Is there No homophony?
Tom Leu, UQAM

This paper discusses the status of No homophony, the idea that UG not only dislikes, but outright disallows homophony. It has been noted that UG avoids homophony (cf. Johns 1992, Embick 2003), but a categorical ban on it may seem too nice to be true. I attempt to raise the plausibility of a UG with No homophony, discussing two considerations. (A) Two sample analyses of (ultimately) non-inflectional functional elements. (For open class words see Gahl 2008; for inflectional syncretism see Bobaljik 2001, Harley 2008). (B) The modeling of grammar: I suggest that No homophony holds within lists, thus rationalizing the ban on homophony, while, in principle, allowing for - possibly insightful (Harbour 2008) - systematic loopholes.

In my first sample analysis I present three arguments for an isomorphemic analysis of French on in (1)-(6).

(A) First, the identical form on. Secondly, the comparative fact that these on’s all correspond to (an allomorph of) German ein; en. The third and crucial observation is that on/ein has a similar local syntax across (1-6). On/ein exhibits a 2nd position syntax, with a single constituent moved to its left. Such has been independently argued for (1) m-...on...... (Corver 2004: Dutch), and (3F) n-...on...... (Leu 2012), and analogously k-...ein...... (and auc-un), and chaq-...un...... (Leu 2015). Kayne (2009) analyzes 1pl (2F) with silent NOUS as the interpreted subject, which likely originates lower: NOUS...on...[...chante]. Analogous are impersonal and generic on. Piedpiping rather than extraction of nous derives the (now archaic) [nous chante]-on...... in a way akin to Müller’s (2004) analysis of V2, leaving on as a Pollockian (1989) suffix. Cf. Lowenstamm (2008) for (6), and Kayne (2009) for the singular numeral one, (un, ein). A second relevant study is German d as in der, die, das (‘the’), dass (‘thatC’), dieser (‘this’), bei-d-e (‘both’), je-d-er (‘every’), which is analyzed as isomorphemic based on d’s uniform syntactic behavior (cf. Leu forthcoming). I conclude that there may be considerably less homophony in functional morphemes than traditional descriptions suggest.

B: From the perspective of the model of grammar, we need to ask, where would the grammar care about homophony? PF doesn’t know about morphs that are not candidates for spelling out a given structure. The syntax doesn’t either, perhaps doesn’t know about segmental phonology at all. That leaves the place where morpheme-sized pieces of phonological information are stored: the lexicon or vocabulary lists. Let me, hence, propose that UG disallows homophony within lists. Cases of arguable homophony then bear on the question of the kind and number of lists that there are, hence providing insight into the organization of grammar. Assuming, e.g., two lists, we, in principle, allow homophonous pairs, but expect no homophone triplets. Beyond open/closed class contrast, different spellout domains may access distinct lists (Embick 2003), with expected correlations to, e.g., amalgamation and fusion patterns. The number of lists there are thus becomes an empirical question to which possible homophony patterns provide partial answers.

Concluding, it is possible to make UG’s aversion against homophony precise by (a) stating it as a categorical ban, and (b) relativizing it to domains in which such a ban is operable: lists of phonological information. The challenge then consists in identifying actual instances of homophony, and elucidating the ways in which association of the homophones with distinct lists (perhaps cycles) follows from their grammatical contrast.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(F) French</th>
<th>(G) German</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) poss dets</td>
<td>m-on, t-on, s-on livre</td>
<td>m-ein, d-ein, s-ein Buch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) pronoun</td>
<td>(1pl) on; (impers.) on ; (generic) on</td>
<td>(1pl) unser-ein-er; (imp.+gen. obj) ein-en</td>
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<td>3) neg. particle</td>
<td>n-on</td>
<td>n-ein</td>
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<td>4) 1pl infl.</td>
<td>chant-ons</td>
<td>sing-en</td>
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<td>5) 3pl infl.</td>
<td>(fur.) manger-ont / lexical f-ont</td>
<td>sing-en</td>
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<tr>
<td>6) Deriv. suffix (N)</td>
<td>bouch-on</td>
<td>Ppropfe-n</td>
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References


