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Whose French does the Machine Speak? Generative AI, Linguistic Norm, and Francophone Plurality in the Beginning Language Classroom

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence is increasingly reshaping beginning French instruction by expanding access to conversational practice, corrective feedback, vocabulary development, translation, and individualized support. Yet the linguistic forms produced by large language models also raise a fundamental sociolinguistic question: which varieties of French are rendered visible, legitimate, and teachable through machine-generated language? This review examines the relationship between generative AI, standard-language ideology, and Francophone plurality in introductory French education. Drawing on scholarship from applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, artificial intelligence in education, critical digital literacy, and Francophone studies, it analyzes training-data representation, algorithmic preferences for standardized forms, regional and African varieties, diasporic French, learner exposure, corrective feedback, representational bias, and emerging approaches to pluralistic AI literacy. The review finds that generative systems frequently operate within data, benchmarking, and alignment environments that privilege standardized, high-resource and often metropolitan forms of French. Consequently, African, Canadian, Caribbean, diasporic, colloquial, and contact-influenced varieties may receive less consistent representation, while novice learners may interpret fluent machine output as neutral linguistic authority. At the same time, generative AI offers important pedagogical benefits through repeated practice, rapid feedback, accessible interaction, and personalized language support. The review concludes that AI should function as a critically mediated pedagogical resource rather than an autonomous arbiter of correctness. It recommends deliberate exposure to diverse Francophone voices, explicit distinction between grammatical error and legitimate variation, systematic verification of AI outputs, teacher professional development, and the integration of critical AI literacy from the earliest stages of instruction. Future research should prioritize longitudinal, comparative, corpus-based, and geographically diverse studies that evaluate both learning effectiveness and representational equity.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence, Francophone Plurality, Linguistic Norms, Beginning French Instruction, Sociolinguistic Variation, Critical AI Literacy

1. Introduction

1.1 Generative AI in Beginning French Instruction

Generative artificial intelligence has rapidly altered the technological ecology of language education, creating new possibilities for beginning French instruction while simultaneously unsettling established assumptions about linguistic authority. Large language models can generate explanations, dialogues, vocabulary exercises, corrective feedback, translations and culturally framed examples in response to ordinary prompts, allowing novice learners to interact with French beyond the temporal boundaries of the classroom. For introductory instruction, this immediacy is especially significant because beginners often require repeated exposure, low-stakes practice and accessible explanations before they can participate confidently in spontaneous communication. Research on language teaching therefore increasingly positions generative AI not simply as an information-retrieval mechanism, but as an interactive pedagogical resource whose usefulness depends on how carefully teachers structure tasks, prompts and verification practices (Kohnke, Moorhouse & Zou, 2023).

The emerging evidence suggests particular value for foundational language skills. A scoping review of generative AI in language education identifies applications in content generation, feedback, learner support and individualized practice, while also emphasizing the need for further empirical validation and responsible implementation (Law, 2024). In foreign-language

settings, classroom-based evidence indicates that ChatGPT can support writing, grammar and vocabulary development and can increase learner engagement through accessible, responsive interaction (Karataş *et al*., 2024). These affordances are pedagogically relevant to beginning French, where learners must consolidate high-frequency vocabulary, elementary morphosyntax and formulaic interaction before progressing toward more complex communicative competence.

French-specific scholarship further demonstrates that generative AI is beginning to enter the conceptual and practical architecture of French-as-a-foreign-language instruction. Analysis of ChatGPT within university French teaching highlights its potential for extending learning activities, generating examples and supporting autonomous practice, while maintaining the necessity of critical pedagogical mediation (Choi, 2024). More directly, investigation of ChatGPT within an A2 French conversation course considers whether the system can function as an additional interlocutor through which learners rehearse language encountered during classroom instruction, a particularly consequential possibility where opportunities for sustained French interaction are limited (Tuboeuf, 2024). In written production, exploratory work with French second-language learners similarly indicates that ChatGPT can facilitate interactive corrective feedback, although the quality of responses remains strongly influenced by learners' prompting practices and degree of engagement (Holmes, 2024).

Teacher mediation remains indispensable because pedagogical value depends on sequencing AI interaction around attainable communicative objectives rather than allowing unrestricted chatbot use to define the curriculum. Carefully designed prompts can invite learners to notice gender agreement, article use, verb forms, pronunciation distinctions and everyday conversational routines, while teachers can compare machine output with classroom norms and Francophone usage. Such practices reposition AI as an object of guided inquiry as well as a source of practice.

The pedagogical promise of these systems, however, should not obscure the distinctive vulnerability of beginners. Novice learners possess limited linguistic resources for detecting inaccurate explanations, pragmatically inappropriate formulations or subtle sociolinguistic distortions. Consequently, fluency and grammatical plausibility may be mistaken for unquestionable linguistic authority. This concern becomes central to a study asking whose French the machine effectively privileges: a tool capable of producing polished French may inadvertently present one codified variety as neutral while rendering regional, African, diasporic or socially differentiated usages peripheral. Broader educational research from Nigeria shows that GenAI scholarship increasingly foregrounds pedagogical enhancement alongside ethical risks, adoption conditions and cultural dimensions, reinforcing the need for contextualized rather than technologically deterministic implementation (Yusuf *et al*., 2024).

African evidence also underscores questions of access, training and learner preparedness. Ghanaian students have reported both perceived academic benefits and concerns regarding overreliance, originality, security and insufficient guidance in using generative AI effectively, illustrating why classroom integration requires explicit literacy rather than mere availability (Baidoo-Anu *et al*., 2024). Institutional preparedness likewise shapes whether generative AI becomes a meaningful educational resource or an unevenly implemented technology, particularly across resource-diverse settings (Ayinde, Ojukwu & Ohunyon, 2025). For beginning French instruction, therefore, generative AI is most productively understood as a mediated linguistic environment: it can multiply opportunities for practice, feedback and interaction, but it also introduces algorithmically produced language into the earliest stages of learners' understanding of what counts as legitimate French.

