

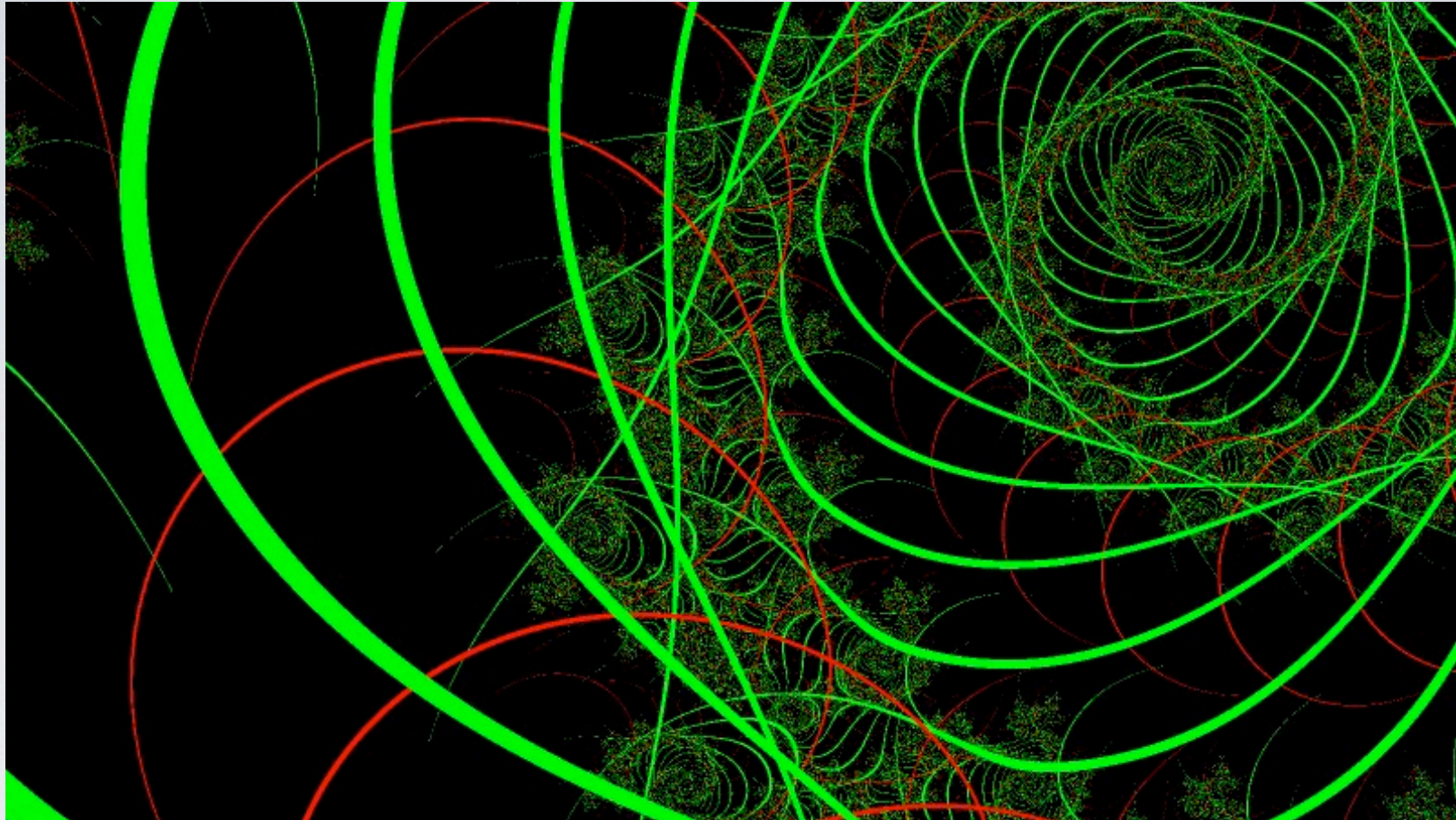
The Common Core Standards: What about English Learners & Language Minority Students?



Lily Wong Fillmore
University of California at Berkeley

What about ELs & LMs?

- Many educators wondering: ELs & LMs are not exactly thriving in school right now—how could they possibly manage the more complex materials implied by the CCSS?
- Their worry is justified. There is no way ELs or LMs could handle texts or performance tasks like the ones specified in the CCSS documents.
- That is—*unless more attention is given to their language needs* than is evident in on-going efforts to map the CCSS onto curriculum or in design of sample lesson plans.



