



## "Crossing the Border: Helping Students Reach Advanced-Level Proficiency"

Eileen W. Glisan, Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Leo Van Lier Lecture Series, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey  
March 6, 2015

### Introduction/Defining Proficiency - *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (2012)

- Quick glance at functions for each major level
- OPI video clip segments of Advanced-level speech (English)
- Why the Advanced level?

### Two-pronged Approach to Promoting Advanced-Level Proficiency

- Micro-level: Course level
- Macro-level: Program level

### In Courses: Building a Discourse Community

- Larger topic-oriented goals
- IRE vs. IRF
- Negotiation of meaning, multiple turns at talk
- Interpersonal Communication & Interaction

### Using Meaningful Contexts

- Current events in U.S. and target cultures
- University contexts
- Other content: video, audio, printed texts
- Using Literature & Film for Narration, Opinions, Debate

### Out-of-class events/activities: Sullivan 2011 study

### Building Linguistic Accuracy

- Accuracy within meaningful contexts
- Focus on form – “teachable moments”

### Program-Level Considerations

- End-of-program proficiency goal
- Benchmark assessments

Closure: Q/A

# Crossing the Border: Helping Students Reach Advanced-Level Proficiency

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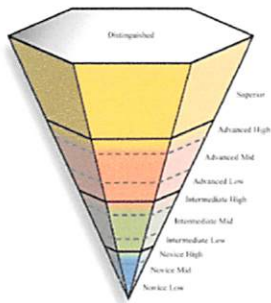
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ACTFL National Foreign Language Assessment (NFLA) Proficiency Scale

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## ACTFL ORAL PROFICIENCY SCALE

Superior  
Advanced  
Intermediate  
Novice

LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

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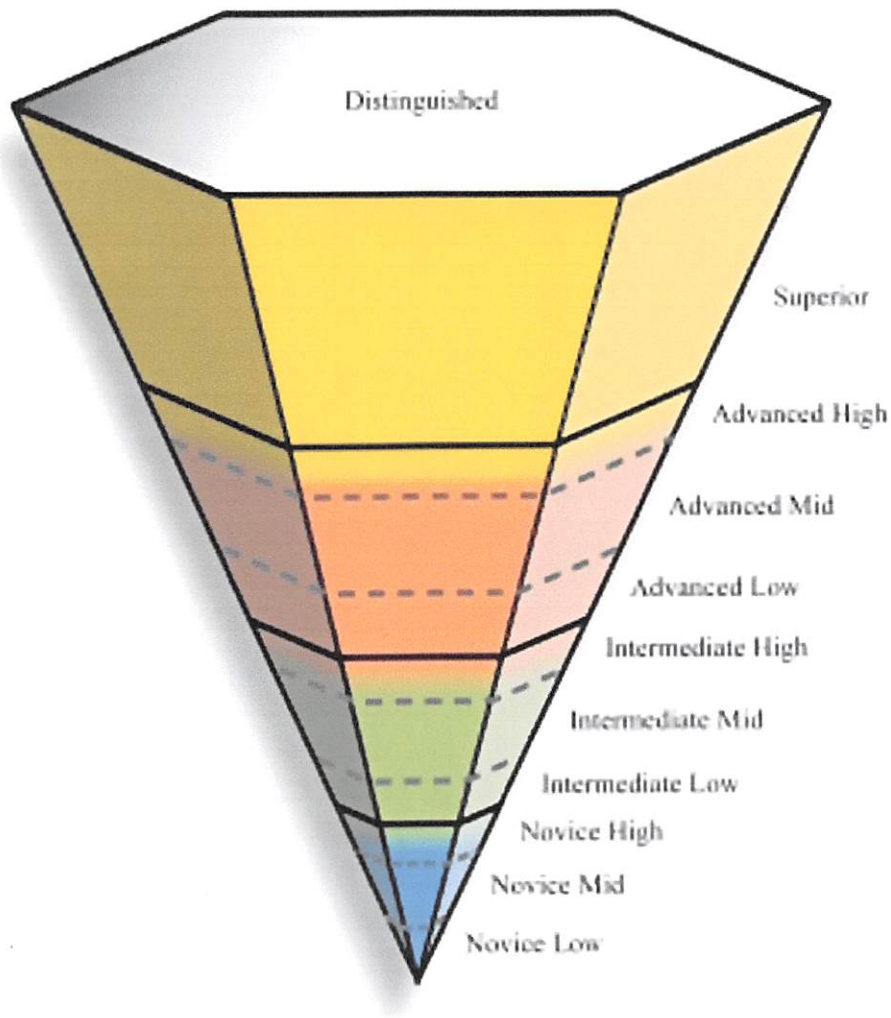
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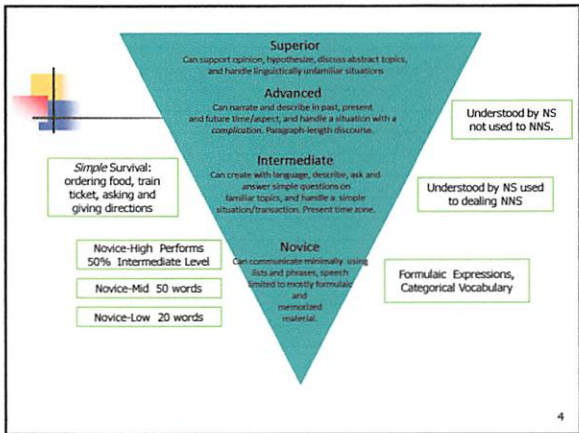
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## Oral Proficiency: The Inverted Pyramid



