COMPARISON OF INTERPERSONAL AND PRESENTATIONAL DESCRIPTION IN
RUSSIAN ORAL PROFICIENCY TESTING

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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2005

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ABSTRACT

The two major testing tools for oral proficiency assessment in Russian are the OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) and the SOPI (Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview). SOPI was developed as an equivalent to the OPI to be used in situations when it is impossible or impractical to use the OPI. Though in recent decades much attention has been directed to the analysis of the validity of the two tests, no research has focused on the investigation of whether the mode of the test influences testees’ performance.

The current study takes the first steps in examining how the modality of the speech (interpersonal in the OPI versus presentational in the SOPI) affects the language production of learners of Russian in a speaking proficiency test [in general and with regard to subjects who took both the OPI and the SOPI within the same week of testing]. This study focuses on the language function of oral description which, according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Guidelines, is one of the core functions of Advanced-level performance.

The primary data, obtained through ACTFL, the Center for Applied Linguistics, the Middlebury Russian School, and the Ohio State University, consist of officially recorded OPIs as well as officially and non-officially recorded SOPIs of testees’ with an oral proficiency rating between Intermediate High and Superior. Additional data come from OPIs and SOPIs collected from Native Speakers of Russian currently residing in the US.
The methodological framework of this dissertation is based on Shohamy’s (Hebrew) and Koike’s research (Spanish) comparing OPI and SOPI speech. It also largely hinges on Rifkin’s work, which examines the syntax of the function of narration given by Russian learners. The current study investigates OPI and SOPI description by analyzing syntactic and lexical complexity. The analysis of syntactic complexity allows the researcher to hypothesize as to why one test constantly exhibits a higher frequency of subordination. The analysis of lexical complexity establishes the correlation between content and function items produced and allows the researcher to conclude why one test elicits more “less frequently used lexical items” [and affects students’ lexicon diversity].

Although previous research on the correlation, comparability, and validity of OPI and SOPI ratings suggests that both tests adhere to the same ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines and elicit the same speech samples, the present research questions the validity of the SOPI at Intermediate-High through Superior levels.

The hypothesis is that the difference in the syntactic and lexical complexity of speech produced in the two tests lies in the modality of the tests, the prompts used by the OPI and the SOPI, and testees’ psychological comfort during the test. Further investigation is needed to reveal the affect of the modality of the test on testees’ communicative strategies, discourse features, and other linguistic characteristics.
To my husband and best friend, Jeff Parker
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratefulness to my advisors, Dr. Benjamin Rifkin and Dr. Brian Joseph, for infinite inspiration, insightful input, intellectual support, cheering, and enthusiasm which made this research possible. Without their faith, encouragement, help and patience this research would still be in the evolutionary stage. They helped me see the importance of my research for the field of language testing and led me through these challenging years towards the completion of my dissertation.

I wish to thank Dr. Daniel Collins and Dr. Valerie Pellegrino who helped me in the beginning stage of this research and who offered valuable intellectual input. Also, my special thanks to Dr. Daniel Collins for his interest in my research, his comments and suggestions. Slavic Department provided me with valuable support to obtain my official data from professional organizations. Without this help I would not have come so far.

I am deeply grateful to my mother and grandmother who kept encouraging me during these two years of writing. My thanks to them and to the rest of my family who believed in me, expressed their patience and provided me with moral support for the past couple of years.

Finally, I am endlessly thankful to my husband, who cheered and supported me daily, who was extremely patient and extra generous with his time to edit my stylistic errors and correct my mistakes, and who continuously encouraged me through the years.
of my Graduate School and research. My degree and this dissertation would not have been accomplished without him.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the Oral Proficiency Guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the ability to describe in all time frames in cohesive paragraph-length discourse or longer is one of the required functions of advanced oral proficiency. This project focused on the language function of oral description produced by learners of Russian in two different but related kinds of oral proficiency interviews, the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI). The project compared linguistic features of testees’ description: syntactic and lexical complexity of speech elicited in each of the tests. Since description appears as a core function only in the Intermediate High, Advanced Low, Mid, and High, and Superior levels of these tests, this project focuses exclusively on those levels.

The OPI is a face-to-face or telephone interview of a speaker of a foreign language conducted by a tester certified by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). In the OPI, description is elicited by the examiner in the context of live interaction. The description is thus in interpersonal mode, as defined in the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1999), because the testee and tester
interact as they negotiate the communication of information in the testee's responses to
the tester's questions. The SOPI is a test administered by the Center for Applied
Linguistics (CAL) in which the student being tested is given a test booklet and a tape
with oral prompts. The test booklet contains instructions and visual prompts for each
task. The student then records his or her speech in response to the oral prompts; students'
responses must fit in the predetermined time allotted each prompt. There is no live
interaction component in the SOPI, and therefore speech elicited by the SOPI would be
classified as presentational in mode according to the definitions of the National Standards
for Foreign Language Learning (1999). Raters certified by CAL receive the tape and
assess the speech production for each of the prompts in accordance with criteria
corresponding to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines.

The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning¹ (1999) distinguish
between interpersonal and presentational modes of communication. This suggests that the
two testing formats may actually be assessing two different kinds of communication. In
the interpersonal mode, there is "active negotiation of meaning among
individuals…There is a higher probability of ultimately achieving the goal of successful
communication in this mode" than in the presentational mode (36). The presentational
mode, which is a "one-way" communication effort, presents "no direct opportunity for the
active negotiation of meaning" between interlocutors. During the OPI, a testee receives
clues and feedback from the tester regarding whether the information given is sufficient
or not. In the SOPI setting such feedback is not available due to the one-way nature of the
speech performance. Indeed, the imagined interlocutor is actually only imagined, and
cannot ask for clarification or indicate comprehension of the speaker’s message by verbal

¹ Henceforth the *National Standards.*
or non-verbal means. Therefore, it is assumed that the two testing formats may actually be assessing two different kinds of communication.

This research project started with a question: “Does the modality of the speech (interpersonal in the OPI versus presentational in the SOPI) affect the language production of learners of Russian in a speaking proficiency test?” To answer this question, I analyzed samples of descriptions in existing officially recorded oral proficiency interviews of students of Russian obtained through ACTFL (the OPI data), the Center for Applied Linguistics (the SOPI data), and oral exams taken by instructors of Russian at the Ohio State University in 2003 and students of Russian at the Middlebury Russian School in the summer of 2003. In addition to these data, I recorded descriptions of places, people, and objects from six native Russians for purposes of comparison to an “ideal” description. The responses of native speakers served as a model of a possible discourse elicited by the OPI and the SOPI, to which I compared non-Russian speakers’ performance of description. Native Russians were asked to perform description tasks similar or identical to those in the OPI and SOPI.

I chose to investigate description for two reasons: First, description is one of the core functions required for advanced level speech according to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines. Second, while previous research has examined other speech functions in proficiency testing (narrating, giving instructions, speculating about advantages and disadvantages, stating opinion, and making requests), description has not yet been considered either in Russian or across languages. Nor has there been a substantial comparison of interpersonal and presentational modes of speaking. Moreover, little work has been done in the area of analysis of testing for Russian. My research
pioneers analysis in how modality affects the assessment of learning outcomes in the two predominant speaking foreign language oral proficiency exams for any foreign language. Finally, I have chosen to investigate an advanced level function because previous analysis of American students’ foreign language proficiency (Magnan, 1986; Thompson, 1996; Brecht, Davidson and Ginsberg, 1993; Davidson, 1998, 2002; and Rifkin, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005) has shown that students completing three or four years of foreign language study at the university level “typically demonstrate oral proficiency in the intermediate range” (Rifkin, 2000: 64) and therefore the advanced low level corresponds most closely to the classroom concerns for most teachers. Moreover, my interest in the Advanced level stems from its proximity to the level at which learners attain minimal working competency in a foreign language, Advanced Low, according to U.S. federal employment standards for employees whose jobs require any degree of language expertise.

I analyze the syntactic and lexical complexity of description in order to understand the differences and similarities in speech produced in each test. That is, a high correlation of speech complexity will provide evidence that the tests measure similar things and therefore may be used for comparable purposes with, one would expect, analogous results, whereas a low correlation will show the opposite. The results of my research will help language professionals better understand the difference between interpersonal and presentational speaking in the learning and teaching dynamic and in the area of testing and teaching Russian as a foreign language.

My approach to the analysis of syntactic complexity of discourse was based on the recent research done by Rifkin on complex syntax in the speech of learners in the
other core function of advanced level speech, narration. In his 2002 study, “A Case Study of the Acquisition of Narration in Russian”, Rifkin “explored the nature of narration in the speech of native speakers of Russian” and learners of Russian “with regard to the frequency of complex sentences in their discourse” (2002: 466). My analysis provided complementary information about the other critical function of advanced-level speech: description. The analysis of syntactic complexity examined the use of subordinate clauses and hypothesized why one test elicited more complex syntax than the other. I argue that the prompts used by both tests, the modality of the test, and the students' psychological comfort all affect their production of complex syntax during a speaking proficiency test.

The analysis of lexical complexity of language samples was based on previous work by Shohamy (1994) and Halliday (1989). By “lexical complexity” I mean lexical density and lexical diversity of speech. Lexical density measures the balance between content and function items “as a proportion of a total number of running words in the text” (Halliday, 1989: 64). Content items are nouns, full lexical verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Function items are determiners (articles and quantifiers), pronouns, prepositions, numerals, conjunctions, interjections, negative particles, and auxiliary and modal verbs. Lexical diversity measures the semantic variety of content and function items in the text, while lexical density measures the number of content and function items.

Though the data of this research raise questions for which I have conflicting results, the lack of consistency in results shows how important this discussion is. In the final chapter of this dissertation I discuss the importance of this research project, the
implications of my findings for language testing and teaching, and suggest directions for
the further research in the field of language testing and language teaching.
CHAPTER 2

ORAL PROFICIENCY TESTING AND STANDARDS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

This Chapter will discuss the field of oral proficiency testing in connection with the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1999). The discussion about oral proficiency testing will review the origins of the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI), the components of these two tests, and the guidelines and assessment criteria for each level discussed in the research. The section on the SOPI will survey in detail the structure of the Russian SOPI. The overview of Standards for Foreign Language Learning will address the five goal areas of the national standards for foreign language learning and foreign language curriculum, which are referred to as the “5 Cs”: communication, comparison, communities, connections, and culture. The chapter ends with a discussion of communication goals, the three “communicative modes” as differentiated by Standards: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational.
2.1 Oral Proficiency Interview.

2.1.1 Historical Development of the OPI System.

The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is a face-to-face or telephone interview of a speaker of a foreign language conducted by a tester certified by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The OPI appeared in the US out of practical necessity when, during World War II, many military personnel were found to have insufficient ability to communicate in foreign languages. Thus, in 1942 the first U.S. language training program, the Army Specialized Training Program, was developed to teach communicative skills in area studies, medicine, and engineering (Chalhoub-Deville and Fulcher). As Angiolillo (1947: 32) states, the goals were “to impart to the trainee a command of the colloquial spoken form of a language and to give the trainee a sound knowledge of the area in which the language is used”. Chalhoub-Deville and Fulcher continue

...promoting the teaching and assessment of practical language use became a driving force in government language schools. Teachers in the ASTP programs designed their own tests to assess the communicative ability of their students. These tests consisted of picture descriptions, sustained speech, and directed conversation (2003: 499).

In 1944 Kaulfers created the first scale for rating communicative ability in the tasks mentioned above. He proposed two categories for rating this “proto-OPI”: “scope of oral performance and quality of oral performance”. By “quality” he meant intelligibility, and by the scope of oral performance Kaulfers’ intent was that a speaker be able to do the following:

1. make known only a few essential wants in set phrases or sentences.
2. give and secure the routine information required in independent travel abroad.
3. discuss common topics and interests of daily life extemporaneously.
4. converse extemporaneously on any topic within the range of his knowledge or experience (Kaulfers, 1944: 144)

The OPI originated in the US State Department’s Foreign Service Institute and spread to other government agencies through the organization of government language professionals, the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) (Malone, Language Testing, 2002). The OPI scale for assessment of language speaking proficiency took into consideration accent, fluency, grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension. Each area was measured on a six-point scale.

In the 1950s the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) became dissatisfied with existing language tests and developed a proficiency-based testing system to evaluate the language skill of its employees. The FSI developed and described five levels of language speaking proficiency ranging, “from basic survival competency (Level 1- Elementary Proficiency) up to the native competency of an educated native speaker of the language (Level 5- Native or Bilingual Proficiency)” (Johnson, 2001: 6-7). By the mid-1950s, language proficiency testing became obligatory for all Foreign Service officers. To evaluate the oral proficiency skills of its employees, government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Peace Corps adopted the FSI OPI system in the 1960s. The mutual goal of these agencies was to modify the FSI system into a standardized version in order to test language. The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) turned FSI’s five-point scale into an eleven-point scale. The Peace Corps introduced the FSI rating scale to nongovernmental institutions by joining with the
Educational Testing Service (ETS) to develop both training and interviewing programs for assessing the oral skills of their volunteers and officers (Magnan, 1987).

However, in early 1980s the ETS concluded that the ILR OPI rating scale did not let students demonstrate the ability to use the foreign language meaningfully due to the fact that many students believed to have some proficiency nonetheless scored the lowest rating (zero) (Liskin-Gasparro, 1984). Since “the ILR version of the interview was designed primarily for government language use, ACTFL collaborated with Educational Testing Services in the late 1970s to develop a similar scale useable in the academic setting” (Malone, 2003: 491).

Later the President’s Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies requested the establishment of proficiency guidelines and goals for oral proficiency skills assessment among students, and ACTFL in 1982 responded to this call by introducing guidelines to assess students’ speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills and to provide ways to evaluate foreign language teaching (Arnett and Haglund, 2001). In accordance with the proposed guidelines, ACTFL developed its own Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI2) to measure oral proficiency. “ACTFL modifies the ILR scale to give it finer increments at the lower end of the proficiency scale. The ACTFL scale includes more gradations between the ILR levels 0+ and 2” (Johnson, 2001: 8)3. The OPI thus differentiates four major levels ultimately broken down into three sublevels at all but the highest level as follows: Superior (ILR 3-5), Advanced Low, Mid and High

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2 Henceforth all references to OPI refer to the ACTFL OPI developed for use in 1982 and used ever since in sightly revised versions.

3 The ACTFL scale has more gradations between 0 and 2. Novice Mid is below 0+, so Johnson is a little inaccurate in her definition of the ACTFL scale.
(ILR 2, 2+), Intermediate Low, Mid and High (ILR 1, 1+), and Novice Low, Mid and High (ILR 0, 0+).

To improve the effectiveness and accuracy of the OPI, the initial guidelines were revised in 1986 and recently in 1999 (Liskin-Gasparro, 2003). The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines of 1986 were based on the guidelines developed by the government (the Foreign Service Institute and the Interagency Language Roundtable) but were designed to be used in academic settings.

The revision of 1986 implemented these important changes.

First, it subdivided Intermediate and Novice levels of proficiency, adding three sublevels: High, Mid, and Low. Such a subdivision was considered necessary to enhance the accuracy of the assessment instrument. The Advanced level was divided into Advanced and Advanced Plus sublevels.

Second, the ACTFL OPI took into account the fact that the majority of students do not reach high proficiency levels in a foreign language classroom and collapsed the two highest levels of the ILR OPI 4 and 5 into ACTFL's OPI level of superior, leaving only four levels from 0 to 3, or Novice through Superior.

In 1999, the Advanced level was subdivided into three sublevels as well. Below is the table (table 1.1) that depicts the ACTFL and ILR scale values at present (ILR scale values are taken from Swender, 2003: 525).
Table 1.1: The ACTFL and ILR Proficiency Levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTFL</th>
<th>ILR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>3 and higher, i.e., 3+, 4, 4+, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced High</td>
<td>2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Mid</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Low</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Mid</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Low</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice High</td>
<td>0+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice Mid</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice Low</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since ACTFL developed a rating scale to be used in educational settings where students rarely score as Superior level speakers, the ACTFL rating of Superior corresponds, minimally, with the ILR scale 3, though it also includes the ILR scales 4, 4+ and 5. Level 5 is the equivalent of the well educated native speaker. 

Third, the description of language skills was rewritten. The ACTFL Guidelines present a “global characterization of integrated performance” and are “arranged in a hierarchical order. Each description is a representative, not exhaustive, sample of a particular range of ability, and each level subsumes all previous levels” (ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview Tester Training Manual⁴, 1999: i).

The revision of 1999 further refined the guidelines. First, it actually changed the presentation of the guidelines in the summary chart: levels of ranking are introduced in top-down rather than bottom-up order. Second, the Advanced Plus level was renamed Advanced High to conform to the pattern of Novice High and Intermediate High. Third, the revision of 1999 introduced the distinction between Advanced Low and Advanced Mid of what previously was just the Advanced level. Thus, the ACTFL OPI gradation of

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⁴ Henceforth the *ACTFL OPI TTM*. 
oral proficiency now consists of four major levels with nine sublevels. Arnett and Haglund contend that the adoption of these 1999 revisions did not change the procedure of the test: both rater training and assessment procedure remained the same.

Today the OPI is used in a wide range of spheres: by government agencies, in academic environments (placements and assessments), and for private purposes. With the help of the OPI it is possible to assess one’s ability in a foreign language, to place students into appropriate language classrooms, to evaluate students’ language skills, to determine who comes into a program, to establish one’s proficiency for employment matters (hiring and promotions), and to fulfill evaluative and research purposes such as program evaluation and professional certification. Currently in the USA, the method of assigning an appropriate rating of speaking skills based on the ACTFL Speaking Proficiency Guidelines of 1999 and the OPI is a widespread method of assessing students' proficiency/speaking ability in a second or foreign language. “Through Language Testing International (LTI), the exclusive ACTFL testing office, ACTFL conducts, rates, and archives 8,000 to 10,000 oral proficiency interviews each year” (Swender, 2003: 520). Malone (2003: 492) provides statistics about the number of OPIs administered by LTI from 1995 to 2003. In 1995 the number of OPIs was 2,660; in 2000 LTI conducted 8,961 OPIs; in 2002 6,183 OPIs were administered. According to Malone, the most popular languages in which the ACTFL OPI is conducted are ESL, Spanish, German, French, and Russian. For a number of less-commonly taught languages, such as Chinese, Arabic, and Japanese, language-specific proficiency guidelines were developed. Provisional language specific guidelines were developed for Russian (Foreign Language Annals, 1988) but
were never formally adapted by the Russian field. The total number of languages for which the ACTFL OPI is conducted in 37 different languages, as listed in Table 1.2.

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<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
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<td>Haitian Creole</td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
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Table 1.2: Languages in which the ACTFL OPI is conducted.

2.1.2 What Is the OPI and What Does It Measure?

What is the “Oral Proficiency Interview” in the ACTFL framework? The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview Tester Training Manual (ACTFL OPI TTM) defines it as a standardized procedure for the global assessment of functional speaking ability; i.e., it measures language production holistically by determining patterns of strength and weaknesses. It also establishes a speaker’s level of consistent functional ability as well as the clear upper limitations of that ability. (1999: 1)

Essentially, this means that the OPI measures how well a testee speaks in accordance with the criteria of language assessment outlined in the ACTFL Proficiency Speaking Guidelines rather than in comparison with other individuals performing the same tasks. The OPI measures speaking proficiency and ability to use the language appropriately and effectively in real-life situations rather than measuring an achievement.
in the target language. “The OPI assesses language proficiency in terms of the ability to respond to questions and tasks in a structured interview” (Swender, 2003: 521). Thus, such matters as when, why, how, where and under what conditions a testee learnt the language are irrelevant to the tester or the rating.

The official ACTFL OPI is conducted live by a trained and certified proficiency tester. The interview is tape-recorded, and then it is assigned an initial rating. The same interview is next “blindly rated by a second certified tester,” meaning that the second tester is not told the rating given by the first tester. If the ratings of two testers are the same, an official rating is recorded and an official OPI certificate is granted to the testee. In those cases when two testers disagree, a third rating is solicited from another certified tester; again, this is a blind rating.

There are four areas of assessment in the OPI:

- global tasks or functions performed with the language;
- the social contexts and the content areas in which the language can be used;
- the accuracy features which define how well the speaker performs the tasks pertinent to those contexts and content areas,
- and the oral text type (from individual words to extended discourse) produced. (ACTFL OPI TTM, 1999:2)

By “global tasks and functions” ACTFL means different things at different levels. At the Novice level minimal communication with enumerating and listing is expected. At the Intermediate level speakers have the ability to create with the language and to handle an uncomplicated conversation by asking and answering simple questions, to get into and through a simple communicative situation such as making a purchase at a store or buying tickets for a concert. At the Advanced level speakers can describe and narrate in all three time frames as well as compare, request, complain, place an order, apologize, give an
explanation, or manage a situation with a complication. At the Superior level speakers argue, support their opinions, hypothesize, and circumlocute. A situation with a complication is a routine situation that is “invaded by complications which add an unexpected twist, requiring recourse to linguistic strategies and functions that are the mark of the Advanced level, such as explanation, description, narration, justification, all within a linguistic framework of connected discourse of paragraph length” (*ACTFL OPI TTM*, 1999: 100). By “routine situations” ACTFL means daily life activities in which people are involved on a regular basis. Routine situations may include habitual activities in the context of an individual’s daily life such as home, school, work, friends, or “social needs and exchanges of goods and services” and may include “survival” situations such as getting food or arranging transportation. Thus, for example buying an item in a store requires the ability to ask and answer questions with sentence-level discourse, which is a function and a text type of Intermediate proficiency. However, trying to return an item at a store is considered a situation with a complication as it requires a speaker to narrate and describe in the past tense about what was found wrong with the item (why the speaker decided to return the item to the store) and to make arrangements for a refund. Another example of a situation with a complication might be giving an explanation to a friend about how the speaker got the friend’s car into an accident and offering a solution, or making arrangements with a teacher for a make-up exam.

“Global tasks are not performed in isolation, but in a particular social context”. (*ACTFL OPI TTM*, 1999: 23). Contexts and content areas include topics discussed and linguistic or situational circumstances in which the tasks are performed. “The term context refers to circumstances or settings in which a person uses language” (1999: 23).
Depending upon the level, speakers are expected to perform in formal or informal contexts. “The Guidelines indicate a hierarchical arrangement of communicative encounters based on the amount and type of language they require” (1999: 23).

Thus, Novice speakers operate only in the simplest and “most common informal settings”, which are basic, concrete in nature, and predictable. Novice speakers function in the context of daily life settings in the present using mostly memorized material. For example, when asked about personal interests, a Novice level speaker might delineate activities or list hobbies. Intermediate speakers communicate in the context of “some informal settings and a limited number of transactional situations”. That is, such speakers can function in the concrete context of most common daily life activities. Such speakers can maintain a basic conversation, asking and answering uncomplicated questions. For example in the context of speaking to a prospective roommate, an Intermediate speaker is able to start a conversation by giving simple information about him/herself and then to ask simple questions to find out more information about the interlocutor. An example of a transactional situation (a situation without a complication) could be buying a token at a Moscow metro station.

The higher the level of language proficiency, the wider and more demanding the context of interaction becomes. Upper-level speakers need to show the “ability to flexibly utilize available linguistic resources. Flexibility is required due to the unpredictable turns a conversation might take and to the complexity of the interaction” (1999: 23). Advanced speakers manage not only most informal contexts but also some formal ones, along with situations with a complication, though still operating in the concrete. The Superior level of proficiency requires handling informal and most formal settings in a wide range of
known and unknown contexts. An example of an informal situation is a discussion with friends, as opposed to stating an opinion about the pros and cons of studying at a state university to a group of students or discussing “professional goals with a potential employer” which are examples of formal settings (*ACTFL OPI TTM*, 1999: 91). The formal setting requires a speaker to produce appropriate forms of address and titles, as well as some language adjustment (1999: 23, 24, 91).

“The term ‘content’ refers to topics or themes of conversation. Content is the most variable element of the OPI and depends, in large part, on the interests and the background of the interviewee” (*ACTFL OPI TTM*, 1999: 23). Novice speakers are limited in the repertoire of information that they can produce. Their responses depend on the context in which the foreign language was learned. Therefore, Novice speakers are unable to create with the language (“to produce language independent of the interlocutor in the conversational mode, to initiate and sustain a meaningful exchange, or to carry out linguistic tasks required for true oral interaction necessary for daily activities” (1999: 108) but they can manipulate the memorized material. The content of Novice-level speakers’ responses is minimal and limited to the “most common aspects of daily life” and “immediate needs”, such as memorized information about oneself (name, age, occupation, and etc.), one’s ritualized daily activities, greetings, “personal experience”. The Novice-level speaker can produce the above utterances only when the tester provides him/her with an appropriate stimuli or comfortable and secure circumstances for a response.

The content of Intermediate level speakers’ responses includes familiar topics about personal information, oneself, daily life, hobbies, food, clothing, and travel.
Intermediate level speakers are able to perform in simple, unsophisticated and routine exchanges which are “associated with the social situations encountered in daily life”: meeting people, shopping, receiving information. For example, in the context of looking for a place to rent, an Intermediate speaker can explain what type of place he/she wants and ask the landlord questions about the place.

The content of Advanced-level speakers’ responses covers “topics of personal general interest” and topics of interest to others. Advanced-level speakers easily take part in most informal and some formal settings, and approach the discussion of topics related to home, school, work, free time activities as well as current events on a concrete level. In the context of being at a Russian restaurant, Advanced-level speakers can handle a situation with a complication by explaining to the waiter that the speaker has forgotten his/her money at home and wants to make arrangements to pay the bill.

The context of Superior-level speakers’ responses covers “a wide range of general interest topics and some special fields of interest and expertise”. Superior-level speakers can discuss both concrete and abstract topics and exhibit an ability to use circumlocution when necessary. The difference between handling concrete versus abstract topics lays not in the kinds of topics discussed but rather in the manner of formulation, presentation and elaboration. “References to a speaker’s own experience and knowledge, however broad or accurate, are basically concrete” (1999:91). Thus, if a speaker incorporates into his or her speech anecdotal descriptions and explanations, these are considered a representation of concrete people, things, events, places, etc. Such a response would be rated below Superior level. The abstract discussion of some concrete issues or problems requires the discussion of various viewpoints on the matter in the form of a debate and an explanation
of generalizable principles. In such a debate, contradicting views stand in competing positions, polemics are needed, and abstract formulations of the language are used. Thus, for example, in the context of a film discussion a Superior-level speaker can elaborate on the importance of the plot in its historical context in abstract terms without falling back on a concrete example.

The accuracy of the interviewee’s speech performance takes into account grammar, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, appropriateness and acceptability in a sociolinguistic setting (what is generally associated with a certain setting, in a certain situation), and appropriateness of discourse strategies to manage a task. When assessing accuracy a tester parses the area mentioned above for repetitive mistakes (patterned errors). For instance, Superior speakers do not have patterned errors in their syntax and grammar; therefore, a listener is not distracted by the occurrence of such mistakes. At the Advanced level, accuracy is determined “in terms of comprehensibility”- that is in spite of a speaker’s sporadic misuse of verbal forms and their aspects, and/or incorrect case endings, the listener’s comprehension of utterances is not disturbed. Listeners who are not accustomed to hearing non-native speakers can follow and understand the story told by an Advanced-level speaker. At the Intermediate level accuracy is also measured in “terms of comprehensibility”. That is, a listener who is not used to hearing non-native speakers will have difficulty following the message and will be distracted by the speaker’s inaccuracy in syntax and grammatical forms. Novice-level accuracy is basically limited to memorized chunks of sentences and phrases; as a result such speech might be difficult to understand even for interlocutors used to hearing non-native speakers.
Alternatively, it may be error free within the parameters of that which has been memorized.

Text type “refers to the quantity and the organizational aspects of speech produced by the interviewee. Text type progresses from single words and phrases at the Novice level …to the extended discourse of organized, sequenced paragraphs at the Superior level” (1999: 29).

Novice speakers operate with discrete memorized words, memorized phrases or sentences which are reproduced as they are remembered. Intermediate speakers function at the sentence level of text type. Despite the occasional incompleteness of sentences, “they make sense and present a complete idea within the context of the conversation, and hence may be referred to as sentences” (1999: 29). Depending upon the sublevel of Intermediate speakers, the quality of sentences differs. Clauses might be linked together into complex sentences which might be organized into a discourse of a paragraph length with cohesiveness that sometimes is not sustained (High sublevel). Clauses might be strung together with conjunctions like и “and”, или “or”, and но “but” (Mid sublevel). They might also be short in length and discrete (Low sublevel). Paragraph-length discourse is produced by Advanced level speakers and is considered in more detail in chapter four.

Extended discourse is the test type of Superior level discourse. Extended discourse consists of two or more linked paragraphs including details. Extended discourse refers to the extensive consideration of a topic. Superior speakers do not just give limited simple remarks or commentaries on the topic but rather “express themselves fully. They sustain an idea and develop it through complex utterances that are linked syntactically
and thematically” (1999: 93). Speaking in extensive discourse requires speakers to control discourse structure, cohesiveness of discourse, and linguistic accuracy. Extended discourse is expected to contain detailed narration, detailed description, developed argument, hypothesis, and the expression and defense of opinions.

2.1.3 The Structure of the OPI.

As mentioned earlier, the structure of the OPI is standardized. The live interview lasts from 15 to 30 minutes and is tape-recorded. The OPI can take the form of a face-to-face or telephone interview between a testee and a certified OPI tester. According to Swender (2003: 521), “[u]ntil 1992 OPIs were conducted primarily for academic purposes” and “took place almost entirely face-to-face”. In the past decade, ACTFL OPIs are given more and more for various purposes (both government agencies and for the private sector) in addition its use in to academia, and accordingly it has become more practical to conduct OPIs over the telephone. The advantages of a telephone OPI are flexibility of scheduling, cost-effectiveness, and the fact that such interviews can rate a testee no matter where he or she may be. Of course, for some testees phone interviews are more difficult because such interviews lack nonverbal cues, facial expressions, and gestures necessary for understanding and comprehension. Nowadays 95% of all ACTFL OPIs are administered over the phone.

The purpose of the OPI is to elicit a ratable sample, that is, a speech sample that represents the level of language ability at which a testee speaks most of the time. A ratable sample should reflect a “sustained performance of functions, context and content areas, accuracy and text-type required for the level in order to be rated at that level”
A ratable sample is elicited through a series of personalized questions and role-play. “On the surface, the interview is interactive and continuously adapts to the interests, experiences, and abilities of the speaker. Below the surface, the OPI follows a specific set of procedures to measure general spoken language by determining strengths and weaknesses” (Swender, 2003:521). According to the ACTFL protocol, the OPI has to consist of four mandatory phases: warm-up, repeated level checks, level probes, and wind-down. The interviewer does not have a fixed series of questions for all interviewees. “Although the conversational format of each ACTFL OPI follows an established protocol, there is no script or prescribed set of questions” (Swender, 2003:521). Instead a tester asks the questions based on the responses of the interviewee and follows up on the topics that emerge during the conversation. The choice of questions depends on the functions that the testee needs to perform: to give a list, to speak about hobbies, to tell a story in past time, to describe a place in present time, to give a supported opinion and so on.

Since the goal of the OPI is to elicit a ratable sample, it means that the testee’s speech should demonstrate the highest level at which he/she can consistently perform and the level at which he/she can not sustain the performance any longer across various topics. In other words, the OPI tester collects data demonstrating the “floor” and the “ceiling” of speaker’s performance. In order to determine a testee's “floor” and “ceiling”, the tester must follow the four mandatory phases of the interview mentioned above.

The purpose of the warm-up is, first, to prepare the speaker for the conversation, to tune him/her into the flow of the language, and to create a level of psychological comfort; second, the tester gets a chance to adjust to the testee’s way of speaking and
pronunciation; third, it provides the tester with some preliminary evaluative assessment of the testee’s probable level of proficiency; fourth, during this phase the tester has an opportunity to note topics that will be developed further during the following phases of the interview. The interview always starts at the Intermediate level, the minimal level at which authentic communication can occur, and later is negotiated to the necessary level by the two speakers. The warm-up may start as the following:

Tester: Добрый день, “Good afternoon”. Меня зовут Валентина Сергеевна, “My name is Valentina Sergeevna”. А как Вас зовут? “And what is your name?”

Student: …..

Tester: Ага, очень приятно, “OK. It is very nice to meet you”. Ну, как у Вас дела сегодня? “So, how are you today?”

Student: …..

Tester: Как Ваше настроение? “How is your mood?”

Student: …..

Tester: Вам нравится такая погода как сегодня? “Do you like the weather like today?”

Student: …..

Tester: Расскажите, пожалуйста о себе: какая у Вас семья? Где Вы живёте? Кто Вы по профессии, по специальности? Какие у Вас хобби? “Tell me about yourself, please. Do you have a family? Where do you live? What is your occupation? What are your hobbies?”
The next phases are level checks and probes. The purpose of level checks is to let the speaker demonstrate his/her strengths. The tester identifies the functions and areas of context and content in which the testee performs with ease, accurately and fluently, thus determining the major level (novice, intermediate, advanced, superior) that constitutes the “floor” of the speaker’s performance. The probes (asking the testee to perform language functions of a level above testee’s floor) demonstrate the testee’s “ceiling”, by which is meant the point at which weaknesses appear in language production. The tester identifies the functions and areas of context and content in which the testees can no longer maintain the same ease, accuracy, and fluency of performance and essentially displays linguistic breakdown (defined below). The level-checks are followed by the level-probes. The tester probes whether a testee can manage the global tasks and language functions of the next higher major level. Note that sublevel is determined within level on patterns of success and breakdown within level checks and probes of major levels. If a testee handles each probe successfully, that is, if the performance remains consistent and accurate, the tester considers this performance the new “floor”.

“Linguistic breakdown” is a term referring to a testee’s language which is “no longer adequate to handle the communicative challenges presented” by the task (ACTFL OPI TTM, 1999:36). That is, the speaker cannot produce language appropriate for a particular level. The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview Tester Training Manual identifies breakdown by

1. deterioration: mostly correct forms or word placement in the message yield to more incorrect forms or word placement;
2. dead-ending: words, phrases, constructions, idioms, sayings, paragraphs, discourse blocks are left incomplete, because lack of language ability prevents their completion;
3. omission: features of language expected at a particular level end up totally or somewhat consistently missing;
4. substitution: the speaker has conscious or unconscious recourse to words or phrases in a language other that the target language;
5. avoidance: a linguistic difficulty is anticipated and evaded by a distracting use of more language on a less demanding level;
6. loss of fluency: frequent pauses are caused, not by the need to reflect on the substance of what is being communicated, but because of the lack of usable language;
7. non-verbal indicators: loss of eye contact, flushing or blushing, playing with fingers or hair, etc. are physical manifestations of linguistic discomfort (1999: 36-37).

After the tester determines the floor and the ceiling, a role-play is introduced. The purpose of the role-play is to elicit functions that were not performed in the previous phases of the interview due to its conversational format. The role-play elicits a particular speech act (for example, explaining, requesting, giving advice, giving directions, etc.) and may serve as a level check or probe to obtain a ratable speech sample to complete the profile. The role-play is necessary when interviewing at the Novice-High through Advanced- High levels. At the Novice and Intermediate levels, a role-play is introduced in English, while at the Advanced and Superior levels in the target language (Russian in this case). The description of the role-play must be given in English to assure that a testee understands the situation correctly (at the lower levels) and to avoid giving the testee vocabulary (at the upper levels) for circumlocution tasks. If a role-play is described in the target language there might be the possibility of a testee’s misunderstanding of the task which might prevent the testee from performing the required task or the possibility a testee might be given vocabulary s/he would otherwise have to circumlocute. The tasks of the role-play change by levels. For example, at the Intermediate level speakers create with the language, ask and answer questions and handle a simple situation. “The tasks
checked by the role-play include initiating, sustaining and concluding a conversation involving simple transactional and tourist-type situations, e.g. asking directions, ordering meals, purchasing essential items and making travel and lodging arrangements” (ACTFL OPI TTM, 1999: 59). At the Advanced level speakers are expected to manage social situations with a complication such as calling the police to report a car accident and describing in detail what and how happened while speaking in paragraph-length discourse. Though at the Superior level the role-play is optional, speakers are supposed to handle a linguistically unfamiliar situation, one which a speaker has never experienced in the target language before. For instance, a speaker may be asked to explain the burdens and pleasures of family life, to talk about the balance between economic growth and environmental protection, to give a spontaneous presentation on an important social issue, or to describe a technical process, such as logging on to the internet. The goal of such probes and situations is to check a testee’s ability to interact in a formal professional situation, to challenge his/her specific vocabulary, to construct an argument, and to circumlocute in the context of extended discourse. In the event a testee knows all the necessary words for which one might expect circumlocution (for example, the testee knows all the specific technical terms for “mouse”, “window”, “icon” and etc. for a role-play about using the computer), the tester should pretend that she/he does not understand the correct lexicon the testee uses and thus elicit the circumlocution anyway.

The last phase of the interview is the wind-down, which returns the testee back to his or her psychosocial and linguistic level of comfort, thus ending the interview on a positive note. If the interview was conducted at the Intermediate-Mid level and above, a common way to perform a wind-down is to ask the testee informational questions about
his/her plans for the weekend or after school. If the testee’s level is below Intermediate-Mid then usually yes/no- or either –or choice- questions on similar topics (plans for the near future) will serve as a concluding positive end to the interview. If the interview was performed at the Novice-High through the Intermediate-Mid levels, then prior to the wind-down phase a testee might be asked to demonstrate the ability to pose questions. Usually a tester asks a testee to pose 3 or 4 questions for the tester.

2.1.4 Elicitation Techniques Used in the OPI.

The selection of a question during the OPI is crucial in eliciting a ratable speech sample from a testee. The choice of question depends on the function that a tester needs the testee to produce in order to collect all the language evidence necessary to determine the testee’s language “floor” and “ceiling”. There are many questions posed during the OPI and their choice is connected with the level of the testee’s performance. A tester might use different types of questions: information-seeking, information-checking, confirmation, clarification and comprehension-check questions (Johnson, 2001: 85-86).

Information-seeking questions are used to collect information from the testee, as for instance, Сколько у Вас сестер? “How many sisters do you have?” An example of an information-checking question would be Вы живете в Алабаме, да? “You live in Alabama, do you?” Confirmation questions are posed by the tester to confirm that the information he/she obtained earlier is correct. For example, Вы сказали, что Вам нравится рыбалка, правильно? “You said that you like fishing, right?” Clarification-questions are questions that a tester might ask if the information delivered by a testee is not understood, for example when a testee says Я люблю смотреть детективные
истории, “I like watching detective stories”, the tester might respond Вы любите смотреть какие истории? “You like to watch what stories?” The purpose of comprehension-check questions is to make sure that the testee follows the tester. For example, Расскажите мне о микрорайоне, в котором Вы живете. Вы понимаете слово микрорайон? “Tell me about the neighborhood you live in. Do you understand the word neighborhood?"

*The ACTFL OPI Tester Training Manual (1999: 45-45)* gives a detailed list of information-seeking questions that arise during the OPI. They are yes/no questions such as Вы любите путешествовать? “Do you like to travel?”; choice questions such as Вы живете в доме или в общежитии? “Do you live in a house or in a dorm?”; fact and information questions such as Почему Вам понравилось в Твери? “Why did you like it in Tver?”; intonation questions, which in the case of the Russian language would be just a repetition of the information/ statement given by a testee because Russian forms questions by means of the rising intonation and does not have any auxiliary verbs (as English does) for this function, inviting the speaker to elaborate more on the mentioned topic such as в Вам понравилась русская кухня? Интересно, расскажите. “You liked Russian cuisine, how interesting. Tell me about it.”; statements with a tag question such as Вы же знали, что такое может случиться, правда? “You did not know that it could happen, right?”; requests such as Пожалуйста, опишите мне университет, в котором вы учились в Москве, “Please, describe to me the university in which you studied in Moscow” or Вы бы не могли мне более подробно рассказать о том, как Вы поступили в университет? “Would you please tell me in more detail how you applied for admission to the university”; prelude, as in Многие считают, что изучение
иностранный языка в школе надо вводить в младших классах. Вы согласны с таким мнением? “Many people think that teaching foreign languages should begin in primary school. Do you agree with this opinion?”; and hypothetical, as in A если бы Вы были министром образования, как бы Вы изменили ситуацию изучения иностранного языка в США? “And if you were the Minister of Education, how would you change the situation regarding a foreign language in the USA?”

Every OPI must consist of speech sample that is clearly ratable. To that end tesers must pose a variety of questions that are open-ended. Closed questions only serve “confidence builders”, they “identify areas of interest”, “jump start a topic”, and “get a permission to persue a topic.” (ACTFL OPI TTM, 1999: 43) Closed ended questions then “must be followed up with open-ended questions” (Ibid.) as they do not require tesees to create their own language; testees may simply repeat tester’s question as a statement. Open ended questions, such as information-requests and clarifications, allow testees to demonstrate their own skills to creating with the language, “soften the role of the interviewer, thus encouraging the speaker to participate” (Ibid.), and establish testees abilities to discuss a topic in detail.

2.2 Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview.

2.2.1 Historical Development of the SOPI.

The Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) is a performance-based, tape-mediated test of speaking proficiency, developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) as an equivalent to the OPI (Stansfield and Kenyon, 1992:129). The SOPI has a similar structure to the OPI; as in the OPI, SOPI tasks and ratings of testees’ responses
are based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. According to Stansfield and Kenyon (1992), in 1988 about 2,000 people were trained to conduct and to rate ACTFL oral proficiency interviews in Spanish, French, German, and Russian. Stansfield and Kenyon say that CAL language professionals understood that many language specialists were trained to conduct an OPI in the area of commonly taught languages leaving less commonly taught languages behind: “…in the less commonly taught languages problems of manpower and economics would limit the accessibility of the benefits of comprehensive oral proficiency testing offered the OPI” (1992). Therefore, in order to assess oral proficiency in less commonly taught languages, CAL decided to explore the use of a tape-mediated procedure of testing, based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. By means of research and development, CAL created a test which would simulate the oral proficiency interview. This test is now called the SOPI.

The first SOPI was developed in 1986 for Chinese (the “Chinese Speaking Test”). This test was developed out of the need to test oral proficiency in situations where it was impractical or impossible to conduct a direct, face-to-face oral proficiency interview due to the lack or unavailability of trained testers. Later, language professionals developed similar format tests for Hebrew (the “Hebrew Speaking Test”) in 1989, Portuguese (1990), Indonesian (1992) and Hausa (1993).

Malone (2000), and Stansfield and Kenyon (1992) report that today many US institutions use the SOPI to rate the language ability of their instructors or to place students into language courses. For example, they report that after the appearance of SOPIs for Chinese, Hebrew, Portuguese, Indonesian, and Hausa, CAL developed similar tests for French and Spanish to be used in the teacher certification program at the Texas
Education Agency. Before teaching Spanish or French, instructors are required to take the Texas Oral Proficiency Test to demonstrate an Advanced level of proficiency in these languages. Stanford University uses the SOPI to conduct diagnosis and placement of students into foreign language classrooms. The University of Pennsylvania used the model of the SOPI to develop tests in Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu. The University of Michigan has developed a similar SOPI test for Arabic, and the University of Virginia for Tibetan. Nowadays the SOPI is used to test eleven languages, including less commonly taught languages. The languages tested are Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hausa, Hebrew, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. The Russian Speaking Test was developed in 1998 and has not been revised since.

Before CAL considers any SOPI test to be operational, it goes through a strict development process. There are two rounds of revision that the test must undergo, and three groups of people participate in the development process and test revision: a team or a test committee that writes the test, the External Review Board that reviews the test, and a group of examinees on whom the SOPI is piloted. First, working as a team, language professionals and experienced test developers write test tasks. The content and the context of the tasks are based on and reflect the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. There are three forms of each SOPI labeled A, B, and C. Each test is parallel in structure, meaning that there are similar functions assessed on each form. Form A is the form used for rater training (given in the Rater Training Kit). Forms B and C are two variants of the official SOPI available at CAL.

