Abstract:

In this talk I will examine aspects of phrase boundary production, perception and the structural properties of boundaries from a multifaceted experimental perspective. The term prosody refers to the phrasal organization and accentual prominence of speech. I will be focusing on the phrasal organization. An example of this aspect of prosody is given below, where the two sentences differ in prosodic phrasing.

a. She knew, Ann thought, about the present.
b. She knew Ann thought about the present.

In addition to intonational events, at their edges, prosodic phrase boundaries introduce systematic phonetic variation in the temporal properties of segments. Acoustic studies have shown that at boundaries segments increase in duration. Articulatory studies have shown that speech movements’ gestures become longer in the vicinity of boundaries and that this articulatory lengthening increases with boundary strength. I will present a series of experimental studies examining a) the articulation of gestures near phrase junctures, b) the link between articulatory properties of boundaries and listeners’ perception of boundaries, c) the categoricity and gradiency in the perception of prosodic boundaries, and d) the effect of prosodic structure on pause duration. Results from this research program further our understanding of the linguistic representation of prosodic structure and its relation to processes involved in producing spoken language, suggesting directions for further research.