The Applied Linguistics & TESOL Program at Teachers College, Columbia University, together with the Educational Testing Service, cordially invite you to

The Second TC/ETS Forum on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment of English Language Learners on the topic of

*New Applications and Challenges in Second Language (L2) Pragmatics Assessment*

Friday, March 4, 2016, from 4:30 to 7:00, Room TBA
Teachers College, Columbia University,
525 W 120th St, New York, NY 10027

The goal of the TC/ETS Forum is to bring together teachers, students, researchers, testing specialists, administrators, and others interested in language assessment topics to listen, explore, discuss, and debate issues and concerns related to the assessment of English Language Learners. This forum features three presentations followed by time for discussion. Wine and cheese will be served.

**Talk 1: Contextualizing L2 Pragmatics as Part of Assessing Communicative Language Ability: Framing a New Video-Based Pragmatics Placement Test (20 minutes)**

Fred S. Tsutagawa, Andrea E. Durkis, & Soo Hyoung Joo
*Teachers College, Columbia University*

Pragmatics involves the study of the conditions of how human language is used and meanings are conveyed across the entire spectrum of contexts and social situations found throughout society (Archer & Grundy, 2011; Mey, 1993). While over forty years of pragmatics research across several academic disciplines has still not led to a complete, unifying construct definition and theory of pragmatic knowledge and ability (Roever, 2011, 2013), second language assessment researchers have come the closest, with
Purpura (2004) and Timpe-Laughlin, Wain, and Schmidgall (2015) offering the most comprehensive and complete treatments to date. This talk will briefly review models of pragmatic knowledge and ability as they relate to the overall construct of communicative language ability, evaluate recent work done in L2 pragmatics testing, and also highlight some of the continuing challenges facing the L2 pragmatics assessment field going forward. A short demo of pragmatics assessment tasks, which are being developed as part of the placement test in the Community English Program at Teachers College, Columbia University, will also be presented in an effort to illustrate how pragmatic knowledge can be operationalized through semi-direct video-based tasks.

Talk 2: Designing a Self-Access Tool for L2 Pragmatics Learning and Assessment (40 minutes)

Veronika Timpe-Laughlin
Educational Testing Service

Heidi Han-Ting Liu
Teachers College, Columbia University

Web-based learning tools have the potential to provide rich situational contexts to enhance second/foreign language (L2) pragmatics learning. However, to date few attempts have been made to leverage this potential. In our presentation, we will share ongoing research that aims to investigate effective design principles for developing a web-based pragmatics learning tool. At the current stage of this research effort, we have developed a prototype that is intended to help adult English language learners increase awareness of English pragmatics in workplace contexts. In the first part of the presentation we will introduce the prototype, which is organized around real-life professional scenarios including a job hunt, an interview, the first day on the new job, and the establishment of a regular job routine. Embedded in this scenario structure are nine learning modules, each of which focuses on a specific pragmatic phenomenon that is important for successful communication in the workplace, such as implicatures, speech acts (e.g., requests, suggestions), and small talk. The tasks and activities completed by the user are immersive and interactive, incorporating extensive audiovisual content to enhance contextualization. Each pragmatics learning module is complemented by an assessment module, designed as an end-of-unit (achievement) test.

In the second part of the presentation, we will introduce the end-of-unit assessment. Specific focus will be placed on the prototype assessment module for the speech act of requests. After briefly outlining the structure of the assessment, we will focus in particular on its interactive speaking tasks, which use spoken dialog systems to assess the L2 learner’s pragmatic performance in a multi-turn conversation. We will present user response samples and findings from a study that investigated how the interactive speaking items and the spoken dialogue system actually performed in assessing L2 requests. Finally, we will discuss the types of request performance evidence that these
items elicit, and how they can be used to expand the construct coverage of a computer-mediated assessment of productive pragmatic ability.

Talk 3: Generalizability Considerations and the Interactionalist Approach to Construct Definition in L2 Pragmatics Assessment: Examining the Trade-Offs (30 minutes)

Kirby C. Grabowski
Teachers College, Columbia University

Throughout its relative short history, L2 pragmatics assessment research has been plagued by a number of issues, most notably with respect to the reliability and generalizability of test scores. In current validation frameworks (Chapelle, Enright, & Jamieson, 2008; Kane, 2003), issues of generalizability ultimately relate back to the constructs being measured. Therefore, a lack of evidence for the generalization inference can be profoundly problematic in any test’s validity argument, but may be particularly so in the case of pragmatics assessments, where the trait being measured is, by definition, context-dependent (Purpura, 2004). Chapelle’s (1998) interactionalist approach to construct definition as well as Chalhoub-Deville’s (2003) call for a construct representation of ‘abilities – in language users – in contexts’ have both provided a theoretical accounting for a certain degree of person-by-task interaction in performance-based tests. Nonetheless, there still remains a tension that is particular to pragmatics assessments in that the influence of the context of use on test-takers’ performance may account for more variance in the test scores than the underlying abilities employed within it. Therefore, traditional metrics for acceptable reliability are often not met, and, as a result, tasks that are highly restricted in terms of context (which are, thus, limited in terms of the universe of generalization they represent) are employed instead in order to maximize reliability. This approach necessarily narrows the scope of the traits being measured and results in a construct of pragmatic knowledge that is often underrepresented and undercontextualized. If language tests really are procedures for generalizing (McNamara, 2006), how can we shift our conceptualization of the construct of pragmatic knowledge in language assessments to account for a strong interaction between context and ability that is theoretically defensible while still allowing the universe of generalization to be relatively unrestricted? To that end, the purpose of the talk is to outline some of the major questions relating to generalizability of pragmatics assessment scores, framed in the context of a performance-based test designed to measure grammatical and pragmatic knowledge in the context of speaking.

