REMARKS ON PRONOMINAL USAGE IN HIBERNO-ENGLISH

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The following is a brief attempt at describing the systems of pronominals which obtain in colloquial registers of Hiberno-English (Irish English). I have not attempted to delimit these as this would involve a sociolinguistic excursus which would lead too far afield. Rather it is my aim to show how despite at times rather severe reduction and substitution morphological contrast is maintained to avoid formal collapse of the labile system of pronominal reference in the spoken language.

Beginning with personal pronouns we see that the subjective forms[1] available in Hiberno-English are the same as in Standard English:

(1) *I* [ae], [aɛ], [a]   *we* [wi], [wɪ]
    you [ju], [jʊ], [jə]   *you* [ju], [jə]
    he [hi], [hɪ]   *ye* [ji], [jɪ], [jə]
    she [ʃi], [ʃɪ]   *they* [ðeɪ], [deɪ], [d̥e], [d̥ɛ]

The exception is the second person plural which one can for convenience represent orthographically as *ye*. This form is of course that retained from early modern English. The retention was strengthened by the differentiation made in Irish between the second person singular and plural. It has become established in Hiberno-English but with a plethora of realizations. These can basically make use of two morphological devices. The first is the front high vowel /i/ as a (former) marker of the second person plural as opposed to singular or personal pronoun. This we can symbolize morphologically as

(2) {J}+{U} → second person singular
(3) {J}+{I} → second person plural

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[1] These and the remaining pronominal forms of Standard English are displayed neatly in Quirk et al. (1972 : 209).

The second, however, is one which has no historic justification within Standard English namely the alveolar fricative as a plural marker with the personal pronoun:

(4) {J}+{U}+{S} → second person plural

This morphological operation can credibly be attributed to compensatory interference from **Irish** as it shows the deliberate manipulation of English morphological categories to attain a plural form to correspond to the second person plural of Irish.[2] But the process has gone a step further: we can also have the vowel and the alveolar fricative as markers for a plural form as in:

(5) {J}+{I}+{S} →second person plural

If we convert these morphological forms into phonetic realizations we arrive at the following attested Hiberno-English pronouns:

(3a) {JI}→[ji], [jɪ], [jə]
(4a) {JUS}→[juz], [jʊz]; [jus], [jʊs]
(5a) {JIS}→[jiz], [jɪz], [jez]; [jis], [jɪs], [jes]

The last two realizations in (4a) and the last three in (5a) are environmentally conditioned, i.e. appear inly with a following voiceless environment:

What do yous think?
[ʍɔʔ də jʊs t̬ʰɪŋkʰ]

All the forms in (3a) — (5a) have been recorded by various authors on Hiberno-English[3] and are found in written representations of it. The following are the usual orthographic forms found:

(3b) {JI}→*ye*
(4b) {JUS}→*yous*, rarely: *youz*
(5b) {JIS}→*yiz, yis, yees, yeez*, rarely: *yes*

In present-day spoken Hiberno-English the signal for plural reference is [ɪ]. Forms with a tenser vowel [i] or with an alveolar fricative or both in combination are somewhat rarer and definitely mark a shift in register downwards. The specifically plural form also occurs after a preposition and as an objective form:

(6) *What are the two of ye* [jɪ] *up to?*
(7) *I haven't seen ye* [jɪ] *for a while.*

By analogy this marking of the second person plural has been transferred to possessive pronouns as well. The transfer has simply consisted of adding {R} (→[ɹ]) to the marker of the second person singular to (5a):

(5b) {J}+{I}+{R}→[jiɹ], [jɪɹ]

The final fricative of both (4a) and (5a) is dropped which means of course that the {I} of (5a) is then the only marker of plurality.

(5c) *Have ye* [jɪ] *got yeer* [jɪɹ] *homework done yet?*

Note that the user of these spoken forms would never write them as such but the Standard English ones. This also applies to the personal forms. There is always correspondence between personal and possessive forms so that [jʊ] followed by a co-referential [jɪɹ] cannot occur. But as we have considerable reduction in spoken Hiberno-English the vowels of either the personal or pronominal forms may be more centralized than the transcription as [ɪ] would suggest. Moving upward in the continuum of registers leads to a decrease in the /i/-like character of this vowel until it finally falls together with the reduction of [u]:

(8) [ji]→[jɪ]→[jɨ]→[je]←[jʉ]←[jʊ]←[ju]

The possessive pronoun *your*, irrespective of whether speakers have another form derived from {JIR} is always realized in Hiberno-English as [juɹ] and not as [jɔ:] as it frequently is in Standard English. With reflexive forms no distinction is usually made in the first vowel as singularity or plurality is indicated at the end of the word. In addition we have stress on the second syllable so that a distinct vowel in the first syllable is unlikely:

(9) *How have ye* [jɪ] *been busying yourselves* [jəˈsɛlivz]?

