

Introducing Song into the Language Classroom: Authentic Materials for Developing Intercultural Competence

SILVA, Sonia
BAREILLE, Laurent

Abstract

This article examines the integration of Francophone songs as an authentic document in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Japan, a context still largely marked by the traditional grammar-translation method. Based on the recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the works of Cuq, Puren, and Gourvennec, the study analyzes the linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and intercultural potential of songs, as well as the didactic conditions that enable their optimal use without altering their original discursive logic. The article first defines the song as an authentic document and as a vector of sociocultural competence, before specifying selection criteria based on learners' profiles, educational objectives, and institutional constraints. Building on teaching experiences with Japanese high school and university students, four songs are presented as case studies: *On brûlera* (Pomme), *Comme un homme / Sois un homme* (Disney, Mulan), *Lettre à la République* (Kery James), and *Saint-Denis* (Grand Corps Malade). Each teaching sequence highlights the contributions of songs in terms of learner motivation, cultural contextualization, and the development of language skills, while also underlining the limitations arising from spatio-temporal and sociocultural gaps between the context of production and that of reception. The findings indicate that songs, when integrated within an action-oriented approach and accompanied by appropriate cultural mediation, can serve as an effective pedagogical lever for enhancing FFL learning in Japan, both linguistically and interculturally.

Keywords: *Authentic Documents, Song-based Pedagogy, French as a Foreign Language (FLE), Intercultural Competence, Language Didactics, Japanese Context*

Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe in 2001, constitutes an international standard. However, paradoxically,

the textbooks used for teaching French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Japan remain largely rooted in traditional approaches, closely aligned with grammar-translation methods. While these methods may have played a relevant pedagogical role in the past, they tend to overlook the integration of authentic materials. Such materials are nonetheless essential to a communicative and action-oriented approach, as recommended by the CEFR.

From this perspective, the use of authentic resources such as films or songs represents a valuable didactic alternative, as it fosters both linguistic and cultural immersion beyond the scope of purely grammatical drills. It can also facilitate the anchoring of learning within more meaningful social communication practices for learners.

In the Japanese context, Francophone popular music generally remains unfamiliar to students. Most learners primarily listen to K-pop, J-pop, or Anglo-American music, and the use of French songs as a pedagogical resource is often perceived as an unconventional learning tool.

Japan is indeed a country where FFL teaching remains strongly shaped by a traditional didactic framework. This raises the following question: in what ways can the use of French songs serve as a relevant teaching aid in Japan?

This article aims to explore this question by showing how songs, when integrated into a coherent didactic approach, can become an effective lever for both linguistic and cultural acquisition. The selection of a song in an FFL classroom, however, cannot be left to chance: it must consider several factors, including the learners' linguistic level, their interests, and the intended pedagogical objectives.

In the first part, we highlight the relevance of using songs in FFL courses as both linguistic and cultural resources. We will focus specifically on their contributions from an action-oriented perspective and on the criteria that enable their effective didactic exploitation. In the second part, we present a reflective analysis of concrete implementations, based on several pedagogical experiments conducted with Japanese learners (high school and university students). These sequences are built around contemporary Francophone songs such as *On brûlera* ("We will burn") by Pomme¹, *Comme un homme* ("As a man")² and *Sois un homme* ("Be a man")³ from the Disney animated film *Mulan*, *Lettre à la République* ("Letter to the Republic")⁴ by Kery James, and *Saint-Denis*⁵ by Grand Corps Malade. They serve to illustrate both the potential and the limitations of didactic exploitation of songs in the Japanese context.

-
- 1 PommeOfficialVEVO. (2017, September 22). Pomme - On brûlera [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved August 24, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jabih9mV6RQ>.
 - 2 WaltDisneyMusics. (2011, September 12). Mulan - Comme un Homme [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved August 24, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iPXNr2o1X8>.
 - 3 La Canadienne. (2014, February 10). Mulan - I'll Make a Man Out of You - Canadian French [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved August 24, 2025, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msUKf_cEKo0.
 - 4 Kery James. (2012, February 27). Kery James - Lettre à la République (Clip officiel) [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved August 24, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp3XZDK7Lw4>.
 - 5 raffproduction. (2013, September 13). Grand Corps Malade - Saint denis (Clip officiel) [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved August 24, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ap8zzR69tJg>.

Why Use Songs in the Language Classroom?

The Song: An Authentic Document?

The CEFR recommends the use of “authentic documents” in the language classroom. But what exactly do we mean by this notion? Can a song be considered such a document in the context of teaching FFL?

In his *Dictionnaire de didactique du français langue étrangère et seconde*, Jean-Pierre Cuq (2003) defines the authentic document as follows:

The characterization of “authentic” in language didactics is generally associated with the term “document” and applies to any message produced by French speakers for French speakers with the aim of real communication: it thus refers to anything that was not originally designed for the classroom⁶ (p. 23).

This definition distinguishes authentic documents from so-called “fabricated” documents, which are specifically created for teaching purposes. Authentic materials thus include supports drawn from everyday life: press articles, advertising posters, recipes, film dialogues... and, indeed, songs.

There are also songs created specifically for pedagogical purposes. For example, we might cite *Au petit déjeuner* (“For breakfast”)⁷ by Alain Le Lait, which can be used to work on partitive articles and food-related vocabulary. For the purposes of this article, we will exclude such songs and focus on those produced outside of any educational intent. These songs, intended for a native-speaking audience, are produced for artistic or commercial purposes. They fully meet Cuq’s definition of an authentic document and also constitute a teaching resource rich in didactic potential.

