

Teaching Non-Hexagonal French Culture in the Language Classroom

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introduction

Although the 2007 MLA Foreign Language report urges language instructors to emphasize “translingual and transcultural competencies” in the classroom, translating this suggestion into practice in the French language classroom can be challenging.ⁱ While textbooks often highlight Francophone countries and issues in cultural and linguistic activities, my project takes as a starting point the criticism that non-hexagonal cultures often come out on the losing side of a comparison with hexagonal France: cultures of countries outside France where French is spoken are often only mention fleetingly, as a point of comparison with “standard” French culture, or referred to in the context of debates on immigration, integration, and the wearing of the headscarf in Europe, which leave little room for talking about non-hexagonal cultures as distinct sites of linguistic and cultural learning.ⁱⁱ My project, which I consider part of a long-term curriculum building undertaking, experiments with ways in which culture can be taught while meeting student learning objectives in second year French classes (French 3 and 4 here at UC Berkeley). From the outset, I felt strongly that talking about non-hexagonal cultures on their own terms, without always drawing comparisons to metropolitan France, was essential to giving students a more balanced and complicated view of these places. By putting together cultural units that focus on specific geographical places and topics, I wanted to expand on the idea of engaging with French culture beyond traditional ideas of Paris-centric themes and comparisons between French and the Francophone “other.” Over the course of a semester, I developed and trialed curricular materials that are designed to be shared and collectively revised by instructors. I hope that these resources will encourage students to think about French-speaking countries in terms of positive themes and ideas, adding another dimension to teaching culture in the language classroom.

theoretical framework – a few key issues

Many theorists have discussed the teaching of culture in the language classroom. Most recently, attention has been given to the idea of transcultural competency as a teachable skill and learning goal, as well as to the way that identity in the language classroom is related to student and instructor ties to source and target cultures. To give just one example of the kind of research being done in this field, Erin Kearney’s 2008 article, “Culture learning in a changed world: Student perspectives,” discusses how “globalized” students conceive of culture and what their

expectations are in the classroom.ⁱⁱⁱ Kearney's work draws on Claire Kramsch's scholarship in the field of language teaching and identity, especially her 1993 book, *Context and culture in language teaching*. A particularly important notion to the way that Kramsch (and in turn, Kearney) perceive the classroom is that of "third space," a new, intercultural space that is opened up for students and instructors alike in the context of the language classroom.^{iv}

Kearney's article is interesting because it looks specifically at what and how students think about culture, and their expectations, helping me to better frame the learning goals of the materials I was developing. Kearney concludes that

"[w]e might speculate that the current organization and delivery of foreign language instruction in the U.S. has obscured the intimate relationship between language and culture by artificially separating them. [...] If the teacher is viewed by students as *the* authoritative voice representing a whole culture, there is a danger that culture will be seen by students as a monolithic and neatly coherent entity rather than the diverse panoply of perspectives that it really is." (76)

Avoiding a monolithic approach to culture, while maintaining the "intimate relationship between language and culture" is of course no easy feat, but Kearney's observation of students and her conclusions provided a student perspective on learning culture, and reinforced my rejection of a "standard" or hexagonal-centric approach to teaching culture.

goals and methodologies

As previously stated, the major goal of my project was to teach cultural aspects of non-hexagonal cultures on their own terms, avoiding comparisons and, wherever possible, looking at cultural aspects that have particular significance to the target culture. Additionally, I was concerned with creating resources that could be accessed online by instructors, and adapted to fit in with the class level and student and teacher interests.

To better meet the needs of instructors currently working in UC Berkeley's French Department, I interviewed five Graduate Student instructors (GSI) who were teaching French 3 or 4 during the Spring 2013 semester, and focused on their replies to questions about teaching culture as I developed lesson plans. I then trialed two lesson plans in two different French 4 classrooms. After reflecting on how students and instructors responded to the materials, I modified the lesson plans and accompanying audio-visual materials.

instructor interviews

Over a week, I interviewed five GSIs who agreed to speak with me about their approach to teaching culture.^v My questions ranged from very specific points about textbooks and available materials to much broader issues of culture, otherness, and identity within the classroom. All the instructors had clearly thought a lot about their role within the classroom, and the ways in which

they taught culture. Several instructors mentioned that they felt they didn't have sufficient time and/or knowledge to talk about all non-hexagonal French cultures within the framework of French 3 and 4, and expressed the desire to incorporate culture within linguistic or grammatical activities. However, each instructor had very different ideas about the balance of language- and culture-based teaching, and their relation to each other, as well as opinions about the pragmatics and politics of what kind of teaching is done in the language classroom.

