



Native speaking English teachers in Vietnam:

Teacher identity and discourses of colonialism

David Bright

School of Education

The University of Queensland

Email: d.bright@uq.edu.au



Aims

- Examine relations between Western native speaker English teachers and their students in Vietnam.
- Understand the discourses these teachers use to construct their identity as English speakers and English teachers.
- Suggest that pedagogical relations between Western native speaker English teachers and their students can be problematic.

Outline

- Context: Politicizing TESOL
- Theory: Identity and difference
- The study
 - Images of English
 - Images of Vietnamese
- Discussion: Difference in TESOL
- Implications: An ethical response

Context: Politics of TESOL

- Continuing significance of Western “native-speakers” in global TESOL.
- Prevailing discourse of English as natural, neutral and beneficial (Pennycook, 1995).
- Politicising English and TESOL.
- Implicating TESOL practitioners in the politics of English (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1995).



Theoretical Framework

- Identity as discursive practice.
- Self and Other: the significance of difference to identity.
- Discourses of Self and Other.
- TESOL and Discourses of Colonialism.



Theoretical Framework:

Identity

- Identity as an analytical lens (Gee, 2000).
- Identity *unfixed* – process, multiple, ongoing, contingent (Hall, 1996).
- Identity constituted through discourse – recognizable “ways of being” in the world (Gee, 2007).
- Identity as a struggle – inequitable access to discursive resources (Lin, 2008).



Theoretical Framework:

Difference

- Difference is crucial to meaning and identity (Hall, 1996).
- “it is only through the relation to *the other*, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed” (Hall, 1996, p.17).
- *The Self and Other.*



Theoretical Framework:

Postcolonial theory

- Orientalism – the relation between ‘West’ and ‘Rest’ (Said, 1978).
- Discursive construction of the ‘Rest’ by the ‘West’.
- Western superiority versus Oriental inferiority.
- Western *self* and Oriental *other*.



Theoretical Framework:

TESOL and Discourses of Colonialism

- Colonialism the history of English expansion (Pennycook, 1998, 2001).
- Colonialism the site of European knowledge and cultural production (Pennycook, 1998).
- Colonial ways of thinking adhere to English and TESOL (Pennycook 1998).



The Study

- Interviews with four Western teachers Hanoi, Vietnam.
 - What representations of difference do teachers employ in negotiating their identity?
 - Do these representations of difference subordinate *the other*?
- Analysis of positive self-presentations and negative other-presentations (van Dijk, 2006).



Positive Images of English

- *It's important for their future ...*
- *if they don't have English it cuts off opportunities for their future ...*
- *opportunities for education, opportunities for employment, success ...*
- *I recognize what the kids don't recognize ... is that the only way they are going to be successful, and by successful I don't mean making a lot of money necessarily ... I mean that ... if they need a job, they will have lots of options in the country, in a country like Vietnam, if they speak and write English effectively.*

Ambivalent Images of Vietnamese

- *In order to be marketable in Vietnam, which is growing in leaps and bounds ... um ... I become much more marketable ... if I'm able to ... converse ... somewhat ... conversationally in Vietnamese.*

Negative Images of Vietnamese

- *There's also, like, the amount of the words in the Vietnamese language are ... much, much, much, much, much, smaller than in English...*
- *Trying to get things translated into Vietnamese, like, for marketing and stuff at schools they're like, 'we just don't have any way to say that', 'it is impossible for us to say that because it doesn't exist'...*
- *I worked with, like ... 60 English teachers, Vietnamese English teachers, worked with at _____ School with great English, and they're like 'I can say it to you in English, but I can't ... there is no possible way for me to ... even convey this idea in Vietnamese' so ...*

Discussion: Difference in TESOL

- Potential for discourses of Self and Other to influence teacher identity:
 - English as developed, beneficial, necessary.
 - Vietnamese as underdeveloped, unnecessary.
- Assumptions about teaching and learning culture (Bright & Phan, 2011).
- Inequitable pedagogical relations in the TESOL classroom?

Implication: An Ethical Response to Difference

- Principles for ethical interaction between humans (Gee, 1993, p.292-293):
 - “That something would *harm* someone else ... is *always* a good reason *not* to do it”.
 - “One always has the ethical obligation to try to explicate any social practice that ... advantages oneself or one’s groups over other people or other groups”.
- Moral imperative to review practices?

Conclusion

- Relation between Western teachers and English learners.
- Influence of discourses of Self and Other.
- Ways of thinking about English in relation to Other languages.
- Ethical approach – Equitable relations.

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