Content-Based Second Language Instruction:
‘Sheltered’ Shakespeare

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In this report, I will describe models for content-based second language courses and consider how these principles can be applied in teaching Shakespeare at the college level in Japan.

Part 1: Introduction

Because of its traditional emphasis on the grammar-translation method of language teaching, Japan has long been known as a country in which many people can read and write some English, but very few can speak it well. In recent years, however, more and more people have realized the absurdity of spending years studying the language, yet not being able to communicate in the simplest everyday situations. In response to this demand, the Ministry of Education (1990) has decreed that from 1994 ‘oral communication’ must play a larger role in high school foreign language classes. For curriculum planners at the college level, this means two things: that the communicative competence of the current group of students who plan to get a teaching credential must be increased as much as possible to prepare them to teach foreign languages according to the new criteria, and that more emphasis must be put on oral skills in courses for future incoming groups of students, whether they plan to teach or not, because they will expect it. As an English teacher, I am pleased with this trend, because I have long felt the need for a healthier balance in the teaching of the four basic language skills — reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension.

Content-based second language instruction, by its very nature, includes these four skills. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche define it as the integration of content learning with language teaching aims. More specifically, it refers to the concurrent study of language and subject matter, with the form and sequence of language presentation dictated by content material. The language curriculum is centered around the academic needs of the students,
crossing over the barrier between language and subject matter courses which exists in most secondary and postsecondary institutions. (1989, p. vii)

Courses in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) could be considered the modern prototype for content-based second language courses. ESP courses are generally taught to groups of adults who have, as the name states, a specific aim and readily identifiable linguistic needs, such as airline hostesses or hotel clerks. These courses are pragmatic, and the students fully expect to use the knowledge they gain in real-world situations in their jobs. The courses described in this report, however, are for groups of students whose interests vary and whose aims could best be described as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), preparation for study in English-speaking countries. The three models for content-based courses are:

1) **Theme-Based Language Instruction**

This type of course consists of a series of units on topical subjects, such as water pollution or the rain forest. Often, the materials are produced by the teacher and an attempt is made to integrate all four skills in the course through the use of reading passages, audio or video material, guided discussion, and writing assignments, all on the same topic.

2) **Sheltered Content Instruction**

This is a regular academic course taught in the target language by a native speaker of that language to a group of non-native speaker students. The teacher must choose reading material carefully, simplify classroom language, and modify course requirements.

3) **Adjunct Language Instruction**

The students are actually enrolled in two classes. One is a content course in the target language, which both native speakers and non-native speakers attend; the other is a sheltered language course on the same subject for the non-native speakers only.

Brinton, Snow, and Wesche describe content-based second language instruction programs which have been initiated at a variety of institutions around the world, including Theme-Based Language Instruction courses at the University of California, Los Angeles's American Language Center and the Intensive Language Center at the
Free University of Berlin, Sheltered Content courses at the bilingual University of Ottawa, and Adjunct Language Instruction courses at the University of California, Los Angeles's Freshman Summer Program and the Social Science English Language Center in Beijing. In all three of these models, the students are graded on their knowledge of the subject, and it is assumed that their language ability will naturally improve through use. The three models differ, however, in the weight given to content, as opposed to language, in grading the students. Theme-Based courses stress language, and Sheltered courses stress content. Adjunct Language Instruction involves two courses, one in language and one in content, so equal weight is given to both.

Part 2: 'Sheltered' Shakespeare

For the past few years, I have been teaching courses on Shakespeare at the college level here in Japan. The situation could best be described as a sheltered content course in an EFL setting: an academic course taught in a foreign language by a native speaker of that language to a homogeneous group of non-native speaker students. I have now done three, on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Macbeth*. In planning these courses, I have kept in mind the fact that the study of Shakespeare, a daunting proposition even for a native speaker of English, must seem quite formidable to a non-native speaker, whose problems with the language are exacerbated by a lack of knowledge about the culture and history of the period. In courses on Shakespeare in Japanese universities, the students expect to spend the entire academic year (thirty ninety-minute classes, once a week) studying one play. I have followed this tradition in my own courses, and I have added an introductory unit on the life and times of Shakespeare and shown a video of the play being studied.

