

Mapping Missionary Language: Even Novices Can Navigate Some Daily Tasks, But Advanced Proficiency is Key for Long-Term Success

Latitude and longitude are not enough to create a detailed map. Elevation also needs to be measured. Both compasses and sextants are needed.

Language cartographers conducting a language needs analysis (LNA) can determine task frequency and criticality using a compass, but without measuring topography and elevation changes via a sextant or altimeter, the map remains incomplete.

Proficiency scales serve as the sextants that measure task difficulty in the language cartographer’s toolkit

Introduction
Long (2014) claimed that Language Needs Analysis (LNA) tasks need to be examined devoid of “an opaque and psycholinguistically meaningless global proficiency level (p. 76).”

We investigated this claim by using the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines as the sextant to evaluate the difficulty of linguistic tasks.

While some LNA research has been performed on professionals with post-secondary degrees, little research has been done on missionaries whose education levels typically include little or no college.

- Purposes of LNA**
To compile a comprehensive list of mission-critical language tasks by using the following resources to:
- Review existing documentation/material
 - Conduct focus-groups with returned missionaries
 - Interview missionary department administrators
 - Consult experts in language learning

- To categorize missionary language tasks by skill areas:
- Reading
 - Writing
 - Listening/Speaking (Interpersonal)
 - Teaching (Presentational Speaking)

- To classify missionary language tasks by proficiency level using guidelines set by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL):
- Novice
 - Intermediate
 - Advanced
 - Superior

To create a survey that asks missionaries to report how frequently they perform these language tasks

