

July 2024

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Recommended Citation

Pégram, S. (2024). Check the Rhyme y'all; Life as a Shorty Shouldn't be so Rough: How hip-hop songs can be used as pedagogical tools to teach grammar/culture and ease comprehension in a French as a Second Language Classroom. *Perspectives In Learning*, 21 (1). Retrieved from <https://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/pil/vol21/iss1/1>

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Check the Rhyme Y'all; Life as a Shorty Shouldn't be so Rough: How Hip-Hop Songs can be Used as Pedagogical Tools to Teach Grammar/Culture and Ease Comprehension in a French as a Second Language Classroom

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Abstract

Language learning can be stressful endeavour for students. To address this, educators of foreign languages often search for new and exciting pedagogical tools that will enable them to reach their learners in meaningful ways. Since both hip-hop music and culture are omnipresent throughout contemporary society in many facets, some teachers are incorporating elements of this ever-expanding and integral part of global pop culture into their lesson plans. This study explores the unique educational approach that is known as a *Hip-Hop Based Education* (HHBE); one where rap music and lyrics can be integrated into classroom instruction and learning. After first introducing and exploring how hip-hop is put to use in classes across several subject disciplines, this paper discusses and analyses several examples where lyrics from rap songs were included as a teaching method into introductory to advanced-level courses where French is the target language. The findings of this research aim to demonstrate the pedagogical effectiveness of incorporating a little bit of hip-hop into second-language curricula as a means in which to teach students and aid comprehension in grammar and culture *en français*.

“If hip-hop has the ability to corrupt young minds, it also has the ability to educate and teach them.” (KRS-ONE)

The power and popularity of hip-hop culture influences fashion, style, music, cinema, television, art, dance, and other means of expression in the United States and around the world. Consumers of the genre can be found across demographic and cultural lines, without regard to one's ethnocultural background or social status. Hip-hop culture as it is known, is defined by its four elements: graffiti, breakdancing, DJing, and the one for which it is best associated, rapping. This once uniquely American phenomenon has now grown into

an international force with artists, DJs, dancers, and rappers honing their skills in a multitude of different languages in countries located on all continents. Although hip-hop based in the United States is the most prominent in terms of familiarity and visibility globally, the second-most prolific market for the genre is in France and other French-speaking nations. Due to this sort of popularity with younger generations in both the Anglophone and Francophone world, a question worth pursuing is to investigate the viability of incorporating the music into a classroom where French is taught as a second language (*Français langue étrangère*, or FLE). To inquire about and probe the effectiveness of integrating hip-

hop into the contours of FLE curricula, this paper introduces and discusses how teachers might explore the cogency and usefulness of incorporating elements of a Hip-Hop Based Pedagogy (HHBE) into their instruction. Secondly, based on our own brief use and examination of this unique approach to teaching in a second language classroom, we provide a few tested lesson-based examples and give suggestions that demonstrate how hip-hop can be used as a pedagogical practice in classrooms where French (or any language) is taught. Although educators can without question use any style or type of music as a pedagogical tool in which to teach vocabulary, grammar, and culture, we chose to focus on hip-hop and elements HHBE since rap music is the most popular contemporary musical style embraced by youths in the United States (Ahmed, 2022). Furthermore, because we teach courses located on a university campus that is majority-minority in terms of its demographic characteristics, hip-hop is also the most popular genre of music as preferred by our students. To commence the present investigation about how a few grammar concepts were taught via the use of rap music along with some HHBE lesson suggestions, it is important to *go back in the day* and give a brief overview of hip-hop culture in both the United States and France.

A Brief Overview of Hip-Hop: *Je rap, donc je suis...*

Hip-hop was born out of neighbourhood dance-hall gatherings in the New York City borough of The Bronx in the 1970s that were put together by gang leaders and young residents, many of whom were the children of Caribbean immigrants. Over time, these mixed sounds that were poetically “*rapped*” would soon be recognised as a genre of music in its own

right; one that later evolved into a type of sound that rallied for social justice (Hebdige, 2003; Kitwana, 2004; Sciullo, 2018). In the embryonic stage of hip-hop, artists rapped about their lives as young people of colour in the forgotten neighbourhoods of New York City’s outer boroughs. These emerging artists had a story to share with the world: *theirs*. As this new style grew in popularity and prestige, the music industry quickly recognised the potential power of hip-hop culture. By the mid-1990s, rap music was given massive exposure by record labels as young consumers across demographic boundaries became more attracted to the sound and the “urban” culture that it represented. Today, contemporary rap music rakes in millions of dollars in commercial sales, and the deep permeation of rap into mainstream American society has great influence on cultural trends (Kitwana, 2004; Sciullo, 2018).

Hip-hop arrived in France via concerts in Paris given by popular visiting American artists in the 1980s. Similar to those initial trends that first occurred in the United States, the music and the burgeoning culture with which it was associated spoke well to the experiences of youths of colour from marginalised communities (Prévos, 1996). As the visibility of rap increased, break-dancers, graffiti artists, and aspiring rappers all honed their skills on the Trocadéro plaza that faces the Eiffel Tower. These performances helped to expand the culture to the masses. As one of the three major innovators of hip-hop in New York (along with Grandmaster Flash and Kool Herc), Afrika Bambaataa and his Universal Zulu Movement was the first American artist to gain an international following. The mantra of the Zulus sought to use hip-hop culture as a means in which to discuss social problems facing people of colour whilst also

promoting the universal values of “peace, love, respect, unity, and having fun” (Boucher, 1998). This juxtaposition of music and social issues proved attractive to many in France, especially amongst marginalised youths of colour from the Paris suburbs. From this environment, French hip-hop was born. Although the Zulu Movement proved popular in France, rap music in French was slow to develop commercially beyond a largely underground audience. Because of this, it was not until the arrival of a rapper named MC Solaar that the genre became widely recognised (Boucher, 1998). Since the 1980s, hip-hop in France has grown to be a major part of the French recording industry and it is popular throughout the Francophone world.

