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# Normalizing Whiteness: A Multimodal Analysis of Cultural Representation in a French Textbook from an Indonesian Perspective

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the normalization of whiteness through a multimodal construction of “Frenchness” and its ideological implications for the intercultural identity formation of Indonesian learners. Utilizing a triadic Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework, the research deconstructs *Mon Alter Ego AI*, a French textbook widely used in Indonesian higher education, by synthesizing Text (Cultural Content), Image (Visual Transitivity), and Task (Verbal Transitivity). Analysis of eight dossiers reveals a persistent regime of representation that prioritizes a narrow, idealized image of French culture. Findings indicate that visual participants are predominantly white, middle-class, and urban, effectively normalizing “metropolitan whiteness” while marginalizing the ethnic diversity of the broader Francophone world. Spatially, the textbook reinforces a Paris-centric worldview through iconic landmarks and curated urban lifestyles. The study demonstrates how high-modality tasks and selective imagery function as cultural gatekeepers that obstruct the possibility of reciprocal intercultural dialogue. By erasing learners’ local cultural resources and plural Francophone realities, the textbook reproduces postcolonial hierarchies and positions Indonesian learners as perpetual “outsiders” rather than active intercultural mediators. This research argues that the dominance of “Whiteness” as a singular cultural benchmark creates identity dissonance, hindering students from engaging in a genuine, bi-directional exchange between their own Indonesian identities and the Francophone world. The findings contribute to discourses on the politics of representation in educational media and offer recommendations for developing more culturally equitable materials in Asian higher education.

**Keywords:** intercultural dialogue; Whiteness; cultural representation; multimodal discourse analysis; Indonesian higher education

## 1. Introduction

Language textbooks are far more than instructional tools; they are influential cultural artifacts that mediate how learners encounter, interpret, and evaluate the world. In higher education, these materials structure not only linguistic input but also the “imagined communities” that learners are invited to join (Syam et al., 2024; Canale, 2021). While contemporary French as a Foreign Language (FLE) materials claim to promote interculturality and inclusivity, they often remain anchored in selective representation (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015; Weninger, 2021).



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In the Asian perspective, specifically in the Indonesian context, where students bring complex multilingual repertoires to the classroom, textbooks act as a primary site for identity work. Unlike former French colonies or protectorates, Indonesia shares no direct postcolonial linguistic ties or historical institutional links with the Francophone world. French is taught in Indonesia primarily as a foreign language within higher education institutions, particularly in French Language Education and French Studies programs. Unlike countries with direct historical or colonial ties to France, Indonesia has no institutional Francophone legacy. As a result, university students frequently rely on textbooks as their primary source of linguistic and cultural knowledge about the French-speaking world. The representations contained in these materials therefore play a significant role in shaping learners' perceptions of French culture, social practices, and intercultural communication.

For international readers, it is also important to understand that Indonesian greeting practices differ considerably from those commonly represented in French language textbooks. Indonesia is a culturally diverse nation with a Muslim-majority population, although greeting conventions vary across regions, ethnic groups, and religious communities. In most contexts, greetings involve verbal salutations, handshakes, or respectful gestures such as placing the hand on the chest after a handshake. Physical greetings involving cheek-kissing are not common in everyday Indonesian interactions, particularly between unrelated men and women. Consequently, French practices such as *la bise* may be unfamiliar to many Indonesian learners and require intercultural interpretation rather than simple imitation.

This study examines *Mon Alter Ego A1*, investigating how "French culture" is multimodally constructed and how this construction positions Asian learners (Davidson & Liu, 2020). Preliminary observations suggest a persistent "Francocentric" bias: visual ensembles predominantly foreground white, middle-class individuals in metropolitan settings, while the diverse realities of Francophone Africa, Asia, and the learners' own Indonesian context remain largely invisible (Xiong & Peng, 2021; Morady Moghaddam & Tirnaz, 2023). By reinforcing a Paris-centric worldview through romanticized imagery of cuisine and landmarks, the textbook risks positioning Indonesian students as cultural outsiders looking in, rather than active participants in a global, pluralistic Francophonie.