Using a song in the FFL classroom requires adaptations by the teacher to guide learners in their understanding of the teaching material. This process is called “*didactisation*” which Cuq defines as follows:

Didactisation is the operation consisting in transforming or exploiting a raw linguistic document to make it into a teaching object. This process generally involves a pre-didactic analysis, essentially linguistic in nature, to identify what may be useful to teach⁸

6 All translations of the following quotations, unless otherwise stated, were done by the authors.

Original quotation: « La caractérisation d’« authentique » en didactique des langues est généralement associée au terme « document » et s’applique à tout message élaboré par des francophones pour des francophones à des fins de communication réelle : elle désigne donc tout ce qui n’est pas conçu à l’origine pour la classe. »

7 Alain le Lait - Topic. (2021, March 5). Au petit déjeuner [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved August 24, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfyQPIpkwS8>.

8 Original quotation: « La didactisation est l’opération consistant à transformer ou à exploiter un document langagier brut pour en faire un objet d’enseignement. Ce processus implique généralement une analyse prédidactique, d’essence

(Cuq, 2003, p. 71).

This means that when teachers “*didactise*” (adapt for teaching) a song in the context of a FFL course, they must preserve the way in which the song’s discourse is organised and acquires meaning in its original context, rather than truncating it (removing elements of meaning), decontextualising it (e.g., examining vocabulary without linking it to the song’s overall meaning), and so forth. This raises the question of the degree of adaptation compatible with maintaining the authentic nature of a document. For example, do pedagogical activities such as preparatory questions designed to contextualise the teaching material, in this case the song, detract from its “authentic” character? Likewise, does encouraging learners to focus only on a few selected lyrics?

According to Hedaywa and Sourak (2013), an authentic document cannot be received in the same way by a native speaker and by a learner, because there is both a spatio-temporal gap and a sociocultural gap. For instance, take the song *Marine*⁹ by Diam’s : it is possible to understand all the lyrics, but the song only fully makes sense when one understands that the name “Marine” refers to Marine Le Pen, a far-right figure and leader of the Front National (later renamed Rassemblement National), which is a French far-right political party.

For the purposes of this article, we will adopt Cuq’s definition of the authentic document and follow Puren’s perspective, whereby the exploitation of an authentic document implies preserving, as far as possible, the logic and meaning of the song, while recognizing that an authentic document loses some of its authenticity as soon as it is used in a classroom context.

A Vector for Sociocultural Competence

As discussed in the previous section, knowledge of the sociocultural context of an authentic document fosters a better understanding of it. An authentic document, such as a French song, will be more easily understood by learners when they possess elements of French sociocultural background than when they do not.

In this regard, Ludovic Gourvenec reminds us that the very notion of *chanson française* (“French song”) can convey a reductive view centered solely on mainland France, even though this artistic production is in fact marked by cultural diversity and openness:

The expression “*chanson française*” may appear inaccurate because it suggests the idea of a strictly hexagonal production (limited to metropolitan France). Yet the history of what is known as “*chanson française*”, like the society from which it springs, is shaped by diversity, by various cultural influences—in short, by openness. This is an essential characteristic that accounts for its dynamism and its constant renewal since the early

linguistique, pour identifier ce qui peut être utile d’enseigner. »

9 Diam’s officiel. (2009, October 25). Diam’s - Marine (Clip officiel) [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved August 24, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsL-2R402r4>.

twentieth century. “*Chanson française*” is a field open to the Other and not restricted to a single geographical space or a culture closed in upon itself, and it would therefore be more appropriate to speak of “*chanson francophone*” (“Francophone song”)¹⁰ (Gourvenec, 2017, p. 16).

The trigger document can take various forms (photograph, video, song, etc.) and serves as a starting point, a stimulus, a lever for encouraging oral expression, sparking reflection, or motivating language production, both spoken and written. The song, which is often presented in the form of a music video, thus constitutes a rich pedagogical resource for teachers, who can work not only on its lyrics (both orally and in writing) but also on the video itself (visual stimulation), among other aspects.

This leads us to consider the actual benefits that can be expected from the pedagogical use of a song. How can this medium meet the objectives defined by the CEFR, particularly in terms of pragmatic, sociocultural, and linguistic competence? From this perspective, it seems essential to identify, on the one hand, the specific advantages that songs offer for the teaching of French as a foreign language, and on the other hand, the limits or constraints they may entail.

The following two sections are devoted to this dual analysis.

The Advantages of Using Songs in the FFL Classroom

A Comprehensive Teaching Material

From a didactic perspective, any document that enables the integrated development of multiple language skills, such as listening and reading comprehension, as well as oral and written production, along with sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and intercultural competence, can be considered a comprehensive teaching material.

This type of material is generally embedded within a structured learning sequence, designed around clearly defined objectives and linked to the various components of communicative language competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic), as described in the work of Cuq and Gruca (2002).

In this respect, the song, as an authentic oral document, constitutes a particularly fruitful material. Depending on how it is exploited in the classroom, it can be used to develop a variety of language skills, comprehension, production, as well as grammatical or lexical observation, while fostering a dynamic and contextualized approach to language.

10 Original quotation: « La formule ‘chanson française’ peut paraître inexacte car elle induit la conception d’une production strictement hexagonale (qui serait limitée à la métropole). Or, l’histoire de cette chanson dite française, comme la société dont elle est l’émanation, est faite de mixité, d’influences culturelles diverses, bref d’ouverture, et il s’agit là d’une caractéristique essentielle qui explique le dynamisme et le renouvellement permanent à l’œuvre depuis le début du XX^e siècle. “Chanson française” est un champ ouvert sur l’Autre et ne se restreint à un seul espace géographique ou à une seule culture close sur elle-même, et il faudrait alors davantage parler de ‘chanson francophone’ ».

