

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## The Spatial Hinge, Literary Geography and Political Science

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In a public lecture given at The University of Tokyo on 18 February 2023, Liz Truss, the former UK prime minister, emphasized the importance of the UK's engagement with the Indo-Pacific nations by calling the Indo-Pacific 'a state of mind' rather than a mere geographic region (Truss 2023). This led me, a political science student and audience member sitting in the lecture hall, to think about how the use of a particular geographic phrase in political speech could be an interesting subject of analysis for both literary geographers and political scientists. Calling the Indo-Pacific 'a state of mind' to show that it is accessible even to the UK, which lacks geographic proximity to the Pacific Ocean, is a clear example of the 'imaginative geographies' often found in literary texts, art works, or discourse (Driver 2013). On the other hand, the phrase 'Indo-Pacific' carries strong connotations of security and military policies that unfold in the actual-world. Understanding the 'Indo-Pacific' indeed requires a careful analysis of the dynamic interactions between the literary geography formed by texts and the physical geography that shapes and is shaped by people's sense of security/threat.

The recent coining of the 'spatial hinge' demonstrates how literary and physical geographies interact with each other, such that 'actual-world places' not only shape 'the reading of the text' but also get 'shaped by the reading of the text' (Thurgill and Lovell 2019: 18). What makes the 'spatial hinge' a creative and useful analytical tool for political analysis is indeed its emphasis on the effect of literary experience upon actual-world spatial experience, as articulated in the following sentence: 'While spatial experience and lived-geographic knowledge inform the reading of literary texts, this process can reverse once the reading is

complete, so that texts themselves come to shape spatial experience and inform geographical knowledge' (19).

The 'spatial hinge' emerges from the recent idea of 'relational literary geography,' whose proponent asserts that literary works should be explored from 'the diversity of agents ... including but not limited to the author and reader' (Anderson and Saunders 2015: 117). This short exploratory paper, however, shows that the 'spatial hinge' may also operate within political speech, a productive but relatively underexplored area in literary geography. In a 1958 essay, Richard Murphy deplored the fact that 'speech as a form of literature receives less and less attention in our day,' while other genres like contemporary novels are 'studied as literature' (Murphy 1958: 127). Indeed, 'Aristotle's paradigm', which divides literature from rhetoric and imagination from deliberation, has long 'prevailed in modern academia' (Johnson 2017: 151). Yet, scholars (including literary geographers) are beginning to contest such a boundary. James Kelman, a Scottish writer, regards speech as 'a new literary genre on the rise,' and declares, '[t]here are only so many genres in literature. It's certainly time that the Speech got its moment' (Kelman 2013). Within this mode of thinking, political speech can be usefully thought of as a specific kind of literary text.

If political speech is to be regarded as a body of literature, then, the idea of the 'spatial hinge' can be applied to the study of not only literary texts but also the texts of politics and international relations. The basic purpose of this paper is to show how a literary geographical approach can be employed to analyze political text, opening up a new area for both political scientists and literary geographers. In the subsequent paragraphs, quantitative text analysis of the speeches of recent UK prime ministers is conducted to show how a specific geographic keyword – 'Pacific' – in political speech/texts carries different geographic connotations when used by different prime ministers, suggesting that the 'spatial hinge' operates in-between the speeches and people's perceptions of actual-world geography. The analysis shows how politicians try to forge connections to places where they have no observable geographical connections.

The UK is not a Pacific country, in much the same way that Japan is not an Atlantic country. Interestingly, however, the number of times the word 'Pacific' has been mentioned by UK prime ministers has increased over the past decade. To explore this phenomenon, I first gathered written speeches of three UK prime ministers – David Cameron, Theresa May, and Boris Johnson – from the government website [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). I then created a co-occurrence network of bigrams (pairs of consecutive written units) that include the word 'Pacific' – such as "Pacific region," 'Indo-Pacific' and so forth – with a window of five. This means that a pair of words located within five bigrams before and after the target bigram appear on the network plot as having an association with 'Pacific'. Figures 1 through 3 display a co-occurrence network for each prime minister.

