The Language Flagship and ACTFL
Partners in Testing and Teaching at Higher Proficiency Levels

Dr. Elvira Swender
ACTFL

Flagship: Results 2012
October 26, 2012
New York City
Agenda

- Official ACTFL OPI Testing for Flagship
  - Training of Flagship faculty
- Arabic Consensus Project
  - Diffusion of Innovation Grant
- Addition of a Distinguished Level to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012
  - Testing beyond the baseline Superior level
Official ACTFL OPI Testing for Flagship Programs

- Since 2002
- More than 2,000 Official OPIs
- 7 languages
  - Arabic
  - Chinese
  - Hindi/Urdu
  - Korean
  - Portuguese
  - Persian
  - Russian
ACTFL OPI Training

- OPI Workshops held in the US
  - For US and Flagship Abroad faculty and staff
- OPI Workshops held on-site at Flagship Abroad locations
  - Baku, Azerbaijan
  - Chungbuk, South Korea
  - Shanghai, China
Impact of OPI Training on instruction and assessment

- Proficiency testing as an element in a “backwards design” model of instruction
- Functional tasks, text types, contexts and content areas of the Superior level are specifically targeted, developed, and nurtured in immersion environments
- Flagship has proven that there is a “road map” to produce Superior-level language users
Getting to Superior
- Does not happen by virtue of being immersed
- Does not happen even in one’s own native language

Most successful programs combine
- Immersion in the target language culture with explicit instruction by experts who understand
  - how targeted levels are defined
  - how to develop those competencies in their students
Certified ACTFL Testers who are faculty in Flagship Programs
  • Trained and certified by ACTFL
Special arrangement to extend the “academic institution” limitations to entire Flagship community
Conduct Advisory/unofficial OPI testing
  • Diagnostic and placement purposes
Can be upgraded to official rating
  • “Institutional Upgrade” option
Arabic Consensus Project

- Funded under a Flagship Diffusion of Innovation Grant
- ACTFL and Arabic Flagship Programs
  - University of Texas – Austin
  - Michigan State University
  - University of Maryland
- Arabic language educators from US and abroad
Arabic Consensus Project

- Convene national meetings with academic, private sector and government representation

- Build consensus within Arabic teaching and testing communities
  - Develop annotations to accompany the 2012 revision of the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines – Speaking*
  - Produce Arabic-specific OPI testing and training materials

- Address a number of Arabic-specific issues for testing spoken Arabic
ACTFL recognizes that the situation for testing Arabic is a special situation and therefore must be dealt with in a special manner. In the ACTFL test protocol, Arabic is considered to be one language represented by a continuum from all colloquial to all MSA, and a combination of mixes along the continuum. During ACTFL OPI testing, testers accommodate to the variety of language that the test taker is producing and accept Arabic language produced anywhere along the continuum. An ACTFL OPI rating recognizes a speaker's overall functional ability in Arabic.

In order to be rated Superior, a test taker must demonstrate that he/she is able to discuss topics and issues from an abstract perspective, support opinions and hypothesize in cohesive and extended discourse with no pattern of error in basic structures, and deal with a linguistically unfamiliar situation in a way that is culturally and linguistically appropriate. The speaker must demonstrate the ability to perform these tasks in both formal (work, business, professional, university, etc.) and informal (home, family, daily routine) contexts.

Meeting all of the assessment criteria required for a rating of Superior in Arabic can be accomplished by using Arabic from anywhere along the continuum, provided that the language used is linguistically and culturally appropriate to sustain all of the criteria for the Superior level across a variety of topics and issues in both formal and informal contexts.

Given the nature of the topics and issues, the formal context of the level, and the expectations of abstract lexical and syntactic features, the Superior-level sample of language must contain ample evidence of MSA.
ACTFL recognizes that the situation for testing Arabic is a special situation and therefore must be dealt with in a special manner. In the ACTFL test protocol, Arabic is considered to be one language represented by a continuum from all colloquial to all MSA, and a combination of mixes along the continuum. During ACTFL OPI testing, testers accommodate to the variety of language that the test taker is producing and accept Arabic language produced anywhere along the continuum. An ACTFL OPI rating recognizes a speaker's overall functional ability in Arabic.

In order to be rated Superior, a test taker must demonstrate that he/she is able to discuss topics and issues from an abstract perspective, support opinions and hypothesize in cohesive and extended discourse with no pattern of error in basic structures, and deal with a linguistically unfamiliar situation in a way that is culturally and linguistically appropriate. The speaker must demonstrate the ability to perform these tasks in both formal (work, business, professional, university, etc.) and informal (home, family, daily routine) contexts.

