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**A Qualitative Exploration of the Effect of Mother  
Tongue on EFL Pupils' Pronunciation  
The Case of First-Year Middle School Pupils**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Master Degree in "*Science of Language*"

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## **Dedication**

*To my family.*

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## Abstract

This study explores the impact of dialectal Arabic, the mother tongue of learners in Mostaganem, Algeria, on their pronunciation skills in EFL pronunciation. Focusing on first-year middle school pupils, the research utilizes an ethnographic approach to investigate the interplay between mother tongue and EFL pronunciation development. Through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers, the study aims to identify specific areas where dialectal Arabic influences EFL pronunciation, and to analyze the mechanisms through which this influence manifests. Preliminary findings suggest that while dialectal Arabic contributes to certain pronunciation challenges, other influences stem from French, a second language in the region, and from the complexities of English spelling and orthography. This research provides insights into the language acquisition processes of EFL learners in a context where multiple linguistic influences converge, offering valuable data for improving EFL teaching strategies and supporting effective pronunciation development.

**Keywords:** mother tongue, interference, pronunciation, middle school pupils, EFL classroom.

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## List of Abbreviations

**EFL:** English as a foreign language

**L1:** First Language

**L2:** Second Language

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the field of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the nuances of pronunciation stand as a crucial aspect of language learning. The impact of the first language -or mother tongue- on EFL learners' pronunciation is potential. The background of any relevant study is framed within the distinctive linguistic landscape of the learning environment.

The Algerian EFL context, for instance, is a raw sociolinguistic example where mother tongue is influential. It is acknowledged that the mother tongue, dialectal Arabic in Algeria, may significantly influence the pronunciation abilities of middle school EFL learners. Pronunciation, being a key element in effective communication, warrants exploration to enhance the quality of language education.

Mostaganem, where dialectal Arabic serves as the mother tongue, sets the stage for investigating its potential impact on the pronunciation skills of EFL learners. Motivated by the need to comprehend the dynamics of language acquisition in this specific context, the research aims to address a pertinent problem: the potential influence of the mother tongue on the pronunciation of EFL learners in Mostaganem middle schools.

The primary objectives of this study are twofold. Firstly, it seeks to examine the extent to which the mother tongue, dialectal Arabic, affects the pronunciation skills of EFL learners. Secondly, it aspires to provide insights into the mechanisms through which such an impact manifests in the linguistic development of these middle school pupils.

The central research question guiding this investigation is:

- To what extent can the mother tongue affect EFL learners' pronunciation at Mostaganem middle schools?

In pursuit of this question, a hypothesis is posited as:

- There is a significant correlation between the influence of the mother tongue and the pronunciation skills of EFL learners in Mostaganem middle schools.

An exploratory qualitative research design is employed to achieve the research objectives. The study's population encompasses first-year middle school EFL pupils at Lakehal Mohamed middle school in Mostaganem. The researcher, a middle school EFL teacher, engages in an ethnographic study, immersing themselves in the teaching environment throughout the academic year. This approach allows for in-depth observation and data collection. To provide rich insights into the intricate interplay between the mother tongue and pronunciation skills among middle school pupils, semi-structured interviews with three middle school EFL teachers are conducted.

The study consists of three chapters. The first chapter introduces the differences between acquisition and learning, presents the language transfer and highlights the major relevant studies on the effect of mother tongue on EFL pronunciation. The second chapter describes the methods, participants, procedure of data collection, and data analysis. The last chapter consists of the findings and discussion, followed by some recommendations for learners and teachers.

# **CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

## **1.1. Introduction**

In the pursuit of understanding the intricate dynamics of language acquisition and the role of the mother tongue in foreign language learning, this chapter embarks on a comprehensive exploration of key concepts and factors that significantly influence this linguistic journey. Starting with an examination of the concept of the mother tongue, we delve into its profound impact on language acquisition and learning. The distinction between language acquisition and language learning is carefully elucidated, laying the foundation for an in-depth analysis of second language acquisition. Within this realm, the phenomena of language transfer and interference are scrutinized, providing valuable insights into how the mother tongue influences the process.

Further, the focus narrows to explore the specific challenges posed by mother tongue interference in foreign language acquisition, sorting out the factors that contribute to this linguistic phenomenon. The chapter then shifts its gaze towards the foreign language classroom, investigating the multifaceted role the mother tongue plays in this educational context. A pivotal aspect explored is the effect of the mother tongue on English pronunciation, unraveling the intricacies that shape the learners' linguistic outcomes. Through a systematic examination of these interconnected topics, this chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the relationship between the mother tongue and foreign language acquisition, offering valuable insights for educators, learners, and researchers alike.

## **1.2. Mother Tongue**

Commencing with expressions of distress and progressing to babbling, followed by the formation of words, and ultimately constructing coherent sentences, a child undergoes distinct stages in acquiring their mother tongue. Various linguists offer differing definitions

of the mother tongue. Corder (1983) characterizes it as one's native language, learned by children and passed down from one generation to the next, received either at birth or from ancestors. In essence, it encompasses the language acquired by the child, encompassing all words learned from older family members or parents. McCarthy et al. (2014) clarify that the term "mother tongue" is frequently employed by linguists, while L1 denotes the language of infancy. This implies that the mother tongue is the initial language utilized by an infant during childhood or the language acquired from birth. It serves as an effective means of communication and interaction, fostering appropriateness and creativity. Contrary to a misconceived notion, it is not necessarily the language spoken by the child's mother.

### **1.3. Language Acquisition and Language Learning**

Language acquisition and language learning are two distinct processes through which individuals develop proficiency in a language. Language acquisition refers to the natural, subconscious process through which individuals acquire their first language (L1) during childhood. It occurs primarily through exposure to linguistic input in the environment, interaction with caregivers, and immersion in linguistic contexts. The critical period for language acquisition is typically during early childhood, and the process is most effective during this period. Acquirers of a language often develop implicit knowledge of grammar and linguistic structures without formal instruction. (Krashen, 1981, pp.34-35)

However, language learning is a conscious and deliberate process of gaining proficiency in a second or foreign language (L2) through explicit instruction, study, and practice. It involves formal education, language courses, textbooks, and explicit teaching of grammar rules and vocabulary. Language learning can occur at any age, and individuals can engage in it throughout their lives. Learners acquire explicit knowledge of grammar rules and language structures through formal instruction. (O'malley and Chamot, 1990)

## **1.4. Second Language Acquisition**

An essential facet of language that has captured the interest of numerous scholars is the phenomenon known as Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This pertains to the process of acquiring a language beyond one's native tongue. According to Ellis (1999), the term "second" encompasses any language acquired subsequent to the mother tongue. In essence, while labeled as SLA, this concept can encompass the learning of a third or even a fourth language. Language transfer and interference are two phenomena that play significant roles in the process of SLA. (Krashen, 1981)

### **1.4.1. Language Transfer**

Language transfer refers to the influence of a learner's native language (L1) on their second language (L2) acquisition. This influence can manifest in various aspects, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse. Positive transfer occurs when knowledge of the native language facilitates learning in the second language, while negative transfer, often referred to as interference, leads to errors or challenges in acquiring the target language. Language transfer is a natural consequence of the cognitive connections learners make between their native and second languages, impacting the way they approach and comprehend the new language. (Selinker, 1969, p.67)

### **1.4.2. Language Interference**

Language interference, a specific aspect of language transfer, involves the negative impact of the native language on the second language. It occurs when learners apply linguistic elements from their native language incorrectly in the second language due to similarities or differences between the two languages. Interference can affect various language components, such as syntax, morphology, and pronunciation (Lekova, 2010).

Understanding the potential areas of interference is crucial for educators and learners alike, as it allows for targeted language instruction and correction.

Linguistic interference, also known as language transfer, denotes the impact of one language on another. According to Odlin (1989), it signifies the influence arising from the similarities and differences between a person's native language (L1) and any additional language that has not been acquired perfectly. The behaviorist perspective on language transfer simplifies it to habit formation. As noted by Ellis (1994, pp.299-302), a significant challenge in learning stems from interference originating from prior knowledge. This interference is attributed to proactive inhibition, where previously formed habits become obstacles, hindering the acquisition of new habits.

Behaviorist theories of second language learning emphasize the inherent difficulty learners face in acquiring L2 patterns. The level of difficulty is contingent upon the degree of similarity or dissimilarity between L1 and L2 patterns. Obstacles arise when distinctions exist, leading to negative transfer and resulting in errors when there is a disparate response to similar stimuli. Conversely, similarities between L1 and L2 patterns facilitate learning through positive transfer (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p.31). Both language transfer and interference are integral considerations in second language acquisition, influencing the learning trajectory of individuals. Recognizing these phenomena provides valuable insights for educators to tailor their teaching strategies and for learners to navigate potential challenges more effectively.

### **1.5. Mother Tongue Interference**

Corder (1993) established a connection between one's native language (L1) and the acquisition of a foreign language. He observed that individuals, when learning a second language (L2), already possess knowledge of their native language. Corder (1993) further

noted that learners often apply the rules they have acquired and understood from their native language to the second language, resulting in errors. These effects of the native language influence both written and spoken language, including aspects such as pronunciation and spelling.

Numerous studies have explored the impact of the mother tongue on second language acquisition. Dulay et al. (1982) characterized interference as the automatic transfer resulting from habits formed in the target language. Conversely, Lott (1983) defined interference as errors in the learner's use of the foreign language traceable back to the mother tongue. Ellis (1997) referred to interference as 'transfer,' asserting that it is the influence exerted by learners' native language over the acquisition of the second language. He argued that the nature of transfer is governed by learners' perceptions of what is transferable and their developmental stage in second language learning.

In contrast, Weinreich (1957) identified transfer as instances of deviation from the norms of either language in the speech of bilinguals due to their familiarity with multiple languages. Odlin (1989) suggested that transfer results from similarities and differences between the target language and any previously acquired language. Additionally, Gass (2012) expanded on Ellis's definition, stating that transfer involves the use of mother tongue information in second language acquisition.

In summary, while there are various influences on learning a foreign language, the interference of the mother tongue has emerged as a significant aspect of study. This influence is commonly referred to as "interference" or "transfer," representing the reliance on or similarities between the target language and the first language. This influence can both aid and impede language acquisition, leading to correct guesses (positive transfer) or causing errors in learners (negative transfer).

### **1.6. Factors Leading to Language Interference**

According to Weinreich (2011, pp.:64-65), the phenomenon of interference in language acquisition is influenced by several key factors. Firstly, the bilingualism background of the speaker emerges as a crucial determinant. The inherent influence of both the source language and the target language on a bilingual speaker significantly contributes to the occurrence of interference. Secondly, disloyalty to the target language becomes a noteworthy aspect. This type of interference is marked by a negative attitude, wherein learners utilize uncontrolled structures from their first language when producing output in the target language.

Thirdly, the mastery of a limited vocabulary in the target language by a learner is identified as another factor contributing to interference. The depth of one's vocabulary is directly correlated with proficiency in the target language. When a learner encounters a term in the target language that is unfamiliar, they may resort to deliberate reliance on their native language. Fourthly, the need for synonyms plays a pivotal role in language learning and contributes to interference. Learners may adopt and borrow new words from their native language, leading to interference in the target language.(Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty, 2008)

Fifthly, considerations of prestige and style introduce another layer of complexity. The use of unfamiliar words, especially foreign words, during communication practices may be aimed at achieving a sense of pride. However, interference may arise, as some words may be incomprehensible even to the intended audience. In essence, these multifaceted factors, ranging from bilingualism and disloyalty to limited vocabulary, synonym necessity, and considerations of prestige and style, collectively contribute to the intricate phenomenon of interference in language acquisition. Understanding these diverse aspects provides valuable

insights into the complexities of language learning and the challenges associated with the interplay between native and target languages.

### **1.7. The Role of Mother Tongue in Foreign Language Classroom**

The utilization and function of the mother tongue (L1) in language instruction have been diverse subjects of description and investigation. Offering immediate translations to students is viewed as ineffective, as it tends to foster dependency. In the foreign language classroom, L1 is employed to convey the meanings of unfamiliar words, clarify confusing terms, and expound on intricate concepts. Various tools such as visual aids, props, and textbook illustrations are utilized to elucidate new terms and address persistent confusion. However, Atkinson (1987) notes that visual aids can sometimes lead to misunderstandings.

In the target language, precision is crucial, necessitating careful selection and grading of explanations, demonstrations, or visual representations. Consequently, L1 emerges as a precise means of effectively conveying information. L1 is also used to assess students' comprehension or in situations where compromise or negotiation is required in disciplinary and managerial circumstances. In a classroom setting, noise and indiscipline might seem to arise due to various factors; therefore, the teacher requires L1 for its immediate impact in minimizing disruptions during tasks (Mitchell and Myles 2004).

Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) contends that incorporating the mother tongue in the classroom can occasionally create a more conducive teaching-learning environment, alleviating language anxiety and fostering self-confidence. Language anxiety, stemming from communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation, or academic evaluation, is assuaged through the use of L1. The intervention of L1 in a foreign language classroom aids students in understanding various expressions, enabling them to use these expressions

according to their needs with enhanced confidence. This approach fosters a sense of security and assurance among students, as they can comprehend and employ the language effectively.

### **1.8. The Effect of Mother Tongue on English Pronunciation**

Numerous researchers and linguists have delved into the multifaceted realm of impediments that deter foreign language learners, namely English, from attaining a native-like pronunciation. Pioneering scholars such as O'Connor (1980) and Yule (2003) have highlighted linguistic factors as significant contributors to the challenges faced in achieving optimal pronunciation of English. These linguistic factors encompass variations in the sound systems between the learners' native language (LI) and the target language, as well as the inherent inconsistencies present in certain English language sounds.

Nunan and Carter (2001) emphasize the importance of comprehending which sounds function as phonemes in a language, as these phonemes convey distinctions in meaning, necessitating learners' proficiency in their pronunciation to avoid errors. Nunan and Carter (2001) underscore the inevitability of errors, attributing them to learners' transfer from their mother tongue's sound system to the target language.

Bashari (2017) further explored the disparities between Arabic and English sound systems, revealing that Arab learners of English tend to rely heavily on the phonological features of their mother tongue. This reliance poses challenges in distinguishing between the sound systems of their native language and the second language. Notably, Arab learners encounter difficulties in pronouncing certain sounds absent in Arabic, such as /p/ and /v/, due to the unfamiliarity and strangeness of these sounds. The absence of silent letters in the Arabic language compounds the challenge, as each letter in Arabic represents a distinct sound. Overcoming these obstacles requires extensive and consistent practice to familiarize

learners with unfamiliar sounds and develop the requisite speech organ training, thus enhancing their competence in English pronunciation.

The impact of the mother tongue extends across various levels, with the phonological aspect being no exception. Scholars such as O'Connor (1980), Yule (2003), and Power (2003) have established a connection between the interference of the native language (L1) and challenges in pronunciation. They concur that certain sounds like /p/ and /b/, /th/ and /t/, /th/ and /d/, /ch/ and /sh/ often pose confusion for many students. Bashari (2017) underscores that native speakers can distinguish between /p/ and /b/ as distinct phonemes, but for Arab learners, the situation is different. Consequently, mispronunciations of these sounds stem from the extensive practice of Arabic. O'Connor (1980, p.24) contends that learners, when confronted with such challenges, tend to substitute these sounds with others deemed closer in proximity. In summary, the mother tongue acts as a potential obstacle affecting learners' progress in pronunciation.

