

## Un-English Accentual Patterns of the Interlanguage Prosody of Students Reading for a Master's Degree in Applied Language Studies, University of Constantine: Underlying Causes and Remedial Didactic Practices

### Abstract:

The author of the present research paper digitally recorded the renderings of 260 monomorphemic and affix words of different accentual patterns and moraic structures along with ten utterances performed by thirty two MA English majors at the Department of Letters and English Language, Constantine University 1. This paper reports on the inferred causes underlying the diagnosed stress-allocation errors, and remedial didactic insights are sketched out. The findings reveal that the respondents have not accommodated their interlanguage phonology to L2 parameters due to a number of interlocked factors: (1) lack of internalised rules regarding stress correlates and stress-assignment guidelines; (2) non-strategic and infrequent usage of print and electronic dictionaries; (3) failure to take advantage of the copious merits of Computer Assisted Pronunciation Learning and (4) shallow pronunciation-promoting strategies.

**Key words:** Un-English ; Accentual Patterns ; Interlanguage Prosody ; Students Reading ; Master's Degree ; Applied Language Studies ; University of Constantine ; Causes ; Remedial ; Didactic Practices

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### ملخص:

لقد قمنا بتسجيل رقمي لكيفية نطق 260 كلمة أحادية المورفيم، منها كلمات بسيطة، وأخرى تحمل أنماط مختلفة من السوابق واللواحق، إضافة إلى أنها تختلف في أنماط النبر، هذا التسجيل متعلق بأداء 32 طالب إنجليزية مستوى السنة الثانية ماستر، قسم الآداب واللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة قسنطينة 1-1. ويدرس هذا المقال الأسباب الكامنة وراء الأخطاء المتعلقة بالأنماط النبرية، كما يتضمن عددا من التوجيهات البيداغوجية التي من شأنها أن تساعد على الإنقاذ من هذه الأخطاء. وتكشف نتائج الاستبيان أن المجيبين لم يستطيعوا تكييف أصوات لغتهم مع خصائص اللغة الثانية، وهذا راجع إلى عوامل عديدة متداخلة من أبرزها:

- 1- عدم معرفتهم للعوامل التي تجعل المقاطع الصوتية مقاطع منبورة، وعدم تحكمهم في قواعد توزيع النبر.
- 2- الاستعمال غير المدروس، وغير المنتظم للمعاجم اللغوية.
- 3- نقص الاستفادة من البرامج الإلكترونية المدعّمة للنطق.
- 4- سطحية استعمال الأدوات التعليمية المختلفة المساعدة على تحسين النطق.

### Introduction:

**The** paucity of research into the Algerian interlanguage prosody has been more than a driving incentive that spurred us to embark on this study that set out, amongst an array of other objectives, to scrutinise the post-graduate students' primary accentual pattern aptitude and get to the bottom of the roots of the variables lying underneath their breaches of the English norms.

The targeted population is second-year students reading for an MA in Applied Language Studies of the 2013/2014 academic year's batch at the Department of Letters and English Language, Constantine University 1. After having conducted several error-diagnosis production tests and gauged the scope of their failure to abide by the canonical patterning (albeit rather hazy and fraught with exceptions) of the Anglo-Saxon tongue stress-placement, the study was pursued to glean some comprehension as to what induces the materialisation of their idiosyncrasies and how this difficulties could be surmounted.

The paper starts out by giving a pithy account on what the related literature has in store about how second language learners' pronunciation errors have been tackled over the years within the general framework of the error-analysis approach along with the most common interlingual and intralingual causes of errors. It subsequently addresses the premises as well as the promises of crosslinguistic influence theory in general and prosodic transfer in particular. Once this theoretical scene has been set, the discussion will move into the core component of the paper: data analysis and induced inferences. It will thereafter close by pinpointing an inventory of recommendations, most of them pedagogic, the current study has generated.

#### **Major Sources of Segmental and Suprasegmental Errors**

In any error analysis enterprise, the most perplexing and arguably the most defiant of procedures researchers deploy is ascribing the amassed errors to their most probable inducers and erecting on the basis of this the therapeutic practices and tools the analyst sees fit. Over the years, learners' interlanguage has undergone large-scale as well as small-scale undertakings which now feed into our knowledge and enlighten our quotidian practices in the second language acquisition sphere. In what follows, discussions will revolve fundamentally around the basic, oft-observed sources of errors. Given the line of enquiry pursued herein along with the forecast linguistic and pedagogic contributions, and to warrant the sketching-out of a fairly informative account of how phonological errors have been handled, only the pronunciation-errors-triggering variables whether they be segmental or non-segmental will be targeted. It goes without saying, though, that affinities bearing on the inducers of errors figuring at the different linguistic strata exist; researchers in the ever-expanding province of second language goofs have drawn substantially upon the findings their fellow researchers have outlined irrespective of whether the errors investigated are lexical, morph-syntactical or phonological.