Further analysis of these preliminary observations indicates a recurring emphasis on metropolitan France as the dominant cultural reference point, embedded in the textbook's visual selections, thematic priorities, and evaluative language (Chapelle, 2014; Xiong & Peng, 2021). A critical multimodal analysis of the visual ensemble across eight dossiers suggests that approximately half of human depictions foreground white individuals characterized as stereotypically European (e.g., pale skin, light hair, and Western facial features), a pattern consistent with findings in textbook studies across language contexts (Elmiana, 2019; Tang & Liu, 2026). By contrast, representations of Francophone Africa, Asian Francophone contexts, and Indonesian learners occur rarely in both photographic and illustrated materials (Morady Moghaddam & Tirnaz, 2023).

This pattern is significant in relation to the global sociolinguistic landscape of French, where a substantial proportion of French speakers live beyond Europe and where African Francophone communities constitute a major demographic and cultural component of contemporary French language use (Chapelle, 2014). The limited presence of these communities in beginner-level materials risks narrowing learners' imagination of who French speakers are and where French is lived, potentially reinforcing a restricted cultural horizon (Xiong & Peng, 2021). In addition to visual representation, the textbook's linguistic and rhetorical choices contribute to the construction of cultural authority. Cultural information is frequently delivered through French cuisine, lifestyle, and social practices, while little space is provided for engaging with contemporary social diversity, multicultural realities, or postcolonial complexities within France and the Francophone world (Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Morady Moghaddam & Tirnaz, 2023). Furthermore, interactional prompts occasionally take the form of rhetorical questions that are promptly resolved by the text itself, which may limit opportunities for learners to negotiate meanings, compare perspectives, or develop reflexive intercultural awareness (Canale, 2021).

The Indonesian context adds a critical, nuanced dimension to this inquiry. University students in Indonesia typically enter FLE classrooms with complex multilingual repertoires (navigating local languages, Indonesian, and English) and deeply embedded cultural identities that could serve as rich resources for intercultural communication (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). However, negotiating identity in Indonesian higher education presents unique challenges: students must reconcile their localized cultural values and national identity expectations with the highly romanticized, Eurocentric ideals presented in Western pedagogical materials.

Because *Mon Alter Ego A1* provides minimal substantive recognition of learners' source cultures, it creates a pedagogical disconnect; Indonesian students are forced to navigate a "one-way" cultural assimilation model rather than a reciprocal intercultural dialogue. When metropolitan French culture is repeatedly foregrounded as the exclusive benchmark of authenticity and communicative success, local identities are marginalized. By explicitly linking these pedagogical gaps to the actual needs of Indonesian university students who require

materials that validate their unique sociolinguistic backgrounds, this study underscores the urgency of decentering Western cultural hegemony in foreign language education.

Accordingly, this study asks: (1) How are cultural identities and social worlds represented multimodally in *Mon Alter Ego A1*? (2) How is the Francophone world beyond metropolitan France positioned, and how are Indonesian learners' cultural resources acknowledged or excluded? By addressing these questions through a multimodal discourse analytical framework, this research aims to contribute to critical concerns regarding representation, identity, and cultural power within the field of Intercultural Communication Studies. Furthermore, it offers evidence-based recommendations for curriculum evaluation and the development of more culturally equitable French as a Foreign Language (FLE) materials in Asian higher education, ensuring that learners are positioned as active, self-aware participants in a global, pluralistic dialogue (Weninger, 2021; Tang & Liu, 2026).

## 2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to examine the construction of cultural representation and its implications for the intercultural positioning of Indonesian learners. The study was conducted between January and June 2025.

The object of analysis was *Mon Alter Ego A1* (Hugot, Waendendries, & Himber, 2023), published by Hachette FLE. The textbook is designed for beginner-level learners of French corresponding to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A1 level. In Indonesia, the textbook is widely used in introductory undergraduate French language courses, particularly within French Language Education and French Studies programs. These courses are typically attended by first-year university students beginning their formal study of French language and culture.

Moving beyond traditional textual inquiry, the study adopts a triadic analytical framework that integrates three distinct semiotic layers: Text (Cultural Content), Image (Visual Transitivity), and Pedagogical Task (Verbal Transitivity). This multi-layered approach is essential for identifying how different modes of communication converge to either facilitate or obstruct reciprocal intercultural dialogue.

