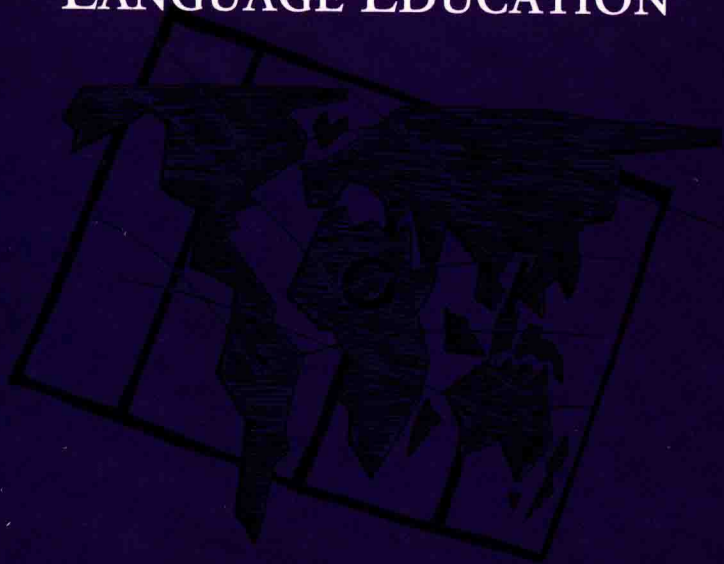


LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE RIGHTS

ILLEGITIMATE PRACTICES

GLOBAL ENGLISH
LANGUAGE EDUCATION



Jacqueline Widin



LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE RIGHTS

*Series Editor: Dr Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Roskilde University,
Denmark*

Illegitimate Practices

Global English Language Education

Jacqueline Widin



MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

Bristol • Buffalo • Toronto

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Widin, Jacqueline.

Illegitimate practices: Global English Language Education / Jacqueline Widin.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. English language—Australia. 2. English language—Study and teaching.
3. English language—Influence on foreign languages.
4. Languages in contact—Australia. 5. Sociolinguistics—Australia. I. Title.

P130.52.A8W53 2010

428.00710994-dc22 2010025434

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-307-5 (hbk)

ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-306-8 (pbk)

Multilingual Matters

UK: St Nicholas House, 31-34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.

USA: UTP, 2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150, USA.

Canada: UTP, 5201 Dufferin Street, North York, Ontario M3H 5T8, Canada.

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Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd, Pondicherry, India.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Short Run Press Ltd.

Illegitimate Practices



LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE RIGHTS

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Acknowledgements

Firstly I wish to convey my sense of gratitude to the teachers, teacher educators and government officials in Laos, Japan and Australia for sharing their stories. Their experiences, insights and analyses are the critical components of this book.

My debt to those who provided the theoretical inspiration and thinking of this book is inestimable. There are many who contributed greatly but in particular, Professor Robert Phillipson and Dr Tove Skutnabb-Kangas offered me the frameworks within which to analyse the implications of my academic work.

I am also indebted to Dr Paul Black he was immensely important in the initial development of my work in this area, his patience, perseverance and input helped me to undertake this study. My close colleague and friend, Sheilagh Kelly enabled the whole project to be completed. Lastly but most importantly my family and friends were the people that gave me the day to day support and encouragement to keep going.

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Chapter 1

Setting the Scene: The International Context of English Language Education

This is a story about the internationalisation of education. In particular, it is a story about the struggles within international English language education projects (IELEPs) and the increasing commodification and corporatisation of English. The story is set in South East Asia, East Asia and Australia and the actors include students, teachers, university and aid organisation staff and government officials. A central theme is the exportation of English language education by so-called English-speaking countries such as Australia to countries, often poor, which are linguistically and culturally diverse, with few English first language speakers. Specifically I am concerned with offshore English language education projects, the role of Australian universities in the export of English language education and the seeming necessity for 'global inequality in the commercial market in international education' (Marginson, 2004: 23). In my exploration of these concerns I am driven to ask: who benefits from the international spread of English language education? Will the economic success of English language teaching (ELT) continue to grow? Will English continue to hold the position of power and domination?

In my thinking about this book my motivation was to problematise the position of the 'beneficiary'. I began by working within the binary framework between the donor/provider and the beneficiary. I was concerned with how the particular interests of the beneficiary could be more effectively negotiated and represented. However, during one of my first interviews with a key stakeholder, Murray, in a fee-for-service project in Japan my thinking was completely turned around. In his interview, he spoke candidly about the many different interests and different beneficiaries in the project and how at different times in a project's life particular

interests may be paramount. In the extract below he succinctly outlined Australia's 'grand interests':

The purpose of this particular project is not to deliver great, you know, English language teaching methodology into this country's teaching system. Actually by doing that we put many Australians out of a job... I mean... in fifteen years time if great English is being taught here then we're, you know, Australians out of business.

