Foreign Language reading as cultural problem-solving:
The intercultural stance of the reader

The purpose of this project is to continue my investigation of the Foreign Language (FL) reader's problem-solving behaviour. Having examined the conditions of implementation of reading strategies associated with lexical and syntactical difficulties, I now propose to study how Anglo-Australian university language students deal with unfamiliar cultural events featured in written texts in French.

While a number of empirical studies have looked at the effect of cultural knowledge on reading comprehension (see Carrell, 1983; Steffensen, 1987; Pritchard, 1990, Shanahan, 1997; etc.), it appears that little research has been carried out in relation to how FL readers identify problematic cultural events and attempt to solve resulting comprehension problems.

The main objective of the project I propose to undertake in the context of Language and Intercultural Communication research is therefore to gain an understanding of the nature of the strategies implemented by FL readers to identify and attempt to overcome cultural unfamiliarity featured in written texts. A corollary objective is to observe how FL linguistic proficiency may influence the perception and apprehension of cultural difficulties.

Beyond the examination of learners' strategic approach to cultural problem-solving, the processes of (re)construction of cultural coherence in unfamiliar textual environments could also be examined. In other words, if FL reading may be described, at least in part, as an act of mediation between the learners' cultural resources and the culturally unfamiliar, the conditions of learners' engagement in the process of intercultural negotiation during reading could then be given consideration.

At the Symposium, I propose to give an exploratory paper, in which I will outline the project's theoretical and instructional rationale, as well as discuss design and methodological issues such as text/task/participant selection and qualitative data collection methods.