

Designing curriculum at the intersection of language, culture, and coloniality: reflections from primary French textbooks in Mauritius

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Abstract

Curriculum development, specifically textbook conception, in postcolonial contexts like Mauritius is neither a neutral nor a primarily technical undertaking; it remains a deeply situated process shaped by linguistic and cultural diversity, tacit colonial language hierarchies, and underlying ethnic tensions. This paper explores these dynamics as they manifested during the conception of Grades 5 and 6 Primary French textbooks within the Nine Year Continuous Basic Education reform. This study adopts an ecolinguistics-decolonial lens, interweaving autoethnography as decolonial praxis with document analysis, and examines both authors' autoethnographic accounts and the textbook materials as artefacts. Indeed, as panel coordinator and panel member involved in the writing of these textbooks, the authors analyse their own experiences of navigating the theoretical, ideological, and affective tensions embedded in the design process, as they resist the "epistemic violence" (Mignolo, 2011), i.e. the silencing of non-dominant modes of knowing through absorption by dominant Western research paradigms and practices. Using an eco-critical textbook research (Stibbe, 2015; Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2017), to understand how decolonial and situated approaches inform curricular choices in a predominantly Creole-speaking environment and a postcolonial context, the findings discuss how the textbooks negotiate epistemological presence and ecological framing, tensions between linguistic ecology and pluriversality, insularity as epistemic centre, as well as Ecological Social Justice. This study thus puts forth how the curriculum design circumvents layers of tensions between learners' plurilingual and pluricultural realities and policy frameworks that continue to privilege colonial epistemologies.

Keywords: decolonial curriculum design, plurilingualism, pluriculturalism, Mauritius, textbook development, ecolinguistics

Introduction

In postcolonial contexts like Mauritius, polyglossic dynamics are still prevalent (Bosquet-Ballah, 2017; Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2024). English and French, the languages of the island's past colonial powers, continue to be perceived as being prestigious, while Mauritian Creole, henceforth Kreol Morisien the most widely spoken local language (Statistics Mauritius, 2022; Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2024) is still relatively devalued and marginalised, despite its considerable socio-institutional progress over the past decades. English being the formal medium of instruction as per the Education Ordinance (1957), textbooks in Mauritius are monolingual and written in English for all core subjects (such as Mathematics, History and Geography for example) while the French textbook remains in French. Indeed, Mauritian pupils learn to read in English and French which are compulsory subjects up to the Cambridge School Certificate for French and the Cambridge Higher School Certificate for English. Introduced as early as 1955 during colonial times, ancestral languages (e.g., Hindi, Tamil, Marathi, etc.) are offered as optional languages from primary up to secondary and have been maintained to this day for ethnic identity reasons. Kreol Morisien was also introduced as an optional language in 2012. In 2026, the recent announcement of the Government that Kreol Morisien would be henceforth offered as main subject at Higher School Certificate sparked a wide range of reactions, notably on social media where the discourses of perceived uselessness and devaluing have been largely replicated. Combined with the dual nature of the term 'Creole' (Carpooran, 2010) as an ethnonym (name of an ethnic group) and a glossonym (name of a language), along with Kreol Morisien being classified as an 'ancestral language' in the Mauritian schooling system, as opposed to its 'national' nature, its

explicit use in the curriculum, including textbook production, is itself subjected to tensions. This has also been noted in the poor reception of the 'Foundation Year Project' which was introduced in 2014 and proposed a bilingual textbook *Let's learn with Timatou and friends* (Rughoonundun-Chellapermal, 2018; Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2021b) which was finally replaced in 2016 by separate monolingual and subject specific textbooks as was the case previously. Another example is the reluctance to use the term 'Creole language' in key policy documents like the National Curriculum Framework Pre-primary, with discursive devices like circumlocutions being used instead, within fundamentally conflictual dynamics (Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2024). Indeed, it seems that the more the country seems to develop at different levels, the more it seems reluctant to let go of its colonial legacy, with the language issue ending up being evaded in the most recent education policy documents (Kee Mew Wan Khin, 2023).

This contribution discusses these dynamics and the choices operated in designing the latest Grades 5 and 6 Primary French textbooks "*J'apprends le français*" in 2016 and 2017 (as part of the 2015 Nine Year Continuous Basic Education reform in Mauritius) from an ecolinguistics-decolonial lens, and through a hybrid approach mobilising autoethnography – the coauthors being the coordinator and panel member of the French textbook writing panel for Grades 5 and 6 – and document analysis of the textbook materials. The first part of the paper positions ecolinguistics as a decolonial lens, and the second part discusses the methodological dimension. Finally, the third part is articulated around the findings and discussion.

