

NATO STANDARD

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LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS

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NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

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NATO LETTER OF PROMULGATION

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Edvardas MAŽEIKIS
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS.....	1-1
1.1.	INTRODUCTION	1-1
1.2.	DEFINITION	1-1
1.3.	PROFICIENCY LEVELS	1-1
1.4.	LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY PROFILE.....	1-2
1.5.	STANDARDIZED LANGUAGE PROFILE	1-2
ANNEX A	TABLE OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS.....	A-1
A.1.	LISTENING COMPREHENSION	A-1
A.2.	SPEAKING	A-3
A.3.	READING COMPREHENSION.....	A-5
A.4.	WRITING	A-7
ANNEX B	DESCRIPTIONS OF PLUS LEVELS OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY	B-1
B.1.	LISTENING COMPREHENSION	B-1
B.2.	SPEAKING	B-3
B.3.	READING COMPREHENSION.....	B-5
B.4.	WRITING	B-7

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CHAPTER 1 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this standard is to provide NATO forces with a table describing language proficiency levels.

Participating nations adopt the appended table of language proficiency levels for the purpose of:

- a) Communicating language requirements for international staff appointments.
- b) Recording and reporting, in international correspondence, measures of language proficiency.
- c) Comparing national standards through a standardized table while preserving each nation's right to maintain its own internal proficiency standards.

The descriptions at Annex A give detailed definitions of the proficiency levels of the commonly-recognized language proficiency skills: "listening", "speaking", "reading", and "writing".

1.2. DEFINITION

Language proficiency/ compétence linguistique

An individual's unrehearsed, general language communication ability.

[NATO agreed]

1.3. PROFICIENCY LEVELS

The language proficiency skills described in Annex A are broken down into six levels coded 0 through 5. In general terms, skills may be defined as follows:

Level 0	-	No proficiency
Level 1	-	Survival
Level 2	-	Functional
Level 3	-	Professional
Level 4	-	Expert
Level 5	-	Highly-articulate native

At Annex B, a series of plus (+) descriptions is provided. A plus indicator may be added to a base level for training, evaluation, recording, or reporting purposes, to indicate a level of proficiency that substantially exceeds a 0 through 4 base skill level, but does not fully or consistently meet all of the criteria for the next higher base level.

1.4. LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY PROFILE

Language proficiency profiles will be recorded using a sequence of 4 digits, with plus (+) indicators if/when applicable, to represent the four language skill areas and those skills will be listed in the following sequence:

Skill L	(CP in French)	Listening
Skill S	(EO in French)	Speaking
Skill R	(CE in French)	Reading
Skill W	(EE in French)	Writing

1.5. STANDARDIZED LANGUAGE PROFILE

The four-digit number will be preceded by the code letters SLP (PLS in French) to indicate that the profile shown is the Standardized (S) Language (L) Profile (P). (For example: SLP 3321 means level 3 in listening, level 3 in speaking, level 2 in reading and level 1 in writing.)

ANNEX A TABLE OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS

A.1. LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Level 0 - No proficiency
No practical understanding of the spoken language. Understanding is limited to occasional isolated words. No ability to comprehend communication.
Level 1 - Survival
Can understand common familiar phrases and simple short sentences about everyday needs related to personal and survival areas such as minimum courtesy, travel and workplace requirements when the communication situation is clear and supported by context. Can understand concrete utterances, simple questions and answers, and very simple conversations. Topics include basic needs such as meals, lodging, transportation, time, simple directions and instructions. Even native speakers used to speaking with non-natives must speak slowly and repeat or reword frequently. There are many misunderstandings of both the main idea and supporting facts. Can only understand spoken language from the media or among native speakers if content is completely unambiguous and predictable.
Level 2 - Functional
Sufficient comprehension to understand conversations on everyday social and routine job-related topics. Can reliably understand face-to-face speech in a standard dialect, delivered at a normal rate with some repetition and rewording, by a native speaker not used to speaking with non-natives. Can understand a wide variety of concrete topics, such as personal and family news, public matters of personal and general interest, and routine work matters presented through descriptions of persons, places and things; and narration about current, past and future events. Shows ability to follow essential points of discussion or speech on topics in his/her special professional field. May not recognize different stylistic levels, but recognizes cohesive devices and organizing signals for more complex speech. Can follow discourse at the paragraph level even when there is considerable factual detail. Only occasionally understands words and phrases of statements made in unfavourable conditions (for example, through loudspeakers outdoors or in a highly emotional situation). Can usually only comprehend the general meaning of spoken language from the media or among native speakers in situations requiring understanding of specialized or sophisticated language. Understands factual content. Able to understand facts but not subtleties of language surrounding the facts.

