

First-Year University EFL Learners' Interpretability Of Unfamiliar And Difficult Words As Affected By The Cross-Phonological Influence Of French On English. (Case Of Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret)

قابلية تفسير متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في السنة الأولى الجامعية للكلمات غير المألوفة والصعبة، عند التأثر بالتأثير الفونولوجي المتبادل للغة الفرنسية على الإنجليزية. (حالة جامعة ابن خلدون، تيارت)

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ملخص:

إن التأثير التبادلي اللغوي للغة ما على لغة أخرى هو موضوع بحث يقع على نحو واسع النطاق، بما في ذلك التأثير الصوتي؛ ولكن عندما يتعلق الأمر بتأثير اللغة الفرنسية على نطق اللغة الإنجليزية في الجزائر، فإنه لم يتم استكشافه على نطاق واسع. يركز هذا العمل على مستوى قابلية متعلمي الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) للتفسير حسبما يتأثر بالتأثير الصوتي المتبادل، مستهدفاً الكلمات غير المألوفة والصعبة على وجه التحديد. وهو يتساءل عما إذا كان تأثير L2 (اللغة الفرنسية) على L3 (اللغة الإنجليزية) في السياق التعليمي الجزائري يؤثر على كيفية نطق الطلاب للكلمات غير المألوفة والصعبة، ويقاس قابلية التأويل. تستخدم الدراسة منهجاً وصفيًا تحليليًا حيث يكون المتعلمون الجامعيون في السنة الأولى للغة الإنجليزية هم محور البحث، وينتمون إلى جامعة ابن خلدون بتيارت في كلية الآداب واللغات، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. ويقوم البحث بجمع البيانات من خلال تسجيلات للطلبة وهم يقرؤون مفردات معجمة غير معتادة عليهم، وتحليل مستوى الاعتماد على تأثير اللغة الثانية في نطق هذه المفردات من اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (L3)، ثم الاستعانة بمدرس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية كشخص يتحدثها بطلاقة لتقييم مدى قابلية تفسير بعض المتعلمين لهذه الكلمات الجديدة عليهم. تشير النتائج إلى الاعتماد الكبير على العناصر الصوتية للغة L2 في نطق العناصر غير المألوفة في L3 مما قد يؤدي إلى مشاكل في التفسير على مستوى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في السنة الأولى الجامعية، مما يشير إلى احتمال أن التأثير الصوتي المتبادل للفرنسية كلغة L2 على اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة L3 يؤثر على متعلمي السنة الأولى الجامعية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ المتعلمون؛ قابلية التفسير؛ التأثير المتبادل الفونولوجي؛ غير المألوف.

Abstract:

Cross-linguistic influence of a code on another is widely researched in many ways, including one of the phonological variety; yet when it comes to the French code's influence on English pronunciation in Algeria, it is not that widely explored. This work focuses on the EFL learners' level of interpretability as affected by cross-phonological influence, targeting unfamiliar and difficult words specifically. It questions whether L2's (French) influence on L3 (English) in the Algerian instructional context affects how students pronounce unfamiliar and difficult words, and it gauges interpretability. The study uses a descriptive analytical approach where first-year English university learners are the focus belonging to Ibn Khaldoun University in Tiarat in the faculty of letters and languages, department of English. The research collects data through recordings of students reading lexical items that are unaccustomed to them, and analyzes the level of reliance on L2's influence to pronounce these L3 items; and then a fluently speaking EFL teacher is used as a guide to assess the interpretability of some learners' pronunciations of such words that are new to them. The results indicate a heavy reliance on phonological elements of L2 in pronouncing unfamiliar items in L3 which may result in interpretability issues at the level of first-year university EFL learners, indicating the possibility that the cross-phonological influence of French as L2 on English as L3 affects first-year university EFL learners' pronunciation of unfamiliar words significantly enough to affect the interpretability of these students.

Keywords:

EFL; Learners; Interpretability; Cross-Phonological Influence; Unfamiliar.

