



The Reconceptualization of Learning English between Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers through the Lenses of Post-Colonialism for EMI Policy in Thailand

Received: 5 May 2020

Revised: 14 August 2020

Accepted: 20 May 2021

Chatuporn Insuwan*

This paper aims to shed light on the impact of post-colonialism on English language learning and misconceptions about non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), as well as to suggest all stakeholders, particularly the policymakers who determine English language learning policies in Thailand, in order to increase awareness among stakeholders who are compatible with English Medium Instruction (EMI) policy and bilingual curriculums in Thailand. This paper employs the binary terms of native English-speaking teacher (NEST) and non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) to reinterpret misunderstanding regarding Thailand's bilingual education policy, which leads to discrimination against English language learners and limited access to English language learning. Finally, Gramsci's decolonization is proposed as solution for all stakeholders, especially those who are involved in Thai education, in order to re-examine the English language teaching policy, decrease social inequality, and to increase Thai people's understanding toward English language teaching and learning. The solutions are the reconceptualization of non-native English-speaking teachers, the understanding and acceptance of the nature of second language users, and the development of the content based on the local context.

Academic Article

Abstract

Keywords

post-colonialism;
hybridity; EMI;
NEST; NNEST;
bilingual education

* Lecturer, Business English Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, e-mail: chatuporn.i@pnru.ac.th



การตีความใหม่เกี่ยวกับการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ ระหว่างครูเจ้าของภาษากับครูที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษา ผ่านมุมมองหลังอาณานิคม เพื่อกำหนดนโยบายการใช้ ภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อเป็นสื่อกลางในการสอนในประเทศไทย

จตุพร อินทร์สุวรรณ*

Received: 5 May 2020

Revised: 14 August 2020

Accepted: 20 May 2021

บทความวิชาการ

บทคัดย่อ

คำสำคัญ

สภาวะหลังอาณานิคม;
การผสมผสาน;
การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ
เพื่อเป็นสื่อกลาง
ในการสอน;
ครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษ
เจ้าของภาษา;
ครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษ
ที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษา;
การเรียนการสอน
แบบสองภาษา

บทความนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อให้ความกระจ่างเกี่ยวกับผลกระทบของสภาวะหลังอาณานิคมต่อการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษและความเข้าใจผิดเกี่ยวกับครูที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษา ตลอดจนให้คำแนะนำแก่ผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียทั้งหมดโดยเฉพาะผู้กำหนดนโยบายการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทยเพื่อสร้างความตระหนักแก่ผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียทั้งหมดที่มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องกันโยบายการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อเป็นสื่อกลางในการสอนและระบบการเรียนการสอนแบบสองภาษาในประเทศไทย บทความนี้ใช้คำศัพท์แบบคู่ตรงข้ามของครูที่เป็นเจ้าของภาษาและครูที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษาเพื่อตีความใหม่เกี่ยวกับความเข้าใจผิดเรื่องระบบการเรียนการสอนแบบสองภาษาในประเทศไทย ซึ่งนำไปสู่การแบ่งแยกผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษและการเข้าถึงการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษที่จำกัด ท้ายที่สุด ทางเลือกในการถอดรื้อสภาวะหลังอาณานิคมของกรั่มที่ถูกเสนอเพื่อเป็นวิธีแก้ปัญหาสำหรับผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียทั้งหมดโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งผู้ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการศึกษาไทยเพื่อตรวจสอบนโยบายการสอนภาษาอังกฤษอีกครั้ง เพื่อลดความเหลื่อมล้ำและทำให้คนไทยมีความเข้าใจเรื่องการสอนและการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษเพิ่มมากขึ้น การแก้ปัญหาประกอบไปด้วยการปรับความคิดใหม่ของครูที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษา ความเข้าใจและการยอมรับธรรมชาติของผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่สอง และการพัฒนาเนื้อหาตามบริบทท้องถิ่น

* อาจารย์ประจำสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏพระนคร ติดต่อได้ที่: chatuporn.i@pnru.ac.th

1. Introduction

A scene from a social studies lesson at a bilingual school in Thailand taught by a native English-speaking teacher has remained with me to this day. As a teaching assistant primarily responsible for assisting Thai students while learning in bilingual classrooms, I frequently saw a picture of a native English-speaking teacher reclining in a soft leather armchair in a relaxed position, holding an expensive imported commercial textbook in his hands, reading passages from the book while the Thai students repeated his reading. Sometimes, questions regarding the learning topic were posed, and the Thai students were willing to provide answers in exchange for rewards and compliments.

