

Syllable merger: Is it a phonological or phonetic phenomenon?

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Syllable merger is an extremely reduced form, but it can be understood with no great difficulty in speech communication. This talk presents a series of studies on the issue of syllable merger as a candidate form for the mental representation of disyllabic words, in addition to the citation form. Results of production-based data on disyllabic word fusion using linguistically motivated categorical reduction types derived from gradient, acoustic properties as well as perceptual experiments conducted with common disyllabic words will be discussed. Our evidence supports the notion that the complete form of fusion occurring in conversation needs not be legitimate syllables and it appears consistently in the form of syllable merger that represents a group of phonetic variants. In other words, the alternative phonological representation is possibly a merging mechanism that predicts a construction, not a specific form.