The high front vowel is retained, however, in other compound forms which result from reduced verb forms:

(10) *I hear ye've* [lɪv] *been away.*
(11) *I'm sure ye're* [jɪɹ] *up to no good.*
(12) *Ye'll* [jɪl] *have to come again.*

Analogously to [jɪɹ] a form *weer* [wɪɹ] for 'our' has been recorded by Joyce[4] though this appears to be an isolated case which is certainly not found today.

When used in a generic sense (i.e. as 'they', 'one', etc.) *you* cannot appear as *ye*, etc.

Note also that *thou* never occurs in Hiberno-English so that the possibility

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[2] The rise of {JUS} may also be due to the rarity of *ye* at the time of the Anglification of Ireland in the 16th, 17th, and early 18th centuries.

[3] See Joyce (1979 : 88), Hogan (1934 : 145/6) and Taniguchi (1972² : 11 ff) for examples.

[4] See Joyce (1979 : 88).

of exploiting it as a singular form to set off against a plural *you* did not and does not arise.[5]

If we remain for a moment with subjective forms we may look at a substitution of subjective with reflexive forms in Hiberno-English as in:

(13) *Himself isn't here at the moment.*

This is not a direct equivalent of *he* but stands for a specific person who also enjoys a position of authority or respect, for example it is said of a boss, one's father, a woman's husband, etc. It may also occur as a subject complement, after a form of 'be':

(13a) *Where's himself?*

With subjective pronoun forms we see that in fact the only position in which all of them can occur is a pre-verbal one. I hesitate to say immediately pre-verbal as we may have an adverbial between the pronoun and the verb:

(14) *I only thought of it yesterday.*

In this environment we may also find certain objective forms. Not all, however; only those of the first and third persons plural and then only when in apposition to a nominal subject:

(15) *Us wives have a hard time of it.*
(16) *Them road workers are awful lazy.*
But:
(17) **Him farmer has lots of land.*

I do not of course offer examples of the second person plural as this shows no difference between subjective and objective forms. It holds (as in (13) and (13a)) that when a form occurs in subject position then it also does so in subject complement position. Note that in (16) *them* stands not for the subjective forms of a personal pronoun but for a demonstrative.

However, it may occur as a substitute for a personal pronoun in:

(18) *Them aren't going to come at all.*

It can be recognized positionally as being, in function, a subjective pronoun. Of the four personal pronouns with different subjective and aobjective forms it is the only objective form which can occur in a subject environment when this is at the beginning of a sentence and when there is only one subject. This is an important addition for if we have a plural subject which is enumerated then the pronominal form may be objective:

(19) *You and me have to do something about it.*
(19a) *You and him should go there soon.*

The first and third persons may also combine in subject enumeration:

(20) *Him and me are going to the match tomorrow.*

We may also have two instances of the third person as a complex subject:

(21) *'Tis some help him and his brother will be!*

Objective forms are also common before gerunds. In cases where these appear instead of a possessive pronoun it is something which is common to many varieties of English:

(22) *I wouldn't mind them (their) going at all.*

Note that pronominal substitution occurs not only across categories as above but also within a category between numbers:

(22) *Give us a chance to finish.*

The singular reference of (22) is by no means confined to Hiberno-English.

In Hiberno-English, however, the objective form can replace a prepositionally governed possessive pronoun, eg.

