

## “Wisely, and slow. They stumble that run fast”:<sup>1</sup> Learner-Friendly Shakespeare in an EFL Classroom

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Since the Japanese government incorporated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a school subject in the late nineteenth century, English literature, particularly Shakespeare (including adaptations of his plays), has been used as material for the study of English in secondary schools and in higher education institutions, where even non-English majors have learned English through the original texts or adaptations of the plays (Uchimaru 2018, 2019).<sup>2</sup> However, Shakespeare is currently banished into the margins of English language teaching in large part due to a shift in the emphasis from liberal arts-oriented study towards career-orientation. The Bard is ignored as a symbol of English considered irrelevant to the needs of more utilitarian language-learners. Indeed, one Japanese business executive even called for a shift in the focus of English departments from “Shakespeare” and the “study of English literature” towards “English for tourism” (Toyama 2014).

No one can argue that communication is a major concern for language learners, but literature is also a promising vehicle for language-learning purposes, if the input is comprehensible and enjoyable (Anton and Hammer 2014: 259). Indeed, despite somewhat official gestures of disregard for Shakespeare, students demonstrate their willingness to read stories from Shakespeare in the EFL classroom. A notable example can be found in the favourable feedback in an EFL class of 25 university freshmen (A1 to A2 levels in CEFR), in which the author employed a mixture of short extracts from *The Merchant of Venice* and the prose version. The students not only enjoyed reading the story, but also felt that the engaging story would better facilitate their language acquisition than newspaper articles or essays. This is reminiscent of what Stephen Krashen (2008) perceives as the “Comprehensive Hypothesis”: we acquire language and develop literacy when we understand “messages.” In H. G. Widdowson (1983)’s words, literature indeed has a significant edge over other kinds of texts in raising language awareness:

It’s not easy to see how learners at any level can get interested in and therefore motivated by a dialogue about buying stamps at a post office.

There is no plot, no mystery, there is no character; everything proceeds as if communication never created a problem. There's no misunderstanding, there no possibility of any kind of interaction. What happens is that learners simply mouth the sentences of their parts, and you don't actually get them interested in what they are doing (33).

Along the same line, Japan-based EFL experts have discussed the effective use of Shakespeare as material for English language acquisition (Kodama 2012; Addison 2014).

In addition, the use of literature as instructional material affords many more cultural benefits to English language learners than the mere ability to communicate with others. The projection of an alternative world in literary works conveys messages that bear upon what is regarded as the actual world. Ruth Wajnryb (2003), for instance, asserts the positive “effect of story” on one’s mind:

Beyond the immediate pleasures of exposure to stories, the uplifting, exciting, moving or thought-provoking qualities of a good story contribute to an educated person’s intellectual, emotional and moral development. The effect of story—one might say, its “magic”—is to offer an infinite well of vicarious experience with the capacity to transport the reader/hearer beyond all boundaries of time, space, language, ethnicity, class or gender (4).

This is also true for stories from Shakespeare’s plays. Indeed, some students in the author’s class argued that *The Merchant of Venice* drew their attention to racial prejudice as a global issue. Their comments give evidence to the “power of learning Shakespeare” advanced by Joe Winston and Miles Tandy (2012), who emphasise that Shakespeare’s plays “deal with the moral realities of life”:

When learners are helped to connect morally and emotionally with these stories they can be taken on a journey that challenges them to extend the range of their moral imaginations...to know about Shakespeare, to be able to discuss, appreciate and quote from his plays is seen as one of the key markers of a good education by influential people, be they politicians, cultural commentators or business leaders. (4–5)

The cultural value accorded Shakespeare can also be exploited in the EFL classroom. For instance, Daniela Rhinow (2001), a teaching practitioner in a prominent English language institute in Brazil, uses Shakespeare as instructional material to cater not only for linguistic improvement but also to enhance “the development of cross-cultural studies in terms of literature, society, history, arts, and other related issues” (46). Shakespearean plays can serve as a vehicle to foster values related to global citizenship, such as a rich sense of humanity, leadership, empathy and respect for different cultures and sensibilities. To that end, however, great care needs to be taken to help expose learners to Shakespeare in a learner-friendly way.

