

# TIRF TODAY

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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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**Editor's note:** In this piece, we highlight the work and resources of CRELLA.

The [Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment \(CRELLA\)](#) at the University of Bedfordshire is a research centre focused on language proficiency and language assessment. CRELLA was established in 2005 with the appointment of Professor Cyril Weir to the Powdrill Chair in English Language Acquisition. Since then, CRELLA has worked to build a research base, and it is now the largest specialist university research centre in language assessment in the UK.

The Centre offers scholars, examining boards, and government organizations, both domestic and overseas, a centre in Britain that can assist in and provide quality research and development in the areas of English language learning and assessment. A major area of Centre activity is research into the nature of and improving methodologies for measuring English language proficiency. Research consultancies provided by the Centre in English language testing and evaluation are currently helping to develop foreign language testing in a number of countries. Recent projects involving CRELLA staff have included work for the Association of Language Testers in Europe, the British Council, Cambridge English Examinations, Trinity College London, the Language Training and Testing Center in Taiwan, Language Testing (Password), the Society for Testing English Proficiency in Japan, the Ministry of Education in Singapore, and Ministries of Education across the Russian Federation. To see a list of current research projects underway at CRELLA, [click here](#).

CRELLA's research program is grounded in the innovative socio-cognitive framework for language test validation first articulated in Weir's (2005) *Language Testing and Validation: An Evidence-based Approach*. Since 2005, the socio-cognitive framework has been steadily elaborated and refined. It has been applied by both CRELLA specialists and others, in the UK and throughout the world, to achieve positive outcomes for language pedagogy and assessment. Research consultancies provided by CRELLA have assisted in the progress of foreign language testing in a wide range of international contexts. This growth is possible through the application of the framework for a variety of purposes in the assessment of English and other languages. Developing test specifications through a clearly defined validation framework helps provide a platform for collecting formal evidence to construct a sound validity argument. The application of the framework has proved valuable for examination boards and ministries of education in the UK, Turkey, Macedonia, Russia, Mexico, Taiwan, Singapore, and Japan as a theoretical and practical basis for defining

and operationalizing second language proficiency levels.

To support research into language testing and assessment, CRELLA has developed a specialized library of resources, available to all staff and students. These tools include a large bank of research articles, specialist software and CD-Roms, and an extensive range of specialist books. In addition, CRELLA houses the Professor John Trim Archive, a unique collection of papers on language testing and assessment documenting the development of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which is available to scholars and students. In 2009, CRELLA also benefited from the donation of the Lancaster University Research Group Archive, an extensive collection of testing materials created over the last thirty years.

CRELLA also hosts a free "webzone" with extensive resources on language assessment, which can be accessed from all over the world ([click here](#) for access). CRELLA is continually expanding its website to make its work more accessible to the global assessment community. The website offers free resources and publications relating to language testing and assessment. These resources include (1) *Links to Testing and Assessment Organizations*, which features websites useful for language testing research; (2) *Links to Testing Resources*, which contains online research articles and online analysis tools useful for language testing research; (3) *Presentations*, which includes downloadable talks from conferences and seminars by CRELLA staff; (4) *Useful Publications*, which has articles by CRELLA staff; and (5) *The Socio-cognitive Approach to Validating Language Testing*, which lists published works related to CRELLA's socio-cognitive approach.

Under *Research Seminars and Conferences*, a list of past and future CRELLA research seminars and presentation slides are available to download, along with some recorded talks. Under *CRELLA Student Resources*, there is a catalogue of CRELLA library books available for loan.

CRELLA annually holds three international research seminars in March, in July, and in December or January. These free events began as in-house seminars at which CRELLA staff, MA students, and PhD students offered short research papers. However, since 2011, the program has expanded to invite attendance from across the UK to discuss matters related to language assessment, with prominent external speakers at each event. The seminars have also gained interest from international scholars in the field of language testing and assessment. This year, the research seminars are on the theme of "Academic English: Towards More Effective Assessment." More information on upcoming seminars, past seminars, and presentation slides is available by [clicking here](#).

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**TESOL in Dallas, March 20-23**



**Advanced registration closes March 1st!**



**Kathleen Bailey,  
Chair of TIRF**

## IRIS: Instruments for Research Into Second Languages



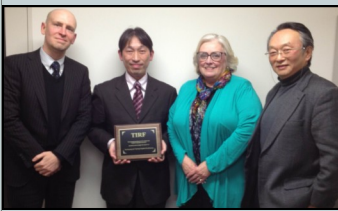
*Editor's note: In this piece, Dr. Alison Mackey, Professor at Georgetown University, shares information about IRIS.*

For those interested in how second and foreign languages are learned and taught, a new freely accessible repository of data collection tools is now available. The database, known as [IRIS \(Instruments for Research Into Second Languages\)](#), is host to all types of instruments, such as communicative tasks, interview protocols, language tests, observation schedules, pictures, questionnaires, software scripts, sound and video files, teaching intervention tasks, URLs, word lists, and working memory tests, among many more types of materials used to elicit data.