Inverted Pyramid Representing ACTFL Rating Scale with Major Ranges and Sublevels including Distinguished




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### Intermediate-Level Speakers Are Able to:

- Create with the language in sentence-length utterances
- Ask questions to obtain information
- Handle familiar topics related to daily life
- Handle straightforward social situations dealing with immediate needs
- Understood by those used to speech of non-native learners

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### Advanced-Level Speakers Are Able to:

- Narrate & describe in present, past, future
- Speak in "paragraph-length" discourse
- Participate in informal & formal contexts
- Handle topics related to self and those related to community, national, international interest
- Handle situations or tasks that present a complication or unexpected turn of events
- Understood by those not used to speech of non-native learners

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## The Intermediate Level on the OPI Scale

The difference between Intermediate Low and Mid is one of quantity of speech and quality (i.e., accuracy of utterances). Intermediate High speakers handle the tasks of the Advanced level but cannot sustain their performance at that level across a variety of topics.

### Intermediate Low speakers...

- ✓ handle successfully a limited number of uncomplicated communicative tasks, although with some hesitations and inaccuracies;
- ✓ create with the language in concrete and predictable exchanges related to basic personal information such as self and family, some daily activities and personal preferences;
- ✓ interact in straightforward social situations dealing with some immediate needs such as ordering food and making simple purchases;
- ✓ ask a few appropriate questions;
- ✓ express personal meaning by combining and recombining into short statements what they know and what they hear from their interlocutors;
- ✓ can be understood by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives in spite of frequent misunderstandings that may require repetition or rephrasing.

### Intermediate Mid speakers....

- ✓ handle successfully a variety of communicative tasks in straightforward social situations;
- ✓ create with the language in concrete and predictable exchanges related to personal information covering self, family, home, daily activities, interests, and personal preferences, as well as physical and social needs, such as food, shopping, travel and lodging;
- ✓ ask a variety of questions to obtain simple information to satisfy basic needs, such as directions, prices, and services;
- ✓ express personal meaning by combining and recombining known elements and conversational input to make utterances of sentence length and some strings of sentences, including some complex sentences;
- ✓ can be understood by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives.

