

The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

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speaking on

**Unpacking the asymmetries in category-specific
phonology**

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

1:30 PM

Location: HUM 1 - Room 210

Abstract:

Lexical category (N, A, V) has long been important for morphology and syntax. However, it turns out that even phonological phenomena—processes or phonotactics—sometimes apply differently to words of different lexical categories.

A typological survey of languages with category-specific phonology finds two striking asymmetries. First, category-specific phonology is skewed toward prosodic phenomena (accent, tone, word shape) rather than segmental or featural phenomena. Second, there is a hierarchy of phonological privilege $N > A > V$, where ‘privilege’ essentially means the ability to support greater phonological complexity.

This talk presents results from both formal phonological analysis and experimental-phonology data, arguing for the view that the skew toward prosodic phenomena comes about through extragrammatical factors (such as acquisition and diachronic change), while the hierarchy of privilege is a linguistic universal (though a ‘soft’ one that can be overcome in the face of data). Category-specific phonology has implications for theories of positional privilege in phonology; approaches to the phonology/morphosyntax interface; the formal modeling of markedness scales in natural language; and the investigation of learning biases in language acquisition and their effect on diachrony and typology.