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The Phonology and Morphology of Romanian Diphthongization

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A unified analysis of three Romanian vowel alternations is proposed in this paper. The alternations occur between mid and low vowels (/a/ and schwa) and between mid vowels and diphthongs (e-ea and o-oa) in stressed position. Diphthongization is treated as vowel lowering under stress. Departing from previous analyses, all three alternations are shown to be part of the same process, both phonologically and morphologically conditioned. The surface distribution of vowels and diphthongs falls out from the interaction of two conflicting forces acting on the stressed vowel of the stem: the pressure on the vowel to lower under stress, and the pressure to rise in a metaphony process conditioned by the vowel of an inflectional suffix. The analysis relies on the interaction of markedness and faithfulness constraints. The latter include a constraint responsible for metaphony, defined as an instance of faithfulness between the vowel of the stem and that of the suffix. Besides allowing a unified treatment of all three alternations, this analysis also reveals the typological relation of Romanian to other languages whose stress systems are sensitive to vowel height. The morphological distribution of vowels and diphthongs is accounted for by morphologically specific instantiations of constraints outranking the general, phonological ones.