

THE MIDDLE ENGLISH SUFFIX *-ISH*: REASONS FOR DECLINE IN  
PRODUCTIVITY

EWA CISZEK

*Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań*

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is to investigate the reasons for the significant decline in both the frequency and productivity of the suffix *-ish* in Middle English. The major factors responsible seem to be the growing popularity of the *of* + Noun phrases as well as the competition among *-ish* and other suffixes.

The analysis will be preceded with the introduction of some essential facts concerning the semantic development and productivity of the OE suffix *-isc* in Middle English.

1. Introduction

In my research, I have mainly relied on electronic databases such as the *Dictionary of Old English* (A-F) and the *Toronto Corpus of Old English Texts* for Old English as well as the *Middle English Dictionary online* for Middle English. The study is supplemented with *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* by Bosworth and Toller (1898-1921), the Middle English part of the *Helsinki Corpus* and a number of complete Middle English texts. Taking into account such an extensive lexical material, I consider any *MED* derivative unattested in any OE database as a new coinage.

The analysis of the productivity of the suffix *-ish* in the period under discussion relies on the type value, as suggested by Dalton-Puffer and Cowie (2000). I will also occasionally quote the number of ME hybrids, which are an important indicator of productivity of the suffix they include (see Ciszek 2008a).

## 2. The semantics of *-isc* in Old English

### 2.1. Previous studies

The OE suffix *-ish* has been subject to only narrow interest as demonstrated in merely a few dictionary entries and short descriptions among other affixes found in some Old English grammars or histories of English.

As regards dictionaries, Bosworth and Toller (1898-1921) and the *OED online* list it as a separate entry.

Bosworth and Toller (1898-1921) describe the suffix as follows:

*-isc*, modern *-ish*, a suffix of adjectives, connoting the quality of the object denoted by the stem, e.g. *ceoel-isc* ‘churl-ish’, *cild-isc* ‘child-ish’; also connotes origin from a place or stock, e.g. *Engl-isc*, *Grēc-isc*, *Iudē-isc*. The suffix may be seen in the cognate dialects in the following words, Goth. *þiud-isk-o* ‘after the manner of the Gentiles’; *Judaiw-isk-s*; O. Sax. *menn-isk* human; O. Frs. *mann-isk*; Icel. *bern-sk-r* ‘childish’; *En-sk-r* ‘English’; *Engel-sk* ‘English’; O. H. Ger. *diut-isc*: Ger. *deut-sch*; v. *militisc*.

The *OED online* gives a slightly more exhaustive description of the Old English *-ish* and defines it as

a suffix forming adjs., of Com. Teut. origin; ... In words of old formation, the prec. vowel had umlaut (which was often present in the n. whence the adj. in *-isc* was formed); ...

1. In OE. and the cognate langs., chiefly forming gentile adjs. from national names: e.g. *British* (OE. *Brittisc*), *English* (OE. *Englisc*, †Sc. *Inglis*), *Scottish*, *Scotch* (OE. *Scyttisc*, Sc. †*Scottis*, *Scots*), *Irish* (OE. *Irisc*), *Welsh* (OE. *Wielisc*, †Sc. *Walys*, *Wallis*); *Danish* (OE. *Denisc*, †Sc. *Dense*, *Dence*); *Frankish*, *French* (OE. *Frencisc*); ...

2. Added to other ns., with the sense ‘Of or belonging to a person or thing, of the nature or character of’. These were not numerous in OE., whence only a few have come down to later times. Examples are *folcisc* popular, *hæðenisc* heathenish, *þeodisc* national, *inlendisc* inlandish, *utlendisc* outlandish (which come close to the gentile group in 1); also *mennisc* human, *cildisc* childish, *cierlisc* churlish.

The Old English suffix *-isc* has also been briefly considered among others by Wright (1914), Jespersen (1942), Quirk and Wrenn (1955 [2001]), Marchand (1969) and Kastovsky (1992). They generally restrict their discussion of *-isc* to mentioning the fact that it was a denominal suffix especially used to derive ethnic adjectives, which the authors illustrate with some examples.

### 2.2. *-isc* in Old English

There are 168 denominal *-isc* derivatives attested in my Old English database. The suffix in them generally added the sense ‘a quality’.

