ABSTRACTS IN X LANGUAGE

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**Glancing Backward, Looking Forward: The History of the “Level 4 Movement” and the *Journal for Distinguished Language Studies***

This article looks at the so-called Level-4 Movement from a historical perspective, beginning in the mid-1980s, reaching its greatest achievements circa 2010, subsiding slowly over the following ten years, and now re-engaging with a small group of experienced and interested teachers, learners, and administrators. The mechanisms of socializing the movement—an annual conference, publication of conference proceedings, and the annual appearance of articles in *the Journal for Distinguished Language Studies*, an international effort associated with the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers (CDLC)—all but disappeared with the closing of the CDLC in 2010. In “looking forward,” this article suggests that from the embers can rise a phoenix and points out the places where the coals have remained hot and the individuals who have continued to fan the flames. It also provides an overview of works devoted to Level 4 topics, including during the years 2010-2020.

**Keywords**: distinguished level foreign language, history of Level-4 movement, Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers, Journal for Distinguished Language Studies, Level-4 publications

**Rethinking the Rating Process: Solution to the Threshold Performance Dilemma**

Test reliability and intrinsically, validity are indisputably linked to valid scoring criteria. When assessing constructed responses in very advanced language proficiency level tests specifically, the extent of the raters’ level of training and norming to the criteria, and their ability to foresee all possibly correct responses are critical. These issues have a bearing in standard setting methods aiming to establish two meaningful categories of candidates who meet and do not meet the minimum criterial levels of performance, which exemplify the construct and reflect the test purpose. This conceptual paper describes an approach to establishing cut scores in an integrated reading comprehension test via the skill of writing, which purports to measure Distinguished proficiency reading skills via constructed responses. A mixed method approach is adopted in which raters’ holistic ratings are triangulated with their analytic scores. The method, which the authors called the Retrodictive Modeling Approach (RMA), relies on raters’ level of expertise and holistic ratings coupled with their qualitative analysis and scores, which yield a pattern useful for establishing a threshold performance level. Although claims to generalizability are beyond the scope of this study, further research may lead to a wider use of the RMA in Distinguished proficiency level testing. Journal for Distinguished Language Studies Volume 7 (2011-2020)

**Keywords**: Standard setting; norming; scoring validity, Distinguished levels

**Re-Conceptualizing Language Programs to Achieve Level 4**

Attaining Level 4 in the target language is challenging due to the great breadth and depth of linguistic repertoire that must be displayed by the candidate. Learning institutions can put proven measures in place to re-conceptualize their language programs to reach Level 4. The measures require fundamental change in curricular design, teacher education, and learner education (the last including instruction in learner styles and strategies, orientations about pedagogical approaches and classroom protocol, etc.). In curricular design, the learning institution can adopt Open Architecture Curricular Design and re-design assessments to focus on formative over summative ones. In teacher education, the institution can foster a community of understanding and practice, set high expectations, redesign the teacher education program, and promote access to institute-wide professional development opportunities. In learner education, the institution can provide learning style and strategy instruction, use individualized study plans, set up a diagnostic and dynamic assessment program, and promote learner voice.

**Keywords**: Language Programs; Transformative Learning; Transformative Language Learning and Teaching; Open Architecture Curricular Design; formative assessment

**To Superior and Beyond: Developing Professional Proficiency in a Fourth-Year Russian Program**

A growing number of specialists in the field of ESL/EFL are beginning to incorporate the long-established tradition of debate into the foreign language classroom as a way of achieving high levels of proficiency. Such an approach has proven beneficial to the development of critical thinking and general speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills. This article addresses a number of scaffolded pedagogical techniques employed in two consecutive fourth-year Russian-language courses, the first of which (Russian 421) employs current events as the modus operandi for teaching presentational speech in preparation for the second course (Russian 422) that operationalizes presentational speech in the culminating rhetorical exercise of debate. A thorough description of the major tasks is provided, which for Russian 421 include weekly extensive listening assignments and three research projects that culminate in in-class presentations, whereas for Russian 422—intensive reading, role plays, and debates. The article likewise addresses the objective of internships in the fourth-year Russian curriculum and includes a discussion of how time in country coupled with level-appropriate language instruction accelerate proficiency gain at all levels. A curriculum that aligns learning tasks with desired proficiency outcomes and that provides scaffolding to complete those tasks both in the classroom and in a professional setting serves to bridge formal language instruction with real-world application and contribute to life-long learning.

**Keywords**: Russian language, debate, language proficiency, professional, curriculum.

**The Challenge of the Inverted Pyramid in Attaining Distinguished-Level Proficiency**

Drawing on imagery from a 1985 contribution by Pardee Lowe, Jr., this article frames the quest for Distinguished-level L2 proficiency as the ascent from the foot of a mountain to the summit (near-native or Distinguished-level proficiency). Success in this quest depends crucially on two conditions: (1) reaching the base camp (around superior-level proficiency) with sufficient time, and (2) with the equipment needed for the final ascent. For this to have any likelihood of occurring more broadly than at present, it is necessary to somehow defeat the phenomenon known as the inverted pyramid. This in turn requires us to probe the reality that underlies this metaphorical construct. Once we understand its nature, shape and causes, the way forward becomes clearer, and there are in fact specific instructional and curricular design approaches that can help us mitigate, if not entirely eliminate it. One of these, a modular open architecture approach to curricular design, is described in Section 2, and a hypothesis is formulated as to one mechanism through which it appears to mitigate the inverted pyramid phenomenon. Section 3 surveys the origin and history of the inverted pyramid construct before turning to an examination of its substance, shape, and slope. The final two subsections summarize the causes of the inverted pyramid phenomenon and realistic approaches to defeating it, which include the curricular approach described in Section 2.

**Keywords**: inverted pyramid of proficiency growth; open architecture curricular design (OACD); modular curriculum; Distinguished-level language proficiency; Interagency Language Roundtable Level 4 language proficiency