The depicted classroom situation reflects the state of native speakerism in Thai education, despite the fact that many other factors, such as teachers' qualifications and teacher training and development, should be more concerned. Without a doubt, Thailand, like many other countries, has been challenged by globalization, which places a great deal of pressure on the country to seek its place in a world that is becoming increasingly constrained by advanced technologies. As a result, the English language has been regarded as the primary tool for the country's survival in the new world, prompting the National Education Act of 1999, which aims to improve Thai people's English language proficiency and communicative ability. Furthermore, in preparation for joining the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) in 2005, the Ministry of Education authorized the establishment of bilingual education, both in public and private schools (Phongploenpis, 2016).

Following the implementation of bilingual education, many stakeholders have expressed concerns and disagreements about the value of the payment for the bilingual program, the quality of native and non-native teachers, and the opportunities for students in the English program and those in the regular program to study in universities. Few people, however, discuss issues such as English language learning accessibility and equity, the disappearance and ignorance of local languages, and the colonial power's influence on Thai education policy.

Inadvertently or otherwise, the majority of Thai people, particularly those in the middle class, are attempting to achieve the norms and values of Western culture and language

by paying a substantial amount of money to support their children to take admission in an English program. In order to provide the Thai people with a broader perspective and a better understanding of English language teaching, this critique aims to provide an overview and shed light on the impact of post-coloniality on English language learning, as well as misconceptions about non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) and recommendations for all stakeholders, particularly the policymakers in the field of English language learning in Thailand.

2. Impacts of Post-Coloniality on English Language Teaching and Learning

Post-colonialism, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000), refers to the impact of colonization on cultures and communities. Other post-colonial words such as transculturalization, which refers to the state in which subordinated groups adopt material and civilization determined by the dominant culture, are influenced by post-colonialism. One of the primary objectives of post-coloniality in terms of language is to promote English as a native language. According to Migge and Léglise (2007), colonizers' ideology is embedded through the educational system and language practice. In this respect, colonizers place their own language in a high position associated with the concepts of nation, culture, and power, while the indigenous language is considered as the language of the inferior, the powerless, and uncultured. As a result of the colonial language's imposition, the indigenous language becomes extinct, in contrast to the colonizers' language, which is more encouraged.

The imposition of colonial culture, language, and ideology has resulted in the emergence of a new post-colonial notion of 'hybridity,' which explains the impact of post-coloniality on post-colonial subjects living in mixed-culture spaces. The term 'hybridity,' according to Bhabha (1994), demonstrates areas where cultures converge in a third space. It is the space of cultural difference where culture cannot be fixed or understood as a whole; rather, it can be translated and read anew. In other words, it is an intermediate space where the subjects feel exiled despite living in their home countries. Many people encounter issues in self-identification and presenting their new identities as merging cultures have been changed and re-invented. As a result, people in the hybrid zone feel isolated and unable to identify their genuine selves.

It is argued that hybridity is a tool of colonial hegemony since it concerns the establishment of a new cultural form of people living in the third space of mixed and transcultural culture. It is stated that cultural hybridity evolves into a method of empowering colonial rule, with hybridity promotion and support based on the benefits of the dominant, producing a new privileged class and linguistic disparity. In the hybrid zone, the English-speaking new privileged or new elites are considered as superior to monolingual users, according to Kubota (2016). As a result, the major point to debate is whether all language users can equally overcome the linguistic barrier to dwell in the privileged hybrid zone. While subjects in hybridity relish their privilege as a result of the dominant power's linguistic practice, many monolingual people are marginalized as a result of the dominant power of linguistic practice, resulting in identity loss and a struggle to re-invent identity in the hybrid zone.

Impacted by transcultural flow in a globalized world where people's identities are hybrid and fluid, the Thai people are experiencing an identity crisis in locating themselves in the hybrid culture. Dwelling in the third space, where people in the hybrid zone feel exiled and unable to identify their true sense of self, Thais, particularly the middle class, who live in cities with diverse cultures under the dominance and influence of Western culture, are struggling and desperate to create new identities in order to feel secure. For example, according to Persaud (2014), who examined Thailand's preoccupation with European civilization, it is claimed that modernity is arguably defined by civilization and stereotyped by Westernization. Therefore, craving for Western civilization, the Thai middle-class struggle to escape the notion of rural backwardness and blackness. The struggle for social acceptance is evident in the large variety of skin whitening creams and cosmetics available in marketplaces, which reflect their desire to be white and the subjugation of top European colonialism.