Forward from the late-1990s, artists grew in prestige as rap music *en français* became more socially entrenched regarding its subject matter. Rap lyrics often graphically describe everyday life as faced by youths of colour in France in ways that no other music variant has previously done before (Prévos, 1996; Boucher, 1998). Thus, hip-hop was (and remains) not just a sound whose mission is to entertain; it soon metamorphosed and became a rhymed protest. This may seem a curious way to express discontent for those unfamiliar with cultural or literary history in France, but rappers are using an age-old tactic to further a message or demand social change. Over the course of many centuries, French poets, authors, and playwrights have employed this exact sort of method (i.e., using a literary rhyme to complain or protest) to build manifestos that would challenge those in power. Contemporary hip-hop artists also do this by rhyming about what they know best, the localised spatial construct of their neighbourhoods.

Renowned hip-hop scholars such as Rose (2008), Campbell & Forman (2023) and Perry (2004) state that the formation of identity in hip-hop is influenced and motivated by the lived circumstances of the artist. When one examines the concept of “race and space” as it relates to French rappers, the “construct” is the suburbs surrounding Paris and other cities.ⁱ It is important to understand that the French concept of “*banlieue*” (suburb) in France cannot be compared with the classic North American definition; for the peripheral communities of Paris are the opposite of what one may expect when considering the smaller bedroom towns that surround most cities in the United States. In the suburbs of Paris, immigrants and others hailing from the working-class live in tiny apartments located in large high-rise complexes known as “*cités*” that are located far and away from the central core of the City of Lights. These immense housing estates were constructed for arriving migrants and workers from French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean during the decades following World War II when blue-collar immigrant and/or migrant labour was needed to rebuild France. Though difficult to know the exact numbers due to the lack of statistical data in officially secular France, the contemporary population in many of the suburbs circling Paris are majority-minority in demographics (Kokoreff, 2006; Tchumkan, 2015). These same outlying areas are also the home to underfunded schools, high unemployment rates, a lack of basic services, elevated crime rates, and a lack of adequate infrastructure. Tchumkan (2015) states that youths of colour living in these disenfranchised suburbs are particularly vulnerable to deviance and other social problems because of this divisive spatial dichotomy. Kokoreff (2006) and Wiewiorka (2008) each argue that young people from marginalised

communities feel ignored by mainstream society with many believing that they have no hope of becoming fully “French” despite any efforts to integrate and belong. Mucchielli (2007) posits that for some of these youths, a turn towards deviant or criminal behaviour represents for them a means in which to navigate the contours of a French society that increasingly turns against its citizens with ethnocultural backgrounds. Thus, hip-hop music in French provides listeners a sort of audio window to start understanding the plethora of sociocultural and socioeconomic issues that confront youths of colour from marginalised communities.

Benefits of Hip-Hop in the Classroom

Rap music has been used by some educators as a sort of *non-traditional* pedagogical practice for years since many songs feature lyrics that deconstruct a variety of subjects applicable for instruction (Chang, 2005; Rose, 2008). Hip-hop itself springs from the educational African narrative tradition of the village *griot*; a librarian of sorts whose job was/is to teach residents about their collective history. Early hip-hop artists in the United States embraced this type of “*griot education*” in their lyrical representations and their focus on community affairs. When deconstructing this subject, Hebdige (2003) and Chang (2005) maintain that hip-hop culture and the art of rapping were once viewed as effective ways in which to teach listeners about the complexities of life in “*da 'hood*.”ⁱⁱ Early rap music in the United States as produced by groups such as Public Enemy provided educational messages about Black America that were to be consumed and disseminated by anyone who listened. Colloquially and theoretically known as “*droppin science*,” this form of a more thematically educational

hip-hop was supported and endorsed by major record companies until the mid-1990s. However, since that time this teaching type of rap waned as corporate commodification in the recording industry favoured a more “gangsta” approach (Jones-Steward, 2012; Krims, 2013). No matter this tonal shift, the use of hip-hop amongst teachers in schools is gaining traction (Rose, 2018; Villanueva, 2022). When addressing this, Tobias (2014) argues that rap music represents a social and cultural practice because the genre critically expresses and socially considers a variety of important subjects that are necessary curricular topics. Themes in many songs discuss one’s representation, agency, place, and space and form the rubric of subjects that may not be covered in official school curricula. Thus, hip-hop offers listeners a musical lens to understand these topics. Further delineating on this subject, Tobias (2014, p. 68) maintains that the use of a HHBE in education enacts and increases critical pedagogy in classrooms in ways for “students to consider themselves and their community in terms of who they are and collectively.” Rose (2018) and Villanueva (2022) posit that even if teachers are not fans of hip-hop, educational researchers should recognise the unique pedagogical opportunities and capabilities offered by this youth-driven genre. In other words, the power of using elements of a HHBE as an instructional tool is employed to strengthen classroom instruction and advance comprehension and the acquisition of new information. Others such as Schultz (2003, p. 105) suggest that educators take an active role and “engage in deep listening” in the interest of their students as to comprehend them in more effective ways. Schultz labels this as “listening for understanding,” and further argues that it can assist educators in effectively meeting the needs of their classroom learners so that the former is most

receptive and the latter less apprehensive when it comes to learning and retaining information. Although any style or genre of music has the capability to aid student comprehension in virtually all disciplines of learning, we chose to employ examples of a HHBE due to its rhythmic poeticism and cultural content, both of which work very well in the French language and a FLE classroom.

