Prosodic structure in language processing:
Phrasing and prominence in production and comprehension

Shari Speer
Ohio State University

Research on prosodic structure in language processing has shown that speakers produce reliable correspondences between prosodic phrasal phenomena and syntactic constituency for a wide variety of syntactic forms, while listeners make incremental and even predictive use of such correspondences during comprehension. Findings on the production and comprehension of pitch prominence and discourse structure show remarkably similar processing effects. At the same time, experiments measuring prosody in production have moved from professional speakers and read speech to naïve participants in more naturalistic production paradigms, providing documentation of a broad range of variability in the acoustic form and phonological types of the produced patterns. I will discuss commonalities in processing results for prosodic phrasing and prominence, examining speakers’ productions of, and listeners’ sensitivity to felicitous, ambiguous, and misleading prosodic forms, with attention to the influence of variation in production on the resulting comprehension processes.