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The Bible, Shakespeare and Faulkner: Inspiring Texts That Can Be Used for Teaching Linguistics

Introduction

University students do not always see the connections between the various subjects that they have to take, and this is all the more so when these subjects belong to areas that seem to be quite different, such as literature and linguistics. So, it has to be pointed out to them that the common ground that literature and linguistics share is language: for literature, language serves as a medium, while for linguistics, language is a subject of study. This means that literary texts can be used in the linguistics class to study certain aspects of any language. In this paper I am going to show how passages from the Bible, Shakespeare and Faulkner are used on a regular basis in "The History of the English Language" and in the "Varieties of English" courses at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary in order to develop students' analytical skills and linguistic awareness.

The history of the English language is taught in various programmes offered by the Institute of English Studies. It is a compulsory seminar in the BA in English and American Studies; it is an elective seminar for the full-time, double-major Teacher of English Language and Culture programme; it is an elective seminar for part-time students in the single-major teacher training programme; and it is also taught in the English Studies MA programme as both a lecture and a seminar. (It has been compulsory so far in this programme, however, it is going to be optional from the 2025/2026 academic year.) The BA and MA courses also attract Erasmus students.

The "Varieties of English" course is also taught in various programmes: it is an elective seminar for students doing a BA in English and American Studies and for students in the full-time, double-major teacher training programme, and is compulsory in the part-time single-major English teacher training programme. This course is also popular with Erasmus students.

Learning about the history of English through Shakespeare and the King James Bible

Recently, attention has turned to the methodology of teaching the history of the English language, as evidenced by publications such as Hayes and Burkette,[1] or

[1] Mary Hayes and Allison Burkette, eds., *Approaches to Teaching the History of the English Language: Pedagogy in Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Palmer and Moore.[2] At Károli University, lecturers involved in teaching this subject (Dr. Dóra Pődör, Dr. Andrea Nagy, and Gyula Kozma) are also constantly developing and redesigning their teaching methods in order to adapt to the changing learning methods of the students.

When teaching a course in the history of the English language, students can be "launched" on a journey of discovery by being introduced first to Early Modern English texts, which can be made fairly accessible for those who possess a good knowledge of Modern English. First, I use excerpts from some of Shakespeare's plays, and then I move on to the more archaic text of the *King James Bible*, which was published in 1611. Although these texts are more or less contemporaneous with each other, still, students will notice that Shakespeare's language is more modern than that of the *King James Bible*, as religious texts tend to be conservative from the linguistic point of view.

To work on Shakespeare's language, students in my class in the part-time teacher training programme normally get excerpts from *The Tempest* and from *Hamlet* – these excerpts can be found in Algeo and Butcher.[3]

Miranda If by *your* Art (my deerest father) *you* haue
Put the wild waters in this Rore; alay them.
. . . . .
Prospero I haue done nothing, but in care of *thee*
(Of *thee* my deere one; *thee* my daughter) who
Art ignorant of what *thou* art. (*The Tempest*, I.ii)

Excerpt 1

For these two excerpts, students get the questions given below, and in most cases, they have to work on these tasks at home with the help of a textbook on the history of the English language, e.g. Algeo 2010.[4]

Excerpt 1 (The Tempest):
a) What is the difference between *thou* and *thee*?
b) What is the difference between *thou/thee* and *you/your*?
c) Can you find any verbal forms that do not exist in Standard English anymore? (Ignore spelling differences such as *haue* for *have*.)

[2] Chris C. Palmer and Colette Moore, eds., *Teaching the History of the English Language* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2019).

[3] John Algeo and Carmen Acevedo Butcher, *Origins and Development of the English Language: Workbook,* 7th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013), 179–180. Sometimes the same excerpts are used in the BA course as well.

[4] John Algeo, *Origins and Development of the English Language,* 6th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010).

[King Claudius and Queen Gertrude urge Hamlet to forgo his n
the Danish court.]

King How is it that the Clouds still hang on *you*?
Hamlet Not so my Lord, I am too much i'th'Sun.
Queen Good Hamlet cast *thy* nightly colour off,
And let *thine* eye looke like a Friend on Denmarke.
Do not for euer with *thy* veyled lids
Seeke for *thy* Noble Father in the dust;
Thou know'st 'tis common, all that liues must dye,
Passing through Nature, to Eternity.

. . . . .

King 'Tis sweet and commendable
In *your* Nature Hamlet,
To giue these mourning duties to *your* Father:
But *you* must know, *your* Father lost a Father.

. . . . .

