Prag-IC Symposium
**20 June 2025**

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
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# Symposium on Bridging Pragmatic Competence and Interactional Competence

We would like to warmly welcome you to the University of Queensland for this one-day symposium on “Bridging Pragmatic Competence and Interactional Competence”. Advancements in the conceptualisation of pragmatic competence and interactional competence, as well as the empirical studies conducted under these frameworks in the recent years, have significantly deepened our understanding of how L2 learners navigate the dynamic, multifaced, and fluid nature of talk-in-interaction. While these models have evolved with distinct theoretical orientations, there has been a growing recognition that pragmatic competence and interactional competence are significantly intertwined and overlapping. This symposium seeks to create a dialogue that bridges the divide and further highlight the reciprocal and complementary nature of pragmatic competence and interactional competence, and how they can be more effectively integrated into both theoretical models and practical applications for L2 acquisition, teaching, and assessment.

Chilmeg Elden, Michael Haugh, Noriko Iwashita and Anh Nguyen
(Symposium Organisers)

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# Symposium on Bridging Pragmatic Competence and Interactional Competence

## Friday 20 June 2025

Venue: 07-222 Learning Theatre, Parnell Building, UQ St Lucia

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| **8:00-8:30** | Registration |
| **8:30-8:45** | **Official Opening** |
| **8:45-9:15** | **Studying Ongoing Calculation of Ostensibility Across Turns: Integrating the Study of Pragmatic and Interactional Competence**<br>Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, *Indiana University*<br>Yunwen Su, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign* |
| **9:15-9:45** | **Reconsidering Politeness Routines/Formulaic Expressions in Relation to Interactional Competence**<br>Matthew Burdelski,<br>*University of Hawai'i at Mānoa & Osaka University* |
| **9:45-10:15** | **(Im)politeness Reciprocity in Language Teaching Textbooks**<br>Vittorio Tantucci, Raffaella Bottini & Jonathan Culpeper,<br>*Lancaster University* |
| **10:15-10:30** | Morning Tea |
| **10:30-11:00** | **Revisiting Pragmatic Competence through the Lens of Social Action**<br>Michael Haugh & Chilmeg Elden, *The University of Queensland* |
| **11:00-11:30** | **Interactional Competence and the Sequential Organisation of Group Discussions in L2 Classrooms in Japan**<br>Kazumi Namiki, *Rikkyo University* |
| **11:30-12:00** | **Interactional Competence in Action: Boundaries in Tellings**<br>Julie Bouchard, *Université du Québec à Chicoutimi* |
| **12:00-13:30** | Lunch Break |
| **13:30-14:00** | **L2 Learning in Action: Participation, Membership, and the Competences that Sustain Them**<br>Tim Greer, *Kobe University* |

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| **14:00-14:30** | **Communicator's Agency and Pragmatic Competence from Conversation Closing Remarks**<br>Lili Gong, *Guangdong University of Foreign Studies* |
| **14:30-15:00** | **Meta-pragmatic Competence Manifested in AI-generated Responses to Online Customer Complaints**<br>Ping Liu, Linlin Yang, Jialiang Chen, Dongheng Yang & Liangli Wang,<br>*Guangdong University of Foreign Studies* |
| **15:00-15:15** | Afternoon Tea |
| **15:15-15:45** | **Measuring L2 Interactional Competence:**<br>**A Comparison of Human and AI-mediated Roleplay Assessments**<br>Yunwen Su, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*<br>Xi Chen, *Nanyang Technological University* |
| **15:45-16:15** | **Pragmatic Competence in Interactional Competence Assessment: Insights from a Systematic Review of Recent Research**<br>Noriko Iwashita & Anh Nguyen, *The University of Queensland* |
| **16:15-17:15** | **Discussion** |
| **17:15-17:30** | **Closing Remarks** |

**The University of Queensland**

**School of Languages and Cultures**

# Book of Abstracts

## Symposium on Bridging Pragmatic Competence and Interactional Competence

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# Studying Ongoing Calculation of Ostensibility across Turns: Integrating the Study of Pragmatic and Interactional Competence

Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, *Indiana University*
Yunwen Su, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champagne*

One of the points at which the study of pragmatics and interactional competence (Young, 2019) intersects is in the turn-by-turn negotiation of ostensible speech acts. Ostensible speech acts are intentionally insincere and often unfold during several turns-in-interaction. Ostensible refusals open with a turn that resembles a refusal and, over a series of turns in which the "refuser" assesses the sincerity of the offer, come to accept what was offered. At the same time, the "offerer" must assess the sincerity of the refusal and whether to repeat the offer.

