0860

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
Proposal Coordination Form

PLEASE ALLOW AT LEAST ONE WEEK BEFORE THE MAILING DATE FOR PROCESSING

When proposal has been signed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, call Ext. ~~3522~~

Please consult Grant Services (Ext. 3667) about budget problems before final typing of proposal.

PROPOSAL DEADLINE DATE
December 2, 1986

AGENCY
U.S. Department of Education

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OR PROJECT DIRECTOR (Name) (Dept.) (School or College)
William B. Fischer
Foreign Languages and Literatures
Liberal Arts and Sciences

AMOUNT OF REQUEST (Total) $ 308,355.00 **(first year)** $102,785.00

TYPE OF AGREEMENT
[x] Grant [ ] Contract [x] New [ ] Resubmission

TITLE OF PROPOSAL
Assessment and Improvement of Proficiency in Large-Scale Foreign Language Programs

PROPOSAL NO. 12860/

[ ] Renewal [ ] Continuation [ ] Supplement

WILL INVESTIGATION INVOLVE THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS?
[ ] Yes [x] No

DESIRED ACTIVATION DATE
September 1, 1987

TOTAL GRANT OR CONTRACT PERIOD (Month, day, year)
From 9/1/87 to 8/31/90

MATCHING FUNDS REQUIRED
[x] None [ ] $

NATURE OF PROPOSAL
[x] Research Project [ ] Training Program [ ] Fellowship Program
[ ] Facilities [ ] Equipment Grant [ ] Travel Grant
[ ] Institute [ ] Conference [ ] Demonstration Project
[ ] Other (Explain)

FEDERAL COST-SHARING REQUIREMENT
[x] None [ ] Met by University Contribution of $ _____
in the form of

Is more than one department involved in the proposal?
[ ] Yes [x] No

If yes, please have the appropriate Deans and Department Heads sign the endorsement below.

ENDORSEMENT

I have reviewed this proposal and agree to commit the stated resources from my area of responsibility.

ALL SALARIES AND OTHER BUDGET ITEMS ARE SUBJECT TO THE NORMAL UNIVERSITY REVIEW PROCESS.

The proposal described in the attached application is consistent with the program of this department. Requirements of space, personnel, utilities and other facilities are available or will be provided by the grant or contract, if awarded. The budget specifies all expenses that can be reasonably anticipated: salaries, including salary increases and fringe benefits; supplies, equipment, travel, contractual services and other special items peculiar to this proposal.

INDIRECT COSTS ARE CALCULATED
(Fill in only one.)

☒ 8 % of total direct costs

☐ (Other/explain)

ITEMS REQUIRING WRITTEN APPROVAL OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

☐ None ☐ Conflict of interest ☐ Position leading to tenure

☐ Contractual commitments of University beyond grant period

SIGNED (Department Head) Robert C Duncan DATE 12/1/86

I accept the foregoing recommendation, and give assurance that the proposal conforms to the program of service, curriculum development, research and graduate training under my jurisdiction. I have examined the budget and approve all categories, including personnel.

☐ Additional observations are made in the attached memorandum.

SIGNED (Dean) [signature] DATE 1 XII - 86

The budget as presented is in proper form. There are no commitments of the University's resources other than those described.

SIGNED (Grant Services) [signature] DATE 12/01/86

All commitments have been verified.

SIGNED (Director of Sponsored Research Activities) [signature] DATE 12/1/86

This proposal is consonant with the University's policies.

SIGNED (Vice President for Academic Affairs) DATE

8/16/76
OGSR

0860

2 December 1986

Assessment and Improvement of Proficiency in Large-Scale Foreign Language Programs

Proposal for International Research and Studies Program Grant
U.S. Department of Education (CFDA No. 84.017)

submitted by:
Dr. William B. Fischer (prospective director), Associate Professor of German
Dr. Sandra Rosengrant, Assistant Professor of Russian
Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
Portland State University, Portland, Oregon

Summary

The applicants propose to apply their expertise in proficiency-oriented foreign language testing and teaching to conduct research and to develop materials and methods useful to the profession at large, in both college/university and K-12 programs. The proposal foresees two major pursuits: 1) the establishment of "baseline" ratings of the language proficiency of students in large-scale undergraduate programs; 2) the development, in accord with the "baseline" ratings, of proficiency-oriented testing and teaching materials suitable for large-scale foreign language programs.

The results of the "baseline" research would be published in appropriate professional journals, such as Foreign Language Annals. The materials developed in conjunction with that research would include models of proficiency-oriented tests and extensive collections of appropriate

instructional materials for the promotion of speaking, listening, reading, and writing proficiency. Such materials would be disseminated widely, both through conventional publication and in the form of testing and teaching kits furnished gratis or at minimal cost to colleagues nationwide.

A notable feature of the project would be the effort to streamline proficiency-oriented testing and teaching through the use of recently developed technology, and thus to permit language teachers to devote themselves more to the dynamic oral/aural interchange with their students which is a hallmark of proficiency-oriented instruction (Dahl and Luckau, 1985; Higgs, 198_). Development of the teaching and testing materials would pay especial attention not only to the efficient evaluation of speaking and writing skills, but also to: 1) efficient measurement and intensive cultivation of listening skills through the use of high-quality, realistic recordings accompanied by conveniently administered objective exercises and tests; 2) production of computer programs (courseware and "testware") for use in the modalities of reading and listening; such software would incorporate certain highly realistic facilities in graphics and sound reproduction which have only very recently become available.

