There is now a long-standing opposition between so-called 'individual' and 'social' approaches to a range of issues in language learning research. This opposition is often viewed as an ideological or epistemological matter. There is also some consensus that the opposition might be resolved through concepts such as the 'social individual' or 'person-in-context'. In this paper I will take a different perspective by asking how changing trends in Applied Linguistics research methodologies may have influenced our thinking on these issues. The title of the paper alludes to art critic John Berger's Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972) and its opening comment: 'Seeing comes before words. It is seeing that establishes our place in the surrounding world'. Like works of art and their reproductions, research methodologies involve particular ways of seeing the subjects of or participants in research that exclude others. Our current interest in questions of individuality in social context, I will argue, is largely a consequence of new ways of seeing language learners that are inherent in a shift from quantitative to qualitative methodologies. Contrasting ethnographic with narrative approaches, I will argue that differing perspectives on qualitative research are also relevant to current debates on what exactly a social view of individuality in language learning means.

Keywords: