

# OPI Testing at ILR Levels 3, 4 & 5

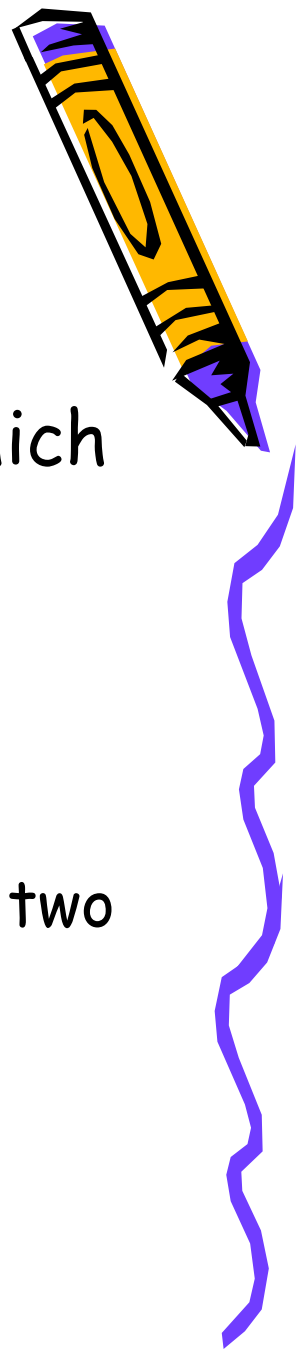
ILR Plenary Presentation  
September 19, 2008

Monika Ihlenfeld, DLIFLC  
Pardee Lowe, Jr., DOD  
Elvira Swender, ACTFL



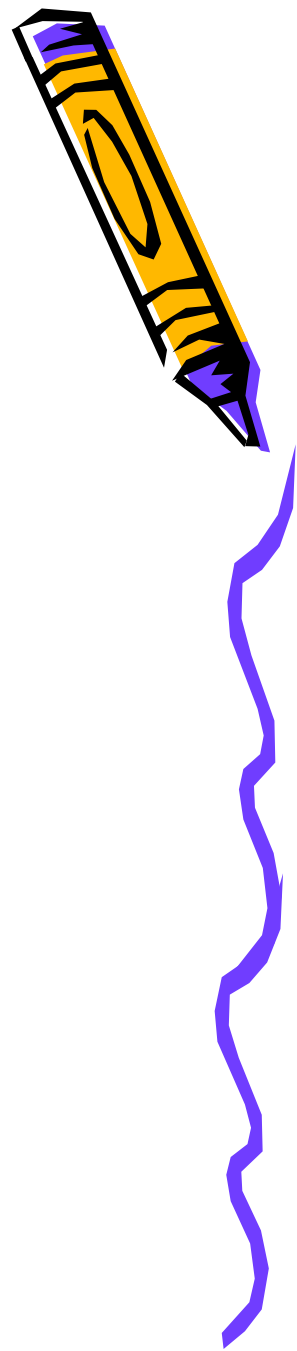
# Background

- Increase in number of languages for which OPI testing is needed
- ACTFL/DLI testing collaboration
  - ACTFL trains OPI testers in DLI testing protocol and ILR rating system
  - ACTFL/DLI circulate samples between the two testing programs
  - Maintain rating standardization



# New demands for OPI testing at the higher levels

- Increase in rating discrepancies at 3+ and above
- Using the same ILR Skill Descriptors
  - Interpreting them in different ways
- Disagreement regarding what constitutes an ILR 4



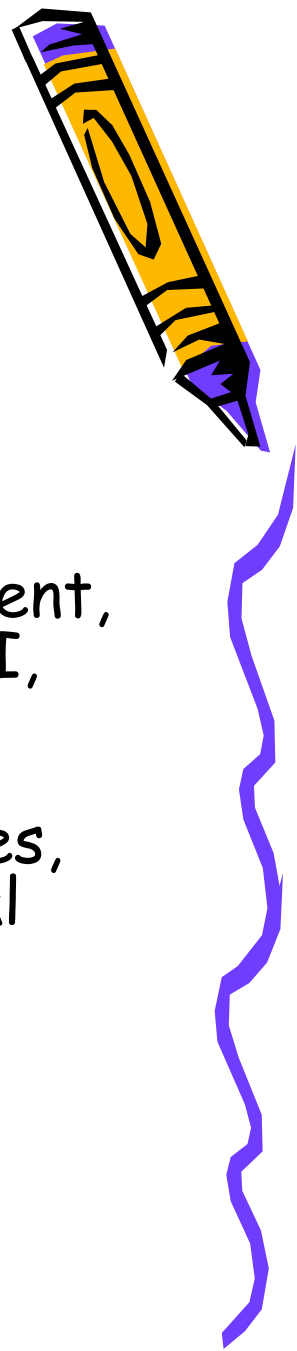
# December 2007 Meeting

- ACTFL/DLI Collaboration to address testing at 3+ and above
- Participants
  - DLI OPI Trainers and Master Testers
  - ACTFL ILR trained OPI Trainers and Master Testers
    - Arabic, English, French, Mandarin, Persian, Spanish
  - Outcome
    - Plan a Summit to address the issues of OPI testing and rating at 3+ and above
    - Include government agencies and private testing contractors

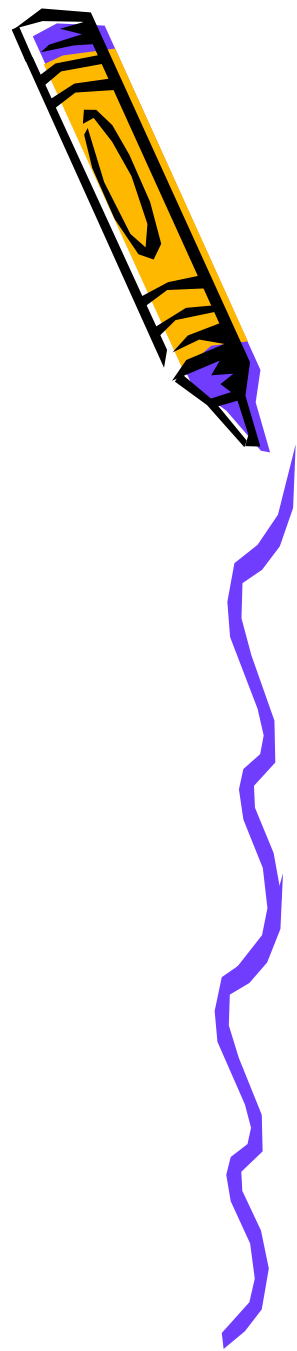


# June 2008 Summit

- June 12-13 in Monterey, CA
- 64 participants
  - ACTFL, American Councils, Avant Assessment, DLI-FLC, Department of Defense, FBI, FSI, Global Linguist Solutions, Language Testing International, LLE-Language Services, Monterey Institute of International Studies, National Foreign Language Center, National Geo-Spatial Intelligence Agency, National Language Service Corps, Second Language Testing, Inc., Washington Language Center



