Phonological Cluster Impairments in the Mentally Retarded Children: An Optimality Theory Account

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Educational research in general and applied linguistics in particular has witnessed ongoing debates on the question of the systematicity of language even in the case of the pathologically deviant utterances produced by individuals suffering from mental diseases. Therefore, the obscure and little understood mechanism of language processing has prompted a more general and pure attack on the mentioned problem by “letting the brain do the talking” about how it organizes itself for the language specially for the phonological processing. To this aim, three children all of whom were suffering from mental retardation participated in this study. In order to gather the required data the subjects were asked, in structured interviews and discussions, questions of various areas. Subsequently, they were all tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed in the framework of optimality theory. It was found that the phonological clusters substituted by the participants are the optimal forms; that is, the forms that are left as the only survivor of all candidate forms after an inspection of the constraint hierarchy. Also, the results are discussed in the context of the importance of optimality theory in the phonological processing.