There are two major ways to teach Shakespeare in the classroom (particularly in Japan). One is through translation-oriented reading. As Daniel Gallimore (2014) rightly points out, “translation is obviously rather more central to the teaching of Shakespeare in Japan, where the English language *per se* is still to some extent taught by the grammar-translation method” (6). The goal is rendition in Japanese, which often discourages students from reading the original texts in large part due to its inevitable teacher-centred approach being, in the words of L. Smith and J. King (2018), “unavoidably linked to disengagement” (329). Another is the use of film adaptations of Shakespearean plays. It is certainly true that the film adaptations can serve as a good platform to provide students with a stimulating opportunity to interpret the plays by comparing various productions from across the globe. However, those materials could reduce students to passivity, rather than remaining active learners; they may not be encouraged to actively read and engage with the plays.

To remedy these issues, this essay seeks to explore a perceived learner-friendly classroom approach to teaching Shakespeare for less advanced English language learners (A1 to A2 levels in CEFR) in the EFL classroom aimed at language acquisition.<sup>3</sup> The target learners are university students learning English as a foreign language, particularly first- and second-year students across disciplines. The pedagogy on which the author will base instruction is a student-centred approach, deploying a reciprocal learning strategy (Silver, Strong and Perini [2007]) flavoured with active-method approaches advanced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, whose workshop he joined as part of the Shakespeare and Education course at the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham.

During a reciprocal learning lesson, two students form a learning partnership committed to help each other to reach a particular goal. The benefits of student learning

partnerships include improving their social interactions, focusing their attention more on a task when working with a partner than they will when working independently, and then developing a more positive attitude towards the subject matter. Particularly when applied to reading, such reciprocal learning enhances decoding skills, deepens comprehension, and helps students learn how to read difficult, information-rich texts. Meanwhile, the active approach to teaching Shakespeare can be briefly defined as (1) teaching Shakespeare actively, (2) using advanced teaching skills in questioning, developing personal, learning and thinking skills in the class, and (3) encouraging students to make their own informed interpretive choices. By adapting these teaching strategies to suit the needs of Japanese EFL instruction under existing circumstances, this paper will provide learner-friendly approaches to reading Shakespeare actively in the EFL classroom.

The discussion is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the most challenging aspect that Japanese teachers and students face in teaching and learning Shakespeare in the classroom, which is the means of introducing Shakespeare, particularly his language, positing the notion that the story should come before the language. The second section explores effective activities to make Shakespeare's language easier for English language learners to grasp. The third section examines ways in which students can narrow a gap between their local cultures and Shakespeare's plays and relate the plays to their lives. In so doing, this paper provides innovative yet pragmatically feasible approaches to teaching Shakespeare in the EFL classroom.

### **The Storyline before the Language**

The perceived idealism of teaching Shakespeare might be to expose learners to Shakespeare's authentic language. For Rex Gibson (1998), "Shakespeare's language is both a model and a resource for students" (5), and for James Stredder (2009), "something of the joyfulness, beauty and sublimity of Shakespeare's language" (118) should be experienced in the classroom. However, the original dramatic texts are challenging, even daunting, for less advanced English language learners. In the words of Jennifer Hulbert (2006), the learners' initial encounters with Shakespeare's plays often become "a site of resistance" derived in large part from the language, which inevitably entails a frustration of "inaccessibility" (1–2).

It is certainly true that, as Kate Flaherty, Penny Gay and L. E. Semler (2013) rightly point out, "this is the case whether they are learning in London, Los Angeles,

Cape Town, Sydney, or Taipei” (2). Yet such challenges are made considerably more formidable when Shakespeare is transferred to an EFL class, as Vince Máté (2005) discusses the teaching of Shakespeare in non-English major classrooms: “[t]he first and probably most demanding difficulty with the teaching of Shakespeare is the linguistic gap between the text and the everyday English that students learn” (57). In teaching Shakespeare’s plays in the EFL classroom, Dyla El-Shayal (2001), a professor at Cairo University, also laments that most students “started the course on a remarkably sour note, complaining that they found Shakespeare too difficult and hopelessly complex” (27). This demanding difficulty with the teaching of Shakespeare’s language in an EFL setting is particularly true in East Asia, as a Korean scholar, Younglim Han, admits:

The students’ capacity to absorb Shakespeare is conditioned by the translatable elements of his language. Reading the original play [*sic*] at full length does not always excite or stimulate them, but rather curbs their imagination. They doubt whether they can do justice to Shakespeare or form a proper conception of his characters (56).

