WH-Voicing in Dublin English: Women across six decades

John Mc Loughlin

Queen Mary University of London

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Abstract

This study was originally designed to look at four features of Dublin English (DubE) that are 'uncontentious' according to Hickey's definition (2005: 81): (1) slit-fricative /t/, (2) TH-dental stopping, (3) yod deletion and (4) WH-voicing. Thirty-two participants who were brought up in Dublin and have lived more than half their life there, were interviewed by Zoom call and the conversations audio-recorded. Semi-structured interviews of about 45 minutes took place following a protocol, based on principles set out by Labov (1981) and Tagliamonte (2006). The interviews consisted of (1) a story, to be read aloud by participants, which had a Dublin flavour and which included examples of the features being researched; (2) demographic questions; and (3) a conversation about growing up in Dublin, about the changes that had taken place in Dublin, and about language change and diversity there.

The focus was narrowed to looking at WH-voicing, i.e. the whine-wine merger of the voiceless labial-velar fricative [ʍ] and the voiced labial-velar approximant [w] among the 19 female participants. A total of 1,654 useable tokens was obtained. The percentage of [ʍ] realisations, the HW Percentage, was correlated against three independent variables: (1) year of birth, (2) area where brought up in Dublin and (3) the socio-economic group of their parents. A strong correlation was found only with year of birth. This was decisive, with participants born up to 1972 having an HW Percentage of 90 percent or above; while the younger cohort (born 1991 – 2000) had more dispersed and lower percentages.

A large amount of qualitative information was gathered in all 32 interviews, dealing with perceptions of language variety, language change, class, local identity, and the salience of the four features being initially researched. With this material there is potential to do further work on the four features and to pursue ethnographically informed research that links to and builds on the work of Lonergan (2016), O'Dwyer (2019) and Schulte (2020, 2023a).

Keywords WH-voicing, whine-wine merger, sociophonetic variation, language change; Dublin English

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1 Introduction

1.1 Original stimulus

This study was originally stimulated by Raymond Hickey's discussion (2005: 81-86) of 'uncontentious features' in Dublin English (DubE). By this he meant features which are shared by 'mainstream' DubE and its successor, which Hickey calls 'new Dublin English' (8) or 'New Pronunciation' DubE (72-80) and which are shared 'not necessarily or only coincidentally with standard varieties of English outside of Ireland' (81). According to Hickey 'mainstream' DubE had developed before the 1980s as the standard, prescribed pronunciation, used by middle-class and educated people and those aspiring to that status, an interpretation accepted by Schulte (2023) and O'Dwyer (2019). Hickey sees 'mainstream' and its successor, 'New Pronunciation' as motivated by dissociation from the 'local' variety of DubE, spoken by working-class people (67-72).

Hickey provided data on four uncontentious features: yod deletion, WH-voicing, metathesis and epenthesis in the word 'modern', and /lm/ vowel epenthesis. Hickey illustrated the features by drawing on 26 speakers reading out a sample sentence illustrating each feature. These are drawn from a larger group of over 300 sound files, contained in the CD-ROM accompanying Hickey 2005. Hickey says he assumes that the pattern found in these 26 speakers 'could be duplicated for the entire set of sound files.'

I initially decided to focus on four speech features. Two were among those discussed by Hickey: WH-voicing and yod deletion. The other two were features meeting Hickey's definition of 'uncontentious' (Hickey 2025: 81) and which he discusses elsewhere: TH-interdental stopping (Hickey 2025:71) and slit-t fricative (Hickey 1984: 119-120; Hickey 2025:81). These are discussed in section 1.4 below.

1.2 The big picture: dialects in change

Ireland, along with Scotland, was one of the first places into which English spread out of England. While the aristocracy leading the invasion of Ireland in the late twelfth century, spoke Anglo Norman (Bliss & Long 1987), they and their successors brought with them settlers speaking dialects of English from south-west counties and the south-west midlands (Bliss & Long: 708-709). There were three main phases of English language coming into Ireland (Hickey 2005: 150-158; Kallen 1997; Kallen 2013: 10-38): in the Middle Ages, English being spoken by settlers in the south-east of Ireland and trading cities such as Dublin and Cork; in the seventeenth century two waves, one from Scotland into what is now Northern Ireland, and one from England, as part of large-scale colonisation and plantation; and in the nineteenth century, the systemic use of more standardised English in education, coinciding with the rapid decline of the Irish language after the Great Famine of the 1840s.

Hickey argues that 'local' DubE has pre-1900 features of 'a considerable heritage' (Hickey 2005: 150). The broad picture of how 'mainstream' DubE developed since 1900, set out in Hickey 2005: Schulte 2023: 9-13), is summarised in Table 1.1

Table 1.1: At a glance: dialects in change

Pre 1900	**1922**	**1930s – 1960s**		**1960s?**		**1980s**		**1990s**		**2020s**
	Ireland independent	Emergence of SupraRegional Standard Irish English	›	Mainstream DubE	›	'Dortspeak' DubE	›	'New Pronunciation' (NP)	›	**?**

When the 26 counties of southern Ireland became independent of Great Britain in 1922, the standard, prescribed way of speaking seems to have been modelled on Received Pronunciation of England. There developed a Supraregional Standard Irish English (SSIE), which for written communication, overtly drew its grammar and dictionary rules from Standard South British English, while covertly codifying the spoken language (Hickey 2020: 222). This was shaped, and continues to be shaped, by what Hickey terms 'mainstream' DubE, which functioned as 'a quasi-standard, even if it has never been accorded recognition as such' (Hickey 2005:28). In the late 1980s there occurred, Hickey argues (2005: 46-49) a significant vowel shift among some young people in south Dublin. It was adopted by people distancing themselves from narrow, conservative, parochial versions of Irishness (47). After becoming quickly ridiculed in the Irish press, this language variety, dubbed 'D4' or 'Dortspeak' faded. Hickey suggests (2025: 49 59) that, while salient, ridiculed features were abandoned, the direction of a large vowel shift accelerated in the 'New Pronunciation' of the 1990s. Hickey has continued to track and report more recent changes on, for instance, his website, http://www.raymondhickey.com/index_(VCDE).html and in Hickey (2018).

Since Hickey's foundational 2005 study new approaches to DubE have been developed, notably by Lonergan (2016), O'Dwyer (2019) and Schulte (2020, 2023a, 2023b) bringing actively ethnographically-informed and third-wave sociolinguistic approaches. Schulte (2023b) looking at DubE through the prism of third-wave sociolinguistics praises ethnographically informed approaches and also points to sources that are underused, such as films, YouTube videos and data from the ICE-Ireland corpus.

1.3 Project phases: Scoping and narrowing

This project had two phases: a scoping study and a narrowing down to focus on WH-voicing among females over six decades. Originally it was conceived as a study of four 'uncontentious features' of DubE, to be based ideally on 30 audio-recorded Zoom calls with Dubliners aged in 2025 from about 20 to over 60 (see section 2.1). The objective was to use these features to answer the following research questions:

1. is use of these features similar across age-groups or does it vary?
2. if varied, does this show language change in the form of age-grading or reversion?
3. are the features salient?
4. is there qualitative evidence that these features are used to index:
    a. localisation in a globalising world (Johnstone 2016)?
    b. distinction within Dublin or Irish contexts (e.g. 'Northside' versus 'Southside' Dublin and Dublin versus rest-of-the country?)

After completion of 32 Zoom calls with participants who met the criteria for inclusion (section 2.1) and the annotation of audio recordings in ELAN (ELAN 2025), two decisions were made in quick succession to narrow the focus of the study, first to females (19 out of the 32 interviewees) only for TH-interdental stopping and WH-voicing; and then for WH-voicing only.

While the findings of this study are specifically focused on WH-voicing, the data gathered has the potential to be investigated more extensively, looking at all four speech features and also drawing on the large amount of qualitative data collected on perceptions of language differences and change, self-perceptions of speech, perceptions of how others 'label' them on the basis of their speech, and perceptions of how class and locality relate to ways of speaking.

