“I so like to hear about your little children”:
exploring the uses of **so** in the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence.

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Corpus of Irish English Correspondence

- Collection of emigrant letters (1700s-1940s)
- Irish Emigration Database, Centre for Migration Studies at the Ulster-American Folk Park, Omagh, Co. Tyrone (based on PRONI collections)
- Other collections added/being added
  - Argentina
  - New Brunswick
  - Australia
  - Carlow (south-east Ireland)
CORIECOR distribution per 20-year sub-period
CORIECOR contents

• Mainly personal correspondence

• 5500+ documents to date (approx. 5000 letters)

• Approx. 3.2m words (3m in letters)

• Min. 55 000 words per subperiod 1761-1940

• Adding (un)published collections
Orality of letters

Letters as ‘substitute speech’:

- Michael Normile: ‘I fancy I am speaking to you verbally while I am writing this scroll to you [...]’.
  (Fitzpatrick 1994:89, No 11h)

- Biddy Burke: ‘I for once in 12 mounths sit to have a few words of conversation with you’.
  (Fitzpatrick 1994:155, Bu 3a)

- ‘I am sure you will be tired before you get through all this long letter, but I almost think I am talking to you’.
  (Mary Cumming, 24.11.1814)
Orality of letters

- Texts to be spoken?

- Popular motif in 19th-century paintings and illustrations (cf. examples in Fitzpatrick 1994; Fitzgerald & Lambkin 2008)

James Brenan, *Letter from America*, 1875, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork
Functions of letters

- social rather than purely informational functions
- used to maintain networks
- reinforce family ties
  

Letters might be expected to reproduce **patterns of spoken usage** in an attempt to signal **solidarity** and **intimacy** between writers and readers:

CORIECOR contains linguistic features like DMs, **intensifiers**, end-**tails**, etc., generally associated with the spoken mode.
SO...
Development of SO in AmE
Development of SO in IrE
Ocurrences of so in AusE, ScE, BrE and IrE

**COOE (Corpus of Oz Early English)**, 1788-1900, contains 2m words. Includes letters, published materials in book form and historical texts.

**CMSW (Corpus of Modern Scotish Writing)**, 1700-1945, approx 5,5m words. Includes from printed novels, to written correspondence, to newspaper and magazine articles, to legal material.

**CLMET (Corpus of Late Modern English Texts)**, 1710-1920, approx. 34m words. Includes narrative fiction, narrative non-fiction, drama, letters and treatise.
CMSC, CMLET and CORIECOR compared

* Normalised per 1m words
**SO as a P-DM**

- Although not one of the P-DMs associated with traditional dialect or vernacular IrE (cf. *arrah, yerrah, sure*), some scholars acknowledge this usage to be typical of spoken Irish English (Joyce 1988: 10; Harris 1993: 176, Kallen 2006: 11; Walshe 2009: 127; Hickey 2007: 371)
• O’Sullivan (fc.) finds it to be the third most frequently used PM in her radio-advert corpus.

• Schneider (2008: 125), comparing small talk in England, Ireland and the U.S.A., finds that the frequency of so is higher in IrE.

• Kallen (2006: 11) also finds that it appears in the ICE-Ireland spoken corpus far more frequently than the majority of the traditional PMs.
Some IrE uses of so

• So-prefacing (Heaney’s *Beowulf*): sequence-initial, generally associated with colloquial usage

• Clause-final (Binchy 2005): “mitigator of the force of the demand implicit in the price [of goods]” (332)
  
  C: Pine Needle please.
  
  S: That’s one eighty eight so please.

• End-tails (Kallen & Kirk 2012; Timmis, fc; Barron, fc)
  
  She’s very pleased with it so she is. (ICE-Ireland)
Some IrE uses of so

- so + now (initial and final positions)

  So now there’s good news all around. (LCIE)

- Intensifier (including the so-called GenX so)

  Joseph O’Connor: I so like it.
  We’re so getting divorced.

  Ross O’Carroll-Kelly: You’re so not making a holy show of me.
  He’s like so last month
For this study...

