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Methodology in Transition: The New Focus on Proficiency

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Once, in the throes of the audiolingual revolution, we "knew" the truth. Today, I am working with only a set of working hypotheses for myself as a foreign language teacher. . . .[1]

FOR MANY YEARS, IT SEEMED THAT THE FOREIGN language teaching profession was engaged in a series of "revolutions," most of which had their origins in an attempt to reach some kind of consensus about the best way — "the one true way" — to teach a foreign language. Yet, despite a few short-lived rallies around a common flag, the history of language teaching has been marked more often by controversy than by consensus. Traditionally, language educators, like linguists, have grouped themselves into two fairly distinct batallions — the "rationalists" and the "empiricists" — engaging in a never-ending controversy "whose roots can be traced to the beginnings of modern thought."[2] Throughout the decades following World War II, theorists and practitioners in both camps devoted reams of paper and hours of conference time to attempting to convince one another that they were right about the way languages ought to be taught. Then, in the 1970s, waves of practitioners, disillusioned by the failure of the various "revolutionary" methods to deliver what they had promised, left the ranks of the absolutists to adopt a militant eclecticism, which, for some, became the new "one true way." With this eclecticism came a new kind of diversity within the profession, at least on the issue of methodology.

It is not surprising, then, that in the 1980s most language educators still feel the need to reach some sort of consensus about language teaching. But for the first time in our professional history, we may be realizing that the controversy has been raging on the wrong battle-field. 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 our various methods, approaches, materials, and curricula might begin to make collective sense. We need to define some set of requirements for language teaching that goes beneath and beyond any one approach and that relates in some clear way to "those elements of soundness and truth that are to be found in any method that has survived long enough to have received a name."[3]

The most recent attempt to reach a consensus about the future directions we should take as a profession was the ACTFL Priorities Conference held in Boston in 1980.[4] From these discussions has emerged an organizing principle that has the potential to revolutionize language teaching in some real and enduring way. That principle is *language proficiency*. By agreeing on what it means to *know* a language at various stages of competence, and by describing what a person can typically *do* with the language at each of these stages, we can begin to find a way to measure outcomes against a common metric, and to predict accurately the degree of success with which an individual can handle a variety of needs in a whole range of situations. The descriptive power that we can obtain from this common metric can help us compare and contrast more intelligently the effects of existing methods and materials. It can also enable us to develop revised versions of approaches we personally favor, compensating for any areas of weakness in them that we might identify. Such a common metric will also allow us to make more realistic promises to language learners about the kinds of competence they can expect to develop within a given sequence of instruction, which is something we have never really been able to do before with any degree of precision.

Because this article is to be devoted to the issue of methodology, I will attempt: 1) to identify certain key elements in the ACTFL/ETS proficiency descriptions that relate to language teaching;[5] 2) to compare various methods and approaches in terms of those elements; and 3) to draw some conclusions about the way methodologies might evolve in the future. To begin, let us review current definitions of "proficiency" and the oral proficiency guidelines developed recently by ACTFL and ETS.

KNOWING A LANGUAGE

Before we can arrive at a consensus about language proficiency, we must share a common understanding of what it is to know a language. What do students have to know, in terms of grammar, vocabulary, sociolinguistic appropriateness, kinesics, cultural understanding, and the like in order to know a language well enough to use it beyond the classroom? The answers to such questions, though still the subject of some debate, seem to be coalescing in the recent literature on language competence. Canale and Swain identify four types of competence that should be considered in defining proficiency: 1) *grammatical competence,* which implies mastery of the features and rules of the linguistic code itself; 2) *sociolinguistic competence,* which addresses the extent to which grammatical forms can be used or understood appropriately to communicate in various contexts; 3) *discourse competence,* which involves the ability to combine sentences and ideas to achieve cohesion in form and coherence in thought; and 4) *strategic competence,* which involves the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies that can help compensate for breakdowns in communication due to interference, distraction, or insufficient knowledge.[6]

The resurgent emphasis on grammatical accuracy is of interest, minimized somewhat in the 1970s with the rhetoric surrounding the term "communicative competence." More recent definitions of the term do include accuracy statements. Higgs and Clifford argue that the grammaticality of utterances is a crucial factor in determining levels of language proficiency.[7] They maintain that earlier definitions of the term "communicative competence," in which the conveyence of one's meaning was clearly more important than the accuracy with which it was conveyed, were based on faulty assumptions: "the apparent assumption (was) that the same communication skills that allow one to obtain food in a restaurant would also serve to negotiate a business contract or an international treaty. . . . Clearly it is easier to order a meal than it is to convince a businessman through logical argumentation that his financial interests are best served by the firm or government one is representing."[8]

They conclude that the question that must be asked in determining an individual's level of proficiency is not *whether* he or she is able to communicate, but rather *what* the person is able to communicate, and *how well*. The *what* refers to: 1) the topic or context (message content); and 2) the language function to be performed in that context. The *how well* relates to the linguistic precision or accuracy and the cultural authenticity of the language produced. *Function, context,* and *accuracy,* then, must serve as the three coexisting and interrelated hierarchies of judgmental criteria applied when describing *all* levels of language proficiency, from novice to native speaker. These three criteria form the core of the newly revised Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) definitions, used by the federal government, as well as the ACTFL/ETS proficiency descriptions created for academic use. The latter set of descriptions for novice through superior levels in speaking are given in the Appendix for the purposes of illustration. Corresponding definitions have been written for listening, reading, writing, and cultural understanding as well.[9]

