



OPI Testing at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center

Thomas S. Parry, Ph.D.

**Proficiency Standards Division
Directorate of Testing**



Workshop Outline

Part I

- OPI program overview
- OPI tester certification
- Requirements for testers to remain in active status
- OPI tester decertification
- OPI relook and score resolution procedures
- Current and planned PSD projects and initiatives

Part II

- The OPI conducted at DLIFLC
- Sample OPI tasks at levels 2 and 3



OPI Program Overview

- **Program Mission:** Provide appropriate interpretation and uniform implementation of the Interagency Language Roundtable Skill Level Descriptions for Speaking to accomplish valid and reliable assessment of spoken language proficiency at DLIFLC and at field sites

Accomplished through training, certifying and maintaining select DLIFLC faculty to serve as collateral duty OPI testers in languages taught at the Institute. In addition, PSD provides orientation and awareness training for all DLIFLC faculty in the ILR guidelines as well as specialized training on advanced-level standards and associated assessment techniques



OPI Program Overview

- **Program Vision:** Using the OPI, conduct consistently fair and accurate assessment of oral language proficiency in meeting all DLIFLC and field testing requirements

Fair assessment is accomplished through effective elicitation of appropriate proficiency-based tasks

Accurate assessment is accomplished by assigning the appropriate rating based on proficiency



Languages Tested via the OPI

- **Category I: (24 weeks)** French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish,
- **Category II: (36 weeks)** German, Indonesian
Category III: (47 weeks) Dari, Hebrew, Hindi, Farsi, Kurdish, Russian, Serbian-Croatian, Tagalog, Turkish, Urdu
- **Category IV: (63 weeks)** Arabic MSA, Levantine, Iraqi, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Pashto

- **English: For job applicants**



Who Must Take the OPI?

- All **DLI students** must take an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) as part of the DLPT battery
- **Faculty applicants** must take OPIs in both EN (minimum score L2) and TL (minimum score L3) to be prequalified for hiring
- **Military personnel** who must qualify for MOS readiness or who want to receive “Language Proficiency Pay” bonuses



The DLI Student Population

SIGINT: 85-90%

Voice Interceptors
Cryptology Linguists

HUMINT: 10-15%

97E Interrogators
Foreign Area Officers



Graduation Requirements

- **All students must complete the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) battery in order to graduate**
 - **Listening:** administered in lab (3 hrs.)
 - **Reading:** administered in lab (3 hrs.)
 - **Speaking: OPI** (face-to-face or telephonic 30-45 mins.)



Graduation Requirements

- **Exit proficiency levels**
 - Basic Course – L2/L2/**L1+** -> (L2+/L2+/**L2**)
 - Intermediate – L2+/L2+/**L2**
 - Advanced – L3/L3/**L2+**

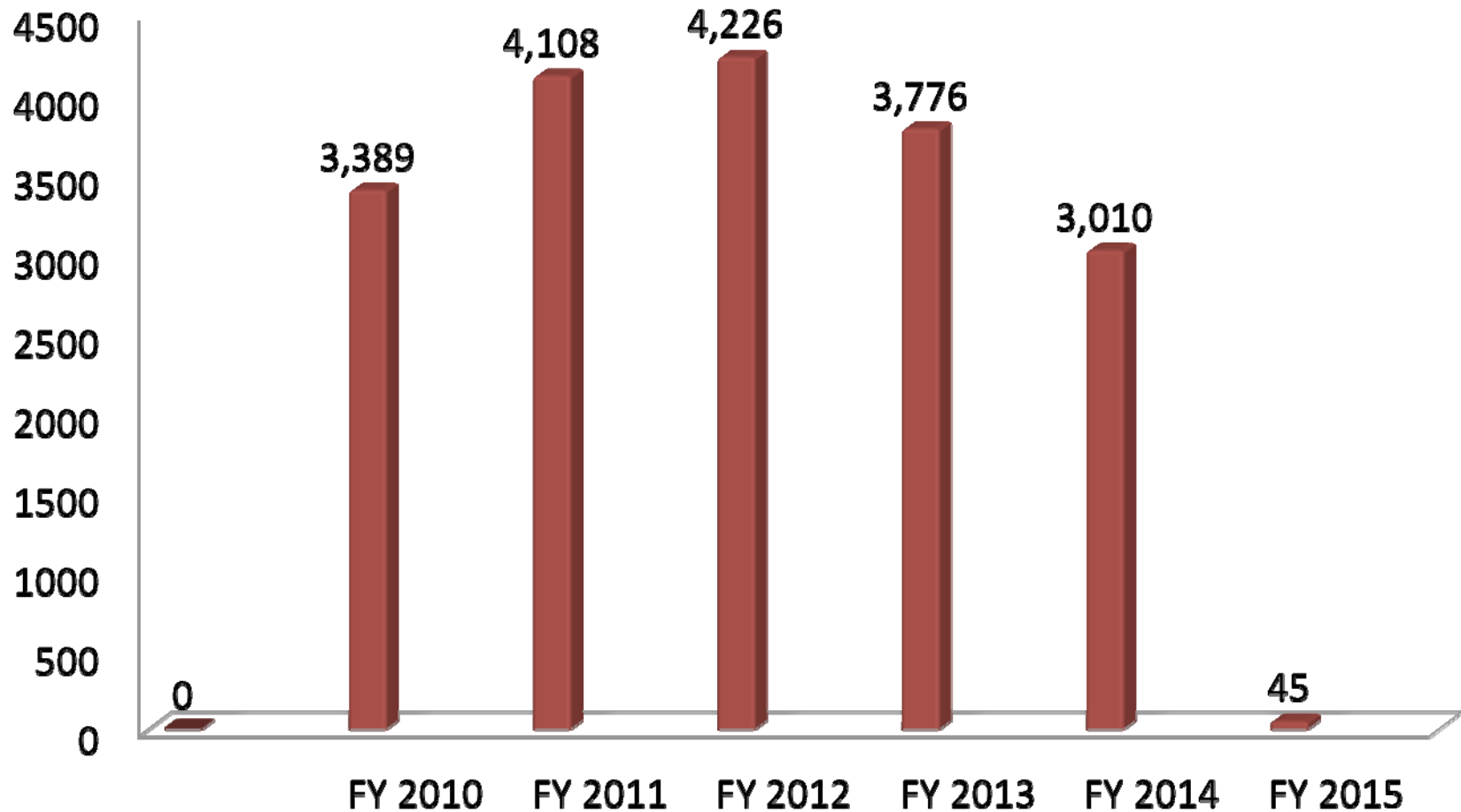


OPI Volume, Statistics and Facts for FY 2014

- Number of DLIFLC OPIs conducted: **3,010**
 - Total students tested: **2760**
 - Total FPS tested: **133**
- Number of certified DLIFLC OPI testers: **351**
 - Some testers are dual certified and test in more than one language
- Tester attrition: **27**
- Tester gain: **39**

