Assessing Foreign Language Proficiency of Undergraduates

Richard V. Teschner
Editor

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Assessing the Problems of Assessment

M. Peter Hagiwara
University of Michigan

More than any other academic discipline, foreign language instruction has seen the rise and fall of approaches and methodologies. As the director of a large, college-level French program and the instructor of a course in applied linguistics and methodology for graduate teaching assistants and undergraduate majors in the teacher certification program, I have monitored such trends and kept students informed about them for more than three decades.

I was initiated into language teaching in the late 1950s when, with the passage of the National Defense Education Act, the traditional grammar-translation approach was beginning to be supplanted by audiolingualism (AL) and propagated through the teacher retraining programs of the NDEA institutes. In the mid-1960s, programmed instruction – in some ways a forerunner of the early computer-assisted instruction (CAI) – also became popular. The rigid pattern practice drills and dialogue memorization of AL were subsequently replaced by audio-visual methods, leading in some cases to the revival of a more "humanistic" direct method and a reexamination of the tenets of AL instruction; in turn, suggestions for other approaches took their inspiration from the cognitive code theory of learning.

It was in the 1970s that the learner started to become the focus of pedagogy, with the resulting curricular goals of individualized instruction, teacher/student accountability, and communicative competence.

The end of the decade witnessed a proliferation of experimental and even controversial methods: the "Dartmouth" method, counseling-learning, suggestopedia, total physical response, the confluent approach, the silent way, and others. Some of these were fads, but others have endured and will continue to play a role in language instruction.[1]

The proficiency movement of the 1980s was reminiscent of the AL movement of 30 years before in that it spread across the nation with fervor and zeal through articles, books, workshops, and textbooks that were oriented toward its tenets. It was officially endorsed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), which created its well-known proficiency guidelines (PGs) in an attempt to counter what many perceived was a widespread national inability to speak foreign languages (President's Commission, 1979).

The PGs imply a methodology that is not as inflexible as AL and offer concrete performance objectives for teachers as well as learners. The PGs seek to influence instructional strategies, materials, testing, and teacher training, as attested by the publication of the ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series.[2] In reality, though, how widespread is proficiency-based instruction? Some statewide adoptions seem to be in the making. Yet to my knowledge, based on many visits to high schools and colleges, most language professionals have done little except use materials labeled "proficiency-oriented," even though most teachers have heard of the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* and some claim to have incorporated them into their curriculum.

In this paper, two of the problem areas in implementing the PGs will be discussed: (1) the instructional materials and (2) teacher training for French in terms of oral proficiency. Subsequently, the practicability of the PGs themselves will be analyzed.

Problems with the Instructional Materials

Assuming for the moment that the goals of the PGs (with their underlying supposition that acquisition of communicative competence progresses in a spiral or linear fashion) are to be incorporated into foreign language instruction, it is a relatively simple task to construct a curriculum encompassing several articulated courses at both the college and the secondary school levels by consulting the ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series. It is difficult, however, for a teacher or even a group of teachers to assemble proficiency-oriented materials and develop coherent instructional procedures. The most logical course of action would be to select suitable textbooks – presuming that these exist – that, with their ancillary materials to promote authenticity, best fulfill the objectives.

The proficiency-oriented books often show charts indicating how their contents correspond to the PGs but seldom offer radically new approaches to the drills. As Omaggio (1984, p. 67) admits, many of the classroom drills predate the PGs and had been available "in the literature of the past decade." On the other hand, "authenticity" has been one of the key words in language instruction since the onset of the proficiency movement, as it is reflected in the extensive use of realia and video in some texts.

Grammar Explanations

Since the days of AL, language courses have stressed oral communication as an important objective. The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) initially considered function, content, and accuracy to be the major criteria, though grammatical accuracy was later de-emphasized. Nevertheless, it is in precisely this area that the proficiency-oriented textbooks do not reflect the PGs.

The lively disputes in the late 1970s about how much to teach or indeed, whether one is trying to teach too much have until recently gone largely unnoticed by textbook authors. Although most proficiency-oriented textbooks have now adopted a "cognitive code" approach, they still tend to teach *all* verb tenses (including the so-called literary tenses). Undefined grammatical jargon abounds, often requiring reexplanation by the teacher. Some texts continue to present several items all at once just because they are grammatically or lexically related: numbers from 1 to 1 million, reflexive/passive/reciprocal use of the pronominal verbs, all interrogative pronouns, all possessive adjectives, all relative pronouns, and so on. This trend remains prevalent in most of the condensed, or "essentials," textbooks that are beginning to emerge.

