Introduction of Drama into University English Education:  
The Case of *The Tempest* 
Performed by the Students of the Prefectural University of Hiroshima

Kazuhiro YOSHIMOTO

**Abstract**
This is a report of a stage performance of the play *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare by the students at the Prefectural University of Hiroshima as a seminar class activity. Firstly, the class setting, activities in the class and the process until the final stage performance are briefly explained. Secondly, the importance of *The Tempest* as a text to deal with post-colonial themes is discussed. The two characters in the play, Caliban and Ariel, are examined as symbols of two types of learners of English as a foreign language who are put into today’s imperialistic situation of English language education. Lastly, the merits of drama method in language education is emphasized, referring to the lack of drama education in Japanese education system as a whole.

*Key words:* Drama for English Education, *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, Post-colonialism, Language Imperialism and Education

**The Class Settings and the Stage Performance**
Twenty-six students at the Prefectural University of Hiroshima performed the famous play *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare on stage on 28th of January 2013. It was shown in the last class time of the second semester at the auditorium of the university with about 130 seats. The show ran about 110 minutes. The performance was open to the public for free. The number of people who came to the play was small; about 30 people, including some teachers and parents of the students attended, probably because it was shown while other classes were going on and the publicity was insufficient. The performance was also the final exam of the class.

Almost all the scenes of the play were performed with some minor changes of orders of the scenes. The script used was not the original text by Shakespeare but a modern English version of a commercially available text partly shortened and revised by the teacher. All the lines by Prospero (a male) were changed into ones by Prospera (a female) and necessary changes of pronouns were made, too. During the performance, Japanese subtitles, translated by the teacher, were shown on the screen set beside the stage, manipulated by the teacher. There were a few staff members to take charge of the sound effects and the lighting, who were fourth year students in the author’s seminar.

All the performers were female third-year students of the Department of Intercultural Studies. Though the university is co-ed, there are only a small number (about 10% out of 90) of
male students in the Department of Intercultural Studies. The class is not an English language class but one of the three seminar classes that includes the title, The Study of British & American Society and Culture.

All the students, except one who belonged to the drama club of our university, had no experience in acting at all. Since the one who belonged to the drama club (in Japanese) was so experienced in acting, she was assigned as the director of the stage and the leader of the company, which was of great help in introducing inexperienced students into acting.

The author spent two semesters, spring and fall for this project, (15 classes of 90 minutes per class for each semester and the school is on the two semester system). The first semester is titled Basic Seminar for the Study of British & American Society and Culture and it was used for the students to understand the text and the story. The students read the original text by Shakespeare and the modern translation at the same time, comparing and translating them into Japanese. The author gave lectures about the background of the work and discussed some recent topics about the work and postcolonial theory in Japanese. The class watched the movie version in class directed by Julie Taymor (Miramax, 2010) to help deepen their understanding of the story. The students also read a Japanese translation of Aimé Césaire’s An Alternative Tempest (translated by Tetsuya Motohashi, 2007), which reflects the history of the strife of black people in the U. S. At the end of the semester the author gave the students a paper exam for evaluation. This class was a preparation to make it easier for the students to devote themselves to the practice of acting on stage in the second semester.

Near the end of the first semester after they understood the story and the roles, the author asked the students which role they wanted to play and had a kind of audition. Because there were more students than roles, most of the main character’s roles were shared among two or more students. The main character, Prospera, who has the largest number of lines, was shared by seven students. They were asked to practice their lines during the summer vacation time so that we could start the stage practice as soon as possible in the fall semester.

In producing a play in English it is often the case that students need a model for their articulation of their lines. In using a film to produce a stage play, which the author has done in the past, students can listen to the correct pronunciation and intonation as a model. However, this time it was impossible to do so because there was on film adaptation of the script we used. Consequently, for the students to check and practice the pronunciation and intonation of their lines, the author made a recording of his reading of the whole script (about 110 minutes) and made copies of it on CDs for them to keep and listen to.

