

**THE**   
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**PROJECT**

**Shakespeare and Asian English**

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(Adapted for Schools by Marcus Barrett)

# 'Asian English' 2016

- In the Republics of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, today, there is one of the largest English-speaking communities in the world - 330,000,000 people.
- With at least 60,000,000 fluent speakers of English that is a speech community matching that of the UK.
- A recent article in *The Guardian* suggests: "English is no longer some colonial language. It is the means [by which] we in Asia communicate with the world and one another." (Gordon Wu, Hong Kong businessman)
- People will be able to maintain their identity while speaking their variety of English. Tommy Koh, senior minister in the Singapore government: "When I speak English I want the world to know I'm a Singaporean."

# India's Shakespeare

- Among the poets most read in that speech community is William Shakespeare and he is the playwright most performed.
- Poonam Trivedi of Delhi University tells us that Shakespeare's plays were being performed for English traders in Calcutta and Bombay in the 1770s.
- Sukanta Chaudhuri of Jadavpur University tells us that The Tempest had been translated into Bengali in the 1810s. The play was used by the East India Company to introduce its clerks newly arrived from England to a language of India.
- In the 1820s, Indians began using Shakespeare as a tool for learning English at Hindu College, Calcutta.

## Bard Result?

- Towards the end of the nineteenth century the teaching of English and teaching in English became dominant. To know English was a proof of education; to know Shakespeare was a proof of higher education.
- 400 years after Shakespeare, the British Council made a worldwide survey of his popularity. Top was India. Bottom was Germany. In Germany, only forty-four people in a hundred said they liked Shakespeare while in India the number was eighty-nine.
- What excited the newspapers was the poor showing of Britain where only fifty-eight people in a hundred admitted to liking Shakespeare. Britons might have been ahead of Germans, but they were way behind Indians.

# All's Well that Ends Well

- Is Shakespeare not loved in the land of his birth? There are plenty of Shakespeare lovers in Britain, but it might be that there is a special love reserved for a poet whom we begin to read easily in a foreign language.
- Indians expect to struggle; Britons do not. Shakespeare tells Indians how much English they know; he tells Britons how little they know.
- Claims that Shakespeare's language is too hard are said (by the New York Times) to go back to the Bard's time itself and Ben Jonson saying some speeches from Macbeth were "bombast...which were not to be understood"
- Test yourself on understanding a few key phrases from Shakespeare on the next slide... just how remote is his language in 2016?

# Love's Labours – Are they really Lost?

**Would you say you had any difficulty with these...?**

- "Naked truth" - *Love's Labour's Lost*
- "Faint-hearted" - *Henry VI, Part I*
- "Send him packing" - *Henry IV*
- "Vanish into thin air" - *Othello*
- "Eaten out of house and home" - *Henry IV, Part II*

**And how many of these words or phrases do you use?**

- "For goodness sake" - *Henry VIII*
- "All of a sudden" - *The Taming of the Shrew*
- "Mum's the word" - *Henry VI, Part II*
- "Puking" - *As You Like It*

# Works Cited

- <http://www.englishproject.org/june-macbeth-and-asian-english>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2000/nov/23/tefl.guardianweekly>
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