

Facts, Fiction, and Performances

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Hello, everyone. ご入学おめでとうございます.
I will be talking about “facts,” “fiction,” and “performances.”

I am going to divide my lecture into three sections. In the first section, I will introduce you to a textbook for a course that all of you will take in year 1 as part of the English language requirement. In year 2, you will have a wide choice of courses—I will give you an example by talking about what I teach in my course for year-2 students. As you will see, the first section will focus on the kind of English that is “facts”-based.

In the middle section, I will talk about my courses that are open to any student from any year within the School. In those courses, my students and I read plays by William Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde. That means we deal with the kind of English which is “fiction”-orientated. Today, I will just give you a rough idea of how my students and I approach Shakespeare’s work.

The final section will be on what I teach as part of a course that is offered not by the School but by the Global Education Center. If you take this course, you will be among a group of students who may be from any School within the University. During my sessions, students read and recite a short play. The title of this lecture has the word “performances” in it for that reason. I will show you a film version of the play which I chose for the course last year.

1

Let us begin with the first section. These are the two textbooks¹ for a course called “Language, Economics, and Politics.” As I have said, all of you will take this course in year 1. I would like to draw your attention to the book that you see on the left-hand side of the screen. The title of the book is—very conveniently—*Language, Economics, and Politics: 12 Perspectives*.

That means the book has 12 units. Ten of those units were written by members of the teaching staff in the School. For example, Professor Anthony Newell discusses language and political conflict in unit 2; Professor Kazumi Shimizu describes what it means to think scientifically in unit 4, which is entitled “What is Economics?”

Now, please do not ignore the photograph for each unit. When we were preparing the book, we spent a great deal of time looking for photographs that would help you guess the content of the units before you actually started reading them. Let us go to unit 11, for example. You might be able to guess from this photograph² and from the title [“A Note on Privacy”] what the unit is about. The text in the unit was written by Professor Norikazu Kawagishi.

In year 2, you will no longer have that kind of textbook. Instead, you will have a choice of

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courses to fulfil your English language requirement. The content will be quite different from course to course, so please remember that what I am going to talk about now is just an example.

I teach a course called “News English.” At the beginning of each class session, my students will be given time to listen to a piece of news which will have been broadcast a few days before. Throughout the semester, the students will listen to 30 different pieces of news since they will have 30 class sessions altogether. The time length of each news clip will be 3 to 4 minutes. The news stations will range from the BBC [the British Broadcasting Corporation] to ABC [American Broadcasting Company] to CNA [Channel NewsAsia], which is based in Singapore, to Al Jazeera, whose headquarters are in Qatar.

Usually, the majority of the students in class find it extremely difficult to keep up with the speed at which people on those news bulletins speak. Accents can also be an issue for many of the students in class—throughout the semester, the students will be exposed to hundreds of different accents, and it will not be easy for them to adjust their ears to all of those accents.

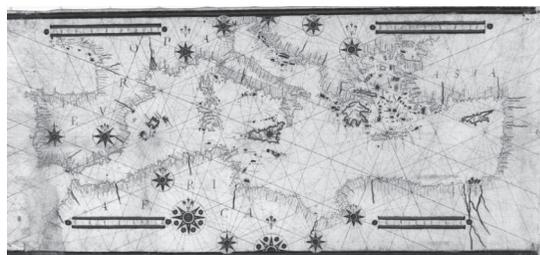
It will be perfectly O.K., however, for any student to struggle for the first 20 minutes or so of each class session. The whole class will work together: we will look for the keywords and key expressions in the piece, check some background information on the internet, read some related articles in the newspapers, write a summary of the piece, and, at the very end of the class session, do some dictation exercises to make sure that we have had a good grasp of what the people in the piece have said.

2

We will now move away from the English language requirement and have a look at examples

of the courses that are open to any student in the School. As I said at the beginning of the lecture, I teach a few courses on Shakespeare. These [*The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*] are the titles of the plays that my students and I have read together in the past five years.

Before we start reading the text of any of those plays, my students and I examine a few maps, drawings, and paintings. If, for example, it is *The Merchant of Venice* that we are going to read, we spend some time looking at this map of Venice³—it is from the mid sixteenth century. In the course on *Othello*, I introduce my students to this chart [see the figure]—it is also from the mid sixteenth century. The story of *Othello* takes place mainly in Cyprus, and there [on the chart] you can see the island.



Portolan Chart of the Mediterranean and Connecting Seas [cropped], c. 1550 (?), pen and brown ink with dark watercolours on vellum <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g5672m.ct003136>> [accessed 19 March 2019].

Now, I am not saying that Shakespeare had maps around him when he was working on those plays. In fact, there is hardly anything we know for certain about Shakespeare the author. Still, *The Merchant of Venice* dates back to around 1596 and *Othello* goes back to around 1603,⁴ a few decades after that map and this chart were produced. My students and I therefore find this kind of material extremely helpful when we try to see those plays from a sixteenth-century perspective.