1. INTRODUCTION:**1.1 – Definitions of Main Terms, Scope, and Problem Statement**

It could be inferred from Adnyani & Pastika (2016) that cross-phonological influence is a phenomenon where a linguistic system impacts another in terms of transfer or interference at the phonological level. Moreover, Kim (2008) states that "interpretability" refers to the recognition of the intent or purpose of a word or utterance (i.e., Austin's [1962] illocutionary force).' (p. 8). In the educational realm and as pertains to the current study, uncharted or unfamiliar words as inferred from Laufer & Yano (2001) are lexical items which EFL learners do not recognize or comprehend their meaning. EFL teaching and learning faces a multitude of challenges; one of the most apparent ones for Arab learners is pronunciation (Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021). English mispronunciation in the Algerian EFL context may be largely due to 'lack of exposure to the target language (Ghouat, 2021). Moreover, the role of interpretability is quite essential in the educational context (Webb et al., 2020). Preliminary classroom observations at Ibn Khaldoun University reveal to us that first-year EFL students seemingly rely of French's phonological patterns when pronouncing words that seem unfamiliar to them, making their interpretability be impacted. However, these are results from simple classroom observations as a preliminary pilot study. In that vein, we present the following problem statement: In

the Algerian EFL university context, specifically in Ibn Khaldoun University – Tiaret, first-year students seem to mispronounce unfamiliar English words possibly due to the influence of French (L2). Yet, little research examines how this cross-phonological influence affects the interpretability of these words which is vital for communication. Classroom observations we conducted preliminarily suggest the prevalence of this issue, which indicates a need to investigate its extent and implications.

1.2 - Motivation and Aim of Study / Research

In our estimation, the EFL educational context could always use technical improvement at the level of teaching pronunciation, and there will not be advancement without the awareness of certain problems. One of the issues that EFL students face and should recognize is pronunciation in general (Plailek & Essien, 2021). In the Algerian EFL context, there is indeed evidence that middle school learners rely heavily on the activation of phonological elements of French as L2 in the active articulation of alien and challenging words in English as L3 (Dellaa, 2021). The latter is a similar practical study that amplifies the significance of this gap. Thus, if the cross-linguistic influence of French (L2) on English (L3) affects EFL first-year university learners at the level of pronunciation of unfamiliar and arduous words and their interpretability, it is a good initial point to shine a light on the existence of this gap since pronunciation is essential in the distinguishing of meaning and production of utterances that are comprehensible (Adams-Goertel, 2013, as cited in Plailek & Essien, 2021). We estimate that it matters practically in terms of informing future targeted pedagogical strategies or models to help with improving pronunciation and comprehension in the EFL classroom.

In order to explore this situation, this study proposes the question:

- Is it possible that first-year university EFL learners' pronunciation and interpretability of unfamiliar words are affected by the cross-phonological influence of L2 on L3?

1.3 - Literature Review

For a proper communicative situation, good pronunciation is a key element, for poor pronunciation makes it quite challenging for a speaker to be understood (Fraser, 2000). Learners' competence requires understandable pronunciation as a fundamental, and language teaching considers it incredibly essential (Gilakjani, 2015). Interpretability is closely related to intelligibility and comprehensibility all being an axiom to the level and degree of understanding and ability to be understood by interlocutors (Holland, 2016). Interpretability per se is the 'meaning behind word/utterance (illocutionary force)' (Smith & Nelson, 1985, p. 334 as cited in Holland, 2016) as opposed to both intelligibility and comprehensibility's functional roles in terms of recognition and meaning.

In order to properly contextualize the study, a brief overview of the linguistic situation in Algeria is due. Generally, Algeria has a linguistically complex situation due to historically and colonially motivational thrusts which guide its variety (Berrabah & Benabed, 2021). For the purposes of this study, the most commonly spoken dialect in Algeria is referred to as ADA, being Algerian Dialectal Arabic. The foreign languages that exist in Algeria, including in the educational system, are mainly French, English, Spanish, and German (Berrabah & Benabed, 2021). In the North African context, usually Vernacular Arabic is generally the mother tongue, though some varieties of natives such as Berber and Tamazight are also in that category as mentioned in Bouchhioua (2016) in the Tunisian context. In Algeria, MSA or Arabic is L1 as it is the first language learned in schools, French is L2 while English is L3. (Chanderli & Zaimesh, n.d; Sadouki, 2020).