Level 3 - Professional
Able to understand most formal and informal speech on practical, social, and professional topics, including particular interests and special fields of competence. Demonstrates, through spoken interaction, the ability to effectively understand face-to-face speech delivered with normal speed and clarity in a standard dialect. Demonstrates clear understanding of language used at interactive meetings, briefings, and other forms of extended discourse, including unfamiliar subjects and situations. Can follow accurately the essentials of conversations among educated native speakers, lectures on general subjects and special fields of competence, reasonably clear telephone calls, and media broadcasts. Can readily understand language that includes such functions as hypothesizing, supporting opinion, stating and defending policy, argumentation, objections, and various types of elaboration. Demonstrates understanding of abstract concepts in discussion of complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, technology) as well as his/her professional field. Understands both explicit and implicit information in a spoken text. Can generally distinguish between different stylistic levels and often recognizes humour, emotional overtones, and subtleties of speech. Rarely has to request repetition, paraphrase, or explanation. However, may not understand native speakers if they speak very rapidly or use slang, regionalisms, or dialects.
Level 4 - Expert
Understands all forms and styles of speech used for professional purposes, including language used in representation of official policies or points of view, in lectures, and in negotiations. Understands highly sophisticated language including most matters of interest to well-educated native speakers even on unfamiliar general or professional-specialist topics. Understands language specifically tailored for various types of audiences, including that intended for persuasion, representation, and counselling. Can easily adjust to shifts of subject matter and tone. Can readily follow unpredictable turns of thought in both formal and informal speech on any subject matter directed to the general listener. Understands utterances from a wide spectrum of complex language and readily recognizes nuances of meaning and stylistic levels as well as irony and humour. Demonstrates understanding of highly abstract concepts in discussions of complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, and technology) as well as his/her professional field. Readily understands utterances made in the media and in conversations among native speakers both globally and in detail; generally comprehends regionalisms and dialects.
Level 5- Highly-articulate native
Comprehension equivalent to that of the well-educated native listener. Able to fully understand all forms and styles of speech intelligible to the well-educated native listener, including a number of regional dialects, highly colloquial speech, and language distorted by marked interference from other noise.

A.2. SPEAKING

Level 0- No proficiency
Unable to function in the spoken language. Oral production is limited to occasional isolated words such as greetings or basic courtesy formulae. Has no communicative ability.
Level 1 - Survival
Able to maintain simple face-to-face communication in typical everyday situations. Can create with the language by combining and recombining familiar, learned elements of speech. Can begin, maintain and close short conversations by asking and answering short simple questions. Can typically satisfy simple, predictable, personal and accommodation needs; meet minimum courtesy, introduction, and identification requirements; exchange greetings; elicit and provide predictable, skeletal biographical information; communicate about simple routine tasks in the workplace; ask for goods, services, and assistance; request information and clarification; express satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and confirmation. Topics include basic needs such as ordering meals, obtaining lodging and transportation, shopping. Native speakers used to speaking with non-natives must often strain, request repetition and use real-world knowledge to understand this speaker. Seldom speaks with natural fluency, and cannot produce continuous discourse, except with rehearsed material. Nonetheless, can speak at the sentence level and may produce strings of two or more simple, short sentences joined by common linking words. Frequent errors in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar often distort meaning. Time concepts are vague. May often use only one tense or tend to avoid certain structures. Speech is often characterized by hesitations, erratic word order, frequent pauses, straining and groping for words (except for routine expressions), ineffective reformulation, and self-corrections.
Level 2- Functional
Able to communicate in everyday social and routine workplace situations. In these situations the speaker can describe people, places, and things; narrate current, past and future activities in complete, but simple paragraphs; state facts; compare and contrast; give straightforward instructions and directions; ask and answer predictable questions. Can confidently handle most normal, casual conversations on concrete topics such as job procedures, family, personal background and interests, travel, current events. Can often elaborate in common daily communicative situations, such as personal and accommodation-related interactions; for example, can give complicated, detailed, and extensive directions and make non-routine changes in travel and other arrangements. Can interact with native speakers not used to speaking with non-natives, although natives may have to adjust to some limitations. Can combine and link sentences into paragraph-length discourse. Simple structures and basic grammatical relations are typically controlled, while more complex structures are used inaccurately or avoided. Vocabulary use is appropriate for high-

frequency utterances but unusual or imprecise at other times. Errors in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar may sometimes distort meaning. However, the individual generally speaks in a way that is appropriate to the situation, although command of the spoken language is not always firm.