Worse still, despite emphasis on oral communication, many texts continue to present language based on its written form. Some seem to consider pronunciation a reflection of orthography, and, as Hagiwara (1980) and Walz (1986) have indicated, the wealth of linguistic data available about spoken language is ignored. Some examples: word boundaries of written language disappear in spoken language; the written form contains many redundancies (e.g., the plural markers in *LeS filmS que j'ai vuS étatENT intéressantS);* words like *le* or *te* are often pronounced /l/ or /t/, whether they are spelled *le/te* or *l'/t'*; written French has only three possessive adjective forms for the first, second, or third person singular, whereas spoken French has five owing to liaison; adjective morphology becomes simpler in spoken French if the feminine is taken as the base; most masculine singular prenominal adjectives are pronounced like the feminine form owing to compulsory liaison; the

formation of the future and the conditional is simpler in oral French if the stem is derived from the first person singular of the present indicative (with the insertion of the transitional /d/ when the stem ends in a nasal vowel, as in *je viens>je viendrai*) instead of the infinitive. If, as has been claimed, the AL method was plagued by an excess of linguists all wanting to have their say, there are too few linguists today who are interested in advising the authors of proficiency-oriented textbooks.

Authenticity and Language Levels

All spoken languages have subcodes, often referred to as registers or levels, ranging from the most formal to the most casual, each level having its own lexical, grammatical, and behavioral components. Native speakers manipulate several, depending on the circumstances in which communication is to be made. In a beginning French class, subcode manipulation begins on the first day with the distinction between *tu* and *vous*, or *Bonjour* and *Salut* in greeting someone, and the complexity increases as students gain more knowledge of the language. Yet many texts are ambivalent about what kind of language to teach, and the issues of levels and their underlying sociolinguistic structures are rarely discussed beyond the first lesson. As a result, while students are informed early that handshaking is very common as part of greeting in French or that the frequency of occurrence of *Monsieur* or *Madame* is much higher than that of the English "equivalent" *sir* or *ma'am*, such features are hardly practiced in class, and some undergraduate majors greet their much older professors with *Salut!*[3]

In colloquial French, the negative particle *ne* is virtually never used, *est-ce que . . . ?* and inversion are rare, subject pronouns exhibit many morphophonemic alternations, and, as discussed by Barnes (1990), Calvé (1985), and Hagiwara (1985), dislocation and certain types of stylistic inversion are quite common for thematic or rhythmic reasons. Moreover, liquid consonants drop out, so that *votre* is pronounced as *vot', il y a* as *y a, ils sont* as *i sont,* and the like, and vowel reductions occur as in *v'zêtes, p't-être,* and *déj'ner.* The number of liaisons made and the "mute" *e*'s retained also reflect speech levels. Virtually none of the textbooks mention such phenomena or the fact that there is a widening gap between the formal or polite level and colloquial speech.[4] There are no texts that "dare" to omit *ne*, and there are some that teach all interrogative structures (including the strictly intonational and *n'est-ce pas?*) in one grammar segment, attaching equal importance to all of them. As for dislocation, the only type usually presented concerns subject pronouns (*Moi aussi, Toi, tu vas rentrer*), and all other cases involving direct objects and prepositional phrases are omitted. More-

over, in the name of authenticity some texts present an inordinate amount of vocabulary. There is also an unnecessary amount of English used in directions for exercises or activities, despite the claim that students can guess or should learn to guess the meaning of new French words from the context.

Lack of Proficiency-based Testing and Curricular Continuity

Textbooks nowadays come with a variety of ancillary materials, including a test bank. It only takes a cursory examination to discover that the majority of test banks are grammar- and vocabulary-based, hardly reflecting PGs, and some give only vague suggestions about how communicative proficiency may be measured. (Cf. Walz, 1991, this volume.)

