

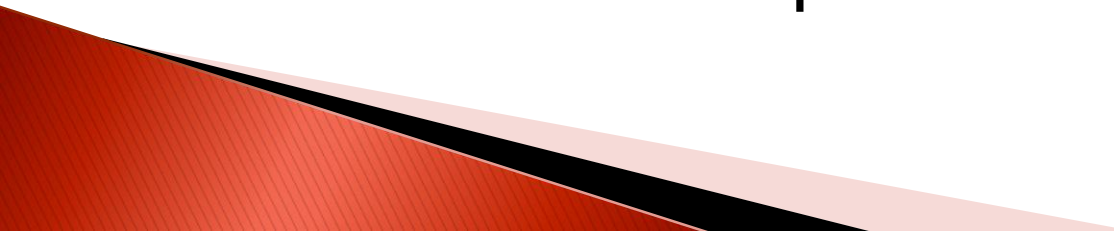
# Assessing Competence in Intercultural Communication: The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Skill Level Descriptions

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Presented at the April 2014 Conference of the  
Association of Language Testers in Europe

# The ILR Skill Level Descriptions for Competence in Inter- Cultural Communication (ICC)

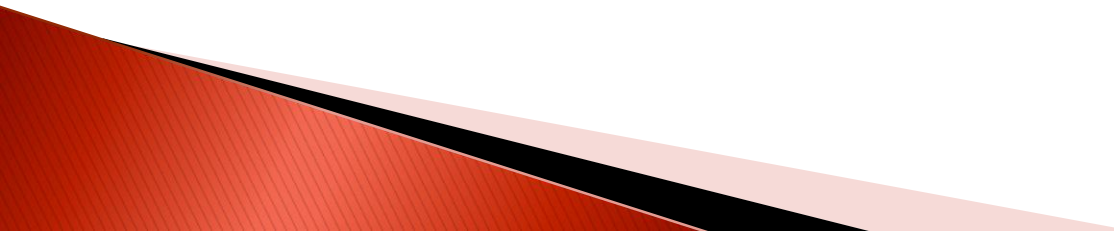
- ▶ Background
  - ▶ Purpose
  - ▶ Definition of Terms
  - ▶ Caveat
  - ▶ Levels
  - ▶ Curricula Development
- 

# The ILR Skill Level Descriptions for Competence in Inter-Cultural Communication (ICC)

## ▶ Background:

- Source: the ILR
  - The ICC Skill Level Descriptions (SLDs) are the most recent in a series of SLDs produced by the ILR for government use
- ICC Committee Membership
  - Government, academia, industry
- Purpose

# Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR)

- ▶ Organization of representatives from different government agencies, academia, and industry
  - ▶ Goals
    - Standardization of assessment criteria
    - Collaboration of language training, language testing, and translation methodology between agencies
    - Dissemination of new language information and practices from both inside and outside the government community
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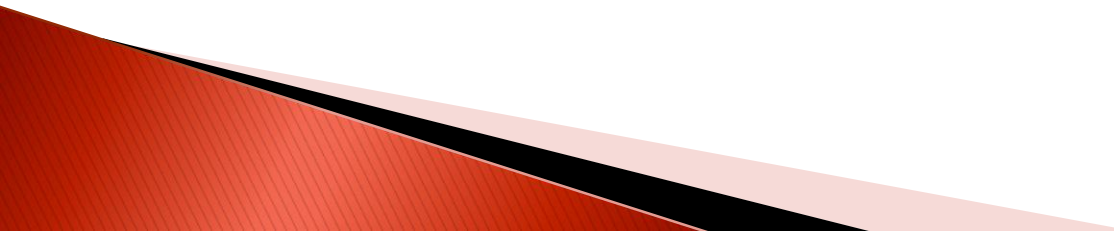
# ILR Skill Level Descriptions

- ▶ Language tasks in a skill are described and categorized by levels of progression
- ▶ Ordinal scale ranges from 0 to 5, with plus levels
- ▶ Each level implies control of the previous one
- ▶ Skills measured:
  - Proficiency: Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing (1985)
  - Performance: Translation (2005), Interpretation (2007), Audio Translation (2011)
  - Competence: Intercultural Communication (2012)
- ▶ Located at: [www.govtilr.org](http://www.govtilr.org)

# ILR Descriptions in Practice

- ▶ Adopted as a standard for all US Government agencies
- ▶ Uses
  - Develop training curricula
  - Develop ILR-based tests
  - Assess examinee's test performance
  - Assign ILR score to examinee
  - Hiring, work tasks, training, promotions depend on ILR scores