Due to the aforementioned linguistic situation, cross-linguistic influence at many levels, especially the phonological one, effectively permeates these codes and varieties. Tunisia and Algeria have similar linguistic environments and histories. Bouchhioua (2016) concludes that French as (L2) cross-linguistically impacts English as (L3) at the phonological level in the Tunisian EFL context. Furthermore, there is significant evidence of the effect of French (L2) on English (L3) in the Algerian EFL context (Ghلامallah, 2018; Berrabah & Benabed, 2021).

The mental lexicon with a basis of familiarity is influential in aiding in the pronunciation of unfamiliar words' (Dellaa, 2021). Meaning, to pronounce words which are strange, students may resort to a facilitating vehicle with a ground in familiarity to successfully transmit the oral realization. In fact, internalized lexical items and grapheme-to-phoneme rules may both or separately take part in elemental causation of errors in the phonological encoding of written words (Fitt, 1998). The idea being that perceived written words initiate phonological activation at the level of both familiar and unfamiliar words, all of which is a basis for the claim that phoneme rules of L2 affect the articulation of L3 at the phonological level and in terms of relying on the familiar.

EXPERIMENTAL (METHODOLOGY):

1.1 – Population and Sampling

This work targets first year university EFL learners in the Algerian context. For reasons of convenience, University of Ibn Khaldoun, Tiaret is the chosen entity that hosts the study's target. Three classes of the first-year (A, B, and C) with 10 students from each class are selected using the proportional stratified random sampling technique to guarantee a sort of representativeness at that level.

	Female	Male	Total
Class A	8	2	10
Class B	7	3	10
Class C	7	3	10

Table 1. Samples for the Study

The table below indicates the students chosen for the study with the first letter representing the classroom, and the last representing gender with either F or M. They are represented as (Class) number (Gender) in the table. For instance, B2M (Class B) Respondent number 2 (Male).

Class A	A1F	A2F	A3F	A4F	A5F	A6F	A7F	A8F	A9M	A10M
Class B	B1F	B2M	B3F	B4F	B5F	B6F	B7F	B8M	B9M	B10F
Class C	C1F	C2F	C3M	C4F	C5F	C6F	C7F	C8F	C9M	C10M

Table 2. The Selected Respondents

To test interpretability, a fluent EFL teacher is selected in the second phase of this study. It is essential to note that all parties involved consent to the participation in this study with knowledge of being recorded while maintaining their anonymity.

2.2 - Tools

The tools employed are catered the objective of the research. The study utilizes a set of written lexical items in English, and a recording device attached to a program 'WavePad Sound Editor' which aids in organizing audio files in order to facilitate the analytical process. The words selected are deemed as unfamiliar due to the classroom observations conducted as a preliminary pilot study, in which a different class, yet with identical conditions to the ones from the current study, of 40 first year university EFL students in the same department were the subject. The observations were conducted once a day for a week, lasting one and a half hours each session, with focus on recognition and responses to target words uttered by the teacher based on criteria of familiarity and understanding. The students identified the following words through oral responses and show of hands during the last session as unfamiliar:

a- Onomatopoeia **b-** Soliloquy **c-** Constituents **d-** Extrapolation **e-** Serendipity **f-** Anathema **g-** Segue **h-** Sesquipedalian **i-** Worcestershire **j-** Nonplussed. In order to guarantee more accurate results, each of the students is asked whether they recognize any of the words, this way the selection of these words is definitively justified. Only the words that they are unfamiliar with are taken into account. The final tool to identify the interpretability is based around relaying an audio sample of the cross-

phonologically influenced items on the ears of a competent and fluent EFL teacher who is knowledgeable about the meaning of the given words