While the PGs have been criticized for depicting language development linearly, they at least imply some kind of curricular articulation and offer an opportunity for textbook authors to interpret the guidelines in terms of pedagogical sequencing from first-year to advanced classes. Yet since most publishers concentrate on beginning-level texts (where the market is), there are few second-year college or levels 3-4 high school texts that continue on in the same format as the first-year books. It is also the case that a successful first-year text has rarely been followed by an equally successful continuation. Further, the materials for the intermediate and advanced levels in a large school program are often selected by a different supervisor from that of the elementary courses, thereby making coherent articulation (and progress in proficiency) even more problematic.

The result of all this is that French as presented by textbooks and practiced in class is a strange mixture of colloquial, formal, and what Valdman (1988) calls "pedagogical" language, usually ignoring sociolinguistic and cultural authenticity. Thus, students pretend to communicate in imaginary "survival" situations that, as Hefferman (1986) declares, are far narrower in range than normal real-life conversations, even though a study by Magnan (1986, pp. 432-33) indicates that at the end of one year of college French, 80% achieve an Intermediate-Low rating on the ACTFL scale. Valdman also claims that students can shift successfully from a simpler to a more complex form (e.g., from questions by intonation alone to inversion) and suggests that one form may be used in speech, another in reading, and yet another in writing. Such claims, however, not only remain largely unsubstantiated but also ignore the fact that the "simpler" forms represent another speech level, with its own phonological and morphosyntactic structures.

In sum, truly proficiency-based texts do not exist. Were one written, it would address various learning models and organize its materials

according to the situations and needs outlined by the PGs and according to the notional-functional concepts advocated by Guntermann and Phillips (1982). It would provide numerous minidialogues with sufficient cultural contents that lead to longer discourses based on pragmatics. As for grammar, it would be subordinated to communication, as a kind of framework (with clear references to spoken language) when needs arise, and would stress discourse cohesion rather than accuracy of single sentences. Such a radical approach might not meet with commercial success, since for many teachers grammar constitutes an easily quantifiable entity. Thus, the argument for curricula that include grammar – opposed by Balcom (1985) and advocated by Hammond (1988) – is likely to continue. The role played by textbooks in language programs is enormous. Curricular designs, instructional approaches, and contents are largely determined by what is available in published form. As Lange (1990, p. 78) so aptly puts it, "We have handed the design of elementary, secondary, and college curricula to commercial interests."

Problems with Teacher Preparation

Faced with a diversity of instructional strategies and materials, many secondary school foreign language teachers feel ill-equipped to analyze them critically and to adopt what is most suitable for their students. These teachers often remain pedagogically isolated as the only people who teach a subject that is not understood by most of their colleagues, and tend to continue teaching the way they were taught in colleges and universities without keeping abreast of various trends in the profession.[5] Teacher training should not end when the degree is awarded and the state certificate tendered. Teacher education is a continuing process; this fact should be stressed from the outset, and institutions awarding teaching certificates need to be more active in providing in-service activities.[6]

Academic Work

Teacher training poses serious problems at all levels. At universities, the majority of graduate departments place emphasis on literature and only a small number grant a master's degree in teaching, let alone a doctorate in foreign language education. Teaching assistants, most of whom are students in literature, may or may not have genuine interest in the elementary and intermediate language courses they are hired to teach. Moreover, staffing of these courses is generally done as economically as possible, with few teaching qualifications demanded of the teaching

assistants, and the faculty member in charge of running the elementary language program often is not trained or even interested in language acquisition methodologies. (See Teschner, 1987, for proof of this situation.) While most departments nowadays appear to give their graduate students some kind of training, consisting of a "methods" course and/or weekly meetings to discuss teaching and testing procedures,[7] it is unreasonable to expect graduate assistants to become competent proficiency-oriented instructors. They may learn some of the techniques by osmosis if the language program adopts the PGs in one form or another. On the whole, however, although most graduate assistants enjoy the teaching experience, the pressure of their own course work is so great that they have no time to investigate the theory and practice of PG-oriented instruction.