With that wider potential in mind, the four features of the scoping study are discussed in the next section (1.4).

1.4 Four 'uncontentious features' of DubE

1.4.1 Slit-fricative /t/

The fricated /t, 'slit-t' or slit-fricative (Kallen 2013: 53-55), also described as lenited /t/ by Hickey (2004: 84) and Kallen (2005), occurs according to Hickey (2005: 81) either intervocalically or word-finally after a vowel and before a pause. It has been seen as a very distinctive element in southern Irish English, being described as 'one of the most conspicuous features of Irish English' (Wells 1982: 429) and 'the clearest phonetic feature of Irish English' (Hickey 2004: 84). Hickey (2005: 81) points out that /d/, too, is often realised in southern Irish English as a fricative. The feature occurs in versions of English that have been in contact with the two similar languages, Irish and Scots Gaelic, and in areas that have had an influx of Irish people. A very substantial literature has developed (Gardner 2013: 3-4) looking at its occurrence in places as far apart as Newfoundland and Nova Scotia in Canada, the cities of Adelaide, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney in Australia, the Shetland Islands, and English cities including Liverpool and Middlesborough (in this case, though, Jones and Llamas, 2008, argue against a common source for the feature in Dublin and Middlesborough).

The terms 'slit-t' and 'slit fricative' will be used here. Had I continued to do analysis of this feature I would have followed Schulte (2023a) in looking at word-final /t/. The use of the slit fricative in Dublin and Southern Ireland has been the focus of several studies. Kallen (2005) views the feature through a theoretical phonological setting. Some studies pay attention to the degree of frication (something that I would not be examining as I had in mind to distinguish between plosive stop, frication, glottal stop and deletion). These studies focusing on degree of frication include Diskin-Holdaway, Loakes & McDougall (2024) and Skarnitzl & Rálišová (2023). O'Dwyer (2019) and Schulte (2020) examined how the slit-fricative was used for stance.

Hickey (2009: 60) argues that 'fricatives for alveolar stops' have a very low salience among speakers and also among outsiders who do not stigmatise or ridicule it in parody or comedy. Nevertheless, elsewhere Hickey noted (1984: 233 n.1) that in 'careful reading of a literary text', frication disappeared almost entirely. There is evidence of some awareness among Dubliners of the slit-t. So, for example in 2004, Gaye Byrne, one of the most prominent broadcasters in Ireland, wrote a jokey magazine article for the *Irish Times* (Byrne 2004) castigating the 'Soft Irish T'. Byrne, then retired, criticised his successors in broadcasting for 'slovenliness of speech' and engaging in 'a lazy, careless habit'.

The comic novelist and author, Paul Howard, writing under the name of the fictional character, Ross O'Carroll-Kelly, also pokes fun at the slit fricative. Amador-Moreno (2016: 4-5) has a quote from one of his novels, when the main character, a young, privileged, rugby-playing Southsider says, "I don't know what it is, roysh', where 'roysh' is the phonetic rendering of 'right'.

1.4.2 TH-dental stopping

Hickey (2005:73) describes TH-stopping, the dental stop realisations of the dental fricatives, /θ/ and /ð/, as part of the wider Supraregional Southern Irish English, which has been maintained in the New Pronunciation of non-local DubE. In contrast to speakers of other varieties of English (Wells 1982; ÓhÚrdail 1997; Kelly 2017), speakers of Irish English distinguish between alveolar stops [t, d] and dental stops [t̪, d̪]. As an Irish person living in England I have had the experience of English colleagues being amused when they think I am saying 'Tursday' for the day that follows Wednesday.

Hickey (2005: 230-231) observes that both in mainstream and New Pronunciation DubE, dental stopping is typical; while in 'local' DubE the alveolar stop prevails.

Had I continued to analysis of this feature I would have focused on it, word-initially, medially and finally. Intuitively, for word-initial occurrences I would have been alert to the effects of it being followed by /r/ and by what type of vowel.

1.4.3 Yod deletion

In his description of yod deletion in England, Wells (1982: 207, 330-331, 338-339) presents it through the examples of East Anglia and working-class Cockney speakers in London. He also describes a far more extensive process in the USA of what he terms Later Yod Dropping (1982: 247). In his few lines about yod use in Dublin (1982: 435-436), Wells makes observations that echo what I heard growing up in Dublin: yod coalescence for 'dew' = 'due' = 'Jew' [dʒu:] and for 'tune' [tʃu:] and yod deletion for 'nude' [nu:d].

Hickey (2005: 81) says that yod deletion in Irish English is confined to when it is after /n/ or /l/ and never after alveolar stops. The sentence he tested out on 26 people from his wider database was, 'They bought a new bath last week'. Equal numbers pronounced 'new' with the yod, [nju:] and without it [nu:]. While I found some of the Hickey's category labels vague or unclear and not defined ('DUB_DVS', 'OldM', 'Young Slangy'), the broad picture seems to be that people speaking local DubE were more inclined to retain the yod (4 out 6), while, of the 14 mainstream and New Pronunciation speakers, whom I could categorise as such, the overwhelming majority (10) deleted yod.

According to van den Doel (2006: 191-192, 316), yod deletion is highly salient for British and southern Irish native speakers of English, who stigmatise it as an 'Americanism'.

I was sorry that in the end I did not analyse this feature. For Hickey's data is something that I do not recognise from my own experience nor from the 32 interviews that were conducted in this project.

1.4.4 WH-voicing

The term 'WHICH-voicing' is used by Hickey (2005:83) to indicate the replacement of [ʍ], the voiceless labial-velar fricative with [w], the voiced labial-velar approximant. This results in there being no phonetic contrast in pairs such as *whales-wails, which-witch* and *whine-wine*. Markl (2023: 79), analysing the feature in the speech of 18 Edinburgh women, distinguishes between 'fricated' realisations of HW (the range of realisations of orthographic 'wh') – in which there is frication before the glide – and 'fricationless' where there is only the glide.

Hickey (1984: 71) points out the extensive use of [ʍ] in IrE for words orthographically beginning *wh-*.

Within Standard Southern British English there has been a dramatic devoicing (or de-fricating) of WH. In 1965, the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Onions 1965) shows a leading /h/ in its phonetic rendering of the words 'whale', 'what', 'wheat', 'whimper', 'whirl', 'whisper' and many more. Sixty years later in the Oxford Dictionary of English (2025) these words are consistently transcribed for British English as /w/ and for US English as beginning with /(h)w/.

Wells (1982: 228-230) describes a complicated history of [ʍ] – [w] alternations in England over centuries, which included at least one reversal. Labov, Ash, Sharon & Boberg (2005: 49-50) show that in the USA there was nearly complete merger in the second half of the twentieth century. At the beginning of that period most Americans used the fricated, unvoiced [ʍ] with only a few Atlantic port cities having the merger. By the end of the period the distinction only occurred in a limited area in the south. Bridwell (2019a, 2019b) looking at 25 participants in South Carolina found the [ʍ] – [w] distinction decreased with date of birth and that there were two sets of social patterns of usage, with [ʍ] being simultaneously associated 'with rurality and localization, as well as the overt prestige of education'. Bridwell & Renwick (2021, 2024) point to college-educated

people in the south of the USA being more likely to use the fricated voiceless [ʍ], suggesting that this realisation is regarded as a prestige feature.

Hickey (2005:83-84) tested WH-voicing on 26 people with the sentence, 'Which one do you mean?' As with yod deletion, discussed above, there was a 50-50 percent split between voiced and unvoiced realisations. Looking at Hickey's category labels for the speakers, I could not judge whether there was a real difference between the outputs of 'local' speakers and 'non-local' ones, as the numbers were so small: a majority of 'locals' (3 out of 5) chose the voiced [w], the majority of the 'non-locals' (9 out 15) did the opposite in choosing the unvoiced [ʍ].

