

Antihomophony and English *of*

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Abstract

Grounded in the principle of Antihomophony (Kayne 2019a), several grammatical/functional morphemes, previously considered to have different properties according to their distribution, are examined. A more abstract and fine-grained analysis of the contexts in which these morphemes appear confirms that they are the same element in all constructions. After reviewing elements such as *there*, *will*, Italian feminine marker *-a* or Spanish plural marker *-s*, the so-called partitive preposition *of* is argued to be the same element as the one in other constructions. Therefore, Antihomophony is a powerful principle that simplifies the functional lexicon.

Keywords: Antihomophony; abstract names; phonological identity; partitive *of*

Resum. Antihomofonia i l'*of* anglès

D'acord amb el principi d'Antihomofonia (Kayne 2019a), que estableix la identitat en el lèxic funcional de dos morfemes homòfons, s'analitzen diversos elements tradicionalment considerats polisèmics, com *there* o *will* de l'anglès, la marca de femení *-a* de l'italià, la marca de plural del castellà *-s*. La mateixa anàlisi, que postula l'existència d'elements abstractes diferents en les construccions en les quals apareix l'element sota escrutini, permet explicar l'existència d'un sol element *of*, sense que calgui diferenciar el partitiu d'altres valors, com el possessiu, cosa que contribueix a la simplificació del lèxic funcional.

Paraules clau: Antihomofonia; noms abstractes; identitat fonològica; *of* partitiu

Table of Contents

1. The Antihomophony Principle	6. The Antihomophony Principle and <i>of</i>
2. Accidental homophony	7. Silent OUT and partitivity
3. Phonology, phonetics and the Antihomophony Principle	8. The interpretation of <i>of</i> in the absence of <i>out</i> /OUT
4. Reducibility vs. non-reducibility of forms	9. The case of <i>All/Each of those books</i>
5. Some (apparent) counterexamples to the Antihomophony Principle	10. Conclusion
	References

PART I

1. The Antihomophony Principle

Johns (1992: 84) proposes that “Where morphemes are identical or similar in phonological properties, in the unmarked case, they are identical or similar in all lexical properties”. Embick (2003: 156) has “Learners seek to avoid accidental homophony; absent evidence to the contrary, identities in form are treated as systematic”. And Bobaljik (2012: 35) has “Learners avoid positing a contextual allomorph of a morpheme μ that is homophonous with the default exponent of μ ”. In agreement with the spirit of these proposals, I began in Kayne (2019a) to pursue an even stronger version of antihomophony. Let me now state it as follows:¹

- (1) In a given language, within the functional/grammatical subpart of the lexicon, identity of phonology implies identity.

This Antihomophony Principle can be illustrated, as I did back then, with English *there* (taking ‘lexicon’ in (1) to include composite elements such as *there*²), which might appear to correspond to five distinct elements in:

- (2) a. expletive *there*, as in *There’s a book on the table*.
 b. locative *there*, as in *Let’s go there later*.
 c. reason *there*, as in *Therefore, you’re wrong*.
 d. reinforcer *there*,³ as in non-standard *Gimme that there book*.
 e. temporal *there*, as in *Let’s meet at 3P.M. or thereabouts*.

1. I am assuming that the functional/grammatical subpart of the lexicon is, or will turn out to be, clearly delineated.
 2. For composite elements to fall under the Antihomophony Principle, they must be composed of the same functional/grammatical subparts, which is not the case with *their* and *there*, whose initial *th*- is presumably the same, but whose *-r* is not. The *-r* of *their* is that of *our* and *your*, as in Bernstein and Tortora (2005), whereas the *-r*- of *there* is that of *here* and *where*.
 3. On demonstrative reinforcers, see Bernstein (1997).

The proposal made in Kayne (2019a) was, however, that all these instances of *there* can be traced back to the same reinforcer *there* (despite its non-standard character in English), which always cooccurs with a noun. For example, locative *there* is as in:

(3) ...there PLACE

with the relation between *there* and silent PLACE (capitals will represent silence) in (3) taken to be identical to that between *there* and *book* in (2d). And similarly for reason *there*⁴:

(4) ...there REASON...

and for temporal *there*:

(5) ...there TIME...

Expletive *there*, on the other hand, is associated in (2a) with the trace/silent copy of *book*.