(24) *She saw he was uneasy by him (his) fidgeting all the time.*

Even in some cases leading to the deletion of the preposition itself:

(25) *There's no use us even trying.* (Hiberno-English)
(25a) *There's no use in our even trying.* (Standard English)

In an absolute clause we can have objective pronominal forms, this being encouraged by the lack of a finite verbs form which would exercise some influence on the choice of pronoun in favour of a subjective one:

(26) *After all that Jim did nothing, him that (he who) was always singing her praises.*

In some instances the absolute clause can be introduced by a preposition in which case it then governs the pronoun:

(27) *After him (he) trying all day he gave up.*

Objective pronouns can appear not only in the place of subjective, but also of possessive pronouns. Whether this is a case of actual substitution of of merger of phonetic realizations of two separate morphemes is not always clear. Take the following sentence:

(28) *My sister was here a few minutes ago.*

The lexical pronounciation of *my* [mae] can be reduced in two basic ways: (i) by reducing the upward glide from the first element of the diphthong thus

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[5] Hogan (1934 : 146) notes that *thou* was moribund at the time of Ireland's Anglification. Hence the use of {I} and/or the productive {S} as a plural marker.

giving [mae]→[ma]→[mæ]; (ii) by centralizing the direction of movement
of the diphthong: [mae]→[maə̞]→[mə]. If this is carried further we may be left
with [mə] which in an unambiguous context may further be raised slightly
to [mɪ̆] which is then the same as the unstressed realization of /miː/. This
[mɪ̆] for *my* is rarely realized as [mi] and is regarded as non-standard if it is.

As a further alternative to possessive pronouns we may have analytical
possessive forms which are also found in Standard English with a demonstra-
tive pronoun preceding the noun they qualify:

(29) *That car of his won't last long.*

An unusual form in Hiberno-English of this analytic possessive construc-
tion with the definite article before the governed noun is to be seen in:

(30) *I can't say I like the cut of him.*

This is a fixed expression, however, and we don't have this constructional
type occurring productively.

Hiberno-English keeps as a rule to the distribution of strong and weak
possessive forms[6] which holds for English though weak possessive forms can
be replaced by the definite article in certain instances such as:

(31) *The mother was on to me the other day about it.* (Hiberno-English)
(31a) *My mother was reminding/reproaching me the other day about it.* (Stand-
    ard English)

In almost all of the above cases of pronoun substitution we have no ambi-
guity arising as the syntagmatic position of the substituted forms only allowed
one interpretation. Where phonetic reduction[7] can lead to ambiguity it is with
objective forms of the third person.

Hiberno-English may like other varieties of English shows glottalization
of consonants in certain positions, particularly word finally:

(32) *Can you see that?* [d̩æʔ]

However, it may also occur initially in many forms words including person-
al pronouns:

(33) *Did you see him?* [...ˈsiʔɪm]

In this case the difference between *him* and *them* is reduced to one of vowel
quality and distinguishing between them depends on the [ɪ]→[ɛ] contrast as
we can see if we change (33) slightly:

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[6] For a full treatment of these in Standard English, see Siegel (1979 : 28 ff).
[7] The unaccented manifestations of various Standard English formatives are dealt
with in Gimson (1980³ : 260—64) and the weak forms in the same 284/5.

(33a) *Did you see them?* [...ˈsiʔɛm]

Added to this is the fact that these personal pronouns are unstressed
and preceded by a stressed word with a high front vowel. This then leads
to a frequent neutralization of the [ɪ]∼[ɛ] opposition with both (33) and (33a)
being spoken as:

(34) [ˌdɪʔjəˈsiʔə̞m]

where [ɪ] and [ɛ] both become [ə̞]. In such cases the context becomes decisive
for disambiguizing the utterance. Note that glottalization only occurs either
word initially or finally. That is we cannot have *him*→[ʔɪʔ] or *that*→[ʔæʔ].

Lastly, I should like to mention, in returning to reflexive pronouns touched
upon briefly above, that Hiberno-English has a number of alternative forms[8]
here which contain subjective pronouns with the ending *-self/-selves* as in:

(35) *As for meself. I don't mind.*
(36) *The Duggans theirselves came to collect them.*

As with the lack of distinction made with the form of the second person
singular and plural before *-self* so we can see that subjective and objective
pronominal forms are interchanged with somewhat greater facility in an en-
vironment which is already marked, here by *-self* as well.

In its use the reflexive pronoun of the neuter third person, *itself*, shows
a non-standard function. This is as an equivalent to 'even' in a concessive
sense:

(37) *If you went down on your knees itself I wouldn't do it.*
    (Hiberno-English)
(37a) *Even if you went down on your knees I wouldn't do it.* (Standard English)

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[8] The first element of [hɪˈself], [hɪ] is not necessarily derived from /hɪz/ but can be
from /hɪm/ also, with deletion of the final consonant.