

# ***Interface Colloquium Series***

## ***Silent Prosody Guides Syntactic Parsing***

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**Friday, March 10, 2006**

**12 o'clock**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

There is growing evidence that in silent reading, readers tend to project a prosodic contour onto the written words and then treat this mentally created prosody as if it were part of the stimulus, so that it influences syntactic processing just as 'real' prosody does when we listen to speech. Real prosody can disambiguate syntactically ambiguous sentences, and so does silent prosody – though perhaps not always as the writer intended, since it is the default prosody that readers project.

Prosodic phrasing is shaped by its alignment with syntactic structure but also by other factors such as phrase length and focus. It can therefore offer explanations for a variety of what would otherwise be aberrant ambiguity-resolution preferences: differences in ambiguity resolution between different languages; between different constructions in the same language; even between instances of the same construction if they differ in their phrase lengths. This is important because it means that the observed contrasts in parsing can be attributed to linguistic facts at the prosody-syntax interface, and so do not undermine the hypothesis that the human parsing mechanism is universal and innate.

I will report studies by CUNY students, and researchers elsewhere, on a variety of languages including Arabic, Croatian, English, German, Hebrew, Japanese, Spanish and Portuguese.