### **1.9. Conclusion**

The present chapter delved into the intricacies of language interference and provided definitions of relevant conceptions. The multifaceted nature of interference, influenced by factors such as bilingualism, vocabulary limitations, and considerations of prestige, highlights the need for nuanced pedagogical approaches. In this respect, and for the purpose of initiating this research in the Algerian context, it is necessary to question the reasons and instances of language interference among Algerian EFL learners.

# **CHAPTER TWO: METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

## **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter is a methodological part. It is devoted to discuss the research design and methodology adopted for this research work. Furthermore, it attempts to describe the context of the investigation, the population and the research methods. After describing the data collection procedure, this chapter also provides the qualitative analysis of data.

## **2.2. Research Design**

The purpose of this research is to qualitatively explore the impact of first language on Algerian middle school EFL pupils' pronunciation. The researcher, as a middle school teacher, was triggered to initiate this research due to their personal experiences with pupils in class. The qualities and diversity of mistakes in pronunciation motivated the researcher to explore the psycholinguistic incentives behind the production of English sounds by Algerian pupils who have bilingual or multilingual backgrounds.

## **2.3. Research Methods**

This study is an exploratory research work that adopts the qualitative approach in collecting and analyzing data. However, the researcher employs two research instruments: an ethnographic observation and interviews. Both data collection tools are defined and introduced in this section.

### **2.3.1. Ethnographic Observation**

Schensul et al. (1999) emphasize the usefulness of ethnographic observations in formal settings like classes. As this method is valuable to collect natural qualitative data, this study employs ethnographic observation as its primary methodology to investigate the pronunciation patterns of English among pupils, specifically focusing on the influence of their mother tongue and the effects of second language acquisition. This approach allows for

the understanding of the complexities of language learning and the role of linguistic background in shaping EFL pronunciation.

The observation takes place in a natural learning setting, which is the classroom, because it is the formal social interaction environment among teachers and pupils. This will allow for the collection of authentic and spontaneous language data. The researcher observes and records the pupils' spoken English, paying close attention to their pronunciation of various sounds, stress patterns, and intonation. A checklist is prepared for field notes where detailed descriptions of specific examples of pronunciation patterns are to be filled (see Appendix A).

### **2.3.2. Interviews**

One of the common methods for gathering qualitative data is through interviews, which are also a great way to learn from others. Accordingly, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) consider interviews as a discussion between two or more individuals or as a topic of mutual interest, emphasized the social situatedness of research data, and considered human contact as essential to the creation of knowledge. The present study employs interviews with teachers in order to obtain diverse views and opinions regarding the influence of mother tongue on EFL pupils' pronunciation. The semi-structured interview of this study consists of only five open-ended questions (see Appendix B).

### **2.4. Participants**

The first population is first-year pupils at Lakehal Mohamed middle school. They are the observed classes throughout the academic year 2023-2024. The choice of this level is based on the fact that it is their first-year learning EFL. This will bring more instances of pronunciation qualities.

The second population is EFL middle school teachers. The sampling was random and the participation of three teachers is made to confirm the observed pronunciations from the classroom notes and to provide insights from experienced teachers when teaching and assessing pronunciation.

## **2.5. Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher took notes and recorded any mispronunciation throughout the year using a simple observation checklist. Moreover, in the last term, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with three colleagues at the same institution in order to explore their perceptions of how language interference and transfer impact EFL pronunciation and what suggestions they consider for a successful teaching and assessment of pronunciation.

## **2.6. Data Analysis**

The present part of the chapter provides the qualitative analysis of data collected from both research instruments: observation and interviews.

### **2.6.1. Analysis of the Observation**

The researcher, a middle school EFL teacher, filled out a checklist of observed mispronunciations of vowel and consonant sounds throughout the academic year and opted the common prominent instances where the mistake is made by a variety of first-year pupils.

The table below shows the pupils' pronunciations of several English vowel sounds with examples of mispronunciations observed from pupils. For instance, they mispronounce /æ/ as /e/ or /ʌ/ as in "apple" and "hand". Pupils replace such sounds due to the influence of the innate acquired vowel sounds. Diphthongs in English, unlike in Arabic dialect, are different; however, some pupils tend to pronounce /eɪ/ as /æ/ or /e/. To illustrate, the word "ate" is mispronounced as /æt/ and /beɪbɪz/ as /bebɪz/.

**Table 1. Mispronounced Vowel Sounds**

Target Vowel Sound	Correct Pronunciation	Pupils' Pronunciations
<b>/æ/</b>	Apple/'æpəl/	/'epəl/ /'ʌpəl/
	Hand/'hænd/	/'hend/
<b>/ei/</b>	Ate/eɪt/	/æɪt/
	Babies/'beɪbɪz/	/'bebɪz/
<b>( / )</b>	Shores / ʃɔ:z/	/ ʃɔ:res/
<b>/i/</b>	Image /'ɪm.ɪdʒ/	/'ɪm.eɪdʒ/
<b>/əʊ/</b>	Home /həʊm/	/h ɔ:m/
	Rose /rəʊz/	/r ɔ:z/
<b>/ai/</b>	White/waɪt/	/weɪt/ /wɪt/
	Kite /kaɪt/	/keɪt/ /kɪt/

The table shows phonemic transcriptions of others English words. In one example of "shores", pupils tend to add /e/ as a sound to be pronounced as /ʃɔ:res/. The spelling of some English words sometimes confuses pupils to pronounce accurately. To illustrate, "image" seems to be pronounced with either /æ/ or /eɪ/ and pupils commit such mistake as they needed to practice listening and pronounce it as /'ɪm.eɪdʒ/.

Further, pupils mispronounce the structure of diphthong in the cluster "o" followed with one consonant and "e" as the short vowel /ɒ/. Examples of this case are "home" /hɔ:m/ and "rose" /r ɔ:z/. Another cluster of "i" followed with one consonant and "e" is mispronounced as /ɪ/. Examples of this case are "white" /wɪt/ and "kite" /kɪt/.

From the examples of vowel sounds, some common mistakes are attributed to the mother language interference. However, some instances demonstrate pupils' confusion of English with French (second language). The interpretations of the observed examples are discussed further in the following chapter. The table below shows instances of mispronounced consonant sounds.

**Table 2. Mispronounced Consonants Sounds**

Target Consonant Sound	Correct Pronunciation	Pupils' Pronunciations
/θ/	Three/ θri: /	/tri:/
	Tooth/tu:θ/	/tu:t/
/ð/	Father/ 'fɑ:ðə /	/'fɑ:də/
	Weather /'weð.ər/	/'wed.ər/
/ʃ/	Touch / tʌʃ /	/ tuʃ /
/tʃ/	ache/ eɪk /	/ eɪ ʃ /
/k/	Spinach /'spɪn.ɪtʃ/	/'spɪn.ak /
/z/	Shores / ʃɔ:z /	/ ʃɔ:res/
/v/	Very/veri/	/feri/
	Of /ɒv/	/ɒf/
/ŋ/	Sing /sɪŋ/	/sɪŋg/
	Ring /rɪŋ/	/rɪŋg/
/dʒ/	Imagine /ɪ'mædʒ.ɪn/	/ɪ'mæ ʒ.ɪn/
	Judge /dʒʌdʒ/	/ ʒʌdʒ/

Based on how middle school pupils pronounce consonants in English classes, the most prominent example of mother tongue interference is changing the labiodentals /θ/ and /ð/ into alveolars /t/ and /d/ respectively. Apart from the examples shown in the table, the pupils tend to keep their tongues in their mouths when pronouncing “mother” /m ʌðə/ and “brother” /br ʌðə/ as /m ʌ d ə/ and /br ʌ d ə/ respectively. Pupils use the voiced alveolar /d/ instead of /ð/ which requires using the tongue under the upper teeth to produce the English sound. Although the sound is found in Arabic, yet it does not appear in the dialectal variety.

The /θ/ sound is a voiceless dental fricative, produced by placing the tongue near the front teeth and pushing air through. The /t/ sound is a voiceless alveolar stop, produced by stopping the airflow completely with the tongue behind the upper front teeth. The voiceless alveolar /t/ also replaces the voiceless labiodental /θ/ in the pronunciations of pupils. Similarly, the sound is widely used in Mostaganem speech community although in Arabic both sounds are used differently (ت and ث). Examples are like “teeth” /ti:θ/ and “mouth” /maʊθ/ that are mispronounced as /ti: t/ and “mouth” /maʊ t/ // and // respectively.

Furthermore, the pupils completely replaced the /tʃ/ consonant cluster with /ʃ/ sound in “touch”. The /tʃ/ sound is a voiceless palatal affricate, a combination of stopping the airflow with the tongue near the hard palate and then releasing it with friction. The assumption made by pupils is that “sh” and “ch” are identical in speaking. Another assumption is attributed to French acquisition of “ch” as /ʃ/ sound and not as /tʃ/. The confusion encountered by pupils becomes more critical when it comes to words with “ch” which is pronounced /k/. For instance, “ache” /eik/ is mispronounced /eif/ and /eitʃ/; “spinach” /'spɪn.ɪtʃ/ is mispronounced as /'spɪn.ak/.

A common orthography-related mispronunciation is the final “-ed” and “-s”. Pupils decide one form of pronunciation since they need to know the rules and listen earlier to

several examples. To illustrate, words like “shores”/ʃɔːz/ and “horses” /hɔːsɪz/ are mispronounced as /ʃɔres/ and “horses” /hɔrsɪs/ respectively. From such instances, it is also observed that the /r/ sound is emphasized by pupils as they produce it in the mother tongue.

Broadly, middle school pupils mispronounced many consonant sounds. Some common errors include replacing fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ with stops /t/ and /d/, omitting sounds, and substituting consonant clusters with different sounds. These mispronunciations are explained through the pronunciation of their mother tongue. Other explanations are made in the discussion chapter.

### **2.6.2. Analysis of the Interview**

This section provides the analysis of interviews conducted with three EFL teachers from Lakehal Mohamed Middle School, Mostaganem province. After reporting the major points mentioned by the interviewees, the analysis focuses on identifying key themes and patterns within the responses to each interview question.

#### ***Q1: How do you evaluate your pupils' pronunciation in English?***

The responses reveal that teachers consider their pupils as moderate at speaking and pronunciation. As they focus on both intelligibility and accuracy in evaluating pronunciation, the respondents emphasize the importance of pupils being understood and the accurate production of individual sounds. Based on the variety of assessment methods, the responses reflect a common agreement on all pupils' level in oral proficiency.