More specifically, in 119 words *-isc* was attached to place-names or to nouns denoting groups of people inhabiting a given place and it assumed the meaning 'of a certain nationality/origin'. 62 of such words functioned exclusively as adjectives. Here one can quote examples such as *Bulgarisc* 'Bulgarian', *Lindisfarneisc* 'of Lindisfarne', *Numentisc* 'of Numantia', *Sicilisc* 'Sicilian', *Sidoneisc* 'of Sidon', *Speonisc* 'Spanish' and *Wincestrisc* 'of Winchester'.

36 of the derivatives could function as both adjectives and nouns (usually in the plural). In 23 of them the suffix *-isc* apart from adding the sense 'of a certain nationality/origin' in some context might also assume the sense 'a group of people of a certain nationality/origin'. Here belong coinages such as, for instance, *Alexandrianisc* 'an Alexandrian', *Babilonisc* 'the Babylonians', *Centisc* 'the Kentish' and *Macedonisc* 'Macedonians'. In the other 4 derivatives the suffix could refer to both 'a certain nationality/origin' and 'the language of a certain nationality' as in, e.g., *Brittisc* 'British, referring to Brittonic speakers', *Bryt-wylisc* 'British, referring to Brittonic speakers', *Denisc* 'Danish (i.e., Norse, Scandinavian)', or *Scottisc* 'Scottish'. In the remaining 9 formations the suffix *-isc* could add all three senses mentioned above. These are: *Denisc* 'Norse', *Ebrēisc* (*Hebrēisc*) 'Hebrew', *Egyptisc* 'Egyptian', *Englisc* 'English', *Frencisc* 'French', *Grecisc* 'Greek', *Indisc* 'Indian', *Rōmānisc* 'Roman' and *Syrisc* 'Syrian'. Interestingly, all these words, except *Syrisc*, survived into Middle English. I assume this was due to the frequent use of the formations with various meanings of the suffix.

Finally, 21 *-isc* derivatives from place-names are attested exclusively with a nominal function. In 18 of them the suffix *-isc* assumes the sense 'a group of people of a certain nationality/origin', e.g., *Hamtunisc* 'inhabitants of Northampton', *Hierosolimisc* 'people of Jerusalem', *Moabisc* 'people of Moab' and *Perscisc* 'Persian'. In the remaining 3 formations, i.e., *Ethiopisc* 'Ethiopic', *Norðhymbrisc* 'Northumbrian' and *Pihtisc* 'lg. of the Picts' the suffix adds the sense 'the language of a certain nationality'.

The suffix *-isc* could also be attached to personal names. In the database, I have attested 15 such coinages, e.g., *Ambrōsianisc* '(composed) by St. Ambrose', *Davidisc* 'of or by David (referring to the psalms)', *Ismaelitisc* 'of Ishmael' and *Magdalenisc* 'of Magdalene'.

Additionally, there are 34 derivatives from common nouns, e.g., *cildisc* 'of a child; of tender age', *crystallisc* 'of crystal', *gimmisc* 'jewelled' and *heofenisc* 'heavenly'.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that six of the OE *-isc* formations attested in my database are not included in the *Dictionary of Old English* (A-F). These are: *Adolamitisc* 'of Adullam', *Ammonisc* 'of Ammon', *Antiochisc* 'Antiochian', *Armenisc* 'of Armenia', *Beadonisc* 'of (Mount) Badon' and *deuelisc* 'devilish'.

### 3. The semantics of *-ish* in Middle English

#### 3.1. Previous studies

The ME suffix *-ish* has been briefly treated by Jespersen (1942), Fisiak (1965, 1968 [2004]), Marchand (1969), *OED online*, Dalton-Puffer (1996) and the *MED online*.

Jespersen (1942: 323), Fisiak (1965: 65, 69, 1968 [2004]: 110), Marchand (1969: 243-244) and the *OED online* note that in Middle English the suffix *-ish* started to derive adjectives also from other adjectives and illustrate it with a few examples. Jespersen and Marchand follow the *OED* and mention that the process started from colour terms to which the suffix added the meaning ‘somewhat, rather, approaching the quality of’.

Dalton-Puffer (1996: 172), in her database, i.e., the first three subperiods of the Middle English part of the *Helsinki Corpus* (1150-1420), found *-ish* derivatives only from nouns. Semantically, she describes them as having the meaning ‘of the nature of -, having the character of -’.

