

Retracing the Path to Proficiency: FL Teacher Educators and the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines



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Over twenty years have passed since the initial introduction of the Proficiency Guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (Hiple, 1982). Although the guidelines are widely regarded as a major innovation in foreign language (FL) education, there is little empirical record of their diffusion through the language teaching profession. Perched at the intersection of professional entities such as ACTFL, academia and the world of K-12 teaching, FL teacher educators are potentially a key

liaison in the process of disseminating an educational innovation such as the guidelines within their particular socio-organizational context (Huberman, 1983). As part of a larger study of FL teacher educators and their perspective on the diffusion of educational innovations, I administered a questionnaire to 83 FL teacher educators in 11 Southeastern states in order to ascertain how they approach educational innovations.

This article presents data from that study and sheds some light on the role played by

these professionals in the dissemination of the guidelines. A theoretical model, the Diffusion of Innovations in Education Model, provided a framework for exploring respondents' activities related to local promotion of the guidelines. Though more commonly employed in communications, agricultural and anthropological studies, diffusion of innovations, or "DOI" research, is earning a following in language education because of the work of researchers like Markee (1993, 1997) and Henrichsen (1989). DOI research has as its central

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aim the goal of predicting and explaining the success or failure of innovations’ being adopted within a given social system. In preparing a study investigating the diffusion of the ACTFL guidelines in the

Southeastern states, I developed a Diffusion of Educational Innovations (DIEM) model (Figure 1), adapted primarily from one designed by Henrichsen (1989) in his study of the diffusion of English language teaching in Japan. Incorporating findings from various studies of diffusion in educational settings, the model frames the diffusion process along three categories of variables aligned in chronological fashion. The first category, *antecedent variables*, precedes the diffusion process, denoting the pertinent background factors of the adopters (FL teacher

educators in the Southeast U.S.), as well as those variables pertaining to the innovation, in this case, the ACTFL guidelines, components of which include proficiency-oriented instruction (POI) and the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). The second group, *process variables*, refers to the diffusion process, which centers on a change agent’s (ACTFL) approach to promoting the guidelines to its constituency. If there is a decision to adopt, a third category of variables is considered. *Consequences variables* measure the extent to which the innovation is implemented and whether or

Figure 1: The Diffusion of Innovations in Education Model (or “DIEM”- adapted from Henrichsen, 1989; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971).
Legend: (+) *factors favorable to process/consequences*; (-).

ANTECEDENT	PROCESS	CONSEQUENCES
<p>Innovation type (Fullan, '93; Rogers): In order of diffusion, adoption potential: Hardware-, practice-, ideas-, principles-based</p> <p>Volitional variables: Optional (individual) vs. collective, policy authority / policy varieties, i.e. mandates (+/-)</p> <p>Individual adopter variables: Personality (R&J, Hall, Mort, Huberman): Innovativeness, openness to change, formal education, literacy, empathy, abstract reasoning, a rational outlook, intelligence (+) Social communication behavior: wide scope of professional networking (+); Categories: followers, supporters, neutrals</p> <p>Communication structure (Mortimore, Rogers, R&J): Channels: Formal / informal; localite vs. cosmopolite, mass media; hetero-/ homophilous; Gate keeping cliques (-)</p> <p>Adopter organization (Carlson, Fullan, '93; Henrichsen, Huberman, NDN, Rogers, R&J): Connectedness to larger context (+) Balance of upward/downward (+) R&D, other innovation support (+) Openness of leadership (+) Openness to, need for innovation (+) Accounting for traditional pedagogical practices (+) Staff morale (+) Size (+)</p> <p>Adopter social system (Rogers, R&J, NDN, Mort): Openness to change (+); Wealth, tax / pop. base (+); Cosmopolitaness (+)</p>	<p>I. KNOWLEDGE External change agent strategy (Fullan '93, '01, Henrichsen, Huberman, Hunkins & Ornstein, NDN, Rogers): Organizational factors: Staff size, experience, support (absence of gate-keeper resistance) (+) Building relationship: Involvement, coordination of networks with school leadership, opinion leaders, aides Outreach, training activity to promote awareness of need for innovation.</p> <p>II. PERSUASION Innovation perceptions (Rogers): Relative advantage (+) Compatibility (+) Observability (+) Triability (+) Complexity (-) Flexibility (+) Relation to LoU (HRHA): Non-use - Orientation Relation to CBAM: Awareness, Information, Personal stages</p> <p>III. DECISION (Rogers)- ADOPT / REJECT (INITIAL)</p>	<p>IV. IMPLEMENTATION External change agent (NDN): Assistance & follow-up, materials support; quantity, quality of training (+); cost (-), consideration of social capital (FZB).</p> <p>Adopter side: Fidelity of use (Carlson, Fullan, '01; HRHAH, L&M, Mort, NDN, Rogers) Planning (+) (Miles, 1969): setting goals, forecasting, diagnosing, inventing, scanning solutions LoU: Preparation stage Diffusion effects: secondary, anticipated / unanticipated, direct / indirect. LoU: Mechanical stage CBAM: Management stage Social capital What social pressures, supports sustain implementation? (FZB)</p> <p>V. CONFIRMATION Consequences of implementation (Henrichsen; HRHAH, NDN; Rogers, R&S): Success, Valuation (finalized adoption, institutionalization)- adoption leads to confirmation, continuance, integration, routinization, maintenance LoU: Routine, Refinement, Integration, Renewal stages CBAM: Consequence, Collaboration, Re-focusing stages</p> <p>Failure (final rejection)- final decision to reject following trial, discontinuance, tabling</p>

