Proficiency Level Alignment Between Students and Learning Outcomes in
Scandinavian 321 Language Courses

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ABSTRACT

The third-year language courses in Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish at Brigham Young University (BYU) are positioned at a crucial intersection within the Scandinavian Studies program, connecting lower-level language courses to the literature courses taught in the language. The Learning Outcomes (LOs) for these four languages, however, are not the same and do not fully align with current program objectives.

This project was designed to provide data to program administrators as they consider whether the third-year (321) Scandinavian language courses are designed at the correct proficiency level. The four questions in this project were: 1) what are the approximate ACTFL[1] levels of Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish 321 LOs, 2) what are the differences between the LOs for the four languages, 3) what are the proficiency levels of the students taking 321 courses, and 4) what is the relationship between student proficiency and the levels of the LOs? While this project was intended to provide data that will be used to improve third-year (321) courses in Scandinavian Studies, the processes may be beneficial to other languages and programs at BYU or at other schools.

For this project, I performed a content analysis of the LOs, examining the language used in the LOs to determine what levels were being described, using ACTFL documents as a reference. As part of the content analysis, I documented the existing differences between the LOs for the four languages. I also addressed the question of how to assess course and program outcomes. To estimate the proficiency levels of students, I used data collected through a BYU-developed instrument called the Language Ability Self Evaluation Resource (LASER). Finally, I compared the self-assessed student proficiency levels with the estimated LO levels to understand the relationship between the two.

The findings were that 1) collectively, the LOs claim to target Intermediate to Advanced but use language that describes the Intermediate to Distinguished levels; 2) there are significant differences between the languages' LOs in specificity, content, and skills described; 3) students in 321 generally self-assess from Intermediate to Advanced, with a small number self-assessing at Superior; and 4) student self-assessed proficiency, overall, appears to be at or just below the level of course outcomes, although more data on student proficiency is needed.

My recommendations are to rewrite the LOs to a more realistic target proficiency level range, to use assessments based on program outcomes to reduce dependency on the OPI for measuring program goals, and to continue collecting data on student proficiency over time to gather a larger sample of results.

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in Scandinavian 321 Language Courses

The Brigham Young University (BYU) Scandinavian Studies Program offers third-year language courses in Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish. These courses, for which the course level number is 321, lie at the intersection of several important program elements. They are the bridge between 200-level language courses and 300-level courses that cover literature in the language. Additionally, the 321 courses are the gateway to the Scandinavian Studies minor, they fulfill certain General Education requirements, and they count as advanced language courses for some majors.

Beside their strategic importance in the program, 321 language classes contain a unique blend of students. BYU is different from most universities in that many students come to (or come back to) the university after having served religious missions in countries all around the world, typically for 18-24 months. This means there is a large number of students on campus with proficiency in a second language. Within the Scandinavian Studies program, there are returned missionaries who have served in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, or Sweden. (Icelandic is not included in this project because there is not an Icelandic course at the third-year level.) Thus, in most 321 classes, there are students who began their learning in 101 and have taken four semesters of language courses at the university, as well as students who have significant in-country language and culture experience but who may not have classroom language learning experience. The 321 courses, then, are tasked with bringing together two student groups who have different strengths and weaknesses and potentially different proficiency levels.

According to the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), the main driver for assessing student LOs at most institutions is accreditation. However, an increasing number of schools are assessing their LOs based on faculty and staff interest in educational improvement (Kuh et al., 2014). In Scandinavian Studies at BYU, there has been an ongoing desire to evaluate various aspects of the program to find opportunities for improvement. One area of focus has been the third-year level, where there is a confluence of returned missionaries and students from the lower-level courses. Because students at this level might range in proficiency anywhere from Intermediate to Superior, instructors can find the course challenging to teach.

Program administrators have looked for ways to support both faculty and students in the 321 courses and administrators have expressed a desire to know more about student proficiency levels. When paired with a close study of the LOs, information about student proficiency may help guide any needed adjustments to the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish 321 courses. At first glance, the LOs for the four languages appear to be proficiency-based and the language used in the LOs sounds familiar to those with experience using ACTFL[1] resources (see Appendix A). On closer inspection, however, there are content differences between Danish and Swedish LOs on one side and Finnish and Norwegian LOs on the other. Not only that, but there are important differences between ACTFL documents and the wording of the LOs.

These differences caught my attention, and I wondered what the relationship really was between the LOs and ACTFL level descriptions. What are the LOs really saying about the level of 321 course outcomes? If I could estimate the ACTFL level of the LOs, that would create a starting point for program administrators when reviewing the LOs for potential adjustments. Initially, a simple read-through seemed like the answer, but reading the LOs raised more

questions and it became clear that a detailed content analysis would be a good way to document the current state of the LOs.

Because LOs are designed to help students understand what they are expected to know and do by the end of a course, the question of student proficiency was raised. What is the proficiency level of students coming into 321? If I could estimate the level of the LOs, maybe I could also collect data on student proficiency to see how these two sides correlate. Using the ACTFL level descriptors and other documents as a centering reference, would it be possible to see the relationship between student proficiency and the levels of the 321 LOs? As a graduate student and the program's language coordinator over the third-year language courses, I designed this project to investigate the alignment between ACTFL levels, 321 LOs, and student proficiency.

This proficiency-level alignment study describes the relationship between what students starting a third-year Scandinavian language course think they can do with the language, and what the course outcomes expect them to be able to do by the end. In the field of second language learning, *proficiency* is defined as "what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context" (ACTFL, 2012, p. 3). Approaching the Scandinavian languages from a proficiency perspective is relatively new in the field of second language education and BYU may be the first to undertake this kind of project for Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish. Alignment of the LOs and students of a single course level is also an area of research where little has been published. It is my hope that the processes used in this project can be beneficial to other language coordinators and program directors at BYU and at other institutions.

Objectives

My project looked at the following:

1. Scandinavian 321 course LOs

    a. What are the approximate ACTFL levels of the 321 LOs?

    b. What are the differences among the current LOs for Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish?

2. Student proficiency

    a. What are the self-assessed proficiency levels of students who take 321?

    b. How does student proficiency compare to the approximate proficiency levels of the LOs for the four languages?

Review of Related Literature

This literature review highlights some of the issues faced by language programs. I will review literature and research related to developing LOs, assessing LOs, how LOs fit into a program evaluation, and research on the use of self-assessment for estimating student proficiency.

Developing Learning Outcomes

What are LOs, how do they function, and how does one write good LOs appropriate to the learning environment? Learning outcomes are the goals and objectives used to help participants understand the point of learning within a designated environment. In education, they describe the end as opposed to the means, are student-centered, and use verbs that suggest a possible form of evidence (BYU, n.d.-a). Outcomes can be broad or narrow, depending on the educational context being described.

Maki (2010) states that LOs should be written at the correct institutional level, meaning that outcomes become increasingly specific the closer they are to the students being described. For example, at the highest institutional level, objectives can be expressed in terms of a mission statement. Within a university, outcomes at the college level might include ideals, behaviors, abilities, or general understandings within a field. At the program level, outcomes can include broad information about content area as well as general criteria like critical thinking skills, or they can describe the outcome of a series of courses. Course outcomes point to level-specific concepts, behaviors, skills, content knowledge, criteria, processes, and/or proficiency. Finally, module, unit, or lesson objectives created by instructors are the most fine-grained and include specific means and criteria that provide evidence of student learning (Anderson et al., 2001; Maki, 2010; Wiggins & McTighe 2005). The first step in evaluating LOs is to determine if they are written for the appropriate institutional level. Writing clear outcomes with the appropriate level of specificity helps align expectations between administrators, faculty, and students.

Clear outcomes are the foundation of a three-step process: writing objectives, creating assessments, and designing classroom instruction (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Having good LOs is crucial for avoiding what Wiggins and McTighe refer to as the "twin sins" of instruction: "activity-focused teaching" and "coverage-focused teaching" (pp. 3, 16). In activity-focused teaching, the focus is so hands-on that students are not engaged at higher cognitive levels with the big, important, and abiding questions essential to the course. In coverage-focused teaching, the instructor is so focused on getting through the textbook or a series of lecture notes or slides that, again, the question of what students should know or be able to do at the end of the course is never made explicit in a way that students can think metacognitively about or articulate at any point in the course. In these two essentially objective-less scenarios, students could fail to grasp

the larger ideas and vital tasks that should endure beyond the course (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). To avoid these scenarios, courses should have LOs that are clearly derived from program outcomes and describe what students should be able to do and/or know because they took that course (BYU, n.d.-a). Once LOs are well-designed and based on aspects of the program outcomes, they fit together to illustrate the broader program outcomes (Maki, 2010).

BYU has a website to assist faculty with writing LOs which contains a link to a document titled "Making Learning Outcomes Work for You" (BYU, n.d.-b). The document suggests a process and formula which is generally applicable across disciplines. It begins with a five-step process to work through developing the outcomes, followed by a formula to write them out: "Students will (be able to) [ability + [disciplinary context] + [criteria or means (ideal, but optional)]" (BYU, n.d.-b). This formula helps faculty write outcomes at the course level.

It's one thing to be able to write LOs at the correct institutional level, but LOs in a university language program also need to be written for the skills, functions, and cultural content of a particular proficiency level because language courses are designed to be taken in sequence. The second step in evaluating LOs, then, is to determine if they are written for the correct proficiency level for the course. Proficiency levels describe what learners can do within set of functions, text types, content areas, and with a certain degree of accuracy in social contexts that mimic real-world situations (ACTFL, 2012). Therefore, developing appropriate LOs for language courses requires determining the right institutional level and proficiency level.

Is proficiency an important consideration when developing language course LOs? A study by Hancock et al. (2022) made the case that proficiency-based instruction not only produces better oral proficiency, but also helps learners feel like their language skills are useful in a practical way. Students interviewed in the study felt like proficiency-based instruction

created a more "relaxed and supportive atmosphere that promoted student oral language use" (p. 14). Because the usefulness of language skills is important to students and programs, LOs should include goals for proficiency in addition to objectives about content mastery.

Understanding how proficiency-based language course outcomes look different from the outcomes for most other courses is vital to writing LOs that can measure proficiency. Ritz and Toro (2022) described the formula for writing proficiency-based learning outcomes as "I can + language function + context (+ proficiency-level information)" (p. 5), where "language function" refers to a communicative task such as asking and answering questions, narrating and describing, or expressing and supporting an opinion. "Context" in the Ritz and Toro formula refers to "what students are communicating about: family, friends, school, and so on" (p.5), something which would be described as "content" in other ACTFL documents (ACTFL, 2020b). The optional proficiency-level information in the formula is the text type expected from students: strings of sentences at the Intermediate level or paragraphs at the Advanced level. One example Ritz and Toro (2022) gave for a proficiency-based outcome was: "I can debate the pros and cons of volunteering in another country" (p. 108). This particular outcome is too narrow for a program or course outcome but, if used in a lesson or unit, this could provide evidence of critical thinking skills named at a higher institutional level.

Proficiency-based language course outcomes should be student-centered statements of the level-appropriate language skills, global functions, and modes of communication taught within the content areas of the course (BYU, n.d.-a; Maki, 2010; Ritz & Toro, 2022). In general, outcomes should help students understand what they should be able to do after successfully completing the course, but LOs in proficiency-based language programs should describe level-specific criteria.

Assessing Learning Outcomes

A report by NILOA about the current state of student learning outcomes assessments reported that "faculty involvement in assessment and improvement is essential to both improve teaching and learning and to enhance institutional effectiveness" (Kuh et al., 2014, p. 4). The Institute reported that the increased use of rubrics, portfolios, and classroom-based performance assessments was a signal that more assessment was being driven by an internal desire for institutional improvement as opposed to mandates. Faculty at BYU are required to provide evidence for how each LO is measured, so outcome clarity, alignment of assessments to objectives, and evidence of outcome achievement are key elements of program and course design.

In addition, having clear LOs that students are familiar with can ease tension surrounding classroom assessment and can improve performance (Posner, 2011). Posner's research shows a positive relationship between explicit proficiency-based assessment of LOs and student achievement and found that "evaluation based on learning outcomes better enabled both students and the instructor to assess learning and design good instruments" (p. 11). Students were able to better articulate exactly what they needed help with by referring to the wording in the LOs. In this way, Posner's results demonstrated the strength of using backward design to connect objectives, assessments, and instruction.

Knowing what kind of assessment options are available for a proficiency-based program can assist in the three-step process of writing objectives, gathering evidence, and designing instruction. Programs typically set goals for student proficiency but sometimes have trouble acquiring evidence that all the goals are being met. Many institutions have used the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) to measure program outcomes (Clifford, 2016; Dewey et al., 2015;

Malone & Montee, 2010). This is common even though outcomes typically contain more than just oral proficiency and interpersonal speaking objectives. Learning outcomes usually have goals for additional communicative skills like listening, writing, and reading, as well as intercultural competence. While it is rare to find a program that assesses all of these objectives at the program level, a program built with well-designed courses can gather evidence of proficiency in all these categories from course assessments (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Clifford (2016) makes the case that intentionally designed criterion-referenced proficiency assessments can and should be used for all four skills. Such tests require very careful alignment between ACTFL levels, item construction, and testing procedures so that the level-appropriate construct being tested can be accurately isolated and clearly elicited without interference from other language abilities. The use of such rigorously designed assessments can provide clear information about student proficiency in reading, writing, listening, or speaking.

Norris and Pfeiffer (2003) looked at whether the OPI was the best tool to measure program outcomes in the Georgetown University German Department. They found that it is useful to have "curriculum-independent measures" like the OPI (p. 580) but that outside tests like the OPI should be balanced with assessments that are dependent on the program's curriculum. Students in the program benefitted from knowing their oral proficiency score and the results provided an additional perspective on program outcomes. Balancing internal and external proficiency assessments, according to Norris and Pfeiffer, maintains a program's ability to set independent goals and measure those objectives they find most valuable.

