

Promoting research and best practices to improve the use of English in the emerging global knowledge economy of the 21st century

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Dr. Ching-Ni Hsieh Shares Her Story with TIRF

Editor's note: Dr. Ching-Ni Hsieh was awarded TIRF's 2010 Russell N. Campbell award for being the highest ranked Doctoral Dissertation Grant applicant that year. Parts of this interview have been omitted due to space constraints. To read the interview in its entirety, please [click here](#).



Dr. Kathi Bailey presents a plaque to Dr. Hsieh at the 2011 Language Teaching Research Colloquium

TIRF: Dr. Hsieh, last year, you were the recipient of TIRF's 2010 Russell N. Campbell Award, which is given to the most outstanding applicant each year. The topic of your study was "Rater effects in ITA testing: ESL teachers' versus American undergraduates' judgments of accentedness, comprehensibility, and oral proficiency." What were the main findings of your study?

Dr. Hsieh: My research investigated how ESL teachers and American undergraduate students evaluate potential international teaching assistants' (ITAs) oral proficiency and how they perceive ITAs' accented speech and comprehensibility. The main findings were that the ESL teachers and the American undergraduates did not differ in their judgments of ITAs' oral proficiency, but the undergraduates were more severe in their ratings of foreign accents and comprehensibility. Results of my study indicate that raters' exposure to accented speech, their perceptions and their attitudes toward accented speech, and the approaches used to rate oral proficiency all had important bearings on raters' judgments of ITA speech. My research suggests that in the process of screening ITAs, it is important to ensure ITA tests are fair to multiple stakeholders, including the ITAs themselves, the undergraduate students, and the universities that hire ITAs for instructional purposes.

TIRF: What did you learn about doing research in the process of completing your dissertation?

Dr. Hsieh: Throughout the process of working on my dissertation, I developed invaluable research and writing skills. I learned how to think analytically, how to present arguments in a logical and coherent way, and how to manage time well. I also learned how to write grant proposals and seek external funding for my project. Overall, this process has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had. It not only allowed me to grow and transition from being a student to a scholar, but it also helped me define my professional identity as it developed over time.

TIRF: What is your position at Cambridge Michigan Language Assessments? What does your work involve?

Dr. Hsieh: I joined Cambridge Michigan Language Assessments (CaMLA) right after I defended my dissertation in January 2011. My capacity as an Assistant Program Manager at CaMLA involves developing large-scale, international-level language proficiency tests and conducting research in test validation. One of my current projects involves the development of a new speaking proficiency test, which is my main area of expertise. I am responsible for creating item writer guidelines, reviewing items, developing examiner training manuals, conducting field testing, and writing reports for test validation. I have also assisted in the construction of other examinations developed by CaMLA. My current position provides me with a great opportunity to develop a research program that focuses on reliability and validity issues involved in test development.

TIRF: What are your current research interests, and how did your dissertation influence them?

Dr. Hsieh: My current work focuses on speaking tests, rater effects in performance assessments, and test validity. My dissertation project has helped shape my main research interests in speaking tests and the issues of rater severity and rater decision-making processes. Following from my doctoral dissertation, I continue to investigate sources of rater effects in performance assessments, and I'm currently designing a research plan to examine potential rater effects and the validity of a newly developed rating scale. I'm happy to see that I can translate the skill sets I have developed while doing my dissertation into the real world of language testing.

TIRF: What did receiving the TIRF Doctoral Dissertation Grant mean to you?

Dr. Hsieh: Receiving the TIRF Doctoral Dissertation Grant and the Russell N. Campbell Award was a huge surprise – and a great honor! It feels like an affirmation of certain decisions I have made at various points during my PhD study. But I guess more than anything else, receiving the award is a truly humbling experience – a lot of the credit for my achievement belongs to my mentors and friends who have been very supportive and honest with me. Being recognized by well established scholars in the field of English language education, who comprise TIRF's Research Advisory Committee, also made me feel proud and I am very appreciative.

TIRF: What would you say to someone who is considering donating to TIRF?

Dr. Hsieh: TIRF's research grants have supported so many doctoral students, including myself, to focus on their research without having to sacrifice rigor for want of funds. TIRF's mission and effort to promote scientific inquiries in the field of English language education deserve wider recognition from the field and beyond. I was thrilled when I received the Russell N. Campbell Doctoral Dissertation Grant from TIRF and felt wholeheartedly appreciative to the many generous donors who support this fund. I know the need for financial support for highly qualified doctoral candidates is great. I want to encourage anyone who would like to help young scholars realize their dreams of making a positive impact in the field of English language education to consider donating to TIRF.

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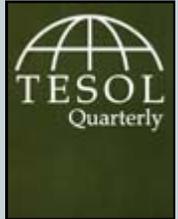


**Kathleen Bailey,
Chair of TIRF**

TESOL Announces Research Publication, Conference, & Virtual Seminars

TESOL Quarterly Special Topic Issue

In September, *TESOL Quarterly* will publish a special topic issue entitled, *Narrative Research in TESOL*, edited by Gary Barkhuizen. Contributors include Bonny Norton and Margaret Early, Kate Cadman and Jill Brown, Cynthia D. Nelson, Karen E. Johnson and Paula R. Golombek, and Janet Holmes and Meredith Marra. For general information on *TESOL Quarterly* special topic issues [click here](#). For further information on subscriptions to *TESOL Quarterly*, please [click here](#).



