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The Expression of the Perfect: Variation in Southern and Northern Irish English

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Abstract

The expression of the perfect in Irish English has been widely studied (Hickey 2007; Filppula 2016; Kirk 2017). However, scarcely have papers focused on regional variation nor provided a thorough analysis of their syntactic features. This present study fills the gap. It re-examines the vernacular forms of the *after*-perfect, the resultative, and the indefinite anterior by comparing their usage in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland from a synchronic perspective. It looks at their frequency of occurrence in the *ICE*-Ireland corpus, their grammatical variables, and their degree of acceptability on a native perception test. The results reveal that the *after*-perfect is conspicuously used in the South. The resultative is more dominant in the Southern corpus, yet equally acceptable in the questionnaire. The indefinite anterior is omnipresent in both territories. The main justification for this distribution is the influence of Celtic substratum, national identity self-identification, use of the Irish language, and globalization processes. Although their internal grammar did not condition regional variation, the paper concludes that these expressions are as regularized as the standard HAVE perfect.

Keywords:

Perfect, variation, Irish English, *after*-perfect, resultative, indefinite anterior.

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1. Introduction

Traditional grammar has taught the expression of the perfect as the unmarked HAVE form (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 139). Yet to denote ‘past action with present relevance,’ other World Englishes have developed a plethora of constructions. One of these varieties is Irish English (IrE), which has vernacular structures such as the *after*-perfect, the resultative, and the indefinite anterior. Several variationists studies have traced the diachronic evolution of these expressions (Harris 1984; Kallen 1990; Ó Corrain 2006; etc.), examined their frequency in corpora (Kirk and Kallen 2008; Kirk 2017), and evaluated their acceptability rates in present-day Ireland (Kallen 1991; Hickey 2004 qtd. in Hickey 2007).

However, most of the literature is outmoded, there being a gap in the last decade. There is also a paucity of papers that analyze their internal grammatical features or contrast their regional distribution. These issues beg the question of whether these three expressions show variation in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI), and which are the motivators for the selection of these structures in each region. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to compare the usage of these three constructions in both territories and discern their grammatical patterns. To operationalize this question, this paper will consult the *ICE-Ireland* corpus to obtain quantitative results, and conduct a qualitative questionnaire on the admissibility of these constructions in each area. This thesis will argue that there is a relationship between regional variation in these expressions and sociohistorical factors, namely the Celtic substratum, national identity, the use of the language and globalization processes.

The paper is divided as follows. Section 2 provides a brief socio-historical framework that accounts for the conditions that facilitated linguistic contact and places Irish English as a World English. It then contextualizes each expression of the perfect by explaining their form, meaning and origin. Section 3 details the methodological procedures and databases, the results of which are presented in Section 4. Section 5 discusses the data in light of previous papers, and extracts some speculative hypotheses to justify grammatical variation in Northern and Southern Irish English. The final section summarizes the relevant information and suggests further research that needs to be conducted.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Diachronic Evolution of Irish English

Only when there is linguistic change can linguistic variation occur. The emergence of IrE roughly dates back to the twelfth century (1169) with the arrival of a cohort of English and

Anglo-Normans (Hickey 2007, 30–32). This resulted in the coexistence of the Irish, Anglo-Norman, and medieval English languages (31), marking the first period of bilingualism and language contact. However, it was not until the sixteenth century during the Tudor-Stuart era that Ireland witnessed a wave of Protestant English and Scottish rulers establishing schemes called ‘plantations’ in Munster and Ulster (Amador-Moreno 2010, 19; Hickey 2007, 35). The plantations not only laid the foundation for the partition of the country but also epitomized a period of language transfer and the establishment of regional dialects in Ireland.

The modern period saw the decay of Irish, which culminated in a language shift in the nineteenth century. Some relevant events were English instruction in National Schools or the emigration to North America following the Great Famine (Amador-Moreno 2010, 25–26). These events secured English as the dominant language. The demise of Gaelic is still evinced nowadays. The 2016 Census (Central Statistics Office, 2017) reveals that around 1.76 million respondents can speak Irish (39.8%). In NI, the Census (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2022) discloses that only 228,617 inhabitants (12.45%) have some proficiency in Irish. However, in December 2022, the Identity and Language Bill was passed to make Irish Gaelic an official language in NI (Ainsworth 2022). This landmark may have future implications for the use of Gaelicized grammatical features in the North.

In the sociolinguistic spectrum, IrE has traditionally been categorized as a norm-providing country in the inner circle (see Schneider 2011). However, previous literature has underestimated its Celtic identity and contact interactions. It is neither a creole language because IrE has a single substratum (Shimada 2022, 17) and there never was strong colonial resistance. Therefore, scholar Tamami Shimada (2022) has reassessed the status of IrE in the global panorama of World Englishes. She manufactures a comprehensive contact-induced model based on Schneider’s *Dynamic Model* from 2007.

In her model, Irish English undergoes a tripartite stage process (Figure 1). During stage I, “Irish adults monoglots became bilingual through contact and interaction with other Irish people who had already acquired English” (17). English became their L2 as a result of the colonization process that peaked during the “Plantation Period” (Corrigan 2011, 39). The contact situation was untutored, resulting in the transfer of sentence constructions and lexicon (Shimada 2022, 17). The outcome is stage II with a new stable language (A’+ B’), where English was the provider of basic vocabulary and morphosyntax. Lastly, IrE has entered a third stage thanks to the spread of mass media (indicated as B1). In this phase, there has been a “norm shift” from an indigenously established norm to an exo-normative variety. It has become an autonomous grammar system that interacts with manifold Englishes.

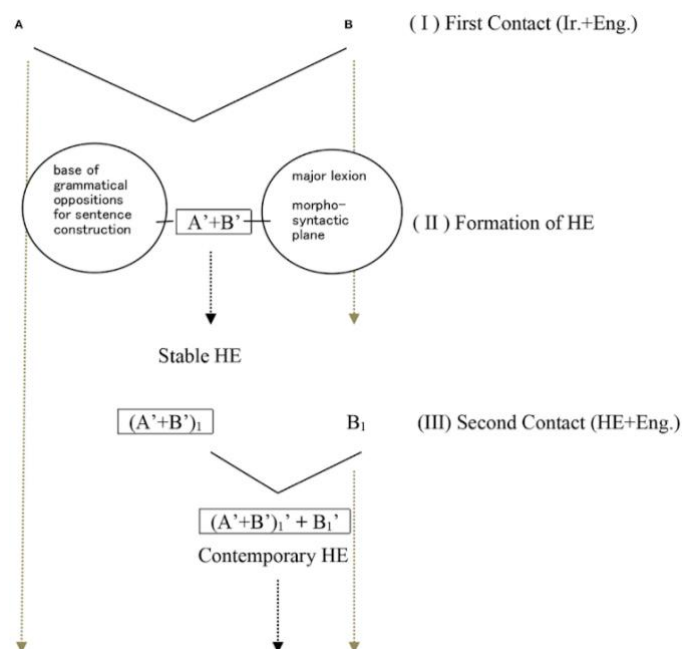


Figure 1. *Contact-induced model* (from Shimada 2022).

2.3. The Expression of the Perfect

In the grammatical description of verb forms, the perfect is the label assigned to the tense and aspect categories to refer to temporal or durative actions (Crystal 2008, 356). Ronan (2005, 253) succinctly explains that the perfect in English expresses “the temporal location of an event prior to the moment of utterance, which may coincide with the ‘speaker-now’.” It denotes an action that occurs in the past but is perceived as having relevance in the present.

Traditional grammarians associate the perfect with the analytically marked HAVE + past participle (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 139). However, they fail to observe that perfect meaning can be realized by a myriad of constructions that are in paradigmatic variation with the standard perfect. Prescriptivists tend to condemn vernacular forms as non-standard. However, Schneider (2011, 18) asserts that these English varieties are completely regular and efficient in their respective contexts. It is what José del Valle (2023) coins as “*lengua pluricéntrica*,” where English is at the summit of a pyramidal structure from which many poles with correct uses of the language radiate.

