Is Pragmatics Creative?

Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig

This talk addresses two readings of the question "Is pragmatics creative?" On the first reading, taking *Pragmatics* to be the field of study that includes language use, I hope to show that the designing of conversation simulation, comprehension, and interpretation tasks is indeed a creative (and exciting) endeavor. On the second reading, taking *Pragmatics* to be the object of study, I will explore the balance of creative and formulaic language use to realize speech acts. In the course of the talk, I will demonstrate the means by which we can confidently identify formulaic language use in pragmatics, study the use of conventional expressions by both learners and native speakers, and determine what expressions learners have been exposed to and how they interpret them. Intensity of interaction in the target language outside of language classes leads to more exposure to conventional expressions and hence better recognition, but for production, target language proficiency coupled with intensity of interaction leads to the use of conventional expressions. This is illustrated by the interlanguage versions of conventional expressions used by learners in both L2 English and L2 Chinese. Within classrooms, learners benefit from corpus-based instruction, including both teacher-developed corpus-based materials and teacher-guided hands-on corpus searches by learners. While many studies explore learners in host environments, recent studies of formulaic language have begun to investigate EFL learners, raising the question of whether formulaic language can be acquired outside speech communities that use the particular formulas. To that end, we will also consider a test designed for use in large-scale evaluation of formulaic language in FL programs for needs assessment and instruction. The presentation will show that both the study of pragmatics and the development of pragmalinguistic resources is creative in the innovation of design, tasks, and instruction, as well as in the grammatical underpinning of formulaic language.