The teaching of Shakespeare for English language learners in the EFL classroom would fail unless those linguistic distance, fear and doubt were carefully treated and minimized by teachers.

It is crucial to admit, therefore, that it is pragmatically impossible for English language learners to appreciate Shakespeare’s language without instructional scaffolds carefully designed to familiarise them with the authentic language. Otherwise, Shakespeare will invite extremely negative responses among students. Given that, in the words of proponents of the active approach advanced by the RSC, Joe Winston and Miles Tandy (2012), most students are hooked by Shakespeare’s story rather than his language, one of the effective ways to orient learners to Shakespeare is to focus on the storyline before the language (Clements 2015). This pedagogy has been advocated by Shakespeare educators, as the legendary teacher from America, Albert Cullum (1986), preferred “to introduce him [Shakespeare] as the greatest story teller of all time...Once the outline of the story is understood, there are a myriad of techniques that can be used to encourage further involvement” (11–12). As Gibson (2000) also admits, “[s]tory, with its changing sequence and central concern for characters, is easy to grasp. It does

not explicitly impose analytic or evaluative demands” (152). To actively encourage the students to engage with Shakespeare, the story should come first.

To that end, the prose or simplified English versions can be used as jumping-off points for the language (though, as Gerald Graff [2000] demonstrates his concern with an academic resistance to ‘reductive simplifications’ (1043), scholars of English literature in general, whether Anglophone or not, tend not to value reductive communication in favour of the so-called authentic materials). Indeed, Chris Lima (2016), a distinguished scholar of teaching Shakespeare in the English-language class, argues for the use of the modern version as a “valid approach”:

[I]f we want people to have some experience of Shakespeare, as opposed to either no experience of his work, or daunting originals, modernizing Shakespeare and adapting his language for “less advanced language learners” should be considered a valid approach (194).

This view is similarly shared by John Haddon (2009), who says that from his classroom experience that “our first wish is for pupils to grasp the basics of character and plot, the narrative line – we want then to get the gist, and their difficulties with (even their hostility to) the language can prevent them getting it” (75). In the Japanese context, Kenneth K. P. Chan (2014), a Japan-based English teacher at the university level, provides an empirical report on teaching Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In his view, the play serves as a gentle and fun introduction to Shakespearean works due to its “relatively light-hearted nature, easy to follow plot, and simple character profiles”. For “native Japanese speakers” whose “English reading level would be about that of an upper elementary pupil in the UK”, beginning the play with the original English “would be too difficult ...and probably off-putting, so three ‘levels’ of the story were used, which allows for a gradual build up to the much more challenging original”:

E. Nesbit’s simplified story of the play for children was used as an easy, short, first read to gain a basic, overall understanding of the characters and plot, followed by Charles and Mary Lamb’s story adaptation for more detailed coverage that also incorporates a little more of the original language. Selected parts of an English-language edition were used last, read in a role play manner to better engage the students with the characters, and accompanied by teacher explanation (4–5).

This will be further validated through the history of teaching Shakespeare in East Asian countries, particularly Japan and China, in which the majority of those students were provided with their initial encounters with the Bard through narrative versions of the plays in general, and Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* in particular, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Huang 2009: 71–83; Uchimaru 2018). A gradual and careful transition from story to language enables learners to reduce their frustration with Shakespeare.