# Goals and Procedures



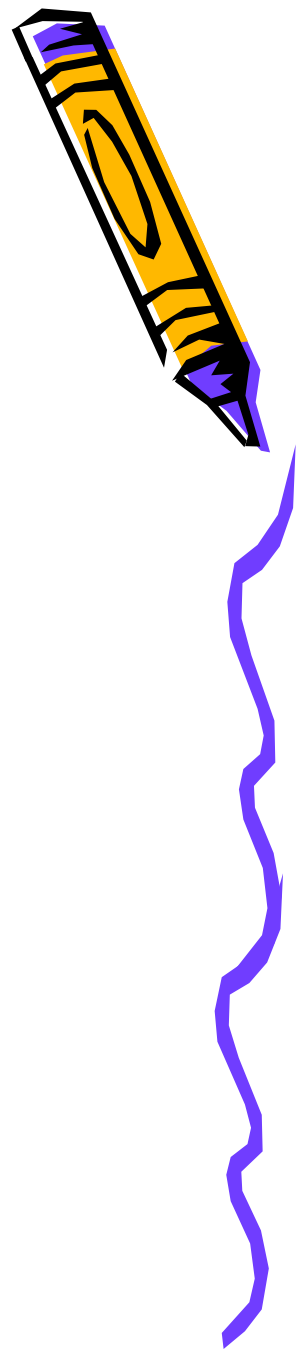
- Observe OPI interview samples at
  - ILR Level 5
  - ILR Level 4
  - ILR Level 3
- Analyze ILR Skill Descriptors of
  - ILR Level 5
  - ILR Level 4
  - ILR Level 3
- Identify the most "salient" features of
  - ILR Level 5
  - ILR Level 4
  - ILR Level 3



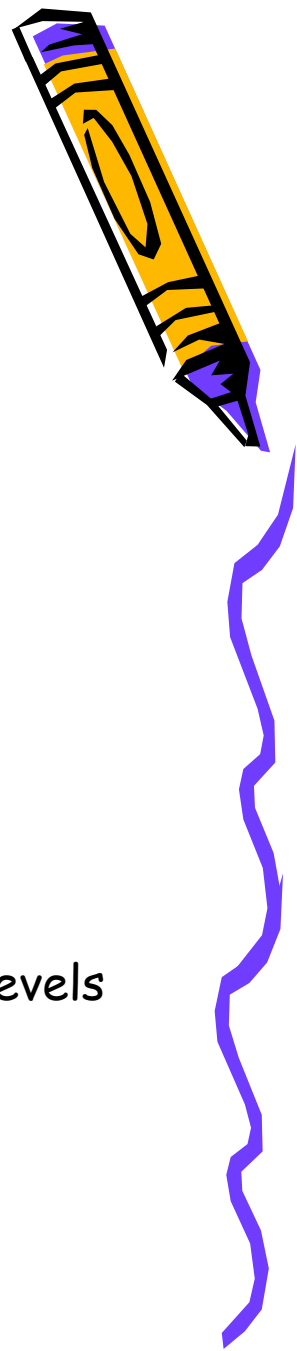
\*ILR Plus Levels were reserved for a later conference

# Day 1 Agenda

- Opening Remarks
  - Setting the stage for the discussion
- Focus on L5 (General Session)
  - Observe Native speaker performance
  - Observe Non-native speaker performance
  - General debriefing
- Focus on L4
  - Break-out groups
    - Observe Native speaker performance
    - Observe Non-native speaker performance
  - General debriefing
    - Groups report back on L4 discussions



# Day 2 Agenda



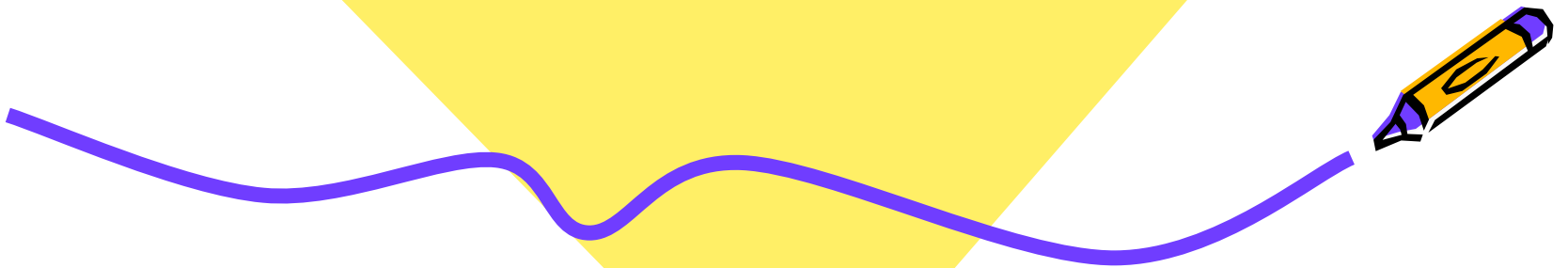
- Focus on L3
  - Break out sessions
    - Observe Native speaker performance
    - Observe Non-native speaker performance
  - General debriefing
    - Groups report back on L3 discussions
- Focus on Salient Features of L5, L4, L3
  - Break out sessions
    - Identify and compare salient features of the three levels
  - General reporting of groups' findings
- Summit Summary and Closing Remarks

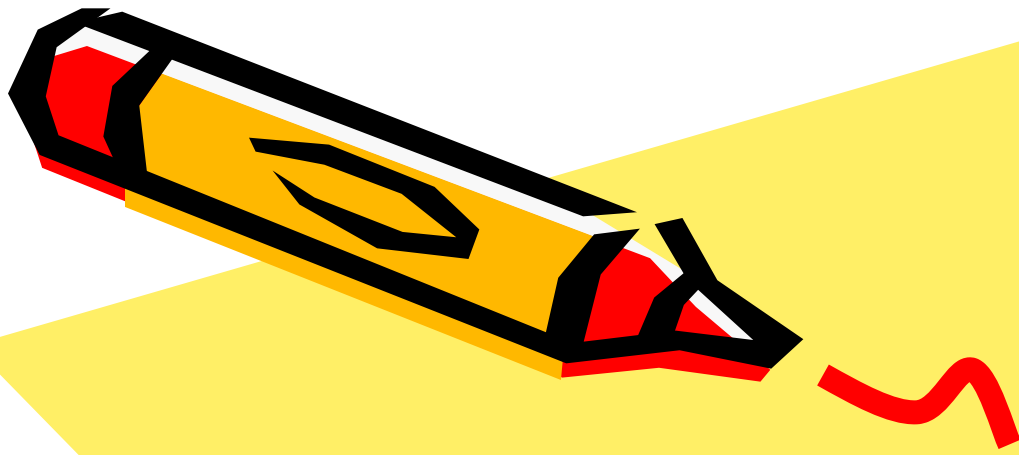






What We Learned





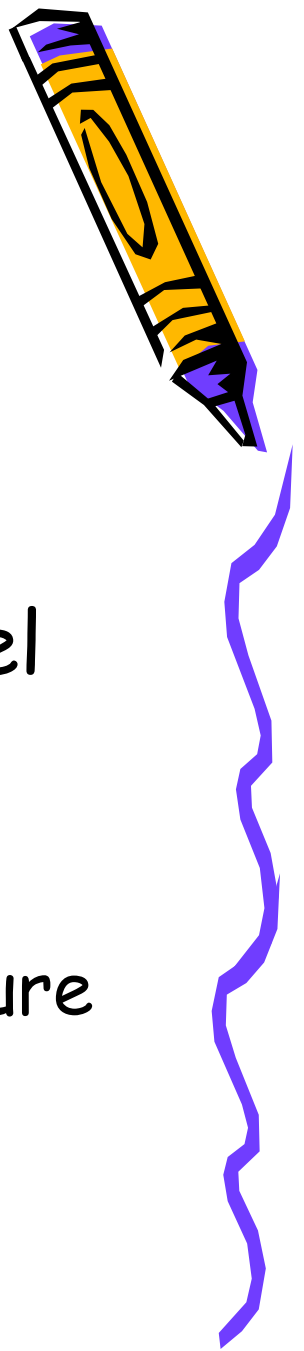
# Synthesizing the Features at ILR 3,4,5

Pardee Lowe, Jr.



