

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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In this Issue:

Interview with DDG Recipient Ms. Kimberly Woo	1
TIRF Trustees at the International Language Conference in China	2
A First-time Donor Talks about TIRF — By Ryan Damerow	2
Chair's Report — The Challenge of Challenge Grants	2

Interview with DDG Recipient Ms. Kimberly Woo



Kimberly Woo (right) with her advisor Dr. Lorena Llosa

Editor's note: *The Russell N. Campbell Award is given each year to the top-ranked Doctoral Dissertation Grant (DDG) applicant in TIRF's annual DDG competition. The 2013 Russell N. Campbell Awardee was Ms. Kimberly Woo, who was interviewed by MaryAnn Christison, TIRF Trustee and Chair of the Foundation's Research Advisory Committee. Commenting on the interview with Ms. Woo, MaryAnn said, "It was a great pleasure meeting Kimberly at the Language Testing Research Colloquium in Amsterdam in June 2014. She is an educator and teacher at heart and also an excellent example of a young scholar doing important research in the field. It is wonderful to know that TIRF has played a role in moving her forward in her career. I hope you enjoy learning more about Kim and her research, and we also hope that getting to know a DDG awardee on a personal level encourages you to support young scholars in the future through your donations to TIRF." Here's the interview.*

1. Tell us a little about yourself and your background.

I come from a family of educators and had originally planned to be an elementary school teacher. Shortly after I began to teach, I realized I wanted to focus on working with English language learners. While completing coursework for ESL certification, I worked as a substitute teacher and found myself administering a variety of standardized tests across grade levels. These experiences led to a growing interest in how English language learners in early grades are assessed, which I then pursued in my doctoral studies.

2. What were the main research questions for your study?

My study explored how standardized English proficiency tests and teachers of young English language learners, respectively, define and measure children's social language. The study also examined how ratings of students' social language compared when they were rated according to tests' criteria or teachers' criteria.

3. Why is your research important to the field of language assessment?

My study is important to the field of language assessment because it highlights a population and a construct that aren't often talked about. Especially in the context of standardized language testing, the needs of language learners under the age of 13 frequently aren't discussed because they are believed to be too young to be assessed in a meaningful or valid way. However, this point of view overlooks the fact

that in practice young language learners are regularly being assessed for a variety of purposes, and that such assessments do inform some relatively high-stakes decisions. Furthermore, even though it's recognized that learning how to engage in social interaction is important for young learners, the current educational landscape only places priority on language for academic purposes and this focus is reflected in assessment.

4. What did you learn about doing research while completing your dissertation?

Completing the dissertation has shown me that research really is an ongoing process and that there is always more that can be done. Even though I have finished my dissertation, I am always thinking about my data and realizing that there are always more connections that can be made, more angles for data analysis and interpretation, and more questions to be asked.

5. What plans do you have for the future?

I plan to revisit some of the data from my dissertation for publications and presentations and to look more closely at some of the unexpected findings that emerged. I am not only a researcher but also an educator and a teacher, so I would like to be able to both share my findings with teachers and also bring some insights from teachers into conversations with test developers.

6. What advice would you give people who are thinking about pursuing a PhD?

I would tell anyone who is thinking about a PhD to consider research topics right away — topics that are important or meaningful on a personal level, as well as significant to the field. Working on a dissertation requires a lot of patience and persistence, and it helps to have questions that you are connected to and are invested in answering.

7. What would you say to someone who is considering donating to TIRF? Why do you think it's important for language professionals to support TIRF?

To potential donors, I would say that there are many young scholars and researchers in the field who need your support, and TIRF is one of the few places we can get it. The funding provided by TIRF is a valuable resource that helps young scholars pursue research and support professional opportunities that would otherwise be difficult or even impossible on a graduate student's salary. Funding for even seemingly small things, such as incentives for classroom-based research or hiring transcription services, can be the difference in whether or not a study can be completed.

Due to space restrictions, several questions and answers have been omitted from this newsletter piece. To read the interview in its entirety, [please click here](#).

TIRF Trustees at the International Language Conference in China

On June 5 and 6, 2014, two TIRF Trustees participated in the International Conference on Language — Enhancing Language Ability and Language Education in Suzhou, China. The conference was organized by the Ministry of Education (MOE) of The People's Republic of China (PRC) in partnership with UNESCO. The venue of the conference was the Taihu International Conference Center in the beautiful city of Suzhou, which is well known as the Venice of the East.

This conference focused on three main themes: language ability and sustainable social development; language ability and innovation in language education; and language ability and international exchange and collaboration. More than 450 attendees — government ministers of education, linguists, educators and international development partners — contributed to and benefited from the program's plenaries, panel discussions, and network sessions. In addition, a special feature of the conference, "Suzhou Conclusions," provided a synthesis of the discussions at the closing session.

Jun Liu gave his presentation on language policy, in which he speculated on the future of English vs. Chinese. Jun said, "I was very happy to participate in this interna-

tional gathering of teachers, researchers, and language policy makers, which was held in my own hometown. I was particularly delighted to see so many colleagues and scholars who I usually see at different conferences and in other communities. It is the power of language that brought us together."

Joe Lo Bianco, one of the conference organizers, gave the closing plenary. He reiterated key messages that were delivered throughout the two-day conference via a one-page summary called "Suzhou Conclusions," synthesizing various perspectives, view points, and controversies around the three themes. He pinpointed the interdisciplinary synergies shared, while directing the audience's attention to the future implications of language ability in the era of globalization.

The Foundation was well represented at this International Conference on Language. We hope that TIRF's influence will be expanded in future international conferences in China and other parts of Asia.



Jun Liu (left) with Joe Lo Bianco in Suzhou, China

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Kathleen Bailey,
Chair of TIRF

A First-time Donor Talks about TIRF — By Ryan Damerow



Ryan Damerow (left) with Courtney Pahl

What motivates a first-time donor to give to TIRF? To answer this question, I interviewed Ms. Courtney Pahl, who responded to the Foundation's midyear appeal with an online contribution. This was Courtney's first donation to TIRF.

Courtney said, "As a Masters Candidate in TESOL, I used some of [TIRF's resources](#) — particularly the [reference lists](#) — while I was doing my own research for my graduate courses. I also subsequently contributed to the reference list on [study abroad research](#), so I feel a connection to the Foundation and I've benefited from the information TIRF makes available to language professionals."

"Additionally, my first publication in our field was in TIRF's commissioned study on [English language training programs](#)," Courtney added. "I also co-authored an article that was influenced by TIRF's research."

Now, Courtney has a new reason to be grateful to TIRF. Until recently, she has been teaching English as a

second language courses at Oregon State University. Now, however, she is going to Saudi Arabia to work for the Saudi Electric Services Polytechnic to design, develop, and implement an English language outreach program for Saudi women.

"I've taught EFL before, in both Chile and Brazil," Courtney said, "and I've had Arabic-speaking students in my ESL classes in the United States, but working with all Arabic speakers in Saudi Arabia will be a new experience for me. For this reason, I was very excited to learn about TIRF's book about research on teaching and learning English in the Arabic-speaking world. I'm sure those studies will be useful to me in the months ahead as I take on my new role. For all these reasons, I felt it was important to give back to TIRF."

As Courtney is a first-time donor to the Foundation, her gift triggers a matching donation from TIRF Trustees in the amount of \$200. We still have yet to meet our goal of attracting new donors to TIRF via our midyear appeal challenge. In sharing this story, I hope that more of our prospective donors will do as Courtney has done, and act to support TIRF, our mission, and our efforts to improve English language education around the world.

Chair's Report — The Challenge of Challenge Grants

What is a "challenge grant"? This term refers to a philanthropic fundraising strategy in which a person or group of people agree to provide funding if certain conditions are met. In general, the trustees of charitable foundations use challenge grants as a way of leveraging contributions to their particular organizations.

This strategy has been adopted by TIRF's Trustees to support the Foundation's 2014 mid-year appeal. For every new donor who contributes \$100 or more to TIRF by August 31, the Trustees will contribute an additional \$200 to TIRF. Thus contributions from new donors at this time are particularly welcome!

The Trustees agreed to support this challenge grant for the gifts of the first 25 new donors, and as of this writing, we have not yet reached that goal. Please can you help? If you are already a TIRF supporter, would you share this newsletter with others and tell them about your commitment to helping the Foundation? If you are not

yet a donor, please think about the impact your gift can have if you respond to the new donor challenge any time in the month ahead.

Challenge grants are a wonderful tool for philanthropic organizations like TIRF, but ironically they present a particular challenge to fundraisers: how to get potential donors to take up the challenge! We understand that giving personal funds to support public initiatives is not universal. We also know that building a culture of donating depends on our stakeholders' financial capability in deciding whether to give. While the notion of donating one's money to a nonprofit organization may not be common in all the cultures in the world, the work TIRF does has an impact on people around the globe. Also, we continue to encourage our supporters to see how much an organization like TIRF can accomplish with many small gifts from individuals such as yourself. There truly is no gift too small; it is not uncommon for us to receive gifts at the

\$20 or \$30 level. We welcome such donations as much as larger ones.

Gifts to TIRF can be made by sending a check drawn on a US bank to the address on this newsletter. It is even quicker and easier to [make a donation online](#), which can be done from almost anywhere in the world.

I hope you will find the interview with Courtney Pahl to be motivating, as she has shared with us her reasons for becoming a first-time donor. And let me add a bit of etymology for the linguists among our readers. The word *philanthropy* comes from the Greek *philanthrōpía*, meaning love for humankind. You can express your concern and care for others in our field by giving to TIRF. Whether you are a long-term supporter or a first-time donor, your gift will be greatly appreciated and carefully used.

Kathleen Bailey