1.2 Linguistic Norms and Standard French Ideologies

Linguistic norms in French are not merely technical conventions governing grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary; they are historically produced judgments about which forms of language are legitimate, prestigious and teachable. Standard French emerged through processes of codification that privileged particular metropolitan usages and gradually converted them into institutional benchmarks for correctness. This history matters in beginning-language instruction because novices commonly encounter "French" as though it were a stable, homogeneous system rather than a pluricentric language shaped by geographical, social and cultural variation. The ideological power of the standard consequently operates through textbooks, assessment practices, teacher expectations and, increasingly, machine-generated language.

The persistence of prescriptive authority is especially visible in spoken French, where variable practices can remain socially stratified even when everyday usage diverges from formal prescriptions. The history of liaison demonstrates how elite norms may be maintained despite changing speech patterns, revealing that judgments of correctness are inseparable from social evaluation and linguistic ideology (Hornsby, 2020). In digital environments, such inherited distinctions become consequential because generative systems may reproduce highly codified forms as unmarked defaults, encouraging beginners to interpret algorithmic regularity as linguistic neutrality.

Francophone contexts beyond metropolitan France further expose the limitations of a singular norm. In Quebec, debates over whether French should be understood monocentrically or pluricentrically reveal a gradual movement toward recognizing legitimate local standards rather than measuring all usage against an external metropolitan centre (Walsh, 2021). Louisiana presents a comparable tension: efforts to revitalize French have generated disputes over which variety should constitute the pedagogical norm, demonstrating that standardization can support institutional coherence while simultaneously marginalizing locally embedded linguistic practices (Rioult, 2021).

African contexts make these ideological questions even more pronounced. In Senegal, French possesses institutional legitimacy, yet urban linguistic practices demonstrate that socially meaningful authority also resides in mixed Wolof-French repertoires that fall outside official recognition (Swigart, 2000). Such evidence challenges classroom models that equate legitimate French solely with standardized metropolitan usage and underscores the communicative value of hybrid, localized repertoires.

Nigeria offers another instructive case because French has been promoted through state language policy despite the country's overwhelmingly Anglophone institutional history

and extensive indigenous multilingualism. The politics surrounding French as a proposed second official language illustrate how language planning is inseparable from ideology, regional positioning and competing conceptions of national linguistic interest (Omoniyi, 2003). For a beginning French classroom increasingly mediated by generative AI, these histories are crucial: when a machine repeatedly presents one vocabulary, accent model or grammatical register as simply "correct," it can obscure the contested processes through which standards acquire authority. Pedagogy must therefore distinguish functional norms from ideological absolutism, enabling beginners to learn widely intelligible forms while recognizing that Francophone legitimacy is inherently plural across classrooms and diverse wider Francophone communities.

1.3 Francophone Plurality in Language Education

Francophone plurality should be treated as a foundational principle of language education rather than as an optional cultural supplement. French is learned, taught and used across societies whose histories, multilingual repertoires and communicative norms differ substantially, yet instructional materials have often privileged a narrow representation of legitimate usage. For beginning learners, this matters because first encounters with the language establish durable assumptions about pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and speaker legitimacy. A plural orientation therefore requires curricula to present French as socially and geographically differentiated while still providing learners with stable forms for initial communication.

Evidence from beginner instruction demonstrates that sociolinguistic variation need not be postponed until advanced proficiency. Explicit attention to variable French negation enabled novice learners to develop greater awareness of relationships among linguistic form, meaning and context without overwhelming foundational learning, indicating that variation can be introduced systematically from early stages (French & Beaulieu, 2020). Such pedagogy reframes competence as the ability to interpret socially situated choices rather than merely reproduce a single decontextualized norm.

This principle becomes especially important when spoken French is considered. Distinctions between prescribed oral forms and naturally occurring speech reveal stylistic and situational variation that learners must negotiate in authentic interaction. A didactics of spoken French therefore benefits from exposing learners to differentiated usage and developing receptive sociolinguistic competence alongside grammatical knowledge (Paternostro, 2023). Corpus-informed work similarly shows that phonetic reduction and alternative realizations common in ordinary speech can create perceptual difficulties when teaching presents only idealized forms; authentic variation should consequently become visible within learning materials (Racine, 2024).

Francophone plurality also has a pronounced African dimension. In Cameroon, attempts to teach phonetic variation demonstrate both the necessity and the risk of addressing accent diversity: instruction that merely labels or hierarchizes accents can reproduce stereotypes and intensify linguistic insecurity rather than strengthen communicative understanding (Daouaga Samari, 2023). This finding is particularly significant for a review concerned with machine-generated French, because algorithmic outputs may similarly classify one variety implicitly as neutral while marking others as departures from it.

In Nigeria, where French is taught within an overwhelmingly multilingual and Anglophone national environment, persistent challenges involving teacher preparation, resources and institutional support influence how learners encounter the language (Lawal, 2020). A plural Francophone pedagogy in such settings should connect French not only to metropolitan France but also to neighbouring African Francophone societies, regional mobility and multilingual communication.

More broadly, Francophone schooling itself continues to struggle with translating recognition of linguistic diversity into classroom practice. Teacher perspectives from minority Francophone education reveal structural and pedagogical obstacles to mobilizing learners' plurilingual repertoires despite longstanding calls for greater inclusion (Levasseur & Allen, 2025). Beginning French education should therefore cultivate an understanding of plurality from the outset, preparing learners to interpret variation as a normal feature of Francophone communication and to question technologies that present linguistic uniformity as authoritative.

1.4 Review Scope, Questions, and Analytical Approach

This review examines how generative artificial intelligence is reshaping the linguistic environment of beginning French instruction, with particular attention to the varieties of French that AI systems privilege, normalize, marginalize, or omit. Its scope extends beyond questions of technological efficiency to consider the sociolinguistic consequences of introducing machine-generated language into classrooms where learners are still forming foundational assumptions about correctness, legitimacy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative appropriateness. The review therefore situates generative AI within broader debates concerning standard-language ideology, Francophone diversity, pedagogical authority, and inclusive language education.

