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**THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN
ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL STUDY****Fathi BENGHEZALA*****Univeristy of Mohamed Khider, Biskra - Algeria****fathi.benghezala@univ-biskra.dz****Abstract**

This study investigates cross-linguistic transfer between French and English reading comprehension among young Algerian learners. A mixed-methods, microgenetic design tracked ten high-achieving 3rd-grade French readers across a two-year period, commencing in the 2023–2024 academic year. The intervention in Year 1 employed parallel-text instruction on shared thematic content, followed by contrastive analysis of linguistic structures. Quantitative results from immediate and delayed post-tests show the intervention significantly improved English text comprehension (from 0% to 60% correct) and syntactic rule recognition (from 0% to 90%). A follow-up cognate test in Year 2 demonstrated sustained metalinguistic awareness, with 80% of students accurately identifying identical cognates. Qualitative analysis revealed the dual role of transfer: positive facilitation through cognates and shared syntax, and challenges due to phonological and morphosyntactic interference. The findings provide empirical support for pedagogies that strategically leverage French proficiency through explicit contrastive instruction to scaffold English reading acquisition in multilingual primary classrooms.

Keywords: Contrastive analysis, French and English learning, Integration and interference, Cross-linguistic transfer, Reading learning

1. Introduction

In the 2022/2023 academic year, English was introduced at the primary level in Algeria, starting from the third grade. This addition means that students are now required to study three or even four languages simultaneously. By the age of eight, students are exposed to Arabic (which often differs from their home language), Amazigh (in some regions), French as a first foreign language, and English as a second foreign language. This multilingual environment poses significant challenges, particularly for children who have not yet mastered the fundamentals of their native language before being introduced to two foreign languages.

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THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG LEARNERS

This research investigates the impact of multilingualism in the school environment on the linguistic development of primary school students. It seeks to determine whether this exposure leads to positive outcomes, such as linguistic integration that enhances learners' linguistic and cognitive development, or negative effects, such as cross-linguistic interference at various levels—linguistic, psychological, cognitive, and pedagogical.

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) posits that learners' prior linguistic knowledge significantly shapes additional language acquisition. For instance, lexical cognates—words with shared etymology and meaning, such as "family" (English) and "famille" (French)—can accelerate vocabulary retention. However, deceptive parallels, like false friends (e.g., "librairie" [French bookstore] vs. "library" [English]), may trigger errors due to misleading similarities (Lado, 1957; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008).

With the integration of English (L3) into primary school education in Algeria, alongside French (L2) as two foreign languages, it is crucial to examine the potential influence between these languages. Although French and English have different roots—French being of Latin origin and English having Germanic roots—they share similarities in sounds, vocabulary, and structures. These similarities might either facilitate or confuse learners, particularly beginners, in their language acquisition process.

While studies have explored the effects of first-language (L1) interference on second-language (L2) learning, fewer have focused on the role of a second language (French) influencing a third language (English), especially in the Algerian educational context. Understanding this cross-linguistic transfer is essential for improving English teaching strategies in primary schools and optimizing language instruction methodologies.

To investigate this, the researcher employed the observation method in a classroom setting, selecting the 10 most proficient students in French reading. By focusing on these students, the study aimed to explore the influence of French on English reading learning.

Problem Statement

There is a lack of contrastive studies that categorize and analyze the specific ways in which French affects English learning at the primary school level. This study aims to bridge this gap by conducting a theoretical and empirical contrastive analysis of French-English cross-linguistic transfer. By identifying key areas of transfer and proposing pedagogical interventions, the research seeks to improve the effectiveness of English language instruction in Algeria.

Research Questions

1. How does French influence English learning among Algerian primary school students?
2. What are the main linguistic transfer phenomena observed (phonological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic)?

3. What types of errors can be attributed to negative transfer from French?
4. How can English teaching strategies be adapted to minimize negative transfer and enhance positive transfer?

Research Objectives

- To identify and categorize the linguistic transfer phenomena from French to English.
- To analyze contrastively the linguistic structures of French and English that contribute to transfer.
- To assess the impact of linguistic transfer on students' English language proficiency.
- To develop pedagogical strategies to mitigate negative transfer and enhance positive transfer.

2. Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Learning Related Languages

2.1 Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

In the field of language learning, the coexistence of two or more languages can lead to "interference," where elements or rules from a learner's first language (L1) are unintentionally applied to their second language (L2), resulting in errors. This phenomenon, known as cross-linguistic influence, is particularly evident in the early stages of learning, where learners often engage in code-mixing—blending linguistic elements from different languages within the same utterance (Hamers & Blanc, 2004).

