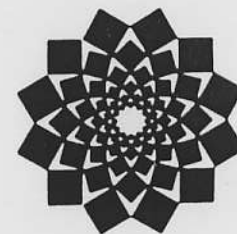


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Teaching for Proficiency, the Organizing Principle

Edited by Theodore V. Higgs

In conjunction with the American Council
on the Teaching of
Foreign
Languages



*Lisikin - Gasparro about
ACTFL Guidelines:
A Historical Perspective*



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The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: A Historical Perspective

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Educational Testing Service

Introduction

In November 1982, ACTFL published the *ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines*, a series of descriptions of proficiency levels for speaking, listening, reading, writing, and culture in a foreign language. These guidelines represent a graduated sequence of steps that can be used to structure a foreign-language program. What exactly are they? Where did they come from? Why were they written? What are their implications for teaching and learning a second language? This chapter will deal with the *what*, *where from*, and *why* of these guidelines in order to give the reader a sense of the background of the contemporary interest in proficiency as the organizing principle of foreign-language study.

Guidelines: A Stepladder for Learning

The ACTFL guidelines are the result of a project funded by the International Research and Studies Program of the U.S. Department of Education entitled "A Design for Measuring and Communicating Foreign Language Proficiency." They were developed in direct response to a recommendation of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (24) to establish "language proficiency achievement goals for the end of each year of study at all levels, with special attention

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to speaking proficiency." The guidelines consist of both generic and language-specific descriptions of proficiency that range from the most minimal acquaintance with the language to adult professional-level skill. These graduated descriptions of proficiency have been written for French, German, and Spanish. Plans are under way to write comparable guidelines for the other Western European languages, as well as for four less commonly taught languages of critical national importance—Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. The generic guidelines are found in Appendix A of this volume. The full set of language-specific guidelines is available at nominal cost from the ACTFL Materials Center.

It has been acknowledged that the language-teaching profession lacks a generally accepted sequence of learning objectives. The pragmatic atmosphere of the 1970s, the push for accountability, and the desire to establish measurable objectives have reemphasized the need for an organizing principle that would guide instruction. Omaggio (18) has recently observed that the history of foreign-language education is replete with battles over methodology, over the "right way" to teach a language. The entry of the discussions about language proficiency and the development of the ACTFL guidelines are a signal that, as Omaggio says, "we may be realizing that the controversy has been raging on the wrong battlefield. Instead of searching for one definitive approach to language teaching—a search that has consistently ended in frustration and a sense of failure—we should be identifying some 'organizing principle' by which various other methods, approaches, materials, and curricula might begin to make collective sense." The organizing principle that is reflected in the ACTFL guidelines is *language proficiency*: the ability to function effectively in the language in real-life contexts.

In an earlier, more innocent era, one could accept the illusion that language study was a classroom activity with little or no application in the outside world. One could create a closed system of curriculum, textbook, and tests. Success could be efficiently gauged in terms of how well the students learned the material they were taught, i.e., by their level of achievement. The question of probable success or failure with the language outside the classroom was seldom asked. The only accountability was internal: whether the students measured up to the expectations of the teacher.

The foreign-language profession has, at various points in our country's history, been jolted into action by national emergencies. Events such as two world wars, the launching of *Sputnik 1*, the Vietnam War, and the current crisis in the automobile industry have forcefully reminded the nation of the critical importance that foreign-language skills and understanding of other cultures play in questions of diplomacy, defense, and commerce.

It is in this context that the guidelines have been developed. Questions that have always troubled the foreign-language profession are being asked more insistently these days, not only from within (for we have always been

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an introspective and self-analytical group) but also from without: What should a student be able to do with the language after one, two, or four semesters of study? What goals are realistically attainable? How much knowledge of culture can we expect of students in a typical two-year high school sequence? Should some skills be emphasized more than others? How does the college language department know how an entering student can function in the language? What can a company know about the language skills of a candidate for a position called "bilingual secretary," and how "bilingual" does the company really want or need this secretary to be? The guidelines promise to be a "common yardstick" for the foreign-language profession that will allow us to organize much needed proficiency-based curricula, materials, evaluation instruments, and articulation plans around well-defined levels of language skill.

History of the Guidelines: The Early Antecedents

It has often been said that there are no new ideas; everything that is now being thought or planned or developed is not original but is a different way of stating an old truth. The guidelines have their most recent antecedents in the President's Commission report, in the various government agencies' efforts to teach and test functional language ability, and in the work in communicative syllabuses that has occupied our European colleagues for most of the last decade. From this viewpoint the guidelines are indeed an extension of already existing ideas. From a broader perspective, however, they have grown out of centuries of teaching, thinking, and theorizing about language, and they must be placed in this context as well.

Fifty centuries of language proficiency

The quest for proficiency, in the sense of mastery of a subject or the attainment of a usable level of skill, has always been with us. Titone (26), who traces foreign-language teaching back to 3000 B.C., recognizes that "the necessity to communicate with foreign peoples . . . is as old as the human race, or at least the Tower of Babel!" (p. 4). Indeed, archeologists have found bilingual dictionaries dating from the third millennium B.C.

Whether foreign languages were learned by conquering or conquered peoples or, as in Renaissance Europe, by young men as part of their general education, the goal of instruction seems largely to have been *practical communicative ability*. Titone (26) reports that textbooks in use until the beginning of the nineteenth century were written mostly in the target language and that ideas about foreign-language teaching from the Renaissance into the eighteenth century would seem surprisingly modern to today's foreign-language educators concerned with teaching for language proficiency.

A seventeenth-century proponent of an early version of what we might term the direct method was the Czech educator Jan Amos Komensky (1592–1670). His methods featured prominently the use of sensory experience to develop intuition, and a large number of examples to help students make the inductive leap from the concrete language to the abstract rules of grammar. While contemporary foreign languages were taught during this period by contact and conversation with native speakers and were synthesized into more complex forms through practice, new directions were being undertaken in the teaching of Latin. In the Middle Ages when Latin was commonly spoken and written in Europe for any kind of formal communication, it was taught in the schools as a first language, and all educated people were naturally bilingual. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Latin came to be studied only as a written language, new methods were developed to teach it. The memory of Latin as a living, spoken language was still recent; what was lacking were native speakers who could teach students by the direct, conversational approach.

The Englishman Roger Ascham (1515–1568) and the German Wolfgang Ratke (1571–1635) both organized Latin language instruction around a written text. The teacher's first task was to translate the text for the student, word by word, until the student could translate accurately from and into Latin. Rules of grammar, deduced from examples in the Latin text, were then taught, but always in the context of the students' previous experience with the text.

John Locke, writing in the second half of the seventeenth century, advocated the translation method of teaching Latin and rejected the practice of teaching grammar rules in order to facilitate accurate and fluent usage. Grammar was to be taught as a cognitive system to those who already knew the language. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Locke anticipated the ACTFL guidelines' concern with accuracy when he wrote,

For Languages are only to be learned by rote; and a Man who does not speak *English* or *Latin* perfectly by rote, so that having thought of the thing he would speak of, his Tongue of Course, without Thought of Rule or Grammar, falls into the proper Expression and Idiom of that Language, does not speak it well, nor is Master of it. [Quoted by Titone, 26, p. 16]

By the nineteenth century, Latin teaching had become extremely grammar oriented. The study of the classics had become a kind of "mental gymnastics," intended to produce "an excellent mental discipline, a fortitude of spirit and a broad humane understanding of life" (Mallinson, 16, p. 8). Herron (10) notes that this view of Latin study reflected a general theory of education prominent during that period in which it was believed that certain academic exercises (connected with the study of Greek, Latin,

and mathematics) could serve to develop mental faculties, such as perception, imagination, memory, reason, feeling, and will. When the modern foreign languages began to achieve greater prominence in the curriculum, this same justification for study was applied to them as well.