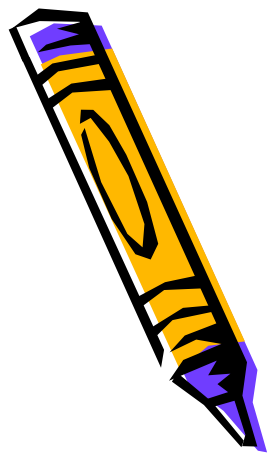
# Charting the Agreement

- Synthesize the results of the four break-out groups for each ILR Level
- Produce Tables that show
  - the features cited
  - how many groups agreed on each feature



# Difficulties in Synthesizing

- Synthesizing the salient features was rendered difficult because some groups cited:
  - A whole sentence from the definition;
  - Others cited phrases, but not the complete sentence;
  - Still others cited only key words.



# Isolating vs. Chunking the Features

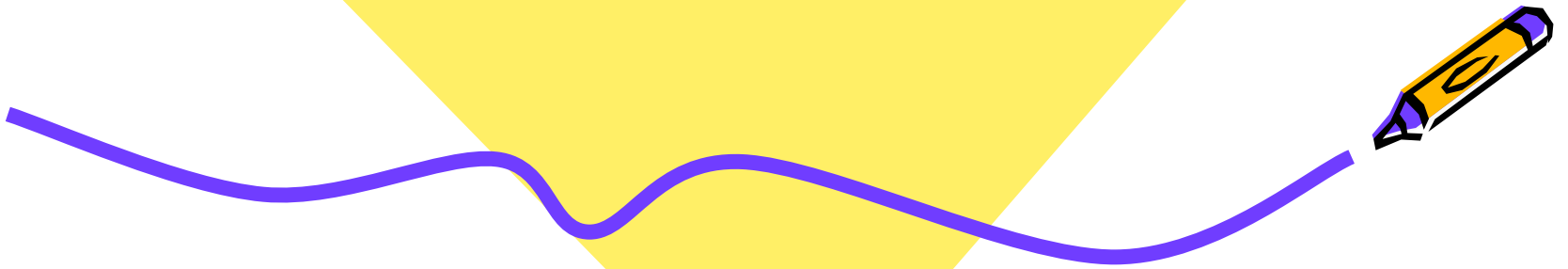


- To determine the amount of agreement, Lowe isolated the features in each definition.
- This was admittedly arbitrary, but he cut them as fine as possible.
- Example: At Level 4 "fluently and accurately" counted as two separate features.



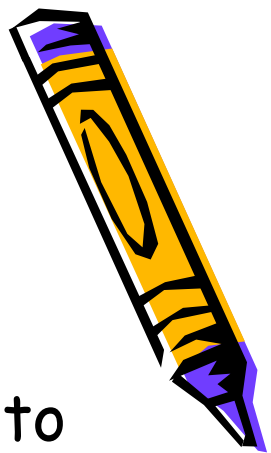


ILR LEVEL 5



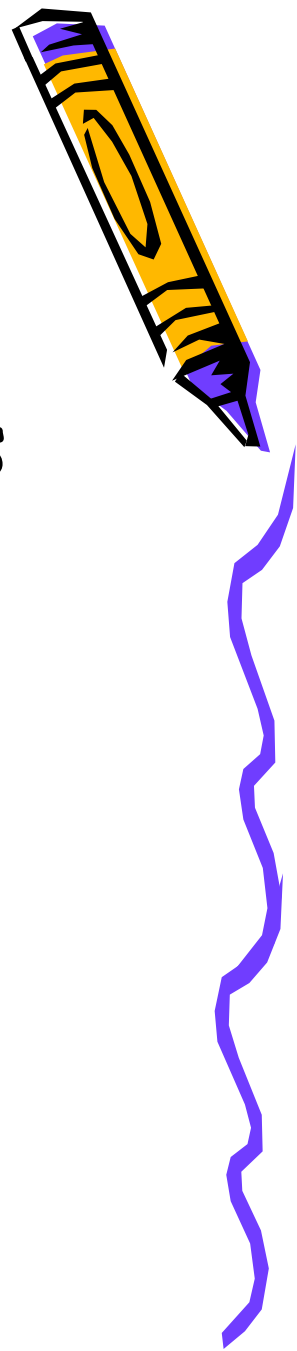
# ILR 5 Speaking

Speaking proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of a highly articulate well-educated native speaker and reflects the cultural standards of the country where the language is natively spoken. The individual uses the language with complete flexibility and intuition, so that speech on all levels is fully accepted by well-educated native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references. Pronunciation is typically consistent with that of well-educated native speakers of a non-stigmatized dialect. (Has been coded S-5 in some nonautomated applications.)



# Level 5 Definition

- The ILR Level description consists of:
  - 3 sentences, containing
  - 12 features
  - Unlike Levels 4 and 3, there is no **EXAMPLES** section





	<b>TABLE 3: ILR LEVEL 3 Salient Features Aligned</b>
	* marks items not in the wording of the definitions
	<b>Four Groups Agree</b>
Grp 1, 2, 3 & 4	Discourse: All agreed, but characterized it differently, social, professional, extended effective
	<b>Three Groups Agree</b>
Grp 2, 3 & 4	Practical, social, professional topics
Grp 1, 2 & 4	Cohesive discourse --If Grp 3's comment is interpreted as "cohesive" -- Four groups may agree
Grp 3	Extended effective discourse
Grp 4	Errors don't interfere, no systematic errors -- If the comments from Grps 1 & 2 are included, 4 agree
Grp 2	Virtually no errors occur in basic structures
Grp 1	Errors virtually never interfere with understanding & errors rarely disturb the native speaker
Grp 2 & 4	Can effectively combine structure and vocabulary to convey meaning accurately -- 3 if Grp 1 include
Grp 1	Use of structural devices is flexible and elaborate
	<b>Possible Three Groups Agreeing</b>
Grp 1 & 2	Elaborate concepts freely -- Grp 2 adds: and practically -- If one includes Grp 1, 3 Groups agree
Grp 3	Ability to deal with concepts, to move from personal/concrete to societal/abstract.
Grp 1	Elaborate concepts freely on social and professional topics
Grp 2 & 4	* Supported Opinion -- Perhaps agreement by three if Grp 1's comment is included:
Grp 1	Stating and defending a policy & justifying decisions & clarifying points & answering objections
	<b>Two Groups Agree</b>
Grp 1 & 4	Formal/informal conversation
Grp 1 & 4	Normal rate of speech
	<b>TABLE 3: ILR LEVEL 3 Salient Features Aligned (cont.)</b>
	<b>Cited by Only One Group</b>
Grp 1	Although may not be fully understood can easily repair a conversation
Grp 4	* Abstract discussion
Grp 1	* Hypothesis
Grp 1	Deliver briefings EXAMPLES???
Grp 1	Doesn't miss a beat
Grp 1	Eliciting information from native speakers EXAMPLES???
Grp 1	Incomplete understanding of cultural references
Grp 1	Makes ideas easily understandable to native speakers
Grp 1	Pronunciation may be foreign
Grp 3	Recognition and limited use of sociolinguistic features and concepts
Grp 1	Speaks readily and fills pauses suitably without searching for words/phrases
Grp 4	Standard dialect
	<b>Participative Listening</b>
Grp 1	Comprehension is quite complete