Hickey (2005:83-84) wonders whether non-local DubE speakers will show the pattern of other parts of the English-speaking world and complete the [ʍ] - [w] merger, 'for it cannot be said that the users of the New Pronunciation unequivocally favour the voicing of [ʍ]. This study will revisit that question 20 years after it was set by Hickey.

1.5 Ethnographically informed

O'Dwyer (2019) in his study of the 'slit fricative' in an all-male sports club in North Dublin, argues that 'ethnographically informed, qualitatively-skewed mixed methods can elucidate the social meaning of linguistic variants'. Likewise Schulte (2023b) encourages the adoption of more ethnographically-aware research into DubE.

From the outset of this project, I wished to adopt an 'ethnographically informed' approach. To me this means:

- being aware of the potentially problematic interaction between researcher and participants; this can arise from several sources: the 'observer's paradox' (Labov 1981: 3-4, 14); misunderstandings or misreadings of what is said or differences in understanding the purpose of the interaction (the 'communicative event') and what the meaning of specific 'communicative actions' are (Briggs 1986);
- seeking to be as fully an 'insider' in terms of understanding the rules, the assumptions, the cultural patterns of participants, while recognising that this will always be partial; recognising that that the fieldworker is both 'insider' and 'outsider' (Milroy 1980/87: 41-43; Milroy 1987: 59-6);
- being aware of the power relationship; sometimes the researcher may be perceived by participants (and maybe even by themselves) as being more powerful, more expert and maybe more official;
- making every effort to reduce 'Interview Style', to create rapport, and to stimulate 'Spontaneous Style' (Milroy 1980/1987: 62-68).

For clarity I set out several key elements that I thought could shape the interaction.

- Like the participants I had grown up in Dublin and so had some shared knowledge and assumptions about Dublin, being Irish and the changing nature of Irish society. But I had lived outside Ireland, in London, for 40 years, returning to Dublin perhaps two or three times a year. I had seen the massive changes in Ireland as a series of snapshots, with dramatic high and low points including: the emigration of graduates still being high in the 1980s, the economic malaise and financial problems of 1980s Ireland, the emergence of Ireland in the 1990s as the 'Celtic Tiger' and moving from having one of the lowest levels of per-capita GDP in Europe to having one of the highest, the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the collapse of the authority and respect accorded to the Catholic Church as a result of sex-abuse scandals.
- The ethnographer does not need to be an expert in the history, the culture, the social divisions and identities, but they do need to be strongly grounded in them.
- For this project, in practical terms becoming more ethnographically informed, within the time available, involved registering as an online reader of two Irish daily national

newspapers; getting advice from younger friends and relatives in Dublin and London about TikTok and YouTube videos dealing with features of IrE and DubE; reading books such as Fintan O'Toole's (2021) *We don't know ourselves: A personal history of Ireland since 1958*, as well as referring to recent general history e.g. Ferriter (2024) and accounts of the collapse of the Catholic Church's authority, such as Scally (2021).

- I was necessarily alert to the range of potential factors at play in the interactions with participants: being 30 to 40 years older than some, living outside Ireland for more than half my life and being related to some of the participants (see section 2.1).

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

This section looks at:

- the criteria used for selecting participants;
- the idealised and actual distribution of participants by age for the initial scoping phase;
- how participants were recruited;
- the level of pre-existing connection between researcher and participants.

2.1.1 Criteria

This study aims to engage participants who were brought up in Dublin and who have lived most of their life there. Initially a criterion was set that participants had to have lived no more than five years outside Dublin. In the early stages of recruitment I decided that this restriction had no explanatory value and it impeded recruitment. So the criteria for participation were revised to be that participants:

- were brought up in Dublin;
- had lived in Dublin within the last five years;
- had lived at least half their life in Dublin.

2.1.2 Idealised and actual distribution by age

In the initial scoping phase (see 1.3) this study was designed as an exploration of differences in variation of four features of DubE, between men and women and across age cohorts. The objective was to engage 30 participants, divided equally between self-identified male and female, spread across three age groups, so creating six cells with ideally five participants in each cell. The idealised sample is set out in Table 2.1. Initially for convenience and communication I labelled the age cohorts with the terms Boomers', 'Gen X', 'Millennials' and 'Gen Z'. These are widely used, including by the Pew Research Center who point out their limitations (2023, 2024),. I make no assumption that the characterisations of these groups necessarily fit the attitudes of these age groups in Ireland.

Thirty-two conversations took place, the distribution of which is set out in Table 2.2.

Table 2.1: Idealised distribution for initial scoping phase

Born	Age in 2025	Female	Male
Before 1965 Boomers	61 and over	5	5
1965 – 1996 Gen X and Millennials	29 - 60	5	5
1996 – 2007 Gen Z	18 - 28	5	5

Table 2.2: Achieved distribution of participants by age in initial scoping phase

Born	Age in 2025	Female	Male
Before 1965	61 and over	**8** 1 born 1937 7 born 1956 - 1961	**6** 1 born 1937 5 born 1952 – 1961
1965 – 1996	29 - 60	**6** 3 born 1968 - 1971 0 born 1975 – 1984 3 born 1991 - 1995	**5** 1 born 1969 0 born 1975 – 1984 4 born 1989 - 1996
1997 – 2007	18 - 28	**5**	**2**
		19	**13**

2.1.3 Recruitment

Participants were identified and recruited via:

- potential participants within my own networks, through customised emails and WhatsApp messages, using a friendly advert inviting them to participate and asking them to encourage their friends to take part;
- non-participants who have networks in Dublin, inviting them to reach out to their contacts;
- snowballing: asking participants to recommend who could be approached.

Three non-participants acted as co-recruiters resulting in eight interviews. Almost a third of the participants (10 out of 32) recruited at least one more participant.

This approach does have the potential effect of skewing the participants towards the researcher's own network and their location within the population being explored. So for clarity on this I set out in Table 2.3, the closeness of relationship between the researcher and participants, using the concept of first order and further order zones in a network (Milroy 1980/1987: 46-47)

Table 2.3: Closeness of researcher's relationship with participants

Zones of contact with researcher	Female participants		Male participants
First order	7		4
Second order	7		6
Third order	5		3

Among first-order zone females, the researcher had a close family relationship with two (as brother and uncle), a more distant family relationship with two, and decades-long friendship with three.

Among the first-order zone male participants, the researcher had a close family relationship, that of uncle, with three; and a decades-long friendship with one.

2.2 The interview

This section looks at:

- framing the interaction with participants;
- recording the conversation;
- the conversation protocol;
- the Story read aloud by participants;

Because I have not been able to find a succinct alternative to the word 'interview', I have retained it in this written report. It is not a term I am happy with. In all my communications with participants, potential participants and co-recruiters, I deliberately avoided the word, as I was conscious that the word 'interview' can carry connotations of formality and question-and-answer, potentially reducing the likelihood of participants engaging in relaxed, less careful vernacular. Milroy (1980/87: 62-63) describes this as IS (Interview Style) with its 'clear two-part discourse structure' in which the speaker is replying to questions on topics set by the interviewer. Opposed to that are Spontaneous Styles (SS) in which the participant has greater control while they hold the floor.

My intuition is that using or even thinking the word 'interview' might also shape, unconsciously, the way in which the researcher frames the interaction and the way in which they interact with participants.

2.2.1 Framing the interaction with participants

Conscious of the 'observer's paradox' (Labov 1981: 3-4, 14), and the challenges to the fieldworker operating as both insider and outsider (Milroy 1980/87: 41-43; Milroy 1987: 59-60); and wishing to minimise the possibility of IS discourse, I avoided the word 'interview' in the advert- blurb sent to potential participants and to co-recruiters. A chatty, friendly and informal style was attempted. The title of the invitation and first five sentences focused on story-telling and personal experiences.:

> **Stories and language: Dublin 2025**
> What's it like growing up and living in Dublin? What is Dublin English like in 2025? Is it changing? And if so, how?
> We'd like your help in taking a snapshot of how English is spoken today in Dublin.

The invitation referred twice to Zoom conversations, rather than to interviews, and described the activity as 'easy and fun'.