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The analysis of "Text" is theoretically rooted in Byram's (1993) categories, focusing on the identification of social identities, interactions, and national stereotypes. Specifically, it examines how institutionalized linguistic distinctions, such as politeness: *tu* and *vous*, function as semiotic markers of social hierarchy and cultural boundary-setting within the French context. This is complemented by a visual transitivity analysis based on Social-Semiotic Theory, which deconstructs participants, actions, and circumstances within photographs and illustrations. This phase determines how relational identities (e.g., familial warmth) and institutional identities (e.g., professional formality a *boulangerie*) are visualized to normalize "metropolitan whiteness" while marginalizing non-European Francophone realities.

Crucially, the methodology prioritizes the analysis of Verbal Transitivity within pedagogical tasks, drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to evaluate their alignment with real-world communication and cognitive-affective processing. By examining "Interaction" and "Process" types, the study investigates how tasks scaffold cultural navigation and social problem-solving. For instance, prompts requiring students to choose between physical gestures like *la bise* or *serre la main* are analyzed to assess whether they open an interpretive space for negotiation. This study uses a simple three-step method to look at the French textbook *Mon Alter Ego A1*. Instead of just reading the words, we look at three things: the text, pictures, and task. First, we look at how the text teaches social rules, like when to use *tu* or *vous*. Second, we look at the pictures to see if they only show white, city-dwelling, middle-class people while ignoring other French-speaking cultures. Finally, we look at the activities to see if they let students share their own ideas, or if they just force them to copy French habits blindly. This helps us see if the book treats students as smart, equal partners or just passive learners.

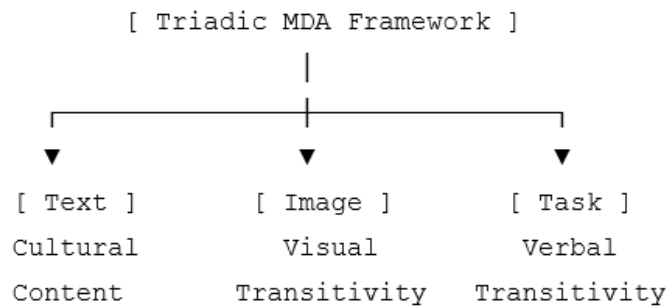
Traditional educational media evaluation often relies on monomodal approaches, such as traditional text-based discourse analysis or quantitative content analysis (e.g., merely counting keyword frequencies or manifest cultural themes). While useful, these traditional methods suffer from a major epistemological limitation: they treat language as an isolated carrier of meaning. They fail to capture how visual design, spatial layout, and pedagogical task architectures interact ideologically to produce subtle cultural biases.

By contrast, MDA operates on the premise that meaning is multimodally orchestrated. The added value of MDA in this study lies in its capacity to treat images and task structures not as mere decorations or neutral

instructions, but as co-equal semiotic resources that actively construct cultural authority. MDA exposes the hidden ideological layer such as the normalization of whiteness that traditional textual inquiry routinely overlooks.

*The Triadic Analytical Framework*

To operationalize this approach, the study moves beyond traditional textual inquiry to adopt a robust, triadic analytical framework that integrates three distinct semiotic layers: Text (Cultural Content), Image (Visual Transitivity), and Pedagogical Task (Verbal Transitivity). The visual representation of this framework is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Triadic MDA Framework.

**3. Findings**

The findings of this research reveal that *Mon Alter Ego AI* operates not merely as a neutral instructional tool for language acquisition, but as a sophisticated multimodal regime where pedagogical objectives and ideological framing converge to normalize a narrow cultural imagination. Through the strategic interplay of textual content, visual transitivity, and task architecture, the material constructs an “idealized” social world that Indonesian learners are expected to aspire toward, rather than engage with as equals. This construct deeply shapes the learners’ ontological understanding of the French-speaking world, framing it as a stable, unidirectional domain of norms and etiquette rather than a pluralistic and contested field of meaning. The comprehensive data detailing these elements and their respective scores are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of Cultural Representation.

