A Reassessment of Anti-Homophony in Bulgarian
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More and more recently in phonological theory the line between phonology and other subfields is becoming blurred. With respect to the meshing of historical linguistics with phonology a very important question arises: to what extent should the synchronic grammar incorporate the causes and results of clearly diachronic events? This question is very important in assessing recent types of Output-to-Output constraints proposed in the OT literature, particularly an *anti-homophony* constraint (named ParCon or AntiIdent) which prevents two distinct underlying representations from yielding the same output. Crosswhite (1997) (followed by Kenstowicz (2005)) uses such a constraint to account for three cases in Trigrad Bulgarian in which the expected lowering of unstressed /o/ to [a] does not occur.[1] As an illustration, one of the three cases is presented in (1).

(1)   Singular of Neuter Nouns

    A.

sg	pl		
/klɔb-o/ → klɔ́ba	klɔbá		'globe'
/per-o/ → péra	perá		'pen'
/varzal-o/ → varzála	varzalá		'morning point'

    B.

sg.	pl.		
/zɔ́rn-o/ → zɔ́rno	zɔ́rna		'grain'
/pétal-o/ → pétalo	pétala		'horseshoe'
/blág-o/ → blágo	blága		'good, blessing'

The forms in A illustrate that the vowel change occurs in the singular of those nouns which exhibit different stress placements in the singular and plural. The nouns in B however, have the position of stress stable throughout their paradigm and as a result would exhibit homophony between their singular and plural forms if the /o/ were lowered to [a].

This talk has three aims. First, I will argue against the encoding of homophony-avoidance into the grammar in any form by presenting various complexities and damaging problems such a move introduces. Second, I will analyze the three apparent cases from Bulgarian which Crosswhite discusses and illustrate that only two of them are actually the residue of a regular sound change having been stymied by homophony considerations. A different synchronic phonological analysis — not using ParCon or AntiIdent — will be sketched. Finally, I will tackle the important question of how exactly a sound change could be stunted from going to completion in a certain morphological environment. Adopting insights from Labov (1994) and Kroch (1989) I argue that it is the consequence of misunderstanding — and *not* a conscious attempt to avoid homophony on the part of the speaker — which results in a sound change from failing to go to

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[1] It is imperative to stress that the idea of homophony preventing a sound change from going to completion is not old — neither in Slavic linguistics or in Indo-European more generally — however, an attempt to actually write some concept of 'homophony-avoidance' into the grammar and thereby make predictions about when homophony-avoidance will reel its head or not *is* new. Kiparsky (1972) was the first — as far as I am aware — to write homophony-avoidance into a grammar by distinguishing between 'weak' and 'strong' categories of inflection, the latter being prone not to undergo a sound change if their desinence would fall together with another desinence. Kiparsky's analysis has numerous counterexamples and is not grounded in the mechanics of the grammar as well as Crosswhite's ideas on homophony-avoidance are; therefore, since the latter approach makes clear predictions as to the kinds of interactions that should exist in a grammar, I focus on thoroughly analyzing it alone.

completion in a particular environment. Further, adopting specifically Labov's "Facultative Theory" I show that if the number of unsupported forms (i.e. forms with no cues in the sentence disambiguating them from homophonous forms) is too high, then the rate of a sound change in that particular morphological environment will decrease due to the fact that children would have misinterpreted too many target forms for a homophonous form. Due to these misinterpretations, children will observe that the rate of the sound change is significantly lower in the one morphological environment, and after a generation or more, the sound change will have totally ceased to apply in that specific environment despite being vibrant elsewhere.

References
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