The ACTFL proficiency descriptions are ideally suited to serve as an organizing principle for language teaching for several reasons. First, they are experientially, rather than theoretically, based; that is, they *describe* the way language learners and acquirers typically function along the whole range of possible levels of competence, rather than *prescribe* the way any given theorist *thinks* learners ought to function. Because the descriptions represent actual rather than hypothetical language production, we can amend our expectations for our learners' linguistic and communicative development to conform to reality. The proficiency descriptions will be useful in designing language programs, precisely because they outline typical grammatical features mastered, functional tasks performed, and contexts and situations handled with reasonable facility at each level of compe-

tence described. A second reason for using these descriptions to organize instruction is that they are *progressive* in nature. 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. The eventual outcomes students hope to attain should also affect methodology, as we shall see below.

METHODOLOGY AND PROFICIENCY

Before discussing ways in which the proficiency descriptions relate to methodology, it would be useful to try to clarify in some way the concept of "methodology" itself. Swaffar and her colleagues conceive of methodology as a "task hierarchy"; they maintain that the differences among major methodologies are to be found in the *priorities* assigned to various tasks rather than to the collection of tasks themselves: "all major methodologies, whether skill or process-oriented, aspire to the same result: a student who can read, write, speak, understand, translate, and recognize applications of the grammar of the foreign language. Methodological labels assigned to teaching activities are, in themselves, not informative, because they refer to a pool of classroom practices (that) are universally used."[10] Therefore, it is not *what* activities are used so much as *when* and *how* they are used that distinguishes methods from one another. According to Swaffar and her colleagues, definitions of methods or approaches need to involve a description of: 1) the hierarchy or value structure of activities; and 2) the position of such activities in the learning sequence.

Stevick also maintains that methods are best differentiated from one another in terms of factors such as ". . . the place of memorization, or the role of visual aids, or the importance of controlling and sequencing structure and vocabulary, or how the teacher should respond when a student makes a mistake, or the number of times a student should hear a correct model, or whether to give the explanation before or after practice, or not at all, and so forth. . . ."[11] The factors that he mentions go

beyond the selection of learning tasks to include philosophical and theoretical principles about ways of proceeding. But whether we adopt these points of view or some other, it makes sense to differentiate methods in terms of priorities rather than make binary oppositions between and among them. In assessing the *relative* value of various factors in any teaching approach, we can begin to assess the degree to which that approach corresponds to the concept of proficiency.
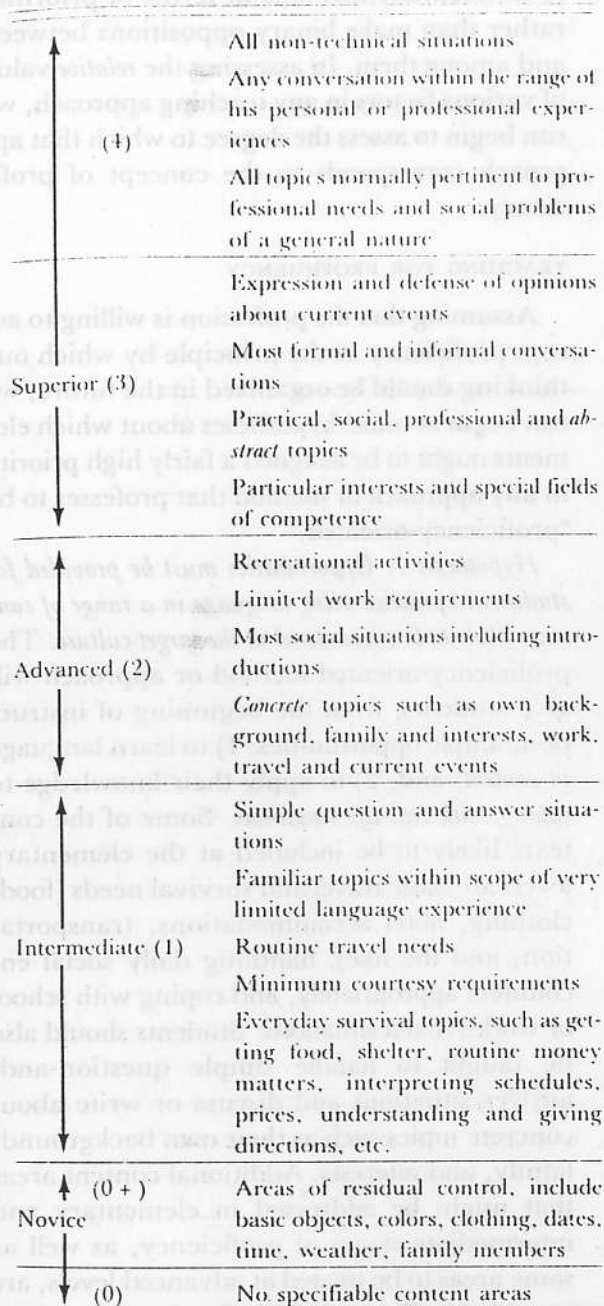
TEACHING FOR PROFICIENCY

Assuming that the profession is willing to accept proficiency as the principle by which our thinking should be organized in the future, we can begin to make hypotheses about which elements ought to be assigned a fairly high priority in any approach or method that professes to be "proficiency-oriented."