Three principal questions guide the analysis. First, what forms of French are most likely to be presented as normative through generative AI outputs used in introductory language learning? Second, how might such outputs influence beginning learners' perceptions of standard French, regional variation, African and diasporic varieties, and socially differentiated usage? Third, what pedagogical strategies can enable instructors to employ generative AI while preserving linguistic plurality and developing learners' critical awareness of machine-generated language?

The analytical approach is interdisciplinary, drawing conceptually from applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, language pedagogy, artificial intelligence in education, critical digital literacy, and Francophone studies. Particular attention is given to relationships among linguistic representation, algorithmic authority, learner exposure, corrective feedback, and curricular design. Rather than treating machine output as linguistically neutral, the review considers how training data, model architecture, prompting practices, and dominant language conventions may shape the French presented to learners.

The analysis also adopts a comparative Francophone perspective, recognizing that legitimate French usage emerges across multiple geographical, cultural, and multilingual settings. This orientation provides the basis for evaluating pedagogical risks, identifying opportunities for inclusive AI-mediated instruction, and establishing priorities

for curriculum development and future research in beginning French education.

2. Generative AI and Linguistic Norm Production

2.1 Training Data and Francophone Representation

Training data are not a neutral technical substrate for generative artificial intelligence; they constitute the linguistic environment from which models learn probabilities about vocabulary, syntax, register, discourse and cultural association. In the case of French, this distinction is critical because a corpus labelled simply "French" may contain large quantities of metropolitan, institutional and highly digitised usage while offering much thinner coverage of varieties associated with West and Central Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean or other Francophone communities. Consequently, the question of whose French a model reproduces begins before generation, at the stages of corpus discovery, language identification, filtering, deduplication and weighting. Large-scale NLP research has already demonstrated that resource abundance is distributed very unevenly across the world's languages, challenging assumptions that multilingual systems are intrinsically inclusive (Joshi *et al*., 2020).

French appears comparatively well resourced in NLP, yet aggregate language coverage does not guarantee intralinguistic plurality. CamemBERT, for example, demonstrated the effectiveness of training a French language model on web-crawled OSCAR data and showed that relatively modest web corpora could support strong downstream performance (Martin *et al*., 2020). For Francophone representation, however, the relevant pedagogical question is not only whether sufficient French text exists, but which speakers, regions, genres and communicative settings become statistically prominent within that text. A model may therefore possess extensive French competence while remaining unevenly exposed to lexical, pragmatic and culturally situated forms familiar across diverse Francophone societies.

Web-scale collection magnifies this problem because online visibility is itself socially structured. Analysis of the Colossal Clean Crawled Corpus shows that large scraped datasets can contain unexpected source concentrations and that filtering decisions may disproportionately remove material associated with minority populations (Dodge *et al*., 2021). Multilingual corpus audits further reveal substantial problems of mislabelling, low-quality text and unreliable language identification in major web-derived datasets, with lower-resource languages particularly vulnerable to contamination and poor representation (Kreutzer *et al*., 2022). These findings are relevant to Francophone plurality because African French frequently coexists with indigenous languages, code-switching, local named entities and regionally specific lexical practices that automated filters may misclassify, normalize or discard.

The wider governance of large training corpora also raises questions of representational authority. Critiques of large language-model development have emphasized that indiscriminate scale can reproduce dominant social patterns while making the composition and consequences of training data difficult to inspect (Bender *et al*., 2021). In a beginning French classroom, such opacity matters because learners may receive fluent outputs without knowing whether the underlying data adequately represent the sociolinguistic breadth of the Francophone world.

African NLP provides concrete evidence of why data availability cannot be separated from linguistic inclusion. Nigerian-language research has documented persistent scarcity of computational resources and uneven development across major languages, illustrating how limited digital infrastructure constrains which linguistic communities become technologically visible (Asubiaro & Igwe, 2020). Africa-centred dataset construction similarly shows that locally curated resources and contextually appropriate transfer languages can materially improve model performance rather than treating English or other dominant languages as universal computational defaults (Adelani *et al*., 2022). Recent South African work on low-resource translation likewise demonstrates that high-quality bilingual data and targeted adaptation can improve large-model performance for isiZulu and isiXhosa, underscoring the importance of deliberate corpus design where general-purpose models remain weak (Khoboko, Marivate & Sefara, 2025).

This distinction is especially important because benchmark success can conceal representational thinness: a system may perform well on standardized French evaluation sets while having little evidence of competence with geographically marked vocabulary, mixed-language discourse, or culturally embedded formulations. For educators, dataset documentation should therefore become part of AI evaluation, allowing pedagogical decisions to distinguish broad computational proficiency from plural Francophone coverage in use.

For beginning French education, Francophone representation should therefore be assessed at the level of corpus provenance, not merely language labels. Training datasets should be interrogated for geographic distribution, genre diversity, multilingual contact, African and diasporic content, conversational registers and locally meaningful cultural references. Otherwise, generative AI may silently convert unequal digital visibility into an appearance of linguistic normality, giving learners a technically fluent but sociolinguistically narrowed image of French.

2.2 Algorithmic Preferences for Standardized French

Algorithmic preferences for standardized French should be understood as an emergent property of data concentration, model optimization, post-training alignment and evaluation practices rather than as an explicitly programmed rejection of Francophone diversity. Contemporary language technologies are commonly trained and tested on codified, high-resource forms because these varieties possess larger corpora, cleaner annotation and established benchmarks. Machine-translation research has shown directly that systems are typically optimized to generate a "standard" target language, leaving regional varieties, sociolects and non-native forms comparatively underserved (Kumar *et al*., 2021).

This structural preference is reinforced by evaluation regimes. Large-scale benchmarking across hundreds of dialects and closely related varieties demonstrates substantial performance disparities between standard and non-standard forms, while mainstream NLP benchmarks remain disproportionately oriented towards standardized varieties (Faisal *et al*., 2024). Applied to French, this suggests that apparent model competence may principally reflect proficiency in the forms that are most extensively represented and benchmarked, rather than equivalent

command of Quebec, West African, Caribbean or other Francophone usages.