Legend:
CBAM refers to Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall, Rutherford, & George, 1977)
FZB refers to Frank Zhao, and Borman (in-press)

HRHAH refers to Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1987)
LoU refers to “Levels of Use” scale (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1987)

NDN refers to National Diffusion Network (Emrick & Peterson, 1977)
R&J refers to Rogers and Jain (1968)

not it is ultimately integrated into the adopting system. In the literature on the ACTFL guidelines, this phenomenon has also been referred to as *impact* (Grosse & Feyten, 1991). This study focuses on the middle category, the *process* variables, employed to investigate the diffusion of the ACTFL guidelines as FL teacher educators in the Southeast U.S. perceived them.

Review of the Literature

This review of the literature on the diffusion of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 1986; Breiner-Sanders, Lowe, Miles, & Swender, 2000) is guided by the Diffusion of Innovations in Education Model (DIEM), which adapts antecedent, process, and consequences variables to educational settings. With regard to the variables of interest in this article, those pertaining to the diffusion process, the DIEM factors in the following: the change agent and its efforts to promote the innovation (Emrick & Peterson, 1977; Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2003; Fullan, 1993, 2001; Huberman, 1983; Rogers, 1995), as well as the adopters' experience of gaining knowledge and being persuaded to adopt it (Rogers, 1995).

Change agent organizational variables (staff size, experience, support)

In order to understand the diffusion of the guidelines, it is important to study the activity of their designer and disseminator, ACTFL. Charged with increasing knowledge and acceptance of an innovation, the change agent must address organizational factors such as staff size, experience and support (Emrick & Peterson, 1977). Other variables pertain to coordination issues in communicating the innovation, such as networks with opinion leaders and their aides in efforts to promote use of the innovation (Emrick & Peterson, 1977; Fullan, 1993, 2001; Huberman, 1983; Rogers, 1995).

ACTFL's evolution is closely linked to the design and diffusion of its proficiency guidelines. Around the time the guidelines were introduced in the early 1980s, ACTFL had only recently gained autonomy from its parent organization, the Modern Language Association (MLA), and had been struggling to assert its leadership within a divided profession (Grittner, 1975; Warriner, 1978). A relatively young and financially insecure professional organization, ACTFL struggled to coordinate a constituency divided on issues of teaching and learning. As then President Grittner said: "The other disciplines are less fragmented than we are, less tied up in the concept of the teacher as dispenser of a particular body of knowledge" (1975, p. 17). Warriner (1978) describes the impact

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of this "eclectic period" of FL instruction articulation issues: the emphasis of quantity over quality in delivery of instruction, low teacher morale, discouraged students who found it difficult to keep pace, discrepancies between levels in district curricular designs, doubled materials expenses, and teachers who found themselves "enslaved to texts" (p. 6). According to Warriner, ACTFL confronted a confusing array of FL methods, each advanced as *the* approach. Consequently, FL teachers were overtaxed and losing faith in the professional leadership.

This confusion led to the need for an organizing principle to navigate the methods maze as well as an opportunity for the young professional organization to test its mettle. According to Omaggio (1986), the ensuing proficiency movement was a convergence of related activities: the Carter Commission's *Strength Through Wisdom* (1979), which underscored the need for greater FL proficiency; the National Criteria and Assessment Program, which initiated the development of a proficiency assessment tool; the Educational Testing Service's efforts to define proficiency in academic contexts under the Common Yardstick Project; and the Foreign Service Institute's work with the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR). At least among these elite channels, there was clear support for an educational innovation focused on the proficiency principle.

In the early 1980s ACTFL tested the constituent waters with a survey of the membership regarding the need for proficiency guidelines and how they should be designed and directed. Out of 400 programs solicited, 35% returned questionnaires (Paul, 1981). A favorable attitude toward the guidelines was reported across the groups, with particular enthusiasm among local FL coordinators. All agreed that the greatest impact would be on curriculum design, articulation, and the measurement of communicative ability. Teachers further requested assistance in adapting teaching methods. Shortly after the survey, ACTFL published the guidelines in provisional form (Hiple, 1982). Pre-existing readiness within the profession for an emphasis on proficiency and the decision to include potential adopters (ACTFL

constituents) in the process suggests that ACTFL was indeed working in extensive coordination with the membership prior to the guidelines' dissemination.

However, reception in the professional literature ranged from guarded optimism to profound criticism (Bachman, 1988; Bachman & Savignon, 1986; Grosse & Feyten, 1991; Lantolf & Frawley, 1985; Lowe, 1986; Schulz, 1986; VanPatten, 1986, 1987). To an extent, academic authorities on language learning and teaching represent a "checks and balances" dynamic in the process of promoting new educational ideas and practices. They are to ACTFL what the Supreme Court is to the Legislative Branch of the federal government. Through the lens of diffusion of innovations research, these published academic authorities form what have been called gate-keeping cliques that make or break educational innovations with their approval or disapproval (Rogers, 1995). In evaluating the phenomenon of gate keeping at work in the dissemination of the ACTFL guidelines, however, it is difficult to determine whether the negative response was significant enough to undermine the credibility of this innovation.

Another dimension of ACTFL's promotion of the guidelines included overtures to textbook companies (ACTFL, 1982). Though the leadership has historically maintained connections with publishers (ACTFL, 1982; Warriner, 1978), ACTFL might have under-estimated how the publishing world would lag behind the proficiency movement. There was a tendency for publishers to "window-dress" a proficiency orientation that bore little resemblance to the guidelines or their pedagogical implications (Byrnes, 1988; Chuanreu, 1995; Finneman, 1987; Mosher & Resch, 1986; Walz, 1986). Young and Oxford (1993) describe how, in student surveys, a textbook associated with the proficiency movement was judged inferior to an alternative and eventually dropped. The publishers' response to the guidelines supports Rogers' (1995) assertion that principles-based innovations are the most difficult to implement.

Change agent coordination with liaisons in promoting training and awareness

A common strategy employed by change agents has been to seek out liaisons such as opinion leaders—contacts within the adopting socio-organizational context—who can put the local stamp of approval on an innovation introduced from outside the local context (Rogers, 1995). Sometimes, to get even more local access, opinion leaders have employed an aide in order to reach potential adopters. Diffusion

researchers use the terms *homophily* and *heterophily* to explain the need for this chain of liaisons. Homophily refers to the sense of group affiliation; heterophily refers to the opposite scenario in which people communicating about an innovation do not identify with one another. Heterophily explains why a state FL supervisor, acting as an opinion leader, might train his or her PreK-12 department heads (aides) to share insights into proficiency-oriented instruction with school colleagues rather than communicate directly with teachers.

With regard to ACTFL efforts, there is a tradition of opinion leadership among local, state and regional professional organizations representing FL teaching, as well as among national organizations dedicated to specific language areas. Referring to the national language-specific organizations (the AATs: American Associations of Teachers of [language]) and the MLA, Dunham (1971) argues “if it (ACTFL) fails, the AAT’s fail, ACTFL fails, and MLA fails” (p. 4). A key ingredient overlooked in this omen was the role of the regional FL organizations—Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (CSC), Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NECTFL), the Southern Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (SCOLT)—as an opinion-leading entity that gives ACTFL innovations a local stamp of approval. In the case of the Southeast U.S., the region of interest in this study, SCOLT coordinated back-to-back conferences focusing on the guidelines and their implications around the time the provisional tag had been lifted. Thus, there is an indication of tight national-regional coordination in order to increase practitioner accessibility to the guidelines.

In advance of the introduction of the guidelines, an ACTFL Executive Council meeting in 1980 planned for the time of the guidelines’ official dissemination, called for their use across levels and professional settings. In addition, it addressed questions regarding teacher education that considered the impact of the guidelines, research needs, and the facilitation of dialogue between “state and federal initiatives” (ACTFL, 1982, p. 411).

Training appears to be an area that was not adequately addressed in planning for the guidelines’ dissemination. In a study of the impact of the guidelines on Florida, Grosse and Feyten (1991) uncovered a lack of PreK-12 teacher access to guidelines-related training. While many university professionals reported training in proficiency-oriented instruction at national centers or through ACTFL consultants (Lange, 1988), issues such as lack of travel funds and release time would prove prohibitive for PreK-12 professionals. With regard to training in use of the OPI, ACTFL

has maintained a clear distinction between initial training and official certification, a status that must be periodically renewed. The combination of workshops lasting several days, rounds of taped interview analyses, and trainee proficiency testing are time- and cost-intensive, beyond the means of the average PreK-12 teacher.

As indicated earlier, ACTFL intended to reach teacher educators. The most direct evidence of ACTFL activity in promoting the guidelines’ use in teacher preparation programs is Muyskens’ (1984) chapter in *Teaching for Proficiency, the Organizing Principle*, which outlined a proficiency-based methods course that included familiarization with related concepts, application and materials construction. Other topics included context-based vocabulary instruction; communicative, contextual grammar instruction; and teaching across the modalities according to the criteria of function, context, and accuracy. Muyskens also offered some planning suggestions based on the OPI: warm-up activities, role-play and small group activities, and “contextualized achievement” testing (p. 194). Finally, she suggested that mentor teachers be educated concerning the guidelines and the implications for curriculum and evaluation.