Hypothesis 1. Opportunities must be provided for students to practice using language in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture. The proficiency-oriented method or approach will give students, from the beginning of instruction, ample opportunities: 1) to learn language *in context*; and, 2) to apply their knowledge to *coping with real-life situations.* Some of the contexts likely to be included at the elementary levels are basic travel and survival needs (food, clothing, hotel accommodations, transportation, and the like), handling daily social encounters appropriately, and coping with school or work-related situations. Students should also be taught to handle simple question-and-answer situations and discuss or write about concrete topics such as their own background, family, and interests. Additional content areas that might be addressed in elementary and intermediate stages of proficiency, as well as some areas to be treated at advanced levels, are provided in Figure 1. This first hypothesis has various corollaries in designing or choosing a proficiency-oriented approach:

Corollary 1. Students should be encouraged to express their own meaning as early as possible in the course of instruction. Therefore, methods that emphasize memorization or that severely limit personal expression in the early stages of instruction are not as easily adaptable to proficiency goals as those that encourage more creative language use. Only at the novice level do learners work almost exclusively with

FIGURE 1
List of Content Characterizations

(4)	All non-technical situations
	Any conversation within the range of his personal or professional experiences
	All topics normally pertinent to professional needs and social problems of a general nature
Superior (3)	Expression and defense of opinions about current events
	Most formal and informal conversations
	Practical, social, professional and *abstract* topics
	Particular interests and special fields of competence
Advanced (2)	Recreational activities
	Limited work requirements
	Most social situations including introductions
	Concrete topics such as own background, family and interests, work, travel and current events
Intermediate (1)	Simple question and answer situations
	Familiar topics within scope of very limited language experience
	Routine travel needs
	Minimum courtesy requirements
	Everyday survival topics, such as getting food, shelter, routine money matters, interpreting schedules, prices, understanding and giving directions, etc.
(0 +) Novice	Areas of residual control, include basic objects, colors, clothing, dates, time, weather, family members
(0)	No specifiable content areas

Source: Pardee Lowe, Jr., *Manual for Language School Oral Interview Workshops* (Washington: Defense Language Institute/Language School Joint Oral Interview Transfer Project, 1982), pp. 2–19.

memorized material. To reach the intermediate range of proficiency (Figure 1, Interagency Language Roundtable Levels 1 and "1 + "), learners must be able to create with the language.

Corollary 2. A proficiency-oriented method promotes active communicative interaction among students. The use of small-group and paired communicative activities that allow students to practice language in context for some simulated or real communicative purpose should lead more readily to the development of oral proficiency than do methods that are teacher-centered or that focus mainly on language forms and convergent answers. Communicative practice need not be totally unstructured; in fact, in the early levels of instruction, it is probably best that such activities be quite carefully structured and monitored to encourage the development of linguistic accuracy (see hypothesis 3 below). Communicative practice should involve exchanges of information in situations where some "information gap" exists, rather than involve totally predictable exchanges among students.[12]

Corollary 3. "Creative" language practice (as opposed to exclusively manipulative or convergent practice) must be encouraged in the proficiency-oriented classroom. Students who hope to advance in their skills beyond the novice range must learn to "create" with the language. They must be encouraged to paraphrase, think divergently, and let their imagination and creative ability function as fully as possible within the limits of their current level of linguistic competence. Methods that help students create in the new language by including well-conceived divergent-production and imaginative tasks should build the flexibility, fluency, and strategic competence needed to achieve higher levels of proficiency, while at the same time encouraging the development of linguistic accuracy that is so important at those higher levels.[13]

Corollary 4. A proficiency-oriented approach emphasizes the use of authentic language in instructional materials wherever possible. The contexts for language practice should be devised, as much as possible, from culturally authentic sources. The use of real or simulated travel documents, hotel registration forms, biographical data sheets, train and plane schedules, authentic restaurant menus, labels, signs, newspapers, and magazines will acquaint the students more directly with real language than will any set of contrived classroom materials used alone. Videotapes of authentic or simulated exchanges involving native speakers, radio broadcasts, television or film, songs, and the like have long been advocated by foreign language educators as stimulating pedagogical aids. The proficiency-oriented classroom will

incorporate such materials frequently and effectively into instruction at all levels.

Just how to make the most effective use of authentic language materials in elementary-level classes remains unclear. Krashen maintains that people acquire language that is directed at the acquirer's current level of competence, but which includes some structures that are somewhat beyond that level as well.[14] He asserts that language learners/acquirers will understand that which is "beyond" them from contextual cues in the message or from extralinguistic cues.

If Krashen's input hypothesis is valid, then we might obtain the best results by using simplified versions of authentic materials in elementary and intermediate instruction, and gradually move towards incorporating complete, unedited language samples in advanced courses. A second possibility would be to provide enough extralinguistic cues to render unedited authentic materials "comprehensible" to the beginning or intermediate student. We should not, however, abandon the use of materials created for instructional purposes in favor of "authentic" materials alone. Rather, a blend of the two seems more appropriate. Krashen, suggests that ". . . we can teach vocabulary, situational routines, grammar, whatever we like, and as long as we fill it with acquisition opportunities, as long as we keep providing comprehensible input, we are contributing to natural language acquisition."[15] "Natural language" includes the comprehensible input provided by teachers in everyday exchanges in the instructional setting that are communicative in nature, from giving directions to recounting personal anecdotes in the target language. The proficiency-oriented classroom is one in which such natural acquisition opportunities are exploited as fully as possible.

