

Semester Start-up Programme.

~~Material week~~

From <http://www.hiberno-english.com> consulted 23 September 2008.

The Vocabulary and Grammar of Hiberno-English

The vocabulary of Hiberno-English to this day includes many words that are no longer in general use in British English. The use of these distinctive words is declining, most noticeably in the face of influence from Global English over the past decade. Many of the words cited in the archive (and more extensively in the dictionary) are used only by the older age group. 'Delph' is still used for crockery, 'shore' for a sewer or an open drain, 'mitch' for playing truant, 'bring' for 'take', 'galluses' for braces, and so forth. Interestingly though, some words which were last in general use in British English centuries ago are still current in Ireland, even among the younger generation. A good example of this is the noun 'bowsie', meaning 'a disreputable drunkard, a lout, a quarrelsome alcoholic', which is still in use by all ages, as my own research and writers such as Roddy Doyle testify (see Dolan, Dictionary of Hiberno-English, s.v. 'bowsie').

In addition to words classified as 'obsolete' or 'dialectal' Hiberno-English includes many words taken from Irish, for example, a fool is called 'an ommadhawn' (Irish 'amadán'), or a left-handed person is called 'a kithouge' (Irish 'ciatóg'). Often the Irish diminutive suffix '-in' is attached to a word, for instance, 'girleen' (a little girl).

The verbal system of Hiberno-English is substantially enriched by the influence of Irish. For example, 'I'm after having my dinner' Irish 'Tá me tar éis mo dhinnéar a ithe), which means 'I've just had my dinner'. Another instance of Irish influence is to be found in such expressions as 'I do be here every day' (Irish 'Bím anseo gach lá'), which reflects the richness of the verbal forms of Irish which can express the habitualness of an action or state (see Dolan, Dictionary of Hiberno-English, s.v. 'do, do be'). There are many other examples of an Irish substratum in Hiberno-English verbal forms. Irish syntax, too, is to be found in such expressions as 'She came in and I writing a letter', where the 'and' + 'pronoun' formation, which is regarded as a solecism by the terms of formal English Grammar, is legitimate by reference to Irish Grammar.

The pronunciation of Hiberno-English also reflects the sounds of Irish. For instance, the insertion of a vowel, known as an 'epenthetic (= inserted) vowel', in such words as 'film' (pronounced 'fillum'), or 'worm' (pronounced 'worrum'). In general, Irish people use the vowels and consonants of the Irish Language in pronouncing Hiberno-English.

Go to 'Archive' section and use the link in the third paragraph to go to a full index of all words. Hiberno-English is abbreviated to HE.

Some examples are shown overleaf.

"Again / agin" ME *ayen*. 'They're turning again you', 'I never seen that cow turn again anyone before'.
 2. adv. another time < Ir. *arís*, again, afterwards, at some future time. 'I'll give it you again', 'There'll be an again in it', = 'I'll treat you next time -- I'll see you again soon, John O'Doherty/Tipperary'.
 3. conj. before < ME *ayen*. Jim Ryan/Offaly, 'I was that far away one time that the youngest postman would die of old age 'agin' he'd reach me with a letter'.

"Chancer" n. a crafty person who would try anything to get an advantage over someone < ME *chaunce* < OF *cheance*. 'He's a right chancer'; O'Casey, *The Plough and the Stars*, Act 2, 174: "Fluther. . .I done as much, an know as much about th' Labour movement as th' chancers that are blowin' about it!", Roche, *A Handful of Stars*, I.1., 4: "Tony. . . you're the biggest chancer I ever met".

"Fierce" adj. adv. great, abundant; (used as an intensive) very < E (Anglo-Norman *fers*, OF *fiers*). 'It's fierce cold the night (= tonight)'; Kavanagh, Tarry Flynn, 33: "Fierce great weather, Molly," said Tarry".

"Gurrier" n. (coll.) an ill-mannered, loutish person (origin obscure, but cf. EDD s.v *Gurr*, v. to growl as a dog, n. the growl, snarl of a dog; n. a short, thick-set person, 'Hence, Gurran, sb. a very strong, thick-set person with a stubborn temper'; It is possible that the word *gurrier*, which is particularly attached to Dublin, may be associated with those who eat *gur-cake*, since eating such a cake was commonly associated with children from deprived families, with the attendant proneness to irregular behaviour": see Cowan and Sexton, *Ireland's Traditional Foods*, 151-2: 'the term "gurrier" became synonymous with poorer Dublin children, so much so that "gurrier" established itself in Dublin dialect, describing one who eats *gur-cake*, a tough street urchin (OED)'; this seems a more likely derivation than from F *guerre*; Sure, they're all *gurriers* in that part of town'; Kearney, *Sam's Fall*, 43: "'We'd often heard their leader Cormac O'Keefe was expelled from school at the age of twelve for assaulting one of the teachers . . . We'd often hear Big Nora and Lizzie go on about them. *Gurriers* and *Gutties* (q.v.), they called them".

"Kacks / kaks" n. slang, underpants, knickers < cf. *kacks*, English teenage slang for trousers. Doyle, *The Van*, 28: "Forgot me washin' yesterday, he said. -No kaks or nothin'", Sweeney, *Waiting for the Healer*, 100: "Another woman grabbed him by the kacks and tried to yank them off"

"Plámás / plaumaus". n. flattery, empty praise; coaxing, 'soft soap', cajolery; conniving < Ir. 'You're all *plámás*' = You are full of empty flattery, 'Stop your *plámásing* and tell me what you really think about my new dress!'. Paul Muldoon, *Diary*, *London Review of Books* 1 July 1999, notes: "I myself have always been taken in by the idea that *plamas* is a corruption of 'blanc-mange', an etymology bolstered by Patrick Dinnee's translation, in his dictionary, of *plamas* as 'flummery', itself defined by the OED as 'a name given to various sweet dishes made with milk, flour, eggs, etc'. Here, Dinneen is using *flummery* in its transferred sense of flattery, humbug. There appears to be no connection with *plámás*, whose origin is unknown.

"Your man" n. an idiomatic phrase used in HE to indicate a specific individual, 'Your man over there needs a drink' < loose usage of second person possessive adj. (cf. Ir. *mo dhuine*, my man). 'Who is it? It's your man over there in the blue jacket'; Behan, *The Quare Fellow*, Act 1, FDA 3, 203: ". . . didn't he tell the wrong man he was reprieved? Your man was delighted for a few hours and then they had to go back and tell him 'Sorry', my mistake, but you're to be topped after all", Muldoon, 'Christo's', FDA 3, 1416: ". . . By the time we got to Belfast | the whole of Ireland would be under wraps | like, as I said, 'one of your man's landscapes'. | 'Your man's? You don't mean Christo's?'"', Doyle, *The Van*, 241: "'Behind the bar. Between Tom Cruise an' your man from *Thornbirds*. The were fuckin' gas (q.v.)'"', Roche, *A Handful of Stars*, I.1, 13: "Jimmy. 'We're runnin' a bus down to see *Stapler* kickin' the shit out of your man tomorrow night.'"