The grammar-translation method, which dominated foreign-language education in the United States for over a century, began in Europe in the late eighteenth century and flourished in the nineteenth. Just as the direct methods of the Renaissance through the eighteenth century had aimed to teach students mastery of the written and spoken language, so too the grammar-translation method was born of goals that had "mastery" or proficiency at their base. The best-known early grammar-translation textbooks were probably those of Ollendorf (17), which were first published in the 1840s, and later those of Plötz (20). Kelly (12) describes the standard format of this type of text: "a statement of the rule, followed by a vocabulary list and translation exercises. . . . [M]ore importance was accorded to exceptions than would have been considered justified during the Renaissance" (p. 52).

Under the grammar-translation system, mental discipline was most important; therefore, students were trained to analyze structures and memorize forms and vocabulary lists. Since the sequence of instruction was structurally rather than textually or communicatively based, no effort was made to relate the instructional material to the students' own needs. Instead, students memorized and translated from one language into the other series of discrete sentences that illustrated particular rules of grammar and their exceptions. As Kelly (12) puts it, "language skill was equated with ability to conjugate and decline" (p. 53).

Arguments over methodology in the nineteenth century seem to have been as heated as they are today, and there is considerable evidence of strong reaction against the grammar-translation approach. For example, Kelly (12) quotes Rouse, who wrote acerbically in 1925:

I will only add finally, that the current method . . . is the offspring of German scholarship, which seeks to know everything about something rather than the thing itself. . . . [P. 53]

Writing in a similar vein, Bahlsen, quoted by Titone (26), reflected in 1905 on his own training in French under Plötz:

Committing words to memory, translating sentences, drilling irregular verbs, later memorizing, repeating, and applying grammatical rules with their exceptions. . . . [It was] a barren waste of insipid sentence translations. [P. 28]

Although the grammar-translation method prevailed until well into the twentieth century, methodological reform was also in evidence. Several

varieties of a kind of "natural method," later termed the "direct method," attempted to bring the focus of language teaching back to the living language itself.

The reforms in language teaching at the end of the nineteenth century were motivated, according to Titone (26), by both economic and scientific considerations. Colonialism and expanded international commerce gave functional foreign-language skills a practical importance that had been lacking for centuries. The new science of descriptive linguistics focused on bringing the spoken language to a place of prominence. Scientific methods of language teaching emphasized mastering the sound system, integrating the study of grammar in stages appropriate in complexity to the student's overall mastery of the language, and gradual sequencing of material.

That there was considerable confusion and lack of consensus on the question of foreign-language methodology in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century is indicated by the appointment of the Committee of Twelve in 1896 by the National Education Association. The mission of this committee was to investigate the place of modern languages in secondary education and to make recommendations in the areas of methodology and teacher training, as well as on some other questions concerning the teaching of modern languages in secondary and postsecondary institutions. A survey was conducted, and a report issued in 1899 confirmed the lack of consensus in methodology within the teaching profession. The report recommended a balanced approach of the phonetic method, some study of grammar, reading-translation of graded texts, oral practice in the language, and written composition. These components were sequenced according to the length of the program, the age of the pupils at the time they began language study, and the goals of instruction.

Foreign-language instruction in the twentieth century

In the early years of the twentieth century, a majority of high school students in the United States studied foreign languages in a "normal" four-year sequence. But the post-World War I xenophobia that predominated in the 1920s reduced enrollments and caused most schools to limit themselves to a two-year sequence of study. This in turn limited the level of proficiency that students could realistically be expected to attain. In addition, communicative skills were shunned, due to the extreme isolationist philosophy of the decade. The Coleman Report, published in 1929 as part of the Modern Foreign Language Study commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation, reflected the ethos of the times by recommending that only reading be taught, since that was the only goal attainable in a two-year sequence of study.

Rivers (21) points out that the Coleman Report appeared at a time when foreign-language professionals in the United States and abroad were reas-

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sessing their goals and methods, and it therefore had considerable impact. It took firm hold in the United States, in spite of the fact that its premises and methods were somewhat questionable (Titone, 26). The goal of the reading method was to produce proficient readers of authentic foreign-language texts who could comprehend directly, without recourse to a dictionary or a translation. The method inspired the production of graded readers geared to the various levels of language study. Since most students studied a language for only two years, they never had the opportunity to progress to ungraded materials (Rivers, 21). Thus, even the limited goal of achieving proficiency in reading was not realized. In addition, the exclusive emphasis on reading resulted in a nation of foreign-language students who could read only limited material and speak and understand the language not at all.

Intensive Language Instruction: Herald of Change

The linguistic isolationism so characteristic of the 1920s and 1930s ended with this country's involvement in World War II. It was realized early on that having military experts trained in foreign languages was vital to the national security. In fact, the roots of both the audiolingual movement and the current government language-teaching programs go back before World War II to an intensive language instruction project developed by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. The project focused on the uncommonly taught languages of potential military and diplomatic importance in a systematic effort to bring the insights of linguistics to the field of language teaching (Thompson, 25).

Soon after its inception, the ACLS Intensive Language Program was offering courses in twenty-six languages at eighteen universities. Based on principles of language acquisition, the program included (1) an understanding of language as a set of habits and (2) a belief that the spoken form of the language should be presented to the students well before the written form, in imitation of the way in which children acquire their first language. The program maintained a low teacher-student ratio and included long hours of drill and oral practice. The immediate need of the military for trained personnel who could communicate with native speakers of other languages made the Intensive Language Program an invaluable resource, and project personnel soon began providing support for new language programs in the government that were being constructed on the same model. Of these, the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), the Education Branch of the Special Services Division (also known as the Army Language Section), and the Foreign Language and Area Programs of the Provost Marshall General's Office, Department of the Army, drew most notably on the resources and experience of the ACLS program. The

ACLS method depended on the coordinated teaching efforts of linguistic experts, who explained the structure of the language, and native informants, who practiced with the students extensive drills and conversation based on graded materials. As Thompson (25) and Rivers (21) point out, the philosophy of language teaching on which this system was based became, more than a decade later, the cornerstone of the audiolingual method.

ACLS and government language teaching

After the war and the closing of the military language programs, the ACLS continued its involvement in foreign-language instruction by forming the Committee on the Language Program (Thompson, 25). Among other endeavors, the committee facilitated the publication of self-study guides in twenty-two languages that had been produced during the war by the Education Branch of the Special Services Division of the Army. Each program consisted of graded text materials and two phonograph records that comprised the equivalent of approximately a year-long course. The collaboration of linguistic scientists in the language-learning projects of that time is apparent in the list of authors of these materials. Thompson (25) remarks that "the authors of these manuals read like a *Who's Who* of American linguists (Bloomfield, Block, Dyen, Hockett, Hodge, Moulton, and Sebeok, to name a few)" (p. 281).

The goals and methods of wartime foreign-language study were continued after World War II at the Foreign Service Institute's (FSI) School of Languages and Linguistics. Its mission was and is today to teach Foreign Service personnel languages that they will need in their work abroad. Carroll (5) wrote that the programs were based on linguistic analysis to an even greater degree than in the Intensive Language Program model on which they were based.