Hypothesis 2. Opportunities should be provided for students to practice carrying out a range of functions (task universals) likely to be necessary in dealing with others in the target culture. Traditional classroom instructional settings tend to limit the role of the student to that of "responder"; that is, students are most often asked to answer questions. In teacher-centered approaches, students are very seldom asked to make inquiries, act out simulated survival situations, narrate or describe events, hypothesize, argue, persuade, provide opinion, or carry out many other lan-

guage functions that are necessary in everyday encounters with others in the target language. In many cases, functional practice of this sort is reserved for advanced conversation courses, many of which are never taken by the majority of students. Proficiency-oriented methods and approaches should introduce students to a variety of functional tasks that have been carefully sequenced to help them cope with the real-world communication demands they will face. The list of task universals that candidates should be able to handle at each level of proficiency on the ILR scale is given in Figure 2. This list may be useful in designing a sequence of functional language practice activities that will build towards these competencies needed at the higher levels of proficiency from the beginning of instruction.[16]

Hypothesis 3. In proficiency-oriented methods there is a concern for the development of linguistic accuracy from the beginning of instruction. We have at least two compelling reasons for hypothesizing that

FIGURE 2
List of Task Universals

(4)	Represents point of view
	Negotiates
	Persuades
	Counsels
	Tailors language to audience
Superior (3)	Handles unfamiliar topics or situations
	Hypothesizes
	Provides supported opinion
Advanced (2)	Gets into, through and out of survival situations with a complication
	Narrates
	Describes
Intermediate (1)	Gets into, through and out of survival situations simply
	Asks questions
	Answers questions
	Creates
0 +	Communicates with memorized material
Novice	
0	Has no functional ability

Source: Pardee Lowe, Jr., *Manual for Language School Oral Interview Workshops* (Washington: Defense Language Institute/Language School Joint Oral Interview Transfer Project, 1982), pp. 2–13.

some type of monitoring and correction of errors is necessary from the beginning of foreign language instruction, at least for those learners who want to function eventually beyond level "2." Both reasons arise from recent research studies: the first relates to native speaker judgements of second language learners' efforts at communication; the second relates to maximum proficiency levels attained by learners whose errors were not systematically corrected during acquisition and/or learning of the target language.

In the first set of studies native speaker reactions to learners' errors revealed that lexical and grammatical errors are the most obstructive to communication of all possible error types.[17] In addition, native speakers tend to have varying levels of tolerance for certain types of errors, and some of the researchers cited above have attempted to create hierarchies of error gravity based on their findings (see also Magnan, elsewhere in this issue). It has also been shown that some language communities may be more tolerant of errors than others. For example, Ensz found that ". . . the French people . . . irrespective of sex, age, occupation, or home region in France, expressed a significant intolerance for grammatical errors. . . ."[18] She adds that ". . . while an American accent and some anglicisms may be moderately tolerable, American speakers of French should be most concerned that they speak with the greatest possible grammatical accuracy."[19] Ensz concludes that "any course should highly prioritize the development of grammatically correct French. . . ."[20] This concern for accuracy is *not* incompatible, in her view, with the encouragement of spontaneous communication of ideas in the foreign language, a view that will be explored further in this section.

The second body of research relating to the question of grammaticality was done at the CIA Language School using performance profiles of second language learners. It seems that attention to accuracy is fundamental in early language learning situations if one is to attain more than a minimal competence in the second language. Recent analyses of students who have not been able to meet performance standards at ILR level "3," or better, have led to the discovery of the phenomenon referred to as the "terminal 2." "The terminal 2 rating is associated with students who enter training with a level 2 proficiency but who peak out at level 2 + . They do not progress to level 3, and thus never attain the linguistic skills needed to reach minimum job proficiency standards."[21] The research reveals, in other words, that the fossilized lexical and grammatical structures that these students have acquired are generally *not* remediable. A second type of terminal profile has also been identified among "street learners," who often fossilize at ILR level "1 + ." Higgs and Clifford argue that the existence of these cases of fossilized language behavior should make us reconsider the "push towards communication" that has been characterized by an inadequate concern, in their view, for the development of linguistic correctness. They base their conclusion on the fact that many of the terminal cases in the CIA study had come from foreign language backgrounds that involved either street learning or academic programs in which the instructors did not place an emphasis on grammatical accuracy. This had occurred either because the instructors had not attained grammatical mastery of the target language themselves, or because they had chosen not to correct their students' mistakes for philosophical, methodological, or personal reasons.[22]

The implications of this last body of research seem clear for methodology oriented to the eventual development of high levels of proficiency: a concern for accuracy seems to be vital to the linguistic health of the learner who wishes to progress beyond the survival level in his skill development.

Higgs and Clifford, like Ensz, stress that a decision to strive for linguistic accuracy from the beginning of instruction does not imply a de-emphasis of communicative language use in the classroom. "A curricular or programmatic decision to strive for linguistic accuracy from the beginning of a program in no way excludes an approach or methodology in which the target language is used as the medium of instruction and for authentic, if relatively more constrained, communication. . . ."[23] They further maintain that no reasoned interpretation of the CIA research would suggest a return to grammar-translation or classical mim-mem audio-lingual methodology. The implication that they see for methodology is that we must recognize in some systematic fashion the ultimate role that linguistic accuracy will play in the achievement of true communicative competence, and

build toward accuracy from the first day of instruction.