Another way the guidelines were promoted in teacher education was through *Teaching Language in Context* (Omaggio, 1986, 1993, 2000), the most widely adopted methods text in circulation (Warford, 2003). Elaborating on five hypotheses of proficiency-oriented instruction that the author had introduced earlier in *Proficiency: The Organizing Principle* (1984), the text extrapolated various pedagogical implications of the guidelines and advanced a proficiency-based critique of various teaching methods. One criticism raised about the approach of this textbook stems from its support of falling back on the native language to explain target language grammar rules, thus potentially sabotaging the objective of emphasizing the target language as the medium of instruction (Kalivoda, 1990; Hypothesis 1.4, in Omaggio, 1984).

While Omaggio’s framework is perhaps the most widely accepted foundation for proficiency-oriented instruction, it is by no means the only one that has been advanced. Lange (1988) also offered some additional insights into the guidelines’ “vague framework” (p. 41). Within the framework of a University of Minnesota proficiency workshop, Lange and colleagues developed a nine-item list of implications for instruction inherent in this educational innovation. Themes included balancing function, content, and accuracy; maintaining a grammar consideration with regard to function; incorporating authentic

materials; balancing achievement and proficiency approaches to assessment; considering how modalities will be separated and integrated; incorporating more student-to-student communicative activities such as paired and small group work; considering the time issue in proficiency attainment; studying the target culture early on in instruction; remembering that there is no proficiency *method*; focusing on receptive modalities prior to the productive ones; and making instruction learner-centered. Overall, ACTFL’s outreach strategy, as far as FL teacher education was concerned, was centered on the dissemination of documents explicating the guidelines’ pedagogical implications.

In summarizing ACTFL’s change agent activity, it is clear that this professional organization, less than two decades old, planned extensively prior to dissemination. Efforts included constituent surveys, the preparation of publications such as *Proficiency: The Organizing Principle* (1984), coordination with regional FL organizations as well as with textbook companies. Though teacher education appears to have been targeted as a point of promotion and education, it is not exactly clear what role the teacher educator was supposed to play in the guidelines’ dissemination. Trends that might have undermined the dissemination of the guidelines included questionable adaptation of the guidelines by textbook publishers, significant criticism in the professional literature, and the tendency for access to training to be more in evidence in higher education settings than in PreK-12 contexts.

Knowledge of the innovation and persuasion to adopt

In addition to measuring change-agent promotion of an innovation, diffusion researchers investigate the way adopters become aware of an innovation and arrive at the decision to adopt or reject it. Rogers (1995) defines an innovation as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (p. 11). In this study, the innovation in question is the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Components include the OPI and its derivatives used in assessing proficiency, as well as proficiency-oriented instruction. While the OPI came with concrete support materials and parameters, proficiency-oriented instruction is a classic illustration of a principles-based innovation. Rogers (1995) distinguishes between *idea-* and *principles-based* innovations. In teaching to an idea, the parameters were considered broad enough as to leave the teacher ample room for variation in practice. Schulz (1986) shares how, at the Language Proficiency Assessment Symposium, over 70 ideas regarding pro-

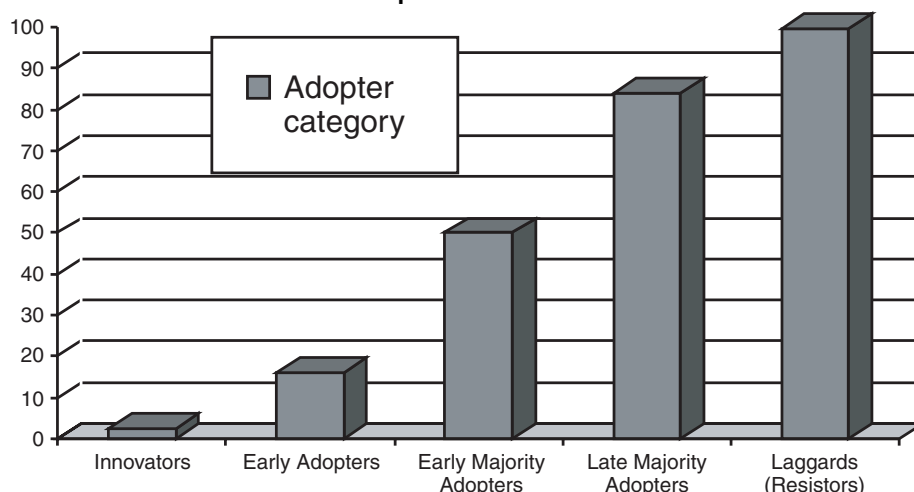
iciency came to light. Molding these ideas into a coherent principle represented a practically insoluble proposition. The proficiency principle itself was adapted from the ILR's criteria for knowing a language: function, content / context, and accuracy (Omaggio, 1983). The extrapolation of pedagogical principles based on this model, *proficiency-oriented instruction*, has defied rigid definition. Based on Rogers' (1995) prediction, one would expect that the diffusion and adoption of this innovation would be compromised by the ambiguity surrounding the issue of how to define and facilitate FL proficiency.