Goertler et al. (2016) studied assessment options other than the OPI to measure the program outcomes in the German program at Michigan State University. They evaluated the mean and median proficiency levels of students using two tests calibrated to the Common

European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The assessments used were a language learning software test and a modified Goethe-Institut practice exam and these tests assessed skills in all four skill areas: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Through their research, they were able to establish that most students met the program's benchmark for their corresponding year of coursework, although scores for receptive skills (reading and listening) were lower than expected.

The article called for more research that considers data from course assessments and correlates the ACTFL and CEFR scales (see note in Appendix G). Such research could be significant for major languages like German. In addition, it could fill gaps that can seem impossible to bridge for Scandinavian languages because Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish have fewer standardized ACTFL tests available like the Reading, Listening, or Writing Proficiency Tests[2]. Therefore, widening the options for assessing outcomes in the four skills would be useful–especially widening the options to include course assessments.

The fact that some of the LOs include culture makes finding comprehensive assessments even more difficult. Intercultural competence, while important, is hard to measure (Barrett & Paesani, 2018; Byrnes et. al, 2010; Garrett-Rucks, 2016), due in part to the difficulty of defining culture. However, the system developed by Miller and Lindseth (2019) could be a good starting point. They created a protocol template for comparing end-of-program student performance to the program's stated outcomes[3]. They coupled one program linguistic outcome with one program cultural outcome and designed tasks and interviews to gather evidence from students, referring to ACTFL proficiency benchmarks in making the rubric. The advantages of using these protocols are simplicity, clarity, ease, and their grounding in language acquisition standards. Although the results of Miller and Lindseth's (2019) instrument have not been determined to be reliable and

valid, their work could be a starting point for further research on how to measure outcomes that include intercultural competence.

Another method for assessing LOs which measures a learner's ability to perform real-world tasks is the GRASPS model by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). In this model, performance tasks measure proficiency in functions, accuracy, content areas, contexts, and text types. The tasks give students a communicative goal, a role, an audience, a situation, a product (like a text type), and a standard or performance criteria. In this way, learners use their language in a simulated real-world communicative task. This model also has the potential to allow students to demonstrate their cultural knowledge and sensitivity.

No matter what assessment tools are used at the program or course level, they should be carefully chosen to gather evidence that the LOs are being met by students (Norris & Pfeiffer, 2003). Thus, if the LOs set objectives for any of the four language skills or culture, there needs to be an instrument for measuring those outcomes.

Program Evaluations

While this project is not a program evaluation, a review of relevant program evaluation case studies illustrates the usefulness of assessing LOs within a program. According to NILOA, "nine out of ten institutions today use student learning outcomes data in program reviews, either institution-wide (62%) or for some programs (29%)" (Kuh et al., 2014, p. 15), demonstrating that studying LOs is an important element in a program evaluation. Many of the following case studies show that student OPI scores have been the most-used form of measurement for program and LO achievement (Clifford, 2016; Dewey et al., 2015; Malone & Montee, 2010), even when program-level outcomes include objectives in addition to oral proficiency. This is the case despite the fact that program outcome measurement is not the purpose of the OPI.

It is important to discuss the use of the OPI to measure program outcomes because there has been some discussion in the Scandinavian Studies program about using the OPI to measure the proficiency of students as they begin 321 and again at the end of the program. There may be face validity to this scenario because it appears to measure student proficiency gains over time in the program, but the only classes taught in the language between the beginning and end of the Scandinavian Studies minor are 321 and 340 (literature). The other courses required for the minor are taught in English. The program's stated goals for writing, speaking, and listening ability are "progress toward advanced-level proficiency in Danish Icelandic Norwegian or Swedish (or intermediate-level proficiency in Finnish)" (Appendix B; BYU, 2023e, para. 1) even though Icelandic, like Finnish, is a Category 3 language (U. S. Department of State, 2020). Students are already self-assessing at those levels in Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish as they come into 321 (see "Findings" section). Requiring whole classes to take the OPI at the start of 321 and again after taking 321 and 340 (and the minor's classes in English) and then expecting students to be at the very level they were already at when they started 321 is not only logistically difficult[2], but a waste of resources. If students showed oral proficiency gains via an OPI at the start of 321 and at the end of the minor, it would be impossible to determine how much of those gains in speaking ability were due to instruction in 321 and 340. Because the program is only requiring "progress toward" either Intermediate or Advanced, there are much easier and more direct methods for gathering evidence of that progress.

It has also been suggested that the Scandinavian Studies program use the OPI as a pre- and post-test to measure 321 course outcomes and semester-long student gains, so it is important to review the research in this area as well. The *OPI Examinee Handbook* states that "the OPI . . . is not designed to assess what you have learned in a specific language program, class, school, or

university" (Language Testing International, 2018, p. 4). Although the OPI can provide a measurement of proficiency gains over time, it is not guaranteed that student proficiency gains at the Advanced level would be apparent in OPIs taken three and a half months apart because the breadth and depth of the Advanced level takes significant time and experience to master (Swender & Vicars, 2012). Nor is there any way to verify that proficiency gains measured by the OPI are due to instruction within the program, making it a weak measurement of program outcomes at best. Furthermore, the OPI provides a rating for a single conversation sample, not a rating of an individual's overall proficiency level (Language Testing International, 2018). Because the OPI is designed to rate a speech sample of an individual, it cannot be a valid instrument for measuring general program outcomes. Regardless, the OPI has been used extensively as a measurement tool in program evaluations (Norris & Pfeiffer, 2003; Thompson et al., 2014).

Where does the idea that the OPI is a good measurement of program outcomes come from? ACTFL has produced some conflicting information. Even though the *OPI Examinee Handbook* states that the OPI does not measure course or program outcomes (Language Testing International, 2018), chapter eight of the *Oral Proficiency Interview Tester Training Manual* states that two possible applications of the OPI are "assessment of learning outcomes at the end of a program of study" and "diagnostic testing for program evaluation" (Liskin-Gasparro, 2012, p. 49). Under the category of assessing at the end of a program, the author states that "the OPI is a natural choice for assessing the speaking skills of graduating language majors" which seems like a reasonable claim since oral proficiency is an important outcome for language programs and the OPI measures oral proficiency.

However, it is important to remember that multiple variables contribute to student proficiency and at BYU there are many students who serve 18–24-month religious missions, arriving on campus (and in 321 classes) already possessing considerable proficiency in their second language. Therefore, a program's objectives–even speaking objectives–cannot accurately be measured by OPI scores because the degree to which a language program contributes to a student's OPI score cannot be made evident through the OPI's conversational interview structure. The OPI is designed to determine a speaker's global level of sustained ability (the "floor") and the upper level of language break-down (the "ceiling") (Swender & Vicars, 2012, p. 15). That the OPI, by design, cannot measure program outcomes is important to remember and using the OPI for that purpose is a pitfall to avoid, especially at a university where so many students are returned missionaries. Using a value-added approach, where students are assessed as they begin and end of a program to evaluate learning within the program, might be possible if there was an acceptable instrument that could measure gains in a pre- and post-test manner. It is possible that the Scandinavian Studies program could develop such a test using something like the Miller and Lindseth model[3] (2019). The practicality of administering it twice for every student would have to be considered.

As for using the OPI as a diagnostic test for a program evaluation, Liskin-Gasparro (2012) frames the OPI as a means for learning whether students in a particular course are meeting program expectations. While the OPI can certainly assist in gathering proficiency information, a program that uses backward design to create rigorous course assessments based on proficiency-oriented course and program goals would already produce information about student achievement without the cost and time involved in administering OPIs to the whole program. In her example, Liskin-Gasparro imagines program administrators using OPI results as a catalyst to

reexamine program goals and instruction. However, the issues of time (which she covers on page 48) and cost (which she does not address) limit the practicality of using the OPI to discover what might be amiss with student speaking proficiency at the program level. To understand why program objectives should be determined prior to and (at least somewhat) independent of OPI results, we can look to other programs that have used the OPI to evaluate their outcomes.

Twenty years ago, the ACTFL-produced journal *Foreign Language Annals* printed an issue devoted to the OPI. As part of that issue, Norris and Pfeiffer (2003) looked at how the test might fit into college program evaluations. After rating all the students in the Georgetown German program using the OPI, their study concluded:

> Setting educational outcomes standards based solely on the ACTFL Guidelines and oral proficiency scales overly constrains the outlook of the educational purposes and goals of collegiate foreign language departments. We therefore argue for the careful incorporation of curriculum-independent measures of this sort to meet clearly defined and delimited roles within program assessment. (p. 580)

In other words, while the OPI has its usefulness in a language program, it should not be used as the base for program standards or as the main evidence of program outcomes. Warning against a myopic view of proficiency, Norris and Pfeiffer stated: "To embrace such a standard as the sole or even a major indicator of learning outcomes is to short-change students, teachers, and the foreign language discipline as part of the humanities" (p. 580). Their research also showed that the end-of-program standard for oral proficiency was too low; students spoke slightly better than the program expected. So, while the OPI was useful for gaining a broad understanding of how program outcomes aligned with student proficiency, the authors nonetheless recommended using

a blend of program-specific and program-independent measurements to achieve the best alignment between standards and outcomes.

During an extensive, multiyear, faculty-led program evaluation, Duke University developed a new set of objectives for their language program (Thompson et al., 2014). In creating the goals, Duke's Language Task Force found ways to combine linguistic and intercultural competence and the result was the following program outcomes:

> Students would (1) develop sufficient proficiency in a second language to engage foreign cultures, histories, and literatures; (2) gain an understanding of the nature of culture in as far as it is embodied in language; and (3) bring a cultural perspective to bear to enhance understanding of issues of similarity and difference. (p. 655)

The new program required students to take a series of courses including at least 3 semesters of language study and at least one upper-level (fifth semester) language course, depending on the level at which the student felt they could begin. At the end of the third, fourth, or fifth semesters, student proficiency levels were measured using the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI). The research did not state which instruments, if any, were used to assess proficiency in other modes of communication or culture, so it cannot be known from the information provided in the study whether these objectives were measured or to what degree students achieved them. While Duke created their own program-specific objectives, which included language proficiency and intercultural competence, measurement of the objectives still appears to have been narrowly focused on oral proficiency.

Another relevant element of this study was the way the task force accommodated students with prior language experience. The task force created multiple paths to fulfill the new foreign language requirement with course placement being left up to the student (Thompson et

al., 2014). Students could take three semesters beginning at semester 1, 2, or 3, placing themselves in the course they thought was the best fit. If, however, they came to the university with higher proficiency, they could take a semester 4 and 5 course, or just a fifth-semester course if they were a native speaker (see page 656). In this way, all students engaged with language and culture studies at some level.

Language programs at BYU also accommodate large numbers of students who arrive with prior language experience due to having served a mission in a second language. Returned missionaries generally start their university language instruction in a 321 course and bring a unique skill set to the class. Many 321 classes also have students who have come up through the program from 101 but have little in-country experience. Students who come up through the program have a different language and culture skill set than returned missionaries and this mix can create challenges for instructors and students.

Is it possible to have a blended-proficiency classroom that effectively supports everyone's level? As part of the Duke study, students were surveyed about their experience with the new program and the report stated:

> It is critical to remember that even the more orally proficient students who self-place into the intermediate courses have different areas of strength and weakness and are not always necessarily misplaced or ill-served by taking these courses, for which oral proficiency is only one of several goals. Nor is their presence in these classes necessarily detrimental to the progress of the less orally proficient students. In fact, student course evaluations, as well as responses to various items on the student self-report survey, indicated a high degree of satisfaction and perceived learning gains from the large majority of students. With increasingly diverse student populations, efforts might be well spent developing

curricula and pedagogical practices that accommodate and leverage this diversity in

productive ways. (Thompson et al., 2014, p. 664)

Here we see that a classroom with mixed levels of oral proficiency can potentially be

advantageous to everyone by using pedagogical strategies and curricula adjustments. The

research, however, did not specify what these strategies and adjustments might look like.

Additionally, it is not clear that student satisfaction was directly caused by mixed-proficiency

classrooms because the questionnaire used in the study was not made available in the report.

In support of mixed-proficiency classes, Ziegler and Bryfonski (2020) noted in their

research that task objective and role assignment can significantly impact whether mixed-level

interactive activities are beneficial to the learners involved. They found that it was helpful to pair

higher- and lower-proficiency learners together and give the lower-proficiency student a role

with more responsibility in the learning activities. This suggests that intentional pedagogical

choices can make a difference in a proficiency-diverse classroom.

The Duke study also considered variations across languages (Thompson et al., 2014),

which is relevant to the BYU Scandinavian Studies Program because the program as a whole

includes Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish. The authors stated, "in evaluating

the findings of this study, faculty began to consider the differences in the number of hours of

language instruction that are necessary across different languages to reach the same level of

proficiency" (p. 663). This supports the potential for differences between LOs of Danish,

Norwegian, and Swedish versus Finnish. Because Finnish is more difficult, it is probable that

students of Finnish will not make proficiency gains at the same rate as students studying Danish,

Norwegian, or Swedish and it is reasonable for the LOs to reflect that difference. (This also

applies to Icelandic, which is also a harder language.) Variation between languages is likely to

impact the contact hours needed for students to reach certain proficiency levels (Thompson et al., 2014). However, because students bring diverse backgrounds, affective components, study habits, and aptitudes to the classroom, certain proficiency levels cannot be guaranteed by contact hours and must not be expected based solely on time spent in a course[4] (Watzinger-Tharp, 2014).

Evaluating the outcomes in a program can help clarify what each course is designed to contribute. According to the research, OPIs can provide valuable information about student oral proficiency levels, but other forms of assessment should be included when determining the degree to which all the program goals are being met. Because of the way the program and the OPI are structured, and taking returned missionary proficiency into account, using the OPI at the beginning and end of the program may not provide reliable results about student achievement of program objectives. The research also shows that mixed-proficiency levels can be beneficial in the classroom and that variation in language difficulty can impact course LOs.

