Objective

To identify, develop, and test a set of linguistic features of Russian that correlate with Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) proficiency levels 2, 2+, and 3. Once implemented and integrated into the language curriculum, these correlates will enable teachers and testers to target learning requirements at each level more accurately and will provide foreign language professionals guidance for mastering level-specific language features.

Definition

**Linguistic correlates of proficiency** are language features—including sounds, vocabulary, collocations, and grammar—that correspond to ILR levels 2, 2+, and 3, indicating which of these features are mastered at a specific ILR level, and which may still pose problems for English-speaking learners of Russian.

Findings

The following preliminary findings are based on test data collected from second-language learners and heritage speakers on 39 perception and production tasks:

1. A substantial number of the tasks (or features) effectively differentiate ILR proficiency levels.
2. Heritage speakers perform significantly better than second-language learners at the same ILR level on some tasks.
3. Learners appear to acquire some linguistic features in distinct stages, while they acquire other features via a gradual incremental increase in accuracy.
4. Production tasks tend to differentiate within the ILR 2–3 range better than perception tasks.

Relevance

Many less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) are critical to national security; however, the demand for language professionals in these languages often far exceeds supply. The long-term goal of this research is to improve the teaching, learning, and testing of LCTLs by providing detailed, empirically based checklists of linguistic correlates of ILR proficiency levels. With such checklists, teachers, testers, and foreign language professionals themselves could help to increase learners’ (or their own) levels of proficiency and, in turn, increase the depth of the U.S. Government’s LCTL talent pool.

Reports & Products

- Report: *Advancing Russian language learning with linguistic correlates of proficiency* (July 2009)
- Products: Two checklists of linguistic features of Russian that differentiate ILR levels 2 to 4: Production & Perception

For More Information

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**Perception of Hard and Soft Consonants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position in the word</th>
<th>ILR Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft before /i, e/</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft before /a, o, u/</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft word-finally</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherently hard /š, ž, c/ before /y/</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preliminary data show that the correct perception of hard and soft consonants depends on the following vowel and correlates with ILR levels.