Resources at PSU are eminently suited to the project. Many of the foreign-language faculty are trained in oral proficiency interviewing, in keeping with the Department's long-time commitment to a proficiency-oriented curriculum and its early participation in FSI/ILR/ACTFL/ETS projects. The university administration enthusiastically promotes study of foreign languages, and the Oregon State Board of Higher Education has made PSU a center for International Studies. Research in computer-assisted language instruction is regarded favorably, and the Learning Center has excellent sound and computer facilities. Lastly, the population of foreign-

language students is large, and in its present diversity anticipates likely trends in the composition of classes in mass language instruction programs.

Discussion

1. Objectives and Need for Assistance

The applicants and their colleagues propose to measure the current language proficiency of large numbers of French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish students at Portland State University, a typical urban institution. During and after the large-scale proficiency testing they will employ new pedagogical and technological resources which will facilitate such testing and also provide useful instructional materials. The assessments of proficiency will establish "baseline" ratings useful throughout the profession. The testing data and the materials and methods developed in conjunction with the testing will be communicated nationally to interested colleagues in both K-12 and college/university programs. Both phases of the project can be expected to contribute significantly to the efforts to expand proficiency-oriented testing and teaching to ordinary mass language programs and to make such goals, methods and materials integral parts of curricular goals determined by the various authorities that set educational policy.

The professional literature clearly demonstrates the need for such research and development, as does informal comunication among proficiency-interested professionals, with whom the applicants are in close contact. The Portland State University Department of Foreign Languages and

Literatures is uniquely qualified as the site for the proposed research and development. For many years the Department has been closely involved in the development of the ILR/ACTFL/ETS proficiency standards and testing methods. Seven members of the Department – two in French, one in German, one in Spanish, one in German and Spanish, and two in Russian – participated in the very earliest of the ACTFL/ETS workshops for oral proficiency examiners, or even in the ventures which preceded them. Their work since then includes publication of relevant pedagogical articles, creation of teaching materials, exploration of proficiency testing in other language modalities, and frequent presentation, often by invitation, of familiarization sessions at regional professional meetings. Other colleagues whose participation in the proposed undertaking would be valuable are committed to obtaining the appropriate training as soon as possible.

The Department itself, acting as a unit to set institutional policy and influence practices in other programs which it affects, has systematically introduced proficiency-oriented teaching and testing, has financed the training of its members at proficiency workshops, has conducted methods courses and outreach programs for K-12 teachers, and has set proficiency-based performance requirements for its own degree and certification programs. To put the matter in less formal terms: our Department has made its commitment to proficiency-oriented foreign language learning manifest throughout the region it serves as an educational institution, and has become a center of reference for colleagues throughout the region and nation who wish to know what is meant by "proficiency."

The Department also pursues energetically research and development in instructional media, including computer-assisted language instruction (CALI). The commitment is manifested in publications, methods courses for

teachers, expansion of technical facilities, and courseware projects. A major feature of that work is the desire to combine proficiency orientation with innovative technology.

At present the Department has adequate faculty, equipment, and administrative support to maintain and gradually expand its own proficiency-oriented program. We have also demonstrated our potential to carry out much larger projects. But we lack both the time and money to do so. As the professional literature (e.g., Pusack, 1984) makes clear, major expansion of proficiency-oriented instruction and the development of attendant technological resources will require substantial commitment of both personnel and material, commitment at a level beyond that which can be expected in the ordinary allocation of resources by a single institution whose official mandate is to serve the immediate needs of its regular constituents.

That is the justification for our proposal. Our professional qualifications and individual commitment are evident, as is the general support of our institution. But evident too is our need for support which will permit us to carry out work which will benefit students and colleagues everywhere while we still perform our duties at our home institution. We work "in the trenches," with heavy teaching loads – which is one reason why we claim the expertise to conduct our project. But to conduct it we must have considerable untrammeled time to undertake intensive proficiency testing, and we need both free time and physical resources to develop proficiency-oriented instructional materials, many of which will capitalize on resources not yet commonly available even to university language departments.

2. Results or Benefits Expected

A testing program of the proposed size (initial stage: 450 students in five different languages) has yet to be undertaken at a large public university. The scope of the project, the fact that many of the subjects will be ordinary students rather than highly motivated or gifted ones, and the continuation of testing over a number of years in several languages will produce data for numerous synchronic and diachronic studies.

The first and most apparent benefit will be to the applicants' university, which will have a complete profile of its language program at the end of the study. Such a profile would be particularly useful for two reasons: 1) over the past few years the Department has forthrightly declared its commitment to proficiency-oriented instruction and has thus revised its curriculum extensively; 2) the Department has formalized its commitment to such instruction by formulating, in ILR/ACTFL/ETS terms, exit norms for both undergraduate and graduate students. Extensive measurement of our students' proficiency would enable us both to judge the accuracy or desirability of the norms, and to establish very manifestly the seriousness of our intent, both to students and to the rest of the educational system from which we draw and to which we return our students.

