

**Linguistic Insecurity in Academic Communication: The Case of First-Year French Students at the University of Constantine (Algeria)**

**Dr Khedidja Salim**

Université Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila

[salim.khadidja@centre\\_univ\\_mila.dz](mailto:salim.khadidja@centre_univ_mila.dz)

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**ABSTRACT**

This article proposes a theoretically grounded framework for analysing linguistic insecurity in academic communication among first-year students enrolled in French-medium programmes at the University of Constantine, Algeria. Drawing on sociolinguistic scholarship on linguistic insecurity, linguistic markets, and postcolonial multilingualism, the study examines how the transition from Arabic-medium secondary education to French-medium university instruction shapes students' perceptions of linguistic legitimacy. Through conceptual synthesis of research on Algeria's language policy, educational structures, and language ideologies, the article identifies key dimensions of linguistic insecurity affecting oral and written academic practices. It highlights how regional origin, schooling trajectories, and family cultural capital mediate access to valued linguistic resources within the university as a stratified linguistic market. By integrating structural, ideological, and interactional perspectives, the study advances a multi-level model of linguistic insecurity in postcolonial higher education and outlines directions for future empirical investigation.

**Keywords:** linguistic insecurity, linguistic market, higher education, multilingualism, sociolinguistics.

**INTRODUCTION**

Linguistic insecurity refers to the negative self-evaluation speakers develop when they perceive a discrepancy between their linguistic practices and socially recognised norms of legitimacy (Labov, 2006). Rather than reflecting objective incompetence, it emerges from hierarchies of linguistic value that privilege certain varieties, registers, and accents while marginalising others. Foundational work has shown that insecurity often manifests through heightened awareness of prestige forms, hypercorrection, and persistent feelings of inadequacy (Labov, 2006; Francard, 1993). Subsequent scholarship has refined the concept by distinguishing formal, status-related, identity-related, and situational dimensions of insecurity, particularly in multilingual contexts where languages themselves are hierarchised (Calvet, 1999; Bretegnier, 1999).

In postcolonial societies, linguistic insecurity acquires additional complexity. Former colonial languages frequently retain institutional dominance in higher education and high-status professions, even when national policies symbolically valorise indigenous or national languages. In Algeria, Arabic, Berber, and French coexist within historically sedimented power relations shaped by colonisation, Arabisation policies, and ongoing global hierarchies

(Benrabah, 2013; Taleb-Ibrahimi, 1995). French occupies a paradoxical position: officially foreign yet functionally central in scientific and technical higher education. This configuration produces structural discontinuities, particularly when students educated primarily through Arabic at secondary level must abruptly transition to French-medium university instruction.

The university constitutes a specific linguistic market in which certain forms of language are recognised as legitimate capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Students enter this market with unequally distributed linguistic resources shaped by regional origin, schooling trajectories, and family cultural capital. When institutional norms presuppose mastery of academic French aligned with metropolitan standards, students whose repertoires diverge from these norms may experience delegitimisation that extends beyond linguistic form to academic identity. Research on foreign language anxiety further suggests that such contexts intensify apprehension, self-monitoring, and avoidance strategies, particularly in oral academic interaction (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Despite extensive research on Algeria's language policy and sociolinguistic ecology, limited attention has been given to linguistic insecurity as a structuring mechanism in French-medium higher education. Existing studies document plurilingual practices, language attitudes, and pedagogical challenges (Queffélec et al., 2002; Cherrad-Bencheffa, 2016), yet few analyses systematically integrate postcolonial language hierarchies, educational discontinuities, and academic communication within a unified theoretical framework.

This article addresses this gap by developing a theoretically grounded model of linguistic insecurity among first-year students enrolled in French-medium programmes at the University of Constantine. It seeks to clarify how insecurity can be conceptualised in relation to the transition from Arabic-medium secondary education to French-medium university instruction, how it may differ across oral and written academic modalities, and how it intersects with broader sociolinguistic stratifiers such as regional background, schooling history, and family cultural capital. By integrating structural, ideological, and interactional perspectives, the article proposes a multi-level framework intended to guide future empirical research in Algerian and comparable postcolonial higher education contexts.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a theory-driven conceptual research design aimed at constructing an integrated analytical framework for examining linguistic insecurity in French-medium higher education in Algeria. Rather than reporting primary empirical data, the article systematically synthesises established sociolinguistic scholarship in order to clarify conceptual relationships and articulate a model adapted to the Algerian university context.