It is customary in interlanguage phonology studies to set a clear-cut boundary between two main sets of error sources, namely *interlingual* and *intralingual errors*. *Interlingual errors* are caused by mother tongue interferences (James, 1980). These errors emerge mainly due to learners' hyper and counterproductive reliance on their mother tongue's constraints which happen to be at odds with those of the target language. When learners

fallaciously perceive non-existent structural affinity between their language and the language they are in the process of learning, then, they are highly prone to make errors. Interestingly, difficulties may also arise when dissonances between the maternal language and the target language are manifestly obvious, known to the acquirer, but unfortunately the acquirer falls short of shaking off his/her language habits when using the target language. Speakers of Mandarin Chinese, for example, are reported to use only one sound, the /l/, whether the English word contains a /l/ or a /r/ (Kenworthy: 1987). They would pronounce light /rait/ or vice versa. This is put down to the fact that in this language /r/ and /l/ do not enjoy a phonemic status as they do in English: they are allophonic variants to the same abstract unit. Beghoul (2007), in his large scale undertaking into the interlanguage phonology of Algerian learners of English at the tertiary level, revealed that one of the contributory, inhibitory factors (yet by no means the most overriding one) behind his students' failure to abide by the pronunciation of English norms both at the segmental and prosodic level (which adversely impacts their decoding abilities) is French interference, the learners' second, institutionally-acquired language. As one of the tenets of his research work is putting forward a more learner-friendly approach to be adopted in Spoken Language Proficiency and Listening Comprehension classes for fostering a better command of the English sound system, he suggests, amongst other things, that 'The learners need also to be aware of the complex pattern of interactions between the various sound inventories and patterns of the linguistic systems that co-work to shape their interlanguage phonology, which, at the end of the day, seriously hinder them in their attempts at breaking through the system (Beghoul 2007: 306-307). *Intralingual Errors* is the second major cause of both segmental and prosodic errors. This label can be rightly viewed as an umbrella term under which comes a whole range of different factors. They bear this name because they are not related to the mother tongue-foreign language relatedness or otherwise lack of it and how this may affect the learning route and ultimate linguistic attainment. On account of this, Gass and Selinker (2008) believe that: 'One would therefore expect similar errors to occur from speakers from a wide variety of first languages.' Corder (1973: 83/4), Ellis (1997: 19) and McCarthy (2001: 74) refer to such errors as *developmental errors*. The following are the most commonly diagnosed ones.

*Errors of Overgeneralisation*

Nemser (1971, cited in Richards 1974), and Gass and Selinker (2008) concur that learners often fall short of knowing the constraints imposed upon usage of target language rules. This, accordingly, may spark off the application of some rules in their output which are not tolerated by the target language. Overgeneralisation errors mirror deficiencies in learners' linguistic sensitivity. They are, nonetheless, not peculiar to second language acquirers: children

picking up their mother tongue go through a period where they largely depend on this strategy (Crystal: 2008).

*Communication-Strategies-Induced Errors*

When the learner gets involved in a linguistic exchange where their current knowledge does not fulfil their needs, they fall back on the usage of their deficient knowledge to fill up the void and ward off awkward communicational breakdowns. This move, hence, may cause the generation of language forms not in accordance with the target ones.

*Teacher-Induced Errors*

It is widely recognized that underneath the detected errors in learner's interlanguage lies a range of didactic variables (Selinker, 1972). The syllabus adopted as well as the teacher's pedagogical orientations and credentials are, likewise, rated amongst the influential error-causing factors. Learners of all ages and competencies are known to extensively rely on their teachers' tuition. This, however, may, under some conditions, where the methodological tools in use, the teacher's own conceptualizations as to how languages are properly taught, the lack of balance between the teacher's gauges of the learner's current needs and the genuinely-faced hurdles may serve to hamper learning or bring about unwanted disturbances. Selinker (1972: 39) calls this 'transfer of training'.

**Crosslinguistic Influence Theory**

Deeply rooted in the language learning past archive and present research landscape, the theory of cross-linguistic influence has not ceased to deliver a great deal of insight into the province of language teaching, most notably in the all-too-perplexing arena of pronunciation learning. Odlin (1989), who wrote extensively on this notion, stated that crosslinguistic-influence-related debates and the discontent regarding the role of transfer in studying linguistic change (including the emergence of pidgins and creoles) could reliably be traced back to as early as the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, he goes on to argue, most of the work on transfer in the nineteenth century was essentially diachronic in orientation following the dominant philological professionalism which reined then and was predominantly preoccupied with language evolution and language families. Odlin, in his landmark work, gives a historical depiction of the phases the theory had gone through from the nineteenth century up till the early 1980s. In a more recent work, Ringbom (2007) traces the growth of the field from the early 1980s up till 2007. The theory, hence, does not suffer from the dearth of documentation and research which plagues recently-occurring ones and renders their inferences highly susceptible to rejection. The on-going maturity of the theory, therefore, bears witness to its robustness and readiness to help researchers to continue deciphering the language learning conundrum. Much to the delight of the scholars of phonetics and teachers of pronunciation, crosslinguistic influence

