

التداخل اللغوي في الفونولوجيا فوق مقطعية: تأثير أنماط النبرة في اللغة الفرنسية على اكتساب متعلمي الإنجليزية في الجزائر لمواضع النبرة في الكلمات الإنجليزية

Cross-Linguistic Interference in Suprasegmental Phonology: The Influence of French Stress Patterns on Algerian EFL Learners’ Acquisition of English Lexical Stress

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Abstract	الملخص	
In Algeria's multilingual context, where French remains rooted in education and society, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners often face considerable phonological challenges when acquiring English pronunciation. One of the persistent areas of difficulty lies in suprasegmental features, particularly lexical stress placement. This article investigates how French phonological patterns, especially stress predictability, influence the acquisition of English stress placement among second-year EFL students at Badji Mokhtar University, Annaba. The research employs a quantitative method using a questionnaire administered to 105 students. Results reveal a high occurrence of negative language transfer, with students frequently applying fixed final-	في السياق متعدد اللغات في الجزائر، حيث لا تزال اللغة الفرنسية متجذرة في التعليم والمجتمع، يواجه متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية تحديات فونولوجية كبيرة عند اكتساب نطق اللغة الإنجليزية. ومن بين أكثر الجوانب صعوبة، تبرز السمات فوق المقطعية، وخاصةً موضع النبرة في الكلمات. يبحث هذا المقال في كيفية تأثير الأنماط الفونولوجية الفرنسية، وخصوصًا قابلية التنبؤ بالنبرة، على اكتساب موضع النبرة في اللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلبة السنة الثانية بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة باجي مختار - عنابة. اعتمد البحث على المنهج الكمي باستخدام استبيان وُجِّعَ على 105 طالبًا. كشفت النتائج عن حدوث مرتفع للنقل اللغوي السلبي، حيث غالبًا ما يطبق الطلبة	

syllable stress rules from French to English pronunciation, resulting in comprehensibility issues. These errors are intensified by socio-educational exposure to French, limited corrective instruction in suprasegmentals, and learners' misconceptions regarding English stress regularities. The study recommends pedagogical reforms in phonetics teaching, including contrastive phonology instruction, enhanced exposure to native English input, and consciousness-raising tasks.	قاعدة النبرة النهائية الثابتة في الفرنسية على الكلمات الإنجليزية، مما يؤدي إلى مشاكل في الفهم. تتفاقم هذه الأخطاء بفعل التعرض التعليمي والاجتماعي المكثف للفرنسية، ونقص التدريب المصحح على السمات فوق المقطعية، وسوء فهم الطلبة لقواعد النبرة في الإنجليزية. ويوصي البحث بإصلاحات بيداغوجية في تعليم علم الأصوات، بما في ذلك تعليم الفونولوجيا المقارنة، وزيادة التعرض للنموذج الأصلي للنطق، وتدريبات توعوية.
Keywords : Lexical Stress Transfer; French Influence on English Pronunciation; Algerian EFL Learners; Suprasegmental Features; Cross-Linguistic Interference.	كلمات مفتاحية: نقل النبرة في الكلمات؛ تأثير اللغة الفرنسية على نطق الإنجليزية؛ متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية في الجزائر؛ السمات فوق المقطعية؛ التداخل اللغوي بين اللغات.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextual Background and Problem Statement

In recent decades, English has emerged as a global lingua franca, essential for academic, professional, and technological advancement. As Algeria increasingly embraces English in higher education and international collaboration, the urgency of effective English language teaching becomes paramount. However, the Algerian linguistic landscape, marked by diglossia and multilingualism, presents unique challenges for learners, particularly in pronunciation. While Modern Standard Arabic is the official language, French remains dominant in education, administration, and daily life due to historical colonial influence. As a result, Algerian learners of

English often rely heavily on French as a linguistic intermediary when acquiring English, especially in phonological aspects.

Among the most persistent difficulties Algerian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners face is the mastery of lexical stress, a suprasegmental feature of English in which stress can shift depending on syllable structure, part of speech, and derivation. Unlike English, French stress is fixed and almost always placed on the final syllable, making the transfer of French prosodic patterns a likely source of pronunciation errors. This negative transfer often results in miscommunication, reduced intelligibility, and fossilized pronunciation habits that are difficult to correct at later stages of language learning.