The methodological approach is structured around three complementary analytical axes.

First, the study revisits foundational theoretical work on linguistic insecurity and linguistic stratification. Core constructs related to norm internalisation, hypercorrection, self-evaluation, symbolic capital, and linguistic markets were identified and comparatively examined across key contributions (Labov, 2006; Francard, 1993; Calvet, 1999; Bourdieu, 1991). Particular attention was given to distinctions between formal, status-related, identity-related, and situational dimensions of insecurity, as well as to mechanisms through which educational institutions participate in the reproduction of linguistic hierarchies.

Second, scholarship on postcolonial multilingualism and language ideologies was mobilised to contextualise these constructs within settings where the medium of instruction corresponds to a former colonial language. Concepts such as truncated repertoires, orders of indexicality, investment, and symbolic violence were examined to understand how insecurity operates when institutional legitimacy is anchored in an externally valorised linguistic norm (Blommaert, 2010; Norton, 2013; Pavlenko, 2005). This stage allowed refinement of the theoretical dimensions by incorporating structural asymmetries characteristic of postcolonial educational systems.

Third, the analysis integrates research on Algeria's sociolinguistic ecology and language policy history in order to situate the conceptual framework within a specific institutional configuration. Sources addressing Arabisation policies, the functional dominance of French in scientific education, and regional variation in linguistic exposure were systematically reviewed (Grandguillaume, 1983; Taleb-Ibrahimi, 1995; Benrabah, 2013; Queffélec et al., 2002). This contextual grounding enables the theoretical model to be anchored in the structural discontinuity between Arabic-medium secondary education and French-medium university instruction.

The University of Constantine is used as an analytical focal point because it exemplifies this discontinuity in a concentrated form. As a major public university drawing student from diverse regional and socioeconomic backgrounds, and as an institution in which scientific faculties operate exclusively in French from first year onward, it represents a paradigmatic site for observing tensions between language policy, educational trajectories, and academic communication norms. The institution functions analytically as a case configuration through which broader structural mechanisms can be examined, rather than as the site of an empirical sample.

The analytical procedure followed an iterative process of conceptual mapping. Theoretical constructs were first extracted and grouped into preliminary categories. These categories were then re-examined in light of the Algerian institutional context, allowing identification of interaction patterns across macro-level policy structures, meso-level sociolinguistic trajectories (region, schooling, family capital), and micro-level communicative practices (oral participation, writing strategies, self-monitoring). The final stage consisted of integrating these levels into a coherent multi-layered explanatory model and formulating theoretically grounded propositions suitable for empirical testing.

As a conceptual synthesis, the study does not provide statistical measurement or field-based observation. Its validity rests on the coherence of theoretical integration and on the convergence of findings across established bodies of literature. The model proposed here is therefore presented as a heuristic framework intended to guide future empirical research, including survey-based measurement of linguistic insecurity, qualitative investigation of student trajectories, and classroom discourse analysis in French-medium Algerian higher education.

## **RESULTS**

### **Structure of the conceptual synthesis**

The results presented here derive from systematic conceptual integration rather than primary data collection. They consist of analytically constructed typologies and structural mappings

grounded in established sociolinguistic scholarship. The objective is to clarify how linguistic insecurity can be modelled in the context of French-medium higher education in Algeria and to identify its principal dimensions, manifestations, and structuring mechanisms.

### **Conceptual profile of linguistic insecurity in the Constantine context**

The synthesis positions linguistic insecurity as a structurally embedded feature of first-year academic experience in French-medium scientific programmes at the University of Constantine. The abrupt transition from Arabic-medium secondary schooling to French-medium disciplinary instruction generates intensified normative pressure around language use (Benrabah, 2013; Taleb-Ibrahimi, 1995). This pressure is experienced as heightened awareness of discrepancy between students' habitual linguistic repertoires and the forms institutionally recognised as legitimate.

This awareness extends beyond grammatical correctness to encompass pronunciation, discourse organisation, and alignment with metropolitan models of French. In peripheral francophone contexts, standards operate as abstract and externalised benchmarks against which local practices are implicitly measured and frequently devalued (Milroy, 2001; Francard, 1993). The resulting insecurity is not reducible to linguistic deficiency but emerges from symbolic hierarchies embedded in the academic linguistic market.