At the secondary school level, the majority of teacher preparation programs fall within the "conventional model," consisting of three main components: (1) the study of the language, literature, and civilization of the target language; (2) courses in general education; and (3) a language teaching methods course followed by student teaching. This model represents the most workable solution within the present academic structure, given adequately close liaison among the components. The problem lies not in this schematization but in the *contents* of the course work. Requirements for teacher certification vary widely, but one common pattern appears to be the heavy proportion of coursework in literature and just a single course on culture and civilization. This state of affairs reflects a presumed preeminence of belletristic research and, as mentioned by Grittner (1981, p. 73), Hammerly (1982, p. 142), and Lange (1986, p. 29), the regnant attitude in most language departments, in which cultural knowledge, language teaching, and language pedagogy are viewed as low-prestige affairs.

Few would dispute that all undergraduate language majors ought to study literature as one of their humanistic goals. One reason many prospective teachers may well aspire to teach the aesthetic appreciation of the target language literature is to prepare their students for a program like the Advanced Placement Test. Yet few departments offer a course in the *teaching* of literature,[8] and the fact remains that the majority of secondary school teachers are engaged in the instruction of levels 1 and 2,[9] where language and culture constitute the most important elements.

Training in Teaching

All prospective secondary school language teachers receive some training in methodologies before certification. But in many cases this training

consists of a single course, designed to dispense information on lesson planning, on the principle of teaching in a speaking-listening-oriented approach, and on testing (some education departments offer a single methods course for all students in humanities).[10] The problem with this kind of course organization, composed of generalities and tips for teaching, is that it serves only as an *introduction* to the field. Future teachers need to see a clear relationship between theory and practice, the rationale of particular procedures recommended, and the pros and cons of certain approaches in order to evaluate methodologies and materials in an informed manner.

Even if a methods course has the luxury of being geared to a single second language, it has to deal with a myriad of classroom-related matters; therefore, discussion of the theories of language acquisition and of the PGs and how to implement them cannot be the sole focus. A look at well-researched books on methodology that have a coherent synthesis and a balanced approach to language teaching, such as Rivers (1981) and Hammerly (1982), along with proficiency-oriented anthologies like those by Higgs (1984), James (1985), and Byrnes and Canale (1986), will more than prove the point that there indeed exists an enormous body of theoretical and practical knowledge that prospective teachers must assimilate. What is needed is a two-semester sequence in methods as proposed by Lange (1983), so that all the basic elements of language instruction can be covered in more than just a cursory manner.

Moreover, several new technologies have been introduced in the past decade, including CAI and interactive video programs. The importance of CAI can be attested by the number of presentations at national professional conferences as well as at regional and local workshops, and by the fact that an increasing number of articles and reviews of CAI programs have been appearing in professional journals since the mid-1980s. It is necessary for prospective teachers to become familiar with the principles of CAI (and other technological developments) and have hands-on experience with some of the software. This aspect includes acquiring knowledge of an authoring system to produce exercises and tests as well as learning to evaluate the effectiveness of a given software program on the basis of the PGs.

Language Proficiency

Becoming proficient in the second language is unquestionably *the* most critical skill that foreign language teachers must master since it is at the very heart of what they will be doing in the classroom. In language classrooms, teachers provide models and initiate conversation practice,

encouraging maximum use of the second language in as many interactive situations as possible. If their proficiency is lacking, it not only limits what they can do but also makes them less able to design communicative types of activities. Teacher preparation should, therefore, aim for as high a level of competence as possible.

The proficiency level expected for teaching a second language is in all likelihood beyond what can be attained through a normal, on-campus college curriculum. It is not surprising that undergraduate majors show a relatively low achievement level in the mastery of the language. Even at the height of AL instruction with its heavy emphasis on spoken language, Carroll (1967, p. 134) found that "the median graduate with a foreign language major can speak and comprehend the language only at about an FSI speaking rating of '2+,' that is, somewhere between a "limited working proficiency" and a "minimum professional proficiency."[11] Many college instructors admit that they have encountered students whose command of the language was so deficient that they really ought not to go into teaching.

It is thus clear that a period of study (ideally an entire academic year) in one of the countries of the target language improves students' proficiency and also enhances their cultural knowledge, both of which are crucial in the classroom.[12] Brickell and Paul (1982, pp. 174-75) report that teachers ranked as the most important contributions to their preparation (1) studying in a foreign country, (2) student teaching, and (3) language courses, especially in listening and speaking. Student teaching was rated 8 on a scale of 1 (low) to 10, and was perceived as second only to study abroad. Yet for various reasons, including financial ones, we are far from making study abroad mandatory for all prospective teachers.