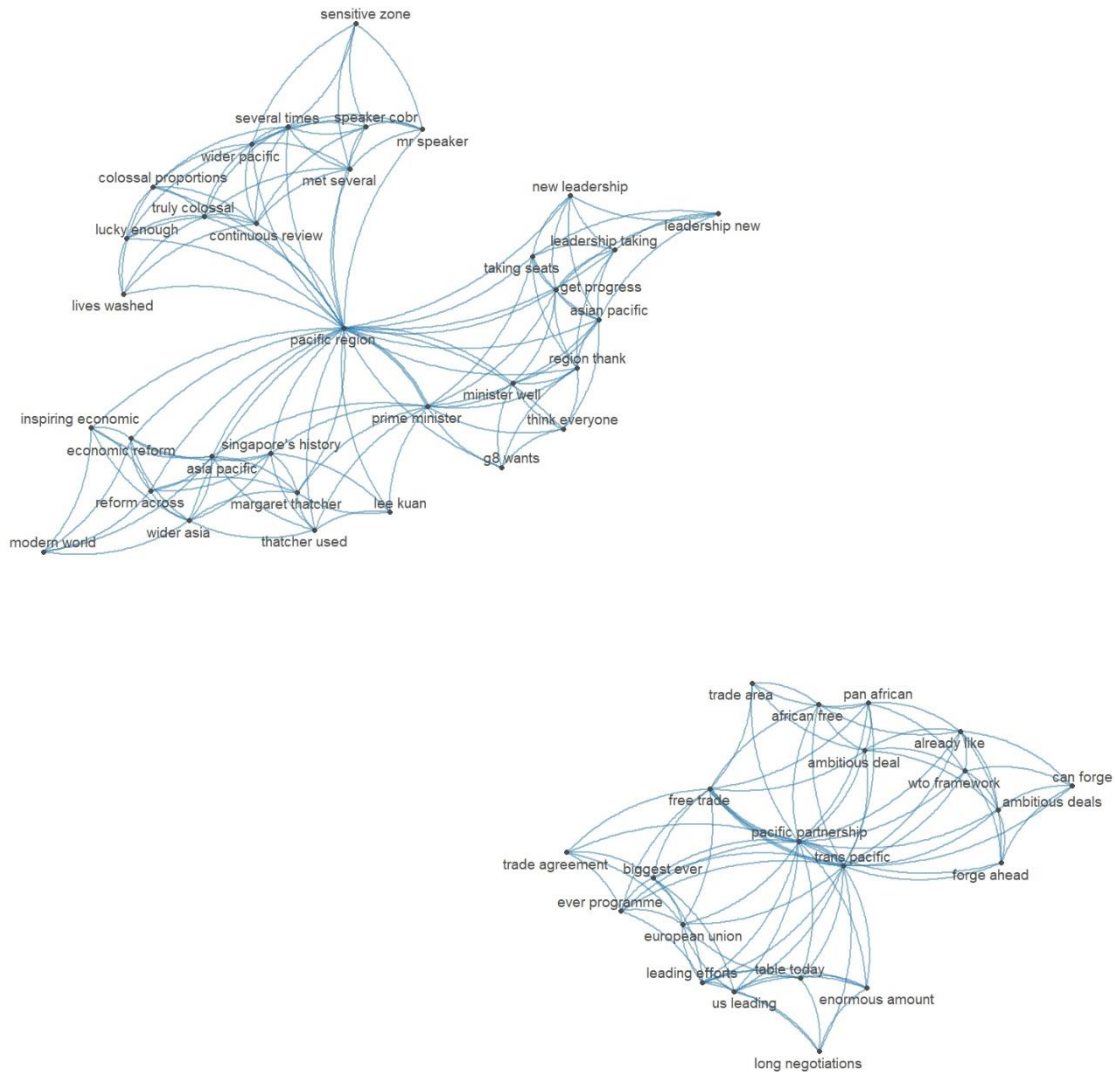


Figure 1. Co-occurrence Network of David Cameron's Speeches.

In Cameron's network plot, we see a cluster whose hub is 'trans-pacific partnership,' with co-occurrence of phrases like "free trade" and "WTO framework". This is unsurprising because the debate on whether the UK should join the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) began during Cameron's tenure as prime minister. Another cluster whose hub is 'pacific region' emerges from a speech delivered in Singapore, where Cameron described Lee Kuan Yew as the person who inspired 'economic reform across the wider Asia-Pacific region,' and hence, is not directly related to the UK. As such, when the word 'Pacific' is mentioned during Cameron's tenure, it is mainly referring to a trade agreement.

