

# 2026 Hong Kong International Forum on Language Aptitude

## Programme Book



Scan me!

Date: 28–30 May 2026  
Venue: N203 & N201  
PolyU West Kowloon Campus, 9 Hoi Ting Road,  
Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, Hong Kong

### Acknowledgement:

This conference is fully supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No.: UGC/IDS24/H05/25; PI: Dr. Zhisheng WEN; Co-Is: Prof. Shaofeng LI, Prof. Zhenguang CAI, Prof. Mark Feng TENG, Prof. Jing YANG).

### Supporting Organisations:

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## Conference Information

### About the Forum

**The 2026 Hong Kong International Forum on Language Aptitude: New Frontiers in Research and Application** is organised by the School of Professional Education and Executive Development (PolyU SPEED) and hosted by the Division of Languages and Communication (LC) and the CPCE Centre for Pedagogic Research (CPCEPR) of the College of Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

This event is fully supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No.: UGC/IIDS24/H05/25), awarded to Dr. Zhisheng Wen (Principal Investigator) of PolyU SPEED. The Co-Investigators are Prof. Shaofeng Li (PolyU), Prof. Zhenguang Cai (CUHK), Prof. Jing Yang (Zhejiang University), and Prof. Mark Feng Teng (Macao Polytechnic University).

This three-day international forum explores the latest frontiers in language aptitude research and its practical applications. Building on over six decades of theoretical and empirical inquiry (see Wen, Skehan, Biedroń, Li & Sparks, 2019; Wen, Skehan, & Sparks, 2023), the Forum examines how established concepts of language learning abilities and potential are being reshaped by cutting-edge developments across linguistics, applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, educational psychology, cognitive and neurosciences, behavioural genetics, computational linguistics, and artificial intelligence. By engaging these interconnected perspectives, the Forum aims to foster genuinely multidisciplinary dialogue and to advance theory, measurement, and practice in the digital and AI era.

## Conference Information

Item	Details
<b>Title</b>	2026 Hong Kong International Forum on Language Aptitude
<b>Sub-title</b>	New Frontiers in Research and Application
<b>Dates</b>	28–30 May 2026 (Thursday to Saturday)
<b>Venue</b>	Room N203 (28–29 May) / Room N201 (30 May), 2nd Floor, North Tower, PolyU West Kowloon Campus, 9 Hoi-ting Road, Yau Ma Tei, Hong Kong
<b>Mode</b>	Hybrid (On-site + Zoom: 869 4942 1816 Code: 185378 )
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Registration</b>	Free of charge

### List of Invited Speakers (Brief Version):

Category	Speakers (in presentation order)
<b>Keynote Speakers</b>	Richard Sparks, Peter Skehan, Morten Christiansen, Ping Li, Philip Dale, Ted Gibson, Brian MacWhinney
<b>Plenary Speakers</b>	Mark Feng Teng, Yuichi Suzuki, Raphael Berthele, Antony Kunnan, Chantel Prat, Jessica Blake-West, Susanne Reiterer, Sabrina Turker, Xin Kang
<b>Workshop Speakers</b>	Zhisheng Wen, Zhenguang Cai, Jing Yang
<b>Invited Speakers</b>	Junlan Pan, Alicia Battenfeld & the GLLAD Team (Frauke Matz, Ulrike Gut, Liane Lillich, Till Utesch), Olivia Rütli-Joy
<b>Roundtable Panelists</b>	Franco Wong & Zoe Chan (CPCE-LC), Brian Rusk & Barry Reynolds (University of Macau), Mable Chan (HASALD/HKBU LC), Nick Wong (HKUST), Men Xuefeng (Beijing Fistar)

## Organising Committee

### Organising Committee

Role	Name
PI and Conference Chair	Dr. Zhisheng Wen (Associate Head, Division of Languages and Communication)
Conference Advisor and Co-Chair	Dr. Esther Tong (Head, Division of Languages and Communication)
Conference Coordinators	Dr. Eric Cheung & Dr. Franco Wong
Conference Secretary	Ms. Karen Chow and Ada Chau
OC Members	Dr. Carol Webster (MC, Opening Ceremony), Dr. Angel Li (IT & Zoom Support), Dr. Raymond Chow (Logistics – Guest Transport), Dr. Phoebe Siu (Logistics – Guest Reception & Ushering), Dr. Nina Jiao (Site Support), Dr. Mariana Ye (Moderator), Dr. Cindy Lau (Moderator), Dr. Jessica Deng (Moderator)

### Scientific Advisory Committee

Role	Name
Director	Dr. Zhisheng Wen (Principal Investigator, PolyU SPEED)
Co-Director	Professor Shaofeng Li (Co-Investigator, PolyU)
Committee Members	Prof. Zhenguang Cai (CUHK), Prof. Mark Feng Teng (Macao Polytechnic University), Prof. Jing Yang (Zhejiang University)

# Supporting Organisations & Journals

## Supporting Organisations

- Beijing Fistar Science and Technology
- Beijing NewClass Digital Technology Co. Limited
- Global Digital Applied Linguistics Association (GloDAL)
- Hong Kong Association for Self-Access Learning and Development (HASALD)
- Hong Kong Learning in Technology Co. Limited

## Supporting Journals

- *International Journal of TESOL Studies (IJTS; Scopus Q1)*
- *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching (AJELT; Scopus)*
- *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics (RMAL; Scopus Q1)*
- *Language Teaching Research Quarterly (LTRQ; Scopus Q1)*
- *Individual Differences in Language Education: An International Journal (IDLE)*
- *Digital Studies in Language and Literature*
- *Digital Applied Linguistics*

## Welcome Remarks

### **Welcome Remarks by Prof. Peter Yuen Dean, College of Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE)**

The Organising Committee gratefully acknowledges the support of Professor Peter Yuen, Dean of CPCE, for his encouragement and leadership. Professor Yuen will deliver his welcoming address during the opening ceremony.



## Welcome Remarks

### **Welcome Remarks by Dr. Esther Tong Head, Division of Languages and Communication (LC) Director, CPCE Centre for Pedagogic Research (CPR)**

*Dr. Tong will deliver her welcoming address during the opening ceremony, following Professor Yuen. The text below is her welcome message as it appears in the programme book.*

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Guests, and Friends,

Welcome to the 2026 Hong Kong International Forum on Language Aptitude. It is an absolute privilege to open this gathering hosted by the Division of Languages and Communication (LC) at the School of Professional Education and Executive Development of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

At LC, we are committed to advancing language education through innovative teaching, cutting-edge research, and meaningful collaboration across disciplines and institutions. Standing at the forefront of the "new humanities", our academics engage in research that spans discourse analysis, second language acquisition, cross-cultural communication, multilingual education and translanguaging, psycholinguistics, translation studies, and technology-mediated language pedagogies and assessment. One key strategic area is to explore how people learn, process, and master their first language and additional language as resources for meaning making, enacting knowledge and relationship in contexts, and as systems for dynamic cognition and representations.

LC hosts the CPCE Centre for Pedagogic Research. Our mission is to support pedagogic research that makes a tangible difference in classrooms and beyond. We believe that research-informed teaching and teaching-informed research go hand in hand. This Forum exemplifies that synergy. It brings together researchers, practitioners, and education technology partners in the Greater Bay Area and the World to explore how language aptitude research can inform pedagogy and real-world practices in a period of transformation driven by the digital and AI era.

To set the stage for our discussion today, I am reminded of a profound observation by MacWhinney and Anderson (1986), who noted, "Language is special in the sense that it, more than any other system, has utilised virtually every major aspect of the general cognitive system" (p.4). This quote brilliantly captures exactly why we are here today. Language is not merely a structured set of grammatical rules to be decoded; it is our ultimate cognitive resource and capacity building tool that shapes how we perceive and engage with the world.

As we spend the next few days exploring the frontiers of language learning and pedagogy, let us remember that our foundational capacities and humanities matter. To close my remarks and officially open this Forum, I would like to extend my warmest gratitude to our keynote and plenary speakers, who have travelled from around the world or joined us online, for sharing their expertise and insights. I also thank our roundtable panelists, supporting organisations, and all participants for being part of this important dialogue.

Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of our Organising Committee led by our Conference Chair, Dr. Edward Wen, whose initiative and perseverance have brought this Forum to fruition.

May the next three days inspire new insights, foster meaningful collaborations, and advance our collective understanding of language aptitude in meaningful ways.

Thank you, and enjoy the Forum!



**Dr. Esther Tong**

Conference Advisor and Co-Chair  
2026 Hong Kong International Forum on Language Aptitude

Head, Division of Languages and Communication (LC)  
Director, CPCE Centre for Pedagogic Research (CPCECPR)  
College of Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE)  
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

May 2026

## A Note from the Conference Chair

### **Dr. Zhisheng Wen (Edward)** ***Principal Investigator & Conference Chair***

On behalf of the Organising Committee, I extend my deepest gratitude to our distinguished keynote speakers, plenary speakers, workshop presenters, invited speakers, and roundtable panelists for sharing their expertise and insights. Their contributions are the intellectual heart of this Forum.