An issue to be addressed first is how to arouse learners' interest in the story. To set the scene for engaging and active first encounters with Shakespeare, the use of a film trailer serves as a good gateway medium (White 2015). In this activity, learners are shown a Shakespeare film trailer, are then encouraged to seek information from the trailer, write down a language item that strikes a chord with them, and any questions that occur to them on the first viewing. Since a film trailer is laboriously created as a short and punchy marketing vehicle designed to attract audiences to the theatre by provoking excitement and expectation in the story, it will help to rivet learners' attention on the story, to actively explore Shakespeare's plays and themes, and then to facilitate post-viewing discussion with learning partners. Some official trailers of Shakespeare films even provide key words from the play on screen, as exemplified by "love," "hatred," "betrayal," and "vengeance" in the 2004 adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, and by "betrayal," "murder," and "madness" in the 2009 RSC production (BBC) of *Hamlet* starring David Tennant. These key words help less advanced English language learners to understand the trailer.

Such trailers are also useful as fill-in-the-blank listening exercises when teachers want to draw students' attention to particular words. To this end, YouTube offers a wealth of Shakespearean film trailers, including cinema and RSC productions. As Christy Desmet (2009) astutely observes, "YouTube Shakespeare videos are infinitely adaptable to classroom lesson plans that focus on interpreting the Shakespearean plot and text" (68). This speculation on the plots of the plays effectively serves as a pre-reading preparation for stories from Shakespeare.

Then teachers can move to reading. For less advanced English language learners, *Stories from Shakespeare* retold by Anne Collins (2008) for Pearson English Readers offers a good point of departure for Shakespeare. Whilst all the vocabulary is taken from A 2 level in CEFR and the plot is simplified, hardly any popular or thought-provoking Shakespearean scenes are eliminated. A good case in point is *The Merchant*

of *Venice*, which includes Shylock's responses to Antonio's prejudice and cruelty, the three-casket scene (expunged from *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb), and Portia's mercy speech. In addition, Portia's opening query in the courtroom ("Which is the merchant here, and the Jew" [4.1.171]) is maintained as "Where are Antonio and Shylock" as a token of no difference between the Jew and the Christian. Additionally, gender issues, including an exclusive male bond between Antonio and Bassanio, and Portia's disguise in the public sphere, are undercurrents in the prose version. Indeed, all the students commented that the story was comprehensible, enjoyable and thought-provoking when the author used the text as material for English teaching in the university-EFL classroom.

Instead of graded readers, a storytelling plot-summary of Shakespeare's plays offered by the British Council as part of LearnEnglish Teens (British Council) may also be learner-friendly. This online course provides an approximately 5-minute narration of a story from Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest*) by a professional actor using B1 to B2 level English and contains transcriptions and activities, including pre-listening vocabulary preparation and post-listening comprehension checks. As animation is incorporated to help students to grasp the whole story, this online storytelling version may make Shakespeare more accessible than text-only adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.

However, an even more useful resource for use in an EFL class is the *No Fear Shakespeare* series edited by SparkNotes, which juxtaposes Shakespeare's original language and a translation into modern English. Students can first understand a storyline by reading the modern translation before moving on to Shakespeare's original language. This version not only enables students to follow the story easily but also can be broken up to furnish material for language activities through the online resources (SparkNotes). Among those is a scene-by-scene plot summary which allows a teacher to easily create a fill-in-the-blank plot summary worksheet designed to check comprehension, like this:



## Plot Summary Exercise

[Plot Summary] Fill in the Blanks
Shylock is also _____ by Antonio's frequent public denunciations of Shylock. Antonio makes it clear to Shylock that he is _____, but that on behalf of his friend Bassanio.

Alternatively, learners should be encouraged to create a plot summary by themselves. This can serve to facilitate not only language acquisition but comprehension, as experts on EFL teaching concur on the beneficial effects of summary writing on the enhancement of content comprehension as well as a writing skill (Krashen 1984). Learners who are not proficient in writing should refer to the “story schema” or “story grammar” (Stein and Glenn 1979): setting, initiating event, internal response, attempt, consequence, and reaction. Chen and Su (2016) elaborates on this schema:

- Setting** Where does the story take place? When does the story take place?  
Who is the main character? What is the main character like? Who is another important character? What is this other character like?
- Initiating event** What is the major problem the main character confronts?
- Internal response** What is the main character's reaction to the major problem?
- Attempt** How does the main character attempt to solve the major problem?
- Consequence** Does the main character solve the problem? Is there any unexpected result in the story?
- Reaction** What is the main character's response to the consequence? (186–187)

According to this story grammar, Act 1 Scene 3 of *The Merchant of Venice* may be outlined as follows:

- Setting:** Venice. Shylock, Antonio and Bassanio
- Initiating event:** Shylock is asked to lend money to Bassanio.