Over the past two decades, a curriculum featuring elements of HHBE as a pedagogical tool has grown expeditiously in school curricula. When discussing this topic, Petchauer (2009) points out that educators across the United States are increasingly experimenting how rap music can be used to teach a variety of subjects. For example, a study by Adjapong and Emdin (2015) demonstrated how a HHBE can be incorporated into the science classroom by focusing on various style techniques used by rappers as a way in which to engage students from a struggling urban classroom in terms of retention and success. These researchers state that incorporating rap into some lessons showed a marked improvement of grades. Moreover, they discovered that the morale in the science classes where this approach was implemented was overwhelmingly positive. Other studies concur with these findings. For example, Stovall (2006) investigates how a HHBE in secondary social studies courses can help stimulate conversations about difficult concepts that deal with culture and history. A number of additional published studies demonstrate how a pedagogical approach that includes hip-hop can be a great value to educators across all disciplines. For example, Hill (2009, 2010), Rice (2003), and Rose (2018) argue that a use of HHBE in school curricula where it is applicable increases student engagement and positively influences student learning. Perhaps the most

frequent academic analysis of a hip-hop pedagogy has been in courses of English or English Language Arts, especially in literature classes where a HHBE could focus on the techniques used by rappers to encourage students to remember complex literary and theoretical theories. A notable example of this is Foster's (2002) examination of how what is known as "Call and Response" in African and African American culture can be employed as a pedagogical tool that facilitates language mastery and literacy. Savvy consumers of hip-hop are cognisant of how rappers frequently call out to their audiences with the expectations that the latter will respond back in a desired manner. Foster's (2002) research denotes how a use of this approach during class can help connect teachers with students in almost any classroom setting.

There may be additional benefits to incorporating a HHBE into teaching in schools with a more diverse population. In these educational facilities, an application or use of a HHBE in curricula can be an effective tool used by teachers in schools and universities where educational retention is problematic. Kelly (2013) argues that the creation of a space through hip-hop literature is helpful to educators who may hail from communities that differ from that of their students. In one investigation, Petchauer (2009), Ozelkan (2022) and Ringsager & Madsen (2022) studied courses that include aspects of a HHBE and found that students were motivated in class dialogue, which in turn stimulated both learning and the retention of grammar concepts and other complex subjects. Lopez-Rocha (2005) researched cultural differences that represent a sort of framework that learners unknowingly carry from their own unique background and found that some students in second language classroom are confronted

with various barriers to comprehension. Positing on this further, Lopez-Rocha (2005) argued that if students learned more about the *culture(s)* of the target language being studied, they would in turn gain a greater comprehension of subtle language indicators within it (in this case, in everyday conversational English). In terms of pedagogical practices used in educational facilities where youths of colour make up the majority of the student population, Emdin (2010) and Ringsager & Madsen (2022) maintain that if learners are engaged in unique ways (such as by incorporating elements of a HHBE into class lessons), they are more likely to succeed. This same study subsequently examined pedagogical practices involving difficult subjects where adolescents may feel marginalised (in this case of this research, science classes). In doing so, Emdin (2010, p. 62) posits that the “complex nuances” of a HHBE help to “value student culture” when employed as a teaching practice, however large or small.

Because of the music’s popularity amongst youths from all cultures, using examples and elements of a HHBE can be effective in any school, whether within a city, suburbs, or in rural areas. Other investigations demonstrated similar results to Emdin’s (2010) research in classes across several disciplines in the humanities (e.g., Hill 2009; 2010; Lutes et al., 2021). Adjapong and Emdin (2015, p. 67) label an application of a HHBE as “a way of authentically and practically incorporating the creative elements of hip-hop into teaching.” In other words, they postulate that if educators use topics relating to rap in the classroom, students from younger generations will be met “on their cultural turf” because educators are thereby given the ability to “teach to and through” the “realities and experiences” of their learners.

Moreover, Adjapong and Emdin’s (2015) research expands on this by challenging educators in subjects relating to the Sciences to concentrate on the culture of students by using hip-hop pedagogical approaches that will be familiar to students. Emdin (2010) contends that because the out-of-school experience of most students in big-city districts is rooted in hip-hop culture, rap music and its visual content permeates and is familiar to just about all youths, and not just those from within large urban areas. This is echoed by Lutes et al. (2021), Campbell (2022), and Ozelkan (2022) who argue that a HHBE allows students to take more responsibility in their learning and retaining of information because the use of rap in the classroom allows them to learn via a subject that is familiar to them (because in many ways it mirrors their own experiences).

The common denominator of these investigations demonstrates that an intermingling of a HHBE with the usual pedagogy gives educators one beneficial way where learners can see themselves as a valuable part of the classroom.

Flow-cabulaire via Rap

Despite the growing amount of research that discusses how any use of a HHBE across school curricula is a positive educational tool, very little investigative work exists on how this unique pedagogy can be incorporated into the foreign language classroom. That said, some studies give credence to how this sort of approach could/might be used. When researching the topic of linguistic acquisition, Krashen (1983) analysed the concept of musical din, which is a common phenomenon that indicates that a second language is involuntarily being acquired through music. Additionally, Salcedo (2010) studied the

learning process in second language classroom where songs were added to the usual pedagogy and sought to discover whether a student's recall in a beginning foreign language class would increase when grammar and/or vocabulary would be introduced and repeated through songs. On this note, Schmidt (2003) and Salcedo (2010) found that students who were exposed to material in the target language through music had a higher and statistically significant recall rate. Furthermore, learners were more successful in retaining information in the subject matter that was introduced by songs. These findings indicate that when music is employed as a pedagogical tool a more facilitated acquisition of the target language occurs. When studying linguistic acquisition, Krashen (1983, 1985) states that acquiring knowledge of a new language is most favourable when the anxiety of learners is low and their confidence in the learning process is elevated. Language educators all over the world are familiar with Krashen's "input before output" theory as a means in which to encourage teachers to make their students feel comfortable in the second-language classroom. Researchers such as Schmidt (2003), Rafiee et al. (2010), and Engh (2012) investigated how music reduces anxiety in foreign language courses and it aids in the creation of a positive learning environment amongst learners. However, music also provides educators with an additional tool. Engh (2012) researched the use of pop culture and its familiarity with today's student, arguing that songs and musical rhythms can help with cultural competency when students learn and acquire a new language (since pop culture often connects different cultures together in various ways) with the bonus of lowering any barriers between the teacher and student. Meaningful connections in terms of an