Meeting all of the assessment criteria required for a rating of Superior in Arabic can be accomplished by using Arabic from anywhere along the continuum, provided that the language used is linguistically and culturally appropriate to sustain all of the criteria for the Superior level across a variety of topics and issues in both formal and informal contexts.

Given the nature of the topics and issues, the formal context of the level, and the expectations of abstract lexical and syntactic features, the Superior-level sample of language must contain ample evidence of MSA.
Arabic Annotations and Samples

- Expanded original scope of the project to include all 4 Skills

http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/arabic
Welcome to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 - Arabic annotations and samples site! This site contains Arabic annotations and samples to accompany the generic ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012. These annotations and samples are intended to help Arabic teachers, learners, and assessment specialists relate the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 to the Arabic context and appreciate the various dimensions involved in assessing the four skills in Arabic.

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are a description of what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context. For each skill, these guidelines identify five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The levels of the ACTFL Guidelines describe the continuum of proficiency from that of the highly articulate, well-educated language user to a level of little or no functional ability.

These Guidelines present the levels of proficiency as ranges, and describe what an individual can and cannot do with language at each level, regardless of where, when, or how the language was acquired. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The Guidelines are not based on any particular theory, pedagogical method, or educational curriculum. They neither describe how an individual learns a language nor prescribe how an individual should learn a language, and they should not be used for such purposes. They are an instrument for the evaluation of functional language ability.

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines were first published in 1988 as an adaptation for the academic community of the U.S. Government's Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Skill Level Descriptions. This third edition of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines includes the first revisions of Listening and Reading since their original publication in 1988, and a second revision of the ACTFL Speaking and Writing Guidelines, which were revised to reflect real-world assessment needs in 1999 and 2001 respectively. New for the 2012 edition are the addition of the major level of Distinguished to the Speaking and Writing Guidelines, the division of the Advanced level into the three sublevels of High, Mid, and Low for the Listening and Reading Guidelines, and the addition of general level description at the Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice levels for all skills.

The direct application of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines is for the evaluation of functional language ability. The Guidelines are intended to be used for global assessment in academic and workplace settings. However, the Guidelines do have instructional implications. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines underlie the development of the ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners (1998) and are used in conjunction with the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996, 1998, 2006) to describe how well students meet content standards. For the past 25 years, the ACTFL Guidelines have had an increasingly profound impact on foreign language teaching and learning in the United States.
Listening – Superior

At the Superior level, listeners are able to understand in a standard dialect speech on a wide range of familiar and less familiar topics. They can follow linguistically complex extended discourse such as that found in academic and professional settings, lectures, speeches and reports. Comprehension is no longer limited to the listener's familiarity with subject matter, but also comes from a command of the language that is supported by a broad vocabulary, an understanding of more complex structures and linguistic experience within the target culture.

Superior listeners can understand not only what is said, but sometimes what is left unsaid; that is, they can make inferences.

Superior-level listeners understand speech that typically uses precise, specialized vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. This speech often deals abstractly with topics in a way that is appropriate for academic and professional audiences. It can be reasoned and can contain cultural references.

Arabic Specific Annotations

1 In Arabic, "standard dialect" refers to MSA or to the standard form of each Arabic dialect (for instance Damascus is the standard dialect of Syrian Arabic, Baghdad the standard dialect of Iraqi Arabic, etc.). A Superior Level listener should be able to comprehend speech delivered in MSA, a standard regional dialect, or a mixture thereof. Mixing of both MSA and the standard dialect of the speaker is a predominant feature in Arabic speech today, and a Superior Level listener should be able to comprehend speech that displays such mix.

2 The Superior Level listener is able to understand extended discourse on a subject pertaining to his/her area of specialization and interest, but also on subjects outside this area.

3 The Arab media provide a wide range of extended discourse outside the academic environment or professional settings, such as roundtable discussions, debates, talk shows, interviews, commentaries, call-in shows. Entertainment programs provide also a substantial amount of extended discourse.

4 Knowledge of Arab culture in general and the country of the particular standard dialect involved is crucial for the comprehension of Superior Level passages. This knowledge includes traditions, history, ethnic composition, political and economic systems, religion and religion-related matters, and major events or changes that have taken place in the country involved.

5 A hallmark of the Superior listener is the ability to understand what is implicit in the discourse. This is very important for Arabic speech because speakers may avoid the explicit expression of their thoughts and frequently resort to allusions, cultural references or colloquialisms.

View Examples
Example 1

The sample displays a good knowledge of the writer about the specialized vocabulary related to economics and consumption.

