

2012

# Integrating Content and Academic Language Using Balanced Literacy Structures: A Framework for Instruction of Emergent Bilinguals

Patricia Velasco

*Queens College, City University of New York*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://fordham.bepress.com/jmer>

Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Velasco, Patricia (2012) "Integrating Content and Academic Language Using Balanced Literacy Structures: A Framework for Instruction of Emergent Bilinguals," *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*: Vol. 3 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://fordham.bepress.com/jmer/vol3/iss1/3>

This Article on Theory and Research is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalResearch@Fordham. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Multilingual Education Research by an authorized editor of DigitalResearch@Fordham. For more information, please contact [considine@fordham.edu](mailto:considine@fordham.edu).

Footer Logo

# Integrating Content and Academic Language Using Balanced Literacy Structures: A Framework for Instruction of Emergent Bilinguals

---

**Patricia Velasco**

Queens College, City University of New York

---

Teachers working with emergent bilinguals<sup>1</sup> face difficult dilemmas. Students who do not receive rigorous content instruction fail to acquire academic language. However, if students do not understand the content or cannot participate in content lessons, they cannot be expected to learn the academic information and the language associated with it. Confronting this challenge requires a sound knowledge of the multiple factors that play a role in developing academic language and its dependency on content area texts. Most importantly, this understanding has to be accompanied by instructional strategies that allow students to gain steady control over academic discourse. In this article, I seek to clarify the nature of academic language and describe different pedagogical approaches used to teach academic discourse to emergent bilinguals. Its focus though, is to introduce a description of how three Balanced Literacy (BL) structures: Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing can provide a framework where academic content and language are taught simultaneously. Using case study methodology, I document how a third grade teacher uses these structures in order to create a cycle of exposure, analysis, and implementation in content classes.

---

Investigations by Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukoma (1976) and Cummins (1979, 2010), in exploring the process of second language learning, highlighted the importance of dissecting language into two main types, social and academic. It is clear that proficiency in a new language requires the development of both, but instructional input varies. Social language requires no explicit teaching; all children will develop it by interacting with family and friends. Yet, the development process for academic language, the type of language used in schools, presents some unique challenges for some emergent bilinguals. Within this population, students who are more at risk are those with interrupted schooling or who come from backgrounds where reading and writing practices have not been consistently present (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). These students will benefit greatly from having differentiated instruction that targets the development of academic language. The instructional strategies presented in this article are particularly well suited for emergent bilinguals who need to develop academic language skills. Before exploring ways to develop academic content and language, it is important to identify the multiple factors that define academic language.

## Elements that Define Academic Language

Academic language is characterized by decontextualization, or the ability to convey information through words alone without the support of gestures, voice modulation, or a shared context (Cummins, 1979; Snow, 1987). This in turn has an impact on the vocabulary and sentence structures that are needed to convey precision and explicitness. The most salient characteristic of academic language, or at least the one that attracts the most attention, is vocabulary. Academic language demands using specialized words (i.e., divergent, delta, metabolize), but this is not its only characteristic. Academic language demands the construction of complex sentence structures with the purpose of packing as much information as possible into each one (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Academic language is used in school for several purposes: to describe an event, to summarize an instructional or disciplinary text, to provide information, but most importantly, to persuade the listener or reader. From sharing an opinion about a book just read, supporting a political candidate, or writing an academic paper, the underlying purpose of the speaker (or writer) is to share well organized arguments, and/or to convince, or at least modify, the other person's perspective. In most instances, oral and written academic language demand one take a position or stance. It requires providing evidence, evaluating, negotiating, and interpreting ideas (Hyland, 1998, 2008).

Understandably, the coalescence of the multiple factors that play a role in developing academic discourse, time constraints, and the testing demands that characterize today's classrooms, make it difficult to focus on instructional practices that specifically target the development of academic language. This challenge usually results in teachers asking three questions.

1. What is the best way to teach academic vocabulary?
2. If academic language is more than words, what else is there?
3. How do I teach academic language in the course of a school day?

While teachers of emergent bilinguals find it easier to plan for developing their students' knowledge and skills related to the content area being taught, they see the task of planning to teach language through that content as a more daunting task. Standards and curricular expectations are in place, and this facilitates the academic content expectations and lesson planning. However, outlining specific academic language goals that need to be integrated into the content lesson remains an elusive task for many teachers. Cregan (2010), in studying teachers' perceptions and knowledge of academic language, found that: "...the specific characteristics of a literary or academic style of language needed to negotiate the school system successfully [are] not clearly articulated by many teachers" (p. 6).

Given the gap in teachers' understanding between the existent research on academic discourse and its classroom application, I propose an instructional framework

that guides teachers to develop language and academic goals through the use of three Balanced Literacy (BL) structures: Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing. I contend that these structures create a cycle of exposure, analysis, and implementation that can support teaching and learning academic language. This practice could be particularly beneficial for bilingual students who are learning a language while also learning through that language.

In this article, I provide an overview of how educational researchers and linguists have contributed to our understanding of academic language as a complex, multifaceted construct. The discussion uncovers essential aspects of the nature of academic language that should not be absent from instruction. A critical examination of the different pedagogical approaches for teaching academic language specifically created for the instruction of emergent bilinguals is offered. The analysis identifies what each methodology has contributed to instruction and signals some significant areas of academic language that are omitted. To address the gaps, I outline the essential elements of a pedagogical framework that combines three structures of BL to teach academic language. My longitudinal documentation of the instructional practices of a third grade teacher exemplifies the application of the proposed framework. The conclusion poses that even though BL is not a methodology originally designed for bilingual students or to be used in the reading of nonfiction texts (Clay, 1991) by modifying the implementation of Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading and Shared Writing, a cycle of exposure, analysis, and implementation of academic language goals can be created. Implications for expanding the current research based knowledge by exploring the proposed instructional framework are considered.

## **The Nature of Academic Language**

### **Initial Studies of Academic Language**

The study of academic language (also known as school language, the language of education and language in academic contexts) did not start with a focus on schools; rather, it started with research about families. While there are a vast number of studies focusing on family interactions, research by Bernstein (1971), Heath (1983), Hart and Risley (1995), and Yoshikawa (2011) highlights the complex relationship between social class, oral language, and school performance.

Bernstein was the first to analyze oral language interactions in families. As an educator in London, Bernstein (1971) noticed the poor performance of some of his working-class students. He suggested that social class was correlated with what he termed the use of restricted and elaborated codes. The restricted code is characterized by short sentences, everyday vocabulary, and phrases that assume shared knowledge (e.g., "You know what I mean"). This code is suitable for insiders, family, and friends, and it creates a sense of inclusion based on shared background knowledge and information. The elaborated code does not assume that the listener shares information and assumptions with the speaker; as a result, it is more explicit and thorough. Although not necessarily better, the precision it demands is imperative so that a larger

audience can understand the message. Bernstein found that in the working-class families he studied, the use of the restricted code was prominent. Middle-class families used both a restricted and an elaborated code. For Bernstein, the differences in codes explained why many students coming from working-class backgrounds had trouble in approaching language-dependent subject areas in school. It should be noted that Bernstein was not implying a denigrating deficit account of working-class families; rather, he was drawing attention to an aspect of the sociology of education that had not been previously identified, that is, linguistic differentiation between the language used by students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds with little exposure to academic texts and the language used in school settings.

Heath (1983) took Bernstein's work a step further by rejecting the claim that it was exclusively social class that caused differences in school performance. According to Heath, children learn language be it spoken or written, through interactions with different members in their specific society. She coined this process as 'linguistic socialization'. These practices have implications for school success. Heath writes, "...the different ways children learned to use language were dependent on the ways in which [members of] each community structured their families, defined the roles that community members could assume, and played out their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization" (p. 11). This researcher observed the ways that three groups of children acquired and used language, and she discovered that children exhibited language behaviors in accordance with the linguistic and literacy practices of their respective families and communities.

Heath found that children from Trackton (an African American working class community) and Roadville (a white working class community) exhibited very different storytelling behaviors, for example. The Trackton children were encouraged to exaggerate and to fantasize when telling a story, whereas children from Roadville, who were expected to recount factual information, interpreted the fantasizing as lying. A third community, Maintown, exemplified a suburban, middle class white and African American enclave. Children in Maintown were engaged in parent-child reading and adult-child conversations. These practices were more compatible with school expectations than had ever been acknowledged before. The families in Trackton and Roadville differed from Maintown and from each other. All families respected teachers and believed in the value of an education, but they differed in the degree of correspondence between the language practices at home and those at school and how these exert an influence on students' academic success.

Differences in linguistic socialization were also a key factor in the 42 families analyzed by Hart and Risley (1995), but they uncovered a further element in understanding family interactions. The key factor was the parents' education, and the relative economic advantage associated with it. Hart and Risley made hour-long, monthly recordings for two-and-half years of parent-child interactions. The families were categorized as professional, working class, or welfare families.