During the early part of the conversations I actively embedded the words 'chat' and 'conversation'. So, before asking for demographic information, I flagged up to participants that I had some 'Q+A' that I would 'shoot at them', 'like a questionnaire, in person' before we got into chatting about growing up in Dublin, about how Dublin has changed and the different ways in which people speak in Dublin and whether this is changing.. If, in answering one of the demographic questions, a participant veered off into memories and storytelling (e.g. about where they went to school), I let them do so and returned to the demographic questions later, keeping to the principle of 'tangential shifting' (Labov 1981).

2.2.2 Recording the conversation

During the COVID pandemic online rather than in-person interviews were adopted. Gardner 2024 shows them to be a trustworthy means to gather linguistic data. Interviews were conducted on Zoom Workplace 6.4.12. Audio recordings were made, with separate channels for the researcher/host and the participant. For each recording a .vtt transcript and separate m4a audio files were downloaded to a secure, password-protected OneDrive folder.

2.2.3 The conversation protocol

There is a long-established tradition in Labovian sociolinguistics of interview protocols setting out the methods and questions to be used in interviews. I looked at two well-known examples: 'Sociolinguistic Questions' (1998?) developed by William Labov and Tagliamonte 2006 (Appendix B). These were developed as flexible toolkits with just a few questions being essential and some others being flagged up as helpful. The objective, to elicit vernacular rather than careful speech, was to adopt 'tangential shifting', letting the speaker shape the topics and direction of conversation. In practice this means asking questions that will stimulate the participant to become fully immersed in telling a story or recalling moments of high emotional charge.

I adapted the Labovian tradition of protocols in a way which I thought would work for me and for participants and be manageable in a conversation of about 45 minutes. The objectives of the protocol that I drew up were: (1) to capture more careful speech through participants reading aloud a story, (2) the collection of demographic information and (3) stimulating the participant to tell stories in as relaxed and unconsidered manner as possible, close to vernacular.

I developed a two-document protocol that worked for me. One document, 'Demographic + ID questions' was a single page, containing all the questions that I needed to ask and also providing an overview – that I could see at a glance - of the different stages of the interview: Pre-Recording, Record Permissions, Story, Demographic Questions, Conversation, and Wrap-up and Thanks. (See Appendix A.) This went through a second version, after I came to the view that I should systematically capture as much information as possible about perceptions of language and language change in Dublin. So additional questions were added to this at-a-glance summary of the script: (1) salience: awareness of the four features I was investigating; (2) perceptions of differences of Dublin speaking; (3) how participants would describe their way of speaking and (4) how might someone from a different part of Dublin describe the participant's way of speaking?

The second document was what began as my original script. At the beginning of the document I wrote the script out in full but as I proceeded, I realised that I did not wish to be 'overscripted' and over-careful in my performance. For this would put at risk the informal, relaxed mood that I wished to co-create with participants. So, later in the document, I shifted to a more note-like format that would remind me of topics. (See Appendix B.)

2.2.4 The story

To elicit a more careful style of speech I included a story which participants read aloud. I considered other examples of stories used in sociolinguistic interviews, such as 'Comma Gets a Cure' (Honorof et al 2000). I decided that I needed something different that would have three characteristics: (1) it would capture the four speech features I was investigating: (2) it would have a relaxed feel, being 'silly' rather than serious or ponderous; and (3) it would have a Dublin flavour. So I drafted a story of about 250 words. (See Appendix C). To ensure that it could be read with greatest ease by participants using computers, laptops and in one instance, a phone, the story was formatted in 14-point Calibri, with 1.5 line spacing on a single page of A4.

To give it a local flavour, the story had references to a part of Dublin (Howth), the local train system (the DART), the national broadcaster (RTE) and Guinness, the archetypal Dublin stout.

To explore the four features, the story included:

1. **WH-voicing:** there were 22 instances with content words and phrases such as 'whales', 'whistle', 'tin whistle', 'magic whistle', 'whirling', 'white whales'; interrogative function words such as in 'Where? What do you mean?'; an imperative ('No whingeing'.) and the function word, 'somewhere'.
2. **TH-interdental stopping**: Six instances of /θ/ were included. Deliberately selected were 'three' (three instances), 'Thursday' (one instance) 'thirsty' (one instance) and the place-name, Howth (one instance). No effort was needed to include /ð/ instances, as these are very frequent in English, with 32 instances in the story.
3. **Slit-fricative,** the frication of alveolar stops, which Hickey (2005:74) describes as occurring in 'intervocalic and wordfinal/prepausal' positions. In this story, 25 instances of post-vocalic, word-final /t/ were included with words such as 'boat', 'fright', 'got', 'not' and 'thought'. Also included were two instances of 'sort', as I have an impression that word-final /t/ preceded by /r/ can be fricated.
4. For yod-deletion, four instances were included: 'Tuesday', 'news', 'students' and 'knew'.

2.3 Data collection

2.3.1 Objectives in data collection

There were two objectives in data collection:

1. to gather data on the independent variables that might explain changes in each of the speech variables; the independent variables being year of birth, socio-economic background, and the area of Dublin where participants were brought up;
2. to gather qualitative data that might throw light on the salience of the features and on perceptions of language change in DubE, language differences (e.g. between 'Northside', 'Southside' or 'local' varieties) and links between class and ways of speaking.

While the qualitative data would not necessarily explain the dependent variables, I consider them important to gather for two reasons: (1) the perceptions of speakers have the possibility of revealing to the researcher, unexpected links and explanations for language change; (2) by interviewing over 30 Dubliners aged between 20 and 87, I was creating a long-term resource that could in future be used for ethnographic and sociological exploration of language, for which qualitative data is pivotal.

2.3.2 Demographic data collected

Ten items of demographic information were collected, six relating to participants and four relating to their parents or main carers. These are set out, below, and, where necessary, discussed further.

Demographic data relating to participants

1. **Year of birth**: A key independent variable.
2. **Area of Dublin where brought up:**
   Participants were asked to name the area in which they were brought up and to say where in Dublin that was. For future work, building on this study, the differing ways in which participants named their childhood area, has potential for exploration, revealing how they position themselves within the larger city and with nearby neighbourhoods. For this study we amalgamated the areas into Northside, Southside and Inner City.

3. **Present location**:
   Though not using this as a key independent variable for this study, I took the view that for future research, drawing on this database, movement from one area to another, or staying in one location, might be worth examining when exploring perceptions of language and class. So, after the first few interviews I asked participants for their Eircode if they still lived in Dublin. The Eircode is a seven-figure postcode system covering all business and residential addresses in the Republic of Ireland (Citizen Information, n.d.) which can be linked to the Pobal HP Deprivation Index that grades areas into eight categories from Extremely Disadvantaged to Extremely Affluent (Pobal 2013, 2017, n.d; Haase, Pratschke & Gleeson 2012). The Eircode data was obtained for the majority of participants: 14 out the 17 female participants still living in Dublin; and 8 out of 13 male participants living in Dublin.
4. **Schools attended:** My shared experience with family and friends in Ireland is that school attended is an item of information to place a person's socio-economic group, wealth, cultural attitudes and religion (as Ireland's schools are still mostly denominationally based).
5. **Religion or denomination in which participants were brought up:** In my experience there is a high awareness of religion as a social or cultural marker.
6. **Sex:** What sex participants identify themselves was a key independent variable in the initial scoping phase but no longer applied when the project focused on female participants only.

Demographic data relating to the parents or main carers of participants

1. Where brought up.
2. If from outside Dublin, did they come to Dublin at over the age of 18?
3. Their occupations (see section 2.4).
4. Their highest level of education (see section 2.4).

2.3.3 Qualitative data collected

Five questions eliciting qualitative answers were put to most participants, when time was available and if I judged that it was clear that the participant was interested enough to continue the conversation. The questions were:

1. What was their awareness – so the salience – of each of the four features I was looking at and any judgements they might have about differing realisations of these features?
2. What differences did they see in ways of speaking in Dublin?
3. What changes did they notice in the way people speak?
4. How would participants describe their own way of speaking?
5. How might a person from a different part of Dublin describe their way of speaking?

