

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FRENCH VOWEL SYSTEM VIS-A-VIS ENGLISH AND UKRAINIAN IN THE CONTEXT OF PHONETICS TEACHING

ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ СИСТЕМИ ГОЛОСНИХ ФРАНЦУЗЬКОЇ МОВИ З АНГЛІЙСЬКОЮ ТА УКРАЇНСЬКОЮ В КОНЕКСТІ ВИКЛАДАННЯ ФОНЕТИКИ

Kikalo A.V.,

orcid.org/0000-0002-6541-3952

PhD in Philology,

*Associate Professor at the Department of Romance Languages and Foreign Literature
Uzhhorod National University*

Smuzhanytsia D.I.,

orcid.org/0000-0002-3342-6927

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor,

*Head of the Department of Romance Languages and Foreign Literature
Uzhhorod National University*

In modern language teaching, the plurilingual approach to foreign language learning is becoming increasingly relevant, as it takes into account the entire linguistic repertoire of learners. In most educational contexts, French is studied after English; consequently, the acquisition of its phonetic system takes place amidst the interaction of several languages – the learner's native language and their first foreign language. This necessitates research into cross-linguistic interference at the phonetic level, which is one of the most sensitive to the influence of prior linguistic experience. A comparative analysis shows that the French vowel system is characterised by a greater number of vowel phonemes, as well as the presence of front labialised and nasalised vowels, which are absent in Ukrainian and English. This poses significant difficulties for Ukrainian-speaking students. It has been established that the influence of English as a first foreign language is often more pronounced than that of the native language, manifesting itself in the diphthongisation of French vowels, the reduction of unstressed positions, and the substitution of individual phonemes with English articulation patterns. At the same time, interference from the native language is predominantly of an articulatory nature. Furthermore, a comparative phonemic analysis helps to identify those phonemes that are shared or very similar. The obtained results confirm the validity of applying contrastive-phonetic and plurilingual approaches in the teaching of French as a foreign language. A systematic comparison of the phonetic systems of Ukrainian, English and French contributes to an awareness of cross-linguistic differences, a reduction in interference and the development of more effective phonetic competence among students.

Key words: plurilingual approach, cross-linguistic interference, phonetic interference, phonological transfer, French as a foreign language, contrastive phonetics, foreign language teaching methodology.

У сучасній лінгводидактиці дедалі більшої актуальності набуває плюрилінгвальний підхід до навчання іноземних мов, який передбачає врахування всього мовного репертуару здобувачів освіти. У більшості освітніх контекстів французька мова вивчається після англійської, тому формування її фонетичної системи відбувається в умовах взаємодії кількох мов – рідної та першої іноземної. Це зумовлює необхідність дослідження міжмовної інтерференції на фонетичному рівні, який є одним із найчутливіших до впливу попереднього мовного досвіду. Найбільшу складність у процесі постановки французької вимови викликає саме засвоєння французьких голосних фонем. Порівняльний аналіз показує, що французька вокалічна система характеризується більшою загальною кількістю голосних фонем, переважанням передніх голосних, наявністю передніх огублених та назалізованих голосних, які відсутні в українській та англійській мовах, що створює значні труднощі для україномовних студентів. Встановлено, що вплив англійської мови як першої іноземної часто є більш виразним, ніж вплив рідної мови, що проявляється у дифтонгізації французьких голосних, редукції ненаголошених позицій та підміні окремих фонем англійськими артикуляційними моделями. Водночас інтерференція рідної мови має переважно артикуляційний характер. Разом з тим, зіставний фонемний аналіз сприяє виокремленню тих голосних фонем, які є спільними чи дуже подібними, зокрема у французькій та українській мовах, що полегшує засвоєння правильної французької вимови. Отримані результати підтверджують доцільність застосування контрастивно-фонетичного та плюрилінгвального підходів у викладанні французької мови як іноземної. Систематичне зіставлення фонетичних систем української, англійської та французької мов сприяє усвідомленню міжмовних відмінностей, зменшенню інтерференції та формуванню ефективнішої фонетичної компетентності студентів.

Ключові слова: плюрилінгвальний підхід, міжмовна інтерференція, фонетична інтерференція, фонологічний трансфер, французька мова як іноземна, контрастивна фонетика, методика викладання іноземних мов.

Problem statement. Given current trends in the development of language teaching methodology, the plurilingual approach to foreign language teaching is taking on particular significance, as it involves taking

into account the full linguistic repertoire of learners. The learning of French as a foreign language (FLE) increasingly takes place not in isolation, but within the context of existing linguistic systems – the mother

tongue (MT) and the first foreign language (FL1), most often English. This necessitates a complex analysis of interlinguistic influences, particularly at the phonetic level, which is one of the most susceptible to linguistic interference.