But--

*it would be a whole 'nother story if we were to provide
ELs & LMs the instructional support they need.*

In the next 42 minutes...

- I will outline the problem, show why I think the CCSS could be the best possible—or the worst—thing that could happen to ELs and LMs, and argue that their present situation suggests we still have a lot to learn about literacy instruction, given the student diversity in our schools.
- The problem of course, is language—it begins with asking how does language figure in literacy?
- A no-brainer, but it's at the heart of the literacy problem for many students, and why I think the CCSS requires a rethinking of teaching and learning in our schools to work.

Language & Literacy in the Common Core Standards

- Although integral to literacy, little attention is given to language in reading instruction;
- It's considered only when it is an obvious problem—e.g., when children are English learners;
- I'll argue it figures heavily in literacy development, and not just for English learners!

Questions regarding language in the CCSS

- The CCSS require more complex texts at all levels, and across subjects; but—
- Why is complexity necessary? Why complex when simple is so much *easier*, especially for kids who might have trouble learning to read? Why not just select less demanding texts?
- That's precisely the kind of thinking that led to the need for the CCSS's radical recalibration of our academic standards in the first place. Not the only reason, but a major factor!

Simplicity, of course, is desirable in reading initially

- Reading materials up through grade 3 kept pretty simple because kids are *learning to read*;
- At grade 4, kids are supposed to be done learning to read, and as it is said, should be *reading to learn*.
- At that point, texts become a means for teaching subject matter—they carry an informational payload, and the language necessarily becomes more complex.

Not an easy transition...

- Remember the infamous fourth grade downturn in reading achievement?
- Many children lose their reading mojo at that point. Most recover eventually, but not poor or language minority kids.
- Problem attributed to many causes—poorly developed vocabulary, not enough basic skills, and lack of automaticity.
- The root cause? The language used in texts becomes more complex as required in support of academic learning.

More complex, but different too

- Structurally, rhetorically, lexically, and in phraseological preferences and tenor, the language of academic discourse is different from the language of interpersonal discourse.
- Among its characteristics: impersonal rather than personal, formal and objective rather than informal and subjective in tone, specificity in reference rather than imprecise, reasoned rather than emotional, and extended rather than abbreviated.
- Many types of academic discourse—varies by fields of study and by genre.

The real problem

- The language used in texts looks like a foreign language to kids when they first encounter it.
- It's different enough from everyday spoken language to be problematic even for native speakers of English.
- There are words they recognize, but the words don't add up to anything meaningful.

*Alas! men complain of
little truths (=trivialities);
hit ys dede and tat
is rwthe (ruth=pity)
falsedam regnis
and bent and buried es
trwlove (true love=
charity).*

Not realizing language is the problem...

- Educators have looked for less demanding materials for children who have trouble regaining their momentum after the fourth grade dive;
- ELs and LMs get simplified, less demanding materials prophylactically—*as preventative measures to guard against failure.*
- Such materials are problematic on many grounds. Let's see if we can tell in what way by looking at some texts.

**COMPARE, FOR
EXAMPLE, THE 2
TEXTS IN YOUR
HANDOUTS:**

Both are biographical
sketches of the American
folk-hero, “Johnny
Appleseed.”
(Grade 2-3 social studies)



BIO-SKETCH #1:

“The Story of Johnny
Appleseed”

www.weeklyreader.com



¶1 A man named Johnny Appleseed lived long ago. His real name was John Chapman. Why did people call him Johnny Appleseed? Let's read the story to find out.

¶2 Johnny Appleseed was born in Massachusetts. He walked west across the country. He carried a sack of apple seeds. He planted seeds in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

¶3 Johnny did not have a home He made clothes from sacks, and he did not have shoes to wear. As a hat, he wore a tin cooking pot. In fact, he used the pot for cooking! Johnny

Appleseed was a kind and gentle man.

¶4 He was a friend to all the people he met. He was also a friend to animals. Sometimes he slept with them in their barn. Years later, many apple trees grew from all the seeds Johnny had planted. People across the country had apples to eat.

¶5 Johnny liked to tell people this story about his life. People have told the story about Johnny Appleseed for hundreds of years. So the next time you bite into an apple, thank Johnny Appleseed.

