

Proposal for PhD in Applied Linguistics

Name:

Title: A content analysis of Thai and international research articles in ELT

Background of the study

Getting published in a journal was initially a necessity for promotion and tenure in European and North American universities, but now is regarded as an indication of professional development and a requirement for academic careers worldwide (Braine, 2005: 707). In Thailand, for example, PhD students are required to publish their work in international refereed journals before their graduation (Liefner and Schiller, 2008: 290), and lecturers are instructed to conduct and publish research (Watson Todd, 2001) as part of their academic life.

To fulfill such requirement, those scholars or graduate students need to make a choice of which journals to send their article to because each field of study has a different number of journals. In applied linguistics, for instance, The Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) website references 53 journals (Perry, 2005: 3). Also not included are some regional or local ELT journals such as Prospect, and ThaiTESOL Bulletin. This implies hundreds of ELT articles are published every year.

These articles, which are from individual researchers, can reflect their social identities such as perspectives, concerns, and cultures (Duff and Bailey, 2001: 596). An example of this reflection is some researchers, when reporting their studies, instead of using just 'ELT', use the words 'ESL' and 'EFL', which are distinguished in reference to the context and purpose for which the language is being learnt (Howatt and Widdowson, 2004:363), signalling that local contexts are now acknowledged, at least by some (Howatt and Widdowson, 2004:370).

Considering these differences is encouraged as it is explicitly stated in Position Statement on Research and Policy of TESOL 2005 that it is important to look at ELT from global and local contexts to examine distinct but probably complementary ways of attaining the same goals, and to ask why problems in one context are not problems in another. One way of doing that is to explore publications to extend our view about research scholarship, and trends in language teaching (Shi et al., 2005: 766), which will be the focus of this study.

Justifications for the study

The proposal for conducting this study can be justified from three aspects: research quality, ELT as a specific interest, and research methodology.

Firstly, due to the changes and competition in the globalization era, the Thai government needs to prepare its people to cope with the challenges (Kanoksilapatham, 2007: 6; Prapaisit, 2003: 1; Tanjitanont, 2006: 1) by encouraging academics and PhD students to get published in international refereed journals since it is believed that doing this will improve quality of research in the country.

Writing for publications in the international journals, however, can be demanding and frustrating, particularly because a paper needs to conform to a publishers' standards (Tee, 1999: 87). This may be why Watson Todd (2003) states that "within the field of language teaching research, the number of Thai academics who have published in international refereed journals, the benchmark of quality research, can be counted on the fingers of one hand." Having learned of this statement, I did an informal survey on several international refereed journals in ELT to see the number of Thai ELT academics who published their work in such journals between 2003 and 2006, and found that Watson Todd's statement was unlikely an exaggeration.

In fact, there are many Thai or foreign English teachers and researchers in Thailand who produce research, but most is published in local or regional journals, possibly indicating that most of the ELT teachers and researchers in the country have not created research

qualified to get published in the international journals. The question then is how these academics can produce work for such publications. To find the answer, we may first need to know the common characteristics of articles written by Thai or foreigners working in Thailand, but are not published in the international journals, and the common characteristics of articles in the international journals. By finding the common and different characteristics of the articles from the two groups of articles, we may see and understand certain characters that attribute to the international publications. This area, nonetheless, has never been explored. Therefore, this study will be conducted to find out ‘what is there’ and ‘what is not there’ in the two groups of the articles. Hopefully, the findings will be used as a guideline for those Thai or foreign ELT teachers, researchers, and graduate students when conducting research and attempting to get it published in such publications.

Secondly, in respect to ELT as a specific interest, we may need to trace people’s concerns as a starting point for doing research. Generally, in an education setting, there may be two sources that research originates from. The first is problems that emerge in the classroom (Kraus, 2006: 39). The second is a new policy. For instance, one statement in the Thai National Education Act of 1999 suggesting that a learner-centred approach would be used with all subjects at all levels led to some confusion as the majority of involved parties understood only the theoretical concepts, not the actual practices (Vanichakorn, 2003: 3). This resulted in numerous research studies into the learner-centred approach such as Prapaisit’s PhD thesis (2003) which investigated how a learner-centred approach had been defined and implemented in the classrooms teaching English.

These teaching/research interests or concerns, whether from classrooms or policies, might be a reflection of a certain context as Hu (2005: 635) suggests that economic, social, and cultural factors can influence teaching. Examining different TESOL topics from global or local contexts is useful as it can provide the field with broad yet highly contextualized understandings of contemporary issues in different socioeducational settings. (Duff and Bailey, 2001: 560). If these understandings are taken for granted, problems may arise as many teaching methodologies developed in the West are often difficult to introduce into

ELT situations with different education theories and realities (Daoud, 1996:598-601, Phillipson, 1992: 314, Li, 2001: 163).

Hence, educators need to recognise the importance and distinctive context based needs of those requiring education in English outside the traditional native speaker contexts (Nunan, 2007:7), and EFL countries should try to encourage their own researchers, teaching methods specialists and classroom teachers to develop language teaching methods that are suitable for EFL situations in their countries (Daoud, 1996:598-601, Phillipson, 1992: 314, Li, 2001: 163).

Based on such perspective, this study, apart from exploring the common and different characteristics of the articles in terms of quality, will find out and compare, through research articles, distinctive interests in ELT in Thailand and those in international journals.