The pronunciation of French vowels presents considerable difficulties for students due to the significant differences between the phonological systems of Ukrainian, English and French. Interference from the mother tongue manifests itself primarily in articulatory habits, rhythmic and intonational patterns, and vowel reduction, whilst the influence of English as the first foreign language often leads to the substitution of French phonemes with English ones, a misinterpretation of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and the transfer of English prosodic patterns. The result is a specific type of accent, determined by the interaction of several linguistic systems.

In this context, traditional approaches to teaching French phonetics, which are mainly based on comparison with the learner's mother tongue, need to be revised. The plurilingual approach not only enables the identification of negative manifestations of interlingual interference, but also allows for the exploitation of positive transfer by consciously drawing on English language skills to develop phonetic competence in French. Such an approach promotes the development of students' metalinguistic awareness and enhances the effectiveness of pronunciation learning.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

The issue of the influence of previously acquired languages on the pronunciation of a new foreign language occupies a significant place in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory and in contemporary research on plurilingualism. The classic concept used to describe this phenomenon is that of cross-linguistic influence, developed in the work of T. Odlin, who defines linguistic transfer as the systematic transfer of phonological, grammatical and lexical features from one language to another [9, p. 27–35].

The concept of multicompetence, proposed by V. Cook, views the linguistic systems of a multilingual speaker as a single cognitive framework, within which all languages interact constantly [5, p. 57–91]. From this perspective, the phonetic influence of the first foreign language on the second appears as a natural consequence of the simultaneous activation of several linguistic systems during language production.

The development of research on multilingualism has led to increased interest in the phonology of the third language (L3 phonology). In the edited volume

edited by J. Cenoz, B. Hufeisen and U. Jessner, the psycholinguistic mechanisms underlying the influence of the first and second languages on the formation of the third language's phonological system are analysed, with particular emphasis on the role of the level of linguistic competence and the order of language acquisition [4, p. 3-12].

Empirical studies confirm that, in the field of phonetics, the influence of the first foreign language (FL1) can be stronger than that of the mother tongue (MT), particularly when FL1 is typologically closer to the target language. Thus, R. Llama, W. Cardoso and L. Collins have demonstrated that the pronunciation of the second foreign language (FL2) is largely influenced by FL1 rather than by the ML, provided that the learner has a high level of proficiency in the first foreign language [7, p. 42-50].

Reviews in the phonology of second language acquisition (SLA), notably the volume edited by K. Hansen and M. Zampini, confirm that phonetic difficulties in foreign language learning result from the interaction of several linguistic systems, and not solely from the direct influence of the mother tongue [6, p. 1-15].

In the Ukrainian academic context, the issue of the influence of L1 on the pronunciation of the second language is approached from a methodological perspective. Thus, O. Panteleieva and O. Kobrynets analyse the influence of English as L1 on the development of phonetic skills in French (L2) among philology students [1, p. 33-35]. Similar results have been obtained in studies devoted to the acquisition of German following English, where phonetic interference is regarded as a systemic phenomenon [2; 8].

The aim of this article is to analyse the influence of the pronunciation of the mother tongue (MT) and English (L1) on the development of the phonetic system of French vowels within a plurilingual learning context, as well as to identify the methodological implications for the teaching of French as a foreign language (FLE) following English.

Methodology / Methods. This research is theoretical-analytical and contrastive-phonetic in nature and falls within the framework of the plurilingual approach to foreign language learning. Plurilingual approaches to languages and cultures are based on the integration and interaction of the different languages known to the learner, thereby promoting the development of comprehensive plurilingual competence [3, p.7]. The methodological basis of the study rests on the principles of cross-linguistic influence theory, the concept of multilingual competence, and contemporary research in the

phonology of the first and second foreign languages (FL1/FL2 phonology).

The study employs a contrastive phonological analysis aimed at identifying structural similarities and differences between the vowel systems of three languages, as well as determining potential areas of cross-linguistic interference during the acquisition of French pronunciation.

The analytical procedure involves comparing phonemic inventories, analysing articulatory properties, and interpreting the typical difficulties associated with the pronunciation of French vowels in a multilingual learning context.

Results and discussion. The theoretical foundations regarding the influence of L1 on the development of phonetic competence in the acquisition of French as L2 allow us to identify a set of relevant pedagogical implications. In particular, the results of previous research confirm that phonetic development in a multilingual context is not additive, but results from a complex interaction of already acquired phonetic systems, notably that of the L1 [9; 11].