Calvet's typology provides an effective analytical grid for differentiating dimensions of insecurity in this setting (Calvet, 1999). Formal insecurity relates to conformity with prescriptive norms. Status insecurity reflects the paradoxical hierarchy in which French holds greater institutional capital in scientific domains despite Arabic's official status. Identity-related insecurity arises when French-medium academic performance is experienced as dissonant with primary linguistic affiliations. Situational insecurity intensifies in high-stakes contexts such as examinations or public oral participation (Bretegnier, 1999).

These dimensions intersect and reinforce one another. Linguistic insecurity thus operates simultaneously at formal, symbolic, and identity levels, shaping both academic participation and self-positioning within the university.

**Table 1 : Dimensions of linguistic insecurity in french-medium higher education (Conceptual Mapping)**

<b>Dimension of Insecurity</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Structural Source</b>	<b>Typical Academic Manifestations</b>	<b>Key Theoretical References</b>
<b>Formal Insecurity</b>	Anxiety related to conformity with prescriptive norms of grammar, pronunciation, lexicon, and discourse organisation	Normative orientation toward metropolitan standards of French	Hypercorrection, excessive self-monitoring, fear of error, linguistic self-censorship	Calvet (1999); Francard (1993); Milroy (2001)
<b>Status Insecurity</b>	Awareness of hierarchical positioning of	French as dominant capital in	Perception of French as prerequisite for	Calvet (1999); Bourdieu

	languages within institutional domains	scientific fields despite Arabic's official status	academic legitimacy; internalised linguistic hierarchy	(1991); Sebaa (2002)
<b>Identity-Related Insecurity</b>	Tension between academic performance in French and primary linguistic affiliations	Postcolonial language ideology and symbolic power	Ambivalence toward French; distancing from vernacular repertoires in academic contexts	Norton (2013); Pavlenko (2005); Benrabah (2013)
<b>Situational Insecurity</b>	Intensification of insecurity in normatively demanding communicative contexts	High-stakes evaluation settings within academic linguistic market	Oral examinations, public speaking avoidance, performance anxiety	Bretegnier (1999); Horwitz et al. (1986)

**Manifestations in oral academic communication**

Oral academic interaction constitutes a central site of insecurity. The convergence of real-time production demands, public visibility, and evaluative pressure activates communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Strategic silence emerges as a key manifestation. In contexts where speech exposes accent, syntax, or lexical choices to immediate scrutiny, withdrawal functions as a face-preserving mechanism. Such silence limits opportunities for interactional practice and reinforces unequal participation patterns.

Hypercorrection and heightened self-monitoring represent additional manifestations. Speakers may slow their speech, simplify lexical choices, or over-regulate pronunciation in attempts to approximate perceived norms (Labov, 2006). While these strategies reduce overt errors, they constrain spontaneity and fluency.

Code-switching practices vary across interactional settings. Informal peer interaction accommodates multilingual fluidity, whereas formal academic contexts privilege monolingual French, reinforcing normative pressure (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2007). The restriction of legitimate codes intensifies awareness of linguistic inadequacy.

Additional manifestations include avoidance of question-asking, preference for minimally visible group roles, and physiological stress responses during oral performance. These behaviours reflect the convergence of language anxiety mechanisms with postcolonial linguistic hierarchies.

**Table 2 : Typology of manifestations of linguistic insecurity in oral academic communication**

<b>Manifestation</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Interactional Context</b>	<b>Underlying Mechanism</b>	<b>Key Theoretical References</b>
<b>Strategic Silence</b>	Voluntary withdrawal from oral participation to avoid exposure to linguistic evaluation	Lectures, seminars, oral examinations	Fear of negative evaluation; face-protection strategies; symbolic domination	Boudreau (2016); Horwitz et al. (1986); Bourdieu (1991)
<b>Hypercorrection and Self-Monitoring</b>	Excessive control of pronunciation, syntax, and lexical choice in attempt to approximate perceived standard norms	Formal classroom participation; presentations	Gap between self-evaluation and perceived prestige norm	Labov (2006); Francard (1993)
<b>Code-Switching Suppression</b>	Avoidance of Arabic or Berber in formal contexts despite natural multilingual competence	Interaction with professors; assessed tasks	Institutional privileging of monolingual French; linguistic market constraints	Bourdieu (1991); Heller (2007)
<b>Avoidance of Question-Asking</b>	Reluctance to seek clarification publicly despite incomplete comprehension	Large lectures; public discussions	Communication apprehension; fear of public error	Horwitz et al. (1986); MacIntyre & Gardner (1991)
<b>Minimally Visible Participation</b>	Preference for peripheral or low-exposure roles in group work	Collaborative tasks; laboratory sessions	Anxiety reduction strategy; avoidance of linguistic risk	Horwitz et al. (1986)
<b>Physiological Stress Responses</b>	Somatic symptoms such as increased heart rate, tension, or sweating during oral performance	Oral presentations; examinations	Language anxiety activation under evaluative pressure	MacIntyre & Gardner (1991); Horwitz et al. (1986)

