

**Match Theory and Recursion below and above the word: Evidence from Tlingit**  
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*Partially based on joint work with James Crippen and Rose-Marie Déchaine*

Match Theory (Selkirk 2011) proposes that prosodic categories are grounded in syntactic constituent structure: specifically, that the distribution of the “above word” categories of Prosodic Word, Phonological Phrase, and Intonational Phrase is (partially) determined by the syntactic categories of word, phrase, and clause, respectively. Prosodic categories below the prosodic word, such as the foot and the syllable, are traditionally assumed to be determined purely by phonological constraints rather than by interface constraints. However, some languages do show evidence for an additional prosodic domain below the level of the word, such as the morphological stem (Downing 1999; Downing & Kadenge 2015).

One advantage of allowing prosodic domains to be recursive is that it allows for a simplified prosodic hierarchy (Ito & Mester 2013; Elfner 2015; Elordieta 2015). For example, in Japanese, Ito & Mester (2013) argue that the distinction of Major/Minor Phrase may be reinterpreted as phonological phrases that may occur recursively. This has the typological and explanatory advantage that some redundancy is eliminated, allowing for a universal theory of prosodic structure that can allow for as much or as little structure as is necessary for a given structure.

Languages showing the qualities of polysynthesis show a unique challenge for Match Theory, as they are capable of showing morphosyntactic complexity both below and above the level of the word, which in principle can affect prosodic domains. In this talk, I will discuss evidence for prosodic domains in Tlingit, a polysynthetic language of northern North America. Tlingit, like other Na-Dene languages, allows for morphologically complex forms in the verbal and nominal domains. Typically analysed using morphological templates, there is phonological evidence for nested phonological domains within verbal and nominal complexes, including evidence from prosodic size, tone, and segmental processes. Recent work has argued that these domains may be accounted for using hierarchical syntactic structure rather than morphological templates, and that this may have consequences for the interpretation of these domains under theories of the syntax-phonology interface, such as Match Theory (Crippen & Déchaine 2016; Crippen 2019; Elfner et al. 2019).

Given a hierarchical representation of prosodic domains in Tlingit, this talk discusses the challenges involved in assigning “labels” to these nested prosodic categories, raising questions about whether “sub-word” prosodic categories can be syntactically grounded and recursive, and about parallelism between languages with morphosyntactically complex words and languages with more isolating morphological systems.

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