



Departmental Seminar

Brain, Language and Literacy Development – Insights into how they Interact from Monolingual and Bilingual Speakers of English, Cantonese and Mandarin

Abstract

Children's early language development is fundamentally tied to both the kind of input they receive from their immediate environments as well as dynamic changes in brain structure and function. At the same time, brain development is highly sensitive to specific features of the languages and literacy experiences that children receive even before they enter school. This talk will provide a window into how children's language and literacy experiences interact with, are shaped by, and in turn shape brain development. It will present data on children learning different languages, highlighting some fundamental differences in early language and literacy development and how those differences shape neural networks that support language processing. It will include data from longitudinal and experimental studies of language development in Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the U.S. to explore the roles that factors such as parental education or household income can have on language and brain development, and how parents' interactions with their children can ameliorate these effects. Reading to young children and introducing them to literacy materials at an early life is one important way that parents can ameliorate these effects, but for bilingual families under time crunches, the question is "in what language"? I will present some recent data from Singapore's longitudinal cohort which has some surprising findings for relations between brain development and later achievement when parents choose to read in "Mother Tongue Languages" (usually Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil) rather than English (the language of schooling in Singapore and increasingly a dominant home language).

Date:
18 November 2025 (Tue)

Time:
2:30 pm - 4:00 pm

Venue:
**Room G6, G/F,
Ho Tim Building, CUHK**

Language:
English

ALL ARE WELCOME



Registration Deadline:
17 November 2025

Speaker

Prof. Twila TARDIF

National University of Singapore / University of Michigan

Professor Twila Tardif is Professor in the Department of Paediatrics at Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore. She is also Professor Emerita of Psychology and Asian Languages and Cultures and faculty associate of both the Lieberthal- Rogel Center for Chinese Studies and the Center for Russian and Eastern European Studies at the University of Michigan. She is former Director of the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies, Associate Dean for the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, and Director of the Center for Human Growth and Development. She received her PhD from Yale University, and was a Fellow in the University of Michigan Society of Fellows, Associate Professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Visiting Scholar at Nanyang Technological University, as well as on the Scientific Advisory Council of the Singapore Centre for Chinese Language. Her primary research interests explore relationships between language, culture, and cognition with a focus on early language learning and predictors of reading in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. Her work includes naturalistic, experimental, and brain-imaging studies in children and adults. She has led large, international research teams in the norming of vocabulary and syntax instruments, the longitudinal development of Chinese children from Hong Kong, Beijing, and rural China, and has examined language and reading development in Chinese- and Spanish-English bilinguals.