But... it is to demonstrate Australia's ability to operate in an area that this country is not accustomed to and not expecting in higher education. It is to enhance our reputation as a provider of education and training... the Agency is after enhancing Australia's interest in Australia's and this country's relationship. So I couldn't care less whether this country wants it, or needs it, or likes it, at the end of the day it's not the judgement of the teachers, it is a decision we've made against the background of what would enhance Australia's interest. (Murray P1AM1)

Looking back now this is axiomatic of the dynamics of the international English language education project (hereafter referred to as IELEP) field, but in that initial period of my exploration my assumptions were still fairly naively based in the binary relations in the ELT project field.

The notion of 'interest' is pivotal in any discussion about international English language teaching projects. So I must declare my interest in writing about IELEPs in the way I do. I work with an Australian university and I have been involved in a number of IELEPs in a variety of roles. It was through my involvement in projects as teacher, project adviser, project proposal writer and project implementer that I became aware, quite belatedly I suppose, that all was not as it seemed. I felt a growing unease that we were not all working to the same goals. While I and other colleagues ostensibly took on the onerous work of the project objectives or tasks, others did not seem to be working towards what I assumed were the principal aims of the project. At the same time I came across the growing body of literature, of articles, books and conference discussions addressing 'the problem of international education projects'. What the literature suggests is that international education projects fail, and not only do they fail, they cause damage and destruction to the areas they are located in, not just in the provision of services, or lack of, but to the individuals (or at least some) working in the projects. A number of researchers describe the project staff as the 'scrapnel' left in the wake of the ravages of the international language education project (Abdul-Raheem, 2000; Griffin, 1991;

Magrath, 2001; Morris, 1991; Murphy, 1999; Pottier, 1993; Swales, 1980). Swales (1980: 62) describes a scenario which reflects current dilemmas of project work.

Expatriate staff of projects often ignore the real needs of the beneficiaries and appear in the 'busy work' mode to pursue their own interests and produce materials satisfactory to their own standards – independent of local interests. They then achieve a validity which was internal to the expatriate world of the project; but they failed to achieve external validity, in the terms of the host institution.

Such criticisms may seem harsh but experience in the field of IELEP projects at least in part supports them and has provided me with the opportunities to investigate the struggles and power lines that delineate the field. Initially, the struggles were ones that as an academic I easily recognised; they were 'naturally' over what are considered the valuable resources in the field. A most obvious one is the struggle for Australian universities to win bids for aid projects. Another critical one is to attract international students. A third one is over language, firstly 'which language?'. In the case of ELT projects it is English. Related questions are how Australia keeps ownership of English and wins the struggle to keep the 'so-called' native speaker of English dominant.

Struggles emerged that contested and challenged embedded notions of the 'normality' of work practices and social life held by the academy. 'Culture' emerged as a most complicated concept. With respect to struggles around work practices questions emerged such as who occupies the dominant position? Which language dominates in the workplace? How are the language rights of the host-country participants recognised or not recognised? How are these struggle carried out? What forms of symbolic violence and abuse are taking place?

The question of who benefits contests the conventional assumption of recipients as beneficiaries. One of my main interests in the problematising of the beneficiary took the form of examining the position given to the first language (L1) in English language teacher training projects located in non-English-speaking countries. Although project stakeholders represented both the recipient countries and the donor countries, all meetings were conducted in English, all project documentation was in English and general communication was in English. This situation, which potentially disenfranchises recipient stakeholders from the project process, prompted me to look more deeply into the impact of language education projects in terms of the relationships they set up between the language/s of the recipient and that of the donor and/or the provider. The notion of the beneficiary

became more problematic as I became aware that there were differing views about who would, or rather should, benefit from the project.

My growing awareness of the complications in the project field is not reflected in the specific ELT project literature analysing and describing this field. The beneficiary is usually depicted as an easily identified singular group or community (AusAID, 2001; Davis, 1991; Marsden & Oakley, 1990; World Bank, 1998), yet this literature identifies the multitude of problems integral to the running of international language education projects and the apparent failure of many projects to meet their objectives. Why such consistent and systematic failure? As the struggles in the project field became more pronounced and the notion of the beneficiary became more problematic, I turned to examine the overall picture of the planning and implementation of university-led IELEPs both in the aid and in the fee-for-service context.

