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Operationalizing the Constructs of Privilege and Marginalization: A Developing Researcher's Autoethnographic Exploration

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Abstract

Although the notions of privilege and marginalization have become a common theme in research, the application of these concepts to extralocal teachers of English (ETEs; i.e., non-local, non-native, or native foreign English teachers who are not citizens of the national community in which they teach) in applied linguistics has been problematic. Much of this research has equated characteristics of marginalization with implicit bias and structural inequity, and privilege as immunity to such prejudice and discrimination, while other work has viewed these constructs as subjective feelings influencing foreign teacher identities. These problematic depictions of privilege and marginalization have resulted in a contradictory situation where an ETE may be simultaneously privileged and marginalized. Using an autoethnographic approach, this paper examines the first author's experiences in developing their identity as a researcher while trying to critically resolve ethical dilemmas, potential criticisms, and feelings of academic inferiority and diffidence, which are seldom addressed in similar research undertakings. This article reports the learning journey of a developing researcher in creating a usable operationalization of the constructs of privilege and marginalization, with attention paid to the aspects of working contexts and social perceptions that emerged within the literature, and the influence of such factors on the self-image of ETEs in Thailand.

Keywords

autoethnography, extralocal teachers of English, marginalization, privilege

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Operationalizing the Constructs of Privilege and Marginalization: A Developing Researcher's Autoethnographic Exploration

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Although the notions of privilege and marginalization have become a common theme in research, the application of these concepts to extralocal teachers of English (ETEs; i.e., non-local, non-native, or native foreign English teachers who are not citizens of the national community in which they teach) in applied linguistics has been problematic. Much of this research has equated characteristics of marginalization with implicit bias and structural inequity, and privilege as immunity to such prejudice and discrimination, while other work has viewed these constructs as subjective feelings influencing foreign teacher identities. These problematic depictions of privilege and marginalization have resulted in a contradictory situation where an ETE may be simultaneously privileged and marginalized. Using an autoethnographic approach, this paper examines the first author's experiences in developing their identity as a researcher while trying to critically resolve ethical dilemmas, potential criticisms, and feelings of academic inferiority and diffidence, which are seldom addressed in similar research undertakings. This article reports the learning journey of a developing researcher in creating a usable operationalization of the constructs of privilege and marginalization, with attention paid to the aspects of working contexts and social perceptions that emerged within the literature, and the influence of such factors on the self-image of ETEs in Thailand.

Keywords: autoethnography, extralocal teachers of English, marginalization, privilege

Introduction

I, the first author, have worked continuously as a foreign teacher of English in secondary and tertiary education in Thailand for nearly a decade and a half. My primary duties have been teaching English and researching English Language Teaching (ELT). For research, I published several academic articles and believed I was fulfilling my responsibility to the ELT researcher community. However, it was emasculating when I would look at my Google Scholar profile page, and there were no outside citations to any of my publications. I desperately wanted to contribute to the ELT knowledge base, but admittedly I knew that my apparent limited understanding of research in the field of ELT must be holding me back. I knew that if I somehow wanted to add value to the ELT field, I had to overcome this burden of academic mediocrity by developing my research practices and academic writing skills. Most of all, I needed to gain both a broader and more in-depth knowledge of the field of ELT to make a meaningful contribution (Lorch, 2016; Mantai, 2017). For these reasons, I decided to pursue a PhD in Applied Linguistics, focusing on ELT. However, I needed a topic for my dissertation, and I knew I wanted to find solutions to real-life English language-related problems that I believed foreign English teachers were facing (J. Richards, 2015). So, with the substantial intellectual support and input of the second author, my PhD supervisor, we decided: where

better to look than my own lived experiences and affiliations as a foreign English teacher in Thailand?

When I took inventory of my time as an English teacher in Thailand, the most prominent recollection was the many social connections I have formed with other teachers. Some of these associations have been with non-local, non-native English speakers, some native English-speaking teachers such as myself, a few local Thai teachers of English, and many teachers whom I found difficult to categorize in the traditional non-native or native framework, such as Filipinos.

Accordingly, when recalling my social connections, two distinct issues came to mind. First, I found that the traditional non-native versus native dichotomy was problematic, and I did not know where the Filipinos and other similar teachers fit (Comprendio & Savski, 2020; Hickey, 2018; Mulkeen, 2009). I also believed that my confusion was shared by my associates. I recalled many conversations when my foreign teacher friends fervently questioned why they were considered non-native English speakers when they came from Anglophone Asian and African countries, and their command of the English language rivaled most native English speakers from the core English-speaking countries.

