The Tonal Phonology of Koasati: the Intersection of Lexical Tone, Intonation and Stress

Matthew Gordon

Friday, May 29, 2015 - 3:30pm
Mary Gates Hall 241

Although prosodic systems have traditionally been bifurcated into two camps, those with stress and those with tone, recent advances in our typological knowledge paint a far richer picture of prosodic variation, including languages with neither stress nor tone, languages blending stress and tone, and diverse types of interactions between intonation and stress/tone. This talk will present results of ongoing research conducted with Jack Martin (College of William & Mary) on the prosodic system of Koasati, an endangered Muskogean language spoken in Louisiana and Texas. Koasati words and utterances feature a complex array of pitch events, most of which are attributed to a combination of lexical/grammatical tone and intonational boundary tones. Some pitch properties, however, are suggestive of pitch accents projected from a word-level stress system. Two recurrent themes characterize tone in Koasati: an avoidance of tonal crowding and tonal polarity effects whereby a high tone is accompanied by a leading low tone. The talk will compare from a diachronic perspective Koasati’s multidimensional prosodic system to the strikingly diverse set of prosodic systems found within the Muskogean family and beyond.

Event Flyer (PDF)