Scholars such as Jespersen (1912), Palmer (1917), and Fries (1945) have emphasized the role of L1 interference in L2 learning, noting that beginners frequently transfer their native language system to the L2 context. To address this, clarifying differences between L1 and L2 and using materials with similar linguistic resources can help mitigate errors caused by interference.

Contrastive Analysis (CA), developed by Fries (1945) and Lado (1957), compares languages to predict learning challenges by identifying similarities and differences. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) states that L1 habits influence L2 learning, making similar elements easier to acquire and dissimilar ones harder. By analyzing structural differences, educators can anticipate errors and tailor instruction. Learners may struggle with phonological, syntactic, or morphological differences but benefit from transferring familiar L1 patterns. CA emphasizes that greater differences between languages increase learning difficulty (Gass & Selinker, 2008, pp. 96–97).

Teachers can use these insights to identify learning obstacles and create targeted strategies, such as adapting materials or supplementing textbooks. By understanding how learners transfer grammatical structures, word order, and other linguistic patterns from L1 to L2, educators can provide more effective support. Recognizing the balance between similarity and difference in language learning helps teachers address students' needs and promote progress in acquiring a foreign language (Lado, 1957).

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG LEARNERS

2.2 French and English as Closely Related Languages

French holds a dominant position in Algerian primary education as the first foreign language and is widely used across Algerian society in various domains, including administration, media, and higher education. This entrenched presence of French creates a linguistic environment where students are often exposed to the language early, shaping their familiarity with foreign language structures.

Despite their distinct Latin and Germanic origins, French and English share significant linguistic similarities due to historical contact, which can facilitate learning for students exposed to both languages. These similarities are evident in phonology (shared Latin sounds), lexicon (cognates), and syntax (similar sentence structures), enabling learners to transfer skills between the two. However, challenges arise from differences such as false cognates which can lead to confusion.

Contrastive Analysis (CA) serves as a valuable tool for identifying potential learning difficulties by comparing L1 and L2. For instance, differences in word order between languages may require explicit instruction to prevent learners from transferring inappropriate rules from their native language. For French (L2) learners, recognizing shared cognates can be advantageous, while awareness of false cognates is essential to avoid errors. By focusing on these contrasts, educators can develop targeted strategies to address specific challenges and enhance language acquisition.

In summary, applying CA to French and English reveals both the facilitative and inhibitory effects of linguistic transfer. By understanding the similarities and differences between these languages, educators can design more effective teaching methodologies to help learners navigate the complexities of multilingual acquisition.

3. Linguistic Influence between Related Languages in Primary Education

3.1 The Hypothesis of Integration

The Hypothesis of Integration emphasizes the advantages of teaching foreign languages at an early age. Research indicates that children achieve higher proficiency levels in second languages compared to adults (Patkowski, 1980; Johnson & Newport, 1989), attributed to their greater mental flexibility and ability to transfer cognitive competencies from their native language (L1) to a second language (L2) (Cummins, 1978). Early exposure to foreign languages enhances linguistic development in both L1 and L2 while fostering cognitive and cultural integration, as demonstrated by studies from Dabène (1991), Luc and Bailly (1992), and Nonnon (1991).

The contrastive approach, which involves comparing grammatical rules and structures between languages, has proven effective in reinforcing language learning. This method encourages learners to analyze and apply linguistic rules, strengthening their understanding of both languages. Additionally, integrating cultural, social, and educational-psychological

elements into language instruction supports intellectual development and linguistic construction across languages.

The integration of linguistic systems, particularly in closely related languages like French and English, further enhances learning. The Hypothesis of Integration provides a framework for effective language teaching by leveraging linguistic overlaps while addressing divergences. This approach not only accelerates L2 acquisition but also enriches cognitive and cultural competencies, creating a holistic learning experience.

3.2 The Hypothesis of Interference

From the early 19th century until the 1960s, researchers believed that bilingualism negatively impacted cognitive development, as the coexistence of two languages in an educational setting could lead to linguistic interference (Baker, 2001). Interference occurs when learners unconsciously transfer elements or grammatical rules from one language to another incorrectly, potentially causing overlapping sounds, vocabulary confusion, and structural errors (Hamers & Blanc, 2004).

The extent of interference varies: it is less pronounced between distant languages (e.g., Arabic and English) but more significant between closely related languages like French and English. This highlights the need for targeted strategies to mitigate interference while leveraging the benefits of linguistic integration in language teaching.