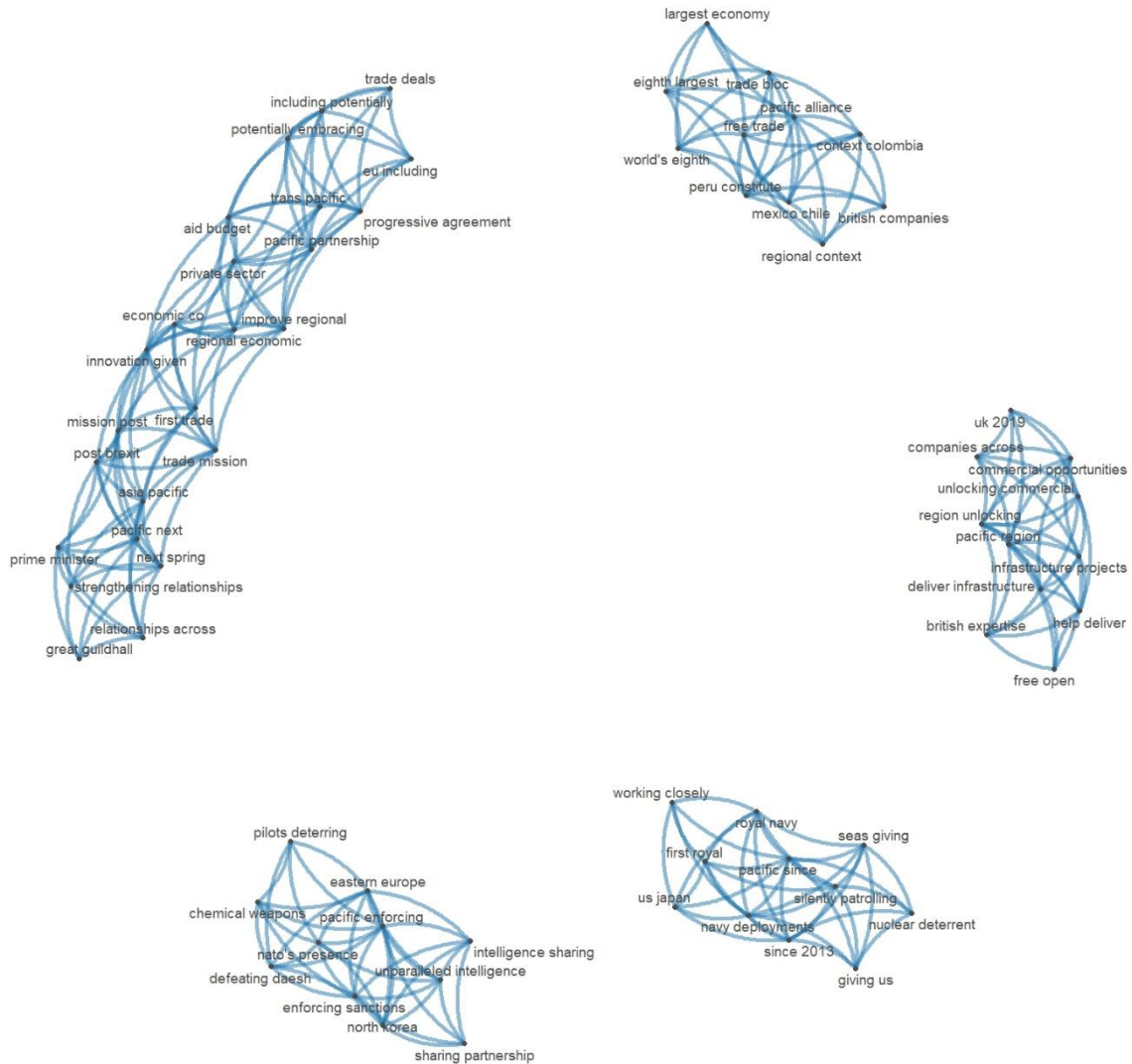


Figure 2. Co-occurrence Network of Theresa May's Speeches.

In May's co-occurrence network, 'Pacific' is still associated with trade and economic phrases like 'private sector,' 'British companies,' and 'commercial opportunities.' What is remarkable, however, is that words related to military and national security also co-occur with 'Pacific' such as 'NATO's presence,' 'enforcing sanctions,' 'royal navy,' 'navy deployment,' and 'nuclear deterrent.' In May's tenure, the word 'Pacific' is used in the contexts of economics and trade on the one hand and national security on the other. This means that the Pacific is not only about British companies and the private sector but also about the British people and British land.

