



# Reconnecting Proficiency, Literacy, and Culture: From Theory to Practice

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**Abstract:** *What does it mean to capably communicate across languages? This article introduces two theoretical models and a lesson plan format designed to facilitate the integration of proficiency, literacy, and culture teaching in foreign language teaching. The Second Symbolic Competencies Model configures proficiency and literacy as subordinate clusters of symbolic tools that flow from a cultural core. With regard to the literacy corner of the triad, the Composite Textual Comprehension Model focuses on the often neglected mistransference of learners' first language and culture in interpreting second language texts. Both models find congruence in the Sociocultural Model Lesson Plan.*

**Key words:** *French, Spanish, culture, literacy, National Standards, sociocultural theory, teaching methods*

## Introduction

In spite of 10 years of the National Standards' dissemination, mainstream foreign language (FL) teaching continues to focus on the explanation and practice of targeted language forms (Kern, 2002; Wong, 2005) and the treatment of culture or reading tasks as "throw-in" activities (Bragger & Rice, 1999; Warford, 2006). Consequently, culture and literacy learning experiences continue to languish in the curriculum (Byrnes, 2010). Recently, a colleague remarked that some students enrolled in our FL education program at Buffalo State College were openly hostile about having to study literature and culture, claiming that communication should be the sole focus of learning an FL. This anecdote is poignant in the sense that it captures the resiliency of a folklinguistic theory about the nature of FL and second language (L2) teaching—that language is the core and that literacy and culture are peripheral considerations. These considerations beg two fundamental questions that have long intrigued FL

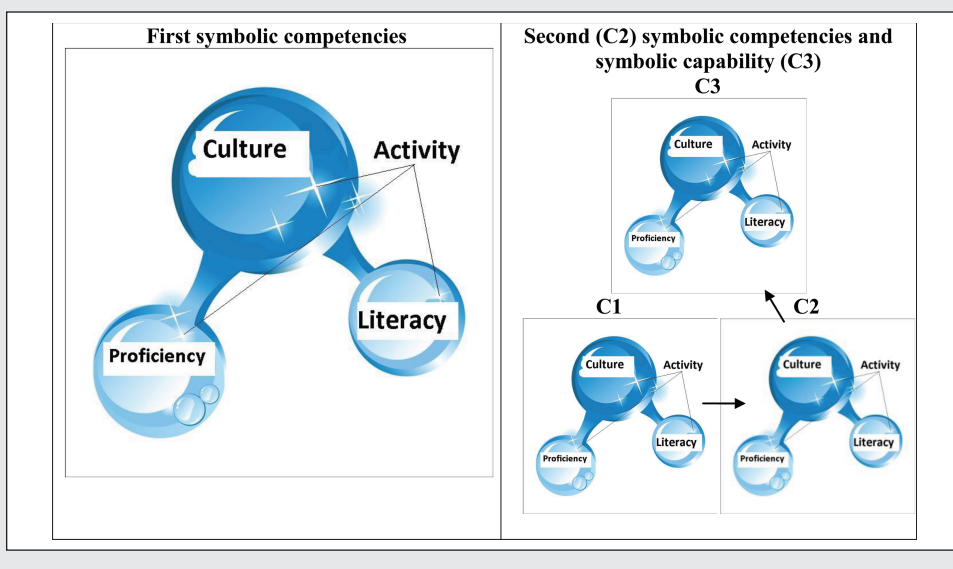
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FIGURE 1

## The Second Symbolic Competencies Model



instructors: (1) What is the true point of communication, and (2) What is the most effective means to promote communication in instructed settings? With this in mind, the goals of this article center on advancing a sociocultural model of FL instruction that integrates language, culture, and literacy into a meaningful whole that supports successful intercultural communication.

More specifically, this article introduces two models, the Second Symbolic Competencies and Composite Textual Comprehension Models (SSCM and CTCM), which reconfigure the language, literacy, and culture triad in ways that are more conceptually coherent and systematic, while also advancing the Sociocultural Model Lesson Plan (SMLP), a tool for putting the aforementioned models into practice.

### Reframing Culture, Literacy, and Proficiency: The SSCM and CTCM

The first step in establishing a framework for a way to integrate language, literacy, and culture is to replace the well-established target of second language acquisition (SLA)

with the notion of second symbolic competencies (Figure 1).

The acquisition construct, by nature, suggests that the ability to communicate is a linear, internal process of morphosyntactic development. Within the emergent language socialization paradigm, this innatist conception of language is largely dismissive of social contextual factors. Izhaki (2004, citing Whitehead, 1967), working from a Darwinian perspective, argued that there is considerable space for recognizing that “the environment has a plasticity which alters the whole aspect of evolution” and which, in fact, represents “co-origination of organism and environment” (Izhaki, 2004, p. 47). Likewise, sociocultural theory (SCT) has established a sociocognitive view of human communication in which mind and society are tightly bound to one another. To be sure, there is little room for literacy or culture—or even pragmatics—within the acquisition frame.