Generative systems also reveal normative tendencies in output selection. Experiments with ChatGPT across multiple English varieties found that models repeatedly defaulted to standard forms and responded less effectively to non-standard dialects, demonstrating that fluent generation can coexist with linguistic hierarchy (Fleisig *et al*., 2024). Related work on African American Language likewise identified performance gaps between marginalized varieties and White Mainstream English, indicating that generative competence is not sociolinguistically uniform (Deas *et al*., 2023).

For French instruction, this evidence is especially important because standardization may appear pedagogically desirable at beginner level. A model that consistently supplies conventional metropolitan vocabulary, orthography and syntax can provide stability, yet repeated exposure risks teaching learners that statistical regularity constitutes linguistic legitimacy. French-specific multilingual-model research further shows that training configuration can alter measured bias, with multilingual training producing different outcomes from otherwise comparable monolingual systems (Nie *et al*., 2024).

African evidence illustrates how easily models can collapse related varieties into a better represented form. Research on Nigerian Pidgin found that generative AI largely operated through West African Pidgin English rather than accurately representing Naija, despite meaningful lexical and structural differences between them (Adelani *et al*., 2025). Such findings are pertinent to African French, where localized lexical choices, code-switching and contact-induced features may similarly be flattened when models privilege broadly recognizable standardized patterns.

Evidence from dialectal Arabic strengthens this interpretation: LLMs have been found more reluctant to generate dialectal varieties than to understand them, with post-training itself potentially contributing to dialect bias (Robinson *et al*., 2025). Conversely, community-oriented adaptation for Egyptian and Moroccan Arabic demonstrates that targeted data can improve linguistic and cultural alignment beyond generic high-resource defaults (El Mekki *et al*., 2025). In the beginning French classroom, algorithmic standardization should therefore be made visible as a computational tendency rather than accepted as a neutral definition of authentic French. This distinction is pedagogically consequential for novices.

3. Francophone Variation and Classroom Legitimacy

3.1 Regional Varieties, Accents, and Lexical Diversity

Regional variation is constitutive of French rather than peripheral to it. Across the Francophone world, differences in phonology, prosody, vocabulary, grammar and pragmatic convention reflect histories of settlement, language contact, mobility and local identity. For beginning learners, however, these differences are often filtered through pedagogical materials that foreground a relatively narrow reference variety. This can create the impression that variation represents deviation from authentic French rather than an ordinary property of a pluricentric language. A sociolinguistically informed classroom should therefore distinguish intelligibility from conformity and introduce learners to regional features without reducing speakers to fixed accent categories.

Within metropolitan France itself, regional phonological differentiation remains observable despite long-standing pressures toward supralocal norms. Research on Alsatian French shows that features such as initial /h/ realization and the devoicing of /ʒ/ vary according to age, social class and urban–rural location, while some traditional forms are undergoing levelling (Boughton & Pipe, 2020). Such evidence demonstrates that "French from France" is internally heterogeneous and cannot legitimately function as a single, accentless baseline against which other Francophone speech is measured.

Canadian varieties further illustrate the interaction between region and lexical choice. Franco-Ontarian speakers display patterned variation in expressions associated with everyday concepts, showing that lexical alternatives are embedded in community histories and contact conditions rather than being random departures from dictionary norms (Bigot, 2016). Second-language learners are also sensitive to the input they receive: research on lexical alternatives such as *automobile, auto, voiture, char* and *machine* found that learners favored prestige and neutral forms while underusing vernacular variants, indicating how classroom exposure can shape an artificially restricted lexical repertoire (Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2008).

The African Francophone space makes the inadequacy of a singular model still clearer. In Senegal, French vocabulary has developed through borrowing from local languages, neologism, compounding and semantic change, producing forms that index local social realities and communicative needs (Holeš, 2011). In Cameroon, phonetic and prosodic variability likewise cautions against treating "African French" or even "Cameroonian French" as a homogeneous accent; stylistic choices shift according to interactional setting and speaker positioning (Telep, 2019). Contact ecologies produce additional differentiation in creolophone settings: comparative evidence from Guadeloupe and Seychelles shows that French develops differently according to the historical and contemporary relations among French, Creole and English (Kriegel & Ludwig, 2018).

These differences have direct consequences for learner attitudes. French learners exposed to voices from Paris, Montreal, Moncton, Vancouver and Abidjan have demonstrated unequal evaluations of accents, including preferences for European and Quebec varieties and comparatively less favorable responses to some other Francophone voices, showing how linguistic hierarchies can be reproduced through limited exposure (Bouchard, 2025). In West Africa, the teaching of French in multilingual Nigeria and Ghana also occurs amid English and numerous local languages, making contextualized resources particularly important for connecting classroom French to regional communicative realities (Akinpelu & Yegblemenawo, 2025).

Generative AI enters this already stratified landscape as a potentially powerful distributor of linguistic examples. If systems repeatedly supply only metropolitan pronunciation models or standardized vocabulary, beginning learners may internalize computational frequency as cultural legitimacy. Pedagogical use should instead expose students to multiple accents, regionally situated lexical items and context-sensitive explanations, while teaching them to recognize variation as structured, meaningful and compatible with communicative competence. Such exposure is particularly important before novice learners develop durable

assumptions about legitimate Francophone speech communities.

3.2 African and Diasporic French Visibility

African and diasporic French visibility is central to any account of Francophone plurality because the demographic expansion of French increasingly intersects with mobility, racialization and multilingualism beyond metropolitan Europe. Yet visibility is not equivalent to legitimacy. In beginning-language education, African and diasporic speakers may appear through cultural topics while their linguistic practices remain absent from models of pronunciation, vocabulary and authoritative usage. This asymmetry becomes especially consequential when generative AI is introduced, since machine outputs can amplify whatever forms of French are already most visible in educational and digital resources.

