

Found in *Translations*: Views from Functionalism, Conflict Theory, and Interpretivism in Friel's *Translations*

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『トランスレーション』にみつけた物
フリールの『トランスレーション』に関する機能主義、コンフリクト理論、
インタープリティビズムからの見解

要 約

『トランスレーション』は、1980年初演のブライアン・フリール作の戯曲である。この作品では、イギリスがアイルランド社会全般のあらゆる面において、着々と統制を強めていった時期にあたる1833年という時期設定のもと、アイルランドの田舎町を舞台に物語が展開する。この統制はさまざまな形で行われたが、特に作品の中心になるのは、ゲール語の地名をイギリス人が英語名に改名しようとする動きと6歳から12歳までのアイルランド人の教育を英国式の義務教育制度に差し替えようとする切迫した動きの二つである。『トランスレーション』はベイリービークという町のヘッジスクール（野外学校）を舞台に、イギリス人の行動が、アイルランド語を話す住人たちの生活に様々な影響を及ぼしていく様子を描いている。イギリス人の不法な統制行為は、最初は、単なる機構上の変化にすぎないように見えるが、戯曲の終わりには、最終的に地域の生活や文化に重大な変化をもたらしていく。

イギリス人がアイルランド人に与えた変化の影響は、これらの変化が起こるにつれて変化する登場人物間の人間関係のあり方とともに、『トランスレーション』全体を通して見られる、実際にありうる社会的な影響力について、多くを教示している。そして、この影響力はかなり明確なため、社会学における3つの主な理論的見解の決め手となる概念の多くを使って、この劇中の出来事を効果的に分析することができると言える。機能主義、コンフリクト理論、インタープリティビズムという概念的レンズを通して『トランスレーション』を考察することにより、この戯曲が扱う事象に関しての重要な洞察が得られるばかりか、さらなる洞察も探求することができ、ひいては、この戯曲全体をより深く理解することが可能となる。

Key words: functionalism, conflict theory, interpretivism, assimilation, hegemony, solidarity, social construction of meaning

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1. Introduction

Translations is a play written by Brian Friel and was first staged in 1980. The play is set in rural Ireland in 1833, a time when the British are exercising increasing control over the all aspects of the country. This control comes in many forms, though central to the play are two in particular: the renaming of Gaelic place names in English by the British, and the impending adoption of compulsory national schooling in English for Irish between the ages of six and twelve. The story of *Translations* revolves around a hedge school in the town of Baile Beag and the way in which the actions of the British affect the way of life for the Irish-speaking inhabitants there. While the encroachment of British control seems simply organizational at first, it ultimately has profound effects on the lives and culture of that community by the end of the play.

The ramifications of the changes being imposed on the Irish by the British, as well as the nature of the relationships between the characters of the play as these changes occur, reveal a great deal about the realistic sociological forces at work throughout *Translations*. So much so, in fact, that it can be argued that a number of key concepts from each of the three main theoretical perspectives of sociology can be used effectively to analyze the events of the play. By looking at *Translations* through the conceptual lenses of functionalism, conflict theory, and interpretivism, it is believed that important insights into what is occurring throughout the play can be found, explored, and used to gain a greater understanding of the play as a whole.

2. A Functionalist Perspective on *Translations*

In functionalism, social institutions and practices can be seen to meet social survival needs (Feinberg & Soltis, 1998). As the needs of a society change, the social institutions and practices must adapt in order to survive. This functionalist concept of adaptation can be seen quite clearly in *Translations* through the views of Maire towards learning English. With the encroaching influence of the British in Ireland, Maire is the only student at the hedge school in Baile Beag that expresses a strong desire to adapt as quickly as possible to at least the language of the British when she says, "We should all be learning to speak English" (Friel, 1981, p. 24). She goes on to cite the view of an Irish politician who also advocates the need to adapt by saying, "He said the sooner we all learn to speak English the better" (Friel, 1981, p. 24). While Latin and Greek have been the foreign languages prioritized for study at the hedge school, Maire has made a more functionalist appeal to learn a language that she feels will be more immediately useful for life in Ireland under

British rule. This appeal shows, as Hawkins (2003) points out, that the “insidious” attempt of linguistic imperialism by the British also has the unintended consequence of providing a “tool by which the Irish may regain control of their experience” (p. 25).