Level 3 - Professional

Able to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social and professional topics. Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with considerable ease. Can use the language to perform such common professional tasks as answering objections, clarifying points, justifying decisions, responding to challenges, supporting opinion, stating and defending policy. Can demonstrate language competence when conducting meetings, delivering briefings or other extended and elaborate monologues, hypothesizing, and dealing with unfamiliar subjects and situations. Can reliably elicit information and informed opinion from native speakers. Can convey abstract concepts in discussions of such topics as economics, culture, science, technology, philosophy as well as his/her professional field. Produces extended discourse and conveys meaning correctly and effectively. Use of structural devices is flexible and elaborate. Speaks readily and in a way that is appropriate to the situation. Without searching for words or phrases, can use the language clearly and relatively naturally to elaborate on concepts freely and make ideas easily understandable to native speakers. May not fully understand some cultural references, proverbs, and allusions, as well as implications of nuances or idioms, but can easily repair the conversation. Pronunciation may be obviously foreign. Errors may occur in low frequency or highly complex structures characteristic of a formal style of speech. However, occasional errors in pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary are not serious enough to distort meaning, and rarely disturb the native speaker.

Level 4 - Expert

Uses the language with great precision, accuracy, and fluency for all professional purposes including the representation of an official policy or point of view. Can perform highly sophisticated language tasks, involving most matters of interest to well-educated native speakers, even in unfamiliar general or professional-specialist situations. Can readily tailor his/her use of the language to communicate effectively with all types of audiences. Demonstrates the language skills needed to counsel or persuade others. Can set the tone of both professional and non-professional verbal exchanges with a wide variety of native speakers. Can easily shift subject matter and tone and adjust to such shifts initiated by other speakers. Communicates very effectively with native speakers in situations such as conferences, negotiations, lectures, presentations, briefings, and debates on matters of disagreement. Can elaborate on abstract concepts and advocate a position at length in these circumstances. Topics may come from such areas as economics, culture, science, and technology, as well as from his/her professional field. Organizes discourse well, conveys meaning effectively, and uses stylistically appropriate discourse features. Can express nuances and make culturally appropriate references. Speaks

effortlessly and smoothly, with a firm grasp of various levels of style, but would seldom be perceived as a native speaker. Nevertheless, any shortcomings, such as non-native pronunciation, do not interfere with intelligibility.

Level 5 - Highly-articulate native

Speaking proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of a highly articulate well-educated native speaker and reflects the cultural standards of the country or areas where the language is natively spoken. The speaker uses the language with great flexibility so that all speech, including vocabulary, idioms, colloquialisms, and cultural references, is accepted as native by well-educated native listeners. Pronunciation is consistent with that of well-educated native speakers of a standard dialect.

A.3. READING COMPREHENSION

Level 0- No proficiency

No practical ability to read the language. Consistently misunderstands or cannot comprehend the written language at all.

Level 1- Survival

Can read very simple connected written material, such as unambiguous texts that are directly related to everyday survival or workplace situations. Texts may include short notes; announcements; highly predictable descriptions of people, places, or things; brief explanations of geography, government, and currency systems simplified for non-natives; short sets of instructions and directions (application forms, maps, menus, directories, brochures, and simple schedules). Understands the basic meaning of simple texts containing high frequency structural patterns and vocabulary, including shared international terms and cognates (when applicable). Can find some specific details through careful or selective reading. Can often guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from simple context. May be able to identify major topics in some higher level texts. However, may misunderstand even some simple texts.

