Prosodic Typology of Japanese Accent

Junko Ito and Armin Mester

University of California, Santa Cruz

This talk will address the main lines of variation found in the accent systems of Japanese dialects, which has been the subject of many important contributions in Japanese accentology/tonology over the years (Uwano 1999, Shibatani 1990, Haraguchi 1977, Kubozono to appear, among others). An attempt will be made to consolidate the main strands of past work, and to synthesize the central ideas in the different traditions of analysis into a comprehensive analytical framework in Optimality Theory that can capture the formal cross-linguistic typology of Japanese pitch accent systems. Couched in a standard metrical-autosegmental framework (see Hyman 2006, for example), the analysis will make use of a system of recursive prosodic subcategories (Ito & Mester 2010) and Match Theory (Selkirk 2009, 2011, Elfner 2012, Ito & Mester to appear, etc.). Instead of starting out with laying out the differences between the dialects, which is likely to make the systems incommensurable from the outset without a clear grounding in the facts, our strategy will be to first outline the similarities among the systems, then turn to the variation, synchronic and diachronic. In an OT grammar, this variation is captured as different priority rankings of the constraining factors, conceived of as violable constraints. Pursuing the formal similarities in this way allows us to identify the underlying sources of the surface differences, leading to a better understanding of the different varieties of the Japanese accent systems. The overall goal is to lay a comprehensive basis for future contributions, and at the same time provide an integral path for meaningful cross-linguistic comparisons.

References