



# Ways of seeing: The individual and the social in applied linguistics research

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**12:45 – 14:00**  
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**(Chair: Dr Andy Gao)**

## **Abstract:**

There is now a long-standing opposition between so-called 'individual' and 'social' approaches to a range of issues in applied linguistics research. This opposition is often viewed as an ideological matter. There is also some consensus that the opposition might be resolved through concepts such as the 'social individual' or 'person-in-context'. In this paper I will take a different perspective by asking how changing trends in Applied Linguistics research methodologies may have influenced our thinking on these issues. The title of the paper alludes to art critic John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972) and its opening comment: 'Seeing comes before words... It is seeing that establishes our place in the surrounding world'. Like works of art and their reproductions, research methodologies involve particular ways of seeing the subjects of or participants in research that exclude others. Arguing that we are in a period of transition from an era of 'learner-centredness' to one of 'person-centredness', I suggest that this transition is largely a consequence of new ways of seeing language learners that are closely linked to a shift from quantitative to qualitative methodologies in the field.

## **About the speaker:**



**Professor Phil Benson** is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University. His main research interests lie in applied linguistics and, especially, in informal language learning beyond the classroom in multilingual settings. He is the author of *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning* (Pearson, 2011) and has co-edited several collections of papers on autonomy and out-of-class learning. His interest in language learning beyond the classroom has recently led to research on multilingual lives and identities, study abroad and international students, and the roles of popular culture and new digital media in language learning.

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