The project will also immediately benefit the Oregon State System of Higher Education, which is currently in the process of establishing language requirements for all of the institutions within its system of three universities and four colleges (see document 3). The requirements will, in turn, significantly affect K-12 and teacher-training programs. The results of this study will provide the State with actual test results upon which to

base its requirements. Presently PSU is far ahead of its sister universities in proficiency expertise, and we anticipate that our recommendation to adopt the ACTFL/ETS standards statewide will be accepted. The establishment of an extensive testing program would not only strongly imply the dominance of the ILR/ACTFL/ETS proficiency standards and evaluation methods, but also provide the hard data to establish the norms we advocate. Thus, although the state of Oregon does not have a truly unitary approach to higher education, there exists the prospect of quickly converting FL instruction to a proficiency orientation throughout the system of public education in an entire state.

The project will also produce results whose effect will extend beyond our own institution and state. We assume that the conclusions which we draw about synchronic levels of proficiency, about the rate of student development within a single language, about the relative development of students in different languages, and about the relative proficiency of graduating majors will be applicable to other large programs as well.

Another benefit of the project, aside from the test results themselves, will be the accumulation of actual tests which can be distributed with commentary to teachers who need to see the ACTFL Guidelines illustrated with genuine materials produced by students like their own, and who need to be convinced that proficiency-oriented testing and teaching are practicable in large-scale programs. Our Department has already produced and distributed modest versions of such materials for use in the Portland Public School System (see document 4). An expanded set of these materials needs to be developed for statewide use to facilitate the adoption of proficiency standards in foreign languages. Although these materials are being developed for a local audience, it is expected that their

applicability will be wider. We foresee national distribution, and indeed work we have previously conducted has evinced requests for such materials.

3. Approach

Background Discussion – The Current State of Efforts to Institute Proficiency Standards and Pedagogical Methods in Large FL Programs

The notion of foreign-language "proficiency," as defined in ILR/ACTFL/ETS terms, is now familiar to many teachers. The Guidelines and, at least for speaking skills, the methods for evaluating proficiency have been widely publicized through workshops and in the professional literature. Despite some criticism (Frawley and _____. 198_), it appears that the ILR/ACTFL/ETS standards will dominate the discussion and determination of practical competence in foreign languages.

Yet much remains to be done – above all, the implementation of the Guidelines and, beyond that, the principles of proficiency-oriented teaching and testing in ordinary large-scale programs, whether in the colleges and universities or, even more difficult, in the K-12 curriculum. The problems and challenges, both theoretical and practical, are many. Despite a few promising studies (e.g., Magnin, 1986), we still lack reliable "baseline" assessments of the proficiency of students in large programs. Under ordinary circumstances the oral proficiency interview is difficult to administer to vast numbers of students; validated testing in the other modalities is virtually unavailable. We thus have no accurate way to set

realistic curriculum goals, or to determine upper or lower levels appropriate for our instructional materials.

While the interview method of determining oral proficiency is now well understood, the full-dress OPI is unsuitable for use in mass programs, except as an occasional measurement of sample populations, a check of exit proficiency, or an aid in the placement of difficult cases. Any attempt to introduce even a modified, modest form of oral testing of all students in a course greatly increases the teacher's workload. While some sort of oral testing is desirable, both as an evaluation of proficiency and as a learning incentive, it would have to be accompanied by the evolution of resources and techniques which would reduce the teacher's workload while still promoting the acquisition and evaluation of proficiency in the other modalities.

While the Guidelines' descriptive standards for proficiency in listening, reading and writing are quite as detailed as those for oral proficiency, we still lack for those modalities testing methods analogous to the OPI. The theoretical difficulty is evident. The speaking modality is particularly suited to adaptive testing, in which the interviewer immediately adjusts level and context to fit the interviewee. Even had we materials and procedures for administering lengthy, individualized reading, listening or writing tests, we would still not be able to conduct them in quantity. We thus need modified tests that can be used to assess rapidly and efficiently, through a "level-check" evaluation, performance in reading, listening and writing.

It is evident that the "proficiency movement" stands on the verge of a new phase, in which small-scale research and experimentation must be translated into large-scale investigation of the proficiency of ordinary students and the development of materials which might advance it. Since it

is almost impossible to divorce the testing of proficiency from the introduction of teaching practices which promote it, a project which proposes to measure proficiency is almost certain to involve the production of useful instructional materials and to improve the pedagogical competence of all who participate in it. Thus the two parts of our proposed project are actually but aspects of a single larger effort.

3 a) Plan of Action

Testing

A key part of the proposed program is intensive testing of students in French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Initially, Modern Language Aptitude Tests will be administered to all language students. The students will also be asked to provide information regarding age, length of previous study, native language, and other factors which seem to play a role in the language acquisition process. Finally, 30 students in each of the five languages will take oral proficiency examinations at the end of the first, the beginning of the third, and the end of their fourth years of study. The final data will give us accurate information about the oral proficiency levels of foreign language students at each stage of their careers, and about the relative importance of factors that contribute to that proficiency. Records of students' course grades will also be kept, so that their correlation to the proficiency assessments can be analyzed.