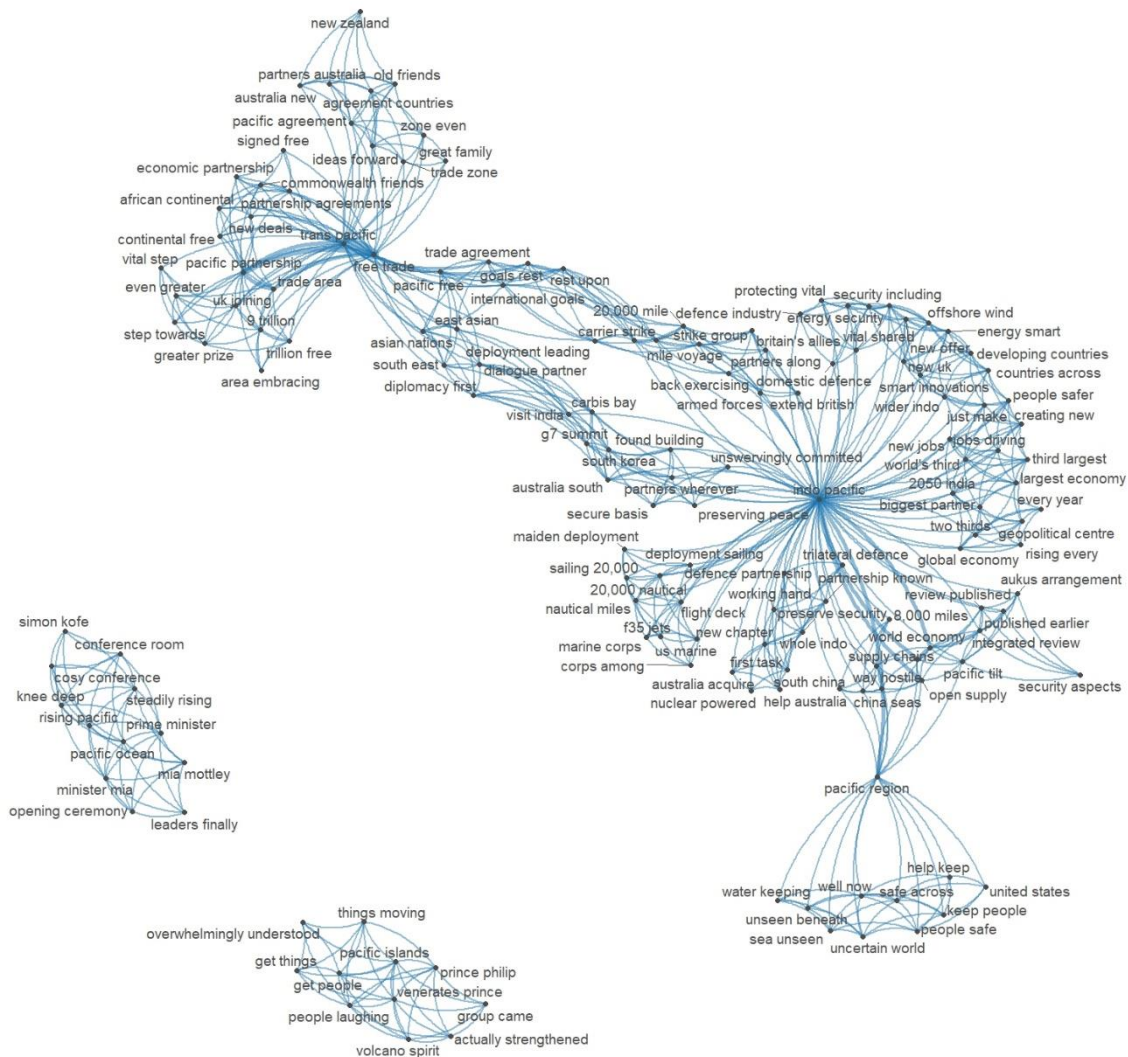


Figure 3. Co-occurrence Network of Boris Johnson's Speeches.

The security-related implications of the word 'Pacific' were further accelerated by Johnson. One of the hubs in Johnson's network plot, 'Trans-Pacific,' is associated with economy-related phrases as usual, but what is noteworthy here is that in another hub we now see a new word called 'Indo-Pacific' with co-occurrence of the phrases that are explicitly related to national security such as 'Britain's allies,' 'defence partnership,' 'preserving peace,' 'armed forces' and 'F35 jets.' Interestingly, the 'Indo-Pacific' concept was articulated by the former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe in 2007 as the 'confluence' of the Pacific and Indian Oceans (Chacko 2014; Naidu and Ishida 2022). As such, the concept itself implies the spatial augmentation of the Pacific region toward the West, which may well be one of the reasons why Johnson frequently links the word 'Pacific' to the UK's national security.

