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ราวเทพยดากับผีสาง : เรื่องความท้าทายในที่ทำงานในประเทศไทย ที่อาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษชาวต่างชาติประสบด้วยตนเอง
Like Gods and Ghosts: Foreign English teachers' Personal Accounts of Challenges in the Thai workplace

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ชาวต่างชาติที่ทำงานในต่างประเทศอาจต้องเผชิญกับความท้าทายหลายประการที่ก่อให้เกิดปัญหายากที่จะแก้ไข การศึกษาครั้งนี้มุ่งเน้นวิเคราะห์การรับรู้ของผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยในเรื่องได้รับการปฏิบัติต่อที่แตกต่างไปจากคนอื่นทั้งในเชิงบวกและเชิงลบในขณะที่ทำงานในประเทศไทย กับเพื่อนร่วมงานและนักเรียนนักศึกษาชาวไทย งานวิจัยเชิงวาทกรรมวิเคราะห์นี้เป็นการศึกษาเรื่องราวส่วนบุคคลที่ได้จากการสัมภาษณ์ครูสอนภาษาอังกฤษชาวต่างชาติในโรงเรียนและมหาวิทยาลัยในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทย ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยทุกคนคิดว่าพวกเขาได้รับการปฏิบัติต่อที่แตกต่างไปจากเพื่อนร่วมงานและนักเรียนนักศึกษาชาวไทย ผู้เข้าร่วมงานวิจัยทุกคนทั้งที่เป็นเจ้าของภาษาคือพูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่และคนที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่สองหรือภาษาต่างประเทศสามารถระลึกได้ถึงประสบการณ์ที่บ่งชี้ได้เป็นนัยและประสบการณ์ที่เป็นที่ชัดเจนจงใจ อันแสดงถึงความเป็นอื่นของตนเองในสังคมไทย อย่างไรก็ตามครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษชาวผิวขาวมีประสบการณ์การถูกปฏิบัติต่อในเชิงบวกมากกว่าครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษคนเอเชียที่ไม่ได้เป็นเจ้าของภาษา ผลการวิจัยนี้อาจเป็นประโยชน์สำหรับโรงเรียนและมหาวิทยาลัยที่ต้องการปรับปรุงกระบวนการคัดเลือกครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษและการฝึกอบรมครู รวมทั้งอาจเป็นจุดเริ่มต้นให้มีการศึกษาวิจัยในด้านนี้มากขึ้นต่อไป

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Abstract

Foreigners working abroad may regularly face a number of challenges that they may struggle to cope with. This study focuses on participants' perceptions of the positive and negative differential treatment they receive while living and working in Thailand with Thai colleagues and students. This discursive study explores personal accounts derived from interviews with foreign English teachers at schools and universities in the Northeast of Thailand. All the participants considered that they received different treatment from their Thai colleagues and students. While all the participants recalled both

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implicit and explicit experiences of otherness in Thai society—regardless of their native or non-native English speaker profiles—white native English speaking teachers were more likely to report extraordinarily positive treatment compared to Asian non-native English speaking teachers of English. These findings may be useful for schools and universities seeking to improve their recruitment processes, working atmosphere, and teacher training, while it should also prompt larger scale research in this area.

Keywords: Foreign teachers, English teachers, Challenges

Introduction

The ever-increasing global demand for English teachers and specialists has been coupled with the spread of the discourse of language commodification, with English having been given the highest economic and social value in the world's job markets. The economic power of the Anglophone countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Australia has made English one of the most sought-after forms of "linguistic capital" (Bourdieu, 1977; Grin, 2001; Park, 2011; Park & Wee, 2014). The desire to accumulate this linguistic capital has resulted in countries investing in English teaching, including by employing a large number of foreign English teachers for all levels of education.