The departments in charge of teacher education need to establish a general proficiency standard and test students through an appropriate method.[13] (The OPI is only one of several possibilities, and it is far from perfect, as will be shown in the next section of this paper.) All prospective teachers need to become familiar with various proficiency tests, and future teachers who are undergraduates should be tested by the end of the third year so that they can improve their rating during their last year in college. Ideally, of course, the test should be administered again before graduation, and those who score low should not be granted a teaching certificate. Adoption of proficiency tests will also necessitate one or more fourth-year language courses in conversation, writing, and grammar review. Moreover, as part of continuing teacher development, graduate-level language courses need to be offered so as to provide useful remedial work for those graduate students who need it.

Problems with the Guidelines and the Oral Proficiency Interviews

The Notion of Proficiency Guidelines

So far I have talked about the proficiency movement in exclusively positive terms and have examined two problems areas in light of it. A "movement" that emphasizes oral proficiency is a natural and logical consequence of the AL method, with its focus on spoken language, and of the methods that succeeded it in the 1970s, based as they were on communicative competence, functional-notional syllabi, contextualization of exercises, less grammar for grammar's sake, and a higher tolerance of learner errors. Language students have always shown an interest in the spoken skill, though they mistakenly believe they can acquire it in a rather short time.[14] In a manner similar to the reactions against the original AL method, criticisms of the PGs began surfacing soon after publication of the "provisional" version in 1982; the critique was spearheaded by Savignon (1985), who pointed out the document's narrow concept of language use and opposed the suggestion by Higgs and Clifford (1982) that language programs develop two tracks: terminal ("survival") and regular, articulated. Kramsch (1986) has called attention to the PGs' oversimplification of illocutionary acts and lack of emphasis on discourse cohesion, and Lantolf and Frawley (1985) have objected to the PGs' classification of various language functions into levels, which may lead to an achievement rather than a proficiency test.

The role of grammatical development in the learner is also a subject of controversy. Magnan (1988) claims that a relationship exists between the percentage of grammar errors and the OPI rating. Conversely, Pienemann et al. (1988) discount the PGs' assumption that a relationship exists between syntactic development and proficiency, and Raffaldini (1988), with some empirical data, attempts to disprove the PGs' notion that rudimentary linguistic competence cannot manage complex speech acts in a sociolinguistically appropriate manner. Bachman and Savignon (1986), Kramsch (1986), and Raffaldini (1988) all argue that the OPI and the PGs are too preoccupied with speech analysis at the sentential rather than the discourse level and that they are not sensitive to other communicative factors; these critics have all offered modifications of or alternatives to the ratings. Clark and Lett (1988) outline numerous questions that must be answered about reliability, validity, and the variables involved. The advantages and disadvantages of the PGs and the OPI can be argued for years without a definitive conclusion, since "proficiency" means different things to different people, and we may not reach a consensus. All the more reason, then, that teachers

need better guidelines for teaching and testing in order to guarantee that their students improve their oral skills.

Oral Proficiency Interview

Once situational and behavioral objectives are established, some kind of instrument is needed to assess the proficiency of the learners to determine whether they have achieved these goals. It is in this area that the OPI's measurements of various language competencies have been criticized most heavily, especially on the grounds that the OPI lacks proper validation as a criterion-referenced test (Bachman, 1988; Bachman & Savignon, 1986). Admittedly, measuring skills in speaking is an elusive thing; Lowe (1986, p. 392) recognizes that quantifiable outcomes in listening, reading, and writing are attainable more readily than in speaking.

The OPI attempts to approximate real-life verbal interaction as closely as possible by using interviewers trained in the technique through the ACTFL-sponsored workshops; however, it can replicate only a small sampling of normal conversations in the real world, by no means all of which are predicated on the presence of only two speakers or on an exchange of questions and answers. As noted by Lantolf and Frawley (1985) and Raffaldini (1988), the testees are at the mercy of the interviewer (who initiates situations) and can neither propose new topics or subjects of their own interest nor switch formality levels. Interviews, no matter how friendly and informal, are unable to elicit voluntary linguistic and sociocultural speech acts, such as suasion, proposals and counterproposals, negotiation, counseling, and rejoinders to statements in all kinds of socializing contexts. As Raffaldini (1988, p. 200) states, even the role-play phase of the interview tends to lapse into elicitation of opinions and information so as to evaluate the scope of vocabulary and structure. Moreover, the OPI does not evaluate what Thomas (1983) calls cross-cultural understanding – that is, the ability to comprehend not only the surface meaning of a message but also the tones and accompanying facial expressions and gestures with all their implications, and the extent to which the speaker can avoid giving a stereotyped impression.

