

**The Department of Linguistics  
is pleased to present**

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**Leibniz-ZAS**

**speaking on**

**Grammatical Tone Allomorphy and Interface Phonology**

**Tuesday, January 26, 2021  
9:00 AM (PST) via Zoom**

Zoom Information: Will be emailed on Monday, January 25, 2021

**Abstract:**

Tone has played an integral role in establishing the (Morpho-)Syntax-Phonology Interface as an important object worthy of study in its own right. One overlooked aspect of tone in Interface theories and debates is grammatical tone allomorphy, where multiple complementary tone patterns express the same grammatical meaning. Using a case study from Cilungu (Bantu: Zambia), I show that such allomorphy provides a unique window into the nature of Spell-out, which translates (morpho-)syntactic features into strings of phonological primitives. Specifically, the grammatical tone of a minority of tense/aspect/mood types in Cilungu shows allomorphy based on the tonal value of left-edge subject agreement markers. I show that only an analysis as morphological suppletion is viable, and that the alternative phonological account would necessitate an unprecedented 'first-last assimilation' rule, known to be outside the range of natural phonological systems. Given that the trigger of allomorphy involves a phonological property, and that this trigger is morphologically-outward compared to the target, this constitutes a rare type of 'outward-sensitive phonologically-conditioned suppletive allomorphy', contrary to claims in much modern morphological typology and theory. In total, I take Cilungu to crucially support the thesis that interface operations at Spell-out apply in parallel rather than serially, which correctly predicts that both grammatical- and phonological-conditioning of allomorphy can be bidirectional. Zooming out to a global picture, if we recognize that virtually all tone languages have at least some grammatical tone and that the world's worst described linguistic areas are also hotspots of diverse tone systems, I conclude that there is much more to discover which will continue to shape our conceptions of the phonology interfaces.