2. Accidental homophony

The restriction in (1) to the functional/grammatical subpart of the lexicon is intended to allow for accidental homophony within the ‘truly lexical’ part of the lexicon, as in, for example:

- (6) a. *read* (past tense) and *red*
 b. *read* (present tense) and *reed*
 c. *beat* and *beet*
 d. *sail* and *sale*

and many others. It is also intended to allow for accidental homophony between a functional element and a non-functional one, as in, for example:

- (7) a. *our* and *hour*
 b. *I* and *eye*
 c. *would* and *wood*
 d. *not* and *knot*
 e. *some* and *sum*
 f. *one* and *won*
 g. *but* and *butt*
 h. *or* and *oar*

and various others.

4. Sharvit (2010: 221) takes *there* to be a temporal *first*; from the text perspective this *first* cooccurs with TIME.

3. Phonology, phonetics and the Antihomophony Principle

Of substantial importance to the Antihomophony Principle in (1) is the word ‘phonology’, as opposed to ‘phonetics’. We can see this by considering the pair:

(8) *two* and *to*

both of which are arguably on the functional/grammatical side of the lexicon, yet have the same pronunciation. If we took only phonetics to be relevant to antihomophony, *two* and *to* would constitute a counterexample. However, if identical phonology is required for antihomophony to come into play, the pair *two* and *to* does not constitute a counterexample, on the almost certainly correct assumption that the unpronounced *-w-* of *two* is part of its phonology, as strongly suggested by the presence of a pronounced /w/ in the related forms *twelve*, *twenty*, *twice* and *twin* (as well as by the fact that the non-pronunciation of the /w/ of *two* is expected, given that English disallows in general initial clusters of the form ‘obstruent + /w/’ followed by the vowel /u/).

The critical relevance of phonology to the working of (1) does not immediately tell us whether or not phonetics is also relevant. Possibly, phonetics is not by itself relevant. That it is not is suggested by the *-a* of the following:

(9) *shoul*da, *coul*da, *migh*ta

(10) *wanna*

To my ear, the *-a* is pronounced the same in (9) and in (10), despite its corresponding to a reduced *have* or *of* in (9) and to a reduced *to* in (10). Yet this phonetic identity does not trigger a violation of antihomophony.

4. Reducibility vs. non-reducibility of forms

Returning to *to*, one wonders about *too*, which has the same pronunciation. One possibility is that they are in fact the same element, with a sentence like:

(11) We liked that movie, *too*.

having the analysis given in:

(12) we liked that movie, IN ADDITION *to*...

that may receive indirect support from German *dazu* (‘thereto’) and/or from English *to boot*. A second possibility, which would also make the pair *to* and *too* compatible with antihomophony, would be to take them not to have identical phonology, thinking of the fact that *to* can be reduced in a way that *too* cannot be. (The first of these two possibilities is almost certain to turn out to be correct for the pair directional *to* and infinitival *to*.)

If reducibility vs. non-reducibility is sufficient to indicate a difference in phonology (and not just phonetics), that would be relevant to the question of *have*, which has reduced forms that, in American English, are generally limited to those of auxiliary *have*. If, as a consequence, auxiliary and non-auxiliary *have* differ in phonology, antihomophony would not force them to be the same, though they might be.⁵

5. Some (apparent) counterexamples to the Antihomophony Principle

A type of potential counterexample to antihomophony is found in Spanish, which has a plural *-s* that resembles English plural *-s*, and at the same time has an *s-* found in its third person reflexives and in its third person possessives.⁶ Again, two possibilities come to mind. One is that the reflexive/possessive *s-* is not a morpheme, but only part of one, with the full morpheme perhaps being the *su* seen in possessives, with the /u/ dropping in reflexives, and with *su* then simply being distinct from plural *-s*. The second, more likely, possibility, of more general import for antihomophony, would be to take plural *-s* and reflexive/possessive *s-* to both be full morphemes, but to take them, despite phonetic appearances, to count as phonologically distinct, with their phonological distinctness then following from the difference between being prefixal and being suffixal.⁷

Affixes often appear to pose more of a challenge to antihomophony than nonaffixes. Yet one would certainly prefer not to weaken the Antihomophony Principle in (1) to exclude affixes from consideration.

One relevant case of an apparent challenge is given by:

(13) ineffective; infix

The *in-* of *ineffective* is a familiar negative prefix; that of *infix* seems, instead, closely related to the preposition *in*. That these two instances of *in-* are nonetheless compatible with antihomophony is suggested by their not being phonologically identical, insofar as the *-n-* of negative *in-* has the property of assimilating to an immediately following liquid, as in:

(14) illegal; irreducible

a property not shared, as far as I can see, by the *-n-* of prepositional *in-*.