#### ***Q2: Can you give examples of your pupils' mispronunciations?***

A common error is reported by all teachers is the pronunciation of "th" sounds. They often pronounce it as "t" or "d". For example, "think" becomes "tink" and "this" becomes "dis". Also, pupils tend to pronounce "v" as "f" in some cases of words like "very" and

"video". One teacher reported that their pupils struggle with the vowel sounds, particularly the diphthongs. Words like "boat" and "go" are often pronounced incorrectly. Also, one teacher emphasized their pupils' pronunciations of the consonant "r" sound after vowels which is mostly less apparent in English as in "car" and "bird". Most of these difficulties highlight the influence of dialectal Arabic pronunciation on English language acquisition.

***Q3: To what extent do you think the mother tongue is the major reason for their mispronunciation?***

All informants agree and believe the mother tongue plays a significant role because dialectal Algerian variety has different sounds and phonetic rules, leading to interference. One teacher focused on the impact of L1 even on the intonation and stress patterns. Pupils use a different intonation system in their dialectal conversations causing difficulty for them in English. Thus, teachers acknowledge the significant influence of the mother tongue on learners' pronunciation. Sounds, rhythm, and intonation are three different levels of English pronunciations that L1 can affect according to the interviewees.

***Q4: What are the other factors, in your opinion, that may affect their pronunciation?***

Teachers highlighted factors beyond language transfer. They mentioned some factors like the lack of exposure to spoken English, lack of phonetic awareness, and lack of motivation and confidence. Teachers' responses suggest that pupils hear English only in the classroom, which limits their opportunities for authentic listening and pronunciation practice. Also, pupils may not be conscious of the subtle sound distinctions in English, making it difficult for them to recognize and correct their pronunciation errors. Further, pupils who lack confidence in their English skills may be hesitant to practice speaking, impacting their pronunciation.

***Q5: What recommendations can you provide for EFL teachers at middle school in order to enhance their pupils' speaking proficiency in English?***

The interviewees' recommendations emphasize creating a conducive environment for English language learning. This includes providing ample practice opportunities, incorporating explicit pronunciation instruction, and fostering a supportive learning atmosphere. One teacher focused on the role of listening to native English speakers as a way to acquire the sounds accurately and fluently.

Explicit pronunciation teaching can be through defining phonetic symbols to pupils and using exercises that target specific sounds and stress patterns. Some strategies are also recommended by teachers to help students feel more comfortable when speaking English such as visual aids, songs, and games to make learning pronunciation fun and engaging. The teachers' responses to the interview questions reveal that Algerian middle school pupils tend to demonstrate a variety of pronunciation obstacles due to language interference and transfer.

As a significant factor affecting the pronunciation of Algerian middle school pupils when speaking English, all participants emphasized the impact of Mostaganem dialect on its young users who are learning to speaking a foreign language for their first year in middle school. Differences in sound systems, stress patterns, and intonation were apparent to all participants. They all acknowledged the crucial role of exposure, phonetic awareness, motivation, and confidence in overcoming these challenges.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

The present chapter described the research design, methods, participants and procedure of data collection. At the end, the chapter presented the analysis of data collected from both qualitative research tools. The following chapter will discuss the findings and provide relevant recommendations.

# **CHAPTER THREE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the study, exploring the influence of the mother tongue on the English pronunciation of Algerian EFL middle school pupils at Lakehal Mohamed Middle School in Mostaganem province. The previous chapter presented the analysis of classroom observations and teacher interviews, detailing the specific pronunciation challenges faced by pupils. In this chapter, an interpretation and identification of the key factors contributing to these difficulties will be provided. The findings reveal a complex interplay of factors, with the mother tongue playing a significant role in shaping pupils' pronunciation.

Moreover, a section is devoted to the discussion to show the indications of findings with references to some previous studies. This section discusses the specific pronunciation challenges observed and confirmed by participants. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for EFL teachers and pupils, outlining practical strategies for minimizing the negative impact of mother tongue interference and fostering a more effective learning environment.

### **3.3. Findings**

This research investigated the pronunciation challenges faced by first-year middle school pupils learning EFL at Lakehal Mohamed Middle School in Mostaganem, Algeria. The analysis of classroom observations and teacher interviews revealed a complex interplay of factors, with the mother tongue, specifically the Mostaganem dialect of Arabic, playing a prominent role in shaping pupils' pronunciation.

The analysis of observed mispronunciations revealed consistent patterns of mother tongue interference. Pupils struggled with vowel sounds, often replacing English sounds with

their closest Arabic equivalents. For example, the /æ/ sound in words like "apple" and "hand" was consistently mispronounced as /e/ or /ʌ/, reflecting the influence of the Arabic vowel system. Similar challenges were observed with diphthongs, with pupils struggling to distinguish between the English sounds /ɒ/ and /ɪ/ in words like "home," "rose," "white," and "kite."

Consonant sounds also presented significant difficulties. The most prominent example of mother tongue interference was the consistent replacement of the labiodental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ with the alveolar stops /t/ and /d/, respectively. This mispronunciation, evident in words like "think" becoming "tink" and "this" becoming "dis," demonstrated the lack of distinct /θ/ and /ð/ sounds in Arabic dialects. In addition, the consonant cluster /tʃ/ was often replaced with /ʃ/, highlighting the confusion arising from the different realizations of "ch" in English and French.