Proficiency, the other dominant focus of FL and L2 classrooms, likewise does little to enhance a discussion of what it takes to communicate capably across, or for that matter, even within cultures.

Poehner and Lantolf (2007), in challenging the proficiency principle, argued that its articulations continue to be limited to measurements of morphosyntactic correctness and a language-based view of communication rather than the fullest possible measure of the myriad ways meaning is conveyed. While they somewhat agreed with Kramsch's (2006) notion of symbolic competence, the authors argued that there is more profit in adopting the less fixed notion of symbolic capability, the human endowment to "create and interpret meanings that suit their social and psychological needs" (p. 6). It is reasonable to suggest that cultures and languages are inherently emergent and confluent; we prefer to take the middle road between these positions by pluralizing competency. In doing so, we posit that there are multiple and measurable boundaries both between and within modern languages and cultures (competencies) that the L2 learner must attain. Symbolic competencies, which appear, disappear, grow, and shrink in quantity and quality, represent the psychological tools intrinsic to members of a particular social system. While symbolic capability, a greater mediational faculty that is the sum of first and second symbolic competencies, is certainly the culmination of this endeavor, the focus of the enterprise researchers crudely call FL learning is the capacity to construct meanings in ways that are differentiated from their first symbolic competencies.

Current nomenclature in SLA research and pedagogy fails to address the processes just depicted; one cannot simply "acquire" new symbolic competencies. To participate effectively in new sociocultural systems, so-called language learners need to develop much more than (socio-) linguistic proficiency; they need to become culturally capable and literate. A semiotic perspective complements an SCT stance by expanding the discussion of how meaning is conveyed and derived. Peircian semiotics, as articulated by van Lier (2004), is concerned primarily with the development of sign systems, which proceed from direct,

iconic processing (emotional and sensorial perception) into indexes (referencing two or more naturally connected stimuli, such as smoke and fire) and finally into processing that adds to the previous two ways of perceiving the capacity to interpret and express meaning through the culturally determined representation of stimuli through the use of symbols, the most common variety of which are spoken words. As cultures grow beyond established notions of proficiency and literacy through digital media innovations, this may be less and less the case, a trend that will eventually force the profession to decide whether (socio-) linguistic mediation is the primary concern of instructors and learners or rather that semiosis (which potentially encompasses blogs, tweets, chats, virtual communities, gaming communities, avatars, and icons) is more central to language scholars' core objectives.

The SSCM (Warford, 2010; Figure 1) takes a historiographic, holistic look at the three previously mentioned phenomena. Historiographically speaking, Vygotsky (1986) traced the development of distinct symbolic competencies back to the fashioning of physical (i.e., axes) and psychological (i.e., the rudiments of linguistic communication and cave paintings) tools. At a later orate stage, natural and cultural phenomena were encoded into linguistic symbols, beginning with the capacity to orally represent elements of the environment and culminating in the telling and singing of stories and events. At a later level of development, linguistic systems evolved into more sophisticated forms such as Egyptian hieroglyphic etchings or the Quechua *quipu* (knot-tying) or the more recognizable form, writing. In this sense, one could argue that culture begat language, which later grew into literacy.

The structural, or perhaps chronological, arrangement of these stages of human cognitive development are predicated, as Donald (1997) suggested, on the increasing importance of social interaction among early humans and perhaps even earlier *Homo Erectus*. As social groups became larger and relationships between members

of clans became more sophisticated and interconnected, human ability to represent the world through symbols became paramount in the evolutionary journey. Donald (1997) believed, in essence, that improved tool-making, the creation of a larger lexicon, and finally the capacity for external memory (writing systems) were required by social groupings that necessitated more sophisticated symbolic processes. In this view, language developed not from innate grammatical rules, as Chomsky might argue, but rather from a need for symbolic representation of the world. Early humans would have acquired the capacity to name items well before they possessed the grammatical structures required for sentence- and phrase-making. Although certainly challenging to universal grammar as an explanation for the origins of language, a lexical-first explanation of human language development explains the communicative needs of early humans and complements meaning-first approaches to SLA; that is, humans process lexical items long before grammatical forms (Lee & vanPatten, 2003).