It is explained to the students on the first day that the aims of the course are to learn something about Shakespeare and study one of his plays (the content component), and to talk and write about them in English (language practice.) The class is conducted in English, but the students are encouraged to make use of all possible resources in Japanese. The problems encountered in the courses will be discussed in the rest of this section. They include the level of difficulty of the introductory unit, lack of student preparation outside of class, and the use of video.

The introductory unit takes up the first five or six classes. It includes information on the life of Shakespeare, the history and language of England in the Elizabethan
and Jacobean eras, and the shared conventions of drama. The texts of the plays, from *The Taishukan Shakespeare* series, each contain long Introductions in Japanese (75 pages in the case of *Macbeth*), containing information on the historical background of the play, Shakespearean criticism and scholarship, prosody, the theater in the Elizabethan era, maps, a selected bibliography, etc. The students are told to read this in their own time as soon as possible. However, it is also useful for the students to do some background reading in English in order to reinforce the material they read in Japanese and to introduce vocabulary in English relevant to the study of Shakespeare.

Very few concrete facts about Shakespeare himself have come down to us. These facts, in the form of church or legal records, mostly serve to prove that he existed rather than tell us much about his personality. By contrast, his work has inspired such admiration that writers have used reams of paper and buckets of ink over the last four hundred years speculating on 'Shakespeare the man', and scrutinizing, analyzing, and criticizing every aspect of his poems and plays and the era in which he lived. In planning an introductory unit, therefore, the problem is pruning the excess.

It is most important for foreign students to have some idea of the times in which he lived in order to appreciate the fortunate accident of history that gave him a chance to become known as one of the greatest writers in the English language.

For background reading, the students were given an excerpt from Chapter 3 “A Muse of Fire” of *The Story of English* (1986), which deals with the growth of the English language in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and includes a few pages on William Shakespeare. In class, we also watched the corresponding part of the BBC television series based on *The Story of English*, dubbed into Japanese by NHK. The video, of course, has been easy for the students to understand, but the reading has proved to be harder than expected. *The Story of English* is an 'authentic' text which was written by and for native speakers of English, so the writers assumed a common pool of cultural knowledge and made no attempt to simplify their grammar or vocabulary. The following is an example of a paragraph from the reading that has consistently proved to be difficult:

Stratford, the place of Shakespeare's youth and old age, was about four days' ride from London, and it was in London, during the last years of the sixteenth century, when the old Queen was ailing on her throne, that the young actor-playwright quickly caused a sensation with his plays. His brilliant forerunner, the
dramatist Christopher Marlowe, wrote magnificent poetry and high-flown speeches, but his work, inspired by his Cambridge education, is formal, almost ponderous, heard best in set-pieces. With Shakespeare, literature and popular culture meet centre stage. He writes about all classes of men and women in every conceivable situation, social and political. . . . (The Story of English, p. 102)

After reading this paragraph, in answer to a question on Shakespeare's education, the students invariably say that he went to Cambridge. The problem concerns the underlined sentence. The correct answer to this question is that the paragraph tells us that Christopher Marlowe went to Cambridge, but says nothing about Shakespeare's own education, which is not documented. This is a good illustration of the point that students in sheltered courses are there because they are not yet ready to handle materials written for native speakers. It is often necessary to revise authentic texts to eliminate extraneous information, such as that on Marlowe, and excess embedding, which led to the confusion over the antecedent of the possessive pronoun 'his', and to simplify items of vocabulary, such as 'ponderous' or 'conceivable'. At its best, this process, which Stevick calls "an art" (1972, p. 113), gives students the information they need in a form that fits the level of their reading ability.

Information of any kind is easier to find when it is organized in an abbreviated form, such as an outline or a chart, than when it is in an essay, and information about something unfamiliar, such as a foreign culture or another period of history, is easier to relate to when it is put into a familiar framework. According to schema theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. Efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. Comprehending words, sentences, and entire texts involves more than just relying on one's linguistic knowledge. (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1987, p. 220)

Japanese history during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is naturally not mentioned in The Story of English, but it is a part of the background knowledge of students here. As such, it makes a good starting point for discussions on culture, politics, and the history of the theater.

The Story of English is valuable for its content, but it is not optimal teaching
material. In the future, an adapted form of the excerpt will be given to the students with a time line, an abridged version of the “Annals, 1552-1616” in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (1974, pp. 1583-1893). Events in the life of William Shakespeare will be listed in one column, and major events in English and Japanese political and theatrical history will be listed in the other. To make it an exercise, rather than just a reading, blank spaces for the students to fill in will be left in the time line next to dates which are mentioned in the excerpt or in the Introduction in the text.

