Conventional expressions are one type of pragmalinguistic resource used to realize speech acts. Conventional expressions are illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), indicating the speech act, such as an introduction “Nice to meet you” or a reciprocal closing “Have a nice day” “You too!” Second language pragmatics researchers have investigated conventional expressions from two perspectives, language testing (Roever, 2005) and SLA (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). This paper explores the methodological networks of SLA research and language assessment in the development of an empirically-based pragmatics assessment task that facilitates large-scale testing of learners, especially in EFL contexts, with the dual goals of evaluating acquisition and informing instruction.

Drawing on both testing and SLA research we designed an empirically-based aural multiple-choice DCT (MC-DCT) that targets learners’ ability to identify conventional expressions. Earlier multiple-choice pragmatics tasks (e.g., Roever, 2005) were short (12 items), had limited authenticity, were written, and used researcher-created distractors. The new test employed 20 observationally-based oral DCT scenarios from Bardovi-Harlig (2009). The favored NS conventional expressions and interlanguage alternatives from learners in an earlier study were selected to create four grammatical, aural options for each item. The test is easier to administer and evaluate than an oral DCT but yields similar information, while maintaining the conversational attributes of an aural-oral task.

In the first round of testing, the MC-DCT was completed by 134 second year college students from three Chinese universities (Authors, 2019). Learners scored a mean 7.38/20 suggesting that the test was very difficult (but not as difficult as the oral DCT on which they scored 5.05/20). The MC-DCT used the audio files of the conventional expressions and alternatives from learners with a variety of L1s. Distractor analysis showed that some frequently selected nontargetlike responses overlapped lexically with target conventional expressions; some distractors were rarely selected.

This paper reports the results of the second administration, which tested a revised aural MC-DCT. The new test maintained the 20 scenarios, but revised the alternatives by resolving all lexical overlaps with target conventional expressions and replacing all highly disfavored options with other alternative learner-produced responses collected in the first administration. Additionally, the distractors were re-recorded using native speakers, following Shin, Lyster, and Lee (2019) who showed that learners from a range of L1s scored higher on NS-produced items than on L1-accented items, even when the accent is their own. Male and female voices alternated for maximal differentiation of the choices. The task was adapted for COVID-19 procedures through web-delivery of the answer-sheet with remote teacher control of the audio-visual task.
Learners heard and read the scenarios, but only heard the choices which were played twice (a-d) as the letter indicating the selection appeared on the screen.

The revised test was administered to 30 NS and 120 EFL students at a Chinese university. Preliminary results show higher internal consistency of the test and higher agreement among NS. Comparison to oral production data suggests that the empirically-driven MC-DCT with audio responses reliably tests knowledge of L2 conventional expressions for both research and instructional purposes with greater practicality.

References


Shin, S.-Y., Lidster, R., & Lee, S. (2019, March). *Examining the effects of foreign-accented lectures on an academic listening test at the item level using differential item functioning analysis*. Paper presented at Language Testing Research Colloquium (LTRC), Atlanta, GA.