

On utterances in Japanese: toward a context-sensitive framework of prosodic structure

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This study investigates the degree to which predictions that syntax-centric models of prosodic phonology make correspond with actual conversational data in Japanese. Formal models (i.e. Ishihara 2007; Kaisse 1985; Kawahara in press; Kawahara and Shinya 2008; Selkirk 1986, 2005, 2009a, 2009b; Selkirk et al 2004, Wagner 2010 amongst others) broadly predict that prosodic units are derived in some fashion from major syntactic units. While accounts as to the precise means by which this is realized differ on specific mechanics, there appears to be a broad consensus in studies such as these regarding the fundamental architectural arrangement of the theoretical syntactic and prosodic 'modules' in question.

Empirical studies of prosody in conversation have outlined some of the discourse properties of prosodic units (Chafe 1987, 1994; Du Bois et al 1992; Schuetze-Coburn et al 1991), and also the central role that prosodic resources have in turn-taking practices in conversation (Couper-Kuhlen and Ono 2007; Ford and Thompson 1996; Ford, Fox and Thompson 1996; Krekoski in press, Schuetze-Coburn et al 1991).

Two questions that naturally arise when these two disparate threads of research are considered alongside each other is what consequences can research on conversation, which tends to focus on actual language use in its interactional context, have on generative models of prosodic phonology, which have tended to be based upon contextually homogenous researcher-constructed data sets, and to what degree do generative models of the relationship between syntax and prosody predict discourse phenomena. The present study will investigate top-level prosodic structure (i.e. depending upon formulation, intonational phrase, intonational unit, utterance, etc) of Japanese conversation and will address the question of what syntactic correlates, if any, do these prosodic units have in actual discourse, and how are we able to characterize the relationship between syntactic and prosodic structure in conversation.

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