

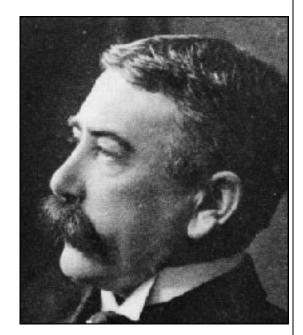
The 19th Manchester Phonology Meeting, 2011 Special Session: Contrast in Phonology

# On the Role and Evaluation of Contrast in Phonology

*B. Elan Dresher University of Toronto* 



Jean-Roger Vergnaud 1945 - 2011 "dans la langue il n'y a que des différences"



Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* ([1916] 1972:166)

#### Introduction

In this talk I will present the main components of Modified Contrastive Specification (MCS, aka what some of us do in Toronto) as it touches on the role and evaluation of contrast in phonology (Avery & Rice 1989; Dresher, Piggott & Rice 1994; Dresher & Rice 2007; Hall 2007; Dresher 2009; Mackenzie 2009).

I will argue for the following positions:

#### Introduction

- Phonetic contrast is not the same as phonological contrast.
- Contrastive features are determined by feature ordering (a contrastive hierarchy), not by minimal contrasts.
- Contrastive hierarchies (i.e., the ordering of features), can vary cross-linguistically.
- The Contrastivist Hypothesis: only contrastive features can be active in the phonology.
- Corollary: to identify contrastive features, look for activity.
- The enhancement of contrastive features can account for surface effects like dispersion.

#### Introduction

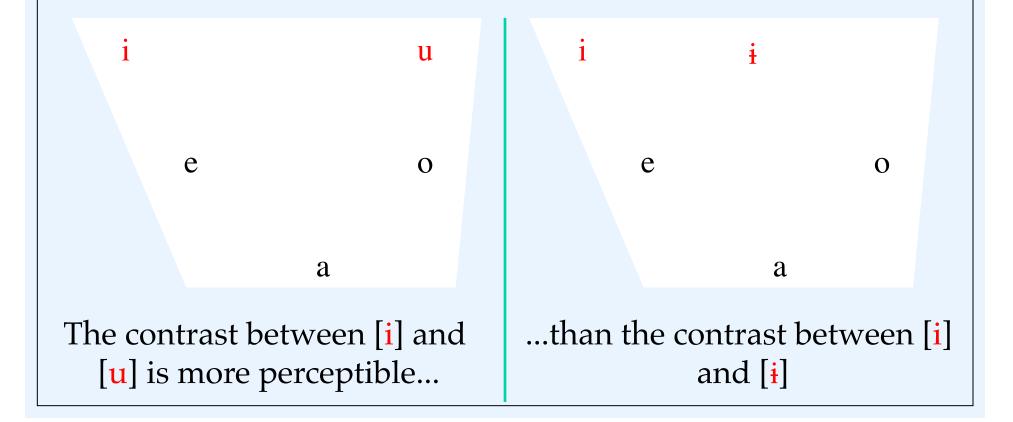
I should add at the outset that I will be assuming that phonology operates on certain types of features, an assumption that is not universally shared.

As Tobias Scheer (2010) observes, it is not clear how issues of contrast apply in frameworks like Dependency Phonology, Government Phonology, and CV-phonology.

I suspect that the basic concepts should apply there, too: the emphasis on representations as driving activity is something that MCS has in common with these theories.

#### Phonetic Contrast

One can study the phonetics of contrast to see, for example, how perceptually salient the difference between sounds is.



#### Phonetic Contrast

It is reasonable to suppose that good contrasts will be favoured in inventories over poor ones (Liljencrants & Lindblom 1972, Flemming 2004), or that perceptual effects of surface contrasts can influence phonological change.

This is an interesting topic, which I will refer to as phonetic contrast, because it is concerned with the surface phonetics of contrasts between sounds.

### Phonetics and Phonological Patterns

However, the study of phonetic contrast has not been the sole —or even the central—preoccupation of phonologists or phonological theory since Saussure.

Phonetic (surface) forms (detailed representations)

Phonological Component (rules or constraints) Underlying the phonetic surface forms phonologists have generally assumed that there exist lexical representations.

Underlying forms (stored in the lexicon)

The levels are related by a phonological component

#### Phonetics and Phonological Patterns

Contrast is relevant to all these levels. Perceptual considerations that have been the subject of much recent interest are relevant to the phonetic level.

Phonetic (surface) forms (detailed representations)

Phonological Component (rules or constraints)

Underlying forms (stored in the lexicon)

But the other levels are also affected by contrast, though in other ways.

First we need to make some hypotheses about the content of these levels.

# Phonological Minimalism

MCS agrees with proposals by phonological 'minimalists' of various types (Anderson 2005; Anderson and Ewen 1987; Carr, Durand & Ewen 2005; Clements 2001; 2003; 2009; van der Hulst 1995; 1996; 2005; Hyman 2001; 2002; 2003; Morén 2003; 2006) that we should specify only those properties that the phonology requires.

# Minimality and Activity

Clements (2001), for example, proposes (2001: 71–2) that 'phonological representations should be freed of superfluous representational elements, leaving only those that are essential to an understanding of lexical, phonological, and phonetic generalizations.'



He 'argues for a general principle of representational economy according to which features are specified in a given language only to the extent that they are needed in order to express generalizations about the phonological system.'

### **Active Feature Specification**

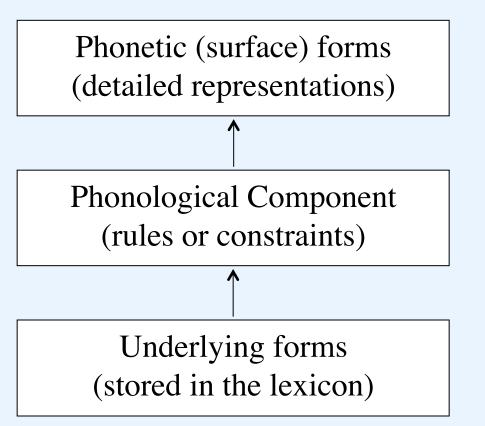
He proposes a principle of *Active Feature Specification*:

All and only those features that are active in a given language occur in its lexical and phonological representations.

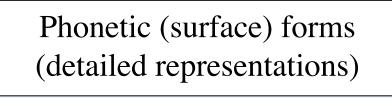
'The term 'active feature' is used to designate a feature or feature value that is required for the expression of lexical contrasts or phonological regularities in a language, including both static phonotactic patterns and patterns of alternation.'

'In this view, whether or not a given feature or feature value is specified in a given language can only be determined from an examination of its system of contrasts and sound patterns.'

Clements proposes that each level is characterized by conditions of specification relevant to that level.



Clements proposes that each level is characterized by conditions of specification relevant to that level.



Phonological Component (rules or constraints)

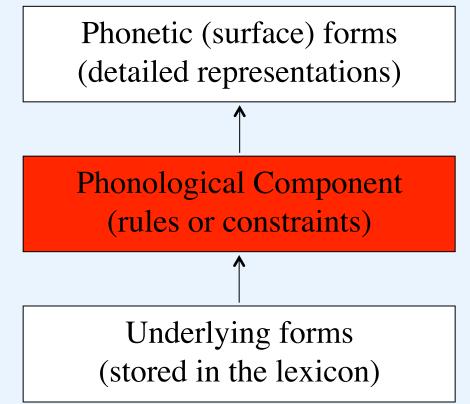
Underlying forms (stored in the lexicon)

At the lexical level the condition is distinctiveness:

• a feature or feature value is present in the lexicon if and only if it is distinctive

A feature is *distinctive*, i.e. *contrastive*, in a given segment if it is required to distinguish that segment from another.

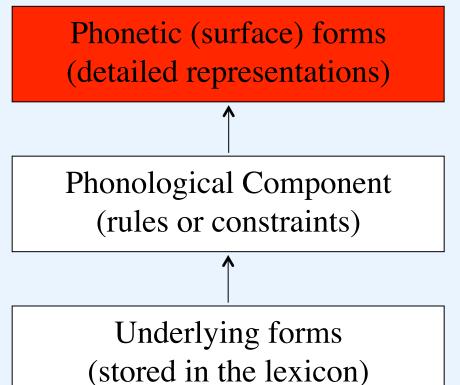
Clements proposes that each level is characterized by conditions of specification relevant to that level.



At the phonological levels the condition is feature activity:

 a feature or feature value is present at a given phonological level if it is required for the statement of phonological patterns (phonotactic patterns, alternations) at that level.

Clements proposes that each level is characterized by conditions of specification relevant to that level.

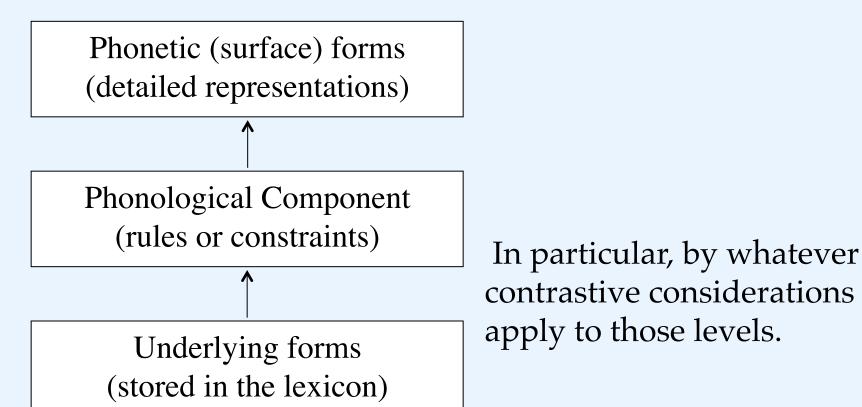


At the phonetic level the criterion is pronounceability:

 feature values are present in the phonetics if required to account for relevant aspects of phonetic realization

# Phonetic and Phonological Contrast

We can also surmise that the sort of contrasts we find at the phonetic level may be influenced by what goes on at the other levels.



# Contrast in underlying forms

Let's look at the lexical level, which Clements proposes consists only of contrastive features.

Phonetic (surface) forms (detailed representations)

Phonological Component (rules or constraints)

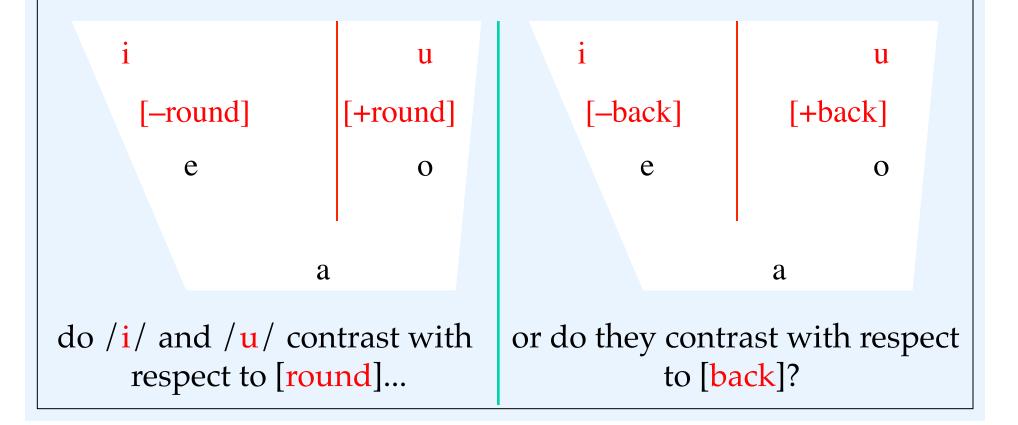
Underlying forms (stored in the lexicon)

This view has a long history in phonological theory. Let's assume for the sake of discussion that it is correct.

It remains to establish a way of identifying these contrastive features.

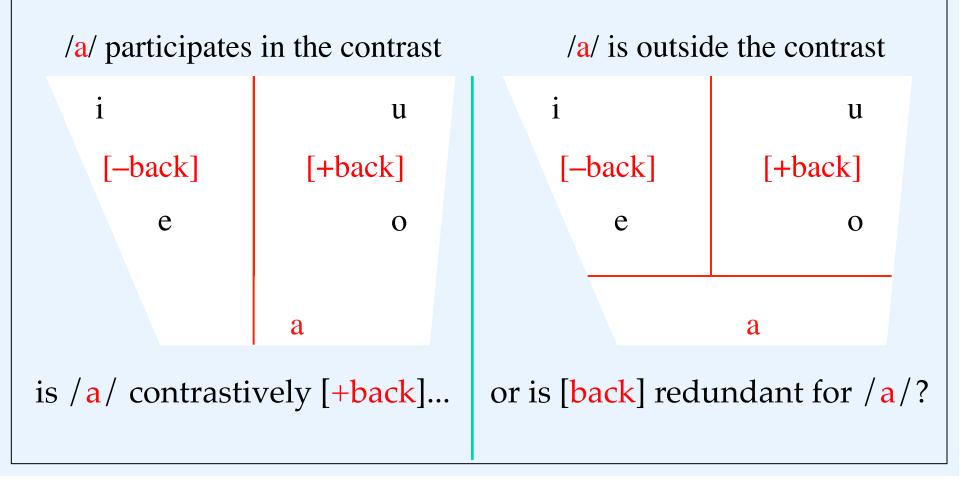
### Phonological Contrast

This is not a trivial matter. For example, given that there is a contrast between /i/ and /u/, which features are required to distinguish them?



### Phonological Contrast

Suppose the answer is that they contrast with respect to [back]. Then another question arises about the status of /a/with respect to this contrast:



## **Phonological Contrast**

To take another example, consider two analyses of the Catalan vowel system in the recent literature.

Eastern Catalan (Crosswhite 2001)

		[+front]		[-front]	
[+high]		i		u	
	[+ATR]	e		0	
	[–ATR]	ε		э	
[+low]		a a	а		

In Crosswhite's (2001) analysis, [ATR] in Eastern Catalan is limited to the mid vowels. It has a narrow scope relative to [high] and [low].

Valencian Catalan (Walker 2005; Lloret 2008)

		[front]	[back]
	[high]	i	u
[+ATR]		е	0
		ε	э
[–ATR]	[low]		а

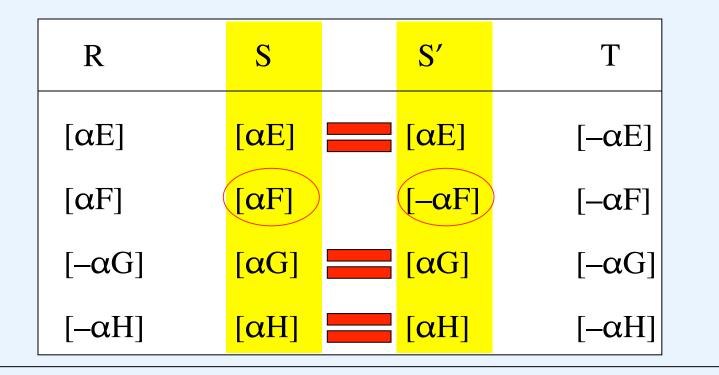
For Walker (2005) and Lloret (2008), Valencian Catalan [ATR] is contrastive over all vowels; it takes scope over the height features.

#### How do we establish contrasts?

How do we establish what the contrastive features are? Phonologists working in a variety of theoretical frameworks have independently proposed that 'minimal contrast' plays an important role in phonology (Padgett 2003, Calabrese 2005, Nevins 2010 explicitly, and many others implicitly).

#### Minimal Contrast

According to the definition proposed by Nevins (2010: 98), a segment S with specification [ $\alpha$ F] is *contrastive* for F if there is another segment S' in the inventory that is featurally identical to S, except that it is [ $-\alpha$ F].



23

#### **Problems with Minimal Contrast**

The main problem with MC is that fewer phonemes than we might think are 'featurally identical' with respect to *all* features that they might possibly possess.

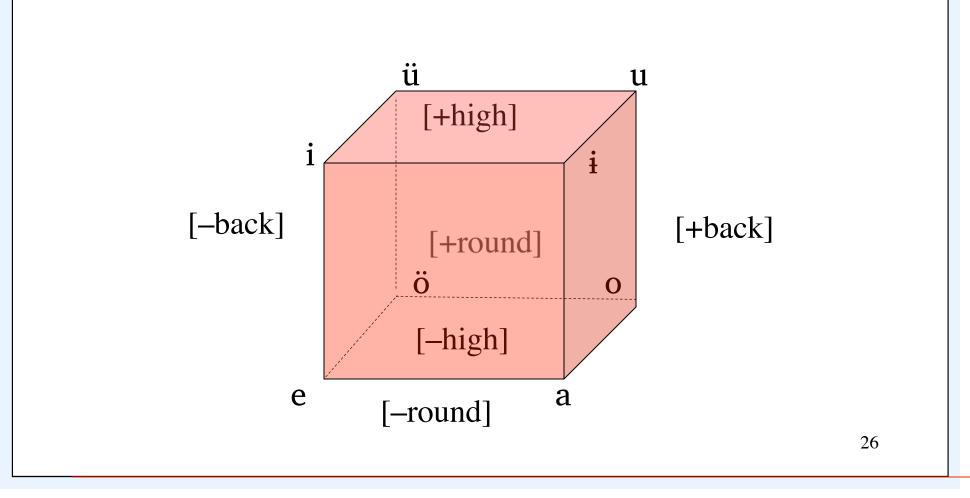
More usually we ignore 'small' or 'irrelevant' features when assessing if two phonemes are minimally different.

An example of the shortcomings of MC and how they are often tacitly set aside is Nevins's discussion of the Turkish vowel system (2010: 26).

In keeping with traditional analyses, Nevins observes that the features [high], [back], and [round] are sufficient to uniquely determine each of the eight vowels of Turkish.

	[–ba [–round]		[+ba [–round]	-	
[+high]	i	ü	i	u	
[–high]	e	ö	а	Ο	25

Here, every feature specification is contrastive, because the vowels completely fill the  $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$  cell vowel space.



Nevins does not mention the feature [low], though it is one of the features commonly employed in vowel systems.

Limiting Turkish to a single height feature is crucial in achieving the elegant traditional classification of Turkish vowels.

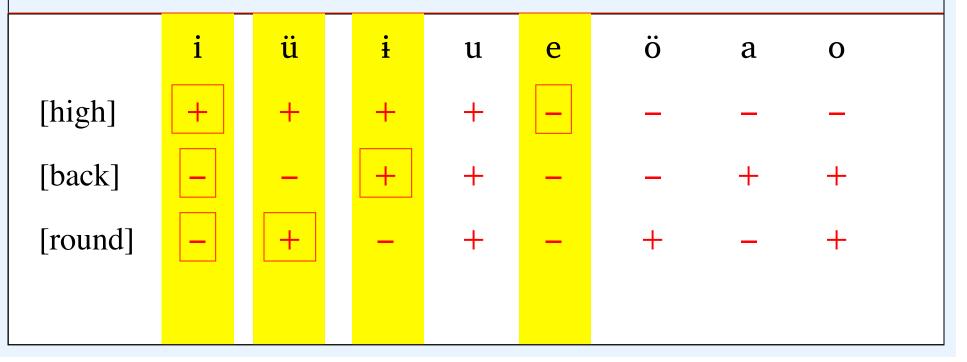
	[–ba [–round]	_	[+ba [–round]	_	
[+high]	i	ü	i	u	
[—high]	e	ö	а	Ο	27

With just these 3 features, every feature specification is contrastive according to MC. Every vowel has 3 counterparts that differ from it with respect to exactly one feature.

	i	ü	i	u	е	ö	а	Ο	
[high]	+	+	+	+	-	-	_	-	
[back]	-	—	+	+	_	_	+	+	
[round]	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	

With just these 3 features, every feature specification is **contrastive**. Every vowel has 3 counterparts that differ from it with respect to exactly one feature.

For example, consider /i/: it differs from  $/\ddot{u}/$  only in [round], from /i/ only in [back], and from /e/ only in [high].