Furthermore, Tim Murphey's research (1992) highlights the value of songs as pedagogical tools in the language classroom. He notes: "it is very hard to escape music and song ... the only place music and song is slow to catch on is in school" (1992, p. 7), and reviews their contributions to pronunciation, fluency, and lexical retention.

Finally, several studies have emphasised that musical structure promotes vocabulary retention and heightens awareness of prosodic features (Fonseca-Mora, 2000).

An Affective and Motivational Driver

From an affective perspective, songs exert a strong power of attraction. Carmen Fonseca-Mora (2000) notes that "music seems to leave a particularly deep trace in our memories; this could be due to the fact that it is related to affective and unconscious factors" (p. 150). She further adds that "in general, the use of music in the language classroom encourages students to be quiet because it avoids other auditory distractions. Therefore, it is especially helpful to create the relaxing classroom atmosphere needed to develop written composition activities. Music has the ability to change the hearer's mood because it stimulates our imagination" (p. 151).

It engages emotion, memory, and identification. This appears, from the teacher's perspective, to foster a positive attitude toward the foreign language. Numerous classroom observations indicate that the enjoyment experienced by learners during a task contributes to strengthening their motivation and facilitating memorization. The rhythmic and melodic structure of songs particularly supports vocabulary retention: some expressions or turns of phrase become firmly anchored in learners' memories thanks to their musical setting. This affective and creative dimension is consistent with the principles of the humanistic approach, which emphasizes the role of emotion, motivation, and personal engagement in the learning process. These principles are explicitly reiterated in the CEFR, which states that "motivation, attitude, emotion, and affective factors influence the success or failure of learning" (Council of Europe, 2001, § 5.1.3.1). As previously mentioned, the choice of a song in the FFL classroom cannot be left to chance. It must meet specific criteria, considering pedagogical objectives, learners' linguistic level, their cultural interests, and didactic constraints. The following are the main factors to consider when selecting an appropriate song.

Criteria for Selecting a Song—Which Song to Choose?

The selection of a song for FFL classroom cannot be based solely on the teacher's personal taste or the popularity of the piece. It must rest on a rigorous didactic reflection, guided by the specific needs of the learners and the aims of the teaching-learning process (Cuq & Gruca, 2002).

The first and most fundamental criterion for selecting a song is its alignment with the intended learning objectives. The song should enable the development of targeted competences: lexical (semantic fields such as love, work, the city), grammatical (present indicative, simple future, imperative), phonological (prosody, intonation), sociolinguistic (registers, regional

variations), pragmatic (politeness formulas, instructions), or intercultural (values conveyed, social representations). As Cuq and Gruca (2002) note: a resource is even more didactic when it makes it possible to integrate several skills around the same document.

The second criterion relates to linguistic objectives and, more specifically, linguistic accessibility. A song can facilitate the study of vocabulary (semantic fields such as love, work, the city, etc.) as well as grammatical points (present indicative, simple future, imperative, subject-verb agreement, etc.). It is therefore necessary to choose a song adapted to the learners. The level of language, syntactic complexity, lexical density, and speed of delivery should be compatible with the CEFR level of the target audience (Council of Europe, 2001).

A third criterion is sonic intelligibility, which is also a key factor. Clear diction, a moderate tempo, and an audible voice are essential conditions to ensure comprehensible listening. In this regard, the song's natural prosody serves as an important lever for sensitizing learners to the musicality of the target language (Murphey, 1992). Through songs, teachers can also work on learners' prosody and intonation.

A fourth criterion is the cultural and intercultural dimension of the song, which makes it a particularly rich authentic resource. As a true reflection of the society that produces it, a song offers access to Francophone imaginaries and fosters comparison between cultural systems (Galisson, 1980; Zarate, 1986). This richness anchors learning in a sociohistorical reality and opens the way to discussions on norms, values, stereotypes, and social representations.

In this context, the artistic quality of the piece should not be overlooked. An aesthetically accomplished song, with a strong artistic intention, can foster learners' affective engagement and enhance their participation. Conversely, a song that is overly childish (outside the intended audience), outdated, or stereotypical may lead to rejection of the resource. Likewise, some sensitive aspects must be anticipated: violent content, explicit sexuality, discriminatory remarks, or offensive stereotypes. The teacher must exercise discernment according to the institutional context, local norms, and learners' profiles (Ruiz, 2015).

These various criteria do not constitute a rigid framework but rather a reflective guide for informed and contextualized selection. The teacher retains a degree of freedom, provided that they can justify their choices in light of the intended objectives and the target audience.

The following section will illustrate this approach through four examples of songs used in FFL classes with a Japanese audience.

Example of Educational Use of Song

In this section, the authors present four songs that they have had the opportunity to use in their teaching careers with Japanese high school and young adult learners of French. Given their age, this audience is particularly interested in issues related to identity, gender equality, ecology, and similar themes. Each song will be addressed in turn, with an explanation of the reasons for its selection, the intended pedagogical objectives, and the structure of the lesson or

teaching sequence. It should also be noted that the songs were always introduced to the learners through their music videos.

Song 1: *On brûlera* (“We will burn”) by Pomme

Why This Song?

