Language Assessment in Quality Assurance

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Preamble

Effective language teaching in which students achieve a worthwhile level of practical language skills is demanding of time and intensity of teaching and hence of teaching costs. In virtually all countries in the world, the learning of at least one or two languages in addition to the child's own first language is regarded as educationally, culturally, socially and economically highly desirable. Yet the desired benefits cannot come and the high cost of language education cannot be justified unless students actually achieve useful levels of language proficiency. In Australia, the contrast in outcomes between the adult migrant English program and the teaching of languages other than English in the education system demonstrates that useful levels of language proficiency cannot be achieved without high quality programmes that are relevant to the needs of the society and the students and are taught effectively by high quality teachers. Recent Australian experience as argued by the Australian Language and Literacy Council in its recent publication on language teacher quality and supply [ALLC 1996] demonstrates that it is futile in terms of reaping the benefits that society wants from the language education programme merely to place large numbers of students in language classes unless steps are also taken to ensure the quality of their experience. That quality depends, in large part, on the quality of the language that the students experience, hence, on the quality of the language teachers as the principal if not sole source of the language, and on the quality of the learning activities that the teacher generates for the learners to experience. Developments in applied linguistics in general but in language assessment in particular in recent decades provide means by which to assure the quality of the language learning experience that we provide to our students.

However, to no small extent, quality, like beauty, exists in the eyes of the beholder. Quality and quality assurance are relevant to all aspects of language policy-making, language-in-education planning and their implementation in language programmes and the different participants in each of these evaluate quality and manage quality assurance differently. For the treasurer and accountant, for example, economy and possibly cost-effectiveness determine quality; for the teacher, cooperativeness on the part of the students and attainment of the prescribed aims and immediate objectives of the course are important features, while students tend to value the relevance of the course to their

immediate and longer term interests and needs. Both overall and for each of the "players", quality and quality assurance are highly complex and variable issues with many interacting and sometimes fleeting variables. Possibly the one feature common to all the "players" in assessing the quality of language programmes is need, the extent to which the programme meets the needs that each player identifies as important to them. In this, language assessment is especially relevant as it identifies and measures need and assesses the extent to which course outcomes match the identified needs and hence programme goals: nevertheless, it is only one of the elements that enter into comprehensive quality assurance in a language education programme.

This paper will necessarily provide no more than a fairly cursory overview of the many issues in quality and its assurance to which language assessment is relevant. In doing so, it will consider the place of language assessment in quality assurance as it relates to the following key elements of language education:

- The society

- The teachers

- The students

- The programmes including the curriculum and syllabuses, materials, methodology, time allocations, and language assessment itself

The Society

In the model of language policy-making that the present writer uses [see Ingram 1994], the basic determinant of language policy is the needs of the society and of the individuals within it. Successive language policies in Australia have focussed on multicultural needs in the 1970s [Galbally Review 1978] and in the first formal national policy on languages in 1987 [Lo Bianco 1987]. Subsequently the principal focus has turned towards economic needs in the Australian Language and Literacy Policy in 1991 [DEET 1991] and the National Asian Languages/Studies Strategy for Australian schools in 1994 [COAG 1994]. It is common for language policy statements to express warm words about the value of language skills but, if these are not translated into firm proficiency goals, firm target student numbers, firm teacher supply proposals and appropriate curriculum reform, they are meaningless. They will remain meaningless while the goals of the course and how they relate to the society and individual needs remain vague and therefore unassessable. The Galbally review of multicultural policies in Australia in 1978 became the blueprint for cultural and social policy in the late 1970s and strongly supported the teaching and learning of languages. In particular, the report stated:

> *Every person should be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures.* [Galbally Review 1978: 4]

However, rather than language education increasing and improving over the next decade, student numbers plummeted and attainment levels remained abysmally low [see ALLC 1996 for commentary on language proficiency attainments]. The 1987 *National Policy on Languages* [Lo Bianco 1987], a major milestone in language policy development in Australia, and the Australian Language and Literacy Policy in 1991 [DEET 1991 and 1991a] were equally strong in the verbal support they gave to the value of language learning but they were equally deficient in specifying precise goals that provide a basis for implementation planning and

evaluation. The first significant attempt to be precise in the specification of goals in proficiency terms and target student numbers was the National Asian Languages/Studies Strategy for Australian Schools in 1994. However, this policy statement was deficient at the time and now, in implementation, because it grossly under-estimated the teacher supply needs and over-estimated the teacher education system's capacity to attract and train teachers of Asian languages.

There is little doubt that Australia has led the English-speaking world in systematic language policy-making but the examples just cited demonstrate how quality in language policy-making depends heavily on accurately and unambiguously identifying and specifying the society's needs for language skills, precisely specifying proficiency goals and target student numbers, systematically working through the corollary requirements for teacher supply and programme development and implementation, and continuously evaluating the success of the policy and its implementation in terms of those factors identified by the societal needs analysis and, not least, the student outcomes. The present writer has argued elsewhere for a more rigorous language policy-making model [Ingram 1994] but the starting point is the accurate specification of proficiency needs and goals in ways that modern approaches to language assessment, especially proficiency description and measurement, allow.

Much of what follows in the rest of this paper can be seen as relevant to quality assurance in the context of the society but here four specific but related issues will be examined: community needs, the need to add rigour (and hence quality) to the everyday assessments made of people's language skills, recognition of language skills, and the need for accredited language assessors.

Needs Analysis: If language policy-making is to be soundly based, the linguistic nature of the community, its resources and its needs and their geographical distribution must be firmly established. Developments in language proficiency assessment have provided the means by which this can readily be done. On the one hand, the Australian census has contained a language-use question for some time. However, the question has been very ambiguous and, for instance, it is highly probable that many homes where English is used for daily communication even though other languages are also known and used elsewhere would appear as monolingual. There is need at regular intervals for more informative and accurate surveys of community language resources and needs to be held. Thus, in the early 1980s, the Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) [Ingram and Wylie 1979/1985; Wylie and Ingram 1995] were used by teams of surveyors who went out into parts of major cities known to have a high level of non-English speaking background residents to asses the level of English skills there, and the corollary needs for ESL programs. The Australian Language and Literacy Council in 1992 together with AGB-McNair, a telephone polling company, used a simplified self-assessment version of the ASLPR administered by telephone to measure the extent of formally learned languages other than English in the Australian community, the proportion of people with a language other than English, and their levels of proficiency in those languages. Identifying quite precisely the level of language skills and matching that level against the skills that are identified as being needed provide a way of ensuring higher quality in language policy-making and language-in-education planning than can be achieved by policy-making and administrators relying on their "gut feeling" or the loudest voices from the community on which to identify need and set goals.

Recognising Language Skills: There is need, probably in most societies, for higher quality in the judgements that are routinely made about other peoples' language skills. At the individual level, decisions as to non-native speakers' language proficiencies are made every day and the educational, vocational, legal and social opportunities that these people have, often their entire future lives, rest on the outcome of that assessment. Very often, these judgements are made by wholly untrained people such as an employer interviewing applicants for a position or a young receptionist on the front desk of a vocational registration authority. Vollmer [1981] refers to the "distinct social function" that proficiency testing serves and recommends that testing not take place unless we can be sure of the validity and reliability of the test. However, the reality is that proficiency assessments occur every day in a multilingual society and testers and applied linguists have an obligation to try to ensure that they are carried out on as just and informed a basis as possible. Many nations outlaw discrimination on the basis of race, sex, age or culture but discrimina-tion on the basis of impressionistic, uninformed and inaccurate assessment of another person's language skills is no less discriminatory or pervasive.

In addition, if a society is genuine about valuing language skills to the extent where it pours millions of dollars into the language education budget, it would seem sensible (and more in keeping with the modern spirit of equity) for all language skills to be recognised, no matter where or how they were developed. At present, for example, many societies (including Australia) recognise, measure and accredit a person's language skills if they have been gained through the education system but native speakers who may well be at a higher proficiency level, receive scant attention. There is need for a system by which such people can have their language proficiency measured, certified, accredited and recognised for all those purposes for which accreditation through the school system is recognised (e.g., for employment and for entry to universities).