research has proven to be far more rewarding and its recommendations more credulous at the phonological level. A flurry of studies has acknowledged the close linkage holding between crosslinguistic influence and L2 sound pattern acquisition (Major, cited in Hansen Edwards and Zampini, 2008: 68).

The fundamental concept in crosslinguistic influence theory pertains to the influence exerted by old habits on the new ones. It is not the inevitable impact of the old upon the new that has enticed much controversy though; rather, it is the conditions under which the influence is prone to materialise and the extent to which it may facilitate or hinder learning that research has been striving to more satisfactorily account for (Major cited in Hansen Edwards and Zampini: 2008). Among the influential models that drew extensively on crosslinguistic influence are the oft-cited works of Andersen(1983) and Kellerman (1995). Note that these researchers used the less neutral word *transfer* instead of the more neutral one *crosslinguistic interference*. It is, hence, worthy of mention that in contemporary practices the former is hardly ever used. In these two elaborate models on second language acquisition, the researchers address the very concepts of similarity and difference and demonstrate how these contribute to setting the linguistic influence in motion.

### **Interlanguage Transfer**

Our discussion would well be patchy and fairly inadequate if no mention is made of *interlanguage transfer*. First and foremost, it is noteworthy that this notion comes up only when investigating bilinguals' learning of a further language. Interlanguage transfer designates the influence, be it constructive or otherwise, a second or a third language has in the acquisition process of an additional language. Gass and Selinker (2008: 155) surmise that 'theories of language transfer that purport to be general must include multiple language acquisition where interlanguage transfer is common and should in principle show that transfer effects exist longitudinally.' Indeed, how could one's inferences be justifiably valid if only the potential contributions of the mother tongue is gauged and accounted for, while any other languages co-existing with the mother tongue in the learner's linguistic repertoire are not adequately incorporated into one's interlanguage analyses? Indispensably necessary though this is, we believe that the inclusion of this dimension into one's analysis will render matters all the more intricate. Furthermore, we would put forth that in any discussion of interlanguage transfer, two major issues should come under scrutiny:

- 1- What are the conditions under which interlanguage transfer is set in motion?
- 2- Would cross-linguistic influence from the mother tongue be unfunctional if interlanguage transfer is in operation?

Now that we have touched upon the notion of interlanguage transfer, we will in the forthcoming paragraphs cite some illustrative examples of linguistic undertakings wherein this genre of crosslinguistic influence is reported on. Cenoz (2001) analysed language production of Spanish-Basque learners of English to gauge which factor, age, proficiency and learners' perception of the existing relatedness between the native language, the second language and English would have the most overriding influence on triggering off interlanguage transfer. He observed that the perceived linguistic distance or closeness on the learners' part was a big determinant. Additionally, age came out as one of the dominant factors: older learners fell back more often on their already amassed linguistic knowledge than did younger ones. Bild and Swain (1989) add to these factors the proficiency level in the languages. In a more recent study, Rothman and Cabrelli-Amaro (2010) showed that interlanguage transfer can be induced by the mother language or by any additional language depending on the 'linguistic level' per se. Framed differently, although these co-authors maintain that interlanguage transfer is prone to crop up, they contend that it may manifest itself at some linguistic layers and fall short of appearing in some others. Before we leave this discussion, it is worthy of mention that Gass and Selinker (2008) posit that this line of research is still under exploration: there is a paucity of empirical evidence as to how bilinguals go about learning another language.

Major (1997) claims that second language phonology had gained its fair share of interest in crosslinguistic-influence-oriented research. This genre of research is not in its infancy, we must adduce here. Probably the work of Weinreich (1953) can be considered the first of its kind to delineate the various components and dimensions of phonological transfer. The following are the various categories of phonological transfer that he distinguished; some of them are segmental whilst others are non-segmental:

1-*Phoneme substitution*: when the learner uses their first language's closest equivalent while attempting to emulate the target sound;

2-*Phonological processes*: when the learner uses constraints of their mother language which are distributed differently from those of the target language;

3-*Under-differentiation*: when the second language has phonemic distinctions not employed by the mother language sound inventory;

4-*Over-differentiation*: this is just the reverse of the preceding category. It obtains when some sound distinctions in the learner's language are not present in the second language;

5-*Phonotactic interference*: when there is lack of convergence in the syllabic make-up of the target and the mother language; and