And we beseech *you*, bend *you* to remaine
Heere in the cheere and comfort of our eye,
Our cheefest Courtier Cosin, and our Sonne.
Queen Let not *thy* Mother lose her Prayers Hamlet;
I pry*thee* stay with vs, go not to Wittenberg.
Hamlet I shall in all my best
Obey *you* Madam.
King Why 'tis a louing, and a faire Reply. (*Hamlet*, I.ii)

Excerpt 2

Excerpt 2 (Hamlet)
a) What is the difference between *thy* and *thine*?
b) Who uses *thou* and who uses *you*, and in what situations?
c) Can you find any verbal endings that do not exist in Standard English anymore? (Ignore spelling differences such as *looke* for *look*.)
d) Are there any negations or questions where auxiliary *do* is present or absent?

As it can be seen, by answering these questions, students will become familiar with the Early Modern English 2nd person singular informal pronoun in its various forms: *thou, thee, thy, thine*; will learn about the difference between informal *thou* and formal *you*; will discover that Early Modern English had some verbal endings (in these excerpts, *-t* and *–(e)st* as in *thou art* and *thou know'st*) that are not used in Modern English anymore; and will learn that auxiliary *do* was not compulsory in questions, negations and negative imperatives.

The next step is to have a look at some sections of the *King James Bible* in class. I normally start with the beginning of Matthew 21, and ask students to take note of morphological and syntactic features as well as vocabulary items that would not be used in Modern English.

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,
2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose *them*, and bring *them* unto me.
3 And if any *man* say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.[5]

As far as vocabulary is concerned, *nigh* 'near', *unto* 'to' and *ought* 'anything' are not used anymore; the online version of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* lists the first two with their meanings but assigns the "old use" label to them.[6] Students are always surprised to find out that online monolingual advanced learner's dictionaries of English contain entries for quite a few Early Modern English words: apart from the ones mentioned in this paragraph, *thou, thee, thy, thine*, and *ye* can also be found in most of them.

A syntactic feature of Early Modern English that does not survive in the modern language is the use of two different auxiliaries in the perfect. Similarly to what we can find in Modern German, French and Italian, transitive verbs in Early Modern English formed their perfect with the verb *have*, while intransitive verbs (mostly verbs of movement and becoming) with the verb *be*. This is exemplified with "were come" in verse 1, and later with "when he was come into Jerusalem" in verse 10, and with "How soon is the fig tree withered away!" in verse 20. Today, we would use 'had come' in the first two cases, and 'has withered' in the last one. Students who know some German, French, or Italian can normally identify this rule here.

Another syntactic feature that is no longer present in Modern English is exemplified by "then sent Jesus two disciples" in verse 1 above. English used to be a V2 language, which means that in the main clause the verb had to be in second place; this is why it is the verb and not *Jesus* that follows the word *then*. Thus, there is inversion between verb and subject. Again, students who know some German are often able to discern this rule, which is still present in that language.

A difficulty is often caused by the verb *say* in "And if any man say ought to you" in verse 3. Few students can recognize *say* as the third person singular present subjunctive form of the verb, although they learn about the subjunctive in the language development and descriptive grammar courses. Modern English does not often use the present subjunctive in general, and rarely after *if* (which was compulsory in Early Modern English), and this may be the reason why students find it difficult to make this connection.

The *King James Bible* is also a rich source of personal pronouns and the corresponding verb forms that are not used today. In the Shakespeare excerpts discussed

[5] Matthew 21 (KJV), *King James Bible Online*, accessed February 20, 2025, kingjamesbibleonline.org/Matthew-Chapter-21/. (A dőlt betűs kiemelések az internetes szövegben találhatók.)

[6] *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, online edition, s.vv. "nigh" and "unto", accessed April 26, 2025, oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/nigh?q=nigh and oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/unto?q=unto

above, students are introduced to some of these, which they will also come across in the *King James Bible*. They will discover hitherto unfamiliar forms in Matthew 21 verse 3, and normally they will be able to make out that while *ye* is the nominative form of the 2nd plural personal pronoun and it functions as the subject of the verb, *you* is the objective form and serves as the direct and indirect object of verbs and prepositions. The verb *hath* occasionally confuses students and is perceived as a past form, but it is the 3rd person singular present indicative of *have*. Verse 16 is also illustrative of Early Modern English personal pronouns and verb forms:

> 16 And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?[7]

The pronouns have already been discussed; what is to be noted here is that we have two verbs in 2nd person singular present indicative, *hearest* and *hast*, and one verb in 3rd person singular present indicative, *saith*. Most students will quickly learn these endings and will be able to recognize them in other contexts as well.

Further examples for using excerpts from the *King James Bible* to teach about Early Modern English morphology, syntax and pronunciation can be found in Kristó; here, for example, one can find a partial phonetic transcription of the "Sermon on the Mount" according to the Early Modern English pronunciation.[8] This very useful transcription is also used extensively in our "History of the English Language" courses.