"Building toward accuracy" does not imply that students should be expected to produce *only* correct utterances in the target language, or that an optimal methodology should provide "wall-to-wall insurance against error."[24] Learners obviously do not generally produce correct utterances when creating with the language. (A general typology of learners' language accuracy at various stages of proficiency is given in Figure 3.) In addition, research has repeatedly shown that errors are extremely useful in determining an individual's current internalized rule system and yield important information for the teacher to help that individual modify his system to conform more completely to that of the target language.

Because proficiency-oriented methods should encourage learners to create with the language and express their own meaning from the beginning of instruction, errors of all types are to be expected. We might, however, be able to help students produce more accurate speech if we adopt an "output hypothesis" similar to Krashen's input hypothesis, discussed earlier. That is, our methodologies might: 1) provide comprehensible input, in addition to formal instruction; 2) encourage students to express their own meaning within, or even slightly beyond, the limits of their current level of linguistic competence; 3) consistently provide corrective feedback. Such an approach may produce more "comprehensible output" among our students at each stage of proficiency. It will also require the use of carefully structured activities that encourage self-expression, yet provide at some point for the monitoring and correction of errors.[25]

Hypothesis 4. Proficiency-oriented approaches respond to the affective needs of students, as well as to their cognitive needs. One of the hallmarks of several recent methodological developments is the greater emphasis on the affective aspects of learning and acquisition. Proponents of "humanistic" methods believe that learning should be aimed at the deeper levels of understanding and personal meaningfulness to be maximally effective. Methods such as "suggestopedia," "counseling-learning," "confluent education," the "natural approach," and the "silent way" all emphasize the need to reduce anxiety and tension, which inhibit performance

FIGURE 3
Accuracy Statements

Level		Accuracy Statement
	(4)	Only occasional unpatterned errors
		Nearly perfect grammar
		Errors of grammar quite rare
		Occasional errors in low frequency structures
		Occasional errors in the most complex frequent structures
Superior	(3)	Only sporadic errors in basic structures
		Errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker
		Control of grammar good
		Joining sentences in limited discourse
		Good control of morphology of the language (in inflected languages) and of the most frequently used syntactic structures
Advanced	(2)	Elementary constructions usually handled quite accurately, but does not have thorough or confident control of grammar
		Some miscommunication
		Understandable to a native speaker *not* used to dealing with foreigners
		Normally errors made even in constructions which are quite simple and common
Intermediate	(1)	Errors in pronunciation and grammar frequent
		Intelligible to native speaker used to dealing with foreigners
Novice	(0)	No functional ability

Source: Pardee Lowe, Jr., *Manual for Language School Oral Interview Workshops* (Washington: Defense Language Institute/Language School Joint Oral Interview Transfer Project, 1982), pp. 2-24.

and create resistance to natural language acquisition and to learning. Stevick emphasizes the close relationship between anxiety and tension in the learning environment (due to self-critique as well as criticism by others) and poor performance.[26] This relationship is central to Krashen's "filter hypothesis," based on Dulay and Burt's concept of the "affective filter," somewhat akin to a mental block.[27] "With acquirers who do not have self-confidence, where the situation is tense, where (in Stevick's words) they are on the defensive the filter goes up."[28]

When the "affective filter" goes up, the results are "a feeling of conflict, anxiety, aloneness, and guilt for failing," all of which are out of harmony with the best environmental conditions for acquisition.[29]

Whether or not we agree completely with the need for the inclusion of certain kinds of humanistic/affective activities *per se* in the classroom, most language educators today would agree that students will probably achieve a degree of proficiency more rapidly than would otherwise be the case in an environment that is accepting, relaxed, personalized, in which they are not constantly put on the defensive. This principle relates directly to the issue of error correction discussed above: teachers must find a way to monitor and correct errors in a non-threatening way that does not "cut off" students' efforts at communication, but which does provide the feedback they need to make significant progress towards accuracy. Stevick speaks of two types of control teachers might exercise in directing the learning process in the classroom: 1) structuring of activity; 2) "making it easy for the learner to know how close he/she is coming to what the native would say."[30] The use of techniques that involve cooperation and mutual interdependence will also improve the chances of establishing a feeling of community in the classroom, which should improve the quality of communicative interaction that is necessary for the development of proficiency beyond the novice level.

Hypothesis 5. Proficiency-oriented approaches promote cultural understanding, and prepare students to live more harmoniously in the target-language community. For many years, foreign language educators have been emphasizing the need to incorporate a cultural syllabus into the curriculum and to promote global awareness and cross-cultural understanding.[31] The use of techniques to increase cultural understanding should receive a high priority in any task hierarchy that defines a proficiency-oriented method. Such techniques might include the use of culture capsules, clusters, assimilators, minidramas, and audiomotor units; the enactment of survival situations through role-plays and simulations; and the viewing of videotapes, films or television programming with follow-up discussions aimed at increasing cultural awareness. Interviews with native speakers either inside or outside the classroom can also be structured to help students increase their understanding of the target culture. Many recent ideas for incorporating cultural learning in the classroom can be found in the professional literature of the last decade.

