

Lisa Ko, in her novel *The Leavers*, employs a fractured timeline which effectively “upends the single conclusion structure” in that it emphasizes the experiences of Deming Guo, the novel’s protagonist, as he adjusts and adapts to different identities ascribed to him throughout the novel. A significant mechanism through which this is achieved is not only the language employed throughout the novel, but the notions and experiences of language throughout. The novel’s fractured timeline serves as a mirror for the ways in which Deming’s grasp of languages shifts and arguably becomes fractured in the sense that he is implored to retain and juggle his multilingualism for different reasons throughout.

In the fourth chapter of *The Leavers*, we observe a scene during which Deming, his foster parents Kay and Daniel, their friends Elaine and Peter, and Elaine and Peter’s adopted daughter, Angel, go out to dinner at a supposedly “authentic” Chinese restaurant. In a well-intentioned yet obviously problematic attempt on the part of the parents to normalize culture and make their children feel comfortable, they all request chopsticks with which to eat their meals following the waiter first handing them silverware. As Deming recognizes that their waiter speaks Fuzhounese, the language which has simultaneously bound and often broke his ties to his mother, the adults speak at large of the deliciousness and authenticity of their dinner. Deming, however, thinks otherwise, thinking things such as “the steam was lackluster” and that “his mother would have never eaten food this bad” (Ko 88). In an act of what appears to be both a reach for a connection to his mother and a way of saying “screw you” to the foster parents who so deeply stress the necessity of Deming become fluent in English, Deming orders dessert for the table entirely in Fuzhounese. At this point, Deming had been living in an entirely white neighborhood with his foster parents for almost a year, having no one or no reason to speak Fuzhounese as he did not have to communicate with or translate for his biological mother. This, then, can be read as Deming’s way of asserting what *he* believes is in his best interest: continuing to practice his Fuzhounese tongue despite it not being of use in his new life.

Occurring about a quarter of the way into the novel, we can see how the fracturing of the timeline reflects Deming’s arguably “fractured” abilities for language. Deming’s fluency in Fuzhounese shifts throughout the novel—first, he is adept in order to translate for and communicate with his mom; later, after having moved in with Kay and Daniel, we observe a kind of loss, a leaving, an unfamiliarity with one of the few things that so tightly bound Deming to his mother due to Deming’s foster parents not encouraging him to speak the language. In a similar manner, Deming’s English becomes less “fractured” as he is urged to become more fluent.