

# A chameleon abroad: English *-ish* and *ish* used in Norwegian

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Norwegian has borrowed both the suffix or clitic *-ish* and the free word *ish* from English. The oldest attested use in Norwegian is from 1996. Building primarily on a collection of 240 examples of use, the article describes and analyses the grammar and meanings of Norwegian *(-)**ish*. The findings are compared to English, and while most kinds of *(-)**ish* use are found to be borrowed, there is also at least one apparently non-English innovation. The use of *(-)**ish* in Norwegian is frowned upon and condemned by some language users, but it seems to have become firmly established in the language.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction

The English suffix *-ish* has, during the last few decades, had its use expanded considerably, and it has even come to be used as a free morpheme, the word *ish* (Norde 2009: 223–25). (To avoid the cumbersome “*-ish* and *ish*”, we will write *(-)**ish*.) Example (1) shows *(-)**ish* attached to a whole noun phrase, while (2) gives an example of free-morpheme use.

- (1) And the clothes could be old person-ish too.<sup>2</sup>
- (2) Is everyone excited? I am – ish.

At least since the mid-1990s, *(-)**ish* has started to be used in Norwegian too. (3) is the oldest example that we have found, from 1996. An example of the free morpheme is given in (4).

1. The article is based partly on the first author’s MA thesis (Nilssen 2015), supervised by the second author, but the theoretical discussion is largely new here.
2. A list of sources is provided at the end of the article.

- (3) prøvd Afterstep? den er relativt beta'ish, men lover godt  
'(have you) tried Afterstep? it's relatively beta'ish, but promising'<sup>3</sup>
- (4) DIY: Skappelgenseren – åja, vi strikker også..ish!  
'DIY: the Skappel sweater – oh yes, we're knitting too..ish!'<sup>4</sup>

These and all the other examples from Norwegian below are more or less informal language, although many come from professional writers (see the list of sources). Nilssen (2015: 73) notes that in the Atekst media archive (see Section 3) there are few examples in the early years of our millennium, but the number is increasing steadily towards 2013 (the most recent whole year studied).

The developments of (-)ish in English have been studied by several researchers, see Section 2. Its use in Norwegian, however, has received little or no attention in language research before Nilssen (2015), except that it has been given two entries in an online dictionary of new words, as part of *Det Norske Akademis Store Ordbok*.<sup>5</sup> One entry is for the suffix *-ish*, another for the word *ish*, which is categorized as an adverb. Discussions by “laymen” on the Internet are not difficult to come by; see for instance the following annoyed utterance:

Hva er greia med `ish?

Har i løpet av kort tid (spesielt de siste ukene) lagt merke til at folk har startet med noe helt idiotisk. Nemlig å legge til `ish bak et ord. Jeg har ikke peiling på hva dette er for noe (nytt nettord som har startet?) men jeg kjenner magen vrerger seg da jeg både hører og leser folk som skriver dette.

(<http://freak.no/forum/showthread.php?t=236545>)

‘What’s the deal with `ish? For a short time (especially the last few weeks), I’ve been noticing that people have started with something completely idiotic. Namely adding `ish after a word. I’ve no idea what this is (some new Internet word that’s cropped up?), but I feel my stomach turning when I both hear and read people writing this.’  
(Authors’ translation.)

3. *Beta* refers to a product under development.
4. The sweater is named after the TV presenter Dorthé Skappel.
5. <http://www.naob.no/nyordene>

This was written in 2012, that is, 16 years after the example in (3). The fact that the phenomenon came to the attention of the writer of the quote in 2012 may indicate that the usage was on the rise at that time. The present contribution explores the grammar and meaning of *(-)ish* used in present-day Norwegian. Our examples are from written Norwegian and have been collected from corpora and the Internet, mostly as part of Nilssen's (2015) study (see section 3), but supplemented for this article.

Specifically, we aim to answer the following questions: (a) What kinds of words, phrases etc. does *(-)ish* combine with to form larger constructions? (b) What kinds of constructions do these combinations result in? (c) To what extent are we dealing with a word rather than a suffix or clitic? (We will discuss the difference between suffix and clitic only briefly.) (d) What is the grammatical category or categories of *(-)ish* (adjectival, adverbial, ...)? (e) What meaning(s) does *(-)ish* have?

The questions that we raise, then, pertain to the grammar and the semantics of the morpheme(s). For reasons of space, we will have little to say about contact linguistics and pragmatics, although of course, these fields are clearly relevant here. We will, however, compare the grammar and semantics of Norwegian usage to what has been found for English.

The article has the following parts: Section 2 presents English *(-)ish* and the research literature dealing with it. Section 3 describes how examples of Norwegian *(-)ish* were collected and analysed in Nilssen (2015). Section 4 presents the empirical and theoretical findings of that work. Section 5 develops those findings further in grammatical and semantic analyses. Section 6 concludes the article.

## 2 English *(-)ish*

The English suffix *-ish* and its cognates are common to the Germanic languages, for instance as German *-isch* and Scandinavian *-(i)sk*. In Old English, it had the form *-isc*. At an early stage, it was used to form adjectives of nationality and ethnicity (as in modern *English*, *Danish*). An early extension was to nominal bases denoting animate beings (*foolish*, *wolfish*), and later to inanimate bases (*bookish*, *stylish*). In Middle English, the suffix started to be used with adjectival bases (*greenish*, *tallish*), and even later, its application has been extended to proper nouns (*Shakespeareish*), numerals (*sixish*), and adverbs (*soonish*). For more about the his-

torical development of the English suffix, see Morris (1998) and Ciszek (2012).

