



Seminar 1

Multilingual identity in the languages classroom: Implications for promoting and enhancing language learning

30 March 2026 (Mon) | 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 n.n. | Room 107, Ho Tim Building, CUHK

Abstract

Schools are becoming increasingly linguistically, culturally and socially diverse spaces; this has implications not only for the identities of migrant students who are learning the language of their new country, but also for those engaging in language learning in the classroom at all stages of proficiency. In this talk, Prof. Forbes explores why a new dimension of pedagogy can help all learners to fully understand their own and others' linguistic repertoires (whether learned in school, at home or in the community) and to recognise their agency in being able to claim a multilingual identity.

Prof. Forbes will draw on both quantitative and qualitative data from a series of studies conducted as part of a large-scale, four-year research project (MEITS: Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies) involving languages teachers and over 2,000 students from secondary schools in England. Prof. Forbes will start by introducing the concept of multilingual identity, which she theorises as being shaped by 'three Es' (i.e. learners' *experiences* with languages and language learning; their *evaluations* of languages and language learning; and their *emotions* in relation to languages and language learning) and reflecting on why this matters for schools. Prof. Forbes will then introduce an innovative package of research-informed, identity-based pedagogical resources for schools, which has been shown to help students develop their multilingual identity by building knowledge about languages, raising awareness and promoting reflexivity (see wamcam.org) and draw on quantitative data which explores links between multilingual identity and attainment in school. The findings from this project have important implications not only for enhancing attainment, but also for encouraging social integration and creating an inclusive, multilingual school community.

Seminar 2

Cross-linguistic transfer of learning strategies between first and foreign language classroom contexts: Making a case for a multilingual approach to writing pedagogy

31 March 2026 (Tue) | 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 n.n. | Room 107, Ho Tim Building, CUHK

Abstract

In an increasingly multilingual world, empirical knowledge about the reciprocal influence between the mother tongue and a learner's acquisition of additional languages is crucial yet remains surprisingly scarce. In this talk Prof. Forbes will explore the potential contribution of foreign language teaching to the development of writing skills more generally. Prof. Forbes will draw on quantitative and qualitative data from a classroom-based intervention study conducted in a secondary school in England to provide insights into how adolescent learners develop and transfer language learning strategies within and between foreign language (FL) and first language (L1) contexts.

While there is evidence in the literature to suggest that the effective use of strategies can be of great benefit to learners, the vast majority of this research has taken place within a single context of either L1 or FL education and has had a tendency to neglect the potential interactions between the two. In addition, it is almost taken for granted within the literature that any reference to transfer between these two contexts implies the one-way transfer of pre-existing skills and strategies *from* the L1 *to* the FL. The focus of this study therefore emerged from a hypothesis that the reverse may be equally, if not more effective; if the use of writing strategies is explicitly developed within the FL classroom, then it seems logical that this knowledge could not only benefit FL writing tasks, but may also positively affect L1 writing. In light of this, Prof. Forbes will consider students' conceptualisations of writing in both the L1 and FL classrooms, provide an overview of the intervention which introduced an explicit focus on developing writing strategies, and explore the multiple directionalities of transfer which emerged: from the L1 to the FL, between two FLs, and from the FL to the L1. Pedagogical implications will also be discussed, which call for a collaborative and multilingual approach to writing pedagogy where L1 and FL teachers work together to encourage and facilitate connection making across language contexts.

Speaker: Prof. Karen Forbes (University of Cambridge)



About the speaker

Prof. Karen Forbes is an Associate Professor in Second Language Education in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. She previously taught modern languages in secondary schools in England before completing an MEd and then a PhD in Second Language Education at the University of Cambridge. Prof. Forbes's current research interests include school language policies, multilingual identity and the development and transfer of language learning strategies. She was part of the Education strand of a large AHRC-funded project on multilingualism which explores the influence of multilingual identity on foreign language learning and Principal Investigator on a British Academy funded project exploring language policies in linguistically diverse secondary schools in the UK. Prof. Forbes has published in a range of journals including the *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *Research Papers in Education* and *Language and Education*. She is also a member of the editorial board for the *Cambridge Journal of Education*.