The language of the Elizabethan era is also an important part of the introductory unit. The first thing the twentieth century reader notices about the plays of Shakespeare is that they contain long speeches, usually in verse, in language that is complex, dense, and often archaic. Shakespeare was writing in early Modern English, and he had a very large vocabulary, over 30,000 words (about twice the number used by a normal educated person according to *The Story of English*.) When printed in a modern typeface, it is basically recognizable as the same language we use today, but, over the last four hundred years, there have been changes. Words have been dropped from or added to the lexicon, and the meanings of extant words have evolved. Verb endings and pronouns have also changed, as has pronunciation. All of these things make his plays difficult for readers today, whether or not their native language is English. Any discussion of the distinctive features of Shakespearean English should be illustrated by lines from the play the students will be studying to help them become familiar with it.

Now, having gotten some idea about the history and language of England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is time to turn our attention to the shared conventions of drama: the structure, the underlying theme, and the basic elements.

Shakespeare’s plays, like any other play, movie, or television drama, are organized into three parts, or stages: the exposition stage in which we meet the characters, the complication stage in which some sort of problem arises for these characters, and the resolution stage in which the problem is solved for better or for worse.

The underlying theme of all plays is the same. Peck and Coyle define this as “a tension between an idea of order and the reality of disorder.” (1985, p. 4) We are introduced to the characters in any play in relatively harmonious circumstances, before something happens which upsets their lives. This is followed by a series of events, but by the end of the play, a kind of harmony is restored. All plays may deal
with threats, both tragic and comic, to an established order, but they do this in
different ways. What makes a play interesting is the manner in which the experiences
of the characters are presented and explored. Part of Shakespeare's greatness lies in
his ability to depict all types of people in a great variety of problematic situations.

In his *Poetics* (circa 330 B.C.), the Greek philosopher Aristotle listed the six
elements of tragedy. In order of importance, they are plot, character, thought, diction,
music, and spectacle. Aristotle was specifically writing about one kind of play in a
by-gone era of another culture, but the elements he listed are universal.

Looking at a play from a critical viewpoint involves a discussion of Aristotle's
six elements, and in order to do this, it is necessary to know the play really well. In
practical terms, this means that students of Shakespeare must expect to read and
re-read the plays, each time with increased understanding. Unfortunately, I discovered
during the first course I taught that many of the students were 'too busy' to read the
play at home, which meant that the classroom reading was the only reading for some
of them. Even the simplest questions took a long time to answer, and the students were
so overwhelmed with the reading of the play that they were not able to take notes
efficiently.

The following year, I decided to follow the advice given in Takizawa and Brody
(1990) and make packets of worksheets for each act of the play. The time and effort
this required was rewarded by a much-improved course. The worksheets gave the
students something to focus on in their reading and lessened the burden of listening
comprehension by having the discussion questions written down. The worksheet paper
was also a convenient place for note-taking. The following steps are suggested:

1. Look for the main action of the play, particularly the action that triggers the
   complication stage. Then, look at the plot in more detail, particularly at the
   significance of what happens. Aristotle clearly stresses the centrality of the plot,
   and this is the first thing the students should look at, but they should not stop there.
2. Look at the main characters, particularly the way they are caught between
   conflicting impulses. Then, look at the minor characters, particularly the way they
   draw attention to the gap between order and disorder.
3. Look at the various themes ('thought') of the play. In addition to the basic
   underlying theme of order versus disorder, there will be others, such as love, death,
   revenge, justice, etc.
4. Look at the language ('diction') of the play, for example, the imagery and poetry.
5) Look at the use of music. (This is important in some, but not all, of Shakespeare’s plays.)

6) Look at the use of ‘spectacle’ (i.e. costumes, stage setting, special effects, etc.)

