

# Characters in the play 'translations' essay sample

[Countries](#), [England](#)



The central theme in 'Translations' is language, with associations between people who do not speak the same language or same objectives. It is a play about alienation, relationships and a small community and its limitations, it is about love and the political problems between the English and the Irish. The play has around ten characters. Many of which are minor characters but they all play different parts and have very different personalities. Each character contributes to the play and each of them has a different impact on the play, they all represent parts of what the play is about. The minor characters in the play includes of Sarah, Jimmy, Doalty, Bridget, and Lancey.

Sarah is described by Friel as a 'waiflike creature' who 'could be anything from seventeen to thirty-five years old'. Friel has made Sarah a very self conscious and insecure character that is supposedly mute. She accepts being mute because everyone made her believe that she has been mute all of her life; it is very easy to ignore Sarah's presence in the play. One of the main significance of Sarah's character being mute is that Friel tries to show different forms of communications as one of the main ideas of the play.

Sarah being mute communicates by grunting and making sounds, she struggles to communicate in her own language but somehow still communicates, this shows how all other communication problems can be fixed if tried.

Sarah communicates with Manus differently from the others, she communicates with him through speech. Manus encourages her to talk and, under his supervision, she learns how to express herself - 'Get your tongue and your lips working.' 'My name-', 'Come on. One more try', 'My name is..', 'Good girl.' Sarah is finally able to say her name - 'my name is Sarah' - for

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the first time she is able to communicate and feel proud of herself. This gives us the feeling that Sarah has some sort of affection towards Manus, she seems to idolize him – ' Sarah presents the flowers to Manus', '...fled in embarrassment to her seat and has her head buried in a book', this could possibly be because he is the only one who takes any interest in her. Sarah is aware of Manus's feelings for Maire.

Humour is important in every play, this is particularly noticeable in the characterisation of Jimmy Jack and Doalty. Jimmy who is one of the oldest pupils in the hedge school, Jimmy Jack knows only one English word ' bosom', one that excites his prurient mentality. He is a bachelor in his sixties and is known as ' the infant prodigy'- Jimmy is dirty and never washes. He is totally absorbed in the stories of the Greek myths, he is very self absorbed is funny at times and is very old fashioned. Jimmy has found his identity in the classical languages and mythology. He is fluent in Latin and Greek – to him it is perfectly normal to speak these languages.

He hides away from what's going on in Ireland by concentrating on his books. Jimmy lives his life mainly through these languages and thinks only in the past. By living in his fantasy world he can exercise power over someone else, namely Athena and Ulysses. Jimmy is always in his own world and not bothered with anything that is going on around him and is genuinely innocent in many ways. The fact that Jimmy is still coming to the hedge school shows that he hasn't moved on just like everything else in the hedge school. Jimmy is lonely and comes to the evening classes at the hedge school partly for the company and partly for the intellectual stimulation.- '

but what I am really looking for, Hugh- what I really want-companionship, Hugh – at my time of life, companionship, company, someone to talk to.'

On the other hand Doalty's character is a young farmer who attends the hedge school and has no great desire to improve himself. His character is rebellious and funny, he loves to mock everyone, and is full of life – 'too lazy to wash himself..' he is simple minded and loves to mock the English, 'immediately starts speaking in gibberish – an imitation of two very agitated and confused sappers in rapid conversation.'. Doalty has no respect for the English whatsoever and symbolises the rebellions that are against the English invading Ireland. This shows when he takes apart the soldiers' equipment, - 'Doalty is brandishing a surveyor's pole'.

Another character similar to Doalty is Bridget. Along with Doalty and Jimmy, she makes the play more light hearted. She is an example of the ordinary inhabitants of rural Ireland whose lives would be destroyed both by the coming of the potato famine and the government's lack of interest in fixing up a disaster. She is fun like Doalty but is more enthusiastic as a student than he is. Both Doalty and Bridget are always joking around together; Doalty never takes anything seriously and is a bit thick. They have some sort of attraction between them, - 'Doalty gooses Bridget. She squeals.' One of Bridget's worst fears would be realized when the potato famine would also come to Ireland resulting in the loss of much of the native population either to hunger or emigration to America and she can always smell the sweet smell of potatoes. – '.. the sweet smell! Smell it! It's the sweet smell! Jesus, it's the potato blight!'

All the characters so far have been representing the Irish side. Captain Lancey however is a typical colonist, interested only in instigating the requirements of his government and not in the local community, their history or traditions. - 'A new map is being made of the whole country.', - 'Commencing twenty-four hours from now we will shoot all livestock in Ballybeg'. He doesn't appear much in the play but from what we see his is a very business like character who doesn't like to socialise much. He seems cold hearted and is not bothered about anything else other than his duty. He is rude patronising and ignorant.

Lancey is a bit foolish, he cannot tell the difference between Latin and Gaelic, - 'I do not speak Gaelic' this shows how the English have come into Ireland to make it more modern and make them learn new things when in fact the Irish know more about cultures and traditions than the English do. When Lancey talks he tends to complicate the English language, he makes the simplest thing seem like the most complicated thing. - '.. this survey cannot be received as proof of the disposition of this government to advance the interests of Ireland.' When he can simply say what Owen translates- 'This survey demonstrates the governments' interest in Ireland.'

In conclusion, the minor characters contribute differently to the play, and each of them have a different significance but it all come together. Friel uses all his characters to carry the ideas and meanings of the play, but they must also come across as interesting and distinguishable individuals. Sarah represents Ireland, as she is alienated, just like Ireland was. It was left alone

until the English came in just like Sarah couldn't talk until Manus encouraged her.

Doalty represents the rebellions, he causes trouble for the English and hates them, he sees the English and Irish relationship as black and white, they are completely different from each other and will never get along, and the English are the enemy. Jimmy Jack is there to give us some humour and to show us how they are still in the past Jimmy represents how old fashioned they are and how they haven't moved on. Bridget is just an ordinary Irish local and Lancey represents the English colonial side. The minor characters in the play tell you more about what the situation is in Ireland and they help describe in detail what the play is really about. 'Translations' is one of the best plays that Friel has written.