In their study race, ethnicity, and birth-order did not have an impact on the results. Parents who work in professional occupations know the expectations that

schools have and the role that language plays in academic success. This was particularly evident in the children's vocabulary knowledge. Children from professional parents used twice as many words as the children from parents on welfare. The familiarity that professional parents had with school related behaviors, academic discourse, and their ability to share it with their children, provided an edge to their children's ability to perform at school. Given the importance that vocabulary knowledge has in the language employed for teaching and learning, and in reading comprehension specifically, Hart and Risley's research expanded on the considerable disadvantages children from homes with parents on welfare face the moment they step into a school.

All these studies compared interactions within families from different socioeconomic status, race, and professional backgrounds. The study by Yoshikawa (2011) departed from this comparative framework and concentrated on the child-rearing practices of a segment of society that is most at risk: immigrant families. He followed 380 families of undocumented, immigrant parents in New York City. His investigation is significant because it is the first one to examine parents' immigration status on young children. Approximately four million children across the country are American citizens but were born to undocumented parents. Yoshikawa identified the parents' fear of deportation as a key element that has negative repercussions in a child's development. The families described by Yoshikawa lived in poverty and in isolated communities that had little interaction with educational and health institutions. The effects of this isolation and fear are dramatic. Yoshikawa found that by the time the children reached the age of two, they showed significant lower levels of language and cognitive development than those children of documented immigrants.

For all these researchers (Bernstein, Hart and Risley, Heath, and Yoshikawa), language development is colored by multiple considerations: economic factors, linguistic behaviors associated to parents' education, and psychological stress imposed by political and economic pressures. However, as important as these findings are, they should not be interpreted as meaning that academic outcomes depend exclusively on what is learned in the early years of life and in family settings. Interestingly, the results provide evidence of the unique role that schools and teachers play in school success in all and for all students. After all, if academic language is the basic tool for communication in school, the best environment for learning it should be a classroom. But how is academic language learned in school? Linguists, reading specialists, and educational researchers have contributed their expertise to answer this apparently, simple question.

### **The Learning of Academic Language in School Settings**

Critical knowledge about learning academic language in school came from studying bilingual students. By observing bilingual (Finnish/Swedish) immigrant children living in Sweden, Skutnaab Kangas and Toukomaa (1976) brought attention to the fact that these children showed fluency in both languages, but their verbal, academic language performance was below that of their peers. This observation prompted Cummins (1979) to draw attention to the time frame associated with

mastering social versus academic language. The BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) are terms rarely used in today's academic literature, but have had serious impact on the field of education. BICS has been replaced by social, conversational, or contextualized language and CALP by academic or decontextualized language (Cummins, 1991). Cummins further hypothesized that social language would take two or three years to master, with no explicit teaching involved, whereas academic language could take between five to seven years of continuous, quality schooling.

Snow (1987) studied bilingual and monolingual children in order to understand how the social and academic language learned in school interacts in a bilingual student. Snow's participants (grades 2-5) came from carefully selected bilingual schools that followed a demanding curriculum. This study showed that oral, social conversations were more language- and context-dependent and were not associated with academic language or literacy growth. Interestingly, these contextual language skills did not result in facilitating the learning of academic language. Providing formal definitions (i.e., "A bicycle is a mode of transport that has two wheels and a handle bar" vs. the more informal "A bicycle is a thing to ride") is a skill associated with schooling (Davidson, Kline, & Snow, 1986; Snow, Cancino, González, & Shiberg, 1989). The difference between these formal and informal definitions was characterized by more precise vocabulary (*vehicle* vs. *thing*) and the length and quality of the sentence pattern (a relative clause vs. a noun clause).

An additional task in this study was to ask the participants to engage in a picture-description task. To understand the implications of this assignment, it is necessary to clarify that the instructions for the children were to describe the picture to someone who could not look at it. The instructions were targeting decontextualization, or the skill to use language exclusively to form the same picture in the mind of the listener. Children were asked to convey the exact position and characteristics of objects and actions in the picture to a peer who had no access to the visual representation of the picture. These studies found that across their languages, bilingual children displayed similar skills. Two factors reflected the decontextualization skills of these children: vocabulary and the sentence structures employed in both the formal definitions and the picture description task. These skills did transfer from one language to another even though, as expected, children could be stronger in one language than in the other.

Decontextualization in oral language requires word and sentence choices that make the meaning clear and unambiguous for the listener. Interestingly, a separate and long line of research in reading comprehension identified vocabulary knowledge and sentence structures as key ingredients in successful reading comprehension (Chall, 1983; Chall & Dale, 1995; DuBay, 2007; Rex, 2010; Thorndike & Lorge, 1944). In essence, oral academic language is the language of literacy (Wong Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012). Word selection and densely packed sentences that convey information and concepts in a clear, explicit manner are common elements that characterize oral and

written academic language. The impact of vocabulary knowledge and sentence structures is of such magnitude, that each deserves to be analyzed separately.

*Vocabulary in oral and written language.* Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are closely related, and this relationship is not one-directional, since vocabulary knowledge can help the learner to comprehend written texts, and reading can contribute to vocabulary growth (Chall, 1983; Nation, 2001). Laufer (2009) states that "...no text comprehension is possible, either in one's native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text's vocabulary" (p. 20). Children who start on the path to literacy with large vocabularies understand that learning implies comprehending new concepts, which are stored in words. Children with limited vocabulary knowledge can "read" words and sentences, but can remain oblivious to the meaning that these words and sentences intend to convey. For teaching purposes, focusing on word meanings will help a student not only understand a specific text, but it will send the message that extracting the meaning of words (by analyzing the context, associating the target words with similar words, understanding that the target word is a cognate or even looking up its definition) is a strategy crucial for mastering oral academic language and literacy.

For teaching purposes, it is important to know that not all words were created equal; they fall into categories. While there are a variety of classifications (e.g., Coxhead, 2000; Nation, 2001), the one by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) stresses which words are commonly found in oral language and which are learned primarily from exposure to print. For these authors, vocabulary can be divided into three tiers. Tier 1 consists of high-frequency words used in everyday interactions and prominent in oral language. They need little or no explicit instruction for native speakers, but emergent bilinguals might not know many of these ordinary words; consequently, in order to learn them they may need to make the connection with their first language or learn a new concept. Words such as *table*, *pencil*, and *milk* would fall under this category. Tier 2 words can be generalized to many different areas of study. Words such as *explicit*, *prominent*, and *sophisticated* are all words that appear in this article and that belong to this category. Tier 3 words are technical or content-specific words. Examples include *camouflage*, *delta*, *habitat*, and *predators*. Without these content-specific words, depth of understanding in a particular content area cannot be reached. Learning academic language requires drawing attention to Tier 2 and Tier 3 words, since these words are encountered mostly in print and rarely in oral language.

For Beck et al., (2002) vocabulary instruction in monolinguals demands that the target word be placed on a network of interrelated words. The word *prominent*, for example, can be clustered with Tier 1 or other Tier 2 words: *important* or *stand out*, for example. For Nation (2001), in describing emergent bilinguals' vocabulary learning, it is crucial that the student in question knows the meaning of at least one of these interrelated words.

Words not only convey a particular meaning, but they can also reflect a particular way of thinking. Zarnowski (2006), in analyzing social studies texts in

elementary classrooms, has drawn attention to how historians approach their subject area by using particular words when they do not have enough factual information. In these instances, historians have to construct a possible scenario. In the following example, notice how Albert Marrin (as cited in Zarnowski, 2006) explains an uncertain but viable chain of events that led to the discovery of the smallpox vaccine:

Scientists *believe* that smallpox is a fairly young disease. About eight thousand years ago, *they think*, the ancestor of the small pox virus lived in an *unknown* farm somewhere in Asia or the Middle East. That virus *probably* made its host animal sick, but not sick enough to kill it. Then in *some way*, that is still *unclear*, the virus crossed over to a person. *Perhaps* the virus DNA mutated, or changed, *in a chance way* that allowed this to happen. (Emphasis in Zarnowski, 2006, p. 15)

The meaning of such words as *perhaps*, *in a chance way*, and *believe* have another dimension in this text. They are showing a thinking pattern, a supposition. A competent historian is compelled to do so when there is no concrete evidence to support a historical event.

In essence, words are fundamental for learning concepts presented in texts and for using them in oral, academic discourse. However, sentences are no less important in these learning and knowledge-application processes.

