World Languages and Cultures Publications   World Languages and Cultures

2015

An Interview With Stacey Weber-Fève, Iowa State University: Creating Language Teaching Through Film and Literature: Creating Connections

So-Young Kim
University of Kansas

Stacey Weber-Fève
Iowa State University, sweber@iastate.edu

An Interview With Stacey Weber-Fève, Iowa State University: Creating Language Teaching Through Film and Literature: Creating Connections

Abstract

Stacey Weber-Fève is Associate Professor of French at Iowa State University (Ames), where she teaches all levels of French language and courses in French cinema, literature, and cultural studies. A research specialist of French and Francophone Cinemas, Stacey also publishes on the teaching and learning of French language, cinema, culture, and literature. She is the coauthor of Liaisons: An Introduction to French (Heinle–Cengage Learning, 2013) and is currently coauthoring an intermediate level French textbook program (forthcoming 2017 with Heinle–Cengage Learning).

Disciplines

Film and Media Studies | French and Francophone Language and Literature | French Linguistics | Theatre and Performance Studies

INTERVIEWS

*Creating Language Teaching Through Film and
Literature: Creating Connections*

An Interview With Stacey Weber-Fève,
Iowa State University

So-Young Kim

STACEY WEBER-FÈVE is Associate Professor of French at Iowa State University (Ames), where she teaches all levels of French language and courses in French cinema, literature, and cultural studies. A research specialist of French and Francophone Cinemas, Stacey also publishes on the teaching and learning of French language, cinema, culture, and literature. She is the coauthor of *Liaisons: An Introduction to French* (Heinle–Cengage Learning, 2013) and is currently coauthoring an intermediate level French textbook program (forthcoming 2017 with Heinle–Cengage Learning).

The theme of our annual meeting this year in Boston was *Korean Language Teaching through Film and Literature: Creating Connections*. You were one of our plenary speakers at the Boston meeting and your paper was entitled: "Connection-making: Using Film for Language Development and Language Awareness." Our readers would love to hear more.

   We would be delighted if you could share some of your insights in our upcoming *The Korean Language in America* volume on this very important topic in second language pedagogy. The six questions below are merely to serve as guides for your response. Please feel free to address each one in order or to select a handful and expand on those in detail.

1. Can you articulate for our readers in a few paragraphs the importance of creating connections with film and literature in the foreign or second language classroom?

2. If you were to name one film or one literary piece as a "must-see" or "must-read" experience for a foreign or second language class in French what would it be and why? Feel free to comment on one film AND one literary piece, if you like.

3. Given that media and literature are typically created by native speakers for native speakers and/or native members of the language and socio-cultural group, which aspects of using film and/or literature do you think pose (in general) the greatest challenge in the classroom? Do you have any specific examples?

4. How might the proficiency level of the language learner affect your selection and/or recommendation of particular pieces to be used in a language classroom? That is, lower proficiency students and higher proficiency students differ significantly in their linguistic, cultural, and discourse competencies. How do you adjust for these various student competency levels in your selection of films and/or literature? Can you provide some specific examples?

5. What advice or suggestions can you give to language teachers who strive to make these language-media/literature connections at all levels of instruction? Please comment, for example, on issues such as material selection; prereading/previewing activities; demonstration and assessment of students' comprehension of the key themes, conflicts, or ideas in the pieces.

6. The concept of "Connections" has become a significant element in language classrooms. How can we, as teachers of language and culture, foster the process of making connections?

Written Interview December 2014

The practices of incorporating film and literature into the foreign language classroom and establishing connections between (i.e., integrating) text, language, and culture have come a long way over the past few decades. What in the past was often viewed as a "culture day"—that is to say a "fun" or "special" day independent of the "typical" vocabulary-/ grammar-focused or "language"-driven curriculum and conducted perhaps at the end of the chapter, following an exam, or when needing a "break" or "breather" from language learning—has importantly given way to the integration

of culture in the daily lesson as a <u>foundation</u> for language development, language awareness, cultural proficiency, and intercultural competence. In this article, we will primarily take up the questions of "why" we should and "how" we can use culture and culture texts (i.e., literature and film) to create linguistic, cultural, and personal connections within and beyond the foreign language classroom, goals that the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has continued to include (if not foreground) in its National Standards recommendations.