Theoretical background: ecolinguistics as a decolonial lens

This contribution positions ecolinguistics as a decolonial lens, arguing that the core epistemic foundations of the former encompass elements of decolonial theories, notably in terms of delinking, recentering local ontologies, ideology, and the issue of linguistic and epistemological diversity.

Ecolinguistics as epistemic delinking and revaluation

In critiquing dominant linguistic frames and actively valorising indigenous languages as well as Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as forms of ecological wisdom, ecolinguistics can be closely linked to Mignolo's (2011) 'epistemic disobedience'. This concept is centred around delinking from what Mignolo calls the colonial matrix of power and the rehabilitation of dominated and subaltern epistemic frames. Stibbe's concept of "stories-we-live-by" (2015) positions indigenous languages as legitimate and valuable systems holding historical, cultural and environmental knowledge, which not only challenges what Mignolo identifies as the "rhetoric of modernity" that relegates indigenous knowledge to shallow superstitions, and the prevailing capitalist praxis associated thereto (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Steffensen 2007), but also aligns with Mühlhäusler's (2003) view that indigenous languages represent linguistic adaptations to ecological niches. This scholarship also questions what Pennycook and Makoni (2020) refer to as 'linguicism', which is an ideological stance favouring certain languages at the expense of others, while resonating with Meighan's (2023: 146-147) critique of *coloniallingualism* that "covertly or overtly upholds colonial legacies, imperial mindsets, and inequitable practices [...] detrimental to multilingual, multicultural learners' identities and heritages; endangered, Indigenous languages and knowledges; minoritized communities; and our environment". However, it must be highlighted that the decolonial framework is not language-centric. Davidson (2024: 470), citing Okoth (2021), argues that Mignolo's decolonial theory may be viewed as a form of idealism, "since it sees colonial relations as ultimately propelled by a prior epistemic framework associated with Enlightenment reason rather than by material practices such as resource extraction, land dispossession, ecological destruction, labour exploitation, slavery, and so on". The historical dimension is thus as important as the epistemic one, expanding the scope of decolonial theory to incorporate diachronically situated events. This is relevant to Mauritius as the country does not have an indigenous population per se. The social tapestry is woven around slavery, indenture and massive land exploitation, which explains the ecological devastation of the island (Florens 2013). Therefore, delinking must necessarily be read against sociohistorical and

ecological dynamics when it comes to reflections around education, and more specifically, textbook conception, as discussed in the sections below. This notably concerns strategic decisions taken for textual and discursive choices operated in textbook writing.

Rehabilitating and recentering local linguistic ontologies

Beyond the epistemic dimension, ecolinguistics also provide methodological pathways to Mignolo's (2011: 132) "border thinking", which provides a frame of thought from the perspective of colonial difference: "border thinking is the epistemic singularity of any decolonial project. Why? Because border epistemology is the epistemology of the anthropoi, who do not want to submit to humanitas, but at the same time cannot avoid". This statement is particularly compatible with the ecolinguistics perspective. First, it acknowledges a form of default anthropocentrism (Mühlhäusler 2001; Stibbe 2015) where the human necessarily perceives the world from its vantage point. This does not normalise anthropocentrism; rather, it makes visible the conditions under which anthropocentric frames become hegemonic and therefore open to critique. Second, it critiques human exceptionalism, re-establishing the natural, mutually inclusive link between the anthroposphere and the biosphere. Additionally, in being "a politics of knowledge that is both ingrained in the body and in local histories" (Mignolo, 2011: 132), the decolonial perspective of border thinking aligns with the core principle of ecolinguistics to value local knowledge systems, as well as embodiment as a means of perceiving and living phenomena (see also Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology). For the purpose of this contribution, we retain two aspects that are relevant to how ecolinguistics was mobilised as a decolonial lens for textbook production: ideology, metaphors relating to and framing of the more-than-human world, on the one hand, and the recognition of linguistic diversity as epistemological diversity.

Ideology, metaphors and framing

Whilst the core premises and principles of ecolinguistics were applied to the textbook conception process as a whole (see Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2021a), the stories we intend to discuss in relation to our choices are ideology, framing and metaphors. The table below, adapted from Hookoomsing and Oozeerally (2020) briefly situates the three forms of stories as explained by Stibbe (2015).

Table 1: Three forms of stories

Form of story (cognitive, i.e. in people's minds)	Description	Manifestation in language
Ideology	A story about how the world is and should be which is shared among members of a group	Discourses, i.e. clusters of linguistic features characteristically used by the group
Framing	A story that uses a frame (a packet of knowledge about an area of life) to structure another area of life	Trigger words which bring a frame to mind
Metaphor (a type of framing)	A story that uses a frame to structure a distinct and clearly different area of life	Trigger words which bring a specific and distinct frame to mind

Everyday language may contain patterns that are anthropocentric (Heuberger, 2007; Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2017; Stibbe, 2021) in nature (i.e. nature existing for the benefit of humans), and are often in the category of destructive discourse, the other two being ambivalent and positive discourse (Stibbe 2014; 2018).