By understanding both integration and interference, educators can design more effective methodologies to support learners in navigating the complexities of multilingual acquisition.

4. Reading in Primary Education

Reading, a cornerstone of literacy, integrates two essential processes: word recognition and linguistic comprehension. This dual process is critical in primary education, where foundational literacy skills are established. Below, we explore the theoretical foundations, developmental stages, proficiency levels, and pedagogical strategies that underpin effective reading comprehension instruction.

Gough and Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading argues that decoding (word recognition) and language understanding (comprehension) are interdependent yet distinct skills. This model is particularly salient for young Algerian learners, who must navigate Arabic, French, and English orthographies simultaneously.

4.1. Word Recognition

The visual stage focuses on the transition from letter recognition to fluent word reading. Key frameworks elucidate this progression:

- **Ehri's Phases of Reading Development (2005):**
 - **Pre-alphabetic:** Reliance on visual cues.
 - **Partial alphabetic:** Use of letter-sound knowledge.
 - **Full alphabetic:** Decoding of words.

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG LEARNERS

- **Consolidated alphabetic:** Automatic word recognition.
- **Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001):** Emphasizes the integration of phonological awareness, sight-word recognition, and other "strands" that contribute to skilled reading.

These frameworks highlight the importance of systematic phonics instruction, as advocated by the National Reading Panel (2000), which identifies phonics and fluency as critical components of early literacy development.

4.2. Linguistic Comprehension and Meaning-Making

The cognitive stage involves synthesizing text with existing knowledge, a process explained by schema theory (Anderson, 1984). Readers activate prior knowledge (schemata) to infer meaning, enabling deeper engagement with the text.

The RAND Reading Study Group (2002) expands this understanding by defining comprehension as an interplay between:

- **Text:** The content and structure of the material.
- **Reader:** The individual's knowledge and skills.
- **Sociocultural Context:** The environment and cultural background influencing interpretation.

For example, a child reading a story about animals may draw on personal experiences to enhance comprehension. Additionally, Duke and Pearson (2002) emphasize the importance of teaching metacognitive strategies (e.g., predicting, questioning, summarizing) to foster active and independent comprehension.

4.3. Proficiency Levels and Assessment

Proficiency in reading comprehension is often assessed through incremental mastery levels. The *Didactic Guide of English for 3rd Year Primary Education (2022)* outlines three proficiency levels, which align with international benchmarks such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2016). PIRLS evaluates fourth graders' ability to:

- Retrieve information.
- Make inferences.
- Analyze complex texts (at the "advanced" level).

Challenges in achieving minimal proficiency may relate to conditions such as developmental dyslexia (Lyon, 1998), underscoring the need for early identification and intervention, particularly in the areas of word recognition and linguistic comprehension.

4.4. Pedagogical Strategies

Effective reading comprehension instruction combines explicit teaching of word recognition with rich experiences in linguistic comprehension. Key strategies include:

- **Text-Dependent Questions:** Encouraging deeper analysis.
- **Diverse Genres:** Exposing students to a variety of texts.
- **Technology Integration:** Using digital tools to enhance engagement and accessibility.
- **Culturally Responsive Practices:** Ensuring texts reflect students' backgrounds, as noted by the *National Literacy Trust (2020)*, to bridge home-school knowledge gaps.

Reading comprehension in primary education is a multifaceted process that requires balanced attention to word recognition and linguistic comprehension. By grounding instruction in evidence-based practices and global insights, educators can tailor approaches to meet the needs of diverse learners. This not only fosters proficiency but also cultivates a lifelong love for reading.

5. Practical Study

5.1. Study Design

This study investigates cross-linguistic transfer in reading comprehension by teaching French and English simultaneously to 8–9-year-old students at the 3rd-grade primary level. Conducted over two academic years (March 2024 and March 2025), the research centered on two lessons that employed parallel texts adapted from the French textbook *MNE* (2017, p. 38). The texts were chosen for their focus on moral values, such as tidiness and politeness, to align with curricular themes and enable a direct comparison of linguistic structures between French and English.

Throughout the study, students were closely observed to identify and measure the extent of cross-linguistic influences. In March 2025, the same group of students, now in 4th grade, were assessed using a list of basic cognates to evaluate the level of integration and interference in their reading and comprehension processes. This longitudinal approach aimed to provide insights into how concurrent learning of two languages influences reading comprehension and the transfer of skills between languages, shedding light on the dynamics of bilingual education at the primary level.