As Figure 1 suggests, the core of the SSCM is a holistic, interdependent sense of culture, proficiency, and literacy, a stance that resonates with Vygotsky's (1986) water molecule metaphor for development. Vygotsky argued that one cannot study water by breaking it down into its component elements (oxygen and hydrogen atoms); rather, water is the dynamic interaction of these elements. Like water, symbolic competencies must not be approached atomistically; just as the bond oxygen shares with its two hydrogen units forms a unique molecule, symbolic competencies have to be understood in terms of a central cultural core that is simultaneously the origin as well as the beneficiary of mediational activity in two essential symbolic systems: linguistic proficiency and literacy. Likewise, literacy and proficiency are dynamically interconnected. Like the electrons whose laps around the three atoms keep the water molecule together, mediational activity centered on the use of various physical and

psychological tools, whether it occurs in natural or instructed contexts, dynamically defines symbolic competencies.

The development of second symbolic competencies confronts the well-worn bonds of first culture (C1) sign systems in order to open opportunities for accessing "second" ways of knowing and being. Winnicott (1993) recognized the development of symbolic processing as the first significant developmental milestone in childhood and considered these native symbolic competencies to be omnipresent in both cognitive and social processes. The implications are formidable; if the dominant symbolic competency exercises such significant control over perception, then language instructors must take great care in scaffolding new sociocultural phenomena.

A deeper appreciation of how culture and language interact to promote second symbolic competencies suggests the need for a more prominent role for literacy in the language curriculum, a case that gains strength to the extent that the learner has developed literacy in his or her first language (L1). The relationship between literacy, culture, and communication was first raised by Hammadou (1984); it is complex and sophisticated, and its integration is particularly problematic, as (1) some college- and university-level language departments tend to bifurcate "language study" into lower-level language courses concerned with developing grammar skills and upper-level "content" courses that promote the appreciation of canonical works of literature (Kern, 2002; Tucker, 2006), and (2) the term *literacy* tends to elude simple definition. Considering literacy primarily from the vantage point of written text, White (2008) contended that forms of L2 writing cannot be seen as a mere collection of words inscribed on paper and separated from the culture from which they originate and for which they are destined. Rather, within the spaces that surround words there lies a rich field of meanings nuanced by cultural codes. Indeed, literacy, which at least in part connotes the communication of

ideas across time and distance via a writing system, is dependent upon a linguistic code that allows for the transmission of both ideas and cultural meaning among members of cultural and speech communities, often under circumstances in which there is no way for the text author to further clarify his or her meanings to the reader. In this way, even the most common forms of discourse may present as many challenges to learners as the more formal varieties associated with the great works. A more socioculturally grounded definition of literacy leads to a more expansive, literacies perspective that transcends the traditional, "capital L" literary view, summoning a range of discursive practices (Young, 2009).

Revisiting the historiographic timeline, what we refer to here as literacy evolved from language-based symbolic systems. According to Donald (1997), as cultures progressed in complexity, the need for increased memory capacity prompted the creation of writing systems that were effective and efficient means to store and codify historical and cultural narratives. The encoding of cultural meaning in texts is partly responsible for the difficulties that many L2 learners have in processing the cultural subtexts of written discourse. Students may be able to decode letters and make accurate judgments about the meaning of individual lexical or sentential elements; however, they often face difficulties when asked to decode the nuances of underlying cultural meaning. Yet in many classrooms, composite literacy is often overlooked in favor of a focus on grammar and vocabulary learning (van Lier, 1996). When literacy and cultural knowledge is treated, some FL programs employ extensive reading programs that, while important, are often unguided. Others embrace the use of chapter-ending cultural and reading blurbs that are intended to provide fodder for medium-oriented language practice activities, pushing reading into an overlooked corner of the curriculum. Difficulties inherent in literacy and the lack of time allotted to the study of literature and culture coalesce to produce a situation where L2 learners' literacy mining

is often halted just below the surface level, resulting in an incomplete and often erroneous interpretation of language.

The ability to create and interpret written texts is a critical skill that must be privileged and honed over time. New conceptualizations of literacy education, especially in foreign languages, must be forthcoming, especially given the current emphasis on literacy skill-building across the curriculum, as evidenced in the current common core movement (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). White's (2008) CTCM (see Figure 2) represents one such attempt. Basing his model on the notion that the goal of language use, whether interpretative or interactional, is communication for complete comprehension, White (2008) argued that composite textual comprehension of L2 texts requires learners to engage bottom-up decoding of lexical items and top-down interpretation strategies with (1) attention to discourse markers and extended discourse frames, as well as (2) insights into the cultural subtexts around which interaction in the target culture is constructed.

It is impossible to understate the power of the C1 cultural lens, as well as the difficulties that L2/second culture (C2) learners have in substituting new perspectives for those that have long served as the foundations for literacy. As Figure 3 suggests, a key difference between general reading skills and reading skills that promote composite textual comprehension is recognition of how mistransference of L1, C1 schemata onto L2, C2 texts can undermine a thorough reading (Hammadou, 1984). Rubinstein-Ávila (2003/2004) suggested that such struggles add to three problematic processing tendencies with which learners contend, including (1) excessive energy directed to decoding at the expense of meaning interpretation, (2) limited word recognition, and (3) decoding that lacks schemata activation (p. 290).