Accredited Language Assessors: Thus there is need for places and people with the skills needed to attest to a person's language proficiencies and, conversely, to assist industry and others to identify the skills they really and realistically require. No less, there is need for people to be trained with the skills to assist industry to identify its needs and to assess the skills of the employees. For such reasons, the Australian Language and Literacy Council recommended in *Speaking of Business* that a system of accredited language assessors be established (more or less analogous to the Australian system for the accreditation of interpreters and translators) which would ensure that industry could draw on appropriately trained personnel for the conduct of language audits, needs analyses and skills assessments and that speakers of a language could have their own language skills assessed at any time [ALLC 1994: 96-7]. The response from the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia to these needs has been to prepare and accredit a Graduate Certificate in Language Assessment that would be available to trained language teachers and to some categories of industry personnel with language skills and which would provide significant competence in language assessment, including not only language testing in general and language proficiency assessment in particular, but also in the conduct of language audits and needs analyses. It is hoped that some authority, perhaps Language Australia, might take steps to provide accreditation for graduates of such a program as accredited language assessors in the same way as persons with interpreting and translation training can become

accredited translators and interpreters. Such a proposal would go some way to making available more trained and certified personnel but there is also need, at least on an interim basis until more such personnel are available, for more centres to be available as reference points to which enterprises and individuals may turn to obtain assistance with language audits, needs analyses, and personal proficiency assessments.

In brief, the start to quality assurance in language programmes is to require that policy statements make use of the language assessment instruments available (especially proficiency scales) to make precise statements of proficiency goals and student numbers and to work the corollaries through into such issues as programme development and teacher quality and supply. In this, language assessment instruments, especially proficiency scales, have a major role to play and it is clear that language testing and language policy-making, which traditionally seem to have been considered disparate fields, are in fact complementary and language policy-making can benefit greatly from the application to it of some of the rigour that is found in modern approaches to language testing (especially proficiency and its assessment).

The Teachers

Probably the element of the language education system that has the greatest influence over quality and its assurance is the language teacher. Very often the language teacher is the sole source of the language for the students and teachers determine the sorts of learning activities in which the students engage. Quality in language education depends pre-eminently on the provision of high quality teachers and matching them numerically and in their distribution across the education system with the desired student numbers. Where the supply of high quality teachers fails to match the desired student numbers (as it does at present in Australia where there is an acute shortage of teachers of all languages, especially Asian languages [see ALLC 1996: Chapter 1], quality must plummet.

Language Competencies: In many systems, it was traditional to appoint almost anyone with some smattering of the language to teach it. Nowadays, however, the means are available through developments in language assessment to be able to identify and specify the essential skills that language teachers require. In Britain and Australia in recent years, there has been much interest in the specification of vocational competencies, the identification of the sorts of tasks people in particular jobs undertake and the skills, attitudes and other abilities they require to carry them out [for further discussion of vocational competencies, see Ingram 1996a]. A project in the Language Testing and Curriculum Centre in the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages at Griffith University in 1995 led to the specification of minimum language teacher competencies in two areas: language proficiency and professional knowledge and skills. These competency specifications provide a benchmark for measuring the minimum desirable skills that a language teacher should have and provide a minimum target for pre-service and upgrading or compensatory in-service teacher education programmes. The specifications could be extended to provide additional sets of specifications for language teachers in a range of other positions including advanced skills teachers, departmental heads, advisers, regional coordinators and so on.

The language competencies are presented in the form of a partial version of the Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) designed specifically for second or foreign

language teachers [Wylie and Ingram 1995]. Unlike the general proficiency version of the ASLPR which describes the proficiency span from zero to native-like, the teacher version goes only from ASLPR 2 (Basic Social Proficiency) to 5 (native-like proficiency) since the authors considered that persons with proficiency levels below 2 should not be permitted to teach. Each descriptor in each of the four macroskills, describes language behaviour observed at that level of proficiency and provides a list of the tasks that a language teacher must undertake in the target language and reflects the roles and activities of language teachers and their capacities at each level. These tasks include classroom tasks, everyday social and transactional tasks, and, at the higher levels, the tasks that occur in professional development contexts. Excerpts from the ASLPR for Second Language Teachers are shown in Appendix Two while further information on the ASLPR is provided in Appendix One.

The Australian Language and Literacy Council [1996: Chapters 5 and 6] recommended ASLPR 4 in each macroskill as the desirable minimum level for language teachers but acknowledged that, in the Australian context of acute under-supply of language teachers, ASLPR 3 would have to be accepted for the foreseeable future and even then would exceed the proficiency of the great majority of Australian language teachers. The Council provides the following justification for accepting ASLPR 3 as the absolute minimum:

> *The scale indicates that teachers at Level 3 have sufficient language to provide a sound model, to be able to adapt their language to suit various contexts, and to use the language spontaneously and creatively. Any lower proficiency level falls below the minimum skills required to carry out the*

tasks that fall to a language teacher - for example, teachers being able to read and write sufficiently fluently that they can read general and professional works for pleasure and for professional development. It makes eminent sense that teachers of languages should be able to maintain correspondence with colleagues in their language. More demanding specialist programs, such as immersion and vocational courses, require higher levels of proficiency: this more specialised use of language is recognised in the scale at Level 4...This scale indicates that courses requiring the highest levels of proficiency (e.g., literature or media studies at tertiary level) require teachers at Level 5 (near-native proficiency). [ALLC 1996: 148 - 149]

Professional Competencies: The minimum competencies required by language teachers also include professional skills, knowledge and attitudes. The Griffith University project broke these down into five broad areas or units of competence covering knowledge, tasks involved in actual classroom practice, and interpersonal skills and attitudes. Within each of these, further elements of competence were identified, allowing for a broad categorisation of the area of competence and clarification of what is involved in each area. Each element of the competency specification is essentially a broad description indicating the properties of the minimum performance expected of language teachers. They are further elaborated and clarified by the addition of "cues" or concrete referents that exemplify activities or attributes that illustrate the competency. The areas and elements of competence identified as providing the minimum competency standards for second language teachers are shown below:

AREA OF COMPETENCE 1: USING AND DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES.

ELEMENTS:

i) Use of the LOTE
The teacher communicates effectively in the LOTE through listening, speaking, reading and writing.

ii) Knowledge about the LOTE
The teacher has an explicit knowledge of the LOTE's linguistic, sociolinguistic and discoursal features.

iii) Cross-Cultural Values
The teacher models and encourages favourable cross-cultural attitudes and behaviours.

iv) Cultural Understandings
The teacher displays sensitivity to and some knowledge of a culture(s) associated with the LOTE and understands how the values and world view are expressed through the language.

v) Goals of LOTE Learning
The teacher has some appreciation of the wider educational goals of LOTE learning.

vi) Understandings about Learning
The teacher has some understanding of how students learn at different stages.

vii) Understandings about Second/ Foreign Language Learning
The teacher has some understanding of how second/foreign languages are learned.

viii) Understandings about Language Teaching Methodologies
The teacher has some understanding of the principles of language teaching methodological approaches and uses language teaching processes appropriate to the learning goals.

ix) Ethical and Legal Requirements
The teacher operates from an appropriate ethical position and within the framework of law and regulation affecting teachers' work.

AREA OF COMPETENCE 2: COMMUNICATING, INTERACTING AND WORKING WITH STUDENTS AND OTHERS.

ELEMENTS:

i) Communication with Students
The teacher communicates effectively with students.

ii) Responding to Individuals
The teacher recognises and makes some responses to individual needs and differences.

iii) Managing Behaviour
The teacher consistently models and encourages positive behaviour.

iv) Working in Teams
The teacher works effectively with teachers, ancillary staff and others in groups and teams.

v) Developing Professional and Community Contacts.
The teacher values communication with school or institution support staff, the profession and with the wider community, including the LOTE speaking community.

AREA OF COMPETENCE 3: PLANNING AND MANAGING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

ELEMENTS:

i) Planning Courses and Units

The teacher plans purposeful learning programs that aim for the outcome of fluent and accurate student communica-tion in the LOTE, cultural awareness and sensitivity, and other learning outcomes in accordance with specific curriculum requirements.

ii) Planning for Specific Groups of Learners

During planning, the teacher chooses language content and language teaching approaches appropriate to student development and learning and to the interactive nature of language.

iii) Implementing Language Programs

The teacher implements effective language programs which motivate and engage learners.

iv) Responding Flexibly

The teacher demonstrates some awareness of the need for flexibility and responsiveness.

v) Fostering Learning Skills

The teacher demonstrates some awareness of the need to foster independent and cooperative learning.

AREA OF COMPETENCE 4: MONITORING AND ASSESSING STUDENT PROGRESS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

ELEMENTS:

i) Understandings about Assessment

The teacher has some understanding of the educational basis and nature and role of assessment in teaching of LOTE.

ii) Assessing LOTE Learning

The teacher uses effective assessment strategies that take account of the relationships between the objectives of LOTE teaching, learning and assessment.

AREA OF COMPETENCE 5: REFLECTING, EVALUATING AND PLANNING FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

ELEMENTS:

i) Reflecting on Practice

The teacher critically reflects on his/her own practice on a regular basis to improve the quality of LOTE teaching and learning programs.

ii) Developing as a Professional

The teacher values and takes some opportunities to develop her/his own LOTE proficiency, cultural awareness and pedagogic knowledge and to critically consider LOTE initiatives.