Next, I recalled witnessing times when my foreign teacher associates faced various forms of privilege and marginalization in ELT settings. During my time in Thailand, I observed that although the local Thai teachers of English are the mainstream English teachers in Thailand, they seem to be privileged administratively (e.g., pension, healthcare, permanent teaching status) and marginalized for their English proficiency. Then there are other groups like the large number of Filipino and other similar teachers from Anglophone countries, whom I have witnessed to be heavily marginalized in many ways. For instance, highly skilled Filipino teachers typically receive lower salaries than their often less qualified native English speaker counterparts. The Filipino teachers are repeatedly criticized by the Thai administrators and Thai teachers for their accents. There are many employment candidates for a limited number of available teaching positions, making Filipino teachers expendable (the Filipinos are not even afforded the same privilege I have of being respected for my white skin color).

Consequently, when I decided to pursue a PhD, I hoped that in developing strategic research skills and gaining a broader understanding of the ELT field, I would be able to offer some transparency about the traditional non-native and native English speaker dichotomy and the categorizing of my foreign teacher colleagues. In addition, I hoped that I could rationalize the often-complicated feelings of privilege and marginalization that I faced, and that I believed my associates might have professionally and personally experienced.

I will now share my journey of developing my identity as a researcher, overcoming my feelings of academic inferiority, learning a new writing approach, and gaining confidence in critiquing the work of others in trying to operationalize the constructs of privilege and marginalization to answer the above focuses. Likewise, besides clarifying the constructs I am investigating and finding a practical, theoretical framework to work within, I will share my challenges in overcoming ethical dilemmas and pre-empting potential criticisms of my work.

Although there have been similar autoethnographic or duoethnographic research undertakings that focus on dilemmas associated with developing as a researcher (e.g., Klevan & Grant, 2022; Maneekhao & Watson Todd, 2001), I was unable to find a study that addressed my particular concerns. Beyond the points mentioned above, I know that the pressure and stress of pursuing an academic degree can be unrelenting at times, often leading to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression, so I hope that other developing researchers may gain insight from sharing experiences when trying to overcome related issues in their academic pursuits successfully.

My Convoluted Identity

In the world of English language teaching, I am inevitably considered the archetypal or model native English speaker (Holliday, 2006). I am identified as a white middle-class American heterosexual male Generation Xer brought up as an authentic English monolingual. Throughout the past decade and a half working as a foreign English teacher in the kingdom, I have felt privileged (i.e., granted, advantaged, accepted, empowered, included) in my professional and social experiences as a native English speaker teacher. It has generally been easy for me to find an English teaching job. I have frequently received a higher salary than many local and non-local non-native English speaking teacher colleagues. My opinion about teaching and learning English has often been more respected than my non-native English speaking coworkers.

However, I have simultaneously felt marginalized (i.e., denied, disadvantaged, rejected, disempowered, excluded). I am regularly left out of the decision-making loop at my places of employment about issues that directly involve me. I have either been hidden in a makeshift back-office away from the parents and students so as not to scare away potential students or made to sit in an office closest to where the parents and students gather to show off the token white teacher. My nativespeakerness or whiteness has repeatedly been more important than my academic background and qualifications. I have incessantly been expected to be an unpaid English tutor for everyone's children. I have been without recourse for unscrupulous work treatment. I have suffered the indignity of repeatedly being called the *farang* teacher even when everyone knows my name [*farang* is a Thai word that crudely means "person with white skin of European descent"], regularly making me feel that the term was being used in a demeaning or xenophobic *othering* manner (Holliday, 2013; Rohleder, 2014). Although I have numerous cherished friends from other Asian countries, I have been unsuccessful in finding genuine Thai friends, even among my familiar Thai colleagues. Worst of all, when I express my concerns or feelings about my experiences to my Thai colleagues, they continually dismiss my pleas with either indignation or incredulous indifference, or a cavalier attitude.

I found that my observations, and my complicated feelings of being privileged and marginalized simultaneously in various professional and social aspects do not seem to fit with the literature. During my literature review for this paper, I was dismayed when I found that the literature is mainly in one direction; either you are privileged as a white middle-class native English-speaking heterosexual male teacher or marginalized as a non-native English-speaking female teacher of color (Appleby, 2016). I knew that depending on my perceptions; I often felt different from the literature.

