

THE BUMPY ROAD TO LITERACY IN A SECOND LANGUAGE:
A SYSTEMIC-FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at literacy in the context of second language learning, expanding the scope of the notion of 'literacy' to include not only written but also spoken language, and redefining the concept of 'proficiency' in an attempt to unveil the reasons underlying failure to master a second language.

A systemic-functional stance is taken to identify the point at which stagnation tends to happen and to explain how successful second language teaching paves the way for the development of literacy in the target language. Systemic-Functional Linguistics sees language as a meaning resource where choices in the resources provided by the lexicogrammar are directly motivated by extralinguistic factors at the level of the context of situation. Whereas native speakers make those choices in an intentional –yet unconscious– way, learners make their selections intentionally and non-automatically (i.e. consciously). Following up on this, I contend that proficiency is achieved through the automatization of choices in the lexicogrammatical resources, which in turn accounts for the ability to function effectively in a given context of situation within a particular context of culture; i.e. being literate in the language of that culture.

It is, therefore, claimed in this paper that effective teaching should focus on developing the strategies to negotiate discourse practices in a context of situation through the appropriate, and progressively more unconscious, use of the resources in the lexicogrammar. This kind of teaching in which the linguistic relates to the extralinguistic fosters the development of empathy with the target culture, thus ironing out the bumpy road to literacy.

KEY WORDS: Language learning, systemic-functional, literacy

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Introduction

This is a paper on and around the development of what is usually studied and discussed under the name of ‘proficiency’ in the context of second language (henceforth L2) learning. Yet it is going to begin by proposing that the term ‘proficiency’ be relinquished in favour of that of ‘literacy’. The reason is twofold; in the first place, ‘proficiency’ may be too reminiscent of the actual teaching environment, whereas ‘literacy’ opens up the scope to the use of language in society. Thus, speaking of ‘literacy’ rather than ‘proficiency’ allows us to integrate second language learning into the overall cultural semiotics of which each language is a manifestation. I am aware that this use of ‘literacy’ is still widely frowned upon by those who associate it with –and circumscribe it to– the written medium, which brings us to the second reason why I think it is time to move ahead and substitute it for the somewhat eroded ‘proficiency’.

This second reason has to do with the fact that the notion of literacy has expanded over the last decades: whereas it used to be very much restricted to the ability to read and write, different kinds of literacy have joined both the technical and the common parlance. Thus, terms such as ‘scientific literacy’, ‘economic literacy’, ‘visual literacy’, ‘information literacy’ (NCREL 2003) –not to mention the pervasive ‘computer literacy’– have all contributed to push the semantic boundaries of the concept of literacy. It is therefore not surprising that ‘literacy’ has also started to be used to refer to the overall command of language, not only written, but also spoken. Online definitions of literacy such as the ones found in Educationoasis (2003-2005), i.e. “the ability to read, write, communicate, and comprehend”; Sumak *et al.* (2001), i.e. “being able to speak, listen, read, write, and view”; and NWT, Education, Culture, and Employment (2002), i.e. “the ability to read, write, calculate, speak, and understand as well as communicate with others”, illustrate the extension of the meaning of literacy beyond the realm of the written word. Within more mainstream educational literature, literacy is used in this broader sense by Hasan (1996a), who defends the idea of literacy as ‘making sense’ both through the written and the spoken modes.

Literacy in this wider sense has also been defined as ‘the ability to function effectively within a given set or sets of discourse practices embedded in their social and cultural contexts.’¹ Being literate in a language would thus be the re-expression of having an advanced level of proficiency in that language. In lower levels, the speakers’ ability –as in the definition of literacy above– is limited. As learners move up the scale, and as their linguistic accuracy improves, the range of discourse practices in which they can function effectively widens.

In spite of the proposed demotion of the term ‘proficiency’, I do not claim that it should be abandoned altogether. Rather, I find it useful to keep the term in its non-absolute or transitional sense, i.e. to refer to the different levels or stages leading to the consecution of literacy. By doing this we will avoid employing the same term to refer both to the transition, i.e. low proficiency level, intermediate proficiency level, etc., and to the goal, i.e. ‘proficiency’ as in *he is proficient in Spanish*, which we will now call ‘literacy’. This terminological distinction allows us to use ‘proficiency’ to refer to pedagogical, classroom-setting-related issues such as the (proficiency) scale and its levels, as well as the characteristics associated with each level, and speak of ‘literacy’ in the more culturally integrated sense of what learners at high levels of proficiency can do with the target language in the target culture (or target culture-like) setting. As this paper unfolds, we will see further implications of the proficiency/literacy split.

The literature on the communicative teaching of L2 abounds in the treatment of strategies to help learners move up the ‘proficiency’ scale. There is an agreement on the need for contextualized teaching, so that learners have the chance ‘to practice using language in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture’ (Omaggio 2001: 139). Learners should, therefore, learn through practice, and that practice should emulate, as far as possible, real life situations. We can see a twofold effect in this: by practising with the language in target-culture-like settings, learners are in the first place guaranteed a soft transition from the classroom to real-life situations in the target language/culture. Secondly, contextualized teaching allows learners not only to practice with the language, but also to understand how that language relates to the extralinguistic

¹ In the “call for papers” for EISFW 16, Miraflores de la Sierra, Spain, 2004. This paper is an extension of my presentation at that workshop.

aspects of the target culture, what Omaggio (2001: 349), after Brooks (1975: 21) calls ‘beliefs, behaviour, and values.’

SFL literature, in turn, while not neglecting L2 learning (e.g. Melrose 1995), boasts a wider range of works dealing with L1 acquisition. Although recent literature on L1 acquisition provides a lot of insights, Halliday (1975) is a major source of information, and inspiration, on the issue. With his account of Nigel’s linguistic evolution until the age of two, Halliday paves the way for a great deal of studies dealing with ontogenetic evolution and the pedagogy of L1 (e.g. Christie 1985, 1989; Painter and Martin 1986; Reid 1987; Painter 1984, 1989, 2004; Hasan and Cloran 1990; Oldenburg 1990; Hasan 1996b; Halliday 2004). Those studies have greatly contributed to improve the strategies employed to help children develop literacy in its broadest sense. The works inspired by Halliday’s insights are not circumscribed to the SFL circle; they have provided sociolinguists and educators with a suitable theoretical framework to carry out their projects (e.g. Wells 1981).

This paper takes an SFL stance to address an endemic problem in L2 learning: despite the existence of ever better targeted teaching methods, there still are several societies (notably the Spanish, the Italian, the French, or the British) where many L2 learners strive –and often fail– to reach a level of proficiency enabling them to function effectively in the target culture. To put it in other words, they remain L2 illiterate.