Collie and Slater (1987) suggest a wide variety of creative worksheet activities that encourage learners to “feel the immediacy and pathos of the central theme, as well as the power of the poetry . . . to read for gist and comprehension, (and) to feel they can appreciate a scene even if they do not understand every single thing about it.” (p. 164) In addition to standard comprehension questions, they suggest on-going activities called ‘snowballs’ that “are added to progressively, as the students read through a long work. They help to maintain an overview of the entire book, provide a valuable aid to memory, and reduce a lengthy text to manageable proportions.” (p. 51) These include retelling the story as a chain activity or on wall charts with drawings and memorable quotes from each scene, continuing predictions of future action or assessments of character motivation, and keeping a notebook of examples of a particular aspect of language, such as puns or images of light and darkness, animals, birds, flowers, etc.

Shakespeare never intended his own plays to be read. He wrote them to be performed by actors that he knew well and to be watched by audiences. As such, a class in which a play by Shakespeare is only read silently is missing something vitally important. Collie and Slater are correct when they say that “asking a student to read aloud an unseen or minimally prepared role” is not very successful (p. 163), but I have found it to be ‘a necessary evil’. There is neither the time nor place for a full-scale production in an elective course, and, as I have mentioned before, the students are ‘too busy’ to spend time outside of class preparing even short scenes. Besides, as Via says,

There is no denying that Mr. S was the greatest playwright in the English language, but I do not feel that his plays are suitable for language learning. Shakespeare is big “C” Culture and students of literature need to know his works, but for someone learning English his plays are not the most useful. The sentence structure, patterns, and a good bit of the vocabulary are those of Elizabethan England and are so far removed from us today that if students were to use them they would certainly sound most strange. (1976, p. 41)

The solution, therefore, is watching a performance on video. One reason that
Shakespeare still 'lives' is that his work continues to inspire people in the theater and movie industries, who look to him for ideas and scripts. The problem in using a filmed version of a Shakespeare play, however, is one of interpretation. No one holds the copyright on his works, which are now considered to be in the public domain, and over the last four hundred years, each generation has seen his plays through different eyes. In the late seventeenth century, the endings were rewritten to suit the mores of the era, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Romantic heroic figures were prominent, and in the twentieth century, the characters have been explored for their psychoanalytic or dialectical import.

When the study of one of the plays is accompanied by the viewing of a film, it is essential to include time for a discussion of the director's interpretation. This was particularly evident to me when using the 1971 version of Macbeth directed by Roman Polanski. Halliwell's description of the film sums it up extremely well, "A sharpened and brutalized version; the blood swamps most of the cleverness and most of the poetry." (p. 631) In Shakespeare's play, most of the violence is off-stage, but in Polanski none of it is. Polanski also made some significant additions to the story, such as not only having the murder of Duncan on-stage, but having Duncan awaken and recognize Macbeth before he is assassinated, and making Lennox an ambivalent accomplice of Macbeth. This interpretation of the play perhaps reflects the violence of our era, but the paradox of the evil man whose beautiful poetry dominates the story and fills us with a sense of man's greatness is lost. Macbeth as played by the legendary eighteenth century actor David Garrick would have been 'noble'; Polanski's Macbeth is not.

Aristotle's concept of 'spectacle' also needs to be discussed before and after watching a performance of a play. In the Introduction to the plays in The Taishukan Shakespeare series, there is a section on the development of the theater in the Elizabethan era, including Johannes de Witt's famous 1596 sketch of the interior of the Swan Playhouse, with its platform stage. This, more than anything, shows us the great difference between the experience of a playgoer in the time of Shakespeare and a person watching a film of a Shakespeare play in a quiet, darkened room in the late twentieth century. In those days, a public theater was a very lively place. Performances were given during the day using natural light. Perhaps two thousand people would have filled the theater, some of them standing in "the pit" directly in front of the stage, others seated on the stage itself or in the three stories of private boxes around it. There was a minimum of scenery and properties, the style of acting was broad and
rhetorical, and the parts of girls and women were played by young boys.

In the Elizabethan era, audiences went "to 'hear' a play rather than 'see' it." (Wickham, 1992, p. 121) Shakespeare the writer painted pictures for the audience with his words in his long descriptive passages. The plays as he wrote them "can stand alone" (Evans, et al., p. 1800) on an empty stage. In the twentieth century, we 'see' a film, rather than 'hear' it. When Shakespeare's plays are filmed outside on location or in elaborate sets, the costumes are carefully planned, and close-up camera shots pick up even the smallest gestures that the actors make, the visual image makes the long descriptive passages redundant, and they are often shortened or cut altogether.