The fact that the English language will undoubtedly play a major role in Irish life due to the approaching adoption of a British national school system conducted entirely in English exposes another important concept from functionalism, the role of social structures within society. DeMarrais and LeCompte address this point as they state, “Individuals accept their roles within the social structure of society by participating in institutions” (1999, p. 5). As the British schools supplant the traditional Irish hedge schools to become the institutions of learning within Irish society, these institutions will leave lasting impressions on the people and culture. Furthermore, schools serve to foster social solidarity within a society (Feinberg & Soltis, 1998). Compulsory national schooling based on the British model and conducted in English will undeniably work to align the Irish more with the British, as not only will the Irish learn to speak the language valued by the controlling British, they will also learn to adopt the social norms they value.

Feinberg and Soltis (1998) also point out that, under the functionalist view, schools serve to differentiate roles within a society. The dramatic change in schooling in Ireland will force change in the manner that vocations are chosen, or in some cases, decided, for Irish schoolchildren as the move through the British educational system. It seems only logical to assume that children will not be as apt to follow in their parents’ line of work because they will no longer be around their parents on a daily basis for such a long portion of their formative years, as was commonplace with the more open system of the hedge school. There is clear evidence in *Translations* that the British value role differentiation as the characters aligned with the British each have a specific role to play as assets in the society. Looking at the Royal Engineers who are mapping out the area where the play takes place as part of an Ordnance Survey, both have quite clearly defined roles: Captain Lancey is a cartographer and Lieutenant Yolland is an orthographer. Owen, who has returned to Baile Beag while assisting the British, also has a saliently delineated role as translator for the Royal Engineers. Even the newly hired schoolmaster from Cork that will take over the national school in the area has the defined roles of future teacher and baconcurer. Although nothing is said in regards to teaching ability, the roles of this new teacher are clearly valued as the area’s Justice of the Peace states that “he will be a major asset to the community” according to Hugh’s report on hearing the news of the hiring (Friel, 1981, p. 85).

The importance of role differentiation exhibited in *Translations* also shows elements consistent with stage theory, the progression towards a more modernized society (Feinberg & Soltis, 1998). There is evidence throughout the play that already by 1833 the traditional

Irish way of children following in the vocations of their parents may be waning. Looking at Hugh and the disparate paths that his sons, Manus and Owen, have taken in their careers supports this claim. While the more Irish-minded Manus has become a rural hedge school teacher like his father, the more British-minded Owen has completely rejected this route and, instead, has presumably amassed wealth while working in Dublin.

While the changes enacted by the controlling British and their implications on Irish life can be seen as in step with a number of functionalist notions, the overall development of British social structure in Ireland probably most clearly represents the functionalist concept of assimilation. Although assimilation may be thought of as a minority group adopting the ways of a majority group, in *Translations* the minority British are able to propagate their way of life to the Irish because they have become the dominant group in Ireland. In fact, Feinberg and Soltis (1998) define assimilation along these lines: "It refers to the process whereby one group, usually a subordinate group, becomes indistinguishable from another group, usually a dominant one" (p. 25). The process of assimilation may be just beginning in Ireland at the time *Translations* is set, but it is unmistakably underway.

3. Conflict Theory in *Translations*

The endless struggle to maintain power and standing between groups in societies is a basic tenet of conflict theory and can be seen throughout *Translations* (Feinberg & Soltis, 1998). Social reproduction is one way that dominant groups maintain their control (Feinberg & Soltis, 1998). In *Translations* the British are trying to impose their brand of social reproduction on the Irish through the introduction of British-style compulsory schooling. This move is a clear representation of Hurn's (1993) point that the demands of dominant groups motivate changes in schooling within a society as the upcoming national schools in Ireland will undoubtedly initiate curriculum with positive views of the British, their culture, and their presence in Ireland, especially if textbooks from England are introduced.

The growing influence and authority of the British, as can be seen in the development of the new national schools, illustrates another important concept from conflict theory: hegemony. The fact that Maire and the Irish politician, Dan O'Connell, are both in favor of the Irish learning English as soon as possible is further evidence that the British have some level of hegemonic control in Ireland. As Irish politicians and ordinary citizens begin adopting the values of the dominant British, they are substantiating the legitimacy of British control by implicitly expressing the belief that British domination of Ireland is valid (Collins, 1992).