**Internal response:** Shylock decides to lend money on the condition that Antonio guarantees the loan, but he has hatred for Antonio.

**Attempt:** Shylock offers to make the loan without interest.

**Consequence:** Instead of lending money without interest, Shylock says Antonio will forfeit a pound of his own flesh unless the loan is repaid in due time.

**Reaction:** Antonio accepts the offer.

Based on this outline, students are asked to flesh out more details with their own flavours and interpretive choices. As a post-summary activity, they can improve their writing by comparing it with SparkNotes' summary or deepen their understanding and gain a new perspective by sharing their summary with the partners. This writing task can be creative in the sense that any summarisation of a narrative text is always subject to interpretation. After helping students to lay the foundation for the study of Shakespeare, teachers can effectively move on to initiate them into the authentic language.

### **Making Shakespeare's Language Accessible through Awareness**

To make students less intimidated and frustrated by Shakespeare's language, exposure to the authentic text should be kept brief, and simpler passages should be located for use in the classroom. First of all, a gentle introduction should be offered to learners unfamiliar with Shakespeare's frequent inverted sentences, in which the subject, verb and object are out of their usual order. To this end, as Lorraine Hopping Egan (1998: 10) suggests, rewriting them in standard English word order will serve as a ladder towards verbal achievement, like this:

#### **Shakespeare's original word order**

Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.

#### **Standard English word order**

Madness in great ones must not go unwatched.

Subsequently, brief comparative extracts from modern English versions can greatly aid students' appreciation of key ideas (Addison 2014). By turning to *No Fear Shakespeare*, teachers can easily lead students to compare extracts from Shakespeare's authentic

language with short passages from the modern versions. Among comparison exercises intended to make Shakespeare’s language easier for English language learners is a mix-and-match exercise suggested by Genevieve White (2014). The students are asked to match the authentic language with the modern English translation with the following worksheet:

Shakespeare’s Language	Match Up
The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes. ’Tis mightiest in the mightiest. It becomes The thronèd monarch better than his crown.	
<b>[Translation in Modern English]</b>	
1: It’s strongest in the strongest people. 2: No one shows mercy because he has to. 3: It looks better in a king than his own crown looks on him. 4: on the ground. Mercy is a double blessing. 5: It just happens, the way gentle rain drops 6: It blesses the one who gives it and the one who receives it.	

Students choose a modern equivalent of Shakespeare’s original language from “Translation in Modern English,” and then write it down in the right box. Through this activity, the students realise independently, for instance, that the meaning of “Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed” is “On the ground. Mercy is a double blessing.” Students who can work independently may find a line from Shakespeare’s original corresponding to the translation in modern English from the text, and then put it into the right column:

Translation in Modern English	Shakespeare’s Language
No one shows mercy because he has to.	
It just happens, the way gentle rain drops on the ground.	
Mercy is a double blessing.	
It blesses the one who gives it and the one who receives it.	
It’s strongest in the strongest people.	
It looks better in a king than his own crown looks on him.	

The use of mix-and-match exercises can aid learners in realising the meaning of Shakespeare’s language independently, without any recourse to translation into

Japanese. To what extent teachers should gloss on Shakespearean words and grammar depends on the level of the class, but overall instruction should be designed not to “teach” the language, but to facilitate students’ language awareness.

Something similar can be said about teaching the scansion of Shakespeare’s blank verse. For Japanese learners of the English language, blank verse scansion is sometimes confusing, in large part due to Japanese phonemes. A syllable in Japanese always consists of a consonant followed by a vowel, with the exception of “n,” which is regarded as an isolated syllable. This sound system causes the Japanese to misunderstand English syllables; to their ears, “quality” is recognised as a four-syllable word (“ku-o-li-ti”) rather than as three syllables, and “strained” as a five-syllable word (“su-to-re-in-do”) rather than as one syllable. Consequently, they often struggle to decide which syllable to stress, thereby making it difficult to read Shakespeare’s blank verse aloud confidently. An iambic pentameter activity, therefore, should be carefully designed to make students clearly aware of English syllabication. To this end, it is a good idea to break up words into syllables and then to put each syllable into a box in the following way:

**Scansion Exercise**

—	/	—	/	—	/	—	/	—	/
It	bles	-eth	him	that	gives	and	him	that	takes

Visualising which syllables are stressed and which are unstressed enables learners to increase their awareness of English syllables and to build confidence in reading the blank verse passages aloud, either in chorus or individually.