The song *On brûlera* by Pomme (2017) provides an opportunity to address the theme of LGBTQ+ rights, which is a significant issue for high school and young adult learners from the perspective of French teachers. LGBTQ+ rights are especially relevant for young people, who are in the process of building their identities and who may need to feel that they are in an open and tolerant environment. In addition, the song makes it possible to discuss the diversity of family structures that exist in France (reconstituted families also commonly known as stepfamilies or blended families, same-sex families, etc.). From a pedagogical standpoint, this makes the song particularly relevant given the themes it raises.

Classroom Exploitation of the Song

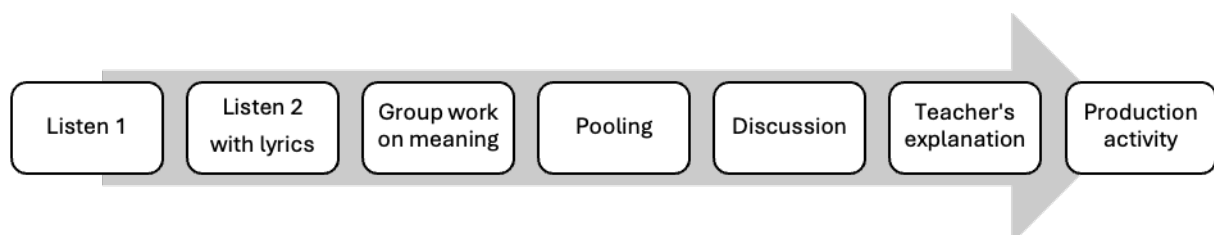
Working with this song in class allows for the development of several aspects of linguistic competence. From a grammatical perspective, three elements are addressed: agreement in gender and number, the use of the pronoun “on”, and the future simple tense. Two lexical fields are also explored: love and religion.

From the standpoint of sociolinguistic competence, the main objective is to help learners understand that the song deals with the tension between social norms (in this case, particularly those conveyed by the Catholic religion) and LGBTQ+ rights. This tension can only be fully understood if learners realize that the French pronoun “on” (e.g.: *On brûlera*) in the song refers to two women in love. This is revealed only by the phrase *toutes les deux* (“both of us”), where the ending -es on *toutes* is a grammatical marker used only when referring to females. The following words *les deux* (“the two”) then clarify that the plural is limited to exactly two women.

The Course Session Schedule

Figure 1

Steps of *On brûlera* Song Course Session



The song *On brûlera* can be used in a single 90-minute lesson in 6 steps, to which a second session may be added to introduce follow-up production activities (Step 7). Since the lyrics are simple and repetitive, this song can be used even with an A1-level audience, provided that the religious vocabulary is explained.

- Step 1: First viewing of the video clip.

(It should be noted here that the video is not very illustrative: it shows the singer seated, singing, while snails crawl over her body.)

→ The objective at this stage is to introduce the song gradually, allowing learners to become familiar with the melody and to try to pick out a few words. Since the video itself is not highly expressive, learners are likely to focus more quickly on the lyrics, which are sung at a slow enough pace to aid comprehension.

- Step 2: Second viewing with the lyrics provided.

- Step 3: Group work to establish the overall meaning of the lyrics.

This collaborative activity encourages learners to co-construct meaning, to cooperate, and to support one another, while also mobilizing their mediation skills. During this stage, the teacher can circulate among the groups to facilitate discussion, clarify vocabulary, and, above all, draw attention to specific lines that students may not have noticed spontaneously.

→ The objective here is for students to work together to understand the lyrics and to identify two essential points: (a) the religious lexical field with words such as *enfer* (“hell”), *dieux* (“gods”), *louanges* (“praises”), and *prières* (“prayers”); (b) the meaning of the lines « *On brûlera toutes les deux / En enfer, mon ange* » (“We’ll both burn / In hell, my angel”), where the indefinite determiner *toutes* is marked in the feminine plural.

- Step 4: Whole-class discussion to pool the results of group work.

- Step 5: Reflection and discussion activity.

After highlighting these elements, students can be invited to reflect on questions such as: “What is the singer’s message in this song?” and “What is the relationship between religion and homosexuality in French society?”

→ This stage can be challenging for Japanese learners, since the dominant religions in France and Japan differ, as does their relationship to LGBTQ+ rights. In Japan, Buddhism and Shintoism, being the most widespread, rarely address LGBTQ+ issues, and therefore are not in conflict with them. As a result, these concerns may seem distant or difficult to grasp for Japanese learners.

- Step 6: Class-wide sharing of reflections.

At this point, the teacher may, if necessary, provide further explanations about the French

sociocultural context in order to facilitate learners' understanding of the meaning conveyed by the song.

- Step 7 (optional): Production activities in a follow-up session.

The lesson can end with Step 6, but an additional session may be devoted to creative production tasks, such as:

- Designing a poster with a message of tolerance.
- Writing a new verse modeled on the structure: On + verb in the future simple + location (e.g.: *On dansera dans la forêt* (“We will dance in the forest”)).
- Conducting research and reflection on topics such as same-sex marriage and the demonstrations that took place in France at the time, or the aesthetic choices made by the singer for the video (for instance: Why is she seated, singing, with snails crawling over her body?¹¹).

In conclusion, the song *On brûlera* constitutes a relevant teaching resource for addressing the issue of LGBTQ+ rights within the French sociocultural context. Although Japanese learners' limited familiarity with this context may present multiple challenges, the song remains highly exploitable thanks to its simple lyrics and slow rhythm. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to emphasize the importance of gender and number agreement, which is an area that often proves difficult for Japanese learners, whose mother tongue does not include such grammatical features.