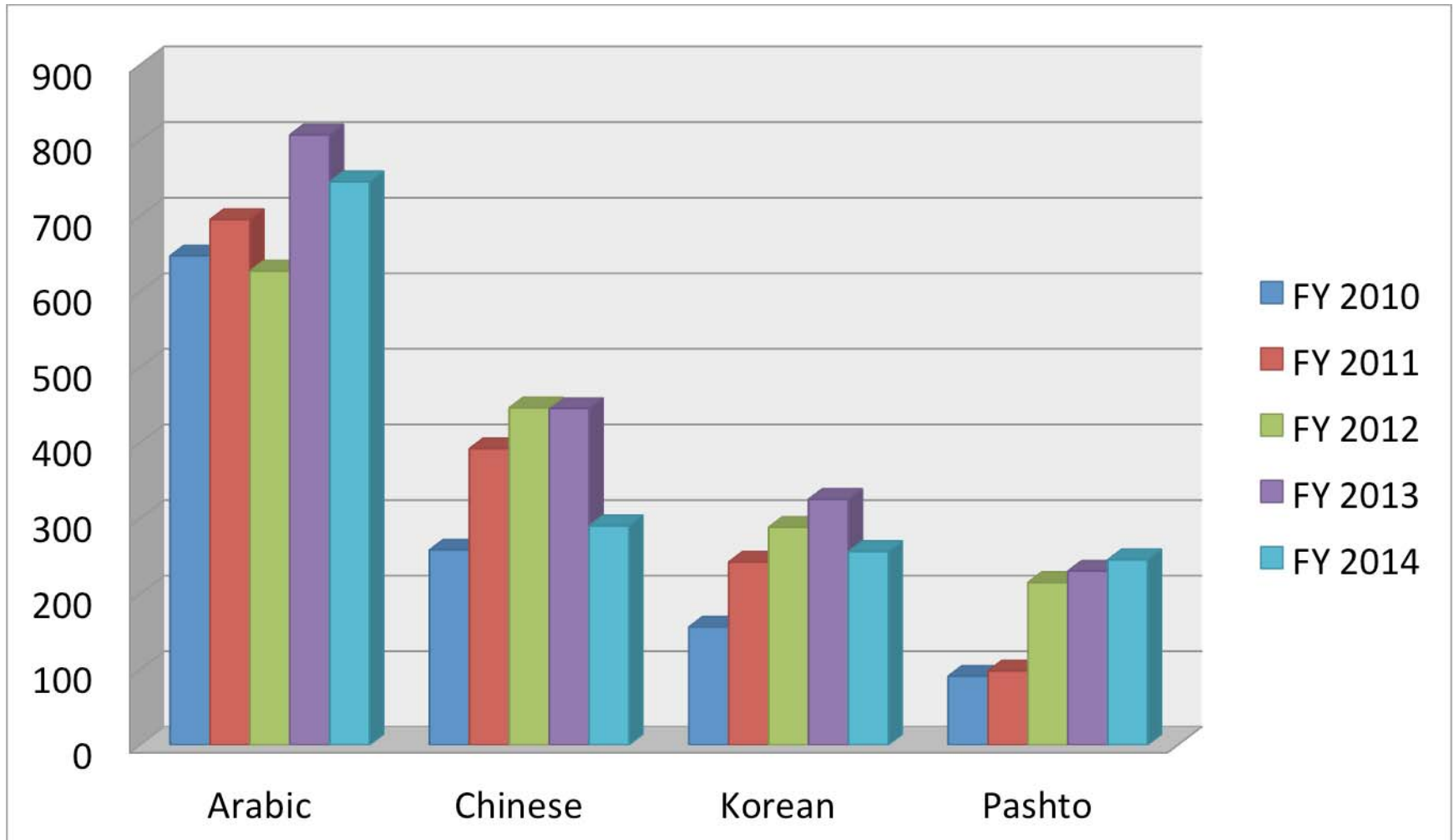


Total Number of DLIFLC OPIs FY 2010-2014



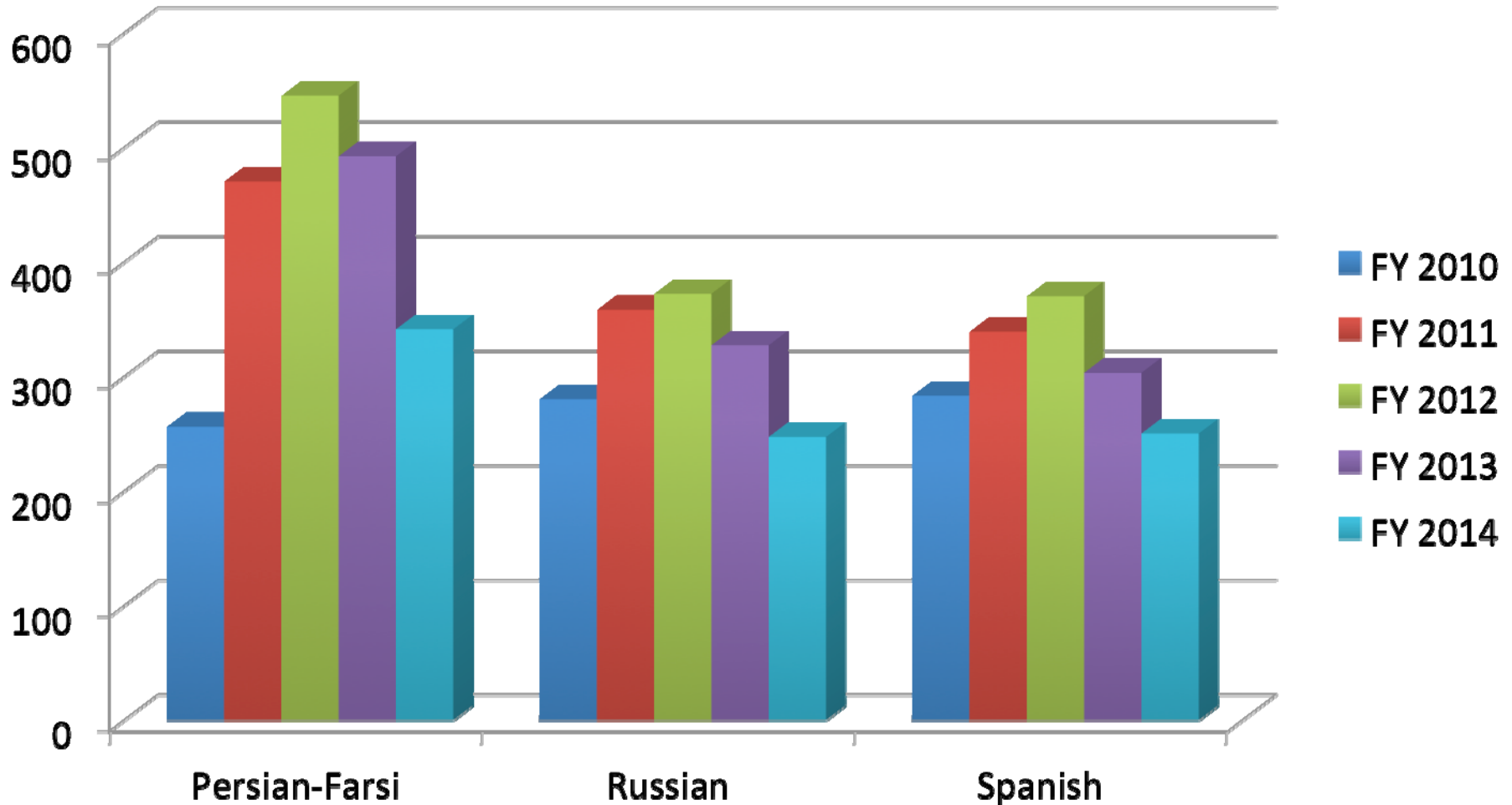


Number of OPIs Conducted for Category 4 (FY 2010-14)



