Toward a science of silence: Retrieval-induced forgetting and the consequences of leaving a memory unsaid

Date: November 01, 2011 (Tuesday)
Time: 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Venue: Room 624, Knowles Building, HKU
Speaker: Dr. Charles B. Stone

Post-doctoral Research Fellow
Université catholique de Louvain
Belgium

Silences about the past permeate acts of conversational remembering, with marked mnemonic consequences. In particular, silence leads to forgetting. Most scholars account for this resultant forgetting by alluding to theories of decay or repression. I will explore the extent to which work on retrieval-induced forgetting may illuminate the way that forgetting occurs following mnemonic silence. I will briefly describe three factors which appear to be critical when considering the mnemonic consequences of silence: whether a silence is accompanied by covert remembering or not, whether the silence is intentional or unintentional, and whether the silenced memory is related or unrelated to the memories emerging in a conversation. For this talk, however, I will focus primarily on the importance of "relatedness" through my work using the retrieval-induced forgetting paradigm. I will argue that not all silence is mnemonically equal. Some types of silence promote greater forgetting than other types. Only by appreciating the psychological mechanisms associated with silence can we better understand how and when individuals and groups forget.