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AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE
TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES



The ACTFL Listening and Reading Proficiency Benchmark Study 2014-2015

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Outline

- Background
- Preliminary Findings
 - University of Utah
- Implications
 - Language distance
 - Task hierarchies, domains, role of vocabulary
 - Receptive and productive skills
 - Curriculum



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Background

- No data on realistic proficiency level expectations in the interpretive skills in college FL programs
- Feasibility of professional (advanced) level expectations in college FL programs
- Relationship between interpretive and productive skills in SLA
- Relationship between types of instruction and proficiency levels



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Advanced Level Expectations

- IM in Speaking: Threshold that is very difficult to cross even at graduation
 - without a significant amount of time in the target culture
- Professional (advanced) levels may be possible in the interpretive modalities
 - for the global market place
 - for STEM
 - bridging the gap between literature (film) and language faculty
 - reducing attrition rates (students realize what they have achieved)
 - allowing FL departments to reassert their relevance in higher ed



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Interpretive and Productive Skills

- Advanced listening proficiency levels may be a prerequisite for speaking proficiency to cross the IM threshold
- Advanced reading proficiency levels may be conducive to reaching advanced listening and speaking proficiency levels
- The vocabulary competence needed to cross into Advanced levels of proficiency for all skills (3000 to 5000 words) may best be gained through reading (and listening)
- Reading, in particular, allows for a focus on form, which may be crucial to reach Advanced levels in speaking



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Research Questions

- What levels of listening and reading proficiency are commonly reached after 2, 3, and 4 semesters and after 3 and 4 years of college FL instruction in a variety of languages?
- What are the differences in proficiency levels in listening and reading proficiency within and across language families, orthographies (deep vs. shallow), and writing systems (Latin, Cyrillic, Chinese, Arabic)?



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Results U of U: Number of Tests

		1020	2020	3040	3060
Spanish	Reading	54	42	24	86
	Listening	46	42	20	84
French	Reading	26	28	28	
	Listening	25	26	28	
German	Reading			9	11
	Listening			9	11



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Highlights: Advanced Levels in Third Year

		1020	2020	3040	3060
Spanish	Reading	3.45	5.04	7.33	7.30
	Listening	2.65	3.19	6.25	7.07
French	Reading	3.27	5.11	6.32	
	Listening	1.92	1.81	3.89	
German	Reading			2.56	6.63
	Listening			1.45	7.00



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Highlights: French Deep Orthography

		1020	2020	3040	3060
Spanish	Reading	3.45	5.04	7.33	7.30
	Listening	2.65	3.19	6.25	7.07
French	Reading	3.27	5.11	6.32	
	Listening	1.92	1.81	3.89	
German	Reading			2.56	6.63
	Listening			1.45	7.00



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Returning Missionaries have Very Similar Levels in Both Skills

		1020	2020	3040	3060
Spanish	Reading	3.45	5.04	7.33	7.30
	Listening	2.65	3.19	6.25	7.07
French	Reading	3.27	5.11	6.32	
	Listening	1.92	1.81	3.89	
German	Reading			2.56	6.63
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German 3040

		1020	2020	3040	3060
Spanish	Reading	3.45	5.04	7.33	7.30
	Listening	2.65	3.19	6.25	7.07
French	Reading	3.27	5.11	6.32	
	Listening	1.92	1.81	3.89	
German	Reading			2.56	6.63
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German: Heterogeneous Groups

	BR	IM	IH	AL	AM	M	SD	N
Reading	5	1	3			2.56	3.05	9
Listening	7	1			1	1.45	2.96	9



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Discussion: Heterogeneity

Spanish	BR	NL	NM	NH	IL	IM	IH	AL	AM
R 2020	6			6	11	7	6	6	
R 3040							1	14	9
R 3060	2						7	30	47
L 2020	17			9	9	2	3	2	
L 3040	1						9	9	1
L 3060						1	8	59	16



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Discussion: Heterogeneity

French	BR	NL	NM	NH	IL	IM	IH	AL	AM
R 2020	1			1	4	12	6	4	
R 3040	3					2	2	13	8
L 2020	13			7	5		1		
L 3040	9					9	3	6	



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Discussion: Reading

- How realistic is: 1020: IM; 2020: AL; 3040: AM?
 - UofU: French 1020: NH; 2020: IM; 3040: IH
 - Spanish 1020: NH; 2020: IL; 3040: AL
- Vocabulary size explains more than 50% of the variation in reading proficiency (Correlation Coefficient: .7)
 - IM: 2000 words; AL: 3000 words; AM: 5000 words
- Principled approach to teaching reading comprehension?
- Principled approach to expanding reading vocabulary?
- Narration/description/explanation/exposition (Functions)
- Humanities/Social Studies/STEM and Literature (Topics)



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Discussion: Listening

- How realistic is: 1020: IL; 2020: IH; 3040: AL?
 - UofU: French 1020: NM; 2020: NM; 3040: IL
 - Spanish 1020: NM; 2020: NH; 3040: AL
- Vocabulary size important for listening comprehension
 - IM: 2000 words; AL: 3000 words; AM: 5000 words
- Principled approach to teaching listening comprehension?
- Principled approach to expanding listening vocabulary?
- Narration/description/explanation/exposition (Functions)
- Humanities/Social Studies/STEM and Film/Theater (Topics)



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Discussion: Advanced Levels

Certification of Advanced level skills in the interpretive modes

- end of second year: may increase the number of continuing students and may be of professional value for students not continuing
- end of third year: may be a decisive professional advantage for students across the humanities, social sciences, and STEM
- end of third year: may enable students interested in literature and film to discover a professional career in the philologies



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Discussion: Program Building

- Advanced Reading and Listening Comprehension instead of Advanced Composition and Conversation?
- Principled approaches to vocabulary building instead of principled approaches to grammar learning?
- Selection of reading materials according to text difficulty and genre in addition to content, canon considerations, and aesthetics?
- Adding courses focusing on film/documentaries?
- Student self-selection of reading and listening materials?



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감사합니다 Natick
Grazie Danke Ευχαριστίες Dalu
Thank You Köszönöm
Спасибо Dank Gracias
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ありがとう

Obrigado