One of the most important elements in diffusion research and one of Rogers' (1995) three areas recommended for further study has been that of the innovation's perceived characteristics: its relative advantage (over previous practice), compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (p. 21). Partially because of the increasing number of international diffusion studies (Henrichsen, 1989), socio-cultural variables have been determined to play a major role in determining an innovation's compatibility: "An important factor in the adoption rate of an innovation is its compatibility with the values, beliefs, and past experiences of individuals in the social system" (Rogers, 1995, p. 4). The notion of indigenous knowledge systems (Rogers, 1995) might explain the idiosyncrasy of implementation in Florida, where adaptation of the guidelines varied considerably from one county to the next (Grosse & Feyten, 1991).

Pinpointing the time of adoption is key to measuring the rate of innovation diffusion, a research measure that has presented problems for the researcher of innovation diffusion in educational settings. According to Carlson (1968), "far more care needs to be exercised in pinpointing the time of adoption if diffusion studies are to provide a firm knowledge base" (p. 9). With regard to the time it takes to see an innovation through to adoption, Rogers (1995) has advanced an adoption decision timeline: knowledge, persuasion, an initial decision to adopt or to reject, implementation, and confirmation. In DOI research the *innovativeness* of potential adopters, ranging from innovators (2.5%), to early adopters (13.5%), early majority adopters (34%), late majority adopters (34%), and ending with laggards (16%) (1995, p. 89), also influences the time it takes for an innovation to be adopted. Rate of adoption in DOI theory is represented in a cumulative chart by an S-shaped curve (Figure 2). Whereas *innovators* inhabit the tail of the *S* (the early stage of diffusion), *laggards* explain the point at the tip that represents the point at which the last few holdouts decide to jump on the bandwagon. The leveling off of

Figure 2: S-shaped diffusion curve (Rogers, 1995).

Y axis = % of those who have adopted the educational innovation



X axis = Time. Full adoption may take as long as 40 years (Mort & Cornell, 1941)

the *S* also represents the point at which an innovation becomes institutionalized. When fully integrated into the adopting system, its diffusion rate stabilizes.

The question of who adopts plays a part in determining the diffusion rate. In addition to the *early/late* adopter distinction, Rogers (1995) identified socio-economic and personality traits of earlier adopters as having a positive impact on the time it takes to disseminate an innovation. Socio-economic characteristics include high degrees of formal education, literacy, social status, upward mobility, and identification with larger (as opposed to local) social units. Personality traits that affect diffusion rates include empathy, open-mindedness, good abstract reasoning, a rational outlook, and intelligence. Teacher innovativeness and attitudes toward the innovation may also enhance the diffusion rate (Rogers & Jain, 1968). Mort and Cornell's study (1941) found three categories of adopting teachers: followers, supporters, and neutrals (p. 29). Sometimes patterns among teachers' "personality, communication behavior, and attitudes" have affected the diffusion process (Rogers & Jain, 1968, p. 8). According to Rogers and Jain (1968), adequate planning is essential since its absence usually ends with the status quo reasserting itself. Teachers have tended to resist change

because of the perception that educational innovations simply add work, that they are hastily advanced, or simply due to "ignorance of the facts" (p. 111).

In measuring the spread of an innovation within a particular context, researchers in educational diffusion, Hall, Rutherford, and George, (1977) developed a Concerns-Based Adoption Model that measures stages of teacher attitudes toward an innovation from passing interest to extensive integration. The first three stages—Awareness, Informational, and Personal—follow the adopter side of the knowledge and persuasion process starting from the development of interest to the establishment of a personal assessment of adopting and its ramifications. In measuring process variables related to the decision to adopt the educational innovation under study, the researchers developed the LoU (Levels of Use) Inventory (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). In the first three stages of this model, teachers move from a lack of interest (Non-Use) to an Orientation Stage in which they begin to show interest in knowing more about the innovation. The decision to adopt is denoted by actual plans to use the innovation (Preparation Stage). A major limitation in any study of the process of becoming aware of and deciding to adopt the guidelines is that the highly specific data considerations just described are perhaps beyond the memory reach of most respondents.

So far, there are only two empirical studies that offer evidence of teacher educators' use of the guidelines. In Schrier's (1989) survey of FL teacher education in liberal arts colleges, Omaggio's *Teaching Language in Context* (1986) emerged as the most widely adopted FL methods textbook (19.56%). The most common foreign

“Personality traits that affect diffusion rates include empathy, open-mindedness, good abstract reasoning, a rational outlook, and intelligence.”

language proficiency assessment method reported was some derivative of the OPI, further illustrating the impact of the guidelines. In Grosse's (1993) study of FL methods course syllabuses, an analysis of instructional materials analysis revealed, as in the case of the Schrier study, that the Omaggio book was the dominant methods text (79 syllabuses cited). The table of contents of Omaggio's text appeared to influence the order of topics on a number of the syllabuses reviewed. Considering that the official proficiency guidelines were disseminated to the profession in 1986, these preliminary investigations into the adoption of the guidelines suggest that FL teacher educators were among the early adopters.