Nigeria illustrates why African visibility must be conceived regionally rather than through a simple Francophone–Anglophone binary. French is taught in a multilingual Anglophone state surrounded by Francophone neighbours, yet classroom provision continues to face material, technological and pedagogical constraints that limit sustained exposure to the language and its African communicative contexts (Olaseinde & Olaseinde, 2024). In South Africa, recent work similarly argues for repositioning French within a decolonial and multilingual educational ecology rather than treating it principally as a European foreign language, thereby connecting its study to African mobility, continental exchange and plural identities (de Oliveira, 2025).

Migration further unsettles institutional definitions of Francophonie. Ethnographic research among Francophone African migrants in Cape Town shows that locally rooted Francophone identities emerge outside officially Francophone states and do not necessarily correspond to institutional narratives of a unified transnational French-speaking community (Vigouroux, 2008). West African migration to France likewise produces "other francophonies" in which French coexists with migrant languages and acquires new intercultural meanings through mobility and everyday urban interaction (Accoroni, 2018). Such evidence demonstrates that diasporic French is not a residual extension of metropolitan norms but a site where linguistic identities are continually reconstructed.

Visibility is also shaped by race and institutional power. Among Black African Francophones in Canada, experiences of linguicism and anti-Black racism complicate assumptions that French-language competence automatically produces belonging within Francophone minority communities (Madibbo, 2020). Schooling research with French-speaking African-Canadian students with refugee backgrounds similarly shows how racialization, educational placement and assumptions about linguistic competence can structure learners' experiences even when French is already part of their repertoire (Schroeter & James, 2015). These dynamics are particularly relevant to beginner classrooms because curricular representations can either reproduce or destabilize associations between legitimate French and particular racialized speaker identities.

A more inclusive pedagogical orientation therefore requires African and diasporic speakers to be visible not merely as cultural representatives but as legitimate producers of French. Scholarship centering race and multilingualism in French linguistics demonstrates how the experiences of the Francophone African diaspora can challenge colonial linguistic hierarchies and broaden understandings of language ownership (Smith, 2024). For generative-AI-supported instruction, this requires deliberate scrutiny of whose voices, lexical choices, multilingual practices and cultural references appear in machine-generated examples. Beginning learners should encounter African and diasporic French as constitutive of contemporary Francophonie, enabling them to recognize that linguistic authority is distributed across mobile, multilingual and culturally diverse comunities rather than concentrated in a single metropolitan centre.

4. Beginning Learners and Normative AI Outputs

4.1 Learner Exposure to Machine-Generated French

Learner exposure to machine-generated French is becoming a consequential dimension of beginning language education because generative systems increasingly mediate vocabulary practice, writing, explanation, translation, correction and simulated interaction. Unlike conventional textbooks, AI-generated language is produced responsively and at scale, meaning that learners may encounter substantial quantities of French whose linguistic form, cultural framing and pedagogical appropriateness have not been pre-screened by teachers. Reviews of ChatGPT in language education indicate that learners increasingly use generative systems for self-directed practice, content generation and feedback, while empirical research remains concentrated in higher education and leaves important questions about long-term learning effects unresolved (Li *et al*., 2024).

French-specific evidence demonstrates why exposure cannot be treated as inherently beneficial. In classroom activities involving French writing and cultural content, learners reported gains in vocabulary, comprehension, writing and creative engagement, but also raised concerns about the reliability of AI-generated information and the need for verification (Zenginaloğlu & Özçelik, 2025). For beginners, this tension is particularly significant: limited proficiency reduces their ability to distinguish a fluent but questionable formulation from an appropriately situated expression, potentially allowing machine output to acquire disproportionate authority.

Generative AI can nevertheless widen access to linguistic practice when carefully integrated into instruction. Applications developed for French courses have shown that ChatGPT can assist with specialized vocabulary, explanations and task preparation while reducing constraints on individualized support (Velescu, 2024). Such affordances may be especially valuable in introductory classrooms where students need repeated rehearsal and immediate linguistic input, although teacher selection of prompts and follow-up comparison with authentic Francophone materials remains essential.

Exposure also involves cognitive demands that are often obscured by the apparent simplicity of conversational interfaces. Research with secondary-school language learners found that ChatGPT-supported writing generated high satisfaction but could impose substantial cognitive load, particularly when learners had to formulate and refine effective prompts (Woo *et al*., 2024). This observation aligns with human–machine interaction research emphasizing the importance of monitoring cognitive workload as users coordinate attention across dynamic

technological environments (Adamolekun *et al*., 2025).

African evidence further demonstrates that exposure is shaped by access, familiarity and educational context. Among University of Ibadan learners, knowledge and attitudes toward ChatGPT varied alongside patterns of use, underscoring that integration depends on learners' practical understanding of the technology rather than simple availability (Shittu, Busari & Olonade, 2025). In Ghana, experimental evidence similarly found that interaction with ChatGPT influenced critical, creative and reflective thinking, indicating that AI exposure can alter cognitive dimensions of learning beyond the immediate completion of tasks (Essel *et al*., 2024).

In beginning French instruction, therefore, machine-generated exposure should be deliberately curated rather than treated as equivalent to neutral linguistic input. Teachers need to regulate task difficulty, model effective prompting, require verification, and juxtapose generated French with authentic voices from diverse Francophone communities. Such mediation allows learners to benefit from responsiveness and repetition while developing the critical capacity to recognize that algorithmic fluency does not automatically guarantee linguistic accuracy, cultural representativeness or sociolinguistic legitimacy.

4.2 Error Correction, Authority, and Language Ideologies

Error correction in AI-mediated French instruction is not a purely technical process of locating grammatical deviations; it is an evaluative act that determines which forms are recognized as legitimate, intelligible, and worthy of preservation. For beginning learners, this distinction is consequential because limited proficiency makes corrective feedback a source of linguistic authority. When a generative system labels an expression as erroneous, replaces it with a standardized alternative, or reformulates a learner's sentence without explaining sociolinguistic variation, it can convert model preferences into apparently objective judgments about "good French."

