

## A Freezing Approach to the *Ish*-Construction in English

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In recent years, the English qualifier *-ish*, used as a derivational suffix in words like *yellowish*, *boyish*, etc., has undergone DEGRAMMATICALIZATION towards becoming a free morpheme in certain dialects of English (Norde 2007, 2009). In this role, it takes on a meaning of approximation of the root associated with it. This process has continued such that for some speakers the sentences in (1-2) are grammatical.

(1) I finished my homework **ish**. (= I kinda/sorta finished my homework.)

(2) I live in Chicago **ish**. (= I live kind of in Chicago, perhaps a suburb.)

It is difficult to tell from the prosody of the construction whether *ish* is TP-internal or TP-external. In this paper, I show that *ish* is in fact TP-internal. I propose that it forms the head of a Qualifier Phrase that takes a VP or PP complement, obtaining the surface structure in (1-2) via movement of the VP or PP to its Specifier.

**Distribution:** The presence of *ish* triggers polarity effects. It cannot occur in contexts where Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) are licensed.

(3) \*I didn't write my paper **ish**.

(4) \*Have you written your paper **ish**?

(5) \*I have yet to finish my homework **ish**. (Harves and Myler 2014)

The restriction on occurrence in NPI-licensing environments suggests that *ish* is a Positive Polarity Item appearing TP-internally. The construction appears to be associated with VPs and PPs. It cannot, for example, modify a DP without creating an adjective.

(6) a. \*[My paper **ish**] has been written.

b. [My paper **ish**] thing has been written.

Despite modifying VP/PPs, it is not an adverb. *Ish* cannot be fronted or appear between an AUX and a VP (Cinque 1999), as shown in (7-8).

(7) \***Ish**, I wrote my paper.

(8) \*I was **ish** writing my paper.

Because the free morpheme appears within the TP, but is not an adverb, I propose calling *ish* a Qualifier, which will Merge as the head of a Qualifier Phrase. Although *ish* appears clause-finally on the surface, it triggers island effects for VPs and PPs. While subjects may be clefted, DP complements within either VPs or PPs may not be. This is licit when *ish* is absent (9-11).

(9) a. It was [Mary]<sub>1</sub> that t<sub>1</sub> finished her homework.

b. It was [Mary]<sub>1</sub> that t<sub>1</sub> finished her homework **ish**.

(10) a. It was [a paper]<sub>1</sub> that John [finished t<sub>1</sub>].

b. \*It was [a paper]<sub>1</sub> that John [finished t<sub>1</sub>] **ish**.

(11) a. It's [New York]<sub>1</sub> that I might move [to t<sub>1</sub>].

b. \*It's [New York]<sub>1</sub> that I might move [to t<sub>1</sub>] **ish**.

These minimal pairs suggest *ish* is triggering a strong island effect. While arguments may not be extracted from an island, island violations may be repaired by pied-piping the entire island (Szabolcsi 2006). This is the case with *ish*; wh-questions and fronted PPs are licit only when *ish* also moves (12-13).

(12) a. [When **ish**] will you arrive?

b. \*[When]<sub>1</sub> will you arrive t<sub>1</sub> **ish**?

(13) a. [To New York **ish**], I might move.

b. \*[To New York]<sub>1</sub>, I might move t<sub>1</sub> **ish**.

**Analysis:** For an object on the right to trigger island effects, it appears movement has occurred. This would lead to Freezing effects (Müller 1998), by which moved items are islands and extraction can only occur when the extraction site is *in situ*. If we supposed that *ish* undergoes External Merge above XP elements of the clause, movement of the entire XP would be necessary to obtain clause-final *ish*. As such, any XP that *ish* takes scope over on the surface would show Freezing effects, evidenced by the inability to extract from the XP.

Revisiting my proposal that *ish* is part of a QualP, we can formalize the proposal now: *ish* is a functional head of QualP, which takes an XP complement. That XP in turn undergoes Internal Merge to raise to Spec,QualP.

(14) [<sub>QualP</sub> [<sub>XP</sub>]<sub>1</sub> *ish* t<sub>1</sub>]

This yields both the facts described above as well as the surface structure of clauses with *ish*. While Spec,QualP cannot be extracted from, movement of QualP itself is licit, which I propose is occurring in *wh*-questions and PP-fronting. Based on the licit movement in (12-13), it is clear that PP may be a complement of QualP. I argue that VP is a potential complement as well, as opposed to TP or *vP*. Subjects may be clefted when there is an *ish* construction, but not objects (9, repeated as 15). At the same time, *ish* may appear on the surface between an object and VP adjunct. It may not, however, occur between objects in a Double Object construction (16) or a verb and obligatory PP (17). In these cases, we would expect ungrammaticality if QualP took a TP/*vP* complement.

(15) a. It was Mary that finished her homework **ish**.

b. \*It was her homework that Mary finished **ish**.

(16) a. John answered my question **ish** in his talk.      b. \*John gave Mary **ish** a letter.

(17) a. I placed it on the table **ish**.                              b. \*I placed it **ish** on the table.

**Discussion:** The above proposal is successful not only in describing the presented data, but in accounting for the behavior of the *ish* construction in other situations as well. Frozen scope, in which clauses with multiple QPs are unambiguous, occurs with *ish* (18). As this is attributed to a blocking of Covert Raising (Bruening 2001), this is to be expected, and in fact occurs with other islands as well (19).

(18) A (different) girl [<sub>QualP</sub> [finished every assignment]<sub>1</sub> **ish** t<sub>1</sub>]. (\*every>a, a>every)

(19) A (different) girl arrived [<sub>AdvP</sub> without reading each book]. (\*each>a, a>each)

Furthermore, Sluicing constructions and VP ellipsis constructions have a key difference when there is an island in the antecedent. *Wh*-movement out of the island is apparently licit in Sluicing, but not in VP ellipsis (Merchant 2008). This is the case with *ish*, which is consistent with the above analysis (20).

(20) a. They [<sub>QualP</sub> [studied a Balkan language]<sub>1</sub> **ish** t<sub>1</sub>]—guess which!

b. \*They [<sub>QualP</sub> [studied a Balkan language]<sub>1</sub> **ish** t<sub>1</sub>]—guess which they did!

**Conclusion:** English *ish* is a TP-internal morpheme when modifying VP/PPs. Since it is a non-adverbial PPI, I propose labeling it a Qualifier, which is the functional head of a Qualifier Phrase. Because the *ish* construction shows island effects, I propose an analysis involving movement of the VP/PP complement to Spec,QualP, which would yield Freezing effects. This analysis accounts for a wide range of phenomena surrounding use of the construction.

**References:** Bruening, B. 2001. QR obeys superiority: ACD and frozen scope. *Linguistic Inquiry* 32:233-73. Cinque, G. 1999. *Adverbs and functional heads: A cross-linguistic perspective*. Oxford: OUP. Harves, S., and N. Myler. 2014. Licensing NPIs and licensing silence: *Have/be yet* in English. *Lingua* 148, 213-239. Merchant, J. 2008. Variable islands repair under ellipsis. In *Topics in ellipsis*, ed. by Kyle Johnson, 132-53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Müller, G. 1998. *Incomplete category fronting*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. Norde, M. 2009. *Degrammaticalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Norde, M. 2007. Degrammaticalization: three common controversies. Paper presented at What's new in grammaticalization?, May. Szabolcsi, A. 2006. Strong vs. weak islands. In *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax Vol. 1*, ed. by Martin Everaert and Henk van Riemsdijk, 479-531. Oxford: Blackwell.