Category	Cultural Aspect	Dominant Element	Score
Social Identity	01—Social Identity		
	French Identity	✓ dominant	85%
	Paris Identity		76%
	Sub Urban Identity		60%
Social Interaction	02—Social Interaction		
	General Interaction	✓ dominant	90%
	Specialized Interaction		70%
Belief & Behaviour	03—Belief & Behaviour		
	Politeness	✓ dominant	81%
	Personal Intact		72%
	Networking		55%
Social Institution	04—Social Institution		
	Family		92%
	Formal Education		76%
	Status Sosial		68%
Socialization	05—Socialization & Life Cycle		
	Respect of Age Differences	✓ dominant	87%
	Social Communication		70%
Stereotypes	06—Stereotypes & National Identity		
	Politeness	✓ dominant	91%
	Peer Interaction		74%

Quantitative data from the cultural analysis framework reinforces this qualitative observation, as presented in Table 2. The systematic distribution of cultural elements shows a heavy concentration on Social Identity, where “French Identity” (85%) and “Paris Identity” (76%) serve as the primary anchors of representation. This statistical dominance suggests that the textbook establishes a “metropolitan center” as the sole site of cultural authenticity.

**Table 2.** Summary of Cultural Representation Categories.

Category	Element Dominant	Score
Social Identity	French Identity	85%
Social Interaction	General Interaction	90%
Belief & Behaviour	Politeness	81%
Social Institution	Family	92%
Socialization & Life Cycle	Respect of Age Differences	87%
Stereotypes & National Identity	Politeness	91%

In the domain of Textual Analysis, the textbook heavily emphasizes institutionalized social norms and identities. Drawing on Byram’s categories, the study identifies a pervasive focus on Social Identity and Social Interaction, particularly through the rigid linguistic distinction between *tu* and *vous*. This binary is presented not merely as a grammatical choice but as a semiotic mechanism for managing social proximity and hierarchy defining the boundaries between the private, informal sphere and the formal, public sphere.

The data indicates that “Politeness” (91%) is the most prominent feature within the Stereotypes & National Identity category. These “rules of politeness” (*politesse*) are often delivered through declarative moods and high-modality markers like *il faut* (“it is necessary”), which transform contextual social conventions into non-negotiable cultural truths. From an intercultural communication perspective, this reduces cultural learning to a process of compliance with a prescriptive national identity, leaving little room for learners to explore the internal diversity within France or the broader Francophone ecology. By presenting these norms as universal, the textbook obstructs the development of reflexive intercultural awareness, as students are taught to follow “correct” behaviors rather than negotiate meanings.

### 3.1. Visual Transitivity

To operationalize the multimodal discourse analysis regarding how cultural identity and social representations are framed, it is essential to examine the visual transitivity embedded within the textbook's key lessons. The textbook utilizes a strategic combination of photographic elements, vector illustrations, and structured text to construct an idealized socio-cultural reality. This semiotic mechanism is consistently applied across various thematic units to guide the learners' ideological internalization. Specifically, this visual framing can be observed in the opening page of Dossier 8 (Figure 2), which introduces social celebrations; the introductory layout of Dossier 3 (Figure 3), which maps out urban navigation; and the foundational interaction matrix in Leçon 1 (Figure 4), which establishes initial personal introductions.

Visually, the page in Figure 2 features a prominent photograph of two young, cheerful Western women engaged in a lively social interaction amidst a celebratory, sketched backdrop, which establishes a distinct visual transitivity that normalizes specific modes of socialization and Western cultural identity. By synergizing these visual and textual layers, the textbook sets a rigid benchmark for target-language cultural competence, guiding Indonesian learners to not only acquire language mechanics but also to internalize and aspire toward a highly idealized, unidirectional domain of French-speaking social etiquette and lifestyle.

As shown in the introductory page of Figure 3, a dominant photograph of two Western individuals riding bicycles with expressions of joy and leisure is layered over a detailed sketch of classic French architecture. This combination establishes a spatial transitivity that links urban exploration with an idealized European lifestyle and historical heritage. Textually, this imagery is anchored by a structured pedagogical overview outlining practical language tasks—such as finding accommodation, sharing good addresses, and mapping out urban itineraries (*Leçons 1–3*)—complemented by explicit cultural windows (*Fenêtres sur...*) focusing on French personalities, street names (*Patrimoines*), and metropolitan characteristics (*Littératures*). By aligning these graphical and textual layers, the textbook sets a specific cultural benchmark, framing the acquisition of French language skills around the navigation and internalization of an idealized French urban environment.