I also thank our supporting organisations and journals, our dedicated student helpers, and all participants – whether joining us onsite or online – for being part of this important dialogue.

This Forum is generously supported by the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No.: UGC/IIDS24/H05/25). We are deeply grateful for their vision and commitment.

**A special thank you to our CPCE Dean and Division Head for their encouragements and leadership, and to the entire CPCE CRO office, the LC Organizing Committee team and the LC administrative office team for their tireless work behind the scenes.**

May the next three days offer you fresh insights, meaningful discussions, and lasting professional connections.



### **Dr. Zhisheng Wen (Edward)**

Principal Investigator & Conference Chair  
2026 Hong Kong International Forum on  
Language Aptitude

Associate Division Head, Division of  
Languages and Communication (LC)  
College of Professional and Continuing  
Education (CPCE)  
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

May 2026

## Programme Rundown – Day 1 (28 May)

**Morning Session: Opening Ceremony and Workshops**  
**Room: N203**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Session (MC: Dr. Carol Webster; Chair: Dr. Eric Cheung; Moderator: Dr. Mariana Ye)</b>
<b>09:00–09:30</b>	<b>Registration at Foyer of Room N201</b>
<b>09:30 – 09:40</b>	<b>Welcoming Remarks</b> Prof. Peter Yuen, Dean of CPCE
<b>09:40–9:50</b>	<b>Opening Remarks</b> Dr. Esther Tong, Head of CPCE-LC and Director of CPCE Center for Pedagogic Research
<b>09:50–09:55</b>	<b>Souvenir Presentation and Group-photo taking</b>
<b>10:00 – 10:40</b>	<b>Workshop I:</b> Dr. Zhisheng Wen (CPCE-LC): <i>Language Aptitude in the Digital and AI Era: What is it, and how to measure it?</i>
<b>10:40 – 11:00 Tea Break</b>	
<b>11:00 – 11:40</b>	<b>Workshop II:</b> Prof. Zhenguang Cai (Chinese University of Hong Kong): <i>AI Tools for Psycholinguistic Research</i>
<b>11:40 – 12:30</b>	<b>Workshop III:</b> Prof. Jing Yang (Zhejiang University): <i>Neural Networks of Successful Second Language Learning (Zoom)</i>
<b>12:30–14:15 Lunch Break (N1301)</b>	

## Programme Rundown – Day 1 (28 May)

**Afternoon Session: Updates on Aptitude Theories, Constructs and Methodologies**  
**Room: N203**

Time	Session (Chair: Dr. Zhisheng Wen; Moderator: Dr. Cindy Lau)
14:15 – 15:00	<b>Keynote 1: Prof. Richard Sparks (Mt St. Joseph)</b> – <i>Aptitude as L1 Achievement plus Metalinguistic Awareness</i>
15:00 – 15:40	<b>Plenary Session 1: Prof. Mark Feng Teng (Macao Polytechnic University)</b> – <i>Working Memory and Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition</i>
<b>15:40 – 16:00 Tea Break</b>	
16:00 – 16:40	<b>Plenary Session 2: Prof. Yuichi Suzuki (Waseda Uni.)</b> – <i>Aptitude for second language speaking skills: Now you see it, now you don't</i>
16:40 – 17:20	<b>Plenary Session 3: Prof. Raphael Berthele (Fribourg)</b> – <i>Multi-Variable Approaches to Language Aptitude: From Exploration with Graph Analyses to Prediction with Machine Learning Models</i>
17:20 – 18:00	<b>Keynote 2: Prof. Peter Skehan (UCL/IOE)</b> – <i>Does one size fit all? Aptitude and its components across contexts and levels (Zoom)</i>
<b>End of Day 1</b>	

## Programme Rundown – Day 2 (29 May)

**Morning Session: Language Aptitude in the Digital and AI Era**  
**Room: N203**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Session (Chair: Prof. Zhenguang Cai ; Moderator: Dr. Zhisheng Wen)</b>
<b>08:45 – 09:00</b>	<b>Registration at Foyer of Room N201</b>
<b>09:00 – 09:45</b>	<b>Keynote 3: Prof. Morten Christiansen (Cornell/Aarhus)</b> – <i>Using LLMs to Improve Real-Time L2 Processing Skills</i> <b>(Zoom)</b>
<b>09:45 – 10:25</b>	<b>Plenary Session 4: Prof. Antony Kunnan (Macau CityU)</b> – <i>Language aptitude assessments and linguistic typology with the assistance of AI tools</i> <b>(Zoom)</b>
<b>10:25 – 10:45 Tea Break</b>	
<b>10:45 – 11:25</b>	<b>Plenary Session 5: Prof. Chantel Prat (University of Washington)</b> – <i>Aptitude for Programming Languages</i>
<b>11:25 – 12:05</b>	<b>Plenary Session 6: Jessica Blake-West (Boston College)</b> – <i>Coding as Another Language</i>
<b>12:05 – 12:50</b>	<b>Keynote 4: Prof. Ping Li (HKUST)</b> – <i>Language Aptitude and Cognitive Abilities in the Digital Era</i>
<b>12:50–14:30 Lunch (N1301)</b>	

## Programme Rundown – Day 2 (29 May)

**Afternoon Session: Cognitive, Neural and Genetic Bases of Language Aptitude**  
**Room: N203**

Time	Session (Chair: Dr. Yuichi Suzuki; Moderator: Dr. Zhisheng Wen)
14:30 – 15:25	<b>Keynote 5: Prof. Philip Dale (New Mexico)</b> – <i>Behavior Genetic Perspectives on Language Aptitude</i>
15:25 – 16:05	<b>Plenary Session 7: Prof. Susanne Reiterer (Vienna)</b> – <i>Pitch, Pleasure, and Proficiency: Positioning Phonaesthetic aspects like Music(ality) and Sound within the Language Aptitude Construct</i>
<b>16:05 – 16:25 Tea Break</b>	
16:25 – 17:05	<b>Plenary Session 8: Dr. Sabrina Turker (Vienna/MPI)</b> – <i>The neurobiology of language (learning) and reading</i>
17:05 – 17:45	<b>Plenary Session 9: Prof. Xin Kang (Chongqing University)</b> – <i>Discontinuity and stability in foreign language development</i>
17:45–18:00	<b>Wrap-Up and Discussions</b>
<b>End of Day 2</b>	

## Programme Rundown – Day 3 (30 May)

**Morning Session: Innovative Approaches to Analyze Languages and Test Aptitude**  
**Room: N201**

Time	Session (Chair: Prof Xin Kang; Moderator: Dr. Sabrina Turker)
<b>08:45 – 09:00</b>	<b>Registration at Foyer of Room N201</b>
<b>09:00 – 09:45</b>	<b>Keynote 6: Prof. Ted Gibson (MIT)</b> – <i>A Cognitive Approach to the Syntax of Human Languages</i> ( <b>Zoom</b> )
<b>09:45 – 10:25</b>	<b>Keynote 7: Prof. Brian MacWhinney (CMU)</b> – <i>TalkBank Methods for Assessing CALF</i> ( <b>Zoom</b> )
<b>10:25 – 10:45 Tea Break</b>	
<b>10:45 – 11:15</b>	<b>Invited Speech 1: Prof. Junlan Pan (Chongqing University)</b> – <i>TALL: linking theory and Open Science in Measuring Language Aptitude</i> ( <b>Zoom</b> )
<b>11:15 – 11:45</b>	<b>Invited Speech 2: Alicia Battenfeld (with Prof. Ulrike Gut, Prof. Frauke Matz: Münster University)</b> – <i>Developing and Validating the German Language Learning Aptitude Diagnostics (GLLAD): A school-based test for Year 6 learners</i>
<b>11:45 – 12:15</b>	<b>Invited Speech 3: Dr. Olivia Rütli-Joy (Fribourg)</b> – <i>L2 Teachers' Individual Difference Characteristics: On the interplay of language history, L2 proficiency, explicit and implicit language aptitude, cognitive styles and preferences for explicit or implicit L2 instruction</i>
<b>12:15–14:30 Lunch Break (N1301)</b>	

