

0042-1

Foreign Language ANI

20:6, Dec 1987

ACTFL Japanese Proficiency Guidelines

The Japanese proficiency guidelines represent a hierarchy of global characterizations of integrated performance in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Each description is a representative, not an exhaustive, sample of a particular range of ability, and each level subsumes all previous levels, moving from simple to complex in an "all-before-and-more" fashion.

The language-specific guidelines exemplify in Japanese the characteristics of each level of the generic guidelines. The examples do not constitute an exhaustive list or a discrete set required at a particular level, but rather they suggest functional samples of non-native ability in Japanese.

Because these guidelines identify stages of proficiency, as opposed to achievement, they are not intended to measure what an individual has achieved through specific classroom instruction but rather to allow assessment of what an individual can and cannot do, regardless of where, when, or how the language has been learned or acquired; thus, the words "learned" and "acquired" are used in the broadest sense. These guidelines are not based on a particular linguistic theory or pedagogical method, since the guidelines are proficiency-based, as opposed to achievement-based, and are intended to be used for global assessment.

These guidelines should not be considered the definitive version, since the construction and utilization of language proficiency guidelines is a dynamic, interactive process. The academic sector, like the government sector, will continue to refine and update the criteria periodically to reflect the needs of the users and the advances of the profession. In this vein, ACTFL owes a continuing debt to the creators of the 1982 provisional proficiency guidelines and, of course, to the members of the Interagency Language Roundtable Testing Committee, the creators of the government's Language Skill Level Descriptions.

ACTFL would like to thank the following individuals for their contribution to this project:

Generic Guidelines

Heidi Byrnes
James Child
Nina Levinson
Pardee Lowe, Jr.
Seiichi Makino
Irene Thompson
A. Ronald Walton

Japanese Guidelines

Seiichi Makino
David Mills
Tazuko Monane
Kiyo Stevenson

These guidelines are the products of grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

1-2400

0042-2

Descriptions-Speaking

- Novice** The Novice level is characterized by the ability to communicate minimally with learned material.

- Novice-Low** *Generic.* Oral production consists of isolated words and perhaps a few high-frequency phrases. Essentially no functional communicative ability.

Japanese: Oral production is limited to isolated words, such as *sayonara*, *hai*, or common loan words in English such as *kimono*. Essentially no communicative ability.

- Novice-Mid** *Generic.* Oral production continues to consist of isolated words and learned phrases within very predictable areas of need, although quality is increased. Vocabulary is sufficient only for handling simple, elementary needs and expressing basic courtesies. Utterances rarely consist of more than two or three words and show frequent long pauses and repetition of interlocutor's words. Speaker may have some difficulty producing even the simplest utterances. Some Novice-Mid speakers may be understood only with great difficulty.

Japanese. Oral production continues to consist of isolated words and phrases within very predictable areas of need. Vocabulary is sufficient only for handling simple, elementary needs and expressing basic courtesies such as *ohayoo (gozaimasu)*, *konnichi wa*, *arigatoo (gozaimasu)*, *doozo*, and *doomo*. Speech may be hesitant.

- Novice-High** *Generic.* Able to satisfy partially the requirements of basic communicative exchanges by relying heavily on learned utterances but occasionally expanding these through simple recombinations of their elements. Can ask questions or make statements involving learned material. Shows signs of spontaneity although this falls short of real autonomy of expression. Speech continues to consist of learned utterances rather than of personalized, situationally adapted ones. Vocabulary centers on areas such as basic objects, places, and most common kinship terms. Pronunciation may still be strongly influenced by first language. Errors are frequent and, in spite of repetition, some Novice-High speakers will have difficulty being understood, even by sympathetic interlocutors.

Japanese. Able to satisfy partially the requirements of basic communicative exchanges. Can handle a very limited number of simple questions, such as *Nan desu ka? Doko desu ka? Dare desu ka?*, and may be able to answer such questions. Vocabulary centers on categories such as basic objects and activities. May utilize English words within a Japanese context without appropriate phonological adaption, for example, *Airport doko desu ka?* Able to count but not to use the classifier system. Delivery may still be strongly influenced by first language.

- Intermediate** The Intermediate level is characterized by the speaker's ability to:

 - create with the language by combining and recombining learned elements, though primarily in a reactive mode;
 - initiate, minimally sustain, and close in a simple way basic communicative tasks; and
 - ask and answer questions.

- Intermediate-Low** *Generic.* Able to handle successfully a limited number of interactive, task-oriented

0042-3

and social situations. Can ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements and maintain face-to-face conversation, although in a highly restricted manner and with much linguistic inaccuracy. Within these limitations, can perform such tasks as introducing self, ordering a meal, asking directions, and making purchases. Vocabulary is adequate to express only the most elementary needs. Strong interference from native language may occur. Misunderstandings frequently arise, but with repetition, the Intermediate-Low speaker can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.