These foreign English teachers include short-term and long-term migrant employees, with work contracts ranging from a few months to a number of years. In Western countries, many migrant workers are required to work in uncomfortable situations, with locals sometimes disliking them for the perception that they have taken local jobs. Unlike migrants in Western countries, the global mobility of foreign English teachers typically does not result in challenges of the same magnitude. Nevertheless, it is not possible to claim that foreign English teachers live and work in challenge-free situations in their host country. In fact, because the work and life circumstances of foreign English teachers is not a traditional focus of research in field of English Language Teaching (ELT), the challenges such foreign teachers face are largely unexplored, including in terms of their daily encounters with Thai neighbours, colleagues, and students.

Foreign English teachers can be found in all types of school contexts in Thailand, from small village schools to large urban schools and universities. A number of studies have been conducted with foreign teachers on a variety of subjects (for example, see Bishop, Chandang & Sumettikoon, 2017; Gleeson, 2012; Bishop, Phusion & Malasri, 2016). Some studies involving foreign English teachers indirectly reflect the challenges they face (Hoy, 2009), while others provide a glimpse into the challenges (Ketkaew, 2011) and some focus on specific types of challenges (Sipe, 2011). Accordingly, the full extent of the challenges that these foreign "English people" (Evans, 1993) have at work and in daily life is largely unexplored. Since the number of foreign teachers is increasing in Thai schools and universities, it is imperative that this area of ELT is opened up and researched to ensure that the complexity of the challenges can be discerned to develop better policies and practices and support foreign English teachers.

Literature review

To highlight the challenges experienced by foreign English teachers in Thailand, the scope of the present study was narrowed and is expressed in the following research question: *In what ways are foreign English teachers in the Northeast of Thailand treated by Thais?* Using this question, the study's theoretical framework was developed around several concepts, including the concept of discrimination in general as well as the concepts of linguistic imperialism and native-speakerism in ELT.

There are a range of understandings of discrimination as a social concept, but as Vandenhole (2005, p. 34) asserts, there is now a widely agreed set of criteria for discrimination. The first criterion on the list defines discrimination as "differential treatments", while subsequent criteria include ensuring whether any differential treatment is justifiable. The verification process of discrimination experiences—as required by legal proceedings—is not relevant for the purpose of this study, since it focuses only on foreign teachers' own perceptions of being treated differently. Subsequently, the first criterion of discrimination is useful and sufficient for the study. Using this definition of discrimination, the study examines the foreign teachers' recollections of events in which they believed they were treated differently by Thais.

Differential treatment can occur in a variety of forms. Studies on workplace discriminatory practices which have a focus that is close to the purpose of the present study have found general categories of explicit and implicit discrimination, as well as more specific discrimination types that are related to biased profiling and unfair organisational processes. The explicit type of differential treatment is characterised by being overt and intentional (Gutek, Cohen, & Tsui, 1996). Examples of explicit differential treatment include verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attacks, and extermination (Allport, 1954). In contrast, subtle forms of differential treatment are more ambiguous and unconscious (see Cortina, 2008; Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief, & Brabdley, 2003; Dipboye & Halverson, 2004; Dovidio & Hebl, 2005; Fiske 1998, Rowe, 1990). Subtle discrimination practices are typically not clearly seen as discriminatory practices, but they constitute actionable mistreatment since they underline discriminatory beliefs and attitudes towards particular individuals or outgroup members (Crocker, Major, & Steel, 1998). Some researchers refer to this type of differential treatment as everyday discrimination (Essed, 1991), which is a pervasive phenomenon in the workplace since it frequently recurs. Since it is often ambiguous and unconscious, everyday discrimination can be disguised in many ways, such as segregation in welfare provisions for different people despite belonging to the same organisation. People who conduct subtle differential treatment with others will not even consider such actions to be discrimination due to habitual practices.

Other more specifically career-related differential practices include biased profiling and unfair institutional processes. Profiling discrimination refers to beliefs about an individual based on their prior profile, which may include the individual's racial stereotypical qualifications or given habitual orientations. According to Gutek, Cohen, and Tsui (1996), such a belief is related to characteristics of social groups that are perceived to be 'other' or an outgroup, including their ethnic, gender, cultural, geographical, and economic background. Predetermined profiling of individuals may result in them either facing real difficulties or experiencing privileges without fair consideration of their true capacities. For instance, white people might be generally considered to be better speakers of English, subsequently resulting in them being offered better employment opportunities as English teachers. Another career-related differential practice is related to institutional processes or the influence of existing networks within the organisation on organisational practice and decision making, especially in relation to hiring and promotion (Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). For instance, an individual might be hired on the basis of a recommendation from someone within the organisation. It is difficult to investigate this type of differential practice since the recruitment process is usually confidential.