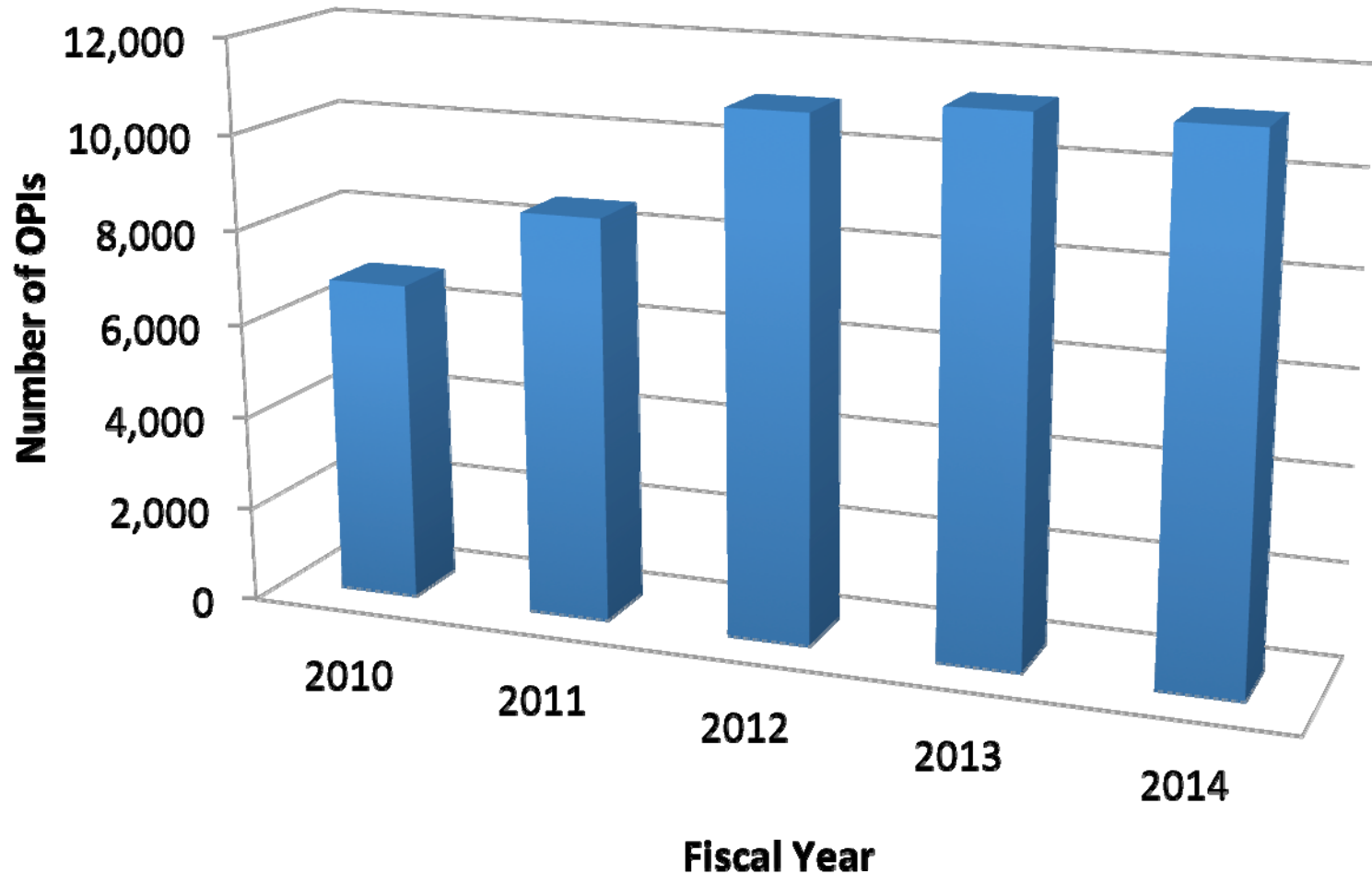


Number of OPIs Conducted for Category 1-3 (FY 2010-14)





Number of OPIs Conducted by ACTFL/LTI FY10-14





OPI Tester Certification

- Eligibility to serve as an OPI tester
 - Demonstrated ability to multitask
 - Effective organizational and teamwork skills
 - Solid academic foundation in language/linguistics
 - Has level 3 or higher proficiency in the language to be tested
 - Must not be in an administrative position



OPI Tester Certification

- Three phases leading to tester certification:
 - Phase 1: Screening and selection of prospective OPI testers
 - Phase 2: The OPI Tester Training and Certification Workshop
 - Phase 3: Post-workshop provisional certification mentoring and training



OPI Tester Certification

- Phase 1: Screening and selection of prospective OPI testers
 - Factors considered when screening prospective tester candidates:
 - Demonstrated ability to multitask
 - Evidence of effective organizational and teamwork skills
 - Currently not serving in an administrative position
 - Has a solid academic foundation in language/linguistics
 - Has speaking ILR level 3 or higher in the language to be tested



OPI Tester Certification

- Phase 2: The OPI Certification Workshop
 - Offered *as needed* based on demand for testers
 - Conducted over a period of 12-15 days
 - Generally conducted for specific languages but multi-language workshops are also possible
 - Admits 8-10 participants maximum per iteration
 - Academically demanding and rigorous curriculum
 - One week devoted to theoretical and foundational testing concepts including the ILR
 - Two weeks of practicum experiences
 - Demands 100 percent attention and effort
 - Required for provisional certification



OPI Tester Certification

- OPI Tester Certification Workshop Outcomes
 - Upon completion of the OPI Tester Certification Workshop, participants receive one of the following certificates depending on their status:
 - Certificate of *Provisional Certification*, valid for one year from date of workshop completion, for those who complete all workshop requirements at standard
 - Certificate of *Course Completion* for those who complete the course but fail to fully meet all workshop requirements and do not obtain provisional certification
 - Certificate of *Attendance* for those who fail to complete the full course and issued only for the dates of attendance



OPI Tester Certification

- Phase 3: Post-workshop provisional certification mentoring and training
 - Normally 12 months from completion of initial tester certification workshop and may be less
 - Provisionally certified testers actively conduct OPIs and receive extra attention in the first year of testing
 - Provisional certification requirements:
 - Successful elicitation and rating of 8-10 OPIs with close review and monitoring by PSD staff
 - Periodic one-on-one test review/mentoring sessions with PSD staff (varies by language and need)
 - Participation in at least one full cadre norming session
 - Completion of assigned third ratings with PSD review

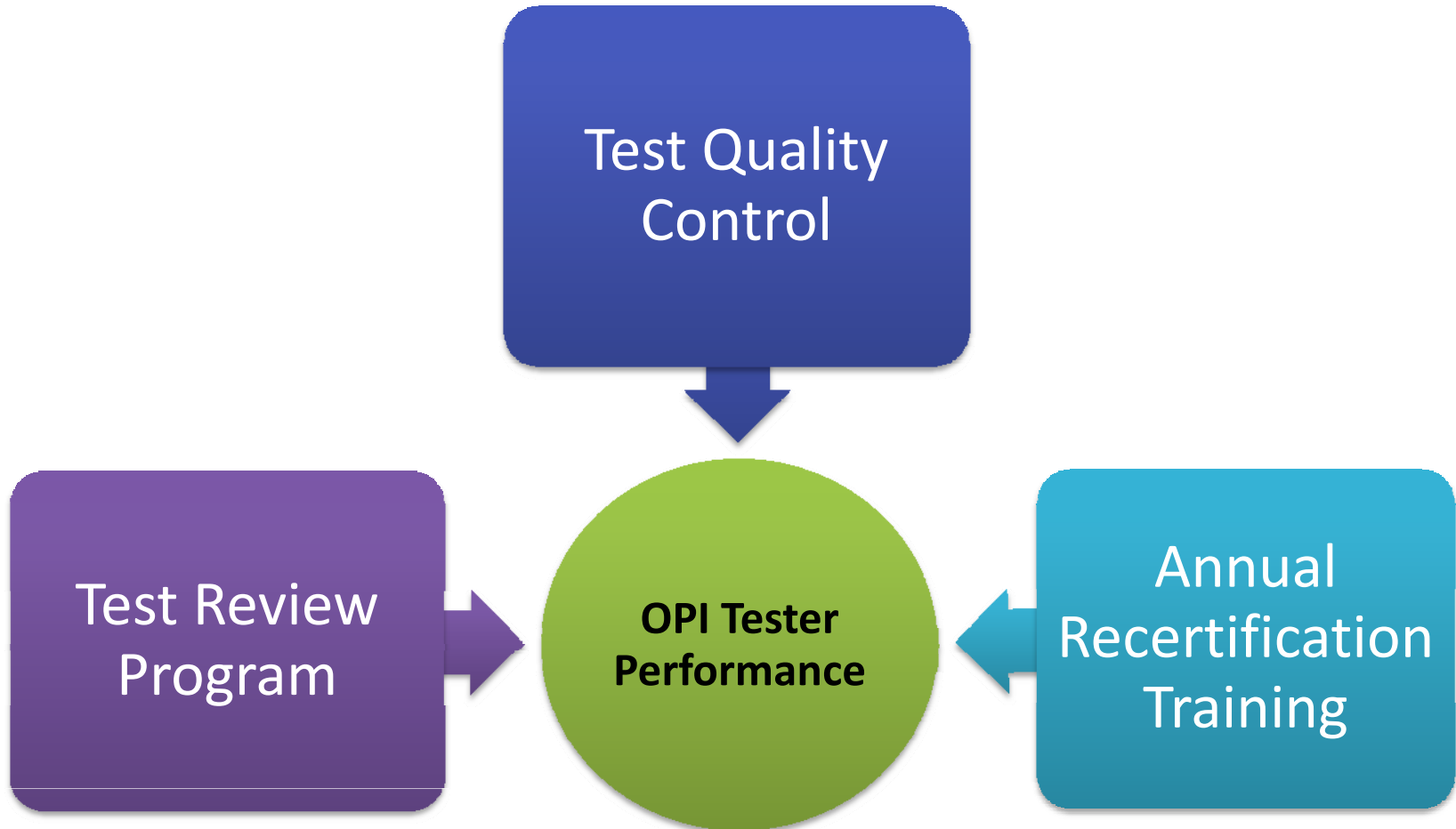


Requirements for Testers to Remain in Active Status

- All fully certified (journeyman) testers must meet minimal annual requirements to retain their certified status:
 - Receive periodic test review and individualized training
 - Meet minimal annual testing requirement
 - Participate in special group norming sessions as required
 - Complete annual OPI tester re-certification training
 - Annually review and sign *OPI Tester Code of Conduct* document



Tester Maintenance and Quality Control





Test Review Program

- Provides for one-on-one feedback sessions from an OPI Education Specialist
- Sessions based on OPIs the tester recently conducted
- Identifies strengths and weaknesses of testing
- Areas of improvement are clarified
- Sessions are scheduled up to four times per year for each tester
- Sessions are approximately two hours in length



