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Adieu! What once was, no longer is: The time has come for French as a second language educators (FLE) to decolonise their curricula and diversify their classroom lessons

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Abstract

For decades, France has been at the cultural centre of teaching French, even though the majority of the language's speakers reside elsewhere. Despite its multicontinental global reach, this mischaracterisation is further perpetuated in French as a second language (FLE) textbooks whose curricular materials often focus on outmoded tropes that minimise or marginalise the world's other Francophone regions. Because educators rely on these materials and since they are the primary ambassadors of French, this pedagogical bias influences how students, administrators, and outsiders consume the language. To counteract these curricular deficiencies in FLE classrooms, a more realistic approach to teaching French is needed. In this paper, we make the case that educators at all levels should liberate and decolonise the French language from France. In doing so, we offer some pedagogical suggestions how French can be taught more realistically. A more pragmatic presentation of the language also has additional potential benefits. As learners and the public become more mindful of the French language's increasingly growing footprint across the Global South (the area of the world that it is the home to most of its speakers), this can increase interest and present French as a vernacular of the future in terms of employment and success. An approach such as this is especially important at a time when administrative decisions in educational facilities continue to threaten the survival of FLE programmes across the United States and beyond.

Keywords French as a second language, French teaching, Francophone world, teaching French, multiculturalism, international French, Francophonie

1. Introduction

If one were to query people in the United States to name any place in the world where one speaks French, the most likely response would be that the language hails from and is spoken in France. Apart from that country and maybe Canada, knowledge of the vast multi-continental footprint of French may not be well known. This sort of linguistic inconspicuousness about French affects how it is presented, taught, and consumed across the United States. For teachers of French, this may result in more dire circumstances. A singular association of French to only France could be interpreted by some that it is a language that is "not important to learn." Consequently, this makes French an easy target for reduction or elimination by school boards and university administrators across the United States. Furthermore, even textbooks used in a typical classroom where French is taught as a second language (FLE) often focus their curricula solely on France, which perpetuates stereotypes about the language. Even when in-class materials do attempt to present French in a more global sense, they often either fall short or they present areas outside of France in sensationalised manner.

The true face of today's French language is no longer what it once was. What was once the primary linguistic property of France has metamorphosed into a global language whose centre of gravity has shifted substantially. Today, the overwhelming majority of the world's Francophones now live in countries and regions that stretch across the planet, especially in regions across the Global South (Africa in particular). Far from being homogenous, French has become a mosaic language that is dominated by countries of which some people might be unaware. A more realistic portrait of French can make a difference in how it is perceived by others who are critical of its importance. However, if students continue to be conditioned to associate or place a greater importance of the language onto France only, this can decrease one's interest in French.

This point is crucial to contemplate because the survival of French programmes at schools, colleges, and universities in the United States has now arrived at a precarious juncture. To address curricular deficiencies that minimise the realistic importance of French, the language must be liberated, extricated, and unshackled from France in a pedagogical sense. The reasoning for this is perspicuously logical. Because FLE textbooks and

educators of French are the primary points of contact for students and administrators alike, they have the primary role of reframing the narrative and presenting the language more factually and pragmatically. The aim of this paper is to make the case of de-colonising the teaching of French in the United States and beyond from the longstanding France-centric model whilst also providing educators with a few suggestions how they might bolster their present curricula more veritably and effectively.

2. Language learning = Learning about culture(s)

Over the past few decades, the trend to teaching foreign languages in the United States has shifted from its former solely grammar-based analytical model to constructing lessons that concentrate on culture and content via communicative teaching. Similar changes have occurred across the Humanities where many disciplines have started to reexamine curricula as to address subjects more accurately as they deal with race, multiculturalism, and gender. Despite the efforts of politicians to curb these types of pedagogical changes, revisions of lesson content are increasingly becoming the norm in schools throughout the United States (Beard et al., 2023). Since this type of reimaging and reforming of educational curricula is happening across many academic disciplines. Intercultural learning like this is also an essential in the foreign language classroom where cultural comprehension is equally as important as grammar lessons (Wiley, 1997; Lomicka, 2009; Joslin, 2015; Thomas, 2019; Nel, 2020). That said, teaching diversity and the multiculturalism of a language's speakers and cultures can only be functionally efficacious when these topics are presented effectively and taught properly.

In the case of the instruction of French, this means genuinely and accurately including all Francophone countries and regions in the pedagogical materials provided to teachers as to encourage them to teach the language realistically. Furthermore, a more inclusive way of teaching French should be a top priority for organisations as the *American Association for the Teaching of French* (AATF), which is an umbrella group for French educators across the United States. Although the AATF has promoted the Francophone world more forcefully than in the past, researchers such as Peer (1995), Petrey (1995), and Spiegelman maintain that a narrative shift will require more than grouping all Francophone countries and regions outside of France together as one unit is unrealistic. Spiegelman (2022. p. 52) takes this thought further and states that whilst French has evolved substantially in past decades and the Francophone world is given more space in FLE materials under the guise of "diversity," this inclusivity is not fully genuine because these areas are not presented veritably. In other words, influential groups like the AATF and ACTFL[1] are not doing enough to present these areas authentically as pluri-ethnic and multicultural societies. Additionally, the presence of French from around the world has not been embraced enough by FLE educators, which makes them are partially responsible for the unrealistic presentation of the language that places France in higher regard than other Francophone countries and regions (Lomicka, 2009; Thomas, 2019; and Bedecarré, 2022). This is problematic because without a sort of multiculturally-based approach to teaching that focuses on the actual diversity of French, students lack a clear understanding of its true importance (Dong, 2005; Nel, 2020).

