1. Introduction

In this talk:

- Provide novel data and syntactic analysis of an understudied form.
- Discuss results of survey on grammaticality judgments of form.
- Show from survey data:
  - Syntactic analysis not ruled out for majority of users
  - Multiple variants of form
  - Forms fit well with theories of syntactic change and grammaticalization

2. *Ish* is similar to *kinda*

- *ish* as a derivational morpheme may be used as a qualifier to denote likeness to a nominal or adjective.

1. A reddish stain
2. A childish game
3. A coffee-ish drink

*Ish* has a similar use in describing an approximation to, but not quite, what is being modified (Norde 2007, 2009; Bochnak and Csipak 2014).

4. I started my homework *ish*. (I kinda started my homework.)
5. I live in Chicago *ish*. (I live kinda in Chicago.)
6. It's easy to swim *ish*. (It's kinda easy to swim/It's easy to kinda swim.)
7. Q. Did you read the book?
   A. Ish. (Kinda.)

This talk is concerned primarily with the use seen in (4-5).

3. Difficulties in analyzing *ish*

3.1. Prosody

In examples like (4-5), *ish* is separated from the rest of the sentence prosodically. This obscures *ish*'s relation to the rest of the sentence.
3.2. Orthography

In examples I place *ish* within the sentence for consistency's sake. However, because it is nonstandard, there is little agreement on how to represent it orthographically, as seen by other examples found online:

8. It was good. Ish. (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=ish)
9. I finished my paper... ish. (http://www.mibba.com/Member/145684/Comments/?page=15)
10. Episode has just started(ish). (https://twitter.com/Culture_Czar/status/43055883736294401)

4. Distribution

4.1. *Ish* is not an adverb

Unlike other adverbs (Cinque 1999), *ish* may not be fronted or appear between auxiliaries:

11. Often, I take the bus to school.
12. *Ish, Katie answered my question.
13. I will have quickly been beaten by Mary.
14. *I will have ish been beaten by Mary.

Is it like *too*? No—*too* can move with fronted complements or stay behind; *ish* cannot.

15. This book too I read.
17. The store I go to too.
18. *The store I go to ish.

4.2. *Ish* is a Positive Polarity Item

*Ish* is incompatible with questions, negation, and other NPI-licensing environments:

19. *I didn't like the movie ish.
20. *Did you like the movie ish?
21. *Few people liked the movie ish.
22. A lot of people liked the movie ish.

In order to derive this effect, *ish* must be TP-internal.

4.3. *Ish* displays island effects

VP and PP complements may normally be fronted in English. When *ish* appears, this is not the case:

23. Here's [the paper] that I [finished t₁].
24. *Here's [the paper] that I [finished t₁] ish.
25. It's [New York] that I'm moving [to t₁].
26. *It's [New York]$_1$ that I'm moving [to t$_1$] ish.

This appears to be a strong island effect, compare with:

27. *[What]$_1$ are you tired because you [ran t$_1$]?
28. *It's [a mile]$_1$ that I'm tired because I [ran t$_1$].

Pied-piping the whole island repairs strong island violations (Szabolci 2006), this is the case for ish:

29. *[When]$_1$ will you arrive ish$_1$?
30. When ish will you arrive?
31. *[On a track]$_1$ I ran ish$_1$.
32. *[A track]$_1$ I ran on ish$_1$.
33. *[A track ish]$_1$ I ran on$_1$.
34. On a track ish I ran.

(Incidentally, this shows ish can form a constituent with PP)

Other island effects consistently appear with ish. Wh-movement from islands is licit in Sluicing constructions, but not VP ellipsis (Merchant 2008). This is the case for sentences with ish.

35. The university hired someone who speaks a Balkan language—guess which!
36. *The university hired someone who speaks a Balkan language—guess which they do!
37. They studied a Balkan language ish—guess which!
38. *They studied a Balkan language ish—guess which they did!