### Intermediate High speakers...

- ✓ converse with ease and confidence when dealing with most routine tasks and social situations of the Intermediate level;
- ✓ handle a substantial number of tasks associated with the Advanced level but cannot sustain performance of all of these tasks all of the time;
- ✓ handle successfully many uncomplicated tasks and social situations requiring an exchange of basic information related to work, school, recreation, particular interests and areas of competence;
- ✓ can generally be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, although interference from another language may be evident and a pattern of gaps in communication may occur;
- ✓ when performing Advanced-level tasks, exhibit one or more features of linguistic breakdown (failure to carry out fully the narration/description in major time frame, inability to maintain paragraph-length discourse, reduction in breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary);

Source: Adapted from Swender & Vicars, 2012.

## **The Advanced Level on the OPI Scale**

Advanced Low and Mid speakers generally perform the same tasks and functions, but Advanced Mid speakers do so with a higher level of quality and quantity in their speech. Advanced High speakers handle the tasks of the Superior level but cannot sustain their performance at that level across a variety of topics.

### **Advanced Low speakers....**

- ✓ handle successfully a variety of communicative tasks, although with a certain grammatical roughness;
- ✓ participate actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations on activities related to school, home, and leisure activities, and about some topics related to employment, current events, public, and matters of public and community interest;
- ✓ narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present, future) in paragraph-length discourse with some control of aspect;
- ✓ handle appropriately the essential linguistic challenges presented by a complication or an unexpected turn of events that occurs within a routine situation or communicative task;
- ✓ speak with sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion;
- ✓ can be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, even though this may require some repetition or restatement.

### **Advanced Mid speakers...**

- ✓ handle with ease and confidence a large number of communicative tasks, and their speech is marked by substantial flow;
- ✓ participate actively in most informal and some formal exchanges on a variety of concrete topics relating to school, home, and leisure activities, as well as events of current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance;
- ✓ narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future by providing a full account and with good control of aspect and in connected, paragraph-length discourse;
- ✓ handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within a routine situation or communicative task with which they are familiar; strategies such as circumlocution and rephrasing are often used;
- ✓ are readily understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives.

### **Advanced High speakers...**

- ✓ perform all Advanced level tasks with linguistic ease, confidence, and competence;
- ✓ handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at that level across a variety of topics;
- ✓ provide a structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypotheses, but patterns of error appear;
- ✓ discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests, but in general they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely;
- ✓ compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms or limitations in vocabulary by using communicative strategies: paraphrasing, circumlocution, illustration.

Source: Adapted from Swender & Vicars, 2012.

## Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Grouping of Languages

- Group 1: Afrikaans, Danish, Dutch, French, Haitian Creole, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish
- Group 2: Bulgarian, Dari, Farsi, German, Greek, Hindi, Indonesian, Malay, Urdu

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## FSI Language Groupings (Cont'd.)

- Group 3: Amharic, Bengali, Burmese, Czech, Finnish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Khmer, Lao, Nepali, Pilipino, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Sinhala, Thai, Tamil, Turkish, Vietnamese
- Group 4: Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean
- Source: Liskin-Gasparro, 1982.

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## Why the Advanced Level?: Internal considerations

- Level at which speakers can discuss topics beyond world of "self"
- Level at which speakers can be more spontaneous, not rely on script
- Level at which speakers can be understood by native speaker not accustomed to NNS speech

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## Why the Advanced Level?: External considerations

- Level expected by ACTFL/CAEP (formerly NCATE) for teacher candidates – Official OPI
- Level that “should” be expected for B.A. majors intending to use language in the workplace or in post-bac program
- Goal for evaluating effectiveness of language programs

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## Promoting Advanced-Level Proficiency

- Two-pronged approach
  - Micro-level: Level of courses, classroom instruction and practices
  - Macro-level: Level of program, program outcomes, summative proficiency assessments and benchmark assessments

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## In Courses: Building a Discourse Community

- Larger topic-oriented goals; avoidance of “lexical chaining”
- Changing the traditional “warm-up”
- Engaging only a few students while the rest of the class listens, reacts, advances topic
- Assisting questions; less IRE – more IRF
- Multiple turns at talk; negotiation of meaning
- Pictures: prompts for narration & description

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## IRE

- Teacher **I**nitiates an assertion or asks a question ("assessing question")
- Student **R**esponds
- Teacher **E**valuates
  - Very good! Très bien! ¡Excelente!
- Evaluates, but does not move conversation forward
- Source: Mehan, 1979.