Somewhat similarly, the suffixal comparative *-er* and the suffixal agentive *-er* look the same, but in fact are arguably phonologically distinct, and therefore com-

5. As in Kayne (1993); for important discussion, see Myler (2016). To be noted is the fact that that 1993 analysis used a form of late insertion incompatible with Collins and Kayne (2023); how exactly the 1993 analysis should now be revised remains to be elucidated.
6. For evidence that reflexive *s-* and possessive *s-* are the same in Spanish and in Romance more generally, see Kayne (2018).
7. A third possibility would be to take the plural to be the *-es* seen in, for example, *quiénes* ('who'), rather than *-s*; on *quiénes* itself, see Butt and Benjamin (1988: 332) and Torrego (1996).

patible with (1), insofar as the comparative *-er* is sensitive to the syllable structure of the preceding adjective:

(15) **importanter*, **interestinger*,...

while the agentive *-er* seems not to be:

(16) *assimilater*, *exerciser*, *demonstrater*, *implementer*, *generater*,...

with these agentive forms sometimes being written with *-or*, which in my English would not be phonetically distinct from *-er*. (The fact that the comparative suffix is never written as *-or* may be related to the phonological non-identity of the comparative and agentive suffixes.)

One further example. Italian has suffixal *-a* usually (cf. Harris 1991) expressing feminine singular grammatical gender, but *-a-* is also the verbal theme vowel associated with the largest class of verbs. In addition, *a* is a common preposition usually corresponding to English *at*, *to*, *in*. As a preposition, though, Italian in some cases allows or requires *ad* before vowels, so the preposition is arguably phonologically distinct from the other two.⁸ As far as the pair gender vowel/theme vowel is concerned, we might want to have recourse to the fact that the verbal theme vowel *-a-* can be stressed (in certain cases), contrary to the gender vowel *-a*, which can never be stressed, and to count that as a phonological difference. Alternatively, one might consider the possibility that the theme vowel *-a-* is the verbal counterpart of the gender vowel *-a*, and that the two thereby count as identical.

Another sort of only apparent challenge to antihomophony can be seen in the case of *we'll* and modal *will*, which in some English (for example, mine) have the same pronunciation (with a lax vowel). If phonetic identity were sufficient to trigger a violation of antihomophony, there would be a problem, but since phonetic identity is never sufficient, there is none, given that *will* and *we'll* differ in their phonology (*we* has a tense vowel that comes to be lax in *we'll*, as in *he'll*, *she'll*, *they'll*, in this English), not to mention in their syntax.⁹

Also of interest to antihomophony, though not directly related to *will/we'll*, is the question of the non-standard *-s* in:

(17) Let's go somewheres else this time.

(18) We ain't goin' nowheres else today.

8. Contrary to Spanish. Therefore it may be that in addition to 'prefixal vs. suffixal' counting for phonological distinctness, as in the discussion of Spanish *s-* vs. *-s* above, the distinction between affixal and non-affixal may suffice for phonological distinctness.

9. Not directly relevant to antihomophony is the fact that in my English, setting aside VP deletion, reduction of *we will* to *we'll* is obligatory (especially clear with a pronominal subject) unless *will* is stressed, so that the following is unacceptable, with unstressed *will*:

(i) I will do it later.

in a way that recalls English *do*-support.

which might be thought to be accidentally homophonous with plural *-s*. On the other hand, the regular English plural morpheme might best be considered to be *-es*. And/or the *-s* of *somewheres/nowheres* might be analyzed as an instance of possessive *'s* cooccurring with silent PLACE, with one relevant question being why this *-s* depends on the presence of a determiner, as shown by:¹⁰

(19) Where(*s) did you put it?

If in English possessive and plural are phonologically identical, then, by antihomophony, they would have to be the same morpheme, as they might be if a banal plural phrase such as *three drawers* were to turn out to have an analysis as in:

(20) three drawer 's SET

with the phrase 'three drawer' (also found in *a three-drawer file cabinet*) the possessor (in the usual extended sense of the term) of silent SET (cf. *a set of three drawers*).¹¹ Alternatively, English possessive and plural might not be phonologically identical (in which case antihomophony as in (1) would be indifferent to them), depending on how seriously we take the following contrast (very clear for me) to be:

(21) Where are the knives?