Embracing Western civilization and development is not the only method to claim for social acceptance, the English language also has long been associated with modernity, civilization, and access to a broad variety of opportunities. Consequently, a huge number of bilingual schools arose, and English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has been promoted in Thailand for decades, leading to the formation of a new privileged class of people. However, before discussing EMI policy in Thailand, it is necessary to first consider EMI in ASEAN countries.

3. EMI in ASEAN

English has been the lingua franca since the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 with its purpose of fostering economic, social, and cultural cooperation among member countries. Additionally, until the signing of the ASEAN charter in 2009, the use of English was sanctioned because English is clearly stated in Article 34 as ASEAN's working language; nevertheless, education policy and regional languages are disregarded (Kirkpatrick, 2019). The author has expressed concern regarding English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in the ASEAN countries divided into countries in the Outer and Expanding Circle utilizing Kachru's Three Circle Model of English Language. The Outer Circle countries are those that used to be British colonies, such as Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, while countries in the Expanding Circle are those who speak English as a foreign language.

Among those countries in the Outer and Expanding Circle, Singapore appears to have the most privilege because of its bilingual policy, which mandates that all people learn English as well as their mother tongue language. Despite the three mother tongue languages of Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil, English appears to be the primary mother tongue language of Singaporeans, while Tamil, Malay, and a Chinese dialect are declining. English is also taught as a first foreign language in the Expanding Circle. For example, Vietnam has advocated multilingual education, and ninety percent of Vietnamese children now learn English, despite the government's concurrent promotion of indigenous languages. Unlike Vietnam, the Indonesian government has not promoted English as a compulsory part of the primary curriculum because of international standard school policy attempting to encourage children and the younger generation to speak the local language. Unlike Indonesia, Thailand's education policy mandates that English be taught as the first foreign language in schools, whereas a number of indigenous languages are not adequately promoted and threatened with extinction.

In summary, the use of English as a medium of instruction varies by country, depending on education policies, cultural backgrounds, and colonial history. Therefore, instead of resisting the colonial power on education, it would be far more valuable to investigate the national education policy on EMI and bilingual education in the country under the dominant power of colonialism.

4. EMI and Bilingual Education in Thailand

According to Huebner (2019), as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), where a free market, free flow of goods, capital, and skilled labor are promoted among member countries, Thailand is facing a new threat because its employment is being challenged by a large number of skilled labors from nearby countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, whose English proficiency is perceived to be higher than that of Thai people. As a result of the new threat, English language teaching and learning are rapidly promoted, and the Thai middle class are pushing their children to enroll in both Thai-English bilingual programs in public and special English language schools to attain a competitive edge.

According to Laksanasut (2019), the Ministry of Education in Thailand encouraged public schools to provide bilingual education in the form of the Mini-English Program (MEP) and the English-Program (EP): the former uses English for fifty percent of weekly teaching hours and at least two subjects are taught in English, while the latter uses English as a medium in four subjects or all subjects. The numbers of both private and public schools that offer bilingual education have reached 200 schools since the policy announcement of the Ministry of Education. Since the Ministry of Instruction announced its strategy, the number of private and public schools offering bilingual education has increased to 200. However, the author indicates that bilingual education in Thailand is a failure due to a number of factors, including a scarcity of certified multilingual teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge. According to self-report, up to half of Thai teachers who use English as a medium of instruction have intermediate English language competence, 42% have beginner English language skill, and 8% have advanced English language ability. Surprisingly, 80% of them do not gain a Bachelor's degree in English language teaching. In this regard, due to the significant challenge of a shortage of Thai qualified bilingual teachers, the Ministry of Education has made every effort to support bilingual teacher training programs in order to increase the number of qualified Thai bilingual teachers rather than employing native English-speaking teachers.

Permission to charge parents for their children's attendance in an English program, according to Bax (2010), is one of the policies that enhance discrimination of English language learners and accessibility to English learning. This charge of additional income can help

support the English program by providing more native English teachers and better facilities, allowing parents to see the return on their investment. The author notes that parents who can afford the higher fees and extra charges are willing to send their children to private schools that offer an English program, and that parents whose children attend government schools are also willing to pay the higher fees so that their children can be immersed in the bilingual education. Aside from a lack of bilingual teachers and excessive fees and extra charges, the role of native and non-native English-speaking teachers is a major concern in Thai bilingual education. While foreign teachers have strong subject-area qualifications and English proficiency, the majority of them lack education qualifications, do not know necessary teaching methods, and also do not have time to give advice to learners. Some foreign teachers also lack the basic knowledge of how to ask appropriate questions to motivate students. In their opinion, their primary role is to provide information about the lessons and to allow students to practice in their own time.