Text analysis of this nature will not only develop students' analytical, linguistic and problem-solving skills while trying to work out the meaning and categories of the unknown forms, but it will also help them in developing an autonomous attitude towards comprehending texts. Moreover, some of the students choose our university because they are practising Christians and Károli is a Christian university, so they are very pleased that this prestigious English translation of the Bible is made more accessible to them.

Faulkner and African-American Vernacular English (AAVE)

English literature has a long tradition of representing varieties of English that differ from Standard British and American English. This tradition is in fact so long that one of the first literary works in English that attempts to represent various dialects

7 Matthew 21 (KJV), *King James Bible Online*, accessed February 20, 2025, kingjamesbibleonline.org/Matthew-Chapter-21/.

8 László Kristó, Introduction to the History of the English Language (Budapest: PPKE, n.d.), 35, btk.ppke.hu/uploads/articles/172337/file/Krist%C3%B3_Introduction%20to%20the%20history%20of%20the%20English%20language.pdf

is *The Reeve's Tale* by Chaucer, where both the London dialect and the Northern dialect can be heard (or rather, seen).[9] In fact, in recent decades the discipline of researching the literary representations of non-standard varieties of English and their translation into various languages has emerged, see e.g. Blake; Taavitsainen et al.; or Montini and Ranzato.[10]

One topic in the "Varieties of English" course at Károli University is African-American Vernacular English (earlier also known as Black English). It appears in several literary representations, including in one of William Faulkner's novels, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929).[11] In my class I use the last couple of pages from this novel to have a look at Faulkner's recreation of the Southern (rural) Black dialect that he would have heard in Northwestern Mississippi; some of the Black characters of his novel use this speech variety. Faulkner's language, including his representation of AAVE, has been widely discussed, for example, by Mark Lencho.[12] Faulkner himself did state that he consciously tried to represent two Black English[13] dialects in his works: that of Blacks from the large Northern cities, and that used by Southern rural Blacks.[14] Opinions vary concerning the faithfulness of Faulkner's representation of the speech of Southern rural Blacks and also as to how faithfully a non-standard speech variety should be represented in a literary work,[15] and it is not the aim of this paper to provide a new assessment. We are simply going to look at how Faulkner's representation can be used in teaching about AAVE in the "Varieties of English" classroom.

Faulkner uses non-standard orthography to represent the pronunciation of Dilsey, the matriarch of the African-American servant family, and that of her children and grandson in the novel. This can provide a challenge, because, as Lencho states,

> because of the limitations of the English system of orthography – it is far from being phonetic – precise dialect renditions in literature are a practical impossibility. As the dialect writer moves away from standard orthography, twisting and reshaping the constraints imposed by our spelling system in order to

9 Algeo and Butcher, *Origins and Development,* 127.

10 Norman Francis Blake, *Non-standard Language in English Literature* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1981); Irma Taavitsainen, Gunnel Melchers and Päivi Pahta, eds., *Writing in Nonstandard English* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999); Donatella Montini and Irene Ranzato, eds., *The dialects of British English in Fictional Texts* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

11 William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* Norton Critical Editions (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988).

12 W. Mark Lencho, "Dialect Variation in 'The Sound and the Fury': A Study of Faulkner's Use of Black English," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 41, no. 3, Special Issue: William Faulkner (Summer 1988), 403–419.

13 Lencho uses the now somewhat controversial term Black English in his article, which some speakers may now find offensive according to Tom McArthur, Jacqueline Lam-McArthur and Lise Fontaine, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the English Language,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 75.

14 Lencho, "Dialect Variation," 404.

15 Lencho, "Dialect Variation," 403–406.

> accommodate a dialect different from his own, he risks mystifying and confusing the reader, who is dependent, after all, on the conventional meaning of the printed symbol.[16]

It has to be added here that for a non-native speaker of English, the possible sounds represented by non-conventional orthography represent an even greater challenge.

This means that for assessing the pronunciation of the Black characters, Faulkner's orthography is of limited use – still, as we are going to see, some key features of AAVE pronunciation are clearly represented.

Faulkner also attempts to reproduce AAVE morphological and syntactic features so as to provide a coherent impression of the speech variety used by his Black characters.

I normally ask students to work in pairs. I give them 20-25 lines from the last pages of the novel, and ask them to identify at least three phonological and three morphological and/or syntactic features that are different from Standard English. It has to be mentioned here that in this section of the book, the narration is in Standard English, and only the dialogue is in AAVE.