MLAT tests have already been administered to all currently enrolled Russian students as part of a pilot project begun in 1986-87 (see

document 1). In the Fall term of 1987, MLAT tests will be administered to incoming Russian students and to all students of Japanese and German. The information provided by these tests will be analyzed to provide in-house aptitude norms. The same students will be asked to fill out questionnaires regarding factors that may affect their performance. During the same term all third-year German, Japanese and Russian students will record oral proficiency interviews with an ACTFL-trained interviewer. During Spring term 1988 oral proficiency interviews will be administered to all fourth-year German, Japanese and Russian students and to 30 randomly selected first-year students of each language.

During the Fall term of the 1988-89 academic year the MLAT test will be administered to all French and Spanish students. The results of these tests will also be analyzed to provide in-house aptitude norms. The same students will also be asked to fill out questionnaires on factors that may affect their performance. During the same term all third-year French and Spanish students will take oral proficiency interviews, along with as many randomly selected German, Japanese and Russian students as are needed to bring the sample for each language to 30. During the Spring term of 1989, 30 randomly selected first-year students of French and of Spanish and all fourth-year Japanese, French, German, Russian, and Spanish students will take an oral proficiency interview. During the 1989-90 academic year oral testing of first-, third-, and fourth-year students will continue as needed to bring the samples to 30.

Ideally, we would like to obtain equally accurate information about the listening, reading, and writing proficiency of the 450 students whose oral proficiency we will have evaluated. In the absence of validated proficiency tests for these skills, however, we propose to develop "level

checks" which will permit us to estimate the subjects' proficiency. The tests, some of which already exist for German and have been class-tested, would consist largely of machine-scorable contextual items which present genuine language (see document 5). When validated tests such as the ETS Reading Proficiency Test of Russian become available, we will use them.

When a sufficiently large sample of students has been tested, the data collected will be subjected to statistical analysis to determine the relative importance of various factors (age, length of study, native language and so forth) in the language acquisition process. We will also be able to generalize about the rate of student development in different modalities within a single language and to compare student development in different languages. Finally, and perhaps most importantly to those who subsequently hire students who have had language training, we will be able to generalize authoritatively about the abilities of language majors upon graduation from college.

Development of Materials

The major part of the testing phase, then, will consist of research which aims to establish the "baseline" assessments of oral proficiency and to compare them to other information about the student population. Information about student proficiency in the other modalities (listening, reading, and writing) will also be gathered, often through the use of testing materials developed by the applicants and other members of their Department. Such materials, it should be noted, might be regarded either as testing or as instructional materials, depending on their varied use; that is

indeed consistent with principles of proficiency-oriented pedagogy, which suggest that a proficiency test is a learning experience and that "teaching toward the test" is methodologically legitimate.

Over the past several years members of the Department, including the applicants, have cooperated in a project to develop a practical "testing kit" for evaluating the proficiency of large numbers of students. As of the date of application the project includes sample tests of speaking and writing proficiency in French, German and Spanish for the Intermediate to Advanced levels (see document 4). The materials include tapes of oral interviews, with ratings and extensive commentary, and writing samples with similar evaluations. Samples were drawn from actual student work at PSU.

Originally the kit was intended for the use of high schools teachers offering enrichment courses for PSU credit, and as such the materials have already been distributed in Portland schools. The Department has already begun to expand the kit to include conveniently administered proficiency-oriented listening and reading rests for the appropriate levels, and to include materials for Russian and perhaps Japanese. Examples of German listening and reading tests created by one of the applicants are attached; they have been used for two years, primarily in first-year German courses. Data already collected include estimates of the proficiency level addressed by individual test items, along with records of the performance of large numbers of students on each item, profiles of the distribution of total scores, and comparisons of performance of each student in proficiency-oriented tests of skills in other modalities.

The writing, reading and listening tests described here cannot be regarded as true proficiency tests, since they necessarily lack the interactive and adaptive features characteristic of the OPI. Nevertheless,

they have several virtues consistent with proficiency pedagogy: 1) they are contextual and task-oriented; 2) they function as relatively reliable "level checks" and "probes;" 3) they can be administered and graded efficiently, thus freeing the teacher to concentrate on productive classroom activities and preparation of other materials.

Moreover, the materials described here can serve as stepping stones to the development of practical testing and instructional resources of a much more sophisticated kind, an activity which would become an important part of the work undertaken with the support of the proposed grant.

We envision the following:

1) for the evaluation and improvement of oral skills, creation of a bank of outline interview-style exercise and test scripts, with advice about interview technique and specific comments about expected performance at the several levels likely to be encountered (see document 6)

2) for the evaluation and improvement of writing skills, a similar bank of situational tasks, with production samples and comments about standards sufficiently detailed to permit rapid "holistic" evaluation and efficient "feedback" for the student (see document 7);

3) for the evaluation and improvement of reading and listening skills, a bank of contextual exercises and tests sophisticated in their targeting of linguistic ability but nevertheless amenable to rapid grading and efficient provision of "feedback" (see document 5).