This problem has plagued French for decades and remains persistent. For years, published studies have denoted that France has been the primary focal point in educational materials being provided to educators and even when these areas are presented, they are in a secondary position (Ogden, 1981; Clark, 1985; Kingue, 1994; Chapelle, 2009; Joslin, 2015; Bedecarré, 2022). The consequences of this invisibility concerning the Global South and other regions can lead to ignorance, however unintentional. Although FLE textbooks may not go beyond presenting the Francophone world beyond token ways, educators themselves have a responsibility. Ogden (1981), Wiley (1997), Lomicka (2009), and Joslin (2015) state that any lack of understanding of the entire French-speaking world (*Francophonie*) on the part of teachers should not be used as a justification for focusing only on France. Put differently, educators at all levels should be lifelong learners who are constantly expanding their views through and from a variety of multicultural perspectives. Further positing on this, Gay (1992), Banks (1993), Margerison (1994), Willis (2000), Stallworth (2006), Willis (2009), Subrahmanyan et al (2021) all state in varying degrees that teachers ought to challenge their own personal perspectives as they develop classroom communities that contextualise all types of cultural, literary, and grammar in their curricula.

This sort of multicultural centering of one's pedagogy is a vital key to showcase diverse voices, outlooks, and viewpoints, and this is especially true when it comes to the teaching of foreign languages. Subrahmanyan et al (2000) posits that by emphasising similarities and distinctions that a localised culture has with one that is global, students are provided with a fresh perspective when learning a new language. Even when the assigned textbooks used in classrooms are not providing enough information, teachers should rely less on pre-made, commercial resources and focus more on creating their own materials (Gay, 1992; Cai, 1998; and Willis, 2002). In other words, educators must learn how to uphold the integrity of multicultural analyses as much as possible, even if it is not built into the materials available to them. Kingue (1994), Lomicka (2009), Rust et al (2015), and Nel (2020) make the point that by learning languages and literatures from a more multicultural perspective should be decisively positioned all through the educational programmes. When conducting a study that measured how a more multicultural approach helps students in classrooms where English literature is taught, Bai (2002) and Dong (2005) found that students benefit from the teaching of multicultural literature because they recognise the diverse world being presented to them, with some even identifying

[1] ACTFL = The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

with the various culture(s) being studied. This means, educators need to expand their worldview. Although in a FLE classroom the native language of students differs from that of the multicultural speakers of French spread across the Earth, the fact that some learners from underrepresented communities could themselves via the content that they are learning (even partially) makes for a more welcoming classroom.

3. Time for a *makeover*

Amongst the unnumerable number of FLE textbooks and materials available on the American market Francophone content is increasingly being included within these publications (Spiegelman, 2022), which is a step in the right direction. Despite this, upon analysing how French-speaking areas outside of France are included, Bedecarré (2022) argues that problems remain. For example, most textbooks published for the teaching of French in the United States continue to present "*Francophonie"* topics in a similar fashion. Countries and peoples not from France are either sensationalised, minimised, or in most cases relegated to small cultural subsections of chapters (often located in a latter sections of books). Some pedagogical materials ignore areas outside of France outright or consolidate all of them into a single section (Bedecarré, 2022). Further positing on this, Kingue (1994), Chapelle (2009), Joslin (2015), Luckett et al (2019), Senekal and Lens (2020), and Nel and Ferreira-Meyers (2020) discuss the scholarly (in)visibility of other French-speaking areas in textbooks and came to the same conclusions and found to varying degrees that no matter the published FLE textbook that is available in the American market, all prioritise France first and foremost to the expense of everywhere/everyone else.

This sort of solely thematically concentrating on a single European country at the expense of all others is not as prevalent regarding the other major foreign language that is taught and studied in the United States (Spanish). If one were to peruse textbooks that are used in education facilities at all levels concerning the teaching of Spanish, the Hispanophone world is extremely present. This means that Spain is not shown in a more privileged position vis-à-vis other places.[2] There are many reasons for this. Most first-language or heritage learners of Spanish hail from or have familial roots in countries located throughout the Western Hemisphere or from historically Hispanophone areas that have been part of the United States since the 1800s (e.g., South Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, etc). Therefore, any pedagogical focus that centres itself on Spain might be considered as offensive or neo-colonial. Other reasons owing to a more diverse presentation of Spanish in schools owes to the massive visibility and reach of the language in the United States, where at times callers requesting customer service via phone from a major company might be invited to "*oprime el dos para español*" (press two for Spanish). Paradoxically, this sort of realistic global presentation is not the case in most FLE classrooms where curricula remain heavily focused on France. Even though the French language has a wider geographical and diplomatic reach than Spanish (second only to English in this respect), students may not be aware of this fact. In other words, because Francophone areas around the world are often minimised or forgotten in FLE curricular materials, this can impact and affect interest and enrollment.