In order to further explore Shakespeare’s language, a teacher can use a reciprocal learning strategy by encouraging student partnerships to translate a line into their own words in their mother tongue. In seeking to interpret a scene creatively and cooperatively, the teacher allocates each line of a speech to each pair until all the lines are assigned. This translation is followed by speaking their line aloud so that one student speaks the original text and the other speaks the Japanese translation to other pairs, accompanied, if possible, by actions. This use of such translation is not traditional grammar translation but cooperative practice designed for students to actively read Shakespeare’s language on their own terms.

After the translation and read-aloud exercise, learners can be encouraged to orally reproduce the Shakespearean lines that they have already translated into their own words. To do this exercise, a teacher needs to prepare a worksheet in which the left box includes Shakespeare’s words and the right box carries the students’ translations. Students are asked to form a pair, one reading the translation and the other orally providing a back-translation into English without looking at the translation:

### Reproduction Exercise

Shakespeare’s Language	Translation
The quality of mercy is not strained.	慈悲は無理強いされるものではない。
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven	天から地上へと降り注ぐ雨のようなもの。
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed:	その祝福は二重のものになる。
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.	慈悲を与える者にも、それを受け取る者にも祝福を与えるからだ。
...	

This reproduction exercise in EFL classes always makes the students excited to orally reproduce English words, because they are happy to speak English as if they were a simultaneous interpreter.

These reading activities to raise language awareness in students inevitably heighten their cultural awareness and encourages them to ask themselves questions about moral issues, such as, in case of *The Merchant of Venice*, racial prejudice, gender issues, the conflicts between the law and mercy, and between Judaism and Christianity: Was Shylock fairly treated? Does the play really have a happy ending? Why did Portia need to disguise herself as a male lawyer? Indeed, some students from a class have asked: “Is Antonio really a good man?” or “I want to know more about why Shylock was bullied so much.” These questions are a simple but important jumping-off point for fostering the cultural development necessary for global citizenship. After this discussion, an essay writing assignment can be given to the students to encourage them to further explore the “moral realities of life” provoked by Shakespeare.

## **Mind the Gap**

Another response to Shakespeare causing some difficulty emanates from the emotional distance between our time and Shakespeare's. Many learners struggle to understand the issues of Shakespearean characters' lives due to the huge gap between Shakespeare's early modern England and the contemporary world or different cultural worlds. To bridge the gulf is imperative because, as Hulbert (2006) argues, the receptivity of the plays is closely connected to this question: "How do we convince the students that Shakespeare is relevant to their lives and worth reading and knowing?" (1–2).

To such challenges being faced by the students, an active approach presents a solution by providing fertile ground for preparing for the world of Shakespeare through introductory activities (although the extensive use of this method in the EFL classroom may be doubtful in its efficacy due to its heavy emphasis on physical activity). For instance, Joe Winston invites students to engage actively with a text by creating an improvisation around ideas, such as "grief," "madness" or "a family that lost their father," making a connection between, for example, Hamlet and the students' own lives. Among others, "Go, stop, show me" and "Make me a ..." (Winston and Tandy 2012: 10–13; Winston 2015: 57–60) can significantly assist students to enter the world of Shakespeare's plays. The purpose of such group improvisation is to help "young people connect with the world of the play by beginning from the world they know" (Winston 2015: 59). In the former, students working in groups are asked to walk through the space and freeze, in order to make a group image that "in some way suggests the subject matter, character, theme or setting of the play with which you are working" (Winston and Tandy 2012: 11). Students about to work on Hamlet, for instance, will be asked to go and stop in response to what teachers call out, such as "Show me grief," "Show me madness," "Show me a king," and "Show me a prince." Then in pairs, with no talking, ask them to "Show me a king and a prince." Then in fours or fives: "Show me a king and his court." Students are then asked to work in groups of five or six to create a series of tableaux, in order to illustrate a family that has just lost a father (Winston 2015: 57–58).