Taking into consideration the potential impact of language and discourse on children's knowledge construction process (Foucault, 1972; Hookoomsing & Oozeerally, 2020; Hookoomsing, 2021), our strategic discursive and textual choices were informed by ecolinguistics in two ways: first, Stibbe's framework (2015) enabled us to avoid destructive discourse while striving to incorporate as much positive discourse as possible, and second, we attempted to give salience and visibility to local and regional knowledge, while at the same time considering the areas of learning as per Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

Recognition of linguistic diversity as epistemological diversity

Another layer of compatibility between decolonial perspectives and ecolinguistics concerns the importance of language preservation. In line with scholars like Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), Maffi (2001) and Crystal (2003), to name a few, Mignolo, through his pluriversal project, argues that language loss represents knowledge loss. Pluriverse is a critique of the "Eurocentric commitment to replacing multiple realities with a single Western world" (Wilson, 2022: 153). Phillipson (2009) describes this phenomenon as 'linguistic imperialism', by analysing the spread of English, which is the de facto official language of Mauritius, across the world, notably in postcolonial contexts including former British colonies. Anchored in this rejection of European universality, pluriverse is a notion that foregrounds the coexistence and flourishing of diverse indigenous cultures. From this perspective, the eurocentric project of instating monolingualism as the norm is considered as a form of homogenisation (Robillard 2008), which ontologically negates diversity. A shift towards a pluriversal stance hence considers linguistic diversity as an inestimable trove of different knowledges, and more importantly as an asset. Maffi's (2001) reflections on biocultural diversity, for instance, establishes meaningful interconnections between linguistic, cultural and biological diversity, positioning language maintenance as an environmental justice issue. This is particularly pertinent in postcolonial insular contexts like Mauritius, where hierarchical representations of languages, notably through polyglossia (Carpooran, 2007) are prevalent.

Ecolinguistics as a decolonial framework

Beyond epistemological resistance through the challenge of universalism and capitalistic paradigms and concomitant valorisation of indigenous and local knowledge, ecolinguistics also advocates ontological plurality. This manifests in the preservation of linguistic diversity, which is considered as an asset instead of a liability. Moreover, ecolinguistics protects place-based knowledge encoded in local toponymy, seasonal vocabulary and semantic classifications that differ from Western taxonomies. As far as textbook production is concerned, this has direct impacts on the overall decisions, in relation to and in tension with prevalent ideologies as well as policy discourses, and the sources for texts and discourses to include in the books themselves. Additionally, Stibbe's (2015) concept of "stories-we-live-by" becomes decolonial with the acknowledgement that local and indigenous languages carry different stories about human-environment relationships. Ecolinguistics therefore becomes a valuable framework for curriculum design and development (Hookoomsing, 2021) while also allowing the respect of key policy frameworks like ESD, through what Oozeerally and Hookoomsing (2021a) call 'ecological social justice' (ESJ).

Methodology

As researchers who have been involved in the curriculum design process, we chose to adopt a decolonial methodological approach combining autoethnography with document analysis to examine the choices operated in the conception of the Grades 5 and 6 Primary French textbooks, arguing that the interweaving of autoethnography and document analysis represents a means to valorise local researcher voices and experiences in restituting the cartography of research-informed decisions that were taken during the textbook conception process. Our stance is further rooted in the understanding that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring

to them" (Denzin & Lincoln 2000: 3). More specifically, our inquiry aligns with what Reed-Danahay (1997: 3-4) identifies as critical autoethnography, i.e., a form of research that interrogates power relations and seeks to challenge dominant structures while giving voice to marginalised perspectives.

Autoethnography as decolonial praxis

Autoethnography is "an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 739). This study adopts "a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience" (Ellis, 2007: 14). This stance is compatible with our decolonial lens, as autoethnography represents a valuable means for highlighting experienced truth in an authentic manner (Méndez, 2013). As panel coordinator and panel member respectively, who were actively involved in the curriculum development process, we have an identity of "complete member researchers" (Anderson, 2006), with a fundamentally reflexive and altero-reflexive (Robillard 2008; 2017) outlook on the experiences and process. Multiple data sources complement our autoethnographic accounts: reflexive journals (notes and reflections documented throughout the curriculum development process); email correspondence and meeting notes (records of discussions with the textbook panel members); critical incident reflections (documented moments of tension and negotiation in the development process).