**Manifestations in written academic communication**

Written academic production generates a distinct configuration of insecurity. Temporal distance and access to resources mitigate immediate performance anxiety. However, writing foregrounds formal correctness and invites explicit evaluation, intensifying formal insecurity (Calvet, 1999).

Excessive self-editing constitutes a central pattern. Students engage in repeated revision cycles in pursuit of normative correctness, often producing linguistically cautious but rhetorically constrained texts. Strategic syntactic simplification and lexical avoidance reduce perceived risk but narrow expressive range. Blommaert’s notion of truncated repertoires clarifies how limited access to advanced academic registers constrains conceptual articulation (Blommaert, 2010).

Genre insecurity further compounds formal concerns. Academic French entails mastery of disciplinary discourse conventions, citation practices, and argumentative structures. Limited prior exposure to these genres amplifies uncertainty about what constitutes legitimate academic performance.

Despite these constraints, writing offers relative protection compared to oral performance. Reduced immediacy of evaluation moderates anxiety intensity, though it does not eliminate structural insecurity.

**Table 3 : Typology of Manifestations of Linguistic Insecurity in Written Academic Communication**

<b>Manifestation</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Academic Context</b>	<b>Underlying Mechanism</b>	<b>Key Theoretical References</b>
<b>Excessive Self-Editing</b>	Repeated revision cycles aimed at eliminating perceived linguistic errors and approximating normative correctness	Essays, reports, examinations	Heightened formal insecurity; prescriptive norm orientation	Calvet (1999); Francard (1993)
<b>Strategic Syntactic Simplification</b>	Use of structurally simple sentences to minimise grammatical risk	Written assignments; timed exams	Risk-avoidance behaviour linked to insecurity	Calvet (1999)
<b>Lexical Avoidance</b>	Avoidance of specialised or complex vocabulary perceived as uncertain	Academic essays; disciplinary writing tasks	Fear of lexical inaccuracy; norm-based self-monitoring	Francard (1993)
<b>Truncated Academic Repertoire</b>	Limited access to advanced disciplinary registers constraining conceptual articulation	Scientific and technical writing	Restricted linguistic capital; uneven repertoire development	Blommaert (2010); Bourdieu (1991)

<b>Genre Insecurity</b>	Uncertainty regarding disciplinary discourse conventions, citation practices, and argumentative norms	Research papers; structured assignments	Limited prior exposure to academic genres; institutional expectations	Bourdieu (1991)
<b>Moderated Performance Anxiety</b>	Reduced immediacy of evaluation compared to oral tasks, partially buffering anxiety	Drafting and revision phases	Temporal distance; private composition context	Horwitz et al. (1986)

**Structural drivers of differentiated insecurity**

The synthesis identifies three primary structuring mechanisms: regional origin, schooling trajectory, and family cultural capital.

Regional variation in exposure to French produces unequal accumulation of linguistic capital. Urban coastal environments provide ambient French presence beyond formal schooling, while interior regions concentrate acquisition within classroom contexts (Benrabah, 2013; Queffélec et al., 2002). This disparity shapes the degree of repertoire truncation upon university entry.

Schooling trajectories exert even stronger effects. Students with sustained bilingual or French-medium instruction enter university with habituses aligned to institutional expectations. Those from predominantly Arabic-medium scientific tracks confront simultaneous disciplinary and linguistic adaptation, intensifying symbolic misrecognition (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Family cultural capital mediates access to French-language resources, academic discourse modelling, and educational guidance. These supports buffer transitions into French-medium higher education, whereas their absence magnifies perceived illegitimacy.