The main historical argument, it would seem, for integrating culture into the foreign language classroom has been the inherent value of using culture texts to present "authentic" language. Naturally, films and literary texts made for "home" audiences reflect a community's "natural" manner of speaking or authentic use of language (e.g., speech patterns, accent, rhythm, intonation, vernacular). Culture texts provide "real" or "genuine" insight into the culture, which we know is shaped by its language but which we also know helps to shape its language. For example, film and video show interactions among native speakers and illustrate semiotic modalities of the target language and its culture(s) (e.g., gestures, facial expressions, body language, and other nonverbal forms of communication). Literature presents socio-cognitive views that draw on and introduce the learner to cultural knowledge (i.e., reading and writing function within particular systems of attitudes, beliefs, customs, ideals, and values). Moreover, both film and literature provide opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural reflection and personal self-reflection.

In my own teaching with culture texts, I begin with these tenets but also ask myself a series of questions to determine how to best use the culture text. First, I find it very useful to break down the potential of any given culture text into two general, basic approaches. I ask myself if I want to use the culture text for *input* purposes or for *output* purposes. I also consider to what degree or extent I wish to use the culture text. For example, do I want the culture text just to model language in authentic use? Perhaps I simply want the culture text to establish an authentic context of some sort, say as a springboard for discussion or to set-up an activity. Or, do I want the cultural knowledge students will gain from that text to be the focus of that activity and its learning outcome? I also ask myself how I can guide my students to interact meaningfully and purposefully with this text. In other words, what personal connections can they make? How can this culture text affect their lives or ways of seeing and thinking? As we shall see a little later in this article, in all cases, I tackle these questions in my teaching through a "multi-step approach."

Picking up again for a brief moment the important fact that culture texts provide authentic language, this has been perhaps both the greatest strength and the greatest challenge to integrating film and literature in the foreign language classroom. Authentic culture texts are written for native speakers of that target language and not second language learners. Thus, culture texts typically exceed the literacy level or comprehension abilities of our students. The levels "even out" more, so to speak, in the advanced levels of foreign language instruction; but this is not permission to avoid integrating film and literature in the beginning and intermediate levels where the focus is typically on language acquisition and proficiency development nor is it an excuse to ignore language acquisition and proficiency development at the advanced levels where curricular focus or priorities typically shift to the comprehension or mastery of culture texts (i.e., content) in the target language.

At whatever level we are teaching, we must always remember that our students remain language learners—be they beginning, intermediate, or advanced—with specific language needs. We should strive to integrate these connections between texts, contexts, and language across all levels of our foreign language curricula and classrooms, but certainly we must do so with an informed eye to student learning and proficiency (i.e., with level-appropriate and manageable student engagement with the text). On that note, let us start with the first question I mentioned above that I ask myself when faced with a culture text I wish to bring into any given lesson: Do I want to use the culture text for *input* or *output* purposes?

As commonly accepted in the field of Second Language Acquisition, input is comprehensible language the student hears or reads that has a communicative intent. In other words, there is meaning in that message that the student can understand, and the student's job is to pay attention to that meaning. Output is language the student writes or speaks to express him- or herself and his or her ideas. Like input, output also contains a communicative intent. Thus, once I have determined what I want my students to do in the activity—for example, glean language for acquisition purposes by (re)establishing form-meaning connections (input) or produce language for communicative purposes (output)—I also consider if I want to target reading, listening, writing, speaking, or cultural proficiency.

In the following descriptions of different types of culture text-based activities for the daily language lesson, we will see that sometimes a particular activity may target one goal or learning outcome but that often they target multiple areas simultaneously. However, one "universal principle," so to speak, that cuts across all of these activities (which incidentally are intended for beginning and intermediate levels of foreign language

instruction) is that we are generally more successful when we work with *segments* of film and *short* videos or *brief* excerpts from literary works. Beginning- and intermediate-level students typically do not have the cognitive load capacity to tackle feature-length films or entire literary works in the target language when our goal is to use these culture texts for language development, language awareness, cultural proficiency, or intercultural competence purposes.

Discourse scrambling is a popular technique that works well with both film and literature. As an input activity to help students discover target vocabulary or grammar items in authentic contexts, instructors can choose a conversation scene from a film or literary work or even select a short cultural reading that contains rich and frequent (i.e., salient) examples of the language items students are learning in that lesson. The instructor prepares individual sentences from that text but scrambles up the order (e.g., include a short blank line next to each sentence so that students can number them 1–10). The instructor asks students first to unscramble or reorder the sentences on their own. Then, after students have completed this step, the instructor can reveal the original written text or play the film scene as many times as needed for students to be able to check and correct their work.