I was pleasantly surprised at the divergence of opinions, and highlight here some of the more compelling and helpful responses to my questions. The most open-ended question that I asked was, simply "What is culture?" GSI A responded that "[s]ometimes it seems like it is everything that's not grammar. [...] More academically, a technique for making order of the world [...]. Some way of making this raw data that is grammar into a global picture." GSI B stated that culture is "[a] series of evolving relationships and constant creations of insiders and outsiders. [...] As a language teacher that's the approach I take to culture."^{vi}

These responses demonstrate the connection between culture and a way of ordering the world for both students and instructors. The idea that culture is "everything that's not grammar" reflects, I think, the focus in second-year teaching on literature and authentic materials: seldom is language introduced in a vacuum, or in a way that **doesn't** suggest a connection to the way French is used in conversation, advertising, film, or literary texts, all cultural aspects.

After discussing their general interpretations of culture and its role in the language classroom, I asked interviewees how they incorporated cultural materials into their class and how they approached those materials in class. One instructor said that it was "a tricky balance between grammar and introducing [students] to French culture and civilization." Her solution was to "illustrate grammar with a concrete example, and that is often a cultural activity" (GSI D). Another instructor spoke about an evolution in the kind of materials that students wanted access to, stressing that they were more interested in pop culture, or "a culture that isn't elitist." This was, he felt, a way of "destabilizing the romantic, elitist idea of France today" and showing a "realistic image of French ideas, feelings, and culture" (GSI E).

One instructor specifically mentioned his desire to incorporate the teaching of grammar and culture, saying that he saw this as "repairing a disjuncture" between the two. He added that he hoped this approach lead to a more critical engagement with both language and culture:

"Teaching culture is teaching a kind of competence [rather than facts]. Developing a critical perspective to look at relationships that form culture at any given time [...] attaching them to geography and geopolitics is important but not as important as being able to teach the critical approach to culture." (GSI B)

One recurring concern during these interviews, and one that I hadn't thought about prior to this phase of my project, was instructor resistance to what they perceived as a biased, negative view of France and the French that they felt was sometimes encouraged by the kinds of cultural

materials they used, or the discussions they fostered. Specifically, they worried that the portrayal of France in a negative light in terms of its colonial presence or its current treatment of minorities was often overwhelming. One instructor said that she felt she had an almost ambassadorial role *vis à vis* student expectations:

“It’s important to be aware, to be critical, but these students are interested in France, they like France, and sometimes I think we’re supposed to not exactly be ambassadors, but not always be so negative. For people for whom this may be their only exposure to French culture, it would be better to mix it up.” (GSI D)

Another interviewee shared his changing perspective on student expectations:

“I react very strongly against the bias that students have about being interested in red wine and the Eiffel Tower, but I shouldn’t necessarily feel that way because when I was teaching [UC Berkeley students] in Paris, I feel like students came with those preconceptions but the shock of living in Paris very quickly moved them so far in the other direction of disenchantment that I found myself in the position of ‘Remember *Amélie*, guys?’”^{vii} (GSI C)

Responses that touch on the affective reasons that students begin learning French – reasons shared by many instructors – connect to my criticism of a focus on polemic debates regarding non-hexagonal spaces and populations. However, before the interviews with instructors, I had not thought specifically about how cultural materials and discussions that focus on France’s fraught colonial history or its recent (and ongoing) debates about integration might impact instructors as well as students.