In investigating the literature on the adoption of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, little is known about how and to what extent the guidelines affected the FL teaching profession, particularly with regard to teacher preparation. Because FL teacher educators demonstrate adoption by including an educational innovation among the topics they promote in their programs, they are placed in the unique role of being both an adopter and an opinion leader for that innovation. Although we have indirect measures of their use of the guidelines through the prominence of a proficiency-oriented methods text, a more complete picture of how FL teachers responded to the guidelines remains to be constructed in order to understand where FL teacher educators stand in the diffusion process.

Methodology

The population in the present study included 83 Southeastern FL teacher educators (N=83), defined as full-time college faculty responsible for instructing the course on teaching FL in eleven Southeastern states. Out of this total, sixty questionnaires were returned (response rate of 72.3%). The return rate for each of the states (Table 1) was between 50% and 100%, with the exception of Kentucky (37.5%); thus the results of this census study may not necessarily speak for this state. The following results and discussion section will focus on questionnaire items (Appendix A) that were designed to investigate FL teacher educators' experience in the diffusion of the guidelines

Results and Discussion

Respondents were asked about their level of familiarity with four educational innovations that have been introduced to the profession over the years along a three-point Likert scale from *Very Familiar* (1) to *Somewhat Familiar* (2), and finally, *Not Familiar* (3). As indicated in Table 2, the highest mean on this scale (lower mean score indicating higher familiarity) belonged to the ACTFL Proficiency

Table 1: Comparison of Survey Return Rate State-by-State.

State	Possible # of returns	Actual # of returns	Response rate %
Alabama	6	5	83.33%
Arkansas	4	4	100%
Florida	7	5	62.5%
Georgia	9	8	88.88%
Kentucky	8	3	42.85%
Louisiana	6	3	50%
Mississippi	2	2	100%
North Carolina	12	9	75%
South Carolina	6	6	100%
Tennessee	9	7	77.77%
Virginia	14	8	57.14%
Total =	11	Total = 83	Total = 60
			Avg. = 72.3%

Guidelines ($x = 1.22$). The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning received the next highest mean rating ($x = 1.45$), followed by the recently published ACTFL K-12 Performance Guidelines ($x = 1.67$). The ACTFL Provisional Guidelines for FL Teacher Education (1988) received a mean score of 1.81, indicating that respondents, overall, were only *somewhat* familiar with this educational innovation. Since these teacher education guidelines were published prior to the performance guidelines (1986) and the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (1996), responses suggest that there was no simple, linear relationship between length of time in dissemination and level of familiarity.

With regard to pinpointing the time of adoption, the FL teacher educators who responded to the questionnaire tended to find out about the guidelines around the time the *provisional* tag was removed from the title in 1986. The majority of the respon-

dents (75.9%) appear to have first become familiar with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines during the first eight years after their initial, provisional introduction (1982-1990). This is a relatively short amount of time considering that complete diffusion of an educational innovation has been known to take up to 50 years (Mort & Cornell, 1941). That same time frame witnessed the respondents' first use of the guidelines (80.5% indicated having implemented the guidelines between 1982 and 1992). Given that four of the respondents were probably not working in the profession at that time, this is an impressive percentage.

Most of the respondents learned about the guidelines from a conference presentation or workshop (27), from a college or university course (19), or from a department faculty member (13). Others learned from professional literature or mailed materials (6) or from their OPI training (3). Though training in and use of the OPI for assessment of FL majors and teacher educators were fairly common among the responses (23), only six respondents reported having obtained ACTFL certification as an OPI tester. Only one of the respondents indicated having both pursued and maintained certification status. Four of six who indicated having allowed their certification status to lapse reported that time was a major factor preventing them from maintaining their certification status; two reported financial constraints as a hindering factor.

When asked about their knowledge of any ACTFL representative activity related to promoting the guidelines in their area, very few responded affirmatively (13). However, more than half of the respondents (37) cited themselves as local promoters of this educational innovation. Within this group promotion manifested itself in various ways:

- 48 indicated encouraging their teacher education candidates to continue developing their proficiency in the target language;
- 17 indicated they used the methods course or contact with students to promote the guidelines;

Table 2: Mean Scores on Indicators of Familiarity with Four ACTFL-Sponsored Educational Innovations.

ACTFL-led innovation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines	58	1.2241	.4971
National Standards for Foreign Language Learning	58	1.4483	.6535
ACTFL Performance Guidelines	58	1.6724	.7583
ACTFL Provisional Guidelines for Foreign Language Teacher Ed. (1988)	58	1.8103	.7364

- nine reported communicating with colleagues or conducting workshops for area FL teachers;
- six promoted the guidelines within their FL departments;
- five promoted the guidelines through conference workshops, presentations, or publications.

Part II of the survey also asked respondents to evaluate the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview and proficiency-oriented instruction on the basis of Rogers' (1995) criteria commonly used by adopters to evaluate innovations (*compatibility, trialability, observability of results, flexibility, and complexity*). Cost of implementation was also added as a criterion, since it had been raised as an issue in the dissemination of the OPI. On a scale of one to four, with four being the lowest rating in a particular category and one being the highest, respondents were asked to rate both innovations (proficiency-oriented instruction and the OPI) based on the criteria just mentioned.