5 However, in fact, a lot of students actually take form A because it is a part of the Rater Training Kit (Self-Rating Kit), and it is the form most used since many institutions administer unofficial SOPIs to evaluate the program, to assess students' progress or for placement purposes (from personal correspondence with Margaret Malone, 04/07/2004).
After the test is written and reviewed by the whole team, it is sent to the External Review Board for further review. Language specialists (language professors who know both the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the OPI or the SOPI) who work on the External Review Board review the test tasks for appropriateness, accuracy, wording, the suitability of the native language prompts and the English directions to the tasks, possible bias, mistakes, and any other problems that might influence students’ performance. Then the team receives the feedback and recommendations from the External Review Board and makes all the necessary alterations, changes, improvements, and revisions of the test. After all these procedures the pilot version of the SOPI is “ready for field testing”.

About 30 examinees\(^6\) participate in the SOPI pilot testing. The purpose of the piloting is to make sure that the instructions, pictures, tasks, time given for the responses, and pauses for planning responses are appropriate and let examinees demonstrate their oral proficiency in a short time. Before examinees take the test, they are asked to fill out a self-evaluation form in which they describe their own language ability and what kind of speaking tasks they think they can perform. Then the examinees’ teachers give an evaluation of the testees’ level of language proficiency based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. After examinees take the test they are asked to complete a feedback form in which they evaluate the test on a four-point scale and write their opinion and comments about the test. In the feedback form examinees “discuss the test directions, the timed

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\(^6\) Test developers find and ask colleagues, students and professors from many universities, institutions, schools, and colleges to participate in pilot testing of the tests. “Participation requires a great deal of contact with language programs, follow-up and tracking”. It may take up to two months to find people who will agree to participate in the pilot testing of the SOPI, or who will allow their students to participate in the study, and then to administer the tests. After that the team tracks all the data regarding how many people took each version of the SOPI test “to ensure that all test forms were taken by an equal number of people”. Participants of the pilot study are different every time the test undergoes the trial testing (from personal correspondence with Margaret Malone, 04/07/2004).
pauses, their nervousness, their ideas for test improvement, and any other comments they may have” and “whether they feel that a person listening to this tape would get an accurate picture of their current ability to speak” the target language, Russian in this case (Russian Speaking Test, Rater Training Kit, Manual, CAL, 1998:129).

In the second round the team rates and reviews examinees’ taped SOPIs, their self-assessment and feedback forms, and written comments about the test and examinees’ performance “focusing on any aspect of each task which might have hindered examinees from giving their best performance”. The team also takes into account the comments and suggestions “made by the raters who participated in the field testing”. All this information is then stored in a database. Second, the team revises and improves the test tasks, prompts, directions, and pictures. After that the revised version of the test is sent again to the External Review Board for further revision and feedback, and afterwards the test is studied for its validity. During the validation study the test is again administered to about 30 examinees who need to fill out a self-evaluation and a feedback form, and their teachers provide ratings of their language proficiency. After that, tapes are rated again, analyzed and revised, and only then is the test ready for public use (Russian Speaking Test, Rater Training Kit, Manual, CAL, 1998: 129-130). “Professional test developers at the Center for Applied Linguistics… carefully designed the SOPI to elicit a representative performance sample of an examinee’s speech in a short period of time. The test is intended for students at proficiency levels from Novice-High to Superior” based on the ACTFL scale or from 0+ to 3+ on the ILR (Interagency Language Roundtable) scale (<<http://www.cal.org/tests/fltests.html>>).
If an institution wants to test its own students and to receive an official rating, it contacts CAL, who administers the test. After the test is taken, it is rated by certified professionals; CAL then sends out an official score report to the institution.

2.2.2 The SOPI and Its Structure

The SOPI is an alternative to the OPI. Before OPIs were conducted over the phone, the OPI’s main limitation lay in administering the test to a testee in a location where a certified OPI tester was not available, and bringing the tester and the testee to one place to conduct the interview was expensive.

The SOPI models the format of the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) used by government agencies and by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) to assess general speaking proficiency in a second language. The goal of the SOPI is to make available a measurement of language proficiency which correlates as highly as possible with the face-to-face procedure of the OPI, for use in situations where it is impractical or impossible to administer an OPI (Rater Training Kit, Russian Speaking Test 1998: 5-6).

The practical characteristics of the tape-mediated test allow the SOPI to be administered “individually or simultaneously to a large number of examinees” (Stansfield, 1996:7). The SOPI is a semi-direct, "performance-based, tape-mediated speaking test". The OPI is a direct test because it is a live interaction of two interlocutors (one tester and one testee), whereas the SOPI is a semi-direct procedure because it employs “recorded and printed stimuli to elicit a speech sample from the examinee”. As a semi-direct test, the SOPI uses two tape-recorders and a test booklet that contains contextualized prompts to elicit speech from the testees. On one of the tape-recorders a testee hears audiotaped instructions; on the other one he/she records the responses. In the
SOPI testees are presented with a number of speaking tasks introduced by three “input modalities; written language via a text booklet, spoken language via a master audiotape, and visual representation of the context via illustrations in a test booklet” (The Test Development Handbook, 1996:7)

Stansfield and Kenyon (1992) differentiate the SOPI from previously created semi-direct tests (such as the Test of Spoken English or the Recorded Oral Proficiency Exam) that assess speaking ability. First of all, the format of the SOPI is similar to that of the OPI (the SOPI begins with a warm-up, which is followed by various tasks to elicit a language sample that would probe for language functions in accordance with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines). Second, the SOPI uses both visual and aural stimuli to elicit examinees’ speech. And third, the SOPI is scored on the basis of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Stansfield and Kenyon continue that a prototypical semi-direct test may vary in format: testees may be asked to read aloud, to repeat and/or complete sentences, to name nouns or verbs shown in drawings of the test booklet, to respond to cues given in the test booklet, or to describe a picture or a sequence of pictures depicted in the test booklet. “However many of these semi-direct elicitation techniques are inherently different from the relatively authentic, context-based techniques that are found in the SOPI” (Stansfield and Kenyon, 1996).

The goal of the SOPI (similar to the OPI) is to rate and evaluate testees’ language proficiency in a “snapshot” of their speaking proficiency in the target language in the framework of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: “(t)he SOPI is designed to elicit a representative portfolio of performances in a relatively short period of time” (Stansfield; 1996:7). All the SOPI speaking tasks are characterized by two features: whether a student
can perform a certain function in the target language and whether he/she can satisfy this particular function at a given level of proficiency in accordance with the Proficiency Guidelines. In order to score testees’ performance on the SOPI, all tasks are first rated separately; then a global rating is assigned based on the highest proficiency level at which a testee consistently performs the tasks.

The SOPI lasts from 25 to 45 minutes. The short form of the SOPI is given to those speakers whose level is expected to be between Novice-Mid and Intermediate-Mid. If the proficiency level of a testee can not be predicted before the interview, the testee takes a 45-minute version of the test. The total speaking time in the target language of a testee is about 10 minutes in the short form, about 20 minutes in the full-length test. The test assigns various tasks that range from easy to quite difficult. The testees are not expected to fulfill all the tasks with equal facility, but they are asked to speak as much and as well as they can and to try to respond to each question posed in the test.

Before a testee starts the exam, he/she listens to general explanations and directions about the test on the master tape. The directions are also written on the front page of the test booklet. Both aural and written directions to each task are given in English. The testee is allowed then to open the booklet and follow further instructions. During the exam, the testee listens to instructions and prompts for each task from a master tape in English, and can follow along with them by reading the same instructions in a test booklet also given in English. Instructions include the description of the context for the speaking task, information regarding to whom and in what situation the testee is speaking, the purpose of the speaking task and any other information that would make the task as authentic as possible. After a testee hears the instructions to the task on the master
tape, there is a short pause to let the testee think about his/her response. Each task provides a certain amount of time to plan the response and a certain time period within which the testee gives the actual response. The amount of time for each task varies and is given in brackets in the booklet.

After the pause, the testee hears a prompt in the target language “to add authenticity to the context” (it could be a question or a statement) based on the description of the situation previously given in English, and immediately gives a response during the allowed time. Depending on the difficulty of the task, the time for the response varies from one minute to a minute and 45 seconds. On the one hand, a testee does not have to talk the whole time allowed for the response and can stop talking when he/she thinks that he/she has given a complete answer. On the other hand, a testee might be occasionally interrupted by the next question before completing his/her answer. The time for response depends on the information requested by the question. The responses of the testee to the tasks are tape-recorded on a blank tape, “the Examinee Response Tape”, and are rated based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines by professional testers. Each testee’s speech sample is given a global rating.

The structure of a prototypical SOPI includes four phases: warm-up, level check, probes, and wind-down. The warm-up phase consists of answering several short simple questions of a personal nature asked by a native speaker, for example, questions about one’s family, education, hobbies, etc\(^7\). After a testee hears a question, he/she has between 5 to 25 seconds to give a response.

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\(^7\) The real warm-up questions of the Russian speaking Test are given later in this chapter in the discussion of elicitation techniques.
Level checks and probes constitute performance-based tasks: picture-based tasks, topic-based tasks, and situation-based tasks. Each of the performance-based tasks elicits a specific speech act associated with the level of proficiency. The tasks are designed in a manner to let testees show characteristics of general language proficiency at different levels which are explained in the Proficiency Guidelines. “As tasks proceed up the ACTFL scale, demands they place on examinees also increase as greater proficiency is required to give an appropriate performance” (RST, Rater Training Kit, 1998: 16).

The warm-up phase is followed by picture-based tasks. In picture-based tasks testees are provided with pictures/ illustrations that can be used as a guide for the response or as a source of ideas. Using visuals given in the booklet the testee is guided through sets of pictures to produce Intermediate-level tasks (asking questions, describing an event, activity or a place, or giving directions using a map in the test booklet) and Advanced level tasks (creating narrations in the present, past, and/or the future).

Picture-based speaking tasks tested on the SOPI include giving directions, describing a place and/or the activities one does there, asking questions, and narrating in present, past, and future time frames (Stansfield, 1996:13).

In the next part of the SOPI, topic-based tasks, a testee is asked to discuss selected topics, give an explanation and elaborate on real-life situations. Topic-based tasks may include a request to “describe a familiar activity or process, describe something in detail, give instructions, present advantages and disadvantages, compare things in some detail, give a brief factual summary of uncomplicated information, explain and defend a point of view, or hypothesize on an impersonal topic” (Stansfield, 1996:15). In other words, topic-based tasks allow a testee to demonstrate various levels of language ability: to give simple information (Intermediate-level task), make a supported request (Advanced-level
proficiency), describe personal activities (Intermediate speaker’s ability), state advantages and disadvantages and give an explanation or apology (both are Advanced-level tasks).

According to the Test Development Handbook (Stansfield, 1996:15), the content of topic-based tasks is accessible to all testees, and no special knowledge of the subject brought up for the discussion is required to respond to the prompt. No pictures are provided to organize responses in the topic-based tasks.

The examinee must organize and present information in as clear a manner as he or she can. The examinee must do this across a variety of functions and topics that represent varying levels of proficiency. (Stansfield, 1996:16)

Selected topics and real-life situations probes testees to perform at higher levels: Advanced and Superior. Since the demands of speaking proficiency at higher levels require speaking in both formal and informal contexts, it becomes crucial to specify in the instructions to whom the task refers, why, and in what situation the speech is delivered. Since Russian distinguishes formal and informal ways of addressing a person, it is necessary to mention the person’s age, social status, and name in the description of the task to be performed.

The situation-based tasks probe for Superior-level language proficiency functions: supportive opinion, making a formal presentation, and hypothesizing; as well as one Advanced-level task: giving advice. In the topic-based tasks, a testee is expected to speak in “a socially and linguistically appropriate manner” (Stansfield, 1996:16).

Stansfield (1996:16) mentions that situation-based tasks serve as an “adaptation of the OPI role play”. In the prototypical SOPI there are five situation-based tasks in which testees must show their ability to respond in a “socio-linguistically correct manner”.
Each situation-based task asks examinees to imagine themselves in realistic situations and to handle the task in a linguistically and socially appropriate manner. Tasks may require examinees to give advice to a friend, propose and defend a course of action, persuade someone to do something he or she is not inclined to do, or give a formal or professional talk (actually, just the beginning of a talk). (Stansfield, 1996:16)

A prototypical SOPI ends with a short wind-down phase consisting of several simple questions in the target language.

A Superior-level speaker can manage all the tasks designed for lower levels; nevertheless such a speaker can demonstrate his/her Superior-level language proficiency in full capacity in the tasks and functions designed for Superior-level response. When “a speaker cannot adequately satisfy the requirements of” functions and tasks of a level, “the speaker will struggle or break down” trying to respond (RST, Rater Training Kit, 1998:16). In order for speakers of lower levels to avoid a great challenge in the performance-based tasks, the test could be ended halfway through. The warm-up section is not rated; its purpose is to give a testee an idea about the testing situation, “to ease examinees into the testing format”. However, in some instances when the speaking level is low, the warm-up may be scored.

2.2.3 Elicitation Techniques of the Russian Speaking Test.

The Russian Speaking Test has four parts: warm-up, 4 picture-based tasks, 5 topic-based tasks, and 4 situation-based tasks (in total –13 performance-based tasks).

On the first page of the booklet are directions for the warm-up in English, eight representations of questions and brackets indicating the time within which a testee can give a response. During the warm-up phase a testee is asked the following seven
questions at the Novice and Intermediate level: (1) Меня зовут Галина Ивановна. А как Вас зовут? “My name is Galina Ivanovna. What is your name?” (2) Я бы хотела побольше узнать о вас. Где Вы живете? “I would like to know more about you. Where do you live?” (3) Ха! Вы учите или работаете? “OK! Do you study or work?” (4) Интересно. А скажите, что Вы любите делать в свободное время? “That's interesting! Tell me, what do you like to do during your free time?” (5) Когда Вы начали изучать русский язык? “When did you begin to study Russian?” (6) Ага. А для чего Вы изучаете русский язык? “OK! So why are you studying Russian?” (7) Интересно. А с кем Вы говорите по-русски? “That’s interesting! With whom do you speak Russian?”

During the warm-up the testee gets an opportunity to familiarize him/herself with the format of the test as well as to practice using the foreign language in response to simple questions in the form of short answers before being asked to produce more complex responses.

The warm-up is followed by the picture-based tasks. The Russian SOPI includes 4 picture-based tasks which target the Intermediate level of proficiency (Pictures 1 and 2) and Advanced level of proficiency (Pictures 3 and 4). On the Russian Speaking Test, Picture 1 asks the testee to form simple questions about four illustrations that represent personal photos of an exchange student from Russia. Picture 2 asks testees “to describe a birthday party in the United States and the kinds of activities that occur there”. Students can give a response based on their personal experience or use a picture provided in the booklet. Picture 3 asks students to talk about an American high-school student’s daily activities. As with the previous task, testees can base their answer on their personal

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8 The questions are transcribed from the Russian Speaking Test, from A.

9 In other versions of the SOPI there are five picture-based tasks (Stansfield, 1996:13)
experience or they can use a sequence of four pictures from the booklet. Picture 4 asks testees to tell the story of a car accident based on a set of five drawings organized in a sequence.

Topic-based tasks are designed to elicit the speech of Intermediate and Advanced speakers. The first topic-based task is an Intermediate level task that asks testees to leave an answering machine message about a change of plans. The rest of the topic-based tasks address Advanced level performance. Topic 2 asks testees to request, in a polite and tactful manner, to shift from the dormitory to a host family housing apartment in a study abroad program. Topic 3 asks testees to tell how they spend their summer vacations. Topic 4 asks testees to explain the advantages and disadvantages of attending a private university. Topic 5 asks students to explain why it is important to use sunscreen lotion.

Situations 1 through 3 probe for Superior level responses. Situation 1 asks the testee to explain the abstract topic of whose responsibility it is to take care of homeless people. Situation 2 asks for a formal presentation about some problems facing the American education system today. Situation 3 asks for a hypothesis on possible consequences of compulsory language study in American high schools. The last task, Situation 4, is at the Advanced level and asks students to give advice to a friend regarding what to do in the summer after the friend’s graduation, to work or to travel (Russian Speaking Test, Form A, CAL, 1998). The Russian Speaking test does not have a wind-down, and students may complete the test at a level at which they have no linguistic competency.
As with the OPI, the SOPI assesses the performance of specific language tasks and not competence in the language. Like the OPI, the SOPI measures oral proficiency according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, which have become the most widely accepted rubric for assessing speaking skills in the USA. However, the difference between these two oral tests lies, first of all, in their modes. That is, first, the OPI is interactive in nature because it involves two speakers: a tester and a testee who can negotiate meaning through clarifications during the interview. Second, the OPI is adaptive because it adapts to the testee’s level of proficiency whereas the SOPI does not. In the OPI, a tester limits the range of tasks to those that the testee is able to do successfully and to those that belong to the next higher level. In the SOPI, a testee is presented with a set of prepared questions that are identical for all students taking the same language SOPI regardless of each individual student’s background, interests or level of oral language proficiency (unless, as mentioned earlier, a tester has information available about the testee’s approximate level of oral proficiency). Nevertheless, the format of the semi-direct tests, the SOPI, has its practical advantages, Malone argues (2000). First, such a setting does not require from the test administrator either any knowledge of the language or special training; second, the SOPI is conducted either individually or simultaneously to a group of testees in a laboratory setting by only one administrator. Thus, she writes:

the SOPI may be preferable when many examinees need to be tested in a short frame. The SOPI may also offer psychometric advantages in terms of reliability and validity, particularly in standard testing situations. The

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10 The word performance will be used in Chomsky’s (1965) definition as a contrast to the concept of competence. Linguistic competence is a speaker’s ideal knowledge of a language. Performance is what speakers actually do with the language in a specific context at a particular time; it is their actual production and understanding of speech on a given occasion. Competence is a mental state that cannot be measured. Performance is a reflection of competence.
SOPI offers the same quality of interview to all examinees, and all examinees respond to the same questions (Malone, 2000).

It excludes such tester factors as “experience, fatigue, personality characteristics” while ensuring a reliable scoring.

2.3 Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Interpersonal, Interpretive and Presentational Modes

2.3.1 What Is the Purpose of Standards in Teaching a Foreign Language?

The role of standards for foreign language teaching is multi-fold. Standards set academic goals for teachers and learners, and describe to administrators, foreign language educators, students, and parents what second language instruction means in U.S. schools. Standards specify what students learn and are able to do, what student performances constitute evidence of their learning, and how well students should perform in a foreign language at a given point in time. “(T)he foreign language standards provide the broader view of second language study and competence: what should students know and be able to do – and how well?” (Standards, 1999:15).

Based on this specification, Wisconsin’s Model Academic Standards for Foreign Languages (adapted from the US Department of Education Standards) differentiate three types of standards: content, performance, and proficiency. Each type has a different purpose and relation to language learning and instruction. “Content standards refer to what students should know and be able to do” with the learned material because students should learn the language to use it. “Performance standards tell how students will show that they are meeting a standard. Proficiency standards indicate how well students must
perform”. It is a criterion by which the progress will be rated (*Wisconsin’s Model Academic Standards*, 2001; ix).

In a discussion in the ACTFL Newsletter regarding the *Standards for Foreign Language Education*, Welles (1998: 7-9) writes that standards provide an understanding of language goals; they “outline and improve the quality of students’ preparation”. In 1997, Sandrock states that standards are used to design language programs, establish curriculum, provide common goals, and plan language instruction. Sandrock suggests that standards lead foreign language educators, “represent what we believe about our teaching”, “keep the teacher and student on track towards the overall goal”, provide “a clear map to get from where we are to where we want to be”, “give focus for developing curriculum”, and “focus a teacher’s selection of what will be taught rather than just covering page after page and hoping that students are getting what they need” (1997: 7).

Standards connect teaching, learning and testing. Sandrock writes that “(a) key purpose of standards is to provide a tool for creating a better match between the official curriculum, what is taught, what is tested, and what is actually learned”(1997:10-11). Standards should be used as a guide to develop grade-by-grade curriculum, a program, designed to prepare students according the standards for foreign language learning. Curriculum should consist, therefore, of activities and lesson plans for each grade level, and include various instructional materials and techniques. Thus, standards within the curriculum provide clear direction about what material will be learned at certain points in time, what language performance will be expected and acceptable as evidence that the learning of the required material took place by design rather than by accident (Sandrock, 1997). Thus, with the help of standards teachers can assess students’ progress toward the
curriculum goal. And finally, with the help of standards, competency-based teaching and assessment in the area of foreign languages directed language professionals to prepare students to use the language in meaningful ways and in real life situations. Clear goals for teaching and learning motivate and promote studying of a foreign language.

2.3.2 Recent History of Standards for Foreign Language Learning.

In 1993 ACTFL, the American Association of Teachers of French, the American Association of Teachers of German, and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese received federal funding “to develop national standards for students in kindergarten through the twelfth grade” (Standards, 1999: 12). The first Committee engaged in the development of national standards consisted of eleven members who came from different geographical regions and who represented various languages, program models and instructional levels. The Committee’s task was to define content standards, standards that state “what students should know and be able to do in foreign language education in grades four, eight, and twelve” (Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, 1999: 13). The standards were to become a model for excellence in teaching and learning, to examine goals of what foreign language education should teach students to do, and what skills and knowledge should be acquired by students by the end of the twelfth grade. The national standards were published in 1996 and were based on the contributions and sponsorships of four professional language organizations: ACTFL, the American Association of Teachers of French, the American Association of Teachers of German, and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. After the “generic” national standards were issued, a decision
was made to extend the collaboration and to include seven other organizations: the American Association of Teachers of Italian, the American Council of Teachers of Russian, the Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools/Chinese Language Teachers Association, the American Classical Leagues and the National Council of Secondary Teachers of Japanese/Association of Teachers of Japanese. Based on the original standards, these seven language organizations took new steps and in 1999 they created language-specific standards for Chinese, Classic Languages (Latin and Greek), French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. (Standards, 1999:13)

2.3.3 The Five Cs of the Foreign Language Curriculum

The national standards for foreign language learning include five goal areas of foreign language curriculum that are all interconnected: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. Each goal has two to three content standards that “describe the knowledge and ability that all students should acquire by the end of their high school education” (Standards, 1999: 27).

The first goal, communication, is defined in the Standards as the ability to communicate in a language other than English. First, “students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions” (1999:42). Second, “students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics” (43), and third, “students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics” (45).
By learning other languages, students gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures in which these languages are spoken. The standards for culture require that students “demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices, [products] and perspectives of the cultures studied” (50-51). In order to “fully understand another culture, students need to develop awareness of another people’s way of life, of the patterns of behavior that order their world, and of the traditional ideas, attitudes, and perspectives that guide their behaviors” (*Wisconsin’s Model Academic Standards for Foreign Languages*, 2001:7).

Studying a foreign language reinforces students’ connections with other disciplines because the acquisition of information is sometimes possible only through a foreign language and its culture. Thus, language classes provide additional knowledge and information to support and enforce what students learn in other disciplines.

The comparison and contrast of the foreign language with the native tongue develops students’ insights into the nature of their own language and culture. The Standards for comparison teach students to understand the “nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own” (58). Through comparison students are able to see how various language systems convey meaning and reflect cultures.

Four goals (communication, cultures, connections, and comparisons) allow students both to achieve the fifth C goal of the Standards -- communities, and to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world. The fifth C goal of the Standards encourages students to “use the language both within and beyond the school setting” (64) and to use “the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment” (66). In other words, the Standards suggest that students come to realize that participation
in multilingual communities helps them enjoy the other culture, and the knowledge of a foreign language opens opportunities to access entertainment and information sources which are available to speakers of the target language only. “With communication and cultures as the cornerstone for language learning, the goal is for all students to learn how, when, and why to say what to whom” (Wisconsin’s Model Academic Standards for Foreign Languages, 2001: 1).

In the framework of the Russian Curriculum, the goal of communication becomes the ground for interaction between American learners of Russian and Russian speakers, both in the Russophone world and Russian émigré communities in the US, in the areas of business, politics, science, arts, and other areas of mutual interest. Interaction with Russian speakers and exposure to Russian language materials raise culture awareness and open students to the heritage of Russian culture: literature, history, arts, films, etc. The study of Russian may enable students to better understand Russian-American political relations. The connection between the material learned in the interdisciplinary courses (history or social studies) and the knowledge of Russian can enable students to find additional sources and information about World War II in Russian, for example. By learning and comparing Russian language and culture to students’ native language and culture, students become aware not only of the cultural and linguistic differences between Russian and English but also of their own language system and culture. And finally, knowledge of Russian will make it possible to be a part of the language community (Standards, 1999: 394-396).
2.3.4 Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational Modes of Communication.

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning are grounded in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines, developed in 1986, which assess second language performance in four skill areas: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. However, instead of breaking communication into four separate areas of skills, the Standards distinguish three “communicative modes”: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. The distinction between these modes suggests that students actually use different channels of communication: communication itself in the interpersonal mode, listening/reading in the interpretive mode, and speaking/writing in the presentational.

The Interpersonal Mode is characterized by active negotiation of meaning among individuals. Participants observe and monitor one another to see how their meanings and interactions are being communicated. There is a higher probability of ultimately achieving the goal of successful communication in this mode than in the other two modes. The Interpersonal Mode is most obvious in conversation (Standards, 1999: 36).

Thus, according to the Standards, within the Interpersonal Mode students “engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions” (1999: 42) in a language other than their native one. In order to be able to function in the Interpersonal Mode and to exchange information with other people in a culturally appropriate manner, students need to know what strategies will make the use of the language more effective. The Interpersonal Mode Standard prepares and teaches students to engage in conversations.

In the Interpretive Mode students “understand and interpret written and spoken language [other than their own] on a variety of topics” (Standards, 1999:43). In this mode
students “develop strong listening and reading skills to interpret the concepts, ideas, and opinions expressed by members of other cultures through their media and their literatures (Wisconsin’s Model Academic Standards for Foreign Languages, 2001: 3). The focus of this Standard is on increasing the level of students’ understanding of audio-visual and written materials in a foreign language.

In the presentational mode students “present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics” (Standards, 1999: 45) in a non-native language.

The Presentational Mode refers to the creation of messages in a manner that facilitates interpretation by members of the other culture where no direct opportunity for the active negotiation of meaning between members of the two cultures exist (Standards, 1999: 38).

Successful communication in the Presentational Mode depends on how strong and developed students’ speaking and writing skills are when they want to effectively convey their thoughts, opinions and ideas to speakers of the target languages. This standard focuses on presenting information; therefore, the Presentational Mode is a "one-way" communication effort, which presents "no direct opportunity for the active negotiation of meaning" between interlocutors. Indeed, the imagined interlocutor is only imagined, and cannot ask for clarification or indicate comprehension of the speaker’s message by verbal or non-verbal means. In other words, the Interpersonal mode is a “direct oral communication (e.g., face-to-face or telephone) between individuals who are in personal contact” (Standards, 1999: 37), whereas the Presentational Mode is a “productive communication using oral …language”. The Presentational Mode is “spoken
…communication for people (an audience) with whom there is not immediate personal contact or which takes place in a one-to-many mode” (Standards, 1999: 37).

Based on the description of three communicative modes and the testing format of the OPI and the SOPI, it becomes obvious that the two testing formats may actually be assessing two different kinds of communication. In the OPI, students’ speech is elicited by the examiner in the context of live interaction. The speech is thus in Interpersonal Mode as defined by the Standards. In the SOPI the listener or interlocutor is imagined by the testee and represented schematically by the cue or prompt to which s/he is responding. The speech is elicited by a recorded prompt and a visual aid, and is therefore in Presentational Mode. In taking the OPI, students communicate in interpersonal mode. In the SOPI format, students demonstrate their presentational skills, how prepared they are to deliver their message when the negotiation of meaning is impossible or irrelevant because the SOPI elicits only one-way communication in presentational mode. In fact, when rating either of the oral proficiency tests, testers need to remember that the OPI tests one mode of speech, interactive speech, and the SOPI tests another mode, presentational. The description of the modes suggests that one test might be preferable over another depending on the testees’ purposes and/or the circumstances in which testees will use the language.

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed two major tools testing oral proficiency in a foreign language, their history and structure, and explained how the two tests correspond to the goal of communication as established by the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning.
CHAPTER 3

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH AND REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The first part of this chapter explains the purpose and importance of the current study of oral description in language testing and the contribution of the investigation of description elicited in the OPI and the SOPI to the area of second language acquisition. The second part of the chapter provides a survey of the previous studies done in the field of language proficiency testing that compared students’ discourse production in the Interpersonal and Presentational Modes.

3.1 Purpose of the research. Why description?

Foreign Language instructors teach students not only translation skills but also the ability to maintain discourse in the second language. Language theory (e.g., theory of discourse analysis) and practice are in interplay. In order to enable instructors to assess students’ language skills and to evaluate teaching effectiveness, discourse analysis needs to consider questions about discourse in general. Questions to be addressed include: What is description? When do we use description? On what occasions do we use it? In what circumstances do we describe? What is the purpose of description? How often do we use
description in our everyday lives? Why do we use it? Who uses description? What does it tell you about the speaker’s language? How is description different from narration?

No matter what level of oral proficiency we deal with, the ability to describe something convincingly serves a speaker well in any kind of communicative situation.

In *St. Martin’s Guide to Writing*, a popular college writing textbook in English, Axelrod and Cooper say that the word “to describe” comes from the Latin *describere* and means “to sketch” or “to copy in writing” (2001: 589). Axelrod and Cooper write that description creates images that help the audience imagine what is being described:

Description creates an intense, distinctive image, one that seems to bring the words to life. Description gives the audience an impression of a person or place, illustrates ideas, makes information memorable, and supports an argument. (589)

Axelrod and Cooper distinguish three types of description: naming, detailing, and comparing. Naming answers the questions “What is it?” and “What are the parts or features” of an object, and attracts the audience’s attention to external features of the subject being described. For example, to describe a house, one might enumerate or name objects that he/she sees around, such as the bedroom, kitchen, balcony, bathroom, etc. These objects provide the information regarding what kind of house it is and give the audience an impression of what it feels like to be in this particular house. “Detailing makes the features more specific or particularized” (591). The detailing type of description answers questions like: “What size is it? What color is it? What is it made of? Where is it located? How many are there? What is its condition? How is it used? Where does it come from? What is its effect? What is its value?” (591). In order to add details,
speakers/authors use modifiers such as adjectives and adverbs, phrases and clauses, similes and metaphors. Axelrod and Cooper write:

…in describing people, writers often combine physical details with details characterizing aspects of the individual’s personality. These characterizations or evaluations let readers know something about the writer’s feelings and thoughts about the person. (589)

The last type of description discussed by Axelrod and Cooper is comparing, which “makes description more vivid for readers”. Simile and metaphor are often used to express comparison. “Simile and metaphor point out similarities in things that are essentially dissimilar” (593). In a simile, the words like and as are used to express appearance and comparison. An example of simile or an artistic comparison would be He is as brave as a lion, in which objects of different classes are compared. A metaphor is a hidden simile, “an implicit comparison”, without formal signs of comparison. Thus, instead of uttering She is like a rose, one can call her simply a rose, thus describing her as if she were the rose.

Simile and metaphors can add to the vividness of a description by giving readers additional information to help them picture the subject. Comparing can also help convey to readers what the writer feels about the subject. (Axelrod and Cooper, 2001: 593)

Reinking, Hart, Osten teach in their Strategies for Successful Writing that description essentially takes the reader “there”. The reader sees, you hears, touches and tastes:

Effective description creates sharply etched word pictures of objects, person, scenes, events, or situations. Sensory impressions – reflecting sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch – form the backbone of descriptive writing. Often, they build toward one dominant impression that the writer wants to evoke. (2002:74)
The importance of description lies in the answers to these questions: when, in which occasions, under what circumstances is description used in speech? As Reinking and others suggest “(m)any occasions call for description”. The following examples illustrate who, when and under what circumstances description is used. An art teacher might want students to describe a painting. A chemistry teacher might ask students to give characteristics of appearances or odors of chemical substances prepared in the laboratory. A real estate agent might create a glowing advertisement using detailed description of a house to sell it. In preparing for a wedding party, a couple might portray to their friends or restaurant owners how the room should look to be appealing for the event. Description is used very often in journalists’ reports to describe places hit by natural disasters such as a tornado or tsunami. Police use description to create a drawing of a suspect or to describe a crime scene. Engineers may discuss the construction of an engine and give a detailed description of its mechanical parts. These examples demonstrate that description is widely used by a variety of people on a daily basis in real-life situations. Description is a part of human interaction. By means of description people attempt to capture the world (2002: 74-75).

What is the purpose of description? Description appears in histories, biographies, poetry, fiction, advertising, journalism, personal letters, and in technical writing. Description creates images that help the audience imagine what is being described. It gives the audience an impression of a person, object, or place. It may illustrate ideas, make information memorable, and support an argument.

Some description merely creates images and mood, as when a writer paints a word picture of a boggy, fog-shrouded moor. But description can also stimulate
understanding or lead to action. A historian may juxtapose the splendor of French court life with the wretchedness of a Paris slum to help explain the French Revolution. And everyone knows the persuasive power of advertising’s descriptive enticements. (Reinking, Hart, Osten, 2002:75)

How often do we use description in our everyday life? Why do we use it? We use description when we want to help understand something, to create an “impression, an overall mood or feeling, such as joy, anger, terror, or distaste” (Ibid. 77), therefore by means of comparison our visual impressions strengthen and we may “visualize unfamiliar landscapes” (Ibid. 76).

Thus, first of all, it should be said that description within narration shows how the speaker sees an object or subject of the story; second, description transforms feelings and emotions that the speaker experienced towards the object, person, or place described; third, description provides a listener/reader with a better understanding and the ability to envision the object, person, or place mentioned in the story; and fourth, description may let a listener interpret a speaker’s impressions and attitude towards some element used in the story. Description allows the listener to see this element through the eyes of the speaker. As Longacre says, successful description is an evaluation: “Yes, I can picture that to myself or I can almost see what it is like” (1986: 266).

Apart from carrying a stylistic and exterior function, description serves as an important linguistic indicator about the speaker’s language abilities, in other words how well a speaker can elaborate on the topic and how well his/her command of the language is. The quality of description may vary. Description could be given as a mere list of adjectives and epithets to characterize a person, object, or a place, or description could be delivered in a cohesive discourse incorporating parenthetic expressions and complex
syntax. For example, if one says that in the fall he/she visited a remote village in Siberia with very hospitable people, a listener might ask: “So what?” However, when the story of the visit to Siberia is filled with details about this village – people, food, and so forth within a connected discourse using cohesive devices, complex syntax and the differentiation of foreground from the background information, description extends the story, turning it from a dry account of events into a rich portrayal. The description that this dissertation is interested in is the latter type of description, description produced within a paragraph-length discourse.

According to the ACTFL OPG, description is one of the two required functions of advanced oral proficiency. In order to be rated at the Advanced-level, speakers should demonstrate their ability to narrate in all three time frames and to describe people, places, and objects in all time frames in paragraph-length discourse or longer. Description appears as a core function only in the Intermediate-High, Advanced-Low, -Mid, -High, and Superior levels of these tests. Description deserves attention not only because it is a core function of Advanced-level proficiency but also because in analysis after analysis of American students’ foreign language proficiency – Carroll (1967), Magnan (1986), Rifkin (2002, 2003), and Thompson (1996) – scholars have expressed concern that students completing three or four years of foreign language study at the university level do not reach Advanced-level oral proficiency. Rifkin, for example, pointed out that “for the most part, students in their fourth year of language study typically demonstrate oral proficiency in the intermediate range” (Rifkin, 2000: 64), though sometimes student might achieve the Intermediate-High level, and very rarely the Advanced level (Rifkin, 2002: 466). The “data suggest that students need more hours of language exposure and
instruction than a college curriculum can provide in order to attain advanced-level proficiency” (Rifkin, 2003: 582). Analysis of learning outcomes in research by Brecht, Davidson and Ginsberg (1993), Davidson (1998, 2002), and Rifkin (2000, 2002, 2003, 2005) for students of Russian suggest that students with Intermediate-Mid oral proficiency may gain Advanced-level language ability if they study abroad for at least one academic year or attend an intensive immersion language program. The constraints of existing language curricula and the limited time of language classes do not let teachers “lead college students to advanced-level function” (Rifkin, 2003: 587).

Taking into account that not all students have the opportunity to study abroad or attend an immersion language program, the key pedagogical question is: how in a non-target language environment can instructors help students make that breakthrough to Advanced-level performance even after completing the college-level curriculum? Researchers find the solution in the increase of hours of language exposure and instruction provided by a college foreign language curriculum. Rifkin’s research (2002) on the acquisition of narration in the second language classroom showed that with a “consciousness-raising” approach to teaching, it is likely that students can actually reach the desired goal of narrating in paragraph-length discourse in three time frames; in other words, Rifkin’s research showed that students were sometimes able to achieve Advanced-level oral proficiency with the use of output-focused instruction that improved their control of speech production. Rifkin’s research does not claim that learners gain Advanced-level oral proficiency just by means of “consciousness-raising” instruction; rather his findings propose that such instruction facilitates students’ achievement,
especially after learners receive output-focused instruction and then apply their knowledge in the target culture during a semester or year-long study abroad.

My dissertation treats an important area in testing as it pertains to oral proficiency. Testing is a crucial part of instruction and pedagogy since it allows teachers to determine the effectiveness of instruction (i.e. whether teachers are imparting to students the skills they need to develop according to the Standards). The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* distinguish between Interpersonal and Presentational Modes of communication; the two testing formats, OPI and SOPI, may actually be assessing two different kinds of communication: dialogic and monologic speech. This dissertation investigates how the nature of oral description elicited in the Interpersonal Mode in the context of an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is fundamentally different from the nature of oral description elicited in Presentational Mode in the context of a Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI). This topic speaks to greater concerns for the importance of different kinds of human communication and whether proficiency testing can or should reflect this diversity. Thus, the purpose of my dissertation is to identify whether the mode of speech in any way affects language production and whether these modes play any particular role when assessing students’ speaking. If the analysis of description shows the different modes’ influence on students’ discourse, this will allow language educators to reconsider how they incorporate these modes into language teaching.

Analysis of tools to assess language proficiency is an important issue in SLA research. However, the body of research in this area is still quite small in the area of OPI testing for Russian. While previous research has examined other speech functions in proficiency testing (narration, giving instructions, speculating about advantages and
disadvantages, stating opinion, and making requests), description has not yet been
considered either in Russian or in other languages. Neither has there been a substantial
comparison of interpersonal and presentational modes of speaking. Moreover, little work
has been done in the area of analysis of testing for Russian, and no research to date has
investigated OPI and SOPI results for the same group of students. My research pioneers
analysis in how modality affects the assessment of learning outcomes in the two
predominant foreign language oral proficiency exams for any foreign language. A
comparison of description language samples elicited in the two modes (Interpersonal and
Presentational) will be a significant contribution to the study of language testing and
second language acquisition. The results of my dissertation will help language
professionals better understand the difference between interpersonal and presentational
speaking in the learning and teaching dynamic and will therefore open new approaches to
the teaching Russian as a foreign language.

3.2 Prior scholarship on the topic and related areas.

Numerous scholars have examined OPI and SOPI testing. However there exists
only a short list of scholarly literature on the detailed comparison of the nature of
functions elicited in the Oral Proficiency Interview and the Simulated Oral Proficiency
Interview (Koike, 1998; Shohamy, 1994). By comparison, there is a bit more literature on
the oral proficiency interview in general and on the tests’ validity as language testing
instruments (Dandonoli and Henning, 1990; Halleck, 1996; Johnson, 2000, 2001;
Lazaraton, 1996; Liskin-Gasparro, 1993, 1996; Magnan, 1987; Malone, 2000; Salaberry,
The majority of the work in this area has focused on questions of the validity, reliability, and comparability of the tests, as well as contextual variables, such as the relationship between the tester and the testee, the tester’s gender, the interlocutors’ personalities, and the topics and settings, all of which can influence language production.

In studying validity, scholars have raised the question of whether the two tests (the OPI and the SOPI) indeed elicit the same kind of language and whether they assess the same language characteristics. The questions of validity and reliability are important in measuring oral performance and communicative features objectively, since previous research has indicated that variables such as “the tester, the type of interaction, and the time of testing affect the oral language score” (Shohamy, 1994: 101). Shohamy suggested that in order to validate the two tests and prove that they elicit commensurate discourse, there should be a study of the specific language samples that each elicits (1994: 102).

Stansfield and Kenyon (1992) based their research on the correlation and comparability of OPI and SOPI rating results in Chinese, Portuguese, Hebrew, Indonesian, and Hausa. In their study, one and the same student took both tests. Each student's OPI and SOPI test were then evaluated twice by two different testers. The results of Stansfield and Kenyon’s experiment showed that each student's performance received a similar rating across tests and testers.

Shohamy (1994) considered the validity of the "direct" (OPI) and "semi-direct" (SOPI) modes in Hebrew through the comparison of the elicitation tasks (the number and types of functions and topics) and language samples obtained in both tests in terms of linguistic features, communicative strategies and discourse features. Language samples
were collected from all possible functions (including description) and tasks were performed by testees at different proficiency levels during the OPI and SOPI.

To compare linguistic features, she looked at the errors made in the areas of morphology, lexicon, and syntax. Shohamy specifically focused on “word order, tenses, verb structure, personal pronouns, gender, singular/plural, prepositions, compounds, articles, lexical approximation and lexical accuracy” (106). Shohamy concluded that since the two tests differed in elicitation tasks, both tests differed in the language samples obtained. No significant differences in linguistic features in the speech elicited by the two tests were found. However, Shohamy found differences in the discourse features by looking at “lexical and grammatical density, rhetorical functions and structures, genre, speech moves, communicative properties, discourse strategies, prosodic and paralinguistic features, and speech functions, as well as in the discourse markers” (117).

Shohamy's approach to the analysis of lexical density of language samples was based on previous work (Chafe, 1985; Ong, 1985; Murray, 1988; Halliday, 1989 and Hornberger, 1989) which suggested that "language samples vary by the number of oral versus literate features they contain" (Shohamy 1994:109). Higher number of lexical items (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) per clause suggests that a text is more literate, while higher number of grammatical items (prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliaries, numerals, articles, negative particles, etc.) indicate a more orate text. Shohamy's comparison of language samples for lexical versus grammatical items per clause in the two tests showed that SOPI responses produced a higher lexical density than OPI speech, while OPI samples contained a broader range of grammatical items. The
SOPI responses included 60% lexical items and 40% grammatical items, whereas OPI responses featured 40% lexical and 60% grammatical items.

The analysis of Shohamy’s testees' discourse strategies indicated a more frequent “switch to L1” in the OPI, and a more frequent use of “paraphrasing” and “self-correction” during the SOPI. OPI testees often clarified, hesitated, avoided the answer, expressed disagreement with the interlocutor, and revealed emotions through exclamations. During the OPI, testees used prosodic and paralinguistic features such as laughter and hesitations. There were very few prosodic and paralinguistic features found in the SOPI, and most of them occurred when the testee did not have an answer and was waiting for the following task.

Shohamy concluded that the discourse produced in the OPI differs from that in the SOPI due to the different contexts of language elicitation -- the “face-to-face” vs. the “tape mediated” setting. Nevertheless, the data collected by Shohamy were not enough to draw a straight line of distinction between the "direct" (interpersonal) mode of the OPI and the "semi-direct" (presentational) of the SOPI. More detailed research comparing functions and tasks used in the tests is, therefore, needed. The term ‘direct’ was introduced by Clark (1975) “to refer to test formats and procedures which duplicate the setting and operation of the real-life situations in which the proficiency is normally demonstrated” (Shohamy, 1994: 100). Semi-derict tests “elicit oral discourse through the unse of recorded and visual task stimuli and in wchih the oral responses of the tes-takers are recorded” (Ibid.).