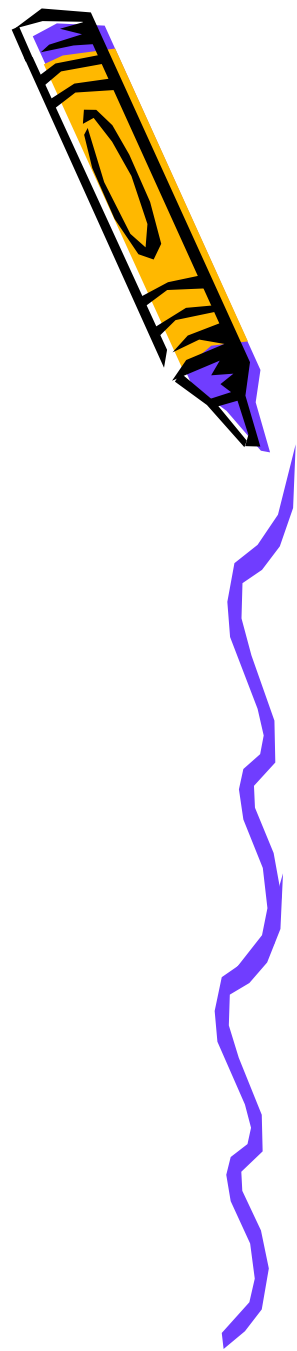
# ILR Level 5 - Agreement

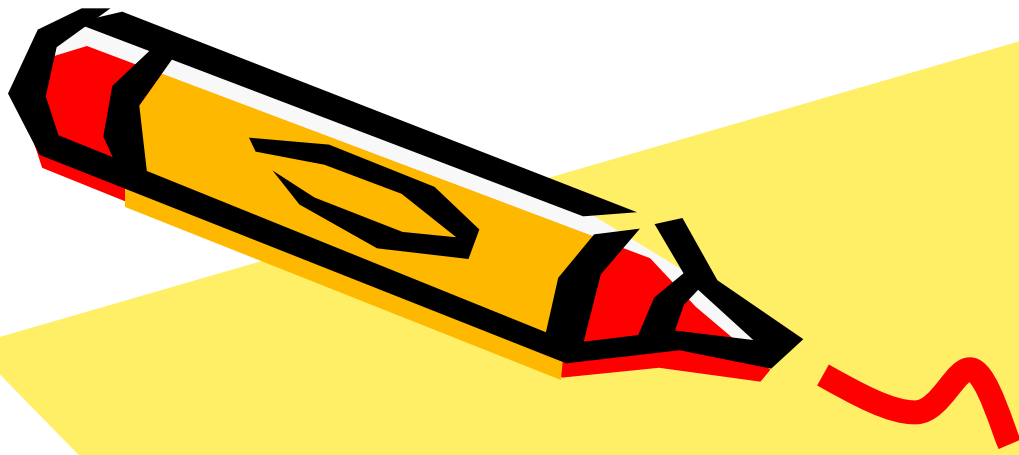


- Consensus that L5 speakers exist
- The features of all four groups taken together cited every feature in ILR Level 5
- Three of the four Break-out Groups cited the "well-educated native speaker"
  - One attendee questioned the "concept of the 'well-educated native speaker.'"
- One group stated "the highest levels of perfection that the language is capable of"

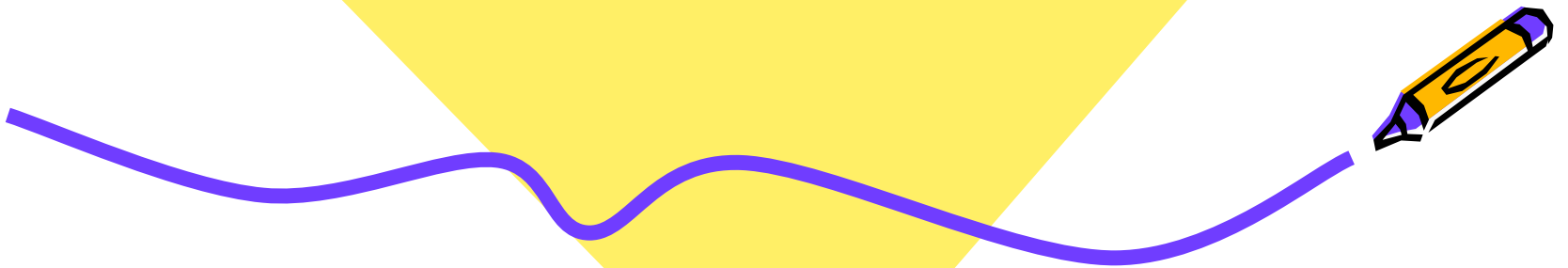


L5 Sample





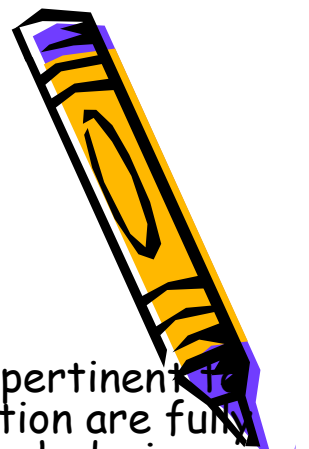
ILR LEVEL 4



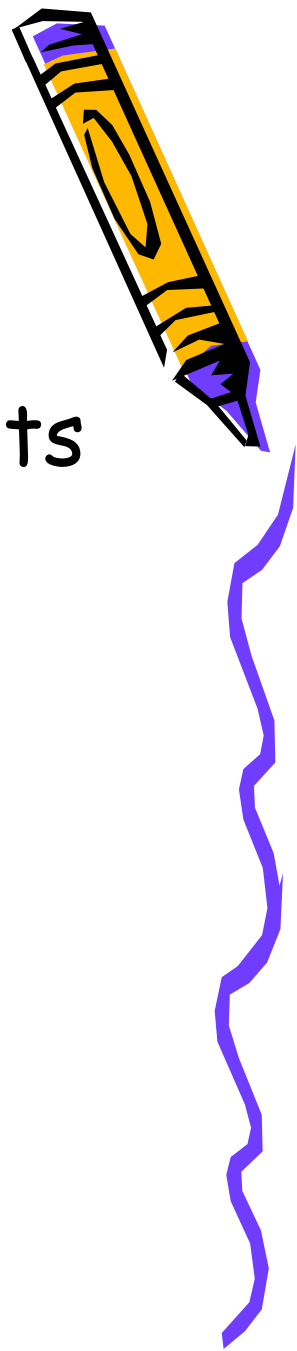
# ILR 4 Speaking

- Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. The individual's language usage and ability to function are fully successful. Organizes discourse well, using appropriate rhetorical speech devices, native cultural references, and understanding. Language ability only rarely hinders him/her in performing any task requiring language; yet, the individual would seldom be perceived as a native. Speaks effortlessly and smoothly and is able to use the language with a high degree of effectiveness, reliability, and precision for all representational purposes within the range of personal and professional experience and scope of responsibilities. Can serve as an informal interpreter in a range of unpredictable circumstances. Can perform extensive, sophisticated language tasks, encompassing most matters of interest to well-educated native speakers, including tasks which do not bear directly on a professional specialty.