One of the reasons we opted for autoethnography is its capacity to align with emancipatory discourses (Richardson, 2000), in the sense that those who are "emancipated are representing themselves instead of being colonised by others and subjected to their agendas" (Méndez 2013: 282). This further links to the altero-reflexive nature of autoethnography as by focusing on our voices as curriculum developers incorporating ecolinguistics and decolonial frameworks, we resist what Mignolo (2011) calls "epistemic violence", i.e. the silencing of non-dominant modes of knowing through absorption by dominant Western research paradigms and practices. This methodological choice also corresponds to Ellis et al.'s (2011) reflections on how autoethnography contributes to make complex lived experiences accessible to readers (Denzin, 1989) while establishing meaningful links with larger social structures. In our case, these structures include colonial legacies in education, institutional constraints on curriculum development, and the navigation of the multiple embedded layers of tensions that govern textbook development, including the issues of local and regional epistemologies, as well as the incorporation of ecological perspectives in education.

Document analysis from a decolonial-ecolinguistics lens

To complement the autoethnographic dimension, we also chose to use document analysis, whereby we examine the Grades 5 and 6 French textbook materials as artefacts, in light of our decolonial ecolinguistics perspective. Document analysis was found to be appropriate for this study as it allows a systematic examination of "materials generated for reasons other than the research at hand" (Bowen, 2009: 27); textbooks are thus treated as "discursive formations" (Foucault, 1972) that reveal underlying power relations and epistemological assumptions. McCulloch (2004: 4) further adds that it is important to know how and why these documents were produced and received, and therefore to interpret them "in the light of specific factors involved in their production and context, such as personal, social, political and historical relationships."

Analytical framework

Document analysis, in this work, is approached not as an "objective" or "distanced" examination, but through what we term a "decolonial-ecolinguistics analytical lens" that integrates Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistics framework. This framework examines how language patterns in educational materials reinforce or challenge destructive stories about human relationships with the more-than-human world. Stibbe (2015) identifies three categories of discourse: **destructive discourse** (patterns that contribute to ecological and social harm), **ambivalent discourse**

(mixed messages), and **positive discourse** (patterns that promote ecological sustainability and social justice). Furthermore, Stibbe's framework attends specifically to three forms of "stories-we-live-by" that are particularly relevant to curriculum analysis:

1. **Ideologies:** Underlying belief systems about the relationship between humans and nature
2. **Metaphors:** Conceptual frames that shape how we understand environmental relationships
3. **Framing:** How linguistic choices foreground certain aspects of reality while backgrounding others

When viewed from a decolonial lens, these analytical tools reveal how colonial epistemologies become insidiously embedded in seemingly neutral curriculum content, as evidenced by an analysis of pre-reform curriculum material (Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2017). Based on this ecolinguistics foundation, our analytical framework positions us as critically engaged interpreters who focus on:

1. **Epistemological presence and ecological framing:** Whose knowledge systems are validated, foregrounded or marginalised in textbook content? How are human-nature relationships framed through ideologies, metaphors and linguistic choices? What discourses do the materials perpetuate?
2. **Linguistic ecology and pluriversity:** How is the French language material positioned in relation to other languages in student's learning ecosystem? How far does the curriculum honour linguistic diversity as epistemological diversity? (Mignolo, 2011; Maffi, 2001)
3. **Place-based knowledge:** Which landscapes and ways of being are being made visible and invisible? Are local and regional toponymy, vocabulary and local semantic classifications being honoured, or are they displaced by Western taxonomies? As Basso (1996) demonstrates, place-based names can encode moral geographies and historical narratives; how far does the curriculum recognise such landscape-language relationships?
4. **Pedagogical assumptions and ecological social justice:** What models of learning, knowing, and being are embedded in the activities and sequencing? Do pedagogical choices support what we term "ecological social justice" (ESJ) by connecting environmental sustainability with social equity, or do they reproduce extractive, hierarchical relationships?

Following Bowen's (2009) framework for document analysis, we engage in the following analytical procedures: **skimming** (superficial examination), **reading** (thorough examination), and **interpretation** (making meaning through a decolonial-ecolinguistics lens). However, we extend beyond conventional document analysis by integrating our autoethnographic knowledge of the documents' production contexts and by applying Stibbe's ecolinguistics analysis. This integrated approach allows us to trace what Hookoomsing and Oozeerally (2020) describe as strategic discursive and textual choices that examine the final curriculum artefacts as well as research-informed decisions taken during the design process within specific socio-political and institutional constraints. Indeed, as panel coordinator and panel member of the Grades 5 and 6 French textbooks writing, we had to function within the key policy documents (such as the National Curriculum Framework and the French Teaching and Learning Syllabus) requirements and the ever-present pressure to engage with content given that the Mauritian educational system is exam-oriented.

