

Making “good” better: Approaches to refresher training

**Johnathan Gajdos, Ph.D.
DLI-Washington Office**



DLIFLC
DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER



Disclaimer

This presentation represents the personal views of the author and not the official position of the Defense Language Institute, Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.



Agenda

- Approaches to conducting and assessing refresher and enhancement training
- Challenges in refresher training
- Use of refresher training to reach higher levels
- Shaping initial acquisition curricula to prepare students for refresher training

- Three hypothetical scenarios



DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

Why care?

- Bridge to higher levels
- Time and money
- Readiness



Background

- Varying training requirements
 - Proficiency levels
 - Training length
 - Languages
- Contracted instruction
- Average shorter duration than initial acquisition
 - Going beyond just returning to prior state



The starting point

- Generally “good” in some areas
 - But what is “good”?
 - Where are the strengths?
 - Where are the weaknesses?
- General proficiency (e.g., lexicon, grammar, fluency, text type)
- Topical (e.g., weaknesses in one or more topical domains or professional areas)
- And what are the goals?



Approaches to conducting and assessing refresher and enhancement training

- Tailored requirement
 - Proficiency
 - Gaps
 - Background
 - Assignment
- Assessing curricular proposals
- Assessing instructor qualifications



Four Challenges in refresher training

1. Limited knowledge of student background
 - Mitigation: require current proficiency scores (re-test), implement self-assessment questionnaires, allow syllabus finalization after training begins
2. Assessing refresher training success/failure
 - DLPT/OPI scores may not move the needle despite progress
 - Mitigation: pre- and post-course diagnostic assessment; targeted progress reports/student self-assessment



Four Challenges in refresher training, Continued

3. Finding appropriate course materials

- Mitigation: focus on current, authentic materials; use of monolingual dictionaries; identify grammar resources for advanced learners; use corpora/web as corpus for discovery

4. Developing instructor capabilities

- Mitigation: selecting experienced instructors; pairing instructors; observing classes early on



Use of refresher training to reach higher levels

- Bridge the gap between a “Plus” level student and the full performance level.
- Bring a solid performer at a base level to the next higher plus level.
- Set the stage for post-course autonomous learning.
 - Resources/materials
 - Self-assessment skills
 - Individual learning plan
 - Maximizing TL use in next assignment



Shaping initial acquisition curricula to prepare students for refresher training

- Re-imagining initial acquisition courses as the **starting point** for language use.
- Foster long-range retention (i.e., building blocks to mastery)
- Develop metalinguistic knowledge (i.e., knowing about the language and how it works)
- Principled approach to vocabulary (e.g., teaching words with high frequency, affixes/particles with meaning-altering uses, and discourse markers)
- Introduce autonomous sustainment resources and techniques



QUESTIONS?

AND/OR

**YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES WITH OR
SUGGESTIONS FOR REFRESHER
TRAINING**



Scenario 1

- Career FAO, senior officer
- Learned French 15 years ago
- Used his French a lot on his first assignment, but has since been working mostly with and in non-Francophone Africa
- Tests at 2/3 (L/R). Last OPI was 10 years ago, a 2.
- Scheduled for 10 week French refresher.
- How should this training be approached?
- What are the likely goals and needs of this student?



Scenario 2

- A young officer in the pipeline to become a qualified Foreign Area Officer.
- 110 DLAB
- 47-week Polish course
- How could her training set her up for future success at higher level proficiencies?
- How can her curriculum prepare her for future refresher training?



Scenario 3

- Career linguist.
- Urdu, Dari, Pashto, Farsi: all 3/3; MSA 2/2.
- No information on OPI scores.
- Scheduled for 6-week Urdu refresher.
- How should this training be approached?
- What are the potential challenges?
- How might this student go from good to great?