These mechanisms intersect, generating stratified distributions of insecurity that reflect broader socioeconomic differentiation.

**Table 4 : Structural and Sociolinguistic Drivers of Unequal Linguistic Insecurity (Conceptual Matrix)**

<b>Structural Driver</b>	<b>Mechanism of Differentiation</b>	<b>Effect on Linguistic Capital Accumulation</b>	<b>Consequences for Linguistic Insecurity</b>	<b>Key Theoretical References</b>
<b>Regional Origin</b>	Unequal ambient exposure to French beyond formal schooling (urban vs. interior regions)	Greater incidental acquisition in urban coastal areas; classroom-bound acquisition in interior regions	Differential repertoire development; varying degrees of perceived inadequacy upon university entry	Benrabah (2013); Queffélec et al. (2002); Blommaert (2010)
<b>Schooling Trajectory</b>	Language-of-instruction	Alignment or misalignment	Simultaneous disciplinary and	Bourdieu & Passeron



	differences (bilingual/French-medium vs. Arabic-medium scientific tracks)	between prior linguistic habitus and university expectations	linguistic adaptation; intensified symbolic misrecognition	(1990); Benrabah (2013)
<b>Family Cultural Capital</b>	Differential access to French-language resources, academic discourse modelling, and educational guidance	Early reinforcement of valued linguistic forms and institutional navigation skills	Buffered transition into French-medium higher education or heightened sense of illegitimacy	Bourdieu (1991); Bourdieu & Passeron (1990)
<b>Intersectional Accumulation</b>	Overlapping geographic, educational, and familial advantages or disadvantages	Compounded capital accumulation or deficit	Stratified distributions of insecurity reflecting broader socioeconomic differentiation	Bourdieu (1991); Blommaert (2010)

**DISCUSSION**

**Interpreting the conceptual dimensions of linguistic insecurity**

The conceptual synthesis developed in this article demonstrates that linguistic insecurity in French-medium Algerian higher education is best understood through an integrated analytical framework combining Labov’s interactional perspective, Calvet’s typological elaboration, and Bourdieu’s theory of linguistic markets. Each framework captures a distinct analytical level, and their articulation allows for a multi-scalar understanding of the phenomenon.

At the micro level, Labov’s formulation foregrounds the gap between speakers’ self-evaluation and their perception of a legitimate norm, as well as hypercorrection as a compensatory strategy (Labov, 2006). In the Constantine context, this gap is intensified by the institutional centrality of French as the medium of scientific instruction. Students continuously evaluate their speech and writing against an imagined metropolitan standard that functions as an implicit benchmark of academic legitimacy. Calvet’s distinction between *insécurité formelle, statutaire, identitaire, and situationnelle* refines this picture by differentiating the multiple sources from which insecurity emerges (Calvet, 1999). Formal insecurity is reinforced by pedagogical traditions privileging prescriptive correctness and normative alignment with external standards (Queffelec et al., 2002; Milroy, 2001). Status-related insecurity reflects the paradoxical positioning of French as officially foreign yet instrumentally indispensable in higher education (Sebaa, 2002; Benrabah, 2013). Identity-related insecurity stems from the historical and symbolic weight of French as a former colonial language, generating ambivalence between aspiration and resistance (Norton, 2013; Pavlenko, 2005). Situational insecurity intensifies in

high-stakes academic events where linguistic performance becomes publicly evaluable (Bretegnier, 1999).

Bourdieu's theorisation situates these dimensions within broader structures of capital distribution and symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The university functions as a specialised linguistic market in which mastery of academic French operates as dominant capital. Students' unequal prior exposure to this capital, shaped by region, schooling, and family background, produces differentiated positions within the academic field. Linguistic insecurity thus emerges not as an individual deficit but as the subjective experience of structurally produced asymmetry.

### **Oral and written modalities : differentiated dynamics**

The contrast between oral and written academic communication reveals modality-specific configurations of insecurity. Oral communication foregrounds immediacy, irreversibility, and social visibility. Communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation are therefore heightened in seminars, practical sessions, and oral examinations (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Strategic silence becomes a rational protective strategy. As Boudreau (2016) shows in other francophone peripheral contexts, withdrawal and self-censorship function as face-preserving mechanisms. In Constantine, silence shields students from immediate exposure of accent, syntactic uncertainty, or lexical hesitation, yet simultaneously restricts opportunities for practice, feedback, and integration into disciplinary communities.