Evidence from French-language writing makes this risk concrete. Analysis of ChatGPT feedback on A2+ French texts found inaccuracies in error detection, error analysis, and correction suggestions, with overcorrection constituting a portion of problematic responses. Such findings indicate that machine correction can erase acceptable learner choices or impose unnecessary revisions, when contextual intention and language norm are insufficiently specified (Do Thi Bich Thuy, 2025). More broadly, L2 writers engaging with ChatGPT-generated corrective feedback require considerable metacognitive regulation and technological competence; positive engagement does not automatically mean that learners critically evaluate the feedback they receive (Yan & Zhang, 2024).

The authority problem is intensified by the persuasive fluency of generative systems. Research found that human feedback outperformed ChatGPT on several dimensions of formative quality, including accuracy, prioritization, and actionable guidance, despite the efficiency advantages of automated provision (Steiss *et al*., 2024). Learners are therefore placed in an asymmetrical relationship with a system that communicates confidently even when its evaluative judgment is incomplete. Yet learner uptake is not passive: students have rejected or contested portions of AI-generated feedback, especially at the content level, demonstrating that feedback literacy can preserve agency against uncritical acceptance (Chen *et al*., 2024).

These concerns intersect directly with language ideology. Educational notions of "appropriateness" often present standardized forms as neutral while concealing the social and racialized processes through which particular linguistic practices acquire prestige. Corrective systems trained on standardized language can reproduce this logic by interpreting variation as deficiency rather than as meaningful difference (Flores & Rosa, 2015). In beginning French, this may affect African, diasporic, regional, colloquial, or contact-influenced forms whose legitimacy depends on speaker community and communicative setting rather than metropolitan prescription alone.

African evidence reinforces the need to treat AI authority cautiously. Nigerian university students report movement from exploratory AI use toward dependency, highlighting how convenience and perceived competence may weaken independent judgment when AI writing tools become habitual (Nwagbara, 2025). In South Africa, AI-generated feedback has shown pedagogical promise but also variability across feedback dimensions, leading researchers to emphasize human oversight rather than autonomous deployment (Venter, Coetzee & Schmulian, 2025).

5. Pedagogical Risks and Inclusive AI Practices

5.1 Bias, Erasure, and Sociolinguistic Misrepresentation

Bias, erasure, and sociolinguistic misrepresentation are particularly consequential in beginning French instruction because generative AI does more than produce grammatical sentences: it implicitly models which speakers, varieties, cultural references, and communicative practices appear normal. Bias therefore extends beyond overtly prejudicial output to patterns of omission, stereotyping, flattening, and unequal linguistic recognition. Critical NLP scholarship has long emphasized that technological bias cannot be separated from social hierarchies and language ideologies, because systems are built from data and evaluative assumptions that reflect unequal relations among linguistic communities (Blodgett *et al*., 2020).

Within French itself, sociolinguistic misrepresentation can arise when language models recognize variation conceptually but generate a narrower repertoire in practice. Experimental work on age-sensitive French found that ChatGPT predominantly favored formal variants across speakers of different ages and did not systematically reproduce expected age-related patterns, revealing a gap between explicit sociolinguistic knowledge and actual generation (Hekkel *et al*., 2024). For beginners, repeated exposure to such outputs can make formal, standardized forms appear socially unmarked while colloquial, regional, generational, African, or diasporic alternatives become less visible.

Erasure is especially important because absence can be as pedagogically influential as inaccurate representation. Recent work defines representational harms to include stereotyping, demeaning portrayals, and erasure, thereby directing attention to what generative systems fail to acknowledge as well as what they explicitly state (Corvi *et al*., 2025). In a Francophone classroom, erasure may occur when prompts about everyday life, identity, food, schooling, work, or cultural practices consistently return metropolitan French examples while African, Caribbean, Canadian, and diasporic realities remain peripheral.

Cultural dominance compounds this problem. Multilingual large language models have been shown to produce responses disproportionately aligned with English-associated cultural objects even when users interact in other languages, demonstrating how training-data concentration can transform one cultural frame into an algorithmic default (Wang *et al*., 2024). Related evidence from Arabic shows that multilingual and monolingual models can privilege Western-associated entities and produce culturally inappropriate or stereotypical outputs, illustrating that linguistic availability does not guarantee cultural alignment (Naous *et al*., 2024). Applied to French, this distinction is critical: generating grammatically correct French does not ensure faithful representation of the heterogeneous societies in which French is spoken.

African evidence demonstrates that representational inequality also appears as substantial differences in technical performance. Evaluation of multimodal models on Nigerian WAEC and NECO questions found performance above 90% for English but below 40% for Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa, indicating severe disparities in linguistic coverage within educationally relevant tasks (Olufemi *et al*., 2025). Although these are not French varieties, the disparity is instructive for Francophone Africa, where multilingual speakers routinely move between French and indigenous languages and where inadequate modeling of local repertoires can distort the ecology surrounding French.

Bias is also culturally encoded within African languages themselves. Research examining Twi and Amharic across translation, sentence completion, and image generation demonstrates that LLMs can reproduce gendered stereotypes in ways shaped by distinct linguistic and cultural systems (Oppong, Nigatu & Okolo, 2025). Beginning French pedagogy should therefore evaluate AI outputs not only for grammatical correctness but also for who is represented, whose practices are normalized, and which varieties disappear. Classroom comparison of machine-generated French with authentic Francophone materials can make such asymmetries visible and prevent algorithmic frequency from becoming mistaken for sociolinguistic truth. This scrutiny is essential if generative AI is to expand linguistic access without narrowing the Francophone world that novices learn to recognize.

5.2 Teaching Francophone Plurality Through AI Critique

Teaching Francophone plurality through AI critique requires a pedagogical shift from using generative systems merely as convenient language assistants to treating their outputs as objects of sociolinguistic inquiry. In beginning French classrooms, students can be taught to ask not only whether an AI-generated sentence is grammatically acceptable, but also whose usage it reflects, which communities are represented, and what alternatives have been excluded. Such work transforms AI literacy into critical language awareness. A recent language-education case study shows that structured engagement with generative AI can stimulate reflection on language construction, creativity, ethics, and reliability when teachers deliberately frame the technology as something to interrogate rather than simply trust (Tacelosky *et al*., 2025).

