What phonology knows and doesn’t know about syntax
Laura J. Downing (work in collaboration with Lisa. L.-S. Cheng)
Göteborgs universitet

The goal of this talk is to address a central question in the syntax-phonology interface, namely: what does phrasal phonology know about syntax (Chen 1990)? Work based on current syntactic models using phases often proposes that prosodic domains are identical to spell-out domains. We argue in this talk that spell-out domains are not adequate to define the domains necessary for phonological processes. Instead, it is phase edges which play a central role in accounting for the prosodic phrasing properties of the languages we discuss. This proposal raises, though, two other central and related questions. First, does phrasal phonology ‘know’ about syntax directly or indirectly? Second, when does the phonology-syntax interaction take place? Most current phase-based theories of the interface assume a strict cyclic model of derivation where the output of each spell-out domain directly feeds the phonology. We argue instead for a non-cyclic model where phonology has access to the syntax only indirectly, when the syntactic derivation is complete. The data supporting these claims comes mainly from Bantu languages, which have been a focus of discussion and testing for theories of the phonology-syntax interface since the 1970s. Implications of the analysis for other languages will be discussed.