incorporation of a HHBE pedagogy in the foreign language classroom amongst learners and educators is important. This is emphasised by Kelly (2013, p. 52) who argues that learners often "shed their true selves to be successful academically," whilst further stating that students who resist or who are uncomfortable will simply disengage from the lesson since a non-positive classroom atmosphere will not be conducive to learning. For this reason, Kelly (2013) contends that by incorporating some hip-hop into teaching various structures in foreign languages, younger students improve academically.

There are many literary and cultural devices that are available to teachers concerning rap music. One such manner is to employ elements of a HHBE when teaching rhymed expression in literature, reading, and writing classes, whether formally or informally. Bradley (2009, p. xiii) describes rap artists as poets who use a "medium of oral educational expression that dates back thousands of years." Thus, poetry in its most traditional sense inspires hip-hop lyrical expression, and the music stimulates the spoken word in return. Hill (2009) analysed HHBE and books related to hip-hop to study topics relating to identity development within a traditional literature class whilst juxtaposing grammar and vocabulary lessons with rap songs. In similar studies, McKeown (2001), Schmidt (2003), Lin (2008), and Bennett (2019) all found that students were able to engage themselves in discussions about words as well as improve their retention and comprehension of new vocabulary through the context of a HHBE. Students learning a new language can also benefit from this type of approach. Because language is always evolving, rap music is a great way in which to expose foreign language learners to slang and

colloquialisms that are not available in traditional textbooks. Through the rich and ever-changing vocabulary made available through hip-hop, a HHBE could assist students to draw connections between themselves and the diverse cultures they are studying. A few key studies research this subject extensively. For example, Pardue (2004), Lin (2008), and Alim (2011) posit that rap lyrics enable learners to become familiar with the wide diversity of vocabulary words and slang, all of which enhance more difficult concepts of grammatical lessons. Furthermore, an addition of rap lyrics and a HHBE to a lesson may have additional benefits as well. Lee (2007) found that contemporary students of all backgrounds (particularly students of colour) often disengage themselves from school practices or lessons because they feel that they do not believe that the content of typical school curricula is representative of them and their needs. Whilst Lee (2007) does not suggest or advocate removing classical literature from school curricula, it is argued that teachers should find more creative ways to reach learners of colour and/or those from marginalised communities, particularly in districts where they make up a majority percentage of the student population.

Rapping Pedagogy

An initial challenge for foreign language educators is to understand how to use a HHBE as a pedagogical tool in a first semester French class where skills in the target language are still in the nascent stage. The initial courses in a new language are a time when anxiety and stress can be high for students, so a strict reliance on a HHBE or any type of music would not be successful. In other words, because rap is full of colloquialisms and slang, students in the

early stages of learning will not be able to comprehend much of what is being presented to them. Any songs used as a pedagogical tool would have to be very specific to the subject matter being covered in a lesson. However, once this is understood, there are many hip-hop tracks in French available to educators that can be used as valuable teaching tools via a HHBE approach, a few of which we will highlight forthwith.

To begin, we tested a use of a HHBE for a first-semester French course where student input and output is still quite limited. To do this, it was imperative to find a song that has easy and repetitive vocabulary with an accompanying video that has an easy narrative to understand and follow. Because this was a beginning class, it was also necessary to focus on a topic that is simple enough to associate with music. To this end, we needed a song that contained good examples that focus on the subject of *telling time*. In French, learning how to read a clock and tell the time can be difficult for new learners because of the differences from the same manner in which this is done in English. Although the concept of telling the time is usually a topic covered in the first semester of a typical university French course, it is one of more difficult things to master for some learners and it can be a point of frustration for many. To address this, we chose to work with the song “5 heures du mat” by the formerly popular hip-hop group named Alliance Ethnik. By virtue of their name, this diverse ensemble was made up of musicians and rappers from various ethnocultural backgrounds and the group had a string of radio-friendly hits in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The track “5 heures du mat,” received massive airplay in France and other Francophone countries because of its repetitive refrain and catchy

hook. Moreover, the song's visual presentation as shown in its interesting accompanying videoclip was also appealing to use in teaching. The lyrical subject matter of this track deals with a protagonist who observes life all around Paris as it is happening at five o'clock in the morning. As such, listeners hear and learn about the observations made by the rapper over the course of a long evening in the City of Lights that culminates at 5:00 AM. Many of the lyrics focus on the duality of various events that are occurring at that hour. For example, words from the song focus on those nocturnal people who "present themselves sadly" as their experience at a "boîte de nuit" (nightclub) is ending, whilst at the same time other clubbers emerge "souriants et net" (smiling and happy) as their evening ends. In terms of the subject of duality as outlined in the song's lyrics, some people mentioned see their night ending, whilst others who are early risers may see their day beginning, as rapped in these lines:

*Le monde de la nuit c'est d'la bombe y'en a
pour tout le monde
Bien sûr à 5h du mat j'ai vu aussi les sans-
abris. Marchant jours et nuits, traversant les
plus belles rues de Paris. Rejetés de partout,
considérés comme de vrais débris (...) À 5h
du mat j'ai vu aussi des fonctionnaires,
ouvriers mal payés
Attendre un bus, aller travailler.*

"The world of the night is da bomb, something for everyone. Of course, at 5 AM, I also saw homeless people walking days and nights, crossing the most beautiful streets of Paris. They're rejected everywhere, considered as rubbish (...) At 5 AM I saw also officials, poorly paid workers waiting for a bus, going to work."