These extracts, re-produced from ALLC 1996: 151 - 153, were summarised from Commins 1995.

Clearly the development of competency specifications for language teachers can make a major contribution to quality assurance. They provide a rigorous way in which to identify, target and assess the minimum skills that language teachers require in order to provide

high quality language programmes. The Australian Language and Literacy Council further elaborated the needs of language teachers and the basic requirements that pre-service and on-going professional development programmes must target. They have clear implications, in order to be assessable, for the development of assessment instruments that go beyond language proficiency to include such areas as cross-cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, professional attitudes, and knowledge of the sciences that underpin applied linguistics and language education. The Council states that the basic requirements that teacher education programmes must fulfil include:

- *Nationally agreed minimum vocational competencies are required as the minimum goals for preservice language teacher education programs...*

- *Understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of language teaching and hence*
    - *knowledge of how language is learned...*

    - *knowledge of the theory of language (hence general and theoretical linguistics...)*

    - *specific knowledge of the linguistic system of the target language...*

    - *knowledge of the basic principles of language teaching methodology...*

- *Knowledge and understanding of the target culture.*

- *Cross-cultural attitudes favourable to life and teaching in a racially, culturally and linguistically diverse society and world.*

- *Practical ability...*

- *Understanding of the actual and potential role of languages and language education...*

- *Ability to reflect rationally...*

- *Commitment to, and the necessary knowledge and skills to enable on-going professional self-development.*

- *Commitment to their profession and its advancement...*[ALLC 1996: 159].

Not all of these basic requirements of teacher education programmes are particularly relevant to language assessment but *commitment to, and the necessary knowledge and skills to enable on-going professional self-development* is and emphasises the importance of teachers having access to valid, reliable and usable proficiency self-assessment scales. If language teachers or other language learners are to go on developing their language, they need both to have knowledge of how to go about autonomously developing their language skills and, as an essential part of doing so, they need to have access to a practically useful, valid and reliable proficiency self-assessment instrument with which to monitor their on-going progress and that can be used to guide their future learning activities and on-going development. Wylie and Ingram (especially Elaine Wylie) have produced a number of different self-assessment forms of the ASLPR including very simple versions for use by the general public, computer-based versions in English and Portuguese, and more

sophisticated versions intended for use by language teachers.

The Students

Ultimately most of what is said about quality assurance in the context of the society, the teachers and the programmes is appropriate to students and will not be repeated here. Of particular relevance to students is the extent to which the language programme identifies and responds to their immediate and long-term needs whether those needs are represented in appropriate long-term goals and immediate objectives or in terms of effective language input and a manageable learning experience. Equally salient needs that influence the quality of the programme include appropriateness of the teaching and learning materials used and the extent to which they match the learners' stage of development and the overall value placed on the skills that the students are developing.

Needs and Goals: The identification of student needs and the setting of long-term and immediate goals raise several issues to which language assessment is relevant. As was noted in relation to the needs of society, language assessment and, in particular, the use of proficiency scales enable the use to which the student will put their language skills to be matched with specifically stated proficiency goals, both in terms of general proficiency and in terms of any special purpose needs the students may have. In addition, however, students have immediate learning needs, to meet which the language input must be relevant to the learners' stage of development and responsive to the deficiencies or limitations in that development. Developmentally based proficiency scales such as the ASLPR not only indicate the learners' proficiency and stage of development but, since they focus on language tasks and how they can be carried out (i.e. on

the language behaviour in which learners can engage at any stage), they can also be used to identify what materials and activities are appropriate for learners. Thus, for instance, it is clear from the ASLPR that a minimum proficiency of ASLPR R:3 is necessary before literary appreciation is linguistically possible and this throws into question the appropriateness of the practice formerly common in language programmes of introducing fine literature (which necessarily entails complex and abnormal use of language) at very early stages in a language programme. It is possible, using a developmentally based proficiency scale to classify teaching materials (including library materials) according to the proficiency level of the students to whom they are relevant and this facilitates the matching of materials with learners' immediate language needs.

Streaming: One aspect of ensuring manageable and appropriate language input to students is the streaming of students into language classes. Commonly, proficiency is seen as the basis for streaming and, for instance, in the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching at Griffith University, the in-coming English language students are assessed on the ASLPR and are streamed into broad levels that match ASLPR proficiency levels. However, other factors also need to be taken into account since the main aim of streaming is to facilitate teaching by having relatively homogeneous learning groups and factors in addition to proficiency determine how similarly learners will progress. These factors include course factors such as common goals, content and methods, and learner factors such as needs, age, aptitude, educational background, fossilisation or stabilisation of the learners' language, social and psychological distance between the learners and the native speaking community, attitude to learning, motivation,

preferred learning strategies, personal and vocational interests and goals, other academic interests, and so on. In other words, while language proficiency is an important factor to consider in streaming, it is only one of many that need to be considered and need to be measured using different methods. In addition, general proficiency relates especially to what Krashen has called "acquired" or informally learned language whereas streaming to facilitate formal teaching is probably more relevant to the learner's formal knowledge and formal learning. In other words, if streaming is to facilitate teaching in pre-planned courses, then streaming using knowledge-based, function-based or discrete point tests based on the language content of the various streams is more likely to give accurate streaming than is general proficiency assessment. Because of the complexity of factors that determine how learners will respond in class and cope with the material to be presented in class, the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, in addition to streaming into broad bands based on proficiency levels, streams within those bands into other classes taking into account these other factors based, especially for continuing students, on what is known about these factors and students' in-class performance.

Diagnostic Testing: Of particular relevance to student needs is the contribution that language assessment instruments can make to diagnosis of learner strengths and weaknesses. What instruments are most appropriate for diagnostic purposes clearly depends on the nature of the strength or weakness one wishes to diagnose. A proficiency scale and proficiency assessment tell the teacher about the learners' ability to apply the language in practical communication tasks. Direct testing can also be used to diagnose, in practice, the detail of learner language by using a checklist to mark off acceptable and unacceptable forms or

deficiencies that occur. However, such an approach is time-consuming since it requires individual student observations and though this can be done on a routine basis in class, it is probably more efficient to use one or more analytic tests that focus on discrete features of the language, tests such as so-called discrete point tests, selective cloze and dictation.

Learning how to Learn and Self-Assessment:
One need that is characteris-tically ignored in language programmes is the need for learners to "learn how to learn". All language programmes are finite, yet, for most second or foreign language learners, language learning needs to go on indefinitely if they are to approach to native-like proficiency levels. In other words, an essential part of a language learning programme should be to provide learners with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to become more rather than less autonomous in their learning and to know how to draw on the resources around them to further develop their language. An important part of this, as we noted in relation to language teachers earlier, is the ability to self-assess and to use that self-assessment to help them to choose appropriate ways to go about their subsequent language learning. The availability of valid and reliable self-assessment instruments (either proficiency scales for self-assessment or other more analytic instruments such as computer-based language tests) is an important contribution to learner autonomy and learners' own on-going autonomous language learning.

Recognising Language Skills: Earlier in this paper, we considered in passing the need for means by which to assess, certify and accredit language skills acquired other than in the formal education system. Adoption of such a system carries with it the tacit recognition that all language skills are valuable and valued and has a potentially strong, motivating effect on

learners in language classes. On the other hand, there have been occasions in Australia when, for instance, the tourism industry has sought approval to import large numbers of tour guides from Japan. Such a proposal, if approved, would have had a strongly negative effect on students in language classes since it reduces their chance of employment using the skills they are being taught and plays down the value of those skills. In addition, the proposal highlights another area in which language assessment contributes to quality assurance, the need for accredited language assessors to be available to conduct language audits and needs analyses and to specify accurately and appropriately the actual needs of industry. Almost as damaging to language education as scant regard to quality, is the unrealistic estimate of language needs. The Australian tourism industry's proposal to import 5000 Japanese tour guides, for example, suggests a blanket assessment of need that fails to differentiate among the jobs to be done when it is certain that, within tourism, there is a range of tasks able to be carried out by people with a wide range of proficiency levels. The blanket assumption that anyone using a language must be a native speaker is obviously erroneous but effectively precludes second and foreign language learners from obtaining employment using their language skills and has a profoundly demotivating effect on students in language classes, and hence on the quality of their learning performance.