**Song 2: *Comme un homme* (“Like a man”) and
Sois un homme (“Be a man”) from Disney movie *Mulan***

Why This Song?

This lesson on songs was requested by Japanese learners, among whom Disney works are particularly popular. The teachers therefore chose to present the French version produced in France (hereafter referred to as the French version) and the French version produced in Quebec (hereafter referred to as the Quebec version) of a same song to students. Indeed, Disney films are almost always translated into these two varieties of French. The study of Disney songs thus enables teachers to draw learners' attention to two important aspects: translation differences and the diversity of the French-speaking world.

For this lesson, the teachers selected a song from the animated film *Mulan: I'll Make a Man Out of You*, translated as *Comme un homme* in the French version and *Sois un homme* in the Quebec version. The choice of this specific song also allowed them to address the issue of sexism, specifically the construction and dissemination of a stereotype.

11 It turns out that the singer made this aesthetic choice of the snail because the snail is a non-binary animal, possessing both female and male reproductive organs.

Classroom Exploitation of the Song

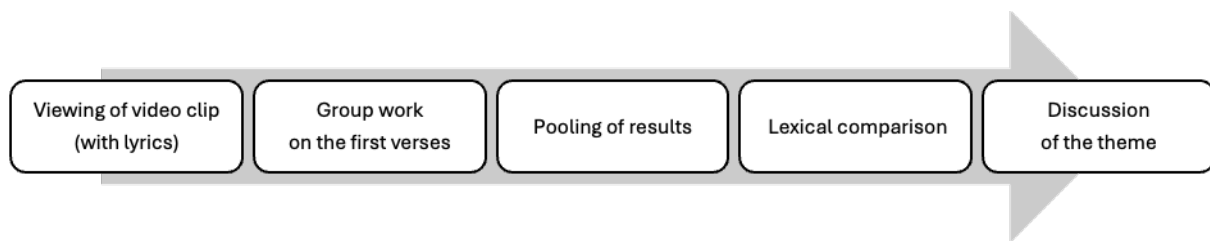
In this lesson sequence, we work with two versions of the same song (one in French and the other in Quebec French), while it is also possible to include the English original and the Japanese version as additional points of reference. From the standpoint of linguistic competence, the study of these two French versions allows learners to identify translation differences, and more importantly, differences in the vocabulary employed.

Highlighting these lexical differences also opens the way for reflection on sociolinguistic competence, particularly on how discourse and vocabulary can convey sexist ideas.

The Course Session Schedule

Figure 2

Steps of *Mulan* Disney Movie Songs Course Session



Working on several songs (especially if we include the English and Japanese versions) is time-consuming. Therefore, to keep within a 90-minute limit, it is wise to restrict the lyrics to one or two verses. In terms of level, this song can be used with A2 learners, but it is more relevant for B1 learners, who are more likely to grasp certain nuances of meaning. We can also consider teaching this lesson with a mixed-level group (A2–B1), where learners could support each other. Since the study of Disney songs was requested by the Japanese audience, even though it was the teachers who chose the specific song, we can assume that most learners are familiar with the story of *Mulan* and already know the chosen song. We can plan a 90-minute lesson in four steps, to which a second session may be added to introduce follow-up production activities (Step 5).

- Step 1: Viewing of video clip with lyrics

Distribution of the lyrics from the different versions of the song (French, Quebec French, and, depending on the learners' level, also the English original and the Japanese version), followed by viewing the video clips of the French and Quebec versions.

→ The aim is to provide learners with the tools necessary to facilitate comparative analysis.

- Step 2: Group work on the lyrics to ensure comprehension and to highlight the lexical fields used.

- Step 3: Whole-class sharing of group work.

→ The objective here is to consolidate understanding of the lyrics at the class level, through peer mediation among learners.

- Step 4: Comparison of the lexical fields used in each version of the song.

→ At this stage, learners' attention is drawn to vocabulary differences. They are first asked to identify terms used to describe incompetent soldiers, and then to classify them according to their connotation (sexist, neutral, pejorative, humorous, etc.).

Learners will observe that the French version employs a sexist lexical field with terms such as *des fillettes* (“little girls”), *de vrais hommes* (“real men”), and *femelettes* (“sissies”), whereas the Quebec version uses more neutral terms such as *des têtes-de-pioches* (“blockheads”), *des lavettes* (“a bunch of wimps”), and *de vraies mauviettes* (“real wimps”).

- Step 5: Reflection on sexism (optional)

Building on the observations from Step 4, learners are encouraged to reflect on the origins of sexist stereotypes and how they are reproduced in society. Following this reflection, further activities may include a class discussion on the normalization of sexist stereotypes in Japanese society, or a written production task (e.g., in the style of a DELF activity, rewriting of text (Silva, 2024)) aimed at promoting gender equality.

In conclusion, these songs constitute a relevant teaching resource for addressing the issue of gender equality while also bringing awareness to Francophonie.

Song 3: *Lettre à la République* (“Letter to the Republic”) by Kery James

Why This Song?

Kery James's *Lettre à la République* is a rich pedagogical resource that can be exploited in multiple ways to address complex themes such as colonization, immigration, and the integration of immigrant populations into French society. Written in an engaged style and addressed directly to the French Republic, the song offers a powerful and incisive critique of the colonial legacy and of the social marginalization experienced by some French citizens from former colonies.

Using this song as a teaching resource makes it possible to examine current issues in French public debate and to introduce Japanese learners to aspects of French history and society that are seldom covered in textbooks.