Hypercorrection and self-monitoring further characterise oral insecurity. Students may slow their speech, restrict lexical choice, or avoid complex constructions to minimise perceived risk. Although adaptive in reducing overt error, such strategies diminish fluency and spontaneity, reinforcing perceptions of inadequacy. The long-term effect is paradoxical: avoidance constrains the very linguistic expansion that would reduce insecurity.

Written communication presents a distinct but related profile. The temporal distance afforded by writing allows consultation of resources, revision, and private drafting, partially buffering performance anxiety. However, writing intensifies *insécurité formelle*. The permanence of written texts and the centrality of formal correctness in evaluation sustain heightened vigilance. Excessive self-editing and syntactic simplification may result, limiting rhetorical ambition and conceptual elaboration. Blommaert's notion of truncated repertoires illuminates how students' available segments of academic French may be insufficient to support the full expression of their disciplinary knowledge (Blommaert, 2010). The gap between conceptual competence and linguistic realisation feeds back into self-evaluation, reinforcing insecurity.

The comparison validates Bretegnier's situational framework while extending it to modality-specific dynamics. Insecurity is not uniform; it fluctuates according to interactional visibility, evaluative immediacy, and degree of control over production. Recognising these distinctions is analytically necessary for understanding how insecurity shapes participation patterns and academic trajectories.

### **Linguistic market and postcolonial power**

The Constantine case foregrounds the structural anchoring of insecurity in postcolonial language regimes. The linguistic market of the university demands resources that are unevenly distributed. Crucially, these demands are naturalised as universal academic standards rather

than recognised as historically and socially situated preferences. This misrecognition exemplifies symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991). Students internalise institutional expectations and interpret structural disadvantage as personal inadequacy.

The Algerian context intensifies this dynamic. French carries global scientific authority while also embodying colonial history. Sebaa's description of French as shared alterity captures this duality: simultaneously embedded and external (Sebaa, 2002). Post-independence Arabisation policies further complicated the linguistic landscape by ideologically valorising Arabic while maintaining French in technical domains (Grandguillaume, 1983; Taleb-Ibrahimi, 1995). Spolsky's tripartite model clarifies how practices, beliefs, and management diverge within this regime (Spolsky, 2004). Scientific faculties operate in French, public discourse politicises language choice, and policy oscillates between symbolic Arabisation and pragmatic reliance on French.

Within this configuration, insecurity both reflects and reproduces hierarchy. Students prioritise authorised French performance and marginalise their Arabic and Berber repertoires in academic settings. Self-censorship confirms the dominant position of French and perpetuates the market logic. Linguistic insecurity thus operates as a mechanism of stratification, reinforcing existing inequalities rather than merely expressing individual discomfort.

#### **Structural stratification and cumulative inequality**

The synthesis shows that linguistic insecurity is systematically structured by regional origin, schooling trajectory, and family cultural capital. These variables function as proxies for differential accumulation of linguistic capital. Urban coastal regions provide greater ambient exposure to French, supplementing formal instruction with implicit acquisition opportunities (Soulimane-Benhabib, 2019; Queffélec et al., 2002). Peripheral regions limit exposure primarily to classroom contexts. This centre-periphery differentiation echoes colonial-era spatial hierarchies and aligns with Blommaert's account of unequal globalisation (Blommaert, 2010).

Schooling type directly channels capital accumulation. Francophone or bilingual schooling socialises students into academic discourse norms, while Arabic-medium schooling leaves students linguistically unprepared for French-medium tertiary instruction (Benrabah, 2013). The abrupt medium shift exemplifies structural incoherence in language-of-instruction policy. Family cultural capital compounds these effects through linguistic modelling, access to resources, and transmission of instrumental attitudes toward French.

These factors intersect rather than operate independently. Geographic, educational, and familial advantages cluster, producing cumulative differentiation. Linguistic insecurity thus maps onto broader socioeconomic inequality. The university ratifies this distribution by rewarding competencies aligned with institutional norms, converting structural asymmetry into apparent meritocratic distinction.