In the second semester, the classes were held in the small gymnasium room for about a month and later we moved to the auditorium where the final performance would be shown. Every class started with voice training and stretching exercises for about fifteen minutes. In the first several classes, the author introduced some acting games to evoke them into action by arousing their emotion. They are typical warm-up exercises used in drama club or workshops.

Starting with reading aloud of the script, the students interpreted and acted each scene with the book in their hands. Most of the class time was spent practicing the articulation of lines and acting certain scenes in groups. The basic policy was that the teacher did not give
so many directions, but let the students make decisions as much as possible. When they were stuck, the author recommended they watch a movie of the work and some other recordings of stage performances, to let them invent their own way of acting and creating the scenes. The teacher's main job was to give advice about the structure of the play and individually correct their pronunciation and intonation of English speech.

The students prepared their own costumes and some stage sets in their free time and had voluntary practice sessions in groups outside the class, but it must be said that they could not have enough practice time. Fifteen times of 90 minute classes is far from enough to complete a stage performance of more than 100 minutes. The class planned to have two complete rehearsals right before the final performance but neither of them was complete because there was always someone absent.

There were many reasons to say that it was far from perfect as a show: in some scenes students forgot their lines and completely stopped for a while on stage. Some of the performers' voices were not loud enough to reach the audience and their bodily and facial expressions were not convincing like professional actresses. However, it can be evaluated as a great success from many educational points of view. There were many students who performed very well with strong voice, which they had never produced before in their lives, along with very good bodily expressions. Some people in the audience wrote in their evaluation sheet that they found a few students almost to be like professional actresses.

The author recorded the performance with a video camera and we had a review session after watching the recording. The author made copies of the recording on DVD packed in a nicely made case for each student to keep and remember the experience.

**Why The Tempest?**

The main purpose of this activity was not just to improve students' ability in English language, but more importantly to let them think about the postcolonial themes in cultural studies by actually playing the roles of the people under such circumstances.

There are three main reasons for picking up *The Tempest* this time. Firstly, it is regarded as one of the most important texts among critics of postcolonial theory. The trend of postcolonial theory grew when Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published in 1978 to analyze the Western way of looking at non-European cultural or racial 'others,' a process which helped Westerners to establish the self-identity by defining the East. Since then, postcolonial critics have re-read the canons of English Literature, among which *The Tempest* has been one of the most controversial works, attracting the biggest attention.

The second reason for choosing *The Tempest* is that to perform this play requires in-depth reading and understanding of the core work of English literature. Although reading literary works has been the most important aspect of learning English in Japan until recently, this is changing in most of the English curriculums mainly because of the criticism against grammar-translation type of teaching methods in language classes. In the recent trend of 'globalization' and 'intercultural communication,' more 'communication-oriented' activities are preferred in college English classes.
As a result, students have less and less opportunities to experience the profound contents of Shakespearean plays or other literary works, which results in a loss of quality in education. When students see texts of literature they may say, “To read it, or not to read it, that is the question!” So, The author dare say, “Then, perform it!”

The third reason for choosing this work was that the author was very much inspired by a new interpretation of The Tempest by Julie Taymor. The uniqueness of Taymor’s film lies in her idea of changing the main character, Prospero, into a female character, Prospera. The character was performed by Helen Mirren, Academy Award winner and damehood holder who started her career with the Royal Shakespeare Company. Since all the students in the author’s class happened to be female students, Taymor’s idea of changing Prospero into, Prospera, could provide them a good theme of discussion about gender and politics.

**The Tempest as a Postcolonial Text**

*The Tempest*, the last play by Shakespeare, has been performed with many different interpretations. Until post-colonialism appeared, the main theme of *The Tempest* had been said to be ‘Revenge and Forgiveness.’ It is basically a story about a political strife between Prospero, the magician and the Duke of Milan, and Alonso, King of Naples, with Prospero’s brother Antonio, who took over Prospero’s position and power. It is also about a marriage of convenience between Miranda, Prospero’s daughter and Ferdinando, Antonio’s son. Prospero resumes his power through the marriage of his daughter to the son of the powerholder. It describes the tactical struggle for power with a happy ending.

