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

Eileen W. Glisan, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
University of Delaware, Dept. of Foreign Langs. & Lits.
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- 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
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Dr. Eileen W. Gilson, Indiana Univ. of PA, gilson@lup.edu
University of Delaware
Dept. of Foreign Langs. & Lits.
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Oral Proficiency: The Inverted Pyramid

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
- Understanded by those used to speech of non-native learners

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
- Understanded by those not used to speech of non-native learners
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 hesitancies 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

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

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
Why the Advanced Level?:
External considerations

- Level expected by ACTFL/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

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

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
IRE

- Teacher Initiates an assertion or asks a question ("assessing question")
- Student Responds
- Teacher Evaluates
  - Very good! Très bien! ¡Excelente!
- Evaluates, but does not move conversation forward

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 Jamaal, do you like...]

IRF

- Teacher Initiates an assertion or asks a question ("assisting question")
- Student Responds
- Teacher gives Feedback
  - Tell me more!
  - Assisting questions
  - Moves conversation forward
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

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

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
### 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!

### Building Linguistic Accuracy
- Accuracy within meaningful contexts
- Focus on form – “teachable moments”
- Holding students accountable
  - Peer revision
  - Self-critique of performances

### 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
References


http://www.soleilpublishing.com/indexsol.htm (see this site for a wealth of picture books for various languages).


Wong, W., & VanPatten, B. (2003). The evidence is IN: Drills are OUT. *Foreign Language Annals, 36*, 403-423.