Several concepts in ELT can be used to further explain these types of differential treatment, including recent interest in the concepts of linguistic imperialism and native-speakerism. For focus within the present study, it is argued that national ideology must be considered. Linguistic imperialism and native-speakerism are related to the expansion of English to different parts of the world and the

subsequent development of linguistic inequality. Phillipson (1992) argued that the global influence of English is a form of imperialism. The impact of linguistic imperialism is similar to that of colonialism, in that the power of English and the cultures associated with it have come to dominate and threaten local languages and cultures (see Crystal, 1997; Blommaert, 2010). Nonetheless, the power of English can manifest differently for "English people" (Evans, 1993), that is, between native and non-native English speakers. In ELT, this gave rise to Holliday's (2005) concept of native-speakerism, in which native speakers are ideal English teachers. Native-speakerism creates an asymmetric power relation among native and non-native English speakers sharing the same profession.

Moreover, in different contexts, ELT is governed by the cultural and ideological framework of that specific country or school where the English teacher is working. The manifestation of native-speakerism must be contextualised within this local context in order to identify the various extents of its influence and reactions (see also Canagarajah, 1999). In Thailand, language ideology is reflected in Smalley's (1994) social hierarchy of languages Thailand which still holds true today. In Thailand, English is still a foreign language, despite the power of the language having increasingly permeated in different domains of language use in the country. The foreign language status of English in Thailand limits it to a language of international communication and of specific groups, such as students at international schools. Additionally, this status of English has constrained the influence of native-speakerism in ELT in Thailand, while it also has implications for Thai English teachers and other non-native and native-English counterparts. ELT is an area of contested power relations within the Thai linguistic ideological framework, and it is difficult to understand how differential practices can manifest without first examining the personal experiences of foreign English teachers.

Methodology

This research is a qualitative study which includes an analysis of oral discourse data about differential treatment of foreign English teachers in Thailand. In language-related research, qualitative methods such as interviews helps acquire deeper personal information, since it allows participants to freely recount their opinions and experiences (Mackey and Gass, 2005). Studies which explore native-speakerism are often criticised for their reliance on the researcher's self-reflections and fragments of personal experience (Holliday, 2005). Accordingly, the present study conducted interviews with nine foreign English teachers of different nationalities, gender, and work contexts in Northeast Thailand in order to acquire a rich source of discourse data.

The participants were labelled K1 to K9 to protect their identities. K1, K2, K3, K4, and K5 are all from the United States of America. K1, K2, and K3 are male and have experience teaching at schools and universities in Northeast Thailand. K4 is male and K5 is female and they both only had experience of teaching at universities. K6 is also a university lecturer and from the United Kingdom. The three other teachers were from Asian countries, with K7 and K8 both female from the Philippines, while K9 is male from Indonesia. K7 and K9 are university lecturers while K8 was a schoolteacher.

All the participants were asked whether they felt they were treated differently by Thais colleagues, students, or the general public. They were then asked to recount specific events. These personal recounts in English were then transcribed and analysed. The analysis relied on the concepts of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995). The language used in the recounts were considered in terms of their association with differential treatment according to the study's theoretical framework. The recounted events were then categorised by different kinds of differential treatments, as follows.

Result

The foreign English teachers' recounts reveal three groups of differential treatment that the teachers experienced, including explicit, implicit, and profiling-related differential treatment. Different treatment related to the organisation's processes were not found in the present study. In this section, the categories within the three main groups of differential treatment are presented and discussed with example instances from the data.

1. Explicit differential treatment Two categories of explicit differential treatment were found, namely avoidance and exclusion.