After the plot is understood, "hot seating" helps the students to better understand Shakespearean characters by inviting them to act as the characters, such as Antonio, Shylock, and Portia, and answer questions from other students. Their questions may include: "Why do you hate Shylock?" and "Why did you disguise yourself as a man?" Students in the hot seat for their assigned characters reply to questions from the

interviewers by personating their characters. This activity makes learners not only feel the characters' emotion but also develop effective questioning skills (Lau and Tso 2017: 3–4).

During an active approach lesson, the students are asked to constantly discuss interpretive choices in pairs and groups through questions concerning character and motivation, including: How might Macbeth and Banquo have become friends? Why do you think Macbeth asks the witches to speak? Why does Banquo ask the witches to speak to him? To develop interpretive choices, they can also be asked to create a physical image (“freeze frames”) in groups and pairs by representing a paused moment in time (RSC 2010: 37–40, 293). For instance, they can read Act 1 Scene 3 of *The Merchant of Venice* and make a freeze frame which shows the relationship between Antonio and Shylock. Then, they speak aloud Antonio's and Shylock's lines. How the lines are spoken is their choice. These constant questions “Why” and “How?” bring the text to life and relate them to students' lives.

The “beginning from the world they know” dictum can also be applied particularly to learners from non-Anglophone countries. As Dennis Kennedy (2001) remarks, “[s]hifting Shakespeare from one country to another inevitably involves cultural displacement,” and “When we move outside the range of the West... Shakespeare must be transmuted into a different creature if he is to make sense and flourish” (258). Thus, with a view to dissolving cultural barriers or impediments, students are, as El-Shayal (2001) argues, “encouraged to constantly try to relate and associate characters, events, themes, etc. with similar or even identical instances present in their own culture” (28). Such semiotic codes shared between Shakespeare's world and their own cultural idioms should be exploited to narrow the gap between the two different worlds. Indeed, El-Shayal demonstrates how successful appealing to the world which students know can be in teaching the world of Shakespeare.

Understanding through homology is a traditional Japanese way of learning Western culture, as Hiroko Willcock (2000) rightly points out: “the receptivity of the Japanese to alien elements as the key is inherently connected to their recognition of affinities found in different cultures” (977). Indeed, Yoshisaburô Okakura (1933), the great educator and the doyen of English language teaching in early twentieth-century Japan, encouraged Shakespeare learners to exploit a shared semantic code between Japanese culture and Shakespeare's plays:

How can Shakespeare be understood? An answer to the question is as follows: we had drama here in the age of Shakespeare. There are a number of similarities in the development of drama between there and here. What I find important is, therefore, to ask our drama of elder people who are familiar with it, to gather further materials from other people as well, and then to infer from our drama what their drama was like, based on research on the former. In other words, it is necessary to draw a parallel between the West and Japan and then to undertake comparative studies (47–48).

For instance, there are a wealth of revenge plays similar to *Hamlet* in Japan. Traditional Japanese theatre, *Kabuki*, includes a number of plays focusing on revenge, such as *The Forty-Seven Rōnin* (*Chūshin Gura*) and *The Revenge of Togitatsu* (*Togitatsu no Utare*). In particular, *A Tale of Ichijō Ohkura* (*Ichijō Ohkura Monogatari*) is in close proximity to *Hamlet* in the sense that the protagonist assumes madness to achieve his revenge on his enemy and restore his clan. By the same measure, several *Noh* plays in medieval Japan, such as *Hibariyama* (*Hibari Mountain*), *Nakamitsu* (*The Loyalty of Nakamitsu*), and *Yorobōshi* (*Yorobōshi: The Blind Man*), are similar to *King Lear* in that children bear ill treatment at the hands of their fathers, although the children of those *Noh* plays are saved by loyal subjects similar to Kent, resulting in a happy ending. Meanwhile, in a Japanese *jōruri* musical recitation, *Tsubosaka Reigenki* (*The Miracle at Tsubosaka Temple*), Sawaichi's (the husband) suspicions of Osato's (the wife) sincerity and his pangs of regret are also reminiscent of Hamlet's situation with Ophelia.

