

Making sense of the English language policy in
Thailand: An exploration of teachers' practices and
dispositions.

Submitted by Damian Fitzpatrick (Student Number: 550000377)
to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of
Education in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
January 2011

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is
copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published
without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been
identified and that no material has previously been submitted and
approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

(Signature)

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Salah Troudi for all of his hard work in helping me with this thesis. Without his valuable comments, and most of all, his patience, much of this work would not have seen the light of day. I would also like to thank Dr. Martin Levinson for all his feedback, particularly with respect to the telling of this story. A big thank you to all of those who participated in this research, particularly the teachers who despite having an incredibly busy schedule still found time to allow me to carry out this study. Of course, a huge thanks to all the members of my family who have constantly supported me throughout this process, as well as to all those who have had to put up with me while I have attempted to complete this work.

Abstract

Similar to other countries in the South-east Asian region, Thailand has transformed its education policy so that it may be able to better face the challenges of the globalised world. In order to do this, constructs such as student-centred learning and critical thinking, as well as the teaching of English in a more communicative manner, have been promoted.

There has been little critical or grounded research carried out on the current English policy in Thailand, which emerged from the National Education Act of 1999 and the subsequent Basic Education Core Curricula of 2001 and 2008, therefore, in order to better understand how this policy works, this study explores how a group of Thai-English language teachers conceptualise the English language policy in Thailand by investigating their practices and beliefs (dispositions). In order to do this, and drawing on a social constructionist perspective from Bourdieu's theory of practice, this thesis adopts a qualitative methodology that incorporates exploratory and ethnographic elements. Employing a combination of data collection methods that include classroom observations, retrospective accounts and semi-structured interviews, the findings demonstrate that a gap exists between the goals of the policy and what actually occurs in the classroom. Thus, there were few examples of either the communicative approach or student-centred learning being employed, with teachers instead tending to transmit knowledge to their students in a teacher-centred manner. Reasons for this may be due to the influence that the national examinations has on teachers' work, the suitability and / or relevance of imported teaching and learning approaches on local contexts, as well as the need for better implementation of change. Teachers would indeed benefit from more professional development concerning the policy, but this thesis also argues that the policy itself needs to be critically examined. This would then allow Thailand, as well as other countries in the region, to better inform and improve their current education policies.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	9
1. Introduction	9
1.1 Rationale for the Study	10
1.2 Significance of the Study	12
1.3 Research Aims	13
1.4 Research Questions	13
1.5 Organisation of the Study	13
Chapter 2: Context of the Study	15
2. Introduction	15
2.1 The Role of English in Southeast Asia	16
2.2 Commonalities in the region	17
2.2.1 Modernity	17
2.2.2 Education	18
2.3 Thailand: Socio-economic and Political Context.....	19
2.4 Current Status of the English Language in Thailand	20
2.5 English Language Education in Thailand	21
2.5.1 History	21
2.5.2 National Education Act of B. E. 2542 (1999).....	23
2.5.3 NEA (1999) Aims and Structure.....	24
2.5.4 Basic Education Core Curriculum (2001 / 2008).....	24
2.5.5 Foreign Language Learning: Strands and Standards	25
2.6 Current Teaching Situation	29
2.6.1 Bilingual Education in Thailand	31
2.7 Summary	33
Chapter 3: Literature Review	34
3. Introduction	34
3.1 Epistemological Perspective	34
3.2 Objective or Subjective?	35
3.3 Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Meaning.....	37
3.3.1 Typification	37
3.3.2 From Habitualization to Institutionalization	37
3.4 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice	38
3.4.1 Dispositions.....	40
3.4.2 <i>Habitus</i>	42
3.4.3 Field	43
3.5 Teachers' Dispositions and Practices.....	45
3.5.1 Teachers' Dispositions about Change.....	47
3.5.2 Teachers' Dispositions and Policy.....	49
3.6 Education Policy Research.....	50
3.7 Agency	51
3.8 Language Policy.....	53
3.9 The Role of English	56
3.9.1 Imported Methodologies in Local Contexts.....	57
3.9.2 Student-centred Learning.....	60
3.10 Summary	63
Chapter 4: Methodology	64
4. Introduction	64
4.1 Research Paradigms	65
4.2 Methodology	66
4.2.1 Qualitative.....	67
4.2.2 Exploratory.....	69