Classroom Exploitation of the Song

Working with *Lettre à la République* allows for the mobilization of both linguistic and sociolinguistic competences. From a linguistic standpoint, the study of the song helps learners

engage with vocabulary from political, historical, and social domains, as well as idiomatic and metaphorical expressions, and the comprehension of implicit meanings. From a sociolinguistic perspective, through notions such as structural racism, the colonial legacy, and the sense of belonging, the song provides opportunities to explore issues of collective memory, identity discourse, and civic engagement.

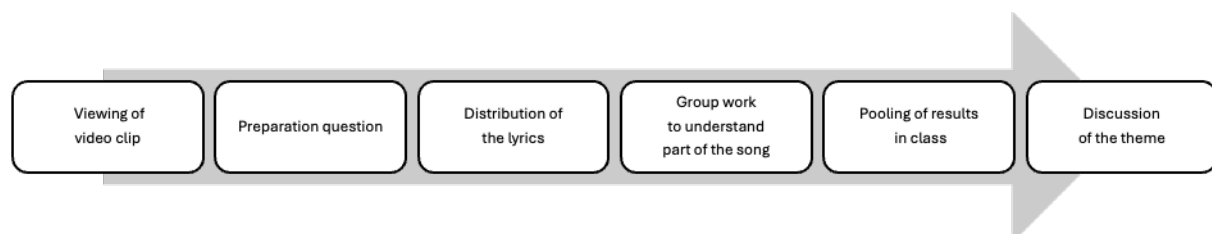
Nevertheless, the song requires substantial historical and cultural background knowledge that may be challenging for Japanese learners. Preparatory activities are therefore necessary to facilitate comprehension. The artist makes numerous references to France’s colonial past (*les pilleurs de richesse* (“the plunderers of wealth”), *les tortionnaires d’Algériens* (“the torturers of Algerians”), *les tirailleurs sénégalais* (“the Senegalese riflemen”), etc.) as well as broader cultural references (like *les favelas*, *le syndrome de Stockholm* (“Stockholm syndrome”), etc.). Although preparation questions can help clarify such references, there are too many to be covered exhaustively. Moreover, many university students may not conduct in-depth research on these issues. For instance, in response to the question “Who were the Senegalese riflemen?”, some students might simply answer that they were “a military corps belonging to the French colonial troops,” without realizing that this was in fact a generic term for all soldiers recruited from French colonies (Senegal, as well as Mali, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Benin, etc.) and that they fought for France in both World Wars.

Another challenge is the interpretation of implicit meanings. Japanese students are often less receptive to implicit discourse, which may make it difficult for them to grasp lyrics such as *Je sais c’que c’est d’être Noir depuis l’époque du cartable* (“I have known what it is to be Black since my schoolbag days”), which refers to experiences of racism. Preparatory work is therefore essential to help learners interpret the artist’s words and establish connections between the lyrics and the historical realities to which they allude.

The Course Session Schedule

Figure 3

Steps of *Lettre à la République* Song Course Session



This song is a dark and meaningful one, as it deals with themes such as colonization, immigration, and integration. It is therefore suitable for intermediate learners who, beyond the linguistic aspects, are also interested in sociocultural issues. As such, the song is appropriate for learners at the B1 level, or even B2. This song should be used over two 90-minute sessions, in

five steps, to which a third session may be added to introduce follow-up production activities (Step 6). These production activities can also be proposed as homework.

- Step 1: First viewing of the video clip, without written support.

→ The objective here is to capture learners' attention through visual and auditory elements and to gather their first impressions (striking images, words understood, emotions felt).

- Step 2: Distribution of a preparatory worksheet with questions for historical contextualization.

→ This step can be carried out either before or after the first viewing, depending on the pedagogical goal (to spark curiosity or to support comprehension).

- Step 3: Sharing and discussion of answers to the preparatory questions, supplemented by the teacher's clarifications and explanations if necessary.

→ The aim of this stage is to ensure that all learners have the same historical and cultural background knowledge before approaching the song.

To prevent learners from giving only superficial answers, it is advisable to stop at this point during the first session and take the necessary time to address the preparatory questions.

- Step 4: Small-group analysis of selected stanzas from the song.

→ Each group works to explain the meaning of the lyrics and to connect them with the information previously studied. For example, after addressing the preparatory questions "From which regions did immigrants come to France?", "Who were the Senegalese riflemen?", and "Who were the Harkis¹²?", it becomes easier to understand the following lyrics:

*De la douce France bafouée par l'immigration africaine
Demandez aux tirailleurs sénégalais et aux harkis
Qui a profité d'qui ?*

"Sweet France trampled by African immigration
Ask the Senegalese riflemen and the Harkis
Who benefited from whom?"

- Step 5: Whole-class discussion and guided debate on the themes raised in the song.

→ The teacher can guide this exchange by posing questions such as: "What are the artist's

12 *Les Harkis* refers to Muslim Algerians who served as auxiliaries or soldiers in the French army during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), often facing persecution in Algeria after the war.

feelings toward France?” and “What is the artist denouncing?”

- Step 6 (optional): Production activities.

As production activities, teachers may:

→ Propose to write a letter to an institution (real or fictional) about a perceived injustice in Japanese society.

→ Organize a discussion or debate on the following question: Does the State play a role in the discrimination experienced by the children of immigrants?

Lettre à la République is a song of considerable depth, which is not easy to exploit in the FFL classroom. It requires carefully designed pedagogical scaffolding, yet it provides an opportunity to focus on sociocultural competence and to equip Japanese learners with valuable tools for understanding current issues in French society, particularly those related to immigration and integration.