Seen from another point of view, *The Tempest* describes the relationship between Europe and its colonies in the new world. It was written at the time when the Virginia Company was trying to develop the new colony on the east coast of North America. The island of exile for Prospero and Miranda can be regarded as the symbol of the British colonies.

Since Christopher Columbus used the word ‘cannibals’ in his journal, it became an ideological symbol to justify the invaders’ actions to eradicate their colonial ‘others;’ the fact that the name ‘Caliban’ is an anagram of ‘cannibal’ proves that Shakespeare himself was conscious of the fact.

Prospero made a slave of Caliban, who used to be the ruler of the island with his magical power, and he forces him to bring fuel and food to survive on the island. Prospero tortures Caliban when he doesn’t obey him. In Taymor’s movie, Caliban as a ‘savage’ or ‘monster,’ was performed by an African American actor, Djimon Hounsou, with fish scales and tortoise-like skin on his body, and partial white skin on his head with one blue eye, which suggests that he is a hybrid of a black man and a white man. This may reflect the recent trend of postcolonial interpretation of the play because there is no racial feature of Caliban described in the original text; most interpretations of the play portray him as a monstrous creature with fish-like appearance.

For postcolonial critics Prospero is the symbol of European invaders and Caliban is the symbol of rebellious natives enslaved by the invaders. The text shows that the domination of Prospero over Caliban is above all the domination of language. The Prospero’s power to name the
world and define his slave is what makes Prospero the master over Caliban and the ruler of the island.

In Act 1 Scene 2, Prospero and Miranda tell Caliban to come out of the cave and work for them. Then, Caliban claims that the island was originally his property. However, when Prospero taught him the language to describe the world, he loved Prospero and gave all the knowledge about the island. Then Prospero deprived him of the island and made him his slave. When Prospero accused Caliban of his attempted rape of his daughter, Caliban suggested the possibility of popularizing the island with his children as hybrids. For Prospero, this threat of miscegenation proved Caliban’s brutality or ‘uncivilized’ nature.

Miranda also pitied Caliban and taught him how to speak. But in response Caliban says, ‘You taught me language; my profit from that is, I know how to curse! May the plague with its red sores destroy you for teaching me your language!’ (in our script in Modern English) This exchange is very symbolic in the sense that forcing the colonizer’s language is the crucial factor of imperialistic domination. And here Caliban becomes “a symbol for representations of subaltern exploitation and resistance,” as Bill Ashcroft says in his book Caliban’s Voice (Ashcroft, p. 17).

Ariel, the spirit, is another slave of Prospero, who was confined into a pine tree for twelve years by the magic of the witch, Sycorax. Ariel was released from the tree by Prospero and made to obey him. Ariel has the magical power to fly, hidden in the air, and produce illusions for people. Ariel petitions for his freedom by following the orders of Prospero. At the end, Ariel was released for the fine work he did for Prospero, such as wrecking Alonso’s ship, leading Ferdinando to Miranda to make them fall in love, torturing Caliban and so on. Ariel is a symbol of the obedient natives who follow the orders of their European masters.

On the other hand, Caliban tries to rebel against Prospero in vein, with the help of Stephano and Trinculo, the drunk servants of Alonso, the king of Naples. Caliban’s plot to kill Prospero was defeated by Ariel’s magic power. However, Caliban was forgiven in the end, being left behind on the island when Prospero and Miranda got on board of a ship back to Naples to have the wedding.

**English Imperialism and Independence of the Mind from its Control**

In the present world, it seems to be the case that English has become the most powerful language on earth and it is getting more and more imperialistic, forcing hundreds of minor languages to disappear, and millions of people to be thrown into an identity crisis as the English language is forced on them over their mother tongues. Japanese university students are also under strong pressure to learn English to get good jobs in multinational companies and to become a so-called ‘global personnel’ who can work in the international business scenes.