Japanese. Can ask and answer questions, such as *Ima nan-ji desu ka? Hachi-ji desu.* Can engage in a simple, reactive conversation using formal nonpast/past, affirmative/negative forms (A: *Boku wa kinoo futtobooru o mi ni ikimashita.* B: *Soo desu ka. Boku mo ikimashita.*), demonstrates (*kore/sore/are wa watashi no kuruma desu.*), and classifiers (*Kami ga ni-mai arimasu.*). Misunderstanding frequently arises from poor pronunciation, wrong pitch-accents, and limited vocabulary.

Intermediate-Mid

Generic. Able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated, basic and communicative tasks and social situations. Can talk simply about self and family members. Can ask and answer questions and participate in simple conversations on topics beyond the most immediate needs, e.g., personal history and leisure time activities. Utterance length increases slightly, but speech may continue to be characterized by frequent long pauses, since the smooth incorporation of even basic conversational strategies is often hindered as the speaker struggles to create appropriate language forms. Pronunciation may continue to be strongly influenced by first language and fluency may still be strained. Although misunderstandings still arise, the Intermediate-Mid speaker can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.

Japanese. Can ask and answer simple questions on topics such as personal history (*Oniisan ga arimasu ka?*), leisure time activities (*Eiga ni yoku ikimasu ka?*), and simple transactions, such as at the post office (*100 en kitte go-mai kudasai.*), etc. Quantity of speech is increased and quality is improved. Greater accuracy in basic constructions and use of high frequency verbs and auxiliary verbs (A: *Ima nani o shite imasu ka? B: Terebi o mite imasu.*). The Intermediate-Mid speaker is generally a less reactive and more interactive conversational partner. (A: *Eiga ni ikimashoo ka? B: Iie, watashi wa ongakkai ni ikitai desu.*). The use of classifiers is expanded, and the use of particles is more appropriate.

Intermediate-High

Generic. Able to handle successfully most uncomplicated communicative tasks and social situations. Can initiate, sustain, and close a general conversation with a number of strategies appropriate to a range of circumstances and topics, but errors are evident. Limited vocabulary still necessitates hesitation and may bring about slightly unexpected circumlocution. There is emerging evidence of connected discourse, particularly for simple narration and/or description. The Intermediate-High speaker can generally be understood even by interlocutors not accustomed to dealing with speakers at this level, but repetition may still be required.

Japanese. Emerging ability to distinguish between politeness and formality usage in most uncomplicated communicative tasks and social situations. (*Sensei, dochira e inasshaimasu ka?*). There is emerging evidence of connected discourse, particularly for simple narration and/or description. (A: *Kinoo nani o shimashita ka? B: Kyooto ni itte, otera o mite arukimashita. Tenki ga yokute, totemo tanoshikatta desu.*

- Moo ichido ititai to omoimasu.*)
- Advanced** The Advanced level is characterized by the speaker's ability to:
- converse in a clearly participatory fashion;
 - initiate, sustain, and bring to closure a wide variety of communicative tasks, including those that require an increased ability to convey meaning with diverse language strategies due to a complication or an unforeseen turn of events;
 - satisfy the requirements of school and work situations; and
 - narrate and describe with paragraph-length connected discourse.
- Advanced** *Generic.* Able to satisfy the requirements of everyday situations and routine school and work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility complicated tasks and social situations, such as elaborating, complaining, and apologizing. Can narrate and describe with some details, linking sentences together smoothly. Can communicate facts and talk casually about topics of current public and personal interest, using general vocabulary. Shortcomings can often be smoothed over by communicative strategies, such as pause fillers, stalling devices, and different rates of speech. Circumlocution which arises from vocabulary or syntactic limitations very often is quite successful, though some groping for words may still be evident. The Advanced-level speaker can be understood without difficulty by native interlocutors.
- Japanese.* Can narrate and describe, linking sentences together smoothly into paragraphs, utilizing such cohesive devices as conjunctions, pronouns, ellipses, and repetitions. (*Chichi wa denkigaisha ni tsutomete imasu. Daigaku o dete sugu sono shigoto o hajimemashita kara, moo nijuunen ni narimasu. Chichi no shigoto ni tsuite wa nani mo shirimasen ga, taihen omashiroi soo desu. Da kara, boku mo daigaku de denkikoogaku o benkyoo shiyoo ka to omotte iru n desu.*) Marked improvement in delivery in terms of intonation, hesitation noises, and *aizuchi*.
- Advanced-Plus** *Generic.* Able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday, school, and work situations. Can discuss concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. There is emerging evidence of ability to support opinions, explain in detail, and hypothesize. The Advanced-Plus speaker often shows a well developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms with confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing and circumlocution. Differentiated vocabulary and intonation are effectively used to communicate fine shades of meaning. The Advanced-Plus speaker often shows remarkable fluency and ease of speech but under the demands of Superior-level complex tasks, language may break down or prove inadequate.
- Japanese.* Able to support opinions, explain in detail, and hypothesize, but this ability is not consistent. Under pressure or stress, control of stylistic registers and/or complicated structures may prove inadequate.
- Superior** The Superior level is characterized by the speaker's ability to:
- participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, professional, and abstract topics; and
 - support opinions and hypothesize using native-like discourse strategies.
- Superior** *Generic.* Able to speak the language with sufficient accuracy to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, professional, and abstract topics. Can discuss special fields of competence and interest with ease.