To identify high-utility cognates, syllabuses for grades 3–5 were analyzed, prioritizing words with overlapping semantic, orthographic, and phonetic features (e.g., "animal"/"animal," "bus"/"bus"). This selection targeted terms recurrent in classroom instruction and daily life, ensuring relevance to learners' experiences.

Participants:

Number of Students: 10 (5 girls, 5 boys).

Selection Criteria: Participants were selected from a larger class based on their top performance in French reading assessments, ensuring they possessed foundational literacy

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG LEARNERS

skills in French. At the time of the study (third grade), they were beginning formal French and English instruction for the first time, with:

- **French:** 3 hours/week.
- **English:** 1.5 hours/week.

5.1.1. Text Reading Assessment

Step 1: Initial Reading of the English Passage

The English version of the text was written on the board. Students read independently to assess baseline proficiency without teacher intervention.

English Text:

- *Radia is a tidy girl. She throws the paper in the trash can.*
- *Mourad is a polite boy. He doesn't push his classmates between the tables.*

Step 2: French Lesson

The French text was introduced, mirroring the English content:

French Text:

- *Radia est une fille propre. Elle jette le papier dans la poubelle.*
- *Mourad est un garçon poli. Il ne pousse pas ses camarades entre les tables.*

Lesson Structure:

1. Reading Phase:

- *Silent Reading:* Students read silently and answered character-based questions (e.g., “Who is tidy?”).
- *Expressive Reading:* The researcher read aloud, using gestures (e.g., mimicking “throwing”) and visuals (images of trash cans, classrooms).
- *Individual Reading:* Students read aloud; peers collaboratively corrected mispronunciations (e.g., “poubelle” pronounced as /pu'bel/).

2. Comprehension Phase:

- Questions progressed from general (“What is the text about?”) to specific (“Where does Radia throw paper?”).

3. Language Analysis:

- *Syntax:* Identified articles (e.g., “une”), subjects, verbs, and adjectives.
- *Morphology:* Plural formation (e.g., “camarades” vs. “camarade”).
- *Punctuation:* Role of capitals and periods.

4. Assessment:

- Criteria included pronunciation, fluency, comprehension accuracy, and grammatical rule application.

Step 3: Second English Reading

Post-French lesson, the English text was reintroduced. The researcher:

- Assumed the role of an English teacher.
- Repeated the lesson structure without referencing French.
- Highlighted cognates (e.g., “polite”/“poli”) and contrasts (e.g., “trash can” vs. “poubelle”) using gestures.

5.1.2. Cognates Reading Assessment

In March 2025, the researcher conducted a comprehensive analysis of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th-grade syllabuses in both French and English to identify the most frequently occurring cognates—words that share similar spelling, meaning, and origin across the two languages. These cognates were selected based on their relevance to students' daily lives and their frequent use outside the school environment as part of their home language. The identified cognates were then organized into thematic categories, such as School, Colors, Numbers, Family, Animals, Transport, and Fruits and Vegetables, as shown in Table 1.

Table N°01: List of Cognates (3rd,4th and 5th French and English Syllabuses)

Topics	English	French
School	school, class, scissors, marker,	école, classe, ciseaux, marqueur
Colors	color, blue, orange, gray	couleur, bleu, orange, gris
Animals	animal, cat, panda, tiger	animal, chat, panda, tigre
Transport	transport, bus, train, motorcycle	transport, bus, train, motocyclette
Fruits	fruit, banana, orange, tomato	fruit, banane, orange, tomate

Source: 3rd,4th and 5th French and English Syllabuses

The same group of students was asked to read these cognates aloud in English during a regular classroom lesson. The researcher assessed their pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension, providing immediate feedback and corrections where necessary.

The purpose of this test was to determine if the students' exposure to cognates in one language (French) positively influenced their performance in the other language (English), particularly in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary recognition, and comprehension.

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG LEARNERS

5.2. Findings and Analysis

5.2.1. Initial English Reading Results

- **Reading:**
 - None of the students read the text fully correctly.
 - Three students partially decoded words.
 - Seven students struggled with basic vocabulary, indicating limited familiarity with English phonology and orthography.
- **Comprehension:**
 - All ten students failed to grasp the general meaning of the text, reflecting their lack of foundational English proficiency.
- **Syntax/Morphology:**
 - No student identified subject-verb-object (SVO) structures, suggesting limited awareness of English syntactic patterns.