As might be expected, aural-oral skills are emphasized, since the primary objective is to give the student a speaking knowledge of the language being taught. Instruction in the written language plays a secondary role. The program could be characterized as carrying the Intensive Language Program to its logical extreme. What differentiates this instruction from the wartime methods is its even greater emphasis on linguistic analysis. [P. 182]

The designers of the language programs at the FSI were soon faced with the need to measure their results. This effort began in 1952 when, under the National Mobilization and Manpower Act, the Civil Service Commission undertook the creation of a register of government employees with skills, background, and experience in foreign languages and cultures. The

register would categorize degrees of foreign-language ability so that individuals could be classified. Sollenberger (23) reports that the project was sidetracked for a number of bureaucratic reasons, but not until preliminary skill-level descriptions had been defined for reading and speaking.

In 1955 the Foreign Service Institute ordered a survey of foreign-language skills. A self-appraisal survey carried out in 1956 revealed that "less than half of the 4,041 regular, reserve, and staff officers surveyed had a [useful] proficiency in French, German, or Spanish." "Useful" was defined as "sufficient control of the structure of a language, and adequate vocabulary, to handle routine representation requirements and professional discussions within one or more special fields, and—with the exception of languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, etc.—the ability to read nontechnical news or technical writing in a special field" (Sollenberger, 23, p. 5).

Sollenberger (23) further reports that these findings led to the announcement of a language policy for the Foreign Language Service in November of 1956 that was based on the premise that foreign-language skills are vital in the conduct of foreign affairs. It committed the Foreign Service Institute to test its officers and to verify whether they had achieved a "useful" level of skill, as defined above.

This mandate thrust the FSI into virgin territory in the field of evaluation. As Wilds (30), who was deeply involved in the development of the oral interview, understatedly says, "Both the scope and restrictions of the testing situation provided problems previously unknown in language testing" (p. 29). The procedure that was developed was a face-to-face interview test, tailored to each candidate's interests, experience, and ability in the language. The rating scale used built on the original 1952 descriptions and expanded them to include both functional and linguistic components.

In the next decade, use of the rating scale spread to other government agencies, such as the Defense Language Institute (DLI), the Language School of the Central Intelligence Agency, and ACTION/Peace Corps. Representatives of the user agencies met in 1968 to standardize the level definitions. The latter, now termed the ILR (Interagency Language Roundtable) definitions, are found in this volume as Appendix B.

Academic Language Programs after World War II

The ACLS Intensive Language Program influenced language teaching in schools and colleges, as well as in the government. Impressed by the results attained by the "Army Method," institutions such as the University of Michigan continued after the war to experiment with language teaching based on new ideas of linguistic analysis to teach structure and on oral practice to form verbal habits. The development of the tape recorder in the 1950s allowed the substitution of recorded native speech for the native

informants that the ACLS system had used in the Armed Forces language program.

The launching of *Sputnik 1* in 1957 brought national attention to the language-teaching profession. The minority of professionals, working toward aural-oral language-teaching reform based on the ACLS experience, quickly swelled to a majority, as external agencies made large sums of money available to education "in the national interest." The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1957 included foreign languages as one of its targeted areas. With the incentive of financial support, school boards were urged to increase enrollments in foreign languages, push for longer sequences, and buy state-of-the-art instructional equipment and materials. Summer and even year-long inservice institutes were created to upgrade teachers' skills and instruct them in new ways of teaching foreign languages.

NDEA funds also provided for the development of new instructional materials. These were commercially printed and distributed and came to be known as "audiolingual materials." The term *audiolingual* had been coined by Nelson Brooks (2) and appeared in print for the first time in 1958. Brooks used the term to refer to verbal language in a general sense, or, as he described it, "language in the air [as opposed to] language on paper" (p. 236). He states that he had searched for a term that would be clearer to the ear than the homophonous "aural-oral." In spite of its modest origins, the term *audiolingual* quickly came to encompass not just a set of materials intended to teach students to speak and comprehend the spoken language, but an entire methodology. Brooks considers this use a misapplication of the term which caused significant harm.

So the official name became "Audiolingual Materials" with the four words Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing prominently printed close beside. However, . . . many people see method in everything, and the quite inaccurate and indeed misleading and harmful term "audiolingual method" came into use. This was, quite simply, too bad. Method is far too valuable a word to be used so carelessly and incorrectly. In the very nature of our language programs, audiolingual could never become a method, for who proposes to do without printing altogether? [Pp. 236-37]

Lack of logic notwithstanding, the audiolingual materials became identified with a method of teaching that was attempted in the United States in the 1960s. Much has been said and written about the theory and practices associated with it and about the success or failure of language teaching of that period. Looking back from a contemporary vantage point, three features of the audiolingual movement stand out: (1) the revolutionary nature of the reforms, (2) the embrace of audiolingualism as the "final answer" to the problem of teaching language, and (3) a general aura of

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optimism and enthusiasm, which is reflected in the professional literature of the decade.

The language-teaching profession underwent a swift alteration. The influx of NDEA funds accounted for much of this, as did the involvement of all sectors of the educational establishment in the change process: school boards, teachers, teacher trainers, students preparing to become foreign-language teachers, and the learners themselves. Grittner (8) reports that the number of language labs in secondary schools rose from about 60 in 1957 to 6,000 five years later, and the number of high school students enrolled in modern foreign-language courses jumped from 16.5 to 27.7 percent between 1958 and 1968.

The "one-solution mentality" of the 1960s is reflected most dramatically in the proliferation of methods and approaches that developed in reaction to it in the 1970s: cognitive methodology, the confluent approach, Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia, the Natural Approach, individualized instruction, the counseling-learning model, the Silent Way, and finally, the eclectic method, which embraced none exclusively yet all generally of the above. New approaches in the 1970s focused on differences among students and differences among teachers, in part as a reaction to the rigidity of techniques of repetition, memorization, and drill that had characterized language teaching a decade before.

The optimism and forward-looking atmosphere of the 1960s could be seen in the expansion of expectations and activities. The NDEA institutes stimulated work that had already been under way in the area of teacher competency, and resulted in the publication in 1966 of *Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages*, a document that assessed the status of teacher education programs, made a case for new directions, and presented a comprehensive framework within which new programs could be developed (Paquette, 19).

One of the crucial areas to examine in light of the ACTFL guidelines involves minimal competencies that the foreign-language teacher should have. The MLA guidelines addressed this need and covered seven areas: (1) aural understanding, (2) speaking, (3) reading, (4) writing, (5) language analysis, (6) culture, and (7) professional preparation. A battery of tests, the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students, was developed to measure competence in these seven areas. The debates of the late 1960s and early 1970s over the adequacy of the tests, the use to which scores should be put, the need for a criterion-referenced rather than a norm-referenced test are not unlike the questions that are certain to arise with respect to the ACTFL guidelines, published more than 15 years later. The experience of applying the teacher-education guidelines and the MLA Proficiency Tests to foreign-language education programs is discussed in detail by Valette (28) and Lange (13). It is clear that these earlier efforts set the stage for guidelines that would be proficiency oriented and would start from the very lowest levels of language learning.