5. Analysis

5.1. Ish forms a constituent with PP or VP.

The data in (21-26) show ish may form a constituent with PP. Less clear is what else it may form a constituent with, although (29-30) suggest perhaps VP. Note that because subjects may move to Spec,TP, ish cannot form a constituent with vP. In fact, subjects can move freely out of TP:

39. John swam ish.
40. It's [John]$_1$ that t$_1$ swam ish.

If it can qualify a verb but doesn't form a constituent with vP, VP seems likely. Evidence of this: ish can appear between a verb and adjunct PP, but not between a verb and obligatory PP:

41. John answered my question ish in his talk.
42. I placed it on the table ish.
43. *I placed it ish on the table.
Likewise, *ish cannot appear between objects in a Double Object construction:

44. John gave Mary a letter *ish.
45. *John gave Mary *ish a letter.

5.2. Getting island effects through Freezing

*ish triggers island effects despite appearing to the right of the island on the surface. It's rather difficult to see how this would occur if *ish Merged in the surface position. Instead, I propose that *ish Merges above the XP it modifies. The XP then raises past *ish. This would cause the XP to become an island due to Freezing (Müller 1998):

a.  ... α₁ ... [β ... τ₁ ... ]₂
46. b.  *... α₁ ... [β ... τ₁ ... ]₂ ... τ₂ (Müller 1998: 124)

The simplest (read: least needed machinery) way to achieve this would be to consider *ish the head of a Qualifier Phrase¹, which takes a VP/PP complement. This complement then raises to Spec,QualP:

47.

![Diagram of Qualifier Phrase](image)

Implemented for VP/PP, this would look like

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¹ Meant as a placeholder name only.
48. Mary lived in St. Louis ish.

49. Mary answered my question ish.

5.3. Predictions
If VP does raise above *ish*, it cannot be extracted from. This predicts that many constructions involving A-Movement should be ungrammatical with *ish*. 
Subject-to-Subject Raising: Because the subject originates below the matrix verb, these are predicted to be ungrammatical for the reading in which the matrix V is qualified. This appears to be the case; the reading is only available with control verbs.

50. *John [seemed to swim ish].
51. *John [needs to swim ish].
52. John [wants to swim ish].
53. John [likes to swim ish].

Passives: The internal argument is predicted to be unable to raise to Spec, TP, and so passive constructions should be ungrammatical. There appears to be a problem:

54. My question was answered ish.

However, it appears that *ish is only compatible with stative readings (Embick 2004):

55. The door was open ish.
56. *The door was opened ish.

This reading seems like the correct one for (54). The pair (55-56) suggests *ish is indeed incompatible with verbal passives, and examples like (54) take the structure of (55)—that is, *ish modifies an adjective here.

Unaccusatives: Like passives, the analysis predicts the internal argument cannot raise to subject position. There are certainly some unaccusatives *ish cannot modify; however, I'm uncomfortable generalizing to all unaccustives:

57. *John fell ish.
58. *Bill arrived ish.

6. Survey

Previous accounts (Norde 2007, Bochnak and Csipak 2014, 1st half of this talk) presume *ish to be a feature primarily used by youth.

We don't actually know who uses it.

A survey\(^2\) was conducted in Washington Square Park to rectify this.

6.1. Methodology

Sought grammaticality judgments of sentences containing *ish. Goal of learning who uses and of testing hypothesized analysis.

Each informant rated five sentences:

\(^2\) This was part of a broader survey in which other modules included knowledge of Yiddish-influenced English and pronunciation of foreign loanwords.
59. I live in Chicago ish.
60. I started my homework ish.
61. I didn't write my paper ish.
62. It's New York that I might move to ish.
63. Here's my homework that I finished ish.

- Of these, (59-60) are predicted to be grammatical for *ish* users, and (61-63) are predicted to be ungrammatical.

- Each informant rated the sentences on a three point scale. Half used the scale in (64-66), while the other half used the one in (67-69). There was no significant difference in responses to the different scales.
  64. 1—People can say this and it sounds ok.
  65. 2—People can say something like this, but it doesn't sound right.
  66. 3—I have no idea what this is.

  67. 1—Sounds natural, and I know what it means.
  68. 2—Sounds unnatural, but I can understand it.
  69. 3—Sounds unnatural, and I have no idea what it means.

