On the clause-mate condition in Japanese: Implicit prosody and argument structure parsing

In this talk, I discuss the so-called 'clause-mate condition' found in certain syntactic constructions in Japanese. This study investigates how the 'clause-mat eness' of XPs can be parsed according to prosody, how a mismatch in prosody causes parsing difficulty of certain sentences, and how such mismatches may be recovered by additional prosodic factors.

In some syntactic constructions in Japanese, more than one constituent can move together to a certain syntactic position. One example is the cleft construction: Japanese clefts allow multiple constituents to appear in the focus position (‘It is x, y that ... t(x) ... t(y)...’). It has often been claimed that such constituents must originate from the same clause, i.e., they must be clause-mates (= the Clause-Mate Condition, the CMC). This condition has often been analyzed as a syntactic constraint that strictly bans any syntactic derivation violating it. There are, however, cases where the CMC can be obviated. So far, no account has been proposed that can explain both the CMC and the CMC obviation cases.

In this talk, I claim that the Clause-Mate Condition in Japanese is not a syntactic constraint, and propose that the CMC effect comes from the influence of ‘implicit prosody’ on sentence parsing. Adopting the Implicit Prosody Hypothesis (Fodor 1998, 2002), I will propose a parsing principle which imposes a certain bias on the argument structure comprehension according to the prosodic phrasing in the implicit prosody. This analysis can explain both the CMC effect in clefts with multiple focus constituents and its obviation effect under certain conditions (including interrogatives) in a parallel fashion.

The analysis also makes further predictions on potential parsing difficulties in other constructions such as long-distance scrambling. It will be suggested that some of the mysterious restrictions found in long-distance scrambling in Japanese (e.g., ban on long-distance scrambling to a sentence-medial position, ban on scrambling of nominative subjects) are related to the parsing difficulty caused by the implicit prosody.