Finally, some instructors offered specific ideas about how they thought non-hexagonal culture should be introduced in the second year of language teaching. The instructors who mentioned non-hexagonal materials were graduate students who work on within Francophone studies, so it is unsurprising that they had given some thought to talking about “non-French” resources and how they might be used to talk about culture. Both instructors who mentioned non-hexagonal resources talked about using current events to introduce these topics, which they did using newspaper articles and recent online discussions (in chat rooms and on forums and Facebook). One of these instructors, for example, said that he “reframed the entire chapter [in *Réseau*, a chapter on “La Francophonie”], in terms of neo-colonialism and *la Françafrique*. [...] Ending the chapter studying the current French intervention in Mali, trying to do it around the question of whether we can frame this intervention as neo-colonial.” His reframing of the chapter was a response to what he described as an “[i]dealized vision of the Francophone world that doesn’t at all address the ways in which the *Francophonie* is a construct of France and is an institution that serves the interests of rich countries particularly France and Québec.” (GSI C)

As a counterpoint to this approach, another interviewed GSI said that there was too much of a focus on recent culture and history and non-hexagonal material, which meant the sacrifice of more traditional or canonical sources:

“There’s an effort to counter Franco-French culture [...] but sometimes I feel like we’re missing some of the French classics [...] there’s a gap there. It’s very 20th century, and I study the 20th century, but we’re missing centuries and centuries of history. [...] There’s also a focus on the dark side of French history and culture, which I like to focus on too, but sometimes I wish we could talk about more positive things.” (GSI D)

Although many of the responses contradicted each other, this data was extremely useful in establishing the objectives of my lesson plans. I had initially been thinking simply in terms of filling in a gap that I perceived in the second-year syllabus, but after speaking to these GSIs, it became clear that the approach to teaching culture was just as important as the material itself. Moreover, making these materials adaptable to fit in with instructor requirements and preferences seemed even more crucial: all of the instructors interviewed said that they would like to have access to cultural materials, but expressed concerns over the time they could devote to “outside” material. For this reason, I endeavored to make the lesson plans modular: they can be broken down into separate exercises and used for just one class period, or extended for use over a week.

developing materials

The initial idea for the curricular materials developed for this project came from an intermediate German textbook that I used in a class several years ago. The textbook, *Stationen*, uses a Germanophone city for each chapter, and focuses on specific cultural or historical activities within that city. For example, in Chapter 1, on Berlin, there is an article on techno music, and another on Die Wende (“the change”), a series of socio-political events, the most famous of which is the fall of the Berlin Wall [see Figures 1 & 2].^{viii} During my German 3 class, I felt that the geographical specificity of each unit helped me have a stronger sense of not just the language, but the way that it is used to talk about culture that is linked to place.

Station 1		BERLIN 1	
	Kulturelle Perspektiven	Strukturen	
	Station: Berlin 2 Eine berühmte Berlinerin: Marlene Dietrich 4 Aufgaben im Internet 7 Kulturnotiz: Techno ist nicht Politik 13 Die Wende 21 Die Geschichte der Currywurst 23	Die Wortarten im Deutschen 9 Die Deklination 15 Das Verb: Konjugation, Tempus, Modus, Aktiv und Passiv 26	
Station 2		MÜNCHEN 42	
	Kulturelle Perspektiven	Strukturen	
	Station: München 42 Ein berühmter Münchner: Christian Morgenstern 43 Aufgaben im Internet 45 Kulturnotiz: Getränkemarkt 50 Trinkgeld 55	Über Vergangenes sprechen: Das Perfekt 47 Befehle, Wünsche, Anleitungen: Der Imperativ 57	

Figure 1: Stationen contents page

Inspired by this approach, I decided to create lesson plans based around one Francophone city and a cultural practice, debate, event, or practice associated with that place. Many of the associations I came up with are atypical; they shy away from stereotypical or expected representations of Francophone spaces, while others connect to personal interests or topics my own students have identified as interesting or important to them.

FRANCOPHONE CITY	TOPIC
Kinshasa, DRC	<i>les sapeurs</i>
Montréal, Canada	the film industry
Dakar, Senegal	<i>mbalax</i> music
Noumea, New Caledonia	environmental activism
Casablanca, Morocco	architecture

Figure 2: City & topic list

I decided to initially develop units for Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Montréal (Canada), focusing on the subculture of the *sapeurs* and the film industry, respectively.

