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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

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Phan Le Ha

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Foreword

The emergence of English as a global language has given rise to many interesting and important debates. Who, if anyone, owns the language – the relatively smaller numbers of native speakers or the much larger numbers of speakers who use it for an ever-growing range of functions? Does International English offer opportunities for neutrality that mitigate the colonial imperialism of the British or the cultural imperialism of the USA? Alternatively, is what we are witnessing best understood in terms of appropriation, as international users harness English for their own purposes?

The meteoric rise of English is closely mirrored, of course, by the growth in the teaching of the language. Given the millions of consumers and the thousands of teachers and support staff, references to the English language *industry* are by no means overplayed. Initially, native speakers dominated English language teaching and they remain in high demand. Growing numbers of English teachers are, however, multilingual, non-native speakers of English. But how do they position themselves in relation to the debates about English? Do they see themselves as international servants or mediators of English? How are they perceived within their own societies? How do they reconcile their own cultural assumptions about teaching with those which underpin the pedagogies associated with teaching English as an international language?

In the pages which follow, Phan Le Ha addresses these and many other related issues. Her arguments and evidence challenge conventional wisdom and nudge our thinking forward. At the same time, and most unusually, she melds Western and Eastern perspectives on similar themes. She sets about this task with a highly distinctive, often lyrical, voice.

Many writers alert us to the dangers associated with the post-colonial dimension of TESOL and ownership of English as an international language. Phan Le Ha, however, demonstrates that this is not a black-and-white issue by drawing attention to both advantages for international teachers of English and to the ways in which they negotiate and resist.

She communicates the tensions for Western-trained teachers using the wonderful metaphor of the 'daughter-in-law of a hundred families'.

There are different messages for different audiences: for native speakers she challenges many assumptions; for non-native speakers she offers strength through introspection.

Viv Edwards

Acknowledgements

Writing is my identity. Writing this book has shaped my identity as much as my identity has shaped what and how I have written.

When I was very little, I always saw my parents reading and writing, and that captured my attention and generated my love for writing. One day, after coming home from school, I told my parents that I was selected to participate in a competition for gifted literature students in Hanoi, and that I was expected to attend a preparatory course held by the Department of Education and Training of Hanoi. Right from that moment, I could feel that my parents would give me everything they could afford for my dream to be fulfilled. And today I am writing my own book.

I am most grateful to my parents for nurturing my dream and for their ceaseless encouragement and confidence in me. The support and love I have received from my husband, Phan Luong Dang, cannot be expressed in words. I thank my little twins, Ha Le and Ha Chi, for understanding my worries, anxiety and determination. All these supports have given me strength to work hard and make my dream come true.

I deeply and sincerely thank Lesley Farrell and Rosemary Viète, my very first 'writing' lecturers in Australia, for their generous comments and support of me having my own voice in writing. Their appreciation for my ideas and voice has been so important in building self-confidence in my writing journey. I thank Marie-Therese Jensen and Margaret Gearon, my lecturers, whose classes were the initial catalyst for my increasing interest in teacher identity. I would like to pay tribute to the useful guidance and valuable comments of Viv Edwards, editor of the *New Perspectives on Language and Education* series. My gratitude is also extended to the Multilingual Matters staff, especially Marjukka Grover and Tommi Grover, who have always been friendly, supportive and available whenever needed. Roby Marlina, my dear friend, student and colleague, has always shared with me how he feels, as a teacher, when reading my work. His reflective eye on my writing is invaluablely meaningful.

I am grateful to Fazal Rizvi for having challenged me with his extensive knowledge of postcolonial theories and accordingly advising me to

incorporate the works of postcolonial writers in this book. I thank scholars whose philosophies have inspired me and served as grounds for me to shape, extend, challenge, question and enrich my ideas, especially Phan Ngoc, Tran Ngoc Them, Tran Quoc Vuong, Duong Thieu Tong, Robert Phillipson, Alastair Pennycook, Stuart Hall, Henry Widdowson, Adrian Holliday, Suresh Canagarajah, Claire Kramersch and Gay Garland Reed. I thank all other scholars whom I have referred to throughout the book.

I thank my colleagues Farzad Sharifian, Simon Marginson and Matthew Piscioneri for their generosity in sharing their knowledge with me and spending time commenting on my work. Farzad, in particular, offered detailed feedback on my book proposal and recommended it be sent to *Multilingual Matters*. Coming from a philosophy background, Matthew's taking the devil's advocate role in relation to my ideas has helped me clarify many important arguments. I thank the staff in the Faculty of Education, Monash University, and my friends and students for their encouragement over the years. In particular, Ying (Faith) Wen's kindness in offering to go through all the references helped make the book ready at the very final stage.

I thank all the teachers who have kindly agreed to be part of this project and shared with me their identity formation journeys as Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of English. They are the very ones who have kept my research interest alive and helped it to be carried out. They deserve my final words of gratitude.

I have made every effort to ensure careful interpretations and presentation of all references. However, if I misinterpret any point discussed in these references, I would like to apologise to the authors in advance. Should there be any errors or omissions in referencing or citation, I hope to be advised so as to be able to fix it. I would like to acknowledge that several sections of this book are drawn from my previous publications: Phan Le Ha (2004); Phan Le Ha (2005); Phan Le Ha (2006); Phan Le Ha (2007); Phan Le Ha (forthcoming); and Phan Le Ha and Phan Van Que (2006).