Item (3) merits considerable discussion, for it addresses aims, methods, and materials often neglected in language programs, and it raises

the prospect of rather spectacular developments in pedagogical materials, more particularly in the use of recent technology. For the sake of brevity, the present discussion presumes some familiarity with the professional literature (see attached bibliography, ____, ____ ; appendix "Courseware;" and document 8).

The types of reading and listening exercises/tests described here and represented in sample form in attached documents are presently administered "semi-manually" in the German program at PSU. That is, in the classroom a teacher distributes test (or exercise) booklets; the students record their responses on SCAN-TRON forms, which are then machine-scored. For reading tests the student receives photocopies of contextual "documents" (business cards, handwritten notes, tourist brochures, etc.); for listening tests the "documents" are samples of the spoken language, either performed by the teacher, who uses naturalistic diction, or conveyed by taped realia (radio commercials, weather reports, songs, etc.).

An initial stage in the work to be undertaken under the proposed grant would be the creation of a much larger bank of testing and teaching materials, in the same form and media, and in languages beside German. That step alone would constitute a major achievement which would provide conveniently administered proficiency-oriented materials for both testing and teaching in large language programs.

But the potential of such materials is far greater, and the applicants and their Department hope to address it in the proposed project. The essential element is the employment of technological resources, both those already available almost anywhere, and those now apparent if not yet widespread. While we anticipate several stages in our development of

materials, all of them might reasonably be addressed within the term of the proposed activities.

A valuable initial pedagogical step will be the recording of the scripted "realia" for listening tests, so that each time such a test is administered it will not have to be "performed" anew. The recording could be on conventional aural tape, but it could also be on videotape, which would reinforce the notion that language occurs in not only aural but also visual ("gestural") and cultural contexts. Such materials could then be studied independently as instructional materials, rather than presented solely as tests.

The objective (often multiple-choice) format of such materials would readily permit the transfer of the test or exercise to computer administration and evaluation, perhaps outside of class, which would then free up class time for greater interactive instruction. Commonly available computer "authoring" programs (such as Great Creator or Superpilot) could be used, with relatively little expenditure of finances or labor. The computer interface would be simple: the student would record responses on the computer while consulting photocopied documents (reading tests) or listening to taped materials (listening tests). An elaboration of the latter would consist of computer-controlled tape interfacing, which is quite feasible now, but likely to be superseded soon by better facilities for linking computers with speech.

Recent advances in microcomputer technology and software promise still more attractive possibilities, and the applicants are in a particularly favorable position to exploit them.

The most important pedagogical feature made possible by newer resources is the facility for interaction and adaption ("branching"), which

would permit the administration of reading and listening exercises/tests whose presentation of items would be governed by the student's performance on previous items. Thus one set of items might serve as a "level check," after which other sets of items would be selected as appropriate probes or further level checks. A score-keeping routine would assign a proficiency estimate. Thus each student would receive an exercise or test suited to his or her level of performance. As tests such materials would yield two benefits: 1) the teacher would have more time inside and outside class to conduct other work; 2) accuracy of evaluation would be improved, for the test could be concluded quickly where a level of performance soon became evident, or conducted at considerable length if the rating were problematic. Similar adjustments could be made if the materials were to be used for teaching purposes, so that the student could either receive carefully targeted review or else encounter more challenging fare at a variably selectable level of difficulty.

For our purposes the most important of the recently introduced technological features for CALI are ready manipulation of high-quality graphics, and the provision of high-fidelity on-disk sound recording (Fischer, 1986a, 1986b, document 8). Such facilities would permit the full computerization of many of the reading and listening materials described above, and would also allow us to experiment with other types of programs. We consider the production of such materials feasible during the course of the grant, since we already have experience in the area, and since – it should be clearly noted – the relevant applications software consists largely of "authoring" programs which do not involve elaborate programming.

The Department already has available for student use sufficient conventional computer equipment (several dozen Apple IIe's, a dozen IBM-PC

compatibles), though we lack such computers for intensive pedagogical research and development. Like most other institutions we lack for student use computers with advanced graphics and sound facilities, though we have a few for our own experimental work (Macintosh, Amiga, Victor 9000). Thus the proposed grant budget provides for a modest expansion of computer facilities for both faculty and student use, so that the new materials might be developed and field-tested. Other support resources, including technicians and programmers familiar with foreign language pedagogy, are readily available.

3 b) Timetable

First Year (1987-1988 Academic Year)

Fall Quarter (Sept.-Dec. 1987)

1) aptitude test and questionnaire (all PSU Japanese, German and incoming Russian students)
2) Oral Proficiency Testing: third-year Japanese, German and Russian

Note: The aptitude test and questionnaire will be administered to all students, so that any student's subsequent performance on other tests may be correlated to that information. Other tests (OPIs and listening, reading or writing tests) will not be administered universally, unless by default. That is, to obtain a representative sample of, for example, third-year Russian students, it may be necessary to gather data over several years, since third-year Russian classes may be relatively small. On the other hand, third-year

German enrollment in a single year may alone be sufficient to provide a representative sample.

