

AS/ Advanced English Literature

Unit 6

Broken Communication

The following sample answer has been written by a student. The comments in the body of the answer and the summative comment have been provided by the Chief Examiner.

Compare and contrast the ways in which the writers of your two texts have dramatically presented the links between language and power.

Brian Friel's play *Translations* and *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare are both plays which deal to a certain extent with the theme of colonisation, in which invading culture is encroaching upon and threatening to overpower a weaker civilisation. Communication between the invading and indigenous civilisations is almost invariably an obstacle to understanding and reconciliation. [**overview of ideas in play, with reference to contextual issues**] The theme of Brian Friel's play is very much concerned with political ideas, while in *The Tempest* Shakespeare's colonisation is on a magical island set apart from the initial political arena. [**setting linked to context, and developed by contrast.**] In both plays there is evidence of the acceptance of the new language of the invaders as the language of power, the way forward towards future progress. [**ideas developed through comparison.**]

In *Translations*, the master of the hedge school, Hugh, is derogatory at first of the English language. He considers it 'plebeian' and just suitable for purposes of commerce, but at the end of the play he realises that the new language and the new English place names are going to have to be accepted and made their own by the Irish people. Caliban similarly in *The Tempest* is disgruntled with Prospero and complains that he was taught Prospero's language but with little advantage to himself as it just taught him how to curse. [**specific textual reference, and comparison noted by 'similarly'.**] By the end of the play, however, after his experience with the worse influence of Stephano, Trinculo and wine, he realises that Prospero and his ways are the best future for him. [**whole play references, though stated rather than examined**].

Brian Friel shows the difficulty of communication between persons of different languages in the several conversations in the play between the British soldiers and the local community of Ballybeg. In all conversations understanding is almost impossible and Friel shows dramatically the power of the translator. [**defining terms of argument, reference to**

drama]. Owen, as translator between English and Irish, was able to translate in words of his own, in fact to mistranslate, [**argues**] in order to make Lancey's message to the locals more palatable. [**touching on contextual issues, but undeveloped.**] In contrast in *The Tempest* Shakespeare uses the combined power of words with the magical nature of the island to manipulate the characters in the island towards the fulfilment of his plan. [**Shakespeare's or Prospero's plan?**] Prospero's main tool in this design is the spirit Ariel, who is constantly sent on errands to work magical effects on the characters. Ferdinand, Stephano and Trinculo, and the courtly party of Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian and Antonio are all victims of this treatment, which consists of magically induced trances through the language of words in song and music. [**reference to dramatic devices, though conflating dramatist and character.**]

Prospero in *The Tempest*, usually so articulate in words, shows by his broken thoughts, in his narrative of his history to Miranda, how language can show the inner emotions under which he is suffering. This uncertainty in Prospero and his continuous need for assurance of Miranda's attention, is displayed in the broken manner of his discourse with her. In *Translations*, Jimmy, who is so fluent in Latin, Greek and Irish, is unable to understand what is being said when the question of English as the language of modern progress is being discussed. [**conflation of issues here – he is unable to understand English, not the problem, and is in any case, rather dislocated from the world around him. At this point, the candidate could usefully have developed and analysed this 'broken communication' linking it to earlier points.**]

Language in Brian Friel's play *Translations* is a central theme in the whole play, whereas in *The Tempest* it is used as a tool in the plot of the play. [**compares and contrasts whole play themes.**] In both plays it is apparent that language is powerful as a means of communication and this can be seen not only in the positive ways in which it is used but also the ways in which it betrays a weakness in the characters or their emotional state, when their power of language fails.

[The comments in the opening paragraph which address key contextual areas are not fully developed, and the answer begins to depend on a series of examples. Comparison and contrast is consistent, but not always used to explore or analyse methods and ideas. An argument is formed and substantiated, with some sense of dramatic methods, including the progression of ideas in the plays. Many relevant comments are made, though not always linked and developed.]