Excluded:

1. Adverb so (without intensifying meaning, e.g. I’m sorry he was so grumpy)
2. So as a pro-form (e.g. Mike is a butcher and so is his son)
3. Subordinating so (e.g. I didn’t see him this morning, so I left him the keys on the table)
4. So + that/as (e.g. The film was so boring that I fell asleep)
5. So + many/much/long
Pilot study (1800-1900)

• End tails:

This morning Fan has lost her two girls, & Ellen knows what that means, Your Mother in fits & vows she will just go back to Ellen so she will- (Letter from John Kelly, Allegheny, to "Dear Mary", 12/10/1865)

Dear Brother you will be apt to say I must get maried [married?] So I must (Benjamin Neely, Burnally, Ireland to brother and sister, S.Carolina, USA. 04/06/1829)

But they have money to spend thus. So they have (Letter from Thomas Bernard Delany to his uncle, 29.08.1853, in Schrier 1997 [1958]: 26)
Narrative device (repetition)

[...] he never married so he has died without a will so I believe the money will be divided amongst his relations so I was counting how many brothers + sisters and nevews [nephews ?] + nieces there were alive so I counted about 35 So I think we should get about two thousand dollars each if it is rightly divided he is dead since last May so I think it should be settled about May next I for one wont.

(Letter from William Beatty New Jersey, America to his Brothers, 27.02.1881)
Pilot study (1800-1900)

- Closing or to mark boundaries

So no more But Remains your [?]ond Brother Robert McArthur. (Letter from R. McArthur, Shenango, to J. McArthur, Carroreaugh, 4.11.1802)

so Dear Brother Betty joins me in or best respects to you and your family, so I conclude, Your affectionate and loving Brother. (Letter from Moses Gallagher, Tully, to his brother Robert Gallagher, Maryland, 03.04.1827)

So we must close up for this We all join in Sending our Kind Love & Blessing to you & Mr. Malloy Catherine & family in the Kindest Manner Whilest [Whilst?] I remain your affectionate Mother till Death (Letter from Mary Cunningham, Killybega, to her son Michael, America, 09.05.1865)
I will do nothing that you will be ashamed of [owning?] me for a son so now dear mother do not give yourself the least unnecessary anxiety about me.

(Letter from Richard Rothwell Jr, Point St. Charles, Canada to Rosa Rothwell, Ireland. 08.11.1864)

So now, especially when a letter only costs a penny, do not leave yourself open to a fine, I mention this, as you may not have been aware of it and sometimes the [officials?] open letters for that purpose.

(Letter from J. A. Smyth, Ontario to J. J. Smyth, [Castledamph?], 09.01.1898)
Pilot study (1800-1900)

• So as intensifier

I can think of nothing more to say you did not ask me Questions enough  Lydia & the Children are Well Eliza Jane is running about altho [although?] she is so fat and not a year old, and Catherine is a fine child *(Letter from John McBride, Watertown, USA, to James McBride, Co. Antrim, 5.03.1825)*

This season brings our [smiling?] mother so much to our mind - her busy loving heart ever on the look out for seasonable presents for her large flock  I so like to look back the very snow falling has many, many early associations of my loved parents *(Letter from Ellen Dunlop, Peterborough. to aunt C. Kirkpatrick, Ireland, 30.11.1874)*

I so like to hear about your little children & how I would like to see them *(Letter from Kate Brown, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada to her aunt Catherine Kirkpatrick, Cullybackey, Co Antrim. 17.11.1874)*
Overview of uses 1800-1840
• **So as intensifier**


    Further support to the idea that an intensifier’s delexicalization trajectory may lie dormant for reactivation at any time (from the recent rise in the use of an intensifying function for so in contexts that would otherwise not be available for intensifiers).

    “GenX so” (Zwicky, 2006)
Preliminary conclusions

• Rise in the use of so in IrE across the 1800s.

• Some of the uses in the letters are highly conversational: an indication of the orality and informality of private correspondence (an invaluable source for linguistic analysis).

• The occurrence of so in end-tails, or as part of the so+now cluster in the letters, even though not very high, should alert us to look for these uses in other periods, too.

• 1800s and 1840s: something going on with so as an intensifier (Tagliamonte’s claim that the origins of the processes of change affecting intensifiers in general, and the GenX so in particular “may be deeper-rooted in the past than we realize” (2008: 391) and presents a fruitful area for study from a quantitative variationist perspective.
So we must close up for this

Thank you!