

Repositioning English through Language, Identity and Power

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1 Background

Statement of the problem

- Vietnam is gradually repositioning English from an EFL to an ESL context.
- English education still tends to prioritize linguistic competence.
- Less attention is given to the social meanings and consequences of English.
- Students may therefore view English mainly as a neutral communication tool.

Rationale

- English is closely linked to: Identity, privilege, Social mobility, Inclusion / exclusion and Power.
- English-major students need opportunities to examine how English operates in real-life social contexts.
- This is particularly relevant as English becomes increasingly embedded in education, work, media, and everyday life in Vietnam.

4 Theoretical framework

Identity, language learning, and social change (Norton & Toohey, 2011)

Identity is multiple, changing and socially constructed. Language learners occupy different positions that may enable or constrain participation. Language learning takes place within unequal relations of power.

Teaching About Language, Power, and Text: A Review of Classroom Practices That Support Critical Literacy. (2006)

Not all ways of speaking have equal social value. Speakers have unequal "rights to speech. Language can function as linguistic / cultural capital.

Language and symbolic power (1991)

Positioning: how learners are positioned - and position themselves - as English users
Investment: what learners expect English to give them access to
Imagined identities: who learners imagine becoming through English

6 Findings and student shifts

English as more than communication

Before: English is important because it helps us communicate with foreigners and study abroad.

After: English does not only help people communicate. It can also give people greater access to education and employment, while those with limited English may have fewer opportunities.

Repositioning the English User

Before: I need to sound like a native speaker.

After: Different English users can be legitimate in different contexts. Having a Vietnamese accent does not mean that our English is wrong or less valuable.

Reading language critically

Use examples from activities such as:

- same event, different headlines
- who gets represented?
- rename the actor
- manufactured consent
- critical redesign

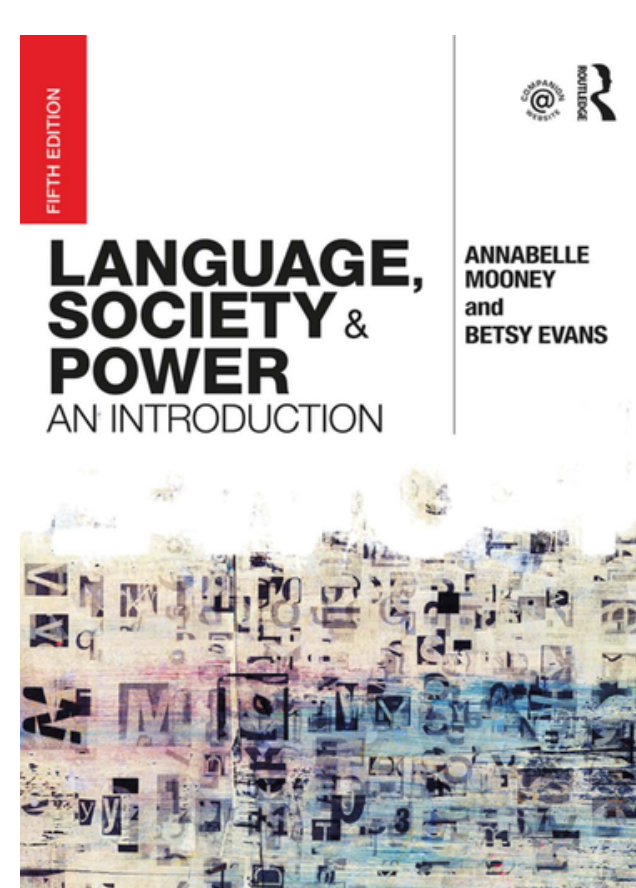
Possible analytical labels:

- language is not neutral
- representation involves power
- missing voices matter

2 Research question

- 1.How do English-major students understand the relationships between English, identity and power through a Language, Society and Power course?
- 2.What shifts in students' positioning of English and themselves as English users emerge across their classroom reflections and written work?

3 Course context & activities



- Language autobiography
- English around us
- Same event, different headlines
- Prestige or practicality?
- Identity in online communities
- Rename the actor
- Who gets represented?
- English and opportunity
- Language and manufactured consent
- Critical redesign

5 Methodology

Research design

A small-scale qualitative classroom-based inquiry

Participants

English-major students enrolled in Language, Society and Power

Data sources

Initial reflections, selected classroom activities/reflections, final written work

Analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis, with attention to how students position English, themselves as English users, and relationships between language, identity, and power

7 References

Norton B, Toohey K. Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching*. 2011;44(4):412-446. doi:10.1017/S0261444811000309

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