Despite increased attention to segmental errors (e.g., vowel and consonant articulation) in Algerian phonetics instruction, suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation remain under-taught. Consequently, many learners apply French stress patterns unconsciously when speaking English, assuming these to be transferable or universal. This gap in instruction and awareness forms the core problem this research seeks to address.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the extent to which French stress patterns interfere with the acquisition of English lexical stress among Algerian EFL learners. It also seeks to understand learners' perceptions of the differences between the two prosodic systems and their strategies, whether conscious or unconscious, for navigating pronunciation in English. By identifying the patterns of stress errors and their likely causes, the study hopes to provide pedagogical insights for improving phonetic instruction in Algerian EFL classrooms.

1.3 Research Questions

To guide this investigation, the study is structured around the following central research questions:

- 1) To what extent do Algerian EFL learners misplace lexical stress in English due to the transfer of French stress rules?

- 2) How does students' self-perceived proficiency in French influence their tendency to apply French prosodic features in English pronunciation?
- 3) What is the relationship between learners' theoretical understanding of English stress rules and their practical ability to apply them in spoken English?
- 4) How do current phonetics instructional practices and exposure to native English input affect learners' accuracy in stress placement?

1.4 Hypotheses

Based on existing literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Algerian EFL learners frequently misplace lexical stress in English due to the unconscious transfer of French final-syllable stress patterns.

H2: Learners who rate themselves as strong in French pronunciation are more likely to transfer stress rules into their English speech.

H3: There is a significant gap between learners' theoretical understanding of English stress and their practical application in speech.

H4: Limited exposure to authentic English input and insufficient suprasegmental instruction in phonetics courses contribute to persistent stress placement errors.

1.5 Research Strategy

To explore these hypotheses and address the research questions, the study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 105 second-year EFL students at Badji Mokhtar University, Annaba. The questionnaire examined students' self-assessment of pronunciation, perceptions of French-English similarities, attitudes toward stress lessons, and frequency of stress-related errors. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify dominant patterns, student beliefs, and pedagogical implications.

By focusing on this specific cross-linguistic influence and the gap in pronunciation training, the study contributes to the growing body of research on suprasegmental acquisition and provides context-specific recommendations for curriculum reform in Algerian EFL settings.

2. Introduction to the Study of Suprasegmental Interference in Multilingual Contexts

2.1 Multilingualism in Algeria and the Socio-phonetic Complexity of EFL Acquisition

Algeria represents a distinctive sociolinguistic setting marked by a convergence of Arabic, Tamazight (Berber), French, and English. While Arabic holds official status and serves as the language of religious and national identity, French persists as a dominant linguistic force in administration, education, and daily communication. English, in contrast, is emerging as the global lingua franca and gaining institutional foothold, particularly in higher education (Belmihoub, 2018). In such a complex linguistic ecology, students learning English often rely on previously acquired phonological systems, particularly French, which plays a dominant auxiliary role in most Algerians' linguistic repertoire. This reliance, however, leads to transfer phenomena that can negatively affect pronunciation accuracy.

2.2 The Nature of Lexical Stress and Its Relevance in English Pronunciation

English is characterized by a stress-timed rhythm and variable lexical stress, meaning that stress placement changes depending on syllable structure, morphology, and word category. Incorrect stress placement can lead to reduced comprehensibility, communication breakdown, or native-speaker misinterpretation. In contrast, French is a syllable-timed language with relatively fixed stress, most often on the final syllable. The contradiction between these systems can pose a substantial challenge to Algerian EFL students, particularly when stress is misapplied in English words due to French influence (Roach, 2009).

2.3 Rationale and Significance of Investigating Cross-Linguistic Stress Transfer in EFL Settings

Given the centrality of pronunciation to oral proficiency and communicative competence, understanding the impact of L1 stress rules on L2 stress acquisition is crucial. This research focuses on identifying the specific ways in which French phonological rules interfere with English stress learning, quantifying their frequency, and proposing pedagogical remedies suitable to the Algerian EFL context.

3. Theoretical and Empirical Foundations: Language Transfer and Suprasegmental Acquisition

3.1 Conceptualizing Language Transfer in Second Language Acquisition Theory

Language transfer, alternatively known as linguistic interference or cross-linguistic influence, refers to the use of prior language knowledge in the acquisition of a new language. According to Odlin (1989), transfer can be positive (facilitating learning) or negative (leading to errors). Negative transfer is particularly frequent when there are significant structural mismatches between the first and second language systems.

3.2 Phonetic and Phonological Transfer: A Multilayered View of Pronunciation Interference

Transfer at the phonetic and phonological levels involves learners importing the articulatory habits of their L1 into L2 pronunciation. Such transfer includes:

- Phonemic substitution (e.g., replacing English /θ/ with French /s/)
- Stress misplacement (e.g., applying French final-syllable stress to English disyllabic words)
- Rhythmic and intonational shift, particularly where learners' first language lacks pitch modulation typical of English

These phenomena are not only observable in learner speech but also systematically predictable using contrastive analysis (Lado, 1957).