As a result, the present world is filled with Ariels and Calibans as Prospero’s slaves, so to speak. So, in the present case of English imperialism, just like the case in The Tempest, there is always the possibility that learners of English language become either like an Ariel or a Caliban, in other words, an obedient servant willing to follow the orders of the colonizer as native speakers of English, or a slave pretending to be obedient, concealing his or her rebellious mind and cursing the colonizer with the language he or she was taught. When teachers teach English in their
classrooms, the teachers are to be agents of Prospero, who taught Caliban his language to enslave him, unconsciously presenting these two options whether to become Ariel or Caliban, probably showing more preference to the former.

If learners of English language are forced to learn and not allowed to reject English, like Caliban was, they have to be obedient and try hard to act like native English speakers. In so far as your English fluency is not as good as that of native speakers, the learners may feel a kind of inferiority complex against them, which makes them to worship a native speaker as a kind of god. When they realize that they have become subordinated, it is inevitable that their use of English forced on them results in a sense of inferiority. Caliban’s linguistic situation concisely and dramatically represents this situation.

And the very reason why the author uses acting or drama in my English teaching is concerned with this point. As far as the learners are conscious that they are just acting or pretending to be an English speaker, they can escape from being totally controlled by the colonizer with blind worship of the colonizer’s language and culture. When they are acting, they have to control themselves and look at themselves from above with objective eyes. In acting in English, they have to be conscious of themselves as a Japanese language speaker who are just trying hard to look or sound like an English language speaker. And when their performance as an English speaker becomes good enough and even surpasses that of a native speaker, which might be almost impossible, that will be the time when they will have a possibility to be released from the sense of inferiority.

The author is not trying to discourage his students from learning English. The purpose is to make them realize that English is just one of many languages of the world and all languages and cultures are equal, and that learning foreign languages is one of the most important activities for all of us to develop real cultural relativism. The author also wants to let the students realize that language has a lot of power to control us, and when it is forced on us, we have to be very careful about the position we are put in to maintain independence of our mind.

In the present situation of the world, however, only English has a dominant power mainly for historical, political and economic reasons. This is not a desirable situation. The author wants to give the students an opportunity to experience the feelings of linguistically enslaved people, like Ariel and Caliban, and to think about the problem of language imperialism and the significance of their learning of English.

Students’ Thoughts and Impressions

The author delivered two questionnaires to the students after the performance: one asking about drama activity as English learning, and the other about The Tempest as a subject. But the author dared not ask about the theme of English Imperialism in this questionnaire mainly because this theme is very complicated and needs further discussion about it in the following seminar class, which they can take in the next academic year.
The questions in the first questionnaire:

Q. 1: What score do you give to the performance as a whole and to your own performance out of 100 points?
Q. 2: What did you do to contribute to the team? And what did you think about the team?
Q. 3: What kind of practice do you think was effective for you to memorize your lines, and how effective was it?
Q. 4: What do you think is the good points in using drama for English learning?
Q. 5: What is your self-examination? What did you do well and what didn't you do well?
Q. 6: Give some advice to the students who will take this class in the future.

As for the Question 1, their scores of the performance as a whole were mainly between 70 and 100, while those for their own performance were generally lower than that. The typical score for each is 80 and 60. There were a few who evaluated their own performance better than that as a whole, showing their sense of achievement. As for the Question 3 and 4, many students answered that they realized the importance of saying their lines with actions and expression of emotion backed up by a deep understanding of their meaning in order to memorize them, and say them naturally without stopping on stage. Some also said that once they memorized the lines and got accustomed to act them, they felt that they could really mean it in English without any help of Japanese. Most of them said this activity was great fun because they could do it with other members to accomplish the same goal. Also they said they felt very happy when they were praised by others. The author thinks these points are what they can rarely get in usual language classes in Japan now.