The lesson page isolated in Figure 4 centers on a prominent, color-coded portrait matrix labeled “*Notre classe de français*” (Our French class), depicting twelve ethnically diverse student profiles and one professor. This configuration projects a visual message of an inclusive, globalized, and modern academic community. This illustrative layer is directly linked to structured pedagogical tasks that prompt learners to observe the class chart

(*trombinoscope*), engage in role-play audio-lingual exercises, and complete phonetic drills mapping out the alphabet. Furthermore, the “*zoom Langue*” section anchors these practices by offering explicit grammatical and situational guides for both formal and informal addressing (“*et toi?*” versus “*et vous?*”). By aligning these diverse representations with verbal tasks, the textbook creates a controlled communicative framework, guiding Indonesian learners to navigate early linguistic mechanics while internalizing a highly structured, multicultural model of target-language social etiquette.

The visual landscape of the textbook further reinforces this hierarchy through a “phenotypic normativity” dominated by white, middle-class participants. Using the lens of Visual Transitivity, the analysis deconstructs how Participants, Actions, and Circumstances are semiotically orchestrated to naturalize “whiteness” as cultural common sense. Relational identities, such as familial warmth and close friendships, are predominantly visualized through European-looking individuals in intimate settings depicting hugs, smiles, and the tradition of *la bise* (cheek-kissing). This is supported by data showing that “Family” (92%) is the most frequent sub-category within Social Institutions. Conversely, institutional and professional identities are framed within iconic metropolitan settings, such as a Parisian *boulangerie* or modern offices. This “Paris-centric” spatial framing (78% in Social Identity) establishes the metropolitan center as the sole site of authenticity, while non-European Francophone identities and the Indonesian context remain largely invisible or relegated to the periphery. For an Indonesian learner, this visual dominance creates a “spectacle” of culture. When the “ideal” French speaker is consistently portrayed as white and urban, learners of color in the Global South may experience identity dissonance, perceiving themselves as perpetual “outsiders” who can only observe this world but never fully belong to it.

	Vous avez besoin de/d'...	Vous allez apprendre à...	Vous allez...
Leçon 1	cuisiner, recevoir	comprendre et expliquer une recette de cuisine	partager des recettes
Leçon 2	rappeler de bons moments	évoquer des événements personnels	faire une rétrospective
Leçon 3	faire la fête	célébrer un événement	organiser une fête de fin de niveau

Fenêtres sur...	Stratégies et outils pour...
<b>Patrimoines</b> Identifier quelques fêtes du calendrier français, les rituels et spécialités associés <b>Sociétés</b> Commenter les résultats d'une enquête sur les Français et la cuisine Découvrir les recettes préférées des Français	<b>Produire un écrit</b> → analyser une consigne : identifier le contexte et le plan de l'écrit à produire

Figure 2. Dossier 8: Prendre part à des événements (Participating in events).

Beyond static representation, the Verbal Transitivity within pedagogical tasks exerts a controlling influence over the learner's positioning. The analysis reveals a "closed" task architecture designed to confirm textbook knowledge rather than open interpretive space. While instructions such as "*Écoutez et associez*" attempt to replicate real-world communication, they often force a cognitive-affective processing that steers learners toward predetermined conclusions. A critical example of this is found in the "Interaction Triggers" regarding physical gestures, such as requiring students to decide between *serre la main* (shaking hands) or *la bise*. While ostensibly designed to foster cultural navigation, these tasks are anchored strictly in metropolitan norms without local reference points. Indonesian learners are signaled that communicative success depends entirely on their ability to mirror the textbook's idealized social model. This effectively erases their own multilingual and multicultural identities as legitimate resources for learning, preventing a reciprocal intercultural dialogue.



