

"Prosodic Domain of Wh-questions in Japanese"

Haruo Kubozono (Kobe University)
Yoshihisa Kitagawa (Indiana University)
Kenji Yoshida (Indiana University)

This talk discusses how focus changes prosodic structure in Tokyo Japanese. It is generally believed that focus blocks the intonational process of downstep and causes a pitch reset, which suggests that the domain of focus prosody constitutes a Major Phrase (MaP, a.k.a. Intermediate phrase). This paper presents experimental evidence against this traditional view by looking at the prosodic behavior of Wh words, which receive focus lexically in Tokyo Japanese as in many other dialects/languages.

In the first half of the talk, it is demonstrated that the focused Wh element does not block downstep although it tends to receive a much higher pitch than its preceding element. This suggests that the presence of lexical (Wh-)focus does not trigger pitch reset in Japanese, and hence that it does not start a new MaP.

In the second half of the talk, experimental results will be presented in which the downstep effect cannot be verified to continue beyond the complementizer marking the scope of Wh-focus. It is pointed out, however, that there is a reasonable explanation for the absence of the downstep effect beyond the complementizer, and that this surface phenomenon does not necessarily prove that downstep is blocked at the end of a Wh-focus prosodic domain. All in all, our experimental results cast doubt on the hypothesis that a Wh-focus prosodic domain constitutes a MaP.