In contrast to Shohamy’s work focusing on the validity of the two language tests and on the characteristics of what Koike addresses as dialogic speech, Koike (1998)
concentrated on “more monolingual tasks” (longer responses) showing differences in responses during OPI and SOPI tests. For his investigation Koike chose to analyze the differences in the discourse elicited in the two test formats at the Advanced and Superior levels from the same Intermediate-High and Advanced-level learners of Spanish. Speeches selected for the comparative analysis were responses given to Advanced-level prompts: narrating, instructing, and comparing advantages and disadvantages; and to Superior-level tasks of supporting an opinion.

Koike hypothesized that the context in which the information is elicited might be related to the differences in discourse in the two tests. To consider the context, Koike included examination of the test mode, the type of stimulus, strategies used to deliver the speech (such as pauses, fillers, false starts, self-correction, switch to L1, turn-taking) and discourse elements (such as speech acts, propositions, supporting statements). Koike’s results conformed to those of Shohamy with regard to the testees’ switch to L1 in the OPI context. He concluded that

In the OPI testees took significantly more turns, quoted more, used more speech acts, and switched into English more often than in the SOPI. On the other hand, testees in the SOPI used more fillers than those in the OPI. The greater use of fillers in the SOPI may be an indicator of greater stress and attempt to fill in gaps under this condition. The switches indicate that either the testee lacked the appropriate lexical item in Spanish, … or the speaker was relying on shared knowledge of English with the interviewer. ...(T)he direct test results suggest an increased awareness of and response to the presence of a live interviewer and a greater willingness to utilize the linguistic resources of that person (1998: 77-78).

In comparing results in the OPI and SOPI for the same individuals, Koike argued that differences between their responses would depend upon the type of task students were performing. He suggested that the differences occurred due to the nature of the two
tests: the OPI is interactive and conversational, more of a “personal story”, whereas the SOPI is a “report of events”.

Koike's interpretation of his SOPI data contradicted Shohamy’s findings in terms of self-correction. In Koike's analysis, a higher number of uncorrected errors were found in the SOPI in the function of narration. He suggested that the amount of error correction might depend on the stimuli and the nature of the tests; and possibly on time constraints. Koike proposed that since the SOPI time is limited, testees may feel stress and emotional strain. It is possible that SOPI testees may concentrate differently than OPI testees on the test and perceive these same problems more by the content of its message than by its form (more research is needed in this area).

Koike did not find significant differences either in discourse or management strategies, or in structural components produced in an OPI and those produced in a SOPI. Koike argued that the majority of the differences lies in the type of tasks and topics rather than in “the test modalities themselves”; thus Koike disagrees with Shohamy, who claimed that the modality of the test is a more significant factor than the stimuli eliciting test responses.

Koike’s study omitted the analysis of description, which is required at both levels of his analysis. It is unclear why Koike did not include description in the framework of his research. Did he randomly select the functions to be analyzed because not all aspects of speech can be studied at once, or did he intentionally choose to omit the function of description for some clear reason? My research project will focus on his omitted function: the nature of description, analysis of testee descriptions in interpersonal and presentational modes with a comparison of testee descriptions in the two tests, and
finally, a discussion of the conflict results obtained by Koike and Shohamy regarding error correction and switches to L1 during students’ breakdowns.

According to Rifkin’s observation of American students’ acquisition of Russian (2002), the function of description seems to emerge in the spontaneous speech of students of Russian only after the appearance of narration in the present and past tense in their discourse. Recent research done by Rifkin (2002) investigated the other core function of Advanced-level speech, narration. This research focused on complex syntax (frequency of complex sentences and relative clauses per narration) produced in narrations (of film plots) delivered by Russian native speakers and learners of Russian.

My analysis of description will therefore continue the research into Advanced-level speakers’ functions and therefore complement Rifkin's study of the acquisition of narration in Russian by addressing the other critical function of Advanced-level speech: description. The proposed analysis of description will indicate the ways to bring our students to Advanced-level proficiency. In order to bring students to this level of performance, instructors need to understand the key features of satisfactory description at this level. Thus the proposed analysis of description is a key piece of the puzzle of oral proficiency testing and of our understanding of second language learning and teaching.
CHAPTER 4

ADVANCED LEVEL FUNCTIONS

Since the present research focuses on the function of description, it is necessary to note that this function is one of the core functions Advanced-level speakers must be able to perform; if a testee cannot describe in paragraph-length discourse, s/he cannot earn the advanced-level oral proficiency rating. Though description can be used by Intermediate and Superior level speakers, the quality of such descriptions will differ from the quality necessary for the Advanced-level. The present chapter will discuss features (as established by the ACTFL OPG) of speech at the Advanced-level according to the global tasks or language functions that Advanced-level speakers can perform; social contexts and content areas in which Advanced-level speakers function; the type of text that constitute Advanced-level speakers’ discourse and the accuracy expectations of their speech.

4.1 Features of Advanced-Level Speech.

Advanced-level speech is characterized by the ability of speakers to fulfill the core requirements of this level: to narrate and describe in all major time frames (in Russian: past, present and future) in paragraph-length discourse and to successfully manage a situation with an unanticipated complication. In successfully managing a
situation with a complication, the ACTFL OPG mean the ability to “get into, through and out of a routine situation with a complication” (1999:99). By a situation with a complication, the ACTFL OPG understand a survival situation in which “things fail to proceed smoothly and routinely” (1999: 60) as might be expected or predicted. Situations with a complication are routine situations with an unexpected twist that require the use of linguistic strategies and Advanced-level functions: narration and description. Additionally, Advanced-level speakers are able to give explanations and instructions, and to make requests. Advanced-level speakers can perform all the aforementioned functions “within a linguistic framework of connected discourse of paragraph length” (1999:100).

At the Advanced-level, in terms of length and discourse structure, a paragraph serves as the measure for the oral text. In order to link sentences into a cohesive, paragraph-length discourse, Advanced-level speakers use connectors such as по-моему, дело в том что, поэтому, наконец and etc. (for more detailed list of connectors see Appendix B). Advanced-level speakers can sustain their conversation in a paragraph-length discourse with appropriate accuracy and confidence. Such speakers have good control of aspect and tense because they must have control of time frame according to the requirements for advanced level oral proficiency. Their errors do not interfere with communication.

Accuracy at this level is demonstrated globally in terms of comprehensibility; i.e., performing the functions of the level, Advanced-speakers are understood by native speakers of the target language not accustomed to dealing with non-natives speaking their language. This does not mean that all aspects of the communication (individual words, forms, syntax, pronunciation, etc.) will be exact, accurate, and appropriate in every case. It does not mean that in spite of speaker error and inaccuracy, the message will be readily understood by a listener who does not need
to make special or repeated efforts to decipher meaning. (*ACTFL OPI TTM*, 1999:26).

For instance, Advanced-level speakers can tell a story in the past tense, organizing the events in coherent and sequential order into a paragraph-length discourse without losing fluency and connectedness; however, sporadically such speakers may misuse correct verb forms (conjugation or stress) and/or appropriate verbal aspect. Nevertheless, the native-speaker interlocutor is able to follow the story without difficulty. Advanced-level speakers are fluent though occasionally may exhibit groping for words. “Advanced level speech is noteworthy for its greater fluency… understood as flow of speech …[and]… as coherent use of the language…in order to differentiate between central and supporting aspect of the message” (Buck et al. (1989) cited in Liskin-Gasparro 1993:14). However, even if speakers are extremely fluent in the target language and exhibit exceptional accuracy in pronunciation, precise grammar, and an extended lexicon, but cannot sustain the performance of the core requirements, the latter skills do not qualify speakers as advanced. In fact, the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is not a "compensatory" test in which excellence in one area can compensate for weaknesses in other areas: testees who cannot consistently perform the core functions of Advanced-level speech (narration and description) in a variety of topic areas in all time frames in paragraph-length discourse cannot be rated as Advanced-level speakers.

Advanced-level speakers are willing to engage in interaction. They actively participate in conversation to deliver information that “includes topics of interest in the speakers’ community, region and country” (1999:14). “Advanced-level speakers are most notable for their conversation management strategies. They are full and autonomous conversational partners…They have at their command a variety of repair strategies…”
(Buck et al. (1989), cited in Liskin-Gasparro 1993:14). Advanced-level speakers manage to fulfill the needs of school and work situations and talk about their personal interests and the interests of others concretely in the context/content of most formal and informal settings. For a substantial review of the OPI Guidelines for the Intermediate-High through the Superior Levels, see Appendix A.

4.2 What Is a Paragraph?

According to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines, a paragraph represents a coherent presentation of a number of utterances tied together by an overall message intent such as narration of an event and/or description of a person, object or a set of circumstances (ACTFL OPI TTM, 1999:123).

The paragraph is not solely distinguished in terms of length, even though length is an important characteristic, strings of unrelated sentences on a topic do not constitute a paragraph, for example. Rather, the defining element of the paragraph is its internal integrity, which is attained through the strategic sequencing of ideas and information. While Intermediate speakers may present a series of descriptive units that have their individual unity and meaning, like a series of slides, Advanced-speakers present a composite of successive sequences that are linked chronologically and sympathetically, rather like a video presentation (ACTFL OPI TTM, 1999:29).

Fulwiler, Toby, and Hayakawa’s (1999:85) definition of a paragraph focuses on the relation between an author and a reader. Nevertheless, their definition is applicable to the current research because it deals with two channels of information transformation. Thus, in their understanding “(g)ood paragraphing helps readers follow an author’s ideas throughout a piece of writing. When a new paragraph begins, readers expect a new idea to begin”. Fulwiler and others suggest that every sentence within a paragraph develops a
“single main idea” that will unify the paragraph. The paragraph presents its ideas in a logically organized order. All the sentences “stick together” or, in other words, are related to the surrounding sentences, thus making the discourse coherent. The transition of ideas within a paragraph must take place smoothly by means of transitional expressions, without which a “paragraph would be a string of seemingly unrelated facts”. Fulwiler and others propose that in order to structure “paragraphs for unity, organization, or length”, one should add transitional expressions (1999:88).

In their *College Writer’s Reference* (1999:90), Fulwiler et al. categorize transitional expressions according to the functions they perform. Thus, transitional expressions may perform an expanding function, “also, and, besides, finally, further, in addition, moreover, then”; an exemplifying/illustrating function, “for example, for instance, in fact, specifically, thus”; give qualifications such as “but, certainly, however, to be sure”; or summarize and/or conclude such as “and so, finally, in conclusion, in short, in sum, therefore, this shows, thus we see”; show logical relationships such as “as a result, because, by implication, for this reason, if, since, so, thus, therefore, this shows that”; compare such as “also, as well, likewise, similarly”; contrast such as “although, but, despite, even though, nevertheless, on the other hand, yet”; place relationships in time such as in “after, before, between, earlier, formerly, later, longer than, meanwhile, since”; and map relationships in space such as “above, adjacent to, behind, below, beyond, in front of, nearby, next to, north (south, east, west) of, opposite to, over, through, within”.

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4.3 Coherent Discourse.

The ACTFL definition of a paragraph implies coherently represented utterances that compose one message. The notion of coherent discourse in speech and writing as well as ways to create and describe coherence are explored by a number of scholars (Halliday and Hasan 1976, Bublitz 1997, Bennett 1978, Gumperz, 1984, Tannen 1984, Barkhudarov 1985, etc). Bublitz views cohesion as “a category for the analysis of the text beyond the sentence”. He considers coherence “as a context-dependent, hearer- (or reader-) oriented and comprehension-based, interpretive notion”, and proposes that coherence is not an inherent property of a text “but rather ‘comes out’ of the text in the sense that it is based on the language of the text, in the same way as it is based on additional information provided inter alia by the linguistic context, the socio-cultural environment, the valid communicative principles and maxims, and the interpreter’s encyclopedic knowledge” (1997:1-2).

Bennett’s (1978) notion of cohesion is based on textual elements which are connected to each other in such a way that they signal a “continuously developing theme”. Cohesive devices, continues Bennett, allow a listener or a reader “to ‘read between the lines’: to fill in elided material, to make references to proceeding discourse, to interpret the relationship of incoming material to the prevailing topic or theme, in short, to follow the links in a chain” (cited by Gumperz and others in Tannen, 1984:5). Cohesive stylistic devices are words which signal what information is coming next, for example, at first, then, finally. By using cohesive devices, speakers provide listeners with advance-signaling of where their discourse is heading. In a cohesive discourse each
newly added element bears its relevance to the rest of the discourse; cohesiveness is created with the help of connective words (1984:16).

In the ACTFL OPG definition, “cohesion refers to surface-structure features of an utterance or text which link different parts of sentences or larger units of discourse” (1999: 119). Discourse ideas are linked by means of cohesive devices (words and phrases most frequently expressed by adverbs and conjunctions), which “move forward the action in some form of logical narrative order, whether the ‘narrative’ is a story, a description or a set of instructions” (1999: 100). Cohesive devices form a logical sequence of a story (narration, description, explanation and etc.); “establish time-frames for actions and events”, build “structures of meaning by establishing principal and supporting language units”, “help create and sustain comparisons” and “provide an oppositional linguistic framework for debate” (1999: 100). Cohesiveness is demonstrated in such a way that every statement within the discourse relates to preceding statements, conveys additional implied meaning “well beyond that of the statement itself”, and “supports and advances what follows”. In other words, single components of cohesive discourse can neither carry the entire significance of the message, nor can they stand independently from the rest of the message. “All components are arranged according to some logical and fixed ordering according to the specific demands of the communication: a chronology, a cause-and-effect elaboration, a comparative posture, a rhetorical stance based on thesis-antithesis-synthesis, etc.” (1999: 96). Transitional expressions, cohesion of the inner structure, and integrity of the discourse make a paragraph into a text in which meaning may be either changed or completely destroyed if the order of sentences is rearranged or scrambled.
Precisely this characteristic differentiates a paragraph from a number of discrete sentences in a lengthy text.

This ordering or discourse structure may not be one totally favored by the target language culture, but the interlocutor understands the full message and is not distracted by any breakdown in linkage governing form or substance. This means that the connectors (conjunctions, temporal indicators such as verbs and adverbs, etc.) as well as the sequencing mechanisms (events, reasons, etc.) are accurate and appropriate and therefore do not cause misinterpretation nor create confusion. (*ACTFL OPI TTM*, 1999: 96)

According to Barkhudarov (1985:116-117), cohesion in the text is successfully formed not only by subordinate conjunctions in complex sentences but also by the use of parenthetical words. He calls parenthetical words special words and phrases that help a speaker express his/her attitude towards what is being said (for example, Русская кухня, безусловно, известна своей оригинальностью, “Russian cuisine, undoubtedly, is known for its originality”). Parenthetical elements are not parts of the sentence, and they denote a number of meanings. Some speak to various degrees of assurance, and the degree of authenticity of a statement: без сомнения, безусловно, беспорно, вероятно, видимо, возможно, впрочем, действительно (a great degree of assurance), кажется, конечно, может быть, наверно, несомненно, очевидно, повидимому, пожалуй (less degree of assurance, suggestion), разумеется, уверяю вас. Consider the degree of assurance in the following examples, Зима, несомненно, скоро кончится, “Undoubtedly, winter will be over soon” vs. Зима, кажется, скоро кончится “It seems like winter will be over soon”. Other parenthetic elements express the speaker’s feelings and emotional attitude to what has been stated in the sentence: к счастью, к несчастью, к (общей) радости, к сожалению, к удивлению, к изумлению, к стыду, к огорчению,
на беду, на счастье. For example, К сожалению, зима скоро кончится,

“Unfortunately, winter will be over soon”. Some parenthetic elements constitute a source of report or information: говорят, известно, по-моему, по мнению (кого-либо), по сообщению (кого-либо), по словам (кого-либо), по слухам, по преданию, с точки зрения (кого-либо). For example, По сообщению синоптиков, зима скоро кончится,

“The weather forecast says that winter will be over soon”. Still other parenthetic elements exhibit the order of thoughts and their connection, and relations between the parts of a statement: во-первых, во-вторых, в-третьих, наконец, в конце концов, с одной стороны, с другой стороны, следовательно, значит, итак, напротив, наоборот, например, между прочим, так, кстати, в частности. There are also ways and manners of expressing one’s thoughts: одним словом, другими словами, иначе говоря, короче (говоря), собственно говоря, лучше сказать, мягко выражаясь, так сказать, стало быть etc. And finally some parenthetic elements denote a form of addressing a person or persons: видишь(ли), знаешь(ли), понимаете, верите, послушай, etc. (Barkhudarov, 1985:116-117). According to Belevitskaya-Khalizeva’s observation (132) “parenthetic words and phrases are most frequently used to express the degree of authenticity of a statement and the relations between the parts of a statement”.

Vinogradov (1954: 142-145) noticed that the syntactic place of parenthetic words and phrases in Russian depends on their relation to the rest of the discourse. If a parenthetic word or phrase refers to the whole sentence, then it is usually placed in the initial or final sentential position in Russian. If a parenthetic word or phrase refers to a part of the sentence then it is located near this referent. Fulwiler and others add that parenthetical elements are not only words and phrases but also are clauses that may
“interrupt a sentence but do not affect its meaning”. Parenthetical elements are not bound to a syntactical position in a sentence, nor are they connected to the other parts of the sentence; they may “appear anywhere in the sentence and can be moved from one place to another without changing the meaning” (1999: 255).

A concise table of cohesive devices (parenthetical words and phrases, adverbs and conjunctions) used in Russian is provided in Appendix B. This table was composed with the help of parenthetical elements cited in Barkhudarov’s Русский Язык. Учебник для 7-8 классов, “Textbook for grade 7-8” (a textbook for native speakers of Russian taking it in Russian Schools), in Belevitskaya-Khalizeva’s “Exercises in Russian Syntax. Compound and Complex Sentences”, and in Rifkin’s 2000 article Video in the Proficiency-Based Advanced Conversation Class: An Example from the Russian-Language Curriculum.

4.4 What is Narration?

According to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview Tester Training Manual (1999: 123), narration is “the ability to produce an oral account of an event or incident.” The narration, a multilevel task, at the Advanced level is characterized by the chronological and logical organization of a series of events or actions. Full detail, vividness and complexity are not yet fully present at this level. Advanced-level students can tell a story or give its summary in a connected paragraph-length discourse. According to the ACTFL OPG, (1999:101), an “important feature of the narration is the ability to make the distinction between the more important and less important matters of the story”. That is, an Advanced-Mid-level speaker can deliver a story in context with some detail.
Advanced-Mid speakers are able to distinguish foreground from background information\textsuperscript{11}. Advanced-level stories show good control of aspect and “contain both description of the context as well as recounting of events in integrated narratives”. Advanced-Low speakers can not interrelate the function of description and narration; they therefore separate them in their discourse. Advanced-Low narration is a recounting of events in linear order with less control of aspect.

In the flow of extended\textsuperscript{12} discourse Superior-level speakers provide a detailed narration characterized by chronological, logical, and contrastive organization, meaning that events are related in the appropriate sequence supported by the suitable discourse structure, cohesion, syntactic, and morphological accuracy. Superior speakers' narrations are so detailed, vivid, and picturesque that the listeners can feel that they witnessed the narrated events themselves. Superior level speakers' narrations include significant foregrounding, backgrounding, and evaluation.

4.5 What is Description?

“Description refers to the ability to produce a cohesive oral presentation of qualities or features characterizing a given object, place, person, etc” (\textit{ACTFL OPI TTM}, 1999: 122).

\textsuperscript{11} “The foreground relates events belonging to the skeletal structure of the discourse (Hopper,1979) and consists of clauses that move time forward (Dry, 1983). The background does not itself narrate main events, but provides supportive material which elaborates on or evaluates the events in the foreground (Hopper, 1979)” (Bardovi-Harlig, \textit{Telling of a Tale}, 1992:144).

\textsuperscript{12} Extended discourse refers to treating a topic extensively beyond the frame of a single paragraph: sustaining and developing the main idea through complex utterances, which link together syntactically and thematically. “Extended discourse is a communicative building process in both form and meaning. It requires control of discourse structure, cohesiveness, and linguistic facility in the functions of the Superior level: detailed description, detailed narration, expressing and defending opinions, hypothesizing, and developing an argument” (\textit{ACTFL OPI TTM}, 1999:93).
The quality and quantity of description differs by level of proficiency. According to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview Tester Training Manual (1999:93), “description is a multilevel task, but the demands of appropriateness and complexity are different at each level.” An advanced speaker’s description is a general description that exhibits a large number of qualifiers: adjectives, prepositional phrases, and descriptive, dependent and relative clauses. Advanced-level description demonstrates a rich and diverse vocabulary, and is organized in paragraph-length discourse. Despite the use of generic vocabulary, Advanced-level description is sufficient to enable the listener to picture the person, object or setting of the description in his/her mind. An intermediate speaker’s description is characterized by the use of simple common nouns and adjectives, with occasional relative clauses or adverbial phrases. Superior-level speakers produce a description full of detail so the listener can draw an imaginative picture of what is being described. In their descriptions Superior-level speakers use multiple qualifiers: adjectives, phrases in apposition, relative clauses, extended adjectival and participial constructions (ACTFL OPI TTM, 1999: 93-101).

In conclusion, this chapter has addressed characteristics of Advanced-level speech as defined by ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines, and discussed the two core language functions that speakers at this level are required to perform.
CHAPTER 5

DATA COLLECTION AND CRITERIA FOR ANALYSIS

In this chapter of my study of interpersonal and presentational modes of speech in
description produced in the OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) and SOPI (Simulated Oral
Proficiency Interview), I discuss the methodology of data collection, preparation, and
processing. This chapter also discusses some problems with the prompts used in the SOPI
to elicit description, as well as factors affecting the selection of data for analysis. Using
conversational analysis techniques, I analyze the data for each individual level
(Intermediate-High, Advanced-Low, Advanced-Mid, Advanced-High and Superior)
separately, and then compare both tests according to linguistic features, discourse
features, and discourse management strategies used in the description portion of the OPI
and the SOPI exams.

5.1 Subjects and Data Collection.

The primary data for this study were collected through official recordings of OPI
and SOPI exams taken by learners of Russian, including existing data in audio-taped
format obtained from ACTFL (OPI data), the Center for Applied Linguistics (SOPI data),
and oral exams (OPIs and SOPIs) taken by students and instructors of Russian at the
Ohio State University (fall 2003) and the Middlebury College Russian School (summer 2003). ACTFL OPI tapes and CAL SOPI tapes were provided without dates indicating the time when each test was taken.

Since the aim of this research is to explore and understand the nature of the description function in the two tests and since according to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines description is a characteristic of advanced level communicative ability in a foreign language, this research considered interviews of upper-level students only. The subjects were learners of Russian at the Intermediate-High, Advanced-Low, Advanced-Mid, Advanced-High, and Superior levels of oral proficiency according to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines (Revised 1999).

The data consisted of 69 audio-recorded speeches: 31 OPIs and 38 SOPIs. All the names of subjects reported here are pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. ACTFL archives all Oral Proficiency Interviews officially administered by ACTFL-certified testers and provided me with 14 OPI tests. CAL archives SOPI tests (although not all SOPIs that are conducted) and provided me with 4 SOPI tests. The recordings obtained from ACTFL and CAL were used for this project with the permission of these organizations.

The OPI data from Middlebury came from students who took entrance and exit Oral Proficiency Interviews as a requirement of the Middlebury Russian School and consented to have their OPI interviews included in the dataset for this research project. OPI Middlebury data consisted exclusively of 17 official OPIs conducted by ACTFL-certified testers on the Middlebury Russian School faculty. The SOPI data from Middlebury, however, were unofficial interviews of those students and instructors of
Russian (for whom Russian was a foreign language) who also signed the consent form (see Appendix F) and volunteered to participate in the research. It was explained to Middlebury subjects that the SOPI results were to be used for research purposes only and that students’ performances on the SOPI would neither affect their course grades, nor be shared with their instructors. All subjects were told that they would not be identified or in any way linked with their OPI and/or SOPI speech samples. All subjects participating in this project did so voluntarily and signed a consent form allowing me to use their responses in my research. The procedures of the research and the consent forms were approved by both the Human Subjects Research Committees at Middlebury College and the Institutional Review Board at the Ohio State University.

Students meeting two criteria were asked to take the SOPI. The first source of Middlebury SOPIs was that group of students whose entrance and exit oral exams (in the first and the last week of the Summer Immersion Program at Middlebury) were rated by OPI testers at the Intermediate High level and above. The second source was that group of students at the higher levels of instruction (levels five through seven and graduate students in the program) who volunteered to take the SOPI as a practice test before their exit oral exams at the end of the summer program. The number of SOPIs collected at Middlebury was 34. The number of SOPIs collected at Middlebury was significantly higher than the number of OPIs because of the lack of SOPI tests available from CAL representing oral proficiency levels of Intermediate-High and above.

The Middlebury Russian School allowed me the opportunity to create a control group of sorts in which one pool of students took both tests. The control group included only those students at the Middlebury Russian School who participated in both the OPI
and the SOPI interviews within the same week to avoid discrepancies in results due to rapid language acquisition in the context of the summer immersion program there. The total number of OPI Middlebury subjects in the control group was 13. After each of 13 students took both tests, the total number of recordings in the control group was 28. The purpose of giving both tests to the same individuals was to ensure that the differences in individual speaking styles and in subjects' peculiarities of describing would not interfere with the analysis of the nature of description performed by the same student in interpersonal (OPI) versus presentational (SOPI) modes.

At the Intermediate-High level alone the data consisted of 18 audio-recorded speech samples (7 OPI and 11 SOPI), of which 4 belonged to the control group. At the Advanced-Low level I collected 22 samples (12 OPI and 10 SOPI), of which 3 students belonged to the control group. At the Advanced-Mid level there were 15 samples (4 OPI and 11 SOPI) with 3 students in the control group. The number of audio-recorded speech samples at the two highest levels, Advanced-High and Superior, was 7 at each level, with 4 OPIs and 3 SOPIs. The control group at the Advanced-High level consisted only of one student, and of two at the Superior level. Table 5.1 summarizes the number of subjects who participated in the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Total number of subjects per level</th>
<th>Number who took OPI</th>
<th>Number who took SOPI</th>
<th>Number who took both (Control Group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IH</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.1: Number of subjects.**
Since this dissertation focuses on how learners of Russian at the Intermediate High through Superior levels perform the function of description in interpersonal and presentational modes, heritage Russian speakers’ exams were excluded from the research. The studies of heritage speakers done by Bermel and Kagan (2000), and Polinsky (2000) showed that the language of Russian heritage speakers is substantially different from the language of learners of Russian as a foreign language. For example, Bermel and Kagan write that “unlike non-heritage students, …heritage speakers have a high percentage of internal grammar. That means that the approach to teaching them … will be vastly different from the approach generally used to teach those students for whom Russian is a foreign language. (2000:430). Bermel and Kagan believe that heritage speakers rely on their own inner linguistic resources and can monitor their speech outcomes. In the future, it would be interesting to study descriptions of heritage learners to find the differences between descriptions produced by heritage speakers and learners of Russian and a foreign language.

This research project consisted of the observation and analysis of performance rather achievement, and therefore I did not investigate whether the performance obtained in interpersonal and presentational modes correlated with the amount of official instruction that testees had prior to taking the OPI or SOPI. Nor did I look at students' gender, age, social occupation, or how many years they spent in Russia before being tested. My focus is on the differences recorded only in learner speech, thus recordings were audio, not video. Paralinguistic effects such as physical movements, gestures, facial expressions, and other visible non-verbal means of communication were not considered.
For comparative purposes, I also interviewed and recorded descriptions from six native speakers\(^{13}\) (NS) of Russian to see what they do with the language complexity and density in description speech samples. I used these data as a model to which I compared non-Russian speakers’ performance of description in the interpersonal and presentational modes of speech. For my project I invited Russians aged 25 to 40 who received their bachelor’s degree at Russian universities and who came from demographically different backgrounds in Russia. I assumed that the descriptions produced by native speakers of Russian would vary depending upon their region of origin but would nonetheless serve as a comparative model. Russian native speakers were current doctoral students and teachers of Russian at North American universities. Like other subjects participating in the current research, the real names of Russian speakers are not used in this dissertation in order to maintain confidentiality.

Native speakers of Russian were asked to perform description tasks similar or identical to those in the OPI and SOPI. NS did not take the entire OPI and SOPI but were asked questions similar to those of the various OPI and SOPI prompts which elicited description. When responding to prompts similar in nature to those found in the OPI, NS were asked to describe their home towns, to compare them with the cities in which they now live or to compare the small towns where they live now with a small town with which they were familiar in Russia; to describe and compare a Russian university and American university; to describe a person’s physical appearance and character (for example, their grandmother, friend, spouse, or children) and, if speakers chose, to talk about their friends or spouses. These responses were asked in face-to-face settings, and their responses were recorded.

\(^{13}\) Out of 6 Native Speakers one was trained in the OPI, which might compromise results.
Occasionally, in case a given NS did not give an extended description and had difficulty giving a lengthy response to a prompt, I followed up the description of appearance and personality of a person with a request to elaborate on what features and characteristics attracted the speakers to the people they described. This mimics the strategies OPI testers use in an actual test to elicit descriptive speech. Since OPI testers do not always use comparison to elicit description, I did not use comparison for each NS’s description as well because I wanted to make the prompts that NS responded to during the study as close as possible to the prompts asked by OPI testers during actual interviews. I tried to keep the same testing environment and circumstances for both non-native speakers and NS. I asked for three to four descriptions from each NS. If one description failed (was not a paragraph), I followed up with questions or switched to another topic to elicit description again.

When responding to prompts similar in nature to these found in the SOPI, NS gave responses to the prompt about the advantages and disadvantages of studying at a private university or college. Similar to non-native speakers, Russian NS were given a time limit for the SOPI task. Of course this particular interaction cannot constitute a speech act utterly identical to the one elicited by a SOPI prompt. It must be noted that the questions were asked by a live interlocutor present in the room. While I went to great length to suppress facial features, gestures and other nonverbal cues normally present at interpersonal communication, these samples cannot be considered to have been elicited under circumstances corresponding absolutely to those of the SOPI. NS responses were transcribed and analyzed for syntactical and lexical complexity following the same format and types of analysis undergone by the speech samples of non-native speakers.
This analysis is used to draw conclusions about the syntactical and lexical features of the testees’ speech samples.

5.2 Techniques of Data Transcription.

After all the speech samples were collected, the instances of description used by testees in the process of interviews were identified and transcribed using Zemskaia’s and Kapanadze’s conventions of transcription (Russkaia Razgovornaia Rech’. Teksty, 1978): words in transcription appeared in their orthographic rather than phonological form. I chose this convention because the goal of my research was to reflect on the structure and strategies applied by students in the production of connected discourse and not to analyze the speakers’ pronunciation. In fact, Zemskaia and Kapanadze wrote in their analysis of colloquial Russian speech:

(Мы) отказались от представления всех текстов в фонетической транскрипции. (Наш) материал должен был и в письменной передаче восприниматься без смысловых потерь, форма передачи речи не должна была стать кривым зеркалом, которое представило бы в искаженном виде факты морфологии, словообразования, лексики и особенно синтаксиса РР [разговорной речи]. (1978:17)14

In order to represent the oral data for analysis and interpretation, I used standard conventions for conversational analysis with some adaptations devised specifically for this project. As Cameron comments in her book Working with Spoken Discourse:

14 “(We) refused to represent all the texts in their phonetic transcription. (Our) material was to be perceived in writing without any meaning loss, the form of the representation of the speech should not have become a distorting mirror, which would misrepresent the facts about Russian morphology, word formation, lexicon and especially syntax of spoken speech”
There is no ‘standard’ way to transcribe talk. Analysis may use a variety of conventions for just about every aspect of transcription, including how to lay out talk on the page, how to represent prosodic, paralinguistic and nonverbal features, and whether to use nonstandard spelling to give a more realistic impression of the speaker’s pronunciation. (2001:43)

I used boldface to any grammatical, morphological, phonetic, or semantic mistakes and any deviation from speaking norms and indicated the correct form or the best guess of what a speaker might have intended to say in brackets. Stress was not marked unless the word carried an incorrect stress.

Punctuation in the transcription represents phrasing and intonation rather than standard punctuation used in writing to define clauses and any other syntactic relations. A full stop or period indicates falling intonation; a comma means continuing intonation; and a question mark shows interrogative intonation. In case students’ talk shifted in pitch up or down arrows are used (↑ or ↓) to indicate noticeably higher or lower pitch than the surrounding talk. Letters or words in capital (upper case) letters show that a sound or a word received an emphatic stress and was louder than the rest of the discourse. Pauses of one second in length are represented by one dash. Every other pause of another second in length is represented as another dash. For example, if a speaker paused for two seconds, this was represented in the transcription with two dashes (--). Hesitations are shown as “а”, “ам”, “э” and etc. After each response, the time length of the response is marked.

Stretched vowels are represented as “мо-о-ожно” by breaking words into syllables with repeating vowels that were stretched in speech. A slower speed of speech is depicted with expanded character spacing as in “h o w  m u c h ?” More rapid pronunciation is indicated by means of italics. Speech variations such as “щас” meaning “сейчас” are
spelled as they were pronounced. The symbol “XXX” stands for incomprehensible output or an unintelligible chunk of discourse. “||” represents latching, when speakers follow one another without any overlap or pauses. Square brackets “[” represent overlapped speech between a tester / taped prompt and a testee. One vertical bar “|” is used to separate clauses. Parentheses “( )” contain the description of noises that speakers made. For example, such parentheses might point out when speech breakdown might occur in a student’s response because all of a sudden a student started laughing or sighing. The time of the response is given at the end of each transcription, “m” for “a minute/minutes”, while “s” “seconds”. The speech is analyzed as clauses\(^{15}\) rather than as sentences; therefore I use lower case in the beginning of each clause. Personal names and names of places are written with small letters too since the transcription represents spoken rather than written discourse. Russian constructions with -то, -нибудь and etc. requiring a dash in writing are shown in transcriptions without the necessary dash because dashes in the transcriptions represent pauses.

5.3 Criteria for Data Analysis.

The methodology of oral discourse analysis used in this research was similar to that found in Koike (1998) for Spanish, Liskin-Gasparro (1993) for Spanish, Rifkin (2003) for Russian, and Shohamy (1994) for Hebrew. In oral proficiency interviews speakers elaborated freely on a variety of topics. As a result the data consist of open-ended questions and student responses to these questions. The speech samples collected from both tests were first grouped into levels and then analyzed individually by test.

\(^{15}\) For more information on why I chose to represent data as clauses rather than sentences, please see Chapter 6 on the syntactical complexity of speech elicited in the two tests.
Performance in each of the two modes was analyzed for linguistic parameters of speech (similar to Koike’s 1998 and Shohamy’s 1994 analysis). In contrast to Koike’s and Shohamy’s research, though, I perform a more detailed comparison of the testees' responses by looking specifically at only one function, which appears in Intermediate High levels and above: the function of description.

The analysis considered the following linguistic features: syntax and lexical complexity. The analysis of syntax investigated three areas: (1) complex syntax (parallel to Rifkin’s 2002 research), in other words subordination; (2) the subordination type elicited in two tests with detailed investigation of subordinate clauses introduced by the relative pronoun который and the explanatory or purposive conjunction чтобы; (3) and the use of participial/gerundial phrases.

The analysis of lexical complexity investigated the vocabulary used by testees in the OPI and the SOPI, and drew conclusions regarding at what level and in which test students used the most diverse vocabulary. I used *First Russian Vocabulary* by Patrick Waddington (which consists of 850 words) as the lexical foundation for learners of Russian as a foreign language in order to perform the analysis of lexical complexity in this research. In order to investigate lexical complexity, I classified non-basic words (words not included in Waddington's *First Russian Vocabulary*) according to their part of speech (e.g., nouns, verbs, and adjectives). A percentage of higher level lexicon density/complexity was calculated in relation to the aggregate number of words in each speech sample.
5.4 Locating Description.

Due to the conversational or interactive nature of the OPI, testers cannot prepare fixed questions prior to the OPI; therefore the descriptions elicited vary from test to test. If a tester was not satisfied with any given answer, he/she followed up with another elicitation of description. In some places this turned into a negotiation of meaning. But, in general, it can be said that this research looked at the description of places, people, objects, and processes. Since description is a part of various language functions, the present research considers only those descriptions that were elicited as a separate language function and omitted any other sentence-length descriptions sprinkled into testees’ speech. This analysis takes up only what may be called "significant" description, or in other words, description in paragraph-length discourse.

Because the SOPI is a pre-recorded test, all students are asked identical questions. Accordingly, at first glance it seemed easy to predict those tasks in the Russian SOPI that should elicit description: description in the task of “description of a birthday party”, description of universities in the task of “stating advantages and disadvantages of attending a private university or college”, and possibly a description of drivers and cars in a picture-based task asking for a story of an accident based on pictures given in the booklet.

After looking at the data as a whole I found that some students attempted to include description in the task of giving explanations for why the use of sunscreen lotion is important, some in the task of supporting their opinion about whose responsibility it is to care for homeless people and/or in the situation-based task requesting opinion about the possible consequences of obligatory foreign language study throughout the high
school years. Considering all discourse featuring some characteristics of description elicited in the SOPI showed *elements* of description in responses to many different prompts:

- 20% of SOPI students included a superficially short description of drivers in their recall of a car accident they witnessed,
- 10% briefly described a dorm when asked to request to move in with Russian host families and explain why they want to live with a family,
- 5% used some description when talking about how they spend their summer vacation,
- 97% described private and public institutions of higher education,
- 30% gave some description of sun burnt skin when asked to explain why sunscreen lotion is important,
- 20% included some description during a presentation of problems facing the American education system today, and
- 35% of SOPI students answered with some description in recounting the possible consequences of obligatory foreign language study at the high school level.

These descriptions were not necessarily “significant” descriptions, i.e. descriptions of paragraph-length or longer. Only those descriptions of paragraph-length or longer were included in the data for this study.

Traces of description in the SOPI were found in tasks that did not prompt for description, but ended up containing some short description anyway. In other words, the
mean number of SOPI tasks that did not require a description but still contained some portion of description was 3.5 at the Superior level, 3 at the AH level, 2.5 at the AM, and 2 at the AL and IH levels. This interesting phenomenon tells teachers and linguists that the higher the level, the higher the possibility we will hear descriptions scattered here and there in tasks that do not directly ask for description. The mean number of non-required descriptions showed that speakers who were closer to native speakers filled their language with additional elements that extend their discourse and make it more eloquent. Speakers do this in extended discourse because as they become more fluent in a second language, “they can do more with it and more closely approximate a native speaker's behavior. It could be argued that their own native language competence guides them how they could start to behave in the second language”\textsuperscript{16}. Fewer instances of descriptive elements used by lower level speakers does not speak to the lack of their cognitive ability to describe in general, but indicates that at this stage of their language development, lower-level speakers lack the ability to put their cognitive skills into use in the second language. Such speakers do not yet think about supplying and extending their speech with ornaments, lace and decorations, so to speak, because they are too busy trying to get their message across by making sure that their grammar and choice of vocabulary is as correct and effective as possible\textsuperscript{17}.

This finding might ultimately lead to the proposition that better descriptions are not found necessarily in the OPI (interpersonal mode) or the SOPI (presentational mode) but rather simply those better descriptions are collected in tests administered at higher levels. There is no doubt in the fact that Superior and Advanced level speakers perform

\textsuperscript{16} From personal correspondence with Dr. Brian Joseph, May 2004.

\textsuperscript{17} From personal correspondence with Dr. Brian Joseph, May 2004
better at descriptions than Intermediate-High level speakers, and there should be a substantive difference in the way that these groups of speakers manage this task. A presumption would be that Superior level speakers should display even better and fuller descriptive discourse.

Nevertheless, the qualitative data of description in many of the SOPI samples did not meet the quantitative requirements of description, in other words short insufficient descriptions did not form a cohesive paragraph-length discourse, required by the ACTFL OPG. As a result such descriptions were excluded from the analysis. Problems with SOPI instructions and prompts complicated the selection of description discourse from SOPI speech samples.

According to the CAL SOPI Rater Training Kit (1998: 9-10), “each of the 13 Russian Speaking Test performance-based tasks has a specific speech function associated with it”. Below (Table 5.2) I provide a list of all the speech functions appearing on the Russian Speaking Test (RST) as determined by CAL. The left and the middle column of this table were taken directly from the CAL SOPI Rater Training Kit (1998: 9-10); indicators for proficiency level assignment (I for intermediate, A for advanced, S for superior) are provided based on the explanations of the SOPI Russian Speaker Test Rating Kit (also from CAL).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of tasks</th>
<th>Language Functions checked</th>
<th>level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Picture-based Tasks</strong></td>
<td>Ask Questions</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe(^a) a Place/Activities</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrate in Present Tense</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrate in past Tense</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic-based Tasks</strong></td>
<td>Give Simple Information</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make a Supported Request</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe(^b) Personal Activities</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State Advantages/Disadvantages</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give an Explanation</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation-based Tasks</strong></td>
<td>Support and Opinion</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make a Presentation</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypothesize</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give Advice</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.2: Speech functions and corresponding targeted levels of oral proficiency in the SOPI.**

According to this list, the SOPI elicits the function of description in a picture-based task “Describe a Place/Activities” (Birthday party) and in a topic-based task “Describe Personal Activities” (summer vacation). It is important to point out that in the SOPI Rater Training Kit description is listed as an Intermediate level task, whereas in the OPI, according to ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, description in paragraph-length

\(^a\) This is the level assigned by CAL; it constitutes a discrepancy with the proficiency guidelines.

\(^b\) This is the level assigned by CAL; it constitutes a discrepancy with the proficiency guidelines.
discourse is one of the core functions of Advanced level performance. This finding might suggest that the SOPI speaking standards differ from those found in the OPI, namely if the SOPI elicits description at the Intermediate level, while according to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines Intermediate level speakers are not required to speak in paragraphs, the SOPI does not require description to be paragraph-length discourse since it is not listed among Advanced level tasks.

To consider this contention I analyzed the responses given in the SOPI to the tasks characterized as those designed to solicit description. First, I investigated the discourse given in responses to prompts to describe a place/activities and second, I analyzed the discourse provided in responses to tasks requiring description of personal activities.

The Rater Training Kit (RTK) defines the task of description of a place/activities as follows:

The examinee is asked to imagine that he or she is living abroad and is asked to describe a birthday party in the United States and the kinds of activities that occur there. A drawing provided in the test booklet can be used as a source of ideas. (1998:67)

Below are example responses given by various level speakers in the SOPI to the picture-based task prompt that elicited description of a place or of activities: "как отмечают дни рождения в Соединённых Штатах? у вас устраивают вечеринки?"

How do people celebrate birthdays in the United States?

---

18 Students’ responses to the task of discussion of a birthday party show that the wording of the instructions in the prompt do not take into consideration the backgrounds of students from a foreign country and who might have never celebrated birthdays in the United States. The responses given to this prompt by non-American students indicate that such students were at a clear disadvantage because they were not familiar with the social content of the event and as a result struggled to answer.
Fred, SOPI/ S

S: да обычно устраивают какие то вечеринки. | часто бывают там ро-о-
dственники↑ или друзья-а ↑ | иногда если это молодеж↑ | то они собираются мож (может) быть у себя-а ↑ или у а - друга ↑ | и а - обычно есть какой то торт↑ подарки ↑ | поют а - одну особую песню↑ “happy birthday to you” (sings it) ↑ и так далее ↑ | и - это - очень приятно конечно ↑ а -ам музыку↑ слушают обычно и танцуют ↑ ну вапще (вообще) это просто время ↑ если они а - ам --- им или достаточно лет↑ или это по возрасту↑ | то одни могут может быть а пить а пиво↑ или что нибудь ↑ или если моложе ↑ то они не пьют ↑ они просто может быть пьют кока колу↑ что то в этом роде ↑ иногда есть какой то обед↑ а-а ↑ или ам просто там а закуски какие нибудь а ↑ и отмечают ↑ | как в россии ↑ всегда обязательно (надо) отмечать день рождения например [ (1m 10s)
T: [Interruption by the beep on the tape.