Level 2- Functional
Sufficient comprehension to read simple authentic written material on familiar subjects. Can read straightforward, concrete, factual texts, which may include descriptions of persons, places, and things; and narration about current, past, and future events. Contexts include news items describing frequently recurring events, simple biographical information, social notices, routine business letters, and simple technical material intended for the general reader. Can read uncomplicated but authentic prose on familiar subjects that are normally presented in a predictable sequence that aids the reader in understanding. Can locate and understand the main ideas and details in material written for the general reader and can answer factual questions about such texts. Cannot draw inferences directly from the text or understand the subtleties of language surrounding factual material. Can readily understand prose that is predominantly constructed in high frequency sentence patterns. While active vocabulary may not be broad, the reader can use contextual and real-world cues to understand texts. May be slow in performing this task, and may misunderstand some information. May be able to summarize, sort, and locate specific information in higher level texts concerning his/her special professional field, but not consistently or reliably.
Level 3- Professional
Able to read with almost complete comprehension a variety of authentic written material on general and professional subjects, including unfamiliar subject matter. Demonstrates the ability to learn through reading. Comprehension is not dependent on subject matter. Contexts include news, informational and editorial items in major periodicals intended for educated native readers, personal and professional correspondence, reports, and material in special fields of competence. Can readily understand such language functions as hypothesizing, supporting opinion, argumentation, clarification, and various forms of elaboration. Demonstrates understanding of abstract concepts in texts on complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, technology), as well as his/her professional field. Almost always able to interpret material correctly, to relate ideas, and to “read between the lines,” or understand implicit information. Can generally distinguish between different stylistic levels and often recognizes humour, emotional overtones, and subtleties of written language. Misreading is rare. Can get the gist of higher level, sophisticated texts, but may be unable to detect all nuances. Cannot always thoroughly comprehend texts that have an unusually complex structure, low frequency idioms, or a high degree of cultural knowledge embedded in the language. Reading speed may be somewhat slower than that of a native reader.
Level 4 - Expert
Demonstrates strong competence in reading all styles and forms of the written language used for professional purposes, including texts from unfamiliar general and professional–specialist areas. Contexts include newspapers, magazines and professional literature written for the well-educated reader and may contain topics from such areas as economics, culture, science and technology, as well as from

the reader's own field. Can readily follow unpredictable turns of thought on any subject matter addressed to the general reader. Shows both global and detailed understanding of texts including highly abstract concepts. Can understand almost all cultural references and can relate a specific text to other written materials within the culture. Demonstrates a firm grasp of stylistic nuances, irony, and humour. Reading speed is similar to that of a native reader. Can read reasonably legible handwriting without difficulty.

Level 5 – Highly-articulate native

Reading proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of the well-educated native reader. Able to fully comprehend all forms and styles of the written language understood by the well-educated native reader. Demonstrates the same facility as the well-educated, non-specialist native when reading general legal documents, technical writing, and literature, including both experimental prose and classical texts. Can read a wide variety of handwritten documents.

A.4. WRITING

Level 0- No proficiency

No functional writing ability.

Level 1- Survival

Can write to meet immediate personal needs. Examples include lists, short notes, post cards, short personal letters, phone messages, and invitations as well as filling out forms and applications. Writing tends to be a loose collection of sentences (or fragments) on a given topic, with little evidence of conscious organization. Can convey basic intention by writing short, simple sentences, often joined by common linking words. However, errors in spelling, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation are frequent. Can be understood by native readers used to non-natives' attempts to write.

Level 2- Functional

Can write simple personal and routine workplace correspondence and related documents, such as memoranda, brief reports, and private letters, on everyday topics. Can state facts; give instructions; describe people, places, and things; can narrate current, past, and future activities in complete, but simple paragraphs. Can combine and link sentences into connected prose; paragraphs contrast with and connect to other paragraphs in reports and correspondence. Ideas may be roughly organized according to major points or straightforward sequencing of events. However, relationship of ideas may not always be clear, and transitions may be awkward. Prose can be understood by a native not used to reading material written by non-natives. Simple, high frequency grammatical structures are typically controlled, while more complex structures are used inaccurately or avoided.

Vocabulary use is appropriate for high frequency topics, with some circumlocutions. Errors in grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation may sometimes distort meaning. However, the individual writes in a way that is generally appropriate for the occasion, although command of the written language is not always firm.
Level 3 – Professional
Can write effective formal and informal correspondence and documents on practical, social, and professional topics. Can write about special fields of competence with considerable ease. Can use the written language for essay-length argumentation, analysis, hypothesis, and extensive explanation, narration, and description. Can convey abstract concepts when writing about complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, and technology) as well as his/her professional field. Although techniques used to organize extended texts may seem somewhat foreign to native readers, the correct meaning is conveyed. The relationship and development of ideas are clear, and major points are coherently ordered to fit the purpose of the text. Transitions are usually successful. Control of structure, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation is adequate to convey the message accurately. Errors are occasional, do not interfere with comprehension, and rarely disturb the native reader. While writing style may be non-native, it is appropriate for the occasion. When it is necessary for a document to meet full native expectations, some editing will be required.
Level 4- Expert
Can write the language precisely and accurately for all professional purposes including the representation of an official policy or point of view. Can prepare highly effective written communication in a variety of prose styles, even in unfamiliar general or professional-specialist areas. Demonstrates strong competence in formulating private letters, job-related texts, reports, position papers, and the final draft of a variety of other papers. Shows the ability to use the written language to persuade others and to elaborate on abstract concepts. Topics may come from such areas as economics, culture, science, and technology as well as from the writer's own professional field. Organizes extended texts well, conveys meaning effectively, and uses stylistically appropriate prose. Shows a firm grasp of various levels of style and can express nuances and shades of meaning.
Level 5- Highly-articulate native
Writing proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of a well-educated native writer. Uses the organizational principles and stylistic devices that reflect the cultural norms of natives when writing formal and informal correspondence, official documents, articles for publication, and material related to a professional specialty. Writing is clear and informative.

