Ways of seeing: The return of the individual to Applied Linguistics research?

Those who have advocated ‘social’ approaches to applied linguistics have often been critical of the ‘individualism’ of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. This presentation identifies the emergence of a more balanced view of the social and individual in recent work. Adopting Berger’s (1972) metaphor of ‘ways of seeing’, it offers a history of applied linguistics based on three eras: the era of ‘the invisible learner’, the era of ‘learner-centeredness’, and the era of ‘person-centredness’, which we are now entering. It suggests dominant research methodologies have led to the particular ways of seeing language learners that are characteristic of each of the three eras. In spite of the critique of individualism, the preference for individual case studies in social approaches is leading to a new theoretical focus on the individual that may be best captured by the term ‘person-centredness’.