A Freezing approach to the *Ish*-construction in English

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1. Overview

- English derivational morpheme *-ish* used as Qualifier in reddish, boyish, etc.
- For some speakers, *ish* may be used to denote approximation outside of adjectival context (Nore 2009, Bochnak and Csipaik 2014).
  1a. I started my homework *ish*, (I kinda started my homework)
  b. I live in Chicago *ish*. (I live kinda in Chicago)

- The analysis: *Ish* is TP-internal, modifying VP or PP. In modifying VP/PP, *ish* must undergo External Merge above the modified phrase. VP/PP then moves past *ish* to obtain the surface structure.

2. Distribution

- *Ish* is not an adverb
  - Unlike other adverbs (Cinque 1999), *ish* cannot be fronted or appear between auxiliaries.
    2a. Often, I take the bus to school.
    b. *Ish, Katie answered my question.
  3a. I will have quickly been beaten by Mary.
    b. *I will have ish been beaten by Mary.

- *Ish* is a Positive Polarity Item
    4a. *I didn’t like the movie ish.
    b. *Did you like the movie ish?
    c. *Few people liked the movie ish.
    d. A lot of people liked the movie ish.
  - To get polarity effects, *ish* is TP-Internal.

- *Ish* triggers strong island effects
  - VP and PP complements may not be clefted when *ish* is present.
    5a. Here’s [the paper], that I [finished t₁].
    b. *Here’s [the paper], that I [finished t₁] ish.
    c. It’s [New York], that I’m [moving [to t₁]].
    d. *It’s [New York], that I’m moving [to t₁] ish.
  - For islands, wh-movement licit in Shoting constructions but not VP ellipsis (Merchant 2008). This is the case for *ish* as well.
    6a. John hired someone who speaks a Balkan language—guess which!
    b. *John hired someone who speaks a Balkan language—guess which they did!
    c. They studied a Balkan language ish—guess which!
    d. *They studied a Balkan language ish—guess which they did!

3. Analysis

- **Proposal**
  - It is unlikely that *ish* could trigger island effects from the right by undergoing External Merge in surface position.
  - Movement past *ish* could derive island effects through Freezing (Müller 1998).
    7a. ... α₁ ... β₁ ... t₁ ... t₂
    b. *... α₁ ... β₁ ... t₁ ... t₂
  - *Ish* as head of Qualifier Phrase, taking XP complement that then moves past it.
  - XP cannot move directly to Spec,QualP due to anti-locality.
  - Possible solution: Prosodically, there appears to be pause between XP and *ish* on surface. Pause as null Spec,QualP Spelled-Out in PF: XP moves to Specifier above pause and *ish*.

- **XP complement may be PP or VP**
  - *Ish* may be pipped-piled along with an entire PP.
    8a. *[When]₁ will you arrive ish,*?
    b. When ish will you arrive?₁
    9a. *On a track₁, I ran ish₁.
    b. *[A track₁, I ran on ish₁.]
    c. *[A track ish₁], I ran on₁. d. On a track ish I ran.

- **VP**
  - Subjects, but not objects, may be clefted.
    10a. It’s [John₁], that t₁, swam ish.
    b. *It’s [a paper, that I finished t₁ ish.]
  - *Ish* may appear between a V and adjunct PP, but not between a V and obligatory PP. It may not appear between objects of a Double Object Construction.
    11a. John answered my question ish in his talk.
    b. *I placed it ish on the table.
    12a. John gave Mary a letter ish.
    b. *John gave Mary ish a letter.

4. Discussion

- *Ish* is functional head of larger phrase, taking what it approximates as complement.
  - Movement analysis derives island effects while maintaining surface structure.
  - Additional structure needed to avoid anti-locality problems, perhaps contributed by pause in PF.
  - Analysis predicts several Raising constructions to be incompatible with *ish*, as embedded subjects or internal arguments could not be extracted from VP. This appears to be a correct prediction (see right).
  - Polarity effects arise because QualP is TP-internal.

- **Subject-to-Subject Raising**
  13a. *John, [seemed t₁, to swim ish].
    b. *John₁, [wants t₁, to swim ish].
    c. John₁, [likes t₁, to swim ish].
  - **Unaccusatives**
    14a. *John fell ish.
    b. *John arrived ish.
    c. ??The window broke ish.
    d. ??The door opened ish.
  - **Passives**
    - The following is licit:
      15. *My question was answered ish.
    - Has stative reading—“My question was in the state of being kinda answered.”
    - *Ish* is only compatible with adjectival passives—no movement required
      16a. The door was opened ish.

Selected References