Of course, we spend most of our class time reading the plays themselves. For example, let us take *Julius Caesar*. In that play, a group of

Roman senators assassinate Caesar. One of the murderers, Marcus Brutus, stands in front of the people of Rome and explains why he and his colleagues killed Caesar. What you see on the screen are just a few lines from Brutus's speech:

If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say, that Brutus' love to Caesar was no less than his. If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.⁵

As I am sure you can tell easily, Brutus is trying to get the message across to the people of Rome by relying heavily on the art of rhetoric.

3

Finally, I would like to talk about one of the courses that are offered by the Global Education Center. In those courses, you will be attending classes and doing group projects with students whom you may not meet otherwise. On the list of courses you will find a huge variety of subjects and topics from the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the arts and the humanities.

I teach a course called "Appreciation and Understanding of Theatre" with four other members of the teaching staff from various Schools in the University. We each choose a play and organise sessions where students discuss the work from theoretical, historical, and practical points of view. To give you an example, I am introducing you to a play that I chose for the course last year. The author of the play is Samuel Beckett.

Beckett was born in a Dublin suburb, which means he was Irish, but he spent most of his working life in France and died in Paris in 1989; the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to him in 1969.⁶ Beckett wrote plays both in English and in French. Since the 1960s, a lot of people have discussed Beckett's work under the

term the "Theatre of the Absurd."⁷ What is it—the "Absurd"? Let us have a look at the play.

This may sound confusing, but the play is called *Play*. Beckett wrote it between 1962 and 1963.⁸ It is a very short piece: a performance of the play, from the beginning to the end, will take only 15 minutes. There are three characters: the "First Woman," the "Second Woman," and the "Man." No personal names. For reasons that are not explained anywhere in the play, each of those characters is stuck from neck down in a huge urn. Here is a photograph⁹ from one of the productions of the play.

The stage directions are given by Beckett himself. All the actors "face . . . front"; the actors' "[v]oices" should be "toneless," that is, the actors are not to add intonation to their speeches "except where an expression is indicated"; the actors should speak at "[r]apid tempo."¹⁰

I am now going to show you a film version of this play. The film was made in 2001; the director was Anthony Minghella and the three characters were performed by Kristin Scott Thomas, Juliet Stevenson, and Alan Rickman. Let us watch the opening 30 seconds.¹¹

If you have found the tempo too fast, please do not worry, because that is the point. For anyone watching the performance, it should be quite difficult to figure out what exactly the two women and the man are saying. On the other hand, it should be quite easy for anyone to guess what is going on amongst the three characters—the two women are fighting against each other over the man, and he cannot decide what to do.

In the sessions last year, my students practiced the three characters' speeches at "rapid tempo" and commented on each other's recitations. The students also asked questions about various aspects of the play. Some of the questions were rather profound: "What is language?", "What does it mean for human beings to talk to anyone?", and "What is drama/theatre?"

I would like to leave you with some conclud-

ing remarks. There are more ways than one to approach a language; there are more ways than one to learn anything. Find your own ways! I have shown you a few examples today, but my message is not that you should be interested in drama or theatre. Rather, I hope that, during the next few years, you will look widely for courses both in the School and across the University. There are hundreds of courses for you to choose from. If you want to learn Arabic, write a piece of music on the computer, learn to dance, and find out what behavioural ecology is, you can give them all a try by attending courses in the School and at the Global Education Center. The key, I believe, is to follow your curiosity—that is what life at university is all about. Thank you for listening.

Notes

- 1 Front cover, from *Language, Economics, and Politics: 12 Perspectives*, ed. by Anthony P. Newell and Mark Jewel (Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 2016); front cover, from Anthony P. Newell, Naoko Yagi, and Garrett DeOrio, *Wordscape: Essential Vocabulary for Academic Reading and Writing* (Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 2012).
- 2 pogonici, photograph, from *Language, Economics, and Politics*, p. 107.
- 3 Paolo Forlani, *Venetia*, 1566, engraving, from *A volo d'uccello: Jacopo de' Barbari e le rappresentazioni di città nell'Europa del Rinascimento* (Venezia Mestre: Arsenale Editrice, 1999), pp. 148–49.
- 4 *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by Margreta De Grazia and Stanley Wells, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010),

pp. xv–xvi.

- 5 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. by David Daniell (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), III. 2. 17–22.
- 6 *Samuel Beckett in Context*, ed. by Anthony Uhlmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. xxiii–xxxii.
- 7 Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3rd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 9.
- 8 *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. by John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. xix.
- 9 Tony Kent, photograph, from Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 230.
- 10 Samuel Beckett, *“Krapp’s Last Tape” and Other Shorter Plays*, pref. by S. E. Gontarski (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 53.
- 11 *Play*, dir. by Anthony Minghella (Blue Angel Films, 2001) [on DVD].

Further Reading

Beckett, Samuel, *Molloy: A Novel*, trans. by Patrick Bowles, in collaboration with Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1955)

Even if you are lost on page 1, keep on reading! Available (in various editions) for borrowing at Waseda’s Central Library.

Brotton, Jerry, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (London: Penguin Books, 2016)

Written for the general reader. Highly informative. Some references to *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Also available in e-book format.

Jenkins, Jennifer, *Global Englishes: A Resource Book for Students*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2015)

For those who want to know more about the varieties of the English language. Available for borrowing at three libraries on the Waseda campus.