The most saliently represented phonological features are the following:

a) /n/ instead of the velar nasal /ŋ/, which is represented in spelling by <in> instead of the standard <ing> spelling, as in *nothin* and *playin* in the sentences "I ain't done nothin. I tole you when dem folks start playin, he git started up."[17]

b) /d/ replaces the voiced interdental fricative /ð/ in word-initial position, which will be spelt with <d> instead of <th> like *dem* in the sentence cited above. Other examples are *dar* for 'there,'[18] *dis* for 'this,'[19] *dat* for 'that,'[20] and *de* for 'the.'[21]

The two features mentioned above are fairly easily spotted and interpreted by students. Features that students find more difficult to interpret include /f/ for the voiceless interdental fricative /θ/ in word-final position, spelt with <f> as in *bofe* for 'both'; or the simplification of final consonant clusters like *tole* for 'told' (cited above) *chile* for 'child', *jes* for 'just', *hen* for 'hand', or *en* for 'and.'[22] Finally, I would like to mention that *fo* for 'four'[23] and *Lawd* for 'Lord'[24] seem to hint at the fact that Southern AAVE is non-rhotic, that is, R is not pronounced in word-final and pre-consonantal position. However, Faulkner is not too consistent here, as in other

[16] Lencho, "Dialect Variation," 406.
[17] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 188.
[18] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 188.
[19] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 189.
[20] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 189.
[21] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 189.
[22] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 189.
[23] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 188.
[24] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 189.

cases the loss of the R is not represented, e.g. in *start* or *started* in the sentence cited in a).[25]

As far as the morphological and syntactic features of Southern AAVE are concerned, in Faulkner's representation the most salient phenomena are the following:

a) *gwine* for 'going to', where 'to' is dropped.[26]

b) The use of *ain't* (spelt as *aint*) as the negative form of 'be' and 'have' in all persons and numbers in the present tense, as in "Aint you gwine stop?" for 'Aren't you going to stop?'; also, see the example at c).[27]

c) Double negation as in "I aint done nothin" for 'I haven't done anything'.[28]

d) The frequent use of the 3rd person singular present indicative inflectional suffix *-s* in the 1st person singular: *I knows, I drives, I does*.[29]

e) The omission of auxiliaries as in "Luster gone to git the surrey" for 'Luster has gone', "Dat un broke," for 'That one is broken', "You gwine be careful" for 'You're going to be careful',[30] or "All you got to do" for 'All you have got to do'.[31]

In general, it can be stated that students find it somewhat easier to detect the morphological and syntactic features of AAVE than the phonological ones.

All in all, it can be said that analysing excerpts from *The Sound and the Fury* in the manner described above will improve students' analytical and comprehension skills as well as raise their linguistic awareness. They will also be made aware of the fact that there may be inconsistencies when it comes to the representation of non-standard varieties of English in literary works; however, attention will be drawn to the fact that it is not normally the aim of a writer to provide a completely accurate representation.

Conclusion

All in all, it can be stated that Biblical and literary texts can provide rich sources for linguistic analysis. In the future, a closer cooperation between literature and linguistics classes could be developed, which could help both in implementing an interdisciplinary approach to the texts studied and in making students realise that their university courses are interconnected at a deeper level than they would have initially thought.

[25] Note that all of the features above are listed in McArthur et al., *The Oxford Companion,* 14.
[26] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 188–189.
[27] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 188.
[28] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 188.
[29] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 189.
[30] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 189.
[31] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury,* 190.

Abstract

This article describes some possibilities for using literary and Biblical texts in linguistics classes in order to achieve certain learning outcomes. The first part focuses on excerpts from Shakespeare and the King James Bible *and how to exploit their potential for introducing students to Early Modern English in a "History of the English Language" course; while the second discusses how William Faulkner's* The Sound and the Fury *can provide an inspiring starting point for students to explore some features of African-American Vernacular English in a "Varieties of English" class.*

Keywords: Shakespeare, King James Bible, William Faulkner, Early Modern English, African-American Vernacular English

Rezümé
A Biblia, Shakespeare és Faulkner: Nyelvészeti ismeretek tanítása inspiráló szövegeken keresztül

Jelen tanulmány néhány olyan lehetőséget kíván bemutatni, amikor is irodalmi és bibliai szövegeken keresztül tudjuk elérni a kívánt tanulási eredményeket egyes nyelvészeti kurzusokon. Az első rész azt mutatja be, hogy Shakespeare-darabokból, illetve a Jakab király Bibliájá*ból származó szövegekben rejlő lehetőségeket hogyan lehet kihasználni, amikor a hallgatókat a korai modern angol nyelvállapottal kívánjuk megismertetni egy angol nyelvtörténet órán; a második rész pedig azt szemlélteti, hogy William Faulkner* The Sound and the Fury (Hang és téboly) *című regénye miként szolgálhat inspiráló bevezetőként az afroamerikai angol dialektus egyes jellegzetességeinek megismeréséhez az angol nyelv változatai kurzuson.*

Kulcsszavak: Shakespeare, Jakab király Bibliája, William Faulkner, korai modern angol, afroamerikai angol dialektus