

The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

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speaking on

Revisiting prosodic reconstruction

Thursday, February 14, 2019
2:30 PM

Location: HUM 2 - Room 259

Abstract:

Prosodic reconstruction refers to the idea that underlying syntactic structure can influence prosody. The examples in (1-2) illustrate this. The prosodic prominence level of the verb 'written' in (1) depends on its complement: if it is a lexical phrase like 'some books', the verb can be deaccented, but not when the complement is a pronoun like 'something' (in information-structurally unmarked utterances).

- (1) a. Helen has written some books.
b. Helen has written something.

It has been reported for English (e.g., Bresnan 1971, Selkirk 1995) and German (e.g., Korth 2014, Truckenbrodt 2019) that this prosodic dependency between the verb and its (underlying) complement sometimes carries over to sentences in which the object is displaced to a different position. For example, Bresnan (1971:259) reports that the accentuation of the verb in wh-questions, as in (2), also depends on the form of the (fronted) object.

- (2) a. What books has Helen written?
b. What has Helen written?

Modeling such non-local prosodic dependencies raises a challenge: syntactic and prosodic structure are not isomorphic (Selkirk 2011), and abstract syntactic entities like copies or traces are typically not represented in the latter. I will revisit previous approaches to the phenomenon and present a new implementation based on a reordering of operations at the syntax-prosody interface. I will also address challenges that arise when investigating prosodic reconstruction empirically and present first experimental results for German.