Bios

Andrea Eileen Durkis is an Ed.M. student in the Applied Linguistics & TESOL Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. She founded and directed a language
training and translation center in France where she taught EFL, developed curriculum, and worked as a language training consultant for over twenty years. Her clients included multinational industries, public institutions, small businesses, and French public schools. She has recently taught ESL at the American Language Program at Columbia University and is currently a Teacher Mentor for the TESOL Certificate Program in the Community Language Program at Teachers College. She is also Program Associate for the Applied Linguistics and TESOL Program at Teachers College. Her research interests are centered on pragmatics and second language assessment.

Kirby C. Grabowski is Lecturer of Linguistics and Language Education in the Applied Linguistics & TESOL Program at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she teaches courses in L2 assessment, L2 research methods, sociolinguistics, and L2 pedagogy. She is currently working on a book Second language pragmatics assessment (Routledge), and has published journal articles, book chapters, and technical reports, and has given professional presentations on grammar and pragmatics assessment, test development, large-scale assessment, test score generalizability, and the use of discourse analysis in language assessment research. Dr. Grabowski was a Spaan Fellow for the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan as well as a Research Fellow at the Office of Policy and Research at Teachers College. She also received the 2011 Jacqueline Ross Award for outstanding doctoral dissertation in second/foreign language testing from Educational Testing Service for her dissertation entitled Investigating the construct validity of a test designed to measure grammatical and pragmatic knowledge in the context of speaking. Dr. Grabowski was a consultant for the development and validation of the Oxford Online Placement Test (OOPT), a computer-adaptive test, and has consulted on numerous other small- and large-scale testing projects. She is currently on the Editorial Advisory Board of Language Assessment Quarterly and formerly served as Managing Editor of Teachers College, Columbia University, Working Papers in TESOL and Applied Linguistics. She currently serves on the Executive Board for the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) and is on the Organizing Committee for LTRC 2016 in Palermo. She was also the East Coast Organization of Language Testers (ECOLT) Conference Co-Chair in 2014.

Heidi Han-Ting Liu is a doctoral student in the Applied Linguistics & TESOL program at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research focuses on second language assessment, with specific interests in game-/scenario-based assessment, learning-oriented assessment, assessing integrated skills, learner cognition, and psychometric measurement. Heidi has had over 10 years of EFL/ESL teaching experiences in Taiwan and the U.S., and has worked with Oxford University Press and Second Language Testing Inc. on test development projects. She worked at Pearson as a test development intern in the summers of 2013 and 2014, and at Educational Testing Service (ETS) as a research and development (R&D) intern in the summer of 2015. She currently teaches the course Second Language Assessment to students enrolled in the TESOL-Certificate Program at Teachers College. Additionally, she serves as the assistant to the Editor-in-Chief of
Soo Hyo Joo is an M.A. student in the Applied Linguistics & TESOL Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. She has taught ESL and EFL learners since 2008 and co-authored textbooks for middle school students through Seoul Education Research and Information Institute. She co-designed WikiTalki, an android application for peer-feedback on speaking. She currently works as an Outside Item Writer for ETS and serves as the chair for Teachers College, Columbia University TESOL/AL Roundtable. Her research interests focus on second language assessment.

Veronika Timpe-Laughlin is an Associate Research Scientist at the Center for English Language Learning and Assessment in ETS’s Research & Development Division. Originally from Germany, she holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics/TESOL and an M.Ed. in German and English from TU Dortmund, Germany. Parallel to her dissertation, she completed an M.A. in Language Testing at Lancaster University, UK, for which she received the 2012 Caroline Clapham IELTS Masters Award. Prior to joining ETS in 2013, she was a junior faculty member in the Applied Linguistics/TESOL branch of the English Department at Dortmund for four years where she worked and taught primarily in the areas of TESOL, educational assessment/language testing, L2 pragmatics, and intercultural communication. During her years as a faculty member, she also spent a year as a visiting scholar at the University of Hawai‘i where she conducted projects in SL program evaluation and pragmatics assessment. At ETS, her research focuses primarily on pragmatics in English language learning and assessment, the assessment of interactive speaking ability, and new technologies in learning and assessment. Her publications include a book on the assessment of intercultural language abilities (Peter Lang, 2013) as well as articles, book chapters, and research reports in the areas of pragmatics assessment, task-based language teaching and assessment, and the evaluation of L2 learning materials.

Fred S. Tsutagawa is a doctoral student in the Applied Linguistics & TESOL Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. His research focus is on second language testing and assessment, and on the assessment of pragmatic knowledge and ability, in particular. More specifically, he is currently developing a semi-direct video-based pragmatics test to simulate interaction and, thus, elicit and collect speaking performance. He has served on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, instructed mathematics and science for five years in inner city high schools for the Long Beach Unified School District in California, and has been an English lecturer at Seikei University in Tokyo, Japan. He is currently a Doctoral Research Fellow through the Applied Linguistics & TESOL Program at Teachers College, working on various projects throughout the year for Educational Testing Service (ETS).