

ARTICLES

Contraction in Russian Dialects: Evidence for Paradigm Contrast*

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Abstract: Contraction of VjV sequences to V as in *aja > a, aje > a, ojo > o, uju > u, eje > e, ije > i* is found in northern and central Russian dialects, primarily in non-past verb forms and in adjectives. The focus of this paper is on the manifestation of this process in verbs and specifically on the resistance to contraction found in the 2pl forms. There are several different explanations in the literature for the exceptionality of 2pl forms, but they are not entirely convincing. I propose a new and more comprehensive explanation for the resistance to contraction in this category based on the notion of paradigm contrast.

One of the characteristic features of many northern and central Russian dialects is the pronunciation of some VjV sequences as V, with the first vowel predominating: *aja > a, aje > a, ojo > o, uju > u, eje > e, ije > i*. The contraction takes place only if the post-glide vowel is unstressed; the preceding vowel may be stressed or not. In northern Russian dialects this phenomenon appears as free variation in verbs and adjectives (Kogotkova 1961; Bromlej 1972; Bromlej and Bulatova 1972; Orlova 1970: 168–77).¹ In central dialects this pronunciation is so common in verbs that dialectologists have postulated the emergence of a third conjugation type (Avanesov and Orlova 1965: 151–54; Bromlej and Bulatova 1972: 196–202),² and contraction is regularly found in adjectives as well.

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¹ For geographical distribution and dialect data, see Kogotkova 1961, Orlova 1970: 168–77, Bromlej 1972, Atlas 1957, DARJa 1989, Pšeničnova 1983: 80, and individual speaker data in Kasatkina 1991: 47, 53, 62, 65, 67, 176, 200, 202, 213.

² In fact, Pšeničnova (1983: 77), on the basis of statistical data, suggests that contracted forms also constitute evidence for a third conjugation in some northern dialects.

There have been different proposals about the origin and mechanism of contraction in the two dialect areas (Kogotkova 1961; Bromlej 1972; Zaxarova 1970: 330–32; Pšeničnova 1983), but northern and central dialects share certain characteristics of this phenomenon, including its ubiquity in verbs suffixed by {-aj-}, its fairly regular occurrence in adjectives, and the very strong tendency to resist the process in the 2pl forms. This paper focuses on contraction in verbs and specifically on the resistance of the 2pl forms to this process.

In the northern dialects, contraction is found in the non-past/present tense of Conjugation I verbs suffixed by {-aj-} and in some verbs suffixed by {-ej-}. The process is generally represented as the weakening and loss of the glide followed by progressive vowel assimilation and shortening: $V_1jV_2 > V_1iV_2 > V_1V_2 > V_1V_1 > V_1$.³ There is free variation among [aje], [ae], [aa], and [a] as well as [eje], [ee], and [e] in the non-past/present tense forms of verbs (Kogotkova 1961), and forms such as [znajet], [znaet], [znaat], and [znat] 'know_{3SG}' coexist in most northern dialects (Bromlej 1972: 125), sometimes in the speech of an individual speaker (Kasatkina 1991). Loss of an intervocalic glide and contraction are also found in adjectives where the process has wider scope as it affects more diverse sequences, *aja* > *a*, *ojo* > *o*, *eje* > *e*, *uju* > *u*, *ije* > *i*, but in this grammatical category there are fewer attestations of what would appear to be intermediate stages. I focus on contraction in verbs only, and an example of the final stage of contraction is given in (1) with the understanding that forms such as [kúšaet] and [kúšaat] also occur.

(1) Contraction in northern Russian dialects {-aj-} verbs:

kúšat 'to eat'

1sg	kúš-aj-u		
2sg	kúš-aj-e-š	>	kúš-a-š
3sg	kúš-aj-e-t	>	kúš-a-t
1pl	kúš-aj-e-m	>	kúš-a-m
2pl	kúš-aj-e-t'e	>	kúš-aj-e-t'e
3pl	kúš-aj-ut		

³ The differences in the scope of contraction between verbs, where it is generally restricted to the {-aj-} (and a few {-ej-}) suffixed verbs, and adjectives, where it is found in all genders and cases that qualify, have been attributed to chronology (active process, more complete in adjectives than verbs; Kogotkova 1961 and Pšeničnova 1983) or to analogy (old process, new change in adjectives by analogy to verbs; Bromlej 1972).