The following section will examine three expressions of the perfect: the after-perfect, the resultative and the indefinite anterior. Even though opinions differ about their terminology, this thesis has adhered to Seoane and Suárez-Gómez (2013) and Kirk’s classifications (2017) because they are the most recent papers this author could find.

2.3.1. The *After*-perfect

No other verbal construction has received as much scholarly attention as the *after*-perfect. It is formed by the copula *BE*, the preposition *after*, and the present participle *-ing* form. In terms of semantics, its prototypical meaning is of ‘immediacy’ or ‘recency’ (Kirk 2017, 244). Harris (1984) coins the term ‘hot news’ perfect to refer to recent information that is unknown to the listener. Studies in pragmatics such as O’Keeffe and Amador-Moreno (2009, 10) have also found that this expression may also have the perlocutionary effect of ‘narrative,’ ‘news marking,’ and ‘scolding.’

Historically, it is a calque from the Irish substratum because there are no other similar constructions in English. Hildegard L.C. Tristram (2009, 11) argues that the origin is to be found in the late Middle Irish periphrastic construction *verbum substantivum* + preposition (*i*)*ar*ⁿ + a deverbal noun in the dative case, as in example (1) from Ronan (2005, 258):

(1) a-taoi	<i>ar</i>	n-am	chrádh
be-VBS.2SG.PRES.IND	after-PREP	my- POSS.PRON	tormenting- VN

In Early Modern Irish, Ó Corrain (2006, 156) notices that the structure expressed future, subjunctive and perfective meaning. This implied that, during the transfer, an analogous structure in English had to be found. The preposition *after* was selected because it similarly expresses future prospective events as in courtship or ‘being engaged upon,’ and retrospective actions, placing an event later than another (Kallen 2013, 228). This parallelism boosted the merging of the construction with the superstrate. The construction was grammaticalized into the VSO English word order (Hickey 2007, 284) and its meaning was later narrowed to express perfective meaning (see Ó Corrain 2006 for a discussion).

2.3.2. The Resultative

This expression refers to the resulting state of a finished action in the past. Kirk (2017, 243) defines it as “the completion of an event or action or activity which has occurred, with an emphasis on the planned or intended result or outcome as a state of affairs.” According to Harris (1984, 313), *HAVE* is a lexical verb denoting ‘possession’ or ‘state,’ which “is seen to have been initiated by the action described in the subjoined participial clause” (313). The construction is formed by the main verb *HAVE* + direct object + an embedded clause headed by the non-finite form of the past participle functioning (Kirk 2017, 246). These constructions are not to be confused with the English causatives.

The expression can be named differently depending on the semantic reference of the actants. Filppula (1999, 107–109) notes that if the subject of the main verb is coreferential with the complementary lexical verb, it will be termed “medial object perfect” (MOP). However, if the subject of the main clause is not the agent of the complementary clause, it is “the pseudo-perfect.”

Diachronically, there is a conundrum on its origin. The substratum transfer model regards the resultative perfect as a calque by analogy. LC Tristram (2009, 122) affirms that it comes from the structure *verbum substantivum* or copular BE + noun phrase as the possessum (logical object) + past participle + a locative prepositional phrase with object complement NP acting as the possessor (logical subject). An example (2) adapted from Harris (1984) is:

(2) Tá	an bad	diolta	agam?
is-VB.3SG.PRES.IND	boat-N	sold-VB.3SG.PP.IND	at-PREP me-PERS.PRON.1SG.

Oppositely, Harris (1984, 322) finds that the origin is the HAVE ‘split’ perfect present in earlier stages of English that Irish helped to retain through contact. It was formed by the construction HAVE + noun phrase functioning as a direct object + EN-participle (321), which is similar to present-day complex-transitive constructions. On the same page, he provides an Old English example *Ic hcefde hine gebundenne*, and an Early Modern English example from Hamlet *Have you the lion’s part written?* (Shakespeare 1603, 4.7.4). The construction grammaticalized from denoting possessive meaning to resulting state (Kirk 2017, 246).

2.3.3. The Indefinite Anterior

This expression is formed by the preterite and the adverbs *ever* and *never*, prototypically (Seoane and Suárez 2013, 13). The scholars dub the meaning the “experiential perfect” because it expresses an indefinite event that is located in the speakers’ past experience and whose temporal frame persists up to the present. Harris (1993, 179–180) interestingly notes that the indefinite anterior “under-differentiates” between present relevance and past time (‘then time’) because IrE does not have grammatical constructions that mark this temporal distinction.

Historically, the indefinite anterior originated from the contact between Irish and English. However, scholars disagree on whether the Irish substratum or the English superstratum exerted a stronger role in its formation. On the one hand, Carolina Amador-Moreno (2010, 43) spots a similar expression in Gaelic. She quotes Ó Se (1992, 55) to illustrate an example (3):

(3) Ar léigh tú an leabhar sin riamh
 did-INT.PART.PAST read-VB you-PRON the-DET book-N that-DET before/ever-ADV

On the other hand, the same past tense construction indicating ‘anterior time’ is well manifested up to the Early Modern English period (Filppula 1999, 96). In 2016, he reassesses the diachronic evolution of the construction and concludes that it stemmed from older versions of English. The construction has lingered up to present times owing to the “reinforcing or preservative” role (106) of Irish through contact.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus Approach

The *ICE-Ireland* corpus (*International Corpus of English*) is a machine-readable corpus that was released in 2008 by Jeffrey L. Kallen and John M. Kirk. It comprises nearly 1 million transcribed words collected in 300 spoken texts and 200 written texts (Kirk and Kallen 2008, 270). The corpus is equally divided into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Previous literature had already scanned the *after*-perfect and the resultative in the *ICE*-corpus (Kirk and Kallen 2008; Kirk 2017), but this thesis will use their data and revise it, providing a more detailed analysis that previous papers lack. The indefinite anterior has not been extensively reviewed before. This study will be pioneering in measuring its frequency. The software AntConc developed by Laurence Anthony (2014) will be used as a toolkit to screen all results and check concordances. Each expression will then be examined quantitatively by conducting a variable-rule analysis. The target is to see whether grammatical features condition regional variation. The variables will be verb valency (transitivity? dynamic or stative verbs?), interrogation, type of subject, number of actants, and their distribution in text types. Once the results are obtained, the chi-square test without Yates correction will be calculated at $p < .05$ with the software SPSS to confirm that there is a statistical difference.

3.2. Questionnaire

Since much literature concentrates on corpora-based approaches, a questionnaire on the acceptability rate was conducted. This author is greatly indebted to scholars Professor John Kirk, Professor Patricia Ronan and Professor Eduard Albert Moyà for personally spreading the questionnaire. Other contributors were the Rosses Community School in Co. Donegal, students at University College Cork and classmates at the University of the Balearic Islands, who

contacted their Northern Irish acquaintances. The questionnaire gathered 107 participants: 71 responses came from all the counties within the Republic of Ireland, and 36 from Northern Ireland. There was one participant who was not counted because they did not select in which region they were raised. Sociolinguistic parameters such as age, ethnic identification, gender, or class were not studied for logistical reasons.

The questionnaire was manufactured by extracting 6 utterances from the *ICE*-corpus in the positive form: 2 sentences were allocated to the *after*-perfect category, 2 to the resultative, and 2 to indefinite anterior (containing the adverbs *ever* and *never*, respectively). The speakers had to evaluate (i) how acceptable these forms were on a numerical scale from 1–4 and, if very acceptable, (ii) whether they perceived them as standard or vernacular.

- 1– Sounds very acceptable, I would use it in all contexts.
- 2– Sounds very acceptable but only in informal contexts.
- 3– Sounds acceptable, but I would not use it.
- 4– Sounds bad, I would never use it.

The limitation of this questionnaire is that it only examines the acceptability degree of these constructions at a superficial level. For reasons of space, this paper does not scan any grammatical variables. The sample size was also uneven and small for the North, which should be taken into account in the discussion of the results.