PROFICIENCY ORIENTATION OF EXISTING METHODOLOGIES: A PRELIMINARY APPRAISAL

In order to make a preliminary appraisal of the extent to which various existing methodologies are oriented toward proficiency, it would be useful to determine how many of the hypothesized elements discussed in the previous section are assigned a relatively high priority in a given approach. There are several problems, however, in any formal comparison of methods in this way. First, it is often difficult to clearly define a "method" to the satisfaction of everyone familiar with it. There are currently so many individual variations of each method that it is almost impossible to discuss one in its "pure" form. Since the demise of the purest form of audiolingualism in the late 60's, many foreign language practitioners have been electing to use selected techniques from a variety of methods in their classrooms, or adapting a given method or approach to suit the abilities, needs, and interests of their students. Therefore, each method or approach being subjected to scrutiny may be interpreted or understood somewhat differently by different people.

A second problem associated with a methodological comparison of this kind is that it will almost certainly be subjective to some extent. Those who favor one approach may attribute characteristics to it that others might not associate with that particular method. One way to achieve some objectivity in comparing and contrasting methodologies would be to refer to a commonly accepted set of descriptions of major teaching approaches, such as those provided by Benseler and Schulz to the President's Commission several years ago, or descriptions found in various methods texts.[32] Using such descriptions as a guide, one could then make a preliminary appraisal of each approach in terms of its proficiency orientation, keeping in mind that variations of any given "method" might alter the appraisal considerably.

For purposes of illustration, three methods of language teaching have been compared and contrasted in terms of their proficiency orientation in Figure 4. A set of components relat-

FIGURE 4

Comparison of Methods in Terms of Proficiency Orientation

	GTRAN	ALM	NATL APP
Provides practice in range of proficiency-oriented contexts	1	2	2
Provides for range of functional language practice	1	1	2
Concern for development of linguistic accuracy	3	3	1
Encourages students to express own meaning	1	1	3
Promotes active communicative interaction	1	1	3
Emphasizes affective concerns	1	2	3
Promotes cultural understanding (formal and everyday culture)	2	2	2
Emphasizes use of authentic/natural language in instruction/materials	2	2	3

ing to the development of proficiency, listed along the left-hand side of the chart, has been extracted from the hypotheses presented earlier. Each of these components has been assigned a value of "3," "2," or "1" according to whether it is given a high, medium, or low priority in the method or approach being considered. This sample appraisal of the methods represented in Figure 4 is offered not as a critique or "scientific" analysis of current practices, but rather as a means of illustrating how one might assess any method or approach in the light of proficiency goals. The reader is invited to subject his or her own approach to teaching to a similar type of analysis.

KEY TO METHODS CITED

GTRAN: The Grammar/Translation Method. This method focuses on the formal and extensive analysis of the grammar of the target language and on translation. Reading and writing skills are emphasized, with very little, if any, training provided in listening and speaking.

ALM: The Audiolingual Method. Based on behavioristic psychology, this method is characterized by the teaching of all "four skills" in their "natural order," with an emphasis on speaking. Oral skills are practiced before reading and writing. Language is viewed as a set of habits to be learned through extensive manipulative pattern practice and mimicry and memoriza-

tion of dialogues. Creative language practice is extremely limited or non-existent in beginning and intermediate stages of learning. The method requires the immediate eradication of all errors through correction, control of output, and overlearning of patterns. Vocabulary and structures are presented in colloquial and authentic language samples. Translation is avoided.[33]

NATL APP: The Natural Approach. Advocated by Tracy Terrell, this adaptation of the direct method emphasizes that "immediate communicative competence (not grammatical perfection) be the goal of beginning language instruction."[34] Students are provided with natural acquisition opportunities, rather than formal learning opportunities, through the use of comprehensible input as the medium of instruction in the classroom. Any formal learning is relegated to homework and out-of-class practice. Terrell advocates using the entire class period for communication activities, with emphasis first on listening skills. Students are permitted to respond in the native language, the target language, or both until they feel comfortable using the target language. Affective considerations are of primary importance in the "natural approach." Error correction during the class period is virtually nonexistent, and is done only for written work. Terrell maintains that the correction of speech errors is not necessary in natural acquisition, and, in fact, is very likely detrimental in terms of motivation, attitude, and embarrassment to students.

CONCLUSION

The set of "working hypotheses" presented in this paper may or may not represent the best assessment of priorities for future approaches, but they may be useful in promoting discussions about priorities as we develop and adapt our methods in the coming years. If the foreign language teaching profession does indeed opt for proficiency as the organizing principle, then almost any of the varieties of methods and approaches now in use today can be adapted or adjusted to meet those common goals more efficiently. Teachers must have the option to make their own decisions about which proficiency goals should receive the highest priority in their own situations and for their own students, and then find ways to achieve those goals most directly. The time when all of us were expected

to slavishly subscribe to one method is past, for none of us yet knows which way will be best for which learners in which setting. As Strasheim pointed out in 1976, we will have to learn to "deal with working hypotheses rather than 'one true ways,' for we are moving out of the period governed by absolutes."[35] The new consensus that proficiency can provide does not need to bring with it a new absolutism; it can bring instead a new freedom, providing us with a means of organizing our thinking in the future so that our many "ways" to approach the teaching of foreign languages can achieve a renewed viability and purpose in the years ahead.

NOTES

[1]Lorraine Strasheim, "What is a Foreign Language Teacher Today?" *Canadian Modern Language Review,* 33 (1976), pp. 39–48.