5.2.2. Post-French Lesson Results:

- **Reading:**
 - Six students partially read the text correctly, with some leveraging cognates (e.g., recognizing *polite* via French *poli*).
 - Four students continued to lag, indicating varying levels of cross-linguistic transfer.
- **Comprehension:**
 - Six students understood the main ideas of the text.
 - Two students partially understood the content.
 - Two students remained confused, highlighting the uneven impact of cross-linguistic transfer.
- **Syntax/Morphology:**
 - Nine students successfully identified articles, syntactic structures, and plurals (e.g., *tables*).
 - One student continued to struggle, suggesting a need for additional support.

Table N°02 : Comparative Analysis

Criteria	First Reading	Second Reading
Reading Accuracy	0 correct; 3 partial; 7 difficulty	0 correct; 6 partial; 4 difficulty
Comprehension	0 correct; 10 difficulty	6 correct; 2 partial; 2 difficulty
Syntax Recognition	0 correct; 10 difficulty	9 correct; 1 difficulty

5.2.3. Cognates Reading

The assessment yielded several key findings:

1. **Recognition of Identical Cognates:** The majority of students (80%) easily identified and understood the meaning of identical cognates shown in table 1, demonstrating a strong cross-linguistic connection between French and English.
2. **Pronunciation Challenges:** All 10 students struggled with cognates that are spelled similarly but pronounced differently in the two languages (e.g., *orange* in English vs. *orange* in French). This highlighted the influence of phonetic differences on reading fluency and accuracy.
3. **Comprehension Strengths:** The majority of students showed a higher level of comprehension for cognates that are commonly used in both languages, particularly those related to everyday topics such as family, animals, and school.
4. **Cross-Linguistic Transfer:** The data suggested a positive transfer effect from French to English, as students who performed well in the French reading exercise also demonstrated improved proficiency in the English reading task. This indicates that cognates can serve as a bridge for enhancing bilingual literacy.

6. Results and discussions

6.1. Reading

6.1.1. Initial Struggles and Progress in Reading English

The students' initial struggles with reading English align closely with Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988), which posits that learners experience cognitive overload when faced with unfamiliar or complex information. As novices, the students lacked the necessary schemata (mental frameworks) to effectively decode English phonology and syntax, resulting in hesitations, mispronunciations, and errors. For example, the irregular spelling-sound correspondence in English (e.g., *through* vs. *tough*) contrasts sharply with the more predictable orthography of French, increasing cognitive strain and making decoding more challenging (Seymour et al., 2003).

By the second reading session, however, three students showed noticeable improvement by self-correcting errors, a behavior indicative of metacognitive monitoring—a skill often associated with advanced language learners (Flavell, 1979). This suggests that these students began to internalize feedback mechanisms, such as recognizing mismatches between their pronunciation and the expected output. For instance, they might have noticed discrepancies in vowel sounds or stress patterns and adjusted their pronunciation accordingly. This ability to self-correct reflects a growing awareness of linguistic rules and an emerging capacity to regulate their own learning, both of which are critical steps in language acquisition.

To further support students in overcoming cognitive overload and developing metacognitive skills, educators can:

- Scaffold learning by breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps.
- Provide explicit instruction on English spelling-sound rules and exceptions.

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG LEARNERS

- Encourage self-monitoring through activities like peer feedback, recording and reviewing their own speech, or using checklists for pronunciation and grammar.
- Foster metacognitive awareness by teaching students to reflect on their learning processes and identify areas for improvement.

By addressing cognitive load and promoting metacognitive strategies, teachers can help students build the mental frameworks needed to navigate the complexities of English and accelerate their language acquisition.

6.1.2. The Role of Positive Transfer

Six students demonstrated notable improvement in reading French-similar words, benefiting from cross-linguistic transfer at both the lexical and phonological levels. This progress can be attributed to:

1. **Cognates:** Words like *table* (French: *table*) and *bus* (French: *bus*) share both form and meaning, acting as "stepping stones" for comprehension (Nation, 2001). These similarities allowed students to quickly recognize and understand English words that closely resembled their French counterparts.
2. **Phonological Overlap:** Shared consonant clusters, such as /bl/ in *blue* (English) and *bleu* (French), facilitated easier decoding and pronunciation (Durgunoğlu, 2002). This overlap reduced cognitive load and helped students bridge the gap between the two languages.

However, students showed limited progress with non-cognates, such as *push* or *polite*, which lack direct equivalents or phonological similarities in French. This aligns with the threshold hypothesis (Cummins, 1979), which suggests that learners need to reach a foundational level of proficiency in their second language (English) before they can fully leverage knowledge from their first language (French). Without sufficient L2 proficiency, students struggle to transfer skills effectively when faced with unfamiliar or dissimilar vocabulary.

