The International Research Foundation
for English Language Education

Title of Project:
Re-Envisioning Assessment of Inter-language Pragmatics (ILP)
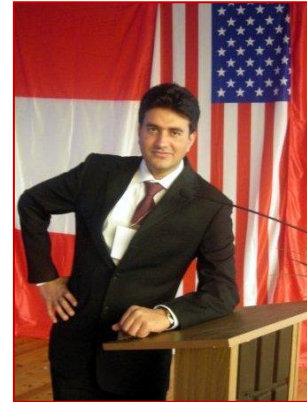through Computer Mediated Communicative Tasks

Researcher:
Iftikhar Haider
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
haider3@illinois.edu

Research Supervisors:
Fred Davidson
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
fgd@illinois.edu

Melissa Bowles
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
bowlesm@illinois.edu

Iftikhar Haider

Project Summary:

Assessment of inter-language pragmatics (ILP) knowledge is still a new and understudied area of research. Some researchers (Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1992, 1995; Roever, 2006; Walters, 2007) have played an important role in advancing the field, but their theories have followed a speech act framework often criticized for pragmatic construct under-representation (Grabowski, 2009; Roever, 2011, Youn, 2013). Methodologically, past studies mainly used closed role-plays based on predetermined interactional outcomes. Kasper and Rose (2002) doubted the validity and authenticity of closed role-play tasks. Moreover, an empirically-driven analytical rating scale (Fulcher, Davidson, & Kemp, 2011) was not used by researchers in the past. In order to address these research gaps, this project combines task-based L2 assessment, L2 pragmatics and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) to assess the pragmatic knowledge of L2 users of English. Using mixed methods (Greene, 2007), qualitative and quantitative evidence will be provided to support test inferences. A thorough needs analysis is conducted first through semi-structured interviews and then through an online survey by involving different ESL stakeholders at a large Midwestern university. The results of the needs analysis helped to determine appropriate role-play situations. Sets of communicative role-play tasks are developed following Davidson and Lynch's (2002) test specification theory. Role-play cards are used to enhance standardization, and test-takers are allowed to communicate naturally without following fixed interactional outcomes. A diverse group of graduate ESL students completed email role-play tasks. Two native-speaking raters will evaluate the pragmatic ability of test-takers and assign scores using an empirically-driven analytical scoring rubric. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this dissertation project is situated at the intersections of language assessment, SLA, and CMC, and offers a unique approach that promises a more nuanced understanding of assessment of ILP.