The most extensive definition of the suffix has been provided in the *MED*:

*-ish* (suf.) Also *-ishe*, *-sh(e, -iȝ sh, -ishs, -esh(e, -i)sse, -i)se, -i)s, -ijs, -es(se, -as, -sæ, -ce, -ez, -isc, -i)sce, -esc, -eisce, -ich(e, -ch(e, -i)chs, -ech & -iske*. [OE *-isc, -sc, -esc* & ON *-i)sk-*. In some words *-ish* & *-eis, -ais* (from AF) are confused.]

A derivational suffix in nouns designating nations, races, or languages, and in adjectives describing them; from OE: *Brittish, English, Denish* (var. of *Danish*), *Frensh, Grekish, Romanish, Welsh*, etc.; of ME formation: *Alemanisc, Britonish, Danish, Frankish, Indish, Irish, Scottish, Spanish*, etc. A few ME adjectives are derived from place names in imitation of the above; e.g., *Flaundrish, Lundenisc*.

The same suffix appears in adjectives derived from common nouns, and having the sense ‘of the nature of, similar to’; from OE: *cherlish, hevenish, mennish, thedish*, etc.; of early ME formation: *elvish, lifish, shepish*, etc.; of later ME formation: *coltish, doggish, feverish, folish, foxish, knavish*, etc. ME *boudish* has the suffix attached to the stem of an OF verb. In late ME, this suffix is attached to adjectives and has the sense ‘somewhat’: *blakish, bleuish, derkish, dullish, fattish, grenish, redish, saltish, wannish*, etc.

#### 3.2. *-ish* in ME formations inherited from Old English

There are 47 OE *-isc* words recorded in the Middle English material available: 40 continued to be used in Early and sometimes also Late Middle English and the other seven reappeared only in Late Middle English. The *MED* lists 10 of these derivatives (about 20%) as new coinages, which does not seem to be correct in view of the available evidence. I have found all the derivatives in the *Toronto*

*Corpus of Old English Texts*. Here they are: *Britonish* ‘Celtic, British’ (1275), *Caldeowish* ‘Chaldean’ (1200), *elvish* ‘belonging or pertaining to the elves; possessing supernatural skill or powers’ (1275), *Flēmish* ‘from Flanders, of the Flemings, Flemish’ (1325) and ‘Flemish people, the Flemish language’ (1325), *Irish* ‘of Irish nationality; found or produced in Ireland; characteristic of Ireland’ (1275), *Israēlītish* ‘belonging to ancient Israel’ (1175) and *outlōndish* ‘foreign’ (1300) for Early Middle English as well as *dēvelish* ‘devilish, fiendish, wicked’ (1439), *Devenish* ‘of Devonshire’ (1451) and *Indish* ‘Indian’ (1398) for the latter period of Middle English. The suffix mostly preserved its OE senses and usually referred to ‘a certain nationality/origin’ and the base was a place-name.

The remaining 37 derivatives also continued to be used with more or less the original senses of *-ish*. Of these, 23 are formations derived from place-names.

### 3.3. *-ish* in new EME coinages (1150-1350)

The *MED online* treats 27 *-ish* derivatives as originating in Early Middle English. The information provided for 10 of them, which means some 40% (!), is apparently misleading. These formations can actually be traced back to Old English.<sup>1</sup> For the list of words see above.

As regards the 17 truly new EME coinages recorded in the corpus, they are all derived from nouns. Seven of them follow the prevailing OE pattern and are derived from a place name. These are: *Alemanisc* (1275), *Lombardish* (1275), *Marchisce* (cf. OE *Mircisc*) (1275), *Norenish* (1275), *Peitish* (1275), *Spanish* (cf. OE *Speonisc*) (1275) and *Corn-walish* (1325).

Moreover, one adjective, i.e., *Jūdeuish* (1200) is derived from a noun denoting ‘a representative of an ethnic group’.

The remaining nine formations are coined on common nouns. Here belong: *sindōnish* (1150), *līfish* (1200), *shēpishe* (1200), *nētish* (1225), *rotherish* (1225), *swīnisc* (1225), *carlish* (1250), *lōndish* (1300) and *mopish* (1300).

Among the derivatives mentioned above one can recognise six hybrids, which is quite a high percentage. *Marchisce*, *Peitish*, *Spanish* and *Jūdeuish*<sup>2</sup> are based on Old French stems, *carlish* on Old Norse and *sindōnish* on Latin one.

### 3.4. *-ish* in new LME coinages (1350-1500)

This group is considerably more numerous and includes 118 coinages. Of these there are 79 derivatives from nouns, 35 from adjectives, two from verbs, one probably from a past participle and one, i.e., *loumish* of unknown origin.