4. Results

This section is an in-depth analysis of the usage of these three vernacular expressions of the perfect. From the *ICE* corpus, 122 tokens have been extracted. The overall distribution is detailed in Table 1. The results estimate that the *after*-perfect is mostly restricted to the South, whilst the resultative and the indefinite anterior are present in both regions.

The *after*-perfect is the least attested expression, although it significantly occurs 9 times more frequently in the South than in the North¹. It should be noted that the *after*-perfect did not originally exhibit any tokens in the North with the structure *be after V-ing*. However, since Kirk and Kallen (2008, 276) interpret in their paper the following example (1) as having perfective meaning, this thesis has included it in the total tally.

¹ $\chi^2(1, N = 10) = 6.40, p = 0.0114$. Please note that the p -value could be inaccurate because of the minimal number of tokens in the North.

(4) <S1A-008\$A> <#> I 'm not not that long *after* my dinner

The resultative approximately doubles its frequency in the South in comparison to the North, and this difference is also statistically significant². In Kirk and Kallen's paper (2008, 278–282), the number of tokens differs. The cause is most likely to be the fuzzy classification between the resultative and false positives. Future studies could revise these numbers.

The indefinite anterior is the most attested expression, being used 7 times more than the *after*-perfect in both regions. In addition, the differences between South and North are much smaller than with the other perfect expressions (only 1.4 times more frequent in the South) and they are statistically non-significant³.

Table 1. *Distribution of the expression of the perfect in the ICE-Ireland corpus.*

	<i>After</i> -perfect		Resultative		Indefinite anterior		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
South	9	11%	28	35%	42	53%	79	100%
North	1	2%	12	28%	30	70%	43	100%
Total	10	8%	40	33%	72	59%	122	100%

4.1. The *After*-perfect

All the verbs were restricted to the positive form. 7 cases were intransitive verbs in the South, to which the example in the North must be added. Of these, two of them were prepositional verbs, namely *taking over* <S1A-046\$A> and *running into* <S2A-012\$A>. Excluding the Northern token, the other 5 verbs had time or place complements. The other 2 examples in the South were monotransitive. By the same token, all verbs were dynamic except for the Northern utterance. Regarding the type of subject, 6 tokens are in the third person singular, whilst the remaining 4 are each distributed in a separate person category (Figure 2).

² $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 6.40, p = 0.0114$.

³ $\chi^2(1, N = 72) = 2.00, p = 0.1573$.

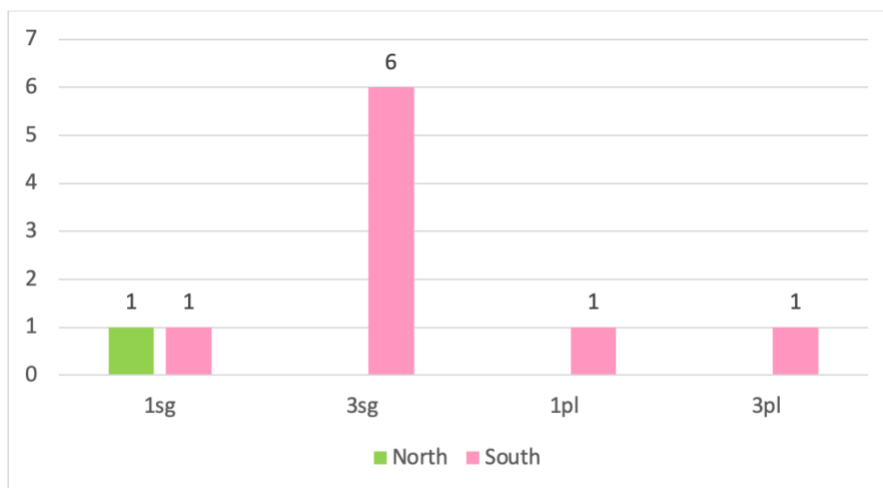


Figure 2. *Type of subject in the after-perfect.*

As regards its appearance in each text type, Figure 3 presents the distribution. The expression only occurred in spoken discourse, the trend being private dialogues (S1A). This is supported by the sole appearance of the North example in this category. The second position is occupied by unscripted monologues (S2A), which is slightly higher than public spoken dialogues. Scripted monologues seem to be the least favored.

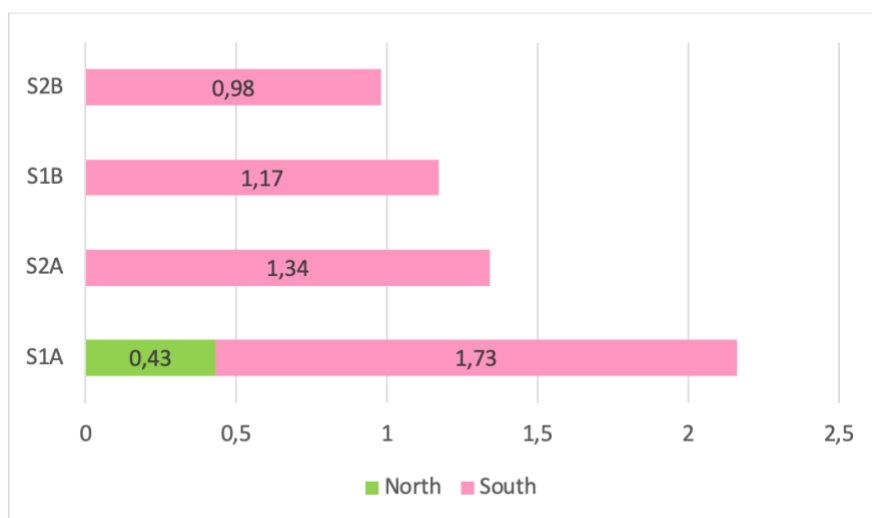


Figure 3. *Text-type distribution of the after-perfect (NF per 2000 words).*

In terms of acceptability rates (Figures 4 and 5), there is a sharp difference between the regions. The vast majority of the 71 Southern speakers qualify both sentences as very acceptable. The second sentence is rated more vernacular than the first one, probably due to the colloquialism *fella*. A meager number of the respondents would not use them or completely disregard them. Conversely, a significant proportion of the 36 respondents in the North rates both sentences as acceptable but not uttered by themselves, or completely unacceptable. The second example seems to be less penalized than the first one although both verbs are

prepositional. However, in general, almost half of the Northern speakers considered the structure as salient, as opposed to the 3% the South bestows on both sentences.

(5) <S1A-046\$A> And he's after coming back from England.

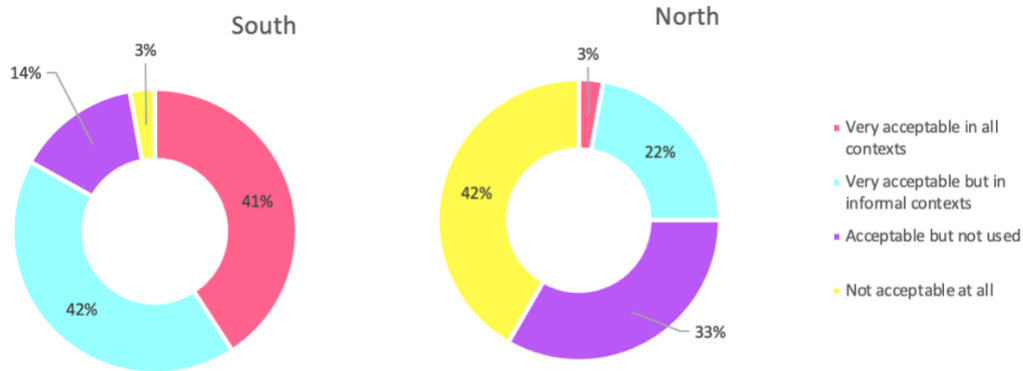


Figure 4. Acceptability rate for after coming back.

(6) <S1A-046\$A> <#> A new fella is after taking over uhm one of the pubs at home.