## Programme Rundown – Day 3 (30 May)

**Afternoon Session: RAISE Roundtable & Closing**  
**Room: N201**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Session (Chair: Dr. Zhisheng Wen; Moderator: Dr. Jessica Deng )</b>
<b>14:30 – 16:00</b>	<p><b>RAISE Roundtable Panel Presentation and Discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Franco Wong and Dr. Zoe Chan (CPCE/LC)</li> <li>• Dr. Brian Rusk (with Dr. Barry Reynolds; University of Macau);</li> <li>• Dr. Mable Chan (Hong Kong Association for Self-Access Learning and Development, HASALD/HKBU LC);</li> <li>• Dr. Nick Wong (HKUST-LC)</li> <li>• Mr. Men Xuefeng (Beijing Fistar Science and Technology);</li> <li>• Forum Discussion ...</li> </ul>
<b>16:00 – 16:20 Tea Break</b>	
<b>16:20 – 16:40</b>	<p><b>Editors' Reports (Journal Special Issues and CFPs)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Issue of <i>Language Teaching Research Quarterly (LTRQ)</i></li> <li>• Special Issue of <i>Journal of European Second Language Acquisition (JESLA)</i></li> <li>• <i>And more...</i></li> </ul>
<b>16:40 – 17:00</b>	<p><b>Closing Ceremony</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Acknowledgements and Reflections</i></li> <li>• <i>Closing</i></li> </ul>
<b>End of Day 3</b>	

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Workshop I

**Time:** 10:00 – 10:40, 28 May 2026 (Day 1)

### Dr. Zhisheng Wen (Edward)

CPCE-LC, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**Title:** *Language Aptitude in the Age of Digital and AI Era: What is it? How to measure it?*

#### Abstract:

This workshop addresses the aptitude paradox: traditional models of language aptitude were proposed before the digital and AI era and thus assumed a "naked brain" learning without technological augmentation – yet post-ChatGPT learners regularly carry cognitive prostheses (smartphones, Grammarly, translation apps). Crucially, this workshop does not argue that traditional models are wrong. They remain essential for understanding fundamental cognitive abilities. However, they were designed to answer one question: "How good is this learner alone?" Today, we also need to answer a second question: "How good is this learner with the tools they will actually have?" After a quick overview of traditional aptitude theories and tests, this workshop draws on Andy Clark's extended mind theory to propose a Distributed Aptitude Framework as a complementary extension – grounded in three principles: distributedness, co-evolution, and resource-relativity. Three stances on AI and aptitude are distinguished: AI as Tool, AI as Factor, and AI as Prosthesis. The workshop argues that the field should now ask both questions – traditional and distributed – to fully understand language learning potential in the 21st century.



#### Biography:

**Dr. Zhisheng Wen (Edward)** is Principal Investigator (PI) of the RGC-funded IIDS project (UGC/IIDS24/H05/25), Associate Head of the Division of Languages and Communication at CPCE-PolyU, and Conference Chair of the 2026 HK Aptitude Forum. He received his PhD from CUHK and has held academic appointments across the Greater Bay Area, including as Full Professor and Department Head prior to joining PolyU CPCE. He has convened international roundtable forums on language aptitude and working memory across the GBA (HKUST 2012, MPU/UMacau 2017, BNU Zhuhai 2019, Shangri-La HK 2023, HKUST 2024). He has published over 10 books and numerous journal articles and book chapters on language aptitude, working memory, translanguaging, and translation. His most influential works on aptitude include the co-edited volumes *Language Aptitude: Advancing Theory, Testing, Research and Practice* (Routledge, 2019) and *Language Aptitude Theory and Practice* (CUP, 2023). His current research projects also explore the 'GBA Translanguaging Brain' and the 'Translanguaging Self' framework and databank.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Workshop II

**Time:** 11:00 – 11:40, 28 May 2026 (Day 1)

### Prof. Zhenguang Cai

*The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)*

**Title:** *AI Tools for Psycholinguistic Research*

#### **Abstract:**

High-quality experimental stimuli are crucial for psychological research, yet creating them remains a manual, time-consuming, and often inconsistent process. With the advent of large language models (LLMs), researchers can now automate major components of experimental design and data collection. This presentation introduces two complementary tools that leverage LLMs for psychological science. StimMAS (Stimulus Multi-Agent System) is designed for stimulus development. It employs a multi-agent architecture, in which autonomous LLM-based agents—Generator, Validator, and Scorer—collaboratively create, evaluate, and refine linguistic stimuli under human supervision. This system enhances the efficiency, scalability, and reliability of stimulus construction. In contrast, MacBehaviour is developed for data collection from LLMs. It is an open-source R package that allows researchers to conduct behavioral-style experiments directly on LLMs, enabling systematic investigation of model responses to experimental stimuli. Researchers can design tasks such as plausibility judgments, cloze tests, or grammaticality ratings, and collect LLM outputs in structured, human-comparable formats. Together, StimMAS and MacBehaviour offer an integrated framework for leveraging LLMs both as experimental collaborators and as research participants, promoting reproducible, large-scale, and cognitively informative studies in the language and behavioral sciences.



#### **Biography:**

**Prof. Zhenguang Cai** is a professor at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He received his PhD in psychology from University of Edinburgh. He was a lecturer at University of East Anglia and an ESRC Future Research Leader fellow at University College London. He uses behavioural, neuroscientific and computational methods to reveal representations and processes underlying language comprehension, language production, and language learning. More recently, he investigates the extent to which large language models resemble humans in language use. For more info, please visit: [www.cuhkpl.github.io](http://www.cuhkpl.github.io).

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Workshop III

**Time:** 11:40 – 12:30, 28 May 2026 (Day 1)

#### **Prof. Jing Yang**

*Zhejiang University, China*

**Format:** Hybrid (N203 and Online via Zoom)

**Title:** *Neural Networks of Successful Second Language Learning*

#### **Abstract:**

This talk explores the neural basis of successful L2 learning, from bilingual lexical representation to embodied semantic acquisition, and individual differences. Using fMRI and behavioral data, we found that L2 words engage sensorimotor systems, with early age of acquisition and high L2 exposure—not proficiency alone—driving stronger embodied effects. I further discuss how VR and other technologies can support embodied L2 learning. The talk suggests that successful L2 acquisition is fundamentally embodied and varies across individuals, with direct implications for pedagogy and adaptive learning design.



#### **Biography:**

**Prof. Jing Yang** is a Professor of Psycholinguistics in the School of International Studies at Zhejiang University, China. Her research interests include the cognitive neuroscience of second language learning, technology-enhanced language teaching, and the neurocognitive mechanisms of Chinese reading disorders. She currently serves as a vice director of the Chinese Association of Psycholinguistics, a board member of the Chinese Neurolinguistics Society, and a board member of the Chinese Cognitive Linguistics Society.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Keynote 1

**Time:** 14:15 – 15:00, 28 May 2026 (Day 1)

### Prof. Richard Sparks

Mount St. Joseph University, USA

**Title:** *Language Aptitude as L1 Achievement plus Metalinguistic Awareness*

### Abstract:

Second language (L2) learning is the learning of language. This is the primary reason that L2 aptitude has been found to be the single, strongest predictor of L2 proficiency and achievement—items on aptitude tests are comprised of language tasks and items related to language learning. For over 35 years, Sparks et al.'s longitudinal investigations have found that there are strong, long-term relationships (from 1st to 10th grades) among learners' L1 ability, L2 aptitude (on the MLAT), and L2 proficiency and achievement. Like Skehan, Sparks speculated that the MLAT measures an underlying language learning capacity similar for both L1 and L2 and the ability to learn language from "decontextualized material." In this presentation, the author describes several recent studies using mediation and regression commonality analyses to address the quantitative relations among L1 and L2 abilities and L2 aptitude (including specific MLAT subtests as well as the Composite) and to distinguish two aspects of prediction from the MLAT to L2 achievement, uniqueness (extent to which MLAT uniquely adds to prediction of L2 outcomes beyond that explained by L1 measures alone), and efficiency (extent to which the total prediction from a specific L1 measure to L2 is mediated by L2 aptitude). These studies have shown that prediction from MLAT is due primarily to its functioning as a measure of an individual's L1 abilities and metalinguistic development. The studies also support the view that L1 literacy is the bridge from L1 development to metalinguistic awareness, and that L2 aptitude has its roots in L1 oral language, L1 literacy, and metalinguistic awareness.



