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What Writing Practices When English Influences French in Algerian Primary Education?

Abstract

The school is, by definition, the institution where foreign language teaching develops and modernizes to adapt, as it should, to social changes in the era of globalization. However, it should be noted that the coexistence of two and/or multiple languages leads the learner, particularly in Algeria, to make errors stemming from cross-linguistic interference between French and English in primary education. After analyzing lexical errors made in 24 written production samples from 4th-year primary students, it appears that this cross-linguistic influence is due to the similarities existing between French and English, both of which are foreign languages taught simultaneously since the 3rd year of primary school. This growing cross-linguistic phenomenon has led us to suggest solutions that could reduce its impact and motivate the learner to write.

Keywords: cross-linguistic transfer, English, French, learners, primary cycle

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Əlcəzair ibtidai təhsilində ingilis dili fransız dilinə təsir etdikdə hansı yazı təcrübələri var?

Xülasə

Məktəb, tərifinə görə, xarici dil tədrisinin qloballaşma dövründə sosial dəyişikliklərə uyğun-laşmaq üçün inkişaf etdiyi və modernləşdiyi bir müəssisədir. Bununla belə, qeyd etmək lazımdır ki, iki və/və ya birdən çox dilin birgə mövcudluğu, xüsusən də Əlcəzairdə, şagirdi ibtidai təhsildə fransız və ingilis dilləri arasında dillərarası müdaxilədən qaynaqlanan səhvlərə aparır. 4-cü kurs ibtidai sinif şagirdlərindən götürülmüş 24 yazılı istehsal nümunəsində edilən leksik səhvləri təhlil etdikdən sonra, bu dillərarası təsirin ibtidai məktəbin 3-cü ilindən bəri eyni vaxtda tədris olunan xarici dillər olan fransız və ingilis dilləri arasında mövcud olan oxşarlıqlardan qaynaqlandığı görünür. Bu artan dillərarası fenomen, onun təsirini azalda biləcək və öyrənəni yazmağa motivasiya edə biləcək həllər təklif etməyimizə səbəb oldu.

Açar sözlər: dillərarası köçürmə, ingilis dili, fransız dili, öyrənənlər, ibtidai dövr

Introduction

Algeria is characterized by the coexistence of several languages: Standard and Classical Arabic and Tamazight as national and official languages; Algerian dialectal Arabic (Darija) and Tamazight with their local and regional varieties (Taleb-Ibrahimi, 2006, pp. 207–218); and French, English, Spanish, Italian, and German designated as foreign languages in Algeria. That said, our study falls within the scope of multilingualism, contrastive analysis, and the didactics of writing, in which interlinguistic influence directly stems from the coexistence of two or more languages in the learner's

interlanguage, as well as from their simultaneous use. In this context, we are interested in interlinguistic transfers between French and English, two foreign languages with so many similarities that favor such transfers. Thus, our contribution attempts to explore this interlinguistic influence among 4th-year primary learners who transfer English words into French in their written productions.

Research

Based on this observation, the question arises as to why these learners anglicize their French in their written productions. We assume that the integration of English from the 3rd year of primary school, simultaneously with French, is the origin of these growing transfers, also due to the similarities that exist between these two foreign languages. The objective is to verify these hypotheses by demonstrating the impact of English on French at the level of lexical transfers.

1. Theoretical reflections on the act of writing

Writing accompanies the learner from an early age, from writing simple words and short texts to producing long and complex texts. Writing allows the learner not only to write what they think but also to think and construct, on a socio-affective level, a representation of themselves as a writing subject. Focusing on the social dimension of teaching and learning writing, Michel Dabène teaches us that writing is a complex act that can only be achieved through scriptural competence, which he defines as: "The mastery of a set of knowledge, skills, and representations, both learned at school in a formal environment; acquired in an unguided manner in a natural environment; and inherited at the level of individual and collective representations. Mastery of this heterogeneous set makes possible, among other things, the exercise of production and reception activity." (Dabène, 1987, p. 14)

Studies on the acquisition of writing skills in a foreign language have experienced considerable growth in the field of learning theories. Researchers in cognitive psychology, following the intellectual line of Tolman and Piaget, have conceptualized written production as a complex mental activity involving multiple cognitive processes and requiring significant intellectual investment from the learner. Thus, various writing processes have emerged, attempting to understand how writing functions through the observation of the linguistic behaviors of writers.

Moreover, knowing that a multilingual learner differs from a monolingual learner (Grosjean, 1989, p. 74), it also appears necessary that the interventions implemented for learners to solve problem situations in a multilingual context should take into account other factors likely to influence their learning of writing, such as consideration of their prior linguistic and cultural knowledge. In this context, encouraging learners to engage in translanguaging practices that promote their linguistic practices and knowledge in all the languages in their repertoire constitutes a promising approach (García & Wei, 2014, p. 26).

In our educational system, initiation to written production begins in the third year of primary school (3rd AP), the first stage of the primary cycle. The learning process evolves gradually, beginning with the formation of simple words up to the elaboration of short paragraphs. By the fifth year of primary school (5th AP), learners are exposed to structured and methodical writing pedagogy. This pedagogical approach is based on a logical and coherent process that guides the learner in searching for information, organizing it methodically, and using it appropriately, with the ultimate goal of producing satisfactory quality texts.

2. French and English in the Algerian primary cycle

Both belonging to the Indo-European linguistic family, the French and English languages share a common historical trajectory, the result of several centuries of exchanges and mutual influences between France and Great Britain. This historical proximity has fostered reciprocal linguistic enrichment, with studies showing that nearly a quarter of contemporary English words come from French, making it one of the main sources of lexical borrowing in English (Dong, 2018, pp. 150–156). This significant linguistic kinship often leads learners to unconsciously mobilize their knowledge of French when studying English. This linguistic transfer can sometimes be an advantage facilitating learning, or sometimes an obstacle generating interferences that complicate the acquisition of English.

Given the above, since 2022, the Algerian primary education system has undergone a major transformation with the gradual introduction of English into the primary cycle alongside French. This reform, initiated by President Mr. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, is part of a desire for international openness and modernization of the educational system. The teaching of English, first introduced in the third year of primary school, now extends to other levels according to a well-defined schedule, with a specific pedagogical methodology and significant deployment of human and material resources. However, contact between two or more languages can lead to phenomena of interference and linguistic transfer, particularly in writing, where lexical interference arises. Indeed, the second language (L2) acquired by a learner may influence the learning of a third language (L3) by introducing similar but not identical words between French and English, as Fishman confirms in this citation: "Language contact refers to the interaction of two languages in the speech of an individual or a community, which can lead to phenomena of interference and linguistic transfer." (Fishman, 1972, p. 17)

3. Cross-linguistic influence in language acquisition.

The phenomenon of linguistic transfer, defined as the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other previously acquired language, constitutes a fundamental mechanism in the process of acquiring a new language. This cross-linguistic influence manifests itself in a complex and multidimensional manner across different linguistic levels, creating dynamic interactions between the linguistic system already mastered and the one being acquired. This influence is not limited to the relationship between the learner's mother tongue (L1) and their second language (L2) but also extends to interactions between different languages, even in situations where the transfer occurs from (L2) to a third language. Indeed, learners of an (L3) regularly develop intermediate linguistic structures that incorporate components of their (L2), whether at the level of vocabulary, word structure, or pronunciation. These interlanguage manifestations demonstrate the persistent influence of previously acquired languages on the process of learning new languages.

Adopting an (L3) approach to foreign language production, Hammarberg (2006, p. 17) observes that the influence of an (L2) plays an important role in (L3) language production. He explains that the concept of linguistic transfer refers to the influence that arises from the similarities and disparities between the language being acquired and any previously learned language, even if this acquisition is only partial.

From this perspective, Singleton (2000, p. 35) questions the intra- and inter-lexical opposition of lexical transfer by focusing on the organization of the mental lexicon. According to this author, there are different degrees of integration of lexicons relating to different languages, and therefore, the idea of cross-linguistic transfer is relevant. It should be noted, in this case, that learners often have difficulty transferring their knowledge from (L2) to (L3) to solve problems in the target language, resorting to known elements to indicate unknown ones, which generates errors due to differences between the two linguistic systems. It should also be noted that the source language can also be influenced by languages learned later, according to Cuq (2003, p. 15).

In the case of Algerian learners, interference corresponds to an interlingual error occurring during the learning of (L2) and is due to the influence of the linguistic system of (L1) (Arabic or Amazigh) on the linguistic system of (L2) (French). It also concerns the influence of the linguistic system of (L2) on that of (L3) (English). It is this second case that interests us throughout this study, which we will explore, during the analysis of learners' papers, through lexical interference (Hammarberg, 2006).

4. Methodology

As part of this research, we adopted a methodology based on contrastive error analysis, favoring a qualitative and descriptive approach among Algerian learners enrolled in the fourth year of primary school at Ahmed Zabana School in Sétif. The analysis is based on 24 written productions by 24 learners enrolled in French as a foreign language (FLE) classes. These learners have a characteristic multilingual repertoire: their mother tongue is Algerian Arabic (Darija); their second language is Standard Arabic; French as their third language; and English as their fourth language.