IRIS is searchable by author, research area, instrument type, age of learners, language being learned, first language, and type of instruction, among many other parameters. Researchers can upload and download materials that have been used to collect data for published research. IRIS contains materials from a wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives. The system also has the active support of several international journal editors, as well as research and teaching associations.

IRIS aims to enhance the visibility and transparency of primary research tools, facilitating replication and research agendas across different contexts. It is also

### TIRF Trustees Meet with Representatives of EIKEN



**From left to right, Todd Fouts, Mitsuo Kimura, Kathi Bailey, and Kensaku Yoshida**

Earlier this month, TIRF Trustees Kensaku Yoshida and Kathi Bailey met with representatives of the [EIKEN Foundation of Japan](#) in Tokyo. (In English, EIKEN is known as the Society for Testing English Proficiency – STEP.) Yoshida and Bailey

presented a plaque in appreciation of EIKEN's support

### TIRF Posts New Resources to Its Website

On the Foundation's website you can find many helpful resources. For instance, the summaries of completed research funded by TIRF are available in three categories: [Doctoral Dissertation Grants](#), [Priority Research Grants](#), and the [Sheikh Nahayan Fellowships](#).

You can also access a wide range of [journals](#) in fields related to language and linguistics, as well as links to several [like-minded organizations](#). There is an extensive [annotated bibliography](#) on language classroom research, teacher research, and research methodology. You can find information about [grants and fellowships](#) from organizations with missions similar to TIRF's and information about [awards](#) for graduate research offered by various organizations.

### Report from the Chair — See Y'all in Dallas!

March is now upon us and seasons are changing around the globe. The long winter is giving way to spring for some, while the cool winds of fall are blowing for others.

Regardless of the season coming your way, March always holds one major event I look forward to every year — the international TESOL Convention. The conference is undoubtedly an excellent time to learn new teaching strategies, to find out what's new in language assessment, or to engage in discussions about

second language acquisition. It is also a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new ones.

At this year's Convention, I would like to invite all old and new friends to attend TIRF's presentation on Thursday, March 21st from 10am to 11:45am in room C-150 of the Dallas Convention Center. Dr. Denise Murray and TIRF Trustee Dr. Mary-Ann Christison will give a presentation on TIRF's forthcoming publication regarding online language

intended to improve the profession's ability to evaluate validity and reliability, and to enhance research capacity, particularly among students, teachers, and early career researchers.

Areas that can be explored with the instruments available on the IRIS website include the effectiveness of diverse instruction types, the underlying processing and acquisition of second languages, and the geographical or sociocultural contexts and classrooms in which second languages are used and learned. Instruments to investigate stakeholder opinions about language use and teaching, as well as tools for linguistic and cultural identity, are available on the IRIS site.

IRIS became operational in August 2012 and already contains over 170 instruments that members of the L2 research community have voluntarily uploaded, many of them from very frequently cited studies. The work of around 500 authors is featured on IRIS. As of this writing, here have been more than 1,200 downloads from IRIS, by language instructors, students, and faculty members. The database has had over 5,000 visits to date.

The IRIS project is supported by grants from the [Economic and Social Research Council](#) (Swindon, UK) and the [British Academy](#) (London, UK) to Dr. Emma Marsden and Professor Alison Mackey at the University of York and Georgetown University, respectively.

of TIRF's programs over the years to Mr. Mitsuo Kimura, the Executive Director and Secretary General of EIKEN, and Mr. Michael Todd Fouts of the Research and Test Development Section of EIKEN. The EIKEN group was one of the earliest organizations to support TIRF.

Aside from developing and operating the most widely used [English proficiency test in Japan](#), EIKEN makes grants available to researchers and language teachers. Additionally, the Society provides local teachers' organizations and schools the opportunity and financial support to invite well known Japanese TEFL scholars and practitioners to give lectures and organize workshops. EIKEN is now celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Finally, you can find free downloadable [reference lists](#) on over 110 topics of current interest to language teachers, researchers, and policy makers. The newest additions to this collection are reference lists on needs analysis; English as a medium of instruction; formulaic language; multilingualism and plurilingualism; writing for academic purposes; the practicum; and the use of movies, videos, and radio in the language learning classroom. We are grateful to the following individuals for their contributions to this collection of helpful free tools: Mansoor Al-Surmi, Graham Crookes, Andy Curtis, Keith Folse, Melanie van den Hoven, Joyce Kling, Florin Mihai, Kerry Purmensky, Laura J. Taylor, and Gergana Vitanova. Please write to [info@tirfonline.org](mailto:info@tirfonline.org) to contribute to TIRF's reference list initiative.

teacher education. Their presentation is entitled, [A Case for Online Language Teacher Education](#).

We are planning on having a fifteen-minute "meet-and-greet" time before the talk to catch up with one another over coffee and hot tea. It is my hope that you will bring a friend and join us for TIRF's talk. So this March, I'll see y'all in Dallas!

*Kathi Bailey*