It has been demonstrated, in reaction to the Direct Method, that the strategies deployed to teach L2 should not mirror the circumstances under which children acquire their mother tongue (Rivers 1981; Higgs and Clifford 1982; Omaggio 2001). The different ontogenetic circumstances of children and learners demand different approaches. Nevertheless, as we will see, the L1 acquisition and L2 learning processes have a lot in common. I will contend here that in both cases there is an initial stage of working out the lexicogrammatical pattern of the language, accompanied by an increasing automatization of the process of making choices in the resources provided by that lexicogrammatical pattern. Once choice making is automatized and the linguistic pattern is activated, we can say that the ‘linguistic code’ of that particular language has

been cracked, and the 'sponge' effect starts: everything falls much more easily into place.

I will discuss in these pages how the L1 pattern conditions L2 learning, and I will try point at the way in which L2 teaching can benefit from the consideration of what I call 'pattern-activation' approach. This approach relies on the existing cline from the extralinguistic context to the lexicogrammar: the learning and automatization of choices in the latter bring about the understanding of the former. This, I will argue, fosters the development of empathy with the target culture, which in turn enables learners to become increasingly more literate in that target language/culture.

To seek the activation of the pattern, and thus avoid stagnation, it will be claimed that teaching should focus on developing the strategies to negotiate discourse practices in a context of situation through the appropriate, and progressively more unconscious, use of the resources in the lexicogrammar.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section provides an overview of the theoretical bases underpinning this work, i.e. the concept of 'teaching for cultural understanding' in the proficiency-oriented method, as in Omaggio (2001), and the semiotic dimensions of SFL, notably stratification, instantiation, and axis, as explained in Caffarel *et al.* (2004) and Halliday and Matthiessen (1999). After that, we will look at the synergy created by the combination of both approaches in an attempt to really understand the importance of culturally-based L2 instruction. This is followed by the presentation of the concept of 'language pattern', leading to a discussion of the similarities and differences in its activation by children and L2 learners as well as of the reasons underlying failure to achieve literacy in L2. The paper then zeroes in on the identification of the level at which many L2 learners get stuck, followed by the suggestion of genre-oriented teaching as the best way to keep learners from stagnating, as well as a remedy for those already in the mire. Finally, the last section will present the potential benefits that the approach here suggested may have in terms of the development of literacy in L2 learners, and the implications thereof.

1. Culture and language

Communicative and proficiency-oriented methods stress the importance of teaching L2 within a cultural framework. The insertion of culture in the L2 curriculum aims, among other things, to help overcome the ethnocentric attitude (Cf. Omaggio 2001: 347) that prevents learners from understanding the relevance of learning a L2. This attitude seriously threatens the whole L2 learning process and is eventually responsible for the endemic problem existing in many countries regarding L2 learning.

If the L2 is taught out of its cultural context, it becomes an end in itself, by which the whole purpose is defeated. L2 learning should rather be regarded by students as a means to an end, i.e. the opening to a new culture and the possibility of functioning effectively in the situations conforming that culture. If learners are not given the chance to look at the L2 learning process in that way, the motivation is lost, they see only the trees (grammar, vocabulary, etc.), not the forest (the target culture), and learning a L2 becomes a drudgery. If this happens, the battle is bound to be lost.

Stern (1983) and Omaggio (2001), among others, acknowledge that the inclusion of culture in the classroom is, in the practice, insufficient. The causes for such a shortcoming, as pinpointed in the literature, are essentially the following: lack of time (Galloway 1985), teacher fear of not knowing enough (Seelye 1993), teacher fear of students' reactions to the target culture (Galloway 1985), lack of training to teach culture (Crawford-Lange and Lange 1984), and –very importantly– indeterminacy in the definition of culture (Stern 1983). All these causes point in a similar direction: a misunderstanding of both the role and the meaning of culture in the L2 classroom.

Omaggio (2001: 349), following Brooks (1971, 1975), identifies the kind of culture that should underlie L2 teaching as the one reflecting the beliefs, behaviour, and values of the native speakers of the target language. This is known as 'little-c' culture, versus the 'big-C' culture dealing with the likes of Literature, Arts, or History. We can understand how the insertion of the latter kind of culture in the L2 curriculum can be both scary to instructors and off-putting to learners who already struggle with their own 'big-C' culture. The aim, therefore, is to develop empathy with the L2 'little-c' culture,

so learners may at a point act as native-like as possible –both linguistically and extralinguistically– in a target culture setting. Once empathy exists, the interest for the ‘big-C’ culture may arise in some learners as a natural entailment to the opening to a new world. If this happens, both the learners’ command of the L2 and their understanding of the target culture will gain from it, but that is part of the out-of-the-classroom L2 learning process.

Although not all methodological approaches agree on the importance of the development of empathy to master a second language, a systemic functional stance as the one I will be adopting here cannot obviate the implications of teaching the language semiotics as an instantiation of the cultural semiotics. Whether we call this ‘developing empathy’ or otherwise, the understanding of the target culture is key to the whole issue of becoming L2 literate, as the discussion above has tried to show.

Omaggio (2001: 355-356) explains Hanvey’s (1979) model for developing cross-cultural awareness in the quest for empathy, as illustrated in table 1. We can observe that the goal is to take learners from outside to inside the culture. When they are outside (levels I and II), learners tend to interpret the target culture antagonistically, i.e. what is different from their own culture is wrong, or at least strange. On the other hand, once cultural awareness develops (levels III and IV), learners start to accept the target culture and progressively learn to act –and, most importantly, feel– like a native speaker. Level IV is evidently the ideal goal, but –as Omaggio (2001: 356) points out– level III ‘may be more achievable’. I think we should add that level III is more achievable **in the classroom**: The appreciation of the target culture by learners at that level can be a first step for them to want to go farther, e.g. by spending some time in the target culture setting. Instructors, therefore, may not be able to provide the highest level of empathy in the classroom, but they can, and should try to, pave the ground for learners to have access to it.

Levels of cultural awareness			
Level	Data	Mode	Interpretation
I	Superficial stereotypes	Tourism text	Exotic, bizarre
II	Significant and subtle contrasts	Culture conflicts	Unbelievable, irrational
III	Significant and subtle contrast	Intellectual analysis	Believable
IV	Awareness as insider	Cultural immersion	Believable from subjective familiarity

TABLE 1 Levels of cultural awareness (after Omaggio 2001: 355)

The integration of culture in L2 teaching as presented by Omaggio and others has important consequences. Firstly, learning a L2 becomes a vehicle to penetrate another culture (Seelye 1993), with the consequent personal enrichment for learners. Secondly, studying language through culture enables learners to ‘feel the fittingness of the detail as perceived by the bearer of the other culture’ (Nostrand, 1974: 273). This idea is of vital importance for the purposes pursued in this paper, since it nicely fits with the systemic conception of language as a resource to construe experience (Halliday and Matthiessen 1999: 66-98). Different languages construe reality differently, i.e. they use different lexicogrammatical resources. Therefore –and sticking to the field of L2 learning– the learning of the resources of the L2 will only be effective if learners understand the world which those linguistic resources construe. If, on the other hand, L2 learning is limited to linguistic aspects such as grammar and vocabulary, learners will have nothing to hang on to in order to understand the significance of what they are studying (not necessarily learning).

