

MIGHT COULD ENGLISH BE ‘DOUBLE DUTCH’ TOO?: DOUBLING AND THE SYNTACTIC ATLAS OF BRITISH ISLES’ DIALECTS

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As noted in Beal (2004), both Wakelin (1983) and Trudgill (1999) classify British Isles’ vernaculars entirely according to phonological/phonetic criteria, whilst Ellis (1889) includes only one feature that might be considered morphological, namely, the form of the definite article. The distribution of this feature shows England north of the River Tees differing from what Wells (1982) (using phonological criteria) terms ‘the middle North’, but the feature was not documented by Ellis for Ireland (north or south) nor indeed for Scotland and Wales. Indeed, there has historically not been any systematic collection of dialectal morphosyntactic data for the entire British Isles, given the largely phonetic and lexical orientation of: (i) the *Survey of English Dialects* (*SED* - Orton *et al.* 1962-1971); (ii) the *Linguistic Atlas of Scotland* (*LAS* - Mather and Speitel 1975); (iii) *A Tape-Recorded Survey of Hiberno-English Speech* (*TRSHES* - Adams *et al.* 1976) and (iv) *A Linguistic Survey of Ireland* (*LSI* - Henry 1958). There are, of course, some important twentieth century surveys of particular locations that document and analyse morphosyntactic variation and change (including ‘syntactic doubling’ phenomena (Barbiers 2005)) in both urban and rural communities across the region (see Anderwald 2002, Corrigan 1997, Henry 1957, McDonald 1981, Pietsch 2005 and Shorrocks 1998, for instance), though many of these remain in unpublished form and, as originally conceived as doctoral dissertations, are rather narrow in focus. The publication of Milroy and Milroy (1993) and, more recently, Kortmann and Schneider *et al.* (2004) in addition to the creation of *CollectBritain* (<http://www.collectbritain.co.uk/>) and *BBC Voices* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/>) have systematised and broadened the range of features explored as well as increasing the number of locations surveyed. Similarly, the completion of other public corpora like the *Freiburg English Dialect Corpus* (*FRED*)/the *Newcastle Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English* (*NECTE*) and private ones such as the *Roots Corpus* (*ROOTS*) collected by Tagliamonte (2000-2001), has been crucial in deepening our understanding of cross-dialectal variation within the British Isles across both time and space (social and regional). Nevertheless, as Allen *et al.* (to appear), Anderwald and Wagner (to appear) and Tagliamonte (to appear) all demonstrate, these enterprises are not without their drawbacks. *NECTE* is confined to data in the far north-east of England, for example, and while *FRED* and *ROOTS* cover more of the British Isles, the nature of the oral narratives used to create *FRED* restricts investigations of present and future tense phenomena and the *ROOTS* corpus is so small that infrequent morphosyntactic phenomena that might well be of interest for the testing of hypotheses about central abstract syntactic relations, for instance, simply don’t appear (Cornips and Corrigan 2005). It is not surprising, therefore, that Bauer (2004:107-108) has recently made the claim that: “on the whole, corpora have been built for national varieties of English rather than for regional dialects within one country. We do not have electronic public corpora that would allow us to investigate differences in the syntax of Newfoundland and Vancouver Englishes, or of Cornish and Tyneside dialects.” *The Syntactic Atlas of British Isles’ Dialects* (*SABID*) project will, therefore, be an initial step towards the investigation of such syntactic differences across the entire region using large-scale vernacular corpora that are collected in a systematic fashion with due regard for potential social (age/gender) and spatial (rural/urban) differences between speakers.

This paper aims to review the following issues relevant to the creation of *SABID*, in general and syntactic doubling phenomena within vernacular British Englishes, in particular:

- (1) The problematical nature of previous atlas-type surveys in the British Isles with respect to

the collection of morpho-syntactic data relevant for the testing of syntactic relations of various kinds.

- (2) Evidence from previous research for syntactic doubling in British Isles' Englishes. Which vernacular grammars has the phenomenon already been located in and how reliable is the evidence?
- (3) The history of such phenomena in English and the ideologies behind the exclusion of such constructions in the British Standard.
- (4) Testing effective instruments for systematically and sensitively uncovering the dynamics of syntactic doubling in different dialect areas of the British Isles.
- (5) Creating a spatial grid for the British Isles in which measuring points (as far as human and financial resources permit) will:
 - Provide an even distribution of informants across the entire region;
 - Be located in areas previously surveyed during *SED*, *LAS*, *TRSHES* and *LSI*, so as to provide a diachronic dimension;
 - Be added for: (i) isolated and transitional zones as well as in other regions in which much variation would be predicted by the existing dialect literature (such as counties in the border area between Scotland and England as well as Northern Ireland and the Republic) and (ii) larger urban centres, given their population densities and the enhanced possibilities for dialect contact both diachronically and synchronically.

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