BIO-SKETCH #2:

AMERICA'S STORY (TIME LINE):
REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD
(1764-1789)

“Johnny Appleseed was born,
September 26, 1775.”

Library of Congress WebSite
[http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/revolut/
jb_revolut_apple_1.html](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/revolut/jb_revolut_apple_1.html)



¶1 You've probably heard about the legendary "Johnny Appleseed" who, according to story and song, spread his apple seeds all over the nation. Did you know there really was a "Johnny Appleseed"? His name was Jonathan Chapman. Born in Massachusetts on September 26, 1775, Chapman earned his nickname because he planted small orchards and individual apple trees during his travels as he walked across 100,000 square miles of Midwestern wilderness and prairie. He was a genuine and dedicated professional nurseryman.

¶2 In 1801, Chapman transported 16 bushels of apple seeds from western Pennsylvania down the Ohio River. He had acquired more than 1,000 acres of farmland on which he developed apple orchards and nurseries. But he didn't just stay there.

¶3 Chapman's work resembled that of a missionary. Each year, he traveled hundreds of miles on foot wearing a coffee sack with holes cut out for arms and carrying a cooking pot, which he is said to have worn like a cap over his flowing hair.

¶4 About 1830, Chapman also acquired land in Fort Wayne, Indiana. There, he planted a nursery that produced thousands of seedling apple trees that he sold, traded, and planted elsewhere. It's no wonder he became a legendary figure with his cheerful, generous nature, his love of the wilderness, his gentleness with animals, his devotion to the Bible, his knowledge of medicinal herbs, his harmony with the Indians, and above all, his eccentric appearance. Fort Wayne still celebrates the life of "Johnny Appleseed" with a festival every September when apples are harvested. Next time you bite into an apple, think of the man who spread wealth through apples, Jonathan Chapman, better known as "Johnny Appleseed."

Which text is more appropriate for ELs?



Johnny #1

What makes it better for ELs than the other?

Which text is the easier one to read and to follow?



Johnny #2

Which text is more informative?
How so?

Which do *you* find to be the more interesting text? Why?

A look at language in the 2 texts

- Text #1:
 - Mostly simple sentences.
 - Nothing to support cohesion except the order of the sentences; few markers used indicating relationship of ideas between sentences. A feeling of non-sequitur.
 - Unusual sequential use of name, nickname, pronoun references affects text coherence further.
 - Each idea is foregrounded.
 - No contextualizing detail—when did these events happen?
 - No expansions or explanation.
- Text #2:
 - Combination of complex & relatively simple sentences.
 - Complex sentences connect related ideas, fore-grounding some, backgrounding others. Purpose—information flow.
 - Follows chain of reference rules.
 - Explanations, supporting information given for assertions.
 - Inclusion of background information and details that give texture to the story.
 - Situated in time and place.

Why so much information?

- Consideration of the writer's task—decisions about what to include in a text, and how to do it:
 - the topic,
 - assumptions about the intended readership—what they might already know about the topic, what they need to be told, their language level, their purpose for reading about the topic;
 - the context under which the text will be read, etc.
- Question—how to package all of it so that what should be foregrounded is made salient, what is less important is backgrounded, and the materials are organized for a coherent and effective presentation.

Complexity

- Sentences get complex by various means. An important one, recursivity—i.e., the same procedure can be repeated again and again.
- One such procedure: post-modification of nouns by relative clauses and preposition phrases;
- Possible to stuff large quantities of information into noun phrases, resulting in bloated structures, and requiring work to unpack before the structures can be understood.

A closer look at language

- Features of the complex language used in text #2 (that give it its character):
 - Informational density (many ideas packed into phrases, clauses, sentences.)
 - Complex noun phrases—a favorite device for packing in information, both **before** and after the head noun.

Born in Massachusetts /on September 26, 1775,/ Chapman earned his nickname/ because he planted small orchards and individual apple trees / during his travels /as he walked /across 100,000 square miles of Midwestern wilderness and prairie.

A closer look at language

- Features of the complex language used in text #2 (that give it its character):
 - **Informational density** (many ideas packed into phrases, clauses, sentences, and structures within structures!)
 - **Complex noun phrases**—a favorite device for packing in information, both before and after the head noun.

It's no wonder he became a **legendary figure with his cheerful, generous nature, his love of the wilderness, his gentleness with animals, his devotion to the Bible, his knowledge of medicinal herbs, his harmony with the Indians, and above all, his eccentric appearance.**

There, he planted [**a nursery that produced thousands of seedling apple trees that he sold, traded, and planted elsewhere**].