**DOSSIER**

**3 Découvrir une ville**

	Vous avez besoin de/d'...	Vous allez apprendre à...	Vous allez...
<b>Leçon 1</b>	trouver un hébergement lors d'un séjour	rechercher / proposer un hébergement	choisir un hébergement
<b>Leçon 2</b>	connaître de bonnes adresses	présenter un lieu « coup de cœur »	faire un carnet de bonnes adresses
<b>Leçon 3</b>	vous déplacer et découvrir des lieux d'intérêt	indiquer un itinéraire	créer un itinéraire de randonnée urbaine

Fenêtres sur...		Stratégies et outils pour...
<b>Patrimoines</b>	Découvrir des personnalités françaises à partir de noms de rues	Identifier un document écrit → repérer des indices visuels
<b>Littératures</b>	Identifier quelques caractéristiques de grandes villes de France	

Figure 3. Dossier 3: Découvrir une ville (Discovering a city).



**LEÇON**  
**1**

# Se présenter

Faire le trombinoscope de la classe

**Notre classe de français**

12 étudiants

et un professeur :



Row 1: Akiko (A), David (D), Fiorello (F), Greta (G)  
 Row 2: Rémy (R), Héloïse (H), Kali (K), Maria (M)  
 Row 3: Paloma (P), Sung (S), Tao (T), Vivian (V), Yassine (Y)

**1** a. 002-003 Regardez le trombinoscope d'une classe internationale et écoutez. Qui se présente ?  
 b. **Debout!** En cercle, présentez-vous comme dans le dialogue.

**2** a. 004-005 Regardez à nouveau le trombinoscope. Écoutez les présentations. Qui parle ?  
 Dialogue 1 → ... Dialogue 2 → ...  
 b. 004-005 Réécoutez et répétez les questions pour demander le prénom.

**3** a. 006-007 Écoutez l'alphabet des prénoms puis dites les lettres de l'alphabet.  
 b. Identifiez les voyelles et les consonnes.  
 c. Prononcez à nouveau les lettres et classez-les.  
 [a] : A - H - ...  
 [e] : B - C - ... - ... - ... - ... - ...  
 [ɛ] : F - ... - ... - ... - ... - ...  
 [i] : I - ... - ... - ...  
 [y] : ... - U  
 [œ] : O

**ZOOM Langue**

**Saluer et se présenter**

Observez et associez.

Bonjour ! / Bonsoir !	•	
Je m'appelle..., et toi ?	•	• Situation formelle
Je m'appelle..., et vous ?	•	
Comment tu t'appelles ?	•	• Situation informelle
Comment vous vous appelez ?	•	

Figure 4. Se presenter (Self-introduction).

The textbook consistently mobilizes positive appraisal to romanticize metropolitan French culture. French cuisine, leisure, fashion, and sociability are evaluated through uniformly affirmative language, producing a celebratory tone. However, this “touristic” orientation is problematic because of the systematic selectivity that accompanies it. Little space is provided for recognizing contemporary social diversity, multicultural realities, or postcolonial complexities. This omission sustains an idealized national image that positions culture as a commodity to be consumed. As a result, intercultural competence risks being reduced to cultural consumption and etiquette performance, rather than cultivated as an interpretive capacity to engage with ambiguity and difference. Interactional prompts that appear to invite engagement are often immediately resolved by the text itself, narrowing the pedagogical space for reflexive comparison.

### 3.2. The Erasure of Indonesian Agency

A particularly consequential finding is the near-total absence of Indonesian source culture as a legitimate reference point. Despite the sophisticated multilingual backgrounds of Indonesian university students, *Mon Alter Ego A1* provides minimal substantive acknowledgment of their identities. This absence intensifies the asymmetry: metropolitan French culture is the “content” to be acquired, while learners’ cultural knowledge is treated as irrelevant. In higher education, this constitutes a missed pedagogical opportunity. Learners’ lived intercultural practices could be mobilized to develop situated communicative competence. Without this integration, intercultural learning is experienced as assimilation rather than dialogue. Learners may feel that successful French learning requires setting aside their own cultural standpoint to approximate the textbook’s ideal.

These collective patterns, identified as the dominance of whiteness, metropolitan salience, high-modality prescriptions, and the erasure of local references, orient learners toward a singular cultural model. Learners are positioned less as intercultural communicators who negotiate meanings and more as cultural aspirants who must align with a metropolitan norm. This can generate identity barriers, implying that linguistic competence is inseparable from cultural assimilation.