Song 4: *Saint-Denis* by Grand Corps Malade

Why This Song?

The song *Saint-Denis*¹³ by Grand Corps Malade was chosen as an introduction to literary analysis. It was selected to introduce learners to the genre of *slam*, which is a spoken musical form that is generally easier for learners of French to understand. The song addresses two main themes: the artist’s love for his city and the cosmopolitan character of that city. It therefore provides a way to reflect on the cultural diversity of French suburbs through a poetic style that helps to deconstruct various stereotypes.

Classroom Exploitation of the Song

This song serves as a useful introduction to literary analysis and textual commentary, the type of exercise French high school students’ practices in preparation for the *Baccalauréat*¹⁴. To write a commentary, one normally formulates a guiding problem statement, but for this initiation activity learners can be asked a simple question such as: How does the artist describe his hometown?, and a straightforward two-part structure can then be proposed: I – Saint-Denis, a cosmopolitan city / II – Saint-Denis, a city loved by its inhabitants.

Learners can be guided to fill out these two parts with concrete examples, focusing on lexical fields (e.g., diversity, affection for the city) as well as figures of speech (anaphora, metaphor, etc.).

For instance, in this song learners can identify:

13 Saint-Denis is a commune in the northern suburbs of Paris (France), where there is a lot of immigrant background people.

14 The *Baccalauréat* is a French national academic qualification that students can obtain at the completion of their secondary education by meeting given requirements.

- Anaphora: the first four lines of the opening stanza all begin with *J'voudrais faire un slam pour ...* (“I’d like to do a slam for ...”)
- Metaphor: the city of Saint-Denis is described as a *grande dame* (“great lady”), an old woman, who has witnessed the artist grow up like a mother figure.
- Alliteration in [r]: *Prends la ligne D du RER et erre dans les rues sévères d’une ville pleine de caractère* (“Ride the RER line D, then roam the rugged roads of a city rich full of character”).
- Assonance in [o]: *Prends la ligne 13 du métro et va bouffer McDo ou dans les bistros d’une ville pleine de bonnes gos et de gros clandos* (“Hop on the line 13, grab some McDo or hit the bistros in a city full of fine chicks and shady locos”).

Learners may also observe the lexical fields of cultural diversity:

En une heure, tu traverseras Alger et Tanger. Tu verras des Yougos et des Roms, et puis j’t’emmènerai à Lisbonne. Et à 2 pas de New Delhi et de Karachi, j’t’emmènerai bouffer du Mafé à Bamako et à Yamoussoukro.

“In an hour, you’ll cross Algiers and Tangier. You’ll see some Yugos and Roms, then I’ll take you to Lisbon. And just a stone’s throw from New Delhi and Karachi, I’ll take you to chow some Mafé in Bamako and Yamoussoukro.”

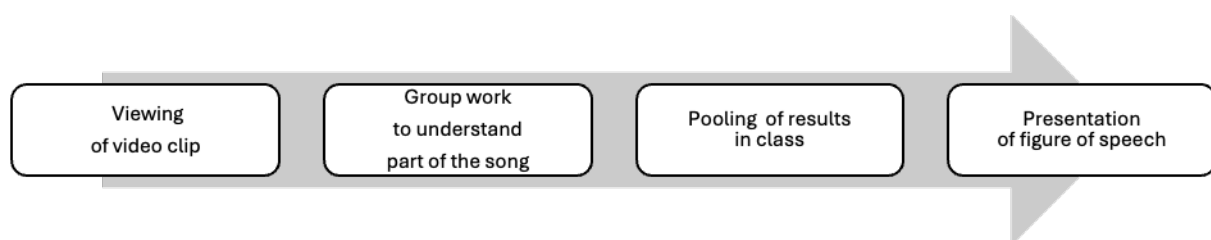
The main difficulty in exploiting this song lies in the fact that learners do not approach literary analysis in the same way as it is done in France, and they are generally unfamiliar with the exercise of *commentaire de texte* (a text commentary).

Thus, from a pragmatic perspective, this song offers an original text that can serve as an introduction to French-style literary analysis. At the same time, on the linguistic level, it helps enrich learners’ vocabulary related to the city, culture, and emotions. On the sociolinguistic level, it also contributes to deconstructing the negative image often associated with the Parisian suburbs.

The Course Session Schedule

Figure 4

Steps of *Saint-Denis* Song Course Session



This song was chosen to serve as an introduction to text commentary for French learners

and is therefore intended for a B1–B2 level audience. This lesson sequence can take place over two 90-minute sessions: the first for understanding and analyzing the song (Steps 1 to 4), and the second for producing the text commentary (Step 5).

- Step 1: Viewing of the video clip.

Learners are asked to pick out words as they listen and to guess the theme of the song.

- Step 2: Distribution of the lyrics and group work.

Learners work in groups to understand the meaning of the lyrics. To save time, the song can be divided into several sections, with each group assigned a different part.

- Step 3: Whole-class sharing of group work.

The objective is to ensure comprehension of the lyrics by the class, drawing on peer mediation among learners.

- Step 4: Teacher presentation of figures of speech.

The teacher introduces figures of speech (using examples not drawn from the song itself) and learners are then invited to identify such figures within the song.

- Step 5: Writing a commentary.

Learners are introduced to the French *commentaire de texte* (as practiced for the *baccalauréat*) and are invited to write one, either individually, in small groups, or as a whole class with teacher support, depending on their level.