Examples: Can discuss in detail concepts which are fundamentally different from those of the target culture and make those concepts clear and accessible to the native speaker. Similarly, the individual can understand the details and ramifications of concepts that are culturally or conceptually different from his/her own. Can set the tone of interpersonal official, semi-official, and non-professional verbal exchanges with a representative range of native speakers (in a range of varied audiences, purposes, tasks, and settings). Can play an effective role among native speakers in such contexts as conferences, lectures, and debates on matters of disagreement. Can advocate a position at length, both formally and in chance encounters, using sophisticated verbal strategies. Understands and reliably produces shifts of both subject matter and tone. Can understand native speakers of the standard and other major dialects in essentially any face-to-face interaction. (Has been coded S-4 in some nonautomated applications.) Skills Descriptor



# Level 4 Definition



- The ILR Level 4 description consists of:
  - 8 sentences, containing
  - 30 features, as well as a set of
- **EXAMPLES** consisting of
  - 7 sentences, with
  - 33 features



**TABLE 2: ILR LEVEL 4 SALIENT FEATURES ALIGNED**

\* marks a feature not in the wording of the definitions

**Four Groups Agreed**

None cited

**Three Groups Agreed that**

Grp 1, 2 & 4 Cultural -- Grp 1 cited "native cultural references"

Grp 1, 3 & 4 Sophisticated

Grp 2, 4 Tailor language/shift to different register -- Three agree, if Grp 1 is included

**Where groups have used a slightly different wording I included it in the following:**

Grp 1 Sets and shifts tone and register to fit the audience

**Two Groups Agreed that**

Grp 1 & 4 Effective

Grp 1 & 4 Extensive

Grp 1 & 4 Precise

Grp 1 & 4 Reliable

Grp 1 & 4 Representational/\*persuasive --Can advocate a position at length (i.e. persuade and convince) Grp 1

Grp 1 & 4 Smooth -- Fluently Grp 1

Grp 2 & 4 Well-organized discourse, -- Three groups if one includes: Planned and unplanned discourse (Grp 1)

Grp 1 & 2 Rhetorical devices

**TABLE 2: ILR LEVEL 4 SALIENT FEATURES ALIGNED (cont)**

**Cited by Only One Group that**

Grp 1 Can perform extensive sophisticated language tasks with precision, effectiveness and reliability...

Grp 1 (cont.) which do not bear directly on a professional specialty

Grp 2 Can tailor language effectively and shift register appropriately in order to accomplish influencing tasks.

Grp 4 Comprehensive

Grp 3 Extensive vocabulary and sophisticated structure allows performance of any task at the appropriate level

Grp 4 Multiple paragraphs

Grp 4 Native

Grp 4 "no" errors

Grp 2 speaks effortlessly and smoothly and is able to use language for the most part with a high degree of effectiveness,

Grp 2 (cont.) reliability and precision for all representational purposes

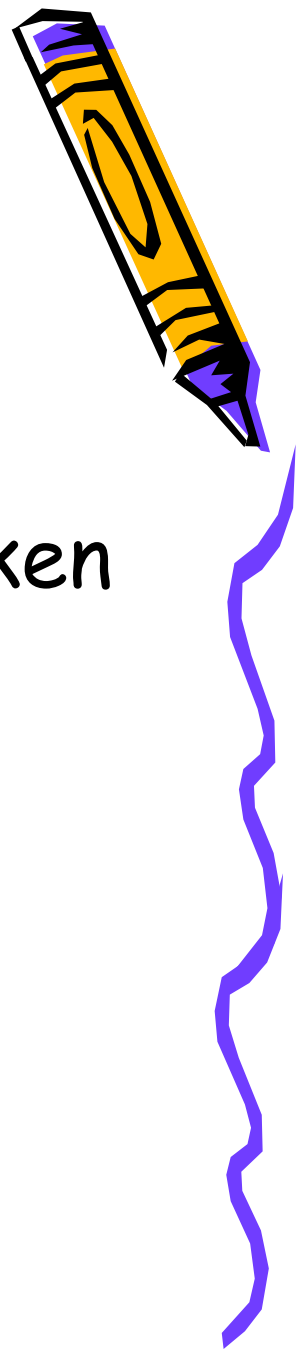
Grp 4 Uses appropriate rhetorical speech devices and native cultural references

Grp 4 Uses language fluently, accurately and with precision

Grp 2 Using well-organized discourse can perform tasks that do not bear directly on a professional specialty

Grp 2 (cont.) and can advocate a position at length using sophisticated and rhetorical devices and cultural references.

# ILR Level 4 - Agreement



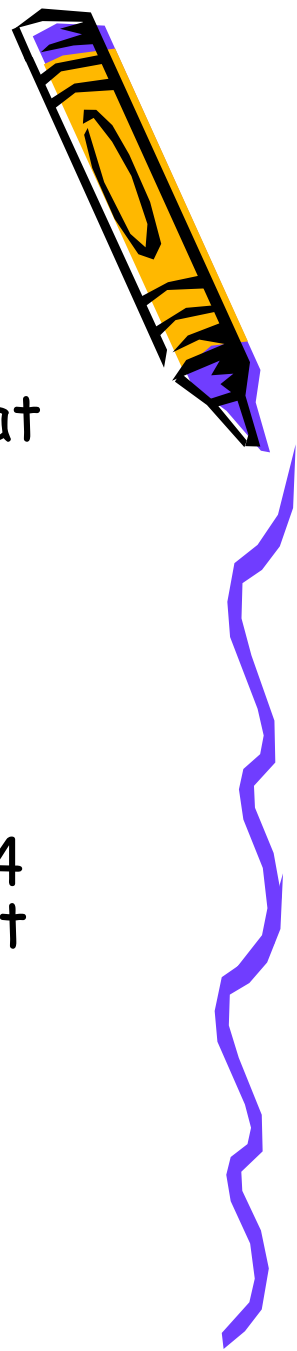
The comments of all four groups taken together: they cited

- 15 of the 30 features in the definition, and
- only 1 of the features from the **EXAMPLES**





# Agreements at Level 4

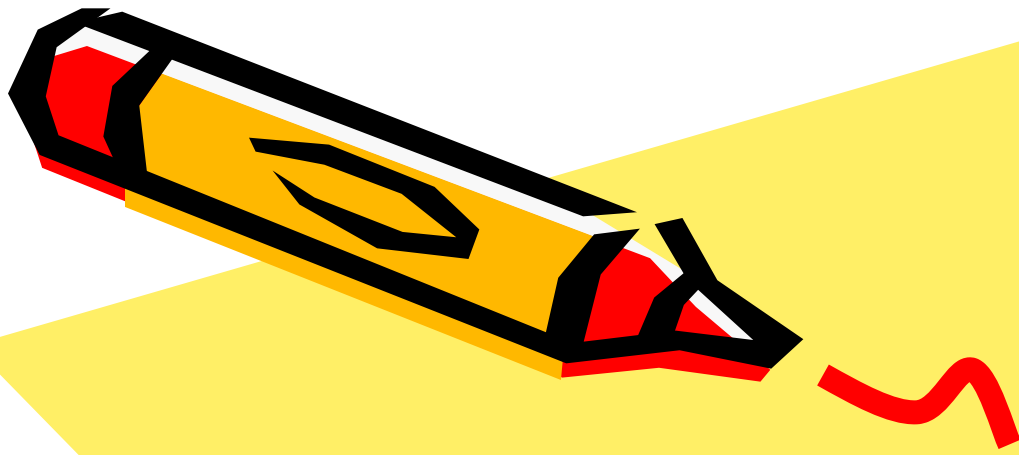


Three groups agreed that Level 4 was the level at which

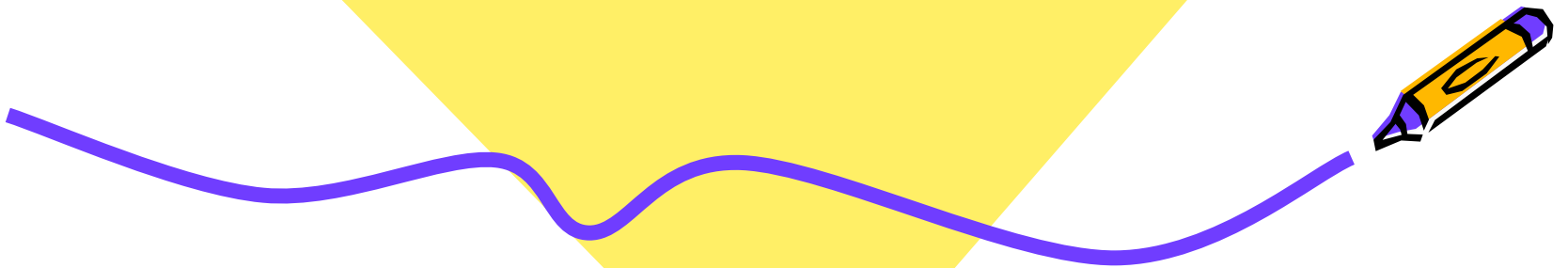
- The language is sophisticated
- Culture plays a role;
- \* Tailoring language is required;

\* NOTE: "Tailoring" does not occur in the Level 4 definition. It may be implied by other words at that level. Compare also: ILR 4 Listening "understands words specifically tailored..."