This paper explores the online interpretation of Chinese ostensible refusals. Although production data show how refusals-as-acceptances in Chinese are resolved across turns by L1 speakers and English-speaking learners of L2 Chinese (Su, 2021), until recently, there was no processing account for such resolutions. The ability to distinguish between genuine and ostensible speech acts had been investigated exclusively among L1 speakers by asking them to rate the "goodness" of speech acts based on written transcripts (Link & Kreuz, 2005).

This talk will discuss how two novel discourse gating tasks designed to probe listeners' ability to distinguish ostensible from genuine refusals and the point in the conversation at which recognition takes place (Bardovi-Harlig & Su, 2024) is crucially an investigation of interactional competence. Using turns as gates, the tasks explore interpretation as the turns build, presenting the conversational stimuli aurally to listeners turn-by-turn and asking them to make predictions about the outcome of each conversation. Listeners volunteer their predictions as soon as they can make them (Task 1) or respond to prediction prompts to make a choice (Task 2). Responses from 60 L1 speakers and 47 L2 learners show that listeners do not immediately recognise pretence and thus may not immediately collude or act on mutual recognition but arrive at interpretations through interaction.

# Reconsidering Politeness Routines/Formulaic Expressions in relation to Interactional Competence

Matthew Burdelski
*University of Hawai'i at Mānoa & Osaka University*

Over the past several decades, a mainstay of studies in pragmatics has been politeness (Brown & Levison, 1987), including those investigating politeness routines and formulaic expressions. During this time, CA scholars, most famously Schegloff (1992, 1999), have critiqued the relevance of pragmatics (e.g., speech act theory, politeness) to the CA project. Meanwhile, research on social interaction in pragmatics has widely recognised that politeness routines and formulaic expressions are among the stock of resources and practices that language users need to acquire and, most importantly, be able to deploy in contingently relevant and socioculturally appropriate ways. As recently argued by Pillet-Shore (forth.), rooted within a legacy of work in CA on "routines" (e.g., Schegloff, 1986) there is actually very little that is "routine" or "formulaic" about social interaction: every exchange is an "interactional achievement".

This presentation bridges work on pragmatic competence and interactional competence, advancing an argument that politeness routines/formulaic expressions, usually viewed in CA as adjacency pairs/paired social actions (e.g., gratitude-acceptance, greeting-greeting), can better be conceptualised in terms of interactional competence – as a public phenomenon that is distributed among multiple parties. The data presented is a single case analysis from an emergent multilingual Japanese child (6 years old), who is also learning English as an L2 and two Indonesian languages as his heritage languages (Bahasa and Manado Malay). The episode focuses on the distributed production of a gratitude expression in Bahasa Indonesian (*terimah kasih*), that reveals the multimodal, multiparty, and multimodal accomplishment of this expression. Although I focus on a single episode, I will also briefly touch upon the longitudinal aspect of the child's development of interactional competence; some aspects of this development could be gleaned from the single episode (e.g., turn design, social action of accounting), whereas other aspects were confirmed from my conversations with the child's parents.

# (Im)politeness Reciprocity in Language Teaching Textbooks

Vittorio Tantucci, Raffaella Bottini, and Jonathan Culpeper
*Lancaster University*

English language textbooks are central in second language (L2) learning, often providing most of the L2 input. Proficient learners are likely to access a wide range of examples of real-world spoken language use (e.g., television programmes, university lectures) with more chances to acquire effective pragmatic and interactional competence. By contrast, less proficient learners are often exposed mainly to the language of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, which rarely focus on spoken pragmatic competence and (im)politeness (e.g., Gablasova & Bottini, 2022; Hughes & Reed, 2017; Le Foll, 2022; Timmis, 2012). Our focus is on EFL textbook dialogues and the way they represent (im)politeness reciprocity in British English. The Principle of (Im)politeness Reciprocity (PIR) (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021) involves the interactional expectation of an equal balance of (im)politeness across speakers, for instance, a markedly polite request such as *Could you please* is normally expected to be responded to with a markedly polite reply, (*yes, not a problem*) rather than just a neutral one (*yes*). Power imbalances play a crucial role (Culpeper et al., 2022) and often influence the degree of (im)politeness responses in different contexts. For this study, we will deploy mixed effects Bayesian regression and Network analysis to look at whether EFL Textbooks' dialogues enact reciprocity in the same way as found in spoken corpus data. We will control for context, power relations, (im)politeness across turn sequences and other co-variants to examine whether higher textbook proficiency levels correlate with more accurate representations of the PIR in naturalistic British interaction. Based on the existing literature on reciprocity in British English, we will be focusing on requests (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021), thanking strategies (Culpeper et al., 2022) and greetings (Tantucci et al., 2018). This is the first study concerned with the teaching of pragmatic competence from the perspective of (im)politeness reciprocity and how this is managed across turns. We discuss the practical implications of our findings: how they can inform language teaching and materials development, as well as teacher training.