<sup>1</sup> The word *ambrōsiānisc*, which comes from the Wintene version of the *Benedictine rule* (1225), was completely excluded from my ME database. The text is a *literatim* copy of the OE manuscript (see also Ciszek 2008 a and b).

<sup>2</sup> *Jūdeuish* could have also been derived from L *Jūdaeus*.

As regards denominal formations, the suffix *-ish* in them assumes the sense ‘a quality characteristic of’. Structurally, there are only 6 examples which would follow the OE pattern, i.e., the base is a noun denoting either a place-name or a representative of a given nation. The prevailing majority, i.e., 73 of the denominal *-ish* coinages is derived from common nouns. It is remarkable that a number of these refer to either a person (12) or an animal (17).

About 30% of all LME *-ish* formations are derived from adjectives. Here, the suffix assumes the sense ‘somewhat’. The coinages can be divided into those formed from colour terms (12) and those from other adjectives (23). It is interesting to notice that these two patterns seem to be initiated by Chaucer.

The number of hybrids recorded in the LME material available is significantly high: 29 are coined on Old French bases, five on Old Norse, two each on Anglo-French and Middle Dutch and one each on Medieval Latin and Old Icelandic.

#### 4. Productivity

The only author dealing with the productivity of *-ish* in detail is Dalton-Puffer (1996). In the *Helsinki Corpus* she finds 16 types of *-ish* in Early Middle English and 2 in ME3 (1350-1420). Dalton-Puffer does not indicate exactly how many of these were new coinages but mentions that “[o]nly a fairly small share of *ISH*-adjectives are actually analyzable on a Middle English basis. Most of the adjectives ... have been inherited from Old English” (1996: 172).

My study has revealed that new ME coinages had a higher frequency of occurrence. 17 have been recorded by the *MED* for Early Middle English and 118 for Late Middle English. In the period 1350-1420, for which Dalton-Puffer quotes 2 *-ish* types, I have found 48 new coinages.

Moreover, a noteworthy number of hybrids, i.e., 6 in Early and 40 in Late Middle English contribute to the productivity of the suffix.

#### 5. Analysis: Reasons for the decline in productivity of ME *-ish*

A peculiar observation is that the productivity of *-ish* is considerably low in Early as compared to Late Middle English. Also, if we look at the frequency of 168 OE derivatives and the fact that only 47 (less than 30%) of them have been inherited into Middle English, we can claim that there was a significant decline in the popularity of the suffix *-ish* in Early Middle English. The general picture of the situation, resulting from what I have described more in detail above, is that *-ish* was gradually losing its primary OE sense, i.e., ‘of origin’. The productivity of *-ish* in Late Middle English was boosted only by the fact that the suffix was more and more frequently added to common nouns and also a new para-

digm was developed, i.e., coinages on colour terms and other adjectives with *-ish* assuming the sense ‘somewhat’.

The potential reasons for the drop in both the frequency and productivity of *-ish* with the sense ‘of origin’ in Middle English are the following: (1) some competing suffixes (also French) started to be successfully applied instead of *-ish* and (2) the *-ish* adjectives were replaced with *of* + Noun phrases.<sup>3</sup>

### 5.1. Suffixes

#### 5.1.1. *-ian*

Dalton-Puffer (1996: 173) speculates that “ISH ceased to be a popular suffix for forming ethnic adjectives in English, possibly through the competition from the Romance IAN which served the same purpose”. This suggestion seems quite convincing. However, Dalton-Puffer does not consider the suffix *-ian* separately and does not provide any statistics for it either.

In my search in the *MED* I have found 41 *-ian* adjectives or adjectives functioning as nouns in which the suffix adds the sense ‘of origin’.<sup>4</sup> 27 of them are derived from place-names and 14 from nouns denoting people. These 41 *-ian* as against only 14 new *-ish* coinages make Dalton-Puffer’s assumption plausible. If we divide Middle English into two subperiods we can see that in Early Middle English *-ish* is attested in 8 new coinages whereas *-ian* is introduced in four derivatives. Thus, *-ish* is still the dominating suffix. In Late Middle English the situation is reversed; there are only 6 new coinages in *-ish* and 37 in *-ian*.