The activity can end here as the instructor has provided students opportunities to work with and process input, which can enhance language development. Or, the instructor can add an additional "expansion" or "follow-up" step or two to the activity in order to capitalize on any new aspects of culture the students have learned or to create opportunities to develop language awareness and/or intercultural competence. For example, the instructor can give an expansion task like (for a short cultural reading) "Go back to the text and underline any key pieces of information that describe an important aspect of French culture. Is this the same for your culture?"

To develop language awareness, the instructor can ask students to make connections between the language used in the text and its function. For example, if the lesson topic is asking and answering questions, the instructor can give an expansion task like (for a conversation scene) "Go back to the exchange between the two characters and circle all examples of language or language structures that indicate the character is asking a question. Then, underline all the examples of language or language structures that indicate the character is giving an answer. How do they go together?"

To develop intercultural competence, the instructor can ask students to notice any language conventions. For example, the instructor can give an expansion task like (again for a conversation scene) "Go back to the

exchange and highlight any conventional formalities in the characters' dialogue or nonverbal language. What clues help establish their relationship to each other? How are they expressing politeness, formality, or respect?"

Giving Advice is another popular approach that also works well with both film and literature. Select a text in which someone is clearly in need of advice at that moment in the text (e.g., soap opera, reality TV show, game show, or scene from a novel). If working with a videotext, stop viewing the scene at some strategic point or if working with a literary excerpt, break it apart into several chunks again stopping at some strategic point and ask students to imagine how they would advise the individual. Have students in groups discuss the best way to do this and predict what the reactions of the individuals might be. Giving advice can work for both input and output activities; it depends on the instructor's goals. Again, if the instructor wants students to discover the target vocabulary or grammar items of the lesson in authentic context, he or she should select a text "flooded" with salient uses of those language items. Students would respond with language they have already learned and not necessarily with the new language featured in the text that they are learning in the lesson. Or, if the instructor is wanting to practice speaking or writing those new language items to develop fluency and accuracy, the instructor can just use the culture text to establish the context for the language items students will be expected to produce (e.g., the imperative or conditional verb tenses in French to communicate: "Do X," "If I were you, I would . . .," or "She should choose Y," etc. if either of these verb tenses were the lesson topic).

By focusing on the specific language lesson items available in the culture text or that can be structured in response to the culture text, students are able to work with and/or process the input or communicative message(s) to enhance language development. To develop language awareness and/or cultural proficiency, instructors can ask students to make connections between language use and language function (e.g., In what register or tone do you want to give this advice to the character? How do we communicate or structure that advice in French? Why?). To develop intercultural competence, the instructor could have students role-play the scene and/or prepare a script adapted from the videotext or literary excerpt with appropriate cultural behavior, references, or other content or language clues that demonstrate their knowledge of the target culture and its language.

A popular and somewhat related output activity requires students to **rewrite a scene**. In this approach, the instructor asks students to respond to a culture text by rewriting it with different characteristics. Students view an original scene from a film or read a short literary scene. The instructor can

guide students to noticing important aspects of the language used in that scene (e.g., How does the man speak to the woman? Is he complimenting her, criticizing her, giving her orders, asking for permission, soliciting her opinion, etc.? What words, phrases, or structures is he using to communicate his intention?).

Then, once comprehension is established, the instructor asks the students to rewrite the scene with different characteristics; for example, by changing the gender, age, or nationality of the characters; by changing the setting or location of the scene; by changing the historical time frame; and so on. Students, usually in pairs or small groups, rewrite the scene and then the whole class reconvenes to share and examine each other's rewrites and talk about what changed in their rewrites and why they made these changes. In this activity approach, language development, language awareness, cultural proficiency, and intercultural competence goals are demonstrated throughout each step of the activity.