Kinshasa: les sapeurs et la S.A.P.E

The first unit I developed focuses on *sapeurs* in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Sapeurs* are a subculture of (almost exclusively) men who dress in a very distinctive, mannered way. La S.A.P.E. is an acronym for *société des ambianceurs et personnes élégantes* (society of atmosphere-makers and elegant people), and each group has its own rules about what should be worn, by whom, and for what occasions.^{ix} Originally, *sapeurs* were men who had visited Paris or Brussels (the Democratic Republic of Congo was a Belgian colony), and had come back to the Congo with designer and bespoke clothes as a symbol of their “European-ness”. Today, *sapeurs* haven’t always visited Europe, and clothes can be locally sourced, but there is still an emphasis on designer labels and other expensive clothing. For many *sapeurs*, a code of behavior and social rules go hand in hand with their sartorial choices. In some ways, we can find antecedents for this subculture in European dandies of the 18th and 19th centuries.



Figure 3: Daniele Tamagni. Cover image from his book, *Gentlemen of Bacongo*.

This unit was planned to complement the *Réseau* chapter on visual art and aesthetics (Chapter 9: *Art, expression, et l'identité française*), since students learn additional vocabulary to discuss artworks and so would be prepared to describe photographs of the *sapeurs* that I included in the

lesson plan. Students also often reference French fashion, especially *haute couture*, as a cultural touchstone, so incorporating discussion of another kind of fashion, one that is influenced by European fashion houses and recently has in turn begun to influence popular culture in the US and Europe, adds to an interest that students have but displaces that interest to a non-hexagonal space.



Figure 4: Still from Solange's 2012 single "Losing You," filmed in Cape Town, South Africa^x

I planned the Kinshasa unit to span three days: on the first day, the instructor would sketch out a very brief introduction to Kinshasa and the DRC, and ask students to complete a preparatory homework assignment, on day two the whole class period would be devoted to discussion of photos of *sapeurs* and text written by *sapeurs*, a third day could be used to discuss a longer article on the *sapeurs*. This final activity could also be turned into a composition assignment.

By spending most class time in this unit talking about photography, and asking students to describe and analyze images of the Kinshasa *sapeurs*, I hoped not only to introduce the *sapeur* subculture, but also to introduce the DRC without framing it strictly in comparison to Belgium or France, and to provoke discussion (using familiar terms/vocabulary) about fashion as a means of expression.

Montréal: l'industrie du cinéma

For the second set of materials, I again tried to integrate my project with the French 4 syllabus. My unit on Montréal, Canada, and the film industry was timed to be used during *Réseau* Chapter 10: *Regard sur la France: le septième art (Le cinéma)*.^{xi} Montréal has, in the past decade or so, become a center for filmmaking because of its financial incentives for film makers and its proximity to the US, as well as its high-skills local and immigrant workforce. Although many non-Canadian films are made in Québec province, and this economic aspect is interesting, I wanted to mainly focus on French-Canadian films made in Montréal and the use of Québécois French in these movies.



Figure 5 : Movie poster, *J'ai tué ma mère*

The unit was based around clips from Xavier Dolan's 2009 film, *J'ai tué ma mère*, and interviews with Dolan, the film's writer, director, and star. As with the Kinshasa unit, the lesson plan was scheduled to take place over three class periods and begins with a preparation done as homework, then moves to in class discussion and activities, and includes a possible extension or writing exercise that incorporates the vocabulary and grammar of the chapter.

It's interesting to note that Montréal is one non-hexagonal space that is often introduced to French-language students relatively early. Because Canada has a similar university system to that of the US, it is often used to talk about concepts that do not translate as easily into the metropolitan French context, like college majors, minors, and certain educational programs that are less well-known outside North America. However, while students may be well aware that French is spoken in parts of Canada, it is unlikely that they have a lot of exposure to Québécois culture unless it is a specific interest of the instructor. My goals with this unit was, once again, to displace a common discussion topic – French film – to a non-hexagonal space, and to think about the economic and linguistic factors at play in Canada.

Both the units I developed contain a strong component of globalization: in Kinshasa, the influence of European fashion has now, to some extent, been reversed, and *sapeur* imagery is being used in art and fashion photography and music videos. In the Montréal unit, money from foreign films made in Québec province helps to fund films like *J'ai tué ma mere*, which then premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and was positively reviewed in the French press (not to mention released in Anglophone – and other – markets).

trialing materials

Each of the two units described above were trialed in French 4 classrooms by two graduate student instructors. I gave the instructors a lesson plan and materials (slide show, video clips, handouts) but also made clear that they could abridge or extend the lesson plans as needed, and use as much or as little of the materials as they felt would be useful in their classes. What follows is a few observations about how students and instructors approached the cultural materials on Kinshasa and Montréal in two different classes.