*Sentence structures.* One of the characteristics of oral and written language is sentence complexity (Rex, 2010; Scott, 2009; Snow, 1987). Vocabulary and sentence structure play an important part in conveying meanings. Sentence structures are associated with syntax (word order) and grammar (set of rules) and these are seldom addressed in today's all English and bilingual classrooms. Sentences though, are not only packed with information, they convey specific thinking processes. Science texts, for example, rest on observing and quantifying cause and effect relationships between two apparently unrelated events. A construction that reflects this scientific way of thinking is a hypothesis or conditional sentence (e.g., "*If I put fenders on a bicycle, then they will keep the rider dry when riding through puddles*").

Cummins (1979, 1999, 2010) posited that academic language was attached to higher-order thinking skills, such as hypothesizing, inferencing, or understanding cause and effect. He associated thinking skills to academic language, referring to reading and writing specifically. In the example, presented in Table 1, there are three different texts. Notice how thinking skills can be recognized by the sentence patterns employed.

Table 1

*Comparison of Three Different Content Areas, Sentence Structures, and the Thinking Skills Associated With Them*

Text sample	Thinking skills conveyed by the language used
<p><b>Math</b></p> <p>Two numbers have a sum of 87. The larger of the numbers is twice the smaller. What are the numbers?</p> <p>(Compiled from a fifth-grade class)</p>	<p><b>Comparison:</b> The larger of the numbers is twice the smaller.</p>
<p><b>Social Studies</b></p> <p><u>Life in a New Land</u></p> <p>In 1607, a ship filled with people from England landed on the coast of the land we now call Virginia. With the permission of King James of England, they started a new life in a new land. With axes and spades, they cleared a spot in the forest. They built a tiny village of mud huts.</p> <p>This village became Jamestown - the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America. Named after King James I, this new village was a colony belonging to England and the King. The people who lived there were called colonists.</p> <p>(Based on Chapter 1 of <i>Colonial Life</i> by B. January, 2000)</p>	<p><b>Cause:</b> With the permission of King James of England....<b>Effect:</b> (The colonists) started a new life, in a new land.</p> <p><b>Cause:</b> Named after King James I of England....<b>Effect:</b> This village became Jamestown, the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America.</p>
<p><b>Science</b></p> <p><u>Vaccines</u></p> <p>One important tool that helps prevent the spread of infectious diseases is vaccine. A vaccine is a substance that stimulates the body to produce chemicals that destroy viruses or bacteria. The vaccine may be made from dead or altered viruses or bacteria. The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body's natural defenses. In effect, the altered viruses or bacteria put the body on alert. If that virus or bacteria ever invades your body, it is destroyed before it can produce disease.</p> <p><b>Preventing Infectious Diseases</b> <i>Science Explorer. From Bacteria to Plants.</i> Prentice Hall, 2000, p. 73.</p>	<p><b>Cause and effect:</b> The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not <b>cause</b> disease but instead activate the body's natural defenses. In <b>effect</b>, the altered viruses or bacteria put the body on alert.</p> <p><b>Contrast:</b> The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease <b>but instead</b> activate the body's natural defenses.</p>

The math word problem in the table above requires comparing and contrasting (*the larger of the numbers is twice the smaller*). This word problem uses very specific words to signal how the numbers have to be modified and transformed (*twice, times*). Failure to understand one of these words will result in an error in the final result. The

social studies and science texts portray cause and effect. However, the language employed by each text is different. In the social studies text, for example, cause and effect relations are presented in the following way:

Cause: *Named after King James I*

Effect: *This village became Jamestown- the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America.*

However, in the text, the temporal order is reversed (Effect: *This village became Jamestown – the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America.* Cause: *Named after King James I*). The reader needs to recover the meaning of the sentence by transforming it or translating it into the chronological order that will facilitate comprehension (McNeil, 1992). The teacher can model this transformation, and this type of modeling constitutes a teaching strategy.

Cause and effect is also used in the science text, but this time the text itself includes the words *cause* and *effect*:

*The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body's natural defenses. In effect, the altered viruses or bacteria put the body on alert.*

The same thinking skill can be conveyed differently by using different words and sentence structures. Furthermore, by using *but instead*, a change of direction or an alternating possibility is indicated: *The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body's natural defenses.*

By studying these sentences, we can recognize the thinking skills that are locked within them. Still, a text is much more than just a collection of words and isolated sentences. The samples presented in Table 1 demonstrate that these sentences form a unified whole, a cohesive text. We will now turn our attention to the cohesive elements that play a role in academic language.

*Written academic language and cohesive devices.* In understanding written academic language, the contribution of Halliday and Hasan (1976) has been fundamental. These linguists described how a text “holds together” by employing certain devices that avoid redundancy and give the text a unified sense. Using the social studies text presented in Table 1, four cohesive devices first described by Halliday and Hasan can be analyzed:

Reference or pronoun substitutions. A pronoun substituting for a noun.

*In 1607, a ship filled with people from England landed on the coast of the land we now call Virginia. With the permission of King James of England, they started a new life in a new land.*

The word *they* is substituting for *people from England*.

Substitution. A word substituted for another, more general word.

*This village became Jamestown- the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America.*

The substituted words *English settlement, or colony* are referring to Jamestown.

Conjunctions. These words establish the relationship between sentences.

*The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body's natural defenses.*

The conjunctions *but instead* are signaling an alternative explanation.

Ellipsis. The deliberate omission, after an initial more specific mention, of one or more words that are not essential for understanding.

*Named after King James I, this new village was a colony belonging to England and the King.*

The word *King* in the last sentence is referring to *King James*.

Cohesive devices are characteristic of academic writing. Rarely are they taught as such, but they demand attention since lack of familiarity with them can be confused with lack of comprehension and this can result in misinterpreting a text.

As can be seen from the considerations presented here, academic language is not a monolithic construct, but a complex and multifaceted one. The interactions among vocabulary, sentence structures, cohesive devices, and decontextualization, recognizing how the language and thinking skills shift and adapt depending on the content area, are collectively referred to as “literate language features” (Pellegrini, 1985, p. 79).

So far, we have analyzed the characteristics of academic language. However, understanding and defining the characteristics of academic language invites the larger question: Why do we need or use academic language?

*Persuasion -- The purpose of academic language.* At its core, the point of using academic language is to persuade, to have an impact on someone else (Hyland, 1998, 2008). Taking a stance, understanding and providing reliable arguments, and negotiating ideas will very likely require the use of academic language. By doing so, the aim is to convince, modify, or even change that person's – or even our own – point of view. Engaging in persuasive arguments entails deciding carefully about the words, sentences, and overall structure that can have the most impact on the intended audience.

To illustrate the close connection between academic language and persuasion, Gebhard, Harman, and Seger (2007) show how Julia, a fifth grader, wrote a letter intended to persuade her principal to change a decision that cancelled recess. Julia's

letter shows mastery of precise vocabulary (e.g., her use of the words “concerned” and “sincerely”) and complex sentence patterns (e.g., she writes, “when we came back in and got straight to work we’ve really gotten bored since we can not go outside”). By learning about the words and structures in the different texts she was reading, by having a particular audience in mind, and with a teacher who directed her attention to this kind of language, Julia reached her own conclusion. She had a purpose for writing a letter addressed to her principal, and she understood how to make it powerful.

Given the complexities of mastering the persuasive nature of academic language, the New York Common Core Standards, ([http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common\\_core\\_standards/](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/)) have embedded persuasion in oral and written discourse across different grades. Students in kindergarten will be encouraged to share and support their opinions. By second grade, students will be required to produce a persuasive written text. These ambitious goals require a conscious effort that starts with the teacher drawing students’ attention to how language works by getting students to notice the words, sentences, and purpose of the text, particularly in content- or subject-related texts.

The research discussed in the first section of the literature review, strongly suggests that the learning and teaching of academic language is too complex and too filled with subtleties to leave it to chance or to expect student families and communities to carry the burden of developing it. I contend that, all teachers need to be strategic in sharing the responsibility of extending students’ academic linguistic repertoire. My cumulative experience as a teacher and researcher positively suggests that having instructional language goals is the vehicle for drawing students’ attention to how language works. Language goals can be defined as the patterns of discourse (vocabulary, sentence structures, and cohesive devices), which support curriculum learning and academic language development.

Language goals have to be centered on teaching academic language across all disciplines and grade levels. The education of emergent bilinguals demands this teaching practice, since emergent bilinguals are both learning an additional language and learning through that language (see Cummins, 2010). Several practitioners and researchers have responded to this demand by creating different instructional procedures and approaches that specify language and content instructional goals, as well as, address scaffolding content and particular language features for emergent bilinguals. In the second section of the research review, these different approaches and their salient characteristics are analyzed.

