



## Disruptive French: Using OER to promote linguistic justice in the French-language classroom

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### Abstract

*A prestige-focused approach to language teaching, motivated by hegemonic definitions of “normativity” defined by a privileged few, is one that sustains inequity, misrepresents the speech community, and excludes learners by denying them access to the cultural and linguistic tools they need to relate to real-world users. Now more than ever, as language departments struggle to fill seats and argue for the relevance of their disciplines, educators must instead embrace a linguistic justice approach which simultaneously critiques monolingualism and integrates plurilingual practices essential to valorizing the linguistically-rich realities of 21st-century learners. #OnYGo, an Open Educational Resource (OER) for first-year French, employs a linguistic justice approach that redraws the francophone landscape through a lens of social justice and cultivates learners’ awareness of language variation and identity via translanguaging, the development of metalinguistic awareness, and the thoughtful use of digital tools which invite learners to create and interpret language across modalities, guided by a multiliteracies framework. Because OERs are free from the censorship of commercial publishers, we argue that they should not only be used to increase accessibility to language education but also to promote equitable and iconoclastic approaches to language teaching like the one on display in #OnYGo.*

**Keywords:** *open educational resources, second language acquisition, multiliteracies, translanguaging, social media*

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### Introduction

For several years, language educators have argued that language teaching should contribute to educational processes more generally, in particular to the development of intercultural learning and to the sensitization of language learners into global citizens (Byram, 2008; 2014; Byram et al., 2017). Many have heeded this call (Rauschert, 2022; Byram et al., 2022; Giralt et al., 2022; Kiyota, 2022; Lütge & Merse, 2022; Janachowska-Budych, 2022; Tarsoly & Čalić, 2022), going as far as arguing that this effort to broaden students’ perspectives should be at the center of language education and not merely a serendipitous byproduct of it. The cultivation of global citizenship has been demonstrated to pair well with adjacent approaches and subfields, e.g., virtual exchanges, service learning, migration literature, ecocriticism, etc., but the approach in and of itself does not spotlight plurilingualism—a reality of 21st century global participation—in a way that adequately problematizes the prescribed monolingualism and normative constructions common to many methods of language teaching. What is missing is an approach that takes plurilingualism as the norm and invites learners to not only embrace multiple varieties of a language but develop metalinguistic and critical language awareness surrounding users’ choice of mixed codes or one code over another.

#OnYGo uses a linguistic justice approach to redraw the francophone landscape through a lens of social justice and cultivate learners' awareness of language variation and identity via translanguaging, the development of metalinguistic awareness, and the thoughtful use of digital tools which invite learners to create and interpret language across modalities, guided by a multiliteracies framework. The approach as it is used in #OnYGo is informed by transnational writing instruction (Martins, 2015), where the method is used to reorient and attune students' discursive practices to focus on language differences, global geopolitical and social contingencies, and cross-cultural rhetorics (Mihut, 2020). In order to model and support multilingualism/multidialectalism, the approach simultaneously critiques monolingualism as the norm and integrates practices that not only tolerate translanguaging but actively encourage it in creative and authentic ways (Linguistic justice - research - metro center, 2021). This translates into inviting learners to reflect on their own use of different languages/varieties within and across interactions, encouraging them to make cultural/pragmatic/linguistic comparisons in their areas of language/culture expertise, and supporting them to create freely with language using all the tools in their linguistic repertoire. This can be challenging for instructors because, although it gives learners complete poetic license over their language use, instructors must grow accustomed to codes being introduced into the discussion that will inevitably surpass their own linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Most of today's basic language programs continue to be heavily influenced by textbooks issued by commercial publishers whose interest in sales and wide palatability often has a normalizing effect on the kinds of content they can contain, indirectly conditioning a rehashing of the same ideas and approaches over prolonged periods of time. Currently, the most popular print French-language textbooks (*Horizons*, *En Avant*, *Deux Mondes*, *Vis à Vis*, etc.) lack rich cultural perspectives in their representation of the French-speaking world and perpetuate the France-centricity common among many French-language materials. In addition, these texts are often lacking in multimodal activities that allow learners to interact with real-world texts in multifaceted language situations, limiting their exposure to, and consequently, awareness of, linguistic and pragmatic variation across French varieties. Additionally, current events and discussions of contemporary issues are often scarce and/or outdated, as print textbooks take many years to become available on the market before being adopted.