2.3 - Data Collection and Analysis

The gathering of data in this study is done through audio-recordings where each of the students is asked to read an assortment of lexical items that are unfamiliar and demanding to them, namely 10 words. Each of them is asked whether any of the words is familiar to them and whether they find them difficult to pronounce. After the recording portion is done, the audio is parsed-through manually by the researcher to identify whether the students activate the phonological encodings of the French language in pronouncing any of the words; meaning, whether they rely on French when pronouncing these words in English. If any of them does so in more than half of the 10 given items, this study's conclusion is that the student heavily relies on French when pronouncing these uncharted words. Furthermore, the percentage of students affected by a heavy reliance on L2 when pronouncing unrecognized words in L3 will dictate the final conclusion of this work. At the individual level, the words recognized by each student are not taken into account in the analytical phase. Meaning, if for instance a respondent recognizes the last word, the focus is on the analysis of the previous nine items and whether there is reliance on L2 in pronouncing them. If the number of recognized words happens to be odd, relative rounding of sorts is to be used in making a final judgment. To further illustrate, if a student recognizes three of the items, seven are taken into account; and if they indicate reliance at the level of four words, it is considered as an indication of the student's reliance on French in pronouncing unfamiliar words in English. The next stage is compiling a sample of the cross-linguistically influenced items in a singular file in order for it to be relayed upon a competent EFL teacher. The teacher is asked to repeat the words and then asked to identify their intended meaning. The data is analyzed in terms of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability; the percentage of correctly interpretable items is what is determinant of the level of interpretability as affected by the phonological influence of French on English.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Cross-Linguistic Influence on Unfamiliar Words

3.1.1. Results of the Familiarity of the Words

The following table indicates the number of recognized words out of the ten read by each of the students. Although some of the identified items are 'a,' 'b,' and 'e,' being 'Onomatopoeia,' Soliloquy,' and 'Serendipity,' all of the other items are not familiar to any of the students.

Class A		Class B		Class C	
Respondent	Recognized Words	Respondent	Recognized Words	Respondent	Recognized Words
A1F	Did not recognize any word	B1F	Recognized the 2 words a and e	C1F	Recognized the word a
A2F	Recognized the 2 words a and b	B2M	Recognized the 2 words a and b	C2F	Recognized the word e
A3F	Did not recognize any word	B3F	Did not recognize any word	C3M	Recognized the word a
A4F	Recognized the word a	B4F	Did not recognize any word	C4F	Did not recognize any word
A5F	Recognized the word a	B5F	Did not recognize any word	C5F	Recognized the 2 words a and e
A6F	Did not recognize any word	B6F	Recognized the word a	C6F	Recognized the 2 words a and e
A7F	Recognized the 3 words a , b , and e	B7F	Did not recognize any word	C7F	Did not recognize any word
A8F	Recognized the word a	B8M	Recognized the 2 words a and b	C8F	Recognized the word a
A9M	Recognized the word a	B9M	Did not recognize any word	C9M	Did not recognize any word
A10M	Recognized the word a	B10F	Recognized the word a	C10M	Recognized the word a

Table 3. The Recognized Words by the Respondents

Analytically speaking, thirty students reading 10 words each make the total pronunciations throughout the whole process 300 pronunciations, and out of these merely 27 realizations of the words by students are recognizable to them. The table's results indicate that the words chosen by this study to gauge the reliance on another phonological system to pronounce unfamiliar words are valid and are appropriate for the purposes of this work since they do not recognize or comprehend them (Laufer & Yano, 2001).

3.1.2. Results of Cross-phonological Influence in Pronouncing Unfamiliar Words

The following represent results found in relation to the cross-phonologically influenced items. All are classified in accordance with how each student displays the influence in activating phonological elements of French. The column for Phonological Influence could be exemplified in **A1F** indicating the result $6 \geq 5$ which means 6 representing **Phonologically Affected Words** \geq 5 representing **(Total of Unfamiliar Words to Each Student)/2**

