



The Encyclopaedia of Shakespeare's Language Project: Reaching out

*Jonathan Culpeper,
Lancaster University, UK*

@ShakespeareLang



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



THE QUEEN'S
ANNIVERSARY PRIZES
FOR HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION
2015







What will the project produce?

The key output: The encyclopedia

Two volumes:

- (1) a kind of dictionary, and
- (2) a compendium of word patterns relating to characters, character groups, plays, play-genres, themes, etc..

To be published by Bloomsbury in paper and electronically.

The challenge: Students in universities and schools, and beyond

Comments from undergraduates (TheStudentRoom; our study):

- We as students are overexposed to him [Shakespeare], forced to put the same overrated value on his work as some "academics" with whom we might not agree have done.
- The plots are pointless, boring and completely irrelevant.
- Shakespeare uses overcomplicated sentence structure to say simple things which makes him seem pretentious and hard to understand, with old and outdated vocabulary.
- I've never really seen the relevance of Shakespeare when it comes to teaching English. I mean he might as well have written his plays in a foreign language.
- If I could go back in time, I'd kill Shakespeare so that today's schoolchildren wouldn't have to study his crap.

Meeting the challenge

Possible solutions:

- Emphasize the performance (e.g. The Globe in London)
- Simplify the text
- Get rid of the text

BUT this is a project about the language.



Meeting the challenge

Outreach work

- Annual summer school
- A mini-MOOC
- Lectures, demonstrations, workshops, etc.
- Website, Twitter, etc.
- An app

Meeting the challenge

Working guidelines

- Don't assume that the audience likes what you are talking about (e.g. Shakespeare).
- Work with what they think they know (e.g. the myths about Shakespeare).
- Use technology familiar to them, e.g. the internet, computer programs, apps.
- Go out to them wherever possible, rather than expecting them to come to you.
- Enable them to study at a distance.
- Target areas where they have difficulty or feel blocked.
- Use humour!

How many words did Shakespeare invent?

‘Learning’ from the internet.

- “Shakespeare coined more words than other writers, around 1700 words ...”
- “The English language owes a great debt to Shakespeare. He invented over 1700 of our common words ...”
- “Shakespeare introduced nearly 3,000 words ...”
- “Shakespeare is credited by the Oxford English Dictionary with the introduction of nearly 3,000 words into the language”
- “Shakespeare invented a quarter of our language”
- “Shakespeare invented half the words in the English language”
- “Shakespeare *is* our language”

Our computer-based methods



The annual summer school.

The MOOC will deliver the same methods at a distance.

Devise a mobile app with a 'lite' version of the Shakespeare dictionary



Devise a mobile app with a 'lite' version of the Shakespeare dictionary

- By 2016, the Shakespeare Pro app had been downloaded over 8 million times (<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/most-popular-shakespeare-app-celebrates-400th-anniversary-300251505.html>)
- Ailles, J. L. (2014). 'Is There an App for That?': Mobile Shakespeare on the Phone and in the Cloud. *Outerspeares: Shakespeare, Intermedia, and the Limits of Adaptation*, 75-110.

Target areas students find difficult

What do people find difficult when they encounter Shakespeare's language?

Some preliminary results from the Reading Shakespeare's Language pilot study (with Sean Murphy and Mathew Gillings)

Preliminary results. What causes difficulty?

- **Words** trump unusual grammatical constructions, ambiguities, metaphors, etc.
 - In most cases, because they are completely unknown. Top examples include: *yclept*, *Gramercy*, *trow*, *fain*, *woo't*, *mar*, *haggard*
 - Occasionally, because their known sense does not seem to fit the context (e.g. *ripe*, *rebuked*, *bully*, *wench*).
- Sentence structure (especially long sentences)
- Metaphors (especially extended ones)
- Historical and cultural context

Looking ahead going global

- Shakespeare is the person most associated with UK arts and culture (2016 British Council report).
- A 2011 joint RSC/British Council study estimated that **50%** of the world's schoolchildren and at least **64 million** children a year study Shakespeare. For many of those studying the English texts, English will be an additional language.

Looking ahead going global

Our goals:

- (1) We would like to find out what students of differing languages and cultures find difficult when they read Shakespeare's texts, And adapt our resources accordingly.
- (2) We would like our dictionary app to accommodate such children, and to include "language learning" games.

What we need is:

Time, money and collaborators.

And looking even further ahead:

We would like to assess the quality of and improve translations of Shakespeare's texts.