Researchers such as Bachman and Savignon (1986), Freed (1987), Savignon (1985), and VanPatten (1986) have also criticized the emphasis on grammatical accuracy placed by the PGs and the OPI in the early developmental stages of communicative competence. Pienemann et al. (1988) have noted the OPI's "false authenticity," which assumes that syntactic complexities and proficiency levels are interrelated and progress in a linear fashion, and which fails to evaluate various other

elements, such as sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic competence. The notion of "accuracy" in the PGs is probably the result of error analyses of the late 1970s that often concluded that the degree of "irritability" felt by native speakers was the highest for syntactic errors (at the sentential rather than the discourse level).[15]

There is something troubling about being rated through controversial competence descriptions and an imperfect testing instrument. Bachman and Savignon (1986) state that the outcome can become similar to the result of discrete-point testing. It is also likely that learners perform better on a task that was most recently acquired. In the field testing of a placement test, for example, I found through item analyses that first-year students did much better than their more advanced peers on recently taught items. We should also note that while learners may acquire vocabulary and expressions in certain curricular sequences, they eventually become more proficient in the area in which they are most interested – cooking, computers, stamp collection, military science, and so forth. Some professions (e.g., banking) may call for higher proficiency in specific tasks but are probably not concerned with lower attainment in "general" skills. We should also remember that the original scales developed by the Foreign Service Institute were somewhat job-specific: the ability to fulfill certain functions for the U.S. State Department. It may very well be that, following the argument of Kramsch (1986), the PGs and the OPI represent a "commercialization" of language skills. One could very well develop guidelines and interview techniques for specific purposes – say, for the potential employment of testees in certain business sectors; were that the case, then hypothetical situations testing general skills, such as asking a neighbor for tools to fix a broken doorknob, could remain in the background.

There is no doubt that OPI techniques constitute an enormous step forward as compared to the days when teachers interested in measuring oral competence used short questions and picture descriptions based on the MLA Cooperative Tests. But the OPI itself is not a suitable instrument for semester-by-semester achievement testing, except perhaps in a longitudinal study or in intensive courses. Besides, if the training of graduate assistants and secondary school teachers in the OPI is problematic, administering such a test is even more so. Interviews generally take 10 to 15 minutes and are increasingly longer beyond the intermediate-mid level. In small language programs, there is only one teacher for each language, and it is difficult for teachers testing their own students, after months of contact in class, to arrive at an objective judgment. Even in a large program, switching instructors and equalizing the number of examinees per instructor often presents logistical problems. Although, short, OPI-*like* tests are possible once or twice a

semester, such tests should be kept in proper perspective and never become the dominant factor in determining course grades, which must also take other elements into consideration, such as reading, writing, cultural understanding, authentic sociolinguistic behavior, and humanistic goals.[16]

Conclusion

The PGs and the OPI are not only logical extensions of the emphasis on oral communication of the 1960s but a definite improvement on previous testing schemata. They give fairly concrete objectives but should be continually revised and refined. There are recurring doubts that the PGs, with their underlying assumption that language competence and communicative ability develop sequentially, and with their failure to include sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic behavior, are able to represent convincing, empirically validated stages of language acquisition. As for the OPI, it is not the only method for measuring proficiency, however one defines it.

Instructional materials and teacher preparation constitute two very large missing links in the proficiency movement. Many texts assume that the PGs and the attainment of oral proficiency are *the* goal of language instruction and claim to incorporate them. Yet this paper has sought to show that written-language based grammar explanations and use of an artificial level of language indicate that true oral proficiency will be difficult to attain unless radical changes are made in organization and approach, with an inclusion of more sociolinguistic elements and a continuing effort to create suitable materials at more advanced levels.