As indicated in Table 3, while most of the ACTFL OPI ratings were in the 2 range (next to highest rating), this innovation received an average rating of 1.8 for relative advantage over traditional assessment methods. The lowest scores it received were in the categories of cost of implementation (2.68) and trialability (2.55). POI also received ratings averaging in the 2 range. Like the OPI, POI also received its best marks (1.53) for advantage over the traditional approach. The proficiency approach also received low marks (2.55) for cost of implementation. The similar low standing for cost of implementation suggested that respondents felt that these innovations were not favorable (i.e., they were too expensive) in this regard. Again, these results should be interpreted with caution since there is the possibility that some respondents might have equated low cost with a low score. The high standard deviations for both POI and OPI in this category ($\sigma = 1.13$ and $\sigma = 1.27$, respectively) are further evidence of potential confusion.

In this census of FL teacher educators in the Southeastern United States, it appears that many questionnaire respondents were among the early adopters of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. In the process of communicating the guidelines, it is not surprising to see that FL teachers reported that they were most familiar with this ACTFL-sponsored innovation. It comes as some surprise, however, that they were least familiar with the ACTFL innovation that perhaps most directly impacted them: the Provisional Guidelines for FL Teacher Education (1988). Lack of attention to this document

Table 3: Respondents' Ratings of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview and Proficiency-Oriented Instruction (1=lowest; 4=highest rating in given category).

The Oral Proficiency Interview

Innovation characteristic:	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Cost of implementation	41	2.6829	1.2736
Compatibility with FL instruction in my local area	49	2.551	.7089
Complexity	44	2.5455	.6973
Trialability (how easy is it to try out?)	46	2.3696	1.0189
Observability of results	47	2.766	.8773
Flexibility	47	2.0213	.7937
Relative advantage over traditional FL instruction	48	1.8542	.7987

Proficiency-Oriented Instruction

Innovation characteristic:	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Cost of implementation	44	2.5455	1.13
Compatibility with FL instruction in my local area	52	2.3077	.7286
Complexity	50	2.18	.8254
Trialability (how easy is it to try out?)	51	2.1373	.6639
Observability of results	51	1.9804	.7613
Flexibility	52	1.9423	.8498
Relative advantage over traditional FL instruction	53	1.5283	.6681

might have been a result of the lingering *provisional* status of this innovation. Nearly 15 years following their introduction and ACTFL's collaboration with NCATE (National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education), guidelines for foreign language teacher preparation were officially approved in October, 2002.

With regard to Southeastern FL teacher educators' assessment of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines as an educational innovation, these adopters appeared to be satisfied with both the OPI and POI applications of the guidelines, though the OPI might have been somewhat costly and difficult to try out or implement, as some respondents pointed out in item #30 on the questionnaire (see Appendix A). POI was perhaps not only somewhat costly to implement but also deemed somewhat complex, though as previously mentioned, interpretation of the complexity measure is undermined by a potential issue of questionnaire clarity. Overall, FL teacher educators appeared to find POI and the OPI to be relatively advantageous over traditional alternatives. Their articulations of POI stay well within the parameters set forth by the designers of the guidelines.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

Overall, Southeastern FL teacher educators appear to have been among the early proponents of the proficiency movement. In fact, many were active promoters of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986). Two aspects of the guidelines, the OPI and POI were judged to be more advantageous than more traditional alternatives. Many of these teacher educators expressed their commitment to the guidelines by stressing to their teaching candidates the importance of continuing the development of their target language proficiency. Others led efforts to promote the guidelines in their local area. With regard to the FL methods course, many of the respondents indicated

“Many of these teacher educators expressed their commitment to the guidelines by stressing to their teaching candidates the importance of continuing the development of their target language proficiency.”

using this forum as a vehicle for disseminating the guidelines to the pre- and in-service teachers they train. While these results suggest a prominent place for the teacher educator in the theater of educational change, it remains to be seen that foreign language teachers see themselves as change agents or how they might engage in such a role. In a related article (Warford, 2003), it was determined that Southeastern foreign language teachers do not participate actively in educational professional organizations outside of their discipline (i.e., the American Educational Research Association, Mid-South Educational Research Association), venues that would most likely provide guidance in promoting the use of FL teaching innovations in their area. They also expressed a tendency to identify with and consult campus colleagues over local area teachers and administrators. With growing attention to the importance of building strong interpersonal networks with area school district personnel in promoting lasting educational reform (Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2003; Fullan, 2001, Huberman, 1983), perhaps the time has come to take a closer look at whether or not, and to what extent FL teacher educators act as change agents on the local level.

