

The role of phrase-level prosody in sound change – the case of vowel insertion. Timo Roettger, Cologne

Abstract: Segmental and prosodic aspects of speech are often assumed to be independent of each other. For example, the intonation contour of a phrase is thought to be independent of the words that bear it. However, detaching segmental from suprasegmental aspects of speech has led us to largely ignore the intricate interactions between these levels which could potentially inform synchronic and diachronic phonological models. Particularly neglected are functional conflicts in the expression of lexical and postlexical meaning, such as conflicts created by the requirement to realise meaningful pitch movements on segments that do not lend themselves to a clear manifestation of these pitch movements. This talk aims at bridging this gap by arguing that prosodic structure and intonation pose functional pressure on the segmental environment favouring certain segmental strings over others. It will be argued that the dynamic negotiation between intonation and the segmental string has important implications for certain sound changes, in particular the insertion of vocalic elements as carriers of pitch.