The use made of any given material depends largely on the teacher. Experienced teachers can make good use of an inefficient text and achieve many of the guidelines' goals. Conversely, a well-intentioned text can be ruined by those who are excessively preoccupied with grammatical and phonological details and who give pages of "supplementary" drills to their students. Moreover, budgetary pressure has forced some secondary school programs to combine two levels in a single class and dilute the program so as to keep up enrollments. In such circumstances, it becomes even more strenuous to follow the PGs effectively.

Higgs (1984, p. 4) explicitly advocates that the PGs/OPI might serve as "an organizing principle," and Lowe (1986, p. 392) states that the "*Guidelines* were originally designed to outline, not to describe the system exhaustively" as a broad framework. Though the PGs provide useful criteria for *some* of the language learning objectives, and the OPI for *some* of the ways in which to evaluate communicative competence,

there is concern among researchers about OPI advocates who view the oral proficiency movement as the only true way. Thus, Schulz (1986) points to the varied needs of students and questions the necessity of the OPI, cautioning the overzealous "missionaries" among not only educators but also public officials who consider the development of oral skills to be the sole objective of language instruction. Lantolf and Frawley (1985, p. 344) urge the profession to "delay any guidelines until researchers are able to develop a clear understanding of what it means to be a proficient speaker in a language" and warn elsewhere of the resultant "premature institutionalization" of oral proficiency (1988, p. 181). (It is unfortunate that the word *provisional* was removed from the PGs in 1986). Magnan (1986) and Freed (1987) report that some institutions of higher learning are already using PG-based rating systems and OPI-oriented speaking tests, along with discrete-point tests for other skills, as a means of fulfilling an entrance or graduation requirement. Phillips (1990, pp. 58-59) mentions that the institutions applying for U.S. Department of Education Title VI projects must now demonstrate how their proposals are based on proficiency and how their evaluative procedures are "compatible with developing national standards." The recent guidelines of the National Endowment for the Humanities Division of Education Programs, designed to encourage colleges and universities to strengthen foreign language education through summer institutes, are laden with the term *proficiency.*

Most arguments against the PGs and the OPIs have been constructive, offering modifications or alternatives. The PGs should be refined continually and remain always as *guidelines* rather than promoted as standards, especially since the OPI continues to be a controversial instrument. There is much work to be done, including the following:

1) Investigation should be made into the extent to which the PGs and OPI-*oriented* techniques have been adopted in each state and at which educational institutions, and what modifications, if any, are being made.
2) Further improvements in the PGs are possible only if more empirical data regarding language learning and development in competence are obtained and analyzed.
3) The validity of the OPI has often been questioned. Its validity must be established and supplementary instruments ought to be explored.
4) PGs for special purposes need to be proposed, and various measurements (including the OPI) and their correlation should be established with the "general" PGs.

5) Native speakers should not be left out of the picture. They show considerable variation in competence, depending on such factors as education, age, social class, residence patterns, intelligence, and experience. How will they score on the OPI, and in what skills? Most studies on native speakers' reaction to learners have focused on "degrees of irritability," especially in terms of grammatical and/or phonological errors. What would be their perception of learners' competence in various situations?

Notes

1. For concise summaries and discussions of various methodological trends, see Benseler and Schulz (1980) and Grittner (1981).

2. In particular, Byrnes and Canale (1986), Higgs (1984), and James (1985) present extensive discussions of the repercussions of the PGs on such wide-ranging areas as curriculum design and evaluation, instructional materials, classroom teaching and testing, and pre- as well as in-service teacher training.

3. As pointed out by Rusterholz (1990, pp. 255-56), the proliferation of informal speech patterns at the beginning level often necessitates a review of expressions for greeting and leave-taking and other simple situations at a more advanced level; even textbooks published in France that aim for communicative competence lack sociolinguistic authenticity. See, for example, the detailed analysis of *De vive voix* by Gschwind-Holtzer (1981).

4. None of the examples cited are considered "vulgar"; see Léon (1967) for a distinction between *style familier* and *genre vulgaire*, and Joseph (1988) for the pedagogical implications of the increasing gap between the formal and colloquial levels. Queneau (1965) as a nonlinguist wrote a series of highly amusing and insightful essays on language levels in the 1950s.