To address this, educators can:

- Explicitly teach non-cognates and highlight their differences from French equivalents.
- Strengthen foundational L2 proficiency through targeted vocabulary and phonics instruction.
- Encourage metalinguistic awareness to help students recognize when and how to apply cross-linguistic strategies.

By addressing these challenges, teachers can help students overcome the limitations of the threshold hypothesis and achieve more balanced progress in both languages.

6.1.3. Phonological Challenges

A linguistic analysis reveals significant differences between French and English that posed challenges for students, particularly in pronunciation and orthography. French has 12 vowel sounds, while English has up to 20, including diphthongs (e.g., /aɪ/ in *polite*). Students often substituted French vowels for English ones, a phenomenon attributed to interlanguage fossilization (Selinker, 1972). For example:

- *Table* was pronounced as /tabl/ (French) instead of /'teɪbəl/ (English).
- *Push* was pronounced with the French /y/ (as in *tu*) instead of the English /ʊ/.

Additionally, the orthographic differences between the two languages created further difficulties. English's deep orthography (irregular spelling patterns) clashed with French's shallow orthography (consistent sound-letter correspondence). Examples include:

- **Silent h:** *Honor* (English, silent h) vs. *honneur* (French, pronounced /ɔ̃nœʁ/).
- **Silent l:** *Could* (English, silent l) vs. a hypothetical French pronunciation /kuld/.

These discrepancies highlight the challenges students face when navigating the phonological and orthographic systems of two languages. Addressing these issues requires targeted instruction, such as:

- Phonetic drills to practice English vowel sounds and diphthongs.
- Explicit teaching of English spelling rules and exceptions.
- Contrastive analysis to highlight differences between French and English pronunciation and spelling patterns.

By focusing on these areas, educators can help students overcome fossilization and develop more accurate pronunciation and spelling skills in English.

6.1.4. Pedagogical Implications and Strategies

Teachers can employ contrastive analysis (Lado, 1957) to systematically address differences between French and English, helping students overcome linguistic challenges. Specific strategies include:

1. **Minimal Pairs:** Practicing minimal pairs, such as /p/ (*pin*) vs. /b/ (*bin*), can help students distinguish between similar sounds that may cause confusion due to differences in voicing or articulation. This is particularly useful for addressing pronunciation errors stemming from L1 interference.
2. **Vowel Charts:** Comparing vowel sounds, such as French /e/ (*été*) vs. English /eɪ/ (*day*), can clarify distinctions in vowel length and quality. Visual aids like vowel charts can make these differences more tangible and easier to internalize.
3. **Cognate-Based Learning:** Incorporating cognates, such as *family/famille* or *planet/planète*, can build students' confidence and expand their vocabulary. Research shows that cognates serve as a bridge between languages, reducing cognitive load and facilitating comprehension (Kelley & Kohnert, 2012).

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG LEARNERS

4. **Synthetic Phonics:** Teaching synthetic phonics, such as blending /s/ + /i/ + /t/ to form *sit*, can help students decode irregular spellings and improve their reading fluency. This approach is particularly effective for addressing the inconsistencies of English orthography (Rose, 2006).

By combining these strategies, teachers can create a more supportive and effective learning environment, enabling students to navigate the complexities of bilingual education while building on their existing linguistic knowledge.

6.2. Reading Comprehension

6.2.1. Improved Understanding Through Lexical Similarities

Eight students showed significant improvement in their ability to comprehend the general meaning of English texts without relying on additional aids. This progress suggests that they effectively leveraged their knowledge of French to decode and understand English, a phenomenon consistent with research on cross-linguistic transfer. Studies indicate that learners often use their first language (L1) as a cognitive resource to make sense of a second language (L2) (Cummins, 2005). By drawing on familiar vocabulary, syntactic structures, and contextual cues from French, these students were able to infer meaning and navigate English texts more independently. This highlights the value of bilingual education in fostering transferable skills and underscores the importance of building on students' L1 knowledge to support L2 development.

6.2.2. Cognates and Their Role in Learning

Cognates played a crucial role in facilitating comprehension during the study. Examples such as *table* (English) and *table* (French), or *papers* (English) and *papier* (French), demonstrate how students effectively transferred meaning from French to English. Research supports the idea that cognates significantly reduce cognitive load, thereby easing the acquisition of new vocabulary (De Groot & Keijzer, 2000). After being provided with a table of cognates, all the students were able to comprehend English words that had direct French equivalents they were already familiar with. However, they encountered difficulties understanding English words that differed significantly from their French counterparts. This highlights the importance of cognates in bridging linguistic knowledge and underscores the challenges students face when encountering non-cognate vocabulary in a bilingual learning context.

