



Language Proficiency Scale

The language proficiency scale used by inlingua is the **Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Proficiency Scale**, which consists of a set of descriptions of abilities (rubrics) to communicate in a language. This scale was originally developed by the Interagency Language Roundtable, which included representation by the United States Foreign Service Institute, the predecessor of the National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC).

Additional information about this proficiency scale and its history may be found online at <http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/IRL%20Scale%20History.htm> and <http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale2.htm>.

The ILR Proficiency Scale consists of descriptions of five levels of language proficiency (and two levels of non-proficiency) and is the standard grading scale for language proficiency used by the United States government. The ILR Proficiency Scale may be used to measure and describe proficiency in any language.

Speaking 0 No Proficiency
A speaker with no proficiency is: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unable to function in the language.• Limited in production to isolated words.• Has essentially no communicative ability.

Speaking 0+ Memorized Proficiency
A speaker with only memorized proficiency is described as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Able to satisfy immediate needs using rehearsed utterances.• Shows little real autonomy of expression, flexibility or spontaneity.• Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only with memorized utterances or formulae.• Attempts at creating speech are usually unsuccessful.
<u>Examples:</u> The individual's vocabulary is usually limited to areas of immediate survival needs.

Speaking 1 Elementary Proficiency
This is the first and essential level of the scale. The following describes the traits of an ILR Level 1 individual: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speaker can fulfill travelling needs and conduct him or herself in a polite manner.• Able to use questions and answers for simple topics within a limited level of experience.• Able to understand basic questions and speech, which allows for guides, such as slower speech or repetition, to aid understanding.• Has only a vocabulary large enough to communicate the most basic of needs; also makes frequent lexical and grammatical errors.• The majority of individuals classified as Level 1 are able to perform most basic functions using the language. This includes buying goods, expressing the time of day, ordering simple meals and asking for minimal directions.

Examples: Structural accuracy is likely to be random or severely limited. Time concepts are vague. Vocabulary is inaccurate, and its range is very narrow. The individual often speaks with great difficulty. By repeating, such speakers can make themselves understood to native speakers who are in regular contact with foreigners but there is little precision in the information conveyed. Needs, experience or training may vary greatly from individual to individual; for example, speakers at this level may have encountered quite different vocabulary areas. However, the individual can typically satisfy predictable, simple, personal and accommodation needs; can generally meet courtesy, introduction, and identification requirements; exchange greetings; elicit and provide, for example, predictable and skeletal biographical information. The speaker is able to formulate some questions even in languages with complicated question constructions. Almost every utterance may be characterized by structural errors and errors in basic grammatical relations. Vocabulary is extremely limited and characteristically does not include modifiers. Pronunciation, stress, and intonation are generally poor, often heavily influenced by another language. Use of structure and vocabulary is highly imprecise.

Speaking 2 Limited Working Proficiency

Limited working proficiency is the second level in the scale. A person at this level is described as follows:

- Speaker is able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements.
- Can handle with confidence most basic social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, work, family, and autobiographical information.
- Can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or difficulties; can get the gist of most conversations on non-technical subjects (i.e., topics which require no specialized knowledge), and has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond simply with some circumlocutions.
- Has an accent which, though often quite faulty, is intelligible.
- Can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar.

Examples: Typically the individual can participate in most social, formal, and informal interactions, but limitations either in range of contexts, types of tasks or level of accuracy hinder effectiveness. The individual may be ill at ease with the use of the language either in social interaction or in speaking at length in professional contexts. He or she is generally strong in either structural precision or vocabulary, but not in both. Weakness or unevenness in one of the foregoing, or in pronunciation, occasionally results in miscommunication. Normally controls, but cannot always easily produce general vocabulary. Discourse is often incohesive.

Speaking 3 General Professional Proficiency

This level of proficiency is usually used to measure how many people in the world know a given language. A person at this level is described as follows:

- Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most conversations on practical, social, and professional topics.
- Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease
- Has comprehension which is quite complete for a normal rate of speech.
- Has a general vocabulary which is broad enough that he or she rarely has to grope for a word.
- Has an accent which may be obviously foreign; has a good control of grammar; and whose errors virtually never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker.

Examples: Can typically discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease. Can use the language as part of normal professional duties such as answering objections, clarifying points, justifying decisions, understanding the essence of challenges, stating and defending policy, conducting

meetings, delivering briefings, or other extended and elaborate informative monologues. Can reliably elicit information and informed opinion from native speakers. Structural inaccuracy is rarely the major cause of misunderstanding. Use of structural devices is flexible and elaborate. Without searching for words or phrases, the individual uses the language clearly and relatively naturally to elaborate concepts freely and make ideas easily understandable to native speakers. Errors occur in low-frequency and highly complex structures.

Speaking 4 Advanced Professional Proficiency

A person at this level is described as follows:

- Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs.
- Can understand and participate in any conversations within the range of own personal and professional experience with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary.
- Would rarely be taken for a native speaker, but can respond appropriately even in unfamiliar situations.
- Makes only rare and unpatterned errors of pronunciation and grammar.
- Can handle informal interpreting from and into the language.

Examples: Can discuss in detail concepts which are fundamentally different from those of the target culture and make those concepts clear and accessible to the native speaker. Similarly, the individual can understand the details and ramifications of concepts that are culturally or conceptually different from his or her own. Can set the tone of interpersonal official, semi-official and non-professional verbal exchanges with a representative range of native speakers (in a range of varied audiences, purposes, tasks and settings). Can play an effective role among native speakers in such contexts as conferences, lectures and debates on matters of disagreement. Can advocate a position at length, both formally and in chance encounters, using sophisticated verbal strategies. Understands and reliably produces shifts of both subject matter and tone. Can understand native speakers of the standard and other major dialects in essentially any face-to-face interaction.

Speaking 5 Functionally Native Proficiency

This is the highest level in the scale. A person at this level is described as follows:

- Has a speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker.
- Has complete fluency in the language, such that speech on all levels is fully accepted by educated native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references.