4. "It's not in the book"

To address this heavy focus on France, researchers such as Ogden (1981), Gay (1992), Kingue (1994), Joslin (2015), Thomas (2019), Nel (2020), and Spiegelman (2022) maintain in varying ways that not only is an overhaul of introductory French textbooks needed, but one must also review the many pedagogical activities that are included with them (e.g. quizzes, online activities, lesson plans, etc). The inclusion of these additional tools is made available to help educators simplify their curricula and guide them through their chosen textbook more efficiently. Therefore, if a realistic and meaningful presentation of global Francophone countries and cultures with respect to the included activities *is not in the book*, educators might omit/avoid any sort of lessons or discussions about these areas of the world in favour of using whatever lessons are included (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006; Nel and Ferreira-Meyers, 2020). This is an important point to denote because the pre-designed pedagogical curricula often anchor courses and are fully intended to facilitate the designing of lessons.

Supplemental materials found in introductory foreign language textbooks always include exercises where geographical samples and terms are needed to support the grammar that is being taught in each chapter (visual and written). These presentations aid students with comprehension and help them situate the language from a cultural point of view. This is done by using a variety of techniques. When grammar is introduced, it is supported with basic or advanced examples that add meaningful context to sentences (according to class level), such as "*Je mange une baguette dans un café à Paris*" (I'm eating a baguette in a Paris café) or "*Ce soir, nous irons aux Champs-Élysées*" (Tonight we'll go to the Champs-Élysées). In addition, various illustrations, maps, and other visual materials showing street scenes from Paris and (at times other locations in France) also might accompany grammar lessons as comprehension tools that denote how the language is used in certain circumstances.

Although some textbooks have generalised their content and have moved away from overtly mentioning France by presenting grammar exercises in a more general sense (e.g., "*Je mange un sandwich dans un café*" or "I'm eating a sandwich in a café), others often centre these sorts of activities with a place of reference since can aid one's recall and comprehension. Ogden (1981), Wiley (1997), Thomas (2009), Joslin (2015), and Nel and Ferreira-Meyers (2020) discuss this and maintain that areas

[2] It should be noted that this does not mean that individual language programmes themselves do not show bias or favouritism towards Spain. See: The edited edition by Machedo (2019) for more information.

outside of France are frequently absent from almost all FLE textbooks when it comes to explaining grammar concepts. Due this invisibility, students may never see grammar examples that state, "*je bois du café à Abidjan*" or "*elle mange une salade à Kinshasa*" ("I am eating a salad in Abidjan" or "I am drinking coffee in Kinshasa") as primary referential points, even though these two locations are the first and third largest cities in the Francophone world (with Paris in the second position). Additionally, the omission of French-speaking areas outside of France is not merely limited their use (or lack thereof) in grammar lessons. When analysing actual cultural content included within introductory FLE textbooks, one also finds mixed results in terms of activities and presentations (Kingue, 1994; Bedecarré, 2022).

No matter the foreign language taught, all introductory and intermediate textbooks used in educational facilities contain sections within each chapter that are specifically devoted to increasing cultural comprehension. Most of these activities are associated with reading, whilst at other times they may include aural content in the form of listening exercises that focus on cultural subjects to advance both literary and cultural comprehension. (Bedecarré, 2022). Examples of these sorts of exercises in a typical FLE textbook might include an examination of a past or recent news event that happened in France, regional culinary influences, the family unit, popular musical artists, films, celebrities, a focus on sports, and more. Depending on the author, publisher, or textbook some chapters may have more culturally based activities than others yet in most cases France-centric content dominates (Bedecarré, 2022). When looking at FLE materials specifically, Joslin (2015), Luckett (2019), and Nel and Ferreira-Meyers (2020), Bedecarré (2022) all discern that France retains its privileged positions for these sorts of learning activities in almost every textbook sold on the American market. Although most materials used by educators in FLE classrooms give at least some attention to the larger Francophone world when it comes to reading, visual, and aural activities, any detailed focus on areas outside of France remains limited or extremely cosmetic. Thus, as was the case with the content often used in grammar-based exercises, the Francophone world is minimised, santitised, or missing almost entirely.

5. Invisibility Endangers Survival

It is no secret to FLE educators that the language is in decline in terms of its availability and/or continued survival in schools, colleges, and universities in the United States (Bowles et al, 2015). Perhaps owing to a reduction in French offerings or for other reasons, students are increasingly moving towards other foreign languages that retain popularity (such as Spanish) or those that are rising in importance (e.g., Mandarin). In terms of the former, Spanish is easily accessible for many in the United States and demand for proficiency in that language will remain a constant for years to come. In terms of Mandarin, its arrival as an important language to learn for success has increased in recent years and one can only imagine that a desire to learn it for business and other reasons will substantially increase as China's global visibility expands. Thus, the popularity once afforded to French in educational facilities in the United States has decreased. Although there is a reduction in the study of subjects across the Humanities, there may be other factors to consider. As Joslin (2015) states, in the post-World War II era a curriculum that centred itself on France might have once been an easy sell in American schools due to that country's previous global importance as well as its historic ties to the United States. Additionally, due to notable occasions where American and French foreign policy has diverged, France is sometimes categorised as punching bag amongst those who disagree with the country's political positions. This sort of negative labelling with respect to politics might affect some who would otherwise consider studying the language. In other words, however France might be characterised in the United States politically has the power either to stimulate or dissipate interest in studying French.

