

**Researcher**

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**Title of Project**

Assessing Second Language Pragmatic Competence for  
Intercultural Communication: The Case of Pre-sessional  
Students in UK Higher Education

**Research Supervisor**

Prof. Talia Isaacs  
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**TIRF Research Topic Investigated**

Language Assessment

**Bio**

Shishi Zhang, is a Ph.D. Candidate at University College London. Her Ph.D. project is on assessment of second language pragmatic competence in the spoken medium for intercultural communication in the academic domain. The project specifically targets U.K. pre-sessional students and draws on the Socio-Cognitive Framework for test development and validation.



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**Project Summary**

Second language (L2) pragmatic competence, which governs social and interactional dimensions of language use, is an essential component of L2 proficiency and shapes communication success. However, despite the past four decades' efforts in assessing pragmatic competence, challenges remain, including assessing pragmatic-relevant skills transferrable to real-life language use and developing purpose-built assessments to facilitate this. The goal of this multi-phase study is to develop a needs-driven assessment tool of L2 pragmatic competence for intercultural communication in speaking in the academic domain, targeting U.K. pre-sessional students. The study is the first to assess intercultural pragmatic competence by tapping *metapragmatic awareness*—that is, students' ability to reflect on and calibrate utterances and meanings, taking into account the interlocutor and communicative goals while mediating linguistic/cultural differences to establish a common ground for communication (McConachy, 2018). This study thereby adopts a broader and more transferrable construct of L2 pragmatic competence than what is covered by current pragmatics tests. Adopting a pragmatist stance and drawing on the Socio-Cognitive Framework (O'Sullivan & Weir, 2011), this mixed-methods study employs an exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to develop a user-friendly prototype assessment tool that could be used in exit testing at university language centers following further validation. The tool will comprise (1) instructions on intended uses of the assessment, (2) group discussion tasks assessing pragmatic knowledge and use, (3) video analytical tasks assessing metapragmatic awareness, (4) rating scales co-developed with pre-sessional teachers, and (5) an assessment/feedback reporting template for students.