### Biography:

**Prof. Richard Sparks** is Professor Emeritus, Mt. St. Joseph University, Cincinnati, Ohio, where he taught courses in reading, learning disabilities, assessment, and research. After retiring in 2015, he traveled the U.S. teaching Reading Science to elementary and middle school teachers. He publishes extensively and has authored over 150 peer-reviewed publications on second language learning, second language aptitude, second language learning problems, learning/reading disabilities, and testing accommodations. Dr. Sparks has presented at many national/international professional conferences, including the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading. He also conducted psychoeducational evaluations for over 40 years in his private practice. Dr. Sparks continues to perform ADA documentation reviews for medical and law boards and other professional licensing agencies. He was a Consulting Editor for the *J. of Learning Disabilities* for over 20 years. Dr. Sparks has co-edited three books on second language aptitude and is the author of two books, *Exploring L1-L2 Relationships: The Impact of Individual Differences* and *Second Language Anxiety: Affective or Linguistic Variable?*, both published by Multilingual Matters.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Plenary 1

**Time:** 15:00 – 15:40, 28 May 2026 (Day 1)

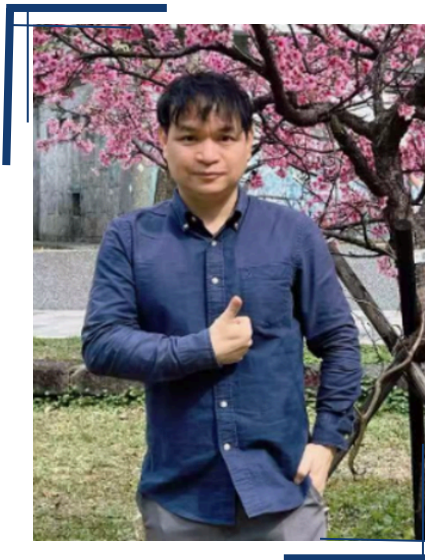
#### **Prof. Mark Feng Teng**

*Macao Polytechnic University*

**Title:** *Working Memory and Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*

#### **Abstract:**

In this talk, I will discuss the critical role of working memory in second language vocabulary acquisition, drawing on both cross-sectional and longitudinal research. Working memory, our capacity to temporarily store and process information, is fundamental to learning new words. Cross-sectional studies reveal consistent positive correlations between working memory capacity and vocabulary size across different proficiency levels. More compellingly, longitudinal findings demonstrate that working memory capacity predicts the rate of vocabulary growth over time. Learners with greater working memory show faster acquisition and better retention of new lexical items. These temporal dynamics suggest working memory supports not only initial encoding but also the consolidation of word knowledge. Understanding this relationship has important implications for assessing learner potential and designing differentiated instruction that accommodates individual cognitive profiles.



#### **Biography:**

**Prof. Mark Feng Teng** is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Macao Polytechnic University. His research specializes in computer-assisted second language vocabulary acquisition, reading and writing. He has published extensively for those focal topics. He is recognized as one of the top 2% most-cited researchers (single year) worldwide (2021–2025) and career-long impact (2024–2025) in the area of Language and Linguistics by Stanford University. He is the founding president of Global Digital Applied Linguistics Association (GloDAL). He is co-editor for *Reading in a Foreign Language*, *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, and editor-in-chief for *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, *Applied Language Sciences*, and *Digital Applied Linguistics*.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Plenary 2

**Time:** 16:00 – 16:40, 28 May 2026 (Day 1)

#### **Dr. Yuichi Suzuki**

*Waseda University, Japan*

**Title:** *Aptitude for second language speaking skills: Now you see it, now you don't*

#### **Abstract:**

Language aptitude is traditionally considered a strong predictor of second language (L2) learning success. However, there are several contexts in which its predictive power diminishes or disappears entirely. In this talk, I will present these specific cases through multiple theoretical lenses. I argue for a dynamic view of individual differences, demonstrating that the relevance of cognitive aptitude is context-dependent and determined by the intricate interplay between L2 knowledge and skills as well as instructional methods.



#### **Biography:**

**Dr. Yuichi Suzuki** is an associate professor in the Faculty of International Research and Education at Waseda University. He serves as an Associate Editor for Language Learning. His research focuses on the interface between theory and practice in instructed SLA and language education. Research website: <https://yuichisuzuki.net/research/>.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Plenary 3

**Time:** 16:40 – 17:20, 28 May 2026 (Day 1)

#### **Prof. Raphael Berthele**

*University of Fribourg, Switzerland*

**Title:** *Multi-Variable Approaches to Language Aptitude: From Exploration with Graph Analyses to Prediction with Machine Learning Models*

#### **Abstract:**

In recent years, the field has seen renewed interest in identifying the factors underlying variability in (multiple) language learning by collecting extensive information on learners. In this talk, I present analyses of such rich data sets that capture various learner characteristics, including cognitive and psychometric measures, language aptitude, motivational variables, and family background. Drawing on three data sets involving both children and adults, I illustrate different strategies for exploring complex patterns of association (e.g. graph-based analyses) and for reducing dimensionality (e.g. factor analysis, partial least squares correlation). Across age groups, the results reveal consistent clustering of variables: language-specific measures tend to group with general cognitive tasks, while motivational dispositions show internal dimensionality. I discuss how such multi-variable approaches can enhance our understanding of additional language learning, including widely held assumptions such as the 'multilingual boost' 'associated with bi- and multilingual experience and the prominent role attributed to motivation in language education. On the methodological level, I emphasize the importance of distinguishing – both in study design and in analysis – between prediction, on the one hand, and explanation or exploration, on the other.



#### **Biography:**

**Prof. Raphael Berthele** is Professor of Multilingualism at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. He studied and worked at the Universities of Fribourg, Tübingen, Berkeley, and Berne. He co-founded the Fribourg Institute of Multilingualism in 2008 and currently directs the MA programmes in Multilingualism Studies and Foreign Language Pedagogy.

His research interests span cognitive to social aspects of multilingualism, with a recent focus on the empirical investigation of language-specific, general cognitive, affective, and social predispositions for learning additional languages in young and adult learners. His research typically involves multi-variable investigations across different learner samples, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. In his most recent studies, he collaborates with a neuroscience lab to combine brain data with behavioural test batteries.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Keynote 2

**Time:** 17:20 – 18:00, 28 May 2026 (Day 1)

#### **Prof. Peter Skehan**

*UCL Institute of Education, UK*

**Format:** Hybrid (N203 and Online via Zoom)

**Title:** *Does one size fit all? Aptitude and its components across contexts and levels*

#### **Abstract:**

Historically, aptitude batteries have tended to be rather broad-brush in approach, and the general goals have been to achieve wide-ranging predictions of the time needed to reach criterion levels of performance. The MLAT is a clear example of this. More nuanced approaches have only concerned age of test-taker, as with the PLAB and younger learners, or the level of proficiency for which prediction is desired, as with the DLAB and HiLAB (both military-linked) batteries. Aptitude testing now faces wider challenges. Second language acquisition has influenced our understanding of learning and developmental processes, and psycholinguistics has shown the complexity of memory components, as well as a fundamental contrast between explicit and implicit learning. There are also debates regarding the tension between domain-general and domain-specific processes. Correspondingly, there are influences on aptitude tests based on the different types of learning context they may target. School-systems still dominate, with structured teaching, but increasingly, in our media-dominated age, alternative opportunities arise, especially in acquisition-rich contexts, and with individualized learning. The presentation will explore the implications of these developments for aptitude test construction. In particular, it will be argued that we now need to consider how different aptitude tests may be needed in order to be effective in different contexts, particularly in terms of the different components different batteries will need to contain. The implications of such changes for aptitude theory will also be discussed.



#### **Biography:**

**Prof. Peter Skehan** is an Honorary Research Fellow at the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), UK. He is a leading international authority on task-based language teaching and individual differences in second language acquisition, particularly foreign language aptitude. He has held academic positions at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, King's College London, and the University of Auckland. His seminal publications include *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning* (OUP, 1998) and *Language Aptitude: Advancing Theory, Testing, Research and Practice* (Routledge, 2019). He is a recipient of the IATBLT Distinguished Achievement Award and the Messick Lecture Award. He is currently focussing on the measurement of second language task-based spoken language performance within a CALF (complexity-accuracy-lexis-fluency) framework.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Keynote 3

**Time:** 09:00 – 09:45, 29 May 2026 (Day 2)

#### **Prof. Morten H. Christiansen**

*Cornell University / Aarhus University*

**Format:** Hybrid (N203 and Online via Zoom)

**Title:** *Using LLMs to Improve Real-Time L2 Processing Skills*

#### **Abstract:**

Many second-language (L2) learners might do well in the classroom yet experience considerable difficulty when conversing with native speakers in real time. Together, the combination of rapid input, short-lived sensory representations, severely limited sequence memory, and fast turn-taking provides a formidable challenge for L2 learners. There are many ways in which engaging in conversations may boost real-time L2 processing—including by delivering crucial communicative feedback—but the standard classroom setting typically only offers limited opportunity for such conversational interaction. In this talk, I will discuss how Large Language Models (LLMs) might be deployed to strengthen the abilities of L2 learners to engage in real-time conversations. While LLMs as conversationalists have their limitations, they nonetheless promise to provide new ways of improving the real-time processing skills of L2 learners.



