

The Roles of Teachers in the Linguistic Marketplace of Private ELT

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The few studies on private ELT in North America agree that this field is a site of ideological conflict where teachers are marginalized (Abrile 2004, Breshears 2008, Shaw 2014, Yarimowich 2004). To more fully understand how teachers position themselves and are positioned by other actors, it is necessary to systematically reconstruct the local industry in context (Bourdieu 1991). This paper is part of a broader macro-sociolinguistic study of commercial ELT in Vancouver, British Columbia. Using Bourdieu's (1991; 1977) linguistic marketplace framework, I explore the major stakeholders and their motivations within the historical and socio-cultural context. An inventory of 65 local private English language programs, along with demographic data, and broad discourse analysis of government, industry, and newspaper texts combine to create a detailed description.

Analysis reveals several factors contributing to the conflicting identities assigned to teachers. Government and industry discourse, as well as program design relegate teachers to service provision. Pre-service training, professional development and research discourse start from the assumption that acquiring communicative ability in the target language is the main goal for all language students. However, the dominance of short-term language tourism and test preparation programs indicate that for many students the goal is the acquisition of cultural rather than linguistic resources. English is a symbolic currency, giving access to a prestigious imagined global community. The function of this high- (Blommaert 2010) shifts drastically when transported to the home context.

This has implications for teacher training and the related issues of course design, advocacy initiatives and policy development. These findings suggest that understanding the non-linguistic goals of students and other stakeholders could help teachers to renegotiate their position in the power relations of ELT and gain a voice in the larger discourse on English and international education.

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This paper examines commercial ELT in Vancouver, British Columbia, using Bourdieu's (1991; 1977) linguistic marketplace framework. Language acquisition is usually assumed as the primary goal, but many students desire social, not linguistic, resources. Understanding English as social capital may help teachers renegotiate their position in the power relations of ELT.