Oral Proficiency Testing Moves Outside the Government

Foreign-language training in academe and the government moved in substantially different directions from the post-World War II years until well into the 1970s. The ACTFL guidelines, based on the government's work with language, particularly oral language proficiency assessment, reflect a convergence of the governmental and academic educational sectors. This rapprochement is due in large part to the private sector's acquaintance with the ILR oral proficiency interview and rating scale at the end of the 1960s in connection with its use in the Peace Corps. In the late 1960s the Peace Corps was teaching languages to thousands of trainees in the United States and abroad. At first, the FSI tested trainees and volunteers, typically at the beginning, the midpoint, and the end of their training, and again after one and/or two years in the field. When the task strained government resources, Educational Testing Service (ETS) was asked to assume the language-testing activities. ETS staff members were trained by the FSI, and later these staff members trained Peace Corps Training Center staff to conduct and rate interviews. The Peace Corps project was the first large-scale interview testing activity not operated directly by a government agency.

Perhaps the principal application of the oral interview procedure outside the government during the 1970s was as a certification instrument in bilingual education. As of this writing, the oral interview is used for this purpose in California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, and Texas. Details of programs, administration, and the minimum standard for certification vary from state to state, but the requirement that teacher candidates, or in some states inservice teachers as well, demonstrate their ability to speak the languages of instruction is a constant. New Jersey, for example, set bilingual certification standards based on the results of a study conducted by ETS (Livingston, 15). The goal of that program, as for those of other states, was to provide assurance that the teacher could "function effectively" in the classroom. Brown (3) described this level of language proficiency as follows.

The ability to function effectively would be manifested by such things as (1) the ability to comprehend completely the "talk" of children and parents, both English speaking and Spanish speaking; (2) the ability to communicate in both English and Spanish with children and parents on school-related and other topics; and (3) the ability to present subject matter in the classroom, carry on classroom discussion, ask and answer questions, and explain concepts in both English and Spanish. [P. 68]

ETS developed the certification program for New Jersey. Ongoing management was turned over to the state in 1979, and it has since been

institutionalized in the colleges that offer degree programs in both bilingual and ESL teacher education. In addition to the certification of bilingual and ESL teachers, the oral interview found other nongovernmental applications during the 1970s, among them the Experiment in International Living, the Missionary Training Center (formerly the Language Training Mission) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints at Brigham Young University, and the New Brunswick (Canada) Education Department.

The FSI Testing Kit Workshops

The expansion of the oral proficiency interview outside the government might well have remained within the modest confines described above had it not been for the efforts of James R. Frith, now Dean Emeritus of the School of Language Studies of the Foreign Service Institute. In 1979, the FSI held the first of a series of three "Testing Kit Workshops," to which ten college and university professors of Spanish and French were invited (Frith, 7). The goals of the initial workshop project were (1) to determine to what degree the French/Spanish Testing Kit, a brochure on the principles and techniques of oral proficiency assessment accompanied by eight cassette tape recordings of demonstration interview tests, could function as a stand-alone document to train oral proficiency testers; (2) to find out whether the language-teaching profession could find useful academic applications for the FSI system of evaluating foreign-language speaking proficiency; and (3) to decide if further collaboration between FSI and academe should be pursued.

The project design included four phases. Phase 1 was the workshop itself at FSI, which included a theoretical introduction to oral proficiency testing, observation and discussion of videotaped and live interview tests, and some opportunity for the participants to conduct their own practice interviews. The FSI team-testing model was followed, in which an interviewer poses the questions and engages the examinee in conversation, while an examiner observes the interview and evaluates the examinee's performance. In the FSI and other governmental agencies, the interviewer is always a native speaker of the language of the test.

After the workshops, the participants undertook phase 2 of the project: rating a set of twelve to sixteen taped interviews (*not* the same tapes that had been included with the kit). Participants consulted by telephone with FSI testers about each tape, discussing their ratings and rationale. The inter-rater agreement between the college- and university-professor ratings and the official FSI ratings was high: 84 percent on the first eight tapes, and 96 percent for those after the first eight.

As a control, the FSI had arranged for eight additional professors, largely from the same institutions, to rate the same set of tapes after

studying the testing kit materials, but without benefit of formal training. The inter-rater agreement of this latter group with the FSI rating was remarkably similar: 84 percent on the first eight tapes, and 94 percent on the remainder. The conclusion after phase 2 of the project was that the testing kit alone, without the FSI workshop experience, served adequately to train college professors to evaluate oral proficiency interviews. The "telephone training" proved to be very valuable to both groups of participants in improving their rating skills.

Phase 3 of the project addressed elicitation technique. During this phase the participants interviewed their students, taped the interviews, and sent the tapes to FSI for evaluation. The judgment of the FSI evaluators was that the participants needed considerably more training in elicitation technique and that a revision of the testing kit would have to include more material in this area.

The last phase of the project was a second workshop at FSI intended to provide additional training in interviewing skills and to seek from the participants their advice about revising the Testing Kit. This first project proved to be so well received that funding was secured for additional ones.

The various groups of workshop participants found numerous applications for the oral interview at their institutions. As reported by Young (31), one of the possible applications, "establish[ing] a reasonable oral proficiency level (perhaps S-1) for the fulfillment of the language requirement . . . a stunning example of the improvement in articulation that widely accepted standards would generate," (p. 67) has in fact been realized by some language departments at the University of Pennsylvania (Freed, 6). Other possibilities are treated in more detail in Chapter 7 of this volume.

The experience of college professors with the oral interview and rating scale revealed limitations of the scale for use outside the government that were to feature prominently in subsequent work. Frith (7) reported the FSI evaluators' concern that nonnative speakers could not interview very high-level candidates, and a goodly portion of the followup workshop with the first group of Testing Kit participants focused on testing at the higher levels. It was clear that college professors, most of whom are not native speakers of the language they teach, would not be able to interview or evaluate candidates at Levels 4 and 4+ as fully and definitively as they would candidates at Levels 0+ through 3. In addition, Young (31) mentions some concern that the 0-5 rating scale cannot make distinctions as fine as can course grades.

Some of these same concerns emerged from the testing and training that ETS had undertaken in connection with ACTION/Peace Corps a decade earlier. Some of the Peace Corps trainees were adults, but many were young people just out of college. The experience of administering oral interviews to these young people gave rise to reflections on the rating scale

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and its appropriateness for measuring the speaking ability of high school and college students.

The ACTFL Guidelines: The Immediate Antecedents

To the uninitiated, one surprising characteristic of the rating scale is that it is not linear. Instead, the level descriptions correspond to various degrees of real-life "usable" language proficiency, ranging from 0 at the bottom (no functional proficiency) to 5 at the top (native, or bilingual proficiency). The descriptions in between are as follows:

- Level 1 elementary (survival-level) proficiency
- Level 2 limited working proficiency
- Level 3 professional working proficiency
- Level 4 full professional proficiency, or representational proficiency

If one were to represent the scale graphically, it would look something like the drawing in Figure 1.

It is clear from this depiction that relatively little language is needed to go from Level 0 to Level 1, relatively more from Level 1 to Level 2, and so on. The most difficult leap is from Level 4 to Level 5. No matter how long one studies the language or lives in a place where it is spoken, it is most unusual to reach Level 5, i.e., to be taken for an educated native speaker of the language.

The Carroll study

John Carroll (5) reported the results of a battery of language tests administered to college majors of French, German, Russian, and Spanish in the second semester of their senior year. In the oral interview, the typical rating was 2 or 2+. (In the FSI/ILR testing system, a plus is awarded for performance that substantially exceed the requirements of the base level but does not represent consistent functioning at the next higher level.) These students were *majors* who had concentrated on the study of the language and its literature for their four undergraduate years, who might have studied the language in high school as well, and who might even have spent some time studying abroad. Even so, very few reached Level 3, "professional working proficiency." The goal of government language schools is to train professional personnel to achieve a useful level of language proficiency, and thus, the levels below 3 are seen largely as way stations in the training process. Since the most proficient of the nation's college students apparently reach only Level 2/2+, clearly any use of the rating scale and the interview in secondary schools and colleges must focus on levels below 2.