#### **Biography:**

**Prof. Morten H. Christiansen** is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Psychology at Cornell University and Professor in Cognitive Science at the School of Communication and Culture, the Interacting Minds Centre, as well as the Center for Contemporary Cultures of Text at Aarhus University, Denmark. His research focuses on the interaction of biological and environmental constraints in the evolution, acquisition and processing of language. He employs a variety of methodologies, including computational modeling, Large Language Models, corpus analyses, statistical learning, and psycholinguistic experiments involving both first- and second-language learners. Christiansen was elected as a member of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters and a foreign member of the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters, as well as elected Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science, the Cognitive Science Society, and the Asia-Pacific Artificial Intelligence Association. He is the author of over 270 scientific papers, has edited four books, and authored two monographs. His newest book aimed at a general audience, *The Language Game: How Improvisation Created Language and Changed the World*, outlines a radical new perspective on how language works.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Plenary 4

**Time:** 09:45 – 10:25, 29 May 2026 (Day 2)

#### **Prof. Antony Kunnan**

*City University of Macau*

**Format:** Hybrid (N203 and Online via Zoom)

**Title:** *Language aptitude assessments and linguistic typology with the assistance of AI tools*

#### **Abstract:**

This talk examines the science of language aptitude and its transformation through artificial intelligence. Beginning with Carroll and Sapon's foundational four-component model – phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, rote learning, and inductive language learning – the talk traces the evolution of aptitude research from early military psychometrics through landmark instruments such as the MLAT, DLAB, PLAB, and LLAMA. The talk then explores how AI could reshape aptitude assessment through computer adaptive testing, NLP-based speech scoring, and multimodal data integration. Ethical challenges – algorithmic bias, construct validity, and the digital divide – are addressed alongside these gains.

A central argument the talk makes is that linguistic typology must inform aptitude profiling. Drawing on language profiles of Mandarin, Vietnamese, Thai, Tamil, and Malayalam – and situating them within Indo-European, Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, and Sino-Tibetan family trees – the talk demonstrates that aptitude demands vary systematically by language-pair distance. The future lies in AI-driven, typology-aware, dynamic aptitude profiling personalized to the learner, the language, and the learning context.



#### **Biography:**

**Prof. Antony John Kunnan** (Ph.D., UCLA) is a distinguished scholar in language assessment, currently Distinguished Professor of Applied Linguistics at the City University of Macau. His research centres on fairness and justice, assessment literacy, ethics, and language policy. He was the founding editor of *Language Assessment Quarterly* (2003–2013) and founding president of the Asian Association for Language Assessment. His major publications include *The Companion to Language Assessment* (Wiley, 2014) and *Evaluating Language Assessments* (Routledge, 2018) and *Assessing language proficiency around the world* (Wiley, 2026) along with 80 journal articles and book chapters. He is currently editing a book on *Language Assessment and AI* (to be published by Wiley in 2027).

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Plenary 5

**Time:** 10:45 – 11:25, 29 May 2026 (Day 2)

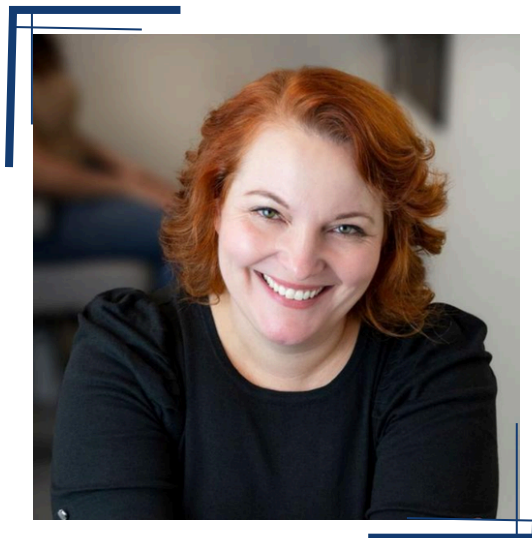
#### **Prof. Chantel Prat**

*University of Washington, USA*

**Title:** *Aptitude for Programming Languages*

#### **Abstract:**

In this talk, I describe a series of investigations into individual differences in the ability to acquire modern programming languages. Across three longitudinal training studies, we found that natural language aptitude measures such as the MLAT and LLAMA explained significant variance in programming outcomes. These effects remained robust after controlling for first-language skill, working memory capacity, and fluid reasoning. The findings also generalized across learners from different linguistic backgrounds (Chinese vs. English L1 speakers) and to learners of different programming languages (Python vs. Java). I conclude by discussing how these results may inform our understanding of language aptitude as a construct, as well as theories of how computer programming is learned.



#### **Biography:**

**Prof. Chantel Prat** is a cognitive neuroscientist at the University of Washington in Seattle with appointments in Psychology, Linguistics and Neuroscience, and the author of *The Neuroscience of You*. Her research investigates how different aspects of brain design combine with our life experiences to shape the unique way each brain learns, understands the world and operates in it. Chantel's upcoming book, *Learn Your Way*, helps people understand how to partner with their own brains to shape lasting change. She is the recipient of a Pathway to Independence Award from the National Institute of Health, speaks internationally at events like the World Science Festival and South by Southwest, and has appeared in a number of media outlets including PBS, *Scientific American*, *Rolling Stone*, *Popular Mechanics*, and *Travel + Leisure*.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Plenary 6

**Time:** 11:25 – 12:05, 29 May 2026 (Day 2)

#### **Jessica Blake-West**

*Boston College, USA*

**Title:** *Coding as Another Language: Teaching Computer Programming as a New Literacy*

#### **Abstract:**

The Coding as Another Language (CAL) approach, developed by Prof. Marina Umaschi Bers understands the learning of computer science as a new literacy for the 21st century. Learning to program supports young learners in developing new ways of thinking, new ways of expressing themselves and new opportunities to engage as active citizens and make the world a better place. Through both curricular and pedagogical design, the CAL framework puts powerful ideas of computer science and literacy into conversation with one another: emphasizing parallels such as algorithms and sequencing, design process and writing process, and debugging and editing and revising. Beyond just technical skills, the CAL approach posits that computer science education is also about children developing character strengths, problem-solving strategies, and collaborative attitudes to think and act in new ways. As emerging technologies continue to develop, Bers and her team have also begun to integrate AI literacies into the CAL framework by drawing connections between the powerful ideas of computer science, literacy, and artificial intelligence (AI). While many of these powerful ideas between CS and AI are the same, a focus on AI literacy also opens up new learning opportunities for children through the exploration of the ideas of models, bias and uncertainty. Not only does AI literacy expand technical concepts within the CAL framework, but provides new avenues for critical thinking, self-awareness, compassion for others, and human-driven creativity.

#### **Biography:**

**Jessica Blake-West** is the ScratchJr Learning Experience Designer for the Developmental Technologies (DevTech) research group at Boston College. She has worked at the DevTech Research Group for over six years, expanding upon Prof. Marina Bers' pedagogical frameworks, writing and implementing the Coding as Another Language (CAL) curriculum, and developing new technologies which embrace the power of on and off-screen creation and expression. Her other research endeavors have included exploring the underlying neural mechanisms employed when coding, developing and running professional development workshops, and the writing and validation of multiple coding assessments. She completed her Bachelor of Science in Cognitive Neuroscience at Brown University and her Master of Science in Human Factors Engineering at Tufts University.



## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Keynote 4

**Time:** 12:05 – 12:50, 29 May 2026 (Day 2)

### Prof. Ping Li

*The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)*

**Title:** *Language Aptitude and Cognitive Abilities in the Digital Era*

### Abstract:

In an era of rapid developments in generative AI and digital technology, we must understand and use emerging technologies to examine the mechanisms underlying language learning, representation, and processing. In this talk, I will focus on individual differences in cognitive capacity and language aptitude, to examine language learning and representation in technology-driven context or naturalistic learning environments. Importantly, age-related factors and social dynamics—such as peer interaction, collaborative learning, and cultural context—play critical roles in how learners interact with digital and metaverse environments, and understanding this interplay is essential for designing inclusive and equitable language learning and education contexts, especially in this digital era characterized by pervasive use of AI in everyday life. I will discuss a number of recent studies from our lab that show how language learning, reading, and teacher-student interaction are embedded in the social context and how language aptitude and cognitive abilities modulate and shape these processes.



