A major topic of debate in research addressing the syntax-phonology interface is the extent to which information about syntactic constituent structure may be recovered from the identification of prosodic domains. One of the major challenges in finding a definitive answer to this question has been the development of an understanding of how syntactic and prosodic domains correspond to each other, and how non-isomorphic (“mismatched”) structures sometimes emerge from this mapping. This talk addresses this question through the examination of sentence-level intonational phonology in Connemara Irish, and proposes an analysis in light of Match Theory (Selkirk 2009, 2011), a theory of the syntax-phonology interface in which syntax-prosody mapping (“MATCH”) constraints interact directly with prosodic markedness constraints, as in an OT framework.

Specifically, this talk presents the results of a production experiment that looks at prosodic phrasing in transitive (VSO) sentences in Connemara Irish and the effect of systematically varying the size and syntactic structure of the subject and object constituents. The data in this talk will focus on intonational patterns, and particularly on the distribution of two discrete types of phrasal pitch accents found in the language, L*H (rise) and H*L (fall), which I have previously argued to provide information on the left and right edges of prosodic constituents in Connemara Irish, respectively (Elfner 2012, 2015).

This talk addresses the question of what role prosodic markedness constraints play in the occurrence and relative frequency of the patterns of prosodic phrasing observed in the experimental data. I will focus on the prosodic markedness constraint STRONG-START (Selkirk 2011), a constraint which militates against prosodic structures with a relatively weak prosodic element at its left edge. I show that despite the presence of variation both between and within participants, this constraint, and its interaction with syntax-prosody correspondence constraints, plays a crucial role in explaining the range and relative likelihood of the prosodic structures that are observed in the VSO sentences produced in the experiment.