The results underscore the pedagogical value of cognates as a bridge between languages. The high recognition rate of identical cognates aligns with theories of linguistic interdependence (Cummins, 1981), where L1 (French) proficiency supports L2 (English) acquisition. For example, students intuitively mapped *animal* (French) to *animal* (English) without explicit instruction, demonstrating innate metalinguistic awareness. However, partial cognates (e.g., *ciseaux/scissors*) revealed limitations in this interdependence, as students over-relied on visual similarity without accounting for phonetic or semantic nuances.

6.2.3. Challenges Posed by False Cognates

False cognates posed significant challenges for students. For instance, the English word *black* differs entirely from the French word *blanc* (meaning *white*). Such discrepancies often led to confusion and errors, as learners frequently assumed that similar-looking words shared the same meaning (Ringbom, 2007). This highlights the complexity of cross-linguistic transfer, where false cognates can mislead students and hinder comprehension. The findings underscore the need for explicit instruction on false cognates to help learners navigate these linguistic pitfalls and develop a more accurate understanding of vocabulary across languages.

6.2.4. Shared Structures and Borrowed Words

Beyond cognates, French and English share numerous structural similarities that likely facilitated students' comprehension. For example, nouns with similar suffixes, such as *attribution* and *qualification*, helped students recognize patterns and predict meanings more effectively. Additionally, the presence of English words borrowed into French, such as *job* and *business*, provided further points of connection between the two languages (Odlin, 1989). These shared linguistic features not only reduced cognitive load but also enhanced students' ability to transfer knowledge from one language to the other. Such structural parallels underscore the interconnectedness of French and English and highlight their potential to support cross-linguistic learning, particularly in a bilingual educational context.

6.2.5. Thematic Overlaps in Syllabuses

The shared themes between the French and English syllabuses for third-year primary education—such as *school*, *family*, and *animals*—played a significant role in supporting students' ability to transfer knowledge between the two languages. This alignment resonates with schema theory, which suggests that learners comprehend new information more effectively when it connects to their existing knowledge and experiences (Anderson, 1984). By encountering familiar topics in both languages, students were able to build on their prior understanding, making it easier to grasp new vocabulary and concepts. This thematic consistency not only reinforced their learning but also provided a meaningful context for cross-linguistic transfer, highlighting the importance of curriculum design in fostering bilingual comprehension.

Table N°03: 3rd-Year Primary Education Themes

French projects	English units
Project 1: Vive l'école ! (Long live the school!)	1 Me, my family and my friends 2 My school
Project 2: En famille (At home)	3 My home
Project 3: Tu connais les animaux ? (You know animals?)	4 My play time 5 My pets
Project 4: À la campagne (In the countryside)	6 My fancy birthday

Source: French and English Syllabuses of 3rd-Year Primary Education

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG LEARNERS

6.3. Recognizing Syntactic and Morphological Rules

6.3.1. Positive Transfer from L1 to L2

Nine students demonstrated notable improvement in recognizing syntactic and morphological structures in English, a development attributed to positive transfer from French. This transfer was facilitated by the shared grammatical frameworks of the two languages, particularly their predominant use of the subject-verb-object (SVO) structure. For example, the French sentence *Il jette le papier* maps directly to the English sentence *He throws papers*, allowing for seamless mental translation of simple sentences. This syntactic alignment enabled students to leverage familiar L1 patterns to decode L2 syntax, easing their initial comprehension of English (Cook, 1991; Odlin, 1989). The findings highlight the role of shared grammatical structures in supporting cross-linguistic transfer, particularly in the early stages of second language acquisition.

5.3.2. Cognitive Strategies and High-Achieving Students

Nine students demonstrated exceptional proficiency in both French and English, illustrating Cummins' (1979) Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model, which posits that literacy skills in one language can support the development of another. These students likely excelled by:

1. **Applying Morphological Awareness:** They leveraged their understanding of word formation, such as recognizing plural formation (e.g., *camarades* vs. *camarade*).
2. **Integrating Top-Down and Bottom-Up Processing:** High achievers often combined top-down processing (using context to predict meaning) with bottom-up processing (decoding individual sounds and structures). For example, they segmented words into syllables, such as *to-ma-to* (English) and *to-ma-te* (French), to improve pronunciation and comprehension.