I owe much to Pierre Bourdieu in the telling of this story. In order to understand the dynamics of the international language education field I used Bourdieu's conceptual framework and his explanatory devices of field, capital and habitus. These allowed for a multi-layered investigation into both the field of the IELEPs and the broader social context, the field of power (Bourdieu, 1984, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1998, 1999). Any analysis of the international field of education must account for two distinctive elements (Marginson, 2008). One element is cross-border flows of people, ideas, knowledge, technologies and economic resources. This element is relatively visible. The other less tangible and one most relevant to this study is the flow of differences and delineations. These include differences in languages, pedagogies, work practices, inclusion and exclusion. Bourdieu provides the tools to investigate the unequal distribution of resources and power. The field of power in this instance is represented by the powerful institutions at national and international levels. Institutions such as Australian aid agencies, Australian foreign relations organisations, international aid and finance organisations, Australian universities and universities in the countries other than Australia are located in the field of power. Although Bourdieu's research was carried out previous to the intense and volatile globalisation of the late 20th and early 21st centuries and in some eyes is nation-bound (Marginson, 2008), it offers much to my study of domination and subjugation in the international field. Bourdieu's framework allowed me to examine the relationships between the different agents, the positions they occupied in the field, the capital (the stakes or resources: linguistic, economic, cultural and social) which they accumulated and the dispositions (habitus: life experiences, expectations, education, knowledge, skills, age, gender and tastes) they

brought to the field. The ways in which the agents carried out their practice of project implementation is what Bourdieu refers to as a 'feel for the game'. An agent or actor's habitus is not deterministic but can influence how well one 'plays the game'. Bourdieu speaks eloquently about habitus below:

social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside agents and when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself 'as a fish in water', it does not feel the weight of the water, and takes the world and itself for granted. (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989: 43)

Bourdieu's (1988, 1998) work encouraged me to make visible the invisible relations of power, to unearth those 'naturally' occurring regularities that become known as 'the norm'. And so my declared interests in this story are to uncover the invisible webs of power which cause the practices to be carried out in a certain way. Given that the field of international language education projects is wrought with difficulties and stories of 'failure', I want to understand how such a wide-ranging and repetitive venture is overlaid with this burden of failure. This means that an analysis of the field will have to make apparent and unravel those taken-for-granted understandings of, in particular, power relations. It will have to identify the resources or stakes (capital) that are sought after by the agents in the field and the strategies employed by agents in the field; these are informed by their position, capital and habitus.

The remainder of this chapter familiarises the reader with the specific project sites and the agents (or actors) involved in the projects. It also gives a brief overview of issues such as: the internationalisation of English, the position of the first language in each site and the concept of the project and culture. The chapter concludes with an outline of the book chapters. The countries central to this story are named but I have changed the details of the participants to protect their identity.

The Sites

The stories in this book are drawn from the experiences of participants in two projects. Project 1 is an aid-funded English language teacher training project located in Laos, a small land-locked country in South East Asia. This project was tendered for and won through a collaboration between an Australian project management company and a large metropolitan Australian tertiary institution. The relationship with the host-country

Ministry of Education (MOE) and other relevant government representatives was formed according to the rhetoric of 'bilateral aid projects' within the Australian Government aid programme. Project 2 is a university fee-for-service project developed by a consortium of Australian universities – the consortium's goal is to provide for the multi-level professional development of English language (EL) teachers in Japan. The project was developed under the auspice of an Australian Government Agency (AGA) located in the host country. The government organisation liaised with the host-country MOE and other key language teaching organisations. The consortium of universities was to present a national image of Australian higher education.

There are similarities and differences between the projects: they were both purporting to introduce a new ELT approach for use with secondary school students and both had a component of English language development for the teacher participants. However, there are key differences, some of which include the role of English in the two countries, the conditions under which the Australian team members participated in the projects and the time frames of the projects. One significant difference is the way in which each project was conceived. Project 1 (P1) was funded by Australia's international aid programme and was jointly managed by a university and a private project management company. Project 2 (P2) was more explicitly an entrepreneurial venture developed under the auspice of an AGA which provided some seeding funding. In spite of these essential differences the goals of the projects were very similar, the main one being to enhance the teaching and provision of English language education in the host countries.

The projects were located in two countries distinguished from each other by their historical, social and material conditions. Laos had emerged from a long history of colonial and quasi-colonial relations with a number of different international powers (Arnst, 1997). In Laos the teaching of foreign languages has been driven by the particular colonial power of the time. Project 2, located in Japan, an industrialised economy, is marked by very different struggles around the role of foreign languages. The post-Second World War focus on ELT was driven by a number of complex international relations.

