

Unit 8 - Ireland



The objectives for this unit are:

- reading: read a text about why Irish English is different from other varieties of English.
- colloquial English: learn some Irish English words and expressions.

Unit 8 - Ireland - Reading: Key phrases

The following words and phrases appear in the text you are going to read in this section:

mindset a set of attitudes or fixed ideas that someone has and that are often difficult to change.
You won't get him to try anything new - he has a very conservative mindset.

commonality a shared feature or attribute
We can see commonalities between these languages.

stem from be the result of something
Most of the company's problems stem from a lack of organization.

for starters used to emphasize the first of a list of reasons, opinions, etc. or to say what happens first
We'll have to get rid of some staff for starters.

turn of phrase a particular way of describing something
She always has a lovely turn of phrase.



This week we're talking to Benny Lewis about how English is spoken in his home country of Ireland. Benny is an expert language learner and has learnt seven languages since 2003. He runs the *Fluent in 3 Months* website, helping people all over the world to learn new languages.

So Benny, we're all familiar with the Irish accent and some of your expressions from television and film, but why do the Irish speak that way?

Well, firstly, there's no such thing as an Irish accent. There are really lots of different Irish accents, just like there are lots of American accents and lots of British accents. Despite this, there are commonalities that stem from a combination of factors, the most important of which being that just a few generations ago, Irish or *Gaeilge*, as we call our language in Irish, was the dominant language of the country, rather than English. Even though fewer people use it nowadays, and there are some people who don't have any Irish, the influence of the language on their English is huge. For example, you'll notice that I've just said *have any Irish*. It's more common in Ireland to say that you *have* a language rather than that you *speak* it. This comes from the Irish phrasing *Tá Gaeilge agam*, literally 'I have Irish'.

Can you give us some more examples of how the Irish language affects Irish English?

One interesting influence from Irish is its absolute lack of words for 'yes' or 'no', so when our ancestors were speaking English as a second language, they would translate how they would say such things directly from their mother tongue. Although the influence of international English means young people do this far less nowadays, a lot of Irish people

still simply don't use the words 'yes' and 'no'. In Irish we just repeat the verb of the question, and so in English, we do the same – *Can you swim? I can. Do you like tomato juice? I don't. Will you have a cup of tea? I will.*

Another example is when we talk about a recently completed action. Rather than rely on 'have just done' like most other varieties of English, we say *be after doing*. So we're likely to say *I'm after finding a euro on the road!* instead of 'I've just found a euro on the road!' Also, the Irish language has different words for singular and plural 'you', *tú* and *sibh*, like pretty much every other language in the world! This translates across into our English. We can say *yee*, *yez*, or even *yous*, depending on the part of the country, for plural 'you'. For example: *Did yez see the film on the telly last night? Are yous going to the cinema?*

We also have a whole other verb tense, known as the 'habitual present', or *do be doing*, although this is much more common in the countryside nowadays than in cities. As the name implies, it's used for habitual actions instead of the present simple – *I do be working every day. It's him I do be thinking of. They do be talking on their mobiles a lot.*

You said before that there are lots of different Irish accents. But are there some common features that we can recognize easily and look out for?

For starters, there's the pronunciation of the letters 'th'. To us, these letters are pronounced like a *t* or *d*. So *tirty-tree* for 'thirty-three', *over dere* for 'over there' and *dat's right!* for 'that's right!' Sounds way better, doesn't it?

My British and American friends seem to love putting consonants together that never belonged next to one another in the first place. For example 'l' and 'm' – how can you say these so quickly at the end of a word? It's really hard! So to us Irish, 'film' is pronounced *fillum* and the Irish name Colm has two syllables – *Collum*.

The Irish always seem to have a lovely turn of phrase. What kinds of expressions can we expect to hear if we visit Ireland?

The first expressions you might hear are all alternatives for 'hello'. *How are ye keepin'? How are ye? How's the form?* are all questions we use as greetings since the Irish translation of 'hello' is a bit too formal for everyday conversation.

What's the story? is a direct translation from Irish, where *story* means 'news', so they're equivalent to 'What's going on?' or 'What's up?' in American and British English – again usually used as a greeting.