[2]Karl Conrad Diller, *The Language Teaching Controversy* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1978), p. vii. This division of foreign language methodological trends into two distinct philosophies is also made in Janet K. Swaffar, Katherine Arens & Martha Morgan, "Teacher Classroom Practices: Redefining Method as Task Hierarchy," *Modern Language Journal,* 66 (1982), p. 24.

[3]Earl W. Stevick, *Memory, Meaning, and Method: Some Psychological Perspectives on Language Learning* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1976), p. 103.

[4]See *Proceedings of the National Conference on Professional Priorities* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: ACTFL, 1981).

[5]See *ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: ACTFL, 1982). This publication is the result of a project entitled "A Design for Measuring and Communicating Foreign Language Proficiency," funded by a grant (#G008 103203) from the International Research and Studies Program of the US Department of Education.

[6]See Michael Canale & Merrill Swain, *Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, 1979).

[7]Theodore Higgs & Ray Clifford, "The Push Toward Communication," *Curriculum, Competency, and the Foreign Language Teacher,* ed. Theodore Higgs (Skokie, IL: National Textbook Co., 1982), p. 59.

[8]Higgs (note 7 above), p. 60.

[9]See *ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines* (note 5 above).

[10]See Swaffar, Arens & Morgan (note 2 above), p. 31.

[11]See Stevick (note 3 above), p. 105.

[12]For sample activities involving information gaps, see Alice C. Omaggio, "Using Games and Simulations for the Development of Functional Proficiency in a Second Language," *Canadian Modern Language Review,* 38 (1982), pp. 517–46.

[13]See, for example, Diane W. Birckbichler, *Creative Activities for the Second-Language Classroom* (Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1982).

[14]Stephen Krashen, "Theory versus Practice in Language Training," *Innovative Approaches to Language Teaching,* ed. Robert W. Blair (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1982), pp. 15–30.

[15]Krashen (note 14 above), p. 30.

[16]For ideas about adapting existing textbook materials to incorporate functional practice, see Gail Guntermann & June K. Phillips, *Functional-Notional Concepts: Adapting the FL Textbook* (Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1982).

[17]See Kenneth Chastain, "Native Speaker Reaction to Instructor-Identified Student Second Language Errors," *Modern Language Journal,* 64 (1980), pp. 210–15; Helga Delisle, "Native Speaker Judgement and the Evaluation of Errors in German," *Modern Language Journal,* 66 (1982), pp. 39–48; Kathleen Y. Ensz, "French Attitudes Toward Speech Errors," *Modern Language Journal,* 66 (1982), pp. 133–39; Vicki B. Galloway, "Perceptions of the Communicative Efforts of American Students of Spanish," *Modern Language Journal,* 64 (1980), pp. 428–33; Gail Guntermann, "A Study of the Frequency and Communicative Effects of Errors in Spanish," *Modern Language Journal,* 62 (1978), pp. 249–53; Jeannette Ludwig, "Native Speaker Judgements of Second-Language Learners' Efforts at Communication: A Review," *Modern Language Journal,* 66 (1982), pp. 274–83; Linda Gaylord Piazza, "French Tolerance of Grammatical Errors Made by Americans," *Modern Language Journal,* 64 (1980), pp. 422–27.

[18]See Ensz (note 17 above), p. 138.

[19]*Ibid.,* p. 137.

[20]*Ibid.,* p. 138.

[21]See Higgs and Clifford (note 7 above), p. 65.

[22]*Ibid.,* p. 68.

[23]*Ibid.,* p. 77.

[24]Earl W. Stevick, *Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1980), p. 24.

25. For activities of this type, see Alice C. Omaggio, "The Proficiency-Oriented Classroom," *Proficiency: The Organizing Principle,* ed. Theodore V. Higgs (Skokie, IL: National Textbook Co., forthcoming 1983).

[26]See Stevick (note 24 above), p. 10.

[27]See Krashen (note 14 above), p. 25.

[28]*Ibid.*

[29]See Stevick (note 24 above), p. 10.

[30]*Ibid.,* p. 24.

[31]See, for example, H. H. Stern, "Directions in Foreign Language Curriculum Development," *Proceedings of the National Conference on Professional Priorities* (Hastings-on-Hudson: ACTFL, 1981), pp. 12–17.

[32]See David P. Benseler & Renate A. Schulz, "Methodological Trends in College Foreign Language Instruction," *Modern Language Journal,* 64 (1980), pp. 88–96. See also any of the following methods texts: Edward D. Allen and Rebecca M. Valette, *Classroom Techniques: Foreign Languages and English as a Second Language* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1977); Kenneth Chastain, *Developing Second-Language Skills: Theory to Practice* (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1976); Wilga

M. Rivers, et al., *A Practical Guide to the Teaching of French* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), and similar volumes for the teaching of German, Spanish, and English as a Second Language.

[33]In addition to above, see Nelson Brooks. "The Meaning of Audiolingual," *Modern Language Journal.* 59 (1975), pp. 234–40.

[34]For a detailed description of this approach, see Tracy D. Terrell, "A Natural Approach to Second Language Acquisition and Learning," *Modern Language Journal,* 61 (1977), pp. 325–37, and "The Natural Approach to Language Teaching: An Update," *Modern Language Journal,* 66 (1982), pp. 121–32.

[35]See Strasheim (note 1 above), p. 45.