Another effective output activity has students engage in a **dictogloss** or **passage reconstruction** task. A dictogloss is the language teaching and learning technique by which students are asked to summarize or reconstruct a culture text after they listened to it and took notes about it. As seen earlier in the discourse scrambling activity suggestion, again instructors can work with level-appropriate culture texts like scenes from a film or novel or a cultural reading. The instructor tells the students to watch the videotext carefully or to listen closely to the passage he or she will read aloud. The instructor shows the videotext twice or reads the text twice. Students are supposed to take their own notes of the content. Then, individually, in pairs, or in a small group, students reconstruct the text by writing out what they remember hearing in the dialogue or script (I usually find it helpful to prepare the beginning portion of the text so that students start off correctly; but for the beginning level, I would probably also give them some of the content from the middle of the text and maybe even the end to help guide them and make the dictogloss or passage reconstruction task more manageable for their level). Then, the instructor plays the videotext or reads the script aloud a third time (or projects it or provides a written copy, especially if the instructor wishes for students to check spelling and other grammatical structures), and students check their work against the original.

Dictogloss or passage reconstruction activities activate all four language skills (listening, writing, speaking, and reading) and create opportunities for students to focus on both cultural content and language at the same time. As suggested above, similar expansion questions or follow-up steps can be

built into the activity at the end to ensure that students draw connections between language used and its function and between language and culture. An equally effective but simpler similar activity is a **modified dictation**. The instructor tells the students that in a moment they will watch or read an excerpt from a film or literary text but that part of that scene is missing. The instructor prepares the first few lines from the text on the students' copy and then reads aloud the script while students take down the content in dictation format. The instructor plays the scene or shares the original text and students check their work for accuracy. Again, expansion questions or follow-up steps as we have seen above can be built into the activity at the end to ensure that students draw those connections between language used and its function and between language and culture.

One very general manner or way in which students can also draw these connections and which works as a follow-up step to roughly any type of activity at whatever language level is by asking students simply to **personalize the content** of the culture text. Many of the examples above intrinsically ask students to personalize the content in one way or another, but instructors can ask explicit questions or build in explicit follow-up steps that invite students to apply the content to their own personal lives in meaningful ways. These can be simple questions or follow-up steps that only require short answers or those with a more elaborate nature that can lead to more extended tasks. As we begin to wrap up this article, let's take a look at one final example of a multi-step culture text-based activity to illustrate this point.

There are countless ways to approach the task of personalizing the content. The following is just one specific example from my own teaching that I hope can communicate more concretely the potential of culture texts in the foreign language classroom and that can allow instructors to see how they can adapt the approach to fit their own and their students' needs. The key, I have found, is to adopt the model of "preparatory activities," "guided interaction activities," and "assimilation activities." (See Chapter 11 of James Lee and Bill VanPatten's *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen*, McGraw-Hill, 2003.)

In this example, intermediate-level students read an approximately 70-word excerpt from a famous early 20th-century novel in Québécois literature. The excerpt talks about berry-picking in Québec and describes family activities surrounding this popular activity (harvesting berries in the woods, making jellies and pies, etc.) and ends by drawing a connection between the acts of berry-picking and eating/making blueberry pies and Québécois regional identity. In designing the activity, I first take a few sentences to introduce the novel and its cultural significance and then summarize the

main action of the passage. In this preparatory step, I prepare students by introducing key words and phrases and main content points to aid their comprehension of the text, but I do not give everything away. Then, students read the excerpt, but I ask them as they read to find in the passage what specific details identify Québécois culture. In this guided interaction step, I am giving my students a specific task in addition to reading. Doing so scaffolds their reading and elicits direct involvement in their construction/interpretation of the meaning of the text as well as avoids passive reading. Instead, they are reading with an explicit purpose and with a reading strategy.

We go over the information they have discovered, making sure that they have made the connection of blueberry pie ("tarte aux bleuets") as the national dessert of Québec. Then, in the assimilation follow-up step to the activity, I ask students to go beyond the general comprehension of the text and to apply this knowledge to their own lives by asking them to invent a "regional dessert" for the region in which our university is found. I break down and structure the task to make it more manageable for them by asking them to think about "les ingrédients" (any local vegetation or crops or other popular regional ingredients), "la forme" (any geographical or topographical forms or natural elements that shape our region such as cityscapes, landscapes, rivers, mountains, plains, forests, etc.), and "les motifs de décoration" (any activities, symbols, or other cultural elements that represent our region). Students then create a recipe, description, or labeled illustration or diagram of their proposed regional dessert that takes into consideration the aforementioned elements.