Hence, the mispronunciations in English are the results of mother tongue interference, lack of exposure to English sounds, and confusing the spelling system with sound system. To illustrate the latter, sometimes pupils use /ʃ/ for the letters "ch" which can be in appropriate pronunciation pronounced as /tʃ/ as in "chase" and even /k/ as in "school". This applies to the letter "c" as some pupils are confused to pronounce it /s/ or /k/, and the same for "s" letter whether it is /s/ or /z/, and sometimes pronounced /ʒ/.

However, the challenges went beyond simple language transfer. Limited exposure to authentic spoken English outside the classroom, a lack of phonetic awareness, and low levels of motivation and confidence in English skills were also identified as contributing factors. This suggested that pupils struggled to internalize the nuances of English pronunciation due to limited opportunities for authentic listening practice and a lack of understanding of phonetic symbols and subtle sound distinctions.

Interviews with EFL teachers corroborated these findings. Teachers acknowledged the prevalence of mother tongue interference in their pupils' pronunciation, noting challenges with vowel and consonant sounds, intonation patterns, and rhythm. They also emphasized the importance of providing ample opportunities for authentic language exposure, explicit pronunciation instruction using phonetic symbols and targeted exercises, and creating a supportive learning environment that fosters confidence and motivation.

All in all, the research revealed that the mother tongue, Algerian dialect, plays a significant role in shaping the English pronunciation of Lakehal Mohamed middle school pupils, Mostaganem Province. The challenges they face are multifaceted, stemming from language transfer, limited exposure to spoken English, lack of phonetic awareness, and low levels of motivation and confidence. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach to pronunciation instruction that includes explicit teaching, authentic language exposure, and a focus on building confidence and motivation. By implementing these strategies, EFL teachers can create a supportive learning environment that enables pupils to overcome pronunciation challenges and achieve greater fluency in English.

### **3.4. Discussion**

The research results indicate a strong reliance on the mother tongue within the classroom, hindering the development of fluency and accuracy in English. Many pupils exhibit a lack of participation in class discussions due to language weaknesses, preventing them from constructing correct and coherent sentences. Moreover, students often resort to using Arabic when speaking among themselves, neglecting the target language. This reliance on the mother tongue extended to seeking explanations from the teacher in Arabic, even when struggling with English concepts. This was evidenced earlier by a research work conducted by Benchabane (2018) in the same sociolinguistic context.

The findings also reflect the tendency among pupils to favor English-Arabic dictionaries over English-English dictionaries. This might reinforce their reliance on translation, potentially hindering the development of independent understanding and vocabulary acquisition in English. As found by Dahmani (2017), EFL learners often revert to using their mother tongue when discussing personal matters or when talking to their mates in class. This suggests a strong emotional attachment to their native language and a reluctance to fully engage in English.

### **3.5. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, and by virtue of the researcher's experience in teaching EFL, some tips and implications can be made for young learners who tend to improve their English pronunciations. Hence, a set of the most relevant recommendations are stated as follows:

- The major and most important recommendation for pupils is to listen to English speakers, use authentic materials to practice listen-and-repeat activities. In such a way, and even by singing, they can acquire the accurate and fluent pronunciations of all vowel and consonant sounds.
- Pupils should strive to actively participate in classroom discussions and activities, utilizing English as much as possible. This active engagement will help them develop fluency, build confidence, and minimize reliance on the mother tongue.
- Pupils should be made aware of the potential for both positive and negative transfer from their mother tongue and French (L2). They should be encouraged to identify and analyze the differences between the languages, understanding how these differences can impact their English pronunciation.

- Pupils should view errors as learning opportunities and approach them with a positive attitude. By analyzing and correcting their mistakes, they can gradually overcome the influence of their mother tongue and improve their English pronunciation.
- Pupils should actively work on developing their ability to think in English. This can be achieved through various activities such as reading, writing, and speaking in English, which help them internalize the language and break the reliance on translation.
- Pupils should be encouraged to read widely in English, both for pleasure and to enhance their vocabulary and understanding of English grammar and pronunciation. The more they engage with English texts, the better they will become familiar with the language's nuances.

Furthermore, the researcher aims to provide more implications for EFL teachers at middle schools. Based on the results of this study and due to enhancement of English in Algerian primary schools, some recommendations are directed to teachers as follows:

- Teachers should employ strategies to motivate and engage pupils in learning English. Creating a positive and supportive learning environment, using varied teaching methodologies, and providing opportunities for authentic language use are crucial steps towards fostering enthusiasm for the language.
- Teachers should carefully analyze the differences and similarities between English and Arabic, as well as French. This understanding enables them to address potential areas of difficulty for their pupils, providing targeted instruction and support.
- Teachers should be vigilant in identifying and minimizing the negative impact of mother tongue interference on pupils' pronunciation. This may involve explicit

instruction on specific sounds and grammatical structures, providing targeted pronunciation exercises, and encouraging pupils to actively use English in various contexts.

- Teachers should encourage pupils to use English-English dictionaries as a primary resource for vocabulary acquisition, fostering independence and promoting a deeper understanding of the language.