If we include [low], the vowel system would look different. Here not all pairs are minimal; MC would not give the desired results. Circled features are noncontrastive.

In particular, /i/ is no longer contrastively [+high], /e/ is not contrastively [-back], and /o/ is not contrastively [+round]. /a/has no contrastive features at all.

	i	ü	i	u	e	ö	а	0	
[high]	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	
[back]	-	_	+	+	-	_	(+)	+	
[round]	-	+	_	+	-	+	$\overline{}$	+	
[low]	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	

# Against the MC Approach

Dresher (2009) argues that MC fails in many common situations to yield adequate contrastive representations.

This is hardly a surprise: Archangeli (1988) showed the same. In fact, *everybody* knows that MC does not really work.

# A Simple Three-Vowel System

Consider a simple 3-vowel system with the feature specifications as below.

There are no minimal contrasts here at all. The 3 phonemes are too far apart in the  $2^4 = 16$  slot feature space.

	i	a	u
[high]	+	_	+
[back]	_	+	+
[round]	_	_	+
[low]	_	+	_

A Simple Three-Vowel System							
There are no minimal pairs, so MC would give no contrastive features at all.							
specify 4 features for	This is not a good result. But most phonologists do not try to specify 4 features for a 3-vowel system, so this total failure of MC would not be noticed.						
i	a	u					
[high]							
[back]							
[round]							

[low]

# A Simple Three-Vowel System

Even if we remove 1 feature MC still gives no results because there are still no minimal pairs.

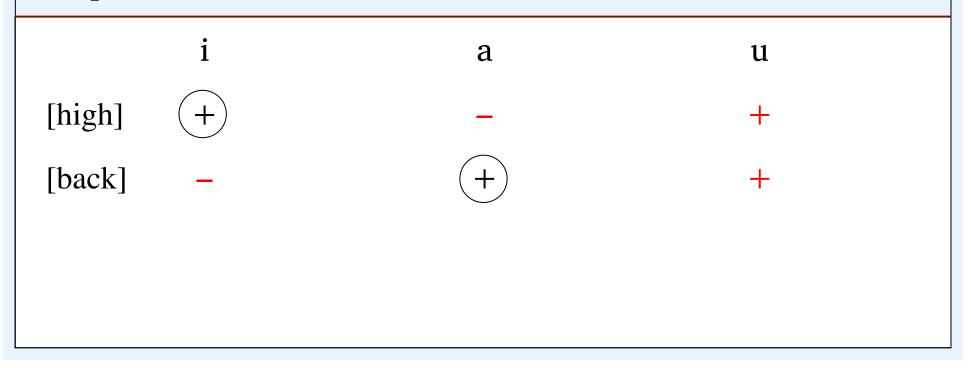
The features [back] and [round] are getting in each other's way. We have to remove one of them.

	i	а	u
[high]	+	_	+
[back]	_	+	+
[round]	_	_	+

# A Simple Three-Vowel System

Now MC *seems* to work: [high] distinguishes /a/ from /u/, and [back] distinguishes /i/ from /u/.

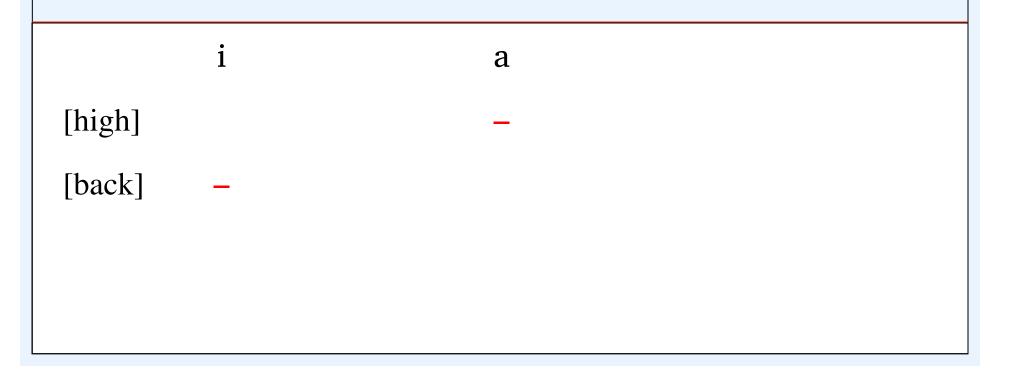
The other features are designated noncontrastive (circled). But I don't think that this is a proper contrastive specification.



# A Simple Three-Vowel System

Without the noncontrastive features, /i/ and /a/ are not properly in contrast.

Without the /u/, these 'contrastive' specifications would look absurd.



# An Alternative Approach

Despite these considerable flaws, MC persists because it seems intuitive—there is indeed a sense in which contrast is minimal, almost by definition—and because phonologists tacitly help it out by discreetly removing 'extra' features and otherwise papering over awkward results.

There is in fact an alternative to Minimal Contrast that has an equally prestigious pedigree in phonological theory.

Reflecting on the cases we have seen, we observe that the Catalan analyses differ in the *relative scopes* of the features [ATR] in relation to [high] and [low].

# **Contrast: Relative Scopes of Features**

#### Recall:

Eastern Catalan (Crosswhite 2001)

		[+front]	[-front]
[+high]		i	u
	[+ATR]	e	0
	[-ATR]	ε	э
[+low]			a

In Crosswhite's (2001) analysis, [ATR] in Eastern Catalan is limited to the mid vowels. It has a narrow scope relative to [high] and [low].

Valencian Catalan (Walker 2005; Lloret 2008)

		[front]	[back]
[+ATR]	[high]	i	u
		е	0
[–ATR]		ε	э
	[low]		а

For Walker (2005) and Lloret (2008), Valencian Catalan [ATR] is contrastive over all vowels; it takes scope over the height features.

# Relative Scope = Ordering

Another way to express this idea is in terms of *feature ordering*: a feature that is higher in the order takes wider scope than a lower-ordered feature.

#### **Contrast: Relative Scopes of Features**

Eastern Catalan (Crosswhite 2001)

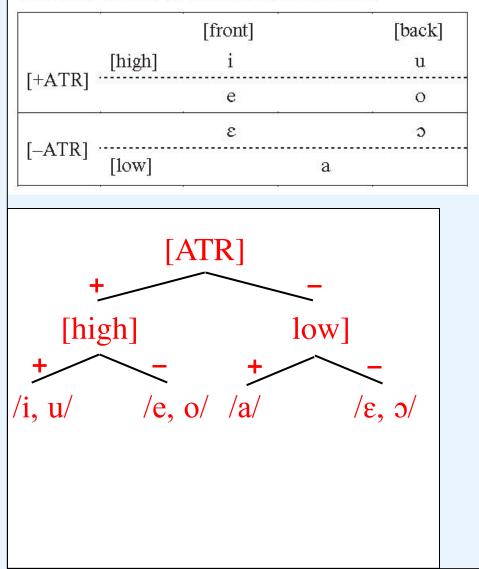
		[+front]		[-front]
[+high]		i		u
	[+ATR]	e		о
	[-ATR]	ε		э
[+low]			а	

[high] + /i, u/ [low] + /a/ [ATR] + /e, o/ / $\epsilon$ , o/ The analysis of Eastern Catalan is tantamount to ordering the features [high] and [low] over [ATR]

The tree diagram expresses the ordering [high] > [low] > [ATR]

# **Contrast: Relative Scopes of Features**

Valencian Catalan (Walker 2005; Lloret 2008)



The analysis of Valencian Catalan is tantamount to ordering [ATR] over the height features.

The tree diagram expresses the ordering [ATR] > [high], [low]

# Ordering in Turkish Vowels

Ordering is also implicit in the traditional analysis of Turkish vowels.

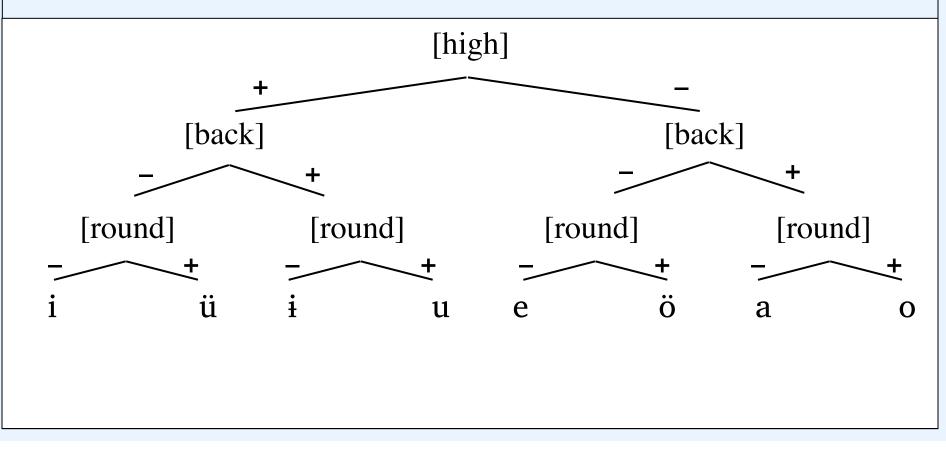
The features [high], [back], and [round] are ordered ahead of [low] and other possible features.

	_	ick] [+round]	[+ba [–round]	_	
[+high]	i	ü	i	u	
[—high]	e	ö	а	Ο	42

# Ordering in Turkish Vowels

Once the top 3 features have applied, all vowels are contrastive and no further contrastive features can be assigned.

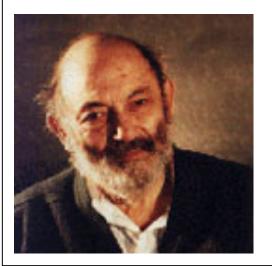
Ordering provides the *rationale* and *justification* for omitting [low] and [ATR] from the analysis of Turkish.



### Origins of the Branching Tree



Branching trees that express contrasts have antecedents in the work of Roman Jakobson and his collaborators. A tree of this kind underlies the feature specifications in Jakobson and Lotz (1949), and is explicit in Jakobson, Fant & Halle 1952, Jakobson & Halle 1956, etc.



Such a tree is prominent in Halle's (1959) *Sound Pattern of Russian*. Halle argues that such trees are the only way of ensuring that phonemes are properly distinctive. Figure I–1, page 46 of *Sound pattern of Russian*, a magnificent tree diagram that shows the lexical feature specifications of every phoneme of Russian.

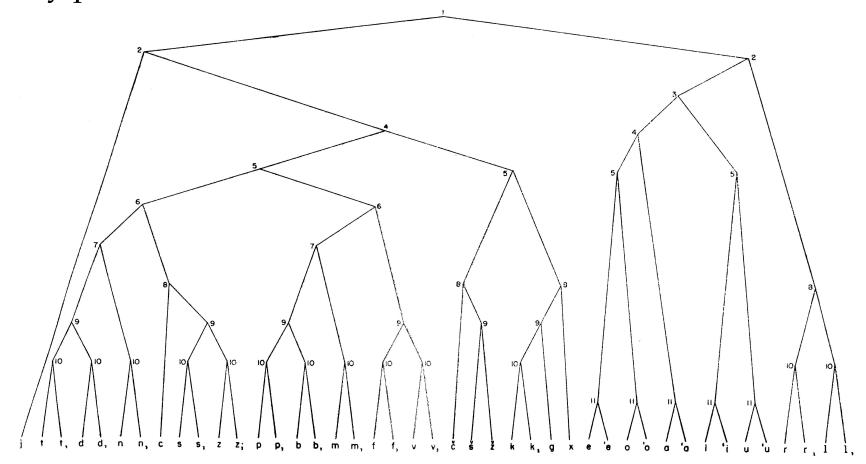
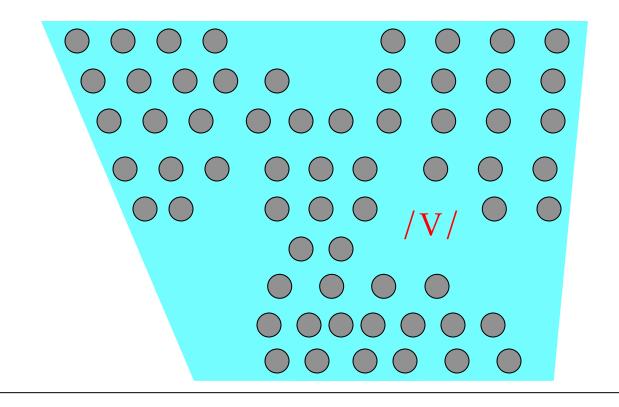


Fig. I-1. Branching diagram representing the morphonemes of Russian. The numbers with which each node is labelled refer to the different features, as follows: 1. vocalic vs. nonvocalic; 2. consonantal vs. nonconsonantal; 3. diffuse vs. nondiffuse; 4. compact vs. noncompact; 5. low tonality vs. high tonality; 6. strident vs. mellow; 7. nasal vs. nonnasal; 8. continuant vs. interrupted; 9. voiced vs. voiceless; 10. sharped vs. plain; 11. accented vs. unaccented. Left branches represent minus values, and right branches, plus values for the particular feature.

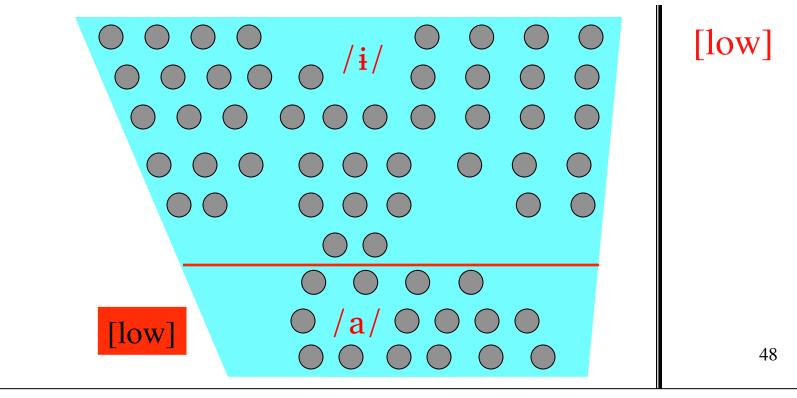
# Contrastive specification by a hierarchy of features

Feature ordering is a way of determining contrastive specifications, via the Successive Division Algorithm (Dresher 1998, 2003, 2009, based on Jakobson, Fant & Halle 1952, Jakobson & Halle 1956)

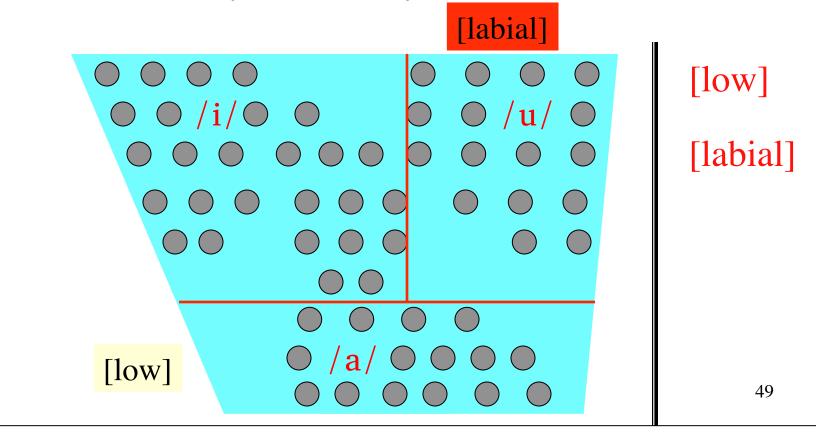
a. Begin with *no* feature specifications: assume all sounds are allophones of a single undifferentiated phoneme.



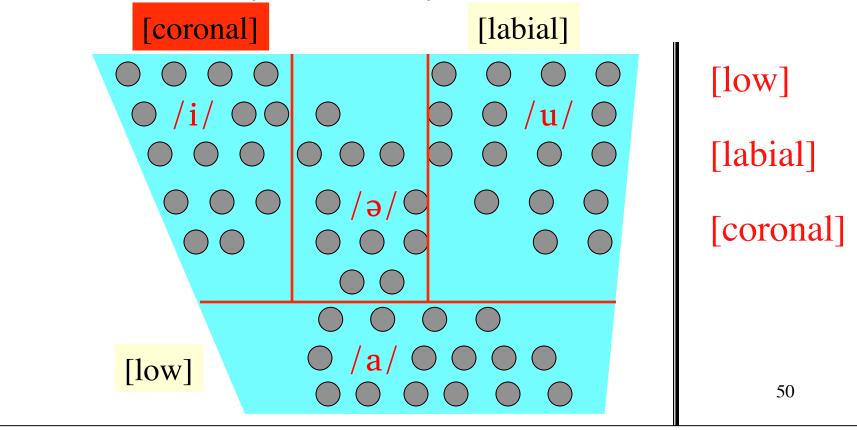
b. If the set is found to consist of more than one contrasting member, identify the contrastive feature and divide the set into as many subsets as the feature allows for.



c. Repeat step (b) in each subset: keep dividing up the inventory into sets, applying successive features in turn, until every set has only one member.

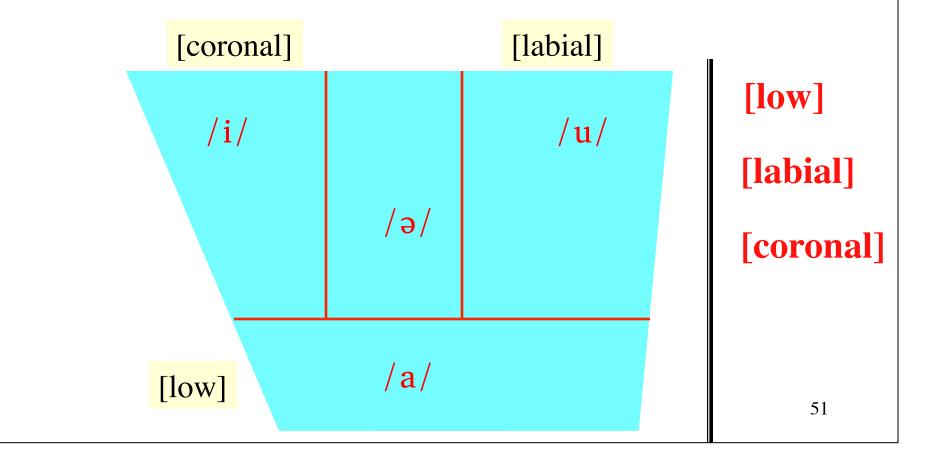


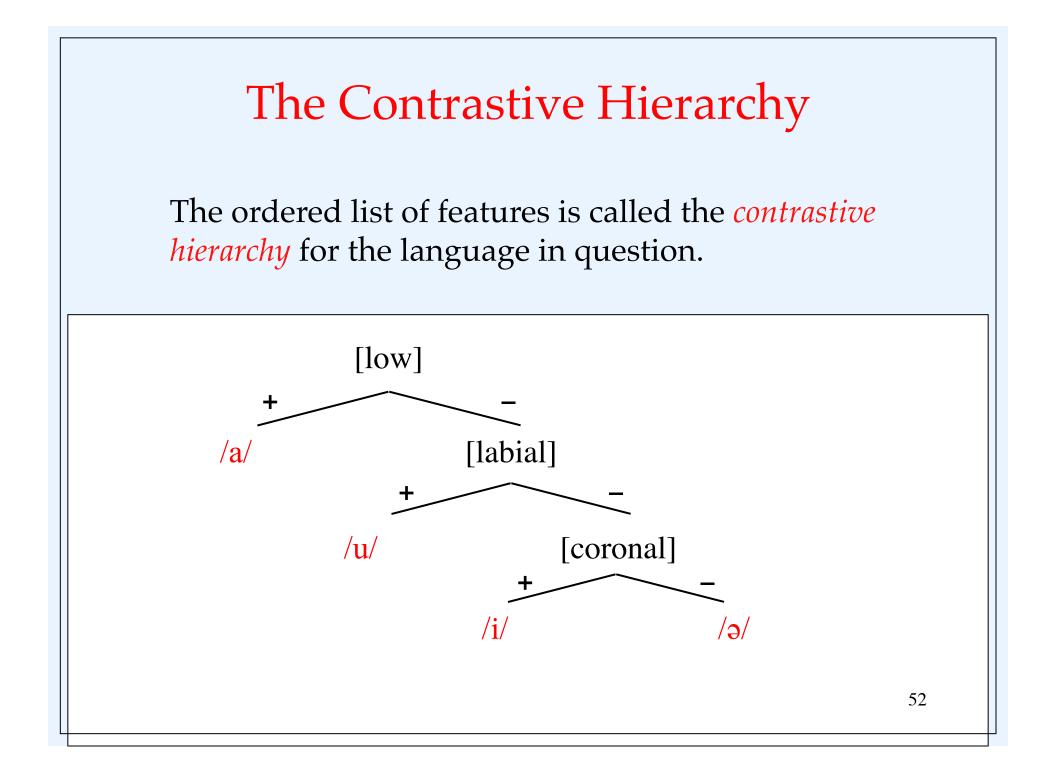
c. Repeat step (b) in each subset: keep dividing up the inventory into sets, applying successive features in turn, until every set has only one member.