Since this is a language class and not a survey course of Québécois literature, I am less concerned with conducting a literary analysis of the novel passage and more concerned with students' discovery of and play with language as it is integrated with culture. My goals in this instance are to help my students develop their foreign language literacy level, increase their cultural knowledge, and make meaningful and personal cross-cultural comparisons and connections with the text in an interactive and creative manner while still practicing and refining their language abilities.

In conclusion, asking students to personalize the content or engage in any of the other types of activities or approaches discussed above requires that they apply critical thinking skills and that they begin to see the world not through just their own eyes but through another culture's perspectives. In short, culture texts—be they film, literature, or other—may begin to put students on the path to making connections; but instructors, through careful planning and consideration and by keeping language learning goals in check, must guide students down that path

by structuring (usually multi-step) activities around those culture texts. Fortunately or unfortunately, culture texts cannot teach themselves, especially when the instructional and learning goals consist of using culture texts for language development, language awareness, cultural proficiency, and intercultural competence purposes. But, culture texts can most certainly bring the language and culture alive in the classroom and make both language and culture "real" to students. They prove very motivating for both students and instructors alike.

I would like to express my sincere thanks for your informative and instructive responses to the interview questions. You provided helpful steps in detail for useful classroom activities when using cultural texts. I personally learned a lot about adopting films or literature pieces for my teaching strategies. I still have a few more questions and I think our readers will have questions like these as well.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

KIM: While authentic language brings learners experience simulated from the world where the target language is used as a first language, many films and videos contain coarse language and depict crude experiences. Would you share your thoughts on how much teachers actually need to control the amount of exposure to the authentic language material and what to do with those spates of less appropriate language?

WEBER-FÈVE: As instructors, we certainly want to be respectful of and sensitive to our students' beliefs and practices, and we know that some individuals may be offended by coarse language and the representation of crude experiences in authentic culture texts. However, I feel there is no "right or wrong" answer to the scenario described in the question. Rather, there are a number of factors to consider, and I would encourage instructors to make the decision they feel is most appropriate for their classrooms and to trust their best judgment and instincts.

For example, I teach in a nonreligious-affiliated public institution of higher education. My students are all at least 18 years old, and thus are no longer considered minors. Therefore, I do not face the same restrictions that colleagues instructing in private, religious institutions or the secondary school system may face. So, the first recommendation I would have would be to know your school's policies and comply!

In my language classes, I do not need to control much for coarse language and crude experiences, but I do make informed decisions when

selecting which texts to use. This would be my second recommendation: Rely initially on your own "comfort zone." In keeping with my political views, I choose not to work with texts with an overabundance of coarse language, gratuitous violence, racial stereotypes, and similar subject matter for I believe that these representations (although authentic) do not support the warm, respectful, and welcoming classroom atmosphere that I establish and maintain in my classroom. Moreover and more importantly, students in the beginning levels of language learning do not typically have the cultural and historical knowledge and linguistic preparation to understand or contextualize accurately such examples of coarse language and crude experiences. Yet, the occasional "bad word" or two might appear in a text I am using, and the students will typically giggle since this is, after all, language that interests them and that most would really like to learn. If students ask questions about any coarse language that they heard and/or read in the subtitles, for example, I answer them seriously and maybe give them another more appropriate—but still slang—equivalent, but I explain that the coarse language is not appropriate for the classroom, the work environment, with strangers or figures of authority, and so on, so that they can see that I am not acting as an "agent of the language police," per se, but rather culturally contextualizing when it is and is not appropriate to use such language.

In my upper-division content courses, however, it is a rather different story. By then, students have grown their socio-cultural-historical knowledge base and language skills sufficiently and are more prepared to understand and analyze the coarse language and crude experiences represented in a text. Yet, we still run the risk of offending some of them indirectly through the culture text. I have found it better to be upfront and honest with students and to "warn" them ahead of time, so to speak. In my film seminar courses, for example, I include the following statement in my syllabus:

The films we will study together in this course may explore sexual themes and other related topics. They may also include nudity, explicit violence, and strong language. Such elements are part of cinema history. Films have been chosen not for their ("R" or other) ratings but because they align with the goals and topics of this course. Like many films with adult content produced by the American film industry, these course films possess great artistic and cultural value. If you feel that you may be offended by adult or similar material, please see your professor during the first week of the semester.