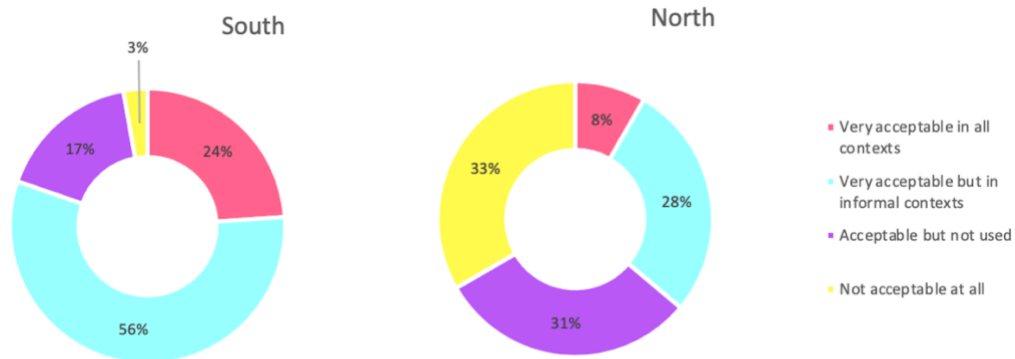


Figure 5. Acceptability rate for after taking over.

4.1. The Resultative

Following Kirk's terminology (2017, 245), the resultative may be sub-classified into the medial perfect object (MOP) and the pseudo-perfect. Table 2 summarizes the total number of tokens. The MOP exhibits the highest number of tokens in the South, followed by the pseudo-perfect in the same area. In contrast to the North, the South doubles the number of MOPs and triples the presence of pseudo-perfect expressions. However, the preference for the MOP is statistically not significant⁴.

⁴ $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 0.31, p = 0.5731$. This is partly because the Northern value of the pseudo-perfect is less than 5.

Table 2. *Distribution of the resultative perfect.*

	Medial Perfect Object		Pseudo-perfect		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
South	16	57%	12	43%	28	100%
North	8	67%	4	33%	12	100%
Total	24	60%	16	40%	40	100%

As regards internal grammatical features, all verbs were in the positive form. They were all transitive and contained dynamic verbs. Another point worth analyzing is the subject the main clause accepts. As Figure 6 exemplifies, the highest frequency is led by the first person singular in all sub-types and regions, even if no tokens for the pseudo-perfect were found in the North. By contrast, the third-person singular subject presents a more uniform representation. They are succeeded by the second-person category⁵. The first-person plural was the most infrequent. Considering these data, regional variation is only found in plural numbers. The South favors first and third-person plural subjects in both MOP and pseudo-perfects in comparison to the North, which only exhibits 1 token for the pseudo-perfect.

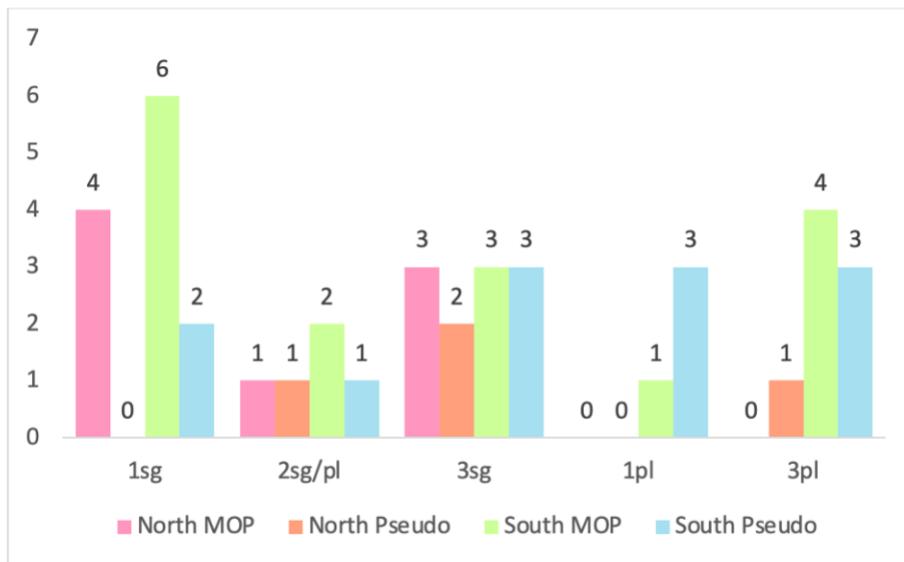


Figure 6. *Type of subject in the resultative.*

⁵ The second-person singular and plural subjects were grouped together because of the difficult number distinction.

Regarding its appearance in text types (Figure 7), the resultative is heterogeneously found in spoken discourse (S1A, S1B, S2A, and S2B) and letters (W1B). The MOP is substantially dominant in private spoken dialogues (S1A) in both regions. In the South, it is particularly present in public dialogues (S1B) and unscripted monologues (S2A). Northern speakers also resort to the MOP in social letters (W1B). The pseudo-perfect is ubiquitous in all text types, being most noticeable in public oral dialogues (S1B) in both regions. In the South, it appears to be less restricted by text type, since in the North it is exclusively present in public spoken dialogues (S1B), spontaneous monologues (S2A), and scripted talks and news (S2B).

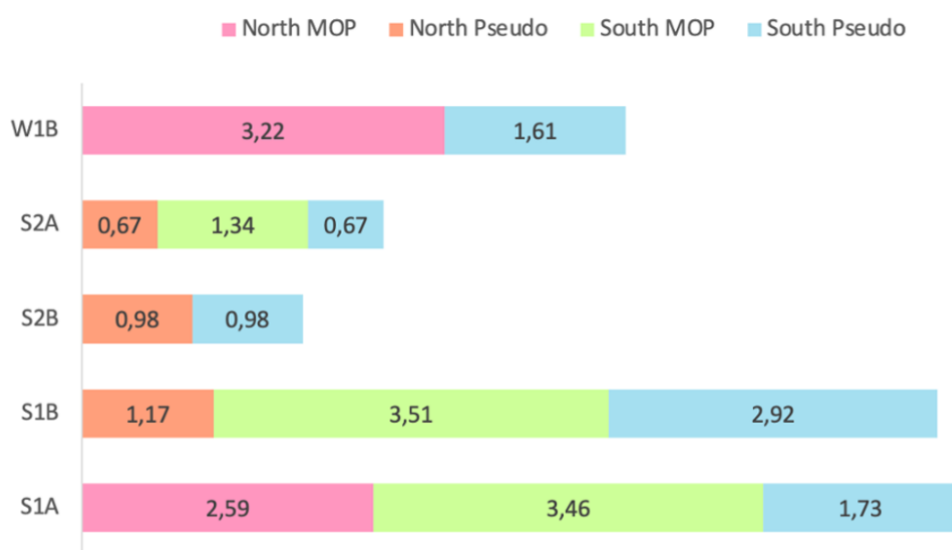


Figure 7. Text-type distribution of the resultative perfect (NF per 2000 words).

The acceptability rates in Figure 8 divert from the general findings in Table 1. While Table 1 showed that there were more tokens in the South, the difference is not significant in the perception questionnaire in either the first example⁶ or the second example⁷. The graphical distribution for each pair of sentences is similar in the North and South.

(7) <S1A-001\$B> <#> So she has her schoolbag packed with her pencil case.

⁶ $\chi^2(2, N = 106) = 6.53, p = 0.088162$

⁷ $\chi^2(2, N = 106) = 0.76, p = 0.858252$.