As regards the competition between *-ian* and *-ish*, eight new ME *-ian* derivatives referring to the nationality/origin/belonging completely ousted the OE *-ish* words. These are: *Sirīen*<sup>5</sup> (1150), *Arabien* (1375), *Ethiōpien* (1325), *Macedoniens* (nom. pl.) (1400), *Persien* (1400), *Philistīenes* (nom. pl.) (1375), *Tūrīen* (1400) and *Effēsians* (nom. pl.) (1430). Moreover, the word *Samaritanisc* appeared only once in 1175, whereas *Samaritanisc* was attested in Old English and in 1150. OE *Egīptisc* can be found in the *MED* only once in *Lambeth Homilies* (1225) In 1300 *Egīpcien* is coined and starts to be frequently used by various authors. Similarly, OE *Troisc*<sup>6</sup> after appearing twice in *Lazamon’s Brut* (1275) is abandoned for the sake of *Troian* (from 1387 as a noun; from 1425 as an ad-

<sup>3</sup> Surely, also the number of new *-ish* formations on common nouns would have been higher if it had not been for competing suffixes such as *-ly* (*-lich(e)*), *-ī* or *-ine* which displayed similar semantic profiles. (For a broader discussion of *-ly* (*-lich(e)*) see Ciszek (2002); for *-ī* and *-ine* see also below).

<sup>4</sup> There are some more *-ian* derivatives from common nouns. The same of course refers to *-ish* adjectives.

<sup>5</sup> From OF *syrien*, *surien* and OE *Syrian* (gen. of *Syria*).

<sup>6</sup> A parallel form *Troianisc* was also attested.

jective). The OE word *Indisc* is revived only in 1398 by Trevisa. In a slightly earlier text, i.e., Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (1393), we find the word *Indien*, which later appears three more times in *Kyng Alisaunder* (1400) and once in Mandeville's *Travels* (1425); however, this is with a nominal function denoting an inhabitant of India or Indians collectively. Finally, adjectives derived from Latin personal names display a very interesting behaviour. In Old English the two attested derivatives, i.e., *Arianisc* and *Pelagianisc*, from *Arius* and *Pelagius* respectively, take both suffixes *-ian* and *-isc*. In Middle English they drop *-isc*.

### 5.1.2. *-īte(s)/-ītāne(s)*

A different suffix which turned out to be competitive towards *-ish* was *-īte(s)* and its related form *-ītāne(s)*. The *MED* treats the suffix *-īt(e)* as a separate entry and defines it as “[a] derivational suffix found in a few toponymics and racial names, chiefly from Latin”. The analysis shows that *-īte(s)* and *-ītāne(s)* add the sense ‘a person or a group of people (either inhabiting some place or followers or descendants of somebody)’ and are attached to place-names or personal names respectively. In the *MED* I have found 22 formations including these suffixes. Seven of these derivatives are parallel to either OE or ME *-ish* formations. Five of them, i.e., *Mōabūt(e)* (1325), *Jerosolomītāne* (1382) (*Jerosolomīte* (1500)), *Ismaelītes* (1387), *Jacōbīte* (1387) and *Latīnitē*<sup>7</sup> (1450) were used instead of the OE *-ish* derivatives which did not survive till Middle English. The OE adjective *Samaritanisc* ‘of Samaria, Samaritan’ appears only once in the *MED* in 1150 (see also 6.1.1. above). In the *Wycliffite Bible* (MS Douce 369, 1384) the form is replaced by the adjective *Samarītān(e)* with the same meaning. In the same manuscript of the *Bible* the word *Samarītān(e)* is also used as a noun with the meaning ‘an inhabitant of Samaria, a Samaritan’.<sup>8</sup> Both forms are found in later texts. However, the nominal function seems more popular and in 1425 it is attested with the meaning ‘Samaria’. The scribe of the MS Bodleian 959 (1382) of the *Wycliffite Bible* uses a related form *Samarītes* denoting ‘inhabitants of Samaria, Samaritans’. The word appears also in two later texts. The OE words *Israēlish* and *Israēlītish* are attested with the meaning ‘belonging to ancient Israel; Hebrew, Jewish’ only in four EME manuscripts. The noun *Israēlīte(s)* ‘(one of) the people of ancient Israel; also, member(s) of the spiritual Israel’ can be found in the *Wycliffite Bible* (MS Douce 369, 1384).

<sup>7</sup> *Latīnitē* ‘Latin’, a hapax legomenon, did not pose any competition to the word *Latīn* which replaced OE *Lædenisc*.