These examples highlight the various contrasts of life that may occur late at night, and we clearly explain this to our learners as we talk about telling the time in the evening. Although most students can imagine and envision government workers and blue-collar employees starting their day at 5:00 AM, students may be unfamiliar with those homeless Parisians who wander "les plus belles rues de Paris" as the rapper croons (the most beautiful streets of Paris). There is a wealth of pedagogical material on this subject that is available to educators that would expose students to new vocabulary which would also stimulate discussion, even at the elementary level. For example, a review of previously studied vocabulary, adjectives, adverbs (especially concerning form and placement for the latter two), and other descriptors could be used for students to talk about the people mentioned in the various lyrical examples and representations throughout the track. The song further goes on to describe the frustration of waking up to the sounds of an alarm clock that is set at 5:00:

*Pas d'heure pour les réveils à coups d'batte
à 5h du mat.
J'ai trop souffert des réveils à 5h du mat.
Pour des raisons professionnelles, ou même
de fac.
Mauvais souvenirs, comas intensifs sur un
trajet bien précis.*

"No time for waking up at 5 AM. I suffered too much waking up at 5 AM. For professional reasons or even school. Bad memories, intensive comas (i.e., sleepless days) working on a specific plan."

In the above example, the rapper mentions his having suffered as he remembers and rehashes the various reasons he was previously forced to get up at this

early hour (for school, work, or other obligations). From a pedagogical perspective, this is a good moment to have students discuss orally in basic terms why they might also set an alarm for this early hour and for them to produce vocabulary that reflects their personal experience (which would also include the use of a variety of reflexive verbs in French). The song ends by reminding listeners that life must go on, early or not, and that we as humans may as well get on with it, as shown in this excerpt: “*Précisément, actuellement indécis, au cas où je me décide. Je quitte le soulier haut, j’ai fini l’morceau 5h du mat, top chrono* (Precisely, currently undecided, in case I decide. I’m out with my head up, I finished the task at 5 AM, top notch).” Spoken activities associated with this song can be set up for learners to construct their own “rap” and rhymes (which we assign as a written composition for students to work on from home as they build their own song lyrics based on their own life).

In addition to this, the video presentation of “*5 heures du mat*” is also a good way to add additional vocabulary, verbs, and other grammatical content as it all related a larger lesson about that hour of the day (or any hour). Aside from discussing the time (5:00 AM), the subject matter of the videoclip differs greatly from the song itself, which enables educators to use it in a multitude of other ways. The video starts by showing the rapper going to a nightclub after he checks his watch, which shows the time as 4:59 AM. As the rapper strolls into the establishment, he notices a variety of different scenarios (e.g., some men are in deep conversation, there is a couple speaking with one another, a glance at a bar, as well as other social situations that would take place within a nightclub). As the visual presentation continues, the rapper then takes

a sip of champagne and acknowledges a patron sitting at a bar as he further walks through the club. After an undetermined amount of time, our protagonist decides to leave. Once the rapper picks up his jacket at a “coat-check,” he then he goes outside as the repetitive refrain of the song is heard for the first time. When the track’s chorus ends, the rapper then checks his watch (which shows the time as 5:00 AM), after which he turns around and is suddenly blindsided by a speeding car that is driven by someone who looks exactly like him. At this moment, the next set of lyrics commence, and the song moves forward anew. The entire scene starts once again at 4:59 AM in the exact same way as before. Before proceeding forward, we often stop the videoclip here to bring in various basic verbs that describe the events (e.g., *être, avoir, aller*, and reflective verbs) as well as ask students to define some of the characteristics of what is shown (e.g., clothing, colours, descriptions of people, etc). Following this discussion, we restart the video and students can see that the story goes on to repeat itself a second time. However, although the same background scenes are shown in the exact order as before, there are interesting differences to denote as viewers see how the repetitive scenarios distinctly change and evolve. For example, the employee of the “coat-check” is now slightly older; the rapper now takes two sips of champagne; the discussions between the men within the club itself appears to be heating up; the couple who were previously chatting have now become much closer romantically (etc). Once the refrain of the song is sung for the second time when the rapper exits the bar, he checks his watch again (5:00) and he is struck by the same vehicle as before. Students will be able to identify, recognise, and discuss all of this, and they will also notice that the driver of the car at the end of the refrain is now

accompanied by a passenger, who looks exactly like the rapper who was struck by the speeding vehicle (now twice). This is a great opportunity to query learners about what has changed from the first presentation of these scenes. Following all of this, the entire story starts over once again a third time at 4:59 AM. This repetitive type of storytelling strongly resembles what one sees in the American film entitled *Groundhog Day*, which features a protagonist whose day keeps repeating itself at the sound of an alarm, albeit with a slightly different outcome during each presentation. In “*5 heures du mat*,” the third repeated story is distinct from the second and the first in that the employee of the coat check-in has now aged significantly (now shown as a senior citizen); the protagonist now takes three sips of champagne when he acknowledges the bar patron; the heated discussions between the previously shown men of the bar have turned into a fight; and the flirting couple is now engaging in some very public displays of affection. When the track’s chorus heard for the final time, the rapper exits the bar visibly frustrated. At this point, he then looks at his watch, which once again shows the time as 5:00 AM. As was the case with each of the previous two scenarios, students will see the oncoming car, which now features three clones of our protagonist, who by virtue of the video’s previous events is struck by the speedy vehicle. However, rather than starting over for a fourth time, the video’s story changes. Instead of the bar scenario being repeated, viewers now see a room that is full of people who look exactly like the song’s protagonist, although everyone is dressed in white (each of whom were previously struck by the speeding car in previous versions of the bar scene, three of which viewers see in the videoclip). Upon noticing the crowded space, the newly arrived rapper observes that he too is

wearing a white suit. As he looks at his clones, everyone is pointing at their wrists, as a way in which to signal him to check the time (which indicates the exact hour of 5:00 AM). There are many exceptional ways to incorporate descriptive vocabulary and basic verb conjugations when discussing how the videoclip ends, all of which can review past studied concepts in class (basic verbs, descriptive vocabulary, etc).