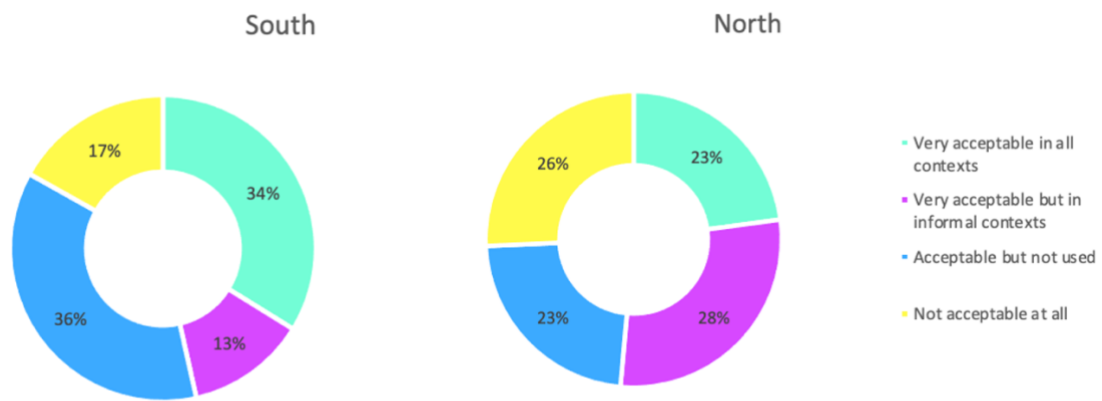


Figure 8. *Acceptability rate for she has her schoolbag packed.*

In the first instance, around half of the respondents in both regions would perceive the construction as very acceptable, and around a quarter as simply acceptable⁸. The only noteworthy difference is that a third of the Southern respondents would consider it very acceptable in comparison to a quarter in the North.

(8) <S1A-003\$E> <#> You see I have Benjamin's number written on his card.

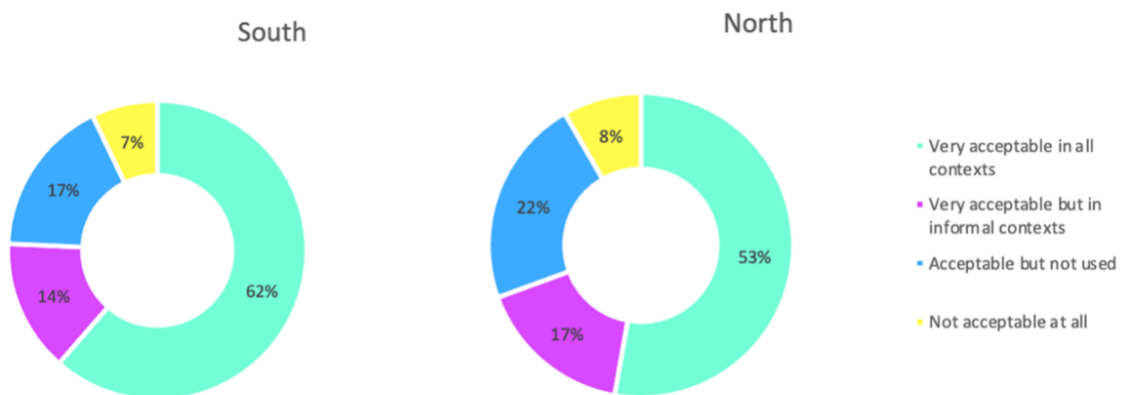


Figure 9. *Acceptability rate for I have Benjamin's number written.*

Strikingly, the second instance is seen as much more acceptable than the first instance in both regions⁹ (Figure 9). This may be due to idiomaticity with the verb WRITE. In fact, out of the total 40 examples, four contained this lexical verb. More than half of the interviewees in both regions would perceive the example as standard in all contexts and a tiny fraction as a vernacular expression. The percentages for the last two categories are virtually the same.

⁸One Northern respondent did not provide any answers for this sentence. *N* participants = 35.

⁹The same happened with one respondent in the South. *N* participants = 70.

4.2. The Indefinite Anterior

The indefinite anterior is the most pervasive expression in IrE. Table 3 details the number of occurrences for each regional variety. The adverb *never* is more conspicuous than *ever* in both regions. The contrast is starker in the North than in the South, where the difference between both adverbials is subtle¹⁰.

Table 3. *Distribution of the indefinite anterior.*

	Ever		Never		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
South	20	48%	22	52%	42	100%
North	7	23%	23	76%	30	100%
Total	27	38%	45	62%	72	100%

Moving on to the grammatical features, the preferred complementation pattern is monotransitive regardless of the choice of adverb and region. As Figure 10 demonstrates, more than half of the tokens stand for transitivity. Nonetheless, the divergence is surprisingly not significant¹¹, which may be explained by the lack of Northern examples for the adverb *ever*.

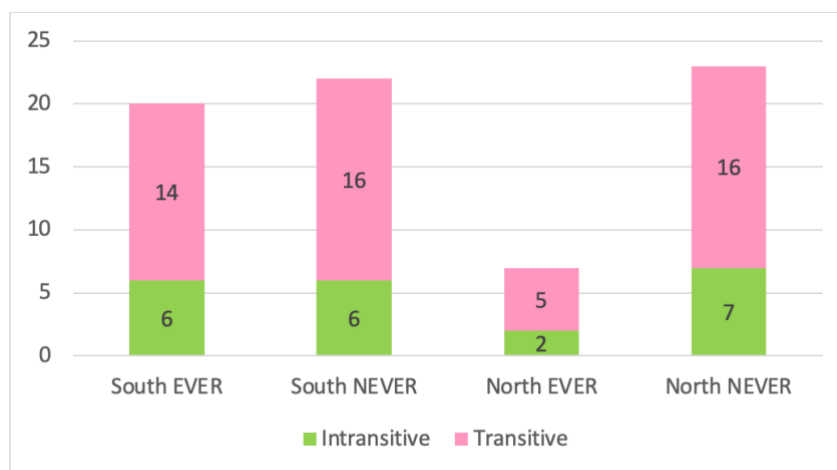


Figure 10. *Verb valency in the indefinite anterior.*

The verbal heads are mostly stative. The corpus yields 44 tokens for stative verbs and 28 for dynamic verbs. If the numbers are converted into percentages, the proportions confirm the notoriety of stative verbs in both territories¹² (Figure 11).

¹⁰ The chi-square test corroborates this disparity as significant $\chi^2 (1, N = 72) = 4.40, p = 0.035859$.

¹¹ $\chi^2 (3, N = 72) = 0.06, p = 0.99577$.

¹² This is upheld by the chi-square test $\chi^2 (1, N = 72) = 0.42, p = 0.51346$.

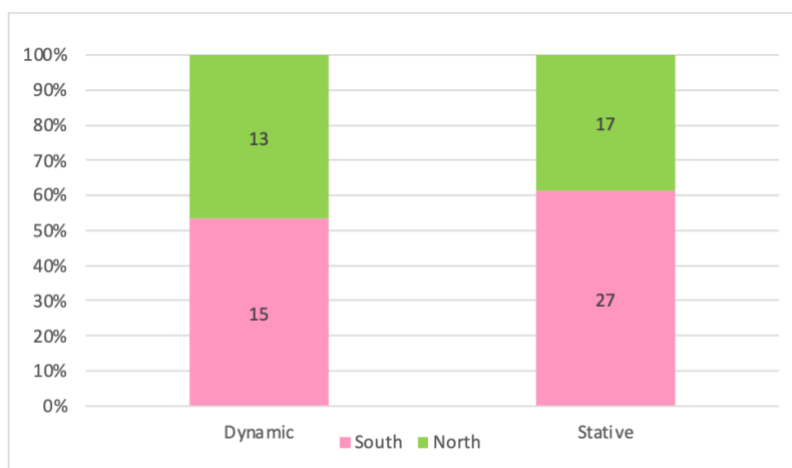


Figure 11. *Distribution of dynamic and stative verbs in the indefinite anterior.*

More specifically, speakers opt for stative verbs in each adverbial category (Figure 12). In particular, the adverb *never* accompanying stative verbs gives the highest frequency with a maximum of 15 tokens in the South and a total of 28 in both regions. The adverb *ever* also favors stative verbs, but it only provides 16 examples. Contrariwise, dynamic verbs are headed by the adverb *never* 17 times, and pre-modified by the adverb *ever* 11 times in total.