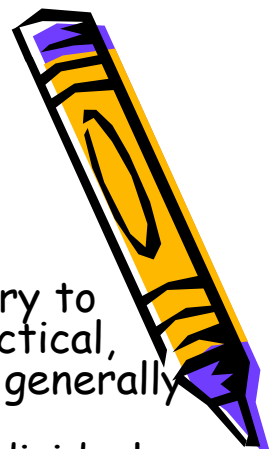
ILR LEVEL 3



# ILR3 Speaking

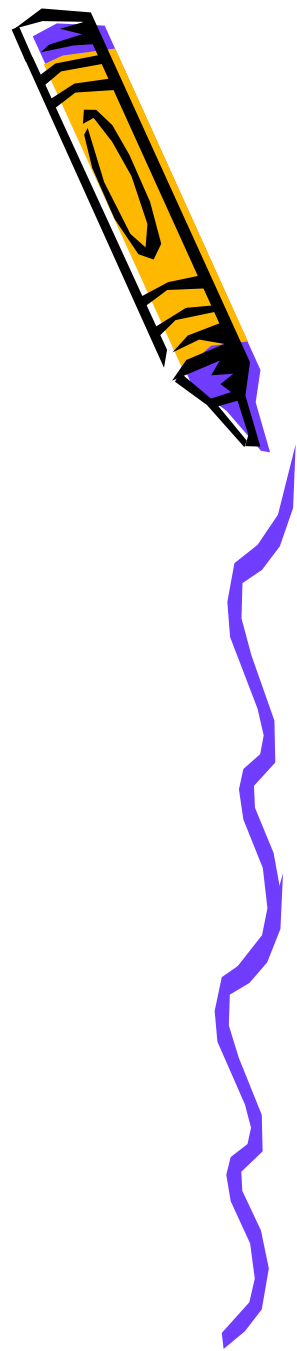
Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Nevertheless, the individual's limitations generally restrict the professional contexts of language use to matters of shared knowledge and/or international convention. Discourse is cohesive. The individual uses the language acceptably, but with some noticeable imperfections; yet, errors virtually never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker. The individual can effectively combine structure and vocabulary to convey his/her meaning accurately. The individual speaks readily and fills pauses suitably. In face-to-face conversation with natives speaking the standard dialect at a normal rate of speech, comprehension is quite complete. Although cultural references, proverbs, and the implications of nuances and idiom may not be fully understood, the individual can easily repair the conversation. Pronunciation may be obviously foreign. Individual sounds are accurate; but stress, intonation, and pitch control may be faulty.

Examples: Can typically discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease. Can use the language as part of normal professional duties such as answering objections, clarifying points, justifying decisions, understanding the essence of challenges, stating and defending policy, conducting meetings, delivering briefings, or other extended and elaborate informative monologues. Can reliably elicit information and informed opinion from native speakers. Structural inaccuracy is rarely the major cause of misunderstanding. Use of structural devices is flexible and elaborate. Without searching for words or phrases, the individual uses the language clearly and relatively naturally to elaborate concepts freely and make ideas easily understandable to native speakers. Errors occur in low-frequency and highly complex structures. (Has been coded S-3 in some nonautomated applications.)



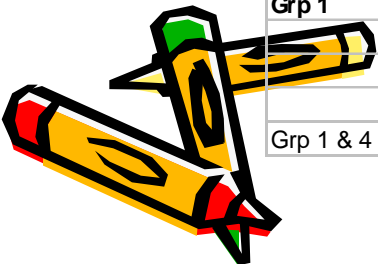
# The Level 3 Definition

- The Level 3 definitions consist of
  - 10 sentences, citing
  - 38 features, as well as an
- **EXAMPLES** section, consisting of
  - 7 sentences, with
  - 37 features

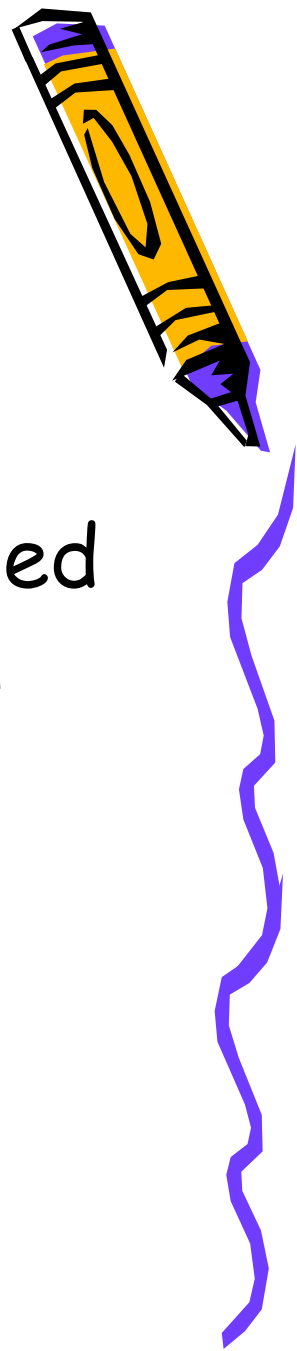




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	<b>Four Groups Agree</b>
Grp 1, 2, 3 & 4	Discourse: All agreed, but characterized it differently, social, professional, extended effective!
	<b>Three Groups Agree</b>
Grp 2, 3 & 4	Practical, social, professional topics
Grp 1, 2 & 4	Cohesive discourse --If Grp 3's comment is interpreted as "cohesive" -- Four groups may agree
Grp 3	Extended effective discourse
Grp 4	Errors don't interfere, no systematic errors -- If the comments from Grps 1 & 2 are included, 4 agree
Grp 2	Virtually no errors occur in basic structures
Grp 1	Errors virtually never interfere with understanding & errors rarely disturb the native speaker
Grp 2 & 4	Can effectively combine structure and vocabulary to convey meaning accurately -- 3 if Grp 1 include
Grp 1	Use of structural devices is flexible and elaborate
	<b>Possible Three Groups Agreeing</b>
Grp 1 & 2	Elaborate concepts freely -- Grp 2 adds: and practically -- If one includes Grp 1, 3 Groups agree
Grp 3	Ability to deal with concepts, to move from personal/concrete to societal/abstract.
Grp 1	Elaborate concepts freely on social and professional topics
Grp 2 & 4	* Supported Opinion -- Perhaps agreement by three if Grp 1's comment is included:
<b>Grp 1</b>	Stating and defending a policy & justifying decisions & clarifying points & answering objections
	<b>Two Groups Agree</b>
Grp 1 & 4	Formal/informal conversation



# The Level 3 Agreement?



- All four groups taken together cited a total of 13 out of 38 features in the definition;
- Only 3 out of 37 features in the EXAMPLES



# ILR Level 3 - Agreement



Four groups agreed that Level 3 was the level of discourse;  
Three groups agreed that discourse was cohesive; the fourth group had a wording that could have been so interpreted;  
Three groups also had comments about errors, although their wording varied:

Errors don't (virtually never) interfere with understanding (and rarely disturb the native speaker);

Virtually no errors occur in basic structures;