Open educational resources (OER) are canonically known for their affordance of the 5Rs (Wiley, 2014): retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute, features that make the OER locally manageable, usable, adaptable, combinable, and shareable, respectively, with other users. Many of these features motivate the openness of OERs and their participation in the larger ecology of open educational practices (OEP), a system that supports the production, use, and reuse of OERs through institutional policies which promote innovative pedagogical models and respect and empower learners as co-producers on their lifelong learning path, e.g., teachers and learners collaborating on assignments, syllabi, or course design. The OEP system gets its foothold primarily in the long-term sustainability of open access over all else. But for that reason, the first generation of OERs does not look that different from commercial textbooks hidden behind the paywall—much of the content is the same, the voices leading the discussion are the same, and the voices missing from the discussion are the same, in terms of both who gets to serve as authors of such texts and who gets to serve as the showcased subject. Such is the case with *Français Interactif* (FI), an innovative French OER (first published in 2004) that brought openness and accessibility to a first-year French curriculum, but still chose to give the majority of its spotlight to white cisgender-heterosexual 18–25 year-old middle-class Americans learning French in a collegiate setting, and interacting while abroad with predominantly white cis-het adult native French speakers living in metropolitan areas of France. #OnYGo's main objective is to quiet the hegemonic voices in the francophone world to give others a space in which to be heard, a feat made possible by both its curriculum and unconventional team of authors. One a Swiss-born applied linguist working as a tenure-track faculty in French and Linguistics and director of the basic language program in a midsized minority-serving public university in the American southeast, another a French-born applied linguist working as a teaching assistant professor of French and basic language coordinator in a midsized public research university in the Pacific northwest, the third an L2-French American-born queer applied sociolinguist working as the director of a language center and tenure-track

faculty in Linguistics in a large public research university in the Midwest, the group brings a variety of academic, professional, and lived personal experiences to the table, many of which are subfield-specific and non-intersecting, but all of which seek to move forward the agenda of open education. None represents the traditional “full professor of French studies” model, concerned with reinforcing the language conventions and social issues of the hegemonic culture in French studies.

Many of FI’s dominant themes also reinforce this prestige bias—gastronomy, art, film, literature, history, ski vacations—as opposed to more popular themes like employment, immigration, homelessness, and race issues that are representative of newer generations of French speakers and/or those without access to a middle-class education and its accompanying cultural experiences. Prestige bias is also represented in FI in constructions of space, as most of the action takes place in or around Paris or Lyon, in France. 21st-century treatments of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, colonialism, intersectionality, dis/ability, audism, etc., have brought to light the problem of hegemonic representations in learning materials, calling for a linguistic justice approach to language pedagogy that provides a more equitable representation of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the francophone community. Although FI has undergone periodic revisions during the intervening years to address certain hegemonic biases in its depiction of the French-speaking world, we see the need for the creation of a French-language text that does not simply offer targeted piecemeal corrections, but rather constructs a curriculum from the ground up with an entirely different understanding of what it means to be a speaker of French. This is the origin story of #OnYGo.

That we would choose OER as the modality of such a text is no coincidence—the openness it offers directly addresses the accessibility and social class biases we are seeking to remediate elsewhere in our curriculum. But we also see OER as a strategic choice for this type of iconoclastic approach because it is not subject to the same type of censorship as textbooks produced by commercial publishers, concerned more with profit margins than issues of social justice. In that respect, OER is the only modality that could ever allow a subversive text like #OnYGo to exist. As such, we argue that the same OER modality that was once praised for its widespread accessibility and adaptability should also be considered by future authors and educators as a strategic venue of publication for texts seeking to take novel approaches to language instruction, particularly those that seek to redraw the landscape of language communities to reflect realistic human tendencies instead of outmoded notions of dominant and prestige culture.