The packets of worksheets prepared for each act of the play include 'snowball' exercises called "Play versus Film" in which the students are asked to observe the differences between the two and discuss the way in which the director has interpreted the play. For many of the scenes, there is also a "Dictation" section, in which the students listen to famous passages and fill in missing words. These exercises help the students become accustomed to the accents of the actors in the film, but the number of lines that have been cut from the play, and the way they have been rearranged, can make them difficult for the worksheet writer to prepare.

Here in Japan, all thirty-seven of Shakespeare's plays are available on video in The BBC Television Shakespeare series, but these are rather expensive at ¥ 70,000 per play. Commercial films are cheaper and may be available at local video rental shops. Table 1 is a list of all the films based on Shakespeare's plays that can be found in Halliwell's Film Guide (L. Halliwell, 1987) and the Video Movie Guide 1991 (M. Martin and M. Porter, 1990). It is not necessarily a list of all such films that have ever been made. Halliwell's rating system runs from no stars (missable) to four stars (outstanding); Martin and Porter's rating system runs from 'a turkey' (poor) to five stars (excellent). The year given is that listed in Martin and Porter.

For cultural comparison, there are also some foreign language versions of Shakespeare's plays available. Of special interest to Japanese are Akira Kurosawa's Throne of Blood, or Kumonosu-jo, (1957), which is a retelling of Macbeth, and Ran (1985), which is King Lear in a Japanese setting. Both of these films were given five star ratings by Martin and Porter. Other films include Grigori Kozintsev's 1964 version of Hamlet (translated into Russian by Boris Pasternak) and Franco Zeffirelli's 1986 Otello, Verdi's opera based on Shakespeare's play (starring Placido Domingo), which was also given five stars by Martin and Porter.
Table 1: Shakespeare's Plays on Film

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Halliwell's rating</th>
<th>Martin and Porter's rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antony and Cleopatra</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Charlton Heston</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As You Like It</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Paul Czinner</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Laurence Olivier</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Tony Richardson</td>
<td>not listed</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry V</td>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Laurence Olivier</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry V</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Kenneth Branagh</td>
<td>not listed</td>
<td>*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius Caesar</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Joseph L. Mankiewicz</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius Caesar</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Stuart Burge</td>
<td>no stars</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Lear</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Peter Brook</td>
<td>no stars</td>
<td>*** 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macbeth</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Orson Welles</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macbeth</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Roman Polanski</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*** 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Midsummer Night's Dream</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Max Reinhardt</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othello</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Orson Welles</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>not listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othello</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Stuart Burge</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>not listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard III</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Laurence Olivier</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo and Juliet</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>George Cukor</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>not listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo and Juliet</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Renato Castellani</td>
<td>no stars</td>
<td>not listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo and Juliet</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Franco Zeffirelli</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>**** 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Taming of the Shrew</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Sam Taylor</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Taming of the Shrew</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Franco Zeffirelli</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>**** 1/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These days, it is not necessary to go abroad to see a live performance of a Shakespeare play. In the spring of 1993, The Tokyo Globe Theater offered Richard III, The Tempest, and an Indian adaptation of Romeo and Juliet, all in English, and a Japanese translation of The Merchant of Venice, and at the Ginza Saison Theater, also in Tokyo, a renowned Kabuki actor could be seen in the title role in King Lear.
Part 3: Conclusion

After a certain point in their foreign language instruction, students benefit from using the language as a tool to study other subjects. Literature is very suitable for this purpose because it is open to many interpretations, and can be a starting point for discussions on a variety of topics, including comparative culture. Authors generally become famous of their excellent command of their own language, and in English, there is no better writer than William Shakespeare. For a teacher planning a course on Shakespeare, the problems include filling the gaps in the students’ background knowledge of the author and the period and bringing the written word to life in creative ways that fit the level of the students’ language ability. If this is done well, the study of literature can be a very satisfying experience for second language learners that can be retained and appreciated in later life.

References


Ministry of Education. (1990). Course of Study for Senior High Schools: Foreign


Note: The Taishukan Shakespeare series includes:

- *As You Like It*
- *Hamlet*
- *Julius Caesar*
- *King Lear*
- *Macbeth*
- *The Merchant of Venice*
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- *Othello*
- *King Richard III*
- *Romeo and Juliet*
- *The Tempest*
- *Twelfth Night*