Interweaving autoethnography and document analysis

One of the particularities of this study lies in the interweaving of autoethnographic narrative with document analysis. This approach aligns with Ellis and Bochner's (2006: 433) observation that "autoethnography can allow scholars to investigate social phenomena that have personal significance by re-imagining and then analysing mundane and epiphanic moments". The meshing of autoethnography and document analysis also creates what Ronai (1995) describes as a "layered account" that provides multiple ways of approaching data, from both the experiential and material lenses. Our analysis is therefore structured around key curricular decisions, with each section including:

Grade 5 – Part 1	“Dossier 2 – <i>Protégeons notre environnement</i> ” (Rodrigues reserve; extinction; habitat destruction; reforestation; protection discourse)	Environmental lexicon: <i>lagon, récif, forêt, vallée</i> . Culinary ecology in “ <i>Je découvre des plats</i> .” Foregrounding of local and regional culinary culture	Explicit appearance of ecology through conservation-forward discourse. Naming of anthropogenic responsibility (exploitation; habitat destruction). Framing remains restorative.
Grade 5 – Part 2	Narrative genres (fables; sports texts)	Football alongside Sepak Takraw; dragon boat festival; horse racing (Mauritius); capoeira; sumo; handisport in “ <i>Le sport</i> ”	Framing of social justice through interpersonal ethics (courage, fairness, solidarity). Pluriversal cultural representation and exposure to cultural knowledge that challenge Eurocentric knowledge sources.
Grade 6 – Part 1	“ <i>Les abeilles : une merveille de notre écosystème</i> ”; “ <i>La légende de Bassin Blanc</i> ”; global “ <i>Les merveilles du monde</i> ” structure	Wonders cluster: Taj Mahal; Lake Retba; Machu Picchu; Petra; Everest; Pyramids; Table Mountain; etc.	Dual decentering layers. First layer decentres the notion of ‘ <i>merveilles du monde</i> ’ away from anthropocentric/man-made artifacts, re-positioning and framing bees as a ‘wonder of our ecosystem’. Second layer of decentering involves exposure to worldwide cultural heritage sites. Global South visibly co-present.
Grade 6 – Part 2	“ <i>Balades dans les îles de l’océan Indien</i> ”; “ <i>Le cyclone Veranda</i> ” (risk bulletin genre); marine regulation discourse	Local wonders (pp. 52–53); turtle conservation; octopus fishing regulation	Framing of ecology through governance and danger management. Environmental responsibility institutionalised. Less relational embeddedness.

Cross-grade movement

- From scenic description to conservation (Grade 5) to governance (Grade 6)
- Progressive visibility of ecological themes
- Anthropocentric epistemic core remains structurally intact

Table 3. Linguistic ecology and pluriversality

Book	Traceable evidence	Author coding notes	Analytical interpretation
Grade 5 – Part 1	Ecological lexicon explicitly taught (<i>indigène; endémique; extinction</i>)	<i>chatini; cari; brèdes; pomme d’amour</i> as foregrounding of local knowledge via selected lexical entries	French exhibits adaptation traits, also functioning as a host language to integrate local ontologies lexically. Evidence of hybridisation, while epistemic medium remains French for curricular purposes and objectives.
Grade 5 – Part 2	“Dossier 3 - <i>Contes d’ici et d’ailleurs</i> ”	Local tales (<i>Tizan ar so 8 frer; Baissac</i>); Perrault; Chinese; German; Vietnamese; Australian; Egyptian tales	Narrative enactment of pluriversality. Co-existence of multiple mythic epistemologies. French mediates instead of suppresses plurality.

Grade 6 – Part 1	Structural thematics: myths; islands; wonders; ecosystem	Japanese myth; Abenaki myth; Mont Ida comparison (Mauritius/Crete/Turkey)	Enactment of border thinking through comparative toponymy. Integration of pluriversal imagination.
Grade 6 – Part 2	Indian Ocean dossier; Seychelles investigation	Regional South–South orientation	Positioning of French as a bridge language embedded in regional ecosystems, rather than the metropolitan norm.

Linguistic ecology pattern

- French remains the epistemic medium of instruction due to curriculum and syllabus-related constraints.
- Lexical choices and hybridity indicate a decolonial frame
- Pluriversality appears thematically instead of structurally (negotiation between what is possible as curriculum developers, and what is required at the level of the policy and programme execution)
- Kreol Morisien present ontologically but not instructionally (negotiation in light of constraints)