The questions in the second questionnaire:

Q. 1: What do you think is the main theme of The Tempest? Whose action and whose way of thinking do you think is the most important in this play?
Q. 2: What is the role of the character you played?
Q. 3: This time we changed the male character, Prospero, into the female character, Prospera, adapting Julie Taymor’s movie. What do you think is the significance of this change?
Q. 4: What have you gained through the experiences you had in this drama in English class? What do you think are the good points of drama for language learning?

The following are some of the students’ answers for the second questionnaire.

An Answer for Q. 1: The main theme of the play is ‘revenge’ and ‘forgiveness.’ There are two revenge stories in the story: one is Prospera’s revenge against the betrayal by his brother
and another is the one by Caliban against Prospero’s dominance over him, two of them forming a contrast against each other. (by the student as Prospera)

An Answer for Q. 2: Caliban’s actions describe his resistance, failure of revenge, despair and emancipation, structuring the story as the main character. He is a bad guy for Prospera but represents the subordinate situation of a slave. Without him, Prospero cannot survive nor hold her position in the island. (by the student as Caliban)

Answers for Q. 3: Prospera as a mother, instead of Prospero as a father, is a better character for describing the theme of ‘forgiveness.’ The change gives more emphasis on love of Miranda as the daughter who plays the key role to regain Prospera’s power to the Dukedom. (by the student as Prospera)

A woman is better for performing the role of a magician, because we have the image of witches. A man could be very violent in describing a revenge story; a woman is better as a character to forgive others. (by the student as Prospera)

Answers for Q. 4: I had a very good experience in acting in front of the audience. Speaking aloud on the stage with exaggerated body actions gave me big confidence. I was very nervous at first, but I felt I would be able to do it again after finishing my performance. It was a great fun to cooperate with other students to create a stage show. I could build up very strong ties with the others. (by the student as Miranda)

To perform on stage and say the lines properly requires a very deep understanding of the meaning of each words and that is what we usually don’t do in the usual English classes. I have come to understand English phrases and sentences without thinking about the Japanese translations for them. I can memorize words and sentences when I try to express them with my body actions and strong emotions. I could actually experience the feeling of the character in the story in a very real way. (by the student as Stephano)

The existence of the audience meant a lot to me. I thought about making them understand what I was trying to say. And I felt that my body memorized my lines when I was acting. (by the student as Gonthalo)

The Tempest by Shakespeare has become a very familiar and important story for me after the production. I think I can understand the feeling of each character now. (by the student as Miranda)

Drama and Language Education

Effectiveness of drama in language education cannot be overemphasized. First of all, drama performance in a foreign language gives the learner a goal and true motivation to learn the target language, which can never be attained in the usual classroom language teaching. To act on stage as an actor or an actress, the students have to repeat their lines hundreds of times until they can articulate them naturally and dramatically. They have to express feelings not only by the
articulation but their body language and facial expressions. Acting requires a lot of voice training, which is also lacking in usual language classes. Acting in a foreign language gives the sense of throwing away one’s old self that confines oneself to one’s own culture and language. Completing a stage requires hard work, good teamwork and a strong sense of responsibility. It requires true interaction and close communication among the members and also between students and teachers, which might be actually difficult to get in the usual classes. Also, acting on stage requires communication between the performer and the audience. Most of all, one can get a great sense of achievement when one finishes the stage and get a big applause from the audience, which gives one a sense of accomplishment and confidence as a learner of a foreign language.

The one major problem that Japanese education system has is the lack of drama education. On the contrary, majoring in drama or performing arts is very popular in the UK and in the US, as we all know. Most of their universities have a faculty for drama or performing arts. Also, drama classes are popular among humanities classes for freshmen. One of the reasons the author got interested in drama is based on an experience in a drama class for undergrads that the author took as a graduate student at a university in the U.S. The experience was so exciting and helped improve his fluency in English so much that the author felt that his students should have that kind of experience especially in their language classes. So, since the beginning of the career as an English language teacher, the author has been using drama in his classes in some ways or other without having any experience or special training in drama education.