A NICE, BUT SOMEWHAT EXTREME EXAMPLE OF COMPLEX NPS

(from *Longman Grammar of Spoken
& Written English*, 1999)

- Mortality among stocks of eggs stored outdoors in the ground **averaged** 70%; eggs collected the following spring from a large number of natural habitats in the central part of the province **suffered** a 46% reduction in viability which could only be attributable to this exposure to cold.

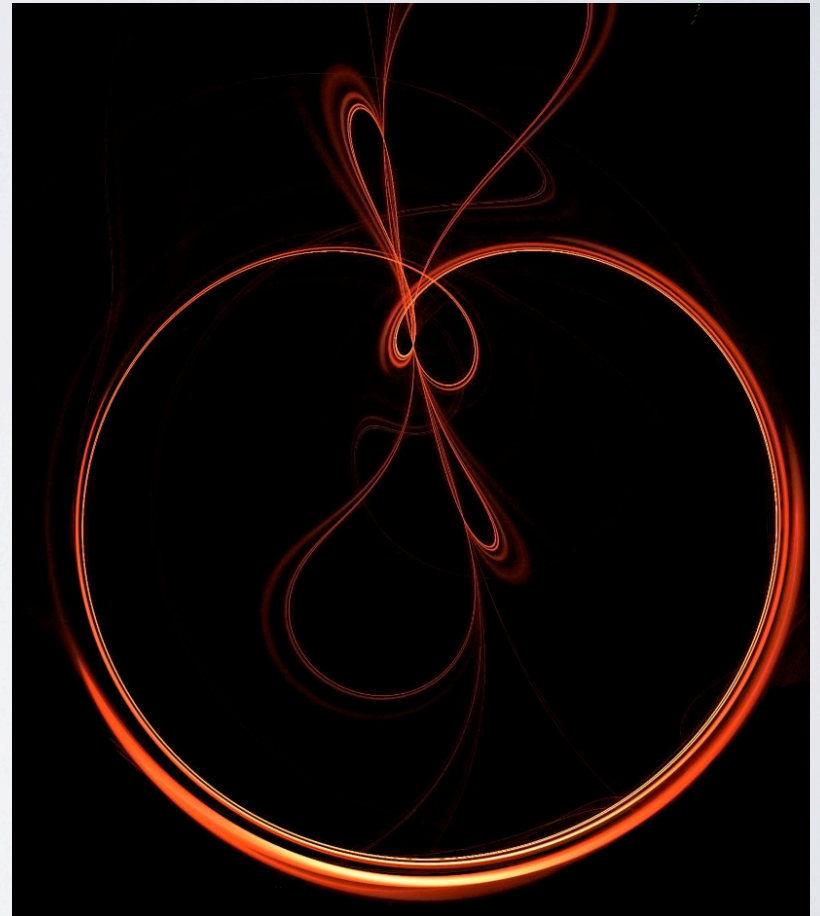
- Devices for **backgrounding** information that may already be known to some readers; devices for **foregrounding** new and important information;
- The use of adverbial clauses & phrases **to situate events in time and place**, and for relating **contingent information: e.g., purpose, reasons, conditions, and causes**.

Old or possibly known information (e.g., “**You’ve probably heard about the legendary Johnny...**”) fronted; new information or the most important events in narratives placed at the end of clauses (“**spread his apple seeds all over...**”).

E.g., “Chapman earned his nick-name **because he planted small orchards and individual apple trees during his travels as he walked across 100,000 square miles of Midwestern wilderness and prairie.**”

Such features make informational texts more difficult to process than literary ones.

- Literary texts include dialogue so they are rarely as grammatically complex as informational texts.
- Informational texts, because their purpose is to inform and “teach”, must include whatever is necessary to do their job.
- Readers have to “unpack” the information stuffed into structures to interpret the text.



How is such language learned?

- Academic language can be learned *only* from texts—by interacting with them in non-superficial ways: by noticing how language works in materials one is reading, by discussing language and meaning in those materials with others, and by writing.
- Why is this the only way to learn such language? Because the suite of grammatical, lexical and rhetorical features that figure in academic discourse can be found only in written texts; hence, the only way it can be learned is by interacting with such texts.

