

# The ACTFL Listening and Reading Benchmarking Study

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ACTFL

# Overview

- Why the Interpretive Modes?
- ACTFL Reading and Listening Proficiency Tests
- ACTFL Listening and Reading Benchmark Study
- Findings
- Implications for Curriculum and Instruction
- Questions



# Time spent communicating in general

Listening	45%
Speaking	30%
Reading	16%
Writing	9%

(Wilt 1950)



# Time spent communicating on the job

Listening	38%
Speaking	33%
Reading	19%
Writing	9.5%

Evans, G. / Pastor, E. (1972). Communication 12½. Field survey of language skills and real job needs. Stockholm.



# Listening

- Provides a foundation for all language and cognitive development
- Plays a life-long role in the processes of learning and communication essential to productive participation in life
- Drives foreign language learning (input as engine)

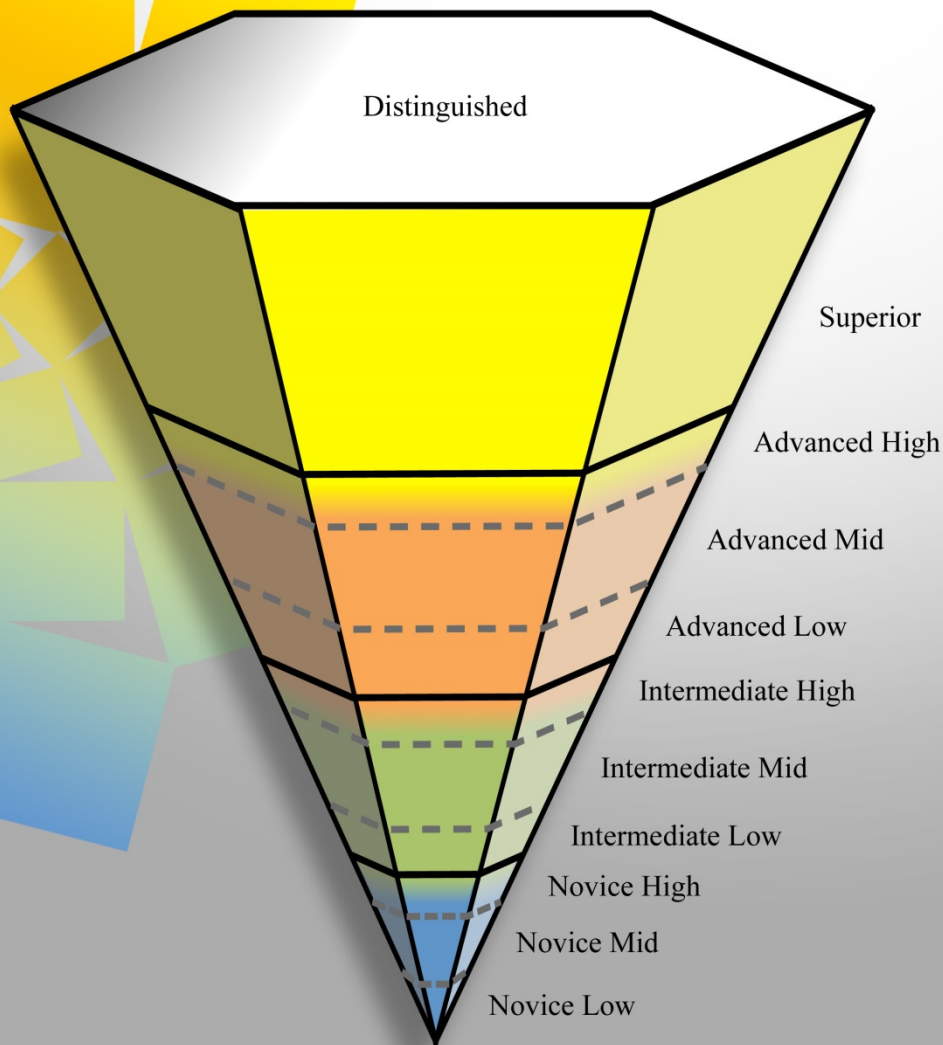


# Reading

- Twice as fast as listening (300 vs. 150 words/minute)
  - More information and learning in less time
- Effective at lower levels of proficiency
  - Requires lower language ability than listening
- Builds vocabulary faster than any other skill
- Builds the right kind of vocabulary
  - Related to higher-order thinking skills and subject areas
- Builds grammatical competence (grammar in use)
- Drives foreign language learning (input as engine)



# ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012



## Reading and Listening

- First revision since the original publication
- Progression of ability to comprehend written and spoken texts
- Division of Advanced into High, Mid, and Low sublevels
- Describe what readers and listeners CAN DO at one major level and CANNOT do at the next higher major level
- Online publication
- Addition of sample written and spoken texts as examples of the major levels

# Questions and Challenges: Reading

- Defining levels of proficiency
- Kinds of texts students can read with what kind of understanding at what level
- The role of reading
  - Influence of reading proficiency on - and how it is influenced by - listening, speaking, and writing proficiency
- Designing curricula to promote the development of reading proficiency





# Questions and Challenges: Listening

- Defining levels of proficiency
- Kinds of aural and visual-aural texts students can understand with what kind of understanding at what level
- The role of listening
  - Influence of listening proficiency on - and how it is influenced by - reading, speaking, and writing proficiency
- Designing curricula to promote the development of listening proficiency



# Assessment for Setting Proficiency Targets

- Assessment provides feedback for students, instructors, and departments
- Assessment helps to set realistic goals
- Assessment outcomes help to align curricula and instruction with program goals



A photograph of a desert landscape. A dark asphalt road with two yellow lines curves through the center of the frame, leading towards the horizon. The road is flanked by sand dunes and sparse, low-lying desert vegetation. The sky is a clear, pale blue. Overlaid on the image is a quote in white text on a dark red background.

If you don't know where you are  
going, you'll end up someplace else.

Yogi Berra

# ACTFL Reading Proficiency Test (RPT)

- Internet-based test taken on a computer in a proctored situation
- Evaluates reading proficiency according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – Reading
- Machine scored





# Reading Highlights

- Real-life passages, tasks, and procedures
- Questions can be seen before reading: **Provides reader intent**
- Test takers can go back and forth between questions for the same text: **Allows flexibility**
- 10 passages at two sublevels: **Provides test takers with enough opportunities to obtain a reliable rating**
- 4 different questions types (global, detail, selective, inference): **Covers a broad range of listening goals**



# Items

- Each text has three questions with four multiple choice options about the text.
- Questions ask for main ideas, supporting detail and the inferences and connections the candidate can make from the content and organization of the text.
- Questions are in the target language.



# ACTFL Listening Proficiency Test (LPT)

- Internet-based test taken on a computer in a proctored situation
- Evaluates listening proficiency according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – Listening
- Machine scored



# Listening Highlights

- Real-life passages, tasks, and procedures
- Questions are asked before listening: Provides listener intent
- Test takers are able to take notes: Prevents having to rely solely on memory
- Passages are heard once: Appropriate for interpretive listening
- 10 passages at two sublevels: Provides test takers with enough opportunities to obtain a reliable rating
- 4 different questions types (global, detail, selective, inference): Covers a broad range of listening goals





# Items

- Each passage has three questions with four multiple choice options about the text.
- Questions ask for main ideas, supporting detail, inferences and connections the candidate can make from the content, tone, pace and organization of the discourse they hear.
- Questions are in the target language for alphabet languages
- For non-alphabet languages, questions and options may be in the target language or in English at the Intermediate level
  - At the Advanced and Superior levels, they are in the target language



# The ACTFL Listening and Reading Proficiency Benchmarking Study



# Acknowledgments

- Language Testing International (LTI)
- The Language Flagship
- University of Leipzig
- Institute for Test Research and Test Development (ITT)
- All participating schools, especially:
  - Michigan State University
  - University of Minnesota
  - University of Utah



# The ACTFL/ILR Proficiency Framework

## Can Do and Will be Able to Do Next Developmental Perspective



# Background

- Little data on realistic proficiency level expectations in the interpretive modes in college FL programs

## Main Questions:

- Are professional (advanced) levels of proficiency in the interpretive modes possible in college FL programs?
- What is the relationship between listening and reading in language learning?
- What role does language distance and orthographic depth play?