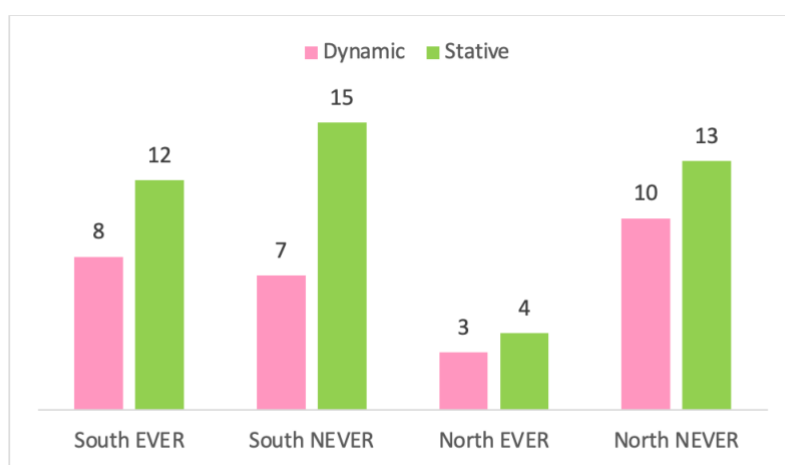


Figure 12. *Distribution of dynamic and stative verbs per adverbs in the indefinite anterior.*

A paramount aspect that needs to be addressed is its occurrence in interrogative sentences. Table 4 details the frequency of each adverb per type of sentence. Assuming that *ever* can only occur in positive sentences and *never* implies negative meaning, their percentages have been added up. The results indicate that more than a quarter of the utterances were in the interrogative form. In fact, the adverb *ever* in the South greatly surpasses the other occurrences in affirmative and negative forms. The ratio is 4:1 with 80% occurring in questions and 20% in other types of sentences.

Table 4. *Distribution of the indefinite anterior in types of sentences.*

	Positive		Negative		Total		Interrogative		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
S. <i>ever</i>	4	20%	0	0%	4	20%	16	80%	20	100%
N. <i>ever</i>	5	71%	0	0%	5	71%	2	29%	7	100%
S. <i>never</i>	0	0%	20	91%	20	91%	2	9%	22	100%
N. <i>never</i>	0	0%	23	100%	23	100%	0	0%	23	100%
Total	9	12%	43	60%	52	72%	20	28%	72	100%

Considering the type of subject (Figure 13), both adverbs have a proclivity to select the singular person in both areas. The adverb *ever* prefers the first person singular in the North and the second person in the South. *Never* also chooses the first person in both areas, followed by the third person in the South. Even though the number in the second-person subjects was sometimes undistinguishable in context, the avoidance of first-person plurals supports the initial hypothesis of preference for singular subjects.

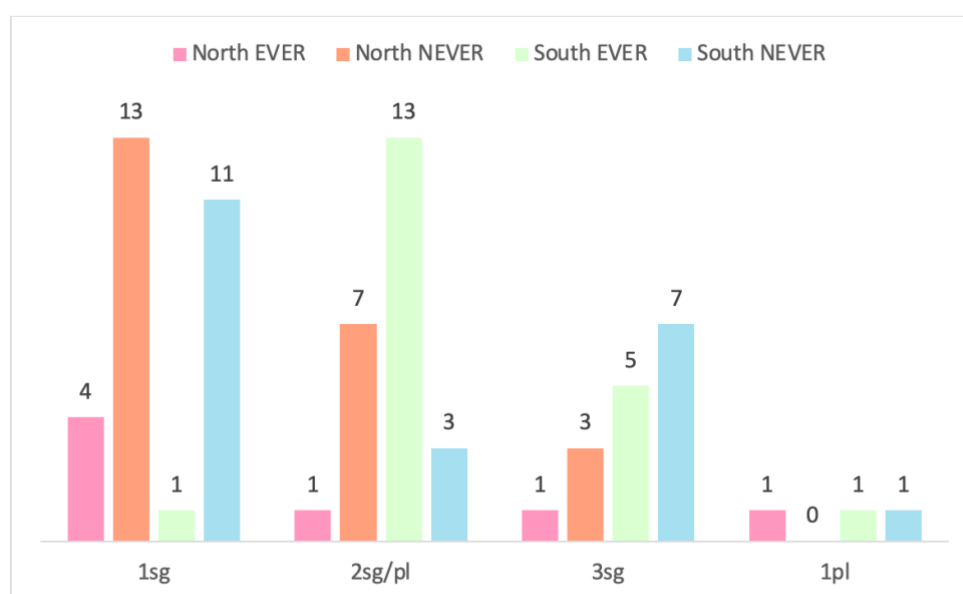


Figure 13. *Type of subject in the indefinite anterior.*

As regards textual type preferences (Figure 14), private spoken dialogues (S1A) and creative writing (W2F) occupy the first positions. In both regions, the adverb *never* is pervasive in all text types except for scripted talks and news (S2B). In terms of regional distribution, *never* is more fairly dispersed in the South, appearing in 6 out of 7 categories. In the North, it is only used in spontaneous oral discourses (S1A, S1B, and S2A) and creative writing (W2F). Contrarily, the adverb *ever* seems to be more restricted than *never* in both regions. It appears in

4 genres, comprising oral contexts (S1A, S1B, and S2B), and creative novels and short stories (W2F). This constriction imposed on *ever* is even more outstanding in the South, as it only appears in public oral dialogues (S1A) and scripted news and talks (S2B).

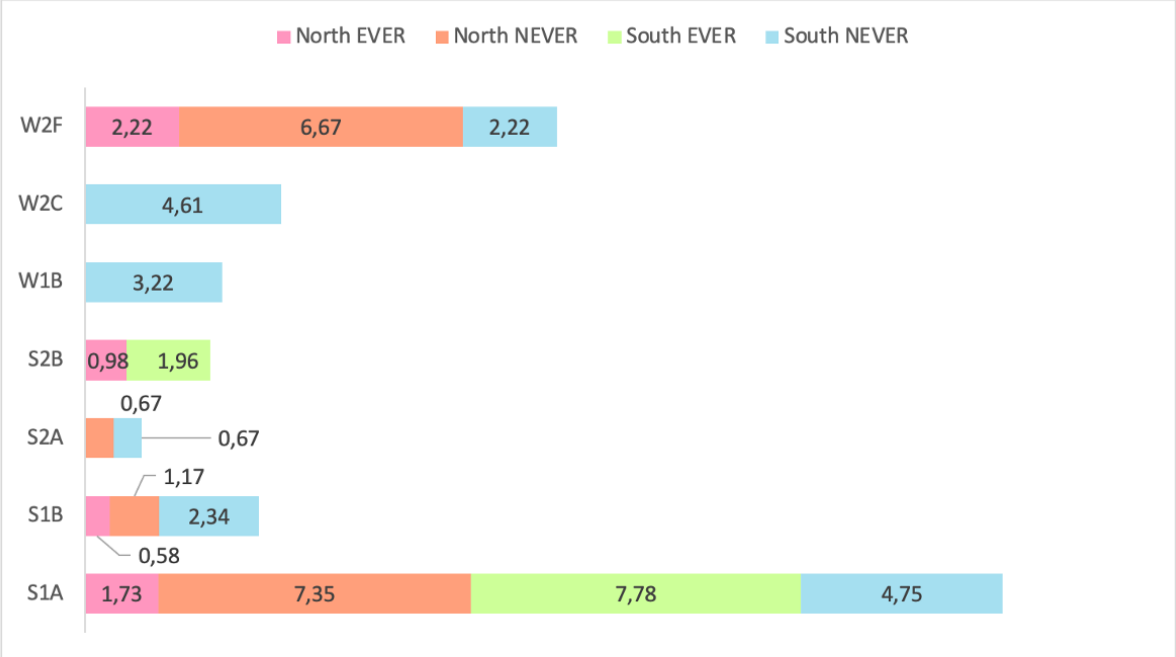


Figure 14. Text-type distribution of the indefinite anterior (NF per 2000 words).

The acceptability rates coincide with the numbers in Table 1 in that there is no regional difference (Figures 15 and 16). The percentages are almost parallel in both sentences. More than half of the participants perceive both sentences as very acceptable, and a small number deem the sentences vernacular. The differentiation between simply acceptable and ungrammatical is also similar in both areas.

(9) <S1A-010\$A> <#> It was the best <{> <[> pizza </[> I ever had.