- Informants who were asked whether they knew what the sentence meant were asked to give the meaning when they claimed to understand it. The majority gave the intended meaning.

- We surveyed 104 informants (White, native English speakers) over a two week period. Informants were split equally among males/females, broken roughly into three age groups: under 26, 26-49, 50 and over.

6.2. Results

- Overall, no sentence was accepted by a majority of informants. However, the sentences predicted to be grammatical were nearly categorically understood, while the predicted ungrammatical sentences were accepted far less and rejected outright far more.
Acceptance of sentences containing *ish* appears to be a change in progress. In logistic regression using Rbrul (Johnson 2009), age is a significant predictor of acceptance (59-60):

**Fig. 1.** Overall grammaticality judgments of *ish* sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence and rating</th>
<th>1 (Accepted as grammatical)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3 (Rejected completely)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I live in Chicago ish.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I started my homework ish.</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn't write my paper ish.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here's my homework that I finished ish.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's New York that I'm moving to ish.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 2.** Results of mixed-effects regression in Rbrul for all sentences.
This may be visualized by the following conditional inference tree, which shows that sentence type and age are the main factors influencing acceptance:

![Conditional Inference Tree](image)

Fig. 3. Conditional inference tree for survey data.

- *Ish* attached to PP appears to be older than when attached to VP. When cross-tabulating results for age and gender, nearly all cells show higher acceptance rates of (59) than (60).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Older</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Younger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 4. Acceptance of *I live in Chicago ish.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Older</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Younger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5. Acceptance of *I started my homework ish.*
Additionally, logistic regression in Rbrul selects age, ethnicity, and questionnaire version as significant predictors of ish+PP acceptance. Only age is a significant predictor of ish+VP. This suggests ish+PP is subject to social evaluations and more of a sociolinguistic marker than ish+VP.

Fig. 6. Results of mixed-effects regression in Rbrul for I live in Chicago ish.

Fig. 7. Results of mixed-effects regression in Rbrul for I started my homework ish.
• The speakers accepting sentences (61-63) are not doing the task wrong. Informants accepting negation were very likely to accept clefting as well:

Fig. 8. Acceptance of *Here's my homework that I finished ish*, given other sentences.

7. Those people's *ish*

7.1. Distribution

*Ish* is not affected by NPI-licensors:

70. I didn't read the book *ish*.
71. Few people liked the movie *ish*.
72. Who read the book *ish*?

It does not show island effects:

73. It's New York that I'm moving to *ish*.
74. *Here's my homework that I finished ish*.
75. *This book I read ish*.
76. *YOUR book, I read ish*.
77. Not a single book did he read *ish*.

Grammaticality due to semantic content rather than syntactic structure:

78. *John fell ish*.
79. The window broke *ish*.
7.2. Analysis

It's right-adjoining to CP.

80.

8. Rapid Grammaticalization

Combining the survey data and proposed analyses, we have a picture of the history of *ish*:

81. Deriving Adj $\rightarrow$ modify PP $\rightarrow$ modify VP $\rightarrow$ modify CP

*Ish* is moving both up and leftward into main clause

These are consistent with minimalist views of syntactic change (Roberts and Roussou 2003).

8.1. Why modify PP before VP?

Aside from these views of syntactic change, there isn't a good explanation as to why *ish* would have undergone a two-step change under other approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+N</th>
<th>-N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+V</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-V</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 9. P&P N/V features (Baker 2003, citing Chomsky 1970)

Allowing *ish* to modify -N categories would simultaneously open up V and P as possibilities.

8.2. Degrammaticalization?

- Norde (2009) argues for cases of DEGRAMMATICALIZATION, by which "a gram in a specific context gains in autonomy or substance on more than one linguistic level." She argues that *ish* provides one example of this.
- Degrammaticalization and grammaticalization treated as separate issues.
- *Ish* data is consistent with grammaticalization though!
9. Conclusion

- *Ish* is a syntactic construction (at least at the moment).
- Provides case study of apparent right-triggered island effects in English due to movement of PP/VP.
- Use of construction is change in progress in apparent time
- Analyses of steps in change suggest construction is grammaticalizing rapidly

References