Rita, SOPI/ AM

S: -- да обычно но это всегда зависит от семьи ↑ ну например в моЕй семье ну не всегда ↑ потому что если вот день рождения попало (совпал с/ выпал) на будни ↑ тогда мож (может) быть у нас было бы что то но более вот просто семьЕйное ↑ мож (может) быть просто с мамой мы гуляли бы куда то ↑ или если у меня было что т _ какое то желание ↑ мы откладывали это (его) вот на выходные ДНи (выходные дни) ↑ и тогда↑ ну↑ - и тоже мой день рождения всегда было (был) летом ↑ поэтому я не была (была) ↑ в школе вот в это время ↑ и все мои во-о-а подру-у-ги вот а они были вот у себя дома ↑ или они вот если с родителями куда то ↑ поэтому это было не очень вот большое вот событие↑ ↑ а те у ↑ которого день рождения во время время учебного года даже в школе ↑ мы все отмЕтили (отмечали) ↑ иногда мы вот шарики вот а - сделали-и (надували/вешали) вокруг ↑ в а комнате были вот шарики и какие то ленточки ↑ ну это это какое то личное дело. (1m 10s)
T: [Interruption by the beep on the tape.

Douglas, SOPI/ AL

S: да-а ↑ коне-е-чно ↑ вечеринки - бывают у нас - на день рождения ↑ э - ну как ты видишь ↑ ХХ фотографии написано на стене с днём рожде-е-нием (рождения) ↑ э много друзей там -- а были (было/ пришло) у меня (ко мне) ↑ на - прошлый день рождения (прошлом дне рождения) ↑ э - и ---- чем мы занимаемся? ↑ ну обычно мы слушаем музыку↑- любимую↑↑ ↑ мы ↑ как - видишь там на фотография (фотографии) ↑ в кухоне торт↑- и всякие сладкие (сладкие) э --- разные - вещи - пищи (пищы) ↑ - так же мы танцуем с друзьями↑ - ↑ и так же обычно мы даём↑ - э тому человеку ↑ у которого есть день рождения ↑ э подарок. (1m 10s)
T: [Interruption by the beep on the tape.
In general guidelines for this task, the RTK says:

…this task is at the Intermediate level since it involves the simple description of a place and the activities associated
with this place. The task does not require much organization in order to be successfully completed. It can be handled through a series of discrete descriptive statements. However, a response to this task may easily be raised to the Advanced level if the examinee chooses to answer in organized paragraph-level discourse. (1998:76)

However, my data showed only barely detectable traces of description in response to this particular prompt. Only two out of 38 speakers (6% of all SOPI testees) attempted to give even a superficial one sentence-length description of a place or an event. Peter, (SOPI level IH) for instance, mentioned that people had posters on the wall “конечно у нас есть плакаты на стене” and Rita (SOPI Level AM) said that sometimes people hang balloons and ribbons in the room “иногда мы вот шарики вот а -- сделали-и вокруг в а комнате были вот шарики и какие то ленточки”. Moreover, the data suggest that the discourse elicited by the birthday prompt is not description at all, but rather narration (telling a story either in the past or in the present tense) about how and what people do to celebrate their birthdays even though the prompt specifically instructs: “describe for her what birthday parties are like in the United States”. Thus, students ignore the word “describe” in the instructions and do not give any description of places or people, with the exception of two individuals who mentioned balloons and posters as descriptive background for a narration. The data from students at higher levels who are clearly able to describe also do not include description. This lack of description even from upper level students suggests that the prompt itself does not elicit description.

The word “describe” creates expectations for the interlocutor of images or illustrations. The formulation of tasks and prompts needs to be revised to avoid students’ misunderstanding. If a test checks for the function of description using a picture-based
task, instead of offering to describe an event, which would eventually mislead students to create an account of events (narration), the test should ask students to compare illustrations of people or places, for example. Since the SOPI is a one-way interaction and cannot provide testees with opportunities to negotiate meaning by means of follow-up clarification questions, the tasks should be organized as precisely as possible to make sure that speakers produce precisely that language function the task intends to elicit. Instead of a prompt to describe a typical American birthday party, students should be asked to describe their hometown or compare their hometown with a famous world city without any visual prompt at all. Such a prompt would also help non-American students perform the function of description without depending on cultural knowledge inconsistent with their own personal experiences.

The other task that presumably asks for description according to the SOPI RST kit is a description of personal activities (a topic-based task). However, the data show that responses to the prompt “что ты обычно делаешь на летних каникулах?” (How do you spend your summer vacations?) indeed consist of present-tense narration. Consider the examples below:

Sam, SOPI/ IH

S: ну несколько (несколько) лет назад я тебе сказал бы | что (я) обычно работаю летом | но теперь (мне) кажется мне | что я - я учусь в мидэльбирийском колэдже летом и ам --- | ну значит | я всегда занимаюсь и делаю домашнюю работу | мне некогда спать | и - ам часто бывает | что -- ам что мы пишем контрольные работы | и после мидэльбери я отдыхаю | но а сейчас это очень трудно | потому что я работаю только работает | каждый день много времени | спать очень мало. (0m 55s)

T: [Interuption by the beep on the tape]
It is unclear what the SOPI authors intended to elicit with this prompt: narration or description? On page 10 of the RTK this task is referred to as description but on the tape, in the student’s book, and on page 85, the RTK cites it as an Intermediate level task in which testees are asked to “to explain to an exchange student how he or she usually spends his or her summer vacation”. General guidelines for this task say that this task “requires the examinee to talk about everyday, personal activities” (1998:85), thus suggesting that it is a present tense narration task. Without any doubt, the responses in this task consist of narrations, not descriptions.

The analysis of the two tasks above leads to a three-part conclusion. First, even if the first description task had been designed to elicit a description of a place, the data show that students perceive this not as a description task, but rather as a narration task. Students’ answers consist of an enumeration of events and actions organized in chronological order in accordance with expectations not for description, but for narration (either in the present or past tense, in discrete sentences or connected into paragraph discourse). Second, SOPI testees are checked for the ability to perform various language functions once (“All tasks are designed to allow examinees to demonstrate his or her ability to perform different speaking tasks in a variety of real-life situations….Each of the
13 RST performance-based tasks has a specific speech function associated with it” (1998:9)), so the fact that both these prompts (description of a birthday party and description of summer vacation) elicit present-tense narration make them redundant. More importantly, the SOPI, therefore, does not explicitly test for description, a required function of the oral proficiency interview at the Intermediate-High through Superior levels and a critical function for the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines from which both the OPI and SOPI are derived.

Since the two SOPI description tasks do not elicit any description as defined by the ACTFL OPG, my search for description was extended to other tasks. According to the RTK (1998:79), a topic-based task that asks students to make a request to move out of a dorm into a host family's home is an Advanced-level task, “since it involves description or explanation of a situation. For Advanced-level tasks, speakers are not expected to go into great detail, but rather just to explain the situation.” However, according to the ACTFL OPG, description and explanation are different functions elicited at the Advanced-level (for more detail see the chapter on Advanced-level functions). Description, though, in ACTFL OPG terms, is considered a core or crucial function at this level. The general guidelines in the RTK specifically highlight that this task involves either description or explanation of a situation, though the subjects are expected to perform a function of explanation, not description.

The SOPI omits elicitation of description (as a separate language function) at the Advanced level (in a paragraph-length discourse) but instead checks for other language functions required of Advanced-level oral proficiency. Indeed, to reiterate what was said earlier, the analysis of data show that only10% of SOPI speakers included at least some
superficial description in their response to this topic-based task, “To request to move in with a host family”.

Meanwhile, I found that SOPI testees described when responding to the prompt asking them to state the advantages and disadvantages of attending a private university or college, a task designed to elicit supported opinion, a Superior-level task. It would be incorrect to label the answers to this prompt as performing purely the function of description because the prompt specifically ask for students’ opinion on the situation. Nevertheless, since 97% of students’ answers included significant chunks of descriptions of buildings and classrooms, such answers were considered as descriptive opinion or opinionated description. The description in the task of stating advantages and disadvantages of studying at a private college or a university was selected for the corpus of this analysis because this very task elicited the highest percentage of description in the SOPI and because the SOPI RTK general guidelines consider this prompt an Advanced-level task “since it requires the examinee to use paragraph-like discourse to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of an activity” (1998:89) even though the SOPI RTK does not specifically use the term "description" in connection with this task.

However, not all SOPI students delivered descriptive elements when asked to respond to the prompt comparing public and private university education in the United States. For example, Rosa, a student with Advanced-Mid oral proficiency from the control group, provided excellent descriptions in her OPI even in response to questions that did not require a lengthy description, but in her SOPI, she seldom described. While taking the SOPI, Rosa did not demonstrate her ability to perform the function of description, as prescribed by the ACTFL OPG; nevertheless her speech was rated as
Advanced because she managed all the SOPI Advanced-level tasks in cohesive, paragraph-length discourse.

Rosa, SOPI/ AM

T: как ты думаешь в чем преимущества и недостатки обучения в частном университете?

S: иногда есть большая разница есть а а если это частного университета (частный университет) очень хороший ам и это конечно ам может быть есть несколько университетов в США которые очень а любое хорошее и ну просто нужно узнать больше информации которые очень хороши с хорошими учеными там но вообще я считаю что разница не такая большая вообще и может быть просто надо платить больше а заплатить больше чтобы а учиться (учиться) в частном университете ам хотя по моему люди уважают больше (больше) ам ам частные университеты ам чем а государственные университеты (училища) ам но я думаю что нет большая разница (большой разницы) ам между университетами просто есть разница а между студентами и это ам ну человек сам знает если он хочет заниматься больше или нет. (1m 15s).

T: [Interruption by the beep on the tape]

I, therefore, draw the following conclusions:

First, students taking the SOPI test do not demonstrate the ability to describe (as required by the ACTFL OPG) in paragraph-length discourse during this test. The function of description is offered to testees as an Intermediate-level task (consequently not requiring paragraph-length discourse) but the task fails as description because students instead deliver narration. The OPI asks for descriptions of people, places and/or objects. Speakers interpreted the SOPI’s assignment to describe activities and events as a task eliciting a list and enumeration of actions rather than the actual description of places (where someone celebrates birthdays or spends summer vacation). Since the description of an event in the SOPI essentially does not require speakers to speak in paragraph-length
discourse, the SOPI does not have the same expectations for description as the OPI does. Such a discrepancy in expectations for the function of description in the two tests led me to turn to the Test Development Handbook for the SOPI (Stansfield, 1996) to investigate whether the prompt for description in the SOPI for languages other than Russian is given as an Intermediate- or Advanced-level task and whether languages other than Russian require paragraph-length discourse on this task.

The Test Development Handbook provides characteristics, directions, criteria and guidelines to develop SOPI tasks in relation to the ACTFL Speaking Proficiency Guidelines at the Novice through Superior levels of oral proficiency. Similarly to OPI measurements of oral proficiency, all SOPI tasks must be correlated with the major categories of criteria assessment on which testees’ performances are rated: functions that testees can perform in the language, discourse text type, and content and context areas. The Handbook was created by CAL for those teachers, language program directors and other administrators who are interested in or need to develop a proficiency-based oral test. The Handbook was written for those “who already use the SOPI and those who wish to use it for specific purposes have expressed interest in developing their own SOPI forms, without having to depend on or wait for CAL to do so” (Stansfield, 1996: vii).

Indeed, the SOPI Handbook features several discrepancies in the way the task of description is approached in the OPI and SOPI formats.

The prototypical format of the SOPI designates description tasks, “Describe a place/activities” and “Describe personal activities”, as Intermediate (Stansfield, 1996:10). On pages 32-33, The Test Development Handbook describes Intermediate level tasks as tasks that do not “require an organized response to be successfully handled.” In other
words, the discourse type can be given as discrete sentences not organized into a cohesive
paragraph-length text. The content criterion characterizes Intermediate level tasks as
“common situations encountered in everyday life” (35). Among the appropriate topics the
Handbook suggests incorporating testees’ homes, their typical day and/or weekend, and
leisure activities:

Of course, the topic is intertwined with the functions,
which is often simple description. Thus, the examinee may
be asked to describe what he, she, or other people typically
do at the beach, at a mall, at school, after arriving home
from school, etc. (35)

The Handbook also says that such tasks of description “can be constructed through
pictures”:

One such task is Picture 2 on the SST, FST, and GST\textsuperscript{19}. In
Picture 2, the examinee describes a place, such as a beach
scene, based on information contained in a drawing. The
examinee is free to make statements about the place in any
order. Because no organization emanates from the drawing,
no organization is necessary in the description. (33)

Second, according to the SOPI Handbook, descriptions of activities in the SOPI are not
considered “narrations” but “descriptions” of activities:

One possibility is describing to a friend the things that one
can do at a particular place they might visit. In Spanish,
French, and German, this description can be handled using
expressions like “we are going to” or “we can”, thereby
avoiding the need for the inflected future tense. This is not
a narrative; rather, it is more like a description of possible
activities. The activities mentioned can come in discrete
sentences in any order. Thus, paragraph-like discourse is
not required to handle the task successfully. These features
keep the task appropriate for identifying proficiency at the
Intermediate level. (35)

\textsuperscript{19} Spanish Speaking Test, French Speaking Test, and German Speaking Test.
The OPI Tester Training Manual defines description differently, as “the ability to produce a cohesive oral representation of qualities or features characterizing a given object, place, person, etc” (1999: 122) rather than discussing possible activities, a function that falls under the definition of narration in The OPI Tester Training Manual, “the ability to produce an oral account of an event” (1999: 123).

Third, before discussing another difference between the OPI and the SOPI tasks for Intermediate and Advanced levels, I need to turn to the analysis of the discourse criterion for developing Advanced-level tasks given in the SOPI Handbook. The Handbook specifies that speakers rated as Advanced should be able to link sentences together smoothly, creating paragraph-like discourse. A task at this level requires the examinee to organize the information to be presented. Thus, the paragraph-like discourse requirement of the Advanced level results in the creation of tasks that require the examinee to give a detailed set of instructions (such as how to prepare a simple meal), or a brief factual summary (such as a short talk reviewing important events in the history of a state). (33)

The content criterion of the Advanced-level includes, according to the ACTFL OPG, situations related to “school and work” and “topics of current public and personal interest” (36). Among other Advanced-level tasks, the Handbook mentions “discussing advantages and disadvantages associated with some behavior” (33), “giving a detailed description, giving instructions on how to do something, giving advice, explaining, or giving a brief factual summary” (35). Though the Handbook instructions (that help with the content criterion necessary to write Advanced-level tasks) suggest giving a detailed description among Advanced functions (“Some of the Advanced functions, such as giving a detailed description, ….can be adapted to many topics” (36)), the Handbook
itself does not give any instructions as to how to create a prompt that would elicit a detailed description in paragraph-length discourse (required for the Advanced-level according to the ACTFL OPG). Furthermore, the *Handbook* does not envision requiring a testee to provide detailed description as an obligatory or core function of Advanced-level speech. Instead, the *Handbook* treats the function of description as one of many optional content areas available to rate Advanced-level oral proficiency. Yet the ACTFL OPG summarized in the *Handbook* specify that “(t)he Advanced level is characterized by the speaker’s ability to …narrate and describe with paragraph-length connected discourse” (27).

Moreover, it appears that the definition of “description” is problematic in the SOPI format. The SOPI uses the word “describe” to refer to the concept of what I would argue should be considered “narrate”. For example, on page 74 of the *Handbook*, in the “Notes on Developing Advanced-Level Tasks”, the picture-based task requesting testees to “describe a typical routine” is “classified at the Advanced level because it involves narration in a present time frame”. Thus, the task asking for description is, indeed, not “description” any longer (as it was defined for the Intermediate task in the *Handbook*) but “narration”. However, as noted earlier, on page 35 the *Handbook* defines the Intermediate level picture-based task “describing to a friend the things that one can do at a particular place” as “a description of possible activities” rather than narration: “This is not a narrative; rather, it is more like a description of possible activities”. I would argue that according to the SOPI, the distinction between “description” and “narration” as language functions does not take into consideration the content of the response but only the text-type. When students are asked to talk about the activities in Picture 2 (description of an
event), they may speak in discrete sentences (Intermediate level text type) and are not required to organize their response into paragraph-like discourse (a required text type for the Advanced level of proficiency) as in Picture 4 (a description of a typical daily routine). Picture 4, according to the SOPI Handbook (page 10), is a narration in the present and must be conveyed in an organized coherent discourse.

To support my contention that in the SOPI the term “description” is defined in the frame of a text type, I use the list of tasks and content areas intended for Intermediate level, given in Chapter 8 of the Handbook: "Writing Intermediate-Level SOPI Tasks". Among the tasks for the Intermediate level the Handbook enumerates the following: giving a simple description of a person, giving a simple description of a place, giving a simple description of a thing, giving a simple description of health problems, and giving a simple description of an event (64) – the latter is the task used in the Russian SOPI. In the “Notes on Developing Specific SOPI Tasks”, page 66, the Handbook defines the “Describe a Place/Activities” picture-based task as Intermediate because testees are allowed to “give simple description of an everyday nature in a sentence-level discourse”. The personal activities description task is again considered to be “a simple description that does not require any particular organization. Simple description is an Intermediate-level task, whereas detailed description is an Advanced-level task” (69). The Handbook suggests that the task of describing personal activities can be developed either as a picture-based task or as a topic-based task (in the case of the latter, the picture is not provided to guide the testee to organize the response). The Handbook suggests that “(s)uch a task appears as Topic 1 in the prototypical SOPI” (69), an Intermediate-level task.

20 Here it is necessary to note that detailed description is not elicited at any time in the course of the SOPI.
Another problematic issue in the SOPI that deserves consideration is the misleading and ambiguous definition and requirements of a paragraph. Neither the Handbook nor the Rater Training Kit explains what characteristics a text should exhibit in order to be called a paragraph. The SOPI RTK’s citation of the ACTFL OPG only says that “Advanced speakers can narrate and describe with some detail, linking sentences together smoothly” (SOPI RTK, 1998: 8). It is unclear what exactly is meant by “linking sentences together smoothly”, and whether “smoothly” refers to accuracy, fluency of response or some other characteristic. The Handbook’s section, which talks about what discourse-type is associated with each level of oral proficiency, describes Advanced-level speech as following:

(t)he Advanced-level speaker should be able to link sentences together smoothly, creating paragraph-like discourse. A task at this level requires the examinee to organize the information to be presented. Thus, the paragraph-like discourse requirement of the Advanced level results in the creation of tasks that require the examinee to give a detailed set of instructions (such as how to prepare a simple meal), or a brief factual summary (such as a short talk reviewing important events in the history of a state). (1996:33)

This definition does not explain clearly just what exactly constitutes “paragraph-like” discourse except for expectations for the discourse to include detailed instructions. Yet, detailed instructions do not always create a paragraph which is, in ACTFL OPI terms, coherent discourse with a clear sequential order of events or actions connected with cohesive devices. Detailed instructions might be given as a list of discrete unrelated sentences. According to the ACTFL OPG, discrete sentences do not constitute a paragraph.
The phrase “paragraph-like” causes a problem in terms of rating testees’ SOPI responses at the Intermediate-Mid through Advanced levels of oral proficiency. In the OPI, the “paragraph” is explicitly defined. A paragraph is a type of text that has integrity, structure, chronological or logical order of events or ideas and detailed elements presented in a clear sequence: “an ordered sequencing of all components connected in terms of cause and effect, and organized within a logical textual framework” (1999: 100). According to the OPI requirements, a text is a paragraph only when its sentences are connected with parenthetic words and cohesive devices which relate and chronologically build the presentation of events or actions. Thus, for the OPI, a paragraph must have chronological or logical development: a beginning, middle, and end of the text, whether narration or description. OPI Training Workshop and the OPI Manual teach trainees a text cannot be "almost" a paragraph. The responses to prompts are either paragraphs or not, and in order to be a paragraph, the response must meet all the required criteria.

The phrase “paragraph-like” does not have a clearly marked definition of what is considered a paragraph and its criteria. Consequently such a definition poses questions: How does the SOPI assign Advanced and Intermediate-High ratings without explicit requirements for Advanced-level text-type? And under what circumstances is a response considered a paragraph in the SOPI rating? The loose definition raises questions about the integrity of the SOPI ratings, because, for instance, there might conceivably be lengthy replies without cohesion that are designated “paragraph-like” only by virtue of their length.

Another significant problem is that the SOPI actually elicited barely one description (within the context of a supported opinion prompt), whereas the OPI
interviews analyzed for this project asked for several (from two to four, depending on the level of the testee and on the testees’ performance). The SOPI prompt explicitly designated to elicit description does not, in fact, do so. This is a problem for several reasons. The OPI, at an OPI tester’s discretion, often checks a certain function several times as the tester conducts level checks (confirming the linguistic floor of the testee) and probes (checking the testee's linguistic ceiling). While a testee may fail a function once, s/he may be able to handle the function with a different topic. The pattern of inconsistent but frequent success with a particular function is correlated with the high sublevel of each major proficiency level from notive through advanced according to the OPI protocol. The speech of a testee who can describe and narrate in paragraph-length discourse in all time frames often, but not all of the time would be rated at the Intermediate-High level in accordance with the criteria as described in the OPI Tester Manual. Obviously this is not a possibility within the SOPI. If a student who takes the SOPI and fails the single description prompt, this failure will prevent the student from attaining an intermediate high rating. Due to the one-way format of the SOPI, the negotiation of meaning is irrelevant and therefore tasks that implicitly elicit description fail to get the description necessary for the Advanced-level (recall Rosa’s SOPI responses that did not exhibit any description but narration instead).

Analysis of the data suggests that a revision of tasks and their formulation is required. The nature of the description questions in the SOPI needs to be similar to those in the OPI. It is noted above that in the OPI students are asked to describe or to compare concrete subjects, objects or places rather than just an event, or advantages and disadvantages of certain social or cultural systems. In the flow of the OPI, a student is
asked to describe a person, a city and/or object, but in the SOPI a student is asked only to provide the description of an event.

Description in both the OPI and the SOPI was found in tasks that did not prompt for description, but nevertheless ended up containing some short descriptions. This finding suggests that as the oral proficiency level increases, so does the frequency of sporadic descriptions of people, objects and places in tasks that do not require description. This confirms the task hierarchy of the OPI which positions description as a core function of the advanced level.

Due to the misleading prompts in the SOPI elicitation of description, there is more data for the analysis of description in the OPI speech samples than in the SOPI speech samples. The question is then: if the SOPI effectively elicits only one description, a description of a university, a building, students, and professors in the task of stating advantages and disadvantages, then how many and what kinds of OPI descriptions should be considered? One option was to consider only descriptions elicited by prompts comparable in nature to the advantages and disadvantages prompt in the SOPI, namely a comparison prompt. However, the majority of tasks asking for description in the OPI were directed to the description of a single person or place rather than a comparison. Thus, it was decided to use all the descriptions elicited in the OPI, but to compare the data collected in the SOPI and the OPI by means of calculating the frequency with which particular features were used.
CHAPTER 6

SYNTACTICAL COMPLEXITY OF SPEECH ELICITED IN THE INTERPERSONAL VS. PRESENTATIONAL MODES

In this chapter I analyze the syntactical complexity of description produced in the OPI and the SOPI. Beaman (1984:45) defines syntactic complexity as “the number, type, and depth of embedding in a text.” My study of syntactical complexity of speech will adhere to Beaman’s proposition that simple sentences and coordinated structures create syntactically simple speech, but longer sentences and subordinate clauses with “complex structural relationships” create syntactically complex speech. The syntactical complexity of description in the OPI and the SOPI will be analyzed by looking at the following criteria: complex syntax (in other words, subordination); the type of subordination used by speakers in the two tests, with special attention paid to subordinate clauses introduced by the relative pronoun который and the explanatory or purposive conjunction чтобы; and participial /gerundial phrases.

First, I will address the approach to sentence analysis in Russian. Second, I will talk briefly about the previous research done in the area of syntactical complexity of speech. Then I will elaborate on the problems that arose in the course of data analysis and possible solutions to these problems. Fourth, I will focus on the data analysis (syntactical
complexity of speech) and discussion of results. Finally, I will draw conclusions regarding the syntactical analysis of the data.

6.1 Structure of a Sentence in the View of Russian Grammar.

Russian grammar distinguishes simple, compound, and complex sentences. Simple sentences consist of either one finite clause or a finite and a nonfinite clause. An example of a finite clause would be: Лиля смотрит на меня блестящими серыми глазами. “Lilya looks at me with her shining grey eyes” (Kazakov, 1956, Blue and Green). A sentence consisting of a finite and a nonfinite clause would be the following: Это очень плохо с его стороны – оставить нас наедине. “It is not nice of him to leave us alone” (Kazakov, 1956, Blue and Green). According to traditional grammar descriptions,

[a] (c)lause is defined … as an expression which contains a subject and predicate, and which may contain other types of expressions as well (e.g. a complement and an adjunct). In most cases, the predicate in a clause is a lexical (= nonauxiliary) verb, so that there will be as many different clauses in a sentence as there are different lexical verbs. (Radford, 1998: 256)

A finite verb carries tense, mood, voice, and aspect. Nonfinite verbs are verbs which do not show tense or mood but that still show aspect and voice.

Simple sentences contain only one finite clause but may have many additional nonfinite clauses. Compound and complex sentences consist of two or more clauses that are combined either with a conjunction and intonation or with intonation and no conjunction.

Compound sentences include two or more simple sentences which are related to each other by means of coordination. “Coordinating is the symmetrical relation, in which
two or more elements of the same status are linked together” (Beaman, 1984:55).
Conjunctions that establish a coordinative relation between clauses can be: copulative, disjunctive, and adversative (examples of conjunctions that combine coordinative clauses mentioned above will be given later). As a rule, Vinogradov explains (1954:177), under any type of coordinative relation within a compound sentence in Russian, the first clause is formed freely and the structure of the second clause is determined by the relations between the two clauses of the compound sentence. That is, continues Vinogradov, compound sentences with copulative conjunctions show that events take place either simultaneously or in a sequence.

Clauses with copulative conjunctions add information (и “and”; да “and” in the meaning of и “and”; тоже “also”; также “also”; не только... но и... “not only - but also”; как... так и... “both - and”) or negate information (ни... ни... “neither - nor”). For example, Прозрачный лес один темнеет, и ель сквозь иней зеленеет, и речка подо льдом блестит (Pushkin), “A lonely translucent forest is dark and a fir-tree is green in the frost and a river glitters under the ice”. Clauses with disjunctive conjunctions provide the choice (или “or”; либо “or”) or speak about alternation of events (то - то “either - or”; не то - не то “either - or”). For example, То светило солнце, то шёл дождь (Arseniev) “One moment the sun was shining, the other [moment] it was raining”. Adversative conjunctions show the opposition of events in clauses (а “but, and, while”; но “but”; да “but” in the meaning of но “but”). In opposition to the compound sentences with the conjunction и “and”, compound sentences with the conjunction a “but, and” usually consist of only two clauses, since any single opposition presupposes only two objects of comparison. For example, Я старался взглянуть в окно, да оно всё было
бело от снега и льда “I tried to look out of the window but it was all white with snow and ice” (Gilyarovski, cited in Barkhudarov, 1985:172).

Complex sentences consist of two simple sentences which are in a subordinate (dependent) relation to each other and are combined with a subordinate conjunction or a relative pronoun.

Subordination is the nonsymmetrical relation holding between two clauses such that one is a constituent or part of (i.e. dependent upon) the other (Quirk et al. 1972:720): there is a hierarchy in the relationships. Thus coordination links two or more independent clauses, whereas subordination unites one independent clause with any number of dependent clauses. (Beaman, 1984:55)

An independent clause in the structure of a complex sentence is called the main clause; a clause subordinated to the main clause grammatically and semantically is called a subordinate or dependent clause. An independent or a main clause of the sentence is a clause that can express a complete thought and can stand alone as a complete sentence. A dependent or subordinate clause is a clause that cannot express a complete thought and cannot stand by itself as a complete sentence but has to be joined to an independent clause, which it modifies in some way.

A subordinate clause may precede, follow or be imbedded into the independent clause. Subordinate clauses are called nominal, adjectival, adverbial, or predicative depending on the functions that they perform in the complex sentence (noun, adjective, adverb, or predicate). Nominal subordinate clauses carry the function of a subject or an object. Some grammarians call adjectival (or attributive) subordinate clauses relative clauses (Beaman, 1984; Belevitskaya-Khalizeva, no year is given). Relative clauses modify or reveal the characteristics or features of a noun or a pronoun in the independent clause. Relative clauses connect to the independent clause by means of conjunctions:
который “which, who, that”, какой “that, which”, чей “whose”, что “that”, где “where”, куда “where to”, откуда “where from”, or когда “when”. A predicative clause functions as a predicative nominal construction and is used with the verb “to be” as in “A long vacation is what I need”. Adverbial clauses have an “adverb-like function” and can modify a verb, an adverb, an adjective, or an entire clause. Adverbial clauses denote где “where”, когда “when”, почему “why”, зачем “what for” or как “how” something was done, or they can specify a condition under which an act took place. Thus, based on the semantic relation that a subordinate clause bears towards the independent clause, Russian grammarians (Barkhudarov 1985:194-195, Vinogradov 1954: 268-351) divide adverbial subordinate clauses into the following groups:

(a) subordinate clause of place (где “where”, куда “where to”, откуда “where from”);

(b) subordinate clause of time (когда “when”, пока “while”, как “as, when”, после того как “after”, как только “as soon as”, только что “just”, чуть только “as just”, прежде чем “before”, раньше чем “earlier then”, до той поры (как) “until”, до тех пор (как) “until”, перед тем (как) “before”, до того (как) “until”, тогда “then, at that time”, в то время “at that time”, в тот день “that day”, с тех пор (как) “since”, едва “hardly”);

(c) subordinate clause of cause (так как “since”, потому что “because”, из-за того что “because of”, оттого что “because, because of”, ввиду того что “since, due to”, вследствие того что “since, due, as a result of”, благодаря тому что “thanks to”, в связи с тем что “in connection with”, тем более что “moreover that”, затем что “because”);
6.2 Previous Research on Syntactical Complexity of Speech.

Previous research on syntactical complexity of speech was conducted by means of comparison of oral versus written speech. Beaman (50-52) summarizes the differences between written and spoken discourse in English found by O’Donnell (1974), Kroll
(1977), Ochs (1979), Halliday (1979) and Chafe (1982) and notes that spoken discourse consists of simpler syntactical structures and exhibits cohesion through coordination. Written discourse uses more complex syntactical structures and exhibits subordinate relations between clauses. According to Beaman (1975), adverbial subordinate clauses are “considerably more frequent in the written narratives than in the spoken.”

Beaman assumes that the reason for such differences lies in the nature of the discourse, namely, in writing the author has more time to plan his/her ideas that result in more complexity and stativity, whereas oral speech is more dynamic, informal, spontaneous, and inconsequential in comparison with the written speech.

According to Kroll’s findings (1977), English written discourse is more complex than spoken due to the higher frequency of subordinate and dependant clauses in writing, whereas while speaking, subjects produce more coordinate structures. “This percentage of coordinate structures in the spoken narratives is attributable largely to a high percentage of occurrences of the coordinator ‘and’” (Beaman, 1984:47). In speech ‘and’ is very often used not only in the function of a coordinative conjunction but also as a filler “to hold the floor” and to imply that he/she has not finished yet and has something else to say. When Kroll’s calculated coordinate constructions in her study, it turned out that 96 percent of the spoken clauses were coordinated with ‘and’.

Beaman proposes that such a high percentage of occurrences of coordinate clauses with ‘and’ might suggest that it is not the case that spoken language is more coordinate, but rather that spoken and written languages are two different modes in which coordination and subordination take place:

…studies have hopelessly confronted two crucial features of discourse: modality (i.e. spokeness/ writtenness) and
register (i.e. purpose or formality). Because of this problem, what looks like differences between spoken and written discourse may really be differences in the register, purpose, formality, or amount of planning time of each task. (1984:51)

O’Donnell’s findings (1974) suggest that written language contains longer syntactical units than spoken language. The findings showed that written language had more gerundial and participial constructions, attributive adjectives, passives, and modal and perfective auxiliaries. In spoken language O’Donnell noticed more nominal clauses, infinitives, and progressive auxiliaries.

Chafe’s analysis (1979, 1982) shows that spoken language exhibits characteristics of involvement and fragmentation. By involvement Chafe understands the “‘first person references, speakers’ mental process (e.g. ‘I think’), monitoring information flow, emphatic particles (e.g. ‘just’, ‘really’), fuzziness, vagueness, hedges and direct quotes” (Beamann, 48). By fragmentation Chafe understands “coordinating conjunctions, afterthoughts, repetitions and false starts” (Beaman 48). Beaman (52) explains that Chafe’s characteristics of involvement and fragmentation “carry considerable additional information for the listener … not available to the writer due to the lack of visibility”.

Ochs (1979) calls spoken language “unplanned discourse”, because it lacks organization and preparation in forethought. Ochs notices that unplanned discourse is similar in its syntactic organization to the discourse produced by children at an early stage of language development. She continues that young children use more coordinate structures (whereas older children incorporate subordinate structures), “determiner plus noun constructions (rather than relative clauses), deictic modifiers (rather than definite
articles), active voice (rather than passive), and present tense (rather than past or future tenses).” (Beaman 50)

Halliday (1979) suggests that written language shows more ‘lexical density’ than the spoken one. He suggests that in writing one finds “high lexical density” (“compactness” or “high content words”) but fewer clauses, whereas in speaking the situation is reversed: we find “low lexical density” but more clauses. Halliday concludes that “speech has complex sentences with simple words, while writing has complex words in simple sentences.” (Beaman, 50) As Beaman put it, “because of this ‘inconsequential …nature of speech, speakers do not feel the need to monitor themselves to the degree that is required in writing, where words are of a more permanent nature. This seems to be an important factor influencing the complexity of discourse.” (Beaman, 51)

Recent research on complex syntax in oral Russian speech conducted by Rifkin is related to the current study of syntactical complexity of the Advanced-level language function description. In his 2002 study “A Case Study of the Acquisition of Narration in Russian,” Rifkin focused on the other core function of advanced level speech, narration. He investigated the nature of narration (the retelling of a movie plot) delivered by Russian native speakers and learners of Russian with regard to “the balance of complex versus simple or compound sentences” per narration and the frequency of relative clauses per each narration, “considering a complex sentence to be any sentence with any kind of dependent clause” (Rifkin, 466). By relativization Rifkin understands “a complex sentence featuring a relative clause introduced by the relative pronoun который”. He “restricted the focus of (his) study just to the use of relative clauses with который
because they were by far the most frequent relative clauses in the speech of the native
speakers and in the speech of the students” (Rifkin, 467).

The results of Rifkin’s study showed that Russian native speakers on the average
produced about 18 sentences per narration, out of which more than half (about 10) were
complex sentences; about three quarters of these complex sentences featured relative
clauses. The mean length of non-native Russian speakers’ narrations was 12 sentences,
out of which only 1.5 were complex, and only 0.5 of the subordinate clauses were
relativized. Rifkin explained that such a significant contrast in the performance of the two
groups of subjects with regard to syntactical complexity and the usage of relative clauses
with который in their narration was due to the learners’ low level of oral proficiency.

Learners of Russian in this study had only Intermediate-Mid and Intermediate-High level
of oral proficiency, but “the use of который-clauses is closely linked to advanced level

Rifkin proposed that one of the goals of instruction to help students progress towards
Advanced level proficiency might be a focus on spontaneous speech. My analysis of
description will therefore provide complementary information about the other critical
function of advanced-level speech: description.

6.3 Problems and Possible Solutions.

To perform the syntactical analysis of the OPI and the SOPI data in my research, I
first divided each description into clauses, fragments that contained at least one predicate
(a conjugated verb, a verbal form that indicated an action or a state, or an adjective) and
an explicit or implied subject\textsuperscript{21}. Then all subordinate clauses were classified according to the semantic functions they perform.

As a token of my analysis I used subordinate versus non-subordinate clauses. I chose to analyze the syntactical complexity of speech produced by testees of Russian from the point of view of frequency of subordination, because my attempt to consider the data from the point of view of what prescriptive grammar sees as a sentence (simple and non-simple sentences consisting of complex and subordinate sentences) failed as I tried to break the speech samples into actual sentences. The example below is broken into clauses. Next to the name of the subject, I identify the type of the test from which the sample was taken and subject’s level of oral proficiency. A detailed guide to reading transcriptions is given in Chapter 5.

Nick, OPI/ IH

Т: Узбекистан говорят очень красивая страна очень хорошая природа да? Я никогда не была расскажите.
S:
[1] ам - ну там очень красиво |
[2] ну мож (может) быть не не из за из за природы (природы) (giggle) | -
[3] ну по моему не знаю |
[4] а ну большинство это за страны это пустыни |
[5]- там там там (giggle) как бы это описать |
[6] ну а ну- бол_ красивее из за того что там (есть) несколько городов |
[7] которые очень старые |
[8] и там безумные ну здания |
[9] да это очень с_ |
[10] не знаю |
[12] и ну как это | один город бу_бухара |
[13] это когда я там был |
[14] это | -- ам сколько (сколько) |
[15] ам ну явление два две тысячи пятьсот лет может быть

\textsuperscript{21} In Russian the verb “to be” is implied in the present tense and not physically expressed. Therefore, some clauses may contain no verb at all due to this phenomenon if an action is expressed with a verb of state.
In the majority of the data it was either rather difficult or absolutely impossible to break the speech apart into sentences due to the lack of clear sentential organization. An overwhelming number of speakers packed voluminous information into one utterance. As a result, an utterance might have consisted of several clauses that lacked any clear indicators where the beginning of a new sentence was, unless clauses were separated by pauses. That is why, in order to avoid both inaccurate analysis of syntactical complexity and misrepresentation of the data, I analyzed the speech from the point of view of how many independent (I will call them non-subordinate) versus subordinate clauses speakers produced at each level in each test.

A similar problem of data analysis was reported by David Crystal (1980) during his study of the varieties of English in the course of an informal domestic conversation as he attempted to break the stream of speech into discrete sentences by defining the borders between sentences. Crystal wrote that it was impossible to break the text up into discrete sentences (157); he argued:

Any attempt to analyze this data in terms of sentence structure and function is beset with difficulties from the outset. Sentence identification and classification is a much greater problem here than in any other variety of English. (155)
He suspected three factors that might account for the majority of problematic instances: indeterminate connectivity, indeterminate ellipses, and intercalation\textsuperscript{22} of structures.

By connectivity Crystal implied “formal criteria” that might help to identify “an utterance as a single complex sentence or as a set of simple sentences” (156). By simple sentence he understood a “mono-clausal” utterance; by a complex sentence, a “multi-clausal” one. Crystal stated that when he analyzed the majority of subordinate clauses, it was usually enough just to look at the semantic relation between the clauses and to see an obligatory connectivity between them because the omission of a connective would render an unacceptable statement. However, there were cases in both coordinate and at times in subordinate sentences where “the semantic distinction between the presence or absence of a connective” (Crystal 156) was used to label a sentence as simple or complex.

My data analysis faced similar problems as those discussed by Crystal. The problem of indeterminate connectivity arose with the use of ‘and’ introducing a new clause. Crystal noticed that almost one quarter of all the clauses in his data were introduced by ‘and’. Consider the following transcript taken from Crystal:

[1] …he gets on the wrong train
[2] and he ends up in the wrong place --
[3] and finds that he is in a place
[4] that’s perfectly quiet
[5] and perfectly innocent
[6] and there is no story -
[7] and so he just writes one -
[8] and within a week he’s managed to create riots you know (156)

In his analysis, Crystal noticed that in these cases of ‘and’ usage, the omission of some ‘ands’ in [7] and [8] did not cause any semantic change to the sentence. He observed that in such places where the omission of ‘and’ was harmless to the semantics

\textsuperscript{22} Insertion of a complex sentence into an existing one, in other words, a combination of the main and subordinate clauses of two different complex sentences in one structure.
and the structure of the sentence, the “intonation, and accompanying linguistic and extra linguistic context could be used for this purpose instead, and the ‘and’ is certainly not obligatory” (156). The author concluded that he had two alternatives: either to call that long utterance with ‘ands’ in each clause a single complex sentence, and accept that the complex sentence consists of “several dozens of clauses” or to “pay attention to the optionality of these connectives, and count” the long utterance as several sentences (156). The examples below illustrate indeterminate connectivity in my data (the bold represents students’ mistakes).

Jeff, OPI/AL
S:
[1] я хотел искал (найти по) вопросам японии
[2] и он специалист
[3] он эксперт по китай (китаю)
[4] - и мы познакомились (познакомились) в вашингтоне в (на) конференции
[5] - и он говорил они хороший он хорошо говорит и по английски и по китайски и конечно по русски↑
[6] и -- у нас э между нами у нас есть ам как общий (общие) интересы
[7] -- э и эм ам мы часто говорим или по телефону или а ам где то встречаемся
[8] и говорим о о м поли-тической ситуации / в азии или ам ам о о (об) отношениях между россией и странами а дальнего [востока. (1m 10s)

Jessica, OPI/AL
S:
[1] просто в БГУ - не было такой (такого) же факультет (факультета) э
[2] и мне (меня) просто заинтересовали - предметы на юрфак (юрфаке)
[3] во-о-т а во вторых у нас -- у нас каждый студент - независимый независимый
[4] и он может ходить э по разным (разным) факуль фкультетах (факультетам) и разных (разные) предмет (предметы) изучать
[5] а в ми-и-нске они поступали
[6] они сдавали экзам экзамен - и поступали сразу на каком то (какой то) факультете (факультет)
[7] --- и им -- а организовали (организовывали) э сначала потока нас на первом

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The data above raises a number of questions: How many sentences do these responses consist of? How many clauses are indeed connected by the obligatory conjunction “and” to maintain the proper meaning of the sentence? Is “and” used to combine clauses or sentences in the beginning of [2], [4]-[8] in the first example and in the beginning of [2], [4], [7] in the second example? Are these “ands” conjunctions or discourse markers inserted by speakers to buy time to think of a new utterance as a continuation of the response? If “and” is omitted in the beginning of the aforementioned clauses, will its absence affect semantics?

The answer to the first three questions is indeterminate because the deletion of the conjunction “and” in the beginning of clauses does not change the meaning of the entire utterance and therefore it will be impossible to say for sure how many sentences we are dealing with and how many obligatory “and”s we have.

The first example may consist of either six [1], [2-3], [4], [5], [6], [7-8] or five [1-3], [4], [5], [6], [7-8] sentences. The second example may consist of either 12 sentences or fewer, where [1] and [2], [3] and [4], [6] and [7], [9] and [10], [11] and [12] would be constituents of compound sentences. However, the deletion of “and” in the examples above does not cause any semantic change, and that is why the conjunction “and” may mark a beginning of a new sentence. Thus, the attempt to count the number of sentences and types of sentences in the examples above will be inaccurate; the attempt to count clauses instead will be more suitable in an arbitrary situation like this.
Another problematic utterance illustrated by Crystal was the use of “but”

[9] they go to the Ledra Palace Hotel for example
[10] and they sit at the bar-
[11] and they absorb you know one or two facts from a few people
[12] but they don’t know the language
[13] and they don’t know the people
[14] and they don’t really know the situation – (156)

Crystal suggested that the use of “but” in [12] is obligatory since it contrasts the information in [9-11] and [12-14]. Therefore, Crystal concluded that this utterance consists of either five sentences: [9], [10], [11-12], [13], and [14] (where the omission of “and” does not involve the semantic difference, and that is why “and” may be considered as a beginning of a new sentence) or three [9-12], [13] and [14] because “but” in [12] does not just contrast the information in [11] but also information in [9] and [10].

In the Russian example below “but” in [2], [16] and [38] is optional and does not contrast any information. The following clauses [5], [11], [12], [14] and [33] that start with “but” contrast information in preceding clauses, however, only in [11] and [33] is “but” absolutely obligatory to maintain the semantic structure of the sentence and contrast.