Learning the academic register

- Children arrive at school with the register of their primary language used for social communication. They learn the various registers required for academic development at school *through literacy*.
- This is true for all children: ***There are no native speakers of academic language.*** No one makes much progress in school without it, beginning with learning to read in the first place.*
- The academic language paradox: it is learned primarily through literacy (reading, writing, argumentation) but at the same time, it is a prerequisite to learning to read & write!

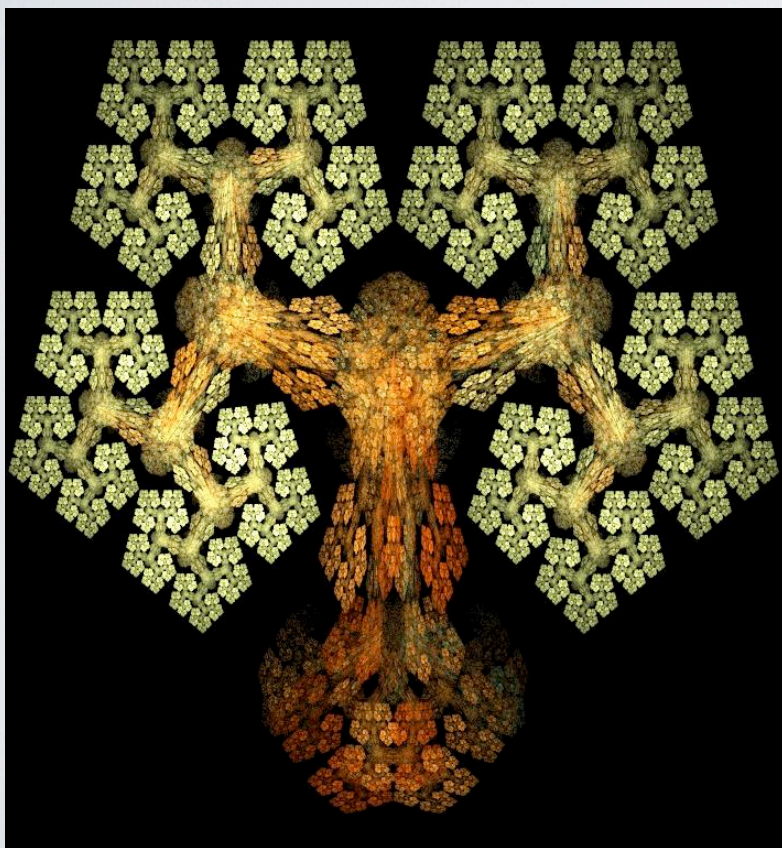
To learn any language...

- Children must have ample enough contact with that language in use (this provides data on which they can build their knowledge of how the language works, and practice in using it);
- The data must be “true” to the target—in this case, to academic language.
- They must pay sufficient attention to the language itself, in order to work out the relationships between form, function, and meaning—this doesn’t come naturally;
- They must have the support of speakers of the language who can call attention to such relationships.

The problem for ELs & other language minorities

- Their access to texts that might reveal how academic English works is severely limited by teachers who believe such materials would be far too difficult for them!
- This might be true for the first year of exposure to English, and the materials would be difficult for them to manage *on their own* for even longer than that—
- But they would not be too difficult with the right kind of instructional support.
- Simplified materials make the task of learning English far more difficult, and they are more difficult to understand!

All students, including ELs, need



- Compelling and complex grade appropriate texts that are fully aligned with the CCSS, *but not without language support!*
- That's across the curriculum, and not just in ELD, or ESL, or whatever.
- The language support should include work on vocabulary—but must go way beyond that!

What students need

- Instructional support from teachers on how language works in course materials the class is working on each day. This is across the curriculum.
- These instructional interludes should be part of larger lessons, but nonetheless bounded events in which the students understand that special attention will be given to the language used in texts.
- Instructional conversation (preplanned)—engagement of students in discussion focused on various aspects of a sentence or two chosen from those texts for their grammatical features or complexity.

Summary: support needed

- The only way to learn the registers used to carry out academic work is through literacy, but that's only if students actually interact with complex texts in which this language figures.
- Such texts, however, aren't easy to interpret because they are, as we have seen, jammed packed with information. Many students need help unpacking the information from those texts.
- The most meaningful support is provided by teachers engaging students in instructional conversations in which they draw the students' attention to the ways in which meaning relates to words, phrases, clauses in texts they are working on.



What would that look like?

That's what Part 2 (after a break) is about.