### Biography:

**Prof. Ping Li (李平)** is currently Chair Professor of Psychology and Cognitive Science, and Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Science at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). He previously served as the Sin Wai Kin Foundation Professor in Humanities and Technology, Chair Professor of Neurolinguistics and Bilingual Studies, and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Prior to that he was Professor of Psychology, Linguistics, and Information Sciences at the Pennsylvania State University, and served as Program Director of the Cognitive Neuroscience and Perception, Action, and Cognition programs at the U.S. National Science Foundation. Li was Co-Editor of *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* and is currently Editor-in-Chief of *Brain and Language* and Senior Editor of *Cognitive Science*. He served as

China's Ministry of Education Changjiang Chair Professor, President of the Society for Computation in Psychology, and is an elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Psychonomic Society, the Cognitive Science Society, and the Hong Kong Academy of the Humanities. Li's research is focused on investigating the neurocognitive and computational bases of language acquisition, bilingualism, and reading comprehension. He uses emerging technologies including AI and cognitive neuroscience approaches to study the neuroplasticity and individual differences in both children and adults, aiming at understanding the relationships among language, culture, technology, and the brain. His research has appeared in premier academic journals including *PNAS*, *Neuron*, *Science Advances*, *Nature Human Behavior*, *Nature Computational Science*, and *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Keynote 5

**Time:** 14:30 – 15:25, 29 May 2026 (Day 2)

### Prof. Philip Dale

*University of New Mexico, USA*

**Title:** *Behavior Genetic Perspectives on Language Aptitude*

### Abstract:

Behavior genetic methods, especially twin studies and related designs, can provide information on individual differences in L2 aptitude and achievement which is highly complementary to that provided by other frameworks and assessments, and warrants being better known. Among the findings: (a) the strong genetic effect on school L2 learning (more than half the variance), (b) the substantial relationship between L2 learning and L1 ability both phenotypically and genetically, (c) shared genetic influence among intelligence, L1, and L2, (d) the role of noncognitive factors, (e) genetic influence on subject choice, (f) the role of anxiety and motivation, (g) whether exceptional learners show different patterns.



### Biography:

**Prof. Philip Dale** is Professor Emeritus of Speech & Hearing Sciences at the University of New Mexico. He received graduate degrees in Communication Sciences and Mathematics from the University of Michigan. His research has focused on first language (L1) development and its relationship to second language (L2) aptitude, using behavioral genetic methods such as twin studies to understand the genetic and environmental influences on individual differences in language learning. He is a collaborator on the Twins Early Development Study (TEDS) at King's College London. Prof. Dale is a Fellow of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and a Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science (APS).

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Plenary 7

**Time:** 15:25 – 16:05, 29 May 2026 (Day 2)

#### **Prof. Susanne Reiterer**

*University of Vienna, Austria*

**Title:** *Pitch, Pleasure, and Proficiency: Positioning Phonaesthetic aspects like Music(ality) and Sound within the Language Aptitude Construct*

#### **Abstract:**

This talk explores the intersection of phonetic talent, neurobiology, and affective-cognitive parameters in second language acquisition. Our research initially established a neurocognitive foundation for language aptitude, identifying structural biomarkers, specifically in the Heschl's Gyrus and inferior parietal lobe, that predict a learner's potential to acquire foreign languages. Building on this, we investigated the "fine ear" of musicality as a powerful co-driver of linguistic ability. While musical and singing aptitude (PROMS) significantly enhance accent imitation, pronunciation and rapid speech processing, our experimental data reveals a nuanced picture: while these skills boost phonological mastery, singing provides no statistically significant advantage for rote vocabulary acquisition compared to mere listening. It does not hold true when used as a pedagogical learning task, nor do advanced singers show any benefits in vocabulary acquisition (LLAMA B).

Extending the aptitude construct to modern learning environments, we present longitudinal data on AI-based speaking practice. Our findings indicate that high-aptitude learners (LLAMA D+E) benefit most from AI interaction, showing increased motivation and self-confidence in speaking, whereas control groups experienced a significant motivational decline.

Finally, we introduce the emerging field of phonaesthetics, examining how the subjectively perceived "beauty" or "eroticity" of a language opens "neural filters", making cognitive processing more efficient. We demonstrate a distinct "vocal aptitude" (musilinguistic continuum) where singing, but not instrumental skills, sharpen sensitivity to the affective qualities of speech. Singing skills were a significant positive predictor of foreign language eroticity ratings. Participants who rated themselves as better singers perceived unknown languages as significantly more erotic.

These findings suggest that pedagogical success relies not just on cognitive hardware, but on a variety of factors, including the emotional and aesthetic resonance of the target language's sound-shape and individual factors like musicality.



#### **Biography:**

**Prof. Susanne Reiterer** is a Professor at the University of Vienna, Austria. Her research interests lie in the cognitive neuroscience of multilingualism and second language acquisition, with the underlying aim of contributing to improvements in language learning methodology. Despite a general interest in the neurobiology of language, one of her main interests centres on polyglottism and individual differences in language talent and aptitude, and how these relate to linguistic theory. More recently, she has been focusing on the sound-aesthetic aspects of foreign language learning, particularly phonaesthetics. Her work also explores the neural and cognitive bases of language aptitude, with special attention to phonetic talent and musical ability.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Plenary 8

**Time:** 16:25 – 17:05, 29 May 2026 (Day 2)

#### **Dr. Sabrina Turker**

*University of Vienna / Max Planck Institute*

**Title:** *The Neurobiology of Language (Learning) and Reading*

#### **Abstract:**

In the past decade, literature reviews, meta-analyses and experimental studies employing behavioural assessments, structural and functional neuroimaging and non-invasive brain stimulation, have provided a comprehensive, multimodal exploration of the neurocognitive underpinnings of language learning, reading and dyslexia. Studies on the neuroscience of language emphasize that language processing and learning are not confined to a specific set of cortical brain areas or cognitive skills. Rather, they involve extensive networks that include the cerebellum and the basal ganglia, and are shaped by both neurobiological structures and individual differences, and modifiable through experience such as musical training. Research on the neurocognitive foundations of reading show the large overlap of the reading areas with the core language networks, and prove that reading networks in typical readers are robust to short-term disruptions, such as with neurostimulation. Last, research with individuals with dyslexia has shown that this learning disability is not only characterized by reduced activation in core left-hemisphere reading regions, but critically by disrupted brain connectivity within crucial reading networks and with the right cerebellum, which are directly linked to reading performance. These neural manifestations are uniform, while behavioural reading profiles show large inter-individual variability.



#### **Biography:**

**Dr. Sabrina Turker** is a postdoctoral researcher and principal investigator in the Brain & Language Lab at the University of Vienna. Her interdisciplinary research lies at the intersection of cognitive neuroscience, language, reading, and learning, with a particular focus on individual differences, dyslexia, and brain plasticity. She has previously worked at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig University and the University of Graz. Her work combines neuroimaging, meta-analytic, and longitudinal approaches to investigate the neurobiology of language and reading. Alongside her research, she has experience as a teacher and educational therapist for learning disorders.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Plenary 9

**Time:** 17:05 – 17:45, 29 May 2026 (Day 2)

#### **Prof. Xin Kang**

*Chongqing University, China*

#### **Patrick CM Wong (Non-presenting co-author)**

*The Chinese University of Hong Kong*

**Title:** *Discontinuity and stability in foreign language development*

#### **Abstract:**

Foreign language learners are highly variable in their developmental trajectories and achievement, but little is known about whether their trajectories show discontinuity (mean-level improvement) and stability (consistency in group-level rankings). This longitudinal study investigates the development of a new foreign language (French, Spanish, or German) (L3) among 135 Cantonese (L1)–English (L2) bilinguals. Participants were assessed for their L3 proficiency using multiple tasks (e.g., picture naming, storytelling) at two time points. We also collected their L1 and L2 proficiency scores and demographic information (e.g., socioeconomic status). Results revealed significant discontinuity (improvement in group means) and stability (individual rank-order consistency) from Time 1 to Time 2. Linear mixed models further showed that factors such as L2 proficiency predicted L3 outcomes differently at each time point. These findings support the continuity/stability framework of foreign language learning and highlight the dynamics of impact factors at different stages of learning.



#### **Biography:**

**Xin KANG** is a professor and principal investigator in the Research Center for Language Cognition and Language Application at Chongqing University, China. She works on the cognitive, neural, and genetic bases of native and foreign language learning and processing among typical and atypical populations. She obtained her Ph.D. degree in Psychology from the University of York, UK. Before joining Chongqing University, she was a postdoctoral researcher at the Brain and Mind Institute at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Keynote 6

**Time:** 09:00 – 09:45, 30 May 2026 (Day 3)

#### **Prof. Ted Gibson**

*Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences*

*Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA*

**Format:** Hybrid (N201 and Online via Zoom)

**Title:** *A Cognitive Approach to the Syntax of Human Languages*

#### **Abstract:**

One of the most celebrated features of human language is its generative power: from a restricted vocabulary of words, we can construct a vast number of new sentences, to express diverse meanings. This generative capacity is underpinned by syntax or grammar—a set of rules for how words go together. The syntax of human languages has long been argued to be complex, and even unlearnable from the input alone (Chomsky’s Universal Grammar proposal). However, the success of large language models (LLMs) has challenged this idea. In this talk, I will argue for a simple view of syntax, where the syntax of a language is just the set of dependency rules, and the dependencies are dictated by how words depend on one another for meaning. Conceptually, this simple approach obviates much of the complex machinery that Chomsky and colleagues have long postulated, including eliminating the learnability problem. Empirically, it accounts for diverse phenomena in human language processing, where non-local dependencies are costly, and explains cross-linguistic word order universals, which stem from the tendency to minimize dependency lengths. I will discuss one interesting exception to this tendency for dependency-length minimization, which is legal language (or legalese) and speculate on possible reasons for the high prevalence of long-distance dependencies in legalese. Finally, I will speculate that LLMs, similar to human children, learn the dependency grammar from linguistic patterns, leading to their impressive syntactic competence.