The support of British legitimacy and the willingness to learn English exhibited by Maire and Dan O'Connell also speaks to the concept of solidarity from conflict theory. The

feelings of alignment with the British demonstrated by some Irish shows that new norms, or “universal principles” as stated by Feinberg and Soltis (1998), that have been advanced by the British are beginning to be accepted by the Irish even though they may not truly benefit them. Collins (1992) points out that “an individual can dominate other people mainly by taking advantage of their feelings of solidarity” (p. 25). He goes further by stating that “the most successful exploiter is the one who makes others feel that he or she has their best interests at heart” (Collins, 1992, p. 26).

While the propagation of English in Ireland, especially by Irish politicians, may be seen as an example of Collins’ points, the renaming and mapping of Ireland by the British plainly is. Captain Lancey of the Royal Engineers displays how an exploiter can endear itself to the subordinate group during his explanation of why the Ordnance Survey is being done. Quoting from the charter for the survey he says, “Ireland is privileged. No such survey is being undertaken in England. So this survey cannot but be received as proof of the disposition of this government to advance the interests of Ireland” (Friel, 1981, p. 34). Lancey also makes a point to say that the new survey will lead to more equitable taxation, another idea that may garner Irish support even though it is most likely that the taxes will actually be used to further support the agenda of the dominant British in Ireland.

Instances of British domination throughout *Translations* also mesh well with key concepts of conflict theory. From the imposition of British-style national schooling to the renaming of places in English, British domination is incrementally permeating Irish life. The threat of force also shows how dominant the British have become at the end of the play when Captain Lancey lists the course of action to be taken if the Irish in Baile Beag do not provide information about the missing Lieutenant Yelland. Further evidence of the British domination can be seen in their use of coercion to acquire the help of key Irish such as translators like Owen. While the motivating factors behind Owen aligning himself with the British are not made apparent in the play, the large salary and increased status he received as a result undoubtedly played a part. As Collins (1992) states, “The powerful individual is one who goes with the grain of things, who acquires what power the social organization at that time has to offer” (p. 61).

By going along with the British, Owen was able to achieve some degree of power, although in order to sufficiently align himself with the British he did develop false consciousness, another important concept from conflict theory. Feinberg and Soltis (1998) define false consciousness as the articulation of views of the dominant group by a member of the subordinate group. Owen exhibits this false consciousness through his views on the renaming project for the Ordnance Survey. Throughout most of the play, Owen views the survey as simply “a catalogue of names” standardized in English to avoid confusion (Friel, 1981, p. 87). His conformance to the British views goes as far as to allow him to accept

the British calling him 'Rolland'. Owen begins to recognize the very falsity of his false consciousness, though, as he first rejects the name 'Rolland' and ultimately admits the error of his ways to his father by saying that the Ordnance Survey was "a mistake—my mistake—nothing to do with us" (Friel, 1981, p. 87). Perhaps even greater than the overt methods of control exerted by the British throughout the play, Friel adeptly uses false consciousness to demonstrate how, as Mays (2005) has stated, "the crucial ambivalences, the reversals, and the disruptions that make up the colonial dynamic...are, every bit as much as reason and order, loci of powerful historical forces" (p. 120).

4. Interpretivist Perspectives of *Translations*

Interpretivism aims at discovering the rational foundation behind behaviors through understanding the meanings those behaviors hold for individual members of a society. Therefore, it is particularly useful when examining the events surrounding the few characters in *Translations*. To the interpretivist, meaning is socially constructed because individuals within a specific context bring their own experiences to bear in their understanding of reality in any situation (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). This social construction of meaning can be seen in all of the characters throughout *Translations* but nowhere as much as in relation to their views on the changing of Irish place-names into English for the British Ordnance Survey, as this is interpreted in a variety of ways. Manus and Owen have very disparate views on the renaming efforts from the beginning. While Manus recognizes the survey as a military operation, Owen dismisses it as just a standardization of the names. Owen even maintains the same position when the British Lieutenant Yolland expresses unease at the renaming by saying, "It's an eviction of sorts" and later, "Something is being eroded" (Friel, 1981, p. 52, p. 53). However, both Yolland and Owen recognize the power created by the renaming process as Owen says, "We name a thing and—bang! It leaps into existence!" (Friel, 1981, p. 56). Owen sustains his view on the renaming until finally, at the end of the play, he recognizes the potential detrimental aspects of it by admitting to his father that his part in the survey was a mistake. By this point in the play, Hugh's views towards the renaming have changed dramatically as well, as he seems resigned to the encroaching reality that the Irish must learn the new place names, make them their own, and make them their new home.