# ILR-Based Tests

- ▶ SLDs prescribe tasks/texts appropriate for each level.
  - ▶ Tests present task/test samples as stimuli for examinee production.
  - ▶ An ILR score on the 0 to 5 ILR scale is assigned according to whether examinee has handled a task successfully and appropriately at a given level.
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# ILR-Based Tests

## ▶ Single Skills/Proficiency

- Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT)
  - Reading/Listening
- English Writing Test (EWT), English Composition (EC)
  - Writing
- Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), Modified Oral Proficiency Interview (MOPI), Speaking Proficiency Test (SPT), Modified Speaking Proficiency Test (MSPT)
  - Speaking

## ▶ Combined Skills/Performance

- FBI Translation Exams
- FBI Audio Translation Exams

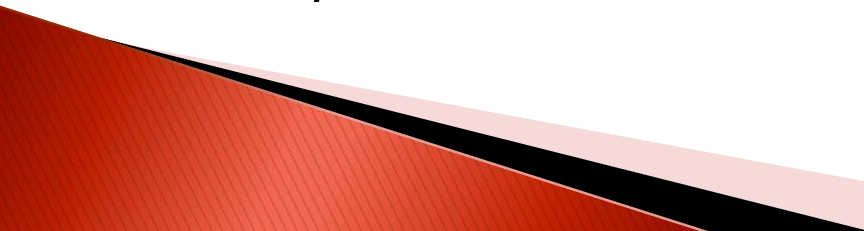


# ILR ICC Committee Members

2009–2012

- ▶ Maria Brau (Co–Chair) *Federal Bureau of Investigation*
  - ▶ Gerald Lampe (Co–Chair) *National Foreign Language Center, University of Maryland*
  - ▶ Nina Bilvais, *Defense Intelligence Agency*
  - ▶ James Dirgin, *Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center*
  - ▶ Allison Greene–Sands, *Defense Language Office*
  - ▶ Thomas Haines, *Defense Intelligence Agency*
  - ▶ Catherine Ingold, *National Foreign Language Center, University of Maryland*
  - ▶ Frederick Jackson, *National Foreign Language Center, University of Maryland*
  - ▶ Pardee Lowe, Jr., *Department of Defense*
  - ▶ Ewa Zeoli, *Transparent Language, Inc.*
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# United States Government Precedents

- ▶ 1955–84: Department of State/FSI–ILR *Performance Descriptions* addressed ability to “function” in another culture
  - ▶ 1972: ILR Study Group developed *Cultural Proficiency* scale but was not presented for ILR approval and never adopted
  - ▶ 1984: Cultural understanding was incorporated in the ILR SLDs for the 4 single skills
  - ▶ 2005: Department of Defense (DOD) Language Transformation Map called for “culture training”
  - ▶ 2007: DOD developed Regional Proficiency Skill Level Guidelines
  - ▶ 2008: DOD issued *Building Language Skills and Cultural Competencies in the Military: DOD’s Challenge*
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# The ILR ICC SLDs

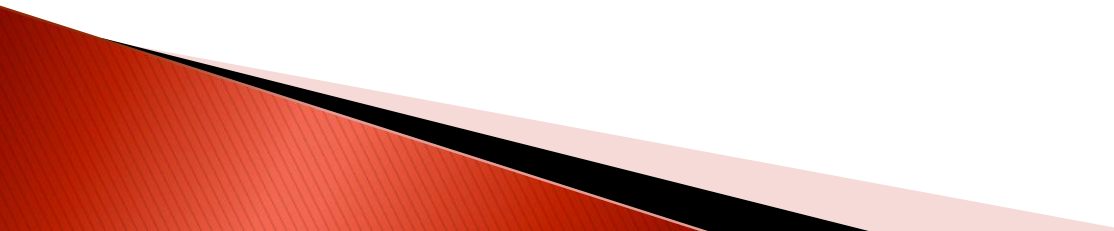
## Purpose

- ▶ For government use
  - Clear, precise language
  - No technical terms
  - No glossary necessary