The use of (-)ish in Modern English is discussed by Marchand (1969), Malkiel (1977), Morris (1998), Szymanek (2005), Kuzmack (2007), Norde (2009), Sugawara (2012), Traugott and Trousdale (2013), Bochnak and Csipak (2014), and Eitelmann, Haugland and Haumann (2015). Kuzmack (2007) identifies three variants of (-)ish. The first is the one found in adjectives of nationality and ethnicity referred to above. It does not take part in the changes relevant to the present study. The second and third, however, do. The second variant is more productive and is added to nominal bases (N), yielding adjectives with meanings like ‘of the nature of N’ or ‘like N’. This suffix variant emphasizes similarity, and Kuzmack calls it comparative *ish*. The third variant is added to bases in the form of adjectives (and adverbs) and means ‘somewhat A, approximately A, kind of A’. The meaning of this last variant is clearly related to that of the second, but it rather emphasizes lack of equivalence; Kuzmack calls it qualifier *ish*. For instance, while *boyish* (the second variant) means ‘similar to a boy’, *greenish* (the third variant) means ‘almost green, but *not quite* green’. Kuzmack argues that while comparative (-)ish has become a clitic, qualifier (-)ish has developed further into a free word, and Norde (2009) shares this view. We will look at their different properties in turn. Both Kuzmack and Norde focus on the question of degrammaticalization. The historical developments in English are not a central concern here; rather, our focus is on the synchronic properties of (-)ish in English as the donor language.

Comparative (-)ish attached not to noun stems but to noun phrases is documented by Kuzmack to exist since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, e.g. in *a clean-cravatish formality of manner* (from Dickens, 1836). A modern example is *real, real grumpy-old-man-ish*. Kuzmack further documents that (-)ish can now also be attached to verb phrases (*It’s very long and not very “can’t put it down”-ish*, about a book) and clauses and sentences (*[I’ve] just been feeling very ... “What do I do now?”-ish*). The property of attaching to phrases and even larger constructions is Kuzmack’s and Norde’s main basis for considering comparative (-)ish to be a clitic rather than a suffix. As opposed to qualifier (-)ish, however, it has not become a free word, and this is reflected in its inability to be stressed (*\*grumpy-old-man-ISH*). All the examples given by Kuzmack and Norde seem to show that the construction formed by phrase + (-)ish is adjectival, i.e., (-)ish is an adjectival head of the construction.

Qualifier (*-ish*) was originally used with adjectival and adverbial stems (*greenish, soonish*), but can now be attached to the phrase level (examples provided by Kuzmack): *Then I'm good to go -ish, Got this email just now-ish*. It can also be used with verb phrases (*I finished the project (ish)*), noun phrases (*So, yeah, we're friends-ish*), and prepositional phrases (*[They] are on their way ...ish...*). It can even appear without a host, as in *Can you swim well? Ish*. Traugott and Trousdale (2013: 236) give an example of an adjective *ish* meaning 'unsure': "If you're like me and feel a little *ish* about dirty dining [...]". In these latter variants, (*-ish*) can be stressed (*We're friends-ISH*); indeed, it sometimes must be, like when it is the sole word in an utterance such as the answer in the mini-dialogue about swimming. Taken together, there is solid evidence that qualifier (*-ish*) can be considered a word. The examples with this variant seem to show that whatever (*-ish*) is attached to, the resulting construction is of the same type as the co-constituent of (*-ish*). It appears that qualifier (*-ish*) is not the head of the construction, and Kuzmack states that is an adverb.

Bochnak and Csipak (2014) deal primarily with a subtype of Kuzmack's qualifier (*-ish*), namely sentence-final (*-ish*), as in *I liked the movie ... ish*. They call it a metalinguistic degree morpheme and compare it to metalinguistic comparatives (e.g. *Your problems are more financial than legal*, indicating that *financial* is a more appropriate description than *legal*), *sorta* (e.g. *Lee drew a circle, sorta*, indicating that *circle* may not be quite right), and sentence-final *not* (e.g. *I liked the movie ... NOT*, denying the content of the main part of the sentence). In this light, sentence-final (*-ish*) belongs in a set of metalinguistic expressions indicating the appropriateness or correctness of (part of) a sentence.

### 3 Data collection and analysis

For Nilssen (2015), examples of (*-ish*) used in Norwegian were collected from the Internet, a media text archive, and a newspaper corpus.<sup>6</sup> An

6. A search in Talebanken, (<http://folk.uib.no/hnohs/Talebanken.html>), a corpus of spoken Norwegian, yielded only two hits. Searches for the norwegianized spelling variant (*-isj*) yielded no hits. The reason may be that many writers are reluctant to norwegianize English expressions. Also, *ish* is homophonous with the interjection *isj!* 'ugh!', and norwegianization would render them homographs.

Internet search with Google was done on April 24, 2014, and held open until all hit pages had been visited. The search was for the word *ish*, and it was limited to pages written in Norwegian. This procedure found examples where *ish* was written as a separate word, and also cases where it was written with a hyphen or the like (*-ish*, *...ish*, *(ish)*, etc.) However, Internet examples where it was written as a suffix, i.e. not graphically separated, were not found (e.g. *londonish*). *(-)ish* was also searched for in Atekst's media archive<sup>7</sup> (on October 17, 2014), and the hits here, too, were limited to graphically separated cases of *(-)ish*. A third search was done in the Norwegian newspaper corpus (a monitor corpus of more than a billion words, from the period from 1998 to the present),<sup>8</sup> also on October 17, 2014. This search was able to find both graphically separated tokens and examples with the suffix written non-hyphenated.