Winter Quarter (Jan.-March 1988)

1) expansion and limited distribution of departmental testing kit (complete French, German, Spanish listening and reading materials for Intermediate to Advanced levels; add Russian and Japanese materials in all modalities for lower levels)
2) begin transferring listening and reading exercises/tests to software; field-test German materials in PSU courses
3) begin videotaping some first-year German oral tests (both brief tests and full OPIs), for addition to testing kit materials and for experimentation with selected coaching

Note: The above activities will likely be conducted throughout the year, but will be concentrated in the winter quarter, when little or no oral testing will be undertaken. If the grant is continued, they will be expanded through the second and third years of the project.

Spring Quarter (April-June 1988)

1) OPIs: first-year Japanese, German and Russian; fourth-year Japanese, German and Russian
2) compile report for DOE

Second Year (1988-89 Academic Year)

Fall Quarter (Sept.-Dec. 1988)

1) aptitude test and questionnaire (all PSU French and Spanish students)
2) OPIs: third-year Russian, German, Japanese, French, Spanish

Winter Quarter (Jan.-March 1989)

1) continue videotaping and testware / courseware development as in 1987-88, with interactive/adaptive programming
2) publish results of 1987-88 testing

Spring Quarter (April-June 1989)

OPIs: first-year French, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish; fourth-year Japanese, German and Russian

Third Year (1989-90 Academic Year)

Fall Quarter (Sept.-Dec. 1989)

OPIs: third-year French, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish

Winter Quarter (Jan.-March 1990)

further expansion of testing kit

Spring Quarter (April-June 1990)

OPIs: fourth-year French, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish

3 c & d) Data Evaluation Criteria

Research data gathered during the project will consist of MLAT results, questionnaire information, and oral proficiency ratings and estimates of listening, reading and writing proficiency of 450 or more students of French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish. The applicants anticipate requesting two primary types of assistance in evaluating the results of their program.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) is the organization that has been responsible for developing and distributing proficiency guidelines and for training and certifying oral proficiency testers. In order to assure the validity of our test results, we intend to request that ACTFL arrange for unbiased testers of French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish to visit our university during the Spring term of each of the years in which testing is conducted to review results already obtained by the original testers and to observe and in part conduct the tests that are currently underway. Because of ACTFL's extreme interest in all projects concerning proficiency testing, we do not anticipate any difficulty in obtaining evaluators. Indeed, we have already received positive responses to tentative inquiries among qualified colleagues elsewhere.

We also intend to request assistance from the various American Associations of Teachers of foreign languages (AATs) in evaluating and distributing the instructional materials developed during the course of this project. Before any instructional materials are distributed in final form, we intend to advertise the availability of the materials through AAT publications. Teachers who agree to field test the materials will be asked to evaluate them, and their comments and observations will be taken into account in developing the final form.

Members of the PSU Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures who will participate in the project include the applicants and colleagues who have received formal training in proficiency evaluation. They are:

William B. Fischer (ACTFL-trained in German), proposed director of the grant (see attached vitae); will directly supervise production of testing / teaching materials

Sandra Rosengrant (ACTFL-certified tester of Russian), co-author of grant proposal (see attached vitae); will supervise testing procedures and analysis of data

Louis J. Elteto (German, Hungarian, Spanish); former Chairman of the Department, early participant in ILR/ACTFL/ETS projects, including preparation of the FSI Testing Kit for French and Spanish, which also involved other members of the Department (Bernard, Cabello, Swenson, Frank Vecchio)

Jeanne Bernard (ACTFL-certified tester of French)

George Cabello (ACTFL-certified tester of Spanish)

Guy Houk (ACTFL-trained in Russian, applying for certification in 1987)

Eric Swenson (ACTFL-certified tester of French)

Two other members of the Department, Roderick Diman (Spanish), the present Chairman of the Department, and Patricia Wetzel (Japanese), have extensive familiarity with proficiency standards and have made arrangements to attend ACTFL testing workshops within a few months. Both are members of the Oregon State System of Higher Education committee which is presently determining the standards and methods by which new statewide requirements for foreign-language study are to be implemented.

4. Biodata on Key Personnel

see attached vitae for William B. Fischer and Sandra Rosengrant

comments:

Professor Fischer was trained as an oral proficiency interviewer at the Washington, D.C. workshop in February, 1983. He designed and customarily supervises the proficiency-oriented PSU first-year German course (see Fischer, 1984, and documents 5-7). Since 1983 he has taught proficiency-familiarization courses for advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and local language teachers, has conducted similar workshops by invitation elsewhere in the region, and has presented numerous conference papers on the subject. His textbook, Wie, bitte? First-Year College German for Proficiency, is scheduled to appear in late 1988 (New York: John Wiley;

co-author Peter Richardson, Chairman, Department of Foreign Languages, Linfield College, McMinnville, Oregon, ACTFL-certified oral proficiency tester). His work with computers is reflected in several publications, in CALI methods courses, and in numerous conference presentations and invited public lectures.

Professor Rosengrant was trained as an oral proficiency interviewer at the Pomona College workshop in 1983. She has published one article about language proficiency (Foreign Language Annals); another is in press (proceedings of 1986 workshop for teachers of gifted students of Russian and Chinese, held at University of Oregon, 1986). Other relevant activities: frequent familiarization workshops; frequent conference papers; field-test reading for Reading Real Russian by Irene Thompson; participant in several projects for setting proficiency-oriented curriculum goals and standards.