# The ILR ICC SLDs

## Definition of Terms (a)

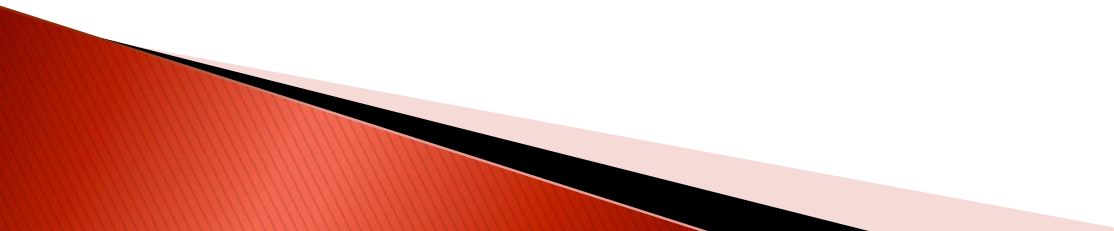
For the purposes of the [ICC] document,  
Intercultural Communication refers to:

- 1) the content *and* form of communication,
  - 2) both verbal *and* nonverbal,
  - 3) among people of different cultures.
- 

# The ILR ICC SLDs

## Definition of Terms (b)

Competence in intercultural communication is:

- 1) the ability to take part effectively in a given social context
  - 2) by understanding what is being communicated and
  - 3) by employing appropriate language and behavior
  - 4) to convey an intended message.
- 

# The ILR ICC SLDs

## Definition of Terms (c)

The SLDs incorporate:

- 1) **linguistic elements** from the ILR SLDs for the four single skills; and
- 2) **extra-linguistic elements**, such as:  
Values, beliefs, traditions, customs, norms, rituals, symbols, taboos, etiquette, attire, and time concepts ... that typically shape the form and content of interactions [and] are often the source of expectations regarding behavior, such as gestures, body language, physical distance between speakers, and deference due to status, age, and gender.

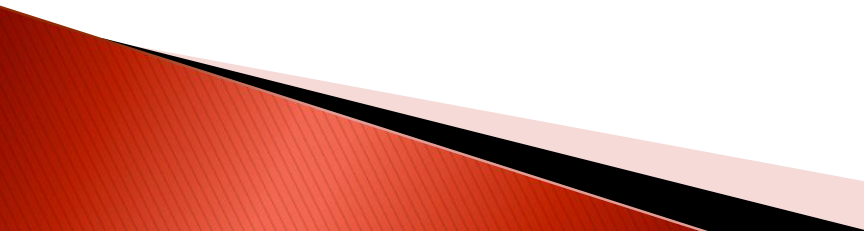
# The ILR ICC SLDs

## Definition of Terms (d)

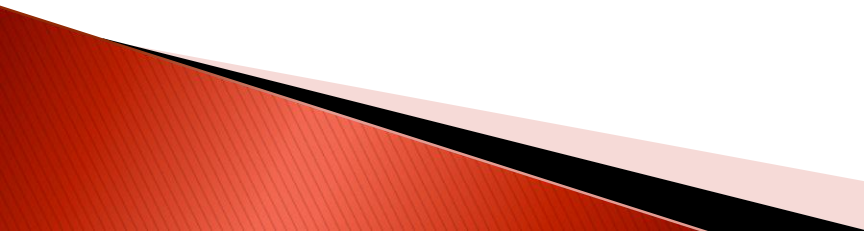
Knowledge and understanding of some extralinguistic elements may be acquired through

- 1) independent research,
- 2) regional studies,
- 3) educational programs that include coursework in such disciplines as anthropology, history, religion, politics, sociology, sociolinguistics, economics, literature, and the arts.

However, control of a full range of nonverbal responses to social cues is typically unattainable without extended immersion in the culture.



# The ILR ICC SLDs CAVEAT

- ▶ A given level of competence in Intercultural Communication requires a *corresponding level in language proficiency*.
  - ▶ But language proficiency *and* cultural knowledge, skills and abilities *do not always align*. Any such differences may impact the effectiveness of intercultural communication.
  - ▶ Moreover, having *different levels of ability* in the various language skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing) may also hinder performance in intercultural communication.
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# The ILR ICC SLDs Levels

Level 0: (No Competence)

Level 0+: (Memorized Competence)

Level 1: (Elementary Competence)

Level 2: (Limited Working Competence)

Level 3: (Professional Competence)

Level 4: (Advanced Professional Competence)

Level 5: (Superior Professional Competence)

*(No plus levels except for 0+)*



# The ILR ICC SLDs:

## Cultural Appropriateness by Level

- ▶ **Level 0**: Unable to adjust when faced with cultural differences.
- ▶ **Level 0+**: Able to use rehearsed behavior and memorized utterances to engage in a few routine interactions serving basic survival needs.
- ▶ **Level 1**: Usually responds appropriately to the most commonly used cultural cues but may exhibit confusion when faced with unfamiliar ones and can rarely cope if misunderstandings arise. Can generally conform to culturally prescribed practices during interactions, such as those regarding posture, eye contact, and distance from others, and observe rules governing personal appearance and attire.
- ▶ **Level 2**: Able to participate acceptably in many everyday social and work-related interactions. Shows conscious awareness of significant differences between the individual's own culture and the other culture and attempts to adjust behavior accordingly, although not always successfully.
- ▶ **Level 3**: Able to participate successfully in most social, practical, and professional interactions, including those that may require a range of formal and informal language and behavior.