# Revisiting Pragmatic Competence through the Lens of Social Action

Michael Haugh and Chilmeg Elden
*The University of Queensland*

Despite significant advancements in L2 pragmatics, many studies of L2 pragmatic competence continue to rely on the original sociopragmatic-pragmalinguistic distinction proposed by Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983). While this conceptualisation of pragmatic competence has provided a useful framework for understanding the importance of form-function relationships and appropriateness in L2 pragmatics, the framework is conceptually rather than empirically motivated, and so has been difficult to operationalise in the teaching and assessing of L2 pragmatic competence. On the other hand, studies of interactional competence that draw on CA methods to investigate the accomplishment of social actions in interaction have largely been focusing on the generic orders of interaction – turn-taking, action formation, sequence organisation, preference organisation, repair and so on – that are the focus of CA more generally, and have largely eschewed considerations of appropriateness. And in both cases, there has tended to be a focus on a relatively narrow range of actions (e.g., apologies and requests). While there have been moves to integrate the two distinct views (e.g., Roever, 2021; Taguchi, 2019), and to examine a broader range of actions (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2015; Bardovi-Harlig & Su, 2021), there remain gaps in the conceptualisation of pragmatic-interactional competence. In order to start trying to address these gaps, this paper employs empirical data to identify various dimensions of pragmatic competence, rather than attempting to develop a theory of pragmatic competence in a top-down fashion. It focuses on troubles-remedy sequences, where Saudi L2 English speakers deploy troubles-complaints to mobilise some form of remedy or assistance from their interlocutors across various kinds of institutional settings (Alshammari & Haugh, 2024, 2025, forthcoming). Through examining the different dimensions and layers of these troubles-remedy sequences, the paper aims to lay the groundwork for the development of a more interactionally grounded approach to L2 pragmatic competence.

# Interactional Competence and the Sequential Organisation of Group Discussions in L2 Classrooms in Japan

Kazumi Namiki
*Rikkyo University*

This study explores the features of conversational sequences in English discussion activities, focusing on learners' interactional competence (IC) and teaching possibilities in a foreign language classroom. Following the emergence of the concept of pragmatic competence in the late 1980s, learners' ability to interact in dynamics has gained increased attention in second language acquisition (SLA) research (Roever & Kasper, 2018). Recently, discussions regarding developing IC in a second language (L2) and teaching methods have become more prominent (Pekarek Doehler, 2021; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2015). This study will analyse audio and video data from 10 groups of English learners at a Japanese university, each consisting of three or four members. The length of each conversational data set was about five minutes, and it was conducted as a class activity. This study uses applied conversation analysis (CA) as a framework for examining the specific features of conversational organisation, such as turn-taking and repairs. While the participants were explicitly instructed on some target discussion phrases in class over four months, the analysis revealed that they effectively used them, resulting in smooth turn-taking during discussions. Additionally, the learners utilised the target phrases and actively engaged in co-constructing conversations using non-verbal cues such as back channels and eye contact. Furthermore, this study will highlight the potential development of L2 interactional competence as observed in classroom activities, referring to previous research in this area. Open discussions from the floor will be appreciated as the analysis is ongoing.

**Interactional Competence in Action: Boundaries in Tellings**

Julie Bouchard
*Université du Québec à Chicoutimi*

In relation to interactional competence (IC) and intersubjectivity, Young (2019, p. 97) identifies 3 types of resources deployed by the participants to attain intersubjectivity: identity resources, linguistic resources, and interactional resources. For this presentation we will investigate the interactional resource he identifies as boundaries. More specifically, the boundaries surrounding telling episodes and how they are deployed will be discussed. This presentation draws on data collected in a grade 9 EFL classroom in the province of Quebec, where the participants are French native speakers learning English as part of the school curriculum. From this data, episodes of tellings were identified and analysed using conversation analysis methodology. A clear pattern emerged: sequentially, the students are first working on a task in English; they then move on to actions that are not related to the task, either because the task has been completed or progressively in a stepwise manner (Sacks 1995) when the discussion moves away from the task and the students stop working on it. Then a student initiates a pre-telling in English and will change code after receiving a go-ahead and do the telling in French. This code alternation shows how the participants grasp the construction of tellings and has the effect of contrasting the talk before and after the switching point (Auer 1984), making the beginning of the telling itself more salient. Two episodes will be presented supported by audio data. The findings contribute to the research on small group interaction in the language classroom and how learners use their linguistic and interactional resources to navigate tellings.