Table 4. Place-based knowledge

Book	Traceable evidence	Author coding notes	Analytical interpretation
Grade 5 – Part 1	Rodrigues reserve; named sites (Anse Quitor; Canyon Tiyel; Grande Caverne)	Island micro-toponymy	Explicit naming of place, with territorial anchoring. Ecological taxonomy locally situated.
Grade 5 – Part 2	Mauritian urban and sporting references	Curepipe; local racing culture; festivals	National locations foregrounded
Grade 6 – Part 1	Bassin Blanc legend linked to toponymic naming	Local wonders (pp. 52–53); Mont Ida (Mauritius/Crete/Turkey)	Moral-geographic potential (Basso). Narrative encoding of place. Destabilisation of singular ownership of landscape meaning through comparative toponymy.
Grade 6 – Part 2	Cyclone bulletin anchored in Mauritius; Indian Ocean islands dossier	Mauritius; Rodrigues; Réunion; Madagascar; Comoros; Seychelles	Repositioning and reframing of insularity as an epistemic centre; foregrounding of regional interconnectedness.

Place-based pattern

- Strong insular and regional recentering.
- Indian Ocean constructed as knowledge-space.
- Limited explicit engagement with local semantic classification systems.

Table 5. Pedagogical assumptions and ecological social justice (ESJ)

Book	Traceable evidence	Author coding notes	Analytical interpretation
Grade 5 – Part 1	Teacher prompts encourage personal experience; cross-	Role-play; grammar scaffolding	Scope for altero-reflexive ecological engagement. However, embedded in

	curricular linking (history-geography; protected species)		linear competency-based progression [curricular constraint].
Grade 6 – Part 1	Ecological reading (“abeilles”); mythic sequencing	Wonders juxtapose South and North deliberately	ESJ seeds present at thematic level. Not structurally reorganising pedagogy.
Grade 6 – Part 2	Cyclone bulletin; compliance discourse (alert levels; prudence)	Marine regulation; conservation authority framing	Environmental literacy framed institutionally. Governance logic > reciprocity paradigm.

Table 6. Longitudinal epistemic trajectory (grade 5 to grade 6)

Dimension	Evolutionary pattern
Ecology	Scenic → Conservation → Governance
Geography	National → Regional → Pluriversal Global
Justice	Interpersonal ethics → Environmental compliance
Language	Standard French → Lexical hybridisation
Epistemology	Anthropocentric core with decolonial representational inflections

The systematic coding across the four manuals indicates:

1. Intentional recentering of insular and Indian Ocean identities.
2. Redistribution of epistemic visibility beyond Eurocentric axes.
3. Lexical decolonisation through incorporation of local ontology.
4. Progressive integration of ecological themes.
5. Persistence of anthropocentric and governance-oriented framing.
6. Ecological social justice emerging at the level of representation rather than as organising epistemology.

Findings and discussion

Whilst the corpus of Grades 5 and 6 French textbooks does not seem to enact an unambiguous ‘decolonial turn’, it does not replicate previous textbook templates, seeking to question instead the frames used previously. It thus stages a negotiated form of repositioning, where ecological discourse is progressively made visible, albeit in a largely managerial form. The enactment of pluriversality is through representation and curricular selection, mediated mostly monolingually through French, as a means to negotiate the complex terrain of curricular prescriptions and stakeholder expectations. One of the more robust facets of the textbooks remains place-based anchoring, while ecological social justice (ESJ) emerges as an aspirational horizon rather than a structuring pedagogical framework.

It is, however, important to note that this does not represent a contradiction to be solved, but an empirical manifestation of how textbook production is negotiated within polyglossic dynamics, in a politically sensitive terrain marked by history of successive colonisations. As argued above, Mauritius is characterised by entrenched polyglossic hierarchies (Bosquet-Ballah, 2017; Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2024), where English and French retain prestige and Kreol Morisien remains a site of tension and contestation, entangled in the dual ethnonym/glossonym ambiguity of “Creole” (Carpooran 2010) and in the administrative classification of Kreol Morisien as an “ancestral language” in the educational landscape. Such a context implies that curricular delinking cannot be read from an exclusively epistemic stance (Mignolo, 2011), as it is necessarily mediated by multilayered

institutional constraints, political prescriptions, reception dynamics and the material histories that Davidson (2024), drawing on Okoth (2021), reminds us should not be displaced by idealist accounts of epistemic change.

Epistemological presence and ecological framing: ecology as staged insertion

The distribution of ecological discourse across the corpus represents a first facet of our findings. The analysis indicates that ecology is not necessarily the curriculum's organising ontology, as it is strategically inserted through the dossiers, the genres, as well as the textual and discursive choices of the curriculum developers. From the autoethnographic perspective, these choices were also informed by our own ideological positioning as we are sensitive to the environmental question, in light of major ecological disruptions that the planet is facing.