Is it time now, then, to have a look at the way the tandem language/culture is dealt with in SFL so we can later exploit the synergy resulting from the two

complementary views presented in this section. To do so, I am going to discuss those aspects of SFL theory that most closely concern the way in which language relates to culture, and the way in which linguistic selections are made by speakers in order to express the intended meaning. By understanding how linguistic choices are ultimately determined by extralinguistic factors, we can later try to suggest an approach to L2 teaching that activates the same kind of mechanisms in learners.

Matthiessen (1995), Martin (1992), Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), and Caffarel *et al.* (2004) are good sources to explore the semiotic dimensions of SFL. Amid the global dimensions –those organising the whole system of language in context (Caffarel *et al.* 2004)– we find ‘stratification, instantiation, and metafunction.’ ‘Stratification’ refers to the cline ‘context (of culture and of situation)/(discourse) semantics/lexicogrammar/phonology (or graphology)’, which is a way of expressing how the extralinguistic determines the linguistic. Each level of symbolic abstraction is realised by the immediately inferior one (context being the most abstract, and phonology/graphology the least). ‘Instantiation’ has to do with the transition from the semantic potential (both contextual and linguistic) available to speakers, to the actualisation of that potential, i.e. transition from system to text. Finally, ‘metafunction’ refers to the complementary modes of meaning and the resources provided by each one of these: ideational resources for construing experience, interpersonal resources for enacting social relations, and textual resources for organising the first two as discourse, i.e. managing the flow of information. Each one of these metafunctions depends, in turn, on the contextual register variables of field (nature of what is happening), tenor (nature, statuses, and roles of participants), and mode (organisation, role, and channel of language), respectively.

At local level –i.e. regarding the organisation of each stratal subsystem of language, namely semantics, lexicogrammar, and phonology (Caffarel *et al.* 2004)– there are two dimensions, i.e. ‘rank and axis.’ The former orders units into a hierarchy so as to facilitate the manageability of the systems. At the lexicogrammatical level, for instance, ‘rank’ is responsible for the scale ‘clause/group (or phrase)/word/ /morpheme.’ ‘Axis’ explains the two different modes of semiotic organisation: paradigmatic (system)

and syntagmatic (structure). In SFL the system is the starting point where choices can be made, and the structure results from the realisation of those choices.

As said above, we will focus on the global dimensions of stratification and instantiation, and the local one of axis, since they deal with issues intimately related to the ideas developed in this paper. Stratification opens the door from language to context and vice versa. This invites to explore the ways in which L2 teaching could open that door to learners so they can access the context of culture of the L2 through the language. Axis provides the ground for the actual mechanics of linguistic production – potential and choice– which will allow us to see how L2 teaching may seek to facilitate the way for learners to approximate native speaker functional and logogenetic skills.²

Now that both theoretical frameworks have been introduced, the next section will look to the way literacy-oriented L2 teaching can profit from the insights provided by SFL, notably regarding the understanding of the nature of the cline between culture and context.

2. The resources of language

We have just seen that, in the SFL approach, language is determined by context, both of culture and of situation. Martin (1992) is a helpful source to understand the transition from the former to the latter. This author states that ‘texts are social processes and need to be analysed as manifestations of the culture they in large measure construct’ (1992: 493). If we apply this to the domain of L2 teaching, we can understand the need to deal with the L2 as a manifestation of the target culture. The texts, written or spoken, used in the teaching process cannot be viewed as mere texts with a grammar, a vocabulary, and a story, but also as constituents of a (‘small-c’) culture.

As said above, the contexts of culture and of situation are the starting point in the cline from the contextual to the linguistic planes. In order to bring such abstract concepts to more practical grounds, we need to resort to the communication planes of genre, at the level of context of culture, and register, at the level of context of situation

² See Halliday and Matthiessen 1999:18 for the concept of logogenesis vs. ontogenesis.

(Martin 1992: 495). At a yet more general level in stratification, Martin (1992: 575) also distinguishes ideology, i.e. the different kinds of discourses constitutive of a language, reflecting heterogeneity in the speech community and semiotic change. We do not need for our purposes here to go thus far into the context plane, so our starting point continues to be that of genre in the context of culture.

Martin (1992: 560) quotes Hasan (1977: 229) about genre: ‘associated with each genre of text –i.e. type of discourse– is a generalised structural formula, which permits an array of actual structures. Each complete text must be a realisation of a structure from such an array.’ I find this of particular relevance for the way in which L2 teaching should address the development of literacy. Each culture has a vast number of possible genres, i.e. ways of arranging text, and L2 learners are in principle biased by the generic resources of their mother tongue. If L2 teaching does not focus on texts as realisations of genres proper to the target culture, it deprives learners of the most important link, i.e. that which makes the text meaningful not in itself but in relation to all the texts possible as a manifestation of that target culture. As said above, failing to deal with language as a means to an end –i.e. the key to another culture, to another way of construing our experience of the world– may seriously attempt against motivation in learners.

Another important advantage obtained from approaching L2 teaching generically is that genre provides support for learners to hold on to. Its sheer generalised structural formula guides learners along the communication process. Following Swales (1990: 37) it can be said that genre is ‘valuable because it is clarificatory, not because it is classificatory.’ Fowler (1982: 286), writing on literary genre, says that it provides ‘a communication system, for the use of writers in writing, and readers and critics in reading and interpreting.’ The same can be said here about genre in the L2 learning setting: it certainly provides a communication system for the use of instructors in teaching, and learners in learning. If instructors and learners are aware of the genres of the target culture they will have a clear and mutual goal, i.e. get to master those genres.

The study of the role of genre in education has a long tradition within SFL (e.g. Painter and Martin 1986; Reid 1987; Rothery 1989; Christie 1988, 1989, 1991; Martin

1993). The consideration of genre can also help methodologists and teachers sequence the learning process. As L2 proficiency increases, learners become more creative with the language, moving from a relatively predictable use, with concrete topics and contexts, to a wider range of possibilities, including hypothesising, giving points of view, etc. (see table 2, below, for an illustration of this evolution). Therefore, the first types of genre to which learners should be exposed are dialogic ones with a lot of turn-taking and a relatively well-defined goal, such as Ventola's (1987, 1995) classic one of service encounters. Once learners are proficient, or literate, in the use of those genres, they will be ready to face other genres, and combinations thereof, requiring more creative and less clearly structured uses of the language, e.g. discussion or exploration.