Class A Students	Phonological Influence	Class B Students	Phonological Influence	Class C Students	Phonological Influence
A1F	$6 \geq 5$	B1F	$5 \geq 4$	C1F	$6 \geq 4,5$
A2F	$4 \geq 4$	B2M	$2 < 4$	C2F	$7 \geq 4,5$
A3F	$5 \geq 5$	B3F	$7 \geq 5$	C3M	$8 \geq 4,5$
A4F	$6 \geq 4,5$	B4F	$3 < 5$	C4F	$6 \geq 5$
A5F	$5 \geq 4,5$	B5F	$8 \geq 5$	C5F	$6 \geq 4$
A6F	$4 < 5$	B6F	$6 \geq 4,5$	C6F	$6 \geq 4$
A7F	$2 < 3,5$	B7F	$7 \geq 5$	C7F	$9 \geq 5$
A8F	$5 \geq 4,5$	B8M	$4 \geq 4$	C8F	$6 \geq 4,5$
A9M	$7 \geq 4,5$	B9M	$5 \geq 5$	C9M	$5 \geq 5$
A10M	$5 \geq 4,5$	B10F	$4 < 4,5$	C10M	$6 \geq 4,5$

Table 4. Words Influenced by L2 for Each of the Respondents

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The table manifests the 30 respondents and their results in terms of total of unfamiliar words to each one of them the total of phonologically affected words is the number of items manifesting phonological elements of French by each respondent without accounting for words that are familiar to them, and the final column accounts for influenced words as compared to half of the total unfamiliar words. This could be analyzed through looking at the abundant existence of phonological influence exhibited by every single student, which is a finding that aligns with previous research in a way that could be seen as a clue for phonological cross-linguistic influence of French on English as studied in Bouchhioua (2016) through the scope of being a prevalent phenomenon in the case of the chosen sample in the current study, possibly due to the similar linguistic contexts. Furthermore, very rarely are there less than two phonologically affected words out of the ones uttered by each student; which can also be an indication of the substantial nature of such influence with regard to unrecognizable words to students, at least when it comes to the sample of this study. As far as the determination of whether there is reliance on French when pronouncing unaccustomed words in the case of each student, it is done through indicating whether they rely on it in pronouncing half or more of the words. In the table, the students A1F A2F A3F A4F A5F A8F A9M A10M B1F B3F B5F B7F B8M B9M C1F C2F C3M C4F C10M C6F C7F C8F C9M C5F all exhibit phonological influence in pronouncing in half or more of the words unfamiliar to them. However, the students A6F A7F B2M B4F B6F B10F indicate a manifestation of French’s influence in pronouncing words difficult to them in less than half of those lexical items. One can notice the obvious difference in amount of students, which is an indication that the majority of respondents in the sample may have a propensity to rely heavily on the phonological system of French in pronouncing difficult and unrecognized words to them confirming and aligning with a previous study’s similar results regarding Algerian middle-school EFL learners (Dellaa, 2021), perhaps due to the similar linguistic history of studying French before English.

The following table is a depiction of students’ reliance on L2 in pronouncing uncharted words in L3. The students with more than half of the hard and unknown words are considered to be reliant on L2:

Classroom	Reliant Students	Non-Reliant Students
A	8	2
B	7	3
C	10	0

Table 5. Respondents Reliant vs. Non-reliant on French in Half or More Words

The table manifests the amounts of students reliant on L2 in pronouncing unfamiliar words in L3 in each class. In classroom A, eight students exhibit a reliance on L2 in that they pronounce half or more of the words which are unfamiliar to them with the activation of the phonological system of French, while only two do so in less than half. Classroom B manifests seven students who fall back on French in half or more of the unfamiliar lexical items and only two who do so in less than half. Finally, classroom C shows the same results in terms of reliance but in all of the 10 students relying on French in half or more of the unfamiliar words. To analyze these results, one must compare the three classes in order to come to a conclusion on whether these three results can be combined. From the results, the values of the students from the classes A, B, and C who are reliant heavily on L2 in pronouncing the unfamiliar words to them, are eight, seven, and 10. These values are extremely similar in terms of being close to one another and representative of the large majority. From that, it is safe to conclude that it is appropriate for the results of the three classrooms to be combined in order to gauge the ultimate percentage of student reliance on L2. The classes chosen as a sample are already very similar in condition.

