

Engaging students utilizing oral proficiency strategies and interviews

Assessment Symposium Presentation

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The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is the main element in the standardized assessment of speaking in a language. This tool was developed by ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). Their website describes the guidelines used for such assessment.

http://www.actfl.org/files/public/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012_FINAL.pdf

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are descriptions 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 (High, Mid, Low)
- Intermediate (High, Mid, Low)
- Novice (High, Mid, Low)

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.

http://www.actfl.org/files/public/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012_FINAL.pdf

The Guidelines describe the tasks that speakers can handle at each level, as well as the content, context, accuracy, and discourse types associated with tasks at each level. They also present the limits that speakers encounter when attempting to function at the next higher major level.

The levels of proficiency are seen 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.

Deciding the level

Superior qualities

- Can defend opinions
- Can support hypotheses
- Speaks in extended discourse
- Errors do not interfere with communication
- No pattern of errors

Advanced qualities

- Can describe
- Narrate in all major tenses
- Compare and contrast
- Speak concretely about autobiography, topics of community, national, or international interest
- Handle a complication
- Understood by native speakers unaccustomed to non-native speakers
- Speak in paragraphs

Deciding the level

Advanced

- Describe
- Narrate in all major tenses
- Compare and contrast
- Speak concretely about autobiography, topics of community, national, or international interest
- Handle a complication
- Understood by native speakers unaccustomed to non-native speakers
- Speak in paragraphs

Intermediate

- Create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life.
- Ask simple questions
- Handle a straightforward survival situation
- Understood by those accustomed to dealing with non-native learners of the language.
- Speak in sentences

Deciding the level

Intermediate

- Create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life.
- Speak about self, family, home, daily activities, interests and personal preferences, as well as physical and social needs, such as food, shopping, travel, and lodging.
- Ask simple questions
- Handle a straightforward survival situation
- Understood by those accustomed to dealing with non-native learners of the language.
- Speak in sentences

Novice

- Short messages on highly predictable, everyday topics that affect them directly.
- Use of isolated words and phrases that have been encountered, memorized, and recalled
- May be difficult to understand even by the most sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to non-native speech
- Short and sometimes incomplete sentences in the present, and may be hesitant or inaccurate

Two examples

Novice or Intermediate

How are you today?

Intermediate or Advanced

How are you today?

Uses in MCLL

The full-time faculty took the ACTFL OPI training in 2005, thanks to assessment funds from Academic Affairs and LAS. This was a 4-day intensive training combining theory with practice—carrying out actual interviews that were observed and assessed by the trainer and trainees.

Uses in MCLL

The OPI is used as an assessment in one of the capstone courses, the advanced conversation classes in Spanish and French. We expect students to achieve the Intermediate High* level by graduation, and the Advanced Low for those students seeking licensure in teaching. We are fortunate to have one of only 2 certified testers in Kansas, Prof. Alejandra Bonifacino.

* Most native speakers of a language operate at the Intermediate High-Advanced Low level most of the time.

Uses in MCLL

Fulltime faculty trains TAs and lecturers about appropriate levels and expectations for beginning students. A debate—an advanced-superior level activity—would not be useful. In fact, it would frustrate students. Similarly, having a 210 student tell the Spanish equivalent of an English word without context is equally useless—a beginning novice activity for one who should be near intermediate by end of semester.

Uses in MCLL

The desire to help students achieve those levels of proficiency resulted in 1) a revamping of the curriculum—now two 3-hr courses in Spanish rather than three 2-hr courses— and 2) changes in the way we teach the conversation classes.

I will give you some examples of how the ACTFL levels have affected my courses.

SPANISH 525 Major Topics:

The development of communication skills—listening and speaking and improvement of speaking proficiency. The major topics to be covered in the course include, but are not limited to:

1. *Real life* situations in the form of cultural dialogues, *role-playing*, cultural readings, and the required vocabulary to communicate successfully in the target language.
2. Improvement of pronunciation.
3. Listening comprehension and interpretation.
4. Fluency and cultural competency.
5. Increase and improve vocabulary specific to situations presented in the book.
6. Facilitate the use of certain linguistic functions in spoken Spanish.

Changes in course content

Syllabus Fall 2000

Grading

- Oral presentations
40% (Best 4 X 10%)
- Work in class
10%
- Debates 11%
- Vocabulary tests
24% (Best 4 X 6%)
- Final oral exam (Oral Proficiency)
15%

I used a standard book; now I use handouts, Blackboard, and the internet.