In order to be L2 literate, learners need to know both the type of genre to choose on every occasion and also how to instantiate it, i.e. use an appropriate rhetorical mode. This brings us directly to the next stage in the cline of stratification, i.e. the context of situation. Because not all possible generic structures are possible at all times, L2 learners should be able to decide at each stage the generic structure to follow, with the corresponding restriction on possibilities determined by register variables. The better learners know how to juggle with the variables of field, tenor and mode, the more literate they will be.

Continuing the stratificational descent we reach the semantic stratum, which grants access to the linguistic plane through the door of the metafunctions. These are activated by choices which are made at the level of the context of situation, and which, in turn, are realised in the lexicogrammar. Therefore, if L2 instruction is contextualized, learners' exposure to texts, as well as practice with the language, should always relate to the contextual plane in terms of genre and register. Register, the same as we saw with genre, should guide learners in the lexicogrammatical choices they make.

We can look now at the issue of teaching in culture in a new light. We saw above that the proficiency-oriented approach sees teaching in a cultural framework as essential to the development of empathy. Once empathy with the target culture exists in learners, these can behave like natives in a target culture setting. By taking a generic

approach to L2 teaching, the target language becomes a tool to deal with situations, lexicogrammatical choices being determined by register variables and –ultimately– by the genre-type most suitable to those situations. Learning to use the genres of the target culture, and learning to make the appropriate register selections, means learning to behave like a native speaker, i.e. developing empathy.

We see now the insights that can be made by looking at the issue of empathy development from a systemic functional perspective. The optimal account given by SFL of the way in which language relates to context has far-reaching consequences than simply identifying the kind of culture that should be taught –i.e. ‘small-c’ culture– to develop empathy and thus foster literacy. SFL shows us where to find that ‘small-c’ culture, i.e. in the contexts of culture and situation, how it is manifested, i.e. through the different types of genre, and how to deal with it, i.e. by the instantiation of particular types of genre and the consideration of the register variables of field, tenor, and mode.

If I say that the consequences for L2 teaching are far-reaching, it is because the whole issue of developing literacy in learners through contextualized teaching takes a new dimension. It is not a question of finding activities that favour the awakening of cultural awareness in learners. The stance taken here is a lot more straightforward. It enables us to approach the whole act of L2 teaching as one in which culture and language are so intimately intertwined that neither of them can be conceived without the other; by learning the language, we are learning the context, and vice versa. Teaching language through culture is, therefore, not simply more effective than teaching language in isolation; it is the only way to do it, since language and culture are ends of the same continuum. If we fail to understand the essentiality of this relationship, L2 literacy will be an unreachable goal.

The remainder of this paper looks at other domains of SFL theory in search of further insights that may help streamline L2 teaching methodology.

3. The pattern of language

Once stratification –with its implications for the teaching of L2 in context– has been discussed, it is time now to have a look at the insights that can be obtained from

the consideration of the domains of instantiation and axis. We saw before that the former has to do with the transition from the potential, the systems available to speakers, to the actualisation of that potential within texts. In the context of text processing, Matthiessen and Halliday (1999: 382) say that ‘in generation, they [processes of instantiation] have to move from potential to instance (from system to text); and in analysis, they have to move from instance to potential (from text to system).’ This is of particular relevance to us here, because the dichotomy analysis / generation resembles the receptive vs. productive processes involved in L2 learning. When learners read or listen to texts, they are being exposed to instances of the overall potential. Conversely, when they speak or write, learners are trying to exploit the potential to produce instances.

Axis being a local semiotic dimension (Caffarel *et al.* 2004), it organises each stratal subsystem: the paradigmatic axis (system) is the starting point in SFL to express the potential of the resources at each stratum; the syntagmatic axis (structure) represents the means for realising systemic choice. The move from system to structure is explained in SFL by means of the realisation statements, which include all the information in terms of the structural consequences of each choice, thus rendering the system network ‘usable’ (Fawcett 1988: 9). This dynamistic role of axis is crucial to the view of L2 teaching presented here, since both modes of semiotic organisation, system and structure, should be addressed in the process of teaching a second language.

In the first place, L2 teaching should help learners develop the system networks of the L2 by practising with the language functionally. This kind of practice fosters the learning of language as a meaning resource. In this respect L2 learning is not all that different from L1 acquisition: the ‘practice in semiosis’, as Painter (1989: 33) puts it, is –in my opinion– as important in the former as in the latter.

According to Painter (1989: 30), children’s protolanguage serves their communicative needs, but at the same time pressures them to require more of their symbolic resources, thus urging them to move into the adults’ language. In the same way, we know that L2 learners speak what is called ‘interlanguage’ (Corder 1978;

Selinker (1972); Omaggio 2001). A learner's interlanguage is 'an intermediate system located somewhere between the learner's native language and the target language ... that rarely becomes totally congruent with the system of the second language' (Omaggio 2001: 232). In both cases –protolanguage and interlanguage– we have semiotic systems that aim to a more complete one: the adult's and the native speaker's, respectively. Halliday (1975) shows how the child's linguistic evolution consists in the creation and permanent modification of a meaning potential which, through interaction, resembles more and more the adult's. In the same way, the learner's interlanguage should be developed through a 'learning-how-to-mean' semiotic-oriented approach, which favours the development of the system networks that constitute the meaning potential.

This is not implying that L2 learning methods should reflect L1 acquisition, as is done in approaches such as the Direct Method. There is a clear difference in both processes. L1 acquisition involves the learning of two semiotic systems, i.e. the language itself and the culture, which is learned through the language (Halliday 1975: 122). Conversely, L2 learners have a cultural background, acquired through their mother tongue, which makes much of the cultural semiotic system learning unnecessary but at the same time impinges into the overall learning of the L2. This explains why the target culture is often neglected in L2 teaching: focus is made on the linguistic forms making up the linguistic semiotic system, failing to consider this system as the manifestation of a cultural semiotic system different from the learner's.

Learners, therefore, need to learn the L2 word for, e.g., [table] but not what a table is for, unless the target culture is so different from theirs' that either there is no such thing as a table in the way they know it, or it has different or additional uses. On the other hand, there are language uses that more clearly reflect the need for functional L2 learning. An example would be the pervasive use by EFL Spanish learners of an expression such as *what do you want?* for the more polite *what would you like?*, where they are translating literally from their mother tongue, thus speaking Spanish with English words, or –to put it in SFL terms– applying the English linguistic system to the Spanish cultural system.

