



Ciambella F., *Teaching English as a Second Language with Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2024, 116 p. ISBN: 9781009331968.

Teaching English as a Second Language with Shakespeare is a part of the *Shakespeare and Pedagogy* series, a carefully curated collection about teaching and learning Shakespeare, which blends theory and practice through innovative classroom-oriented pedagogical approaches. Fabio Ciambella's *Element* offers a preliminary exploration of the potential of Shakespearean drama as a tool for teaching English pragmatics in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. More specifically, it combines pragmatic insights into contemporary approaches to Shakespeare's language in ESL teaching, with ready-made lesson plans tailored for both university and secondary-school students, thereby addressing a significant gap in the scholarly debate about Shakespeare and pedagogy.

The author moves beyond traditional teaching methodologies by proposing Shakespeare's plays as a primary vehicle for language education. This approach is rooted in Content-Based Instruction (CBI), also referred to as Content-based Language Teaching (CBLT), an umbrella term encompassing a variety of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) approaches and methodologies that promote foreign-language learning through engagement with non-linguistic subject matter. In this context, Shakespeare's plays are used both as linguistic means and literary content in what has been defined as CBLT or CBI. More specifically, Shakespearean texts become the resource through which students develop their pragmatic competence in English.

Ciambella establishes his theoretical framework by building upon and adapting Roy Lyster's taxonomy of CBI language courses, which consists of "a range of instructional initiatives [that] can be identified along a continuum" (Lyster, 2018: 2), framed by language-driven and content-driven programmes. The middle part of CBI spectrum is occupied by what Ciambella calls "well-balanced courses" (Ciambella, 2021: 349), where "students study one or two subjects in the target language, usually in tandem with a foreign language or language arts class" (Lyster, 2018:2). In particular, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) stands out as the paradigmatic example of a balanced approach to content-based language teaching.

Within this framework, the author's main "linguistic objective is the teaching of pragmatics, that is, language in a meaningful context, while the principal content goals ranges from English literature to the history of the English language" (Ciambella, 2024:3). In this respect, the introductory section of the *Element* thoroughly examines the legitimacy of literature as content within CBI frameworks, while also foregrounding the structure of lesson plans as a crucial aspect of content-based language teaching. Notably, he draws upon Lyster's proactive approach to CBLT, whose four-phase pre-planned instructions correspond to the traditional tripartition of lesson plans into: input (Lyster's "noticing activity"), scaffolding, (Lyster's "awareness activity and guided practice"), and output (Lyster's "autonomous practice"). Furthermore, he suggests that the Shakespearean text for each lesson plan should be provided in the input/noticing phase in order to pique students' curiosity and encourage reflection on the content from the very beginning.



Yet, one cannot help but wonder: why choose Shakespeare? In this respect, Ciambella argues that Shakespearean texts have been widely adopted in CBLT courses mainly with a focus on vocabulary. Indeed, Larry Z. Zaroff (2010) uses Shakespeare to give his premedical students some basic notions of medicine, while John F. Maune (2015) aims to teach the lexis of biochemistry via *Romeo and Juliet*. Nevertheless, recent developments in language pedagogy have increasingly shifted attention away from structuralist approaches toward methodologies that foreground pragmatics and communicative competence. From this perspective, Shakespeare's plays – originally conceived for theatrical performance and intrinsically grounded in action – provide a particularly fruitful framework for the teaching and learning of English pragmatics in the ESL classroom.

This Element is composed of three sections, each focusing on the teaching of a specific pragmatic aspect of the English language as contextualised in a Shakespearean play. Section 1 draws on the curses found in *Richard III* in order to provide a compelling basis for exploring speech acts as pragmatic tools in the ESL classroom. In particular, Ciambella places significant emphasis on female characters, using these linguistic interactions to examine the power imbalances between men and women. By adopting a selected scene as input, both secondary school and university students are encouraged to develop their speaking skills. Section 2 focuses on *Romeo and Juliet*, and exploits the communicative potential of discourse markers in the play to foster students' writing skills. Ciambella underlines the importance of discourse markers as a fundamental linguistic component that ESL students must master in order to produce coherent and cohesive written work. In Section 3, the author identifies *The Taming of the Shrew* as a particularly fertile ground for investigating (im)politeness strategies such as insult, offences, and taboo language, stressing the importance of teaching aggressive language in the ESL classroom to ensure that students understand its force and can successfully navigate or avoid it in real-world interactions. This section combines speaking and writing skills.

Teaching English as a Second Language with Shakespeare aims at demonstrating that teaching English as a foreign language via Shakespeare's plays is “one of the most productive ways of exploiting the linguistic potentials intrinsically offered by works that have contributed so much to shaping the English language as we know and use it today” (Ciambella, 2024: 81). In conclusion, *Teaching English as a Second Language with Shakespeare* offers an original and valuable contribution to both Shakespeare pedagogy and contemporary ESL studies. By foregrounding speech act theory, discourse markers, and (im)politeness strategies, Ciambella moves beyond more traditional approaches centred primarily on grammar and vocabulary, demonstrating instead the pedagogical potential of Shakespearean drama for the development of pragmatic competence. Particularly compelling is the balance between theoretical reflection and practical application, which makes the Element relevant to both scholars and language practitioners. In highlighting the performative and interactional dimensions of Shakespeare's plays, the book opens promising new directions for the use of literary texts in pragmatics-oriented language teaching and establishes itself as a significant contribution to the growing dialogue between Shakespeare studies and language pedagogy.

ALESSIA CISTERNINO
Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro