Invitation to all faculty, staff and students

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Dr. Soyoung Kang

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4:00 – 5:00 p.m.
Room 115 Paterson Hall

Effects of Prosody on The Resolution Of Syntactic Clausal Boundaries in Korean and Japanese

Previous work has demonstrated that prosodic structures of a sentence can carry critical information about the meaning and/or syntactic structures of spoken sentences in many languages. In this talk, I present the results from two auditory comprehension experiments, one for Korean and the other for Japanese. Unlike English, Korean and Japanese include pro-drop and verb final word order, which contribute to abundant syntactic clausal boundary. In addition, prosodic structures of these two languages differ from English; Korean lacks lexically-associated prosodic elements, such as stress pattern in English or lexical pitch accent in Japanese, which can interact with phrasal prosodic structure. The constructions tested contain two types of relative clauses, gap type relative clauses (temporary ambiguity) and pro type relative clauses (global ambiguity). The presence of either type of relative clauses in a sentence gives rise to the ambiguity as to the presence or absence of a syntactic clausal boundary in both languages. Two auditory experiments were set up in order to explore the effects of prosodic boundaries on the comprehension of these ambiguous sentences in Korean and Japanese. For each test sentence, two prosodic versions were created so that they had either matched or mismatched syntactic and prosodic boundaries for the gap type and two differing interpretations for the pro type sentences. The listeners heard one prosodic version of each test sentence and answered comprehension questions. The results from 40 Korean and 40 Japanese listeners showed sensitivity to prosodic phrasing information; for the temporarily ambiguous constructions (gap type relative clauses), the mismatched conditions induced garden-path effects despite the presence of syntactic information that could resolve the ambiguity whereas the two differing prosodic structures led listeners to assign a different syntactic clause boundary even if this required them to posit a null pronoun (pro) for the embedded predicate, which is rare in the presence of any preceding context. These results confirm the importance of prosodic structure during spoken language comprehension, demonstrating that prosodic structure can be one of the most important elements in determining the syntactic structures of a given string of words.

Dr. Soyoung Kang holds a PhD from the Department of Linguistics at the Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, where she specialized in psycholinguistics. Her dissertation, "Effects of prosody and context on the comprehension of syntactic ambiguity in English and Korean", examined the role of prosodic structures and context in resolving syntactic ambiguity in English and Korean. She is currently a visiting scholar to the Linguistics Department at University of Ottawa working on acquisition of English stress by speakers of two dialects of Korean.