This information has not been analysed but some of it is referred to in section 3.

2.4 Socio-economic status

This section gives an overview of the types of socio-economic data collected and a discussion of the three approaches I considered for evaluating socio-economic status: by occupation, using education as a proxy, and self-perception of class or socio-economic group.

In this study, with its focus on speech features, I have not been able to give attention to the complex ways in which class, personal networks and group identity operate (Milroy & Milroy 1992). As Breen & Whelan (1996:2) note: 'class groups share not just economic position but a web of social relationships, attitudes and values. We are faced with not merely sets of individuals carrying out similar jobs, but definite groups with a recognisable social identity.'

2.4.1 Overview of socio-economic data gathered

There were two categories whose socio-economic grouping, I wished to establish as possible social independent variables to explain the four speech features: the participants and their parents or main carers. As all were brought up by parents, that term will be used from now on in this report. I considered three possible approaches to establishing the socio-economic group of participants and their parents: by work occupation, by using education as a proxy, and by perceptions of class or socio-economic group. How I applied this to participants and their parents is summarised in Table 2.4 and discussed below.

Table 2.4: Collecting data on socio-economic groups

Possible approach	**Parents**	**Participants**
1. Occupation	Scripted. Systematically asked of all participants.	Not scripted. Woven into conversation. Data collected was not always specific.
2. Education	Scripted. Established for all.	Not scripted. Established for all.
3. Perceived socio-economic group/class	Not scripted. Established occasionally.	Not scripted. Established occasionally.

2.4.2 Approach 1: Occupation

Participants were asked what their parents' occupations were. The occupations of participants themselves were established through conversation, rather than being posed as a specific question.

For categorising by occupation I considered two models. The first was to use and adapt the classifications for socio-economic group or for social class developed by Ireland's Central Office of Statistics (CSO: 2002, 2022), which are based on the UK Standard Occupational Classification (1995 cited by CSO 2002: 176) and adapted for Irish market conditions. I compared the usability of CSO classifications:

- 'socio-economic group' which aims to 'bring together persons with similar social and economic statuses on the basis of the level of skill or educational attainment required;
- 'social class', which aims to bring together' people with similar levels of occupational skill', with no account being taken of characteristics such as education.

The latter, I decided was more easily useable with its seven broad groups:

A. Professional workers
B. Managerial and technical
C. Non-manual
D. Skilled manual
E. Semi-skilled
F. Unskilled
G. All others gainfully occupied and unknown

The second model was to draw on one of the two classification schema set out by Breen and Whelan (1996: 20-22, 144) in their *Social mobility and social class in Ireland* and used in McCarthy (1997) These draw on wider eleven-part and seven-part CASMIN classifications. Their first classification is tripartite (22-23):

1. Professional and managerial class;
2. Intermediate class;
3. Working class.

Their second classification is a four-class schema (144)

1. The professional and managerial class;
2. Intermediate non-manual group, the *petit bourgeoisie* and farmers with more than 50 acres;
3. Skilled and semi-skilled manual workers and small farmers;
4. Unskilled manual workers.

The CSO (2002, 2022) 'social class' model and Breen and Whelan's (1996) model looked equally useable and the CSO was chosen as the frame for designating socio-economic group.

Specific data was collected about the occupations of participants' parents. At the point when all interviews had taken place, a review of parents' occupations showed that the CSO social class categories A to D could be collapsed into two categories: (1) Professional, management and technical and (2) Non-manual and skilled manual. The occupations and adapted classifications for the parents of the 19 female participants are set out in Table 2.5.

The occupation of participants themselves was not one of the specific demographic questions put to participants. The primary reason for not including this as an essential question was that in a conversation of about 45 minutes in which I was seeking to have participants speaking in as vernacular manner for as long as possible, we needed to restrict the number of essential demographic questions, which run the risk of creating an Interview Style precluding relaxed, uncareful vernacular (Milroy 1980/87: 62-63). Nevertheless in all but one case, their occupations or former occupations were established in the course of conversation. The information gathered was not as precise as that which we gathered about their parents.

Table 2.5: Occupations of parents of female participants

CSO classification	**Adapted classification**	**Occupations of parents, as described by participants**	**Participants with one or more parent in category**
A. Professional workers B. Managerial and technical	1. Professional, management and technical	• Air traffic controller • Architect • Architectural engineer • Chartered accountant • Civil servant • Clerk, then manager, Electricity Supply Board • Lawyer • Manager at Guinness • Physiotherapist • Pilot • Owner of haulage business • Scientist and professor • Secondary school teacher • Social worker; CEO of charitable organisation	15
C. Non manual D. Skilled manual	2. Non-manual and skilled manual	• Personal care assistant • Ran fruit & veg shop; various, including construction worker, taxi driver • Secretary -then housewife • Train driver • Varied: shirt cutter in department store, managed aunt's pub, security guard. • Watchmaker	9

2.4.3 Approach 2: Education as a proxy

To use education as a proxy for socio-economic group we found out the highest level of education for all parents by scripted questions and for all participants through conversation. We set three levels: primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education (either by university attendance, professional qualifications or post-secondary vocational education).

After all interviews were completed, we looked at the highest educational levels of participants and their parents but did not run these as independent variables.

2.4.4 Self-perception of socio-economic status

Because I wished to stimulate relaxed, vernacular conversation and to limit 'set questions', I decided not to include questions about participants' perceptions of their parents' and their own social class. Nevertheless some participants did mention class and escaping from former class. So F14 says that her father would have described himself as 'a clerk' but really he was a manager. She also talks about the move from Dublin City to South County Dublin of differing social groups living a few minutes' walk from each other but speaking differently and living in different housing estates, one privately built for owner-occupiers, and the other built by, and belonging to, 'the Council', the local authority.

While not being used in this study, these perceptions of how language is linked to socio-economic identity, are ones worth revisiting and exploring in future work drawing on these 32 interviews.

2.5 Processing data

2.5.1 Stage 1: From interview to 'focused feature files'

In Stage 1 the following steps were taken before examining audio and transcripts in ELAN (ELAN 2025).

1. For each participant's m4a audio file generated by Zoom Workplace, Python Jupyter Notebooks was used to generate a word-separated text file. These related to conversations with 33 participants, one of whom was dropped from analysis as she did not fully meet the criteria for participation.
2. For the first six of the 32 interviewees, each word-separated text file was used to generate four 'feature text' files, one for each of the features being considered in the initial scoping phase.
    a. Each text 'feature file' was saved in Excel and all words not displaying the relevant feature were deleted to produce a 'focused feature file'.
    b. For TH/θ/ stopping, initially words containing the orthographic 'th' were selected. Filter and Delete was used to remove words that equalled 'than', 'that', 'the', 'this' or 'though'. The list was then eyeballed to find remove other words in which 'th' was /ð/.
        i. At a later stage, it became clear that before doing this I should have searched for numbers, cardinal and ordinal, sounded with a /th/ (e.g. three, thirteen, thirty) which appeared as numbers and so were not picked up by a search for 'th'. What seems to be a small number of tokens was thus missed.
    c. For WH-voicing, initially words containing the orthographic 'wh' were selected and then the list was eyeballed to identify and remove words where the orthographic 'wh' in words such as 'who' and 'whole', that since at least 1965 (Onions et al 1965). have been pronounced with /h/ and not as /ʍ/, the voiceless labial-velar fricative, nor as /w/, the voiced labial-velar approximant.

d. For slit-fricative, all words ending in Vowel-/t/ or in /rt/ were retained. The retention of words ending /rt/ was based on my impression that I had experienced hearing these sometimes being fricated.
e. For yod deletion, a pragmatic approach was adopted: to extract the following words that in British and Irish English, can contain a yod:
    - cute
    - due
    - music
    - new and news
    - student
    - tube.