(22) Be careful, that knife's/*knife's edge is very sharp.

A rather different pair relevant to antihomophony can be seen in (23) and (24):

(23) The number 17 is a prime number.

(24) You have a large number of books.

It may be that these differ in that *number* in (23) counts as being 'truly lexical', while *number* in (24) counts as functional/grammatical, so that (1) does not come into play, since it's not the case that both instances of *number* are on the functional/grammatical side of the lexicon.

As for the often discussed case of English *any*, I will note only that, if free choice *any* and polarity *any* have the same phonology (as they seem to), then by antihomophony they must be the same element, a conclusion supported by Matthews and Yip's (2011, 308) observation that "the two types [are] expressed by similar means in both English and Cantonese".

10. Possibly, there is a link to:

(i) *that's importance; *this's importance.

11. On SET, see Kayne (2006).

There is another question that arises for *any* (though not directly related to antihomophony), namely whether it is monomorphemic. If *any* is bimorphemic, it is presumably *an+y*, with the *-y* the same as that found in *every*, taken to be *ever+y*, with the *ever* subpart then, this time via antihomophony, identical to the *ever* of both of the following:¹²

(25) Have you ever been there?

(26) Whatever happens, don't worry.

PART II

6. The Antihomophony Principle and *of*

The varieties of *there* given in (2) are, as discussed there, to be analyzed as follows. There is a single *there* that has the property of being compatible with a variety of syntactic environments, with silent nouns playing a key role.

Like *there*, English *of* readily lends itself to initially being thought of in terms of a single phonological form associated with a variety of syntactic elements. As with *there*, that is the wrong way to think about *of*. The right way, imposed by antihomophony, is to take *of* to be a single syntactic element compatible with a range of syntactic environments.¹³ To (non-exhaustively) illustrate this range, we have:

(27) a. We've already read three of those books.

b. I ran into a friend of yours yesterday.

c. You've written too long of a dissertation.

d. You should of worked harder.¹⁴

e. They just walked out of the house.

f. Mary is the sister of our best friend.

g. We think of you often.

h. The removal of the evidence was illegal.

12. French has no good match for *every*, nor for the *ever* of *whatever*. French *jamais* does, on the other hand, appear to be a good match for the *ever* of *Have you ever...?* and for the *ever* of *never*. *Jamais* may itself be bimorphemic, if its initial syllable is identical to the final syllable of *déjà* ('already').

13. As for the question of what category *of* belongs to, the usual answer is that it is a preposition, but thinking of Pesetsky's (2013: 7) proposal that genitive morphemes in Russian are Ns, *of* might alternatively be a noun, which would be a better fit for Kayne's (2008) taking there to be in essence only two categories, nouns and verbs.

Some languages can show no counterpart of *of* at all in their partitives, a particularly striking case within Germanic being Icelandic's zero-partitive, as discussed by Sigurðsson (2003: 239).

14. Cf. Kayne (1997).

7. Silent OUT and partitivity

Barker (1998: 698) calls the *of* of (27a) ‘partitive’ *of* and assigns it a specific semantic translation. In addition, he proposes on page 700 that the *of* in (27b), which he calls the ‘possessive partitive’ *of*, “can be viewed as distinct from but closely related to the standard partitive *of*”. (Barker gives an extended interesting argument in favor of this view.) On page 683, he calls the *of* of (27f) a ‘genitive’ *of*, which he takes to be quite distinct from ‘(possessive) partitive’ *of*.

The Antihomophony Principle given in (1) tells us, to the contrary (assuming phonological identity) that there cannot be multiple *ofs*. All the *ofs* in (27) must be the same *of*. Therefore, if the semantic translation that Barker provides for the *of* in (27a) is correct for (27a), then it must, given antihomophony, hold for all the other *ofs* of (27), too. But Barker explicitly denies that that semantic translation is appropriate for the *of* in (27f) (and would almost certainly deny that it is appropriate for the *ofs* in (27c, d, e, g, h)).

The conclusion, then, is not that Barker’s specific semantics for (27a) is on the wrong track; the conclusion is, rather, that the *of* in (27a) cannot be the locus of that semantics (and similarly for (27b), from his perspective).