This aligns with Carroll's Model of Language Aptitude (1962), which highlights phonetic coding ability (the capacity to recognize and reproduce sounds) and grammatical sensitivity (the ability to identify and apply grammatical rules) as key predictors of language learning success. These students' ability to integrate these skills likely contributed to their high achievement in both languages.

To support other learners, educators can:

- Emphasize cross-linguistic connections (e.g., shared syntax and morphology).
- Teach metacognitive strategies (e.g., pattern recognition and word segmentation).
- Provide opportunities for contextualized practice to strengthen both top-down and bottom-up processing skills.

By fostering these abilities, teachers can help more students achieve similar success in bilingual or multilingual learning environments.

6.3.3. Challenges in Syntactic and Morphological Differences

Despite the advantages of shared grammatical frameworks, students faced challenges due to negative transfer, where structures from French interfered with their production in English. Key areas of difficulty included:

1. **Adjective-Noun Order:** In French, most adjectives follow the noun (e.g., *un garçon poli* – “a boy polite”), whereas in English, adjectives typically precede the noun (“a polite boy”). This difference often led to errors in English sentence construction.
2. **Negative Sentence Structures:** French negation uses a two-part structure (*ne...pas*) that surrounds the verb (e.g., *Il ne pousse pas*), while English employs the auxiliary verb *do* + *not* before the main verb (e.g., *He does not push*). This structural discrepancy caused confusion, as students attempted to apply French negation patterns to English sentences.
3. **Morphological Differences:** French and English differ in how they form plurals and verb conjugations. For instance, French plurals often involve adding an -s (e.g., *cat* → *cats*), while English plurals can involve more complex rules (e.g., *child* → *children*). These differences sometimes led to errors in English pluralization and verb conjugation.

These challenges underscore the complexities of cross-linguistic transfer, where differences in syntactic and morphological rules between French and English can hinder accurate language production. Addressing these areas through targeted instruction may help mitigate the effects of negative transfer and support more effective bilingual learning.

6.3.4. The Role of Explicit Instruction

To mitigate language interference, contrastive analysis—comparing the structures of the first language (L1) and the second language (L2)—is essential (Ellis, 2015). For example, teachers can employ the following strategies:

1. **Use Side-by-Side Examples:** Presenting parallel sentences in French and English can help highlight key differences, such as adjective placement (*une orange délicieuse* vs. *a delicious orange*) or negation structures (*Il ne lit pas* vs. *He does not read*). This visual comparison makes syntactic distinctions clearer for students.
2. **Incorporate Drills and Corrective Feedback:** Repeated practice through structured exercises, combined with immediate and constructive feedback, can reinforce correct patterns and help students internalize L2 rules (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). For instance, drills focusing on adjective-noun order or negation can solidify understanding.
3. **Encourage Metalinguistic Discussions:** Engaging students in discussions about language rules and structures can deepen their awareness of syntactic and morphological differences. By reflecting on how French and English operate

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG LEARNERS

differently, learners can develop a more analytical approach to language learning, reducing reliance on L1 patterns.

These strategies not only address specific areas of difficulty but also empower students to navigate cross-linguistic challenges more effectively, fostering greater accuracy and confidence in their L2 production.

7. Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that French proficiency exerts a significant and dual-faceted influence on English reading acquisition among young Algerian learners. The results demonstrate clear empirical support for positive cross-linguistic transfer, where prior knowledge of French serves as a powerful cognitive scaffold. The targeted pedagogical intervention, which explicitly leveraged shared vocabulary and structures through contrastive analysis, successfully enabled students to harness their French skills, leading to dramatic improvements in English text comprehension and syntactic awareness. This confirms that in Algeria's multilingual classroom context, French L2 can function as a valuable linguistic asset for scaffolding English L3 reading.

However, the study simultaneously confirms that this transfer is not uniformly beneficial. The research identifies specific challenges arising from phonological and morphosyntactic interference, where similarities between French and English become sources of error rather than facilitation. Therefore, the overarching conclusion is that effective English language instruction at the primary level must be strategically designed to optimize this linguistic relationship. Pedagogy should actively promote metalinguistic awareness by systematically highlighting cognates and structural parallels while preemptively addressing areas of potential interference. By adopting such a contrastive approach, educators can transform the complex multilingual reality of Algerian pupils from a potential obstacle into a definitive advantage for English learning.

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THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH READING LEARNING IN ALGERIAN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN YOUNG
LEARNERS

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