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ABSTRACT

The report describes a federally funded study of the application of language proficiency concepts, developed for commonly taught languages, to less commonly taught languages. It summarizes the project's background and origins and the activities of the project, including four separate studies on the feasibility of proficiency-based instruction and testing in Arabic, Hindi, Indonesian, and African languages as a group. In each study, a workshop or demonstration of proficiency testing was held for language teachers and linguists and recommendations for further study and action were made. The report also describes the final project activity: publication and dissemination of a volume of working papers that includes the four language-specific study reports, the 1986 American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' Proficiency Guidelines, and five papers on aspects of proficiency-based instruction and assessment. A mailing list for the project volume is appended. (MSE)

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Design, Development, and Dissemination of
Informational Materials and Instructional Sessions
on "Proficiency" Concepts
For the Less Commonly Taught Languages.

Final Report

Grant No.: G008540634

Charles W. Stansfield and David Hiple

Submitted to:

International Research and Studies Program

United States Department of Education

Washington, DC

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I. Project Overview

During the past decade a major theoretical and practical development in the field of foreign language teaching and assessment has taken place, namely, the development and application of a proficiency orientation to the testing of foreign language competence. From the foundation laid by the Foreign Service Institute Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), the proficiency testing movement in the United States has extended beyond government and into academia. The primary movers behind this extension have been the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

This movement has impacted greatly on the instruction and testing of commonly taught foreign languages in the United States (Spanish, French and German) as the guidelines for testing proficiency in those languages were developed and disseminated. However, as language specific proficiency testing guidelines began to be developed for less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), certain concerns in the movement arose. On the one hand, there seemed to be a great deal of misunderstanding among some teachers of LCTLs as to what the proficiency testing guidelines really were. On the other hand, there was a need for further discussion in academia of the issues raised in extending the proficiency guidelines to the LCTLs.

With these concerns in mind, ACTFL and the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) undertook a two-year familiarization

project, supported by a grant from the Department of Education. The goal of the project was two-fold: 1) to familiarize teachers of the LCTLs as to what proficiency testing guidelines are and to clear up common misconceptions about them, and 2) to provide a forum for the issues involved in adapting proficiency testing guidelines already used in the commonly taught languages to the LCTLs. The project goals were achieved through the organization and sponsorship of special workshops during 1986 and 1987 for teachers of targeted LCTLs and through the publication and distribution of a special project volume of articles and working papers.

II. Project Activities

Under the direction of John L.D. Clark¹ from CAL and David Hiple from ACTFL, the project co-directors, four LCTLs were targeted for inclusion in the project and a working group was formed. Arabic was chosen on the basis of preliminary work on the guidelines completed by Roger Allen of the University of Pennsylvania and Ernest McCarus of the University of Michigan. Hindi was chosen on the basis of preliminary work done at the University of Pennsylvania. The Hindi language contribution to the project was presented by Rosane Rocher and Vijay Gambhir. Indonesian was assigned to John Wolff of Cornell University.

¹ In the course of the project, John L.D. Clark transferred to the Defense Language Institute. His responsibilities as project co-director from CAL were assigned to Charles W. Stansfield.

Although Swahili was originally targeted as the fourth LCTL, this category was expanded to African Languages in general and is represented by the work of Patrick Bennett and David Dwyer.

From December 7-9, 1985, a major three-day project planning meeting of representatives from ACTFL, CAL and the language groups mentioned above was held at the CAL offices in Washington. Members of the groups charged with revising the ACTFL guidelines for Chinese, Japanese, and Russian were also present for two days of the meetings. This highly productive planning and discussion session resulted in agreement on all of the original project goals. These included the agreement that 1) the top priority would be in clarifying what the movement was and dispelling a variety of misconceptions about proficiency testing guidelines; 2) priority would be given to presenting familiarization workshops at annual professional meetings for teachers of the LCTLs, particularly those represented in the project; and 3) speaking proficiency would receive preeminence at this time in the development of proficiency testing guidelines for the LCTLs. As to specific implementation of these goals, each of the language specialists undertook the responsibility of advertising and disseminating information about the project in their respective constituencies while ACTFL undertook to run the workshops and CAL assumed the role of coordinator and publisher of the proposed volume.