This is a cleverly produced videoclip, and we found that it is one that stimulates much discussion and elaboration in class. After we show the video in its entirety once without stopping, we then screen it a second time and pause at various spots to query students about some of the things that are present within it. To do this, we ask “*Qu’est-ce que nous voyons ici*” (what do we see here), “*qu’est-ce elles portent*” (what are they wearing), or “*quel âge a-t-il/elle*” (how old is s/he), and much more. In addition to this, we also want students to describe what is happening at certain points in the videoclip (by going to those examples and pausing the clip, etc). These visual descriptions include a variety of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and all can easily be done by students at this level of instruction and most will recognise the evolving storyline as the video progresses after seeing it a few times since the scenes follow the same thematic mode (though by adding subtle distinctions).

The use of rap music as heard and seen in the song “*5 heures du mat*” has been very effective as a pedagogical tool in which to explain time, after which it is not uncommon to hear our students “singing” answers as they learn how to tell time in French (in the same way the refrain about 5:00 AM is sung in the song). This track provides a way to connect basic FLE learners to grammar and vocabulary through

the use of authentic materials that are rich in vocabulary and content, none of which is too complex for this particular level. Educators could adjust their lesson plans in a variety of ways to work with this song in the ways best fit for their classroom, which could include using it in role-plays and parodies, or by asking students to create personalised lyrics that may apply to them, and so forth. We would like to denote that although this study focuses on how this track can be used by educators in beginning classes, it can also be employed as a pedagogical tool in advanced courses of French, albeit in more complex ways. For example, in a high-level FLE class, the videoclip could be grammatically, culturally, and thematically deconstructed by focusing on and deconstructing the song's many contrasting elements and scenes. In advanced-level literature classes where this subject matter might be quite applicable, this videoclip is a particularly a good lesson to employ. To this end, we have used this song and its videoclip when analysing some poems written by the French poet Charles Baudelaire, specifically "*Le crépuscule du matin*" (the dawn of the morning) and "*Le crépuscule du soir*" (the twilight of the evening) because these two works discuss the various dualities of life during the night in Paris (for which that poet is famous in examining).ⁱⁱⁱ

Another song and videoclip that can be used at the beginning levels of French is the track entitled "*Il fait chaud*" by the rapper Passi. The subject matter of this song deals with a hot summer day in Paris, as the rapper outlines many things that people are doing to overcome the heat. Fans familiar with "old school" American hip-hop will be quick to notice that the track's lyrical content highlights the many activities done to pass the time on a hot day, all of which strongly resembles the popular 1991

American hip-hop song "Summertime" by Will Smith (we often show that older song's video as a means in which to introduce "*il fait chaud*"). This means, the track by Passi is both rich in its teaching possibilities. The vocabulary of "*Il fait chaud*" can be incorporated into lesson plans that deal with how to discuss the verbs, weather, activities, adjectives, and adverbs in French, and students can further parody the song with self-designed role-plays, oral activities, and writing compositions assigned as homework assignments. The song's repetitive refrain is rapped as follows:

Il fait chaud, de Viliers-Garges-Sarceles. À Paris Porte de la Chapelle, Lyon, et Marseille, Il fait chaud, il fait de plus en plus chaud.

"It's hot, from Viliers-Garges-Sarceles. To Porte de la Chapelle in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille, it's hot, getting hotter and hotter."

What one hears in the above lyrics is a listing of several cities in France that span geographical and cultural lines. Within these general mentions are a variety of subjects and topics that educators can make use in lesson plans. For example, teachers could discuss weather phenomena that happen in various parts of France, as well as the numerous sociocultural issues that are also omnipresent in these areas. The suburban Paris communities of Viliers-Garges-Sarcelles are places where ethnocultural minorities represent the majority of the population. Thus, this can generate a good discussion of whether "*la canicule*" (the heatwave) as described by the rapper might be felt or experienced differently in a "*cité*" (housing estate) than it would be in a nicer section of Lyon or Paris (where air conditioning is the norm). Moreover, the song's videoclip also suggests this

differentiation between locations and people as its participants are almost all from communities of colour, all of whom are shown escaping the heat on a rooftop of a “*cité*” located in Sarcelles, one of the poorest and most socioeconomically marginalised suburbs of Paris.^{iv} Similar to the song “*5 heures du mat*,” this track can also be used in advanced FLE classes where there is a greater focus on culture instead of teaching grammar. In those courses, we engage students by putting together compare-contrast exercise activities where they juxtapose and analyse issues and experiences facing economically-disadvantaged areas within large cities. Even in a first-semester French classroom there is enough takeaway in the video to start a discussion where students can practice newly acquired adjectives and adverbs as well as general vocabulary as it relates to sentence structure. The lyrics of “*Il fait chaud*” are simplistic and easy to adapt, as shown in this excerpt:

*C'est l'été, et c'est bon la température va monter.
Voilà les beautés, les décolletés.
Les nouvelles modes sexy (hum!)-serrées.
Les faits-divers, les Boom-Boom de quartier
Zoom, gros plan de la tête aux pieds. Les petits,
les grands veulent peser
Les bruits de bécane se précèdent
Les marques, les sapes se succèdent.*

“It's summer, it's cool (*i.e. the sentiment*), the temperature is gonna rise. Here are the beauties, the undone collars/necklines. The new sexy looks (hum!) – tight. Random news, neighbourhood gossip. [Everyone] looking at each other close-up from head to toe. Little kids, old folks want to impress. Motorcycle rumble upon rumble. Brands and [those who wear] designer clothes show and follow.”