## **The Affordances of OER for any Curriculum**

### ***Accessibility***

For students already struggling with the rising cost of tuition in higher education, the additional expense of renting or buying costly textbooks that may or may not be used for more than a single semester presents another barrier. Local, short-term solutions, such as placing copies of a course text on reserve at the library, only provide limited relief, as students must either present themselves in person to borrow the print text and/or wait their turn to access a limited number of digital copies online. For this reason, a shift to an OER-based curriculum that grants everyone access on a variety of smart devices would significantly address some of the inequity presented by some students being able to gain access to textbooks and others not. Language programs may also consider the use of a Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) program made possible by OERs as a tool for the recruitment and retention of students who face significant financial hardships, are on the fence about which language to pursue, and/or wish to fulfill a multi-semester language requirement without the burden of additional textbook costs. In K–12 districts where funds for textbooks diminish with each passing year, the presence of high-quality OERs, particularly those for foreign language instruction, may well become a necessity that dictates which courses are able to be offered.

A more global benefit to OER adoption is that the digital environment and lack of cost allow for wider access to information and research than conventional materials, ensuring broader participation in scholarship. To that end, it allows researchers, authors, programs, departments, etc., to participate in the ecosystem of OEP more broadly, e.g., Learners and teachers co-constructing, authoring, and circulating a

course textbook; collaborating on course, syllabus, or assignment design; or contributing to broader knowledge commons or repositories (Ehlers, 2011). This serves not only at the local level to sustain cost-free systems of knowledge production for faculty and students, but also globally to help universities disseminate research across political and institutional boundaries (Stacey, 2021). In this way, the home institutions of the authors benefit from the exposure of their OER, as do the online hosts of the texts, which oftentimes provide greater visibility due to their status as OER repositories, e.g., Center for Open Educational Resources on Language Learning, Open Textbook Library, Open Language Resource Center, etc.

### **Flexibility and Adaptability**

Another benefit of open materials is that they are fully remixable and can be customized to fit the way an instructor wants to teach a particular course. When using traditional print resources that cannot be easily edited or combined due to static format types, password protection and copyright restrictions, instructors may be forced to teach their course in a way that conforms to available resources, rather than desired content and sequencing. If an instructor wants to incorporate new activities or add information about a particular aspect presented in a chapter in #OnYGo, they can do so by simply making a personal copy of the text and modifying their own copy of the textbook. Although flexibility and adaptability are often touted as benefits of the OER modality, we have noticed that many in existence suffer from what we call *false adaptability*, in that they bear Creative Commons-licenses that seemingly invite remixing and redistribution of the source file, but use static formats like pdfs or Pressbook sites as their default modality, severely hampering users' ability to alter the text in any kind of straightforward way. #OnYGo addresses this by living entirely in the Google environment—users must make their own copy of the Google doc text, after which changes can be made in the personal copy by simply clicking within the document and typing. Homework and assessments to accompany the textbook also live in the Google Forms environment and follow an identical pipeline for personalization and adaptation.

In addition to modifying pre-existing activities or features of activities, instructors and learners can also personalize their text, by deleting or adding to existing activities in their copy of the textbook. This personalization can be applied intermittently throughout the text or more systemically, to reflect a particular focus or sequence that an instructor would like to emphasize in their course. #OnYGo has identified in its Teachers' Guide several different proposed learning sequences that highlight different skills and content areas: culture, grammar, oral competency, social media, translation, and writing. In this way, an instructor wishing to focus on digital media applications of French in their introductory French course could follow the social media pathway through the textbook. In contrast, an instructor wishing to focus on more traditional texts, could choose to follow the grammar and/or translation and writing pathways. On the learner end, each chapter boasts a category called *Mon vocabulaire* that empowers students to take an active role in their own language learning and identity creation by inviting them to add ten vocabulary items to their wordlists that are uniquely relevant to their own lives (i.e., hobbies, personal descriptors, actions, etc.)