The Programme

When we think of quality assurance, it is probably quality assurance in programme design and implementation that most readily comes to mind. From what has been said so far, it is clear that quality assurance and the application of language assessment to it go a lot further than that. Nevertheless, they are especially relevant

to programme design and implementation. Some of the issues already considered are relevant here as well, in particular, the identification of societal and student needs and the setting of programme goals and objectives. In this, the availability of proficiency scales has an important contribution to make but a developmentally based scale such as the ASLPR also provides an overarching framework within which programmes can be coherently designed and sequenced. Such scales enable proficiency goals to be set and for courses within programmes to be sequenced according to proficiency targets but, in addition, developmentally based scales indicate the major parameters of development and so suggest key issues to be included in language courses at the different proficiency levels. Thus, for instance, the ASLPR would suggest that, from Level 1+ to approaching 3, a major parameter of development is the complexification of the language and that that occurs especially as a result of learner motivation to develop social relationships and express their own unique ideas. From 2+ to 4, a major parameter of development is flexibility in and sensitivity towards different registers and the context-dependency of language. For this reason, it is through these levels that it becomes more appropriate to introduce such forms as literature with its atypical use of language and its manipulation of different registers and also to introduce "specific purpose" language programmes. Thus, assessment instruments focussing on proficiency are now making major contributions to course design. In addition, as was noted earlier, more analytic tests can contribute substantially to diagnosis of learner strengths and weaknesses and hence to the setting of immediate course objectives.

Programme Focus: As is already evident through this paper, one of the most crucial issues in determining quality of a language

programme is the focus on proficiency. In the last two decades, as instruments have become available to specify proficiency more concretely and meaningfully than by the use of such terms as "moderate", "good" or "average" so the notion of proficiency itself has been examined and has influenced course design and assessment methods. In turn, a fundamental consideration in quality assurance is the setting of clear unambiguous proficiency targets, their use in designating courses and hence in arousing learner expectations about the course, and, not least, in monitoring course quality.

Programme Evaluation: The observations just made also suggest that, in the context of quality assurance, language assessment has a significant contribution to make to programme evaluation. It has to be stressed that there is no simple relation between proficiency attainment and course quality since there are many variables that intervene to influence the outcome of courses and to influence judgements about their quality, variables such as student aptitude, age, nature of the target language, and so on. Nevertheless, if language teaching is pre-eminently about the development of proficiency, then clearly the rate and amount of change in the learners' proficiency levels is one factor to be considered in programme evaluation. Unfortunately, the reality is that no up-to-date reliable information is available on how rapidly learners of different ages, aptitude and educational backgrounds develop their language proficiency in courses of different types and lengths. The most quoted tables are undoubtedly those published by the United States Foreign Service Institute School of Language Studies but these tables are based on the performance of well educated adults in the civil, military and foreign service learning languages in the FSI's own intensive audiolingual courses in the 1960s and 1970s [FSI 1973]; these estimates do not transfer

automatically to other students in other learning situations. There are also tables published for the IELTS test which indicate recommended minimum lengths of intensive English language instruction for overseas students wishing to study in Britain and Australia but these estimates were not strongly based on empirical evidence and, again, apply to students in fairly distinctive circumstances. To try to rectify this lack of firm data on which to estimate course lengths and on which to evaluate the acceptability of learner achievements, the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages has undertaken a large scale project in which it is accumulating such data as learner characteristics, entry proficiency levels, exit proficiency attainments, course types and methodology. When the very large amount of data required to provide reasonably reliable estimates has been accumulated and analysed, it should be possible to make more informed judgements about, for instance, the desirable lengths of courses to achieve desired proficiency levels in different languages, the consequent resources to be allocated, and whether any particular programme is performing more or less adequately.

As already noted, as important as proficiency is as the most pervasive goal of language programmes and hence as an element in programme evaluation, many factors intervene to make a simple measure of proficiency change inadequate alone as a basis of programme evaluation. In addition to the factors already listed earlier, language programmes generally include other goals beside proficiency, goals such as the improvement of intercultural attitudes, cultural understanding, social confidence, literary appreciation, or translation and interpreting ability and the effectiveness of any programme can only be evaluated reasonably if all the specified and overt or covert goals are evaluated. In reality, because

of the complexity of the language teaching process, programme evaluation is better attempted descriptively in which the variety of variables can more adequately be discussed and accounted for rather than statistically though the observation and description should be reinforced with whatever additional hard evidence (including proficiency change data and detailed diagnostic information) can be accumulated.

Language Assessment

In consider-ing the relevance of language assessment to quality assurance of language programmes, it is essential to consider the quality of the language assessment itself. Numerous factors, which here can be referred to only briefly in passing, are relevant.

Appropriateness to Purpose: Perhaps the most fundamental issue considering the quality of language assessment is to ask whether it is appropriate to the purpose of the course. There is an old adage that you should test what you teach but, in fact, like many old adages, that dictum does not stand up to scrutiny. What is more important is that the way in which one assesses should match the purpose of the assessment. If the aim is to diagnose learner strengths and weaknesses, we have already seen that a battery of tests will be appropriate including discrete point tests that focus on the elements of the language. If the aim of the course is to develop learner proficiency (as it is in all courses whatever else one might wish to achieve), then a proficiency assessment, preferably a direct test, should be included in the end-of-course assessment and in steps taken to check on course quality. Proficiency tests may not, however, be obviously or directly related to the specific content of what is taught or to how it is taught: one needs to distinguish

between the goal and how that goal is reached; tests that focus in on the detailed content of a course may be relevant to the notion of course achievement but will not give an accurate measure of the learners' general proficiency or how they are able to generalise their language to a range of real-life language tasks and situations. In other words, in assessing student progress and, by implication, the quality of a course, one needs to differentiate between course achievement and general proficiency and their assessment: the former relates to attainment on the specific content of the course that has been taught including such areas as syntax, lexis, functions, discourse structure, articulation, and so on whereas the latter relates to more general use of the language and the learners' ability to generalise to a range of everyday communication tasks [cf. Education Committee 1996: 116].

Formative and Summative Assessment:
This distinction between assessment for course achievement and assessment of language proficiency is relevant also to the distinction between formative and summative assessment. In summative assessment, the interest may be in both course achievement and general proficiency attainment and both sorts of tests may be appropriate. Formative assessment, however, relates rather to how well learners are mastering the course content that is being taught to them, and the identification of things that need to be taught, re-taught, or are appropriately internalised and available for use. For formative purposes, therefore, a variety of test types will be appropriate that focus in on the detailed content of the syllabus that is being taught. Such tests may include discrete point tests of grammar, selective integrative tests such as cloze or dictation, function-based tests, task cards, progress cards and portfolios that provide a systematic way of keeping a record of the

detailed progress of the learners' language development.

Continuous Assessment: Another important distinction that relates to these issues but has become salient over the last two decades, is that between continuous and one-off testing.   In western education systems, increasingly from the 1960s through the 1980s it has become commonplace to give more emphasis to continuous assessment than to end-of-course assessment. Continuous assessment is supposed to be less anxiety-producing for students and so to provide assessments that are more closely reflective of their actual knowledge and abilities. In reality, at least so far as language programmes are concerned, neither assumption is correct and one should exercise considerable care in assuming that continuous assessment is appropriate for inclusion in assessment procedures aimed at quality assurance even though it may serve other legitimate ends such as for formative assessment purposes.   In the Queensland education system, some form of continuous assessment was introduced into Queensland Secondary schools at the start of the 1970s. In terms of anxiety levels, it rapidly became evident that all it did was to extend the anxiety over a longer period, i.e., the final two years of students' secondary schooling which were the basis for the continuous assessment for tertiary entry.   As a result, the weighting given to continuous assessment tends to have been reduced even though school-based assessment continues. So far as language programmes are concerned and, for that matter, all skills-based in contrast to knowledge-based learning areas, more fundamental issues also argue against the use of continuous assessment for summative purposes.   In particular, in a developmental, skills-based subject such as a language, learners ' performance at, for instance, Week 5 has little bearing on their performance at Week 15 or

Week 40 other than in developmental terms. Further, there is more to language proficiency development than just formally learning an array of syntax and lexis whereas, in addition, the redundancy of language means that most language tasks can be carried out in a variety of different ways, different courses may follow different paths towards the same proficiency goals, and a proficiency-oriented course should culminate in an assessment of general proficiency that is not focussed deliberately or specifically on the content of any particular course.