This orientation is especially appropriate for French because plurilingual pedagogy rejects the assumption that learners should approach the target language through rigidly separated linguistic systems. French teaching can instead mobilize heterogeneous linguistic and cultural repertoires, allowing learners to compare forms, meanings, and communicative conventions across languages and communities (Villada Castro, 2024). In AI-supported activities, students might compare machine-generated descriptions of everyday situations in Paris, Dakar, Abidjan, Montreal, Port-au-Prince, or Brussels, then identify differences in vocabulary, address forms, cultural references, and register. The objective is not to produce a catalogue of exotic variants, but to reveal that communicative legitimacy is geographically and socially distributed.

Evidence from beginner French pronunciation teaching reinforces the value of such plural practices. Multimodal translanguaging strategies have enabled multilingual learners to draw actively on prior linguistic resources while developing French pronunciation, challenging monolingual approaches that treat existing repertoires as interference (Chen, Li & Zhu, 2021). AI critique can extend this principle by asking learners to compare generated pronunciation guidance, phonetic descriptions, or dialogues with authentic recordings from different Francophone speakers and to explain where algorithmic representations simplify real variation.

Critical AI literacy also requires learners to understand how generated content is shaped by data, design, prompting, and institutional choices. Language learners therefore need practices that combine functional use with critical evaluation, ethical awareness, and reflection on how AI mediates meaning (Tour, Pegrum & Macdonald, 2025). A transnational perspective is particularly valuable because classroom fact-checking and revision can expose the tendency of generative systems to privilege dominant norms while providing learners opportunities to preserve diverse linguistic knowledge rather than automatically accepting standardized reformulations (Ghimire, 2025).

African educational contexts make such scrutiny particularly urgent. Nigerian higher-education scholarship identifies digital colonialism, overreliance, trust, and governance among the challenges accompanying generative AI adoption, supporting the case for critical AI literacy rather than technologically deterministic implementation (Peters & Olojede, 2025). For French teaching in Nigeria, critique can therefore connect algorithmic outputs with the country's multilingual environment and its proximity to Francophone West Africa, encouraging students to test whether AI recognizes regional linguistic and cultural realities.

Teacher capacity remains decisive. Evidence from Ghana indicates that basic-school teachers possess only moderate competence across AI knowledge, application, evaluation, and ethics, demonstrating that meaningful classroom critique depends on professional development as much as learner access (Arkorful *et al*., 2025). This approach also helps novices see variation as communication rather than as error or deficiency. Teaching Francophone plurality through AI critique should consequently combine prompt comparison, source verification, authentic Francophone media, reflective discussion, and teacher-guided correction. Used in this manner, generative AI becomes not the arbiter of correct French but a pedagogical surface upon which learners can examine linguistic hierarchy, detect exclusions,

compare legitimate alternatives, and develop a more plural understanding of contemporary Francophone communication.

6. Curriculum Redesign and Future Research

6.1 Pluralistic AI Literacy for Beginning Learners

Pluralistic AI literacy for beginning French learners should extend beyond operational competence with generative tools to include the capacity to interrogate how machine outputs construct linguistic legitimacy. At introductory proficiency, learners are especially susceptible to treating fluent responses as authoritative because they possess limited linguistic resources for detecting bias, register mismatch, cultural simplification, or the suppression of legitimate regional forms. AI literacy should therefore be embedded within language learning as a developmental practice through which students learn what generative systems can do, how their outputs are produced, why those outputs require verification, and how linguistic diversity may be unevenly represented. Foundational AI-literacy frameworks emphasize competencies such as recognizing AI, understanding its capabilities and limitations, interpreting outputs critically, and considering ethical consequences, providing an appropriate basis for age- and proficiency-sensitive instruction (Long & Magerko, 2020).

For beginning learners, however, technical comprehension alone is insufficient. AI literacy is more educationally meaningful when knowledge, practical use, critical evaluation, creation, and ethical awareness are treated as interconnected capacities rather than isolated digital skills (Ng *et al*., 2021). In French instruction, these capacities can be translated into accessible routines: learners might compare two AI-generated dialogues, identify differences in vocabulary or register, verify unfamiliar expressions against trusted sources, and discuss why one variety of French may be presented as more "normal" than another. Such practices make sociolinguistic plurality visible without requiring advanced theoretical terminology.

Evidence from K–12 research further supports gradual, learner-centred progression. AI-literacy initiatives for school-age learners increasingly combine conceptual knowledge with experiential activities, collaborative problem solving, ethical reflection, and critical engagement with AI-mediated environments (Casal-Otero *et al*., 2023). Assessment should likewise determine whether learners understand basic mechanisms and limitations rather than merely whether they can obtain useful outputs; validated work with middle-school students demonstrates that foundational AI concepts can be taught and assessed systematically at relatively early educational stages (Zhang, Perry & Lee, 2025). Applied to beginning French, this suggests that students can be introduced early to ideas such as probabilistic generation, training-data imbalance, hallucination, and representational bias through concrete language examples.

Pluralistic literacy also requires attention to learner agency. Nigerian evidence associates academic buoyancy with factors including self-efficacy, school engagement, and connectedness, indicating the importance of cultivating confidence and persistence when learners encounter uncertainty or correction (Yusuf, Sabboh & Asiyanbi, 2023). Similarly, evidence concerning academic self-handicapping highlights the relevance of locus of control and socio-educational influences to learner behaviour, reinforcing the value of instructional designs that preserve responsibility for judgment rather than encouraging passive delegation to AI (Sabboh & Ojo, 2023).