After removal of "noise", duplicates, and metatextual examples (where *(-)ish* was discussed or evidently used parodically), there remained 240 tokens of *(-)ish* used in Norwegian text, which presumably gives us a fairly good picture of how it is used. Because of the limitations of the two first searches, however, our materials cannot be regarded as fully representative of the use of *(-)ish* in Norwegian; examples with the morpheme written as a suffix (without a hyphen or the like) are probably underrepresented. For this reason, we have not done any statistical calculations based on the categorization described below. The examples were recorded in a database, along with screen images for the Internet examples (to assist in the text interpretation).

Figure 1 shows the grammatical levels that need to be taken into consideration in the analysis of the data. The placement of *(-)ish* after its co-constituent dominates, but we will see examples of the opposite order in Section 4.

In the analysis of every example, the beginning and end of the *(-)ish* construction, formed by *(-)ish* and a co-constituent, was determined. Further, the examples were categorized for a series of properties:

- (a) placement of *(-)ish* after or before its co-constituent
- (b) orthography of the junction between co-constituent and *(-)ish*
- (c) category of the co-constituent (word class, phrase type, etc.)

7. <https://web.retriever-info.com/services/archive.html>

8. <http://avis.uib.no>

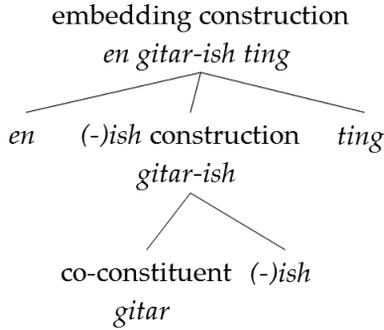


Figure 1. *(-)ish* constructions and their constituents and embedding constructions, exemplified with *en gitar-ish ting* ‘a guitar-ish thing’

- (d) modifiers in the *(-)ish* construction
- (e) embedding construction
- (f) syntactic function of the *(-)ish* construction
- (g) category of the *(-)ish* construction
- (h) stressability of *(-)ish*

As an example, *Det er en gitar-ish ting* ‘That (a dobro) is a guitar-ish thing’ was categorized as follows: The *(-)ish* construction is *gitar-ish*, and *(-)ish* is (a) placed after its co-constituent, (b) written with a hyphen, (c) combined with a noun co-constituent, (d) used without modification; the *(-)ish* construction (e) is embedded in a noun phrase, (f) functions as a prenominal modifier, and (g) is formally an adjectival expression; and (h) *(-)ish* is unstressable.

In many examples, the *(-)ish* construction was not embedded, viz. in headlines or various other kinds of grammatically shortened utterances. Such cases could not be categorized for (e) and (f), and (g) and (h) would often also be difficult to determine.

#### 4 Overview of the main uses of *(-)ish* in Norwegian

We cannot present a full overview here of all the property combinations found when categorizing the 240 examples as described above. In particular, non-embedded *(-)ish* constructions will not be in focus (although some examples will be given). For fuller treatment, see Nilssen

(2015: ch. 4.). First, we will look at Norwegian usage where we interpret (-)ish as being most naturally unstressed (at least not carrying primary stress) if the text were spoken. Most of the examples correspond fairly closely to usage found in English. But we have also found examples where (-)ish exhibits properties that we have not seen mentioned in the literature on English. Second, we will present some examples where we interpret (-)ish as being most naturally stressed in spoken language. This usage largely corresponds to Bochnak and Csipak's (2014) metalinguistic degree (-)ish and accounts for a much smaller share of the materials.

#### 4.1 Uses where (-)ish tends to be unstressed

This section is organized in three parts based on the category of the (-)ish construction (the construction formed by (-)ish and a co-constituent): adjectival (-)ish constructions (including quantifiers) and nominal (-)ish constructions (including those referring to the hour or year).

##### 4.1.1 Adjectival (-)ish constructions

These constructions account for about half of the examples. The co-constituent of (-)ish is either a (common or proper) noun or an adjective, more or less fitting into Kuzmack's classes of comparative and qualifier (-)ish, respectively. (Quantifiers are assumed to be a subclass of adjectives; see 4.1.2.) The embedding construction is either a noun phrase (usually with the (-)ish construction as a premodifier) or a clause or sentence (with the (-)ish construction as a predicate complement of the subject or object or as an adverbial of manner). Examples (5)–(10) provide a fairly representative selection of adjectival (-)ish constructions.

- (5) ... Zune er en iPod-ish MP3-spiller som trolig vil bli lansert i November  
'Zune is an iPod-ish MP3 player that probably will be launched in November'
- (6) Kontoret hennes er typisk professor-ish  
'Her office is typically professor-ish'
- (7) Selv spiller han sart, forsiktig simon-og-garfunkel-ish gitarmusikk  
'He himself plays tender, careful simon-and-garfunkel-ish guitar music'

- (8) Eg trur me klipper deg litt slik shane-ish, sa ho  
 ‘I think we’ll cut your hair (literally: you) a little shane-ish, she said’<sup>9</sup>
- (9) P85 rød MC legges ut til “gammel ish” pris på finn idag.  
 ‘P85 red MC will be posted at an “old-ish” price on finn today’<sup>10</sup>
- (10) Prøver fortvilt å være rutinert-ish i en ellers kaotisk hverdag  
 ‘(I’m) trying desperately to be experienced-ish in an otherwise chaotic everyday life’

The adjectival nature of these *(-)ish* constructions is evident from their functions in embedding constructions. Also, note that they may contain modifiers typical of adjective phrases, as illustrated by *typisk* ‘typically’ in (6) and *litt* ‘a little’ in (8). Our only example with *(-)ish* followed by an inflectional suffix is given in (11), where *-e* shows plural agreement. An example of the opposite order is shown in (12), where *-e* in *hvite* is inflectional (also plural agreement).