6-*Prosodic interference*:



When the learner falls back on their prosodic constraints when attempting to abide by the norms of the target language. In a later work, Haugen (1956), in his landmark undertaking into bilingualism in the Americas, made use of virtually identical categorizations. There are, nonetheless, three labels that are dissimilar to those of Weinreich: he preferred *simple identification* to *soundsubstitution*; *divergent* was used instead of *under-differentiation*; while *convergent* was used instead of *over-differentiation*. Of all the aforementioned dimensions of transfer, the sixth one has been the least chartered in pronunciation research. In fact, learners' suprasegmental aptitude has not received its fair share of scholarly attention over the years at least according to the account of Luckyanchenko *et al* (2011).

### **Prosodic Transfer**

In the above discussion, an older name for prosodic transfer figures is prosodic interference. In almost all current work, however, this old term is no longer in common researchers' parlance.

Wenk (1985) claims that transfer is legitimately not an-all-or-nothing determinant of L2 prosody acquisition. He teased out in a longitudinal study of French learners of English that stress acquisition was not constrained by transfer all along; rather, the learning process went through a number of developmental phases. It was only during the beginning and intermediate phases that these learners drew upon their French accentual structures and, thereby, exhibited a hybrid stress pattern in their interlanguages. As their command of English increased, he concluded, they gradually steered away from their mother-tongue influence and adopted more native-like constraints. In a comparable later study into the acquisition of English pitch accent and stress assignment by Chinese learners, Juff (1990) found that erroneous allocations of stress were largely due to the teaching approaches institutionally deployed. He noted that over-careful speech was indeterminately underscored by the instructors which eventually resulted in learners erroneously placing stress on nearly every word in the sentence which runs counter to native norms: hardly did they un-stress function words when applicable.

### **The Participants and Data Collection Procedure**

Now that we have reviewed primary basic literature bearing on the subject matter under scrutiny, the upcoming space will take up the various practical components of our research work. It is prudent to mention right at this juncture that the study reported on herein constitutes but a portion of a larger research enterprise we have been conducting for the third year now. The undertaking as a whole is an essentially error-analysis-based prosodic undertaking that set out to investigate the production and perception of the English primary accentual patterns by MA English majors at the Department of Letters and English Language, Constantine University 1. In this paper we have

chosen to solely report on the findings, interpretations and some viable recommendations one of the research questionnaires used in this research has generated. We are both confident and fairly hopeful that these recommendations will contribute to helping the Phonetics and Phonology teachers and those of Spoken Language Proficiency and Listening Comprehension as well as syllabus designers to set up a more learner-friendly framework that would empower the future batches of Algerian learners to gain a far better mastery of English stress assignment both productively and receptively. The following discussion, then, will dwell on the particulars of the participants and the data-collection tool, a students' questionnaire.

For a number of intertwined reasons to be addressed shortly below, we have opted for second-year students reading for a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics at the aforementioned university. All the targeted respondents started their major studies in the third year of the BA programme; the first two years thereof were wholly devoted to a more general programme encompassing modules such as Literature and General Culture. Out of a totality of 100 students, 32 were randomly appointed to take part in the survey. Most of the participants had handed in the approved-of, final version of their Master's thesis by the time we started administering the questionnaire. In collaboration with my mentor, the students' tutor of Phonetics and Phonology of the foregoing academic year, most of the survey was conducted in a language laboratory. The selfsame respondents had previously undergone two diagnostic pronunciation-assessment tests. The first one encompasses 260 monomorphemic and affix words of different syllabic make-up (light, heavy and super-heavy syllables were used), moraic structure and different accentual patterns (stress on the penultimate, antepenultimate, etc). The second test comprises ten sentences. The informants' renderings of these inputs were digitally recorded and ultimately analysed. It is, indeed, the many and varied un-English renderings of these stretches of language that spawned the tailoring of this questionnaire.

Now that we have looked at the participants along with the circumstances under which the survey was run, we will proceed in what follows to address the rationale underpinning our choice of this specific genre of respondents together with the whys and wherefores for the tailoring of the questions. The current study sets itself the aim of getting to the bottom of the variables that have resulted in the persistence of accentual pattern anomalies in post-graduate Algerian learners' interlanguage phonology despite the ample linguistic tuition they have received over the years. It is worthy of mention that our informants had attended Phonetics and Phonology and had Spoken Language Proficiency classes in the foregoing year which were meant to be a crucial toolkit for them to build up a good phonological aptitude.



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By the same token, we are keen on working out whether or not crosslinguistic influence from the learners' linguistic repertoire is one of the overriding determinants of their ultimate success. Right at the outset of our study, we were of the contention that although interference from French and Standard Arabic could hamper learning, the impact of this factor is dwarfed by other factors, such as a gap in the internalised rules of English stress assignment, what makes a syllable stressed and the communicative strategies which seem to serve solely interactional fluidity with their fellow Algerian students.