The findings from such comparisons may help us understand the current concerns in ELT in Thailand, and probably be useful for planning a new educational policy concerning ELT in Thailand.

Concerning the research methodological aspect, content analysis is one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences (Krippendorff, 2004: xiii). However, although it has potential interest and application, content analysis is a method less well-known in ELT (Basturkman, 1999: 21). A search for "*a content analysis*" + *ELT* on Google shows only 840 occurrences, and for "*a content analysis*" + "*research articles*" + *ELT* only 66. However, from my further analysis in these occurrences, I found that a content analysis has been used for analysing contents in published articles in academic journals in a variety of professional fields such as psychology, science education, and instructional technology (Shih et al., 2007), but not in the ELT realm.

Therefore, there is a gap in the literature which this piece of research may fill because this study will probably be the first to use a content analysis for researching articles in

ELT. The way this research method is used in this study will be useful for future researchers who want to use it to expand the horizon of research in ELT.

Based on the first two justifications that most ELT research in Thailand does not have quality required for publication in the international journals and that examining different TESOL topics from global or local contexts can provide the field with better understandings of contemporary issues in different socioeducational settings, the following research questions are raised.

Research questions

1. What are the characteristics of ELT research articles published by academics in Thailand?
2. What are the characteristics of ELT research articles published in international refereed journals?
3. What are the common and different characteristics between the two groups of the articles?
4. What are the current interests in ELT in Thailand expressed through the articles?
5. What are the current interests in ELT expressed through the international articles?
6. What are the common and different interests in ELT between the two groups of the articles?

Definitions of terms

1. ELT research articles in international refereed journals
These articles refer to articles published in international, categorised as class 'A' or 'B' by European Science Foundation.
2. ELT research articles written by academics in Thailand
These articles refer to articles written in English and published by Thais or foreigners working in Thailand.

Expected contributions

1. On the research side
 - For Thai ELT researchers, teachers, and ELT graduate students, the results can be a guideline to produce research to meet requirements of and get published in international refereed journals.
 - To ELT course developers, the results can be a guideline when designing a research methodology course for the students.
2. On the teaching/research interest side
 - The results will help us understand the current interests/concerns of ELT in Thailand, and in an international context. These interests, although expressed through research articles from a minority of ELT teachers or researchers, will be based on a large amount of data analysed by deductive and inductive manners.
 - The results may be useful for policy makers in planning for a policy concerning ELT.
3. On the research methodology side
 - This methodology used in this study can give some guidelines such as a framework for analysis to those who wish to use a content analysis in their research in the future.

Assumptions

1. Getting articles published in international refereed journals is a goal of ELT researchers, teachers, and graduate students in Thailand.
2. Academics in Thailand do not publish enough in international refereed journals.
3. Academics in Thailand find it easier to publish (in English) in journals in Thailand.
4. At least part of the difference may be attributable to a difference in quality between research published in Thailand and that published internationally.
5. Analysis of published texts will reveal qualitative differences between journal articles written by academics published in international peer-reviewed journals and those published by Thailand-based academics in Thailand.
6. English is used in many different countries which have different contexts such as EFL or ESL. Thus, ELT is a specific concern depending on where it takes place.

7. Analysis of published articles will reveal academics' interests in ELT.

Limitation

1. The number of published Thai ELT teachers and researchers is small, compared to ELT teachers of the whole country. So, the concerns cannot be taken as the country's concerns, although these concerns are from 'leading figures' in ELT in Thailand.

Data

Data collection

1. Articles in the international refereed journals

Stage 1: Journal selection

International refereed journals

The international journals will include (1) Applied Linguistics, (2) ELT Journal, (3) International Journal of Applied Linguistics, (4) Language Learning, and (5) Journal of EAP, (5) Tesol Quarterly.

Note

1. These journals are concerned with ELT, and are graded as 'A' or 'B' in European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH), which means these journals are of quality.

Stage 2: Article selection

1. The articles are published between 2003 and 2007.
2. The articles are written in English.
3. Ideally 30 articles will be randomly selected from each journal. So the number will be 150 articles.

2. Articles written in Thailand

Stage 1: Journal selection

Articles written in Thailand can be published in local, regional, or international refereed journals.

Local journals include (1) ThaiTESOL BULLIETIN, (2) PASAA, (3) rELFfections, (4) Journal of English Studies, Studies in Languages and Language

Teaching, (5) The English Teacher (ABAC), (6) Suranaree Journal of Social science, (7) Manusat paritat (Srinakarinwirote U.), (8) Journal of Humanities (Naresuan U.), (9) Journal of Humanities (Ramkamhaeng U.), and (10) Thoughts. Regional journals include Prospect.

International refereed journals include the mentioned journals and others such as RELC.

Note

1. Not all of these articles in these journals are devoted especially to ELT such as No. 7, 8, and 9, but only ELT research articles will be considered.

Stage 2: Article selection

1. The articles are published between 2003 and 2007.
2. The articles are written in English.
3. The articles are written by Thai or foreign ELT teachers or researchers who are working under institutions in Thailand.
4. The number of articles from each journal will vary according to their publications. However, the total will be 150 articles.

Data analysis

1. Developing a code book
2. Developing a coding form
3. Checking the validity and reliability of the book and the form
4. Coding the articles
5. Checking the validity and reliability of the coding
6. Making a comparison of the coded articles from the two groups
7. Checking the validity and reliability of the comparison

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