The axial dimension also shows how the achievement of literacy actually takes place. The meaningful contextualization provided by learning through genre results in the gradual configuration of the L2 meaning potential in the learner. If L2 learning is done meaningfully –i.e. functionally– everything that is learnt relates to the overall semiotic potential, thus facilitating its assimilation. As the L2 is learnt, new choices are added to the system networks of the lexicogrammar with the corresponding realisation statements. The more complete the system networks are the easier it is to add new elements, since everything falls into place more meaningfully, by reference to the rest of the paradigmatic potential as well as to the contextual parameters.

L1 researchers identify a critical time, between the 30th and the 38th month, at which a boom happens in the acquisition of vocabulary by children (Marchman and Bates 1994; Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001). Interestingly, that period corresponds to phase III of L1 development as described by Halliday, when ‘language comes to occupy the central role in the process of social learning’ (1975: 59) and language use starts relating to the outside, the context. When the child enters phase III ‘he has constructed for himself a 3-level semiotic system which is organized the way the adult language is. It is English and not any other language, just as a tulip bulb is a tulip bulb and not a rose bud. But it still has a long way to go before it comes into full flower’ (Halliday 1975: 115).

The boom in vocabulary acquisition in children seems to be motivated, then, by the fact that their protolanguage has become a language (English, Spanish, Chinese...), and everything falls more easily into place. So to speak, they have developed and activated what we could call the ‘pattern’ of that particular language. In the same way, L2 learners need to develop and activate the pattern of the L2, but with the added, occasionally insurmountable, difficulty that they already have a pattern activated, i.e. the pattern of their mother tongue. That pattern will condition the way the L2 is approached and, unless instruction remedies it, will impinge into the L2 pattern.

The notion of pattern in language can be traced back to Whorf (1956: 220-232), who speaks of the effects of the sound pattern in language acquisition: ‘In the English-speaking world, every child between the ages of two and five is engaged in learning the pattern expressed by this formula [for words of one syllable], among many other formulas. By the time the child is six, the formula has become ingrained and automatic...’ (1956: 223).

Interestingly, Whorf (1956: 224-225) also has something to say about the sound pattern and L2 learning: ‘When the youth begins to learn a foreign language, he unconsciously tries to construct the syllables according to this formula. Of course it won’t work; the foreign words are built to a formula of their own...The frustrations and inhibitions thus set up...Or else he even HEARS by the formula, so that the English combinations that he makes sound to him like real French, for instance. Then he suffers less inhibition and may become what is called a ‘fluent’ speaker of French -bad French!’

The extracts quoted are very revealing about the nature of the language pattern and its effects on L2 learning, and I think the same idea can be safely extended beyond the word structure to the rest of the lexicogrammar. In the same way children get used to the sound pattern of their language, they also learn the mechanics of activating the paradigmatic resources, i.e. making choices and applying the corresponding realisation rules, to obtain structures and ultimately text. Once the activation process starts automatising, children can be said to be acquiring the language pattern, and new additions fall into place much more easily. This would explain both the vocabulary boom and the development of grammar.

The activation of the pattern by children –through interaction with adults (Wells 1981)– in the process of acquiring their mother tongue has a negative side effect for L2 learning: it conditions the way native speakers of a given language construe meaning. As Halliday (1975: 140) puts it, ‘this is an inevitable consequence of having a lexicogrammar –the child is no longer free to code as he likes.’

The automatization of the lexicogrammatical pattern and the conditioning it brings about is, therefore, what accounts for the difficulties in learning a second language: learners approach the target language pre-conditioned by the construction and exploitation of language resources in their mother tongue. The acquisition of the lexicogrammatical pattern of the mother tongue –i.e. the automatization of choices in the resource that is the lexicogrammar– overshadows other possible ways of exploiting those resources in the speaker's mind. Of course, age is a factor, too. The older we are, the harder it is to learn a language, but this is simply a consequence of the decaying nature of our bodies, including the brain. Pinker (1994: 293-301) provides an account of the age factor in L2 learning and in the rare cases of late L1 learning.

The language pattern, then, accounts for the fact that when we study a second language, one of the main difficulties is precisely to deal with those ways of exploiting the linguistic resources differently from what we are used to. Those resources that are exploited similarly by the mother tongue and the L2 will be more easily assimilated, whereas learners will try to force their own way of traversing the lexicogrammar into those areas in which the native and the target language show different options. This is what accounts for the risk of ending up speaking the mother tongue using L2 vocabulary, instead of really learning the L2, and this is why we have to seek the automatization of the L2 pattern.

L2 instruction therefore has a clear goal: keep the learners' mother tongue from conditioning the way in which they approach the target language. If instruction does not provide the means to solve that conflict, learners will not be able to activate the L2 pattern. The failure to activate the pattern implies that learning will continue to happen painfully, since learners cannot relate what they are learning to what they already know, i.e. they cannot learn meaningfully. Also, learners will stagnate at a certain level of proficiency beyond which it is not possible to advance if the language pattern is not automatized, thus being barred from access to literacy in the L2. The next section homes in on the precise level of proficiency at which stagnation happens.

4. Identifying the point of stagnation

As it is being claimed here, L2 learners cannot be granted access to literacy if instruction does not find the way of helping them to activate and automatise the linguistic pattern. In order to do so, L2 teaching has to encourage the search for meaning through interaction; it has to develop a lexicogrammatical system in learners while making them look not at the lexicogrammar itself but at the meaning potential realised in the lexicogrammar, i.e. see the implicit (semantic choices) through the explicit (lexicogrammatical choices). At the same time –and this is key to the whole notion of literacy– semantic options have to be learned as realisations of the higher-order meanings of the social semiotic (see Halliday 1975: 129).

Hanvey's levels of cultural awareness need at this point to be brought back into the picture. We saw that those levels reflect the ideal, gradual transition from a situation of misunderstanding –even rejection– of the target culture to an understanding and appreciation thereof. Hanvey finds level III –interpreting the target culture as believable– the most realistically attainable one, since IV –target culture believable from subjective familiarity– requires living in and through the culture, i.e. learners need to spend a significant amount of time immersed in the target culture.

Although level III is more realistically achievable than IV, there are grounds to suspect that many learners never make it beyond level II, i.e. interpreting the target culture as unbelievable, irrational. That is what happens when L2 learners are not given the chance to relate the use of the lexicogrammatical resources to the context of situation, and ultimately to the context of culture. The contextual and cultural implications of linguistic choices remain in that case inaccessible to learners, and so language loses its real meaningfulness, its functionality. By not seeing how the linguistic system is coherent with the culture, learners cannot see how it is coherent within itself; they are not granted access to the pattern of the L2 language, so learning –because of its meaninglessness– becomes more difficult, and motivation fails. If there is no motivation to do things with language, the linguistic system will not be extended (see Painter 1989: 63). Learning enters a phase of stagnation, and, if measures are not taken, the learner risks becoming impervious to the L2.