Assessing other Things: In reality, most language programmes have other aims in addition to language proficiency. In the present writer's view, there are three fundamental goals of any language programme: the attainment of useful levels of language proficiency, the development of cultural understanding and the development of more favourable cross-cultural attitudes.   Language assessment aimed at controlling the quality of courses needs also to take account of these things though in all cases their assessment is even less straight-forward than is proficiency assessment. A mere test of cultural knowledge would seem to be appropriate but to be very limited in its usefulness. Culture is definable as the meaning system underlying the language, language cannot exist as anything other than verbal algebra without the culture that gives it meaning, and one could conclude that the most effective way to assess cultural knowledge and understanding in a language programme is to consider it in the context of language proficiency assessment.   For this reason, proficiency scales such as the ASLPR make reference to culture without specifying the detailed knowledge that cultural understanding has as a pre-requisite. Cross-cultural attitudes are undoubtedly a vital goal in language teaching programmes but attitude assessment is

highly problematic, it is easy for students in a pencil-and-paper test of culture to respond in the way that they believe the teacher or examiner would want them to respond rather than in ways that reflect their attitudes. Consequently, while it is essential that language programmes be designed to lead to more rather than less favourable cross-cultural attitudes, it is highly questionable whether any formal assessment of them should be included in, for example, formal course-exit assessments.

Code of Practice: When one considers the quality of language tests, there are many, more technical issues to be considered. Some major tests such as IELTS or the ACCESS test (the English language test taken by applicants for migration to Australia and currently managed by IDP Education Australia and the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages at Griffith University) publish codes of practice that include reference to standards of professional practice in such areas as validity, reliability, impact, quality of service, cultural appropriateness, test bias, reporting mechanisms (including the on-going quality assurance results), the training of assessors and item-writers, trialling or "pre-testing" arrangements for the tests, statistical procedures used in validating the test and in monitoring its on-going performance, and test management and advisory arrangements. Each of these is highly pertinent to the issue of quality assurance in language testing and, by extension, in language education.

Test Specifications: Fundamental to the preparation of any valid, reliable and appropriate test is to ask specific questions about the purpose of the test, and how that purpose can be achieved, not least through what itemtypes. To ensure that these issues are considered and that the answers to the questions remain consistent across different versions of

tests, it is essential that test specifications be prepared before the tests themselves are written. Again, major tests such as IELTS or ACCESS are accompanied by test Specifications that may or may not be published but are used by itemwriters and editors continuously as they prepare new versions of the tests. Specifications characteristically cover such issues as the focus of the test, the proficiency levels targeted, the domain of the language to be assessed, the test format, the text types that are used, the itemtypes and any limitations or qualifications on how they are used, item rubrics, and a checklist for itemwriters to compile intended to ensure that they focus on the detail of the specifications as they write their items.

Test Development: Ultimately, whether one considers the development and use of proficiency scales or the development, use and interpretation of other assessment procedures, the major determining factor in the quality of the test will be its appropriateness to the purpose and the context of administration and the care with which it has been constructed. Elsewhere, the present writer has described at length the process by which the ASLPR has been developed and re-developed continuously over a period of some 18 years [see Ingram 1996a]. In addition, a project is currently being established by which all assessments on the ASLPR can be subjected to on-going monitoring and moderation for quality. A database is being established at the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages at Griffith University into which all users of the ASLPR will be able to enter the names of certified assessors and the results of their assessments. Modern statistical procedures will then be applied to this data at regular intervals so that the reliability of the assessments will be assessed and fed back to the assessors.

Cultural appropriateness: Cultural appropriateness poses a complex problem especially for tests that are administered on a large scale around the world to candidates from many different cultures. It is less of a problem where teachers are designing their own tests or where the tests are being used nationally rather than internationally [see Ingram 1995 for a discussion of cultural issues in international tests]. Nevertheless, in preparing and evaluating tests one has to decide whether the cultural knowledge that is assumed or even directly tested is sufficiently fundamental to the target culture that it is reasonable to assume that, in the course of a language programme, it will be experienced, learned and made available for use in using the language, or whether it is distinctive to a small part of that total culture, idiosyncratic to one form of the culture, or too detailed to be required for normal language use. For instance, in learning English, it would not be unreasonable to expect that learners at a high level of proficiency would know that national health schemes exist in Britain and Australia but it would not be reasonable to expect that learners would be aware of the differences, significant though they are to Britons or Australians. To take a sporting example, cricket is so pervasive an element of the culture of most of the English speaking world outside of North America that it is appropriate to assume that learners know what cricket is and that they may have encountered and learned to use some of the idiomatic expressions that have entered the general language from cricket but it would be quite inappropriate to expect a second language learner from a different cultural background to be familiar with, for example, the complexities of the "LBW" rule or the no-ball rule or even to know what those important features of the game are.

Test Impact or Washback: Finally, in considering the issue of language assessment for quality assurance, it is worth considering the issue of test impact. As fundamental as it might be that one should identify needs, set goals and teach for the attainment of those goals, not for success on tests, the practical reality is that tests do impact on what is taught and how it is taught. It is inevitable, if one places hurdles in front of students, success on which can determine the rest of their lives, that the courses leading up to the hurdles will start to focus on the hurdles themselves and will become training grounds for the subsequent examinations. This is harmful only if the tests are not compatible with good teaching or the attainment of the goals of the course. What it also means is that, in designing tests, one should also keep in mind the impact that the test will have on the teaching-learning process. Thus, for instance, when the IELTS test was being developed, the test development team was very conscious that its presence and its use in selecting overseas students for study in Australia or Britain would start to affect the nature of the teaching in the countries or language schools whose students aim to be accepted into British or Australian universities. The issue of impact or washback affects many aspects of the test from issues of face validity through to test specifications in such areas as item types and language domain and good test design, mindful of impact effect, will set requirements in these areas which, if taken into language programmes, would have a beneficial effect on the development of useful levels of language proficiency or whatever other aims courses leading to the tests might have. In some ways, admitting to impact also tends to gainsay the statement made earlier about the difference between goals and how they are assessed and course content or the path towards the goals and how that content is taught. Nevertheless, the practical reality is that tests do have impact or washback effect and test designers need to consider these to the extent they can without invalidating the tests

themselves. In other words, quality in language testing cannot be considered or quality control exerted without considering the effect of the test on the language teaching and learning programmes that precede the test.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to review some of the contributions that language assessment can make to quality assurance in language programmes. It has also considered issues of quality assurance for language assessment itself. While language assessment is not the only component of quality assurance and the measures taken to ensure it, it is an important component which can lend some objectivity to the necessarily more subjective evaluation that educational programmes ultimately require. Language assessment procedures can also add rigour to the thinking that leads to the development of all aspects of language programmes from basic societal needs analysis to language policy-making, language-in-education planning, teacher recruitment, materials design, and the teaching and assessment of language programmes and courses.

Appendix One

The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR)

The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) were initially developed by Elaine Wylie and D. E. Ingram in 1978 and first published in January 1979. The basic scale is designed to measure general proficiency or practical language skills in real-life language contexts in second or foreign language learners. The scale consists of 12 levels from zero to native-like, numbered from zero to 5 as shown below. The scale is presented in three columns: the first column provides a "General Description of Language Behaviour" and is almost identical across all versions of the scale, the second provides "Examples of Language Behaviour" and is specific to the particular version of the scale, and the third is a "Comment" column that explains, gives definitions and draws attention to critical features of the descriptor or level.

The outcome of using the ASLPR for the assessment of a second or foreign language learners' proficiency is a profile showing the rating for each macroskill separately, e.g., S:3, L:3+, R:2+, W:2. The levels in each of Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing are identified with a number and a short descriptive title as follows:

0	Zero Proficiency	e.g., S:0, L:0, R:0, W:0
0+	Formulaic Proficiency	
1-	Minimum 'Creative' Proficiency	
1	Basic Transactional Proficiency	
1+	Transactional Proficiency	e.g., S:1+, L:1+, R:1+, W:1+
2	Basic Social Proficiency	
2+	(unnamed)	
3	Basic 'Vocational' Proficiency	
3+	(unnamed)	
4	'Vocational' Proficiency	e.g., S:4, L:4, R:4, W:4
4+	(unnamed)	
5	Native-like Proficiency	

Ingram and Wylie have worked on the ASLPR virtually continuously since 1978. it has been formally trialled in a number of different contexts and has been applied and re-developed in a number of different versions listed below. It is now the most widely used instrument for the specification of proficiency levels in Australia, is used in many places around the world, and has significantly influenced proficiency scale development elsewhere (e.g., the *ACTFL Guidelines*).