The practical part of the study is based on a contrastive analysis of the vowel systems of Ukrainian, English and French, in order to identify typical phonetic difficulties and pronunciation errors in the learning of French as a second foreign language. The analysis takes into account the fact that Ukrainian is the mother tongue (MT), whilst English is the first foreign language (FL1), already exerting a stable influence on the students' articulatory habits.

The vowel system of Ukrainian is characterised by a relatively small number of vowel phonemes and by the absence of any phonological distinction based on tension or length. In contrast, English has a well-developed system of monophthongs and diphthongs, in which vowel length and quality have distinctive value. As for the vowel system of French, it is distinguished by the presence of rounded front vowels ([y], [ø], [œ]) as well as nasal vowels, which are absent in both Ukrainian and English.

A comparative analysis of the vowel phoneme systems of Ukrainian, English and French reveals significant quantitative and qualitative differences, which play a fundamental role in the development of phonetic competence in a foreign language within a multilingual context. Ukrainian is characterised by a compact and symmetrical system of six vowel phonemes ([i, e, ε, a, o, u]), devoid of phonological length, diphthongisation and nasalisation. This stability promotes clear phonemic distinction, but at the same time limits speakers' ability to perceive subtle articulatory contrasts.

English has an expanded and highly differentiated vowel system, including the distinction between long and short vowels, reduced central phonemes ([ə, ɜ:]) and a developed system of diphthongs. When English is used as a first foreign language (FL1), this often leads to cross-linguistic interference in the learning of French, notably in the form of undesirable diphthongisation of French monophthongs and excessive vowel reduction.

Table 1

Comparative breakdown of vowel phonemes in Ukrainian, English and French

Place of articulation	open/close	rounded	nasal	Ukrainian	English	French
front	close	–	–	[i]	[i:], [ɪ]	[i]
front	close	+	–	—	—	[y]
front	close-mid	–	–	[e]	[e]	[e]
front	close-mid	+	–	—	—	[ø]
front	open-mid	–	–	[ε]	[æ]	[ε]
front	open-mid	+	–	—	—	[œ]
front	open	–	–	—	—	[a]
front	open-mid	–	+	—	—	[ɛ̃]
front	open-mid	+	+	—	—	[œ̃]
central	mid	–	–	—	[ɜ:], [ə]	[ə]
central	open	–	–	—	[ʌ]	—
back	close	+	–	[u]	[u:], [ʊ]	[u]
back	close-mid	+	–	[o]	[ɔ:], [ɒ]	[o]
back	open-mid	+	–	—	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
back	open	–	–	[ɑ]	[ɑ:]	[ɑ]
back	open	–	+	—	—	[ã]
back	open-mid	+	+	—	—	[õ]

French has the largest number of vowel phonemes and is characterised by greater articulatory complexity, due to the presence of rounded front vowels ([y, ø, œ]) and nasal vowels ([ã, ê, ô, õ]). The absence of these phonemic categories in Ukrainian and English explains the persistent difficulty in producing and perceiving them, thus constituting a source of foreign accent.

Teaching implications. The results obtained confirm the relevance of a contrastive-phonetic approach in the teaching of French as a foreign language. Practical analysis confirms that the development of phonetic competence in French is influenced in two ways – by the mother tongue and by the first foreign language.

For Ukrainian-speaking learners, particular methodological attention should be paid to:

- teaching rounded front vowels as distinct phonemes, rather than as allophonic variants;
- mastering nasal vowels as independent phonemes, rather than as a combination of a vowel and a nasal consonant;
- neutralising the negative influence of English, in particular avoiding the diphthongisation of French vowels and excessive reduction in unstressed positions.

The systematic comparison of the vowel systems of the three languages, accompanied by articulatory descriptions, listening and perception exercises, helps to reduce interlinguistic interference and improve students' phonetic proficiency.

In practice, this manifests itself in typical interference phenomena such as:

- the substitution of the French [y] with the Ukrainian [u] or the English [ju:] (*tu* → [tu] or [tju]), whilst [ø] and [œ] are brought closer to [ɜ:] or [ə] (*deux, peur*), and the semi-open vowels [ɛ] and [ɔ] are realised as the more tense English vowels [e] and [ɔ:];
- the neutralisation of the distinctions between [e] – [ɛ] and [o] – [ɔ] under the influence of long and short English vowels;
- the denasalisation of French nasal vowels ([ã], [õ], [ẽ]) with the addition of a consonant [n] or [m] (*bon* → [bɔn], *vin* → [vɪn]), resulting from the articulatory patterns of Ukrainian and English;
- the diphthongisation of French vowels following the English model (*beau* → [bəʊ]), which contradicts the norms of the French vowel system.