It seems that no national or public universities in Japan have specific faculties of drama or performing arts. Only two private universities have a drama major. The situation is almost the same among elementary and high school education. It is not surprising that there is little drama activity in foreign language classes if there is no drama activity even in our own languages. Drama or performing arts doesn’t seem to be regarded as a proper academic activity for universities, which is one of the biggest defects of the Japanese education system. If we want to teach English and its culture to our students and if we really want to enhance the so-called ‘communication ability’ of our students, we definitely need to teach them the tradition and techniques of drama.

References
Appendix 1:

Some Photos of the Performance

1. Caliban at PUH
2. The Stage and Subtitles
3. Prospera and Miranda
4. Caliban, Prospera and Miranda
5. Ariel as Demonic Bird
6. Prospera Forgiving Everyone

Appendix 2:

A Part of the Script Used, Extracted from Act 1 Scene 2

MIRANDA: The strangeness of your story made me drowsy.
PROSPERA: Shake off your drowsiness. Come on, we’ll visit my slave Caliban, who never answers us respectfully. [She turns to the opening of a cave nearby]

MIRANDA: He’s a villain, mom, I don’t like to see.
PROSPERA: As things are, we can’t do without him. He lights our fire, fetches our wood, and generally useful to us. [Calling] Hey there! Slave! Caliban! you clod, you. Answer!
CALIBAN: [inside] I have to eat my dinner! There’s enough wood inside.
PROSPERA: Come out, I say! There are other jobs for you. Come here, you tortoise! How much longer? [Ariel returns, looking like a sea nymph]

A splendid likeness! My ingenious Ariel! A word in your ear. [She whispers]
ARIEL: My lord, it shall be done.
PROSPERA: [to Caliban] You poisonous slave, sired by the devil himself upon your wicked mother — come out!
[Caliban, an ugly and deformed creature, enters]
CALIBAN: May as wicked a fog as ever my mother swept from a putrid bog with a raven's feather drop on you both! May a southwest pestilential wind blow on you and blister you all over.

PROSPERA: For saying that, you'll suffer cramps tonight, for sure! Side stitches, that will cut your breath short! Goblins will get to work on you throughout the long night hours! You'll be pinched till your skin resembles the checkered pattern of the honeycomb, each pinch worse than a bee sting.

CALIBAN: This island is mine, through my mother Sycorax, and you've taken it from me. When you first came, you stroked me and made much of me. You'd give me water with berries in it and teach me what to call the big light that burns during the day and the smaller one that shines at night. I loved you then and showed you all the features of the island: the fresh springs and the salt pits; the barren places and those that are fertile. Curse me for doing so! May all the spells of Sycorax—toads and beetles and bats—befall you! I am all the subjects you have. I, who was once my own king! You pen me in a cave and keep me away from the rest of the island.

PROSPERA: You lying slave, you! Whipping works with you, not kindness! Filth though you are, I've treated you humanely! I let you sleep in my own cave, till you tried to rape my daughter.

CALIBAN: Oh ho! Oh ho! I wish I had! You stopped me. Otherwise I'd have peopled this island with Calibans!

MIRANDA: You disgusting slave! Goodness makes no impression on you; you're all evil! I pitied you took the trouble to teach you speak.

CALIBAN: You taught me language: my profit from that is, I know how to curse! May the plague with its red sores destroy you for teaching me your language!

PROSPERA: Off with you, you son of a witch! Bring in some fuel for us. [Caliban gestures his indifference] Do you shrug your shoulders, you malicious object? If you disobey my orders, or work halfheartedly, I'll rack you with miserable cramps, fill your bones with aches, and make you roar so loud that beasts will tremble at your groans.

CALIBAN: No, please don't! I've got to obey. Her magic is so powerful it would control Setebos, my mother's god, and make servant of her.

PROSPERA: So, slave—go!