3.3 Cross-Linguistic Differences between French and English Suprasegmentals

French stress is predictable and predominantly final, often unaffected by word class or morphological change. English, however, displays variable stress placement across nouns, verbs, and adjectives (e.g., 'record vs. re'cord), requiring learners to memorize stress rules and lexical exceptions. This mismatch frequently leads to L1-induced errors in word-level prosody (Flege, 1999; Yurtbaşı, 2017).

4. Research Design and Methodological Framework for Investigating Pronunciation Transfer

4.1 Objectives of the Empirical Study: Identifying and Explaining Stress Placement Errors

This study aims to uncover the extent to which French influences English pronunciation among second-year university EFL students, specifically at the suprasegmental level of stress. The research also seeks to

identify the root causes of transfer and examine learners' perceptions of their pronunciation difficulties.

4.2 Population and Sampling Strategy: Description of the Participants

Participants consisted of 105 second-year EFL students enrolled at the Department of English, Badji Mokhtar University. They were selected using convenience sampling from four different cohorts to ensure heterogeneity in exposure, proficiency, and language background.

4.3 Research Tool: Construction and Implementation of the Student Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was developed, comprising three major sections:

Section A: Students' background, exposure to French and English, and linguistic preferences.

Section B: Perceptions of phonetics modules and stress instruction.

Section C: Self-reported instances of stress-related pronunciation difficulties.

The instrument was pilot-tested with a small sample for reliability before full deployment.

4.4 Analytical Strategy and Statistical Treatment of the Data

The collected data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics and content analysis for open-ended responses. Data visualization through tables was also employed to enhance interpretability.

5. Results and Interpretation

To gain an in-depth understanding of how French stress patterns influence the acquisition of English lexical stress among Algerian EFL students, a structured questionnaire was administered to 105 second-year students. The questionnaire was divided into four thematic sections. The results below focus primarily on phonetics module perception, stress learning, and stress differentiation, before drawing connections to French influence and transfer.

5.1 Student Perceptions of the Phonetics Module and Stress Learning Experience

The first three questions aimed to assess learners' general attitudes toward phonetics, their self-evaluation in pronunciation practice, and their experience with learning the stress lesson specifically.

Table 1: Students' Opinion about the Module of Phonetics

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Easy module	8	8%
Difficult to comprehend	30	28%
Hard but gets easier with practice	67	64%

As illustrated above, the majority of students (64%) reported that the phonetics module is difficult at first but becomes manageable with consistent practice. Only 8% found it easy. This highlights the demanding nature of phonetic studies and emphasizes the importance of pedagogical scaffolding.

Table 2: Students' Self-Evaluation during the Practice in the Phonetics Session

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	7	7%
Good	22	21%
Average	52	49%
Weak	24	23%

Nearly half of the students assessed themselves as “average,” indicating moderate self-confidence and room for improvement. This average self-perception aligns with the earlier observation that practice enhances comprehension. However, the 23% who rated themselves as weak require additional support.

Table 3: Students' Impression about the Lesson of Stress in the Phonetics Module

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Difficult	24	23%
Difficult at first but improves	73	69%
Easy	8	8%

The stress lesson, as per 69% of respondents, is initially challenging. English stress is variable and full of exceptions, which contrasts with the more predictable final stress of French. This contrast generates learner confusion but can be overcome with guided instruction and practice.

5.2 Learners' Struggles with Stress Rule Application and Complex Words

Table 4: Students' Attitude toward the Lesson of Stress Placement in Simple and Complex Words

Response	Frequency	Percentage
I did not understand the lesson	24	19%
I understood it but had trouble applying the rules	63	60%
I understood every part of the lesson	22	21%

While 60% of students grasped the theoretical component of stress placement, they struggled with its application. Complex words, especially those with affixes or foreign origins, tend to confuse learners more, as they deviate from predictable patterns. Only 21% fully mastered the lesson.

Table 5: Students' Differentiation Between Stressed and Unstressed Syllables via Listening

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	34	32%
Sometimes	60	58%
Rarely	11	10%

58% of respondents reported only occasionally being able to distinguish between stressed and unstressed syllables. This limitation severely impacts pronunciation accuracy. It suggests a lack of exposure to native input or an inability to internalize stress rules. The data supports the urgent need for auditory training and prosody-focused listening activities in class.

5.3 Learners' Perception of French and its Influence on English Pronunciation and Stress

Table 6: Students' Self-Evaluation in French Language

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	15	14%
Good	50	48%
Average	26	25%
Weak	14	13%

Nearly half of the students (48%) assessed themselves as good in French, and a significant portion also reported being excellent or average. This widespread fluency may predispose students to rely on French

phonological rules, such as final-syllable stress, during English pronunciation, contributing to transfer-related errors.

Table 7: Students' Use of French to Understand English

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	14	13%
Often	30	29%
Rarely	39	37%
Never	22	21%

A substantial number of students (42%) either always or often use French to support English comprehension. While bilingualism may aid in content understanding, it may also hinder phonological independence, especially when pronunciation models are transferred unconsciously.

Table 8: Use of French Pronunciation in Learning English Pronunciation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
I do use it with all the words	10	9%
I do use it in difficult words	67	64%
I do not use it	28	27%

A striking 64% of learners admit to using French pronunciation as a fallback strategy for difficult English words. This confirms the strategic reliance on L1 phonology, often resulting in systematic stress misplacement.

Table 9: Students' Opinions of the Ease of Pronunciation Between French and English

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	41	39%
No	64	61%

A majority of students perceive English pronunciation as more manageable than French, perhaps reflecting increased exposure to English in digital environments. However, those who find French easier may be more likely to fall into transfer traps, given their comfort with its stress patterns.

Table 10: Students’ Perceptions of Similarity or Difference in Pronunciation Between English and French

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, they are similar	9	8%
No, they are very different	27	26%
They are similar in some points but not in pronunciation	69	66%

Most students are aware of the structural differences in pronunciation, suggesting a latent awareness of suprasegmental mismatches. However, the fact that 8% view them as similar, and 66% note overlap, may explain the blurring of stress application rules.

5.4 Learner Strategies, Confusion, and Coping with Pronunciation Transfer

Table 11: Strategies to Acquire English Pronunciation Independently from French

Response	Frequency	Percentage
By understanding the difference between English and French pronunciation	20	19%
By understanding English pronunciation rules correctly	52	50%
I did not find an appropriate way yet	33	31%

While half of the learners strive to master English rules independently, a large portion (31%) have not yet found a strategy, indicating the need for guided pronunciation strategy instruction within EFL curricula.

Table 12: Students’ Views on French Language Dominance as an Obstacle in Learning English Pronunciation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	68	65%
No	37	35%

A clear majority agree that French dominance in Algerian society presents a significant barrier to learning accurate English pronunciation. This affirms the need to decouple French linguistic norms from English pedagogy in Algerian EFL contexts.

Table 13: Perceived Similarities and Differences in Stress Placement Between French and English

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Completely different	52	50%
Might share some points	43	41%
Indeed similar	10	9%

These results are promising, as 91% of learners acknowledge some degree of difference. However, the 41% who perceive shared aspects may inadvertently transfer stress rules across languages.

Table 14: Students' Reasons for Mixing French and English Stress Patterns

Response	Frequency	Percentage
I know the rules but forget to apply them	66	63%
I did not understand the stress lesson	24	23%
I think French and English are similar in pronunciation	15	14%

The dominant reason for stress errors lies in rule misapplication or memory lapse, rather than complete ignorance. This underscores the value of repeated practice and feedback in ensuring rule internalization.

Table 15: Students' Conclusions About the Nature of English Stress

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Stress is fixed	27	26%
No rule in stress placement	10	9%
Stress is not fixed	58	55%
Same as French	10	10%

While over half recognize English stress as variable and rule-based, a sizable minority (35%) maintain incorrect assumptions. These misconceptions necessitate explicit metalinguistic clarification within pronunciation training.

6. Discussion of Findings

The results derived from the questionnaire bring forth several interrelated themes that underscore how French pronunciation patterns interfere with English stress acquisition.

6.1 The Inherited Challenge of French Influence on English Prosodic Transfer

Algerian EFL learners grow up in a francophone socio-educational system. As such, French acts as a phonological filter through which learners decode English sounds. The fixed stress of French is subconsciously imposed onto English words. Learners often default to stressing final syllables in English, mirroring French, even when English rules call for initial or penultimate stress (e.g., RE-cord vs re-CORD).

This transfer is not purely linguistic, but also cognitive and environmental. Students equate spelling and pronunciation between English and French (due to similar orthography) and believe pronunciation patterns to be transferable (Flege, 1999; Yurtbaşı, 2017).

6.2 Internalization of Rules vs. Practical Implementation

Despite understanding stress theory, many students exhibit difficulty applying it during real-time speaking. This reflects the gap between declarative knowledge (knowing about stress) and procedural competence (applying it in context). As Table 4 shows, 60% of learners fall into this category, indicating the need for task-based oral activities and integrated pronunciation drills.