During the written production class, we asked the learners to write a short text in response to the following question: "Look at the picture of the neighborhood, write a text to help Lina find the new pharmacy in the neighborhood." The analysis of the papers revealed that some learners made no interlingual errors between English and French, while others made two or three at most. In total, eight (08) interlingual errors were identified in the 15 analyzed papers.

After analyzing our corpus, we identified examples of lexical interference errors influenced by the English language. Based on Ringbon's work (Singleton, 2007, p. 158), we categorized these lexical transfers according to two main criteria: those related to the form of the word and those concerning its meaning. In accordance with the terminology established by Ringbon, cognates are words that show similarities both formally and semantically. These terms share a similar appearance and meaning in both languages. In contrast to cognates are substitutions, a linguistic phenomenon in which an English term is directly used in a French context, either without modification or with slight morphological adaptation. Finally, there are also false friends: English words whose graphic or phonetic appearance resembles a French term but whose meaning differs.

Table 1. İllustrates the form transfers.

Form	French word	English word	Transfer in French
French words with an English ending	-pharmacie	-pharmacy	-pharmacy
-cité	-city	-city	
-parc	-park	-park	
-société	-society	-society	
Addition of a consonant	hôpital	hospital	hospital

Table 2. İllustrates the semantic transfers.

Meaning	French word	English word	Transfer in French
Substitution without change or with morphological adaptation	-route	-road	-road
-elle	-she	-she	
-jardin	-garden	-garden	

The above-mentioned form and meaning transfers correspond to the following written production model, based on the previously presented picture:

The new pharmacy is on the side of the road. It is located next to the supermarket, opposite the hospital, not far from the public garden.

5. Results and Discussion

These illustrative examples reveal that English influence interferes with most of the elements mentioned above, thus generating multiple lexical, phonetic, and consequently orthographic errors. The analysis of these statements highlights a compensatory strategy adopted by the learners: faced with deficiencies in their French lexical repertoire, they spontaneously drew upon their knowledge of English vocabulary. This approach reveals a mechanism of linguistic adaptation where the foreign language already mastered serves as a resource to fill lexical gaps encountered during expression in French.

Learners frequently integrate English lexical elements into their written productions in French. These linguistic transfers are manifested through the application of English suffixes to French roots. Thus, they use forms such as "pharmacy," "city," "park," or "society" instead of the correct French

endings. Some lexical transfers are expressed through the addition of an English consonant, as in "hospital." The phenomenon extends even to words where English forms are preferred over their French equivalents, such as "road," "she," and "garden."

The data collected in this research clearly indicate a predominance of form transfer over meaning transfer among the participants studied. This phenomenon can be partly explained by the cognitive processes involved in the early stages of language learning. Indeed, the recognition and reproduction of formal structures often constitute the first step in acquiring a foreign language. Learners initially rely on perceptible graphic and phonological similarities between the languages in their repertoire before developing sensitivity to semantic nuances.

Furthermore, this translinguistic strategy also meets immediate communicative needs. Faced with lexical gaps and operational deficiencies in the target language, learners resort to the complete transfer of lexical units from their previously acquired languages. This compensatory approach allows them to maintain communicative fluency despite limitations in their competence in the new language.

Conclusion

Mastering a multiple linguistic repertoire represents a considerable challenge. Our study reveals that the interlinguistic influence of English on French among the participants is significantly more pronounced than our initial hypotheses suggested. Particularly striking is the systematic recurrence of certain identical errors observed in various written productions. An astonishing finding emerges: although English is the language acquired later by the subjects and its use is mainly limited to academic contexts—unlike French, which enjoys a privileged status—its imprint on French productions remains substantial.

Transfer between languages fundamentally represents a positive cognitive strategy in foreign language learning. However, it can generate errors when interlinguistic influence operates negatively. Our analysis of eight (08) occurrences of errors potentially attributable to the influence of English (L3) on French (L2) demonstrates that this phenomenon manifests primarily in the lexical domain, particularly at the formal level.

The structural similarities between French and English constitute the determining factor in these interferences. These results confirm the crucial importance of the typological factor in the influence exerted by English on French among our participants. It should be emphasized, however, that these interlingual errors provide teachers with valuable indicators for assessing learners' skills and adapting their teaching. Considering that learners are generally unaware of the non-normative nature of their productions, raising awareness about the constructive use of interlinguistic similarities proves essential. Learning should progress methodically, first building upon the similarities between languages before addressing their divergences.

Ultimately, understanding the mechanisms of interlinguistic influence and adopting targeted pedagogical approaches make it possible to transform these challenges into learning opportunities. By developing learners' metalinguistic awareness and making judicious use of similarities between languages, teachers can foster a more effective construction of plurilingual competences, thereby helping to form speakers capable of navigating with ease among different linguistic systems.

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