Contraction is not found before the /u/ of the 1sg or the /ut/ of the 3pl, but it is also commonly absent in the 2pl forms. Otherwise, contraction is a regular process involving the theme vowel {-e-} of Conj I verbs in the 2sg, 3sg, 1pl forms. Dialectologists generally agree that in northern Russian dialects contraction is phonetically motivated and instigated by the weakening and loss of intervocalic /j/ followed by progressive assimilation of the unstressed vowel and shortening, as in *áje* > *áj̣e* > *áe* > *áa* > *á*; *aje* > *aj̣e* > *ae* > *aa* > *a* and a few cases of *éje* > *éj̣e* > *ée* > *é*. It apparently does not take place in those northern dialects where the theme vowel is realized as /o/, e.g., [d'élaj-o-t] 'do_{3SG}', [znáj-o-š] 'know_{2SG}' (Kogotkova [1961: 82–83] notes only isolated examples of forms like [znaot] 'know_{3SG}'), and it is not found in Conj II verbs, where the theme vowel is {-i-} ([stróit] 'build_{3SG}', but no *[strót], and 3pl [strójat]; Bromlej 1972: 112–13). So either the conjugation class and/or the quality of the second vowel is relevant.⁴

The phonetic nature of the process and its regularity before /e/ notwithstanding, there is strong resistance to contraction in the 2pl forms, as shown in (1) above. Dialects which freely exhibit contraction variants in the 2sg, 3sg, and 1pl forms for some reason do not have contraction in the same phonetic environment of the 2pl forms. There are several different explanations for the exceptionality of the 2pl forms in the literature and none of them is entirely convincing. The point of this paper is to propose a new and more comprehensive explanation based on paradigm contrast.

One explanation attributes the absence of contraction in the 2pl to the palatalized nature of the consonant that follows the /aje/ sequence. Kogotkova (1961: 92–94) claims that the palatalized nature of the /t'/ makes the preceding /e/ more tense and as a result it does not assimilate to the preceding vowel, as in 2pl /rabotajet'e/ 'work' vs. the 3sg /rabotat/ < [rabot-aj-e-t]. Thus the claim is that contraction is found before non-palatalized consonants but not before palatalized ones. Note that the explanation here involves the likelihood of assimilation and not the likelihood of glide weakening or deletion. The problem is that contraction is sometimes found before a palatalized /t'/ in certain dialects in 3sg forms, as in [d'élit'] < [d'elaj-e-t'] 'do' and [pád'ət'] < [pádaj-

⁴ Bromlej (1972: 116) points out that in those dialects where etymological tense /ē/ is realized as /i/, there is no assimilation in the resulting /ie/ sequence, e.g., *umēj-* > *umij-e-t* 'know how to_{3SG}' > [umiet]. She attributes this to avoidance of potential homophony with Conjugation II verbs whose theme vowel is {-i-}. But see Kasatkina 1991: 70 for an example of assimilation in /pomolod'ej-eš/ 'become younger_{2SG}' > [pomolod'iiš].

e-t'} 'fall', but then this is attributed to dialect contact/mixture in a scenario where northern dialects with contraction acquire the palatalized /t'/ suffix of southern Russian dialects (Penza Oblast, Kogotkova 1961: 92). A bigger problem is that contraction is found before a palatalized consonant in other forms of the verb within the northern dialects, as in reflexives, e.g., [rugat'c'a] < /rugajet'c'a/, 'scold_{3SG}', as Bromlej (1972: 118) points out. So palatalization of the consonant is probably not the determining factor in resisting contraction in the 2pl forms.