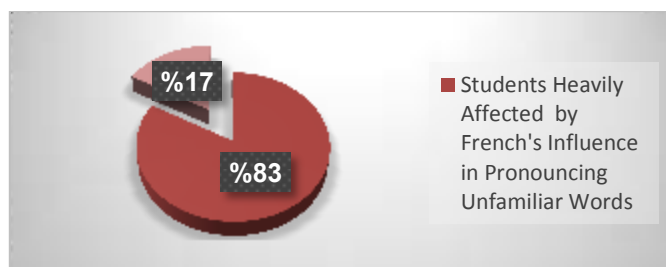


Fig.1. The Total of Affected Students (Overall L2 Influence in Pronouncing Unfamiliar Words)

The figure above represents the total number of students affected by heavy reliance on French in pronouncing half or more. The red represents the influence of French while pronouncing unrecognized words and the color is more pronounced for the majority. One can notice the overwhelming majority being 83% of all respondents who manifest markers of French's phonological elements in the pronunciation of half or more of the given unknown words. This influence from French to English occurs to Algerian students due to Latin spelling (Ghلامallah, 2018), and that is shown in the results above which contribute to the ongoing dialogue and that study by demonstrating that most of these students have a tendency to activate the phonological encodings of the L2 system when faced with a lexical item that does not present itself as a part of these students' vocabulary.

3.1.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the results above exhibit an overwhelming confirmation of word unfamiliarity when it comes to the lexical items chosen for the study. Furthermore, the results collected with the use of these words indicate a heavy reliance on French as L2 when pronouncing words in English as L3 at the level of first year university EFL learners. Meaning, the cross-linguistic influence of French on English in the EFL university context may significantly affect the learners' ability to pronounce words that are unfamiliar to them. That is done through activating the phonological system of L2 in pronouncing these aesthetically alien items in L3.

3.2. Measuring the Interpretability of Affected Unfamiliar Words

The following are the results from the identification of the meaning behind the utterance of the selected items, and that is done by a competent EFL teacher who already knows the meaning of all the items. Meaning that an audio portion of ten utterances by ten of the students who rely on French is heard by the teacher and they give responses on what they perceive as the intended meaning of those words.

Lexical Items	Responses from the EFL Teacher in Identifying the Intended Meaning
a- Onomatopoeia Uttered by A3F	Onomatopoeia, representation of sound in word form
b- Soliloquy Uttered by B6F	Solely low-key, as in only subtle and downplayed
c- Constituents Uttered by C3M	Cons to tents, maybe a scenario where cons escape a prison and must hide in tents
d- Extrapolation Uttered by C7F	Extrapolation, estimating something unknown
e- Serendipity Uttered by A9M	Certain deep pity, a phrase expressing deep disappointment
f- Anathema Uttered by A8F	Honor theme or, perhaps of a story with a theme of honor
g- Segue Uttered by B4F	Unintelligible and incomprehensible
h- Sesquipedalian Uttered by B8M	Sesquipedalian, as in long words
i- Worcestershire Uttered by C3M	Wars' sister Sheer, a metaphor on something resembling war
j- Nonplussed Uttered by B6F	Non / Rest is unintelligible and incomprehensible