3. Each 'focused feature file', containing potential tokens, was saved as a txt file, ready to be uploaded into ELAN.

2.5.2 Stage 2: Narrowing down #1: to female participants

After the first five 'focused feature files' had been prepared, I decided that, given the remaining time available, I should focus on the 19 female participants and on their use of WH-voicing and TH-dental stopping.

2.5.3 Stage 3: Preparing data in ELAN

For the 19 female participants (22 recordings in all because some calls were interrupted and restarted) the following steps were taken:

1. Each of the word-separated .txt 'focused feature files' was opened in Excel. In addition to the Start and End time for each word, additional columns Start 2 and End 2 were created, respectively as Start-1000ms and End+1000ms, to provide preceding and succeeding speech sounds. The resulting text file, ready for importing to ELAN was of the type shown in Figure 2.A
2. All 22 audio files and their 44 text files were imported into ELAN, with tiers for WH and TH being created. An ELAN .eaf file was created for each recording.
3. This generated 2476 tokens for /th/ and 1707 tokens for /wh/.

Figure 2.A:
Excerpt of 'WH' .txt file ready to be imported into ELAN (Participant F09)

Start	End	Speaker	Wrd	Start 2	End 2	
120479	120800	A	when	119479	121800	
120800	121360	A	whales	119800	122360	
132889	133369	A	whales	131889	134369	
140889	141289	A	whales	139889	142289	
142129	142569	A	somewhere		141129	143569
144129	144449	A	Why	143129	145449	
147128	147288	A	what	146128	148288	
149849	150289	A	"whispered,"		148849	151289
153249	153649	A	Where?	152249	154649	
153969	154289	A	What	152969	155289	
158580	159220	A	whinging.		157580	160220
161140	161660	A	whistle.		160140	162660
167420	167780	A	white	166420	168780	
167780	168460	A	whales	166780	169460	
169620	170140	A	whirling		168620	171140
171580	171900	A	When	170580	172900	
173340	173860	A	"whistle,"		172340	174860
174100	174660	A	whales	173100	175660	
177340	177620	A	What	176340	178620	
186660	187060	A	whistled		185660	188060
187980	188340	A	whales.	186980	189340	
211870	212230	A	what	210870	213230	

2.5.4 Stage 4: Narrowing down #2: WH-feature for females

Given the time remaining in the project, I narrowed the focus down to looking at the WH-feature in females.

2.5.5 Stage 5: Transcription in ELAN

1. Selecting only the WH-tier in Transcription Mode, every token was annotated with additional information. Each item of additional information was consistently separated by a divider hyphen (-) so that later, once the text file of the transcription was read in Excel, the additional information would be inserted into separate columns, using 'Data > Text to Columns'.
2. Initially the additional information marked was: Realisation (as HW for /ʍ/ and as W for /w/), Preceding Sound, Following Sound, Location in Word (Initial or Medial). I decided to discontinue with Following Sound and with Location in Word, as these could, if judged necessary, be marked much more swiftly in Excel with the files exported from ELAN. In addition, I added 'Comments' information, in which I noted unusual or surprising features, for example when a speaker whose realisations of 'wh' were until that point 100% in one way, suddenly changed over to the alternative.
3. An annotation for Style was included. All words spoken reading the story, were marked 'S'. The few instances where I could hear that the participant was imitating another way of speaking, I marked up as 'I'. All other tokens were marked up as 'C' for Conversation.
4. There were some instances where a word could not immediately be discerned. This was often because of the overlap created by extending the start and end times of words by -1000ms and +1000ms respectively. The problem could usually be resolved by checking the following token and occasionally by checking a transcript. Unidentified tokens (marked up as 0-0-0-0 in the annotations) reduced the number of tokens from 1707 by 3 percent (53) to 1,654 useable tokens.

2.5.6 Stage 6: Final Feature Files and Participant File

1. The creation of Final Feature Files: The 22 annotated WH tiers were exported from ELAN as CSV-Tab Delimited Files. Each was then saved and structured in Excel, with the addition of Participant Code Number, Interview Number, and Location within Word). The additional information collected in ELAN for each word was put into columns (see example in Figure 2.B)
2. A Participant File had already been created into which all demographic data had been added for each participant.
3. From the Final Feature Files, number of HW and W realisations by each participant were counted and a percentage calculated for HW. These figures were entered into the Participant File for each participant.
4. I considered whether it would be helpful to categorise the 'wh' words grammatically into lexical and functional words. But I judged that this would not have explanatory value, because all but three of the 19 participants had either extremely high HW realisations (90 percent or above) or extremely low HW realisations (10 percent or below).

Figure 2.B: Excerpt of 'WH' Excel file, revising .txt file from ELAN (Participant F09)

Feature	Participant	Int number	Start	End	Word	Style	Realisation	Loc. in word	Preceding sound	Succeeding sound	Comments
WH	F09	9	119479	119800	when	Story	HW	Initial	FACE	DRESS	
WH	F09	9	119800	122360	whales	Story	HW	Initial	n	FACE	
WH	F09	9	131889	134369	whales	Story	HW	Initial	schwa	FACE	
WH	F09	9	139889	141129	whales	Story	HW	Initial	schwa	FACE	
WH	F09	9	141129	143129	somewhere	Story	HW	Medial	m	FACE	
WH	F09	9	143129	145449	Why	Story	HW	Initial		0 PRICE	
WH	F09	9	146128	148288	what	Story	HW	Initial	s	LOT	
WH	F09	9	148849	151289	whispered,	Story	HW	Initial	nd	KIT	
WH	F09	9	152249	152969	Where?	Story	HW	Initial		0 FACE	
WH	F09	9	152969	155289	What	Story	HW	Initial		0 LOT	
WH	F09	9	157580	160140	whinging.	Story	HW	Initial	GOAT	BIT	
WH	F09	9	160140	162660	whistle.	Story	HW	Initial	k	KIT	
WH	F09	9	166420	166780	white	Story	HW	Initial	FLEECE	PRICE	
WH	F09	9	166780	168620	whales	Story	HW	Initial	t	FACE	
WH	F09	9	168620	170580	whirling	Story	HW	Initial	nd	NURSE	
WH	F09	9	170580	172340	When	Story	HW	Initial		0 DRESS	
WH	F09	9	172340	173100	whistle,	Story	HW	Initial	n	KIT	
											rather than HW in this
WH	F09	9	173100	175660	whales	Story	W	Initial	n	FACE	conversation
WH	F09	9	176340	178620	What	Story	HW	Initial		0 LOT	
WH	F09	9	185660	186980	whistled	Story	W	Initial	t	KIT	second use of W
WH	F09	9	186980	189340	whales.	Story	HW	Initial	schwa	FACE	
WH	F09	9	210870	213230	what	Conversatior	HW	Initial	GOAT	LOT	
WH	F09	9	479830	482110	what	Conversatior	HW	Initial	GOAT	LOT	
WH	F09	9	563320	565520	when	Conversatior	HW	Initial	FLEECE	DRESS	
WH	F09	9	580980	583180	what	Conversatior	HW	Initial	GOAT	LOT	
WH	F09	9	607720	609920	What	0	0	0	0	0	
WH	F09	9	610560	613040	whilst	Conversatior	HW	Initial	z	PRICE	
WH	F09	9	653790	654270	why,	0	0	Initial		0	0

2.6 Analysis

The Participant File in Excel showed for each participant their demographic data along with:

1. the number of HW realisations they had made; i.e. the number of tokens for [ʍ], the voiceless labial-velar fricative;
2. the number of W realisations, i.e. the number of tokens for [w], the voiced labial-velar approximant;
3. HW Percentage, the overall percentage of HW realisations.

I tested HW-Percentage, the use of [ʍ], against three independent variables:

1. Year of Birth
2. Where brought up in Dublin (Inner City, Northside or Southside)
3. Highest occupational level of parents.