6.3 Listening Deficiency and Its Impact on Stress Perception

The ability to perceive stress is as critical as the ability to produce it. Table 5 reveals that only 32% can consistently identify stress placement in spoken English. This means that receptive phonological skills are underdeveloped, making it difficult for learners to mimic accurate stress patterns. A curriculum with intonation-based shadowing and repetition listening activities would remedy this issue.

6.4 Confusion Between French and English Lexical Rules: A Psycholinguistic Insight

The confusion regarding whether English stress is “fixed” or “rule-based” was also evident in the findings. Some students (26%) believe that English stress is fixed like French (Table 15), and 10% think the two systems are the same. This misperception suggests a deep-seated conceptual transfer that stems not just from linguistic habits but from psycholinguistic assumptions about language structure. Correcting such assumptions requires explicit contrastive phonology instruction and conceptual differentiation tasks.

6.5 Emotional and Motivational Factors

Students who self-rated as weak in phonetics (23%) also tended to report higher difficulty in stress placement. The affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) suggests that high anxiety or low confidence can impede L2 learning. Therefore, stress instruction must include confidence-building strategies, peer support, and low-pressure pronunciation tasks to increase learner engagement.

7. Pedagogical Recommendations for Mitigating the Effects of Suprasegmental Transfer

7.1 Integration of Contrastive Phonology into EFL Curriculum Design

Educators should integrate side-by-side comparisons of French and English phonological features, particularly stress, rhythm, and intonation. Instruction should focus on the unpredictable nature of English stress and offer practice in minimal stress pairs.

7.2 Emphasizing Suprasegmentals in Phonetics and Oral Expression Modules

Phonetics courses should be redesigned to allocate more hours to suprasegmental features. Teachers should use audio-visual resources, native speech samples, and authentic materials that highlight stress variations.

7.3 Feedback-Based Correction and Consciousness-Raising in Stress Placement

Learners should receive immediate, targeted feedback when making stress errors. Activities such as stress marking, syllable counting, and stress-based games can help build awareness.

7.4 Enhancing Learners' Exposure to Natural English Prosody through Immersive Input

Introducing learners to podcasts, movies, and spoken corpora featuring native English can recalibrate their internal models of English rhythm and stress. Repetition and shadowing techniques may reinforce accurate prosodic patterns.

8. Limitations of the Study and Opportunities for Future Research in Pronunciation Transfer

8.1 Constraints in Sampling, Instrumentation, and Generalizability

This study was limited to one university and one academic year, which may affect the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, pronunciation errors were self-reported rather than acoustically measured.

8.2 Directions for Future Research on Cross-Linguistic Influence in Suprasegmentals

Future research could employ acoustic analysis tools to objectively measure stress errors. Comparative studies across Arabic- and French-dominant learners in Algeria may also yield diverse insights into differential transfer effects.

9. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the extent to which French stress patterns, particularly the fixed final-syllable stress characteristic of French phonology, interfere with the acquisition of English lexical stress among Algerian EFL learners. The central purpose was to explore how suprasegmental transfer from French affects learners' spoken English, identify the most recurrent stress errors, understand learners' perceptions and strategies, and assess the effectiveness of phonetics instruction in addressing such issues.

The findings confirmed that cross-linguistic interference is a significant factor in shaping Algerian students' English pronunciation. Specifically, many learners unconsciously apply French prosodic rules when speaking English, resulting in systematic misplacement of stress, reduced intelligibility, and phonological fossilization. The quantitative data drawn from the student questionnaire further revealed that a large proportion of learners are aware of these difficulties, yet still struggle to apply English stress rules in practice. This gap between knowledge and performance is intensified by limited exposure to native English input and insufficient emphasis on suprasegmental features in phonetics instruction.

By highlighting these patterns, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of pronunciation challenges within the Algerian EFL context and draws attention to an often-overlooked area of language instruction: the teaching of rhythm, stress, and intonation. It highlights the necessity of pedagogical innovation, specifically, the integration of contrastive phonology, regular auditory exposure to native English models, and metacognitive training that fosters self-awareness and corrective habits among learners.

Ultimately, for Algerian EFL learners to achieve clearer, more native-like pronunciation, instruction must move beyond segmental accuracy and address the deeper prosodic level of speech. English stress, being variable and lexical, cannot be acquired through imitation alone; it must be systematically taught, reinforced, and practiced. This study thus serves as a call for curriculum designers, phonetics instructors, and EFL practitioners to reassess current approaches and adopt methods that recognize and strategically respond to the linguistic realities of Algerian learners.

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