When in shops or when requesting something from someone, even when you're by yourself, it's important to say *give us*, which sounds a lot less direct than 'give me'. *Give us a packet of Taytos, will ye?*

You might hear *There you go now* in reply, said when giving someone something, and *Not a bother* instead of 'You're welcome' after you've said 'Thank you'.

We use *your man* as a nice avoidance technique for not using someone's name. It's usually clear from the context who you're taking about, and the *your* definitely can't be taken literally – he may have no connection whatsoever to you and even be a complete stranger, although a close friend is just as likely. *I saw your man on the TV last night.*

C'mere 'till I tell ye! is a precursor to someone saying something interesting. It's only requesting your attention – you don't actually have to 'come here'

because *your man* is usually right beside you when he says it. And if you do start listening to a story, you may hear the Irish word order *says I* or *said I* used for reported speech, which is also frequently placed mid-sentence: *Ah, now, you'll be grand on the drive – says I – sure, isn't the sun splittin' the stones today!* Here *grand* means 'good' and *the sun is splittin' the stones* means 'it's very hot.' This is *grand* because it happens so rarely in Ireland!

From fluentin3months.com

Why do the Irish speak the way they do? Read the text and answer the questions I

Decide if the statements from the text are **true**, **false**, or **not mentioned**...

1. There is more than one Irish accent.
2. Irish people tend to avoid using the words 'yes' and 'no'.
3. Monks first started to teach English to the Irish people.
4. In Irish English people use singular and plural forms of 'you'.
5. The Irish have only one way of saying 'hello'.
6. The author thinks that the weather in Ireland is good.

Why do the Irish speak the way they do?: Read the text and answer the questions II

Read the text again and answer the questions.

If you ask an Irish English speaker the question 'Can you show me on the map?', what is the most likely reply?

- A. Yes, of course.
- B. Yes, I can.
- C. I can

What does the Irish English phrase 'I have Irish' mean?

- A. I can speak Gaeilge.
- B. I was born in Ireland.

C. I can speak Irish English.

If an Irish person says to you 'I'm after meeting Billy', what do they mean?

- A. The have just met Billy.
- B. They are meeting Billy right now.
- C. They are going to meet Billy.

What does 'I do be going to the cinema of a Sunday' mean?

- A. I'm going this Sunday.
- B. I go every Sunday.
- C. I went last Sunday.

When might you hear the phrase 'There you go now' said?

- A. When someone is asking for something.
- B. When someone give you something.
- C. When someone gets on a train.

The phrase 'your man' refers to what?

- A. A stranger
- B. A friend
- C. Any person

Unit 8 – Ireland - Irish English

These Irish English words, phrases, and structures are taken from the text you read in the previous section:

be after doing used in place of present perfect
with 'just' for recently finished actions
I'm after going to the corner shop. = I've just been
to the corner shop.

yous plural you
A Did yous come along the Fearnley Road?
B We did.

do be doing habitual present, used in place
of present simple for habits
**We do be working in the garden at
weekends.** = Every weekend we work in the
garden.

How are ye keepin'? How are you?
How are ye keepin'? I haven't seen you for
ages.

What's the story? What's up? / How are you?
**So, what's the story with you and your man
there?**

give us give me
Give us a cup of tea, will ye?

There you go now! Here you are! (when
giving someone something)
There you go now! Have a grand day!

Not a bother. You're welcome.
A Thanks for the tea.
B Not a bother.

When I crossed over the way your man was
coming in the other direction.

grand good; great
Well, now, isn't that just grand.

your man that man

Irish English: Practice

Choose the correct words to complete the conversation between two Irish friends.

Seamus	Well, now, if it isn't Caitlin! How are ye []?	keepin'
Caitlin	Just [].	after
Seamus	What can I get []?	yous
Caitlin	Give [] a tea and one of them sandwiches. Thanks, Seamus.	bother
Seamus	There you go now. Not a [].	grand
Caitlin	I saw your [] the other day in the pub.	man
Seamus	Who? Jim? I'm [] seeing him myself.	you
Caitlin	What's the [] there, then?	us
Seamus	Can't say, really. He do be [] what he wants.	doing
Caitlin	Ah, well, so do we all. Maybe see [] both next time, then.	story