## Teaching Content and Academic Language to Emergent Bilinguals

All of the procedures and approaches that have been created to instruct emergent bilinguals place content at the center of language learning, but they emphasize different components of academic language. In Table 2 below, I summarize different procedures and approaches developed to accentuate the formal instruction of academic language in linguistically diverse classrooms. The discussion underlines the main components of each approach and how it supports the use of dual instructional goals, that is, the instruction of language and content. I explain how each responds to what research has shown about the nature of academic language and the important linguistic features to integrate in its teaching (see discussion in first section of synthesis). Attention is also given to key features that might not be covered by the procedures and approaches.

Table 2

### *Applying Conceptual Understanding of Academic Language when Instructing Emergent Bilinguals*

<b>Author(s) and method</b>	<b>Theoretical principles</b>	<b>Specific aspects that the method addresses</b>	<b>Absent features</b>
Snow, Met, & Genessee (1989)  <i>A conceptual framework for the integration of language and content in second/foreign language instruction</i>	Differentiating between content-obligatory and content-compatible language	<i>Content-Obligatory</i> goals are the vocabulary and sentence structures that are intrinsically connected to the content being taught.  <i>Content-compatible</i> refers to language that supports, but is not intrinsic to, the content being used.	Cohesive devices
Gibbons (1993, 2002)  <i>Learning to Learn in a Second Language</i>  <i>Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning</i>	Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985), which analyzes language in all interactions. These interactions are analyzed using three parameters:  <b>Tenor</b> (knowledge between the speaker and the listener);  <b>Mode</b> (written or oral communication); and  <b>Field</b> (the topic being discussed).	Gibbons uses the Tenor dimension to create exercises that emphasize decontextualization. Thinking skills (language functions), vocabulary, and sentence patterns are underscored.	Even though cohesive devices are explained in Learning to Learn in a Second Language, no specific exercises are offered.

Author(s) and method	Theoretical principles	Specific aspects that the method addresses	Absent features
Chamot & O'Malley (1994); Chamot (2009)  <i>CALLA Handbook</i>	Cummins's Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency	Vocabulary is emphasized, particularly how words can shift their meaning from one content area to another (e.g., the word <i>mean</i> in math and in everyday language).  Emphasis is on content area and conversations that reflect different thinking strategies: Metacognitive, Cognitive, and Social-affective.	Sentence structures and cohesive devices
Echevarría, Vogt, & Short (2008)  <i>The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)</i>	Scaffolding content and careful delivery of the lesson	Technical vocabulary is addressed in every unit.  Emphasis is on developing background knowledge, manipulatives, and graphic organizers. Thinking skills are emphasized through questions that are teacher-and student-generated.	Sentence structures and cohesive devices

Snow, Met, and Genessee (1989) were the first to draw a conceptual distinction between content-obligatory language and content-compatible language. Content-obligatory language refers to the language required for understanding and meeting content-area objectives. Selecting key words and sentence patterns that allow in-depth understanding of a unit would be one of the aspects to consider in selecting content-obligatory language. Content-compatible language complements and supports the content of the unit, as well as the linguistic and cultural objectives of the curriculum.

Numelin (1989) applied this conceptual distinction into her instruction of a first-grade class in a French-English immersion program. In the article, this teacher describes how her content lessons differentiated between content-obligatory and content-compatible language goals. For a unit she had to teach about time, Numelin would have as a final assessment project an individual booklet describing daily activities and the time of day when these took place. This project required that the students master reflexive verbs, (e.g., "I get up"). Reflexive verbs became her content-obligatory language goal in both English and French (which uses them more extensively). Numelin's compatible language goal was using the words *before* and *after* and *half past* and *o'clock* to talk about time and routines (e.g., "I brush my teeth after I have breakfast"). Focusing on these aspects of language enabled her students to develop an in-depth understanding of the content goal. In turn, the content goal supported the language-development goal.

Pauline Gibbons’s (1993, 2002) contribution to helping educators develop academic language-instruction procedures remains one of the most comprehensive and detailed examples of how to implement language goals. Gibbons’s work is deeply influenced by Michael Halliday’s (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL argues that interactions depend on language and these are present in almost everything we do. SFL analyzes the discourse patterns and the pragmatics (or purpose) of the message by using three parameters: tenor (who the audience is for the message and how well we know the audience); field (what the message is about); and mode (whether the message is written or oral). Tenor is the aspect that addresses contextualized or decontextualized language (familiarity or distance from the audience has an impact on decontextualized or contextualized language choices). Gibbons incorporates this aspect in her lesson planning.

For Gibbons, language goals require planning for how language is going to be used in a specific school task. She differentiates between language functions (thinking reflected in language), sentence structures, as well as vocabulary. The following planning chart (see Table 3) shows Gibbons approach in working with classification of different geometrical figures by shape and size. Her language goal is the language of classification: *These are all blue; These are triangles*. Gibbons takes this activity one step further by incorporating what she calls a barrier game. A barrier game is an exercise in decontextualization. She sits two students back to back and one student draws a pattern of geometrical figures. This student has to describe it to her partner, who cannot see it. For this exercise to be successful, it is imperative that both students know the meaning of position words or prepositions. For Gibbons, every lesson (even a math lesson) is an academic language lesson.

Table 3  
*Planning Chart According to Gibbons (1993, p. 19)*

Topic	Activity	Language Functions	Language Structures	Vocabulary
Shape, size, color	Arranging attribute blocks	Classifying	They are all blue	Triangle, square, circle
	Barrier game: Giving partner instructions	Giving instructions and describing position	These are triangles	Red, green, blue
			Draw a triangle under the ___	Under, beside, between
			Draw a triangle beside the ___	

Stemming from Cummins’s description of CALP, The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach or CALLA (Chamot, 2009; Chamot & O’Malley, 1994)

stresses the language for thinking across different content areas. There are three different thinking strategies:

1. Metacognitive: includes planning, self-monitoring, and classification.
2. Cognitive: involves note taking, summarizing, inferencing, and self-reflection.
3. Social-Affective: entails cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and asking questions.

The CALLA method stresses oral, decontextualized discourse through these different strategies. Students are required to share experiences and explain how they learned and understood different concepts. CALLA is unique in that it accentuates the importance of paying attention to vocabulary, particularly as to how words can shift their meaning depending on the content area. Think of the word *solution*, for example. It means *result* in math, *clarification* in everyday language, and *mixture of substances* in science.

CALLA stresses the importance of connecting background knowledge to new information, attention to word meanings as well as the emphasis on thinking skills. These components are also present in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, or SIOP (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2008). This instructional approach was first published in 1999. SIOP targets the new vocabulary that is an intrinsic part of the content area being developed. SIOP, like CALLA, focuses on questioning strategies that target higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) such as creating and analyzing. The questions are not only modeled and directed to the students; the students are required to create their own questions (Echevarría et al., 2008). These focused questions are the platform on which conversations grow.

SIOP is unique in that it follows a careful planning cycle that starts with assessing and building the student's background knowledge (by using manipulatives, providing non-verbal cues, and extensive use of graphic organizers) and comprehensible input (the teacher's pace of speech and explanation style). Every SIOP lesson includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Since its first publication, SIOP has expanded and has published specific books that target different content areas such as math (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2009), and social studies and history (Short, Vogt, & Echevarría, 2010). For SIOP, the main concern is scaffolding content; vocabulary is the only specific language goal addressed.

The contributions of all these researchers emphasize the relationship between content and language, although they differ in their individual approaches. All the researchers target thinking skills and vocabulary but syntactic structures for instance, are only addressed by Numelin (1989). In all of the procedures and approaches discussed, the absence of cohesive devices as language goals needs to be underscored. The lack of attention given to cohesive devices is curious since these elements have a great impact on written academic language.

Accordingly, I propose that language goals should target features of academic language, namely: vocabulary knowledge, sentence structures, and cohesive devices (Pellegrini, 1985). Language goals should stem from the content area being studied. Effective teaching, in this view, would have language goals and content goals support and scaffold each other. As Swain (1996) and García (2009) contend, language and content function as mutually supportive scaffolds.

In the next section, I identify the main objectives and components of Balanced Literacy (BL). The research exploring its use with multilingual students is discussed.

### **Balanced Literacy Structures and Teaching Academic Language**

A prevalent methodology for literacy instruction used in most New York City (NYC) schools is Balanced Literacy, a methodology that infuses oral language, listening, reading, and writing within the language arts instructional block (Calkins, 2001). Balanced Literacy though, was not designed with emergent bilinguals in mind and it was not developed for content area instruction (Clay, 1991). However, as described later in this article, my research raises the possibility that a strategic adaptation of BL, offers a promising path for the effective integration of language and content goals into the academic instruction of emergent bilinguals.

According to these researchers, BL is a framework for teaching reading and writing. It provides students with specific instructional structures for the development of their language and literacy skills. Listening and speaking lie at the core of all the different structures, as there is constant instruction, talk between partners, and collaborative work. The reading curriculum is built around modeling and practicing comprehension strategies (i.e., summarizing, getting the main idea, inferring, predicting, or visualizing). The writing curriculum revolves around understanding the characteristics of different genres (i.e., poetry, nonfiction texts, persuasive essays). Usually, students' writing reflects their own life events. Its main instructional structures are described in the Appendix.