Taken together, the SSCM and CTCM share a common commitment to semiotic integrity in FL and L2 pedagogy. While

FIGURE 2

## The Composite Textual Comprehension Model (White, 2008)

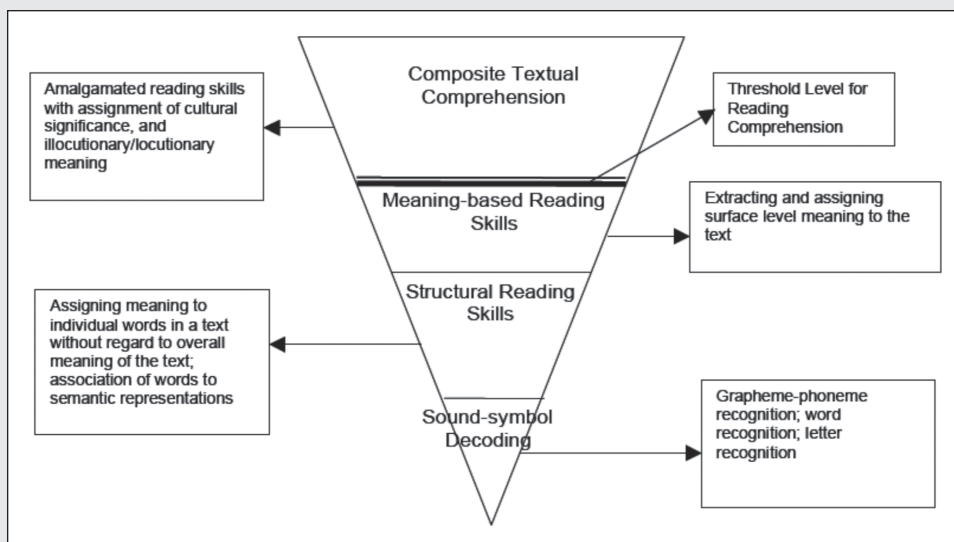
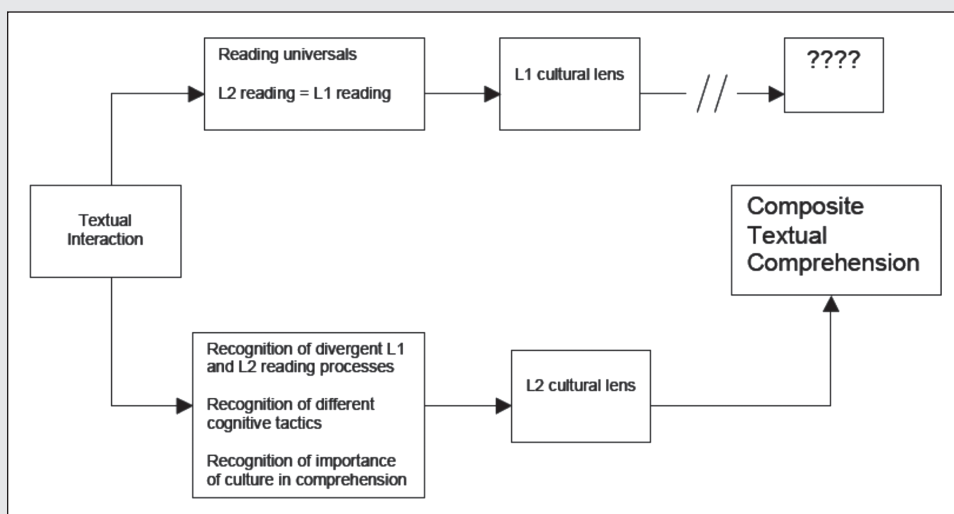


FIGURE 3

## How Composite Textual Comprehension Differs from Reader Response



they recognize the importance of understanding communication as the central aim of language development, both models challenge researchers and practitioners to remain cognizant of the rich and complex

semiotic systems that are often overlooked in the pursuit of capable communication across cultures. With regard to research, the potential for original studies based on the models is too broad a topic to fully address



in this article; moving from an SLA to a second symbolic competencies perspective in itself represents a major epistemological sea change that will require great care and innovation in the shaping of constructs and research designs. The pedagogical implications of the two models are, however, within the purview of this article and are the topic of the next section.