As one observes via this example, students can learn a variety of grammatical points. Beginning learners can see how the near-future (*la température va monter*) is put to use, and intermediate to advanced students can review idiomatic uses of certain verbs in the reflexive tense (*se précèdent, se succèdent*). Additionally, the various nouns and pronouns within these lyrics can also be explained as students acquire more vocabulary. Overall, the videoclip for “*Il fait chaud*” mirrors the song's actual lyrics (unlike what one sees and hears in “*5 heures de mat*” where the storyline differs slightly from the full storyline of the song's word) and it allows students to follow along visually because the pace of the track is quite slow. At the beginning level, we use “*Il faut chaud*” in lessons where weather is a central focus. Furthermore, we also discuss new vocabulary as it relates to hobbies and activities, all of which includes an introduction a wide variety of verbs (*faire, vouloir, pouvoir*), adjectives, and adverbs that apply to the topical matter described in the track and shown in the videoclip. In intermediate to advanced classes, the song can be used to review weather terms, but in these FLE courses we further deconstruct the lyrical and visual presentation from a cultural perspective. No matter the level where one chooses to use “*Il fait chaud*,” we noticed a substantial difference in quiz and exam grades in our beginning-level courses where this song was introduced as a supplement to our traditional pedagogical matter. Furthermore, our intermediate to advanced students wrote reflective essays concerning communities of colour in France as they pontificated on the video's deeper sociocultural presentations. For the latter students in advanced FLE courses, there are other hip-hop tracks that can be used to explain grammar in even more targeted ways (we can suggest “*Petit frère*” by IAM and

“*Laisse pas trainer ton fils*” by Suprême NTM; both of which are excellent songs to use for a discussion not only of grammar, but especially in relation to sociocultural topics that are continuously occurring in contemporary France (e.g. racism, immigration, integration).

One of the more challenging aspects for students in an introductory FLE course is the formation and placement of adjectives. All Latin-based Romance languages are similar in the sense that all used descriptors in a sentence must agree in number and gender with the noun that they are modifying, unlike in English where no alterations vis-à-vis the subject is necessary. This grammatical structural difference can be a headache for new learners. Although a wide variety of lessons and pedagogical tools are available to educators, we employ a HHBE and use songs as to emphasise grammar differences between French and English. Amongst them, a track by the female French rapper Diam’s entitled “*Jeune demoiselle recherche un mec mortel*” serves as a great model for this sort of very-targeted grammar lesson. The song and its videoclip are playful in content and rich in grammatical structures where students can hear how adjectives are used in a variety of ways. For example, the track’s refrain is “*Jeune demoiselle recherche un mec mortel, Un mec qui pourrait me donner des ailes, Un mec qui rêve de famille et de toucher le ciel*” (Young lady looking for a hot guy, A guy who could give me wings, A guy who dreams of family and touching the sky). The song provides an interesting narrative and cultural angle for FLE educators to share with their students due to its role reversal focus on gender and its emphasis on female empowerment. In other words, this track could be labelled as feminist in its lyrical content because its thematic matter centres

on a woman who is searching for her perfect partner, albeit with a caveat; that this man must meet her strictly stated and narrowly-defined set of qualifications. In beginning classes, this is a great moment where comparative adjectives and adverbs can be studied and emphasised. In intermediate courses, the use of the sometimes-complicated comparative and superlative of adverbs and adjectives can be studied here. The videoclip for “*Jeune demoiselle*” is equally empowering because it features the rapper along with a group of her friends “*shopping*” for a mate. The women in the video walk through a store as they are shown products sold by the establishment’s employees, which in this case means different types of men as potential life partners. The males that one sees are presented to the “customers” by the sales associates are standing on pedestals, and each differs according to what he has to offer in terms of his aesthetic and intellectual content (or lack thereof). In this sort of a gender role-reversal, it is men (and not women) who are seen as objects of a gaze, and they are each judged superficially, yet critically based on their looks and what they have to offer to the shopping females (much like one would shop for any product in a high-end store). This song can be deconstructed in FLE classes at all levels to teach students various grammar concepts according to the course level, as shown in these lyrics:

*Dans mes rêves mon mec me parle tout bas.
Quand il m'écrit des lettres il a la plume de
Booba. Mon mec a des valeurs et du respect
pour ses sœurs. Il a du coeur et quand il
danse mon mec c'est Usher.*

“In” my dreams my guy talks to me softly. When he writes letters, he has Booba's pen. My guy has values and respect for his sisters

(i.e., women). He has heart and when he dances my guy, it's like Usher does.”

For beginners, the track's lyrics can demonstrate how to use descriptive adjectives, adjective placement and agreement, adverbs, in addition to giving learners a diverse cultural perspective. In the intermediate to advanced classroom, further examination of the song can deconstruct the track's cultural content as it relates to gender issues in France and elsewhere in addition to examining more complex grammatical structures such as the comparative, superlative, and subjunctive, possessive pronouns, amongst other possibilities.

Using Rap to Explain Culture

Language and culture are intimately linked, and grammatical lessons can always lead to broader discussions that highlight similarities and differences between one's familiar surroundings and those being studied. Current events as they happen in places where the target language is spoken can be openly examined in the classroom, including at the introductory level. At times, social and political issues as they relate to the culture of the target language can mirror things discussed at a wider level that is familiar. For example, FLE students may be acutely aware of recent headlines emanating from France as they deal with sociocultural issues occurring in that country. Teachers of French can use these types of opportunities to discuss important social topics within oral activities that are level appropriate. As previously discussed, hip-hop music in French serves as a mouthpiece for youth cultures in France and many tracks examine issues and frustrations as experienced by this segment of the population. Therefore, a sort of HHBE pedagogical approach from a socio-cultural angle can be a part of all

levels of FLE teaching, especially in advanced courses where vocabulary abilities amongst students is greater.