Another explanation, offered by Bromlej (1972), is that the glide simply does not delete before the high vowel /i/. This version claims that the 2pl suffix for northern dialects is primarily {-it'e}, found in suffix-stressed verbs of the eastern areas in northern Russian dialects, as in /n'es'it'é/ ~ /n'es'it'ó/ 'carry', /s'id'it'é/ ~ /s'id'it'ó/ 'sit' (p. 118) as well as in unstressed suffixes of this verb class, e.g., /stán'it'e/ 'stand'. It is said that this suffix is generalized to Conj I verbs and that it determines the behavior of contraction in northern and central Russian dialects, thus presumably no contraction in {um'éj-it'e} 'know how' or {znáj-it'e} 'know' (p. 117). Because northern Russian dialects also have 2pl forms with the suffix {-et'e} in which contraction is likewise absent, Bromlej (1972: 118) proposes that this suffix is a later development and the phonetics established for the {-it'e} suffix hold here by analogy. The basic claim is that /j/ does not delete before /i/. But phonetic studies of Contemporary Standard Russian (CSR) show that the glide is normally not found before the high front vowel /i/ (Es'kova 1957), as Bromlej herself observes (p. 114, fn. 8). And Panov (1957/2004: 494–99), for example, states that the glide is incompatible with an unstressed [i] and cites examples from CSR pronunciation where the glide is deleted before /i/. See also Avanesov 1972 (91–94), which states that /j/ and its weaker variant [j̄] are not found before /i/ except in very careful speech, especially in verbs. In fact, data in Kasatkina 1991 include examples of [ii] sequences in northern dialects. The proposal that the glide remains before a high vowel and deletes before the mid vowel runs contra to established phonetic properties of CSR insofar as these also apply to northern dialects. And if the contraction process is actually phonetically based, one would expect it to apply in the {-et'e} environment, as it does in all other {-e-} theme vowel environments, if not for phonetic reasons, then perhaps by analogy to other forms in the same verb paradigm.

A variant of this explanation appears in Bromlej and Bulatova 1972 (198–99), which confirms that contraction in the northern Russian dialects is not found in the [ae] sequence of 2pl forms. The authors retain

the argument based on the {-it'e} suffix but modify the position slightly to say that even if /j/ deletion does occur there still is no assimilation or contraction (p. 199). Thus we may get 2pl /dúmaet'e/ from {dúmaj-e-t'e} but not 2pl /dúmat'e/. Bromlej and Bulatova recognize that the {-it'e} suffix is not as systematically used in the dialects as is {-et'e}, but they claim that contraction is prevented in {-et'e} in order to maintain its two-syllable characteristic as a match for the two syllables in the {-it'e} suffix (pp. 198–99). The essential claim is, again, that it is the high vowel which limits glide deletion and the presence of the glide even before the /e/ of the {-et'e} suffix is due to prosodic analogy with the {-it'e} suffix.

In central Russian dialects, which tend to be dialects of late settlements, contracted forms are regularly found throughout the non-past/present tense and encompass a greater variety of Conj I vowel-plus-/j/ stems, as shown in (2) and (3).⁵ The verb forms in (2) have stress on the vowel before the /j/; those in (3) have an unstressed vowel before the /j/. Although Kogotkova (1961: 94) found contracted forms in the 2pl, especially in akan'e dialects, later dialectological work (Avanesov and Orlova 1965: 151–54; Orlova 1970: 168–69; Bromlej and Bulatova 1972: 196–97) notes resistance to contraction in both types of paradigms here as well. Data below are from Bromlej and Bulatova (1972: 196–97).

(2) Central Russian dialects (eastern areas): VjV sequences

	<i>igrat'</i> 'play'	<i>umet'</i> 'know how to'	<i>kryt'</i> 'cover'	<i>obut'</i> 'put on shoes'
1sg	igráj-u	um'ěj-u	krój-u	obúj-u
2sg	igrá-š	um'é-š	kró-š	obú-š
3sg	igrá-t	um'é-t	kró-t	obú-t
1pl	igrá-m	um'é-m	kró-m	obú-m
2pl	igrá-t'e ~ igráj-et'e	um'é-t'e ~ um'ěj-et'e	kró-t'e ~ krój-et'e	obú-t'e ~ obúj-et'e
3pl	igráj-ut	um'ěj-ut	krój-ut	obúj-ut

When the vowel before the /j/ is not stressed, the Conj I Vj-verbs have two types of "contracted" paradigms (Bromlej and Bulatova 1972: 197), the second a completely reanalyzed one where the glide is also

⁵ Some examples of contraction are also found in past tense forms and in the infinitive involving sequences of /eja/, /aja/, /uja/, as in /s'ėjali/ 'we sowed' > [s'él'i] (Kogotkova 1961: 89).

lost in the 1sg and 3pl, as shown in (3). But even here the 2pl form still shows variants with /j/.