Project Budget for First Year (Academic Year 1987-88)

Notes:

1) numbers/letters in parentheses refer to line items on "Part III – Budget Information" of the DOE forms)
2) * = see comments following budget

Salaries and Wages*

Fischer, William B.		
9/16/87 – 6/15/88 @ .33 FTE	10,350.00	
7/01/88 – 8/31/88 @ .50 FTE	3,450.00	
Rosengrant, Sandra F.		
9/16/87 – 6/15/88 @ .33 FTE	9,290.00	
7/01/88 – 8/31/88 @ .50 FTE	3,097.00	
Clerical Assistance		
9/16/87 – 8/31/88 @ .50 FTE	7,200.00	
Total Salaries and Wages		33,387.00 (6a)
Fringe Benefits		
Staff: 32% of salaries and wages		10,684.00 (6b)
		44,071.00
Travel		1,000.00 (6c)
Equipment		
Computers*	12,500.00	
Audio and Video Equipment*	10,000.00	
Total Equipment		22,500.00 (6d)

Supplies

Teaching and Testing Materials*	10,000.00	
Duplicating	500.00	
Telephone Toll Charges	600.00	
Total Supplies		11,100.00 (6e)

Other

Consultants	10,000.00	
Consultant Travel	4,000.00	
Printing Materials	2,500.00	
Total Other Direct Costs		16,500.00 (6h)
Total Direct Costs		95,171.00 (6i)
Indirect Costs (8% of TDC)		7,614.00 (6j)
TOTAL COSTS		102,785.00 (6k)

Commments on Budget for First Year

1) Salaries and wages – The first-year budget provides released time for Fischer and Rosengrant, since they are the supervisors of the project and since initial testing will be conducted for their language specialities (German and Russian). Should continuation be approved, the released time in subsequent years, generally amounting to .67 FTE in aggregate, will be shifted largely to other members of the faculty in accord with plans for intensive testing in other languages (see Timetable). Clerical assistance is needed throughout the project for ordinary office work, supervised scoring of tests, record-keeping, and preparation and mailing of testing results, test materials, and instructional materials developed in the course of the project.

2) Equipment – The project envisions acquisition of computers and other equipment appropriate to the proposed development of testing and instructional materials. Present PSU facilities will be employed wherever and whenever that is practical, but we cannot assume their convenient availability for constant intensive use, and some of the technology required for the project is as yet unavailable even at PSU. For the first year of the project we propose to acquire the following equipment:

about 5 advanced personal computers (Macintosh or Apple IIgs) with support software and peripherals (approx. cost $12,500), for development and local field-testing of tests and instructional materials; reasons for selection: 1) popularity of the two computers in college and K-12 foreign-language programs; 2) user-friendliness and convenient high-quality management of graphics and digitized sound

audio and video equipment suitable for the production and experimental administration of testing and teaching materials as described elsewhere in the application (e.g., portable high-quality audio recording, playing, and duplicating equipment for recording of oral interviews and use in listening tests/instruction; video recording, playing, and duplicating equipment for recording of selected oral interviews and development of contextual listening tests/instructional materials)

The same budget line also includes provision for large quantities of blank audio and video cassettes. Some would be used in-house for recording of oral proficiency interviews and preparation of testing/teaching materials. Many more, however, would be intended for the distribution of testing-kit packages envisioned in the proposal. The applicants favor free distribution

of such materials to interested qualified parties, in order to further the adoption of proficiency principles, standards, methods and materials on a large scale. Should DOE recommend in favor of distribution at cost rather than gratis, the request for support would be reduced.

3) Teaching and Testing Materials – The item addresses not the acquisition of such materials, but rather the cost of producing and distributing teaching and testing materials developed in the course of the project and aimed at the project's prime beneficiaries, i.e., our colleagues in foreign-language programs nationwide. Aside from the publication of our work through conventional channels (professional journals, etc.), we envision production and distribution of a basic testing and teaching kit (50-page booklet, 2 cassettes, 1 videocassette) in an edition of perhaps 500 copies.

Appendix I

Courseware – Comments on the Use of Computers for Proficiency-Oriented Testing and Teaching

The first generation of CALI courseware consisted largely of analytic grammar exercises and vocabulary drills. Such materials came readily to the minds of computer developers who, it would appear, usually lacked knowledge of language pedagogy; moreover, analytic grammar and vocabulary drills are easy to program.

Foreign-language professionals have now acquired sufficient understanding of CALI that they can confidently point out the weaknesses of conventional software. Like much other courseware, it is often difficult to use – by individual students, often, and even more by groups of students in typical learning-lab environments. Graphics are generally unappealing, and there is virtually no provision for serious use of sound, much less facility for management of student speech.

Those familiar with principles of proficiency will discern still greater flaws. Conventional courseware does little to promote genuine reading or writing proficiency, in large part because dealing with language that is created relatively freely by the student would seem to pose immense programming problems.