Andy, OPI/ AL

T: А какая разница между кристиз и содбиз?
S:
[1] содбиз да | а
[2] но ам содбиз это а -- |
[3] они а |
[4] я м я точно не знаю а разные разные (разницы) между а между ними|
[5] но я знаю |
[6] что ну |
[7] это так кажется мне |
[8] что кристиз э больше (больше) |
[9] чем содбиз |
[10] и поэтому ам они не толко (только) а они не толко (только) продат
(продают) а ну искусство и мебель (мебель) скульптуры
[11] но тоже домов (дома) и иногда иногда машины |
[12] но я не знаю |
[13] если содбиз тоже |
[14] но это кажется мне |
[15] что они не м продают таких вещей и домов (и) так далее |
[16] но это тоже они |
[17] дело в том | что - может быть год назад / а содбиз и кристиц а был на су́де (судились) |
[18] потому что они э госу́дарство эм узна́л (узнало) |
[19] что они э нелегальны́е (нелегально) продаи э искусство в наших э компанию́х |
[20] и поэтому государство - ам сказа́л (сказа́ло) им |
[21] что это нёвоз ам |
[22] дело в том |
[23] что они э сове́товали (советовались) а с друг с другом |
[24] чтобы продаи искусство выше |
[25] чем а выше чем качество а выше чем качество |
[26] это что то выше |
[27] чем ам да для качества а этих вещей |
[28] и поэтому сейча́с и поэтому может быть дльа (для) неслколько (несколько) лет он им были одинако |
[29] потому что они сове́товались друг с другом |
[30] как много а сколько (сколько) стои́т (стоит) э эти э́ти ве́щи (эти вещи) |
[31] и тоже а по моему эм кристиц больще (больше) |
[32] потому что они не так не только в нью ёйке и в лондоне |
[33] но тоже в париже и ам чикаго (чикаго) даже |
[34] я думаю |
[35] по моему и а содбиз |
[36] я думаю |
[37] что только в нью ёйке или в лондоне может быть - неслколько (несколько) а м ну других месток (мест). |
[38] но э тоже я знаю |
[39] что а у кристиц есть (есть) э многих много других ам кафера́х |
| на кото́ром а люди могут а продаи. (2m 55s)

The next problematic area that both Crystal and I experienced in the analysis of syntactical complexity was the intercalation of structures which seemed to consist of two interlaced sentences. Crystal’s example below demonstrates intercalated structures

[22] I’m very suspicious of the Press generally
[23] and I can tell you
[24] because not only I mean that’s one case
that you’ve given but also in their reporting of foreign affairs – because living in Cyprus I’ve seen quite a number of historical events you know (158)

Crystal’s analysis shows that [24-26] give the reason for [22], and that [27-28] explain [23]. Therefore, Crystal proposes that the example above has the following structure: “Main Clause A + Main Clause B + Subordinate Clause A + Subordinate Clause B….Because of such complications, we are once again faced with an unclear analysis in terms of sentence structure” (158). Crystal’s data also included instances in which a subordinate clause within an intercalated structure could be related to either of two main clauses; such ambiguities were caused by “a lack of correspondence between syntactic and semantic structure” (159). An example of intercalated structure in Russian would be the following example, in which [7] describes [6], and [11] supplements the information in [9]. Both [7] and [11] could be deleted and their deletion would not change anything in the semantic perception of the response.

Helena, OPI/AL
S:
[1]… может я-а буду стать (стану) учителем |
[2] но это тоже трудно |
[3] а потому что а я только что я читала статью (статьё) о том |
[4] что ам -- а сейчас а много хороших учителей |
[5] а после того как они работали а несколько лет на а о |
[6] эти а учитель-и (учителя) конечно |
[7] которые работают а в общественных школах |
[8] да более того как они работали несколько лет в этих школах |
[9] они а часто бросают (бросают) работу из за того |
[10] что -- а а как бы они не хотели помогать детям (детям) детям в этих школах |
[12] а из за того что они а в этих школах не-е-достаточно денег да из (от) а правительства. (1m 20s)
After I divided the speech into clauses I encountered a problem in the analysis of indeterminate ellipses which Crystal calls “isolated clauses or phrases, where it [is] wholly unclear whether the utterance is colloquially reduced, independent of the linguistic context, or is an utterance in a relationship of ellipsis to some nearby clause” (157). I had to decide to which nearby clause the ellipsis related, and then to determine whether the ellipsis was its coordinate or subordinate clause.

Since I am investigating spontaneous speech, I had to take ellipses into consideration and count them as clauses even if they did not respond to the official definition of a clause. However, false starts were not considered as clauses. Only final versions of utterances with which the speaker was satisfied constituted the body of my analysis and results. Parenthetical phrases such as “Я не знаю” or “мне кажется” were counted as clauses because, according to the definition of a clause, they show the presence of a predicate and a subject, even if in the latter phrase the logical subject is given in the dative case. In this particular construction, Russian allows a PRO-drop of the introductory subject.

6.4 Data Analysis and Discussion of Results.

First, I will compare the speech of students during OPI and the SOPI descriptions looking at the use of subordinate clauses within their descriptions. Second, I will hypothesize as to why one test elicits more complex syntax than the other. I will argue that the prompts used by both tests and the students' psychological comfort affect their production of complex syntax during the speaking proficiency test. Table 6.1 shows the results of the OPI and the SOPI for each level. The visual results of the investigation of
the frequency of use of subordinate clauses across levels and per description in each of
the level at each of the two tests are given in chart 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IH OPI</th>
<th>IH SOPI</th>
<th>AL OPI</th>
<th>AL SOPI</th>
<th>AM OPI</th>
<th>AM SOPI</th>
<th>AH OPI</th>
<th>AH SOPI</th>
<th>S OPI</th>
<th>S SOPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of speakers at this level</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of descriptions at this level</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of descriptions per person at this level</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of clauses at this level</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of subordinate clauses at this level</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per level estimated in %</td>
<td>20.90</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>26.99</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>26.88</td>
<td>38.33</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>38.63</td>
<td>30.15</td>
<td>24.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of clauses per description</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>11.81</td>
<td>10.67</td>
<td>13.60</td>
<td>18.60</td>
<td>16.36</td>
<td>14.87</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>20.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per description</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1: Results of the OPI and the SOPI description in the IH through S levels.
Chart 6.1: Frequency of subordinate clauses (in %) across levels and per description used in the OPI and SOPI.

In the SOPI at the IH level, 11 subjects produced one solid description per test, whereas 7 IH level subjects in the OPI produced 32 descriptions. Such a discrepancy of the number of descriptions produced in the two tests is attributable to the nature and the structure of the tests. The OPI elicits description more than once in the course of the interview based on the tester's assessment of the student's level. The mean number of descriptions per person in each test shows that, while in the SOPI subjects gave one description each, in the OPI each subject produced about 4.5 descriptions per interview.

The results show an interesting paradox. Despite having a smaller number of subjects at the IH level in the OPI (7 speakers), the aggregate number of descriptions at this level for this test is almost 3 times higher than the aggregate number of descriptions produced by 11 subjects of the SOPI (32 vs. 11 descriptions). We may hypothesize that the larger number of descriptions would result in a higher number of clauses and
subordination; however this is not the case. Out of 311 total clauses produced by IH level subjects in the OPI, 65 of them were subordinate. In other words, only one fifth of the description discourse featured subordination. In the SOPI there were a total of 130 clauses of which 52 clauses were subordinate. This constitutes one third of the total data at the IH level in the SOPI. As a percentage the frequency of subordination used at the IH level in the OPI was 20% versus almost 40% in the SOPI.

The AL level data consisted of an almost equal number of subjects in both tests: 12 in the OPI and 10 in the SOPI. The SOPI AL level, as was found with the IH level, subjects gave one description per test. The OPI AL level subjects produced three times more description than the SOPI subjects (34 vs. 10). Thus the mean number of descriptions per each speaker at the AL level shows that, in the OPI speakers gave almost 3 descriptions per each interview (for details see table 6.1), whereas in the SOPI speakers gave only 1. The OPI AL speakers produced a total of 363 clauses in the task of description, of which 98 clauses (26.99%) were subordinate. This constitutes almost one third of the total clauses elicited at this level in the OPI. The SOPI AL subjects produced 136 clauses of which 51 (37.5%) were subordinate, more than one third of the clauses produced at this level. The results seem to indicate that both the OPI and the SOPI subjects at the AL level used subordination approximately 30% of the time when they were asked to provide description.

The comparison of frequencies of subordinate clauses per level showed similarities between two tests at the AL and the IH levels: the SOPI elicited a higher frequency of subordination than the OPI did, though this time fewer AL subjects took the

---

23 The total number of clauses at each level of each test is counted as 100% of the total data at this level on this test.
SOPI than the OPI. So far the data of the IH and the AL levels suggest that the higher number of the total clauses produced per level does not result in a higher percentage of subordination. Preliminary results of the analysis showed that the SOPI consistently elicited fewer total clauses per level due to the fact that fewer description tasks are included in this test, but at the same time the SOPI elicited a higher frequency of subordination than the OPI did (two times more at the IH and one fourth more at the AL level).

The AM level outcomes are particularly interesting. Despite the low number of OPI subjects (4) there were 15 descriptions produced in aggregate at this level. These 15 descriptions consisted of 279 clauses, of which 75 clauses (about 30%) were subordinate. 11 SOPIs at this level contained 11 descriptions and 180 clauses, out of which 69 clauses (38.33%) were subordinate. Both the OPI and the SOPI at the AM level elicited subordination approximately 30% of the time (about 27% in the OPI and about 38% in the SOPI), results consistent with the AL data. The analysis of the AM level results shows familiar outcomes: despite the higher number of descriptions at this level in the OPI, the SOPI was still able to elicit more complex syntax.

Surprising results were observed at the AH level as well. In the SOPI, 3 subjects produced one description per test. In the OPI, 4 subjects produced a total of 8 descriptions. The mean number of descriptions per person per test was 1 in the SOPI and 2 in the OPI. The 119 total clauses in the OPI featured 25 subordinate clauses, constituting one fourth of the total number of clauses used at the OPI AH level. Out of 44 total clauses used in the SOPI description, 17 were subordinate, constituting almost one third of the total clauses used at the SOPI AH level. The calculations show that the OPI
speakers produced three times more clauses than the SOPI speakers did; however, the lower total number of clauses did not stop SOPI subjects from out-performing the OPI subjects with regard to frequency of subordination. The comparison of the frequency of subordinate clauses used at the AH level by speakers of both tests shows that SOPI subjects used subordination in their descriptions almost two times more than the OPI subjects did (21.00% in the OPI vs. 38.63% in the SOPI).

The data at the Superior level consisted of 4 OPIs and 3 SOPIs. As expected, the total number of clauses elicited in the OPI is higher than the number of clauses elicited in the SOPI (126 versus 62, almost two times more). Despite the fact that SOPI Superior level speakers produced a lower frequency of subordinate clauses (24.19%) than OPI Superior speakers (30.15%), the data show that the SOPI subjects actually handled the task of description a little bit better than the OPI subjects did. Seven OPI descriptions had only about 6% more subordination than the 3 SOPI descriptions had.

The results suggest that that the greater frequency of subordination in the descriptions of the SOPI speakers at the Intermediate-High, Advanced, and Superior levels is related to the modality and the structure of the SOPI. As shown in chart 6.1, the frequency of subordination used in the OPI grows as the level of speaking increases from IH to Superior. The total frequency of subordination in description used by IH level speakers was 20.90% and this increased to about 30.15% at the Superior level. The frequency of subordination is, very likely, correlated with proficiency level. However the results of the AH level speakers in the OPI are puzzling: the OPI AH level speakers used subordination less often in their descriptions than the OPI IH speakers did. This may be a statistical blip due to the small sample size and should be the subject of further research.
As for subordination in the SOPI, chart 6.1 indicates that this test regularly elicited the same frequency of subordination across levels (IH through AH) during description, approximately 38% of the time. The SOPI graphs may suggest that there is no clear evidence of students’ second language acquisition of subordinate clauses (complex syntax) in the SOPI results in comparison with the results in the OPI. The actual peak of the SOPI subordination falls onto the IH speakers who produced complex syntax at a frequency of 40%. The SOPI Superior level speakers showed quite unexpectedly, the weakest results (24.19%). Why did the SOPI Superior level subjects produce less subordination than subjects at any other level in the same test? My first hypothesis is that such low results may be caused by the lower number of speakers at this level and the lack of a diversity of speakers. However, the SOPI data were collected from only three students at the AH level, numbers similar to those obtaining for the OPI Superior level group. The low number of descriptions at the AH level did constrain the frequency of subordination used in description. The AH level students used 14% more subordinate clauses than the Superior level students did.

The second hypothesis is based on the functions that Superior level speakers are tested to perform. Superior level speakers are checked on the ability to develop an argument, to support and defend an opinion, to hypothesize, and to discuss abstract topics in formal situations. Superior level speakers might not have felt an interest in demonstrating their language ability at full capacity while performing the Advanced-level task of description. Alternatively, some speakers might not feel comfortable speaking to a tape-recorder, and their psychological discomfort might have a negative impact on their
language production. In order to prove the hypothesis about psychological comfort I will later look at the results obtained from students at Middlebury in the control group.

The third hypothesis for the lower frequency of subordination of Superior speakers in the SOPI could be the time constraint implicit in the format. Speakers are given only a certain amount of time to perform the task of description in the SOPI whereas in the OPI the tester might not interrupt the response, letting speakers produce longer responses, more clauses and more subordination. In the SOPI speakers might not have had enough time to complete the task at full capacity because they were cut off by the tape.

Chart 6.1 also summarizes the frequency of the use of subordinate clauses per description at each of the five levels in each of the two tests. In other words, it indicates at which levels speakers gave the most syntactically complex description (the numeric results are given in table 6.1). The AM level description in both the OPI and the SOPI showed the highest frequency of complex syntax (5 subordinate clauses in the OPI and 6.27 in the SOPI). Not surprisingly, the lowest frequency of subordination per description occurred in speech at the IH level in both tests (the frequency of subordinate clauses per description in the OPI was less than two, but in the SOPI it was more than twice as high: 4.72). The bar graphs in charts 6.1 show a similar picture: the frequency of the use of subordinate clauses at the IH through AH levels in the SOPI is consistently higher than in the OPI. The speech of superior level speakers in the OPI more frequently evidenced complex syntax than did that of the SOPI speakers’ speech at the same level. Superior-level speakers in the OPI used subordination with the frequency of 5.42
I propose that the explanation of the striking contrast between the performances of the OPI and the SOPI testees lies in the nature of the description prompts used in the SOPI. The OPI description prompts are requests to describe places and objects (cities, apartments, campuses, universities, lifestyles, educational programs, companies, nature, buildings, and countries) and people (their appearances and characteristics). For a more detailed list of actual questions asked in the OPI, see Appendix C. An example would be: “Я слышала что Остин и Хьюстон очень отличаются друг от друга. Чем? “I heard that Austin and Houston differ a lot. How?” Other such OPI prompts as well as student responses are given in Appendix D. The SOPI prompt, on the other hand, asks testees to compare the advantages and disadvantages of studying at a private vs. public university or college: Как ты думаешь, в чём преимущества и недостатки обучения в частном университете? While comparison is often used in oral proficiency interviews to elicit description, it is not required and it was not used in all of the speech samples analyzed for this project.

Assuming that the difference in students’ performance in the OPI and the SOPI is affected by the nature of the prompt, I decided to apply a different approach to the analysis of the syntactical complexity of speech. I divided the OPI descriptions into two groups: one group of descriptions consisting of direct descriptions, simple requests to describe someone’s personality or appearance, a city, state, or university. The other group consisted of descriptions provided in response to a comparison prompt (such as the private university prompt) in the SOPI. The nature of this type of question elicits both
description and opinion. Therefore, my next hypothesis is that the results of a comparison of the subordination elicited in the two tests will change if the analysis of OPI descriptions includes only those OPI descriptions elicited by a prompt similar to the SOPI prompt. That is, the analysis of description in the two tests should compare descriptions elicited by similar stimuli.

6.4.1 Revised Data Analysis Based on More Selective Datasets.

When I isolated OPI prompts for comparison, then, out of the total number of 98 descriptions elicited in the OPI across levels, only 26 (one fourth) were similar to the comparison prompt used in the SOPI. The total number of descriptions used in the SOPI test across the levels was the same: 38. Table 6.2 demonstrates the results of OPI and SOPI descriptions prompted by similar stimuli. Chart 6.2 shows the frequency of use of subordinate clauses per each level and per description at each of the two tests.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IH</th>
<th>AL</th>
<th>AM</th>
<th>AH</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of speakers at this level</td>
<td>OPI 4</td>
<td>SOPI 11</td>
<td>OPI 6</td>
<td>SOPI 10</td>
<td>OPI 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of descriptions at this level</td>
<td>OPI 8</td>
<td>SOPI 11</td>
<td>OPI 10</td>
<td>SOPI 10</td>
<td>OPI 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of descriptions per person at this level</td>
<td>OPI 2.00</td>
<td>SOPI 1.00</td>
<td>OPI 1.66</td>
<td>SOPI 1.00</td>
<td>OPI 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of clauses at this level</td>
<td>OPI 70</td>
<td>SOPI 130</td>
<td>OPI 128</td>
<td>SOPI 137</td>
<td>OPI 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of subordinate clauses at this level</td>
<td>OPI 19</td>
<td>SOPI 51</td>
<td>OPI 49</td>
<td>SOPI 51</td>
<td>OPI 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of clauses per description</td>
<td>OPI 8.75</td>
<td>SOPI 11.81</td>
<td>OPI 12.80</td>
<td>SOPI 13.70</td>
<td>OPI 14.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per level estimated in %</td>
<td>OPI 27.14</td>
<td>SOPI 39.23</td>
<td>OPI 38.28</td>
<td>SOPI 37.22</td>
<td>OPI 27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per description</td>
<td>OPI 2.37</td>
<td>SOPI 4.63</td>
<td>OPI 4.90</td>
<td>SOPI 5.10</td>
<td>OPI 4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2: Results of the OPI and the SOPI descriptions across levels prompted by similar stimuli.
per level

Chart 6.2: Frequency of subordinate clauses per level and per description in the OPI and the SOPI estimated in %, the analysis of similar comparison prompts in the OPI and the SOPI.

per description

The tables with graphs (chart 6.2) present unexpected results. While the complexity of the syntax of description in the OPI gains ground, it is still significantly less frequent than in the SOPI. The data show again that the majority of speakers in the SOPI out-performed speakers in the OPI.

The analysis of the aggregate number of comparative descriptions used in the OPI shows that the highest number of such comparative prompts were given at the IH and AL levels (8 and 10) and the lowest number (2) was registered at the Superior level. Thus, if we compare the mean number of comparative descriptions per person across the levels in the OPI, we see an eventual decline of this mean number from 2 at the IH level to 1 at the Superior. Such a decline is not surprising, because at the Superior-level speakers easily demonstrate their ability to narrate and describe in paragraph-length discourse, and instead they are challenged with abstract topics in extended discourse. During the OPI for a Superior-level speaker it is sufficient to demonstrate paragraph-length description on a
concrete topic just twice, and the tester is not required to elicit description through comparing.

The results of the Superior OPI speakers are again higher than those of the same level speakers in the SOPI. As in the previous analysis, the AH level speakers in the OPI used subordination less frequently than in the SOPI. When the analysis compared speech samples elicited with similar prompts in both tests, the frequency of subordinate clauses per level and per description remained lower in the OPI than in the SOPI responses at the IH, AM and AH levels. The narrowed analysis indicated that the frequency of subordination in the speech of the OPI AL speakers increased from 26% to 38%, and indeed surpassed the frequency of subordination in the general SOPI AL speakers’ responses by only 1%. The almost identical results of subordination at the AL level in the two tests may suggest that the test itself (OPI or SOPI), or the modality of oral description (interpersonal and presentational) had no impact on the complexity of the language it elicited at this particular level.

The frequency of subordination in the OPI was between 27% and 38% per level for all levels of interest in this investigation (IH – S), whereas in the SOPI it was still higher, between 37% and 39% at the IH through the AH level, but only 27.86% at the Superior level. The results of comparison of the frequency of subordinate clauses per description showed that the SOPI mean description has a higher frequency of subordination at levels below Superior than does the OPI. The discrepancy at the Superior level needs further attention. Across all levels, the OPI mean description consisted of about 2 to 6 subordinate clauses, whereas in the SOPI the mean description across levels was between 4 and 6.
The presentational mode of the SOPI might seem to be a more formal speaking situation than the interpersonal mode in the OPI. The results of this project, therefore, suggest that the modality of the test (interpersonal for the OPI and presentational for the SOPI) may affect the complexity of the speech it elicits. The prompt of the SOPI seemed to elicit more formal speech and more subordinate constructions. The reasons for this are pure conjecture, but the evidence suggests that speech in the SOPI is truly presentational. That is, students cannot go back and erase what they have already said. They cannot negotiate meaning, and that is why they need to make their statements as clear as possible.

Another factor that might affect the complexity of speech in presentational mode descriptions is the time students are given in the SOPI to plan their responses. Testees first hear the situation to which they need to give a response, and then the instructions allow them 20 seconds to plan their responses. After the planning time is over, testees hear the prompt in the target language and they are given a length of time, differing by prompt, to give the response. The interpersonal modality of the OPI excludes this reflective planning phase. The comparison of interpersonal vs. presentational modes in oral proficiency testing seems to be parallel to the analysis of spoken vs. written discourse by Beaman, Crystal, and Schiffrin (1982). They argued that spoken discourse is less syntactically complex, and speakers use more coordinate structures than subordinate structures. The findings as related to written discourse suggested that the process of writing allows a “writer time to ‘integrate’ his or her ideas into a more complex, coherent whole” discourse. Juxtaposed to this kind of discourse is the ‘fragmented’ or disjointed, spontaneous and improvised nature of speech in which ideas are loosely joined by the
coordinating conjunction *and* (Beaman, 1984:48). Preliminary findings in my research suggest that the OPI mode is unplanned and spontaneous spoken discourse. In the SOPI mode a speaker has time to organize and prepare the response and to integrate his/her thoughts and ideas into a more complex response.

The SOPI format also has a silent period of 1 minute and 20 seconds (for the task of description) during which students may feel a need to “fill the silence” with further description. This might account for some of the higher subordination rates. Despite the speaker’s level, all the speakers are given the same amount of time to perform the task of description in the SOPI. In other words, it is assumed that in order to show that a speaker can function at the Advanced level, performing core advanced level functions; he/she is provided with a certain amount of time for that. Nevertheless, since IH speakers perform 50% of the tasks required by the Advanced level, they still give shorter responses than Advanced level speakers. Thus, in the SOPI, if IH level speakers complete their answer to the prompt before the time for the answer expires, they hear silence on the tape. Some speakers (across the levels) are pushed to produce more speech, thus producing longer responses and more clauses. The Examples below demonstrate students’ attempts to continue and extend their answer as their response was followed by silence on the tape:

---

24 Though limited to 20 seconds.
Description of Activities

T: Как отмечают дни рождения в соединённых штатах? У вас устраивают вечеринки?
How do people celebrate birthdays in the United States? Do people have parties?

S: у нас всё зависит от возраста человека | потому что когда постарше | обычно отмечают с друзьями дома или вообще не отмечают | но когда мы дети | когда мы маленькими (маленькие) когда мы маленькие | у нас а родители обычно строят усе а устраивают вечеринки для детей | и приглашают всех - друзей ↑ рёбёнка | есть эстафеты ↑ какинибудь | и есть - торт ↑ со свечками ↑ | ам все играют ↑ танцуют ↑ | шарики ↑ обычно есть | короче весёлая вечеринка | и детям очень нравятся такие вечеринки | подарки ↑ прин ▲ приносят конечно имениннику --и едят торт с мороженым | чё ещё? ----- когда я ↑ была маленькая | всегда ↑ у меня были такие вечеринки | я очень хорошо помню | что у нас всегда ↑ были эстафеты. (1м 3с)

T: [Interrupted by the beep on the tape.]

Karina, SOPI/ AL
Advantages/Disadvantages

T: Как ты думаешь в чем преимущества и недостатки обучения в частном университете?

S: я думаю | что большинство (большинство) американских студентов -- учится в м государственном (государственных) университетах ♦ в государственных университетах | потому что там дёшево | чем частных университетах (там дешевле чем в частных университетах) | а но э -- в частных университетах | м вероятно | м классы - меньше | чем в государственных университетах | а образование в оба (обоих) в оба университетах очень хорошо ♦ (хорошее) - очень хорошее ♦ э---- м я ходила в государственный / университет только потому | что было дёшево | ходить туда я думаю | что я получила очень хорошее образование. (1м 10с)

Ada, SOPI /IH
Advantages/Disadvantages

T: Как ты думаешь в чем преимущества и недостатки обучения в частном университете?

S: ну конечно а учить а учиться в частном университете это а гораздо а дороже | чем учиться в государственном университете | но а во первых
много (многим) людей (людям) ам больше (больше) нравится а учиться в частных в частном университете | потому что ам - если они живут в а штате | где государ_ государственный университет государственный университет не очень сильный (сильный) а программы | а --- можно (то) лучше а заниматься а в частном университете а и есть вообще а лучше курсы | а про_ а профессоры а у каждого (каждого) профессором (профессора) есть / а меньше студентов | ноа в государственном университете это а а есть наверно а много [профессоры (профессоров) и а много программы (программ) а | потому что больше [(1m 18s)
T: [Interruption by the beep on the tape.] Nick, SOPI/ IH
Advantages/Disadvantages
T: Как ты думаешь в чем преимущества и недостатки обучения в частном университете?
S: а ну -- может быть на самом деле -- если говорим о о (об) университетах | это - ну большая (большой) разницы нет | ну а в частных университетах очень очень а дороги дороги (дорого) | ну там надо платить много денег и (но) меньше надо платить в для (в) а государственых а университетах университетов. | а ну с а дело в том что ты получишь почти тоже самое образование (тоже самое образование) | может быть тебя если хочу поступать вы-вы ты хочешь поступить в аспирантуры (в аспирантуре) | тогда (sigh) -- ам -- лучше -- может быть в частном университете. (0m 46s).
Kelly, SOPI/ AL
Advantages/Disadvantages
T: Как ты думаешь в чем преимущества и недостатки обучения в частном университете?
S: ну с одной стороны очень дорого стоит а ходить в частную в частный университет | - ну на самом деле я думаю | что образование там гораздо лучше | там обычно - мало студентов в (на) каждом курсе | значит | что есть больше возможностей --- м-м м у хорошо у’читься (учи’ться) | -- ну с другой стороны я думаю | --- ну в большинстве университетах больше библиотек-е-ки там | а вообще ресурсы такие большие | что ну это и есть преимущество на самом деле | -- значит | - ну --- я наверно бы предпочитала (предпочла) ходить в маленький н - а маленький частный университет | если бы/ у меня был – вы-вы-бор | но вообще для многих это невозможно | денег не хватает | и - это [ просто невозможно. (1m 15s)
T: [Interruption by the beep on the tape.}

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In the OPI, testers do not set a time during which testees may plan and then give a response to a particular prompt, except for the role play situation administered in the last few minutes of the oral proficiency interview. The flow of the OPI is modeled on a “natural-like” conversation, in which one person (a tester) asks questions and the other (a testee) responds without time to plan and organize his/her discourse. In this setting, testees might feel pressure to give an immediate response to avoid the silence and a pause between the question and their response. It remains to be seen if students who give more subordination in the more artificial context of the SOPI are able to provide it in interactive speech. In other words, if they are able to function at the same high level in authentic real world contexts requiring advanced-level speech, an important reason for distinguishing between whether presentational or interpersonal speech is being tested.

The SOPI not only supplies speakers with planning time, but it also provides a contextualized prompt in English. Thus, if students do not completely understand the question in the target language in the SOPI, they are still able to give a response, whereas in the OPI the pressure of a natural-like flow of the conversation, lack of planning preparation period, and prompts exclusively in the target language may be reasonably expected to contribute to the lower frequency of complex syntax in the OPI.

Is it these artificial SOPI circumstances that lead to more subordination? To answer this question, I will now turn to the analysis of description in the control group.

6.5 Control Group

The control group consisted of 13 speakers: 4 at the IH, 3 at the AL, 3 at the AM, 1 at the AH and 2 at the Superior levels. The conclusive results for both tests are given in
Due to the small number of speakers in the control group at each level and even smaller number of comparison prompts used in the OPI of these subjects, the OPI data of the control group consist of all the descriptions given by these speakers within their OPIs rather than the comparative prompts only.

![Table 6.3: Total OPI and SOPI IH level results of descriptions.](image)
Chart 6.3: Frequency of subordinate clauses per person in % in the control group at the IH level.

The results indicate that at the IH level speakers in the control group produced more subordination in the SOPI than in the OPI, except for Peter who produced subordination with approximately similar frequency in both tests. Sam used 11 subordinate and only 5 non-subordinate clauses, but among the total 29 clauses in the OPI description (almost three times more than in the SOPI), only 5 were subordinate. In Jon’s OPI speech there was no use of complex syntax at all; however in the SOPI the frequency of subordination per description reached 40% of the total clauses he produced.
### Table 6.4: Total OPI and SOPI AL level results of descriptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Andy</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Helena</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OPI</td>
<td>SOPI</td>
<td>OPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 description</td>
<td>Total clauses</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total subordinate</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of subord. per description</td>
<td>60.60</td>
<td>35.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 description</td>
<td>Total clauses</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total subordinate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of subord. per description</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>88.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 description</td>
<td>Total clauses</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total subordinate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of subord. per description</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate per person at this level</td>
<td>Total clauses</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total subordinate</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean of clauses per description</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of subord. per description</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of subord. per person</td>
<td>60.60</td>
<td>35.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chart 6.4: Frequency of subordinate clauses per person in the control group at the AL level.**

The AL level results contradict the results we have observed earlier. For AL speakers in the control group, subordinate clauses were produced more frequently in the OPI setting.
than in the SOPI. The total results for this level show that speech elicited by the OPI was consistently richer in complex syntax than speech elicited by the SOPI. Andy and Mary’s answers showed similar frequency of subordination (35%) in the SOPI, but differed by 20% in the OPI (60 vs. 40). However, Mary’s responses in the OPI and the SOPI were almost identical with regard to subordination (35% vs. 40%). The answers of Helena were the highest in the usage of subordination in both tests and differed across test modality by less than 10% (71.42% vs. 63.63%). Such a high frequency of subordination may be explained by Helena’s more sophisticated speech style. Her responses may suggest that the modality of the two tests did not play a role in her high outcomes of subordination.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total clauses</th>
<th>Total subordinate</th>
<th>Frequency of subord. per description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 description</td>
<td>38 OPI</td>
<td>16 SOPI</td>
<td>44.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 description</td>
<td>31 OPI</td>
<td>n/a SOPI</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 description</td>
<td>35 OPI</td>
<td>n/a SOPI</td>
<td>34.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate per person at this level</td>
<td>104 OPI</td>
<td>16 SOPI</td>
<td>34.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total clauses</th>
<th>Total subordinate</th>
<th>Frequency of subord. per description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 description</td>
<td>17 OPI</td>
<td>8 SOPI</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 description</td>
<td>8 OPI</td>
<td>0 SOPI</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 description</td>
<td>12 OPI</td>
<td>4 SOPI</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate per person at this level</td>
<td>37 OPI</td>
<td>8 SOPI</td>
<td>12.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total clauses</th>
<th>Total subordinate</th>
<th>Frequency of subord. per description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 description</td>
<td>14 OPI</td>
<td>4 SOPI</td>
<td>15.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 description</td>
<td>n/a OPI</td>
<td>11 SOPI</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 description</td>
<td>18 OPI</td>
<td>n/a SOPI</td>
<td>34.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate per person at this level</td>
<td>58 OPI</td>
<td>14 SOPI</td>
<td>53.33</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Total clauses</th>
<th>Total subordinate</th>
<th>Frequency of subord. per description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 description</td>
<td>9 OPI</td>
<td>1 SOPI</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 description</td>
<td>11 OPI</td>
<td>n/a SOPI</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 description</td>
<td>6 OPI</td>
<td>n/a SOPI</td>
<td>16.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate per person at this level</td>
<td>26 OPI</td>
<td>3 SOPI</td>
<td>15.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total clauses</th>
<th>Total subordinate</th>
<th>Frequency of subord. per description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 description</td>
<td>15.11 OPI</td>
<td>8 SOPI</td>
<td>8.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 description</td>
<td>14.66 OPI</td>
<td>4 SOPI</td>
<td>15.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 description</td>
<td>14 OPI</td>
<td>4 SOPI</td>
<td>15.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate per person at this level</td>
<td>26 OPI</td>
<td>3 SOPI</td>
<td>15.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.5: Total OPI and SOPI AM level results of descriptions.
Students at the AM level of the control group showed a higher frequency of complex syntax in the descriptions elicited by the SOPI (between 28% and 53%, which is from approximately one third to half of all the clauses produced in description). The OPI elicited complex syntax between 11% and 35% of the time, which is between one tenth and one third of all the clauses produced by speakers at this level. The column of frequency of subordinate clauses per person shows that two AM speakers out of three (Rosa and Polly) used subordinate clauses half of the time in their response to the SOPI prompts. Some of the speakers (Linda) at times produced only non-subordinate clauses in her OPI descriptions in a pattern similar to Jon's at the IH level. In her second description, Linda produced 8 clauses, of which none were subordinate.
Table 6.6: Total OPI and SOPI AH level results of descriptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total Clauses</th>
<th>Total Subordinate</th>
<th>Frequency of Subord. per Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1 description</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Aggregate per person at this level</td>
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<td>26.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 6.6: Frequency of subordinate clauses per person in the control group at the AH level.

The analysis of the AH level cannot show enough objective information about the use of subordinate clauses in the tests due to the fact that the control group at this level consisted of only one person. However, it is interesting that the total number of both Tom’s OPI descriptions is lower in syntactical complexity than the total number of subordinations in
his description in the SOPI (26% vs. 42%). Even though Tom was given two opportunities to describe in the OPI, he did not provide more subordination in his OPI discourse than he did in the one description in the SOPI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ann OPI</th>
<th>Joy OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total clauses</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Total subordinate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subord. per description</td>
<td>31.81</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 description</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total clauses</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<td>Total subordinate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequency of subord. per description</td>
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<td>Aggregate per person at this level</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Mean of clauses per description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequency of subord. per description</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subord. per person</td>
<td>31.81</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>29.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.7: Total OPI and SOPI S level results of descriptions.

Chart 6.7: Frequency of subordinate clauses per person in the control group at the S level.
The descriptions produced by two Superior-level speakers in the control group were syntactically richer in OPI-elicited discourse than in SOPI-elicited discourse. Ann used 7 subordinate and 15 non-subordinate clauses to perform the task of description in the OPI (one third of all the clauses Ann produced in this test); Ann’s SOPI description consists of an almost identical number of clauses to the OPI performance: 6 subordinate and 15 non-subordinate clauses. Thus, for this speaker the nature of the test seems not to be a factor and she managed both descriptive tasks equally. Joy’s OPI responses exhibited higher frequency of subordination than her SOPI did. In order to see whether Joy’s performance in both tests was affected by the time limit in the SOPI, I timed the responses. The results were unexpected: in the OPI both Joy’s responses were 40 seconds each. Her SOPI response lasted for 1 minute and 14 seconds. As for Ann, she took 55 seconds to complete the task of description in the OPI and 1 minute and 14 seconds to describe in the SOPI. The time results for both speakers indicate that neither Joy nor Ann were impeded by the SOPI time limit, but despite their shorter responses in the OPI, provided more complex syntax in their OPI descriptions than they did in their SOPI descriptions with a longer period of response. Ann managed to create more subordination in less time in the OPI than in the SOPI, though the frequencies of subordination in her descriptions in the two tests are very similar.

Thus, the investigation of the syntactical complexity of the two speaking proficiency tests done on the basis of the data collected from speakers in the control group indicate that for 10 out of 13 speakers (in other words, for 77% of the speakers in the control group) the modality and format seemed to influence the production of complex syntax. For 3 speakers (23%) out of 13, the frequency number for both tests was
so similar that I must assume that the mode of the test had no impact on the language production for them. The graphs depicting the results of the control group illustrate that production of higher subordination is distributed equally across tests among the speakers in the control group: 6 speakers (46%) in the control group showed a higher frequency of subordination in the OPI and 7 speakers in the control group showed a higher frequency of subordination in the SOPI. This suggests that different speakers will react differently to the modality of the speaking proficiency test as well as to the prompts used in the test. However, to make these differences (in speakers’ performance in the two different modes) meaningful and statistically significant, the research needs, first, to look at a larger scope of data in the control group and, second, to analyze only those prompts that are similar in both tests.

6.6 Types of Subordination.

Table 6.8 represents a full picture of the types of subordinate clauses elicited at levels IH through Superior in the OPI and SOPI.
The analysis of the types of subordination used in each test indicates that in both tests at levels IH through AH nominal clauses made up 30% of all subordinate clauses. At
the other end of the spectrum the least frequent clauses at IH through AH levels were adjectival clauses with a frequency of only 8.82% to 12.5%. The comparison of the frequency outcomes across corresponding levels in both tests shows no outstanding difference in performance between tests: the numbers of frequency in the two tests at parallel levels are very close.

At the Superior level, adverbial clauses were the most frequent (about 65% in the OPI and more than 80% in the SOPI). Nominal clauses appeared least frequently in the OPI (13%); adjectival clauses appeared least frequently in the SOPI (5.88%). The two tests had an inverse relationship in terms of adverbial and adjectival clauses: the SOPI elicited almost 20% more adverbial clauses than did the OPI, but the SOPI elicited almost 15% fewer adjectival clauses than the OPI.

Thus, the results suggest that both tests elicited a similar number of nominal, adjectival, and adverbial clauses on parallel levels across the tests. However, Superior OPI speakers out-performed Superior SOPI speakers in their use of adjectival clauses by almost 4 times. This outcome was not surprising, because Superior-speakers in the SOPI did not form any relative clauses – only one attributive clause lacking a relative pronoun – whereas Speakers in the OPI produced 4 relative and 4 attributive clauses.

There were no predicative clauses produced at any level in any of the tests.

Both tests demonstrated that the majority of subordinate clauses were objective clauses created with the conjunction что. The frequency of usage of objective clauses varied between 25% to 37 % in both tests at levels below Superior and at the Superior level in both tests the frequency of objective clauses was 13% in the OPI and almost 12% in the SOPI. It was not surprising that Superior level speakers produced less objective
clauses than speakers at lower levels. Objective clauses are fewer sophisticated than adjectival or adverbial clauses, and therefore Superior level speakers are able to produce more sophisticated speech by means of using more sophisticated types of subordination.

The majority of adverbial clauses in the OPI were adverbial clauses of cause (55 clauses), time (45), result (29), comparison (21), and condition (8). In the SOPI, the majority of adverbial clauses were clauses of condition (31), cause (27), comparison (17), result (16), and purpose (12). It is interesting that the least frequently occurring adverbial clause in the OPI, the clause of condition, was the most frequently occurring adverbial clause on the SOPI. This should not, however, be surprising because students apparently perceived the SOPI prompt as a condition they needed to account for: what advantages or disadvantages students might have if they study at a private university or if they study at a public school. The frequency of other types of subordinate clauses in this short hierarchy is very close across the tests. Such results suggest that both tests elicit very similar types of subordination with relatively similar frequency, except for subordinate clauses of condition.

6.6.1 Чтобы, Который, and Participles and Gerunds.

I will now address in more detail subordinate clauses with чтобы, relative clauses that are joined with который, and the use of participial and gerundial phrases for three reasons. First, these constructions are widely used in the speech of Russians. Second, the markedness of these constructions is challenging for learners of Russian whose native

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25“Marked” forms are less common, more unusual and “least distributed structural entities in the language”... According to the Markedness Differential Hypothesis, “those linguistic phenomena in the target language which are more marked than the corresponding phenomena in the native language will be more difficult to learn” (Isurin, 2004).
language is Germanic (English in this case). Third and finally, the usage of чтобы and который clauses are features of Advanced level oral proficiency in Russian and participles and gerunds appear regularly in the speech of Advanced High and Superior speakers. According to the ACTFL Russian Proficiency Guidelines Advanced-level speakers have “partial control of reported statements, i.e. those using ли, чтобы. Speaker frequently expands discourse by using various types of subordinate clauses, although errors involving который are common.” (FLA: 1988: 182) Superior-level speakers exhibit “good control of all constructions... including various types of subordination and clauses with participles and gerunds.” (FLA, 1988: 197)

Russian subordinate чтобы clauses can be of two kinds: those that are followed by an infinitival predicate, as in English (non-finite clauses), and those that are followed by the past-tense form of the verb (finite clauses). The latter is often referred to as the subjunctive26 mood. If the predicate in the main and subordinate clauses refer to different subjects (animate or inanimate), then the verb in the subordinate clause is used in the past-tense form irrespective of the time it denotes. If the subject of the main and subordinate clauses is the same, then in the чтобы clause the infinitive form of the verb is used.

(1) Родители хотят, чтобы дети пошли в лес.
The parents want their children to go to the forest.

(2) Дети пошли в лес, чтобы собирать грибы и ягоды.
The children went to the forest to pick up mushrooms and berries.

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26 “The subjunctive mood is used in referring to … situations that are uncertain, tentative, unlikely, hypothetical, or contrary to fact…(T)he subjunctive mood is used to express advice, wishes, hopes, desires, requests, and commands that may or may not be (or may not have been) realized” (Levine, 1999:262).
Subordinate finite чтобы clauses function as adverbial clauses of purpose and explanatory clauses. Explanatory clauses denote a wish (хотеть, желать), request (просить, требовать), demand (приказывать, заставлять, настаивать), or necessity (надо, необходимо, нужно, желательно) (Bolevitskaya-Khalieva: 55).

(3) Мама просит, чтобы я открыла окно.
   My mom asks me to open the window.

(3) Необходимо, чтобы ты пил витамины.
   It is necessary that you take vitamins.
   It is necessary for you to take vitamins.

Adverbial clauses of purpose are joined to the main clause with purposive conjunctions чтобы “in order to, so that”, для того чтобы “for the purpose of, so that”, с тем чтобы “with the purpose of, so that”, за тем чтобы “for the purpose of, so that” (Levine, 1999: 301). In the current research project I am interested in considering only those чтобы clauses that have a marked feature, namely the predicate in the past tense, because the чтобы clauses that take the infinitive in Russian exist in English and consequently their formation does not represent any unexpected and/or ill-formed outcomes. As described by Levin (1999), Russian subjunctive clauses of wish, desire, and command with чтобы + the past-tense form of the verb are translated into English by “direct object + infinitive” construction. That is, the English direct object becomes the subject of the subordinate clause in Russian, as in this example below:

(5) Врач сказал, чтобы ты лежал в постели.
   The doctor told you to stay in bed.

In Russian the relative pronoun который may refer to the English “who”, “that” or “which”. The Russian relative pronoun который has the same gender and number as
the antecedent noun, however the case of the relative pronoun depends on the function it performs the clause in which it is used. If the relative pronoun serves as the subject of its clause, then it will be in the nominative case. If it serves as an object of the verb in the relative clause, then который will be used in the case assigned by the governing verb or preposition in the relative clause.

Table 6.9 demonstrates the results of the usage of subjunctive clauses with чтобы and relative clauses with который and other relative conjunctive words in the OPI and the SOPI across levels.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IH OPI</th>
<th>AL OPI</th>
<th>AM OPI</th>
<th>AH OPI</th>
<th>S OPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of descriptions at this level</td>
<td>36 11</td>
<td>34 10</td>
<td>14 11</td>
<td>8 3</td>
<td>6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of clauses at this level</td>
<td>318 130</td>
<td>358 137</td>
<td>274 180</td>
<td>119 44</td>
<td>117 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of subordinate clauses at this level</td>
<td>65 51</td>
<td>96 51</td>
<td>80 68</td>
<td>24 17</td>
<td>37 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per level estimated in %</td>
<td>20.44 39.23</td>
<td>26.81 37.22</td>
<td>29.19 37.77</td>
<td>20.16 38.63</td>
<td>31.62 27.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6.9: The usage of subjunctive clauses + чтобы and relative clauses in the OPI and the SOPI across levels.**

The results of the detailed analysis show that in both tests students produced very few subjunctive clauses + чтобы, and at times did not produce them at all. In the OPI
subjunctive clauses + чтобы were used in the speech at four levels: IH through AH level speakers; in the SOPI only IH and Superior levels featured this type of чтобы clause. Thus, we indeed can compare the results of these clauses at the IH level because it was the only level that exhibited subjunctive clauses + чтобы in both tests.