(3) Central Russian dialects (eastern areas): VjV sequences

	<i>dúmat'</i> 'to think'		<i>tr'ébovat'</i> 'to require'	
1sg	dúmaj-u	dúm-u	tr'ébuj-u	tr'éb-u
2sg	dúma-š	dúma-š	tr'ébu-š	tr'ébu-š
3sg	dúma-t	dúma-t	tr'ébu-t	tr'ébu-t
1pl	dúma-m	dúma-m	tr'ébu-m	tr'ébu-m
2pl	dúmaj-et'e	dúmaj-et'e	tr'ébuj-et'e	tr'ébuj-et'e
	~ dúmat'e	~ dúmat'e	~ tr'ébu-t'e	~ tr'ébu-t'e
3pl	dúmaj-ut	dúm-ut	tr'ébuj-ut	tr'éb-ut⁶

There are claims that the developments in the central dialects are different from those in the north and that this phenomenon is not actually phonetic contraction. Thus there have been different explanations for the VjV shortening in central Russian dialects: phonetic (Kogotkova 1961), morphological (Bromlej 1972), and a combination of the two (Zaxarova 1970: 330–31; Pšeničnova 1983). Given the greater range of the phenomenon and the general absence of pronunciations that would represent intermediate stages of the process in central dialects, Kogotkova (1961: 89) attributes the shortening of VjV sequences to the post-tonic vowel reduction of /e/ or /a/ followed by loss of the glide: $e > \iota > \emptyset$ as in /mójet/ > [mójit] > [mót] 'wash_{3SG}'. Many of these dialects do show vowel reduction in the syllable before the immediately pretonic one and in the post-tonic syllable, a prosodic profile known as a strong center and weak periphery (Kasatkina 1996), so there may be some phonetic basis for this interpretation. Because in this area one also finds dialects with a palatalized {-t'} suffix in 3rd person forms, the claim that contraction takes place only before non-palatalized /t/ cannot hold (see Kogotkova's explanation for the resistance of 2pl forms in northern dialects). In this regard, the vowel-reduction explanation (Kogotkova 1961: 92; also Zaxarova 1970: 331) which is independent of the palatalization of the following consonant fares somewhat better. It would also account for the shortened/contracted variants in 2pl forms as the posttonic non-final

⁶ Kogotkova (1961: 96) notes that there is resistance to contraction in 3pl /uju/ forms, e.g., [tancúj-ut] 'dance', which she attributes to potential homophony with the 3sg form, cf. the 3sg [tr'ébu-t] above with the 3pl [tr'éb-ut]. Thus paradigm contrast would appear to be active here as well.

vowel tends to be prosodically the weakest one in a word (Kasatkina 1996; also Bromlej 1972: 128). On the other hand, there is documented resistance to shortening in the 2pl forms in these dialects (Orlova 1970: 168–69; Bromlej and Bulatova 1972: 191–202), and the vowel reduction scenario does not provide any explanation.

Bromlej (1972: 126–31) claims that the greater scope of what appear to be contracted forms in central Russian dialects is the result of dialect contact and morphological extension, not a phonetic process of intervocalic glide deletion (and contraction per se) or vowel reduction. The scenario is that dialect contact between northern Russian dialects with contraction and central dialects which did not have this process led to the borrowing of contraction from the northern dialects in {-aj-/-ej-} suffixed verbs, and that the forms borrowed were the ones which most differed from existing forms in central dialects, namely, the fully contracted verb forms (VjV > V) and not any intermediate type of pronunciations (VjV > VV), thereby accounting for the very few cases of attested intermediate pronunciations. This contracted pattern then spread to other Conj I verbs which had /Vj/ stems. The appearance of paradigms in which the /j/ appears to be lost in the 1sg and 3pl, as in (3) above, and the emergence of a special conjugation type (Conj III) are attributed to further paradigmatic leveling (p. 130). The explanation for the non-contracted forms in the 2pl is that they were borrowed that way from the northern dialects (Bromlej 1972: 128). But given that morphological analogy was so active in the central dialects in leveling out the non-past/present paradigm, there is no satisfactory explanation for why the 2pl forms, even if they were borrowed that way from the northern dialects, should retain the glide and resist change. This becomes even more problematic when we consider that verbs other than the {-aj-/-ej-} suffixed ones, such as *kryt'* 'cover' or *trebovat'* 'require' above, which are said to have been formed by extension from the borrowed {-aj-/-ej-} forms, also exhibit resistance in the 2pl forms. We would have to assume that, although paradigm leveling produced changes in the 1sg and 3pl before the {-u, -ut} suffixes, it still did not apply to 2pl forms before the {-e-}.