Based on the project meeting resolutions, the following activities took place. Descriptions are provided by language

group.

Arabic

Roger Allen and his associates at the University of Pennsylvania had previously developed a set of Arabic guidelines with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education.² They addressed the diglossic situation in the Arabic speaking world which presents unusual problems to developing oral proficiency guidelines. There is no dominant form of spoken Arabic, nor is there is a consensus as to which form of colloquial Arabic should be the model. The practical solution chosen by Allen and others was to use the model of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is the standard learned by Arab speakers in school and used widely in the media.

As an implementation of the project's goals, a workshop for familiarizing Arabic teachers with the ACTFL proficiency guidelines was held on April 22 and 23, 1987, the two days preceding the first annual Symposium on Arabic Linguistics and Literature, sponsored by the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

At the workshop, the participants were primarily interested in teaching for proficiency in the four skill areas and in testing for proficiency. Roger Allen demonstrated the OPI in Arabic.

² The guidelines may be found in Roger Allen, "Arabic Proficiency Guidelines," al-'Arabiyya, 18 (1985): 45-70.

In the volume of working papers and articles for the project, concerns in applying the proficiency guidelines to Arabic are specifically represented in three works:

1. "Arabic Proficiency Guidelines," by Roger Allen
2. "A Model of Proficiency-Based Testing for Elementary Arabic," by R.J. Rammuny
3. "The Arabic Guidelines: Where Now?" by Roger Allen.

Hindi

Hindi presents a challenge to the development of proficiency guidelines in that while code-switching is in many languages an indication of low level ability, appropriate Hindi-English code switching is the mark of an educated native speaker. Given the multi-lingual speech community of India, the content and context of the code-switching must be elucidated in the guidelines at all proficiency levels. An approach to developing Hindi guidelines is to combine what is expected in terms of functions, content/context and accuracy at different levels based on the observations of experienced teachers and linguists with an analysis of data collected from a large number of Oral Proficiency Interviews conducted following the generic guidelines at different proficiency levels. The process of training Hindi raters is already underway.

Under the direction of this project, Rosane Rocher organized a demonstration of the OPI in Hindi at the 1986 Association of Asian Studies (AAS) meeting in Chicago on March 23. She also organized a demonstration of the OPI at the 1986 South Asian

Studies conference held at the University of Wisconsin at Madison on November 7-9.

In 1987, a major project activity was the well-attended two-day workshop at the AAS meeting in Boston, which was held on April 10th and 11th. The workshop included familiarization of oral proficiency testing through the demonstration of the OPI by Isabelle Kaplan of ACTFL and Vijay Gambhir. They also addressed general proficiency concepts as they relate to the four skill areas. The workshop provided a forum for an exchange of ideas with the participants on the transfer of guidelines from Western languages to Eastern languages.

The work in Hindi is represented in the final volume of working papers by the article entitled "Some Preliminary Thoughts About Proficiency Guidelines in Hindi" by Vijay Gambhir.

Indonesian

Testing oral proficiency in Indonesian, according to John Wolff, does not present any particular problems. However, special emphasis will need to be given to the candidate's ability to make use of appropriate style, register and sociolinguistic rules which are quite rigid in Indonesian. The guidelines for Indonesian will need to reflect these rules.

The major activity of this project for Indonesian proficiency guidelines development was the participation at the 1987 AAS meeting in Boston by John U. Wolff, who demonstrated the OPI in Indonesian at the same workshop session at which Hindi was

demonstrated.

The work to date in Indonesian is represented by Wolff's article "The Application of the ILR-ACTFL Test and Guidelines to Indonesian" in the volume of working papers compiled for this project.

African Languages

Although Swahili was originally proposed as the fourth LCTL, very early on in the project it was decided to concentrate on the problems confronting the African languages area as a whole, rather than to concentrate on a single language. The African languages present a difficult challenge for the drafting of language-specific proficiency guidelines. There are 1,500 to 2,000 African languages and the demand for instruction is quite low; furthermore, there are very limited resources for materials development in the African languages. Therefore, guidelines will be drafted for only a relatively small number of these languages.