- (11) [Bandet] spiller akustisk(ish)e julesanger mest egnet for folk som tar seg en tur på byen lille-julaften  
 ‘The band plays acoustic(ish) Christmas carols best suited for people who go out on the town on the night before Christmas Eve’
- (12) Jeg har noen hvite ish prikker/ uthevelser rett under penishodet  
 ‘I have some white ish spots/ swellings right under my glans’

Examples with quantifiers are given in (13) and (14).

- (13) ... det er vel rundt ørten. Ørten-ish, for å være helt unøyaktig?  
 ‘I guess they’re around umpteen. Umpteen-ish, to be quite imprecise?’
- (14) Av 250-ish deltakere var 50-ish av dem kvinner  
 ‘Out of 250-ish participants, 50-ish were women’

#### 4.1.2 Nominal *(-)ish* constructions

The use of *(-)ish* after expressions referring to the hour is probably the

9. *Shane* probably refers to the actor Shane Dawson.

10. *Finn* refers to the market-place Internet page [finn.no](http://finn.no).

most entrenched aspect of the grammar of (-)ish in Norwegian (spoken, at least) and which most people associate with (-)ish when asked – at any rate, that is the case for the present authors. In our materials, however, this use is not very frequent. Formally, the expressions are nominal. Some examples are given in (15)–(17).

- (15) jeg skal nemlig på p3 fra 8-ish  
'(You see,) I'm going on P3 from 8-ish'<sup>11</sup>
- (16) Vi lå i senga til ti-ish  
'We lay in bed until ten-ish'
- (17) Rundt 2006'ish, hvis jeg ikke husker feil  
'Around 2006'ish, if I don't remember incorrectly'

Our materials contain relatively few examples of other nominal (-)ish constructions. Two are given in (18) and (19).

- (18) Alle snakker flytende manusforfatterish, med usannsynlig velplasserte punchlines  
'Everybody speaks fluent script-writerish, with unbelievably well-placed punchlines'
- (19) [Bandet] har lagt hjerte og sjel i sjangeren country-ish  
'The band has put their hearts and souls into the genre of country-ish'

Note that (18) contains the name of a “language”. Language names tend to be ambivalent between noun and adjective in Norwegian (e.g., *engelsk* ‘English’ belongs in both classes), and some of the nominal expressions in (-)ish, like *manusforfatterish*, appear to belong grammatically to this construction type. (It would seem possible to inflect this word like a noun, e.g. *manusforfatterishen* ‘the (language of) script-writerish’ in the definite singular – see further Section 5.1.) The example in (19) is typical in that it refers to an artistic genre of an indeterminate character. In (20) an example is given which could be interpreted as either nominal or adjectival and illustrates the intermediate status of expressions referring to genres.

11. P3 is a radio channel.

- (20) Bandets sjanger kaller hun punk-ish  
 ‘The genre of the band, she refers to as punk-ish’

4.2 *Uses where (-)ish tends to be stressed*

This kind of *(-)ish* use is less frequent in our materials than unstressed *(-)ish*. Many of the examples involve utterances of less than a sentence, and some are headlines. A good example is given in (4) above, and a few more in (21)–(24). In (21), the first token of *(-)ish* is the relevant one, the second being an example where *(-)ish* would probably be unstressed.

- (21) Det skal være gjenkjennbart hvilket verk vi spiller. Ish. Gjenkjennbart-ish  
 ‘It should be recognizable which work we’re playing. Ish. Recognizable-ish’
- (22) Strekkmerker, ish?  
 ‘Stretch marks, ish?’
- (23) Reiseruten. Ish  
 ‘The itinerary. Ish’
- (24) Altfor ivrig! Ish  
 ‘Far too eager! Ish’

Recall from (11) that in *akustisk(ish)e* ‘acoustic(ish)’ with unstressed *(-)ish*, the inflectional suffix *-e* follows *(-)ish*, while in (12) the different order is seen for *hvite ish* ‘white ish’. In all examples of inflection in constructions with stressed *(-)ish*, *(-)ish* is placed after the inflectional suffix, as in (21)–(23) above.

Our materials include several examples where it is hard to decide between stressed and unstressed *(-)ish*, such as (25)–(28). We tend to regard (25) as an example of stressed *(-)ish*; the natural way to pronounce it is by giving *(-)ish* the intonation of an insertion. The other examples are harder to categorize.

- (25) Miljøpartiet de mektige (-ish) bestemte seg for at bevisene ... var for uklare  
 ‘The Environmental Party of the Mighty (-ish) decided that the evidence ...was too unclear’
- (26) Men vi var på utflukt til et magisk slott ish  
 ‘But we were on an outing to a magic castle ish’

- (27) Delenummeret på dem slutter iallefall på N62 ish  
 ‘Well, the part number on them ends in N62 ish’

In (28), (-)ish is used alone with the grammatical properties of an adjective; *veldig “ish” på tiden* is an adjectival phrase functioning as a predicate complement. The meaning of *ish* is here something like ‘imprecise’ or ‘vague’.