But there is another explanation for the systematic resistance to contraction in the 2pl forms, and only in the 2pl forms, and this explanation does not require the postulation of questionable phonetic processes (loss of the glide before the mid front vowel /e/ but no loss of the glide before a high front vowel /i/), analogy to an {-it'e} suffix, or peculiar properties of loanword morphology in dialect contact or

lapses in paradigmatic analogy. The fact is that the Russian verbal paradigm contains imperative forms which are based on the non-past/present tense stem for most verbs. In {-aj-} and {-ej-} suffixed verbs, as well as in almost all of the other {Vj-} suffixed verbs, the imperative for the non-inclusive plural or the singular polite register is based on the present tense stem with no overt imperative suffix, e.g., {dúmaj-} 'think', {kúšaj-} 'eat', {uměj-} 'know how to', {trébuĵ-} 'require', etc., and suffixed by the plural marker {-t'e} or {t'o}: {dúmajt'e} 'think!', {kúšajt'e} 'eat!', {znájt'e} 'know!'.⁷ When we compare the imperative forms in (4a) with the non-contracted and potentially contracted 2pl forms in (4b) and (4c), the point becomes obvious.

- (4) a. Imperative/non-inclusive/polite sg: kúšajt'e [kúšaj̩t'e]
 b. 2pl non-past without contraction: kúšajet'e/kúšait'e or kúšaet'e
 c. 2pl non-past with contraction: *kúšat'e

Given that the contracted form would differ from the non-inclusive imperative only by the presence of a preconsonantal glide in the latter (*kúšat'e vs. kúšaj̩t'e), one can see that any additional weakening or loss of the glide in coda position before the {-t'e} suffix in the imperative would make the forms perceptually very difficult to distinguish, in essence creating near homophones or homophones. One way to maintain the contrast between the two paradigmatic forms is to retain the /e/ in a non-contracted version of the 2pl. Regardless of how the suffix vowel of the 2pl is pronounced, [et'e] or [it'e], the salient factor is that the non-contracted form retains an extra prosodic count or syllable which is exploited in the interest of avoiding homophony between the non-past form and the plural/polite imperative form. Thus Bromlej and Bulatova (1972) are correct in observing that a disyllabic suffix is the desired outcome in the 2pl, but it is not because the {-et'e} form wants to copy the {-it'e} variant. No other non-past/present tense form faces the same type of homophony problem. The singular imperative form in {-aj-} suffixed verbs has no overt suffix, i.e., [kúšaj] vs. 2sg [kúšaš], and

⁷ Avanesov and Orlova (1965: 167) point out that in dialects where morphological re-analysis has produced a Conj III contracted paradigm, e.g., 1sg {dúm-u}, 2sg {dúm-aš}; 3pl {dúm-ut}, the imperative is formed by the suffixation of {-aj-}, so the plural/polite imperative form [dúmajt'e] would still be potentially homophonous with a restructured 2pl [dúmat'e].

the inclusive form (plural) makes use of a variety of possibilities, including a synthetic form with {-t'e} after the {-m} suffix as in {napíšem-t'e} 'let's write!', or the analytic with *davaj/davajte* as in {davaj počítajem}, {davajt'e počítajem} 'let's read!' (Bromlej and Bulatova 1972: 265). Compare the latter forms with the contracted 1pl form [počítám].⁸ The 2pl form is used in addressing the second-person plural group as well as a second-person singular in polite speech, both in the indicative and in the imperative, so there is the question of functional load and the importance of distinguishing commands from statements when addressing the you-person directly.

There is no apparent phonetic reason for the anomaly in 2pl forms, and any type of analogical leveling within the non-past forms would clearly favor loss of the glide and shortening, as seems to be increasingly the case in some areas. But the persistence of "uncontracted" 2pl forms is persuasive evidence that these forms are somehow special, and the claim here is that they resist contraction and paradigm leveling because they would become homophonous with the plural imperative forms. The fact that 2pl forms are exceptional in this way in both northern Russian and central Russian dialects, where the genesis of contracted forms may in fact be quite different, suggests that the explanation lies in language structure in general and in the tendency to maintain contrast between related paradigmatic forms.