Therefore, if France serves as a motivator or deterrence to a desire to study French, new approaches are needed in terms of what people in Haiti and elsewhere in the Francophone Caribbean call "*déchoukaj*," which in kréyol means tearing something by the root (or "*déraciné"* in "standard" French), ultimately resulting in fresh makeover. Simple curricular changes can minimise or uproot France from the teaching of French as appeal more to new learners and promote the language more efficaciously. FLE instructors could present and teach the language in the same manners that one might encounter in a typical Spanish classroom. This is especially important due to the diversity of the language, given its vast global footprint. The continent of Africa alone is the home to the overwhelming majority of the world's Francophones, soon to be approaching 85% of the global total, which means that the future of French is fully in the hands of Africans (Marcoux & Konaté, 2011). In fact, of the world's five largest French-speaking cities, three are in Africa with the largest global Francophone metropolis being Kinshasa, not Paris. Decades ago, Ogden (1981), Kingue (1994), and Wieczorek (1994) stated juxtaposing the importance of the wide diversity of Francophone countries to the contemporary status of the Francophone world was not emphasised enough in classrooms and textbooks and it would serve French teachers more advantageously if they changed their pedagogical approach. When making this point, Wieczorek (1994, p. 487) mentions:

> *"One common trend in French-as-a-second-language texts is to expose students to the many facets of France. The texts therefore ignore to a large extent the cultural and sociolinguistic contributions of the 42 countries that boast French as a primary, secondary or tertiary language."*

Apart from the African continent, other places are equally ignored. As Joslin (2015) maintains, French still enjoys a constant presence in France's former colonies in Southeast Asia and remains the official language across many South Pacific islands. Furthermore, the birth of the Caribbean nation of Haiti by arguably the greatest event of

Black History is rarely taught in classrooms even though that occurrence and Haitians are an integral part of the American experience. Americans are arguably more familiar with European countries and affairs, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Monaco are sidelined. Additionally, the commercial importance of Québec to the United States economy cannot be understated. Although Québec is the most important Francophone area economically vis-à-vis the United States, in a study that examines the presence of the province in FLE classrooms Chapelle (2009) found that not only is the province notably absent in many FLE books, negative characterisations of the Québécois accent of French persist amongst many educators. Dismissive thoughts about French-speaking areas outside of France causes learners to endorse negative delineations about different variants and accents in the language. These sorts of subliminal depictions of Francophone countries and regions around the world will condition learners to view or downplay them as being inferior to France. Gandolfi et al (2021, p. 34-35) describes and advocates for the importance teaching French in a way that defies stereotypes by stating:

> *"The need for French-speaking professionals in global business, philanthropy, diplomacy, education, and the military has never been greater. French blankets the entire African continent from Morocco to Madagascar and from Senegal to Djibouti (…) The country with the highest French-speaking population is not France, but the Democratic Republic of Congo. Because of high birth rates, 85% of French speakers could live in Africa by 2050 according to the International Organisation of La Francophonie and ODSEF."*

Yet, if FLE school curricula are hindered by textbooks that perpetuate an association of French to France at the expense of most of its speakers that do not live in that country, there cannot be any growth in interest. As American schools are more now diverse than they have ever been in history, teaching the language via a more multicultural approach opens the world (Margerison, 1995; Cai, 2002; Joslin, 2015; Schechner, 2021). As foreign language teaching is increasingly moving award from grammar-centred methods to techniques that are more content and culturally based, there are several ways in which educators can bring in more Francophone content to their courses.

6. Some Curricular Suggestions

The first suggestion for FLE educators is to bring in and introduce cultural differences and distinctions from the *Francophonie* immediately forward from the first day of class when students begin to learn vocabulary. For example, the initial thing that students learn in French is how to greet one another. Although the typical "*bonjour*" (hello) salutation remains constant and is used throughout the Francophone world, there are other distinguishable differences that can be added to that initial point of contact between persons. For example, as the average introductory FLE textbook highlights how someone in France might first say hello and then carry on a basic conversation, it is at this teaching juncture where educators could diverge and add significant focus on alternate forms of greetings that used elsewhere. Because most building blocks in the first days of class will focus salutations and verbs associated to them (e.g., "*s'appeller, être, avoir*" or "to be called, to be, to have"), greetings and words may differ from one another in other regional or cultural ways. For example, in Southeast Asian countries where French remains present, adding additional variances are important, none of which will require strict memorisation. In addition to "*bonjour*," people in Laos will place both hands together in a "*wai*" and bow their head slightly. Greetings in the Arab/Berber Maghreb countries of North Africa will sometimes omit the word "*bonjour*" completely in favour of saying "*asalaam-aleikem*" (peace be with you) in its place. In the French-speaking Caribbean, whenever people meet one another after the hour of noon, "*bonsoir*" is the salutation that is used.

