Re-thinking assessment of advanced language proficiency (ALP)

1. The role of testing w/in CALPER:
   - Re-thinking LA (language assessment) in accordance with re-definition of advanced proficiency in the other projects (Lantolf, McCarthy, etc.)
   - But also in accordance with previous definitions, theories, research and practices in LA over the years.
   - In the past, LA theories and practice (e.g., discrete point, integrative, communicative, performance) were affected by SLL/A theories, yet, they also defined them (e.g., ACTFL guidelines and Common European Framework (CEF) (Bachman, Cohen, 1998).

2. Why need to re-define? criticism of current assessment practices in ref to ALP (advanced language proficiency): what assessment is NOT?
   - ALP is defined and dictated by rubrics/guidelines (e.g., ACTFL, TLR CEF) as well as others; they dictate proficiency and levels (Fulcher, 2004)
   - Guidelines which were supposed to define levels got institutionalized and became the ‘it’ of language.
   - Guidelines are too narrow, detached from learning context (age, program type, FL, immersion, immigrants, indigenous, purposes, grade levels, classroom, text types, school vs. workplace, etc.); it assumes all learning contexts are the same: one type of assessment fits all.
   - These definitions represent artificial hierarchies, driven by ideologies and wishful thinking, and detached from reality of language development, # of years (e.g., NCLB)
   - ALP does not rely on research on language development and learning esp. in context of academic learning (e.g., immigrants learning) and in the classroom
   - ALP does not examine its consequences, ethical violations, washback, impact on definitions of language, teaching, learning, political motivations, including cutting scores, etc.

*Email: elana@psst.tau.ac.il
• LA affects the very languages that are being taught (NCLB), the criteria of language correction, imposes native speaker criteria as 'the ideal' and language purity.
• LPA does not reflect the kind of traits defined by Lantolf and others in terms of cognition, socio-cultural theories, interactions, etc.
• standardization via the rating scales: who invented them? are they valid? are they real? are they valid? are they real? are there alternative ways of organizing language? how should level be defined? are they hierarchical? are they vertical or horizontal?

4. Current understanding of ALP
• a broad construct: multiple ways of being 'advanced'
• language is embedded in specific contexts
• multi-lingual ways of expression, no defined boundaries of
  'language x and y; multi-modal, multi-code multiple ways of languaging (Kress) (words AND gesture, visuals, clothes, music, signs, etc.)
• multilingualism in the public space (LL) (Graph 5)
• content-based (academic, workplace, etc.) (content affects prof.)
• cognitive, socio-cultural
• language in interaction
• non-hierarchical
• no 'one' correct way of language in terms of grammar, lexicon, accent (English in US vs. w/in and in other countries, per situation, purpose, etc.)
• ideological/political - depends on 'the specific language' in given contexts, for given purposes (e.g., Spanish in the US vs. Spain: Arabic in Israel among Arabs vs. among Jews, related to status, uses, needs, aspired identity in given contexts)

5. Principles of current methods of LA of ALP
• combining contents and language (Graph 1)
• creating realistic expectations of advanced language learners (Graph 2) and different ways of progression
• multiple ways of demonstrating knowledge (performance and others) multilingual, multi-modal assessments: visuals, music, gestures, etc.
• bilingual forms of assessment and other types of accommodations which are needed for processing content and language (Graph 3: bilingual forms, Graph 4)
• expand dimensions of performance even beyond bilingual forms: familiar content, 'simplified' language, graphs, vs. word; cognitive processing (additional data explained in 3-a)
• multiple procedures: alternative, complementary (self assessment,
peer, projects, drama, portfolios, etc. etc. etc., and ...tests??)

- patterns evident from combined measures (portfolios, etc.)
- purpose dependent
- content based
- formal and informal
- context dependent: different assess. procedures for FL, heritage, immigrants, immersion, two ways, age, program, grades, etc.
- social - interactive
- new ways of determining criteria of 'quality ALP'
- refer to processing and development
- relates to learning, assessment and learning affect one another,
- dynamic assessment: minimize different of teaching/testing/ learning
- non-hierarchical and no pre-determined levels
- context/content dependent
- no pre-determined levels
- rejection of 'the native speaker' or even 'educated NN' as criterion
- multiple criteria for correctness
- diagnostic: leading to instructional feedback, strategies, profiles (no meaningful feedback is considered unethical assessment)
- using accommodations (bilingual forms, familiar content, etc.)
- involvement of learners in the assessment
- rubrics: flexible, context, teacher/course based, detailed, not generic
- negotiable, flexible standards
- multiple stake-holders requiring different reporting system
- on-going/continuous assessment as learning is on-going process
- 'expert knowledge' for providing techniques and quality control for assessment
- teachers to provide model items: experts to examine quality criteria
- rejection of 'big testing' as impostor of methods and criteria
- democratic practices; choice of ways to demonstrate knowledge (in terms of methods, topics, content and criteria); visibility of results
- in educational contexts: external/internal + constructive since
- encourages questioning of test uses, results, and critique the values and beliefs inherent in them.
- modesty, nobody knows everything but both parties know something; only via dialoging/negotiating/conferencing can obtain valid patterns
- on the policy level: examination of LA consequences and uses as part of validation: effect of assessment on learning, motivation, definition of language, multilingualism, purity, language to be taught, ethicality and social/political/economic inclusion and exclusion.
6. Future directions

- Methods of scoring type of assessment procedures (e.g., content, multilingual, multi-modal) and new ways of validation
- Research on assessment practices (Cummings, 2004), how tests are used by teachers in classrooms
- Research on accommodations
- Convergent divergent validities in terms of different methods
- Innovative methods of interactions, teaching/learning/assessment
- The need for guidelines/rubrics given their effects on AP definitions, narrowing LP and political drives (Fulcher, 2004)
- Assessment consequences (what happens to TT taking tests? knowledge created by tests? teachers preparing their students for tests? materials and methods used in preparation for tests? decisions made based on tests' results?)
- Innovative types of rubrics or any other method of lang quality
- Contributions of students, teachers, to assessment of ALP
- The necessity of assessment as a separate entity for ALP
- Examine interactions of accommodations: bilingual forms (what causes it? familiar content? simplified language? processing strategies?)

Evidence for claims based on the Graphs presented in the lecture:

Graph 1: How advanced level of academic proficiency varies from one content area (Mathematics) to another (language); because of the interaction of content and language.

Graph 2: How long it takes for immigrants to achieve advanced levels of achievements (proficiency) in language in comparison to native speakers (7 to 9 years for immigrants from USSR, 11 (or never!) for immigrants from Ethiopia. Advanced level in academic subjects is a long process.

Graph 3: How bilingual (2 languages) versions of tests help improve academic scores in comparison to mono-lingual version for immigrants.

Table 3-a: Further data that improved scores: a. familiar topics, b. 'simplified' language'; c. graphs over words; d. cognitive processing.

Graph 4: How the first language is an asset in expression of specific content area.

Graph 5: How two (or more) languages are part of the linguistic landscape of most territories, and therefore should be included in assessments.