

Mid-Ulster Dialect

Warren Maguire

Ulster is one of the most linguistically rich places in the world. Let's start at the beginning. You've got Irish, Think about your own surnames, your own townland names. That's part of who we are. And then there's the Scots element. Ulster -Scots is a fascinating linguistic importation from Scotland into Ireland. And then of course what's often forgotten in all of this is you can talk about your Irish, you can talk about your Ulster -Scots, but what do most of us do? We speak our Mid Ulster English.

LAURA SPENCE

This hybrid, which is what Ulster has today, is really Scottish, Irish, Northern Hiberno English, this lovely blend which makes our language so unique

JOHN ERSKINE

John Braidwood he was a Queen's lecturer, a Queen's researcher, and he was fascinated by dialect. And he said, Ulster dialect begins like a bad joke, there was an English man, an Irishman and a Scots man - and he was quite right, of course.

VOICE OVER

Warren Maguire is a lecturer in English language at the University of Edinburgh. He's originally from County Tyrone in Northern Ireland, an area with a rich and diverse linguistic heritage.

WARREN MAGUIRE

I think it's deeply rooted in my life. I grew up in the rural Tyrone countryside. I lived there till I was 18, and I don't know, I don't think I could have lived there and not been interested in language, it was all around me all the time. From the townland names that are so characteristic of Ireland, the dialect of my father, my grandfather, my grandmother, the farmers around about us, the dialect words, the way people spoke in towns being different from the way we spoke in the countryside. And the fact that in Northern Ireland everything to do with language is kind of interesting and political. You can't get away from it.

VOICE OVER

For the past 15 years Warren has been recording the way people speak in his home townland in Mid- Ulster

WARREN MAGUIRE (Actuality of Warren walking and talking)

This is the townland of reciaranbeg in County of Tyrone between Finton and Dromore where I develop my love of the country side and of the dialect. Anytime I'm home I bring my recording equipment with me and I try to make an effort to record somebody when I'm here – Whether it be a relative or a neighbour or somebody through a connection or something

Or sometimes I just get in the car and go around and land on the street and say, Hi I'm so and so son, I'm Jacks son. You wouldn't be able to help me, would you? and they'd say what are you doing anyway? I say well I'm doing this dialect project. I'm trying to gather up a bit of the way people speak in this part of the world, you know and some of the memories of the place a bit of history of the place. You know what Irish people are like. Once you get them talking you've no bother.

WARREN MAGUIRE

The Mid Ulster dialect is kind of a unique and interesting form of English for the following reasons. First of all, it's only about 400 years old so it's a new ish dialect of English, it's not a very new dialect of English, but it's a new ish dialect of English. How did this dialect develop? Well, we all know how it developed, it developed through the settlement of the planters from England and Scotland coming to Ireland, interacting with each other and interacting with Irish speakers in Tyrone, and you get the development of a new dialect coming about through contact between those different groups of speakers. So, you have 17th century English, 17th century Scots, 17th century Irish all in contact with each other.

WARREN MAGUIRE - Actuality with Warren and his uncle

'So, this house you are living in tell me a wee bit about it?

WARRENS UNCLE

This is a quarter house this was originally you know what is called a quarter house here belonging to the farm up there. Yeah, usually a person living in the quarter house would have to be working for the farmer, you know.

The people (inaudible) one time lived there and then the women's husband I believed died. Then she was put out of the house, because she's no longer of use to the farm because she wasn't you see She had no husband working for them. And then she was heartbroken she used to come to the head of that hill and look over at that house and cry, I don't know where she was living then, but she used to everyday come over and look over at the house

WARREN MAGUIRE

Hard times?

WARRENS UNCLE

That might be going back about 100 years.

WARREN MAGUIRE

I just ran in to my uncle there, he noticed me out and about the road and he thought he pop his head out. And that's the way it goes in Tyrone, you bump into somebody and they love to see you and have a chat and its nice wee illustration really of what it's all about, it's about the dialect – yes and you can hear that but it's about more than that its about connecting with the people and hearing their stories and finding out a bit about the area. I mean that's something I never heard before in my life about the relationship between that house and the larger farm house. So, it just shows what you can find in the country roads of Tyrone.

WARREN MAGUIRE - Actuality of Warren and his father

Right Dad we've done this before. so this is nothing new to us and I'm going to rig you up with a microphone here... and do a wee bit of a session and record some stuff.

WARREN MAGUIRE

Things are changing rapidly in Tyrone, as they are everywhere in the English-speaking world and elsewhere. Dialect is changing, and it's not just change in the way it's changed for centuries, it's changing rapidly, it's levelling, if you like, with more exposure to other varieties, more education and so on.

WARREN MAGUIRE – (Actuality of Warren and his father)

Many a time in your life Im sure you must have been involved in the cutting in turf or spade can you maybe give me a wee run down about how that works?

WARREN'S DAD

I used to be kept at home from school for a week to fill turf. You see you had the bog bank and ah then there was the bog hole from the year before and the bog bank was paired to about 3 to 4 foot wide and the and pairs were thrown down into the bog hole, and then there were so many flowers you see, and there was a turf spade and it had like an ordinary spade but had a flange on it and it cut the turf in to the shape, but there....

WARREN MAGUIRE (IV)

It's all right being interested in it, but unless you record it how can you say anything about it? So, I set myself this mission, and I have been at it now for almost 15 years, of going into the Tyrone countryside, speaking to older people in the countryside, recording them.

WARREN'S DAD

If the weather wasn't to good you footin them

WARREN

What's Footin now?

WARREN'S DAD

That was, you get 2 or 3 turfs and prop them up against each other, kind of standing up and then the air got through them and then if that didn't work they were Rickled

WARREN

What's Ricklen then?

WARREN'S DAD

Ricklen is you put two turf this road and a two turf that road, two turf the other road and one turf on the top

WARREN

Oh, so just a wee structure like that?

WARREN'S DAD

Aye then whenever they were in the Rickles for a while, then they were clamped, kinda like made into big rickles about 3 foot... 2 and half foot wide at the bottom and went up to, and it got narrow up to the top.

WARREN MAGUIRE (IV)

Gathering up these recordings, and you know, it's not just about the dialect, it's also about the stories, about the people. Some of the things that people have told me about, you know, stories from the past, story about things that are happening in their farms, are amazing and it's a wonderful thing to have recorded.

WARREN

And there's another word, Hirplin. What was that?

WARREN'S DAD

I'm kinda Hirplin myself at the minute. If you're lame now and your walking in kinda hop that's hirplin and then if you're telling people hoagin that's a kinda walloping along, you know and then there is slithering and that's trailing your feet on the ground.