# Participants: 22 Colleges and Universities

- U of Minnesota, U of Utah, Michigan State U
- UC Berkeley, U of Southern California, Yale U, U of Delaware, U of Maryland-College Park
- U of Pittsburgh, U of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, SUNY Plattsburgh
- Middlebury College, Hunter College, Bowdoin College, Loras College
- San Diego State U, Georgia Southern U, Lee U
- North Carolina State U, Eastern Washington U, Grand Valley State U, Old Dominion U



# Languages

	Listening	Reading
Spanish	ca. 1700	ca. 1800
French	ca. 750	ca. 800
German	ca. 250	ca. 350
Russian	ca. 150	ca. 150
Italian	ca. 100	ca. 150
Portuguese	ca. 50	ca. 50
Japanese		ca. 100
Total	ca. 3000	ca. 3400



# Results

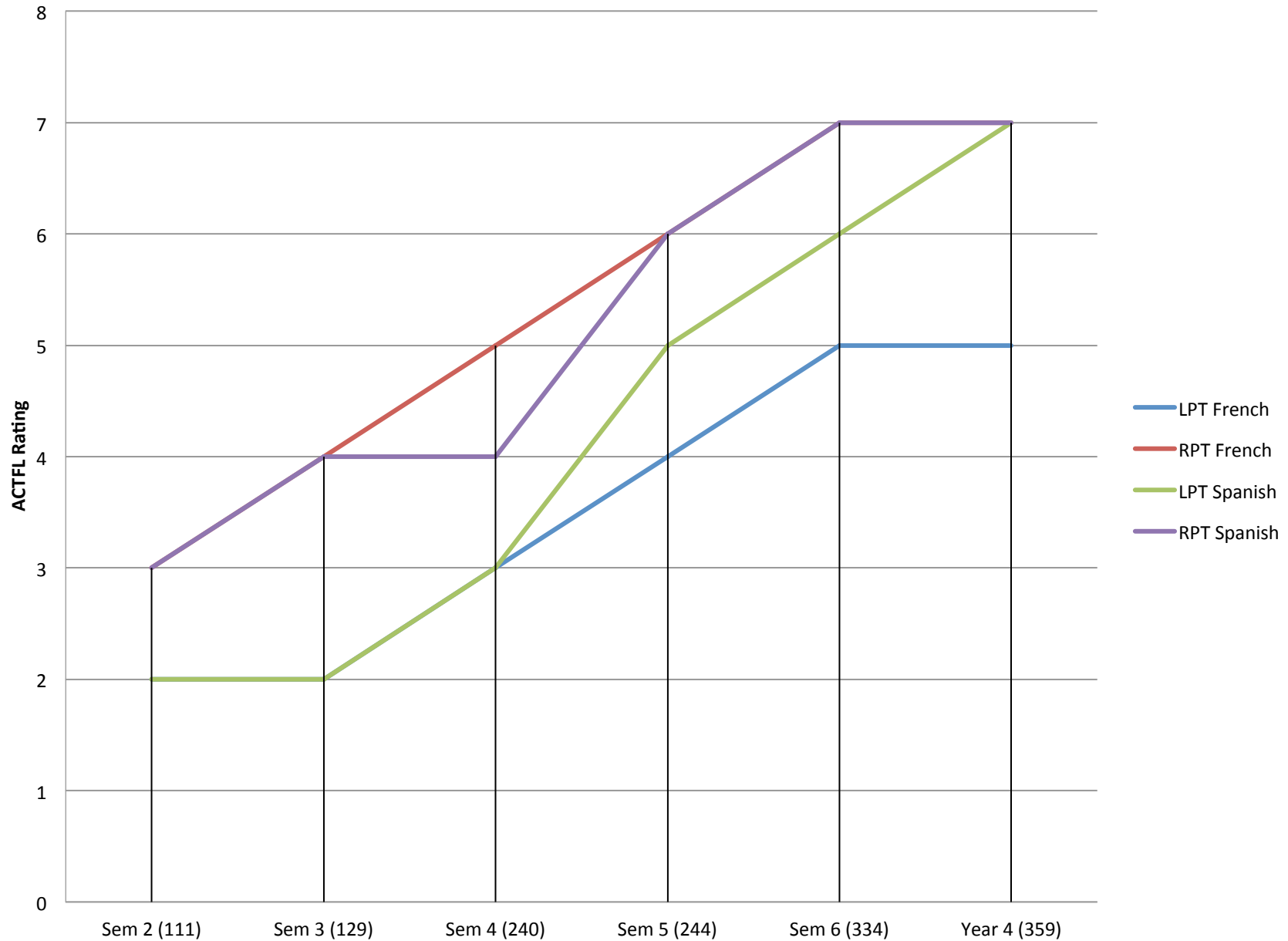
NL = 1, NM = 2, NH = 3, IL = 4, IM = 5, IH = 6