Self-Assessment

The second objective of this project is to look at student self-assessed proficiency. In the field of assessment, it is widely understood that the most valid use of an assessment's results is the purpose for which that assessment was designed (Miller et al., 2013). Thus, the most valid use of the results of a self-assessment would be for improvement by the one who took the self-assessment (Summers et al., 2019). Any use of test results outside of the intended purpose should be guided by research.

Self-assessment has many positive benefits, like improved self-efficacy and helping students set appropriate expectations for language learning (Kissling & O'Donnell, 2015; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001). Rios-Font (2017) argues that giving post-secondary students self-assessment tools helps them set realistic goals for themselves. She states:

Because language learning as an adult is inevitably a confidence-mining experience for

students constantly asked to stretch their communicative limits, goals need to be detailed,

and quality self-assessment tools made widely available to provide learners grade

independent criteria for evaluating their own progress. Without them, they are liable to

measure themselves against an idealized standard. (p. 21)

Rios-Font (2017) suggests that the CEFR self-assessment grids are a good starting point for self-

assessment and ACTFL states that self-assessment is one of the valid purposes of the NCSSFL-

ACTFL Can-Do Benchmarks (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017), giving the students at least two

resources for self-assessments. Another benefit of self-assessment is that it can bring the idea of

language goals and self-determination to the forefront for students who had not previously

considered a long-range purpose in language learning or whose goals had heretofore been

extrinsically motivated.

Despite the benefits of self-assessment in the classroom, Ma and Winke's (2019) research

indicates that caution should be used when using student self-assessment for higher-stakes goals.

Their results found that student self-assessments correlated with Oral Proficiency Interview-

Computer (OPIc) scores at some proficiency levels, but not at all of them. Students at the Novice

and Advanced level tended to self-assess more correctly, while self-assessments for those at the

Intermediate level did not correlate with OPIc scores[5]. This could be due to the nature of the

Can-Do statements at the Intermediate level or another factor like the linguistic experience

required to accurately self-assess at the Intermediate level. They suggest that self-assessment

results can be used for low-stakes applications like a broad understanding of where students are

in terms of proficiency, but when using in program evaluations some caution is needed due to the

inconsistency at the Intermediate level. For Scandinavian 321 courses, which include students

who self-assess at the Intermediate level or at the Advanced-Intermediate border, Ma and Winke's research shows that Intermediate self-assessment results might not be accurate.

Tigchelaar (2019) demonstrated that the statistical method and scale (ordinal, interval, or graduated) used to analyze self-assessed proficiency against OPIc scores made a difference in how strong the relationship looked between self-assessed scored and OPIc scores. Therefore, she recommends that self-assessments based on proficiency can-do-type statements be used alongside standardized test such as the OPIc to paint a more complete picture of student proficiency. For Scandinavian languages, however, this is not an option since the OPIc does not exist in Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, or Swedish.

The research supports using self-assessments to track general proficiency gains over time from a program perspective with the understanding that not all levels self-assess with the same accuracy. However, Cox and Dewey (2021) and Ma and Winke (2019) state that a low-stakes purpose, such as the alignment study in this project, would be a valid use of self-assessment results.

In this literature review, I have discussed developing and assessing LOs, evaluating LOs as part of a program evaluation, and using self-assessment for proficiency estimates. A few points stand out. One is that the OPI is not the ultimate way to measure program and course outcomes; other forms of assessment are needed if outcomes include the full range of language skills. Second, if culture is included in the LO, then there needs to be a way to measure that. The literature shows that classrooms with a range of proficiency levels can be successful, but instruction and assessment need to be well thought out so proficiency diversity can be a benefit to all. Finally, self-assessment within a language program can be used, but with some caution and only for low-stakes applications.

Methods

This section describes how the LOs were divided, compared, and analyzed. It also shows how data on student proficiency was gathered and who was included in that data.

Content Analysis

For this project, I analyzed the LOs for the four 321 courses as found in the BYU course catalog. In February or March 2023 (near the end of this project), the website containing the BYU course catalog was redesigned by the university, resulting in the removal of all the subheadings in the LOs. I believe this was an unintentional result of the new website design; the director of Scandinavian Studies confirmed that he did not remove the subheadings. Because the subheadings were intended to remain, they may be reinstated in the future. However, to reflect the outcomes as they are currently found in the source material, I redid the content analysis without the subheadings. This impacted the level estimates because the former subheading contained claims about the ACTFL level of the outcomes for each section. Appendix A contains the LOs as they are organized in March 2023, as well as information about the former subheadings. The findings and recommendations in this project are based on the analysis of the LOs without the subheadings.

To analyze the LOs, I created a spreadsheet wherein I separated them by language and divided each outcome into phrases. These phrases were organized by the four Modes of Communication: Interpretive (Reading and Listening), Interpersonal (Writing and Speaking), Presentational (Writing and Speaking), and Intercultural (Investigate and Interact) (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017). In the spreadsheet, Danish and Swedish were combined because the LOs are nearly identical except for the name of language and culture mentioned.

I looked for language in ACTFL documents that was the same as or similar to the phrases in the LOs. The documents used were the Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (ACTFL, 2012a), Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL 2012b), the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Benchmarks (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017), and the Proficiency Test Familiarization Guides for Oral, Reading, Writing, and Listening tests (ACTFL, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). This comparison, shown in Appendix C, produced the level estimates for the LOs which are documented in Table 8 of the Findings section.

Participants, Instrumentation, and Data Collection

Data on student proficiency were gathered using the Language Ability Self Evaluation Resource (LASER). The LASER is an instrument created and validated by BYU's Center for Language Studies (CLS) and calibrated to the OPI. The self-assessment survey collects background information, asks students to self-assess on a variety of can-do type statements, and prompts students to produce several writing and speaking samples. The results are useful to students as they think about where their language skills are and what their future goals might be. Students also receive a course placement suggestion at the end of the assessment.

During the first week of each semester (before the add-drop deadline), students taking a 321 class are asked to complete the LASER assessment. The LASER is administered to students in roughly 13 different languages across campus. Students in Scandinavian courses are strongly encouraged but not required to take the LASER. Data for this project was collected in Fall 2021, Winter 2022, Fall 2022, and Winter 2023. Because of variations in course availability, Danish, Finnish, and Norwegian each have two sets of data and Swedish has three. I was given anonymized results for each language and each semester, though I should disclose that I am the instructor for the Norwegian 321 class in Winter 2023. The number of LASER results per

language and semester (out of total number enrolled in each course that semester) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Number of Student Results/Students Enrolled

Language	Fall 2021	Winter 2022	Fall 2022	Winter 2023	Total
Danish	10/12		10/8		20
Finnish		12/11		14/13	26
Norwegian	14/18			1/4	15
Swedish		2/14	16/17	5/6	23

For some semesters there are more results than there are students registered for the course. This could be due to several factors and the reason(s) cannot be known without de-anonymizing the data. Possible factors are that the LASER is an open test that any BYU student can take at any time regardless of whether they are registered for a course, course levels other than 321 can use the LASER, it can be retaken, and it is usually taken before the add-drop deadline. However, the graduate student who organized the data filtered out retakes and students who said they were registered for a course other than 321, so it is probable that the extra results are for students who came to 321 the first week, took the LASER, but then dropped the class. A total of 84 students are included in this data set: 40 females and 48 males.

In addition to providing student self-assessed proficiency, the data included the number of self-reported months of time spent abroad for each student. This is most likely time spent serving a religious mission in one of the four countries. The Scandinavian Studies program did

not hold any study abroad trips in 2021 and no students reported an amount small enough to indicate the six-week study abroad held in summer 2022.

Most students reported between 9-24 months in the country. Twelve out of the 39 females who reported any in-country experience said they had been in the country for a full 18 months which equals 31% of those females. (Two of the 12 females reported 19.5 months; no female reported more than 19.5 months.) Twenty-eight out of the 45 males (62%) reported having been there for a full 24 months. The lowest non-zero amount of in-country experience was nine months for females and 12 months for males. In total, one female and three males took the LASER without reporting any in-country experience, although it is possible that those who served missions did not consider their mission as "time spent abroad"; thus, this data subset could potentially contain students who served missions.

Table 2

Time in Country

Language		No time abroad	9-14 mo	15-19.5 mo	20-24 mo
Danish	Female	1	6	5	0
	Male	0	0	1	7
Finnish	Female	0	3	8	0
	Male	0	1	3	11
Norwegian	Female	0	1	5	0
	Male	0	1	0	9
Swedish	Female	0	4	7	0
	Male	3	0	2	7
Total		4	16	31	34

In Table 2, about three quarters of the students spent 15+ months in the country. This is assumed to be between 2019-2022, which includes pandemic years, so it is uncertain what kinds of opportunities for language development were available to these students.

There are multiple reasons for collecting data on time spent in the country. First, it is important to get a sense of how many of the 321 students come to the course with prior experience and how many do not. Second, it is important to know just how much time students are spending immersed in the language and culture and, third, how that experience is divided between male and female students (since females do not have the option to serve 24-month missions). By tracking this information and considering student in-country experience as one of many variables influencing assessment results, program administrators can better understand longer-term trends.

Content and Data Analysis

To analyze the LOs, I created a spreadsheet that divided the LOs into meaningful phrases. The spreadsheet contained a column for each of the following: *Modes of Communication*, *Correlating Phrases* (phrases found in the LO), *ACTFL Level* (the level I think the LO actually is), *Citation* (sources to support my claim), and *Notes*. I looked for the same or similar terms from the LOs in ACTFL documentation to see where the language was derived from ACTFL documents. I noted similarities and/or differences between the linguistic and cultural goals being described in the LOs and descriptions found in the following documents: the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012), the Familiarization Guide for the Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL, 2020b), the Familiarization Guide for the Writing Proficiency Test (ACTFL, 2020d), and the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Benchmarks (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017). The analysis

documented any existing differences between the LOs of the four courses and these differences are described under Findings.

After analyzing the Finnish, Norwegian, and Danish/Swedish LOs, another graduate student who is familiar with ACTFL documents and proficiency levels checked my analysis for each language. The resulting recommendations were then incorporated into the spreadsheet. The LOs are found in Appendix A and the spreadsheet results are described in the Findings section and detailed in Appendix C.

Findings

The content analysis data indicate that there are differences among the LOs for Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish and that the LOs make some level claims that are inaccurate.

The student proficiency data generally show that students of Danish, Finnish, and Swedish spanned the Intermediate–Advanced border.

Learning Outcomes

The findings for the LOs are divided into three sections that deal with 1) the differences between the languages' LOs, 2) the range of levels within the LOs, and 3) the specificity of the language used in the LOs.

Finding 1: Differences Between Languages

First, I found that the LOs for the four languages have significant differences. It is to be expected that the LOs for Finnish 321 would be unique since Finnish is a Category 3 language according to the United States Department of State while Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish are Category 1 (U.S. Department of State, 2020). As they currently stand, the LOs for Norwegian and Finnish are very similar in content. The main difference is the target level; Finnish 321 mentions Intermediate while Norwegian is aimed at Advanced. The LOs for Swedish 321 and

Danish 321 briefly mention the Advanced level and are almost exactly the same, with the only difference being the name of the language and culture (see Appendix A).

Comparing the LOs reveals that Finnish and Norwegian 321 are concerned primarily with productive skills (speaking and writing), while Danish and Swedish also include wording that could refer to interpretive skills (reading and listening). All four contain a version of wording that says students will "employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features of advanced-level Norwegian in descriptive and narrative texts as well as in producing basic analyses" (BYU, 2023c, para. 2). In the Finnish LOs, "Norwegian" is replaced with "Finnish" and "advanced" is switched out for "intermediate" (BYU, 2023b, para. 2). The Danish/Swedish LOs include the verb "analyze" and refer to using literary functions and argumentative essays and omit the phrase "basic" when referring to analyses. They state: "Students will analyze and employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological and literary functions in descriptive and narrative texts, in summaries, detailed descriptions and narrations, analyses and argumentative essays" (BYU, 2023a; 2023d, para. 2). The LOs do not state whether the texts, summaries, and/or essays will be written, read, listened to, or spoken by students. As noted in the spreadsheet in Appendix C, the linguistic criteria in this LO come from the description of Distinguished Writing in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012).

There is an additional issue within the Danish and Swedish LOs. "Advanced topics" (BYU, 2023a, 2023d, para. 1) is probably level-appropriate, but the inclusion of "dialects" (para. 3) is a problem from a proficiency-based perspective. Nowhere do the ACTFL documents refer to a language user's ability to communicate based on understanding a variety of dialects as a communicative goal. At the Distinguished level, which is the highest level described by ACTFL, the Proficiency Guidelines state that listeners might "still have difficulty fully understanding

certain dialects and nonstandard varieties of the language" (ACTFL, 2012, p. 16). Stating that Swedish and Danish 321 students will be able to understand and use a variety of dialects is therefore problematic. The Finnish and Norwegian LOs do not mention dialects. To complicate the matter further, Norwegian has two written forms and innumerable spoken dialects, so whether the Norwegian 321 LOs *should* mention dialects is something to consider but is beyond the scope of this project[6].

The LOs for Swedish and Danish 321 include a section on culture with the goal that "students will broaden and deepen their perception and appreciation of Danish [Swedish] culture" (BYU, 2023a, 2023d, para. 4). Culture is an important part of the 2017 revision of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Benchmarks (2017), which makes the inclusion of culture commendable. However, the vague language makes it impossible to estimate the proficiency level of this objective, not to mention assess it in a meaningful way. Cultural perception and appreciation can be broadened and deepened at every proficiency level. Again, culture is not mentioned in the Finnish or Norwegian 321 LOs.

Finding 2: Range of Levels

My second finding is that, despite the levels claimed in the previous subheadings, the LOs for Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish 321 collectively span the ACTFL levels from Intermediate to Distinguished. The only level truly missing from any of the 321-level LOs is Novice. A visual of the scale of levels is provided in Appendix E, the full text of the LOs is in Appendix A, and the content analysis is in Appendix C.

