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Prominence, focus and speech comprehension in Samoan and English.

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in the role of prominence in speech comprehension, e.g. the role of prominence in regulating attention, signaling focus and generating implicatures. In this talk, I will discuss two recent studies I have led in this area, looking at the perception of two types of prominence – phonological and focal – in two unrelated languages, Samoan and English. Phonological, or nuclear, prominence and focus usually align in both languages; however, this is not always the case. I will show that the perception of both nuclear prominence and focus vary according to expected patterns of alignment of nuclear prominence, syntax and focus in both languages. I will also outline planned future work on the role of focus in speech comprehension more generally in both languages.