In addition to cultural distinctions such as these, gestures used throughout the French-speaking world also vary greatly depending on location. For example, Joslin (2015) points out that in many cultures of Africa, instead of the two-cheek "*bise*" (kiss) that is common in Europe and Québec, in Francophone Africa different types of handshakes or hugs are used. Moreover, although it is customary in Québec to inquire about one's well-being following this initial "*bonjour*" greeting in the form of "*ça va*" (how are you), across sub-Saharan Africa such subsequent interrogations are made in reference to the immediate and/or extended family. Even within the Francophone countries of Europe (France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Monaco, Switzerland), asking a stranger "*ça va*" after "*bonjour*" is not a typical inquiry as it might be in Québec. Questions about "*la famille*" following an initial greeting are quite common across the Francophone Caribbean, Oceania, the Maghreb, and Southeast Asia, whereas in France this inquiry is viewed as too personal upon first contact with a stranger. To teach students how to respond to a greeting where family is one of the initial inquiries, this would require a comprehension of how to form small interrogative sentences using possessives (e.g., "*mon, ma, mes*," or "my," etc) earlier than one typically learns in the average FLE textbook (that information typically appears in one of the immediate subsequent chapters). It may not be ideal to overwhelm students by teaching all of forms of possessives on the first few days of class at the introductory level, but the first three of usages of them (e.g. "*mon, ma, mes*") can be brought into lessens immediately along with "*être*" since that verb usually appears in the first day or two of a university-level introductory FLE course. Therefore, for students to understand how most of the French-speaking world greets one another, different approaches are needed in terms of the provided vocabulary of the typical textbook and these new pedagogical tactics would be simple to incorporate into lessons forward from the first day of class. Undoubtably, many educators are already teaching these important cultural differences. That said, by officially adding them to an introductory FLE textbooks at the very beginning when greetings are introduced on the first day of class, this would give immediate agency to the global

Francophonie. Educators can make activities related to greetings and gestures interactive by having students choose a country and ask their peers guess the location being represented.

Other small subtleties related to Francophone cultures are equally important to denote. Even subject pronouns used in French differ depending on one's location. As Joslin (2015) denotes, in the African context there is much less use of the "*vous*" form over the much preferred informal "*tu*" (even amongst complete strangers), whereas in France it would be unthinkable to choose the latter over the former unless speaking with a child. Chokah (2013 p. 5) addresses the importance of explaining these sorts of linguistic differences by stating "Politeness for instance, is expressed differently in different cultures and therefore languages." Mengara (2000) discusses the variety of different "Frenches" and suggests how vocabulary from countries located across Francophone Africa could make for interesting lessons in language classes at all levels. Yet, due to the invisibility of these topics in many FLE textbooks, unless educators are aware of these variations and they discuss them in their classrooms, students are not provided with this important cultural content when they begin studying French.

Another important illustration of this is when Joslin (2015 p. 134) explains that the Western definition of what constitutes the notion of family typically does not include aunts and uncles as parents, by stating that "cousins are therefore as innumerable as grains or sand" whilst also emphasising the special bond and relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. This should be highlighted strongly when vocabulary relating to the family is introduced, which often occurs in one of the very first chapters of a FLE textbook. The same definition of what constitutes a family can be argued for Caribbean and Southeast Asian cultures. In addition to inclusion in introductory FLE materials, excerpts from films and books could be used to give a visual narrative, even in the introductory French classroom. For example, Joslin (2015) mentions how the book "*Une si longue lettre*" by Mariama Bâ and films by Ousmane Semba are two subjects around which lessons can be built.

Music from around the Francophone world has its place in an FLE classroom as well. The use of videoclips and song lyrics could be incorporated into various lessons as they apply to the taught concepts. Hip-hop might be an attractive genre to explore since many artists can trace their roots back to Francophone Africa and the Caribbean. Furthermore, because rap music is the most popular musical genre in the United States, lessons built around it can give students a more multicultural view of French from a point of view that is familiar to them. Amongst the many examples available to teachers in beginner-level classes, we suggest pedagogical lessons based on songs like "*5 heures du mat*" by the group Alliance Ethnik (a song that discusses time in a manner that imitates the American film *Groundhog Day*). Educators can create a variety of teaching ideas from this song, such as instructing students how to tell the time, how to use reflexive verbs, adjective and adverb placement and functions, examples of basic verbs about movement and being (*être, aller, avoir*), vocabulary about circumstances, and more. Hip-hop songs and videos such as IAM's track "*Petit frère*" also worth including for the variety of vocabulary and verb explanations that can be used in terms of intermediate to advanced classes, much material can be taken from these tracks concerning social and culture content in addition to exploring the use of the imperative and subjunctive moods.

