

**DRAFT**

**Culture Proficiency Guidelines (3.2)**

## Preface

The following Culture Proficiency Guidelines are a work in progress, to which many linguists and anthropologists have contributed. The initial draft of the Guidelines was presented at the plenary session of the Interagency Language Roundtable in April 2007 as part of the ACTFL Arabic Testing Consensus Project. Subsequent to that session, very substantive feedback and recommendations have been received from colleagues in government and academia, including Drs. Pardee Lowe, Diane de Terra, Frederick Jackson, Maria Brau, Bill Young, and David Ellis. Many thanks also to Dr. Catherine Ingold for her strong support of this project and to Dr. Anne Wright for the discussions we had regarding culture proficiency and the guidelines she has developed for the government.

The literature of anthropology and linguistics is replete with definitions of “culture,” some of which include almost every aspect of society. The definition used here is the cultural knowledge, perspectives, values, practices, behaviors, and products that are reflected in or influence human communication. The purpose of these Guidelines is to delineate means of improving cross-cultural communication *via* the identification of the components of culture and to develop a graded culture proficiency scale that includes them. Among the many such components are:

- aspects of daily life in the culture
- degree of interaction
- speaking styles and usage in familiar and unfamiliar situations for different discourse functions
- non-verbal communication and body language
- knowledge of society
- etiquette/behavior/politeness formulae and selection of appropriate forms of address
- common practices
- formal and informal registers
- metaphors, idiomatic expressions, sayings, and allusions
- social, regional and other dialects/variants of the language
- Fine Arts and other cultural artifacts, including stories and events known throughout the culture
- cultural products

At the risk of over-simplifying, these examples of cultural components reflect two broad kinds of cultural knowledge and understanding: *declarative knowledge* of socially important events, people, products, and other artifacts and achievements, and *procedural*

*knowledge(ability)*, which is reflected in individuals' language, behaviors, and expectations in different contexts and in their reactions to others' behaviors and language.

The Guidelines are intended primarily to inform the assessment and education of adults in academia and government but also anyone else who is interested in culture. It is hoped, in particular, that they will serve as a framework that will not only enable language instructors to incorporate more culture education in the classroom, but also inform program administrators about the importance of culture in language.

There is general agreement that culture is an important element of language proficiency and that strong cultural understanding and the ability to reflect it in communication are essential for reaching professional levels of language proficiency (ACTFL Superior and ILR 3) and beyond. Below those levels, both behavior and language are almost always characterized by culturally inappropriate aspects that reflect gaps in understanding.

Although the Culture Guidelines are generic, in that they refer to the ability to function in any culture, in applying them to consideration of an individual, the individual must be thought of as functioning within a specific culture. Thus, one would be thought of as having "culture proficiency" at a certain level for , e.g., Arab or French or Chinese culture.

It must be noted that these guidelines are intended to supplement and extend beyond the ACTFL/ILR Guidelines, which include several statements about cultural effectiveness as reflected in language use. Since language is a critical component of human communication and behavior, it is inevitable that these guidelines overlap in many respects with the existing language proficiency guidelines.

Colleagues in the fields of language and anthropology and also individuals who work professionally in other cultures are encouraged to submit their comments and recommendations, which will be gratefully acknowledged.

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## **Culture Proficiency Guidelines 3.2**

### **Novice/ILR 0**

NO FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCE.

### **Novice High/ILR 0+**

EMERGING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE. Can use some memorized words and phrases in verbal exchanges for most immediate needs but cannot alter behavior appropriately to accommodate new cultural contexts. May be unaware of non-verbal cues that would typically accompany the few verbal expressions that have been acquired. Unable to alter speech and behavior to adjust to different interlocutors (child/adult, same/different gender, friend/ stranger), senior/junior in status or rank and the differences between private and public manners.

### **Intermediate/ILR 1**

LIMITED SOCIAL COMPETENCE. Realizes that differences exist between behaviors in one's own society and that of the other society but has little understanding of the nature of these differences. Can produce through language a few expressions of the culture for some immediate needs. Can deal with familiar survival situations and interact with native speakers accustomed to dealing with foreigners. Can successfully greet, bid farewell, express very basic needs and desires, ask directions, buy food, use transportation, etc. but has limited sense of the appropriate use of phrases used for these purposes in other contexts. Frequently experiences difficulties in unfamiliar situations, such as bargaining and small talk where interactions may be extended. May be unfamiliar with and uncomfortable using certain speaking conventions (volume of speech, emotional affect, and turn-taking) and non-verbal conventions (proximity, touch, and eye contact).