### **Teaching Second Symbolic Competencies and Composite Textual Comprehension**

The implications of a curriculum centered on second symbolic competencies are numerous, starting with a reconceptualization of the typical course of language study. If language learners are to be fully served in the development of second symbolic competencies, the dubious divisions between the proficiency-, civilization-, and literature-oriented curriculum need to be reconsidered. Several years ago, an MLA subcommittee advanced the imperative that language departments commit to “deeper translingual and transcultural competence across the board” (Holquist, 2007, p. 4), which is a start in the right direction. In reimagining language programs around second symbolic competencies, it makes sense to organize coursework around symbolic syllabi. Lantolf and Thorne (2006), for example, suggested organizing curricula around cultural metaphors, such as “honesty.” Teaching for second symbolic competencies must be squarely focused on meaning. The capacity to interpret and negotiate meaning is what distinguishes cultural from natural phenomena; it represents people’s ability to represent nature through symbols.

Teaching for symbolic competencies finds support in Tang’s (2006) notion of cultural performance, which entails the ability to weave a variety of physical and psychological tools and serves to expand the myopic focus on (socio-) linguistic performance in the FL curriculum. Take, for example, the everyday act of offering

and following instructions. Under a traditional cognitivist lens, one would expect to see form-focused activities designed to promote the intake of imperative verb markings. Whether one decides to follow the nativist stance of offering input practice or strong interface-oriented (de Keyser, 1998) traditional models of explaining command formation, followed by output practice activities, the core assumption is the same; the focus is on acquisition of the morphemic changes associated with forming commands in the L2. A sociolinguistic stance might transfer the focus from the grammar form to key phrases in the context of role-plays or simulations. From a semiotic perspective, even this adjustment would not address the symbolic competencies one would need to capably navigate this particular communicative act; their full measure extends beyond more established constructs like input or interaction.

According to van Lier (2004), the input unit will no longer suffice. Working from an ecological-semiotic stance, he argued that everything to which the learner is exposed merits attention as obstacles or catalysts for sign system development. In other words, it is not just the (socio-) linguistic architecture of the language class that matters—the participation structure, seating arrangement, décor, technologies, and other affordances are of equal importance in semiotic development. For example, the deceptively simple act of offering and giving instructions is subject to the rich realities of their actual manifestations in everyday cultural performance—both linguistically (the infinitive and “se” particle, in Spanish, as well as the subjunctive in noun clauses, are used more frequently than the imperative) and socioculturally (in the digital age, instructions are mediated through online forms). Transcending the structural-notional dichotomy posited by cognitive and sociolinguistic stances on the nature of language, a symbolic competencies perspective challenges instructors and researchers alike to move past a structuralist emphasis on the acquisition of

lexis and morphosyntax (structuralism), or for that matter, a sociolinguistic focus on the development of language functions; the affordance construct invites us to look at all of the mediational means that underlie the capacity to capably communicate across cultures.

With regard to pedagogical materials, authentic content is imperative; it ensures that both proficiency- and (cultural) literacy-oriented learning outcomes are respected in the service of second symbolic competencies. Because authentic texts carry the cultural code, their careful integration into the curriculum is essential; in a sense, to borrow from Kearney (2010), the work of our profession centers on helping learners to re-narrate their identities around other ways of being and making meaning. In the age of Google, YouTube, blogs, and vodcasts, more and more instructors are making use of smart classrooms, which offer nearly unlimited access to authentic media in ways that foster connections between the L2, its literacies, and cultural perspectives. A symbolic competencies perspective leads to the holistic integration of the myriad cultural tools imbued in L2 speech samples and authentic sources ranging from advertisements to historic paintings and literary works. In applying the CTCM, instructors should remember to address ways that culture influences the intentions of the authors and readers alike.

With regard to proficiency-oriented instruction, promoting second symbolic competencies requires that instructors fully address all dimensions of communicative competence, not just linguistic (grammatical) proficiency. While the teaching of socio-pragmatics and the infusion of authentic artifacts into the curriculum may offer an imperfect, perhaps idiosyncratic, snapshot of the target cultural mind and its manifestations (Tang, 2006), they nonetheless provide a template for probable conversation turns and turns of phrase, as well as a sense of its deep structure. Vygotsky (1986) referred to the sense of language as *smysl*, arguing that no linguistic unit can be grasped outside of

a dynamic, emergent valence of meanings. The essential goal of FL teaching and learning, we argue, is the uncovering of these interconnected systems of symbols.

A symbolic competencies approach calls for maximal instructor use of the L2; consequently, we concur with affirmations of maximal instructor use of the L2 within SCT (Brooks & Donato, 2002; Wells, 1999), as well as with ACTFL's (2010) call for a minimum of 90% instructor use of the target language. However, quality is at least as important as quantity. If, as the position statement asserts, instructor L2 is to be put to use in the promotion of "develop[ing] language and cultural proficiency," then as should be the case with all classroom affordances, instructor L2 must convey semiotic integrity, a sense of the linguistic, cultural, and discursive richness of communication inside the target culture; filtering the C2 through the L1, whether mediated through a lecture or a short passage in a textbook, inherently undermines an inside view of cultural manifestations. A variety of culture teaching activities potentially integrate linguistic and or socio-pragmatic learning outcomes with cultural objectives without recourse to L1. Knop (2009) advanced the Cultural Gouin Series, which takes a C2 practice or event and stages it into six to eight statements in the L2. Optimally, statements should:

1. be formulaic (i.e., steps, events)
2. avoid changes in time, person
3. make use of linguistic (emotive quality, chunking, "motherese") and extralinguistic (props, clip art) cues

For each step, the instructor may want to plan ahead of time how to convey each of the statements in the L2.