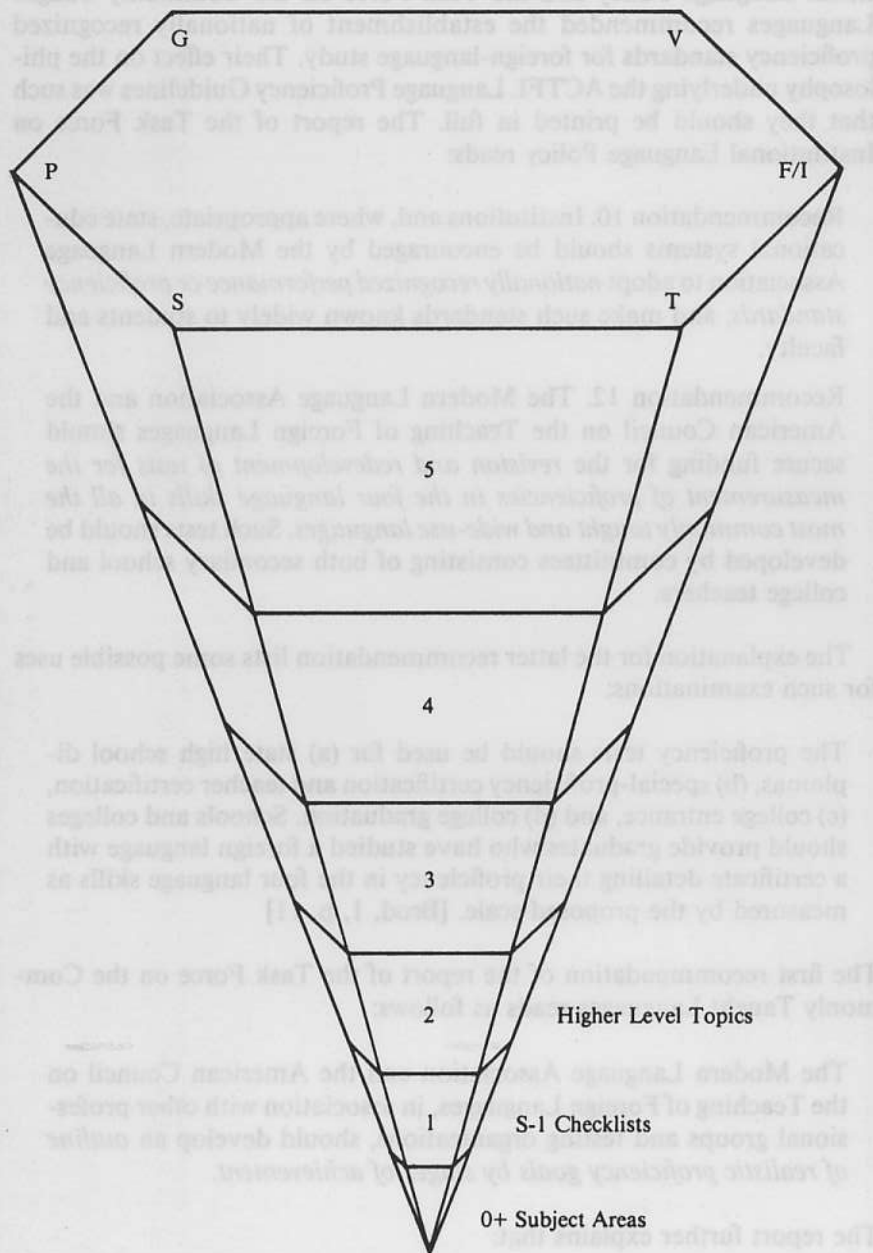


Figure 1. Inverted Pyramid of Language Proficiency

Reprinted with permission from the *Manual for LS Oral Interview Workshops* (June 1980).

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The ETS study

Even within these relatively narrow ranges at the low end of the scale, the definition at each level reflects a wide variety of possible performances. The intuitive perception of the ETS staff who had worked with Peace Corps volunteers was that the scale was not sensitive enough to register substantial differences in performance, such as those that would take place during one semester or one year of study. A student might well start a course with Level 1 proficiency, improve considerably, and finish the course still at Level 1. This untested perception was affirmed by an informal study carried out at ETS in 1979. ETS staff members conducted oral proficiency interviews with approximately thirty first- and second-year high school Spanish students. Although the students varied considerably in their ability to communicate orally, none of them reached Level 1. Some of them were rated 0+ but most would have rated a 0 on the ILR scale. The hypothesis was confirmed that the low end of the scale did not effectively discriminate among students whom teachers would judge to be significantly different in oral ability.

One major outcome of both this informal ETS study and the FSI Testing Kit Workshops was consensus on the need to expand the low end of the ILR scale to make it more applicable to students in traditional academic environments. The ILR scale provides for five ranges of proficiency between Levels 0 and 2: 0, 0+, 1, 1+, and 2. There had to be more definable benchmarks between Levels 0 and 2 for academic use so that students' progress could be more readily registered.

The ETS Common Yardstick Project

At about the same time, ETS was approaching the question of an academically oriented speaking scale from another perspective. As early as 1970, Protase Woodford coined the term "Common Yardstick," which was later applied to a project jointly undertaken by the English Speaking Union of Great Britain, the British Council, ETS, the Deutscher Volkshochschul Verband, representatives of the United States government, and various business and academic groups which met to develop or adapt a series of descriptors of language ability. Several groups presented draft scales for consideration by the group. After two meetings in Great Britain and the United States, a grant to ETS from the U.S. Office of Education provided for further refinement of the Common Yardstick scales.

The outcome of the project was the development of additional, intralevel descriptions for Levels 0 and 1 of the ILR rating scale. In addition, the decision was made to rename the levels, since the denominations 0, 1, 2, etc., tended to give the impression that the proficiency levels were equivalent to the academic understanding of "level" as "year of study."

A side-by-side comparison of the ILR and ACTFL scales shows the expansion of the discretely describable levels of proficiency at the bottom of the scale, and the corresponding decision to combine levels of proficiency at the top. (See Figure 2.)

| ILR | ACTFL/ETS (Academic) |
|-----|---|
| 0 | 0 (no ability whatsoever) Novice Low Novice Mid |
| 0+ | Novice High |
| 1 | Intermediate Low Intermediate Mid |
| 1+ | Intermediate High |
| 2 | Advanced |
| 2+ | Advanced Plus |
| 3 | Superior |
| 3+ | |
| 4 | |
| 4+ | |
| 5 | |

Figure 2. The ILR and ACTFL Scales

The project also produced verbal descriptions for the newly created proficiency levels, which were subsequently validated in a study undertaken jointly by ETS, ACTFL, and the CIA Language School. The expanded lower end of the speaking scale was developed at a fortuitous moment, because ACTFL was just beginning to work on the Proficiency Guidelines Project. These operationally validated descriptions were used as the cornerstone of the generic guidelines.