<sup>8</sup> In the *Toronto Corpus* there is one occurrence of the noun *Samarītān(e)*, which functions as the plural.

5.1.3. *-īk*

The other suffix competing with *-ish* was *-īk*. The *MED* describes it as a “[d]erivational suffix in nouns and adjectives meaning ‘in the nature of, pertaining to’”. This definition does not include any examples of coinages based on place-names however. I have found seven such formations in the *MED*. Of these, four, i.e., *Arabīk* ‘Arabic’ (1325), *Sirik* ‘Syriac, Aramaic’ (1425), *Galatike* ‘Galatian’ (1440) and *Memphetik* ‘of Memphis’ (1450) appear instead of the corresponding OE *-isc* derivatives not recorded in the ME database.<sup>9</sup> The fifth coinage, i.e., *Ebraīk* ‘Hebrew, Jewish’ (1390) replaced *Ebreish* ‘of or pertaining to the Jews of Biblical times or their language, Hebrew; (b) as a noun: the Hebrews; the Hebrew language’ inherited from Old English and documented between 1225 and 1325. For the other two derivatives, i.e., *Marmorik(e)* ‘of the Roman territory of Marmarica in North Africa’ (1425) and *Italike* ‘Italian’ (1440) there are no Old or Middle English *-ish* counterparts recorded in the database.

5.1.4. *-ān*

*-ān* is another suffix which overlaps semantically with *-ish*. The *MED* characterises *-ān* as appearing “[i]n several nouns taken from Latin, denoting persons, as *Afffrican*, *publican*”. In the *MED*, I have found ten such coinages. Of these only *Grēcan* ‘a Greek’ (1500) shared the derivational base with the *-ish* formation going back to Old English and with the sense ‘an inhabitant of Greece, a Greek’ recorded till 1275. The words *Grēcan* and *Thēbān* are recorded also with an adjectival function, not mentioned by the *MED* in the definition of the suffix above. Thus, *Grēcan* could also mean ‘Grecian’ (1450). Still, the dominating derivative was *Grēkish* ‘of Greece or the Greeks, Grecian’ attested throughout the whole Middle English period. *Thēbān* ‘of or pertaining to Boeotian Thebes’ (1395) did not have any *-ish* parallel. Two other similar adjectives are *Tolletān* ‘for the city of Toledo, Spain’ (1395) and *Gāllican* ‘Gallic, Gaulish’ (1425). The latter adjective seems to have replaced the OE *Gallisc* ‘Gaulish, belonging to Gaul, French’.

5.1.5. *-in(e)*

Yet another suffix worth mentioning is *-in(e)*. It appears in 17 adjectives and nouns derived from place-names as well as personal names and adds the sense ‘of origin or belonging to’. However, none of the formations is coined on the

<sup>9</sup> For *Arabien* and *Sirīen* see 5.1.1. above.

same base as the attested OE and ME *-ish* derivatives. The *-in(e)* coinages discussed here include, e.g., *Numantīnes* (n. pl.) ‘the people of Numantia, in northern Spain’ (1387), *Tartarīn* ‘made of a costly fabric, perhaps a kind of silk, from (or originally from, or imported via) Tartary’ (1400), *Tarentīne* ‘from or pertaining to Tarentum, Tarentine’ (1440), *Sclāvīn(e)* ‘an inhabitant of some Slavic territory’ (1450), *Alpīne* ‘Alpine’ (1475) and *Molmutīne* ‘of Dunwallo Molmutius, British king and law-giver’ (1475).

## 5.2. *of* + Noun phrases

As regards my second assumption, i.e., that the *-ish* adjectives were replaced by *of* + Noun phrases, I have decided to investigate what happened to the OE *-ish* formations coined on place-names attested in the *Toronto Corpus* but not found in the *MED*. There are 86 OE derivatives which were not inherited by Middle English.

In the case of almost half of these *-ish* words, i.e., 43, not only were the *-ish* derivatives not attested in the Middle English material available but also there were no base-words or any forms related to them. Thus, it seems there was no context for the usage of these words. Here belong, e.g., *Cyrenisc*, *Geatisc*, *Lindisfarneisc*, *Sicilisc* and *Turonisc*.