The brief analysis of the UK prime ministerial speeches above shows that, over time, the security-related implications of the word 'Pacific' have become stronger. When Cameron

used the term ‘Pacific’ it was mainly in reference to a trade agreement; for May, ‘Pacific’ not only concerned the British companies and private sectors but also the British people and land; while Johnson was the most explicit amongst these three politicians in connecting ‘Pacific’ with the UK’s national security. I did not conduct an analysis for the subsequent prime ministers, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, as they do not at present have a sufficient number of speeches. However, given Sunak’s recent statement at the G20 Summit in Indonesia on 15 November 2022 that ‘[t]he Indo-Pacific is increasingly crucial for our security and our prosperity,’ the trend of the Pacific being securitized is likely to continue in future.

To return to the ‘spatial hinge’ (Thurgill and Lovell 2019; Thurgill 2021), the term describes a mechanism at work in the interplay between texts and spatial experience. Given the persuasive nature of political speeches, change in the implied meaning of ‘Pacific’ may well shift the spatial reach of the Pacific region toward the West. It should be recalled, however, that the ‘spatial hinge’ refers to the extra-textual experience of the reader/listener. So the ‘spatial hinge’ can usefully describe the way the imagined extraterritoriality of a certain geographic concept is reinforced by people’s spatial experience outside the text/speech that conveys it. As such, we can imagine, for example, how the British people’s support for various UK foreign policies in the Pacific region such as the creation of AUKUS, a security pact with the purpose of enhancing trilateral military cooperation between the UK, US, and Australia, has been partly triggered by the recent dramatic shift in the international geopolitical environment, as with the rise of China. If, due to heightened geopolitical tension, British people’s support for AUKUS further strengthens the imagined expansion of the Pacific region, then this is a clear case of the ‘spatial hinge’ operating in-between the textual and extra-textual experience. This is commensurate with the basic idea of a relational literary geography in which a text can be understood as emerging from the interaction of a ‘diversity of agents’ (Anderson and Saunders 2015: 117), such as ‘writers, readers, texts, networks, and contexts’ (Hones 2008: 1310), the ‘context’ in this case being the shift in the international geopolitical environment.

Of course, spatial expressions used in the speeches of heads of state do not necessarily reflect the spatial experience or imaginings of the people they represent. Hans Kelsen critiques the assumption that in democracies ‘the leader and those who are led, that the Subject and Object of rule, are identical’ (Kelsen 2013: 35), asserting that there always resides a subtle discrepancy between heads of government and the people they supposedly represent. Nevertheless, it is also true that political speeches are designed to influence political thought and action and are constantly subject to (re)interpretation by the public who receive them. The discrepancy between spatial expression in political speeches and the spatial experience of the societies those speeches intend (or pretend) to represent is a significant part of the political-literary-geographical process and has the potential to become a fruitful area of future research, unfolding at the intersection of literary geography and political science.

The ‘spatial hinge’ offers an insightful analytical perspective for both political scientists and literary geographers. For political scientists, the idea provides us with a previously unexplored way to understand a nation’s foreign policies. For literary geographers, the idea shows that political speech is another important source for exploring one’s spatial experience

in (extra)textuality. Indeed, the application of the ‘spatial hinge’ to the analysis of political speech is an inherently interdisciplinary work. Hones, when discussing the difficulty of thinking across boundaries of geography and literary studies, points out, ‘while literary critics do work with geographical theory, they do not often refer to substantive work on literary texts produced by geographers, and even the key reviews of work in the field are rarely mentioned’ (2008: 1307). This is also true for the relationship between political science and literary geography as well. For instance, Iver B. Neumann, a renowned international relations scholar, proposes ‘a regional-building approach’ to show how a region can be imagined beyond geographic borders (Neumann 2003), but he makes no reference to the work of literary geographers despite being interested in how a particular region is imagined in discourse, a well-worked topic in literary geography. The idea of the ‘spatial hinge’ should be what truly draws wisdom from these two academic practices. And indeed, this is where the possibility for a political literary geography might present itself.

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