1.1 Avoidance

The participants recalled incidents in which they were intentionally avoided by people. For example, K2 described an experience of Thai children who laughed at him, and they then ran away once he greeted them:

"I don't know. It seems like they're shy and I say 'hello'. And they're like 'hee kiki'. Hahaha. It's just a laugh like they're shy. I just like say, 'hello, hi' and they run away. A lot of people don't talk to me very much. Lol" (K2).

This event happened while K2 was working as an English teacher at an elementary school in Yasothon province. While working there, he felt many that students avoided talking to him. When he greeted them, they often simply laughed and ran away. From the above excerpt, K2 interpreted that it could be because the kids were too shy to talk to him. However, their reactions in the form of laughter and running away are acts of avoidance. The fact that K2 commented that "*A lot of people don't talk to me very much"* shows that he often experienced this differential treatment. Despite his laughter at the end of the excerpt, having the students avoid him was not a good experience for him.

Shyness is one thing, but when people regularly avoid foreign English teachers it can cause negative emotional impacts on the teacher. K2 revealed that he actually felt that the students were scared of him, as he continued *"Ahhh... made me feel like I am scary. Like I don't see I am friendly enough".*

The Thai students and staff also appeared to avoid the foreign English teachers due to their inability to talk to them in English. K5 explained that *"So sometimes I feel like people were nervous to speak English with me so they avoided talking to me".* K2 recounted an incident when he was in the office with three Thai colleagues who he had never spoken to, despite sharing an office for three months. K2 considered that the linguistic differences caused his colleagues to avoid him, but felt uncomfortable when they met.

All the foreign English teachers experienced avoidance and attempted to account for it as a consequence of shyness, fear, or the language barrier. This is beyond the scope of the present study, but would be a suitable subject for further study. Nonetheless, teachers who regularly experience avoidance can be detrimental for them as it is easy for them imagine that this is the result of a fundamental difference.

1.2 Exclusion

The data shows that exclusion occurred in response to a social group's explicit act of excluding the foreign English teachers from joining activities. Many participants felt that they were explicitly not included in activities in the workplace. K2 said that "*It is about the exclusion so I felt left out of activity".*

According to K2, exclusion occurred regularly and became a normal practice that he simply had to accept. K2 continued to explain that there were too many incidents for him to give specific details. Other participants echoed this perception and described having been excluded from activities so often that they did not know what was happening in the organisation. At times, they felt as if they were invisible like ghosts. Moreover, this exclusion often meant that they were either not informed about events, or they were the last person to be told. K4 described his story of exclusion as follows:

"They had a trip to Cambodia to [a university] and I didn't go. It wasn't mentioned to me" (K4).

The trip was planned by people in his workplace, and while many people went, he was not informed of it. Since the workplace was small, K4 felt that he was explicitly excluded. The participant felt frustrated when he was made aware of what was going on. It did not matter whether he could go with them, but he felt that he should have known what was happening as a member of a small organisation.

Indeed, not being informed was an important challenge for all the participants. At times they were informed, but typically much later than their Thai colleagues (K8). Being informed about things too late often caused issues because they were unsure what their Thai colleagues had done or expected from them. In particular, K3 described feelings of having been left out:

"I would give it in terms of information about what is happening. I definitely feel I'm behind native colleagues. I don't know what is happening" (K3).

The other foreign teachers had similar experiences of being intentionally left out and left knowing nothing about what was happened, with K3 explaining that he felt like he was "*behind native colleagues",* indicating that information was shared with Thai colleagues before himself. These examples highlight how the foreign English teachers were not treated in the same way as their native colleagues.

Occasionally information was transmitted to Thais in front of them, but they were left practically excluded and unaware because it was all explained in Thai. In this way, the Thai language was a tool to exclude the foreigners in the workplace, despite being members of the same English department and their Thai colleagues did not have difficulties communicating in English. This was shown in K1's account:

"Well, they knew that I didn't speak Thai very well so they wanted to make sure that I don't understand something. So they speak Thai only because they knew my Thai was bad so they wanted to keep some information away from me. Keep a secret, plan to go somewhere and not include me" (K1).