Table 6.9 reveals interesting outcomes. In the OPI, the analysis of the frequency of чтобы clauses per level (IH through AH) was lower than 1.00 with the exception of the AM level, where the frequency was 1.09. In the SOPI, the frequency of чтобы clauses was above 1.5 at both IH and Superior levels. It seems that the OPI speakers outperformed SOPI speakers in the frequency of subjunctive clauses + чтобы (7 in the OPI vs. 3 in the SOPI), but the SOPI speakers used these clauses with higher frequency.

As for the frequency of чтобы clauses per description and per person, the analysis indicates that the highest frequency per description was in the SOPI (0.33 at the Superior level). In the OPI the highest frequency of чтобы clauses per description was recorded at the AL level (0.29), which almost matches the results of the Superior SOPI.27 The mean number of subjunctive clauses + чтобы per person can only truly be compared at the IH level where it is higher by 0.10 in the OPI mode. If we calculate the general frequency of чтобы clauses used per person in the OPI and the SOPI, the SOPI frequency is two times greater than the OPI data. In the OPI, 7 uses of чтобы clauses among 31 speakers result in 0.225, while in the SOPI data 3 uses of чтобы clauses among 38 speakers result in 0.078.

Despite the fact that on individual levels the SOPI data are higher in frequency of usage of чтобы clauses, it still may seem that overall the OPI students produced more

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27 I need to mention that I did not run statistical tests to determine whether the differences I find are statistically significant, because my analysis is based on a small amount of data only.
such clauses. Is the quantity of subjunctive clauses with чтобы in the OPI correlated with quality? The investigation of accuracy in the usage of such чтобы clauses shows that in the OPI, out of 7 usages, only 1 (14%) was ungrammatical. The speaker used the predicate in a чтобы clause in the infinitive:

“У меня друг | который а собирается поехать в россию на год | и он хотел | чтобы я занимать его квартиру а во время его - ам пое _ отъездка” (Matt, OPI/ AL)

In the SOPI out of 3 usages of чтобы 1 (33%) was incorrect. Instead of the past tense, the student put the predicate in the present tense form, see example below:

“значит -- не нужно | чтобы -- всё чтоб чтобы есть реальный опыт | чтобы --- стретиться с неприятными элементов неприятных элементов общество” (Matt, SOPI/ AL)

The analysis of subjunctive clauses + чтобы across levels in the OPI and the SOPI showed that overall there was more usage of such clauses in speech elicited by the OPI. Nevertheless, the SOPI elicited a higher frequency of subjunctive clauses + чтобы per level. It is therefore possible to draw conclusions about the usage of subordinate clauses across tests per description and per person only at one level – IH. Only IH speakers used subjunctive clauses in both tests. The performance at other levels lacks usage of this construction at parallel levels of both tests. That is, if subjunctive clauses are present at one level in the OPI, they are absent at the parallel level in the SOPI. The IH data indicate that the SOPI did a better job eliciting more subjunctive clauses + чтобы per description at this level, but the OPI did a better job of eliciting speech with subjunctive clauses + чтобы per person. It must be noted that the nature of OPI and SOPI prompts did not require the use of subjunctive clauses + чтобы. As a result, the instances of usage of such constructions in both tests were limited, and therefore one cannot draw
general conclusions regarding which mode triggers more and/or better (more accurate) use of such clauses.

Table 6.9 provides information on the general picture of relative clause usage in the task of description in the OPI and the SOPI. Relative clauses were introduced by the relative pronoun который and conjunctive words где and кто (in the form of the instrumental case ‘с кем’). In the OPI, the use of relative clauses was seen at all levels. Strangely enough, the highest two SOPI levels did not exhibit any usage of relative clauses at all performing the task of description. Thus, the data collected for который clauses allow us to make a comparative analysis of relative clause usage in both tests at three levels: IH, AL, and AM. The results suggest that at most levels students used 4 relative clauses with который in their speech, except for AL OPI speakers, who actually produced 8 relative clauses altogether.

The highest frequency of the usage of который was reached by OPI Superior level speakers (3.41) and the lowest, by the IH level speakers (1.25) again in the OPI.

If we compare results of который usage only at those levels (IH, AL and AM) for which который was produced in both tests, we observe that in the SOPI, relative clauses were used with higher frequency than in the OPI both per level and per description. Looking at the frequency of который usage per description across levels shows that the frequency of который usage per description in the OPI starts with 0.11 at the IH level and increases almost two and a half times to 0.28 at the AM level. In the SOPI, the frequency of который clauses per description is constantly higher than at parallel levels of the OPI (0.36 and 0.4). These outcomes are not unexpected: the total number of descriptions at all
levels in the OPI is constantly higher than the total number of descriptions at levels in the SOPI.

A comparison of frequencies of который clauses per person shows that the speech elicited by the OPI was characterized by a higher frequency (0.57 at the IH level as the lowest and 1.00 at the AM level as the highest) of relative clauses. In the SOPI mode the frequency of relative clauses per person was the same as the frequency per description: between 0.36 and 0.4 from IH to AM.

23 total relative clauses were produced by all the OPI speakers out of 1186 total clauses produced for description prompts in this test across levels (1.93%), two times more than the total number of который clauses used by speakers in the SOPI (12 out of an aggregate 499 SOPI clauses). However, these 12 sentences comprised 2.4% of the entire clauses produced in the SOPI. Nevertheless, the mean number of relative clauses in the OPI per person is two times higher than the mean number of relative clauses in the SOPI per person (0.741 vs. 0.315). I therefore conclude that the form of the test influences the frequency of который clause usage by level and description leading to higher results in the SOPI speech samples; however, the frequency of который clauses per person indicates that in the OPI mode speakers are able to produce more relative clauses.

Speakers in both tests made mistakes in the proper usage of the relative pronoun который. The most common mistake was the usage of который as the subject of relative clauses with compound nominal predicates in the present tense. In Russian, the relative clause would stand as an independent simple sentence. For example, in
“это конечно может быть есть несколько университетов в США | которые очень а очень хорошие” (Rosa, SOPI/ AM)

the relative clause should stand as a separate sentence: “Университеты (ог Они) очень хорошие”.

Other mistakes were caused by the transfer of English syntax (syntactic calques) into Russian structure, as in the sentence below:

“но в большом публическом университете бывает | что много а много человек много людей часто бывает что а -- что с этими людьми ты ты можешь найти ну друзей | которые более как ты чем а в маленком университете | где а в котором не всегда могло бы быть найти а людей | которые ам похож на тебя” (Sam, SOPI/ ИН)

or were caused by lack of agreement as in

“и в книге | который я думаю | что она написала на самом деле | она говорит о нём” (Mary, OPI/ AL)

or as in

“я имею в виду | что это о -- у нас такая культу-у-ра там | который (которая) нуждается в э иностранцах |” (Betsy, OPI/ AL)

Overall, the majority of forms of который were used in the nominative case. The calculations suggest that in the SOPI, speakers made fewer grammatical mistakes with который than in the OPI. In other words, SOPI speakers showed better control of the usage of который. In the SOPI 8% (1 out of 12) were grammatically incorrect, whereas 13% (3 out of 23) of the который clauses in the OPI were incorrect. It might seem that the higher usage of an item (in this case a relative pronoun) might result in higher frequency of ungrammatical usage and ungrammatical usage might not be dependent upon the mode of the test in which it is produced28.

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28 Again it is not clear if this difference is statistically significant.
The absence of который clauses at upper levels in the SOPI and what might seem to be a low frequency of relative clauses with который at upper levels in the OPI have a reasonable explanation. In Russian participles may be used in place of relative clauses introduced by который. Participles exhibit characteristics of a verb and an adjective (relative pronoun). Like verbs, participles show transitivity (or intransitivity), aspect (perfective or imperfective), tense (except for the future), and voice (active or passive). Like the relative pronoun который, participles have endings marked for gender, number, and case agreement with the nouns they modify. The examples below show how participles can replace the relative pronoun.

Девушка, которая сидит у окна, моя сестра.
The girl who is sitting by the window is my sister.
(Main clause + inserted relative clause)

Девушка, сидящая у окна, моя сестра.
The girl sitting by the window is my sister.
(Main clause + inserted participial phrase)

In Russian participles are mostly used in written rather than in oral speech in the spheres of academic, scientific, and journalistic writing, therefore these constructions are considered more formal than который clauses. Thus, since Advanced High and Superior level speakers can function in both formal and informal settings, instead of using relative clauses with который (the characteristic of advanced oral proficiency) speakers might be using participial constructions considered to be higher in register (more formal in tone).

However, the expectation that there would be more participial constructions (instead of relative clauses with который) at upper levels was not met. The only three usages of participial constructions in the OPI were found at the advanced level; only one
SOPI speaker, at the Advanced Mid level, used a participle. Participles used in the OPI were

“сейчас москва очень западная | ам а везде а реклама -- | ам очень очень многие ГОВОРЯЩИЕ английсноко языка |” (Betsy, OPI/ AL)

“это один из первых а домов| - ам построенных а ам в этом микрорайоне|” (Rosa, OPI/AM)

“и а у нас тоже испанский ГОВОРЯЩИЙ а а испанско ГОВОРЯЩАЯ группа людей из боливии” (Betsy, OPI/ AH)

The only instance of the participle found in the responses of the 38 SOPI speakers was

“Например я учились в частном университете| - который очень на самом деле очень дешёвый |но он финансирован в частности ам одной церквью |” (Linda, SOPI/ AM)

Like participles, gerunds are also indicators of a higher level of oral proficiency and formal sophisticated speech. Like participles, gerunds are primarily used in the written language of academia, science, journalism, and politics. Gerunds are also called verbal adverbs because they combine characteristics of verbs and adverbs. Verbal characteristics include aspect, transitivity, and ability to assign case to the noun phrases they govern.

Like adverbs, gerunds are not declined. The Russian gerund is grammatically equivalent in some ways with English verb forms ending with –ing, as in “I highlight ideas while reading textbooks”. Higher level speakers use gerunds in place of subordinate clauses of reason, time, and condition under which some action was performed or manner expressed by the main verb (Levine, 1999:285-286). For example, the only two instances of a gerund found in the entire data were at the IH and Superior level in the OPI. In the speech of Nick, an Intermediate High speaker, a gerundial construction is used as a form of a cohesive devise that connects a previous statement with the following. The usage of a gerundial construction in this particular instance at the Intermediate High level response
does not constitute evidence of the ability of this student to form gerunds freely, but is rather an example of a memorized formulaic expression:

“честно ГОВОРЯ | мне лучше больше (больше) нравится рус_руская и узбекская тр_вечеринка | чем чем американская)” (Nick, OPI/ IH)

On the other hand, when a Superior level speaker replaced a potential subordinate clause of reason “о деревенской жизни я не могу судить, потому что я не была никогда в деревне” with a construction with a gerund “о деревенской жизни я не могу судить а не бывав не ПОБЫВАВ никогда в деревне” (Sally, OPI/ S), this is an example demonstrating some student competence in using these constructions.

Meanwhile, in spite of the anecdotal nature of the usage of participial and gerundial constructions in the speech of the OPI testees, the results still show that in the OPI setting students produced more of these constructions, while in the SOPI there was only one instance of a participle.

6.6.2 Preliminary Conclusions.

The results of the analysis of syntactical complexity of oral descriptions given to the OPI description and SOPI university prompts by students of Russian in the two types of oral proficiency tests indicate that the speech produced in the OPI was less syntactically complex and more simplistic and coordinate than the speech elicited by the SOPI. Though for the majority of speakers the modality and the format of the speaking test is a factor contributing to the syntactical complexity of responses, some speakers were nonetheless indifferent to or not affected by the modality and produced subordination with almost equal frequency in both tests.
Both tests elicited adverbial clauses with the highest frequency and adjectival clauses with the lowest frequency (except for the Superior level results in the OPI, where students produced more adjectival clauses than nominal). The percentage of the three major types of subordination (adverbial, nominal, and adjectival) across levels in both tests appears to be very close. It became possible to establish an approximate hierarchy of frequency of adverbial subordination in each test. Both the OPI and the SOPI elicited similar types of clauses with similar frequency. However, due to the nature of the SOPI prompt, conditional clauses were produced with the greatest frequency of all clauses used in the SOPI.

The findings of this research showed that the SOPI university responses exhibited a higher frequency of relative clauses with the pronoun который both per level and per description. Such outcomes might be due to the unidirectional and presentational mode of the SOPI: students might have wanted to ensure that the imagined interlocutor (the tester) would correctly understand because of the absence of live interaction and the impossibility of any negotiation of meaning. Therefore, SOPI speakers provided more information (as much “identificatory material” as possible) often using the relative pronoun который in doing so. Other possible explanations of greater usage of relative pronoun который in the SOPI responses might be due to the planning time that the SOPI allows and an abstract nature of the question testees respond to. The SOPI university prompt asked for abstract comparison and supported opinion (Superior level task). That is why student might have tried to be more formal/literature in their SOPI speech. Even if testees did not demonstrate Superior level function, they may have demonstrated advanced level function with the university prompt. If this is the case, the the SOPI
The university prompt needs to be compared to OPI abstract comparison and supported opinion prompts at the Superior level where it does not elicit more frequent subordination than the OPI.

Finally, the impact of the test mode on the production of subjunctive clauses + чтобы, gerund and participle constructions needs further investigation due to the low frequency of the above mentioned structures in the students’ responses within the scope of the current research project. A plausible explanation for the low frequency of subjunctive clauses + чтобы in these data might be the nature of the prompts used in both tests. It is possible that description prompts are simply not conducive to the use of this type of subordinate clause in description. It is possible that participial and gerundial constructions can only be assessed in speech elicited at proficiency levels above the baseline superior level (ILR levels 4 and 5), a proficiency level not within the scope of this dissertation.

These conclusions may ultimately suggest that one of the tests is better at eliciting complex syntax than the other. So for now, I ask the question, Why did the SOPI do a better job eliciting subordination than the OPI at levels below Superior?

The implicit comparison in this type of a question elicited not only the enumeration of general advantages and disadvantages of higher education in public and private institutions (speech constitution supported opinion rather than description) but also comparative descriptions of buildings and classrooms in subordinate syntax. Naturally the content of the SOPI prompt elicited more formal speech and therefore more subordination (for example, students in the SOPI started their description with the sentence: я думаю, что...,and continued with потому что...) because the prompt itself is
more formal. The results of the Superior level speakers were surprising. A plausible explanation could be that the SOPI gives Superior speakers insufficient time to answer the question as fully as the superior level prompts in the OPI.

Thus, since the syntactical complexity of the OPI description and the SOPI university prompts showed that the SOPI elicited twice more subordinate clauses and the context of the responses included a combination of opinion and description, it was assumed that the SOPI university prompt elicits higher than advanced level speech—Superior. Therefore, the responses given to the SOPI university prompt need to be compared to a Superior level OPI prompt for supported opinion. Since CAL claims that the SOPI is based on ACTFL OPG and is a surrogate of an OPI, it means that it elicits all the core functions of each level of oral proficiency. That is the function of description must be elicited by some other prompt. According to the SOPI Trainer’s Kit, description is elicited by an Intermediate level task asking to describe an event, a birthday party. That is why instead of comparing OPI descriptions to the SOPI university prompt, which is called an Advanced-level prompt requiring “to use a paragraph-like discourse to discuss advantages and disadvantages of an activity” (SOPI RTK, 1998: 89), I compared OPI descriptions to the SOPI birthday prompt. The following comparisons ask three questions. First how does the modality of the test affect language production? Second, can the SOPI birthday prompt be indeed considered a comparable to an OPI description prompt? Third, is the university prompt indeed a Superior rather than Advanced level prompt?
6.7 Extended Analysis of Syntax.

Next, I will discuss the comparison of outcomes found in responses to the OPI descriptions and the SOPI descriptions of a birthday party (as the OPI description prompt). It was mentioned earlier that according to the *SOPI Russian Training Kit*, the prompt for a description of a birthday party is considered Intermediate level as it requires neither complex syntax, nor paragraph-length response. Though initial results (chapter 5) led me to assume that this prompt did not elicit description desired by the SOPI but rather narration (despite the fact that the SOPI prompt asks for a description of a birthday party, testees answered as to how people celebrate birthdays, thus giving narration), the decision was made to compare OPI descriptions with the SOPI birthday descriptions to see whether the SOPI prompt might be comparable to the OPI ones, - in other words to see whether it might elicit advanced level discourse, and whether the SOPI birthday description elicits complex syntax similar to that elicited by the OPI description prompts.

For these two prompts to be comparable and target at the same level (Advanced), they should elicit a similar text-type from those students able to meet that challenge: paragraph-length discourse. The analysis of SOPI responses showed that Superior and AH level speakers gave Advanced-level discourse to the SOPI Intermediate-level birthday prompt (testees were not required to respond in a paragraph-length text-type but they did so anyway because of their high level of oral proficiency). As for AM, AL and IH level speakers, more than half of the responses were Intermediate-level discourse (discrete sentences), as shown in table 6.10, while less than half of responses exhibited Advanced level features of paragraph-length. Such outcomes might suggest that the SOPI “description” prompt (which is actually a narration prompt) of a birthday party is not
comparable with an OPI description prompt because results disclosed that at certain levels, all at or above the level at which one would expect paragraph-length discourse, more than 50% of testees completed this task at the Intermediate level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of responses per level</th>
<th>No. of responses per level at paragraph-length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IH</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total birthday responses</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.10: SOPI birthday responses that exhibit paragraph-length discourse.

Table 6.11 depicts the results of syntactical complexity of the OPI description and SOPI birthday party “description” discourse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IH</th>
<th>AL</th>
<th>AM</th>
<th>AH</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OPI</td>
<td>SOPI</td>
<td>OPI</td>
<td>SOPI</td>
<td>OPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of speakers at this level</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of descriptions at this level</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of descriptions per person at this level</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of clauses at this level</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of subordinate clauses at this level</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per level estimated in %</td>
<td>20.90</td>
<td>27.34</td>
<td>26.99</td>
<td>21.42</td>
<td>26.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of clauses per description</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>11.63</td>
<td>10.67</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>18.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per description</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.11: Syntactic complexity of OPI and SOPI birthday descriptions at levels IH through Superior.
Analysis of the frequency of complex syntax in the responses given to the SOPI birthday prompt leads to conflicting results. On the one hand, IH and AH level speakers produced more subordination in the SOPI than in the OPI. On the other hand, at all other levels (AL, AM, S) testees produced more subordination in response to the OPI description prompt. Such results might suggest that the mode of the test affected IH and AH testees’ performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IH OPI</th>
<th>IH SOPI</th>
<th>AL OPI</th>
<th>AL SOPI</th>
<th>AM OPI</th>
<th>AM SOPI</th>
<th>AH OPI</th>
<th>AH SOPI</th>
<th>S OPI</th>
<th>S SOPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of subjunctive clauses at this level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subjunctive clauses per level estimated in %</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subjunctive clauses per description</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of который clauses at this level</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of который clauses per level estimated in %</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of который clauses per description</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.12: Subjunctive clauses + чтобы and relative clauses in the OPI and the SOPI birthday description across levels.

The analysis of subjunctive and relative clauses (table 6.12) indicated that the OPI description prompts elicited more instances of subjunctive clauses, while the SOPI birthday prompt elicited more instances of relativization with который (except for Superior level responses that did not feature any instances of который at all), resulting in double the frequency of который clauses for SOPI responses (narration, as I concluded in chapter 5) in comparison with the OPI description responses. The low frequency of
subjunctive clauses is not unexpected as neither of the prompts were conducive to situations that might require subjunctive clause usage; however, the widely used который clauses match the expectation of discourse that would be produced in a description rather than narration.

The overall number of relative clauses produced in the SOPI birthday prompt (an Intermediate-level prompt according to the SOPI RTK) was higher than the overall number of relative clauses produced in the SOPI university prompt (an Advanced-level prompt according to the SOPI RTK). This finding confirms my earlier conclusion that the prompt predetermines the type of subordinate clauses speakers might be able to produce in response to a prompt.

The next approach analyzes whether the SOPI university prompt is actually a Superior level prompt (since it elicits abstract argument and supported opinion). This time I used for comparison OPI prompts that elicited supported opinion (discourse elicited from 3 students at the AH and 3 students at the Superior levels) and the data with the SOPI university prompt at the corresponding levels. Similar to the comparison of the OPI description and the SOPI birthday prompts, I analyzed the content and text-type of SOPI university responses, and compare their syntactical complexity with the OPI opinion responses. The distinction must be made between what the SOPI university prompt asks for (abstract content of response and supported opinion) versus how testees reply to this prompt. I hypothesize that if the SOPI university prompt elicits abstract extended-length discourse, then this prompt might be comparable to an OPI supported opinion. If testees give abstract comparison but in paragraph-length discourse, or concrete comparison in extended-length discourse, then I conclude that though the SOPI
university prompt asks for a Superior level response (abstract argument), it still elicits an Advanced-level response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of abstract/paragraph responses</th>
<th>No. of concrete/paragraph responses</th>
<th>No. of discrete sentences responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IH</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total university responses</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.13: Types of responses given to the SOPI university prompt by IH through Superior level speakers.

As seen in table 6.13 there were no responses at the Superior level: abstract argument delivered in an extended discourse without patterned errors. IH through AM level speakers were able to respond in paragraph-length discourse to the SOPI university prompt (except for two IH speakers, whose discourse was Intermediate: discrete sentences). The speakers (AH and Superior) who were able to provide an abstract reply in an extended-length discourse gave responses that can be rated only as Advanced. First of all, 66% the responses were concrete, and second, they were only of the length of a paragraph. These results lead me to draw the conclusion that though the SOPI university prompt is a Superior-level prompt, it elicits Advanced-level function.

The results (shown in table 6.14) indicate that the OPI opinion prompt elicited a significantly higher percentage of subordination than that observed in the SOPI university prompt responses. The OPI AH opinions featured 25% more subordination than the SOPI university prompt responses (50.87% to 38.63%). OPI Superior opinion prompts elicited almost twice as much subordination as the SOPI university prompt (47.36% to 24.19%). The frequency of subordinate clauses per mean response turned out to be almost but not
quite two times higher in the OPI opinion responses than in the SOPI university responses: 9.66 versus 5.66 at the AH level and 9.00 versus 5.00 at the Superior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AH OPI</th>
<th>AH SOPI</th>
<th>S OPI</th>
<th>S SOPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of speakers at this level</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of descriptions at this level</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of descriptions per person at this level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of clauses at this level</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of subordinate clauses at this level</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per level estimated in %</td>
<td>50.87</td>
<td>38.63</td>
<td>47.36</td>
<td>24.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of clauses per description</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per description</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.14: Syntactic complexity of OPI opinion and SOPI university responses at levels AH and Superior.

The use of subjunctive and relative clauses in the responses to the OPI opinion and SOPI university prompts by AH and Superior speakers needs further investigation due to single instances of either of the constructions in these testees’ discourse. In general it can be noted that the interpersonal mode of the OPI elicited both subjunctive and relative clauses at both Ah and Superior levels, while there was only one instance of usage of subjunctive clause in the presentational mode, in the response of a Superior speaker.
The results of my study suggest that despite the fact that the SOPI university prompt may be viewed as a Superior prompt (since it asks for abstract content of the response and supported opinion), the majority of testees provided a concrete comparison of advantages and disadvantages studying at private or state university or college in paragraph-length discourse. These responses, accordingly, do not meet the criteria sufficient for a Superior-level rating. Moreover, although the SOPI university prompt requires description as well as opinion, it does not elicit supported opinion in ways that are comparable to OPI opinion prompts at the superior level. As a result SOPI responses were half as much syntactically complex than the OPI opinion responses.
6.8 Conclusions.

Attempts to apply a descriptive model of a written sentence to spoken data are largely unsuccessful in terms of the full reflection of the range of information conveyed in spoken discourse. Some features of the spoken data are not analyzable in terms of a sentence; therefore the data were investigated in terms of a clause or a unit in which the spoken material was organized. My analysis was based on Crystal’s method of speech analysis (1980): the analysis of clauses and conjunctions instead of complex versus compound sentences. Such an approach helped me avoid the arbitrariness involved in procedures investigating syntactical complexity of spoken discourse analysis.

The investigation of the syntactical complexity of OPI description and the SOPI university prompt showed that the presentational mode of the SOPI prompt elicited a higher frequency of subordination per response than the OPI. Nonetheless, complex syntax alone does not determine an oral proficiency rating. Oral proficiency ratings are a product of the interaction of the following speech and discourse characteristics: content, text-type, language functions and accuracy. Thus, even though testees produced more complex syntax in response to the SOPI university rather than to the OPI description prompt, the SOPI university prompt was proved to elicit Advance-level discourse. The OPI and the SOPI elicit description differently: the SOPI stimulus asks for an abstract comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of studying at a private college or university, whereas in the OPI the majority of the prompts ask for a description of a place, person or object.

The hypothesis that the SOPI university prompt elicited Superior-level discourse was ultimately refuted. The analysis of the SOPI birthday prompt revealed that it is not
comparable to an OPI description prompt since more than half of the testees at the IH through Superior levels, levels at which one would expect description, did not provide paragraph-length discourse. This confirms that the SOPI birthday prompt is not comparable with an Advanced-level OPI description prompt eliciting paragraph-length discourse.

The syntactical analysis of speech produced in the OPI description and both SOPI prompts showed both SOPI prompts elicited a higher frequency of subordination than the OPI. Thus, it is clear that the difference in the prompts that elicited description at the Advanced level (OPI description of people, places and objects and the SOPI advantages and disadvantages of private universities) did not affect the syntactical complexity of testees’ speech. Rather, the reason for such a difference between the OPI description and both SOPI prompts may be in the modality of the test and the level of formality of the prompt itself. The SOPI prompt is more formal and it elicits presentational mode speech, giving testees time to prepare their answers; the SOPI also lacks live feedback and the pressure of a dynamic conversation. The OPI is perceived by students as less formal, but more spontaneous and improvised. The SOPI speakers are, perhaps, less susceptible to the pressure and demands of live conversation. The OPI tests what speakers can do at the moment, and the SOPI tests what speakers can do when they are given time for preparation of their responses. Each test assesses speech in only one modality, the SOPI – in presentational modality, the OPI – in interpersonal modality. Both modalities are valid contexts for oral discourse, but neither by itself constitutes a full and comprehensive assessment of oral proficiency.
7.1 Hypothesis and Criteria for Data Analysis.

In this chapter I compare the lexical complexity of the speech samples from the OPI and SOPI. First, I will analyze responses to the OPI description and the SOPI university prompts in order to understand the differences and similarities in speech produced in each test. After that I will follow up with a study that compares the lexical complexity of OPI description with the SOPI birthday prompt and the SOPI university prompt with an OPI opinion prompt to conclude whether the SOPI university prompt elicits Superior-level lexical complexity and whether an Intermediate-level prompt, the SOPI birthday prompt, is a comparable prompt to an Advanced-level OPI description prompt.

The term “lexical complexity” will refer to a combination of lexical density and lexical diversity of speech. **Lexical density** measures the presence of “content” words such as “nouns, full lexical verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Determiners (articles and quantifiers), prepositions, pronouns, numerals, conjunctions, interjections, existential “there”, the infinitival marker “to”, negative markers, auxiliary and modal verbs are referred to as “function” words (Sityaev, 2000: 294). **Lexical diversity** measures the
semantic variety of content and function words, while lexical density measures the number of content vs. function words.

Halliday 1989 suggested that “language samples vary by the number of oral versus literate features they contain”:

Literate language samples feature higher lexical density (i.e., the number of lexical items per clause), measured by the number of lexical items (i.e., content items rather than words) in relation to grammatical items (i.e., function items). Accordingly, texts, which are more literate, will contain larger numbers of lexical items as a higher level of sophistication, that is, per clause. The reverse will be true for texts of an oral nature, which rely more on grammar than on lexical items. Thus, the complexity of literate language is lexical, while that of oral language is grammatical. (Shohamy 1994:109)

In her study, “The Validity of Direct Versus Semi-Direct Oral Tests” Shohamy compared lexical versus grammatical density of speech elicited in the OPI and the SOPI, among other areas of investigation. Shohamy's comparison of language samples for lexical (content) versus grammatical (function) items per clause in the two tests showed that SOPI responses produced a higher lexical density, because they contained more nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs than OPI speech, while OPI samples contained a broader range of grammatical items (prepositions, pronouns, numerals, conjunctions, interjections, negation, auxiliary and modal verbs). In her research the SOPI responses included 60% lexical items and 40% grammatical items, whereas OPI responses featured 40% lexical and 60% grammatical items. This ratio suggests the two modes elicit two different types of texts, orate in the OPI, and literate in the SOPI (according to Halliday's definition of orate vs. literary texts, 1989).
I will first compare the lexical density of students’ speech in OPI and SOPI descriptions, examining most closely their production of content versus function items. My hypothesis, consistent with Shohamy’s research, is that, because the SOPI elicits presentational mode speech, it will exhibit a higher production of content words versus function words than OPI descriptions. On the other hand, I would hypothesize that the OPI samples will have more function words because the OPI simulates spontaneous oral conversation and this type of speech is characterized by greater grammatical complexity as opposed to lexical complexity.

To analyze lexical density of speech, first I counted the total number of lexical items uttered at each level in each test and established this raw lexical count as 100% of lexical items produced and 100% of the frequency with which items were produced. Total words were then divided into content and function words and percentages for each were calculated. Content words were classified into four categories (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) and calculated as a number of words and as a frequency in relation to the entire corpus.

After the lexical density was established, the data were further analyzed for basic versus non-basic lexicon (different lexicon) used in the speakers’ responses in the two tests. For this analysis, I used Patrick Waddington’s *First Russian Vocabulary* (which consists of 850 of the most commonly used nouns, verbs, adjective, adverbs, and etc.) as the lexical foundation for learners of Russian as a foreign language. I investigated the basic versus non-basic lexicon by comparing words used in students’ responses to the basic vocabulary list of Waddington’s dictionary. I determined which words from each
test sample were present in this dictionary and which were not, giving a general picture of the complexity of testees’ lexicon.

I then classified non-basic words (words not included in Waddington's *First Russian Vocabulary*) according to their part of speech (e.g., nouns, verbs, and adjectives). Henceforth, I will refer to lexical items not listed in the Waddington lexicon as "less frequent lexical items" (LFLIs). A percentage of the higher level LFLIs was calculated in relation to the aggregate number of words in each speech sample. After all LFLIs were counted, the words which were not included in Waddington’s dictionary were further classified (noun, verb, adjective, and adverb, and prepositions, numerals, particles, conjunctions, and parenthetic words) – to determine which mode, presentational or interpersonal, elicits a higher percentage of innovative vocabulary (words not listed in Waddington’s dictionary) among nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs across levels, in other words, which test elicited greater frequency of nominal, verbal, adjectival and adverbial LFLIs. I hypothesize that at the lower levels more interesting lexical innovations will occur in nouns rather than in verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. Furthermore, I hypothesize that as the level of proficiency rises, so does the lexical density of verbs, showing greater numbers of adjectives and adverbs at increasingly higher levels of oral proficiency.

The lexical diversity of the corpus was established by analyzing LFLIs for single and repeated instances of words used in the descriptions. I argue that the prompts used by both tests affect language production of lexical items during a speaking proficiency test.

The data for analysis consist only of fully formed lexical items; unfinished words (words that either did not take an ending or were abandoned in the middle of their
production) did not enter the data pool. In those cases when students slightly
mispronounced words but the meaning of the words was still recognizable in context,
such words were included in the analysis. For example, if a testee intended to say свечи
“candles” or свечки, diminutive of “candles”, but produced свечочки, a mixture of
свечи/ свечки “candles” and цветочки “flowers”, or instead of гостеприимный
“hospitable” the student said the mis-formed *гостливый, then such words were counted
towards the total number of words produced. If a testee missed a syllable in a word, and
for example, instead of именинники “people who are celebrating a birthday” pronounced
именики leaving out –ни-, or instead of устраивают “organize” said устраивают leaving
out –ива-, such words were recognizable from the context and therefore entered the body
of data, either as listed or unlisted vocabulary if their correct forms were not in the
Waddington’s dictionary. However, if a testee produced words that do not exist in
Russian and could not be recognized in context, such words were eliminated from the
data completely.

The data excluded categories that did not carry any semantic content such as
fillers that are words (including там “there”, вот “here”), fillers that are not words (for
instance а, э), discourse markers (including ну “well”), interjections (for instance ой),
and words of dis/agreement in the beginning of responses (да “yes” and нет “no”).
Discourse markers “do not convey social and/or expressive meanings” (Schiffrin, 1987:
318). They are

little words like well and phrases like y’know and I
mean…these features are often decried as marks of
‘inarticulacy’ and ‘sloppiness’ in speech. They are
sometimes described as ‘meaningless’ and as ‘fillers’ (in
other words devices speakers use to ‘fill out’ their remarks
Fillers are words or sounds used to fill in gaps, and to “retain the floor”. Like discourse markers, fillers do not convey any social meaning or have semantic content. However, in the present research, if вот “here” carried a function of a pointing particle, then it was counted as part of the data. Interjections are words that express feelings, emotions, and inducements. For example, Russian interjections are ах, ай, ой, эх, ух, тыфу, коль, ну, еле – еле. Interjections can be non-derivative (ну, эх) and derivative. Derivative interjections are formed from independent parts of speech, for example, Батюшки “Gosh”, ужас “horror”, брось “stop it, forget about it”. Interjections are independent elements (not members of the sentence) and are characteristics of oral speech (Baranov, 1987: 332-351).

7.2 Lexical Density of Discourse.

Table 7.1 represents the lexical density results for the OPI and the SOPI: the total number of words and LFLIs uttered by subjects at the IH to the Superior level, the frequency of content versus function items, and the frequency of LFLIs among content and function items. Chart 7.1 represents the same results but in visual form.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IH</th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. words</td>
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Table 7.1: Lexical Density. OPI vs. SOPI university. Total words and LFLIs. IH through Superior levels.
The analysis of lexical density of speech at the IH through Superior levels (chart 7.1), in other words the balance between content (lexical) versus function (grammatical) items, showed that both tests elicited a close correlation between content and function items at each level. Nevertheless, the OPI descriptions contained more function then content items, while the SOPI descriptions exhibited the reverse: more content and less function items. AH level speakers produced almost identical results in both tests: 53.08% content items in the OPI and 53.73 % content items in the SOPI, and 46.91% function items in the OPI and 46.26 % function items in the SOPI.

The lexical density of OPI responses at all levels, excluding the AH, featured more than 50% function items, thus suggesting the orate nature of the test. The reverse was true in the SOPI (Table 7.1 and Chart 7.1). These results are not surprising and
confirm my hypothesis that the two tests measure two different modes of speech: interpersonal (interactional) in the OPI and presentational in the SOPI.

The analysis of LFLIs (Table 7.1) showed that out of the total of all words produced by OPI subjects, about 12.5% of them were LFLIs, words not included in the basic vocabulary list by Waddington. As expected, when the level of oral proficiency increases, so does the frequency of LFLIs. For example, at the IH level in the OPI, LFLIs were used with a frequency of 8.83%. The frequency of LFLIs increased two times to 15.34% in the OPI answers of Superior-level speakers.

A similar pattern was observed in the answers of SOPI speakers. At the IH level, 15.5% of the description discourse featured LFLIs, while at the Superior level the frequency of LFLIs doubles to 34.20%.

The comparison of frequencies of LFLIs used in the OPI and the SOPI at corresponding levels showed that the SOPI data included almost two times more LFLIs than the OPI data at levels IH, AM, AH and Superior, and 25% more at the AL level (LFLIs in the OPI constituted 12.55% of the data: in the SOPI, 16.36%). Compare the results for all the levels in table 7.1.

Though both tests elicited similar ratios of content versus function items at each level, the close analysis of the lexical density for LFLIs showed that testees produced Less Frequent Content Items more than 11 times more than Less Frequent Function Items (two right grey columns in Table 7.1 in both tests). In other words, the mean frequency of LFLIs among function items across levels showed that the OPI speakers used Less Frequent Function Items less than 1.00% of the time (0.68%) but used Less Frequent Content Items about 12% of the time (11.94%). The mean frequency of Less Frequent
Function and Content Items in the SOPI responses showed even higher results: Less Frequent Function Items were used with a mean frequency of less than 1.00% (0.93%), while Less Frequent Content Items were used with a mean frequency of about 20% (20.33%). These numbers suggest that the SOPI elicited more than twice as many Less Frequent Content and Function Items than the OPI.

Table 7.2 represents the total number and frequency of content words and the number and frequency of content LFLIs uttered by speakers in the OPI and the SOPI across levels. The lexical items and LFLI are broken into speech categories: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Arrows in the tables point at the low correlation of results between the responses of the OPI and the SOPI speakers.
### Table 7.2: Lexical Density. OPI vs. SOPI university. Total words and Content LFLIs. IH through Superior levels.

The analysis of content items of the entire corpus showed a high correlation of the frequency of nouns and verbs in the two tests across levels (two right white columns in...
Table 7.2). Meanwhile, the correlation among adjectives was low. There were about two times more adjectival LFLIs in the mean SOPI description than in the mean OPI description at the IH level (6 to 12) and the AL level (5 to 9). At the AM level the correlation of results is close, 7 to 9, however, at the upper levels, AH and Superior, the correlation of results is low again (7 to 11). The correlation of adverbs in these tests varied by level: similar results were observed in the responses of AM level speakers (9 to 9) and AH level speakers (12 to 13); the frequency results at other levels differed by 3%.

The analysis of production of content LFLIs led to similar results: a high correlation of the OPI and the SOPI results with regard to the elicitation of nouns, verbs, and adverbs. However, interesting outcomes were found in content LFLIs among adjectives. The data suggest that speakers produced twice as many less frequently used adjectives in the SOPI than in the OPI responses. Compare the adjectival LFLI across levels: 1.55 adjectives in the OPI to 6.99 adjectives in the SOPI at the IH level; 1.73 to 5.15 at the AL level; 2.66 to 4.83 at the AM level; 2.05 to 6.34 at the AH level; and 3.23 to 5.46 at Superior.

The initial conclusions of this research are: first, the tests elicit lexical density (the correlation between content and function items) with near identical frequency, about 50% of content and 50% of function items in each test, suggesting that the two tests are comparable and both modes elicit similar kinds of discourse in terms of the speakers' lexicon. Second, the SOPI elicited LFLIs at double the frequency of the OPI. Third, the comparison of the balance between content versus function items in only LFLIs provided evidence that both tests elicited nouns, verbs and adverbs with similar frequency, but the SOPI elicited significantly more adjectives. This may ultimately suggest that the SOPI is
better at eliciting content items than the OPI, but there are some extenuating circumstances that need to be considered. I will turn now to the qualitative analysis.

7.3 Lexical Diversity of Discourse and Discussion of Results.

Once again, an explanation for the discrepancy regarding adjectives may lie in the relationship between the language samples and the prompts that elicit them. While the OPI prompts ask testees to describe or compare places, objects and people, vocabulary used in the prompts rarely serves as an input or source vocabulary for the response and does not obligate students to repeat it in their discourse particular lexicon. Examples of OPI prompts might be:

- Расскажите мне об Алабаме. Я там никогда не была. (Tell me about Alabama. I have never been there)
- Расскажите об этой квартире. Опишите её. (Tell me about this apartment. Describe it for me)
- Опишите мне его (брата) пожалуйста. (Describe your brother, please)
- А расскажите мне о вашем отце. Вы сказали он художник. Какой у него характер? (Tell me about your father. You said he is an artist. Tell me about his character)

The SOPI prompt, on the other hand, asks testees to compare the advantages and disadvantages of studying at a private university or college: Как ты думаешь, в чём преимущества и недостатки обучения в частном университете? The SOPI testees are given this prompt three times: at first in oral and written form in English, and then orally in Russian. The question elicits not only the vocabulary chosen by the testees but also the words used in the prompt itself. Thus, the prompt in the SOPI to some extent cues testees to use the vocabulary of the prompt itself including the Russian words for ‘public’ versus ‘private’, and ‘advantages’ and ‘disadvantages’, some of which (like ‘private’, ‘advantages’ and ‘disadvantages’) were mentioned in the prompt itself. This has a direct
effect on the results because these words are not included in Waddington’s dictionary whereas many of the words likely to be found in a description of one's apartment are.

Thus, the structure of the SOPI allowed testees to incorporate these lexical items into their speech after they heard the prompt first in English and then in Russian. Testees taking the SOPI had a slight advantage over those taking the OPI because if SOPI testees did not know Russian words for ‘private’, ‘advantages’ and ‘disadvantages’ used in the input (prompt) or could not recall these lexical items in Russian prior to their response, testees still were able to hear the core vocabulary necessary to handle the situation successfully in Russian. They were able to recognize these lexical items because they were provided also an English translation in the testing manual and use them in their output. Since the prompt focused on the advantages and disadvantages of studying at a private or state university, consequently, the lexical items ‘private’, ‘state/public’, ‘advantages’ and ‘disadvantages’ were frequently used by testees in the comparison of the two types of institutions.

Another issue affecting the results is the repetition of certain words each counted as a single instance of a LFLI including the words mentioned above that are present in the prompt. Table 7.3 represents the qualitative results of the lexical diversity of LFLIs.
Table 7.3: Lexical Diversity of LFLIs. OPI vs. SOPI university. IH through Superior levels.
Chart 7.3 depicts the proportions between diverse (dark) and repeated (light) LFLIs in the two tests at the IH through Superior levels.

OPI

SOPI

Chart 7.3: The proportions between diverse (dark) and repeated (light) LFLIs in the two tests at the IH through Superior levels.

The analysis of lexical diversity of LFLIs suggests that the OPI responses consistently featured more diverse vocabulary than the SOPI. In general it can be said that in the OPI about three quarters of LFLIs were diverse and one quarter of the vocabulary was repeated, while in the SOPI almost half of the vocabulary was repeated.

In the SOPI the major repetition of lexical items took place in the categories of verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and function items. When the frequency of total elicited LFLIs and their diversity, non-repeated LFLIs elicited in the SOPI are compared (two right columns of table 7.3), one sees that the SOPI results are higher than those of the OPI.
The higher overall results of LFLIs in the SOPI suggest that the SOPI prompt provided testees with the lexical items necessary to handle the task. The SOPI prompt predetermined a high frequency of utilization of the lexical items used in the prompt to be used in testees’ responses. For example, compare the results of lexical diversity in the two tests (table 7.3). Across levels, in the SOPI a little bit less than 50% of the nouns were repeated. For instance, in the SOPI at the IH level, out of 45 nouns only 27 were unique. In other words, slightly more than half of the nouns were repeated.

Преимущество ‘advantage’ was given in the prompt and was repeated 5 times. Out of 10 of the less frequently used verbs uttered in the SOPI, only half of them were diverse. The analysis of adjectives at the IH level in the SOPI exhibited striking results. Out of 60 LFLI adjectives used in the SOPI, half of them were частный ‘private’ (33 instances), a word used in the prompt, one fourth were государственный ‘public’ (15 instances), and 5 were публичный intended to mean ‘public’ but actually represented a semantic misuse of the item. The correct adjective is государственный, and the incorrect usage of публичный ‘public/state’ proves my earlier hypothesis that in the SOPI where students hear the prompt both in English and Russian, and the prompt provides them with the necessary vocabulary. The word ‘state/public’ is not in the prompt, and therefore students had to come up with the Russian equivalent. In some cases students who did not know the correct equivalent to the word ‘state’ or ‘public’ used a false cognate ‘public’ публичный, which in Russian carries a different meaning.

Thus, the SOPI test of presentational mode speech elicited only 11 semantically unique adjectives, while the OPI test elicited more adjectival LFLIs. For example, in the OPI (table 7.3, column 1), out of 27 adjectives only 5 were repeated (2 строгий “strict”, 204
2 безумный “crazy” and 3 худой “skinny”), in other words 22 adjectives among the OPI LFLIs were semantically diverse and only 11 adjectives of the SOPI LFLIs were. Out of 85 nouns in the OPI only about 10 of them were used twice, and only one verb was repeated twice, вырос ‘I grew up’.

