irish English. Thus, *jackeen* originates from the suffixation of the proper name "Jack" with the Irish diminutive *-een.* For this reason, the variation *Jackeen*, with a capital "J", is also

quite frequent. The name *Jack* makes reference to the flag of the United Kingdom, commonly known as the *Union Jack*. The slur was coined during the 19th century, when the kingdom of Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom, which continued until the Irish independence in 1922. Thus, it was used to disparage Irish people who defended and followed England, addressing them as "little Jacks" (Carabini, 2013). As previously mentioned, this power dynamic and "enmity" between Irish and English people still prevails, and so does this pejorative term.

The NOW Corpus generates 56 hits of *jackeen*, though, unlike its opposite *culchie*, these are mainly pejorative in meaning (12). Despite this, there are some samples of a more neutral use (13) or even in a humoristic tone (14).

(12) "David Walsh (47) struck the airport police jeep, then left the scene with the officers in pursuit after calling one of them a 'JACKEEN bastard' " (*Herald.ie*, 2011).

(13) "According to the study, conducted by TNS & Social Network throughout the capital cities of the EU, an astonishing 95% of JACKEEN respondents are satisfied with their quality of life in Dublin" (*JOE*, 2016).

(14) "I'm a jackeen but a JACKEEN with rural notions" (*Irish Examiner*, 2019).

Likewise, this slur can be used as a noun (15) and as a denominal adjective (16). Besides, it is also frequently collocated with the noun *Dublin*, as it illustrated in (17), probably reinforcing its original meaning.

(15) "Sure, I get called a JACKEEN by my friends from Cork and I call them langers" (*independent.ie*, 2020).

(16) "With your Dublin reg, JACKEEN accent and big city confidence, it will be assumed that you have moved to the country under the witness protection programme" (*thejournal.ie*, 2017).

(17) "The dialect of a Dublin JACKEEN is as peculiar as everything else about him" (*thejournal.ie*, 2017).

4.3. Sexual field

The last term this paper will analyse is the swear word *feck*, selected because of its unique characteristics. The expletive *feck* is considered a quite popular "minced oath" in Ireland (Carey, 2012). Accordingly, a minced oath is a euphemism or euphemistic expression created by intentionally mispronouncing, misspelling or altering a part of a stronger taboo expression, in order to convey the same core meaning but reduce its negative effect. Thus, it is usually believed to be a euphemism for the original English expletive *fuck*, from the taboo field of sex. It is now defined as vulgar Irish slang, used to express "annoyance, frustration, impatience, or surprise" (*Lexico*).

Nevertheless, there is no real consensus regarding its origins either. The common assumption defends the euphemistic vowel change from the English *fuck* to the Irish variation *feck* lessening its blasphemous power, making its way into today's Irish English. Notwithstanding, other scholars like Julian Walker and Pádraig Ó Méalóid advocate for another etymological path, from the English expression "in faith" shifting into "in faith's kin", to the Irish variation "i'fackins", gradually shrinking to "fac" and finally becoming the Irish English *feck*. Ó Méalóid ("Some Notes on the Origin and Meaning of the Word "Feck", 2005) states that "what we have instead is a euphemistic meaning layered on top of a much older existing expression". The Irish writer does not deny its current use as a euphemism for the English expletive *fuck* but does indicate an earlier origin.

This swear word is by far the most frequent one of the analysed ones, with 620 hits on the NOW Corpus as *feck*, 259 hits as *fecking,* 100 as *fecker* and 90 hits as *fecked*. Among all these samples, it is possible to observe the six distinct functional uses of swear words categorised by Pinker (2008, p. 350). Firstly, *feck* and its lexical derivations can be employed descriptively, standing for the action of having sexual intercourse (18) or as an insult (19), as a part of an idiomatic expression or lexicalised construction (20) or used as a term of abuse (21). Hence, this swear word can also modify other lexical elements as an intensifier, either positively (22) or negatively (23). Finally, *feck* can be used cathartically, expressing the speaker's emotional state, frequently in an outburst (24).

(18) "People who genuinely had nothing else in their brains other than " girls, arse, FECK" were suddenly viewed as comic geniuses" (*Irish Independent*, 2015).
(19) "I went from that inconsistent, lazy FECKER to a runner who was putting races back to back" (*SportsJOE.ie*, 2021).
(20) "If your goal is to piss people off, you might as well do it in a way that makes sense to them, so that you at least show a bit of cultural sensitivity for FECK sake" (*Enternainment.ie*, 2015).
(21) "Well, FECK you too! I'm trying!" (*Irish Examiner*, 2019).
(22) "I only discovered machiatos recently, FECKING lovely!" (*dailyedge.ie*, 2021)
(23) "What FECKING eejit picked her up?" (*leinsterleader.ie*, 2021).
(24) "FECK. Did I say that out loud?" (*Kilkenny People*, 2018).

Lastly, *feck* usually belongs to idiomatic expressions such as "feck off", "feck it", "feck-all", "feck(ed) up" and "(for) feck ('s) sake" (20) (Carey, 2012) and frequently collocates with other Irish English insults such as *gobshite* or *eejit* (23). As it can be observed, this expletive can have a nominal function, as illustrated in (19), an adverbial function, such as the intensifiers in (22) and (23),

and a verbal function (21). Besides, it can also work as an adjective, meaning "exhausted, ruined or in bad condition" (25).

(25) "Without them, to put it in the most Irish way possible – we'd be fecked" (*universitytimes.ie*, 2020).

5. Conclusion

This project was undertaken to examine the most frequent expletives borrowed from Irish into Irish English, following a semantic and pragmatic approach. These pejorative terms carry a great connection with the reclaiming of Irish identity, though most Irish people are not fluent in the Irish language. However, the taboo or offensive nature of the terms limit the instances of these terms in corpora and studies.

As it has been noted, this process of borrowing pejorative and taboo terms involve two linguistic phenomena. Firstly, cursing and insulting in a second language comprise an emotional detachment which allows the speakers to use these expletive terms more freely and openly. This is illustrated by the most frequent swearword *feck* or the expletive *gobshite,* whose blasphemous impact is reduced in Irish English. On the other hand, using these borrowed expletives promote in-group identity, establishing a common solidarity and identity among Irish speakers. For instance, the geographical slurs *culchie* and *jackeen* display the speaker's "tribal badge", their Irish awareness and identity. Despite their pejorative meanings, these terms forge a social sympathy among Irish English speakers.

Finally, Irish English expletives reveal the complex power dynamics between Irish and English, manifesting the influence of language in the establishment of social categories and identity construction. Particularly, expletive terms fulfil their expressive and interpersonal function, giving the speaker the opportunity to convey their emotions and attitudes, while stating group membership and identity. Hence, this is the ultimate human aspiration, granted here by language: a sense of belonging.

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