#### The Contrastive Hierarchy

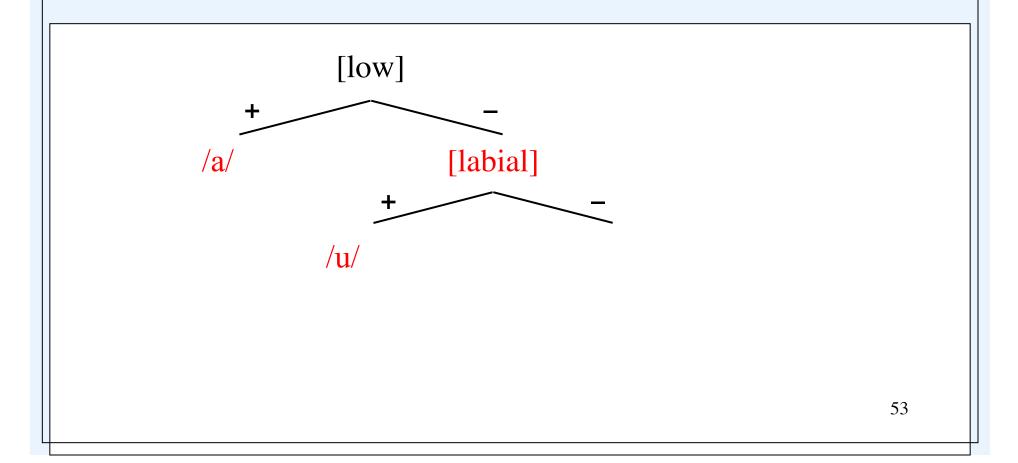
The ordered list of features is called the *contrastive hierarchy* for the language in question.





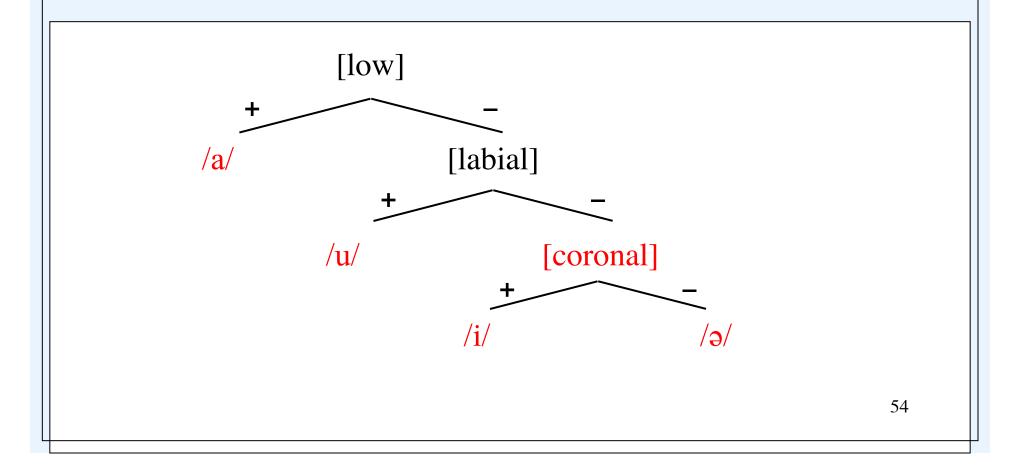
#### The Contrastive Hierarchy

On this approach, each contrast is minimal *at the point at which it applies*. At the point where [labial] applies, it makes a minimal contrast between /u/ and the [-labial] vowels.



#### The Contrastive Hierarchy

Later, the [–labial] vowels are further divided by [coronal]. After this happens, /u/ is no longer minimally different from /i/ and /a/.



# **Contrast and Activity**

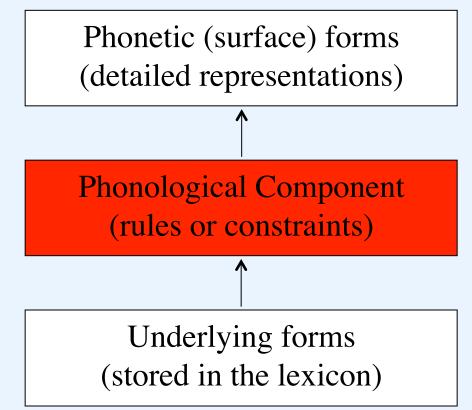
Why does it matter how we establish phonological contrasts between phonemes?

It matters because there is an empirical question that arises about the workings of the phonology:

Does phonology compute *all* features or only *contrastive* ones?

# Conditions for feature specification

Recall that Clements proposed that only *active* features are specified in the phonological component.



At the phonological levels the condition is feature activity:

 a feature or feature value is present at a given phonological level if it is required for the statement of phonological patterns (phonotactic patterns, alternations) at that level.

# Conditions for feature specification

Clements (2001: 79): 'An interesting question is whether one can maintain the following strong hypothesis:'

(7) Lexical feature representations are identical to phonological feature representations

'in other words, only lexically distinctive values are phonologically active.'

#### The Contrastivist Hypothesis

Hall (2007: 20) calls this the *Contrastivist Hypothesis*, which he formulates as follows:

The phonological component of a language L operates only on those features which are necessary to distinguish the phonemes of L from one another.

# The Contrastivist Hypothesis

Clements (2001: 79): "This hypothesis is attractive in that, if true, it would place strong constraints on the nature of feature representation."

'However, we shall see below that some features that are absent in lexical specification are active, and necessarily present, in the phonology, showing that (7) cannot be maintained in its strong form.'

# The Contrastivist Hypothesis

Similarly, Calabrese (2005) and Nevins (2010) propose that phonological processes can target 3 circles of feature specifications:

Marked contrastive features

Contrastive features (marked and unmarked)

All features (contrastive and noncontrastive)

60

#### Weak Contrastivist Hypothesis

The positions of Clements, Calabrese, and Nevins amount to a weak version of the Contrastivist Hypothesis:

The phonological component of a language L *may* operate only on those features which are necessary to distinguish the phonemes of L from one another.

# Weak Contrastivist Hypothesis?

Does the Contrastivist Hypothesis need to be weakened in this manner? It's not so clear: there is a major obstacle in evaluating the empirical status of this hypothesis.

The obstacle is that many analysts assume that contrast is determined by MC (Calabrese, Nevins), or by a fixed feature hierarchy (Clements).

Either way, the set of contrastive features that will be derived from a given inventory is *fixed*.

## Variable Feature Hierarchies

Following work in the Modified Contrastive Specification (MCS) framework (Avery & Rice 1989; Dresher, Piggott & Rice 1994; Dresher & Rice 2007; Hall 2007; Dresher 2009, Mackenzie 2009), I assume rather that feature hierarchies may *vary* from language to language.

Even closely related dialects with identical-looking inventories may have different contrastive relations due to different feature orderings.

A nice example of this is given by Mackenzie (2009).

#### Nilotic Dialects (Mackenzie 2009)

Both Anywa (Reh 1996) and Dholuo (Tucker 1994), related Nilotic languages, have a dental~alveolar contrast in the coronal stops; in both languages, the alveolar nasal /n/ has no dental nasal partner.

Should /n/ be considered contrastively alveolar, or is it outside the dental~alveolar contrast, being only redundantly alveolar?

Anywa (Reh 1996)

Dholuo (Tucker 1994)

Dental	Alveolar		Dental	Alveolar
ţ	t	Voiceless stops	ţ	t
ď	d	Voiced stops	ď	d
	n	Nasals		n

#### Nilotic Dialects (Mackenzie 2009)

Mackenzie (2005, 2009) argues that the two languages adopt different solutions to this question: in Anywa /n/ acts as if it is contrastively alveolar with respect to co-occurrence restrictions; in Dholuo it acts neutrally with respect to the contrast.

In Anywa, the ordering is [distributed] > [nasal]; in Dholuo, the ordering is [nasal] > [distributed].

Anywa (Reh 1996)

Dholuo (Tucker 1994)

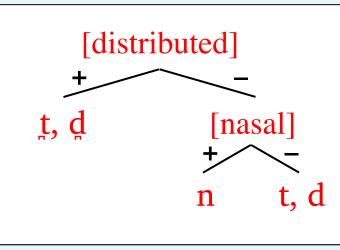
Dental	Alveolar		Dental	Alveolar
ţ	t	Voiceless stops	ţ	t
ġ	d	Voiced stops	ģ	d
	n	Nasals	1	l

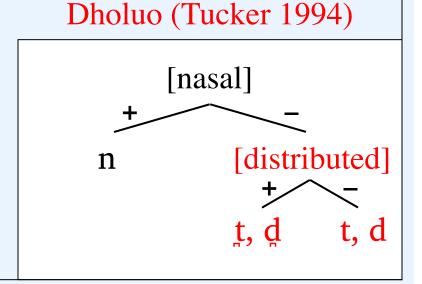
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In Anywa, the ordering is [distributed] > [nasal]; in Dholuo, the ordering is [nasal] > [distributed].







#### Contrast depends on point of view

As Trubetzkoy remarked in his 1936 article addressed to psychologists and philosophers, the correct classification of an opposition "depends on one's point of view"; but "it is neither subjective nor arbitrary, for the point of view is implied by the system." (Trubetzkoy 2001: 20)



Feature ordering is a way to incorporate "point of view" into the procedure of determining contrastive properties. Different orders result in different contrastive features.

#### How many features are contrastive?

Returning to the question of the empirical status of the Contrastivist Hypothesis, it is clear that the approach one adopts to identifying which features are contrastive will play a big role in how one evaluates the success of the hypothesis.

In this connection it is important to note that the MC approach labels *fewer* features as contrastive than does the SDA.

#### Which Features are Contrastive? MC

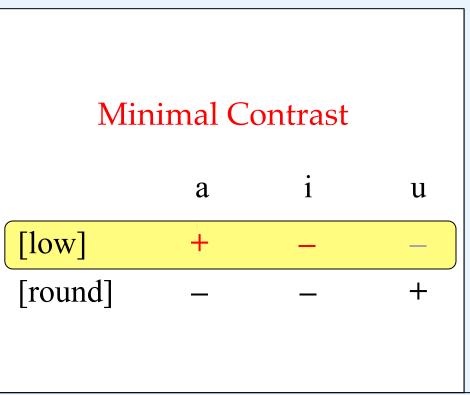
To take a simple example, consider an inventory with three vowels / a, i, u / and the features [low] and [round] (if we pick any more features the MC approach won't work).

#### Minimal Contrast

	a	i	u
[low]	+	_	_
[round]	_	_	+

#### Which Features are Contrastive? MC

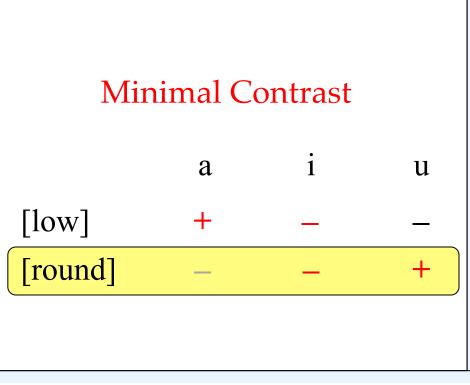
To take a simple example, consider an inventory with three vowels / a, i, u / and the features [low] and [round] (if we pick any more features the MC approach won't work).



The feature [low] uniquely distinguishes /a/ from /i/.

#### Which Features are Contrastive? MC

To take a simple example, consider an inventory with three vowels / a, i, u / and the features [low] and [round] (if we pick any more features the MC approach won't work).



The feature [low] uniquely distinguishes /a/ from /i/.

The feature [round] uniquely distinguishes /i/ from /u/.

#### Which Features are Contrastive? MC

To take a simple example, consider an inventory with three vowels / a, i, u / and the features [low] and [round] (if we pick any more features the MC approach won't work).

#### Minimal Contrast

The feature [low] uniquely distinguishes /a/ from /i/.

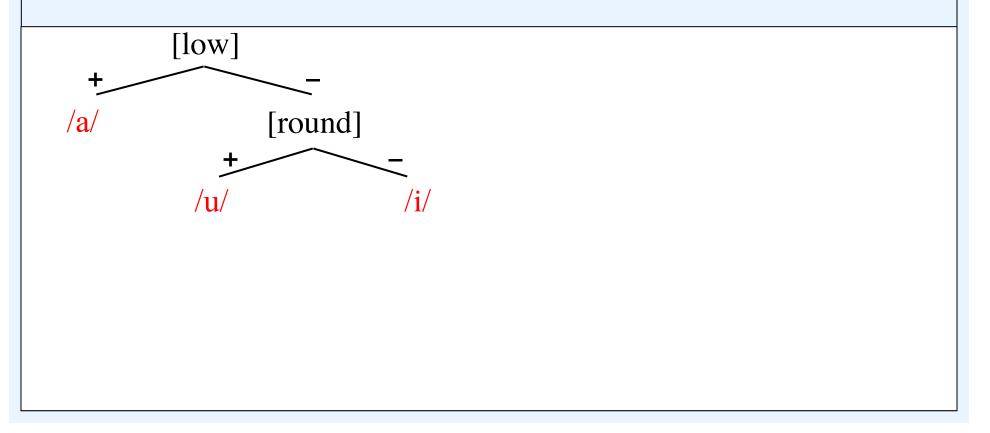
The feature [round] uniquely distinguishes /i/ from /u/.

There are 4 contrastive features and 2 non-contrastive features (circled).

#### Which Features are Contrastive? SDA

In a hierarchical approach we obtain different results. There are two outcomes, depending on the ordering of the features.

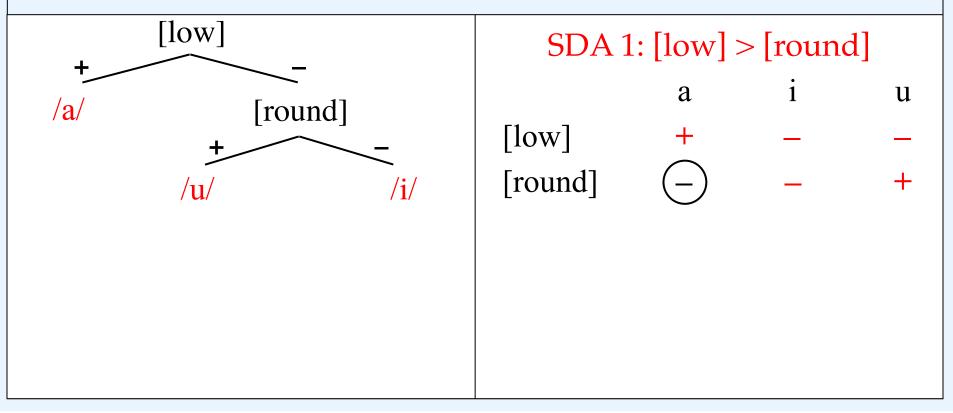
First, let's suppose that [low] is ordered above [round]:



#### Which Features are Contrastive? SDA

On this order, [low] is contrastive for all segments, and [round] is contrastive for /u/and /i/.

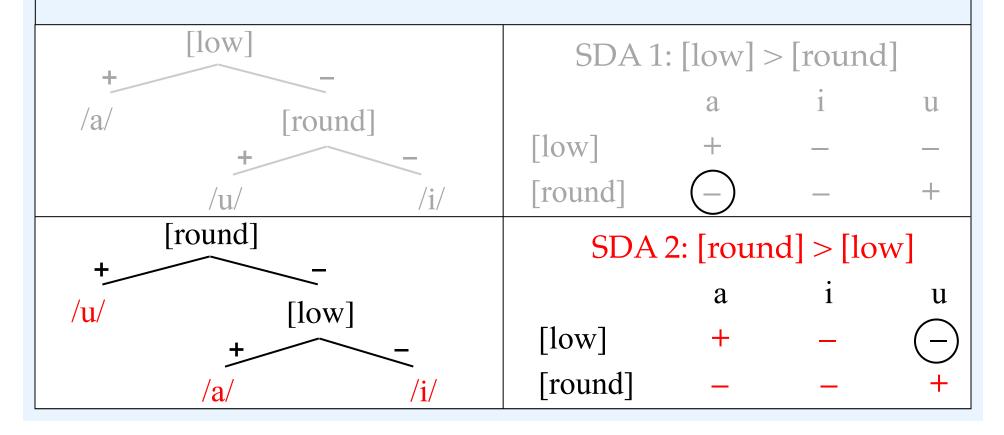
5 features are contrastive and only 1 feature (circled) is noncontrastive.



#### Which Features are Contrastive? SDA

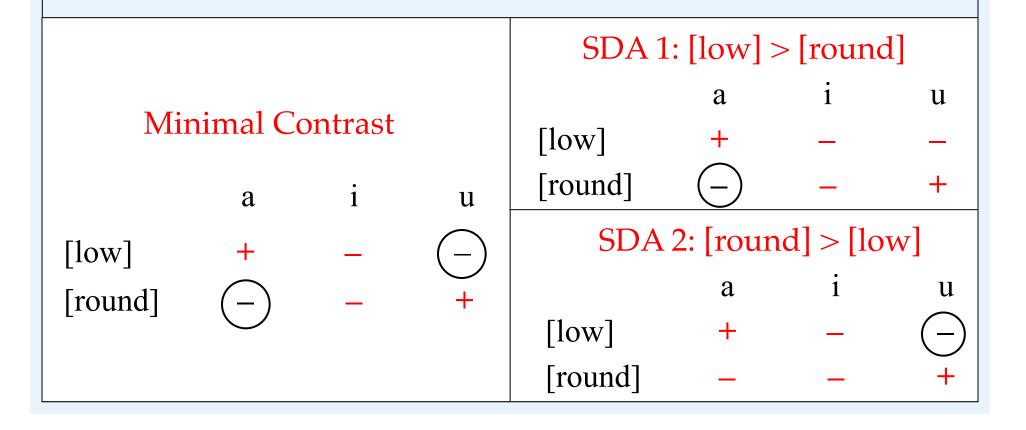
In the other possible order, [round] is contrastive for all segments, and [low] is contrastive for /a/ and /i/.

Again, 5 features are contrastive and only 1 is non-contrastive.



#### Which Features are Contrastive?

Comparing the two approaches, we observe that one or the other of the features that MC designates as non-contrastive is designated as contrastive by the SDA, in either ordering.



# Against the MC Approach

Therefore, we might expect that there are cases where in an MC analysis it *looks like* non-contrastive features are active, contrary to the Contrastivist Hypothesis; but those same features could be designated contrastive by the SDA.

I argue that such cases in fact arise in Nevins's (2010) analyses of vowel harmony.

# Yoruba Dialects

In Ife Yoruba, lax (or RTR) mid vowels  $/\epsilon$ ,  $\mathfrak{o}/$  can occur nonfinally only when another lax mid vowel follows (a, b).

Locality is computed only with respect to mid vowels (leaving aside /a/ for now); a high tense vowel can intervene (c, d).