Examples:

- الاقتصاد (الاستثمار) - نظام مكافحة نشاط التجسس.
- الميزانية (المالية) - نموذج تحليلي للأساليب المصرفية والتجارية.
- الاستثمار (المالي) - تحليل تدفق الأموال وتحليل الأداء المالي.
- تحليل (المالي) - استخدام النماذج математических للتحليل المالي.
- السياسة (المالية) - تحليل السياسات المالية وتأثيرها على الاقتصاد.
- التدخل (المالي) - تحليل التدخلات المالية وتأثيرها على الاقتصاد.
- الاستثمارات (المالية) - تحليل الاستثمارات المالية وتأثيرها على الاقتصاد.

Topic: Consumption of stuff

Function: Reflecting upon a documentary. Expressing and supporting an opinion.

Lexical complexity:

- The sample displays a good knowledge of the writer about the specialized vocabulary related to economics and consumption.
The Language Flagship
A “Superior” Success Story

- ACTFL Superior OPI rating
  - There are no sublevels at ACTFL Superior
- What kind of Superiors are Flagship students?
- What more would you want to know about them?
- Is there a need to measure their abilities across the range of Superior and beyond?
Rationale for Addition of Distinguished Level

- Create stronger connections between the educational system and post-education professional world
  - Demand for higher levels of proficiency in workplace to serve in a professional field as a highly articulate, well-educated speaker of the language

- Target educational goals of higher linguistic proficiency
  - Students are reaching higher levels of proficiency
  - Ex: Language Flagship and Wharton School’s Lauder IMBA Program

- Coordinate definitions of proficiency at the highest levels with standards used by the government

- Better align with the highest level (C2) described in the Common European Framework of Reference

- Differentiate that which is Superior from that which is more than Superior
Speakers at the Distinguished level are able to use language skillfully, and with accuracy, efficiency, and effectiveness. They are educated and articulate users of the language. They can reflect on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts in a culturally appropriate manner.

Distinguished-level speakers can use persuasive and hypothetical discourse for representational purposes, allowing them to advocate a point of view that is not necessarily their own. They can tailor language to a variety of audiences by adapting their speech and register in ways that are culturally authentic.

Speakers at the Distinguished level produce highly sophisticated and tightly organized extended discourse. At the same time, they can speak succinctly, often using cultural and historical references to allow them to say less and mean more. At this level, oral discourse typically resembles written discourse.

A non-native accent, a lack of a native-like economy of expression, a limited control of deeply embedded cultural references, and/or an occasional isolated language error may still be present at this level.
Speakers at the Distinguished level are able to use language skillfully, and with accuracy, efficiency, and effectiveness. They are educated and articulate users of the language. They can reflect on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts in a culturally appropriate manner.

Distinguished-level speakers can use persuasive and hypothetical discourse for representational purposes, allowing them to advocate a point of view that is not necessarily their own.

They can tailor language to a variety of audiences by adapting their speech and register in ways that are culturally authentic.

Speakers at the Distinguished level produce highly sophisticated and tightly organized extended discourse. At the same time, they can speak succinctly, often using cultural and historical references to allow them to say less and mean more. At this level, oral discourse typically resembles written discourse.

A non-native accent, a lack of a native-like economy of expression, a limited control of deeply embedded cultural references, and/or an occasional isolated language error may still be present at this level.
What do programs like Flagship need to know about language competencies at the Superior level?
  • What kind of Superior?

What do programs like Flagship need to know about language competencies beyond the Superior level?
  • How best to measure the competencies of the tasks and other criteria beyond the Superior level?
Thoughts about Testing Beyond Superior

- Discuss complex issues and highly conceptual, abstract ideas
  - Issues related to personal or professional expertise?
  - Should topic be provided in the form of a written or oral passage?
- Use persuasive and hypothetical speech
  - How best to assess if a speaker is able to advocate a point of view that is not his/her own?
  - Diplomats are often required to represent a “neutral” point of view
- Demonstrate certain tailoring functions
  - Convey the same message in different registers
  - “Info pass”
- Control embedded cultural and historical references
  - Is this feature assessed explicitly?
    - e.g., using the ILR Skill Level Descriptions for Competence in Intercultural Communication?
  - Are these references expected in speech that is produced extemporaneously?
Thoughts about the Logistics of Testing Beyond Superior

- Create a new test construct?
  - Only available once test taker has demonstrated baseline Superior-level proficiency

- Test administration challenges
  - How to communicate written test components?

- Time factor
  - Can this level be proven in a 30-minute assessment?

- How to recruit, train, norm reliable assessors?
  - Does one need to have Distinguished-level proficiency in order to elicit and rate at the Distinguished level?
Thank You!

eswender@actfl.org