ANNEX B DESCRIPTIONS OF PLUS LEVELS OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY*
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B.1. LISTENING COMPREHENSION

LEVEL 0+ (MEMORIZED PROFICIENCY)

Understands isolated words and some high frequency phrases and short sentences in areas of immediate survival needs. Usually requires pauses even between familiar phrases and must often request repetition. Can understand only with difficulty even people used to adapting their speech when speaking with non-natives. Can best understand those utterances in which context strongly supports meaning.

LEVEL 1+ (SURVIVAL +)

Sufficient comprehension to understand simple, very predictable, face-to-face conversations in a standard dialect on everyday social and routine job-related topics. Not only comprehends short conversations based on simple questions and answers, but also has some limited and unsustained ability to understand slightly longer conversations on concrete topics. Shows a limited and unsustained ability to understand descriptions of people, places, and things; narrations of events; factual information; and straightforward instructions or directions. Usually unable to sustain comprehension of texts of paragraph length. Topics best understood include basic needs such as food, lodging, transportation, shopping, as well as family, personal background and interests, and travel plans. However, shows some ability to comprehend several related sentences linked to workplace communication, current events, responses to requests for information and clarification. Quite likely to comprehend the main idea of this type of spoken text, but may misunderstand some supporting facts. Similarly, comprehends simple structures in short spoken texts but may misunderstand more complex structures. Shows a very limited ability to comprehend the general meaning of spoken language from the media. Natives used to speaking with non-natives may need to resort to repetition or rephrasing to be understood.

LEVEL 2+ (FUNCTIONAL+)

Able to understand many informal and formal conversations on practical, social, and everyday professional topics. Can reliably understand face-to-face speech in a

** Note: "Plus level" proficiency as described in this document is understood as language proficiency that is more than halfway between two base levels. "Plus level" proficiency substantially exceeds the base skill level but does not fully or consistently meet all of the criteria for the next higher base level.*

standard dialect, delivered at a normal rate with minimal repetition and rewording, by a native speaker not used to speaking with non-natives. In addition to understanding all discussions of concrete topics found in descriptions and narration about current, past, and future events, can also understand a significant amount of the language used at interactive meetings, briefings, and other forms of extended discourse including some discussions of unfamiliar subjects and situations; however, will demonstrate some lapses in understanding. Shows ability to follow essential points of discussion or speech on topics in his/her special professional field. Also, shows some ability to understand the essential points of conversations among educated native speakers, lectures on general subjects, reasonably clear telephone calls and media broadcasts. However, occasionally misinterprets discourse built upon hypothesis, supported opinion, argumentation, and the voicing of objections. May follow discussions of abstract concepts without fully understanding abstract linguistic formulations. May not always discern the distinctions between various stylistic levels of discourse. However, may show some ability to recognize humour and emotional overtones. Does not always understand implicit information in a spoken text. Occasionally misses some words and phrases of statements made in unfavourable conditions (for example, through loudspeakers outdoors or in a highly emotional situation). Will probably have some difficulty understanding native speakers if they speak very rapidly or use slang and unusual idioms.