Ife Yoruba		
a.	olè 'thief' *olè	
b.	ose 'soap'	
c.	orúko 'name'	
d.	èlùbó 'yam flour'	

# Yoruba Dialects

Standard Yoruba has the same process (a, b), except that high vowels count in the computation (c, d).

Only tense mid vowels may precede a high vowel, even if a lax mid vowel occurs to the right.

Ife Yoruba	Standard Yoruba		
a. olè 'thief'	a. olè 'thief'		
b. ose 'soap'	b. ose 'soap'		
c. <b>o</b> rúko 'name'	c. orúko 'name'		
d. <mark>è</mark> lùbó 'yam flour'	d. èlùbó 'yam flour'		

# Yoruba Dialects

Nevins (2010: 16) explains the difference as follows:

The locality of vowel harmony in Ife Yoruba is determined by the closest vowel contrastive for the tense/lax distinction, while the locality of vowel harmony in Standard Yoruba is determined by the closest vowel, period.

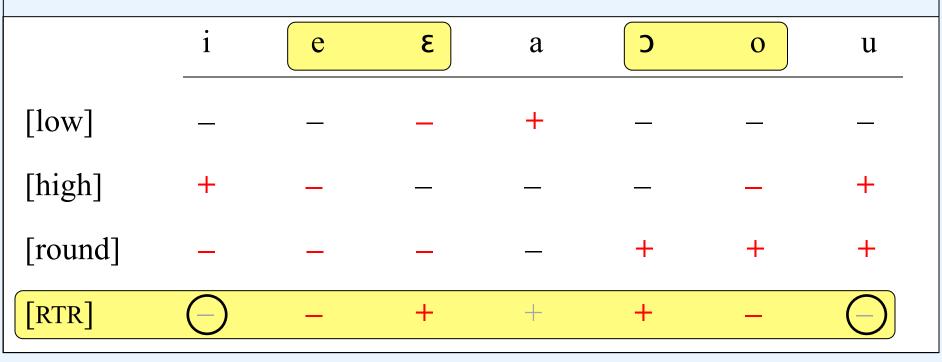
Nevins assumes that only mid vowels are contrastive for [RTR] in *both* dialects, in keeping with the MC approach to contrast.

Recall that on this approach contrastive features are those that uniquely distinguish two phonemes. (Following the usual practice I tacitly choose only one of [round] and [back] so that the MC method can appear to work.)

	i	e	3	а	С	0	u
[low]	_	_	_	+	_	_	_
[high]	+	_	_	_	_	-	+
[round]	_	_	_	_	+	+	+
[RTR]	—	_	+	+	+	_	—

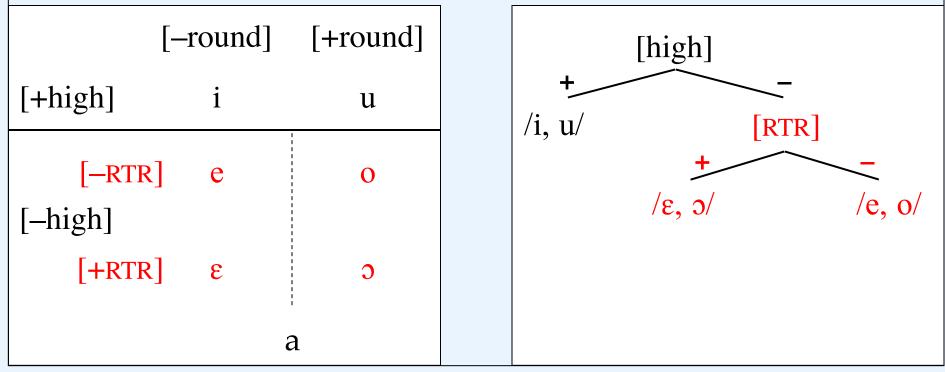
Only the mid vowels can be contrastive for [RTR] in any dialect with the same vowel inventory.

Therefore, if high vowels block harmony in Standard Yoruba, it must be because [RTR] harmony computes *all* features, not just contrastive ones.

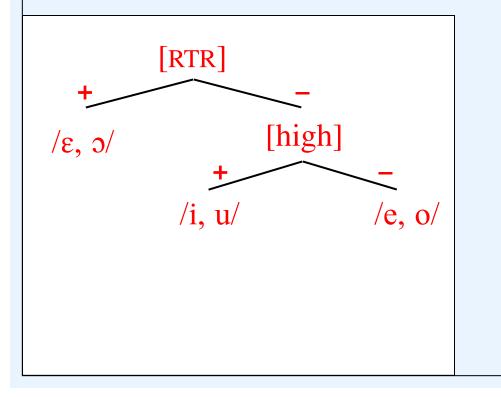


This conclusion does not follow in a hierarchical approach to contrast. The SDA *can* limit contrastive [RTR] to mid vowels, corresponding to ordering the features [high] > [RTR].

#### Ife Yoruba: [hi] > [RTR]



But the other ordering is also possible. On this ordering, *all* vowels are contrastive for [RTR], including the high vowels.



Standard Yoruba: [RTR] > [hi]

[-	[–round]		
[+high] [-RTR]	i	u	
[_high]	e	0	
[+RTR]	ε	Э	
	ć	a	

It is thus not obvious that Standard Yoruba vowel harmony computes non-contrastive features. The difference between the dialects may be one of feature ordering, a difference in the relative scope of [RTR].

Ife Yoruba: [hi] > [RTR]				Standard Yoruba: [RTR] > [hi]		
	-round]	[+round]		[-	-round]	[+round]
[+high]	i	u		[+high]	i	u
[-RTR]	e	0		[–RTR] [–high]	e	0
[–high] [+RTR]	ε	Э		[+RTR]	ε	С
а					ä	a

On this view, *both* Ife and Standard Yoruba limit [RTR] harmony to contrastive values of [RTR].

The difference is in the contrastive scope of [RTR]: in Ife Yoruba the high vowels are not included, in Standard Yoruba they are.

Ife Yoruba: [hi] > [RTR]

Standard Yoruba: [RTR] > [hi]

[–round]		[+round]		[-	-round]	[+round]
[+high]	i	u		[+high]	i	u
[-RTF	e] e	0		[–RTR] [–high]	e	0
[-high]	ε]	Э		[+RTR]	8	Э
a					ä	a

# Vowel Harmony and the Contrastivist Hypothesis

Therefore, we cannot conclude from this example that vowel harmony must sometimes compute all features rather than just contrastive ones.

So far, vowel harmony is consistent with the Contrastivist Hypothesis.

How a Change in the Underlying Contrasts Causes a Diachronic Change:

East Slavic Post-velar Fronting

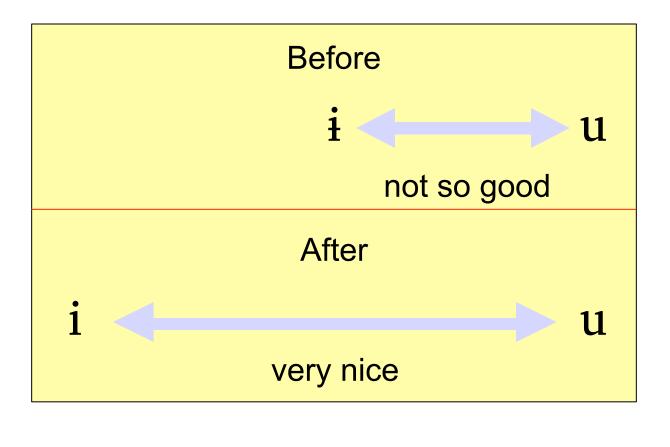
# East Slavic post-velar fronting

Between the 12th and 14th centuries  $k_i$  fronted to  $k^{j}i$  in East Slavic.

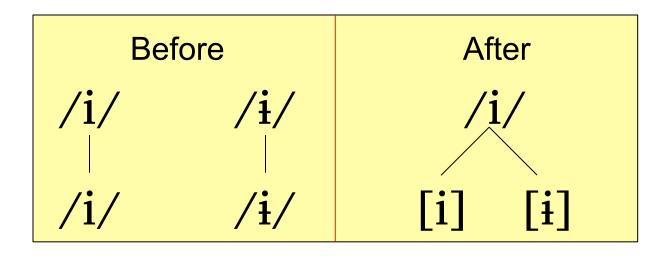


What caused this fronting? Everyone agrees that the lack of contrast at the time between  $\mathbf{k}$  and  $\mathbf{k}^{j}$  is crucial to accounting for this change.

Padgett (2003) argues that it was motivated also by the surface distance between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{4}$ .



I argue, following Jakobson (1929), that the trigger was the reanalysis of underlying vowel contrasts, whereby the phoneme /i/ became a positional allophone of /i/.



At issue is the proper way to incorporate contrast into phonology. I will argue for the following positions:

Which features does the phonology compute? NOT all features but only contrastive features

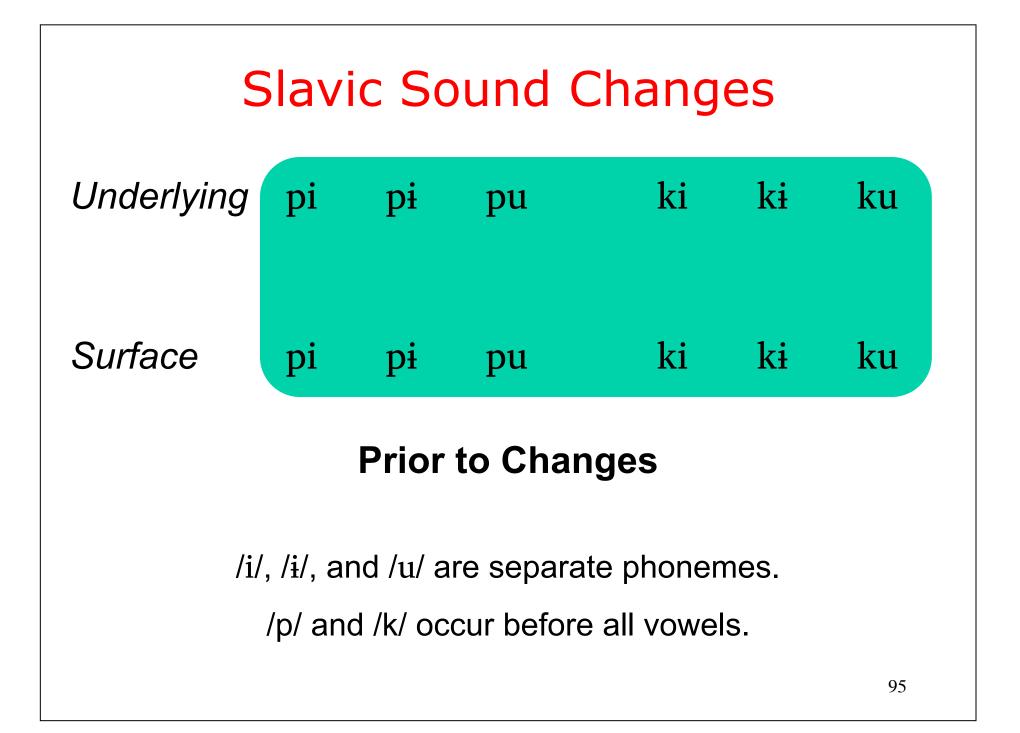
How is contrast assessed? NOT by minimal pairs but by a contrastive feature hierarchy

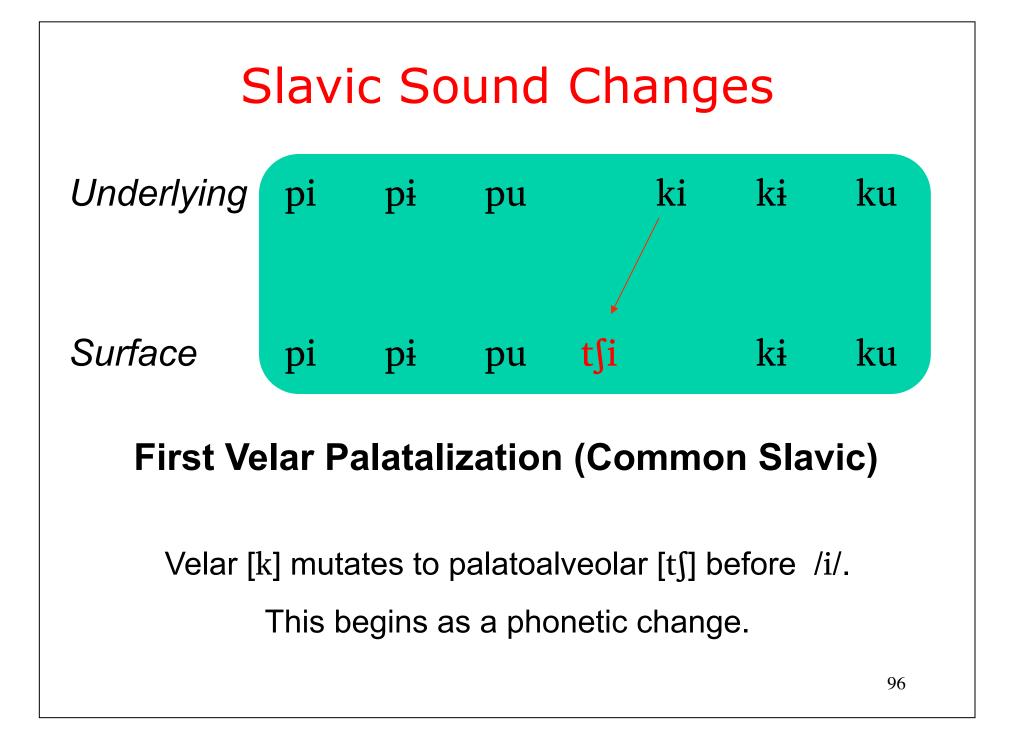
Where does phonology access contrast? NOT at the surface but at the underlying form

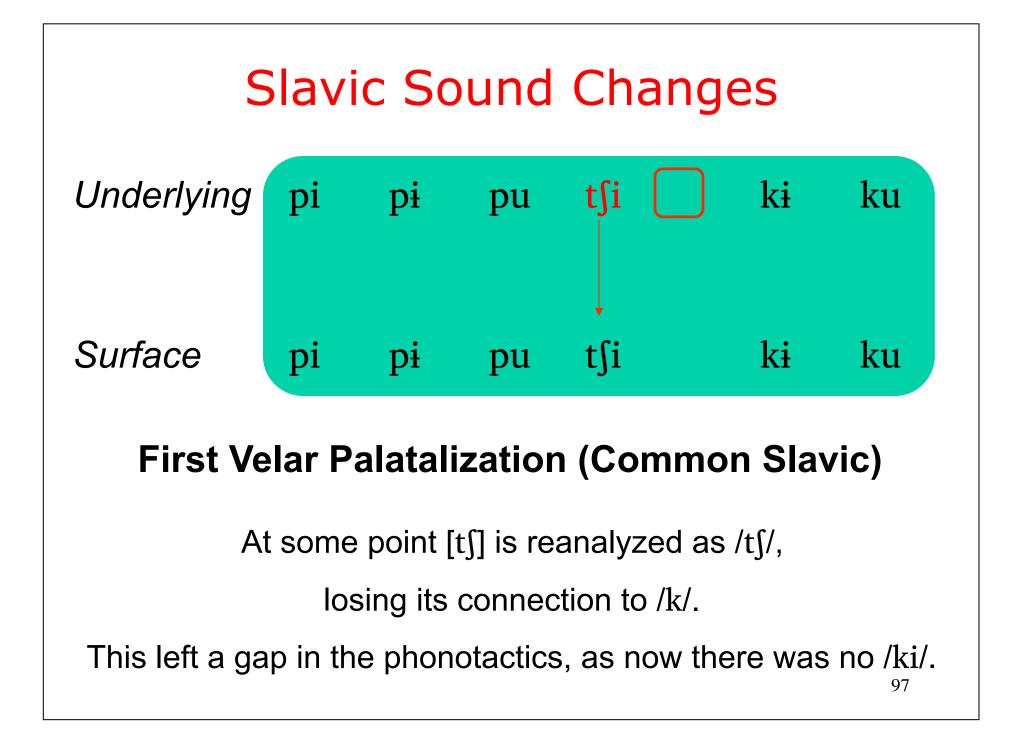
I will begin by giving a fairly standard account of some changes in the history of Slavic that led up to this change.

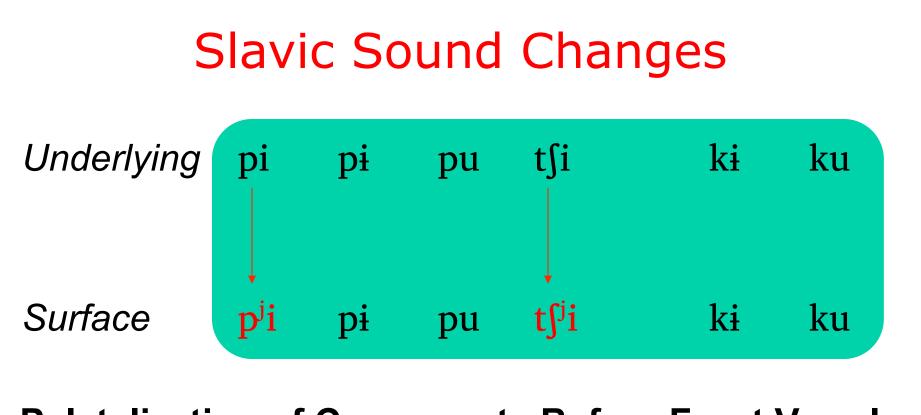
Then I will discuss both analyses and argue in favour of my approach, which adheres to the framework of Modified Contrastive Specification (Toronto phonology)

