

# Cultural Representations in French Language Textbooks for Higher Education: A Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis

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Tri Indri Hardini, Wawan Gunawan, Raden Sasnitya

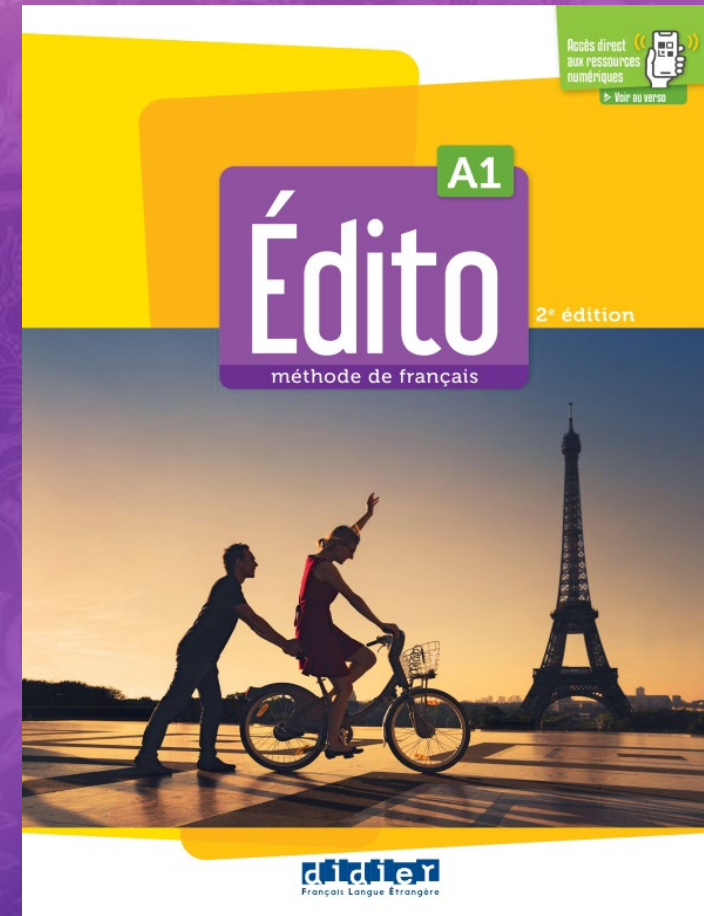
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia



# INTRODUCTION

This study examines how the French language textbook *Édito A1* encodes cultural meanings through language, particularly for beginner-level learners.

- It applies the framework of **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, focusing on **Ideational metafunction**: how language represents experiences, including cultural practices.
- The study highlights the important role that textbooks play in shaping both linguistic competence and cultural understanding. While *Édito A1* introduces global French, it often does so by prioritizing French cultural norms and practices, with limited integration of learners' local cultures.





# LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Transitivity System** = part of the **ideational metafunction** in SFL (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014)
  - Explains **how language represents experience** through: Processes (e.g., material, mental, relational), **Participants** (e.g., Actor, Sensor, Carrier), and **Circumstances** (e.g., time, manner, place)
  - Extended to **multimodal discourse** to analyze **visual meaning-making** (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; O'Halloran, 2008).

**What** is being **represented** and **how**?

Some **probing questions**:

- Are there any **events**?
- What **type of events**?
- What are the **settings**?
- Is there any **participant**?

## IMAGE REPRESENTATION

- Narrative
  - indicating some sort of **events or process**
  - **vectors**
    - action
    - gaze
    - speech & thoughts
- Conceptual
  - not indicating any **processes**
  - showing **relations between participants**:
    - classification
    - Analytic
- Circumstances  
**Spatio temporal**

# METHOD

- **Textbook Analysis:** *Édito A1*, widely used in French beginner courses, including in teacher training.
- **Analytical Framework:**
  - Qualitative discourse analysis using the transitivity system from SFL to examine how actions, participants, and settings are constructed.
  - Focus on both **ideational** meanings.
- **Data Collection:**
  - Selection of units that cover daily routines, food, places, professions, and interactions.
  - Each clause analyzed for process type, participants, and circumstances.