#### **Theoretical contribution**

This analysis contributes theoretically in three respects. First, it integrates interactional, structural, and global perspectives into a coherent multi-level account. Labov clarifies micro-level mechanisms; Bourdieu situates them within institutional reproduction; Blommaert contextualises them within global hierarchies of value. Second, it demonstrates that linguistic insecurity in postcolonial higher education operates simultaneously as intralinguistic,

interlinguistic, ideological, and situational. Analytical frameworks privileging only one dimension risk underestimating the phenomenon's complexity. Third, it reconceptualises insecurity as rational adaptation to structurally incoherent language regimes rather than psychological deficiency.

Linguistic insecurity can therefore be understood as emerging at the intersection of macro-level policy structures, meso-level capital trajectories, and micro-level interactional practices. This multi-level articulation extends critiques of educational meritocracy by identifying linguistic competence as a covert mechanism of selection in contexts where policy incoherence produces predictable asymmetries.

### **Limitations and research agenda**

This article remains a conceptual synthesis rather than empirical demonstration. Its claims are theoretically grounded but not empirically tested in the Constantine population. Future research should operationalise the proposed dimensions through validated instruments and qualitative methodologies. Survey studies could measure prevalence and correlates of insecurity across regions and schooling types. Ethnographic and interview research could examine narrative constructions of legitimacy and identity. Classroom discourse analysis could illuminate interactional production of insecurity. Longitudinal designs could trace developmental trajectories and adaptation strategies. Intervention research could test pedagogical approaches legitimising multilingual repertoires and reducing normative pressure.

Such empirical work would refine and validate the conceptual model, transforming theoretical clarification into actionable knowledge for equitable language policy and inclusive pedagogy in postcolonial higher education.

### **CONCLUSION**

This article has proposed a theoretically grounded framework for analysing linguistic insecurity in academic communication among first-year French-medium students at the University of Constantine, Algeria. Through systematic integration of scholarship on linguistic insecurity, postcolonial multilingualism, and Algerian language policy, the study has identified the principal dimensions, manifestations, and structural determinants that shape this phenomenon in French-medium higher education.

The model developed here conceptualises linguistic insecurity as emerging from the intersection of macro-level language regimes, meso-level trajectories of capital accumulation, and micro-level communicative practices. At the macro level, historically layered language policies and ideologies position French as simultaneously external and indispensable, generating institutional incoherence between Arabic-medium secondary schooling and French-medium university instruction. At the meso level, regional origin, schooling pathways, and family cultural capital structure differential access to francophone linguistic resources, producing stratified entry positions within the university linguistic market. At the micro level, practices such as hypercorrection, strategic simplification, code-switching suppression, and silence constitute rational responses to normative pressure, while simultaneously constraining academic participation and linguistic development.

The analysis reframes linguistic insecurity not as individual deficiency but as structurally mediated experience. Within the university as linguistic market, French proficiency operates

as dominant capital, unequally distributed and differentially valorised. Students whose linguistic habitus aligns with institutional expectations experience relative security, whereas those from less privileged trajectories confront systematic delegitimation of their repertoires. Linguistic insecurity thus operates as a mechanism through which educational institutions participate in the reproduction of social inequality, translating historically sedimented linguistic hierarchies into apparently neutral academic standards.

The theoretical contribution lies in articulating a multi-scalar model that integrates Labov's micro-interactional insights, Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, and Blommaert's perspective on globalised hierarchies of linguistic value. By demonstrating how intralinguistic normativity, interlinguistic hierarchy, postcolonial ideology, and situational pressure converge in higher education, the study advances sociolinguistic understandings of insecurity beyond single-language or purely psychological accounts.

The implications extend across policy, institutional practice, and pedagogy. Greater coherence between secondary and tertiary language-of-instruction regimes is necessary to mitigate structurally produced disadvantage. Universities must recognise unequal linguistic starting points and provide sustained support mechanisms rather than presuppose mastery. Pedagogical practices that acknowledge multilingual repertoires as cognitive resources rather than deficits may reduce insecurity and enhance academic inclusion.

As a conceptual synthesis, this study calls for systematic empirical investigation to test, refine, and extend the proposed model. Future research should examine the distribution, intensity, and interactional production of linguistic insecurity across diverse institutional settings. Such work would not only deepen theoretical understanding but also contribute to more equitable language policy and inclusive academic practice in postcolonial multilingual contexts.

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