
A new case of paradigmatic contrast: Haitian Creole third person pronouns

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Paradigmatic contrast describes cases where the phonological grammar seems to conspire to avoid *pernicious homophony* or *similarity* between two forms in a morphological paradigm. This paper proposes that a puzzling phonotactic restriction in Haitian can be analyzed as a case of paradigmatic contrast motivated by perceptual similarity avoidance.

In Haitian, pronouns can generally reduce when adjacent to a vowel, but the 3d pers plural pronoun *yo* [jo] cannot reduce to *y* [j] after a vowel. The reduction of *yo* is argued to be blocked to avoid a perceptual confusion with the short form / [l] of the 3d pers singular pronoun *li* [li] in this context. The hypothesis is supported by external phonological evidence showing that the [l]-[j] contrast may be maintained prevocally but not postvocally (e.g. in Cibaeno) and by internal perceptual evidence showing that Haitian [l] and [j] are more confusable postvocally than prevocally. The fact that reduction of *yo* rather than *li* is blocked postvocally is argued to be a frequency effect: plural pronouns are less frequent than singular pronouns and are therefore more resistant to reduction.

If correct, this analysis provides further evidence for the role of phonetic detail in shaping morphological paradigms.