



THE LOVE IRELAND GUIDE N. 006

Irish Slang & Hiberno-English

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Grammar That Sounds Wrong But Isn't

Hiberno-English carries the bones of the Irish language underneath the English words, and nowhere is that clearer than in the grammar. "I'm after eating my dinner" means you just finished eating - it's a direct translation of an Irish tense structure that English has no other way to express. You'll also hear "amn't I coming too?" - a perfectly logical negative of "am I," even though standard English never bothered to invent one.

The biggest one catches most visitors without them noticing: Irish has no direct word for "yes" or "no." Ask someone "are you coming?" and in Irish you'd answer "I am" or "I am not" - and that habit carried straight into English. So Irish people will often echo the verb back - "are you finished? I am" - rather than a flat "yes." It isn't evasiveness. It's just how the grammar underneath still works.

Words You Will Hear Every Single Day

Craic (pronounced "crack") - fun, banter, a good time. "What's the craic?" means "what's going on," and "the craic was mighty" means everyone had a brilliant night.

Grand - fine, okay, acceptable. Said about almost anything, and can mean genuinely great or simply "not a disaster" depending entirely on tone.

Deadly / Savage / Class - all three mean "excellent." "That gig was savage" is the highest compliment a gig can get.

Eejit - a fool, almost always said with affection rather than real insult.

Banjaxed - broken, ruined, or exhausted. Your car can be banjaxed. So can you, after a long day.

Yoke - a thing whose name you can't remember, or don't need to.

Gaff - house or home. "Come back to mine, we'll have a few in the gaff."

The messages - the weekly grocery shop. Nothing to do with texting.

Words That Mean Something Completely Different Here

A press is a cupboard, not a device that prints or squeezes anything - ask where the hot press is and you'll be shown the airing cupboard. Runners are sneakers. A jumper is a sweater. The footpath is the sidewalk. And a mineral is any soft drink, not a chemical element - ordering "a mineral" at a bar gets you a lemonade, not a vitamin supplement.

Phrases With No Real English Equivalent

Fair play - genuine respect for something well done, used for almost anything from finishing a marathon to buying the next round.

Sure look it - a catch-all for something that can't really be explained or fixed. Often the entire second half of a conversation.

What's the story? - a greeting, not an actual request for a story.

Acting the maggot - messing around, behaving foolishly.

Has notions - acting above one's actual station. Rarely a compliment.

Common Myths About Irish Slang

"It's basically just an accent." Not true - Hiberno-English has its own grammar structures borrowed directly from Irish, not just a different pronunciation of standard English.

"Everyone talks like a film." Phrases like "top o' the mornin'" were invented for American audiences and will get you a puzzled look, not a warm welcome.

"Slang is only for young people." Words like "grand," "fair play," and "the messages" are used by every generation, constantly.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is Hiberno-English the same as an Irish accent?

No - the accent is pronunciation, while Hiberno-English is the distinct grammar and vocabulary underneath it, shaped by the Irish language.

Will people understand me if I try using these words?

Yes, and making the effort is almost always well received. A slightly wrong "that's deadly" gets a laugh, not a correction.

Does it vary a lot by region?

Considerably - a word standard in Cork or Limerick can be unfamiliar in Dublin, and vice versa.

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