The proposal that it is avoidance of homophony or near homophony which explains resistance to contraction specifically in 2pl forms is based on the notion that paradigm contrast is active in the phonology and morphology of Russian. Several cases in the literature have shown this to be the case. For example, Avanesov (1972), Crosswhite (1999, 2001: 156–59), and Kenstowicz (2002, 2005) have claimed that the absence of expected vowel reduction in Conj II verbs in the 3pl is due to the need to keep the 3sg and the 3pl forms distinct. In other words, the expected reduction of /a/ after palatalized consonants to [ɨ] does not take place in the 3pl {-at} suffix because the unstressed 3sg suffix in that paradigm is [ɨt]: 3sg /kúr'it/ [kúr'ɨt] but 3pl /kúr'ut/ [kúr'ot] or /kúr'at/ [kúr'ət] from {kúr'-at} and not the expected *[kúr'ɨt]. This type of blocking is found between certain critical morphosyntactic categories within a paradigm, here NUMBER: SG vs. PL. And it was noted above that in some central Russian dialects Conj I verbs with the unstressed

⁸ There is remarkably little data on the inclusive 1pl imperative forms in these dialects but it would be of interest to know whether the contracted form is used.

non-past suffix {-uj-} as in the 3pl {tr'éb-uj-ut} 'require, need' also show some resistance to contraction /tr'ébujut/ ~ /tr'ébut/ for the same reason, because the 3sg form in that paradigm is /tr'ébut/ (Kogotkova 1961: 96; see (3) above and fn. 6). Bethin (2012a) showed that in spite of extensive case syncretism and homophony in nominal paradigms of CSR, vowel reduction after palatalized consonants exhibits a lag or blocking effect in certain forms subject to the requirement of maintaining contrast in NUMBER within a given CASE. Thus paradigm contrast is maintained between certain morphosyntactic categories in Russian.

The contrast involved in the data discussed here is one of MOOD, INDICATIVE vs. IMPERATIVE, where in the normal course of events, contraction would yield forms such as [dúmat'e] for the indicative and [dúmaĭt'e] for the imperative. The indication is that MOOD is also a contrast that is maintained in Russian. This contrast is, in fact, consistently maintained by the morphology in CSR, either by the use of different suffixes, as in the indicative [dúmæt'ɨ] from {dúm-aj-e-t'e} (with vowel reduction and glide deletion) vs. the imperative [dúmæĭt'ɨ] from {dúm-aj-t'e}, or by differences in stress, as in the indicative root stress [p'íšit'ɨ] {p'íš-e-t'e} vs. the imperative suffix stress [p'íšit'ɨ] from {p'íš-í-t'e} 'write'. There is no syncretism between the indicative and the imperative in the Russian verbal paradigm.

The data discussed here also suggest that near homonyms, forms such as [dúmat'e] and [dúmaĭt'e], are sufficiently close to motivate paradigm contrast mechanisms such as blocking. Given that contraction in northern Russian dialects is in free variation and to some extent dependent on speech rate, the phenomenon is one that takes speech rate into account. In rapid speech the glide in the imperative is not fully articulated or not perceptible, and the pronunciation of the imperative [dúmat'e] is the reference cell for contrast, blocking contraction in the 2pl. These types of glide effects are also discussed in Bethin (2012b), where CSR Conj I verbs suffixed by {-ej-} such as 'to recover one's health' {vídorov-ej-} with unstressed suffixes in the non-past forms, undergo vowel reduction in the suffixes and {ej-e} is pronounced as [ɨɨ], for example, 3sg [vídərəv'ɨɨt] from {vídorov'-ej-e-t}. Apparently Russian speakers hear the sequence [ɨɨ] as [ɨ]. Because the [ɨ] is also the vowel reduction reflex of the theme vowel in Conj II verbs, these Conj I verbs are reassigned to Conj II, where they undergo the appropriate Conj II morphophonemic alternations. For example, when 3sg [vídərəv'ɨt] is taken to be a Conj II verb form, the 1sg form in this reanalyzed paradigm becomes [vídərəv'ɨ] in accordance with Conj II morphophonemic patterns, and

not the expected 1sg [vʲɪzdərɐv'ɨ̞u] form characteristic of Conj I. The shift in conjugation class is motivated by vowel reduction and glide loss before [ɨ], which results in homophony for several forms of the two conjugation classes. It may lead to reanalysis. The difference between the created homophony in these {-ej-} verbs and the potential homophony in contraction verbs has to do with the nature of categories involved. In the former, homophony is created in some forms of the non-past paradigm between two conjugation classes. As this distinction is not a morphosyntactic one, homophony is tolerated and may lead to reassignment of conjugation class. But in the latter case, homophony would eliminate a contrast in the expression of MOOD within the non-past paradigm of a given verb class. The expression of MOOD is a critical contrast in the verbal paradigm, in terms of the verbal categories and in terms of pragmatics, so homophony is resisted.

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