- (28) Jeg er veldig “ish” på tiden  
 ‘I’m very “ish” timewise’

We have found a couple of examples where (-)ish is used as the first part of a compound noun, two of which are given in (29) and (30).

- (29) Være på ish-tid  
 ‘Being on ish-time’
- (30) Den gylne regelen er å være tydelig, slik at de involverte er klar over ish-aspektet.  
 ‘The golden rule is to be explicit, so that those involved are aware of the ish-aspect’

## 5 The grammar and meanings of (-)ish in Norwegian

### 5.1 The grammar of unstressed (-)ish

The (-)ish constructions presented in Section 4.1.1 have (-)ish combining with nominal or adjectival constituents to form constructions with properties that are clearly adjectival, i.e. with similar functions to adjectival phrases in noun phrases as well as clauses/sentences.

When the co-constituent is a noun (e.g. *professor-ish*, *simon-og-garfunkel-ish*), it is clear that the adjectival nature of the (-)ish construction comes from (-)ish and not the noun. Thus, (-)ish is an adjectival head with a meaning like ‘similar to N’. When both the co-constituent of (-)ish and the (-)ish construction are adjectival, the status of (-)ish is less obvious (e.g. *gammel ish*, *rutinert-ish*). The (-)ish construction may be analysed in the same way as when the co-constituent is nominal, with (-)ish an adjectival head. However, it is also possible to regard (-)ish as an adverbial modifier and the (-)ish construction as headed by the adjectival co-constituent.

In nominal (*-ish*) constructions referring to hour or year (see Section 4.1.2), (*-ish*) is combined with a functionally nominal co-constituent (although formally it may be a numeral or the like). The (*-ish*) construction is also nominal (as evidenced by its function as the complement of a preposition in examples (15)–(17), e.g. *fra 8-ish*). In such examples, an analysis parallel to the second alternative above for adjectival (*-ish*) constructions is possible: The (*-ish*) construction is headed by the nominal co-constituent of (*-ish*), and (*-ish*) is an adverbial modifier. However, it is also possible to regard (*-ish*) as a nominal head.

The latter alternative is how the other nominal (*-ish*) constructions in Section 4.1.2 need to be analysed. The examples from Nilssen (2015), like those given in (18)–(20), are often open to alternative analyses as adjectival; recall that they resemble language names in this respect (compare *manusforfatterish* ‘script writerish’ and *engelsk* ‘English’). However, we can supplement Nilssen’s findings with expressions in (*-ish*) that are inflected as masculine nouns, with plural and definite suffixes. Examples (31)–(35) have been found by searching the Internet with Google.

- (31) Synd, i og med at hele denne ‘kodeord’ ishen nærmest varte runden ut  
 ‘A pity, since this whole ‘codeword’ ish lasted almost all throughout the round.’<sup>12</sup>
- (32) Men tuuuuusent takk for guide-ishen!  
 ‘But a thooooousand thanks for the guide-ish!’
- (33) fordi ... mor ikke ville la meg bruke ene saus-ishen de hadde  
 ‘because Mother wouldn’t let me use one sauce-ish that they had’
- (34) Likte tights ishen din!:D  
 ‘I liked your tights ish! :D’<sup>13</sup>
- (35) I går klarte jeg mange flere push-ups-isher enn tidligere. Skriver isher siden jeg fortsatt har knærne nedi OG bruker strikk ...  
 ‘Yesterday I managed many more push-ups-ishes than before. I’m writing ishes since I’m still doing them on my knees AND with rubber bands’<sup>14</sup>

12. The expression ‘kodeord’ *ishen* refers to a way of speaking.

13. The English plural *tights* is typically singular in Norwegian, thus definite singular *tightsen* ‘the tight-fitting leg garment’.

14. The English plural *push-ups* is normally plural also in Norwegian, but singular forms

In examples (31)–(35), it is possible to analyse (-)ish as a nominal derivational suffix attached to a nominal stem, producing a new masculine nominal stem that is capable of receiving the inflectional suffixes typical of nouns.

The ambivalent adjectival–nominal nature of (-)ish is illustrated well in the passage in (36) recounting a meeting with a large reptile, where *lizard'ish* appears first to be used as an adjective ('lizard-like'), but then later clearly as a nominal expression ('the lizard-like sth.') with definite singular inflection added to (-)ish.

- (36) men denne jævelen her var seriøst svær. Aldri sett noe så gigantisk (lizard'ish) gå rundt på fortauet ... .. han kunne lett ha tatt meg igjen om jeg la på sprang. Nå spør det om det sier mer om meg eller lizard'ishen, men for et beist!  
 'but this bastard was seriously big. Never seen anything so gigantic (lizard'ish) walk around on the pavement ... .. he could easily have caught up with me if I started running. That may say more about me than about the lizard'ish, but what a beast!'

The presentation above has shown that unstressed (-)ish combines (a) with adjectival expressions to form adjectival expressions, (b) with nominal expressions to form adjectival expressions, and (c) with nominal expressions to form nominal expressions.