To use survey results to determine the language needs of missionaries

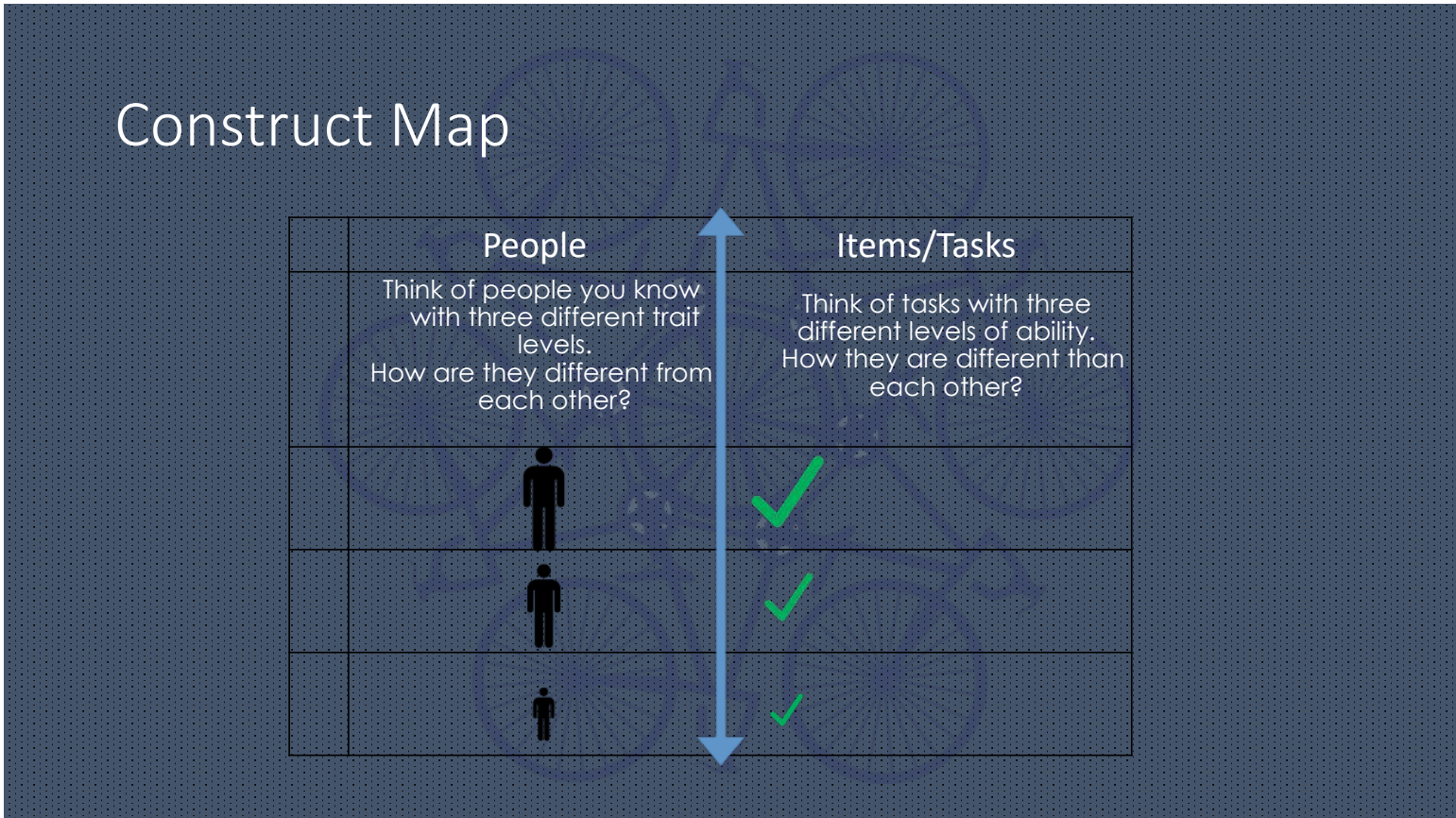
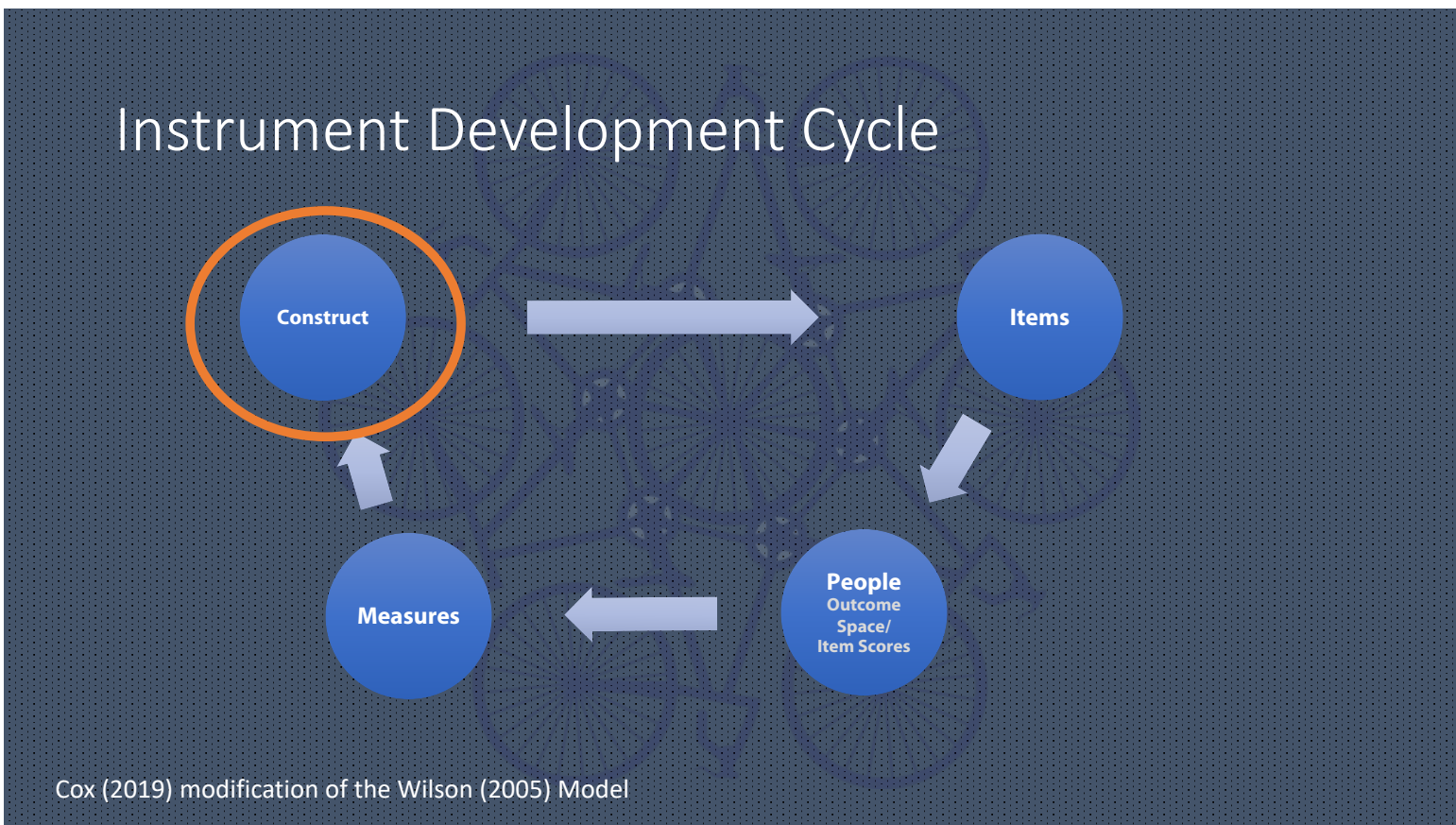
- Research Questions**
- Critical Language Tasks: What are the critical language tasks that missionaries are expected to perform based on current documentation and in actual practice?
 - Task Frequency: What is the interaction between the frequency of the tasks, the ACTFL level, skill area, and the language that is spoken?