Even though I knew that investigating the issues of privilege and marginalization was essential to the world of ELT, I felt crippling anxiety that other researchers might presume that my masculinity, nativespeakerness, or whiteness could have impeded my analysis of such complex abstract constructs. I concluded that I had to develop a critical understanding of the constructs of privilege and marginalization in order to overcome these ethical dilemmas and pre-empt potential criticisms of my analysis. After some thoughtful reflection, I decided to investigate the following topics.

- The inconsistencies in my feelings of privilege and marginalization
- My lack of knowledge of whether other foreign teachers felt the same
- My dilemma with the non-native versus native speaker dichotomy

Utilizing an Autoethnographic Method

Even though I felt that examining my chosen topics may be a monumental task for even the most experienced researcher, I needed to challenge myself if I wanted to become a recognized authority in the field of ELT. I realized that to succeed in my endeavor, I first had to confront my paradoxical feelings that a white middle-class American heterosexual male Generation Xer brought up as an authentic English monolingual could never possibly be marginalized. I further realized that I had to subsequently develop a comprehensive and expanded understanding of how to overcome the challenges of investigating and reporting such sensitive topics as privilege and marginalization. Above all, I needed to feel free to problematize the existing beliefs of privilege and marginalization, then redefine these beliefs in the world of ELT.

I realized that in order to accomplish the above goals, I had to read widely and retrospectively recall my observations during my time working in Thailand and within the communities of practice of foreign English teachers (Lowe & Kiczowskiak, 2016). For this analysis, I am positioned as both an insider and outsider within two communities of practice: Special Interest Groups (e.g., developing researchers, doctorate research, PhD students) and Professional Networks (e.g., teachers of English as a second or foreign language). A community of practice is a group of individuals united in sharing their concerns or passion for their interests (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

As an insider, I am a developing researcher pursuing a doctorate degree, and I work in the same educational context as other foreign English teachers. In being within the same community of practice as my fellow foreign English teachers, I believed my experiences and identity within this group would provide some value to my research endeavor. However, I recognized that I am also an outsider, as I either do not share or only partly share the same cultural or social background, or ethnicity as my fellow foreign teachers. While hypothetically not sharing the similar lived experiences of either privilege or marginalization as other members of the community of practice, I knew that I still needed to discover what difficulties are likewise encountered in the professional and social lives, and the effect of such on the identity of other foreign teachers. In doing so, I hoped that I could come to terms with the inconsistencies in my feelings of privilege and marginalization. Likewise, I hoped to discover whether other foreign teachers felt the same so I could further develop an appropriate way to overcome the challenges of investigating and reporting on privilege and marginalization.

I decided upon review of previous autoethnographies of developing researchers (Klevan & Grant, 2022; Maneekhao & Watson Todd, 2001; M. Richards, 2015) that the autoethnographic approach, combining attributes of both an autobiography and an ethnography, was an appropriate approach for this type of exploration (Chang, 2013; Ellis et al., 2010). An autoethnography approach was a new type of research methodology and a different writing style for me. As mentioned earlier, I felt that I did not have the best record with my previous research efforts; furthermore, I was already comfortable with the standard writing pattern of journal-style scientific papers subdivided into the typical impersonal IMRD (Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion) sections (Sollaci & Pereira, 2004).

So why would I undertake such a demanding genre of writing as an autoethnography? Well, the point of doing a PhD, according to J. Richards (2015), is to gain practical research experience, improve understanding of theoretical foundations, and cultivate an experiential basis. If I wanted to contribute as a recognized authority to the English language teachers' professional knowledge base and support the practical aspects of teaching English, then I felt that I must be further challenged as a researcher.

Despite the hesitation of being challenged by learning an unfamiliar academic writing style, I found that I could retrospectively and selectively recall my lived experiences with an

autoethnographic approach. I could use “my voice,” rather than the impersonal manner of writing that I was familiar with, to discuss the issues I perceived as a foreign English teacher in Thailand. I also believed I would better understand the commonly held values and beliefs of the communities of practice (Chang, 2016; Ellis & Adams, 2014; Wall, 2008; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Regardless of my apprehension with this new academic writing style, I also understood that if I wanted to overcome my academic mediocrity and develop as a researcher, I needed first to think through and resolve specific issues. Therefore, the autoethnographic approach was fitting for my purposes. The autoethnographic approach would allow me to reflect on my lived experiences and the experiences of others I witnessed and with whom I had a conversational engagement about their experiences as data to analyze, describe, and understand experiences within my communities of practice. The autoethnographic approach would also allow me to process my need to rationalize categories of teachers, to better understand the nature of privilege and marginalization, and discover a theoretical framework to work within.