What I would like to suggest, instead, much as in the discussion of *there* starting at (2) above, is that both the syntax and semantics of (27a) call for additional structure, and in particular for the presence of a silent element, thinking of the fact that (27a) has a fairly acceptable counterpart with *out*¹⁵:

(28) We’ve already read three out of those books.

which to my ear becomes fully acceptable if a numeral is added, with the following two sentences being equally acceptable:

(29) We’ve already read three of those five books.

(30) We’ve already read three out of those five books.

The proposal, then, is that (27a) is to be analyzed as:

(31) ...three OUT of those books

with this silent OUT, like the pronounced *out* of (28) and (30), now the locus of Barker’s partitive semantics.

15. Cf. the fact that alongside the English-like partitive:

(i) J’ai rencontré trois de tes amis (‘I have met three of your friends’)

French requires, with a pronoun (especially third person), more than just *de*:

(ii) *J’ai rencontré trois d’eux (‘...of them’)

(iii) J’ai rencontré trois d’entre eux (‘...of among them’)

This in turn recalls Borras and Christian’s (1971: 312) saying that ‘many of us’ in Russian requires the preposition *iz* rather than just genitive Case.

8. The interpretation of *of* in the absence of *out*/OUT

Apart from (27a)/(31) and from (27e), which already contains an overt *out*,¹⁶ the other examples in (27) are incompatible with *out*, most of which are shown in the following:

- (32) a. *You've written too long out of a dissertation.
 b. *You should out of worked harder.
 c. *Mary is the sister out of our best friend.
 d. *We think out of you often.
 e. *The removal out of the evidence was illegal.

There is nothing particularly surprising here, and we can readily conclude that the examples in (27) that correspond to those in (32) are equally incompatible with silent OUT.

Of greater interest is the fact that (27b) is also incompatible with overt *out*:

- (33) *I ran into a friend out of yours yesterday.

and, by extension, incompatible with OUT, too. This contrast between (33) and (28)/(30) is unexpected from the perspective of Barker's (1998) taking (27b) to be "closely related" to the familiar partitive of (27a).

At the same time, Barker's point that (27b) usually shows the proper subset effect known from (27a), as illustrated by his (page 705) examples:

- (34) *Let me tell you about a mother of mine.
 (35) *Let me tell you about two parents of mine.

is well-taken. Barker further notes that the infelicitous status of these kinds examples (taking 'biological' to be understood) is not exceptionless. He gives (page 714):

- (36) That nose of his is humongous!

My English also allows:

- (37) No nose of mine is going to be operated on by that surgeon!

Against the background of the impossibility of (33), let me tentatively conclude that the proper subset effect felt to hold in standard partitives, and traceable back

16. Which by antihomophony must be identical to the *out* of partitives (Cf. Linder 1981).

to out/OUT, is not identical to that seen in (34)/(35), which must then have another source, yet to be determined.

9. The case of *All/Each of those books*

Let us note in addition that the feeling that in *three of those books* there must be more than three books at issue is itself not entirely straightforward. Barker (1998: 703-704) notes the challenge of:¹⁷

(38) all of those books

(39) each of those books

and suggests a semantic solution that does straightforwardly allow these. My suspicion, though, is that something is not right. In the case of (39), the relevance of:

(40) each one of those books

seems likely. In fact, in French, ‘one’ is obligatory:

(41) chacun de ces livres (‘each-one of those books’)

(42) *chaque de ces livres (‘each of those books’)

which suggests that (39) obligatorily contains silent ONE (perhaps forced by distributivity):¹⁸

(43) each ONE of those books

in a way that Barker’s proposal would seem to leave unaccounted for.

As for (38), it has the key property that many languages don’t allow it at all. More specifically, Romance languages never do, as far as I know. Certainly, it’s true of French:

(44) tous ces livres (‘all those books’)

(45) *tous de ces livres (‘all of those books’)

17. One will also want to look into sentences like:

(i) Exactly 37 of our 37 graduate students are working hard these days.

18. The presence of ONE may underlie the obligatoriness of *of*:

(i) each *(of) the books

vs.

(ii) all the books

without ONE.

To my eye, then, Barker's semantic proposal makes (38) too readily available (though why it is English that allows (38), and not French, rather than the reverse, remains to be understood).

10. Conclusion

The Antihomophony Principle given in (1), repeated here:

(46) In a given language, within the functional/grammatical subpart of the lexicon, identity of phonology implies identity.

desirably acts to restrict the space of analyses available to the linguist, as well as to the learner; applied to *of*, it forces in partitives the presence of a silent OUT.

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