As discussed in the scholarly literature, BL does offer a comprehensive framework for developing reading and writing, but it was initially created for children who are English speaking and who have extensive background knowledge (McGregor, 2007). Significantly, the implementation of BL with emergent bilinguals demands specific scaffolding, which is absent from its original descriptions and practice.

Two researchers investigated the use of BL with emergent bilinguals and considered how best to adapt its use with this student population. O'Day (2009) explored the performance of emergent bilinguals in balanced literacy classrooms in San Diego public schools. O'Day found that there was a lack of "focus on academic language development" (p. 115). Specifically, O'Day reports that emergent bilinguals need more explicit language instruction, and teachers must have enough knowledge of second language acquisition to anticipate potential barriers to emergent bilingual students' comprehension.

Cappellini (2005), in implementing a balanced literacy program for reading development with emergent bilinguals, describes how modifications to existing instructional structures are the key to success. Guided reading, for instance, is a structure that Cappellini implements with emergent bilinguals on a daily basis. Guided reading in classrooms where students are learning to read in their native language is implemented exclusively when students are ready to move to more difficult texts. The work by Cappellini shows that modifications and flexibility are key aspects in successfully implementing balanced literacy with emergent bilinguals.

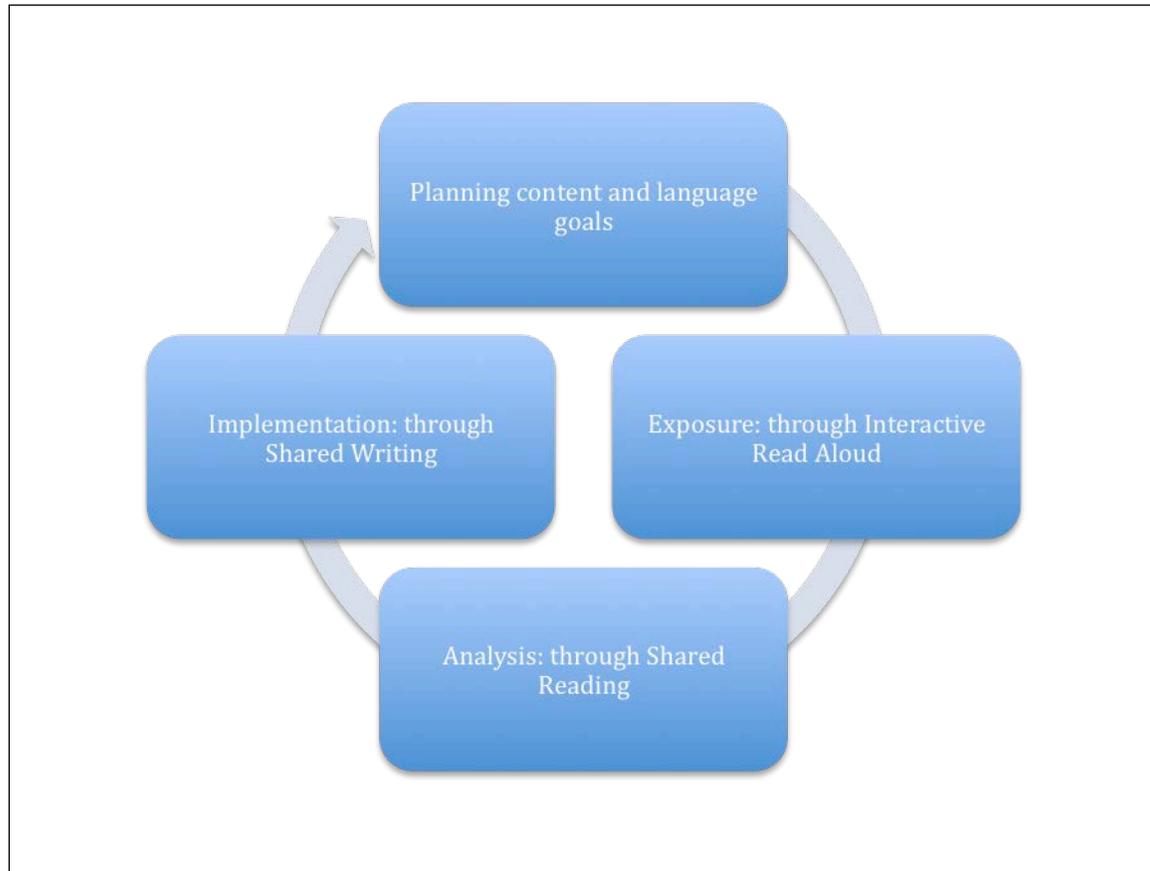
Building on the available research literature and the current work on teaching academic language to emergent bilinguals, a colleague and I collaborated with a group of teachers in NYC to tailor the BL structures they used to better serve the emergent bilinguals in their classrooms (Swinney & Velasco, 2011). That work revealed that teachers can make content accessible to emergent bilinguals by adapting the use of three BL structures: (a) Interactive Read Aloud; (b) Shared Reading; and (c) Shared Writing (see Appendix, for a description of these structures).

As my understanding of integrating language and content goals and adapting these structures evolved, I later designed a framework for targeting instruction on vocabulary, sentence structure, and cohesive devices when working with emergent bilinguals. I conducted a qualitative study to explore the application of the framework in a bilingual education classroom. The inquiry was guided by the following research question: How does a teacher in a bilingual third grade class implement the framework to design instructional goals, connecting content and academic language when teaching emergent bilinguals?

## **The Study**

This section highlights how Ms. Vélez<sup>2</sup>, a third grade teacher working in a transitional bilingual classroom designed and implemented language goals in instruction using Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing. These Balanced Literacy structures allowed her to create a cycle of exposure, analysis, and implementation where content and language support and define each other. I begin by describing the proposed framework and then include details of the qualitative exploratory study conducted.

## Framework for the Design and Implementation of Language and Content Goals



*Figure 1:* Framework for the Design and Implementation of Content and Language Goals using Balanced Literacy Structures (Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing).

As Figure 1 illustrates, the Framework is a cycle where language and content goals lead instruction interconnecting and supporting the components of: (a) Exposure through Interactive Read Aloud, (b) Analysis through Shared Reading, and (c) Implementation through Shared Writing. Below each cycle component is described in detail.

### **Planning for content and language goals.**

Curricular or content area objectives are based on developmental characteristics, student needs, and interests. Content goals are usually predetermined by city and state departments of education and they are measured in learning

outcomes. These outcomes are statements that describe the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners should have after successfully completing a learning experience or program. Teachers are familiar with the curricular objectives and the learning outcomes expected for the different units and lessons. However, less confidence is displayed when targeting language goals for emergent bilinguals.

Many teachers believe that reading, engaging in conversations, and discussing should lead to mastering academic discourse in their second language. While this is true for many bilingual students, there are those who do not understand the content or cannot participate in the lessons, these students need someone who can help them pay attention, to focus on the language of the texts. Instruction for these students needs to be shaped by language goals.

Language goals are the implementation of linguistic features associated with academic language such as vocabulary, sentence structures, and cohesive devices. The teacher needs to analyze the texts that will support a particular unit, select particular words and structures that lie at the core of the unit and that represent a learning opportunity. Planning becomes intentional and student progress can be assessed.

### **Exposure to academic language through Interactive Read Aloud.**

Read Aloud is a BL structure that benefits the learning of emergent bilinguals. It allows the teacher to anchor a unit of study, to provide background knowledge, and to expose and scaffold vocabulary, concepts, and structures that are an intrinsic part of the linguistic data employed within a particular content area (Swinney & Velasco, 2011). The language goals guiding reading aloud interactively may focus on these linguistic features to expose emergent bilinguals to academic language and content.

### **Analysis of language goals through Shared Reading.**

Once the emergent bilinguals have been exposed to the content text, they have to be given the space and time to analyze the forms and structures of the academic language employed in the specific text. Language goals in Shared Reading may offer students the chance of unpacking the meaning from sections of the text by relating words, phrases, clauses, and cohesive devices to its overall meaning. Interacting with text in this manner increases the support for understanding the content area and for reading comprehension.

### **Implementation of language goals through Shared Writing.**

This is the culminating, assessing activity. By producing text collaboratively, the teacher can see if the students have integrated the language goals that she has pursued through Interactive Read Aloud and Shared Reading.

The cyclical quality of the Framework allows for the continuous work on the same language goals through a recursive use of the structures with the same or a new text.