The MLA-ACLS Language Task Forces Project

Slightly earlier in time, when the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Modern Language Association and the American Council of Learned Societies convened the MLA-ACLS Language Task Forces Project. The latter included task forces on Institutional Language Policy, the Commonly Taught Languages, the Less Commonly Taught Languages, Public Awareness, and Government Relations. Recommendations from each task force were produced during the academic year 1977-78 and were available for the first meeting of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and

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International Studies in October 1978. Both the Task Force on Institutional Language Policy and the Task Force on the Commonly Taught Languages recommended the establishment of nationally recognized proficiency standards for foreign-language study. Their effect on the philosophy underlying the ACTFL Language Proficiency Guidelines was such that they should be printed in full. The report of the Task Force on Institutional Language Policy reads:

Recommendation 10. Institutions and, where appropriate, state educational systems should be encouraged by the Modern Language Association to adopt *nationally recognized performance or proficiency standards*, and make such standards known widely to students and faculty.

Recommendation 12. The Modern Language Association and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages should secure funding for the *revision and redevelopment of tests for the measurement of proficiencies in the four language skills in all the most commonly taught and wide-use languages*. Such tests should be developed by committees consisting of both secondary school and college teachers.

The explanation for the latter recommendation lists some possible uses for such examinations:

The proficiency tests should be used for (a) state high school diplomas, (b) special-proficiency certification and teacher certification, (c) college entrance, and (d) college graduation. Schools and colleges should provide graduates who have studied a foreign language with a certificate detailing their proficiency in the four language skills as measured by the proposed scale. [Brod, 1, p. 11]

The first recommendation of the report of the Task Force on the Commonly Taught Languages reads as follows:

The Modern Language Association and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, in association with other professional groups and testing organizations, should develop an *outline of realistic proficiency goals by stages of achievement*.

The report further explains that:

The purpose of this recommendation is to develop a set of standards whereby achieved proficiency can be demonstrated in ways that are universally accepted and understood, similar perhaps to those used

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by the Foreign Service Institute. It is assumed that courses offered at the various levels . . . will require different lengths of time to reach the established goals. [Brod, 1, p. 29]

The President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies

On April 21, 1978, the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (24) joined the general climate of planning for positive change. The commission was charged with four tasks: (1) to recommend how public attention should be directed to the importance of foreign-language and international studies, (2) to assess the need in the United States for foreign-language and area specialists and the job market for such specialists, (3) to recommend what foreign-language and international education programs are appropriate at different levels, and (4) to specify legislative changes needed to implement the commission's recommendations (Burn, 4).

The foreign-language profession will for a long time owe special thanks to Representative Paul Simon of Illinois for bringing to national attention his concern that foreign-language and area studies in the United States were not being pursued to an extent consistent with the Helsinki Accords. Under these Accords, the United States had agreed to "encourage the study of foreign languages and civilizations" in order to increase cross-cultural understanding. According to Burn (4), Simon's efforts coincided with a concern of the State Department and the National Security Council for the nation's capability in foreign areas and training and research. This coalescence of concerns from several sources resulted in the appointment of the commission and in the focusing by the foreign-language profession as a whole on the areas which the commission had been mandated to address.

After a year of study, public hearings, and meetings, the commission presented its report to President Carter on October 15, 1979. Among its recommendations was one that addressed directly the issue of language proficiency. In the Foreign Languages section, the commission included as one of its principal recommendations the establishment of "a National Criteria and Assessment Program, funded by NIE [to] develop foreign language proficiency tests, and report on, monitor, and assess foreign language teaching in the U.S." (24, p. 15). The functions of the proposed National Criteria and Assessment Program are spelled out in the body of the report. The program would "establish language proficiency achievement goals for the end of each year of study, with special attention to speaking proficiency," and would, in addition, develop tests to "assess the proficiency of both students and teachers in existing as well as new or experimental foreign language programs" (24, p. 38). The report goes on

to cite the FSI Testing Kit Workshops as a valuable effort to bring techniques of language proficiency assessment to the academic sector that should serve as a base for continued work in this area.

The MLA-ACLS Language Task Forces' Reports and the President's Commission Report, with their recommendations that the profession establish proficiency-based course goals and construct proficiency tests to measure these outcomes, combined with the recommendation of the ETS Common Yardstick Project on the expansion of the lower end of the government oral proficiency scale and the enthusiastic reaction of the participants at the FSI Testing Kit Workshops set the stage for the appearance of the ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines in 1982.

Elements of a Proficiency-Oriented Program

A proficiency-oriented program is one that trains students to use the language outside the classroom, independently of the materials and activities of the course. The grammatically oriented text, the legacy of Ollendorf and Plötz, has conditioned language teachers to make the *structure* of the language, rather than proficiency in the *use* of the language, the focus of a course of study. Most major textbooks currently in use are organized around a structural or grammatical syllabus. A glance at their contents reveals that they are all organized around grammatical topics, with only minor differences in sequencing. The grammatical syllabus assumes that all students must learn the same representative corpus of the language over the same period of time. Operationally, this leads to a "coverage approach," in which progress is measured in "chapters covered." Warriner (29) discusses the disadvantages to this type of curriculum in her background paper on methodology for the President's Commission.

The functional/notional syllabus

An alternative, the functional/notional syllabus, has been developed and used successfully by the Council of Europe. Such a syllabus organizes the material not by grammatical topics and vocabulary but by the uses to which language can be put. A functional/notional syllabus will include much of the same content as the grammatical syllabus, while organizing it differently. For example, a traditional textbook treats topics such as present tense endings for regular verbs, the formation of adjectives of comparison, or noun-adjective agreement; a functional/notional textbook deals with topics such as asking questions, making suggestions, or expressing disagreement. Teaching grammatical forms at a fixed pace can give the false impression that knowing the forms is equivalent to knowing how, when, and where to use them. The functional/notional syllabus places the

forms in contexts in which they can be readily and meaningfully employed.

The grammatical syllabus is inherently analytical; it abstracts one aspect of the language from its many contexts and lays it out for study. The functional/notional syllabus is synthetic; it selects particular linguistic functions in real-life contexts for study. Although compiling an exhaustive list of linguistic functions probably is impossible, and even though the selection of certain functions for particular courses and the sequencing of materials are still in their formative stages, one can see major differences in the two approaches in pedagogy and especially in evaluation.

Valdman (27) counterposes the linear approach of the grammatical syllabus with the cyclical progression suggested by the functional/notional or other communicatively oriented syllabus. In the former, progression is necessarily linear. The structural items are presented in contrived, artificial settings. This results in a heavy grammatical load, difficulty in distinguishing between linguistic features targeted for receptive control versus productive mastery, lack of definition of different levels of mastery, and the absence of authentic texts.

As an alternative to this linear coverage, Valdman (27) recommends a cyclical syllabus. This approach "requires a precise definition of mastery levels at each phase of the instructional program: which features will be targeted for recognition, which for limited productive control . . . , which for use in communicative activities" (p. 19). Integral to this approach is the breaking down of the traditional grammatical paradigms, teaching the various parts separately, and expecting different kinds and degrees of mastery of them at any given time. The cyclical approach involves teaching some features of the paradigm for active mastery and others for comprehension only. The next time through, students get additional practice in the items already studied, work on active use of the items presented passively before, and then study additional features for passive recognition. This allows students to focus on fewer features at a time, to review systematically, and to treat reception and production differently. The cyclical approach works for functions as well as for structures.

Evaluation is a second area that would be treated very differently under a grammatical versus a functional/notional syllabus. A major testing problem with a grammatical syllabus is that it is far easier to list the goals than to describe the desired degree of mastery. A typical Level I high school syllabus lists the following under a heading of "Basic Instructional Objectives" for French, Spanish, and Italian:

1. Regular and irregular verbs—present tense, commands
2. Grammar usage—appropriate idioms and basic grammar
3. Expressions of language: numbers, dates, times, seasons, weather, pronouns, adjectives, cooking, family, sports, classroom, colors, nationalities.