Once we have identified the level of cultural awareness (not beyond II) that characterises L2 learners who stagnate in their quest for literacy, it is time now to pinpoint the proficiency level at which stagnation typically occurs. For that, I am going to follow the ACTFL/ETS Oral Proficiency Level scale illustrated in table 2 below (based on Swender 1999: 31), reflecting the functions, topics, and accuracy characteristic of each proficiency level from 0 to 5. It could be argued that, by referring to an oral proficiency scale, half of the picture (the written mode) is missing. However, if we consider that communication is mostly oral, and that, as Halliday (1994:xxiii) points out, ‘the potential of the system is more richly developed, and more fully revealed, in speech’, the apparent shortcoming is mitigated.

We do not have to go very much up in the scale to find our average stagnated learner. Bypassing level 0 –the starting, Novice level– the three criteria in level 1 –or Intermediate– as shown in table 2 below,³ seem, for the most part, to be attainable by most learners before stagnating. However, there is something already at this level that points at possible future stagnation: creating with the language. In fact being creative with the language, as opposed to using memorised phrases and expressions, is a symptom of starting to grapple with the linguistic systems, in a way that may lead to a future activation of the pattern. Proper exposure to the L2 through contextualized texts favours the development of creativity with the language. Conversely, instruction not relating form to meaning and meaning to context will fail to foster creativity.

Moving up the Oral Proficiency Scale, we reach level 2 –or Advanced. The functions learners must be able to fulfil at this point, such as describing, reporting, or providing narration, already require a good degree of creativity with the language. Dealing with current events is also something that asks for a creative use of language as well as a relatively extensive vocabulary. Furthermore, not only do learners at this stage have to create with the language; they must do so with such accuracy as to be able to communicate with native speakers.

³ Table 2 also provides a contrast –and the approximate correspondences– with the levels in the Common European Framework of Reference, for those more familiar with this scale (see Council of Europe 2001, for a detailed account of the functions proper to each level).

I think the criteria presented at this level 2 are already quite hard to attain by many L2 learners in virtue of the creativity that is required. Being creative, as said above, means being able to play with the language systems, and, for that, learners need two things: quite complete paradigmatic systems and relatively effortless realisation mechanisms, which is tantamount to saying that their L2 pattern is starting to be activated. Since having a level 2 implies that learners can do all the things proper to that level – which requires the activation of the L2 pattern– we have to conclude that stagnated L2 learners can be found somewhere in the transition from level 1 to level 2 within the proficiency scale. The shaded area in table 2 indicates this approximate point of stagnation. Interestingly, the scale of the Common European Framework of Reference shows that stagnation prevents learners from becoming independent users of the target language.

ACTFL/ETS				Common European Framework of Reference	
	Function	Context	Accuracy		
5	Equivalent to an educated native speaker	All subjects	Equivalent to an educated native speaker	C2	Proficient user
4	Able to tailor language to fit audience, counsel, persuade, negotiate...	All topics pertinent to professional needs	Nearly equivalent to educated native speaker. Only occasional errors	C1	
3	Converse formally and informally, resolve problems...offer supported opinions, and hypothesize	Practical, social, professional, and abstract topics, particular interests, and special fields of competence	Errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native; only sporadic errors in basic structure	B2	Independent user
2	Fully participate in casual conversations, express facts, give instructions...provide narration about current, past, and future activities	Concrete topics: own background, family, interests, work, travel, and current events	Understandable to native speakers not used to dealing with foreigners; sometimes miscommunicates	B1	
1	Create with the language, ask and answer questions, participate in short conversations	Everyday survival topics and courtesy requirements	Intelligible to native speakers used to dealing with foreigners	A2	
				A1	Basic user
0	No functional ability	None	Unintelligible		

TABLE 2 Identification of the approximate area of stagnation on the proficiency scale

Pessimistic as the account above may seem, it is realistic enough, mostly if we consider the results obtained by L2 teachers in a number of oral proficiency tests described by Omaggio (2001: 21). Averages went from 1+, for teachers of Russian, to 3, the beginning stage of the Superior level, for teachers of German. The requirements for L2 speakers at level 3 are only attainable if learners –or instructors– can exploit the L2 pattern in a similar way to natives, including the automatic and effort factors. There are still pieces to add to the systems, and the realisation mechanisms have room for improvement, but at this level 3, according to the criteria shown in table 2, there is already a considerable degree of literacy. In any case, if this is the average level of L2 instructors, it can be safely entailed that the achievement of level 3 requires some kind of immersion in the target culture. Levels 4 and 5 seem, therefore, to be out of reach for the majority of L2 learners, even many instructors. In fact, levels 4 and 5 in the scale take the ‘educated native speaker’ as their reference, which excludes many natives, too.

The conclusion we can draw at this point is that beyond level 3 learners have the linguistic resources to seek higher levels of literacy in similar conditions to native speakers: they are now ‘independent users’, quoting the above mentioned European Frame of Reference. It is not a question now of learning a second language in a classroom setting but of using the language to continue discovering the semiotic system that is the target culture. At this level, the responsibility for the successive improvement in literacy largely lies in the hands of the L2 learners themselves. Before reaching this point, their improvement in the command of the L2 greatly depended on the quality of the instruction, but once the code of the target language/culture has been broken, learners can provide themselves with the means to become educated speakers, often in direct competition with the natives themselves.

We have therefore identified not only the stage at which L2 learners stagnate but also the point at which learners show an activation of the language pattern –thus becoming L2 literate– and beyond which they have an open road to the achievement of literacy. It is now time to go back to the idea of genre-based L2 teaching in order to see how it can help learners activate the language pattern and so avoid the problem of stagnation.

5. Mastering the genre to move ahead

I claimed above that learning a language through its genres helps learners in a number of ways. First, the structured nature of genre provides guidance for learners to follow. Next, genres are goals in themselves for learners to master, with the essential added value that they allow seeing texts as meaningful not in themselves but in relation to all the texts possible as a manifestation of the target culture. It was also claimed that L2 literacy required from learners to be able both to engage in the appropriate genres for each context of situation and to master the structure of the genres themselves. The latter involves making the right linguistic choices, as required by the genre and the context of situation, in order to express the intended meaning.

There, however, is a temptation that must be avoided when teaching a second language through genre. If the exploitation of texts is reduced to memorising whole passages to act them out later, learners will be missing the whole dynamic aspect of language in context. Texts are in that case treated as products, and the effect is the same as learning the language out of context. As Melrose (1995) points out, the process is as important as the result: we want to teach not only form but also meaning. Learners must, therefore, be exposed to texts instantiating different genres in a way that they learn to handle the different possibilities available in terms of the intended meanings, including the arrays of formally different expressions for similar meanings (e.g. *how do you do?* and *nice to meet you*). Additionally, generic practice should facilitate the development of prediction-making skills in learners, thanks precisely to the structured nature of genres. Melrose (1995) distinguishes between schematic –e.g. shopping– and discursive –e.g. casual conversation– interactions. I think it safe to suggest that learners should be exposed to more schematic genres first, where the number of possible intended meanings at each turn is more limited. This makes it easier for learners both to learn the prototypical different possibilities at each stage and to build expectations about what will come next. Without laying these foundations it will not be possible for learners to become creative with the language, let alone use it in real-life situations, i.e. becoming literate.