Table 6. Responses on the Potential Meaning of Utterances

The EFL instructor is already familiar with the intended meaning of the items due to their competence, and that is later confirmed through showing them the words in written form and asking for responses on their intended meaning; the teacher is able to identify all of their correctly intended meaning and thus assess interpretability as instructed in Kim (2008). It is worthy to stress that all 10 lexical items are altered phonologically since French as L2 affects realizations by each of the students A3F B6F C3M C7F A9M A8F B4F B8M C3M B6F. One could notice that merely three words affected by the phonological influence are correctly identified in their intended meaning; these are Onomatopoeia, Extrapolation, and Sesquipedalian. One could speculate that the alteration on the phonological level is not severe enough to warp their structure to be less similar to their appropriate one. From the table, the results indicate that the instructor does not identify the intended meaning of the rest of the words. Two of which are found to be unintelligible and incomprehensible by the teacher, and thus, impossible to find the intended meaning of these utterances. The latter are the words Segue and Nonplussed which cannot be placed in any way by the instructor, which may be an indication that the cross-phonological influence of French changed the structure of the two words, similarly to Berrabah & Benabed (2021), where the results align their results of alteration of an item in an extremely drastic way that ultimately affects interpretability in this case. Finally, five of the words (Soliloquy Constituents Serendipity Anathema Worcestershire) are identified incorrectly in terms of intended meaning. From observing how these words are identified by the teacher, it is safe to deduce that the influence of French alters the structure of the utterances in a manner that segments each of them into respective entities that have a different meaning in the English language. For example, Soliloquy is affected by the cross-phonological influence is interpreted by the teacher as 'solely low-key' as in 'merely subtle and understated.' Therefore, the effect on intelligibility of this word reflects on its comprehensibility, and ultimately its interpretability. This occurs at the level of the rest of the four lexical items with 'Constituents' as 'Cons to tents, a scenario where cons escape a prison and must hide in tents,' 'Serendipity' 'Certain deep pity, a phrase expressing deep disappointment,' 'Anathema' 'Honor theme or, perhaps of a story with a theme of honor,' and 'Worcestershire' as 'Wars' sister Sheer, a metaphor on something resembling war.' In conclusion, the cross-phonological influence of French on the pronunciation of the first-year university English students has a significant impact on the interpretability of most of those words.

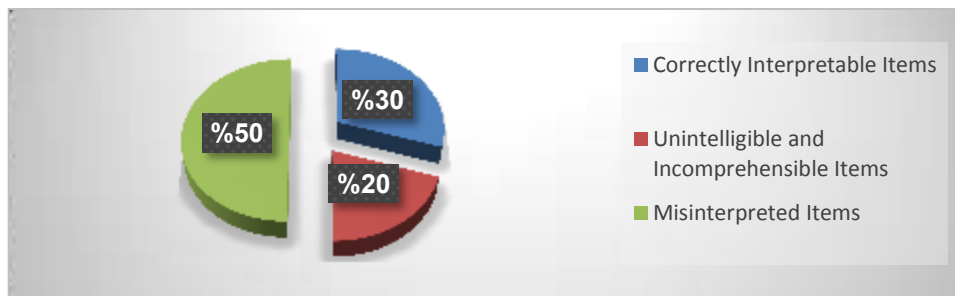


Fig.2. The Level of Interpretability (Interpretability of the Items by the Instructor)

The figure indicates the items' interpretability as pronounced by the selected student where the words are affected by French's phonological influence. The red color and its harshness represent the disturbed interpretability, whether it is completely lacking due to unintelligibility or changed due to altered meaning. The green represents the correct identification and interpretability of the lexical items. One can observe that 70 percent of the students' pronunciation of the items does not convey the original intended meaning of such words. While only 30 percent are correctly identified by the teacher for their intended meaning. This is mostly due to the mispronunciation affecting the intelligibility and comprehensibility; however, three of the items achieve correct interpretability despite being phonologically affected. Thus, it is reasonable to deduce that the majority of the phonologically influenced words uttered by first-year student selected for this study are affected in terms of their interpretability. This leads to the analysis that phonological influence of French on the utterance of unfamiliar words affects the interpretability of the students in one of three ways: the interpretability is diminished through the alteration of meaning by the structural change of the word at the phonological level, the complete nullification of interpretability through rendering the utterance unintelligible and incomprehensible, or a non-drastic change that keeps the interpretability intact due to one reason or another. In the case of this sample, the three words exist in both French and English, and that aids in the fact that their pronunciation with French realization does indeed keep the intelligibility, and ultimately interpretability, of these words intact. In conclusion, the selected items affected by cross-phonological influence may indeed be responsible for impacting interpretability. The results indicate the latter by manifesting how a change in the phonological structure of lexical item may damage its intelligibility and comprehensibility, and therefore interpretability. However, there is a possibility that the meaning and original intention could be retained despite such change in linguistic

structure as long as it is not too drastic or when the original correct pronunciation is not too far off from the affected pronunciation. It is also worthy to note that the three correctly identified items being ‘onomatopoeia,’ ‘extrapolation,’ and ‘sesquipedalian’ exist in both French and English, thus one could argue that the cross-phonological effect of one language on another is not significant enough to cause a malfunction in intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability when the affected word is a borrowed word that exists in both languages.

3. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at testing whether students are likely to rely on the French language as L2 in pronouncing unfamiliar words in English as L3. Its focus is on first-year university English learners, and 30 students from Ibn Khaldoun University were chosen as a sample. 10 students from three classrooms were designated with markers in order to keep tabs on them. Moreover, 10 very difficult and long words were selected in order to gauge the students’ familiarity with them. This was done to proceed safely in knowing whether the respondents are familiar with the words or not, and if they are affected by the phonological influence of French. The data was gathered through audio-recordings of the students and the manual analysis of these audio pieces to register when there is a phonological reliance on French in pronouncing the words. After that was determined, the number of the cross-phonologically affected words out of the unrecognizable words at the level of each student was compared to half of the total number of lexical items they found unknown. If in half or more of the new words they used the phonological system of French, then they are in our estimation considered to be relying heavily on L2 in pronouncing unknown words. The results from that indicated that the overwhelming majority of students display heavy reliance on the French system when pronouncing words that are unfamiliar by a percentage of 83%, which could be explained in the fact that they do not recognize the lexical item and may activate the phonological representations of a system that they are familiar with in order to deal with the difficulty and unfamiliarity of that word that they encounter. In order to gauge the possible effects that the cross-phonological influence of French could have on the interpretability of unfamiliar items, a fluent speaking and competent EFL teacher was selected to help in making that determination. Another element which aided in that process is the selection of an audio sample, and it is of 10 different students who pronounce the 10 different words used throughout the study. The words as pronounced by each respondent were in one way or another affected by the cross-

phonological influence of French, the audio was relayed upon the teacher's ears where they were asked to determine the intended meaning of each phonologically affected utterance. The results indicated that the majority (70%) of the lexical items affected by phonological influence were either affected at the level of interpretability by being misinterpreted or by downright being unintelligible and incomprehensible. Only 30% of the items were correctly interpretable. The drawn conclusion was that the effect that the cross-phonological influence has on the structure of the word modifies it in a manner which may alter its meaning or renders it unintelligible. It was speculated that the reason the three lexical items that were identified correctly in terms of intended meaning despite being affected by cross-linguistic influence was possibly due to the fact that they existed in both codes. Therefore, they possibly were easy to identify in their new realizations since both versions are similar. In terms of pedagogical implications, findings from studies such as this can provide benefits for instructors and administrators in the enhancement and development of instructional training for EFL students regarding pronunciation (Plailek & Essien, 2021). Furthermore, this research can be helpful in providing insight for developing models or strategies to combat such influence in EFL classrooms, especially in Algeria where there is a tendency for students to activate their L2 knowledge to tackle English as L3 (Sadouki, 2020), which perfectly aligns with the results of the current study in the manner of manifested influence of L2 in tackling L3, and that is possibly due to the aforementioned contextual reason where most learners acquire French before English. As a limitation acknowledgment, the use of one EFL teacher to gauge interpretability and ten pronunciations is too small of a sample size to draw general and all-encompassing conclusions about the population. Also, another limitation could be the possibility of human error. However, we reiterate that the gathering and analysis of the data was done to the best of our abilities in a precise and careful manner. Thus, we conclude that the cross-phonological influence of L2 on L3 may affect first-year university EFL learners' pronunciation of unfamiliar words significantly, and that the interpretability of unfamiliar words as affected by the cross-phonological influence of L2 on L3 is potentially disturbed in a fundamental way. In that vein, the main question proposed by this work could be answered as the following: It is indeed possible that first-year university EFL learners' pronunciation and interpretability of unfamiliar words are affected by the cross-phonological influence of L2 on L3.

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