Phan Le Ha
Monash University, Australia, May 2007

Chapter 1

Introduction

*Teachers of the English word,
we are tossed about,
defined by others,
insecure
yet whole.
We are special,
knowledge experts, moral guides
and yet the public's tails.
We have access to the world,
we belong,
yet seem foreignised,
unselectively
Westernised.
We are not allowed to be human,
to fall in love
(with students),
yet we need to live, to change.
We are nobody in this world of Others
yet not the shadow of native English teachers
we light the way for our own.
We are the daughter-in-law of a hundred families
And proudly ourselves,
growing.*

The Need to Investigate Teacher Identity in the Context of English as an International Language

The recent tendency to treat English as an international language (EIL) has suggested the possibility of forming a new group of EIL teachers (Llurda, 2004; McKay, 2002). Those who support this tendency have argued that much of the communication in English nowadays is between non-native

speakers, and speakers of English tend to be multilingual. Nevertheless, how to teach EIL and how teachers of English negotiate their identities and reconceptualise their pedagogies remain under-discussed. In other words, while attention has been given to the development of EIL and EIL methodologies, the question of EIL teacher identity formation has hardly been addressed. In addition, within the limited existing literature on teacher identity in bilingual and second language education (Block, 2005; Morgan, 2004; Varghese, 2004; Varghese *et al.*, 2005), identity is not a central concern. Neither is teacher identity in these works explored in close relationship with local teaching contexts and English as an international language.

Various aspects of teacher identity are assumed and imagined rather than proved in current literature on the ownership of EIL, such as whether teachers of English see themselves as ambassadors/international mediators or 'servants' of English, whether they negotiate their identities according to the romanticising prospects of EIL and how being teachers of English is seen by their societies. While globalisation heavily relies on English, and English language teaching (ELT) solely relies on English teachers and English teaching, what happens to English teachers and their teaching is an important question that needs to be explored, particularly in the context of mobility and transnationality. Moreover, understanding what teachers want, how they perceive themselves and how they are often represented is crucial to the success of ELT teacher training courses and EIL pedagogy in global and local contexts.

This book discusses in particular the identity formation of Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of English, whose identity formation processes respond to all of the above concerns. These EIL teachers see themselves as 'the daughter-in-law of a hundred families', a figurative translation of the Vietnamese expression 'lam dau tram ho'. It is assumed in Vietnamese society that being a daughter-in-law is very demanding, since a girl has to try hard to please her in-law family, particularly the mother-in-law. She will have to distribute her attention everywhere so as not to be judged as bad. She has to 'please' many parties. So when being a teacher is compared with being a daughter-in-law, it suggests that being a teacher is already hard, but being a daughter-in-law of a hundred families is a hundred times more difficult. How can a teacher satisfy all expectations from multiple parties? This expression indicates how difficult it is to play the teacher role in Vietnamese society, where whatever a teacher does is being judged by the whole society. At the global and transnational level, specifically given the literature surrounding EIL and these teachers' movement in space and time between Vietnam and the English-speaking

West, the identity formation processes of these 'daughters-in-law of a hundred families' undergo complexity, contradictions, tensions, negotiations, sophistication yet fluidity, connectedness and continuity at all these interlinked mobile domains, personal, local, global and transnational.

In particular, this book examines how Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of EIL see themselves as professionals and as individuals in relation to their work practices. It reveals the often invisible sides of their identity, which are the tensions, compromises, negotiations and contradictions in their enactment of different roles and selves. Furthermore, very importantly, as Holliday (2005) consistently demonstrates in his book, native-speakerism (his term) is dominant in almost every teaching setting, and heavily influences EIL teachers' perceptions and practices. This book on the one hand examines in what ways and aspects native-speakerism applies to these Vietnamese teachers and on the other shows that they often do not identify themselves in relation to it and offer us alternatives that are healthy for critical EIL pedagogy.

'Daughter-in-Law of a Hundred Families': Western-trained Vietnamese Teachers of EIL

As a result of historical and political circumstances, Vietnam has only recently opened its doors to the world. English language education, though enjoying a long history in Vietnam (Phan Van Que *et al.*, forthcoming), has only started to boom over the last 20 or so years. This boom has created opportunities for teachers of English to go overseas for further professional training. Australia has appeared to serve as the second 'former Soviet Union' in terms of training tertiary teachers and scholars for Vietnam since then. In addition, other English-speaking countries have also contributed to this teacher training and/or professional development process. There is now a large group of so-called 'Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of English' working at universities in Vietnam.

The last 20 years have witnessed the heyday of Vietnamese teachers of English. Their identities have been coupled with how English has been seen. Being a teacher of English has become desirable and fashionable, and it is attached to opportunities, wealth and advanced education. Teachers of English have also been seen as being more 'Westernised', in that their enactment of their teacher roles has been assumed to be more or less influenced by English and associated values. Those teachers who are trained in English-speaking countries are seen even more critically by Vietnamese society. They are, again, labelled with additional identities because of their physical exposure to the West.