The ELT goals of Project 1 as expressed in the project documents were based on the notion of 'capacity building'. They assumed that the 'building up' of the ELT sector would lead to improved social and economic growth. The documents go on further to illuminate the way that improved teaching and learning of English will strengthen the country's capacity to develop and sustain the type of English language provision initiated by the project. The proposal document for Project 2 differs in that the goal

was not to enhance social or economic development as the host country was already one of the most industrially developed countries in the world. Rather, the inference was that the English language teaching and learning approaches in this host country were deficient and that improvement in these areas would enhance the country's involvement in the international arena.

This story clearly draws on the experiences of participants within two IELPs; while the particularity of these experiences is important, the analysis and findings can be applied to a broader context. Throughout this book I refer to and weave in stories from education projects around the world; projects based in East Timor, Cambodia, Vietnam, Hungary and countries in Africa are all echoes of the story I am about to tell you.

Australian Universities and the Project Field

Australian universities have a principal role in this story. They are key players in the international English language field in the Asia-Pacific region. The international role of these institutions has changed dramatically over the last three decades. In 1988 the Australian Government phased out international education programmes premised on foreign aid objectives (e.g. the Colombo Plan); it then confirmed the full-fee market as the dominant framework for cross-border education (Marginson, 2004; Meiras, 2004). This major change in focus began in the mid-1980s when Australia shifted its orientation towards the Asia-Pacific region from its previous ties with countries in the British Commonwealth. During the late 1980s and 1990s the Asia-Pacific region became a lucrative market for recruiting fee-paying students. International students were no longer regarded as an 'elite group'; instead they were recognised as a mass market. The recruitment of these students became an export industry and was based upon an analysis of cost-benefit ratio and profit margins.

Because of Australian Government policy changes in the 1990s, Australian universities were driven to generate an increasing amount of their own funding and the market in international education promised to ease the funding crisis for universities. The notion of 'the internationalisation of education' featured in the critical development themes of Australian universities (Marginson, 1995, 1997b, 2004; Meiras, 2004). Between 1990 and 2002, the number of international students enrolled in Australian universities increased from 24,998 to 185,058 (Marginson, 2004). The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (2005) report, *Education at a Glance*, estimated that international students comprised 19% of Australia's tertiary student body in 2003. This

was the largest percentage recorded in any OECD country. Internationalisation is an uneven global activity. While the number of students studying outside of their country of origin is increasing at an exponential rate, a relatively small number (five) of OECD countries are the majority exporters of education. In 2003, 2.12 million tertiary students enrolled in universities outside of their country of origin (OECD, 2005) and 93% of these students studied in an OECD country. This was an 11.2% increase since 2002.

A statistic which makes this increase even more significant is that since 1998 there has been a 50% rise in the absolute numbers of international students enrolled in tertiary institutions in the OECD countries. As mentioned in the above paragraph, in 2003, the vast majority of these students (70%) were enrolled in only five OECD countries (USA 28%, UK 12%, Germany 11%, France 10% and Australia 9% [OECD, 2005]). These statistics do not necessarily reflect the absolute increase in student numbers in all countries. For example, the USA has experienced a 1% decrease since 2002 and also the data do not distinguish between resident and non-resident international students in countries such as Germany. New Zealand, while not in the largest group of exporting countries, has experienced enormous growth in the numbers of international students since 1998, now 13% of their total tertiary student body.

The latest figures from the OECD (2005) reveal a massive demand for foreign education (from the UK, the USA, Australia and New Zealand) in the Asia-Pacific. In 2003, 46% of all international students were from countries in Asia (OECD, 2005). Four of the five major importing nations are China (12.8%, this was 9.6% in 2002), Korea (4.2%), India (5%) and Japan (3%). Malaysia (1.9%), Indonesia (1.7%), Hong Kong (1.6%), Singapore and Thailand (together 2.3%) are also in the top 20 importing nations.

International education was Australia's third largest service export in 2003 (OECD, 2005). Australian universities earned over \$1.5 billion from student fees, approximately 15% of their revenue. This at first does not seem excessive. However, Australia earned more than \$5 billion in total from international students spending on fees, food, transport, accommodation, living costs and entertainment, on and offshore (Marginson, 2004). In its recently released policy on aid funding (Australian Government, 2006), the Australian Government has doubled the number of higher education scholarships it will offer in the Asia-Pacific region over the next five years (from 9500 to 19,000) (Australian Government, 2006). Unlike previous years the in-country demand for ELT will be met in the main by an increased number of volunteers and integrated development projects with an English language component. The Government itself is claiming to revive the Colombo Plan which essentially carried out colonial