5. The general career satisfaction of language teachers as reported by Fitzpatrick and Liuzzo (1989) is misleading, since those authors surveyed only ACTFL members. According to a somewhat old but quite extensive survey (Brickell and Paul, 1982, p. 178), only 20% of language teachers attend national professional conventions annually, 40 to 50% attend state or regional conferences, and most go to an in-service workshop, often of very general nature, only once a year. Jarvis and Taylor (1990, p. 177) also report that a full 40% of language teachers in Ohio work in more than one certification area.

6. Lange (1986, p. 30) proposes a fifth year, as "an additional, trial year" for which only a temporary certification would be granted, and Mellgren and Caye (1989) describe a closely coordinated collaborative program between the University of Minnesota and a nearby public school district; this latter effort is based on Lange's model and is a bright exception to the general state of affairs.

7. Surveys of the past and present problems and case studies definitely indicate improvements in the training of instructors at the college level; see Hagiwara (1970), Nerenz, Herron, and Knop (1979), and Schulz (1980).

8. Herr (1982) makes precisely this point, and very little research appears to have been done in the field, though use of literature at lower rather than

higher levels is advocated by Schofer (1990) and has been the focus of the journal *Teaching Language through Literature*.

9. Brickell and Paul (1982, p. 179) report that the majority of teachers are engaged in the instruction of levels 1 and 2, in which the main components according to the teachers are 75% language, 20% culture/civilization, and 5% literature. On the other hand, their undergraduate coursework consisted of 35% in language, 45% in literature, and 15% in culture/civilization. (At the graduate level, 25% was in language and 65% in literature.)

10. For a detailed discussion of various issues in methods courses, see Lange (1983) and Phillips (1989), and for desiderata for teacher training and teacher educators, see ACTFL (1988), Hancock (1981), and Jarvis and Taylor (1990).

11. More recent studies, such as those by Cramer and Terrio (1985), Kaplan (1984), and Magnan (1986), though not based on mass data like Carroll's, indicate the range of advanced students' proficiency as intermediate-high to advanced-high in terms of the ACTFL-ETS Speaking Proficiency Scale.

12. For a survey and an excellent bibliography of the types of study abroad and the experiences gained by participating students, see Koester (1986). According to Brickell and Paul (1982, p. 174), only about 50% of foreign language teachers have ever studied during college in a country where the language is spoken. Carroll (1967, p. 137) reported that the amount of time spent abroad (even if it is only a summer) and the age of the student when first beginning to study the language were the two factors most strongly associated with second language competence.

13. Testing of college graduates, especially those in the teacher certification program, has been advocated by many (see Brod, 1983, p. 40; Lange, 1986, p. 29; and Muyskens, 1984, p. 183). The need to establish national proficiency standards is advocated by Joiner (1981, p. 21). Even Schulz (1986), who opposes testing all students, expresses agreement. Hammerly (1982, p. 134) advocates a proficiency level equivalent to at least 4 on the U.S. State Department Foreign Service Institute (FSI) scale. Muyskens (1984, p. 183) suggests that it should be equal to the "Superior level" of the ACTFL scale, and Lange (1986, p. 30), to "Advanced Plus" to "Superior." See Johnson and LaBouve (1984) and Magnan (1986) for discussions of a movement in some states to establish minimum proficiency standards in certification programs.

14. The initial high interest in speaking and subsequent disappointment in the lack of progress are frequently voiced in our surveys of students. Horwitz (1988, p. 292) found that upward of 40% of students in French, German, and Spanish felt they would be fluent in two years or less of college study, and points to the need to "disabuse students of deleterious misconceptions about language learning." Curiously, student preference for written rather than oral activities are reported by Swaffar (1989, p. 306).

15. For a review of error analyses from this period, see Ludwig (1982). Later studies, such as those by Fayer and Krasinski (1987), attempt to go beyond individual sentences.

16. That the OPI should not be used as an indicator of classroom achievement is emphatically asserted by Dandonoli (1986, p. 78), a proponent of the OPI, and Schulz (1980, p. 375), who is skeptical about the OPI. OPI-oriented achievement tests leading ultimately to a full-fledged OPI are advocated by

Magnan (1985, p. 117); Omaggio (1986, p. 313) shows how it is possible to convert traditional test procedures to PGs-oriented types, and gives numerous suggestions; Berrier (1991) and Rusterholz (1990) describe evaluation of various aspects of oral communication from the instructors' point of view.

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