As research on interlinguistic phonetic interaction shows, it is precisely these areas of divergence that become sources of lasting interference if conscious phonetic work is not undertaken.

Let us add a few more comments regarding vowel phonemes that are similar in these three languages or

may appear very close. In such cases, the teacher's role is to avoid the negative influence of English pronunciation and to draw attention to the similarity between French and Ukrainian vowels.

The phoneme [e] is very common in French; it also exists in English and Ukrainian, so when learning it, particular attention should be paid to its orthographic representations. The front vowel [a] in French can pose difficulties: it is often replaced by English or Ukrainian vowels belonging to the back vowel series (note that, in classical French, such a vowel also existed, but it tends to disappear in modern pronunciation). When learning the phoneme [i], which does not present any major articulatory difficulty for Ukrainian students, care should nevertheless be taken to avoid substituting it with the short [ɪ] of English.

Thus, within the framework of the plurilingual approach, it is appropriate to use targeted contrastive exercises, simultaneously engaging the three linguistic systems and developing students' awareness of interlinguistic differences at the phonetic level.

Conclusions. A contrastive analysis of the phonetic systems of Ukrainian, English and French has confirmed the initial hypothesis that the acquisition of French pronunciation as a foreign language in a multilingual context results from the interaction of several linguistic systems. The influence of the mother tongue and the first foreign language manifests itself in different ways; the teacher's role therefore becomes essential in drawing learners' attention to the positive and negative aspects of the influence of their pre-existing phonological competence.

The results obtained show that English, as the first foreign language, often plays a decisive role in the emergence of interference phenomena in French pronunciation, particularly in the realisation of vowel phonemes. In contrast, the influence of Ukrainian is mainly of an articulatory nature and linked to established motor speech habits. This asymmetry confirms the need to take into account not only the mother tongue, but also prior experience of learning the first foreign language (English) when teaching French phonetics.

Furthermore, the analysis carried out shows that interlinguistic interference should not be viewed solely as an obstacle to the development of phonetic competence. Within the framework of the plurilingual approach, it can serve as a teaching resource (i. e. transposition), provided it is identified and addressed systematically through a contrastive approach. The conscious comparison of phonetic phenomena in Ukrainian, English and French promotes the

development of students' metaphonetic reflection and creates the conditions for a more effective assimilation of French pronunciation.

Thus, the results of this study confirm the relevance of reorienting the methodology of teaching French as a foreign language towards a plurilingual model, in which phonetic interference

is viewed as a natural stage of the learning process. Prospects for future research lie in the empirical verification of the effectiveness of contrastive phonetic exercises, as well as in the development of didactic models for teaching pronunciation that take into account the individual linguistic profiles of learners.

REFERENCES:

1. Пантелєєва О., Кобринець О. Вплив англійської мови як першої іноземної на формування фонетичних навичок французької мови. *Іноземні мови*. 2021. № 2. С. 32–38.
2. Рибалка О., Михальченко О. Фонетична інтерференція при вивченні другої іноземної мови після англійської. *Наукові записки з філології*. 2024. № 3. С. 115–121.
3. Candelier M. (dir.). *CARAP : Cadre de référence pour les approches plurielles des langues et des cultures*. Graz : Centre européen pour les langues vivantes du Conseil de l'Europe, 2007. 135 p.
4. Cenoz J., Hufeisen B., Jessner U. (eds.). *Cross-linguistic Influence in Third Language Acquisition: Psycholinguistic Perspectives*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001. 192 p.
5. Cook V. *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*. London: Edward Arnold, 1992. 296 p.
6. Hansen Edwards J. G., Zampini M. L. (eds.). *Phonology and Second Language Acquisition*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008. 378 p.
7. Llana R., Cardoso W., Collins L. The Influence of Language Distance and Language Status on the Acquisition of L3 Phonology. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. 2010. Vol. 7, No. 1. P. 39–57.
8. Makukhina O. Phonetic Interference in Learning German as a Second Foreign Language after English. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*. 2024. Vol. 20, No. 1. P. 210–220.
9. Odlin T. *Language Transfer: Cross-linguistic Influence in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. 224 p.
10. Ringbom H. *Cross-linguistic Similarity in Foreign Language Learning*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007. 190 p.
11. Wrembel M. *Second Language Phonology and Multilingualism*. In: *The Cambridge Handbook of Third Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. P. 275–296.



Стаття поширюється на умовах ліцензії відкритого доступу CC BY 4.0

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 30.04.2026
Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 22.05.2026
Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 29.05.2026