This is an adapted variation of the typical statements that all my colleagues teaching sensitive film subject matter in my department routinely include in their syllabi. Thus, my third recommendation would be to save the culture texts featuring heavier coarse language or crude experiences for the advanced levels, where you can engage (with advanced notice) in a more academic discussion or analytical treatment of that type of authentic language material.

KIM: While cultural texts have obvious benefits in a foreign language classroom, selecting the right material seems very important. Do you have any suggestions for choosing these texts, such as: page length or number of words; need for consistency of material to be covered throughout one semester, term, or quarter (if any); specific genres of film or literature, and so forth?

WEBER-FÈVE: This is a very important question that I think can be answered in a few different ways depending on an instructor's goals or objectives. It most certainly can seem like an overwhelming challenge to select the "right material." But, I have discovered (mostly through trial and error as well as research) a few strategies and a few rules of thumb to help with that process. Ultimately, to some extent at least, I feel it is often more a question of designing the "right use" of a culture text than selecting the "right one."

For beginning levels, we want culture texts that feature more basic and straightforward uses of language and that feature (mostly) the language that students have learned and are in the process of learning. In other words, I look for culture texts that feature the vocabulary and grammar of the course at that point in the semester. A "text" can be as short as a sentence or two (such as a proverb, popular saying, or line of dialogue from a film or television show) that models authentically the vocabulary or grammar item of the lesson. In these instances, I would use this short text (accompanied with a corresponding image of some sort) to introduce or present the new vocabulary or grammar item and ask a follow-up question or two to verify that students are making the correct form-meaning connections of the new language item(s). At the intermediate levels, students can initially handle longer texts. Thus, I might look for an authentic culture text that features (or that I can "doctor" a bit to feature) many examples of the target vocabulary or grammar item(s) at the discourse level (around 75–100 words).

When it comes to getting into the "meat" of the lesson, as I discussed in the initial section of this interview, I find it beneficial to start by asking myself if I want the culture text for input or output purposes. I also

consider how much class time in the lesson I can devote to reading the text and working with it through activities. The class time available to me on that given day and my efforts to balance practice with the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) across the lessons of that week largely inform the length and type of culture text I select. Language learners are always able to comprehend slightly more than they can produce. Thus, if I want to work on reading comprehension, I'll select a slightly longer culture text (perhaps 100–125 words for beginning levels and 200–250 words for intermediate levels) and then follow-up with reading comprehension questions and assimilation questions or activities. But, if my desire is to use the culture text to create a context and elicit student reactions and production of the language items under study or review, I'll opt for a shorter text (25–50 words for beginning levels and 50–75 words for intermediate levels) or even a visual culture text of some sort such as an advertisement, graph or table, or other type of text that communicates key information or messages both visually and linguistically. I think about where I want my students primarily to focus their energies—reading the text itself and perhaps noticing particular language structures or specific pieces of information expressed in the text or reacting to the text in some way and paying more attention to the language they are using to express those reactions—and then I select texts accordingly.

In target language content courses such as seminars and survey courses, the lengths and types of culture texts may vary widely, again depending on a number of factors including but not limited to: the type of institution, if the course is required for the major or minor or is an elective, the level of motivation and profile of the students, and so on. When designing these types of film and literature courses, I have found the inclusion of a variety of types and lengths of texts as the key to my success in the classroom and with the curriculum. I have had the most luck when developing a special topic or identifying a theme of high interest and/or high relatability to students and then selecting either entire works or excerpts from works from a number of canonical and noncanonical genres and forms (e.g., literature, poetry, film, graphic narration, song lyrics, and theater) that treat the topic or theme from varying perspectives, historical points in time, and so on. For the French curriculum, I believe it is important to include culture texts from a wide range of Francophone countries (not just France) and both male and female authors. I do this not so much for the sake of "coverage" but rather to provide my students with a more comprehensive view and understanding of the special topic or theme from voices both in the mainstream and in the margins of the French-speaking world.