For instance, in Grade 5 Part 1 French textbook, ecological discourse becomes explicit through the dossier "*Protégeons notre environnement*", centred on the *Réserve François Leguat* in Rodrigues. We also chose to weave together ecological discourse and place-based knowledge, foregrounding the local spaces to illustrate conservation attempts, as a form of recentering the epistemic dimension around the local. The text foregrounds autropogenic causality patterns, with the explicit naming of habitat destruction and exploitation, hereby aligning with what Stibbe (2015) would classify as a move away from destructive stories. The human agent is thus not erased or dissociated from ecological harm. However, the narrative remains restorative, with repair being framed through protection and reforestation. No lexical, textual or grammatical evidence of reciprocity, where the more-than-human world is not merely protected but co-constitutive of human life-worlds, were detected. While the material avoids extractive frames, it does not fully reconfigure the human-nature relation into an ontologically anthroparmonic (Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2021a) frame.

In terms of progression, Grade 6 French textbook intensifies ecological shifting, through a shift in ecological grammar. For example, "*Les abeilles: une merveille de notre écosystème*" signals a deliberate discursive move towards interdependence as the lexical choice of *notre écosystème* suggests shared belonging, potentially repositioning the learner within a collective ecology. Our choice of presenting this lesson in this manner was also informed by our stance of viewing the biosphere and anthroposphere (Morin, 2008) as mutually inclusive and nourishing, instead of the pervasive dualist views of human exceptionalism, where the environment is considered as separate (*res extensa*) from the human-thinker (*res cogitans*). At the same time, it can be observed that Grade 6 Part 2 French textbook's cyclone bulletin ("*Le cyclone Veranda*") inserts ecology through the institutional genre of risk management. The environment, here, is framed in terms of vulnerability, which itself implies governance, through the logics of monitoring, warning and compliance.

Across the Grades 5 and 6 French textbooks, we therefore observe a movement from scenic and lexical ecology, to conservation discourse re-establishing human responsibility in an explicit manner, to regulation and framing. Whilst the progression is pedagogically sound, its epistemic consequence is the relative softening of anthropocentrism, where humans are framed as observers, protectors and managers. The more-than-human world concomitantly appears as an object of stewardship or a source of hazard, instead of a co-agentive subject. This resonates with Mühlhäusler's (2001) and Stibbe's (2015) observation that anthropocentrism is not merely a theme but a deep default frame, often reproduced even within sustainability-oriented discourse.

Linguistic ecology and pluriversity: a pluriversal imaginary mediated monolingually

The tensions between pluriversity and linguistic ecology appear as a second important finding of the study. Whilst the corpus indicates a strong pluriversal redistribution of knowledge, this is largely mediated through monolingual epistemic authority. On the one hand, the Grade 6 French textbook architecture ("*Les merveilles du monde*", myths and legends, Indian Ocean islands) questions and disrupts a North-centric civilisational references in a deliberate manner. The recurring juxtaposition of Global South and Global North sites (e.g., Taj Mahal, Lake Retba, Machu Picchu, Petra, Everest, Table Mountain alongside European referents) performs a form of representational delinking, decentering Europe instead of erasing it. Grade 6 Part 2 French textbook's dossier logic

also reconstitutes Mauritius and the Indian Ocean (Mauritius, Rodrigues, Réunion, Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles) as a coherent epistemic region. In this sense, “border thinking” (Mignolo, 2011) becomes curricular: the learner’s world is articulated through regional relationality and insular connectedness, making the pluriverse not only global but regionally grounded. As curriculum developers, this was also a decision made from the locus of our own representations, where we deemed it ethical to disengage with insular subalternity by giving a form of ‘epistemic voice’ to the local and regional.

On the other hand, the presence of French as the sole epistemic medium may legitimately open interrogations. However, this must be situated within the multiple tensions that exist between the curricular prescription of French being the medium, and stakeholder expectations of how the material should be. The textbook is not dissociated from the Mauritian context where language is a site of polyglossic tension and political sensitivity. The poor reception of the Foundation Year bilingual initiative in 2014, as discussed previously, and the circumlocutory avoidance of “Creole” in policy documents are not external to textbook production: they are part of the ecology of constraints within which curricular decisions are made. In this sense, the absence of Kreol Morisien as an instructional epistemology should not be read as a simple deficit, but as evidence of negotiated decoloniality: a pluriversal project constrained by the sociopolitical economy of language.