### 3.3. Visual Transitivity

Using the lens of Visual Transitivity, the analysis deconstructs how Participants, Actions, and Circumstances are semiotically orchestrated to naturalize “whiteness”. Relational identities—familial warmth, close friendships—are predominantly visualized through European-looking individuals in intimate settings depicting hugs, smiles, and *la bise* (cheek-kissing). This is consistent with the finding that “Family” is the most frequent sub-category within Social Institutions (92%). Institutional and professional identities, meanwhile, are framed within iconic metropolitan settings such as Parisian boulangeries and modern offices, reinforcing the Paris-centric spatial framing (78%) as the sole site of authenticity.

For an Indonesian learner, this visual dominance creates a “spectacle” of culture. When the “ideal” French speaker is consistently portrayed as white and urban, learners of color skin may experience identity dissonance, perceiving themselves as perpetual outsiders who can observe this world but never fully belong to it.

### 3.4. Verbal Transitivity and Task

Verbal Transitivity within pedagogical tasks exerts a controlling influence over learner positioning. The analysis reveals a predominantly “closed” task architecture designed to confirm textbook knowledge rather than open interpretive space. Instructions such as “*Écoutez et associez*” attempt to replicate real-world communication but often steer learners toward predetermined conclusions. Tasks involving physical gestures, requiring students to choose between *serrer la main* (handshake) or *la bise* are anchored strictly in metropolitan norms without local reference points.

### 3.5. Indonesian Perspectives into Politeness Tasks

Greeting conventions provide a useful example of how intercultural understanding can be developed through comparative pedagogical design. In metropolitan French contexts, social interaction may involve practices such as *la bise* (cheek-kissing) among friends, family members, or acquaintances, depending on regional and social conventions. In contrast, Indonesian greetings generally emphasize verbal politeness, handshakes, and other gestures of respect. Indonesia is a culturally diverse society with a Muslim-majority population, and greeting practices vary according to regional, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. In many Muslim communities, physical contact between unrelated men and women may be limited or avoided altogether according to individual beliefs and social norms. Consequently, greeting behaviors represented in French textbooks may require intercultural interpretation rather than direct imitation by Indonesian learners.

As a concrete alternative, a redesigned task on greeting conventions might present three scenarios side by side: a formal French business greeting, an informal Francophone West African greeting, and an Indonesian workplace greeting. Students could be asked not merely to identify which gesture is “correct” in the French context, but to analyze *why* each culture has developed its own formality markers and what social values each encodes. A follow-up reflection prompt “*How would you explain your own greeting customs to a French speaker?*” positions the learner as a cultural informant and interlocutor, not merely a cultural apprentice. This kind of reciprocal framing would operationalize the intercultural competence that the textbook’s current design forecloses.

The textbook also consistently mobilizes positive appraisal to romanticize metropolitan French culture, cuisine, leisure, fashion, sociability through uniformly affirmative language. This “touristic” orientation is

problematic precisely because of its systematic selectivity: little space is given to social diversity, multicultural realities, or postcolonial complexity.

#### 4. Discussion

While this research offers a robust critique of the multimodal regime in *Mon Alter Ego A1*, it is not without its limitations. Primarily, the scope is restricted to a single A1-level textbook; thus, it may not fully account for how cultural representations evolve as students progress toward higher proficiency levels or how other series used in Indonesian universities negotiate these same tensions. Furthermore, as this study is grounded in the discourse analysis of the “static” text, it lacks classroom-based reception data. It cannot definitively account for how Indonesian lecturers might subvert these materials through critical mediation or how students might resist or re-appropriate the textbook’s cultural messages in practice. Finally, the focus of the analysis remained on the printed page, leaving companion digital platforms and teacher guides unexplored.

To address these gaps, this study proposes a strategic shift toward more reflexive research and inclusive pedagogical practices. Future inquiries should move beyond static texts to embrace longitudinal and comparative designs that track cultural ideologies from A1 through B2 levels across diverse publishers. Crucially, there is a pressing need for classroom ethnography to investigate the “lived curriculum” and understand how Asian learners actively negotiate identities when confronted with Francocentric materials. Such research is vital for a nuanced anthropology of education that captures the agency of learners in the Global South.