The comparison of the lexical diversity of content LFLIs at other levels in the two tests showed similar outcomes: the SOPI repeatedly elicited the vocabulary used in the prompt. In addition to the words used in the prompt, the SOPI responses were full of repeated words (non-diverse words). Such a high usage of non-diverse vocabulary in the SOPI resulted in a higher lexical density of content LFLIs. Table 7.4 summarizes the information about the most common and widely repeated LFLIs in the SOPI and the number of times these words were used (the table includes both non-diverse words and words that were used in the prompt):
Table 7.4: Widely Repeated LFLIs and their number in the SOPI. IH through Superior levels.

The previous contention that the SOPI effectively elicits content items is called into a question. Consider Chart 7.4, which shows the comparison of frequencies of lexical density with repeated\(^{29}\) items included and then with them factored out. When the repetition is factored out such that only unique content (lexical) items are counted, the picture of the lexical diversity of LFLIs changed significantly. Chart 7.4 (below) shows the comparative results of the frequency in percentage of lexical diversity of content and function LFLIs used by IH though Superior level speakers in the OPI and the SOPI responses.

\(^{29}\) The word ‘repeated’ refers to non-diverse lexical items and not the prompt words used by speakers in their responses.
Frequency of lexical diversity with repeated words counted at the IH level

Frequency of lexical diversity with repeated words factored out at the IH level

Frequency of lexical diversity with repeated words counted at the AL level

Frequency of lexical diversity with repeated words factored out at the AL level
Frequency of lexical diversity with repeated words counted at the AM level

Frequency of lexical diversity with repeated words factored out at the AM level

Frequency of lexical diversity with repeated words counted at the AH level

Frequency of lexical diversity with repeated words factored out at the AH level
The results of this analysis, with repeated words factored out, are fascinating because they show that there is essentially no difference in the lexical diversity of the speech elicited by the two tests once repeated words, including those suggested in the SOPI prompt, are removed from consideration. Despite the fact that the SOPI prompt elicited more (almost 2 times more) LFLI lexical density than the OPI, a qualitative analysis of the lexical diversity of LFLIs in SOPI and OPI descriptions demonstrates that both tests elicit almost identical lexical diversity of speech in terms LFLIs. This shows that although SOPI testees repeated the same vocabulary again and again in their
descriptions, the lexical strength of their speech is essentially no different from the lexical strength of their OPI counterparts who lacked a Russian prompt.

The analysis of lexical density across levels shows that though the mean frequency of lexical density in the SOPI was higher among nouns, verbs, adverbs, and particularly adjectives, nevertheless, the qualitative analysis of speech suggested that the OPI elicited a similar number of lexically diverse nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives, thus proving the assumption that the SOPI prompt affects the speech outcomes of testees.

7.3.1 Preliminary Conclusions.

The lexical density results of responses produced in the OPI and the SOPI across levels showed that OPI speakers uttered somewhat more function than content items, while SOPI speakers produced the opposite: slightly more content and less function items, but this difference might not be statistically significant. It could be argued that such a balance of content versus function items might suggest, as Shohamy predicted, that OPI speech is more orate, while SOPI speech is more literate. However, since the difference between the frequency of content versus function items produced in the OPI and the SOPI is small, the distinction of orate versus literate nature is questionable. More research is needed to confirm or refute this hypothesis.

A close analysis of the frequency of content items produced by speakers in the two tests at each level shows that both interpersonal and presentational modes of speech elicit relatively similar frequencies of nouns and verbs. The analysis of the frequency of adjectives used across levels shows that the SOPI prompt constantly elicits more adjectives than the OPI prompt: two times more adjectives were produced in SOPI
responses at the IH and AL levels, and about 3% more adjectives were found in the answers of SOPI speakers at AM, AH, and Superior levels. The analysis of the frequency of adverbs used in the two tests showed that speakers below the Superior level produced fewer adverbs in the OPI responses than in the SOPI.

These results of the analysis of LFLIs suggest that my hypotheses were correct. First, at the lower levels more LFLIs did occur more frequently among nouns rather than verbs, adjectives or adverbs. Second, with increasing levels of oral proficiency the occurrences of LFLIs among verbs, adjectives, and adverbs increased. Despite the level, the frequency of LFLIs among nouns kept growing significantly faster than the frequency of LFLIs among verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. See chart 7.5 below.

Indeed, by looking at the frequency of LFLIs at the IH level in the OPI and the SOPI nouns were used with the highest frequency, while adverbs were used with the
lowest. A striking increase of LFLIs is observed among adjectives and adverbs. In the OPI, the frequency of adjectives increased from 1.27 at the IH level to 2.42 at the Superior, and the frequency of the use of adverbs grew from 0.46 to 1.61. In the SOPI, the frequency of the use of adjectives at the IH level was 1.28 and reached 2.37 at the Superior level, while the frequency of the use of adverbs at the IH level was 0.51 and few to 1.42 at the Superior level. The frequency of LFLIs among verbs in the OPI changed from 1.03 to 1.75, and in the SOPI from 0.58 to 1.90.

The analysis of LFLIs in speech elicited by the two tests across levels showed a higher frequency of LFLIs in the SOPI responses. A close analysis of the LFLIs among content and function items in the corpus showed that SOPI speakers produced twice as many less frequently used adjectives than did OPI speakers. The frequency of the nominal, verbal, adverbial and function LFLIs is very close across the tests.

The lexical density results of the usage of LFLIs across levels in the OPI and the SOPI suggested that the SOPI elicited twice as many LFLIs than the OPI. However the analysis of lexical diversity showed that both tests elicited LFLIs with very similar frequency. The lexical diversity of OPI and SOPI responses across levels suggested different outcomes based on the type of speech:

**Nouns:** After repeated nouns were factored out, the difference between the frequency of the lexical diversity of nouns in the OPI and the SOPI responses was not significant. Both the OPI and the SOPI results decreased but the frequency of usage did not show extensive changes in the outcomes. In the OPI responses the mean frequency of LFLI nouns with repeated words counted was about 6%. After the repeated words were factored out, the frequency of nominal LFLI fell to about 5%. In the SOPI, the frequency
of LFLI nouns peaked at the Superior level (10.92%) with AM (9.75%) close behind. The lowest frequency of 5.25% was observed in the IH level responses. After repeated words were factored out, the frequency of nominal LFLIs diminished to about 4.5% (3.14% at the IH level and 6.17% at the Superior level). This result might suggest that the SOPI university prompt successfully elicits a higher frequency of nouns both when repeated words are counted and when repeated words are factored out than the OPI description prompts.

*Verbs*: The frequencies of the lexical diversity of verbs in the OPI responses with repeated words counted, first, and then, second, with repeated words factored out were not strikingly different. The frequency of verbal LFLIs with the repeated words counted varied between 1.09 (IH) to 2.68 (AH). After the repetition was factored out, the frequency of verbal LFLIs fell 1.03 (IH) to 1.75 (AH). In the SOPI the frequency of verbal LFLIs with repeated verbs counted ranged from 1.16 at the IH level to 3.19 at the AM level. After repeated verbal LFLIs were factored out, their frequency became 0.58 at the IH level and 1.90 at the Superior (with a continuing increase from IH to Superior: 0.58 to 1.03 to 1.46 to 1.49 to 1.90, similar to the situation with LFLI nouns after repeated words were factored out)\textsuperscript{30}.

*Adjectives*: The analysis of lexical density suggested that the SOPI speakers outperformed the OPI speakers with regard to adjectival LFLIs: almost 4.5 times more LFLI adjectives were used at the IH level, almost 3 times more adjectival LFLIs were used at the AL and AH levels, and almost two times more adjectival LFLIs were used at the AM and Superior levels. However, the analysis of lexical diversity of the adjectival LFLIs

\textsuperscript{30} There are no explicit verbs in the SOPI university prompt, the verb быть ‘to be’ in the present tense is not used in Russian.
suggests a surprisingly different picture. After the repeated LFLI adjectives in the SOPI data were factored out, the frequency of the lexical diversity of adjectives in the OPI and the SOPI were again quite similar. The lexical diversity results suggest that despite the fact that the SOPI seems to elicit a higher number of adjectives per description, the lexical diversity of adjectives produced by the SOPI speakers was actually similar to that found in the descriptions of OPI speakers’.

The SOPI results show that out of all the adjectives used per level, IH speakers use only one fifth of the diverse (unique) adjectives, and AL and AM speakers – one fourth. At the AH and Superior levels, almost half of the LFLI adjectives were diverse. Such results are not surprising: as the level of oral proficiency rises, so does the diversity of vocabulary. Thus, the rate of lexical diversity at low proficiency levels is lower than the rate of lexical diversity at the higher proficiency levels.

Adverbs: The analysis of lexical density and diversity among adverbial LFLIs produced in both tests before and after repeated words were factored out shows that both tests elicited adverbial LFLIs with approximately the same frequency at corresponding levels, except for SOPI AH level, which featured 3.35 of LFLI total adjectives and 1.26 of LFLI total adjectives in the OPI at the same level.

Functions Items: The results of lexical density and diversity suggest that both tests elicit LFLI function items with similar frequency (except for the AH level in the SOPI, where the frequency of LFLIs among function items was 3 times higher than the frequency of LFLIs among OPI function items: 0.63 to 1.86).
7.4 Extended Data Analysis and Conclusions.

Lexical analysis demonstrated that the SOPI university prompt elicited a higher number of the LFLIs than the OPI description prompt. A similar situation occurred in the chapter on syntactical analysis revealing that the SOPI university responses exhibited two times more subordinate clauses than the OPI descriptions. As a result, the research was extended to compare the OPI description prompt with the SOPI birthday prompt and the SOPI university prompt with an OPI opinion.

The analysis of learners’ discourse elicited by the OPI description and the SOPI birthday prompt yeilded the following findings: the SOPI birthday responses of AM, AH and Superior level speakers showed about half content and half function items. The responses of IH level speakers exhibited 16% more function items, while responses of AL level speakers had 7% more content than function items. As the level of oral proficiency increased, the difference between the frequencies of content and function items in both tests fell. Table 7.6 represents the results of lexical density at the IH through Superior levels.
### Table 7.6: Lexical Density. OPI description vs. SOPI Birthday lexicon. Total words and LFLIs. IH through Superior levels. (to be continued on the next page)
The analysis of lexical density indicated that at the IH, AL and AM levels the SOPI birthday prompt elicited 5% more LFLIs than the OPI description. At the two highest levels, AH and Superior, the frequency of LFLIs produced in response to two prompts was similar (about 13 at the AH and 16 at the Superior).

The analysis of lexical diversity of LFLIs across two tests and across the IH through Superior levels showed that the modality of the test did not affect the language production (table 7.7).

![Table 7.6](image-url)

**Table 7.6: (continuation) Lexical Density. OPI description vs. SOPI birthday lexicon. Total words and LFLIs. IH through Superior levels.**

The analysis of content items showed: the SOPI birthday prompt constantly elicited more nouns and verbs, while the OPI description prompt constantly elicited more adjectives. The results for adverbs vary level by level. Results for nouns, verbs and adjectives gathered from learners’ of Russian confirm the previously discussed findings that the SOPI birthday prompt does not elicit the function of description but rather elicits narration as it contains more nouns and verbs but fewer adjectives than the description OPI prompt.
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<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Func. items</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total LFLI per level</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7.7: Lexical Diversity of LFLIs. OPI description vs. SOPI Birthday lexicon. IH through Superior levels.**
The SOPI birthday prompt and the OPI description prompt elicited roughly equal frequencies of diverse LFLIs. In investigating the SOPI LFLIs that repeated the vocabulary used in the birthday prompt, the results showed that 11 IH and 10 AL level speakers repeated 15% of the prompt vocabulary. At the IH level the word вечеринки was said 11 times; отмечают, 3; устраивают, 1. At the AL level the word вечеринки was produced 9 times; отмечают, 3; and устраивают, 4. At the AM level, 11 testees repeated 19% of the prompt vocabulary (вечеринки: 18, отмечают: 6, устраивают: 9). At the AH level, 3 testees repeated 29% of the prompt vocabulary (вечеринки: 4, отмечают: 1, устраивают: 5). Responses of 3 Superior level speakers featured 17% of the prompt vocabulary (вечеринки: 3, отмечают: 4, устраивают: 3). The other widely used LFLIs in the SOPI testees responses are listed in table 7.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of speakers</th>
<th>Repeated Nouns</th>
<th>Repeated verbs</th>
<th>Repeated adjectives</th>
<th>Repeated adverbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IH 11</td>
<td>подарок 'gift': 9, свечи 'candles': 6</td>
<td>собираться 'get together': 3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL 10</td>
<td>торт 'cake': 10, подарок 'gift': 10, свечи 'candles': 4</td>
<td>приглашать 'to invite': 4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 11</td>
<td>торт 'cake': 11, подарок 'gift': 9</td>
<td>приглашать 'to invite': 9</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH 3</td>
<td>торт 'cake': 2</td>
<td>собираться 'get together': 1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S 3</td>
<td>торт 'cake': 5, подарок 'gift': 5</td>
<td>собираться 'get together': 3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.8: Widely Repeated LFLIs and their number in the SOPI Birthday response. IH through Superior levels.

Analysis of the lexical diversity of LFLIs indicated that SOPI IH, AL, AM and Superior level speakers repeated almost half of their noun and verb LFLIs, of which 15% to 19% were LFLIs used in the prompt. These results suggest that the SOPI provided the speakers both with the vocabulary necessary to respond to the prompt and cues for the lexical items that might be used in the response.
Next I will compare the lexical complexity of responses given to the SOPI university and OPI opinion prompts. As proposed initially in the chapter on the syntactical analysis, the SOPI university prompt might not be an Advanced level prompt but rather a Superior-level prompt since it elicits opinion, an abstract topic, a function of Superior level oral proficiency. In order to prove this hypothesis the SOPI university prompt was compared to an OPI prompt that elicited supported opinion. Since opinion is a Superior-level task, I look only at the OPIs of Superior and AH speakers.

The comparison of content and function items elicited by the OPI opinion and SOPI university prompts showed that the OPI opinion prompt elicited less content and more function items (about 43 to 57 at the AH and 46 to 54 at the Superior). The SOPI university prompt elicited the reverse: more content and less function items (54 to 46 at the AH level and 56 to 44 at the Superior), see table 7.9.
Table 7.9: Lexical Density. OPI opinion vs. SOPI university. Total words and LFLIs. AH and Superior levels.

The above analysis of content items elicited by the prompts suggests that the OPI opinion prompt elicited more verbs while the SOPI university prompt elicited more nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

LFLIs were found with higher frequency in the SOPI university responses (table 7.10). There were about two times more verbal LFLIs used in the OPI opinion response, but more adjectival LFLIs in the SOPI university response. After the repetition was factored out so that only unique LFLIs were counted, the results showed that at the AH level the OPI opinion prompt elicited a higher frequency of nominal LFLIs and two times higher frequency of verbal LFLIs than the SOPI university prompt at the same level, while the SOPI university prompt elicited two times higher frequency among adjective...
LFLIs and function items. As for the results at the Superior level, it was found that
Superior level speakers produced just a bit higher frequency of diverse content and
function items in the OPI than in the SOPI responses.