English (-)ish has, as we have seen, partly developed from a suffix into a clitic and even further into a free word. In Norwegian, it is sometimes possible to regard (-)ish as an adjectival derivational suffix (e.g. in *professor-ish*, *rutinert-ish*) and sometimes as a nominal derivational suffix (e.g. in *manusforfatterish*). As such, it is expected to take adjectival and nominal inflection, respectively, as has also been illustrated (e.g. in *akustisk(ish)e* and *guide-ishen*). However, examples with (-)ish "outside" of the adjectival or nominal inflection have also been found, e.g. in *hvite ish* above and in (37):

like *pushupsen* 'the push-up' are also found. Thus, *push-ups-isher* might be interpreted as double-marked for the plural, but this is not evident given that English plural -s may be found in clear Norwegian singulars.

- (37) Når du ser noen bekjente-venner-ish og du vet ikke om du skal stoppe eller ikke  
 ‘When you see some acquaintances-friends-ish and you don’t know whether to stop or not’

In such usage, (*-ish*) rather has the character of a clitic that is added to a full-fledged phrase. Examples where it is attached to complex names, e.g. as (38) and (39), are similar:

- (38) Noe særlig “Hot Toddies” (Randy Newman’ish) og “Steady Pace” (The Band’ish) er utsøkte eksempler på  
 ‘Something that “Hot Toddies” (Randy Newman’ish) and “Steady Pace” (The Band’ish) are exquisite examples of’
- (39) Bratten har kort, svart skinnjakke. Er vever, litt mystisk, litt [E]dith Piaf-ish  
 ‘Bratten is wearing a short, black leather jacket. Is dainty, a little mystical, a little Edith Piaf-ish’

To sum up, unstressed (*-ish*) exhibits two main kinds of grammatical variation. First, it is typically adjectival, but may also be nominal. Second, it can usually be analysed as a suffix, but in some uses, it has clitic properties. Applying Occam’s razor, one might wish to analyse all instances as clitics, but examples where an inflectional suffix is placed after (*-ish*) make this problematic. It seems, then, that the grammatical status of this kind of (*-ish*) has not yet stabilized in Norwegian. In English, the development has led from a derivational suffix to a clitic. In Norwegian, however, there seems to be an insecurity about its status, which may be a result of borrowing more than one variant.

### 5.2 *The grammar of stressed (-)ish*

The ability to receive stress independently of words in the context is a fairly clear indication that (*-ish*) in the kinds of use illustrated in Section 4.2 is an independent word.

Most Norwegian examples where (*-ish*) must clearly be stressed, as in (4) and (21)–(24), correspond well to those discussed for English by Bochnak and Csipak (2014). (*-ish*) used in this way may be considered an adverb.

But used as in (28) above, where it is a word and heads a predicate complement, it is clearly an adjective. The last kind of use illustrated in (29)–(30) above has *(-)ish* as the first element of compound nouns. These compounds are headed by the nominal second element, and Norwegian allows most word classes (and even phrases) in the first element slot. Thus, adverbs and adjectives are equally possible, and it is not possible on formal grounds to decide on the word class of *(-)ish* in these compounds. The compound *ish-tid* ‘ish time’ is clearly connected to the expression *være ish på tiden* ‘be ish, timewise’, so at least for this example, it can be assumed that *(-)ish* is adjectival.

### 5.3 Norwegian vs. English *(-)ish*

Most of the examples presented in Sections 4.1 and 5.1 are similar to English usage, with *(-)ish* combining with nominal or adjectival expressions to form adjectival constructions, and also the usage where nominal *(-)ish* constructions refer to hour or year. However, other uses of *(-)ish* as a nominal derivational suffix (or clitic) – described in Section 4.1.2 and discussed in Section 5.1 (e.g. *manusforfatterish*, *country-ish*) – have not to our knowledge been described for English. It seems that in this respect, Norwegian *(-)ish* has taken at least one path which is not borrowed from English but is a Norwegian innovation. (Admittedly, *(-)ish* is found also in Danish and Swedish. We have not studied those languages in detail, so the innovation might not be Norwegian, but Scandinavian.)

As indicated, sentence-final *(-)ish* are similar in English and Norwegian. We have not, however, seen compounding mentioned in the literature on English. But such usage can be found, as illustrated in (40).

(40) My ish time is usually a 10 min cushion around a time

These findings indicate that the different types of *(-)ish* as a free morpheme and separate word are mostly developed in English and borrowed into Norwegian.

### 5.4 The semantics and pragmatics of *(-)ish*

The two meanings described by Kuzmack (2007) for English *(-)ish* are found also in Norwegian. Combined with a noun, *(-)ish* means ‘similar

to N', what Kuzmack calls comparative (*-ish*). Thus *professor-ish* means 'similar to (something related to) a professor', and *simon-og-garfunkel-ish* means 'similar to (something related to) Simon and Garfunkel'.

Nilssen (2015: 66–67) observes an interesting difference between adjectival (*-ish*) constructions formed from common and proper nouns, respectively. Compare *boyband'ish* in (41) and *newyorkish* in (42):

- (41) Rytmisk tung, melodisk veldig lett. Men med boyband'ish refreng skreddersydd for stemmekapring  
 'Rhythmically heavy, melodically very light. But with a boy-band'ish chorus tailored to catch votes'
- (42) Støyen av kakling og det estetiske nivået på gjestene er nærmest newyorkish, men køhåndtering og service er dessverre på norsk nivå  
 'The noise of cackling and the aesthetic level of the customers are almost newyorkish, but the queue management and the service are unfortunately on a Norwegian level'

These (*-ish*) formations differ in meaning distribution. The common noun *boyband* has a conventional denotation to speakers of Norwegian, with publicly shared connotations about the band members and their music. These meaning aspects are all relevant to the meaning of the derived expression *boyband'ish*. The selection of relevant features depends to some extent on the cotext, e.g. *boyband'ish refreng* 'boy-band'ish chorus' focuses on the music rather than the band members. Still, much of the meaning is inherent to the adjective itself.