In terms of course design, balance and flow are critical when it comes to the selection of culture texts and how much of them to use. I typically create cycles oscillating between challenging and less-challenging texts throughout the semester. Students may read an entire novel in an advanced-level course, but I make sure it is one that is not too challenging in terms of language or too removed from their everyday life experiences (i.e., not too abstract and usually a more modern text). I may only use excerpts from the more challenging or demanding novels. I have found that students typically have an easier time comprehending plays (probably because dialogue lines generally appear at the sentential level as opposed to the discourse level in prose.) Entire poems and song lyrics generally do not pose problems in terms of length but present challenges in terms of language use and comprehension. Generally-speaking, I have found that by balancing the lengths of texts and by varying the types of texts across the semester, I am able to support my students' language and cultural learning needs and avoid overwhelming them (at least too much or too often). However, the "secret," as I hinted above, rests not always so much in the selection of texts but more in how the instructor asks the students to engage with the text. The importance of "personalizing the content," as I discussed above, has proved my best strategy in dealing with culture texts in all levels of French courses I teach at the undergraduate level. Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that we must make an effort to ensure that the level of the culture text, however one wishes to define that concept of "level," is manageable for the class as a whole. But, as I detailed in the "tarte aux bleuets" example, we can prepare our students by introducing key words, phrases, and main content points and engage them in some preliminary thinking so as to make the culture text more manageable from the onset.

KIM: Teaching learners at a novice level of proficiency is always challenging. Would you share your strategies for modifying the content or procedures of media-centered activities in a low-proficiency, elementary-level classroom so that students are guided to actively participate in speaking and writing tasks that are based on those activities?

WEBER-FÈVE: This is an excellent question, which I actually began to answer at the end of the previous question, I think. As I explained above, I make informed decisions when selecting which culture texts to bring into my lessons. Thus, I have found that the only minor modifications I make for beginning and intermediate levels are: (1) glossing into English a handful of unfamiliar main content words that are not cognates, (2) simplifying a

few grammatical constructions when necessary, (3) replacing a few words with synonyms if the synonyms are words we have already studied or are cognates, or (4) rewording some brief phrasings in order to "flood" the text with more target vocabulary or grammar from the lesson. When glossing difficult words in English, I look to make sure I am not glossing too many words throughout the text. If so, I abandon the text and look for another, as this would be a sign that the text is not level-appropriate. For the other strategies, I always make sure that any simplifications or substitutions I make are still native-like-sounding; in other words, a native speaker would or could also realistically phrase the text that way. If not, I'll gloss the word or phrase into English; or if there are already too many glosses in the text, I'll abandon the text and look for another. I do also want to add that I employ the second, third, and fourth strategies only to cultural background reading-type texts. When working with original literary texts, as I do not want to change the original artistic language, I only apply the first strategy or insert a footnote that rephrases or provides other information to assist comprehension of that difficult example of language.

As I was starting to suggest earlier and touched on in the first part of this interview as well, adopting a "multi-step approach" and carefully designing the "preparatory step" to any culture text are critical to the success of the text in the lesson. Not only, of course, do "multi-step approaches" allow students to engage more meaningfully with the text, they also allow instructors to modify culture texts less and/or work with slightly harder texts. There is a seemingly infinite number of strategies to employ in preparing students for a culture text. In my teaching, I find that the preparatory steps I design tend to purport to achieve one (or a combination) of the following strategies: (1) to provide useful reading strategies to aid comprehension, (2) to activate students' existing background knowledge of the topic of the culture text, or (3) to help students anticipate the key information expressed in the culture text they are about to encounter. Much scholarship and a plethora of examples exist in the field of foreign language literacy surrounding useful reading strategies to aid comprehension. So, I will not go into them at this moment.

For the second strategy, brief activities that ask students to identify individual pieces of information first work quite well. For example, I recently designed a multi-step culture text activity surrounding a cultural background reading text on two important cultural figures in France, Saint Nicolas *(Saint Nick)* and Père Noël *(Father Christmas/Santa Claus)*. Children growing up in the US tend to think of these two figures as the same man, whereas children growing up in the eastern regions of France

(as well as in Belgium and elsewhere) know the two figures separately. For the preparatory step, I prepared a series of individual characteristics that described one figure or the other, and I asked students to identify which figure (Saint Nicolas or Père Noël) was being described in each statement. Not only did this preparatory step activate students' background knowledge (as least regarding Père Noël/ Santa Claus), but also it allowed them to discover first in isolated sentential structure (which is initially easier for comprehension) the key pieces of information they would encounter in the subsequent culture text written in discourse format. Then, as they went on to read the culture text, I guided that reading process by asking students to check their answers from the preparatory step against the information in the text before going over the answers together as a class.

