The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

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speaking on

Idiosyncrasy and contextual variability in
the prosody of functional morphemes

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1:30 PM
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Abstract:
Dependent morphemes (affixes, clitics) may idiosyncratically select for prosodic properties of their hosts (Inkelas 1990, Zec 2005, etc.). For example, the English comparative suffix -er does not attach to stems greater than two syllables in size (smart-er vs. *intelligent-er). Violation of a prosodic subcategorization frame may lead to simple ungrammaticality (e.g. *pretentious-er). In other cases, subcategorization requirements are met by restructuring the prosody of a morpheme's host. In this talk we consider several case studies in which functional morphemes idiosyncratically impose a particular prosodic structure on their hosts, sometimes with dramatic results.

In Macedonian, preverbal object clitics are typically unstressable (<go Vlde> ‘(s)he saw him’, *<GO vide>). But in the presence of wh-words or sentential negation, such clitics are parsed into the same prosodic word as the verb and may bear stress (<koj GO vide> ‘Who saw him?’). In Kaqchikel, a variety of diagnostics indicate that absolutive agreement markers have a different prosodic parse depending on the presence or absence of outer aspect marking (e.g. [x-in-b’e] ‘I went’ vs. [in=jwi] ‘I am intelligent’). The puzzle here is understanding why the prosody of “inner” morphemes (e.g. object clitics) depends on the occurrence of a specific "outer" morpheme (e.g. wh-words).

We propose that these patterns arise from prosodic subcategorization: the “outer” morphemes in question have subcategorization requirements which force re-parsing of their hosts, including any dependent morphemes present in the same structure. We account for this behavior in a novel theory of subcategorization which makes extensive use of prosodic recursion, and which emphasizes the prosodic result of combining a dependent morpheme with its host. We then consider possible extensions of this framework to Chamorro and English, and conclude with the theoretical and methodological implications of our proposal.