An additional pedagogical idea for teachers to use in beginning classes is include global content when clothing and colours are first introduced to students. Wieczorek (1994, p. 23) mentions how a variety of different vocabulary can be added here by stating the words "*djelaba*" (Morocco) and "*pareu*" (Tahiti and Francophone Oceania) can be taught along with "*robe*" (Western-style clothing) when asking students to describe what women in photos might be wearing (e.g. "*qu'est-ce qu'elle porte*" or "what is she wearing"). However, instead of merely acknowledging these cultural differences once and then moving forward with information that concentrates on influences from France or the United States, we suggest further testing students on all the taught vocabulary and having them associate these things with the appropriate country of origin. Another idea is to incorporate lessons where students research Francophone countries on their own and learn about the different types of clothing worn in these areas. Written compositions and oral presentations can be assigned with the assistance of technology. Furthermore, clothing words and other vocabulary can also be taught via music videos, all of which can be associated with a variety of verbs, such as "*porter*" (to wear), "*être*" (to be), "*avoir*" (to have), "*venir de*" (come from), and so forth.

Grammatically, typical first and second semester classes introduce prepositions of place early (e.g. *sur, devant, derrière, à côté de*, etc) and pair them with those of geographical use (*à, au, aux, de, des, du*). The introduction and teaching of these grammatical concepts is a great time for educators to make mention of countries and cultures of the Francophone world. Additional vocabulary can be added as it relates to the family as a part of this instruction, which naturally includes teaching students about possessive pronouns and adjectives. In more advanced FLE classes when these concepts are first taught, deeper discussions relating to various sociocultural or political events occurring could be employed as oral discussions in class or in written compositions. Some suggestions for deep analysis might consist of deconstructing the political debates raging throughout Francophone Africa as they concern the past policy of "*Françafrique,*" the continued use of the CFA Franc, or discussions about ongoing neo-colonialism on the continent. Subjects relating to cultural issues and political science are not the only way to mix grammar instruction with the larger French-speaking world. Joslin (2015, p. 129) states that the growing importance of Francophone literature regarding Africa is an important "reason why we [educators] should reflect on how we construct our French studies curriculum." Writings published by Africans can be used right away from the introductory levels, one of which might include Léopold Sédar-Senghor's short masterpiece entitled "*L'homme de couleur,*" a cheeky poem that discusses the topic of racial differences via highlighting colours in very simplistic language that even beginners can

understand.

Other published studies denote how making curricular changes to reflect today's diverse Francophone world achieve fruitful results in terms of student success (Rust et al, 2015; Santos & Soares, 2023). Research by Rust et al (2015) that deconstructed a curricular shift undertaken in French courses at the University of Pretoria in South Africa showed positive results. In this example, FLE classes evolved from following the typical France-centric model to one that is more Africanist in scope. One of the ways that Rust et al (2015) supplemented their French curriculum is that they built pedagogical lessons around music from Francophone Africa. Instructors of these classes chose songs by popular artists from French-speaking countries to serve as what they refer to as "*textes déclencheurs*" (source texts) for various classroom assignments and lessons at all levels. Written and oral compositions that deal with a variety of grammar and cultural activities are built around lyrical content or subject matter (Rust et al, 2014, p. 105-107). Lessons and tutorials using music were used to teach all levels of French in terms of grammar, increasing one's acquisition of vocabulary, and gaining a more profound understanding of cultural similarities and differences. The findings of this study show that students in French classes at the University of Pretoria reported that their overall awareness of Francophone cultures outside of France enriched their overall learning experience substantially in terms of grades and cultural competence (especially concerning how these FLE students could connect themselves with others on their own continent). Instead of being marginalised as a distant or exotic region where people just happen to speak French, new perspectives in teaching such as this help students understand that Francophones in the Global South are equal in importance to the mother country of the language. Others such as Schechner (2021) argue that the type of agency given to Francophone Africa by bringing that region into FLE classrooms should be an integral part of one's pedagogy. Rust et al (2015, p. 105) further this exact reasoning when they state: "French programmes should ideally comprise African francophone cultural content in order to equip the learner with a more inclusive understanding of the French language and to encourage the development of a greater degree of intercultural sensitivity with regard to francophone Africa."

Scholastic rules in some countries encourage or even mandate national school curricula to teach diversity and/or African culture history as a matter of educational policy (e.g. across Africa, Brazil). A study published by Santos & Soares (2023) investigated how curricular changes that are the result of a law in Brazil that requires all school districts to devise ways to teach and discuss African History and Afro-Brazilian Culture in all subjects of the national school curriculum (at both the primary and secondary level) affect FLE pedagogy and students of French. Santos & Soares (2023, p. 13-14) found that FLE classrooms are well positioned to incorporate a more diverse curricula and that French benefits greatly from this mandated legislation. The authors argue that the inclusion of Africanist lessons in FLE courses is an easy task for educators because it serves as a "positive way to teach culture from a more social, critical, and questioning perspective." Moreover, Santos & Soares (2023, p. 13-14) further state that FLE classes are diverse spaces that encourage the teaching of subjects that encapsulate "the search for humanisation," which enables students to engage in "debates that revolve around social problems, identity constructions, relativisations" that aid in the growth and nourishment of critical thinking.