The results of the study offer also some recommendations for future research in the same scope. This study may not serve as a starting point for further research on the influence of the mother tongue on EFL learning in the Algerian context. However, its results may encourage researchers in higher studies to extend the context or the target sociolinguistic area. Further exploration of Algerian sociolinguistic areas can provide valuable insights into effective strategies for language acquisition and contribute to the development of more targeted and effective teaching approaches.

The findings of this study, alongside these implications, underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to EFL teaching and learning in Algerian middle schools. By actively addressing the influence of the mother tongue, fostering language awareness, and promoting positive learning attitudes, teachers can empower pupils to overcome pronunciation challenges and achieve greater fluency in English.

### **3.6. Limitations**

This research, while providing valuable insights into the influence of the mother tongue on the English pronunciation of Algerian EFL middle school pupils, acknowledges certain limitations that may have affected the scope and depth of the findings.

- The study was conducted within a limited timeframe, which restricted the use of quantitative data collection and analysis.
- The long-term observation is beneficial, yet it could not provide a synchronic aspect of the language recorded.
- The limited number of recordings of pupils' pronunciations, while sufficient for initial analysis, could have potentially limited the ability to identify more subtle pronunciation patterns and variations.
- The reliance on subjective observations regarding pupils' mispronunciation, while supported by teacher interviews, may have introduced a degree of bias in the analysis.
- The lack of access to acoustic analysis tools, which would have enabled a more objective assessment of pronunciation accuracy, represents a significant limitation and an obstacle since the researcher is not familiar with using ICTs and digital to assess pronunciation.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings of the study. After presenting the indications of results, the chapter discusses them and cite the results of other studies. At the end, the chapter emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to pronunciation instruction, highlighting the importance of explicit teaching, authentic language exposure, and fostering positive learning attitudes.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by Algerian EFL middle school pupils in mastering English pronunciation. The analysis clearly demonstrates the significant influence of the mother tongue, specifically the Mostaganem dialect of Arabic, in shaping pupils' pronunciation. Furthermore, the study identifies additional factors that contribute to these difficulties, including limited exposure to spoken English, lack of phonetic awareness, and low levels of motivation and confidence.

Therefore, it is important to note that the hypothesis of this research is found true. There is a significant correlation between the influence of the mother tongue and the pronunciation skills of EFL learners in Mostaganem middle schools. The researcher attempted to prove it through a qualitative research design that adopts two research instruments. First, an ethnographic observation took place in class by the participant observer (the researcher). Second, interviews were conducted with three EFL teachers.

The present research work consisted of three chapters. Major theoretical bases were introduced in the first chapter. Concepts like language acquisition, learning, transfer, and interference were defined. Some relevant studies on the effect of mother tongue on EFL pronunciation were also reviewed. The second chapter described the research design, choice of methods and participants. It further provided the procedure of data collection and data analysis. The last chapter summarized and interpreted the findings. Also, a section was devoted to the discussion of results. Based on the results, some relevant recommendations for learners and teachers were included.

The implications for EFL teachers and pupils are clear. Teachers must take a proactive role in minimizing the negative impact of mother tongue interference, while simultaneously fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages active engagement, promotes language awareness, and builds confidence. Pupils, in turn, must embrace opportunities for active participation, actively seek to improve their pronunciation, and develop a positive attitude towards error correction.

This research underscores the importance of acknowledging the complexities of language learning and the critical role of the mother tongue. By addressing the challenges identified in this study, EFL educators can empower their students to overcome pronunciation barriers and achieve greater fluency in English. Future research should continue to explore the nuanced relationship between the mother tongue and EFL learning, seeking to identify and implement even more effective strategies for supporting language acquisition in diverse contexts.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A – Observation Checklist

This checklist is meant to record all instances of pronunciations that are affected by language transfer and interference.

Lakehal Mohamed Middle School

Level: 1<sup>st</sup> year

English words	Transcription	Pupils' Pronunciation	Target Sounds												
-.....															
-.....															
-.....															
-.....															
-.....															
-.....															
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<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; vertical-align: top;">Source Mistake</td> <td style="width: 25%; vertical-align: top;">of L1</td> <td colspan="2" style="vertical-align: top;">Examples: .....</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="border-top: 1px solid black; vertical-align: top;">L2</td> <td colspan="2" style="border-top: 1px solid black; vertical-align: top;">Examples: .....</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="border-top: 1px solid black; vertical-align: top;">Other sources</td> <td colspan="2" style="border-top: 1px solid black;"></td> </tr> </table>				Source Mistake	of L1	Examples: .....			L2	Examples: .....			Other sources		
Source Mistake	of L1	Examples: .....													
	L2	Examples: .....													
	Other sources														

**Notes:**

## **Appendix B –Teachers' Interview**

Dear Participant,

In order to collect data about the impact of mother tongue on the pronunciation of young Algerian learners of English, you are kindly requested to participate in a study by accepting to participate in this interview. The researcher guarantees anonymity and confidentiality of all your data.

**Question 1:** How do you evaluate your pupils' pronunciation in English?

**Question 2:** Can you give examples of your pupils' mispronunciations?

**Question 3:** To what extent do you think the mother tongue is the major reason for their mispronunciation?

**Question 4:** What are the other factors, in your opinion, that may affect their pronunciation?

**Question 5:** What recommendations can you provide for EFL teachers at middle school in order to enhance their pupils' speaking proficiency in English?

*Thank you for your participation and valuable feedback!*