# FINDING AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis of several chapters, the textbook clearly highlights French culture—daily life, social habits, and food traditions—through familiar names (like Mona Lisa, Amélie), places (boulangeries, Paris, Lyon), and common expressions such as “Ça va ?” and “Tu habites où ?”.

## **What cultures are included?**

While the focus is mostly on traditional French culture, there are some intercultural elements. Names like *Amir* and *N’Golo Kanté*, and mentions of *Côte d’Ivoire* and *Japan*, suggest some diversity. However, these characters are still placed within a French context, they live in France, speak French, or are described through a French perspective. This reflects a French-centered approach, where cultural differences are included but still fit into a dominant French narrative.



# A SAMPLE OF ANALYSIS

## Data

Text	Participant	Process	Participant	Circumstance
Je m'appelle Mona Lisa My name is Mona Lisa	Je (actor)	The verb "appeler" (to call) used reflexively here expresses identification	Mona Lisa	
Je m'appelle Amir My name is Amir	Je (actor)	The verb "appeler" (to call) used reflexively here expresses identification	Amir	
Je m'appelle N'golo Kanté My name is N'golo Kanté	Je (actor)	The verb "appeler" (to call) used reflexively here expresses identification	N'golo Kanté	
Je m'appelle Sophie My name is Sophie	Je (actor)	The verb "appeler" (to call) used reflexively here expresses identification	Sophie	
Je suis français I'm French	Je (the person being described)	Relational suis - The verb "être" (to be)		français (identity/nationality)
Je suis un footballeur I'm a soccer player	Je	Relational suis - The verb "être" (to be)	un footballeur (profession)	
Je suis japonaise I'm Japanese	Je	Relational suis - The verb "être" (to be)		japonaise (identity/nationality)



# FINDING AND DISCUSSION

## 1. Repetition of Daily Routines and Domestic Life

Cultural values are subtly encoded in habitual actions such as waking, grooming, eating, and resting. Expressions like “je me coiffe,” “on fait du sport,” or “on regarde la télé le soir” illustrate how cultural norms are reinforced through language use tied to home, family, and self-care routines.

## 2. Culinary Culture as National Identity

Food plays a dominant role in shaping the cultural narrative. Frequent references to shopping at local markets (“à la boulangerie,” “à la boucherie”) and consuming culturally significant dishes (“le risotto de soja,” “baguette,” “croissant”) frame cuisine as a marker of regional pride and national identity.

## 3. Professional Identity and Cultural Prestige

Characters such as Michelin-starred chefs, athletes, or media professionals are featured not just for career diversity but to celebrate France’s global cultural influence. Their inclusion signals values such as excellence, innovation, and national pride.

## 4. Spatial Anchoring in Real Urban Contexts

The inclusion of well-known French cities (Lyon, Paris, Valence) and institutions (e.g., Université Lumière, Trek TV) localizes learning. These settings serve both as symbolic and literal anchors of cultural authenticity, familiarizing learners with real-life French environments.



# CONCLUSION

The book constructs culture through food, language, routine, and familiar places; projecting a unified French identity while lightly touching on multiculturalism.

The textbook builds French cultural identity through everyday language and context. Key patterns include:

- **Daily routines and home life**  
Language reinforces cultural habits like grooming, eating, and relaxing (e.g., *je me coiffe, on regarde la télé*).
- **Food as national identity**  
Frequent references to *boulangeries, croissants, and local markets* frame cuisine as central to French culture.
- **Celebrating French excellence**  
Featuring chefs, athletes, and professionals highlights values of mastery, innovation, and national pride.
- **Authentic French settings**  
Cities like Paris and Lyon, and institutions like Trek TV, anchor content in real French life.
- **Natural communication**  
Expressions like *Ça va ?* and *Tu habites où ?* reflect the casual, relational style of spoken French.
- **Limited multicultural view**  
Non-French figures appear, but are typically portrayed within a French context—showing diversity through a French lens.



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**THANK YOU!**  
**MERCI BEAUCOUP!**