**L2 Learning in Action: Participation, Membership, and the Competences that Sustain Them**

Tim Greer
*Kobe University*

Participation is an integral part of interactional competence. Competent members of a group demonstrate their membership through their ability to fully participate in the practices and rituals of that group, and newcomers are socialised into the group via reoccurring routines that are played out through the organisation of talk. Interactional competence and pragmatic competence both provide evidence of the extent to which a person can participate within a particular (sub)culture. This presentation builds on research into second language interaction in learners' lifeworlds, extending beyond the classroom to consider (1) how interactants draw on a range of ecologically available resources to co-accomplish participation and membership, and (2) how such participation affords newcomers with an expanding repertoire of resources, including linguistic elements and new participatory practices. Through conversation analysis of naturally occurring interaction between novice and expert speakers of Japanese and English, this presentation demonstrates how pragmatic and interactional competence manifest in real-time conversations, highlighting the sequential and ecological aspects of language use. The analysis will show that language learning is more complex than the mere provision of linguistic input: new lexical items and practices emerge within the interactants' respective lifeworlds in relation to locally situated contingencies, and can be occasioned and explained via recourse to a range of material and embodied affordances beyond just language. Interactional competence, therefore, is sequentially and ecologically located in the broader business of an ongoing sociality and primarily serves the two key interactional imperatives of progressivity and intersubjectivity. A key part of this involves pragmatic competence, including the real-time co-accomplishment of both actions and action ascription. Therefore, despite their epistemological and methodological differences, pragmatic competence and interactional competence share a range of compatible features that both account for and unpack forms of participation and membership within talk.

# Communicator's Agency and Pragmatic Competence from Conversation Closing Remarks

Lili Gong
*Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*

Second language (L2) pragmatics focuses on the differences in pragmatic strategies utilised by L2 users in contrast to native speakers, with the objective of improving the pragmatic competence of L2 users. Research on L2 users' comprehension of specific communicative acts is limited, particularly concerning their perceptions of communicative behaviours and the impact of interactive subjectivity on their pragmatic performance and discourse patterns in interaction. This research investigates conversation closing remarks (CCRs) through the use of questionnaires and situational feedback reports to gather data on the key insights and diverse adaptive interpretations of CCRs among L2 users. This study examines the practical interpretations of L2 usage as informed by communicators' perceptions in various contexts. The findings demonstrate that L2 users exhibit varied discourse realisations of CCRs and develop unique pragmatic interpretations shaped by situational adaptations. Moreover, CCRs tend to elicit complex and negative emotions, including fear, anxiety, and embarrassment, when performed in a second language, as users view this action as engaging but prone to adverse consequences. The ambivalence stems from the communicator's comprehension of performing a specific communicative act, leading to the adoption of certain discourse patterns in interaction, which are associated with their agency in perceptions of L2. This study offers a communicator-centred perspective to clarify issues concerning L2 pragmatic competence and enhances the field of interactive agency in second language pragmatics.

# Meta-pragmatic Competence Manifested in AI-generated Responses to Online Customer Complaints

Ping Liu, Linlin Yang, Jialiang Chen, Dongheng Yang and Liangli Wang
*Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*

This study investigates the meta-pragmatic competence manifested in AI-generated responses to online customer complaints. Drawing on a comparative corpus of AI-generated responses and human agent responses to negative customer reviews, we examine how AI employs meta-pragmatic expressions and demonstrates meta-pragmatic awareness and competence in managing complaint interactions. The analysis reveals six types of meta-pragmatic expressions in AI responses, particularly verbal act descriptions (e.g., "Let me explain"), epistemic and evidential adjusters (e.g., "According to our records"), and message glosses (e.g., "In other words"), among others. These linguistic resources serve as indicators of AI's meta-pragmatic awareness across three dimensions: metacognitive awareness (monitoring information processing), metarepresentational awareness (understanding complainants' intentions and attitudes), and metacommunicative awareness (managing interaction). Building on these findings, we identify four dimensions of AI's meta-pragmatic competence: linguistic form monitoring (awareness and control of language use), communicative intention comprehension (understanding and responding to users' intentions), contextual adaptation (adjusting responses according to specific business contexts), and interactional norm management (regulating communication according to social and institutional norms). The findings suggest that while AI demonstrates competence in managing rapport through these dimensions, its effectiveness is influenced by various contextual factors, including the complexity of complaints, the diversity of user needs, and the specificity of business contexts. This study contributes to both theoretical understanding of meta-pragmatic competence in artificial intelligence and practical insights for optimising human-AI interaction in customer service contexts.

