

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, NAGAON



WORKSHOP REPORT

ON

PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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INTRODUCTION:

We simply have a hard time figuring out when someone can claim a foreign language as one they speak. Linguists and language educators have known about this problem for this year that is why they came up with the idea of language proficiency.

The term 'proficiency' implies that we're dealing with skills because language ability is just that - a skill. In many ways, it's like dancing, playing the guitar, riding a bike or drawing a cake. When it comes to skills, there's a spectrum of abilities.

Different language organisations around the world have developed scales to help identify a person's foreign language ability. The scales might vary in the details but they all basically want to identify whether a person is a beginner in the language, an expert or somewhere in between.

PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Language proficiency or linguistic proficiency is the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language. As theories among pedagogues as to what constitutes proficiency go, there is little consistency as to how different organisations classify it. Language proficiency refers to the person's ability to use a language for a variety of purposes including speaking, listening, reading and writing. Proficiency is commonly measured using guidelines developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL). Language proficiency has been defined as the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts while completing the students. Such uses may range from a simple task such as discussing work with fellow students, to complex tasks such as writing an academic paper or delivering a speech to a professional audience.

This view of proficiency as the ability to organise language to carry out a variety of communication tasks distinguishes the use of English language proficiency from a narrow focus on language as a formal system concerned only with correct use of grammar and sentence structure. English language proficiency has become an important issue in education system due in part to a heightened awareness of the role of English language ability in employment all over the globe. There is also an increased recognition of the fundamental nature of language in learning and academic achievement for all students. The rapid progress of global higher education is prompting to address the complex issues of learning and teaching in multilingual environments. Given the current prevalence of English in work and professional fields internationally, many countries are seeking better ways for students whose first language is not English to develop their disciplinary English proficiency through academic studies.

With widening participation across tertiary education and the increasing numbers of international students, it can no longer be assumed that students enter their study with the level of academic language proficiency required to participate effectively in their studies. Irrespective of the English language entry requirements of most students, in particular those from language backgrounds other than English will require English language development throughout the course of their studies. Different disciplines have different discourses of academic inquiry. Students' English language proficiency can be developed through appropriate course design, supplemented where necessary by other developmental activity. Development of academic language and learning is more likely to occur when it is linked to need (e.g. academic activities, assessment tasks).

A student's ability to engage in conversation, understand written or spoken text and present information orally or in writing is developed over a

a number of years of learning a language. Each person is unique and even in immersion programmes not all students attain the same level of proficiency in the same period of time. However, all students should be able to increase their proficiency each year if they are in a high-quality language programme taught by a fluent and capable teacher. So, assessing language proficiency is a critical component of programme evaluation. An even more important reason to assess language proficiency is to provide students with accurate feedback on their developing abilities in the language.

While grades may be based on many non-linguistic factors such as attendance, mastery of specific grammar points or completion of homework, language proficiency focuses only on what a student is actually able to do with the language. It might seem nitpicky to differentiate between various terms relating to linguistic proficiency especially since the difference can be blurring. In fact, it's the relative similarity of

these terms that makes the need for more concrete definitions all the more necessary in order to avoid confusion and misrepresentation of an individual's linguistic capabilities.

It should be noted that while the descriptions above aim to clarify these terms, they are not by no means concrete, go-to definitions. In an ideal world, those in the language professions would develop and use an official industry standard of language proficiency terms in order to more accurately represent their capabilities as interpreters and translators. Until such a standard is adopted, however, those requiring language services should seek to verify a linguist's language proficiency.

There are five levels of language proficiency—

1) Level 1 — Elementary — Can fulfil the basic needs in a language such as ordering meals, asking time and asking for directions.

b) Level 2 - Limited working proficiency - can fulfil routine social demands such as small talk about one's self, one's family and current events.

c) Level 3 - Professional working proficiency - can discuss a variety of topics with ease and almost completely understand what others are saying.

d) Level 4 - Full professional proficiency - can participate in all manners of conversations with ease and only rarely makes grammatical mistakes in all manners of conversations with ease and only rarely makes grammatical mistakes.

e) Level 5 - Native or Bilingual proficiency - can use the language the way an educated native speaker of the language would.

Language Proficiency Definitions —

SI No	Proficiency Code	Speaking Definition	Reading Definition
0	No practical Proficiency	No practical speaking Proficiency	No practical Reading Proficiency
1.	Elementary Proficiency	Able to satisfy Routine travel needs and minimum Courtesy requirements.	Able to read some personal and place names, street signs, office and shop designations, numbers and isolated words and phrases.
2.	Limited working Proficiency	Able to satisfy Routine social demands and limited work requirements	Able to read simple prose, in a form equivalent to typescript or printing, on subjects within a familiar context.
3.	Minimum Professional Proficiency	Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively	Able to read standard newspaper items addressed to the general reader, routine correspondence,

	In most formal and informal conversations on practical, social and professional topics.	Reports and technical materials in the individual's special field.
4. Full Professional Proficiency	Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels pertinent to professional needs.	Able to read all styles and forms of the language pertinent to professional needs.
5. Native or Bilingual Proficiency	Equivalent to that of an educated native speaker	Equivalent to that of an educated native.

CONCLUSION:

Learning a first language is a complex and lengthy process. While learners follow a similar route in learning a second language, the rate in which they acquire the target language varies depending on a variety of linguistic, sociocultural and cognitive factors. As students navigate through the process of becoming competent users of English, educators' awareness of their location along the language learning continuum can help them better address the students' needs and build on their strengths.

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