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## IRE: English Example

- 1 What time is it?
- 2 It's ten o'clock.
- 3 Right! Very good. *It's* ten o'clock.

(Source: Johnson, 1995, *Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge Univ. Press, p. 4.)

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## I – R – E Example & Lexical Chaining

- T: *¿Te gusta cantar?* [Do you like to sing?]
- Mercedes: *Sí.* [Yes.]
- T: *Muy bien, a ti te gusta cantar. Daniel, ¿a ti te gusta cantar?* [Very good, you like to sing. Dan, do you like to sing?]
- Daniel: *Sí, me gusta cantar.* [Yes,....]
- T: *Excelente, sí. Y Jamaal, ¿te gusta cantar?* [Excellent, yes. And Jammal, do you like...]

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 **IRF**

- Teacher **I**nitiates an assertion or asks a question (“assisting question”)
- Student **R**esponds
- Teacher gives **F**eedback
  - Tell me more!
  - Assisting questions
  - Moves conversation forward

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 **IRF: English Example**

- ▶ 1 What time is it?
- ▶ 2 It's ten o'clock.
- ▶ 3 Oh, ok, thanks.

(Source: Johnson, 1995, *Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge Univ. Press, p. 4.)

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 **Interpersonal Communication**

- Interaction, interaction, interaction
- Element of spontaneity; not scripted talk
- Information-gap activities, opportunities for “real” negotiation of meaning
- Students acquire new information through research and interaction

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## Using Meaningful Contexts

- Current events in U.S. & target cultures
  - Politics, sports, education, religion
- University contexts
  - Sports/social events, current happenings
- Other content: video, audio, printed texts
  - Integration of 3 modes of communication
    - Interpretive, Interpersonal, Presentational
  - Maximum opportunities for narration, sharing of ideas & opinions

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## Using Literature/Film for Narration, Opinions, Debate

- Narration & description in past
- Interpersonal speaking: students solicit and share opinions
- Providing of detail to support opinions
- Organizing ideas for arguments to defend point of view
- Presenting and defending arguments in a debate

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## Out-of-Class Activities Make a Difference

- Club-sponsored conversation events
  - Coffee hour, "tertulias", "how to..."
- Cultural presentations, talks, movies
- Chats with students from target-language countries
- Sullivan study (2011): Candidates successful on OPI spent 19 hours outside of class weekly—triple the time spent by those who did not reach required level!

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## Building Linguistic Accuracy

- Accuracy within meaningful contexts
- Focus on form – “teachable moments”
- Donato & Brooks, 2004;Thoms, 2012; Zyzik & Polio, 2008
- Holding students accountable
  - Peer revision
  - Self-critique of performances

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## Program-level Considerations

- End-of-program proficiency goal
  - Externally validated? OPI, OPIc, etc.
- Continue proficiency development across ALL courses
- Benchmark proficiency assessment
  - Mid-program point
  - Advisory OPI, SOPI, etc.
- OPI Training for Faculty

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## Challenges to Reaching Advanced Level: Students Say

- “Too much literature” at the expense of speaking the language
- Classes are too large
- Too much English in classes
- Professors teaching content classes don’t know how to support students’ development of proficiency

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## In Conclusion: It Takes a Department!

- 2014 Brooks & Darhower study of top 3 programs with candidates reaching Adv.level
- Candidates & faculty are familiar with ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines
- Regular monitoring & feedback of students' proficiency
- All faculty teach language and content

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## Department cont'd.

- Culture of proficiency and collaboration among faculty to reach proficiency goals
- Classes are "challenging": proficiency goals clear and expectations high
- Professors provide targeted proficiency practice both in and out of class

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## Department, cont'd.

- Some faculty are trained OPI testers
- Abundant opportunities to practice Advanced-level speaking in upper-level classes.
- Study abroad is required or highly recommended
- Multiple opportunities to use TL outside of class.

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