Furthermore, given that most students at an advanced post-BA level locally have linguistic credentials for reading books and because of the inherent wealth of guidelines imbedded in phonetics books and pronunciation teaching manuals, we aimed to explore how much awareness our students hold about this. Additionally, as knowledge on stress allocation rules, we maintain, feeds immediately into students' performance, we felt it incumbent upon this research to check how much of it our students possess and whether or not deficient assimilation of these rule is one of the inducers of the diagnosed errors.

Owing to the fact that dictionaries wherein the phonemic transcription is provided for all existing entries could (when used strategically) be an asset for students of English irrespective of their proficiency level, we aimed to get a closer look at how much this tool is used by the respondents. What is more, the era of technological revolution we live in has endowed us, language practitioners, with electronic dictionaries containing 'pre-recorded renderings of entries'; this feature is, we claim, bound to solve a great deal about the pronunciation learning riddle for our learners. We, accordingly, want, to see how much importance our informants attach to such a rewarding device. We hypothesise that if dictionaries (electronic and print) are not wisely consulted by the students on a regular basis, their pronunciation will not be in happy harmony with the native norms.

**Data Analysis and Discussion of the Obtained Results**

Under this heading, we will discuss the respondents' answers and gauge how they correlate with the study's objectives and projected accomplishments. We will, for reasons of space constraints, blend and discuss the questions which had been devised to elicit comparable answers under the same item.

**Item one:** The first set of questions aimed to find out about the presence or absence of internalised knowledge of stressed syllables correlates and some rudimentary understanding as to how stress is assigned to affix and compound words. Regarding their knowledge of what hallmarks a stressed syllable, the overwhelming bulk of the respondents (72%) did not attempt to answer the question altogether. 15% sufficed with penning down stretches such as,

‘honestly, I do not know and I have no idea.’ The only answer we got was just inaccurate in the sense that the answerer did not even touch on one correlate of stressed syllables; some guidelines outlined in Roach (2009) were mentioned in their stead. He/she wrote, (reproduced verbatim) ‘the phonological features, the grammatical, the number of syllables.’ Data of some affinity with the above were obtained when the respondents ticked off the provided alternatives, when asked about the impact of prefixes and suffixes on stress maintenance or shift along with how stress behaves in compound words. Firstly, regarding prefixes influence on stress allocation, 27% ticked off the wrong alternative which says that prefixes make stress shift one syllable forward. 9% went, likewise, for the faulty alternative, prefixes make syllable shift one syllable back. Only one respondent got the answer right, while the remaining (61%) manifested their ignorance of these rules. Secondly, when asked about whether they discern any resemblance between suffixes and prefixes in view to how they impact stress placement, 45% of the participants ticked off wrong answers, while the rest (55%) got it right.

Lastly, unlike their answers about the above categories, when asked about how compounds are stressed, 39% got the answer right, 51% got it wrong. What is, however, patently obvious in the aforementioned data is that our informants’ display virtually no command of the ABC of stress assignment rules; notwithstanding the shallowness of the questions put about English stress, the correctness of their answers was borderline non-existent. Had they been asked more intricate questions about the state of affairs under scrutiny, their responses would have been all the more unsatisfactory. Their amassed errors, accordingly, could be partly ascribed to un-internalised rules about the traits and functioning of English stress. It goes without saying that the phonetics’ literature abounds in learner-friendly guidelines on this issue: we recommend the landmark book of Cruttenden (2014) as a primary reference for the novice learners who need to come to grips with the essentials of English accentual patterns. It is only natural to see our Algerian learners lagging behind phonetically while they continue to thrive at other linguistic levels because they do not seem to view pronunciation rules as ‘ordinary rules’ the same as grammar ones; they are not ‘pseudo-rules’ nor are they available for aesthetic objectives. Hence, it is perhaps legitimate to argue that only when our students’ learned perceptions of the pronunciation contribution for the wholeness and the wholesomeness of their interlanguage are altered, that we hope to see them make frantic efforts at this critical level.