In this example, the preparatory step incorporated both the activation of students' existing background knowledge and their anticipation of the content (i.e., they could assume that the characteristics that didn't describe Père Noël would describe Saint Nicolas). Another more general approach to the third strategy to help students anticipate key information is the preparation of more open-ended questions that solicit students' initial thinking or elicit personal reactions. In this instance, instructors can ask leading questions like, "Do you think that . . .?," "Would you agree or disagree that . . .?," "Why might someone . . .?," "What are some of the reasons for . . .?," and so on. These questions should tap into the key content points of the culture text, which in turn allows students to start to anticipate what they might be soon encountering in the text and thus makes comprehension easier. The instructor can then continue with a "guided-interaction step" as modeled in the preceding paragraph, or the instructor can design this step in another format. (Like reading strategies, a plethora of examples of guided-interaction activities exist in the landscape of foreign language literacy scholarship as well.)

What is important in the preparatory step is that these activities are relatively brief and should be so to remain effective. The instructor is ultimately "setting the stage," so to speak. I've found that long and drawn-out preparatory steps may risk diffusing the impact of the culture text and/or tire out the students before they even get to the culture text. In returning to the interview question at hand, I believe that the richer the preparation is, the more comprehensible and meaningful the reading of the culture text is, and the better the students can interact with the text (i.e., participate in speaking and writing tasks). One final recommendation I would like to share when designing these speaking and writing tasks is to keep in mind the level of the class (i.e., what they can truly say, do, and write in the target

language). It is very easy to get carried away as instructors, which I can say from personal experience!

In the "multi-step approach," these types of tasks would be known as the "assimilation step;" and again, there is a multitude of ways to design these types of activities. In the lower levels, as we know, students are limited in what they can produce in the target language. Therefore, instructors want to keep these tasks realistic. The "tarte aux bleuets" example I shared in the article showed how students could write a recipe, write a short description, or prepare a labeled illustration of their regional dessert. Partner activities with simple expansion questions that invite students to personalize the content of the culture text can work well too. For example, in relation to the Saint Nicolas/Père Noël text above, I could ask students to identify the traditions described in the reading that they also practice with their families and then share that information with a partner (as well as mention any different traditions not described in the reading) to find out if their partner celebrates in the same manner and also for cross-cultural comparisons. The culture text talked about how the French initially opposed and resisted the introduction of Père Noël in French culture, as they saw him as a product of American materialism and capitalism and as an agent of secularization of the traditional religious holiday. (In fact, religious authorities in the city of Dijon in 1951 accused Santa Claus of heresy!) For a more advanced-level class, I might want to have the class conduct a debate stemming from this information regarding "Has the holiday season become too commercial in the United States?" with different groups assigned to present different arguments in favor and against. For a lower-level class, the debate would be unimaginable. Students would have to resort to English to perform the task. However, instructors can still capture the spirit of critical-thinking but through more controlled expansion activities that may or may not lead to more open-ended expansion or assimilation activities.

By controlled expansion activities, I am suggesting that the instructor structure the task in such a way as to make it manageable for the beginning-level student. Picking up again the debate example from above, I could not ask beginning-level students to construct the various debate arguments, but I can prepare those arguments ahead of time (in comprehensible language) and ask students to choose the argument that reflects their own personal opinion. Low-proficiency students may not be able to produce abstract concepts in the target language, but they can think critically about what they are reading in the target language and process that abstract concept when it is presented to them, provided that the language is clear and comprehensible. Thus, I would encourage instructors to think about different

ways in which they can design tasks (speaking or writing or mini-tasks that can lead to more open-ended speaking or writing) that take advantage of controlled formats like agreeing or disagreeing with individual statements, providing yes or no answers to questions that stem from the culture text, or even responding to questions with just one-word or very short answers.

Low-proficiency students have the easiest time speaking or writing about their own lives and experiences and typically in only very concrete terms. I always strive to design open-ended or more extensive expansion tasks that capitalize on that reality and look for ways to help students make more abstract connections through more controlled and manageable activities or mini-activities.

REFERENCE

Lee, J., & VanPatten, B. (2003). *Making communicative language teaching happen* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

SO-YOUNG KIM
So-Young Kim earned a PhD in Curriculum & Teaching, focusing on Korean morphology, at the University of Kansas in December 2013, and has been working as a Korean instructor at multiple institutions such as the Korean Institute at Kansas City, KS, the University of Kansas, KS, and Johnson County Community College since 2006.