

Consonant clusters in Basque. A generative account in the framework of Optimality Theory.

The study of the sound system of a given language provides ideas as to why this language behaves in a particular way. For instance, phonological descriptions of Polish and English show why in the former people devoice word-final consonants and in the latter they do not. The study of phonological theory, on the other hand, provides explanations and predictions regarding sound systems and their behavior. Accordingly, we know why people tend to devoice word-final consonants and we predict that new words in Polish and English will comply with the phonological rules of the corresponding systems.

The goal of this project is to create a phonological description and analysis of Basque consonantal clusters that would show the particular reasons behind their phonological behavior. To this end, an empirical study must be conducted in order to gather the missing data. Audio recordings of native speakers of Basque living in the Basque Country will be made. The relevant audio material will be transcribed phonetically and analyzed using the most up-to-date phonological theories, such as Optimality Theory (OT). OT analyses of many languages proved insightful to the understanding of the behavior of sound patterns. It is predicted that similar results may be obtained in the current project.

The outcome of the analysis will not only yield an adequate phonological description of Basque, but also will contribute to the understanding of phonology in general. Particularly, Basque data are interesting from the perspective of several controversial topics in phonology, e.g., the nature of affricates, segmental fusion and phonological opacity. Finally, Basque has a limited number of speakers and is categorized as vulnerable. Therefore, any study on Basque helps in its popularization and preservation.