# Some Slavic Diachrony



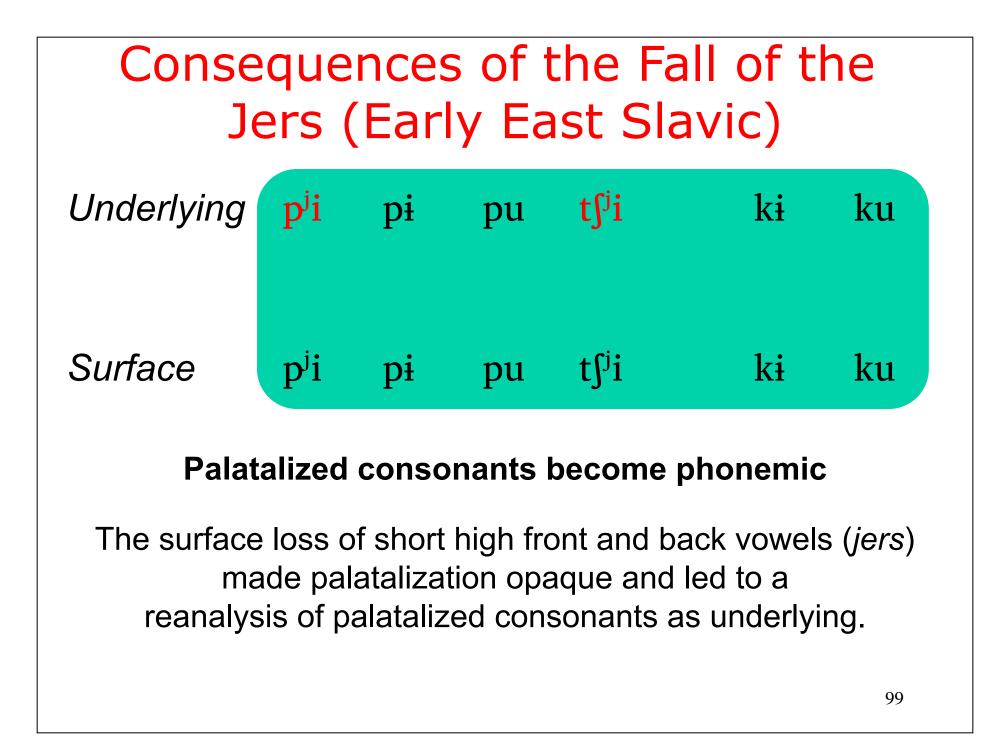


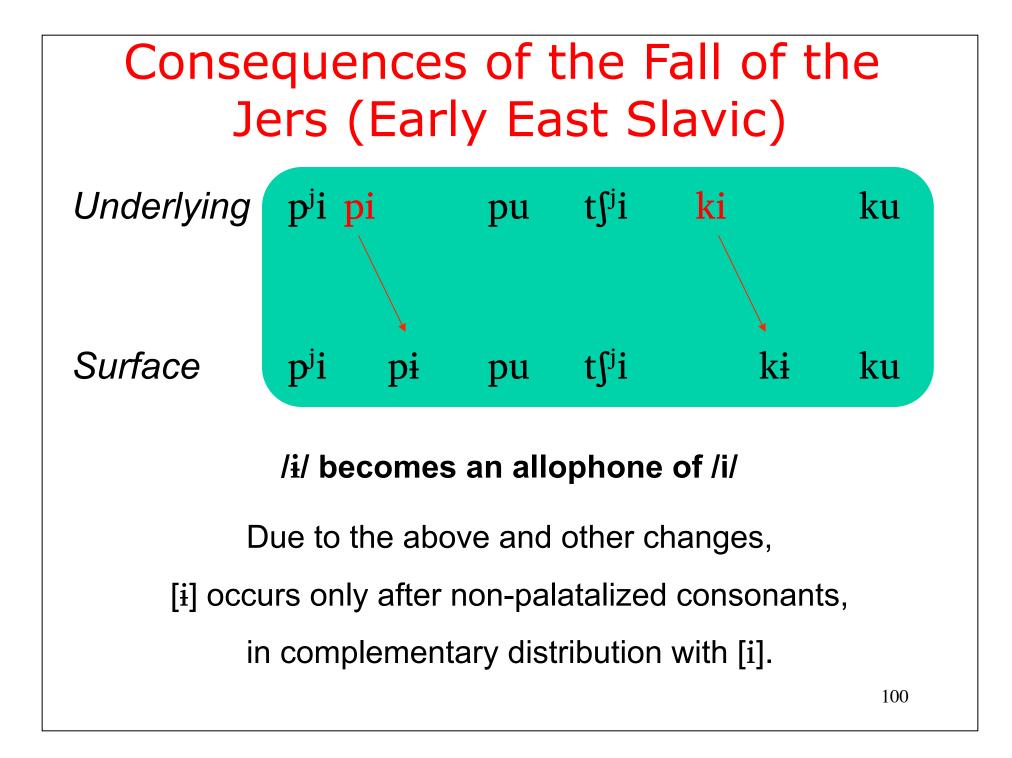


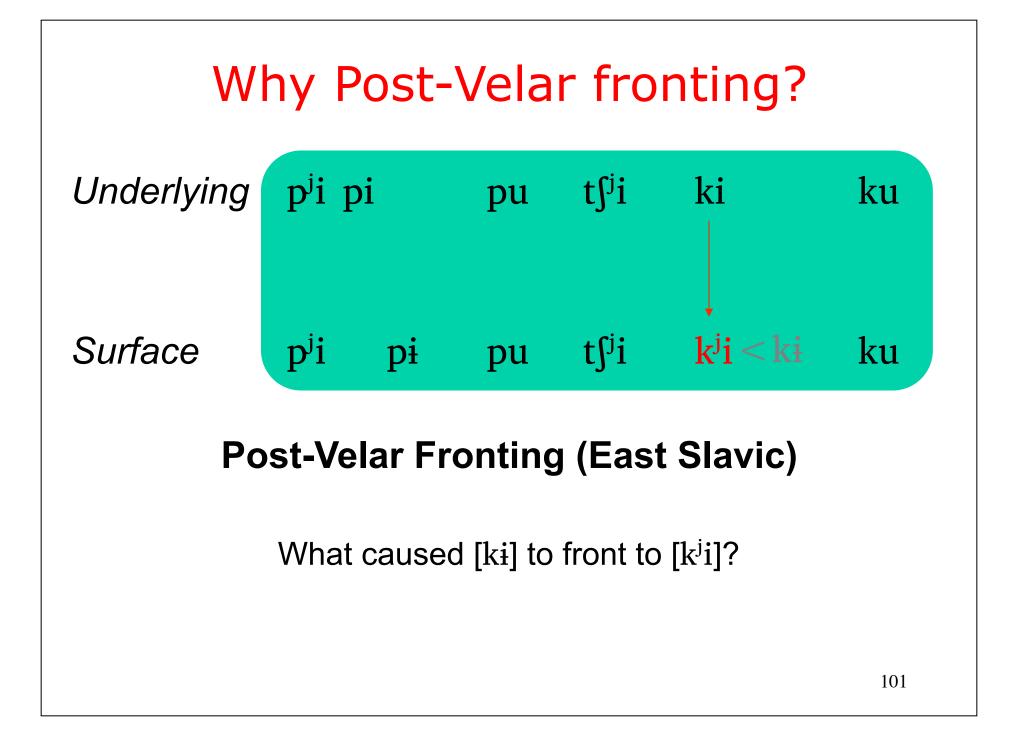


#### Palatalization of Consonants Before Front Vowels (Post-Common Slavic)

This change begins as a predictable allophonic palatalization.



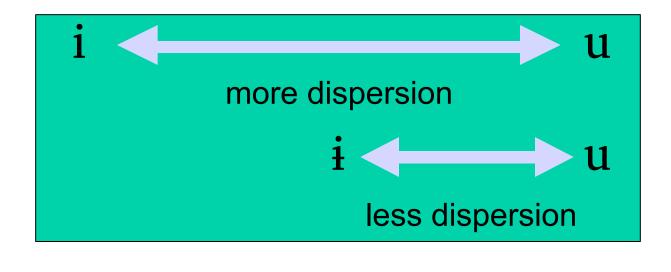




# A Dispersion Theory Analysis (Padgett 2003)

A Dispersion Theory Analysis (Padgett 2003)

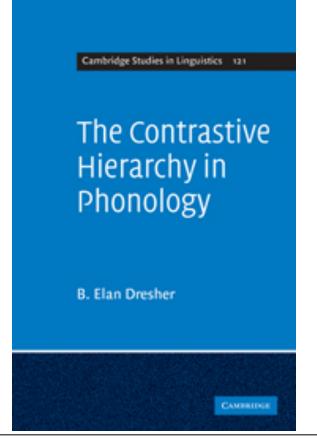
Padgett (2003) looks at surface phonetic contrasts and proposes that the key to the change of  $k_i$  to  $k^j i$  is that  $k^j i$  makes a better perceptual contrast with ku than does ki.



103

### Formal Implementation of the DT Analysis

I have argued elsewhere (Dresher 2009\*) that there are technical problems with the DT analysis, but I will not dwell on these here.

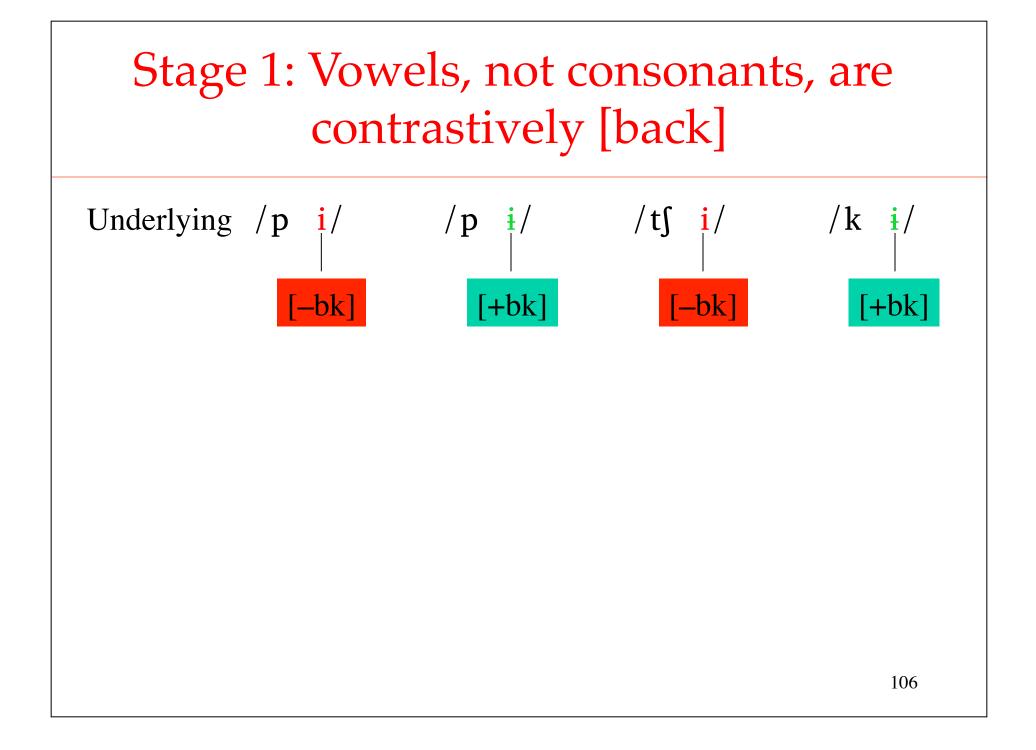


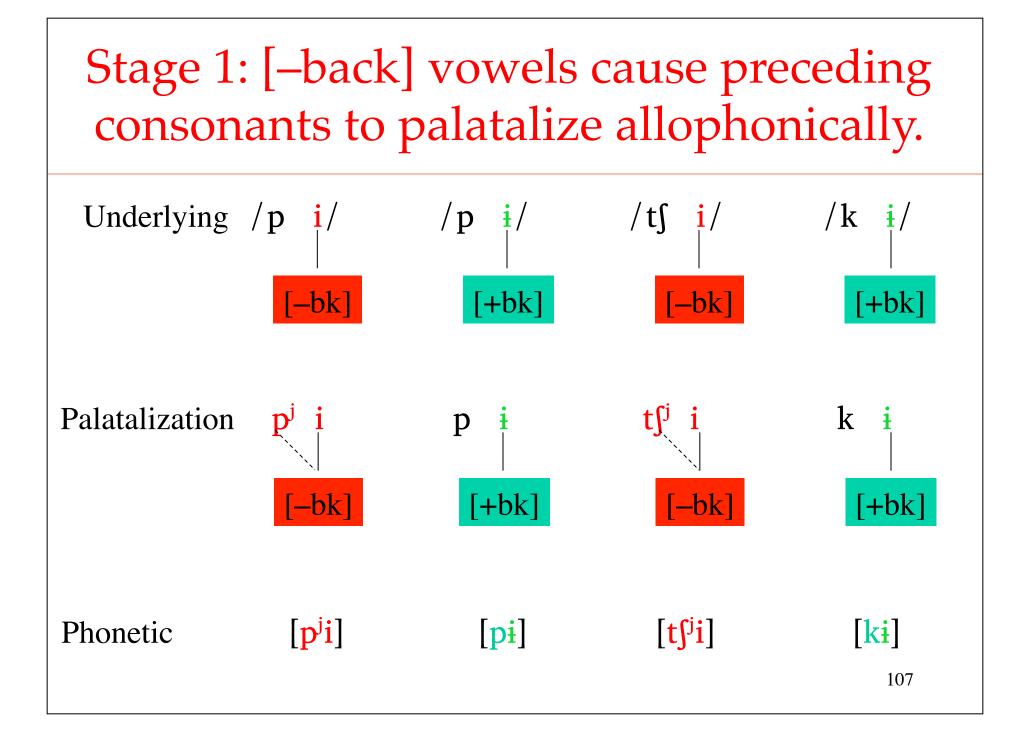
\*See pages 218–220.

#### Modified Contrastive Specification

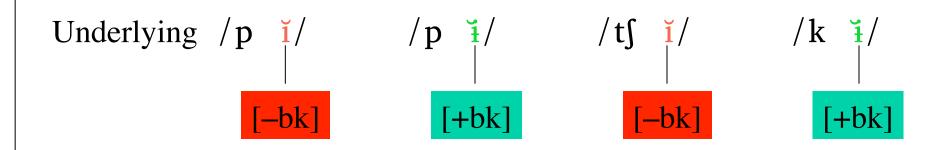
The theory of the contrastive hierarchy suggests a different solution to post-velar fronting, one which is closer to the spirit of Jakobson's (1929) analysis. In keeping with generative grammar, it requires paying attention to the succession of *grammars*, not just to changing surface forms.

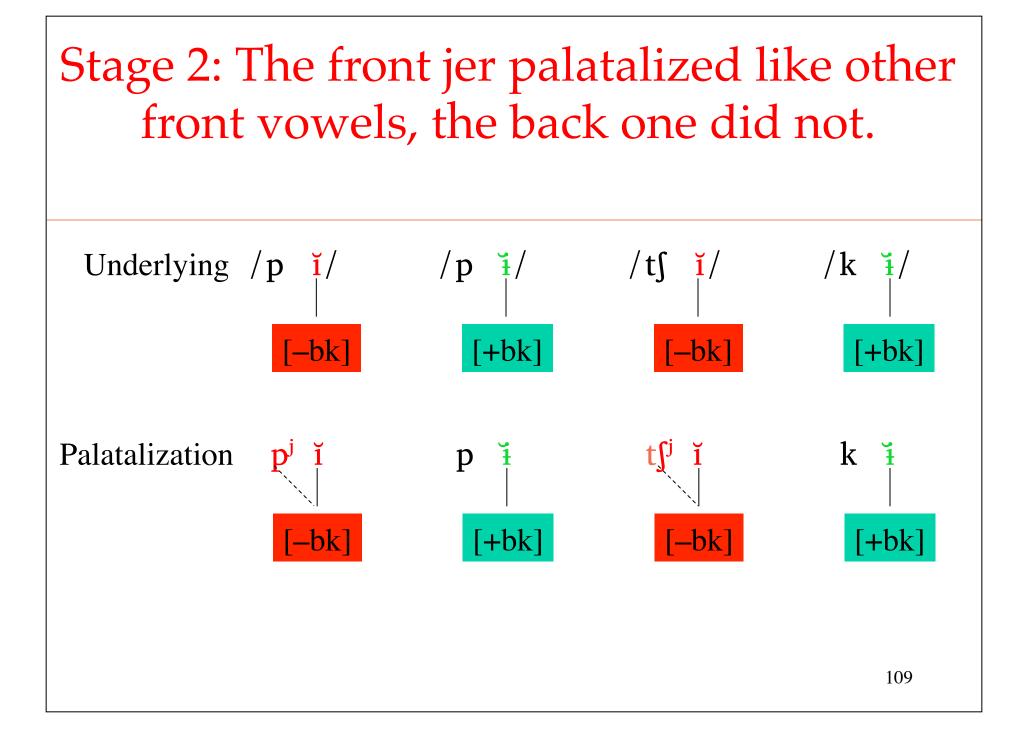
Based on the traditional chronology given earlier, I assume the following sequence of grammars, starting with Common Slavic, after First Velar Palatalization (FVP) but before the East Slavic post-velar fronting:



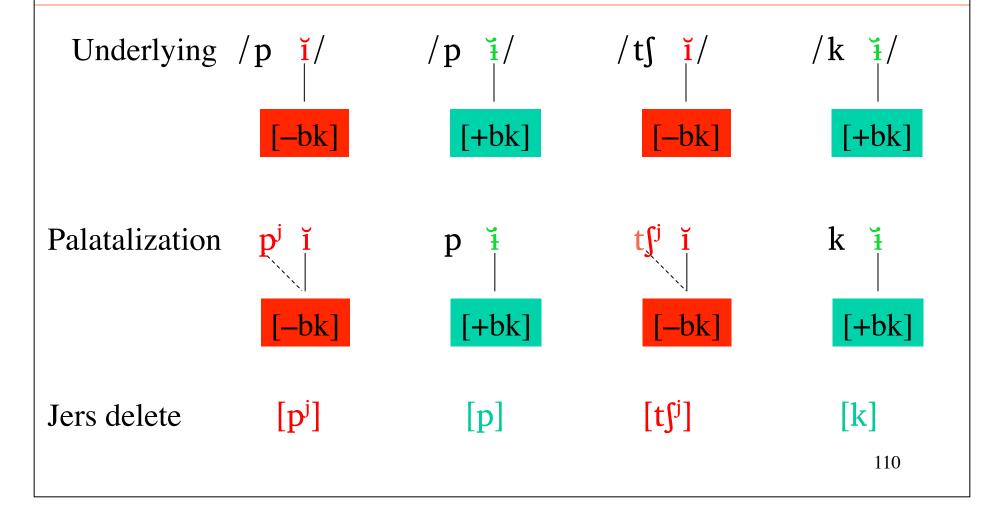


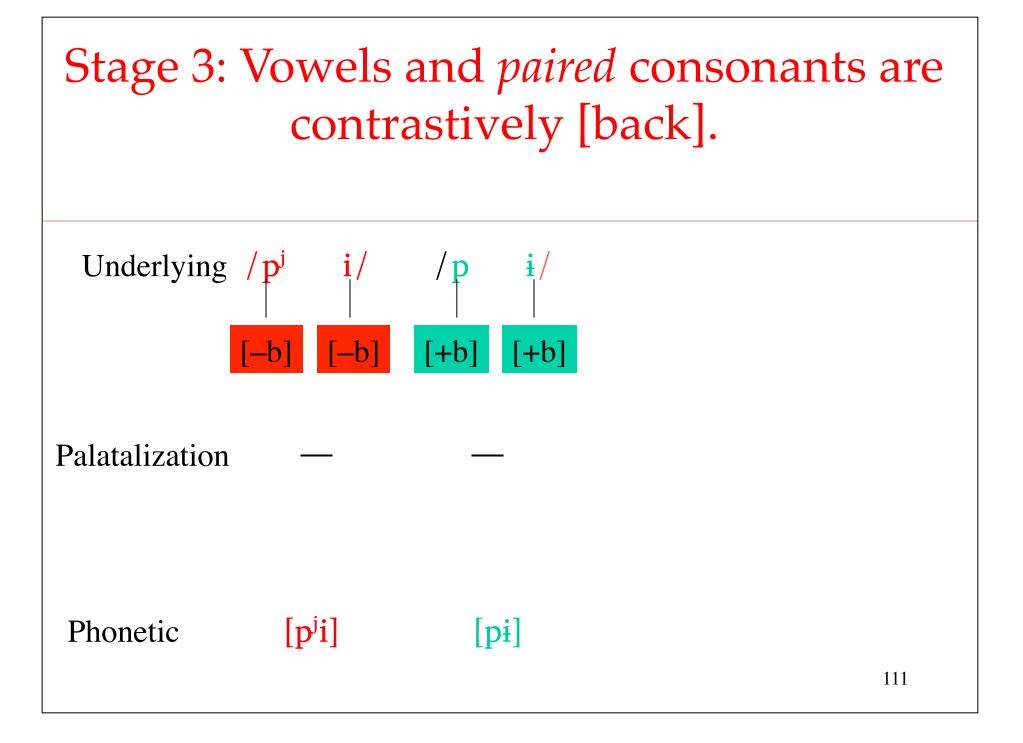
Stage 2: There were two ultra-short vowels called jers: one was a front vowel and the other was a back vowel.