The proper noun *New York* has no denotation, but only a referent, and individual connotations (for Norwegians) presumably differ. Presumably, most Norwegians think of tall buildings, lots of people and the like. Combining the proper noun with (*-ish*) into *newyorkish* yields an adjective with a highly cotext dependent meaning. In the example, what is described as *newyorkish* is the noise level and the appearance of customers in a café. This focuses in on properties of New York that are not likely to be at the front of most Norwegians' ideas of the city, and the selection of meaning features relevant to the interpretation of *newyorkish* are more heavily dependent on the cotext than in the case of

*boyband'ish*. The same can be observed for the suffix *-(i)sk*, e.g. *parisisk* 'Parisian' vs. *forbrytersk* 'criminal' (adjective).

Combined with adjectives (A) and quantifiers (Q), *(-)ish* means 'something like A/Q, but not exactly A/Q', what Kuzmack (2007) calls qualifier *(-)ish*. For example, *akustisk(ish)* means 'acoustic like, but not quite acoustic', and *250-ish* means 'around 250, but not necessarily exactly 250'. For Kuzmack, qualifier *(-)ish* extends to the uses dealt with separately here as typically stressed, the metalinguistic degree *(-)ish* of Bochnak and Csipak (2014). The difference between basic qualifier *(-)ish* and metalinguistic degree *(-)ish* is that the meaning of the former is part of the propositional meaning of the sentence, while the meaning of the latter is metalinguistic, indicating that the expression used does not quite appropriately categorize the described situation. Thus, while *250-ish* states that the number is actually in the vicinity of 250, by saying *reiseruten ... ish* 'the itinerary ... ish', the speaker indicates that the categorization of the referent as an itinerary is not quite right.

As indicated by Kuzmack (2007), qualifier *(-)ish* is younger than comparative *(-)ish*, and metalinguistic degree *(-)ish* is doubtless the youngest in English. When Norwegian *(-)ish* is used as a nominal derivational suffix (clitic), its meaning is, of course, nominal: 'sth. resembling N' (see Nilssen 2015: 67–72). Thus, *guide-ishen* means 'that sth. resembling a guide'. As mentioned above, this usage has to our knowledge not been observed for English. Having apparently developed in Norwegian (or Scandinavian), it may be considered the youngest use here. One might speculate that language names in *(-)ish* have served as a "bridge" for other *(-)ish* expressions to cross over from adjectival to nominal status, since Norwegian language names in *-(i)sk* have an ambivalent status as both adjectives and nouns.

In English, many formations in *-ish* (like *English*, *childish*, *greenish*) are part of the standard conventional language, while some of the younger uses, especially metalinguistic degree *(-)ish*, are not. In Norwegian, all kinds of constructions with *(-)ish* are quite young; as stated in the introduction, our oldest documented example is from 1996. In many cases, the function and meaning of adjectival *(-)ish* constructions are similar to established words formed with the suffix *-aktig*. This holds above all for those that correspond to English comparative formations. Thus *professor-ish* is very close in meaning to *professoraktig*. To some degree, qualifier *(-)ish* can also replace *-aktig*, as in *hvitaktig* 'whitish' (cf.

*hvite ish*). In expressions involving quantifiers, *(-)ish* replaces approximative adverbs like *omtrent* and *cirka*, both ‘approximately’. But not all types of *(-)ish* correspond equally clearly to more conventional expressions. There is no single simple way to reformulate e.g. *guide-ishen*, but of course the meanings can be expressed, for instance as *den guideaktige tingen* ‘the guide-like thing’ or the like. Metalinguistic degree *(-)ish* has no similar older equivalent, but one could rephrase it with expressions like *på en måte* ‘in a way’, *eller noe sånt* ‘or something like that’, etc.

Being recent borrowings, *(-)ish* constructions are not merely unconventional, however. As shown in the introduction, some Norwegians dislike them, and it is easy to find web pages where the (over)use of *(-)ish* is ridiculed. (43) is a scathing example:

- (43) Vet du hva? jeg hater ishene, de ish ish folka du ser rundt omkring i Drammen, de med de søte stramme luene som innehar navnet carhartt, det søte samfunnsengasjementet som ender opp i et arbeiderparti ish ... blandet med litt venstre meningsregister.  
 ‘Do you know what? I hate the ishes, the ish ish people that you see about in Drammen, the ones with the cute tight hats called carhartt,<sup>15</sup> the sweet social involvement that ends up in a labour party ish ... mixed with a dash from the register of the left.’

As will be evident from several of the examples provided here, *(-)ish* is typical of informal text types. It often co-occurs with errors in spelling and punctuation, and a large portion of the examples gathered in Nilssen (2015) involve just fragments of sentences, including many headlines. Still, *(-)ish* is not seldom found in the writings of journalists in all kinds of newspapers and magazines.

## 6 Conclusion

Norwegian has borrowed both the suffix or clitic *-ish* and the free word *ish* from English. Our oldest example is from 1996. Our materials do not allow us to make strong claims about frequency, but Norwegian *(-)ish* appears to have risen in frequency since the early years after 2000. Most

15. The correct spelling is *Carhartt*.

uses of (-)ish in Norwegian resemble English uses quite closely and can be assumed to be borrowed. However, Norwegian usage also exhibits examples of -ish as a nominal derivational suffix (or clitic), which appears to be an innovation in Norwegian (or possibly Scandinavian). The use of (-)ish is characteristic of informal language. Some Norwegians dislike it rather strongly, but it seems to be gaining ground. Only the future can tell how far the development will lead, and what the grammar and meaning of Norwegian (-)ish will be when it has had more time to stabilize.