5. Decolonial Options

Hybridity, as previously noted, creates inequity between the new privileged and monolingual users, and the main challenge is determining whether all language users can transcend linguistic barriers to dwell in the hybrid zone. Nonetheless, according to the information on bilingual education in Thailand described in the preceding arguments, inequity in access to the English language is increasing because very few Thai students are reported to have studied in the English program, whereas those privileged Thais are capable of urging their children to study in the English program despite some additional costs. Gramsci's subaltern act could be embraced as a solution to reduce inequity and increase Thai people's understanding of English language instruction and learning as follows:

5.1 Reconceptualizing Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers

The first act non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) should do is halting self-marginalization in order to escape the binary of native and non-native. Gramsci's subalternity, according to Kumaravadivelu (2016), is derived from the military term 'subaltern,'

which refers to noncommissioned troops who are subservient to the authority of commissioned officers. The hegemonic authority thus dominates the subaltern through the practice of political, social, cultural, and economic interactions, which undermines the subaltern's will to resist and causes self-marginalization. Accordingly, in order to dissolve the process of marginalization both from the dominating power and self-marginalization, the action should be taken by the subaltern themselves, rather than the dominating power. In terms of English language teaching, the NNESTs, comparatively regarded as the subaltern, need to re-conceptualize and re-position themselves when associating with the hegemonic power of colonialism. In other words, their task is to de-naturalize concept set by the hegemonic forces attempting to produce and distribute knowledge.

5.2 Understanding the Nature of L2 Users

According to Cook (2005), the L2 user's knowledge of the second language is typically not identical to that of a native speaker. Since L2 user's knowledge of their native language differs from that of a monolingual native speaker, their first language is influenced by other linguistic features such as syntax, lexicon, stylistic vocabulary, pragmatics, and phonology. For this reason, because it is still unknown what constitutes successful L2 usage, the fact that an L2 user's language ability is similar to that of a native speaker should not be expected. Therefore, instead of attempting to imitate the native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), the NNESTs should be mindful of their own unique abilities. For example, as the author points out, the NNESTs can serve as role models of successful proficient L2 users. Additionally, the second argument is that the NNESTs can do something the native English-speaking teachers cannot; they can have a profound comprehension of two languages as well as an appreciation for other languages and cultures. Third, the native English-speaking teachers do not have such degree of understanding of the educational system as the non-native English-speaking teachers. Finally, since the NNESTs have a lower level of fluency and have to prepare to go through the course, it is a good opportunity for them to investigate and solve the students' problems.

5.3 Developing Material based on the Local Contexts

Kumaravadivelu (2016) proposes a decolonial option in which the hegemonic power maintains its dominance by situating the subaltern as a subordinate, whose power has mostly been controlled through publication and instructional materials. Therefore, it is the responsibility of local intellectuals to devise instructional strategies based on the learners' local contexts, such as local history, politics, and culture, in order to decolonize the hegemonic power. Furthermore, restructuring education programs should be promoted in order to increase the knowledge and skills of future teachers, who will subsequently become producers of pedagogic knowledge and materials.

According to Matsuda (2012), English is not mainly preserved for native English speakers, and it is a myth that non-native English speakers learn English to communicate with native English speakers. Accordingly, in order to use English as an international language (EIL), teachers must take on the responsibility of encouraging a sense of ownership over the English language. Textbooks that are comparable to their background, for example, make learners feel that they are part of the English language community and that the English language is genuinely close to them. As a result, learners should have the opportunity to study English in the context of their own culture. When students discover that the instructional materials are relatable and meaningful to them, they will gain higher knowledge and language competency as a result of this practice.

6. Education Policy for Decolonizing Colonial Power in Thai Education

In the Thai educational context, all stakeholders must cooperate together to decolonize the colonial power's influence on English language learning and to eliminate inequity between the privileged class of English-speaking subjects and monolingual users of a single national language. The practice should be initiated by the NNESTs who have the power to propose their education policy through policymakers. The use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) should be the first policy to consider. Instead of EMI, Coleman (2009) recommends that children be taught in their mother tongue, particularly in the early years of their education,

because it has been proven that children who study in their mother tongue have a higher tendency of being successful in school. Furthermore, the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) claims that children's poor academic performance is caused by the fact that their first language is not taught in school. In addition, a minority group of Thai children with inadequate standard Thai skills had 50% lower learning results than Thai-speaking children. In case it is imperative that English must be used as the medium, the author suggests delaying use as long as necessary until children have mastered basic literacy in their first language.