White (Warford, White, & Amato, 2010), in adapting Di Pietro's (1987, p. 2) Strategic Interaction Model, injected more of a sociocultural focus:

1. Rehearsal: Class chooses a situation, discusses both the linguistic and sociocultural aspects of how it would play out.



FIGURE 4

## Discourse Completion Task with Forced Choice Response

Context	Possible Responses	Explanation
Vous êtes dans la bibliothèque à votre école. Vous essayez de lire un livre, mais un autre étudiant, que vous ne connaissez, parle à haute voix, avec sa copine. Alors, vous vous sentez obligé de lui dire de se taire.	Vous dites : <input type="checkbox"/> Rien <input type="checkbox"/> Taisez-vous s'il vous plaît. <input type="checkbox"/> Un peu de silence, maintenant. <input type="checkbox"/> Fermez-la ! <input type="checkbox"/> S'il vous plaît. Je ne peux pas me concentrer. Alors, s'il vous plaît, parlez moins fort.	
Vous êtes chez votre patron. Il vous sert de la viande, mais vous êtes végétarien.	Vous dites: <input type="checkbox"/> Rien <input type="checkbox"/> Excusez-moi, mais je ne mange jamais de viande. C'est horrible ! <input type="checkbox"/> C'est dégoûtant de manger de pauvres animaux. <input type="checkbox"/> J'ai mal au ventre. Il faut que je rentre chez moi. <input type="checkbox"/> Cela a l'air somptueux, mais je suis végétarien. Alors, je prends des légumes et un peu de salade.	

II. Performance: Students perform role-plays based on their understanding of target cultural and linguistic norms. This might be as simple as asking for directions or as complex as disagreeing with an instructor over a grade.

III. Debriefing: After the role-play, the class discusses the performance and critiques its appropriateness given the context. The role-play can be repeated to reinforce concepts and to provide opportunities for practice.

Yet another variant, which adapts processing instruction to culture learning outcomes, is the Discourse Completion Task (Figure 4; see Levenston & Blum, 1987) with forced-choice response. In these activities, students are provided a detailed account of a situation and asked to choose the most appropriate response from a list. As a whole, the class can discuss the response and provide a rationale for the choice that was made. This debriefing, as it were, provides the opportunity to explore surface interactional differences, as in proxemics, politeness formulas, and kinesthetics, as well as the deeper cultural differences on which the surface markers are based.

With regard to teaching for proficiency and literacy, traditional bottom-up instructional approaches will not suffice. In terms of the former, the persistent and pervasive

focus on grammatical competence has produced learners who may be efficient morphosyntactic processors, but as Pearson (2006) noted, even speakers with a high degree of grammatical competence may fail to maintain even basic conversations with native speakers due to inappropriate transfer of L1 to L2 socio-pragmatics. Regarding literacy, the CTCM establishes the limitations of focusing on the nuts and bolts of textual interpretation without more top-down, holistic heuristics for understanding the cultural codes imbued in L2 texts.

Furthermore, the instructor must always bear in mind the interconnected reflexive nature of culture, proficiency, and literacy. Tang's (2006) "Two M's" notion of cultural manifestations within a given cultural mind provides a useful framework for this purpose, reminding researchers that cultural manifestations may be simultaneously imbued with both literacy and proficiency-oriented aspects that are informed by a common aspect of the cultural mind. For example, the practice of playing or listening to a Mexican *corrido* may be construed both as a spontaneous speech event, centering on words and utterances shared and received in a musical performance, and in the form of sheet music that may act as a literacy event, representing an asynchronous external memory system for encoding and preserving events and values of importance

FIGURE 5

**Wiley's (2000) Questioning Strategies for Photos Depicting Target Cultures**

Description	Analysis/Info. Gathering	Comparison
What do you see in this picture?	Can you tell me where this picture was taken?	What, if anything makes this picture Fr.?/...Sp.?
Can you describe some of the items?	Do some of the objects in the picture have historical significance? Why?	Could a similar picture be taken here in _____?
What are the people doing?	Does this picture tell you anything special about life in _____?	Where would you go in US to find a contrasting picture?
How are they dressed?	What aspect of _____ society is expressed?	Could this picture be taken in other parts of _____?

