

Translating Power: Language, Legitimacy, and Francophone Voices.



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INTRODUCTION

This project proposes the creation of a student-facing translation activity for the Year 1A core French module, designed to encourage critical reflection on the relationship between language, power, and colonial legacies, using extracts from diverse Francophone cultural texts including music, film, and literature. The activity invites students to interrogate what is considered ‘proper’ or ‘standard’ French and why. Translation becomes a tool for exploring linguistic legitimacy, identity, and the cultural politics of communication. The project includes a short bibliography of potential texts, a translation activity with embedded discussion prompts, and notes on implementation that staff can adapt freely, over other modules and can even be used across different languages across the MLAC department.

<p>Aims and Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">oTo introduce students early to the idea that language is never neutral, especially in multilingual, postcolonial Francophone contexts. Discussing decolonisation should not be ‘too complicated’ for first years in core modules. It should be central to the curriculum, not added as an afterthought.oTo provide a ready-to-use translation activity that explores slang, non-standard forms, and cultural meanings.oTo support students in developing confidence and criticality in both language learning and cultural interpretation from an early stage in their learning.oTo shift the perception of translation from a purely linguistic exercise to a space of ethical and political inquiry.	<p>Project Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop Translation Activity (Student-Facing)<ul style="list-style-type: none">Select a 150-250 word extract from a diverse Francophone text (see Bibliography below).Highlight elements that resist ‘standard’ or classroom French (e.g. Creole, verlan, idioms, register, rhythm).Design the activity to include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Literal translation taskCultural reflection prompt (e.g. “How do you preserve meaning beyond the words?”)Critical thinking discussion prompts (see below)2. Create Discussion Framework<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pre- and post-translation questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">“What makes French ‘proper’?”“What does this text reveal about power, identity, or class?”“Would you translate this differently depending on audience?”“What does it mean when a text refuses translation?”Option to be used as discussion or reflective writing prompts.3. Annotated Bibliography of Suggested Texts <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide a short, flexible bibliography (5-6 texts) from global Francophone sources-contemporary, accessible, diverse in form and region.Each with a 2–3 sentence summary and why it’s useful for translation work.
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Task	Deliverable
Translation activity	1 complete student-facing handout with embedded discussion prompts
Bibliography	Annotated list of 5-6 Francophone texts for future use
Teacher-facing notes	Optional guidance on use and adaptation (no full lesson plan)

Tangible Impact:

- Promotes early student confidence in tackling complex linguistic and cultural questions.
- Centres heritage and global Francophone voices through active engagement, not token inclusion.
- Offers a clear, high-impact template for incorporating decolonial perspectives into language learning.
- Respects staff workload while providing critical, ready-to-use material.



CONCLUSION

This project offers a focused and practical contribution to the decolonisation of the French curriculum by using translation as a critical entry point into questions of linguistic power, identity, and legitimacy. Through the integration of diverse Francophone voices and non-standard linguistic forms, the proposed activity encourages students not only to develop linguistic competence, but also to interrogate the hierarchies that shape how and whose language is taught, valued, or dismissed. Crucially, decolonisation is not a one-time goal to be achieved, but an ongoing, evolving process of reflection, disruption, and reimagining. It is not static, nor should it be sidelined as an optional extra. Embedding decolonial thinking from the outset of a student’s learning journey is both necessary and achievable. Discussing complex cultural questions should not be considered too ambitious for first-year core modules; rather, these conversations should form the foundation of a curriculum that seeks to reflect the world in its full diversity. This proposal aims to take one step toward that future: practical, thoughtful, and grounded in student engagement.

Bibliography