Because this study was limited to a specific population, a nationwide sample study is needed to amplify the findings related in this article. A case study follow-up that adds the voices of ACTFL leaders, state and district supervisors, and PreK-12 teachers might also serve to round out a more comprehensive portrait of the guidelines' diffusion in the Southeast U.S. Also, with the preponderance of standards-based innovations that have recently entered the diffusion process [i.e., ACTFL-NCATE Guidelines for Foreign Language Teacher Preparation Programs, 2002; National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, 1996; Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Foreign Language Standards Committee, 2002], researchers have the unique opportunity to answer Rogers' (1995) call for studies that capture the innovation diffusion process as it is getting started and chart its progress in-depth over time. Now would be a good time for investigations documenting the progress of these guidelines through FL teacher education programs on national level.

Finally, an important issue that this article did not directly address is the impact of the guidelines on FL education within the Southeast and other regions. How and to what extent have the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines been implemented in the foreign language classroom? How has the introduction of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning changed the meaning of using the guidelines? Can we

definitively say that the POI and OPI/OPI-derived assessments have been fully institutionalized by the profession as the status quo of language pedagogy and practice? In tracking the often-variegated definition of what it means to implement a principles-based innovation, we should not be surprised to find a range of results. For example, whereas Wolf and Riordan (1991) discovered that teachers seemed less likely to implement the ACTFL guidelines the more they grappled with them. Allen (2002) has found that teachers were more likely to implement the national standards even if their grasp of that particular document was shallow. Findings such as these suggest that those leading the design and dissemination of language teaching innovations need to look carefully at the ways practitioners construct unique, localized adaptations of new ideas and practices. Hall (1992) asserts that there is a development-implementation imbalance in American education, with too much focus on the former without regard to the latter. Grounded research on the adopting practitioner's perspective may hold the key to designing diffusion campaigns that result in substantive changes in teaching and learning. Emergent sociocultural theoretical approaches to language teaching and learning (Lantolf, 2002), particularly the area of activity theory (Wang, 1996, in Donato, 2002), can complement research in the diffusion of educational innovations by deepening our understanding of the complex relationship between task and activity. Much in the same way that language learners engage in activity that extends or redefines the task set by the teacher, we should not be surprised to find the same dynamic at work between change agents and adopting practitioners.

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Appendix A: Survey of Foreign Language Teacher Educators

The following survey is divided into three sections. The first section asks for some background information. The second section focuses on what you might know about the process of disseminating the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The final section asks information regarding their adoption and implementation.

II. ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES DISSEMINATION

12. How would you define 'proficiency-oriented instruction' (FL instruction derived from the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines)?:

13. How familiar are you with...? (1 = **Very familiar**, 2 = **Somewhat familiar**, 3 = **Not familiar**):

	VF	SF	NF
ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1982, 1986)	___1___	___2___	___3___
ACTFL Provisional Guidelines for FL Teacher Education Programs (1993)	___1___	___2___	___3___
National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (K-12) (1996)	___1___	___2___	___3___
ACTFL Performance Guidelines (1998)	___1___	___2___	___3___

14. As best you can remember, when did you first learn of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines ('82, '86)?

___'82-'84 ___'84-'86 ___'86-'88 ___'88-'90

___'90-'92 ___'92-'94 ___'94-'96 ___'98-'99

___ I'm really not at all familiar with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (If you check this item, feel free to skip any of the following items which do not apply)

15. How did you **first** become familiar with the Proficiency Guidelines? **Check all that apply:**

___ Through a colleague at work.

___ At a conference workshop / presentation on _____

___ Through a college/university course

___ Other. Please describe: _____

16. Have you implemented the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines?

___ Yes ___ No

If 'Yes', approximately when did you first put them into practice?

___'82-'84 ___'84-'86 ___'86-'88 ___'88-'90

___'90-'92 ___'92-'94 ___'94-'96 ___'98-'99

___ Haven't put them into practice. (If checked, please skip any items that don't apply.)

17. Are you aware of activity of ACTFL representatives related to promoting the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines in your area?

___ Yes ___ No

If you answered 'Yes,' please describe:

18. Have you played a role in promoting the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines? ___ Yes ___ No

If you answered 'Yes,' please describe your role:

19. Have you received training in use of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview? ___ Yes ___ No

20. Have you obtained official certification as an ACTFL OPI interviewer/rater? ___ Yes ___ No

If 'Yes,' and you have allowed your certification to lapse, why? (Check all that apply)

___ Lack of time ___ Financial reasons

___ Other (please describe): _____

24. Please rate the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) according to the following criteria:

1 indicates the highest rating in the given category, 4 indicates the lowest

Relative advantage over traditional assessment methods:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Compatibility with FL instruction in my area:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Trialability:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Observability of results:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Flexibility:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Complexity:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Cost of implementation:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___

25. Please rate your impressions of proficiency-oriented instruction along the following criteria:

1 indicates the highest rating in the given category, 4 indicates the lowest:

Relative advantage over traditional FL Instruction:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Compatibility with FL instruction in my area:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Trialability:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Observability of results:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Flexibility:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Complexity:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Cost of implementation:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___
Interns enrolled in this program:	___1___	___2___	___3___	___4___