Table 3

LO Levels

	LO range (original)	LO range (actual)
Danish	Advanced	Intermediate to Distinguished
Finnish	Intermediate	Intermediate to Distinguished
Norwegian	Advanced	Advanced to Distinguished
Swedish	Advanced	Intermediate to Distinguished

It is important to note that these estimated level ratings do not tell the full story; a patchwork of ACTFL language exists throughout the 321 LOs.

Finnish

In the Finnish LOs, the objective states, "Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present, begin using connected discourse, and learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies, all with only slight gaps in communication." (BYU, 2023b, para. 1). The categorization of the first part of this objective ("Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present") might be Intermediate, though there are some unknowns that make it hard to assign a proficiency level. If "develop" is taken to mean that students have partial but not full control over the ability to narrate and describe and are only narrating and describing in present tense in everyday content areas and social contexts, then that would qualify as an Intermediate objective. Narrating and describing are Advanced functions when students can sustain the function (ACTFL, 2012; Clifford, 2016). The content areas and

social contexts are not described in the LO, however, so it is not clear exactly which level is expected.

The phrase "begin using connected discourse" (BYU, 2023b, para. 1) appears to come from the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012). The description for Advanced Mid Speaking says, "Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse" (p. 6). The Advanced Writing description includes similar language about connected discourse: "Advanced-level writers produce connected discourse of paragraph length and structure" (p. 12), and the *Oral Proficiency Interview Tester Training Manual 2012* refers to "connected discourse" as an Advanced speaking assessment criterion (Swender & Vicars, 2012, p. 14). To begin using connected discourse at the Intermediate level is appropriate as learners begin to practice with elements at the next level. The same is true for "and learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies" (BYU, 2023b, para. 1); this is clearly an Advanced function but must be started at the Intermediate level[7].

The qualifying phrase "all with only slight gaps in communication" (BYU, 2023b, para. 1) appears to be derived from the description of Intermediate High speakers (ACTFL, 2012b) which states, "Intermediate High speakers can generally be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, although interference from another language may be evident (e.g., use of code-switching, false cognates, literal translations), and a pattern of gaps in communication may occur" (p. 7). The term "slight gaps" indicates that the LO expectation for accuracy is higher than Intermediate level (the level of "patterns of gaps"), making the first paragraph in the Finnish 321 LO an amalgamation of Intermediate and Advanced levels.

The second paragraph of the Finnish LO states: "Students employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features of intermediate-level Finnish in descriptive and narrative texts as well as in producing basic analyses" (BYU, 2023b, para. 2). The first part of this objective comes from the Proficiency Guidelines for Distinguished Writing: "Writers at the Distinguished level demonstrate control of complex lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic features of the language" (ACTFL, 2012b, p. 11). The realm of "narrative and descriptive texts" (BYU, 2023b, para. 2) are clearly Advanced level functions and appear in ACTFL descriptions for Advanced Reading, Writing, and Listening (ACTFL, 2012a). "Producing basic analyses" (BYU, 2023b, para. 2) does not come from ACTFL proficiency documents, though it may connect to two program outcomes that mention the ability to "critically reflect" and demonstrate "analytic thought" (BYU, 2023e, para. 2 & 3; see also Appendix B). This objective has an appropriate blend of language skills and program goals, but the proficiency levels range from Advanced to Distinguished.

The final objective in the Finnish 321 LOs says, "Students will develop partial control of their ability to narrate and describe in the past and future with connected discourse" (BYU, 2023b, para. 3). Here partial control is expected for narration and description in the past and future, all of which indicate the high end of the Intermediate level. So, the function as described remains Intermediate even though the goal is to practice functions and text types at the next level. The same issues apply for "narrate," "describe," and "connected discourse" as detailed above for paragraph 1; that is, what is being described is Advanced but developing partial control over Advanced functions and skills is still Intermediate level proficiency. One final note about the Finnish LOs: reading, listening, and culture are not directly mentioned.

Norwegian

The first paragraph of the Norwegian LOs reads: "Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in past, present, and future time frames, use connected discourse, and learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies, all without patterns of error." Much of this objective is Advanced, with minor exceptions. The qualifying phrase "without patterns of error" (para.1) is a Superior level of accuracy according to the *Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide* (ACTFL, 2020b) and the verb "develop" is, as previously stated, too vague to know whether students are just beginning to develop this ability (Intermediate) or whether they are developing a sustained ability even further (Advanced)[7]. The middle of the paragraph, which deals with narrating in all time frames, using connected discourse, and using strategies to manage complications, are all mentioned in Advanced level descriptions in ACTFL documents (ACTFL 2012b, 2018).

The second paragraph of the Norwegian LOs contains the same Distinguished-level language as the Finnish LOs. The full text is: "Students will employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features of advanced-level Norwegian in descriptive and narrative texts as well as in producing basic analyses" (BYU, 2023c, para 2). Again, the language functions ("descriptive and narrative") are Advanced. This paragraph, like the Finnish example, is a combination of linguistic objectives and critical thinking program.

The final section states that "Students will develop partial control of their ability to support their opinions and hypothesize about abstract topics, in the context of extended discourse" (BYU, 2023c, para. 3). The qualifier "develop partial control" indicates work being done at the Advanced level and not the Superior level. Partial control is developed at the high end of the major level below. Supporting opinions and hypothesizing about abstract topics are

functions of the Superior level and extended discourse is a context that belongs to the Advanced level. This paragraph describes what Advanced level learners do, not Superior level learners; Superior level learners have stable control of these functions and contexts and have moved beyond developing partial control. Similar to the Finnish LOs, the Norwegian LOs do not directly mention reading, listening, or culture.

Danish and Swedish

Danish and Swedish 321 are grouped together because the LOs are nearly identical. These LOs have four paragraphs. The first section states:

> Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present and past time frames, use connected discourse, and learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies, without patterns of breakdown. Students will develop partial control of their ability to support their opinions and hypothesize about abstract topics, in the context of extended discourse. You should be able to discuss various subjects with ease and debate your position with success using a number of strategies. (BYU, 2023a, 2023d, para. 1)

The first two sentences describe Advanced level functions, content areas, contexts, and text types. Sentence two mentions developing partial control of Superior level skills, similar to paragraph 3 in the Norwegian LOs. The last sentence, where the writing turns from third person to second person, wanders into the Superior and Distinguished context of debate. Additionally, it contains language that is too vague to assign a level to: "various subjects," "with ease," "with success," and "using a number of strategies." The first objective in the Danish and Swedish LOs covers a range from Advanced to Superior/Distinguished.

The second section is slightly different from the corresponding sections of Finnish and Norwegian. It says that "Students will analyze and employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological and literary functions in descriptive and narrative texts, in summaries, detailed descriptions and narrations, analyses and argumentative essays" (BYU, 2023a, 2023d, para. 2). Here we see language from the Distinguished Writing description (see ACTFL, 2012a, p. 11) pieced together with a list of Advanced functions and text types (see ACTFL, 2012a, pp. 12, 13-14, 17, and 22).

The third paragraph states, "Students will be able to understand a variety of advanced topics and dialects and use this as a basis for communication" (BYU, 2023a, 2023d, para. 3). "Advanced topics" is straightforward enough, but the inclusion of dialects is problematic from a proficiency standpoint (see Finding 1). This part of the objective is not connected to a program goal since there is no mention of one's ability to understand or use dialects in the program outcomes for the BYU Scandinavian Studies minor (Appendix B; BYU, 2023e).

The concluding section of the Danish and Swedish 321 LOs simply says, "Students will broaden and deepen their perception and appreciation of Danish [Swedish] culture" (BYU 2023a; 2023d, para. 4). There is no way to assign an ACTFL proficiency level to this objective because the language is not clear enough to compare it to ACTFL Intercultural Communication Benchmarks (see Finding 3), but the idea of culture is clearly associated with two program objectives:

Nordic Literature, Culture, and History

Learn to recognize and critically reflect upon key dimensions of Nordic literature, art, society, culture, and history, with an emphasis on appreciating these cultures' artistic production and intellectual histories.

<u>Lifelong Learning</u>

Develop a lifelong appreciation of Nordic cultures as well as literature while developing

attitudes and habits of thought and study that encourage lifelong learning and continued

contact with the informed study of Nordic culture. (BYU 2023e, para. 5 & 7)

Because ACTFL has Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication at all levels, the

potential exists for creating proficiency-based course objectives about culture (ACTFL, 2017).

The verbs used in the LOs for Danish and Swedish allude to the four language skills, but not by

name.

In summary, the LOs for all four languages are a patchwork of proficiency levels. Only

two languages' LOs mention culture, and none are overtly specific as to which language skills

will be taught, even though all four skills are mentioned by name in the program outcomes

(Appendix B; BYU, 2023e).

Finding 3: Specificity

Finding 3 is that some of the LOs use language that is not specific enough to determine

the intended level which makes gathering evidence more difficult (or potentially less

meaningful). As mentioned, the use of the verbs "develop" and "learn to" (BYU, 2023a, 2023b,

2023c, 2023d) are not clear enough to know what level is intended in the objective because

ACTFL proficiency sub-levels can straddle major level borders when a learner has partial control

of a major level function, accuracy, text type, content area, or context. If these verbs describe the

beginning of the process, they are said to be at the level below the major-level border. If they

describe sustained control (even if it is a little wobbly), then they are at the next major level

(ACTFL, 2012b, Clifford, 2016).

The Swedish and Danish 321 LOs state: "You should be able to discuss *various subjects* with *ease* and debate your position with *success* using *a number of strategies*" (BYU, 2023a, 2023d, para. 1, italics added). While the context of a debate is clear enough (though it has already been noted that debate is a Superior and Distinguished context), it is difficult to know what kind of student work might provide valid evidence of this objective because the wording is too vague. Course outcomes that are more specific typically include the way the outcomes will be assessed (Maki, 2010).

The LOs as currently written follow the general LO pattern suggested by BYU (BYU, n.d.-b) but are not specific to proficiency-based language learning.

Student Self-assessment and Proficiency

Regarding student proficiency, the findings show that student proficiency ranges from Intermediate to Superior (though just barely). As stated previously, students took the LASER at the beginning of their Scandinavian 321 course and assessed themselves using ACTFL-style can-do statements in all four skills. Their responses produced a self-assessed proficiency rating, and the LASER provided a course recommendation for each student.

Below are the tables for each language describing participant results from each semester.

Table 4

Danish Student Proficiency

	Fall 2021			Fall 2022			
Danish	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior	Total
Females	1	2	0	2	7	0	12
Males	0	7	0	0	1	0	8

Table 5

Finnish Student Proficiency

	Winter	2022		Winter	2023		
Finnish	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior	Total
Females	2	3	0	5	1	0	11
Males	2	5	0	4	3	1	15

Table 6

Norwegian Student Proficiency

	Fall	2021		Winter	2023		
Norwegian	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior	Total
Females	3	2	0	0	0	0	5
Males	1	8	0	0	1	0	10

Table 7

Swedish Student Proficiency

	Winter	2022		Fall	2022	
Swedish	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior
Females	0	2	0	1	8	0
Males	0	0	0	2	5	0

	Winter	2023		
Swedish	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior	Total
Females	0	0	0	11
Males	0	4	1	12

Table 8

Combined 321 Proficiency Across Languages

Language	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior
Danish	3	17	0
Finnish	13	12	1
Norwegian	4	11	0
Swedish	3	19	1
Total	23	59	2

Students in Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish tended to self-assess as Advanced, with some at Intermediate. Students taking Finnish 321 tended to self-assess at an even rate between Intermediate and Advanced.

It cannot be known from the data used in this project what impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the proficiency levels of these students, but for those who were serving religious missions during the that time, it is assumed that there was at least some impact. Traditionally, most interactions in which missionaries participate require Interpersonal Communication, although missionary work during the pandemic involved much more Presentational Speaking and Writing via social media than was the case prior to the pandemic. So, while oral proficiency may have been negatively affected, other proficiency skills may have received a boost. Appendix D shows that time in country is only moderately correlated with self-assessed proficiency level for students of Danish, Finnish and Swedish. The data from Norwegian 321 show almost no correlation between time in country and student self-assessed proficiency level.

The self-assessed proficiency results show that students in this data set range from Intermediate to Advanced when they started 321, which is reasonable if the course is designed to help students cross into and/or make progress within the Advanced level.

Comparison of Student Proficiency and Learning Outcomes

In Table 9 below, we see that more students in Danish and Swedish self-assessed at Advanced than Intermediate. Meanwhile, the LOs for Danish and Swedish claimed to be at about the Advanced level, but the content analysis shows that they ranged from Intermediate to Distinguished. Students in Finnish 321 were evenly split between Intermediate and Advanced. The LOs for Finnish claimed to be at Intermediate to Advanced, but actually range from Intermediate to Distinguished. Similar to the results for Danish and Swedish, students in Norwegian 321 self-assessed at Intermediate and Advanced. The LOs for Norwegian claimed to be Advanced, although the analysis shows that they range from Advanced to Distinguished.

Below are the comparisons of levels of student proficiency and LOs. Table 9 and Figure 1 show the distribution and frequency of the levels in student proficiency and LOs. Figure 2 visualizes the range of levels without showing the distribution or frequency of levels within the data.