Kinshasa

In GSI D's French 4 class, as a pre-lesson homework activity, several students were initially asked to find out something about the Democratic Republic of Congo. At the beginning of the class I observed, they gave feedback about the country to the class and then GSI D began to show and discuss the images of *sapeurs*.

The discussion of the images of *sapeurs* quickly moved away from description and analysis of their clothing choices to questions and concerns about the socio-economic status of the men portrayed and the relationship between photographer, subject, and viewer. Looking at the photo below, students immediately pointed out the discrepancy between the man's clothes, which look expensive, although perhaps old, and the shabby house behind him. They also questioned the choice to have the man's face obscured: he is looking down at the ground rather than staring directly at the camera, which is a departure from the composition of many photos. Students were also quick to ask how *sapeurs* afforded their clothes in such a poor country, and why no women were portrayed in these images. GSI D, when asked questions like this, directed the questions back at the class – “Why do **you** think there are no women in these images?” – rather than take

on the role of instructor and “expert” on *sapeurs*. This deferral connects to something several instructors communicated to me: they were sometimes nervous to talk about French-speaking countries about which they knew very little, concerned that this would seem like a superficial or meaningless approach. GSI D’s strategy, to keep the questions and possible answers between the group of students, and to ask them to provide additional information, or even to rephrase or change the stakes of the questions, is one that I thought worked very well in this class. Several students mentioned that they had been to African countries, or majored in Economics or Peace and Conflict Studies, and so were in a position to be able to talk about difficult topics like economic disparity in Africa and its ramifications, something that I hadn’t explicitly included while creating materials and lesson plans.



Figure 6: Daniele Tamagni

I was pleasantly surprised that students had so much to say, and were so curious about the images, but the number of images given, in addition to the short text taken from a *sapeur*’s blog, was really too much for a 50 minute class. I had anticipated less discussion of the photos, but this didn’t take into account the interests of the students and their engagement with photography. This meant that there wasn’t time for any discussion of the “authentic” cultural text – a blog post by someone who identifies as a *sapeur* – and a chance to contrast it with the photos taken by Europeans who are, in some respects, voyeuristic outsiders to the *sapeur* subculture.

Montréal

After observing classes that used the Kinshasa materials, I slightly modified my approach to the unit on the film industry in Montréal. I was more aware of the limitations of time and so shifted my initial focus on filmic language and describing film scenes to a more narrowed-down lesson plan that looked at the larger issue of Québécois French and *francisisation* within the context of a specific film. The materials in this unit were used during the *Réseau* chapter on *le septième art*. Students had already watched a feature film in French and worked on it in class and in a longer composition, so they had some familiarity with talking about film in general. With this in mind, the cultural materials on Montréal became more of a case study of how one writer and director works within Québec and as part of a global film industry.

In class, GSI C decided to begin class with a creative discussion rather than introduce the topic via a homework activity. He asked students to think about what they would do if they wanted to make a film but didn't have enough of a budget to make the movie in the Bay Area. Students talked briefly in small groups and came up with ideas, including filming in a cheaper location. Although no one specifically mentioned Canada, GSI C easily transitioned into some introductory comments about the film industry in Montréal and the available incentives for filmmakers. Because the students in this section had watched a film based in Montréal very recently, they already had some context available to talk about Québec.^{xii} The instructor told me that one of the reasons why he had selected this film was his own experience of Francophone Canada and his desire to talk about this region in class. Because of this familiarity, GSI C was able to talk at length about Québécois French and both its linguistic and socio-political stakes. Instead of reading a text, this part of the class was more like an informal lecture, with students interrupting to ask questions or give examples.

After some discussion of Québécois French, students watched a clip from *J'ai tué ma mère* and were asked to explain the use of the word "spécial" in the main character's initial monologue. Subsequently, they watched another short clip, in which as actor's speech becomes more and more colloquial and she uses more and more Québécois curses as she gets angrier.



Figure 7: Still from *J'ai tué ma mère*

Finally, they broke into small groups again to work on a handout that asked them to guess or deduce out the meaning of some commonly used Québécois words that are not or no longer used in “standard” French. Students were extremely adept at deducing the meaning of these words, and GSI C added to the discussion by giving other examples of Québécois words.