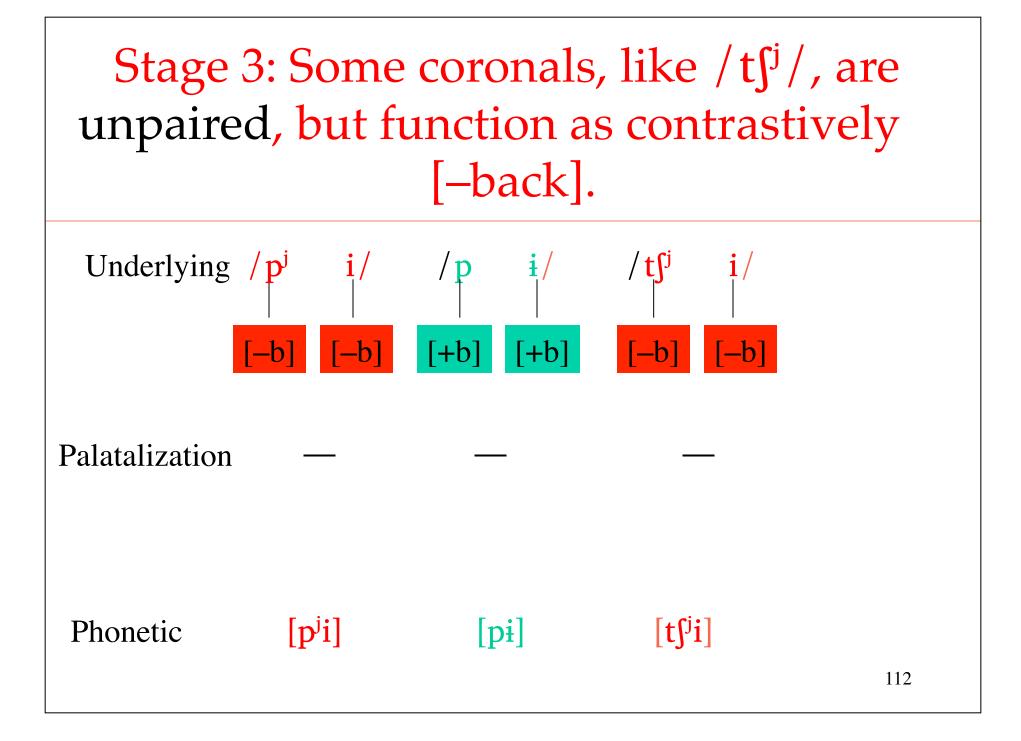




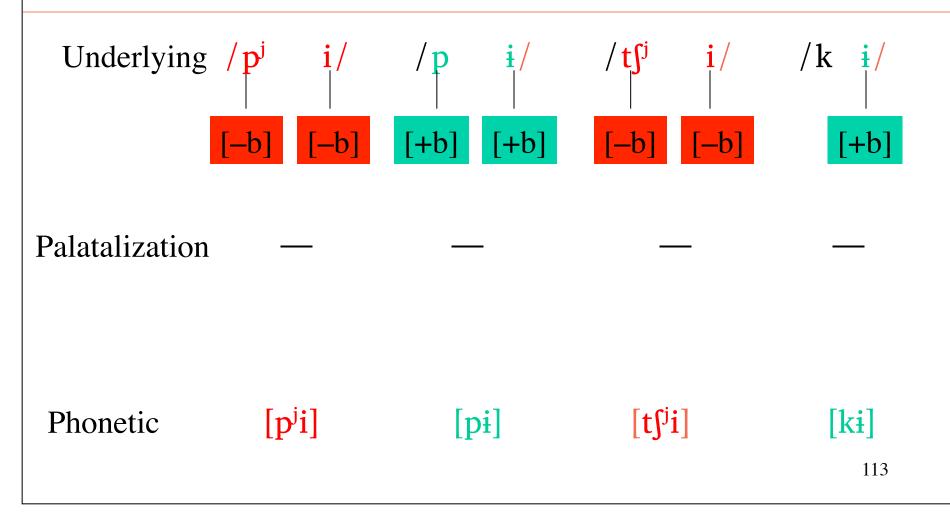
Stage 2: The fall of the jers made palatalization opaque and led to the reanalysis of palatalized consonants as underlying.



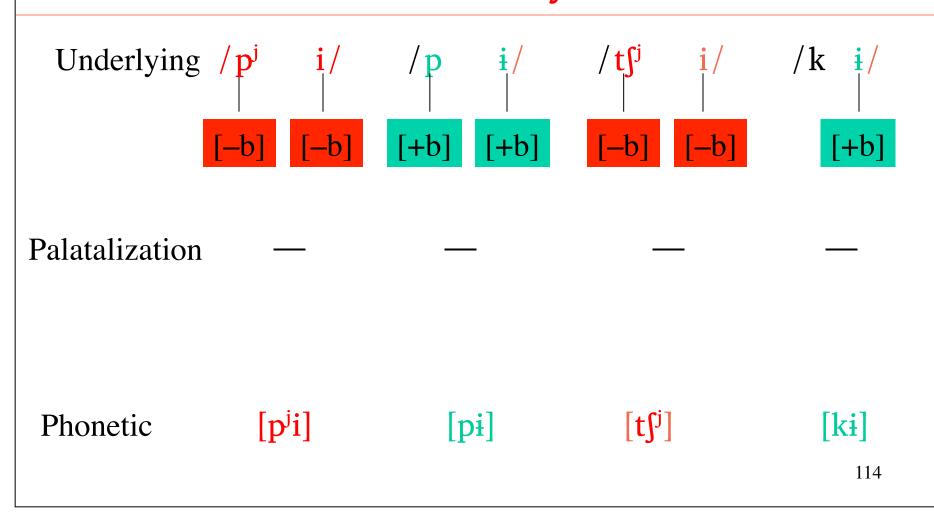




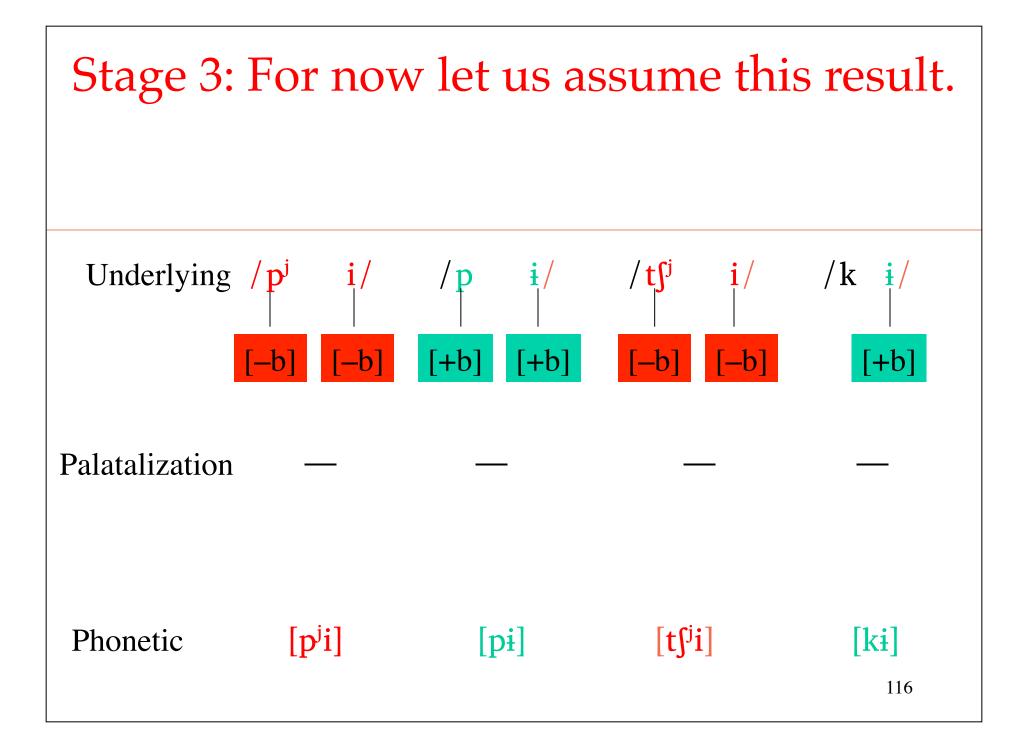
Stage 3: Velars are unpaired, but they are *not* contrastively [back]. Why the difference between /tʃ<sup>i</sup>/ and /k/?



Stage 3: The contrastive status of unpaired consonants depends on the contrastive hierarchy.

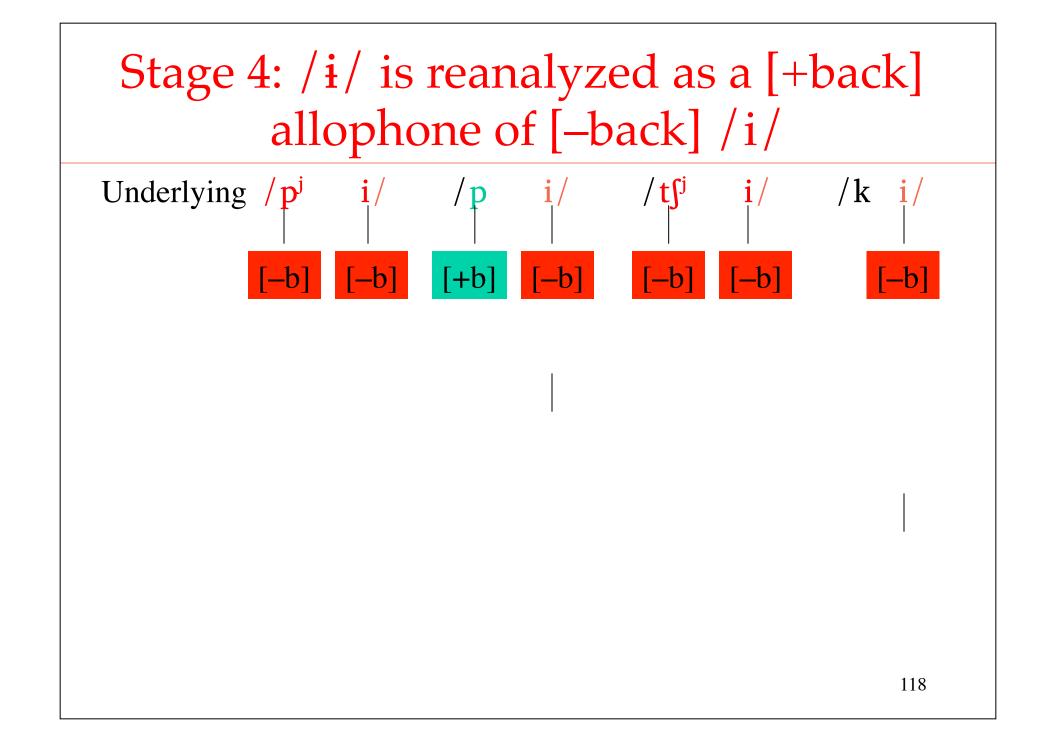


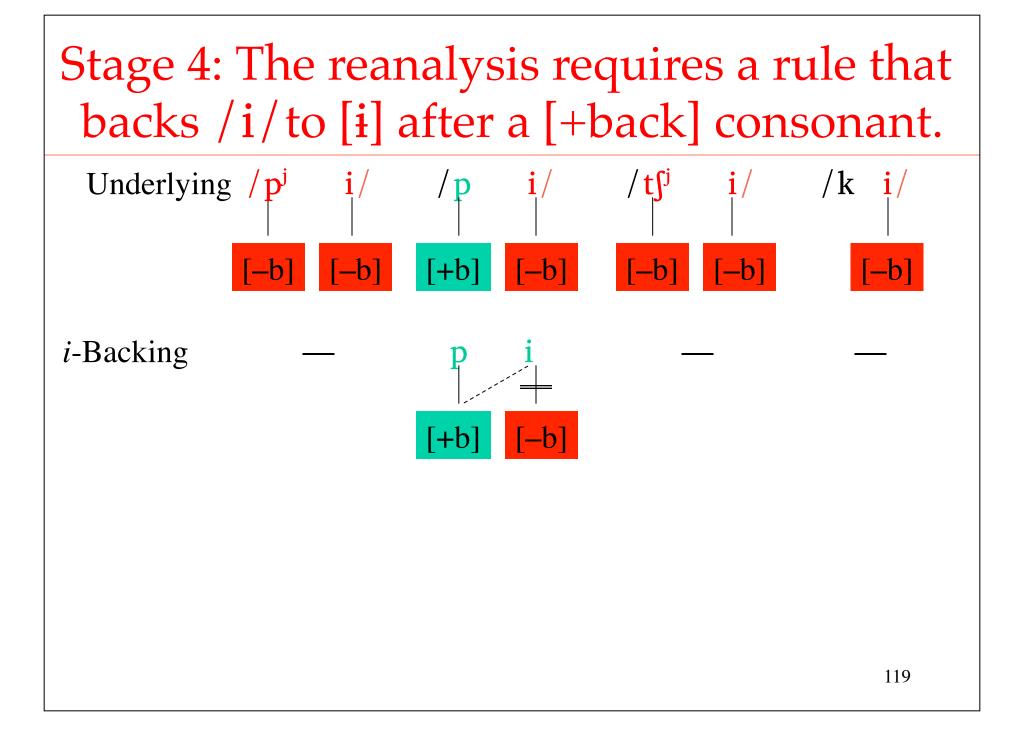
Stage 3: I will show why unpaired coronals are contrastive for [back] while velars are not contrastively [+back]. Underlying  $p^{i}$  i/  $p^{i}$  i/  $k^{j}$  i/  $k^{i}$ [-b] [-b] [+b] [+b] [-b] [-b] [+b] Palatalization Phonetic [p<sup>j</sup>i] [pi] [tʃ<sup>j</sup>i] [ki] 115

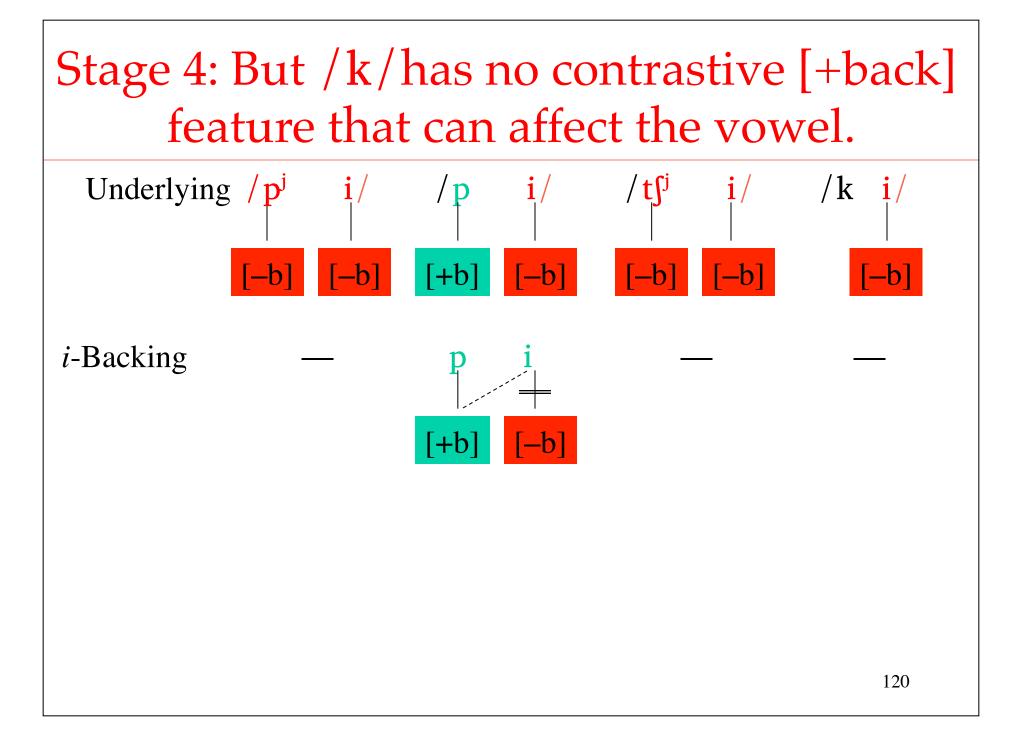


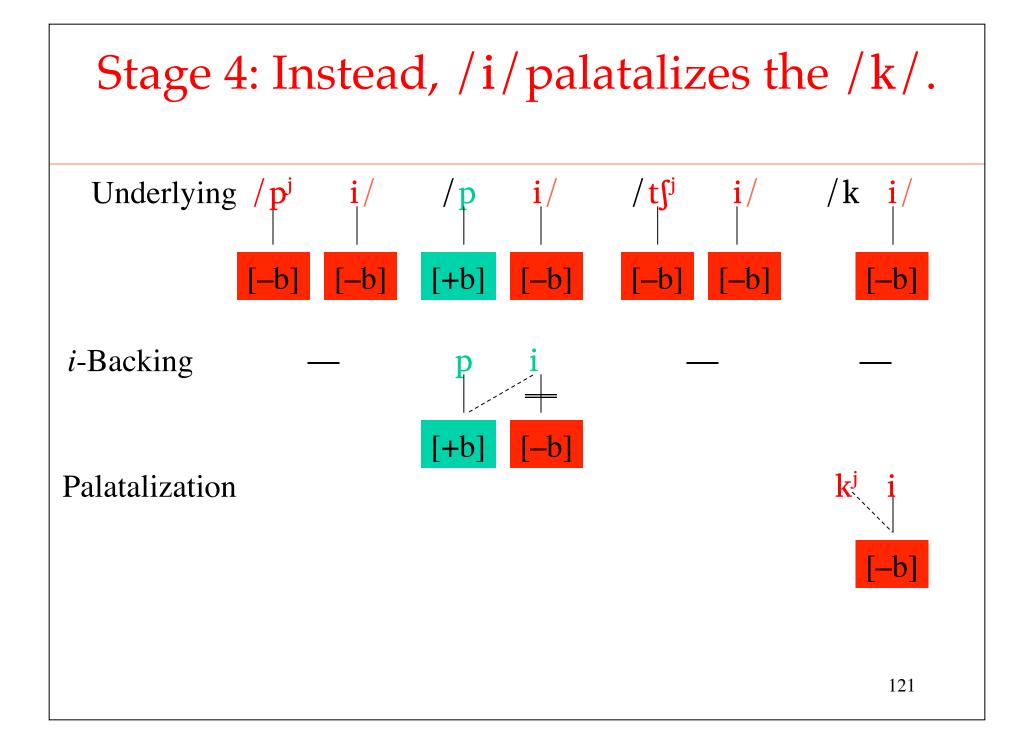
Stage 4: The regularity whereby [i] followed back consonants and [i] occurred elsewhere led to a reanalysis:

