Some new kind of *ish* in American English

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Ish in English

- Historically a derivational morpheme creating adjectives
  - *childish, reddish, etc.*
- Meaning of somewhat/kind of
**Ish in English**

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  - *childish*, *reddish*, etc.
- Meaning of somewhat/kind of
- Used productively, particularly with numerals
  - Arrive at *sevenish*, feeling *happyish*, a *New Yorkish* vibe, etc.
Ish in English

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  - *childish, reddish, etc.*
- Meaning of somewhat/kind of
- Used productively, particularly with numerals
  - Arrive at *sevenish*, feeling *happyish*, a *New Yorkish* vibe, etc.
- Corpus studies: production varies with *register* (Theijsen et al. 2010, Ruzaite 2012)
This Study’s *Ish*

- Used in sentences where no adjective/adjectival reading present
  1. I finished my homework *ish*.
     ‘I kind of finished my homework.’
  2. I live in Chicago *ish*.
     ‘I live kind of in Chicago.’
- Similar meaning to *-ish*
- Seems to modify VP/PP
This Study’s \textit{Ish}

- Few studies (primarily formal) observe feature (Bochnak and Csipak 2014, Duncan 2015)
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Two issues:
  - Assumption: in use among young people
Research Questions

- Who uses *ish*?
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Two issues:
- Assumption: in use among young people
- Formal approaches disagree in both analysis and data
Formal Approaches to *ish*

- Put broadly, question of what *ish* modifies
- Approach 1: modifies whole sentence (Bochnak and Csipak 2014)
  - Restricted only by semantic content
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CP

I finished my paper  ish
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Approach 2: modifies particular phrase (Duncan 2015)
- Assertion: *ish* triggers island effects
- Surface structure derived through movement
- Grammatical constraints due to Freezing effects (Müller 1998)
Formal Approaches to *ish*

- Approach 2: modifies particular phrase (Duncan 2015)
  - Assertion: *ish* triggers island effects
  - Surface structure derived through movement
  - Grammatical constraints due to Freezing effects
Approaches have differing predictions
- Clefting VP/PP objects ruled out in Approach 2, fine in Approach 1
  - ?It’s my homework that I finished ish.
- Both find incompatibilities with NPI-licensors
  - Differing reasons: entirely semantic in 1, semantic and c-command issue in 2
  - #/*I didn’t write my paper ish.
Research Questions

- Who uses *ish*?
- What is the structure of *ish*-constructions?
Methodology

- Grammaticality judgment survey
Methodology

- Grammaticality judgment survey
- Honest reporting an issue? (Rickford 1975)
  - Seems to be below level of consciousness
- Other alternatives not viable
  - Corpus study finds 0 tokens in both Buckeye Corpus and COCA sample (Pitt et al. 2007, Davies 2012)
  - Difficult to elicit, and non-elicitation =/= non-use
Methodology

- Grammaticality judgment survey
- Five test sentences:
  - I live in Chicago ish.
  - I started my homework ish.
  - I didn’t write my paper ish.
  - Here’s my homework that I finished ish.
  - It’s New York that I’m moving to ish.
- Testing for acceptance of feature and grammatical constraints
Methodology

- Grammaticality judgment survey
- Sentences rated on three-point scale
  - 1: Sounds natural, and I know what it means.
  - 2: Sounds unnatural, but I can understand it.
  - 3: Sounds unnatural, and I have no idea what it means.
Methodology

- Conducted in Manhattan park
- Solicited white native English speakers
- 104 subjects, divided male/female
- Roughly three age groups
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- 104 subjects, divided male/female
- Roughly three age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Gender/Age</th>
<th>Young 18-25</th>
<th>Middle 26-49</th>
<th>Old 50+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conducted in Manhattan park
Solicted white native English speakers
104 subjects, divided male/female
Roughly three age groups
Part of larger 5–10 minute survey
Collected birthplace, education, political affiliation
Overall Results

- About half of respondents accepted plain sentences
- Far fewer accepted clefted/negated sentences
- Clefted/negated sentences received far more 3’s than plain 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>
Overall Results by Age Group

- Majority of younger/middle groups accepted PP sentence
- Majority of younger group accepted VP sentence
- Group differences significant ($\chi^2$ test, $p<.05$)
## I live in Chicago ish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response by age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
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<td>21</td>
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p = 0.039
I started my homework ish.

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p=0.032
Overall Trend

- Plain sentences increase in acceptance over time
- Clefted/negated sentences remain unaccepted over same period
Logistic Regression

- Fixed factors of age, sentence type, gender
- Random factor of interviewer
- Age and sentence type significant
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Estimate (β)</th>
<th>p–value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (modifying PP)</td>
<td>0.865134</td>
<td>0.0994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negation</td>
<td>-1.942741</td>
<td>7.27E–08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleft VP obj.</td>
<td>-1.720599</td>
<td>6.12E–07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cleft PP obj.</td>
<td>-2.220646</td>
<td>6.49E–09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modifying VP</td>
<td>-0.469227</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenum</td>
<td>-0.031088</td>
<td>9.93E–06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

- Question 1: Who uses *ish*?
  - Age of respondent significant predictor of acceptance
  - Younger speakers of all backgrounds accepted *ish*-constructions
  - Points to change in progress within at least American English as a whole
Question 2: What is the structure of *ish*-constructions?

- Sentence type is a significant predictor of acceptance
- Most speakers—even those who accept *ish*-constructions—reject clefted/negated sentences
- Appear to be grammatical constraints → more complex structure than modifying sentence
Further thoughts

- Is this one construction or many?
- Acceptance of PP appears to lead acceptance of VP in apparent time
- Separate constructions or separate stages?
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References