### **Advanced/ILR 2**

GENERAL SOCIAL COMPETENCE. Is consciously aware of some of the differences between one's own culture and the target culture and attempts to adjust behavior accordingly. Can produce some expressions of the culture through language for everyday needs. Handles routine social situations successfully with native speakers accustomed to foreigners. Shows comprehension of common rules of etiquette, taboos, and sensitivities, although home culture is still dominant. Is aware of many aspects of native speaking

styles and is partially aware of their significance but rarely uses them in speaking situations (raised/lowered voice and heightened/minimal affect). Functions appropriately in many common situations that require explicit politeness, but not all. Can appropriately make polite requests, accept and refuse invitations, offer and receive gifts, request support or help, apologize, make introductions, telephone, purchase and bargain, and conduct routine banking). Has acquired some knowledge of society (customs, traditions, history, and institutions) and can incorporate that knowledge into a one-on-one conversation in a limited way.

### **Superior/ILR 3**

GENERAL SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE. The individual's social behavior and interactions reflect significant knowledge and understanding of cultural expectations. Is able to use language that reflects the target culture in the words and phrases themselves, with semantic fields beginning to emerge (home, school, work, recreation, hobby, etc.). Usually able to adjust behavior and speech to take into account a variety of interlocutors and cultural differences. Can participate without offending in any social and work-related situations. Handles even most unfamiliar types of situations with sensitivity, including some involving common taboos or other emotionally charged subjects. Comprehends and correctly interprets most non-verbal responses (gestures, facial expressions, proximity, touch, style). Displays mastery of politeness formulae and appropriate forms of address in most social situations. Can recognize and produce localized, colloquial forms of speech and behavior (local drinking songs in pubs, wedding songs and dances) and can compare them with own customs. Speech includes appropriate use of some slang and everyday words, phrases, idiomatic expressions, and collocations. Non-verbal and paralinguistic behaviors are appropriate and rarely, if ever, disturb a native of the culture.

Individual often is able to relate and refer to a larger cultural framework in conversation but may be inconsistent over long periods of discourse. Occasionally exhibits an almost native command of affect, tone, and register and often makes appropriate use of cultural references and expressions. Where appropriate, interactions may express some understanding and appropriate use of culture-based expressions and genres of speech (proverbs, jokes, and poetry). Generally distinguishes correctly between formal and informal registers. Discusses and understands abstract ideas (globalization) and can hypothesize.

### **Distinguished/ILR 4**

FULL SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE. Adapts behavior to audience in order to achieve intended effect. Demonstrates underlying knowledge of the culture through language in everyday and professional circumstances, almost all applications of which are appropriate, yet not always performed exactly in a native-like manner. Has wide mastery of use of language styles and register and can adjust to meet demands of

very different social situations. Choice of appropriate manner, body language, tone, and language style enables the individual to counsel, show empathy, argue, persuade, negotiate, command, or represent a point of view. Can establish credibility and participate effectively in all examples of public discourse, including meetings, conferences, speeches, and presentations, and public interviews, including on public media.

Appropriately uses and/or references everyday words, phrases, idiomatic expressions, and contextually appropriate discourse structures. Almost always understands references and allusions to culturally salient events, people, texts, or other artifacts but still might not always be able to make comparable references in the appropriate way or at the appropriate time or place. Lacks the full cultural background and range of experiences of a person growing up within a family and being educated in the cultural milieu, i.e. a well-educated native of that culture. Can easily discuss history, geography, customs, traditions, current events, politics, and national policies, as professionally or personally relevant. Perceives and comprehends non-verbalized forms of communication. Recognizes all common metaphors, sayings, proverbs, and allusions but may fail to recognize rare or archaic examples. Controls formal and informal registers and can use them appropriately in own speech. Controls a broad and precise lexicon (including jargon), rhetorical style, specialized knowledge, and behavioral norms normally associated with a particular profession or affiliation in the foreign society. Is able to use like a target-language native those words, phrases, quotes, and allusions from other languages that are common in the target language (e.g., for a native English speaker, a French phrase like *ca va sans dire* or Latin *tempus fugit* and *carpe diem*).

### **Educated Native Speaker/ILR 5**

FUNCTIONALLY EQUIVALENT TO A HIGHLY ARTICULATE, WELL-EDUCATED PERSON RAISED AND EDUCATED IN THE CULTURE. Able to function and communicate effectively in all professionally - and personally - relevant situations. All aspects of behavior and language use reflect the individual's full understanding of cultural norms and expectations for the situation. Understanding of the intent reflected culturally in the behaviors, explicit and implicit cultural allusions and language use of natives of the culture is also complete. Almost always able to interpret communicative behaviors accurately, even when they reflect cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes that are very different from the individual's own. Has complete mastery of both formal and informal registers and expressions of the culture through language. Has abundant knowledge of the domains mentioned above in Distinguished/ILR 4 and command of non-verbalized forms of communication, metaphors, and allusions.