The ASLPR currently exists in the following versions:

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - Master General Proficiency Version (English Examples)*. Brisbane: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, 1995. ISBN 0 86857 814 2. Co-author Elaine Wylie

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - General Proficiency Version for English.* Brisbane: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, 1979/1985/1995. ISBN 0 86857 815 0. Co-author Elaine Wylie

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - Version for Teachers of Indonesian.* Brisbane: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, 1996. ISBN 0 86857 819 3. Co-authors Elaine Wylie and Geoff Woollams

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - General Proficiency Version for Indonesian.* Brisbane: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, 1995. ISBN 0 86857 816 9. Co-authors Elaine Wylie and Geoff Woollams

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - Version for Second Language Teachers.* Brisbane: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, 1995. ISBN 0 86857 817 7. Co-author Elaine Wylie

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - English for Business and Commerce Version.* Brisbane: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, 1995. Co-authors Elaine Wylie and Hilda Maclean

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - English for Engineering Purposes Version.* Brisbane: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, 1995. Co-authors Elaine Wylie and Laura Commins

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - English for Academic Purposes Version.* Brisbane: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, 1995. Co-authors Elaine Wylie and Catherine Hudson

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - Version for Japanese.* Brisbane: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, 1994. Co-authors Elaine Wylie and Peter Grainger

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - Version for French.* mimeograph. 1981. Co-authors Elaine Wylie and Edwige Coulin

- *The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings - Version for Italian.* mimeograph. 1981. Co-authors Elaine Wylie and Carlo Zincone

- Various self-assessment versions ranging from very short, simplified versions administered by telephone to computer-based versions, and versions used with language teachers.

Other versions are currently under development, e.g., a version for Korean and for the assessment of the proficiency of teachers of Korean.

Appendix Two

The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR):
Version for Second Language Teachers

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LANGUAGE BEHAVIOUR

W:3 BASIC VOCATIONAL PROFICIENCY

Able to use the L; effectively in most primary and secondary activities directly related to teaching in 'regular' L; programs aimed at developing general proticiency, and in non-teaching situations pertinent to the profession which do not require very complex, precise or specialised language. Uses the l; effectively in most intormal and formal written communications pertinent to social and community life and everyday commerce and recreation in the target culture. In most texts in such situations, conveys fairly precise meanings, and has sufficient control of discourse to be able to luxtapose different 'planes' of meaning. Discussion about professional matters can not, however, be pursued to the complexity, depth, and extent of abstraction that are often required of teachers. In more complicated situations, there may be some difference between what the write wants or intends to convey and the total message (including purposive and attitudinal elements) that is actually conveyed purposive and attiticuinal elements) that is actually conveyed. In simple discussion texts, the argument is generally established, but metorical structure may be non-standard. In such texts, while a variety of connectives are used, discourse relationships are often inappropriately marked, with misuse or overy expicial use of cohesive devices. Texts may reflect inapproxiate influences of spoken text at and beyond the sentence level. Uses a wide variety of subortnate clauses, and of verb forms and other grammatical structures. Errors are made (sometimes reflecting the influence of L;), particularly in texts where a less congruent form of writing is required, but these errors rarely interfere with understanding, and do not generally initate or amuse native-speaking or highly proficient readers of similar sociocultural background (although the expectations of some readers who know that the writer is a teacher of the language may not be met). Vocabulary range is such that, in the situation types indicated, the writer can usually think of a word which conveys the broad meaning, although use of a dictionary or other support is required for more precise meaning. There is some ability to manipulate lexical items to change them from one part of speech to another where this is applicable and needed. Makes secure use of only high-frequency idioms. If the largest language uses an alphabet or syllabic system, spelling is sufficiently accurate not to intrude on readers comprehension. Writers who are moving to a significantly different script type show signs of maturity in their handwriting. Modifies language to a significant degree to meet the differing register requirements of farmiliar situation types.

EXAMPLES OF LANGUAGE BEHAVIOUR IN SPECIED FIELD VERSION FOR SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Can use the L; to leach students to do the kinds of everyday tasks which are of the complexity of those indicated in the paragraph below. Can teach written L; functions and forms within texts appropriate to students' age, lifestyle and , where applicable, gender, although hot necessarily by modelling forms themselves (particularly when of different age and gender from students). With minimal use of dictionary or other support, can prepare own worksheets/instructions for tasks which do not entail very specialised language (e.g. a guided response by students to a feature film or exhibition) and other documents for students (e.g. individualised leaming contracts for self-access study). Can give written feedback (e.g. explaining misuse of an aspect of grammar or register) adjusting language forms to students' lower proficiency levels. When addressing students in writing, generally uses language appropriate to their age and gender. Can summariese texts (e.g. newspaper reports) as an advance organiser for a comprehension activity. Can produce notes or glossaries to help students access authentic lexts which would otherwise be too difficult for them. With only minimal use of a dictionary or other material (e.g. program notes), can create own texts in a relatively simple, familiar gener for students to read for general interest or for cultural background (e.g. the historical background of a festival).

Can write most of the informal and formal social and transactional communications used in everyday situations in the target culture without errors intruding on a native speaker's understanding. In more complicated persuasive (and similarly demanding) situations, users may not be able to express exactly what they want to with regard to, for example, the intensity of their feelings or the flexibility of their intentinos. Can write on a wide range of professional and community matters which require relatively abstract reasoning but not highly specialised language. For example, can write to teacher whose name has been given as a contact in order to sound out the possiblity of a sister school relationship or, when working as an exchange teacher, to the editor of the local L; newspaper in order to correct misinformation (e.g. on an aspect of own country's policy regarding overseas students in tertiary institutions). Can very style over broad parameters, although may lack some subtlety in differentiating between some contexts. In some uncomplicated straightforward situations in everyday or professional life (e.g. a simple report on an uneventful student exchange) can convey meaning with reasonable accuracy in informal transtation from L;

Can contribute effectively in professional development situations. Can write a review of a textbook for a newsletter or as a basis for a discussion group. It may need some editing, but the arguments is coherent, with the different 'planes' of the original author's intentions and own, interposed comments clearly distinguished.

COMMENT

See also other COMMENT columns for 3 and NOTES and GLOSSARY

Register flexibility and register sensitivity feature at this level, although finer distinctions are not made. In familiar situation types, users have an awareness of how situational variables influence what functions may be expressed directly and/or indirectly and how they may be expressed. Moreover, their language repertoire is large enough to give them access to alternative ways of expressing particular meanings. Thus users are able to make choices and tailor the language they write to the particular situations. There is, therefore, great breadth in the range of everday situation types in which users perform effectively. Users at this level also have some degree of mastery of the specialised language of their vocational field (s). Thus they can use the L; in the macro-roles of consumer of goods and services, participant in social and recreational activities, worker and /or student, and citizen (of the local community and the wider world). (While these categories are to some extent arbitrary, they are intended to represent all the macro-roles that adolescent and adult members of a society perform in that society.)

L; teachers' mastery of the language used by native speakers of the target variety in everyday situations in the target culture is sufficient to meet the content demands of most 'regular' L; programs, whether in face-to-face or distance mode. (Note that it is not necessarily appropriate or feasible for the teacher to take on the role of someone of a different age or gender; alternative sourses of such language can be used). The model of writing that users provide in everday situations is fairly accurate and appropriate (but note the reference to expeciations in the GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LANGUAGE BEHAVIOUR column on this page).

L; teachers have some mastery of the written language of classroom management (in face-to-face and where relevant in distance contexts) and of the basic metalanguage of L; teaching and learning. They may also have some mastery of the register (s) of a vocational field, areas of the school curriculum, or an academic discipline (including broader aspects of pedagogy and applied linguistics). If required to teach in a specified (vocational) purpose program, however, they are very restricted in the methods they can use, and rely heavily on materials prepared by others. They can not use the L; as the medium for teaching subjects other than the L; itself, and are not ready for a 'content-based' program. If a class includes native speakers, the teacher is likely to need extra support to provide, for example, an appropriate level of challenge.

An important factor to note is the ease of communication at theis level. (Raters who are inexperienced at the level are often over-impressed by this ease) Although users' mastery of the L; systems is far from that of native speaking peers, the amount of accommodation required of interlocurors in many situations is minimal. Moreover, users may employ a range of strategies to avoid in-depth treatment of a topic, and the attendant likelihood of losing face or failing to attain a desired goal.