African AI-literacy research further demonstrates why culturally situated approaches are necessary. Evidence from universities in Ghana and Nigeria conceptualizes AI literacy through affective, behavioural, cognitive, and ethical dimensions and shows that these dimensions interact rather than operate independently (Asghar *et al*., 2025). For beginning French classrooms, a pluralistic model should therefore combine basic AI understanding with critical linguistic awareness, ethical reflection, confidence to challenge outputs, and exposure to multiple Francophone voices. Students should learn to prompt for regional alternatives, compare generated language with authentic African, Canadian, Caribbean, European, and diasporic materials, and identify when a model incorrectly treats variation as error. The pedagogical objective is not technological mastery, but the formation of learners who can use generative AI productively while retaining human judgment over correctness, representation, and linguistic legitimacy. This orientation positions teacher mediatio as essential for ensuring that accessibility, simplicity, and experimentation do not become uncritical dependence.

6.2 Research Priorities for Francophone AI Pedagogy

Research priorities for Francophone AI pedagogy should move beyond demonstrations of technological possibility toward a coordinated agenda explaining what generative AI does to language learning, linguistic representation, and classroom authority over time. The field remains young, and much existing work is concentrated in higher education, English-language contexts, self-reported perceptions, and short interventions. A systematic review of empirical GenAI research found strong concentration on English, university learners, writing, and attitudinal measures, while identifying the need for longitudinal designs, broader educational levels, behavioral evidence, and more diverse target languages (Li *et al*., 2025). For beginning French, these gaps are consequential because early exposure can influence learners' durable beliefs about correctness, accent, vocabulary, and Francophone legitimacy.

Future studies should therefore compare how major generative systems represent metropolitan, African, Canadian, Caribbean, and diasporic French under controlled prompting conditions. Research should measure not merely grammatical accuracy but lexical diversity, regional authenticity, pragmatic appropriateness, accent representation in multimodal systems, correction behavior, and consistency across model updates. Stakeholder-based research on GenAI-supported second-language education identifies effectiveness, learner differences, ethical issues, teacher roles, and long-term consequences among priority areas requiring systematic investigation (Wu & Pan, 2025). Francophone research should extend these priorities by making sociolinguistic plurality an explicit outcome variable rather than assuming "French" to be internally homogeneous.

Longitudinal classroom research is equally necessary. Generative AI can affect pedagogy, assessment, second-language acquisition, and teacher knowledge simultaneously, creating methodological questions that cannot be resolved through isolated satisfaction surveys (Chapelle, 2025). Studies should track beginning learners

across proficiency stages to determine whether repeated machine interaction expands communicative confidence while narrowing exposure to regional forms, or whether carefully designed prompting and teacher mediation can strengthen sociolinguistic awareness. French-specific classroom evidence also needs expansion beyond small-scale interventions: work with prospective teachers demonstrates that generative text and image systems can become materially embedded in French vocabulary instruction, but their classroom effects emerge through complex relations among teachers, learners, artifacts, and AI tools (Meyer & Gregersen, 2025).

Research must also become geographically less concentrated. In Nigeria, reviews of AI in education identify expanding interest alongside infrastructural, policy, expertise, and implementation challenges, indicating the importance of studying how local conditions shape educational adoption rather than transferring assumptions from highly resourced systems (Bali *et al*., 2024). Research across Francophone and adjacent African contexts should consequently investigate device access, connectivity, teacher preparation, locally relevant datasets, multilingual repertoires, and the cost of sustained GenAI use. A Global South review similarly highlights unequal infrastructure, limited faculty preparedness, ethical concerns, and underrepresentation of many regions, supporting stronger South–South collaboration and context-sensitive research designs (Khoza & van der Walt, 2025).

Teacher readiness deserves particular attention because pedagogical quality depends on whether educators can evaluate model output, recognize sociolinguistic bias, design productive prompts, and intervene when standardized forms are presented as universally legitimate. Technology-adoption research emphasizes that readiness involves skills, adaptability, and psychological acceptance, suggesting that implementation research should examine professional preparation alongside technological availability (Akhigbe, Falemi & Akin-Oluyomi, 2024). Future Francophone AI pedagogy should thus combine experimental, longitudinal, corpus-based, ethnographic, and participatory methods; include beginning learners and teachers from diverse Francophone regions; document model versions and prompts transparently; and evaluate educational benefit together with representational equity. Such an agenda would make it possible to determine not only whether generative AI improves French learning, but which French it makes learnable, visible, authoritative, and culturally imaginable. It should establish reproducible benchmarks enabling comparison across institutions, regions, platforms, proficiency levels, and model generations.

7. Conclusion

This review has demonstrated that generative artificial intelligence is becoming an influential mediator of how beginning learners encounter French, while also revealing that its pedagogical value cannot be separated from questions of linguistic normativity, representation, and authority. By examining training data, algorithmic preferences, regional variation, African and diasporic visibility, corrective feedback, learner exposure, and critical AI literacy, the study has met its central objective of assessing whose French is rendered most visible, legitimate, and teachable through machine-generated language.

The analysis shows that generative systems often operate within data and evaluation environments that privilege standardized, high-resource forms. In French instruction, this can translate into recurrent preferences for metropolitan vocabulary, formal registers, and codified structures, while regionally marked, African, diasporic, colloquial, and contact-influenced varieties receive less consistent representation. The review further establishes that beginners are particularly vulnerable to these asymmetries because limited proficiency can encourage them to interpret fluent machine output as neutral linguistic authority. At the same time, generative AI offers clear pedagogical benefits through expanded practice, rapid feedback, personalized interaction, and accessible language support.

The study therefore concludes that generative AI should neither be rejected nor adopted uncritically in beginning French classrooms. Its most productive role is as a mediated instructional resource whose outputs are compared, questioned, contextualized, and verified. Teachers should deliberately expose learners to multiple Francophone voices, explain the distinction between grammatical error and legitimate variation, and incorporate critical AI literacy from the earliest stages of instruction. Curriculum designers should diversify examples, pronunciation models, cultural references, and assessment materials beyond metropolitan norms. Future research should prioritize longitudinal, comparative, and corpus-based studies across African, Caribbean, Canadian, European, and diasporic Francophone settings. Such measures would help ensure that technological innovation expands, rather than contracts, learners' understanding of the linguistic and cultural plurality that defines contemporary French across increasingly interconnected multilingual educational environments worldwide today.

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