K1 was confident that his colleagues were hiding things from him by speaking in Thai and that their deliberate action was to "not include" him. Participants K6, K7, and K8 all recalled being in a meeting room with colleagues speaking in Thai for most of the time, despite knowing they were there and did not understand what was being said. Aware that all their colleagues spoke good English, the participants felt they were intentionally excluded from the discussion.

2. Implicit differential treatment

One subtle type of differential treatment found in the study was varying implicit special treatment directed towards white and Asian colleagues.

At times, the white native English speaking participants were implicitly granted special positive status from Thai colleagues at their workplace. For example, instead of letting their white colleagues to do things they were supposed to do or could do, Thai colleagues would assign other Thai colleagues

to do it for them. This resulted in the white colleagues feeling as if they had been given a privileged status like, as in the excerpt below:

"Sometimes I feel like people treat me like God. Like, hmm, they will expect someone like (name of a Thai person) to be helping everything, but they don't expect me to do anything. It makes me feel like I have some kind of status." (K5).

In excerpt above, K5 compared her situation to a Thai colleague with the same job. The Thai colleague was assigned many tasks but K5 explained that she was not asked to do anything. In her words, K5 felt that Thais treated her like "God". They knew that she could do what the Thai person was asked to do. K5 worked at a university, but all the white schoolteachers also reported similar experiences and that they did not enjoy being pampered. They instead wished that they had been more involved and part of the group. K5 felt that the positive differential treatment actually *"makes me feel like I'm not included".*

Meanwhile, things were very different for Asian English teachers as they were not bestowed the 'God-like' status like as the white native English teachers. Accounts from Asian colleagues show that they were asked to do a number of things by Thai colleagues, while their white native English teacher colleagues were given freedom to choose what to do.

"When there are activities, when they tell the Filipinos 'Oh you should come to join the meeting... to join the camp...to join the workshop'. But the farangs said 'Oh I'm not free', 'Oh we are going somewhere'" (K8).

All the non-Thai Asian teachers echoed what K8 said to different extents. Thai colleagues expected all of them to join and organise activities. In one instance, K6 was requested to join a weekend activity while the white native English teacher colleague was not asked to. To the Asian teachers, it appeared that they were at their Thai colleagues' disposal and they could clearly see how their Thai colleagues treated them differently compared to their white colleagues.

3 Profiling-related differential treatment

The foreign teachers' personal accounts of differential treatment show that being a native English speaker gave them an automatic qualification to work as English teachers. The data suggests that "nativeness" was more important than actual academic qualifications. This prejudice was revealed in the account given by K2:

"It was interesting like when I first came here. My first job I thought I'd have an interview like jobs in America. But when I showed up, they saw me and they said, 'When can you start working?'. Didn't ask me any questions. They just saw me and they're like 'Good!'. So that's the positive discrimination. They don't care about my experiences, my skills, my abilities, can I teach? They just like, 'When can you start?' just by looking at me. Lol. It was crazy. I was so shocked" (K2).

Due to the great demand for native speakers of English, many educational institutions did not ask for the teachers' qualifications. As K2 experienced, "*They just saw me and they're like "Good!"*, implying that their appearance as a white person was sufficient for them to get the job. According to the participants, looking white is equated with being a native English speaker, regardless of where they are from. Unfortunately, none of the research participants were African American, so their experiences within the Thai education system are unknown. However, from the data it is clear that biased profiling has a role in the recruitment process in some school contexts, which subsequently has unfortunate consequences for non-Thai Asian English teachers.

The preference for white teachers negatively affects job seekers from countries where English is used as either a second language or a foreign language.

"Even I already put it in my CV and in my cover letter that I'm Filipino, but they asked me again, 'What is your nationality?' and I replied, 'I'm Filipino'. And they replied to me like 'Oh! Sorry but we do not accept other nationalities apart from the US, UK, New Zealand, Australia'. So you know, I failed and I feel bad" (K7).