The other 14 *-ish* derivatives were replaced by adjectives or nouns with some competing suffixes (see above).<sup>10</sup>

Finally, 33 OE *-ish* adjectives were substituted for *of* + Noun phrases, where a Noun denotes ‘a place-name’ or sometimes ‘an inhabitant(s) of a given place’.<sup>11</sup> Here are some examples:

- 1) *Arabī* ‘Arabia’: *the kyng of Arabe* (1395), *Fenyx of Arraby* (1400), *gumme of Araby* (1425), *the kyngdam off Arabe* (1449);
- 2) *Ethiōpe* ‘Ethiopia’: *þe folk of Ethiopie* (1350), *Zara of Ethiop* (1425), *a man of Ethiopie* (1425), *kyng off Ethiopie* (1439), *the kynge of Ethioppe* (1475), *folke of ethiopy* (1500);  
*Ethiōpien*<sup>12</sup> ‘an inhabitant of Ethiopia’: *men of Persis, Ethiopiens and Libiens with hem* (1384), *the puplis of Ethiopiens* (1425), *the queen of Ethiopiens* (1425);
- 3) *Frīse* ‘Frisia’: *þe duk of ffryse* (1400), *Kyng Froderike of Fres* (1440);  
*Frisōun* ‘an inhabitant of Frisia’: *Ricoldus duke of Frisons* (1387), *men of þis londe ffrysones* (1398) (comp. OE *ealra manna Frysisca and Englisca*), *a marchaunde of Fryslande* (1400), *a flote of Fresons* (1450);
- 4) *Milan* ‘Milan’: *of Melan grete Barnabo Viscounte* (1375), *they of Milayn were* (1425), *viij habergouns, some of meleyn and some of Westewale, of the which v of*

<sup>10</sup> A few OE *-isc* derivatives were replaced with more than one parallel form (see above).

<sup>11</sup> The numbers overlap since a few adjectives appeared both with competing suffixes and in *of* + Noun phrases.

<sup>12</sup> See also 5.1.1. above.

*meleyn were delyvered to the College of Eyton* (1456), *a salat wyth a vesere of meleyn* (1464), and *j herneyse complete of the touche of Milleyn* (1465);

5) *Pers(e)* ‘the land of the Persians, ancient Persia’: *Of kynges blood of Perce* (1375), *Egipt was vnder seuene kynges of Perse* (1387), *þe hool kyngdom of Pers* (1387), *þe prowde prynce of Perce* (1400), *þe kyng of Perse* (1425), *þe kyngdom of Persy* (1425), *þe diademe of Pers* (1450), *fyrst dyd wryte ... in the langage of Parce* (1450), *We have found in the reavme of Percy* (1475), *The Selentes..callid the holy stone..is founde in the lande of Perse* (1500);

6) *Sirīe* ‘the Roman and Byzantine province of Syria, including Palestine’: *the langage of Sirīe* (1425), *of Surre and of Ethyope the kyng* (1470);

7) *Tīre* ‘the Levantine city of Tyre’: *of Tyro Appollonius* (1390) (comp. OE *ic eom Apollonius se tirisca ealdorman*), *the Prince of Tyr* (1393).

A preliminary analysis of the OE derivatives inherited into Middle English and the newly derived ones exhibits similar tendencies.

## 6. Conclusions

The present paper endeavoured to establish the circumstances in which the OE suffix *-isc* with the sense ‘of origin’ underwent a significant decline in both the frequency and productivity in Middle English. The examination was preceded by the description of the semantics as well as frequency and productivity of the suffix in Old and Middle English. The analysis has been conducted on the basis of electronic corpora exhaustive of the preserved Old and Middle English linguistic material, i.e., the *Toronto Corpus of Old English Texts* for and the *Middle English Dictionary online* respectively. The investigation has revealed two factors which seem to have played influential role in the discussed development. One of these are some competing adjectival suffixes such as *-ian*, *-īte(s)/-ītāne(s)*, *-īk*, *-ān* and *-in(e)*, which were successful mostly due to having a semantic profile similar to that of *-ish*. The other attractive way of expressing the meaning ‘of origin’ of the OE *-isc* adjectives turned out to be the use of *of* + Noun constructions in Middle English. The latter development, however, seems somewhat contradictory in the light of the language economy tendency. At this point, a plausible explanation seems that *of* + Noun phrases were more communicative than parallel simple lexical items with an adjectival suffix since the phrases were able to clearly indicate their object(s) of reference, i.e., either ‘a place-name’ or ‘an inhabitant(s) of a given place’, whereas some discussed adjectives could have been ambiguous in this respect.

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