Objectives like these present difficulties for testing. Let us look for an

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example to one goal for Spanish: "Present tense of regular verbs." We will assume that the Spanish I teacher has used a variety of grammatical explanations, choral repetition, pattern drills, fill-in-the blanks worksheets, and oral exercises to teach and reinforce the use of regular verbs in the present tense.

One of the ground rules in evaluation is that the test should not contain any surprises; it should be a microcosm of the activities and subject matter of the course. One logical way to test mastery of the subject matter of the course described above would be to present students with a series of statements in Spanish with blanks where the verbs belong. The students would fill in the blanks with the correct form of the verb. Another possibility, suggested by Grittner (8), would be to present a series of drawings of activities. Students would then state orally in a complete sentence the activity illustrated in each drawing.

In the first exercise, the teacher would learn whether students knew the verb endings and could match them to a given subject. On this basis would one know that the student had "mastered" the regular verbs in the present tense? The "basic instructional objective" leaves many questions unanswered: Which verbs? How many? Mastery to what degree and to what purpose? There may be little or no carry-over from filling in a blank to evoking and using the same form of the same verb in a less structured situation, such as a composition or a conversation. Students could fill in the blanks of all the sentences on the test, and thus would demonstrate in a discrete-point fashion that they have "mastered the present tense of regular verbs." Yet we have no idea whether or how well they could make themselves understood to native speakers of the language.

A more communicatively oriented test of "regular verbs in the present tense," although no less problematic, is the second exercise described above. One possible format might be to present a picture of a boy talking on the phone. The student who has studied well and remembers lines from the pattern drills may respond correctly, *El muchacho habla por teléfono* (the boy is talking on the phone). What does the teacher do with the student who responds, *Juan hablo en teléfono con su amigo Jorge que es en el hospital porque es enfermo* (John is talking on the phone with his friend George who is in the hospital because he is sick [boldface italic portions represent errors])? This second student perhaps has not "mastered" the objective but certainly has understood that a language is learned to fulfill certain needs or functions, in this case the recounting of an event.

How does the teacher grade these two students? Does the first get a perfect score, and the second a lower one? Should the errors other than the incorrect present tense verb ending "not count," since the test is aimed at a single objective? Or should the second student be rewarded for "creating" with language to express his own thoughts?

One of the disadvantages of behavioral objectives based on a grammatical syllabus is that they encourage a discrete-point "achievement-type"

orientation to teaching, testing, and learning. We need to look beyond structured manipulation of bits and pieces of language to the larger goals of language use. Gritner (8) expresses it in this way:

[If] language use is creative and idiosyncratic, students should be taught to apply to unanticipated situations functional principles that they perceive to be relevant rather than being expected to meet arbitrarily stated objectives based on someone else's formulations of reality. This means, in effect, that such things as grammatical forms, syntactical patterns, and vocabulary items should not be treated as specific, behavioralizable learning "outputs" but rather as tools for receiving and communicating thoughts and feelings. [P. 118]

What kind of evaluation instrument would be appropriate in a proficiency-oriented course? A first-year high school Spanish course designed from this perspective might well have the following as one of its objectives: "Able to ask for directions and other information with sufficient structural and phonological accuracy to be intelligible to a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners." Linguistic *functions*—asking for information and asking for directions—are defined; the *content*—simple facts about a place or a person—while not spelled out, is implied; and the *accuracy* is defined as intelligibility to a sympathetic and linguistically supportive native speaker.

The statement of the objective, including the elements of *function*, *content*, and *accuracy*, points to a global testing mode. It will be difficult if not impossible to draw up an answer key for such a test, since what is to be elicited from the student is not a preset list of answers but rather variable answers that achieve the purpose of giving or getting information on a given topic. Teachers might profitably decide to set up the test as a role play, putting themselves in the role of the native speaker. Instructions for a role play might look like this:

A friend calls to invite you to a party. In your conversation, be sure to ask the following:

1. When and where the party will take place
2. Directions to the party
3. If your friend wants you to take something (records, refreshments, etc.)

An exchange student from France is at your school for the year. You invite him to spend Saturday afternoon at your house. In your conversation, ask him:

1. If he can come over in the afternoon and stay for dinner
2. If he'd like to go to the movies
3. If his American "brother" would like to come too

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A number of such role plays could be constructed with different details but within the general context of an invitation to a social event. No two students would have the identical test, but each would go through the same testing procedure measuring the same linguistic functions in contexts of equal difficulty and including the same requirements of intelligibility.

The ACTFL Guidelines in the Proficiency-Oriented Program

The ACTFL guidelines attempt to take the functional/notional emphasis on language in context for a particular purpose and apply it to the academic setting in the United States. Their point of departure was the proficiency-based approach of the functional/notional syllabus rather than the structural orientation of the grammatical syllabus.

Writing in 1978, Harlow (9) recognized the promise of proficiency-based curricula.

We all know how important it is to develop behavioral objectives for a program and how difficult and time-consuming they can be to formulate. A program using functional/notional organization would almost eliminate that problem, since each unit would be focused around the grammatical structures, vocabulary items, and their use in a particular linguistic function. The ease of testing becomes evident also if we assume that what we want to teach is what we want to test. [P. 562]

The ACTFL guidelines are a first step in creating proficiency-based curricula that respond to the need of the profession to define what students should be able to *do* with the language at various stages in the learning process.

The guidelines are modeled on the ACTFL oral proficiency rating scale, which is in turn an adaptation of the ILR oral proficiency scale. The descriptions of proficiency at each level include statements about linguistic *functions* that the speaker is able to express, about the topics or *content* that can be discussed, and about the degree of *accuracy* of the communicated message. These have been developed for speaking ability by the CIA Language School and are reproduced in Figure 3.

The literature of the last several years, beginning with specific consideration of the functional/notional syllabus and continuing with more general discussions of communicatively oriented curricula, has focused on the need to broaden our understanding of the term "communicative

| Level | Functions | Content | Accuracy |
|--------------------|---|---|--|
| ILR Speaking Level | Task accomplished, attitudes expressed, tone conveyed. | Topics, subject areas, activities, and jobs addressed. | Acceptability, quality, and accuracy of message conveyed. |
| 5 | Functions equivalent to an Educated Native Speaker (ENS). | All subjects. | Performance equivalent to Educated Native Speaker. |
| 4 | Able to tailor language to fit audience, counsel, persuade, negotiate, represent a point of view, and interpret for dignitaries. | All topics normally pertinent to professional needs. | Nearly equivalent to ENS. Speech is extensive, precise, appropriate to every occasion with only occasional errors. |
| 3 | Can converse in formal and informal situations, resolve problem situations, deal with unfamiliar topics, provide explanations, describe in detail, support 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 ENS. Only sporadic errors in basic structures. |
| 2 | Able to fully participate in casual conversations; can express facts; give instructions; describe, report on, and provide narration about current, past, and future activities. | Concrete topics such as own background, family, and interests, work, travel, and current events. | Understandable to NS <i>not</i> used to dealing with foreigners; sometimes miscommunicates. |
| 1 | Can create with the language; ask and answer questions, participate in short conversations. | Everyday survival topics and courtesy requirements. | Intelligible to an NS used to dealing with foreigners. |
| 0 | No functional ability. | None. | Unintelligible. |

Figure 3. Functional Trisection

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competence" to include more than simply getting the message across. Higgs and Clifford (11) have written that:

A student cannot merely be declared competent in communication. The functions that he is competent to express must be specified. The degree of proficiency required to survive as a tourist or a student is not the same as that required to negotiate treaties. One finds that content areas and language functions needed for discussing abstract ideas differ from those used in telling about one's immediate needs or one's latest European vacation. . . . We must tell [our students] not that they are competent to speak German, but that they are competent to meet routine physical and social obligations in an environment where German is spoken. [Pp. 60-61]

In the descriptions of proficiency on speaking, listening, reading, writing, and culture in the ACTFL guidelines, *function*, *context*, and *accuracy* are all interwoven. Judgments of an individual's proficiency, made by comparing performance with the descriptions, take all three factors into account.