7. Critiques and Moving Forward

However, educators should comprehend that a mere inclusion of Francophone content is not a subject without criticism. In other words, merely acknowledging French-speaking regions outside of France is not enough to give these areas appropriate agency. Moreover, educators should be cognisant of how the Francophone world is being presented to them and their students in their provided textbooks and materials. Chapelle (2009) and Spiegelman (2022) caution that even well-intentioned textbook authors and publishers can be problematic in how they present the Francophone world. Perhaps a big question for educators is to understand how to diversify their curricula and teach French realistically without invertedly promoting old colonialist tropes where France was once viewed as being benevolent towards the possessions within its former empire. In other words, FLE teachers need to analyse the type of presentations that one sees within chapters of their textbooks so that educators can avoid the pitfalls of perpetuating stereotypes.

In two recent studies that critically analyse the type of structure and/or vocabulary used to introduce and discuss the global Francophonie, Bedecarré (2022) and Spiegelman (2022) identify several problems found within some FLE textbooks on the market today. Both researchers offer a few alternative examples of how teachers might discuss and present the Francophone world more accurately to students. Amongst the suggestions given by Bedecarré (2022) and Spiegelman (2022), educators should deliberate about the reasons why the French language is spread across the world, which might include class discussions about the history of France's former empire linked to the era of European colonialism. Moreover, during these lessons students can also be made aware of the colonial origins relating to the maps of the Francophone world that are omnipresent in almost all introductory and intermediate FLE textbooks. In a study that examines this visual geographic phenomenon, Bedecarré (2022 p. 37-40) maintains that a fascination of maps coupled with statistics that count the number of the world's Francophones are a continuing part of the colonialist legacy. Although some educators might not fully agree with all of the arguments of the aforementioned study in terms of downplaying the use of maps and statistics as an essential way to promote French and the Francophone world (especially in primary and secondary schools where learners may not be not fully prepared to or are prohibited from deconstructing subject matter in terms of critical race theory), the curricular discussions suggested by Bedecarré (2022) are a good starting point for students to gain a more profound understanding about

why areas of the Global South and Francophone. [3] Accordingly, we posit that the presentation of maps in FLE materials is important, if given proper context as to address the issues raised by Bedecarré (2022).

Spiegelman (2022, p. 54) discusses potential problems and complexities associated with how textbooks present the appellation "*Francophonie*" along with how people are defined as "*Francophone*. Spiegelman (2022, p. 54) argues that these terms "perpetuate racialised dynamics of domination and objectification" because "two major patterns emerge" when these locutions are used in FLE textbooks. This is first elaborated when the author critiques problems related to the concept of "*Francophonie*" by stating "first, the presentation of *francophonie* as justifiably colonised, contrasted with France as a benevolent coloniser; and second, positioning *francophonie* as a consumable product vis à vis France as a discerning consumer." Later, this same study analyses how various people and subjects are presented to readers by deconstructing the descriptive language that is used when the Francophone topics are introduced.

However, with respect to the defining, analysing, and deconstructing the statistical totality of the word "*Francophone*" and counting the number of French-speakers around the world, we propose a different analysis. For example, it is our view that educators should be more aware of the implications that result from the actual number of the planet's French-speakers being *severely undercounted* (which at present, makes France seem far stronger linguistically than its true position). In other words, in addition to the arguments made by Bedecarré (2022), it is time to reconsider how one define the word "*Francophone*." Population counts of the world's French-speakers remain strikingly similar as they regard who is classified as a Francophone. Statistics by the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* and others qualify people as "*Francophone*" by one's "mother tongue" only, and not by one's "language of education" or "public use" (whether frequent or limited), and so forth. Paradoxically, when looking at statistics concerning the number of English-speakers in Anglophone countries similar classification methods are not used. Thus, we would counter, alter, and then advance the reasonings made by Bedecarré (2022) by expostulating that the statistical tabulations of Francophones based on current criteria as listed in FLE textbooks (i.e., "mother tongue") diminish the importance and true linguistic weight of Africa and the Caribbean with regard to who dominates the French language of today. Consequently, we argue that a redefinition or reclassification of the term "*Francophone*" could solidify the case that French has become a language that is now in the control of the Global South, particularly (but not exclusively) by Africans.