At the same time, it is also worth noting that the corpus performs a more subtle form of linguistic decolonisation through lexical hybridity and permeability. Following previous episodes of resistance to innovative multilingual pedagogies, when tasked with another textbook writing for Grades 5 and 6 for French, we opted to navigate the dominant monolingualism in textbook writing by decolonising the lexicon. So doing we chose to acknowledge the Mauritian pupil’s linguistic diversity and the other languages in the latter’s learning ecosystem. Local culinary and ecological terms (e.g., *chatini*, *cari*, *brèdes*, *pomme d’amour*) have been deliberately used, without recourse to metropolitan French substitutes. These examples refer to some sort of tomato chutney though “*pomme d’amour*” seems to be a variety of tomatoes which are sour, curry which may not necessarily be spicy as per its usual definition and leafy vegetables which are very common in Mauritian cuisine. Choosing to normalise these loanwords is a means to develop children’s metacultural awareness and ability to see themselves in their own textbooks. One timid example may be found in a previous Grade 6 French textbook (2005) where recipes of semolina cake and fried split peas were given. However, while the first one was given in its Mauritian name “*Oundé*”, the second fried cake was not named in the textbook and translations juxtaposed were as follows: “*mantèque*” as “*graisse végétale*” (vegetable fat) and “*dholl*” as “*petits pois cassés*” (split peas). In this sense, in our Grades 5 and 6 French textbooks, French becomes porous, hosting local ontologies. This refusal of lexical erasure corresponds to Maffi’s (2001) biocultural diversity argument: linguistic forms carry ecological and cultural knowledge; maintaining them within curricular discourse, even as borrowings within French, functions as a small but meaningful form of epistemic preservation.

Place-based knowledge: insularity as epistemic centre and moral geography potential

A third finding concerns place-based knowledge, which emerges as one of the corpus’ most robust achievements, positioning insularity as an organising principle rather than a deficit. Indeed, the Grades 5 and 6 French textbooks “*J’apprends le français*” aimed to expand the universes of references from the normalised dominant lenses to the marginalised ones closer to the insular Mauritian pupils. There has been a deliberate attempt in the choice of thematic chapters to move the lens from the dominant North (with overtones of colonial legacies) to promote the underexplored South as well as develop an awareness and valorisation of one’s insular and regional identity.

The Indian Ocean is thus constructed as a knowledge space. In a postcolonial insular context marked by displacement, exploitation of land for plantation and ecological devastation (Florens, 2013), this recentring is epistemologically significant. Additionally, the corpus goes beyond mentioning places and instead, linguistically inhabits them. For example, the Rodrigues dossier mobilises micro-toponymy, anchoring ecological learning in a

territorially situated landscape. Likewise, the Bassin Blanc legend performs what Basso (1996) terms moral geography, where place bears stories. Even if the textbooks do not explicitly theorise this, they create the conditions for learners to acknowledge that landscapes are not neutral but represent repositories of meaning. From an autoethnographic perspective, this decision was also taken as we deliberately chose to foreground Mauritian and regional legends to strengthen place-based recentring. As Mauritians, we considered the textbook conception process as an opportunity to foreground what emerges from our land, instead of systematically relying on exogenous sources of stories.

Pedagogical assumptions and ESJ

A fourth finding concerns pedagogy. The analysis suggests that ecological and decolonial themes are embedded within the structure of the textbooks. From an ESJ perspective (Oozeerally & Hookoomsing, 2021a), social justice appears to be present through values discourse (respect, solidarity, fairness). Ecological justice emerges through the conservation and hazard discourse (extinction, habitat destruction, protection, cyclone risk). However, ecological social justice as an integrated paradigm, where environmental sustainability is explicitly linked to social equity, vulnerability and historical-material conditions, is not systematically foregrounded in task design. Environmental responsibility is often framed as prudence, protection, and compliance.

The deeper problematisation of vulnerability or structural causes of ecological harm is largely absent unless approached by teacher mediation. In this sense, Davidson's (2024) critique becomes relevant: without sufficient consideration given to material practices and histories, decoloniality risks remaining idealist. Whilst the textbooks do converge toward materiality (exploitation/habitat destruction; cyclone vulnerability), they do not systematically connect these to social stratification or historical political economy. ESJ thus remains emergent rather than structurally foundational, indicating that curriculum development exists at the threshold between reform and transformation.

Conclusion

Building on a decentred, altero-reflexive epistemology, this study establishes a dynamic equilibrium between the experiential, the multilingual and policy constraints. So doing, it suggests that decolonial pathways in curriculum and textbook design require confronting these multifaceted epistemic remnants of colonialism rather than bypassing them. By recognising how affect, culture, plurilingualism and ideology shape material development, curriculum designers can create pedagogical resources that more authentically reflect local plurilingual and pluricultural competencies and support culturally and linguistically contextualised learning. This situated, decolonial stance hence offers valuable insights for textbook development across Global South educational settings. In contexts like Mauritius where primary class teachers (also known as General Purpose teachers) in local public schools are responsible to teach both English and French among the other core and non-core subjects, teachers may mobilise their range of competencies and experiences in the teaching process, while also having the means to scaffold among the languages of the pupils' plurilingual repertoire.

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