Figure 1

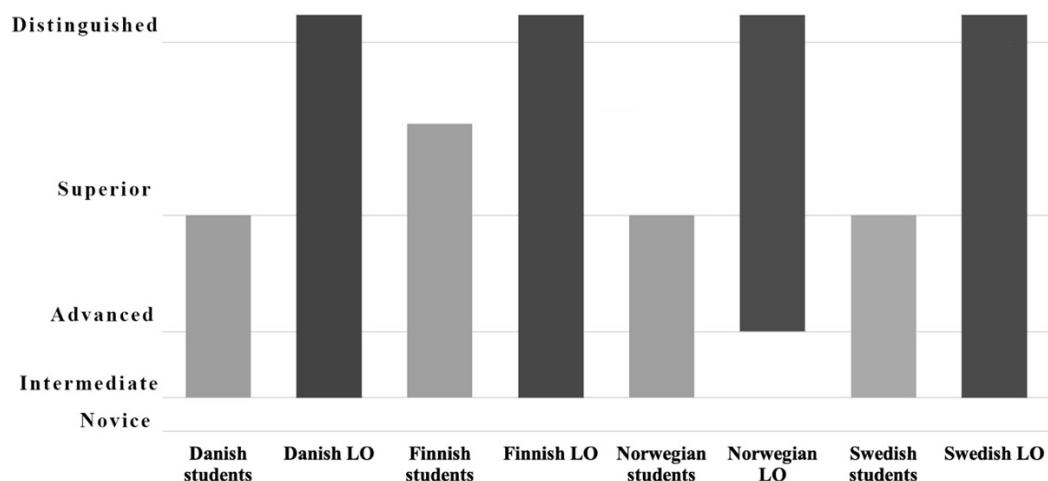*Simple Comparison of Range of Levels*

Table 9

Distribution of Student Proficiency and LO Levels

Language	Level	Student	LO	Total
Danish	Intermediate	3	1	4
	Advanced	17	11	28
	Superior	0	1	1
	Distinguished	0	2	2
	Total	20	15	35
Finnish	Intermediate	13	3	16
	Advanced	12	2	14
	Superior	1	0	1
	Distinguished	0	1	1
	Total	26	6	32
Norwegian	Intermediate	4	0	4
	Advanced	11	8	19
	Superior	0	1	1
	Distinguished	0	1	1
	Total	15	10	25
Swedish	Intermediate	3	1	4
	Advanced	19	11	30
	Superior	1	1	2
	Distinguished	0	2	2
	Total	23	15	38
Total	Intermediate	23	5	28
	Advanced	59	32	91
	Superior	2	3	5
	Distinguished	0	6	6
	Total	84	46	130

Figure 2

Graphed Distribution of Student Proficiency and LO Levels
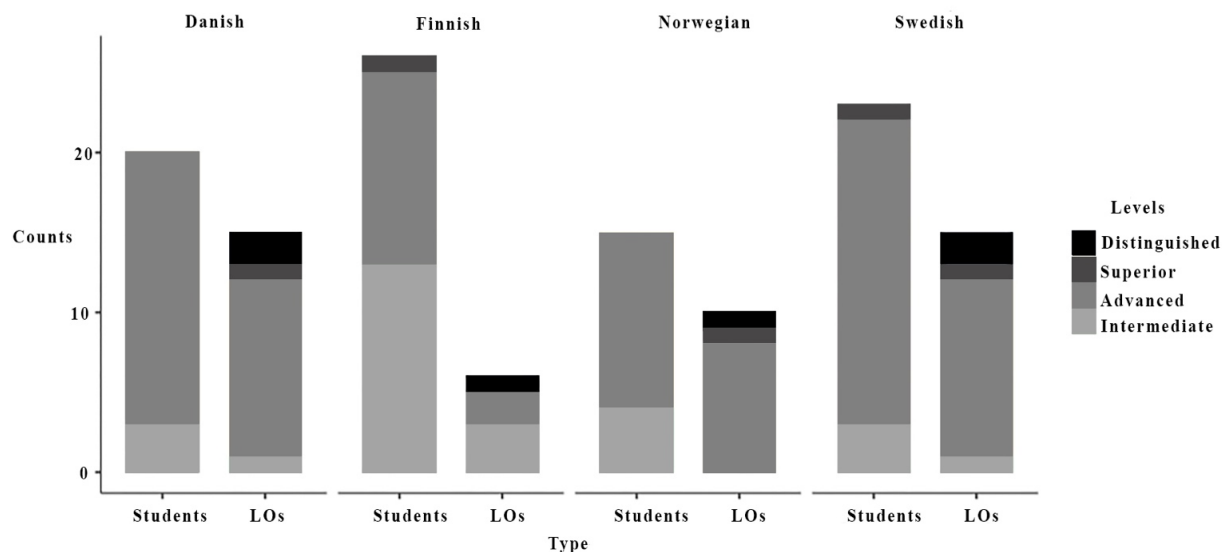
When comparing the range and distribution of levels, it is important to remember that moving from one level to the next is not an interval but a graduated ordinal progression, meaning the time and effort required to move from Novice to Intermediate is considerably less than what is required to move from Intermediate to Advanced or from Advanced to Superior (see Appendix E). In addition, student proficiency is measured at the beginning of the semester and is therefore anticipated to be lower than the LO level because the course is intended to help students increase their proficiency by the end. No course, however, can take learners from Intermediate to Distinguished.

Recommendations

The main recommendations are to rewrite the LOs for Scandinavian 321 courses based on program objectives and to align them more accurately with each other and with ACTFL level descriptions and standards. Student proficiency can be considered when deciding the target level for 321 LOs, but some caution is needed. Proficiency results for students between 2021-2023 may have been impacted by the social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and may not represent

longer-term trends. Therefore, student proficiency data should continue to be collected and analyzed.

To provide insights for potential adjustments, I will make broad suggestions followed by fine-grained recommendations based on each of the findings. In general, it is expected that curricula for language courses would include all four language skills as described by ACTFL: speaking, writing, listening, and reading (ACTFL, 2012a). Changes should be made to the LOs to include all four language skills in Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish 321 outcomes.

Additionally, Intercultural Communication is an important Mode of Communication (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017), so course outcomes should include this element as well. Currently, only half of the Scandinavian 321 course outcomes address culture. In a proficiency-oriented language program, course outcomes should be written with reference to level-appropriate criteria using documents such as the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012b), the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Benchmarks (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017) and potentially the familiarization guides for the ACTFL oral, writing, reading, and listening proficiency tests. Most importantly, course objectives should be based on program outcomes.

I should point out that this project does not definitively equate course levels with proficiency levels despite estimating the ACTFL levels of the LOs. It may be a fine line, but LOs can set goals that align with proficiency levels and yet students might not achieve that proficiency level just by finishing that course[4]. This is due in part to the fact that proficiency is defined as what one can do with a language in spontaneous, real-life situations and not whether one has achieved course content mastery. Even proficiency-based courses typically contain course-specific content and contexts as well as some performance-based assessments. In

addition, as discussed previously, there are multiple variables involved in student progress that make it impossible to guarantee proficiency gains or levels simply by taking a course.

Because Finnish is a more difficult language to learn for English-speakers than Danish, Norwegian, or Swedish, the Finnish 321 LOs can reasonably be written for a slightly lower proficiency level than those of the other three languages. The Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish 321 LOs, however, should be better aligned with each other than they currently are due to the similarities between these languages.

One way to begin adjusting the LOs would be to add categories that describe language skills or Modes of Communication in the course catalog. Once the organization of the objectives is clear, the objectives can be written so that only the intended levels are described. Deciding which levels are appropriate for the 321 courses should be a discussion that includes looking at higher institutional goals (program, department, etc.) and looking at the LOs for the courses that come before and after 321 (202 and 340). The LOs should be written referring to both the BYU formula (BYU, n.d.-b) and language-learning-specific models like the Ritz & Toro (2022) formula. Special attention should be paid to the verbs used in the LOs to provide transparency for instructors and students. Concise verb use will also make it easier to provide clear evidence for institutional reporting.

Proficiency level descriptions for 321 should be based on ACTFL documents and other program-specific goals but cannot be an *à la carte* amalgamation of a wide range of proficiency levels. Each proficiency level has a distinct set of language functions, accuracy expectations, content areas, social contexts, and text types, making the level descriptions non-transferable to other levels. It is not advisable to use language from the Superior or Distinguished level as goals in the Scandinavian 321 LOs because these courses are not designed to teach those levels.

Students in well-designed Advanced courses gain sustained and stable control over the functions, content areas, social contexts, accuracy expectations, and text types of the Advanced level using Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational, and Intercultural Communication in the areas of writing, speaking, reading, and listening. In addition, they start learning skills and functions of the next level (Clifford, 2016). Students at the Advanced level no longer have "developing ability" (p. 230) in any of the Advanced functions, content areas, social contexts, text types or in Advanced accuracy. All of those are now at the "sustained ability" level (p. 230). Advanced students may begin to gain certain skills at the Superior level even before they have fully mastered the Advanced level, but they do not have Superior-level proficiency until they can sustain all the elements of Superior all the time, according to ACTFL. Thus, moving through the whole breadth and depth of the Advanced level takes more time, practice, vocabulary development, and cultural experience than any one course can provide.

The comparison of student proficiency to LO levels showed a mix of alignment between the two. This is not only expected but appropriate since students will ideally come into a course at one proficiency level and finish slightly higher. However, the LOs for 321 should reflect a more realistic scope. Finnish 321 could reasonably target the Intermediate to Advanced border, while Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish could aim to solidify student proficiency at the Advanced level. Therefore, adjustments should be made to every set of LOs to eliminate language that refers to the Superior and Distinguished levels.

After creating proficiency-oriented course objectives, the next steps would be to design assessments that would provide evidence of the objectives. Following that process, it would be advisable to write curricula based on the assessments and objectives. The work of Wiggins and McTighe is instructive in the process of designing courses based on outcomes (Wiggins &

McTighe, 2005). Outcomes should be written using language that is specific to the course while being grounded in program objectives.

As stated previously, LOs should use verbs that imply or specify the way students will show evidence of that objective. For example, the mixed-level and vaguely worded Danish/Swedish LO that states "You should be able to discuss various subjects with ease and debate your position with success using a number of strategies" (BYU, 2023a, 2023d, para. 1) could be rewritten as a clear Advanced level objective like, "Students will listen to, read, discuss, and write about topics of general interest in paragraph-length language that is easily understood by native speakers or readers." An additional objective could state, "Students will develop emerging strategies for debating abstract topics through speaking, reading, listening, and writing." In this way, the LOs could include language skills, functions, content areas, contexts, accuracy expectations, and/or text types at a particular level as well as indicate what students will practice for continued proficiency growth, while keeping in mind that no one course can cover it all.

As far as finding measurement instruments to provide information about how well students are achieving course and program outcomes, there are no easy answers. Assessments that take the course or program outcomes into account are better than the OPI for measuring student and program performance, especially in a program that teaches languages not fully supported by the full range of ACTFL testing[2]. The research in this project supports using the OPI as one of several forms of evidence and feedback for students, as well as at the end of the program for students desiring level certification in the form of a Language Certificate. The OPI, however, should not be the only standard by which course and program outcomes are written or measured for Scandinavian languages and may not be practical or meaningful as a pre- and post-

test in 321 (Liskin-Gasparro, 2012) or as a pre-test in 321 and a post-test at the end of the program (see "Program Evaluations" under "Review of Related Literature").

One solution might be to use a triangulation of program-dependent assessments like well-designed course summative assessments, as well as independent instruments like ACTFL designed or ACTFL-based tests. Because the OPI is only designed to rate a specific speech sample by an individual, it is not the best measurement of program or course outcomes that are written to cover more skills and modes of communication that oral proficiency, and the interview's structure cannot produce evidence of a program's effectiveness. To assess whether program-specific outcomes are being met, backward design can be implemented from the program level downward. One thing to keep in mind is that the BYU learning management system, Learning Suite, allows instructors to tie assignments and exams–even items on an exam–to course LOs, which means that better LOs can lead to better evidence-gathering within the system, reducing the need for external assessment instruments.

Measuring specific outcomes can also be done with the Wiggins and McTighe GRASPS model. This is a performance task framework that includes a goal, a role, an audience, a situation, a product, and a standard. Using this model, it is possible to design an assessment which would measure proficiency-based language skills. For example, if an Advanced language course teaches media literacy and has Advanced writing text types as part of the course objectives, a GRASPS model assessment could be written to elicit a narration in the past tense on an Advanced topic using a culturally appropriate situation. The following writing prompt from a Norwegian exam is one example of how this could be done:

> Answer the following prompt with a short descriptive text: You work as a fact-checker
>
> for the newspaper *Aftenposten*. At work yesterday, your job was to determine whether the

picture below is real or not. Write an email to your Norwegian friend describing your day at work and include at least two things you did to check the truthfulness of the image. Your writing will be graded on vocabulary, grammar, connection to chapter and in-class content, and ability to narrate in the past tense (an Advanced writing function).

In answering this prompt, students would produce a narrative text in the past tense that shows they understood the media literacy strategies discussed in class as well as the vocabulary and grammar from the unit. The response can even show cultural understanding, assuming this has been highlighted in the classroom discussion. If the course had a LO such as "Students will listen to, read, discuss, and write about topics of general interest using paragraph-length language that is easily understood by native speakers or readers" then this exam item could be connected to the LO in Learning Suite as evidence of student outcome achievement. Using the GRASPS model, outcomes unique to the program or course can be assessed using proficiency-oriented communicative tasks in all four language skills.

The GRASPS model is very useful, but it isn't the only option for designing outcome assessment. The program outcome protocols designed by Miller and Lindseth (2019) could potentially be adapted to the course level[3]. Using this model, assessments can use course-specific content areas to measure student performance in a proficiency-based manner. However, this set of protocols is not as inherently comprehensive as the GRASPS model when it comes to including functions, accuracy, content areas, contexts, and text types of a particular proficiency level.

As for deciding which level or levels the LOs should target, the original intent for the courses is probably correct. Meaning, Finnish can aim for the Intermediate High sublevel by the end of the course, while Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish can reasonably aim for the Advanced

Low to Advanced Mid range. While it would be good to help students cross the Advanced floor and move into Superior, this is too much to ask of a one-semester course. Offering language courses at the 400 level could fill that need if the program decided to expand its offerings. Student proficiency should be tracked over time with a combination of LASER self-assessments, well-designed proficiency-based course assessments, and end-of-program OPIs for the Language Certificate.