Wytie and ingram 1995 ASLPR Version for Second Language Teachers

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LANGUAGE BEHAVIOUR

R:3 BASIC VOCATIONAL PROFICIENCY

Able to use the L: effectively in most primary and secondary activities directly related to teaching in 'regular' L: programs aimed at developing general proficiency, and in non-teaching situations pertinent to the profession which do not require very complex, precise or specialised language. Gets the essential meaning of most straightforward correspondence pertinent to social and community life and everyday commerce and recreation in the target culture. Readily gets the gist of standard news stories addressed to the general reader and of other everyday materials (e.g. best-selling novels and similar recreational literature). Gets the essential meaning of most simply-structured, straightforward semispecialised material related to the profession. Fails to perceive subtle nuances of meaning. Even in texts with a relatively simple rhetorical structure, may occasionally have problems if there are relationships in the discourse which are not clearly marked, which are marked by lowfrequency cohesive devices, or in which a referents is well separated. May have problems with and particularly complex grammatical structures. Uses the context to work out the meaning of occasinoal unfamiliar lexical items, but has problems with relatively low-frequency idioms. In situations where precise understanding is important, moderately frequent use of a dictionary is required. Is likely to have significant problems or institutions, or meanings that assume understanding of esotenic aspects of the culture. Understands a ranget of handwriting styles, although non-standard or ill-formed scripts may cause difficulty. Has significant senstivity to register vanation, although finer distinctions are not made. In straightforward situations, generally perceives the purposes, attitudes and mood of the writer. Has some ability to go beneath surface meaning but, where there is less support from the context, may faill to perceive the illocutionary force of less straightforward statements. Genuine appreciation of stylistic vanation for aeslthetic pruposes is very tentative, limited to obvious stylistic effects. Has a broad understanding of the recognised varieties of the L: which are very closely related to the target variety, but often misses regional references and forms.

EXAMPLES OF LANGUAGE BEHAVIOUR IN SPECIFIED FIELD VERSION FOR SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS

If asked by own students to help with letters from native-speaking penpals (whether by regular or electronic mode), can generally understand, although may occasionally have problems with parts of the text where there are, for example, low-frequency expressions or references to more 'peripheral' aspects of the culture, or when handwriting is careless. Can generally understand the purposes, attitudes and mood as well as the propositional content well enough to give appropriate spontaneous responses to most lexts on everyday topics written by own native-speaking students; may fail, however, to understand some parts (e.g. where the meaning is hidden) and may even fail to see the point of a whole text (by an older student) in which meaning is deliberately obsured. When selecting teaching materials, can without a dictionary understand the essential meaning of standard newspaper stories and popular magazine articles addressed to the general reader, for thorough understanding, however, moderately frequent use of dictionary is required, and there may be specific references which are not understood because to lack of cultural understanding. If choosing texts for students' extensive reading, can without a dictionary follow straightorward extended popular literary forms (e.g. best-selling novels) which do not assume deep understanding of the culture, although may words and idiomatic expressions are likely to be unfamiliar. As part of research/preparation for teaching (in own school or on exchange) can read with relative ease text books on the grammar of the L: and on other areas of the curriculum which match own particular fied (s) of interest, provided these do not assume great mastery of specialised language (e.g. 'core' texts aimed at native-speaking students in the middle secondary school).

Can grasp the essential meaning of formal but uncomplicated and straightforward correspondence and documents on professional matters (e.g. arrangements for student exchange visits and rationale for changes, conditions of a teacher exchange program, report on a student's truancy) without use of a dictionary. Generally perceives attitudes of writers of such texts. In some uncomplicated straightforward situations in everyday or professional life (e.g. a simple report on an uneventful student exchange) understand sufficiently accurately to undertake informal translation into L:.

In professional development situations, can understand uncomplicated and straightforward articies or papers in own specialised field (s) provided they are not particularly teacnical. Can generally follow communications in an e-mail network, but in 'chat' mode (e.g. with colleagues from a sister school) slower reading speed may require some accommodation by correspondents.

Register flexibility and register sensitivity feature at this level, although finer distinctions are not made. The extent of users' language repertoire is such that they can understand the propositional content of most everday texts which have an uncomplicated structure, provided the information is presented in a straightforward manner. Familiarity with the topic is no loner an important factor in determining the level of understanding of such texts. Moreover, users' level of understanding of how texts in the language are shaped by contextual factors is such that they can usually perceive the writers' purposes, attitudes and moods in usch texts.

Users at this level have serious problems, however, when there is significant allusion to more 'peripheral' cultural institutions and phenomena (ct. freemasonry and its rituals in an English-speaking society) of when assumptions are made about knowledge of esoteric aspects of the culture (such as social mores) which is shared by native speakers and is so fundamental that it is not overtly refemed to. (See also L: 4 COMMENT column and reference to the inaccessibility of others' personal correspondence in R.2 COMMENT column)

L: teachers at this level understand sufficiently well in everyday situations to effectively expoilt a wide range of authentic written language (including language produced by and for native speakers of the target variety who are the same gender and age as own students) to develop their student's language skills. The breadth of registers allows teachers to cater for students' diverse interests. In providing such examples of the kinds of everyday situations that native-speaking peers engane in, they can also help their students to go beyond stereotypes to appreciate the dynamics of the target culture. Their reading skills are, therefore, sufficient to meet the content demands of most 'regular' (i.e. not immersion or bilingual) primary and secondary schhol programs, whether in face-to-face or distance mode.

Users at this level have some degree of mastery of the specialised language of their vocational field (s). L: teachers have some mastery of the written languageof classroom management (in face-to-face and where relevant in distance contexts) and the basic metalanguage of L: teaching and learning. They may also have some mastery of the register (s) of a vocatinoal field, areas of the school curriculum, or an academic discipline (including broader aspects of pedagogy and applied linguistics). If required to teach in a specified (vocational) purpose program, however, they are restricted in the methods they can use, and rely heavily on materials prepared by others. They can not use the L: as the medium for teaching subjects other than the L: itself, and are not ready for teaching in a 'content-based' program. If a class includes native speakers, the teacher is likely to need extra support to provide, for example, an appropriate level of challenge.

Limitations in reading for teaching and professional development purposes relate to both the types of texts that users can process and the speed with which they can process them (reading speed at this level is significantly less than of a comparably educated native speaker).

White and ingram 1995 ISLPR Version for Second Language Teachers.

L.4   VOCATIONAL PROFICIENCY

Able to use the L₂ effectively in all primary and secondary school and most tertiary-level activities directly related to teaching in 'regular' L₂ programs aimed at developing general proficiency, and in specified (vocational) purpose and immersion and bilingual programs in own fields of specialisation; able to use the language very effectively in almost all non-teaching situations pertinent to the profession. Understands easily and accurately in virtually all straight forward situations pertinent to own field(s) of specialisation, and to social and community life and everyday commerce and recreation. Does not, however, understand some meanings which are accessible to native-speaking peers. Can often go beneath the surface meaning to identify the purposes, attitudes and modds of speakers/authors, although may occasionally miss the point of even a whole text in which these are more subtly obscured. Usually (but with the important exception of those meanings which depend on thorough knowledge and understanding of the culture, including subtleties of the type referred to above) requires approximately the same amount of support from the context as native speakers do. Follows texts in which the information is dense and the rhetorical structure is complex. Understands even fast rates of utterance in the target variety and tolerates approximately the same amount of acoustic interference as native speakers do. Occasionally fails to understand low-frequency idioms or colloquialisms. Understands borrowings (from other languages or other varieties) that are in high- and medium-frequency use in the speech of native-speaking peers. Has considerable sensitivity to register variation. Has some appreciation of stylistic variation for aesthetic purposes. Gernerally understands the recognised varieties of the L₂ which are closely related to the target variety, but misses some regional references and forms. Difficulty with varieties which are distant from the target variety is significantly greater than that of comparably educated native speakers.

Can interact in the classroom in depth with native speakers of the target variety or a closely related variety on any everyday topic or any topic within own specialised field(s)(e.g. cognitively challenging issues in the curriculum of a 'content-based' course). Can understand conversations/discussions between native-speaking students of such varieties, no matter what their age, virtually as well as native-speaking teachers do, although a significant amount will be missed if the students are aiming to exclude her/him. Can understand well enough to participate very effectively in interactive audio or video links with native-speaking teachers and students on complex, abstract topics (e.g. own nation's contribution to reduction of the greenhouse effect). Ability to discern speaker characteristics such as attitude, mood and level of sophistication in relation to such topics is close to that of native-speaking peers. Can cope with nearly as much interruption and simultaneous talking and nearly as much acoustic interference as native speakers can. If using direct broadcasts of authentic radio or TV in the classroom, can generally understand documentary material on everyday topics or topics within own specialised field(s). even when delivered at a fast pace. Can generallyunderstand talkback programs, provided the varieties spoken are close to the target variety. and editional commentaries. although may have some problems when they assume knowledge of the very latest events. Is likely to miss the point of satirical comment. Can integrate as much background or overlaid sound and tolerate virtually as much acoustic interference related to transmission as a native speaker can.

Can understand virtually all those spoken forms of the target variety needed in everyday situations and out-of-class situations related to own specialised field(s). Has flexibility close to that of comparably educated native speakers when confronted with new situation types. Can use the L₂ effectively in complex, sensitive interactions with native-speaking colleagues and aides from own or sister school, and paarents and students who speak a variety of the L₂ which is closely related to the target variety (e.g. can understand the 'tone' and intention of parents who are embarrassed and/or angry about aspects of the L₂ curriculum or the general educational philosophy of the system). In most straaightforward situations in everyday and professional life, understands sufficiently accurately to undertake informal consecutive interpreting into L₁.