# The ILR ICC SLDs

## Tasks and Functions by Level

- ▶ **Level 0+**: Greetings, farewells, and expressions of thanks and apology.
- ▶ **Level 1**: Typically experiences difficulties with less predictable and spontaneous interactions, such as open-ended conversations or bargaining... normally observes basic courtesy requirements in encounters with individuals of different gender, age, or status.
- ▶ **Level 2**: Can typically... adhere to basic social norms..., such as in accepting and refusing invitations, offering and receiving gifts, and requesting assistance. Can appropriately issue straightforward directions and instructions, give or receive orders, whether in person, on the telephone or in writing, and may be able to address some job-related problems.
- ▶ **Level 3**: Can usually discuss a variety of issues and subject matter that refer to the culture, such history, politics, literature, and the arts.... In professional contexts, the individual can interact appropriately during meetings and provide detailed explanations or reports both in person and in writing.

# The ILR ICC SLDs


## Literacy by Level

- ▶ **Level 0+**: [No reference.]
- ▶ **Level 1**: Exhibits emerging ability to participate in some *social media* activities.
- ▶ **Level 2**: Able to participate in various social media activities. In a work environment, can appropriately issue straightforward directions and instructions, give or receive orders, whether in person, on the telephone, or in writing.
- ▶ **Level 3**: Can interpret reading materials and recognize subtleties, implications, and tone. Able to communicate via social media. In professional contexts, the individual can interact appropriately during meetings and provide detailed explanations or reports both in person and in writing.

# The ILR ICC SLDs: Level 4

## Level 4: (Advanced Professional Competence)

Able to participate successfully in virtually all social, professional, and official interactions, including those where leadership is required. Controls the full range of formal and informal styles of language and behavior. Responds effectively to verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, and almost always correctly interprets visual cues, cultural allusions, nuance, tone, and subtle manifestations of underlying values. Can effectively employ, both in person and in writing, a wide variety of sophisticated communicative strategies to command, argue, persuade, dissuade, negotiate, counsel, and show empathy. Can take part successfully in public discourse, such as presentations, conferences, speeches, and media interviews. Can use intercultural communicative skills to facilitate information exchanges in a variety of situations. Makes frequent and appropriate use of cultural references, literary allusions, quotations from literature and other significant documents, and can discuss in depth the culture's traditions, beliefs, history, national policies, and public issues.

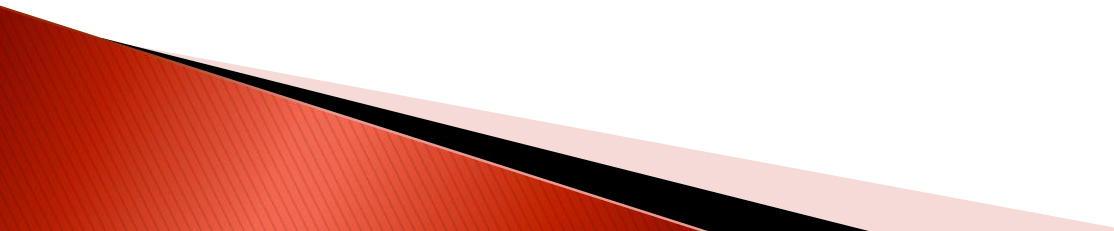


# The ILR ICC SLDs

## Level 5: Full Description

### **Level 5: (Superior Professional Competence)**

The individual has mastered and controls virtually all forms of intercultural communication. Can deal skillfully with a very extensive range of circumstances, including high-stress situations. Recognizes and understands the intended meaning of a very wide variety of colloquialisms, regionalisms, slang, and pertinent cultural references. Able to analyze, debate, and synthesize the most creative expressions of language and aesthetics, as well as the concepts, values and standards that constitute the fundamental underpinnings of the culture.



# The ILR ICC SLDs

## CURRICULA DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ Implementation of ICC SLDs is proceeding slowly:
  - Training needs differ by USG agency
  - Difficulties in aligning linguistic and extralinguistic elements
  - Political Environment

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