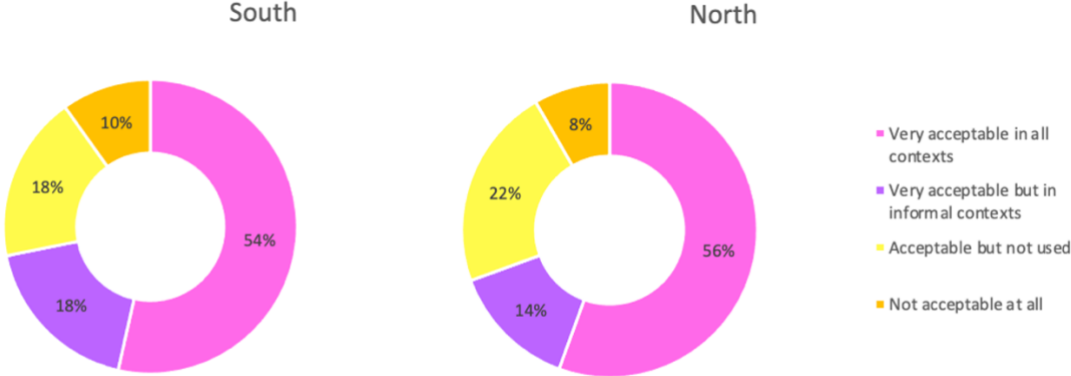


Figure 15. Acceptability rate for I ever had.

(10) <W2F-012\$A> <#> I never met a child with an imagination like yours.'

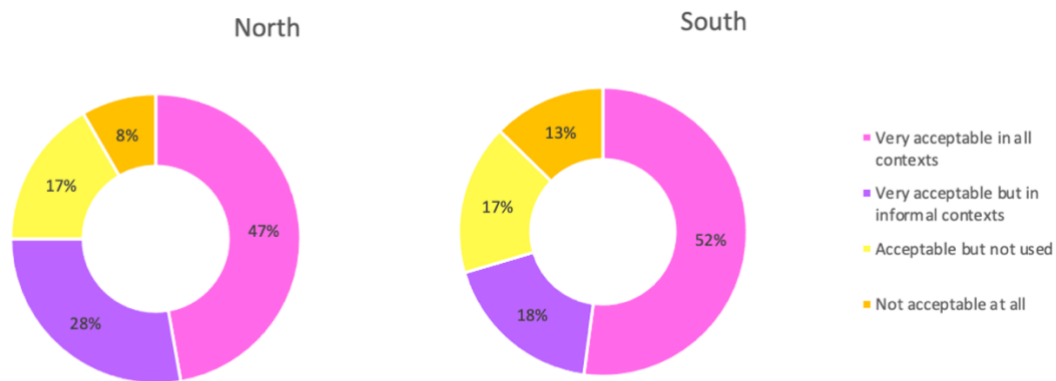


Figure 16. *Acceptability rate for she never met.*

5. Discussion

The *after*-perfect is much more common in the South. One motivation for this preference may be the ‘substratal’ influence of Irish, which is reinforced by the survival of the language in the South, as the Census shows. Filppula (2008, 328) confirms that Celtic-based constructions are better preserved in Irish-speaking areas. A second reason is national identity. Scholar José del Valle (2023) coins the term “glottopolitics” or “*políticas del lenguaje*” to refer to the ideological phenomenon whereby language is used to project subjectivities and social identities in a context of political conflict. Southern speakers might unconsciously Celticized structures to mark their identities amidst the political turmoil between both regions.

All these factors would account for the 90% occurrence of this expression in both the Southern corpus and the questionnaire. Specifically, the survey reveals that it is a very acceptable feature and, for some, the expression ingrained in their daily use of the language. The results could be compared to Hickey’s *A Survey of Irish English Usage* (quoted in Hickey 2007, 206), a comprehensive opinion poll comprising 1000 questionnaires. He discovers that out of 24 counties, 13 areas outside Ulster rated the expression as over 90% acceptable. The three lowest rates were granted by East Ulster, an area of considerable Ulster-Scots settlement.

At the syntactic level, no comparison can be drawn between the regions because the *ICE*-corpus only records one example in the North. As regards verbal features, all verbs were in the positive form. This constraint is supported by Kallen (2013, 98) who declares that the *after*-perfect “can be seen by its rarity in questions and negatives” because its temporal relevance is “reduced when negation dictates that there is no event for after to highlight.”

Moreover, all verbs were dynamic. Since the corpus size was very limited, this author conducted a quick cross-corpus analysis using *The Corpus of Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE) (Davies 2013). Unexpectedly, from 120 tokens extracted, 34 tokens were dynamic verbs and 26 were stative. These numbers reject the hypothesis that the *after*-perfect favors dynamic verbs. The corpus seems to be too limited and the distribution is random.

There also seems to be a tendency to favor intransitivity. However, given the meager number of examples in this corpus, this author consulted GloWbE a second time. (Davies 2013). From the same 120 tokens extracted, 76 were transitive verbs and 44 were intransitive. Adding the tokens obtained from *ICE*, the difference is statistically significant in favor of transitive verbs¹³. Hence, even though there is a tendency in the *ICE* corpus to use intransitive verbs, results differ with a larger corpus. *After*-perfect seems to favor transitive verbs.

Another factor is the preference for third-person singular subjects. This may be linked to its pragmatic use of reporting ‘how news’ information. Reporting is usually done in English in indirect speech in the third person because the speaker is recounting what an external person has said. To test this hypothesis, GloWbE (Davies 2013) was consulted again. From the 120 examples analyzed before, 71 tokens were in the third person singular and plural. Adding up the tokens in Figure 2, the difference is also significant¹⁴. The numbers thus reinforce the premise that the *after*-perfect prefers third-person subjects. However, a caveat to this explanation is that the focus is on the ‘hot news,’ ignoring the other functions exposed by O’Keeffe and Amador-Moreno (2009). More in-depth research is needed.

A final consideration is its distribution in text types. Five examples were extracted from informal contexts; four from private domains <S1A> and one from a spontaneous commentary <S2A-012>. The other four tokens came from formal contexts: one from a classroom discussion <S1B-016>, one from an unscripted speech <S2A-047>, one from broadcast news <S2B-014>, and another from a business transaction <S1B-077>. In Kallen’s (1991) conducted in Dublin (qtd. in Kallen 2013, 100), the results were alike. It was mostly heard in spontaneous everyday contexts, with 60% of his 114 examples coming from “friendly” or “family” conversations.

The resultative presents divergent results. While in the *ICE*-corpus the resultative is more prevalent in the South, the chi-square dictates that the distribution is not significant. The questionnaire equally reports that on average 61% of the respondents consider both resultative sentences as acceptable and 43% as standard in all contexts. To validate that there is no regional

¹³ $\chi^2(1, N = 130) = 5.20, p = 0.0226$

¹⁴ $\chi^2(1, N = 130) = 4.43, p = 0.0353.$

variation, this author consulted *The Electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English* (eWAVE) (Kortmann et al. 2020) As Figure 17 shows, the resultative is used in Irish English, Newfoundland English and Australian vernacular English, the latter most likely being byproducts of colonialism. This is in line with Kirk’s words (2017, 245), who contends that the resultative is not “part of standardised or dialectised English in England and only occurs in Ireland.” With all these findings in mind, the conclusion is that the resultative is an idiosyncratic construction of Irish English at a national level.