Test Quality Control

- Up to 20% of all OPIs are randomly-selected for third rating and analysis
- The analysis of OPIs is critical because it identifies
 - areas of weakness to address in one-on-one Test Review sessions
 - trends in the testing cadre, by language, that can inform the content of recertification and norming workshops
- The focus of third-rating analysis is on
 - interview structure
 - elicitation
 - rating accuracy



Annual Recertification Training

- Offered annually for each language-specific testing cadre
- Conducted for two or three days depending on need
- Admits 10-20 testers per iteration
- Number of iterations is dependent on size of the testing cadre for a given language
- Emphasis is “hand’s-on” with practice OPIs and third rating activities providing practice and evaluation of elicitation techniques, appropriate test structure and rating accuracy
- Issues related to higher-level testing are also discussed
- Each workshop is tailored to to specific language groups informed by the OPI quality control process



Minimal Annual Testing Requirement

- Minimal annual testing requirement:
 - Designed to equitably distribute workload, prevent tester burnout and enhance cadre norming in each language
 - Applies specifically to testers in the highest enrollment/most-frequently-tested DLIFLC language programs
 - Does not apply to low-enrollment language programs
 - Testers must test up to 70% of the average number of testing events per tester in their language each year
 - Testing events include elicited OPIs and third ratings
 - Testing averages are revised each year by language



The OPI Code of Conduct

- OPI testers sign a document and agree to:
 - Adhere strictly to official testing procedures
 - Use only the ILR descriptions for speaking and the rating factor grid to rate the performance of any test
 - Rate independently and not discuss with their partner
 - Never discuss the content of an OPI with anyone at any time
 - Never seek information pertaining to other OPIs
 - Notify PSD of any attempt to solicit information about a test, negotiate or influence ratings
 - Consult with PSD about any questions or concerns
 - Never bring a cell phone into the testing room
 - Attend Test Review sessions as required



OPI Tester Decertification

- Grounds for tester decertification include:
 - Tester misconduct
 - Consistent inability to conduct tests per established procedures
 - Consistent inability to rate according to the ILR
 - A pattern of justifiable examinee complaints or excessive retests
 - Ongoing/repeated non-availability to test as required
 - Demonstrated inability/unwillingness to cooperate with other testers
 - Unwillingness or inability to take feedback
 - Reduction in testing requirements
 - Active tester is moved into an administrative position



OPI Tester Decertification

- Documentation for decision to decertify an OPI tester
 - A decision to decertify an OPI tester is based on documented evidence of patterns of difficulty in testing and/or rating correctly, not on random or isolated errors
 - Testers who experience difficulties in elicitation or rating OPIs correctly are de-certified only if they fail to respond to remedial training
 - Testers who commit ethical or other serious conduct violations may be de-certified immediately.



OPI Tester Decertification

- Documentation for decision to decertify an OPI tester
 - To ensure all decisions are made fairly and on the basis of accurate information, the following documented aspects of tester performance are carefully reviewed:
 - OPI ratings
 - Response to tester support sessions
 - Response to annual re-certification/norming sessions
 - Third/fourth ratings conducted by a given tester
 - Third/fourth ratings conducted on a given tester's OPIs
 - Retests necessitated by a tester's errors/misconduct
 - Substantiated complaints by students/FPS applicants, etc.



OPI Tester Decertification

- Temporary decertification and leaves of absence
 - Occasionally, OPI testers may, with legitimate justification, request a temporary, short-term leave of absence from conducting OPIs
 - The following are the most justifiable reasons to grant a temporary leave of absence as an OPI tester:
 - Temporary duty (TDY) assignment for three to six months duration
 - Exigencies of mission requiring a temporary re-assignment, detail or reprioritization of workload
 - Extended absence from work due to a severe health problem, critical family emergency and/or extended leave



OPI Relook and Score Resolution

Cases	Situations	Action
Splits across a major border	0+/1, 1+/2, 2+/3, 3+/4, 4+/5	Third rating
Splits in the following ranges	2/2+, 3/3+, 4/4+	Assign lower rating only
Graduation requirement cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Any 1/1- Any 1/1+ split- Intermediate course student lower than 2- Advanced course student lower than 2+- 97E student receiving lower than 2	Third rating
Relooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- If speaking score is higher than listening score by one skill level or more- Written requests by examinee endorsed by service unit commander	PSD Dean will make decision on whether to third rate
Retests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- If testers failed to elicit a ratable sample- If a test did not record and the recording is needed for resolution- Special problems on a case-by-case basis	PSD Dean will make decision on retest



Current and Planned PSD Projects

- Best practices in OPI dialect assessment
- Alternative methods of assessing speaking proficiency at levels 3+ and higher
- Collaborative tester and tester trainer norming with ACTFL
- Explanatory notes for the ILR speaking guidelines
- Produce all new set of training videos in English and key languages



The OPI Conducted at DLIFLC



Overview of the OPI

- **General overview**
- **Student OPI testing at DLIFLC**
- **The OPI assessment process**
- **OPI rating criteria**



The OPI –General Overview

The OPI

- is a global test that goes beyond course content and measures ability to handle real-world tasks by simulating them
- measures language proficiency holistically by determining patterns of strengths and weaknesses
- is an interactive and adaptive test
- is based on a set of assessment criteria and its structure is standardized



The OPI –General Overview

The OPI

- is a *valid and reliable* assessment of spoken language ability when the following conditions are met:
 - The sample obtained accurately reflects an examinee's proficiency and is ratable
 - The rating is based on the ILR criteria



The Purpose of OPI Testing

- **The twofold purpose of OPI testing is to find out what the examinee**
 - **can do in the TL**
 - **cannot do in the TL**



What the OPI Measures

- **The OPI measures general spoken language proficiency, which includes**
 - **daily life transactions**
 - **social interactions**
 - **performance of work-related and professional tasks**



What the OPI does NOT Measure

- **The OPI does NOT measure**
 - The ability to perform job-specific tasks
 - The specific knowledge of an individual
 - Discrete points, language-specific knowledge
 - Achievement
 - The education level of an individual



OPI Test Modalities

- **Face-to-face**
- **Telephone**
- **Video Teleconferencing**



OPI Content and Activities

- Each OPI consists of
 - **Conversation** on a **range of topics** which are familiar and, in some cases, relatively unfamiliar to the examinee (according to appropriate ILR level descriptions)
 - **Role-plays** in the **target-culture setting** which require language that cannot easily be elicited in a conversation
 - The performance of **specific tasks**



The OPI Structure

Four Phases and Three Perspectives

Four Phases	Warm-Up	Level Checks	Probes	Wind-Down
Three Perspectives	<i>Iterative Process</i>			
Psychological	Relaxes examinee	Proves to examinee what she can do	Proves to examinee what she cannot do	Returns examinee to level at which she is comfortable
Linguistic	Reacquaints examinee with language, if necessary	Checks for tasks and content that examinee handles with greatest accuracy	Checks for tasks and content which examinee performs with least accuracy	Chance to check that the iterative process is complete
Evaluative	Provides testers with preliminary indication of level of examinee's speaking skills	Finds the examinee's speaking level	Finds level at which examinee can no longer speak accurately	No new information for evaluation



The Core of the OPI Required Tasks by Level

Level 0+	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<p><u>10 Subject Areas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Basic Objects ● Months ● Basic Colors ● Time ● Clothing ● Weather ● Date ● Weekdays ● Family Members ● Year 	<p>1. Simple Short Conversation</p> <p>2. Role Play</p> <p>3. Examinee Ask Qs</p>	<p>1. Past Narration</p> <p>2. Present Narration</p> <p>3. Future Narration</p> <p>4. Description</p> <p>5. Instruction</p> <p>6. Reporting Facts</p> <p>7. Role Play +C</p>	<p>1. Support Opinion</p> <p>2. Abstract Topic</p> <p>3. Hypotheses</p> <p>4. Role Play (Unfamiliar Situation)</p>	<p>1. Support Opinion</p> <p>2. Abstract Topic</p> <p>3. Hypotheses</p> <p>4. Role Play (Formal)</p> <p>5. Role Play (Informal)</p>	<p><u>All L 4 Tasks</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+</p> <p>1. High Level Colloquialisms</p> <p>2. (Information Pass)</p>



OPI Assessment Criteria

- **Task**
 - What can the person do in the language?
- **Content/Context**
 - On which topics and in what settings?
- **Accuracy**
 - How well can they do it?
- **Text Type**
 - How much language is produced and in what type?