Although using self-assessment to estimate student proficiency gets a mixed rating, the research shows that, overall, it is beneficial (Cox & Dewey, 2021; Ma & Winke, 2019; Tigchelaar, 2019). Self-assessed proficiency can be a relatively painless, low-cost way to gain insights into the range of levels students are at when they begin a 321 course. Not only that, but the reflection required in self-assessment supports the BYU aim of life-long learning. When students regularly self-assess, they think metacognitively about where they are and where they would like to be in their learning. The Scandinavian Studies program should continue to have students take the LASER in the first week of 321 classes it should be a required assignment.

It is difficult to determine how the results for student proficiency should influence the level of the LOs because student proficiency during the 2021-2023 period might be abnormal due to the pandemic. Additionally, the data set is small. Norwegian, in particular, draws largely from one semester and needs more data. Student proficiency levels should continue to be measured and data should be analyzed over a longer period before deciding if and how to take student proficiency levels into account when revising the LOs.

To summarize, the recommendations are that the LOs for Danish, Norwegian and Swedish be rewritten so that they are similar. Finnish 321 LOs should be structured like the others but can describe proficiency goals at a slightly lower level. All the LOs should be based

on program outcomes and course content at the appropriate level. ACTFL documents should be used to describe the appropriate target levels and language from one level should not be applied to a different level. Learning outcomes that use more specific language would make the process of designing course assessments easier and provide better alignment and cohesion within the program. Creating assessments that cover all areas of proficiency and are based on course and program outcomes would reduce dependency on the OPI as a measurement of program achievement. Lastly, self-assessment for student metacognition and for low-stakes program use is a beneficial practice and should continue.

Conclusion

In this project, I analyzed the content of the LOs, compared to the four languages' LOs, collected data on student self-assessed proficiency, and compared student proficiency levels to the levels of the LOs. Through these comparisons and analyses, I found that there are important content differences between the LOs of the four 321 courses and that the LOs target more proficiency levels than they claim. I gathered data about student self-assessed proficiency levels and found that students self-assess at Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior. Lastly, I looked at the relationship between student self-assessed proficiency and the proficiency levels of the LOs and found that they are offset, which can reasonably be expected. If additional data are collected over a longer period, then the LO level could be more intentionally aligned to student proficiency.

At the conclusion of this project, the next steps would be for the Scandinavian Studies program director and the language coordinator to discuss which language skills, communication modes, program objectives, content areas, and other elements should be a part of the 321 outcomes. They should also determine which level(s) should be included in the LOs for each

language and draw from appropriate ACTFL documents to describe the expected proficiency level(s). By reconsidering the LOs in light of student proficiency, we can strengthen the essential link that the 321 courses are in the Scandinavian Studies program.

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Footnotes

1. The field of second language learning uses proficiency standards produced by ACTFL (formerly called The American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages, now simply "ACTFL"). The ACTFL proficiency standards and levels are widely used to understand what learners can do with their language.

2. The ACTFL OPI typically exists for Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Finnish, but not for Icelandic. The test incurs a significant cost of both time and money for each student. It sometimes happens that a pair of certified testers and raters in these languages cannot be found (each OPI must be scored twice: once by the one administering the test and once by a second rater). Over the course of the last couple of years, testers and raters in some Scandinavian languages have occasionally been hard to find. When there are not very many raters, individuals needing a Language Certificate can take the OPI, but capacity is too limited to run OPIs for entire classes.

The less expensive computer version, the OPIc, does not exist for any of these languages, and the WPT exists only for Swedish (of the Scandinavian languages). The LASER, on the other hand, is free to us at BYU and has been calibrated to ACTFL instruments. The low-stakes use of estimating student proficiency is consistent with the LASER's validity tests. See laser.byu.edu or https://cls.byu.edu/language-ability-self-evaluation-resource-laser for more information on this instrument.

3. The six program outcomes for Language majors at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire were based on *ACTFL Performance Descriptors, ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, and *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements* (ACTFL 2012a; ACTFL 2012b; NCSSFL-ACTFL 2015). They coupled these six program outcomes in pairs to create three "bundles," each of which had

one language component and one culture component. For example, they developed an assessment that combined the goal that students "Engage in interpersonal communication on a variety of topics of a personal, public, and professional nature" with the goal to "Connect and integrate their language study with other disciplines and communities for academic and social purposes." Each student participated in a 5–7-minute unscripted oral interview and were asked questions such as "What is happening on campus/in your community? How will your language studies inform your future plans? … Tell me about a challenging project related to your language studies." (pp. 41-42). Rubrics for the protocols were said to evaluate students against communicative and cultural skills rather than directly against the ACTFL proficiency scale, although the outcome targets were based on ACTFL Standards (only one sample rubric was included in the article).

This innovative approach has a framework against which intercultural competency can be judged while remaining close to the ACTFL proficiency standards and benchmarks. It includes three delivery methods: an oral interview, an essay, and an oral presentation or written paper, aimed at covering the communicative modes of interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational, respectively. The disadvantages include unanswered questions about reliability in the assessment and its scoring (how consistent are the test-givers and raters?) as well as validity (what are the constructs being measured and what is the evidence that these constructs are being measured by the conversations?). As far as how the results will be used, they are assessing students to estimate whether they are exceeding, meeting, or not meeting the program's standards, which is in line with the purpose of the assessment. Time per student for these assessments was estimated at about 30 minutes.

4. For a discussion on the disconnect and loss of validity that happens when programs equate seat-time and proficiency, see Watzinger-Tharp (2014), especially page 134 where she argues that stating linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence as learning goals and then requiring a certain number of semesters (seat-time) to fulfil those outcomes is nonsense. Since the publication of her writing, the University of Oregon (University of Oregon, 2021) has changed its requirement for Global Studies majors. Students can now demonstrate "third-year, third-term proficiency" in one language or "second-year, third-term proficiency" in two languages (see section titled "Major Language Requirement"). These requirements can be fulfilled by either seat-time or a placement exam. The exam is not specified or linked on the website, but the idea that there is such a thing as "second-year, third-term proficiency" is, in fact, ludicrous considering the standard definition of language proficiency and the diversity of backgrounds, resources for in-country experiences, linguistic aptitude, and effort that individual students possess or demonstrate. Language instructors know that final course outcomes for students depend heavily on variables outside the instructor's control and sometimes outside the student's control. Proficiency cannot and must not be measured by time spent taking a course.

5. In Ma and Winke's (2019) study of Chinese speakers, Intermediate students tended to underestimate their level, but the authors cite research by other authors in which Intermediate students overestimate their oral proficiency level. See Dolosic et al. (2016), Kaderavek et al. (2004), and Stansfield et al. (2010). The authors state that this may be due to a difference in how the scoring was done: binary in the case of the studies in which Intermediate students overestimated their proficiency. When binary scoring is used, according to Ma and Winke, it might not be able to capture what is happening at the upper edge of a major level, that is to say "developing" ability as opposed to "sustained" ability. Ma and Winke's self-assessment used a

Likert scale with descriptions such as 1 ("I cannot do this yet") up to 4 ("Yes, I can do this well") (p. 72). The authors also state that there may be a cultural influence at work in the underestimation of ability for students at the Intermediate level.

6. Norwegian is more of a small family of languages than one language. There are two official written forms and government documents are produced in either one with similar frequency (Lov om språk (språklova), 2022). This official equality between the written forms also helps maintain equality for the social use of all spoken dialects of Norwegian. There is no standard form of spoken Norwegian. Each region, county, city, and village has its own dialect characteristics, and the differences vary in terms of pronunciation, tonality, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. To say that one "speaks Norwegian", therefore, is something of an illusion; some Norwegians have difficulty understanding other Norwegians in conversation. Dialect variety and equality is something Norwegians are proud of and actively work to maintain, particularly after the Nazi occupation government in the 1940s attempted to streamline linguistic differences among Norwegians (Nilsen, 2015). Speaking and maintaining one's dialect is, therefore, a patriotic duty for Norwegians.

Operationalizing the concept of "the Norwegian language" in a language class, on the other hand, is typically dealt with by stating which written form and spoken dialect the course will use for instruction and assessment. Normally, the instructor creates space for some speaking diversity and helps students practice listening comprehension within the natural range of dialects by using authentic audio texts in class. Reading and writing in the Norwegian L2 classroom are restricted to one or the other of the standard written forms.

For these reasons, including the Pandora's box of "dialects" in the LO of a Norwegian course is complicated beyond the fact that dialect comprehension and use is not mentioned as a

proficiency goal by ACTFL. If a language program wants to include dialect comprehension and use as a goal, the assessment and teaching of that objective in courses should be carefully thought out and intentionally described.

7. A helpful way to understand what kind of control belongs at which level is the "REDS" hierarchy described by Clifford (2016, p. 230) where the lowest ability is Random, followed by Emerging, then Developing, and finally Sustained ability. Once learners can sustain functionality, accuracy, and text type for a level in all the appropriate social context and content areas, they can be considered to be at that major level in that skill. Proficiency in speaking may develop sooner or later than proficiency in Reading, and so on for Listening and Writing. Thus, each learner possesses a unique proficiency topography.

Appendix A

The Course Outcomes for Danish 321, Finnish 321, Norwegian 321, and Swedish 321

Danish 321

Learning Objective (Formerly: Speech and Writing)

Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present and past time frames, use connected discourse, and learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies, without patterns of breakdown. Students will develop partial control of their ability to support their opinions and hypothesize about abstract topics, in the context of extended discourse. You should be able to discuss various subjects with ease and debate your position with success using a number of strategies.

Learning Objective (Formerly: Critical Thinking, Accuracy, Text Types)

Students will analyze and employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and literary functions in descriptive and narrative texts, in summaries, detailed descriptions and narrations, analyses and argumentative essays.

Learning Objective (Formerly: Listening Comprehension)

Students will be able to understand a variety of advanced topics and dialects and use this as a basis for communication.

Learning Objective (Formerly: Danish Culture)

Students will broaden and deepen their perception and appreciation of Danish culture.

Finnish 321

Learning Objective (Formerly: Intermediate Functions in Writing and Speech)

Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present, begin using connected discourse, and learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies, all with only slight gaps in communication.

Students employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features of intermediate-level Finnish in descriptive and narrative texts as well as in producing basic analyses.

Learning Objective (Formerly: Advanced Functions in Speech and Writing)

Students will develop partial control of their ability to narrate and describe in the past and future with connected discourse.

Norwegian 321

Learning Objective (Formerly: Advanced Functions in Writing and Speech)

Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in past, present, and future time frames, use connected discourse, and learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies, all without patterns of error.

Learning Objective (Formerly: Critical Thinking)

Students will employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features of advanced-level Norwegian in descriptive and narrative texts as well as in producing basic analyses.

Learning Objective (Formerly: Superior Functions in Writing and Speech)

Students will develop partial control of their ability to support their opinions and hypothesize about abstract topics, in the context of extended discourse.

Swedish 321

Learning Objective (Formerly: Speech and Writing)

Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present and past time frames, use connected discourse, and learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies, without patterns of breakdown. Students will develop partial control of their ability to support their opinions and hypothesize about abstract topics, in the context of extended discourse. You should be able to discuss various subjects with ease and debate your position with success using a number of strategies.

Learning Objective (Formerly: Critical Thinking, Accuracy, Text Types)

Students will analyze and employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological and literary functions in descriptive and narrative texts, in summaries, detailed descriptions and narrations, analyses and argumentative essays.

Learning Objective (Formerly: Listening Comprehension)

Students will be able to understand a variety of advanced topics and dialects and use this as a basis for communication.

Learning Objective (Formerly: Swedish Culture)

Students will broaden and deepen their perception and appreciation of Swedish culture.

Scandinavian Studies Minor Learning Outcomes

Scandinavian Language Proficiency

Learning Outcome

Progress toward advanced-level proficiency in Danish Icelandic Norwegian or Swedish (or intermediate-level proficiency in Finnish) in writing speaking and listening in a variety of living as well as professional contexts and reading various text types (newspapers literature college-level texts etc.) with a strong level of comprehension.

Nordic Literature

Learning Outcome

Culture and History Learn to recognize and critically reflect upon key dimensions of Nordic literature art society culture and history with an emphasis on appreciating these cultures' artistic production and intellectual histories.

Effective Writing and Analytic Competence

Learning Outcome

Learn to use writing as a process of discovery by composing essays that demonstrate mature analytic thought the orderly development of ideas and vigorous argument.

Lifelong Learning

Learning Outcome

Develop a lifelong appreciation of Nordic cultures as well as literature while developing attitudes and habits of thought and study that encourage lifelong learning and continued contact with the informed study of Nordic culture.