Ease of alterability in the text also allows educators and learners to tailor their instruction to local learning communities in a variety of teaching, geographical and cultural contexts. To address the stale nature of traditional print textbooks, we sought to create #OnYGo as a text with a generative structure that would allow users to seamlessly update dead links and swap out images, media, and current events topics in real time as society evolves. Rather than placing the full responsibility of needing to update the text at each use on educators, we instead encourage them to use #OnYGo's personalizable component to generate buy-in among learners by letting them take charge of certain aspects of the curriculum. This can range from letting learners innovate a procedure to decide what the topic of a debate unit will be to having them swap out stock images in the text with personal images of their city or learning group. In the bigger picture, involving students in the adaptation and revision of the OER also allows instructors to seize such opportunities to engage in "open pedagogy" (Wiley, 2014) assignments that leverage OER to create more meaningful learning experiences. Traditionally, students work hard on assignments that are handed in to their instructor, graded, and then never seen again. Instead, instructors might ask students in the context of an assignment

to edit part of the OER for redistribution or openly license their own work for use by future students. This both positions students as active participants in scholarly knowledge-sharing and allows their work to be part of a larger discussion with a broader audience.

## The Affordances of OER for a Linguistic Justice Curriculum

### ***Inclusive Education: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion***

Although no textbook can claim to address the entire cultural richness of groups and individuals within and across countries, textbook analyses have found egregious cultural biases toward a mother country (e.g., France in the teaching of French) or a single culture (Wieczorek & College, 1994). Others have claimed that many textbooks portray the way authors and publishers conceive of language and culture (Hilliard, 2014), thus resulting in materials constrained by market ideologies that do not offer a just representation of current language use or important cultural norms (McConachy, 2018).

#OnYGo's linguistic justice approach offers cultural perspectives from several continents, avoiding the France-centricity common to many French-language materials, providing learners with the opportunity to identify with individuals of a variety of intersectionalities. This approach to language teaching avoids overgeneralizations, simplifications, and the development of stereotypes associated with a particular culture. Instead, we present societal deepdives of French-speaking locations and use locally informed cultural themes to animate each case study: Belgium (Stromae), Benin (voodooism), Switzerland (gay marriage), Martinique (heritage poetry) and Benin, Gabon, and Mali (sub-Saharan cuisine). Each case study contains a sequence of activities that asks learners to reflect on these topics via different media sources and to compare them with their own customs and habits. For instance, the deepdive on Switzerland focuses on a recent gay marriage referendum, prompting students to consider the question of marriage rights in different global societies, including the communities they have personal experience with. Contrary to many print textbook activities that only consist of recalling cultural information, students in #OnYGo are challenged to go beyond historical facts and famous geographical locations (Berti, 2020) to develop intercultural competence (Byram, 1997, 2008; Kramsch, 1993, 1998), by developing cultural awareness in their home and target cultures.

In response to shifting sociocultural constructions of gender and the emerging visibility of non-binary individuals morphologically constrained by grammars marking gender binarily (e.g., French), we integrated the inclusive non-binary pronoun *iel* into texts and activities throughout the book to provide a grammatical means for non-binary learners to exist, informed by in-group users (see [Figure 1](#)). As Knisley (2020) explains: "understanding the lived linguistic experiences of non-binary individuals has substantial implications for language teaching and learning" (p. 851). We agree with Knisley that although language forms in French or any other language cannot fully erase the symbolic or real violence and inequities experienced by non-binary students, providing these linguistic resources to learners is a foundational step in fully realizing educational inclusivity and fostering intercultural competence. #OnYGo also features targeted linguistic activities that allow learners to develop skills in marking non-binary adjectival agreement or subverting the binary altogether in favor of invariable adjectives.