AL = 7, AM = 8, AH = 9, S = 10





## Median Spanish and French Proficiency Ratings



## Reading Semester 2 (111 h)

	N	Rating Median	Rating 85 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
Spanish	242	NH (3)	IM (5)
French	120	NH (3)	IL (4)
Italian	73	IL (4)	IM (4.9)



## Reading Semester 4 (240 h)

	N	Rating Median	Rating 85 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
Spanish	338	IL (4)	IM (5)
French	215	IM (5)	IH (6)
Italian	24	IL (4)	IM (5)
German	178	IL (4)	IM (5.15)
Russian	52	NH/IL (3.5)	IM (5)



## Reading Semester 6 (339 h)

	N	Rating Median	Rating 85 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
Spanish	208	AL (7)	AM (8)
French	62	AL (7)	AM (8)
German	18	IH (6)	AL (7)
Russian	20	IM (5)	AL (7)



## Reading Year 4 (359 h)

	N	Rating Median	Rating 85 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
Spanish	242	AL (7)	AM (8)
French	124	AL (7)	AM (8)
German	38	IH (6)	AL (7)
Russian	45	BR	AH (9.1)



# Spanish Reading

	N	Rating Median	Rating 85 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
Year 4	242	AL (7)	AM (8)
Sem 6	208	AL (7)	AM (8)
Sem 5	432	IH (6)	AL (7)
Sem 4	338	IL (4)	IM (5)
Sem 3	222	IL (4)	IM (5)
Sem 2	242	NH (3)	IM (5)



# French Reading

	N	Rating Median	Rating 85 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
Year 4	124	AL (7)	AM (8)
Sem 6	62	AL (7)	AM (8)
Sem 5	166	IH (6)	AL (7)
Sem 4	215	IM (5)	IH (6)
Sem 3	86	IL (4)	IM (5)
Sem 2	120	NH (3)	IL (4)



# Reasonable Goals: Reading Proficiency

College Year	Reading Proficiency
End of Senior Year	Advanced High
End of Junior Year	Advanced Mid
End of Sophomore Year	Intermediate High
End of Freshman Year	Intermediate Mid





# Spanish Listening

	N	Rating Median	Rating 85 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
400	233	AL (7.0)	AL (7)
302	187	IH (6)	AL (7)
301	392	IM (5)	AL (7)
202	317	NH (3)	IL (4)
201	209	NM (2)	IL (4)
102	235	NM (2)	IL (4)



# French Listening

	N	Rating Median	Rating 85 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
400	121	IM (5)	AL (7)
302	89	IM (5)	AL (7)
301	141	IL (4)	IH (6)
202	203	NH (3)	IL (4)
201	88	NM (2)	IL (4)
102	111	NM (2)	NH (3)