On a structural level, Indonesian higher education institutions must institutionalize “cultural equity” by implementing a formal rubric for textbook selection that prioritizes visual diversity, global Francophone inclusivity, and open-ended tasks. Simultaneously, material development must move toward a decolonial framework, abandoning prescriptive metropolitan models in favor of “bi-directional” activities. These tasks should explicitly validate Indonesian students’ multilingual resources, positioning their local identities not as peripheral observers, but as legitimate and valuable starting points for global intercultural dialogue. By opening these interpretive spaces, educators can transform the classroom from a site of passive assimilation into a dynamic arena for reciprocal engagement.

#### 5. Conclusions

This study shows that the cultural themes in *Mon Alter Ego A1* are not neutral. Instead, the book carefully promotes a very specific idea of what it means to be “French.” By focusing mostly on Paris and ignoring the diverse, French-speaking world outside of Europe, the textbook creates a narrow standard for success. Culture is taught as a fixed set of European rules that students must copy, rather than a living, diverse concept. For Indonesian students, this causes an “identity disconnect.” Their own rich languages and cultures are ignored, making them feel like permanent outsiders who must change their identity to fit a European ideal.

To change this, universities in Asia need to update their courses to treat all cultures fairly. Learning materials must stop looking at culture like a tourist brochure. Instead, they should embrace French speakers from all over the world. By showing that social rules change depending on where you are, and by asking students to compare cultures, teachers can turn the classroom into a space for real conversation. The goal is to help Asian students use French confidently, not as outsiders begging for approval, but as equals who use their own cultural backgrounds as a strength.

The textbook’s approach to culture reveals three major flaws that may restrict learners’ opportunities for meaningful intercultural engagement. First, it maintains a narrow focus on metropolitan France by presenting particular norms of politeness as universal cultural standards. Through high-modality expressions such as *il faut* (“it is necessary”), learners are encouraged to accept these conventions as fixed rules rather than culturally situated practices open to interpretation and comparison. This prescriptive orientation is reinforced by a limited range of visual representations that predominantly depict white, middle-class, urban lifestyles, while offering little visibility to the broader diversity of the Francophone world.

Second, the textbook provides few opportunities for Indonesian learners to connect French cultural practices with their own sociocultural experiences. This issue is particularly visible in representations of greeting behavior. For example, learners are introduced to practices such as *la bise* (cheek-kissing), which may be common in some French social contexts but are not customary in most Indonesian settings. Indonesia is characterized by considerable cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, yet greetings generally emphasize verbal politeness, handshakes, or other gestures of respect. In many Muslim communities, physical contact between unrelated men and women may be limited according to personal beliefs and social norms. Without opportunities to compare these differing conventions, intercultural learning risks becoming an exercise in imitation rather than critical understanding.

Finally, the textbook's predominantly closed-ended pedagogical tasks limit students' ability to contribute their own cultural knowledge. Activities frequently guide learners toward predetermined answers instead of encouraging reflection, comparison, and negotiation of meaning. As a result, Indonesian students are positioned primarily as recipients of French cultural knowledge rather than as active intercultural communicators capable of bringing their own cultural perspectives into dialogue with the Francophone world.

To address these limitations, French language education in Asian higher education should move beyond a model of cultural transmission toward one of intercultural dialogue. Learning materials should represent the diversity of contemporary Francophone communities while also recognizing learners' own cultural backgrounds as valuable resources for communication. Rather than asking students to reproduce culturally specific behaviors uncritically, pedagogical activities should encourage them to compare, explain, and negotiate cultural meanings across contexts. Such an approach would help Indonesian learners engage with French not as cultural outsiders seeking assimilation, but as confident intercultural speakers capable of participating in reciprocal global communication.

### Author Contributions

R.S.: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, writing—original draft preparation; T.I.H.: supervision, project administration, funding acquisition, writing—reviewing and editing; W.G.: methodology, validation, writing—reviewing and editing; N.F.S.: software, visualization, validation. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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All data analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Use of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this work the authors used Claude in order to improve the English grammar and phrasing of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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