

WHAT DO THEY THINK OF ME? A SEMI-ETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION INTO STUDENT STEREOTYPES AND BIASES TOWARDS TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study investigates the stereotypes and biases held by students at an international university in Thailand towards teachers in terms of race, accent and native speakerness within the context of the internationalization of higher education. It takes a semi-ethnographic approach, interviewing and staying in contact with the participants over a period of about three months. The data were transcribed, coded and organized into themes as they emerged. The findings showed that native and non-native English speaking teachers were stereotyped differently. That certain accents were highly stigmatized and that this stigmatization resulted in the perception of the accents being harder to understand, and furthermore that the blame for misunderstanding was put onto the speaker of the stigmatized accent; whereas with an accent perceived to be native speaker the participant (as listener) would put the blame on themselves. Race was found to be an issue only in the implication that a White identity was associated with native speakerness, and that a non-native accent was sometimes not stigmatized if it came from a White teacher. Another finding was the perceived marginalization of international students. The findings are integrated into existing theories of social connotations (Trudgill & Giles, 1978) and communicative burden (Lippi-Green, 2012), and through these it is discussed how the stigmatization of an accent might affect intelligibility. Finally, implications are looked at and recommendations made in consideration of the findings.

Keywords: internationalization, native speaker, non-native speaker, accent, race, social connotations, communicative burden, attitude, bias, stereotype.