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Dr. Helena Gao received her Ph.D. in general linguistics from Lund University, Sweden and her post-doc. research training in psycholinguistics at the Department of Psychology of the University of Toronto, Canada. Her research at NTU focuses on language acquisition, bilingual development in children and adults, and contrastive linguistics.

Understanding the mind of bilinguals from their progression in linguistic behaviour (selected)

Since Kaplan's pioneering study (1966) on ESL students' essay writing in English showed rhetorical differences in paragraph organization, many questions and criticisms have been raised with regards to Kaplan's claim that rhetorical differences could reflect different patterns of thinking. Kaplan modified his earlier position in a number of later publications (e.g., Kaplan, 1987; 1988), in which he stated that rhetorical differences do not necessarily reflect different patterns of thinking. Instead, differences may reflect writing conventions learned across different cultural contexts.

In this talk I revisit Kaplan's earlier claim and raise the following questions for discussion:

- (1) If rhetorical differences in writing reflect different patterns of thinking, at what bilingual proficiency level can the differences be observed?
- (2) If rhetorical differences in writing reflect different writing conventions learned across different cultural contexts, at what language proficiency level can the differences be minimized?
- (3) What are consciously and unconsciously changed in a bilingual's linguistic behaviour that might suggest the reshaping of the bilingual mind? In seeking answers to the above questions, new data collected from bilingual speakers of English and Chinese in Singapore will be discussed with a focus on those features that show how unconsciously or silently speakers can change their perspectives in regard to social and personal values, family values, and relationships, while expressing their opinions in a particular language.