These proficiency descriptions were developed empirically, that is, by observing how second-language learners progress in the functions they can express or comprehend, the topic areas they can deal with, and the accuracy with which they receive or convey a message. The guidelines, then, are descriptive rather than prescriptive, based on experience rather than theory. Omaggio (18) points out that the progressive nature of the guidelines makes them a valuable tool for designing curricula.

Knowing what competencies lie at the *next* level will help us sequence materials to conform to natural developmental patterns in adult second-language learners and prepare them for making progress. The descriptions will also allow us to keep in mind the *ultimate* goal(s) learners hope to achieve. Our instructional materials, as well as the design of our courses, should be influenced by those ultimate goals.

Conclusion: Future Directions

What, then, are the next steps? What can we hope for from the guidelines? There are several directions in which the guidelines take us, and ACTFL is already at work on most of them. These next steps fall into the general categories of (1) further work on the guidelines themselves, (2) curriculum and materials development, (3) testing, and (4) teacher training and certification.

Further work on the guidelines

The ACTFL guidelines as published are still provisional. An important next step in their development will consist of close inspection by the profession and suggestions for change. It is anticipated that alterations will have to be made in the wording and format, as well as in the sequencing of some of the functions. We may also find that the finer distinctions at the lower end of the scale that have been so valuable in the speaking descriptions will not be as operationally useful, or perhaps even measurable, in the receptive skills. The culture guidelines, which have no antecedents in government language training programs will clearly need more informal and formal field testing to see if they are meaningful for instructional purposes. Chapter 5 in this volume, in fact, presents a radical new way of defining "culture" and treating it in the classroom. Finally, the generic guidelines will undoubtedly be generalized still further, or an alternative set will be written to meet the requirements of languages more distant from English.

Curriculum and materials development

The guidelines make no statements about how much each course in a sequence should attempt, about methods or materials that might be used, or about the relative emphasis that should be placed on the various skill modalities. All of these decisions rest with curriculum planners, textbook writers, and teachers. The next step is to design curricula, classroom activities, and materials that are designed to move students from one level of the guidelines to the next. The 1983 ACTFL Summer Institute for Secondary-School Teachers, funded by NEH, was the first organized effort to apply the guidelines to curriculum projects. Chapter 2 in this volume deals with classroom activities, while Chapter 3 details some curriculum development projects now under way at the Foreign Service Institute Language School.

Another step, somewhat more distant but no less important, is the development of proficiency-based materials. College teachers of French and Spanish who participated in the ACTFL/ETS oral proficiency testing workshop at Houston in February of 1982 have reported changing their methods, expectations, and to some degree, their materials as a result of insights gained at the workshop. These changes are reported in depth in Chapter 7 of this volume. It is expected that efforts in this area will continue to grow and be shared through the professional literature until a consensus emerges within the profession to support the development of commercially published basal programs.

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Testing

The government oral proficiency interview has needed only minor modifications to be usable in high schools and colleges. Although problems still remain, they are logistical rather than theoretical—how to cope with the demands of time and teacher power that the interview requires. Thirty years of use of and research with the interview have demonstrated that it is a valid and reliable procedure for testing second-language oral proficiency. The next step is to develop similar evaluation procedures to measure attainment of proficiency in the other skill modalities and in culture. Chapter 4 in this volume examines some possibilities along these lines.

At the end of 1982, ACTFL received from the Exxon Foundation an unsolicited grant of \$50,000 to establish a model regional assessment center. Such a center, in addition to conducting oral proficiency tests for students, teacher candidates, job seekers, or anyone else interested in obtaining an official oral proficiency rating, could also serve as a site for proficiency workshops and research on and development of proficiency testing in the other skill modalities.

A related issue that will soon have to be addressed is the certification of testers. Through the federally funded training projects that have taken place so far under the auspices of ACTFL, the Illinois Foreign Language Teachers' Association, and the University of New Hampshire, a procedure for training oral proficiency testers has emerged. It includes an intensive four- to five-day workshop with a small enough trainer-participant ratio that each trainee has a chance to conduct several supervised interviews and observe some twenty more, and later conduct twenty-five post-workshop interviews. These interviews are usually conducted in two sets. A portion of the first set is rated and critiqued by the trainers. These critiques are then discussed with the trainees before they conduct their second group of interviews.

Once this training system has been formalized, procedures must be developed for certifying proficient testers, and to recertify them periodically to ensure that they have retained their skills. It is anticipated that the proposed regional assessment centers can provide some of these certification and recertification services.

Teacher training and certification

No one has been able to describe completely the characteristics of the effective teacher, and the experience of the Pennsylvania studies (Smith, 22) cautions us not to assume that a high degree of foreign-language skill

alone will make for a competent teacher. Nevertheless, the development of language skills is an important priority in teacher-training programs.

The guidelines can be applied to teacher candidates and other adults, and it is hoped that ultimately all persons whose jobs demand a professional level of language will attain a rating of Superior in the relevant skill areas. A research project currently under way at ETS will result in the development of a self-assessment questionnaire, validated against the oral proficiency interview, that can be used to survey the oral proficiency of secondary school teachers of French and Spanish. This will provide valuable baseline data as we begin to focus on proficiency-based teaching of students, including prospective teachers.

As of this writing, ACTFL and the state of Texas are planning a model proficiency-based foreign-language teacher certification program. As in bilingual teacher certification in a number of states, a teacher candidate's linguistic competence would be measured directly by means of proficiency tests, rather than simply be assumed on the basis of years of study or courses passed.

Summary

This is an exciting time in foreign-language education. Interest in our efforts outside the profession is at a high point that has not been enjoyed since the heyday of the NDEA almost twenty-five years ago. Our understanding of how language is acquired has never been greater, and textbooks, for all we may complain about their imperfections, have never been better. The ACTFL guidelines are one of several important tools that can help us as we work to help our students and ourselves attain a greater level of language proficiency.

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The Proficiency-Oriented Classroom

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Introduction

The question addressed in this chapter is as old as the language-teaching profession itself: How do we help students learning a second language in a classroom setting become proficient in that language? Historically, the responses to this question have been as varied as the talents and creativity of those who have tried to answer it. And still we feel compelled in the present volume to pose the question again, and to answer it again in the light of our understanding of what we are about as a profession.

Like all fundamental questions, this one is not easily answerable. In the past, responses to this question have been widely divergent. Volumes of material have been written in which new theories of language acquisition have been advanced, new "revolutions" started, and a long succession of "innovative" methods and approaches proposed. This proliferation of ideas has resulted in some extremely valuable insights into the learning and teaching process; it has also left many of us feeling somewhat bewildered, once the dust has settled, about how we are to apply our newly acquired knowledge to change what is going on in the classroom.

This chapter is not designed to raise new dust. It does not propose any new theories or methodologies. Rather, it seeks to extract from our rich heritage of resources and practices those elements that seem most sound and to reevaluate them in terms of the organizing principle of proficiency.

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