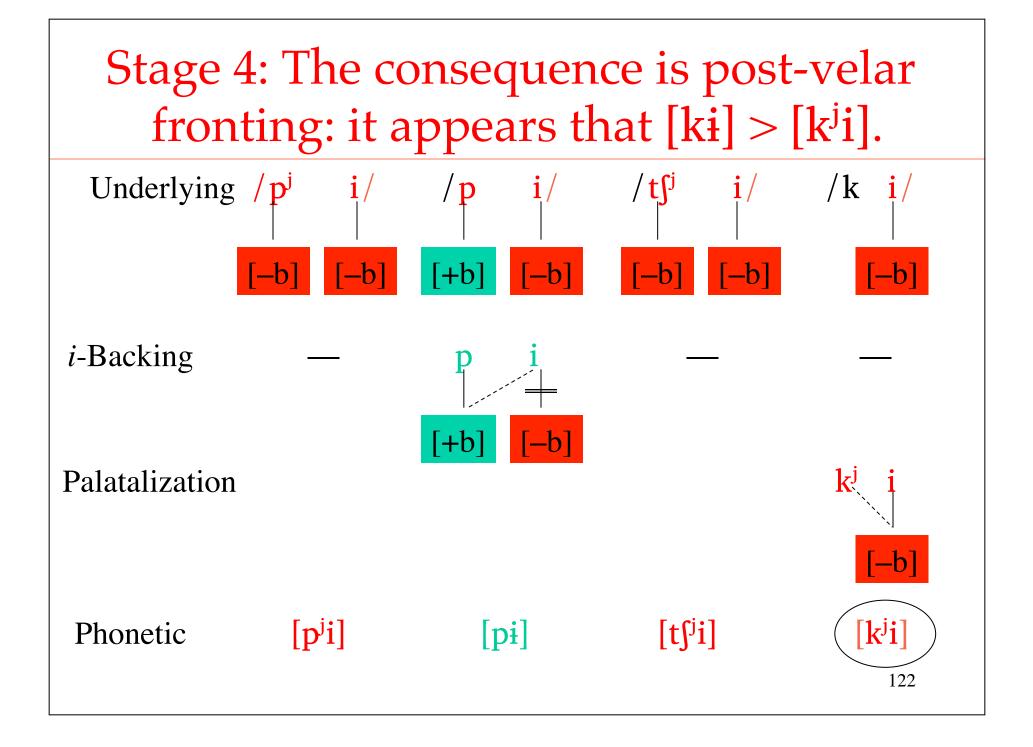








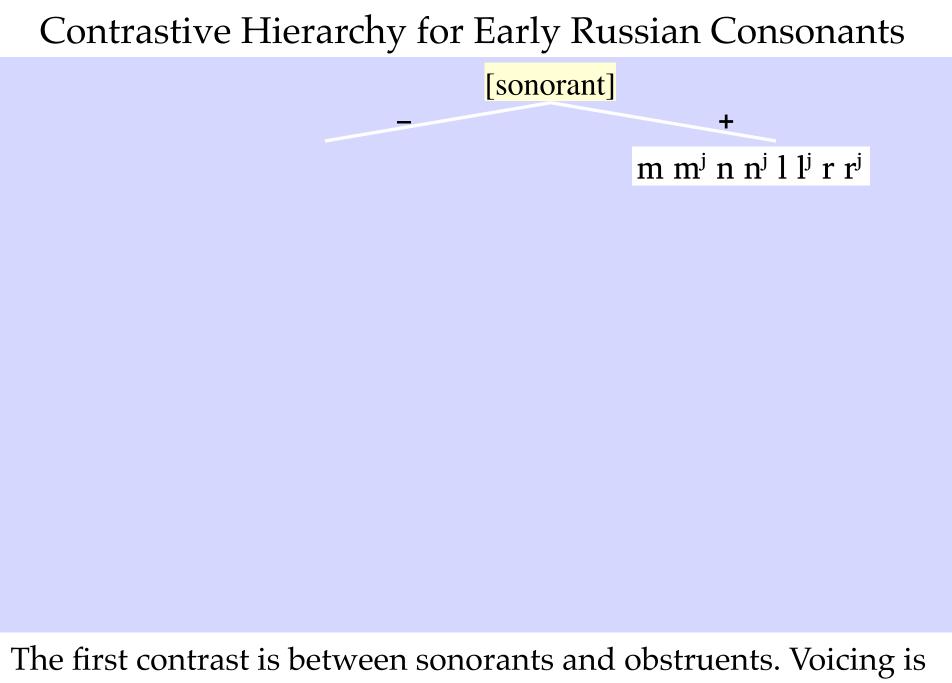




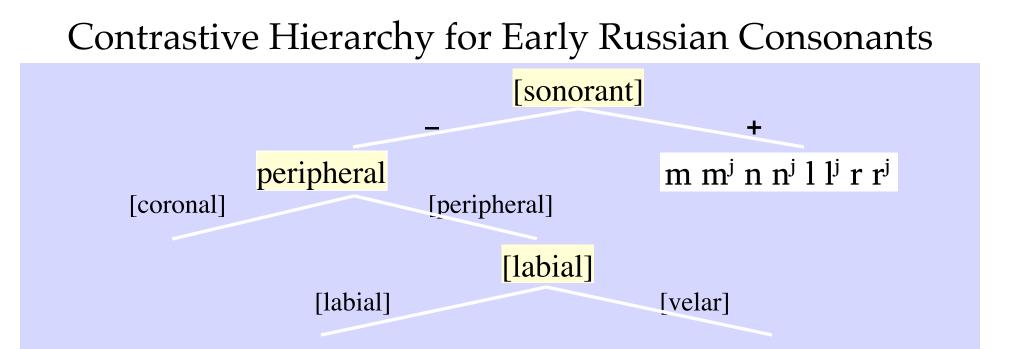
# A Contrastive Hierarchy Analysis

This is essentially Jakobson's (1929) analysis, in which the crucial event that provoked post-velar fronting was the reanalysis of [i] as an allophone of /i/, not the lack of dispersion between [i] and [u].

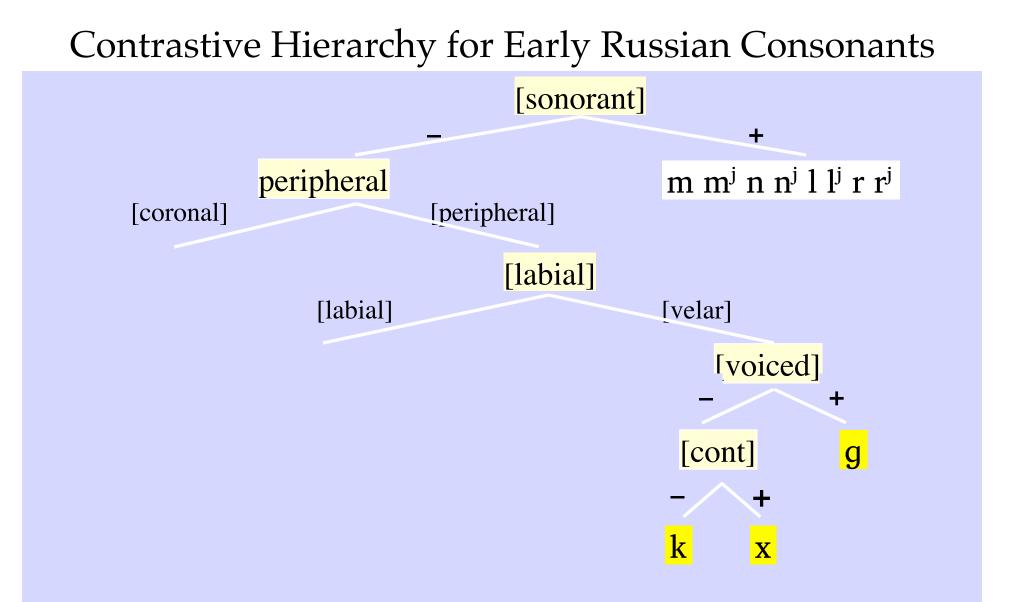
This analysis is based on a contrastive feature hierarchy for Russian that should apply to other aspects of Russian phonology, such as voicing:



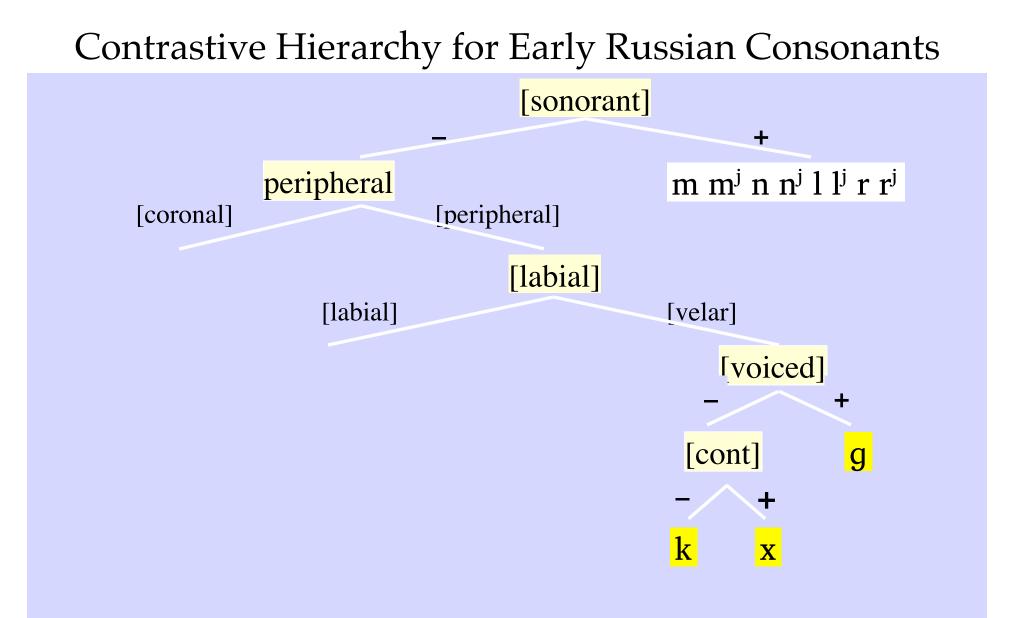
now not contrastive among the sonorants, which are all voiced.



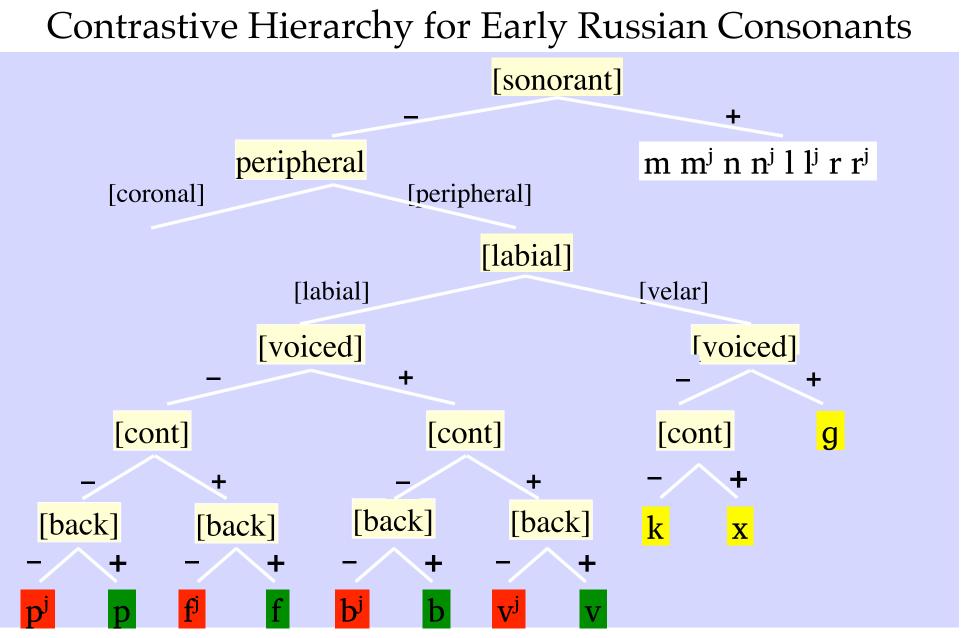
I assume that the place features [peripheral] and [labial] come next. [–peripheral] = [coronal] and [–labial] = [velar].



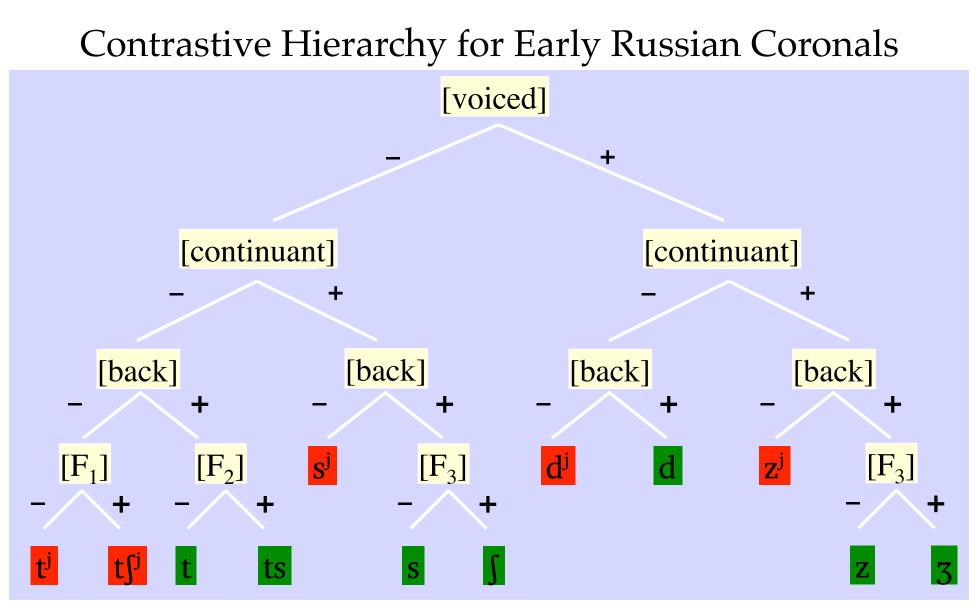
We know that the velars have contrastive specifications for [voiced] and [continuant]. They receive no further features.



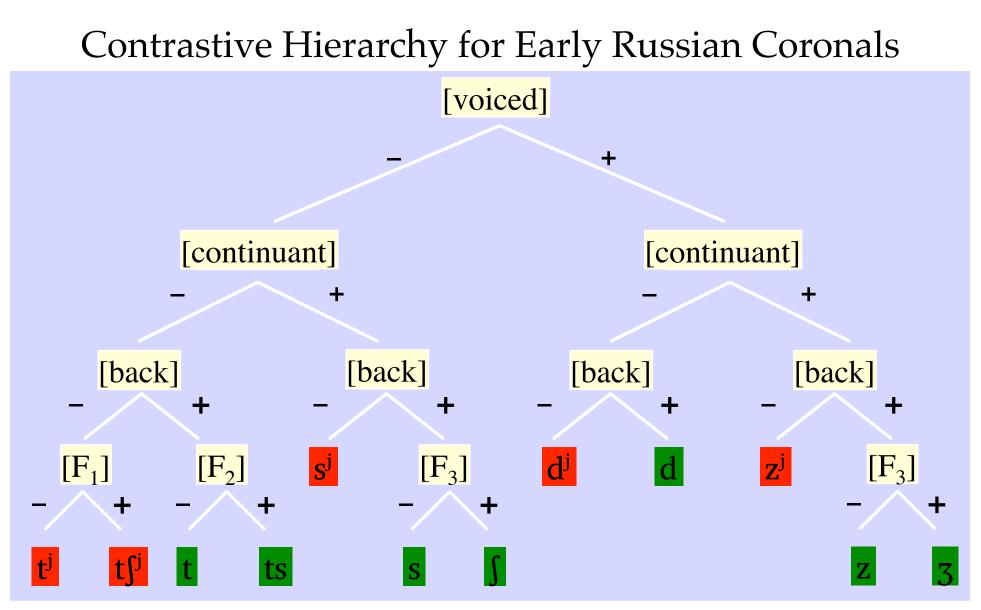
In particular, they receive no contrastive specifications for [back].



The same ordering applies in the labials. Since they are all paired, they all receive contrastive values of [back].



The coronals are more interesting. There are more contrasts in the coronals than in the velars; if we assume that the feature [back] is ordered ahead of some other features, designated here as [F<sub>i</sub>],



the result is that all the coronals receive contrastive values of [back]. This explains why the 'unpaired' coronals act as if they are contrastively palatalized or nonpalatalized, unlike the velars.

#### Russian 'Paired Consonants'

Russian has two types of 'paired' consonants: palatalized ~ nonpalatalized (involving the feature [back]); and voiced ~ voiceless ([voiced]).

Paired consonants are contrastive for the relevant feature in any theory:  $/t/\sim/d/$  contrast only in voicing, and  $/t/\sim/t^{j}/$  contrast only in palatalization.

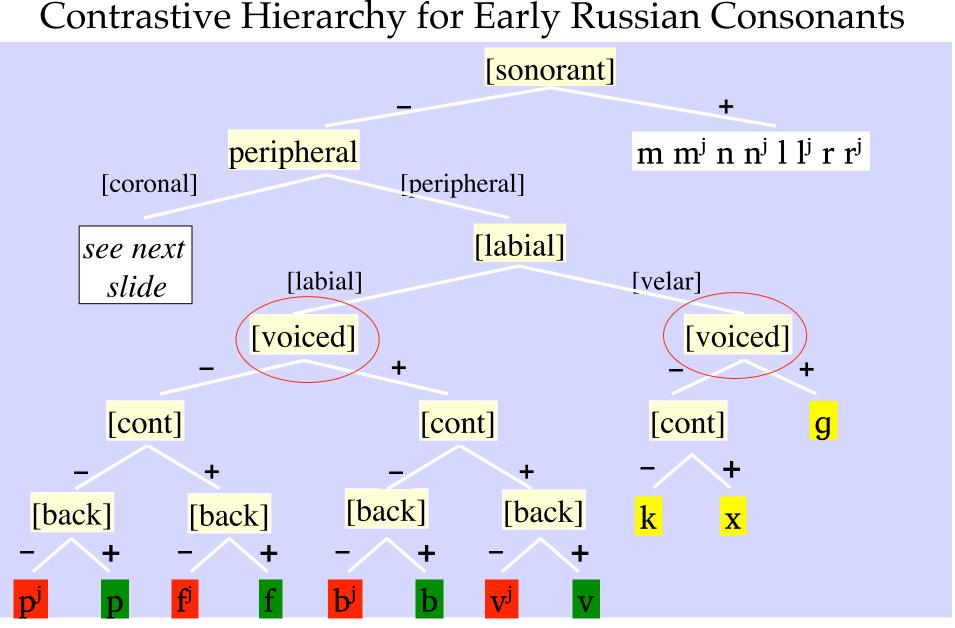
# Russian 'Unpaired Consonants'

But the unpaired consonants are *not* all noncontrastive for each feature.

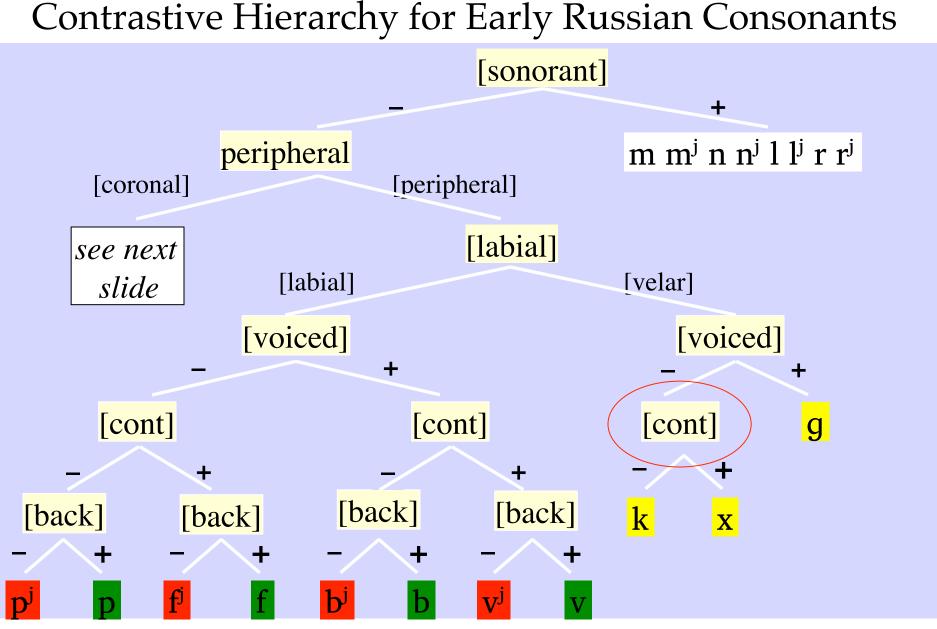
In the case of voicing, the famous unpaired voiceless consonants / ts, t $\int$ , x/ all act as if they are contrastively voiceless.

In the case of palatalization, the unpaired velars are not contrastive, but the unpaired coronal consonants act as if they *are*.