Nevertheless, since 1980, the African linguists and language teachers at the Title VI African studies centers and other programs have undertaken a rationalization of the approach to these many languages as a first step toward proficiency-oriented instruction. Agreement has been reached on setting priorities among the languages. Twenty-three first priority (largely national) languages were identified; 30 second priority; 30 third priority; and all others fourth priority. This step provided a

rationale for developing materials more strategically.³ Second, a global search for African language materials was conducted and published, and guidelines for the evaluation of language teaching materials in light of teaching for proficiency have been discussed.⁴

Work on language specific proficiency testing guidelines for African languages had already been undertaken by Roxana Ma Newman and her colleagues at Indiana University (Hausa, Lingala and Swahili), while Patrick Bennett (Wisconsin) and Ann Biersteker (Yale) established a project on proficiency profiling. Closer to the ACTFL model of proficiency guidelines is the ACTFL Team Testing model. Using this approach, the oral interview is conducted by two persons instead of one: a native speaker of the target language who is not a trained proficiency evaluator and an ACTFL-trained and certified evaluator who is not necessarily proficient in the target language.

The ACTFL Team Testing model was presented to the African language community through a workshop carried out by the project co-director, David Hipple, held at the University of Wisconsin on May 1-3, 1987, with financial support from Title VI African Studies Centers. It was agreed that such an approach was necessary in order to cope with the rich variety of African

³ For further information see African Language Instruction in the United States: Directions and Priorities for the 1980s, Wiley and Dwyer, East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1980.

⁴ See A Resource Handbook for African Languages compiled by David J. Dwyer and The Design and Evaluation of African Language Learning Materials edited by David J. Dwyer.

languages and the limited resources available to deal with them. In response to the workshop and related activities, a plan to expand and test various components of the team model has been agreed to.

The issues in proficiency testing in the African Languages are represented in the final volume of working papers by the article "African Language Teaching and ACTFL Team Testing," by David Dwyer and David Hiple.

Volume of Working Papers and Articles

The final task of the project was the publication of the volume of working papers. In addition to the language specific articles mentioned above, the following works were added to the final publication:

1. The 1986 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines
2. "Testing Speaking Proficiency: The Oral Interview," by Pardee Lowe, Jr. and Judith E. Liskin-Gasparrao
3. "Interagency Language Roundtable Oral Proficiency Interview," reviewed by Pardee Lowe, Jr.
4. "Adapting the ACTFL/ETS Proficiency Guidelines to the Less Commonly Taught Languages", by Irene Thompson, Richard T. Thompson, and David Hiple
5. "Materials Development for the Proficiency-oriented Classroom," by Jeannette D. Bragger
6. "Topical Bibliography of Proficiency-Related Issues," by Vicki Galloway, Charles W. Stansfield, and Lynn E. Thompson.

These articles were chosen or commissioned by the project

co-directors with the purpose of providing a state-of-the-art volume. Original manuscripts were edited by Charles Stansfield. The volume serves as a survey of materials and current thinking in the proficiency movement*. Both introductory articles for those who are new to proficiency testing, as well as articles for those currently involved in the drafting of guidelines for LCTLs have been included. The bibliography stands as a valuable resource of information on the development of the guidelines and their application to classroom instruction and testing, proficiency concepts, and the issue of accuracy. The entire volume is attached to this report.*

More than 200 copies of the volume were distributed to all participants of the workshops, relevant Title VI center directors, relevant department chiefs in the various agencies in the U.S. Government's Interagency Language Roundtable, and various leaders in the proficiency movement, or persons able to disseminate information on the proficiency movement (see Appendix A). The volume was also submitted to the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics for inclusion in the ERIC database. A brief article reporting on the project has been prepared for submission to the Modern Language Journal.

[*Not attached to copy received by ERIC. For this volume, see ED 289 345.]

Appendix A

"ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES FOR THE LESS
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