The tonal phonology of Koasati: the intersection of lexical tone, intonation, and stress

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.