No systematic errors

Three groups cited: Can effectively combine structure and vocabulary to convey meaning accurately; if one includes:

Use of structural devices is flexible and elaborate



# ILR Level 3 - Agreement- Cont-1.



AT THIS POINT WE CITE THE STATEMENTS OF GROUPS TO  
SHOW HOW COMPLICATED ASCERTAINING THE SALIENT  
FEATURES CAN BE:

POSSIBLE AGREEMENT OF THREE GROUPS ON "CONCEPTS":

Elaborate concepts freely - two groups;  
and practically - adds on of those groups;  
Ability to deal with concepts, to move from  
personal/concrete to societal/abstract - a third group;  
Elaborate concepts freely on social and professional topics  
- added by an above group;





# ILR Level 3 - Agreement- Cont-2.

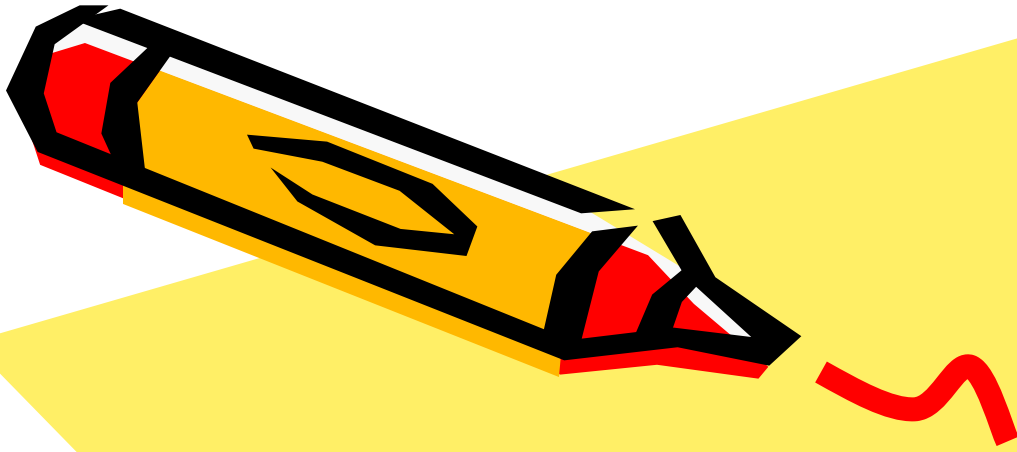


ON \* "SUPPORTED OPINION": Two groups mention this feature, three if another group's comment is included:

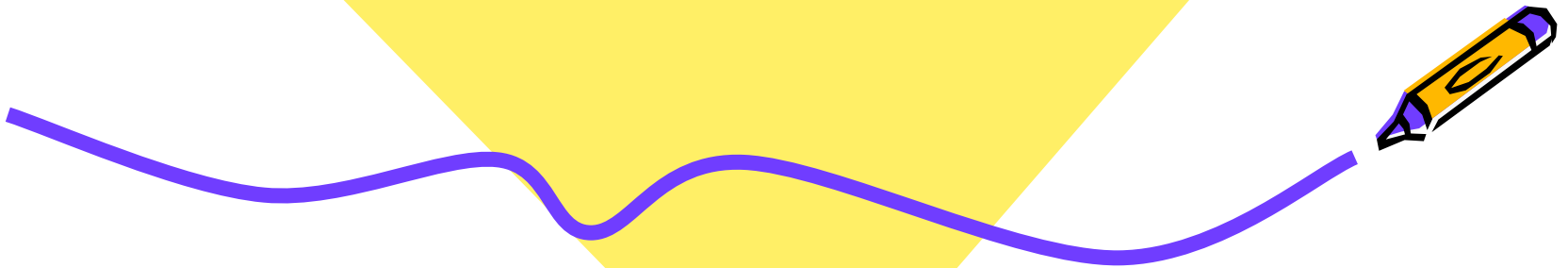
Stating and defending a policy & justifying decision & clarifying points & answering questions

\* NOTE: There is no wording on Supported Opinion in the ILR Level 3 Speaking Skill Description itself,  
BUT it might be implied by the EXAMPLES that follow there and from the actual wording in the ILR Reading and Listening Skill Level Descriptions - both of which cite understanding Supported Opinion.

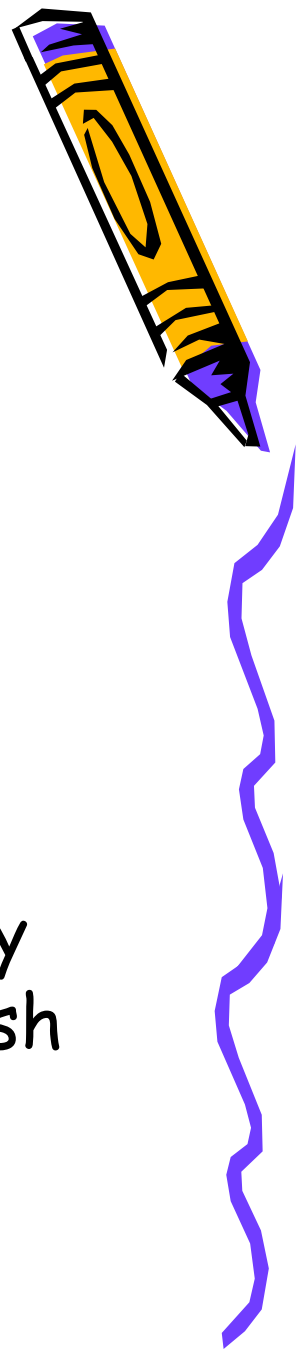




FEATURES MENTIONED  
BUT NOT IN LSLDs



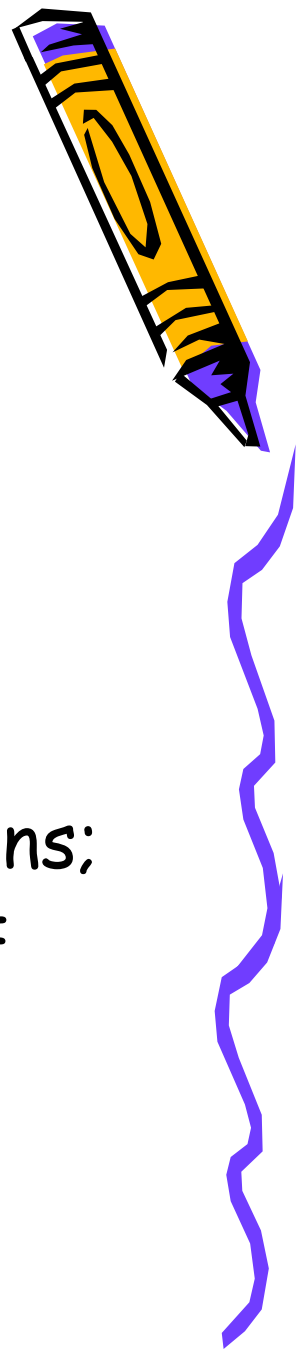
# FEATURES CITED BUT NOT IN LSLDs @ ILR 4



- Level 4: Comprehensive;
- Level 4: Multiple Paragraphs;
- Level 4: Native;
- Level 4: No Errors;
- Level 4: "Can tailor language effectively and shift register in order to accomplish influencing tasks";