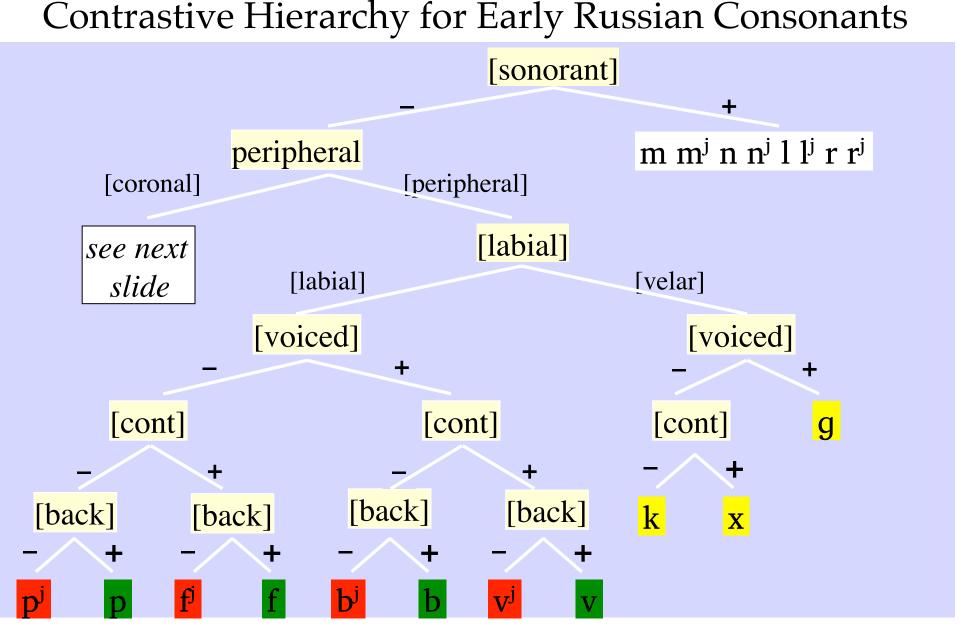
'Minimal pairs' cannot explain this, but the contrastive hierarchy for Russian shows why this is so.



[voiced] is sufficiently high in the order to take scope over all obstruents, so paired and unpaired consonants function alike.

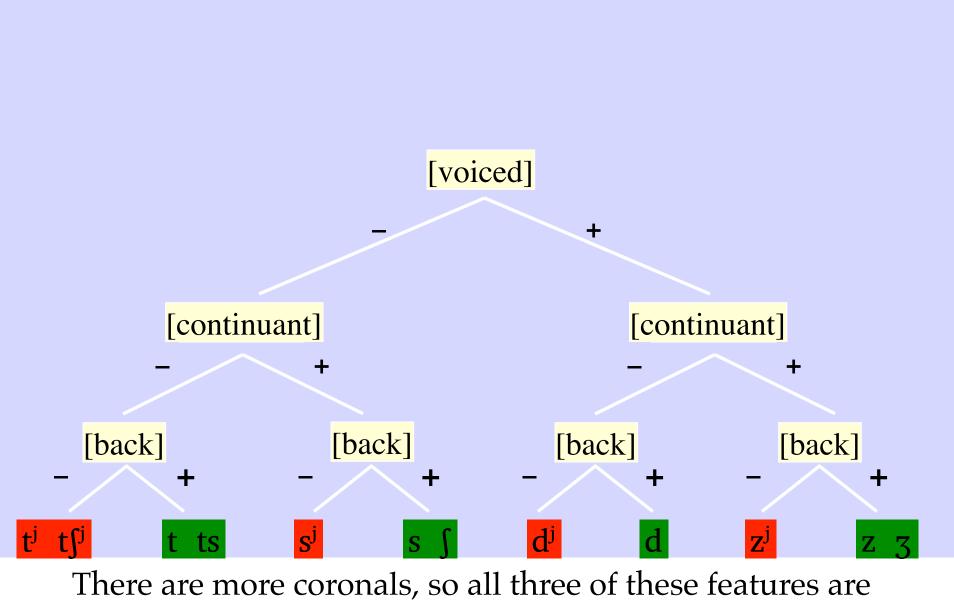


But [cont] is lower. In the velars, 'unpaired' /g/ has no contrastive value for this feature.



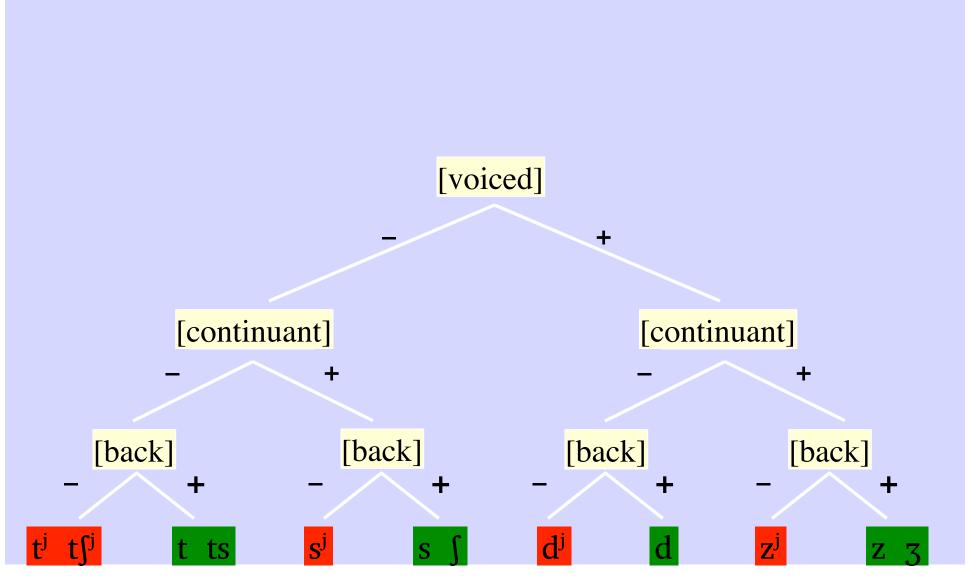
[back] is even lower. In the velars, the segments run out before it can apply, and all velars have no contrastive value for this feature.

#### Contrastive Hierarchy for Early Russian Coronals



contrastive in all coronals.

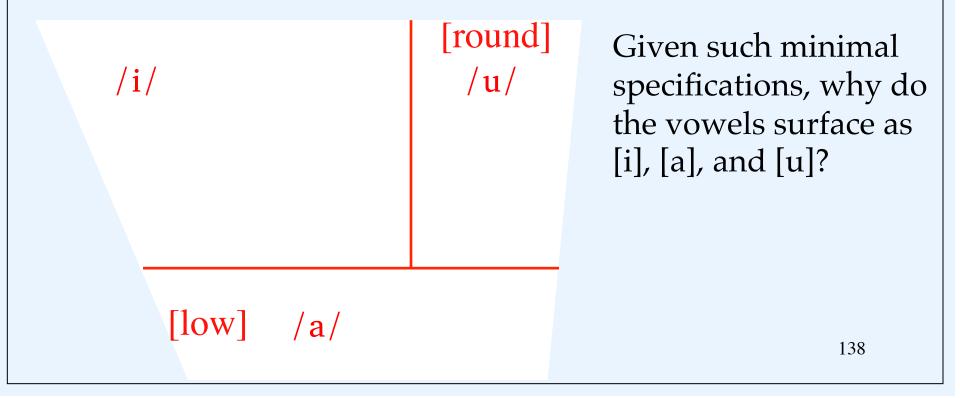
#### Contrastive Hierarchy for Early Russian Coronals



The evidence from different phonological processes converges on a single consistent feature hierarchy.

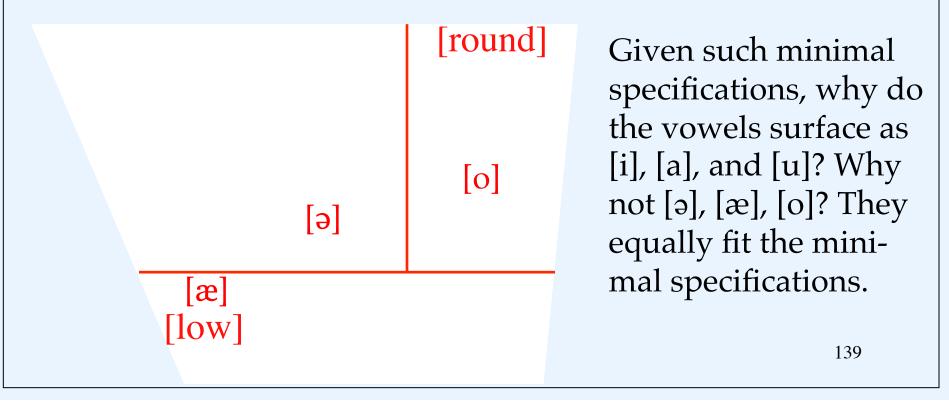
To conclude I would like to consider other ways contrastive specifications can contribute to phonetic patterning.

Suppose we have a 3-vowel system as below, with the features ordered [low] > [round].



To conclude I would like to consider other ways contrastive specifications can contribute to phonetic patterning.

Suppose we have a 3-vowel system as below, with the features ordered [low] > [round].



MCS adopts enhancement theory (Stevens et al. 1986; Stevens & Keyser 1989; Dyck 1995) to account for how contrastively specified representations are elaborated in the phonetics.

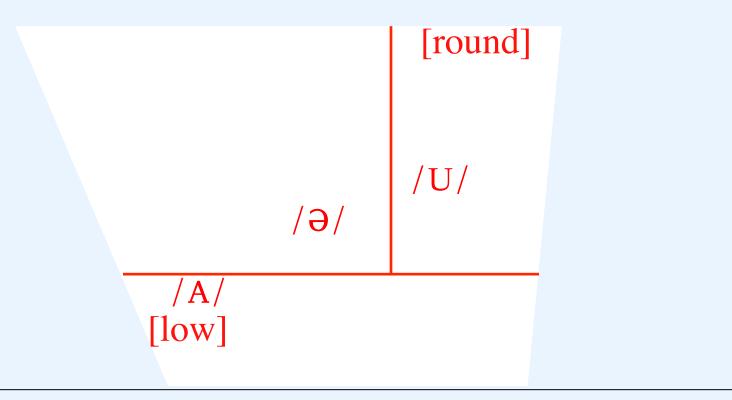
Like Dispersion Theory (Liljencrants & Lindblom 1972; Flemming 2002; Padgett 2003), the contrast and enhancement model accounts for why inventories tend to have certain common shapes (Hall 2011).

The assumption is that features not used contrastively in a language are available to *enhance* a contrast.

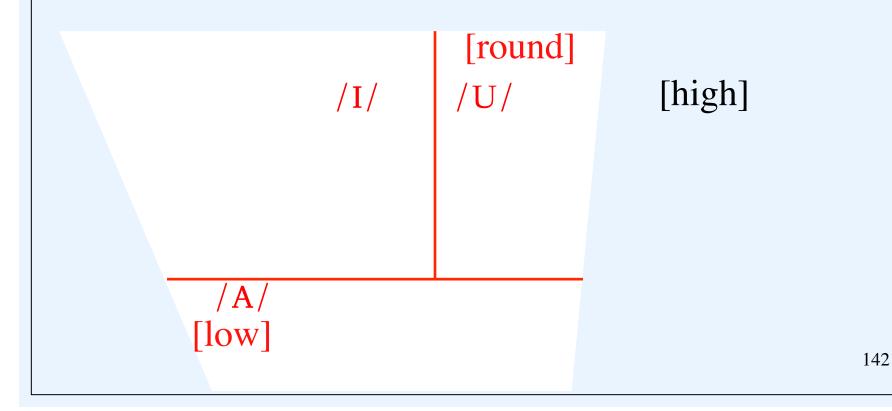
Suppose we begin with the three contrastively specified vowels below, where capital letters represent underspecified segments.

It doesn't matter where in the space they start, as long as they fit the contrastive specifications.

141



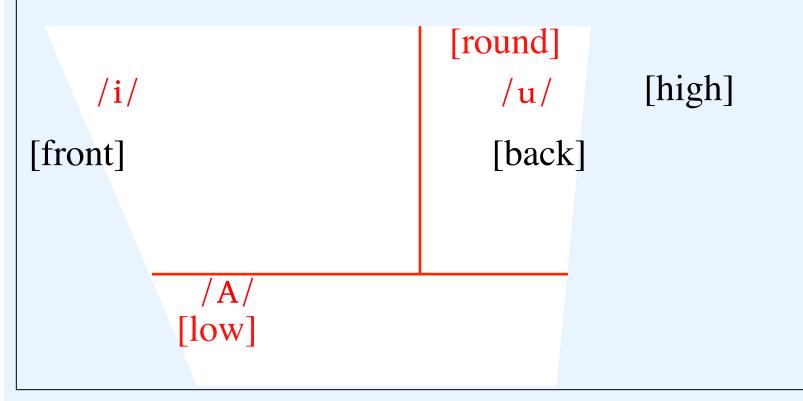
Vowels that are contrastively not [low] can enhance their nonlowness by becoming [high].



Vowels that are contrastively **not** [low] can enhance their nonlowness by becoming [high].

A vowel that is contrastively **[round]** can add [back]; a vowel that is **not [round]** can add **[front]**.

143



### **Enhancement of Contrastive Features**

There is no phonetic reason why a vowel specified only for [low] should take on any tonality, so, other things being equal, it would surface as a [central] vowel.

144

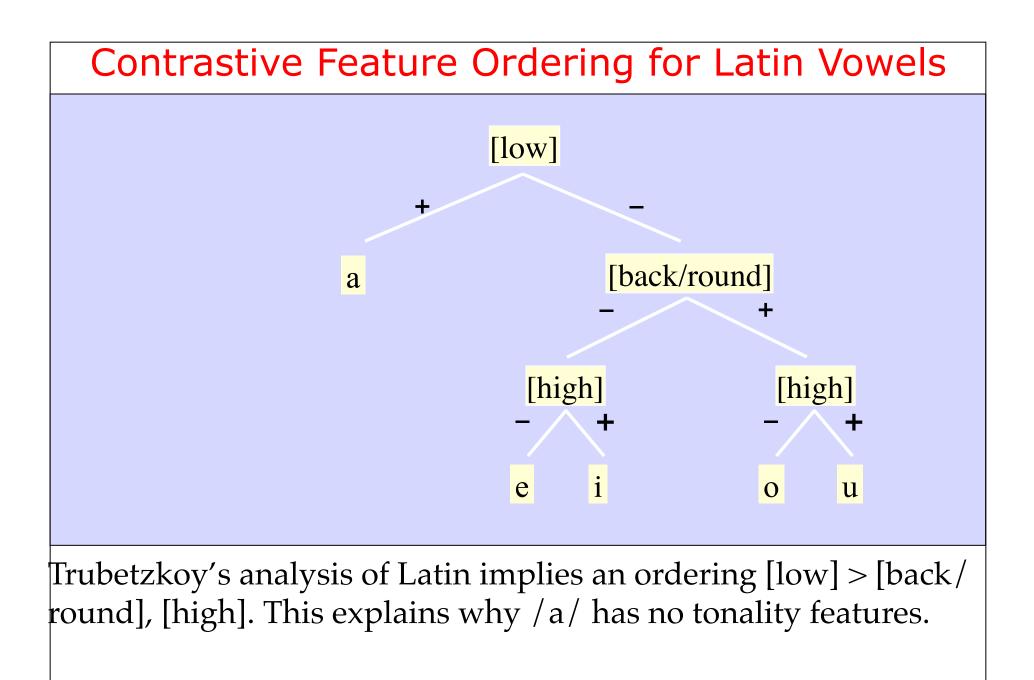
/i/ [high] [front] [back] [low] /a/ [central]

# **Five-Vowel Systems**

Trubetzkoy (1939) reviews a number of five-vowel systems. He observes that many such systems are like Latin and Czech in that the low vowel does not participate in tonality contrasts.

#### Latin

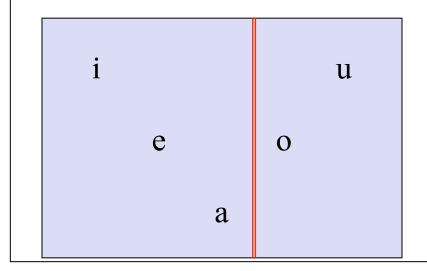
]	Front/unround	Back/round		
	i	u	High	
	e	0	Mid	
	a		Low	145



However, he observes that other types of vowel systems exist.

In Artshi, a language of Central Daghestan, a consonantal rounding contrast is neutralized before and after the rounded vowels /u/and /o/. 'As a result, these vowels are placed in opposition with...unrounded *a*, *e*, and *i*'.

Artshi (East Caucasian)



147

'This means that all vowels are divided into rounded and unrounded vowels, while the back or front position of the tongue proves irrelevant...' (Trubetzkoy 1969: 100-101).

This analysis corresponds to ordering [round] first, followed by [high] and [low] (the latter only in the unrounded vowels).

### Artshi (East Caucasian)

Unround	Round	
i	u	High
e	0	Mid
a		Low

Trubetzkoy argues that neutralization of the opposition between palatalized and non-palatalized consonants before iand e in Japanese shows that these vowels are put into opposition with the other vowels /a, o, u/.

#### Artshi (East Caucasian)

Japanese

Unround	Round		Front	Back	_
i	u	High	i	u	
e	0	Mid	e	0	
a		Low		a	

The governing opposition is that between front and back vowels, lip rounding being irrelevant.

This analysis corresponds to ordering [front] first, followed by [high] and [low] (the latter only in the back vowels).

#### Artshi (East Caucasian)

Japanese

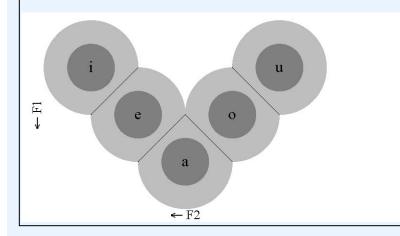
Unroun	d Rour	nd	Front	Back
i	u	High	i	u
e	0	Mid	e	0
a		Low		a

## Perception of Five-Vowel Systems

Boersma and Chládková (2011) show that perception of vowel categories does not correspond exactly to production.

Production is sensitive to fine details of the vowel space resulting in diagonal boundaries between vowels in a 5-vowel system. The diagonal boundaries result from the fact that higher vowels differ in F2 from lower vowels.

#### Production boundaries

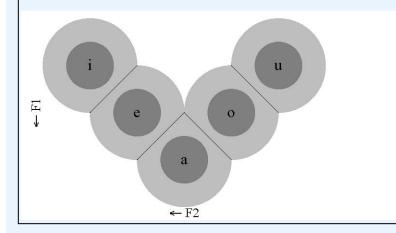


### Perception of Five-Vowel Systems

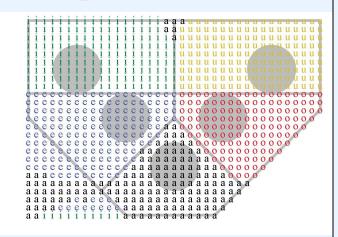
But perception does not mimic the diagonal boundaries, but ignores the F2 differences between vowels of different heights.

Boersma and Chládková (2011) propose that the discrepancy can be explained if perception is sensitive to features. The 'Greek'-type system below can be obtained by assigning the features [high]/[mid] and [front]/[back] to the nonlow vowels.

#### Production boundaries



#### Perception boundaries

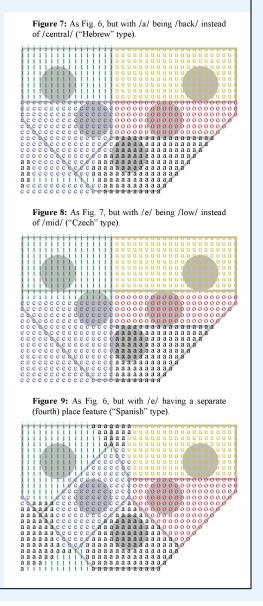


### Perception of Five-Vowel Systems

Moreover, they observe that there is variation in the perceptual boundaries of 5-vowel systems.

In the Hebrew system at the top, it appears that /a/ groups with the [back] vowels.

These diagrams are strikingly reminiscent of the contrastive diagrams of the systems we reviewed earlier. These are based on perception, those were based on activity.



## Conclusions

In the best case, these different sources of evidence would converge: the underlying contrastive features would correspond to the perceptual phonetic boundaries.

Such convergent evidence would be of great use to language learners in acquiring the phonological grammar.

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163