APPENDIX

ACTFL/ETS PROVISIONAL SPEAKING DESCRIPTIONS

ILR scale were taught for the first time at the ACTFL/ETS workshop under the sponsorship of a grant to ACTFL from the US Department of Education entitled, "Professional Development: Oral Proficiency Testing and Rating."

NOVICE-LOW

Unable to function in the spoken language. Oral production is limited to occasional isolated words. Essentially no communicative ability.

NOVICE-MID

Able to operate only in a very limited capacity within very predictable areas of need. Vocabulary limited to that necessary to express simple elementary needs and basic courtesy formulae. Syntax is fragmented, inflections and word endings frequently omitted, confused or distorted and the majority of utterances consist of no more than two or three words and are marked by frequent long pauses and repetition of an interlocutor's words. Pronunciation is frequently unintelligible and is strongly influenced by first language. Can be understood only with difficulty, even by persons such as teachers who are used to speaking with non-native speakers or interactions where the context strongly supports the utterance.

NOVICE-HIGH

Able to satisfy immediate needs using learned utterances. There is no real autonomy of expression, although there may be some emerging signs of spontaneity and flexibility. There is a slight increase in utterance length but frequent long pauses and repetition of interlocutor's words still occur. Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only where this involves short memorized utterances or formulae. Most utterances are telegraphic and word endings are often omitted, confused, or distorted. Vocabulary is limited to areas of immediate survival needs. Can differentiate most phonemes when produced in isolation but when they are combined in words or groups of words, errors are frequent and, even with repetition, may severely inhibit communication even with persons used to dealing with such learners. Little development in stress and intonation is evident.

INTERMEDIATE-LOW

Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements. In areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics, can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, and maintain very simple face-to-face conversations. When asked to do so, is able to formulate some questions with limited constructions and much inaccuracy. Almost every utterance contains fractured syntax and other grammatical errors. Vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs. Strong interference from L1 occurs in articulation, stress and intonation. Misunderstandings frequently arise from limited vocabulary and grammar and erroneous phonology but, with repetition, can generally be understood by native speakers in regular contact with foreigners attempting to speak their language. Little precision in information conveyed owing to tentative state of grammatical development and little or no use of modifiers.

INTERMEDIATE-MID

Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands. Some evidence of grammatical accuracy in basic constructions; e.g., subject-verb agreement, noun-adjective agreement, some notion of inflection. Vocabulary permits discussion of topics beyond basic survival needs, e.g., personal history, leisure-time activities. Is able to formulate some questions when asked to do so.

INTERMEDIATE-HIGH

Able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands. Developing flexibility in a range of circumstances beyond immediate survival needs. Shows some spontaneity in language production but fluency is very uneven. Can initiate and sustain a general conversation but has little understanding of the social conventions of conversation. Limited vocabulary range necessitates much hesitation and circumlocution. The commoner tense forms occur but errors are fre-

ent in formation and selection. Can use most ques-
on forms. While some word order is established,
rors still occur in more complex patterns. Cannot
stain coherent structures in longer utterances or
nfamiliar situations. Ability to describe and give
recise information is limited. Aware of basic cohe-
ve features (e.g., pronouns, verb inflections), but
any are unreliable, especially if less immediate in
ference. Extended discourse is largely a series of
ort, discrete utterances. Articulation is compre-
ensible to native speakers used to dealing with for-
gners, and can combine most phonemes with rea-
onable comprehensibility, but still has difficulty in
roducing certain sounds, in certain positions, or in
ertain combinations, and speech will usually be
abored. Still has to repeat utterances frequently to
e understood by the general public. Able to pro-
luce some narration in either past or future.

ADVANCED

*ble to satisfy routine social demands and limited work re-
quirements.* Can handle with confidence but not with
acility most social situations including introductions
and casual conversations about current events, as
well as work, family, and autobiographical informa-
ion; can handle limited work requirements, needing
help in handling any complications or difficulties.
Has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond sim-
ply with some circumlocutions; accent, though often
quite faulty, is intelligible; can usually handle ele-

mentary constructions quite accurately but does not
have thorough or confident control of the grammar.

ADVANCED PLUS

*Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability
to communicate on concrete topics relating to particular in-
terests and special fields of competence.* Often shows
remarkable fluency and ease of speech, but under
tension or pressure language may break down. Gen-
erally strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but
not in both. Weaknesses or unevenness in one of the
foregoing or in pronunciation result in occasional
miscommunication. Areas of weakness range from
simple construction such as plurals, articles, preposi-
tions, and negatives to more complex structures such
as tense usage, passive constructions, word order,
and relative clauses. Normally controls general
vocabulary with some groping for everyday vocabu-
lary still evident.

SUPERIOR

*Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accu-
racy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal
and informal conversations on practical, social, and profes-
sional topics.* Can discuss particular interests and
special fields of competence with reasonable ease.
Vocabulary is broad enough that the speaker rarely
has to grope for a word; accent may be obviously
foreign; control of grammar good, errors virtually
never interfere with understanding and rarely dis-
turb the native speaker.

Native- and Foreign-Language Acquisition

TWO DECADES OF INTENSIVE RESEARCH INTO FIRST
language acquisition have produced an enor-
mous amount of information on the processes
and stages of language acquisition in general,
from phonology to pragmatics, and the role of
the parent as tutor. *Native Language and Foreign
Language Acquisition* brings together papers in
first language and second language acquisition
at a time when researchers in these two fields
are beginning to see that they have much to

offer each other. The thirty-two presentations
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