### ◆ Variations sociales : pronoms non-binaires

You have probably already noticed that nouns (=words for things) in French are often described in terms of their grammatical gender, e.g. *la/une chaise* 'the/a chair (f.)' or *le/un livre* 'the/a book (m.)'. This system of *grammatical* gender has nothing to do with *social* gender and instead is a remnant of which declensions these words came from in Latin, French's parent language.

Pronouns are little words used to replace nouns in order to improve the efficiency of communication, e.g. *The cat* (noun) was sitting at the door. *The cat* (noun) was meowing. *It* (pronoun) looked hungry. Pronouns traditionally reflect the same masculine/feminine binary categories found in nouns, e.g. *il* is used to mean 'it' when the noun is grammatically masculine; *elle* is used to mean 'it' when the noun is grammatically feminine.

The problem is that pronouns also refer to people, and humans have complex social identities that reflect their norms, behaviors, roles and relationships in the communities they are a part of. One of these social identities is gender. Because the same word is used to talk about (social) gender as (grammatical) gender, people often conflate the two. This is not a problem in languages like Finnish where all people use the same pronoun in grammar regardless of their social gender identity (all use *hän*), but it does create a problem in French because there are only two grammatical categories in the language and a variety of gender categories that someone might identify with. So how do French speakers who don't identify with the masculine/feminine binary use grammar to talk about themselves? They innovate a new non-binary pronoun, known as *iel*.

*Iel*, pronounced "yell," is a combination of *il* and *elle*, and is a common way for people who do not identify as masculine or feminine to refer to themselves in French. In English, speakers use the singular 'they' to do this, e.g., Someone just texted you! Oh, really? What did **they** want? Other languages with similar binary grammars have also innovated new forms to bring representation to non-binary individuals. In Swedish, for instance, speakers did something similar to French by innovating a novel form from the pre-existing forms in the grammar: *hun* = 'she', *han* = 'he', *hen* = non-binary 'they'.

Throughout this book, you will see *iel* regularly in exercises and activities. It is our hope that learners will understand the ways in which language can be changed to bring better representation to the people who use it and, in doing so, find the necessary tools to represent their own complex social identities when using French.

What are the non-binary pronouns in the other languages you speak?

What other ways are non-binary genders recognized in the grammar?

Figure 1. An activity explaining the social and grammatical function of non-binary pronouns, Chapter 1.

#OnYGo addresses diversity not only in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, dis/ability, audism, etc., but also in terms of French users' relationship to the French language. In commercial textbooks, the native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992) is still palpable, such that many of the characters a learner meets throughout the textbook are either native French speakers or trying to emulate one for immigration, personal or other purposes. #OnYGo addresses the larger reality of diglossia in the French-speaking world by instead giving the floor to multicultural characters who use French as just one of many codes throughout their day, e.g., Yoruba-French speakers in Benin, Arabic-French speakers in Morocco and Tunisia, and Wolof-French speakers in Senegal. This seeks to validate the concept of the multilingual French user and learner by portraying the linguistic reality of how French is used in conjunction with other languages, and not in exclusive from-birth monolingualism.

#OnYGo extends its definition of diversity to include a robust sociolinguistic representation of French varieties that goes beyond the standard and literary forms that populate traditional commercial textbooks. The textbook's recurring category, *Variations sociales*, provides support in decoding register, slang, and age-, gender- and geography-based variation common in various corners of the francophone world. As such, learners get firsthand practice at counting in Swiss and Belgian French (i.e., using a base-ten system for 70, 80 and 90 instead of a base-twenty system), at interpreting isogloss maps depicting regionally specific words for everyday items like "bag" and "mop," and at understanding handshape differences between signed French in Quebec versus signed French in France. Rather than simply presenting information, these sections challenge learners to fully experience variable forms by employing them in authentic culminating application activities.