ILR Base Levels

Base Levels: 0 - 5

- **Examinees at a given base level perform ALL the tasks required by that level and minimally meet the criteria of that level**



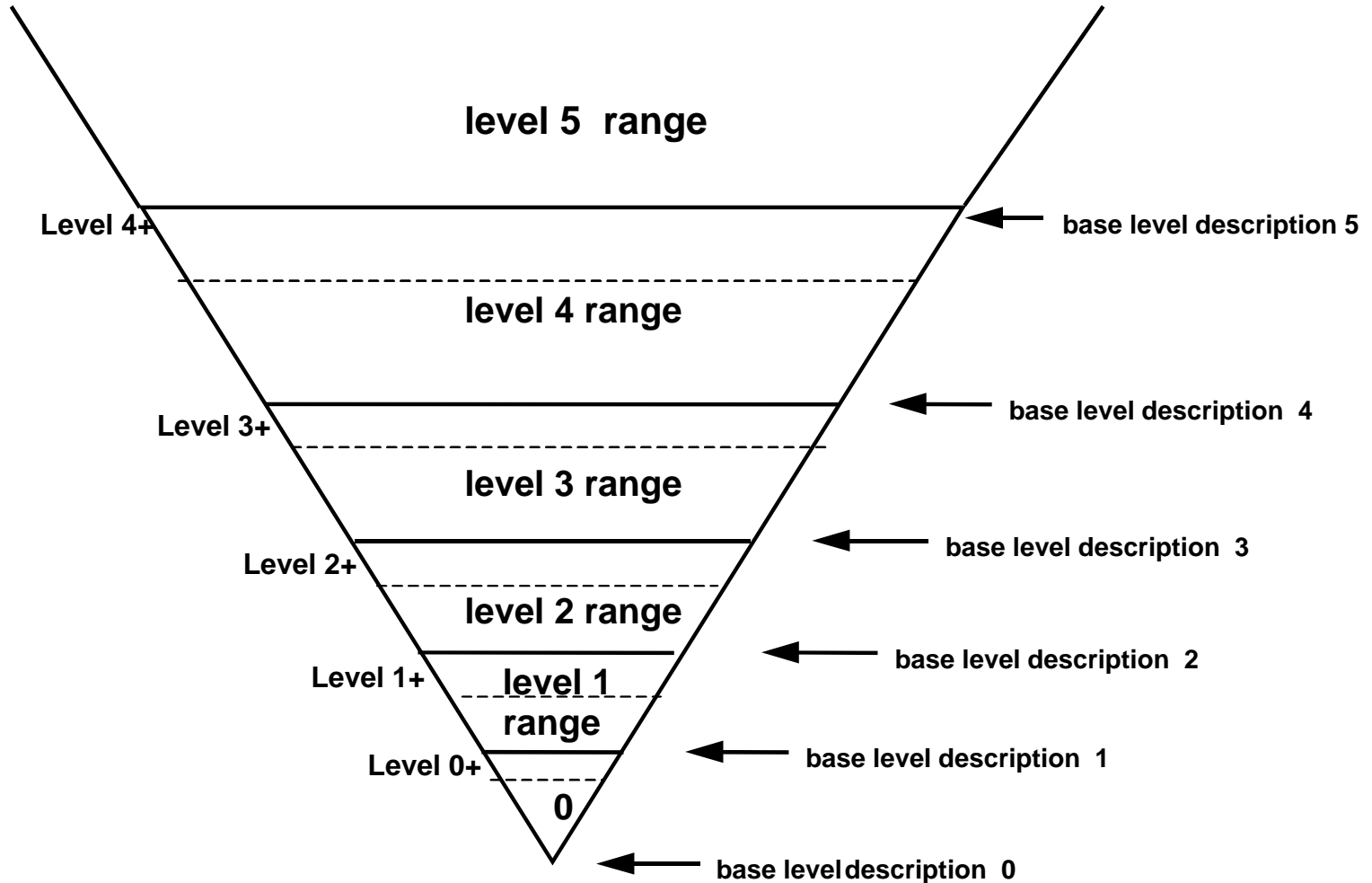
ILR Plus Levels

Plus Levels: 0+ - 4+

- **Examinee performs with a significant increase in proficiency over the base level**
- **Shows evidence of proficiency at the next higher base level, but cannot sustain proficiency at that level**