The fact that both Owen and Hugh's views change throughout the course of the play is also evidence of the multiple roles they play, and how their intentions affect those roles. The conflicting roles held by Owen can be seen from his first appearance in *Translations*. His job as a go-between translator between the British military and the Irish of his hometown creates a tension within him, and the audience, throughout the play. As Baker (2000) points out, "It would have been easy for Friel to portray the soldiers as

unsympathetic invaders and the peasants as gullible victims, but Friel's vision is much more complex, forcing his audience to reevaluate his characters while continually reconsidering the language question" (p. 265). The characters themselves are also constantly reevaluating their own roles. At first, Owen's intentions clearly seem to be much more aligned with his role in assisting the British as he calls them his 'friends' when introducing them, works to soften their words during translation to Irish, and constantly voices his support for the renaming project. Eventually, however, he admits the negative aspects of the encroaching British control and, ultimately, adopts positions more consistent with his upbringing as an Irishman from Baile Beag, as he seems in some ways sympathetic to Doalty's call to fight the British at the end of the play, at which point he also lies to Captain Lancey about Manus. It seems that as the role to which Owen consciously subscribed began to change, so did his intentions and loyalties.

Hugh's roles also change due to developments throughout the play. His role as a respected hedge school teacher is firmly in place at the beginning of *Translations* as even though his students know that he is drunk, they still worry about appearing ready for class. Hugh's fulfillment of this traditional role in Irish society begins to change though, after he is offered the teaching job at the area's new national school and subsequently tends to outwardly portray a positive view of the British restructuring in Ireland, evidence that he has begun taking on new role as future employee of the British. However, after he loses this job and his role is reduced to soon to be unemployed former hedge school teacher, he expresses a clearly negative view of the British as invaders or occupiers calling them, "Visigoths! Huns! Vandals!" according to Bridget's report (Friel, 1981, p. 74).

Hugh's allusion to the attacks on Rome is also an example of how important the interpretivist concept of symbols is throughout the play. In *Translations*, symbols are expressed through words. The overarching renaming project of the British shows the power behind the symbolic choice of words as applying an English name to a place can be seen as ostensibly making it British. Symbols are also expressed through the words used by the various characters that come with multiple meanings attached. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the translating work done by Owen. As Owen translated for Captain Lancey at the beginning of the play, his selection of Irish words for the Captain painted a very rosy picture of what the British were attempting to do. This framing of reality through the symbols chosen changed dramatically by the end of the play, however, as Owen presented only the bare facts in his translation of Captain Lancey's threats in which he demanded information from the Irish about Lieutenant Yolland. As the contextual demands of the discourse between the British and the Irish in Baile Beag became more serious, the symbols chosen by Owen reflected that change. While understanding inferences in discourse is central to understanding social interactions for the interpretivist,

the complex interplay between that discourse and the symbols chosen to represent it creates an even more complicated tension between the countries, characters, and sociological phenomena involved throughout *Translations*.

5. Conclusion

Brian Friel's *Translations* is a play that works on a variety of levels to tell the story of the individual and cultural effects of increasing British control over Ireland in the early 19th century. The play not only relays an interesting fictional account of actual events, it does so palpably through the construction, maintenance, and progression of complicated social interactions between the various characters and groups. By examining the sociological forces behind the events of the play through applications of concepts from functionalism, conflict theory, and interpretivism, it can be argued that a fuller, more vivid understanding of the multifaceted intricacies of the story can be attained. Although these perspectives may offer different or even conflicting explanations of the events in the play, ultimately, it is believed that they can provide meaningful insight into the social behavior at the heart of *Translations*, as well as that of society eternal.

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