#### **Biography:**

**Ted (Edward) Gibson** was born and raised in Toronto, Canada. He went to Queens University (Kingston, Ontario) for undergraduate, graduating in 1985 with a Bachelors of Science in mathematics and computer science. He then got an Masters in Philosophy in 1986 in Computer Speech and Language Processing from Cambridge (UK), and a PhD from Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, USA) in computational linguistics in 1991. After a postdoc and short faculty position at CMU, he was hired as an assistant professor of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at MIT in 1993, and was promoted to full professor in 2004, where he has been ever since. Gibson also rowed at the 1984 Olympics, coming 7th in the coxless four for Canada, and he rowed in the Oxford Cambridge Boat Race in 1986, winning by 7 lengths. Gibson works on all aspects of human language: the words, the structures, across many languages. He has published many articles in the top journals in the field. He is married to Ev Fedorenko, a neuroscientist of language and cognition also at MIT. They have collaborated on many projects including Lana (age 8).

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Keynote 7

**Time:** 09:45 – 10:25, 30 May 2026 (Day 3)

### Prof. Brian MacWhinney

Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), USA

**Format:** Hybrid (N201 and Online via Zoom)

**Title:** TalkBank Tools for Examining CALF

### Abstract:

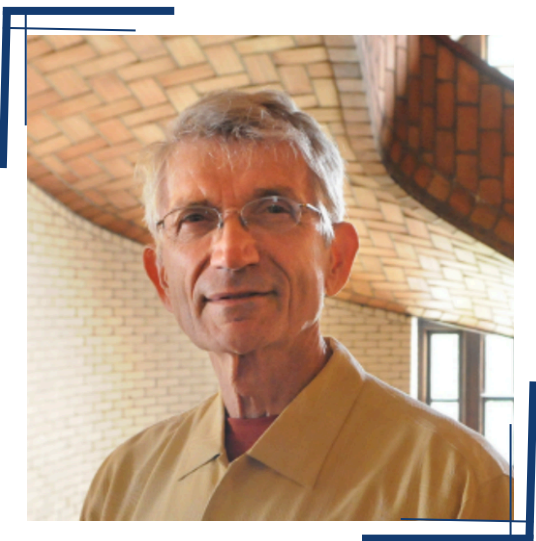
Task-based analysis (Housen & Kuiken, Bui&Skehan) characterizes L2 performance in terms of complexity, accuracy, lexical diversity, and fluency. Recent advances in AI, NLP, and ASR tools in the TalkBank framework are making it possible to compute these dimensions of L2 acquisition automatically from a variety of spoken language samples, including conversation, narration, retelling, and sentence repetition. The system also makes it possible to analyze the further dimensions of chunking and acoustic stability. The same methods that are useful for L2 analysis can also be applied to L1 acquisition, childhood bilingualism, and language disorders.

### References:

- Liu, H., et al. (2023). "Automation of language sample analysis." *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* **66**: 2421-2433.
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- MacWhinney, B. (2019). Task-based analysis and the Competition Model. *Researching Second Language Task Performance and Pedagogy: In Honor of Peter Skehan*. Z. Wen and M. Ahmadian. New York, John Benjamins: 305-315.

### Biography:

**Brian MacWhinney** is Teresa Heinz Professor of Psychology, Computational Linguistics, and Modern Languages at Carnegie Mellon University. His Unified Competition Model analyzes first and second language learning as aspects of a single basic system. In 1984, he and Catherine Snow co-founded the CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System) Project for the computational study of child language transcript data. This system has extended to 13 additional research areas, including L2 learning and code-switching from dozens of languages in the form of the TalkBank Project. MacWhinney's recent work includes studies of online learning of second language vocabulary and grammar, fluency as a shaper of language proficiency, neural network modeling of lexical development, fMRI studies of children with focal brain lesions, and ERP studies of between-language competition. He is also exploring the role of grammatical constructions in the marking of perspective shifting and the construction of mental models in scientific reasoning. Recent edited books include *The Handbook of Language Emergence* (Wiley) and *Competing Motivations in Grammar and Usage* (Oxford).



## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Invited Speech 1

**Time:** 10:45 – 11:15, 30 May 2026 (Day 3)

#### **Prof. Junlan Pan**

*Chongqing University, China*

**Format:** Hybrid (N201 and Online via Zoom)

**Title:** *TALL: Aligning Theory and Open Science in Measuring Language Aptitude*

#### **Abstract:**

This presentation introduces the development and validation of Tests of Aptitude for Language Learning (TALL), an openly available internet-based aptitude battery, addressing two challenges: (1) aligning theoretical frameworks of aptitude constructs with their operationalization, and (2) conducting comprehensive validation of aptitude measures. Grounded in Skehan's (2016) Stages Approach and Wen's (2016) Phonological/Executive Model, TALL has been developed into an open research tool that measures aptitude components via five subtests, with L1 Chinese instruction and a miniature target language (Lithuanian-based) to control for L1/L2 proficiency effects. This talk presents evidence from 165 Chinese university students regarding internal validity (unidimensionality, reliability, item quality) and predictive validity (against NMET scores) of the battery. Implications for aptitude construct operationalization and future substantive research are discussed.



#### **Biography:**

**Junlan Pan** is an associate professor at Chongqing University, China. She did her PhD research at the University of York, UK. Her research focus is to investigate the role of learners' cognitive individual differences (language aptitude and working memory) in second language learning. She is also an advocate for open research practices.

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Invited Speech 2

**Time:** 11:15 – 11:45, 30 May 2026 (Day 3)

### Alicia Battenfeld and The GLLAD Team

*University of Münster, Germany*

**Title:** *Developing and Validating the German Language Learning Aptitude Diagnostics (GLLAD): A School-based Test for Year 6 Learners*

### Abstract:

The field of language learning aptitude (LLA) has so far been scarcely researched in German-speaking countries (Gut & Matz, 2022), although it represents an important variable that can reliably explain differences among learners in terms of learning success and processes in foreign language teaching (e.g. Li, 2016; Sparks et al., 2009). Although LLA testing has a long international tradition (e.g. Carroll & Sapon, 1959; Linck et al., 2013; Kiss, 2009), most existing instruments are either too time-intensive for school use, not publicly accessible, or not designed for learners with German as (one of) their first language(s). To date, not validated diagnostic instrument has been available for this target group (Gut et al., 2026).

Our interdisciplinary research project addresses this gap through the development of the German Language Learning Aptitude Diagnostics (GLLAD), a digital, free of charge instrument for Year 6 students in Germany. The GLLAD is designed to be administered by teachers within a 45-minutes lesson, scored automatically, and made available free of charge from the end of 2026.

The final version of the GLLAD operationalises the three traditional dimensions of LLA:

Phonetic coding ability, language analytical ability, and memory for lexical items. Additional tasks intended to capture aspects of implicit LLA were piloted during development but had to be excluded from the final version because they did not meet psychometric quality criteria or could not be administered in classrooms. The analysis of test items, reliability and construct validity were carried out using probabilistic methods.

Validation was based on one pilot study (N = 199), three quantitative validation studies (N= 616, N = 450, N = 135), one qualitative expert review with four international LLA researchers, and a standardisation study (N = 1250), all involving Year 6 students (11-12 years) in Germany.

In our presentation we will introduce the conceptual foundation and design of the GLLAD, report key findings from the validation and standardisation studies, as well as outline further steps, such as the automated evaluation and workshops with teachers on the use of LLA diagnostics in educational contexts.



### **Biographies of The GLLAD Team:**

**Alicia Battenfeld** is a doctoral candidate at the University of Münster. She studied English, Social Sciences and German as a foreign language at the University of Münster (MEd).