K7's account shows that nationality or nativeness was used as the primary criterion for recruitment. Being Asian can mean it is not possible to get a job in some school contexts. The experience of being rejected based on her nationality and informed that only people from Anglophone countries would be hired was a nightmare for K7. Other Asian teachers did not have direct experiences of differential treatment like K7, but they recalled difficulty in finding a job. Meanwhile, such difficulties were not reportedly faced by any of the participants from preferred Anglophone countries.

Discussion

This study focuses on foreign English teachers' first-hand experiences of the differential treatment they received from Thai colleagues and students. Their recounts of specific events in which they perceived themselves to be treated differently indicate that they all experienced implicit and explicit differential treatment, while some teachers recalled profiling-related differential treatment. None of the reported differential treatment found in the research were related to organisational processes, which can be difficult to investigate due to the secrecy of hiring and promotion processes. Two important points will be discussed from the findings.

First, there is an ingroup-outgroup relationship between the foreign English teachers and their Thai colleagues and Thais in general. This relationship meant that the foreign English teachers experienced implicit and explicit differential treatment in non-ELT contexts (see Allport, 1954; Cortina, 2008; Deitch, et al., 2003; Dipboye & Halverson, 2004; Dovidio & Hebl, 2005; Fiske, 1998; Gutek, Cohen, & Tsui, 1996; Rowe, 1990). This appears obvious due to the different nationalities of the Thai and non-Thai staff, regardless of whether they appear white or Asian. This relationship may account for the different treatment that the foreign English teachers received from Thais and non-English teaching colleagues. Yet when considering ELT as a profession, English teachers all in theory belong to the same social group of "English people" (Evan, 1993) and should therefore be treated similarly, for instance by inviting foreign teachers to meetings conducted in English to ensure that everyone can understand. The fact that the foreign English teachers in the present study received different treatment indicates that the profession might have less influence on the formation of an in-group and outgroup relationship than nationality. This is undoubtedly a consequence of foreign teachers being considered as 'others' in the profession in terms of daily work and life, which therefore requires being addressed to improve the ELT profession in Thailand. Nevertheless, other explanations may account for the foreign teachers' perceived different treatment, for instance they may be excluded from meetings on curriculum-related matters due to their unrelated qualifications since it is generally known that most of foreign teachers in Thailand do not have an ELT-related degree. This may be a type of resistance to linguistic imperialism (Canagarajah, 1999), in which Thai teachers sought to take absolute control of ELT matters in Thai institutions by limiting the influence of the native English speakers. There is still much to explore about what helps maintain the in-group and outgroup relationship, as well as how diverse foreign English teachers identify themselves, especially how they understand themselves in the ELT profession in Thailand and how they are perceived by Thais.

Second, native-speakerism influences some aspects of ELT, with relative favouritism towards white English teachers. This is clearly the result of biased profiling (Gutek, Cohen, & Tsui, 1996). Indeed, being considered to be a white native English speakers may make it easier to find employment (Waldinger & Lichter, 2003) and offer more freedom at work. Meanwhile, having a "white" appearance has become an indicator for being qualified as an English teacher. Moreover, American, British, and Australian nationalities help to create a desirable profile for job candidates, with those coming from Anglophone countries deemed to be competent teachers even before starting their job.

Due to the small size of the present study the results cannot be generalised, but the findings raise questions about the pervasiveness of this belief about native English speakers in Thai schools, universities, and Thai society in general. Another finding is that while the white teachers received relatively more freedom and special status at work, the Asian foreign teachers lacked such privileges. Whether this suggests a hierarchy of different English speaking people in ELT in Thailand is a moot question, and it is certainly an important question to improve the ELT profession in Thailand.

Suggestion

The data collection methodology utilised is the main limitation of this study. Although the interviews were expected to reveal detailed stories, the nature of the stories in which the participants were treated differently from Thais is a sensitive topic. This meant that the data largely consisted of short recollections of separate events and at times involved the foreign teachers' own justifications for their different treatment. The lack of specific detail in the stories limited the description thickness, which is preferred for this type of study. Future research may consider using a more diverse data collection methodology to acquire more detailed accounts. Future studies are also recommended to examine Thai teachers' perspectives and include foreign teachers from different countries.

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