**Measuring L2 Interactional Competence: A Comparison of Human and AI-Mediated Roleplay Assessments**

Yunwen Su, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*
Xi Chen, *Nanyang Technological University*

Recent research on the assessment of speaking highlights interactional competence (IC) as a key construct. Studies have shown that IC can be measured through various interactional features (e.g., Ockey et al., 2023; Roever & Kasper, 2018; Youn, 2020). Assessing IC typically involves tasks that prompt meaningful, interactive language use, such as roleplays and discussions. However, such tasks often require another speaker, which may reduce practicality (Ockey & Chukharev-Hudilainen, 2021) and increase rating complexity (Su & Shin, 2024), alongside interlocutor effects (Galaczi & Taylor, 2018). This mixed-methods study investigates the potential of using generative AI as an interlocutor for assessing IC in L2 English by comparing it with a native-speaking human peer interlocutor. The research addresses: (1) how interlocutor type (human vs. AI) impacts the severity and consistency of IC ratings; (2) differences in interactional features elicited by human versus AI interlocutors; and (3) raters' perceptions of AI interlocutors. Forty test takers completed a 6-item roleplay task targeting refusals of requests, invitations, and offers with a native-speaking human and an AI interlocutor (ChatGPT-4) two weeks apart. Four trained raters assessed the audio-recorded performances using a data-driven rubric covering two IC domains: Interactive Listening (supportive listening, comprehension efforts, smoothness, repair) and Sequential Organisation (position, modification, justification, context awareness). Many-Facet Rasch Measurement (MFRM) compared IC ratings across interlocutors, raters, scenarios, and domains (RQ1). Interactional features were manually coded and analysed quantitatively (correlations, multiple regressions, discriminant analysis) to identify reliable predictors of IC scores (RQ2). Finally, thematic analyses of rater interviews explored their perceptions of human versus AI interactions (RQ3).

# Pragmatic Competence in Interactional Competence Assessment: Insights from a Systematic Review of Recent Research

Noriko Iwashita and Anh Nguyen
*The University of Queensland*

Since Kramsch's (1986) seminal work, the concept of interactional competence (IC) has been continually developed within second language (SL) pedagogy and assessment over the past three decades. IC encompasses general linguistic knowledge and the ability to deploy context-specific communicative strategies, including managing participant roles and navigating interaction (e.g., Hall & Pekarek Doehler, 2011; Ross, 2018; Young, 2008, 2011). As IC becomes increasingly central to speaking assessments, research has identified its core components, integrated them into assessment tasks, and embedded them in rating scales across diverse settings (Galaczi & Taylor, 2018). However, despite the expanding literature, the field lacks a comprehensive synthesis, and the assessment of IC in multicultural contexts remains challenging due to linguistic and cultural complexities.

While pragmatic competence has long been a focus of language assessment research, its relationship with IC—though conceptually distinct—has become increasingly intertwined. Pragmatic competence, which addresses the appropriate use of language in social contexts, is now often considered within the broader construct of IC, particularly in contemporary assessment practices.

This paper draws on data from a systematic review of research on the assessment of IC to explore how pragmatic competence is conceptualised and operationalised within this domain. Employing the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021), the review focused on studies published between 2019 and 2024 and identified 60 eligible publications. Thematic analysis revealed four main themes: (1) key features of IC, (2) factors influencing its development and performance, (3) interactional modes, and (4) research methodologies. Turn-taking—especially in non-verbal interactions—emerged as the most frequently examined among IC features. Qualitative approaches, particularly conversation analysis, predominated, although mixed-methods designs are gaining traction. Several studies employed role-play tasks, traditionally associated with pragmatic assessment, and examined speech acts as part of their analytic frameworks.

These studies were situated across various contexts, including face-to-face, virtual, and high-stakes testing environments. This review contributes to a more holistic conceptualisation of IC in speaking assessment and clarifies the interplay between pragmatic and interactional competence. It offers insights for developing more effective assessment tools and educator training materials, providing practical recommendations for evaluating IC in multicultural settings and outlining directions for future research.