### List of sources of examples

The Internet pages referred to were accessed in the autumn of 2014 or the spring of 2015, some in the spring of 2016.

- (1) Norde (2009: 224).
- (2) Kuzmack (2007).
- (3) [https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/no.general/qPgAwwabz\\_M\[1-25\]](https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/no.general/qPgAwwabz_M[1-25]), dated 10.08.1996.
- (4) <http://www.iknowthatmagazine.com/2013/07/05/diy-skappel-genseren-aja-vi-strikker-ogsa-ish/>, dated 05.07.2014.
- (5) Atekst: *Dagbladet* 04.08.2006.
- (6) Atekst: *Dagbladet* 19.10.2013.
- (7) Atekst: *Dagbladet* 10.12.2004.
- (8) Atekst: *Bergens Tidende* 22.06.2008.
- (9) <http://elbilforum.no/forum/index.php?topic=11952.0>, dated 22.01.2014.
- (10) Atekst: *Sortlandsavisa* 06.02.2014.
- (11) Atekst: *Adresseavisen* 23.12.2011.
- (12) <http://www.klara-klok.no/spoersmaal/303780>, dated 02.07.2013.
- (13) Atekst: *Stavanger Aftenblad* 27.12.2011.
- (14) <http://blogg.aftenbladet.no/tinabru/2012/01/14/tina-og-de-fleste-pampene-pa-sola-vil-ha-storre-kommuner/#.VA64kxY01w>, dated 14.01.2012.
- (15) <http://fotballfrue.no/2012/03/15/den-er-her-hos-meg/>, dated 15.03.2012.
- (16) Atekst: *Dagbladet Magasinet* 10.10.2009.
- (17) <http://milforum.net/archive/index.php/t-63477.html>, dated 28.04.2014.
- (18) Newspaper corpus: *Dagbladet* 12.12.2006.

- (19) Atekst: *Ringerikes Blad* 30.04.2013.
- (20) Atekst: *Finnmarken* 30.08.2013.
- (21) Atekst: *Stavanger Aftenblad* 18.11.2011.
- (22) <http://forum.fitnessbloggen.no/threads/strekkmerker-ish.27459/>, dated 28.01.2014.
- (23) <http://reidarreisernart.travellerspoint.com/4/>, dated 14.02.2010.
- (24) [http://sorfordnordpolen.blogg.no/1396709226\\_altfor\\_ivrig\\_ish.html](http://sorfordnordpolen.blogg.no/1396709226_altfor_ivrig_ish.html), dated 05.04.2014.
- (25) Atekst: *Dagsavisen* 04.10.2014.
- (26) <http://www.smsfeil.no/index.php?id=andre>, dated 23.11.2013.
- (27) <http://www.200sx-ogn.org/archive/index.php/t-29099.html>, dated 09.07.2012.
- (28) Atekst: *Rana Blad* 19.10.2013.
- (29) Atekst: *Agderposten* 16.06.2013.
- (30) Atekst: *Agderposten* 15.09.2012.
- (31) <http://skeezsqueeze.blogspot.no/2015/01/201-mc-magnus-vs-amfia.html>, dated 18.01.2015
- (32) [http://www.battlefield.no/forum/index.php?/topic/78595\\_endre\\_deathbordinfo/](http://www.battlefield.no/forum/index.php?/topic/78595_endre_deathbordinfo/), dated 03.11.2006
- (33) <http://www.ebookxp.org/colourattack.blogg.no?b=4>, dated 01.03.2012
- (34) [http://idaydream.blogg.no/1392137919\\_hi\\_pony.html](http://idaydream.blogg.no/1392137919_hi_pony.html), dated 10.02.2014
- (35) [http://balanselin.blogg.no/1449244385\\_unarmed\\_to\\_the\\_julebo.html](http://balanselin.blogg.no/1449244385_unarmed_to_the_julebo.html), dated 04.12.2015
- (36) <https://rotorwing.wordpress.com/category/jobb/page/13/>, dated 22.08.2012
- (37) <https://twitter.com/mariasj095>, dated 16.06.2012
- (38) <http://www.musikknyheter.no/record/10782>, dated 05.02.2013
- (39) Atekst: *Dagens Næringsliv Morgen* 14.09.2013
- (40) <https://www.facebook.com/ConnieandCurtis/posts/505823256109344>, dated 12.11.2012
- (41) Atekst: *Verdens Gang* 14.03.2011
- (42) Newspaper corpus: *Dagbladet* 30.06.2008
- (43) <http://anonymodown.blogg.no/>

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## Samandrag

Norsk har lånt suffikset eller klitikonet *-ish* og det frie ordet *ish* frå engelsk. Det eldste norske belegget er frå 1996. Artikkelen byggjer i hovudsak på ei samling av 240 bruksdøme og analyserer grammatikken og tydingane til norsk (*-ish*). Funna vert samanlikna med engelsk; dei fleste bruksmåtane er lånte, men det er minst éin innovasjon som ser ut til å ikkje ha oppstått i engelsk. Ein del nordmenn mislikar og kritiserer bruken av (*-ish*) i norsk, men det ser ut til at uttrykket har etablert seg i språket.

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