3 Findings

The objectives in data collection were twofold: to gather data on independent variables that might explain participants' HW Percentage, that is the percentage of their use of the voiceless fricative [ʍ] rather than the voiced approximant; and also to gather qualitative data on salience of features and on perceptions of language differences and change in Dublin. So, this section first of all sets out the findings for the HW-Percentage, against three independent variables: (1) Year of Birth, (2) Where brought up in Dublin (Inner City, Northside or Southside) and (3) Highest occupational level of parents.

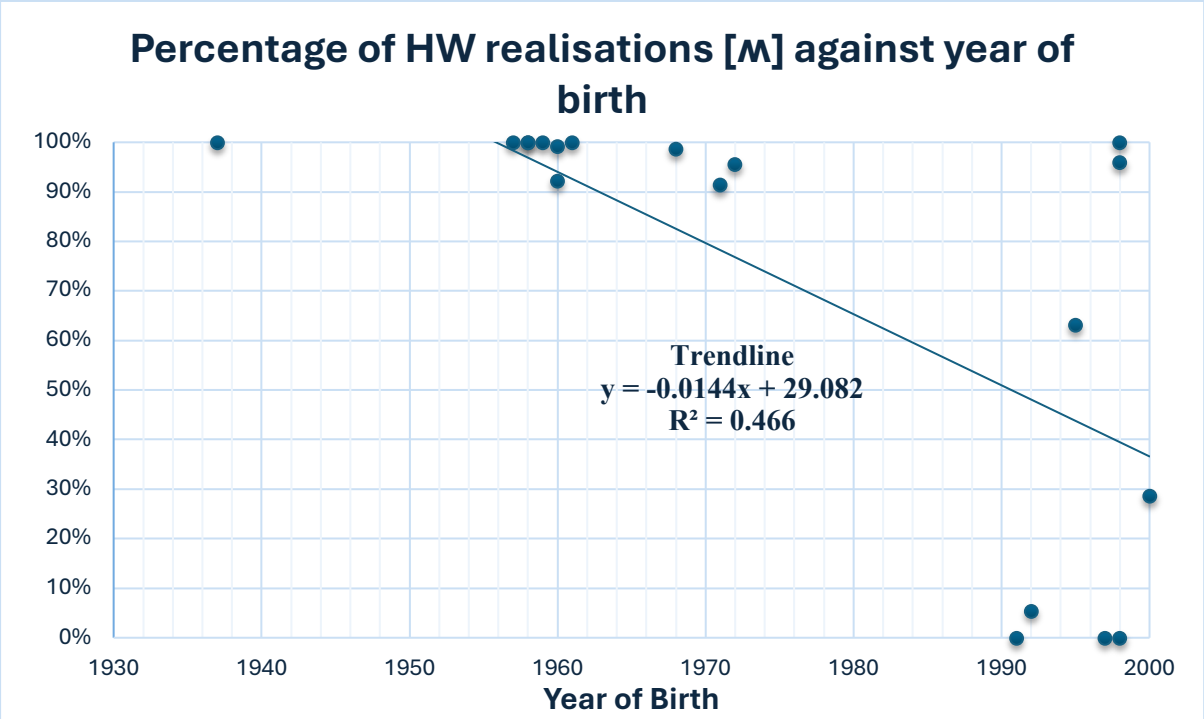
In summary we found a strong correlation between Year of Birth and HW Percentage and no significance in the correlations with the other two independent variables (sections 3.1 - 3.3). Section 3.4 gives a flavour of the large amount of qualitative data collected, which provides a resource for future research with a strongly ethnographic focus.

3.1 Age

A strong negative correlation, with p = 0.0013, was found between Year of Birth and HW Percentage. So the younger participants were less likely to use [ʍ] the voiceless labial-velar fricative and more likely to use [w] the voice labial-velar approximant. (See Table 3.1.) All participants born up to 1972 had an HW Percentage of 90 percent or over. Strikingly over half of these (6) had HW Percentages of 100 percent. There were no participants born between 1973 and 1990 inclusive. For those born after 1990, the majority (6 out of 8) had 41 percent or less; with a cluster (4 out 8) having HW percentage of 5 percent or below.[1]

While finalising this text, I looked again at Table 3.1 and found an error in it. I was surprised to see two participants born in 1998 had HW realisations of 100 percent and 96 percent. I recalled that one speaker of about that age had an almost categorical use of the HW realisation but I had not been aware of any others. So, I rechecked on ELAN the recording of the participant with the 100% and discovered that in annotating the ELAN WH file, I had wrongly input this realisation. The realisation for this candidate was 41% rather than 100%. Concerned by this, I then did the same for the other three participants who had been born after 1990 whose HW-realisations were over 10%.

Table 3.1
Percentage of HW realisations [ʍ] against year of birth



Even with the adjustment of one post-1990 participant from 100 percent to 41 percent HW Percentage, the spread of the younger age cohort is more dispersed than that of the pre-1973 group. Additionally the presence of one participant, born 1998, at 96 percent HW Percentage looks like an outlier. I am conscious that below the overall figures, there are patterns of individual choices made in the contexts of school, family, and career ambitions. Among the eight people in the younger age-group, there were pairs of sisters. (See Table 3.2). Within these we can see

[1] This change in *wh*-voicing appears very abrupt. So I intend to explore this in further development of this study.

possibilities for explanation of the patterns, which might lie in social factors or in how the individuals deploy other speech features. So:

- In pair 1 with the lowest HW Percentages (0 percent and 5 percent) we might postulate that there are similar sets of circumstances influencing their choices. The age gap of five years might not be an explanation for the difference in HW Percentage. The difference, if significant, might reflect the circumstances of the interviews or possibly the range of words used.
- In pair 2 we have a very large difference in HW Percentage (0 percent and 29 percent) in sisters born just two years apart.
- Pair 3 has the highest HW Percentages for this younger group. Both went to the same school, identify themselves as 'southside' and say that others would label their voice as 'posh'. One of them said that Irish friends from outside of Dublin make fun of her south County Dublin accent.

Table 3.2 Sister pairs born 1992 - 2000

	Sister 1		**Sister 2**	
	Year of birth	**HW Percentage**	**Year of birth**	**HW Percentage**
Pair 1	1992	5 percent	1997	0 percent
Pair 2	1998	0 percent	2000	29 percent
Pair 3	1995	63 percent	1998	96 percent

3.2 Area where participants were brought up

As we were interested in the potential for difference in HW realisation between those brought up on the Northside of Dublin and those brought up on the Southside of Dublin, we removed the one person brought up in Inner City Dublin (F20 born 1937) out of our analysis. No significant difference was found between Northsiders and Southsiders, the p value being 0.221. We then decided to categorise as 'South Plus', all Southsiders and three Northsiders who grew up in Bayside or Sutton, areas identified by some participants as 'posh' and commonly referred to as 'honorary Southside'. A comparison of Northsiders and South Plus-siders also resulted in no significant difference in HW realisation between the two groups, with a p value of 0.973.

3.3 Socio-economic background of parents

All participants had studied to tertiary level education (either by university attendance, professional qualifications or post-secondary vocational education). So, if using education as a proxy, they belong to the same socio-economic group. If using the socio-economic group categories derived and adapted from CSO (2002, 2022) and set out in section 2, Table 2.5, we get less certain information, but 16 of the 19 participants belong to category 1 (Professional, management and technical) and 4 belong to category 2 (Non-manual and skilled manual).

We recorded precise occupation on participants' parents. From this we found two groups of participants: those who had at least one parent in 1.Professional, management and technical (14) and those who had both parents in 2. Non-manual and skilled manual. (5)

No significant correlation was found between socio-economic background of parents, with a p value of 0.4022.

3.4 Qualitative data

A lot of qualitative information was gathered, which will provide material for future exploring of perceptions of language. This includes a very strong sense of distinguishing Northside, Southside and 'local' ways of speaking with socio-economic overtones (e.g. Southside depicted as 'posh',

wealthier, speaking in a 'more polished way'). This could definitely be used to build on Lonergan's work (2016) on perceived and actual variation in Dublin English.

