

# CONFERENCE REPORT

---

The 34<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference and Educational Materials Exposition of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) was held from October 31 to November 3, 2008 in Tokyo at the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center. The conference was held in conjunction with the Pan Asian Consortium (PAC7). The theme was *Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads*.

Following are some highlights of just a few of the pragmatics presentations that were on offer at the conference.

**Noriko Ishihara** of Hosei University, Japan  
*Teacher-Based Assessment for Foreign Language Pragmatics*  
[ishi0029@umn.edu](mailto:ishi0029@umn.edu)

Ms. Ishihara reported on a case study she conducted in her university EFL classroom of the results of explicit teaching of the pragmatics of requesting in discourse. In week two of the course, the learners were assigned to write dialogues for a role play in which a student asked a professor for an extension of the due date of a paper. This assignment was used as a baseline to compare another role play of the same scenario written six weeks into the course. Ms. Ishihara discussed how the teacher assessment and feedback were given, both on the learners' initial self-reflection of their awareness of appropriate request forms and the ways in which this awareness developed during the six weeks of the case study.

**Jill Murray** of Macquarie University, Australia  
*Teaching Pragmatics for Test Preparation*  
[Jill.Murray@ling.mq.edu.au](mailto:Jill.Murray@ling.mq.edu.au)

Ms. Murray is one of the designers of a program for the Australian government's Department of Education which aims to prepare overseas trained English language teachers in Australia for The Professional English Assessment for Teachers (PEAT). She reported on the explicit teaching of pragmatics to a group of such teachers. The specifications of the PEAT test determined the course contents, which covered such theory areas as speech acts and speech events, politeness, pragmatic transfer, and many others. Ms. Murray explained the teaching cycle, gave examples of teaching materials (scenarios and simulations), and evaluated the program. She closed her presentation by posing some questions regarding the teaching of pragmatic competence:

- as “a kind of socialization into the norms and practices of a speech community”
- and the relevance of ‘nativelike’ pragmatic competence to the rise of English as an international language.

**Seiji Fukazawa** of Hiroshima University, Japan

*Pragmatic Needs Analysis of Japanese EFL Learners in Study Abroad Contexts*

Mr. Fukazawa reported on a study of Japanese EFL learners during their study abroad experiences in the UK with the aim of identifying their pragmatic needs in such contexts. Additional purposes of the study were “to examine the cases of pragmatic noticing” and “to get baseline data for developing the pre-/post study abroad program.” The study found that the most challenging communicative situations were with the learners’ homestay host families (53%) compared to classroom situations or socializing with peers. The most difficult speech act situation was to explain Japanese culture. The second most difficult was requests, and the third most difficult was complaints.

**Tim Greer** of Kobe University, Japan

*Observing talk: How to hold a CA data session*

[tim@kobe-u.ac.jp](mailto:tim@kobe-u.ac.jp)

In his workshop, Mr. Greer first explained how Conversation Analysis (CA) approaches data taken from naturally-occurring talk. He discussed such key concepts as adjacency pairs, action sequences and third turns. Then, he led workshop participants through a mini CA data analysis session. The data featured Japanese speakers of English taking an oral proficiency test. While analyzing the data, workshop participants were asked to keep in mind the fundamental question of “Why this now?” To understand the pertinence of this question:

- ‘this’ means to name the object under scrutiny (a pronoun, a pattern of intonation, a question), for example, the object under scrutiny is labeled as ‘teasing’ by Speaker X.
- ‘now’ means a point or spot or slot in the development of the conversation. What is the importance of any utterance occurring in any given point to the development of the interaction?
- ‘why’ pertains to “how a piece of talk is functioning.” Instead of speculating about the intentions of a speaker, consider what a given utterance might be doing and how it is regarded and responded to by other participants in the interaction.

**Sybil Armstrong** of Kansai Gaidai University

*Desperate Housewives in an EFL Classroom*

[sarmstro@kansai-gaidai.ac.jp](mailto:sarmstro@kansai-gaidai.ac.jp)

Ms. Armstrong discussed how she used a popular American television show, *Desperate Housewives*, in her Japanese university classes as a vehicle for the teaching and learning of pragmatics in social interaction. She explained how an eleven chapter handout for the students was created that followed a particular strand of the plot of the program during its first TV season. She ended her presentation with proposed revisions to the course to create a more task-based activity that would involve students more in the activity and perhaps further develop their ability to notice pragmatic aspects of conversational interactions.