“Putting Research Into Practice” – TESOL Conference in Doha

In Doha, Qatar from October 1-3, 2011, TESOL, Inc. will be offering a conference entitled, “Putting Research Into Practice.” Along with TESOL, the conference is being organized by university partners in Doha, Qatar; Qatar TESOL; TESOL Arabia; and other TESOL affiliates in the region.

During the three-day conference, experts from across the region and around the world will focus on three critical areas of applied research in the field of ELT: (1) understanding the “good language learner,” (2) bridging the gap between goals and results, and (3) facilitating and supporting ongoing professional development.

For more information on registration, featured speakers, and much more, please go to [the conference homepage](#).

TESOL Announces Virtual Seminars

With its dedication to offer opportunities for professional development, TESOL is pleased to announce two upcoming virtual webinars. Anne Burns’ seminar, “[Research: People, Practices, and Processes](#),” is scheduled for September 13 at 5:30pm (EST). Walt Wolfram’s seminar, “[Integrating Language Variation Into TESOL: Challenges from English Globalization](#),” will begin October 13 at 10:00am (EST).

Registration for the virtual seminars is free to TESOL members; however, registration deadlines apply. Those interested in attending the webinars who are not TESOL members may register for a fee of \$45 per webinar. For more information, please [click here](#).

IRIS: Instruments for Research Into Second Language Learning



IRIS is an exciting new project currently under development in the field of second language research. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) and headed by Emma Marsden at the University of York and Alison Mackey at Georgetown University.

The IRIS repository will collect an extensive range of audio, visual, and written materials, including questionnaires, experimental scripts, interview schedules, and verbal/pictorial/video stimuli.

For further information about IRIS, or to contribute a research instrument to the collection, please contact iris@iris-database.org and visit <http://www.york.ac.uk/education/research/cllr/digital-repository/>.

New Resources Available from TIRF

TIRF is pleased to announce the addition of a new resource on its website. Many scholars, teachers, and graduate students have contributed to the development of a new [annotated bibliography on research methods](#). This resource is stored on TIRF’s website as a free downloadable Word document. Please feel free to share the annotated bibliography with your students, colleagues, or anyone who may be interested.

In addition, many of the TIRF reference lists have been updated and two new lists have been added. They are on [corrective feedback in second language speaking](#) and in [second language writing](#). We are particularly grateful for contributions from Emese Bukor, University of Toronto in Canada; David Chiesa, Hangzhou Normal University in China; Ahmar Mahboob, University of Sydney in Australia; and Tony Vernon, Camosun College in Canada.



New Slidecasts from 2011 LTRC Posted Online

New slidecasts from the 2011 Language Teaching Research Colloquium are now available on TIRF’s Slideshare channel. This past June in Ann Arbor, Michigan, TIRF Board members Mike Milanovic, MaryAnn Christison, and Kathi Bailey were involved with giving presentations related to TIRF’s current research focus at that conference. Please click on any of the following presentation titles to view its Slidecast:

- Nick Saville & Mike Milanovic: [Using quality management \(QM\) to improve language testing](#)
- Kathi Bailey: [Surveying English language assessment practices in international plurilingual organizations](#)
- MaryAnn Christison: [Assessment issues in workplace ESL instructional programs](#)
- Jean Turner: [Workforce language assessment in the 21st century knowledge economy: A QM perspective](#)

Dr. Jean Turner, Professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, was the discussant for the presentations. Dr. Nick Saville, Director of the Research and Validation Group for University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, presented on behalf of his co-author, Mike Milanovic. Dr. Elana Shohamy, Professor at Tel Aviv University, was the moderator. For more on TIRF’s Slideshare channel, please [click here](#).

Report from the Chair — The Busy Month of August

A famous Gershwin song says, “Summertime, and the livin’ is easy.” Don’t you believe it! August has been a very busy month for TIRF!

The Research Advisory Committee and a team of invited reviewers have vetted the proposals for the 2011 Doctoral Dissertation Grants. We will be announcing the winners in the September newsletter. And as noted above, we have produced a newly updated annotated bibliography about research methods. Tony Fitzpatrick and Robert O’Dowd have

been working with the case reports contributed by individuals from around the world for the research report on workforce training programs, and members of the Board of Trustees are preparing for our upcoming Board meeting in New York.

Most importantly, August has been the first half of our two-month push to encourage new donors to contribute to TIRF. Thanks to a matching challenge from an anonymous donor, any contribution of US \$50 or more will trigger a US \$100 matching contribu-

tion. Can you [help us please](#)? We have received several donations from new donors in response to this challenge, but the offer stands for another month. If you have not yet contributed to TIRF, please consider doing so. If you are a donor already, please share this newsletter with your colleagues, students, and other interested parties. Together, we can help build a solid financial base with which TIRF can expand its sphere of influence.

Kathi Bailey