

Abstract

This study takes a semi-ethnographic approach in an attempt to investigate the stereotypes and biases held by students at an international university in Thailand towards their teachers in terms of native speakerness, accent and race. This is done within the context of the internationalization of higher education. The characteristics of the university in which this study took place, including its policy of using English as the main medium of instruction, creates numerous possible multilingual and multicultural classroom situations. This means, for example, that the teacher may not be a native speaker of English but also not share the L1 of most or all of the students. Consequently students often encounter teachers, both native and non-native speakers of English, from many different backgrounds where their (the students) stereotypes and biases will come into play, possibly interfering with the learning experience. It is my view, following a reading of the literature, that qualitative research on attitudes towards the issues involved, namely, accent, native-speakerness and race, have focused almost solely on the teacher's perspective (or voice), and that research on the students perspective (or voice) has been entirely quantitative, largely using questionnaires following viewing or listening to recorded extracts of speech. As far as I am aware, an in depth, qualitative and long term approach to finding out how a teacher's accent and other identity factors create stereotypes and biases in a student's mind has not been done. That is, I would say, that the student's voice has not been heard. A total of seven participants were involved, each interviewed at least twice, whilst contact was maintained throughout the period of the study using Line an internet based chat application popular at the time. Small focus group meetings were also conducted with two participants discussing the issues together. The number of participants was kept low due to the semi-ethnographic approach of the study, and given the time frame it is my view that this study would not have been possible with more participants. The findings suggest that there are biases held by the participants involved, including the 'Bias of Blame' that could affect communication between student and teacher and therefore interfere with the learning experience. Accent was found to be the main issue involved in the biases, with race being explicitly rejected as a factor by the participants but implied as such through their discourse.

Also revealed but not part of the original research questions was the marginalization of international students, whereby international students perceived themselves, and sometimes perceived by others, to be sidelined by the teacher's use of Thai in the classroom with Thai students.