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OPI No. LFLI</th>
<th>SOPI No. LFLI</th>
<th>OPI Fqcy. LFLI</th>
<th>SOPI Fqcy. LFLI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Func. items</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total LFLI per level</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OPI No. LFLI</th>
<th>SOPI No. LFLI</th>
<th>OPI Fqcy. LFLI</th>
<th>SOPI Fqcy. LFLI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>diverse</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Func. items</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total LFLI per level</td>
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<td>98</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>50</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
```

Table 7.10: Lexical Diversity. OPI opinion vs. SOPI university. Total words and LFLIs. AH and Superior levels.

This continues to support the hypothesis that the SOPI university prompt is a
superior – level opinion prompt. However, this research project constitutes a case study
rather than a statistical analysis and therefore more research is indicated.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS ON THE NATURE OF DESCRIPTION
DELIVERED IN THE OPI AND THE SOPI.

This chapter draws general conclusions regarding the similarities and differences in the nature of the discourse elicited by description prompts in presentational and interpersonal modes. In order to make final conclusions about whether speech elicited in the presentational mode is similar or different from speech elicited in the interpersonal mode I used responses of native speakers whose discourse serves as an “ideal” response.

First, I will discuss the samples obtained from native speakers (NS). The discussion will consider responses given by NS to the OPI description and the SOPI university prompts, OPI and SOPI birthday descriptions and finally, to the SOPI university prompt and to a variety of OPI opinion prompts. Second, I will draw general conclusions based on the findings of syntactical and lexical complexity of the discourse of native and non-native speakers (the testees who constitute the main pool of data previously analyzed). Third, I will discuss problems encountered during the analysis and will propose some suggestions for the revision of the Russian SOPI. After that I will discuss implications for teaching, limitations of the current research, and finally, I will raise questions for further investigation in the field of language testing.

The data collected in the present research were not run through statistical analysis, but rather were considered on the basis of a rigorous case study of several speakers at each
of the five levels (IH through Superior, and NS). Therefore the outcomes of the present research may only suggest possible findings and must be understood in that context. To be absolutely certain of the accuracy of the results, more data are needed in Russian, and similar comparisons should be done for other languages.

8.1 Comparison of Russian NS and NNS Descriptions.

The analysis of the nature of the interpersonal and presentational modes of description was extended to speech samples of six native speakers of Russian who currently study and/or work in the US. The responses produced by native speakers of Russian serve as a model of discourse that might be elicited in the two modes of speech. Native speakers of Russian took a short version of the OPI and the SOPI tests. The NS were asked to describe a person’s appearance and personality, and to describe a place, specifically a university or city (analogous to the OPI description prompts to which the NNS replied). After giving 3 to 4 descriptions, NS were asked to provide supported opinion in response to the following prompt: “Many people disagree with Bush's policies regarding Iraq. Do you think that it was necessary to start a war with Iraq and to bring American troops there? What is your opinion regarding this situation?” This is a typical OPI opinion prompt. As previous results suggested, the SOPI university prompt elicited supported opinion; therefore, it was assumed that the SOPI university prompt should most properly be compared with an OPI opinion prompt. In the short version of the SOPI NS described how people celebrate birthdays in America, and talked about the advantages and disadvantages studying at a private college or university (analogous to the SOPI university prompt to which the NNS replied).
An important finding was that half of NS failed to describe people’s appearances and personalities in paragraph-length discourse, as required for Advanced level oral proficiency, even when asked to compare one person with another person or to elaborate on how certain personality traits are expressed. In these instances, about half of all NS discourse, the text type observed was that of discrete sentences.

The prompts asking for descriptions of places and objects (cities and universities) successfully elicited paragraphs, even without asking for comparison. Examples below demonstrate NS descriptions of someone’s appearance and characteristics.

Ivan, OPI/ NS
Description of a Person

Т: А скажите, если я должна встретить вашего брата в аэропорту, то как я его узнаю?
S: а мальчик лет девяти | а белобрый а сероглазый а розовощёкий | а -- скорее всего бегает или уже с кем то дерётся (0м 16с)

Andrej, OPI/ NS
Description of a Person

Т: Представьте себе, что я должна в аэропорту встретить вашу жену. Как она выглядит? Вы бы не могли мне её описать?
S: она высоко выше среднего женского роста | у ней а -- тёмные а -- тёмные во_волосы | а - голубые глаза | а --- среднего телосложения | - а её зовут даша (0м 20с) ||
Т: А по характеру какая она?
S: она добрая отзывчивая а лёгкая в общении умная талантливая
Т: А как проявляются эти качества?
S: ну доброта самое главное женское качество | она любит детей | она прекрасно общается со всеми людьми | она вс _ всегда очень а терпима а ко всем жизненным ситуациям | она всегда готова человеку помочь| она очень отзывчивая (0м 18с)
Similarly to the analysis of NNS’ discourse, I will start with the discussion of comparative results of lexical and syntactical complexity of NS responses elicited by the OPI description and the SOPI university prompts, including and excluding OPI descriptions of people. Then I will compare NS’s results to those obtained from learners of Russian to draw conclusions as to whether the mode of speech affects testees’ discourse. Next I will proceed to the discussion of comparative results of NS and learners of Russian observed in the OPI description and the SOPI birthday prompts. I will follow with a discussion of comparative results of the SOPI university prompt with the OPI opinion prompt among the NS and NNS. Table 8.1 shows the quantitative results of NS speech collected in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. words</td>
<td>LFLI</td>
<td>No. words</td>
<td>LFLI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total words per level</td>
<td>1191</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of content items</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of function items</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1: Lexical Density. OPI description vs. SOPI university. Total words and LFLIs. Native Speaker Respondents. OPI description of people are included.
The analysis of the NNS's speech showed that both tests (OPI description and the SOPI university prompt) elicited about the same correlation of content and function items, with more function items in the OPI and more content items in the SOPI responses. The analysis of lexical density of NS responses to the OPI description prompt featured higher frequency of content than function items (57% to 43%), while the SOPI responses to the university prompt had an almost even proportion of content and function items (49% to 51%).

The analysis of unique lexical items found in the speech samples of NNS indicated that the SOPI elicited twice as many LFLIs than the OPI did. No such dramatic difference was observed in the NS responses. The analysis of the speech of NS showed that both tests elicit almost the same frequency of LFLIs: about 23% in the OPI and about 25% in the SOPI.

The quantitative analysis of content items produced by both NNS and NS suggested that both tests elicited total nouns and verbs with a high correlation. Nonetheless, the frequency of adjectives showed contradicting results in the responses of NNS and NS. The frequency of adjectives was two times higher in the NNS’ SOPI responses than in the NNS' OPI responses, but adjectival frequency was observed to be higher in NS OPI descriptions as compared to NS SOPI descriptions. The opposite results for adjectives between NS and NNS in the two tests raise questions whether the format of the test and the type of a prompt affected higher frequency of adjectives in NNS SOPI responses when compared to the NNS OPI responses. There are two possible explanations for this phenomenon. First, it may have been easier for NNS to talk about inanimate things (places and objects) rather than about people. Second, NNS did not have
enough vocabulary to describe people and their personalities. If the cause of lower frequency of adjectives among OPI descriptions is the lack of necessary vocabulary, then this finding might suggest that prompts, rather than modes, affect NNS’ language outcomes. Third, it was noted earlier that even NS description of people’s appearances did not constitute a paragraph: this suggests that perhaps the entire genre of the OPI description of appearance is unlikely to elicit paragraph-length discourse from anyone.

Analysis of the NNS’ and NS’ OPI description and SOPI university prompt data suggested that the SOPI responses featured more frequent use of LFLIs among verbs and adjectives than observed in the OPI descriptions. Such outcomes may not be surprising, because the SOPI university prompt elicited both description of places and opinion; therefore the higher frequency of adjective and verb LFLIs is expected in the SOPI responses. The OPI prompt, on the other hand, elicited only description; therefore, we might expect fewer verbs in the OPI responses. The OPI descriptions may have featured fewer adjectival LFLIs than the SOPI responses, perhaps due to the mode of the test or the nature of the given prompt itself. SOPI NNS’ responses featured twice as many LFLIs than the OPI responses of the same speakers, perhaps because speakers repeated the same LFLIs again and again in their speech. After the repetition was factored out, an analysis of lexical diversity showed that NNS repeated 50% of their vocabulary in the SOPI, and 25% in the OPI (see table 7.3). Such a stark contrast in the amount of repeated vocabulary in the two tests was not observed in NS discourse (table 8.2). After all repetition was factored out, data from the speech of NS and NNS suggest that, despite quantitative differences (the total words produced) in the OPI and the SOPI, both tests elicited a similar number of diverse LFLIs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content items</th>
<th>OPI No. LFLI</th>
<th>SOPI No. LFLI</th>
<th>OPI Fqcy. LFLI</th>
<th>SOPI Fqcy. LFLI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>diverse</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Func. items</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LFLI per level</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8.2: Lexical Diversity of LFLIs. OPI description vs. SOPI university. Native Speaker Respondents. OPI description of people are included.**

A close analysis of the content LFLIs in the NS responses across both tests showed that the responses to the OPI description and SOPI university prompt feature similar frequencies of LFLIs but different proportions of LFLIs of the different parts of speech. The OPI elicited slightly more diverse nouns and adjectives, while the SOPI elicited twice as many diverse verbs. The NS data suggest that though the SOPI university prompt elicited characteristics of description, it did not elicit the same quality of description as that elicited by the OPI prompts. The NNS’ data, on the contrary, showed very similar frequencies of diverse nominal, verbal, and adjectival LFLIs in the OPI versus SOPI responses.

The SOPI does not have a prompt similar to those observed in the OPI, which elicit the function of description as such. However, 87% (33 speakers) of NNS interpreted the SOPI university task as one requiring concrete description, and 13% (5 speakers) as an abstract argument. Thus, description in the SOPI appeared as a part of another function – comparing advantages and disadvantages (in an abstract and formal context). Thus, NNS’ results might suggest that though the SOPI university prompt might be the prompt in the SOPI that most closely corresponds to an OPI description prompt,
nevertheless, the SOPI university prompt neither elicit description consistently nor is a description prompt.

Despite the difference in results of NS and NNS, the analysis of the SOPI responses of both NS and NNS suggests that the SOPI prompt and the presentational mode of discourse affected the language these speakers produced. NNS read or heard the question both in the native and target language, and they then reused the language of the prompt in their responses. This was true not only for NNS, but also for NS, who presumably did not require “help” from the prompt in the same way NNS might. For example, almost 50% of the nouns in the native speakers' SOPI responses were repeated, and 17% of these were the nouns used by the prompt itself (преимущество ‘advantage’, and недостаток ‘disadvantage’ were used each 8.5% of the time); see table 8.3 for more detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of NS</th>
<th>Repeated Nouns</th>
<th>Repeated verbs</th>
<th>Repeated adjectives</th>
<th>Repeated adverbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>колледж ‘college’: 8</td>
<td>поступить ‘to enter a university’: 5</td>
<td>частный ‘private’: 18</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>преимущество ‘advantage’: 8</td>
<td>государственный ‘public, state’: 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>недостаток ‘disadvantage’: 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>профессор ‘professor’: 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.3: Widely Repeated LFLIs and their number in the NS responses to the SOPI university prompt. OPI descriptions of people are included.

The analysis of adjective LFLIs in the discourse of NS is similar to that observed among NNS' responses: 50% of the adjective LFLIs used in these responses were repeated; almost one third of the repeated adjectives were частный ‘private’ (the adjective used by the prompt) and one tenth was государственный ‘public/ state’. Thus, NS did not have to depend on the input vocabulary (of the prompt) but still used it widely in their responses. The lexical diversity of both NNS and NS discourse confirm the assumption that regardless of the level of oral proficiency, the SOPI prompt affects the
speakers’ choice of the lexicon and results in the repetition of the LFLIs used therein. The
prompt of the SOPI test predetermined the repetitve use of certain words. (Note,
however, that NS responded to SOPI prompts in an artificial presentational environment
because there was a live interlocutor in the room asking questions and possibly giving
nonverbal cues, although the researcher did not look at NS while they were responding to
the SOPI prompts.)

Table 8.4 represents the comparative results of lexical diversity of OPI
descriptions, excluding descriptions of people, and SOPI university prompt. It turns out
that the exclusion of description of people did not affect the OPI lexical density
outcomes. The SOPI university prompt still elicited higher frequency of verbal an
adjectival LFLIs, and high correlation of nominal LFLIs. The frequency of adverbial
LFLIs is still higher in the SOPI responses. Such similarity of results between the OPI
data that included and excluded descriptions of people lead me to assume that the mode
of the test indeed affects testee’s performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. words</td>
<td>No. LFLI</td>
<td>No. words</td>
<td>No. LFLI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total words per level</td>
<td>935</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of content items</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of function items</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of nouns</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
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<td>Number of verbs</td>
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<td>42</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freq. words LFLI</td>
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<td>10.58</td>
<td>19.69</td>
<td>10.17</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freq. LFLI</td>
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<td>2.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.4: Lexical Density. OPI description vs. SOPI university. Total words and
LFLIs. Native Speaker Respondents. OPI descriptions of people are excluded.

An interesting observation was made regarding the comparison of syntax in
discourse given in the presentational mode of the SOPI university prompt and
interpersonal mode of the OPI description prompts. Though the discourse elicited by these prompts exhibited similar rates of lexical complexity, it featured different rates of syntactical complexity. Table 8.5 summarizes findings regarding the syntactical complexity of NS responses to prompts for OPI description, OPI opinion, SOPI university and SOPI birthday tasks, including OPI descriptions of people. Table 8.6 displays the same information but with OPI descriptions of people excluded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OPI description</th>
<th>SOPI description of birthday</th>
<th>OPI supported opinion</th>
<th>SOPI advantages of universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of speakers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of descriptions</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of descriptions per person</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of clauses</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of subordinate clauses</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses in %</td>
<td>25.31</td>
<td>34.32</td>
<td>56.25</td>
<td>47.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of clauses per description</td>
<td>11.85</td>
<td>22.33</td>
<td>13.71</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per description</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>11.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.5: Native Speaker Respondents’ results. OPI descriptions of people are included.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OPI description</th>
<th>SOPI description of birthday</th>
<th>OPI supported opinion</th>
<th>SOPI advantages of universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of speakers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of descriptions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of descriptions per person</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of clauses</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of subordinate clauses</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses in %</td>
<td>25.14</td>
<td>34.32</td>
<td>56.25</td>
<td>47.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of clauses per description</td>
<td>12.21</td>
<td>22.33</td>
<td>13.71</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of subordinate clauses per description</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>11.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.6: Native Speaker Respondents’ results. OPI description of people are excluded.

The data show that after descriptions of people were removed from the analysis, the frequency of subordinate clauses among NS descriptions and the frequency of subordinate clauses per NS’s description remained almost unchanged. Consequently, the
SOPI university prompt responses still exhibit higher syntactic complexity than the OPI does: 10% more subordination among NS’s descriptions and two times more subordination per description\textsuperscript{31}.

One might presume that the nature of the SOPI prompt affected the lexical complexity of the speech. Since NS took a version of the SOPI in an artificial presentational mode, the mode should be excluded as a factor affecting language production. A comparison of the syntax of the speech of NS and NNS elicited by OPI descriptions, on the one hand, and by the SOPI university prompt, on the other, showed that the SOPI prompt consistently elicited twice as many complex clauses (subordination) than the OPI. The significant difference in testees’ performance may have been due to the nature of the prompt\textsuperscript{32} used in the SOPI in which supported opinion was intermixed with concrete description. In other words, the SOPI prompt elicited more complex syntax than the OPI description perhaps because the SOPI prompt targeted a Superior level response (the function of supported opinion in abstract and formal discourse). Accordingly I decided to compare the SOPI university prompt to an OPI opinion prompt, and the OPI description prompt with the SOPI description of a birthday party.

\textsuperscript{31}Since the lexical and syntactical results of OPI data that include and exclude descriptions of people are almost identical, henceforth, I will use for comparison and further discussion the entire pool of OPI descriptions.

\textsuperscript{32}Since NS did not take the SOPI in the truly presentational mode, the affect of the mode should be excluded.
8.2 Lexical and Syntactic Complexity of OPI description and SOPI Description Elicited by the birthday prompt.

In chapter 5 I discussed that the *SOPI Rater Training Kit and Test Development Handbook* for the SOPI claim that the SOPI birthday prompt is a description prompt (elicited as an Intermediate-level task without requiring a paragraph-length discourse). If the SOPI birthday prompt elicits description, then, accordingly, an OPI description prompt should elicit speech samples similar to those elicited by the SOPI birthday prompt. Thus, the next step is to compare NS’ performance in OPI description and SOPI description elicited by the birthday prompt to see whether the SOPI birthday prompt does, in fact, elicit description and, if so, how the modality of the test affects speakers’ discourse.

NS and NNS descriptions elicited by the SOPI birthday prompt featured more nouns and verbs, while the OPI description prompts elicited more adjectives. The analysis of these NS descriptions is provided in tables 8.7 and 8.8. For the convenience of comparison, tables 8.7 and 8.8 include the frequencies for OPI descriptions, previously depicted in tables 8.1 and 8.2 of this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. words</td>
<td>No. LFLI</td>
<td>No. words</td>
<td>No. LFLI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total words per level</td>
<td>1191</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of content items</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>137</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of function items</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of nouns</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of verbs</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of adjectives</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of adverbs</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.7: Lexical Density. OPI description vs. SOPI birthday. Total words and LFLIs. Native Speaker Respondents.
The analysis of the data obtained from NS revealed that there were more LFLIs in the NS OPI than in the SOPI birthday descriptions. The frequency of adjective and adverb LFLIs was found to be almost three times greater in the OPI descriptions, while the frequency of verb LFLIs was almost half that observed in the SOPI birthday descriptions.

The qualitative analysis of diverse LFLIs in the OPI and SOPI birthday descriptions of NNS did not show such a difference. However, the lexical diversity of NS descriptions (table 8.8) indicated that in the OPI descriptions the frequency of diverse adjective LFLIs was two times higher than in the SOPI birthday description. The SOPI birthday description, on the other hand, elicited from NS twice as many diverse verb LFLIs and a higher frequency of noun LFLIs than those found in the OPI description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content items</th>
<th>OPI No. LFLI</th>
<th>SOPI No. LFLI</th>
<th>OPI Fqcy. LFLI</th>
<th>SOPI Fqcy. LFLI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>diverse</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Func. itms</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total LFLI per level</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.8: Lexical Diversity of LFLIs. OPI description vs. SOPI birthday. Native Speaker Respondents.

The overall lexical density and diversity of NS responses raise questions regarding the function of speech elicited by the SOPI birthday prompt. If the SOPI birthday prompt elicited description, its discourse should be similar to those elicited by OPI description prompts. However, the 50% difference between verb and adjective frequencies in NS discourse suggests that these two prompts elicit different kinds of discourse functions: one is more descriptive (OPI) and the other is more narrative (SOPI).
In the ACTFL OPG definition, “narration refers to the ability to produce an oral account of an event or incident”, that is, a narration is a text that gives an account and enumeration of events, often in chronological order. Narration tells what happened. In order to retell what happened, narration draws listeners’ attention to an action by means of verbal constructions. The purpose of narration is to tell, while the purpose of description is to show. In the ACTFL OPG, “description refers to the ability to produce a cohesive oral presentation of qualities or features characterizing a given object, place, person, etc”. Consequently, description features the presence of descriptive elements such as, most importantly, adjectives and epithets, as well as, in the speech of individuals at higher levels of proficiency, the usage of metaphors and similes. Thus, this analysis confirms my hypothesis that the SOPI birthday prompt does not elicit the function of description but rather that of narration. Therefore, the lexical complexity of learners' description elicited by these two prompts is not comparable.

The syntactic complexity of learner description varied considerably by level. One overall impression was that the SOPI birthday prompt elicited a slightly higher frequency of subordinate clauses than the OPI description prompt. Different syntactical outcomes in the responses to an intermediate-level and an advanced-level prompts might be related to the fact that narration appears in spontaneous speech of Russian learners prior to description. From Rifkin’s personal observation narration emerges before description in the speech of [English-speaking] Intermediate-level learners [of Russian] as they progress towards (without necessarily ever reaching) Advanced-level speech. If that is true, then one might expect to find higher syntactical complexity in narration discourse of Intermediate-level speakers as
compared to the syntactical complexity of Intermediate-level speakers engaging in description.\textsuperscript{33}

Both lexical and syntactic analysis revealed that the SOPI birthday prompt does not elicit the function of description but rather narration, therefore the speech samples collected in response to the SOPI birthday prompt should be compared to the narration data in the OPI. Only then the final conclusion should be drawn regarding how the modality of a test affects testees’ discourse. However, this topic will be beyond my present research.

The NS results present some unexpected data. Strangely enough, the Intermediate-level prompt (SOPI birthday) elicited higher syntactical complexity than the Advanced level prompt (OPI description). Similarly to NNS, NS used slightly more subordination in the SOPI (33\% of the total clauses features subordination) than in the OPI (25\% of the total clauses were subordinate). A mean NS OPI description featured only 3 subordinate clauses, while description of a birthday in the SOPI featured an average 7.66\% such clauses. Similar results were found in the frequency of relative clauses among NS. The SOPI birthday prompt elicited double the frequency of OPI relative clauses.

Such a difference between the OPI description and the SOPI birthday syntactical results of NS in my study might be caused by the OPI prompt that asked for the physical description of a person. As analysis has shown, NS failed to give a description of appearance in paragraph-length discourse but rather used simple discrete sentences.

In the future, to receive more precise results of the speech delivered in the interpersonal mode at the Advanced level, only OPI descriptions (or comparisons) of places (cities) or objects (universities, campuses) should be used. The results of my study showed that not

\textsuperscript{33} From personal correspondence with Dr. Benjamin Rifkin, April 2005.
every prompt for description elicits the required Advanced-level discourse, therefore as a consequence of unsuccessful OPI description prompting testees’ OPI ratings may be lower than when testees respond to an OPI description prompt that truly elicits description in paragraph-length discourse such as description of inanimate entities (cities or universities). This is one of the reasons OPI testers check description multiple times. For the same reason, I hypothesize that the nature of a prompt that asks for description of appearance logically fails to elicit high frequency of relative clauses; while a narration prompt visa versa might be conducive for relativization.

The responses of NS description of appearance call into question the value of such prompts, since NS did not give paragraph-length descriptions required by the ACTFL OPG. In real-life situations, a detailed succinct description of someone’s appearance might be used only in a police report or in a novel. Thus, OPI testers should be discouraged from asking a testee to describe someone’s appearance for an Advanced-level question.

More studies are necessary to investigate which OPI description prompts indeed elicit required Advanced-level paragraph-length discourse and which elicit Intermediate-level discourse. I propose that as an OPI tester probes and checks a testee for advanced oral proficiency, a tester should exclude tasks requiring the description of people’s appearances or houses, as these prompts fail to elicit subordination and cohesive paragraph-length discourse. This is a topic for another investigation.

Another factor that might affect the complexity of speech in presentational mode descriptions is the time students are given in the SOPI to plan their responses and the time available for testees to respond to a prompt. Testees first hear the situation in
English to which they need to give a response, and then the instructions allow them time to plan their responses (15 seconds for the birthday description and 20 seconds for the university prompt). After the planning time is over, testees hear the prompt in the target language, and they are given a length of time, differing by prompt, to give the response. This format was also used in the testing of NS for this research project. The interpersonal mode of the OPI excludes this reflective planning phase. The comparison of interpersonal and presentational modes in oral proficiency testing seems to be parallel to the analysis of spoken and written discourse by Beaman, Crystal, and Schiffrin (1982). They argued that spoken discourse is less syntactically complex, and speakers use more coordinate structures than subordinate structures. The findings as related to written discourse suggested that the process of writing allows a “writer time to ‘integrate’ his or her ideas into a more complex, coherent whole” discourse. Juxtaposed to this kind of discourse is the ‘fragmented’ or disjointed, spontaneous and improvised nature of speech in which ideas are loosely joined by the coordinating conjunction and” (Beaman, 1984:48).

Preliminary findings in my research suggest that the OPI mode is unplanned and spontaneous spoken discourse. In the SOPI mode a speaker has time to organize and prepare the response and to integrate his/her thoughts and ideas into a more complex response.

The SOPI format also has a silent period of 1 minute and 10 seconds for the task of birthday description, and 1 minute and 20 seconds for the university task, during which students may feel a need to “fill the silence” with further description. This might account for some of the higher subordination rates. Despite the speaker’s level, all the speakers are given the same amount of time to perform each task in the SOPI. In other words, it is

34 Though limited to 15 or 20 seconds, depending on the prompt.
assumed, for example, that in order to show that a speaker can function at the Advanced level, performing core advanced level functions; he/she is provided with a certain amount of time for that. Nevertheless, since IH speakers perform 50% of the tasks required by the Advanced level, they still tend to give shorter responses than Advanced level speakers.

Thus, in the SOPI, if IH level speakers complete their answer to the prompt before the time for the answer expires, they hear silence on the tape. Some speakers (across the levels) are pushed to produce more speech, thus producing longer responses and more clauses. The examples below demonstrate students’ attempts to continue and extend their answers as their responses were followed by silence on the tape:

Beth, SOPI /AM
Description of Activities

**T:** Как отмечают дни рождения в соединённых штатах? У вас устраивают вечеринки?
How do people celebrate birthdays in the United States? Do people have parties?

**S:** у нас всё зависит от возраста человека | потому что когда постАрше | обычно отмечают с друзьями дома или вообще не отмечают | но когда мы дети | когда мы маленькие (маленькие) когда мы маленькие | у нас а родители обычно строят ус_ а устраивают вечеринки для детей | и приглашают всех - друзей| ребёнка | есть эстафеты| какинибудь | и есть - торт| со свечками| | ам все играют| танцуют| | шарики| обычно есть | короче весёлая вечеринка | - и детям очень нравятся такие вечерики | подарки| прин_ приносят конечно имениннику |--и едят торт с мороженым | чё ещё? |---- когда я была маленькая | всегда| у меня были такие вечеринки| я очень хорошо помню | что у нас всегда | были эстафеты. (1m 3s)
**T:** [Interruption by the beep on the tape.]
Karina, SOPI/ AL
Advantages/Disadvantages

T: Как ты думаешь в чем преимущества и недостатки обучения в частном университете?

S: я думаю что большинство американских студентов -- учиться в государственном университетах -- потому что там дешево | чем частных университетах там дешевле чем в частных университетах | а но э -- в частных университетах - это вероятно - м классы - меньше чем в государственных университетах | образование в университетах очень хорошее | всего разницы нет | если говорим о университетах | но а в частных университетах много людей людям ам больше нравится а учиться в частных университетах потому что ам - если они живут в штате | где государственный университет государственный
муниверситет не очень сильный (сильный) а программы | а --- можно (то)
лучше а заниматься а в частном университете а и есть вообще а лучше
курсы | а про_ а профессоры а у каждого (каждого) профессором
(профессора) есть / а меньше студентов | но в государственном
университете это а а есть наверно а много [профессоры (профессоров) и а
много программы (программ) а | потому что больше [(1m 18s)
T:

Kelly, SOPI/ AL
Advantages/Disadvantages

T: Как ты думаешь в чем преимущества и недостатки обучения в
частном университете?

S: ну с одной стороны очень дорого стоит а ходить в частную в частный
университет | - ну тем на самом деле я думаю | что образование там гораздо
лучше | там обычно - мало студентов в (на) каждом курсе | значит | что
есть больше возможностей. --- м-м-м ну хорошо у'ч.ться (учиться) | -- ну с
другой стороны я думаю | --- ну в больших университетах большие
библиоте-е-ки там | а вообще ресурсы такие большие | что ну это и есть
преимущество на самом деле | -- значит | - ну --- я наверно бы предпочитаа
(предпочла) ходить в маленький и а маленький частный университет | если
бы/ у меня был - вы-вы-бор | но вообще для многих это невозможно | денег
не хватает | и - это [ просто невозможно. (1m 15s)
T:

In the OPI, testers do not set a time during which testees may plan and then give a
response to a particular prompt, except for the role-play situation administered in the last
few minutes of the oral proficiency interview. The flow of the OPI is modeled on a
“natural-like” conversation, in which one person (a tester) asks questions and the other (a
testee) responds without time to plan and organize his/her discourse. In this setting,
testees might feel pressure to give an immediate response to avoid the silence and a pause
between the question and their response. It remains to be seen if students who give more
subordination in the more artificial context of the SOPI are able to provide it in
interactive speech. In other words, if they are able to function at the same high level in authentic real world contexts requiring advanced-level speech, an important reason for distinguishing between whether presentational or interpersonal speech is being tested.

The SOPI not only supplies speakers with planning time, but it also provides a contextualized prompt in English. Thus, if students do not completely understand the question in the target language in the SOPI, they are still able to give a response, whereas in the OPI the pressure of a natural-like flow of the conversation, lack of preparation period, and prompts exclusively in the target language may be reasonable factors contributing to the lower frequency of complex syntax in the OPI.

Overall results also show that in the presentational mode a mean response had a larger number of lexical items and was longer than a response given in the interpersonal mode. These results were not unexpected, since in the presentational mode subjects are instructed to talk during the time allowed for each response. This fixed period of time for response might account for much of the repetitiveness in SOPI responses, when a testee has nothing further to say but feels he or she must keep talking. In the OPI there is no set time for response discouraging students to repeat and elaborate for a silent duration.

The opposite was true for the rate of speech that is the number of words uttered per minute. Subjects produced a higher rate of speech in the interpersonal mode than in the presentational mode, except for NS who did the reverse. Such results among NNS are not surprising, as the interpersonal mode presented subjects with an opportunity to negotiate meaning and seek paralinguistic assistance. In other words, the presence of the interlocutor affected the language production. Subjects were able to see by the reaction of the tester whether the information presented in the response was sufficient or needed
extension. It was noticed that encouragements and phrases like “really”, “how interesting”, “right”, inserted by OPI testers during testees’ responses prompted OPI speakers to produce more language. During my testing of the NS, while I was present in the room, I did not interrupt their speech and gave them the same allotted time as NNS to reply to the prompts. The presentational mode of the SOPI excluded this advantage. Though the presence of the “live” interaction featured a higher number of lexical items per minute, the interpersonal mode did not have any impact on the higher frequency of LFLI in learner discourse.

8.3 The Lexical and Syntactic Complexity of the SOPI university prompt and OPI opinion prompts.

I will next turn to an analysis of the lexical and syntactical complexity of speech elicited by the SOPI university and OPI opinion prompts. Tables 8.6 and 8.7 represent lexical density and diversity of NS speech elicited by the OPI opinion and SOPI university prompt. For the convenience of comparison, tables 8.9 and 8.10 depict the results of frequency for the SOPI university prompt, provided first in tables 8.1 and 8.2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
<th>OPI</th>
<th>SOPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>words</td>
<td>LFLI</td>
<td>words</td>
<td>LFLI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total words per level</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of content items</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of function items</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.9: Lexical Density. OPI opinion vs. SOPI university. Total words and LFLIs. Native Speaker Respondents.

The analysis of lexical diversity of the NS and NNS discourse elicited by OPI opinion and SOPI university prompts shows that they are quite similar: the frequency of adjectives was slightly higher in the SOPI than in the OPI, while the frequency of verbs was somewhat higher in the OPI. The outcomes of the discourse comparison of OPI opinion and SOPI university prompts are similar to the outcomes of the OPI description versus the SOPI birthday prompts comparison: the OPI opinion and the OPI birthday prompts elicited more verbs, while the SOPI university prompt and OPI description elicited more adjectives and adverbs.

The comparison of lexical density of the SOPI university and OPI opinion responses revealed that the SOPI university responses had somewhat higher adjectival and somewhat lower verbal frequencies than the OPI opinion responses. Such outcomes were not unexpected because, during the SOPI university prompt, speakers delivered a mixture of description and supported opinion, while in the OPI speakers were not required to describe but to give an opinion. Accordingly, the prompt that elicited description featured a higher frequency of adjectives, while the prompt that elicited an opinion featured more verbs.
The analysis of LFLIs in NNS’ responses showed that the SOPI university prompt elicited a higher frequency of LFLIs than that observed in discourse elicited by the OPI opinion prompt; however, the frequency of LFLIs in NS the SOPI university prompt and OPI opinion were almost identical. The analysis of content LFLIs in NNS and NS discourse showed that the OPI opinion prompt elicited more verbal LFLIs, while the SOPI university prompt elicited about twice as many adjectival LFLIs than the OPI opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content items</th>
<th>OPI No. LFLI total</th>
<th>OPI No. LFLI diverse</th>
<th>SOPI No. LFLI total</th>
<th>SOPI No. LFLI diverse</th>
<th>OPI Fqcy. LFLI total</th>
<th>OPI Fqcy. LFLI diverse</th>
<th>SOPI Fqcy. LFLI total</th>
<th>SOPI Fqcy. LFLI diverse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Func. items</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total LFLI per level</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>24.33</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>25.21</td>
<td>15.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.10: Lexical Diversity. OPI opinion vs. SOPI university. Total words and LFLIs. Native Speaker Respondents.

Though the analysis of lexical density of LFLIs among all speakers demonstrated that the SOPI university prompt elicited a higher frequency of adjectives, the analysis of lexical diversity of LFLIs indicated that 50% of those adjectives were reused (repeated) as were half of the nouns. Thus, the analysis of lexical diversity of LFLIs exposes that the OPI opinion prompt elicited more nominal LFLIs than the SOPI university prompt but about the same frequency of verbal, adjectival and adverbial LFLIs. Overall results of the lexical diversity of LFLIs exhibit a tiny difference that is probably not statistically significant between the OPI opinion and SOPI university responses.

The data from SOPI university prompt descriptions lead me to surmise that the SOPI university prompt elicits Superior-level discourse targeting supported opinion with
description; this would explain why there are more adjectives in the SOPI university prompt than in the OPI opinion responses among native speakers and Advanced-High speakers.

A comparison of the SOPI university prompt discourse to the OPI description and opinion prompt discourse was surprising. The SOPI university prompt elicited discourse quite similar to that elicited by OPI prompts targeting two different proficiency levels: Advanced-level speech (elicited through an OPI description prompt) and Superior-level speech (elicited through an OPI opinion prompt). Such a paradox might suggest that the SOPI university prompt is a prompt that calls for Superior-level response but elicits discourse on the border between the Advanced and Superior levels as its results are comparable to both kinds of OPI prompts.

The frequency of subordinate clauses in NS’ responses (table 8.5) show very similar results in both tests. Such similar results in NS’ subordination validate my previous hypothesis that the SOPI university prompt does not call explicitly for description of two types of institutions, as a results some testees will (in this case they are NS) perceive the SOPI university prompt as a prompt asking for opinion. In this case, testees who are able to describe at the Advanced-level in the OPI setting, would fail to give a description in the SOPI, thus jeopardizing their own performance.

8.4 General Results

My overall results showed that the SOPI university prompt elicited twice as many subordinate clauses and twice as many LFLIs as the OPI description prompt. The syntactical complexity of discourse solicited by the SOPI suggests that the SOPI
discourse indeed resembles written planned discourse as it contained more cohesiveness and subordination as compared to the OPI discourse. This supports my research hypothesis that the modality of the test (interpersonal for the OPI, presentational for the SOPI) affects the syntactical nature of the very speech it elicits.

The conclusions drawn in this research project regarding the nature of the discourse elicited by the OPI and SOPI in Russian contradict Shohamy’s findings for Hebrew (1994). She found that SOPI responses featured higher lexical density (more content than function items) than OPI responses. In her study, OPI responses contained about 40% content items and 60% function items, while SOPI responses were characterized by the reverse pattern: 60% of lexical items were content and 40% of lexical items were function. Shohamy assumed that such results showed that the OPI and the SOPI modes elicited different types of discourse. Based on her results, Shohamy was able to claim that SOPI-elicited language is more formal and cohesive, putting pressure on testees to expand and elaborate their responses. My results differed from Shohamy’s: my data suggest that both interpersonal and presentational modes elicited samples of similar lexical complexity: half content items and half function items. This leads me to assume, first, that the analysis of content versus function lexical items does not seem to be a productive approach for research at least in Russian, second, to reject my original hypothesis that one test is more lexically dense than the other, and third, to call into question the findings of Shohamy in her earlier study comparing the OPI and SOPI in Hebrew. However, it is possible that different languages have different grammatical structures (Russian has no articles, no auxiliary verbs, for example) and will result in different proportions of content to function items. Thus, since the findings are so
I found by means of the analysis of lexical diversity that the SOPI prompts influenced speakers’ lexicon. They cued speakers for the vocabulary to be used in the response. However, because of the presence of certain lexical items in the SOPI prompt, the usage of which was necessary to perform the task, the higher frequency of lexical items in the SOPI seems to have been artificially inflated, enabling SOPI speakers to outperform OPI speakers by the frequency of lexical density of LFLI. The task used in the SOPI created expectations for testees to use this vocabulary in their responses, providing them with English translations in the written materials accompanying the oral prompts. If students did not know or could not remember the core words required to complete the task in the SOPI, they were still able to give a response in most cases using these very same LFLIs. The lexical richness of student speech was directly related to the very prompt to which they were responding in the case of the SOPI. The lack of a clear descriptive prompt in the SOPI led to a situation in which the prompts exhibiting description used high-level lexicon.

Though the SOPI prompt assisted speakers in reaching greater lexical density, it was noticed that SOPI subjects not only used the vocabulary from the prompt but used it repeatedly, thus reducing the range of the lexicon they used in their discourse. SOPI speakers more frequently repeated the same lexical items than did OPI speakers. When this repetition was factored out, it was shown that interpersonal mode prompts elicited a higher frequency of diverse LFLIs, unique items not given in the basic vocabulary list.

The SOPI did, however, feature a higher frequency of lexical items produced per turn. Such results are attributable to the relationship between the mode of speech and the prompt. The SOPI is presentational, and therefore provides testees with planning and
response time. The OPI is interpersonal. It involves the negotiation of meaning, lacks a preparation period, and is conducted exclusively in the target language. I hypothesize that the nature of the SOPI might affect speech outcomes of testees’ for whom planning and response time is a factor, therefore it will have an impact on their presentational mode speech, but for those testees who find themselves in an interpersonal situation, the lack of planning time will impede their speech. Hence, it could be proposed that neither the OPI nor the SOPI provides a full-fledged assessment of both interpersonal (in other words interactional) and presentational oral proficiency since in life, as opposed to the artificial context of language testing, individuals are often compelled to speak in both modalities.

OPI responses provided by both NS and NNS demonstrated that proficiency testers should not ask testees to describe someone’s appearance as an Advanced-level question because this does not generate paragraph-length discourse in Russian (though other languages may be different).

8.5 Implications for SOPI Revision.

My study has shown that the SOPI is not designed around the same understanding of description as the OPI. First, the SOPI treats description as an Intermediate level function, while in the OPI, according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, description is one of two core functions of Advanced level performance. Essentially, this means that a SOPI description does not require of speakers cohesive discourse of paragraph-length: for the SOPI, apparently, a number of discrete sentences may suffice in response to the description prompt. Second, according to the SOPI Rater Training Kit and Test Development Handbook for the SOPI, the one task that asks specifically for a description
is the SOPI birthday prompt. According to the ACTFL OPG, description is a function that conveys the characteristics of a person, place or an object; however, the SOPI "description prompt" asks for a description of an event. If this task is designed to elicit a description of the picture presented in the Student Manual, then the instructions should say so explicitly. The analysis of SOPI data demonstrates that many students (and some native speakers) provide a narration of what people do at a birthday celebration, rather than a description of the place where such a celebration is held. Indeed, the lexical analysis of discourse elicited by SOPI description of a birthday party confirms that the SOPI description of an event does elicit narration instead of description (in ACTFL OPG terms). The results of my analysis imply that the SOPI, one of the major testing tools in the foreign languages field, simply does not elicit description. This suggests that the entire test is unreliable for ratings at the advanced and superior levels, although it may still be valid at the novice and intermediate levels. Since my study did not take up questions focusing on the nature of discourse elicited by novice and intermediate level tasks, I cannot argue here as to the validity of SOPI tasks at those levels.

Another problem of SOPI prompts consisted of questions based on the cultural norms and knowledge of American culture: this description prompt shows a picture of a birthday party in the US. Some SOPI subjects may be international students lacking knowledge of American cultural norms or even Americans of some religious background (such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example) who do not go to or sponsor any birthday celebrations. Accordingly, such students might be unable to talk about how Americans celebrate birthdays or describe a picture of an American birthday party. In other words they could not handle the task of “description” in the SOPI because of a cultural and/or
religious bias. Some of the prompts indicate that this test is developed for students who grew up in the US. If this is the case, then it is important to let testers know about this in the beginning of the Tester Manual, otherwise international students might not show what they are able to do with the language if they lack cultural knowledge about the United States. Ironically, this prompt does not test cultural knowledge of the target culture (e.g., Russia) in the same way.

The content and text-type of responses delivered by NS’ to the SOPI university prompt proved my argument that this prompt is not a description prompt, though it may have elicited some description, but rather a Superior-level prompt that calls for the abstract discussion of a social phenomenon (education). That discussion may or may not include description, as proven by NS’s responses to this prompt: 83% (5 speakers) of NS gave an abstract comparison of advantages and disadvantages studying at a private or public university, while the content of 17% (1 speaker) of NS’s responses was concrete comparison. The discourse of all 6 NS was of extended-length.

As for NNS’s responses, it was found that though the SOPI university prompt asked for an abstract response with supported opinion, it elicited both concrete and abstract description, muddled with supported opinion. Nevertheless, the responses of NNS that featured abstract content could not be given a Superior-level rating because testees did not provide extended-length discourse, but rather only a paragraph. The SOPI data showed that for this prompt, students who gave concrete responses described buildings, classrooms and campuses. Thus, the SOPI task that most closely elicited a description of a place was part of a Superior level task that required comparison of the
advantages and disadvantages of studying at a private university or college (again in the United States, therefore testing American cultural knowledge).

Descriptions were found in some higher level students’ response to other prompts in the SOPI which did not call for description. Such descriptions were not analyzable because they were short, did not qualify as description according to the ACTFL OPG definition, and were constituent of another function. It was noticed that as the proficiency level of the speakers increased, so did the speakers' cognitive ability to describe, confirming the relative position of the function of description within the proficiency guidelines task hierarchy. At lower levels speakers lack the cognitive ability to do description in general because at this stage of speakers’ language development they lack the ability to put their cognitive skills into use in the second language.

In the SOPI, description was found not as a separate function but as a constituent of a larger task. The results of my research therefore call for the revision of the SOPI. I suggest that the nature of questions in the SOPI should be similar to those in the OPI: a description of a concrete object (e.g., a city or a building) and not an event. For example, SOPI-test takers could be asked to compare two cities with which they are very familiar or their home and the home of a relative or good friend. Alternatively, SOPI-test takers could be given pictures of two scenes (e.g., a 5-story apartment building with various people doing different things in each apartment window or, alternatively, a wildlife scene with many different flora and fauna) and asked to describe one of these scenes, choosing either the rural or urban scene as they prefer. The data of the OPI showed that Advanced level speakers successfully gave descriptions for the OPI prompts requiring descriptions of a city or a university. Since there is no negotiation of meaning in the SOPI, the SOPI
prompt could offer students the opportunity to compare places, in other words, to elicit a
description of a place by means of comparison. Without such a revision, SOPI ratings at
the IH through Superior levels are suspect because they are not based on evidence that
individuals with these ratings can describe, as required by the Oral Proficiency
Guidelines on which both the SOPI and the OPI are based. Unless the test is revised to
reflect the OPG and requirements of Advanced level speech, the SOPI test cannot be
considered a valid testing tool in the foreign language field.

8.6 Implications for Teaching.

The comparison of interpersonal and presentational modes of speech led to a
collection of different speech functions: narration and supported opinion (presentational
mode) and description (interpersonal mode). The analysis of the data showed that testees
are able to speak with more complex syntax when asked to perform in presentational
mode. This finding might be attributable either to the presentational mode of the test, to
students having acquired the skill of planning and delivering practiced or prepared
discourse, or to both. Thus, it might be assumed that students practice giving a speech in
a presentational mode more often than in interpersonal. Therefore, they are more familiar
and comfortable with this type of speech. The implication is that students might not have
much experience with interpersonal communicative tasks at the advanced level; in other
words, when they are required to complete interpersonal communicative tasks, they are
not asked to reflect on the nature of the language they are using. Thus, in order to
improve our students' proficiency in both interpersonal and presentational modes, we
should devise learning tasks that require them to perform in these different modes at the

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advanced level, providing both description and narration in paragraph-length discourse, using all the tools of complex syntax.

The linguistic and communicative goal for Intermediate-level students trying to reach Advanced level is the ability to narrate and describe in a cohesive paragraph-length discourse in all time frames. However, often communicative exercises are geared towards novice and intermediate level performance in the Russian curriculum and do not require students to develop paragraph-length descriptions and narrations in their interpersonal communication. Due to the time constraints of language classes, instructors of upper level courses cannot let every student in the classroom deliver lengthy responses, therefore shutting down many opportunities for students to develop and practice Advanced-level language skills. As an example of how instructors might help their language students improve Advanced-level oral skills (narration and description), I will briefly describe a methodological approach proposed by Rifkin in his article *Video in the Proficiency-Based Advanced Conversation Class: An Example from the Russian-Language curriculum* (2000). He suggested that

students in the advanced conversation class should be able to handle some of the tasks associated with advanced level oral proficiency… with discourse approaching the advanced level criteria for accuracy and text type…Students can maintain simple face-to-face conversations by asking and responding to simple questions in informal settings and some formal settings, and, more importantly, can occasionally describe and narrate in paragraph length or longer in all time frames (but not consistently) on concrete and factual topics of personal and public interest. The target – language speech of these students features some connecting words and phrases used to create relative clauses. (63)

Since the focus of this research is the function of description, I will summarize Rifkin’s methodology with regard to teaching description (though techniques of teaching narrative skills resemble those used in teaching descriptive skills).
At the beginning of a semester students learn cohesive and syntactic elements (parenthetic words and subordinate conjunctions) and practice using them in a string of sentences. At the same time students learn vocabulary to “prepare themselves to describe, for example, a character’s personality or appearance, or the appearance of a particular set or setting used in the assigned film” (Rifkin, 2000: 66). For a few weeks, students practice description in pairs. They “create the longest and fullest description” and tape-record it for self-analysis. After that students change partners, and perform the same task but in a different time frame.

In the middle of the semester students start watching films and describing the characters, and some settings in which the action took place. Rifkin advises instructors to use the film Kindergarten for didactic purposes since it “provides an excellent opportunity to practice description because it features numerous minor characters, all of whom are visually quite distinct” (Rifkin, 2000: 66).

During his video-based language course students tape their own speeches during pair work, listen to their own speech recordings three times during the semester, and reflect in writing on their own progress in using thematic vocabulary, complex syntax, connectors and cohesive devices in a paragraph-length discourse. Rifkin calls students’ reflection on their own learning (a “consciousness-raising activity”) one of the important features of his methodology to improve students’ narrative and descriptive skills. Rifkin’s approach to teaching Advanced-level oral skills is not language specific, and could be used in any foreign language classroom.
8.7. Implications for the Field and Further Research.

Research on the nature of the interpersonal and presentational modes of speech revealed interesting outcomes and made a contribution to the field of language testing and language assessment. My research examined one of the core language functions of Advanced level oral proficiency, pioneering the investigation of how interpersonal and presentational modality affects testee performance in the two predominant speaking foreign language oral proficiency exams for any foreign language. As part of this project, I analyzed discourse in a language function previously not examined in Russian or, for that matter, in any other language. The results of this dissertation will help language professionals better understand the difference between interpersonal and presentational speaking in the learning and teaching dynamic and will open new doors for teaching Russian as well as other foreign languages. This research explored new areas beyond those discussed by Rifkin in his 2002 study of the acquisition of narration in Russian. The syntactic analysis of description in the speech of advanced level speakers continues a research paradigm explored previously for the study of description in speakers of Spanish and Hebrew, providing different results and suggesting different problems and concerns than those raised by other scholars (Koike, 1994; Shohamy, 1994).

The findings of this dissertation should be taken up in other research projects examining the nature of learner discourse elicited by OPI and SOPI prompts in Russian as well as other languages.

First, performance in Russian, as well as that in other foreign languages, in each of the two modes should be further analyzed for the parameters of speech such as communicative/management strategies, discourse features, as well as other linguistic
characteristics such as word order, English calques, morphosyntax, lexical approximation and accuracy, and pragmatics. The analysis of morphosyntax might consider verb structure, tense, aspectual choice, personal pronouns, gender, number, prepositions, and compounds.

Second, the analysis of pragmatics should investigate what language speakers do to deliver a description and whether speakers use culturally and sociolinguistically appropriate lexical items and idioms in their discourse. In other words, future research should look at what people do with words, phrases, sentences, and discourse to communicate a message successfully.

Third, the analysis may also take into account discourse features such as the question of time: duration of the speech acts, length of responses (number of words), and rate of speech (the number of words per minute), genre, register (the use of formal versus informal speech), fillers (such as Russian так “so”, что “that”, вот “here”, мол “as if”, дескать “as if”; fillers that are not words like um, eh, uh were excluded), discourse markers (such as u "and", ну "well", но "but", хотя "though", однако "however"), and uncorrected grammatical, lexical, and pronunciation errors.

Fourth, data from speech elicited by the OPI suggested that speakers used discourse markers with a high frequency when speaking in the interpersonal mode. It would be interesting to see how the modality of the test affects the usage of discourse markers in the sentence/ clause initial position.

Fifth, the analysis of syntax calls for further investigation of the relative pronoun который, the explanatory or purposive conjunction чтобы, and the use of participial/gerundial phrases. The data showed a low frequency of these constructions in the speech...
of testees. The next step would be to examine how these constructions are treated and practiced in the major second- and third-year textbooks for Russian.

Sixth, this project raises the question as to whether certain characteristics of the OPI in its two variants, i.e., face-to-face or phone interview, might be a factor affecting the production of language elicited by the OPI as opposed to that language elicited. SOPI, namely whether the presence or absence of the tester's visual feedback from a tester (facial expressions and gestures) might influence testee performance in the OPI.

8.8. Limitations of the Present Research.

The present study, of course, has limitations. With regard to lexical analysis, the findings might have been different had the analysis of less frequent lexical items been based not on Waddington’s *First Russian Vocabulary* but on another dictionary. For example, Waddington’s dictionary lists terms which are out of date in contemporary Russian culture and which have low frequency in today's daily usage, such as пионер 'pioneer’, товарищ ‘comrade’, but does not list contemporary words cognates like компьютер ‘computer’, техника ‘technology, equipment’, турист ‘tourist’, политика ‘politics’ and etc. The purpose of this research was to obtain a rough estimate of the overall lexical complexity and this procedure was accomplished. In future research, lexical complexity of testees’ discourse might be based on a more up-to-date dictionary, such as Brown’s *Russian Learner's Dictionary: 10,000 Words in Frequency Order*, and on the vocabulary provided in the most commonly used college-level textbooks for beginning Russian such as *Golosa, Nachalo, Russian Stage One: Live from Moscow*, and *Troika*. 
Second, the OPI measures “linguistic knowledge, grammar and sentence structures of the language” (Halleck, 1995), but it does not assess language complexity. The OPI does not have a mechanism to diagnose the lexical complexity of responses as the ACTFL OPG have no lexicon criterion. My observations in this area are unattached to the guidelines and the test criterion; nonetheless they remain interesting and suggest further investigation in other languages.

Third, the data collected from NS cannot show whether the modality of the test indeed affects language production because of the presence of the live tester in the room where native speakers were completing SOPI tasks for the purpose of this research project. These data can only show the effect of the prompt on language produced by the testees. In order to understand the effect of the tests' modality on NS responses, NS need to take complete OPIs and SOPIs.

Fourth, all of this research has been conducted with a small set of speech samples. To be certain of the validity of these findings, one would need a larger set of data: at present this is not possible in Russian, but perhaps the day will come when scholars can pick up this preliminary study and validate or refute its findings.
Superior
Speakers at the Superior level are able to communicate in the language with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. They discuss their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency, and accuracy. They explain their opinions on a number of topics of importance to them, such as social and political issues, and provide structured argument to support their opinions. They are able to construct and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities. When appropriate, they use extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations. Such discourse, while coherent, may still be influenced by the Superior speakers’ own language patterns, rather than those of the target language. Superior speakers command a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic and lexical devices, as well as intonational features such as pitch, stress and tone. They demonstrate virtually no pattern of error in the use of basic structures. However, they may make sporadic errors, particularly in low-frequency structures and in some complex high-frequency structures more common to formal speech and writing. Such errors, if they do occur, do not distract the native interlocutor or interfere with communication.

Advanced High
Speakers at the Advanced-High level perform all Advanced-level tasks with linguistic ease, confidence and competence. They are able to consistently explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames. In addition, Advanced-High speakers handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypotheses, but patterns of error appear. They can discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise, but in general, they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely. Advanced-High speakers may demonstrate a well developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms or for limitations in vocabulary by the confident use of communicative strategies, such as
paraphrasing, circumlocution, and illustration. They use precise vocabulary and intonation to express meaning and often show great fluency and ease of speech. However, when called on to perform the complex tasks associated with the Superior level over a variety of topics, their language will at times break down or prove inadequate, or they may avoid the task altogether, for example, by resorting to simplification through the use of description or narration in place of argument or hypothesis.

**Advanced Mid**

Speakers at the Advanced-Mid level are able to handle with ease and confidence a large number of communicative tasks. They participate actively in most informal and some formal exchanges on a variety of concrete topics relating to work, school, home, and leisure activities, as well as to events of current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance. Advanced-Mid speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present, and future) by providing a full account, with good control of aspect, as they adapt flexibly to the demands of the conversation. Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse. 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. The speech of Advanced-Mid speakers performing Advanced level tasks is marked by substantial flow. Their vocabulary is fairly extensive although primarily generic in nature, except in the case of a particular area of specialization or interest. Dominant language discourse structures tend to recede, although discourse may still reflect the oral paragraph structure of their own language rather than that of the target language. Advanced-Mid speakers contribute to conversations on a variety of familiar topics, dealt with concretely, with much accuracy, clarity and precision, and they convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion. They are readily understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives. When called on to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the quality and/or quantity of their speech will generally decline. Advanced-Mid speakers are often able to state an opinion or cite conditions; however, they lack the ability to consistently provide a structured argument in extended discourse. Advanced-Mid speakers may use a number of delaying strategies, resort to narration, description, explanation or anecdote, or simply attempt to avoid the linguistic demands of Superior-level tasks.

**Advanced Low**

Speakers at the Advanced-Low level are able to handle a variety of communicative tasks, although somewhat haltingly at times. They participate actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations on activities related to school, home, and leisure activities and, to a lesser degree, those related to events of work, current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance. Advanced-Low speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present and future) in paragraph length discourse, but control of aspect may be lacking at times. They can handle appropriately the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of
events that occur within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar, though at times their discourse may be minimal for the level and strained. Communicative strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution may be employed in such instances. In their narrations and descriptions, they combine and link sentences into connected discourse of paragraph length. When pressed for a fuller account, they tend to grope and rely on minimal discourse. Their utterances are typically not longer than a single paragraph. Structure of the dominant language is still evident in the use of false cognates, literal translations, or the oral paragraph structure of the speaker’s own language rather than that of the target language. While the language of Advanced-Low speakers may be marked by substantial, albeit irregular flow, it is typically somewhat strained and tentative, with noticeable self-correction and a certain ‘grammatical roughness.’ The vocabulary of Advanced-Low speakers is primarily generic in nature. Advanced-Low speakers contribute to the conversation with sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion, and it can be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, even though this may be achieved through repetition and restatement. When attempting to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the linguistic quality and quantity of their speech will deteriorate significantly.

**Intermediate High**

Intermediate-High speakers are able to converse with ease and confidence when dealing with most routine tasks and social situations of the Intermediate level. They are able to handle successfully many uncomplicated tasks and social situations requiring an exchange of basic information related to work, school, recreation, particular interests and areas of competence, though hesitation and errors may be evident. Intermediate-High speakers handle the tasks pertaining to the Advanced level, but they are unable to sustain performance at that level over a variety of topics. With some consistency, speakers at the Intermediate High level narrate and describe in major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length. However, their performance of these Advanced-level tasks will exhibit one or more features of breakdown, such as the failure to maintain the narration or description semantically or syntactically in the appropriate major time frame, the disintegration of connected discourse, the misuse of cohesive devises, a reduction in breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary, the failure to successfully circumlocute, or a significant amount of hesitation. Intermediate-High speakers can generally be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, although the dominant language is still evident (e.g. use of code-switching, false cognates, literal translations, etc.), and gaps in communication may occur.

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APPENDIX B

COHESIVE DEVICES

(Rifkin, 2000; Barkhudarov, 1985)

без сомнения
безусловно
беспорно
благодаря тому,
что
будто
ввиду того, что
вдеверите
вероятно
видимовидишь ли
вместо того, чтобы
возможно
вообще (говаря)
впрочем
всё-таки
вследствие этого
/to того что
в зависимости от
в конце концов
в отличие от чего
в первую очередь
в результате чего
в связи с тем, что
в соответствии с чем
в таком случае
во всяком случае
во-первых
во-вторых
в-третьих
в частности
где
говорят
действительно
de дело в том, что
dля того чтобы
другими словами
dо сих пор
dо того как
dо тех пор, пока не
edва
если
если – то
за - до того как
знаешь(ли)
значит
ибо
из-за чего
известно
итак
инче говоря
кажется
как
как будто
как говорится
как оказалось
как только
как ни
когда
конечно
короче (говаря)
который
кроме того, что
кстати
куда
к изумлению
к огорчению
к несчастью
к (общей) радости
к сожалению
к стыду
к счастью
к удивлению
лучше сказать
мало того, что
между тем
между прочим
может быть
мягко выражаясь
на беду
на всякий случай
на самом деле
на счастье
насколько
наверно
наконец
наоборот
напротив
например
несмотря на (то что)
несомненно
APPENDIX C

Transcriptions of actual prompts asked by OPI testers (both native and non-native Russian speakers, therefore all grammatical and syntactical mistakes found in the examples below reflect original speech).

(a) comparison of people (А вы по характеру разные люди тоже? Are you different people by temperament?, Как вам кажется молодые люди в америке и в россии похожи? Do you think American and Russian youth are similar?, Чем русские отличаются от американцев? How do Russians differ from Americans? Чем ваша русская мама отличается от вашей первой мамы? Одна русская а другая америкanka? How was your Russian host mother different from your real mother? One is Russian, another is American?),

(b) comparison of geographical places (for example, Какая разница между этими двумя городами? What is the difference between these two cities? Что вы чувствуете насколько этот город отличается от прошлого? How is this city different from the city in the past? Я слышала что остиин и хьюстон очень отличаются друг от друга. Чем? I heard that Austin and Houston differ a lot. How? Как жизнь на дальнем востоке отличается от жизни в москве? How is life in the Far East different from life in Moscow? Похожи казахстан и москва? Are Kazakhstan and Moscow alike? Как вы можете сравнить эти два города? How can you compare these two cities?),

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(c) comparison of education and schools (for example, Какая разница между тем, как вы учились в России и в американской школой? Вы заметили разницу? What was the difference in the way you studied in Russia and in the American school? Did you notice any difference? Чем отличается система американского образования от российской? How is the American system of education different from the Russian one? Чем отличались ваши занятия в Минске от американского университета? Какую разницу вы заметили? How did your classes in Minsk University differ from classes at an American University? What difference have you noticed?),

(d) comparison of objects (for example, Расскажите мне о кампусе. Он похож на кампус Мидлберри Колледжа? Tell me about the Campus. Is it similar to the Campus of Middlebury College? Похож Ярославский университет на ваш университет в Америке? Is Yaroslavl University like your University in the States?),

(e) giving advantages and disadvantages (for example, Какие недостатки в этой программе? What disadvantages did you notice in this program? Какие плюсы есть в этой программе? What plusses can you name of this program?).
APPENDIX D

OPI SAMPLES OF DESCRIPTION

Sam, OPI/ IH

T: Расскажите мне [как выглядит] алябама. Я там никогда не была.

S: [как выглядит?]

S: ну маленькие (маленькие) горы - а | и ам --некого делать (мало что можно делать) | просто немного людей | а это это прекрасно иногда вернуться в алябаму | а но мой город или этот город | где я вырос | называется таскулуса | и там может быть сейчас а сорок тысяч человек или семьдесят (сёмьдесят) тысяч | я не знаю | уже пять (пять) лет я там не живу ам -- | но - а когда я там жил - | почти ник_ никого нет там было (никого там не было) а| XXX (0m 45s)

Sam, OPI/ IH

T: Опишите мне этот кампус. Я в атланте была но вот на кампусе нет.

S: Обычный кампус. Просто много [зданий].

T: [Что значит обычный кампус?]

S: Много зданий э | много студентов | э не так много как в вирджинитейском университете (вирджинии) | где было около двадцать восемь (двадцати восемью) тысяч студентов | ну и ещё есть | а много студентов | думаю | а итого -- а десять тысяч человек | да это достаточно | и кроме (того) есть там а город | и э значит (что там) всегда много человек много людей (0m 30s)
Kim, OPI/ IH

T: Интересно. А вы можете мне описать дашу. Как она выглядела?

S: ам она невысокая а с кр_ -- а с крАсными волосами (волосами) и а без очки (очков)↑ | ам она спортивная | а она занималась тенисом | и поэтому она часто -- одна часто бежала (бегала)↑ (grin) ам играла на улице↑ | -- ам она - ам худела? а худ_ худая она худая↑ | а ну и что ещё а а (0m 46s)

Lucie, OPI/ AL

T: Расскажите мне что она за человек (ваша подруга).

S: (что) за человек-ек| а она очень интеллигентная↑ | а она очень как а очень а хорошо - ам она очень хорошая студентка↑ | а она очень ам смеющая | как она любит а сказать (рассказывать) шутки↑ вообще | она очень открытая↑ а девушка | она почти сразу | после (того как) мы с ней познакомились | она сказала (рассказала) мне всё о жизни и ам | - это интересно | потому что мы работали вместе | и когда я брала интервью у человека | я с ней говорила об этом | и тоже наоборот | и это было так - так продуктивно (0m 52s)

T: А вы можете мне описать ее внешность.

S: да немножко маленькая (маленькая) | нет не очень высокая - девушка↑ | а чёрные волосы↑ ам | не толстáя (толстая) | но я мне не правится (хотеся) сказать худенкий (худенькая) | но не очень (очень) толстая | ам чёрные глаза ↑а | немного бледная↑ | ну в санкт петербурге мало солнца и да | и что ещё | - ну-у ам ей правится носить юб_ юбки↑ | Я не знаю | (0m 37s)

Matt, OPI/ AL

S: Я сейчас живу а живу один а в подвале (подвОле) | это да это очень[

T: Раскажите.

S: = о подвал (подвале) | ну это очень хорошая с_ситуация | у меня (есть) друг | который а собирается поехать в россию на год | и он хотел | чтобы я а з_занимат (занил) его квартиру а во время его - ам noе_ отъездка (отъезда) | и з это очень токо (просто) прекрАсно | потому что здесь там (есть) всё мёбель (вся мебель) | у меня ничего нет | а у меня наверное два рюкзака (рюкзака) и всё | и от у него (есть) диван и телевИзор плеер и так далее | и я просто ам переезжая туда | и потом з ког_ а жи_ буду жить на год | и (а) после этого не знаю | а наверное когдато а мне нужно будет купить вещи | но счас (сейчас) ничего нет | и это мне (для меня) - очень
странно | потому что а это нахо_ эта квартира находится в соседство (в районе) | где в общемто квартиры очень дорогого дорога (дороге) | и мне а очень повезло | это ам ст_ это дешёвый (дешево) | или по сравнению с другими квартирами это очень дешёвый (дешево) | и я м я буду есть а -- я успешно и жить и есть – одновременно | и мо_ (1m 46s)

T: =И учиться. (laugh)

S: =И учиться

West, OPI/AM

T: Угу понятно. Вы сказали что она была как вторая мама. Чем она отличается от вашей первой мамы одна русская одна американка?

S: да а чем отличается? - ну во первых точнее сказать | что она как -- та бабушка (бабушка) | которую я всегда хотела в принципе | она она конечно слишком старая для (для) | а она намного старше | чем м-моя мама - | ах отличается - практические ни с чем (grin) | а в смысле она м-много волновалась про меня (обо мне, за меня) | - когда я а ушла уходила | и когда я при _ а приходила а поздно из (с) занятий от (с) занятий | -- ам она волновалась | когда я недостаточно ела и так далее | но она тол_ она тоже а волновалась про а личной жизнь (за личную жизнь) э э жизнь | она хотела | чтобы я до достигла (достигла) цели в жизни и и так далее | мы мы ещё а ведём контакты (поддерживаем отношения) - тоже| (0m 53s).

Rosa, OPI/ AM

S: когда ам мне исполнилось десять лет | мы с родителями переехали в колорадо | когда моя мама получила там работу | - и-м мы там жили ам в очень маленького (маленьком) городе | который называется пайн | что з_ по русски это значит сосна | - и-м а мы жили в очень а красивом доме по моему | я считаю | что это очень красивый дом | потому что а это один из первых а домов - ам построенных а ам в этом микрорайоне ↑ ам в пит а десятых (пятидесятых) годов ↑ (годах) | и ам это деревянное а деревянный | как а большая (большая) часть а стройки колорадо ↑ | ам ну первый эта моя комната находится на первом этаже | ам я почти все всё в доме кроме спальни (спальной) моих родителей | и ам - там а а м -- на можно сказать н_ поскольку а дом был мал для художественной работы ам моего отца | он построил а своими руками ещё ам очень большую (большую) мастерскую ам | потому что он художник | и это ам - двоил (удвоило) размер нашего дома | э так что - дом а очень а маленький | где люди живут ↑ (WO) | и мастерская а (мастерская) очень большая | - но это очень красивый район | а мне очень нравится проводить (проводить) время а там вместе с родителями | они с тех пор живут в этом доме | и мне особенно нравится проводить время там |посому что ам - это уже и и где начинаются а горы (горы) | и есть (есть) очень а красивое ам го_ красивая

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гора а против (напротив) нашего дома | где а лес виден | и на улице очень тихо и ночем (ночью) а мы можем смотреть на звезды | очень красиво | так как это восемнадцатый (восемьдесят) а километров на юге (юг) от денвера | это (то там) спокойно | и - ам и ночью на улице не очень светло | - но а (в) последние ам годы ам в последние годы денвер каждый год ам улучшива_улучшиваетя↑ (снановится лучше) | и ам они очень любят поставить а большие (большие) а светы (фонари) на улице | и поэтому счай (сейчас) уже стал (стало) н_ чуть чуть светло на улице даже ночем (ночью) | где мы живём | и это меня очень огорчает (3m 30s)

T: Что вы считаете самым хорошим в Вашингтоне?

S: самым хорошим в Вашингтоне должен быть наш мол | ам это ам конечно - по английскому это обычно значит (место) а | где где можно купить продукты | ам в Вашингтоне это значит очень а ш-широкая м-магистраль | можно сказать | где ам где это как ам m -- парк | можно сказать | очень (очень) большой (большой) парк | и около ам пАрк а находится а ве_болшой (большая) часть | можно сказать | м дост-то-примечател-ьное (достопримечательностью) в Вашингтоне | например институт сметсона там находится | капи_капитоль там находится | белый дом ам памят (памятник) а Вашингтону и ещё а / памят_памятник а линкольну | там ещё я м нет конце (конца) э (тому) | сколько там есть (всего)] | и это очень красивое место | а это было ам даже | когда они а строили город уже давно | это был а центра а | их план их идея | что это будет очень красивым | потому что Вашингтон тоже это город а - приджумали | и они хотели строить (строить) город | как ста-лица (столицу) | и конечно это очень редко ам в мире | как а санкт петербург | это м не часто бывает | что есть город | который строили именно а | чтобы было (стал) очень красивый столица (красивой столицей) (1м 58с)

T: А расскажите мне о вашем отце. Вы сказали он художник.

S: да он художник | он скулпту́р | и он тоже рисует| 

T: какой у него характер?

S: ух! (laught) о о он очень спокойный человек | я бы сказала | э он очень не любит а - не лубит (любит) а конфликт (конфликты) | и поэтому он всегда а очень добрый | и он всегда хочет а | чтобы люди а - успокоивали (были спокойны) а и не рас-страивая а расст_ (не расстраивались) | ам моя мама наоборот | поэтому они очень хорошо (им хорошо/ они хорошая пара) вместе | а он а думает по абстрактному (абстрактно) | я бы сказала | он любит а | когда он рисует | он рисует ам вещи | которые все могут (могут) узнать | что (это) такое | иногда да и вообще он лубит (любит) сказать что то (говорить о чём нибудь) ещё | чтобы объяснить жизнь | он очень любит науки↑ | любит философию↑ | а любит ам а любит понимать | как а козырь и а ум работают вместе | а очень абстрактно вообще и ам он ам ему не очень важно | как он выглядит | он а каждый день а работает руками
руками | поэтому а его одежда не очень красивая | ам но ему это вс_ совсем не важно | а очень м м глубокие волосы а | не как у меня | -- a a чут чуть выглядит | как а будто что то страшное а с случилось | но почти всегда а улыбается | он очень добрый человек | и я думаю | что он всегда думает о других (2m 6s)

Bob, OPI/AH

T: Похожи казахстан и москва? Похоже что это одна страна?

S: ....не-ет конечно а как э многие говорят и в казахстане и здесь а в разных городах | они говорят | что есть а-а москва и питэр (питер) и все остальные | а а потом есть настоящая россия|| (0m 20s)

T: ||А почему они так говорят?

S: поэто_ да говорят | что москва это и для москвичей | и а питер это ну это сам по себе | и потом (laugh) есть настоящая россия | и ну я не знаю | это конечно -- э у каждого есть свои мнения а - | но казахстан конечно отличается от россии | у них свои традиции там | больше мусуль-мане (мусульман) | и до сих пор там они - а кумыс (laugh) а пьют | ам - отличается их менталитет | я я думаю | и ну естественно и язык | они на сч (сейчас) более (больше) на казахском языке говорят| ну (sigh) -- ам москва это как конечно больше_ большей город | и / а жизнь здесь а отличается от других городов| ну-у (sigh) я часто путешествовал ну допустим в нижний новгород в саратов| в воронеж| где ещё? | ну в разных городах | и там я думаю | что н-не очень отл_отличается (отличаются) от друг (от) друга они (1m 26s)

Jerry, OPI/AH

T: А как она (жизнь на дальнем востоке) отличается от жизни в москве скажем или в санкт петербурге?

S: ну здесь более тихо (гораздо тише)↑ | более спокойно↑| маленький город↑ | а-ам ---- (sigh) не знаю | может быть здесь не так много людей↑ | не так много ам мероприятий или возможностей↑ не так много музей (музеев) | ам может быть люди более гостеприимные↑ более ам естественные↑ | и ам могу сказать | что -- здесь очень хорошо↑ очень легко общаться с людьми| (0m 33s)

Ann, OPI/S

T: А какие плюсы есть в этой программе?

S: а коллектив хороший и дружный | и то что вот они друг друга вот не то что профессоры друг друга лю-ю-бят или | но они друг другу друг друга ав_ уважают |
и нет таких случаев, о которых я слышала в других университетах, когда
вот один преподаватель говорит: "Ну эта дура там и та та та та и вот нет таких -
сложно-жных отношений, которые бывают в других местах, значит, коллектив
хороший." - И к тому же хорошо работать вместе, - и умеют друг с другом работать.
И и там к тому же я тоже поступила наконец, то поступила туда, потому что мне
сказали: "Хорошо, вы можете и преподавать и учиться; я сомневаюсь в том, что я
поступила бы, если мне сказали бы: "Хорошо приезжайте учиться" а я бы
сказала: "А нет ли работы?" (laugh) Просто потому что мне очень нравится
преподавать и просто там. (XXX) (0m 55s)

T: || Интересно.

Joy, OPI/S

T: Как вы можете сравнить эти два города?

S: Очень хороший вопрос на самом деле. Афины - это тоже университетский город.
Так как Колумбус университетский город, ну и в отличии от Колумбуса, где универ,
университет конечно, не в центре города, не в центре внимания, кроме тех дней,
когда есть футбольный матч. В Афиах же университет это центр города, где
производят [напоминаю как кипятить будет кипятить пиво или воду] непонятно. А
кроме этого просто вот университет и всё. В университете учится двадцать тысяч человек.
Я городе крОме университета в городе живут население двадцати двух тысяч человек.
Так что это ровно половина населения. Это университет студенты, преподаватели. || (0m 40s)
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