Rationalizing Categories of Teachers

As I mentioned earlier, I desperately wanted to contribute to the field of ELT, but I was hesitant due to some ignorance of the ELT discipline. I also believed that the subjective feelings of privilege and marginalization experienced by myself and my associates might somehow be associated with the non-native and native categories imposed on foreign English teachers. Although the non-native or native categorization was not the focus of my research topic, I believed I needed a more practical unifying distinction for foreign teachers in Thailand in order to clarify the constructs of privilege and marginalization. This realization caused me to rethink the non-native versus native speaker dichotomy before focusing on the main task of rationalizing the constructs of privilege and marginalization.

While delving into the concepts of privilege and marginalization of foreign teachers, I became somewhat troubled and confused with the ambiguous terminology used for non-native and native foreign English teachers (Braine, 2010; Davies, 2004; Dewaele, 2018; Holliday, 2006; Jain, 2018; Mahboob, 2010; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Medgyes, 1992, 1994, 2001). Even though I found that most of the literature was ambiguous in categorizing teachers, challenging or critiquing the work of others was still something I had to overcome. In my literature review, I found that much of the current work had conflated the concept of foreign teacher categorization, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Traditional Categorization of English Teachers

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
Thai teachers	Filipino (and other) teachers	Native English Speaker teachers
Non-native	?	Native
Local	Non-local	

I found that some studies differentiated teachers into the traditional non-native or native categorization. Then some categorized teachers by local versus non-local, where non-native teachers who speak English as a foreign or second language and who are not citizens of the national community in which they teach as outsiders were considered “non-local” teachers

(e.g., Filipinos and other similar teachers). Even though I was acquainted with the conventional ways of categorizing foreign teachers as non-native and native, upon further exploration of the literature, I found that Filipinos and other similar teachers did not neatly fit into either of these categories. Therefore, I needed to think of more straightforward ways of categorizing teachers.

I considered utilizing Daewele's (2018) terms "L1" and "Lx," which avoids the connotations of native when describing the various types of English teachers, or Thomas & Osment's (2020) three-part hierarchical model, which is a more comprehensive tool to curb this bias in the native versus non-native dichotomy. However, I decided that these concepts were too simplistic and still possessed a sense of subjectivity. I found that while most literature focuses on non-native being in contrast to the native speaker (e.g., Dewaele, 2018; Floris & Renandya, 2020; Mahboob, 2010; Medgyes, 1992), in terms of teacher working conditions in Thailand, a local being in contrast with a non-local distinction may be more relevant. I initially decided to call the Filipinos and other similar teachers "foreign" or "non-local" teachers, but I felt that both terms were slightly problematic.

Administratively, there is a distinct difference between local non-native (i.e., Thai) English teachers and non-local non-native (e.g., Filipino) foreign English teachers (i.e., different working conditions, different salary scales, different benefits). I also found categorizing the local Thai English teachers to be straightforward. They are what the ELT research would traditionally describe as non-native English teachers because they are native Thai speakers, and English is their second language. Labeling the other non-native teachers (e.g., Filipinos) was more problematic because many are not native speakers, although they are not local.

I knew I needed to think of clear terms for these non-local, non-native English teachers. I found that the local English teacher side was not complicated, as shown in Figure 1. Nowadays, there are references that use the term local English teacher (LET) rather than non-native (Copland et al., 2016). Up to now, I have used "foreign" as the opposite of "local," but this term is tricky since "foreign teacher of English" is often associated with "white Western native English speaker" (Williams, 2017). An alternative would be non-local, but the term "non-local" uses the prefix [non-], which would be promoting a deficit view of being less worthy than the local teachers (Davies, 2004; Holliday, 2013).