to Mexican Americans. All cultural manifestations, whether taken primarily as literacy or as speech events, should be respected as complex discourses governed by a central cultural mind, and the instructor should be skillful in planning a variety of leading questions to guide students in navigating rules that are often difficult for learners to discern without assistance. In preparing foci for analyzing literacy events, Kramsch (2003) suggested attending to (1) events depicted; (2) target audience; (3) purpose; (4) register (i.e., formal, informal), related to audience; (5) a stance or tone (serious, ironic, enthusiastic); (6) prior text (relationship to a particular discourse); and (7) setting/perspective. Defined broadly, visual media like photos and videos can also be considered as texts. Figure 5 presents a taxonomy of questions targeting the exploration of photos depicting scenes from the target culture (Wiley, 2000). Judd (1999, p. 162), in addressing the integration of speech events into language teaching, offered some guidelines for selecting samples:

1. Context in which students will encounter the targeted speech event
2. Likely interlocutors, their social status, age, gender, and additional factors
3. Topics to be developed

With regard to a pedagogical framework for instruction that aligns to the SSCM and CTCM, we recognize that many excellent instructors are able to neatly bind language, literacy, and culture in service to second

symbolic competencies within the two major lesson plan formats currently in circulation. That said, the PACE Model's (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002) emphasis on grammar concept development and the Interactive Model's (Shrum & Glisan, 2005) focus on surface-level reader response-oriented text engagement do not specifically address the theoretical models advanced in this article. In addition, we propose the SMLP, which is closely attuned to the need for instruction that puts second symbolic competencies at the center of the planning process. In this model, instruction moves toward a cultural center, allowing for the grammatical, lexical, and cultural background knowledge needed to explore the surface and deep characteristics of the cultural phenomenon. From the access point, a cultural artifact, or other authentic material, provides the basis for an in-depth exploration of the cultural element and the ways in which the phenomenon represents the two cultural minds of the C2 society. Finally, while keeping the cultural element in mind, lessons move away from direct interaction with authentic material as they engage learners in meaningful language use that brings together the form-meaning-culture triad.

Following are the key features of this lesson plan variation:

1. Example (authentic artifact with pre-identified second symbolic competencies): vocabulary, grammar, socio-pragmatics, cultural manifestations

2. Exploration (mediated by leading questions and other dialogic interventions; includes preliminary activation of L1 and C1 assumptions, as well as critical investigation of the symbolic competencies imbued in the example)
3. Extension (students engage in some kind of cultural performance that reflects the second symbolic competencies presented and explored)

Like a tree, this model offers the opportunity for the instructor to branch off into a myriad of directions but remains rooted, as does language, in the cultural roots of the C2 community. In addition, the model allows instructors the opportunity to tailor the lesson to the proficiency, cognitive, and emotional developmental level of the learners. In short, classes for novice learners can focus on binary, forced-choice questions (e.g., yes/no and here/there question forms). The model also assumes an SCT stance on the FL learner; consequently, the lesson should be intensely dialogic and exploratory throughout the process, employing interactionist dynamic assessment (DA) (Poehner, 2008). Interactionist DA, as the name suggests, centers on carefully crafted cues and leading questions, as well as other verbal tools that instructors use to stay within students' emergent zones of proximal development, the area between what learners can accomplish on their own and a higher level of capability they can attain, given appropriate assistance from the instructor or a more capable peer. For reasons advanced earlier in this article, we think that instructors can and should maintain the L2 to the maximum possible extent through all five stages of the SMLP; however, we concur with the established stance in SCT that students should have complete freedom to use the L1, as it represents an essential problem-solving tool for navigating language learning tasks (Brooks & Donato, 1994; Poehner, 2008). The five stages of the SMLP include I. Activation of Schemata, II. Text Interpretation, III. Sociocultural Interpretation, IV. Socio-

cultural Presentation, and V. Sociocultural Debriefing.

### *I. Activation of Schemata*

Prior to presenting a speech or discourse event such as a broadcast, video, filmed, or audiotaped speech event or printed source, the instructor poses lexically and morphosyntactically simple top-down (i.e., Kramsch, 2003; Wiley, 2000) and bottom-up leading questions about cultural conventions (in L2) that pertain to the text that students are about to explore. The instructor then collects students' comments, translating them into the L2 if offered by students in the L1.

- Top-down activation: May center on students' (C1) experiences of the symbolic competencies in question. If a video or photo is the focus of the lesson, further activate students' schemata by asking some leading questions to preview text (freeze frame, if video is involved) and generate some hypotheses about content. These hypotheses should also be recorded for subsequent (dis)confirmation.
- Bottom-up activation: Address any unfamiliar lexical or idiomatic items that may undermine comprehension of the text vis-à-vis a glossary and, in the case of printed text, by asking students to scan for and present unfamiliar terms for clarification. This stage may also anticipate lexical items, such as false cognates, that may mistakenly engage the L1.

