



MAJOR BORDERS AND THRESHOLDS

10. The proficiency rating scale is divided by borders.

- Major borders divide the major levels of the scale (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior). A major border is a line of demarcation on which it is impossible to remain undecided because it establishes a speaker's sustained performance of the tasks that define the major level. In the description of proficiency, the insistence on control of the required functions is essential, while in testing any doubt about performance at the threshold leads to the lower rating.
- When the tasks are sustained barely above the major border, then the speaker is functioning at the threshold within the next level. Such threshold performance profiles are indicated by the "Low" sublevels of the rating scale.
- When the tasks are not sustained, i.e., the major border is not crossed because of the speaker's inability to fully control the requirements of the next level, then the threshold performance is indicated by the "High" sublevels of the rating scale. The "High" represents a fall from the next higher level, rather than a strong ability demonstrated at the general level.

The following illustration is an example of threshold and major border.

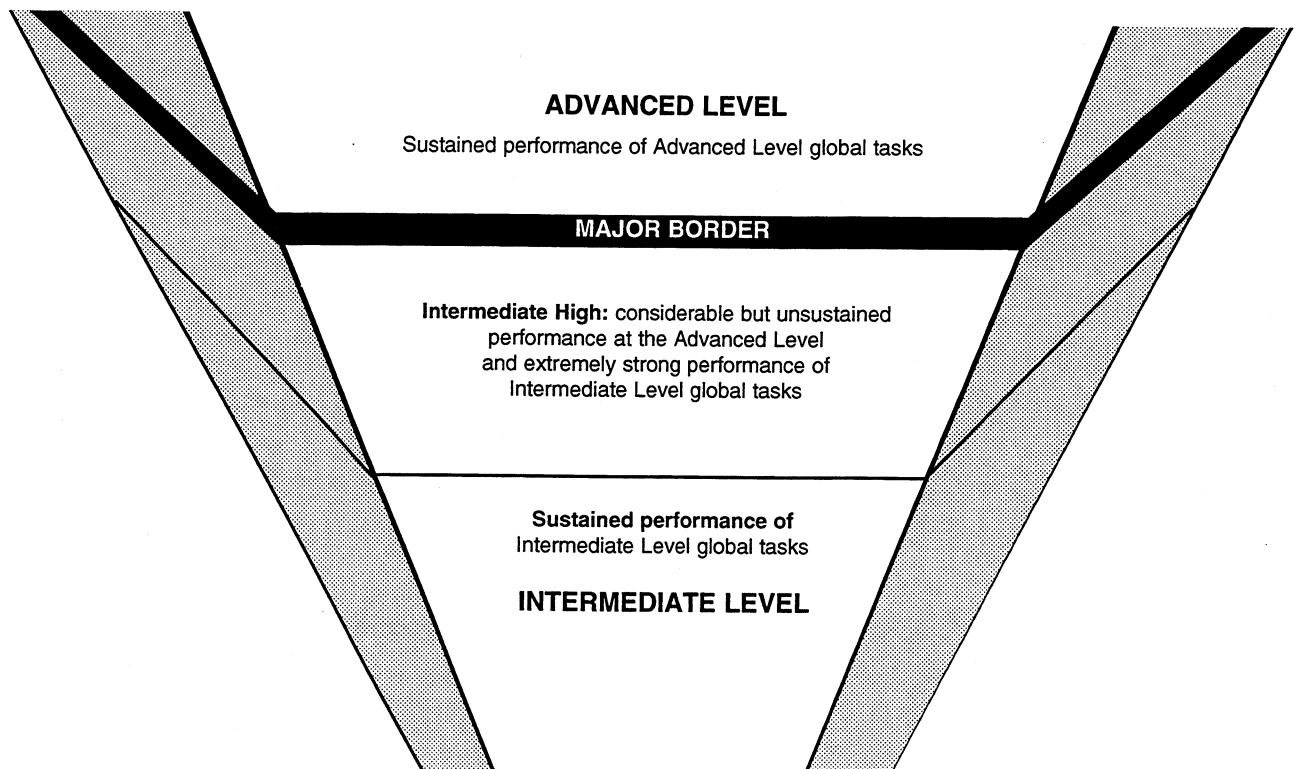


Figure 3: Example of Threshold and Major Border.



SUBLEVELS

11. The major levels are further divided by minor borders into High, Mid and Low range-internal minor sublevels.
- These sublevels differ from each other in terms of the quantity as well as the quality of language with which a certain task is performed. The former refers to the sheer volume of speech produced; the latter refers to the efficiency and effectiveness with which a message has been conveyed. Thus both quantity and quality indicate a speaker's increasing flexibility in using the language.

The "High" sublevel:

- Speakers at "High" sublevels communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of their respective level. They are capable of functioning much of the time at the next higher level and may spontaneously raise the exchange to that level, but they are unable to sustain language at that next higher level without intermittent lapses or evidences of difficulty. These inadequacies may be evidenced in the inability to handle one particular function or the unwillingness to treat certain topics on the next higher level. The result is a lessening of the overall performance, i.e., a form of linguistic breakdown that is generally mild and limited in scope: a drop in fluency, a lessening of control and accuracy, an intrusion of syntactic or lexical elements from other languages, or some form of avoidance, sometimes accompanied by paralinguistic indicators such as nervous laughter, sighing, fidgeting or other body movements indicating discomfort.
- The dynamic of the "High" is therefore best understood in a top-down representation of proficiency: the "High" represents a fall from the next higher level rather than a strong ability demonstrated at the general level. Hence, while Advanced-High speakers show solid and sustained ability to provide lengthy narrations and detailed descriptions in all time-frames with good control of aspect, it is more significant to note that, when required to perform Superior level functions, they demonstrate some form of linguistic breakdown or some pattern of error.

The "Mid" sublevel:

- Speakers at the "Mid" level represent a number of speech profiles, based on their particular mix of quantity (sheer volume of speech produced) and/or quality (efficiency and effectiveness with which meaning is communicated) at level, and/or the degree to which they control language features from the next higher level base level.



The “Low” sublevel:

- Speakers at the “Low” level summon up all their linguistic energy to sustain the requirements of the level. They exhibit less fluency and accuracy, more lexical confusion (even some surprising lapses in vocabulary) and more self-correction than the Mid speaker. The “Low” functions primarily within the level with little or no demonstrated ability on the next higher level.

white knuckle flyers → just hang on