WH-voicing had a very low salience with participants sometimes unsure (and in two cases wrong) about how they realised 'wh' words. There was a higher salience of TH-stopping but this was interpreted not as dental stopping but as the stigmatised 'local' DubE alveolar stopping of TH.

Most participants perceived that DubE was changing. When talking about this the focus (by the younger and older cohorts) was on people younger than them. Just two participants spoke about older generations and spoke about a lexical gap and the need to 'translate' for their older relatives.

4 Discussion

4.1 The findings in context

The main finding of this study was that among a group of 19 females in Dublin, there was a decisive decline in the use of the voiceless labial-velar fricative [ʍ] by younger participants. So here we see taking place the 'whine-wine' merger (or 'WH-voicing' in Hickey 2005) which has taken place in other English-speaking countries (Wells 1982: 228-230; Labov, Ash, Sharon & Boberg 2005: 49-50; Bridwell 2019a, 2019b; Bridwell & Renwick 2021, 2024). The exception to this trend is found in Markl (2023) who found no change taking place in her study of 18 females in Edinburgh.

Because this group is highly educated (all to tertiary level) and we can find no correlation between WH realisation and the socio-economic background of participants' parents, we cannot draw conclusions about social factors, such as Markl (2023) has done in her study, and Bridewell (2019a, 2019b) and Bridewell & Renwick (2021, 2024) have done for the southern states of the USA.

Hickey (2005: 83) was unsure whether WH-voicing would be adopted by the New Pronunciation speakers in Dublin. He sounded sceptical, saying that they did not seem to 'unequivocally favour the merging of [ʍ]'. The trend in this group of mainstream and New Pronunciation DubE speakers, suggests that the merger is decisively taking place and is almost categorical.

Hickey (2005: 45-46) argued that among 'non-local' DubE speakers (i.e. among the speakers of 'mainstream' DubE and its successors) there are significant differences in the speech of those born before c.1970 and those born after the early 1970s. Among the younger cohort, changes included considerable back vowel raising, fronted onset for /au/, retroflex /r/, velarised syllable-final /l/, possibly variable T-flapping and possibly retracted onset for /ai/. Our data shows almost categorical realisation of [ʍ] among those born up to 1972. For the second cohort, born after 1990 the pattern has reversed. In a further study, I would like to recruit female participants for that 'missing' period, 1973 – 1990 to see whether the change is cliff-like or has a gentle gradient.

4.2 The future: building on this project

A significant database of about 95,000 recorded words has been created through conversations with the 19 female participants with years of birth ranging more than 60 years (from 1937 to 2000). Besides that there are the recordings and transcriptions of interviews with 13 male participants (with years of birth ranging from 1937 to 1999).

In a future study I would wish to examine the evidence collected from all 32 participants, on the realisations of all four of the features in the original scoping phase, i.e. slit-fricative /t/, TH-dental stopping, yod-deletion and WH-voicing. I would also wish to explore further the perceptions of Dublin English that were gathered as qualitative data – the salience of the four features, perceived differences in ways of speaking in Dublin, perceived changes in DubE, self-

perceptions of the way participants speak, and of how people from other parts of Dublin would label their speech. This ethnographically informed approach would link up to the 'third wave' linguistics work done by Lonergan (2016), O'Dwyer (2019) and Schulte (2020, 2023a).

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Appendix A
Interview protocol: Demographic + ID questions
Discussed in Section 2.2.3 (The conversation protocol)

Date & Time of interview		
Code Name		
PRE-RECORDING		
Name		
Year of birth		
START RECORDING		
Amazon voucher + keep email details for that?		
Report of project?		
Retain contact information so that we might involve you in future projects?		
STORY		
DEMOG		
What part of Dublin brought up in		
Neighbourhood, 'village'		
Broadly, what part of Dublin – North, South, central?		
Where in Dublin now + EIRCODE		
What schools at?		
What religion or denomination brought up in?		
Parent/caretakers		
Where they brought up?		
If from outside Dublin, did they come to Dublin over the age of 18?		
Their occupations		
At what level did they finish education?		
What sex would you classify yourself?		
CONVERSATION		
• Awareness of 4 features?	• Differences of Dublin speaking?	
• How would you describe your way of speaking?	• How might someone from a different part of Dublin describe your way of speaking?	
WRAP-UP & THANKS		

Appendix B: Interview protocol: Document 2

Discussed in Section 2.2.3 (The conversation protocol)

Script v.2 – Stories and language: Dublin 2025.

Shaded grey = Information that **must** be noted.

PRE-RECORDING

1. Thank warmly
2. I'm going to audio-record in a few moments. If at any stage you want to stop the recording, just say so.
3. Before we start recording, I'll confirm:
    a. Your name is XX
    b. What year were you born?
4. OK, we'll start recording now.

RECORD

5. Could I just check with you:

Amazon voucher + keep email details for that?
Like a report of project and keep email details for that?
Retain contact information so that we might involve you in future projects?

6. What I'd like to do is to hear from you about what it's been like growing up in Dublin and how you think Dublin has changed, is changing and what it's like now.
7. I'd also like to talk about language, words and accents in Dublin.
8. What I'm going to do first: is to get you to read a story.
9. After that I'll shoot you a few questions – it will be a bit like questionnaire about you and your family.
10. After that we'll shift into chat.

STORY

11. So let's start with the story.

DEMOG

CONVERSATION

12. There were three areas I thought we might talking about:
    a. What it was like growing up in Dublin.
    b. What Dublin is like now and how it's changed/ is changing.
    c. The different ways of talking in Dublin – language, accents, words.

13. Which of those would you like to start with?

Growing up in Dublin

14. What was it like?
15. Your earliest memories?
16. Brothers and sisters?
17. Contact with other relatives?
18. And your friends?
    a. Play/hang out a lot outside? Inside? In special places?
    b. Sport?
    c. Other games?
    d. Mainly from school?
    e. Did you keep in touch with many of them after you left school?
    f. Are you still in touch with them?
19. **Your school**
    g. What was [X school like?]
    h. Did you like it?
    i. Were you the kind of student to get into trouble?
    j. Did you have any amazing teachers?
    k. Did you have any terrible teachers?

How Dublin's changed – and Ireland too?

The biggest difference since you were at school?

What's Dublin like now

- International?
- Inward looking?
- Open-minded?

- Positive and upbeat?
- Satisfaction/dissatisfaction?
- What are greatest anxieties?

Prompts

- Social attitudes
- Religion
- Referendums on abortion, same-sex marriage, divorce.
- Immigration.

Language in Dublin

Different ways of talking

- Northside?

- Southside?
- 'Dub accent'?

Language changing

- Do you think the way people talk is changing?
- In what ways?
- New languages being spoken?

Do you know any languages beyond English

- Irish too?

Wrapping-up and thanking

Appendix C: Story read aloud by participants

Máire woke up suddenly. It was the middle of the night. She remembered it all. Almost three days ago – on Tuesday – when whales had been seen swimming around Howth. Máire and Pat first heard the news on RTE: three students in a boat had seen them and got the fright of their life as the whales came really close, almost knocking over the boat.

Máire thought for a moment. It was Thursday now and the whales were still here, somewhere in Dublin Bay. Why were they still here? At once she knew what to do. She woke Pat up and whispered, 'We've got to go now. Right now!'

'Where? What do you mean?', muttered Pat. He was not happy.

'Come on', said Máire, 'No whingeing. We've got to go. And bring your magic whistle!'

They caught the DART. Soon they were standing on the seashore. They could see three white whales, splashing around and whirling their tails. When Pat started to play his tin whistle, the whales stopped and then began to sing.

'What are they saying?', asked Máire.

Pat got very excited. 'They're awfully thirsty. They want some stout.'

'You mean Guinness?'

Pat whistled a tune again to the whales and then listened to their song.

'No', said Pat, 'They've come from Cork. And they want some Murphy's - or some Beamish would do.'

'Ah, no problem,' said Máire, 'I know who'll sort that.'

And then the dream ended. How did they sort it? Perhaps she'd find out in the next dream.