In this class, the lesson ended up being less structured and more spontaneous than I had planned and expected, but it highlighted the role of instructor knowledge and experience, and reminded me of the comment by another GSI about being an informal ambassador for Francophone culture in the classroom. Although the class didn’t watch all the clips I mentioned in my lesson plan, they were given a glimpse of a different genre of Québécois film and had a chance to think about linguistic differences between Francophone cultures, a topic that can be difficult to broach within the framework of teaching hexagonal French, and “standard” grammar and accent to non-native speakers.

modifying materials

Being able to trial both the Kinshasa and Montréal lesson plans in French 4 classrooms gave me the opportunity to modify my lesson plans and materials to better fit the needs and limitations of a 50-minute class period. One of the goals of this project was to make the lesson plans totally adaptable by instructors: they should be able to download the whole lesson plan, which is divided into clearly labeled segments, and then use whichever parts they find useful, either as a stand-alone activity, a several-day unit, or as homework or composition activities. Seeing how different classes interacted with the materials made it clear that my initial lesson plans had been too ambitious in terms of time, mostly because I underestimated how much students would have to say, and how quickly their questions would open up class discussions onto broader, more complex issues.

For the Kinshasa unit, I modified my lesson plan to focus mostly on the images of the *sapeurs*, and to include questions about photography in general and the use of these images in global media. For the Montréal unit, I also included a global component, by inviting discussion about the criticism and media treatment of Xavier Dolan’s film. This discussion would replace the exercise on defining Québécois terms which, while it worked well in the two classrooms in which it was trialed, reinforced the idea that there is a “standard” or normative French and then derivations from that norm. Focusing on the Québécois accent and code switching between a strong Québécois accent and more “international” form of French seems to me less comparative and more a question of socio-linguistics within the space of Québec.



Figure 8: Still from *J'ai tué ma mère*

In both units, students raised issues of globalization without much instructor prompting. In the Kinshasa unit, the European influences on the *sapeurs* is immediately evident, and the mention of the film industry in Québec brings to mind the competing industries of Hollywood, Paris, Bollywood, Vancouver, and other locations. Introducing the question of globalization in these curricular materials raises some conflict with my initial goal to present non-hexagonal cultures on their own terms, without constantly comparing them to France. However, looking at contemporary cultural texts, paired with asking students to use internet-based resources such as YouTube or Wikipedia, inevitably raises questions about cultural connections and influence not only among French-speaking regions, but also between Francophone and Anglophone spaces. The proliferation of *sapeur* imagery in fashion magazines is one example of this, as is the fact that many of Xavier Dolan's films are available in their entirety on YouTube, with English (and Spanish, and Russian etc) subtitles. These questions and conversations are, I think, still useful when introducing non-hexagonal cultures because they suggest ways in which the global circulation of culture displaces or disrupts traditional definitions of "high" culture and reveals new and ever-changing hybridizations of culture and language. These hybrid forms of culture offer students and instructors a transcultural way of approaching culture in the classroom, and underline the fact that no culture is monolithic or unchanging.

Modifying these materials to be much more modular and therefore more usable, and allowing for inevitable discussions of globalization and influence hopefully makes these materials more accessible and suggests to me new ways of thinking about the other places and topics about which I hope to create curricular materials.^{xiii}

remaining questions

As is evident in my comments about the modification of cultural materials, avoiding any and all comparison with metropolitan France is a difficult task. As an instructor and researcher, this opened up questions about how those comparisons could be used in class to provide meaningful discussions about postcolonial relationships and the “third place” of language teaching: our task as language instructors is not to provide a one-for-one calque between the abstract and problematic “source culture” and “target culture,” but to open up different relational spaces and dialogues.

The development of city-specific curricular materials is an ongoing project, and one that raises productive questions about classroom interactions. Two of these questions that were especially interesting to me, and which will help frame this project in the future, are issues of linguistic diversity and evaluation. As instructors of the French language, how can we integrate linguistic as well as cultural diversity into our teaching? Is this something that we need to focus on when we teach non-hexagonal cultures, or can we use the umbrella-term “Francophone” to elide the differences in French spoken in the Maghreb, French Polynesia, and Québec? As native and non-native instructors who have devoted many years to learning (mostly) standard French, how can we introduce variants of French to students who will ultimately be tested on (mostly) standard French?