## **The Context and Participant**

Ms. Vélez teaches in an urban school in NYC. The school has a bilingual transitional and an English only program. There are 826 students and 80% are entitled to free lunch. Latinos are the highest group represented in the student body (80%), followed by African Americans (17%) and Asian (3%). Ms. Vélez' third grade class has 25 students, including three newcomers and nine other emergent bilinguals. The first language of all her 25 students is Spanish but several of her students are English dominant and struggling learners (they have academic or emotional issues that interfere with their academic success).

The teacher instructs all content areas in English except for Social Studies. This is in response to the school requirements of transitioning students into an all English program by fourth grade. Additionally, an ESL teacher works with the emergent bilingual students three times a week as a push in teacher (teaching inside the classroom) during the literacy period in particular. The ESL teacher uses her time with the children to reinforce and individualize the language goals that Ms. Vélez is addressing to the whole class.

## **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

I observed this classroom over an academic year. The number of observations per week varied from initially one day per week observing 2 or 3 different content subjects being taught, to 4 days a week later in the year, specifically during the period allocated for science. I increased the number of observation days when the teacher was implementing a science thematic unit which modified the BL structures.

The observations were carefully documented through copious field notes. I also took photos of instructional materials produced by the teacher and photocopied student work. Before beginning data collection, I obtained permission from the NYC DOE, school principal, the teacher, and students' parents.

Data analysis began at the same time that data was collected. The field notes were continuously read to identify any instructional behavior related to teaching content knowledge and the academic language associated with it. The behaviors were then identified as instructional episodes and analyzed to answer three questions: (1) What part of academic knowledge and language is being taught?; (2) How is the teacher instructing it?; and (3) How is the teacher adapting the BL structure to allow students to analyze and produce the academic language intrinsic to the text?

Any instructional episode that did not answer any of the questions was set aside. Only those events that provided information relevant to the three analytic questions were further scrutinized, by writing analytic memos and discussing them with the teacher. The fact that I was in the classroom several days a week facilitated ongoing interaction with Ms. Vélez which served to triangulate the data analysis.

## Findings

To exemplify how Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing Structures target content and language goals, we followed Ms. Vélez, as she developed a thematic unit on the rain forest with a focus on science subject area. The specific concept that she addressed was camouflage.

### Establishing Language Goals

Ms. Vélez planned for three language goals. These stem from the required content area vocabulary and students academic and language needs:

- **Mastery of technical vocabulary:** such as *camouflage*, *survive*, and *habitat*. Without knowing the meaning of these words, her students would not be able to gain an in-depth understanding of this unit.
- **Sentence structures:** analyzing the structure of relative clauses that appear in the text. Ms. Vélez wanted to focus on this specific aspect because she had noticed that the sentences her students produced were short and stilted. By focusing on a longer, more sophisticated sentence pattern, she aimed at having her students produce them in their writing.
- **Cohesive devices:** pronoun substitution. Ms. Vélez noticed that some of her students, when they read a pronoun, did not know the object or person to which the pronoun is referring.

In addressing these language goals, Ms. Vélez targeted different aspects of academic language from words, to sentences, to how a paragraph is put together (cohesion). She also “recycled” the language through listening (Interactive Read Aloud), reading (Shared Reading) and writing (Shared Writing). In her planning chart, Ms. Vélez included the language goals, strategies, and materials she used within each of the structures.

Table 4

*Language Goals and BL Structures for Instruction in Ms. Vélez' Class*

Planned Language Goals	Exposure through Interactive Read Aloud	Analysis through Shared Reading	Implementation through Shared Writing
Vocabulary (Technical vocabulary specific to the unit): camouflage  survive	Definitions on the run when reading associating words:  <i>Camouflage</i> and <i>disguise</i> , for example.	Analyze a paragraph from the Read Aloud that incorporates all the language goals  Associating tier 3 words with tier 1 or 2 counterparts:  <i>Camouflage/disguise</i> ;  <i>Survive/live</i> ;  <i>Predators/hunters/killers</i>	Through the creation of a collective, written text, students will use the new words, sentences and pronouns that have been the language goals.
Sentence Structures (Relative clauses)	Separating the two sentences to clarify the meaning:  1. Camouflage is a color or pattern in an animal's body.  2. (Camouflage is a color or pattern) that allows it to blend with a certain background.	Deconstructing and constructing relative clauses to model for students the role of <i>that</i> as a substitute for <i>camouflage is a color or pattern</i> .	
Cohesive devices (Pronoun substitution)	Using associated nouns and pronouns when reading aloud.	Associating the pronoun <i>it</i> with <i>the animal</i> in the text taken from the Read Aloud.	

**Exposure to academic language within the Interactive Read Aloud Structure**

The book that Ms. Vélez read is *Camouflage and Mimicry* (Kalman, 2001). The section she read aloud to her class was the following:

In order to survive, many animals use camouflage to find food or hide from their natural enemies. Camouflage is a color or pattern on an animal's body that allows it to blend with a certain background. The type of camouflage an animal uses depends on the environment in which it is hiding (p. 4).

She used different instructional strategies to scaffold meaning for her students (association of technical words; definitions on the run; paraphrase to clarify sentences; sentence repetition providing a noun and its corresponding pronoun). During the Interactive Read Aloud, Ms. Vélez associated technical words (Tier 3) with words that are Tier 2 or 1. She provided a "definition on the run" by providing a similar word after she read the word *camouflage*:

Teacher (reading): "Many animals use camouflage... [T]his means disguise, hide; many animals use camouflage or disguise...."

Ms. Vélez transformed complex sentence structures to make them accessible to her students:

Teacher (reading): "Camouflage is a color or pattern on an animal's body that allows it to blend with a certain background."

Teacher (clarifying the sentence): "Camouflage is a color or pattern on the body of an animal. The color or pattern helps the animal blend with a certain background."

The third language goal that the teacher targeted is pronoun substitutions. As she read, the teacher selected the pronouns that she wanted to focus on so that the meaning would not be lost. As a result, she occasionally repeated a sentence, presenting it once with the pronoun and once with the corresponding noun:

Teacher (reading): "The type of camouflage an animal uses depends on the environment in which it is hiding."

Teacher (substituting the pronoun with the noun): "The type of camouflage an animal uses depends on the environment in which the animal is hiding."

Even though this might sound redundant, the teacher prefers that the meaning is clear and her students are aware of the information they are receiving. Ms. Vélez followed the same procedures for subsequent pages as she read the book. By taking care of scaffolding the academic language that the text presents, the content became accessible.

### **Analysis of Language Goals through Shared Reading Structure**

During the Shared Reading, Ms. Vélez was able to associate Tier 3 words with equivalent terms in Tier 2; to model how to understand and construct challenging structures such as relative clauses; and to confirm that pronouns were always connected with the appropriate reference. The paragraph selection for analyzing the

language goals in Shared Reading was taken from the book used in the Interactive Read Aloud. For purposes of clarity, the same paragraph that was used in the Interactive Read Aloud to illustrate scaffolding strategies above will be used in this section.

Ms. Vélez placed Post-it notes to cover her target words. On the Post-it, she wrote a similar, Tier 2 word that created a link with the more technical target word: *survive/live, camouflage/disguise*. Ms. Vélez employed a similar strategy with pronouns. She covered the pronoun *it* with a Post-it that said *the animal*. When the students first read the paragraph, they read it with the Post-its covering these language goals. Ms. Vélez gave her students a chance to think about what word could be under the Post-it. The students thought and shared their ideas with their peers. Several students came to the front and, after sharing their prediction, took the Post-it away:

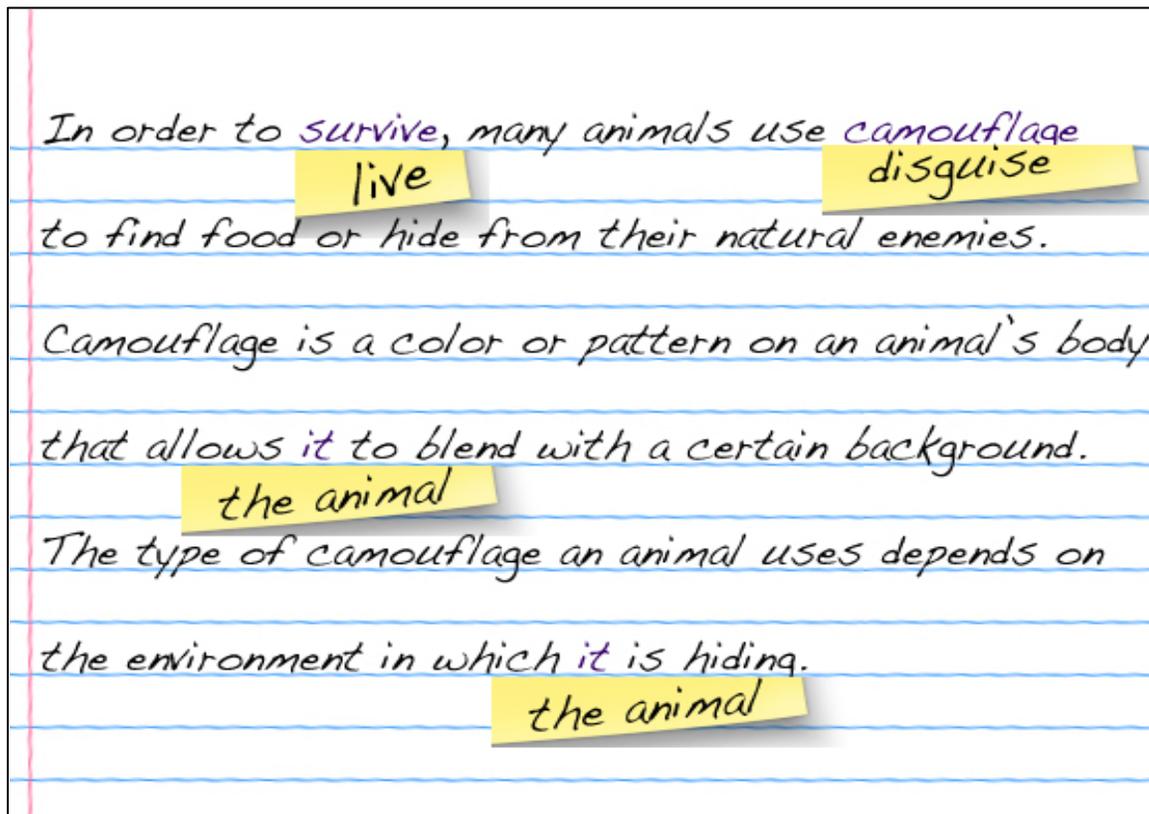


Figure 2: Shared Reading text focusing on technical words and pronoun substitution during Shared Reading

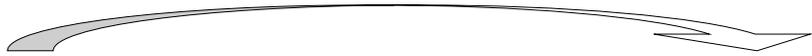
Relative clauses are used to give additional information about something without constructing an additional sentence. A relative clause requires the use of *which, that, whom, whose*. To address the specific construction of the relative clause that this short passage presents, she broke it into two sentences:

Camouflage is a color or pattern on an animal's body. The color or pattern allows it to blend with a certain background.

Then, the two sentences were put back together, substituting *the color or pattern* for *that*.

Camouflage is a color or pattern on an animal's body. <sup>that</sup> ~~The color or pattern~~ allows it to blend with a certain background.

A second strategy that the teacher used was to place a connecting arrow between *that* and *camouflage is a color or pattern*:



**Camouflage is a color or pattern** on an animal's body **that** allows it to blend with a certain background.

On another day, a second relative clause and a pronoun substitution were analyzed:

**The type of camouflage** an animal uses depends on the environment in **which it** ~~(the animal)~~ is hiding.

The relative clauses were deconstructed and constructed again. It gave the students an opportunity to understand the role of *that* and *which* in constructing a longer, more sophisticated sentence. Notice how these structures were not taught using grammatical rules or explanations. Their pedagogical strength comes from being taught through the use of visual devices.

### Implementation of Content and Language Goals in Shared Writing Structure

In Shared Writing, Ms. Vélez was able to assess what content and language structures her students integrated into a collectively written text, written by the teacher with students input. As students contributed to the Shared Writing, she noted what vocabulary and linguistic structures they spontaneously used allowing her to determine if the lesson's language goals were achieved.

Ms. Vélez introduced Shared Writing by prompting her students to create a summary of what they had learned so far about camouflage:

Teacher: How do we start writing what we have learned about camouflage?

Student 1: The animals hide...

Teacher: That is something that we have to say, but should we start by writing: the animals hide?

Several students: No!

Teacher: Who wants to suggest something else?

Student 3: We start with camouflage

Student 4: Camouflage is the way the skin...

Student 5: The way the skin of some animals looks...

Student 1: Yes, like that.

The students created this introductory paragraph. It summarized what they had learned so far:

Camouflage is the way the skin of some animals looks. Some animals have patterns, like the cheetah. Other animals have the same color as their habitat. They blend with it, like green frogs. An animal's camouflage blends with the place in which the animal lives.

As Ms. Vélez wrote this text, she could see that her students had incorporated the language goals that she had initially planned: vocabulary (camouflage, habitat); sentence structures (i.e., An animal's camouflage blends with the place in which the animal lives.) and pronoun substitution (i.e., it, they).

The findings confirmed that writing an academic text is an exercise in decontextualization. It requires that the information presented is explicit and precise so that the audience can easily understand the text. Shared Writing facilitates this decontextualization process by allowing students to reword and revise concepts and to hear similar ideas presented in a variety of ways. Engaging in Shared Writing requires that students organize, sequence, and evaluate the importance of the information being presented.

## **Analysis**

The analysis of Ms. Vélez teaching a thematic unit revealed that the cycle of planning, exposure, analysis, and implementation is one of transformation. Having specific language goals that targeted different aspects of academic language gave clarity and purpose to her teaching. She chose words that were at the center of understanding the science lessons that she was undertaking. The sentence structure and cohesive device she selected stemmed from the observed needs in most of her students and that the texts portrayed.

During the Interactive Read Aloud, the exposure to listening to rich language and concepts, together with the scaffolds that Ms. Vélez implemented, gave her students the opportunity to understand new linguistic forms that the unit conveyed. The strategies she implemented within the Interactive Read Aloud acted as a first step- scaffold that prepared the students to read and analyze the text in Shared Reading. This subsequent analysis provided the opportunity for the students to play with and understand words and sentences before engaging in the collective creation of the Shared Writing piece.

The cycle took them from listening to text, to reading and speaking it, and finally to experiencing the decisions that writing demands.

For Ms. Vélez, these Balanced Literacy structures acted as gradual scaffolds that allowed her and her students to focus on language and in the process, the content was scaffolded. In essence, there was a double transformation in this third grade, transitional bilingual class. From Ms. Vélez's point of view, she gained confidence in knowing what to teach and how to teach it. From her students' perspective, they experienced the rewarding effects that come from being able to understand and use sophisticated words and structures.

## Conclusions

Understanding all the elements embodied in academic language has been a long, and often winding, road. The research reviewed in this paper revealed that linguistic socialization in early childhood, densely packed information in sentences and words, considerations of the immediacy of the audience, understanding how texts are put together, as well as how texts are cohesive units, are all elements of academic language (Chamot, 2009; Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2009; Gibbons, 1993, 2002, 2006; Numelin, 1989; Snow, Met, & Genessee, 1989;). All these researchers place content at the heart of academic language learning, requiring teachers to place a dual emphasis on language and content in their daily pedagogical practices. I contend that, the task of teaching academic language is less daunting if the focus is on its different aspects which clarify academic content for students.

The instructional framework proposed in this article responds to two issues, (1) the lack of practical information provided for teachers on how best to plan for the integration of academic language and content, and (2) consideration of how best to deconstruct the linguistic features of academic text when teaching emergent bilinguals. The depiction of how a teacher worked at designing language and content goals and in modifying BL structures to make academic content comprehensible for students navigating two linguistic repertoires, suggests provocative possibilities for other practitioners with similar educational demands. The strategies that Ms. Vélez implemented in planning for language and content goals and in instructing through modified Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing, can be emulated by ESL, mainstream, and bilingual education teachers working in multilingual schools. The cycle of planning, exposure (through Interactive Read Aloud), analysis (through Shared Reading), and implementation (through Shared Writing) affords opportunities for learning about language in the context of using language to learn academic content.

To understand the impact of this approach, more research is needed on how specific attention to language can benefit the learning of emergent bilinguals by focusing on particular words, sentence structures, and cohesive devices that are characteristic of texts at different grade levels and content areas. The refining of this research should include different types of emergent bilinguals (i.e., SIFE or long-term English Learners) and bilingual programs where attention is given to academic language in a language other than English (i.e, Mandarin, Spanish, Russian, Bengali).

Within this line of research, the modifications that other Balanced Literacy structures offer should also be analyzed. For instance, SIFE students in upper elementary grades or even middle school, who often have a weak command of the alphabetic principles of English, may benefit from Interactive Writing. This process though, needs to be documented and described for the benefit of other emergent bilinguals and their teachers.

The research discussed in this paper contributes to the existing literature on instruction for emergent bilinguals that rely on the integration of language and content goals, through literacy in the content areas. By modifying and adapting three Balanced Literacy structures: Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading and Shared Writing, emergent bilinguals can achieve a deeper understanding of the content and the academic language associated with it.