I was already grappling with the anxiety that other researchers may criticize me for believing that I could be marginalized as a white, male, western, native English-speaking teacher, so I knew I had to be incredibly careful with the terminology I would use to categorize teachers. Then in my readings, I discovered work by Fought (2006), who stated that although researchers have used different terms for local and extralocal positioning, these terms primarily refer to whether a user of a language (Daewele, 2018) has strong connections to their country of origin (local) or if instead, they are oriented toward opportunities outside of their country of origin (extralocal). Finally, I found literature with a term that I liked: *extralocal*. The prefix [*extra*] denotes being from the outside or beyond something (i.e., outside or beyond a country's borders, from another nationality, not a citizen of the local or national community). The unhyphenated term extralocal (*extra* [prefix] + *local* [root] = *extralocal* [word]) therefore means a foreigner, outsider, or non-local who is not a citizen of the national community. Therefore, I will not compare local and extralocal; instead, I will focus only on "extralocal" in my research.

Extralocal seems not to have the negative deficit aspect of using the prefix [*non-*] and is still broad enough to encompass all non-local, non-native, and even native foreign English teachers. Extralocal can be mutually applied without negative connotations as one homogeneous term to both classifications of non-native and native non-local English teachers whose origin is not the country in which they teach and who do not hold nationality in the country in which they teach (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Proposed Categorization of English Teachers

Category 1	Category 2
Thai teachers	Extralocal teachers (Non-local Non-Native or Native)
Non-native	
Local	

As it happens, by this time in my journey, my research skills were improving, and I had become acquainted with a variety of influential empirical studies and research approaches in ELT. While I searched for terms to use for non-local, non-native English teachers, I overcame some insecurities, ethical dilemmas, and pre-empted criticisms. Solving this first obstacle of determining that Extralocal Teachers of English (ETE) would be the categorization that I would utilize in my research for all non-local, non-native, and native foreign English teachers as one homogeneous group was a tremendous confidence boost for me as a researcher. Now I had to overcome the challenges of investigating and reporting on privilege and marginalization.

The Nature of Privilege and Marginalization

I also realized early on in reviewing the literature that the world of ELT is also very one-sided when looking at the nature of privilege and marginalization. I found that marginalization faced by non-native English teachers in their professional and social experiences, and the effect of such on their identity has received increased attention in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Floris & Renandya, 2020; Kamhi-Stein, 2004, 2018; Mahboob, 2010; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Medgyes, 1992, 1994; Pelc, 2017). According to Erling (2017) and Kiss & Medgyes (2019), an unintended result of such focus is that now many native English-speaking teachers have become both “alienated” and “vilified” in the field of ELT.

Even though I knew that I had experienced feelings of marginalization in professional and social environments, I felt that the overwhelming single-minded focus of the literature undermined my feelings and identity. Consequently, I nearly changed the focus of my research topic. I was already mortified for feeling marginalized until I came across the work by Kiss and Medgyes (2019) [the same Peter Medgyes who spearheaded the non-native teacher recognition movement in the early 1990s; see Medgyes, 1992, 1994], who stated that research primarily focusing on the perceived plight of the non-native English teachers had “invalidated” the likewise presence of similar marginalization faced by native English teachers (Chen & Cheng, 2010; Erling, 2017; Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Medgyes & Kiss, 2020). I felt a glimmer of hope that these enterprising studies confirmed my feelings of marginalization.

Likewise, in reading Liggett (2010), I felt a sense of familiarity when I discovered further examples of marginalization, which I have likewise faced due to the social perceptions of foreign English teachers in Asia. In social perceptions, according to Liggett, many types of marginalization are present, such as patterns of physical separation where offices occupied by the foreign English teachers are located outside of the main area of the school building or in areas within the school that were not meant for teaching which gives foreign English teachers a sense of temporary or lesser status by not having a permanent workspace. Similarly, Erling (2017) discussed being villainized for being an overprivileged, idealized, white native English Speaker, born in the United States of America.

I felt both relief and a newfound sense of courage in pursuit of my research focus when reviewing the criticisms by Erling (2017), Liggett (2010), and Medgyes & Kiss (2020), who have recently begun to challenge the traditional mindset that only non-native English teachers are marginalized. I began to feel confident that I was developing a more comprehensive and expanded understanding of privilege and marginalization, and the freedom to problematize the existing beliefs of privilege and marginalization. My next step would be to try to redefine these beliefs in the world of ELT that native English teachers may also be facing similar situations in professional and social settings (Rudolph et al., 2018, 2019; Yim & Hwang, 2019) rather than only benefiting from a perceived default privilege (Phillipson, 1992; Rudolph, 2019; Ruecker & Ives, 2014).