4.2.3 Methodologies in Language Policy.....	70
4.2.4 Ethnographic Perspective.....	71
4.2.5 Ethnographic methods: Understanding the local	74
4.3 Methods.....	76
4.4 Credibility of the Study.....	77
4.5 Background of the Study.....	78
4.5.1 Location	79
4.5.2 Schools	79
4.5.3 Participants.....	82
4.6 Ethical Issues.....	86
4.6.1 Permission.....	87
4.7 Classroom Observation	87
4.8 Interviews.....	91
4.8.1 Post-observation Interviews.....	93
4.8.2 Semi-structured Interviews	94
4.9 Document Analysis.....	97
4.10 Data Collection Summary.....	97
4.11 Data Analysis.....	98
4.11.1 Categorising the Data.....	99
4.12 Summary	100
Chapter 5: Data Analysis	101
5. Introduction.....	101
5.1 Data Analysis: Practices.....	101
5.1.1 Types of Practices	101
5.2 Teachers' Dispositions.....	102
5.3 Teachers' Dispositions about Teaching.....	104
5.3.1 Teaching Approaches.....	104
5.3.2 Materials.....	107
5.3.3 Evaluation	109
5.4 Teachers' Dispositions about Learning.....	110
5.4.1 Student-centred Approaches	110
5.4.2 Helping Students to Understand: Classroom Language	112
5.4.3 Helping Students with Pronunciation	114
5.4.4 Helping Students with Reading and Vocabulary	115
5.4.5 Helping Students with Listening.....	116
5.5 The Role that the English Language Policy Plays on Teaching.....	117
5.6 The Role of English	119
5.6.1 The Optimum Time to Learn English.....	121
5.7 The Influence of the National Examination.....	122
5.8 Summary	124
Chapter 6: Discussion	127
6.1 Teaching.....	127
6.1.1 Approaches to Teaching.....	127
6.1.2 The Policy Effects.....	130
6.1.3 Materials.....	131
6.2 Learning	132
6.2.1 Student-centred Learning.....	132
6.2.2 English: When to Learn?.....	133
6.2.3 Bilingual Programmes.....	134
6.3 The Role of English	136
6.4 The Influence of the National Examination.....	138
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	139
7.1 Summary of Main Findings	139

7.2 Limitations of the Study.....	140
7.3 Implications.....	141
7.4 Recommendations.....	142
7.4.1 The National Examination.....	142
7.4.2 Materials and Review of Teaching Approaches.....	142
7.4.3. The Role of English in Thailand.....	143
7.5 Further Research.....	143
7.6 Conclusion.....	144
7.7 Final Comment.....	146
References.....	148
Appendices.....	165
Appendix 1: Key sections from the National Education Act (NEA) of B. E. 2542* (1999).....	165
Appendix 2: Strands and Standards of the Foreign Language Learning Area.....	169
Appendix 3: Example of <i>Prathom</i> 3 (grade 3) indicators.....	170
Appendix 4: The Thai Education System (2005).....	171
Appendix 5: Certificate of ethical research approval form.....	172
Appendix 6: Sample Research Request to School Director.....	175
Appendix 7: University of Exeter Consent Form.....	176
Appendix 8: Example of Field Notes: School A - Observation 1.....	177
Appendix 9: Example of Post-observation: first interview (Nattaporn).....	181
Appendix 10: Example of practices and beliefs (Nattaporn).....	184
Appendix 11: Bio-data questionnaire.....	186
Appendix 12: Example of Semi-structured interview with Nattaporn (N).....	189
Appendix 13: Process of assigning categories from the data.....	194
Appendix 14: List of Observed Practices.....	194
Appendix 15: Teacher's Dispositions: Categories (An Example - Nattaporn).....	195

Tables

	Page
Table 1: Key dates in Thailand's English language education history	22
Table 2: From Policy to Practice: An overview of the English Language Policy in Thailand	28
Table 3: Number of hours of English instruction at primary and secondary levels	30
Table 4: Language Planning Goals: An Integrative Framework	54
Table 5: Overview of schools involved in the study	80
Table 6: Background Information of Participants	83
Table 7: Observation and Interview Schedule	88
Table 8: Summary of data collection methods	96
Table 9: List of Teachers' Dispositions	101
Table 10: Main categories and sub-categories of data	102
Table 11: Teaching Approaches of Participants	103

Figures

Figure 1: Design continua for classifying research	67
--	----

Abbreviations used in the study

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BEC	Basic Education Core Curriculum
ELI	The English Language Institute
EP	English Programme
ERIC	Educational Resource and Instruction Centre
KWL	Know-Want-Learn
MEP	Mini English Programme
MoE	Ministry of Education
NEA	National Education Act
NESAC	National Economic and Social Advisory Council
OEC	Office of the Education Council
ONEC	Office of National Education
PPP	Present, Practise, Produce
TKT	Teacher Knowledge Test

Thai words used in the study

<i>Ferrang</i>	The Thai word for foreigner
<i>Matayom</i>	The Thai word for secondary school grade
<i>Prathom</i>	The Thai word for primary school grade