Othello: Introduction Notes

Language in Shakespeare is always an issue in the following ways:

I.   As a novice or beginner: there is a common belief that Shakespearian is incomprehensible.
   a. WHICH IT IS NOT IF YOU CONSIDER…
      i. Shakespeare is NOT Old English! It is very modern English!
      ii. Its "unreadable" only in the sense that Shakespeare writes in verse and that it is written in dramatic form: Both poetry and drama are meant to be heard and performed, not read silently.

II.   Once you get beyond the initial problems in understanding Shakespearian language, you then have to grapple with the language analytically:
   a. Shakespeare as a "Works-in-Translation": You must consider the implications of Shakespearian language within the contexts of the socio-political, historical, and cultural, both in the past and the present.
   b. The most important consideration of language, analytically: how Shakespearian language operates as the driver of…
      i. Character Development
      ii. Plot Development
      iii. As the concrete representation of the Dynamics of Power

III.   The compelling Statement for Our Study of Othello:

   "You don't know what it means to be oppressed until you are forced to speak the language of your oppressor."

IV.   This is problematic in this context because in several ways it seems that Shakespeare is "meta" exploring the concepts of racism, xenophobia, and misogyny in order to comment on these things, but the extent to which the text is actually perpetrating these values – especially as an Canonical Work – should be a central consideration for us.
   a. Is Shakespeare really confronting and calling out racism, xenophobia, and misogyny or is the play racist?
   b. And, if it is racist, how is this problematic for a work that considered a pillar of Western Civilization? How might the seriousness by which culture embraces this text ensure that it only continues to disseminate the harmful tropes of racism, xenophobia, and misogyny?