Another pitfall that must be carefully avoided when dealing with contextualized meaning is neglecting the teaching of the lexicogrammar. As Melrose (1995: 154) says, ‘grammatical structures and communicative functions are a legitimate –indeed necessary– part of any language course, provided they are inserted in a clear context and perform a clear sociosemantic function, for in this way they help the learner to build up his/her storehouse of cultural knowledge.’ Although ‘learning how to mean’ (as in Halliday 1975) is the ultimately important, the fact that semantics is realised in the lexicogrammar urges instruction to pay its dues to the latter; without lexicogrammatical accuracy learners cannot be expected to become L2 literate.

Regarding the teaching of lexicogrammatical issues, great help can be obtained from SFL-based language typologies (see Caffarel *et al.* 2004). That kind of language description illustrates, by means of the system networks of the lexicogrammar, the resources existing in each language as well as the ways in which those resources are exploited. Among the benefits that can be obtained from those descriptions, one is of particular relevance here. The explicitness of SFL linguistic description about the resources of each language –and their realisation rules– provides an excellent reference tool for the design of second language teaching methods addressing the particularities of the exploitation of those resources by the target language. Those areas in which the target language shows to diverge from the learners’ mother tongue in terms of the exploitation of lexicogrammatical resources should be dealt with in a way that fosters the activation of that potential. This would arguably deter learners from trying to apply the pattern of their own language to that of the target language, thus facilitating what we could call ‘bias-free’ second language learning.

Figure 1 illustrates how SFL-based language description can help pinpoint areas showing contrast across languages. The area concerned in this figure is that of hyperphenomenality in mental transitivity in Spanish. For those not familiar with SFL, examples (1-4) show Spanish and English pairs of mental structures with the metaphenomenon highlighted in bold. As we can see, emotive and intentional structures project differently in English and Spanish from the point of view of the grammatical realisation of the Finite, thus requiring specific attention in the L2 teaching process so

as to avoid language transference. Examples of contrastive descriptions of specific areas in the lexicogrammar of English and Spanish can be found in Lavid and Arús (1998, 2004), Arús and Lavid (2001), and Arús (2003). Lavid and Arús (forthcoming) show how to exploit constructions such as the ones in examples (1-4), in the L2 teaching classroom setting (in this case, Spanish as a foreign language).

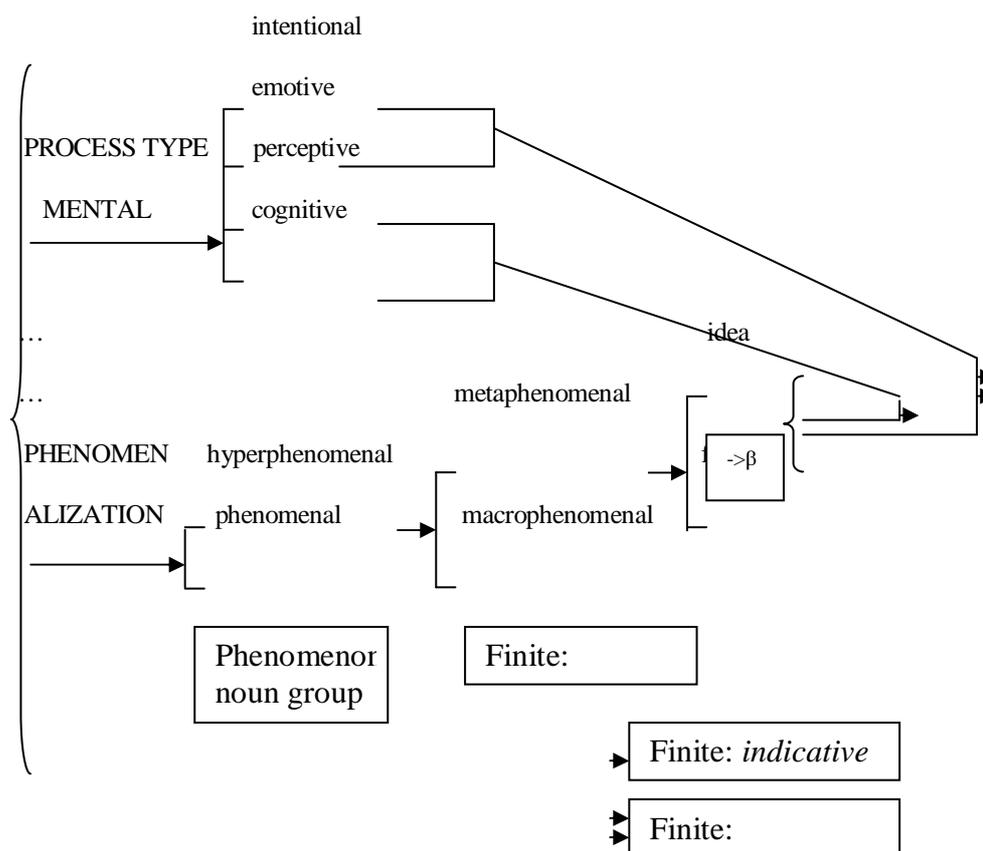


FIGURE 1 Most general discrimination between indicative and subjunctive in Spanish mental transitivity (affirmative statements with disjunctive Subject)

(1) Emotive:

(a) Me alegra que **vengas**

SUB

(b) I'm glad **you're coming**

IND

(2) Intentional:

(a) Quiero que limpies el choche

SUB

(b) I'd like you to clean the car

INF

(3) Perceptive:

(a) Veo que **estáis todos**

IND

(b) I see you're all here

IND

(4) Cognitive:

(a) Sé que **pasa algo**

IND

(b) I know something is the matter

IND

Methods minimising the mother tongue bias when approaching the L2 are obviously more feasible when teaching linguistically homogeneous groups. In the case of multilingual classes it is more difficult to zero in on the different areas of the lexicogrammar that can be expected to pose specific problems. In any case, even in multilingual groups, language typologies can always serve instructors as a reference to understand the source of specific language transfer, and so find the way to deal with such transfer.

Summing up, I have proposed resorting to texts instantiating genres of the target culture as an ideal way to teach language in context. The structured and, at the same time, dynamic nature of genre guides learners in their practice with the target language. Because genre relates to the context of culture, mastering the different genres opens up the access for learners to the target culture. At the same time, because genre finds its expression form in register, and register finds its expression form in language (Martin 1992: 495), becoming generically proficient requires mastering the strata down the scale of stratification.