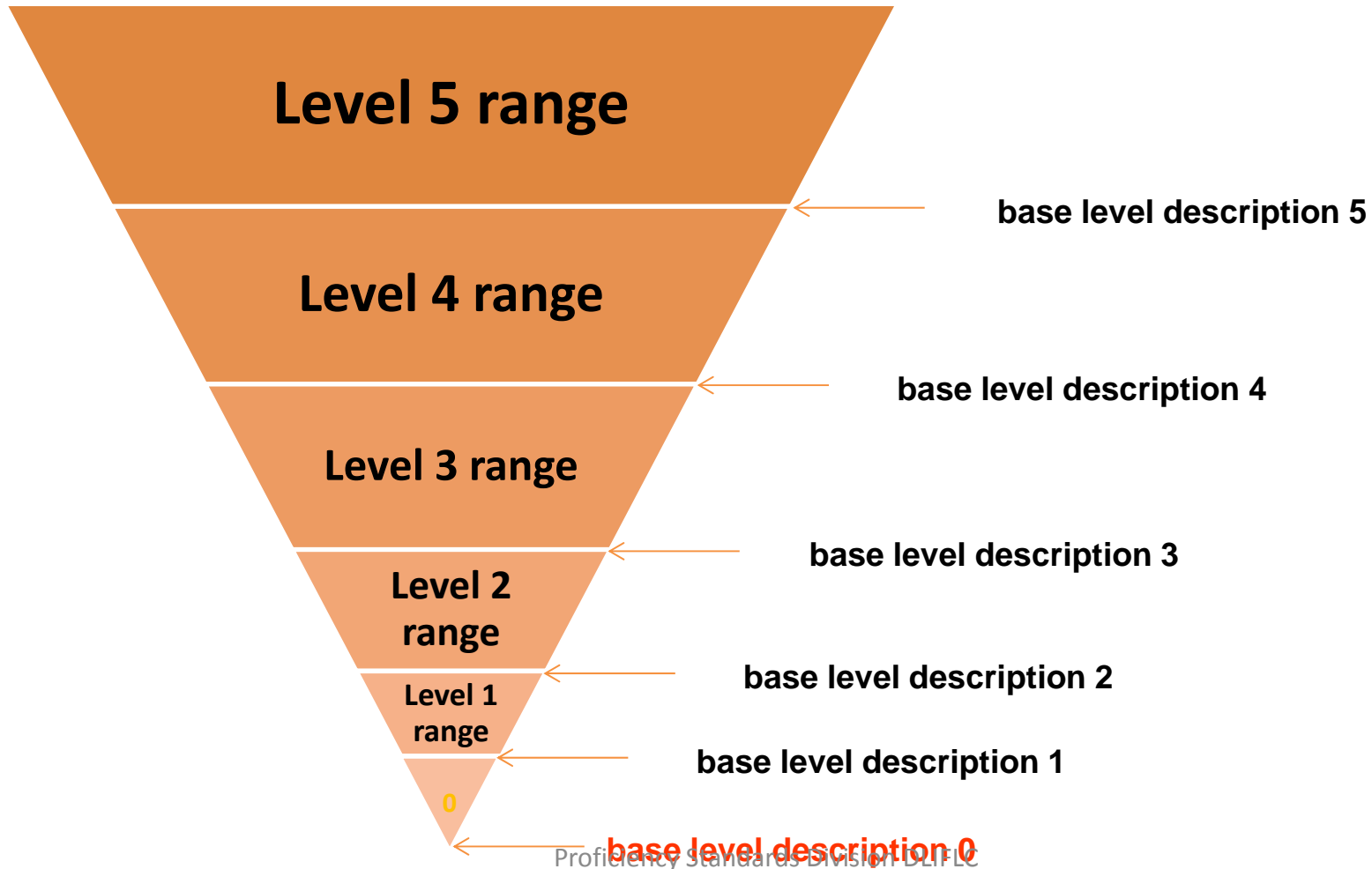


Graphic Depiction of Base Levels and Plus Levels



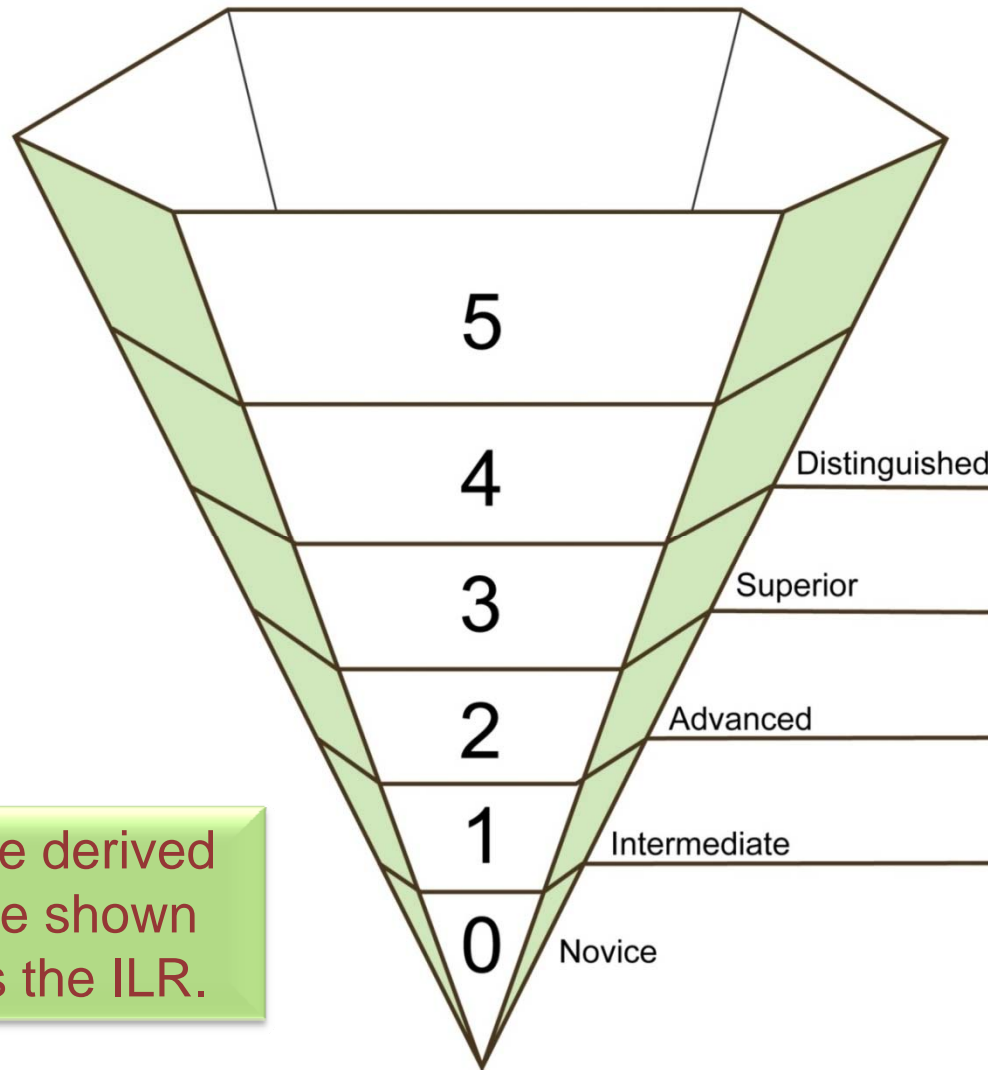


Increase in Breadth and Depth across ILR Levels





Relationship Between the ILR and ACTFL Scales



ACTFL uses the derived academic scale shown here as well as the ILR.



The OPI Assessment Process

Tester
elicitation

Examinee
response

Tester
assessment

Examinee
rating



The rate-as-you-go process



Example OPIs Levels 1-3

- **OPI topic domains at each level**
- **The ILR Skill Level Descriptions - Speaking**
- **OPI basic rating factors (Levels 0+ to 3)**
 - **What a speaker can do**
 - **How well a speaker can do it**