To assert this point effectively, whilst educators are encouraged to analyse more critically how Francophones are presented or defined (as suggested by both Bedecarré and Spiegelman), that analysis can be juxtaposed with additional and ongoing lessons that focus on the current and future importance of the global Francophonie of today. Once students understand the historical reasons why words like "*Francophonie*" came to exist as deconstructed by Bedecarré (2022), we concur with Mengara (2000) who maintains that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on contemporary realities that show how the French language is now dominated by its hundreds of millions of interlocuters in the Global South. No matter the class level, both Kern (2008) and Spiegelman (2022) state by helping students understand and situate texts socioculturally in a multimodal sense, any Francophone content that appears in FLE materials should be deconstructed more contextually in class lessons. This is especially important as it relates to the subtle ways in which Francophones around the world are represented in the textbooks used in introductory and intermediate courses. Spiegelman's (2022, p. 62) also emphasises this and concludes with some suggestive framework for teachers to educate students to move beyond being mere "passive receptors" of language and by teaching them to learn how words are often used as a means in which to maintain power.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, researchers have denoted for years that Francophone content in FLE textbooks sold on the American market is either diminished or trivial (Ogden, 1981; Wiley, 1997). At other times, French-speaking areas outside of France are presented in exotic, sensational, and artificial ways that minimalise or erase the latter's colonial legacy (Nel, 2020; Bedecarré, 2022; Spiegelman, 2022). Thus, because of this lack of a true presentation of *la Francophonie* in FLE materials, the onus to change the narrative and decolonise the French language from France lies on educators themselves. In addition to the grammar and vocabulary-based recommendations provided earlier, when teaching Francophone cultural content to students FLE teachers might examine exactly how they are presenting information. For example, as argued by Bedecarré (2022) and others, it is important to avoid assuming that just because the vast Francophone world shares an official language that these areas are homogeneously and fraternally related. From a visually perspective, educators should avoid illustrations that fetishise locations with different cultural traditions, rules, religions. Spiegelman (2022) fiercely argues that it is especially necessary not to juxtapose the Global South in ways that make France's past (and current) colonialism in a benevolent way. Thus, it behooves educators to avoid any sort of teaching about the Francophone world that has the potential to make students learn about these areas as mere visitors passing through in a pedagogical tour bus. Instead, we propose that the entire Francophone world to be given full equal footing in France in ways that absolutely no FLE textbook has ever done in

[3] FLE textbooks are not exclusive concerning this type of cartographic presentation. Introductory and intermediate textbooks of all foreign languages taught in the United States include maps and linguistic statistics of various sorts as to educate students about the global reach and/or importance of the language that is being studied. Bedecarré (2022) disagrees with this visual approach and critically analyses FLE textbooks in this respect. The same study subsequently provides educators ways in which they might discuss some critical issues and theories regarding racism and colonialism as they are connected to maps.

its (re)presentation. Educators are the ambassadors of French and they have an enormous role in presenting the language wholistically and realistically.

The primary contact that learners have with a foreign language in their introductory classes is extremely important, and it is something that they will carry with them beyond the classroom. Most students who enroll in entry-level foreign language classes in the United States will not move forward to more advanced levels of socialisation beyond whatever general education requirements are necessary for their diplomas and degrees. It is also for this exact reason FLE materials in schools, colleges, and universities may be the first or only engagement that learners will ever have with the Francophone world. Moreover, the very educators who teach students at the nascent stage in French have the dubious distinction of being the person(s) whose presentation of the new language matters the most. Therefore, if Francophone areas are missing, misrepresented, fetishised, sanitised, or *otherised* as exotic places of consumption when compared to France and its culture, this sort of teaching promotes negative perceptions of French. However unintentional, stereotypes of these have consequences, especially concerning countries located in the Global South with which Americans are more unfamiliar. When discussing what might attract today's students to study French, Bowles et al (2015 p. 43) state that:

> *"it is equally plausible that as l'exception française wanes, students may be drawn to French departments for different reasons than before, such as an interest in Quebec, the Caribbean, or Africa, where the majority of French speakers in the world live."*

Thus, it is for this reason that we strongly suggest that teachers, instructors, and professors make it clear forward from the first day of class that France is just a single piece of a large Francophone world; One that is no more and no less important than the other countries where the language is used officially (especially) or regionally/traditionally. The older pedagogical model of "*l'exception française*" mentioned by Bowles et al (2015 p. 43) no longer applies. On the African continent alone French is the official language of 29 countries and is spoken regionally in several others in a high position (e.g., Algeria, Mauritania, etc). French also enjoys official status in non-independent places, such as Québec, the overseas *départements* and territories of France, etc). This means, France should not be viewed as the model from which all other cultures are measured. France's place in the classroom should represent no more than 1/29th of cultural discussions (or at least be minimised quite substantially. This and other narrative shifts in teaching will require an adjustment forward from primary and secondary schools where France's dominance of FLE classrooms often remains intact. When positing upon this topic, Joslin (2015 p. 128) imagined a moment when American students first walk into a classroom where French is taught. At this initial point of contact it was said that new learners see a variety of symbols that represent French (e.g., a French tricolour flag or posters showing popular monuments in Paris), and the conditioning begins. Even when other countries are later introduced, students already view these areas as less important than France and the fact that French is one of the most widely spoken and studied languages on Earth is nullified. We implore educators to embark on a new form of conditioning. Rather than only decorate one's space with posters of the Eiffel Tower and the tricolour French flag, educators should decolonise that visual presentation by replacing those images with others that can diversify the walls as to reflect the realities of the language of today. Teaching French via in a more diverse way that concentrates on many identities and cultures, this will give learners more authenticity of the language. Through a deeper sociocultural presentation that engages students via intercultural as they learn grammar concepts, French's global reach is given more agency via inclusivity.

Small changes such as these by FLE educators make a genuine difference on how learners are consuming the language visually. We believe that this sort of international focus helps to increase interest in French amongst students and educate them and others about the true importance of the language. In turn, French affirms itself as the true international language and multicultural mosaic that it has become, which may the way to preserve it as a viable academic programmatic option for our ever-diverse world.

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Conflict of Interest

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