We also include contemporary manifestations of French languaculture, including non-standard language forms prevalent on the Internet (e.g., *lol*, *xpdr*, *ptdr*) and on various social media platforms (e.g., *un hashtag* vs. *un mot-dièse* "hashtag"). #OnYGo's focus on contemporary linguistic trends centered on social and identity-based issues serves to empower learners in the co-creation of linguistic and cultural elements in their French curriculum and guide them about their own French language learning trajectory.

### Translanguaging

Another issue present in many traditional textbooks is the lack of pedagogical activities that allow for certain complexity, raise students' awareness, and prepare them for intercultural experiences and



citizenship (Berti, 2020). One way #OnYGo achieves this is by making use of translanguaging, or the simultaneous support of multiple codes, during instruction. As illustrated in the title, #OnYGo's vision of language learning is informed by both linguistic hybridity (i.e., *on y va!* "let's go" blended with English "go") and the multimodality common to online culture (i.e., its representation as a hashtag like those used to index posts on social media). More specifically, #OnYGo supports a specific type of translanguaging known as *dynamic translanguaging* (García, 2009; García & Li, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015; Wei, 2018), which involves presence in the learning materials and learning environment of a translanguaging stance (teacher attitudes toward multilingualism), translanguaging design (lesson planning to involve multilingualism), and translanguaging shifts (spontaneous interactions while teaching that invite multilingualism). Translanguaging transforms classroom discourse by allowing for the dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and varieties in making and decoding meaning, a process that raises learners' critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992) and stimulates knowledge construction that goes beyond the language(s) themselves (Wei & Lin, 2019; Wei, 2018) (see Figure 2). In this way, learners can tap into what they already know typologically, pragmatically, and socially about language and understand how each one relates to French more specifically. This builds metalinguistic awareness that serves not only in helping students excel at processing French, but languages in general. The monocultural monolingual default is thus replaced with the multicultural multilingual model, and students can observe for themselves in what contexts French speakers might move between languages and varieties and to what extent they might mix them.

### ❖ Variations sociales : compter en français dans le monde francophone

In francophone Switzerland and Belgium, Congo, the numbers for 70 and 90 are septante and nonante. Only in Switzerland is 80 *huitante*. They follow the rest of the Romance languages by combining a root word from Latin for 7 (sept), 8 (huit) or 9 (neuf) with a root word from for ten (-tente/a), e.g. *settanta* 'seventy' (Italian: sette + anta), *noventa* 'ninety' (Portuguese: nove + enta).

Suisse	Belgique	France
1 - 20	1 - 20	1 - 20
21 - 69	21 - 69	21 - 69
70 - 79	70 - 79	70 - 79
80 - 89	80 - 89	80 - 89
90 - 99	90 - 99	90 - 99

#### Modèle :

70 = septante

81 = huitante et un

92 = nonante-deux

France follows a different system which is vigesimal (=base 20) from 70-99. The system is mixed due to North Germanic influence, first appearing in Normandy, in northern France. From there, it spread south after the formation of the French Republic, replacing the typical Romance forms still used today in Belgian and Swiss French. The current vigesimal system was introduced by the Vikings and adopted by the Normans who popularized its use (e.g. In English, four score and seven = 87). Pre-Roman Celtic languages in Gaul also made use of a vigesimal system, but this system largely vanished early in French linguistic history or became severely marginalized in its range. The Nordic vigesimal system may possibly derive ultimately from the Celtic ([Wikipedia](#)).

Les nombres de 1 à 20
Le système d'additions dizaine + unités
De 70 à 79, le système d'addition : 60 + (nombres de 10 à 19)
De 80 à 89, le système de multiplication et d'addition : (4 x 20) + (les nombres de 1 à 9)
De 90 à 99, le système de multiplication et d'addition : (4 x 20) + (les nombres de 10 à 19)

For more information on the topic, check out: [Compter en français de 0 à 99, les différents systèmes, les différences culturelles - Le français illustré](#)

#### Modèle :

70 = 60 + 10 = soixante-dix	80 = 4*20 = quatre-vingts	90 = 4*20 + 10 = quatre-vingt-dix
71 = 60 et 11 = soixante-et-onze	81 = 4*20 = quatre-vingt-un	91 = 4*20 + 11 = quatre-vingt-onze
72 = 60 + 12 = soixante-douze	82 = 4*20 + 2 = quatre-vingt-deux	92 = 4*20 + 12 = quatre-vingt-douze

What does the counting system for tens (10, 20, 30, 40,...90) look like in the other languages you speak?

Is the system predictable? Are there multiple ways to count? Does it incorporate counting systems from other languages? Which ones?

Which francophone system do you prefer and why?

*Figure 2.* An excerpt from a translanguaging activity, Chapter 2.

### **Multiliteracies via Multimodality**

A multiliteracies framework (Allen & Paesani, 2010; Paesani et. al, 2016) is what drives #OnYGo's linguistic justice approach, selected because it interprets the notion of text in the broadest way possible and then modularly cultivates learners' abilities to identify, interpret, transform, and communicate meaning across a variety of visual, oral, and digital forms. In each chapter, we use a variety of contemporary texts from authentic websites to guide learners through activities that encapsulate linguistic, sociocultural, and cognitive dimensions—everything from Squishmallow (a stylized plush toy) tags to weather broadcasts to Olympics timetables. The acts of experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying—the key skills defining a multiliteracies framework—serve as the guiding principles for learners trying to systematically unravel layers of meaning in the themed tasks of each chapter.

To support and stress-test these multiple literacies, #OnYGo incorporates the informed and authentic use of 21st-century digital language tools, such as online translators and social media, through engaging activities that invite learners to create and interpret via various platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, TikTok), showcasing how versatile these tools can be at facilitating language development when used mindfully. For example, one activity aims to empower students in the development of their cross-cultural literacy by bridging the gap between L1 and L2 intercultural representations of untranslatable concepts via a series of guided visualization tasks using the photo-based social media application, Instagram. These situated practice and critical framing activities with rich and authentic input allow learners to refine their understanding of lexical items (i.e., freedom/*liberté* and snack/*goûter*) in both languages in a culturally specific environment.

The textbook's recurring category *Social Media Frenches* complements these activities from elsewhere in the curriculum by providing support in decoding and interpreting French as it lives on various social platforms, demonstrating that even first-year learners are able to rally their resources to successfully participate in such activities. For example, one exercise, entitled *PhonéTikTok* "PhoneticTok," helps learners make sense of the celebrated Google Translate meme on TikTok where people make long contextually implausible sentences in English that all map onto the same or similar sounds in French, e.g. "Your uncle mows your tuna" *Ton tonton tond ton thon* (all syllables are pronounced as [tɔ̃]). Students first experience such texts in the wild on TikTok, then analyze the forms in a clip of their choosing, before finally (after being furnished with a small lexicon containing different sets of homophones) formulating a Google Translate meme of their own (see [Figure 3](#)).



### Social media Frenches : la phonétiktok (phonétique + TikTok)

You've noticed by now that there are many words in French that are written differently but pronounced the same, e.g. c'est 'it is' vs. ces 'these' vs. ses 'his/her/their' or *mange* '(you,he,she,they) eats' vs. *manges* '(you) eat' vs. *mangent* '(they) eat'. These kinds of words are called homophones (*un homophone*) and can be the source of a lot of confusion and humor in language. This phenomenon has captured much attention on TikTok, where users input various homophones into Google Translate and configure them all together into a single sentence for Google to read aloud comically.

#### 1. On observe et on répond aux questions

Watch the following clip and look for examples: [French homophones on TikTok](#) and answer the following questions:

**Step 1.** Were all of the words used in the TikToks identical in pronunciation? If they were different, in what ways were they different?