We are now in a position to draw conclusions in terms of the effect of contextualized genre-based teaching on the staving off of stagnation and the achievement of L2 literacy. To that we turn in the next –and final– section.

6. Conclusion and final remarks

This paper opened with the presentation of a problem, i.e. the high rate of failure, in several societies, to produce literate L2 speakers. In order to understand the reasons underlying that failure, the discussion has pointed to the concept of empathy with the target culture. Following the proficiency-oriented approach (Omaggio 2001), these pages have claimed that, for L2 learning to be successful, learners must reach a certain degree of empathy with the target culture, for which both contextualized teaching and the inclusion of ‘small-c’ culture are essential.

Yet it is the case that empathy is rarely achieved, and –more worryingly– is often not even an issue, which typically results in the stagnation of learners at relatively low levels of proficiency. I have argued that this is due to unsatisfactory ways of tackling the contextualized teaching of languages, motivated by the failure to grasp the absolute indivisibility of language and context as well as the nature of the cline from one to the other. This has motivated the present SFL-based account of why contextualized teaching is essential –with hints at how it should be addressed– in order to open the target culture to L2 learners, and thus enable the development of literacy.

Looking at language from an SFL point of view, we can understand how speakers express meaning through the exploitation of linguistic resources, and how this is motivated by contextual factors. Drawing upon this, L2 instruction should present the language in a way that facilitates the understanding of the relations between the linguistic and the extralinguistic and at the same encourages functional language practice. I have claimed that teaching through genre is a good method to introduce learners to the functional use of language in context: generic structure guides them in the process of learning how to make meaningful lexicogrammatical selections motivated by the register constraints of the situation.

Through this kind of practice, learners gradually build up the paradigmatic resources of the L2, together with the rules that are necessary to convert them into structure. New additions to the systems –new things learnt– are facilitated by the fact that they relate to the other choices and ultimately to context. The more complete the network is, the easier it is to make new additions because everything makes gradually

more sense. At the beginning, selections in the linguistic resources are made painfully, both because the systems are very incomplete and because the realisation rules to convert the system into structure are not well fixed. Eventually, the lexicogrammatical systems become richer and richer, and learners exploit them more and more effortlessly, until the time arrives when linguistic choices are made quite unconsciously. That means that the L2 pattern has been activated: learners are breaking the code of the target language. Because of the stratificational cline from context to language, the activation of the L2 pattern can only happen if choices in the lexicogrammar relate to the context, so the activation of the language pattern implies that the situational and cultural patterns are also activated. This means that learners have developed empathy with the target culture: they have managed to reach level III in cultural awareness. The target culture is now 'believable.'

The development of empathy and accompanying activation of the L2 pattern bring us back to the suggested replacement of 'literacy' for 'proficiency' in order to refer to the ultimate goal of L2 learning. By leaving the instruction-related term 'proficiency' to refer to the stages in the course leading to the development of literacy, we avoid the potential terminological delusion of referring to learners with a certain level of proficiency but not yet proficient. With the proposal made here, we will continue referring to different proficiency levels in the same way as it has been traditionally done, with the difference that learners will be only considered L2 literate once the L2 language pattern is activated, which, again, will only happen through contextualized, empathy-seeking instruction. I have suggested the approximate proficiency level –around intermediate– at which stagnation happens and precludes the L2 pattern activation. This should bring awareness to the methodological community of the need for the design of methods and strategies that prepare learners to move beyond that critical point. A lot of work on this point, I believe, remains to be done.

There is a very important affective factor in contextualized L2 teaching as it is being presented here. Learning the language through genre, besides fostering the development of literacy from the very beginning, offers an immediate goal to learners, i.e. master the genre. When learning language functionally, one becomes aware of the things that can be done with language, i.e. the purposes it fits. Learning to do things

with language –to mean, to negotiate situations– is encouraging. When learners feel that they can do things with the target language, they are impelled to move ahead, to do more things with the language, in very much the same way children do. Contextualized teaching challenges them to extend their resources (Painter 1989: 63). It is precisely that challenge that I consider essential to the future activation of the pattern and the building up of literacy. Successful L2 teaching dangles the carrot for students to want to explore further in the realms of the culture to which they are being opened through its language. Once the pattern is activated, learners are ready to move into less schematic, more self-regulated (Di Pietro 1990), uses of the L2, precisely the uses proper to the functions associated with the superior levels 3, 4 and 5 in the oral proficiency scale. At those levels of proficiency, L2 instruction has probably already done the most important part of its job: it has given learners autonomy –both in terms of proficiency and motivation– to account for their further progress up the proficiency scale and become more and more literate in the L2.

This is, then, the answer to the question with which I closed the previous section. Because functional teaching shows learners that language is not an end in itself but a means to discover another cultural semiotic, it provides them with the motivation to go ahead. Motivated L2 learners will eventually be able to activate the linguistic pattern of the target language, thus developing empathy and staving off stagnation. Once the activation of the pattern and empathy are there, learners can be considered literate in the target language. Their literacy may increase in the same measure, and to a great extent by the same means, as that of native speakers, i.e. learners can take the steps leading them to become educated speakers of the target language, even if some details, notably regarding pronunciation, can continue to give away their non-native-speaker condition.

The discussion to introduce the concept of the language pattern and its activation has also led us to the consideration of issues related to language acquisition and its relation to second language learning. The contention has been made that the activation of the language pattern follows a similar process in language acquisition and language learning, although different methodological approaches are required in each case. The difference in the approach is justified by two factors. Firstly, L2 learners access the

target language preconditioned by the pattern of their mother tongue, which overshadows the ways in which other languages exploit linguistic resources differently. Those overshadowed resources are precisely the ones that instruction should foreground to facilitate their integration in the activation process. The second factor justifying specific L2 teaching methods is motivation. Whereas children need the language not only to communicate but also to learn about the world (Halliday 1975; Painter 1989), L2 learners lack the latter motivation, unless instruction manages to show them that there is another world to learn about; i.e. the world as seen through the filter of the target language.

To conclude, I would like to remind about the gap that this paper attempts to fill. It has defended something that is not new –in fact it is rather trite– as is the importance of teaching language through culture. The contribution here to the field of applied linguistics has been to provide an SFL-based account of why it is important to teach language through culture, and what it is that teaching language through culture means. It is my impression, as a L2 instructor, that the consideration of these factors widely escapes the L2 teaching community, ultimately accounting for the failure in the development of proficiency in learners. Opening the eyes of instructors and methodologists to these issues should pave the way to more functionally sensitive L2 teaching methods that foster the development of empathy with the target culture, thus ironing out the bumpy road to literacy.

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