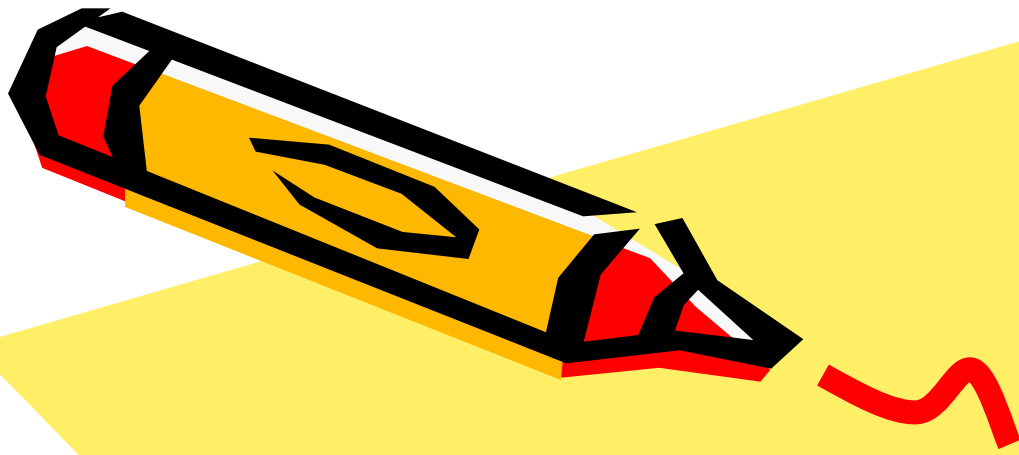


# FEATURES CITED BUT NOT IN LSLDs @ ILR 3

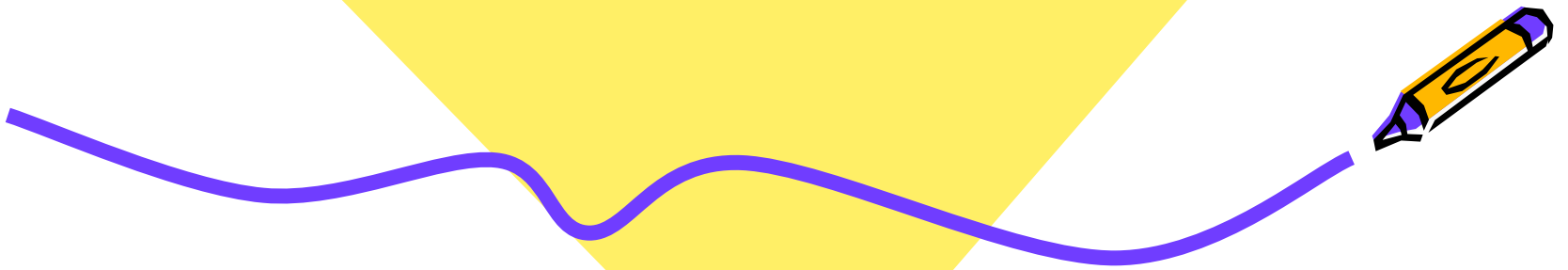


- Level 3: Supported Opinion;
- Level 3: Hypothesis;
- Level 3: Abstract Discussion;
- Level 3: Abstract Linguistic Formulations;
- Level 3: "Recognition and limited use of sociolinguistic features and concepts."





FURTHER STUDY



# Aspects Warranting further Study

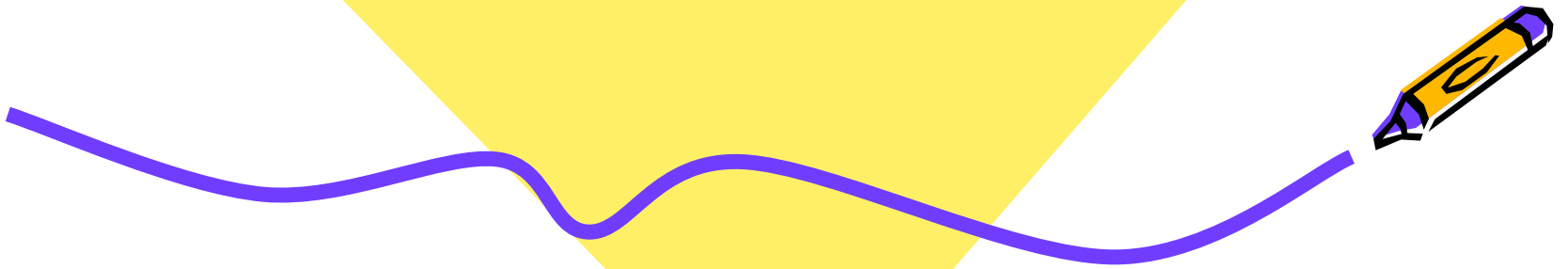


- Nature of the "highly articulate, well-educated native speaker";
- Difference between Level 4 Representation and Level 3 Supported Opinion;
- Features groups cited that were not directly mentioned in the ILR LSLDs;
- Aspects of research since the ILR LSLDs were revised in 1985?



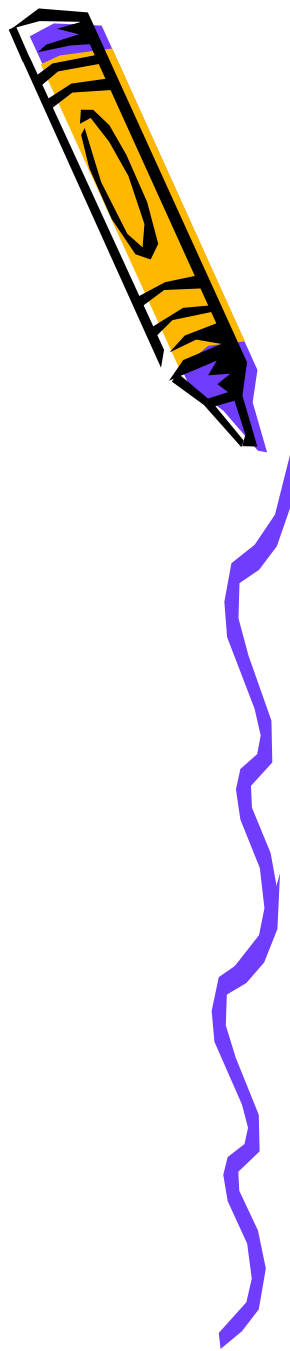


Next Steps



# Conferences

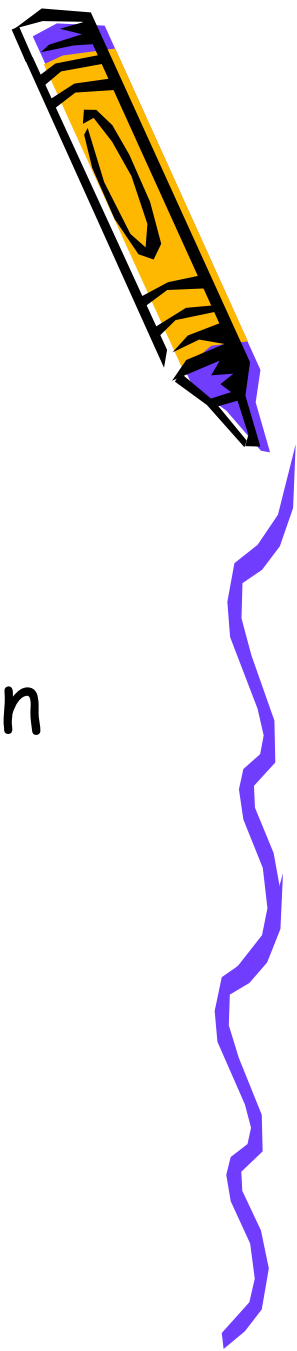
- Two per year
- Future Topics
  - Definition of Terms
    - cf. ACTFL Speaking's Explanatory Appendix
  - Plus Levels
  - Other Skill Modalities
    - Reading
    - Listening
    - Writing





# Bigger Picture

- Implications for the ACTFL Guidelines Revision 2010
- Collaborating on any future revision of the ILR Skill Descriptors for Speaking



# The Future of OPI Testing at the Higher Levels?

