Free Word Order and Prosody in Complex DPs in Xitsonga

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This talk has two aims. First, I will introduce a novel way of thinking about the syntax-prosody interface based on Lee & Selkirk (2022) and Elordieta & Selkirk (2022). In this version of Match theory, two sources of mismatch between the syntactic constituents and the prosodic structures are identified. Prosodic structure constraints such as BINARITY and STRONGSTART are one source of mismatch. The interface constraint Match-Lex, which limits XPs to lexical phrases when generating prosodic structures, is another source of mismatch. High (H) tone patterns in Xitsonga (S53), a Bantu language spoken in South Africa, offer empirical grounds for this talk. H tone spreading is allowed into a unary DP, but blocked by a binary DP, due to the BINARITY constraint. In ditransitive constructions, H tone spreads from the verb into the first object DP, but not beyond. The prosodic grouping of the verb and the first object to the exclusion of the second object is a mismatch between syntax and prosody driven by STRONGSTART.

The second part of the talk concerns the prosody of complex DP in Xitsonga, which has a free word order; a three-word DP allows six orders, and a four-word DP allows all 24 orders. Non-canonical word orders express focus of different DP-internal elements. Analyzing data of three-word DPs in post-verbal and pre-verbal positions, the effects of focused elements in the prosodic structures in Xitsonga are further examined.