As the policy should be created appropriately and not too risky in order to raise awareness about the effectiveness of EMI in bilingual education, Bax (2010) suggests that test scores comparing English and content levels of EP students and those not in the EP should be compared across the country. In terms of teacher training, the author advises that non-native instructors in the EP should receive regular training and development so that they are aware of their roles as well as classroom techniques and approaches. This approach helps to promote the school's quality and also build parental trust. In terms of teacher training and development, Phongploenpis (2016) critiques Thai pre-service English teachers' preparation to teach in Thai-English bilingual schools. The findings revealed that native English speaker norms of communication affected their lack of confidence, so they tried to improve their speaking skills as well as the English-language course content they had to teach. Consequently, future teacher training programs for bilingual education should place a greater emphasis on converting native English-speaking norms to multilingual norms in order to alleviate non-native teachers' feelings of unsuccess. To reduce dependence on native English-speaking instructors, Thai bilingual education teachers should have a high level of English proficiency in order to effectively teach both content and language using EMI, and the Thai students would be the ones who benefit directly from this policy.

7. Conclusion

The practices proposed in this paper for decolonizing the influence of colonial power on education are not meant to annihilate colonial power; rather, this argument seeks to find the most appropriate solutions in order to maximize benefits for all stakeholders involved in

English language teaching and learning in Thailand. The main focus for non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) is to never compare themselves to native English-speaking teachers (NESTs); instead, they should be confident in many aspects of their qualifications that native English-speaking teachers may lack. They should also be part of small parties working to promote English language teaching and learning policies that assist students while still protecting the minority's local language and identity. Additionally, learners and parents should be aware of the common misconceptions regarding native and non-native English-speaking teachers so that social discrimination and inequity, not only among teachers but also among students, would eventually decline as a result of this mutual understanding and practice. Finally, the country's education will progress and develop in the proper direction, providing good learning circumstances for the varied groups of people who are proud of themselves on their diversity of local cultures, customs, and languages, rather than the top-down perspective of the hegemonic power.

References

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (2000). *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Bax, S. (2010). *Researching English Bilingual Education in Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea*. Malaysia: British Council.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Coleman, H. (2009). Teaching Other Subjects through English in Two Asian Nations: A Review Unpublished Report Commissioned by the British Council.
- Cook, V. (2005). Basing teaching on the L2 user. In E. Llurda (Ed.), *Non-Native Language Teachers: Perceptions, Challenges and Contributions to the Profession*, pp. 41-61. New York: Springer.
- Huebner, T. (2019). Language Policy and Bilingual Education in Thailand: Reconciling the Past, Anticipating the Future. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 12(1), 19-29.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2019). The languages of higher education in East and Southeast Asia: Will EMI lead to Englishisation? In Sun, Y. (Ed.). *Foreign Language Teacher Education and Development: Selected works of Renowned TESOL Experts*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Kubota, (2016). The Multi/ Plural Turn, Postcolonial Theory, and Neoliberal Multiculturalism: Complicities and Implications for Applied Linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*. 37(4), 474-494.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2016). The decolonial option in English teaching: Can the subaltern act? *TESOL Quarterly*, 50, 66-85.
- Laksanasut, S. (2019). *Bilingual Education in Thailand, Background, Implementation, Limitation, and Case Study*. Bangkok: Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University.
- Matsuda, A. (2012). Teaching materials in EIL. In L. Alsagoff, S. McKay, G. Hu and W. Renanyda (Eds.) *Principles and practices for teaching English as an international language* (pp. 168-185). New York: Francis and Taylor.
- Migge, B. and Léglise, I. (2007). Language and colonialism. Applied linguistics in the context of creole communities. In Marlis Hellinger and Anne Pauwels (Eds.), *Language and Communication: Diversity and Change. Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 297-338). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

- Persuad, W. (2014). Thai Globalization through Postcolonial Lenses. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 5(16), 167-173.
- Phongploenpis, S. (2016). *The Education of Bilingual Teachers: Preparation of Thai Pre-service Teachers of English to Teach in Thai-English Bilingual Schools* (Doctoral thesis of Education in TESOL). University of Exeter, Exeter.