The fundamental shortcomings of conventional courseware are that: 1) it fails to differentiate the modalities of speaking listening, reading, and writing; 2) it has no concern for communicative context; 3) the organization, presentation, and weighting of items typically ignores the vital distinctions of level made clear by the ILR/ACTFL/ETS standards and methods; and, 4) it is seldom if ever genuinely adaptive, in the sense that the program will change its behavior to suit the student's linguistic input.

In recent years a few courseware packages have pointed the way, though perhaps very modestly, toward proficiency-oriented computer materials ("Juegos Communicativos," 1985, and "Utilisons l'ordinateur," 1984; see also Kossuth, 1984). Their existence suggests that even relatively primitive equipment and programming can produce courseware consistent with the principles of proficiency. Moreover, certain recent technological advances offer resources eminently suited for the production of adaptive, contextual courseware which takes into account differences in modality.

Our Department, through years of faculty effort and strategic administrative support, has developed considerable computer competence, and is thus, with its strong foundation in language proficiency, well qualified to take a leading position in the creation of a proficiency-oriented second generation of CALI courseware. Many members of the Department are quite computer-literate, and several are competent in programming or similar skills (electronics, authoring programs, computerized speech, etc.).

For several years the Department has offered CALI workshops for teachers, and some research has been published. The proposed director of the present grant, who teaches most of those workshops, is also currently designing proficiency-oriented software for a first-year German package. We have also developed contacts with specialists, here or elsewhere, who would be useful consultants. The Department's material facilities and the favorable attitude of the university administration are described in the main body of the grant application.

The production of proficiency-oriented "testware" or courseware under the proposed grant would be carried out in two stages. The first requires only the conventional computer technology, modest CALI expertise, and moderate investment of labor either now available in our Department or to be supported during the first year of the grant. Using as models conventional (non-computerized) listening and reading tests already created, the applicants and their colleagues would develop computerized versions of similar material. The simplest versions would consist of sequential computer-administered exercises or tests which would be interfaced "manually" with photocopied reading selections or recorded listening materials.

A simple elaboration, capitalizing on graphics and sound facilities which are more sophisticated but now readily available (e.g., for Macintosh), would consist of similar sequential items which would call up realistic reading texts stored on disk, or would automatically activate a cassette player for playback of realistic speech samples. A third substage might be the sequential interfacing of the computer with video facilities, though with no facility yet for "adaptive" programming or "branching." Where possible, authoring programs such as Great Creator (for Apple II) or its

much more sophisticated successors would be used. One could make a case, however, for greater investment of programming in order to produce versions (e.g., in generic BASIC) which would be portable to the several computers commonly used in language instruction, and which would anticipate the "branching" facilities discussed in the next paragraphs.

Much more desirable, and indeed attainable if the proposed grant is approved and then continued, would be contextual, user-friendly, and truly adaptive programs, especially those which would exploit recent innovations in interfacing, graphics, and audio. Whatever the modality such programs would address, facility for adaptive programming would be paramount. That is, the courseware or "testware" would customize the material presented to the student, taking into consideration performance on previous items. Although earlier computers could support adaptive programming, recently-developed hardware and software make it far more practicable, and indeed place it well within the capability of the language specialist who is not a professional programmer but who is genuinely CALI-literate.

Easiest to create would be interactive, adaptive software which would evaluate and promote reading proficiency, with careful weighting of item difficulty, concurrent assessment of performance, and on-disk storage and call-up of texts which would emulate the original context and typography – all prime desiderata of proficiency-oriented instruction and testing. Better facility for management of complex student input might well encourage development of limited facility for exercise of writing skills at the lower proficiency levels; the student might be encouraged, for example, to customize a short personal note.

But most spectacular and yet now practical and genuinely effective pedagogically would be the introduction of realistic speech samples into

such adaptive programs in order to exercise and evaluate competence in listening, perhaps the most neglected of the modalities. The essential feature is on-disk, immediately accessible digitized speech material which can be called up automatically for virtually instant playback within interactive, adaptive programs. The technique has two virtues: 1) It permits intensive exercise of listening comprehension, particularly at the lower proficiency levels which are often neglected in traditional programs but whose importance is substantiated in the ACTFL/ETS Guidelines; 2) it obviates the cumbersome manual or semi-manual interfacing between the student and the teacher or computer which characterizes more primitive efforts to exercise and test listening comprehension.

One can envision a stage beyond those described here, namely the creation of proficiency-oriented courseware and "testware" which conveniently integrates several language modalities and perhaps includes as well facilities for interactive, adaptive video. But such speculation, though our Department is quite prepared to pursue it, lies beyond the scope of the proposed grant.

Other parts of the present grant application, including the comments on the proposed budget for equipment, discuss the hardware and software we propose to acquire and employ in our larger effort to assess and improve proficiency in large-scale language programs.

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List of documents

#1 Description of pilot Russian testing program (1986-87)

#2 Letters of support

#3 Statement of new language requirements for students in Oregon State System of Higher Education

#4 Excerpts from departmental proficiency testing kit (not including the cassettes which ordinarily accompany the kit)

#5 Samples of German listening and reading tests

#6 Samples of German oral tests and evaluation standards

#7 Samples of German writing tests and evaluation standards

#8 article and software review about computer digitization of speech