Coding the LOs for Finnish, Norwegian, and Danish/Swedish

Scandinavian 321 LO coding   Finnish

Finnish 321 Learning Outcomes

Coding according to the Modes of Communication: Interpretive, Interpersonal, Presentational, Intercultural

Modes of Communication	Correlating phrases	ACTFL Level	Citation	Notes
Interpretive	(nothing)			Nothing in the LOs directly mentions reading or listening.
Interpersonal	Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present	Intermediate to Advanced, depending on content and context	ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 4 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf ACTFL Intermediate Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 4 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Intermediate%20Can-Do%20Statements.pdf ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 13 https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012.pdf	I have put this under both Interpersonal and Presentational because these skills can happen in both Modes. *The qualifying term "develop" would indicate a reaching from one level up the next at the "High" sub-level. Narration and description are Advanced-level functions, but the Proficiency Guideline description for Intermediate High Writing says "They can narrate and describe in different time frames when writing about everyday events and situations", meaning within certain content and context boundaries and so the boundaries might need to be deliniated. In the Proficiency Guidelines, Intermediate Writing states "They write primarily in present tense." In the Writing Proficiency Familiarization Guide, the functions for Intermediate Writing are: "Can Create (sic) with language. Can meet practical needs, such as simple messages and letters, requests for information, and notes. Can ask and respond to simple questions."
	(Students will) begin using connected discourse	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, pages 6 and 12 https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012.pdf	The term "connected discourse" is found in the Advanced-Mid Speaking Proficiency Guidelines: "Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse" and Advanced Writing: "Advanced-level writers produce connected discourse of paragraph length and structure."
	learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies	Intermediate or Advanced, depending on what "learn to" means	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Advanced global functions) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 6 https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012.pdf	The term "learn to" implies conceptual and partial control over this function. Full control could also be implied, but it is unclear. Emerging or partial control of this Advanced function can be found at the Intermediate High level. Full control is Advanced-Mid level. From the Proficiency Guidelines: "Advanced Mid speakers can handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar. Communicative strategies such as circumlocution or rephrasing are often employed for this purpose."
	all with only slight gaps in communication	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 7 https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012.pdf	The Proficiency Guidelines refer gaps in communication in the description of an Intermediate High speaker. This LO qualifying term might be an extension of that concept into the Advanced level. Some of this depends on how sympathetic the interlocutor is.

| Presentational | Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present | Intermediate to Advanced, depending on content and context | ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 4 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf ACTFL Intermediate Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, pages 4 and 13 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Intermediate%20Can-Do%20Statements.pdf Writing Proficiency Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/2020%20LPT%20Familiarization%20Guide.pdf | I have put this under both Interpersonal and Presentational because these skills can happen in both settings.

*The qualifying term "develop" would indicate a reaching from one level up the next at the "High" sub-level. Narration and description are Advanced-level functions, but the Proficiency Guideline description for Intermediate High Writing says "They can narrate and describe in different time frames when writing about everyday events and situations", meaning within certain content and context boundaries and so the boundaries might need to be deliniated.

In the Proficiency Guidelines, Intermediate Writing states "They write primarily in present tense." In the Writing Proficiency Familiarization Guide, the functions for Intermediate Writing are: "Can Create (sic) with language. Can meet practical needs, such as simple messages and letters, requests for information, and notes. Can ask and respond to simple questions." |
| | (Students will) begin using connected discourse | Intermediate or Advanced, depending on what "begin using" means | ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, pages 6 and 12 https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012.pdf | The term "connected discourse" is found in the Advanced-Mid Speaking Proficiency Guidelines: "Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse" and Advanced Writing: "Advanced-level writers produce connected discourse of paragraph length and structure." |
| | Students will employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features of intermediate-level Finnish in descriptive and narrative texts | Distinguished | ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 11 https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012.pdf | This LO could refer to Interpersonal or Presentational Speaking as well as Writing since it includes terms associated with both speaking and writing and the verb "employ" implies that it is tied to the productive skills (speaking and writing).

The specification of "proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features" appears to come from the Proficiency Guidelines for Distinguished Writing: "Writers at the Distinguished level demonstrate control of complex lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic features of the language." Phonology is not mentioend, however.

This terminology does not appear in any of the descriptions Advanced skills, benchmarks, or functions. It might not be advisable to lift wording from the Distinguished level and apply it to outcomes at the Advanced level without evaluating whether the wording can truly describe Advanced function and it is not known whether such an evaluation was undertaken at the time of the writing of the LO.

The description of Intermediate Writing describes control of basic grammatical structures (grammar), generic vocabulary (lexical), ability of a native speaker to understand the learner (phonological; applicable to Presentational Speaking but not Writing), and control over descriptive and narrative text types (stylistic features?). |
| | ...as well as in producing basic analyses | N/A (Critical thinking) | | |

	Students will develop partial control of their ability to narrate and describe in the past and future with connected discourse.	Intermediate	ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 5 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf	
Intercultural: Investigate	(nothing)			There is no mention of culture or Intercultural Communication in the LOs.
Intercultural: Interact	(nothing)			The LOs do not mention cultural interaction.

Proficiency Level Alignment Between Students and Learning Outcomes in Scandinavian 321 Language Courses, BYU Second Language Teaching Master's Project by Maren Mecham, 20

Norwegian 321 Learning Outcomes

Coding according to the Modes of Communication: Interpretive, Interpersonal, Presentational, Intercultural

Modes of Communication	Correlating phrases	Level	Citation	Notes
Interpretive	(nothing)			Nothing in the LOs directly mentions reading or listening.
Interpersonal	Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in past, present and future time frames	Intermediate to Advanced, depending on content and context and meaning of "develop"	ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 4 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf ; Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Advanced global functions). https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 5 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The term "develop" is vague enough to make it unclear whether the learner is expected to have conceptual, partial, or full control over this function. Sustained control is Advanced level.
	use connected discourse	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 6 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The term "connected discourse" is found in the Proficiency Guidelines under "Advanced Mid" Speaking: "Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse." It can also refer to the text types found in oral proficiency descriptions and seems to be a mix of paragraphs (Advanced) and extended discourse (Superior).
	learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies	Advanced	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Advanced global functions) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 6 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	From the Proficiency Guidelines: "Advanced Mid speakers can handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar. Communicative strategies such as circumlocution or rephrasing are often employed for this purpose."
	without patterns of error	Superior	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Superior accuracy) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	There is a lot missing from the Advanced Interpersonal Mode Benchmark in the LOs, such as Advanced contexts, accuracy, and text types, although Superior criteria are included.

	Students will employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features of advanced-level Norwegian	Distinguished	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 11 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	This LO could refer to Interpersonal or Presentational Speaking as well as Writing since it includes terms associated with both speaking and writing and the verb "employ" implies that it is tied to the productive skills (speaking and writing). However, the phrase following this is "in descriptive and narrative texts", which does not sound like Interpersonal Communication; it sounds like Presentational Speaking and Writing. The specification of "proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features" appears to come from the Proficiency Guidelines for Distinguished Writing: "Writers at the Distinguished level demonstrate control of complex lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic features of the language." Phonology is notmentioned, however. This terminology does not appear in any of the descriptions Advanced skills, benchmarks, or functions. It might not be advisable to lift wording from the Distinguished level and apply it to outcomes at the Advanced level without evaluating whether the wording can truly describe Advanced function and it is not known whether such an evaluation was undertaken at the time of the writing of the LO.
	Students will develop partial control of their ability to support their opinions and hypothesize	Advanced	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Superior global tasks and functions) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
	(Students will develop partial control) about abstract topics	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 5 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
	(Students will develop partial control) in the context of extended discourse.	Advanced	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Superior text type) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
Presentational	Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in past, present and future time frames	Intermediate to Advanced, depending on content and context and meaning of "develop"	ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 4 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf ; Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Advanced global functions). https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 5 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The term "develop" is vague enough to make it unclear whether the learner is expected to have conceptual, partial, or full control over this function. Full control is Advanced level.
	use connected discourse	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 6 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The term "connected discourse" is found in the Proficiency Guidelines under "Advanced Mid" Speaking: "Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse." It can also refer to the text types found in oral proficiency descriptions and seems to be a mix of paragraphs (Advanced) and extended discourse (Superior).

	learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies	Advanced	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Advanced global functions) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 6 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	From the Proficiency Guidelines: "Advanced Mid speakers can handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar. Communicative strategies such as circumlocution or rephrasing are often employed for this purpose."
	without patterns of error	Superior	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Superior accuracy) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	There is a lot missing from the Advanced Interpersonal Mode Benchmark in the LOs, such as Advanced contexts, accuracy, and text types, although Superior criteria are included.
	Students will employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features of advanced-level Norwegian	Distinguished	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, pages 5, 11, and 12 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	This LO could refer to Interpersonal or Presentational Speaking as well as Writing since it includes terms associated with both speaking and writing and the verb "employ" implies that it is tied to the productive skills (speaking and writing). The specification of "proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features" appears to come from the Proficiency Guidelines for Distinguished Writing: "Writers at the Distinguished level demonstrate control of complex lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic features of the language." Phonology is not mentioend, however. This terminology does not appear in any of the descriptions Advanced skills, benchmarks, or functions. It might not be advisable to lift wording from the Distinguished level and apply it to outcomes at the Advanced level without evaluating whether the wording can truly describe Advanced function and it is not known whether such an evaluation was undertaken at the time of the writing of the LO. The description of Advanced Writing describes control of basic grammatical structures (grammar), generic vocabulary (lexical), ability of a native speaker to understand the learner (phonological; applicable to Presentational Speaking but not Writing), and control over descriptive and narrative text types (stylistic features?).
	in descriptive and narrative texts	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, pages 5 and 12 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	Unclear whether the "employ" verb is meant as writing or speaking or both
	as well as producing basic analyses	N/A	N/A	This is not part of the Standards of language learning, but is a reasonable expectation for a 300-level language course that is a bridge to the literature course.
	Students will develop partial control of their ability to support their opinions and hypothesize	Advanced	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Superior global tasks and functions) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
	(Students will develop partial control) about abstract topics	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 5 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
Intercultural: Investigate	(nothing)			There is no mention of culture or Intercultural Communication in the LOs.
Intercultural: Interact	(nothing)			The LOs do not mention cultural interaction.

Proficiency Level Alignment Between Students and Learning Outcomes in Scandinavian 321 Language Courses, BYU Second Language Teaching Master's Project by Maren Mecham, 2023

Swedish and Danish 321 Learning Outcomes

Coding according to the Modes of Communication: Interpretive, Interpersonal, Presentational, Intercultural

Modes of Communication	Correlating phrases	Level	Citation	Notes
Interpretive	Students will analyze ... proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and literary functions	Distinguished	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 11 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	This LO seems to refer to Reading, though it could also refer to Interpersonal Speaking. The specification of "proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features" appears to come from the Proficiency Guidelines for Distinguished Writing: "Writers at the Distinguished level demonstrate control of complex lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic features of the language."
	Students will analyze ...in descriptive and narrative texts	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, pages 17 and 22-23 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	Unclear whether the "analysis" is strictly interpretive (listening and/or reading) or also productive (writing and/or speaking)
	Students will analyze ...(in) detailed descriptions and narrations	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, pages 17 and 22-23 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	Unclear whether the "analysis" is strictly interpretive (listening and/or reading) or also productive (writing and/or speaking)
	Students will analyze ...(in) argumentative essays	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 22 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	Unclear whether the "analysis" is strictly interpretive (listening and/or reading) or also productive (writing and/or speaking)
	Students will be able to understand a variety of advanced topics	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 17 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	Could potentially be more specific to the course material
	Students will be able to understand a variety of ... dialects	Distinguished+	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 16 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	"Distinguished-level listeners comprehend language from within the cultural framework and are able to understand a speaker's use of nuance and subtlety. However, they may still have difficulty fully understanding certain dialects and nonstandard varieties of the language." PG pg 16
Interpersonal	Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present and past time frames	Intermediate to Advanced, depending on content and context and meaning of "develop"	ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 4 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf ; Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Advanced global functions). https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 5 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The term "develop" is vague enough to make it unclear whether the learner is expected to have conceptual, partial, or full control over this function. Full control is Advanced level.
	use connected discourse	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 6 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The term "connected discourse" is found in the Proficiency Guidelines under "Advanced Mid" Speaking: "Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse."

	learn to manage complications in the language through communicative strategies without patterns of breakdown	Advanced	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Advanced global functions) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, pages 6 and 13 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	From the Proficiency Guidelines: "Advanced Mid speakers can handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar. Communicative strategies such as circumlocution or rephrasing are often employed for this purpose." "Breakdown" is a term used in OPI testing and in the Proficiency Guidelines to describe the failure of a speaker at the "High" sublevel to sustain skills at the next major level.
	Students will develop partial control of their ability to support their opinions and hypothesize	Advanced	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Superior global tasks and functions) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
	(Students will develop partial control) about abstract topics	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 5 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
	(Students will develop partial control) in the context of extended discourse.	Advanced	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Superior text type) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
	You should be able to discuss various subjects with ease	(Too vague to categorize; true at all levels)	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (text types) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	Every level can discuss some subjects "with ease" and "various" is not specific enough to cover the content/context of a particular level.
	and debate your position with success	Superior/Distinguished	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 16 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012 ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 1 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf	The Proficiency Guidelines mention "academic debate" as one of the contexts in which Distinguished listeners can understand language. The Can-Do Statements mention "debate" as part of Superior and Distinguished Interpersonal Communication.
	using a number of strategies	(Too vague to categorize)	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 5-8 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The Proficiency Guidelines mention "strategies" as part of Superior, Advanced and Intermediate speaking. Without specifics as to the strategies or their context, this cannot be assigned a level.
	Students will be able to understand a variety of advanced topics and dialects and use this as a basis for communication.	Advanced to Distinguished+ (see also Interpretive section)	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 16 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012 Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Advanced content/contexts) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	"Distinguished-level listeners comprehend language from within the cultural framework and are able to understand a speaker's use of nuance and subtlety. However, they may still have difficulty fully understanding certain dialects and nonstandard varieties of the language." PG pg 16 Nowhere do the ACTFL documents refer to a language user's ability to communicate based on understanding a variety of dialects, but communicating based on an understanding of advanced topics is clearly an Advanced Interpersonal Communication skill. Therefore, the term "and use this [understanding of...dialects] as a basis for communication" is not tied to an ACTFL level; speaking additional dialects and alternative forms (be they official or unofficial) is given no special status within the ACTFL levels.