This last question connects to subject of evaluation. Although many instructors saw culture as something that could and should be integrated at all levels of instruction, they were unsure about how this body of knowledge could be assessed. Is having students write on cultural topics sufficient, or should quizzes and other in-class evaluation ask about cultural facts? Is cultural knowledge a “way of thinking” or an approach that precludes evaluation, or at least makes it extremely subjective?

These are questions that are well outside the scope of a semester-long project, and certainly don’t have singular or definite answers and solutions. However, I wanted to end this discussion of my research with these open-ended questions as they are the pedagogical, political, and even ethical issues that I believe will help me continue to work on cultural diversity and non-hexagonal materials both in and outside the French-language classroom.

Notes

ⁱ “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World” <http://www.mla.org/flreport>

ⁱⁱ A note about terminology: generally, textbooks (and literature departments) refer to France and Francophone countries, eliding issues of colonization, economic and linguistic differences, and race. Often in textbooks, the label “Francophone” is used to refer to the non-European other who happens to speak French. To avoid this, I use the adjective “hexagonal” to refer to metropolitan France, and “non-hexagonal” to refer to countries and regions where French is spoken.

ⁱⁱⁱ Erin Kearney. “Culture learning in a changed world: Student perspectives.” *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*. 4.1 (2008): 62-82. Online.

http://www.coe.uga.edu/jolle/2008_1/culture.pdf

^{iv} Claire Kramsch. *Context and culture in language teaching*. London: Oxford University Press, 1993. Kramsch develops here her idea of the language classroom’s “third space,” a term coined by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*.

^v I’ll refer to them here as GSI A, B, C, D, and E.

^{vi} I spoke to Graduate Student Instructors in both English and French, but here have translated all comments into English, for the sake of both consistency and anonymity.

^{vii} Instructor C is referring to *Le Fabuleux Destin d’Amélie Poulain* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001), a film that students cite as a favorite, but one that presents a very idealistic, sanitized view of Paris.

^{viii} Prisca Augustyn and Nikolaus Euba. *Stationen: Ein Kursbuch für die Mittelstufe*. Andover: Heinle & Heinle, 2011.

^{ix} The acronym was created to spell out the French word “la sape,” slang for clothing. The verb “saper” means to wear, be dressed in, and its adjectival form “sapé(e)” is usually used to describe someone’s style: *Il est bien sapé*, or *Elle est mal sapée*. (He is well-dressed/fashionable; She is badly-dressed/unfashionable).

^x For a fascinating discussion of Solange’s video, and the use of *sapeur* style in the media, see “When Solange filmed a music video in a Cape Town township,” by Tom Devriendt.

<http://africasacountry.com/2012/10/05/when-solange-filmed-a-music-video-in-a-cape-town-township/>

^{xi} It didn’t occur to me until after I had completed my classroom trials that the chapter promised a “regard sur la France,” but this title was already made ironic by French 4 instructors’ choice of films. In this chapter, instructors can select a film to screen and then discuss with students, popular selections over the past few years include *Monsieur Lazhar* (Philippe Falardeau, 2011), *Ma vie en rose* (Alain Berliner, 1997), *Chocolat* (Claire Denis, 1988), and *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (Agnès Varda, 2000). Only one of these films was made France, and Varda’s film is a portrayal of the “france d’en bas” that is quite critical of contemporary French culture. The other films portray an Algerian immigrant in Québec, a transsexual boy in Belgium, and the French colonial experience of Cameroon.

^{xii} *Monsieur Lazhar* (Philippe Falardeau, 2011)

^{xiii} One instructor has already used the *sapeur* materials in his French 3 class. His class discussed the images and were given the option of writing a composition on the following prompt:

“Discutez des priorités et des valeurs esthétiques des *sapeurs* de Kinshasa. Qu’en pensez-vous? Élaborez vos idées en situant les *sapeurs* dans le contexte d’un ou plusieurs des thème(s) suivants : la mondialisation, le consumérisme, la culture populaire et la mode, et le genre (rôles masculin et féminin)” [“Discuss the priorities and esthetic values of the *sapeurs* of Kinshasa. What do you think of them? Expand on your ideas by situating the *sapeurs* in one or more of the following contexts: globalization, consumerism, pop culture and fashion, and/or gender.”]