Grand Corps Malade's *Saint-Denis* is an ideal resource for introducing learners to literary analysis. The text, rich in stylistic devices and allusions yet written in a contemporary and accessible style, is well-suited to learners of French who are not literature specialists. Moreover, compared to classical literary texts, this song allows students to engage with contemporary themes such as immigration and integration.

Conclusion

This article aims to explore the pedagogical richness of the Francophone song as a teaching resource. Indeed, the Francophone song can prove to be an original authentic document, more or less easily exploitable in the FFL classroom. In the context of this article, we have chosen to present four contemporary songs: *On brûlera* by Pomme, *Comme un homme* and *Sois un homme* (taken from the Disney animated film *Mulan*), *Lettre à la République* by Kery James, and *Saint-Denis* by Grand Corps Malade. Each of these songs was selected for its strong thematic scope, whether dealing with LGBTQ+ rights, gender norms, or the major

triptych: colonization, immigration, and integration.

The results of this analysis, structured around a didactic perspective, reveal that the song constitutes an effective lever for addressing complex and sensitive issues in the language classroom. Its evocative power, its anchoring in orality, and its expressive function foster both affective and cognitive engagement on the part of learners, while confronting them with varied social and cultural representations. Far from being reduced to mere “entertainment” or a passive listening exercise, the song here becomes a genuine resource for intercultural reflection, at the intersection of linguistic, identity-based, and civic issues.

The exploitation of these songs indeed makes it possible to develop transversal skills: understanding implicit meaning, critically analyzing social discourse, raising awareness of stereotypes, and expressing oneself on sensitive topics. The proposed pedagogical activities, discussion and debate, reformulation, personal creations, or text analysis, show that learners are capable of appropriating such complex content, as long as structured support is provided. This work requires the teacher to adopt a reflective didactic stance, attentive to learners’ sociocultural contexts, their representations, and possible resistances.

In the specific context of a Japanese audience, the chosen songs made it possible to question often implicit social norms, open up a space for discussion on topics sometimes rarely addressed in the school environment, and confront learners with other relationships to language, gender, or collective memory. This reinforces the idea that the teaching of FFL can and should be part of a broader educational perspective, integrating objectives of civic education and intercultural openness.

In sum, far from being a mere classroom animation tool, the Francophone song proves to be a genuine vehicle for critical learning. It invites learners to enter the language through the prism of sensibility and lived experience, while giving them the means to express themselves, to understand, and to act in a plural world. It is thus in the tension between aesthetics and ethics, between pleasure and reflection, that its pedagogical power lies. The song hence becomes a tool for pragmatic and sociocultural reflection, going beyond the purely linguistic objectives of the FFL classroom.

References

- Alain le Lait. (2021). Au petit déjeuner [For breakfast] [Song]. On Song from videos.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>
- Cuq, J.-P., & Gruca, I. (2002). *Cours de didactique du français langue étrangère et seconde* [Course in didactics of French as a foreign and second language]. Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.
- Cuq, J.-P. (2003). *Dictionnaire de didactique du français langue étrangère et seconde*

- [Dictionary of didactics of French as a foreign and second language]. CLE International.
- Diam's. (2004). Marine [Song]. On *Ma vie/Mon live*. EMI.
- Fiori, P., Garcia, J., Pistorio, P. -F., Vigné, M. & Mulan. (1998). Comme un homme [As a man] [Song]. On *Mulan (French Original Soundtrack)*. Walt Disney Records.
- Fonseca-Mora, C. (2000). Foreign language acquisition and melody singing. *ELT Journal*, 54(2), 146–152. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/54.2.146>
- Galisson, R. (1980). D'hier à aujourd'hui la didactique générale des langues étrangères : du structuralisme au fonctionnalisme [From Past to Present: General Didactics of Foreign Languages—From Structuralism to Functionalism]. CLE International.
- Gilmore, A. (2007). Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 40(2), 97–118. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444807004144>
- Gourvenec, L. (2017). Paroles et musique: Le français par la chanson [Lyrics and music: French through songs]. Hachette FLE. <https://doi.org/10.14375/NP.9782012600935>
- Grand Corps Malade. (2006). Saint-Denis [Song]. On *Midi 20*. AZ.
- Hedaywa, J., & Sourak, S. (2013). Le rôle des documents authentiques dans l'enseignement/apprentissage du français langue étrangère [The role of authentic documents in teaching/learning French as a foreign language]. *Tishreen University Journal for Research and Scientific Studies - Arts and Humanities Series*, 35(2).
- James, K. (2012). Lettre à la République [Letter to the Republic]. On *92.2012*. Silène.
- Marien, R., Chevrier, M., Kavanagh, A., Charette, M., Couture, A., & Montmorency, A. (1998). Sois un homme [Be a man] [Song]. On *Mulan (Canadian French Original Soundtrack)*. Walt Disney Records.
- Murphey, T. (1992). *Music and song*. Oxford University Press.
- Pomme. (2017). On brûlera [We will burn] [Song]. On *À peu près*. Polydor.
- Rogers, C. (1969). *Freedom to learn: A view of what education might become*. Charles Merrill.
- Ruiz, F. E. (2015). *La chanson en classe de FLE-Technique et pratique de classe* [The Song in the FLE Classroom Technique and Classroom Practice]. CLE International.
- Silva, S. (2024). Il était une fois ... Exploration des stéréotypes de genre à travers la réécriture de texte [Once upon a time ... Exploring gender stereotypes through text rewriting]. *Revue japonaise de didactique du français*, 19(1–2), 387–392. https://doi.org/10.24495/rjdf.19.1-2_387
- Zarate, G. (1986). Enseigner une culture étrangère [Teaching a Foreign Culture]. Hachette.