Presentational	Students will develop their ability to narrate and describe in the present and past time frames	Intermediate to Advanced, depending on content and context and meaning of "develop"	ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 4 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf ; Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Advanced global functions). https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 5 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The term "develop" is vague enough to make it unclear whether the learner is expected to have conceptual, partial, or full control over this function. Full control is Advanced level.
	use connected discourse	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 6 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The term "connected discourse" is found in the Proficiency Guidelines under "Advanced Mid" Speaking: "Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse." It can also refer to the text types found in oral proficiency descriptions and seems to be a mix of paragraphs (Advanced) and extended discourse (Superior).
	Students will develop partial control of their ability to support their opinions and hypothesize	Advanced	Oral Proficiency Interview Familiarization Guide, 2020, page 7 (Superior global tasks and functions) https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/assessments/OPI%20Familiarization%20Guide%202020.pdf	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
	(Students will develop partial control) about abstract topics	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 5 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	The function is Superior, but the qualifying term "partial control" sets the LO at an Advanced High level.
	Students will ... employ proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and literary functions	Distinguished	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 11 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	This LO seems to refer to Presentational Writing (like essays and reports), though it could also refer to Interpersonal or Presentational Speaking. The specification of "proper grammatical, lexical, phonological, and stylistic features" appears to come from the Proficiency Guidelines for Distinguished Writing: "Writers at the Distinguished level demonstrate control of complex lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic features of the language." Phonology is not mentioned. The term "literary functions" might need elaboration.
	in summaries	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 17 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	Unclear whether the "employ" verb is meant as writing or speaking or both
	in descriptive and narrative texts	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 12 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	Unclear whether the "employ" verb is meant as writing or speaking or both
	(in) analyses	Advanced	ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, pages 13-14 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf	Unclear whether the "employ" verb is meant as writing or speaking or both
	and (in) argumentative essays	Advanced	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, page 22 https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	Unclear whether the "employ" verb is meant as writing or speaking or both
Intercultural: Investigate	Students will broaden and deepen their perception and appreciation of Swedish/Danish culture	(Too vague to categorize; applies to all levels)	ACTFL Advanced Proficiency Benchmarks, part of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015, page 1 https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/can-dos/Advanced%20Can-Do_Statements.pdf	Every level can broaden and deepen their perception and appreciation of a culture.
Intercultural: Interact	(nothing)			The LOs do not mention cultural interaction.

Proficiency Level Alignment Between Students and Learning Outcomes in Scandinavian 321 Language Courses, BYU Second Language Teaching Master's Project by Maren Mecham, 2023

Time spent in country and self-assessed proficiency level: 1=Intermediate, 2=Advanced, 3=Superior.

Figure 2

Time abroad and self-assessed proficiency: Danish
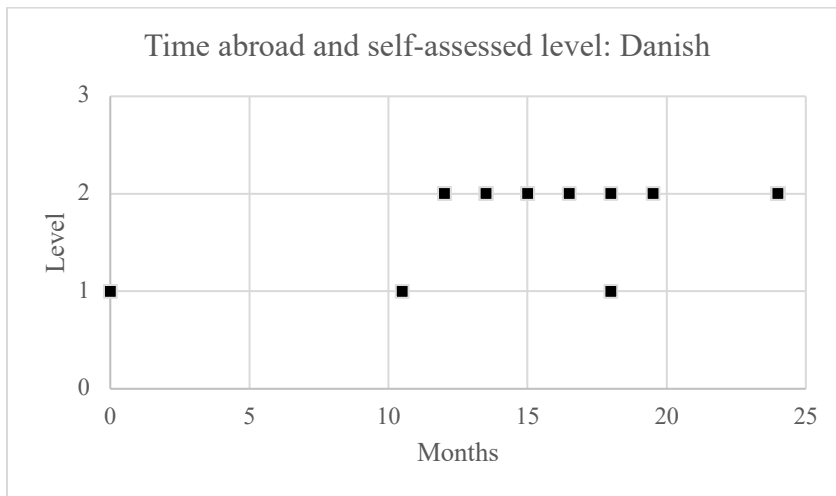
Correlation = 0.52

Time abroad and self-assessed level: Danish

Figure 3

Time abroad and self-assessed proficiency: Finnish

Correlation = 0.56

Time abroad and self-assessed level: Finnish

Figure 4

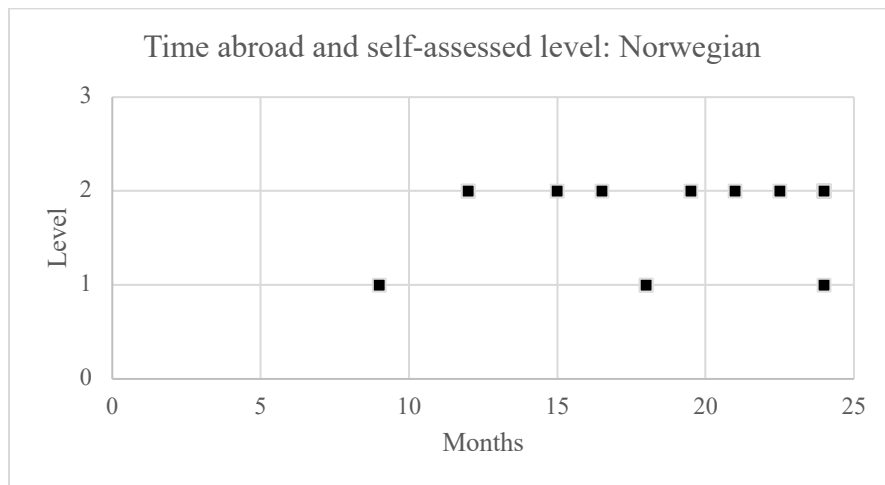*Time abroad and self-assessed proficiency: Norwegian*

Correlation = 0.27

Time abroad and self-assessed level: Norwegian

Figure 5

Time abroad and self-assessed proficiency: Swedish

Correlation = 0.56
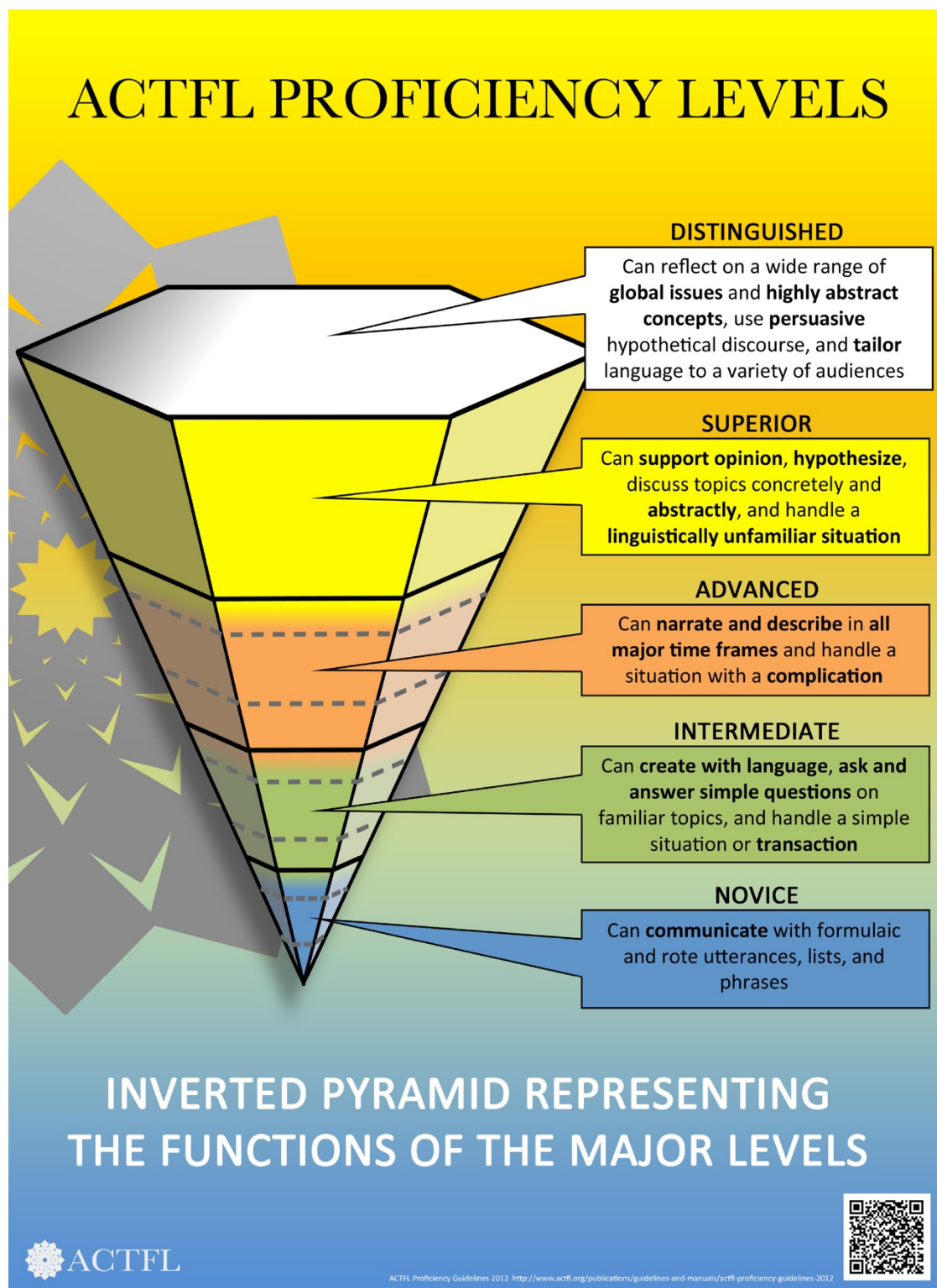
Time abroad and self-assesses level: Swedish

ACTFL Proficiency Levels

ACTFL Proficiency Benchmarks

NCSSFL-ACTFL CAN-DO STATEMENTS
PROFICIENCY BENCHMARKS

	NOVICE PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK	**INTERMEDIATE** PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK
COMMUNICATION		
INTERPRETIVE	*I can* identify the general topic and some basic information in both very familiar and everyday contexts by recognizing practiced or memorized words, phrases, and simple sentences in texts that are spoken, written, or signed.	*I can* understand the main idea and some pieces of information on familiar topics from sentences and series of connected sentences within texts that are spoken, written, or signed.
INTERPERSONAL	*I can* communicate in spontaneous spoken, written, or signed conversations on both very familiar and everyday topics, using a variety of practiced or memorized words, phrases, simple sentences, and questions.	*I can* participate in spontaneous spoken, written, or signed conversations on familiar topics, creating sentences and series of sentences to ask and answer a variety of questions.
PRESENTATIONAL	*I can* present information on both very familiar and everyday topics using a variety of practiced or memorized words, phrases, and simple sentences through spoken, written, or signed language.	*I can* communicate information, make presentations, and express my thoughts about familiar topics, using sentences and series of connected sentences through spoken, written, or signed language.
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION		
INVESTIGATE	In my own and other cultures *I can* identify products and practices to help me understand perspectives.	In my own and other cultures *I can* make comparisons between products and practices to help me understand perspectives.
INTERACT	*I can* interact at a survival level in some familiar everyday contexts.	*I can* interact at a functional level in some familiar contexts.

PROFICIENCY BENCHMARKS

ADVANCED PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK	SUPERIOR PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK	DISTINGUISHED PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK	
COMMUNICATION			
I can understand the main message and supporting details on a wide variety of familiar and general interest topics across various time frames from complex, organized texts that are spoken, written, or signed.	**I can** interpret and infer meaning from complex, academic and professional texts on a range of unfamiliar, abstract, and specialized issues that are spoken, written, or signed.	**I can** interpret and infer meaning from dense, structurally sophisticated texts on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts, with deeply embedded cultural references and colloquialisms and dialects that are spoken, written, or signed.	INTERPRETIVE
I can maintain spontaneous spoken, written, or signed conversations and discussions across various time frames on familiar, as well as unfamiliar, concrete topics, using series of connected sentences and probing questions.	**I can** participate fully and effectively in spontaneous spoken, written, or signed discussions and debates on issues and ideas ranging from broad general interests to my areas of specialized expertise, including supporting arguments and exploring hypotheses.	**I can** interact, negotiate, and debate on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts, fully adapting to the cultural context of the conversation, using spoken, written, or signed language.	INTERPERSONAL
I can deliver detailed and organized presentations on familiar as well as unfamiliar concrete topics, in paragraphs and using various time frames through spoken, written, or signed language.	**I can** deliver extended presentations on abstract or hypothetical issues and ideas ranging from broad general interests to my areas of specialized expertise, with precision of expression and to a wide variety of audiences, using spoken, written, or signed language.	**I can** deliver sophisticated and articulate presentations on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts, fully adapting to the cultural context of the audience, using spoken, written, or signed language.	PRESENTATIONAL

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In my own and other cultures **I can** explain some diversity among products and practices and how it relates to perspectives.	In my own and other cultures **I can** suspend judgment while critically examining products, practices, and perspectives.	In my own and other cultures **I can** objectively evaluate products and practices and mediate perspectives.	INVESTIGATE
I can interact at a competent level in familiar and some unfamiliar contexts.	**I can** interact in complex situations to ensure a shared understanding of culture.	**I can** engage with complexity and pluricultural identities and serve as a mediator between and among cultures.	INTERACT

Appendix G

CEFR-ACTFL Correlation Table

Maren Mecham, 2022

With reference to the document *Assigning CEFR Ratings to ACTFL Assessments* and the

research by Goertler, Kraemer, and Schenker in 2016, the following table is proposed for use by

the Scandinavian Studies Program for curriculum development and consideration of materials. It

is important to remember, however, that the two scales were designed based on different

foundations and for different purposes, so directly translating from CEFR to ACTFL is not

advised for high-stakes testing (ACTFL, n.d.).

CEFR Levels	General ACTFL Equivalencies:	Receptive skills (Reading and Listening):	Productive skills (Speaking and Writing):
B1	Intermediate High-Advanced Low	Intermediate High-Advanced Low	Intermediate High
B2	Advanced Mid	Advanced Mid	Advanced Low-Advanced Mid
C1	Advanced High	Advanced High-Superior	Advanced High

ACTFL. (n.d.). *Assigning CEFR Ratings to ACTFL Assessments*. American Council on the

Teaching of Foreign Languages.

https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/reports/Assigning_CEFR_Ratings_To_ACTFL_Assessments.pdf

Goertler, S., Kraemer, A., & Schenker, T. (2016). Setting evidence-based language goals.

Foreign Language Annals 49(3), 434-454. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12214