

*'The seas was like mountains':*

*Intra-writer variation and social mobility in Irish emigrant letters*

James Horner was one of the 150 000 Irish emigrants that crossed the Atlantic between 1783 and 1814 (Miller 1985), a period when Ireland paradoxically enjoyed relative prosperity thanks to the commercialisation of Irish textile and agricultural products in England. Interestingly, this internal economic success did not stop the emigrant flow to North America. In the period between 1800 and 1845 “over a million emigrants left Ireland for North America and about half a million for Britain” (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 2008:162). Unlike the vast majority of the Irish emigrants, James Horner did not regard himself as an involuntary expatriate who had to emigrate to escape oppression. On the contrary, he was one of those young men who responded to the social, economic and political changes in their homeland by emigrating voluntarily in search of new opportunities. Communication between James Horner and his family and friends back in Ireland was kept through personal correspondence. His letters, which are part of CORIECOR, the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (McCafferty and Amador-Moreno, in preparation), contain detailed accounts of his experiences and impressions of the recently adopted country, and also show progressive standardisation. In this sense, and since he was upwardly mobile, his language use seems to change over the 10 years covered in the letters, shifting from vernacular Irish English towards a more standardised type of English to some degree.

The present study will consider Horner’s case study in the light of linguistic characteristics of Irish English in the period covered by the letters. This sub-corpus, which contains about 14,000 words, will be analysed in the broader context of CORIECOR (which has approximately 3,5 million words). Our analysis will focus on how intra-writer variation evolves over the lifespan of writers in specific historical contexts, and it will address the question of how social mobility and dialect contact can contribute to the blurring of identity markers in language use.

## **References**

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