### *II. Text Interpretation*

At this stage, the goal is to combine bottom-up and top-down leading questions to process text:

Bottom-up strategies (in the L2):

- What do you think \_\_\_\_\_ means? Is \_\_\_\_\_ a cognate or false cognate?
- What do you think of when you picture \_\_\_\_\_?
- What does person A ask? How does person B respond?
- What form of the verb does person A/B use in addressing the interlocutor?

Top-down strategies (in the L2):

- What is the purpose of \_\_\_\_? Is it to \_\_\_\_? Etc.
- What is the emotional state of person A/B?
- What are the interactants trying to accomplish?
- Do they accomplish the task?
- What are the phases of this speech event? (beginning, middle, end?)

### III. Sociocultural Interpretation

The goal of this stage is for the instructor to lead learners through an examination of the points raised in the activation stage. Sample leading questions include:

- What similarities do you see between the way native speakers approach “X” and our approach to “X” (for examining L1 and C1 assumptions).
- Which of our assumptions about this text were correct? ... incorrect?
- What are the rules for carrying out this speech event in the L2? (address relevant grammatical, lexical, discourse, and socio-pragmatic elements)

### IV. Sociocultural Presentation

Students develop an adaptation or re-creation of the presented text. This stage aligns to the role-play simulation stage of Di Pietro’s Strategic Interaction Model (1987).

### V. Sociocultural Debriefing

The instructor and the students examine the appropriateness of the students’ simulations against the linguistic and cultural elements identified at Stage III and the assumptions generated at Stage I. There may be some lingering transference of L1 and C1 to the L2 and C2 features.

There is no better evidence of the rift between culture and language teaching than the widespread tendency for instructors to teach culture through the native tongue (Edstrom, 2006; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). This practice is detrimental from a

second symbolic competencies perspective. If language instructors want students to really interpret the target culture from the inside, then the L1 has no place in instructor discourse; however, as alluded to earlier, students should not be dissuaded from using their L1, as it will persist as the language of cognition (Brooks & Donato, 1994) even into the highest levels of L2 proficiency attainment (Centeno-Cortés & Jiménez, 2004). Throughout the lesson, the target language should predominate as the medium of instruction. The accommodation of second symbolic competencies, as we have stated previously, is a monumental task; hence, they should be omnipresent in classroom affordances—both verbal (i.e., instructor talk) and visual (i.e., furnishings, posters, and other media); therefore, students need to experience the L2 as the means and not just the end of FL study.

The introduction of any or all of the aforementioned additional foci should not detract from the semiotic integrity of the speech event or text depicted; the instructor should always start with the question: What are the core symbolic competencies imbued in this text or that speech event? Attention to instructor discourse, and in particular, the lexical and morphosyntactic features of leading questions, is a central concern throughout the lesson. Even in the complete absence of any focus on form, instructor input should be level-appropriate and foster interactional competence by modeling how to ask and answer simple wh- questions and manage topics beyond the I-R-E (instructor initiates, student responds, instructor evaluates) scripts that are still legion in today’s classrooms.

## Conclusion

Research has well established that the endeavor called language learning is not an enterprise situated in either cognition or community but rather in both (Watson-Gegeo, 2004). Mainstream language instruction, however, continues to be custodially concerned with the four F’s treatment of

culture learning (food, folklore, festivals, and facts; Kramsch, 1991), addressing the five C's of the National Standards as an accretion rather than a synergy of learning experiences at the expense of richer use of authentic content and community connections (Allen, 2002; Bird, Hlas, Watzke, & Valencia, 2011). The unmet challenge of the FL teaching profession is the confrontation with the subtle and pervasive influence of L1 and C1 affordances, the primary filters through which learners and instructors approach classroom practices.

The SSCM and CTCM address this need, drawing from an expansive and tightly interconnected consideration of communication within and across cultures that resonates with standards-based pedagogy; however, they require a practical lesson syntax that fully and coherently engages the interconnections among text, talk, and core cultural perspectives. Furthermore, the SMLP format introduced here has the potential to integrate the National Standards' cultural (Standards 2.1 [practices and perspectives], 2.2 [products and perspectives], 4.2 [cultural comparisons]) and literacy-oriented learning outcomes (3.1 [connecting with other disciplines], 3.2 [authentic viewpoints], 4.1 [language comparisons]) in ways that promote authentic and capable engagement in cross-cultural communication and exploration (Standards 1 [Communication] and 5 [Communities]). In order to facilitate the dissemination of the SMLP, the authors have created a Web site (Warford & White, 2012) that contains SMLP examples for use in French and Spanish classrooms, additional resources, and an online lesson plan template that educators can use to contribute to a database.

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