Semantics of English suffix *-ish* as a degree head

In this talk, I investigate the semantics of the English suffix *-ish* as seen in *tall-ish*, *now-ish*, or *toy-ish*. Little theoretical work has been done on the nature of the suffix, whose use is highly productive (see Morris (2009) for descriptive work). Intuitively, *-ish* that appends to an adjectival base modifies the degree of the base. Contrary to this naive view, I argue that *-ish* is a degree head of type $<<d, <e, t>>, <e, t>>$ (cf. "pos" of Kennedy (2007)).

I point out that adding *-ish* is not productive with lower-bound adjectives, while it is productive with open scale and upper-bound adjectives. Another characteristic of ADJ-*ish* is that it is not gradable. The proposed semantics for *-ish* below, where "s(P)" stands for the standard of $P_{<d, et>}$, and "d_c" for contextually provided expected deviance from the standard, correctly predict those characteristics.

$$[[\text{-ish}]] = \lambda P_{<d, et>}. \lambda x_e. \max \{d \mid P(d)(x) = 1\} < s(P) \ \& \ (s(P) - \max \{d \mid P(d)(x) = 1\} < d_c)$$

I also argue that the possibility for a lower-bound adjective to append *-ish* is contextually dependent, given that speakers generally find that there is a difference in acceptability between **bent-ish* and *?*open-ish*. The idea is that context provides a non-zero degree of "*properly* ADJ" and hence there is a gap between the degree and the lower bound. This can be compared to Kennedy & McNally's (2005) discussion of "imprecise" uses of absolute adjectives.