LEVEL 3+ (PROFESSIONAL +)

Able to understand all formal and informal speech on practical, social, and professional topics, including particular interests and special fields of competence. Can readily understand extended discourse used for personal and professional purposes such as justifying decisions, responding to challenges, and defending policy. Understands a significant amount of highly sophisticated language produced by well-educated native speakers even on some unfamiliar topics. Can usually adjust to shifts of subject matter and tone. Comprehends native speakers at conferences, negotiations, lectures, presentations, briefings, and debates. Usually demonstrates understanding of highly abstract concepts and linguistic formulations in discussions of complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, technology, as well as his/her professional field). Can follow some unpredictable turns of thought in both informal and formal speech. Often understands language specifically tailored for various types of audiences, including that intended for persuasion, representation, and counselling. Recognizes nuances, humour and emotional overtones of speech; and may be able to correctly interpret culturally-related references. Comprehends most media broadcasts, conversations among native speakers; sometimes understands regionalisms and dialects. However there are some limitations in performance of these more sophisticated skills. May miss some subtleties and cultural references, but this rarely prevents successful comprehension of native speakers.

LEVEL 4+ (EXPERT+)

Comprehension of all forms and styles of the spoken language is usually equivalent to that of a well-educated native listener. Demonstrates internalization of sociolinguistic

and cultural references of any country or area where the language is natively spoken. However, there may be an occasional non-native lapse in comprehending native speakers using nonstandard dialects, regionalisms, and slang. Shows some lapses in understanding language distorted by marked interference from other noise. Accuracy is nearly native.

B.2. SPEAKING

LEVEL 0+ (MEMORIZED PROFICIENCY)

Able to satisfy immediate needs using memorized, rehearsed utterances. Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only with memorized material. Attempts at creating speech at the sentence level are usually unsuccessful. Vocabulary is random and generally limited to areas of immediate survival needs, such as some or all of the following: greetings, brief personal data, numbers, time expressions, common objects. However, most utterances are telegraphic; linking words and markers are omitted, confused, or distorted. Even with repetition, communication is severely limited, even with native speakers used to speaking with non-natives. Pronunciation, stress, and intonation are usually quite faulty even in memorized speech.

LEVEL 1+ (SURVIVAL+)

Able to initiate and maintain predictable everyday face-to-face conversations. Can easily take part in short conversations by asking and answering simple questions but shows little understanding of the target culture's conversational conventions. Shows a very limited and inconsistent ability to handle longer conversations on concrete topics. Discourse consists of strings of related sentences but not full paragraphs. Can satisfy a few social demands and provide somewhat more than skeletal information when making introductions and supplying biographical background. Can readily ask for assistance; request information and clarification; and express satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and confirmation. Shows a limited and inconsistent ability to describe people, places, and things; to narrate events; to state facts; to give instructions or directions; to communicate in the workplace, and to talk about current events. However, may hesitate and even have to change the subject because of lack of language resources. In addition to basic needs, topics may include family, personal background and interests, travel plans, and simple work-related matters. Simple structures and basic grammatical relations are only somewhat controlled. Time references may be used incorrectly. Vocabulary may be imprecise except for the highest frequency utterances. Frequent errors in pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar may impede communication. Delivery may be labored. Natives used to speaking with non-natives may occasionally need to request repetition or rephrasing and to use real-world knowledge to understand this speaker.

LEVEL 2+ (FUNCTIONAL+)

Able to communicate in many informal and formal conversations on practical, social, and everyday professional topics. Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence in a way that is often, but not consistently effective and acceptable to a native speaker. Can use the language effectively to narrate, describe, state facts, compare and contrast, give detailed instructions and directions. Can use language with less ease and effectiveness to support opinion, clarify points, and answer objections. Will show some linguistic limitations when participating in meetings, giving briefings, and dealing with unfamiliar subjects and situations. Can generally elicit information and informed opinion from native speakers. Can often discuss abstract concepts but can rarely use abstract linguistic formulations successfully. Can communicate relatively well with native speakers not used to speaking with non-natives, although natives may perceive some awkward phrasing. Can create a significant amount of discourse beyond the paragraph level. However, imprecise vocabulary and flawed use of more complex structures and cohesive features will sometimes interfere with efforts to elaborate on an argument or point of view. Pronunciation errors may occasionally impede communication. Nevertheless, speech is usually appropriate to the situation.

