Video Transcript
Lily Wong Fillmore: Text Complexity, Common Core, and ELLs

In the paper, Charles Fillmore and I take on the problem of what the Common Core Standards' requirement for more complex text will mean for English learners, for language minority students, and their teachers. And we consider the fact that in many, many cases there isn't a lot of attention given to language in teaching and learning, not even in literacy development. So, many, many teachers have not had any training at all in, say, how language works — and yet we're going to be asking them to deal with the language of complex text. They're going to have to make those texts available to students who might not otherwise understand the language used in them. And the question of course is: what does that mean? You know, what does this mean in terms of what they will be dealing with and what they will have to be giving their student access to?

One of the most serious policy questions that comes from the work that I am talking about is the need to give teachers, not just teachers but also school administrators, the kind of understanding of how language works in learning. And what kind of support they will have to be providing teachers. First of all, you know, to learn about language, to be able to do the very, very difficult things that we're asking them to do. And then secondly, how will teachers learn how to promote language through literacy in their students. And so, you know, there has got to be some built-in ways for schools to develop the expertise needed among the teachers they have. I want them to see that something they take for granted — language — we know the language we can read that paper, if you're in a position to be reading it at all. You are completely literate and you are comfortable enough with the language of academic discourse that you don't see a problem with it. But I want them to take away from that the fact that language is pretty invisible, if you know it well. It is not invisible if you don't know it well — then it's a big wall, and the students especially are going to need help getting through that giant barrier.