**Item two:** We have mentioned earlier on that amongst the tenets of this study is measuring the students’ devotion to dictionary usage together with how they go about deploying this indispensable pronunciation-boosting tool. For this particular end, a set of questions was devised and here are the findings they endowed us with. When asked about their usage or non-usage of dictionaries,

more than half of the respondents (63%) reported that they used dictionaries, 37% do not utilise dictionaries for the enhancement of the totality of their language skills. A subsequent question aimed to find out which type of dictionaries, print or electronic, respondents customarily use. The data show that 33% of them use electronic dictionaries whilst the remaining 67% use print ones. They were subsequently asked to provide elucidations regarding the merits of the type they prefer. About the pros of electronic dictionaries, their answers varied: 'They don't take much time in reading and searching'; 'They help in learning correct pronunciation'; 'It is faster than the printed one'; 'It will help me to know how words are pronounced correctly'; 'It helps me not only read the transcription, but hear it also.'; 'They provide me with the both accents American and English.' On the other hand, users of print dictionaries cited the following reasons: 'It is easier'; 'I have not internet'; 'Electronic ones do not give you the specific things you need.'; 'It is available everywhere.' 'I dislike electronic books.' Of relevance to these questions is the one that sought to explore whether e-dictionary users take full advantage of all the features it has in store for them. 66% said that they solely suffice with listening to the pre-recorded renderings of the entries; 44% depend solely on the phonemic transcription. The immediate interpretations to take away here is that despite their multi-faceted functionality, electronic dictionaries are underused.

Consequently, this has robbed our informants of a readily accessible pronunciation-learning asset. It is, then, imperative that students are sensitised about the differing merits of electronic dictionaries and are spurred to use them in Spoken Language Proficiency Classes during their freshman year in order that they will develop constructive pronunciation-learning habits and this will ultimately ward off 'fossilisation' which will defy didactic interventions in later years. The syllabus of this module does not encompass any components which are devoted wholly to pronunciation-enhancement strategies and neither does the syllabus of Phonetics fill up this void. This is not only true in the first year; it is an oft-repeated scenario all along the BA and the MA training programmes. Spoken Language Proficiency Classes more often than not are conducted via a student-student interaction or a teacher-student one about pre-prepared topics or ad lib conversational exchanges. Corrective feedback is given, though, but this does not necessarily pay off as some students are disengaged when the feedback is given. Consequently, more properly structured, independent classes are, we believe, desperately needed for inculcating long-lasting appreciation of how dictionaries can be more than a mandatory tool for stress-placement rules mastery in particular and overall pronunciation accuracy in general.

**Item three:** In our endeavours to work out how savvy the learners are about the benefits of pronunciation-promoting programmes, we set up two questions. The

first question one was about whether or not students use such tools: 55% said they did use them while 45% answered that they did not. None the less, in a subsequent question which queried the naming of those software tools, only few out of the ones whose answers were positive appended names thereof: one informant mentioned *Phonetiser, a Pronunciation Coach*, one penned *Rosetta Stone* and *Tell Me More* and the third mentioned *Easy Speak*; 15% fallaciously named Oxford, Cambridge and Collins dictionaries whilst the rest, that intriguingly constitutes the majority (66%), fell short of giving the requested names. Here again, what is readily noticeable is that the informants are not well attuned to what Computer Assisted Pronunciation Learning (henceforth: CAPL) has in store for them. CAPL is an expanding research enterprise that has been gaining momentum year on year and has proven its robustness in the province of pronunciation learning (Elimat and Abuseikeel: 2014). We believe that given the notorious subtlety of the task, one cannot rightfully aspire to discard irregularities out of one's interlanguage phonology unless one takes the requisite measures and procedures. The aural and oral training these approved-of, computerised pronunciation-learning tools is incredible and, by implication, syllabus designers should pay due heed to incorporating into the curriculum some components which are prone to kindle the learners interest in exploring the advantages of CAPL research and giving them some guidelines about the usage of such software tools. However, training teachers on these tools is of paramount importance for the fruitful conduct of such a procedure. The infusion of the teaching on these software tools, such as *Tell Me More*, into the syllabus will at least contribute to generate, among other things:

- 1-The oft-sought learner autonomy;
- 2-expansion of the learners' language-learning-tools-horizon and means for extra-curricular activities; and
- 3-Usage of one of these tools which will whet the students' appetite to explore this world further and take advantage of the other tools on offer.

However, it is prudent to say before we leave this discussion that unless the tangible role of such tools is accentuated and the profitability potential is highlighted, the learners are not bound to be fully attentive to such training.

**Item four:** Reading phonetics books and pronunciation teaching manuals is, we surmise, a good coach for learners at all levels of linguistic competency. To delve deeper into the hampering variables which could be lying behind our informants deficient grasp of English stress, they were asked to name some of the books they have read and found genuinely insightful. One informant said that they used '*An Introduction to English Phonology* by April McMahon' and '*A Little Encyclopaedia of Phonetics*' by Roach; 27% said that they read Roach without any precision. 12% said that they did not read phonetics books altogether; the remaining respondents (48%) replied that they did not read books at all whether they be on phonetics or other subjects. A conceivably

accurate indication these answers give is that the informants' erroneous production is not fundamentally due to the inherent difficulty of English stress rules and the slippery rules on offer in phonetics books. The informants do not (as most of them are not into reading books of phonetics and some of them do not read at all) glean anything out of the richness imbedded in phonetics books. Over the years, phonetics books and pronunciation-teaching manuals have been developed and up-dated and novel dimensions are constantly being appended to expand their usability and usefulness, but the Algerian post-graduates, under investigation, do not seem to have a vested interest in the outcomes of the fertile collaboration of past, modern and contemporary phoneticians such as Jones, Quirk, Ladefoged and others. To conclude this discussion, we must underscore the potential contribution of introducing some drastic changes to the syllabi of Phonetics both at the undergraduate and the post-graduate levels. Framed more overtly:

1-Some compulsory reading of selected phonetics that suits the students' developmental stage must be implemented. Given time constraints and the countless pronunciation features taught, over-reliance on the teachers' tuition is by no means enough to promote the learning of English stress or the learning of any other aspect of pronunciation for that matter;

2-Students at university should not get those handouts altogether, because if they do anything at all, they are only distancing the students from the 'wonders and the manifold utilities' incorporated into phonetics books.

**Item five:** Students own perception of whether English accentual pattern is difficult or easy can be conducive of errors in the sense that their efforts to get the hang of the canonical structures and rid their accents of breaches of the rules will be insufficient. When asked about which of a set of pronunciation aspects are most cumbersome, the overwhelming majority (72%) ticked off 'stress assignment', 3% found vowels the most challenging; while 15% experienced far more learning hurdles articulating consonants. It is evident that the students do not rate stress placement as a readily learnable aspect of pronunciation. Hence, we may venture to say that their ill-formed pronunciations do not emanate from their distorted perception as to the daunting challenges surrounding stress rules. They will supposedly be geared up to make efforts once the right incentive is given. However, this recognition of the existing difficulty is not enough since (as shown above) the learning strategies per se are by no means facilitative of success. On the basis of this, we call for the integration into the Phonetics syllabus or that of Spoken Language Proficiency classes of components concerned with raising the students' awareness about the benefits of pronunciation-learning strategies, such as encouraging peer-correction, usage of electronic dictionaries and listening out to how the stressed syllables are articulated in non-modified native-speech.

**Item six:** Another question pertains to whether our informants strive to retain their national, cultural and (most crucially) linguistic identity when using English. Interestingly, their answers revealed that 63% of the respondents replied that they truly attempted to do so, while the remaining 27% said no. The data derived from this question seem to denote that students endeavours to preserve their differing identities when using English may consciously or otherwise render them less willing to pronounce in accordance with the native code's requirements. Although it is just natural that the informants are after sounding Algerian when using English, this should not, we maintain, entail that they should flout all the pronunciation maxims; identity maintenance should not be sought at the expense of intelligibility. What is prudent to pinpoint at this juncture of the discussion is that our students should alter this conceptualisation because no matter how much they try to bow to the stress placement norms and the pronunciation of segments, they assuredly will still sound Algerians. The objective of this will consequently be twofold:

1-Their 'national and linguistic belonging' will conspicuously manifest itself through their un-English intonation, their overt breaches of some pronunciation rules which are not half as detrimental to intelligibility as is distorted stress patterns (such as usage of elision and assimilation and syllabic consonants), grammar rules, collocational patterns and their not-always idiomatic use of language;

2-They will, via complying with accentual patterns norms, impart intelligibility to their speech which, when distorted, will render them difficult to listen to not only by native speakers but by their fellow Algerian learners who are well attuned to their pronunciation errors.

**Item seven:** In a similar vein, this questionnaire sought to elicit the range of strategies students rely on to get over the many and varied stress-learning hurdles. An open-ended question was set for this particular end. To begin with, 27% of the informants fell short of answering this question: no strategy was mentioned; neither did they write anything on the dotted lines. Those who cited their strategies displayed a patent dearth of them and an un-sophisticated set of tactics used and did not elucidate in what ways the strategies were helpful and how they go about their strategic manoeuvres. 18% penned that they used solely one means for this end: dictionaries. 6% reported that they reverted to transcription exercises; 3% rely on rote learning of stress rules; 18% sufficed with listening to native speakers; 12% depended on reading and listening; 3% recorded their own voice and then compared it to that of the native speaker. The remaining 12% of the respondents replied that they read books and used dictionaries and BBC podcasts. Although this is an open question (as mentioned above), intriguingly, the respondents' answers converge; the informants deployed strategies that neatly fall into a 'few types' most of them not well-devised. What can be drawn from these findings is that more needs to



be done on this front on the part of students and teachers alike because their own accounts of the tactics that they use is very shallow which reflects a defective grasp of the range of strategies that can foster good mastery of accentual pattern..

### **Conclusion**

Our first foray into the interlanguage accentual patterns of Algerian post-graduate English majors has striven to disclose a number of dimensions thereof which have been heretofore uncharted; no study of this scale and scope has been conducted at the Department of Letters and English language, Constantine University 1. The present paper sought to identify the error-inducing variables and come up with a number of remedial suggestions and guidelines which are prone to sensitise all the members of the local language learning academic community. Students, teachers and syllabi designers are called to pay far more heed to an integral facet of students' interlanguage phonology that had not been explored prior to the conception and commencement of our research work: post-graduate accentual structures aptitude. Accordingly, we can enumerate a number of recommendations the data analysis and interpretations have generated:

- 1- Explicit instruction about stress correlates should be optimised if we are truly after gearing the Algerian students up for a subsequent ongoing growth of their knowledge on how English stress works. This is fundamentally because it is rather immature and potentially unhelpful to spell out the rules of stress placement, if learners are still grappling with the very elementary concept of what it is that defines a 'stressable syllable' and how do stressed and unstressed syllables differ. Exaggerated stressing of syllables could pay off here. Moreover, using 'Praat' to visually show the learners how the pitch contours operate and the fundamental role pitch plays in setting stressed and unstressed syllables apart is forecast to be of value, too. Students should also be explicitly taught about the linkage holding between the vocalic make-up of syllables and stress. Furthermore, full/partial articulation should, by the same token, be contextually taught. The decontextualized teaching of pronunciation is, we believe, not prone to make the teaching atmosphere lively and will eventually only serve to minimise the forecast instructional outcome.
- 2- Phonetics textbooks and pronunciation teaching manuals provide a whole host of materials capable of optimising to a great extent the learners' readiness to assimilate the rules and guidelines about stress allocation. Although the English sound system is notorious for the subtlety of its accentual patterns, these books, old and new, offer ample opportunity for learners to help them surmount the difficulties.

Furthermore, the teachers and learners should explore the range of research articles and dissertations which tackle these issues and other pronunciation issues since these scholarly products may offer substantial guidance not present in pronunciation teaching manuals.

- 3- Much research into the payoffs and viability of Computer Assisted Pronunciation Learning lays especial emphasis on the many and matchless merits of computer technology in the pronunciation learning sphere as a whole, not only stress learning. These software tools could be a big asset for the Algerian learners of English to get over at least some 'drastic deviations' from the native norms. The present study has not tested this presumption, but the advantages of the fully-fledged features of such digitalised tools 'stare us all in the eye'.
- 4- Finally, 'pronunciation-learning strategies' must be infused as an independent component into the syllabus of English Phonetics and Phonology. Important and indispensably necessary though English stress is, the knowledge thereof is not enough for fostering a better command of English stress productively and better comprehension skills. Learning strategies are, we insistently argue, of premium significance not least because they serve to yield, amongst other things, learner autonomy and empower the learners to monitor their own phonological growth.

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**Appendix**

**Students' Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is part of our research which aims to analyse the interlanguage accentual patterns of advanced learners of English. Please, answer the questions figuring herein by ticking off the right box when applicable or writing on the dotted lines. I hereby express my heartfelt, lasting gratitude to you for your collaboration.

1) Since when have you been an English language major?

2007  2009

2) A number of features work together to make stressed syllables stand out in their respective phonological environments. Can you mention them?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3) Regarding their impact on word stress placement, prefixes:

Make stress shift one syllable forward

Make stress shift one syllable back

Do not impact stress placement altogether

I do not know

4) Stress-allocation wise, suffixes behave exactly like prefixes.

Yes  No  I do not know

5) In compound words:

The first element of the compound is always stressed

The second element is always stressed

Both the first and the second receive primary stress

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**It all depends on the nature of the compound**

**I do not know**

6) Other rules, please mention them:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

7) Will you call yourself a devoted user of dictionaries to learn the pronunciation of new vocabulary items?

**Yes**  **No**

8) If your answer is yes, which dictionaries do you frequently use?

**Print**  **Electronic**

9) Can you explain why, please?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

10) When using electronic dictionaries, do you:

**Suffice with the listening out to the prerecorded pronunciation of the individual words**

**You depend on the phonemic transcription only and never use the above feature**

**You use them both together**

11) Have you over the years used any pronunciation-promoting software tools?

**Yes**  **No**

12) If your answer is yes, would you kindly name it (them).....

.....  
.....  
.....

13) If reading has contributed to your knowledge in this area, cite the titles of some of the books you have found the most insightful?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

14) Which of the forthcoming pronunciation points has been the most challenging for you over the years?

English vowels  English consonants  English stress assignment

15) When you speak English, do you want to preserve your national, cultural and linguistic identity?

Yes  No

16) There are certainly many learning strategies for the language learner to get over the difficulties of stress. Cite some of the most effective ones you have used to master English stress.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

..... Thank you for your time and energy.