LEVEL 3+ (PROFESSIONAL +)

Able to participate effectively in all formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Can readily use the language to perform professional tasks such as justifying decisions, responding to challenges, and defending policy. Readily produces extended discourse, conveying meaning correctly and effectively. Topics come from such areas as economics, culture, science, and technology, as well as from his/her professional field. Can perform a significant number of highly sophisticated language tasks such as representing an official policy or point of view. Usually communicates effectively with native speakers at conferences, negotiations, lectures, presentations, briefings, and debates. Can generally elaborate on highly abstract concepts using abstract linguistic formulations in discussions of complex topics. Discourse is usually appropriate for the situation. Shows some ability to tailor his/her use of the language to communicate with many types of audiences. Often demonstrates the language skills needed to counsel or persuade others but may show some inconsistency due to sociolinguistic limitations. Shows some inconsistent ability to set the tone of verbal exchanges with a variety of native speakers, as well as shift the tone and adjust to shifts initiated by other speakers. Can sometimes express nuances, subtleties, and humour, and may respond appropriately to culturally-related references, including proverbs and allusions. There are some limitations in performance of these more sophisticated skills; these occasions may be indicated by hesitancy, unusual effort, or uncharacteristic errors. However, non-native pronunciation and occasional lapses in grammar, vocabulary, or cultural references do not disturb native speakers or interfere with intelligibility.

LEVEL 4 + (EXPERT+)

Usually speaks the language with superior precision, accuracy, and fluency in all respects. Speaking proficiency is generally equivalent to that of a highly articulate well-educated native speaker and usually reflects the cultural standards of any country or area where the language is natively spoken. While speaking ability does not impede the performance of any language task, the speaker would probably not be perceived as culturally native. There may be an occasional non-native lapse of vocabulary, idiom, colloquialism, pronunciation, cultural reference, or ability to interact in a manner that seems totally native.

B.3. READING COMPREHENSION

LEVEL 0+ (MEMORIZED PROFICIENCY)

Can recognize all the letters in an alphabetic system and high-frequency elements of a syllabary or a character system. Able to read some or all of the following: numbers, isolated words and phrases, personal and place names, street signs, office and shop designations; however, may misinterpret even these texts. May be able to read phrases that are memorized or strongly supported by context, but cannot read at the sentence level.

LEVEL 1+ (SURVIVAL+)

Sufficient comprehension to understand simple, very predictable authentic printed texts intended to convey everyday social and routine job-related information. Can best understand material such as announcements of public events and brief biographical facts. Also shows some limited and unsustained ability to understand slightly longer concrete texts such as descriptions of persons, places, and things; narrations of events; factual information; and instructions or directions. Usually unable to sustain comprehension of paragraph-length texts. Topics best understood include basic needs such as food, lodging, transportation, shopping, as well as family, personal background and interests, and travel plans. However, shows some ability to comprehend short written workplace communications, simple predictable factual accounts, and responses to requests for information and clarification. Will probably comprehend the main idea of this type of text, but may misunderstand some supporting facts. Similarly, comprehends simple structures in short written texts but may misunderstand more complex structures. Can often successfully guess the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary from context. May have difficulty understanding cohesive features of discourse and using this knowledge to support effective guessing.

LEVEL 2+ (FUNCTIONAL +)

Able to read with complete comprehension concrete, factual, authentic written material on familiar subjects. Can also understand a significant amount of more complex general and professional material, including unfamiliar subject matter. Demonstrates some ability to learn through reading. Contexts include not only factual news items but

also some informational and editorial items in major periodicals intended for educated native readers; personal and some professional correspondence; as well as some reports and related material in special fields of competence. Can readily separate main ideas from less important details and use linguistic context, real-world knowledge, and a broad reading vocabulary to make intelligent guesses about unfamiliar material. However may not always accurately interpret written texts built upon hypothesis, supported opinion, argumentation, and various forms of elaboration. May partially understand abstract concepts in texts on complex topics without fully understanding abstract linguistic formulations. Demonstrates inconsistent ability to “read between the lines” (or understand implicit information), distinguish between different stylistic levels, and recognize humour or emotional overtones in a text.

LEVEL 3+ (PROFESSIONAL +)

Able to read with complete comprehension a variety of authentic written material for the general reader. Also, demonstrates almost complete comprehension of all styles and forms of the written language used for professional purposes in such contexts as newspapers, magazines, and professional literature written for the well-educated reader. Usually demonstrates understanding of highly abstract concepts and linguistic formulations in texts on complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, technology) as well as his/her professional field. Strong ability to further learning through reading, interpret material correctly, relate ideas, or “read between the lines” (or understand implicit information.) Readily distinguishes between different stylistic levels. Recognizes humour, emotional overtones, and nuances of written language. Understands a significant amount of highly sophisticated language produced by well-educated native writers even when the subject matter is unfamiliar: this includes texts with unusually complex structure, low frequency idioms, or a high degree of cultural knowledge embedded in the language. May be able to understand sociolinguistic and cultural references of any country or area where the language is natively written, and may be able to relate a specific text to other written materials within the culture. Can follow some unpredictable turns of thought on subject matter addressed to the general educated reader. However, there are some limitations in performance of the most sophisticated skills, such as recognizing subtleties and cultural references.

