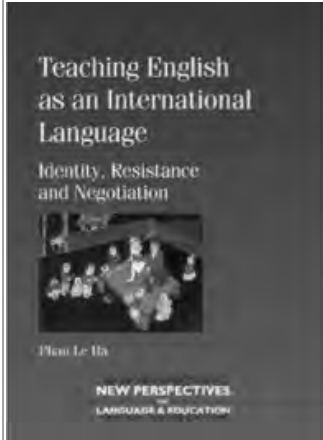


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Teaching English as an International Language: Identity, Resistance and Negotiation		
Author:	Phan Le Ha (2008)	
Publisher:	Multilingual Matters	
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204 pages	9781847690487	\$44.95 USD



Teaching English as an International Language: Identity, Resistance and Negotiation is an invaluable book that offers new perspectives on language and its education. The central theme of the book is how a group of Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of English shape, reshape, negotiate and appropriate their multiple identities in relation to their roles and selves in the context of teaching English as an international language. Phan explores this process of identity formation through a study based on in-depth interviews, group focus interviews, guided reflective writings and other informal communications.

The book contains seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides rationales for investigating teacher identity in the setting of English as an international language. What is distinctive of this chapter is the introduction of the participants in the study with a beautiful metaphor: Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of English daughter-in-law of a hundred families with the implication that being a daughter-in-law of a family in Vietnamese culture is hard but being a daughter-in-law of a hundred families is much harder. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework and conceptual tools for the study in relation to language, culture and identity. Chapter 3 overviews the politics of English as an international language and English language teaching (ELT) by drawing on debates of ELT and constructs of colonialism, the ownership of English, TESOL programs and their criticisms, Communicative Language Teaching and the

dichotomy of native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs). Chapter 4 and 5 picture the identity formation of this group of teachers through their contradictory roles, selves and the politics of ELT while chapter 6 specifies more on identity construction of an individual teacher. Chapter 7 summarizes some key features of identity formation of these teachers and simultaneously indicates their ongoing identity journey in ELT.

One of the most prominent strengths of the book is Phan thoroughly combines both Western and Vietnamese theoretical resources in her discussion of the shifting professional identities of a group of Vietnamese EFL teachers. This contribution surprisingly places the theories of Vietnamese scholars – those who are still devalued in international TESOL debates equally as important as Western ones. Drawing on the discussions of identity construction of post-colonial writings and non-essentialist Western perceptions of identity, Phan argues persuasively that these are not sufficient for her theoretical framework in the coming discussion. According to Phan, the investigation of the group of Western-trained Vietnamese EFL teachers also needs Vietnamese authors' perception of identities in which identity as both "being" and "becoming", national identity and identity as a sense of belonging are particularly highlighted.

Furthermore, the ways these teachers perceive their identity construction challenge the seemingly dominant Western views of identity as always changing, hybrid, fragmented and as a "matter of becoming rather than being" (Hall, 1997, p. 53). Phan argues that though identity construction of these Western – trained Vietnamese teachers changes as moving to a new environment – English speaking countries for their study, their experiences highlight the importance of the sense of belonging, being, connectedness, continuity and coherent growth in identity formation. The more they have chance to contact with outside world, the stronger they feel they are connected with Vietnamese culture in which they shape, reshape, fasten, unfasten, negotiate and appropriate their identity formation under three main umbrellas: Vietnamese teachers, Vietnamese teachers of English, Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of English. The core identity is considered as a stable platform that they are able to form their multiple identities. While non-essentialist views of Western scholars strongly emphasizes only on the continuous shifting of identity, Phan sees changing and the root of identity construction are both important and adds that although it may undergo ceaseless transformation, it always remains the core, the root, the sense of belonging to national and cultural values. This view has opened a new direction and a way of looking at identity formation that is not only non-essentialist but also represents national values.

In addition, through these teachers' perception of the dichotomy of NESTs and NNESTs, Phan suggests persuasively that they do not look at the dichotomy in relation to the Self (the colonizer-native speakers of English) and the Other (the colonized-non-native speakers of English) as mentioned in postcolonial notions (Holliday, 2005). Instead, they view themselves in relation to difference compared to NESTs as Phan points out, "These teachers defined themselves as NNESTs and presented the dichotomy between the two to reveal differences rather than tensions or contradictions" (p. 137). Therefore, the dichotomy in this sense offers positives rather than negativity as pictured in literature or it changes into different form to fit

in different cases produced by the complexity of identity formation. Again, the dichotomy challenge postcolonial notions of Self and Other and suggests a radical view on looking at NESTs and NNESTs from the perspective of NNESTs themselves--Vietnamese teachers of English.

The open and ending of the book is another distinctive factor that contributes to its value. It is started with the poem and the wonderful metaphor: Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of English – a daughter-in-law of a hundred families and it is ended with the same poem and metaphor. This open-ended strategy in writing up the book shows that though the study is complete, the identity construction journey is still going on. Identity formation undergoes transformation, changing, and fragmentation but always remains the core, sense of belonging, connectedness, and continuity.

The shortcoming of the book that I am able to find out lies in its methodological section. Though Phan indicates that her study of the group of these teachers based on in-depth interviews, group focus interviews, guided reflective writings and informal talks, email exchange, I am not able to identify what kinds of data collection given to each extracts in data analysis. It seems to me that all given evidences are more concerned with guided reflective writings than the others. If Phan would specifically mention different tools in the analysis, the book and its study would be more complete. Despite this minor shortcoming, the book should be considered an invaluable tool for English language teachers, students and educators to investigate and further understand the complex identity construction of language teachers in general and Western-trained Vietnamese EFL teachers in particular.

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