## References

- Beck, I., McKeown, M., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life. Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Bernstein, B. (1971). *Class, codes and control. Vol. 1*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Calkins, L. (2001). *The art of teaching reading*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Cappellini, M. (2005). *Balancing reading and language learning. A resource for teaching English language learners. K-5*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Chall, J. S. (1983). *Stages of reading development*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.
- Chall, J., & Dale, E. (1995). *Readability revisite: The New Dale-Chall Readability Formula*. Northampton, MA: Brookline Books.
- Chamot, A. U., & O'Malley, J. M. (1994). *The CALLA handbook: Implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach*. Reading MA: Allison-Wesley.
- Chamot, A. U. (2009). *The CALLA handbook. implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach*. New York, NY: Pearson.
- Clay, M. (1991). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Coxhead, A. (2000). A new academic word list. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(2), 213-238.  
<http://language.massey.ac.nz/staff/awl/index.shtml>
- Cregan, Á. (2010). *From policy to practice: The oral language challenge for teachers*. London: National Education Trust. Available from  
<http://www.nationaleducationtrust.net/SISL/Downloads/TheOralLanguageChallengeForTeachers.pdf>
- Cummins, J. (1979). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age and some other matters. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, 19, 212-219.
- Cummins, J. (1991). Language development and academic learning. In L. Malave & G. Duquette (Eds.) *Language, culture and cognition* (pp. 161-175). Clavendon, England: Multilingual Matters.

- Cummins, J. (1999). *BICS and CALP: Clarifying the distinction*. ERIC database. (ED:438551).
- Cummins, J. (2010). Foreword. In O. García & J. Kleifgen (Eds.). *Educating emergent bilinguals: Policies, programs and practices for English Language Learners* (pp. x-xi). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Davidson, R., Kline, S. B., & Snow, C. E. (1986). Definitions and definite noun phrases: Indicators of children's decontextualized language skills. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 1(1), 31-48.
- DuBay, W. H. (2007). *Unlocking language: The classic readability studies*. Charleston, SC: BookSurge.
- Echevarría, J., Vogt, M. E., & Short, D. J. (2008). *Making content comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model*. (3rd ed.) New York, NY: Allyn and Bacon.
- Echevarría, J., Vogt, M. E., & Short, D. J. (2009). *The SIOP Model for teaching mathematics to English Learners*. New York, NY: Allyn and Bacon.
- García, O. (2009). *Bilingualism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A global perspective*. London: Wiley Blackwell.
- García, O. & Kleifgen, J. (2010). *Educating emergent bilinguals: Policies, programs and practices for English Language Learners*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gebhard, M., Harman, R., & Seger, W. (2007). Reclaiming recess: Learning the language of persuasion. *Language Arts*, 84(5), 419-430.
- Gibbons, P. (1993). *Learning to learn in a second language*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gibbons, P. (2006). *Bridging discourses in the ESL classroom: Students, teachers and researchers*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *Spoken and written language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Hart, B. & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (1998). *Hedging in scientific research articles*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Hyland, K. (2008). Persuasion, interaction and the construction of knowledge: Representing the self and others in research writing. *International Journal of English Studies*, 8(2), 1-23.
- January, B. (2000). *Colonial life*. New York, NY: Children's Press.
- Kalman, B. (2001). *What are camouflage and mimicry?* New York, NY: Crabtree Publishing Company.
- Laufer, B. (2009). Second language vocabulary acquisition from language input to form-focused activities. *Language Teaching*, 42(3), 341-354.
- McGregor, T. (2007). *Comprehension connections: Bridges to strategic reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- McNeil, J. D. (1992). *Reading comprehension: New directions for classroom practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup>ed.) New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- New York State Education Department. (2011). *NYS P-12 Common Core Learning Standards*. Available from [http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common\\_core\\_standards/](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/)
- Numelin, K. (1989). The importance of sequencing and planning when integrating language and content. *ACIE Newsletter*, 2(1), 1-4.
- O'Day, J. (2009). Good instruction is good for everyone, or is it? English language learners in a balanced literacy approach. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 14(1), 97-119.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (1985). Relations between preschool children's symbolic play and literate behavior. In L. Galda and A. D. Pellegrini (Eds.), *Play, language and stories: The development of children's literate behavior* (pp. 79-97). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Preventing infectious diseases science explorer. From bacteria to plants*. (2000). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Rex, M. (2010). *Thorndike visual vocabulary scales: Corrections for their use*. Charleston, SC: Nabu Press.
- Scott, C. M. (2009). A case for the sentence in reading comprehension. *Language, Speech and Hearing – Services in Schools*, 40(2), 184-191.
- Short, D., Vogt, M. E., & Echevarría, J. (2010). *The SIOP Model for teaching history-social studies to English learners*. New York, NY: Allyn and Bacon.
- Skutnaab-Kangas, T., & Toukomaa, P. (1976). *Teaching migrant children mother tongue and learning the language of the host country in the context of the socio-cultural situation of the migrant family*. Tampere, Finland: Tukimuksia Research Report.
- Snow, C. E. (1987). *Second language learners' formal definitions: An oral correlate of school literacy*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Center for Language Development and Research.
- Snow, C. E., Cancino, H. E., Gonzalez, P., & Shriberg, E. (1989). Giving formal definitions: An oral language correlate of school literacy. In D. Bloome (Ed.), *Classrooms and literacy*, (pp. 233-249). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Snow, C. E., Griffin, P., & Burns, S. (2005). *Knowledge to support the teaching of reading: Preparing teachers for a changing world*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Snow, M. A., Met, M., & Genesee, F. (1989). A conceptual framework for the integration of language and content in second/foreign language instruction. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(2), 201-217.
- Swain, M. (1996). Integrating language and content in immersion classrooms: Research perspectives. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 52(4), 529-548.
- Swinney, R., & Velasco, P. (2011). *Connecting content and academic language for English learners and struggling students: Grades 2-6*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Thorndike, E. L., & Lorge, I. (1944). *The teacher's word book of 30,000 words*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.

- Wong Fillmore, L. (1991). When learning a second language means losing the first. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 6(3), 323-346.
- Wong Fillmore, L., & Fillmore, C. J. (2012). What does text complexity mean for English learners and language minority students. Understanding language, literacy and learning in the content areas. Stanford University. Available from <http://www.stanford.edu/publication/6-what-does-text-complexity-mean-english-learners-and-language-minority-students>
- Yoshikawa, H. (2011). *Immigrants raising citizens: Parents and their young children*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Zarnowski, M. (2006). *Making sense of history: Using high-quality literature and hands-on experiences to build content knowledge*. New York, NY: Scholastic Teaching Resources.

## Notes

- 1 In this article, I use the term “emergent bilinguals” (García & Kleifgen, 2010), instead of the more common one “English language learners.” The term “emergent bilinguals” encompasses students who are learning two languages simultaneously as well as students who are in the process of acquiring the majority language, English. Since weaving together content and language is an educational practice mainly targeted to these populations, it seems appropriate to use the term that emphasizes their uniqueness.
- 2 Not her real name

**Acknowledgements:** I want to extend my gratitude to Antonia Mandry for creating the Shared Reading graph. To Stan Wanat, Ruth Swinney, and Ofelia García for reading early versions of this article and providing valuable suggestions. Mostly, I want to thank Ms. Vélez and her students for allowing me to learn with them.

## Appendix

### Balanced Literacy Structures (Swinney & Velasco, 2011)

1. The teacher models by reading or writing to the students using the following structures:

**Interactive Read Aloud:** The teacher reads to the whole class or to a small group of students, exposing them to a variety of literary genres. As the teacher reads, she is modeling the array of reading comprehension strategies previously mentioned. At different points, the teacher will ask the students to turn and talk to their partners and share their thoughts, make a prediction or summarize.

**Shared Writing:** In this component, the teacher and students collaborate to write a text together. The teacher writes what the students dictate. The purpose is to demonstrate the decision making that takes place while constructing an academic text.

**Interactive Writing:** The teacher and students write a short text and the teacher guides the students' attention to specific aspects of the mechanics of writing (i.e., spelling of familiar words, capitalization, spacing between words). The expectation is to work on one or two sentences at a time so students are able to focus their development of these technical aspects.

2. The teacher reads with the students using the following structures:

**Shared Reading:** An enlarged text is presented to the whole class. The students read the text collectively, and the teacher can focus on specific aspects: punctuation or vocabulary, for example. Although shared reading and shared writing are a structure associated with the lower elementary grades, their use in the upper elementary grades (fourth and fifth grade) and middle school can be very effective (Swinney & Velasco, 2011).

**Guided Reading:** The teacher scaffolds reading strategies with a small group of students who are reading at the same level.

3. The students work independently using the following structures:

**Independent reading** (with the teacher observing and conferring): Students read on their own for extensive periods of time.

**Writing process** (with teacher observing and conferring): Students write mostly about their life experiences for extensive periods of time.