I knew I was progressing as a researcher when I realized that ethically I must view articles that looked at both sides – for example, looking at the literature about non-native and native teachers that gives typical advantages and disadvantages for both categories of teachers (Menard-Warwick et al., 2019; Rudolph, 2013, 2018, 2019; Sutherland, 2012). From my experience of feeling both simultaneously privileged and marginalized, I realized that this was a complex phenomenon, and there were no clear-cut answers within the literature. Therefore, I needed to look at the concepts of privilege and marginalization from different perspectives (Minarik, 2017; Park, 2015).

I, therefore, chose to view the ideas of privilege and marginalization in three ways. First, I would explore the concepts of privilege and marginalization, which could be assessed by structural inequity within the working contexts of extralocal teachers of English. Next, I would look at the notions of privilege and marginalization, which could be assessed by the social perceptions within Thai society of ETEs. Finally, I would focus on the subjective feelings of privilege and marginalization, which may shape the identity of ETEs (Park, 2015; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Rudolph et al., 2019; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018).

Now, I had successfully rationalized the categories of teachers, and I better understood the nature of privilege and marginalization, but how was I going to research such abstract constructs as privilege and marginalization considering my newfound realizations? I knew that I would have to search for a theoretical framework to work within regardless of the identity of the ETE. Before, I would have simply found similar research and utilized the same or similar theoretical framework of that study, but I wanted to make an impact in the field of ELT. I knew that I would have to think creatively.

Choosing a Theoretical Framework

In my search for a theoretical framework to work within, I knew I wanted to focus on professional and social relationship theories to answer my queries about privilege and marginalization for ETEs as a group. I looked at dozens of studies within ELT with similar objectives, but none of the studies focused on both working contexts and social perceptions and how these combined views affected the self-image of ETEs. I was at my wits' end until I recognized that I needed to look at privilege and marginalization from a new perspective. I needed to think differently, or more unconventionally, than the many studies that have come before.

I believed I had found my theoretical framework when I came across the influential work by Bourdieu (1986), a French philosopher and sociologist. Bourdieu considered the amount of relational credibility a person gains for possessing or achieving a higher status in professional associations or groups, and social networks, which makes benefits within these resources more accessible to the individual as Social Capital Theory. He later continued with his Theory of Fields as the totality of resources, whether explicit or implicit, within social capital accrued by an individual by virtue of possessing a stable network of relationships within

communities of practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Just as I believed in using the term “extralocal” to create one homogeneous group of foreign teachers of English, I thought, what better framework to work within than Bourdieu’s Social Capital Theory to investigate the constructs of privilege and marginalization, with attention to the professional and social experiences of ETEs in Thailand?

Before pursuing a PhD, I would have stopped my investigation at this point; I would have thought that I had enough information to begin my research. However, I realized I needed to better understand, from first-hand accounts, how the perception of social capital in the professional and personal environments would affect the identity of various ETEs in Thailand. I began conducting preliminary informal interviews with potential subjects and discussing with them the emerging themes I found in the literature. After several informal interviews, I realized that the notions of privilege and marginalization experienced by all the ETE subjects were within the similar themes of professional and social relationships as I had found in the literature, and how the subjects felt about these relationships. At this time, I knew that I had to search for empirical work by individuals who had similar first-hand experiences to what I experienced and what I discovered from the informal interviews.

I then looked at Erling’s (2017) and Zacharias’ (2018) introspective works, who alluded to how their working contexts and social perceptions directly affected their self-image. In their autoethnographic account of teaching English in the 1990s in Seoul, South Korea, Erling (2017), as a native English speaker teacher, was labeled as a “villain” or “the privileged” teacher. Erling (2017, p. 14) recalled being in Korea as “disorienting and sometimes lonely,” “an experience of being otherized,” and likened the experience to “the feeling of being positioned as an English prostitute.” Erling continued that “many [native English speaker] teachers in a similar situation experienced exploitation, and I, too, was unjustly treated at times.” Erling asserted that “privilege can lead to idealization, dehumanization, commodification, utilization, and exploitation” of the native English speaker teacher. Erling (2017, p. 14) concluded that perceived social capital is “having an impact on us all, turning victims into villains and vice versa, and native speaker status does not protect teachers from hardship.”

Zacharias (2018), along with most English teachers globally, is a non-native English teacher. Zacharias mentioned that the sense of professional self or persona of a non-native English teacher would affect the teachers’ effectiveness in the classroom and decision-making processes and relations with the learners. Zacharias stated that non-native English teachers who are “confident of their language proficiency and teaching professionalism could provide a powerful model” of teaching and learning and “serve as competent educators in the classroom” (p. 1). Zacharias continued that perceived self-efficacy and identity, and teachers’ beliefs (self-image) about the teachers’ capabilities are even more salient issues in establishing the legitimacy (social capital) of non-native English teachers as English language users and teachers.

Although the accounts of Erling (2017) and Zacharias (2018) were instrumental to my decision of how I would use Social Capital Theory as my framework, I realized I was missing one crucial point: how does Thai society view ETEs? I needed to gain more background information on the Thai social system and how ETEs fit before I could successfully proceed with my study. Even though I have been in Thailand for a decade and a half, I realized I had a narrow understanding of the Thai social system.

In developing my research focus, I also needed to better understand Thailand’s social systems and how general social capital plays a part in Thai social systems, so I scrutinized seminal in-depth explorations by Komin (1990) and Persons (2008, 2016). They stated that the social system in Thailand is organized, resembling a hierarchy, and power is given to the leaders whom the masses believe hold sway or exercise control over them. Their accounts are

similar to Dr. Nataphol Teepsuwan, Minister of Education (Daily News, 2020), who stated that in considering the hierarchical social system of Thailand, one must accept that transforming the way the Thai society perceives the value of ETEs must be accomplished by a top-down approach from the government leaders.

I was now able to see that the social views of the value of individuals may be associated with the traditional appraisal of ETEs within Thai society and the effect on the professional and the social perception of these ETEs as possessing a sense of greater or lesser social capital. In adopting Bourdieu's (1986) hypothesis of social capital theory, I believe I can now analyze the impression of ETEs within Thai society. Bourdieu's social capital and field theories also affirmed the themes I discovered in the literature. There may be a possible link between the behavior of Thai educational organizations (i.e., working contexts) and Thai individuals (i.e., social perceptions) to the subjective feelings of privilege and marginalization and how these feelings affect the identity (i.e., self-image) of the ETEs in Thailand.

Discussion and Conclusion

Each step in my research journey has allowed me to develop as a researcher. At the beginning of this manuscript, I realized that if I wanted to make the impact in the field of ELT that I desired, and overcome my academic anxiety, I needed to gain a greater understanding of my field of study and better understand the commonly held values and beliefs of the communities of practice which have become an integral part of my life. I had to learn a new writing approach by being challenged with autoethnographic exploration. In pursuing a new writing approach, I was able to recall my lived experiences retrospectively and selectively and use "my voice" to discuss the issues I perceived as a foreign English teacher in Thailand.

I had to peruse the literature to overcome diffidence in critiquing the work of others so that I could adopt the term "extralocal teachers of English" as an all-inclusive term for all foreign English teachers. I also had to think deeply and creatively about privilege and marginalization so I could clarify the constructs I was investigating to pre-empt potential criticisms. By utilizing "extralocal teachers of English" and not differentiating between non-native and native English speaker teachers, I hoped to achieve such an undertaking. I had to learn to think differently from the many studies that have come before and look outside of the field of applied linguistics to find a practical, theoretical framework within which to work. However, the most challenging part of my journey in developing as a researcher was taking a deep introspective look at my identity and being bold enough to problematize the current beliefs of privilege and marginalization.

Along with the development of my personal beliefs and my growth as a researcher, I have been able to successfully operationalize and problematize the constructs of both privilege and marginalization to focus on the working contexts and the social perception and the interrelationships between working contexts, and the social perception and that of the self-image of ETEs in Thailand through an autobiographical lens.

I have now ended with these four research questions for which I am now collecting data:

1. What are the working contexts of ETEs in Thailand?
2. What are the social perceptions of ETEs in Thailand?
3. What are the self-images of ETEs in Thailand?
4. What is the interrelationship between working contexts, social perceptions, and self-image of ETEs in Thailand?

In the process of developing the manuscript, I felt that I overcame my academic mediocrity, developed greater research prowess, honed my research practices and academic writing skills, and gained a broader and more in-depth knowledge of the field of ELT. Most of all, I became more aware of my identity as a person and as a researcher. Therefore, I have faith that, in developing as a researcher in my pursuit of a PhD in Applied Linguistics, my journey will help other developing researchers realize their research aims and contribute to the field of Applied Linguistics.

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