### ***Non-presenting co-authors including:***

- **Prof. Dr. Frauke Matz** is Chair of English language education at the University of Münster. Her research interests lie in the areas of language learning aptitude, oracy and cultural and literary learning (especially in connection with human and children's rights education and peace education) in the EFL classroom.
- **Prof. Dr. Ulrike Gut** is Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Münster, Germany. Her research focuses on 2nd & 3rd language acquisition, language learning aptitude, phonetics and phonology of English varieties, in particular Nigerian, Scottish and Malaysian English, as well as corpus linguistics. She has compiled the LeaP corpus (Learning Prosody in a Foreign Language), ICE Nigeria and – still in progress – ICE Scotland.
- **Liane Lillich** is a doctoral candidate in the Multilingualism and Education working group in the Department of Education and Social Sciences at the University of Münster. She studied mathematics, Romance languages (Spanish) and sports science at Heidelberg University (MEd).
- **Prof. Till Utesch** is Professor of Prevention and University Health Management at the University of Lübeck. Previously, he headed the Educational Diagnostics and Potential Development working group in the Department of Education and Social Sciences at the University of Münster. His research focuses on issues of human development, performance optimisation, and educational-psychological diagnostics (test development and validation).

## List of Speaker Abstracts and Bios (in Presentation Order)

### Invited Speech 3

**Time:** 11:45 – 12:15, 30 May 2026 (Day 3)

#### **Dr. Olivia Rütli-Joy**

*University of Fribourg, Switzerland*

**Title:** *L2 Teachers' Individual Difference Characteristics: On the interplay of language history, L2 proficiency, explicit and implicit language aptitude, cognitive styles and preferences for explicit or implicit L2 instruction*

#### **Abstract:**

Teachers' individual characteristics (ICs) – inherent variables to all L2 instructors – are important sources of variance in the (L2) learning opportunities teachers provide (Gurzynski-Weiss, 2017). As teacher ICs are systematic, understanding them and their impact on teachers' decisions in the classroom is thus highly relevant (Gurzynski-Weiss, 2017; Li, 2010). Teacher ICs include native language(s) (Gurzynski-Weiss, 2016), educational background and training (ibid.), L2 teaching experience (Wolff et al., 2015), or working memory (Ziegler & Smith, 2017). Language aptitude (LA), a learner individual difference (ID) considered a key component of L2 learning success (Li, 2019), has not yet been investigated for its potential role as a teacher IC. However, from the perspectives of socio-constructivist learning theory, lifelong learning and continuous professional development (Billett, 2018), L2 teachers remain L2 learners who continuously develop their L2 abilities, learning capabilities, and teaching competences. Accordingly, it can be theorised that learner IDs such as LA continue to play a role in L2 teachers' (i.e. *language-teacher-learners'*) relationship with language instruction as they engage with continuous professionalisation processes throughout their careers. This explorative mixed-methods study responds to the call for further research on teacher ICs in L2 learning and instruction (Gurzynski-Weiss, 2017). With the guiding question to identify whether LA can be seen as a relevant IC of *language-teacher-learners'*, the following overarching questions are addressed:

- 1) To what extent do pre-service L2 French teachers' LA scores predict their L2 French proficiency scores?
- 2) How strongly do the sample's explicit and implicit LA correlate?
- 3) To what extent does the sample's language history mediate their LA scores and L2 French proficiency?
- 4) Are the sample's implicit and explicit LA differentially related to the rational-analytical and experiential-intuitive cognitive styles?
- 5) Do the data reveal a relationship between the sample's explicit and implicit LA scores, cognitive styles and preferences of explicit or implicit instruction?

48 pre-service primary school L2 French teachers in their final year of their teacher training constitute the sample. To address questions 1-4, participants completed the following tests asynchronously and online: the LLAMA test battery (Meara et al., 2005; Meara & Rogers, 2019) to access “explicit” LA, the probabilistic SRT (Kaufman et al., 2010) to gauge aptitude for domain-general implicit learning, an elicited imitation test (Tracy-Ventura et al., 2014) and a C-test (Cromheecke & Brysbaert, 2022) to measure general L2 proficiency, the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q, Marian et al., 2007) to obtain participants’ language learning experience, and the Rational-Experiential Inventory (Pacini & Epstein, 1999) to access the sample’s cognitive styles. To address question 5, semi-structured qualitative interviews with 10 participants were conducted. This paper presents first results and discusses theoretical, empirical and methodological implications.



**Biography:**

**Dr. Olívia Rütli-Joy** is a senior researcher at the Department of Multilingualism and Foreign Language Education at the Université de Fribourg (CH) and the research officer of the rector at the St. Gallen University of Teacher Education (CH). Her background is in English and Media Studies (BA), English Literature (MA) and in English language education at both upper secondary school and tertiary level in Europe and New Zealand. She received her PhD in language sciences. Her research interests are in language aptitude, teacher education, foreign language teaching and learning, language teacher identity, language / LSP testing, and educational assessment and feedback.

## RAISE Roundtable on Language Education and AI Innovation Research & Projects

**Session:** 14:30 – 16:00, 30 May 2026 (Day 3) | Room N201

### **Abstract:**

This roundtable brings together research project PIs, academic organisation team leaders, educators, and industry partners to discuss the intersection of language education, pedagogy, and artificial intelligence, with a particular focus on project management and team efforts. The session highlights how research-informed practice and cross-sector collaboration can shape the future of language learning in the digital and AI era.

### **Presenters and Panelists:**

#### **Dr. Franco Wong & Dr. Zoe Chan (CPCE-LC)**

PI and Co-PI of the SELA project, an adaptive English learning system using interactive assessment to generate proficiency-appropriate test questions for sub-degree and top-up degree students in Hong Kong.

#### **Dr. Mable Chan (Hong Kong Baptist University / HASALD)**

Senior Lecturer at HKBU Language Centre and President of HASALD. Her interests include self-access language learning and learner autonomy.

#### **Dr. Brian Rusk (University of Macau)**

Research Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education, specialising in second language acquisition and morphological processing.

#### **Dr. Nick Wong (HKUST – Center for Language Education)**

Applied linguist and Principal Investigator of a HK\$30M project developing an AI-assisted VR English-speaking programme for secondary and tertiary students.

#### **Mr. Men Xuefeng (Beijing Fistar Science and Technology)**

Sales Representative focusing on psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics equipment (eye trackers, EEG, etc.).

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***All research project team leaders, lab directors, and registered participants are welcome to join our discussion.***

## Acknowledgements

The Organising Committee of the 2026 Hong Kong International Forum on Language Aptitude wishes to express its sincere gratitude to all who have contributed to the success of this event.

### **1. Thank You to All Invited Speakers, Roundtable Panelists & Participants**

We extend our deepest appreciation to our distinguished keynote speakers, plenary speakers, workshop presenters, invited speakers, and roundtable panelists for sharing their invaluable insights. We also warmly thank all onsite and online participants for their active engagement.

### **2. Thank You to the Supporting Organisations and Journals**

We are grateful to our supporting organisations and journals for their generous support.

### **3. Thank You to the Host Institution and Funding Body**

This Forum would not have been possible without the support of PolyU CPCE, the CPCE Research Office (CRO), the Division of Languages and Communication (LC), and the CPCE Centre for Pedagogic Research (CPR). We are profoundly grateful to the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No.: UGC/IIDS24/H05/25).

### **4. Thank You to the Organising Committee**

We thank the dedicated members of the Organising Committee and the Scientific Advisory Committee for their tireless work.

### **5. Thank You to the Student Helpers**

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the student helpers who have worked diligently behind the scenes – from preparation and rehearsal to registration, ushering, technical and on-site/online support, and logistics.

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### **Dr. Zhisheng Wen (Edward)**

Principal Investigator & Conference Chair  
On behalf of the Organising Committee

## Important Information – Maps

### Map of PolyU West Kowloon Campus: 9 Hoi Ting Road, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon



### MTR Route to Conference Venue:

Take the MTR to Yau Ma Tei Station (Kwun Tong Line / Tsuen Wan Line). Exit B2. Walk approximately 5–8 minutes to PolyU West Kowloon Campus (9 Hoi Ting Road).



## Important Information – Emergency Contacts

Role	Name	Contact
Conference Chair	Dr. Edward Wen (LC)	Tel: 3746 0647 <apt2026@cpce-polyu.edu.hk>
IT Technical Support	Andy Sun [ITU]	Tel: 3746 0584 <gstandy@cpce-polyu.edu.hk>
Zoom link Enquiry	Dr. Angel Li (LC)	Tel: 3746 0320 <angel.li@cpce-polyu.edu.hk>

**End of Programme Book**

### **Join Us Onsite or Online**

Encouraged to attend onsite at N203/N201.  
For online participation, scan the QR code or use the link below.



**Zoom Link:**

[https://cpce-polyu.zoom.us/j/86949421816?  
pwd=oxgPolHIQU3Oerl7QXPNpyu4r6QN0w.1](https://cpce-polyu.zoom.us/j/86949421816?pwd=oxgPolHIQU3Oerl7QXPNpyu4r6QN0w.1)

**Meeting ID:** 869 4942 1816

**Passcode:** 185378

**See you at the Forum!**