Although these traditional plays are categorised as high culture, Japanese youth culture, particularly *anime* and *manga*, also makes a number of references to Shakespeare's works. An early version can be traced back to Osamu Tezuka (1928–1989), known as the so-called “God of *Manga*,” who was inspired by, and adapted, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. *Manga* and *anime* creators still use the plays as material resource to exploit for their new products. To take a few examples, *Blast of the Tempest* (*Zetsuen no Tenpesuto*) refers to *Hamlet* as well as *The Tempest*; *SwordArt Online II* (from the so-called light novel rather than *manga*) incorporates an Oberon and Titania episode from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; one episode of *Psycho-Pass* is inspired by *Titus Andronicus*; *Love and Liar* (*Koi to Uso*) uses *Romeo and Juliet* performed by the main characters in the school festival as a driving force of the plot; *Nise-koi* also gains



inspiration from *Romeo and Juliet*. In *Fate/Apocrypha*, Shakespeare himself appears along with his lethal weapon, “First Folio,” and speaks several famous passages from his plays, including “We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on; and our little life/ Is rounded with a sleep” in *The Tempest* (4.1.156–158). One scene from these *anime* and *manga* could be used in the EFL classroom alongside truncated sections of original texts for comparative reading. This will awaken the students to a study of intercultural interpretations of Shakespearean plays, which is currently one of the most powerful academic fields: “Global Shakespeares.” Points of contact between different cultures and Shakespeare’s plays can be exploited to relate Shakespeare’s characters and themes to their equivalents in a local culture, thereby enabling the students to engage with the plays on their own terms.

## **Conclusion**

The EFL classroom has been not recognised as a suitable place in which Shakespeare can be taught profitably. However, if the input is made comprehensible and enjoyable, Shakespeare can be a very welcome source of knowledge and pleasure for English language learners. To that end, great care needs to be taken to adapt the pedagogy to local classroom circumstances, rather than to the perceived idealism of Shakespeare teaching. To meet this requirement, this paper has suggested learner-centred instructional models pragmatically feasible even for less advanced English language learners in the EFL classroom. Given that Shakespeare’s story, rather than the language, universally hooks students, the storyline has to come first, and then the language should be introduced through short comparison extracts containing both the original and the modern versions. In so doing, a teacher should invite the students to facilitate their language awareness, rather than “teaching” the authentic language in a teacher-centred way.

Similarly, the exploitation of the students’ known world as an aid to understanding Shakespeare’s plays leads them to actively engage with the plays on their own terms. At a time when Shakespeare is no longer an exclusively English sealed box but has become global cultural capital, reading beyond the centre is increasingly becoming more necessary. A learning approach from the story to the language and from a local culture to Shakespeare’s plays can be seen as less frustrating and more effective.

If Shakespeare teaching as suggested by this paper may be innovative, it is because the teacher eschews the imposition of time-worn frameworks in favour of learner-

friendly pedagogies for less advanced English language learners, who are usually excluded from appreciating Shakespeare's language. Teaching and learning about Shakespeare as global cultural capital not only fosters citizenship education to empower students but also stimulates communication across different cultures, countries, races, religions and genders. If communication is a vital reason for language learning, then Shakespeare is indispensable. To that end, a teacher should always accept the status quo, rather than aiming at some perceived idealism, and then adapt his or her pedagogy to the local needs and culture. It is only then that effective measures can be taken to teach Shakespeare in an entertaining and learner-friendly way.

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## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> All references to Shakespeare's plays follow the act and line numbering of *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).
- <sup>2</sup> EFL refers to the learning of 'English in a formal classroom setting, with limited or no opportunities for use outside the classroom, in a country in which English does not play an important role in internal communication (China, Japan, and Korea, for example)' (Richards and Schmidt 2010: 196–197).
- <sup>3</sup> The average English proficiency of Japanese EFL learners is said to be A1 to A2 on CEFR.