Correspondence of prosody and syntax by phase in a polysynthetic language

Research on prosodic phonology over the past 40 years has shown that prosodic structure is closely related to syntactic structure, but may mismatch in ways that are phonologically optimizing (Nespor & Vogel 2007, and many others. An open question is how syntax-prosody correspondence differs in polysynthetic languages with large “clausal words” (see Arnhold, Elfner, and Compton 2020; Compton & Pittman 2010; Dyck 2009; Miller 2018; Piggott & Travis; Wojdak 2008). One hypothesis is that the Prosodic Word (PWd) constituent corresponds to different syntactic units in different languages, some of which are quite large. A second hypothesis is that the PWd constituent corresponds to the same syntactic unit across languages, and that some other mechanism creates large “clausal words”. In this talk, I argue in favor of the second hypothesis.

I investigate the correspondences between syntactic, prosodic, and metrical constituents in Blackfoot (Algonquian), a polysynthetic language. I show that a particular vP phrase matches to a Prosodic Word (PWd) constituent, while DP and CPs match to Phonological Phrase (PPh) constituents. I propose that syntactic vP, DP, and CP phases (Chomsky 2001; Uriagereka 1999) correspond by default to the PWd, the PPh, and the IPh, respectively. I model these relationships using a modified version of Match Theory (Selkirk 2011). The large “clausal words” in Blackfoot arise because of a phonological pressure for sisters to a PPh to also be a PPh. The findings in this talk show that phrasal correspondence like Match Theory extend “below the word” level.