One such song that can be used in intermediate to advanced classes to talk about contemporary youth culture in France is “*Ma France à moi*” (My France) by Diam's. The track's lyrics (and the videoclip) feature an in-depth description of various people, places, and things that exist in what the rapper labels as the “other France”; one that is far and away from the stereotypical imagery that is associated with French culture (i.e., the beauty of Paris). We suggest that FLE educators screen the track's accompanying videoclip in class, as it will absolutely provoke profound in-class discussion on the subject matter. The video features an angry man from the majority culture who is annoyed because he cannot stop hearing the song wherever he ventures (and as the story progresses, he is shown destroying things located in each place where he hears it being played). As the clip continues forward, the man becomes increasingly frustrated and incensed as he breaks the personal property of strangers that do not look like him. The clip prominently features a random, unnamed drab-looking suburb outside of Paris that is populated by people who do look like the protagonist or “his France.” In other words, viewers see a part of the country where few from the majority culture ever venture if they are not residents of those areas. In advanced courses, much discussion can be asked of FLE students about what they see, and how they might react to the various scenarios shown in the clip. This can be done as oral activities or assigned homework assignments that might focus on structural racism in Paris. Finally, students can juxtapose all of this with their own familiarity with similar events happening in the United States (past

or present, concerning topics surrounding race/culture/gender as they learn about the “other France” presented by the rapper Diam’s in this song).

Another excellent hip-hop song similar to “*Ma France à moi*” that is rich in vocabulary and cultural content is the previously mentioned track “*Petit frère*” by the Marseille-based group IAM. In this song, the storyline highlights an older brother who advises (i.e., raps to) his younger sibling about the ills and vices of crime and life on the streets. The lyrics are rich in content, but easy enough for students to follow along, especially at the intermediate to advanced level. We use this song in intermediate and advanced FLE when we introduce the imperative and/or the subjunctive moods (both of which are heavily used in the track), where advice, demands, or commands are given. These two grammatical concepts can be tricky for learners as they struggle to understand the nuances between French and English relating to the subjunctive mood; a verb tense that is all but non-existent in English. To address these difficulties and aid students in learning, the song’s lyrical content as well as the accompanying videoclip can be used as examples of how these two moods are used in everyday speech. In addition to deconstructing the scenes from the video in oral discussions, we also ask students to give their own suggestions via the imperative and subjunctive moods, both in oral activities and written compositions assigned as homework.

Conclusion

The incorporation of any sort of a HHBE brought into the foreign language classroom gives FLE educators additional tools to help them reach today’s students.

Past investigative work of a various uses of HHBE in the classroom validates how both teaching and learning are positively impacted by applying elements of this different approach to teaching. This means, even the smallest inclusion of an element of rap music into a day’s lesson plan can be incredibly beneficial to learners in terms of the retention of information and the overall environment within a classroom space. Simply put, the inclusion of HHBE into one’s pedagogy helps educators meet students where they already are.

Although our use of rap music focuses on FLE classrooms and French curricula, any sort of inclusion of a HHBE is available and accessible to all foreign languages due to its similarity to the American variant of rap music. This connection makes hip-hop music, even when rapped in a different language, something that sounds very familiar to students. A HHBE can not only assist FLE students as they learn complex grammatical nuances as they study, it can also give them a deeper comprehension of the diverse cultures who speak French. More comparative studies of HHBE are needed as to evaluate curricular effectiveness in the other major foreign languages taught in the United States and beyond. That said, because hip-hop culture is prominent amongst youths from many cultures located in countries across the Earth, we believe that the use of HHBE in lessons enriches any foreign language classroom. As denoted in this essay, past academic research delineates how this pedagogy could transform daily lessons and expand curricular opportunities. In FLE spaces, applying elements of a HHBE is a beneficial way to address potential pitfalls before they occur. Previously published studies have shown how effective that hip-hop is in terms of motivating students and

generating what Adjapong (2021) labels as a form of cultural capital for educators and their students. It should be restated that although the use of any music has been shown to be positive and beneficial to teachers and students, our investigation focuses on HHBE in FLE classrooms since that is by and large the most popular musical style as expressed by our learners of French. Thus, through any use of a HHBE, educators of nearly all second languages can employ elements of this pedagogy as an additional curricular tool in which to provide their students with new opportunities. These connections have the means in which to enable language learners to understand and culturally engage with their peers in faraway places though rapped rhymes and a bassline.

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Content Notes

ⁱ Whereas in the North American context “the suburbs” are often assumed to be areas outside cities with larger houses and better school districts, in France the opposite is true: The cities are elegant and the suburbs are often disenfranchised.

ⁱⁱ Perhaps the most famous of these is Grandmaster Flash's 1982 song entitled “*The Message*.” This track was one of the first ones to teach listeners about a myriad of negative social issues emanating from the ‘hood. Another rapper who juxtaposed hip-hop with pedagogy was KRS-One, from the Bronx-based group Boogie Down Productions (BDP). In fact, KRS-One labels himself as a teacher, and his very name is broken down as “*Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everything*.”

ⁱⁱⁱ On this note, Charles Baudelaire published a very famous book of poems entitled “*Les fleurs du mal*” (The Flowers of Evil) from which this song could also be deconstructed in lessons in advanced-level courses.

^{iv} The videoclip for the song “*Summertime*” by Will Smith is set in a primarily African American section of Philadelphia (West Philly) and it shows scenes of life as they might occur there on a hot summer day.