Can undertake in-country mainstream post-graduate studies. Can understand formal conference papers and seminar presentations in own specialised field(s) virtually as well as native-speaking peers can.

At this level, the range of everyday situation types in which users perform effectively in the target variety is very close to that of native-speaking peers. Users also have a high degree of mastery of the specialised language of their vocational field(s).

L₂ teachers' mastery of the language used by native speakers of the target variety in everyday situations in the target culture is generally sufficient to meet the content demands of all primary and secondary and most tertiary L₂ programs aimed at developing general proficiency. Teachers have a high degree of mastery of the spoken language of classroom management (in face-to-face and where relevant in distance contexts) and of the metalanguage of L₂ teaching and learning, with a high level of flexibility, enabling communication with lay people. They also have a high degree of mastery of, and flexibility within, one or more of the following spoken registers, depending on their experience: a vocabulary field; an area or areas of the school curriculum; an academic discipline (including broader aspects of pedagogy or applied linguistics). This mastery is generally sufficient for teaching in vocational e.g. tourism, teacher education) and 'content-based' (immersion or bilingual) programs in teachers' own field(s) of specialisation. It is not sufficient for some situations requiring the highest level of language proficiency and cultural understanding (e.g. in sociology or media studies at tertiary level). If a class includes native speakers, the teacher may occasionally need access to extra support to provide, for example, an appropriate level of challenge.

Meanings which are not understood at this level are those which assume wide knowledge and deep understanding of the target culture. They willinclude overt references to unfamiliar aspects of the culture (e.g. to more 'peripheral' aspects of institutions, history, religion, sports, literature and other art forms). They will include situations where the author/speaker assumes knowledge of esoteric aspects of the culture (such as social *mores*) which is shared by native speakers and is so fundmental that it is not overtly referred to. They will also include subtle plays on verbal phenomena (e.g. innuendo and irony which depend on subtle prosodic features, and humour which depends on associations or incongruities related to juxtapositions or distortions of the language or world views).

'Borrowings' from other languages or varieties could be linguistic (grammatical, lexical, or phonological) or paralinguistic.

progress beyond this level is dependent on thorough, long-term submersion in the target culture and users' sensitivity to all aspects of the culture.

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S:4   VOCATIONAL PROFICIENCY

Able to use the L_2 effectively in all primary and secondary schooland most tertiary-level activities directly related to teaching in 'regular' L_2 programs aimed at developing general proficiency, and in specified (vocational) purpose and immersion and bilingual programs in own fields of specialisation; able to use the language very effectively in almost all non-teaching situations pertinent to the profession. In straightforward conversations/discussions and monologues related to the profession, and to social and community life and everyday commerce and recreation, conveys his/her desired meaning with virtually the same fluency, complexity and precision, and to virtually the same depth as do native-speaking peers. Usually needs no more support from the context to communicate than a native speaker does. The user may for a short time in some situations produce language which is indistinguishable from that of native-speaking peers. In very complex texts, however, has less control of the argument than such peers do. Rhetorical structure in such texts may at times be non-standard, particularly in less familiar situation types. There are occasional lapses in the use of cohesive devices (typically when the referent is well separated) which may momentarily distract the listener(s). No grammaatical structures are lacking; errors of grammar, which never interfere with understanding, are fairty area, tend to be unsystematic, and are often picked up in a monitoring process and corrected immediately. Vocabulary range is wide enough to allow for some stylistic variation for aesthetic purposes (e.g. for euphony). High-and medium-frequency idiomatic and colloquial forms are secure, but some non- or misuse of other items may occur. Is secure in the use of borrowings (from other language or other varieties) that are in high- and medium-frequency use in the speech of   native- speaking peers. There may be an obvious foreign accent but this in no way impedes comprehension by native speaking or highly proficiente interloctors of the same or a similar variety of the target language. Has considerable sensitivity to register requirements. Particularly in less familiar situation types, however, there are occasional minor lapses in terms of appropriateness of expression (e.g. inappropriate influences of written text) and possibly in tems of what meanings may be (directly) expressed.   Such lapses do not confuse the interloctors, and do not generrly per se offend native speaking peers.

Can use the L_2 for virtually all spoken aspects of the role of practitioner in L_2 courses which aim at developing general proficiency for students of any age or level of proficiency. Exceptions are a few, very select situations where the highest level of mastery of the linguistic and cultural systems is essential (e.g. personally modelling native-like language in a sustained situation, or spontaneously explaining very subtle, highly culturally-dependent meanings in popular or 'high culture). With only occasional preparatory use of a dictionary or other sources of support, can give effective instructions for learning tasks involving specific language (e.g. preparation of a radio broadcast for native speakers in the community), and in-depth explanations of aspects of grammar and register and comparative comments on aspects of the two cultures. Can use the L_2 effectively in virtually all situations relevant to vocational and 'contend-based' programs in own field(s) of specialisation (e.g. applied linguistics in a teacher education course, music or science in the school curriculum). Can effectively present, and ask and answer questions about, curriculum content being taught through the L_2 Can teach the language of relevant spoken registers at an appropriate level of technicality. Any failure to tailor language to the age, level of sophistication in the subject and level of proficiency of students in the situations indicated is unlikely to be attributable to L_2 developmental factors.

Can use virtually all those spoken forms of the target variety needed in everyday situations and out-of-class interactions related to own specialised field(s) with native-speaking colleagues, aides, parents and other members of the community. Has flexibility close to that of native-speaking peers when confronted with new situation types. Can explain details of the L_2 curriculum, responding in depth to technical questions. Can handle complex concerns or complaints from parents about the school curriculum, tailoring language to their level of understanding of concepts involved. Can negotiate details of important agreements with sympathetic interioctors (e.g. school twinning). In an exchange situation, can give an impromptu talk (e.g. to a service club) about aspects of own profession. In most straightforward situations in everyday and professional life can convey meaning accurately and fluently in informal consecutive interpreting from L_1.

Can undertake in-country mainstream post-graduate studies. Can take a major role in the professional development of colleagues. Can present a conference paper or make a complex seminar presentation from notes, and respond in depth to questions from the audience, integrating references to handouts, visual aids or previous points made by self or others. Can comment or ask questions from the floor at a seminar or conference.

At this level, the range of everyday situation types in whcih users perform effectively in the target variety is very close to that of native-speaking peers. Users also have a high degree of mastery of the specialised language of their vocational field(s).

L_2 teachers' mastery of the language used by native speakers of the target variety in everyday situations in the target culture is generally sufficient to meet the content demands of all primary and secondary and most tertiary L_2 programs aimed at developing general proficiency. Teachers have a high degree of mastery of the spoken register of classroom management (in face-to-face and where relevant in distance contexts) and of the metalanguage of L_2 teaching, with a high level of flexibility, enabling communication with lay people. They also have a high degree of mastery of, and flexibility within, one or more of the following spoken registers, depending on their experience: a vocational field; an area or areas of the school curriculum; an academic discipline (including broader aspects of pedagogy or applied linguistics). This mastery is generally sufficient for teaching in vocational (e.g. tourism, teacher education) and content-based' (immersion or bilingual) programs in teachers' own field(s) of specialisation. It is not sufficient for some situations requiring the highest level of language proficiency and cultural understanding (e.g. in sociology or media studies at tertiary level). If a class includes native speakers, the teacher may occasionally need access to extra support to provide, for example, an appropriate level of challenge.

At this level, grammatical development is more or less complete. Errors of performance occur, particularly in complex texts when a high level of extralinguistic processing is required and/or there is a high level of emotion or fatigue on the part of users. Users can often, however, hear and correct such ench (For reference to 'slips' made by native speakers, see W:4 COMMENT column.)

Mismatch between what users convey through their L_2 speech (and accompanying non-verbal communication) and their self-image and intentions in rarely attributable to L_2 developmental factors (but note reference below to accent).

Strength of accent depends on individual factors (e.g. personality and musicility) and on the L_1 and the age at which users were exposed to the L_2. If the L_1 phonological system is very different from that of the L_2 and there was no significant exposure pre-puberty, the accent may be fairly strong (although not, at this level, strong enough to interfere with understanding). Some users at this level may have an accent which is associated by native speakers with a different sociocultural variety. L_2 teachers are aware of their accent and of its implications for their teaching (e.g. the desirability of giving students wide exposure to other, native-speaker models).

Progress beyond this level is dependent on thorough, long-term submersion in the target culture and users' sensitivity to all aspects of the culture.

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