Syllabus Fall 2011

Evaluation criteria:

Oral presentations 100 points

- 2 formal X 30 maximum; Biography 10; news 10; Skits 10; guided tour of campus 10

Final presentation 70

Classwork 150 points

- discussions and small-group work—up to 2 points per day X 45 days = 90); esquela and epitaphs 10; written description from directions 10; games 20; answers from native speakers 10; crazy clothes dress & narrations 10

Vocabulary tests 120 (3 X 40 points each)

Final interviews 60 (maximum points)

500 total points

Grading of final interview



60 points	Student has improved one or more steps at end of semester and is at least intermediate high on ACTFL scale
55 points	Student is at intermediate mid
45 points	Student is at intermediate low
40 points	Student is at a novice level (novice high, mid or low)
0 points	OPI was not done

KEY: **Green** = intermediate level; **Red** = advanced; **Purple** = superior & distinguished

Date	Activity you will prepare prior to class.
22 Aug.	Introduction; activity: Get signatures: <i>Intercambios</i> 92
24-29 Aug.	<i>Interviews in my office</i> (200 Lindquist Hall)
26 Aug.	Mi casa ideal— describe your ideal house and your partner draws it. Plan placement of furniture, etc.
29 Aug.	Discuss ACTFL ratings (handout);
31 Aug.	Report on a famous Hispanic person (2 minutes)—informal presentation
2 Sept.	Circumlocution and pronunciation practice
14 Sept.	Vocabulary describing things around campus.
16 Sept.	Asking/giving directions (Copeland, Kite & Sandstedt, <i>Conversación y repaso</i> pp.158-60); activities with maps
19 Sept.	pp. 158-60; groups follow directions & write a description of what they see for report to class and to turn in (10 points)
21 Sept.	You give Dr. Myers a campus tour ; prepare vocabulary to aid you in describing what we will see. Each person should have information about a particular building or the history of the university, trees and flowers, etc.
30 Sept.	¿Do animals have rights? (<i>Perspectivas</i> 7th ed.: 164-70) [Defend an opinión.]
1 Oct., Sat.	TRIP TO ZOO
3 Oct.	Bring a picture and tell your classmates about a pet
5 Oct.	Several native speakers of Spanish will visit our class today. Prepare 3 questions. You will turn in your summary of their answers.

KEY: **Green** = intermediate level; **Red** = advanced; **Purple** = superior & distinguished

7 Oct.	News items about the Spanish-speaking world from the internet (an article written in Spanish from a newspaper/magazine published in a Spanish-speaking country); 1-2 minute summary reports 10 points: You will state the news <i>in your own words</i> and turn in your printed version.
10 Oct.	Day to speak about your interests/hobbies
12 Oct.	Food vocab (<i>Portafolio</i> 130-31) + On web: meats 13, fruits 39, vegetables 47 + practice with authentic menus
14 Oct.	Practice using situation cards , including spontaneous skits ALL LEVELS
28 Oct.	Presentations (3 minutes each maximum) on someone's biography. You will write an <i>esquela</i> for your person and you will write epitaphs for three of the "difuntos" (described by your classmates). You will share these with the class and turn them in. [uses narration in the past; summary]
31 Oct.	Finish presentations
2 Nov.	http://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/voces_hispanicas/ Listen to speakers from two different regions of Latin America and be ready to compare and contrast the pronunciation/vocabulary on Monday
7 Nov.	Crazy Clothes Day to practice clothing vocabulary; you will dress in mismatched clothes & we will narrate [description] a "fashion show"
9 Nov.	Practice vocabulary on parts of the body (handout + on website medical care ch. 42), using TPR and Simon Says
16 Nov.	Begin game "Paseo de la Reforma"— gaining information through questions
28 Nov.	"Crear una civilización nueva" (<i>Conversar sin parar</i> 65-67)
7 Dec.	Activity: if I had unlimited funds, this is what I would do over the break.
Last weeks of class: Oral Proficiency Interviews with Prof. Alejandra Bonifacino	

A “typical” exam

**Español 525 Prueba II de vocabulario
2011**

Otoño

I. At Jimmie’s Diner, politely order the following things for yourself and your friend. You want two eggs scrambled (*revueltos*), bacon, toast, and coffee [tell how you like it]. Your friend would like fried chicken, a baked potato with butter, and water with lemon. Order two different desserts, one for you and one for your friend. **9 puntos**

II. **18 puntos** An exchange student has just visited his first *buffet* in Wichita. Write a list of all the things he includes in a letter to family. **DO NOT REPEAT ANYTHING FROM PART I ABOVE.** You should include

3 seafoods

3 other types of meat

3 vegetables

3 fruits, describing each fruit’s flavor—sour, sweet, bitter, or salty.

3 drinks

III. Old McDonald had many animals on his farm. Name 5 of them. **5 puntos**

IV. You are going to visit the Sedgwick County Zoo with your young niece. Discuss animals from Africa and Asia that you will see, describing them. **(At least 4 with their description). 8 puntos.**

Una esquela

ESQUELAS Y GENERALES

JUEVES 4-9-80



ROBERTO MERTINS MURUA

PRESIDENTE DEL INSTITUTO GUATEMALTECO
DE CULTURA HISPANICA

FUE ASESINADO

EL DIA 3 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 1980

D. E. P.

La Asociación de Antiguos Colegiales del Mayor Hispanoamericano Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, de la cual era presidente para el área Centroamérica

RUEGA una oración por su alma.

(4)

Conclusion



Assessment can inform curriculum and courses. It can positively influence how faculty teach and students learn. My Spanish 525 hardly resembles the course I used to teach.