LEVEL 4+ (EXPERT+)

Comprehension of all forms and styles of the written language is usually equivalent to that of a well-educated native reader. Usually demonstrates the same facility as the well-educated, non-specialist native when reading general legal documents; technical writing; and literature, including both experimental prose and classical texts. Demonstrates strong sensitivity to sociolinguistic and cultural references of any country or area where the language is natively written. Shows strong ability to relate a specific text to other written materials within the culture. However, there may be an occasional non-native lapse in comprehending material influenced by regional dialects, highly colloquial speech, or slang. Can usually read a wide variety of handwritten documents, including less than fully legible handwriting.

B.4. WRITING

LEVEL 0+ (MEMORIZED PROFICIENCY)

Can produce symbols in an alphabetic or syllabic writing system or several of the most common characters. Can write numbers, dates, own name, nationality, address, etc., such as required on registration forms. Otherwise, can only write memorized material, set expressions, lists of common items, or a few short memorized sentences. Attempts at writing at the sentence level are usually unsuccessful. Spelling and even representation of symbols (letters, syllables, characters) are often incorrect.

LEVEL 1+ (SURVIVAL +)

Can readily write short notes and personal letters, post cards, phone messages, and invitations as well as fill out forms and applications. Can write simple personal and routine workplace documents but shows little understanding of the target culture's writing conventions. Shows some inconsistent and unreliable ability to write instructions; descriptions of people, places, and things; narrations of activities; and short factual accounts. Also shows some limited ability to connect a group of sentences coherently. Topics include basic needs such as food, lodging, transportation, shopping, as well as family, personal background and interests, travel plans, and simple work-related matters. Can be understood by native readers used to material written by non-natives; others may have to confirm meaning with the writer. Simple structures and basic grammatical relations are often inaccurate. Time references may be incorrect. Vocabulary may be imprecise except for high frequency words. Errors in usage, spelling, and punctuation may sometimes impede communication.

LEVEL 2+ (FUNCTIONAL +)

Can write relatively coherent personal and informal correspondence and documents on practical, social, and everyday professional topics. Can organize and elaborate on ideas in special fields of competence in a way that is often, but not consistently, effective and acceptable to the native reader. Can write acceptably and provide considerable detail when narrating, describing, stating facts, comparing and contrasting, and instructing. Writes less effectively when supporting opinion, clarifying points, and answering objections. May be able to write about abstract concepts, but use of abstract linguistic formulations is inconsistent. Shows some ability to arrange a series of paragraphs into essay-length documents. However, there will be limitations. For example, organization and development of ideas may not be consistently clear, and transitions may occasionally be awkward. Also, imprecise vocabulary as well as flawed use of more complex structures, cohesive features, or punctuation will sometimes interfere with efforts to sustain essay-length argumentation. Nevertheless, prose can readily be understood by a native not used to reading material written by non-natives.

LEVEL 3+ (PROFESSIONAL +)

Can write all types of formal and informal correspondence, documents, and papers on practical, social, and professional topics effectively. Readily uses the written language to produce professional essay-length documents, such as justifications of decisions or defences of policy as well as extended argumentation and analysis. Can usually elaborate on highly abstract concepts, using abstract linguistic formulations, when writing about complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, and technology, as well as his/her professional field). Can sometimes perform highly sophisticated language tasks, such as writing to represent an official point of view. Shows some ability to tailor his/her written language to communicate with a variety of readers. Often demonstrates the writing skills needed to persuade others, but may show some inconsistencies. Usually organizes extended texts well, conveys meaning effectively, and produces writing that is stylistically appropriate for the audience and topic. Can often express nuances, subtleties, and humour, and make correct culturally-related references. However, there are some limitations in performance of these more sophisticated skills. Organizational techniques and methods of developing arguments may lack syntactical and rhetorical variety. Nevertheless, such limitations do not disturb native readers or interfere with intelligibility.

LEVEL 4+ (EXPERT +)

Usually writes the language precisely and accurately for all professional purposes. Writing proficiency is generally equivalent to that of a well-educated native writer. Almost always uses the organizational principles and stylistic devices that reflect the cultural norms of natives when writing formal and informal correspondence, official documents, articles for publication, and material related to a professional specialty. Writing is almost always clear and informative. However, there may be an occasional non-native lapse of vocabulary, usage, or cultural reference.

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