97 Medial object perfect

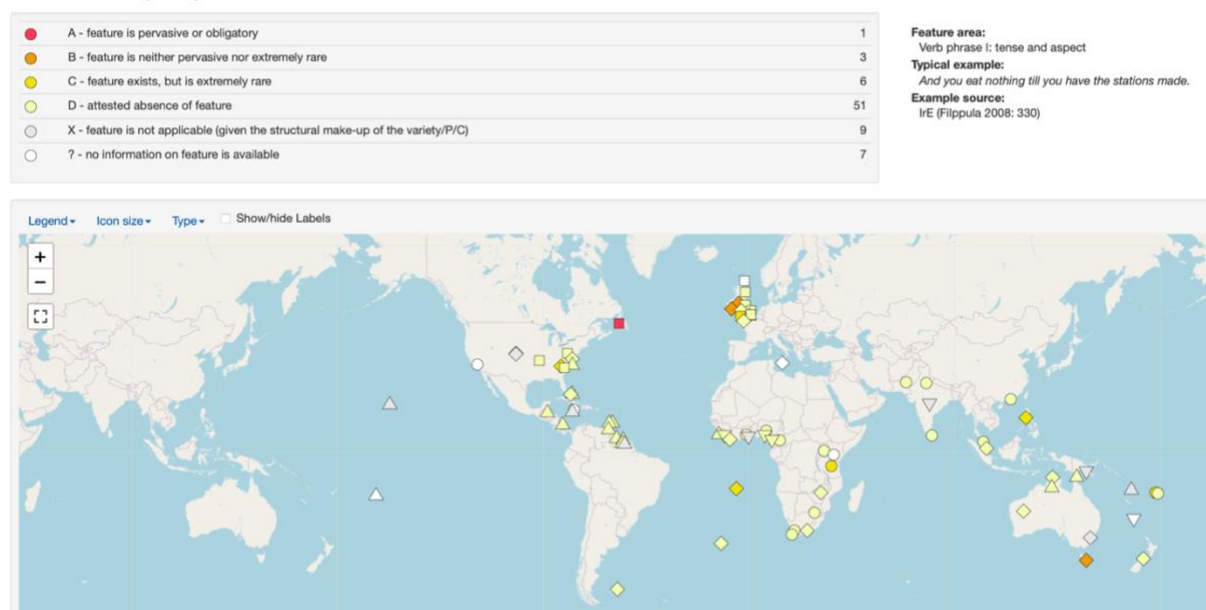


Figure 17. *International presence of the resultative (adapted from Kortmann et al. 2020).*

In terms of complementation pattern, there was no geographical variation. All verbs were transitive. Harris (1984, 308) corroborates that resultative verbs can only be transitive to distinguish them from the intransitive construction formed by copula BE and past participle as in *I’m not too long left*. All verbs were also dynamic. He explains that even though it might look contradictory for a construction denoting ‘a resulting state’ to appear with dynamic verbs, “for the state referred to in [resultatives] to exist, there must be some prior action to bring it about” (313). The resultative requires a dynamic verb because the state of the object depends on the outcome of a previous action conveyed by the non-finite verbal form.

Apart from verbal variables, the first and third plural subjects show regional variation. There are no Northern examples in the first-person plural for either the MOP category or the pseudo-perfect, and 1 example for the pseudo-perfect in the third person. However, taking into consideration that there are only 12 tokens in the North, this author cannot draw conclusions. The low number of occurrences in the plural seems arbitrary. On a similar note, the distribution

in text types is likely to be random because speakers do not ascribe one subtype of the resultative to a territory; language is malleable. The only clear pattern is that the resultative appears in both regions in spoken texts and social letters, which mimic oral discourse.

The indefinite anterior is omnipresent all across the island. The questionnaire displays that half of the respondents view the indefinite anterior as standard in all contexts, and three-quarters would judge it as acceptable. Indeed, Filppula (2016, 104) asserts that it is extremely common in all Irish English dialects, being preferred over the standard HAVE perfect. One attributable reason could be the presence of the construction in other World Englishes. If eWAVE (Kortmann et al. 2020) is consulted, Figure 18 illustrates the global spread of the indefinite anterior. Filppula (2016, 104) confirms that “it is attested in 59 % of the varieties, and its rate of pervasiveness in these amounts to 61 %, thus making it cross-dialectally a common feature.”



Figure 18. International presence of the indefinite anterior (adapted from Kortmann et al. 2020).

A sound explanation for this internationalization would be the progressive leveling of the simple past and the perfect uses in other World Englishes. According to Kortmann (2006, 607), the distinction between these two temporal meanings is becoming increasingly blurred. The indefinite anterior most likely originated in the inner circle and spread during the colonization period. However, the fact that the perfect is being substituted by the preterite may not only influence other varieties to adopt the structure but also reinforce the existence of the original construction in Irish English. This phenomenon is in consonance with Shimada’s

contact-induced model (2022) because present-day IrE has entered a stage of reciprocal cross-interaction between varieties in a globalized world.

Regarding variation, the indefinite anterior shows no overt differences in the adverbial distribution. It is true that *ever* shows a strikingly higher frequency in the South contrasted to its presence in the North. However, given that the adverb *never* is evenly distributed in both regions and the responses in the questionnaire were similarly satisfactory, it seems that the low number of occurrences of *ever* in the Northern corpus is only an exceptional case in point. There does not seem to be an underlying reason. Future scholars should examine bigger geographically divided corpora to confirm this hypothesis.

Moving on to the verbal heads, the indefinite anterior tends to favor transitivity in the South and North. This paper could not find a logical explanation for this preference; the higher frequency of transitive verbs is arbitrary. The same is true for dynamic and stative verbs, as there is no regional difference between these two verbal types. Scholar Van Hattum (2012, 138) writes that the most commonly found verbs with this expression are BEAR, SEE, BE, HAVE, GO, GET, KNOW, and TELL. Since the list entails a combination of dynamic and stative verbs, it confirms the presupposition that the distribution is random.

Another remark is that the indefinite anterior can easily appear in the interrogative form in both regions. The most plausible reason is the correlation between these adverbials and the type of sentences they accept. In standard HAVE perfect with ‘experiential’ meaning, the adverb *never* prototypically appears in negative sentences and *ever* in interrogative sentences (Seoane and Suárez-Gómez 2013, 13). This association can equally be applied to the indefinite anterior, as the findings in this paper confirm. The adverb *never* was only found in negative sentences, and *ever* in positive and interrogative forms. The only exceptions were 2 examples for *ever* in the South appearing in questions, which is probably attributed to the ability of language not to conform to the rules.

One non-verbal factor analyzed is the preferred type of subject. The first person is preferred by the adverbs *never* and *ever* in the North, and *never* in the South. *Ever* in the South selects the second person and the third person. However, it is venturesome to draw conclusions from these data, since there are multiple occurrences of these adverbs in all singular-person subjects. The only clear pattern is that the indefinite anterior precludes plural subjects in both territories. There must be some mental restrictions among speakers. Yet again, this hypothesis is not precise because of the ambiguous assignment of second-person subjects to singular or plural numbers. Other corpora should be compared.

Another non-verbal factor is the preference for certain textual types. In terms of variation between *ever* and *never*, so minor are the differences that it would be audacious to detect a trend. It would be more appropriate to provide broad descriptions. The indefinite anterior is the most prevalent expression across textual genres. According to Filppula (2008, 331), it is widely heard in educated speech and occasionally in written newspapers. The findings in this paper not only verify his statement but also expands it. The construction is also present in spoken informal dialogues (S1A), unscripted monologues (S2A), written letters (W1B) and creative writing (W1F).

6. Conclusion

The present study has analyzed three Celtic-based expressions of the perfect in Irish English and compared their usage in Northern and Southern Irish English. The aim was to discover whether there was regional variation and which factors conditioned the change. The results illustrate that the *after*-perfect prevails in the Republic of Ireland, the resultative is present at a national level, and the indefinite anterior is used indiscriminately in both regions. This confirms that Southern dialects allude to its substratum history and Celtic identity. However, globalization processes and the upcoming enactment of Irish as an official language in the North may change this linguistic situation in the foreseeable future, especially for the *after*-perfect. Even though no overt regional variation was found at the syntactic level, it has been demonstrated that vernacular forms are governed by their own grammatical rules. Additionally, the discussion in this thesis has proved that it is essential to conduct multi-modal analyses combining several methodologies to obtain accurate results. As regards to further research, it is incumbent on scholars to trace the evolution of these expressions, as well as publish updated data on other grammatical features. This author also encourages academics to conduct a more thorough questionnaire analyzing the grammatical variables presented in this paper, as well as filtering the results through more sociodemographic factors.

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