# Reasonable Goals: Listening Proficiency



# Listening and Reading



# Correlations

Language	<i>N</i>	Spearman's rho	<i>p</i>
French	539	.766	.01
German	179	.719	.01
Italian	62	.739	.01
Portuguese	53	.736	.01
Russian	99	.842	.01
Spanish	1403	.786	.01
<b>All</b>	<b>2339</b>	<b>.777</b>	<b>.01</b>



# Listening vs. Reading (Median)

	SPA	ITA	FRE	POR	GER	RUS
Reading Sem 2	3	4	3	4		1
Listening Sem 2	2	4	2	1		1
Reading Sem 4	4	4	5	6	4	3.5
Listening Sem 4	3	4	3	4	3	3
Reading Sem 5	6	7	6	7		6
Listening Sem 5	5	7	4	5		5



# Mean Hours of Instruction

		FR (M)	SD	GE (M)	SD	SP (M)	SD
R	IL	187	71	219	45	182	68
	IM	231	61	233	66	233	80
	IH	277	56	274	93	279	69
	AL	309	63	306	81	312	80
	AM	319	54			342	75
L	IL	238	63	242	31	210	76
	IM	291	62	289	56	273	73
	IH	304	61			317	110
	AL	330	68	373	153	398	164
	AM					444	176



# Orthographic Depth

Katz, L. & Frost, R. (1992). The reading process is different for different orthographies: The orthographic depth hypothesis. In Frost, R. & Katz, L., (Eds.). Orthography, Phonology, Morphology, and Meaning, pp. 67-84. Amsterdam: Elsevier North Holland Press.





# Results and Implications

- Advanced levels of reading proficiency appear to be very realistic goals for Category I languages at graduation
  - Advanced in reading: Semester 5: top 15%; Semester 6: median
  - Principled approaches to reading (Years 1-4) may help students achieve Superior levels
- Listening proficiency needs extra attention – it appears to develop more slowly than reading
  - It needs super extra attention in deep orthography languages such as French
  - Not much gain in listening proficiency in the first two years (Median = NH)
  - Even less gain in deep orthography languages
  - Principled approaches to listening (Years 1-4) appear to be highly desirable



# Results and Implications 2

- Listening proficiency levels appear to be similar to oral proficiency levels
  - Foreign language majors do not usually achieve *Advanced* levels of oral proficiency unless they spent a significant amount of time abroad (1 year or more)
- Is the feeble development of listening proficiency the main reason for the *Advanced* barrier in speaking?
- Does listening proficiency need to be taught differently for deep orthography languages?



# Preview of Phase 2

- Additional languages
- Effect of listening proficiency on speaking proficiency
- Effect of vocabulary size on reading and listening proficiency



# Additional Languages (Total *N* as of March 2016)

German	370
Russian	243
Portuguese	143
Italian	141
Chinese	125
Japanese	96
Korean	12
Arabic	



# Preview of Phase 2

## Effect of listening proficiency on speaking proficiency

- ca. 3,600 students with LPT and OPIc results  
(Collaboration with MSU, U of Utah, U of Minnesota)

## Effect of vocabulary size on reading proficiency

- Spanish, Russian, German, Chinese
- Correlations between RPTs and Vocabulary Size Tests  
(Collaboration with the U of Utah)



# How much vocabulary do you know?

Test your receptive and productive vocabulary in different languages.

What percentage of the 5000 most frequent words have you mastered?

- **German**  
receptive  
productive
- **English**  
receptive  
productive
- **French**  
receptive  
productive

- **Arabic**  
coming  
soon
- **Japanese**  
receptive  
productive
- **Russian**  
receptive  
productive

■ **About the Vocabulary Tests**

Questions or suggestions:  
info@itt-leipzig.de

# Vocabulary Tests

- **Italian**  
receptive  
productive
- **Portuguese**  
receptive  
productive
- **Spanish**  
receptive  
productive

**In cooperation with:**

Herder-Institute Leipzig  
University of Leipzig -  
Language Centre

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

Obrigado