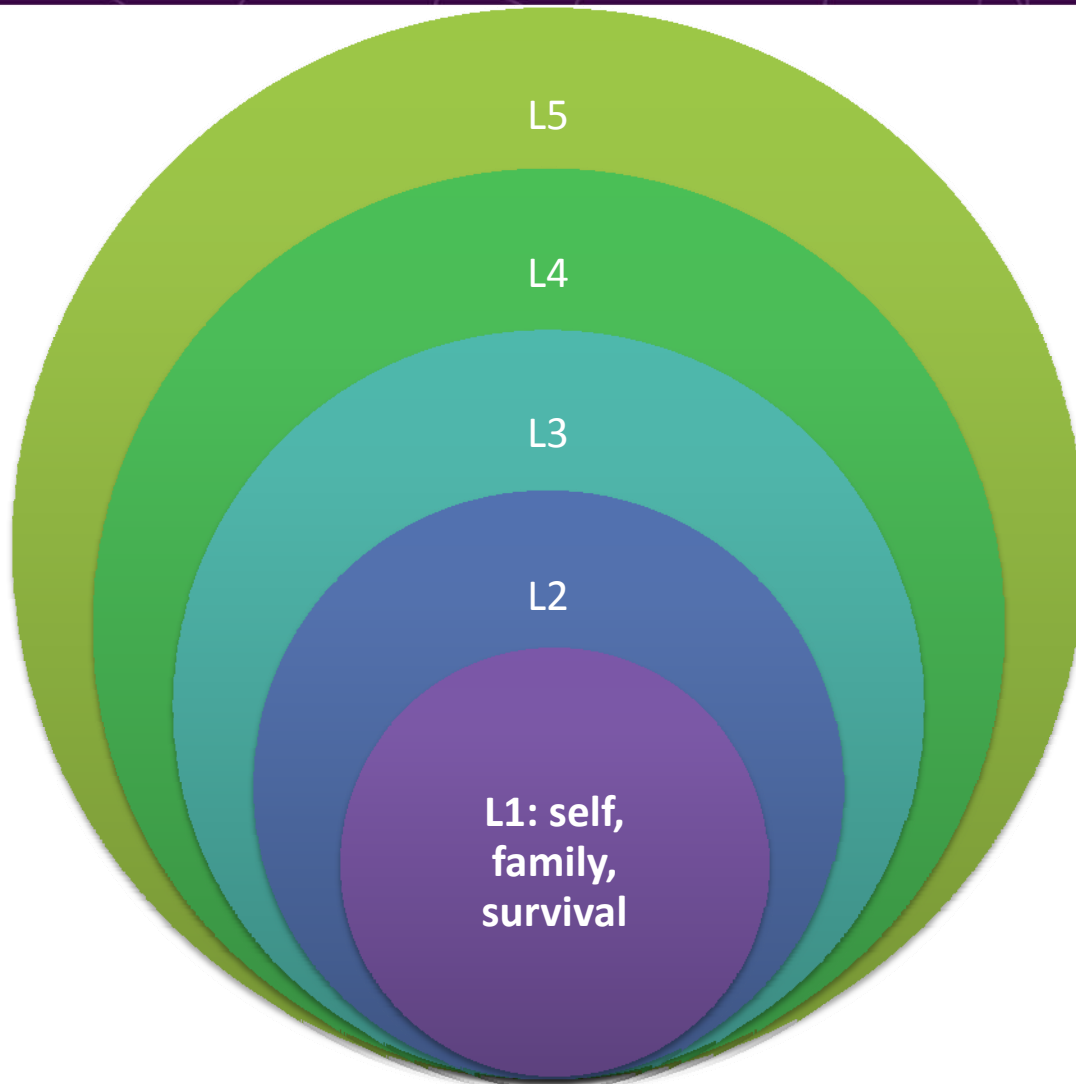
OPI Topic Domains at Each Level

**The ever-
widening circle
of language
proficiency**



DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

The Ever-Widening Circle of Language Proficiency





DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

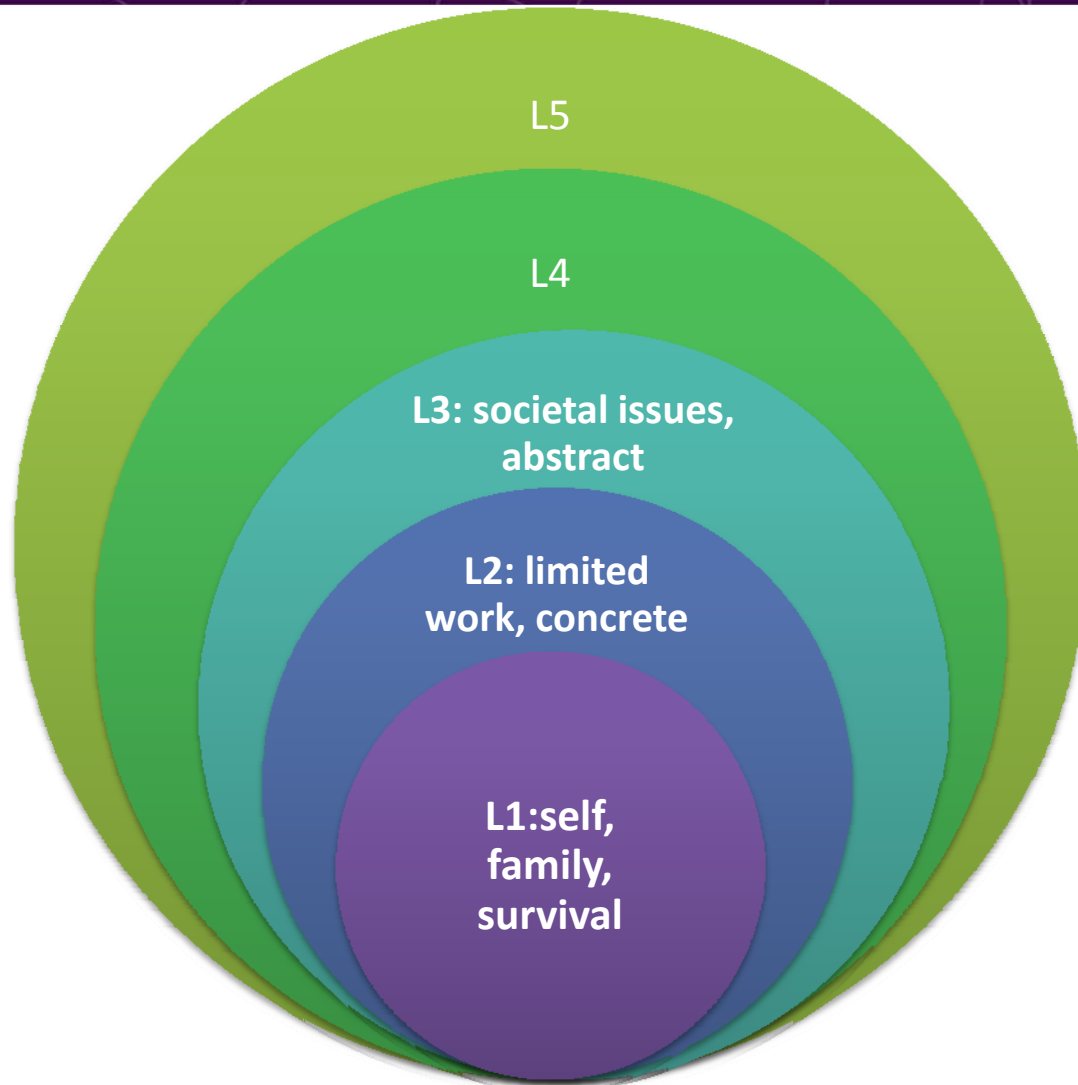
The Ever-Widening Circle of Language Proficiency





DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

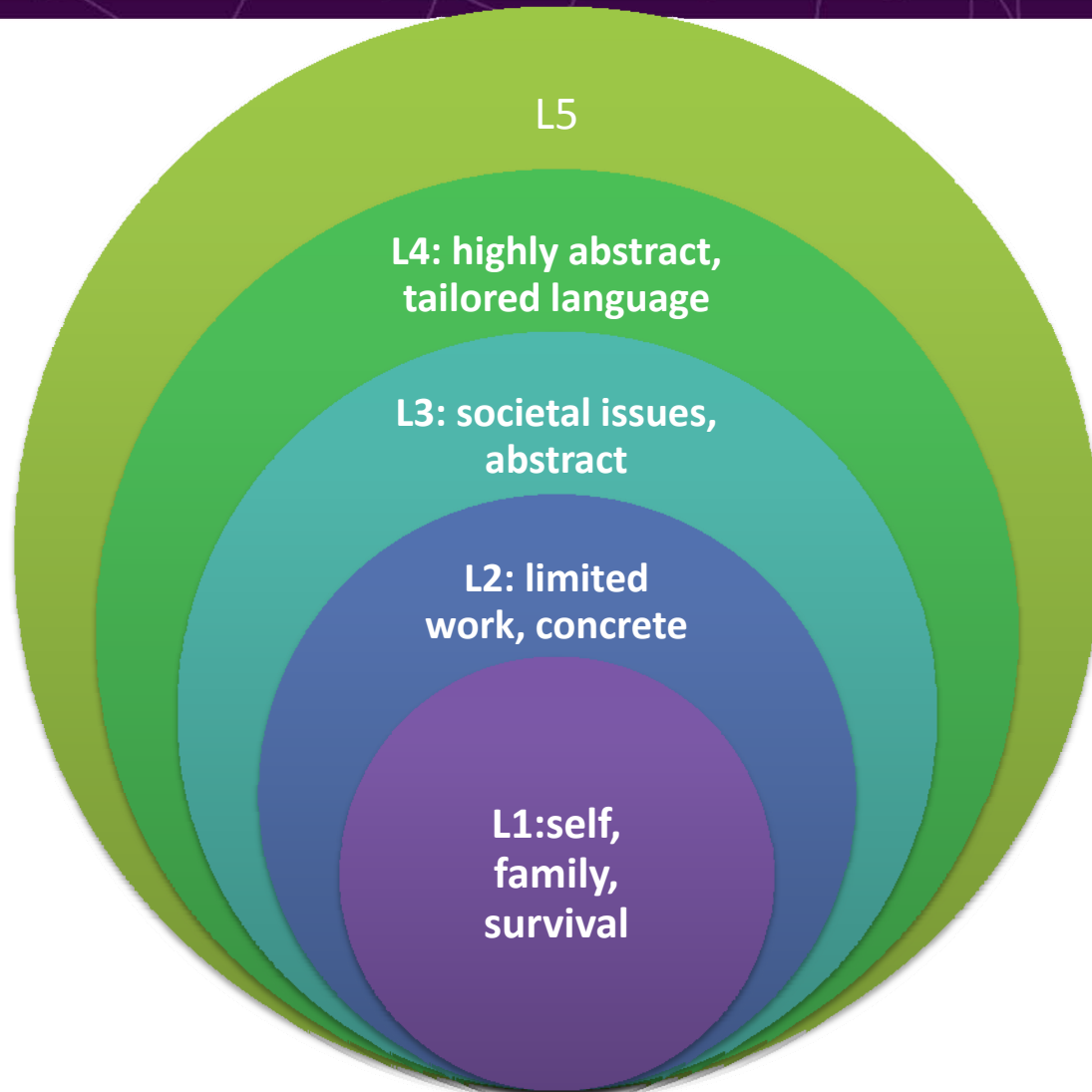
The Ever-Widening Circle of Language Proficiency





DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

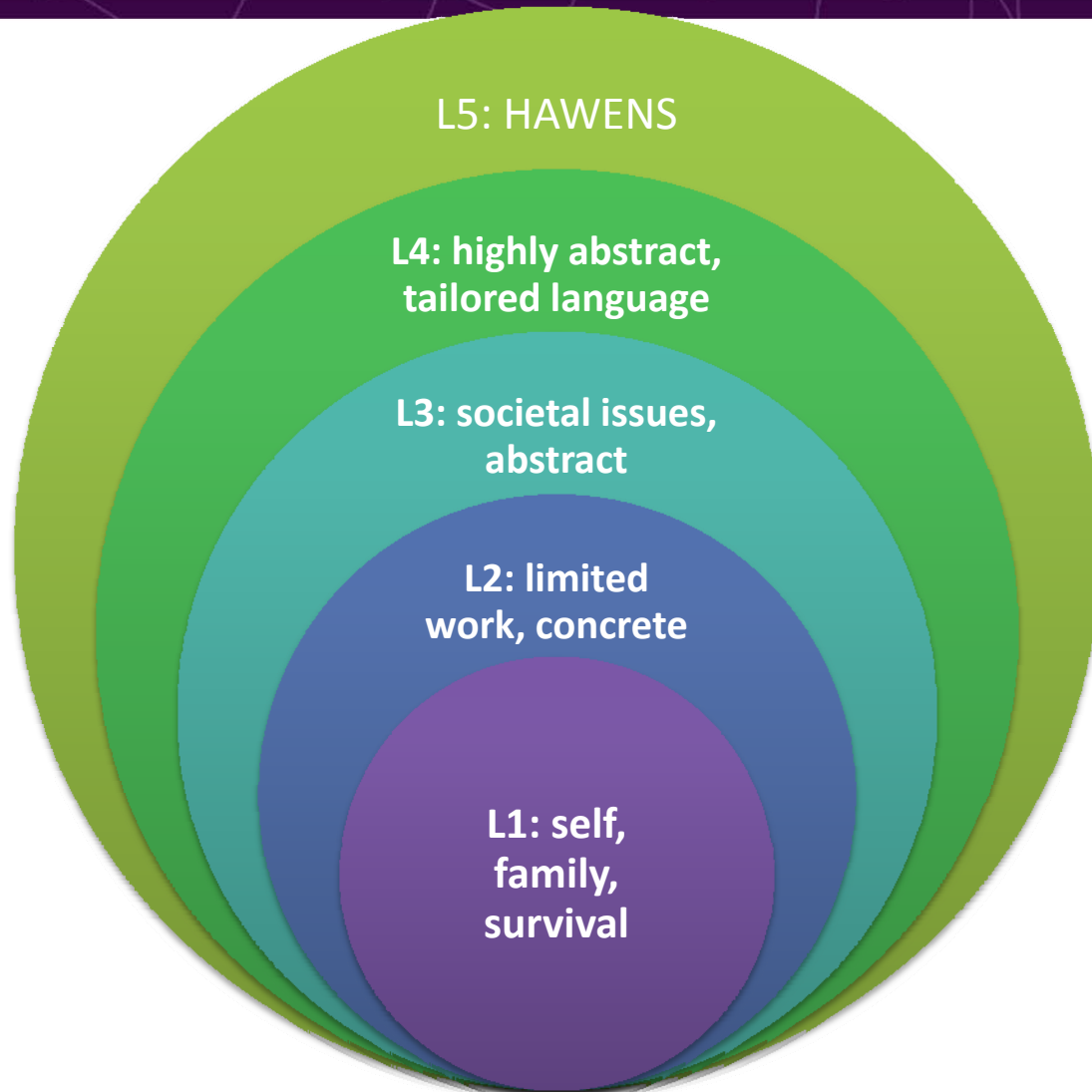
The Ever-Widening Circle of Language Proficiency





DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

The Ever-Widening Circle of Language Proficiency





The ILR Skill-Level Descriptions

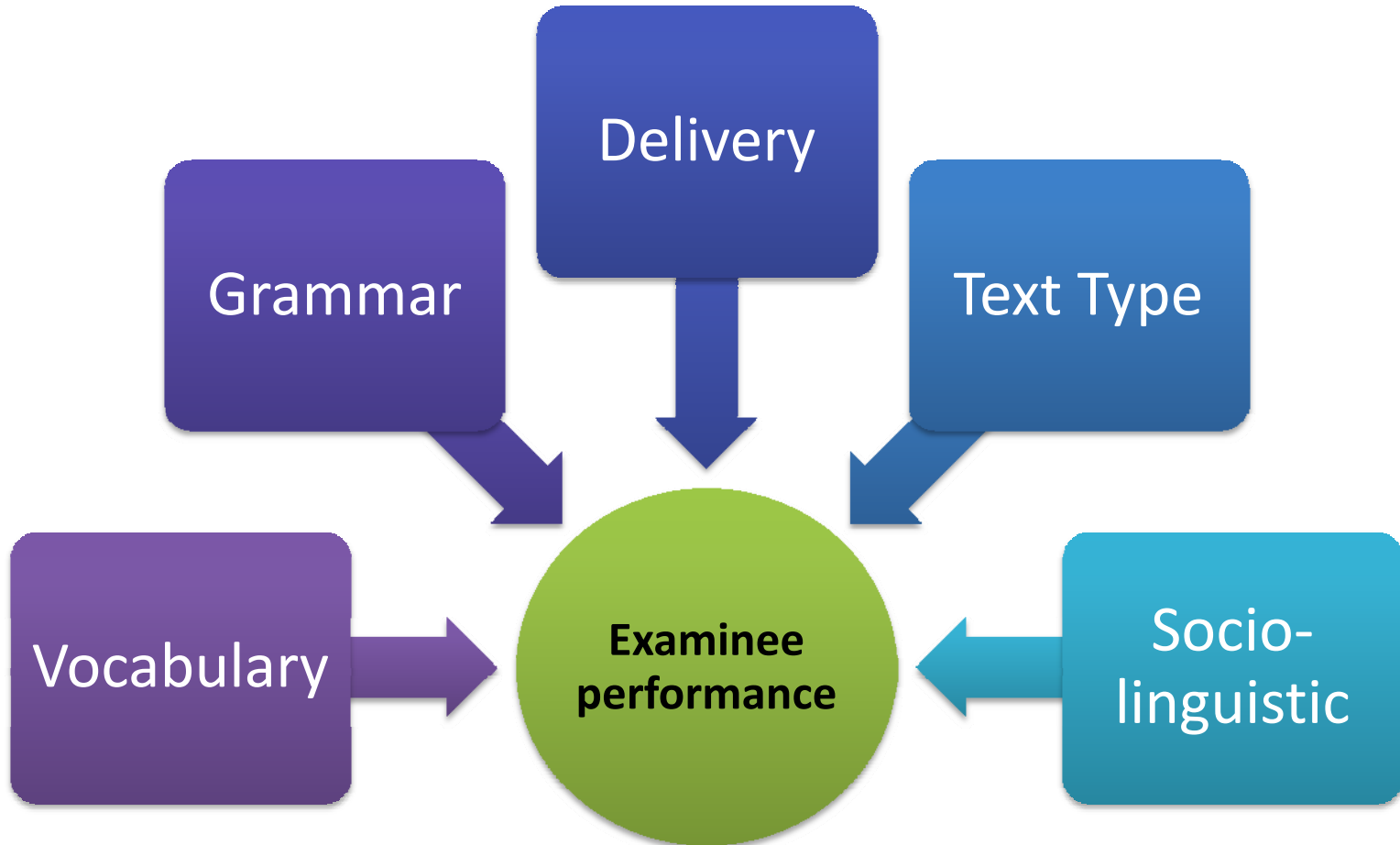
Interagency Language Roundtable Language Skill Level Descriptions

<http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale2.htm>





OPI Basic Rating Factors





Hypothesized Relative Contribution Model

- **Level 5:** *Delivery* is that of a highly articulate, well-educated native speaker (all factors line up equally)
- **Level 4:** Emphasis is on *sociolinguistic variation* and *appropriateness*
- **Level 3:** *Structures* are controlled
- **Level 2:** *Text type* is minimally cohesive
- **Level 1:** *Vocabulary* is sufficient for simple conversations on familiar topics
- **Level 0+:** Word/phrases are limited to rehearsed utterances to satisfy immediate needs



Level 0

- **No Functional Ability in the language**
 - Occasional isolated words, but cannot use them in a functional manner
 - Unable to communicate with the language



What a Level 0+ Can Do

A Level 0+ can

- **communicate with rehearsed and memorized utterances**
- **cover limited topics on immediate survival needs including food, colors, numbers, clothing, weather, days of the week, etc.**



How Well a Level 0+ Speaks

A Level 0+ speaks with

- lists of simple fixed rehearsed words or phrases
- memorized utterances
- faulty stress, intonation and tone



What a Level 1 Can Do

A Level 1 can

- maintain very simple face-to-face conversations to satisfy simple daily needs
- ask for help and to verify comprehension of native speech
- ask and answer simple questions



Level 1 Tasks

- **Simple short conversation**
- **Role play**
- **Examinee ask questions**



How Well a Level 1 Speaks

A Level 1 speaks with

- very limited vocabulary to survive immediate personal and accommodation needs including daily routine
- random or severely limited structural accuracy, time concepts vague
- great difficulty
- discrete sentences



What a Level 2 Can Do

A Level 2 can

- satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements
- describe people, places, and things
- narrate in present, past and future time frames
- give instructions or directions
- deal with non-routine daily situations



Level 2 Tasks

- **Narration in the past**
- **Narration in the present**
- **Narration in the future**
- **Description**
- **Directions/Instructions**
- **Role play with complication**
- **Reporting facts**



How Well a Level 2 Speaks

A Level 2 speaks with

- sufficient vocabulary to talk about high-frequency concrete topics including current events
- simple structure and basic grammatical relations typically controlled (more often than not)
- confidence
- minimally cohesive utterances



What a Level 3 Can Do

A Level 3 can

- support opinions on practical, social and professional issues
- discuss societal issues, clarify points
- hypothesize or speculate on societal issues
- deal with unfamiliar situations and justify decisions



Level 3 Tasks

- **Support opinion**
- **Discuss abstract topics**
- **Hypothesize**
- **Deal with unfamiliar situations**



How Well a Level 3 Speaks

A Level 3 speaks with

- broad vocabulary on practical, social and professional topics, conveying abstract concepts
- structural devices flexibly and elaborately but with noticeable imperfections
- extended discourse

And

- a level 3 speaks readily, fills pauses suitably and uses cultural references



Q&A

Discussion