**Step 2.** Did you recognize any of the words that appeared in the TikToks? Which ones?

#### 2. On pratique

##### A. On traduit #OnlineTranslator

Now you will try to make your own homophonic creations using Google Translate. Consider the following forms:

1	moi 'me'	mois 'month'	moins 'less'	moine 'monk'
2	pain 'bread'	pin 'pine'	peint 'paints.3.sg'	pince 'pliers'
3	baie 'berry'	bée 'gape'	bai 'bay'	bébé 'baby'
4	la 'the.f.sg.'	là 'there'	las 'tired'	l'a 'has it'

**Step 1.** Set your language to French on GoogleTranslate and enter the French equivalents of one of the (near-)homophonic rows from the table above into the box. Set the other side of Google Translate to English or another language you know well. Play around with the configuration of the French words to try to make a logical phrase without needing to change any of the forms for grammatical reasons, i.e. gender or number, which might

change the pronunciation. When you are satisfied with your sentence in French, turn up your device's sound and click on the speaker button to have Google read it out loud.

**Step 2.** Write the final version of your French sentence here:

**Step 3.** Now write the translation of this sentence into English/the language of choice:

**Step 4.** Comment on the non-French translation. Is it predictable? Logical? Does it make for a coherent sentence? Why (not)?

**Step 5.** Now you will play the game in English. Make a list of 4-5 (near-)homophones in English and enter them into the English side of Translate.

List of English homophones:

**Step 6.** Write the final version of your English sentence here:

**Step 7.** Now translate your English homophones into French and write the result:

##### B. On analyse

Answer the following questions:

1. Comment on the French translation. Is it predictable? Logical? Does it make for a coherent sentence? Why (not)?

2. What have you learned about French pronunciation through this exercise? What have you learned about Google Translate?

*Figure 3.* An excerpt from a Social Media Frenches activity, Chapter 4.

## #ONYGO: The Little OER That Could

#OnYGo makes full use of the bouquet of affordances on offer by OERs. But what makes it truly unique in its class of French-language OERs is its linguistic justice approach, made possible by its ability to subvert society and industry norms for what it means to be a French speaker by sidestepping the censorship common to commercial publishers. In that way, it can bring new and different, iconoclastic representations of the francophone world to educators and learners in real time, without undergoing years of tempering via the publisher-mediated review process. It was ultimately these pedagogical needs: to bring better human and linguistic representation to a first-year French curriculum, greater flexibility, and a higher degree of accessibility across media types, that led us to select the modality of OER for this project. Yet we realize now that the text exists that its content would never be endorsed in any other format.

We argue that the traditional textbook is effectively dead (Dalola, 2023), insofar as “the traditional textbook” is defined by any static component of printed text or fixed structure that is not immediately changeable to reflect the dynamic reality of 21st-century digital existence. Our current reality is one that changes with every tweet cycle, every viral TikTok fad, and every Instagram influencer. The consumption of print media has drastically diminished (although it is now considered “vintage” in some circles), as users gobble up newsfeeds, sports scores, and stock tickers in real time in every reflective surface they pass. Some people live in virtual or online spaces for just a few hours a day, while others spend their full workdays or entire lives there with people physically located all over the world. Living life and documenting it later is no longer a valid workflow, in the same way that reducing a diasporic language to simplified descriptions of its norms in the mother country isn't.

Thus, the materials we educators use to introduce learners to language communities must be authentic; they must reflect the same agility, the same diversity, the same accessibility, and the same relatability as the ambient input in learners' native languages. OERs broadly construed are not necessarily the panacea to the

unfortunate dry rot common to language learning materials. In particular, those that live in pdfs or unalterable Pressbooks seem to preserve a static quality just as much as traditional print materials, only in digital form. Where we believe OERs can shine in the future is not just in their widespread accessibility and adaptability, but in their ability to give a seat at the table to the voices and varieties of language that have always lived right alongside prestige forms but have never been invited to the discussion.

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