Original instrument
37 general statements with 3 examples per statement
4 skill areas
4 proficiency levels

Pilot Testing/Cognitive Labs
Stage 1
Missionaries who spoke only English in South Salt Lake (n=10) were presented with questions
Questions that didn’t work were revised or eliminated
Stage 2
Missionaries who spoke both English and Spanish (convenience sampling) in California and Mexico were presented the questions translated into Spanish
Participants were confused as to which language they should be responding to
Stage 3
Missionaries who spoke English in Arizona (n=40) were presented with questions
Participants were confused about examples vs. statements

Conducting a language needs analysis through a proficiency framework: A Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) case study

Troy L. Cox, Brigham Young University
troyc@byu.edu



Proficiency Model Selected: ACTFL

Level	Novice	Intermediate	Advanced	Superior
Functions	• Communicate minimally • Use formulaic utterances • Produce words, lists and phrases	• Create with language • Participate in simple conversations • Ask and answer questions • Engage in simple transactions	• Narrate and describe in all time frames • Past • Present • Future • Linguistically negotiate situations with complications	• Discuss abstract topics extensively • Support opinion with nuanced language • Explore hypothetical realities vis-à-vis conjecture
Accuracy	Only understood by patient, sympathetic listeners accustomed to nonnative speakers	Understood by people accustomed to speaking to nonnative speakers	Can be understood without confusion by monolinguals not accustomed to speaking to nonnative speakers	No patterns of errors in basic structures. Errors virtually never distract or impede communication
Content	Self	Self Daily Life	Self Daily Life Non-autobiographical topics Topics of General Interest	Self Daily Life Non-autobiographical topics Topics of general interest Abstract topics Figurative language use
Text Type	Words Lists	Sentences Strings of sentences	Oral paragraphs with a variety of text types including the use of complete sentences, transitions, and discourse markers	Extended discourse

Keep your FACTs straight and you are at a major level.

- Findings**
- Even beginning speakers can perform some tasks on a daily basis.
 - Advanced level language proficiency has been empirically shown to be necessary for successful missionary work from a language use standpoint
 - All skill areas including literacy skills are needed to be effective
 - Some tasks that are not frequent are still critical
 - Task frequency did vary by language

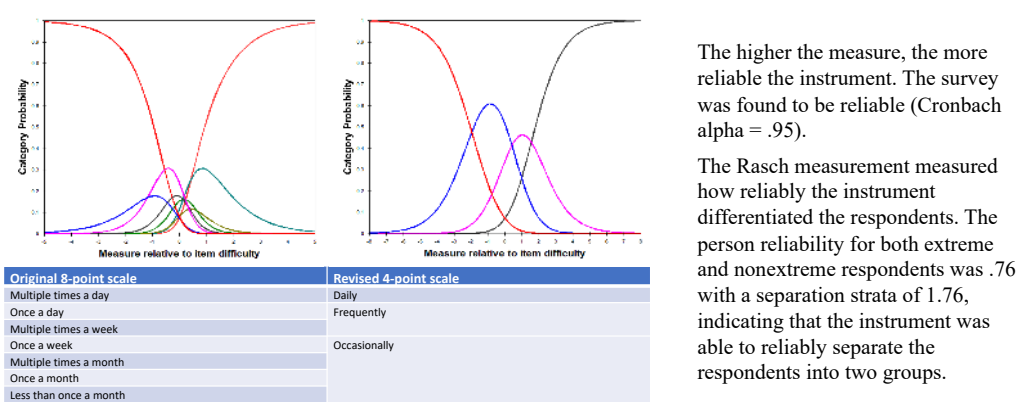
The proficiency scale was invaluable as a tool to aid in developing the instrument and in communicating the findings with stakeholders

Final Instrument
41 specific example questions
Skill Areas
4 Reading
5 Writing
21 Speaking (Interpersonal-L/S)
11 Teaching (Presentational Speaking)
Levels
5 Novice
12 Intermediate
21 Advanced
3 Superior

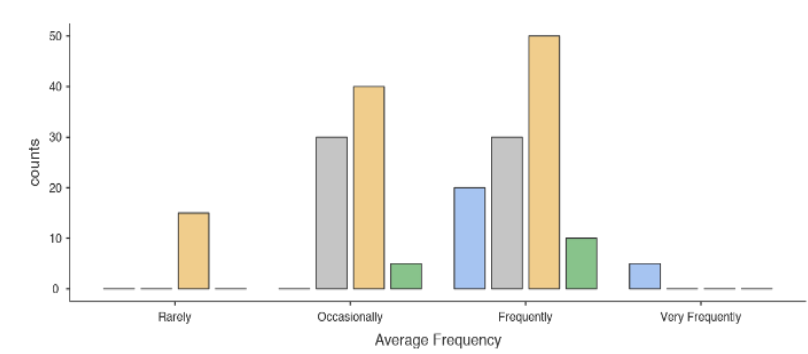
Each respondent was presented with a stratified random sample of 23 questions by ACTFL level.

Survey Respondents
A total of 1,419 in-field native-speaking missionaries participated in the survey. Participants came from 17 areas: Argentina, Australia, Benin, Canada, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, El Salvador, France, Honduras, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Spain, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
693 English-speaking missionaries
572 Spanish-speaking missionaries
96 French-speaking missionaries
83 Japanese-speaking missionaries
24 Chinese (Mandarin)-speaking missionaries.

Rating Scale Diagnostics and Reliability



Frequency of Tasks by ACTFL Proficiency Level



Frequency of Tasks by Skill Area

